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Representations of Voodoo:

The history and influence of Haitian Vodou within the
cultural productions of Britain and America since 1850

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Caribbean Studies.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Affranchis	Free people of colour
CAB	Committee Against Blaxploitation
CGI	Computer Generated Imagery
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
Code Noir	The first document to establish guidelines for the policing of slaves, it first took shape in 1685 in the court of Louis XIV of France.
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
Hays Code	The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930
IATA	International Air Transport Association
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
PC	Personal Computer
Poppet	A small figure of a human used in witchcraft and sorcery
SNCC	Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee
UN	United Nations
VOC	Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie

GLOSSARY

Asson	Ritual Rattle, also ason
Ayti	Haiti, also seen as Hayti (means ‘mountainous’)
Agwe	Loa of the sea
Azaka	Rada spirit of agriculture, also as Kouzin, Zaka, or Papa Zaka
Baron	Head of the Gede family, spirits of the cemetery, also Baron Samedi
Bizango	Secret society known for association with zombification
Bokor	A Vodouist who practices ‘black magic’, also Bòkò
Bondye	The term for God, an eternal force without human characteristics, also Grand Mèt and le bon Dieu
Bosou	Spirit seen depicted as a bull with three horns, Petro and Rada
Dahomey	Area of West Africa from where many Haitian slaves were taken
Damballah	Serpent spirit associated with water and the rainbow, also Danbala
Dechoukaj	Vengeance sought on Duvalierists, including Vodou persecution
Drapo	Ceremonial flags of Vodou
Erzulie	Spirit of love, often addressed as <i>Mistress</i> , also Ezili
Gédé	Family of spirits associated with the dead, also Guede
Ginen	Generic term for things derived from West Africa
Govi	Pot used to house a spirit
Gris-gris	New Orleans Voodoo, a charm that can be used for good or evil
Hoodoo	African American folk magic, conjuring and herbal medicine
Hounfort	Vodou temple, also Ounfò and Houmfo
Houngan	Vodou Priest, also Oungan
Juju	New Orleans Voodoo, a charm that originates from ‘white magic’
Kalfou	Petro spirit of the crossroads, also Carrefour

Kréyol	Creole French language, as spoken in Haiti and some other parts of the Caribbean, referred to as Creole in Louisiana
Krik? Krak!	Kréyol stories start with this call-response
Lasirène	Female loa of the ocean
Legba	Spirit of doorways and gates
Loa	Spirit, deity, also Iwa and loi
Loup-garou	Literal translation is werewolf, creature from folklore
Mambo	Priestess, also Manbo
Maroon	A runaway slave
Mojo	New Orleans Voodoo, a charm that originates from ‘black magic’
Ogou	Family of spirits associated with war and justice
Pantheon	A group of loa, also nanchon
Peristyle	Vodou temple, also Peristil
Petro	Pantheon of malevolent spirits associated with sorcery and magic
Poteau-mitan	The centre post of the hounfort or peristyle, the temple
Rada	Pantheon of benevolent spirits and rites
Rara	Festival associated with Vodou societies
Reposwa	A generic term for an object that contains a spirit, or loa
Societé	The group of Vodou followers within a particular community
Tontons Macoutes	‘Bogeymen’ or armed guards from Duvalier’s police, also Tonton Makout or Makout
Vèvè	Ritual ground drawings used to invoke the spirits, also Vever
Vodou	Predominant religion/way of life within Haiti and the Diaspora
Vodu	The Fon word for spirit from which Vodou may have derived
Voodoo	Religion in New Orleans; Generic term for representations derived from Vodou; used to describe the predominant religion in Haiti
Wanga	A magic charm or work of magic, also Ouanga

Yoruba	The people from West Africa whose religious practices, along with those from Dahomey, formed the basis of Vodou in Haiti
Zobop	Secret society associated with malevolently using zombies
Zombie	A soul separated from the body (astral) or a body separated from the soul (flesh), also zonbi or zombi

La Lumière

Quand la lune est au visage plein,
Mo va posé un poème
Sur so sein
De sorte que
Quand la lune té parti
To sera capable souffler mes paroles
Et connais que mo té là.

When the moon is full
I will place a poem
On your bosom
So that
When the moon is gone
You will breathe my words
And know that I was there.

La Lumière written and translated by Sybil Kein.

For the people of Haiti and New Orleans.

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This is dedicated to my wonderful Mum, Sandra

For her strength, support, inspiration and love

Forever in my heart

DECLARATION

I declare that all of the work presented within this thesis is entirely my own, unless otherwise referenced, and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first major investigation into the representations of Vodou within the cultural productions of Britain and America. It also opens up opportunities for further research to be undertaken in the representations of Vodou, Haiti and the culture and religions of other Caribbean countries.

This thesis explores the representations of ‘Voodoo,’ the widely accepted and recognised term for the re-imagined religion, in Britain and America since 1850. The history of the Caribbean and Haiti is examined before considering the influence that the religion of Haitian Vodou has had on cultural production. Through a historical perspective the thesis will consider the evolution of Vodou during the horrors of slavery. The historiographic representations form the basis of the productions and are explored to contextualise Vodou in the British and American imagination. All genres of literature are examined, from the first mention of Vodou in the eighteenth century through to the present day. This is followed by an examination of the cultural reproductions of Vodou in film, animation, theatre and television to explore the diversity of the representations. The wider societal influences are considered throughout this work to contextualise the productions of ‘Voodoo.’

This thesis argues that the cultural reproductions of Vodou since 1850 have not changed greatly, despite various efforts to redress the misrepresentations, they remain rooted in colonialism. It will argue that many of the cultural productions are reliant on previous representations. They do not in the majority introduce authenticity, instead opting for the more sensational approach. Many of the representations will be shown to be derogatory to the religion, culture and people of Haiti and the diaspora. This is despite Vodou as a religion having survived, gained strength and continuing to thrive in the twenty-first century.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Voodoo. The word alone strikes up images of priests with blood-spattered robes sacrificing animals under the cover of darkness, of zombies, the living dead roaming the earth seeking human flesh, frenzied dancers pulsating to the rhythm of the drums, pins in dolls and images of ritualistic possession. These images have very little to do with Vodou,¹ the Haitian religion that rose from the horrors of slavery.

There are many familiar images that are associated with Voodoo and arguably the best known is that of the Voodoo doll embellished with pins to inflict pain on an enemy miles away. The images that are easily recognisable are those that have been fed to us through a variety of media. These include visual images devised and exploited by Hollywood and television. There were also earlier inflammatory literary works that introduced readers to Haiti as a mysterious and exotic land, a land that was described in the words of many respected authors. These representations have formed 'imagined' Voodoo and have provided a framework of understanding that has subsequently been passed from generation to generation, reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating myths. Images and writings of Vodou have shaped our imagination to this aspect of Haitian culture. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the cultural representations and their relationships to how perceptions have been created and communicated.

¹ There are many variations of spelling which will be clarified within chapter one, at this point the spelling 'Voodoo' refers to the generally accepted spelling and reference and the spelling 'Vodou' refers specifically to the Haitian religion.

This introduction provides background information on the Caribbean, Haiti and Vodou before outlining the thesis. I will discuss my aims and methodologies, including the difficulties encountered by being an outsider to a culture that is well guarded and where outsiders are viewed with suspicion and scepticism. The newspaper and literature searches are discussed; however literature is covered in more depth within Chapter Two. The rest of the introduction will outline the definitions used throughout this thesis and models used as a basis for the research, concluding with a summary of the chapters.

The Caribbean

The Caribbean became known to the West when Christopher Columbus and his fleet arrived in 1492² and records of this area began,³ unfortunately this was also the time when the indigenous population was virtually wiped out. The term Caribbean⁴ is derived from the *Caribs*, one of the dominant Amerindian groups in the area at the time of the European arrival. The whole area is also known as the *Antilles*, being divided into the *Greater Antilles*⁵ and the *Lesser Antilles*.⁶ The name West Indies originated from Christopher Columbus when he thought that he had reached the Indies but had in fact reached the Americas. Columbus continuously tried to differentiate between the peoples of these Indies; he referred to the Arawaks as ‘friendly natives’ and the Caribs as ‘fierce savages’

² Christopher Columbus saw and landed on Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic) in December 1492.

³ Christopher Columbus, *The Four Voyages*, trans. J.M.Cohen (London: Penguin, 1969).

⁴ The Caribbean as a region has over seven thousand islands, reefs and cays that are organised into twenty five territories spreading over nearly 2000 miles.

⁵ The Greater Antilles are the larger of the Caribbean Islands, Cuba, Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic), Jamaica and Puerto Rico.

⁶ The Lesser Antilles include the smaller islands of the Caribbean, the Virgin Islands, the Windward Islands and the Leeward Islands.

and ‘man-eaters.’⁷ There has been an intertwining of the meanings between *Carib* and *cannibal* since Columbus arrived in the area.⁸ Columbus justified the enslavement of the Caribs when in his imagination he believed them to practice anthropophagy. This became a precursor to the African slave trade when Bartolomé de Las Casas defended the ‘Indians’ of the Caribbean and called for the enslavement of Africans instead.⁹

There is an illustration of sixteenth-century African slaves within the *Histoire Naturelle des Indes* (also known as the *Drake Manuscript* because of the references to Sir Francis Drake). This is a collection of illustrations created by the French Huguenots who travelled with Drake on his voyages to the West Indies during the sixteenth century (Fig.1). This collection also makes a reference to the practice of anthropophagy by the Indians of Ihona (Fig.2): the notes for this illustration read

When the Indians have defeated their enemies, they make them lie down on the ground, then pound them and, after that, give them a blow on the head with their sword. When the blood starts flowing, they hold it back promptly, thinking that by this means the body will make a better roast for a solemn feast, calling this a deed of prowess.¹⁰

⁷ Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986).

⁸ For more on this see Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead (eds.), *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day - An Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁹ Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, and the Commodification of Difference* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1998).

¹⁰ *The Drake Manuscript*, trans. Ruth S. Kraemer (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1996) 264.



Fig.1. “Come les esclaves naigres trauillent et cherchent lor aux-mynes en la terre nommee veraugue” in *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, ca.1586.¹¹



Fig.2. “Hindes De Ihona” in *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, ca.1586.¹²

¹¹ Fig.1. “Come les esclaves naigres trauillent et cherchent lor aux-mynes en la terre nommee veraugue (How the negro slaves work and look for gold in the mines of the region called Veragua [Panama])”, *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, illustration in *The Drake Manuscript*, f.100, trans. Ruth S. Kraemer (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1996).

¹² Fig. 2. “Hindes de Ihona (Indians of Ihona)”, *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, illustration in *The Drake Manuscript*, f.85, trans. Ruth S. Kraemer (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1996).

It is easy to forget that the original inhabitants of these islands, their cultures and entire societies were almost obliterated by the Europeans during the sixteenth century. The arrival of the Spanish was disastrous for the Amerindians who lived on the islands of the Caribbean; they were massacred, enslaved or, having no immunity to European diseases, died of illness.

During the period between the arrival of Columbus and emancipation there were very few visitors to the Caribbean who came for reasons other than to profit from the region. During the eighteenth century a number of hotels opened throughout the area that catered for business travellers within the islands as well as the occasional visitors from overseas. The Caribbean came to be promoted as a destination for good health (despite there being a number of diseases prevalent such as cholera and yellow fever) and, by the end of the nineteenth century, tourism for recreation began to rise in popularity.¹³ Tourism in the early twentieth century was limited to those who could afford to travel as the only way of reaching the Caribbean was by sea, which took days or weeks and cost a great deal. During the 1950s there was a huge increase in tourism with the advent of safer air travel and the introduction of the first trans-Atlantic passenger jets in 1958.¹⁴ Costs were cut, travel times were reduced and periods of stay were shortened. Previously a traveller would stay for a few weeks or months, air travel allowed visitors to stay in the Caribbean for a week, or as is possible today, for just a few days. Tourists and visitors to the islands today are now greeted by a mix of cultures that have been influenced by the colonists, slaves, and indentured

¹³ For more information on Tourism in the Caribbean see David Timothy Duval, *Tourism in the Caribbean: Trends, Developments, Prospects* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁴ "History of IATA" *International Air Transport Association*, 27 January 2006
<<http://www.iata.org>>

labourers from Europe, Africa and Asia with little reference to, or information about, the indigenous peoples.

The image of the Caribbean is varied: this is due to the descriptions and information that have been disseminated since the late nineteenth century. The iconic image and signifier of the Caribbean is the palm tree, often supported by the cliché of white sands and turquoise seas, an image that has been used to promote many holiday destinations for many years. Mimi Sheller identifies this idea of the 'tropical' and the influence of the nature and landscape in *Consuming the Caribbean*.¹⁵ We are being sold this 'paradise', without reference to any aspect of the Caribbean that may be controversial or not quite what we expect to find and so historical fact is overlooked in favour of the idyllic. There are a few representations of Haiti that depict the country as a Caribbean 'paradise' and yet these are very limited.¹⁶ On the contrary, Haiti is generally portrayed as the 'other' or the 'exotic' or not referred to at all, being missed out of some guide books altogether.¹⁷

The Caribbean is a hotbed of mixed representations, sometimes portrayed as the exotic, a 'paradise' to be embraced, and sometimes shown as a place of abject poverty and violence. The portrayals vary depending on the source: travel companies push for the idyllic whereas news media tend to be more critical.

¹⁵ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2003) 36-70.

¹⁶ There is one example of a positive representation in a tourist guide that was published about Haiti; John Allen Franciscus, *Haiti: Voodoo Kingdom to Modern Riviera* (Puerto Rico: Franciscus Family Foundation, 1980).

¹⁷ *Rough Guides* chose not to publish a guide book on Haiti due to the area being perceived as unsafe for travellers. Rough Guides, email to the author, 26 September 2003.

Despite these confusions millions of visitors flock to the area in search of a taste of 'paradise' every year.

Haiti

Haiti is in the Caribbean between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean to the West of the Dominican Republic. The total area of Haiti is 27,250 sq km including 190 sq km of water, with a coastline covering 1771 km (Fig.3). The climate on Haiti is mainly tropical, semiarid where the mountains cut off the trade winds and there is high humidity in many of the coastal areas. The terrain is mostly rough with rugged mountains rising from 0m at the Caribbean Sea to 2680m at the *Chaine de la Selle*. There are small coastal plains and river valleys and a large east central elevated plateau. There are still natural resources on Haiti, despite the over farming of agricultural land, including bauxite, copper, calcium carbonate, gold, marble and hydropower.¹⁸



Fig.3. Detail from the Map of Haiti and Santo Domingo, *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies*, 1931.¹⁹

¹⁸ "Haiti," CIA The World Factbook 2005, 30 November 2005
<<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ha.html>>

¹⁹ Fig.3. Map of the Republics of Haiti and Santo Domingo, The Edinburgh Geographical Institute, John Bartholomew and Sons Ltd., in Sir Algernon Aspinall, *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* (1907; London: Sifton, Praed & Co. Ltd., 1931) 362.

Haiti does lie in the hurricane belt and as such is subject to severe storms from June to October: in recent years this has led to severe flooding. The country is also at risk of earthquakes and droughts. Current environmental issues include extensive deforestation,²⁰ soil erosion and inadequate supplies of potable water. Some of these are factors in the devastation that areas of the country have experienced in recent flooding where villages have been buried under massive mud slides following floods and severe storms. At least six hundred people died in the floods of 2004.²¹ This severe deforestation has had an effect on the quality of the soil for agricultural use and currently just 28.3% of the country is in use as arable land, 11.61% with permanent crops and the remaining 60.09% used for other purposes. In 1998 the estimated amount of irrigated land was 750 sq km.²² The climate is generally very warm; there are two rainy seasons in April-May and September-October. The driest, coolest months are December-March; the temperature is generally cooler in the mountainous villages and temperatures can vary from 20 – 35 degrees Celsius.

Haiti has a population of 8,121,622 (estimated July 2005). There is a lower life expectancy than other parts of the world as well as higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates, due to the effects of AIDS. There are around 280,000 people living with HIV/AIDS with approximately 10% of this number dying each year. The life expectancy at birth in Haiti is just 52.92.

²⁰ In an article featured in *National Geographic* in 1987, it was estimated that deforestation covered 95% of Haiti. Charles E. Cobb, Jr., Haiti Against All Odds, *National Geographic*, 172.5 (Nov., 1987) 648-9.

²¹ The floods came in the wake of tropical storm Jeanne; these statistics were reported by the BBC on Tuesday 21st September 2004. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3674990.stm>>

²² CIA The World Factbook 2005.

The capital of Haiti is Port-au-Prince where the population is approximately 2,000,000. Cap Haitien is the next largest populated area with 800,000 inhabitants. Haiti has the lowest urban to rural population percentage in Latin America and the Caribbean with 75% of the population in rural areas and 25% in urban. 80% of the population lives in abject poverty. Haiti is 95% black with mulattos²³ and whites making up the remaining 5%. There are a number of religions in the country;

Roman Catholic	80%
Protestant	16%
Other / None	4%

These statistics are listed in the CIA Factbook and although Vodou is accepted as a religion within Haiti it did not feature on the US list in 2005. In 2007 there was an addition in the section referring to religion that claims “roughly half the population practices Vodoo.”²⁴ It is often stated that 100% of the population practice Vodou, there are no statistics to support this claim, but it should be noted there is no conflict with other beliefs, devout Catholics are also Vodouists.

The official languages of Haiti are French and Creole (known in Haiti as Kréyol), but English is being more widely spoken especially in business. One aspect of the language to note is that within schools children are taught French, the language of their colonial oppressors, despite the majority of the population (many of whom are illiterate) speaking Kréyol.

²³ The term *Mulatto* refers to Haitians of mixed parentage.

²⁴ CIA The World Factbook Haiti, updated 23 January 2007.

Tourism is very low in Haiti despite it being such a colourful and unique island in the Caribbean. There are difficulties for tourists due to the political instability of the country and the weak infrastructure. There has been an increase in violent crime since 2000 with lawlessness increasing. Many of the foreign offices and tourist advisory services are advising that Haiti not be visited at this time.²⁵ The operations at the British Consulate office in the capital, Port-au-Prince, have been suspended since 2005 because of the threat to security. It is difficult to gain accurate up to date crime statistics as no records are available and there are contradictory reports to the level of crime within Haiti from journalists. Guide books for visitors were published in the 1950s that featured Haiti as a tourist destination. They picture fascinating monuments, varied architecture, a bright and colourful culture, beautiful beaches, and of course Vodou.²⁶ These are rare and as will be shown are not usual representations of Haiti or her culture.

Vodou

Vodou is a syncretic religion, a complex system of beliefs and practices that were inherited from Africa. On arrival in Haiti slaves were given new names and baptised into Catholicism before being distributed among the plantations. This systematic attempt to eradicate the slave's heritage failed because they assimilated the Catholic religion with their own beliefs and Haitian Vodou evolved. Catholicism was the only permissible religion; all other religions were

²⁵ The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against all but essential travel to Haiti, "Travel Advice by Country, Haiti" *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, 1 February 2006 <<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029390554>>

²⁶ These are rare and originals have yet to be found. Photocopies were sent to the author by the Haitian Embassy in New York, September 2003.

forbidden, as were any gatherings, so Vodou became hidden.²⁷ The slaves were able to conceal Vodou with Catholicism and honoured their spirits by giving them the faces of the saints; today images of Catholic saints are present within all aspects of Vodou. Laennec Hurbon suggests that the ancestral spirits were invoked and celebrated in the shadow of the church as a survival mechanism.²⁸ It was a mechanism for survival and for the retention of identity; Haitian Vodou was to be a powerful force. Vodou played an important role in the history of Haiti and along with the evolution of Haitian Vodou is covered in more depth in Chapter One.

The religion itself is complex and many scholars have written extensively in an attempt to explain the intricacies and theology of Vodou.²⁹ It is not possible within the scope of this thesis to explore the religion in depth; although it is of benefit to have an awareness of the Vodou ceremony.

The basics of the ceremonies have changed little since the first descriptions were written by Moreau Saint-Méry in 1797.³⁰ Vodou acknowledges one God and through God the spirits (the loa) were created to serve Him, in much the same way that the people serve the spirits. God is known as *Bondye, le bon Dieu* or

²⁷ These rules were from the Code Noir which was prepared in France during the seventeenth century. The Code Noir gave precise information on the regulation of slaves and identifies the justification of slavery with the church. A copy of the Code Noir with a full translation by John Garrigus can be found on "Le Code Noir," *The L'Ouverture Project* website, 14 June 2007 <http://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Le_Code_Noir>

²⁸ Laënnec Hurbon, *Voodoo: Truth and Fantasy*, trans. Lory Frankel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) 28.

²⁹ These will be covered in chapter two including the work of Alfred Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (1959, New York: Schocken Books, 1972) and Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo*, trans. Robert B. Cross (1953, San Francisco: City Light Books, 1969).

³⁰ L.E. Moreau Saint-Méry, *Descriptions Topographique, physique, civil, politique et historique de la partie Française de l'isle de Saint Domingue*, 3 vols (Philadelphia, 1797) 45-51.

Gran Mèt, and is an eternal force without human characteristics. Bondye is removed from the lives of the Haitians so they worship the spirits, or the loa, to connect with the spirit world. The loa are believed to be a constant presence. The loa are divided into *pantheons* with the two most dominant being the *Rada* and *Petro*. Rada rituals are generally benign and the ceremonies held inside Vodou temples, participants wear white and the sacrifices tend to be small.³¹ The Rada loa are not overly powerful and their punishments when given are fair. They do not evoke fear and tend to be much gentler. The Petro loa are more unpredictable and can be violent. Their ceremonies are held outside the temple in areas such as a cemetery or forest, participants wear red and larger sacrificial offerings are demanded such as sheep or cows. The Petro loa are powerful and they are demanding of their followers. It is the Petro loa most associated with the secret societies held responsible for zombification and the basis of many folktales.³² As J. Michael Dash explains “When all else fails or when the devotee wishes to turn to sorcery, the Petro loas are invoked... it is true to say that many are called ‘devils’ or ‘eaters of men.’”³³ Generally the Rada loa are the ones invoked, the Petro loa tend to be a last resort. It is this duality within Vodou that tends to be divided into ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and yet this is too simplistic. There are two sides for balance but either can perform ‘good’ and either can punish when neglected.

³¹ A small sacrifice would be considered to be a chicken. Important ceremonies may include the sacrifice of a goat or a bull.

³² As with many cultures there are folktales, in Haiti one of them features the *loup-garou*, a werewolf figure that steals children in the night. This is believed to be based on the followers of the Petro who were rumoured to sacrifice children and so the folktale is suggested to be a way to keep children safe.

³³ J. Michael Dash, *Culture and Customs of Haiti* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001) 68.

Each of the pantheons has specific loa with defined personalities such as *Ogou* for war and *Erzuli* for love.³⁴ Vodou followers usually identify with one of the loa and will have an altar within their home to ensure that they serve their spirit; in return the spirit will help them.

The rituals in Vodou are held to invoke the spirits to enter the living world through possession of the devotees. The ritual follows a basic pattern that has remained fundamentally unchanged for centuries but the ceremony itself, after these basic elements have taken place, can change direction. Before any ritual begins the drums start to beat and the members of the société³⁵ gather at the *peristyle*. Some ceremonies are opened with a series of Catholic prayers spoken in French (an echo of the colonial origins) and at the same time the Vodou priest or priestess, the *Houngan* or *Mambo*, shakes their rattle, or *asson*. The ceremony is then spoken in Kréyol. The peristyle is prepared by the Houngan or Mambo with water, from the entrance to the *poteau-mitan*, the centre pole, and the assembly and drummers are saluted. Following the libations the drummers change their rhythm and the ceremonial flags, the *drapeau Vodou*, are carried into the peristyle. The Houngan or Mambo then invokes the loa in a specific order usually starting with Papa Legba who guards the gates between worlds. At this time the *vèvè*, complex designs that call the loa to the living world, are drawn on the ground, usually in flour or cornmeal.³⁶ These are temporary works of art and during the ceremonial dancing they tend to be destroyed.³⁷ The

³⁴ For more on the loa see for example Hurbon, 140-143 or Phyllis Galembo, *Vodou* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1998). There are a number of spellings for each of the loa. For example, Ogou may also be seen as Ogun or Ogoun. Widely accepted spellings have been used throughout.

³⁵ The members of a société are the Vodou devotees within that particular community.

³⁶ Other substances may be used such as ash.

³⁷ The visual arts of Haitian Vodou are covered in more depth in Chapter One.

drumming, chanting and dancing speeds up and this is when the first loa usually appear through possession. Other participants are invited to join the dancing and the ceremony can then continue for hours or days.³⁸

The drumming is an essential part of the Vodou ceremony; three sacred drums are played by male drummers who control the rhythms. The offerings, the altars, the vèvè, the drumming and the dancing and singing are all in place for the loa to appear. These are the main elements to a Vodou ceremony and are the main aspects that will be shown to have been incorporated across cultural production. The climax to the ceremony is the sacrifice and the reason for the sacrifice is to feed the loa. The animal is killed humanely, a chicken has its neck broken quickly and a larger animal would have its throat slit. It is believed that the life force of the animal is passed onto the loa. The blood is mixed with other ingredients and a few drops tasted by the Vodouists or crosses are made on their heads.³⁹ The animal is taken outside and cooked and the meat eaten by those present, shared within the community where food is generally scarce indicating the importance of these ceremonies. If possession has not yet taken place the Houngan or Mambo vehemently encourages the loa and then the spirits do appear. The ceremony generally begins to wind down when the loa *Gédé* appears.⁴⁰

³⁸ For more on Vodou ceremonies see for example Elizabeth McAlister, "Serving the spirits across two seas: Vodou culture in New York and Haiti," *Aperture*, 126 (Winter 1992) 40-48 and Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The living Gods of Haiti* (1953; New York: Documentext, 1970).

³⁹ In New Orleans there is an increased cessation of animal sacrifice. The loa are offered other foods and objects instead.

⁴⁰ *Gédé* is the loa of the dead.



Fig. 4. A Voodoo ceremony in Haiti.⁴¹

Vodou ceremonies are not as secretive as would be believed. There are aspects of the initiation rites that are held sacred but the ceremonial rites are accessible if a genuine interest is expressed. They are not tourist attractions for curious onlookers wishing to find sensational orgiastic rituals; they are religious ceremonies that are held within communities. The elements of Vodou, visual and ceremonial, are featured throughout this thesis across all aspects of cultural production. The representations selected will show how the Vodou rituals as they exist in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora are depicted.

⁴¹ Image of a Voodoo ceremony in Haiti, *Bahamas Press*, 15th April 2009
<www.bahamaspress.com>

Background

This thesis examines and analyses the broad range of representations of Vodou throughout many aspects of cultural production within Britain and America since 1850, exploring how they have developed and the influences that have shaped them. The emphasis is on these origins because they have been the most prolific and influential. However, it is acknowledged throughout the thesis that other countries have had a creative output that has incorporated Vodou and these works are referenced where relevant. While researching Vodou and representations of Vodou it soon became apparent that there was a gap in research on this subject. Although research had been undertaken in the fields of Vodou and in specific aspects of representation such as Zombie films,⁴² Sacred Art⁴³ or Dance,⁴⁴ there was no overview of how Vodou had been recontextualised across all cultural production. Issues of stereotyping surround Haiti, Vodou and Black Culture and various sources of misinformation are prevalent about the country, the culture and this region of the Caribbean.

I originally chose to research the representations of Vodou during study for a Masters degree. I trained as a visual artist and when exploring cultures of the Caribbean within my paintings, during a trip to Haiti and the Dominican Republic, I discovered Vodou. Prior to this trip the only exposure and knowledge

⁴² Jamie Russell, *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema* (Surrey: FAB Press, 2005).

⁴³ Donald J. Cosentino (ed.) *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995).

⁴⁴ Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953; New York: Documentex, 1970); Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

of Vodou that I had experienced was through watching the film *Live and Let Die*.⁴⁵ When I discovered the true practice of Vodou I began to question how and why the images had been created. I decided to research further for three reasons; previous research had been focussed on specific areas so the first reason was to address the misrepresentation that Vodou has received; secondly to evaluate the impact of the literary portrayals of Vodou and thirdly to provide a broad overview of cultural reproductions of Vodou. I believe that this research needed to be undertaken. Haiti is the first Black Republic in the Western Hemisphere and has had a turbulent history, nonetheless, it maintains a unique culture which is often misunderstood and misrepresented conforming to the stereotypes that have been constructed since the eighteenth century.

Haiti celebrated two hundred years of independence in 2004. As the nation enters its third century it is necessary to undertake this study to begin to understand how a culture can be so maligned. Further study could include research into how racism affected film production of Vodou, the evolution of religions within slave culture and an examination into the impact of the narratives of the early twentieth century. As became clear to me following a paper that I presented at the Louisiana Historical Association conference in Lafayette, Louisiana,⁴⁶ many people have some knowledge of Vodou, yet there is a gap in formal research on its development through cultural production.

⁴⁵ *Live and Let Die*, dir. Guy Hamilton, MGM, 1973.

⁴⁶ Louise Fenton, "The History and Representations of Voodoo in New Orleans," Session VI-B Image is Everything: Representations of Louisiana during the Twentieth Century, Forty eighth Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Historical Association, Holiday Inn Central, Lafayette, 23-25 March 2006. A discussion ensued that identified, by scholars present, how many areas of Vodou heritage and culture are neglected within academic research including Dr. Sybil Kein (Resource Development Director, Creole Heritage Centre, University of Louisiana) who identified the lack of research in Creole culture.

