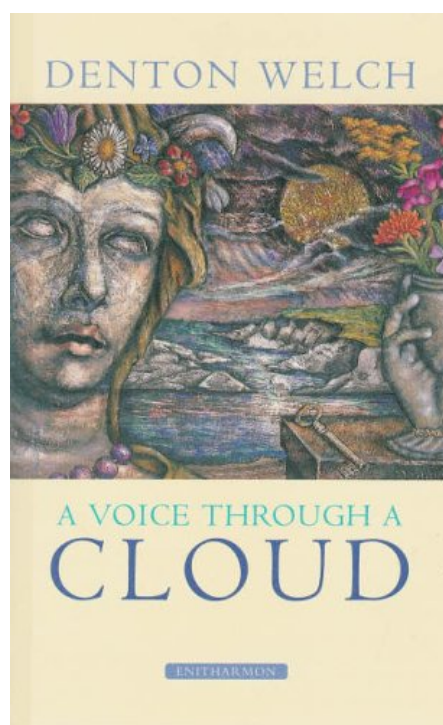




A Voice Through a Cloud

Denton Welch

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A Voice Through a Cloud Denton Welch

A masterpiece of self-analysis by the British novelist Denton Welch, who recounts the far-reaching struggle of his short life through a cloud of personal affliction and tragedy.

A Voice Through a Cloud Details

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Author : Denton Welch

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From Reader Review A Voice Through a Cloud for online ebook

Sarah says

This is a beautiful book.

Lizzie says

The last, and I think best, book by Denton Welch. This describes his recovery from a horrible accident in which he was hit by a car while bicycling; but it's more than that. At first he describes his new reality of finding himself in a hospital bed, unable to move, dominated by unsympathetic nurses. As he heals, he begins to notice other patients in the ward and, curious as a magpie, observes their stories and describes them in perfect prose. Eventually he leaves the hospital for a nursing home where he becomes obsessed by his doctor and starts to figure out to do next. His whole life has changed and he mourns his health and the way he'll never be able to take strength and ease for granted again.

But it's not self pitying. Welch is too interested in life and in observing people to get stuck there. I've turned down about a million page corners of places where his descriptions are just so perfect. If a writer is someone upon whom nothing is wasted, Welch is a true writer.

Amijoy says

If you like to savor the language and scenery of a book and don't care about plot, then this book is a real gem. Welch is a wonderfully descriptive writer who intertwines external observation with internal narrative that runs the entire gamut of human emotions. All unapologetically expressed through the intelligence of a sensitive English young man. It's a beautiful and honest story, a quiet and absorbing read.

Raül De Tena says

“Una Voz A Través De Una Nube” fue publicado de forma póstuma después de la muerte del autor y, de hecho, es este un libro inacabado cuyo final deja al lector con una insidiosa sensación de desasosiego al saber que lo que se relata en el libro, el accidente en bici y los posteriores meses de enfermedad y (muy ligera) recuperación, son el germen de la tragedia que obligó al escritor a dejar el libro inacabado.

«Oí una voz a través de una nube de dolor y vértigo. La voz me hacía preguntas. Parecía abrirse y cerrarse como un acordeón. Las palabras me llegaron altas y fuertes, como las notas tonantes de un órgano, para luego fundirse en el más diminuto y esquivo caer de una gota en un vaso». Así relata el autor el momento en el que despertó justo después del trágico accidente, estableciendo de paso el tono que reinará en las páginas que vendrán después. En contraposición a la gozosa exuberancia multisensorial de sus anteriores libros, “Una Voz A Través De Una Nube” está escrito haciendo honor a su propio nombre: está escrito como si Welch se abriera paso a través de una negra y casi solida nube de tormenta.

