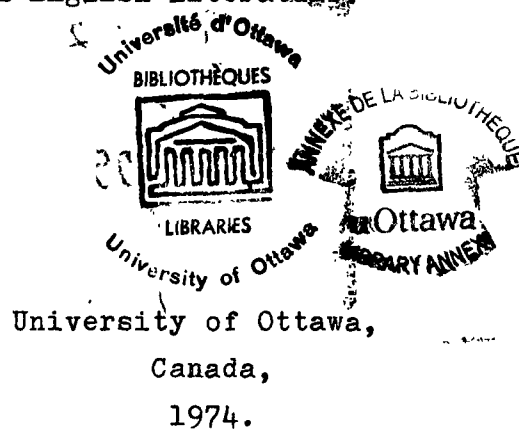


Leonard Cohen:
Sexuality and the Anal Vision
in Beautiful Losers

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A Thesis Presented to the
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in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
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Abstract

Leonard Cohen's second novel, Beautiful Losers, provides an effective critique of western civilization. This thesis will examine the interrelated conceptions of sexuality and anality as two counter-acting forces in the novel, representing life and the fear of death. To a limited extent Freud's theories, interpreted by Norman O. Brown, on the state of infantile polymorphous perversity and the subsequent repression of the infantile experience of pleasure will be examined as an aid to understanding the complex sexual ordeal experienced by the Narrator under the supervision of his friend, F.

Chapter one will treat sexuality as the life force; the manner in which the Narrator has become alienated from it; the development of the sexuality of the two female characters, Edith and Catherine; and the nature of the erotogenic body as distinct from its antithesis, the body dominated by genital imperialism.

Chapter two will discuss Cohen's anal view of technological life as a metaphor for all that is evil in twentieth century society, particularly from the perspective that a fear of death has produced a lack of integrity both within the individual and within society as a whole. Constipation, the Narrator's chronic disease, will be seen as a literal physical counterpart to his intellectual disease of hoarding the facts of history. In effect, the Narrator is constipated with the past, to the extent that

he is unable to fully appreciate and experience either the present or the future.

Chapter three will attempt to clarify the resolution of the problem of *anality* presented in chapter two as an impediment to fully liberated sexual life. In this context the element of play will be seen as the vital factor enabling the Narrator to confront and to accept death as a necessary adjunct to life.

Introduction

Leonard Cohen's novel, Beautiful Losers, is an exceptionally imaginative, if not provocative, critique of western man and the technological civilization he has developed. Cohen's interrelated conceptions of sexuality and the anal vision offer the reader a perspective of modern life that not only focusses attention upon its deficiencies, but also provides a tentative solution to crucial problems facing man in his relations with other men, his history and his universe.

This thesis will show that Cohen's understanding of F.'s term, "the erotogenic body", is remarkably similar to Sigmund Freud's description of the infantile experience of pleasure. Freud described this experience as a state of polymorphous perversity, the natural state of man before the onset of the organization of sexual energy into the genital areas which produces the normal, mature adult. Cohen is advocating a breakdown of this sexual organization, theorizing that the need for sexual organization within the body is required by an essentially anal view of life, death and other men. This is the primary reason for Cohen's vehement scatological attacks upon what he perceives as the inadequacies of our present life. The anal vision suggests a locus from which modern man's dilemma is seen in terms of excremental metaphors, especially, filth, feces, and the anus itself. As well, Cohen discusses, imagistically, anal character traits, originally hypothesized and empirically

tested by Freud; these are obstinacy, parsimony and orderliness. Ultimately, Cohen is positing that the dilemma of man, his erroneous conception of knowledge and his inability to relate to other men, is a product of the sexual organization of the body and an anal view of reality. As the outside observer, the critical artist, the acutely conscious poet, Cohen requires a thorough analysis of his fears and aspirations for man and this analysis he presents honestly and often bluntly.

In this thesis the discussion of the above ideas will be approached, first, by examining the nature of sexuality in Beautiful Losers, secondly, by exploring the essential characteristics of anality as employed by Cohen, and thirdly, by attempting to relate the concepts of sexuality and anality in order to see their relevance to a total framework around which the novel is written. Chapter One will develop the subject of sexuality as a form of communication between men as well as a means of integrating the whole man. Sex for Cohen is not confined to the instincts of man but pervades every aspect of his social relations with other men. Chapter two will discuss anality as the major impediment to effective social intercourse. The primary emphasis will be upon the orientation that the anal vision gives man toward his history and the manner in which this distorted view of history has inhibited the ability of the Narrator in Part One to relate to and love others; it has created in the Narrator a fear of death that prohibits fruitful life. Chapter Three will provide an integrated analysis

of sexuality and anality as amplified in the preceeding chapters, with the purpose of deriving a satisfactory aesthetic resolution from the struggle between sexual life and anal death.

Freud's assessment of the future of civilization was clearly pessimistic. He saw no possibility of therapeutically riding man of the universal neurosis that makes all men mad and a few insane. This pessimistic emphasis upon the future has been replaced in Cohen's work by a prophetic optimism that is vital and free. Because of Cohen's essential optimism, and for this reason only, the key psychological works to which parallels might be drawn are Herbert Marcuse's Eros and Civilization and Norman O. Brown's Life Against Death. Both of these studies are a reinterpretation of Freud's primary theories of neurosis in personality and in civilization, both discussing sexuality in a similar manner. Both Marcuse and Brown realized that Freud had only begun to apply his theories of personality to civilization as a whole late in life and was, in fact, unable to perceive the solutions to his difficulties because he did not realize the full implications of past revisions in his own work. Only Brown discusses at length the anal orientation of modern man, qualifying his study as the basic psychological source for a parallel to Cohen's Beautiful Losers. Justification for the choice of Brown is further reinforced by Michael Ondaatje's statement in his critical study, Leonard Cohen. "The basic and most popular advocate for this religion of flesh and several other ideas in the book is, of course, Norman O.

Brown. F., the first apostle, spouts Brown's theories constantly, though not so delicately." ¹

It must be stressed that this thesis will discuss Brown's work only as a parallel useful in understanding Cohen's imaginative response to twentieth century man. No attempt will be made to establish that Brown's ideas are valid or that Brown was a major source for Cohen's inspiration, regardless of the many similarities. Psychological sources will not be used extensively. Focus will rest almost exclusively upon the novel, Beautiful Losers.

Footnotes

- ¹ Michael Ondaatje, Leonard Cohen (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 53.

Chapter One

Man and Other Men

Children on the other hand, explore in indiscriminate and anarchistic fashion all the erotic potentialities of the human body. In Freudian terms, children are polymorphously perverse. But if infantile sexuality, judged by the standard of normal adult sexuality, is perverse, by the same token normal adult sexuality, judged by the standard of infantile sexuality, is an unnatural restriction of the erotic potentialities of the human body.¹

All parts of the body are erotogenic.²

Post-industrial man is facing a crisis which, in Leonard Cohen's view in Beautiful Losers, requires for its successful resolution the development and exploitation of every potentiality of the human personality. Briefly, Cohen is attempting to release the instinct for life in its uniquely human form from the restrictive bonds of all that would see life's expression muted. F., the teacher, the mentor, the friend, places the Narrator of Part One under a tutelage that is nothing less than an ordeal. He moulds the Narrator into the perfect man who will be able to shape reality to his own pleasure and, finally, will be able to accept, rather than flee from, death.

This chapter will deal with the problem of sexuality in Beautiful Losers and Cohen's proposed solution to the dilemma which was first foreseen by Freud. It is Cohen's innate toughness and honesty that compel him to ignore all Western taboos and prejudices so that he may sift through the complexities of an elaborate and often ambiguous social structure in order to probe the fundamental drives and instincts of the human animal. Many writers have stripped man of his self-imposed trappings, but few so thoroughly, or so bluntly, as Cohen exposes the Narrator in the first part of the novel.

F. has suggested in the above quotation that "all parts of the body are erotogenic." These words parallel Freud's term describing infantile sexuality as polymorphously perverse. F.'s conjecture may at first appear absurd but, granting its validity, the implications are enormous and varied. The early part of this chapter will attempt to define what Freud, according to Brown, meant by the term polymorphous perversity and to indicate how Cohen places the same concept in the mouth of F. What logically and inevitably follows from the premise, that all parts of the body are erotogenic, is F.'s desire to create in the Narrator and Edith two perfect bodies. Within the framework of the erotogenic body, the sexual maturation of Edith and Catherine will be discussed in this chapter. Because of its greater complexity the question of the Narrator's sexual maturation will be dealt with throughout the paper. Finally, this chapter will include a discussion of the uniting element of mysticism in the

novel, in particular, its application to Cohen's conceptual framework of sexuality.

Freud, unable to accept the idea that sexual feelings and desires commenced suddenly at puberty, looked for their origins in childhood. He discovered that in the infant, unlike the normal adult, sexual energy (libido) was not concentrated in the genital areas, but rather, was diffused over the entire surface of the body as well as in the external organs, for example, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and tongue. It is only as the infant grows into a child, having passed through certain traumatic experiences, that the sexual energies become organized and concentrated, first in the area of the mouth, then in the anus, and then in the genitals. This constituted, psychologically, a normal sexual development. However, Freud realized that in a distinct sense this development was unnatural, forced upon the child by external stimuli, that is, the need for food, shelter, and affection. In human growth, he observed, only during the infantile stage of polymorphous perversity is happiness fully achieved and truly experienced. In later stages as the sexual energies become organized first around the mouth, then the anus, and finally the genitals, the child experiences frustration at the loss of his infantile Eden and gradually adopts the universal neurosis afflicting all men—the impotent desire to recover childlike pleasure. Freud described the final

stage of sexual organization, the concentration of libido in the genital areas, as a genital tyranny, because all sexual pleasure would thenceforth have to be experienced through the genitals rather than throughout the whole body. The ultimate reason in reality for a genital concentration of libido was the continuance of the species:

If normal adult sexuality is a pattern which has grown out of the infantile delight in the pleasure-able activity of all parts of the human body, then what was originally a much wider capacity for pleasure in the body has been narrowed in range, concentrated on one particular (the genital) organ, and subordinated to an aim derived not from the pleasure-principle but from the reality-principle, namely, propagation (in Freudian terminology, the genital function). Then the pattern of normal adult sexuality (in Freud's terminology, genital organization) is a tyranny which suppresses some of the other components altogether and subordinates the rest to itself. (LAD, p. 27.)

This helps to explain certain obscure passages in Beautiful Losers attributed to F., in particular:

—Lie down, take it easy. Discipline yourself.
Aren't you happy?
—No.
—Why have you allowed yourself to be robbed?
—F., you spoil everything. We were having such a nice morning.
—Why have you allowed yourself to be robbed?
(BL, p. 14.)

There are no specific references to the Narrator's infancy in Beautiful Losers but the above quotation clearly refers to a past time when the Narrator was happy. The quest motif in the novel is quite evident and the object of the quest seems to be a happiness known to men at one time. The similarity to

to the Eden myth is striking but the Freudian suggestion that happiness has its roots in childhood innocence has a firm basis in the novel and is not essentially in contradiction with the mythical elements.

The Narrator's question on the opening page of the novel, "Do I have any right?", is the underlying question of Cohen's work. Does man have a right to happiness or must he stoically resign himself to a life of frustration and ineffectuality? This, too, was the ultimate question facing Freud in his later writings and it was a question that he did not satisfactorily resolve. Only in reinterpretations of Freud's work such as those of Brown's Life Against Death and Marcuse's Eros and Civilization do we find that Freud, in fact, held the necessary answers within his grasp.

The concepts of polymorphous perversity and genital tyranny as well as their implications fascinate Cohen and he develops them extensively in the novel. On every page the reader comes across some new example of perversity, but one particular passage seems to draw these together:

All parts of the body are erotogenic. Assholes can be trained with whips and kisses, that's elementary. Pricks and cunts have become monstrous! Down with genital imperialism! All flesh can come! Don't you see what we have lost? Why have we abdicated so much pleasure to that which lives in our underwear? Orgasms in the shoulder! Knees going off like firecrackers! Hair in motion! And not only caresses leading us into the anonymity of the climax, not only sucking and wet tubes, but wind and conversation and a beautiful pair of gloves, fingers blushing! Lost! Lost!

(BL pp. 40-41)

Not only does the above passage again imply the loss of an ability for pleasure but it dramatically defines human sexuality in the very terms used by Freud. The reader may excuse Cohen's coarse language because he has touched the basis of normal sexuality and declared it wanting. In effect, then, sexual energy which should be released throughout the entire body, has been subordinated (for reasons relating to anality, to be discussed in the following chapter) by the genitals, constituting in Freudian terminology, a tyranny, and in Cohen's words, an imperialism.³

Thus, the model of the perfect body in Beautiful Losers becomes the daring fulfillment of F.'s desire for man's subconscious to transform itself into the true consciousness of man in the real world. The episode dealing with F.'s extraordinary body is as much a humorous treatment of comic book heroes as another of F.'s memorable lessons for the Narrator. Nevertheless, it is here that the reader begins to observe the significance of physical development in the novel. "HERO OF THE BEACH" is the proclamation but it is to F. nothing less than a divine command.

—Those words are always in the sky. Sometimes you can see them, like a daytime moon. (BL p. 90.)

F. maintains that Charles Axis is a Christ-like figure calling all those that are weak.

—Charles Axis is all compassion, he's our sacrifice! He calls the thin but he means both the fat and the thin; he calls the thin because it is worse to be fat than thin; he calls the thin so that

the fat can hear and come and not be named!
(BL pp. 91-92.)

Unlike the comic super-heroes, Charles Axis is a human bridge between man the super-hero and ordinary man, he is the human who believes in, seeks for, and approaches divinity.

—He's fat. He understands the fat. Use your eyes! Look at his face. Now look at Plastic Man's face. Charles Axis wants to be our uncle. He is one of us slobs who dwells pages behind Plastic Man. But can't you see that he has made his peace with Plastic Man? With Blue Beetle? With Captain Marvel? Can't you see that he believes in the super-world? (BL p.91.)

As one of the bridges between man and the supermen, Charles Axis becomes a man to be imitated, and F.'s mimetic adoption of the muscular body becomes a living lesson for the Narrator, proving the existence of a super-world in which men can transcend themselves, transforming their deep-seated yearnings in the sub-conscious into the reality of conscious action.

Clearly, however, Charles Axis is only a proto-type of the perfect body, for, in developing the physical at the expense of the psychological he eventually becomes the bully of the beach, himself caught in what appears to be a recurring cycle of egotism.

The reader by this time in the novel should be aware that F. is putting the Narrator through an ordeal, a training that is ritualistic and that has a specific purpose. It is obvious that the Narrator moves progressively from one stage to another in his development until the reader meets with the finished product in the third part of Beautiful Losers. But it is per-

haps not so clear that both Edith and Catherine Tekakwitha enter into a similar educative process and that they, too, pass from one stage to another. Therefore, some discussion is necessary concerning the nature of this process and how it relates to Cohen's essentially romantic conception⁴ of sexuality, before examining the sexual maturation of the characters themselves.

Sexuality in Beautiful Losers is the life force, the uniting force that not only draws men together but that also draws the disparate elements of the individual man together. Thus, the erotogenic body is a whole body de-emphasizing the parts. This is a romantic notion that Cohen maintains has a mystical base. References which will be discussed in chapter three are frequently made in the novel to the Cabbala as a true source of knowledge, one that binds men together in society as well as the inner man as he achieves wisdom.

F. correctly conceived of himself as the sewer, the one who binds all things together.

I seemed to wake up in the middle of a car accident, limbs strewn everywhere, detached voices screaming for comfort, severed fingers pointing homeward, all the debris withering like sliced cheese out of cellophane—and all I had in the wrecked world was a needle and thread, so I got down on my knees, I pulled pieces out of the mess and I started to stitch them together. I had an idea of what a man should look like, but it kept changing. I couldn't devote a lifetime to discovering the ideal physique. All I heard was pain, all I saw was mutilation. My needle going so madly, sometimes I found I'd run the needle right through my own flesh and I was joined to one of my grotesque creations—I'd rip us apart—and then I heard my

own voice howling with the others, and I knew that I was also truly part of the disaster. But I also realized that I was not the only one on my knees sewing frantically. There were others like me, making the same monstrous mistakes, driven by the same impure urgency, stitching themselves into the ruined heap, painfully extracting themselves—
(BL p. 221.)

Yet, in seeming contradiction, F. admonishes the Narrator, who as an historian also draws relations between isolated episodes of history, to "Connect nothing." Significantly, the Narrator, too, has envisaged himself as a sewer.

