

**Leonard Cohen**

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of “The Flame: Poems, Notebooks, Lyrics, Drawings” (Jan. 6), William Logan — whom I had never heard of but who, from his professorial perch, has apparently written numerous hatchet jobs on fellow poets (what a miserable job, hitting those already down) — refers repeatedly, patronizingly, to the “cult” of Leonard Cohen, with all its attendant connotations of not-too-intelligent, uneducated, deluded individuals who are in thrall to fulfilling the narcissistic needs of a power-hungry, often evil leader. Far more than offering a critic’s dispassionate eye, Logan strikes me as passionately, revealingly enraged about Cohen’s fame and his particular appeal to women, which Logan casts as his “famous lechery,” begging the question: “Why the beef, Bill?”

No matter. Please register me in the “cult” of Cohen as I join with the millions around the globe who are deeply moved, united by Cohen: the man, the music, the “gravelly” voice, the wit, the Astairan grace, the divine self-deprecation. (Full disclosure: I am also a card-carrying member of the “cults” of Dylan, Presley, Orbison, Fitzgerald, Sinatra, Mozart, Bach, Shakespeare. . . .)

Logan has, contrary to his aim, succeeded in giving Cohen the ultimate — though pathetically P.C. — honor given to all great artists: the vitriolic posthumous takedown. One sees Cohen, in his fedora, looking down with his all but imperceptible impish grin.

TONI BENTLEY  
LOS ANGELES

TO THE EDITOR:

In his almost heroically ill-informed review of “The Flame,” William Logan writes that Cohen “was never taken very seriously as a poet.” In fact, Cohen won numerous accolades during his career, including the 1968 Governor General’s Literary Award, Canada’s highest prize (which he refused to accept), for his “Selected Poems, 1956-1968”; the Canadian Authors Association

Literary Award for “Book of Mercy” in 1985; and the Prince of Asturias Award in the literature category in 2011. Millions of readers would also testify to his brilliance as a poet.

JAY STONE  
OTTAWA

TO THE EDITOR:

I wish to thank William Logan for his corrective appraisal of Leonard Cohen. Hitherto, as a failed doctoral student of literature, I had naïvely honored Cohen for the many moments of joy, sorrow and insight he had offered us in the last half-century.

Clearly, if I had properly understood what constituted fine lyrics and technically kosher poetry, I would have known better than to enjoy such works as “Tower of Song,” “Joan of Arc,” “Dance Me to the End of Love,” “Who by Fire” and countless others.

Still, as Keith Reid, another lyricist I honor, reminded us, “Nothing’s better left unsaid.” I stand corrected.

HOWARD COWAN  
WOODLAND HILLS, CALIF.

TO THE EDITOR:

I have only one question: Did Leonard Cohen steal William Logan’s girlfriend?

TIM MCDONALD  
FITCHBURG, MASS.

**How a Republic Dies**

TO THE EDITOR:

Yascha Mounk’s review of Edward Watts’s “Mortal Republic: How Rome Fell Into Tyranny” (Dec. 30) traces the beginning of the fall of the ancient Roman republic to the actions of the Gracchi brothers, Tiberius and Gaius. This is like blaming the decline of the United States on Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal.

Just as the New Deal incurred the hatred of wealthy rightists by championing the deprived classes, so did the reforms of the Gracchi brothers incur the hatred of the Roman senators. As a tribune, Tiberius (a war hero against Carthage) pushed

against the concentration of lands by the wealthy, whom the Senate represented. Tiberius sought to reclaim lands from the wealthy landed senators to give to displaced peasants or to the landless urban poor.

Incredibly, the review implies that Donald Trump is a bizarre reincarnation of the Gracchi brothers. You might as well call Trump a reincarnation of Karl Marx.

ROGER CARASSO  
SANTA FE, N.M.

**‘Becoming’**

TO THE EDITOR:

In her splendid review of Michelle Obama’s “Becoming” (Dec. 23), Isabel Wilkerson referred to the first lady’s garden and promotion of nutrition for children as “apolitical.” As the author of “Food Politics” and other books on this topic, I viewed her efforts to improve the quality of school meals as anything but.

I wish her book said more about whether she was surprised by the ferocity of opposition to improving school nutrition standards, what it was like to challenge the entire food industry to reconsider how it markets products to children and when she realized how politics so strongly affects food as well as much else in our society.

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NEW YORK

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**CORRECTION**

A review on Dec. 30 about “Tell Them of Battles, Kings, and Elephants,” by Mathias Énard, described incorrectly the terminal points of a bridge in that novel. Michelangelo designs the bridge to cross the Golden Horn in Constantinople; it is not “a bridge that will join Asia to Europe.” The review also misspelled the surname of the book’s translator; she is Charlotte Mandell, not Mandel. These errors were repeated in the Editors’ Choice column on Jan. 6.

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