

A.J.M. SMITH

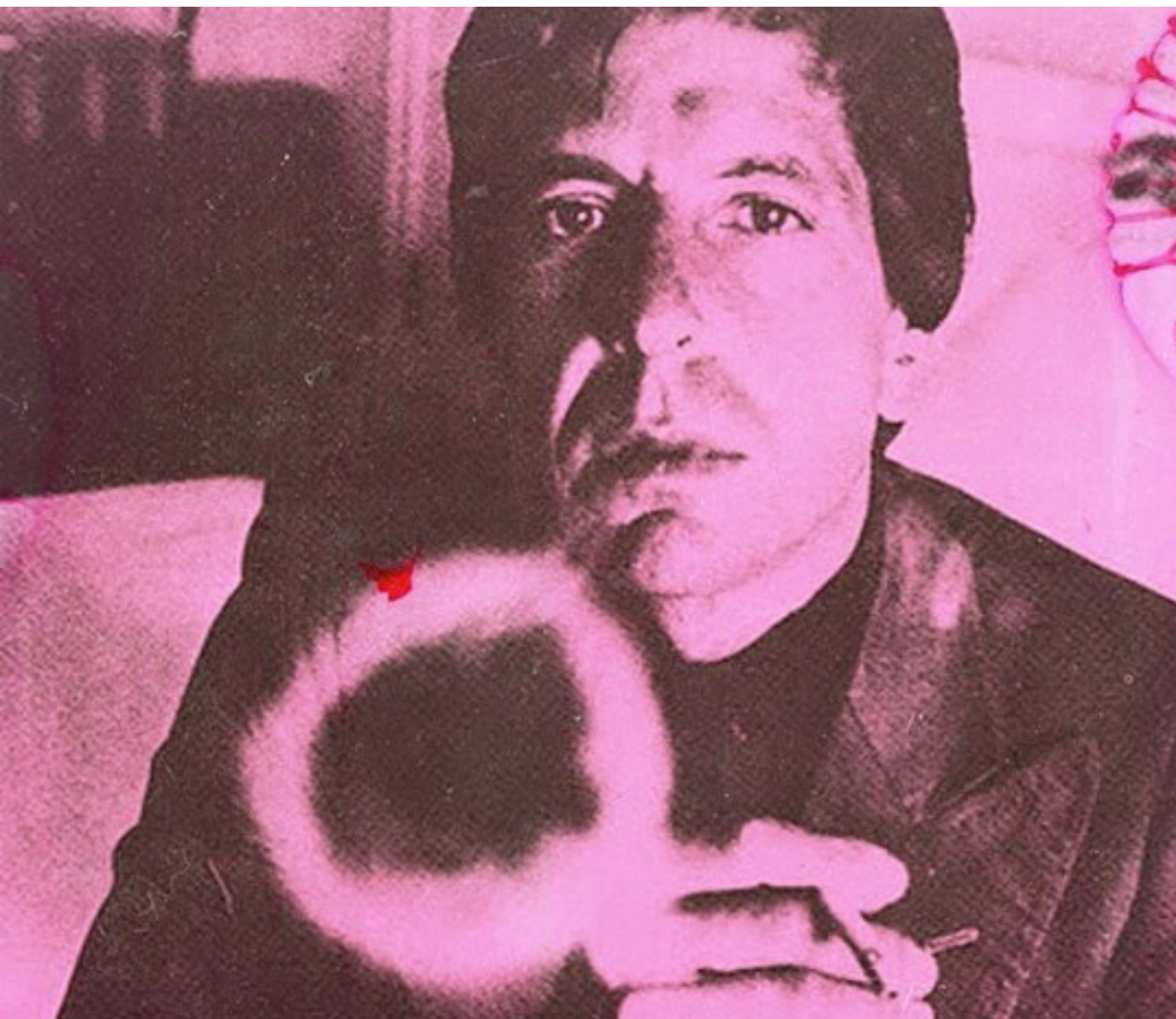
IRVING LEYTON

LEONARD COHEN

MCGILL MOVEMENT

POETRY

SCENE IN MONTREAL



by Vincenzo Mercuri

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Introduction to Montreal's Poetry

A Success Story Stemmed from the 20th Century

Following the first World War and the Victorian era, the 1920s was a decade due for alteration. From George Stanley's creation of the Canadian national flag to Montreal's renowned Expo 67, the City of Saints has always been a fundamental space for forward-thinking.

