



The Last of Chéri

Colette

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At the end of Chéri the young Chéri left his aging mistress Léa on the eve of his marriage. Having served in the army during the war Chéri returns to Paris haunted by memories of his carefree youth and the bounty of his benevolent mistress. In the post-war 1920's he finds it impossible to settle down to a new life with his efficient and entrepreneurial wife and friends.

As his looks and his reputation begin to deteriorate Chéri's life is thrown into crisis as he attempts to recapture the contentment and companionship of his luxurious youth. As Chéri and Léa confront each other, and the changes a decade has wrought on their lives and their looks, Colette displays the incredible sensitivity and insight for which she is justly famous.

The Last of Chéri Details

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From Reader Review The Last of Cheri for online ebook

Mehrnoosh yousefi says

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Joanna says

What amazed me about this book was the way that Lea managed to dominate my feelings about the book even though she only appears in one brief chapter and is only glimpsed through the eyes of Cheri. In the first book, Colette manages to describe with pitch-perfect text the emotions of doomed lovers and a woman facing the changes in her life as she ages. Here, we see the woman transformed from stylish and sexy courtesan to decidedly frumpy but brilliantly comfortable and happy middle/old age. I couldn't stand Cheri and am glad to see the last of him here as he mopes around moaning about how he's thirty (30!) and his youth and life is over and his marriage is pointless and all the rest. But the picture of Lea was so powerfully drawn that the book came together for me. I'm totally smitten with Colette. How had I totally missed this author before now?

Milanie Howard says

I read "Cheri" and "The Last of Cheri" back-to-back; I liked "Cheri," but I loved this book, probably more than it deserves based on the other reviews and ratings I've read. But to me, it was a perfect description of the fear, frustration, and futility of fighting the process that accompanies the aging of a deeply unhappy person. Others have said that Cheri seeks out Lea because, after all this time, he still loves her, and that the horror he experiences on their reacquaintance is because he realizes that she no longer loves him, and that is why he kills himself. But I think Cheri is obsessing about Lea because he is trying to recapture the last moments of true happiness he felt; he is a man disappointed in love and life, a man who can see himself growing older with nothing to mark the time he has spent in the world, a man who has experienced the death of the way of life in which he excelled and seen it replaced with a world into which he cannot fit himself, and a man who is suffering from the trauma of fighting in a devastating war and probable depression. When he sees Lea for the first time since their ill-fated affair, he sees a fat happy old woman instead of the beautiful, haughty, slightly tragic mother/friend/lover that taught him to be the man he desperately wants to be again. It is in that moment that he fully realizes he can never go back; he has managed (with a questionable degree of success) to ignore the signs of age and change in himself, his friends and family, and in the city and the world at large, but he cannot, no matter how hard he tries and hopes, make Lea the woman he knew in his youth. In his mind, she has always been ageless, a constant, the lodestone to which he can return when the realities of his life become too harsh. Seeing her transformed into an elderly woman, no different than his mother and her cronies, forces him to realize that no one is immune to the vagrancies of time, and he is sent into despair. The world has evolved beyond him; he has nothing to offer. He kills himself not over lost love, but over the loss of himself.

Julie Bozza says

...omg...

Jenny says

Wow. This didn't have the same impact on me as Chéri at first, but as the book progressed and moved towards its climax, I was enthralled.

What I loved most about Chéri was the dialogue, which was so achingly realistic. This book has less dialogue and more inner monologue mixed with narrative, which is why I found it more boring at first. But as Chéri declines, the book inclines (can I say that about a novel?). It steadily moves towards a peak from which the only possible escape is a jump.

Chéri was raised as an illegitimate child, first by his decadent mother, and then by his much older lover. He knows nothing of real life, of struggle, of life and death. That is, until he fights in World War I. But the War ends, and now what? Chéri reflects, "Tout ce monde change et vit pour changer. Mais moi..." "Everyone is changing and lives to change. But me..."

