



The Favorite Game

Leonard Cohen

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In this unforgettable novel, Leonard Cohen boldly etches the youth and early manhood of Lawrence Breavman, only son of an old Jewish family in Montreal. Life for Breavman is made up of dazzling colour – a series of motion pictures fed through a high-speed projector: the half-understood death of his father; the adult games of love and war, with their infinite capacity for fantasy and cruelty; his secret experiments with hypnotism; the night-long adventures with Krantz, his beloved comrade and confidant. Later, achieving literary fame as a college student, Breavman does penance through manual labour, but ultimately flees to New York. And although he has loved the bodies of many women, it is only when he meets Shell, whom he awakens to her own beauty, that he discovers the totality of love and its demands, and comes to terms with the sacrifices he must make.

The Favorite Game Details

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From Reader Review The Favorite Game for online ebook

Susan Armstrong says

longest read ever of a short book. The Globe and Mail compared it to Catcher in the Rye. I think not.

El says

It's been over 10 years since I read Cohen's Beautiful Losers and I really don't remember much besides, well, a vibrator. I wasn't sure what to expect from this book? What will the favorite game turn out to be? Does it involve a vibrator?

This is a semi-autobiographical, coming-of-age novel about Montrealian (is that a thing? let's call it a thing) Lawrence Breavman who, from a rather young age, is fairly obsessed with sex. Or, I don't know, maybe all boys are, or maybe it's a Canadian thing.

But in Leonard Cohen fashion, parts of his story are really beautiful. Not when he's using Breavman to talk about women being his property, certainly; but Cohen is a poet, and his poetry comes across even in his prose.

I understand from the never-wrong Wikipedia that Cohen's story was actually much longer than what it turned out to be because a lot of it got chopped. I think that it's actually noticeable. The chapters are short to begin with, vignette-like, but there's a flow to a lot of it. But the flow is disrupted quite a bit, and I wonder if those breaks are where some chop-chop happened.

Breavman isn't as interesting a character to me as one of his lady friends, Shell. Cohen spent a considerable amount of time discussing Shell, and managed to make her a fascinating character. I would have liked to know even more about her. I also wish Cohen had spent similar amounts of energy on Breavman and the other characters. But, again, maybe all of that is in the chopped sections which I hold out hope will one day come to the light of day.

And, I'm sorry. Can we just comment for a moment on the fact that Cohen was asked to heavily edit his novel? That's like cutting Frank Sinatra off during his Lifetime Achievement award speech. Nobody puts baby in the corner.

Daniel says

As can be confirmed from the recently released biography of Leonard Cohen I'm Your Man, The Favourite Game is a semi-autobiographical work. Humour is something most people don't associate with Leonard Cohen but this book has it (mostly in the first part). What I first found striking about the book was the short chapters, more like vignettes almost like poems connecting the dots of the story. Not having grown up in 1950's Canada I can only guess that Cohen's depiction of it during Breavman's childhood was on the mark. I found the main characters discovery of sexuality particularly interesting and how educators at the time hid essential facts behind meaningless trivia; e.g. 'A single sperm is one thousand times smaller than this [.]'

The characters in this book don't come to life easily, it is as if they have a soul but it is just half alive and thus do not jump off the page. Cohen's writing commands a powerful atmosphere at times, however this is not constant, it merely comes and goes.

Cohen is a master of subtlety, I was most impressed with his description of a masturbation session (chapter 19), without once mentioning the word masturbation or anything blatantly related to it. At the time of writing *The Favourite Game*, Cohen was 28 or 29, however his recall of the frustrations experienced by many adolescent boys that girls their own age develop faster and thus prefer to date older males appears very fresh. Throughout the novel Cohen writes a lot about the body in both similes, metaphors and descriptions. It is clear that the body has held high significance for Cohen throughout his life and writings. Pick from any section of Cohen's writing life; poetry, the novels or lyrics and you will find various homages to the human body especially the female form. He worships it like a religion.

