UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

"CONNECT NOTHING" : LEONARD COHEN'S *BEAUTIFUL LOSERS*, TSANGNYÖN HERUKA'S *THE LIFE OF MILAREPA* AND *VAJRAYANA* BUDDHISM

MÉMOIRE
PRÉSENTÉ
COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE DE LA
MAÎTRISE EN SCIENCES DES RELIGIONS

PAR
MARK WEISSFELNER

AVRIL 2019

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

"CONNECT NOTHING" : *LES PERDANTS MAGNIFIQUES* DE LEONARD COHEN, *LA VIE DE MILAREPA* DE TSANGNYÖN HERUKA ET LE BOUDDHISME VAJRAYANA

MÉMOIRE
PRÉSENTÉ
COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE DE LA
MAÎTRISE EN SCIENCES DES RELIGIONS

PAR
MARK WEISSFELNER

AVRIL 2019

REMERCIEMENTS

I wish to thank, firstly, my supervisor Chiara Letizia, for her guidance through my studies at UQÀM and for helping me to formulate the landscape of this work.

I thank also the readers of my initial version of this project for their suggestions—Jacques Pierre and Eve Paquette of UQÀM, and Norman Ravvin of Concordia University, without whom this would be a vehicle without engine. Thank you also Laura. You are candle-light.

In the eternal thread of acknowledging those who have held my hands upright, I thank Brian Trehearne for having accepted me as a wayward student in his seminar on Leonard Cohen at McGill years ago; Jim Kanaris for his inspiring and critical regard in reconsidering and redefining the scope of studied "Religion"; Lara Braitstein for her guidance in explorations of Tibetan literature and Buddhist poetics; Zsolt Alapi for both teaching about and carrying the Beat Generation's echoes; Vanessa Sasson for alighting so many tales in her classes and for having trusted me to embark on her study-group sojourning to the Himalayas in the old nest of 2010. And Mark Bednarczyk for the belief in story.

To all of those who have left fresh embers among dry fuel; saints, friends, family—who have listened and offered ideas or dreams from the West Island, Medellín, Ottawa, Dublin, Saguenay, Kathmandu, Val-Cartier, the starry Negev, Toronto or Saint Urbain street. You have made my fingertips rustle. Thank you for keeping me awake.

"He tried for four years to open a matchbox"

AVANT-PROPOS

Leonard Cohen is considered Montreal's chansonnier d'excellence—a world renowned poet, musician and songwriter whose artistic career has stretched from 1956 to today, challenging even the closure death generally carries. The following constitutes an examination of the circumstances surrounding his composition of the novel *Beautiful Losers* (1966), offering a further analysis of this difficult work by way of comparison with *The Life of Milarepa* by Tsangnyön Heruka—a Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist text from the *Kagyu* school. Through this interpretative action, I provide a new filter and means to process this novel.

TABLES DES MATIÈRES / TABLE OF CONTENTS

RÉSUMÉ

Leonard Cohen est connu autour du monde comme le chansonnier d'excellence de Montréal—un poète, musicien et écrivain avec des écrits qui continuent de parler même après la fin de sa vie. Son roman *Beautiful Losers* (*Les perdants magnifiques*) de 1966 est considéré comme un des plus « difficiles » romans parmi la bibliothèque de la littérature canadienne, et se trouve souvent classé sous le genre « expérimental »—une catégorie aussi définie que l'air. Ici, je propose une lecture de ce roman sous le filtre du bouddhisme tibétain *Vajrayana*, particulièrement en comparaison avec l'hagiographie médiévale *The Life of Milarepa (La vie de Milarepa)* écrit par Tsangnyön Heruka. Le projet qui suit suggère qu'une telle lecture interdisciplinaire —une analyse de matériel littéraire par la voie d'une religion— facilite la compréhension du roman. Mon intention humble est de fournir un nouveau cadre par lequel on peut interpréter cette œuvre.

Mots clés : bouddhisme, littérature canadienne, Leonard Cohen, Milarepa, Vajrayana, Kagyu, Tibet, sagesse folle (drubnyon), Tsangnyön Heruka, tantra (tantrisme)

ABSTRACT

Leonard Cohen's 1966 work *Beautiful Losers* has, across the last half-century, proven time and again to be one of Canada's most "difficult" books, and continues to be marketed as an "experimental" novel—a fluid category as useful for description as a net might be for catching water. I here propose a reading of this novel through a filter of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism; in particular, by comparison with Tsangnyön Heruka's medieval Tibetan hagiography, *The Life of Milarepa.* I suggest that such an interdisciplinary reading—an analysis of literary material by way of an exemplary text from a religious tradition —proves helpful to digesting the novel. My humble intention is to provide a new framework for which to process this work.

Keywords : Buddhism, Canadian Literature, Leonard Cohen, Milarepa, Vajrayana, Kagyu, Tibet, Crazy Wisdom (Drubnyon), Tsangnyön Heruka, Tantra (Tantrism)

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of 1960s Montréal is dotted with local shades of an eminent Western counterculture, and scratched with the lettering of exchanging tongues: English and French, art amidst politics. These years' catalogue is inscribed by a pair of the city's own hands, through the work of Canadian poet Leonard Cohen. The basis for this master's project is his last published novel from this period, and of this—his city. My work is a combined literary and religious analysis of Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) by way of Tibetan *Vajrayana* Buddhist concepts derived from my analysis of Tsangnyön Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa* (late 15th century), a hagiography of Tibetan poet and saint *Milarepa*.

Beautiful Losers, an "Experimental"[1] novel of the mid 1960s, is Cohen's second and final published prose work, whose release predates his first album *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967) and wider celebrity by a calendar year. Along the other palm, and acting as a lens to this work, is Tsangnyön Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa*. Its titular character Milarepa is an eleventh century religious figure revered especially within the *Kagyu* school of Tibetan Vajrayana[2] Buddhism[3] and whose "songs" are Buddhist

---

[1] As categorised by its cover blurb in editions since 1990, scholarly criticism noted below, as well as its inclusion in Canadian experimental anthology *Ground Works: Avant Garde for Thee* (Anansi Press: 2002).

[2] These terms will be further explored below. In the interim, suffice to note that the Tibetan variation of Vajrayana is but one line amidst other types of Vajrayana Buddhism(s). The Tibetan variation often gets monopoly of the term, as "Vajrayana" is used synonymously with "Tibetan Buddhism" in academic literature. Vajrayana or "Tantric" Buddhism, however, also applies to other, non-Tibetan

poems which characterise existence (Stagg, 2017: "Translator's Introduction"). Tsangnyön Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa* is a medieval text written four centuries or so past the saint's actual lifetime, and is the most popular depiction of his life-story (Quintman, 2010: "Translator's Introduction"). It portrays Milarepa as a storyteller, an artist, and religious figure both instructed by and instructing a further lineage of "Crazy Wisdom"[4] teachers. These latter figures are *gurus*—a South Asian term for teacher—who use unconventional means to instruct their pupils. Their lessons which might inflict pain, infect their students with doubt, cast illusions, or involve ingesting pollutive substances (i.e. inedible, poisonous, or ritually impure items). Tsangnyön Heruka, the author of this version of Milarepa's biography, is considered a part of Milarepa's own continued lineage (Quintman, 2015). I will argue that the structure, characters and tropes that *The Life of Milarepa* crafts can be used to analyse and understand Cohen's work, and that *Beautiful Losers* can be read as documenting a similar lineage of teacher to student relations.

Chapter I below sets the field for my research. It provides an introduction to *Beautiful Losers*, the Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist religious tradition it will be read against in my work, and my research question. Chapter II is a historical summary situating

---

Buddhist traditions: most notably the Nepali Newari Buddhists who self-identify as followers of Vajrayana as well (Gellner, 1992)

[3] Tibetan Buddhism is divided into numerous "Schools." These separate traditions are found within the larger faith categorised as "Tibetan Buddhism," and each follow from different lineages, revere different *gurus*, and often originate from different geographical parts of Tibet. The surviving four are the *Kagyu, Nyingma, Gelug,* and *Sakya* schools (Powers, 2007).

[4] Crazy wisdom, or *drubnyon* in Tibetan, applies to religious figureheads who are both "saintly and erratically behaved" (Bell, 1998: 59). My use of the term "Crazy" is limited to referencing the Tibetan tradition that has taken on this set of English terms to translate its ideas, per Tibetan-American religious authority Chögyam Trungpa's adapting of the term (Trungpa, 1991). I realise that popular usage of "Crazy" can be problematic when purposed off-handedly for mental illness.

Leonard Cohen's composition of *Beautiful Losers* in the social and academic movements around 1966; particularly involving the Beat Generation. Chapter III is a literature review outlining the history of critical studies of *Beautiful Losers* (divided into analyses of the novel's sexual content, its experimental qualities and postcolonial readings of the novel), how Leonard Cohen's work has been read "Religiously" over time, and two previous works that provide context for my current project. Chapter IV constitutes the work's theoretical framework, and theories useful for my analysis: Mircea Eliade's conception of echoes (that artistic creations often hum with religious content), Georges Bataille's conception of religious transgression via sacrifice (or religion *as constituted by* transgressive acts) and Victor Turner's elucidation of Arnold van Gennep's stages of liminality. Chapter V summarises my methodology, a qualitative analysis by contextualisation. Chapter VI is an investigation of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, and the specific history of Tsangnyön Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa*. Chapter VII is the body of my analysis, analysing *Beautiful Losers* via elements derived from *The Life of Milarepa*. A conclusion follows.

CHAPTER I

"(...) ALL THE DISPARATES OF THE WORLD, THE DIFFERENT WINGS OF THE PARADOX"[56]: RESEARCH PROBLEMATIC

1.1 How to Read

Beautiful Losers remains a difficult novel for contemporary palettes to digest. Its vulgarity and graphic imagery are incompatible with Cohen's current portrayal as the sombre, quiet, grinning old man in a suit and fedora—Montréal's "Secular Saint" per Dan Bilefsky's 2018 *New York Times* article. The novel speaks to stories lost under stronger voices: the native Iroquois of what would become Canada, the Catholic world of Nouvelle France converting them, a scholar who studies them both, and his friend the teacher who silences that mouth with his penis (and evidently, the author's pen atop them all). The book's characters are scholarly, pious, kinky, dictatorly, masochistic, and in the book's epilogue, even paedophilic. A reader must ask themselves how they should process such a "transgressive" literary work which also

---

[5] Cohen, 2005: 17-18.

refers, on nearly every page, to history's transitions and traditionally Orthodox religious concepts from Catholicism, Judaism, Indigenous spiritualities and Buddhism: especially, a continual regard for "saints" and sainthood in the novel. The only recent popular criticism of the novel implores a Canadian public to forget it: in literary magazine *Canadian Notes and Queries* (*CNQ*), Anakana Schofeld calls it "a broken collaboration where Cohen hits manic incoherence and little else" and "pointless hell" (Schofeld, 2016), while Myra Bloom describes it most recently in *The Walrus* as a novel that will "likely continue its slide into the dustbin of history" (Bloom, 2018).

The book was already immensely contentious after its publication over fifty years ago. Canadian writer and critic Robert Fulford's initial reaction to *Beautiful Losers*—of it being "[...] the most revolting book ever written in Canada"—is often quoted but never in context. A fuller, more helpful excerpt of his review, in the *Toronto Daily Star* of April 26, 1966:

> This is, among other things, the most revolting book ever written in Canada. [...] it is not in any sense pornographic. Far from encouraging sexual drives it will if anything mute them. [...] At the same time it is probably the most interesting Canadian book of the year.

Beautiful Losers' initial sales were in fact rather low. The novel was exclusively sold in select stores, and was purchased in greater numbers only after Cohen's musical success, in reprinted editions of the 1970s (Simmons, 2012: 134-5).

As will be elucidated in the literature review of Chapter III, many authors from across disciplines (though primarily from the domain of English literary studies) have tried to grapple with the novel in the decades following its publication. Analyses have often focused on its experimental aspects (as in, its irregular manner), its sexual content, as well as rendering legible the postcolonial contours of the work. For my

part, I believe that a new reading through the filter of a spiritual tradition (the Tibetan Buddhism also vaguely referenced in the book) can provide context for a reader to navigate the uncertain waters that pool in the novel's pages; a method to swim.

1.2 Buddhism and *Beautiful Losers*: Introduction to the Topic

Firstly, a specific reading of Buddhism (potential or otherwise) in *Beautiful Losers* has yet to be performed. Studies of Judaism in Leonard Cohen's poetry and music are abundant and more interrogations are flowering—similarly popular are analyses of his "Spiritual"[7] echoes. This project's point of departure, however, is my own cognition that elements of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism—often popularly referred to as "Tantric" Buddhism—can provide a lens to better understand and illuminate the novel's narrative. I came to this belief during my initial reading of the book in 2012, in the context of an undergraduate course at McGill University looking at Cohen's literary works, and during a seminar discussion questioning the abusiveness of the character "F." in the novel. F. forcibly instructs everyone else in the book on the nature of reality, and I realised that while the representation of such a spiritual teacher was foreign to the popular understanding of religion in the contemporary West (assembled from the spiritual heritage of Western Christianity), the representation of such an instructor is commonplace in the literatures of South Asia and Tibet; literatures which I was otherwise engaging with and studying. Colleagues felt the novel was problematic due in part to such a teacher's presence, and this sentiment was reflected in scholarship around the novel from both the 1970s—"the sort of work you watch but don't attempt to explain" (Dufy, 1976: 30)—as well as in current arguments for avoiding study of the novel. I felt that a wider awareness of this

---

[7] I note especially the indirectness carried by such a term as "Spiritual."

specific religious tradition and its surrounding culture could be helpful in processing the book. Specifically that a precedent for such "transgressive" tutorship[8] already exists in religious literature five hundred years before the novel's time. While originally of humble beginnings, the lengthy literature review below also provides a context for the very different ways this book has been received and interpreted in the past.

Distinct elements of Tibetan Buddhism can be found threaded through the fiction that is *Beautiful Losers*. Hints of this are given when Cohen situates a certain historical period in the work: Cohen uses the marker of Tibetan history to organise his timeline, noting that the founding of colonial Canada occurs at the same time as "The fifth re-incarnation of Tsong Khapa achieved temporal supremacy: the regency of Tibet was handed to him by Mongolia, with the title Dalai Lama" (Cohen, 2005: 89). Cohen also references a *kangling*—a Tibetan instrument made of a human femur—in a lengthy prayer of sorts ("O God, This Is Your Morning. There Is Music Even From A Human Thigh-Bone Trumpet" p. 57). Over the course of the novel, the word "mandala" also appears repeatedly to describe geometric patterns, and most prominently in a moment where a Jesuit paints "a bright mandala of the torments of hell" (p. 86)—a cross-religious reference to *thangka* scroll paintings of the Himalayas, and specifically to the image of the *Bhavacakra* which often includes depictions of Buddhist hell-realms within a mandala shape. These disparate elements all point to Tibetan Buddhism; however, the character of F. is the most vivid example. His professorly abusiveness follows a distinctly Tibetan, Kagyu form of crazy wisdom in

---

[8] Though be it noted, formats of so-called crazy wisdom—or unorthodox teaching—are also found amongst strata of diverse religious traditions and archetypes: from stories of the *Baal Shem Tov* in Orthodox Judaism, to variations of the "Trickster" in Indigenous spiritualities of the Americas.

instructing the main narrator, I.[9], with cruel lessons. He teaches under the precept that everything in existence is diamond—even if it is literal "shit" (Cohen, 2005: 9). This particular moment of the novel—of shit-stained diamond—also occurs alongside the ironic mention of a shade of nail-polish titled "Tibetan Desire"[10] during an argument between I. and F. over history, religion, and reality. Tibetan Buddhism's (indeed, Tibetan Vajrayana's) indirect mention in this moment cannot be washed away as simple irony: it is a religious tradition from Tibet, passed along by teachers of crazy wisdom, and which uses the symbol of the mind being a diamond covered in dirt (or feces). That metaphor is deployed throughout the book, and the skeleton of the plot is supported on the further abusiveness of F.[11] as teacher.

Be it noted, my work will not be an argument for Cohen's having *actively* integrated Tibetan Buddhism in the novel, nor an attempt at proving that Cohen wished his readership to distill Tibetan Buddhism from the book. There is certainly no way to prove this, especially now that the scribe is no longer among our eyes still pacing his written works. Instead, I am arguing that Tibetan Vajrayana is a useful and illuminating lense through which to interpret the novel.

---

[9] As scholars have previously referred to the work's first narrator as "I." I (myself) will also name him by the letter. The trend is highlighted in Stephen Scobie's 1977 study *Leonard Cohen* (p. 97).

[10] "He chose a color named Tibetan Desire, which amused him since it was, he claimed, such a contradiction in terms." (Cohen, 2005: 10)

[11] Readers are left to question, at the novel's end, whether F.'s lessons stem from a proper understanding of reality, or whether he is inventing his process in the moment, constantly, without concern for his "disciple" and friend I.

1.3 Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism: Brief Introduction to the Tradition

Buddhism divides into multiple "Vehicles"; not unlike the divisions of larger Christianity into Catholicism, Protestantisms and forms of Orthodox or Eastern Christianity. Vajrayana Buddhism is thus a vehicle within the larger body of *Mahayana* Buddhism, the "Great Vehicle." Mahayana itself is categorised by a vast diversity of forms and a spectrum of philosophical thought (Williams, 2009). In *Theravada* Buddhism (or, to some, "Hinayana"), another branch of the tradition, emphasis is placed on the textual sources of the *Pali* language canon (Ray, 2001: 18), whereas Mahayana and Vajrayana rely on Sanskrit-language and Tibetan sources instead "Sutra(s)" and "Tantra(s)," respectively. Mahayana's characteristic history of physically embodying religious concepts (in visualisation and artwork) carries over into the Tibetan context, and Vajrayana is so named after its focus on the symbol of the lightning rod—the *vajra*—as the light of immediate enlightenment (Lama and Lama, 2015: 11). The vajra can also stand for the diamond of true understanding regarding the nature of reality. Such a perception is achieved via intense study and practise within the course of one single lifetime on the Vajrayana path, rather than spiritual perfection over the course of many lives as in other forms of Buddhism (Ray, 2001). Vajrayana also emphasises the stories individual figures of devotion, intended for emulation: "saints" of sorts.

1.4 Leonard Cohen and Buddhism: A Note

It is well documented and generally known that Leonard Cohen was involved with Zen Buddhism. In my experience, many who know him only by name in Montreal

still know that he was a "Buddhist" (sic.)[12]. Cohen was involved with *Rinzai* (Nadel, 1997: 190), a tradition of Zen Buddhism, from 1969 onward, even practising as a monk in the tradition over decades (pp. 172-3). My current project and his own personal Buddhist explorations are not to be conflated. Rinzai is a Japanese tradition apart from Tibetan Vajrayana, and this dissertation's primary intent is not to explore Cohen's personal involvement with Zen Buddhism (though I will offer some exposition of his time studying it below). Its object of study is *Beautiful Losers*, which was published years before his personal Buddhist practice.

1.5 Summary : Research Problematic

Previous readings of *Beautiful Losers* have found the book "difficult" in a variety of ways, but often for the presence of its cast of "saints" alongside the violent, transgressive, dictator-like, teacherly character of F., whose cultural heritage has nonetheless not been much investigated. To begin my argument, I posit that the novel presents various (and conflicting) characterisations of saintliness. F., further, uses unconventional means of spiritual mentorship corresponding to the principle of crazy wisdom [13] as elucidated in strands of Tibetan Buddhism. Tsangnyön Heruka's biography of Milarepa—*The Life of Milarepa*—is a popular fifteenth century Tibetan text which offers a definitive characterisation of both saintliness and of such tutorship in the Vajrayana tradition. As such, a reading of this latter biographical text provides a beneficial context for understanding Cohen's novel.

---

[12] In the years of my working on this project, when asked about my topic and field of studies, even many unfamiliar with Cohen's work still asked about his Buddhism as often as his Judaism, and often conflated his Zen practice with Tibetan Buddhism or the Dalai Lama.

[13] While traced in Tibetan literary examples over the last millennium, I note that crazy wisdom as a term is invented by the more contemporary Chögyam Trungpa to contain the multitude of *drubnyon* forms in this system of instruction.

A champion of the Buddhist faith, or *Dharma*, Milarepa's name is ironically comprised of a Tibetan cry meaning "Loser"[14]. This of course resonates with the title of Cohen's novel, but is also echoed in *Beautiful Losers'* academic character I., who describes the "pack of failures" he studies:

> Their brief history is categorized by incessant defeat. The very name of the tribe, A—, is the word for corpse in the language of all the neighbouring tribes. (Cohen, 2005: 5).

Within Tibetan Buddhism's own religious corpus, there exists a prominent literary tradition of hagiography called *namthar* (Quintman, 2014: 6-7). These texts often depict the lives of individual saints or artists who compose meditative songs and describe Buddhist practice. Notable examples of *namthar* include stories of the Eighty-Four *Mahasiddhas*, mad-saint *Drukpa Kunley* and *Tilopa*. Their exemplar, however, is Milarepa: a poet and foundational ("mad") saint within the Kagyu lineage. The Kagyu school consists of a "teaching lineage" or "whispered" transmission whose

> [...] adherents claim that its doctrines and practices are passed down through a succession of awakened teachers, each of whom directly understands the true nature of reality through spontaneous, nonconceptual awareness and then transmits the essence of his or her teaching to the next generation of meditators. (Powers, 2007: 399)

In this way, a Vajrayana saint's biography further informs its receivers of the tradition's norms, central figures and values. From *Beautiful Losers'* opening and

---

[14] Milarepa's family name—"Mila"—is supposedly derived from an ancestor's defeat of Himalayan demons, who cried 'Mila' as "an admission of submission and defeat," and which he then, in irony, took on as a family name (Quintman, 2010: xxi). Milarepa's own life story refers to the emancipation of "Losers," as Milarepa family and himself would later find themselves enslaved, and again freed through his practice in the Dharma.

onwards, F. is construed as a wayward and cruel spiritual teacher. Milarepa's own teacher Marpa ("the Translator") is presented in much the same way in *The Life of Milarepa*: sadistic, instructional, and playfully putting Milarepa through physical, mental and emotional torment. That commonality, along with the various strata of cursory Vajrayana elements noted above, led me to choose *The Life of Milarepa* as a text for comparison with *Beautiful Losers*. This tome of Heruka's is among Tibet's most popular literary oeuvres, and helps to craft the archetype of the *drubnyon* teacher—the "master" who utilises unconventional means in so-called crazy wisdom.

Beautiful Losers and *The Life of Milarepa* are texts which speak of and reflect on artistic creation. They are both about poets and storytellers, and both are written by authors who break the fourth wall, and reference themselves actively crafting literary works in their narratives. Both works also present their authors and narrators as originating from lineages—being taught by artist/teachers with greater understandings of existence than themselves. With their shared self-observational, narrative natures in mind, I am using the filter of literary analysis to process both Heruka and Cohen's texts.

My project thus uses a medieval work belonging to a recognised religious tradition—Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism—to read and understand Leonard Cohen's modern novel. My hypothesis is that reading *Beautiful Losers* with a lens crafted from Tibetan Buddhism helps provide a new framework for digesting the novel.

1.6 "[...] dialling various questions"[15]: General Questions

In building this project, two preliminary questions (and their offshoots) have helped me to orient the direction of my work. I provide them here as context:

1. What can reading *Beautiful Losers* through the lens of Vajrayana (tantric) Buddhism bring to an understanding of the novel?
    a. How does a reading of Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa* inform a reading of Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*? (i.e. how might the figure of F. in *Beautiful Losers* effectively provide a twentieth century rendering of a Kagyu teacher of crazy wisdom? How might the novel reflect an understanding of saintliness from this tradition?)
2. Does reading religion within a novel thus make it a religious work?
    a. If elements of a religious tradition such as Tibetan Buddhism are used to analyse a novel, can that render *Beautiful Losers* a Buddhist book, or instructional text?

1.7 Research Question

My research question guiding the remainder of the project is thus as follows: In what ways can the (oral, saintly) Kagyu tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism, depicted in *The Life of Milarepa* inform a reading of *Beautiful Losers*? What can be gathered from a contact reading of these two works?

a. How might the depiction of crazy wisdom in *The Life of Milarepa* help to contextualise F.'s behaviour in *Beautiful Losers*?

---

[15] Cohen, 2005: 32

b. In what ways can the depiction of saints in *The Life of Milarepa* help form an understanding of the saints of *Beautiful Losers*?

CHAPTER II

"A HISTORY OF THEM ALL": HISTORY AND CONTEXT

This section will contextualise Leonard Cohen's early poetry, his contemporaries in the Beat Generation, and his life in Hydra, Greece, during the publication of *Beautiful Losers*.

2.1 Under the Cross: Cohen in Montreal

An artist is an echo between the sounds of their environment, though the noise Leonard Cohen produced was initially one in discord with his context. The first established artistic community Cohen can be lassoed within is that of Montreal's English-language modernist scene in the mid to late-1950s. These were writers who followed the ethos of the American and British modernists from the 1910s through 1930s. Such influences of the early twentieth century include poets T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore, who respectively either shirked poetic forms and rhythms[16] (Nadel, 1997: 44) or explored new ones in a departure[17] from their English tradition.

This group of writers—and their contemporaries in other media—inherited their inclination toward religious exploration from the experiments of French novelists and

---

16 Such as sonnet, sestina, etc.

17 "Free verse," or Japanese haiku, for example.

poets a century prior. From the early 1800s, French arts and letters were significantly influenced by a general interest in matters spiritual and "Occult." This consisted of their reading about and composing writings on a mixture of topics in magic, witchcraft, and surface explorations of "Asian" religious traditions (Buddhism included) which eventually apexed in the work and "research" of the Theosophical Society of Helena Blavatsky (Fields, 1992: 87). Notable figures of this early French period include writers Eliphas Lévi, Charles Beaudelaire, the Comte de Lautréamont (pen-name of Isidore Lucien Ducasse) and Arthur Rimbaud (Eliade, 1976: 46-53). In American Modernism, this intrigue with the "Orient" continued with Ezra Pound's interest in Chinese poetry, and T.S. Eliot's use of Orientalist translations of South Asian works embedded in his early work. I would thus conclude that Buddhism (processed through an essentialised, Orientalised lens) has been centrally tied to each respective English language poetic movement of the twentieth century[18], leading up to Cohen's time.

So far as Montreal's English Modernists go, Cohen helped shape the contours of this later group by organising parties and gatherings. Guests included Montreal poet-professors Irving Layton, Louis Dudek, novelist Hugh Maclennan and lawyer-poet F.R. Scott[19] (Simmons, 2012: 45-9). The younger Cohen was a living irony among

---

[18] After the aforementioned French literary explorations, American writers Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman (among the American "Transcendalists") found inspiration when studying early English translations of Buddhist works (Fields: 46). This carries over to the Modernist movement, to the Beat Generation, through to Alan Watts' popular literary/philosophical works in the 1960s-70s, forwards into the latter half of the century with Gary Snyder's poetry. Closing out the millennium, famous American voice and Beatnik-influenced Tom Waits sings a Vajrayana inspired song called "Diamond in Your Mind" –written with his wife Kathleen Brennan and performed alongside the Kronos Quartet and bassist Greg Cohen—for the Dalai Lama at benefit concert "Healing the Divide" in 2000.

[19] While Cohen's group was brought together of different origins, I should note that their assembly was absent of any voice from the emerging French literature of Québec's Quiet Revolution. While he would eventually record a cover of "Un canadien errant" (the famous folk song) and write of the

these individuals however, as his early work is clothed in the very same poetic forms that early modernists tried to unbutton.

As an English-language poet in Canada, Leonard Cohen's early literary career is also nestled in the North American literary landscape of the postwar twentieth century. His work can therefore be understood as being in conversation with, and inspired by, poets of notable movements of the period. His first poetry collection, *Let Us Compare Mythologies* is published in the "McGill Poetry Series" of 1956; the same year as Allen Ginsberg's first book *Howl and Other Poems* (City Lights Books). An American, Jewish and gay poet, Allen Ginsberg was seen as the spokesperson of the emerging "Beat" or "Beatnik"[20] Generation of the late 1950s (Morgan, 2010: xv).

2.2 The Beat Generation

The Beat Generation (the "Beats") influenced Cohen's work significantly. He briefly pursued a Master's degree at Columbia University in the late 1950s, where both Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac had studied. In New York city he encountered their work and attended one of Jack Kerouac's public readings in 1957 (Simmons, 2012: 56), though would only befriend Allen Ginsberg[21] when they met in Greece years later

---

political situation of Québec separatism in *Beautiful Losers,* I cannot find any source speaking to Cohen being influenced by any of his contemporaries writing in French in the mid-1950s.

[20] As Professor Zsolt Alapi of Marianopolis College and Concordia University explains: connoting a tripart "Beatific, Beaten Down, and musical Beat." (Alapi, 2010).

[21] Cohen's early music became popular in the folk scene that also produced musician Bob Dylan: the music and lyrics of these two have been compared over time (most recently in David Boucher's 2004 work *Dylan and Cohen: Poets of Rock and Roll*). Allen Ginsberg was close to musician Bob Dylan—being featured as a background "Performer" in Dylan's 1965 video for the track "Subterranean Homesick Blues" (the title of which is an homage to Kerouac's novel *The Subterraneans* of 1958). Cohen and Dylan were friends, thus adding another layer to the entwined relationship of Cohen and the Beats. In 1977, both Dylan and Ginsberg would sing backup vocals on Cohen's "Don't Go Home with

(Nadel, 1997: 78). While Montreal and New York are but a border apart, Cohen felt at the time that his was a distant and reactionary voice when contrasted to the Beat literary movement, as he used the very writing conventions they rejected (Simmons, 2012: 57). After seeing Jack Kerouac read live from his writing, and studying the work of the Beats, Cohen apparently garnered an appreciation for jazz and poetry's musicality, eventually transforming his own style and manner of recitation (in performance) (Nadel, 1997: 52-3).

2.2.1 Buddhism and the Beat Context

Contextualising the history of the Beat Generation and its relationship to Buddhism's spread in North America helps to situate Cohen's own spiritual investigations, as Cohen writes *Beautiful Losers* in the wake of their popularity. Below, I will be providing both a history of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac's involvement with Buddhism, followed by a brief regard for Ginsberg's friendship with Cohen.

Like American transcendentalists Walt Whitman or Ralph Waldo Emerson who emphasised the potential held in alternative experiences to their social parameters a century earlier, members of the Beat Generation[22] valued the idea of counterculture (Morgan, 2010: xv). The so-called "Beat Generation" emerged in the United States in the postwar 1950s; a Christian (predominantly Protestant), industrialised society that enforced rigid limits on social acceptability. Spiritually, then, members of the Beat Generation began exploring Buddhism, in part for the differences they perceived

---

Your Hard-On" off of the disco-inspired, Phil Spector-produced album *Death of a Ladies Man* (Nadel, 1997: 215).

[22] So named after an interview with John Clellon Holmes in the *Sunday Times* of November 16, 1952 (Charters, 1992: xx).

between it and the Protestant society around them. Both Ginsberg and the other face[23] of the Beats, Jack Kerouac[24]—author of *On the Road* (1957) and *The Dharma Bums* (1958)—became heavily influenced by Buddhist literature(s) and practice, eventually also turning into proponents for the Dharma's place in North America.

In an early letter of 1954, Allen Ginsberg closes an address to Kerouac: "I will be reading *Bagavad* [sic.] *Gita* and some Buddhism soon, if you have directions or advice" (Ginsberg to Kerouac, "June 18 1954," 2010: 222). This is perhaps the first extant example of Ginsberg's writ mention of Buddhism[25] in a career that would have significant implications for Buddhism's presence in North America. Studying the impressive friendship in letters between Ginsberg and Kerouac documented in exchanges over a decade, I note that nearly all of their exchanges from 1954 and onward involve some discussion of Buddhism, or "the [D]harma," culminating in 1962 with Ginsberg's interview of the current Dalai Lama while travelling in India (Fields, 1992: 294-5). Ginsberg writes of his awareness of T.S. Eliot's sweeping "Buddhist" quotations in "The Wasteland" of 1922 (Ginsberg, 2010: 228) and of other American interests in Buddhism over the nineteenth century (Ginsberg, 2010: 279). This overview helps to frame Ginsberg and Kerouac's understanding of Buddhism as being inherently compatible with the American circumstance. Knowledge of intellectual explorations of Buddhism by Modernist writers in

---

[23] I note based on the sales figures for his novels. By its fiftieth anniversary, *On the Road* had sold in and around fifty million copies, according to the *New York Times* (Shattuck, 2001).

