

Still Waiting for the Miracle

A review of Ira B. Nadel, *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen* (1996; 2006)

Written for the *Leonard Cohen Files* by Doron B. Cohen

For Tom Sakic, a hundred floors above me

In the tower of LC scholarship

A truly satisfying biography of Leonard Cohen has not been written yet. Among several unsatisfactory attempts, Ira B. Nadel's *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen* is probably the most successful effort, and most readable account. However, the book is plagued by various frustrating problems that cause it to be considerably less useful, captivating or authoritative than the book it might have been. And, unfortunately, ten years after its first publication it was reissued with only a short new afterword, rather than undergoing the thorough overhaul it required.

The book was first published in 1996, by Random House in Canada, and by Pantheon Books in the United States, as well as by Bloomsbury Paperbacks in the UK in 1997. It was reissued, with the new afterword, in 2006 by Vintage in Canada, and in 2007 by University of Texas Press, Austin, in the series "Jewish History, Life and Culture" (in paperback). The book has also been translated into German, French, Polish, Croatian and Japanese – an indication of Cohen's global appeal, and of the need felt for such a biography.

Following a short introduction, Nadel begins his story with a relatively extensive background of Cohen's family and roots in the Jewish community of Montreal. He goes on to portray Cohen's first steps as a poet and musician, his student years, his life on Hydra, his drug habits, women, children (very briefly), and his life-long commitment to both his Jewish tradition and the practice of Zen. He tells of his visit to Cuba during the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and of his singing to Israeli soldiers during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. He reviews the publication of his books, his albums and his concert tours, as well as his friendship with various artists and his relationship with his Zen master Roshi, one of the most stable commitments in his life. Nadel depicts Cohen as a man trying to fulfill his "priestly" call through art and religion, while struggling to overcome years of depression through sex, drugs, alcohol, meditative regime, and the discipline of a dedicated artist. He also depicts him as a person both craving and fearing attachment.

Nadel has done a very thorough job in consulting Cohen, interviewing many of his relatives and friends, going through archives preserving his manuscripts and his unpublished

material, traveling to various destinations connected with his life, and shaping it all in the form of a fairly readable book. Among the book's most rewarding merits are the numerous quotations from Cohen's journals, letters and other material otherwise unavailable to the public. In quoting extensively from these materials Nadel has done readers an important service, but by seeing everything through Cohen's eyes, as it seems, he also deprived them of a more critical analysis of his subject. In his introduction to the book Nadel tells how he had asked Cohen, at the publisher's insistence, whether the book may be called "an authorized biography"; "Cohen paused and then thoughtfully said, 'tolerated,' adding an instant later, 'benignly tolerated.' Such understatement disguises the remarkable assistance he and those close to him have provided for my work" (p. 1). And indeed, the line between "tolerated" and "authorized" is extremely thin. Cohen is often quoted – from interviews, journals, letter, books, songs etc. – with hardly any comment from his biographer, and even in many cases where there are no quotation marks he seems to be the speaker. Even readers who greatly admire Cohen's work – and the writer of these lines is certainly one of them – would like to hear his life described from a more detached position, by a voice different than Cohen's so familiar one.

As an illustration to this problem, here is a paragraph combining some sentences quoted from Cohen's journal, with some sentences in which it is not clear whether the speaker is Cohen or Nadel (there is no reference to this page in the endnotes, but it seems to relate to Cohen in 1973):

Despite the animosities between him and Suzanne, Cohen no longer felt that he earned the right to sing his songs of heartache. He believed he had not suffered, not lost anyone, not experienced enough pain to justify his lyrics. A journal entry summarizes his state: "It's no good if it ain't the woman that you love. Write songs but your heart will never sing." Tormenting him was an unanswerable question: "What unfreezes a man?" (p. 200)

Cohen "felt" and "believed": although this is not given as a direct quote, Cohen must have been the source for these feelings. And if so, isn't it the biographer's duty to comment and perhaps qualify those assertions? Did Cohen really never suffer? A little earlier Nadel quotes Cohen as saying: "Suffering [...] has led me to wherever I am. Suffering has made me rebel against my own weakness" (p. 180). And hadn't he experienced loss, such as the loss of his father? Isn't Cohen putting up a little show here, perhaps, that requires at least some comment, or a psychological interpretation?