Aims

Within this thesis I aim to establish the following:

- i) The historiography of Haiti and Vodou to contextualise the development of representations of Voodoo since 1850.
- ii) A broad overview of the representations of Voodoo that have been created within the wider context of cultural production.
- iii) The relationship between socio-political, sociocultural and sociological influences on the representations of Voodoo and those who created them.
- iv) Whether Voodoo has been re-imagined in post-twentieth century [re]productions.

Methodology

- Initial research was through primary and secondary literature searches, including newspapers, journals and magazines.
- Films, television and animation were researched; only those viewed as a primary source are incorporated within the thesis although some secondary references are identified throughout the text where appropriate.
- Research of radio broadcast scripts.
- Museum and art gallery exhibitions and archives.
- Fieldwork
- Interviews
- Observation
- Participation

This research has covered a broad range of methodologies and has drawn on a wide range of approaches including anthropological, ethnographic, cultural studies, history and humanities. Vodou has an oral tradition and as such early references can be very biased and need to be carefully considered and contextualised. There are a number of secondary references that have to be used due to original manuscripts and documents no longer being available or some that have been destroyed following hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.⁴⁷

Although the costs of fieldwork in Haiti, New Orleans and other parts of the Caribbean and United States are high the electronic archiving of materials has increased access to resources. Many of the primary resources of reproduction such as film, literature, television and animation are available without the need for travel. There are many reasons why a researcher may choose a field of study.

As mentioned previously my reason was because of the research I had undertaken for my Masters degree, a chance encounter with a religion.

Historically, as will be shown, Vodou has been persecuted and there is a great deal of suspicion and fear when being interviewed for those who practice and believe and it is for this reason that in some cases the source has remained anonymous. It has been possible to integrate within the Vodou community in Louisiana, in New Orleans particularly, which has allowed for a better understanding of the sociocultural and socio-political contexts of Vodou in the US.

I have visited overseas archives including the Amistad Research Centre, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Tulane University, Creole Heritage Centre,

⁴⁷ Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of America in August 2005.

Cammie G. Henry Research Centre, Florida State Archives, The University of the West Indies and The Cabildo. There are limitations in visiting these resources due to the time constraints; however, with access to many of the archives online and having the opportunity to order materials in advance the time spent at each was optimised. There have been opportunities to order photocopies of original documents and have them posted back to the UK, these facilities also apply to the photographic archives and collections, many of which can be viewed online for minimal or no cost. Fieldwork has similar constraints to archive visits with regards to time limitations so all visits have been as extensive as they could be within the time allocated and all potential sources of information available have been exhausted. Fieldwork has taken place in Louisiana, in the areas of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, The River Road Plantations between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Natchitoches and Cane River Country; in Florida, in the areas of Fort Myers, Naples, Tallahassee, Eatonville and Miami; in the Caribbean countries of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago. Fieldwork has comprised visits to local museums, interviews with contacts made within Vodou, Botanicas,⁴⁸ tours, historic sites and archives. Vodou is a secretive religion that is suspicious of interest from 'outsiders' and so it took a great deal of time to build relationships with practitioners in New Orleans and New York who would be able to give me access to Vodou within the communities where they work. These relationships did develop and I was very grateful to Priestess Miriam and Brandi Kelly for allowing me into their lives and giving me access to their altar rooms to discuss Vodou with them at length. Observations of Vodou were made throughout the

⁴⁸ Botanicas are the shops where many Vodou ingredients can be bought and where local practitioners and locations of ceremonies can be found.

research to contextualise the religion within the broader field of cultural production.

To keep up to date with events and developments within Haiti the *Haitian Times Online*⁴⁹ has been accessed; there is also an active Haitian Support Group which operates within the UK and they publish newsletters and bulletins on their website⁵⁰ so this has been regularly consulted.

In Britain I have undertaken primary and secondary research at the University Libraries of Warwick, Birmingham and Oxford (Bodleian); the Museums of Liverpool, Hull, Birmingham, Oxford, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cornwall and London (Horniman, British Museum, V&A); British Library; and art galleries including Tate Modern, Tate Britain, October, Serpentine, Hayward, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, the National Gallery and Ikon.

Problems Encountered

There is a lack of documentation relating directly to Vodou due to the religion having an oral tradition. The documents that do exist are limited and tend not to be specifically related to the religion as it exists in Haiti or the Haitian diaspora.

There are a larger number of accounts written from secondary sources such as those of the Federal Writers Project held at the Cammie G. Henry Research Centre in Natchitoches. These tend to rely on hearsay in the most part and yet do provide an insight to the views of Voodoo in New Orleans during the 1930s and

⁴⁹ *Haitian Times Online*, <<http://www.haitiantimes.com>>

⁵⁰ *Haitian Support Group*, <<http://www.haitisupport.gn.apc.org/>>

1940s when the accounts were documented.⁵¹ Documents have been researched on aspects of Vodou, Haitian History and History of the Southern States of the US.

There are pros and cons of being an outsider in a religion such as Vodou. Vodou is seen as belonging to the black population; while there are a large number of white practitioners today, historically the practitioners have been black from slave origins. Dash refers to Vodou as “the people’s religion in Haiti.”⁵² Vodou is associated with the poorer classes of Haitians although this is less the case in New Orleans. There have also been reported celebrity associations including Michael Jackson and Angelina Jolie.⁵³ The social factors that surround Vodou are steeped in oppression and persecution which means that many practitioners today still face ridicule and misunderstanding in the hands of the media and society. The word ‘Voodoo’ has many connotations that will be explored in more depth: this leads to practitioners being suspicious of any outsiders expressing an over-keen interest in their culture.

On a more practical aspect of fieldwork, time keeping is non-existent in many of the Caribbean locations so the pace that was anticipated had to be modified. An interview may be scheduled at a specific time and then the priestess called away so another day had to be found; this happened frequently so there was always an

⁵¹ These documents and other New Orleans research are to be included in further publications being prepared by the author.

⁵² Dash, 63.

⁵³ Michael Jackson, pop singer, was reported to have sought revenge on Steven Spielberg by paying for the Voodoo services of a Priest in Mali, *Vanity Fair*, 4 March 2003. Angelina Jolie, Hollywood actress, was associated with Voodoo in an article in ‘Testimonies’ on the *Real Voodoo* website

<<http://www.realvoodoo.org/testimonials.html>>

alternative option available to maximise the use of time. Language can be a barrier: as I only have a basic understanding of French and Spanish I focussed my research on material available in the English language. However, when interviewing some of the participants they would only speak Kréyol or French. An interpreter was found on many occasions, usually a friend of the person being interviewed and when trust was established it transpired that those interviewed did speak in English, demonstrating another protection mechanism. There were occasions of harassment in some countries, mainly due to me being a white female asking questions in a culture that remains predominantly black. Some initially felt that they were being viewed as a 'curiosity', a subject to be written about in the West with further misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Despite the support of those within these communities some would not change their minds, since years of marginalisation have forged this state of mind and element of distrust. At the beginning of this research I made the decision to remain on the outside of Vodou as it would take many years to be initiated into the religion fully and I intended to remain as objective as possible.⁵⁴ The time spent with Vodou priestesses and contact with other leading figures in Vodou enabled an insight into the religion without being directly involved. Some may question the approach taken, I could be criticised for exploiting the very culture that I am trying to defend. I respond to this by stating that it is not just the black culture of Haiti and Vodou that I wish to defend but I aim to critically interrogate the white perspective and give criticism to my own culture.

⁵⁴ Many Haitians who are initiated as Houngan or Mambo tend to follow a family line, their ancestors before them were also Vodou priests and priestesses. Initiates who do not have a Vodou 'blood line' can take up to fifteen years to be ordained as a Houngan or Mambo.

Despite the problems, this thesis looks at Vodou from a fresh viewpoint and from a very broad range of representations. It offers different perspectives and approaches to those previously available, especially with the focus being on the religion of Haitian Vodou.

Newspaper Searches

I have undertaken sampling of several newspapers from 1800 to present day. The newspapers that I have considered have been those found to have articles and published material relating directly to Vodou and a number of other associated subjects. The selections have been made following general searches for subjects including Vodou (and Voodoo), Haiti, Cannibalism, New Orleans, Deep South, Louisiana, Slavery, Creole and Plantations. Several visits were made to the Newspaper archives held at the British Library as well as archives in New Orleans, many of the newspapers were on microfilm. The newspapers selected include from New Orleans *The Times Picayune* and *The Daily Picayune*, and from the UK *The Times*, *The Caribbean Times* and *The Guardian*. Other newspapers that were also selected include *The New York Times* and *The Haitian Times*.

The newspaper searches were broader than just Vodou to ensure a wide range of media representations were considered as shown previously in the associated subjects. During the Haitian Revolution and Haiti gaining independence there were a number of newspapers that had opinions and made comment. It was important to look at these reports to gain an insight into the socio-political views during the early introduction of Vodou to both the UK and US.

Literature Review

Literature is integrated throughout this thesis and referenced accordingly. This review establishes some of the key texts that have been researched. These texts establish a historical overview to the representations and identify some of those that form the basis of the theoretical framework.

The literature reviews within the context of this research have been wide ranging and have included popular fiction, accounts of life in the West Indies, literature during the American Occupation of Haiti, women writers, fiction for children, non-fiction accounts of Vodou and Haiti, guidebooks and travelogues, and other literary works that link Vodou to cannibalism, witchcraft and Satanism. Primary literary sources are limited and have to be considered within the context they were written, some during the days of the British Empire when there was an air of superiority and possibly ulterior motives for some of the more sensational accounts of Vodou. Secondary sources are slightly more extensive with an apparent renewed interest in the subject, especially during the last twenty years, and these include books, journals and theses.

There are a number of accounts of life in the West Indies which include Vodou, these were considered along with historiographic representations of Haiti and Vodou and will be detailed in Chapter Two. A good introduction to the region is John Gilmore's *Faces of the Caribbean*⁵⁵ and this has been considered as a general reference.

⁵⁵ John Gilmore, *Faces of the Caribbean* (London: LAB, 2000).

Chapter Two provides a broad analysis of the literature pertaining to Vodou, Haiti, and the Haitian Diaspora and focuses on 'Voodoo in literature' across all genres starting with issues of race. In both the UK and US there was an increase in biological sciences with a number of publications addressing the question of race in the late nineteenth century. The work of J.C.Nott and George Gliddon,⁵⁶ Robert Knox⁵⁷ and David Hume⁵⁸ will be considered for their literary contribution to the construction of race in the imagination of the Victorian reader. This establishes the context of the representations that were to follow early in the twentieth century. These constructions of race have been considered when then examining the travel narratives between 1850 and 1915, to the start of the American Occupation of Haiti. It was during this time that the influence of the 'race' narratives was evident. Haiti had gained independence and no longer belonged to the colonial powers of the west which resulted in prejudice, suspicion and hostility. Race is an issue that will be explored throughout the thesis. As bell hooks suggests, before the white supremacists ever reached the US "they constructed images of blackness and black people to uphold and affirm their notions of racial superiority their political imperialism, their will to dominate and enslave."⁵⁹ This construction of blackness will be explored throughout the representations of Vodou both within the US and the UK. As Stuart Hall suggests the positioning of black people and black cultures was an effect of "cultural power and normalisation," they were classified as 'different' and 'other' in the constructed knowledge of the West and as such dominated at

⁵⁶ J.C.Nott and George Gliddon, *Types of Mankind* (1854; Miami: Mnemosyne, 1969).

⁵⁷ Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Influence of Race Over the Destinies of Nations* (London, 1862).

⁵⁸ David Hume, *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, vol.III (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, Facsimile Edition, 1996).

⁵⁹ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and representation* (London: Turnaround, 1992) 2.

the time by the white regime.⁶⁰ The issue of cultural power and of power recurs throughout the thesis as will be shown.

One of the most inflammatory and influential works at the end of the nineteenth century was Sir Spenser St. John's *Hayti or The Black Republic*.⁶¹ This narrative was subsequently followed by J.A. Froude's *The English in the West Indies*.⁶² Froude comments on St. John's work within his narrative as does Hesketh Prichard in his work of 1900.⁶³ There was a propensity to reflect on previous works and this was to continue throughout the twentieth century. These works are considered for their colonial perspective towards Haiti and the prejudice of Victorian Britain. There were other non-fiction narratives, newspaper reports and magazine articles to feature Vodou at the end of the nineteenth century which will be examined, as mentioned previously, in Chapter Two.

The American Occupation led to a renewal of prejudice against Haiti and her culture and so the work of two marines is considered, Faustin Wirkus and John H. Craige.⁶⁴ Both of these men were serving officers in the US military occupying Haiti and they published their memoirs, books that would be read by millions. These are supported by considering other more recent reports issued by the military reflecting on the American Occupation such as Peter L. Bunce's

⁶⁰ For more see Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

⁶¹ Sir Spenser St. John, *Hayti or The Black Republic* (1884; London: Cass, 1971).

⁶² J.A. Froude, *The English in the West Indies* (London, 1888).

⁶³ Hesketh Prichard, *Where Black Rules White* (London: Archibold Constable and Co, 1900).

⁶⁴ Faustin Wirkus, *The White King of La Gonave* (New York: Doubleday, 1931); John H. Craige, *Black Bagdad* (New York and Chicago: A.L. Burt, 1933) and John H. Craige, *Cannibal Cousins* (New York: Minton, Balch and Co, 1934).

*Foundations on Sand: An analysis of the first United States Occupation of Haiti 1915-1934.*⁶⁵ These narratives are explored for their insight into the American perspective on Haiti and Vodou at a time of renewed Imperialism.

In the years that followed the American Occupation Hollywood was entering its 'Golden Age,' producing numerous films for eager audiences. Vodou was to be included within the visual narratives. *The Magic Island* by William Seabrook was to be a highly influential work across cultural production and this is discussed throughout the thesis.⁶⁶ It was the inspiration for theatre and film and is often referenced for being the first narrative to use the term *zombie*. This was not accurate as will be explored in Chapter Two.

Anthropological studies of Haiti and Vodou began to appear in the 1930s. Writers such as Melville Herskovits, Gordon Sinclair and Richard A. Loederer will be considered for their contribution to redressing the balance between misrepresentation and academic anthropological studies during this decade.⁶⁷ Further scholarly studies followed in the 1950s and the work of anthropologists such as Alfred Métraux, Harold Courlander and Milo Rigaud are considered.⁶⁸ Their work was written in the wake of the cinematic exploitation of Vodou and provided anthropological and ethnological studies of this Caribbean religion.

⁶⁵ Peter L. Bunce, "Foundations on Sand: An analysis of the first United States Occupation of Haiti 1915-1934," 5 June 1995, United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Quantico, December 2006.

<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1995/BPL.htm>>

⁶⁶ William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (1929; New York: Paragon, 1989).

⁶⁷ Melville Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York and London: A.A. Knopf, 1937); Gordon Sinclair, *Loose Among Devils* (London: Hurst and Blackett Ltd, 1935); Richard A. Loederer, *Voodoo Fire in Haiti* (1935; London: Beacon Library, 1937).

⁶⁸ Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (1959; New York: Schocken Books, 1972); Harold Courlander, *Drum and Hoe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo*, trans. Robert B. Cross (1953; San Francisco: City Light Books, 1969).

Women writers are considered across fiction and non-fiction to explore the feminine perspective. Women have written of Haiti and Vodou since the latter part of the nineteenth century and authors such as Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Winifred James are considered for their anti-Vodou and anti-Haitian sentiments.⁶⁹ They wrote at a time when other European colonies were still in existence throughout the Caribbean and yet Haiti had broken free from colonial rule redefining herself as the 'other'. The women writers who came after Wilcox and James were more sympathetic towards Haiti and Edna Taft and Zora Neale Hurston are considered.⁷⁰ Ethnographic and anthropological studies were not the exclusive domain of male writers. The work of Maya Deren and Katherine Dunham is examined as both of them were interested in performance, providing a different approach to Haiti and Vodou to those of their male counterparts.⁷¹ Women play a major role in Vodou with numerous *Mambos* or priestesses; this is in contrast to many other religions where the ordination of women is not acceptable. It is also interesting when considering that particularly in American society the Black woman has been oppressed from both within and outside her own race. This feminine perspective on race is important to consider within the context of the representations of Vodou for the very reason that females are involved so prominently within the religion. Contemporary women writers of Vodou are included such as Elizabeth McAlister and Karen McCarthy Brown.⁷²

⁶⁹ E.W. Wilcox, *Sailing Sunny Seas: A Story of Travel* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Co., 1909); W. James, *The Mulberry Tree* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1913).

⁷⁰ Edna Taft, *A Puritan in Voodoo Land* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing, 1938); Zora Neale Hurston, *Voodoo Gods* (London: Dent, 1939), this book was published in the US as *Tell My Horse* in 1938.

⁷¹ Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953; New York: Documentext, 1970); Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

⁷² Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara: Vodou, Power and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002); Karen McCarthy

McCarthy Brown's study of Vodou in the US involves a narrative that blends ethnography with biography providing a unique insight into the religion and the Mambo, Mama Lola. bell hooks argues that in the twentieth century US there was a feminist white racial imperialism that disavowed the feelings of empathy with black people.⁷³ There was a dichotomy between the women fighting for the rights through suffrage and the feelings by those same women, especially in the South, that racial segregation was acceptable. The work of bell hooks, among others, will be used to examine this conflict of interests when considering the work of the women writers of Vodou.

Vodou has appeared in fiction since the end of the nineteenth century and a variety of fictional genres are explored. These narratives took Vodou to mass audiences and are examined for the way that the Caribbean religion was represented in the imagination of the fiction authors. A variety of authors of popular fiction are referenced starting with Captain Mayne Reid and M.G. McClelland from the late nineteenth century.⁷⁴ The variety of Vodou in fiction is vast and includes romance, horror, comedy, thriller and homo-erotica. The selections have been made based on the Vodou content and the more 'popular' authors. The 'popular' authors include Ian Fleming, Graham Greene and Barbara Cartland.⁷⁵ A number of these popular novels were the basis for films including those previously mentioned by Ian Fleming and Graham Greene. Others

Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991).

⁷³ Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1981).

⁷⁴ Captain Mayne Reid, *The Maroon: A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah* (New York, 1883); M.G. McClelland, *Mammy Mystic* (New York, 1895).

⁷⁵ Ian Fleming, *Live and Let Die* (1954; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988); Graham Greene, *The Comedians* (1965; London: Vintage, 1999); Barbara Cartland, *The Drums of Love* (London: Pan, 1979).

considered include the narratives by John Berendt, William Hjortsberg and Wade Davis.⁷⁶ The theory of adaptation, of novel to film, is examined using the work of Brian McFarlane and Roland Barthes amongst others.⁷⁷ McFarlane suggests that when considering adaptation it is valuable “to distinguish what the filmmaker has sought to retain from the original and the kinds of use to which he has put it.”⁷⁸ It is on this basis that the Voodoo films are examined for their adaptation from the associated novel and their Vodou content.

The work of Wade Davis is examined as his is arguably some of the most widely debated because of his theories and the scientific implications of zombification.⁷⁹ His work was published as a scientific investigation into documented cases of zombification; however, it soon became sensationalised when adapted for film by Wes Craven.⁸⁰ The film adaptation took Hollywood ‘Voodoo’ to mass audiences, renewing the interest in the perceived ‘exoticism’ of Haiti and Vodou.

Literature from the Vodou diaspora has been examined, particularly from New Orleans. ‘Voodoo’ in New Orleans began to appear in publications in the late nineteenth century in works by H.C. Castellanos and Mary A. Owen but there were more thorough accounts of Voodoo in the first half of the twentieth century

⁷⁶ John Berendt, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (London: Vintage, 1995); William Hjortsberg, *Falling Angel* (1978; Harpenden, UK: No Exit Press, 2005); Wade Davis, *The Serpent and The Rainbow* (New York: Touchstone, 1985).

⁷⁷ Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text: Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath* (Glasgow: Fontana Collins, 1977).

⁷⁸ McFarlane, 23.

⁷⁹ Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (New York: Touchstone, 1985) and *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

⁸⁰ *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, dir. Wes Craven, Universal Studios, 1987.

from the work of Lyle Saxon, Herbert Asbury and Robert Tallant.⁸¹ These were viewed as accurate accounts of the religion in New Orleans and yet as will be shown there was very little substantiation for any of the claims made.

Journals such as *Small Axe*, *Science*, *Wadabagei*, *Journal of American Studies*, *The Journal of American Folklore* and *The Forum of Modern Language Studies* have been researched extensively as have numerous others that are referenced throughout the following chapters. The broad-based nature of the research has led to a wide range of journals being considered as there are aspects of Vodou such as the ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie and ‘Vodou deaths’ that have necessitated research within the scientific fields of scholarly activity.

The field of representation is an area of academic study in itself and I fully acknowledge this fact. The research that I have undertaken implements some of the theoretical aspects of representational studies relating to cultural representation and I have used the methodologies and theoretical considerations when analysing the cultural [re]productions of Vodou. The definition of representation can be found in the Oxford Dictionary of English as “the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way”⁸² and this will be shown to have been a literal interpretation within many of the reproductions within this research.

⁸¹ H.C. Castellanos, *New Orleans as it Was* (New Orleans, 1895); Mary A. Owen, “Among the Voodoo’s,” *International Folklore Congress* (1891); Lyle Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans* (1928; New Orleans: Robert L. Crager and Co., 1954); Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter: An informal history of New Orleans with particular reference to its colourful iniquities* (1936; New York: Garden City Publishing, 1938); Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (1946; Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican, 1998).

⁸² Soanes, C. and Stevenson, A, (eds.) *Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd ed. Oxford: OUP, 2003.

This is an interdisciplinary project and so the thesis has to include the theories of a number of scholars throughout to provide a historical and theoretical context to all of the different representations - there is no single methodology. The theories and models that have been considered throughout all of the chapters are referenced where appropriate. Cultural production and representations are considered using the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Paul Du Gay and Stuart Hall amongst others. Bourdieu suggests that many works across cultural production have significance to groups and individuals “based on their own objective position, cultural needs and capacities for analysis or symbolic appropriation.”⁸³ This is considered within the context of the cultural production of Vodou, particularly in the fields of visual representations where audiences have to analyse and appropriate the information before them based on their previous knowledge biased by historical inaccuracies. Du Gay references the early concept of ‘cultural industry’ through the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.⁸⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer were the first to argue that cultural production was not independent, it was driven by the need for profit and their theories have been used as a metaphor for the industry since.⁸⁵ First published in 1947 their work was believed to echo the thoughts of the ‘cultural elite,’ those who felt that ‘mass culture’ was corrupting cultural production with the need for profit over creativity. Du Gay suggests that Adorno and Horkheimer developed an argument in which “domination and manipulation of the people was explicitly connected to the production and dissemination of a particular form of

⁸³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) 21.

⁸⁴ Paul Du Gay, *Production of Culture/ Cultures of Production* (London: Sage, 1997) 70.

⁸⁵ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947; London: Verso, 1979).

homogenous culture [mass culture].”⁸⁶ It could be suggested that this theory of ‘domination’ and ‘manipulation’ was used in the cultural [re]production of Vodou. Hall discusses the three general approaches to representation, reflective, intentional and constructionist.⁸⁷ Within the context of this thesis it is Hall’s theory of the ‘intentional approach’ that will be considered; how it is the author or speaker who imposes the meaning of Vodou across cultural production. These models have been selected for the theoretical considerations of culture and how culture is perceived and absorbed by society.

Race is an issue that occurs across the cultural production of Vodou from the earliest representations through to contemporary productions. There are many theories of race and representation and the predominant models used are those written by bell hooks and Paul Gilroy. As mentioned previously Vodou and Haitian culture features women in dominant roles and hooks argues that racism and sexism have to be confronted together, it is this perspective that lends itself particularly well to Vodou.⁸⁸ hooks also addresses the notion of forgetting the past and so denying the past when referring to the white supremacist attitude of the nineteenth century; she suggests that ignorance of history by contemporary white society is a mechanism for the dominant culture to erase the past.⁸⁹ This is an interesting theory that will be explored throughout the thesis, whether white society has indeed ‘erased’ the past or if the attitude continues. Gilroy’s work is used as a basis for contemporary attitudes towards race, however, he does

⁸⁶ Du Gay, 72.

⁸⁷ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997) 24-26.

⁸⁸ Bell Hooks, *Killing Rage Ending Racism* (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁸⁹ Bell Hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) 174.

explore the idea that race has to be “socially and politically constructed...to secure and maintain different forms of ‘racialization’.” He goes on to stress the importance of recognising this construct and to “compare and evaluate the different historical situations in which ‘race’ has become politically pertinent.”⁹⁰

It is this idea of race formation that is considered throughout the thesis, in particular with the early works and those produced during the American Occupation when ‘race formation’ can be traced through literature.

Across the cultural productions of Vodou there is a notion of ‘power,’ of white colonial dominance. The issue of ‘power’ is examined as a method of domination, using the theories of Michel Foucault around power relationships that are hierarchical. Foucault’s idea that having knowledge makes a subject easier to understand is questioned in the context of the representations of Vodou. This is because the source of the ‘knowledge’ is arguably the ‘power.’⁹¹ He writes of the existence of power within individuals and how the power “inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.”⁹² This is particularly relevant when considering the colonial rule of Haiti and the subsequent attitude towards Vodou.

Haiti is often referred to as the ‘other,’ the ‘exotic’ unknown due to the break from colonial rule when she gained independence in 1804. The work of Edward Said is considered and how he examines the European creation of Orientalism as a way to deal with the ‘otherness’ of Eastern culture.⁹³ Although dealing with

⁹⁰ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987; London: Routledge, 1992) 35.

⁹¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (1972; Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980) 109.

⁹² Foucault, 39.

⁹³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; London: Penguin, 2003).

Eastern culture it is very much entwined with the theories of contemporary history and these can be explored when considering the representations of Vodou. Said discusses the interchangeability of the 'Orientalist' with the 'White Man,' especially in the nineteenth century complexity of circumstances and history.⁹⁴ Said's theory of "binomial opposition of 'theirs' and 'ours' with the former always encroaching upon the latter" is particularly relevant to the representations of Vodou throughout literature and cinematic production.⁹⁵

Vodou has featured across cultural production, in literature, television, animation and film. This thesis will consider all aspects of representation including the 'popular' cultural representations in cartoons, television and comic books, representations that met mass audiences. Hall's paper regarding television "Television as a Medium and Its Relation to Culture" is a good introduction to this area as he considers the paradigmatic relationship between the medium of television and culture.⁹⁶ This consideration opens discourse across the representations and the relationships between the mass audience and the representations of 'popular' Vodou.

Historical Persecutions

Throughout history there have been persecutions of people, race, communities, nations and Cultures, Vodou is not exclusive in this regard, although it may be argued that Vodou has received the most sustained persecution.

⁹⁴ Said, 226-328.

⁹⁵ Said, 227.

⁹⁶ Stuart Hall, "Television as a Medium and Its Relation to Culture," Stencilled Occasional Paper (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 1975).

Throughout this thesis other persecutions will be identified such as witchcraft (to which Vodou has been linked) including the 'European Witch-Craze' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, followed more alarmingly by recent cases of witch-hunts in Indian States such as Jharkhand⁹⁷ and in Northern Ghana.⁹⁸ These cases highlight how society identifies a scapegoat and a target for alienation sometimes within the socially acceptable hierarchical structures within a community. Youth culture has faced an onslaught of media portrayal and condemnation, for example, the Mods and Rockers during the 1960s and the 'Hoodies' of the 2000s. The Mods were an interesting phenomena, arguably the first true youth culture in the UK, a culture that was led by the young people, for the young people.⁹⁹ The signifying factors within this culture included the clothes, the music and even the way of walking all of which alienated them to an older generation. There have been a number of studies on this movement such as those by Stanley Cohen in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*¹⁰⁰ and by Paolo Hewitt in his books including *The Soul Stylists*.¹⁰¹ The marginalisation by society of minority groups features throughout this research and has been identified where appropriate: this includes issues of racism and stereotype using the methodologies as outlined previously.

⁹⁷ *The Great Indian Witch Hunt*, dir. Rakhi Varma, narr. Sohaila Kapoor, The National Geographic Channel. 11 May 2005.

⁹⁸ Jeevan Vasagar, "Witch Hunt." *Guardian Unlimited* 6 December 2005, January 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,7792,1659556,00.html#article_continue>

⁹⁹ For more on this phenomenon see Dick Hebdige, "The Meaning of Mod" in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (Eds), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain* (London: Routledge, 1976) 87-97.

¹⁰⁰ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁰¹ Paolo Hewitt, *The Soul Stylists*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2000).

Summary

The research undertaken for this thesis has not been straightforward for a number of reasons. Vodou has an oral tradition and identifies with African derived cultures; therefore the earlier written accounts were produced by outsiders to the religion taking a colonial perspective. There are limited references to Vodou and gaining access to ceremonies and those within the religion is difficult because of the distrust of those from 'outside'. It has taken a great deal of time to achieve this access resulting in limited time to observe and interview, this is in addition to short intense periods within the field: however, significant findings were made, and relevant and scholarly resources located.