[24] While Ginsberg is spiritually linked to Cohen through their heritage as Jews, Kerouac is also tied to Cohen by virtue of his own French Canadian heritage (Morgan, 2010: 8).

[25] Ironically asking Kerouac, like a student to a teacher, of Vyasa's *Bhagavad Gita*, whose central narrative involves the teacher to disciple mentorship of royal Arjuna by divine Krishna, cut from the larger Indian epic poem *The Mahabharata*. Not unlike Marpa to Milarepa, Trungpa to below Ginsberg, Roshi to Cohen, or *Beautiful Losers'* F. to I.

America (i.e. T.S. Eliot and, more skirtingly, Ezra Pound) were certainly an encouragement to them (Fields, 1992: 164).

Jack Kerouac was at first inspired by a wide personal reading list in Buddhism—something that also impressed his friend and fellow Beat poet Gary Snyder.[26] He was particularly influenced by Dwight Goddard's *The Buddhist Bible*: a combination of Sanskrit *sutras*, Pali *suttas* and other texts pulled from Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan sources in translation, all compiled into one volume in 1932. Ginsberg writes that Kerouac originally found the volume in a San José library (Aitken, 1994: vii). While a helpful "Editor's Introduction" (for the second edition of 1938) and new "Foreword" (for the 1994 edition) of *The Buddhist Bible* provide a self-aware commentary on the nature of creating a work from such texts originally composed with centuries and continents between them, it must still be registered as an orientalising[27] act to even frame all of these as arising from a single tradition. As an example, a Catholic papal ordinance would not be understood to hold bearing on the world's Lutheran peoples, despite both of these traditions being "Christian." Nonetheless, this book notably provided Kerouac with an introduction to Buddhism's variations (Aitken, 1994: vii-viii). His resulting awareness of Zen, Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism were thusly transmitted to Allen Ginsberg and beyond. A version of Milarepa's biography is included in the 1938 edition of the book: *The Life and Hymns of Milarepa,* from a

---

[26] Gary Snyder had earlier travelled through East Asia and brought back learnings from Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. He was also deeply affected by his meeting with Alan Watts on the West coast of the United States (Fields, 1992: 215), who was in turn influenced by meeting with and reading the scholarship of D.T. (Daisetz Teitaro) Suzuki (pp. 186-7). Kerouac, Snyder, Watts, and Suzuki were eventually all published together in a special edition of the *Chicago Review* in 1958, in a special Zen section occupying most of the magazine (p. 220).

[27] Quoting Edward Said is perhaps redundant at this juncture in time, but to note, I use "Orientalist" to here connote the construction of an other as an absolute. In this instance, as building a singular "Buddhism" that could never have historically existed outside a colonial imagination.

larger *Biographical History of Jetsun Milarepa* (1928) attributed to famous Orientalist and essentialiser[28] Walter Evans-Wentz. For Kerouac, Ginsberg, and any other readers of this compilation, the framing of poetic expression as an essential—and even saintly—aspect of spiritual practice in Buddhism would thus be integral. In a book purporting to be the "Bible" of Buddhism, Milarepa's story as a devotional poet constitutes one of only two entries on Tibetan Buddhism; an understanding of poetry being inherent to Buddhist practice might thus be assumed.

Kerouac's new dharmic interest manifested in a series of specifically Buddhist writings after his popular success with *On the Road.* In 1953 he began a lengthy but unfinished manuscript titled *Some of the Dharma* as "Reading Notes" (Stanford, 1999: ix) to *A Buddhist Bible* and other foundational texts which, according to Kerouac's executor John Sampas, would have been "[...] a series of notes for Allen Ginsberg" (Sampas, 1999) during their exchange in the letters above. That work is complemented by Kerouac's retooling of the Buddha's life-story in *Wake Up* (2006), his (also unfinished) text *Buddha Tells Us,* and a final melding of his Catholic and Buddhist faiths titled *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity* which saw publication in 1960 (Fields, 1992: 211-15).

After Kerouac's passing in 1969 (Morgan, 2010: 229), Allen Ginsberg furthered his explorations in Buddhism through the 1970s, newly directed by his growing relationship with Tibetan religious authority Chögyam Trungpa. Trungpa was a reincarnated *lama* (a regional Tibetan spiritual authority), a dual lineage-holder of two out of Tibet's surviving four schools of Buddhism (both Nyingma and Kagyu)

---

[28] Though he brought Tibetan texts into the English world (Lopez, 1998: 172) Evans-Wentz did not himself speak nor write in Tibetan. The work was rather done by Tibetan translator Kazi Dawa Samdup (Samdup, 2008: 157).

and an eccentric teacher who was known to drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, and engage in regular sexual relations with his students (Fields, 1992: 310-12). He is also the first person to translate the Tibetan term *drubnyon* ("Unconventional tutorship" or "irregular mastery") as "Crazy Wisdom," popularising the term in his lectures for wider usage (Bell, 1998: 59). Having set out to spread Buddhism in the West, Trungpa met Ginsberg at an opportune moment in New York in 1970 (Gimian, 2004: xxxiii), as he was in the midst of organising what would become Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. Ginsberg later accepted Trungpa's invitation to help form the school's literature department, which he co-directed with poet Anne Waldman, naming it the "Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics" (Morgan, 2010: 241).

The West Coast and Colorado were essential for Buddhism's synthesis with American culture in the 1960s and onwards. Following the spiritual/psychedelic experimentation of Timothy Leary (Fields, 1992: 249), Ken Kesey and the other Merry Pranksters of the 1960s, the poets and teachers at Naropa Institute played a role in defining 20th century Buddhism. Trungpa later established "Vajradhatu"—the North American religious insititution today known as "Shambhala," named for the mythological Tibetan kingdom hidden in the Himalayas (p. 290). Shambhala Publications, the publisher[29] responsible for many of the works cited in this very project, gained much of its early popularity through its distribution of Trungpa's works and transcribed lectures in English (Lopes, 1998: 174).

Allen Ginsberg and Chögyam Trungpa's close relationship provided benefits for both individuals. Their friendship provided an entry for Ginsberg into the lineage of Vajrayana—and a resulting creative streak—through the door of Kagyu literary

---

[29] To note, Shambhala Publications is a separate legal entity from the current Shambhala religious group.

creativity. Likewise, Trungpa benefitted from Ginsberg's help in adapting his own art and poetry to fit the new, changing "Spiritual supermarket" (Fields, 1992: 309) of North America. Trungpa—already a multidisciplinary artist—began writing improvised poetry in English, which he likened to Milarepa's own improvised poem/songs [30] (Gimian, Intr. xxxiii). Ginsberg and Trungpa's relationship also occurred coterminously with the beginnings of the twentieth century movement of "Bujus" (or "Bujews," "Jewbus," etc.); a situation referred to in poet Rodger Kamenetz's popular memoir *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (1994). This phenomenon refers to individuals from Jewish backgrounds who either engage with or convert to Buddhism. A story passed along by Kamenetz relates how Chögyam Trungpa joked about founding an "Oy Vey"[31] School of Buddhism after encountering so many Jewish converts to Buddhism in the 1970s (amongst whom one can count poets Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, meditation teacher Jack Kornfield, and scholar Robert Thurman).

Cohen is tied to the Beat Generation through Allen Ginsberg. While evidence exists of their friendship, their relationship is not significantly documented. They first met in Athens somewhere in the early 1960s—near romantically, Cohen "recognised [Allen] from a photograph"—and Ginsberg proceeded to stay with him on Hydra for a few days (Nadel, 1997: 78). Later, Ginsberg apparently introduced Cohen to other Beat writers, some of whom were also residing in Europe at the time (Simmons, 2012:

---

[30] In Heruka's biography, Milarepa improvises his poetic œuvres when encountering a given situation. A fair deal of Trungpa's poems are likewise self-described as "Improvised" works, composed on the spot without forethought or edits, some even resulting from audio recordings. Such is the case of "Lion Roars Sunset over Rockies' East Slope," a poem co-authored with Allen Ginsberg involving a tape-recorded exchange between the two artists (Trungpa and Ginsberg, 2004: 362-71).

[31] "Oy/Oi Vey" is a popular Yiddish declaration that can apply to frustration, surprise or joy in equal measure.

83). Years later, in New York City in 1967, Cohen was on his way to a meeting of young Orthodox Jews when he stopped to listen to a gathering of Hare Krishna devotees chanting in a park. Again, Allen Ginsberg appeared from the ether to join them[32] (Nadel, 1997: 172). There exists an as-yet unpublished personal exchange in letters between the two (Simmons, 2012: 430-1), in addition to their entwinted voices on the Cohen song "Don't Go Home with Your Hard-On" recorded in 1977 (pp. 287-8). The morning after their all-night recording session with Bob Dylan, Cohen considered himself in light of the Dharma: he mused that "inside [his] serene, Buddha-like exterior beats an adolescent heart" (Cohen via Simmons, 2012: 288). Decades afterwards, Ginsberg described Cohen in *Take This Waltz: A Celebration of Leonard Cohen* (1994) as a Buddhist compatriot when witnessing him perform live in 1993: "The language [is] bitter, disillusioning like a practiced (Buddhist) Yankee-Canadian, always surprising" (Ginsberg, 1994: 93). In this passage, Ginsberg further describes Cohen with the specific religious vocabulary of traditional Mahayana terms: that there is "some kind of Bodhisattva[33] Sambhogakaya[34] vow behind his strength in public across the ocean & here."

---

[32] The encounter could form lyrics to a Leonard Cohen song:

"Stopped to listen
to foreign music
on the sidewalk to my own.
Forgot to remind myself
of conversion."

[33] *Bodhisattva* is a Mahayana term, to be further explored in Chapter VI below, referring to awakened beings who remain in cyclical existence to help others achieve awakening.

[34] In the Mahayana tradition, Buddhahood (or existence as a Buddha) can involve three types of form bodies : these three are referred to as the *trikaya* (Ray, 2001: 116). Allen Ginsberg here references the second of these, the *sambhogakaya,* the "subtle, nonphysical body" (p. 116) of a Buddha which can teach others even without manifesting as a tangible physical entity. This form could arguably exist in lines of literature or poetry.

In closing this section, Leonard Cohen began his literary career in tandem with the Beats. The writers of the Beat Generation inherited the unregulated poetry forms from their ancestors in the Modernist literary movement, along with an orientalised Buddhism of that period. The Beats further expanded on this religious study, helping to create the foundations (and even institutions, in the case of Vajradhatu/Shambhala and Naropa University) of contemporary Western Buddhism. Lastly, the Beats' first encounters with Buddhism included a reading of *Milarepa*'s story in translation. Cohen was not only trailing their religious and poetic explorations, but was also a friend of one of the central architects of this movement—Allen Ginsberg—himself responsible for helping to embed the Dharma deeper into the heart of America.

2.3 Leonard Cohen and the Dharma

Leonard Cohen, like Allen Ginsberg, also came into contact with a Buddhist religious authority who shaped the direction of his life and artistic work. In 1969, Cohen met a Japanese monk from Zen Buddhism's Rinzai school, "Roshi,"[35] at a friend's wedding in Nashville (Simmons, 2012: 211-2). Zen is a delineation of Buddhism specific to Japan, sharing a history with the Chinese *Chan* tradition and Korean *Seon,* all of which fall under the larger landscape of Mahayana Buddhism (Williams, 2009: 119).

Despite its current multitude of uses[36], Zen practice involves intense, rigid meditation, and historically coagulates in a period coterminous with Japan's feudal system. Zen's

---

[35] While often referred to by this Japanese title (similar to a Catholic address of "Father" or general "Padre," his given name is Joshu Sasaki.

[36] "Zen" is a current product name for Canadian athletic wear (Lululemon's "Free To Be Zen" bra) Taiwanese computer peripherals (the Asus ZenFone and ZenBook line) and as an adjective to describe one's calm mood (a search of "#zen" on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter elicit a whole array of colourful photography and status updates).

monastic units reflect a military ethos especially in the Rinzai school (associated with the samurai) which couples this with a focus on *koans*—poetic riddles (Williams, 2009: 120). While they developed a continent apart, Zen and Tibetan "Tantra" (as Vajrayana was and is often popularly referred to) meet in the American context, as Chögyam Trungpa and Roshi themselves become friends in the United States. This experience is documented in a series of Trungpa's lectures in 1974, collected as *The Teacup and the Skullcup*: *Where Zen and Tantra Meet* (2015). While all four individuals—Ginsbeg, Cohen, Trungpa and Roshi—never seem to have occupied the same physical space at the same time, two of the world's most famous Jewish poets were thus friends, and so too were their respective Buddhist teachers.

Cohen's first experiences at Roshi's Zen centre at Mount Baldy, Los Angeles, were of a certain intensity. One story involves himself and the other monks walking through California snow at three in the morning while wearing sandals, returning to a dining hall invaded by the sleet on their return (Nadel, 1997: 190-1). Cohen would nonetheless describe the experience as an ideal:

> I dreamed about this [...] the formality of the system, the spiritual technology was there; it was no bullshit. You *could do it* if you wanted, if you developed your will (Cohen via Nadel, 1997: 191).

Cohen would remain a practising Zen monk for the remainder of his life,[37] but his writing of *Beautiful Losers* precedes this involvement by at least four years.

---

[37] There is much room for debate as to what extent his Zen practice constitutes involvement in a formal religious tradition: saying he practised Zen nonreligiously might be read as a form of hypocrisy (the popular, fictional adage that Buddhism is a "Philosophy and not a faith") – but constructing his Judaism as too insular for meditation is also a fundamentalising disservice to both Judaism and Cohen himself.

2.4 Meeting Mythologies

Cohen composed *Beautiful Losers* while living on the Greek island of Hydra, where he had purchased a home in the early 1960s (Simmons, 2012: 128-9). The reality of the novel's writing is thus contemporary with the transversally minded counterculture that followed in the wake of the Beat influence on North American society, but is a geographic world apart from the Beat Generation in New York, the Buddhist movements of the West coast, or North American urban life. On Hydra Cohen was involved with a group of other artists who were participating in a "spiritual" reading group of sorts. Besides Cohen's own personal research for *Beautiful Losers,* involving readers about Catherine (Kateri) Tekakwitha, French Jesuit missionaries of colonial Canada, *Blue Beetle* (the 20th century DC comic book), the farmer's almanac and Henry Longfellow, he was also engaging with readings suggested by his peers[38] in Greece. These included, specifically, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, Tibetan Yoga and the Secret Doctrine* as well as otherwise unspecified "translations" of Asian texts by Walter Evans-Wentz[39] (Nadel, 1997 131-2). In sum, *Cohen was engaging with Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism* while writing *Beautiful Losers.* Of this time, Cohen even notes (in an unpublished essay of 1965) that

---

[38] With this group Cohen also apparently shared his background and texts on mystical Judaism.

[39] Sadly, no reading list seems to have been preserved from this time. While these works are cited, it is nearly certain that Cohen was also reading other sources as well. He notes in Ira Nadel's biography that he was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Twilight of the Idols* (Nadel, 1997: 132) but nowhere mentions that he was also reading *The Gay Science,* from which he directly plagiarises an excerpt from the "Preface for the Second Edition" in *Beautiful Losers.* Nietzsche writes: "What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance (Kauffman translation, p. 38). Compare to F.'s "We've got to learn to stop bravely at the surface. We've got to learn to love appearances" (Cohen, 2005: 4).

> [...] the charity we all practice in regard to another's discipline forbids me to treat the subject with any further aggression[40]. We also have among us students of tantric sexual systems, and I regret to say, misplaced as my regret may be, that these students have often found themselves in adulterous predicaments (Cohen via Nadel, 1997: 132).

After completing *Beautiful Losers*, in a letter to American publisher Corlies "Cork" Smith, he considered it to be a "a long confessional prayer attempting to establish itself on the theme of the life of a saint, meditation on a tight rope [...]" (Cohen via Nadel: 134).

From this history of Cohen, and investigations of the Buddhist intercessions in his composition of *Beautiful Losers* then, I transition to the history of interpretations of this self-professed religious work.

---

[40] A fresh and useful definition of comparative religion.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following constitutes an at-times brutally lengthy overview chronicling the place of my project in the history of academic work on Leonard Cohen and *Beautiful Losers*. The reason for its presence is at a glance simple: because no one else has listed the interdisciplinary history of studies on this very problematic book. Further, however, my intent is also to highlight that the book is not only a deserving topic of study but one that *can* be studied because it already has been (though lacking an address of Buddhism that could be helpful to processing it). In composing a literature review of studies on *Beautiful Losers,* sources have here been assembled in three parts for this research project's intent:

1. Review of the assembly of scholarly books and academic graduate work written specifically[41] on *Beautiful Losers*, some of which have discussed "Religion" in the novel, though often shirking a complete definition of what said "Religi(ous)" might refer to. Any missed studies are faults of my own. These are divided into readings of the novel's sexual content, its experimental qualities, and postcolonial readings of the work.

---

[41] English scholarship on Cohen ranges from a smattering of Canadian literary criticism from the 1970s onward, to non-scholarly, self-published volumes describing personal reactions to his work (i.e. 2016's *Smudging the Air: The Lyrics of Leonard Cohen* by Teresa Quayle).

2. Works analysing religion in Cohen's literary corpus.
3. Two works specifically informing my current study.

3.1 Scholarship on *Beautiful Losers*

In a review of the *Toronto Star*'s articles dealing with Cohen over the 1960s[42], Ben Rayner notes that in 1964, the University of Toronto acquired the rights to Cohen's manuscript of *Beautiful Losers* ahead of its publication in 1966, alongside a number of his own private letters and notes (Rayner, 2016). When several students of the university attempted to consult these documents for use in graduate research that year, they were apparently dissuaded by their supervisors, who noted that Cohen was too young an artist to yet be researched (Rayner, 2016). This, I will assume, is a portion of the reason why there is little scholarly criticism of *Beautiful Losers* before 1970.

Following this period of relative critical silence, readings of *Beautiful Losers* have often tended to centre on the novel's overt sexuality, its experimentalism (lack of a conventional novel's structure), or on postcolonial readings of the novel or the Indigenous characters present within its pages. I have here attempted to represent the entirety of available popular and academic work on the novel's original English version[43] I could uncover.

---

[42] Cohen's early publication history includes *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956), followed by *Spice Box of the Earth* (1961), his first novel *The Favourite Game* (1963), a third collection of poetry *Flowers for Hitler* (1964), both *Beautiful Losers* and the poetry collection *Parasites of Heaven* (1966) before the release of his popular musical album *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967) which led to his rise as celebrity.

[43] As Scobie notes in his 1978 volume *Leonard Cohen,* criticism on Cohen's work is abundant in other languages: Portuguese (1975's *Leonard Cohen: Redescoberta da Vida e uma Alegoria a Eros* by Manuel Cadafaz de Mato) and French especially. While I am familiar with contemporary French language scholarship on Cohen, I do not have the linguistic capacities for Portuguese scholarship, and am unfamiliar with the range of French literary critics who might have also

The first lengthy critical study of *Beautiful Losers* is to be found in Michael Ondaatje's short volume *Leonard Cohen*, published in 1970 and detailing each of Cohen's non-musical works up to that year in a series of essays. In his chapter "Beautiful Losers" (pp. 44–56), Ondaatje describes that on his first reading, "[...] the book was simply too sensational" (p. 45) though filled with "superb moments" left divorced by the book's scope. His second impression of the work, however, is that *Beautiful Losers* constitutes a "vivid, fascinating and brave modern novel." Ondaatje is particularly interested in the narrative conflict created between the narrator and F., which he frames as Cohen's own successful removal of himself (as author) from the work. He deems *Beautiful Losers* to be Cohen's most "Impersonal" creative work up to 1970 (pp. 55-7). While Ondaatje in this early instance also provides an important reading of religion in the novel, I will leave those notes to the section dedicated to religion below.

Following Ondaatje's short volume, in 1976 Michael Gnarowski anthologises a collection of essays on a diversity of Cohen's literature—*Leonard Cohen: The Artist & His Critics*—that signals later developments in research on *Beautiful Losers*, mainly in elements of experimentalism and a movement towards postcolonial studies. The work's five articles on *Beautiful Losers* include: John Wain's "Making it New," Lawrence M. Bensky's "What Happened to Tekakwitha," Dennis Dufy's "Beautiful Beginners," Stephen Scobie's "Magic, Not Magicians: Beautiful Losers and the Story of O" and David Barbour's "Down with History: Some Notes Towards an Understanding of *Beautiful Losers*." Their points of focus do not particularly touch on specific depictions of religion in the novel.

---

worked on *Beautiful Losers* in the 1960s or 70s. I am thus limiting myself to English work, save for the translation of Professor Hugh Hazelton's article on Cohen and tantra below. There is perhaps a future adorned with comparative studies of *Les Perdants magnifiques, Belli e perdenti,* or *Kauniit häviäjät* . But not today.

Stephen Scobie's volume *Leonard Cohen*[44] (1978) constitutes the most in-depth critical study of Cohen's literary works, and his exposition of religion in the novel will be explored below. His passage on *Beautiful Losers* (pp. 96–125) opens with an address of the novel's original dust-jacket description[45]. From the 1966 Viking Press first edition, designed by Gilda Kuhlman:

> *Beautiful Losers* is a love story, a psalm, a Black Mass, a monument, a satire, a prayer, a shriek, a road map through the wilderness, a joke, a tasteless affront, an hallucination, a bore, an irrelevant display of diseased virtuosity, a Jesuitical tract, an Orange sneer, a scatological Lutheran extravagance, in short, a disagreeable religious epic of incomparable beauty.

Another early reading in a published book is provided by Margot Northey, who closes her critical volume *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction* with an address of *Beautiful Losers* in a final chapter: "Towards the Mystical Grotesque: Beautiful Losers" (Northey, 1976). Her reading sees in *Beautiful Losers* an orientation toward the Victorian sublime through its "obverse" (i.e. unorthodox, "grotesque") aspects. In its ugliness, it demonstrates a sort of beauty. While her study skirts an address of religion in the novel, it does so in order to discuss the modes of eighteenth century Gothic literature. I have thus left her study here, rather than include it in the section on religion.

---

[44] Neither Stephen Scobie nor Michael Ondaatje seems to have been able to fathom another title beyond Cohen's own name to contain his multitudes.

[45] In Canada, the cover of the 1966 Mclelland & Stewart edition is designed "backwards," and features a drawing of a man kissing a long haired woman while another man watches, but with no title present. The title-text is instead found on the back cover, above another ink sketch of a woman reaching upwards to the sky. In the United States, the Viking edition's design was of a an illuminated and green Canadian forest with a photograph of Cohen's face on the back cover, taken by Sandy Noyes. These designs were abandoned as of the novel's later editions in the 1970s, which rather like pulp paperbacks, included sensationally appropriate illustrated naked bodies entwined, with regular title-text above the cover design.

Following these, scholarly and/or graduate work on the novel has tended to revolve around the specific topics thus explored below.

3.1.1 Sex

Beginning with the narrator's inserts on his masturbatory habits from the novel's first two pages, sexual acts are present throughout the work, and thus often the point of focus for academic studies of *Beautiful Losers*.

In their anthology chronicling various expressions of Canadian sexuality through English Canadian media, Peter Dickinson and Richard Cavell file an excerpt of *Beautiful Losers* under their chapter on "Sex and Religion" in *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook* (Dickinson and Cavell, 2006), though their volume lacks critical notes apart from their introduction. Terry Goldie also highlights the romantic and/or sexual activities between the narrator and F. in a full chapter "Producing Losers: *Beautiful Losers*" from his work *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction* (Goldie, 2003). In one of the first instances of graduate work done on *Beautiful Losers*, Reynolds Kanary bridges the sexual world with that of the experimental in his thesis *Leonard Cohen: Sexuality and the Anal Vision in* Beautiful Losers (1974), at the University of Ottawa[46]. He describes Cohen's work as dividing the modern world into a dichotomy of "Sexuality" and "Anality"—or, in some sense, liberation and restraint. Stephen Scobie—before publishing his own volume on Cohen's work—contributes the article "Beautiful Losers and The Story of O" to *Leonard Cohen: The Artist & His Critics* (1976). He relates the variety of sexual acts in the novel to the popular French novel *Histoire d'O,* by Pauline Réage/Dominique Aury/Anne Desclos (sic.), which is itself an ode to the work of the aristocrat and writer Marquis de Sade. From the realm of gender studies, Paul Nonnekes' 1993

---

[46] Ironically appropriate, considering the novel's ejaculatory drive towards the Canadian capital city.

presentation "Beyond Mummy and the Machinery: Leonard Cohen's Vision of Male Desire in *Beautiful Losers*" is complemented by the second chapter of Peter Cumming's thesis *Some 'Male' from Canada 'Post' – Heterosexual Masculinities in Contemporary Canadian Writing* (2002) which "analyzes the 'masculinism' of *Beautiful Losers.*" According to Cumming, the novel ultimately "collapses into conservative gender constructions" (Cumming, 2002: iii).

Peter Wilkins, in a more contemporary figuring of the novel's "pornographic" elements, explains in "Pornographic Sublime: *Beautiful Losers* and Narrative Excess" that the novel's free flow of sexual imagery forces a reader to re-examine their role as voyeur, and question their place as a consumer of culture. He posits that the sex of the novel also serves to instigate a meditation through its dually sensual and religious overtones (Wilkins, 2000).

3.1.2 Experimentalism

The novel's unconventional format – its narration interspersed with radio announcements, musical lyrics, and excerpts from a Greek phrasebook (amongst others) lends itself to many examinations of its "experimental" (read: abnormal, irregular, etc.) qualities in contrast to other literary works. This also contributes to what might be read as Cohen's own self-reflexivity in figuring out the limits of the "artist" through writing the novel. Under this light, his vision of a novelist or poet would seem to connote one who combines different media for their craft.

Regarding experimentalism, Margaret Atwood and Christian Bök open their anthology *Ground Works: Avant Garde for Thee*—a chronicle of the "wild and weird, transgressive and transformative, funny and fearless works at the root of our best (Canadian) writing" (from the jacket description: Atwood and Bök, 2002)—with an excerpt from *Beautiful Losers'* final, apocalyptic chapter. Atwood helpfully categorises "experimental fiction" as that which "sets up certain rules for itself—rules

that are not the same as those followed by the mainstream fiction of its day—and then proceeds to obey its own new commandments [...]" (Atwood, 2002: x) in the work's introduction. In sum, she relates experimentalism to the founding of a spiritual system; certainly helpful in helping to read *Beautiful Losers.*

Linda Hutcheon provides the most significant early criticism of the novel in "Beautiful Losers: All the Polarities" (1974). In her interdisciplinary approach, she examines the novel's robust and unique figuring of sexuality, looks to the political situation within its folds, and argues that the novel crafts a dichotomy between a religion of the flesh and one of the spirit. She connects this to Cohen's constant borrowing of biblical and mythological themes. Mirroring her subject, Hutcheon intersperses her text with visual charts to analyse Cohen's lexicon in the novel. She concludes that *Beautiful Losers* recognises its reader, but intentionally prevents them from "creating a system of interpretation, leaving [them] caught between unresolved dualities" (Hutcheon, 1974: 56). Douglas Barbour's essay published in the same year, "Down with History: Some Notes Towards an Understanding of *Beautiful Losers*," (later reprinted in Michael Gnarowski's anthology noted above, in 1976) describes the multimedia investigation of history provided by the novel. Barbour concludes that the novel is "Quite deliberately NOT committed to logic, but to excess; for *Beautiful Losers* is a religious work and not merely science fiction" (Barbour, 1976: 145).

John Wain writes of the modernist elements in the novel in his essay "*Beautiful Losers:* Making it New" (from 1976's *Leonard Cohen: The Artist & His Critics).* Dennis Dufy's "*Beautiful Losers:* Beautiful Beginners," in the same volume, looks to the work's "discordant" elements, suggesting that it is a book to read only once for its chaotic vision (Dufy, 1976: 31).

In Canadian poet Dennis Lee's book-length essay *Savage Fields* (1977), Lee uses *Beautiful Losers* alongside Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*

(1970) to posit a social and political vision of contemporary life. For him, these two novel exhibit the whole of existence (summarised by his term "planet") as being defined by strife between "earth" (or nature) and "world" (civilisation and human development). Lee's small treatise posits that the strife between earth and world is a "Savage field" that *Beautiful Losers* both reflects (as a work of art) and also reflects upon. His focus is upon Edith as a saviour-figure in the novel, who can balance these two extremes.

In *The Gazette,* English Montreal's daily newspaper, the novel is mentioned in a 1973 article by Jack Kapicas. Here, *Beautiful Losers* is discussed briefly when contextualising Cohen's return to living in Montreal amidst his pop-music success: Cohen's experimental push against conventions is by Kapicas' count, best exemplified in *Beautiful Losers* (Kapicas, 1973). In a posting for *The Library Journal* on the occasion of *Beautiful Losers'* reprint in 1993, reviewer Michael Rogers attempts to advertise the book for a modern audience by noting that it might be better received in the 1990s than it had been in the 1960s; that its strangeness was too ahead of its time (Rogers, 1993).

Canadian novelist and literary scholar Stan Dragland[47] contributes a study of *Beautiful Losers* in the context of the 1994 Cohen retrospective anthology *Take this Waltz.* As such, his essay provides both a reading of the novel and a personal narrative about Dragland responding to *Beautiful Losers* over time. Dragland focuses on F. as a teacher, and is perhaps the first scholar to describe him as a "guru." He sees F.'s formulation of a system that appears to encompass the entirety of existence in its abundant differences (Dragland, 1994: 50). Dragland summarises *Beautiful Losers* as

---

[47] Dragland is also the author of the "Afterword" included in some recent editions of *Beautiful Losers,* partially adapted from this essay (or vice-versa).

a visceral experience both sexual and experimental : "a holy book for many readers of the Age of Aquarius" and "the first weird book I'd ever read" (p. 48). He ultimately argues that the novel will make total sense only to a reader who is partially "amnesiac" (p. 61) due to its conflicting statements, and that both life itself and novel are "a fabulous game with fluid rules and no possibility of winning" (p. 51). In total, Dragland sees it as a novel worthwhile of study but which cannot be analysed under a singular thesis.

A few works look towards *Beautiful Losers* as testing the limits of what constitutes a Canadian artist. Medrie Purdham speaks to Cohen's poetic listing and *Beautiful Losers'* array of sources in her thesis *The Encyclopedic Imagination of the Canadian Artist Figure* (2005). The novel's extracts from Jesuit colonial literature are especially prominent for her. She defines the 'Canadian Artist' as an artist who assembles: further, that Canada itself is an assembly of diverse peoples and nations. In one of the earliest graduate projects involving *Beautiful Losers, The Poetry of Leonard Cohen: "His Perfect Body"* (1971) Dorothy Helen Jantzen describes the novel as a turning point, where Cohen portrays creativity as being self-harming or "parasitic" (Jantzen, 1971: viii). Claudine Gélinas-Faucher, in her Master's work "Beautiful Games: Alienation, Autonomy and Authenticity in Leonard Cohen's Fiction" describes Cohen's figuring of this artist as the individual most likely in society to achieve autonomy (Gélinas-Faucher, 2007).

Ian Rae documents *Beautiful Losers* in his work *From Cohen to Carson: The Poet's Novel in Canada* (2008). His introduction's central point relates that both Cohen's poetry and novels are influenced by a rarely-documented early interest in photography; especially, that Cohen is often obsessed with minute details in his imagery and the framing of his subjects (Rae, 2008). Brea Oneal Burton speaks to the use of onomatopoeia and other aural techniques in the novel in her thesis *The Cry: Silence & Sound in Six Contemporary Canadian Works of Fiction* (2006). These add

to the infusion of non-literary elements in the literary body that is *Beautiful Losers.* In sum, as Claudine Gélinas-Faucher notes in her doctoral work, *Beautiful Losers* is a "highly self-reflexive novel [which] juxtaposes and parodies different literary forms" (Gélinas-Faucher, 2015: 129).

3.1.3 Postcolonialism

Under the heading of 'Postcolonial' readings of *Beautiful Losers,* I have included any texts dealing with the novel's depiction of Canada's Indigenous peoples, themes of Québécois independence, or other political topics.