Chéri, like Dick Diver in Tender is the Night, has no place in this post-war world. He can't run a hotel or work at a hospital. He has no skills. Chéri knows how to be rich and spoiled, and that's it. Even Léa has moved on, accepted the aging process, and lives like a thriving elderly woman because that's what she is. But Chéri can only cry out, "Tout est foutu, j'ai trente ans." "All is f-d. I have thirty years." I translated that literally because the impact is stronger in French. It's not that Chéri IS thirty but that he has thirty years, that he's lived that long and has nothing tangible to show for it. He's losing his looks, his friends, his wife, his lover, his mind. That's it. That's thirty for Chéri. For him, "Pureté et solitude sont un seul et même malheur." "Purity and solitude are one and the same misfortune." He is no longer pampered, and even when he tries to recreate his glory days with La Copine, he's painfully aware that it's not the same, that he's no longer a child, and that La Copine has nothing to offer him but old, tired stories of her own past (and passed) glory days. So, when Chéri realizes that he is "encore accroché, comme elle, à ces quelques clous rouillés, à ces épingle fichées de travers," ("still stuck like the photo, to these rusty nails, to these pins fixed in the wrong direction"), he has no recourse but to end it all.

The last line of the book is beautifully haunting. The title of the novel is The End of Chéri, but it's not just his physical end. It's the end of the person he was before the war, when he had Léa, when he knew who he was and lived in a world in which he could be that person. Now, all is lost. He's like the main character in Saul Bellow's A Dangling Man, stuck between lives, mourning the loss of one thing and waiting for the next. But unlike the dangling man, Chéri has no idea what he's waiting for. He knows where everyone else will be in a year from now, but for him, what? Where will he ever fit?

Colette could write about life, starkly and with bare reality, but then, she could write poetically beautiful descriptions of nature and the city. The contrast of the two, blended with her moving dialogue, is what makes her writing special. This is a great book, and I highly recommend it (but you do have to read Chéri first).

Ramonz says

"Che cosa pensavi di lasciarmi dopo di te, Nounoune cara, quando mi hai mandato via? Fare la magnanima ti è costato poco, sapevi quanto valeva uno Chéri, non rischiavi gran che. Ma tu, per essere nata tanto prima di me, e io, per averti amata più di tutte le altre donne, siamo stati duramente puniti: tu sei finita e pacificata da

far vergogna, e io ... Io, mentre gli altri dicono: c'è stata la guerra, posso dire: c'è stata Léa, la guerra ... Credevo che per me non contassero più né l'una né l'altra, e invece sono state l'una e l'altra a cacciarmi fuori da questo tempo. D'ora in poi occuperò soltanto mezzo posto, dappertutto ...". Mi chiedo sempre se le prime impressioni sono quelle che contano e, sempre, i fatti mi smentiscono. Nonostante il titolo di per sé sembri in un certo qual modo profetico, annunciando e dettando quella che è la linea narrativa (insomma, una sorta di "cronaca di una morte annunciata"), nulla è quello che sembra: ciò che Colette attentamente descrive, soffermandosi sui particolari, calcolando le inquadrature, senza sbavature e omissioni, non è il declino di Chéri, il suo "Sunset Boulevard" se vogliamo restare in tema di citazioni, ma bensì il suo duro percorso di presa di coscienza, duplice peraltro, perché coinvolge inaspettatamente sia Chéri che il lettore.

