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## Book Review - Blood, Bone and Marrow: A Biography of Harry Crews

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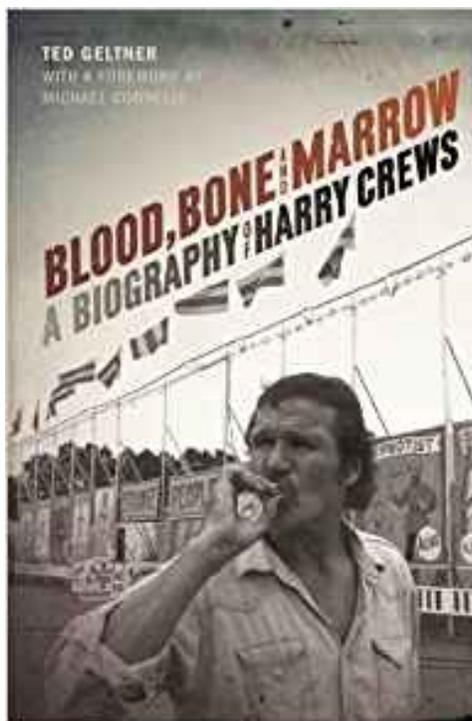
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## Off the SHELF

**Blood, Bone and Marrow: A Biography of Harry Crews** by Ted Geltner, foreword by Michael Connelly (University of Georgia Press, 2016: ISBN 9780820349237, \$32.95)

Ted Geltner, associate professor of journalism at Valdosta State University, has written a fascinating biography of the writer Harry Crews. Documentaries and published interviews exist, but this is the first biography on Crews. The book is published by the University of Georgia Press and Geltner made use of Crews's papers, which are housed at the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library in Athens, Georgia. Crews grew up in South Georgia, but then lived most his adult life in Gainesville, Florida. He wrote several books, a few screenplays, a play, and had a column in *Esquire* and journalistic pieces published in *Playboy*. He taught creative writing at the University of Florida.

Geltner tells Crews's life story through four parts in mostly chronological order with a few breaks describing his own first-hand experience with Crews. Part one is about Crews's upbringing, military experience, marriage, and early teaching years ending with the publication of his first novel. The second part covers the late 1960s through the 1970s when he was publishing about a book per year along with journalist articles. Part three delves into his struggles with alcohol, fighting, and relationships. The final part reviews his time with celebrities such as Madonna and Sean



Penn, writing his final books, receiving recognition, and declining health and death.

Crews's novels were often about whatever current obsession he had at the time, whether it was karate, boxing, or body building. They featured outsiders or "freaks" and usually ended in violence. He clashed with his mentor, Andrew Lytell, who wanted Crews to slow down

and further develop his stories before getting them published. Although Crews received much critical praise, most of his books did not become bestsellers.

In this time of the #metoo movement and news stories of harassment, the sections on Crews's behavior toward female students and lack of administrative action from the university are poignant. Harry Crews's wild character and stories of brawling and sex could be romanticized, but Geltner wisely presents the damaging effects of Crews's behavior on friends, family, young female students, and himself.

Geltner quotes one former girlfriend saying that Crews destroyed several lives psychologically.

Despite his reputation, or perhaps because of it, Harry Crews was a popular teacher and in high demand as a speaker. Amongst the depictions of Crews showing up drunk to class or speaking engagements, Geltner identifies several occasions when Crews mesmerized and entertained audiences with his take on writing and favorite authors such as Flannery O'Connor. Crews often had a dedicated circle of students

who spent time with him after class at his house or favorite bars. Geltner interviewed several former students who remarked on how much Crews cared about their work.

Fans of Harry Crews will benefit from this complete overview of his life and the insights into how he wrote his stories. This book is also

recommended for those interested in the struggles of the life and business of being a writer. A must for libraries with collections on Southern literature.

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