Lawrence M. Bensky's "Beautiful Losers: What Happened to Tekakawitha?" from *Leonard Cohen: The Artist & His Critics* (1976) chronologically begins this genre of criticism, while Leslie Rempel's "Postmodernism's Defeat: *Beautiful Losers* and *Prochain Épisode*[48] as Postcolonial Works" (2010) demonstrates that postcolonial interpretations of the novel continue in more contemporary criticism. John H. Ferres also looks to Cohen's Pocahontas-like depiction of historical figure Kateri Tekakwitha in his essay "The Indian Maiden in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and John Barth's *The Sot Weed Factor*" (1980). *Beautiful Losers* is highlighted in Windfried Siemerling's exegesis of four Canadian authors who explore diversity in conceptions of Canadian identity, and also explore the populations who have been ignored within it. *Beautiful Losers* is included in Siemerling's evaluative chapter within this work: "Hailed by Koan: Leonard Cohen and the Aesthetics of Loss" (1994). In his essay "Mad Translation in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and Douglas Glover's *Elle*" (2014) Robert David Stacey describes how *Beautiful Losers* translates a "lost" history (a history ignored by current depictions of Canada's

---

[48] *Prochain Épisode*, the novel by Québécois writer Hubert Aquin.

evolution) to a contemporary context, providing a reminder of the old sufferings inflicted on Canada's Indigenous peoples, while also forcing a re-evaluation of such circumstances.

Poet Ann Diamond provides a short reflection on *Beautiful Losers* in *Take this Waltz*: "Losers, Sore and Beautiful" (Diamond, 1994). Her reading investigates both the novel's experimentalism and its postcolonial aspects, whereby Diamond considers the "post-modern" qualities of the book to be a reflection of Cohen's study of Canadian history. Such experimental qualities are already present in the near-magical descriptions of North America by Christian missionaries in centuries past, who wrote of their experiences in vivid language (Diamond, 1994: 42). *Beautiful Losers* constitutes, for her, an attempt by Cohen to probe into Canada's historical traumas.

Jesse Rae Archibald-Barber's study "The Elegiac Loss of the English-Canadian Self and the End of the Romantic Identification with the Aboriginal Other in Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers" (2012) provides a dense, multi-faceted and original reading of the novel. It carries elements of postcolonialism, a regard to the novel's refiguring of Catholicism's early encounters with the First Nations of Canada, as well as the "loss" of personal identity for the novel's narrator(s). The characters' loss of self leaves room for their own transformation, and also represents Canada's transformation based on an ignored past of abusing its First Nations and minorities. Archibald-Barber creates a dichotomy between the terms "Religion" (for him: Catholicism or the traditions of Western monotheism) and "Spirituality" (once again, per his work: a more positive force in line with the magical traditions of the novel's colonised peoples). For Archibald-Barber, Cohen "critiques the institution of religion" while praising the "reinvigoration of Aboriginal forms of spirituality" (Archibald-Barber, 2012: 204). He alternately uses terms such as "metaphysical beliefs" (p. 179) "spiritual transcendence through art" (p. 203) or "apocalyptic visions" in reference to the traditions of Canada's Indigenous peoples, juxtaposed with the "mechanization of

the modern world" (p. 176) as the cause for spiritual disenfranchisement brought about by the Catholic, colonial world. In his argument, the lack of a cohesive social wholeness in Canadian identity (that Canada is from its origins built atop Indigenous cultures) results in the lack of a personal wholeness for the primary narrator of *Beautiful Losers.*

Linda Dydyk's 1981 thesis speaks to the role of the Québécois Quiet revolution in *Beautiful Losers,* extrapolating Cohen's vision of revolution as being one undertaken on a spiritual level, as opposed to the artificially created, institutional constraints of society. The retrospective Cohen literary anthology *Intricate Preparations* (2000) features two further readings of the novel's politics in this vein: Frank Davey's "*Beautiful Losers*: Leonard Cohen's Postcolonial Novel" and Peter Wilkins' "Nightmares of Identity: Nationalism and Loss in *Beautiful Losers.*" Claudine Gélinas-Faucher's 2015 thesis is the most recent published doctoral entry relating to the novel, and speaks to the politics within mid-century English Québecois novel-writing: in particular, what she figures as the post Second World War "minoritization" (Gélinas-Faucher, 2015: iii) of English-speaking peoples in Québec during and after the Quiet Revolution. Considering the postcolonial readings above, her summary proves apt: "In *Beautiful Losers*, Cohen also features characters whose marginal status is a source of authenticity; they are beautiful, not despite the fact that they are losers, but because of it" (p. 130).

3.2 Religion and Leonard Cohen : His Work and/in Faith

Cohen's work has often been described in spiritual terms, though as noted above, the specific use of "religious" to categorise his poems and novels is not often specifically defined. Elaine Kalman Naves' 1993 work *The Writers of Montreal* reserves a space for Cohen under the title "Erotic Mystic, Apocalyptic Troubadour." Following from her summary of Irving Layton's characterisation of Cohen as a "saint and hedonist,"

she concludes that "religion, sex, death, violence, beauty and the search for ecstasy have been the touchstones of [Cohen's] work from the beginning and continue to fascinate him [...]" (Naves, 1993: 144). Precisely what, however, is mystical, eschatological, or "religious" about his work is not defined in her brief study, though she concludes that his corpus has and will "[...] alternately inspire and outrage with his wild iconoclasm" (p. 145). Her work also refers to an oft-quoted, but hard to find interview "Leonard Cohen: Working for the World to Come" where Cohen refers to Montreal as the "Jerusalem of the North." [49]

In *The New Yorker*'s 2015 tribute to Cohen, author Bernard Avishai begins with an address of the song "Hallelujah," and continues to paint an image of Montreal as a city carved by its religious heritage. Avishai highlights that Cohen was a product of the "religious-linguistic cultures rubbing each other the right way" in Montreal; Judaism wedged between the English Protestantism and (former) French Catholicism amidst the city's architecture (Avishai, 2015).

Cohen is thus referred to above as an individual able to commingle separate religious cultures. Michael Ondaatje's early reading (1970) offers an important, preliminary interpretation of *Beautiful Losers* as especially religious, in that it introduces readers to an inverted new faith practised by the novel's protagonists. Highlighting Cohen's twisting (perversion?) of the term "saint" when contrasting Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha to his other characters, Ondaatje notes that:

> [...] although Catherine is a saint and the others are nothing, their status in life is similar, only their beliefs are different: Catherine rejects the

---

[49] The interview is available in its entirety on the Leonard Cohen fan site, *Leonardcohenfiles*, but I am unable to trace its origins. http://www.leonardcohenfiles.com/intheirwords.html. I've preserved a portrait of the site in PDF should this link cease to function.

> body, F. and friends embrace it as the source of a new religion (Ondaatje, 1970: 52).

Ondaatje's figuring of F. as "[...] the fanatic, the politician, the madman, the bully, the sensualist, the saint" (p. 46) also intimates the aura of a charismatic religious figure in its contours, and it is upon the saint-figure that Ondaatje focuses his reading. While the principal narrator is obsessed with social bounds and norms, F.'s religiosity is instructional and welcomes social transgression, as he attempts to "lead" the narrator through "madness into sainthood" (p. 47) by defying these bounds. Ondaatje sees the trio of the novel's principal characters as testimonies and emblems of a new religion, and the heart of their sainthood as the capacity to enact transformation or transcendence (pp. 51-3). Ondaatje sees Cohen, through the novel, as valourising the downtrodden because they are most true to real life. He interprets the novel's spiritual vision as a redemptive chance at transformation from such circumstances (pp. 55-6).

Stephen Scobie's *Leonard Cohen* (1978) speaks in its introduction to the strange lack of scholarly discussion in English Canada of Cohen's work. While at Scobie's time, there was already an in-depth Portuguese critical volume looking to Cohen's poetry—Manuel Cadafaz des Matos' *Leonard Cohen: Redescoberta da vida e uma alegoria a eros* (1975)—in English Canada there was not yet any such lengthy study. Scobie then highlights the trend of Canadian authors' use of "Saints" in recent literature of the decade: fictional Canadian saints being individuals who explore the wilderness of the country and find some truth in its depths, particularly in the work of bpNichol (sic.)[50], Leonard Cohen, and famous Canadian novelist Robertson Davies (Scobie, 1978: 6–8). These saint-characters often become teachers, and Scobie notes that in works such as *Fifth Business* (Robertson Davies) this includes the construction

---

[50] Barrie Phillip Nichol, the Canadian writer of wayward lowercase initials.

of a community of disciples who in turn question the teacher themselves, not unlike Cohen's own assembly in *Beautiful Losers*. For Scobie, F. is a (spiritual) teacher more "master than saint" (p. 97), and Scobie notes that while Cohen weaves this thread in his novel, it is also repeated in the master and slave relationships in his other songs and poems. Scobie also looks to Cohen's thematic use of both sex and religion. He draws from Susan Sontag's 1969 article "The Pornographic Imagination" to note that sex and religion are perhaps the sole two human experiences that are "all encompassing"[51] (pp. 8-9). To this, Scobie highlights the repeated phrase "fuck a saint" throughout the novel (pp. 98–99). For him, this phrase condenses the vision F. is leading his entourage upon: the breaking down of systems, the perversion and opening up of a commonly held value. The novel attempts to open up these systems, and Scobie understands that "(Cohen's) writing sparkles with wit and humour, yet the laughter is never far from the apocalypse" (p. xii).

I thus draw especially from both Ondaatje (1970) and Scobie (1977), in their summaries that *Beautiful Losers* introduces its audience to a new sort of religiosity: as Ondaatje puts it, a new figuring of the frontiers of religious experience. Building on this, however, I instead take a new direction in comparing the text with the specific religious tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism.

Patricia A. Morley compares writer Hugh MacLennan's work to Cohen's two novels in *The Immoral Moralists: Hugh MacLennan and Leonard Cohen* (1971). She describes both as having come from established religious traditions—Christian and Jewish—and argues that both rework the expected norms of the Puritan Canadian heritage of English Literature. Elliot R. Wolfson's 2006 article "New Jerusalem

---

[51] Writer and German military officer Ernst Jünger (and my colleague David Brodeur of the Canadian Grenadier Guards) would add to these the experience of war.

Glowing: Songs and Poems of Leonard Cohen in a Kabbalistic Key" provides an insightful look to the "mystical" elements of Cohen's poetic works. Wolfson is amongst the few studying Cohen's literary work from the realm of formal academic religious studies. *Beautiful Losers* does not especially enter the discussion in his article, which focuses rather on the displays of Cohen's (Orthodox) Jewish strands, as well as elements of Christianity and (Zen) Buddhism, that make their way into his poetry and songs. From Christianity, Wolfson sees Cohen paying attention to the minimalism and sexuality (or lack thereof) in the colloquial depiction of Christian saints: the "Christian monastic ideal (blending) eroticism and asceticism" (Wolfson, 2006: 106). Borrowing from Ira Nadel—writer of Cohen's first biography, *Various Positions* (1997)—Wolfson speaks to Cohen's threading of renunciation and longing as major themes throughout his literary career. He claims that the inherent reflections on discipline and suffering that are carried in the monastic Zen meditative tradition (pp. 107-9) connect with Cohen's explorations of religion. This leads Wolfson onto a brief exposition on various preliminary concepts of Mahayana Buddhism, as he attempts to bridge the worlds of Kabbalah and Zen, via their shared meditational focus on a given "Oneness"–whether that be a concentration on the single truth of emptiness or the single truth of the all-encompassing divinity (pp. 110–115). Ultimately, these qualities make up what Wolfson reads as a kabbalistic trend throughout Cohen's writing: a mystical, sensual version of the Judaism he was raised with. This study, however, excludes *Beautiful Losers*.

This leads to the most "comprehensive" work on Cohen and religion thus composed: Aubrey Glazer's very recent *Tangle of Matter & Ghost: Leonard Cohen's Post-Secular Songbook of Mysticism(s) Jewish & Beyond* (2017). Glazer, himself a rabbi, offers a philosophic and religious exposition of Cohen's poetic and musical opus. He attributes Cohen's Zen practice to "a commitment (to) redeeming the frequently xenophobic, triumphalist" elements of more reactionary strains within Judaism (Glazer, 2017: 43); indeed, of expanding potential Jewish practice. Glazer's work is

fascinating and critical for a current regard of Leonard Cohen, but here must be constituted as an apology ("Apology" in the traditional sense—as an argument) for Cohen's para-Judaic religious explorations, and does not mention *Beautiful Losers.* Glazer's earlier article, "Leonard Cohen and the Tosher Rebbe: On Exile as Redemption in Canadian Jewish Mysticism" (2012), on the other hand, offers a radical approach to the novel, citing and expanding on Michael Greenstein's *Third Solitudes—Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature* (1989)[52] who also looks to Cohen's Jewish heritage. Glazer here considers *Beautiful Losers* to be the "novel of Canadian Jewish mysticism, par excellence" (Glazer, 2012: 170) and a marker of Cohen's career-long interest with "celibate piety" (p. 165).

Numerous other scholars have written on Cohen and religion between the 1990s and the present day. Two further essays in *Canadian Poetry: The Proceedings of the Leonard Cohen Conference* (1993) fall under this heading. Nicole Markotic's "The Telephone Dance & Mechanical Ecstasy" skirts the subject of religion, while Norman Ravvin discusses Judaism in "Writing Around the Holocaust: Uncovering the Ethical Centre of Beautiful Losers."[53] David Boucher's *Cohen and Dylan: Poets of Rock and Roll* (2004) looks to religion in Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan's lives, particularly to their shared Jewish pasts, and also to Boucher's belief that Cohen holds a specific affinity for a "Non-denominational" Judaism. Mark Migotti's 2009 article "Nietzsche as Educator: Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers and the Achievement of Innocence"

---

[52] Its title a remix of Hugh Maclennan's novel *The Two Solitudes.* Greenstein rather posits that Canada is a multitude of cultures that do not fall under the poles of either "English" or "French."

[53] Scholarship on Cohen's use of the holocaust in his work does exist, but this seems the sole entry on it regarding *Beautiful Losers.*

traces the Nietzschean heritage of the novel [54]. Migotti accurately compares Nietzsche's spiritual system of self-affirming faith to the constructed spirituality of Cohen's characters in *Beautiful Losers*, and also notes Cohen's plagiarism from *The Gay Science* (noted in section 2.4's footnote above, under Cohen's reading on Hydra).

3.3 Previous Work on *Beautiful Losers* and Buddhism

Under this final section of my literature review, I present two works informing my study: the first as setting a precedent for my method, and another which has very recently tried to combine literary and religious studies to read the novel (an analysis of *Beautiful Losers* via unspecified "Tantra").

3.3.1 Previous Study: Robert Verreault

An exemplary work in assembling my own project is one close to home, in journalist Robert Verreault's *L'autre côté du monde: Le Passage à l'âge adulte chez Michel Tremblay, Réjean Ducharme, Anne Hébert et Marie-Claire Blais* (1998). This work is a Master's dissertation-turned-publication that performs a "Religious" reading of some of Québec's most prominent literary figures from during and after the Quiet revolution of la belle province. It is comforting, after having cut through my own theoretical readings, to read of Verreault likewise investigating Mircea Eliade and quoting from Georges Bataille, looking especially to Bataille's perception of the sacred as a "bubbling" violence (Verreault, 1998: 13). His project uses the archetypical formulations of human development elucidated through Eliade's corpus

---

[54] Migotti highlights a parenthetical point about Cohen's life which I thought I had discovered : that Cohen's F. of *Beautiful Losers* is in part a mirror of his own teacher Irving Layton, whom Cohen saw as an embodiment of Friedrich Nietzsche's spirit in a number of his published poems. Most prominently, in "To I.P.L" (To Irving Peter Layton) in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, where Cohen speaks of one with "zarathustrian tales" who confronts the divine (Cohen, 2006: 46).

however—"the essential dimensions of the human condition: childhood, family, social integration, passage of time, death, sexuality, and the sacred"[55] whereas mine, as shall be demonstrated in Chapter IV below, looks only to Eliade's conception of religious echoes in artistic creation.

Verreault's study—primarily a regard for the journey into adulthood between these Québécois authors— is similar to my intention. He performs a critical literary reading of nonfiction works (prose and theatrical scripts) while informed by traditional Western archetypes—Biblical and Classical as figured in the work of Mircea Eliade—as well as the contexts and additional works by these authors. My project is similar: a critical literary reading of both a Tibetan religious text and an English Canadian literary work, the latter of which I will be doing based on my reading of the first.

3.3.2 *Beautiful Losers* by Buddhism: Hugh Hazelton

The most noteworthy work—so far as Buddhism is concerned—preceding my own project is Hugh Hazelton's recent entry "Tantra et transcendence dans les *Perdants Magnifiques* de Leonard Cohen," in *Les révolutions de Leonard Cohen* (2016) as it appears from its title to deal specifically with my subject[56]. Hazelton retells the essential structure of *Beautiful Losers* while extracting a variety of themes that relate to elements of either esoteric Buddhism or Hinduism. In his introduction, he explains that while *Beautiful Losers* seems composed of disparate elements, it is "imbued with

---

[55] [...] *des dimensions essentielles de la condition humaine: l'enfance, la famille, l'intégration à la société, le passage du temps (et son inéluctable achèvement que constitute la mort), la sexualité, et, bien sûr, le sacré.* (Verreault, 1998: 10)

[56] I note, as an aside, that its publication occurs a year after my own work was begun.

a stunningly coherent cosmology"[57] (Hazelton, 2016: 200). His article deals with this "cohesive vision" which "work[s] between the principles of pain and pleasure, the affirmation or the rejection of essential energies and the desire for transcendence."[58] Hazelton feels that the novel's religious reflections are spurred by both a reactionary iteration of Catholicism obsessed with correcting an original sin, and an unspecified "tantric Buddhist and Hindu philosophy" [59] (p. 201). He does not trace any specific tradition, as "Tantra" can apply in equal measure to a multitude of South Asian religious traditions. He compares the character of the novel's third portion to the fabled Hindu writer Valmiki of the *Ramayana,* who patiently waits outside of time (p. 203). Hazelton then describes the novel's format as being an oral, intimate lineage: the first part a narrator confiding in his audience, the second as a letter from a teacher to his pupil, and the last ending with a direct address to the reader, whereby "the reader is thus transformed into the direct confidante of the narrator and will carry his work forward into the world"[60] (pp. 203–204). Hazelton sees the sexualised (and victimised) Edith as a "bodhisattva"[61] (p. 206) who returns in the novel's conclusion to bring an emancipatory "Nirvana." In the article's final three pages, Hazelton briefly summarises his own vision of Buddhist tantra as passed down from Vedic traditions before noting that the novel in sum describes the manner by which F. combines elements of different faiths into his sexuality, which is in turn his teaching,

---

[57] *imprégné d'une cosmologie étonnamment cohérente* (Hazelton, 2016: 200)

[58] *lutte entre les principes de la douleur et du plaisir, l'affirmation ou le rejet de l'énergie vitale et le désir de transcendence.* (Hazelton, 2016: 201)

[59] *philosophie tantrique bouddhiste et hindoue.* (Hazelton, 2016: 201)

[60] *Le lecteur est donc devenu le confident direct du narrateur et portera ensuite son œuvre dans le monde* (pp.203-4)

[61] "A buddha in training" (Powers, 2007: 36) that might manifest in the world to help others attain Buddhahood even before themselves.

"an effort to eroticise the body"[62] to make a universal union (p. 211). Hazelton closes this article by comparing this universal ecstasy with Allen Ginsberg's famous poem *Howl* of 1956.

This article is useful in its conception of Cohen's crafting a teaching lineage of his characters, as well as Hazelton's figuring of the novel's character Edith as a "Bodhisattva." Its eclectic and incomplete comparisons with the tantric traditions of South Asia, however, is problematic. Further, my project is a different nature from this study, as it constitutes a direct comparison between *Beautiful Losers* and a text from within a specific religious tradition (the Kagyu school of Tibetan Vajrayana).

3.4 Literature Review : Conclusion

Processing this significant collection above, my own research falls into a reading of the religious echoes of the work similar to those of section 3.2. Michael Ondaatje's configuration of Cohen's building a new religious type in the novel is a similar intention to my own, while Scobie's characterisation of F. as a failed saint is also helpful; even if these two evidently do not discuss Tibetan Buddhism specifically. Hazelton's conception of an intimate lineage being drawn from F. to the other characters of the novel (I. especially) is also particularly interesting, and will play a part in my analysis.

My reading of *Beautiful Losers* through the lens of a specific piece of religious literature is thus, so far as I have researched, a novel one.

---

[62] *dans un effort d'érotiser le corps* (p. 211)

CHAPTER IV

THEORY

This project—and myself holding its pillars—posits a unified reading and comparison of a fifteenth century religious text and a Canadian novel from the 1960s.

4.1 Religion Wrote: Literature and Faith

The respective fields of "Literature" (or literary analysis) and "Religious Studies" find themselves divorced despite the collective knot of the world's written expression[63] having been tied with strings of the world's faiths. The two nearly meet in mid-twentieth century "Mythological" criticism: in the French-language work of Gilbert Durand (who analyses mythological archetypes in literary works) (Chevrel, 2009: 64) and in the stream of "Myth criticism" in English-language[64] literary studies,

---

[63] Whether in the handwritten scrolls of the Torah carried in each synagogue, in Western Protestant forms by the rise of late-medieval/early Renaissance printing presses, or in the Tibetan Buddhist context by popular written hagiographies.

[64] The substantial volume *Myth and Literature* (1962), edited by John B. Vickery, is an exemplar of this trend, though its contents wade primarily through the evolution of English literature and poetry's usage of exclusively Western (Greek, Latin and Christian) tropes across the centuries. My intention is not to perform a "Myth criticism" of *Beautiful Losers* in this way. While this critical method acknowledges the interdisciplinary means of "link(ing) (the critic) to other disciplines, notably anthropology and psychology," it still "endorses the autonomy of literature and its study" (Vickery, 1962: x). This means that it does not take the religion it deals with on the tradition's own terms. Further, use of the term "Myth" in lieu of "Religious" or "Spiritual" appears a marker of the time: potentially used in order to avoid a negative connotation with "Religion" and its institutions in the context of the mid-1960s.

These two ultimately favour an analysis of myths outside of their own terms, however, and only for better understanding a given modern text. Leonard Cohen's first poetry collection of 1956 is written in the midst of this academic movement: his poems' encounters between different cultures and faiths occurs under the auspice of *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, rather than "Let Us Compare Beliefs," or "Religions."

Precedents for my current project are thus limited, though more recent examples can be found in works such as literary critic Northrop Frye's *The Great Code* (1981) and *Words with Power* (1992) (each using the methods of English literary analysis to interrogate the Bible) and the anthologised works within *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (1987) edited by Biblical scholars Frank Kermode and Robert Alter.[65] These previous works however—whether through the disciplines of English Literature or Jewish/Biblical studies—do not correspond to my current project, as I am not performing a singularly literary analysis of religious material, nor an exclusively scriptural reading of an otherwise "secular" novel by an institution's standards. My intent is, more clearly, to compare:

1. a central religious text from the Kagyu school—within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition—which valourises the spiritual and social transgression by its titular saint and the tradition that births it,
2. with that of a 1966 novel by Leonard Cohen, featuring similar moments of social transgression and sharing essential symbols with this Tibetan text: most prominently, the uncouth tutorship or spiritual mentorship by an eccentric teacher towards their pupil.

---

[65] Alter and Kermode are each also responsible for significant work in studying the "Poetry" of the Hebrew Bible.

As such, the "Religion" shared between these two is not one that can be defined in an orthodox manner, nor precisely theorised by traditional scholarship on either religion or mythology. In collecting theories to build a frame around my project, I will be exploring the early comparative mythological thought of Mircea Eliade, the transversal ("Transgressive") religious vision of Georges Bataille, and Victor Turner's coneption of liminality. This section will contain many footnotes; a centipede of studies.

4.2 Eliade, Echoes

A precedent for such a comparative method—reading a contemporary text through the filter of an older, culturally recognised work—is found in the opus of historian Mircea Eliade. I should recognise, as when handling any author charged a difficult history, that I am aware of Mircea Eliade's early involvement with Romania's fascist and anti-Semitic *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail* or "Iron Guard" assembly in the 1930s (Heinämäki, 2011: 61-2). His continued and empathetic use of Judaism in symbols or story to illustrate concepts throughout his popular literary and academic career thereafter—if not negating this involvement—verifies his potential for citation.

In his later essay collection *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions* (1976), Eliade embarks on an analysis of popular (literary) media—"Cultural Fashions"—by way of religious tropes developed over the course of his academic career. His essential argument is that for readers and researchers aware of religious archetypes (and the world's religious histories in story), elements of humanity's collective religious/mythological narratives become apparent in works they consume, and ultimately that any popular work of literature can be subject to a "religious analysis" of sorts. When crossing disciplines, he notes that "[It] is surprising that so few

historians of religions have ever tried to interpret a literary work from their own perspective" (Eliade 1976:3), and further argues that to fully "enjoy"[66] a work, its spiritual currents must also be understood, or processed.[67] For this, he briefly uses the example of playwright Eugène Ionèsco's *Le roi se meurt / Exit the King* (1962), which is usually categorised as an "absurdist" play, but which Eliade guarantees was written after the author's personal readings of a version of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and of the Brahmanical *Upaniṣads* (Eliade 1976: 2). This is not unlike *Beautiful Losers'* filing under the "Experimental" genre despite its diversity of in-text citations.

Eliade intones that there is power carried by an artistic production which repeats archetypes, images and rituals from religious traditions (and "Myth"), as such symbols form inalienable parts of human existence (Eliade, 1952: 31) and expression.[68] There is a dangerous universalising strand within this, but also a kernel for my work here: the suggestion that a religious story can echo in a context estranged from its origins. Eliade explains that this is because such stories have always been echoing in different ways. Even when unintentional, he argues that aspects of foreign, ancient, or far-gone religious elements continue to rattle in the cultural structures built through time, and it is thus not illegitimate to see elements of a religion that one practises or studies in the world or artistic works surrounding oneself.

---

[66] I would argue, this "Enjoyment" would translate better as digestion.

[67] "[...] there are instances when only a historian of religions can discover some secret significance of a cultural creation, whether ancient or contemporary [...]" (Eliade 1976: 2).

[68] Eliade's conception of symbols within religious traditions is especially relevant: by his measure, a symbol's validity in a given context doesn't depend on a person's individual understanding of its specific meaning (either the author's intent in manipulating it, or a reader's interpretation of it in that instance). A symbol can be used both without the author's knowledge, or even with a separate interpretation of what they are doing, but still continue to speak to echo when read by someone in or from a different context (Eliade, 1952: 29).

As I have noted above, while *Beautiful Losers* and *The Life of Milarepa* might be displaced by time and geography, Leonard Cohen was *actively* involved in personal readings of Tibetan Vajrayana during his composition of his work. Therefore, the "echo" carried is not of nondescript universal archetypes, but *rather of a specific, lived faith tradition being engaged with*. While Chögyam Trungpa's import of Tibetan Buddhism into North American popular culture occurs in the decade after Cohen's composition of *Beautiful Losers*, this "Americanisation" of the Buddhist Dharma also provides a very direct geographical link by which to contextualise the novel.

In Eliade's earlier work, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* (1949) time is interrupted in the "religious" perspective. A belief in the past also involves a return to it: the perpetuity of its forms demonstrates an "Eternal return"[69] both from and towards a history where those forms (ritual, action, etc.) began[70] (Eliade, 1949: 11). Ritualistic activity—I would extrapolate, artistic activity included—repeats actions often concretised by religious/mythological authorities (Eliade, 1949: 45). As such, religious symbols (a communally recognised text, for example, as in this project) provide "formulas"[71] for continued returns to such practice (p. 52). Eliade further states that "an object or act only becomes real when it imitates or repeats an archetype [...] its truth is acquired

---

[69] Different, perhaps, than the samsara-like "eternal return" of Friedrich Nietzsche that Milan Kundera obsesses over in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being / Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí* (1984).

[70] The inventedness of such created pasts, however, is important to note, and might be a point less apparent in 1949 Paris, at the war's recent close.

[71] Eliade's *formule* is too precise.

by repetition (of) or participation (in) it"[72] (p. 63). Read in comparison with Heruka's hagiography of Milarepa, then, *Beautiful Losers* is imbued with a new way to be made meaningful.

4.3 Transgression, Bataille

Beautiful Losers, by virtue of its direct references to Catholicism, Judaism and Indigenous spiritualities (and below, I will build on its specific echoes of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism) finds itself echoing these religious traditions. By virtue of its explicit[73] content, however, it also finds itself within a lineage of sexualised, countercultural French transgressive fiction; amplified by its composition by a canadien[74] of Québec. These include the fiction works of the Marquis de Sade, the Comte de Lautréamont, the poetry of Charles Beaudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud and more recently, the writings of Georges Bataille.

Bataille, a novelist, poet and theorist, wrote fictions comparable in content to Cohen's novel, particularly his *Histoire de l'œil* (*Story of the Eye*) (1928). Originally published under Bataille's pseudonym of "Lord Auch," *Histoire de l'œil* is a heavily violent and sexualised narrative describing a bizarre love triangle not unlike *Beautiful*

---

[72] Translation from French is my own: *un objet ou un acte ne devient réel que dans la mesure où il imite ou répète un archétype. Ainsi, la réalité s'acquiert exclusivement par répétition ou participation* [...]

[73] I am hesitant to describe it as such without full context, as explicit (meaning "Sexual") can be used as a term to either denounce the novel for simple perversity, or as a buzz-word to promote it as something progressively edgy without acknowledging the self-reflexion each of the novel's (occasionally non-consensual, often violent) sexual acts should elicit for a reading body.

[74] If any should question Cohen's identity as such, please refer to his mariachi version of Antoine Gérin Lajoie's "Un canadien errant" on *Recent Songs* (1979).

Losers. Bataille's characters, however, celebrate and never question their sensationalised rapes and murders, and *Histoire de l'œil* lacks also the mingling spiritual narratives and specific religious references entwined in *Beautiful Losers.*

Bataille's more theoretical works constitute a critical voice that helps in my analysis of *The Life of Milarepa* and *Beautiful Losers.* His meditations on worldliness and escape from it provide a characterisation of "Religion" that is beneficial here; a theoretical framework (so much as a poetically-worded-nebula might be) for setting borders on my project. Bataille uses the specific language of "immanence"—and the violence, sex, and eroticism therein—and the "transcendent"—referring to divinity and to sacrifice specifically. With these, he creates both a criticism of contemporary commercial culture and an attempt at revivifying a lost spiritual life: what I will collectively refer to as his theory of transgression, as partially summarised in his *Théorie de la religion* (1973).

Before this exploration of Bataille's "religious" vision, I do wish to make note of Ashley Tauchert's work *Against Transgression* (2008), which reflects on the term's contemporary history. She approaches Bataille with caution, as she sees his work as the precedent for the current academic esteem for the term "transgression," himself building from the carnal and existential worlds of the Marquis de Sade and Friedrich Nietzsche, then followed in the work of theorists such as Michel Foucault (Tauchert, 2008: 15-7). Noting that transgression is not an "absolute value" by itself, and that it must rather be considered contextually (p. 2) she defines transgression as "seeking out the secret modes of regularity that structure human life and consciousness *by breaching their terms*" (p. 9). She highlights Bataille's fascination with the Marquis de Sade, whom he saw as "[...] attempting to make apparent the things that most revolted the mind" and were thereby the most (politically) powerful instruments that could be manipulated through artistic activity (Bataille via Tauchert, 2008: 9). In de Sade's vision, however, the end of this activity is personal, individual pleasure for the

architect or perpetrator[75], who maintains a position of authority. For Bataille in *Théorie de la religion*– and for Milarepa and the characters of *Beautiful Losers*—the end of transgression is religious, insofar as it goes beyond the realities of their immediate, sensual worlds. I think a warning from Tauchert on the authority involved in such motions is essential for this study (particularly with regards to crazy wisdom). While so-called transgressive action might dissolve the social order, it does so in order to reaffirm a new structure—its own:

> Preaching transgression from a position of authority might suggest that regularity itself has been overturned in the name of liberation, but the fact remains that any *experience* of transgression depends on the regulation of human contact. (Tauchert, 2008: 13)

Bataille's *Théorie de la religion* (1973) sets up a distinction between the "profane" (or immanent) world and that of the "sacred" (or transcendent). In his vision the world humans inhabit daily is one of tools (objects) and animals: this is the profane (Bataille, 1973: 27-29). Due to the contemporary perception of the world and its resources existing solely for human use, however, humanity has amputated any inherent value of the profane—again, objects and animals—beyond their immediate functionality towards our needs or wants (p. 37). We thus live in a world that is not only divorced from meaning, but which lacks it. Bataille's vision encourages the view that the social norms imposed by a society which facilitate such a lack of meaning– the laws which cement this void—cannot be absolute, nor true (pp. 24-7). Such human customs are founded on a subjective, temporal (and thus temporary) morality drawn from a specific and narrow version of reason: when every object and animal has been set out for human use, it becomes a world that is exclusively objectified,

---

[75] Still within a political context, evidently, as de Sade is writing within the social motion of the French Revolution and the establishment of the French *République*.

both made up of objects and made into an object itself (pp. 42-3). Vajrayana philosophy likewise considers the physical world to be a complex illusion resulting from humans' imposition of meaning onto disparate parts (a concept to be expanded upon below). To note, Bataille never specifically defines "religion": the term is used very rarely and intermittently in the work[76].