There are many other examples for such "suspicious" sentences. Regarding his Zen training, Nadel writes that Cohen "learned how to get rid of the baggage that prevented him from deepening his work" (p. 202). What does this mean exactly? Wasn't there any depth to Cohen's work before that? Or, alternatively, shouldn't we be told in what way did his work become deeper? On the same page, between sentences quoted from Cohen, Nadel inserts the quite startling observation: "The desire for women no longer satisfies him; the reality of their being

possessed tarnished his idolatry of them.” Cohen is forty-one years old at this point; did it take over twenty years of possessing a great number of women to tarnish their image for him? And on the other hand, was he ever before that “satisfied” by the “desire” for women? Many other such examples could have been quoted.

Nadel sometimes uses information supplied by Cohen without attribution, and seemingly without verification. For example, he writes: “Cohen began writing ‘Chelsea Hotel #2’ in a Polynesian bar in Miami in 1971 and finished it at the Imperial Hotel in Asmara, Ethiopia, in 1973” (p. 145). No reference is given in the endnotes – which are often much too sparse – and it may sound like the result of Nadel’s independent research (which would still require a reference). However, those familiar with Cohen’s work would recognize this piece of information (except for the hotel’s name) as coming from the liner notes compiled by Cohen for his album *The Best of Leonard Cohen*. If Nadel was indeed able to confirm where and when the song was begun and concluded, he should have specified it in his endnotes. There are numerous other such cases in the book.

Nadel often uses Cohen’s writings as if they consist of autobiographical fact, rather than fiction. Even allowing that Cohen’s work is markedly autobiographical, his poetic license should not be ignored, and the use of his published material, and even his private journals, should be qualified and corroborated by other sources, rather than taken at face value. Even *The Favorite Game* – clearly an autobiographical work of fiction, but also a work Cohen rewrote twice over and tinkered with endlessly – shouldn’t be quoted as a reliable source of biographical data, as Nadel sometimes does (pp. 15, 18 etc.). Or another example: on pp. 196-8 Nadel quotes scenes relating to Cohen’s trip to Israel in 1973 as if they were objective journalistic descriptions. The endnotes give the source for these quotes as “FR”, referring to “The Final Revision of My Life in Art”, described on p. 196 as an “unpublished prose work”. Clearly, this text too should not be quoted as factual evidence requiring no comment or verification.

Two other problems in the book sometimes coincide with each other. One is the jumping forward and backward in time with quotations and facts, as well as the absence of a clear timeline. The book advances in a chronological order, but often the reader cannot be sure about the exact point in time, and there are also some vague assertions such as “for a time in the early seventies he became Roshi’s secretary...” (p. 191). The other problem concerns the rather succinct information supplied about Cohen’s literary and musical works, while largely avoiding in-depth analysis or evaluation of their merit. Nadel may have considered that there is already a big enough body of critical writing about Cohen’s work, having himself written an earlier book about it (*Leonard Cohen: A Life in Art*, 1994) but still, in such a full-scale biography of an artist readers expect to learn more about his work, as well as an expert’s opinion of its value.

An example for the two problems just mentioned is the case of the composition and publication of Cohen’s first novel *The Favorite Game*. Indeed, Cohen wrote and rewrote the book over several years, but Nadel’s narrative, divided between several chapters of the book, is

not well organized and even confusing. Contacts with publishers and editors switch from Canada to the US and then to London without an explanation. Alternative titles are mentioned on p. 89, and then others come up on p.113. After this long saga, the actual publication of the book is mentioned in passing (inside parentheses) on p. 116. And although Nadel often refers along the book to the novel's contents, there is no clear, concise abstract of the story it tells.

