



Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie

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The Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 102, No. 406, Vietnam (Oct. - Dec., 1989),
495-497.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8715%28198910%2F12%29102%3A406%3C495%3APODTEO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V>

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Is a Reporter? The Private Face of Public Journalism”), David L. Eason (“On Journalistic Authority: The Janet Cooke Scandal”), and John J. Pauly (“Rupert Murdoch and the Demonology of Professional Journalism”) explore the origins of journalistic authority and communality via different routes. Each argues that contrasting traditions of journalism make for different models of the cultural practice called “reporting,” suggesting that there is not only one source of conventional wisdom by which reporters report the news, but many.

Perhaps because a number of the essays are abstracts of larger works in progress (i.e., Silverstone, Liebes and Katz) and were originally presented as a 1986 round table seminar at the International Communication Association (entitled Current Research on Television as Myth, Ritual and Storytelling), the collection does set up a distinction that it does not fully play out: two sections, respectively labeled “Television” and “The Press,” establish a premise that the book will discuss either the shared or distinctive features across media. But the collection actually does neither, satisfying neither the technological determinists who would argue for more of a distinction, nor the generic analysts who would argue for less. For instance, Cornfeld’s essay on Watergate is aligned with the section labeled “the press,” although Watergate was most certainly a television story too. A better distinction might have separated cultural categories of “facts” and “fictions” across mass media.

But even this small point does not detract from the book’s most central contribution: it is dialogic across academic communities. It appeals to folklorists because it allows for the examination of folkloric concepts against a new background that expands the repertoire of existing forms of expression. It appeals to communications researchers because it allows them to reconsider mass-mediated social and cultural existence as a continuous process linking up with folkloric tradition. Rooting cultural practice within folklore overturns some of the more collectively agreed-upon assumptions about media effect. There is room for further endeavors of this kind: communications might profit by attending to the models of reception which have traditionally occupied folklorists, while communications research might help to enrich folklore’s focus on production modes.

Carey argues that “we are driven by the absolute need to construct a cultural frame within which the pictures of our lives can be drawn” (p. 15). This collection of essays is similarly driven, and successfully so. If Carey’s words run true, the glimpse of cultural practice in mass-mediated societies that it provides augurs a promising future for both folklorists and communications researchers, as well as for cultural historians and cultural anthropologists. It suggests that the folklore of communication may not be so different from the communication of folklore.

Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie. By Wade Davis. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. Pp. xv + 344, foreword by Robert Faris Thompson, preface by Richard Evans Schultes, illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth; \$9.95 paper)

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Coming on the heels of the author’s sensational book on Haitian zombies, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, a lurid film based on it, and a heated attack by a number of pharmacological researchers (see *Science*, 15 April 1988), this book aims at setting some of the record straight. It is sober to the point of dullness, with all the faults of dissertations, including half a dozen “literature review” sections, which contain much that is marginal to the author’s thesis. There are other stylistic

defects, including the author's very idiosyncratic and arbitrary spelling of Creole, for which no key or explanation is offered.

The book comes at a time when Haiti has again been much in the news, but though Davis attempts to shed some light on the political situation in that unhappy country, the light is at best oblique and the insights offered are debatable.

As is by now widely known, Davis, a student of the ethnobotanist R. E. Schultes, went to Haiti to find the poison used to make zombies, after a Canadian-trained Haitian psychiatrist, L. Douyon, identified a well-documented case of a zombie. This man had been declared dead by an American physician at the Albert Schweitzer Hospital, and buried. He reappeared 18 years later. His return prompted systematic investigations by Douyon, including an analysis of fingerprints by Scotland Yard. Conclusion: this case was indeed authentic—the buried man and the returnee were the same. No other cases have come to light in which the supposed zombie was able to tell so convincing and coherent a tale, nor have others been as thoroughly investigated.

In cloak and dagger adventures, Davis located sorcerers and had poisons prepared to be analyzed in European and American laboratories. It was Davis's announcement of preliminary, unpublished findings and his disregard of negative findings that had researchers cry "foul." Davis has now reduced his claims from the earlier, more sensational ones, which appeared in the public record first on ABC-TV and BBC magazine programs. He now says that the poisons are of varying composition and strength, and contain many inert ingredients, including human bone. Also, that puffer fish and certain species of toads are used, and if prepared and administered correctly their poisons (tetrodotoxin) can produce temporary paralysis and lowering of vital signs to such a degree that the victim may be declared dead. This fits well the pattern of curare, the famous Amazonian arrow poison. If quantities are insufficient, nothing happens, and if excessive the victim dies outright. Only in rare cases where the scenario works and the victim is removed from the grave in time and administered a second poison, a hallucinogenic, is the making of the zombie complete. The "antidote" keeps the victim stupified and unable to resist physical and ritual manipulation, he or she remains the sorcerer's prisoner, made to work cruelly for the remainder of the sorcerer's life. The problem is that there is no good evidence of such slavery and that slavery is indeed economically irrational in a country such as Haiti. Davis is aware of this problem but cannot resolve it. Where the curare-like action of the first poison is conceivable, the second phase of the process raises more questions that are not dealt with.