The world of the "sacred," in contrast, becomes the valuing of objects beyond their mere utility. Religion–despite Bataille's avoiding the term—is what breaks through these invented frontiers. Not religious transgression, but religion *as* transgression. Sacrifice becomes Bataille's ideal religious motion, as the act of sacrificing an object or being is not its total destruction, but rather an erasure of the physical subject while leaving its essence affirmed and renewed in the world (p. 58).[77]

Mircea Eliade also sees objects which exhibit "Sacred" qualities as being those items which hold the potential to become something else (though, no matter the transformation, never ceasing to continue holding onto their "essence") (Eliade, 1965: 18)[78]. Theorist Maurice Bloch contends, from his anthropological field work, that all religious activity is at its root a violence, radically separate from the norms of its surroundings (Bloch, 1992: 2). He also speaks of sacrifice as exhibiting the quintessential "crossing of the barrier between the sacred and the profane" (p. 28), as ritual or sacredness becomes "An 'other' life" (p. 4); an alternative to one's current existence.

---

[76] He characterises (institutional) "religion" as rejecting proper celebration (i.e. sacrifice), though doesn't specify which faith this applies to (Bataille, 1973: 77). In his postscript, he also criticises the tendency by (institutional) religion to consider all religious experiences as stemming from the same divine source. In Bataille's view, this universalising trend has effaced the liveliness and violent potential of religious experience, and made the act of sacrifice impossible (pp. 141-3).

[77] Eliade would see in sacrifice a rendering towards a "primordial unity" (Eliade, 1949: 121).

This builds into Bataille's view of religion, or the sacred, as the flame which destroys the wood in its consumption of it (Bataille, 1973: 71): sacred matters are that which dually destroy and affirm. He also draws the distinction—in his journals from the Second World War—between "mysticism" (religious experience of sorts) and entrapment in the flesh ("eroticism"), whereby

> The mystical experience differs from the erotic in that it succeeds fully. Erotic excess leads to a depression, a nausea, an impotence to persevere, and [such] unrequited desire completes a perfect suffering. Eroticism's end is above the reach of human hands. (Bataille, 1944: 10).[79]

Bataille's partial hope is to reimbue the world with the caution and wonder that he sees in former societies who dared to be religious by his standards: not solely "people of faith," but peoples who existed before an industrialised world and carried a deep-seated fear (of elements beyond their immediate existence) and respect (of the world around them). Bataille expresses the potential for a system that is both critical of its surroundings and devotional (in a readiness for sacrifice): a sort of "[...] doubt mixed with terror and nostalgia"[80] (Bataille, 1973: 47) at the world.

Vajrayana philosophy relies heavily on imagery of transgression too, and while not of the same impetus as Bataille's, Tibetan Buddhism's end is a sacrifice of selfhood by an immolation of one's attachments to the world. Vajrayana Buddhism itself

---

[79] Translation my own, perhaps a touch liberally: *L'expérience mystique diffère de l'érotique en ce qu'elle réussit pleinement. L'excès érotique abouti à la dépression, à l'écœurement, à l'impossibilité de persévérer, et le désir inassouvi parfait la souffrance. L'érotisme excède les forces humaines* (Bataille, 1944: 10).

[80] *Tout indique que les premiers hommes étaient plus près que nous de l'animal ; ils le distinguaient peut-être d'eux-mêmes, mais non sans un un doute mêlé de terreur et nostalgie* (Bataille, 1973: 47)

constitutes a theory of religious transgression in its valuing of transversal meditation and practice, but I will expand on its specific elements in my sixth chapter below.

These concepts are vast but provide useful threads for my interpretation of *Beautiful Losers* and *The Life of Milarepa.* Victor Turner's conception of liminality will help chain these links in the following section.

4.4 Victor Turner and Liminality

Performance theorist Victor Turner provides a bridge to the practical application of this concept in *The Anthropology of Performance* (1986). Bataille's sacrifice interrupts the common (profane) world by a violent removal of oneself from it[81]. For Turner, the action of this removal would result in a state of liminality. Turner expands on Arnold van Gennep's threefold stages of ritual to explain the process :

1. *Separation* occurs first, where one is displaced from regular activity and routine.
2. This is followed by a state of *liminality* where one finds themself existing in the folds of a "betwixt-and-between condition often involving seclusion from the everyday scene." Here, they also encounter elements which can ignite personal and social transformation (such as ancestral rites, which often occur beside other individuals also entering a liminal state).
3. After this ceremony, the ritual concludes with a final *reintegration* to everyday life. Participants carry a new change in personal status and are

---

[81] Whether by the sacrifice of objects which disrupt one's conception of existence, or by the actual sacrifice of a body.

> now capable of deeper, fuller, or more meaningful participation in the activities of their surroundings.
>
> (Arnold van Gennep via Turner, 1986: 101-4)

This process of ritual corresponds to the structure of both *Beautiful Losers* and *The Life of Milarepa*. Each text establishes a world, and then signals moments where its subjects exit the borders of their given society. In Turner's vision this is the departure from reality into ritual, while for Bataille these transgressive moments constitute the "sacred" interruptions which reimbue meaning into existence. At this stage, the liminal comes into play: the in-between[82] or "threshold" (Turner, 1986: 25) being prodded by the constituents of these realms of fiction and faith. Maurice Bloch synthesises this further, emphasising that both the separation and reintegration are violent actions as both dispel any sense of comfort: for one to be fully removed from their context, a violence must be applied to their sense of security[83] (Bloch, 1992: 6). After (ritual) transgression,[84] an individual "never again fully leave(s) the sacred but they achieve a combination of the sacred and the profane" (p. 15): their return from a liminal state has resulted in their transformation. For my study, this proves useful for determining whether F.—in his attempt at defining sainthood and forcing instruction upon I.—actually succeeds as a saint himself. The questions is whether his amalgamation of the sacred and profane actually transforms him.

---

[82] The "hold between" from the Latin roots of "liminal" (Turner, 1986: 41-2).

[83] A violence which can also be symbolically performed via other types of physical transgression

[84] His conclusions are drawn from a distance reading of Papua New Guinea's Orokaiva peoples (Bloch, 1992: Chapter 1, "Initiation").

The saints, exemplars and figureheads of Vajrayana Buddhism–including Milarepa who is here being studied—each also depart from their regular lives, and undergo difficulty before attaining Buddhahood or Bodhissatvahood. Despite their change in status, they return to the world to teach, and help others to attain a state of awakening.

4.5 Returns from Chapter III: Literature Review

At this juncture, is helpful to highlight that I will be drawing from a few elements first covered in my literature review above, which speak to Vajrayana Buddhism without naming it. Michael Ondaatje exposes F.'s teacherly certitude, and his attempts to use transgressive practice to "break down the restrictive laws and values" that have socialised I. (Ondaatje, 1970: 47). With I. and Edith, F. leads a new religious community of sorts in a faith of "the flesh" (pp. 52-3) in order to force them to transform and become "saints" of his own vision (p. 54). Ondaatje describes how F. seems to already consider himself a saint (p. 52): he assumes it, but enacts this status by force, as Ondaatje elucidates, by his perfecting his own body in exercise, and injecting holy water into his bloodstream.

Stephen Scobie, writing after Ondaatje, expands on the conception of F.'s sainthood, concluding that F. is a teacher more "master than saint" (Scobie, 1977: 97). Scobie does not see the sex and religion in the novel as not being diametrically opposed, but rather as intertwined concepts. He argues that F. manipulates sex in a sort of religion that perverts systems, but not necessarily towards an actual end.

Like Ondaatje, Hugh Hazelton describes witnessing a "lineage" drawn from F. down to I. and Edith in the novel. I will not only be expanding on the precise language and history of teaching lineages in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism in Chapter VI, but will further analyse the methods of crazy instruction in *Beautiful Losers* after situating them in relation to the instructional methods in *The Life of Milarepa.*

4.6 Blind Spots

Of important note are the limits of my current study. There is potential for many further analyses of Leonard Cohen's novel. I am aware of, and thus noting, the areas I have not further approached.

The narrator's obsession with Kateri Tekakwitha precedes her canonisation by half a century; despite her veneration for over three hundred years, she only becomes a saint (the first Indigenous Catholic saint in the world) in 2012. The gay relationship between I. and F. is possibly the first instance—and certainly the first popular depiction that I am aware of—of a same-sex relationship in Canadian fiction. F.'s participation in a Québécois nationalist rally highlights Québec's Quiet revolution and independence movement of the 1960s (a topic otherwise nearly absent from English-language Canadian fiction of the period), foreshadowing the first Québec referendum on separation a decade after the novel's publication. The violence experienced by Indigenous people in the book both highlighted and continues to highlight the real-world violence experienced by Indigenous peoples (and Indigenous women especially) in the territory of Canada. These aspects of the work are mostly excluded here, in the interest of focusing my study, but I am aware of the offshoots and their importance.

4.7 Theory Summary

Through Mircea Eliade's theories of comparative study, *The Life of Milarepa* can be understood to craft a framework for reading later artistic creations such as *Beautiful Losers* (through a religious filter). Even though Leonard Cohen is chronologically estranged from the compositional context of *The Life of Milarepa* , there is potential

for this medieval text's movements to echo in Cohen's work; *especially* because Cohen was reading translations of Vajrayana scholarship while writing the novel.

Georges Bataille's conception of religion is that of spiritual transgression. His is one particularly fleshy, but this theory of religion is tied to the breaking out of established behavioural standards in the contemporary objectified world. Beyond Bataille's valourising of everyday objects (our tools for crafting more of the world we already inhabit) and animals (our co-inhabitors of this world) he also valourises our relationship to our fellows. His "transgression" (and religion) can thus be understood as the sacred interruption of our use of the world as an object, and he re-imbues meaning in that which is regular. I see the moments of spiritual transgression in *The Life of Milarepa* to be comparable to those in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, and their parallels are further highlighted by the Vajrayana tradition which likewise sees the use of transgressive symbols as holding immense power for helping one to come to a better understanding of worldly existence. Lastly, Victor Turner's elaboration of Arnold van Gennep's conception of liminality aids in contextualising these moments of transgression. Following subversive experiences, both Milarepa and the characters of *Beautiful Losers* return to form communities (or are destroyed by their experiences in a liminal state). In summary, this study will pursue a reading of the transgressive nature of crazy wisdom and saintliness in these two texts.

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

5.1 Qualitative Research

This project's methodology involves a content analysis of Leonard Cohen's 1966 novel, being read through the filter of a medieval Tibetan religious work. I will principally be using a "qualitative research method" as outlined in Pierre Paillé and Alex Mucchielli's *L'Analyse qualitative en sciences humaines et sociales* (third edition, 2012). Their definition of qualitative research is that of a "discursive method of reformulating, clarifying, or of theorising testimonies, experiences, or phenomena"[85] (Muchielli and Paillé, 2012: 11). For them, the logic of the object being studied contributes to the researcher's own discovery of how meaning is constructed by it, and the end of any qualitative research must be no mere sum, but an extension and (re)conceptualisation of the object itself. Pierre Paillé explains that work involving qualitative methods is also by nature an artistic endeavour, as each study requires new means of both performing one's research and of "being" (that is, of situating oneself as researcher in regards to the chosen subject) (Paillé, "Introduction" 2006: 6).

---

85 Translation is my own : *une démarche discursive de reformulation, d'explicitation ou de théorisation de témoignages, d'expériences ou de phénomènes.*

I will be working specifically with a "Qualitative analysis by contextualisation" (*L'analyse qualitative par contextualisation*) (Muchielli and Paillé, 2012: 157) which involves the interrogation of a text after having put it into a contextual relationship with another source. Paillé and Mucchielli emphasise the tendency to seek "forms" during qualitative research. After interpreting the patterns and phenomena in a given source, a researcher can reduce them to "types" or schemas (p. 45) for comparing to other phenomena. My method, then will be the analysis of the transgressive crazy wisdom teachings in *The Life of Milarepa*, a characterisation of Milarepa's saintliness (in his asceticism especially) to construct "types" which I will then use as touchstones for reading Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers.*

5.2 Tool : Comparative Literary Analysis

My two selections are a canonical piece of Tibetan literature that both affirms and upends the religious authority of its period by depicting a saint who transgresses his given social norms, and a Canadian novel whose "saints" likewise contort the social norms of their modern nation. Thus, a method that traces these works' turns must also reflect the unconventional traits and aspects of their content and characters, rather than solely attempting to analyse measurable, quantifiable characteristics.

The discipline of Religious Studies (or *sciences des religions*), in which I am situated, is but one bundle amongst the many academic comparative projects. So much as I've written of this work escaping the boundaries of departmental jurisdiction, my method certainly borrows from the tradition of literary analysis, however. Literary criticism is defined in M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham's classic *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Tenth Edition, 2012) as "the overall term for studies concerned with defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of literature" (p. 67).

Within the bounds of literary analysis, the tradition of "comparative literature" is most specific to my intention. Yves Chevrel, in *La littérature comparée* (1989) describes the human tendency to better understand materials by alignment (and juxtaposition) with each other, in order to identify elements that were not clear when they were independent (Chevrel, 2009: 3): specifically, one can learn more about texts once they are embedded in a context. Chevrel defines "comparative literature" as the practice of putting text(s) into an order[86] to find the unifying threads between them (pp. 4-5). Comparative literature thus relies on the presence of differentiated bodies of documents, estranged from each other in context, language, or geography (pp. 8-9). It is the uniting of two perspectives, as given texts might be varied in style or even the products of different traditions or time periods (p. 18). A qualitative method is noted to be the most befitting analysis for comparative literary study of this kind (p. 37).

Chevrel also argues that comparative literary study has the ultimate end of widening the possible landscapes of the world (p. 22) by broadening its possible connections. Citing writer and critic Julien (or "J.") Gracq, Chevrel notes that the purpose of comparing literature is twofold: to both pierce through the invented frontiers between "traditions" of national or genre-based literary divides (that are themselves arbitrary interstices) and to build new possibilities for their consumption and spread (pp. 21-3). Work performed in comparing two different texts is valuable for its revelation of possibility, and comparative disciplines inherently reject closed systems (p. 122).

For comparative studies, Chevrel notes that translated works must be understood as "displaced" texts because they are changed from their original versions, and have had

---

[86] Chevrel believes this order can be decided upon and elaborated by the researcher.

their contours altered to be comprehensible for a new context[87] (p. 11). I must therefore acknowledge that despite this being a comparative project between the centuries, the version of *The Life of Milarepa* that I am using was translated by Andrew Quintman[88]—a recognised authority on Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan literatures, but nonetheless a contemporary American scholar and not a Tibetan storyteller of the middle ages. The version of the source story which I am ingesting, analysing and making a "type" for further study is thus etched by a Westerner born apart from the realities of its original composition in a Himalayan desert or highlands, as Heruka would have been. Quintman also writes his translation in (American) English based on the text's original Tibetan. Chevrel notes that for work involving a translated text, a critic (in this case, myself as researcher) must highlight certain information regarding previous translations, and whether the translator has preserved the essential, local qualities of its original (p. 32). In brief, I thus note that this translation is one of the most recent English translations of *The Life of Milarepa* from Tibetan. The work "leaves quiet" (Chevrel, 2009: 50-51). the original by preserving its unique Tibetan elements in English (despite its wider audience not living in a Himalayan circumstance). It is situated in the eleventh century (though written in the fourteenth), and assumes that its readership is familiar with the geography, literature, and religious context of the medieval Himalayas, and of Tibetan *namthar* (the genre of Tibetan hagiography, which will be explored in my seventh chapter below).

---

[87] Annex A (at this project's end) offers some expansion and explanation of Chevrel's "Displacement."

[88] I have selected Andrew Quintman's translation for its completeness, and for being the most authoritative recent translation of Milarepa's life-story. I am not using the version of *The Life of Milarepa* translated by Walter Evans-Wentz of the *Buddhist Bible* which, theoretically, Cohen might have actually read, as it is an incomplete text and rendering of Milarepa's story. Further, my intention is not to prove Cohen was actively using this text (which is impossible) but rather to show how the tradition (which he was interacting with) might be used as filter for understanding his novel.

5.3 Method : Analysis

My intention is to process *Beautiful Losers* by way of a religion and one of the tradition's central texts. In the history of Tibetan Vajrayana, "Sainthood" and the ideals of its religious practice are constructed by narratives. By *reading* of saints (idealised characters) one learns how to practise the tradition they are emblems of. Study of Tibetan Vajrayana thus invites literary analysis.

My projects's remaining steps are as follows: to first characterise the scope of the Vajrayana tradition that gave rise to Tsangnyön Heruka's composition (in the next chapter). Following this, I will be analysing *The Life of Milarepa* beside *Beautiful Losers* along these two guiding lines:

1) A characterisation of the unorthodox skillful means (*upaya*) used in shaping the telling of Milarepa's life-story. Skillful means is a Buddhist concept referring to unorthodox methods of practice or instruction. This section of my analysis will include an address of the crazy wisdom of Marpa—Milarepa's teacher—alongside the teachings of F. in *Beautiful Losers*: The "difficulties" in reading *Beautiful Losers* novel often stem from difficulties with the character of F., or his instructional methods in the book. I feel that an analysis of the *drubnyon*/crazy wisdom that has been filtered down through the Kagyu school proves particularly useful in contextualising his practice.

2) And secondly, an investigation of how saintliness is portrayed in *The Life of Milarepa* (in the figure of Milarepa himself) and how this translates to the "saints" of *Beautiful Loser.* The religion formulated by both texts describes the actions and thoughts of individuals, rather than general communities, and

so a consideration of their examples is essential to deciphering the conception of religion formulated between them, and evaluating which aspects are shared.

CHAPTER VI

VAJRAYANA BUDDHISM: AN EXAMINATION

6.1 Sainthood : Introduction

As a Tibetan Buddhist saint, images of Milarepa are prominent in Himalayan art: painted on *thangkas* (colourful scroll paintings) or cast in traditional bronze sculpture. He is typically portrayed as a mendicant holding a hand to his ear "receiving" (teachings, echoes) before putting them into poetry; into song. As a hagiographic text of Vajrayana Buddhism, his life story is situated in a specific literary context—*namthar*—of the region. This Buddhism relies heavily on telling stories, especially about the human and celestial beings who model its ideals and value system: "saints" of sorts[89].

The Tibetan emphasis on such characters—and the literary tradition of Tibetan hagiography or *namthar*—is imported from outside of Tibet. The tradition is carried from the Indian Buddhist landscape, where precedents for Tibet's own saints are found in the lives of *siddha* figures and stories of the *Mahasiddhas* ("Great" poets) of early medieval Indian Buddhism. Particular examples of these include *Virupa* and

---

[89] While I acknowledge that the specific concept of sainthood is drawn from a Western Christian context, institutional forms of many world traditions make use of individual icons as models for religious practice and social cohesion.

Saraha among the ensemble of the eighty-four Mahasiddhas. Scholar James B. Robinson, translator of Abhyadatta's traditional collection *The Lives of the Eighty Four Mahasiddhas,* writes that their stories are he studies:

> [...] essentially a collection of short biographies, though these narratives, while clearly anchored to historical figures and traditions, could perhaps best be considered as "hagiography," writings from within a living tradition honoring holy or exalted individuals. (Robinson, 1979: 2)

I emphasise the following from the paragraph above: the note regarding "hagiography" (that such stories depict the lives of saints, to be looked up to and idealised), that they are "living" (connoting that the traditions that arise from such stories remain a continued set of beliefs and knowledge to be exchanged and practised) and that they are "holy or exalted" (that the stories also suggest their hearers emulate elements being received).

The Tibetan tradition carries this emphasis on sainthood forward from India and into its own literary culture: indeed, the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet is carried by way of hagiographic tales. The life story of Tibetan Buddhism's figurehead, *Padmasambhava* (the "Lotus-born"), or "Guru Rimpoche" (the teaching authority), anchors the beliefs and value system the tradition, and further establishes a precedent for the hagiographies of later Tibetan saints. It also, however, involves a mirroring of *Sakyamuni's* life story (the original Earthly and "Historical" Buddha) in Padmasambhava's birth, coming of age, and decision to pursue the dharma: Padmasambhava's tale seems a parallel and localised retelling of Sakyamuni's (Prince Gautama's) life, and Padmasambhava's tale is re-engineered, in turn, for later Tibetan works, like Milarepa's. In *Yeshe Tsogyal*'s telling of Padmasambhava's life, she relates his missionary work in the Himalayas, how he tames the ferocious local

deities of the older, local *Bön* tradition of Tibet through spiritual combat and forces them to become protectors of Buddhism dharma as *dharmapalas*[90] (Tsogyal via Kunsang and Schmidt, 1993). Buddhism is thus imprinted on the Himalayas through a missionary tale, which serves as inspiration for further tales and transformations of Buddhism in the region.

Throughout the middle ages Indian Buddhism declines and nearly disappears from the subcontinent (Thurman, 1997: 18). Meanwhile, Tibetan Buddhism suffers both internal religious strife and Mongolian military and cultural invasions following the tenth century (Dowman, 1985). Stories told of the tradition's figureheads—whether oral or writ—thus help preserve Buddhism's tenets during these periods of invading social and religious norms. Buddhist social values are retained amidst changing narratives by the preservation of local voices, and local story: the hagiographies of Buddhism serve as anchors in uncertain times, and stories act as capsules to retain the tradition, especially in Tibetan *namthar*.

6.2 Tibetan Vajrayana: Defining Points

As a whole, Vajrayana can be understood as a "Vehicle" (path) of Buddhism, characterised by an "emphasis on meditation, personal realization, the master-disciple relationship, and the nonmonastic ways of life of the householder and the wandering yogin" (Ray, 2005: 5603). The section below is limited to explorations of the tradition useful for my current study.

---

[90] "Protectors" of the Dharma, figured as fearsome, frightening and colourful deities.

Synonymous with Buddhist tantra or tantrism[91], Vajrayana is an esoteric route situated within the larger Buddhist vehicle of Mahayana. As with other forms of Buddhism, it is founded on the principle that worldly existence is comprised of suffering in cyclical time (*samsara*), but that beings can escape from this eternal return via *nirvana* (removal from the circle, often translated as "enlightenment" or "awakening"). Its texts are called *tantras* in lieu of the *sutras*[92] of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, though its renunciants/mendicants are often referred to by the general South Asian term *Yogin*[93]. I should note, as well, that while I am studying the Tibetan iteration of this phenomenon, variations of Vajrayana Buddhism exist too in Nepal's Newari culture, though its contours are different in the Kathmandu valley (Gellner, 1992) as well as in other Asian historical contexts. Vajrayana values an escape from all dual conceptions, including attachment to nonduality[94] (Dowman, 1985: 11). Through this mindset, it ultimately posits the idea that "there is no fundamental or truly existent difference between ordinary beings and fully awakened buddhas" (Powers, 2007: 272). The difference is in one's perception of their surroundings, and in the Vajrayana understanding, one is bound further within

---

[91] Linguistically tantra connotes a "thread," referencing the path's continuousness but also its inherent lack of wholeness; its emptiness (Dowman, 1985: 8). A thread is but a part of a larger knot or a gathering of separate bodies.

[92] *Sutta(s)* in the Pali language.

[93] Indian renunciants were often also yoga practitioners, hence their common title of "Yogin"; later, the term was often applied even to mendicants who did not necessarily practise the specific physical exercises nor adhere to the Indian philosophic schools which birthed *Yoga*.

[94] Nonduality is a concept important for Hinduism and Buddhism's evolutions, and connotes the end of perceiving differences between states (and individuals). To perceive neither existence or emptiness, as explained by Chinese Buddhist theorist Jizang of the 6th century CE (Williams, 2009: 82). The instruction is also summarily sung by artist Ezra Koenig, to: "Never pick sides, never choose between two [...]" (Vampire Weekend, 2010: "I think ur a contra" [sic.])

samsara when they perceive "inherent" differences between other individuals, living beings, or even between their regular life and Buddhahood (Dowman, 1985: 7).

The archetypical image of Vajrayana is the *vajra*: an "unbreakable," adamantine, diamond-like, two-headed scepter that symbolises a lightning strike. Vajrayana is a Buddhist path which offers an intense, rapid approach to awakening in the span of one single lifetime, rather than over the course of many (Powers, 2009: 250). Such a route is powerful, dangerous and occurs suddenly; like a flash of lightning (Ray, 2005: 5604). Symbolically, the vajra is complemented by the bell, which rings through the formless air and symbolises existence's inherent emptiness (Powers, 2007: 303). Physical vajras and bells play a part in Vajrayana ceremony, and they are also often depicted with Vajrayana figures in Himalyan art.

The Mahayana concept of *bodhisattvas* and *bodhisattvahood* are essential transmissions to Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism. Bodhisattvas are beings who, in the river-current to awakening, choose to disembark and remain behind in the whirl of samsara in order to help or inspire other beings to awakening of their own (Powers 2007: 55-9). Besides the local *dharmapalas* mentioned above and ḍākinīs (feminine embodiments of wisdom who dually challenge and aid those on their way to awakening) (Robinson, 1979: 14), Tibet's bodhisattvas are also figured in imagery as near-divinities, with superhuman features to inspire: characters such as *Manjusri* (Bodhisattva of Wisdom, carrying a sword to cut through wrong views) and *Avalokitesvara* (Bodhisattva of Compassion, often figured with a thousand arms to help many beings at once, and eleven heads to see multiple perspectives and every possible permutation of his actions) are significant examples. Bodhissatvas also make use of unconventional methods, and "all [their] actions, no matter how problematic they may [look] from a conventional point of view, [are] to be taken as teachings" (Fields, 1992: 360).

The Vajrayana tradition puts heavy emphasis on the Mahayana idea of skillful (or skill-in) means—the Sanskrit *upaya* (Powers, 2007: 252). "Skill in means" refers to a teacher's adapting of a teaching to the level of their hearers (Williams, 2009: 55). Chögyam Trungpa elucidates in a transcribed lecture that in the direct stream of the Vajrayana vehicle, "the method or means is itself vajrayana (sic.)" (Trungpa, 2015: 20): indeed, one's tools in practising the tradition also define the tradition itself. Vajrayana is further referred to as the "Upayana" or the "Path of Means" in the index to Reginald Ray's exposition of the tradition (2001: 523). In employing such a method, however, "it can be skill-in-means for a Bodhisattva to act in a way contrary to the 'narrower' moral or monastic code of others" (Williams, 2009: 152) and it might appear that "The doctrine of skill-in-means [...] knows no bounds" (p. 136), and thus lead to overturning previously prohibited or unrecognised thought patterns/behaviours. Its goal, however, is to act as a transformative method for understanding; while it uses unorthodox methods, its religious motivation is in line with orthodox Buddhist ideas.

Exemplary Vajrayana practitioners were often "iconoclasts, dissenters and anti-establishment rebels [...] destroying the rigidity of old and intractable customs and habits" (Dowman, 1985: 2) through their practice. The following two paragraphs will will elucidate the Vajrayana method of teaching through skillful means, as the bulk of my argument depends on an understanding of this concept. These examples show that such teaching methods can include both transgressive and sexual practices.

1. *Transgression*:

   Skillful means can include a flight from surrounding culture: whether by transgressive acts, "counter-cultural" practice, or indulgence in substances that might otherwise be considered ritually pollutive (and thereby prohibited). This can range from renunciation (of both the human world of interpersonal relations, or renunciation of monastic, community life in an institution) to

practices of "meat-eating, drinking liquor, and [...] sexual intercourse between untouchables[95] and twice-born initiates" (Dowman, 1985: 4) in order to disavow one's attachment to the idea that such polarities have any inherent meaning. These actions are designed to disrupt one's understanding of the subjective world and force a new conception of the emptiness of such moral divisions. In regular Buddhist practice, such actions are irregular or barred (as in the case of drinking liquor or having sexual relations as a monk). In *The Life of Milarepa*, Marpa beats his pupil, gets drunk, has a wife, and pretends to forget his religious instructions; all from the privileged place of presumably knowing these acts are empty of inherent truth.

2. *The Body*:

While Buddhism's endgoal is an excision of the self and its worldly body from cyclical existence, the study and use of that physical vessel remains important for reaching awakening.

a) *Chakras and Channels*: Tibetan Vajrayana conceives of the human physiology as a network of energy/wind (*prana*) channels (*nadis*) (Ray, 2001: 112) which meet at constriction points (*chakras*: in Tibetan, "wheels")[96] (Powers, 2007: 284-5). This "subtle body" (a mapped system that is imprinted upon, but not necessarily a visible

---

[95] Emphasis on the "untouchability" aspect: In the Indian case Keith Dowman refers to above, there is a dual movement away from Brahmanic Hinduism but also a re-enforcement of traditional religious and cultural norms: it is "transgressive" to have sex with a person tied to the "untouchable" caste solely on account of their status, and of one's own in a caste above theirs. This is, in sum, a mere reinforcement of elite cultural norms.

[96] This system mirrors other South and East Asian religious traditions using the same ideas of the human body's subtle anatomies.

part of the human anatomy) of one's energies can be manipulated through meditative activity, or "inner yoga(s)."[97] The circuitry of these channels is arranged like the network of consciousness (with *chakras* found in areas that demand attention, like one's stomach or genitals), and in practising inner yogas, one can come to "experience [...] the essence of mind itself": emptiness (Ray, 2001: 230-3). At each *chakra* are also drops (*bindu*) of matter residual from an individual's conception, which remain ingredients for further yogic activity: white masculine seed and red feminine blood (Powers, 2007: 337). Alongside its focus on renunciation then, Vajrayana nonetheless requires a *constant* consideration and address of the physical body in the practice of its religious system. This involves active meditation regarding the body, its appetites, instincts, and conception in sexual activity and birth, per the above.

b) *Sexual Relations*: An important Vajrayana image is that of *Yabyum,* whereby two (often ferocious) colourful deities embrace in sexual union: one male celestial buddha or dharmapala, and one female ḍākinī. This candid representation serves as an analogy for the emblems of the tradition: the male dharmapala is a vajra, the female ḍākinī is a bell, and their union represents a combined understanding of both method (compassion) and wisdom (emptiness)[98]. A precedent

---

[97] Just as knots in musculature may be stretched out in yogic poses, so too can mental knots and afflications be untied through this sort of meditative activity (Ray, 2001: 231-2).

[98] Symbolically, the vajra (male principle, phallic) represents the "method" aspect of realisation: lightning-like compassion, focused on worldly actions to help beings in suffering to escape samsara. This is linked to the bell (female principle, yonic), representing the "wisdom" aspect of realisation, in understanding the emptiness of reality (an understanding necessary to achieve awakening) reflected in the resonance of hollow brass (Powers 2007: 457-8).

> is thus set in the tradition, whereby meditation on (or enacting) sexual activity is practised as "skillful means." In the Vajrayana tradition then, "the path to extinction of desire does not necessitate its suppression" (Powers, 2007: 260). Milarepa's teacher Marpa—in another hagiography by Heruka—is confronted by his eventual wife, who believes him a hypocrite for his wayward practice, and in conversation with him states: "you said that if one does not enjoy meat, liquor, and women, it is a disservice to oneself. It appears to us that this is no different than what we do" to which Marpa replies "you do not understand. [...] Though I enjoy sense pleasures, I have these confidences that I am not fettered by them" (Heruka, 1995 translation: 153). Whether depicted as a sexual act or simply figured as the union of principles, *yabyum* ultimately connotes the Vajrayana tradition in miniature: the fusion of an understanding of emptiness alongside veritable action in the world.

