

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/3

The Place of the Yellow Woodpecker

By Hugh Fox

185 pages (2010)

The Drill Press, Cedar Park TX

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Review by Steve Glines

Hugh Fox is a perpetual mystery to me. I've read about a dozen of his books (and edited one) but, for me, it's hard to tell where one book ends and another begins. I'm convinced that Hugh Fox sits at his typewriter/computer and types for three or four months or until he thinks he has enough material to fill yet another volume whereupon he cuts it off, slaps a title on it, calls it a book and oddly enough he often finds someone to publish it.

This little volume, *The Place of the Yellow Woodpecker*, takes place on an island off the coast of Brazil during the course of roughly a year. All the usual suspects are there, Harry Smith, Bernadette, Blythe, and assorted characters (or is it caricatures) from his other books. Hugh slips easily between non-fiction and fiction with the same characters appearing in both and only a disclaimer on the cover informs us of the difference. This is fiction ... I think or he thinks. I don't really know.

Hugh's style is stream of consciousness. Sometimes descriptive – at one point he spends three pages describing the little hamlet, too small to be a village – that serves as the location for this work – sometimes pure narrative – we learn all about the characters that inhabit this place. My personal favorite is the old man who sits in his kitchen all day reading Thomas Aquinas. Why? We're never told except that he serves as a foil for his mid thirties daughter, an old maid by local standards – sometimes philosophical – not in any organized way but more like the wise comments your grandfather uses to utter at odd moments.

Be warned, reading Fox is not for the faint of heart; strong coffee, a bright light and a willingness to place yourself completely in the hands and mind of this prolific scribbler are required to suck the elusive juice from the page. Fox combines the best (and worst) of Charles Bukowski (of whom Fox is a well renowned scholar) and the worst (and best) of Kerouac. In short, I love him and hate him all at the same time. Your mileage may vary.