The arguments over the pharmacology of the two zombie poisons—both need to be dealt with, not just the first one—must be worked out by specialists. For the folklorist and the cultural anthropologist there are other issues. One, as already noted, is the use sorcerers are supposed to be making of zombies. Although the ethnobotanical and ethnobiological nature of the poison, if there was one, was the task set for Davis, he seeks to place zombification in a cultural, social, and historical context. It might be noted that there was an anthropologist on Davis's doctoral committee; Irvén DeVore is a physical anthropologist who had worked among the !Kung in Southern Africa not a Caribbeanist or West Africanist. It is here, then, that Davis was on his own and where he is vulnerable. He argues that for the Haitian sorcerer, from his emic perspective (a term not defined) zombification is only partly a matter of substances administered but more importantly a matter of magical and ritual manipulation of essences. Second, the sorcerer is not an independent agent, but a member of a secret society, which acts not arbitrarily, but, in the absence of any effective government, to enforce social rules and values on behalf of the community. The secret societies are compared to possible West African antecedents. It is further claimed that Duvalier made use of the secret societies to gain and maintain political power and that they formed the core of the Tontons Macoute. Now called "thugs" in the American press, Davis refers to them by their official name, "Volunteers for the National Security," a militia trained by

a U.S. mission. Davis also suggests that the ultimate downfall of Duvalier Jr. (“Baby Doc”) was linked to a withdrawal of support by the Tontons Macoute and/or the secret societies. The picture is coherent and therefore somewhat attractive. The evidence, including that for the existence of the secret societies and their links to both sorcerers enforcing morality and to the Tontons Macoute, is fragmentary.

The presentation seems to be heavily influenced by the views of certain of Davis’s informants who have a perspective beyond the rural level. In the process Davis overlooks the abuses of the Tontons Macoute, the Duvaliers and the Duvalieristes, and what amounts to a tyranny over the country people by the secret societies.

Clearly, there are lessons to be learned here. What is the kernel of empirical reality in the fantastic tales informants tell as part of their emic view of the world? People, including fieldworkers, construct realities. Do not seek coherence at all costs—to do so may do violence both to the emic and the etic reality. Most importantly, there are the ethical questions. Davis has been criticized for paying for poisons for which graves were opened. The political implications of the study raise more serious questions for me, for ultimately Davis seems to be arguing for social control, keeping people in line through the secret society/Tontons Macoute connection, keeping them in line through terror, by making or threatening to make zombies.

Taleworlds and Storyrealms: The Phenomenology of Narrative. By Katharine Galloway Young. (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987. Pp. xiv + 268, preface, acknowledgments, appendix [Transcription Devices], index, bibliography, figures. \$66.50)

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Folklore study has, from its inception as a modern discipline, held fundamental the very propositions that continue to disorder the humanities generally these days: radical cultural relativism, the importance of response dynamics, the problematic nature of authorial claims, the determining power of extratextual forces, and so on. But we *begin* with these assumptions, and seem not to concern ourselves overmuch with the processes by which they were established. Katharine Galloway Young has elected to work with some of these vexatious matters and has undertaken to raise the level of the philosophical conversation in folklore. Regrettably, *Taleworlds and Storyrealms* is a dreary exercise of little consequence, one that is curiously self-canceling, rather stamping on its own feet as it progresses, stumbling over its own awkward “neutrality,” and heedlessly occluding what it would avowedly clarify.

In this particular “phenomenology,” “taleworld” and “storyrealm” are surrogates for what are called “story” and “discourse” elsewhere. “Taleworld” denotes the events to which the narrative alludes; “storyrealm” pertains to the manner of telling, shaded here to specify only the discourse of conversationally embedded narratives and differentiated by virtue of its capacity to mediate between story-content and nonnarrative conversational interaction. “Storyrealm” is “an enclave in the realm of conversation” (p. ix) that is processually distinct from the conversation in which it arises. That a special coinage is warranted for this shift in discursive register is not shown.

Young derives much of her vocabulary from Husserl by way of Alfred Schutz and Maurice Natanson, Merleau-Ponty, and Berger and Luckmann; her procedures descend from the ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel and, especially, Harvey Sacks, whose unpublished University of California lecture notes have a kind of underground cult status (Young provides tantalizingly brief quotations from these manuscripts). She acknowledges the influence of the dra-