Altogether, these practices signal what John Powers considers an entirely nondual understanding of the Buddhist path. In his words, "tantra seeks to transform every experience—no matter how "unreligious" it may appear—into the path of fulfillment" (Powers, 2007: 260). Practices ordinarily seen as negative acts, such as counter-cultural activities and sexual relations, are turned into essential motions ("skillful means" of sorts) for unlocking the tiers of Buddhist realisation; awakening.

6.3 Teaching Crazy Wisdom

When adapted to a teaching situation, skillful means refers to the use of (instructional) methods appropriate to a given time and place, and certainly, to an intended audience. Scholar Paul Williams describes the situation as requiring an ideal teacher who has the "ability to adapt himself and his teachings to the level of his hearers, without

attachment to any particular doctrine or formula as being necessarily applicable in all cases" (Williams, 2009: 57). Skillful means thus also connotes the use of methods that best disrupt, and thereby best latch teachings on the ears of those who need them. From this standpoint, every meditative encounter with physical reality (whether sublime or silly) can be seen as an exercise in contemplation through the transformative use of skillful means. Below, I will speak first to the Kagyu method of crazy wisdom, and follow with a brief address of the importance of the guru, or teacher, in Tibetan Vajrayana.

1. *Crazy Wisdom*: Tibetan authority Chögyam Trungpa translates *drubnyon* as crazy wisdom: a particular method from his own Kagyu school, drawn from skillful means, and which he writes about over the course of his entire literary corpus[99]. In "The Art of Calligraphy," he defines crazy wisdom as "Absolute Perceptiveness, with fearlessness and bluntness [...] there aren't any books to follow. Rather there is endless spontaneity taking place" (Trungpa, 2004: 244). Chögyam Trungpa's exegesis of Padmasambhava's life is published as *Crazy Wisdom* (1991), and this work demonstrates the trajectory of unconventional mentorship in Trungpa's own Kagyu / Nyingma line: Trungpa is a descendant and lineage holder of Milarepa's own Kagyu school. Padmasambhava (or Guru Rimpoche) is here figured not solely as founder figure of Tibetan Buddhism, but also as *the* original mad-saint for Tibet and the Kagyu lineage. Trungpa summarises this method as an exploratory combat with anxiety towards fearlessness, a path which

[99] And embodiment of, as highlighted by his own embrace of American narcotics (cocaine and alcohol especially) and unfastened sexuality.

> [...] know[s] no limitation and no logic regarding the form it takes [...] Instead, there is tremendous delight in exploring the razor's edge, like a child who happens to pick up a razor blade with honey on it. It starts to lick it; it encounters the sweet taste and the blood dripping off its tongue at the same time. Simultaneous pain and pleasure are worth exploring, from the point of view of the sanity of crazy wisdom. (Trungpa, 1991: 114)

While not noted in his own work, Trungpa's format of crazy wisdom finds precedent specifically in the composition of Milarepa's life story. Andrew Quintman, translator of *The Life of Milarepa,* explains that Tsangnyön Heruka—the work's author—had a "role in defining a new form of Buddhist practice in Tibet—that of the religious madman, the *nyönpa* (smyon pa), from which his name derives" (Quintman, 2014: 29).

2. The presence of teachers (gurus) and the sanctity of teaching lineages is a prominent feature of Vajrayana Buddhism. The chain drawn between one and one's teacher is a solemn undertaking, referred to as the *samaya* or *samaya* vow (Powers, 2007: 268). The student vows to regard their teacher as if they are an awakened buddha, and to follow them without question (p. 315). Gurus carry the unique ability to transmit living traditions to their disciple(s) (Robinson, 1979: 3), such that it might be said that "without the lama there is no Buddha" (Willis, 1995: 17), or indeed, without a teacher, there is no tradition. A guru is thus treated like a living Buddha and can confer "both instruction and power" (Robinson, 1979: 16-7). Through the grace of a guru one might be turned from an aspirant to one who understands the material and is linked directly (through teaching-student lineage) to the period of Sakyamuni Buddha[100] (Powers, 2007:

---

[100] Again, the original and "Historical" Buddha.

311). A further examination of the history of teachers (*guru*) in South Asian traditions is provided in 6.4 below.

6.4 Teaching Transmission: The "Guru" Lineage from India to Tibet

As *namthar* usually depicts Tibetan teaching lineages, I here provide a regard for the heritage of teacher to student relationships in South Asia, and the concept of guruship in the Indian-turned-Tibetan trajectory of Buddhism. This is helpful for contextualising Milarepa's instruction by Marpa.

Teacher-to-student, or master-to-disciple relationships find their precedent in the specific *guru-śiṣya paramparā* (or "Teacher to student tradition") in Sanskritic culture. While Buddhism is sometimes contextualised as an offshoot of Brahmanic Hinduism, scholar J.N. Farquhar historically situates the early evolution of Buddhism geographically near Bodhgaya in the vicinity of the sixth century BCE, either proceeding from or around the same time as the composition of the earliest *Upaniṣads*[101] (Farquhar, 1967). Both Brahmanic Hinduism, Buddhism and their respective gurus likely arose in the same sphere, in whatever form these faiths might have been found over two millennia ago (Fogelin, 2015: 188).

The term "Guru" is a popular adage that echoes from a wide South Asian heritage. When used currently, it often connotes a knowledge-holding teacher dually noble and wise, adept at unlocking the spiritual potential of their disciples. Anil Sooklal's "The Guru-Shishya Parampara: A Paradigm of Religio-Cultural Continuity" (1990)

---

[101] The *Upaniṣads* are a compilation within the Hindu *Vedas* (sacred texts) and in form take the contours of lessons: repetitively, teachers of various sorts advising their disciples on spiritual matters. The Sanskrit "Upaniṣad" translates literally to "Sitting close to," as in the tradition of resting in proximity to a teacher, within earshot of their lessons (Rao, 2015: 13).

describes "guruhood" as "the oldest form of religious education still extant in Hinduism" (1990: 16). In André Padoux's brief piece, *The Tantric Guru,* he writes of the idealised tonal quality of the transmission of the Hindu tradition ("oral/aural/verbal") (2000: 41), positing guru-śiṣya's origins as being founded in the realm of *śruti* (or "heard") literature: the sacred Indian *Vedic* texts. Padoux thus also provides the opening, striking irony, that all knowledge attributed to guru lineages—indeed, what is essentially the entire corpus of Indian spiritual information—begins as esoteric knowledge, issuing forth from a master unto a disciple they have deemed "worthy" of receiving the knowledge (Padoux, 2000: 41). The popular tradition of Brahmanical Hinduism (and Vajrayana, in turn) is thus formed of what is perpetuated as a protected, coded language – having become, in turn, a commonplace secret.

Sooklal notes that linguistically a guru triply connotes a "dispeller of ignorance," a weightiness of spiritual strength (for the holder of the title) and an output for the echoes of divinity—a transmitter for religious callings who can make those around them into receivers (Sooklal, 1990: 15-16). *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen's* entry on "Guru" relates the concept as being an individual who is both a teacher and "Spiritual Master" in a South Asian context (Fischer-Schreiber et al., 1991), and that after the Vedic period, the term becomes paralleled with other addresses such as *rishi* (seer), *muni* (sage), *acharya* (instructor) and *swami* among others (Sooklal, 1990: 16).

Sooklal further explains that originally, the Vedas would have been spoken between master and disciple, uninterrupted, and thus "perfectly" (1990: 15-6). In the Vedic age, texts were usually not used and at best were rare. Value was placed on the experience of proximity to the origin—that being, the spoken word from the mouth of an expert—alive in the guru, functioning as a live dispeller of tradition. Prostration, surrender, and worship to the guru thus occurred in the realm of the *guru-śiṣya paramparā*, as the human embodiment of the divine object was so near to the

practitioner and source in the form of their teacher. Gurus could be looked to in the same manner as a *murti* (image) of the divine, and a was thus a dual holder of religious knowledge, as well as one worthy of and requiring devotion (p. 15).

The Shambhala Dictionary explains that obedience to the guru ought to first be made with a heart that is full of trust towards them, even if the guru's teachings do not immediately make sense. The initial choice to follow them must be made with a clear mind, however, without intimidation, as otherwise the relationship will be built on a faulty foundation (Fischer-Schreiber et al., 1991). In Tibetan Buddhism, the *abhisheka* vow is the specific, active promise made by a student to their guru—or *lama* in the Tibetan context– to commence their studying and practice in Vajrayana: the vow gives them permission to embark on the journey (Ray, 2001: 112-3).

While a guru then functions as a guide, their role is by nature impermanent. Eventually, in all such relationships, it is the student who must ultimately take on a role of self-determination—*antaryamin* (the transformation into an "inner leader") (Fischer-Schreiber et al., 1991). As the student progresses in their spiritual work, eventually the transmission continues as the student becomes the teacher again[102].

The *guru-śiṣya paramparā* is an important element of early Buddhism in India, as the Mahayana structure depends on a single historical figure (Gautama Buddha) as origin, The Buddha is a teacher who dispells wisdom, after reneging on their own worldly lineage to create a new spiritual one. As J.N. Farquhar summarises, in many schools

---

[102] The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* tells a brief anecdote about how a spiritual seeker is like a person who has been brought to an unknown and strange place while covered by a blindfold. The guru is like the person who takes off their blindfold and points the seeker in the direction they wish to venture. Ultimately, it is the seeker that must carry their self forward, but with a teacher, they have been imbued with a certainty of arrival (Olivelle translation: 6.14).

of Buddhism the historical Buddha is looked to as the source-guru (1967: 210-110); all Buddhist monastic orders are deviations of his *parampara*. This is interesting to note, for while Buddhism is apart from Hinduism's chain of authority, it reproduces a version of it.

Buddhism also deviates from the lineage-based world of Hinduism's gurus by positing a founder-figure who is himself self-awakened. The Buddha, while having gone through a variety of teachers, ultimately gathers spiritual knowledge to carry himself to awakening without the direct aid of another being (indeed, one of the principles of categorising a "Buddha" in the world of *Theravada* Buddhism becomes the facet that the individual be self-awakened—a separate term, *arhat,* exists to categorise those who achieve awakening with a mentor's aid). Like the Brahmanical gurus, Buddha "was accepted by his followers as a full authority in matters of faith and life" (Farquhar, 1967: 62-3).

Moving forward from Indian Buddhism's origins and into the world of visualisations, supplementary bodhisattvas and Himalayan gods, Tibetan Buddhism (and its larger vehicle of Mahayana) contains its own references to specific authorities and gurus. In the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, Padmasambhava is popularly referred to simply as "Guru Rimpoche" across Tibetan speaking peoples: the "Teaching jewel," or reincarnated master. His authority (as well as that of other Tibetan teachers) stretches past his physical life in the eighth century to the present day, as his teachings are continually uncovered through revealed texts and teachings. These instructions (called *terma*) only manifest to those spiritually capable of handling them (Powers, 2007).

A student might also make use of meditative practices where one places themselves in the mindset of their guru, and visualise the entirety of their spiritual lineage as coming to a head in themselves (Padoux, 2000: 42). This has permutations for any

study of Milarepa and the Kagyu school, which depends on the direct transmission from *siddha* Tilopa, to academic, saintly Naropa, to Marpa the Translator, to Milarepa the poet, to Rechungpa his student, and onwards to the present day, with a lineage holder like Chögyam Trungpa who returns to the artistic practice of his origins. These instructions are not to be perceived as stagnant hieroglyphs of former days, but rather as active instructions carried from master to disciple. Sooklal highlights the guru's further timelessness, as their pronouncements stretch beyond their physical death. A guru's lineage continues past the withering away of a physical body and voice through the surviving exchange of a lineage's ideas (Sooklal, 1990: 27). The exchange, in the Tibetan instance, survives as texts to interact with.

6.5 *Namthar* and *The Life of Milarepa*

Following from the overview of Vajrayana, I turn now to an address of lineages established in writtern biographical stories. This Tibetan literary genre is called *namthar*, linguistically denoting a "complete liberation" (Willis, 1995: 3) and describing the lives of Tibetan saints, many of whom also exhibit magical abilities. In his significant work *The Yogin & the Madman* (2014) Andrew Quintman offers an analysis of *The Life of Milarepa* and the situation of its author Tsangnyön Heruka. Much work has been done on the Indian *siddha* poets above, but Quintman's text also provides one of the most in-depth studies of the Tibetan *namthar* tradition—the Tibetan hagiographic literary genre—which mirrors inherited Vajrayana practices from India while also adapting them to a Tibetan context. Such written works often begin as "heard" teachings: as oral instruction, *nyengü* ("mouth to ear" lessons, or otherwise, aural tantra) (Quintman, 2014: 34-40) before their literary recording. As per Andrew Quintman's definition:

> [...] namthar (*rnam thar*) literally 'complete liberation,' signifying a literary genre that typically recounts the lives of religious figures with an emphasis on their practice of the Buddhist path and eventual spiritual awakening. Namthar is defined in *The Great Tibetan Dictionary* as "stories of the deeds and conduct of eminent individuals or a work that is a biographical narrative [...] In its most common formulation, the term refers to texts that not only record the life stories of great masters traversing the Buddhist path and gaining liberation but also encompass the means for attaining liberation itself." (Quintman, 2014: 6-7)

For an audience, then, reading these stories is considered a method of motion towards awakening, and they provide ideals to reflect upon or trail. Functioning as both popular and local media, *namthar* propose an adaptable religious trajectory, pressing emphasis on practice rather than doctrine. By dispersing religious life from monasteries alone, the literature "puts the goal within the reach of the layman as well" (Robinson, 1979: 4). It offers the possibility for transformation with "practices that can effect a dramatic change in that very life" (p. 12). The potential for transformation in a single human lifetime is highlighted by the miraculous depictions of saintly characters, capable of performing magical skills as a result of their understanding of reality, or of their compassion. As Robinson explains, "the sanctity and the extraordinary powers [...] go hand in hand, a linking of magic and spirituality that may seem strange to us in our so called 'rationalistic' culture" (Robinson, 1979: 8). In sum, these texts in their story-telling capacities are instructional too.

Tibetan biographies are written to remember individuals whose lives are already in popular memory—their lives constructed, in part, post-mortem. Specifically, I note the fact that the historical Milarepa is supposed to have lived in the 11th century, while Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa* was composed in the 15th century (Quintman, 2014: 1-3). These Tibetan texts intend to educate and provide instruction to those who will continue the lineage of their described saints. *Namthar* is thus both a history

and an initiation to practice[103] (Quintman, 2014: 9) as it establisheses a lineage. In Milarepa's case, this runs through Tilopa, to Naropa, to Marpa, to Milarepa, and to his own disciples Rechungpa, Gampopa, Ngendzong (among others), and finally down to Heruka the writer. The writer, then, offers the story to further potential practice in those who ingest it: those who receive it by eye or ear[104].

In his research, Quintman situates Milarepa as not only a primary and essential literary character in the Tibetan Buddhist canon, but also as the principle characterisation of a Tibetan "mad" saint. That is, an operator of transgressive practices (skillful means, as per above) or crazy wisdom to attain awakening. Quintman speaks to the existence of a whole corpus of Milarepa-related biographical works aside from Heruka's, the existence of which points to Milarepa's prominence as the primary characterisation of a Tibetan artist-saint[105] too.

Quintman also highlights the importance of considering the social context for the production of Tibetan tantric literary works. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the institution of Kagyu—in the larger sphere of multiple Tibetan schools—required religious foundational texts to legitimise itself:

---

[103] If samsara is "esoterically [...] the whirligig of mind," (Dowman, 1985: 7) then the *experience* of reading literature (describing a world apart from one's own) offers a sensory alterity from the commonplace cycle of the day. The experience for a reader or listener when entering a poem or story is itself a *nirvana* in miniature. Curious, then: for the study of a tradition emphasising the world's inherent emptiness, its literature constitutes such an impetus to fill it with expression, and song.

[104] Heruka can be seen as a teacher, offering the story to educate potential practitioners.

[105] The Catholic patron saint of artists—Caterina de Vigri (Catherine of Bologna)—was also a a writer, and is also the patron saint against temptations. Milarepa and herself would have much to discuss. Or perhaps very little, but their mutual meditative silence would be a treat to witness.

> If Tibetan biography could emphasize the lives of individual founder figures, another important function was to record the lineages of transmission stemming from them. In a religious culture where the notion of unbroken lineage originating from an authoritative source was of paramount importance, such lineage biographies served a powerful legitimizing function (Quintman, 2014: 10).

Heruka's text can thus be understood as translating another time-period, describing an asceticism inspiring but foregone (Quintman, 2014: 56-9). In his capacities as a scribe, a former monastic, and himself a religious personality, Heruka then returns to the teachings' source, living in poverty, becoming an antisocial menace (the description of Quintman's is particular poetic[106]) before inspiring compassion in those he meets. He practises this in the midst of the fifteenth century, in a period of sweeping social change in Tibet around the historical "Tibetan Renaissance" that occurs as the Buddhist territory is in contact with the Chinese Yuan court (Quintman, 2014: 121-4). In short, the writer becomes the subject; and a glimpse at both the text and its author suggests that those dealing with a topic can inherit it even corporeally, as Heruka "becomes" Milarepa (Quintman, 2014: 148)[107].

---

[106] As Quintman translates: "Upon his naked body he rubbed human ashes, daubs of blood, and smears of grease; he wore a necklace of intestines from a human corpse and with them made ornaments for his hands and feet. He cut off the fingers and toes, tied them together with thread, and bound them into his hair. He wore fine ornaments of bone that someone offered him. Sometimes he laughed, sometimes he cried, and he made a point of carrying out all manner of outrageous behavor in the marketplace. Thus, although the people of Tsari were uncivilized and quite wild, his abilities overwhelmed them and his compassion brought them under his control. As a consequence, they became extremely devoted. In agreement, they all gave him the name Tsangpa Nyonpa, "Madman Tsang" and in every direction he became as famous as the sun and moon." (Quintman, 2014: 124)

[107] A curiosity I should note: the humble simplicity connoted by the wearing of mendicant robes in the "Yogin" title, in addition to the antisocial practices of both Heruka and Milarepa is a paradox when considering the structural, grammatical, and stylistic complexity of the *namthar* biographical genre: Heruka was a literary hoodlum.

CHAPTER VII

ANALYSIS: THE LIFE OF MILAREPA AND BEAUTIFUL LOSERS

The banner of this dissertation at last unrolls with a comparative reading of Cohen and Heruka's œuvres. Per Mucchielli and Paillé (2012), the following is a "qualitative analysis by contextualisation" comprised of an interrogation of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* now placed in a contextual relationship with Tsangnyön Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa.*

The Life of Milarepa highlights a specific Vajrayana method of tutorship; skillful means (the Tibetan *upaya,* and the crazy wisdom that comes of it) while also depicting a saintly ideal of the tradition. Using these two principal ideas of skillful means and sainthood, I analyse below the portions of *The Life of Milarepa* I have found most useful for contextualising and reading *Beautiful Losers*, making them "types" (per Muchielli and Paillé, 2012: 45) to use as touchstones for analysing Cohen's work. Their division is as follows below:

7.1) Under the heading of *Skillful Means,* those elements which connect the two texts are:

7.1.1) their prologues

7.1.2) the textuality of the works (their shared literary medium),

7.1.3) their use of citations from other existing literatures and media (their contextualisation in their given worlds of composition), and

7.1.4) the relationships between teachers (gurus) and their students (the apprenticeship that is at the heart of the Kagyu school) in hoth works. Tied into this is an address of transgressive practices between the two texts (as it is so often part and parcel of the wayward apprenticeship of crazy wisdom).

7.2) *Sainthood* collects the conceptions and representations of saints, or the ideals of religious life paralleled by the two texts. Between them, sainthood is characterised principally by

7.2.1) the power of language and naming,

7.2.2.) and the sufferings that each text's characters undergo.

Each passage below opens with an elucidation of the points provided by Heruka's text ("a" section), followed by their inlay on Cohen's ("b" section), separated by a diamond (◊) to signal the transition. At the end of each section examining *Beautiful Losers,* I will offer a short additional summary of the information gleaned by reading *Beautiful Losers* through *The Life of Milarepa.*

7.1 Skillful Means

Skillful means—*upaya*— here connotes a method of instruction; a transmission of knowledge between an origin and receptor. It is also the translation of a teaching to the level of its hearers.

Within this analyse, I feel it is essential to interpret the format of each work's presentation, in lieu of a lonely analysis solely of its content. Skillful means is here employed as a term for analysis of the texts' respective Prologues, textual aspects and cross-textual references because these points each constitute irregular examples for the relevant cultural milieus of both *The Life of Milarepa* and *Beautiful Losers.*

As such, I will first be analysing each respective text's opening pages (their "Prologues,") as they constitute the linguistic gates by which a readerly audience enters the temple-space of the work. While a reader might not be receiving instruction from a guru, they are receiving language from the book; a text's opening thus establishes the community who will be glossing its contents (and thereby entering its confines). Mircea Eliade describes physical "sacred space" as an area that is differentiated from its surroundings (surroundings which lack a communally-accepted sacred form or meaning) (Eliade 1976: 21). While the life-story of Milarepa would likely have begun as an oral transmission, the experience of beginning to read a physical sacred book—a text that is a container for the religious beliefs and practices of the community whose hands hold it—is akin to opening its door.

7.1.1 Openings, Prologues

a) Heruka begins his "Prologue"[108] of *The Life of Milarepa* with a self-conscious address, "Namo Guru" (Heruka, 2010: 3): constituting an address to an esteemed teacher with a status above the author's own. The work, in its first breaths, is thus presenting itself as a part of a lineage. It is also framed as a prayer dedicated to an entity both beyond its speaker and comprising an intimate part of his existence. Within a few paragraphs, Heruka says "to you known as Mila [...][109] glorious protector of beings vast as space, I bow down" (p. 3). The book's subject (Milarepa)

---

[108] This was originally just text without title opening the source. The specific heading was added by Quintman, as noted in his "Translator's Introduction" (Quintman, 2010: xxxvi).

[109] I should here note that the names "Milarepa," "Mila," "Lord of Yogins," "Great Magician," "Töpaga" and "Jetsün Mila Zhepa Dorjé" are used interchangeably to refer to Milarepa in this text.

is also partially its audience, and Heruka reaffirms his servant-like, lowly position by prostrating to the presence of Milarepa being summoned by the text's recitation.

This moving oration affects not only Heruka as narrator, however, but also his very environment, which both reflects and is transformed by the telling of the story: "your full form body, the sun and moon, radiates enlightened activities, limitless light rays of wisdom [...]" (p. 3). The practice of recitation is here framed as altering the very limits of the physical world. The recitation also wipes away the stains of an author who is sick: Heruka professes to be in the midst of "the burning heat of mental afflictions" (p. 4) that can be cleared by telling the story of Milarepa.

Notably for a Buddhist work of this sort, attempting to establish itself as a part of the larger dharmic textual canon, Heruka near-immediately describes the bodily sensations that erupt in encountering Milarepa's story:

> Thus I am suddenly overwhelmed with joy, like a passionate
> man confronted in a secluded place by a beautiful bejeweled
> maiden, maintaining his vows of chastity yet in light of her
> youthful and radiant splendor unable to take a step back. (p. 4)

This is curious because Heruka derives sexual pleasure from hearing the story of an ascetic saint. He also acknowledges it as a tale received, and not of his own creation "[...] this life story, like that enchanting beautiful woman, adorned with compassion, fell upon this fortunate one's ears" (p. 4). He will be the voice, but not the source. He continues:

> [...] though it had
> been concealed, in order to bring broad smiles and deep laughter
> by means of its amazing glorious splendor, I lay out this feast of words.
> So, with the fragrant water of faith and exertion I cleanse the
> stain of concealment from this jewel of a life story, and then for
> the benefit of beings I offer it as the crown of the victory banner

> of the Sage's teachings. For this, may the lama and ḍākinīs grant their permission. (p. 4)

Besides the sexual overtones of listening to what is in essence a religious parable—a literary "skillful means"—Heruka is also acknowledging his reader's eyes upon his page. He is aware of both their presence and their own previous familiarity with the tale, promising that his version will be more palatable by virtue of it now eliciting bodily enjoyment in anyone who consumes it: curious for a text ultimately proposing a removal from "the vast shortcomings of life's round" (p. 4). In the quote above, Heruka further ties himself, his audience, and his subject into one bundle, noting that Milarepa (both his guru and addressee) forms a portion of the larger cosmology of beings earthly (the male Tibetan lamas; representing social and religious authorities of the period) and celestial (female ḍākinīs; spirits and guides holding great power in the Himalayan context). All cosmic existence will be altered by his coming recitation.

A final element of the block quote above involves Heruka's highlight that this is a story whose essence is not discernable without guidance. Its meaning is hidden and requiring of purification: a stained jewel[110]. He is thus a solvent in his role as its translator and narrator, clearing debris from what is in essence a precious gem, disguised until his actions reveal it.

Heruka's Prologue thus frames his telling of the story as an inherited tale. *The Life of Milarepa* is not Heruka's invention, but his recitation constitutes a further transmission eliciting bodily reactions. It is revealed from beneath dross, and he confirms that his telling of it will be unconventional and directed towards an audience:

---

[110] "I cleanse the stain of concealment from this jewel of a life story" as quoted above.

a Buddhist text which seeks to liberate its hearers from the cycles of suffering and sufferings of the body by having them engage with bodily sensation.

◊

b) *Beautiful Losers'* first page is comprised of a dedication (oddly removed from later versions of the novel): "for Steve Smith, 1943—1964." Despite being a common name and surname, the only "Steve Smith" I can find linked to Cohen is the author of *God's Kaleidoscope* (1964), a poetry collection published in the "McGill Poetry Series" which also produced Cohen's initial *Let Us Compare Mythologies* of 1956. *God's Kaleidoscope* is a short bundle of experimental poems addressing the author's identity, their Jewish heritage, and a worsening "cancer" [111]. In much the same way as *The Life of Milarepa*, the first movement of *Beautiful Losers* is thus an invocation [112] for reflection on death, the sickness of life's round, and creation. Likewise, this prayer is made by naming a deceased forebearer—specifically, a dead poet, aware of their mortality, whose poetry reflects on and reshapes their own

---

[111] Specifically closing with this poem, "God's Kaleidoscope":

When my speck of green
turned the brown
of Job's dunghill
I looked up
to curse...
but then I saw
the reflection in God's eye.
Through his kaleidoscope
all turns are just as
beautiful.

Cohen's title *Beautiful Losers* thus continues directly from Smith's final published words.

[112] An invocation known only selectively: Smith's book had a limited print in 1964 and would certainly have not been a widely known or studied poet in Canada in his own time, let alone during this analysis.

religious context. Following is etched a table of contents—abnormal enough for a novel (now made a textbook, or treatise)—which demonstrates the work's being comprised of three "Books": "The History of the Them All," "A Long Letter from F." and a final "Beautiful Losers: An Epilogue in the Third Person." The work thus establishes a canon in miniature between its own covers. Following this is a quote as epigraph occupying a full page, attributed to late popular pianist Ray Charles:

Somebody said lift that bale

-RAY CHARLES singing "Ol' Man River"[113]

The fact that this is a cover song furthers the novel's opening reflection on transferred knowledge. These lyrics are words attributed to a source that is not their composer, but instead to a voice that makes them known: a voice which makes them heard. Even before *Beautiful Losers* presents a reader with its narrative, it thus encourages them to reflect on how information is transferred, and to ponder on echoes of their own cultural circumstance.

The opening of the narrative itself—"Book 1"—constitutes a voice asking: "Catherine Tekakwitha, who are you? Are you (1656-1680)? Is that enough?" (Cohen, 2005: 3). An address to Canadian Indigenous figure of veneration, and now Catholic Saint, Catherine (Kateri) Tekakwitha imbues the text with an immediate institutional religiosity via its address to her. An atypical figure of veneration for the period of the novel's composition (due both to her being a woman, and more importantly, not being white). The work thus opens as an interrogation, but an intimate one: who can

---

[113] A commandment to toil thrown from an indeterminate source, the phrase is actually a few levels removed from its origins, as an excerpt from the Broadway musical *Show Boat* of 1927, written by Oscar Hammerstein (Coyle, 2014).

directly address a saint of four hundred years past? Tsangnyön Heruka evidently[114], but so too can "I.," the initial narrator of Cohen's work. He uses Tekakwitha's full and anglicised (imposed) name, rather than her ancestral one, signalling a (forced) translation to a new context; a new identity. And while the physical environment of the author isn't affected by his invocation, hers is, as he imagines birds listening to her parables (Cohen, 2005: 3-4). Like Heruka, I. then describes the sexual longing that overtakes him while invoking Catherine Tekakwitha, pondering "how far up [her] moccasins were laced" (p. 3). He then brings up the death of "Lady Marilyn," making a parallel between an image of Catholic orthodoxy and Marilyn Monroe (an oft-sexualized icon from popular culture) while remembering their respective ends. This initial passage maneuvers in precisely the same way as Heruka's "Prologue"—an ascetic, nonsexual saint eliciting bodily pleasure in the one invoking their life. Both Heruka and Cohen's I. are aroused by prayer to the Holy deceased.

A teacherly aphorism is then presented from the mouth of I.'s friend F.: "We must learn to stop bravely at the surface [...] We've got to learn to love appearances" (Cohen, 2005: 4)—seemingly celebrating such bodily feeling. This teacherly legitimacy is immediately put into question, however, as F. "died in a padded cell, his mind rotten from too much dirty sex" (p. 4). I., meanwhile describes himself as an entirely different sort, not one to act in the world but rather "having to pull himself off every night so he can get to sleep"—a masturbatory pilgrim full of "maybe five thousand books" (p. 4). He is an academic but not a teacher: just "an old scholar." (p. 4). His lineage then, is history too: collected experience passed down, but which he hasn't lived himself. I., in this instant, only transfers. Like Heruka, narrating the life of Milarepa, we understand the narrator to be in the "heat of mental affliction;"

---

[114] Again, Heruka's address to Milarepa occurs about four centuries after Milarepa's historical life.

(Heruka, 2010: 3), in a suffering that translates here to physical discomfort and existential stillness in I.'s self-professed constipation[115] (Cohen, 2005: 4).

Beautiful Losers' opening is thus framed as reflecting on and eliciting bodily reactions, its elucidations trickling from the mouth of an unconventional narrator. The opening of *The Life of Milarepa* has its audience reflect on the death of Milarepa, but also his continued life in narrative, and the echoes and permutations that story can hold on their own lives. Heruka as narrator is transcribed on the figure of I., as both are sexually aroused by their prayer to ascetic saints, both are in periods of emotional and mental distress, and both situate themselves in lineage, learning from Milarepa and F. respectively. Unlike Heruka, I., however, suggests that he doesn't fully trust his teacher.

7.1.2 Textual Aspects

The composition of these texts is notable, as the narrative structures (and even physical formatting) are each respectively irregular—to varying levels—for their cultural contexts. The following sections also include my summaries of the respective plots of *The Life of Milarepa* and *Beautiful Losers* to facilitate the remainder of this analysis.

a) To begin, *The Life of Milarepa's* structure does reflect many norms (and the irregularity and abruptness) of the Vajrayana vehicle itself. So far as narrative is concerned, the story depicts the fall and rise of Milarepa, his labours to meditate and his eventual overcoming of his previous murderous transgressions to attain

---

[115] What a metaphor.

Buddhahood; or, indeed, *bodhisattva*hood, as he remains in the sphere of existence to influence beings in need of his instruction in the world.

When Milarepa's father dies, despite his spoken will and inheritance being clear, Milarepa's aunt and uncle seize Milarepa's inheritance[116], and enslave his mother, sister and himself, forcing them into abject poverty. Sent away by his mother to undergo "magical" instruction, Milarepa returns with the power to manipulate the environment, and murders thirty-five of his kinsfolk who failed to protect his family from his aunt and uncle. Fearing for their safety, the other villagers further shun Milarepa and his mother and sister. Unhappy with his previous misdeeds, he leaves home to pursue instruction in the Buddhist Dharma. Meeting his fated teacher Marpa, he undergoes severe physical and psychological abuse under him, becomes an accomplished religious renunciant, returns to his homeland, sees his uncle die, his aunt renounce her previous acts, and then accumulates a series of followers. Finally, he experiences bodily death from a poisoned meal[117], having attained a near-awakened state, though remaining in cyclical existence to benefit other beings. He continues to pass on his teachings by way of his surviving meditative songs and exemplary meditative practice.