The first chapter of this thesis provides the historical framework and contextualises Vodou in Haiti and is divided into two parts: Part I is the history of Haiti and Vodou and Part II considers the developments within the twentieth century, including the evolution of Haitian Art and etymological developments of Vodou. Chapter Two focuses on historiographic and literary representations in the fields of fiction and non-fiction and considers the colonial viewpoint, white Imperialism and the associations with Vodou, especially cannibalism. Chapter Three explores the developments within cinema from the earliest introduction to 'Voodoo' in the late 1920s through to the big budget Hollywood productions of the last two decades; this chapter also considers the authenticity and accuracy of the portrayals of Vodou. At the same time as cinematic productions were reaching audiences, cinematic animated shorts were being screened and Chapter Four examines the theme of animated Vodou from cinema to television and more recently through the development of computer gaming. Vodou has made its way

to drama and documentary, and Chapter Five is divided into two parts with Part I considering theatrical productions and Part II exploring television programmes in the genres of documentary, drama and comedy. In the conclusion I draw together the key features from each of the chapters and offer my interpretation of the representations and re-imagination of Vodou across the areas of cultural reproduction.

Chapter One

THE HISTORY OF HAITI AND VODOU

Introduction

This Chapter will explore the history and developments of Haiti and Vodou to explore the context for the products of popular culture: literature, cinema, animation, theatre and television. The first part will examine the history of Haiti since it was discovered in 1492 through to the years preceding the American occupation. The second part starts with the American occupation to outline the developments in the twentieth century and how the persecutions and political turbulence have contributed to modern day perceptions of Vodou.

Haiti has had a turbulent history since it was discovered in 1492. The first slaves arrived in the sixteenth century to replace the remaining indigenous population who had been forced into labour. The numbers grew as the Spanish started to import thousands of black slaves to work, initially, in the mines (see Fig.1, p.5). The French began to battle with the Spanish by the early part of the seventeenth century when a small band of French criminals settled on the island of Tortuga off the northern coast of Haiti. It was from this island that these French pirates and rustlers were able to gradually break down the Spanish defences and start to gain a foothold on the main island from where their trades were started; they grew cacao, cotton and indigo before realising that other crops would flourish on the island, they then began to grow sugar and coffee. J. Michael Dash writes a general introduction to the colonial history of Haiti in *Culture and Customs of Haiti*, providing a contextualisation of Haitian culture.¹

¹ J. Michael Dash, *Culture and Customs of Haiti* (Westport: Greenwood, 2001) 3.

Vodou is believed to have evolved from the first importations of African slaves in the seventeenth century. There are no written accounts of the religion until the eighteenth century when Moreau de Saint-Méry discussed *Vaudoux* within the context of the African dance, trance, rites and beliefs of the black slaves in 1797.² This was to change in 1884 when Sir Spenser St John wrote his inflammatory accounts of Vodou in *Hayti or The Black Republic*,³ a book that will be explored in further detail in Chapter Two.

Part I: History

Occupations of Haiti and the Slave Trade

Haiti has been occupied by the Spanish, the French and the Americans since its discovery in 1492. As mentioned previously, the Spanish colonised the island and named it Hispaniola in 1492 where they remained until the French began to edge their way in during the early seventeenth century. The French presence grew and a French Governor was appointed by King Louis XIV in 1665, Bertrand d'Ogeron. By the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, Spain ceded the western third of the island to the French. This part of the island was known as *Saint Domingue* and for a while was to be the most lucrative colony in western colonial history.⁴

² L.E. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description Topographique, physique, civil, politique et historique de la partie Française de l'isle de Saint Domingue*, 3 vols (Philadelphia, 1797) 45-51.

³ Sir Spenser St. John, *Hayti or The Black Republic*, 2nd ed. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1889).

⁴ For further reading on French colonial history see Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 4-24.

It was during the seventeenth century that the slave trade grew and in 1664 the French founded the *Compagnie des Indes*⁵ (Company of the Indies) a company that was given privileges through a declaration of the King including the right of slavery. This company was formed in response to the other Europeans who had created similar companies, the English had the East India Company which was formed in 1600 and the Dutch had the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) formed in 1602. The coat of arms of the French Company of the Indies (Fig. 5) clearly shows figures of the indigenous population of the Islands which the company is known to have exploited.



Fig.5. *Coat of arms of the Compagnie des Indes*, Musée de la Compagnie des Indes, Lorient, France.

⁵ Fig.5. There is a museum dedicated to the Compagnie des Indes in the town of Lorient, France. Throughout the website, and available information published by the museum, there is no mention of the company's involvement with the slave trade. The only reference on the website is in reference to the declaration of 1664 stating the privileges of the company to have « le droit d'esclavage et autres droits utiles qui pourroient nous appartenir à cause de la Souveraineté desdits Pays ». <<http://www.lorient.fr>>

The company supplied Saint Domingue with black slaves due to a greater demand for labour as production increased on the island. The slaves that were being transported to the island were from most of the peoples of West Africa. As Laennec Hurbon writes within his work on Voodoo, slavery was economically beneficial to the kingdoms of the West African coast: for example the royal family of Dahomey were known to have sold the [allegedly] less desirable, the criminals, sorcerers and Voodoo priests to the slave trade, an extremely profitable practice, leading to the transplanting of African religions to Hispaniola.⁶ There is a Creole⁷ saying that indicates some of the slaves knew they had been sold by their own people: “Depi lan Ginen, nèg rayi nèg” translated means “Already in Guinea, the Negro hated the Negro.”⁸ The slave trade is an area that has, and continues to be, researched in depth by many scholars. This section considers the conditions and origins of the slaves that were to enter Haiti to contextualise the wider questions of this thesis and is not intended to pursue the question of slavery.

Those involved in the trade conspired to eradicate the African culture and so from the moment the slaves were captured their spirits and ancestry were attacked. On the ships as they crossed the oceans to the new destinations these people were put in chains, abused, fed badly and stripped of dignity and strength. As they arrived in the new world they were given new names and distributed amongst the plantations, mixed systematically with those from other tribes. There was a belief from the owners that this would lead to a loss of identity and

⁶ Laennec Hurbon, *Voodoo: Truth and Fantasy*, trans. Lory Frankel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) 20-21.

⁷ Creole culture will be explored throughout this thesis.

⁸ Hurbon 21.

obliteration of previous memory and culture, a new start as a commodity, not as people. This is important to consider because it is from these origins of despair that Vodou evolved and has become a religious force throughout the world.⁹ The French entered the slave trade with significance following the acquisition of Saint Domingue¹⁰ and France's trade was almost exclusive to her own colonies, the French West Indies. The demand of the islands was difficult to fulfil and so the French relied increasingly on the Portuguese and the British to supply slaves from Africa.¹¹ To help regulate and justify the slave trade and slavery the French drafted the Code Noir, the Black Code. The Code Noir prevented gatherings of any kind and regulated every activity within the lives of the slaves; it was also used in Louisiana, Canada and other French colonies as a code of conduct. This code gives an insight into how the slaves were viewed by the French during the seventeenth century,¹² and it was not only the slaves who were persecuted within this document but also the Jews and non-Catholics.¹³ The articles within the Code Noir outline forms of punishment, expected behaviour, restrictions on daily living and religion, all of which identifies why the African religions were driven underground and hidden by those who practiced them for fear of prosecution or even death, a legacy that would be difficult to forget.¹⁴ Orlando Patterson discusses in his essay "The Constituent Elements of Slavery" that slaves held no

⁹ There are conflicting reports as to how many practitioners there are worldwide but the general agreement seems to be in excess of 60 million.

¹⁰ The island has been known by several different names throughout the centuries. These will be made apparent through this chapter.

¹¹ There is a great deal of research on the transatlantic slave trade, for more information see for example James A. Rawley with Stephen D. Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (Lincoln, US: University of Nebraska, 2005).

¹² The Code Noir was used until 1789.

¹³ The very first article of the code calls for all Jews to be expelled from the colonies, see "Le Code Noir" on *The Louverture Project* 15 June 2007, July 2007
<<http://www.thelouvertureproject.org>>

¹⁴ For further information on the Code Noir see also William Renwick Riddell, "Le Code Noir," *The Journal of Negro History* 10.3 (1925): 321-29.

identity and this rendered them powerless.¹⁵ Throughout history the slave has been viewed as a commodity, not a person, an object to be bought and sold at will under the complete authority of the master. This fact desensitised the emotional involvement of those in power. During the seventeenth century the differences between black and white unfree persons were not so evident. The difference centred on the religion. The role of the master was the same irrespective of the ethnicity of the person in servitude. Winthrop D. Jordan discusses this in his book of 1969,¹⁶ exploring the issues of power and how, to begin with, the master treated the unfree workers the same, irrespective of whether white or black. This did change over time and from these early issues related directly to power and not ethnicity, the role of the master over the slave made a shift to race. During colonial times and the power of white over black there was an increasing tendency for white masters to view their black slaves as the 'other'. Slaves were no longer just slaves, they were black slaves. The fact that they were non-Christian and thus perceived as not 'civilised' meant that they were viewed as barbaric and heathen, this shift helped to justify the actions of the slave traders. This theory of the master/slave relation is supported by Foucault's concept of power/knowledge.¹⁷ It is important that we consider what people thought they 'knew' in any particular period for consideration. Foucault examines how this has an impact on how we react, for example if we consider what the masters thought they 'knew' of their African slaves, according to Foucault, would have a direct impact on how they would regulate and punish

¹⁵ Orlando Patterson, "The Constituent Elements of Slavery," *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, ed. Verene Shepherd and Hilary McD Beckles (New Jersey: Markus Weiner, 2000) 32-41.

¹⁶ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes towards the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969) 45-48.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).

them. The combination of power/knowledge has to be considered historically as it may give an insight into the representations produced through this perceived knowledge, thus creating power and having a real impact on the communicated images. He writes that there is a disproportionate placement of subjects in domination and that the coloniser is the dominant force. Said also wrote of 'power', however, Bhabha argues that Said's suggestion of the colonial power and discourse being in the possession of the coloniser is too simplistic within a historical and theoretical framework.¹⁸ Another view to this is Césaire's theory that it is also the oppressor that faces oppression "colonisation works to decivilise the coloniser, to brutalise him in the true sense of the word...to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism".¹⁹ It is not that Césaire is defending the oppressor, merely offering the complexity of the situation rather than as Said, to simplify. Nandy also supports the complexity of the master/slave dichotomy by suggesting that none of the 'categories' remain pure in a violent and oppressive society.²⁰

This power of master over slave is evident throughout the years of slavery in Haiti until the Revolution (which will be discussed later in this chapter), yet there were other powers and structures in place. There was a social structure and a hierarchy that had been in existence for centuries. The Code Noir aimed to eradicate any social interaction amongst the slaves; however, these social

¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" in H.A. Baker, M. Diawara and R.H. Lindeborg, *British Black Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 94-95.

¹⁹ A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972) 13.

²⁰ A. Nandy, "Oppression and human liberation: toward a post-Ghandian utopia", in *Political Thought in Modern India*, eds Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutsch (New Delhi: Sage, 1986) 356.

structures were in existence both amongst the slaves and amongst the wider Haitian society according to wealth and colour.

Social Structure

Roland Wingfield wrote an article that explored the class structure in Haiti where he outlines and analyses the class structure as he believed it stood in 1965, relatively unchanged since colonial days.²¹ The categories of the structure remain similar even today, in Haiti and within the Haitian diaspora. The structure based on colour is divided into white, mulatto and black. Wingfield categorises the mulatto section as *affranchis* (free people of colour) consisting of descendents of white fathers and black or mulatto mothers. In Haiti the social structure is viewed as simplistic, viewed as the have and have nots, and is reflected throughout all aspects of society. Each of the categories is subdivided with higher and lower levels, for example the whites were subdivided into *grands blancs* who were the people in power such as government officials and the *petit blanc* who had less important social status such as tradesmen.

This hierarchical structure has remained an influence on all ethnic configurations of Haitians and tends to be viewed in much the same way as it would have been centuries ago. These structures within Haitian society were constantly shifting and causing displeasure amongst those living on the island during the eighteenth century. As Carolyn Fick discusses, the *petit blanc* were facing increasing competition from the *affranchis* and the upper-strata slaves for trade jobs, and they were “the most vulnerable and consequently most volatile element in the

²¹ Roland Wingfield, “Class Structure and Class Conflict in Haitian Society,” *Social Forces*, 43:3 (1965): 338-447.

white colonial regime".²² Due to the increase in relationships between masters and their slaves there was an increase in the free mulattoes and free blacks, who formed an intermediate class between the whites and the slaves. The free population evolved from the grants of freedom to the offspring of the unions between master and slave and by 1789 almost equalled the white population.²³ These shifts in structure led to overlapping between the lower classes of whites and the upper strata of the free mulattoes. In the years that preceded the Haitian Revolution the society was becoming more fluid. It should be remembered that the slave/master dichotomy was not as straightforward as it may appear. Slaves were often given elevated status to assist with control: gang masters, or slave drivers, were often black slaves, and domestic slaves received more privileges than field workers. It was a complex system and there is not the scope within this thesis to discuss it in depth.²⁴

There are representations of those with mixed heritage throughout cultural production and they will be discussed within following chapters. In films such as *Chloe Love is Calling You*,²⁵ a production that will be considered within Chapter Three, an early example of cinematic portrayals of miscegenation is shown. This film's representation of Chloe, a girl of mixed heritage who attempts to hide the fact she is part black, deals with racism and miscegenation in the South, albeit with a racist view, as will be examined. In the early part of the twentieth century

²² Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990) 18.

²³ Fick 19.

²⁴ See Fick 15-45.

²⁵ *Chloe Love is Calling You*, dir. Marshall Neilan, Pinnacle Productions, 1934. There is some dispute over whether this film was made in 1929 or 1934 as it has been lost for many years.

there was a Production Code²⁶ for cinematic releases and this banned depictions of miscegenation. Susan Courtney argues that “dominant fantasies of miscegenation” have had a major impact on cinematic production.²⁷ These ‘fantasies’ were arguably instrumental in the perpetuation of the stereotype of the black male as will be discussed in Chapter Three in films such as *The Birth of a Nation*.²⁸ Miscegenation was not exclusive to cinematic representations, although this was arguably the most dominant area, it will also be discussed within the context of literature.²⁹

There was an increase in the slave population throughout the Haitian diaspora during the seventeenth century and in Louisiana there was a culture emerging among people of European, African or Caribbean mixed descent, known as Creole. Creole, or as may also be found relating to Haiti, *Kréyol*, is a term used to refer to the language and culture of Haitians as well as to the Francophone culture within Louisiana. There are many differing definitions of the word Creole and its etymology. Gwendolin Midlo Hall gives one description that describes Creoles as people born within the New World,³⁰ and the term Creole is used to refer to people who were born of mixed ancestry within the New World, mainly in Francophone Louisiana. Creole culture will be considered throughout this thesis as there were a number of cultural productions based in New Orleans and Louisiana.

²⁶ The Motion Picture Production Code, often referred to as the Hays Code after its author, Will H. Hays. It was published in 1930 in an attempt to censor films and provide a set of guidelines for film makers to follow. This is discussed in more depth in Chapter Three.

²⁷ Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁸ *The Birth of a Nation*, dir. D.W.Griffith, 1915. DVD. Eureka Video Release, 2000.

²⁹ In Chapter Two miscegenation features in literary works such as M.G. McClelland, *Mammy Mystic* (New York, 1895).

³⁰ Gwendolin Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1995).

Fehintola Mosadomi outlines the origins of Louisiana Creole within the context of the varieties of French that coexist within Louisiana and it is worth considering that the study of Louisiana Creole is still young.³¹ Mosadomi writes of the transportation of slaves to Louisiana (including those brought by the Company of the Indies) and how the numbers increased during the eighteenth century.³² There is some discrepancy between scholars on exact numbers, however, it is agreed that the first slaves arrived in Louisiana in 1719. This work also addresses the origins of the language from Africa and attempts to analyse the linguistics of Creole to be found in Louisiana, the same origins of the slaves that were transported to Haiti, some of whom were then taken from Haiti to Louisiana,³³ illustrating that there are similarities between Haitian Creole and Louisiana Creole. This mix provides an explanation to the origin of some of the words to be found in Vodou today.

Virginia Dominguez describes the social structure of Creoles within Louisiana and across the US in *White by Definition*.³⁴ Dominguez makes an interesting point, which relates to those raised by Wingfield, which within the aftermath of slavery there has been an association of white with upper status and black with lower status. This hasn't really altered over time and is examined throughout the representations of Vodou. Dominguez describes the question of status amongst those of mixed heritage:

³¹ Fehintola Mosadomi, "The Origins of Louisiana Creole," *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: LSU, 2000) 223.

³² Further information on this can be found in Mosadomi 223-43.

³³ During the years around the Haitian Revolution there was also a large influx of Haitians to Louisiana, again adding to the mix of Louisiana Creole and Haitian Kréyol.

³⁴ Virginia R. Dominguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

To white Creoles today the mere suggestion of possible African ancestry invokes a lowering of social and economic status for the people in question. To colored or black Creoles, on the other hand, the claim of at least partial European ancestry accords the group in question a status (or an expectation of status) higher than that accorded to “pure” blacks. Moreover, to colored or black Creoles the association with early European settlers in Louisiana signals a tie to the state’s “old families” and, by extension, higher status.³⁵

The expectation of higher status as described above in relation to Creoles can also be found within Haiti when the mulattoes and affranchis felt that their part-European ancestry elevated them to a status above that of the black, whether slave or free. There is considerable debate today about how the legacy of slavery and the black/white divide has had an impact on black identity in the twenty-first century. Paul Gilroy’s work *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* outlines the issues of contemporary racism.³⁶ He discusses the fact that Black British cultures “have been created from diverse and contradictory elements apprehended through discontinuous histories...contemporary black British culture has important qualities that give substance to the basic oppositional frameworks which derive from tradition, and historical memories of slavery.”³⁷ This not only applies to Black British cultures but arguably to Black cultures globally. Where slavery has tainted a culture there are the diversity and contradictory elements that influence identity today.

³⁵ Dominguez 263.

³⁶ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

³⁷ Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, 296.

This early categorisation and segregation is still identifiable and is complex. Throughout history society has placed black as the lowest category and this needs to be considered throughout this thesis as a possible explanation for some of the persecutions within the products of popular culture. The focus will remain on the representations of Vodou and not primarily on the issue of race. This is however a consideration due to many of the representations being a direct result of colonial power and the power of white over black.

The Evolution of Haitian Vodou

The earliest literary reference to Vodou in Haiti found was that of Moreau de Saint-Méry (as mentioned earlier in this chapter, p. 42).³⁸ The earliest reference to Vodou in New Orleans was identified in *Fabulous New Orleans* by Lyle Saxon when he writes of the first reference to “black magic” being in documents held at the Cabildo in New Orleans. He claims that these documents include a sentence where Governor Galvez³⁹ states “these negroes are too much given to voodooism and make the lives of the citizens unsafe”⁴⁰ dated 1782.⁴¹

It has been established that the first slaves began arriving in Haiti from West Africa during the late seventeenth century and continued to arrive until the nineteenth century. From the Code Noir it would be reasonable to assume that the masters attempted to eradicate the West African religions during the early stages of the slave trade. Louisiana was a French colony and so the same code

³⁸ L.E. Moreau de Saint Méry 45-51.

³⁹ Bernardo de Galvez was Governor of Louisiana, succeeding Governor Unzaga in 1777.

⁴⁰ Lyle Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans* (New Orleans: Robert Crager and Company, 1954) 237.

⁴¹ I was unable to authenticate the existence of these documents and so am relying on the text of Lyle Saxon which was also corroborated by Robert Tallant in his book *Voodoo in New Orleans* (New York: Macmillan, 1974) 9.

applied to the slaves that were being transported to the plantations there. These slaves were forcibly baptised as Catholics and as can be found in *The Catholic Church in Haiti*, Anne Greene explains how the slave ships would have been met by the slave masters and the clergy; the slaves had to be baptised within eight days of arrival.⁴² Interestingly, Anne Greene claims that early documentation and journals show that the Catholic Church in Haiti was not opposed to slavery and it was viewed as a good thing as it allowed the slaves to become Christian.⁴³ The Church in Haiti was a formidable force and was instrumental in the anti-superstition campaigns that were to follow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This was a time when the power of the Government and the Catholic Church combined in an attempt to eradicate Vodou; this will be discussed later in this chapter.⁴⁴

Haitian Vodou, and the Voodoo that we know from the cinema and cultural products since the twentieth century, will be shown to be influenced from the early days of slavery. These start with the earliest accounts of Vodou from the eighteenth century. Understanding the evolution of Haitian Vodou relies heavily upon accounts of those who were in power or control. Initially information about the islands came from the Spanish and then subsequently from the slave masters, the plantation owners, the Church and European travellers, ambassadors and envoys. It is therefore difficult to accurately follow the evolution until anthropological studies began in depth during the twentieth century. At this time

⁴² Anne Greene, *The Catholic Church in Haiti: Political and Social Change* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1993) 77.

⁴³ Anne Greene 77-78.

⁴⁴ It is believed that there were repeated anti-superstition campaigns from as early as 1864 but the most well documented are those that occurred between 1940 and 1943, the actual dates vary amongst scholars. The most recent campaigns allegedly took place in 1986 under the presidency of General Henri Namphy.

a number of scholars began to trace the origins and practice of Vodou both from within Haiti or by working in communities throughout the Haitian Diaspora.

Vodou is a religion that is generally agreed to have evolved predominantly from two ethnic groups, the Fon of Dahomey and the Yoruba of Oyo. Dahomey covers the area we now know as Benin, Togo and part of Nigeria and Oyo was a region of present-day Nigeria. These two groups had the most influence, but were not the only ones involved in the evolution of Haitian Vodou. Before Vodou began to develop in Haiti the Fon already actively appropriated the beliefs of their rivals within their own religious practices. It was this ability to adapt and change beliefs that was so important to the evolution of religion with the slaves transported to Haiti. Many of the African tribes shared the same core beliefs, another important factor to consider when examining the evolution of Vodou. When brought together from Africa, slaves integrated their different beliefs into syncretic religions which, in spite of wide variations, show a broad overall similarity throughout the New World. The same African beliefs were transported to other parts of the Americas such as Cuba, Brazil and Jamaica, all of whom have their own religions derived from African beliefs rooted in slavery.⁴⁵

There are a number of respected and accepted accounts of the evolution of Haitian Vodou which were written following many years of study; two to examine at this point were completed during the 1950s by Milo Rigaud, a Haitian scholar, and by Alfred Métraux, a French scholar. In *Secrets of Voodoo* Rigaud introduces the reader to Voodoo, contextualising it as a religion much the same

⁴⁵ For example Santeria can be found in Cuba, Condomblé in Brazil and Obeah in Jamaica.

as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam, acknowledging, in 1953, that Hollywood horror films had presented a distorted picture.⁴⁶ Rigaud's book was compiled following over thirty years of research and study and is acclaimed as an authoritative text. Rigaud writes in depth on the rituals and elements of Haitian Vodou which follows an introduction to the origins of Voodoo.⁴⁷ According to Rigaud, many aspects of Vodou are alien to white culture and so it is difficult to convey an accurate idea of a religion following years of persecution, since perceptions have been formed since the early days of slavery. It is important to consider possession within Vodou as this features throughout the cultural productions. Vodou is a complex and multi-dimensional religion. Sallie Ann Glassman describes possession as not being the attack of a demonic force but "it is the melding of self with the spirit" and is the "entrance into the mystery of the divine."⁴⁸ Possession in Vodou is believed to give transport to the spirit to allow the loa to act and communicate through the body.⁴⁹

Another aspect of Haitian Vodou that is repeatedly misrepresented is zombification. In cultural production the zombie is to be feared; an animated corpse that evolved into a flesh-eating creature. Haitians do not fear zombies; they fear the *process* of zombification, of being made into a zombie, whereas in the west the purpose of the pseudo-zombie is to evoke fear. This is discussed throughout the thesis, especially within the context of cinematic production which saw the evolution of the sedate Haitian zombie into a cannibalistic

⁴⁶ Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo* (1953; San Francisco: City Lights, 1985) 7.

⁴⁷ Rigaud 7-13.

⁴⁸ Sallie Ann Glassman, *Vodou Visions* (New York: Villard, 2000) 24-25.

⁴⁹ A more comprehensive description of Vodou can be found earlier in the Introduction, pages 11-16.

monster.⁵⁰ There is also published academic research into the phenomenon by Wade Davis which will be examined in Chapter Two.⁵¹

Rigaud discusses the assimilation of the religions of the different African tribes, explaining that if they did not bring together their rites and practices then they would be in even more cruel isolation. This is important when considering Vodou in modern terms as there are so many variations to the religion. These variations are due to the combination of beliefs within the different plantations that the slaves found themselves, the heritage to follow and societal influences. Rigaud terms this process as 'tribal fusion' and classes, as a Haitian, this new form of Voodoo as "not pure."⁵² This use of phrase, "not pure" is not necessarily accurate. The religion that was to be found in Haiti is different from the Voodoo that was found across Africa. It could be argued that this newly evolved Vodou was pure, pure in the sense that it was a new religion born out of extreme circumstances.

White Europeans had virtually no understanding of the cultures of the Africans they were capturing and selling as commodities. Africa was only known as 'the dark continent'⁵³ a place of 'savages', terminology in common use since the nineteenth century. The metaphor of the 'dark continent' has undergone much critical analysis by scholars including Patrick Brantlinger and Lucy Jarosz.

⁵⁰ Such as in *Night of the Living Dead*, dir. George A. Romero, Image Ten, 1968. This will be discussed in Chapter Three.

⁵¹ Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

⁵² Rigaud 9-10.

⁵³ For further information on the image of 'Darkest Africa' see Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Africa that Never Was: Four Centuries of British Writings about Africa* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1992).

Brantlinger discusses in his article "Victorians and Africans" how "the myth of the dark continent was [thus] a Victorian invention;"⁵⁴ he goes on to explain how the system of blame was initially placed on the European slave traders by the abolitionists; however, by the mid-nineteenth century the blame had been shifted to the Africans. Brantlinger goes on to examine how slavery had tainted society and this was fused with the sensationalist accounts of cannibalism, witchcraft and what were seen as shameful sexual customs. The Victorians accepted this as the reality of Africa.⁵⁵ These same accusations were used against Vodou by the Victorians who wrote sensationalist accounts of life in Haiti, and Sir Spenser St. John in particular devoted much of his book to tales of cannibalism and Vodou, interspersed with witchcraft.⁵⁶ Janosz takes an approach on the term as a 'Euroamerican discourse' and examines the metaphor of the Dark Continent and how this phrase has constructed and represented Africa and Africans. This relates directly to the representations of Vodou as will be examined throughout this thesis. The negative and racist valuation of Africa and Africans as discussed by Janosz has a direct correlation to the negative and racist values that have been applied to Vodou.⁵⁷ Similarly, Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism*⁵⁸ of how there was a comparable colonial attitude towards Asia. Said examines how writers such as Caussin and Carlyle⁵⁹ show us "that the Orient

⁵⁴ Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent", *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985) 198.

⁵⁵ Brantlinger 198.

⁵⁶ Sir Spenser St. John, *Hayti or the Black Republic* (1884; London: Cass, 1971).

⁵⁷ Lucy Janosz, "Constructing the Dark Continent: Metaphor as Geographic Representation of Africa", *Geografiska Annaler*, 74:2 (1992) 105-115.

⁵⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; London: Penguin, 2003).

⁵⁹ For more on the writings of Caussin and Carlyle see Caussin de Perceval, *Essai sur l'histoire des Arabes avant l'Islamisme, pendant l'époque de Mahomet et jusqu'à la reduction de toutes les tribus sous la loi musulmane* (1847-48; reprint ed., Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck-und Verlagsanstalt, 1967) 3: 332-9 and Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841; reprint ed., New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906) 63.

need not cause us undue anxiety, so unequal are Oriental to European achievements.”⁶⁰ This is much the same as the attitude of the Victorians to Africa and Africans and subsequently that of many of those responsible for the subject of Vodou across cultural production. Said examines the unequal partnership between East and West and the “English colonial interference.” There was however another perspective when in 1853 Karl Marx argued that ‘we’ in the West should reconcile ourselves with the atrocities of “England...was actuated by the vilest interests...[colonialism] because of the necessity for societal transformations.”⁶¹

It is difficult to define exactly what Vodou is. It is a religion that is constantly changing and evolving to suit the needs of those who serve, to fit into the environment in which it finds itself and a religion that still faces persecution and misunderstanding as it has done since the late eighteenth century.⁶² Alfred Métraux writes more extensively of the origins and history of Voodoo within his anthropological study, *Voodoo in Haiti*, before providing an explanation of the intricacies of the religion.⁶³ Métraux studied in Haiti at various times from 1941 to 1950 during which time he became friends with one of Haiti’s foremost writers, Jacques Roumain, who worked extensively to preserve Haitian heritage and Vodou by setting up the Bureau of Ethnology during the early 1940s.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Said 152.

⁶¹ Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach (London: Pelican Books, 1973) 306-7 in Said, 153-4.

⁶² A brief outline of the Vodou can be found in the introduction 11-16.

⁶³ Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (1959; New York: Schocken, 1972) 15-57.

⁶⁴ Having trained in ethnology across Europe, Roumain returned to Haiti following exile in 1941 aged 34. He, Alfred Métraux, Jean Price-Mars and others founded an ethnological research centre, the ‘Bureau d’Ethnologie.’ For more on this see for example Roger Dorsinville, *Jacques Roumain* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1981).

Métraux does describe Voodoo as a cult, making the implication that it is a religion practiced by a small group of people imposing excessive control over its members; this is unfortunate as he gives a favourable account of the religion.