Assembled in the twenties, the Montreal Group was a collective of aspiring poets united within the institution of McGill University. Inspired by the Imagist movement, the McGill Group combined efforts "to modernize Canadian poetry and reform critical standards" (Roza). Contrary to the Victorian-style, the group of emergent writers strived to alter "the tradition of sentimental nature poetry then popular in Canada" (Luebering). Comprised of six members; Leon Edel, John Glassco, A.M. Klein, Leo Kennedy, F.R. Scott, and A.J.M. Smith, the McGill pupils were driven by the measures taken by the Group of Seven. The seven landscape painters "waged a protracted and vocal campaign for the advancement of Canadian approaches and subjects" (Roza). With the genre of modernist poetry on the rise, the McGill Movement issued a series of verses titled Six Montreal Poets. The collection of poetries provided listeners with "a slice of the romance and bustle of mid-century Montreal" (Folkways Records). As stated in Michael Darling's review of a unit of A.J.M. Smith's works "Lonely Land": he appears "to do for Canadian literature what the Group of Seven did for painting".

The spoken word literature would subsequently stimulate and bring about prominent artists such as Leonard Cohen and Irving Layton. Along with the poets' triumph, their influencers continuously sought out "to develop a national culture which looked beyond the country's borders to its place within the international forum" (Roza). As a result, local poets such as Melissa Bull and David McGlimpsey can subsist and bloom.



*"Experimentation
was welcomed,
not censored."*

Alexandra Roza

A.J.M. Smith



The Crows
by A.J.M. Smith

*“Over the pines the crows,
are crying and calling out, in
a tongue that no man knows,
out of an agonized throat.”*

The short text suggests a voiceless bird is weeping for help, in a place where no one is heard. In a world where climate change persists to be a major issue, the symbolism aligns accurately with today's reality. Oblivious to the planet's status, many perceive the cries for support as “a tongue that no man knows”. Foreshadowing life in 2019, Smith captivates the reader through his crafty diction and thorough utterance.

Member of the Montreal Group of poets, A.J.M. Smith was “a leader in the revival of Canadian poetry of the 1920s” (Luebering). Together with his colleague F.R. Scott, Smith established the newsletter “McGill Fortnightly Review”. As McGill graduate scholars, he and Scott aimed to liberate “Canadian literature from artificial forms and narrow provincialism” (Luebering). His leading figure is a strong component to why countless others can compose free verse poetry.

Leonard Cohen



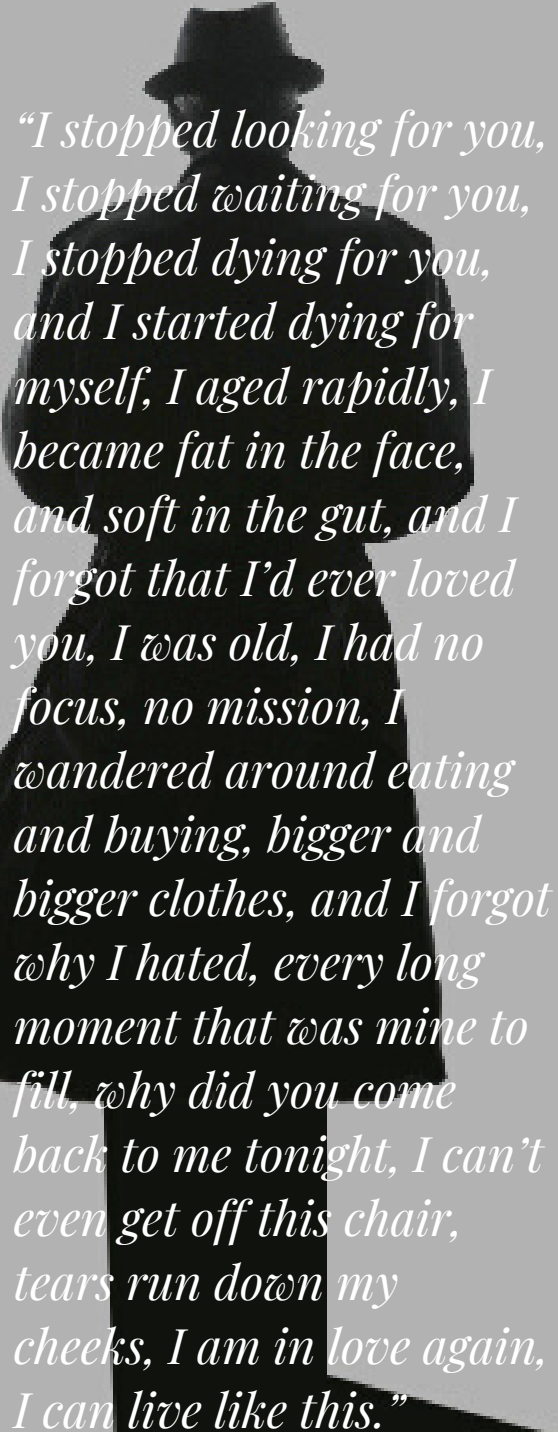
The Only Poem
by Leonard Cohen

“This is the only poem, I can read, I am the only one, can write it, I didn’t kill myself, when things went wrong, I didn’t turn, to drugs or teaching, I tried to sleep, but when I couldn’t sleep, I learned to write, I learned to write, what might be read, on nights like this, by one like me.”