Following the Prologue, Heruka opens the main body of his work with (the Tibetan language equivalent of) "Thus have I heard," (as Quintman translates it, "Thus did I

---

[116] Perverting the father's spoken word, interpreting it only for their own ends. A comment, perhaps, on the need for oral instruction to be written down: *The Life of Milarepa* itself, as text, functions as an embodiment of a formerly oral tradition.

[117] Mirroring Sakyamuni Buddha's death by consuming a poisoned meal.

hear[118]"). In so doing, Heruka uses a turn of phrase familiar to a larger pan-Asian Buddhist audience beyond his Himalayan context. So far as the "Prologue" was addressed to Milarepa himself, the first words of this opening thus address its readerly and scholastic audience. They are defined as literate Buddhists, familiar with the norms of Buddhist canonical literature, as "Thus have I heard" is typically only used to open Buddhist sutras—works making up the large corpus of Buddhist religious texts—within both the Mahayana Sanskrit texts and the Theravada Pali canon. Heruka, however, very quickly establishes that even if his work is bred of this tradition, it is apart from and superior to both of these two, noting that Milarepa "quickly learned the path of the unsurpassed Vajra Vehicle and perfected experience and realization" (Heruka, 2010: 5).

The format of the work is, however, vastly divergent from Buddhist sutra norms, and manipulates its own genre. Heruka appears, at first, to be both the writer and work's narrator, but highlights that the following is received information, that he did not create; which was "heard" (and therefore inherently more legitimate than original creation, as it is a donation from history). The true identity of the narrator then shifts again, creating a series of nested narrations.

The story begins in a celestial realm where Milarepa is teaching. While he instructs, his disciple Rechungpa falls asleep[119] and has a dream where he receives teachings

---

[118] Connoting a transmission of a *single* instance, rather than a common story: Heruka suggesting perhaps the uniqueness of his transmission that follows. In an early study of Tibetan literature, John Hough notes that the Tibetan epigram differs from other South Asian sutras in its opening of "Thus heard I on one occasion" (Hough, 1950: 416).

[119] Narcoleptic buddhahood is certainly a curiosity. "Celestial" realms are a fixture of Mahayana and Vajrayana literature, where awakened beings –or beings on their way to awakening –can perfect their practice. The premise here that even enlightened beings and bodhisattvas can fall asleep involuntarily is quite amusing. Sleepy awakened beings.

and a fortune from a celestial buddha. Rechungpa wakes briefly, then returns to the dream again, where he becomes fixated on a recitation of Milarepa's life story. When he wakes for a second time, he implores Milarepa to tell his own life story. Milarepa at first refuses, explaining to Rechungpa (and the eyes reading the work) that this is unnecessary, as his life story is already such common knowledge. When asked again, Milarepa relents and begins to tell his biography. The narrator of the work thus becomes Milarepa himself.

To review, the work as a whole constitutes Heruka narrating Milarepa telling his own life story in the context of a meeting with his disciples in a celestial, paranormal circumstance. This story within a story remains the format of the work, with occasional interruptions for describing the amazement among Milarepa's disciples in the celestial realm.

Three quarters of the way through the text, in the tenth chapter, the narrative shifts suddenly. Another of Milarepa's disciples, Zhiwa Ö, fully interrupts the telling of the story that began in the first chapter with an expression of his extreme disbelief. In response, Milarepa then gives a substantial religious sermon—essentially a "Half-Time Show" dharma talk. The remainder of the work transitions unsettlingly into a third person narrative, in Heruka's voice, retelling the end of Milarepa's life. In this portion, he includes an in-text advertisement (Heruka, 2010: 175) for his collection of Milarepa's poetry not otherwise found in the biography,[120] and an epic listing[121] of each of Milarepa's disciples, before finally depicting Milarepa's eventual death and

---

[120] Renowned compilation *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. A recent benefit is Christopher Stagg's 2016 translation of the work (Shambhala), whose introduction I have quoted in this research.

[121] The array of character names usually a trope of epic poetry: most famously, in the second book of Homer's *Iliad* where the name and homeland of each famous warrior is listed for the listener.

dissolution. Milarepa's bodily death is eschatological, as Heruka guarantees that Milarepa's activities will continue "until all existence comes to an end" (p. 228). The work itself thus functions as a medieval, Himalayan, speculative and experimental compilation of mixing narrators and styles.

While there is a history of oral recitations of Milarepa's life-story, Heruka's version uniquely makes a reader aware of their position as a consumer of (transcribed) narrative literature. He does this by dividing the work into chapters (meant to be read in order and not picked at random). He also closes each chapter with a few lines describing the reactions of Milarepa's audience to the telling of his story (either surprised, saddened, or in awe of his biography). Throughout the work, Milarepa also "sings" poetry reflecting his circumstances, and the dharmic lessons he is extracting from the given situation. Crazy wisdom connotes a transmission method different from its surroundings, and this is reflected in the "Experimental," non-linear format of *The Life of Milarepa.*

◊

b) The narrative of *Beautiful Losers* is divided into three parts. In the first, "A History of Them All," the narrator, I., recounts his life story from his basement apartment, and then from a tree house after he blows up his home with fireworks. In this section, we are introduced to his two dead "loves": F.—his friend, wayward teacher, Canadian Parliamentarian [122] and Québec nationalist—and Edith, his wife. This

---

[122] F. is a Canadian politician of a surreal sort, described as both an "MP" (a member of Parliament, thus an elected representative of the Canadian House of Commons) and also sitting in the red seats of Parliament, which would make him a Senator (a member of a Canadian minority selected by a serving Prime Minister to represent their given ethnic, linguistic, religious, or professional milieu in the red seats of the Canadian Senate). In reality one cannot be both an MP and a sitting Senator at the same time in Canada.

section is comprised of a narrative that jumps back and forth in time: from the mid 1950s when I. meets Edith, to F. and I. as young orphans together, to I.'s ramblings in the novel's present, to extracts from I.'s conversations with F. before and after Edith's suicide. This section also details I.'s obsession with Kateri Tekakwitha, her identity's comingling with Edith's, and I.'s "instruction" by F. (and their sexual activities together in the midst of such tutorship). Two critical moments for my analysis of the novel take place in this section: the first, a sexual experience on a car-ride to Ottawa, and the second, a scene at a nationalist rally in Montréal in the 1960s.

Like *The Life of Milarepa*, the identity of the narrator is often unclear in *Beautiful Losers,* as is the distinction between the narrator and author. The text often enters a story within a story format, and the reader must be attentive: they too are being taught by a wayward instructor (a narrator twisting them around, and Cohen's hand directing them). Interspersed with the non-linear narrative of I. and F. are an array of inserts from historical material surrounding Nouvelle France and Kateri Tekakwitha: French Jesuit literature describing their experiences in colonial Canada, documents describing miracles linked to Tekakwitha, a narrative of Tekakwitha's uncle, and an assortment of interspersed textual references, such as an advertisement from a comic-book, excerpts from a Greek-English phrase book, and a transcribed portion of a radio show. While this will be better explored below in the section on cross-textual material in 7.1.3, I note them only to explain that the narrative of *Beautiful Losers* could[123] provide a textbook definition of "Experimental fiction," and this styling unseats a reader from their usual manner of ingesting fiction: they are forced to be attentive in a way they aren't normally (when reading academic, journalistic, non-fiction or even other fiction works). This transgressive styling forces them in a

---

[123] And does! Per Atwood and Bök (2002).

liminal mindframe per Turner's conception of the term: reading the novel *is* uncomfortable, because most other novels are not like it.

The second section, "A Long Letter from F." provides an alternate narrator's voice for some of the events provided in the previous account. Here, F. is in a hospital (or asylum) room, masturbating his nurse with one hand while simultaneously writing out his last will and testament in narrative to I. with the other. In that document he explains his "torture," "instruction," and "perfecting" of I. and of Edith: an ode to both transgressive practice per Georges Bataille, and to crazy wisdom as well. F. also completes the telling of Tekakwitha's life story: while I. followed Tekakwitha's early life as a Mohawk convert to Christianity in seventeenth century colonial Canada, F. descriptively fulfills a summary of her final four years. He recounts the specifics of her self inflicted bodily torture, her vow of chastity, and her death from ascetic practice in devotion to Christ; a willful suffering unto death, as characterised in the novel. The section concludes with F. writing out a radio excerpt documenting his escape from the asylum (which can't be happening in the novel's timeline, because he is still writing it).

As in *The Life of Milarepa,* the novel's final section twists suddenly into a third person narration describing an "old man" who seems to be a combination of both I. and F., living in the tree-house that F. left to I. in his will. Fleeing from the police, this man encounters a woman who is both Edith and a version of Kateri Tekakwitha. They make his (their) way into downtown Montréal and walk into an old-style pool and pinball games room. There, a crowd recognises him as both F. the politician and

as I. the fugitive before he initiates a sort of semi-apocalypse, transforms into a blindingly massive movie of Ray Charles, and bursts into light[124].

The wayward, non-linear format of *Beautiful Losers* is a direct reflection of the unorthodox format of Milarepa's story above. The bridges made by such a comparison reveal this convoluted storytelling as a form of skillful means—a crazy wisdom (elaborated upon below), that contextualises the novel. Heruka embeds stories within the framework of larger narrations, and interrupts his characters' (and his own) recitations of the tale repeatedly. *The Life of Milarepa* is also composed of mixing genres: narrative storytelling, religious sermon and advertisement that even breaks the fourth wall to speak directly to its audience. This medieval text establishes a sort of experimental formatting, and when *Beautiful Losers* is read against it, the latter gains a beneficial context: indeed, that *Beautiful Losers* is not composed of an irregular or fancifully modern structure. Rather, it mirrors the formatting of a traditional religious style from half a millennium before Cohen's birth[125]. Further, rather than rendering the work too experimental to offer insight to a reader, *Beautiful Losers* wayward linearity can point us to a more generative way of reading it. The

---

[124] The composition of these two is also an interesting point of comparison: Heruka, as a writer, went "Back to the source" of his Kagyu tradition, not only writing of it but also turning his life into a transgression of his context by living antisocially in the 15th century, in a time of mass social change in Tibet (Tibetan Renaissance), amongst the Yuan court (Quintman, 2014: 121-4). This would like a Canadian today trying to legitimise their identity by preparing for a renewed fur-trade. *Beautiful Losers,* likewise, rises from the orderly and conservative 1950s, in the context of a changing nation. Cohen, in a 1960s Canadian setting looking particularly to its future, rather describes its continuing colonial history and celebrates the religious asceticism of its past. The old man that is I. and F. becomes like Heruka's practice above: growing an unruly beard, smelling terribly, and living outside of conventional acceptability for 1966.

[125] One might also simply conclude that medieval literary forms were less constrictive than the concrete genre-based boundaries currently erected around fiction.

convoluted structure mirrors *The Life of Milarepa* because F., and the novel itself, are teaching readers through the use of "skillful means." Readers must be discomforted in order to break out of their regular ways of thinking to be jettisoned into a liminal place, where they might reconsider their circumstances in a critical way.

7.1.3 Cross-textual References

a) Along with its "experimental," nonlinear structure, *The Life Story of Milarepa* often refers to ideas from beyond its immediate literary world: the text is intertextual. It assumes a reader's familiarity with its own history's and its contemporary ideas and celebrity characters, which are each usually mentioned without context (i.e. Himalayan towns, geography, or even Nāropa[126]). In the Prologue, Heruka notes that Milarepa "became a self-developed buddha, a fact beyond dispute by anyone, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, and stood apart from them all [...]" (Heruka, 2010: 5). For this to make any sense, one would require a previous knowledge of the "historical" Buddha's life-story (the life of Prince Siddhartha/Gautama Buddha), the meaning of a buddha (in opposition to a Buddhist *arhat*—defined as one who attains awakening through the hand-held guidance of a teacher, rather than on their own after instruction)[127] and that other, non-Buddhist faith traditions also exist in the world. This continues into the first chapter, where Milarepa's primary disciple, Rechungpa, enters a dream sequence, receiving instruction from a celestial buddha—Bharima—and listens to excerpts from the lives of Tilopa, Nāropa, and Marpa (p. 12). A reader

---

[126] The renowned teacher of Marpa, Milarepa's teacher, and also namesake for Trungpa's later American university, whose story is never mentioned or contextualised in this biography but whose name is nonetheless invoked a number of times over the work

[127] Even in awakening, a hierarchy of how one lands outside of samsara: one can never be a buddha if they are carried there.

is assumed to know who each of these individuals are, and the importance of their invocation.

The Life of Milarepa also refers to famous texts from the Buddhist religious canon that exist in the world outside of the text itself: *The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* (p. 66), the life story of Taktungu (p. 66) (referring to a hagiography within a hagiography, though this text seems to have been lost to time), *The Two Divisions* (p. 69) (in this case, *The Life of Milarepa* even offers excerpts of the work totally without context, like a radio announcement in the midst of a sports game), and lastly offers notes on Indian sutras (p. 79). The principle here is that a full understanding of existence involves a multimedia exploration of its elements and sources.

◊

b) *Beautiful Losers*, so much as I have problematized its "experimental" label elsewhere in this work, is the very definition of an experiment—a new attempt. Using liberal onomatopoeia, ("sweet Almighty, slurp, flark, glamph, hiccup, jerk, zzzzzz, snort, Jesus, she must have made his life hell" [Cohen, 2005: 17]), extracts from a Greek phrasebook (pp. 146-51), and even magazine clippings for advertising mail-order "Holy water" (pp. 114-15), Cohen constructs the book as a a collage of sorts. While English evidently dominates, the book also features writing in French, contemporary Greek, a phrase in ancient Greek, Latin[128] and Mohawk. Opening with the Ray Charles quote above, it also references music from rock-pop pioneers The Platters as sung by F. (pp. 10-11), 1960s movie theatres, DC Comics' original *Blue Beetle* and *Batman* series, radio programming and beyond.

---

[128] "Dumque crescebat aetate, crescebat et prudentia, says P. Cholenec in 1715." (Cohen, 2005: 46)

Both I. and F. quote from colonial French literature composed during the conquest of Nouvelle France; old books on Catherine Tekakwitha by P. Cholenec, the manuscript "*Certificat de M Remy, cure de la Chine, des miracles faits en sa paroisse par l'intercession de la B. Cath. Tekakwita*" (p. 105). At times they even translate the work themselves, or force their audience to recognise the contemporary aftershocks of this history:

> The Iroquois almost won. Their three major enemies were the Hurons, the Algonquins, and the French. 'La Nouvelle-France se va perdre si elle n'est fortement et promptement secourue.' So wrote Le P. Vimont, Supérieur de Quebec, in 1641. Whoop! Whoop! Remember the movies (p. 14).

This is a joke, evidently, as the Western film genre both never depicted colonial France, and Vimont's worries about becoming a victim are ironic. The Imperial power he addresses for help in securing New France in turn helps annihilate a local Indigenous culture, and New France is consumed anyways by a larger Imperial power afterwards.

Beautiful Losers can be understood as a port for vastly different elements. The novel is nearly impenetrable without at least a cursory knowledge of American popular culture surrounding 1966, and of the early history of Canada.[129] Just as *The Life of Milarepa* situates itself as a locus of previous Buddhist literatures crystallising into the Vajrayana vehicle, *Beautiful Losers* provides a translation of its time. It funnels history through itself, and uses a diversity of forms to transmit its content. The impression made by the novel is, however, only possible because a reader is familiar with other media which don't mash forms together as it does. Transgression can only

---

[129] I must note, *Beautiful Losers* is published on the eve of Canada's centennial in 1967 (after the British North America Act of 1867, which cements the British "Dominion" of Canada).

occur in an already existing system, and the understanding here is that *Beautiful Losers*' waywardness is only possible within a context (of texts which arent's as intertextual as it is).

I have looked to the ways that the structural crazy wisdom (or crazy formatting?) of *The Life of Milarepa* provides a means of processing *Beautiful Loser's* experimental qualities. *The Life of Milarepa* helps establish that crazy wisdom requires a context for its practice, and even such a transversal lineage requires a canon around it to function. It exists in tandem with other elements, other texts, and is a part of the world. *Beautiful Losers'* intertextual references, in this context, force one to re-examine even quotidian elements and other media as possibly imbued with religious meaning. Like Bataille's idea of reconceiving the "profane," in Cohen's text, even a Greek phrase-book is investigated as potentially holding some form of existential truth. Crazy wisdom involves using content from both within and beyond its own history to instruct. In translating its means to its current circumstances; Trungpa explains that an "overall approach" is employed (Trungpa, 1991: 13).

7.1.4 Apprenticeship, Crazy Wisdom

a) The principal of teacher to student relationships—specifically, in the lineage of the Kagyu religious school of Tibet—is illuminated in *The Life of Milarepa*. The Kagyu tradition and its specific lineage is explained as being both apart from and superior to other Buddhist lineages of the region, and even amongst religious traditions elsewhere in the world. In his "Prologue," Heruka explains that Milarepa was esteemed in part for "his devotion toward previous masters of the lineage" (Heruka, 2010: 5). A critical element of this relationship is the *samaya* vow—the commitment by a student to their guru (Fields, 1992: 312). As elucidated by Chögyam Trungpa, it is this devotion to a teacher "which makes the student persist in this long, difficult, and often extremely painful voyage of discovery" (Trungpa via Fields, 1992: 331); such devotion comes after observation of one's guru, and the investment of total trust

in them. Milarepa vows to follow the instructions passed down to him from Marpa, who received them from his teacher, and so forth.

During Rechungpa's dream sequence in the first chapter, this lineage is named and established: a celestial buddha, Bharima, "recounted the life stories of Tilopa, Nāropa, and Marpa" (Heruka, 2010: 12). Bharima explains that the life story of Milarepa "is even more excellent than those I have just described" (p. 13). Once Rechungpa wakes from the dream, he notes that "I should request the Jetsün's life story for the benefit of beings" (p. 13) and when he does so, he asks Milarepa by invoking the names of those that came before him. Within this is an idea that intentionally invoking a collective heritage carries with it significant power, and that there is further strength transmitted through storytelling.

As Milarepa's story proceeds, after leaving his home and seeking instruction on how to redeem himself after his murder of his family, he hears the name of Marpa the Translator for the first time. In that instant of hearing of his future guru he describes himself as "filled with an indescribable happiness, every hair on my body quivered with joy, and I sobbed with boundless devotion" (Heruka, 2010: 48). Better yet, the moment he sees Marpa in person—though the guru is disguised—he is "overcome with a feeling of inconceivable and inexpressible happiness in which the flickering perceptions of this life suddenly came to a halt" (p. 50). Later, when he becomes uncertain of the tribulations he is put through by Marpa, one of Marpa's other students consoles him by saying "we in the lineage of Nāropa and Maitripa have an oral instruction [...]" (p. 72). The power, prominence and continuation of the lineage is reiterated in Marpa's exaltation of Milarepa at the end of his instruction of him: "the teachings of the Kagyu will thus expand like the waxing moon, so rejoice!" (p. 85). Later, when Milarepa departs Marpa's instruction, he is told that "You too must transmit them to a single disciple, who will be prophesied [...] [it will be] handed down through a line of single individuals for thirteen generations" (p. 106). Once

Milarepa allows his body to die, near the work's conclusion, his disciples even begin to sing songs in his own style (p. 218), realising this prediction of continued teaching while "becoming" him.

The teacher-to-disciple relationship is a unique and often bizarre relation as set forth in *The Life of Milarepa*. Milarepa's first teacher, an instructor of murderous magic, renounces his practice after one of his patrons[130] dies. He then notes to Milarepa that "all composite things are impermanent" (Heruka, 2010: 46) and encourages him to pursue the Dharma elsewhere. Milarepa receives instruction from a number of sources, but only those instructions from Marpa are considered to be from his true guru. Despite Marpa being an authoritarian with "right" view, he still nonetheless acts erratically. Marpa is never presented as an entirely trustworthy mentor—he breaks down into tears after chastising Milarepa, gives Milarepa contradictory orders, and beats him constantly. Only at the end of his instruction of Milarepa does he explain that the suffering and wayward behaviour was a skillful means to cleanse Milarepa of his previous misdeeds (pp. 106-16). As I will elaborate on further, this reflects F.'s own explanation of his abuse of I. and Edith in a letter towards the end of *Beautiful Losers*. I feel it important to note that despite this untrustworthiness, Marpa is nonetheless held up as a pillar for the insitutional form of Kagyu within Tibetan Buddhism (Powers, 2007 :201), and indeed *relies* on the structures of insitutional religion to teach Milarepa. A medieval reader of *The Life of Milarepa* would be taking in this text, describing abuse and transgression of their social circumstances, while living within a culture with norms, directed by dually civil and religious

---

[130] Buddhism's monastic origins resulted in the *sangha* (the Buddhist community) requiring support (nutritional, but also financial) from its surrounding society. This translates to *namthar* and the Himalayan world it depicts, where patrons who give financial support for religious projects (and are not themselves gurus) are common.

authorities. Milarepa, who is an exemplar of transgressive, antisocial practice, exists because there is a society and cultural standards around him to deviate from.

Marpa's "skillful means" of instruction involve violence. After Milarepa meets Marpa, takes his *samaya* vow and commits to learning under the teacher, Marpa beats Milarepa a number of times. Milarepa recounts how "he slapped me, grabbed me by the hair, and threw me out" (p. 59), "he threw me down and beat me" (p. 63), "he threw me facedown and everything went dark. Then he threw me on my back and I saw stars. Then he grabbed a staff but Ngok held him back" (p. 65). At one point, Marpa even prepares to beat his wife when she helps Milarepa (p. 78). These are explained as acts required to cleanse Milarepa's previous transgressive murders, done out of his love for him. Even the text itself demonstrates a discomfort with the actions, however, as when Marpa begins crying when confronted by his wife over his abuse of Milarepa: he "turned dour and a tear ran down his cheek" (p. 67). The greater violence is Marpa's manipulation of Milarepa's emotions and faith, which often push him to the brink of suicide. This violent, aberrant behaviour separates Milarepa from society, and puts him in the liminal space of feeling valueless. The violent behaviour also, however, mutilates his conception of selfhood, and prevents him from returning to a conception of his old self as being based in absolute fact: the beatings he endures initiate his later bodily self-sacrifice towards awakening.

Just as violence is an unexpected method, the skillful means of crazy wisdom's instruction also includes contact with typically prohibited materials such as alcohol or non-consumable substances[131], ingesting these and entering altered (drunken) states

---

[131] Milarepa also explains that he comes from a blood lineage of transgression, citing his ancestor Khyungpo Josey who proclaims the adage that "one uses even dog fat if it cures the wound. So call him!" and who also famously scares off a demon by proclaiming "I eat the flesh and drink the blood of demons and obstructing spirits, so just you wait" (p. 16).

in *The Life of Milarepa.* As Marpa explains to his wife in section 6.2 above, when one attains proper views and understands skillful means, they don't hold bias or preference for ritual purity, or one element over another.

As such, alcohol remains a constant in the text. While beer is a normative part of Himalayan culture and diet, alcohol is nonetheless a prohibited substance in the canonical Buddhism *The Life of Milarepa* situates itself amidst. In the initial dream-sequence that opens the work, the experience of being among celestial beings renders a drunkenness in Rechungpa (Milarepa's eventual chief disciple): "intoxicated with bliss and well-being, he felt as if he would faint" (p. 12). Beer functions as a sort of a currency in the Himalayan world of the work: it is offered to Milarepa at various junctures as fuel for his toil, while Marpa is usually depicted consuming beer. Milarepa, while learning how to perform black magic, first becomes drunk with his dark-magic teacher and sings for the first time (an early foreshadowing of his later, celebratory dharma songs). This enrages his mother, however, who insists that all of his efforts should be directed towards preparing revenge. In this instance, alcohol ironically serves as a distraction from his learning how to murder his kin (in an orthodox Buddhist view, the drinking the prohibited alcohol delays a pollutive act). Without his act of murder, however, he would never embark on the Buddhist path. Milarepa reflects—later—on his own nondual understanding of these divisions from the vantage point of an awakened being: "First I committed evil deeds. Later on I practiced virtue. Now I am free from both good and bad deeds, and having exhausted the bases for karmic activities, I will not conduct them in the future" (p. 15).

The work also circles addresses bodily excretions: typically, dung would never enter into orthodox Buddhist practise. Milarepa performs a fecal offering of his garment, sacrificing his cape after gathering in it "horse and donkey manure, cow dung, and dog droppings" to receive instruction in black magic (p. 31). Once he proves himself to the teacher of black magic, he is initiated in a ceremony involving "oath-bound

protectors of the teachings [...] carrying thirty-five human heads and hearts, covered in blood" which they arrange is a sort of bloody mandala (p. 33)—significant, because in the passage following, this signifies the thirty five individuals that Milarepa murders in his spell against his errant family (pp. 33-4). On Milarepa's initiation to the Kagyu lineage, he celebrates by drinking "inner offerings" (there is no exposition of what this essential fluid might be—an invitation for wholesome imagination) from a cup made of a skull (pp.83-4).

Not all of the moments of uncanny consumption (or contact with irregular substances) are as wayward as shit or blood, however. Milarepa also survives on a diet of nettles (the small, barbed plants) throughout most of his ascetic practice, though their effect on his body is significant:

> I moved over to it and stayed there living on nothing but nettles as I practiced. I had no clothes on my outside and nothing nutritious to sustain me inside. My body thus became like a skeleton and turned the color of nettles, covered with soft green hair. (p. 136)

The transgression of his culture's norms and diet results in his physical transformation, and in his asceticism his appearance becomes monstrous; inhuman. He is thus not solely separated from society by his practice and anticultural worldview, but also by what this does to his physical self. Thus sacrifice and suffering he chooses for himself.

Lastly, on his demise, a revealed text given to his disciples returns to the scatological orbits of the work. It states that anyone who is inspired by Milarepa's story will not be reborn in a lower life: however, anyone who focuses *solely* on its merits while believing that Milarepa had "gold in life" should have their mouth filled with "shit" (p.225).

Milarepa's religious trajectory can be summarised by the stages of liminality, as elucidated by Victor Turner's conception of separation, liminal existence ("neither-here-nor-there," which is also the field of religious practice), and reintegration:

> 1) Separation: Milarepa is separated from his society early in his life by the slavery and isolation imposed on him by his aunt and uncle. His isolation is extended during his instruction by Marpa, who breaks down his ego and smashes his very will to live: Milarepa becomes a stranger in himself, and to his own body.
>
> 2) Liminality: After such instruction, Milarepa enters a liminal state. He is in a liminal space, unable to abide in the social world he was born from, thus leaving society for retreat on mountains and in caves. Apart from society, his mental state and body shift, and he continues to perfect his individual ascetic practice in isolation. As a result of it, however, he builds a *new* society: a community of disciples.
>
> 3) Return / Reintegration: Milarepa's return to society is a new vision of it: he creates a society of his followers. His further reintegration comes about when he becomes story: a Buddhist exemplar through his songs and his biography, which can now be recited for and by new generations of Kagyu practitioners. His renewed life is as a symbol and inspiration, to be passed along by the community he established while in a liminal state.

I have covered a great deal in this essential section above. Suffice to say that *The Life of Milarepa* reiterates the outlines of both apprenticeship and crazy wisdom as elucidated in the exposition of Vajrayana Buddhism in Chapter VI previous. Crazy wisdom in the Kagyu lineage involves devotion to previous masters: in *The Life of Milarepa*, devotion to the heritage Milarepa inherits is both a comfort and a key

toward further instruction for him. It is also figured as a responsibility, however, as the apprentice eventually becomes the professor, embodying previous lessons and methods (as Milarepa's disciples, at the end of the work, "sing" just like him). Crazy wisdom relies on an already existing (institutional structure) to bounce itself off of, and in its skillful means, a guru can become a dictator of sorts, recreating at times the abusiveness of the system they are apart from (Marpa's abusiveness nearly drives Milarepa to suicide, after the torment he faces before embarking on the Dharma). This wayward practise can involve contact with ritually pollutive substances, but the goal of this transgression is to induce practitioners into a liminal state. Once a practitioner is broken, they can tie new fibres of meaning in the world (with an understanding that all constructs are inherently empty). At its end, it values the sacrifice of self, with the ultimate intent to free its readership from the cycles of suffering in samsara.

◊

b) The principle of "lineage" is highlighted by Hugh Hazelton's study above, where the author sees an intimate religious lineage drawn from F. the teacher to his students in I. and Edith. I here expand on this idea, positing the lineage as being one comparable to the Kagyu order above.

The principal "guru" of *Beautiful Losers* is F., who takes on a teaching role through the first half of the book. In Book 2 he reframes the occurrences of Book 1 in a "Long Letter" of his own hand, where he explains his pedagogy. I. refers to "my friend F." as his teacher on numerous occasions in Book 1, and F. refers to himself as an instructor in Book 2: "your teacher shows you how it happens" (Cohen, 2005: 198). I. misses, however, that his wife Edith offers a separate lineage to follow in the novel, which he rejects at every turn (pp. 15-6). Whereas Milarepa *chooses* to embark on his

journey with Marpa, I. is forced by F. to follow his lead. When Edith asks him to follow her, he ignores her or says no.

F., like Marpa above, seeks to put his students in a place of liminality. In *Beautiful Losers*, the liminal state comes about through insecurity, discomfort, and membership in a community of failure. F., as such a teacher, is constantly correcting and guilting I.—"Discipline yourself. Aren't you happy?" (p. 12) and repeatedly tries to prevent him from drawing logical conclusions about their time together. To I. he says:

> 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 [sic.]. Connections should be forbidden citizens under seventy. (p. 19)

Despite his barring I. from healthily ingesting the lessons of their relationship—or even making sense of his instruction—F. describes his hope for I. to "become" him in numerous ways. F. says, "but I dare to hope that you embody the best of my longings" (p. 164), and "do not follow. Go beyond my style. I am nothing but a rotten hero" (p. 174-5). F. admits that

> "[...] perhaps it is my own fault. I withheld certain vital items, an apparatus here, a fact there--but only because (yes, this is closer to truth) I dreamed you would be greater than me." (p.171)

F. reflects on his place as a transmitter: like each generation of Kagyu teachers who journey and perfect their practice in order to become the catalysts and inspiration for the next generation of students. Marpa spends his life travelling and learning, to become the teacher for Milarepa, who in turn learns, suffers, and dies to manifest a life-story to inspire others to take on the challenge of helping others to escape the cycles of samsaric suffering. F. reflects on the cusp of his own death that "I cannot

stop teaching. Have I taught you anything?" (p. 161). He also frames himself in his teaching role as a funnel for hoarded knowledge:

> Like many teachers, a lot of the stuff I gave away was simply a burden I couldn't carry any longer. I feel my store of garbage giving out. Soon I'll have nothing left to leave around but stories. Maybe I'll attain the plane of spreading gossip, and thus finish my prayers to the world. (p. 159)

I. inherits F.'s style and spirit, concluding that "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"[132] (p. 28). *Beautiful Losers* thus depicts its characters as belonging to a tradition. Like the Kagyu lineage above, it carries on past the bodily death of its instructor F., and continues in I. (because F. has linked I., Edith, and himself together through his manipulation of them all).[133] Without his students, however, there is no teacher, and F. feels himself completed only in his instruction of I, just as Marpa feels himself reaching spiritual fulfillment when meeting Milarepa.

Unlike Marpa, F.'s, instruction of I. is not solely academic but romantic as well. He describes the dehumanising torture he puts I. through as helping himself to feel more comfortable in the world[134]. His transgression corresponds not to Bataille's idea of a

---

[132] The irony here, of course, is that F.'s first quotations are plagiarised, stolen from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* as noted above. Cohen is implicitly placing F. in the same sort of teaching lineage, borrowing material from a previous generation. What else was F. stealing? (Or Cohen for that matter?)

[133] While using the same means of crazy wisdom to instruct, F., however, fails to uphold their value-system as depicted in the Kagyu lineage above: the *samaya* vow connotes an informed consent on the part of the pupil taking on the vow of obedience, and so far as I. and Edith go, neither ever takes a vow to F. in the novel: nobody consents to his domination of their lives.