The evolution of *Beautiful Losers* and its publication are more concisely described (pp. 128-139), and the book's narrative forms are commented upon (p. 133), but again, there is neither an attempt to describe the structure of the book, nor an evaluation of its place in the literature of its era. Apparently it is assumed that everyone reading the biography is familiar with the novel, but there must be readers of this biography who haven't read all of Cohen's books, and for the sake of such readers more information should have been supplied.

The writing and publication of *Book of Mercy* occupies roughly one page (238), but only two sentences actually describe the contents of the book (more about them below). For his appraisal of the book Nadel gives only one sentence: "*Book of Mercy* was mystical, spiritual, and indulgent, displaying none of the lyricism of his early work or the anger of his later" – a surprising failure on behalf of Nadel to recognize the great merit of the book, including its obvious lyrical qualities.

Near the end of the book Nadel startles the reader with the following sentence: "For all his despair, Leonard Cohen has led a life of unfettered romance, largely free of obligations or responsibility" (p. 274). Along the book Nadel created a basically favorable image of Cohen, with just a little criticism now and then, especially regarding Cohen's relations with his women, and therefore this unkindly summing up comes as a surprise. True, Cohen had adopted a bohemian way of life, even a self-centered one, perhaps sometimes at the expense of others, although Nadel is not clear in showing that. On the contrary, he often demonstrates Cohen's obligation to his family members, his children and his friends in many ways. He also emphasizes that even if he never remained obligated to one woman for a very long period, he remained good friends with his lovers after they have separated (p. 55). It seems to me that Cohen has demonstrated his responsibility in various ways, including the one toward his musicians while accepting long and grueling concert tours. He also kept his obligation to his public beyond anybody's expectations, as proven by his going on a tour of concerts at the age of 73. Reading through Nadel's biography the reader does not end up with the impression that Cohen has lived his life "largely free of obligations or responsibility", the impression the biographer himself ends up with. At least, this is not the impression he was able to demonstrate throughout his book. Had he perhaps withheld some information from his readers?

Apart from the problems discussed above, the book contains numerous errors, some small, some more crucial, which could have been avoided with more careful editing. Following is a list of some of the obvious errors, as well as some of Nadel's questionable assertions that should be reexamined, for the benefit of the book's readers and of future biographers.

P. 7

"...alongside *Ozar Taamei Hazal, Thesaurus of Talmudical Interpretations*, a seven-hundred-page volume compiled by Cohen's maternal grandfather, Rabbi Solomon Klinitsky-Klein."

However, on p. 12 Nadel gives a different – and in fact, *much more accurate* – translation of the Hebrew title: "*A Treasury of Rabbinic Interpretations*".

P. 16

"His mother had actually named the dog Tovarishch, but his father disliked the reminder of the site of the Russo-German treaties".

The name given to the dog by Cohen's mother is a noun meaning "comrade" in Russian, and is not a geographical name. It's hard to imagine the cause for this error. Incidentally, this dog is mentioned in Book I, Chapter 22 of *The Favourite Game*: "Tovarich, named before the Stalin-Hitler pact [...]"; perhaps here lies the reason why the father came to dislike the name.

P. 23

"...lines from Lorca's poem 'The Divan at Tamarit'."

It is not a poem but rather a book of poems, and the correct translation of the title is *The Divan of Tamarit*.

P. 23

"...Lorca was executed by Granadian Falangists on August 19, 1936, shortly after his return to Spain to aid in the Spanish Civil War."

Lorca returned to Spain from South America in April 1934, more than two years before the outbreak of the war in July 1936. Also, describing him as going "to aid in the... War", as if he was an outsider and not part of the conflict, gives the wrong impression. See Ian Gibson's exemplary biography, *Federico Garcia Lorca: A Life* (1993).