The book raised two incredibly fascinating and essential questions in the examination of life and ourselves. Can some things about ourselves be too deep for us to discover? And. Can we only just ever scratch the surface of who we are?

In book I Cohen depicts the crumbling of a once passionate relationship in to passive aggressive onesupmanship. With lots of subtle attacks from each partner regarding various grievances the other harbours, such as Breavman's short story about how Tamara can make him feel so worthless. Cohen also notes the mild longing for aspects of ones single life which were given up to facilitate relationships, such as the wish for solitude or not needing to compromise as much. He writes from the true perspective of one who has experienced such a trauma; it is clear that Cohen has been very emotionally vulnerable and damaged in this area of his life. I found this part of the story a very though pill to swallow because I have been through very similar experiences myself, experiences which I didn't wish to remember.

In parts Breavman's character reminded me greatly of Oscar Wilde's Dorian Grey because he seemed to be on a one-way road to emotional disaster and ignoring the warning signs, this was extremely frustrating for me to read. The issue of Breavman and his mother is a horrible one, it angered me to see him abandon and constantly disrespect her and eventually drive her insane. Breavman is not a person I would like to be friends with. The themes are very bitter indeed, it is almost a textbook on how to hurt those you love. Which is in line with Cohen's later work; "All I ever learnt from love is have to shoot somebody who outdrew you."

When I got to book III I began to lose interest in the story because it proceeded down a path I found to be very foreign, gritty and grotesque in parts, I simply could not identify with the character of Breavman anymore (not that identifying with the character is everything). The voice of the book 50 years on from its publication remains a youthful one with no apparent aged tone to its text, eventually the tone will of course freeze and remain in a fixed period of history. I believe the timeless themes of adolescence, relationships and self-discovery are to the books credit that it doesn't appear too dated.

Cohen himself said "If you hold an artist special to you, you will appreciate their early work as well as latter work." when I started reading this book I found myself slightly pressured to like this book because Cohen is my number one favourite artist. Luckily I managed to dispel this feeling and became unbiased in my judgement of this work. It was not an easy read but it is rewarding nonetheless.

Laura Leaney says

This book – a kind of sexual bildungsroman of the young man Leonard Breavman (Leonard Cohen) – is gorgeous and rather appalling simultaneously. To be formally accurate it's written in the stream-of-consciousness style, but it's bolder than that. The point of view is third person, but so close to Breavman's consciousness as to give me the odd effect of perceiving things from two places at once. The images at the onset of the novel required some effort as I read because they leap from the death of Breavman's father, to his best friend and sounding-board Krantz, to the games they play and stories they tell (often sexual), to his mother's needling passive aggressiveness, to his first sexual encounters.

The scenes and images miraculously coalesce into a deep understanding of Breavman's nature. Still in school, he lives an affluent life in a Jewish suburb of Montreal. He is intellectually interesting, attracted to beauty at the linguistic and physical level, and obnoxious in his objectification of women. At one point Breavman learns the art of hypnosis and uses it on Heather, his family's maid. "She was a husky, good-looking girl of twenty with high-coloured cheeks like a porcelain doll. Breavman chose her for his first victim of sleep. A veritable Canadian peasant." It works. He handles her naked body, "unbuttons his fly and told her she was holding a stick [. . .] He was intoxicated with relief, achievement, guilt, experience." From that point on, Breavman's sexual obsession with women becomes more profound and - for me - more exhausting.

He begins a relationship with Tamara, who becomes his "mistress" for three years until he turns twenty. The scenes with her are interrupted by episodes with his mother and make for an interesting psychological effect. The sexual repetition got on my nerves but the descriptions are lovely. At one point he leaves Tamara after she falls asleep: "Her body was with him and he let a vision of it argue against his flight. I am running through a snowfall which is her thighs, he dramatized in purple. Her thighs are filling up the street. Wide as a snowfall, heavy as huge falling Zeppelins, her damp thighs are settling on the sharp roofs and wooden balconies. Weather-vanes press the shape of roosters and sail-boats into the skin. The faces of famous statues are preserved like intaglios. . . ." This vision causes him to return, and he quietly lets himself back into the apartment.

