

# Who By Fire Who By Water: Exploring the Mysteries Behind Leonard Cohen's Iconic Song

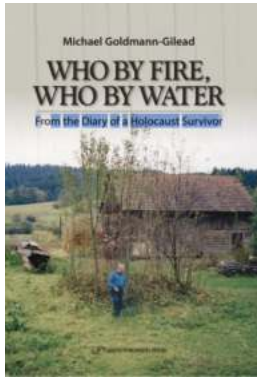
Leonard Cohen, the legendary Canadian singer-songwriter, poet, and novelist, has mesmerized audiences worldwide with his profound and introspective works. One of his most enigmatic songs, "Who By Fire Who By Water," continues to captivate listeners even decades after its release. This article delves into the mysteries and symbolism behind this iconic song, unraveling its deeper meaning and offering insights into Cohen's artistic genius.

## **The Origin and Structure of "Who By Fire Who By Water"**

Released in 1974 as part of Cohen's album "New Skin for the Old Ceremony," "Who By Fire Who By Water" stands out with its haunting melody and poetic lyrics. Cohen drew inspiration from Jewish liturgy, particularly the Unetaneh Tokef prayer recited during the Jewish High Holy Days. The prayer addresses the themes of life, death, and fate, emphasizing the uncertain nature of human existence.

The song is structured in a call-and-response format, mimicking the liturgical style of the Unetaneh Tokef prayer. Cohen's deep and resonant voice initiates each verse with the question "And who by fire?", while the female vocalist, represented by Cohen's collaborator Jennifer Warnes, responds with the individual circumstances that determine one's fate.

**Who by Fire, Who by Water: From the Diary of a  
Holocaust Survivor (Gefen Publishing)**



by Alice L Baumgartner (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 1483 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Print length : 403 pages

Lending : Enabled



## Interpreting the Symbolism

While "Who By Fire Who By Water" draws its inspiration from religious prayers, Cohen's interpretation transcends the boundaries of traditional spirituality, leaving space for personal reflection and contemplation. The song's profound symbolism invites listeners to ponder upon the complexities of life, mortality, and the choices we make.

The central motif of fire and water plays a crucial role in the song's imagery. Fire symbolizes destruction, passion, and purification, while water signifies cleansing, renewal, and emotional depths. By juxtaposing these elemental forces, Cohen alludes to the contrasting aspects of human existence, the duality of creation and destruction woven into the fabric of life.

Moreover, the recurring question "Who shall I say is calling?" implies an existential crisis, a search for identity and purpose. Cohen challenges the listeners to confront their fears of mortality and their role in the grand scheme of things, alluding to the omnipresent question of who decides our fate.

## Legacy and Influence

Leonard Cohen's "Who By Fire Who By Water" has had a profound impact on both his fans and fellow musicians. Its timeless lyrics and captivating melody continue to resonate across generations, transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Artists from diverse genres have paid tribute to the song by offering their interpretations and covers, showcasing the enduring influence of Cohen's work. The song's profound themes and haunting atmosphere make it an ideal canvas for artists seeking to express their own journey through life and death, encapsulating universal human experiences.

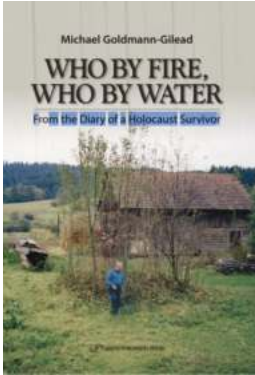
Leonard Cohen's "Who By Fire Who By Water" stands as a testament to his poetic genius and ability to explore profound existential questions through his art. By drawing inspiration from religious liturgy, Cohen creates a poetic masterpiece that touches the depths of the human soul.

The song's symbolism and thought-provoking lyrics invite listeners to reflect upon their mortality, fate, and the choices that shape their existence. "Who By Fire Who By Water" serves as a poignant reminder of the uncertainties of life and our shared human experience, leaving an indelible mark on the world of music and beyond.

Through his mastery of words, Cohen continues to ignite our imaginations and challenge our understanding of existence, ensuring that his work remains an eternal flame in the hearts of those who appreciate the beauty and complexity of the human condition.

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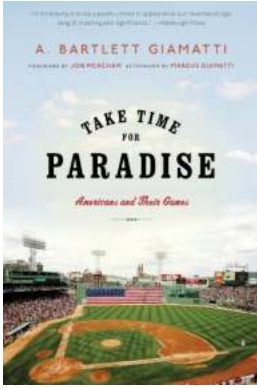


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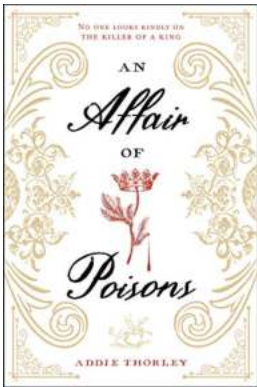
“While I’m writing these words I’m sitting next to my bed in a military hospital, wounded in my leg. Not only did I escape from the death march, but I am now a soldier in the Red Army and fighting at the front against my enemies, the enemies of all humanity.”

So writes Michael Goldmann-Gilead in the first entry of this extraordinary firsthand account of one of the most tumultuous periods in all of human history. Although the author kept a diary from his early youth in the 1930s, and even scribbled on pieces of paper in a labor camp in the Przemyśl ghetto during the war, he was unable to write during his time in Auschwitz-Birkenau or on the death march, and earlier writings were forever lost. This volume contains the extant portions of his postwar diary, supplemented with letters written in the immediate aftermath of World War II, covering his illegal immigration to Palestine, his arrest and detention in Cyprus, and his eventual arrival in the Jewish State of Israel. This is a remarkable witness to history.



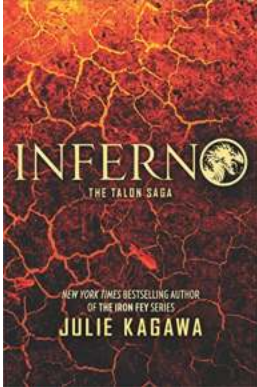
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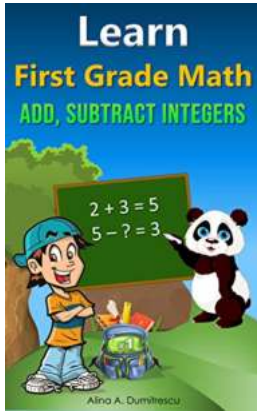
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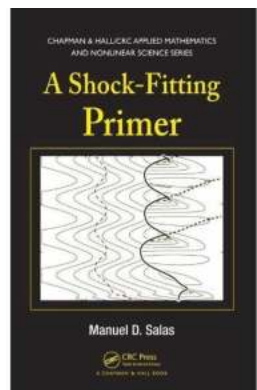
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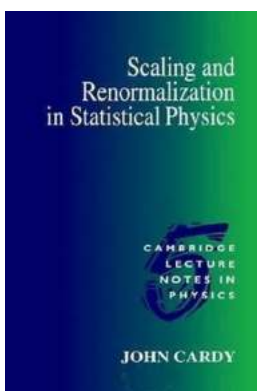
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