



## Research article

# Bipolar Disorder and Drug Abuse: A Psychoanalytic Study of Suicidal Ideation and Perception of Women as the 'Other' in Leonard Cohen's "Dress Rehearsal Rag"

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### Abstract

Leonard Cohen's lyric "Dress Rehearsal Rag" from the album *Songs of Love and Hate* (1971) presents an existential crisis of an artist caught up in the post-war turmoil of the counter-culture in the 1960s. Though not particularly successful as a song in the popular context, the lyric deserves scholarly attention because it can reveal many issues concerned with the general and personal contexts of pop culture. Following this line, this paper will try to investigate how the combination of bipolar disorder and narcotic drug abuse leads the poet to a suicidal rehearsal. It will also explore how this kind of positioning influences his negative perception of women as the 'Other.' We will apply Freud's concepts of the death drive and repression, alongside Lacan's theories of the Symbolic Order and the "Other" to expose the psychological and relational complexities. Recent research on bipolar disorder and narcotic drug abuse will also be used to illuminate the conditions further.

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## 1. Introduction

The song "Dress Rehearsal Rag" has a fascinating history. Originally an outtake recorded during the *Songs from Room* sessions in 1968, it was released as a bonus track on the 2007 remastered edition of *Songs of Love and Hate*. Cohen wrote the song before it appeared on his 1971 album *Songs of Love and Hate*. Interestingly, Judy Collins had already introduced the song to audiences in 1966 on her album *In My Life*, after Cohen played her several compositions in the hope she might record one. Collins recalled her immediate response:

"Talk about dark... a song about suicide. I attempted suicide myself at fourteen, before I found folk music, so of course I loved it. We were desperately looking for something unusual for my album and when I heard 'Dress Rehearsal Rag,' that was it" (Simmons, 2012).

The stark imagery and fragmented narrative of the song expose the psychic turbulence of a speaker overwhelmed by insignificance and despair. Cohen himself acknowledged its disturbing power. In a 1968 BBC interview with Kathleen Kendel, he compared it to "Gloomy Sunday", a song banned in Czechoslovakia for its association with suicides. Cohen remarked that he reserved "Dress Rehearsal Rag" only for rare occasions when the "landscape could support the despair" it projected (Kendel, 1968). He further confessed that he considered it too private and too closely tied to his own experience and rarely performed it: "It is an authentic song... but I don't think I could ever do that under the spotlight" (Kendel, 1968). Cohen's unease betrays his well-documented struggles with bipolar depression (Nadel, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Simmons, 2012; Aiken, 2020). The all-consuming state of hopelessness in the lyric is symptomatic of the depressive episodes, characteristic of bipolar disorder and substance abuse (Stokes, Kalk, & Young, 2017). The deep introspection and numbness experienced by the subject match the symptoms described in psychiatric literature: "The prevalence of mixed symptoms in manic and depressive episodes suggests that introspection and emotional blunting are central to psychiatric diagnosis" (Cerullo & Strakowski, 2007, p. 12).

Cohen's experimentation with LSD, stimulants, and sedatives further complicates the psychological issues presented in the song. In Hydra, Greece, he used drugs both recreationally and creatively (Maplethorpe, 2024). In a 2001 interview, he admitted: "I've used almost everything that I could ever get my hands on... taken them in every possible way" (Cohen, 2001). His dependence on Maxiton (dextroamphetamine) and Mandrax (a sedative popular in the UK) greatly influenced both his writing and his lived experience, as reflected in *Beautiful Losers* (Simmons, 2012, p. 94). Marianne Ihlen recalled his drug-fueled inscription on a wall: "I change, I am the same"—a slogan of instability and continuity (Simmons, 2012, p. 94). Psychiatric commentary has suggested that Cohen's symptoms are more closely associated with bipolar disorder than major depression, though complicated by substance use and intoxication (Simmons, 2012, p. 119).

It seems that Cohen deliberately positioned "Dress Rehearsal Rag" within a lineage of modernist art that foregrounds fragmentation and dissonance. With the song, he departed from the warmth of earlier recordings through a vocal delivery that is strained and almost harsh, a tonal austerity that heightens the speaker's alienation and self-loathing. The sparse instrumentation further intensifies this bleakness, with the guitar accompaniment functioning more as a skeletal frame for

the lyrics than as a melodic anchor. Aesthetically, the performance resists catharsis. Rather than offering transcendence, Cohen seems to have chosen a showdown with despair.