Métraux describes the context of the religion, “that Voodoo gives to the traditional culture of Haiti its sole originality,” and goes on to conclude that “Voodoo as a religious system has lost none of its creative force.”⁶⁵

Vodou had faced over five hundred years of discrimination and exclusion and was not recognised officially as a religion in Haiti before President Aristide issued a decree to that effect, 4 April 2003. This was part of a decision to preserve the heritage of the country⁶⁶ and to recognise Vodou as an ancestral religion with the same rights as any other.⁶⁷

Politics and Independence

Haiti has without a doubt had a turbulent political history since independence in 1804. This section will take a brief overview of the political developments in Haiti from independence through to 1911 when Government instability was the precursor to the American Occupation.⁶⁸

The signing of the declaration of independence at Gonave on 1 January 1804 was to have an immense impact, not only on the French and on the Haitians but to

⁶⁵ Métraux 364-65.

⁶⁶ It should be noted that Jacques Roumain and others mentioned previously had set up the Bureau d’Ethnologie for much the same reason, to preserve the heritage of Haiti (see footnote 63, 59).

⁶⁷ Haitian Press Agency circulated an email on April 5th 2003 announcing that Vodou is fully recognised as a religion in Haiti, P. D. Bellegarde Smith, e-mail to the author, 10 April 2003.

⁶⁸ For further information relating to the politics of Haiti see David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier* (1979; London: Macmillan, 1996).

white colonial power. The defeated Napoleon had lost his vision of creating a new empire in the Caribbean and subsequently sold Louisiana to the Americans in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The independence, and renaming of Saint Domingue to Haiti,⁶⁹ was formally declared by Jean Jacques Dessalines in 1804. Following the assassination of Dessalines in 1806 the country divided into a republic in the south ruled by Alexandre Pétion and a northern state ruled by Henri Christophe, who later proclaimed himself king.⁷⁰ There were a number of developments throughout these early years of independence until 1820 when General Jean-Pierre Boyer became president of a reunited Haiti. There were thirty two heads of state during the period of 1804 – 1915 some of whom lasted for little more than a few months.

Vodou played a major part in the Haitian revolution; all of the leaders were Vodou devotees and many Vodou priests. Vodou provided a network of communication between the plantations when slaves gathered for ceremonies; this was when plans could be devised for the impending insurrection.

Interestingly Moreau de Saint Méry wrote of these gatherings (where plans were hatched) in the years preceding the revolution.⁷¹ Despite the accounts of these gatherings there appears to be no suspicion that the slaves were planning a revolt.

One of the most recognised pre-Revolutionary leaders was François Makandal.

According to the work of Hyppolite Pierre he operated from the mountains

⁶⁹ Haiti, also seen written as Hayti or Ayti, was the name given to the island by the indigenous population and means 'mountainous island'.

⁷⁰ For more information on Pétion see Louise Fenton, "Alexandre Pétion," *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion*, vol. 2, ed. Junius P. Rodriguez (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007) 374-376; for information on Henri Christophe see Wayne Ackerson, "Henri Christophe," in Rodriguez, vol.1, 115-117.

⁷¹ Moreau de Saint Méry 1:66-67.

building a network of resistance and, terrifying French planters from 1751-1757, establishing the foundations for the revolution. Unfortunately he made an error of judgement and was captured, managed to escape, and then was re-captured following which he was tried, found guilty and burnt at the stake in 1758. Makandal was known as a Vodouist, he incorporated elements of Vodou into his leadership elevating his status in the view of those who followed him. During his execution it was reported that the stake used to tether Makandal snapped in two, a clear indication to the slaves that the Vodou Gods were on their side, it was a sign.⁷² In the years preceding the revolution the slaves were gathering and unrest was building. The mulattoes and plantation owners on the island felt that despite the regular uprisings on the plantations the French Revolution would help to re-establish the Code Noir and with it their rights. This was not to be: in *The Uses of Haiti*, Paul Farmer describes how a group of mulattoes who returned to Saint Domingue early in 1791 to demand their rights, were instead brutally tortured and executed by the colonial forces. This alienated the mulattoes from the whites, who found mulatto support was not forthcoming when they desperately wanted it during the events which soon followed.⁷³ Later this same year Vodou was a driving force when the great slave insurrection was planned at a ceremony in Bois Caiman led by Boukman, a Vodou priest. This gathering was followed by a brutal and savage attack on the white planters who had no chance of defence against nearly half a million slaves. Much confusion followed and in spite of large-scale military intervention by the British as well as the French, the

⁷² Hyppolite Pierre, "Faith, and Community Leadership in Haiti (Part 1)" *Institute for Research and Social Sciences and Politics*, 2006. <<http://www.irsp.org/culture/faith1.htm>>

⁷³ Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, 2nd ed. (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 2003) 59-60.

rebellious slaves eventually secured their freedom and Haiti's status as the first free black state in the Americas by the end of 1803.⁷⁴

It is widely recognised that the period between 1843 and 1915 was a time of decline and disorder for Haiti. There were persistent revolutions and a socio-economic crisis due in large part to the enormous reparations which Haiti agreed to pay to France in return for recognition of her independence. The country could not return to the productivity levels and associated wealth that it had experienced during early colonial times. This was exacerbated by a structure of rival factions, limited production and from early in the twentieth century a succession of incompetent presidents. Between the years of 1911 and 1915 a series of revolts resulted in a succession of six presidents. This was accompanied by heavy borrowing from Germany, France and the US. The American Occupation started in 1915.

Part II: Developments in the Twentieth Century

American Occupation

The American occupation of Haiti took place during the years 1915-1934. This occupation is important in the development of Vodou as it was members of the occupied forces who wrote literary works offering dark tales of Vodou that were to sell in their millions. These will be covered in further detail in the next chapter. It is also widely suspected that Vodou was one of the factors that led to the occupation. Shannon Turlington writes that in 1908 it was believed that US

⁷⁴ See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938; London: Penguin Books, 2001) although it has been argued that this work relies heavily upon secondary sources it is nevertheless an extensive and thorough account of the Haitian Revolution.

Minister H.W. Furniss, a black man appointed to office by President Roosevelt, sent a report home stating that President Antoine Simon and his family were devotees of Vodou and given to superstition.⁷⁵ Zora Neale Hurston also writes of Simon's association with Vodou in *Tell My Horse*, corroborating Turlington's supposition. She writes of Simon relying on his daughter Celestine, a known Mambo.⁷⁶ Hurston remarked that Simon became a folk legend due to his reliance on his daughter and her goat, Simalo, which accompanied her and was allegedly 'married' to Celestine.⁷⁷ Vodou ceremonies were reported to take place at the Palace, something that the elite of Haitian society did not approve of and with tales of the goat circulating the people viewed their leader with contempt and disgust. The President was facing a downfall, and he eventually left Haiti in 1911.⁷⁸

The catalyst for the US occupation came when President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam was lynched in July 1915.⁷⁹ This provoked many of the various diplomats residing in Haiti to ask the Americans for their assistance, that same night the US marines invaded.⁸⁰ The Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico were seen as 'American Seas' at this time which may also explain why the US forces were in the area.⁸¹ The occupation was justified by America with the same reasons as

⁷⁵ This fact is given brief acknowledgement in Shannon R. Turlington, *Voodoo* (Indianapolis: Alpha, 2002) 38.

⁷⁶ A Mambo is the term for a female Vodou Priestess.

⁷⁷ Within Haitian society Mambos are held in high esteem and are equal to their male counterparts. It would not be unusual therefore for a Mambo to be consulted.

⁷⁸ Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (1938; New York: Harper & Row, 1990) 93-102.

⁷⁹ It does seem ironic that America used the lynching of Sam as one of the reasons for the occupation, and yet in the US there were regular lynchings of black men.

⁸⁰ At this time the US had gunboats anchored in Port au Prince. This was in part a strategic reaction to the desire of America to keep Europe, heavily involved in World War I, out of the hemisphere and because of the interest in the recently completed Panama Canal.

⁸¹ For further information see Ludwell Lee Montague, *Haiti and the United States 1714-1938* (Durham, USA: Duke University Press, 1940) 193.

those given by the original colonial rule; to protect the lives of their own citizens and foreign nationals residing in Haiti and to save the declining country from itself.⁸²

Haiti was made a protectorate of the United States, a president installed and a new constitution passed. The constitution allowed foreign nationals to own land in Haiti, there were military courts and forced labour was imposed, all of which appeared to be yet another phase of colonial rule. Figure 6 shows the presence of the American troops as seen from Port au Prince, Haiti, in 1917.



Fig.6. Faustin Wirkus, *Uncle Sam comes to The Magic Island* (Haiti, 1917).⁸³

The Americans began to build an infrastructure in Haiti, but they also revived many of the issues of race and class that had been so influential during the

⁸² US forces were in the waters around Haiti repeatedly from 1849, not for the benefit of their nationals but to maintain control of commercial traffic in the waters, access to the Panama Canal was through this passage. For more information on this see Farmer, 77-78.

⁸³ Fig.5 Photograph in Faustin Wirkus and Taney Dudley, *The White King of La Gonave* (New York: Garden City, 1931) 31.

revolution for independence. During the occupation there were developments that would have been beneficial should they not have been so heavily imposed, bridges and roads were built, a telephone system installed, health and sanitation improved and schools created. The downside to these developments was a regime of military force and the influence that this military force was to have on the Haitian army. They based their ethic and force on an army in occupation, not on a national army. This ultimately led to a Haitian army that helped to govern the country as an occupying force, the only fight they had was with fellow Haitians. This was particularly illustrated during the Duvalier regime which will be discussed later in this chapter. The American Occupation evolved as another period of colonial rule in the history of Haiti, a time of further persecution and oppression, enforcing and perpetuating myth and misunderstanding throughout the Western world.

Visual Arts of Haiti

The focus of this research is on the history and influence of Haitian Vodou on the cultural productions of Britain and America, however, a study of this nature would not be complete without considering the impact and influences within the visual arts of Haiti. There is no written text in Vodou and so much of the religion is visual, from the Sacred Art used for ceremonies to the walls around villages. This does mean that the religion can transcend cultural boundaries. The visual elements of Vodou will be shown to be the main inclusions for cinematic and televisual representations of the religion. Throughout this thesis discussions will show that Vodou is not necessarily the focus of the narrative, however, there is generally an attempt to maintain 'authenticity' within the visual representations.

An example of this is in the opening scenes of the film *Voodoo Moon* when a Vodou practitioner is shown surrounded by religious paraphernalia (see Fig.7) before the film digresses into the less Vodou related Satanic rituals.⁸⁴



Fig. 7. Still from *Voodoo Moon* (2005), “Jean Pierre’s Shack”.⁸⁵

These visual elements of Vodou, or the signs, have a system of signification and as Roland Barthes suggests the reader of these ‘signs’ plays an important role in constructing the meaning.⁸⁶ There should be a common understanding of the signs but for Vodou this is not the case, mainly due to the confused representations of the previous decades. How the items are shown directs the viewer and they play their part at this stage by applying the knowledge they have of Vodou to construct a meaning and so humanising the process. This applies to

⁸⁴ *Voodoo Moon*, dir. Kevin VanHook, IDT Entertainment, 2005.

⁸⁵ Fig.7 “Jean Pierre’s Shack” from *Voodoo Moon*, image from <http://www.michaellevinson.com/voodoo.html>

⁸⁶ Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (1968; New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

any of the cultural productions. In the visual elements there may not be any verbal link between the object and Vodou so there is a reliance on the knowledge of the viewer, or to the creator of the representation, to contextualise the objects and give them an identity. This issue of identity within cultural representation is discussed by Hall as having two forms,⁸⁷ one as a separate and distinct identity and the other as an identity which is, as Grossberg describes, “relational and incomplete, in process.”⁸⁸ Grossberg suggests that identity within cultural studies is more complex than just the two models suggested by Hall, and that struggles over identity are within the politics of representation itself, questioning how identities are produced.⁸⁹ It is this question of identity that is considered throughout the visual representations of Vodou. If there is no common understanding of the visual components then meanings are applied and consequently elements of the religion are confused or misunderstood.

The visual aspects of Vodou have arguably been stereotyped, as have most aspects of the religion. The images that are most recognisable and repeated throughout cultural production include a human skull, a blood stained altar and the Voodoo doll. In the background to many visual cultural productions of Vodou there are symbols that relate directly to the religion such as vèvè, altars, drums, packets and bottles.⁹⁰ It is possible that the lack of knowledge the viewer has means that these are overlooked in favour of the more recognisable sensational elements such as orgiastic ritual dancing or animal sacrifices.

⁸⁷ Stuart Hall, “Cultural identity and diaspora,” in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 222-37.

⁸⁸ Lawrence Grossberg, “Identity and Cultural Studies: Is that all there is?” in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996) 89.

⁸⁹ Grossberg, in Hall and du Gay, 90.

⁹⁰ These will be discussed throughout this chapter.

It was during the twentieth century that the Visual Arts of Haiti came to prominence, to some extent, ironically, due to the cultural representations and documentaries that were to feature them. Much of the art from Haiti incorporates Catholic iconography. This originates from the days of slavery when in an attempt to eradicate the West African religions the slave owners (and the Catholic Church) insisted on the baptism of all arrivals to the colonies.⁹¹ This resulted in the slaves disguising their beliefs behind the Catholic deities and practices. Many of the West African artistic practices associated with Vodou had to evolve when slavery brought people to the Caribbean. It was this evolution that possibly led to the use of doll like forms that were later misrepresented and attracted fantastical theory. Vodouists often made wooden or stone figures for powers in West Africa but on the plantations they were unable to do so. It is possible that cloth figures were made instead, leading to the confusion between these and the European witchcraft 'poppets,' dolls that were used to inflict harm and that became the stereotype of the Voodoo doll. As René Benjamin explains, the "figurine made of wax or wood and stabbed with a pin ... was in use before the discovery of Haiti."⁹² The Vodou Arts and Art of Vodou are a unique combination of history and tradition inspired by the spirits and artistic production is evident throughout Haiti.

The vèvè are transient images, they are the symbols drawn on the ground in preparation for the Vodou ceremony, and are temporary in nature. The vèvè are

⁹¹ See Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990) and Anne Greene, *The Catholic Church in Haiti* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1993).

⁹² René Benjamin, *Introspection dans l'inconnu* (New York: French Printing Publishing, 1976) 18.

generally drawn in white powder or flour on the ground by the priest or priestess. They are intricate patterns that are specific to individual spirits and contain elements that are sacred to the Vodouists and clearly demonstrate the importance of aesthetics within Haitian cultural heritage.⁹³ Their role is not to embellish the houmfort, they are an intricate part of the process of invoking the spirits and so have a religious function.⁹⁴ To be ritualistic as part of the ceremony the vèvè must be drawn on the floor to act as a doorway to the spirits (Fig.8). Once the spirit has been invoked the vèvè is no longer required and tends to be erased throughout the ceremony.⁹⁵

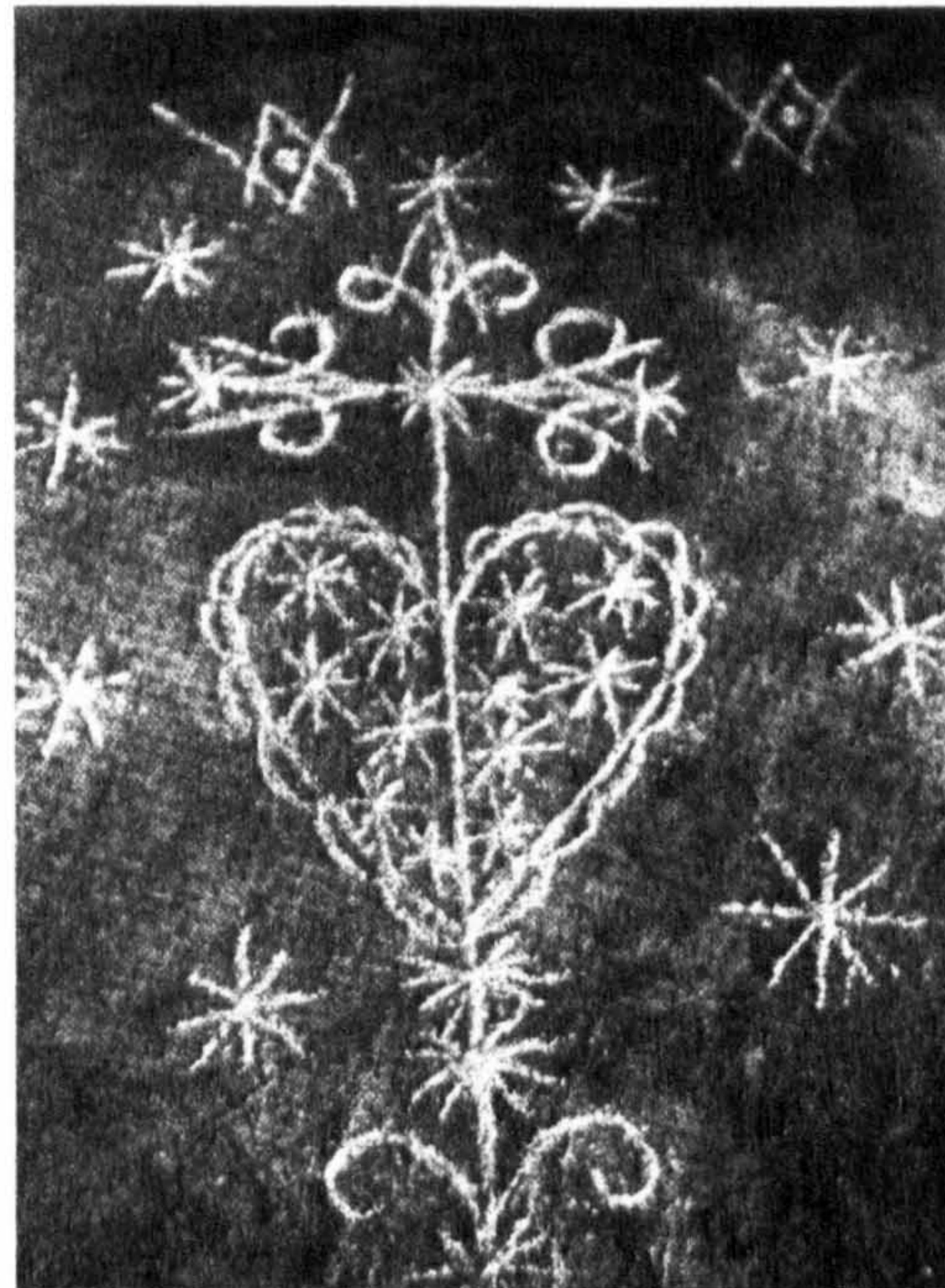


Fig.8. Vèvè of Ezili Dantò.⁹⁶

⁹³ Some of the loa have numerous vèvè's and some have no image. They can be drawn in ground corn, coffee, wheat flour, talc, sand, gun powder, depending on which spirit is to be evoked.

⁹⁴ The vèvè can be abstract or figurative, depending on the spirit to be invoked and feature many small symbols. These are sometimes drawn for a rest period (such as the stars) or as an identifiable sign of a particular houngan or mambo.

⁹⁵ Vèvè may be seen drawn on walls, made in iron or in paintings. These are purely decorative and do not feature as part of a ceremony.

⁹⁶ Fig.8. Vèvè of Ezili Dantò taken in Haiti in 1970, in Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (1997; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995) 62.

Gérard Alphonse Férère suggests that the vèvè have a binary iconography evolved from “the impact of the Catholic Church, the African substratum, and according to some, the influence of the pre-Columbian inhabitants.”⁹⁷ This pre-Columbian influence is also discussed by Patricia Mohammed with the evidence of links between the two religions being found in the Amerindian petroglyphs in caves across the Caribbean and also the presence of Indian thunderstones on many Vodou altars.⁹⁸ Mohammed continues to identify that the Europeans may have influenced the makers of the religious images, this theory is one shared by Alfred Métraux who attributes some of the intricacies of the vèvè to the ironwork and embroideries of the eighteenth century.⁹⁹ The temporality of the ceremonial vèvè means that they are often not seen by the outside world, they have a fragility that leads to their disappearance.

Vèvè are one of the visual symbols of Vodou that feature regularly across cultural productions from both America and Britain. There are rarely explanations and so it is left with the audience to construct a meaning or just accept these symbols as part of the Voodoo narrative without appreciating their significance.

There was a blending of African and European cultures in Haiti and one of the most celebrated of the sacred arts that evolved from this creolisation was the ritualistic flags, the ‘drapeau Vodou,’ which are made from thousands of

⁹⁷ Nancy Turnier Férère, Introduction by Gerard Alphonse Férère, *Vèvè: Ritual Art of Haitian Vodou* (Boca Raton: Rémé Art Publishing, 2005) 19.

⁹⁸ Patricia Mohammed, “The Sign of the Loa (Vodun ritual in Haiti),” *Small Axe*, 18 (Sept., 2005) 124-150.

⁹⁹ Mohammed, 130, and Alfred Métraux, trans. Hugo Charteris, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

individually sewn sequins and images of syncretised Catholic Saints. Patrick Arthur Polk suggests that the origins of these flags may be traced to Africa where flags and banners have long been used to express “cultural identity, military prowess, and religious affiliation.”¹⁰⁰ During colonial expansion there was an influence on African flag making with the introduction of European banners (Fig.9). This was then an influence on Haitian flags.



Fig.9. Asafo military flag used by the Fante people of Ghana.¹⁰¹

The use of flags to express relationships and affiliations with authority and power has transferred to the Vodou flags which show affiliation to a spirit or loa. Vodou societies possess flags which represent the deities they worship and are an essential element of a ceremony as they are powerful liturgical objects. The flags are kept in a shrine as they are amongst the most expensive and sacred of the ritualistic pieces and as soon as they have been used they are returned. The drapeau Vodou use a similar format to the vèvè and any of the loa may be

¹⁰⁰ Patrick Arthur Polk, *Haitian Vodou Flags* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997) 7.

¹⁰¹ Fig.9. Asafo military flag used by the Fante people of Ghana, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History (X90.24.150) in Polk, plate 1, 41.

represented on them.¹⁰² The background motifs to the Vodou flags are influenced by the flags of the Napoleonic era, these can be found in O. Hollander's book of 1913 and the similarities are shown below in Figure 10.¹⁰³



Fig.10. A comparison between the flag of the Napoleonic era and a Vodou flag showing the influence that the French design had on the Haitian design.¹⁰⁴

The demand for the flags as a commodity has led to two distinctive styles, those that are made for ceremonial purposes and those that are made for tourists, galleries and museums, the former are still known as the *drapeau Vodou* but the latter are known as 'art' flags.¹⁰⁵ There have not been any Western influences on the content of this element of cultural production from Haiti (even though the

¹⁰² The loa that should have flags are Ogou and Damballah. Ogou is the family loa of warriors and most associated with the Haitian revolution and Damballah is the spirit divinity associated with wisdom, often represented as St. Patrick.

¹⁰³ O. Hollander, *Les drapeaux des demi-brigades d'infanterie de 1794 à 1804, avec un chapitre préliminaire sur les drapeaux des régiments d'infanterie de 1791 à 1794*. (Paris, Leroy, 1913).

¹⁰⁴ Fig. 10. Left, a Napoleonic flag, in Donald J. Cosentino (ed.), *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), plate 13.19 'Typical French Napoleonic cavalry standards, ca. 1794. Musée de l'Armée, Paris.' 336; right, a Vodou flag in Polk, plate 44 'Societe Lacroix' by Yves Telemak, Fowler Museum of Cultural History (X94.69.8), 71.

¹⁰⁵ The main difference between the two is the aesthetic quality, the ceremonial flags tend to be less intricate but the 'art' flags allow more experimentation by the artist.

design is of French origin); the artists remain true to their culture by representing the saints and the spirits.



Fig.11. A ceremonial flag for Damballah and Erzuli Freda, the centre section shows a sparser covering of sequins due to the cost implications and availability of materials.¹⁰⁶



Fig.12. An 'art' flag by artist Yves Telemak showing the more intricate central image.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Fig.11. Ceremonial flag for the loa of Damballah and Erzuli Freda, note the sparse sequins and the appliquéd face of Erzuli Freda on the right, in Polk, plate 11, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Fig.12. An art flag by Yves Telemak showing the black Madonna, the sequins are closely sewn and the image much more intricate, in Polk, plate 38, Erz Danthor (Erzuli Dantor), 67. There are many now high profile artists working in Haiti as flag-makers but the most well known contemporary makers are Silva Joseph and Yves Telemak. Both create flags for ceremonial and commercial purposes and both now sign their work which is highly collectable.

It should be noted that the flag-makers of Haiti are predominantly men, most of whom are houngan; this is evident in the writings of Tina Girouard whose examples feature no women at all.¹⁰⁸ Although women are priestesses in Vodou Haiti remains a male-dominated society with men rising to the highest ecclesiastical ranks and to date there are no high profile female flag-makers in Haiti.¹⁰⁹

Throughout fictional cultural production there is rarely an indication of the use of the Vodou flags. They are an important part of the religion and yet overlooked in the imagination of producers and programme makers although they do appear in a number of documentaries. This evolution of sacred art to commercial enterprise is not exclusive to the flags, and sequin arts are used for the creation of the libation bottles, another sacred item that is sought after in the commercial art market.

On most Vodou altars there will be at least one bottle, covered in sequins, fabric or beads used as an offering. They are coded to honour a particular loa; they are also used as protection or for divination. The other item often found on altars in Haiti is the pakèt Kongo, commonly known as pakèt, which has its origins in Africa again showing the syncretisation of African religions into Haitian Vodou.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Tina Girouard, "The Sequin Arts of Vodou," in Cosentino, 357-377.

¹⁰⁹ The assistants to the male flag-makers are predominantly women.

¹¹⁰ For more on these origins see Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (New York: The Museum for African Art, 1993).

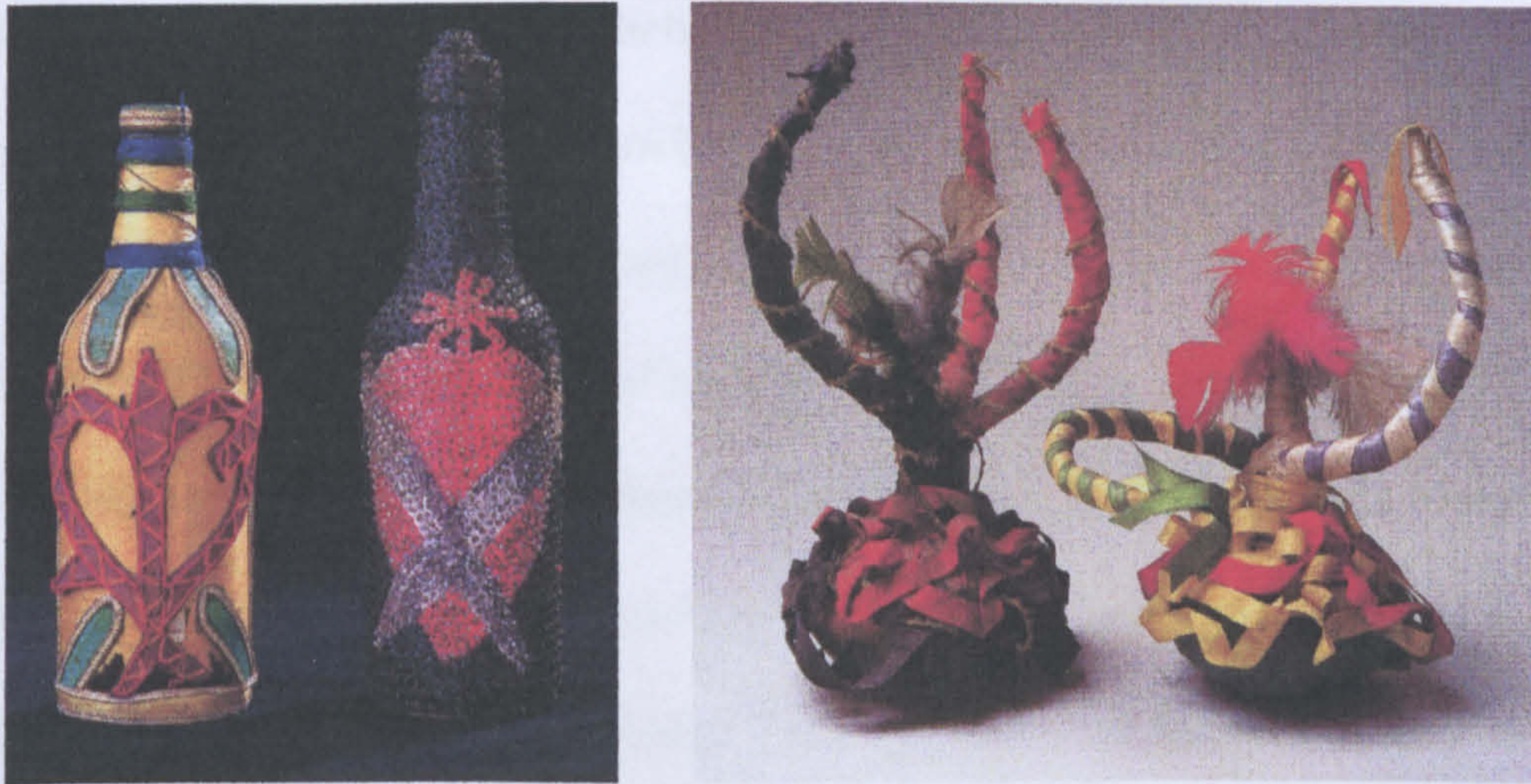


Fig.13. Left, bottles, right, pakets.¹¹¹

There is often reference to ouangas (also seen as wanga) in many cultural productions. In film and television they are often seen as the bottles or pakets as shown above but the ouanga is a reference to these objects when the houngan, mambo or bokor has placed ‘magic’ on the item for religious purposes. Their use in cultural production evolves from the identification of the ouangas used by the bokors believed to contain the souls of those captured for zombification. This association with ‘flesh’ zombification (a body separated from the soul) where the bokor has taken the soul is more popular in cultural production. Astral zombies (where the soul is separated from the body and contained in a bottle or pakèt after death) are lesser known and so not represented. Elizabeth McAlister explains the bottles are sometimes believed to contain the spirit of the dead.¹¹² The bottles and pakets are artistic creations and have similar components to the vèvè and the flags, mainly because they are made to honour the loa. The ‘magic’

¹¹¹ Fig. 13. Two examples of libation bottles (left) in George René and Marilyn Houlberg, in Cosentino, plate 11.15, 298, and two pakets (right) in Robert Farris Thompson, in Cosentino, plate 3.50 (FMCH X93.9.1C,D), 116.

