

PASSAGE OF DARKNESS: THE ETHNOBIOLOGY OF THE HAITIAN ZOMBIE. By WADE DAVIS. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988. 344 p. + xx, maps, illus., glossary, bib., index. Hardbound, US\$29.95; Softbound, US\$9.95, Cdn\$12.95.

H.P. Lovecraft and Indiana Jones move over! Wade Davis has shown once again that facts can be stranger than even the strangest fiction. Northern readers interested in the resilience of traditional lifeways and mechanisms for sharing power in traditional societies will find food for thought in this book. Those interested in traditional uses of plants and animals will learn something new. Even those cabin-bound sourdoughs who need a good mental holiday in the tropics should pick it up. Anyone seriously skeptical of the powers of magic, bored with science, unconvinced of the value of interdisciplinary research or unfamiliar with the discipline of ethnobiology should make *Passage of Darkness* required reading.

Unabashedly emulating his vodoun (voodoo) mentors, who had no qualms about trading knowledge for cash (including the ritual secrets of their legendary "zombie powder"), Davis has already published many of his findings in the popular novel *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, which has been sensationalized in a film and video version of the same name. After all, isn't it a sign of stupidity to give up something of value and receive nothing in return? But, unlike some popular authors, Davis has not abandoned his discipline for the chase of gold. He has contributed an enormously captivating, thoroughly researched treatise on an elusive, dangerous and bizarre topic of significance to an array of disciplines ranging from pharmacology and conservation biology to parapsychology and political science.

My only problems with the book might have been solved with another round of rigorous editing. I found some sections to be repetitive and to occasionally dwell too long on relatively unimportant points. For example, I found the twenty pages on the "problem of death" a bit tiresome and rambling. The overall impression was that the book had been hastily assembled from the author's collection of pre-written essays and field notes out of a sense of duty to publish a scholarly account. Perhaps the publisher recognized the quality of most of the writing and let the weak spots pass rather than risk interfering in an overall high quality piece of work.

Davis's original objective was to verify and document the zombie phenomenon, the macabre process of creating living corpses. If such secrets could be ciphered, the pharmacological community, especially anaesthesiologists, might once again benefit from traditional ethnobiology. Davis accomplished this objective admirably. He witnessed and documented eight complete preparations of the "zombie powder" from four widely separated locations in rural Haiti. Then he analyzed the physiological activity of the active ingredients and determined the emic and etic processes by which they are prescribed and administered. He discovered the main active ingredient to be one already known by science. This potent nerve poison produces death, near death-like symptoms, erroneous diagnoses of death and even premature burial in completely unrelated modern societies.

The sophisticated techniques and knowledge of otherwise illiterate practitioners are evidence that many phenomena unknown to science may well be understood and practiced in so-called primitive cultures. The destruction of biological diversity throughout the world along with the indigenous cultures that know and depend on it are shown once again to be tragic losses for us all.

Parapsychologists might recognize the *ti bon ange* (the aura? the luminous egg?), the vodoun concept of the outer soul that is stolen from the victim in the zombification process. This is the presence that hovers above the grave of the freshly buried victim and is captured by the bokor (an evil voodoo priest) before exhuming the helpless living corpse and leading it away to a miserable half-death of mind-broken slavery. They will be interested in similarities between the experiences of documented zombies and the recorded accounts

of patients recounting near-death experiences. They will also recognize the tremendous power of suggestion and psychosomatic symptoms of powerlessness and malaise induced by bokors through post-coma suggestion and reinforced by powerful psycho-active drugs. Empathetic readers might want to re-evaluate any romantic notions they may have about witchdoctors, shamans and the like. They will surely increase their appreciation for the power of terror that "magical" practices can generate in pre-literate societies.

Passage of Darkness is much more than a documentation of the mysterious Haitian zombies and explication of the secret powder used to create them. It is an exposé of an incredibly resilient and powerful folk lifeway, violently uprooted by slavers from deepest darkest Africa, and unknowingly transplanted to root and flourish in the hothouse Haitian cultural amalgam. Through the tumultuous slave trade, the evil colonial era and equally brutal slave rebellions, through the post-revolutionary period and into modern Haiti, the vodoun hougans (good voodoo priests) and bokors have survived. Aided by their secret Bizango societies (including the infamous Tonton Macoute), they have practiced and enforced their traditional techniques of fear, discipline and social order as recently as their late leader, the Baron Samedi, Papa Doc Duvalier.

One does not fear zombies. One fears becoming a zombie!

REFERENCE

DAVIS, W. 1985. *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. Toronto: Simon and Schuster. 288 p.

Jack Van Camp
Arctic College
Box 600
Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, Canada
XOE 0P0

FROZEN IN TIME: UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF THE FRANKLIN EXPEDITION. By OWEN BEATTIE and JOHN GEIGER. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1988. xi + 180 p., maps, illus. Hardcover. Cdn\$22.95.

Frozen in Time is the public account of Owen Beattie's exhumation of three sailors buried on Beechey Island in 1846 by Sir John Franklin's Northwest Passage expedition, an expedition that met with total disaster in the years immediately following the burials. Beattie, a forensic anthropologist at the University of Alberta, has already published many of the results of his research in a variety of academic journals. And as further laboratory tests are completed, the undertaking of Beattie and his colleagues will likely produce numerous more detailed and scholarly articles concerning a multiplicity of facets of mid-19th-century life previously lost to modern man. Most of this work will, unfortunately, be conducted at a level of specialization and expressed in a language beyond the ken of many readers.

Frozen in Time, however, is directed to the layman — both to the reader interested in the fate of Franklin and his men and to those with more general curiosities, perhaps stirred by what the tabloids sensationalized. Unquestionably, this book will cause most readers to marvel at the state of forensic science. And no better specimens exist as a showcase for such skills than the bodies of these men who have been permanently frozen for nearly a century and a half. Much of what makes the book succeed rests with John Geiger, its co-author, who, I would assume, did most if not all of the actual writing. Geiger is an Edmonton journalist, and a fairly good one. He manages to convey clearly the basic issues at hand in Beattie's work and to present the five years of research in a way that intrigues and entices the reader. To be sure, the "story-selling" mark of the journalist appears in *Frozen in Time*, but with the exception of a few references or allusions to a hokey prescience about the ability of mothers to foresee disasters awaiting their sons or