Sometimes after I have come or just before I fall asleep, my mind seems to go out on a path the width of a thread and of endless length, a thread that is the same color as the night. Out, out along the highway sails my mind, driven by curiosity, luminous with acceptance, far and out, like a feathered hook whipped deep into the light above the stream by a magnificent cast. Somewhere, out of my reach, my control, the hook unbends into a spear, the spear shears itself into a needle, and the needle sews the world together. It sews skin onto the the skeleton and lipstick on a lip, it sews Edith to her greasepaint, crouching (for as long as I, this book, or an eternal eye remembers) in our lightless sub-basement, it sews scarves to mountain, it goes through everything like a relentless blood-stream, and the tunnel is filled with a comforting message, a beautiful knowledge of unity. All the disparities of the world, the different wings of the paradox, coin-faces of a problem, petal-pulling questions, scissors-shaped conscience, all the polarities, things and their images and things that cast no shadow, and just the everyday explosions on the street, this face and that, merely have different letters in their names, my needle pierces it all, and I myself, my greedy fantasies, everything which has existed and does exist, we are part of a necklace of incomparable beauty and unmeaning.
(BL pp. 20-21.)

In reply to these words F.'s comment is:

Connect nothing: ...Place things side by side on your arborite table, if you must, but connect nothing!
(BL p. 22)

F. goes on to explain:

—You're pathetic. That's why you must not try to connect anything, your connection would be pathetic. The Jews didn't let young men study the Cabala. Connections should be forbidden citizens under seventy. (BL pp. 22-23.)

The reader, then, perceives that the ability to see the unity of all things requires a certain maturity or practised discipline, and that there is a distinction between the initiated, F., and the uninitiated, the Narrator.

F. declares that the Narrator lives in "a world of names". The very act of naming objects separates and symbolizes them, creating disunity, dividing the essential wholeness of all matter into various and at times arbitrary parts.

F. said: Names preserve the dignity of Appearance.
F. said: Science begins in coarse naming, a willingness to disregard the particular shape and destiny of each red life, and call them all Rose. To a more brutal, more active eye, all flowers look alike, like Negroes and Chinamen.
(BL pp. 50-51.)

Names grant an appearance to objects that is of itself false. Certainly, "a rose is a rose is a rose" but this is an anthropomorphic distinction wrought by science and common sense with no verifiable basis in reality. Cohen ironically underlines his argument, stating in the words of the Narrator that, "The French gave the Iroquois their name. Naming food is one thing, naming a people is another". (BL p. 7.)

The implication of this argument for F. is the need to destroy all that stands for individualism and identity. For this reason the reader discovers that at age sixteen F. drew no distinctions among the physical appearances of his sexual

partners.

F. once said: At sixteen I stopped fucking faces. I had occasioned this remark by expressing disgust at his latest conquest, a young hunchback he had met while touring an orphanage. (BL p. 7.)

Later F. remarks, "At twenty-eight (yes, my friend, it took that long) I stopped fucking colors." That F. does not make these distinctions becomes increasingly significant, particularly when it is projected into the realm of identity. The episode concerning "the red greasy stuff" highlights this point very well.

She handed me the tube, saying: Let's be other people. Meaning, I suppose, new ways to kiss, chew, suck, bounce. It's stupid, she said, her voice cracking, but let's be other people. Why should I diminish her intention? Perhaps she meant: Come on a new journey with me, a journey only strangers can take, and we can remember it when we are ourselves again, and therefore never be merely ourselves again. Perhaps she had some landscape in mind where she always meant to travel, just as I envisage a northern river, a night as clean and bright as river pebbles, for my supreme trip with Catherine Tekakwitha. I should have gone with Edith. I should have stepped out of my clothes and into the greasy disguise....I disdained her tube. Take a bath, I said. I listened to her splashing, looking forward to our midnight snack. My mean little triumph had made me hungry. (BL p. 18.)

Edith was demonstrating to the Narrator the unimportance of ego-based personality but at the Narrator's present level of development he was not prepared for this drastic concept and lesson.

The Dance of Masks, performed as a cure, appears on the surface to be an orgy during which the young girls of the village and their selected young men perform every sort of sexual rel-

ations. During the cure Catherine's uncle sings "the greatest and truest sacred formula" of Manitou.

—I change
 I am the same
 I change
 I am the same [these words are repeated many times]
 (BL p. 166.)

The miracle of the cure occurs because the patient vicariously takes part in and comprehends the oneness of all personalities and identities.

It was a dance of masks and every mask was perfect because every mask was a real face and every face was a real mask so there was no face and there was no mask for there was but one dance in which there was but one mask but one true face which was the same and which was a thing without a name which changed and changed itself over and over.
 (BL p. 167.)

But more than de-emphasizing the importance of identity and individual personality, F. has purposely attempted to force the Narrator into his own mould. Those familiar with the process of identification that occurs between a patient and his psychiatrist during psychoanalysis understand that the Narrator will emulate his mentor, F. Thus the reader finds the Narrator raving at one point:

I'll publish a paper on Catherine Tekakwitha, that's all. I'll get married again. The National Museum needs me. I've been through a lot, I'll make a marvelous lecturer. I'll pass off F.'s sayings as my own, become a wit, a mystic wit. He owes me that much. I'll give away his soap collection to female students, a bar at a time, lemon cunts, pine cunts, I'll be a master of mixed juices. I'll run for Parliament, just like F. I'll get the Eskimo accent. I'll have the wives of other men.
 (BL p. 183.)

That F. consciously makes the Narrator's identity interchangeable with his own is mentioned very early in his own letter.

If my lawyers have performed according to my instructions, you are now in possession of my worldly estate, my soap collection, my factory, my Masonic aprons, my treehouse. I imagine you have already appropriated my style. I wonder where my style has led you.
(BL p. 44.)

In the third section of the novel all identities merge into one another. Both the Narrator and F. are confusedly perceived as the same person.

—Look at his hand!
—It's all burnt!
—He's got no thumb!
—Isn't he the Terrorist Leader that escaped tonight?
—Looks more like the pervert they showed on TV
 they're combing the country for.
—Get him out!
—He stays! He's a Patriot!
—He's a stinking cocksucker!
—He's very nearly the president of our country!
(BL p. 302.)

Almost certainly the physical body of the third person protagonist of part three of the novel is that of the Narrator, but Cohen is letting the reader know that this sort of certitude is no longer relevant.

The women in the novel all appear to be manifestations of one another. Edith describes herself as the Egyptian goddess, Isis (BL p. 231.), as does the blonde housewife in part three. In his letter F. describes Edith as "our perfect nurse" when comparing her face to the face of the nurse, Mary Woolnd (BL p. 187.). Both Edith and Catherine are Indians and the blonde housewife appears to be one as well. "She rammed her moccasin

down on the gas pedal...." (BL p. 229). Each of the women in some way displays the characteristics of the others.

A final and crucial demonstration of the relationship between mysticism and eroticism in the novel occurs in the Danish Vibrator episode. Brown in a long statement clarifies what Freud had conjectured and what mystics have long taught.

From the Freudian point of view the subordination of forepleasure to endpleasure in sexual intercourse is a compromise concealing a conflict between the desire of the immortal child in us for pure polymorphous play and the reality-principle which imposes genital organization on us. This conflict explains the fact that while it is not true, as the Church father said, that post coitum omne animal triste, it is true of the human animal: the immortal child in us is frustrated, even in the sexual act, by the tyranny of genital organization. Hence, the attempt to overthrow genital organization in certain practices of mysticism—mysticism being able, as Freud said, "to grasp certain relations in the deeper layers of the ego and the id which would otherwise be inaccessible." (LAD pp. 29-30.)

The episode of the Danish Vibrator is one of the crucial sections of the novel for in it the reader witnesses the arrival at the final stage of sexual maturity of both Edith and F. F. through perversion has been teaching the Narrator the validity of sexual exploration. Perversion for F. is the infinite variability of sexual pleasure. Already Edith is at the point where she is no longer able to experience orgasm.

—All right, Edith. What seems to be the trouble now?
—I can't make myself come anymore. (BL p. 211.)

She has gone to Argentina with F., desperately hoping to recover this lost ability, yet not realizing that this lost ability is

precisely what F. has been leading her towards. He tells her,

—Of course you can't. If we're going to perfect the pan-orgasmic body, extend the erogenous zone over the whole fleshy envelope, popularize the Telephone Dance, then we've got to begin by diminishing the tyranny of the nipples, lips, clitoris, and asshole. (BL, p. 211.)

Nevertheless, Edith pleads with F., "—Give it back to me, F." (BL p. 211.)

F. seems to comply with her wish and begins to read to her from sexual manuals that should serve to stimulate her. However, the reader learns from F. that these manuals are intended to stimulate immensely but not necessarily to genital orgasm. Rather their intention is to explore "unusual" sex practices that do not lead to orgasm.

"Unusual" sex practice is one where there is some pleasure greater than orgasm through intercourse. Most of these bizarre practices involve a measure of mutilation, shock, voyeurism, pain, or torture. (BL p. 213.)

Shortly, she realizes that she has become greatly stimulated but no release or orgasm is forthcoming. She pleads, "Please, F. Don't leave me like this." (BL p. 213.). F. then proceeds to recount endless tales of savage perversity only to stimulate and frustrate her further, ending, finally, with a recital of the torture and death of Brebeuf and Lalemant. His purpose he makes clear in his letter to the Narrator:

—How do you feel, Edith?

There was no need for me to ask. My recitals had served only to bring her closer to a summit she could not achieve. She moaned in terrible hunger, her gooseflesh shining in supplication that she might be freed from the unbearable coils of secular

pleasure, and soar into that blind realm, so like sleep, so like death, that journey of pleasure beyond pleasure, where each man travels as an orphan toward an atomic ancestry, more anonymous, more nourishing than the arms or blood of foster family.
(BL pp. 218-219.)

As the Danish Vibrator is activated both Edith and F. reach the plateau of pleasure described by F. above, yet, significantly, at no time does either actually achieve genital orgasm.

She had stopped moaning; I had assumed she had approached the area of intense breathless silence which the orgasm loves to flood with ventriloquist gasps and puppet plots.

—Thank God, she whispered at last.

—I'm glad you could come, Edith. I'm very happy for you.

—Thank God it's off me. I had to blow it. It made me do oral intimacy.

—Wha—?

(BL p. 223.)

Most important is that the Danish Vibrator, a man-made machine, the silent and vital partner that has just actualized F.'s dreams, has become an independent entity having learned to feed itself.⁵ Thus is marked the beginning of the revolution and the end of an era.

...the tiny figure beneath us watched, as did we, the descent of the apparatus into the huge rolling sea, which closed over its luminous cups like the end of a civilization.

—Will it come back, F.? To us?

—It doesn't matter. It's in the world.

(BL pp. 227-228.)

F. describes the moment sentimentally but, the reader must note, with approval:

A great sadness overtook us as we looked out over the miles of sea, an egoless sadness that we did not own or claim. Here and there the restless water kept an image of the shattered moon. We said good-bye to

you old lover. We did not know when or how the part-
ing would be completed, but it began at that moment.
(BL p. 228.)

Edith and F. are interrupted by none other than the mysterious waiter who turns out to be Hitler, exiled in Argentina. F. seems to harbour something of a morbid fascination for this man who authorized so many perverse, exploratory experiments upon the human body at the expense of millions of Jewish people. Hitler bathes with Edith and F. using a bar of human soap in a symbolic act of cleansing and initiation. F. remarks,

That bar is now in your hands. We were baptized by
it, your wife and I. I wonder what you will do with
it.
(BL p. 230.)

At this point it is possible to trace the sexual development and maturation of Edith, Catherine, and the Narrator. Edith begins her sexual experiences with her rape at the hands of four village men when she is only thirteen years of age. Edith is afraid and in her fear she urinates causing all of the men to become impotent. However, crazed with the idea of rape, the men continue "with index fingers, pipe stems, ballpoint pens and twigs." Although this is excessively painful for Edith, she accepts the situation after appealing to Saint Kateri, and loves the men.

I saw the thirteen year old Edith suffering under the impotent attack of these four men. As the youngest knelt down to better examine the progress of his sharp twig, Edith siezed his head in her arms and drew him to her bosom, and there he lay weeping like that man on Old Orchard Beach. (BL pp. 77-78.)

Later, as Edith comes under the tutelage of F., the reader finds that the mode of her sexual behavior, although prolific, is in some ways unusual and thoroughly in keeping with F.'s over-all sexual conceptions. Particularly in the passage describing the manner in which Edith kisses the Narrator, the reader finds that Edith tantalizes his entire body.

Her kisses were loose, somehow unspecific, as if her mouth couldn't choose where to stay. It slipped over my body like a novice on roller skates. I always hoped it would fasten somewhere perfect and find its hope in my ecstasy, but off it slipped after too brief a perch, in search of nothing but balance, driven not by passion but by a banana peel. (BL p. 29.)

Here it is the Narrator, unaware of what Edith is actually doing, who states that somehow Edith is at fault. He goes on to indicate how much he desires her to kiss his penis but she, now committed to the concept of pan-erogenism, ignores his non-verbal communiques.

Stay, stay, I wanted to shout at her in the thick air of the sub-basement, come back, come back. Don't you see where all my skin is pointing? But off she skidded, up the piggy steps of my toes, a leap into my ear while my manhood ached like a frantic radio tower, come back, come back...no I won't turn over and bury my hope, down, down, come back, no I won't fold it against my stomach like a hideaway bed, Edith, Edith, let some things happen in heaven, don't make me tell you! (BL pp. 29-30.)

It is unnecessary to repeat the discussion of the Danish Vibrator episode as it relates to Edith except to add one comment of F.'s after the Danish Vibrator had left Edith for the last time. "Of course the implications of her pleasure are enormous." (BL p. 226.). This last statement seems to be the most revealing and suggestive, for, one of the implications of these words

is that Edith must die in order to demonstrate to the Narrator that death is not to be feared as a last exit but must instead be accepted as a part of human life.⁶

Catherine Tekakwitha also begins her sexual life in what amounts to a rape scene. Her thoughtful and protective aunts had prepared a wedding night for the "Shy One" without her knowledge. The young brave that the aunts had procured for Catherine was the epitome of masculinity and his mere appearance before her was sufficient to stimulate nascent desires in the young Catherine for the first time.

All at once and for the first time, Catherine Tekakwitha knew that she lived in a body, a female body! She felt the presence of her thighs and knew that they could squeeze, she felt the flower life of her nipples, she felt the sucking hollowness of her belly, the loneliness of her buttocks, the doorache of her little cunt, a cry for stretching, and she felt the existence of each cunt hair, they were not numerous and so short they did not even curl! She lived in a body, a woman's body, and it worked! She sat on juices. (BL p. 63.)

Vicariously, she experienced the foreplay of her expectant love-making in terms of circles that became a form of torture deciding her mind and body against final orgasm.

The circles of love tightened like a noose, squeezing, ripping, slicing. Little hairs were caught in knots. Agony! (BL p. 64.)

At this precise moment her decision was made to remain a technical virgin; that is never to experience genital love.

A burning circle attacked her cunt and severed it from her crotch like the top of a tin can. She lived in a woman's body but—it did not belong to her! With a desperate slingshot thought she hurled her cunt

forever into the night. It was not hers to offer to the handsome fellow, though his arms were strong and his forest magic not inconsiderable. And as she thus disclaimed ownership of her flesh she sensed a minute knowledge of his innocence, a tiny awareness of the beauty of all the faces circled around the crackling fires of the village. Ah, the pain eased, the torn flesh she finally did not own healed in its freedom, and a new description of herself, so brutally earned, forced itself into her heart: she was a virgin.

(BL p. 64.)

The significance of the above quotations cannot be underestimated. Let the reader recall the line from F.'s book of unusual sex practices. "Most of these. bizarre practices involve a measure of mutilation, shock, voyeurism, pain, or torture." (BL p. 213.). Essentially, Catherine's form of sexuality is to be masochistic. All pain is to be the source of her pleasure and is to be the reason for her continual self-affliction and mortification. She has, in effect, sacrificed herself to her God, the "strange fish" so ominously present throughout this episode.

Above the Mohawk River a fish hovered in a halo of blond mist, a fish that longed for nets and capture and many eaters at the feast, a smiling luminous fish.

(BL p. 66.)

