

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Lew Welch**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Lew Welch(August 16, 1926 — May 23, 1971)

Born August 16, 1926 in Phoenix, Arizona, to Lewis Barrett Welch Sr. and Dorothy Brownfield Welch. Mrs. Welch was the daughter of a wealthy Phoenix surgeon. Following the birth of Welch's sister his parents marriage broke up, and Dorothy Welch moved the family to California in 1929. Welch was three at the time, and for most of his childhood his mother moved from town to town in California. He attended schools in Santa Monica, Coronado, La Mesa, and El Cajon. In Palo, Alto Welch finished high school.

Welch entered Reed College in 1948, and the following year moved into a house with Gary Snyder; the following year they were joined by Philip Whalen. By the fall of 1949 Welch was co-editor of the school's literary magazine and was writing constantly. He wrote his senior thesis on Gertrude Stein and graduated in 1950.

For a number of years Welch showed his poetry only to close friends. With the emergence of the Beat movement, however, Welch's friends Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder began receiving national attention. Welch's desire to devote himself completely to his poetry was revived. He transferred to the Oakland office of Montgomery Ward and soon became a part of the San Francisco poetry scene. In 1958 he was fired from his job. His marriage fell apart soon after.

At the same time, however, Welch's poetry was beginning to meet with some success. Donald Allen included one of Welch's poems in *The New American Poetry* - the important anthology published in 1960. That same year Welch's first book, *Wobbly Rock*, was published. He was drinking heavily during this time, but he continued to write extensively. For a time he lived with his mother in Reno, Nevada, and then in a cabin in the Trinity Alps. He moved back to San Francisco in 1963, and in 1965 published three books.

In 1965, Welch began teaching a poetry workshop offered through the Extension program of the University of California at Berkeley. Despite his burgeoning success, Welch's bouts with depression and heavy drinking continued. After the breakup of another relationship in 1971 Welch returned to the mountains. On May 23, 1971, Gary Snyder went up to Welch's campsite and found a suicide note in Welch's truck. Despite an extensive search, Welch's body was never recovered.

# Dear Joanne

Dear Joanne,

Last night Magda dreamed that she,  
you, Jack, and I were driving around  
Italy.

We parked in Florence and left  
our dog to guard the car.

She was worried because he  
doesn't understand Italian.

Anonymous submission.

Lew Welch

# I Saw Myself

I saw myself  
a ring of bone  
in the clear stream  
of all of it

and vowed  
always to be open to it  
that all of it  
might flow through

and then heard  
"ring of bone" where  
ring is what a

bell does

Lew Welch

# Not Yet 40, My Beard Is Already White.

Not yet 40, my beard is already white.  
Not yet awake, my eyes are puffy and red,  
like a child who has cried too much.

What is more disagreeable  
than last night's wine?

I'll shave.  
I'll stick my head in the cold spring and  
look around at the pebbles.  
Maybe I can eat a can of peaches.

Then I can finish the rest of the wine,  
write poems 'til I'm drunk again,  
and when the afternoon breeze comes up

I'll sleep until I see the moon  
and the dark trees  
and the nibbling deer

and hear  
the quarreling coons

Lew Welch

## Taxi Suite (Excerpt: 1. After Anacreon)

When I drive cab  
I am moved by strange whistles and wear a hat

When I drive cab  
I am the hunter. My prey leaps out from where it  
hid, beguiling me with gestures

When I drive cab  
all may command me, yet I am in command of all who do

When I drive cab  
I am guided by voices descending from the naked air

When I drive cab  
A revelation of movement comes to me. They wake now.  
Now they want to work or look around. Now they want  
drunkenness and heavy food. Now they contrive to love.

When I drive cab  
I bring the sailor home from the sea. In the back of  
my car he fingers the pelt of his maiden

When I drive cab  
I watch for stragglers in the urban order of things.

When I drive cab  
I end the only lit and waitful things in miles of  
darkened houses

Lew Welch

# The Image, As In A Hexagram:

The image, as in a Hexagram:

The hermit locks his door against the blizzard.  
He keeps the cabin warm.

All winter long he sorts out all he has.  
What was well started shall be finished.  
What was not, should be thrown away.

In spring he emerges with one garment  
and a single book.

The cabin is very clean.

Except for that, you'd never guess  
anyone lived there.

Lew Welch