Later, "He saw the most beautiful person and pursued her. Shell." In the third part of the book sexual desire does not abate but it does (finally) deepen, intertwining itself with beauty and spirituality. His comments about Shell still jar - in that they're constantly objectifying – but his feelings for her are convincingly like love. By the end of the book, I feel the power that women had over Leonard Cohen's own mind and memories – and the book deepened my appreciation for his song lyrics. I am reminded of his shortest poem from *Book of Longing* titled "The sweetest little song": *You go your way / I'll go your way too.*"

K says

Kada spava, svaki covek je samo dete!

Iskreno, nisam nikad bila fan Koeni ali me je zainteresovalo da procitam njegov prvi roman i moram priznati da sam se prijatno iznenadila. Pise na jako dopadljiv nacin, ima lepe opise i drzi paznju do samog kraja.

Gina says

I wanted to review this. I wanted to underline so many passages but it's a library book. I wanted to devour and savour it at the same time, I wanted to review it but everything I say sounds like a slam poem. Glorious, drowsy summertime prose and witty one liners, this book epitomises everything Leonard Cohen has ever meant to me. The Future was the soundtrack to my childhood. Later, drinking red wine on the couch late at night with my dad talking literature listening to hallelujah obnoxiously loudly over the speakers. This book felt so very familiar, and I missed it when it wasn't by my side. I tried to record my favourite lines but there was nearly one on every page. beautiful beautiful.

Intortetor says

e così un editore rifiutò all'epoca questo "il gioco preferito" definendolo "una prolungata e noiosissima storia d'amore di cohen con se stesso".

mica aveva tutti i torti. intendiamoci, quella che fa leonard cohen non è narrativa: è poesia, e come ogni poeta cohen, tramite il suo quasi doppio lawrence breavman, cerca la bellezza ovunque, nell'amicizia, nei momenti che fissano per sempre nella memoria l'adolescenza, nelle donne, nella loro bellezza e nel loro mistero, nella musica, nella divina follia dei giochi di un bambino autistico, in quello che lo circonda e -in definitiva- anche in tutto il resto. perchè cohen -come diceva del se stesso bambino un altro cantautore, stavolta italiano- "si innamorava di tutto", e in quel tutto certamente e sopra tutto c'era anche se stesso. ma è solo un modo come un altro per dire che era innamorato della vita.

bel romanzo? no, ha dei momenti che ti annoiano a morte e delle volte vorresti che cohen/breavman si spostasse e ti lasciasse vedere il resto della storia: ma è il prezzo da pagare per quelle pagine in cui la poesia ti travolge. che è una cosa che potrebbe irritare tantissimi, e non a torto, così come potrebbe trovare i suoi estimatori pronti a difenderla in tutto e per tutto.

comunque meglio le canzoni, davvero.

Ilyhana Kennedy says

This book is the reason why I give less than five stars to so many others.

Exquisitely written, it allows the reader an insight into the life experiences of a brutally self-involved person. The central character Breavman lives in a world of his own creation, a world of "expectation". He lurches from one whim to the next and in the process leaves a trail of relationship debris, about which he cares little. In the sheer genius of his style, Cohen redeems his protagonist from his life of arrogance and loneliness in one acute paragraph. In so doing, Cohen restores hope for the reader, hope for his protagonist, hope that all things, all people have potential for change.

And this was Cohen's first novel, beautiful, crafted with an obvious intelligence and depth of perception.

Melissa D'andrea says

I respect Leonard Cohen but I was so bored with this book and felt it lacked a plot. Didn't help that the protagonist was extremely unlikable.