¹¹² Elizabeth McAlister, “A Sorcerer’s Bottle: The Visual Art of Magic in Haiti,” in Cosentino, 305-321.

that is made to fill the ouanga is believed to be powerful and these vessels are the containers for this power. They are believed to be 'alive' filled with a living soul that is directed to provide good luck or, if created for evil, bad luck (or worse).

The items placed within the vessel and the incantations are sacred and rarely recorded, the semiotics of the ouanga is complex and known to few. As Mary Nooter identifies, the coding, obscurity and containment are strategies used to maintain powerful cultural knowledge.¹¹³ The pakèts are made and dressed as 'people' due to their African origins, dressed in plush ribbons and feathers for the Kongo royalty they represent. This is not likely to be known by the audience of films or television, or by the consumers who buy these as decorative pieces.

Bottles and pakèts command high prices in the commercial market but rarely are they authenticated as a charm (although widely sold as such). These items appear on altars in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora and are still made for the sacred role they have, despite their commercial success.

Vodou altars are the most commonly misrepresented aspect of Haitian culture within cinematic and televisual productions. They are featured as Christian altars with the addition of skulls, as stone pagan altars without embellishment or not featured at all. The altars are unique and individual works of art in their own right and may incorporate the sacred arts of Haitian Vodou including the bottles, pakèts and flags, or may be small shrines with a few offerings to a specific loa for public or private use. They can be found in Haiti and throughout the diaspora.

¹¹³ Mary Nooter, "The Visual Language of Secrecy," in Mary Nooter (ed.) *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals* (New York: The Museum for African Art, 1993).



Fig.14. Detail from a Haitian Altar to Erzuli showing the bottles and pakèt.¹¹⁴

Many priests and priestesses have altar rooms where there are altars and shrines to numerous loa, from small tabletop shrines to ceiling high altars they are artistic creations undoubtedly of Vodou origin. The altar is not the focus for ceremonial ritual as in Christianity, in Vodou it is where offerings are made and placed. The altar rooms are seen as a doorway between the spiritual world and this world and with all of the loa honoured the houngan or mambo can approach the altar of the loa to ask for advice or help.¹¹⁵

Haitian communities are very visual, there are paintings found on the walls of most buildings, there is wrought iron featuring aspects of vèvè, artists sell their canvases and sculptures on the streets of most towns and even the public transport represents the loa. During the 1940s an American called DeWitt Peters

¹¹⁴ Fig. 14. A Haitian Altar to Erzuli (also seen as Ezili), photograph taken by Leah Gordon in Leah Gordon, *The Book of Vodou* (London and New York: Barrons, 2000) 81.

¹¹⁵ Shannon Turlington, *Voodoo* (Indianapolis: Alpha Books, 2002) 168-170.

was in Haiti on a wartime assignment, as a painter himself he wished to set up a school of art to teach Haitians how to paint. It was at this point that he discovered the untrained art of Hector Hyppolite, Philomé Obin and Rigaud Benoit and the joy of art in Haiti. These artists are commonly referred to as the first generation. Vodou has been an influence on the Haitian artists, many of whom are Houngan. To raise awareness of the arts in Haiti a demand for the work had to be created and this happened with the opening of the Centre d'Art¹¹⁶ which was offering the 'primitive' style of painting for sale.¹¹⁷ The Centre opened in the late 1940s and Selden Rodman and DeWitt Peters made the decision to encourage the artists to work on large pieces for public buildings, there was now a market place for Haitian art and collectors were flocking to Port-au-Prince to buy. The success of these untrained artists is a reflection of the Italian Quattrocento who also set a precedent and a standard that was emulated by the generations to follow.¹¹⁸ The work of Haitian artists is devoid of rules and this has provided a freedom of expression. The 'Renaissance in Haiti' attracted worldwide interest and it was this international response that arguably made Haitian painting what it is today, it brought financial stimulation encouraging many Haitians to paint. This commercialisation is criticised but it also provided a great incentive that motivated the movement in Haitian painting.¹¹⁹ The second and third generations of Haitian artists feature Vodou more than their predecessors. Although this discovery of Haitian art happened in the 1940s there was evidence of Haitians

¹¹⁶ Selden Rodman, *Haiti: The Black Republic* (Connecticut: Devin-Adair, 1954) 94-105.

¹¹⁷ The term primitive causes much debate, it is a term that is used to define a part of Haitian painting that relates to the fact that the artist is untrained but for many it has connotations to the colonial view of the nation and so the term 'naïve' is used more frequently.

¹¹⁸ Stefano Ugo Baldassarri and Arielle Saiber (eds.), *Images of Quattrocento Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹¹⁹ Eva Pataki, *Haitian Painting: Art and Kitsch* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1986) 1-3.

painting much earlier on the walls around the communities, the flags, bottles, and the decoration of the ceremonial drums.¹²⁰ The arts feature narratives of religion, political struggle, communities and the culture of this unique country.

Tap-taps are the primary form of public transport in Haiti. They are brightly covered small buses that are as intricately decorated as any Vodou flag or bottle and for many years have featured the symbols of the loa by representing the syncretised Catholic saint or the use of text. During the latter part of the twentieth century there has been a direct impact on the decoration of these vehicles and the American influence is seen infiltrating the representations of the loa. Ogou, the family of warrior spirits can be seen represented by the character of Rambo played by the actor Sylvester Stallone as shown below.¹²¹



Fig.15. American culture infiltrates Haitian cultural tradition, 'Rambo' as a Vodou loa on a tap-tap in Port-au-Prince.¹²²

¹²⁰ There is not the scope within this study to discuss the arts of Haiti although it merits further research. For more on the origins of Haitian Art see Selden Rodman, *Where Art is Joy: Haitian Art the First Forty Years* (New York: Ruggles de Latour, 1988).

¹²¹ *Rambo: First Blood*, dir. Ted Kotcheff, Orion Pictures, 1982.

¹²² Fig.15. A photograph of the rear of a tap-tap in Haiti, by Donald Cosentino, image in Cosentino, plate 9.14, 249.

There have been developments in contemporary Haitian art and the work of Pierrot Barra and Marie Cassaise uniquely express the Vodou aesthetic. Their pieces are made from material available in Port-au-Prince and include the iconography of Catholicism recognised in Vodou as the loa. Their work is not traditional, it is a fresh new approach to Vodou and they make beautiful pieces reflective of the altars and shrines found in the hounfort. Barra started by making Vodou flags but then felt that the loa wished him to make 'Vodou Things,' he was a Vodou initiate, a houngan. Barra was president of a Bizango group, a secret Haitian Society which has the reputation of social enforcement through the practice of zombification, it is also known as one of the Sect Rouge, the organisations blamed for human sacrifice and terror by Hollywood folklore.¹²³ There are Bizango symbols in his work, coffins, skulls and crucifixes create a dark spiritual link and Cosentino intimated that this society "has ancient links with Freemasonry whose regalia and rituals have been extensively borrowed by Vodou priests and artists (many of whom are also Masonic initiates)."¹²⁴ This may be another European influence on Haitian creation but cannot be substantiated at this time. One of the startling elements to Barra's work is the inclusion of doll parts; this is an ironic reference to the Voodoo doll so frequently featured in American and British stereotypes of Haiti and Vodou. Barra's dolls have no link with the fabric dolls used for spiritual purposes or any

¹²³ Barra was a member of the Bizango prior to his death in 2003 because he believed that he needed a bad side to protect him from those who challenge. For more on the lives of Barra and Cassaise see Donald J. Cosentino, *Vodou Things: The Art of Pierrot Barra and Marie Cassaise* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998).

¹²⁴ Cosentino, *Vodou Things*, 12-13. This is the only place that I have found an association with freemasonry and at this time this cannot be substantiated.

other historical source.¹²⁵ The deconstruction of the items take on a new meaning when re-assembled with a unique force and beauty.



Fig.16. Mojo board, *Cross with Spoon and Fork*.¹²⁶

Persecutions of Vodou

As Vodou emerged as a syncretic religion in Haiti, racism and colonial rule led to the first waves of persecution. This has not stopped and it could be argued that this misunderstanding continues into the twenty-first century. Literary representations began to appear late in the eighteenth century and the first widely accepted visual description of the religion as found in Haiti was given by Moreau

¹²⁵ Articles of the industrial materialistic world are fetishised in Haiti.

¹²⁶ Fig.16. *Cross with Spoon and Fork*, a mojo board by Barra, in Cosentino, *Vodou Things*, plate 16, 60.

Saint-Méry in 1797 (as mentioned previously). He describes Vodou as an all powerful and supernatural being and even though he clearly writes of the ceremony he goes on to write that the ceremony is cloaked in secrecy with no onlookers present. This does then raise the question how would he be able to view the ceremony? He states that the ceremony is accompanied by “the most horrible things that delirium is capable of imagining...”¹²⁷

There were references to Vodou in earlier literary works such as *Nouveaux Voyages aux Isles Françaises d'Amérique* in which Father Jean-Baptiste Labat recounts tales of his time on the island as a missionary. Although he does not refer to Vodou directly he makes several references to the beliefs of the slaves in the Caribbean.¹²⁸ There is an interesting translation of an encounter with a slave that can be found in *Voodoo: Truth and Fantasy* where Labat suspects a slave of making a deal with the devil and of carrying a bag full of items that are used for sorcery.¹²⁹ The law at this time would have led to the execution of any slave being found to practice their own religion, a threat used by Father Labat to maintain power. Slavery meant that slaves were being persecuted irrespective of their religious beliefs, the plantation owners and slave drivers appeared to require very little reason to punish those who were in their charge. Vodou gave those in power another excuse for oppression. This exercise of power is described by Lukes as a ‘radical’ view.¹³⁰ Hindess discusses this view further by suggesting that Lukes is concerned with “what he sees as those more sinister cases in which

¹²⁷ A translation of a section of the work by Moreau Saint-Méry can be found in Hurbon, 132.

¹²⁸ Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveaux Voyages aux Isles Françaises d'Amérique* (Paris, 1722).

¹²⁹ Hurbon 130-31.

¹³⁰ S. Lukes, *Power: A radical view* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

the power to control the thoughts of others is used against the interests of its victims.”¹³¹ This theory can also be applied to the plight of the slaves.

Haiti was the first Black Republic in the Western hemisphere and had achieved independence through the leadership and struggle of the slaves. Vodou had played a major part in this process and so to the white world Vodou was seen as a force to be suppressed and ultimately eradicated. The Church and the Government joined forces and began a series of campaigns against Vodou that would be known as the anti-superstitious or anti-superstition campaigns.¹³²

Travellers to the region also helped to fuel the hatred and misunderstanding by recounting tales of cannibalism, Satanism and perversion, tales that would be spread in the Western world and believed. Racism was on the rise in the nineteenth century and Haiti and Vodou provided an inexhaustible supply of mystery, fear and exoticism. The literary representations will be considered in more depth in the next chapter as it is important to understand the impact that these inflammatory words would have on their readers.

The anti-superstition campaigns are suspected to have started as early as 1860 following the fall of Emperor Faustin Soulouque,¹³³ a leader who was also a follower of Vodou. In 1860 Haiti signed an agreement with the Vatican to establish Catholicism as the official religion. Vodou was driven into secrecy by slavery and then in the late nineteenth century was driven into secrecy by the

¹³¹ Barry Hindess, *Discourses of Power: from Hobbes to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 69.

¹³² It should be noted that anti-superstition campaigns are not exclusive to Haiti. There are examples as recently as 2006 in India, reported in *The Asian News* online [26th April 2006] at <http://www.theasiannews.co.uk/community/heritage/s/508/508463_living_gods_facing_purge.html>

¹³³ Faustin Soulouque was a black leader of Haiti from 1847, he declared himself Emperor in 1849 before being overthrown in 1859, and he was widely regarded as a barbaric leader.

Catholic Church. The persecution of Vodou that had begun with the overthrow of Soulouque was to find added impetus with the publication of *Hayti or the Black Republic* and the tales of cannibalism and human sacrifice associated with Vodou.¹³⁴ Vodou was considered a problem from the moment the Concordat was signed with Rome in 1860, for despite Catholicism having a privileged status on the island the people were still attending Vodou ceremonies and turning to Vodou for spiritual guidance. The Church and Haitian officials started to consider how to resolve this 'Vodou problem'. There were attempts at anti-superstition campaigns during the 1860s and 1890s led by the Haitian government and the Church. Many of the early literary works and historiographic accounts of Haiti accuse Presidents of being Vodouists. Many of the Presidents who were, or were said to be, Vodouists were black and therefore deemed unsuccessful or incompetent, an extension of racial prejudice. It was not accepted that Vodou was a legitimate religion and so those who were followers in power could not be trusted.

There is a first-hand account by one who was in support of the campaign, Roger Riou, *The Island of My Life: From Petty Crime to Priestly Mission*.¹³⁵ He writes with pride that "I felt that I had done useful work..."¹³⁶ He describes the artifacts as "Voodoo signs" and how he, along with a crowd, gathered them up and burned them. This attitude was arguably worse than St. John who wrote of second hand accounts rather than actual involvement.

¹³⁴ St. John 187-257.

¹³⁵ Roger Riou, *The Island of My Life: From Petty Crime to Priestly Mission* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1975) translated from the French *Adieu La Tortue* (Paris: Robert Laffont Publishers, 1974).

¹³⁶ Riou 155.

During the American Occupation there were numerous accounts of Vodou, especially directed at the Cacos.¹³⁷ The vocabulary of the marines was found to feature the same words as those that had been used throughout the years of hatred directed at Haiti, the reports from 1791 feature words such as “bandits”, “savages” and “cannibals.”¹³⁸ These same words were used by the Americans in the twentieth century, re-affirming racism in the West. Throughout the American Occupation, and shortly afterwards, there were several accounts of how the Marines were ‘saving’ Haiti by destroying the idols of the African ancestors and ridding Haiti of the Vodou temples.¹³⁹ In *The White King of La Gonave* Faustin Wirkus gives an account of how he helped ‘save’ the Haitian people from cannibalism and black magic. His book has several accounts of the treatment of the Haitians including an early passage which tells of his arrival in the barracks of a mountain village, Perodin. In just two weeks the Americans had accumulated a pile of hats¹⁴⁰ and a large collection of Vodou paraphernalia which Wirkus describes;

There were other things - things I was seeing for the first time at close range...But of the objects which interested me most were a jumbled collection of grotesquely painted, rag-doll looking things – transfixed with thorns and pieces of wire; and long-strands of bright-colored beads – the beads interspersed with human and animal teeth.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ The Cacos were groups of peasants who resisted the American invasion, opening themselves up for persecution by the Marines who justified their actions against them.

¹³⁸ The reports of 1791 can be found in Jacques Thibau, *Le Temps de Saint Domingue: L'Esclavage et la Révolution Française* (Paris: Lattès, 1989) 270-331.

¹³⁹ These activities are supported by the testimony of Roger Riou as mentioned previously.

¹⁴⁰ References to the number of hats occur throughout many accounts of the American Occupation and each ‘hat’ or ‘straw hat’ represents a Haitian killed.

¹⁴¹ Faustin Wirkus and Taney Dudley, *The White King of La Gonave* (New York: Garden City, 1931) 51.

The paragraph above allows an insight into the scale of the persecution against Vodou; items were being collected at an alarming rate during the occupation and would continue with even more ferocity during the anti-superstition campaign that began in 1940. In 1940 the Catholic Church set out to eradicate Vodou, they believed that people were denouncing the spirits but when they found they were not and that altars and Vodou items could still be found in many dwellings, the Church took a radical step. The Church insisted that all of the faithful followers of Catholicism were to take an anti-superstitious oath; the text of this can be found in *Voodoo in Haiti* and includes promises not to attend Vodou ceremonies, to destroy all objects and not sink to any superstitious practice.¹⁴² There were severe penances for those found to be continuing with their Vodou practices. This was to become more brutal when President Lescot ordered the army to assist in the hunting down of all Vodou items. Seized items were piled high, drums, bowls and talismans, these were then set on fire to symbolise the victory of the Church over Satan, thousands of items were destroyed during this campaign and irreparable damage was inflicted on Vodou.¹⁴³ It is difficult to conceive that such a vicious campaign could take place.

This form of 'discipline' is described by Foucault as a specific form of power. He argues that it is not necessarily a repressive or negative act, it could be seen as a productive way to utilise the capacities of those being 'disciplined'.¹⁴⁴ Although his theories applied to the motivation of the American forces in occupation, it was definitely not in the best interest of the Haitians.

¹⁴² Métraux 341.

¹⁴³ Roger Riou wrote that it took him a year to catalogue all of the Voodoo items he had confiscated.

¹⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Allen Lane, 1979).

The anti-superstition campaigns have been represented in many paintings such as this example by Wilson Anacr on which shows the joint forces of the Church and military to destroy Vodou and the methods that were used to rid communities of the objects (Fig.17).



Fig.17. Wilson Anacr on, *The Anti-Superstition Campaign*. 1995.¹⁴⁵

Haitians were being persecuted for their beliefs and facing yet another form of oppression. The government, increasingly aware of the national and international disapproval for their actions, withdrew their support for the anti-superstition campaign early in 1942.

¹⁴⁵ Fig. 17. Wilson Anacr on, *The Anti-Superstition Campaign*. 1995, in *The Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, by Donald J. Cosentino, ed. (California: UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995) plate 6.9, 191.

The severity of this campaign lasted for just under two years, as fierce as the attack was on Vodou the people still turned to their loas, the spirits, for support. In 1946 President Estimé¹⁴⁶ led the country into a new era and with many of the intellectuals supporting the authenticity of heritage there was a revival of Vodou. Presidents of Haiti have used Vodou, whether they were followers or not, to maintain the support of the people they lead. The next section will look at the politics of Haiti and how Vodou played a part.

Politics in Haiti since 1950

Between the years of 1950 and 1957 there were several provisional Presidents and heads of state before François Duvalier became President and the Duvalier regime began. Haiti went to the polls in September 1957 when they voted by a huge majority for this Black Nationalist candidate. These elections were among the few that had been held throughout Haiti's history and were heavily shrouded in corruption, fraud and intimidation. Ironically all of the candidates employed underhand tactics so it was democratic in an unorthodox manner. There were indiscretions throughout, La Gonave registered more votes than the total population and illiterate voters had to take their polling cards to their favoured candidate, opening themselves up to intimidation by hired henchmen.¹⁴⁷

Francois Duvalier was a doctor prior to being President and he opened many clinics throughout the country helping thousands of Haitians to whom he was

¹⁴⁶ Dumarsais Estimé became President of Haiti in August 1946 where he stayed for four years before being overthrown in May 1950.

¹⁴⁷ For more on the elections of 1957 see Philippe Girard, *Paradise Lost* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 92-93, and Elizabeth Abbot, *Haiti: The Duvaliers and Their Legacy* (London: Hale, 1988) 63-77.

affectionately known as 'Papa Doc.' He spent time in America receiving additional training to help fight the disease known as yaws.¹⁴⁸

Duvalier soon realised that he needed to use force and power rather than democracy to keep his hold on Haiti. This was to be the start of a regime that would last for many years. He quickly gained a reputation as a ruthless and brutal leader and reports, rumours and testimonies assisted in securing his regime. He was alleged to have started his regime immediately by jailing hundreds of political opponents. He arranged for a journalist to be gang-raped and shot¹⁴⁹ and most shockingly as outlined in detail in Abbot's *Haiti: The Duvaliers and Their Legacy*, was the rounding up of men, women and children in the back of trucks who were subsequently buried alive under soil and concrete.¹⁵⁰

Vodou played a major role in his regime and Duvalier studied Haitian folk culture, especially Vodou, with black pride remaining central to his thought.¹⁵¹ He created a paramilitary force called the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (Volunteers for National Security). They were poorly paid and so increased their income by extortion and bribes, they became known as the *Tontons Macoutes*. The Macoutes were recruited from the poorer black majority; they dressed in a denim uniform with red scarf, carried guns and wore dark sunglasses.¹⁵² Race was an issue with the Macoutes, they were black and from the lower classes and

¹⁴⁸ Similar to leprosy yaws was widespread in Haiti before the advent of penicillin. The US helped Duvalier to rid Haiti of the endemic during the early 1940s.

¹⁴⁹ Yvonne Hakime-Rimpel was a journalist who openly opposed Duvalier, she was gang-raped, shot and left for dead, and miraculously she survived.

¹⁵⁰ Abbot 80-81.

¹⁵¹ For more on Duvalier see for example Bernard Diedrich and Al Burt, *Papa Doc: Haiti and its Dictator* (1969; Middlesex: Penguin, 1972).

¹⁵² The colours of the uniform reflected those of the Cacos, the rebel forces who stood against the American marines. The red scarf is also recognisable as Vodou.

given power within their ranks they took pleasure in humiliating and persecuting the mulatto rich. It is estimated that there were over three thousand Macoutes, men and women, using violence and corruption under the veil of Vodou. Many of the Macoutes were Vodou practitioners, many were priests. Duvalier entrusted his regime to the spirits of Vodou. As time passed the Vodou he practiced became more unorthodox and it was alleged that he was indulging in unsavoury practices upon the bodies of his dead enemies as part of Vodou ceremonies.¹⁵³

Philippe Girard describes Papa Doc as “impenetrable”, an accurate description of a man who was always impeccably dressed in dark suits and hat with a calm and well poised demeanour.¹⁵⁴ The people believed that he was the personification of Baron Samedi, the loa, or spirit, who was commonly symbolised as wearing black suits and being associated with graveyards. The symbols of Baron Samedi are the skull and crossbones, graves and shovels.¹⁵⁵ Baron Samedi is an iconic representation of Vodou and appears throughout cultural production as will be identified. This may be due to the dark aspect of his demeanour as there are many more colourful loas within the Vodou pantheon.¹⁵⁶

Duvalier’s demeanour and dress deliberately played on the Baron Samedi image (Fig. 18), a stereotype that would appear in cinema and animation in future representations of Vodou.

¹⁵³ There were also rumours in Haiti that Duvalier had sacrificed his mentor, Lorimer Denis, in exchange for the presidency of Haiti. This is unsubstantiated. These rumours are mentioned in Diederich and Burt 97-8.

¹⁵⁴ Girard 94.

¹⁵⁵ Details on the loa can be found in Phyllis Galembo, *Vodou: Visions and Voices of Haiti* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1998). For information on Baron Samedi see Galembo, 18-21.

¹⁵⁶ For more information on the loas and their associated foods, colours and offerings see Hurbon, 142-3.

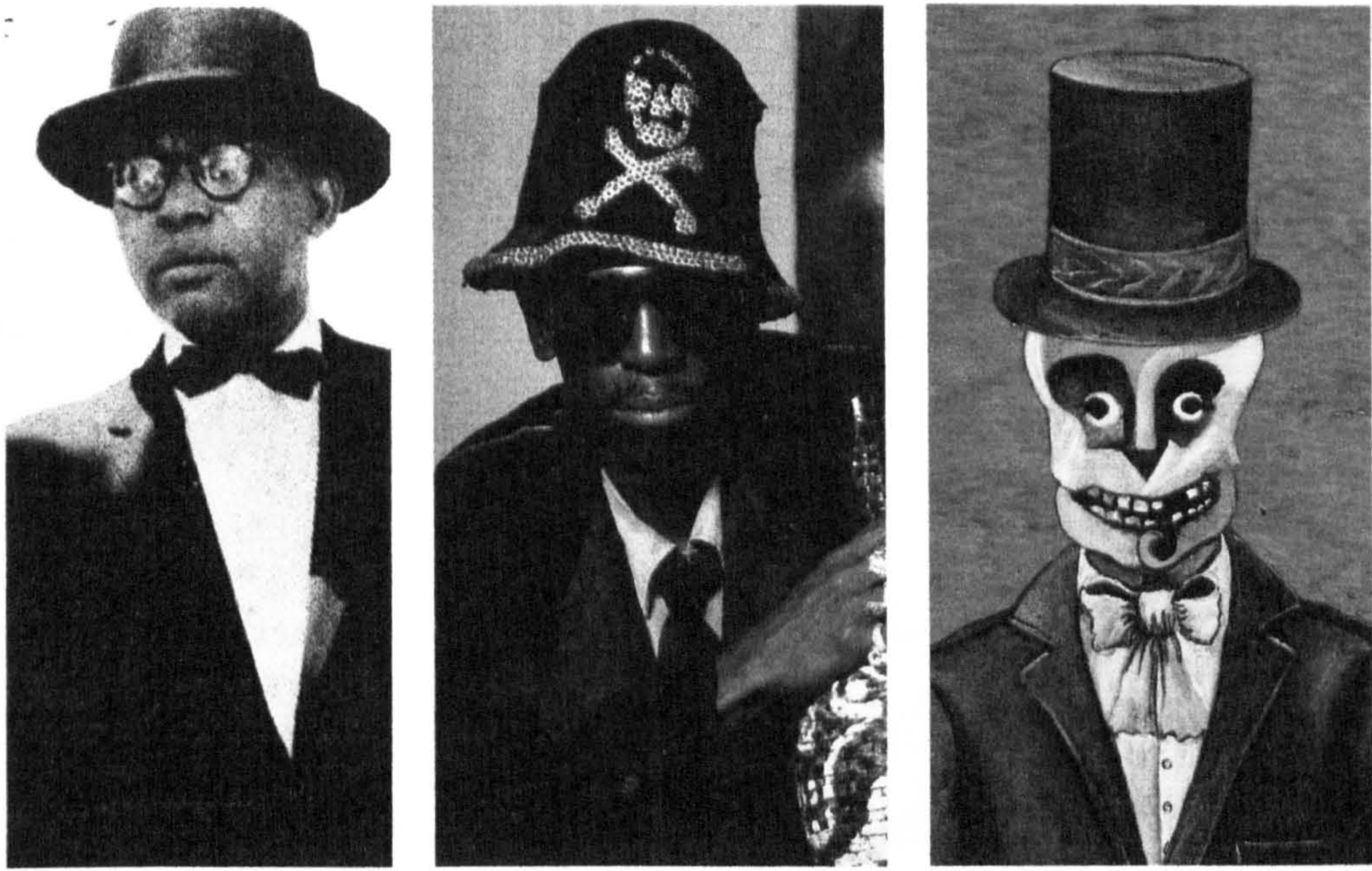


Fig.18. Representations of Baron Samedi, from left to right, Papa Doc Duvalier in familiar *Baron* attire, Jean Philippe Jeannot as *Baron* and a detail from a painting.¹⁵⁷

Duvalier became a personification of the misrepresented Vodou that many had tried to dispel. The profile of his dictatorship and that of the Tontons Macoutes were immortalised in the work of Graham Greene in his book *The Comedians*.¹⁵⁸ Duvalier was reported to have read and hated the book, something that Greene delighted in and writes about in his autobiography, *Ways of Escape*.¹⁵⁹ The Duvalier regime continued through two more elections which took place in 1961 and in 1964, when Duvalier received, allegedly, one hundred percent of the votes and was made President for life. By 1963 US relations with Haiti were breaking down and the tone of articles at the time in periodicals such as *Life* were

¹⁵⁷ Fig.17. Left, photograph of Duvalier from 1957 in Hurbon, 118. Centre, photograph of Jean Philippe Jeannot as Baron in Phyllis Galembo, *Vodou: Visions and Voices of Haiti* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1998) 19. Right, detail from painting in Hurbon, 74.

¹⁵⁸ Graham Greene, *The Comedians* (1965; London: Vintage, 1999).