It is with interest that the reader notes the curious passage dealing with the wine-spilling. (BL pp. 123-125.). The Narrator, himself, describes the passage as apocalyptic, and for good reason. Catherine momentarily blinded and pained by the bright, flashing light of silver and glass utensils, spills her cup of red wine, creating at first a whale shaped stain. Gradually, the stain engulfs the entire party, chromatically meta-

morphizing the colours into purple. It may not be too much to recall that Herman Melville had used the symbol of the whale to represent that which is inscrutable and that which man, as Ahab, is compelled to pierce. As the Narrator peruses the origin of the word apocolypse, he discovers that it, too, means to reveal. "Therefore apocalyptic describes that which is revealed when the woman's veil is lifted." (BL p. 126). There is an element of humour in these passages concerning the dinner, but the reader must not allow levity to conceal their true meaning. Ultimately, Catherine is re-committing the original sin, the sin that seeks after the essential knowledge of the universe. For this reason she feels guilty, but because she, unlike Adam, is pursuing knowledge according to a discipline (this is F.'s word) she will, therefore, eventually arrive at it.

F. in his letter to the Narrator describes how Catherine decided to leave her home village upon hearing the words of an Indian chief, newly converted to Christianity. He had described what he found in the village of Sault Saint-Louis.

—The spirit was not with me before. I lived like an animal. Then I heard about the Great Spirit, the true Master of the sky and the earth, and now I live like a man. (BL p. 240.)

It was in this village that masochistic torture was employed as the means to purification and salvation.

They liked to draw blood from their bodies, they liked to pull some of their blood outside. Some wore iron harnesses to which they attached a load of wood which they dragged everywhere they went. Here is a naked woman rolling in the 40-below snow....

Here is a naked man chopping a hole in the ice, and then he lowers himself in up to the waist, and then he recites "plusieurs dizaines de chaplet." He pulls out his body like an ice mermaid, the erection perpetuated as it formed. (BL pp. 244-245.)

However, Catherine's inclination was toward the opposite element, fire:

—What do you think is the most horrible painful thing?
 —My daughter, I don't know anything worse than fire.
 —Me neither. (BL p. 245.)

Freud had reasoned, as noted earlier in this paper, that the state of polymorphous perversity could not be maintained into adulthood because of human dependence upon the basic realities of food, shelter, and affection. Thus, Catherine at one point wanders through the fields asking herself and the Lord, "O Master of Life, must our bodies depend on these things?" (BL p. 247.). Afterwards she begins her fasting as an attempt to wean herself from physical dependencies and concurrent with her self-inflicted tortures initiates a regulated schedule of fasting. F. also notes that Edith never ate. (BL p. 253.).

Clearly, Catherine could not continue fasting and self-torture without serious physical damage, and she does in fact become fatally ill. The priests are unable to ascertain the source of her sickness since she has promised them that she would desist from further of her more exaggerated tortures. One evening the two priest witness her most extreme self-punishment:.

That night the priests came into Catherine Tekawitha's cabin. Wrapped tightly in blankets, the Indian girl was sleeping. They tore off the blankets. Cather-

ine was not sleeping. She only pretended to sleep. Nobody in the midst of that pain could sleep. With all the skill she had used to weave the belts of wampum, the girl had woven thousands of thorns into her blanket and mat. Every movement of her body opened up a new source of outside blood. How many nights had she tortured herself like this? She was naked in the firelight, her flesh streaming.

(BL p. 255.)

Soon afterward she dies, almost certainly in a sexual ecstasy, indicated by the conversation she has with the two priests (BL pp. 255-258.), and as a reward or as a miracle for the onlookers, the voyeurs, her pock marked face becomes unblemished.

But this face, so battered and so very swarthy, underwent a sudden change, about a quarter hour after her death. And in a moment she became so beautiful and white...

(BL p. 266.)

Thus, the reader discovers that both Catherine and Edith, in order to develop their full human potentialities, entered upon essentially the same course, Edith, more conventionally, Catherine, more exotically. Catherine it seems is the more aware of the two, yet it is Edith, who under the guidance of F., achieves a consciousness that allows her to declare that she is Isis, the female principle.

Up until this point a number of arguments have been presented, developing a certain perspective in viewing the novel. Using Norman O. Brown's interpretation of Freud's writings, F.'s terms, erotogenic body and genital imperialism, were clarified. The erotogenic body referred to the diffusal of sexual energy over the surface of the body; genital imperialism to a concentration

and organization of this energy in the genital areas. Each term represents an opposing position and both Freud and Cohen argue that the tyranny of the genitals is a stage that dominates modern civilization at the expense and loss of pan-erogenism. They also argue that true human happiness can only be realized if the sexual energies of the body are released anarchistically rather than organized and controlled.

F. ironically found evidence for this higher level of human development in one human who graced the pages of comic-book super-heroes, Charles Axis. Here, in the cult of the physical, F. verified the existence of the potential for a new consciousness, perceivable only in the unexpressed yearnings of man's subconscious. However, the physical is only a part of the overall framework of the novel. The real strength of this framework derives from a mystico-romantic conception of all life and the life forces in terms of a unity, and it is this unity that the new and perfect man must be able to comprehend.

Relative to man, this unity can be viewed in two ways, socially and psychologically. F. argued that the Narrator must divest himself of his own identity, or at least the importance of it, since ego tends to separate men from one another, thereby, destroying social unity. In the overall mystical framework genital imperialism becomes a divisive force concentrating libido in specific parts of the body. It is the practice of pan-orgasm and excitation of the entire body that finally breaks down the

hold of the genitals and unites the parts of the body into a whole.

Essentially, then, Cohen has defined sexuality as the life force, the force that unites the individual body as well as the body politic of the human race. The concept is not a new one but rarely has it been so imaginatively or so graphically interpreted as in Beautiful Losers.

Footnotes

¹ Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 27. Hereafter this text will be referred to as LAD and will follow quotations directly with page references.

² Leonard Cohen, Beautiful Losers (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), p. 40. Hereafter this text will be referred to as BL and will follow quotations directly with page references.

³ For a detailed analysis of this process see LAD pp. 26-27.

⁴ It is difficult to apply a specific definition to the term Romanticism. I use this term not because I place the novel within the Romantic tradition, but because it reflects certain characteristics of that tradition. Two characteristics in particular are striking, one, a love of Nature, and the other, mysticism. These characteristics appear in the definition of romanticism in the revised edition of Thrall and Hibbard's A Handbook to Literature (N.Y.: Odyssey Press, 1960), pp. 429-432. Cohen's antipathy towards civilization is quite evident during the episode in which the Indians forget the Telephone Dance (BL pp. 103-105.). Thrall and Hibbard also note that mysticism as a characteristic of romanticism often entails a transcendent God with whom the human soul seeks to unite after passing through a series of stages. Refer to chapter three of this thesis, pp. 89-94 for a discussion of how mysticism relates to the novel.

⁵ Refer to chapter three of this thesis, pp. 92-93.

⁶ Refer to chapter two of this thesis, pp. 48-49.

Chapter Two

Man and History

Inter urinas et faeces nascimur.
St. Augustine.

But love has pitched his mansion
in the place of excrement.
Yeats.

The relevance of history as an essential element in Beautiful Losers has been too often overlooked by critics. The title of Book One, "The History of Them All", as well as the actual occupation of the Narrator as an historian, initially should lead one to expect a factual, if not detailed, account of specific events in the lives of specific people in a specific sequential order. Certainly, one of the great difficulties of the novel lies in this expectation and in the reader's problems in coping with the very real discrepancies in historical logic within the stream of consciousness technique of the Narrator.

In chapter one of this thesis it was argued that Cohen is exploring and investigating the nature of sexuality in man. In chapter two it will be argued that Cohen is examining the nature

of history, its root causes, and western man's particular developmental use of history. Thus, even though history appears to play no relevant role in Beautiful Losers, its implications may prove decisive and actually essential to any clear understanding of the novel.

The major purpose of this chapter will be to establish a direct relationship between the history of civilization as interpreted by Cohen's characters and the anal orientation of modern man and his consequent fear of death. If, as has been established in chapter one, sexuality represents the life force in the novel as a result of its power to unite opposites and to dispel paradoxes, and, in effect, is the true protagonist of the novel, then, the antagonist of the novel that creates the conflict must be an equally potent force for division. That force is death, or the fear of death brought about by a particular attitude towards history.

Although Cohen at no point in the novel clearly specifies that the fear of death is the overwhelming force that F. is attempting to defeat in his unusual education of the Narrator, he does lead the reader to this conclusion in a number of passages, particularly in his affirmative statement on Magic.

God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is afoot. Magic is alive. Alive is afoot. Magic never died. God never sickened. Many poor men lied. Many sick men lied. Magic never weakened. Magic never hid. Magic always ruled. God is afoot. God never died. God was ruler though his funeral lengthened. Though his mourners thickened Magic never fled. Though his shrouds were hoisted

the naked god did live. (BL p. 197-198.)

These words suggest that in some way mysticism and a fear of God's death have dominated men's minds for a great period of time. F. had earlier commented that a revolution was at hand in his letter to the Narrator when he described what was said by the speaker at the separatist rally.

—From the earliest dawn of our race, this Blood, this shadowy stream of life, has been our nourishment and our destiny. Blood is the builder of the body, and Blood is the source of the spirit of the race. In Blood lurks our ancestral inheritance, in Blood is embodied the shape of our History, from Blood blooms the flower of our Glory, and Blood is the undercurrent which they can never divert, and which all their stolen money cannot dry up! (BL p. 154)

Blood is, of course, the universal symbol of life, and this life according to F. has been stolen specifically from the Quebecois.

Book Three of the novel further reinforces the idea that a struggle has been occurring between the fundamental forces of life and death. That book opens with springtime in Montreal. The old man has just awakened much as a bear does after long hibernation.

Spring comes into Quebec from the west. It is the warm Japan Current that brings the change of season to the west coast of Canada, and then the West Wind picks it up. It comes across the prairies in the breath of the Chinook, waking up the grain and caves of bears. It flows over Ontario like a dream of legislation, and it sneaks into Quebec, into our villages between our birch trees. In Montreal the cafes, like tulip bulbs, sprout from their cellars in a display of awnings and chairs. In Montreal spring is like an autopsy. Everyone wants to see inside the frozen mammoth. Girls rip off their sleeves and the flesh is sweet and white, like wood under green bark. From

the streets a sexual manifesto rises like an inflating tire, "The winter has not killed us again!"
(BL p. 289.)

It is, however, only towards the end of Book Three, as the old man is finally converged upon by the crowd, that the reader perceives the true significance of man conquering the fear of death, embracing life and developing a future orientation.

His presence was like the shape of an hourglass, strongest where it was smallest. And that point where he was most absent, that's when the gasps started, because the future streams through that point, going both ways. That is the beautiful waist of the hourglass! That is the point of Clear Light! Let it change forever what we do not know! For a lovely briefness all the sand is compressed in the stem between the two flasks! Ah, this is not a second chance. For the time it takes to launch a sigh he allowed the spectators a vision of All Chances At Once!
(BL p. 305.)

That Cohen is presenting the reader with new human alternatives is clear from a superficial reading of the novel. But it is only after an examination of the nature of life's antagonist that the direction, implications, and thrust of F.'s new way are revealed.

Both Freud and Brown have suggested that the sexual organization of the human body, or "genital imperialism" in Cohen's apt phraseology, is caused by anxieties that find their origin in the anal orientation of modern man. This postulate is, however, not unique to these two men, for Erich Fromm in The Sane Society establishes the connection between Freud's anal character type and the sociological type of the modern capitalist, a concept originating in the basic sociological works of Max Weber¹

and R.H. Tawney². This chapter, then, will concern itself with defining what is meant by anality and with demonstrating in what way Cohen uses anality as a determining characteristic of the Narrator. A brief parallel will be made to certain writings of Jonathan Swift, who was also a vehement writer of scatology. This will be done in an attempt to show that Cohen's rather unusual form of anal metaphor does not occur in a literary vacuum. Just as Swift's characters use objects of the lower faculties, such as, urine, feces, and related excrementia as correspondences to objects of the higher faculties, such as ideas, philosophies, love, and memories, so do Cohen's characters. In this way the reader will understand F.'s need to collect soap and fireworks, as well as their important role in the violent revolution conceived by F. Moreover, and finally, this chapter will clarify the Narrator's preoccupation with historical accuracy, fact gathering, and his prolonged constipation.

Freud's finding that certain character traits may become profoundly influenced by sexual excitation experienced by the infant in the region of the anal canal has elicited the liveliest incredulity, repugnance, and opposition from students of psychology and laymen alike. However, this has not prevented Cohen's perceptive intellect from utilizing Freud's findings with great dexterity, unless his use of anal metaphor is purely intuitive as it was for Swift and several other writers of scatology.

Analinity as such refers to the second developmental stage of sexual organization in the normal human child. Freud posited that the child passed through certain traumatic experiences that caused sexual energy (libido), originally spread throughout the body, to be focussed sequentially in the areas of the mouth, anus, and genitals. This constituted normal sexual development, but, as he goes on to write, not necessarily a natural one. Subsequently, he argued that the individual might seem to progress to the genital stage of sexuality because of various social pressures, but nevertheless remain fixated at the anal or oral stages of sexual growth. Brown faithfully records Freud's anal theory in the following manner:

According to Freudian theory the human infant passes through a stage—the anal stage—as a result of which the libido, the life energy of the body, gets concentrated in the anal zone. This infantile stage of anal erotism takes the essential form of attaching symbolic meaning to the anal product. As a result of these symbolic equations the anal product acquires for the child the significance of being his own child or creation, which he may use either to obtain narcissistic pleasure in play, or to obtain love from another (feces as gift), or to assert independence from another (feces as property), or to commit aggression against another (feces as weapon). Thus some of the most important categories of social behavior (play, gift, property, weapon) originate in the anal stage of infantile sexuality and—what is more important—never lose their connection with it. (LAD p. 191.)

The difficulty for the reader of Cohen's work, however, seems to arise from an inability to perceive the very real relationship between sexuality and analinity. The notion that there is some absolute contradiction between the state of being in love

and not having an awareness of the excremental function of the beloved has a particularly perverse and disgusting overtone for western sensibilities. Brown quotes from Freud's Collected Papers in an effort to formulate and establish this very relationship:

Above all, the coprophilic elements in the instinct have proved incompatible with our aesthetic ideas, probably since the time when man developed an upright posture and so removed his organ of smell from the ground; further a considerable proportion of the sadistic elements belonging to the erotic instinct have to be abandoned. All such developmental processes, however, relate only to the upper layers of the complicated structure. The fundamental processes which promote erotic excitation remain always the same. Excremental things are all too intimately and inseparably bound up with sexual things; the position of the genital organs—inter urinas et faeces—remains the decisive and unchangeable factor. The genitals themselves have not undergone the development of the rest of the human form in the direction of beauty; they have retained their animal cast; and so today love, too, is in essence as animal as it ever was. (LAD p. 187.)

In effect, then, the positioning of the genital organs, as noted by St. Augustine between the organs of defecation and urination, suggests the fundamental relationship between anality and sexuality. And it is this relationship that remains one of western man's most sacred and deep-seated taboos. That Cohen is able to fully exploit and explore this connection is further testimony to his intellectual abilities as a creative artist and critic of society.

On the first page of the novel, the Narrator refers to his progressively pleasing appearance:

I am an old scholar, better-looking now than when I was young. That's what sitting on your ass does to your face. (BL p. 3.)

On the following page the Narrator indicates that he suffers from the perennial problem of desk-ridden western man—constipation.

And you, Catherine Tekakwitha, if you must know,
I am so human as to suffer from constipation, the
rewards of a sedentary life. (BL p. 4.)

Later, the Narrator when speaking of F.'s ramblings as "mystical shit" (BL p. 10.) suggests in two words the relationship between the lower and higher functions of men. Concerning F., the reader learns that as a child he had experimented with consuming feces.

F., you ruined my life with your experiments. You
ate a raw sheep's heart, you ate bark, once you ate
shit. (BL p. 19.)

The reader is well aware throughout the first and second books of the novel that the Narrator suffers from constipation, but, significantly, F. was a sufferer of diarrhea.

I don't want to think too much about what F. said.
Why must I? Who was he after all but a madman who
lost control of his bowels. (BL p. 42.)

F.'s disease is a figurative as well as a literal example of the function of his role as the Narrator's teacher.

Cohen is not writing in a literary vacuum, and the fact that he attaches greater significance to his apparently crude language is not without precedent. Much of the criticism of the works of Jonathan Swift has conveniently ignored, or condemned as outrageous, Swift's scathing scatological pieces, especially those found in the Fourth Book of Gulliver's Travels, and three of his poems, "Strephon and Chloe", "Cassinus and Peter", and

"The Lady's Dressing Room". These poems continually stress the fundamental, animal nature of man contrasted with his pretentious aesthetic sensibilities. In "Strephon and Chloe", Strephon, fully the courtly gentleman, expends a great deal of energy in a greater number of lines depicting his flower, Chloe, as above and beyond all men and women.

