FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

The Yellow Ribbon Snake
J.R. Dailey
978-1-880284-37-7
(January 31, 2000)

What is left in the world for people who are still alive yet whose lives have been destroyed? All is inverted. Pain is now painless. Poverty is ambiguous riches. The hurtful past is now the ambivalent present. Dailey writes with the metaphoric passion of Hawthorne and the real-life matter-of-fact edge of Louise Erdrich. Her first novel's setting is a truck stop-desert highway Arizona where Jacko Lee, a "mentally" discharged Vietnam veteran, lives out of a dumpster. Lee is a character in a book of ghosts where his sister-in-law says, "The past, present and future blend together into a soft nickering."

The only softness of the novel is an eyelid found in a can of corned beef and the binding material that gives the book its title. Wrapped tightly around Jacko's wrists as a sex abused child and, later, his mind, as a western hobo wandering aimlessly through the lost days of his own mind and hometown, the yellow ribbon snake is a rope-sized tapestry of doom. Jacko's friends are drifters and the dead, including his grandmother and the people he has apparently murdered.

Dailey writes with a careful objectivity, teasing the reader with a combination of peace earned in midlife and a criminally charged infestation of madness that parallels the Furies of ancient literature. "Have you ever seen someone die? It's not like in the movies," says Marie, the novel's only other narrator. "They don't die instantly, they struggle and flop, every bit of their energy goes into not dying. And the man's last words aren't anything noble. He says, 'Oh shit,' because of the terrible unfairness of losing one's life to another man's whim." The author bridges this disturbing commentary with a Mexican dinner at a villa that is so well presented you can just about taste the chili

burritos and feel the warmth of a prairie home.

All the past's voices converge in this novel with the sights and sounds of the inspired failure of the goldrush dream turned strip bar-gas station hell of today's midwest. It's indeed possible to wonder at the close of this little book if we are in the presence of our own worst philosophical fears of man's inhumanity to man, or if we are getting just another (too close) view of the garbage at the side of the I-10 highway. Either way, Dailey commands serious attention.

Brandon M. Stickney