Lo que en anteriores libros es un abrirse al mundo, aquí es un cerrarse en torno a uno mismo para hacer más llevadero el dolor físico. El carácter perverso que en los dos anteriores libros convertían la voz de Welch en

algo único aquí se agría más todavía, llegando a rozar los límites de la sociopatía más arisca: «Mientras seguía pensando en el doctor Farley, empecé a tomar conciencia de que su marcha había despertado algo en mí. Ese algo al principio apenas respiraba, pues quedaba ahogado por mi tristeza y agitación, pero ahora podía sentirlo resurgir. Era la vieja alegría de librarme de la carga de la amistad. Aquel sentimiento asomaba la cabeza casi avergonzado, pues ¿alguna vez la amabilidad me había supuesto una carga? ¿Acaso no había aceptado de buen grado cada migaja que caía en mi plato y había esperado impaciente a que me dieran más?».

“Una Voz A Través De Una Nube” no es un libro de superación personal en el que el protagonista sufre un accidente para, a continuación, vivir una recuperación epifánica gracias a que sus seres amados le obligan a abrazar la vida y le ayudan a seguir adelante. Más bien lo contrario. La familia de Denton Welch no hace casi acto de presencia, los amigos escasean y, al fin y al cabo, las únicas compañías que tiene el escritor son los médicos, las enfermeras y el resto de enfermos. Durante la mitad del libro, Welch describe el bullicioso y surrealista ambiente de un pabellón de enfermos por el que circula un plantel de personajes de lo más variopinto. Son descripciones escarbadas en el papel atravesando una nube de dolor y analgésicos.

Una nube que se abre, pero no demasiado, cuando el enfermo es trasladado a una pequeña clínica en la que por fin puede disponer de una habitación individual. Allí vivirá un continuo tira y afloja con el Doctor Farley, con el que establece una enfermiza relación en la que siempre bascula entre el deseo y el rechazo (deseo y rechazo vividos de forma completamente mental, ya que el doctor está casado y, más que probablemente, no comparta los desvelos de su paciente). Pero no, ni llegados a este punto puede decirse de “Una Voz A Través De Una Nube” que sea una novela amable sobre el proceso de recuperación de un enfermo bienhumorado.

Puede decirse, eso sí, que es una novela necesaria que muestra la realidad de un paciente convalesciente de la forma más cruda y directa posible. Lo hace conjugando las espinas de la realidad con las rosas de su prosa, que sigue siendo multisensorial por mucho que, en este punto de su vida, las terminaciones nerviosas de todo el cuerpo (literario) de Welch se muestren hastiadas y tendentes al dolor. Porque puede ser que en la juventud esté el placer, pero en el dolor está la verdadera madurez.

Eddie Watkins says

To read Denton Welch is to read his sensibility. The words of this book (and each of his books) are so thick with it that at times it's almost hard to see the words. I didn't know at first why I read him so slowly. At first I actually thought I was bored, as his writing has a dryly objective quality and precision of detail that can overwhelm, but then I realized that the writing was so tactilely sensuous that every other line was setting my mind adrift, and each of my senses along with it, into the rooms and landscapes of his descriptions, and once there would wander into memory chambers of its own, re-touching, re-tasting, re-seeing driftly yet specific things from the far and recent past, until it had wandered so far off that the readerly thread snapped and I'd reawaken a page later having no idea what I had just read. This is an exhausting ordeal that at times I mistook for boredom, but it's actually its fruitful twin – reverie.

Reverie is induced when reading his books. It's not that the books themselves are reveries, or even reverie-like, even though they do take place almost entirely in memory. His books actually have a very nuts-&-bolts quality, deeply rooted in specific sensations as they are, sensations that actually feel etched into the pages. But Welch himself I'm certain was a master of reverie, and his sensibility is saturated with it, fed and unbelievably enriched by it, so it leaches into the pages and thus into the mind of the reader, inducing reverie.

I suppose the subject of every artist is his or her own sensibility. But this is true only if you accept the full

spectrum of degrees of encoding and artifice that can interpose themselves between the raw sensibility and the final product. In Welch there are no obstacles between his raw sensibility and the reader. There is such a pervasive honesty, and an objective laying bare of himself and his world, that it can be disarming, and this honesty and objectivity was actually criticized (in staid old England) when his works were published. But of course it's this very quality that makes his works perennially fascinating to those who are receptive.