Her dearest comrades never caught her
Squat on her Hams, to make Maid's Water.
You'd swear, that so divine a Creature
Felt no Necessities of Nature.⁵

It is only on his wedding night that Strephon is awakened to the sublunary faculties of his new bride.

The Nymph oppres't before, behind
As Ships are tossed by Waves and Wind,
Steals out her Hand by Nature led,
And brings a Vessel into Bed:
Fair Utensil, as smooth and white
As Chloe's Skin, almost as bright.
Strephon who heard the fuming Rill
As from a mossy Cliff distill;
Cry'd out, ye Gods, what Sound is this?
Can Chloe, heavenly Chloe piss?
But, when he smell't a noysom Steam
Which oft attends that lukewarm Stream;...
And, though contiv'd, we may suppose
To slip his Ears, yet stuck his Nose:
He found her, while the scent increased,
As mortal as himself at least.⁴

In the poem, "The Lady's Dressing Room", Strephon slipped into the chamber of the "haughty" but "magnificently array'd" Celia in order to verify the source of her beauty. After a brief introduction the remainder of the poem consists of an inventory that raises a disgust in the reader that can only be relieved finally by gross laughter.

But oh! it turn'd poor Strephon's Bowels,
 When he beheld and smelt the Towels,
 Begumm'd, Bematter'd, and Beslim'd
 With Dirt and Sweat, and Ear-Wax grim'd.
 No object Strephon's Eye escapes,
 Here pettycoats in Frowzy Heaps;
 Nor be the Handkerchiefs forgot
 All varnish'd o'er with Snuff and Snot.
 The Stockings, why should I expose
 Stained with the marks of stinking Toes;
 Or greasy Coifs and Pinners reeking,
 Which Celia slept at least a Week in?⁵

In the third poem, "Cassinus and Peter", two young sophomores at Cambridge discuss Cassinus' great disillusionment with his beloved Caelia. After much probing and many cliché suggestions as to the source of Cassinus' discomfort, Peter finally learns from the reluctant Cassinus:

But when thou seest me laid in Dust,
 The Secret thou shalt ne'er impart;...
 But, if you fail, my Spectre dread
 Attending nightly round your Bed;
 And yet, I dare confide in you;
 So take my Secret, and adieu.
 Nor wonder how I lost my Wits;
 Oh! Caelia, Caelia, Caelia, shifts.⁶

The source of Swift's horror is the discovery of the hidden relationship between the higher faculties and the lower, the mental and the physical, which psychoanalysis calls sublimation, that is, the representation in an ideal or disguised manner of that which is seen as either base or taboo. The earliest of the three poems, "The Lady's Dressing Room" (1732), argues that sublimation is still possible.

He [Strephon] would learn to think like me, [Swift]
 And bless his ravisht Eyes to see
 Such Order from Confusion sprung,
 Such gaudy Tulips rais'd from Dung.⁷

But in "Strephon and Chloe" (1734) the narrator concludes that all awareness of the excremental function must be hidden or repressed.

Authorities both old and recent
Direct that Women must be decent;
And from the Spouse each Blemish hide
More than from all the World beside.

It is only with "Cassinus and Peter" (1734) that Swift explodes even this solution, finding that the life of civilized sublimation, marked by the eighteenth century word "Wits," must eventually be shattered because in the end the anal vision cannot be repressed. Cassinus, a special wit, is left to explain his dilemma:

Nor wonder how I lost my Wits;
Oh! Caelia, Caelia, Caelia, shits.

The fourth book of Gulliver's Travels has been both condemned and praised as Swift's most pessimistic contribution to literature. As a satiric critique of man's merit, this work places civilized man below the level of Swift's most abominable creation, the Yahoo, "a sort of Animal to whose Share, by what Accident he could not conjecture, some small Pittance of Reason had fallen, whereof we made no other use than by its Assistance to aggravate our natural Corruptions, and to, acquire new ones which Nature had not given us."⁹ Swift depicts the Yahoo as a creature of "filth" and "Nastiness" with a positive attitude towards its own excrement. At various times the Yahoo employs excrement as an expression of aggression and it even plays a signi-

ficant role in the Yahoo ritual symbolizing the renewal of society. When the leader of the herd is discarded, "his successor, at the head of all the Yahoos in that district, young and old, male and female, come in a body, and discharge their excrement upon him from head to foot."¹⁰ Consequently, within the Yahoo system of infeudation, "...this leader had usually a favourite as like himself as he could get, whose employment was to lick his master's feet and posteriors, and drive the female Yahoos to his kennel."¹¹ This demonic (its similarity to the Satanic Black Mass is certainly striking) depiction of the anal nature of humanity has been explained variously as an aesthetic lapse and as crude sensationalism.¹²

This brief discussion of scatology in Swift is intended to clarify certain aspects of Cohen's work. First, it should be apparent that Cohen is writing within a tradition of scatological writing that perceives man as having a base nature that can best be expressed in terms of the anal vision of excrement and filth. Several critics, notably Middleton Murry, Ricardo Quintana, and Aldous Huxley have condemned Swift's viewpoint, but their stance has not yet removed Gulliver's Travels from the bookshelves, nor is it likely to, for, generations have recognized that regardless of man's high aspirations he remains firmly attached to his lower self. Secondly, Swift has established a correspondence between the higher and lower faculties, particularly one between beauty and idealism and filth and bestial-

ity. This is most succinctly stated in his metaphor of "tulips rais'd from Dung". Cohen is using precisely this image when selecting the foot of the elevator, a vehicle which transports between higher and lower positions, as the location of Edith's suicide. In the same way the ascent of the Narrator from his sub-basement apartment to F.'s treehouse is meant to suggest an upward displacement in the Narrator's perception of himself and his fellow man.

What the reader would normally assume to be a duality of opposites becomes, in fact, a duality of correspondences. The unlikely situation that constipation is a product of the history of ideas and that man's conception of beauty is no more than excrement is the basic premise of Cohen's anal vision. Thus, in Cohen those things that are normally seen as repellent and those seen as attractive are now seen as closely related. F. emphasizes this paradoxical relationship between opposites when he paints his model of the Akropolis a garish red. "He chose a color named Tibetan Desire which amused him since it was, he claimed, such a contradiction in terms." (BL p. 12.). At this early point in the novel F. is not proposing that the monastic life is synonymous with sexuality, but that the paradox of "Tibetan Desire" is only possible in anal man. Throughout the novel religious objects are degraded and torn away from the sacred position they have traditionally held in men's minds. The Narrator in one of his numerous monologues to Catherine

asks her of heaven:

But right now you must know more about heaven.
Does it look like one of those little plastic altars
that glow in the dark? I swear I won't mind if it
does. (BL p. 4.)

This is not to say, however, that there is nothing sacred in
Cohen, for, the very objects that are condemned are also exalted.

And what if there is a plastic reproduction of your
little body on the dashboard of every Montreal taxi?
It can't be a bad thing. Love cannot be hoarded.
Is there a part of Jesus in every stamped-out crucifix?
I think there is. Desire changes the world! What
makes the mountainside of maple turn red? Peace, you
manufacturers of religious trinkets! You handle
sacred material! (BL p. 6.)

Cohen is denouncing what man has interpreted as holy in the past,
and not condemning what is essentially sacred. The Narrator,
by way of clarification goes on to say to Catherine:

How I want the world to be mystical and good? Are the
stars tiny, after all? Who will put us to sleep?
Should I save my fingernails? Is matter holy? I
want the barber to bury my hair. Catherine Tekak-
witha are you at work on me already?
(BL p. 6.)

The Narrator is suggesting in the two passages above that all
matter is sacred, therefore, he is placing matter on a level
equal to spiritual existence. In this way he resolves the para-
dox of opposing spirit and matter by positing the creation of
the universe from one sacred substance, a distinctly mystical
concept.

Subsequently, the reader shares the Narrator's astonish-
ment after he has been examining, 'Strephon-like, Edith's cosmetic
drawer and has discovered the advertisements for and ampules of

Lourdes water. Cohen's conception of spirit and matter facilitates the acceptance of this blasphemous usage of holy water as a substitute for heroin in a meaningful ceremony that is heavily wrought with emotion. The linking of holy water with anal imagery is explicitly stated when the reader discovers that the word for heroin in street argot is "shit". (BL p. 239.).

Perhaps the most revealing condemnation of western man's anthropomorphic conceptualization of heaven is found in the dramatic confrontation between Catherine's uncle and the Jesuit priest. In this encounter the Judeo-Christian view of heaven is peeled away piece by piece, eventually being portrayed as no more than an illusion.

- Let me baptize you, said the Black-Robe.
- Do not let any of your water fall on me. I have seen many die after you touched them with your water.
- They are in Heaven right now.
- Heaven is a good place for Frenchmen, but I wish to be among Indians, for the French will give me nothing to eat when I get there, and the French women will not lie with us under the shadowy firs.
- We are all of the same. Father.
- Ah, Black-Robe, were we of one Father we should know how to make knives and coats as well as you.
- Listen, old man, in the hollow of my hand I hold a mystic drop which can snatch you from an eternity of woe.
- Do they hunt in Heaven, or make war, or go to feasts?
- Oh. no!
- Then I will not go. It is not good to be lazy.
- Infernal fire and torturing demons await you.

(BL p. 142-143.)

Cohen has been attempting to demonstrate that the opposites, in particular those that represent the sacred and profane, are no less than reflections of one another. In this way he graphically

portrays the anthropomorphicity of man's present arbitrary divisions of what Cohen asserts to be an indivisible unity. Without entering into the philosophical and theological arguments, let it suffice to note that Cohen's viewpoint is wholly in keeping with the predominant sexual argument in the novel, that is, that sexuality, when divested of its anal orientation, is a force for unity.

That anality, the divisive force, the force that breaks down the perception⁴ of reality, is, in fact, the source of western man's preoccupation with death and ultimately his fear of death, is evident in the Narrator's obsession with the form of Edith's suicide. In a number of passages throughout the Narrator's section, he muses upon the significance of the elevator as though the elevator was, itself, attempting to convey some meaning to life as yet obscure to the Narrator.

I was loved in 1950! But I didn't speak to Edith, I couldn't. Night after night I lay in the dark listening to the sounds of the elevator, my silent commands buried in my brain, like those urgent, proud inscriptions on Egyptian monuments dumb under tons of sand. (BL. p. 32.)

The Narrator is aware very early in the novel that Edith's suicide is an intrinsic part of his tutelage under F.

She was going to teach me a lesson, my old wife.... We were the only ones who lived in the sub-basement, we were the only ones who commanded the elevator into those depths. But she taught no one a lesson, not the kind of lesson she meant. (BL p. 8.)

The symbolism of the elevator as a vehicle transporting one between higher and lower positions was not lost on either F. or

Edith and, for this reason, her death, her final and most important lesson to her husband took place at the base of the elevator shaft. The physical correspondence of the base of the elevator shaft and the anus is further suggested by Cohen in his description of the unsuspecting murderer.

A delivery boy from the Bar B-Q did the dirty work
by misreading the numbers on a warm brown paper bag.
(BL p. 8.)

The overt meaning is clear but the ambiguous possibility that the "dirty work" was performed by a young man holding a bag containing fresh feces is only too apparent. Edith's lesson is nothing less than a martyrdom because she has given up her life having perceived in the Danish Vibrator episode¹³ that life is what is most relevant. Because death is a natural part of life she is able to accept it for what it is and to use it for the continuing education of the Narrator.

Aside from the vertical displacement of the elevator there is a second movement in the novel that further illustrates Cohen's usage of anal metaphor to demonstrate the Narrator's advancement under F.'s training. This is in the change of setting from the sub-basement to F.'s treehouse. The Narrator broods for much of his time in the sub-basement apartment which provides the physical background for his confrontation with past memories, lessons, and experiences. Yet suddenly, and curiously, there is a transition of place from the sub-basement to F.'s treehouse, a vertical displacement from lower to higher.

Admittedly, the Narrator now owns the treehouse according to the terms of F.'s will, but the underlying rationale and the reason that F. left it to the Narrator, can only be understood in terms of two other episodes, one in Catherine's history, and the other immediately before the Narrator moves, the Gavin Gate episode.

Le P. Jean Pierron in his successful attempt to convert and baptize the Indians of Catherine's village employed a method that effectively transmutes the Indian mode of thought into a western orientation. The Indians responded to his entreaties by placing their fingers in their ears as if to block out his words, an action highly suggestive of the Telephone Dance, and, in fact, the priest anachronistically recognized their actions as such. In order to counter their reaction, the priest sketched an excessively graphic and imaginative representation of the suffering in hell, thus instilling in the Indian mind a fear that up until that point in their history had not been present.

—That's right, pull them right out, the priest invited them. And don't put them back. You must never put them back again. Old as you are, you must forget forever the Telephone Dance.

—Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop!

—That's better, isn't it?

As those waxy digits were withdrawn a wall of silence was thrown up between the forest and the hearth, and the old people gathered at the priest's hem shivered with a new kind of loneliness. They could not hear the raspberries breaking into domes, they could not smell the numberless pine needles combing out the wind, they could not remember the last moment of a trout as it lived between a flat white pebble on the streaked bed of a stream and the fast shadow of a bear claw. Like children who listen in vain to the sea in plastic seashells they sat bewildered. Like children at the end of a long bedtime story they were suddenly thirsty. (BL pp. 104-105)

The conclusion of their forced betrayal of Indian life is the loss of all sensual contact with nature, which was, according to Cohen, the fundamental basis of their heritage. Thus, the water of their life, their union with nature, has been taken from them; and in a literal sense they have been exiled from the Garden of Eden. Their sin is not concupiscence as it was in the Judeo-Christian context, but fear for their souls after death. Their thirst-filled loss is reminiscent of F.'s vague accusation of the Narrator, "Why have you allowed yourself to be robbed?"¹⁴

The above episode clearly places Cohen within the "noble savage", "back to nature" tradition of earlier romantics. However, as the reader shall see in the Gavin Gate episode, Cohen's perspective is more realistic, because he recognizes that urban life and urban technology are a fact of life. His invocation is a call to transform anal-based, fear of death based technology into a sexual-based, life-based civilization. For the Narrator the transition is not an easy one. His ordeal is still in progress when he discovers F.'s note concealed in the box of firecrackers commanding him to turn on the radio. (BL p. 93.). The reader is then introduced to the enigmatic and perhaps obscure Gavin Gate episode.

The lyrics speak of the pleading and deserted lover who would never have hurt his beloved and yet the stage directions are vividly masochistic, involving a great deal of pain

and sexual pleasure.

THEY FADE, THE ELECTRIC OPERATORS, GAVIN, THE GOD-
DESSES, THEIR BACKS BLEEDING, THEIR GENITALIA RED
AND SORE, THE GREAT STORY HAS BEEN TOLD, IN THE
DICTATORSHIP OF TIME. A COME HAS RENT THE FLAG,
TROOPS ARE MASTURBATING WITH 1948 PIN-UPS IN THEIR
TEARS, A PROMISE HAS BEEN RENEWED. (BL p. 98.)

The promise of love has been renewed through a savagely ritualistic, religious and historical punishment and purgation that are recognized as such by the Narrator who has become particularly conscious of the ambiguous meanings attributable to self-torture in his own ordeal. This incident anticipates the conclusion of the Narrator's section of the novel during which he passes the final test, that of acknowledging his need for F. in the same way that the lover in Gavin Gates lyrics acknowledges his need for the beloved.

Upon hearing the recording the Narrator for the first time departs from the sub-basement apartment and enters into the real world of Montreal which he embraces wholeheartedly.

Then I was out on the street, 4 a.m. in the morning, the streets damp and dark as newly poured cement, the streetlamps nearly merely decoration, the moon given speed by flying scarve of cloud, the thick walled warehouses with gold family names, the cold blue air filled with smells of burlap and the river, the sound of trucks with country vegetables, the creaks of a train unloading skinned animals from beds of ice, and men in overalls with great armfuls of travelling food, great wrestling embraces in the front-line war of survival, and men would win, and men would tell the grief in victory—I was outside in the cold ordinary world, F. had led me there by many compassion-tricks, a gasp in praise of existence blasted my chest and unfolded my lungs like a newspaper in the wind.

(BL p. 99.)

The combined power of the two episodes, the Indian's conversion and Gavin Gate, are sufficient to overcome the Narrator's alienation from nature and society. It is enough for the moment to surmount the anality of his sub-basement so that he is able to make the upward movement to the treehouse. The Narrator, then, lodges in the treehouse that he had earlier grown to love because it is where he and Edith had spent their honeymoon. (BL p. 108.). But now, not only is it a place in the midst of nature¹⁵ but it is also a place of Death and the underlying paradox of nature and Death fills the Narrator with fear.