P. 24

"Leonard Cohen began to write poetry seriously in 1950 at the age of sixteen, a year after he discovered Lorca. He recalls: 'I was sitting down at a card table on a sun porch one day when I decided to quit a job. I was working in a brass foundry [W. R. Cuthbert] at the time, and one morning I thought, I just can't take it anymore and I went out to the sun porch and I started a

poem. I had a marvelous sense of mastery and power, and freedom, and strength, when I was writing this poem.”

The quote is taken from an interview given by Cohen to Michael Harris in 1969, but there is clearly a difficulty here. Did Cohen really hold a job at the foundry when he was sixteen? Nadel has him working there after his return from New York, when he was 23 (p. 56); at sixteen he'd either be in school or in summer camp. In the interview he may have wished to project a certain image (provided that he is quoted accurately), or perhaps he had something else in mind, not the very first poem he had written. This is one example in many for the uncritical use of material by Nadel.

P. 38

“The issue also contained work by both Creeley and Corman”

These two are introduced by their full name (Robert Creeley and Cid Corman) only on the next page, and nothing else is said about them; readers unfamiliar with the North American poetry scene at the time will remain puzzled. Corman's name is also missing from the index, which has many other substantial omissions (and was not updated to include the text of the “Afterword” either).

P. 49

“As he matured, Cohen began to display the characteristics of manic-depressiveness.”

Is this an expert opinion? Was Cohen diagnosed? Did Nadel at least consult experts before making his diagnosis? The “clinical” evidence he supplies in the next few sentences, including Cohen's alleged fastidiousness, is inconclusive and not very convincing. Cohen undoubtedly suffered of some kind of depression, but there is no evidence that he suffered of manic-depressiveness, or bipolar disorder, as it is known today.

P. 50

“...his 1984 video ‘I Am A Hotel’, in which he dramatized numerous stories among the hotel's inhabitants”.

Cohen is not given credit neither as writer, director or producer of this film. To what degree was it really “his” film? It seems that he appears in it and his songs are used, but other than that it wasn't his work.

P. 52

“Cohen recalls hearing [Kerouac] read [...] and later meeting him at Ginsberg's apartment.”

However, on p. 78 it is stated that Cohen hailed Ginsberg in Athens “recognizing him from a photograph”. One of these two assertions is probably incorrect.

P. 61

“...Layton and Cohen dressed as kibbutzim in slacks and white shirts with their sleeves rolled up”.

The word “kibbutzim” is the plural form of “kibbutz”, a collective community in Israel. The members of kibbutz are known as “kibbutzniks”, and that is the word that should have been used here.

P. 76

“Rain is rare [on Hydra], the average yearly precipitation being only an inch and a half”.

Yet Nadel himself writes later about “the chilly and rainy winter” on Hydra (p. 81). It can even snow there in winter.

P. 78

“Israeli journalist Amos Elan”

The correct name is “Elon”.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amos_Elon

P. 105

“When Marianne returned to Oslo to visit relatives, Cohen followed”.

In fact, Marianne said on a radio interview, the translation of which appears on the *LC Files*, that Cohen actually drove her to Oslo in Axel Jensen’s car:

<http://www.leonardcohenfiles.com/marianne2006.html>

Marianne Ihlen is one of several important people in Cohen’s life whom Nadel did *not* interview for the book (Suzanne Elrod, the mother of his two children, is another), and her perspective of their relationship is clearly missing. Almost nothing is said about Cohen’s relations with Marianne’s son Axel (and very little about his relations with his own children or about their lives). Nadel tends to emphasize the negative aspects of Cohen’s relations with his women: always fearing commitment, drawing away, separating, angry; at one point Nadel even determines that a law suit by Suzanne “added to his mistrust of women” (p. 253), no less. However, Marianne, for example, paints a very different picture, largely absent from this book, and we never hear anything from Suzanne Elrod’s point of view either.