¹⁵⁹ Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980). The reaction and account of Duvalier's response can be found on pages 228-30 and 232.

indicative of the American sentiment with headlines reading “A voodoo-touched tyrant exhausts patience of US and his people” and “guns, black magic, torture are what ‘Doc’ prescribes.”¹⁶⁰ There is an echo back to the occupation as part of the article is related to a Marine who had been on tour in the country being expelled by the tyrannical dictator.¹⁶¹

The regime did not end with the death of François Duvalier in 1971. As he was dying he made his son Jean-Claude president for life. The Macoutes and the Duvalierist regime continued until 1986 when Jean-Claude, nicknamed ‘Baby Doc,’ was finally driven from office. One of the catalysts for the demise of Duvalierism was the Catholic Church. During François Duvalier’s Presidency Haiti was excommunicated because of alleged associations with the murder of a number of priests. This excommunication was overturned when a concordat was signed to give Duvalier power over Haitian clergy. When Baby Doc took over he invited Pope John Paul II to visit Haiti and the Vatican regained the right to name Haitian bishops. During his visit the Pope gave a speech in which he condemned the regime by telling the masses that things must change in Haiti. This was to be the destruction of the Duvalier stronghold. The Duvalier regime left behind a legacy of death and destruction, thousands were murdered and the country faced economic crisis. Vodou had been represented in a negative and frightful way by the highest authority, the presidency, and it was to plunge Vodou into yet another downward spiral, it had another battle to win.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Barry Farrell, “It’s Hell to Live in Haiti with Papa Doc”, *Life* 54.10 (Mar., 1963) 28-35.

¹⁶¹ This section also refers to the arrest of the Marine’s son, adding to the construction of the leadership in Haiti for the American reader, Farrell, 34.

¹⁶² For further information on the Duvalier regime see Bernard Diedrich and Al Burt, *Papa Doc: Haiti and Its Dictator* (1969; Middlesex: Penguin, 1972) and Elizabeth Abbot, *Haiti: The Duvaliers and Their Legacy* (London: Hale, 1988).

Following Baby Doc's departure the country was left reeling, deforestation was widespread, hundreds of thousands of Haitians had sought exile, AIDS was killing a generation and the Macoutes were being lynched. Some of these occurrences following the departure of Jean-Claude Duvalier were documented by photojournalist Alex Webb in his collection *Under a Grudging Sun*. There are two graphic images of the mutilated bodies of suspected Tontons Macoutes and the violence of the 1987 election.¹⁶³ The country faced instability for a number of years and from 1986 until 1991 there was no formal government.

At the end of 1990 the country held presidential elections, the precedents for which were not good. In 1916 the elections were led by the American occupation. In 1957 Duvalier was brought to power and in 1987 the elections had to be terminated because of violence. One man who was to gain the support of the people this time was Jean-Bertrand Aristide. He was an ordained Catholic Priest who also followed Vodou. He was educated, black and he had survived a number of assassination attempts having made enemies of the Macoutes and the Vatican. He used symbolism from Vodou and Haitian culture to gain the trust of the people. He used phrases that were common amongst agricultural workers and he used the iconic image of the cockerel, a creature used in Vodou sacrifice and in the sport of cockfighting to enable illiterate voters to select a drawing on ballot papers.¹⁶⁴ The elections took place without incident, thousands of voters turned out and Aristide won his place in Haitian history. The only incident during election days came from Aristide himself when he accused America of

¹⁶³ Alex Webb, *Under a Grudging Sun* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

¹⁶⁴ Cockfighting was and is a very popular spectator sport in Haiti and the Dominican Republic with the rings providing a meeting place in villages and communities.

interfering with the process, an accusation that was to impact on future international relations.¹⁶⁵ During Aristide's first few months in office there were several attempted coups and political tensions and yet this soft spoken religious man was settling into his Presidency. These were brutal times in Haiti, a form of torture known as 'necklacing' was being used, some suspected by Aristide, to rid the country of opposition.¹⁶⁶ Aristide gave a speech calling on the people to give the Macoutes what they deserved, the implication being the necklace.¹⁶⁷ Aristide was overthrown by Raoul Cédras. He had a conspiracy theory that the US orchestrated the coup and although there is evidence that the CIA had some of the opposition on the payroll as informants there is no evidence that they supported the coup. A US economic embargo had repercussions on the people and children who were dying from food shortages. There was an increase in Haitian boat people, those seeking a new life in the US or Cuba with many meeting their end in the waters that had claimed their ancestors centuries before.¹⁶⁸ In 1993 Aristide approached Bill Clinton, the then President, to assist his restoration to power, sanctions were lifted and it was decided that the US would reinstate Aristide. This did not happen immediately due to the political stance of Haiti leading to refusal of entry to the US, now referred to as the 'Harlan County' incident.¹⁶⁹ The embargo was resumed in October 1993 and in 1994 a UN resolution gave the US the right to use all necessary means to reinstate Aristide.¹⁷⁰ Aristide remained in power this time until 1996 when he stood

¹⁶⁵ America sent many observers out to the elections, including former President Jimmy Carter, to ensure that they were peaceful.

¹⁶⁶ Necklacing was a method of torture where a car tire would be soaked in petrol, placed around the victim's neck and set ablaze.

¹⁶⁷ For more information about this speech and the inferences see Gerard, 123.

¹⁶⁸ For more on the boat people see Lawless, 4-9.

¹⁶⁹ For further information on the *Harlan County* incident see Girard, 139-142.

¹⁷⁰ Although the US did not technically invade Haiti this time they were there in force and occupied the country once more.

down, and then in 2001 Aristide was inaugurated as President for a third time, another paramilitary force was created, the *Chimères*, and force was used to bring Haiti to order.¹⁷¹ He was ultimately overthrown in February 2004.¹⁷²

The one positive thing that Aristide did do for Haiti was to officially recognise Vodou as a religion. Vodou was still a part of life for people and when Haiti was hit by tropical storm Jeanne later in 2004 mass areas were flooded causing death and destruction. 2004 saw the bicentenary of independence for Haiti, that same year Haiti was top of the list as the most corrupt country in the world, a place it maintains.¹⁷³

Vodou to Voodoo

Vodou has an oral tradition and therefore it is difficult to identify the etymology of any of the words used to reference the religion. There are numerous historiographic and literary references. The religion of Haiti can be found written as *Vaudoux*, *Vodun*, *Vodoun*, *Vodou*, *Voodoo*, *Voudou*, *Vodu* and many other variations. The first use of *Vaudoux* can be found when in 1797 Moreau Saint-Méry¹⁷⁴ used it as a singular noun, in 1809 M.E. Descourtilz referred to *Vaudoux* as a plural when he describes the religion in more detail within *Voyages d'un Naturaliste en Haiti, 1799-1803*.¹⁷⁵ Following the independence of Haiti in 1804 the religious practice was suppressed which may account for the lack of

¹⁷¹ The *Chimères* are described by the US Department of State as "violent gangs," see Roger F. Noriega, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, *Haiti at the Crossroads of Democracy* on website <<http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/rm/31411.htm>>

¹⁷² For further reading on the overthrow of Aristide see Paul Farmer, "Who Removed Aristide," *London Review of Books* 26.8 (April, 2004).

¹⁷³ This ranking can be found on the Transparency International's annual survey of the most corrupt countries in the world, 2006 <<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0781359.html>>

¹⁷⁴ Moreau Saint-Méry 45.

¹⁷⁵ M.E. Descourtilz, *Voyages d'un Naturaliste en Haiti, 1799-1803* Vol.3 (Paris, 1809) 180-87.

reference to Vodou during the period between 1804 and 1840. Those that did visit the island are likely to have mixed with the elite and not wished to acknowledge the folk cultures of the blacks, instead opting for the ‘civilised’ society. When Soulouque became President in 1847 he encouraged Vodou and, according to a reference in Alasdair Pettinger’s article of 2004, the first mention of Vodou in an English language text was from a missionary called W.W. Webley. He wrote “they [dancers as part of a religious service] form themselves into one vast society (called les vaudous) which almost deluges the Haitian part of the Island.”¹⁷⁶ Sir Spenser St John wrote of the ‘Black Republic’ and retained the spelling of *Vaudoux* throughout, this book was to have a major influence on the perceptions of Vodou and was to be quoted by subsequent authors on Haitian culture in the late nineteenth century.¹⁷⁷

The press in the Southern States of the US started to report on Vodou and in 1874 an article was written in an attempt to explain how Vodou arrived in New Orleans, the spelling had changed and was written as *Voudou*.¹⁷⁸ This spelling of *Voudou* has been recognised as Louisiana Creole, it featured in English language newspapers in New Orleans and generally remained unchanged when translated, for example in George Cable’s *The Grandissimes*.¹⁷⁹ At the end of the nineteenth century it was recognised that English suffixes were added, in particular in Louisiana, and this Americanisation of the word then led to the more familiar

¹⁷⁶ W.W. Webley, “Haiti” (letter dated 8 December 1849), *Missionary Herald*, February 1850, included in the *Baptist Magazine* 42 (London, 1850), 122-23 in Alasdair Pettinger, “From Vaudoux to Voodoo”, *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 40.4 (2004) 417.

¹⁷⁷ St John was quoted in J.A. Froude, *The English in the West Indies* (London, 1888) 165 and 302.

¹⁷⁸ “A Wild Story – 1723 – The Birth of Voudouism”, *New Orleans Daily Picayune* 28 June 1874, quoted in Ron Bodin, *Voodoo Past and Present* (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1990) 54-57.

¹⁷⁹ Examples within George W. Cable, *The Grandissimes* (1879; New York: Hill and Wang, 1957) 311 and 312.

vowel sounds and spellings. In 1888 the spelling of *Voodoo* was acknowledged as the one commonly written spelling in the US.¹⁸⁰

Pettinger writes in his article that it could be the Anglicisation or Americanisation of the spelling to *Voodoo* is a product of the exotic, it is not an English word and could not be mistaken as such (the French spelling of *Vaudoux* appears to be French and does not have the exoticism). He goes on to examine how it has been broken down into two syllables and can be deemed as a word of children or (in the imperial view) of ‘savages’.¹⁸¹ Haitian *Voodoo*, linked to cannibalism and black magic, was found within many travel accounts and especially those produced during the American Occupation. This spelling remained and was widely used to refer to any magic/religious practise whether of African origin or not and continued to be employed as a metaphor for disdain in terms such as ‘voodoo economics’ and ‘voodoo death’. Even though this spelling has negative connotations it has been embraced within popular culture such as *Voodoo Lounge*, the title of a 1994 album by the Rolling Stones.¹⁸² Another variation of the spelling came following the American Occupation when English speaking scholars made use of the spelling *Vodun* with variants such as *Voudoun* and *Vaudun*. The term *Vodou* is now widely used and appears to be accepted by scholars as a way to rectify the misconceptions of the religion within Haiti. The shift seems to define the spellings but is not definitive. *Vodou* has a clear link to the ethnographic study of the Haitian religion, and *Voodoo* refers to the representations in popular culture and is used indiscriminately to describe

¹⁸⁰ W.W.Newell, “Myths of Voodoo Worship and Child Sacrifice in Hayti”, *Journal of American Folklore* 1 (1888) 16.

¹⁸¹ Pettinger 420.

¹⁸² Rolling Stones, *Voodoo Lounge*, Virgin, 1994.

witchcraft, black magic and has little to do with its Haitian origins. Other spellings can still be found. During the past two decades there has been another shift to the use of *Voodoo*, not in a derogatory way but as an introduction to the Haitian religion. This use is not necessarily representational of Haitian culture as it was a century ago, it is a word that is in common use and it is far more important that the content is representational of the religion rather than deliberating on which word is being used. *Voodoo* is commonly used for the religion as it is found in Louisiana and has been since the late nineteenth century. The terminology of Haitian culture and translations of Kréyol¹⁸³ will be constantly moving and changing and so the etymology of *Vodou* will continue and the orthography of the religion will continue to be a subject of debate.

For the purposes of this thesis, and from this point forward, *Vodou* will be used when referring specifically to the Haitian religion and the term *Voodoo* at all other times, for popular culture and the religion as it is found in Louisiana. The only variants will be when referring specifically to the work of an author where their preferred spelling will be quoted.

Summary

This chapter has explored and examined the turbulent history of Haiti and Vodou since 1492. It has shown how a religion that evolved from slavery has faced oppression and persecution. This historical overview has placed Vodou within Haiti's past to contextualise the representations that were to follow in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century.

¹⁸³ *Kréyol* is the accepted spelling of the Haitian language and culture; it may also be seen as *Creole* when referring to the culture found in Louisiana.

Haiti, or Saint Domingue as it was known in the seventeenth century under French rule, was for a time the most lucrative colony in western colonial history. It was during this time that the slave trade grew. This chapter has examined the mix of peoples from West Africa who were to find themselves captured for slavery. The power of the master over the slave has been explored by considering Said and Foucault's theories of power/knowledge and power. Although these ideas relate to the dominant force of the coloniser it is too simplistic to apply a straightforward power/knowledge theory. It is more appropriate for Haiti and Vodou to consider Bhabha's argument that Said's suggestion that power in the colonial situation is in the possession of the coloniser is too simplistic.¹⁸⁴ There is more complexity to the master/slave dichotomy, especially when considering the social structure within Haiti.¹⁸⁵

Colour has been a factor within the construction of Haiti, racism has been found amongst Haitians between the whites and mulattoes, the mulattoes and blacks and the whites and blacks as well as from colonial rule. Haitians have faced the horrors of slavery, the brutality of political oppression and international persecution and yet have maintained their religion. When this is considered in terms of contemporary Vodou it is more understandable why many followers are secretive and distrustful. The Haitian heritage has been maintained through Vodou. Having arrived from Africa many people from various tribes were displaced but their beliefs were combined and this survival instinct has remained with the religion that is still practiced by millions worldwide.

¹⁸⁴ Bhabha, in Baker, 94-95.

¹⁸⁵ See Wingfield 338-447.

Vodou is practised throughout the Haitian diaspora, with New Orleans arguably being the most well known outside the Caribbean. Slaves arrived in Louisiana early in the eighteenth century, some of whom were transported from Haiti, and Louisiana Creole evolved.¹⁸⁶ Louisiana Voodoo and Haitian Vodou do have similarities and both are considered in the following chapters across cultural production. The evolution of Haitian Vodou has been discussed and compared to the inequalities of other cultures. Africa was seen as the 'Dark Continent' by the Victorians and as Brantlinger suggests, the Victorians accepted sensationalist accounts as "the reality of Africa."¹⁸⁷ Said felt that there was a comparable colonial attitude towards Asia when he examines the work of people such as Caussin and Carlyle.¹⁸⁸ The colonial attitude did not recognise the beliefs and culture of Haiti but Vodou was finally recognised as a religion on 4 April 2003.¹⁸⁹

Vodou has been entwined with the political history of Haiti, despised by some, practiced by many and abused by a few, but whatever the context it has remained evident within the fabric of Haitian society. Many historiographic and literary representations will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. The influence of Vodou has been evident since the Haitian revolution but even before this there was evidence of a growing force in Haiti. An example of this is Makandal who Pierre writes of, one of the most recognised pre-revolutionary leaders in Haiti, and a Vodouist.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ See Mosadomi 223.

¹⁸⁷ Brantlinger 198.

¹⁸⁸ Caussin de Percival 3: 332-9 and Thomas Carlyle 63.

¹⁸⁹ President Bertrand Aristide issued a decree to officially recognise Vodou as a religion in Haiti.

¹⁹⁰ Pierre <<http://www.irsp.org/culture/faith1.htm>>

As communication evolved and cultural production expanded Vodou was discovered by the masses. American forces occupied Haiti early in the twentieth century and sensational accounts of Vodou began to disseminate throughout the Western world. Despite strengthening the infrastructure in Haiti the US military were an occupying force and another era of colonial rule had begun.

Many of the representations discussed throughout this thesis are visual; in films, animation, television and theatre. The visual representations have been influenced by the visual elements of Vodou and so these have been introduced. The European influence on Vodou art is evident in the flags and the ironwork. The temporality of the vèvè means that they are rarely seen in context. The symbology of the vèvè appears throughout cultural production as will be shown.

The arts of Haiti all have a sacred element, they are inspired by Vodou and the artists are directed by the loa. Vodou arts are created on a low budget, recycling any objects that appear and although the objects in isolation are not sacred and they are not 'art,' by being used for the loa they take on a new meaning and become sacred. The altars provide an insight into the eclecticism that has been Haitian history. The 1940s catapulted the Haitian artists into the international art market and their work was highly sought after. DeWitt Peters marketed the work from the Centre d'Art and Haitian art was purchased for major galleries such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Today there are numerous galleries that trade in Haitian art and work by the better known names such as Hector Hyppolite command very high prices in auction houses across the world. There remains a high demand for the sequined flags and Vodou paintings created by

the houngan who work from their Haitian roots. The arts reflect the impulse of Vodou and the intensity of the processes in creating work, there is a dynamic cultural synthesis taking place.¹⁹¹

The cultural representations will be discussed throughout this thesis but they should be considered in the context of the direct persecution that Vodou has faced. The Catholic Church and the Government systematically attempted to eradicate Vodou from Haiti during the anti-superstition campaigns which began as early as the 1860s. There are first-hand accounts of this attempted eradication by Riou and Wirkus.¹⁹² In direct contrast to this it has been examined how the Duvalier regime exploited Vodou and raised the profile of Haitian culture for political gain. Papa Doc's use of the image of Baron Samedi, the loa of the dead, is testament to his knowledge of the culture and his willingness to rule by fear. Political turmoil has continued in Haiti and the country remains in crisis. The etymology of Vodou has been explored from its origins in the late eighteenth century.

This chapter has discussed the history of Haiti and Vodou. This has established the context for the cultural representations that were to follow in Britain and America. The following chapters explore the influence that Vodou has had and how this Haitian culture has been portrayed since 1850.

¹⁹¹ As mentioned previously, Haitian Art merits further research and there is not the scope to discuss within this study.

¹⁹² Riou 155, and Wirkus 51.

Chapter Two

VOODOO IN LITERATURE

Introduction

The earliest narratives of Vodou were those written by the French in the late eighteenth century. This chapter will explore the representations of Vodou within the narratives of the British and American writers whose presence in Haiti increased during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The selected narratives will show how Vodou was re-imagined in the mind of the writers, and how the representations metamorphosed from Vodou into Voodoo. The spellings used will be those that are most appropriate to the narrative being discussed and the same as those used by the author.

Literary representations of Vodou across all genres will be discussed starting with the travel and non-fiction narratives to contextualise Voodoo in the imagination of the factual writers. This section will consider the source of the information gathered and interpretations of a Caribbean religion considering the socio-cultural and societal influences on the authors. The early travelogues provided a basis for literary works into the twentieth century. The earliest representations of Voodoo would constantly be viewed as authoritative on the subject, being referenced continuously. During the twentieth century there was an increase in more carefully considered non-fiction narratives, ethnographic studies of the religion based on research. These will be explored to show how there was an attempt to redress the balance between myth and reality. Andrew Hacker makes a point in his work *Two Nations* when he states that the fact that “Americans of African origin once wore the chains of chattels remains alive in

the memory of both races and continues to separate them.”¹ This idea of racism will be considered to question whether it permeates literary discourse. Racism is arguably evident in many of the representations of Vodou. Hacker’s suggestion that racism is very real draws on the work of many black scholars. His work, as described by bell hooks, “highlights the anti black feelings white people cultivate and maintain in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.”²

During the American Occupation there were works written by those in the occupying forces who decided to tell of their experiences in non-fiction narratives that were somewhat fictionalised. A number of these narratives will be reviewed as they were the primary source material for millions of readers across the US in the early part of the twentieth century, shaping public opinion of Haiti and her culture. These American Marines also had links to other writers on the subject of Voodoo and their respective works will be compared.

There is a wide variety of Voodoo in fiction, in horror, crime, thriller, romance and homo-erotica for adults and in a number of stories for children. A selection of books spanning the twentieth century will be reviewed to consider their treatment of Voodoo and how some of the literature has been re-imagined in other cultural products, including novel to film.

¹ Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: black and white, separate, hostile, unequal* (New York: Scribner, 2003) 3.

² bell hooks, *Killing Rage: ending racism* (London: Penguin, 1996) 17.

Research has been undertaken by scholars such as Evelyn O'Callaghan in the field of women's literature³ and this forms the basis of the section within this chapter that specifically addresses the women writers of Voodoo and Haiti. There are many important female literary figures such as Maya Deren, Joan Dayan, Katherine Dunham, Karen McCarthy-Brown and Zora Neale Hurston who have their place in the history of Vodou narratives. Earlier writers such as Edna Taft and Winifred James will be considered and all will be examined to explore how they constructed Voodoo from a feminist perspective. Vodou has many female priestesses, known as *Mambo*, within the religion and women play an important role in many aspects of Haitian society. There is still evidence that women in Haiti are not always equal to their male counterparts. As mentioned in the previous chapter in the creation of the Vodou flags there were no women artists identified although they do assist in the sewing process. There will be an exploration of whether the narratives of female writers differ from their male counterparts in the treatment of Vodou. In addition to this there will be a consideration of the black female perspective. There are many scholars who have written of race, for this chapter though bell hooks will be considered for her theories of feminism and race. Hooks argues that black women have been excluded throughout history and that sexism and racism negates any recognition of their place in society.⁴ This will be considered when examining the work of Hurston and other black writers.

³ Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Women Writing the West Indies, 1804-1939: A Hot Place Belonging to Us* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

⁴ bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black women and feminism* (London: Pluto, 1982).

There will be a review of the scientific study into the phenomena of zombification and its relationship to Vodou. The work of Wade Davis will be considered, an ethnobotanist who researched this subject during the 1980s.⁵

There are many associations with the 'dark side', Voodoo that is associated with cannibalism, witchcraft, black magic, Satanism and zombies. This will be discussed to examine how these associations became an integral part of Voodoo literature. The final part of this chapter will address the fact that a number of the early books were illustrated, the covers and the artwork were indicative of the tone of the content.

The aim of this chapter is to identify how Voodoo and Haiti have been constructed within narratives since the eighteenth century.

Travel Narratives 1850 - 1915

Vodou has existed in silence, it has an oral tradition. No elements of its history were written down and the earliest accounts were interpretations in the imagination of observers with many contradictions. The French were visiting what we now know as Haiti, and there were French plantation owners and travellers writing their accounts from as early as the eighteenth century. These earliest accounts, written in French, have been mentioned previously as they contained the first references to *Vaudoux*. This section will focus on accounts of the religion within English and American travelogues that were written prior to the American Occupation.

⁵ The subject of zombification will also be considered in the wider context of scientific study.

Steve Fenton writes in *Ethnicity* that there was a difference between the races resulting in inequality and difference in terms of social, political and scientific thought which “invariably placed the ‘whites’, ‘Europeans’ or ‘Caucasians’ at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of humankind.”⁶ During the eighteenth century when the perception of superiority of white over black was rooted in the justification of slavery, the influential Scottish philosopher David Hume wrote a series of essays that included *Of National Character*.⁷ In 1753 he added a footnote to this essay that read

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilised nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation.⁸

During the nineteenth century there was an increasing interest in biological sciences. In the 1850s there were a number of publications on the question of race such as Nott and Gliddon’s *Types of Mankind*⁹ and Robert Knox’s *The Races of Man*.¹⁰ Brantlinger argues in his book *Rule of Darkness* that the Europeans were seen as rational and driven by a desire for knowledge whereas the ‘primitive’ were irrational and motivated by a fear of the unknown that

⁶ Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity: Racism, Class and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1998) 4-5.

⁷ “Of National Character” is an essay that was written in 1748 and added to vol I of David Hume, *Essays Moral and Political*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1748).

⁸ David Hume, *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, vol III (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, Facsimile edition, 1996) 228.

⁹ J.C. Nott and George Gliddon, *Types of Mankind* (1854; Miami: Mnemosyne, 1969).

¹⁰ Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Influence of Race Over the Destinies of Nations* (London, 1862).

manifested itself in superstitious beliefs and magical practices.¹¹ The Victorians had an insatiable appetite for the discovery of the 'other' and of collecting. Adding to which there were the new sciences and ease of travel so there was an increase in the accumulation of cultural artefacts in Britain and of written accounts describing adventurous travels. As the abolition of slavery passed there was an increase in racial hostility and in imperial expansion. This resurgence in prejudice was supported by the new school of thought known as 'Social Darwinism.' A justification for the domination of inferior races and the mission to raise the condition of these races, a theory that believed that the strong should dominate and the weak should perish.¹² Mann discusses power within the realm of social theory and he defines social power in two categories. Firstly that there is the power of some people over others and secondly, when people who are cooperating they can gain power over a third party. Both suggestions relate to domination and in the second example influenced by organisation.¹³

The first literary representation of Voodoo that was to have an extraordinary impact on the imagination of the west was *Hayti or The Black Republic* (1884) by Sir Spenser St. John. St. John was the British minister resident and consul-general in Haiti, and had first arrived in the country in 1863. The narrative describes the country, history, politics and *Vaudoux*, a narrative that would be of tremendous interest to Victorian society with their appetite to acquire knowledge and artefacts of peoples and cultures.

¹¹ Patrick Bratlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 177-79.

¹² For further reading see Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought 1860-1945: Nature as model and nature as threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹³ M.Mann, "The Sources of Social Power" Vol. 1, *A History of Power from the beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

The narrative of *Hayti* has a veneer of authenticity, written by a man appointed by the Queen, a man of good standing who writes of his time in this country. *Vaudoux-worship and cannibalism* is introduced as “the most difficult chapter to write” and that he has “endeavoured to paint them in the least sombre colours.”¹⁴ He revised the first edition of 1884 in 1889 when he added more to the sections on *Vaudoux* due to the issue of cannibalism being, he claimed, more rampant than ever.¹⁵ Assumptions of racial superiority were characteristic of Victorian Britain and St. John highlights this to contextualise his work when describing the “Negroes” and in line with the increase in scientific study “...but after the eye becomes used to the grotesque, the study of the people is both interesting and instructive.”¹⁶ He categorises the ‘negro’ in two classes, the town and the country, the town ‘negro’ being the lower-class who is insolent and dishonest and the country ‘negro’, having an innate idea of white superiority, treats whites with respect, hospitality and kindness.¹⁷ These explanations of race appear in the chapter immediately prior to *Vaudoux-worship and cannibalism*. However, Vodou appears throughout the book in relation to politics, the people and the country, and St. John appears to have recognised the requirements of his Victorian readership. A thorough account of a *Vaudoux* ceremony within this chapter is taken directly from Moreau St. Méry’s “excellent description... [in] whose truthful pages it is a pleasure to seek for information”.¹⁸ These categorisations are another metamorphosis of the perceived power of white over black. As Foucault suggests, power is often unstable and reversible, as was the

¹⁴ Sir Spenser St. John, *Hayti or the Black Republic*, 2nd ed. (1884; London: 1889) xi.

¹⁵ St. John, xii.

¹⁶ St. John, 136.

¹⁷ The issue of the ‘Negro’ is discussed in St. John 136-167.

¹⁸ St. John, 192-199.

case in Haiti.¹⁹ In Haiti there was a French government but, according to Foucault's theories on government and domination this allowed the situation to be reversed, and Haiti became the first Black Republic. When St. John wrote his account of 'Vaudoux' he is returning the power to the white oppressor, despite Haiti being independent from the Western colonial powers. St. John could arguably be defined by Hobbes theory of Power and the Sovereign in as much that he has a power constituted by Covenant.²⁰ He is writing of Haiti for the consumption of the Victorian west and as such is authorising himself to speak on their behalf, to be trusted to disseminate information through his words.

All of the accounts within the chapter *Vaudoux-worship and cannibalism* are based on secondary sources and at no point did St. John acquire first hand knowledge of Vodou. There is a horrific account of child sacrifice retold at a dinner by a Catholic priest who in turn was told the tale by a young priest (who was thrown out of the ceremony before he actually saw a child killed).²¹ As another proof of "hideous practices" he recalls an account by an American correspondent "whose testimony I am assured on good authority can be implicitly accepted." The account tells of sacrifice and cannibalism, the correspondent did not stay to the end of the ceremony but was told that a little girl was sacrificed as well as the boy he had witnessed and they were both "cut up, cooked, and eaten by the wretches."²² This pattern is repeated; the

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).

²⁰ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin, 1968) 227.

²¹ This account is told by Monseigneur Guilloux, the Archbishop of Port au Prince, who was told the story by a young priest in charge of the area of L'Arcahaye. The young priest allegedly managed to gain access to the ceremony by blacking his face and hands and disguising himself as a peasant. St. John, 200-202.

²² This account is quoted as being published in *The New York World*, 5 December 1886, St. John, 202-207.

construction of St. John's *Vaudoux* is based on hearsay and imagination and contains no first hand account by the author. The descriptions of sacrifice and killing are brutal and create an image of depravity and 'savageness' reinforcing the Victorian understanding. When deconstructing the text there is an occasional glimmer of the truth. St. John briefly mentions discussing the issue of *Vaudouxism* with a 'native' gentleman who implies that the incidents have been exaggerated; St. John also acknowledges that there are a majority of practitioners who would be horrified by the cannibalistic and sacrificial elements to Vodou.²³ These brief acknowledgements are absorbed into the end of the book and are not commented upon further, they are difficult to find amongst the anti-Haitian sentiment.

The substantiation of the narrative is based on the words of the respected and the official (in a Government known to be anti-Vodou) and would have resonance within Victorian society. This book is arguably the most influential on the construction of *Voodoo* into the twentieth century. It gave information on Haiti to subsequent travellers such as J.A. Froude who wrote of it in his book *The English in the West Indies*. He identifies that the English are not favoured on the island, the mainly because of St. John's book "which they cry out against with a degree of anger which is the surest evidence of its truth."²⁴ This is an interesting reasoning, that a society repeatedly oppressed and mistreated through colonialism should have their hatred of the whites rooted in a book.

²³ St. John, 230.

²⁴ J.A. Froude *The English in the West Indies* (London, 1888) 302.