The title phrase occurs early in the book, as Welch's alter-ego is regaining consciousness after being hit by a car while out biking – the book is a recounting of his search for health and recovery after the accident, which he was never to find, dying from complications 14 years later. Through a cloud of pain and suffering, as he's lying on the side of the road, he hears a voice asking with great concern about his well being. But the phrase can also refer to Welch's own voice, as it reaches us through the pain and suffering of the writing of the book. This was his final book, not quite completed. As his companion, Eric Oliver, says in the foreword

...and in the last few months of his life he was given morphia to alleviate the constant pain. Still he worked on, though the effort to do so gave him a high temperature and he would have to lie on his bed blindfolded without moving. Towards the end he could only work for three or four minutes at a time and then he would get a raging headache and his eyes would more or less give out. Complication after complication set in, and the left side of his heart started failing. Even then, he made colossal and nearly successful attempts to finish the book.

But the book itself doesn't feel painful, though descriptions of pain are part of its fabric they only add to the dark and richly toned joy, however muted, that permeates the book through its courageous and sensuous engagement with the world and its people. This is a book that can re-engage you to your own world.

Neusovita says

4,8

JohnnyLee says

Lovers of finely written memoirs will love this book. Although written as a novel it is closely based on the author's own experiences. Welch's style is incisive and at times macabre, always compelling and honest. When he complains about others and his circumstances he blames himself and ultimately wonders if he's being selfish. It's this internal struggle that maintains the momentum and the tension in the story. An image of the skeleton beneath the skin kept appearing to me as I was reading. Death hovering nearby. The writer's bravery in confronting again this bleak period in his life is truly admirable. But there is brightness too in the lovely depiction of his landlady and his silent crush on his handsome doctor. Others may not see this as a 5-star read but I loved the naturalness of the writing and the poignancy of the story.

Gaz says

Clear sighted existentialist account of illness and the void upon which our emotions skate.

Mary Narkiewicz says

I grew tired of his pessimism and cynicism, but enjoyed his appreciation of objects, old things, antiques, nature.

As the book drew to a close, he discussed Christian Science beliefs. I began to think he was more Buddhist in his outlooks! Just on the cusp of enlightenment, mired in the tragedy, suffering and sometimes horror of life.

Eric Cartier says

"I began to long, as I had before, for some special smell, some special music that would fill me, lift me up and carry me away, float me off the rocks of my body and sweep me into some wideness, some vast expanse of blue-grey nothingness."

Denton Welch was only 18 years old when a car knocked him off his bicycle. Having suffered a serious spinal injury, he lived the rest of his short life in constant pain. He wrote poetry and prose and drew illustrations when he had the strength to do so, but his mobility was severely limited and, near the end of his life, he could only work for three or four minutes at a time before having to affix a blindfold and remain absolutely still in his bed. A Voice Through A Cloud, his fictional autobiography, was nearly finished when his heart failed at the age of 33.

"I laughed for all the horrors I could imagine existing at that moment; for all the terrors and despairs and tortures and madnenses. I laughed to think of the strange things that were happening to human bodies all over the world. Some were feasting, some were locked in dungeon cells, some were copulating, some were singing, some were having babies, some were starving, some were weeping, some were having Turkish baths, and some were being torn to bits. I thought of the infinite number of postures, expressions, gestures and functions of the body; and these were the funniest thoughts of all."

His observations of people and the world are poetic and acute. I often thought of the work of William H. Gass while I read Welch's book. The two writers' themes, as well as the richness of their sentences, are similar, too: pain, loneliness, resentment, despair.

"What was my life? It was all a scraping together of little incidents, a sucking of them dry before I hurried on in search of one more drop of nectar."

There is humor, friendship and love as well. It's fleeting and intangible, though, and therefore bittersweet.

"'I don't smoke, thank you,' I said between munches of my chocolate, thinking it strange of him to expect me to both eat and smoke at the same time. But the man did not think it strange, he sat there, looking out to sea, a cigarette in one hand and a chocolate in the other, puffing and chewing by turns. I waited for him to bite at the cigarette or suck at the chocolate, but he made no mistake and the rhythm flowed smoothly."

I found the book at Half Price Books when I was looking for David Foster Wallace's first novel. William S. Burroughs, whose oeuvre I've nearly completely devoured, has often championed Denton Welch, so his name was on my inner scroll. I'm glad I finally found his work, which has spurred me to try to capture more of my own experiences on paper every night.