## 2. Thesis Statement

We propose that Cohen's "Dress Rehearsal Rag" can be read as an artistic exploration of the psychological effects of bipolar disorder and narcotic drug abuse, particularly in relation to suicidal contemplation and the perception of women as the "Other." The ambivalent treatment of women in the song and Cohen's refusal of public performance reveal his alienation and the corrosive interplay of illness and artistic vision within the album *Songs of Love and Hate*.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

We propose to examine the lyric through the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories to uncover the speaker's inner turmoil and the gender dynamics. Freud's concepts of the death drive (*Thanatos*) and repression provide a foundation for understanding the destructive impulses and psychic conflicts presented in the song (Freud, 1920/1961). This is complemented by Jacques Lacan's theories of the Mirror Stage, the Symbolic Order, and the Other, which offer a framework for understanding the fragmented self-image, alienation, and projection of desire that structure the protagonist's experience (Lacan, 1949/2006).

To situate these psychoanalytic insights within the contemporary clinical context, we also refer to recent research on bipolar disorder and narcotic drug abuse. Studies point out the comorbidity of mood disorders and substance dependence and show how drug use exacerbates fragmentation, instability, and alienation (Goodwin & Jamison, 2007; Kosten & George, 2002). By applying this interdisciplinary framework, we seek to attempt a viable reading of Cohen's lyric as a meditation on mental illness and the human struggle for coherence and meaning.

## 4. A Close Reading of "Dress Rehearsal Rag"

"Dress Rehearsal Rag" is primarily a piece of popular art, and the first-person speaker may not necessarily be Cohen himself. Whenever a singer performs it, the voice goes to them, as, for example, to Judy Collins. However, its complexity and autobiographical references demand academic scrutiny. When we analyse the outtake, we find it raw and unfiltered, laying bare the deepest recesses of the human psyche. Cohen's visceral honesty in delivery, coupled with the stripped-down instrumentation, emphasises the song's sombre tone and draws the listener closer to the artist's internal struggle.

A close textual reading reveals even more elements. The first stanza vividly portrays the speaker's deep introspection and self-doubt, grappling with feelings of inadequacy and the realisation that their previous self-perceptions and dreams may have been illusory or unattainable.

Four o'clock in the afternoon and I didn't feel like very much  
I said to myself, "Where are you, golden boy?"

Where's your famous golden touch?"

I thought you knew where all of the elephants lie down

I thought you were the crown prince of all the wheels in Ivory Town... (Cohen, 1971)

Both excessive sleep and insomnia are common symptoms of acute clinical depression; "... sleep disturbance often precedes the onset of an episode of depression, making the presence of clinically significant sleep problems a potent risk factor" (Neubauer, 2022, p. 711). In this context, waking up at "four o'clock in the afternoon" implies excessive sleep. The phrase "I didn't feel like very much" indicates a feeling of insignificance or emotional numbness. In the following line, the narrator's introspective questioning reveals a sense of lost potential and identity: "I said to myself, "Where are you, golden boy? Where's your famous golden touch?"(Cohen, 1971) The use of "golden boy" suggests that the narrator once saw himself as unique or gifted, but now doubts that identity. This phrase alludes to the myth of King Midas, who could turn everything he touched into gold. In this case, it refers to his creative power. The narrator questions his ability to create new art: "I thought you knew where all of the elephants lie down" (Cohen, 1971) This line refers to the mythic idea that elephants have a secret burial ground where they go to die. It symbolises access to sacred knowledge. The narrator's belief that he once had access to such sacred knowledge suggests a feeling of having lost touch with deeper understanding or wisdom. The narrator reflects on his own disillusionment with his former sense of knowing or control over life's mysteries: "I thought you were the crown prince of all the wheels in Ivory Town" (Cohen, 1971) This term signifies a position of high status and potential future leadership. The narrator's past self-perception as a "crown prince" indicates he once saw himself as destined for greatness either as a poet or singer or both. Ivory Town is a modification of the ivory tower, the abode of a true poet in solipsistic engagement. The loss of this elevated status or identity compounds the narrator's disillusionment. This refers to his prolonged stays in hotels.