Froude's narrative is an exploration of the West Indies in which his aim was to acquaint himself with the condition of the British Colonies. He made two visits to Haiti during his travels and in both he refers to St. John's account of the island. While Haiti was not part of the British colonies that he wished to explore, the Captain of his boat was acquainted with the President of the time and decided to allow Froude to go ashore accompanied by an officer to "see this paradise of negro liberty."²⁵ Froude does not discuss Vodou at length, he focuses on his racial prejudice and the prejudice of Victorian Britain, and instead he makes a passing reference to the culture of the island. During his travels he opens the narrative to his first visit with a brief history before proceeding to explain the deterioration of the 'negro race.' Having been left to themselves, starting with a civilised language, Catholic religion, and European laws²⁶ they have declined and where they are now, when out of sight, "can follow their instincts, they sacrifice children in the serpent's honour after the manner of their forefathers."²⁷ He writes that he fears being torn to pieces should he ask any questions, explaining that he had read *Hayti*. This indicates that St. John's narrative had a direct influence on those who read it and allows an insight into the impact that *Hayti* already had on the perceptions of the country at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁸ Froude refers to the blacks as "The wild African black" and goes on to refer to "the faces which I saw in Hayti the most repulsive which I had ever seen in the world... the foulest, dirtiest, and nastiest of human habitations," echoing

²⁵ Froude, 160.

²⁶ These attributes, the civilisation of the blacks, were gained during slavery, Froude, 162.

²⁷ Froude, 162.

²⁸ This is the first reference to St. John's book in which he stresses that the anger in Haiti is considerable, Froude, 165.

the same description that St. John gave.²⁹ This was re-enforcing the prejudice of the time, re-affirming the justification of racism. His second visit was to the capital, Port au Prince, a place he thought was foul. He does provide an outline to the political history acknowledging St. John once again for describing the condition of Haiti.³⁰ There are interesting observations that provide an insight into the status of the armed forces and their position with Haiti when Froude observes seeing both English and American frigates in the waters off Port au Prince. Froude makes the main reference to Vodou when he writes

...but behind the immorality, behind the religiosity, there lies active and alive the horrible revival of the African superstitions; the serpent worship, and the child sacrifice, and the cannibalism. There is no room to doubt it.³¹

St. John quotes from Froude in his revised edition of *Hayti*, using the above reference with the emphasis on the words “there is no room to doubt it”. St. John feels that Froude’s account is that of an independent observer, someone who visited the island believing that the accounts of *Vaudoux* were somewhat exaggerated, finding that they were true. “Mr. Froude is a man of experience and observation, and not likely to allow a preconceived opinion to influence his judgement.”³² Froude has directly contradicted this within his own narrative when he bases his fears on St. John’s narrative. There was an element of mutual

²⁹ He only remained on the island on this occasion for a little over an hour, landing in the port of Jacmel on the south coast, Froude, 166.

³⁰ Froude, 300.

³¹ Froude, 303.

³² St. John, xiv.

admiration between these two Victorian men. At no point does Froude refer to the religion as *Vaudoux*, he prefers instead to deem it ‘devil-worship’ or ‘West African superstitions’ however there is no question that he is talking of Vodou. On leaving Haiti after his second visit Froude observes of the people that the only “specimens of humanity to be found” are those “that have been directly influenced by the white masters.” He continues with the colonial justification and imperialism by adding that the countries within the British West Indies do not have any of the African customs, and never will under English authority.³³

These two British narratives have been echoed throughout literature pertaining to Vodou since their publication. They are important texts in the development of the representations of the religion because they were viewed as accurate and from a reliable source. It could be argued that St. John and Froude were using what Lukes describes as a “radical” power.³⁴ The power here is not directed at individuals but at the readership of the books. This power is directed at the social structure, affecting thoughts and opinions of individuals through the action of “collective forces.”³⁵ These ‘collective forces’ then perpetuated the myth and misunderstanding initiated by these writers at the end of the nineteenth century.

There was a direct response to these texts by William Newell in his paper of 1888 on “Myths of Voodoo Worship and Child Sacrifice in Hayti”. He writes that the accounts were grown out of a general superstition and even though he discredits Voodoo worship in the context of Froude and St. John, he does not

³³ Froude, 307.

³⁴ S. Lukes, *Power: a radical view* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

³⁵ Lukes 22.

deny the existence of African beliefs. Newell believed that further investigation was required to legitimise the claims.³⁶ This was an early appearance of the spelling of *Voodoo*, a spelling Newell claims is that preferred by Americans. A different approach was taken by an author of an article in the 1894 *The Geographical Journal*.³⁷ When writing of the geography of the country there is a reference to the people, advising that Haitians not be regarded as a nation in the accepted 'European' sense but they are instead acknowledged as a good example within 'coloured' nations because they "adopted the civilisation and culture of Western Europe."³⁸ The representation of Vodou within this article continues with the same approach as those that wrote before, describing the preservation of African superstitions by the lower classes and claiming that "cases of cannibalism have occurred in connection with a still existing demon-worship of African origin, called Vaudou."³⁹

Hesketh Prichard visited Haiti in 1899, and published an account the following year in the same journal that published the article on the "Geography of Haiti."⁴⁰ He was commissioned to undertake the expedition for *The Express* newspaper and although he had previously sailed around Haiti he had not visited the Island. He writes that the only information available at this time was St. John's "excellent" book, even though it had been published over ten years earlier.⁴¹ This

³⁶ William W. Newell, "Myths of Voodoo Worship and Child Sacrifice in Hayti", *The Journal of American Folklore*, 1.1 (April – June 1888)16-30.

³⁷ "Geography of Haiti," *The Geographical Journal* 3.1 (January 1894) 49-52, author unknown.

³⁸ "Geography of Haiti," 51.

³⁹ The spelling of Vaudou here is the accepted British spelling of the time, the 'x' has been dropped from the end as this was conducive to the French spelling, "Geography of Haiti," 51.

⁴⁰ Hesketh Prichard, "Through Haiti", *The Geographical Journal* 16.3 (September 1900) 306-319.

⁴¹ Prichard, "Through Haiti" 306.

is his only reference to the British publication, he writes of his own travels through the interior of Haiti. The general tone to the start of the paper is positive, he writes that he finds the warnings he had received unfounded, that the people proved to be friendly and sociable, offering food and shelter throughout his travels. However, his prejudices soon appear. He describes Vodou in much the same way as those before him; he starts with “The practice of Vaudoux, with its attendant horrors...”⁴² and then goes on to discuss the “evil of Vaudoux.”⁴³

Hesketh Prichard developed this paper and published a book in 1900, *Where Black Rules White*.⁴⁴ Similar to St. John the narrative contained an equal amount of prejudice and misrepresentation of the culture of Haiti. It is worth noting that Prichard uses both spellings, Hayti and Haiti, within his work.⁴⁵

The same as St. John, Prichard dedicates a chapter in his book to “Vaudoux Worship and Sacrifice.”⁴⁶ He also mentions child sacrifice in the first two pages. Prichard states that beneath the Catholic veneer lies “a solid groundwork of West African superstition, serpent worship, and child-sacrifice.”⁴⁷ He concludes this chapter of his book with the acknowledgement that the *Papaloi*, or Priest, does not possess supernatural powers but does have inherited knowledge which “lies outside the white man’s range.”⁴⁸ He suggests that the Priest is no more than “an actor, a colossal quack, and a terrorist,” harsh words to impart and a strengthening of the power of white over black in *Where Black Rules White*.

⁴² Prichard, “Through Haiti” 313.

⁴³ Prichard, “Through Haiti” 317.

⁴⁴ Hesketh Prichard, *Where Black Rules White* (London: Archibold Constable and Co, 1900).

⁴⁵ The spelling of ‘Haiti’ is the one adopted by Jean Jacques Dessalines when the country secured independence. It is the term used by the indigenous Tainos. Early English texts used the spelling of ‘Hayti’ until the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. It was at this time that the spelling widely used returned to ‘Haiti.’

⁴⁶ Prichard, *Where Black Rules White* 74.

⁴⁷ Prichard, *Where Black Rules White* 75.

⁴⁸ Prichard, *Where Black Rules White* 101.

In this period from 1850 to 1915 there were limited accounts in the English language. Those that were published were particularly damaging and contextualised Vodou in the imagination of the British and Americans. This was very much a male space in the post-emancipation era. Haiti was independent in a time of white superiority so found that hostility was thrust upon it. Brydon and Tiffin wrote of the oppressed within the conditions of literacy and cultural production, this has to be considered in the unique identity of Haiti.⁴⁹ When considering post-colonial literatures there is a concern of this oppression, whether conscious or unconscious in the mind of the writer. Vodou was oppressed by a supposedly superior race, the white. There is a common feature in post-colonial literature of the myths of identity and authenticity, Haiti and Vodou being prime examples. Ashis Nandy revises Foucault's analysis of power in his own work when discussing this aspect of colonial power.⁵⁰ Nandy argues that "this colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonised societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all."⁵¹ Gandhi simplifies this by explaining that the West "attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-West,'" an appropriate description of these early literary accounts of Vodou.⁵²

These early literary accounts were produced by the representatives of the imperial power in the language of the coloniser. They provide detailed reports of Haiti and Vodou and yet are not integrated within the culture they represent. They are situated in a privileged position and emphasize the 'cultured' white

⁴⁹ D. Brydon and H. Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions* (Mandelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1993).

⁵⁰ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁵¹ Nandy xi.

⁵² Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) 16.

over the 'primitive' black. Said suggests that colonialism (and imperialism) is not only an act of acquisition but that it is supported by the notion that some people require domination.⁵³ This 'justification' of stereotyping and negating Vodou within early literary works is discussed by Homi Bhabha. Bhabha refers to stereotyping as setting up a "false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices."⁵⁴ When considering the 'false images' portrayed by the early literary works, Vodou very much becomes the 'scapegoat' for discrimination. This dichotomy of coloniser and colonised is apparent in the representations of Vodou from 1850-1915 and when Haiti faced re-colonisation, this time by the Americans; the literature took a similar post-colonial position.⁵⁵

Literature of the American Occupation

When the Americans occupied Haiti in 1915 the Marines were entering an area of the world many of them were unfamiliar with. There were testimonies recorded of serving Marines such as Major General Smedley Butler but full memoirs were less common. Two Marines who did publish their memoirs were Faustin Wirkus and John Craige, both of whom wrote successful publications.

Faustin Wirkus is arguably the most well known and his account of being crowned King of La Gonave reportedly sold over ten million copies.⁵⁶ The cover credits for *The White King of La Gonave* include Taney Dudley who was the

⁵³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) 8.

⁵⁴ Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: difference, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism" in *Literature, Politics & Theory*, Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen eds. (London: Methuen, 1986) 169.

⁵⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

⁵⁶ La Gonave is a small island off the coast of Haiti.

photographer for Wirkus; he is not mentioned within the book which was the first of the memoirs to be published in 1931.⁵⁷ Vodou features throughout the narrative in varying degrees and there are vivid descriptions of ceremonies that would have provided a scientific interest. Wirkus appears to have difficulties in his position on the subject of Vodou. The Marines were persuaded that Vodou was witchcraft and as discussed by Peter L. Bunce this was a “glaring example of the American inability to grasp the Haitian culture”, they allowed the Government of President Borno to use the *Gendarmerie*, in which Wirkus was involved, to persecute practitioners of Vodou.⁵⁸ This decision was in complete contradiction to the Constitution of the Republic of Haiti: under Haitians and their Rights, Civil and Political Rights, Article 17 states “All forms of worship are equally free. Everyone has the right to profess and freely practice his religion, provided that the public order is not disturbed thereby.”⁵⁹ This was not the case; Wirkus writes of orders received “We had orders from headquarters, as the natives well knew, to make a report leading to a criminal punitive action on all *papalouis, hougans, bocors* and *mamalois* or as the orders read: ‘on all voodoo artists.’” Officially the troops were told that “the voodoo cult was the medium of black magic, blasphemy, treason to Haiti and the United States...” as this is in contradiction to the Constitution it is apparent that Vodou was not classed as a religion by the authorities.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Faustin Wirkus, *The White King of La Gonave* (New York: Doubleday, 1931).

⁵⁸ Peter L. Bunce, “Foundations on Sand: An analysis of the First United States Occupation of Haiti 1915-1934,” 5 June 1995, United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Quantico, December 2006.

<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1995/BPL.htm>>.

⁵⁹ The Constitution of the Republic of Haiti as it stood during the occupation of America can be seen in the supporting documents of Bunce, 115.

⁶⁰ Wirkus, 136-137.

Knowing that this was the standing of the American forces on the subject of Vodou it is more poignant when we read the memoirs of those involved. Wirkus was a self-declared rookie Marine when he was sent to Haiti in 1915 and he describes his arrival in Haiti by writing that he was entering a world of “jumbled savagery” and “weird religious beliefs.” The men he was with asked superior officers about their destination and were told that “...men stationed there don’t generally come back, and if they do, they ain’t fit for nothing but the bug house. That place is full of Voodoos and God knows what else.”⁶¹ Wirkus appears not to have such prejudice of colour as the earlier writers of Vodou, he refers to Africans as “strange blacks” but appears not to have heard of the term ‘nigger’ which some of his comrades are using and claims not to understand why the blacks are despised.⁶²

These memoirs give an indication of the persecutions inflicted on Vodou and the uncompromising position the Marines were in. Wirkus frequently questioned Vodou, expressing a curiosity for the religion and seizing any opportunity to learn of the beliefs. According to his memoirs he saw and heard nothing until he was into his second year in Haiti, by which time he had been promoted to Lieutenant. Five years after his arrival in Haiti he appears to have grasped the language but still the search for the truth behind Vodou evaded him. This is astonishing when the island is painted as a country of such extreme debauchery.

⁶¹ Wirkus 3.

⁶² Wirkus, 13. This is questionable as the term ‘nigger’ was used to refer to black people in a derogatory manner from the eighteenth century and would have been in wide use at this time, it was used in varying forms from as early as the sixteenth century, for example see Geoffrey D. Needler, “An Antedating of Nigger,” *American Speech*, 42.2 (May, 1967) 159-160.

In 1922 Wirkus was acting as assistant Chief of Police, part of the *Gendarmeries* vowed to persecute Vodou. Despite his evident fascination with the religion and his associations with the people, he took his duty seriously. He needed to understand all he could of Vodou and if admittance to a ceremony by force was the only way to access the evidence he was satisfied that it was acceptable. He writes that he is uneasy with the government's decision to regulate the religion of the people but "my beliefs had nothing to do with my job."⁶³ There are a number of descriptions of Vodou ceremonies throughout this narrative and he uses Haitian words to describe aspects of the religion such as *houmfort*⁶⁴ and *loi*.⁶⁵ It is difficult to understand how a man could befriend many Haitians, even be crowned King of one of the islands and yet so openly betray them with his duties. On Christmas Eve 1922 he gained access to a ceremony which he describes in detail; the shock comes not from the descriptions of sacrifices or worshippers but from the raid that Wirkus had orchestrated to imprison those present at the ceremony, the Vodou priests, priestesses and followers who were all sentenced to between one and three months imprisonment. He concludes with his satisfaction of his night's work and of what he had finally wished to learn since arriving in Haiti, at the cost of the people.⁶⁶

The White King of La Gonave contains a narrative that gives an insight into life in Haiti and the role of Vodou during the American Occupation but one that is still being written by the oppressor. This is primarily an 'adventure' story, a tale

⁶³ For details on the raid at Croix Bossale and Wirkus's feelings see Wirkus, 167-182.

⁶⁴ The *houmfort* is the place where ceremonies take place.

⁶⁵ The *loi* are the spirits and due to the oral nature of Vodou can be seen as this spelling, as *lwa* or as *loa*.

⁶⁶ The full description of the Christmas Eve raid can be found in Wirkus 167-182.

of an American Marine and his encounters on an 'exotic' island. Wirkus appears to mock the Haitians within his memoirs. The appointment he has bestowed upon him as 'King' is fundamentally because of his name, some of the people believed he was a re-incarnation of Faustin Soulouque, the Haitian President who was a Vodouist. He decided not to correct them but instead went along with their ceremonies so that he could learn more about their beliefs "...it was out of the question to back out now and it was the last thing in the world I wanted to do, anyway, I was getting on with these secretive, happy, earnest people faster and farther than I had ever hoped."⁶⁷ There are articles and reports of Wirkus and his friendships with the Haitians. These are difficult to accept because when reading his accounts there are many descriptions of killings and raids to eradicate Vodou followed by descriptions of his friendships. This disparity was described in a book review in *Time* magazine, "A crack shot, he personally potted many a Caco (bandit), but in off hours he made friends with the peaceful natives, did many queer, unsoldierly things... going to Voodoo meetings."⁶⁸ Wirkus had a conflict of interest that was eventually recognised by the Haitian Government and by his superior officers. Wirkus remained on La Gonave for four years, to his commanding officers he was the commander of the island, to the people of La Gonave he was King Faustin II. The news of the King of La Gonave eventually filtered down to President Borno and when he read of William Seabrook's account in *The Magic Island*,⁶⁹ in which he wrote a whole chapter about Wirkus, he retorted "Haiti is a republic. I am its President. It is unthinkable that there

⁶⁷ Wirkus, 274.

⁶⁸ "Black and White," book review, *Time*, 6 April 1931, 3 January 2007, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,741397,00.html>>

⁶⁹ William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (1929; New York: Paragon, 1989) 171-184.

should be a Kingdom within a republic or a 'king'."⁷⁰ Wirkus was soon removed from his post and his life on the island. Seabrook noted how embarrassed Wirkus was when he visited him, he wouldn't let him take a photograph of him wearing his feather and mirrored crown and when he asked about his 'Black Queen' Wirkus vehemently pointed out that he was not married to anyone.⁷¹

The memoirs that were to follow by John Craige were *Black Bagdad* and *Cannibal Cousins*.⁷² The first published was *Black Bagdad*, its title originating from the words of Craige's friend, Hennessey (who was later shot dead in Guatemala), who described Haiti as; "This is Black Bagdad. These people are still living in the days of the Arabian Nights... You may hear tales as amazing as any Sheherezade ever told. You may see woolly-headed cannibals and silk-hatted savants side by side. An amazing place."⁷³ Craige was a Captain in the Marines and arrived in Haiti in 1925. He had a different approach to Vodou than Wirkus; his descriptions were more factual with no intentional sensationalism. He accepted the beliefs of the Haitians even though he did at times question them. He openly discusses his opinions of 'white superiority' and writes that "The American's superiority complex in tropical lands is based largely on the color-line."⁷⁴ Whereas previous writers position their work from a white superior position Craige acknowledges the colour prejudice and starts by expressing that he feels races should mingle, he acknowledges that they do not and apporions no

⁷⁰ This quote can be found in the Time book review, see previous footnote, and in Wirkus, 329.

⁷¹ Seabrook, 191-193.

⁷² John H. Craige, *Black Bagdad* (New York and Chicago: A.L. Burt and Co, 1933) and John H. Craige, *Cannibal Cousins* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1934).

⁷³ Craige, *Black Bagdad*, 1-2.

⁷⁴ Craige, *Black Bagdad*, 240.

blame. This appears to contradict his opinions when further in the same section he states that he has found the black races to be the “least able of all.”⁷⁵ His descriptions of Vodou question the legitimacy of the religion within society but he acknowledges that it is a religion with tradition and no different to the beliefs of many other cultures. The ‘dark side’ of Vodou is included within Craige’s memoirs but unlike previous literature he does not assimilate the ‘dark practices’ into the Vodou practiced by the majority, he identifies these practices as something to be treated outside of the religion of Vodou.

The Voodoo doll is an iconic image of Voodoo and has appeared since the cultural productions of the twentieth century began. The doll itself has its roots in the *poppet* used in European witchcraft which was assimilated into Louisiana Voodoo. There is no evidence of the familiar ‘voodoo doll’ being used in Haiti. In New Orleans it is more evident and believed to have assimilated into Voodoo with the European influences, possibly to instil fear into plantation owners. Craige writes a description of a doll and its effects; this was likely to be the inspiration for cultural products of the twentieth century.⁷⁶ Kitty Smith was a *Bokor*⁷⁷ and Craige writes of her throughout *Black Bagdad*. The Voodoo doll appears when he recalls seeing a rag doll that she had dressed in a khaki uniform and that he thought was the psychic image of himself. This deadly *wanga*⁷⁸ that Kitty had created included hair clippings, nail clippings, a piece of his clothing and other matters that would be needed, the most familiar image though is when

⁷⁵ Craige, *Black Bagdad*, 240-241.

⁷⁶ The Voodoo Doll and the practice of sticking pins into effigies has been perpetuated by the cinematic representations of Vodou and the association has remained.

⁷⁷ A *Bokor*, also seen written as *Bocour* or *Bocor* is a practitioner of the dark side of Vodou, responsible for curses and inflicting harm, and zombification.

⁷⁸ A *wanga* is a work of magic.

he explains “Every day she would stick a pin in this doll in a new and agonising position.” He noticed this doll in Kitty’s cell when she was under arrest. When she was released a few days later she cursed him for believing in superstition but when he asked about the doll she replied in Creole so he did not understand her words. Days later he claimed that he began to experience stabbing pains throughout his body; he became very ill and eventually asked another *Bokor* for help. The man created a *wanga* for him following which his pain subsided and his luck changed. He admits that he kept the *wanga* with him long after he left Haiti.⁷⁹ This description of the doll and the ability for thaumaturgy accurately depicts the image that remains in circulation today of the Voodoo doll and what can allegedly be achieved with its use. These books were popular in the 1930s, the time of early cinematic productions and increase in fictional literature containing Voodoo, all of which were seeking new material.⁸⁰

Craige’s second book, *Cannibal Cousins*, is less about his time spent as a Marine and more on the history of Haiti. It was written after the withdrawal of the American forces in 1934 and the introduction again gives an account of his friend Hennessey. He discusses aspects of cannibalistic practices within the ‘dark side’ of Vodou and this element of his narrative provided the title of the book. This was in contrast to his first memoir where the ‘dark side’ is not given so much credibility. The Vodou content is limited although he does provide a description of the origins, that “a dozen religions and superstitions merged to

⁷⁹ Craige, *Black Bagdad*, 266-276.

⁸⁰ There is no evidence that these literary works were a direct influence on cultural productions. This is being suggested due to the popularity of the books and the demand for new material from Hollywood at the same time.

form the voodoo.”⁸¹ There is more written on Craige’s disgust at the thought of killing due to race and he felt saddened when he read of this happening in Haitian history. He delved into the history and discovered a movement known as *Picquets*, a group of blacks that fought for their supremacy over the mulattoes. Despite initial sympathy with the Haitians Craige proceeds to liken this group to the Ku Klux Klan in America. He positions himself as the superior when he draws a comparison between the *Picquets* and the Ku Klux Klan. The Ku Klux Klan he explains “confined itself to frightening credulous Negroes, or indulged in an occasional lynching, the *Picquets* massacred thousands in their periods of power.”⁸² This placing of the Ku Klux Klan over the *Picquets* demonstrates the view of white superiority that still existed.

There are echoes back to the colonial when he refers to the ‘Dark Continent’ and returns to the description of Vodou as “African superstitions.”⁸³ He appears to stereotype the Haitians when he explains that Haitians of the lower class, the class who were regarded as ‘savages’, saw African images, “gilded by a touch of European clarity and European imagination” and he concludes that “able Haitians of this class were almost always active in voodoo.”⁸⁴ Despite the obvious contradictions and conflict in his opinions Craige attempted to write objectively without relying too heavily on sensational accounts.

In 1929, just prior to Wirkus leaving La Gonave there was an article written in *American Anthropologist* by Robert Burnett Hall that focuses on the island and

⁸¹ Craige, *Cannibal Cousins*, 114-115.

⁸² This implies that the behaviour of the Ku Klux Klan is favourable to that of the *Picquets*, Craige, *Cannibal Cousins*, 177-178.

⁸³ Craige, *Cannibal Cousins*, 207-208.

⁸⁴ Craige, *Cannibal Cousins*, 208.

its history.⁸⁵ There was an anthropological interest in La Gonave for two reasons, firstly it was an island that was infrequently mentioned in comment and literature and so was believed to conceal treasures from the indigenous population, and secondly it was believed to have very little white influence, instead providing a haven for black Haitians. Hall recognises Wirkus within this article for the fact that he had collected many interesting artefacts during his time; this reflects the Victorian penchant for the collection of cultures and the privileged position that Wirkus was in. This article was written from an anthropological perspective and there is very little mention of Vodou. He recognises that *voodooism* is the religion of the mass and that the inhabitants of La Gonave have African ancestry. Hall discusses the penal code of the island and that betrayal of the ‘Society’ may result in torture or death, he believes this to be gossip and that the chance that *voodooism* may enter the ceremonies held and crimes may be committed in the name of religion to be exceedingly rare. His references include Moreau Saint-Méry’s descriptions of the island but none of the sensational accounts of Vodou are included.

There was no disputing the good that the American Occupation achieved. Bridges and miles of roads were built as were schools and medical centres, telephone lines were repaired, airstrips appeared and irrigation was expanded. This led to an increase in exportable goods. The problem came with the oppressiveness of the occupation. These improvements were made from Haitian taxes and not from foreign aid, highlighting the poor management of the country.

⁸⁵ Robert Burnett Hall, “The Société Congo of the Ile á Gonave,” *American Anthropologist* 31.4 (Oct-Dec, 1929) 685-700.

There was a lack of cultural sensitivity and when orders came to eradicate Vodou there was a mistrust of the Americans by the Haitian people, they felt that their new white masters were again eliminating their heritage, the slave culture that had survived.⁸⁶ When considering the position of the American forces during the occupation there is an element of colonisation. They wished to retain a distinction between themselves and the Haitians. This was an aspect of later colonisers as discussed by Robert Young when he writes of colonisation and domination, and there was no integration, despite the perception of it in the memoirs of the Marines.⁸⁷

The representations of Vodou relied on previous historical accounts and were once again influenced by non-substantiated testimony. Wirkus wrote a memoir that appeared to be steeped with contradiction and personal conflict, his interest in Vodou was a curiosity of 'otherness' and he had no difficulty in betraying those he held in friendship in the fight to eradicate the religion. Craige writes more academically in his first book, there is less of the 'adventure' element to his memoirs and they do include an early description of a Voodoo doll, an element that was to feature in future cultural productions of Britain and America.

There was a propensity for these writers to refer and rely on the testimony of a limited circle of authors. Moreau Saint-Méry appears throughout these works, Froude and St. John reference each other, Wirkus and Craige mention St. John, and Wirkus befriends William Seabrook, the author of a highly influential account of Voodoo in Haiti, *The Magic Island*.

⁸⁶ For more on this see Philippe Girard, *Paradise Lost* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 85-88.

⁸⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 19-24.

Vodou Non-Fiction

Haitian Vodou had been represented as an evil that was integrated into Haitian society. Since the nineteenth century it had been re-imagined in the narratives of those in assumed positions of power. Prior to the inflammatory literature of St. John and Froude there was an occasional opposing view to the negative representations of Vodou such as W.W. Harvey's *Sketches of Hayti*. In this work Harvey considers that the 'savagery' exhibited was more likely a reaction to slavery than an evil embedded in religion. Despite this positive reflection his limited experience meant that he considered the Haitians to have a tendency to superstition and he did stereotype the nation, albeit with the best of intentions.⁸⁸ Another opposition to these negative literary works was published in 1908 when L.N. Léger wrote *Haiti: Her History and Her Detractors* and attempted to defuse the influence of St. John.⁸⁹

St. John was believed and trusted by his readers and his accounts were rarely questioned. The multiple reprints of his book made it well known to academics and the popular reader. Froude then supported this work and Prichard followed with *Where Black Rules White*.⁹⁰ This was a difficult combination to oppose when the general preference was to believe the sensational.

During the American occupation the United States were bombarded with tales of Voodoo, the demonic possessions, cannibalism, frenzied orgies, zombies and the

⁸⁸ W.W. Harvey, *Sketches of Hayti: From the Expulsion of the French to the Death of Christophe* (London, 1827).

⁸⁹ L.N. Léger, *Haiti: Her History and Her Detractors* (1907; Westport: Negro University Press, 1970).

⁹⁰ Hesketh Prichard, *Where Black Rules White* (London: Archibold Constable and Co, 1900).

'savagery' and 'barbarity' of the people. These accounts were written by those who were there and so believed and trusted. Mass audience newspapers and magazines distributed stories of cannibalism and Voodoo with headlines such as "Why the Black Cannibals of Hayti Mutilated Our Soldiers"⁹¹ and so Voodoo was developing in the minds of the American and British public. These early accounts constructed an image of Voodoo that was to endure as it reflected the popular sentiment, provided mis-education on Voodooism and reinforced the stereotypes. Haiti was still viewed as the exotic other, a place that fed the imagination. Nikolas Rose suggests that this relates to the "genealogy of subjectification...the kinds of attention that humans have directed towards themselves and others in different places, spaces and times."⁹² Others consider this 'subjectivity' the result of broader perspectives within theories of societal and cultural change.⁹³

There were non-fiction narratives that opted for a less prejudicial approach. For example, in *Roaming Through the West Indies* Harry Franck dismissed cannibalism as he could not find anyone with "unquestioned integrity" that had seen such things. Voodoo is described as "childish incantations" with "nonsensical fetishes."⁹⁴ Franck differentiates the benign practices of Voodoo from the dark witchcraft of *Obeah*. This is an interesting perception when considering the origins of the two religions which are very distinct. *Obeah* is

⁹¹ Don Mariano Alvarez, "Why the Black Cannibals of Hayti Mutilated Our Soldiers," *New York American* (13 February, 1921).