...if I'm not constipated I'm scared. [thus linking constipation with a fear of death rather than with death itself]. O Death, let the firecracker burns heal once more. The trees around F.'s treehouse (where I'm writing this), they are dark. I can't smell the apples. O Death, why do you do so much acting and so little talking? The cocoons are soft and creepy. I am of worms with a butterfly heaven. Is Catherine a flower in the sky? Is F. an orchid? Is Edith a branch of hay? Does Death chase the cobwebs? Has Death anything to do with Pain, or is Pain working on the other side? [Cohen is relating pain to the purgative principle in the life force, a mystical and cabbalistic concept, recalling the pain of both Gavin Gate and Catherine]. O, F., how I loved this treehouse when you lent it to me and Edith for our honeymoon! (BL pp. 107-108)

The Narrator's fear of death leads to despair.

How do I get close to a dead saint? The pursuit seems like such nonsense. I'm not happy here in F.'s treehouse. It's long past the end of summer. My brain is ruined my career is in tatters. O F., is this the training you planned for me? (BL pp. 122-123.)

The Narrator can only take consolation from F.'s advice, "To discover the truth in anything that is alien, first dispense

with the indispensable in your own vision." (BL p. 107.). He finally recognizes that the "indispensable" in his own vision is his entire orientation towards life, a technological and wasteful life that has promised him a better material future that it cannot fulfill.

I demand National Health! I demand an operation!
 I want a slow transistor machine sewn in my head.
 Otherwise let science keep its insights out of the
 newspapers....
 Where is the science-fiction world of tomorrow they
 promised us today? I demand a change of climate.
 What bravado impelled me to come here without my
 radio? (BL pp. 139-140.)

Only as the Narrator is faced with the futile and empty goals of anal life does he place its machinations where they belong—among forgotten memories.

The Leader of the Pack lies mangled under his Honda
 in a wreck of job prospects, the ghostly Negro
 fullback floats down the wintry gridiron into Law
 School prizes, and the lucky football you autograph-
 ed takes pictures of the moon....
 ...I have forgotten my radio, so you languish with
 the other zombies of my memory, you whose only honor
 is hara-kiri with the blunt edge of returned identi-
 fication bracelets,...
 I hoard you like the stuff of my chronic disease,...
 (BL p. 141.)

Thus, the Narrator relates his constipation, his "chronic disease", with ever accumulating memories that are catalogued, forgotten, but never lost. The Narrator hoards facts, a position particularly suited to his role as an historian who collects past facts of history, just as he literally hoards his own fecal matter. Nevertheless, this constant physical reminder of his pre-

occupation with the past serves the additional purpose of stimulating his recall of apparently irrelevant personal events that in the context of F.'s training become more significant than all of the misleading memories of civilized life.

I forgot who I was. I forgot that I never learned to play the harmonica. I forgot that I never learned to play the guitar because F chord made my fingers bleed. I forgot about all the socks I've stiffened with semen. I tried to sail past the plague in a gondola, young tenor about to be discovered by a talent-scout tourist. I forgot about jars Edith handed me that I couldn't open. I forgot the way Edith died, the way F. died, wiping his ass with a curtain. I forgot that I only have one more chance. I thought Edith would rest in a catalogue. I thought I was a citizen, private, user of public facilities. I forgot about constipation! Constipation didn't let me forget. [*italics mine*] (BL p. 47.)

At this point the Narrator enters into a lengthy discussion of the overall primacy of constipation and its manifest relationship to every aspect of his life. In terms of anality the Narrator's suggestions, exhortations and conclusions make the following passage one of the most crucial of the novel.

Why me?—the great complaint of the constipated. Why doesn't the world work for me? the lonely sitting man on the porcelain machine. What did I do wrong yesterday? What unassailable bank in my psyche needs shit? How can I begin anything new with all of yesterday in me? (BL p. 47-48.)

Why me? I'll use science against you. I'll drop in pills like depth charges. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, don't make it tighter. Nothing helps, is that what you want me to learn? The straining man perched on a circle prepares to abandon all systems. Take hope, take cathedrals, take the radio, take my research. These are hard to give up, but a load of shit is harder still. Yes, yes, I abandon even the system of renunciation. In the tiled dawn courtroom a folded man tries a thousand oaths. Let me testify! Let

me prove Order! Let me cast a shadow! Please make me empty, if I'm empty then I can receive, if I can receive it means it comes from somewhere outside of me, if it comes from outside of me it means I'm not alone! I cannot bear this loneliness. Above all it is loneliness. I don't want to be a star, merely dying. Please let me be hungry, then I am not the dead centre, then I can single out the trees in their particular lives, then I can be curious about the names of rivers, the altitude of mountains, the different spellings of Tekakwitha, Tegahouita, Tegahkouita, Tehgakwita, Tekakouita, oh, I want to be fascinated by phenomena! I don't want to live inside! Renew my life. How can I exist as a vessel of yesterday's slaughter? Is the meat punishing me? Are there wild herds who think poorly of me? Murder in the kitchen! Dachau farmyards! We are grooming beings to eat! Does God love the world? What a monstrous system of nourishment! All of us animal tribes at eternal war! What have we won? Humans, the dietary Nazis! Death at the center of nourishment! Who will apologize to the cows? It's not our fault we didn't think this whole thing up. These kidneys are kidneys. This is not chicken, it is a chicken. Think of the death camps in the basement of a hotel. Blood on the pillows! Matter impaled on toothbrushes! All animals eating, not for pleasure, not for gold, not for power, but merely to be. For whose eternal Pleasure? Tomorrow I begin my fast. I resign.
(BL pp. 48-49.)

The Narrator feels that he is being punished for some unknown reason, but he remains unaware that his constipation is retribution for actions in the present. He discovers that what he ate yesterday effectively inhibits activity today, suggesting that it is the past that does not allow meaningful life in the present. Because of his constipation he experiences a primary alienation from the world system, that is, the natural cycle that nourishes plants, then animals, then man. At this most basic level he is unable to make a worthwhile contribution to human life by providing fertilizer that would regenerate the natural cycle.

To the Narrator's dismay, he discovers that technology offers no miraculous cure for his particular ailment, thus compelling him to discard all of the intellectual systems¹⁶ of his life in exchange for physical (and therefore, mental) relief. The impenetrable wall of alienation in which constipation has enveloped him leads the Narrator to conclude that he is utterly alone and isolated, something that he can no longer bear.

In the latter part of the above quotation the Narrator arrives upon a curious paradox concerning sustenance. He realizes that life feeds and nourishes itself upon that which is dead, or in his own words, "Death is at the center of nourishment". What is most horrifying and monstrous to the Narrator is that man raises living creatures solely to lead them to their death. Perceiving that the fear of dying, that is, survival, is at the centre of nourishment, he concludes that he must begin to fast.¹⁷ It is intensely disturbing for him to learn that as one of the constipated, true life has been barred from him.

What's it like outside? Is there an outside? I
am the sealed, dead, impervious museum of my appetite.
This is the brutal solitude of constipation. This
is the way the world is lost. (BL p. 50.)

The episode of the warts is particularly cogent to any discussion of the Narrator's memory, alienation, and constipation. The incident, itself, is overtly anal, taking place in the school lavatory. Moreover, the reason for the cutting is for the purpose of forgetting, that is, it is deeply involved with both the Narrator's and F.'s sense of time. Cohen consciously

puns a relation between warts and time as F. holds the Narrator by his wart covered hand, describing both a literal and a figurative condition:

—Step right up folks. Look at the man who can wait.
Look at the man who has a thousand years on his hands.
(BL p. 129.)

The warts are literally time, itself. In his mortification, the Narrator detaches himself from F. and addresses the reader but finds that abdominal pains, or the constipation that does not allow him to forget, force him to continue his story telling.

O Reader, do you know that a man is writing this?
A man like you who longed for a hero's heart. In
arctic isolation a man is writing this, a man who
hates his memory and remembers everything, who was
once as proud as you, who loved society as only an
orphan can, who loved it as a spy in the milk and
honey. A man like you who writes this daring passage,
who dreamed like you of leadership and gratitude.
No no please, not the cramps and I promise never to
interrupt, I swear, O you Gods and Goddesses of the
Pure Event.
(BL p. 130.)

The above passage further reinforces the debilitating effects of constipation and memory upon the Narrator's ego, that is, his self. Memory has formed him into what he is now and has, therefore, placed him into an "arctic isolation" that does not allow him to love society as he desires to do. By inference, it can be assumed that the loss of his memory, or ego, will allow him to breach his loneliness and to enter into a love relationship. Later, F. states in his letter to the Narrator a part of the rationale behind the ordeal in which he has placed the Narrator and consequently links constipation, memory,

and fact gathering with loneliness:

I promised you a joyous letter, didn't I?
It is my intention to relieve you of your final burden: the useless History under which you suffer in such confusion. Men of your nature never get far beyond the Baptism.

Life chose me to be a man of facts: I accept the responsibility. You mustn't meddle any longer in this shit. Avoid even the circumstances of Catherine Tekakwitha's death and the ensuing documented miracles. Read it with that part of your mind which you delegate to watching out for blackflies and mosquitoes.

Say good-bye to constipation and loneliness.
(BL p. 237.)

Again it is interesting to note that F. suffered from diarrhea as distinct from the Narrator's constipation.

Cohen employs feces in the novel to indicate many of the undesirable aspects of modern civilization. He brings together his understanding of anality with his conception of genital erotism or genital imperialism when the Narrator speaks of his possessive attitude towards Edith:

How quickly pettiness returns, and that most ignoble form of real estate, the possessive occupation and tyranny over two square inches of human flesh, the wife's cunt.
(BL p. 16.)

According to both Brown and Freud, the child's first recognition of objects to be valued occurs as he manipulates his own feces during the anal stage of personality development. Freud argued that feelings of ownership originated at this stage and after Freud, sociologists¹⁸ maintained that the anal character type bore marked similarities to the sociological type of the modern capitalist. Freud demonstrated that feelings of owner-

ship originated at this stage and, later, sociologists maintained that the value of gold, property, and money found in capitalist societies derived from the value attributed to feces by the child. It is for this reason that the Narrator speaks of one form of genital imperialism in terms of land value. Cohen has carefully related economic man to anal and sexual man.

Catherine also recognized (albiet unconsciously) the fundamental relationship between feces and money, and because she, herself, was free of the anal orientation, that is, did not fear death, she never felt herself to be in need of money.

Now I read that Catherine Tekakwitha had a great gift for embroidery and handicraft, and that she made beautiful leggings, tobacco pouches, moccasins, and wampums. Hour after hour she worked on these, roots and eelskins, shells, porcelain, quills. To be worn by anyone but her! Whom was her mind adorning? Her wampums were especially cherished. Was this the way she mocked money? Perhaps her contempt freed her to invent elaborate designs and color arrangements just as F.'s contempt for commerce enabled him to buy a factory. (BL pp. 57-58.)

And as if in further mockery, but perhaps only to more clearly demonstrate the root relationship between the sacred and the profane, the reader learns that in a number of the miraculous cures performed after Catherine's death a key element was mud, an obvious symbol for feces. In the first miracle Madame Roaner had been cured by Catherine's crucifix but later the crucifix was replaced with a bag of mud from Catherine's tomb.

The priest insisted but gave the woman a little bag of mud from the tomb of Catherine to hang in the place of the crucifix. Sometime later, she happened to take it off for one reason or another. As soon as it was clear of her head she collapsed, stricken

to the ground. It was only when the bag returned to her chest that she recovered once again. A year later her husband was seized by a violent pain in the kidneys. In a reckless instant of charity she removed the mud from her person and hung it over his neck. His pain stopped immediately, but she staggered, stricken again, crying out that her husband was murdering her. He was persuaded by several bystanders to return the little sack to his wife. She was instantly cured but his kidneys began again. Let us leave them here, in their new cruel service to Catherine Tekakwitha, as she invites their souls.

(BL p. 274.)

A second cure took place in 1695:

M. de Granville and his wife mixed the mud with a little water and fed it to their little daughter, who was dying. She sat up laughing.

(BL p. 276.)

A third cure in the same year involved an animal:

Last winter, writes le P. Cholenec, a steer fell through the ice in Montreal. They hauled him out but his body was so frozen that he couldn't walk. He was obliged to spend the winter in his stable. —Kill that animal! commanded the master of the house.

—Oh, let him live one more night, a servant girl pleaded.

—Very well. But he dies tomorrow!

She put some of the tomb mud which she cherished into the steer's drinking water, saying:

(BL p. 276.)

In the context of the preceding description of anality in this chapter, it becomes possible for the reader to understand the great importance F. places upon his collections of fireworks and soap. Soap is the means by which an individual cleanses himself of impurities and, as noted in chapter one of this thesis, it is most appropriate that Edith and F. are baptized into a new life with that at once most valued and most despicable

of soaps, human soap. The Narrator, early in the novel had likened F.'s ears to bars of soap: "The light came through his ears as if they were made of a bar of Pears Soap." (BL. p. 32.) Significantly, it is the ears that play the important role in the highly erotic Telephone Dance, an episode recounted by F. several pages after the Narrator's description of his ears.

The political counterpart of soap in the novel is fireworks which perform the same necessary cleansing function for those constipated with history. A covert form of mild constipation is congestion of the nasal passages. The Narrator observes that the pungent odor of the fireworks was sufficient to unblock his sinuses: "The sharp fragrance of gunpowder has cleaned my sinuses." (BL p. 80.). That this bears a relation to anality can be seen in the passage dealing with F.'s immense pleasure while sneezing.

I can only remember the way he used his handkerchief, the meticulous folding to keep his nose away from snot, his high-pitched sneezes and the pleasure they gave him. High-pitched and metallic, positively instrumental, a sideways snap of the bony head, then the look of surprise, as if he'd just received an unexpected gift, and the raised eyebrows which said, Fancy that. (BL pp. 58-59.)

Excretions of mucous generally elicit the same repugnance from humans as do feces. In any case sneezing is like a minor explosion which effectively clears blocked passages. This may appear to be belabouring the point, but when the reader considers that F. had concealed explosives within the fireworks he was smuggling into Quebec in anticipation of a violent revolution,

then the parallel between sneezing and fireworks becomes marked and striking.

I don't want any of your filthy politics, F. You're a thorn in the side of Parliament. You've smuggled dynamite into Quebec disguised as firecrackers.
(BL p. 169.)

At the historical level F. is attempting to rid man of his anal orientation by means of a social revolution that will explosively unlock man constipated with anal history. His parliamentary disgrace, taking a stand against conscription, made him a hero in French Quebec because it set the Quebecois apart from other Canadians, placing them in a position conducive for future revolution. What F. wished to create in Quebec was the "New Jew".

The New Jew loses his mind gracefully. He applies finance to abstraction resulting in successful messianic politics, colorful showers of meteorites and other symbolic weather. He has induced amnesia by repetitious study of history, his very forgetfulness caressed by facts which he accepts with visible enthusiasm. He changes for a thousand years the value of stigma, causing men of all nations to pursue it as superior sexual talisman. The New Jew is the founder of Magic Canada, Magic French Canada, and Magic America. He demonstrates that yearning brings surprises. He uses regret as a bulwark of originality. He confuses nostalgic theories of Negro supremacy which were tending to the monolithic. He confirms tradition through amnesia, tempting the whole world with rebirth. He dissolves history and ritual by accepting unconditionally the complete heritage. He travels without passport because powers consider him harmless. His penetration into jails enforces his supranationality, and flatters his legalistic disposition. Sometimes he is Jewish but always he is American, and now and then, Quebecois.

(BL pp. 202-203.)

The "New Jew" must be defined as a loser on the historical

level of the novel but F. feared that the "New Jew" could never come into existence because of the soporific effects of anality. In this particular instance he is referring to the pre-war mentality that allowed for German aggression:

I simply refused to support the War, not because I was French, or a pacifist (which of course I'm not), but because I was tired. I knew what they were doing to the Gypsies, I had a whiff of Zyklon B, but I was very, very tired. Do you remember the world at that time? A huge jukebox played a sleepy tune. The tune was a couple of thousand years old and we danced to it with our eyes closed. The tune was called History and we loved it, Nazis, Jews, everybody. We loved it because we made it up, because like Thucydides, we knew that whatever happened to us was the most important thing in the world. History made us feel good so we played it over and over, deep into the night. (BL p. 205.)

In perfect drowsy battalions we moved through the moonlight. Its will be done. In perfect sleep we took the soap and waited for the showers. (BL p. 206.)

F. is describing a people that has become so dulled to the ultimate threat that it is being led unsuspectingly to its death in false showers that release poisonous gas instead of cleansing and life-giving water. The fireworks and the dynamite were his political investment in the future of both Quebec and man.