The next stanza presents almost an infernal depiction of the internal struggle with despair and suicidal thoughts. His assessment of his own body reflects a deep sense of self-loathing and worthlessness. The expression, "there's nothing much to save," conveys the speaker's perception that they are beyond redemption or repair. The "bitter voice in the mirror" represents the narrator's inner critic, which is basically a manifestation of self-disgust and contempt. This voice sarcastically addresses the narrator as "prince," mocking the former sense of self-importance: "Hey, prince, you need a shave" (Cohen, 1971). It indirectly implies that he has lost the will or capacity to care for himself: "Now if you can manage to get your trembling fingers to behave" (Cohen, 1971). The trembling fingers betray the physical and emotional instability, which we can relate to the effects of drug abuse. The word "behave" implies a struggle for control over his own body. In the line, "Why don't you try unwrapping a stainless steel razor blade?" (Cohen, 1971), the mention of a razor blade is a direct reference to suicide. This image betrays the speaker's contemplation of self-harm as a means of escape from the current state of psychological suffering and pain. The physical deprivation mimics the symbolic decay and presents a dark portrait of a person on the brink of suicide. Cohen's use of repetition and rhetorical questions in the chorus heightens the emotional impact and forces listeners to feel the weight of his psychological journey. The contemplation of how he arrived at this point suggests that the current state has resulted from a long and bewildering process.

In the next stanza, the lack of hot water and the scarcity of cold water symbolise neglect and deprivation in the narrator's life. These details paint a picture of a bleak and uncomfortable living situation and reinforce the sense of hopelessness. The reflection on his own choices and living conditions leads to further despair: "Well, what do you expect from the kind of places you've been living in?" (Cohen, 1971). This seems to him so because he falsely attributes his despair to the impact of external conditions. The next line, "Don't drink from that cup, it's all caked and cracked along the rim", symbolises decay and deterioration. That drinking from such a cup would be harmful reflects his own sense of being damaged and unworthy. Symbolically, however, this may refer to the end or perversion of the quest for the holy grail: the attainment of aesthetic ideals. The broken aesthetic quest is represented through a low reward. Symbolically, the "vision growing dim" represents the loss of the visionary faculties of the mind. The comparison to an electric light suggests that what once brought illumination and understanding has now faded, leaving the narrator in darkness. This also represents the effect of drug abuse on the physical organs.

The next stanza captures the speaker's sudden defiance: "Cover up your face with soap there, now you're Santa Claus" (Cohen, 1971). Dressing up in another role functions as a defence mechanism here. However, the figure of Santa Claus is associated with joy and giving, and, therefore, it ironically contrasts with the speaker's desperate state. This can be interpreted, on the contrary, as a metaphor for masking one's identity and presenting a false front to the world. The line, "...you've got a gift for anyone who will give you his applause", reflects his desire for external validation and approval. The "gift" symbolises the artistic creations the narrator can offer once the audience accepts him. In the next line, the narrator reflects on his past self-perception as someone capable and competitive ("racing man") but acknowledges his inability to keep up with popular demands ("couldn't take the pace"). This image suggests someone who is driven and ambitious, but the realisation of not being able to "take the pace" reveals a vulnerability and a sense of failure. That is why he considers the present act of dressing up a "funeral in the mirror". It refers to his confrontation with the mortality of his creative powers. The reflection in the mirror symbolises self-realisation and the acknowledgement of his impending demise as an artist.

In the next stanza, the speaker plunges into regression as a form of defence mechanism to get out of the present state of extreme psychological pain. He falls back on the past memories filled with innocence, love, and sexual adventure. However, the apparently Romantic portrayal of distant memories hides a *carpe diem* intent. The imagery of passing summers picking berries betrays the sexual adventures of the youth. Here, too, we note that the female figure is presented in bipolar vision: "There were times she was a woman, oh, there were times she was just a child". While the girl becomes "a child" in a manic state, the same figure appears as a 'woman' in a depressive state, in which she is to be exploited sexually:

And you held her in the shadows where the raspberries grow wild

And you climbed the twilight mountains and you sang about the view

And everywhere that you wandered, love seemed to go along with you... (Cohen, 1971)

Here, "the raspberries grow wild" may refer to the female sex organs, for which Cohen frequently expressed his obsession through euphemistic images. The shadows hint at hidden or private moments. Climbing mountains in Cohen's songs is associated with a sexual journey (See "So Long

Marianne). Here, too, the image is associated with such adventures. Even the word 'love' is here an euphemism for sex. However, the act of remembering these moments becomes "a hard one to remember" immediately and clenching a fist is a physical response to emotional pain. "And then the veins stand out like highways, all along your wrist", suggests a visceral reaction to the memories and symbolises the physical manifestation of emotional pain.

