

A testament to the old made new – LEONARD COHEN: THE MYSTICAL ROOTS OF GENIUS | BOOK REVIEW

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Leonard Cohen - credit Stephen Bennett

Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots Of
Genius – Harry Freedman

There has always been something mystifying about Leonard Cohen's obsession with Christian stories. Even if you know nothing of his family's prominence in the Montreal synagogue, the surname is enough to tell you of his Jewish heritage and upbringing. If you add in his many years at the feet of Zen master Roshi, atop Mount Baldy, it all adds up to a tapestry of spiritual storytelling.

► **RELATED:** 'It's the sensual and scenic imagery that stays with you, this pleasant little concert doing a good job of keeping the memory of Leonard Cohen alive.'

In *Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots of Genius*, religious scholar Harry Freedman attempts to unravel the twisted threads of dozens of song lyrics, exposing the many inspirations and biblical references behind Cohen's stunningly poetic writing. The format works, focusing on stanzas or couplets to draw out the underlying mythos with everything from *Suzanne* to *You Want It Darker* covered in great detail. You don't need to be a biblical scholar to enjoy the analysis of *The Mystical Roots of Genius*, and if you're into Cohen then you should be up for some deeply religious analysis. Which begs the question of why the book's title steers so far from any mention of faith – "mystical" doesn't quite cover it for me and

“genius” implies something more spontaneous than Cohen’s laboured writing process. But this is a fascinating analysis of one of popular music’s great lyricists and greatest interpreter of religious stories – a testament to the old made new.

**Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots Of Genius, Harry Freedman
(Bloomsbury Continuum)**