P. 112

“Masha Cohen’s visit precipitated some drastic changes, the most important being Marianne’s removal from the house. According to Jewish law, a Cohen (member of a priestly caste) cannot marry a divorced woman, and living with a divorced woman and her child would have been even more upsetting to his mother.”

Clearly what would have been upsetting to Cohen’s mother was not the fact that Marianne was a divorcee, with or without a child, but the fact that she wasn’t Jewish, as also becomes clear from Cohen’s letter to his sister, quoted by Nadel: “Mother doesn’t realize what a freak I am, a real live artist living with an actual woman, Christian or not” (p. 123).

P. 170

“Robert Altman called him, telling him that he had built a film [*McCabe and Mrs. Miller*] around Cohen’s songs from his first album. He said he had been writing the script while listening to Cohen’s record”.

Altman tells a quite different story on the audio channel of the DVD of *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*. He says that he used to listen to Cohen’s album constantly some years before he made the film, but during the making of the film he forgot all about it and didn’t know what music to use. Only after completing the shooting of the film and hearing the record again by chance, did he realize how much the songs fit the film, and contacted Cohen about getting them. He later thought that perhaps the songs were on his mind subconsciously as he was making the film. I’ve put the transcription of Altman’s story on the *LC Files*:

<http://www.leonardcohenforum.com/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=13054>

PP. 170-171

“Reaction to the film itself was mixed”.

The reaction was mixed but Nadel quotes only negative reviews. For a very positive one he could have quoted the great film critic Pauline Kael (from her book *5001 Nights at the Movies*): “A beautiful pipe dream of a movie [...]. Delicate, richly textured, and unusually understated, this modern classic is not like any other film. [...]”.

P. 172

“...they broke out the saki and enjoyed themselves.”

The Japanese rice wine is not called “saki” but “sake” (with the “ke” pronounced as in “Kent”).

P. 173

“*Selected Poems* [...] was published in England in 1969 and in the following four years in Germany, Israel, Sweden, France, and Spain”.

France and Spain are correct; I’m not sure about the other two, but I’m certain the book has not been published in Israel.

P. 181

“Between 1971 and 1977 he released five albums, but only two books appeared. But his productivity did not bring popularity, and Cohen felt marginalized”.

Here and in few other similar places it should have been mentioned that while his work didn’t become popular in America, it was always very popular in Europe, Israel and some other countries, and his records were always available.

P. 186

“In Jerusalem, at the Yad Eliahu Sports Palace...”

The “Yad Eliahu Sports Palace” is in Tel-Aviv, where Cohen gave a concert before the one in Jerusalem during his 1972 tour. In Jerusalem the concert took place at the “Binyanei Ha’uma” hall. See also the following pages:

<http://www.leonardcohenlive.com/concerts/setlists/1970s/1972-04-19.htm>

<http://www.leonardcohenlive.com/concerts/setlists/1970s/1972-04-20.htm>

P. 186

“The young audience responded by singing the Hebrew song ‘Zim Shalom’ (‘We Bring You Peace’).”

First, the correct transliteration is “Sim Shalom”, which means “put peace”, and can be found in the Jewish prayer book. However, this is not what the audience was singing, but rather “Hevenu Shalom Aleichem”, which indeed means “We Bring You Peace”. The audience can be heard singing in the film *Bird on the Wire*, made on that tour.

P. 196

“...Cohen flew to Israel from Athens a few days before the Yom Kippur War began in October 1973, partly out of a determination to help, ...”

Cohen could not have gone “to help” a few days *before* the war broke out, because it started with a surprise attack on Israel by Egypt and Syria on October 6. Other records show that

he went there soon after the war had started, and even what Nadel himself says on the same page points in that direction. Still, it is possible that Cohen flew to Israel sometimes before the war broke out (not “to help”, but for reasons of his own). This point still remains obscure until it can be clarified by a reliable source.