Consapevolezza di che cosa? Da un ambiente corrotto, in cui l'eleganza e l'affettazione sono come un bel tappeto sotto cui nascondere lo sporco, ci si aspetterebbe che nascano persone altrettanto corrotte; eppure proprio Chéri sfugge a questa "regola" di natura, ed è più puro di quel che si può pensare: "La sua infanzia da bastardo, la sua lunga adolescenza sotto tutela gli avevano insegnato che in un mondo che passa per dissoluto vige un codice rigido quasi come un pregiudizio borghese. Chéri vi aveva appreso che l'amore ha a che fare con il denaro, i tradimenti, i delitti e i vili compromessi; ma adesso stava dimenticando i vecchi statuti e respingendo le tacite condiscendenze." Sentirsi fuori posto nel proprio luogo d'origine è forse una delle cose peggiori che si posso affrontare, è un po' come vedere il mondo riflesso da specchi deformanti: così Chéri, quando attentamente si rimira allo specchio, non è sconcertato da rughe più marcate o da occhiaie più profonde, il passare del tempo è per lui qualcosa di avulso dalla sua persona, ma è alla ricerca del suo vecchio io, quello in cui si sentiva a suo agio in una realtà che ora gli pare estranea; forse perché tutto ora si sta muovendo (persino invecchiando e morendo), mentre lui è lì fermo, immobile senza nessuna prospettiva ("la parola <> attrasse l'attenzione di Chéri che si voltò verso il punto additato da Desmond, in alto, sopra il cortile ... Non vide nulla e si stancò"). Per cui la conclusione è prevedibile, inevitabile, ma anche la più coerente; la memoria di un amore ormai perduto e snaturato non è un tesoro prezioso, ma una maledizione perché si scontra con la meschinità del reale, violandone la purezza e la bellezza.

Cheri Vause says

I knew the story before going in, but it was still surprising. I had difficulty walking away from the book, the prose is so beautiful. But all of Colette's books are like that. This is really a continuation of the story, Chéri. It picks up a number of years after Chéri and Lea part company. Chéri has measured his life's state from those moments he spent with Lea in this book. It's a tragic tale of a young man who has been pampered to the point he can't function in society. The women in his life are controlling, and dismissive of anything he deigns to do, even though he fought in a war as a soldier.

Women are not the only persons in western culture who have been controlled and dismissed. Although men may not have suffered in the numbers women have, it only proves that women can be just as power hungry, greedy, and cruel toward men as men have been toward them. His wife plays the coquette, but really has no feeling toward Chéri, other than his money provides her with a life she enjoys apart from him. She's more interested in her career at the hospital and what happens there than anything to do with husband, Chéri. She's turned dinners and lunches into an extension of hospital work, of raising funds for the hospital, and of flirting with the doctor. Chéri becomes a satellite, disinterested in the friends he made as a young man, or even the soldiers his wife pampers in the hospital. In his depression, he spirals further into the abyss. One last moment, he shows up at Lea's door, only to find her enormously overweight and old. He barely recognizes the women he loved so desperately. Only her laugh remains, but even that has become slightly cynical and callous. Bereft upon leaving Lea's house, he happens upon an old friend of Lea's, and he spends every evening at her flat, listening to stories of Lea.

For those of you who don't know the story, I shall end it there. I can't help but feel for Cheri (my namesake), having had moments of that same depression before I finally made up my mind to write. Love is a vital ingredient in growing up, in maturation. To give it and snatch it away in the formative years of a young man can cripple him, as it did Cheri. He had everything, but was denied the meaning of it. No one has to look very hard for those who've tasted fame and fortune and possess good looks who've not ended well. Comfort is not enough. Being surrounded by those who compliment and praise you is not enough. People need meaning, to be useful, to find something that uplifts them. They need to know that there is meaning and a reason why we are here. The story of Cheri is timeless.

Collette must have had those same feelings to write about them so beautifully. No one can write about the despair of indifference like someone who has felt it. Watching the new film about her life might be interesting after reading two of her great works recently.

Matthew McElfresh says

I liked this much more than "Chéri," but that shouldn't be too surprising, considering my propensity for sad bastard suicide stories. What's fantastic about this, however, isn't so much the general pre-war youth nostalgia that's so common w/ 1920s Lost Generation-ish lit, but that the changing place of women in the world is well described.

