

Hayduke Lives! Too Bad!

Book review

Val Salvo (Peter Werbe

1991

a review of

Hayduke Lives! by Edward Abbey, Little, Brown, Co., Boston, 1990

Hayduke lives? Well, after reading the late Edward Abbey's sequel to his 1976 novel, *The Monkeywrench Gang*, one almost wishes the "wilderness avenger, industrial saboteur, night-time trouble-maker, barroom brawler, free-time lover..." had not made it safely off the cliff where we had assumed he plunged to his death at the end of the first book.

But like Prof. Moriarity, Hayduke and gang are back for another go-around with more earth-rapers, who this time have a 7-story high road grading machine at their service.

Sequels rarely make it as literature. They self-consciously re-do the well-loved original with a slightly different plot, and so it is here. However, this one is worse in other regards. Abbey received a lot of criticism for the blatant sexism and racist utterances of his characters in *The Monkeywrench Gang*, but rather than try to come to grips with the role patriarchal attitudes and the elimination of native cultures played in the destruction of his beloved wild West, he pores it on even thicker in the sequel.

A cranky and obstreperous man and writer, Abbey laces *Hayduke Lives!* with enough descriptions of breasts and buttocks to compete with a cheesy, soft-core porn novel. It's just embarrassing and downright bad writing; a stupid detraction from what could have been an exciting depiction of a battle to save the environment.

In other sections, the plot moves quickly enough to be engaging, but it is often agenda-driven so as again to irritatingly detract from the plot of the book. Abbey's sympathies for Earth First! founder, Dave Foreman, and other EF! old guard figures were no secret, but his description of the 1988 EF! Round River Rendezvous where Foreman is portrayed as suffering the slings and arrows of his critics is a bit much.

Christ-like, Foreman carries the wilderness in his heart while his opponents, "the furies of Berkeley" and a host of others who won't put the earth first, savage the valiant founder. This, along with the plot device of having other EF! personalities make cameo appearances, is so self-conscious that the smoothness of Abbey's story telling ability is washed out in a sea of polemics barely concealed beneath his prose.

However, when his prose is on, it's good. His nature writing, his howl of protest against what is being done to our fair earth is compelling, as good as a Muir or Leopold. The opening and closing chapters centering on a 135-year old turtle could almost stand by themselves as a metaphor for the durability of nature.

Abbey, undeniably writes exciting stories even in a predictable sequel. From his first novel, *The Brave Cowboy* (with its clear anarchist sympathies), through nature writings like his famous *Desert Solitaire*, his feel for the West, his description of the region's flora and fauna and the human players who live with them is often first-rate.

The good parts of *Hayduke Lives!* notwithstanding, it's sad to realize that this greatly flawed novel is the last we'll hear from Edward Abbey.

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