The next stanza encapsulates the narrator's profound despair and the futility of seeking superficial solutions to deep emotional pain. "You can still find a job" brings out Cohen's middle-class dilemma of choosing an ordinary middle-class life or becoming an artist. However, given the context of the song, there is an underlying irony that these suggestions seem trivial in the face of the narrator's tremendous despair. Then, "Why don't you join the Rosicrucians, they will give you back your hope" (Cohen, 1971) sounds ironic as such a way to regain hope is futile. The line, "You can find your love with diagrams on a plain brown envelope" (Cohen, 1971) conveys the speaker's feeble belief that love can be found through simplistic or formulaic worldly means. This, however, further accentuates the irony by betraying the speaker's sense of hopelessness and the absurdity of seeking meaningful connections in such trivial ways.

In the next stanza, the narrator has exhausted all conventional options ("coupons"), except for one drastic measure symbolised by the wrist:

But you've used up all your coupons except the one that seems

To be written on your wrist along with several thousand dreams... (Cohen, 1971)

The speaker here is referring to suicide as the last option, with writing emerging as an ironic and destructive act of inscription against the lost hopes represented by "several thousand dreams". The concluding lines reinforce the central themes of the song: existential struggle with the sense of life being a futile performance.

And then the cameras pan

The stand-in stunt man

Dress rehearsal rag

It's just the dress rehearsal rag

You know, this dress rehearsal rag

It's just the dress rehearsal rag (Cohen, 1971)

With the imagery of cameras and the stuntman, Cohen conveys the artificiality of the dress rehearsal, reflective of the futile drama of life, in which living in a perpetual state of preparation becomes the perpetual existential struggle, never reaching the final performance or true fulfilment. The camera panning implies that the speaker is being watched, as if life were a performance and that the speaker's performance of life is being judged by others. The use of "stand-in stunt man" implies a sense of substitution in absurd moments, when the speaker feels like a mere stand-in in his own life. In the final choric stanza, the word "rag" conveys a sense of something worn out and to be rejected. Placed with "dress rehearsal," it suggests that for the speaker, life has become an insignificant, yet repetitive cycle.

## 5. A Freudian Analysis of the Lyric

Freudian psychoanalytic theories can be applied here to uncover the hidden elements in the inner recesses of the speaker. The unfiltered emotions and the desperate wish to escape present realities exemplify the workings of the id, which Freud defined as “the dark, inaccessible part of our personality... filled with energy... striving to bring about the satisfaction of instinctual needs subject to the pleasure principle” (Freud, 1923, p. 25). The ego, “that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world” (Freud, 1923, p. 25), attempts to mediate these drives by considering practical coping strategies. This psychic negotiation is evident in the speaker’s fleeting references toward reality-based solutions, such as contemplating employment or seeking social contact, as the ego strives to balance instinctual urgency with external constraints. However, the superego exerts its own pressure and complicates the struggle with guilt and moral condemnation. Freud observed that “the superego retains the character of the father, and the stronger the Oedipus complex, the stricter will be the domination of the superego over the ego” (Freud, 1923, p. 25). In Cohen’s lyric, the speaker’s self-condemnation and inability to reconcile inner drives with external reality reflect this domination of the superego.

We can also apply Freud’s theory of the Oedipus Complex which involves the internalisation of authority, usually represented by the same-sex parent (Freud, 1924). This internalised authority forms the superego of the individual, which acts as the moral part of personality. It seeks perfection and often clashes with the desires of the id (Freud, 1923). In the song, the speaker’s self-criticism can be seen as the voice of the internalised authority while the mirror represents self-reflection, and the “bitter voice” stands for the internalised authority judging and condemning the speaker. This heightens his feelings of worthlessness and despair. This critical voice clearly depicts the superego, which imposes guilt and self-reproach. We can interpret the existential angst and inner turmoil of the speaker as the unresolved tensions of the Oedipus Complex. The line, “I thought you were the crown prince of all the wheels in Ivory Town” (Cohen, 1971), betrays the speaker’s initial self-perception as destined for greatness, a symbolic heir to authority and meaning. However, the subsequent disillusionment reveals the collapse of this imagined identity and echoes Freud’s observation that “the Oedipus complex is not left behind, but is dissolved; its residues are carried into the formation of the super-ego and give it its characteristic position” (Freud, 1924, p. 179).