"But there was sadness, too, in coming to this point in the day, for it brought with it the realization that another precious piece of my life had melted away; and I had done nothing to catch it, to hold it, to *know* it."

Jeff says

Although I'm a big fan of Denton Welch's writing, this last, incomplete autobiographical novel was a bit of a struggle for me to finish.

As with his other writings, there is no real plot to speak of, but that part does not trouble me - I think it's one of Welch's strengths as a writer. What doesn't really work for me is that the author's idiosyncratic personality has become annoying and somewhat mean-spirited in these pages, making his voice unappealing and the narrative a bit dreary.

Of course, this novel is about the aftermath of a terrible traffic accident which left Welch a permanent invalid. But where his earlier novels (and his excellent short fiction) allow his unusual viewpoint and mannerisms to function as something of a mirror to the world around him, in "A Voice Through a Cloud" the mirror has become a dark cloak, and that defensive shield is simply too impenetrable to make for an interesting read.

Mariel says

I heard a voice through a great cloud of agony and sickness. The voice was asking questions. It seemed to be opening and closing like a concertina. The words were loud, as the swelling notes of an organ, then they melted to the tiniest wiry tinkle of water in a glass.

Everyone dies alone. The cyclone of the witch of hell hath no fury opens sulks and pouts. A why doesn't my bike freedom fly like this all of the time young man with things he wanted to do, to live, under towed to her house of it's all a bitch, which bitch, mother nature's sister too, and it is so fucking horrible. The take us all down with it orbit of it's just not fair, this isn't happening. Anyone would die alone in that hospital, the system, the machine. Smells like that young man with the promise isn't coming back to bedside. Every day a little bit more. The weight of pity sits on your chest, the impatience of the nurses steals your breath like one of those fairy tale cats, doctors grin nightmares. The masks or are they shadows playing tricks grins. The kinds that make my tummy do that flip I hate. The nights are long enough to make you forget. Wake up and remember and the remembering is amputated from what memories were before and the same memories are after.

He was dying when he wrote A Voice Through A Cloud. I feel like he saved my life when he could save his own.

I wrote about the night bird cries, the sea sounds and the lonely barking, and I liked what I wrote in flashes; but something was wrong with it. There is always something wrong with writing. So I tore the paper up at last, liking the untouched memory so much better, not wanting it forced into the insincerity of words.

Don't you believe this. Denton Welch is the perfect writer. Every time I had ever wanted to be talked to like I and everyone was a real person. Whenever I say that this is what I mean. How he has this way of wanting.

The way he has of being still under the screwed up face of today to the bleeding you do underneath. When he is afraid the doctor didn't mean it when he suggested that he might get to escape the awful institution, come live with him. Don't be disrupted, be accepted. When he just wishes he would ask again so he could believe he had really meant it. When he immediately starts to care about everything he never cared about when he thinks he's going to get to leave the awful hospital he demanded to leave. He knows he's doing it and it is this wonderful way of being outside yourself and inside. I just wish I was still reading this book. I felt so warm and okay because whatever he wrote I got to be. Inside. It gives me this feeling that is going to spite all of the heaviness when he...

I began to long, as I had before, for some special smell, some special music that would fill me, lift me up and carry me away, float me off the rocks of my body and sweep me into some wideness, some vast expanse of blue-grey nothingness.

I stared at all the types, and a terrible feeling of loneliness swept over me; this in spite of my special wish to be alone that night. I felt that everyone was cut off from me, that it would always be so, and that nothing I could do would ever make any difference. I turned away from the people hating them passionately, yet longing to be taken into their bosoms.

I know. I don't know what to do about feeling like this. I would read Denton Welch describing the man in his hospital who stares sadly at Welch's locker for his tasty (I'll take his word for it) foodstuffs. He no longer allows him to mooch off him once his weight is too much for him to bear. The sinister nurse who abuses in the night. In the morning he's smiles and Welch's introspective shame and questions. I can't get enough of the brother's friends who shower him with their strange mercies. I want all of it. It's horrible when he's forcing himself to walk again. When I say horrible I mean that every word of this book is glorious. If you could be hugged and know at the end that it was all worth it that is seeing through his eyes. (But better than that. How do you say that you felt despairing of being ugly old you forever and it wasn't like that when you read this one book?) I never wanted anything more than I want a Denton Welch in my head to see instead of me. It's so hard to keep doing this.