F. was, figuratively and literally, playing with fire. Just as he feared that the Narrator would blow himself up in death by misadventure, so he feared that Quebec would be destroyed in a revolution.

Now my fat confession. I loved the magic of guns. I sneaked them in under the skin of firecrackers. My old monkey made me do it. I planted guns in Quebec for I was hung between free and coward. Guns

suck magic. I buried guns for future History.
 If History rule let me be Mr. History. The guns are
 green. The flowers poke. I let History back because
 I was lonely. Do not follow. Go beyond my style. I
 am nothing but a rotten hero. (BL p. 206.)

Nevertheless, he saw that in extreme action lay the only possibility for hope because he knew himself to be the frantic sewer with limited time and scarce means. He chose violence as the only viable alternative to dissipate the crippling constipation of history.

It should at this point be apparent that the Narrator's occupation as an historian is intimately a part of his character as well as the character of historically conscious, civilized man. F.'s "Invocation to History In The Old Style" introduces the necessity of eradicating the anal orientation toward history in favour of liberated eroticism.

The miracle we all are waiting for
 is waiting until Parliament falls down
 and House of Archives is no more
 and fathers are unpoisoned by renown.
 The medals and records of abuse
 can't help us on our pilgrimage to lust,
 (BL p. 237.)

However, it is F.'s "Invocation to History In The Middle Style" with its copious footnotes that firmly establishes the formal binding of History and anality.

History is a Scabbie Point
 For putting Cash to sleep
 Shooting up the Peanut Shit
 Of all we need to keep. (BL p. 238.)

History metaphorically becomes the infecting vehicle that somnambulizes consciousness and subsequently infects man with the false

perspective of the anal vision, that is, that historical facts are pure in their own right, but that anality has adulterated them with additives. Using F.'s very illuminating footnotes (BL pp. 238-239.) one might freely translate the invocation as: History is the infected needle for putting the intellect to sleep, injecting adulterated drugs into all we need to pass on. Footnote five (BL p. 239.) explicitly states that the infection caused by history is anal. Cohen bluntly asserts that "Peanut" is from the Coprophagist's argot and then gives the etymological derivation of the word from the Greek and Sanskrit so that even the most obtuse of readers might understand that he literally means infected with dung and manure.

The problem of anality in western society is one that has been approached by psychologist's and sociologists alike, but because of the deep-seated taboos that repress the natural expression of this aspect of personality, the question has never been adequately treated other than in literature. Clearly, the problem remains complex and ambiguous because self-analysis at any time is so difficult. Cohen, however, has confronted the anal orientation of man and drawn numerous conclusions from its far reaching implications. Particularly, in the ontological dimension he has established the profound relationship between the lower, bestial, physical nature of man and his higher, intellectual, spiritual nature. Cohen's treatment, on the one

hand, condemns the anal orientation as perverse and potentially destructive to civilization, and, on the other hand, admits to the necessity of knowing with complete awareness every element of the anal condition. Special emphasis must be placed upon his conception of the tie binding the anal vision to the fear of death.

The question of pursuing life while fully accepting the inevitability of death will form the subject matter of the third chapter of this thesis. This treatment of anality has taken the novel out of the arena of mere wish fulfillment and sexual utopias and placed it within the realm of serious and imaginative critiques of twentieth century man. Essentially, Cohen has metaphorically uncovered the anal perspective of history, relating feces to economics, and abdominal pain to historiography. The feat is not a small one but rests as almost a unique work on the shelves of literature.

Footnotes

- 1 Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Scribner, 1948).
- 2 Richard H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: An Historical Study (Mass.: P. Smith Ltd., 1954)
- 3 Jonathon Swift, Poetical Works, ed. Herbert Davis, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 522.
- 4 Swift, p. 524.
- 5 Swift, pp. 477-478.
- 6 Swift, pp. 530-531.
- 7 Swift, p. 480.
- 8 Swift, p. 526.
- 9 Jonathon Swift, Gulliver's Travels (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967) p. 315.
- 10 Swift, Gulliver's Travels, p.310.
- 11 Gulliver's Travels, p.310.
- 12 Ricardo Quintana, The Mind and Art of Jonathon Swift (London: Methuen, 1953).
- 13 Refer to Chapter one of this thesis pp. 24-25.
- 14 Refer to chapter one of this thesis pp. 9-10.
- 15 The location of F.'s treehouse is most probably the Caugna-waga Indian Reserve which is the only national forest south of Montreal. For a further reference to the location of the tree-house refer to BL p. 290.
- 16 Refer to chapter one of this thesis for the discussion concerning "connections" pp. 13-16.

- 17 Refer to chapter one of this thesis p. 28. Catherine also fasts for the same reason and presumably so does Edith.
- 18 Notably Fromm in The Sane Society.

Chapter Three

Man and the Universe

Who am I to refuse the Universe?¹

The machine will never be dominated, as some imagine; it will be scrapped, eventually, but not before men have understood the mystery which binds them to their creation. The worship, investigation and subjugation of the machine will give way to the lure of all that is truly occult. This problem is bound up with the larger one of power—and of possession. Man will be forced to realize that power must be kept open, fluid and free. His aim will be not to possess power but to radiate it.²

Here is a plea based on my whole experience:
do not be a magician, be magic.³

The critical problem of this chapter will be to consolidate the many avenues of Cohen's thought expressed in Beautiful Losers into a coherent whole, for, it is indeed a conceptual unity within which Cohen is working. However, much of the difficulty of the novel lies in the discontinuity of the free flowing consciousness of the characters. Cohen does not offer facile solutions that are readily perceptible to the problem-solving ment-

ality. Only rarely does he define his terms, and then the meanings are frequently complex and ambiguous, often drawing upon obscure sources that are difficult to trace definitively. Yet, a little patience and more tolerance yield results that offer not only aesthetic satisfaction but also positive hope and direction for beleaguered twentieth-century man.

As posited at several points in this paper, the central issue of Beautiful Losers is the traditional, if not monumental, struggle between life and death. Chapter two of this thesis established the causal relationship developed by Cohen between the anal vision and contemporary historical perspectives. It is in the anal perception of man's history that Cohen discovers the basis of civilization's diverse ills. Brown, as well as Freud, argues that history is the record of man attempting to transform himself into something which he presently is not. The rationale for this conclusion derives from the fundamental effort of man to recover the state of polymorphous perversity experienced by every child before the onset of repression originating in the oral, anal, and phallic stages of psychological development. It is only because of repression that the death instinct converts itself into a fear of death, compelling men into the frustrating and potentially disastrous pursuit of creating time and history.

The death instinct is reconciled with the life instinct only in a life which is not repressed, which leaves no "unlived lines" in the human body, the death instinct then being affirmed in a body which is willing to die.

And, because the body is satisfied, the death instinct no longer drives it to change itself and make history, and therefore, as Christian theology divined, its activity is in eternity. (LAD p. 308.)

Cohen confirms this analytical direction in F.'s cryptic interrogation of the Narrator, "Why have you allowed yourself to be robbed?" The robbery and recovery of child-like or pre-lapsian pleasure constitutes one of the major themes of the novel as a delineation of the life and death struggle. The conclusions reached in this chapter will ultimately define what Cohen means by the ambiguous term, loser.

In approaching the question of the life and death struggle from the standpoint of sexuality and the anal vision it will be necessary to draw to a limited extent upon Cabbalistic lore with which Cohen was certainly acquainted. As well, a portion of this chapter will be devoted to the Telephone Dance and to the entire concept of play as a divine and human function, particularly for the new man as envisioned in the third part of the novel.

What has been described in this paper as the life force in the novel requires further clarification for the more extensive purposes of this chapter. In chapter one the life force was identified with polymorphous perversity or pan-erogenism in the novel. For the intent of that chapter it was adequate to consider only the ramifications of wholly liberated eroticism. The definition of the life force was further elaborated upon to include an overview that provided an essentially romantic conception of life, one that urged the continued unification of anthro-

pometric disparities found in everyday judgements as well as in philosophical and technological perceptions and speculations. A final extension to this understanding of the life force is the crucial element of play, for it is in play that man is able to discover the authentic possibility of truly accepting death as a vital adjunct of human life.

Brown, as well as Freud, notes that play is the most important infantile activity producing pleasure, and, therefore, concludes that the chief mode of erotic pleasure is to be found in play.

Freud is not merely referring to all the activities conventionally recognized as children's play; he is also making a structural analysis of the infantile activities which he insisted were sexual and perverse, of which thumb-sucking is the proto-type. In early infancy the child, according to Freud, inevitably takes his own body as his sexual object; in doing so, he plays with it. Play is the essential character of activity governed by the pleasure-principle rather than the reality-principle [Freud later identified the pleasure-principle with the life instinct and the reality-principle with the death instinct]. Play is "purposeless yet in some sense meaningful." It is the same thing if we say that play is the erotic mode of activity. Play is that activity which, in the delight of life, unites man with the objects of his love, as is indeed evident from the role of play in normal adult genital activity. But according to Freud, the ultimate essence of our being is erotic and demands activity according to the pleasure-principle. (LAD pp. 32-33.)

Brown goes on to extrapolate this hypothesis in an application to modern life and our problem with leisure time:

The doctrine that play is the essential mode of activi-

ty of a free or of a perfected or of a satisfied humanity has obvious implications for social reform.... The most realistic observers are emphasizing man's increasing alienation from his work; the possibility of mass unemployment—ie., liberation from work—given by modern technology; and the utter incapability of human nature as it is today to make genuinely free use of leisure—to play. (LAD pp. 34-35.)

One of Brown's major sources concerning play is Johan Huizinga's classic study of the play element in culture, Homo Ludens. Huizinga in this work clearly defines certain of the basic characteristics of play as it appears in all of its various forms.

Here, then we have the first main characteristic of play: that it is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather, a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. Every child knows perfectly well that he is "only pretending", or that it was only for fun.⁵

It is, therefore, with conscious choice that Cohen has F. whistling the tune of "The Great Pretender" as he paints the model of the Greek Acropolis from white to red.

He was humming snatches from "The Great Pretender", a song which was to change the popular music of our day. (BL p. 12.)

Concerning the quality of pretense in play, Huizinga remarks:

This "only pretending" quality of play betrays a consciousness of the inferiority of play compared with "seriousness", a feeling that seems to be something as primary as play itself. Nevertheless, as we have already pointed out, the consciousness of play being "only a pretend" does not by any means prevent it from proceeding with the utmost seriousness, with an absorption, a devotion that passes into rapture and, temporarily at least, completely

abolishes that troublesome "only" feeling. Any game can at any time wholly run away with the players. The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid. The inferiority of play is continually being offset by the corresponding superiority of its seriousness. Play turns to seriousness and seriousness to play. Play may rise to heights of beauty and sublimity that leave seriousness far beneath.⁶

But the most important characteristic of play that is relevant to Beautiful Losers is the ordering of existence that occurs within the play sphere. First, play is fixed with respect to time and space, and the sequence of events can be repeated ad infinitum.

Play begins, and at a certain moment it is "over".... It can be repeated at any time, whether it be "child's play" or a₇ game of chess, or at fixed intervals like a mystery.

It is regarding the rules of play that order is imposed upon a chaotic and arbitrary life within the physical, temporal, and spatial boundaries of the game.

Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, is order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it "spoils the game", robs it of its character, and makes it worthless. The profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play, as we noted in passing, seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics. Play has a tendency to be beautiful. It may be that this aesthetic factor is identical with the impulse to create₈ orderly form, which animates play in all its aspects.

Huizinga makes a final comment concerning the significance of play in everyday life. He specifically speaks of sacred ritual and observes that the meaning of play can create a reality that

will carry over into ordinary life:

Passing now from children's games to the sacred performances in archaic culture we find that there is more of a mental element "at play" in the latter, though it is excessively difficult to define. The sacred performance is more than an actualization in appearance only, a sham reality; it is also more than a symbolical actualization—it is a mystical one. In it something invisible and inactual takes beautiful, actual, holy form. The participants in the rite are convinced that the action actualizes and effects a definite beatification, brings about an order of things higher than that in which they customarily live. All the same this "actualization by representation" still retains the formal character of play in every respect. It is played or performed within a playground that is literally "staked out", and played, moreover, as a feast, i.e. in mirth and freedom. A sacred space, a temporarily real world of its own, has been expressly hedged off for it. But with the end of the play its effect is not lost; rather it continues to shed its radiance on the ordinary world outside, a wholesome influence working security, order, and prosperity for the whole community until the sacred play season comes around again.

The comments made by Huizinga concerning the ordering function of play recall the statement made by the Narrator concerning the meaning of Catherine Tekakwitha.

Tekakwitha was the name she was given, but the exact meaning of the word is not known. She who puts things in order, is the interpretation of l'abbe Marcoux, the old missionary at Caughnawaga....
Like someone who proceeds in the shadows, her arms held before her, is the elaboration of P. Lecompte. Let us say her name was some combination of these two notions: She who advancing, arranges the shadows neatly. (BL p. 55.)

In effect, Catherine's nomenclature designates her as a player, one meant to bring order into a life devoid of order. This unusual notion is further echoed in the curious form of Indian address.

Thus each man took full responsibility for intruding into the inarticulate murmur of the spheres. To hiro they added the word koue, a cry of joy or distress, according to whether it was sung or howled. Thus they essayed to pierce the mysterious curtain which hangs between all talking men: at the end of every utterance a man stepped back, so to speak, and attempted to interpret the words of his listener, attempting to subvert the beguiling intellect with the noise of true emotion. (BL p. 9.)

Every Iroquois acknowledged that verbal communication was an arbitrary formulation of sounds and that it was necessary to interpret what he had heard according to a specific regimen in order to derive meaning from it.

In relating to the Narrator the events leading up to the Telephone Dance, F. states quite forcefully the primary significance of the game aspect of the dance:

Then it turned into a game. Games are nature's most beautiful creation. All animals play games, and the truly Messianic vision of the brotherhood of creatures must be based on the idea of the game, indeed—
(BL pp. 36-37.)

He views the game as having universal appeal to all forms life, divine, animal, and human. His assertion that "the brotherhood of all creatures must be based on the idea of the game", gives to play primal importance in the structure of Cohen's conceptual framework of the new society. All activity will be performed in the mode of play, requiring order, ritual, and intrinsic sacredness.

Dancing fulfills all of the prescribed characteristics of play with regard to time, space, and ordering, not excepting modern dance and its elicited response to primitive tribal

rhythms. The concept of play places the Telephone Dance and the Dance of Masks in an altered context from that of polymorphous pleasure, opening wider vistas for exploration and establishing the vital predominant role of these dances in Cohen's vision. F.'s speculations on the origins of the Telephone Dance bear all the earmarks of sacred and divine ritual.

The telephone, hitherto so foreboding and powerful, was our friend! It was the agent of some benign electronic deity, and we wanted to praise it. I suppose that certain primitive bird and snake dances began the same way, a need to imitate the fearful and the beautiful, yes, an imitative procedure to acquire some of the qualities of the adored, awesome beast. (BL p. 39.)

The process involved is mimetic as are all serious artistic and aesthetic endeavours. F. has placed the Telephone Dance within the cultural pattern of development because its intent is communication, just as the mechanical operation of the telephone is for the purpose of communication.

It is during the episode of the Telephone Dance that F. defines what is meant by the erotogenic body and claims on behalf of humanity the lost ability that can only be recovered by performing the Telephone Dance. But because of the essentially sacred and playful nature of the Telephone Dance, the imitation of the awesome beast, as Huizinga had noted, is mystically actualized in a way that parallels F.'s command to the Narrator, "to be magic."

—What did you hear?

—Hear is not the right word. I became a telephone. Edith was the electrical conversation that went through me. (BL p. 41.)

Significantly, the Narrator at this point launches into a vituperative attack upon F.'s credibility as a "madman who has lost control of his bowels". (BL p. 42.), thereby, reinforcing the antagonism between the life and death elements of the novel within the Narrator's consciousness, since he is at this point the principle exponent of the anal view of history and sexuality in the novel.

Mention of the Telephone Dance recurs in the passage which portrays le P. Jean Pierron converting the older Indians to Christianity through his explicit and fearful representation of hell. The Jesuit priest acknowledges the crucial importance of the auditory sense and the symbolism of the fingers in the ears as an anachronistic variation of the Telephone Dance.

—That's right, pull them right out, the priest invited them. and don't put them back. You must never put them back again. Old as you are, you must forget forever the Telephone Dance. (BL p. 104.)

