

Introduction to the Chinese edition of
Beautiful Losers

Dear Reader,

Thank you for coming to this book. It is an honour, and a surprise, to have the frenzied thoughts of my youth expressed in Chinese characters. I sincerely appreciate the efforts of the translator and the publishers in bringing this curious work to your attention. I hope you will find it useful or amusing.

When I was young, my friends and I read and admired the old Chinese poets. Our ideas of love and friendship, of wine and distance, of poetry itself, were much affected by those ancient songs. Much later, during the years when I practised as a Zen monk under the guidance of my teacher Kyozan Joshu Roshi, the thrilling sermons of Lin Chi (Rinzai) were studied every day. So you can understand, Dear Reader, how privileged I feel to be able to graze, even for a moment, and with such meagre credentials, on the outskirts of your tradition.

This is a difficult book, even in English, if it is taken too seriously. May I suggest that you skip over the parts you don't like? Dip into it here and there. Perhaps there will be a passage, or even a page, that resonates with your curiosity. After a while, if you are sufficiently bored or unemployed, you may want to read it from cover to cover. In any case, I thank you for your interest in this odd collection of jazz riffs, pop-art jokes, religious kitsch, and muffled prayer, an interest that indicates, to my thinking, a rather reckless, though very touching, generosity on your part.

Beautiful Losers was written outside, on a table set among the rocks, weeds, and daisies, behind my house on Hydra, an island in the Aegean Sea. I lived there many years ago. It was a blazing hot summer. I never covered my head. What you have in your hands is more of a sunstroke than a book.

Dear Reader, please forgive me if I have wasted your time.

— Leonard Cohen



Three Poems

KAREN SOLIE

Pathology of the Senses

Oligotrophic: of lakes and rivers. The heat
an inanimate slur, a wool gathering, hanging
like a bad suit. Suspended fine particulate

matter. And an eight-million-dollar ferry shoves off
for Rochester with no souls aboard. I see you,
you know, idling like a limousine through the old

neighbourhoods, your tinted windows. In what
they call “the mind’s eye.” Catch me here
in real time, if that’s the term for it. We’re working

our drinks under threat of a general brownout.
Phospholipase: bitter stimuli activate it.
Back home, we call this a beer parlour.

*I washed my hair at 4 A.M., he says. The full moon,
it was whack. He can’t sleep. The woman
who says pardon my French, over and over,*