I fixed my eyes on them and experienced the utter silence of the house. To be awake in the sleeping house gave me power. It was right that I should watch. I was no longer part of the nursing home; it seemed incongruous that I should still be there.

I distrusted it, not because I thought it false, but because I felt it pleased me too much and so falsified my judgement. I told myself that it was a trick of his and that he knew it pleased, just as a child sometimes knows that its childishness is endearing. I waited for him to overdo the smile and repel me. But he never did, or if he did I embraced the extravagance wholeheartedly.

I'm always going to need this. I know this. *I was in the state to make it human.* He's perfect. I can't tell you how horrible wonderful and like dying it is to not be able to breathe when everything is this beautiful. It's like removing every stone in your body and you gotta grow everything all back together again. The heavy pulling out in your gut by brick. I don't know of anything more beautiful than when he's in his head. It was

made more believable to me when he has to stop doing it because of their voices through the air, the dream, the breaking, the doubt and the hope. Damn damn damn. I am not doing this right. I don't know how anyone couldn't like Denton Welch. When he's alone with himself and his visitors look unbelievably beautiful walking away. Don't leave me.

p.s. He even knew about the stone lions. He draws a stone lion when he's in hospital. I wasn't alive yet when he wrote this and this year when dealing with my stupid back problems (so awful) I was fixated on stone lions. He even knew about that. (I had this feeling that my body acting without me could be frozen. Stiff cemented snarling. You were here.) Denton Welch had powers.

Terresa says

This book is Welch's account of his life after a terrible bicycle accident. It's a book to read when in a contemplative mood. His words settle like a soft and floating blanket. His pain is keen, his observations, haunting, especially towards the end of the book. What takes place is not action as much as clouds of imagination, thought.

Some quotes:

"I began to long, as I had before, for some special smell, some special music that would fill me, lift me up and carry me away, float me off the rocks of my body and sweep me into some wideness, some vast expanse of blue-grey nothingness."

and

"I greedily embraced the never-ending sadness of human life. At that moment I wanted to be overwhelmed by it. Nothing else but the sadness of destruction seemed real. I would sink down, be its victim, fall asleep in it. How can I describe the deep vibrating pleasure I felt? Perhaps it was a little like the moment just before a child bursts into tears. He knows he is going to cry, he does nothing about it, he has no shame, he wants to be drowned, to be swallowed up forever in his own unhappiness." (p. 213)

The ending, of course, was never finished, was swallowed up in Welch's own early death, and left me feeling a bit haunted.

P.S. Clinen says

An achingly beautiful read. Sombre, poignant, rich in descriptive language. Expertly balances glowing optimism with darkness and questions our purpose and how life can have other ideas for what we might expect. An absolute gem of a read, instantly a favourite that I am likely to return to in years to come.

Simon Robs says

Ok, so there be bits and pieces of "Marcel" in our protagonist "Maurice" to wit, a querulous and importunate neediness notwithstanding his very real dilemma of injury, pain and lengthy recovery whilst holed up in convalescence setting. This being the backdrop of our story here, a lad out for a bike foray, an accident and road back to, if ever, normalcy. He is given to careful scrutiny of environment and psychology of all those who must care for him, those being nurses, doctors and sundry caregivers who are mostly indifferent to emotional upheaval in their charges. There are piquant observations and some finely tuned imagery in these mostly staid settings that do offer glimpses of sublimity to an otherwise grey English air. It's an unfinished tale and it does indeed fall flat of its face for an ending. It also doesn't ever quite build a desire to "like" our chap Maurice more than any other of the also stolid characters, yet overall a quiet savor like a nice broth needing some succulence still satisfies a readers' want, if only till something hearty comes along. I'll probably read another of Welch's earlier books to see what he's got quivered to get him here.