Only by creating a fear of death as a time of horror and punishment can the priest be certain of overcoming or, at least, counteracting the revitalizing power of the Telephone Dance. Catherine's uncle alone is able to resist the arguments of the priest, in part because he is, himself, on the verge of death and in part because he perceives the true nature of the death experience. For him death is warded off by a resurgence of life in the Dance of Masks, a dance that bears a substantial qualitative likeness to the Telephone Dance. Each dance is a process of communicating that permits the participants to mystically

become one with one another and to share in the act of transforming the symbol into reality. Both dances have erotic overtones, particularly the Dance of Masks in which eroticism is quite explicit.

That Catherine is a player, one "who advancing orders the shadows neatly", is demonstrated when on her deathbed she utters the Tetragrammaton.

On her knees, praying with Marie-Therese and several other whipped girls, Catherine Tekakwitha stumbled over the names of Jesus and Mary, mispronouncing them.. But why didn't you record the exact sounds she made? She was playing with the Name, she was mastering the good Name, she was grafting all the fallen branches to the living tree. Aga? Muja? Jumu? You idiots, she knew the Tetragrammaton!...We had her there, nailed and talkative, ready to undo the world, and we let the sharp mouths of relic boxes gnaw at her bones. Parliament! (BL p. 265.)

The Tetragrammaton, originating among the Jewish Geonic mystics (500-900 A.D., this is probably a neo-platonic influence derived from Pythagoras that became part of the Greek influence upon the Cabbala) as a symbolic manipulation of number and letter, represented the magically powerful name of God which when spoken in the proper order rendered unto the speaker the divine power of creation and destruction. This was the same force that created the universe and was of the utmost importance to later Cabbalists. This explains F.'s remark that Catherine was "ready to undo the world". This type of word play that Cohen is employing indicates the scope in the revolution that F. is planning.

However, the concept of play in Beautiful Losers cannot

be limited to dancing and word games, no matter how serious their intent, for, as play becomes the hiatus between life and death, its manifestations become more profound and intrinsic. F. characterizes the Indian inclination towards play early in the novel when he compares the Indian to the Greek. This is one of F.'s most incredible conjectures:

He compared the Indians to the ancient Greeks, suggesting a similarity of character, a common belief that every talent must unfold itself in fighting, a love of wrestling, an inherent incapacity to unite for any length of time, an absolute dedication to the idea of the contest and the virtue of ambition. (BL p. 11.)

The Narrator regards F.'s pronouncements upon the Indian character as "unscholarly", but grudgingly admits to their probable validity. Serious evidence for play as a physical combat occurs in the novel when Catherine's uncle attempts to protect her from le P. Jacques de Lamberville.

The priest wheeled around and made toward the door. The Shadow greeted him and they wrestled. The Shadow was naked and easily tripped his heavily robed opponent. The Shadow threw himself upon the priest, who was struggling to extricate himself from the coils of his robe. The Shadow in his ferocity managed to entangle himself in the very same robes. The priest quickly perceived his advantage. He lay perfectly still while the Shadow suffocated in the prison of a fortunate pocket. He got up and threw the door open. (BL p. 109.)

Catherine's uncle, who pursued a sexual, rather than a masochistic form of eroticism was rarely of help to his niece, thus his defeat at the hands of the priest had little effect upon Catherine's ultimate victory over the negative aspects of Christianity.

The wrestling match between the priest and the Shadow serves

to later introduce a piece of Indian mythology that graphically illustrates the nature of the life and death struggle. This the uncle recalls after he is defeated by the priest:

But he was not thinking of the kernels he had just sown, he was thinking about the life of his people. All the years, all the hunts, all the wars—it would all come to nothing. There would be no harvest! Even his soul when it ripened would not be gathered to the warm southwest, whence blows the wind which brings sunny days and the bursting corn. The world was unfinished! A deep pain seized his chest. The great wrestling match between Ioskeha, the White one, and Tawiscara, the Dark one, the eternal fight would fizzle out like two passionate lovers falling asleep in a tight embrace. There would be no harvest!
(BL p. 112.)

In other words, the White one and the Dark one, the two violent lovers, would become irrelevant and forgotten after the Christian priests introduce the fear of death to the Indian. Catherine's uncle says as much when he extracts from her the promise never to leave Kahnawake:

—There will be no harvest, my daughter. Our heaven is dying. From every hill, a spirit cries out in pain, for it is being forgotten.
(BL p. 113.)

A second myth, told to Catherine by her uncle explains why the Indian does not fear death. This myth refers to the journey that the Indian soul takes after death. It is a difficult and treacherous trek that leads finally to the hut of Oscotarach who then removes the brain from the Indian's skull, thus permitting him to take part in the Eternal Hunt. The belief in Oscotarach is also an explicit reference to the title of the novel adding a further dimension to the term "loser" as one

loses one's intellect.

When the wind is no longer in my nostrils my spirit body will begin a long journey homeward. Look at this wrinkled, scarred body as I speak to you. My beautiful spirit body will begin a hard, dangerous journey. Many do not complete this journey, but I will. I will cross a treacherous river standing on a log. Wild rapids will try to throw me against sharp rocks. A huge dog will bite my heels. Then I will follow a narrow path between dancing boulders which crash together, and many will be crushed, but I will dance with the boulders. Look at this old Mohawk body as I speak to you, Catherine. Beside the path there is a bark hut. In the hut lives Oscotarach, the Head-Piercer. I will stand beneath him and he will remove the brain from my skull. It is the necessary preparation for the Eternal Hunt. look at this body and listen. (BL pp. 145-146.)

Clearly the Indian death is a ritualistic one, undertaken by all Indians and not to be feared in the Christian sense of terrifying torture for failure. Again the play element is invoked by the dancing boulders, frustrated by the more nimble uncle. But more significantly, upon completion of the journey, the Indian loses his brain as "the necessary preparation for the Eternal Hunt." The importance of this aspect of the myth will be accentuated when the Narrator suggests that F. is his "Head-Piercer" and when F. confirms this speculation. Regarding the life and death struggle in Beautiful Losers, the myth of Oscotarach provides a firm basis for the successful resolution of the struggle, that is, that death must be accepted, not feared and thereby ignored out of that fear, if man is to achieve eternity. The mythological notion is also in accordance with the Christian and Judaic traditions but has never been adequately

dealt with by theologians, for, the apprehensive dread that death may be the ultimate end is a suspicion that is almost universally present in the western mind.

As was established in chapter two of this thesis,¹⁰ F.'s treehouse represents a return from an anal technology to the natural state. The Narrator affirms the naturalness of the treehouse when he identifies it with the bark hut of Oscotarach:

Is this treehouse the hut of Oscotarach? F. are you the Head-Piercer? I did not know the operation was so long and clumsy. Raise the blunt tomahawk once more. Poke the stone spoon through the cerebral porridge. Does the moonlight want to get into my skull? Do the sparkling alleys of the sky want to stream through my eyeholes? F., were you the Head-Piercer, who left his hut and applied to the public ward in pursuit of his own operation? Or are you still with me, and is the surgery deep in progress?
(BL p. 168.)

F. responds in his letter to the Narrator by employing almost the same words as the Narrator in the above quotation, as he takes upon himself the role of the Head-Piercer:

Ask yourself. Perhaps the treehouse where you suffer is the hut of Oscotarach. You did not know the operation was so long and clumsy. Again and again the blunt tomahawk pokes among the porridge. The moonlight wants to get into your skull. The sparkling alleys of the icy sky want to stream through your eyeholes. The night winter air which seems like "diamonds held in solution," it wants to flood the empty bowl.

Ask yourself. Was I your Oscotarach? I pray that I was. The surgery is deep in progress, darling. I am with you.
(BL p. 232.)

The removal of the Indian's brain in the Oscotarach myth becomes an archetypal image for F.'s destruction of the Narrator's identity, or more precisely, of his narcissistic ego that insists

upon retaining all of the useless encumbrances of memory and experience that form the "I" of the novel.

F. asks the obvious question, "But who could perform the operation on Oscotarach?" (BL p. 232.). F. realizes that he is no god, no "prima causa", and so finds that he must turn to the politics of revolution, placing the initiative upon humanity to pierce his skull. F.'s ordeal is the difficult task of transforming himself into Oscotarach.

The myth of Oscotarach provides the efficacious solution to the paralyzing and soporific effects of anality and the consequent fear of death. As the Narrator is gradually able to accept the paradoxical struggle between life and death he embraces both with what can only be described as love. In a sense, Cohen has reached back into primitive tradition and ritual, literally into the medicine man's magical bag, in search of universal answers to modern problems. As such the myth of Oscotarach is made into one of the intellectual bases of the novel, ultimately justifying the road to revolution.

It has been mentioned a number of times that the characters, themselves, enter into an ordeal, the intent of which is to raise them to increasingly higher levels of enlightenment. The Narrator's own progress is marked by F. through several tests which must be passed before moving from one stage to another. Perhaps the most striking of these tests involves the masturbation episode during which F. and the Narrator stimulate them-

selves to the point of orgasm at which time a wall appears before them, so frightening the Narrator that all sexual excitement is lost for him. Unknown to the Narrator, however, the wall is no more than a silk replica created by Edith and F. as a means of allowing the Narrator to experience fully sexual life or energy in the face of imminent death in order to overcome his fear. The Narrator describes his feelings before he sees the wall:

As for me, I knew that one more stroke would deliver me—I hovered on the edge of my orgasm like a parachutist in the whistling doorway—I was suddenly forlorn—I was suddenly without desire—I was suddenly more awake (for this fraction of a second) than ever before in my whole life—
—The wall! (BL p. 118.)

Nevertheless, he fails the test. The importance of it is, however, not lost on him. What had originally driven him to masturbation was his loneliness. "I could bear my loneliness no longer." (BL p. 117.), and F. laments the Narrator's failure before the wall in terms of loneliness:

—O my friend, you are so lonely. Each day you get lonelier. What will happen when we are gone.
(BL p. 120.)

The test was to have been the Narrator's final exploration of sexuality, because through it he should have been able to overcome his fear of death. F. never repeats the same test, probably because even in failure the lesson is learned. Technically, one might argue that, in terms of the erotogenic body, the idea of the Narrator performing genital masturbation before the wall indicates that F. has constructed the test poorly. But if one

examines the Narrator's ordeal as a process of first becoming familiar with all the parts of the body before seeing them as an erotogenic whole, then the incongruity is less apparent.

F.'s next test, "the second-to-last test", is the one that allows the Narrator to experience the pan-orgasm reinforced by the compelling cry for political life at the Separatist rally. The sexual nature of the rally is introduced at the beginning of the episode as the Narrator notices that everyone, including the women, has a "hard-on". While he becomes totally absorbed in the ardour of the revolutionary speech, the Narrator discovers that he is being masturbated by a female hand, the fingers of which Cohen curiously and appropriately describes in weapon metaphor..

I felt a hand slip down the back of my baggy trousers, a female hand because it had long fingernails smooth and tapered as a fuselage. (BL p. 151.)

What is emphasized in the passage is not so much the impersonality of the Narrator's experience:

I loosed my belt to let her hand go deeper. I did not dare turn around to face her. I did not want to know who she was—that seemed to me the highest irrelevance. (BL p. 151.)

as the pervasive unity of feeling felt by the multitude:

We began our rhythmical movements which corresponded to the very breathing of the mob, which was our family and the incubator of our desire. (BL p. 153.)

When F. is recognized as the true leader of the revolution the mob as a whole achieves pan-orgasm in their frenzied state of excitement.

And now, as if the presence of this veteran conferred a new mystic urgency, the speaker began to speak, almost to chant. His voice carressed us, just as her fingers me, his voice fell over our desire like a stream over a moaning water wheel, and I knew that all of us, not just the girl and me, all of us were going to come together. Our arms were tangled and squashed, and I did not know if it was I who held the root of my cock or she who greased the stiffening of her labia! Every one of us there had the arms of Plastic Man, and we held each other, all naked from the waist, all sealed in a frog jelly of sweat and juice, all bound in the sweetest bursting daisy chain!
(BL pp. 153-154.)

It is at this point that blood, the symbolic and literal fountain of life, is invoked as the effective source of their humanity.

From the earliest dawn of our race, this Blood, this shadowing stream of life, has been our nourishment and our destiny. Blood is the builder of the body, and Blood is the source of the spirit of our race. In Blood lurks our ancestral inheritance, in Blood is embodied the shape of our History, from Blood blooms the flower of our Glory, and Blood is the under-current which they can never divert, and which all their stolen money cannot dry up! (BL p. 154.)

The crowd, fully satisfied, begins to disperse and the Narrator having fully expected genital sexual release is perplexed by the apparent gratification of the crowd. The mob declares him a pervert for wishing genital orgasm, and, thoroughly confused, he cries to F. that he has failed again to achieve orgasm. F. states that he has passed "the second-to-last test". The Narrator's surprise is comparable to that of F.'s astonishment when he had discovered that Edith had not achieved orgasm with the Danish Vibrator in Argentina.

Before discussing the final test of the Narrator in which he confesses his need for F., having learned that F. is about to

commit political suicide, it is necessary to briefly examine the Cabbalistic¹¹ references in the novel in order to realize the deepest significance of the Narrator's final pronouncement to F., "BECAUSE I NEED YOU, F." It is the final test that ultimately shatters the ego-based selfishness of the Narrator and underlines the most profound meaning of the term, "loser".

Early in the novel F. has denounced the Narrator's attempts to conceptually unify the disparate elements of the universe. He describes the attempts as "pathetic" implying that they are premature since, "The Jews didn't let young men study the Cabala." (BL. p. 23.). The passage with the most overt reference to the Cabbala in Beautiful Losers occurs in episode Forty of Part One which defines what is meant in the novel by a saint:

What is a saint? A saint is someone who has achieved a remote human possibility. It is impossible to say what that possibility is. I think it has something to do with the energy of love. Contact with this energy results in the exercise of a kind of balance in the chaos of existence. A saint does not dissolve the chaos; if he did the world would have changed long ago. I do not think a saint dissolves the chaos even for himself, for there is something arrogant and war-like in the notion of a man setting the universe in order. It is a kind of balance that is his glory. He rides the drifts like an escaped ski. His course is the caress of a hill. His track is the drawing of the snow in a moment of its particular arrangement with wind and rock. Something in him so loves the world that he gives himself to the laws of gravity and chance. Far from flying with the angels, he traces with the fidelity of a seismograph needle the state of the solid bloody landscape. His house is dangerous and finite, but he is at home in the world. He can love the shapes of human beings, the fine and twisted shapes of the heart. (BL pp. 121-122.)

In fact, the description of the saint is an accurate portrayal

of what has been termed a white magician in the process of achieving goodness. Epstein delineates the distinction between the black and white magician in a manner similar to Cohen's definition of a saint.

'Black magician' is an occult term designating those highly gifted, often charming individuals who, for egotistical purposes, have elected to follow the left-hand path through the dense stages of matter that lead eventually to hell. White magicians, on the other hand, devote themselves to a life of self-control, and an expansion of consciousness in order to serve all that lives.¹²

Concerning the problem of evil and how it figures in the training of the white magician, she says:

Evil is not to be shunned. For the artist it provides secret knowledge unavailable to the plodding healthy man. He must know it and subdue it, employing equilibrium as his most powerful weapon. If he is successful, he will eventually learn that what he had, in his ignorance, originally perceived as evil is actually another aspect of God's multiple manifestations. Should he fail the abyss awaits him.¹³

The essential and common characteristics mentioned in the above three quotations are the white magician's, or saint's, selflessness and love for humanity and the internal equilibrium with which he is able to express himself. Cohen's Narrator speaks of the balance in terms of a skier who forms patterns in the chaos. This he does for the benefit of others, and this is his magic, a type of ordering, a play-like activity. Cohen differentiates this from the dissolving of the chaos which he describes as an "arrogant and war-like" aim, in effect, that which is done by the egotistical black magician. Epstein speaks of

descending into evil so that one understands it solely as a manifestation of goodness. Evil in Beautiful Losers is all things anal, and F. ensures that the Narrator fully knows and comprehends the nature of his constipation and loneliness before he is able to progress to a positive appreciation of life, himself, and those who love him.

There are a variety of references throughout the novel to numerology and astrology that appear in Cabbalistic-lore, particularly in the tradition as it had developed until the nineteenth century. However, it will not be necessary to enter into a discussion of their role in the novel, except to suggest that they open up an avenue for further study. But magic, itself, the irrational art that is supremely rational in its closed system of ritualistic ordering processes, does need to be further elaborated upon.

