



Green Book Yellow Dog

J. Brown

Lulu

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Green Book Yellow Dog contains some sparkling prose and evocative landscape descriptions, but the book's structure is so disjointed that it is difficult to follow the story line or ascertain exactly what the author is trying to convey. Is the book meant as a straight novella that follows fifteen years in the life of a group of violent and aimless young men, or is it intended as a focus on the lifespan of a contemplative dog character, Fudge? Fudge would appear to be the titular yellow dog, but there is only one brief reference to a green notebook written by a minor character, Aaron, and so it is unclear what the significance of the object might be, even at the end of the book.

Perhaps the book is intended as a fable contrasting animal and human characteristics, or as a simple offering of vignettes about life in an Angola town in the late twentieth century. Or is Jesu (who has a sister named Mary) supposed to represent Jesus Christ in some alternate incarnation? Another main character is named Zen, so one is left to wonder if this book is a commentary on various world religions. Alternatively, *Green Book, Yellow Dog* could be construed as an interlinked collection of short stories, but the book's form is so ill-defined that the reader is left confused and wondering what the author meant by all the scenes, even at the conclusion.

Brown does offer many poetic descriptions of sunbaked backyards and urban industrial areas, making ugly scenes seem almost beautiful and serene: "Long roads with rough, porous, black tar soaking green sunshine. The fickle wind blowing only where it desired. Grass fires choking thick plumes of carbon into the atmosphere. Or dragon wisps of heat distorting the horizons. Unbearable sweaty summers, eternities long, fading to scorched autumns as grasses died white and winter evenings faded to gray".

Unfortunately, these interesting and vivid descriptions are then peppered with short bits of plot involving a myriad of characters, most of whom meet nasty, brutish ends at each other's expense, so it's all a confusing jumble. Add in some ruminations about cosmology, existential philosophy and diatribes, sprinkle in a few typos and misspelled and misused words ("mucous" instead of "mucus," "teaming" instead of "teeming") and now the book is an even more confusing presentation.

In one of the first scenes in the book, Jesu meets Fudge when he jumps into the dog's yard while fleeing some folks who want to beat him up. He befriends the dog by feeding her two pieces of chocolate, which every dog lover knows is poisonous to canines, so one is left to wonder over the significance of the scene. Did Jesu mean to befriend her, or does he want to harm her? Is he simply clueless? This scene sets a puzzling tone for the rest of the book and ultimately makes for a challenging reading experience.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (May 12, 2011)

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