Barbara says

I always enjoy reading Colette. She has such an understanding and love for people. I found Fred/Chéri more likable in this book than in the first one. He had grown a bit and was more introspective here. There was much less about Lea here, and what there was was a bit sad. She'd let herself go more than the passage of time seemed to warrant. Nonetheless, she still had a positive attitude. Chéri was unable to move beyond his own past and find a way to live in the present. Some of it was perhaps due to his experiences in the Great War, but much of it was due to his lack of healthy interests. Edmee seemed to have made a better life for herself, although I wondered to what extent she was using busyness as a means to avoid her own feelings. The ending was very sad.

Renate says

This book is both boring and brilliant. Nothing happens. The main character just mopes around Paris feeling sorry for himself. And as the reader you join the other characters in the book in trying to figure out the cause of his melancholia. Is it simply because he pines after Léa? Or is it because of his extreme narcissism? Or is it because Chéri too is one of the countless casualties of WW I? Someone who survived the war but finds himself on the other side of it, unable to adapt to the new order of things. Is it maybe just because he is a spoiled brat who never really grew up? After all, we already know from the first book that his upbringing left a lot to be desired. You never get a definitive answer.

After reading Chéri last year I was keen to get my hands on the sequel to see how one of the most dislikeable characters that I'd come across in fiction, gets his comeuppance. I was looking forward to gloating over his demise. What I did not expect was to feel both empathy and sympathy for him!

I found the writing in this book to be absolutely brilliant. If it is so good in translation how well it must be in the original French?

Val says

After seven years of marriage and four years of war, Chéri's girlish wife is now a capable woman working in a hospital and managing the family finances, his mother is doing dodgy deals in a Paris full of Americans, his friend runs a successful club and no longer has time to waste, Lea has allowed herself to age and is happy, grey and overweight, and Chéri, exquisite narcissistic Chéri, is just older. (The book description is a little misleading.)

Chéri has served in the war and been decorated, although Colette does not let him off the hook and made him heroic. He has been wounded, a knee injury keeps him in bed for several months (the suggestion is that he takes advantage of this for longer than is needed for recovery) and he has two symbolic scars on his chest. He may have other invisible scars from the war and he does not see a place for himself in post-war Paris. Chéri, unlike Lea, does not cope well with aging, he is still obsessed with looks and does not want to recognise that anything has changed. (view spoiler)

It was difficult to care about the young Chéri in the first book, Colette makes us feel some sympathy for him in this sequel, without changing his character to make him more sympathetic.

I think that Chéri can act a symbol for Paris and perhaps all of France. The country may have been corrupt and complacent before the Great War and also beautiful. It paid a high price and much was destroyed. It could not rebuild or easily move on and that was a tragedy.

Emma Keiu says

When the first part 'Chéri' was more about fine older lady lover Léa, this one was to dive into Chéri's character. The one who 'no animal have ever loved'.

His still narsistically wrestling around his own self. Other people seem to be just statistics in his play. But still one has to feel compassionated towards our flaming out hero, bitterly disappointed in his loveless marriage, craving for past love affair with Léa. Craving for passion, for youth.

Is his perpetually praised beauty his curse in the end? As much as it seemed to be his blessing in the beginning.

Portia Costa says

Couldn't finish this. Life's too short.

I can't deny that Colette is a wonderful writer, and that the translator has done a first rate job.

I can't deny that I often really enjoy reading about an anti hero, because sometimes they're a lot more interesting than the heroes.

But sorry, I can't read about Chéri any more. Colette has very skillfully drawn him as an empty person,

completely self absorbed and with virtually no empathy for anybody else's feelings. She's made him seem real, and I know there are people out there just like him, people who think it's all about them, but there's no pleasure for me in his story.

Adieu, Cheri, it wasn't very nice knowing you.

A.H. says

Interesting book including commentary on society, love, grief, and human psychology. See my full review at [www.thegreatcakeadventure.weebly.com/...](http://www.thegreatcakeadventure.weebly.com/)

Charles says

A rather disturbing but enjoyable sequel to Colette's famous novel of love and loss, Cheri.