Stacy LeVine says

This book is imperfect. Immature. It's a misogynist screed in search of the novel within it. At times, the book utterly infuriated me. (At many times, actually.) Most of the time, it turned me on in a guilty sort of way. I don't like the feeling of arousal during my morning commute, and I never lusted for the narrator. If anything, I yearned to smack his face.

But, ultimately, I really like this little scrap of early Leonard Cohen. It brought me as close to my own mother's experience of growing up Jewish in Montreal as I can ever hope to get. Thanks, Breavman, for that.

Mark Drew says

Lawrence Breavman, you are, in actuality, a misogynist, a user and a taker and your ultimate fate is briefly noted within the same grey colored future as you left your mother and deserted your friend and lovers.

I have no real summary review of this book - what it does is remind me again of the wisdom of Shakyamuni in the Upajjhathana Sutta:

"I am subject to aging, have not gone beyond aging.'

"I am subject to illness, have not gone beyond illness.' ...

"I am subject to death, have not gone beyond death.' ...

"I will grow different, separate from all that is dear and appealing to me.' ...

"I am the owner of my actions,[1] heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir.'*

This book is not about these remembrances, but underscores them as one reads.

Having said this, this was a very hard book for me to read. I found the stream of consciousness writing to be very difficult to absorb and to be closer to poetry than to prose. It is jelled from isolated vignettes that slowly create an arching narrative of a not very likeable individual who uses his genius as both a cudgel and as a means to isolation.

*("Upajjhathana Sutta: Subjects for Contemplation" (AN 5.57), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight, 3 July 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka...>)

Makis Dionis says

Magic Bus!!

Paul Bryant says

Leonard Cohen, like the artist at various times known as Prince, likes to fuse God and sex together, so that for him shagging is like Communion is for Catholics, and he shares this view with crazy cult leaders and holy lechers throughout history, as can be seen in songs like Hallelujah (check out what that holy dove is up to), Dance Me to the End of Love (one of my top favourites) and his other - wilder - weirder - better - far more disgusting - novel Beautiful Losers.

In this first novel he gives us a portrait of the artist as a young slightly bohemian bore, mooching and yearning his way around Montreal. It's okay, but he hasn't got his mojo working yet. Beautiful Losers is the one Cohen novel to read - he quit writing novels after that one. It was impossible to follow up.

This one is a saunter, that one is a mind-melt. Read Beautiful Losers and get the full Cohen experience - it'll dance you to the end of something or other, that's for sure.

Note ; i saw Mr Cohen in concert once. He's a very funny guy. At one point he said to the audience ;

"I'd like to thank you for all the letters and cards and good wishes you've sent me over the years, but I'm sorry to tell you they didn't help at all."

Jade says

One of the most beautifully and well written books I've ever read. Breavman by all normal reasons is not the most likeable character; he is selfish, uses people for his own ideals and stuck in his own adolescent immaturity and naivety. However, in this snapshot of his life Cohen creates a poetry around Breavmen with an almost childlike fascination in things. Where Breavman emotional abuses young women to admire them as one would pictures upon a wall, this is done with such poetic licence that although you know you should hate the character, you just can't help becoming wrapped up in his fantasies. Breavmans particular relationship with a child within the book also adds to the character's inner greatness as Breavman tends to see wonder in the uniqueness in others, rather than trying to make them confirm with the norm. It is also the moment when this pure individual is killed off (and thus in Breavman's mind rejected by the normal world) that he realises once and for all that he would rather be a world observer, occasionally disturbing the water's surface, than play a part in a world so removed from his own ideals. He wants to love, but is not a lover, he wants to have faith in others, yet not be faithful.

I think this is a book to be recommended to all, one which any individual could learn something from.

Kristjhan says

Some pretty incredible imagery and language unfortunately mired by misogyny in what is essentially a young man's coming of age story established around an enumeration of his sexual conquests.

Eggs over greasy says

I tired to read this book for a second time and again I couldn't make it past the first 10 pages.

Leonard Cohen is one of my top 5 favorite music list, but I don't like his prose at all.