[134] Not unlike the Marquis de Sade.

religious elevation, but rather in deepening the jaggy abyss of the profane's void. F. makes I. a human tool, a utility:

> Something in your eyes, old lover, described me as the man I wanted to be. Only you and Edith extended that generosity to me, perhaps only you. Your baffled cries as I tormented you, you were the good animal I wanted to be, or failing that, the good animal I wanted to exist. It was I who feared the rational mind, therefore I tried to make you a little mad. I was desperate to learn from your bewilderment. You were the wall which I, batlike, bounced my screams off of, so I might have direction in this long nocturnal flight. (p. 161)

F. even turns the typically sacred into a twisted turn of phrase, instructing I. to "fuck a saint" throughout the novel (pp. 98–99). I. often struggles to make sense of these lessons disseminated by F., even as he comes to an understanding that through them he is being prepared for a religious vocation of an irrational, erratic sort: crazy wisdom removes one from social convention so that they may in turn learn to change the society they come from:

> I wish I knew why he took so much interest in me. Now that I look back he seemed to be training me for something, and he was ready to use any damn method to keep me hysterical. Hysteria is my classroom, F. said once. [...] (p. 59).

F.'s crazy wisdom which perpetuates mental duress in the quote above—just like that of Marpa above in relation to the *Kagyu*—relies on the institutions around himself for context and survival. He is a politician, even wealthy enough to buy himself a factory. When I. tries to "rescue" Kateri Tekakwitha from the Jesuits (Cohen, 2005: 5) he also provides a quote from F. highlighting the irony of reaffirming a Catholic figure of veneration whose existence is contrary to regular Catholic religious life: "a strong man cannot but love the Church" (p. 5)—the unspoken undercurrent being perhaps

that "A strong (individual) who loves transgression cannot but love the institution that produces it."[135] Ashley Tauchert's skepticism for transgression (of Chapter IV) seem particularly apt here; especially the highlight that upending a social order often merely reinforces another one (based on the principles of the last).

F., however, begins to characterise himself as a failed teacher when he ends up imprisoned in an institution of power (a mental institution, after his attempts at setting off a bomb). He admits to having given false teachings, to "I do not understand the mystery, after all [...] I understand nothing. I'm picking lies out of the air. They're aiming lies at me. The truth should make me strong. I pray [...]"[136] (pp. 168-9). His art is artifice, and he appears a guru of gloss: in lieu of Himalayan wisdom, his lineage is composed of twentieth-century popular culture and comic book systems that he admits leaves him feeling incomplete. Indeed, he reveals that he did not receive instruction from a true lineage: "I hated my life, I hated my meddling, I hated my ambition [...] How I longed for my old teacher, Charles Axis" [137] (p. 177).

F.'s instruction exceeds dictating verbal commands (or, dictatorship), however. Per the *Yabyum* portion of "skillful means" outlined above, F. and I. repeatedly

---

[135] Worship of an ascetic, antisocial saint (Milarepa) whose story is central to the institution of a monastic religious order nonetheless affirms the institution itself. In this case, validating a Catholic Saint also affirms the Catholicism that provides her with an encounter of Christ.

[136] He also reaffirms his role as a performer, singing excerpts from The Platters' 1955 hit "The Great Pretender"[136] "I'm wearing my heart like a crown" (pp. 10-11) while excluding the preceding lyric, "I seem to be what I'm not you see."

[137] Charles Axis as a play on the "Charles Atlas" advertisements that glazed American comics until the late 1980s, promising anyone who sent money an instruction book for muscular betterment in the mail. In a wayward moment of the novel, I. and F. meet Charles Axis on the beach after F.'s having perfected his own body by the Axis method: a manipulative teacher just the same, Charles Axis needlessly grabs and intimidates F. and provides no lesson before leaving.

masturbate, fellate, or have sexual intercourse with each other over the course of the novel, and these moments are often comingled with F.'s moments of forced instruction. Stephen Scobie accurately characterises this entwining of sex and religion in his early study of 1977, without naming Vajrayana. A prominent example is when I. remembers "F. said: Connect nothing. He screamed that remark at me while overlooking my wet cock about twenty years ago" (p. 17). His abusiveness overlaps with this sexuality, as the following dialogue explores:

> —I think you have ruined my life, F. For years I've been telling secrets to an enemy.
>
> —You're wrong, my friend. I have loved you, we've both loved you, and you're very close to understanding this.
>
> —No, F., no. Maybe it's true, but it's been too hard, too much crazy education, and God knows for what. Every second day I've had to learn something, some lesson, some lousy parable, and what am I this morning, a Doctor of Shit.
>
> —That's it. That's love![138] (pp. 33-34)

---

[138] In full:

--I don't know whether to laugh or cry.
--Why are you crying?
--I think you have ruined my life, F. For years I've been telling secrets to an enemy.
--You're wrong, my friend. I have loved you, we've both loved you, and you're very close to understanding this.
--No, F., no. Maybe it's true, but it's been too hard, too much crazy education, and God knows for what. Every second day I've had to learn something, some lesson, some lousy parable, and what am I this morning, a Doctor of Shit.
--That's it. That's love!
--Please go away.
--Don't you want to hear what happened when I was a telephone?
--I do, but I don't want to beg. I have to beg you for every scrap of information about the world.
--But that's the only way you value it. When it falls on you from out of the trees you think it's rotten fruit.

Cohen characterises F.'s means as "crazy education," and these instructions plug-up I. with an overabundance of dichotomous elements, preventing him from making meaning of the lessons. His constipation as metaphor, I. sees himself on a toilet bowl, a circular return of samsara:

> 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 (Cohen, 2005: 41)

I. describes a state of nonduality so extreme he can't even defecate: he can't expel previous waste, and can't move forward to another, more awakened mindset. F.'s attempts at forcing I. to anticipate instruction at every moment puts his life on pause, especially when the teacher is no longer there. This is precisely Turner's liminal state at an extreme: F.'s instructions tear I. from his own body and his own mind, awaiting some form of instruction that never comes, from a teacher he both depends upon and loathes. It is perhaps a sign of I.'s stagnation and sense of being lost that he interprets even his wife's suicide as being an attempt at giving a teaching:

> She was going to teach me a lesson, my old wife. You and your fictional victims, she used to say. [...] But she taught no one a lesson, not the kind of lesson she meant. A delivery boy from the Bar-B-Q did the dirty work by misreading the numbers on a warm brown paper bag. (Cohen, 2005: 7)

--Tell me about Edith when you were telephones.
--No.
--Arrwk! Sob! Ahahah! Sob!
--Contain yourself. Discipline!
--You're killing me, you're killing me, you're killing me!
--Now you're ready. (p. 33-4)

There is violence too in *Beautiful Losers*. It is present especially in F.'s instructive methods, and his manipulation of I. and Edith. Its end, however, seems different from Marpa's abuse of Milarepa (to both cleanse him of his previous misdeeds and divorce his attachment to his self). F.'s violence seems to be perpetrated in part because he enjoys it, but also because he wants to live on through I.

When young, F. "perfected" I. of a wart by having other boys hold him down while he used a pen-knife to carve it out of him (p. 108). Before dying, F. incites a crowd to overturn its governing state, blows up a statue of Queen Victoria[139] and tries to arm the rebelling population, saying "now my fat confession. I loved the magic of guns" (p. 173-74). F. is a dictator and "conqueror" over the bodies and spirits of those around him, similar to Marpa who bullies both Milarepa and his own wife (though crying about his abuse in private). Despite I.'s descriptions of F.'s liberal sexuality—"Who am I to refuse the universe" (p. 6)—F. is also described as overtaking his sexual partners: describing one as "his latest conquest" (p. 6) and I. noting "his sexual exploitation of [...] four teen-age [girls]" (p. 5). This colonial persona[140] translates to F.'s method of instruction too, as I. notes that "F. never shut up. His voice has got into my ear like a trapped fly, incessantly buzzing. His style is colonizing me" and, when the two are alone in an abandoned factory "F. began to orate. He loved to talk against mechanical noise" (p. 44) . F is aware of his abuse, telling I.: "I confess I tortured you but only to draw your attention to this. I confess I betrayed you but only to tap your shoulder" (p. 167). Further, even his sexual relationship with I. (and Edith)

---

[139] The one before the Music Building of McGill University, specified by the Queen Victoria statue on "Sherbrooke street" in the novel.

[140] F.'s visions of social alterity consist of the same abuses as the French colonial system described in the novel: again, corresponding to Ashley Tauchert's point of how transgression often reproduces the order it eschews.

was a form of experimentation: "What is more sinister is the possibility that I may have contrived to immunize you against the ravages of ecstasy by regular inoculations of homeopathic doses of it." (p. 173). Like Marpa after beating Milarepa, F. attempts to contextualise this abuse as being a product of his "Great love" for I.: a great love parallel to Edith's love for her husband (p. 26). F. describes it as being beyond a "partnership [...] which can be dissolved by law or parting" (p. 26) as their relationship is something existentially more real. Like Milarepa in a middle state, telling his life-story in a celestial realm (out of compassion for existence and for each of his remaining disciples, and all those reading of his life too), F. continues to instruct from beyond bodily death, specifically for I., imploring him to transform, to become and exceed him, to "be what I want to be!" (Cohen, 2005: 241). While F.'s acts on I. are explained as the result of love, they do not serve to inspire I., but rather to extend F.'s reach beyond the grave; to transform I. into a receptacle for F.'s spirit.

Having psychological and physical violence done unto him, I. fantasises about doing it to others—in a full page of describing his desperation for any sense of power, including with "I always wanted to be loved by the Communist Party and the Mother Church. [...] I wanted to weep for the innocent people my bomb would have to maim. [...] I wanted to attend cocktail parties wearing a machine gun" (p. 10). This violence and desperations leads to the eventual combination of I. and F. in the final book of the novel.

I.'s resulting abusiveness manifests as passivity towards her Edith, who tries to act as an alternate teacher to F through the work (her position and "sainthood" will be expanded upon in section 7.2 below). Though she does not get a narrative voice in the novel, in one instant she waits for I. nude and painted in deep red. Her appearance here is a mimicry of a ḍākinī—usually depicted in stark, bright colours when they appear to saints on the path to awakening, and especially when they are depicted in

the *yabyum* posture. The passage where she greets I. in this mannr also provides a clipping of Cohen summarising Turner's stages of liminality:

> 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" (Cohen 2005:15-6)

When offered the chance to engage in ritual (to make meaningful transgression in a sacred interruption of time) I. rejects Edith's teaching. He also expresses confusion or disgust too at the ways in which she makes use of strange substances. He notes that "Sometimes [she] [...] filled her belly-button hole with olive oil," as well as an index of other items including semen, rice, urine, fingernails, a man's tears, spit and rain water (p. 28), or injects herself with holy water (pp. 112-6). The difference in instruction from F. is that Edith asks I. to participate with her lessons—she asks him to consent, and he denies her entirely.

An early passage summarises *Beautiful Losers*' conception of crazy wisdom. On the same night that Edith has killed herself, I discovers that F. and her were having an affair. I addresses F.:

> —But you were trying to protect me, weren't you? Oh, F., do you think I can learn to perceive the diamonds of good amongst all the shit?
>
> —It is all diamond.
>
> —Damn you, rotten wife-fucker, that answer is no comfort. You ruin everything with your saintly pretensions. This is a bad morning. My wife's in no shape to be buried. They're going to straighten her out in some stinking doll hospital. How am I going to feel in the elevator on my way to the library? Don't give me this all diamond shit, shove it up your occult hole. Help a fellow out. Don't fuck his wife for him.

> Thus the conversation ran into the morning we could not perceive. He kept to his diamond line. Catherine Tekakwitha, I wanted to believe him. We talked until we exhausted ourselves, and we pulled each other off, as we did when we were boys in what is now downtown but what was once the woods. (p. 9)

Meanings, like diamonds, are hidden beneath a veneer of feces and sexual acts between an abusive teacher and his student. F. notes that I. has survived his instruction by the time of his letter in Book 2: "you have been dipped in the air of our planet, you have been baptized with fire, shit, history, love, and loss. Memorize this. It explains the Golden Rule." (p. 159). I.'s conclusions, however, are not redemptive of F.'s purported intent. He remembers F. as a friend and teacher whose methods stretch too far, and are too selfish. In the following passage, he speaks directly of F. consuming illicit blood, indigestible shreds of a tree, and feces just like a tantric practitioner. He is at once jealous, disgusted, and confused, as F. never explained what the greater purpose of all this work was for. He never explained compassion, nor emptiness, he simply forced I. to follow his commands.

> F., you ruined my life with your experiments. You ate a raw sheep's heart, you ate bark, once you ate shit. How can I live in the world beside all your damn adventures? F. once said: There is nothing so depressing as the eccentricity of a contemporary. (p. 16)

I.'s analysis of the teachings forced on him by F. offers an apt conclusive summary of the method of crazy wisdom: "take one step to the side and it's all absurd" (p. 37). If looked at without the context of a a religious tradition that sets up the boundaries and lineage of transgression, or if skillful means are employed and forced upon someone who doesn't intentionally embark on the path, crazy wisdom is blunt and absurd violence. When looked at directly, however, its purpose constitutes the unsettling of a practitioner to help them see the inherent emptiness of existence by divorcing them of their attachment to selfhood. Such work must be embarked upon concensually, however, and the sacrifice made voluntarily, rather than by force. Through the lens of

The Life of Milarepa, I.'s instruction at the hands of F. seems a perverted continuation of the Vajrayana skillful means; one that fails because of its execution through F.'s selfishness and attachment to selfhood. F., as teacher, does not seek to end suffering; he perpetuates

7.2 Sainthood

The end of the transgressive crazy wisdom method above is to release those who practise it from samsara; cycles of suffering, and to inspire others to the same. While "hagiography" (the "life of a Saint") is a Christian term imposed on *namthar*, the genre is itself the revealing of stories about esteemed beings. A "saint" in the Vajrayana context is either a buddha or bodhisattva whose story—in its depiction of the realistic and relatable difficulties they face–helps its audience to overcome their own suffering and aspire to the same release as them. The ideal of a saint—as implied in *The Life of Milarepa*—is an individual who shuns the world for greater purpose. Below, I will be focusing on two points to analyse *The Life of Milarepa* and *Beautiful Losers*:

a) the manner by which a Vajrayana saint is purported to be capable of manipulating language and

b) the manner by which saints process suffering.

7.2.1 Language

a) The power to name, or otherwise manipulate language is a pivotal point in defining a "saint" in Vajrayana. Milarepa's name(s) are both inherited and earned: a product of both his lineage and his blood. He explains, "my clan is Khyungpo. My family line is Josey. I am Milarepa" (p. 15). His ancestor, who defeated a series of spirits, was given the name Khyungpo Josey, and later earns the name "Josey Mila" once he

defeats a demon: "Mila" being the demon's cry of defeat, for mercy (p. 16). Milarepa's name, then, is a reclamation of defeat, an ironic handling of loss[141]. Milarepa's father names his son even before he sees him, and calls him *Töpaga* "Delightful to Hear" (p. 19), foreshadowing his singing voice and poetry.

Later, during Milarepa's first encounter with his master, Marpa disguises himself as a field worker and pretends to not know where "Marpa" is to be found. When finally introducing himself by name, however, he demands that Milarepa bow in recognition of the power his title carries: "Prostrate yourself!" (p. 51). The implication is that the utterance of his own title demands recognition.

After his instruction with Marpa, Milarepa earns his full title, that Marpa notes was foretold to him by his own teacher Naropa: Marpa names Milarepa (p. 97) "Mila Dorgé Gyaltsen" as a means of closing their period of tutorship together. The figuration of Milarepa's names—both inherited and earned—play into his saintly status. He becomes a manipulator of language himself, perhaps the greatest exemplar of the Vajrayana tradition, through his sung poetry. In *The Life of Milarepa*, Milarepa sings poetry to tell the future (pp. 95-6) to convert his aunt to a proper way of living (pp. 162-4), bow to his lineage (pp. 178-9), and to instruct others on how to practise the Dharma (pp. 183-5) among the many instances in the work. Further, the entire physical book is figured as a result of his manipulation of language, both while he was alive on earth but still as a celestial example for anyone reading the work.

The Life of Milarepa demonstrates that a saint is one who both carries a meaningful name, as well carries the ability to name (or manipulate language). This

---

[141] The foreshadowing of a beautiful loser.

characterisation of a holy figure suggests that a saint can alter the language around them, to siphon it in a more meaningful way.

◊

b) *Beautiful Losers* likewise plays with names, titles and the ability to craft language: neither of the novel's principal narrators (who are, as I am coming to argue, its two failed saints) receive a name. They are known as simply F. and "I." (who never even receives a name in the text, as "I." is simply the address scholars have given him). Its two successful saints on the other hand are female figures—Kateri Tekakwitha who is also Edith. Both are named, though Catherine Tekakwitha is referred to by her given English name, rather than by her Mohawk one. I. is aware of this colonial manipulation, which renders him curious rather than indignant: "the different spellings of Tekakwiha, Tegahouita, Tegahkouita, Tegahkwita, Tekakouita, oh, I want to be fascinated by phenomena!" (p. 41). On the subject of names, F. says:

> Into the world of names with us. F. said: Of all the laws which bind us to the past, the names of things are the most severe. If what I sit in is my grandfather's chair, and what I look out of is my grandfather's window– then I'm deep in his world. Names preserve the dignity of Appearance [...] Science begins in coarse naming, a willingness to disregard the particular shape and destiny of each red life, and call them all Rose (p. 43).

F. is here highlighting the subjectivity of language, and how it can displace one from their circumstance and into a different perspective. He also labels it with a negative connotation, however, tying names to history as if he is already beyond the past.

Not *all* those who hold the power to manipulate language are saints, however. As I. recalls, "The French gave the Iroquois their name. Naming food is one thing, naming a people is another" (p. 6). Even Kateri Tekakwitha's name is forcibly imprinted on her:

> 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'abbé Marcoux, the old missionary at Caughnawaga. L'abbé Cuoq, the Sulpician Indianologist: Celle qui s'avance, qui meut quelquechose devant elle. Like someone who proceeds in shadows, her arms held before her, is the elaboration of P. Lecompte. Let us say that her name was some combination of these two notions: She who, advancing, arranges the shadows neatly. Perhaps Catherine Tekakwitha, I come to you in the same fashion. (p. 46-7)

The definition of Tekakwitha's name is here yet another colonial imposition; not only was she forcibly named, but she did not choose the meaning. It is attributed by both priest and narrator atop her own voice that isn't even fully recorded. When her voice *is* present, however, F. highlights that she crafts prayer: she makes art through devotional poetry like Milarepa, a poet whose craft professes a readiness to suffer. "Mon Jésus, il faut que je risque avec vous: je vous aime, mais je vous ai offensé; c'est pour satisfaire à votre justice que je suis ici; déchargez, mon Dieu, sur moi votre colère...." (Cohen, 2005: 211-2). In Kateri's final moments, F. (and I.) latch onto the fact that she is documented to have stumbled on the names of Jesus and Mary, but F. emphasises that her language in that moment was a truth above what her chroniclers simply saw was a mistake in pronouncing holy names (p. 223): she was re-ordering divine titles. The power to name is a form of skillful means here, as Kateri is figured as crafting an alternate language for communication with God.

Edith is also demonstrated as carrying the power to manipulate language, but her speech and strength is for the most part part non-verbal. In an early instant of *Beautiful Losers*, she is shown to communicate in kisses to her husband I.: "Her lips were not full but very soft. Her kisses were loose, somehow unspecific, as if her mouth couldn't choose where to stay" (pp. 24-5). F. remarks in jealousy that she seems to be loving I. in a unique way, though he doesn't see it that way, complaining instead about how indirect her mouth is. When F. suggests that I. simply ask Edith for oral sex if that is what he wants, I. responds in complete anger that he never could:

In contrast with Edith, I. cannot name, and *cannot even manipulate his language to communicate*. In another instant—the one looked to above, when Edith paints herself like a ḍākinī[142]--she asks I. to accompany her on a journey:

> 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? (pp. 14-16).

I. rejects her here, also possibly mistaking her request. Her invitation could have been to join her and renounce his indignation and selfhood to let her lead him in a view of existence outside his own, but he imagines it was all just for sex. Edith also invents a non-verbal, non-sexual liaison with F., the "Telephone Dance," when, in a moment alone at a movie theatre, they are shocked by the ringing of a pay-phone and insert their forefingers into each others' ears: without exchanging a single word, F. describes how they could hear the world humming, "Ordinary eternal machinery". (pp. 29-36). In a moment that seems torn from a religious parable, Edith further consoles a complete stranger on the beach who throws himself onto her stomach as if she were a religious icon, crying into her belly-button for five minutes (pp. 38-9).

From *The Life of Milarepa*, we come to see that saintliness involves a manipulation of language: a creativity that is in turn found in Kateri Tekakwitha, when she is allowed to speak, and Edith, in an alternate form of language than the bombast of F. and the scribbles of I.

---

[142] The reference is of course not lost on me, that an Indigenous character in the novel paints themselves in red. I believe Cohen might also be suggesting that Edith is here asking her husband I. to join her in her own perspective, as an outsider and marginalised person, by taking on the colour too. I. rejects the proposition, doesn't take the red paint, and leaves her to wash it off alone.

7.2.2 Suffering, Samsara, Meaning

a) A constant thread through *The Life of Milarepa* is the mental duress that both everyday, *samsaric* life puts on individuals, as well as the utter distress that occurs when trying to leave it too. Especially prominent are individuals' repeated threats of self-effacement. Milarepa's mother threatens suicide if Milarepa cannot learn how to kill his relatives (p. 29), and Milarepa is pushed to the brink of ending himself when under Marpa's wing. Multiple times through Marpa's abuses Milarepa describes that it would be better if he ended his earthly life rather than continue in the confusion of working under a teacher he can't decipher, whom he feels only means to harm him. This sentiment, however, also fuels Milerapa's pursuit of a higher cause, despite his sense of depression:

> I felt remorse for the evils I had committed through casting black magic and hailstorms. I thought about the dharma so intensely that during the day I forgot to eat. If I went out, I wanted to stay in. If I stayed in, I wanted to go out. At night I was so filled with world-weariness and renunciation that I was unable to sleep. (p. 46)

Bataille would see in Milarepa an ideal characterisation of one who sacrifices to re-establish spiritual value in their surroundings. Milarepa's reflections on how worldly pleasures are ultimately a cause for unease—because they reinforce one's attachment to the physical world—also relates to Bataille's conception of the physical world being conceptualised as a tool for for human us. (and his opposition to the value-systems in place that emphasise such immediate, selfish utility alone).

It is interesting the note that Heruka highlights the suffering brought upon Milarepa's remaining family and friend by this same ascetic practice. His sister Peta and former fiancé Dzesé are existentially harmed by the sight of him when he returns home: not just in his nakedness, but in his malnourished poverty. The motion towards awakening is not characterised as jubilant by Heruka, but rather as a process difficult

not only for the renunciant and their own pain, but the pain it inflicts on those that love them:

> Several days later, Dzesé came to see me, together with Peta, carrying meat, pungent butter, barley flour, and a good amount of excellent beer. I had gone to fetch water when I met them. When they saw me without clothes and completely naked, they both blushed and could not help crying. (Heruka, 2010: 144)

Beyond Milarepa's early suffering alongside his mother and sister, Milarepa faces much of his greatest turmoil at the hands of his actual teacher. Marpa abuses him physically and emotionally: it comes to the point where, after having tried to escape from Marpa's tutorship, Milarepa comes to the precipice of suicide, stopped only by an intervention by another of Marpa's disciples, who explains that killing oneself "carries the offense of killing a deity. Killing oneself is an even graver sin [...] there is no worse negative act than taking one's own life (p. 79). Ultimately, Milarepa succeeds in his tutelage, and explains (to his disciples, and his audience) that it was "because I had done terrible actions [...] that I experienced such suffering" (p. 79). Suffering "purifies" Milarepa of his previous murderous deeds, but the surrender of his body also seems a pathway to liberation. Following Milarepa's expression of willingness to die to attain awakening, and his commitment to suffering in his ascetic life apart from society, Milarepa specifically offers his "body, speech and mind" to his instructors—a self effacement in miniature:

> Until I have gained extraordinary experience and realization, I shall not descend from this mountain retreat to eat the crumbled remains of food from funeral offerings even if I die of starvation; I shall not descend for clothing even if I die of exposure; I shall not engage in frivolous entertainment or distractions even if I die of sadness; I shall not descend for a single dose of medicine even if I die of sickness. Without moving my body in the slightest way toward affairs of this life, I shall achieve buddhahood with my three gates undistracted. (p. 134)

The Life of Milarepa posits that the intentional offering up of one's body, in this manner, is a saintly act, because it is performed willingly and for a higher purpose (in departing from cyclical existence). When he meets his sister after returning to witness the devastation of their homeland, his sister tries to convince him to return to the world (and he in turn tries to convert her to the dharma). He says "you are embarrassed at my nakedness and my unconventional behavior [...]" (156) though he describes being at ease with his suffering, as he is working for awakening in a single lifetime. *The Life of Milarepa* personifies sainthood, through Milarepa, as being the readiness to sacrifice one's physical self, relationships and comforts for the pursuit of liberation from samsara. Further, sainthood is the capacity to embed meaning into that suffering.

The ideal of a saint in *The Life of Milarepa* is one caked in ascetic practice: as above, Milarepa starves himself, eats only bitter plants for most of his meditative activity, suffers of cold from lack of garments, and even accepts poison knowing it will painfully cut through his bodily existence. This reflects Georges Bataille's understanding of the sacred ideal in sacrifice—the flame which destroys the wood in its consumption of it; both destroying and affirming. Bataille's view of the world's objectification plays a part in Milarepa's formulation of a saintly life—sacrifice of one's desires (even unto a sacrifice of one's desire to live) is held up as paramount, and saintliness, as formulated here, is a rebellion against the idea that the end of existence is human enjoyment, and that the world's elements are for human use.

◊

b) A definition of "sainthood" is given by F., and expanded upon through *Beautiful Losers*, but I here argue that both F. and I. are failed saints in the book. Drawn from *The Life of Milarepa,* the book's two successful saints provide examples, rather than instruction, to others: these are Kateri Tekakwitha and Edith.

Every character in *Beautiful Losers* suffers immensely: through physical or psychological torture, sexually transmitted infections, emotional abuse or literal martyrdrom. Everyone is also an orphan of some variety (like Milarepa, who loses his father), without initial lineage, in need of determining their own tradition; I. and F. grow up in an orphanage, Edith is a member of a lost First Nation, and Kateri Tekakwitha loses her parents to plague. I. prays, in his loneliness:

> Are All Of Us Tormented With Your Glory.You Have Caused Us To Live On The Crust Of A Star. F. Suffered Horribly In His Last Days. Catherine Was Mangled Every Hour In Mysterious Machinery. Edith Cried In Pain [sic.] (p. 58)

Each character's interpretation of the pain, and how they make use of it alters their status as saints. Both I. and Kateri Tekakwitha are especially put through severe and involuntary suffering, but their digestion of it is a world apart. I. becomes stuck in its midst. He relives his sufferings and lost relationships over and over, studying them and reciting what he considers his mistakes. Tekakwitha, on the other hand, accepts and embraces her sufferings: she welcomes them. I. notes that "I am frightened and alone" (p. 66) while thinking back on his life—"[...] I've lost everything in this dust" (p. 24) and emphasising that

> I hate pain. The way I hate pain is most monumentally extraordinary, much more significant than the way you hate pain, but my body is so much more central, I am the Moscow of pain, you are the mere provincial weather station (p. 67).

Nearly a Buddhist joke on how to stay in samsara, I.'s attachment to the exclusivity of his suffering becomes a badge for him. I.'s existence in following F. has turned into a living torment, and his studies have become only a research for more evidence of suffering elsewhere:

> Why do I feel so lousy when I wake up every morning? Wondering if I'm going to be able to shit or not. Is my body going to work? [...] Is it surprising that I've tunneled through libraries after news about victims? (p. 6).

I. is forced into a liminal, "Constipated" state by F., but is prevented from moving beyond this status by his own circular studies: he can't even interpret the ongoings around himself, noting that "I've forgotten most of what I've read and, frankly, it never seemed important to me or to the world" (p. 4). He is an aspiring saint—as he explains to his figure of address, Kateri Tekakwitha: "do you see how I get carried away? How I want the world to be mystical and good?" (p. 6) but that desire oftentimes becomes a mere sexual one attached to the world: "on that cool Laurentian night which I work toward, when we are wrapped in our birch-bark rocket, joined in the ancient enduring way, flesh to spirit, and I ask you my old question [...]" (p. 8)[143]. Milarepa is a saint of total renunciation, and the religious example posited by *The Life of Milarepa* is one of complete sacrifice. In this regard, I. fails as a saint not because he fails to lose all he holds dear to him, but because he fails to do so voluntarily, and refuses to give them up even after they are gone. Continuing to study and pore over foregone histories merely binds him to them further. He provides his own definition of a saint when pondering on F.'s—a famous passage of the novel:

---

[143] I. here gets trapped in the "Erotic," rather than the "Mystical" of Georges Bataille's *Le coupable.*

> What did F. mean by advising me to go down on 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 that a saint dissolves the chaos even for himself, for there is something arrogant and warlike 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 a caress of the hill. His track is a 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. It is good to have among us such men, such balancing monsters of love. (p. 101)

I highlights the saintly balancing of elements—their walking a middle way. A saint also lives with the limits of the body—they are not (yet) in flight with angels. They also do not "dissolve the chaos": suggesting that the world does not end in their willingness to suffer, nor does suffering end due to their inspiration or practice. Despite this massive paragraph on defining sainthood, however, the fact that I. genders his language to include only male beings also proves that he doesn't know how to enact saintly ideals in his own life, as he excludes the gender of the very saint he addresses the whole length of the novel. His elucidation of this idea of sainthood also fails to encompass what he most honours in Tekakwitha (her taking charge of her body's destiny) and what he most abhors in F. (his "dangerous" control of everyone's lives). I.'s ideal "Saint" here is one he never even encounters. Michael Ondaatje's study (1970) highlights further that F. assumed his own sainthood while forcibly attempting to convert everyone around him into his vision of a saint as well: (Ondaatje, 1970: 54): the mistake, evidently, is that suffering must be an election. When it is imposed it prevents interpretation, and only binds one further to pain (rather than an escape from it).

I. suffers but cannot manipulate that pain into meaning. He explains that "I've been through a lot, I'll make a marvelous lecturer" (p. 37); a relayer of stories, but not an example. After his lengthy research to the ends of available scholarship, I. notes that he has lost any sense of self:

> [...] the evidence tricked me into mastery. I started making plans like a graduating class. I forgot who I was. I forgot that I never learned to play the harmonica. I forgot that I gave up the guitar because F chord made my fingers bleed." (p. 40)

Unlike Milarepa, he can't even sing, and he fails at finding meaning in his liminal position. The vulnerability leaves him in an ideal place to be absorbed by F.'s style. In "Book 3," this has occurred by way of the "old man" who is a surreal configuration of both I. and F.—marked by the same missing thumb as F., but alive and living in a treehouse as I. is at the end of Book 1. The old man is described as one who can't even situate himself in time, let alone pass along teachings to others: "His memory represented no incident, it was all one incident, and it flowed too fast" (p. 246). This amalgamation represents the two failed saints of *Beautiful Losers*: I. fails as a saint because he ultimately neglects to perform sacrifice and can thus never be an example. F. fails to assume sacredness because in all of his practice he seeks only to "fuck a saint" rather than become one. Per Bataille's journal observations noted in *Le coupable* (1944), F. is entrapped in the flesh, a snake chasing its tail in erotic obsession and missing the mystical. "Fuck a saint" (first noted on page 12) becomes an aphorism he forces on I. throughout the book. F., despite his pretensions, is rendered a failed saint; in his last spoken moments—in "Book 2" of the novel—he specifically admits to his never having sacrificed enough:

> --But I think I could be happy here. I think I could acquire the desolation I coveted so fiercely in my disciple.
>
> --That's just it, F. Too easy.

> --I want to stay, Mary.
>
> --I'm afraid that's impossible, F.
>
> --But I'm right on the edge, Mary. I'm almost broken, I've almost lost everything, I almost have humility! (p. 239)

Beautiful Losers does characterise the life of two successful saints: Tekakwitha and Edith. I. refers to Catherine "Kateri" Tekakwitha as such despite her not yet being officially canonised by the Roman Catholic Church (either within the timeline of the novel or in the 1966 of its composition).