By the time F. and Edith have arrived in Argentina F. deeply doubts the viability of the regimen of initiation that he has constructed for Edith and the Narrator. This is not too surprising from a moralistic viewpoint. But F. is a humanist, an agnostic, he does not know whether he should believe in a god or any outside beneficent force. Therefore, he has not included any concept of a god in his plan. He speaks of loneliness in terms of separateness from other men, not of man's separateness from God. Thus, when he unplugs the Danish Vibrator and discovers that "it had learned to feed itself", he is confronted by a

miracle of overwhelming implications and he is able to spontaneously formulate a prayer to his new God.

(O Father, Nameless and Free of Description, lead me from the Desert of the Possible. Too long I have dealt with Events. Too long I have labored to become an Angel. I chased Miracles with a bag of Power to salt their wild Tails. I tried to dominate Insanity so I could steal its Information. I tried to program the Computers with Insanity. I tried to create Grace to prove that Grace existed. Do not punish Charles Axis. We could not see the Evidence so we stretched our Memories. Dear Father, accept this confession: we did not train ourselves to Receive because we believed there wasn't anything to Receive and we could not endure with this Belief.) (BL p. 225.)

What he confesses in the above prayer is his attempt to make himself into a god, the ultimate sin of pride and egotistical selfishness. He pleads ignorance and repents. The nature of his repentance, that is, the demolition of the statue in order to bring about his own death at the hands of society and Edith's suicide have been discussed in chapter one of this thesis¹⁴. The prayer, itself, however, lists the elements in F.'s conception of the universe that form the basis for his initiatory ordeal for the Narrator. Angels (saints), Miracles (magic), and Insanity (irrationality), were all that he thought there was that was important. But with his act of faith, God must be added to the framework as an integral part. Thus, the reader finds in his speech, "God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is afoot. Magic is alive. Alive is afoot." (BL p. 197.) that "God", "Magic", and "Alive" (life) are synonomous. The entire section is devoted to the discovery of magic, God,

and life as an underground movement that has been hidden and repressed for two thousand years, but never destroyed. The death of Christ, the death of Edith, and the probable death of F. all serve the same function of reviving God, magic, and life so that they will eventually encompass all men.

This I mean my mind to serve till service is but Magic
moving through the world, and mind itself is Magic
coursing through the flesh, and flesh itself is Magic
dancing on a clock, and time itself the Magic length
of God. (BL p. 199.)

Edith's suicide had stood for the Narrator as an example that he must not fear death. But the Narrator was not prepared to see the implications. He was only capable of arguing afterwards with F. concerning F.'s faithlessness as a friend as well as his wife's infidelity. For this reason the last test that F. puts him through, the final stage in his ordeal, must involve a confrontation with the probable death of F. This forces out the strangled response, "—Because I need you, F."

I know nothing about love, but something like love
tore the following words from my throat with a
thousand fishhooks. (BL p. 171.)

The recognition of his need for others, his need for F., his need for Edith, all converge to transform the Narrator into a white magician, a saint in Cohen's terminology, who is tempered by love. The Narrator had come to love the "twisted shapes" of the world when he first left his basement apartment and walked the streets of Montreal. He now comes to love his fellow man as he is faced with his own loneliness and the loss of those who loved him. He leaves behind him his hell, the anal vision, his

constipation, and his memory, but in a manner that demonstrates their interrelatedness with all that is good.

As I set this down I have a clear impression of F.'s pain. His pain! Oh yes, as I peel off this old scab of history, gleaming like one pure triumphant drop of red blood—his pain. (BL p. 172.)

Only in F.'s pain created through the interaction of good and evil, life and death, sexuality and anality, is the Narrator free to step forth as the New Jew of Book Three. To help himself the Narrator calls upon Catherine, "Kateri Tekakwitha, calling you, calling you, calling you, testing 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 my poor un-electric head calling you loud and torn 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9..." (BL p. 172.), and she responds through the Greek-English phrase book that F. had given him so long before as a prayer-book.

At that time F. had said:

Prayer is a translation. A man translates himself into a child asking for all there is in a language he has barely mastered. Study the book. (BL p. 71.)

Each lesson of the phrase book deals with a specific need and the social or human means of answering that need. The effective, hyperbolic metaphor of the phrase book is finally comprehended by the Narrator as he closes his section of the novel:

O God, O God, I have asked for too much, I have asked for everything! I hear myself asking for everything in every sound I make. I did not know, in my coldest terror, I did not know how much I needed. O God, I grow silent as I hear myself begin to pray: (BL pp. 179-180.)

Book Three of Beautiful Losers illustrates the rebirth or ultimate metamorphosis of the Narrator into the egoless third

person of this part of the novel who now represents the merged identities of the Narrator and F. Life is being reborn after its near defeat with death in Winter.

Spring comes into Quebec from the West....
From the streets a sexual manifesto rises like an
inflating tire, "The winter has not killed us again!"
(BL p. 289.)

The mood is erotic, but refreshingly so, and the reader is prepared for an ending that is positive, not immersed in the torment of the preceeding pages.

The old man leaves the treehouse, free of the Narrator's constipation, free of F.'s diarrhea, "and he wondered why he no longer fouled the shack with excrement." (BL p. 290.). The most striking characteristic of the old man is his lack of memory.

...he scraped his memory for an incident out of his past with which to mythologize the change of season, some honeymoon, or walk, or triumph, that he could let the spring renew, and his pain was finding none. His memory represented no incident, and it flowed too fast, like the contents of a spittoon in recess jokes.
(BL p. 291.)

He has become thoroughly attuned to Nature as even the animals of the forest recognize:

Long ago, the animals fled each time he broke the air with his suffering, but that was when he screamed for something. Now that he merely screamed, the rabbits and weasels did not frighten. He presumed that they now accepted his scream as his ordinary bark.
(BL p. 292.)

The young boy is chastized by the old man for the way he is crouching just as F. had criticized the Narrator for his

"rocky buttocks".

—Be careful! Look at the way you're squatting!
 You're ruining your little body like that. Keep the
 thigh muscles engaged. Get the small buttocks away
 from the heels, keep a healthy space or your buttock
 muscles will overdevelop. (BL p. 293.)

The merging of identities is extended to the women in this book through the blonde housewife who is not only Indian (Edith and Catherine), but is also Isis (Edith), the ancient Egyptian fertility goddess who brought her husband back to life in the spring. As one becomes a "beautiful loser", a white magician, a saint, one dissolves the defensive and selfish barriers constructed by the ego, that in fact make up the ego, and, thus, is able to flow into the identity of another in union. This is thoroughly in keeping with the erotic mode of the novel, bringing about a satisfactory aesthetic resolution to the Narrator's earlier predicaments.

Because of the merging of identities, the old man is simultaneously mistaken for both the Narrator and F.:

—Look at his hand!
 —It's all burnt!
 —He's got no thumb!
 —Isn't he the Terrorist Leader that escaped tonight?
 —Looks more like the pervert they showed on TV they're
 combing the country for.
 —Get him out!
 —He stays! He's a Patriot!
 —He's a stinking cocksucker!
 —He's very nearly the President of our country!
 (BL p. 302.)

The "Terrorist Leader" and "Patriot" are F.; the "pervert" and "cocksucker" are the Narrator. The last line of the above quota-

tion indicates the imminence of the revolution that is about to take place. The stage is set. the theatre, or playhouse is the "Main Shooting and Game Alley". The old man is the performer. The audience is gathering to observe the spectacle, but it is a very special audience, composed of "trained revolutionaries", "terrorists", police ready to serve the new regime, "poets", businessmen disguised as consumers, "androgynous hashish smokers", all those who have been awaiting the revolution. The old man performs his magical act, one which the reader has been prepared for by his unusual demonstration of the Yoga "movie position":

The old man had commenced his remarkable performance (which I do not intend to describe). Suffice it to say that he disintegrated slowly; just as a crater extends its circumference with endless tiny landslides along the rim, he dissolved from the inside out. His presence had not completely disappeared when he began to reassemble himself. "Had not completely disappeared" is actually the wrong way of looking at it. His presence was like the shape of an hourglass, strongest where it was smallest. And that point where he was most absent, that's when the gasps started, because the future streams through that point, going both ways. That is the beautiful waist of the hourglass! That is the point of Clear Light! Let it change forever what we do not know! For a lovely briefness all the sand is compressed in the stem between the two flasks! Ah, this is not a second chance. For all the time it takes to launch a sigh he allowed the spectators a vision of All Chances At Once!

(BL pp. 304-305.)

Although Cohen treats this section of the novel with exaggerated irony, its importance must not be underestimated. The symbolic death and rebirth of the old man, here depicted, represents not only his complete mastery over death, but also the immense con-

trol he has over his body, to the point of manipulating its very atomic structure, a consequence of the sexual training involved in developing the erotogenic, polymorphously perverse body. Linked with the Christ theme, the new Adam who will become the saviour of the world, the old man dissolves into the shape of an hourglass, focussed at the central point into "Clear Light". Clear light, the Cabbalistic vision of God, or perhaps the biblical tree of knowledge, gives to the spectators a view of "all Chances At Once", in effect, the past, the present, and the future. As Brown pointed out it is modern man's fear of death that turns him from his present, and, more importantly, from his future, so that he is left with only a morbid reviewing and analysis of his past. When the horror of death is seen and accepted in its full interrelationship with life, the future opens fully and the old man is able to offer "All Chances At Once". The hourglass and the sand, representing time, give to man the power to shape his own destiny.

Through the mode of play Cohen's characters possess the remote human possibility of perceiving the true nature of the universe. In the Telephone Dance, F. hears the sound of "ordinary eternal machinery", thus, realizing in one moment the rhythms of the ordinary and the eternal, the profane and the divine. In the Dance of Masks, Catherine's uncle learns the meaning of the first prayer, "I change, I am the same.", losing his ego, his

very identity, among all the egos and identities present at the curing. He glimpses the manifestation of Manitou, his God. As a player, he recounts the ritual of Indian death, very much a part of the serious game in which preparation for the Eternal Hunt requires removal of the intellect, the part of the body that arbitrarily rationalizes and orders existence.

The entire realm of primitive ritual and magic introduces the reader to the Cabbalistic framework of the novel that portrays the descent of the initiated magician into the evil of anal history and technology until he receives the deepest insight, that life is life and death, sexuality and anality; that all the struggle, the pain, the torment, lead to the Clear Light, to "All Chances At Once", to control over one's ultimate destiny.

Footnotes

- 1 BL, p. 7.
- 2 Henry Miller, Sunday After the War (N.Y.: New Directions, 1944), pp. 154-155.
- 3 BL, p. 207.
- 5 Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1950), p. 26.
- 6 Huizinga, p. 27.
- 7 Huizinga, p. 28.
- 8 Huizinga, p. 29.
- 9 Huizinga, p. 33.
- 10 Refer to chapter two of this thesis pp. 49-53.
- 11 Unfortunately, there are very few scholarly studies of the Cabbala available in English and, generally, these are no more than historical accounts of its growth. The others tend to describe the various Cabbalistic doctrines with elaborate detail and could, therefore, only be used awkwardly since they require even more elaborate explanations of the explanation. For the limited purposes of this chapter I have therefore selected Part One of Perle Epstein's work, The Private Labrynth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabala (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), first, because she is able to accurately and succinctly reduce the basic aspects of the Cabbala into literary and aesthetic themes and, secondly, because her sensitive approach to the Cabbala seems to parallel that of Cohen much more than the academia of, for example, Gershom Scholem. For a more detailed knowledge of the Cabbala, refer to the bibliography of texts and unpublished theses relating to the Cabbalistic framework.
- 12 Epstein, p. 8.
- 13 Epstein, p. 9.

¹⁴ Refer to chapter one and two of this thesis pp. 24-25, 48-49 respectively.

Conclusion

Welcome to you who read me today.
Welcome to you who put my heart down.
Welcome to you, darling and friend,
who miss me forever in your trip to the end.¹

The poetic closing of the novel is wholly optimistic and prophetic. What has, in the course of the novel, been an arduous trial resolves itself into a cordial salutation inviting the reader to participate in an experience that has been difficult, but ultimately justifiable and fulfilling. Book Three of the novel is more than an epilogue in the third person, it is the product, the master realized in his protege. One is left after Books One and Two without a concrete referrent. What after all will become of the Narrator after all is said and done? The purpose of Book Three is to provide a specific answer to this question.

Part one of this thesis dealt primarily with a delineation of the role played by Cohen's concept of sexuality in the novel. Sexuality was described as the life force because the earliest experience of life was couched in terms of satisfied pleasure that was sexual in origin. The infant, according to Freud, enjoyed to the fullest a state of polymorphous perversity that was lost only as the child was allowed to face the harsh realities of human existence. The first sensations of pain, hunger, and

fear introduced to the child the trauma of living in our world. This corresponds to the eviction from the garden, from the shelter of divine protection, and is, in fact, the robbery which F. refers to so enigmatically early in the novel. Much of the novel refers to the loss of innocence and the attempt to recover it, that has in the past frustrated the efforts of man. F. encourages the Narrator to explore his own sexuality as F., himself, has done, and to discover again the pleasures of the erotogenic body, the body that is totally receptive to sensuous gratification, the body that is polymorphously perverse. As the body becomes unified in its physical perceptions, so does the intellect tend to unify and integrate its perceptions of reality. Connections become irrelevant as the universe is perceived in its indivisible wholeness. Sexuality as the life force completes the man within himself and by its very nature opens the individual to satisfying relationships with others.

The critical episode examined in part one of this thesis is that in which the Danish Vibrator produces in F. and Edith the pan-orgasm. This final devolution in sexual development returns the two characters to the pre-lapsian state of erotic pleasure and induces a qualitative change in their natures. It permits them to breach the abyss between humanity and divinity that fulfills the complex order of creation. The characters do not themselves become gods, but they become the god-like perfection of humanity in its quest for happiness.

One might expect that the antagonist to the powerful force provided by sexuality would be one that encourages divisiveness in man's perception of life and reality. This force, in fact, is a fear of death, described metaphorically by Cohen in terms of anal imagery. The Narrator is an historian, preoccupied by the minute and individual facts of the past. His pathetic attempts to relate these facts into a coherent whole are recognized by F. as amateurish and undisciplined. So much is the past with the Narrator that he is physically constipated, unable to make room for meaningful life in the present or even to contemplate the future. This inability to look towards the future is closely related to the fear of death, for it is in the future that death awaits. The Indian lost his sensual union with Nature because he feared the tortures of hell and the possibility that the afterlife might not conform to the myth of Oscotarach. Yet, the Narrator learns and he finally realizes that the lesson Edith had wished to teach him was that he must not fear death but must be willing to accept its reality as a part of life. This is the meaning of her suicide in the anal depths of the elevator shaft. Her death and Gavin Gate's renewal of the promise of love bring the Narrator out into the "cold, ordinary world" with "a gasp in the praise of existence".

Ultimately, it is F.'s "magic guns", the smuggled weapons intended to provoke a violent revolution that will de-congest the constipation of history, turning man away from his past

toward his future. All men are embodied in the Narrator who is unable to "lose" his ego, that amorphous mass of private and personal memory that, in toto, forms the individual identity. F.'s collection of fireworks represents the power that will release the Narrator from the pain of his constipation, just as the dynamite will release civilization from the constipation of its history.

The apparent wishful thinking involved in Cohen's conception of sexuality is impeded by the enormous obstacles of anally oriented civilization. Chapter three of this paper attempts to clarify and illuminate the brilliant resolution to the problem arrived at by Cohen. An essential element is play and its role in the "Messianic vision" of F. Play is the mode of the highly erotic Telephone Dance as is the ritual of the therapeutic Dance of Masks. Cohen sees in the mythological belief in Oscotarach the entrance into the "Eternal Hunt", a game that lasts forever. Death becomes, not a state to be feared, but paradoxically, a life to be accepted and embraced. F. purposely stimulates the Narrator to a high pitch of erotic expectancy, only to be confronted by imminent death before a brick wall. The Narrator fails this test, but, is at that moment most aware of the inadequacies of his own life, the loneliness and the isolation of one who fears his own death. When next the Narrator is faced with death, it is the probable death of his friend, F., and he is forced to admit that from his position

of isolated independence he needs, and further, loves his friend. The pain that he has suffered in coming to this admission tempers his fibre and allows him to reappear in the third book of the novel as the wise old man.

The old man no longer refers to himself as "I" for he no longer possesses the selfish ego that had separated him from his fellow man. He suffers no longer from constipation and finds himself in complete harmony with Nature. As he appears before the expectant crowd of revolutionaries he is able to offer them "All Chances At Once", their life in the future.

Cohen's highly imaginative criticism of post-industrialized society is scathing in its denunciation of the anal orientation of modern man. Nevertheless, his criticism offers positive alternatives that are a natural extension of man's psychological and mythological consciousness.

"Do I have any right?"

Footnotes

- ¹ B.L., p. 307.

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