This inner conflict manifests itself as an identity crisis, in which the superego turns against the ego with relentless criticism. The contemplation of suicide and his search for solace reflect Freud’s claim that the Oedipal struggle embodies a lifelong pursuit of resolution and meaning. The reference to the Rosicrucians, a mystical society, suggests a yearning for esoteric knowledge and spiritual transcendence. This represents a symbolic attempt to resolve psychic conflict through mystical affiliation. Cohen’s autobiographical engagement with Scientology and other spiritual systems once again strengthens this search for alternative frameworks of meaning beyond the collapse of paternal authority.

We can also apply here Freud’s concept of Thanatos, or the death drive, to understand the speaker’s suicidal rehearsal. Introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud described this unconscious drive as a compulsion toward destruction and a return to the inorganic state: “Besides the instinct to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units, there must

exist another, contrary instinct seeking to dissolve those units and to bring them back to their primaeval, inorganic state" (Freud, 1920/1961, p. 46). This destructive impulse is continually in tension with Eros, the life drive, which seeks pleasure, survival, and cohesion. In "Dress Rehearsal Rag," the protagonist's contemplation of suicide can be read as a manifestation of Thanatos, the pull toward self-annihilation. However, the speaker's reference to the Rosicrucians, a mystical society associated with esoteric wisdom, suggests a countervailing search for transcendence and meaning, which can be said to be an expression of Eros. The speaker is caught between these two fundamental drives: the lure of self-destruction and the yearning for redemption through spiritual affiliation. This tension reestablishes Freud's insight that the perpetual struggle between life and death instincts controls human existence.

## 6. A Lacanian Analysis of the Lyric

Lacan's concept of the *Mirror Stage* (1949) posits that identity formation begins when the infant first recognises its reflection, inaugurating the "I" as a self-image. This moment is both formative and traumatic, since the image is inherently fragmented and incomplete. The subject's ego is thus constructed through a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), identifying with an idealised image that masks the instability of the lived self (Lacan, 1949/2006). In "Dress Rehearsal Rag," the protagonist's fragmented self-image is presented through self-reflective and self-critical lines: "Just take a look at your body now, there's nothing much to save / And a bitter voice in the mirror cries, 'Hey, prince, you need a shave.'" (Cohen, 1971). Here, the mirror functions not as a site of affirmation but of condemnation. The bitter voice exemplifies Lacan's claim that the ego is formed through an alienated image, one that simultaneously promises coherence and exposes fracture. The struggle with identity formation is further conveyed in the lyric, "I thought you were the crown prince of all the wheels in Ivory Town" (Cohen, 1971). This juxtaposition of the idealised self with the disillusioned present self intensifies the gap between the ego-ideal and lived reality. Lacan emphasised that the ego-ideal, born in the Mirror Stage, becomes both a source of pride and anxiety, as the subject strives to live up to an image that is unattainable:

What is thus inaugurated in the subject is the triumph of the image. The ego is structured by identification with this image, which becomes at once the source of pride and the locus of alienation. (Lacan, 1949/2006, p. 76)

Cohen captures this tension in the speaker's being caught between the memory of an idealised self and the despair of his current existential collapse. Thus, the song turns out to be a metaphor for life as death, as though life itself were a rehearsal for death. This goes with the Lacanian notion of the Real, the pre-symbolic and pre-linguistic realm of pure being that remains inaccessible to human consciousness. Lacan emphasised that the Real is that which resists symbolization and stands outside the structures of language and representation (Lacan, 1981). He wrote:

The Real is impossible. It is the impossible, not in the sense of the logically contradictory, but in the sense of what cannot be attained. (Lacan, 1998, p. 167)

In Cohen's lyric, the speaker's descent into despair can be interpreted as a confrontation with this Real. His suicidal rehearsal is an enactment of the impossibility of achieving wholeness or fulfilment within the Symbolic order of language and social structures.

## 7. Perception of Women as the "Other": Insights from Freud and Lacan

Freud's Oedipus Complex involves the projection of unresolved desires and conflicts onto external figures;

The object-choice of the man is characterized by a certain amount of over-estimation, which is derived from the infantile sexual situation. What is in fact sought is the mother, and the woman who is chosen is only a substitute for her. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it. (Freud, 1905/1953, p. 222)

The speaker's relationship with a woman can be interpreted through this perspective. The woman is simultaneously idealised and associated with unattainable desires: "Once there was a path and a girl with chestnut hair / And you passed the summers picking all of the berries that grew there" (Cohen, 1971). This nostalgic reminiscence presents a projection of idealised love and happiness onto the woman. The subsequent sense of loss implies the persistence of unresolved Oedipal desires and their impact on the speaker's current despair. Lacan's concept of the *Other* can also be applied here:

