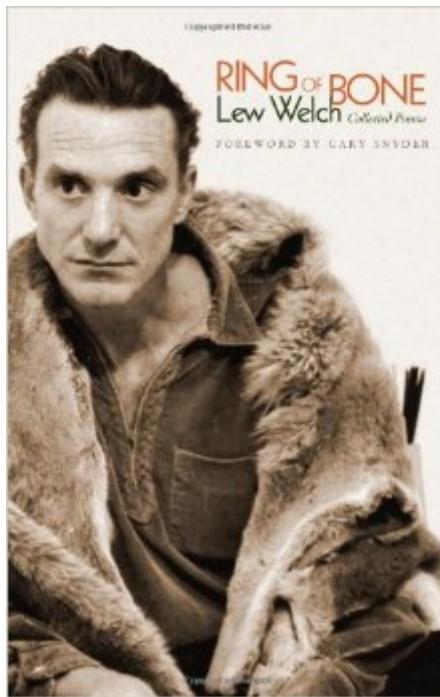


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Ring Of Bone: Collected Poems



Synopsis

A San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of 2012Lew Welch was a brilliant and troubled poet, legendary among his Beat peers. Ring of Bone collects poems, songs, and even a few drawings, documenting the full sweep of his creative output, from his early years until just before his death. This new edition includes a biographic timeline and a statement of poetics gleaned from Welch's own writing. Welch entered Reed College in 1948, and the following year moved into a house with Gary Snyder; they were soon joined by Philip Whalen. With the emergence of the Beat movement, Welch's friends began receiving national attention and his desire to devote himself completely to his poetry was galvanized. He soon became a part of the San Francisco poetry scene. Legendary editor Donald Allen included Welch's poetry in The New American Poetry – the seminal anthology published in 1960. That same year Welch's first book, *Wobbly Rock*, was released. He continued to write extensively, and in 1965 published three books. Despite his burgeoning success, Welch suffered from bouts with depression, and on May 23, 1971, Gary Snyder went up to Welch's campsite in the Sierra Nevada mountains and found a suicide note. Despite an extensive search, Welch's body was never recovered. "Lew Welch writes lyrical poems of clarity, humor, and dark probings . . . jazz musical phrasings of American speech is one of Welch's clearest contributions." —Gary Snyder" . . . Music permeates his poems, which range from scored lyrics to epistolary correspondence to formal villanelles. . . . It's fascinating to trace the evolution of this artist, from his early, lax, exultant style to his later, less jubilant work, characterized by benedictions, invocations, and requests. This is a necessary read for anyone interested in the greater Beat movement and its progenitors."—Booklist""His luminous poems feel as vibrant today as when they first burst from the wellsprings of creativity in his own head. . . . A postmodern Walt Whitman. . ."—San Francisco Chronicle" In the poet's own words, [Ring of Bone] is a spiritual autobiography . . . no better description of him exists than that which came in his own vision, deep in the wilds of the Klamath Mountains, the poem after which the collection is titled. . . . These 40 years later, Lew, you are missed."—The Rumpus" Ring of Bone: Collected Poems is Welch's major work. Exuberant, funny, dark, hypnotic, Welch's poems are as infused with nature as [Gary] Snyder's and as spiritually alive as [Philip] Whalen's. They're technically brilliant, grounded in form and wildly experimental. . . ."—The Oregonian

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: City Lights Publishers; Expanded ed. edition (June 19, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0872865797

ISBN-13: 978-0872865792

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 0.7 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (6 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #725,045 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #51 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Beat Generation #1097 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > United States > Anthologies #2258 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Themes & Styles

Customer Reviews

I honestly had no idea what to expect since I only knew of Lew Welch through Jack Kerouac's novels but wanting to explore the Beat poets fully, I bought this. I was really blown away by Welch's masterful writing. His writing is concise, mysterious, entertaining, and brilliant. His grasp on the english language is exquisite. I highly recommend buying this.

A handsome book, "Ring of Bone" assures Lew Welch a firm place in the galaxy of Beat poets. Welch was comrades with Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac and especially Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen. Reading his poetry I see him moving toward what Jonathan Stalling calls the "Poetics of Emptiness," the Zen influence prevalent in Beat poetry, especially West Cost Beat poetry. While I enjoy his poetry, the detailed observation of nature, the self-enforced solitudes and his appreciation for language, I wish he had seen his mundane life as legitimate material for his poetry. He worked as a cab driver (and does have a series of "rider" poems that I particularly like), on the docks, as copy editor for Ward's catalogue, and even acted in a Hollywood movie, but all of this experience seems purposely excluded from his poetry. Obviously, from his statement about poetics, he understood where Words come from, but he did not privilege his blue-collar reality. Surely rust on iron drums abandoned along the docks is as mystical as lichen. An important poet, if he had not tragically deleted so much of his life (both aesthetically/editorially and by his suicide at 45) he might even have been a great poet.

Lew Welch was a great lyric poet, with a gift for the music of words that equalled Keats and T.S. Eliot. It's a hard gift to handle, as evidenced by the limited and sporadic production of lyric poets

generally, and by Welch's own short and stormy life. Comparing artists is unfair, but since Welch has been neglected, it should be said that the best poems in Ring of Bone are better as lyrics than those of Robert Duncan, William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, or any of the other mid-to-late 20th century establishment "greats." They are also better as lyrics than those of other beat poets. Philip Whalen acknowledged this in a letter to Welch after Welch had enthusiastically reviewed his collection, On Bear's Head, in the San Francisco newspaper in 1969: "D.R. Carpenter mailed me a copy of your Chronicle review. I feel enormously flattered & pleased & delighted & at the same time wish that the book amounted to something-- & after all it just DON'T, not really. Any one of your poems is more authentic & solid than this whole wretched book"

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