It should be noted that Nadel did research in various places in Europe and America, but he did not do so in Israel, and this is evident from his description of Cohen’s war experience on pp. 196-198, which is often inaccurate. Nor was press material from that period and from later recollections by musicians who appeared with Cohen available to him. Some of this material have been translated and posted on the *LC Files* by Einat and by myself:

<http://www.leonardcohenforum.com/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=4978&hilit=Yom+Kippur+war>

<http://www.leonardcohenforum.com/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=7327&hilit=Yom+Kippur+war>

P. 197

“I went immediately to the Cafe Pinoti...”

The correct spelling is “Pinati” (meaning “on the corner”).

P. 198

“...he went to see the singer/promoter Sholomo Semach...”

This probably refers to the promoter Shmuel Tzemach, who organized Cohen’s 1972 concerts in Israel; the name may have been confused with that of singer/promoter Shlomo Tzach.

P. 199

“...where that night at dinner his friend Asher confronted him...”

Asher who? Often in the book people are not fully identified – in most cases woman with whom Cohen was involved (p. 114, for example, has a list of those).

P. 199

“...and began several songs incorporating his Israeli experience, ‘Field Commander Cohen,’ for example...”

Nadel gives only one example, and fails to mention “*Lover, Lover, Lover*”, which Cohen wrote and performed in front of the Israeli soldiers during the war. Its earliest version began with the line “I saw my brothers fighting in the desert”.

P. 236

“Filming [of “I Am a Hotel”] took six days. It was a thirty-minute surreal drama, a pastiche of fantasy, song, and dance...”

The film is in fact 24 minutes long. While it may certainly be called “a pastiche”, “surreal drama” is a little too fanciful description for it.

P. 237

“...suggested that their next video would be an adaptation of *The Favorite Game*, but it has never been made”.

A film based on the book was eventually made in 2003.

P. 238

“Like the biblical psalms, the psalms in *Book of Mercy* deal with longing and self abnegation...”

In fact, both the biblical psalms and the ones in *Book of Mercy* (which, by the way, Cohen himself did not call “psalms” but rather “prayers”), has many themes, and self abnegation is not necessarily one of them, although suffering is, as well as the glory of God and his creation, repentance, and more.

P. 239

“The reawakening of his Judaism in the eighties took another form as he transposed Hebrew prayer into songs. ‘Who By Fire’ is based on the melody for the prayer ‘Mi Bamayim, Mi Ba Esh’ sung at the Musaf or noontime service on Yom Kippur”.

First, Nadel speaks here about the “reawakening” of Cohen’s Judaism “in the eighties” (although earlier he said that Cohen resumed Jewish practice in 1976, p. 213), but the song he gives as the first of two examples was already on the album *New Skin For The Old Ceremony* from 1974 (and perhaps relates, at least partially, to Cohen’s experience in the 1973 war). Second, the correct name of the prayer is “U’netanneh Tokef”, of which “Mi bamayim, umi ba’esh” (“who by water, and who by fire”) is one of the lines. Third, it is sung also on Rosh Hashanah (New Year, ten days before Yom Kippur). And fourth, more than on the melody, Cohen’s song is based on the prayer’s words.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unetanneh_Tokef

P. 261

“‘Anthem’ was borrowed from Kabbalistic sources, especially the sixteenth-century rabbi Isaac Luria.”

This should have been qualified, since “Anthem”, which relates to many fields of reference, was not “borrowed” from the Kabbalah. Perhaps the only line that may have had its source of imagery in Luria’s Kabbalah is “There is a crack in everything / That’s how the light gets in”. While pivotal to the song, one or two lines are not sufficient to consider the song as having been “borrowed” from one specific source.

P. 276

“...taking the name “Jikan” (“Silent One”)...”

