

Poetry analysis the famous blue raincoat by leonard cohen

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



Poetry Analysis The poem under analysis is “ Famous Blue Raincoat’ written by Leonard Cohen. It appears as a single in the 1971 album Songs of Love and Hate. The song talks of a love triangle between Cohen, Jane and presumably another man. It is addressed to the other man who is only referred to as “ my brother, my killer”. Cohen himself has claimed in an interview that he is not entirely sure which love triangle he meant and who the third party was, although he says he is certain there was always a shadowy other “ seducing the woman [he] was with” (“ Famous Blue Raincoat”). The title refers to the unnamed person’s raincoat. This becomes an important symbol in the song. The tearing at the shoulder of the raincoat suggests the passage of time, vulnerability, and also the inability perhaps to “ shoulder” responsibilities like fidelity. Maurice Ratcliff in *The Complete Guide to the Music of Leonard Cohen* suggests that since Cohen has admitted that the title refers to a “ Burberry” raincoat he owned himself, perhaps the letter is addressed to his own past self (Ratcliff 37). The interpretation of the other being Cohen himself is possible and suggests that writing or singing the letter is a kind of therapeutic act to redeem his own perhaps unjust behavior towards Jane. The form of the poem is roughly in the AABB rhyming scheme with minor variations. For instance, in the stanza following “ Well I see Jane’s awake”, the rhyming scheme shifts to ABCB temporarily. There are also devices to indicate the epistolary nature of the poem: “ Sincerely, L. Cohen” at the end and the vague mention of the date and time at the beginning, for instance. Most of the song appears to fall in the metrical pattern of amphibrach, although this varies also. The content of this popular song is obscure and open to interpretation. The letter seems to

be addressed to the “ brother” who Jane had an affair with and who now seems to be living the life of a gypsy in a desert. Jane and the poet are living together again although things are never the same again: “ she was nobody’s wife.” This change however appears to have set both the poet and Jane free: “ his woman is free”. There are allusions to drug addiction too; as in the terms “ flake”, “ go clear” meaning breaking the addiction perhaps, and so on. The poem uses a lot of imagery. The raincoat, as mentioned, comes to symbolize the addressee as well as his failings and point to Cohen/the poet himself. The man’s “ lock of hair” that Jane returns with is never explained but appears to stand for the only tangible remnant of the relationship the three shared. A lock of hair also has numerous religious and superstitious connotations - superhuman qualities, immortality, and fortune, among others - and could stand in for any of these (“ Lock of Hair”). Lili Marlene, a character from a German love song about a soldier yearning for his ladylove, also becomes a symbol. Lili Marlene appears to be a woman who cheated on this “ brother” and perhaps led him to the sorry state he is now: “ you looked so much older”; “ raincoat was torn at the shoulder.” The poem ends on a melancholic and yet peaceful note, like many of Cohen’s songs. The affair has certainly changed things between the poet and Jane; and yet, the change seems to have set them both free from the need to be faithful to and possessive of each other. Works Cited “ Famous Blue Raincoat.” Songfacts. n. d. Web. 6 Feb 2011. “ Lock of Hair.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. 1 Jan 2011. Web. 6 Feb 2011. Ratcliff, Maurice. The Complete Guide to the Music of Leonard Cohen. London: Omnibus Press, 1999. Print.