

Doug Holder

Hugh Fox: Way, Way Off On His Final Road: 1932 to 2011

From the introduction of "Way, Way Off the Road: The Memoirs of The Invisible Man" by Hugh Fox (Ibbetson Street Press)



Several years ago the Ibbetson Street Press published a Hugh Fox poetry collection "Angel of Death." I had never actually met Fox in the flesh, but I was aware of his substantial contributions to the small press over the past 40 years. Fox was a founding member of COSMEP, (a seminal small press organization), a founding member of the PUSHCART PRIZE, and edited the groundbreaking anthology "The Living Underground," to name just a few achievements.

One day, in my apartment on Ibbetson Street in Somerville, Mass. I was just about asleep when I heard my doorbell ring. I went to answer it and a man of a certain age, with long gray hair spouting from the sides of his cap and a heavy Bronx accent said: "Hi Doug, what do ya' have in there a Blonde?" I said: "Well my wife is here, she's sort of blondish." I asked him in but I guess he sensed I was in no condition for company. He declined and promptly took a cab back to his hotel.

Since then I have had the opportunity to meet him on a couple of occasions. Fox is full of anecdotes about many of the stumble bums, poets, poseurs, publishers, editors, with all their infinite variety, on the small press scene. I am glad this manuscript has seen the light of day. And when you read it hopefully you will see the light too.

—Doug Holder (2006)

I don't remember when I first became aware of Hugh Fox. He was a prolific writer across all genres. It might have been through one of the many reviews he wrote for the Small Press Review; it might be from the manuscripts he sent me to publish, or through the many poets of the "Invisible Generation" (A term he used to describe his peer group of writers) he befriended over the years. Whatever you say about Fox, he wasn't a cliché of a man—he was a total original. He was a PhD with a big disdain for the academy; his breadth of knowledge left me breathless; he could be incredibly kind and incredibly rude, but I loved him warts and all—hey ain't that what love is after all?

I asked Fox a few years ago what he would like to be remembered for. He told me: "That I reminded people to take a close look and engage the world around them." Fox took it all in: from sex, the Aztecs, religion, the meaning of being, the meaning of meaning...you name it.

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He was a firm believer in the small press—not the New York publishing houses where the buck is the bottom line. It was his religion, his passion, to review the thousands of small press books of all genres for the late Len Fulton's Small Press Review, and other publications. To Hugh, the chap, or the big tome was all high holy. Nothing was too obscure, too raw. He called many a writer a "genius," but what I think what he really was trying to say was he recognized the genius in all of us.

He took many a writer under his wing. He could be unapologetically flirtatious but more often than not he would charm the pants off you—and in his younger days I am sure he literally did. Hugh had a huge cadre of writers that were the objects of his affection.

He introduced me and countless others to the short form or capsule book review. In one of his short reviews he could really get to the core of the book with an economy of words, and he nixed the deadening academic jargon that could bleed the life out of any writing.

I would get unexpected calls late at night from Fox. He would say: "Hey I miss you pal—why haven't you called?" When I was laid off of my job of many years he offered to put me and my wife up at his home in Lansing, Michigan; he lobbied for me to be included in the important avant-garde poetry anthology "Inside the Outside." Fox told me he loved me more than once... and you know what?... I truly think he did.

I thought that Fox would never die. He told me for years he was on his last legs with cancer, and his time was short. He even wrote a play that concerned him and the noted small press poet Lo Galluccio, meeting cute while in the throes of ovarian and prostate cancer. To my knowledge Galluccio has never suffered from ovarian cancer, but she was a dear friend of Fox and he included a lot of us in his work.

As Samuel Beckett wrote: "We are born astride the grave," and Fox is gone. He died in a hospice in Michigan at 79, heavily sedated, out of pain finally, drifting up into the ether in a dream—to the cosmos—to that grand poem—infinity.