Man's desire is the desire of the Other. This is what we must understand in the sense that it is not simply the desire to be desired, but the desire for the Other's desire. The subject's demand is always addressed to the Other, and it is in the field of the Other that his desire is constituted. The Other is the locus in which this desire is articulated, and it is from the Other that the subject seeks recognition. (Lacan, 1949/2006, pp. 80–81)

The nostalgic memory of the "girl with chestnut hair" illustrates the idealisation and projection of desire onto the woman, who becomes the *Other*, the unattainable locus of desire (Lacan, 1949/2006). This relationship is marked by longing for an ideal that cannot be fulfilled. The speaker's contradictory perceptions of women represent the projection of his own fragmented identity: "There were times she was a woman, oh, there were times she was just a child" (Cohen, 1971). This oscillation between idealisation and infantilization actually betrays the instability of the self. Lacan's theory of the *Other* is closely linked to the phallus as the signifier of lack:

The phallus is the signifier of desire. It is not a phantasy, if by that we mean an imaginary effect. Nor is it the object (the partial, internal, good, bad object) that the desire aims at. It is, rather, the signifier intended to designate what is lacking in the Other, inasmuch as the Other is the locus of speech. (Lacan, 1981/1998, p. 285)

In the song, the woman, though once a source of happiness, becomes a symbol of lost innocence and unattainable desire. She embodies the *Other*: elusive and unattainable, and she also becomes the source of both longing and anxiety. In another occasion in the song *Suzanne*, Cohen projected his internal conflicts onto the woman: "And you know that she's half-crazy but that's why you want to be there" (Cohen, 1967). This fascination with the "Other" reinforces Lacan's insight that desire is structured around lack. The woman in the "Dress Rehearsal Rag" embodies the unknown and transgressive and offers the possibility of escape from the constraints of the Symbolic Order.

## 8. Drug Abuse, Bipolar Disorder and Alienation from the “Other”

Drug use functions as a coping mechanism in an attempt to escape psychic conflict. As Feingold and Tzur Bitan observe, “addiction is rooted in deficits in neurobiological and psychological reward mechanisms, but also as a coping-oriented effort to contend with, or ‘self-medicate,’ negative emotional experiences” (2022, p. 2). In Cohen’s lyric, it seems that this reliance on drug aggravates the speaker’s contradictory perceptions of women: “There were times she was a woman, oh, there were times she was just a child” (Cohen, 1971). Such oscillation represents the fragmentation of identity characteristic of bipolar disorder, wherein alternating states of mania and depression destabilise perception and relational coherence (Cerullo & Strakowski, 2007).

Psychiatric research has consistently shown the close relationship between bipolar disorder and substance abuse, with comorbidity exacerbating the course of illness and magnifying interpersonal dysfunction. The literature underlies the gravity of suicide risk in bipolar populations: suicide attempts are reported in 25–56% of cases, while completed suicides occur in 10–15% (Harris & Barraclough, 1997; Goodwin & Jamison, 2007). Compared to the general population, individuals with bipolar disorder exhibit markedly higher lethality in suicide attempts (Baldessarini et al., 2006). Crucially, Hawton et al. (2005) note that “suicide risk was considerably increased in the presence of drug misuse or dependence.” Stokes et al. (2017) further emphasise that individuals with comorbid bipolar disorder and addiction use drugs both to induce euphoria and to alleviate mood or anxiety symptoms, irrespective of the prevailing mood episode, and they display heightened substance sensitivity and sensation-seeking.

In this context, Cohen’s *Dress Rehearsal Rag* may be read as a dramatisation of the entanglement of psychic fragmentation and substance dependence. The speaker’s oscillation between despair and fleeting attempts at self-soothing reflects the instability intrinsic to bipolar disorder, while drug use functions simultaneously as symptom and catalyst. All these facts contribute to deepening alienation and intensifying contradictory perceptions of the “Other.”

## 9. Conclusion

In conclusion, “Dress Rehearsal Rag” stands out as a haunting exploration of identity and alienation. Critical insights from Freud and Lacan disclose a protagonist caught between the death drive (Thanatos), relentless judgment of the superego and the fragmented self-image of the Mirror Stage. The addition of drug abuse, bipolar instability, and gendered projection further problematizes this fragmentation. Artistically, Cohen does not merely narrate despair; it stages the psychic theatre of alienation, where the Other, whether woman, authority, or mystical society, becomes a screen for unresolved conflicts. Thus, his art, it may be said, explores the inner depths of existential longing.

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