All of the literature in the James Joyce style of "steam of consciousness" or whatever you call it... when the text tries to confuse you... no, it doesn't cut it with me. Though I can't say Cohen's text in this book was incoherent... you just get the feeling immediately that it's more about the writer than about telling a story the reader will be enriched by.

Brian Baker says

Ok, I only got halfway through this so maybe it's a bit unfair to give it a one-star rating, but I couldn't sustain my interest in this book. It's a good job he took up music in my opinion - a three minute drone is pleasant enough, but over a hundred pages of it palls horribly. Sincerely B. Baker

Matej Vidaković says

Ne sramim se priznati kako sam "Divne gubitnike" Leonarda Cohena počinjao čitati dva puta. Prvi put sam odustao od tog aluzivnog postmodernog kaosa punog seksa, prošaptanih molitvi i pritajene želje za vječnim spasenjem. Kad sam roman, pak, uzeo drugi puta - progutao sam ga u jednom dahu. To je bilo TO. I danas mi je to jedan od najdražih romana, jedan od onih čije mjesto ne možeš objasniti drugima koliko god se trudio. Kakve to veze ima sa "Omljenom igrom" (inače, prvim Cohenovim romanom)? Baš nikakve.

Što je uopće "Omljena igra"? Žanrovska, formalno, strukturom?

"Omljena igra" je jedan od najtužnijih, samotnih monologa. "Omljena igra" je jedan od najtužnijih romana ikada napisanih. Tužan jer progovara o uobičajenom, toliko svakodnevnom da ga više i ne primjećujemo, užasu tijela. Svatko mora imati tijelo. Tijela vječno ostaju jedna drugima strana, i mi u njima zatočeni ostajemo jedni drugima ne samo daleki, nego i osučeni, prokleti na nedohvatljivost. Nedohvatljivost koja se ima dovršiti jednom u vječnoj kontemplaciji Zlatne Vječnosti, u naručju iz kojega smo iskorakili na ovu Zemlju.

"Omljena igra" je roman koji je predivno čitati sam u svojoj malenoj studentskoj sobi, roman koji je predivno čitati u jesen pokriven dekom u svojem krevetu dok vjetar na prozore lijevi otpalo lišće koje izgleda poput raskvašenih žitnih pahuljica, roman koji je predivno čitati u bilo kojem od kafića gdje smo tražili (i još tražimo) smisao života uz šalicu kave, roman koji se može čitati na obali rijeke dok ljetno sunce na zalasku

blagoslivlja grad...

Roman o samo?i koji se ?ita u samo?i. I koji jest Samo?a. Samo?a koja se vje?no širi prema Drugome, a uvijek ostaje samo Moja.

Loren says

"Shell was genuinely fond of him. She had to resort to that expression when she examined her feelings. That sickened her because she did not wish to dedicate her life to a fondness. This was not the kind of quiet she wanted. The elegance of a dancing couple was remarkable only because the grace evolved from a sweet struggle of flesh. Otherwise it was puppetry, hideous. She began to understand peace as an aftermath."

Out of print, bitches. Find your own copy.

Ana says

It isn't often we meet someone who has the same vision of what we might be as we have for ourselves.

I have really enjoyed this work. Cohen seems to write prose the same way he would write poetry, but without pressing Enter at the end of a line. I liked the main character and his struggles and I loved the way the book seemed easier to read in the beginning, harder in the middle, and then easy again towards the end, because that speaks volumes about a character's life. I enjoy Cohen's poems (and songs) more than his prose, but he is still a very good writer and defines his worlds very nicely with the (sometimes surprising) use of words.

The only problem with this work is that the last 30 pages or so seem to be very hastily written - I haven't felt like a conclusion had been drawn, but I also didn't feel like a full open end was before me. Maybe that was the author's desire, but as a reader I felt the last pages lacked in the same gravity as the rest of the book. Apart from that, very happy to have picked this up.