The following text sheds light on Cohen’s internal struggles and his method of coping with the effects. Its gloomy, grin tone speaks volumes for numerous others who have been there. It pertains with me given that it is the same reason I began composing poetry. Years ago, I encountered challenging times in all spheres of my life. Wherefore, I commenced documenting my grievous emotions and hardships during this period. By dint of this, I utilized the printed word to voice out my troubled thoughts. Similar to Cohen, I was told that I had a gift to write and can assist others. Moving forward, drafting poems have consistently been my outlet from my somber thoughts. Together with this, I aspire to encourage individuals to take productive measures in times of difficulty.

Born in the year of 1934, Leonard Norman Cohen was raised in the prestigious and eminent sector of Westmount. Brought up in a middle-class Jewish household, the late author’s interest in poetry grew vastly while attending secondary school. Years thereafter, he pursued his passion for literature inside the faculty of McGill. Over several decades, Cohen became not only one of the most illustrious Canadian poets but a Grammy award-winning musician. His numerous talents largely contributed to his prominence in and around the city and to why he is classified among Montreal’s foremost creative spirits. “Sporting his signature fedora,” the Montreal icon was paid homage to with a full-size portrait mural, the following year of his passing (Tourisme Montreal).

Leonard Cohen Cont.



*“I stopped looking for you,
I stopped waiting for you,
I stopped dying for you,
and I started dying for
myself, I aged rapidly, I
became fat in the face,
and soft in the gut, and I
forgot that I’d ever loved
you, I was old, I had no
focus, no mission, I
wandered around eating
and buying, bigger and
bigger clothes, and I forgot
why I hated, every long
moment that was mine to
fill, why did you come
back to me tonight, I can’t
even get off this chair,
tears run down my
cheeks, I am in love again,
I can live like this.”*

This narrative of the composition is executed flawlessly. From cover to cover, it exhibits a lifespan of melancholy and despair. Coupled with “The Only Poem,” it leads me back to a time of distress and agony. In short, a stage in my life where I saw no real path and I was in essence lost. Seeking solace among the wrong person led me to a dreadful place and for this purpose, I looked to free verse poetry. Without any guidelines, I wrote unrestrictedly to channel my thoughts and embark on a blissful journey.



Irving Leyton



Newsboy
by Irving Leyton

*“Neither tribal nor trivial he shouts,
from the city’s center where tramcars
move, like stained bacilli across the
eyeballs, where people spore in
composite buildings, from their
protective gelatine of doubts, old ills,
and incapacity to love.”*

Leyton’s linguistic techniques are certainly disclosed within “Newsboy”. During his lifetime, his ability to recite a modernist narrative was beyond comparable to other poets. His resourceful use of verbs surely evokes a mental image for the lector. Regarding the chronicle itself, Leyton offers an exclusive perspective to what a bustling city resembles. For myself, it taught me a novel way to depict and interpret a metropolis.

On the same terms as the foregoing artists, Montreal-based writer Irving Leyton was another who “pushed for the development of modern Canadian poetry” (Poetry in Voice). Tutored by the poet A.M. Klein, Leyton’s interest quickly grew for the literary form of art (Cameron). During his academic studies, the late Romanian writer began publishing his initial works and steadily became “the most outspoken and flamboyant” of the city’s poetry scene (Cameron). Serving as an influence for authors suchlike Leonard Cohen, Leyton is a significant figure when discussing Canadian literature.



Conclusion to Montreal's Poetry

A Success Story Stemmed from the 20th Century

In summary, the poetry scene in Montreal serves as a vital role in the city's liveliness and vibrancy. The historical context behind its rebellious acts for modernism is, without a doubt, revolutionary. Weary of the classical Victorian era, the aforementioned writers sought out for change. Artists differing from the Montreal Group to Leonard Cohen, are all substantial contributors to Canadian literature and the world of art. Montreal, as we know, is an artsy place that showcases its craftiness across each borough. Whether its lusty graffiti on Saint-Lawrence Boulevard or the dangling rainbow balls in the Gay Village, the artful experiences are near and far.

As time progresses, it is necessary to rewind and distinguish who provided the basis. As people of today, we often overlook the influencers of movements like minimalism. Without the modern visions of former creatives, there would be no such thing. Employing their imagination, they were able to shape future trends and notions. For myself, the local movements including the McGill Group was a pleasure learning about considering how highly innovative and progressive they were. Personally, I do not believe some of the following writers get a sufficient amount of recognition. For what they contributed to the art scene, I would suppose their movement and efforts are far more appreciated from local inhabitants. In terms of poems, I generally connected with Leonard Cohen and his emotive narratives. In comparison to Cohen, I enjoy writing the most when it is done through a personal approach. Along with wordplay and verbs, I take pleasure in capturing emotions and getting a sense of what the author is feeling. Prior to this project, I was not fully aware of who he was or what he accomplished. With that said, I am glad I selected to work on a matter deemed passionate to me.



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The End.