The meaning of ‘Jikan’ was hotly debated, but it most certainly not “silent one”, and it’s a shame that this misunderstanding was incorporated into the new afterword of the book. See the posts by Jarkko, including a quote from Cohen himself, on the following page of the *LC Files*:

<http://www.leonardcohenforum.com/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=3590&p=38414&hilit>

Unfortunately, none of the above-mentioned errors - as well as other errors not mentioned here and some obvious misprinted words and names - was corrected in the recent printing of the book, which is exactly similar to the original edition, except for the twelve-page afterword added at the back of the book. Whether the publishers did not care to spend the money on a revised edition, or whether Nadel himself did not care to revise his book, I cannot tell (in fact, at least one error *was* corrected, as Tom Sakic has observed: on p. 150 a reference to “Both Sides Now” as a Judy Collins’ hit was corrected to “Joni Mitchell’s hit”). In his afterword Nadel reviews briefly Cohen’s life between 1996 and 2006, including the albums that came out during that period, and Cohen’s mounting popularity with younger audiences and performers who covered his song (but not a word is said about the vast, global community of Cohen’s admirers created by the Internet, or the several excellent sites dedicated to his work). The review of events, and especially the description of *Dear Heather* and *Book of Longing*, is much too concise and unsatisfactory. About four of the afterword’s twelve pages (282-285) are dedicated to one episode from the past, and to the only specifically declared correction of an error from the first printing of the book, through the discovery in a student’s magazine of an interview Cohen gave during his 1966 visit to Edmonton, which lead to the unearthing of a somewhat different version concerning the writing of “Sisters of Mercy” than the one Nadel had given earlier.

With the wealth of material at his disposal, and his expertise in modern literature generally and Canadian literature specifically, Nadel could have written twice as long a book as the one he did write. For example, much more could have been said about the literary background against which Cohen had grown up as a poet. Not many readers will be familiar with Canadian literature of the time, and although Nadel introduces some figures from the Montreal poets’ scene, others are only mentioned by name. No doubt much more should have been said about A. M. Klein, to whom hardly one page is dedicated, and who according to Nadel was “an

instrumental figure in Cohen's life" (p. 66). Nadel should be commended on introducing the expatriate community on Hydra in a lively manner, but other places and periods in Cohen's life deserved a similarly elaborate treatment. Also, much more could have been said about Cohen's music. One more thing: the book should have had an extensive bibliographical list of books and articles other than that produced by Cohen; Nadel mentions his sources in the endnotes, but these are often hard to follow. An appended time-line is also greatly missed. All these technical faults, together with various other problems mentioned earlier, and especially what seems to be Nadel's failure to distinguish between Cohen's real, private self and the image he wishes to project, combine to make this book frustrating for those who know and admire Cohen's work, and an unsatisfactory introduction for those who wish to become familiar with it.

A revised edition of Nadel's book can hardly be expected (although it would be welcomed), given that the book has been reissued recently in the original format, and therefore most of the above was written with the thought of a future biography of Leonard Cohen which will be written by as yet unknown biographer. A new, updated, comprehensive, authoritative, well-written biography of Cohen is very much needed, but what are the chances of its being published in the foreseeable future? First, because Nadel's biography is available again, publishers might be reluctant to finance a new one. Second, after collaborating so closely with Nadel, and considering his very busy schedule, it is not likely that Cohen himself will support another such project. On the other hand, time is running short: many witnesses to Cohen's life are already departed, and others are aged, so a new biographical project should be launched sooner rather than later. Ideally such a project would require an extremely gifted and dedicated biographer, who would be willing to go over all the familiar information with fresh insight and also uncover new material. This would have to be a person with deep understanding of Canadian life and literature, of Jewish tradition and history, of Zen and other eastern traditions, of the music scene, and of much else; a person appreciative of Cohen but willing to view him from a detached position. Considering this long list of factors and requirements, it is not surprising that we are still waiting for the miracle.

Kyoto, December 2008

(Slightly corrected June 2009)