Beautiful Losers emphasises Kateri's true existence in the world by repeating the calendar dates linked to her life and history: "Catherine Tekakwitha was a Mohawk, born 1656. Twenty-one years of her life she spent among the Moahawks, on the banks of the Mohawk River, a veritable Mohawk lady" (p. 14). It also highlights her heritage as an Iroquois, the sole tribe (by I.'s count) to have fought off attempts at conversion by the French, "Eaten the hearts of its priests: Here comes Catherine Tekakwitha ten years later, lily out of the soil watered by the Gardener with the blood of martyrs" (p. 16). Tekakwitha, like I. and F., comes of a broken family—her parents and brother dead in plague, and her saintliness marked in her body's scarring (like Milarepa's bodily monstrousness, her physical deformity is a sign for spiritual attaintment). I speaks: "Of this doomed, intermarried family, only Catherine Tekakwitha survived, the price of admission gouged in her face. Catherine Tekakwitha is not pretty! Now I want to run from my books and dreams" (p. 24). This is juxtaposed with the "better-looking" I. (p. 3) and Herculean form of F., both "beautiful" in body but not ultimately saintly, and both incapable of finding meaning in their pain. Kateri Tekakwitha, on the other hand, distills a jewel of understanding in her suffering at first inflicted on her by a cruel outside world:

> Catherine Tekakwitha smiled cheerfully. It wasn't her body they were kicking around, not her belly the old ladies jumped on in the moccasins she had embroidered. She looked up through the smoke hole while they tormented her. (p. 56)

Though eventually, the suffering that characterises her life becomes suffering she chooses. From an exchange with a Jesuit after she hurts herself:

> --I stubbed my toe.
>
> --Let me look.
>
> --No. Let it go on hurting.
>
> --What a lovely thing to say, child. (p. 91)

It is perhaps redundant (ascetic practices around the world find a similarity in their limitation of bodily consumption) but the Catholic ascetic ideal depicted in Tekakwitha's personal practice is heavily similar to the practice of Milarepa. Just as when Milarepa is seen by his sister looking like a ghost in his frailty, and lack of any food energy (his body described as being thin and scaly, much like we might understand someone suffering famine or malnourishment today) is parallel to Tekakwitha's: "Catherine Tekakwitha got an iron harness and she stumbled through her duties. Like St. Thérèse she could say, 'Ou souffrir, ou mourir' " (p. 206). Early on, Tekakwitha concludes for herself that "She lived in a woman's body but it did not belong to her! It was not hers to offer!" (p. 54), and in her last year, "Catherine Tekakwitha became seriously sick. Marie-Thérèse told the priests the details of their excess." (p. 213). Following this, however, she wraps herself in a thorny blanket to destroy her physical form.

Suffering is further held up as a saintly standard from Kateri to Edith, who also chooses to sacrifice her bodily self in suicide. F. invites I. to reflect: "I knew one

woman who surrounded herself with a very different noise, maybe it was music, maybe it was silence. I am speaking, of course, about our Edith" (p. 156), and "Do you remember Edith ever eating? Do you remember those plastic bags she wore inside her blouse? Do you remember that birthday when she leaned over to blow out the candles and ruined the cake with vomit?" [144] (p. 213). Edith is a successful saint in this context, even confirming her celestial qualities when asked by F. of her true identity. In Greek characters, she tells him "Ισις εγω ειμι παντα γεγονος και ον και εσομενον και το εμον πεπλον ουδεισ των θνητων απεκαλυψεν"[145] (p. 195); "Isis is always a thing and an object, and the moon of the dead has (been) revealed,"[146] likening herself to the Egyptian goddess of revival and the natural world[147]. Just as I. becomes F. in the final chapter, in many instances Edith becomes Tekakwitha. The passage below highlights I.'s comingling of the two:

> Edith, Edith, let some things happen in heaven, don't make me tell you! [...] I didn't think this would force itself into my preparations. It is very hard to court you, Catherine Tekakwitha, with your pock-marked face and your insatiable curiosity. (pp. 25-6)

---

[144] The plastic bags a means of inducing excess sweating in the body, and the vomit of one who doesn't take in sustenance; in short, an ascetic self-harm like Tekakwitha's.

[145] "Isis ego eimi panta gegonos kai on kai esomenon kai to emon peplon oudeis ton thniton apekalypsen," thanks to Google translate and my very basic knowledge of the ancient Greek alphabet.

[146]The epigraph to the first English translation of the hermetic foundational text *Virgin of the World* by Hermes Merucurius Trismegistus, translated by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland in 1885. Be it noted, this was incredibly hard to trace, and I don't believe it's yet been addressed in Cohen scholarship.

[147] Who also invites a reflection on death by the Greek "Apekalyps(e)n" that is both a connotation for uncovering as well as eschatology. While I. reflects on the linguistic qualities of "Apocalypse" earlier in the novel (pp. 104-5), my discovery of this was haphazard.

Or again, in the midst of one of his sexual fantasies, where he sees "Catherine Tekakwitha in the shadows of the long house. Edith crouching in the stuffy room, covered with grease" (p. 46). Finally, both Edith and Tekakwitha die at twenty four years of age: Edith by sitting under an elevator (an ironic reiteration of crazy wisdom of sorts; as what others use to rise in, she uses to crush herself with) while Tekakwitha uses her skills in needlework to sew herself a thorn blanket that destroys her body in the night. Unlike F., these saints don't teach: they provide examples. Further, the violence they inflict is on themselves, rather than on the rest of the world.

Beautiful Losers can thus be seen to depict two successful and exemplary saints when read through *The Life of Milarepa.* Milarepa's sacrifice of body and comfort until the extinction of desire is paralleled by Kateri Tekakwitha and Edith. Bataille's initiation to sacrifice is echoed again, in this renewal of meaning

CONCLUSION

Leonard Cohen began writing in the wake of the Beat Generation's literary explorations and the resulting transformation of North American popular culture. He thus wrote *Beautiful Losers* in the same timeframe as the 1960s' psychedelic, spiritual and Orientalising explorations of Buddhism were taking place in North America: the novel is a holographic result of these mixing influences.

The studies of Michael Ondaatje (1970), Stephen Scobie (1977) and Hugh Hazelton (2016) each accurately open discussion of *Beautiful Losers'* formulation of lineages, F. as teacher, and the critical eye necessary toward his instruction. It was encouraging to see my instincts echoed in their work.

Beautiful Losers nonetheless remains a difficult novel (confirmed after the lengthy, considerably varied and at times contradicting previous interpretations of this work in my literature review of Chapter III): its motions are sickening, arousing, confusing, and occasionally even inspiring. I wish I could have inquired of Cohen's specific influences while composing it before his passing (especially if his personal readings included *The Life of Milarepa*), ask Chögyam Trungpa if he had ever read the work or drawn inspiration (or laughter) from *Beautiful Losers* and F., or witnessed a conversation between Cohen, Trungpa and Georges Bataille on erotic excess and its limits.

In providing a method to wade through the inundation that is *Beautiful Losers,* I believe that the contextualisation provided by Tsangnyön Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa* provides an anchor amidst the novel's thick waters. The Vajrayana

Buddhism characterised in this work provides a new framework by which to process the novel's waves. Theoretical support is lended by aspects from Mircea Eliade, as there are direct echoes of Vajrayana in the novel (potentially attributable to the fact that Cohen was *reading* of Vajrayana Buddhism while writing the novel). Georges Bataille conceives of a Vajrayana-like, transgressive vision of religion that emphasises sacrifice, and helps provide a definition of religious practise for the novel (leading to its characterisation of sainthood). Victor Turner's elucidation of liminality contextualises the "Betwixt and between" that Milarepa enters and successfully leaves to form a community. I. also enters a state of liminality, from which he doesn't survive. Bataille and Turner elucidate this transition into a "sacred" realm as being the process of ritual. While a small stretch, when a reader enters the literary worlds of these works, they too are participating in a liminal ritual encounter. My walk between them has taught me of interpretation, and I carry it back here.

As my scribbling fingers near a rest I here provide abridged iterations of my research questions of section 1.7:

> *-In what ways can the Kagyu tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism, depicted in* The Life of Milarepa *inform a reading of* Beautiful Losers?
>
> *-How might the depiction of crazy wisdom in* The Life of Milarepa *help to contextualise F.'s behaviour in* Beautiful Losers? *In what ways can the depiction of saints in* The Life of Milarepa *help form an understanding of the saints of* Beautiful Losers*?*

And additionally, a general question:

> *-Does reading religion within a novel thus make it a religious work? If elements of a religious tradition such as Tibetan Buddhism are used to analyse a novel, can that render* Beautiful Losers *a Buddhist book, or instructional text?*

Vajrayana provides the framework of a religious tradition by which to understand the novel's echoes. Reading *Beautiful Losers* through the lens of Vajrayana helps contextualise F.'s transgressive and teacherly motions as being embedded in the thought-system of crazy wisdom (the Tibetan *drubnyon*), as elucidated by Chögyam Trungpa. Contextualisation of F.'s method doesn't justify his abusiveness, but does provide a means to highlight the religious heritage he can be analysed against—and whose ideals of sacrifice and selflessness he also fails to embody. When Milarepa is thrown into a liminal state by his teacher Marpa's abusiveness, he makes meaning of the situation to form a new community. When F. initiates his friend and disciple I. into a state of liminality, F. only succeeds in destroying him completely.

The saintliness of *Beautiful Losers* is informed by a specific worldview valourising a mastery of language (in crafting poetry) and a readiness to sacrifice one's body; Tsangnyön Heruka's *The Life of Milarepa* provides a definitive characterisation of saints in the context of medieval Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, with Milarepa as the exemplar. Milarepa is a successful poet who interprets his previous sufferings in the world as meaningful, directed towards a spiritual end. While *The Life of Milarepa*'s iteration of sainthood does not apply to the self-defined saint of *Beautiful Losers* (F. and I. are both failed saints by Milarepa's standard) the example does help uncover the novel's successful saints in Kateri Tekakwitha and Edith. They mirror Milarepa, whose poetry serves as a continual inspiration toward spiritual practise and whose self-sacrifice is an affirmation of existence stretching beyond the simple cyclicality of the here and now.

Lastly, the question of sacredness: as to whether this makes *Beautiful Losers* a religious—or Buddhist—book? In response, *The Life of Milarepa* holds an important place in the Tibetan literary canon: a textual body, drawn from centuries of iterations of itself, that helped, and helps formulate the contours of its culture and traditions particularly in the midst of immense social upheaval and change (Quintman 2014:

121). Its characterisations of crazy wisdom and the ideals of sainthood help inform the turns taken in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. Cohen's 1966 novel is likewise *namthar*-like in scope—its two principal narrators eventually combine, are reborn in the book's final section, and usher in an apocalypse. The saints for emulation, however, are not I. nor F. but those that they make tools out of in their stories: those who are abused by their language atop them: Edith and Catherine Tekakwitha. The "experimental" textual aspects of *Beautiful Losers* are found in this medieval text, and in sum, Cohen might be understood to have crafted a Canadian centennial *namthar* of sorts.

The borders of sacred material are often considered closed. *The Life of Milarepa* is divorced from the Canadian Jewish artist writing on an English typewriter under a Greek island sun by centuries and mountains. Milarepa's medieval story, however, is recently translated and revealed for a new context, breathing new air. And this elderly text nonetheless helps open the rusty latches of what is often considered too jaggy a novel to nudge. *Beautiful Losers* does not offer a clear treatise for religious instruction, but it demands a reflection from its audience on their value system, their hopes, and who they they believe they should take instructions from; who they are willing to listen to, follow, and to what end.

◊◊◊

I close this now at summer's crown. There are dark grapes bleeding on the late vines beside our chipped and ancient front door. New students are nesting in the city, in bright coloured shirts and dresses, amongst each other, and wander in and out of the garden café across the street. Saint Urbain is a drainpipe of moving trucks and violent bicycles. I walk in a neighbourhood that knows different languages than it did when my grandfather delivered fruits along the Main, sold herring to Russian sailors who walked North from the port until they smelt fish. Québec will know another

provincial election in just a month. I pass a small house off Marie-Anne, nearly unremarkable now. "Salut, old friend!" There's a photograph of Ray Charles fixed now in the centre of town. And yourself, newly nostalgic, far too serious to be your teacher.

ANNEX A

SITUATING THE TRANSLATION

Yves Chevrel notes that the following are essential questions to respond to when working with a text in translation (Chevrel, 2009: 32). The following are thus responses regarding Andrew Quintman's translation of *The Life of Milarepa* (2010) used for this analysis.

a) *Which version of the object is being used?*

Here, *The Life of Milarepa* is a text understood to be a *version* of Milarepa, the Tibetan saint's biography, which is one amongst others (such as the version in *The Buddhist Bible* above). This particular iteration, however, is understood to carry a greater legitimacy than others because its author—Tsangnyön Heruka—is of the same transgressive Kagyu lineage as Milarepa. Milarepa is in the lineage of his teacher Marpa (whom Heruka also wrote a hagiography of) who learned from the great teacher Naropa, who in turn learned from the poet Tilopa (according to Heruka's telling of Milarepa's lifestory). The specific version I am using is the most recent English language translation, and the most recent non-Tibetan translation of the book available.

b) *Is there a confrontation between the translation and the original version?*

It is impossible for me to answer precisely, as I cannot currently read Tibetan. Chevrel offers some guidance, noting that a translation can tumble under two types: either "Left quiet" by a translator or converted to a new context. The litmus test in situating a given translation, he explains, is to see if elements of a translation remain strange to the new audience (Chevrel, 2009: 50-51). If the original, non-normative signatures of its original remain, then the text has been "Left quiet." Otherwise, if it has adopted elements of the modernity it finds itself translated within, the translation has been "adapted" to its new circumstance. In the case of Quintman's translation of Heruka's text, the specifically Buddhist symbols and Tibetan geography thus described are foreign to the general, English-speaking, Western reader; even in such an effective translation, many elements, turns of phrase and symbols remain entirely alien (save perhaps for those who are Buddhist, Tibetan, or have visited the Himalayas or have previously read its literature). It has thus been "Left quiet."

c) *Where in time is the work situated?*

The work takes place around the 11th century amid the geography of Tibet and himalayas. This is noteworthy, as the work is composed in the middle ages (and thus describing a period that is hundreds of years in the past). Already then, it has passed a stage of translation in its original telling: it is not news, but history.

d) *Lastly, what knowledge is assumed for readers?*

The whole of the text assumes an audience's familiarity with its religious (Buddhist), geographic (Himalayan), and literary context (of Tibetan *namthar* texts; used to inspire their audiences).

REFERENCES

Upaniṣads. (2008). (P. Olivelle, Trans.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Abrams, M.H. and Harpham, G.G. (2012). *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Tenth Edition*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Aitken, R. (1994). Foreword. *A Buddhist Bible* (pp. vii – xxii). 1932. Ed. Goddard, D. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Alapi, Z. (2010). Introduction (Lecture). *The Beat Generation Course*. Montreal, QC: Marianopolis College.

Alter, R. and F. Kermode (Ed.) (1987). *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Boston, MA: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press.

Archibald-Barber, J. R. (2012). The Elegaic Loss of the English-Canadian Self and the End of the Romantic Identification with the Aboriginal Other in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. In M. Mannani (Ed.), *Selves and Subjectivities: Reflections on Canadian Arts and Culture*. Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press.

Barbour, D. (1976). Down with History: Some Notes Towards an Understanding of *Beautiful Loseres*. In M. Gnarowski (Ed.), *Leonard Cohen—The Artist & His Critics* (pp. 136-149). Toronto, ON: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited.

Bataille, G. (1993). *L'Histoire de l'œil*. France: Gallimard.

Bataille, G. (1944). *Le coupable*. France: Gallimard.

Bataille, G. (1986). *Théorie de la religion* (T. Klossowski Ed.). France: Gallimard.

Batmanglij, R. and Koenig, E. (2010). I Think Ur a Contra. On *Contra*. New York, NY: XL Recordings.

Bell, S. (1998). "Crazy Wisdom," Charismas, and the Transmission of Buddhism in the United States. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, 2*(1), 55-75. University of California Press.

Beyer, S. (2013). *Magic & Ritual in Tibet—The Cult of Tara*. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd. .

Bilefsky, D. (March 6, 2018). Montreal's Not-So-Secret Chord: Is Leonard Cohen the New Secular Saint of Montreal? *The New York Times,* p. C1.

Bloch, M. (1992). *Prey into Hunter*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Bloom, M. (Apr. 12, 2018). The Darker Side of Leonard Cohen: How the Myth of the Male Genius Shields Our Cultural Heroes from Scrutiny. *The Walrus.* https://thewalrus.ca/the-darker-side-of-leonard-cohen/

Bök, Christian and Margaret Atwood. "Introduction." *Ground Works: Avant-Garde for Thee*. Anthology. Ed. Christian Bök, Margaret Atwood. Toronto, ON: Anansi. 2002. Print.

Boucher, David. *Dylan and Cohen: Poets of Rock and Roll.* 2004. UK: Bloomsbury Publisching PLC. 2004. Print.

Burton, B. O. (2006). *The Cry: Silence & Sound in Six Contemporary Canadian Works of Fiction*. University of Calgary. Ph.D Dissertation, Department of English. Calgary, AB.

Charters, A. (1992). Variations on a Generation: Introduction. In A. Charters (Ed.), *The Portable Beat Reader* (pp. xv-xxxvi). New York, NY: Viking Penguin.

Cohen, L. (2006). *Let Us Compare Mythologies*. 1956. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart.

Cohen, L. (2005). *Beautiful Losers.* 1966. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart. Print.

Coyle, B. (2014). Heart's Companion: Listening to Leonard Cohen. *Image Journal..* https://imagejournal.org/article/hearts-companion/

Cumming, P. (2002). *Some 'Male' From Canada 'Post'—Heterosexual Masculinities in Contemporary Canadian Writing*. University of Western Ontario. Ph.D Dissertation. London, ON.

Davey, F. (2000). Beautiful Losers: Leonard Cohen's Postcolonial Novel. In S. Scobie (Ed.), *Intricate Preparations: Writing Leonard Cohen* (pp. 12-23). Toronto, ON: ECW Press.

Diamond, A. (1994). Losers, Sore and Beautiful. In M. Fournier. and K. Norris (Ed.), *Take This Waltz* (pp. 42-43). Ste. Anne de Bellevue, QC: The Muses' Company / La Compagnie des Muses.

Dickinson, P and Cavell R. (2006). Sex and Religion. In P. Dickinson. and R. Cavell (Ed.), *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook.* Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.

Dowman, K. B. (1985). Introduction *Masters of Mahamudra—The Legends of the Eighty-Four Mahasiddas* (pp. 1-29). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Dragland, S. (1994). F. ing Through *Beautiful Losers*. In M. Fournier. and K. Norris (Ed.), *Take This Waltz* (pp. 48-69). Ste. Anne de Bellevue: The Muses' Company / La Compagnie des Muses.

Dufy, D. (1976). Beautiful Beginners. In M. Gnarowski (Ed.), *Leonard Cohen: The Artist & His Critics.* Toronto, ON: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited.

Dydyk, L. (1981). *Faces of Revolution in the English Québec Novel: A Study of Hugh Maclennan's Return of the Sphinx, Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers, and Scott Symons' Place D'Armes*. McGill University. Ph.D Dissertation, Department of English. Montreal, QC.

Eliade, M. (1949). *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*. Paris, France: Gallimard.

Eliade, M. (1952). *Images et symboles. Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux.* France: Gallimard.

Eliade, M. (1965). *Le sacré et le profane*. France: Éditions Gallimard.

Eliade, M. (1976). *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Farquhar, J. N. (1967). *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass and Oxford University Press.

Ferres, J. H. (1980). The Indian Maiden in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and John Barth's *The Sot Weed Factor. Journal of American Culture*.

Fields, R. (1992). *How the Swans Came to the Lake*. Boston, Mass.: Shambhala Publications.

Fischer-Schreiber, I., F.-K. Erhhard and M.S. Diener. (1991). *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen.* (M. H. Kohn., Trans.). Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Fogelin, L. (2015). *An Archaeological History of Indian Buddhism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Frye, N. (1990). *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. Markham, ON: Penguin Books.

Frye, N. (1992). *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of "The Bible and Literature"*: Mariner Books.

Fulford, R. (April 26, 1966). A Hot Market for Manuscripts. *Toronto Daily Star*.

Gélinas-Faucher, C. (2007). *Beautiful Games: Alienation, Autonomy and Authenticity in Leonard Cohen's Fiction*. Concordia University. Master's Dissertation, Department of English. Montreal, QC.

Gélinas-Faucher, C. (2015). *The Mountain, The Main, and the Monuments: Representations of Montreal in the Anglo-Quebec Novel 1945-2014*. McGill University. Ph.D Thesis. Montreal, QC.

Gellner, D. N. (1992). *Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gimian, C. R. (2004). Introduction to Volume 7. In C. R. Gimian (Ed.), *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa* (Vol. 7, pp. xv—lxxix). Boston: Shambhala.

Ginsberg, A. (1994). Leonard Cohen. In M. F. and K. Norris (Ed.), *Take this Waltz: A Celebration of Leonard Cohen*. Ste. Anne de Bellevue, QC: The Muses' Company.

Ginsberg, A. and J. Kerouac (2011). *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters* (Ed. B. Morgan and D. Stanford). New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Glazer, A. (2012). Leonard and the Tosher Rebbe. On Exile as Redemption in Canadian Jewish Mysticism. *Canadian Jewish Studies, 20*, 149-190.

Glazer, A. (2017). *Tangle of Matter & Ghost: Leonard Cohen's Post-Secular Songbook of Mysticism(s) Jewish & Beyond.* Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press.

Goldie, T. (2003). Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.

Greenstein, M. (1989). *Third Solitudes—Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature*. Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Hazelton, H. (2016). Tantra et transcendence dans les *Perdants Magnifiques* de Leonard Cohen. In C. Ringuet. and G. Rabinovitch (Ed.), *Les révolutions de Leonard Cohen*. Québec, QC: Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Heinämäki, E. (2009). Politics of the Sacred: Eliade, Bataille and the Fascination of Fascism. *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory, 10*(2), 59-80.

Heruka, T. (2010). *The Life of Milarepa* (A. Quintman, Trans.). New York NY: Penguin Books.

Heruka, T. N. (1995). *The Life of Marpa the Translator* (N. T. Committee, Trans.). Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications Inc. .

Hough, J. (1950). Thus Have I Heard. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 13*(2), 416-426.

Hutcheon, L. (1974). Beautiful Losers: All the Polarities. *Canadian Literature*(59), 42-56.

Jantzen, D. H. (1971). *The Poetry of Leonard Cohen: "His Perfect Body"*. York University. Master's Dissertation, Faculty of Graduate Studies. York, ON.

Kamenetz, R. (1994) *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India*. New York, NY: HarperOne.

Kapicas, J. (August 25 1973). The Trials of Leonard Cohen. *The Montreal Gazette,* p. 37. Accessed via Google news. https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=TRQyAAAAIBAJ&sjid=3qEFAAAAIBAJ&pg=1969%2C2559449

Kanary, R. (1974). *Leonard Cohen: Sexuality and the Anal Vision in Beautiful Losers.* University of Ottawa. Ph.D Dissertation. Ottawa, ON.

Kerouac, J. and Ginsberg A. (2011). *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Lama, M. N. and M. T. Lama. (2014). *Ritual Objects & Deities: An Iconography on Buddhism and Hinduism*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Vajra Books.

Lamont-Stewart, L. (2002). Dennis Lee. In W. H. New (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (pp. 645-647). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. Accessed via Google Books. https://tinyurl.com/z8m8bcx

Lee, D. (1977). *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology*. Toronto, ON: House of Anansi.

Lopez Jr., D.S. (1998). *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*: Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Markotic, N. (1993). The Telephone Dance & Mechanical Ecstasy in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. In E. F. Dyck (Ed.), *Canadian Poetry: The Proceedings of the Leonard Cohen Conference*. London, ON: University of Western Ontario Press.

Morgan, B. (2010). *The Typewriter is Holy—The Complete, Uncensored History of the Beat Generation*. New York: Free Press.

Morley, P. A. (1972). The Immoral Moralists: Hugh Maclennan and Leonard Cohen. Toronto, ON: Irwin Clarke.

Nadel, Ira B. (1997). *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen*. 1996. Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada.

Naves, E. K. (1993). Leonard Cohen: Erotic Mystic, Apocalyptic Troubadour *The Writers of Montreal* (pp. 142—146). Montréal, QC: Véhicule Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1974). *The Gay Science* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage Books (Random House).

Nonnekes, P. (1993). Beyond Mummy and the Machinery: Leonard Cohen's Vision of Male Desire in *Beautiful Losers*. In E. F. Dyck (Ed.), *Canadian Poetry: The Proceedings of the Leonard Cohen Conference*. London, ON: University of Western Ontario Press.

Northey, M. (1976). *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Ondaatje, M. (1970). *Leonard Cohen* (Vol. 5). Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart.

Padoux, A. (2000). The Tantric Guru. In D. G. White (Ed.), *Tantra in Practice* (pp. 41-51). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Paillé, P. (2006). Qui suis-je pour interpréter ? *La méthodologie qualitative. Postures de recherche et travail de terrain* (pp. p. 99-123). Paris, France: Armand Colin.

Paillé, P. and Mucchielli, A (2012). *L'analyse qualitative en sciences humaines et sociales, 3e édition.* France: Armand Collin.

Powers, J. (2007). *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Second ed.). Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion.

Purdham, M. (2005). *Encyclopedic Imagination in the Canadian Artist Figure.* McGill University. Master's Dissertation, Department of English. Montreal, QC.

Quayle, T. (2016). *Smudging the Air: The Lyrics of Leonard Cohen.* United Kingdom: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Quintman, A. (2010). Translator's Introduction. *The Life of Milarepa* (pp. xix-xxxvi). New York, NY: Penguin.

Quintman, A. (2014). *The Yogin & the Madman: Reading the Biographical Corpus of Tibet's Great Saint Milarepa.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Rae, I. (2008). Leonard Cohen: (Un)framing Narrative *From Cohen to Carson: The Poet's Novel in Canada* (pp. 41-90). Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Ram, B. (1955). The Great Pretender. *The Great Pretender Single.* Performed by The Platters. 45 rpm. Mercury Records.

Rao, P. (2015). The Role of Religion on Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices in India. In A. Malik and V. Pereira (Ed.), *Investigating Cultural Aspects in Indian Organizations* (pp. 11-30). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Ravvin, N. (1993). Writing Around the Holocaust: Uncovering the Ethical Centre of *Beautiful Losers.* In E. F. Dyck (Ed.), *Canadian Poetry: The Proceedings of the Leonard Cohen Conference.* London, ON: University of Western Ontario Press.

Ray, R. A. (2001). *Secret of the Vajra World—The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Ray, R. A. (2005). Mahāsiddhas. In L. Jones (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Vol. 9, pp. 5603-5606). Detroit: Macmillan Reference.

Rayner, B. (Nov. 12, 2016). Leonard Cohen didn't always get glowing reviews. *The Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/music/2016/11/12/leonard-cohen-didnt-always-get-glowing-reviews.html

Rempel, L. (2010). *Postmodernism's Defeat: Beautiful Losers and Prochain Épisode as Postcolonial Works*. Université de Sherbrooke. Master's Dissertation. Sherbrooke, QC.

Robinson, J. B. (1979). Introduction *Buddha's Lions—The Lives of the Eighty-Four Siddhas* (pp. 2—19). Berkeley, CA: Dharma Publishing.

Rogers, M. (1993). Classic Returns: *Beautiful Losers* by Leonard Cohen. *Library Journal, 118*(17), 102.

Samdup, D. P. W. (2008). A Brief Biography of Kazi Dawa Samdup (1868-1922). *Bulletin of Tibetology*(44), 155-158.

Sampas, J. (1999). Foreword. *Some of the Dharma*. 1997. viii. Kerouac, J. New York, NY: Penguin.

Schofeld, A. (2016). Beautiful Losers: Fifty Years Later, Leonard Loses His Erection. *CNQ: Canadian Notes and Queries, 97*(The Fall Issue, September 2016). http://notesandqueries.ca/essays/beautiful-losers-fifty-years-later-leonard-loses-erection-anakana-schofield/

Shattuck, K. (2001). Kerouac's 'Road' Scroll is Going to Auction. *The New York Times* (March 22, 2001). https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/22/books/kerouac-s-road-scroll-is-going-to-auction.html>

Siemerling, W. (1994). Hailed by Koan: Leonard Cohen and the Aesthetics of Loss *Discoveries of the Other: Alterity in the Work of Leonard Cohen, Hubert Aquin, Michael Ondaatje and Nicole Brossard*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Simmons, S. (2012). *I'm Your Man—The Life of Leonard Cohen*. London: Vintage Books.

Sooklal, A. (1990). The Guru-Shishya Parampara : A Paradigm of Religio-Cultural Continuity. *Journal for the Study of Religion.* (pp. 15-30)

Stacey, R. D. (2014). Mad Translation in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and Douglas Glover's *Elle*. *ESC: English Studies in Canada, 40*, 173-197.

Stagg, C. (2017). Translator's Introduction *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa: A New Translation.* (pp. xvii-xlv). Boulder, CO: Shambhala.

Stanford, D. (1997) About the Manuscript. *Some of the Dharma*. 1997. ix – xii. Kerouac, J. New York, NY: Penguin,

Tauchert, A. (2008). *Against Transgression*. Oxford, OX: Wiley-Blackwell.

Thurman, R. A. F. (1997). *Essential Tibetan Buddhism*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books.

Trismegistus, H. M. (1885). *Virgin of the World* (A. Kingsford. and E. Maitland, Trans.). London: G. Redway.

Trungpa, C. (1991). *Crazy Wisdom* (D. J. Mukpo Ed.). Boston, MA: Shambhala South Asian Editions.

Trungpa, C. (2004). The Art of Calligraphy. In C. R. Gimian (Ed.), *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa* (Vol. 7, pp. 165-260). Boston: Shambhala.

Trungpa, C. (2015). *The Teacup & the Skullcup: Where Zen and Tantra Meet*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.

Trungpa, C and Ginsberg A. (2004). Lion Roars Sunset over Rockies' East Slope. In C.R. Gimian (Ed.), *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa* (Vol. 7, pp 362-71). Boston: Shambhala.

Tsogyal, Y. (1999). *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava* (E. P. Kunsang, Trans. M. B. Schmidt Ed.). Boston, MA: Shambhala South Asia Editions.

Turner, V. (1986). *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York, NY: PAJ Publications.

Vickery, J. B. (1966). *Myth and Literature*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Waits, T. et al. (2007). Always Keep a Diamond in Your Mind. *Healing the Divide: A Concert for Peace and Reconciliation.* Anti Records.

Wilkins, P. (2000). Nightmares of Identity: Nationalism and Loss in *Beautiful Losers.* In S. Scobie (Ed.), *Intricate Preparations: Writing Leonard Cohen* (pp. 24-50). Toronto, ON: ECW Press.

Wilkins, P. (2000). Pornographic Sublime: *Beautiful Losers* and Narrative Excess. In S. Scobie (Ed.), *Intricate Preparations: Writing Leonard Cohen* (pp. 213-234). Toronto, ON: ECW Press.

Williams, P. (2009). *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations (2nd edition).* New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Willis, J. D. (1995). Namtar as Literature and Liturgy *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition* (pp. 3-29). Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

Wolfson, E. R. (2006). New Jerusalem Glowing: Songs and Poems of Leonard Cohen in a Kabbalistic Key. *Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*(15), 103-153.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

Abhayadatta. (1979). Virupa. In J. B. Robinson (Ed.), *Buddha's Lions—the Lives of the Eighty-Four Siddhas* (pp. 27-32). Berkeley, CA: Dharma Publishing.

Anon. (2006, February 10). Steve Smith: God's Kaleidoscope [Online forum thread]. Message posted to https://www.leonardcohenforum.com/viewtopic.php?t=5302&start=30

Dalton, J. P. (2011). *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dowman, K. (2000). *The Divine Madman—The Sublime Life and Songs of Drunkpa Kunley* (K. D. a. S. Paljor, Trans.). Varanasi, India: Pilgrims.

Eliade, M. (1962). *Aspects du mythe.* St. Amand: France: L'imprimerie Bussière.

Eliade, M. (1971). *La nostalgie des origines. Orig: The Quest. Meaning and History in Religion*. France: Gallimard.

Lopez, D.S. (2010). Introduction. *The Life of Milarepa* (pp. ix-xviii). New York, NY: Penguin.

Patry, J. (2012). *L'interdit, la transgression, Georges Bataille et nous*. Québec, QC: Presses de l'Université de Laval.