⁹² Nikolas Rose, "Identity, Genealogy, History," in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996) 129.

⁹³ For more on subjectivity and identity see for example A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) or U. Beck, *Risk Society: towards a new modernity* (London: Sage, 1992).

⁹⁴ Harry A. Franck, *Roaming Through the West Indies* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1920) 163-166.

very much a Jamaican religion, however Franck chooses to depict it as 'dark' and links it to witchcraft, as opposed to Voodoo which he refers to as benign. Franck uses the language of the colonial oppressor when he discusses the softness of Haitian voices being the same as "our Southern darkies."⁹⁵ Although there is a chapter titled *African Jamaica* there is no mention of religion or Obeah being linked to Jamaica. Joseph J. Williams differentiates the religions by explaining that both are very much of African origin, they evolved due to the origins of the slaves who were brought into the Caribbean.⁹⁶ Williams associates Obeah with witchcraft, not Voodoo.

In Sir Algernon Aspinall's *Pocket Guide to the West Indies* there is very little reference to Vodou, he recalls a lecture given by Sir Harry Johnston in which the stories that had been connected to Vodou worship were described as "exaggerated nonsense" and the talk of cannibalism described as ridiculous.⁹⁷ He does make a reference to St. John but this time to depict the Haitians in a positive light, he selected a quote from the book that illustrates the Haitians' horror of seeing an execution by guillotine and the subsequent mass dismantling of the apparatus,⁹⁸ not the behaviour of the barbaric savages that St. John depicts in the rest of the book.

In 1929 William Seabrook, a friend of Faustin Wirkus, wrote *The Magic Island*. Seabrook was to some extent sympathetic towards Haiti but this work was an echo of the previous non-fiction works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

⁹⁵ Franck 167.

⁹⁶ Joseph J. Williams, *Voodooes and Obeahs* (New York: Dial Press, 1932).

⁹⁷ Sir Algernon Aspinall, *Pocket Guide to the West Indies* (London: Sifton, Praed & Co. Ltd, 1931) 366.

⁹⁸ Aspinall, 364.

century. This publication continued to represent Vodou in a manner to reinforce the American sentiment on Haiti and the culture of Haitians. The most repeated accolade given to *The Magic Island* was that it introduced zombies to English speaking audiences, and in many references it is given the credit for the first use of the word zombie. This is not accurate as the word *zombi* was used in Moreau Saint-Méry's *A Civilisation that Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti*⁹⁹ which was published in 1792 when he describes *zombis* as a "Creole word that means spirit." *A Civilisation that Perished* was written in French and was not widely read. In 1886 George W. Cable wrote an essay "Creole Slave Songs" which was published in *The Century Magazine*; this features the word *zombi* when describing "The Voodooos."¹⁰⁰ Then in 1890 the word *zombi* appears in Lafcadio Hearn's *Two Years in the French West Indies*, an account of life in Martinique within a Creole society.¹⁰¹ These early references do not link zombies with the living dead: the earliest accounts of the revival of the dead were made in Captain Mayne Reid's 1883 novel *The Maroon: A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah*¹⁰² and in 1912 Stephen Bonsal's *The American Mediterranean*,¹⁰³ which both describe the practice of raising a person from the dead but without the use of the word zombie. It was then William Seabrook's book that brought together the living dead and the word zombie in 1929 positioning it within Vodou and Haiti.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ M.L.E. Moreau Saint-Méry, *A Civilization That Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti*, (Philadelphia, published by the author, 1797-1798), translated, abridged, and edited by Ivor D. Spencer, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).

¹⁰⁰ George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," *The Century Magazine* 35.6 (April 1886) 815.

¹⁰¹ Lafcadio Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies* (1890; Oxford: Signal Books, 2001) 142-144.

¹⁰² Captain Mayne Reid, *The Maroon: A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah* (New York, 1883).

¹⁰³ Stephen Bonsal, *The American Mediterranean* (New York: Moffat Yard, 1912).

¹⁰⁴ Zombies will be discussed in more detail throughout the following chapter as they evolved significantly in the cinematic representations.

Seabrook's introduction to the book describes the landscape before him and then closes by stating "...as night fell it faded to vagueness and disappeared. Only the jungle mountains remained, dark, mysterious; and from their slopes came presently far out across the water the steady boom of Voodoo drums."¹⁰⁵ The narrative serves to re-ignite the popularity and imagination of Haitian superstitions, for it was not a new account of Vodou, it was an extension of the Voodoo that had come before. The book itself is divided into four parts and Voodoo features throughout. Although Seabrook attempts to be non-judgemental and sympathetic he adds to the superstitions with his accounts of the use of human corpses and zombies. This is ironic when in the opening chapter he describes the religion

...toward which whites generally have been either scoffers, spiers, or active enemies, and whose adherents therefore have been forced to practice secrecy, above all where whites were concerned.¹⁰⁶

Seabrook writes of the *Petro* sacrifice, this term had historically been associated with the negative side of Vodou. *Rada* were the rites of the benign religion and *Petro* were the rites associated with human sacrifice and the work of the bokors. This indicates his tendency toward the fantastical rather than the factual.

Although the narrative sets out to be a non-fiction account of the Haitian religion Seabrook falls back to the style of the previous texts relying on the stereotyped representations of Haitian culture. His sensational style of writing is

¹⁰⁵ Seabrook, 3-4.

¹⁰⁶ Seabrook, 31.

supported by the grotesque drawings of Alexander King which will be discussed later in this chapter. Although this was supposed to be an objective view of Haiti and Voodoo it reads as a piece of fiction with Seabrook writing as an adventurer rather than a historian. His account was given credibility because he lived with a Vodou practitioner allowing him direct access to the religion, something his nineteenth-century counterparts had not achieved. The reviews of the book were generally good from the mass publications, while criticisms came from academic journals such as *American Journal of Sociology*¹⁰⁷ which commented that “He has written as an artist, not an ethnologist.”¹⁰⁸ *The Magic Island* was to be the direct influence for the first Voodoo film in the talking era, *White Zombie*,¹⁰⁹ which was released in 1932, resulting in Voodoo being introduced to the mass cinema audiences, transforming the imagined into visual horror.

Anthropological studies of Haiti and Vodou developed during the 1930s. The well known American anthropologist Melville Herskovits published *Life in a Haitian Valley*,¹¹⁰ an introduction to Haitian religion within the context of its West African roots and not based on superstition and malice. As Robert Baron outlines in his writing on Herskovits, he was trying to substantiate the existence of living African heritage within the Americas to analyse its transformations to show that it was not lost, views that were revolutionary in their day.¹¹¹

Herskovits considered the duality of Haitian culture, how Vodou and

¹⁰⁷ Robert Redfield, “Review of *The Magic Island*,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 35.2 (Sept. 1929) 315-317.

¹⁰⁸ Redfield, 316.

¹⁰⁹ *White Zombie*, dir. Victor Halperin, perf. Bela Lugosi, United Artists, 1932.

¹¹⁰ Melville Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York and London: A.A.Knopf, 1937).

¹¹¹ Robert Baron, “Amalgams and Mosaics, Syncretisms and Reinterpretations: Reading Herskovits and Contemporary Credits for Metaphors of Creolization”, *Journal of American Folklore* 116 (Winter 2003) 88-115.

Catholicism existed in unison and he was interested in how the elements of Catholicism had been mingled with Haitian beliefs. This element was generally overlooked by previous writers of Haitian culture but is very important to understand that it was through the adaptation of the Catholic deities that Vodou flourished. This was just one positive work among many negative ones and it had little impact on the wider reading public; the fantastical was preferable to the real.

Seabrook was not the only writer of inflammatory literature. In 1935 Gordon Sinclair published his book *Loose Among Devils*.¹¹² Sinclair described his travels between South America and Africa. Primarily he writes of life on the penal colony of *Devil's Island* off the coast of South America, however, he then writes of his visit to Africa with chapter headings including 'Human Sacrifice', 'Jungle Justice' and 'Witch Doctors'. He makes a brief stop in Haiti during his travels and he writes that he stopped off "to get a foretaste of voodoo" and to investigate zombies, of which he was disappointed.¹¹³ He has a generalistic and stereotyped view of Voodoo. This view is made apparent when he declares that "Once every thirty minutes, day and night, year in and year out, somebody somewhere dies under a voodoo curse."¹¹⁴ This opens a chapter in which he declares that "the dread threat of voodoo hushed all witnesses."¹¹⁵ Sinclair contextualises Voodoo as a practice that can be found everywhere so he disassociates it from Haiti by emphasising the African connections whilst on his travels. He writes of a 'juju' man, the practice of voodoo and sacrifice on African soil and there are echoes

¹¹² Gordon Sinclair, *Loose Among Devils* (London: Hurst and Blackett Ltd, 1935).

¹¹³ Sinclair, 97.

¹¹⁴ This was the opening of the chapter titled "Death from the Sky", Sinclair, 112.

¹¹⁵ Sinclair 112.

back to colonialism when he questions whether he is a traveller in a British crown colony or an explorer in the eighteenth century. The hierarchy of race appears within the narrative when he is talking of the harem. He explains how it was abolished many years ago in Turkey and Persia, it was in the process of being reduced in China and India but that it “still thrives in old-time grandeur in the land of voodoo.”¹¹⁶ On the issue of race, he corrects the reader that Africans should not be called ‘natives’ anymore and then proceeds to call his guide ‘Sambo.’ The very name he feels is comforting, “it has to do with minstrel shows, crap shooters and banjo players. But not with African voodoo.”¹¹⁷ Sinclair’s discussion of Voodoo depicts it as a practice that cannot be avoided, the same approach that the writers of Haitian Vodou took, and by avoiding the use of the word ‘African’ it would be linked in the mind of the reader as the same as Haitian Vodou, whether this was written or not.

Richard A. Loederer frames his travel narrative, *Voodoo Fire in Haiti*,¹¹⁸ with Voodoo when he opens his book with a chapter written to explain *Congo Bean Stew*. This was alleged to be a meal made from human flesh contextualised within the ceremonies of the “horrible, age old religion,” immediately associating cannibalism with Loederer’s Voodoo. Again the reader is introduced to the bizarre rituals through a second hand account from a ‘reliable’ witness. The book closes with two chapters dedicated to Voodoo, ‘Black Magic’ and ‘Voodoo Fire’ both of which return to reinforce the religion within the imagination of the reader. Loederer finds that he is “dumbfounded” at the universal spread of

¹¹⁶ This indicates the hierarchy within the imagination of the author, he does not refer to Africa by name but by the phrase “the land of voodoo,” Sinclair, 142.

¹¹⁷ Sinclair, 174.

¹¹⁸ Richard A. Loederer, *Voodoo Fire in Haiti* (1935; London: Beacon Library, 1937).

Voodoo and he finds that Voodoo is a “devilish cult...dangerous and devilish...”¹¹⁹ The final chapter emphasises the author’s attendance at a ceremony but the focus is on the eroticism and frenzy of the dancers with little description of the surroundings. This is typical of the travel accounts of the time; the pattern is undeniable, cannibalism, witchcraft, ‘savagery’, ‘barbarity’ and primitiveness created the twentieth-century image of Voodoo.

In 1952 Marcus Bach published *Strange Altars*,¹²⁰ an account of Voodoo from research conducted in Haiti. While in Haiti he gained access to the religion by working with a Voodoo initiate, a white man, called Stanley Reser, known as ‘Doc’ Reser.¹²¹ He questioned his own preconceived ideas of Voodoo as his references had been gained from the works of St. John, Seabrook, Loederer and Wirkus. He identifies that (in 1952) nearly every reference to Voodoo had been sensationalised and he questions why, if there are so many superstitions worldwide, Haiti had been persecuted.¹²² The representation of Voodoo in *Strange Altars* is different to those that had gone before and it is almost a book of two halves. The first half of the book describes in detail all aspects of Bach’s interpretations of the religion, interspersed with the interviews with Doc Reser, describing the vèvè, the altars and the ceremonies accurately before changing direction. The relationship that was building between Bach and Reser was brought to an abrupt halt at one of the ceremonies. Bach was working with a photographer called Lorena, and the agreement with Reser was that in return for

¹¹⁹ Loederer, 262.

¹²⁰ Marcus Bach, *Strange Altars* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1952).

¹²¹ Stanley Reser was also known to have helped Katherine Dunham in her research and was friends with Zora Neale Hurston, both women writers of Vodou.

¹²² Bach, 52-56.

access to Voodoo there would be no photography at any of the ceremonies. Lorena disregarded this and immediately the trust was broken between Voodooist and observer.¹²³ The second half of the book reflects this loss of connection between Bach and Reser when the author decided to seek out Voodoo without assistance. Bach writes of many discussions and second-hand accounts he had in Haiti around Voodoo and of previous literary representations but does not mention any names. He frequently reflects on Reser and remembers his words

Unfortunately, a sensational lie is more quickly believed than the sober truth. Rest assured that when a writer bases his remarks on one fanatical case of human sacrifice he is not talking about Voodoo as a people's faith. We are always tempted to scorn that which we do not understand.¹²⁴

This sentiment is an accurate perception of the general thought of Voodoo. There were many who thought they understood the religion and yet there were repetitive accounts of cannibalism, sex orgies and witchcraft. Bach's path did cross with Reser again during his time in Haiti and he speaks fondly of him. Although this narrative is predominantly fictionalised fact, frequently questioning the negativity surrounding Voodoo, there is still a reference to a case of human sacrifice. The originator is not identified by name, but is referred to as a man from Florida who did not know of Voodoo in Haiti but did know what it was like in Cuba.¹²⁵ The sacrifice described is that of a white baby, reinforcing the colour divide in the white imagination and provoking the horror of child

¹²³ Bach, 143-144.

¹²⁴ This quote is cited in Bach, 161.

¹²⁵ An account of the sacrifice of a white baby followed by a sex orgy in Bach, 162-163.

sacrifice.¹²⁶ The book concludes with the theft of all the films when the author and photographer reach Cuba. There is an implication that Voodoo played a part and that somewhere in Haiti a *wanga* was made. Bach was a professor of religion and yet writes of Voodoo from the interpretations of Reser.

Following on from this account by Bach there were further factual narratives. During the 1950s there was a direct opposition to misrepresentational texts. In the wake of the cinematic exploitation of Vodou a series of scholarly narratives were written to redress the balance and provide researched anthropological and ethnological studies of the Caribbean religion. Milo Rigaud wrote *Secrets of Voodoo* in 1953, Alfred Métraux wrote *Voodoo in Haiti* in 1959 and Harold Courlander published *Drum and Hoe* in 1960, all in an attempt to provide accurate narratives of Vodou.¹²⁷ These narratives provided an insight into the complexity of the religion that was by this time confined in a broad stereotype that had been constructed over the previous two centuries. Unfortunately these accurate and authentic accounts of Vodou were absorbed into the wave of misrepresentation that had been gaining momentum since the late nineteenth century and they were soon overlooked by the masses. The links with Christianity were being explored by the anthropologists of the 1950s onwards. Until this period there had been an assumed opposition between the Church and Vodou and this was not the case. Many Vodouists were also devout Catholics,

¹²⁶ This emphasis on 'white' is not used in a positive light when talking of Doc Reser but only when discussing the child sacrifice.

¹²⁷ Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (1959; New York: Schocken Books, 1972); Harold Courlander, *Drum and Hoe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo*, trans. Robert B. Cross (1953; San Francisco: City Light Books, 1969).

early ceremonies were disguised as devotion to Catholic Saints and the liturgical calendar was followed.¹²⁸

In the 1980s there were renewed persecutions of Haiti. There was an increase in the Haitian boat people and the American stereotypes were rejuvenated with another apportioning of blame to Haiti. Blame was directed to Haiti for the bringing of AIDS to America and the link with Voodoo made. Paul Farmer writes that during the early 1980s there were many making links between Voodoo and AIDS.¹²⁹ A number of physicians wrote comments such as “It seems reasonable to consider voodoo practices a cause to the syndrome.”¹³⁰ This was not an isolated incident. The theories continued to associate Voodoo with AIDS, there were links to necromancy, zombies and Voodoo rituals and this revival in the misrepresentation of Haiti led to the revival in stereotypes and racism. The misreading of texts meant that there was a tendency to return to the works of those sensational and inflammatory narratives that people like Métraux, Rigaud, Deren, Dunham and Courlander had been fighting so hard to eradicate. This renewed focus on Haiti and Voodoo fed the imagination of Hollywood once more and even accepted academic accounts of Vodou such as *The Serpent and the Rainbow* by Harvard ethnobotanist Wade Davis¹³¹ were transformed into Voodoo horror for the big screen. As Laurent Dubois writes, Wade Davis’ publication contributed to the increase of “stereotypical and denigrating portraits

¹²⁸ For further information on Vodou and Catholicism see Leslie G. Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

¹²⁹ For further information on the accusations directed at Haiti for AIDS see Paul Farmer, *Aids and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

¹³⁰ Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation*, 2-4.

¹³¹ Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (New York: Touchstone, 1982).

of Vodou.”¹³² This renewed interest in Voodoo not only increased the number of fictional literary works and Hollywood films but it also led to an increase in a broader representation of the religion both culturally and within society.

Travel accounts became more dramatised and less serious such as Ian Thomson’s *Bonjour Blanc*¹³³ and Zenga Longmore’s *Tap-Taps to Trinidad*.¹³⁴ These accounts are popular fact rather than the more ‘serious’ travelogues that were published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and yet there are still similarities.

Thomson integrates historical fact with his own explorations of the island and portrays colourful encounters with Haitians. His descriptions of Vodou ceremonies are in complete contrast to those written previously. There is an insight into the Vodou ceremony to initiate a group of women to become *hounsi canzos*.¹³⁵ Written empathetically it describes how initiates have to prepare themselves prior to the ceremony and then describes the ceremony itself, one of the most elaborate within the religion. Vodou is intertwined throughout the narrative; it is evident that throughout his travels Thomson finds Vodou within every aspect of life within Haiti. The author’s response to Vodou is confusing, he doubts its powers and questions its methods, he writes “Voodoo then is an

¹³² Lauren Dubois, “Vodou and History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43.1 (Jan. 2001) 92-93.

¹³³ Ian Thomson, *Bonjour Blanc: A Journey Through Haiti* (1992; London: Vintage, 2004).

¹³⁴ Zenga Longmore, *Tap-Taps to Trinidad: A Journey Through the Caribbean* (London: Arrow Books, 1990).

¹³⁵ The *hounsi canzos* are the assistants to a Vodou Priest.

imaginary world of displaced desires, a fantastical theatre of the mind...”¹³⁶ and yet he is initiated into the *Bizango*.¹³⁷ This move to become an initiate is possibly a means to an end to gain access to the ceremony, but he respects it enough not to write of the details. As mentioned previously, women are prominent within Vodou and so the fact that Thomson writes of a group of female initiates is unsurprising. Mary Magoulik suggests that religion is an outlet for women to be involved within their communities, she goes on to add “some of these are female-centred...women are venerated figures, functionaries, and officials, and play significant roles as adherents.”¹³⁸ This is true of many beliefs such as Wicca and it is particularly true of Vodou.¹³⁹ Folklore is a major part of Haitian culture and when Thomson is told of the *loup-garou*¹⁴⁰ he dismisses the tale: “I was incredulous of this superstitious jabberwocky...”¹⁴¹ He does however recognise the persecution that Vodou has faced, even late into the twentieth century when he writes of the post-Duvalier repression of the religion by the Catholic and Protestant Churches. It is believed that in 1986 hundreds of Vodou priests and priestesses were murdered as scapegoats for Duvalierism in another attempt to eradicate Vodou. Due to Duvalier’s connections with the religion the priests and priestesses were sacrificed for the sins of others.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Thomson, 212.

¹³⁷ The *Bizango* are believed to practice the dark side of Vodou, the *Petro* rites, which include the creation of zombies.

¹³⁸ Mary Magoulik, “Women in Popular Culture,” Georgia College and State University on <<http://www.faculty.de.gcsu.edu/~mmagouli/popculture.htm>> (entry for *Encyclopedia of Women’s Folklore and Folklife*).

¹³⁹ For more on women in ‘new’ religions across America see for example Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (London: Penguin, 2006).

¹⁴⁰ The *loup-garou* in Haitian folklore is a werewolf.

¹⁴¹ Thomson, 269.

¹⁴² For more on this see Thomson, 295-299.

Longmore includes two chapters within her account. As a black woman visiting Haiti she was treated with less scepticism by the Haitians than the white travellers. Unfortunately the descriptions of time spent in Haiti are riddled with her fears, evidently based on the stereotypes of Haiti and Vodou, described in the first chapter on Haiti, "Drums in the Caribbean Night",¹⁴³ when Longmore writes that "everything I had ever heard about the country was horrifying... what comes to mind? Voodoo, the Tontons Macoutes, mad dictators and zombies."¹⁴⁴ The next chapter is called "The Devil Woman and the Zombie".¹⁴⁵ The Devil Woman transpires to be a woman dressed in costume begging on the side of the road making unusual gestures and the zombie is an old man with white diseased eyes [suspected cataracts] resulting in his loss of sight and him stumbling with his arms outstretched to negotiate his way. There is little mention of Vodou or the culture of the people, just a number of pages recounting the fears of a British visitor to the island. The companion that Longmore finds does play to the stereotypes (and finds it very amusing to do so) by pretending that the car is slowing when near the 'Devil Woman' and describing the man in ragged clothes as a zombie. The attitude of the Haitian companion appears to be one of contempt, if people are so willing to believe the worst then why try to correct them?¹⁴⁶

Dubois argues that in the 1990s there was a shift in the representations of Vodou both in literature and in wider cultural production due to an increase in the

¹⁴³ The chapter "Drums in the Caribbean Night" can be found in Longmore, 76-96.

¹⁴⁴ Longmore, 77.

¹⁴⁵ The chapter "The Devil Woman and the Zombie" can be found in Longmore, 97-122.

¹⁴⁶ A similar sentiment was expressed by Priestess Miriam in New Orleans, personal interview, 6th June 2003.

visibility of the religion throughout universities, museums and across America.¹⁴⁷

This is evident in the increase of exhibitions and scholarly contributions to the study of the religion. One of the strongest collections of contemporary thought on Vodou was linked to an exhibition held at the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, *The Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*.¹⁴⁸ This edited volume is beautifully illustrated and contains the work of respected scholars in the field of Vodou, Karen McCarthy Brown, Elizabeth McAlister, Donald J. Cosentino and Laënnec Hurbon amongst others. Divided into three sections, history, devotion and art, this volume contextualises the historical developments of Haitian Vodou since colonialism before exploring the many facets of the Haitian religion.

Beyond this exhibition Vodou has entered the imagination of society and even the sporadic appearance of misrepresentation or links to human sacrifice are now viewed with scepticism and instead there is a search for the truth. There has been an increase in Vodou narratives including the work of Leah Gordon, Shannon Turlington and Sallie Ann Glassman allowing an insight into the rituals and ‘spells’ of Vodou. These publications also give an introduction to the religion without stereotype and colonial discourse, possibly because writers such as Sallie Ann Glassman are Vodou Priestesses.¹⁴⁹ Voodoo was to feature prominently in fiction and non-fiction literature from and about Louisiana, especially New Orleans, the home of American Voodoo.

¹⁴⁷ Dubois, 93.

¹⁴⁸ Donald J. Cosentino (ed.), *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995).

¹⁴⁹ Sallie Ann Glassman is a practicing Vodou Priestess in New Orleans. For more on Sallie Ann Glassman see for example < http://www.feyvodou.com/services/about_sallie.htm>

Voodoo in New Orleans

Voodoo in New Orleans began appearing as non-fiction in publications during the late nineteenth century.¹⁵⁰ Vodou, or Voodoo as it is more commonly referred to in New Orleans, was evident in Louisiana from as early as the seventeenth century. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that accounts were widely disseminated. Newspapers were reporting Voodoo with headlines such as 'A Voudou Story' in the *Times Picayune* in 1892 which outlines the organisation of Voodoo in New Orleans.¹⁵¹

There was a more thorough account of Voodoo when Lyle Saxon published *Fabulous New Orleans* in 1928.¹⁵² In the chapter on Voodoo there is very little substance or information about the evolution of the religion in New Orleans.¹⁵³ He writes a vivid account of a ritual that ends with what he describes as his "miraculous escape on his hands and knees before reaching the safety of the street despite the waves of nausea."¹⁵⁴ The ceremony features the creation of a wax Voodoo doll, something quite unique and iconic, and today very profitable in New Orleans.¹⁵⁵ He describes the black people he knows as 'ignorant' and 'superstitious' and this re-affirms the prejudice towards the black community in the years of the American Occupation of Haiti.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ See H.C. Castellanos, *New Orleans as it Was* (New Orleans, 1895); Mary A. Owen, "Among the Voodoo's," *International Folklore Congress* (1891).

¹⁵¹ W.H. Seymour, "A Voudou Story," *The Times Picayune*, 3 July 1892.

¹⁵² Lyle Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans* (1928; New Orleans: Robert L. Crager and Co., 1954).

¹⁵³ There are two chapters pertaining to Voodoo, one on the religion and one dedicated to Marie Laveau (the Voodoo Queen of New Orleans).

¹⁵⁴ Saxon, 309-322.

¹⁵⁵ The author actually sets out to have a doll created so there is a suspicion to the motivation of the Voodooists and the authenticity of the Voodoo that Saxon witnessed. Saxon, 315-318.

¹⁵⁶ Saxon worked on the Federal writer's project in the 1930s, he collected numerous references and accounts of all aspects of life in New Orleans. These papers are held at the Northwestern state University of Louisiana, and include accounts of Voodoo and Marie Laveau.

In 1936 Herbert Asbury wrote a chapter on Voodoo in his work, *The French Quarter*.¹⁵⁷ Many of the accounts and stories that had been collected were very similar to those of Saxon, with the same quotes and citations. This was a continuing pattern when in 1946 Robert Tallant wrote *Voodoo in New Orleans* with a foreword written by Lyle Saxon.¹⁵⁸ The early chapters address the issue of human-sacrifice which he linked with Haiti but suggests that there is evidence that this behaviour has been taking place in New Orleans; he identifies accounts of Voodooists killing children.¹⁵⁹

These were three of the most influential books about Voodoo in New Orleans and yet they regressed back to the literature of the nineteenth century and the misrepresentations, myth and stereotypes were perpetuated and disseminated throughout America.

Voodoo Fiction

Voodoo has appeared in fiction since the earliest accounts of Haiti and the culture began to appear in the English-speaking narratives of the late nineteenth century. It is sometimes difficult to separate the fictional works from the works deemed to be non-fiction, or more accurately, fictionalised fact.

One of the earliest works was *The Maroon: A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah* (1883). This is a tale of love, spells, sugar plantations and 'resurrection', which, although set in Jamaica features Voodoo throughout. The author, Captain Mayne Reid,

¹⁵⁷ Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter: An Informal History of New Orleans with Particular Reference to its colourful iniquities* (1936; New York: Garden City Publishing, 1938).

¹⁵⁸ The content is limited and over half of the book is dedicated to Marie Laveau. Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (1946; Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican, 1998).

¹⁵⁹ Tallant, 15-23.

was believed to have been a friend of Edgar Allan Poe and so may have been influenced by his friend's penchant for horror.¹⁶⁰ This was published just prior to St. John's *Hayti* (1884) but for the masses who may not read non-fiction literature *The Maroon* would introduce them to Voodoo and the living dead.¹⁶¹ This book confuses Voodoo and Obeah in much the same way as some of the non-fiction narratives did, particularly those of Franck and Williams.¹⁶²

Non-fiction accounts of Voodoo were located in Louisiana and New Orleans and the Southern states of America were used as a location in fictional works too. In 1895 M.G. McClelland wrote on the first page of his novel *Mammy Mystic*¹⁶³ "The story Tom told was of negro assemblies, in the swamp openings, for Voudou rites and ceremonies – hideous necromantic orgies."¹⁶⁴ *Mammy Mystic* is a novel that revolves around racism with the characters from the American South. The *Voudou* content is minimal and reserved for the first few chapters to contextualise the black and mulatto characters. The Voudou that is described is similar to many other representations. McClelland describes naked orgies in the darkness of the swamps with the participants as 'devils' and that they all looked the same.¹⁶⁵ 'Mammy Mystic' of the title was a quadroon¹⁶⁶ and so described as despising the blacks. This reflects the Haitian race prejudices between the

¹⁶⁰ For more on Edgar Allan Poe see for example J. Gerald Kennedy, *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe* (London: Penguin, 2006), particularly "The Oblong Box." 306-316.

¹⁶¹ The chapter "The Resurrection" introduces the concept of the living dead.

¹⁶² Harry A. Franck, *Roaming through the West Indies* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1920) and Joseph J. Williams, *Voodooes and Obeahs* (New York: The Dial Press, 1932).

¹⁶³ M.G. McClelland, *Mammy Mystic* (New York, 1895).

¹⁶⁴ McClelland, 5.

¹⁶⁵ The account of Vodou in *Mammy Mystic* can be found in McClelland, 6-11.

¹⁶⁶ A *quadroon* was a person of one quarter black heritage, this was part of a system of differentiation of race that was frequently used in Louisiana and elsewhere.

mulattoes and blacks.¹⁶⁷ Voodoo is written as belonging “entirely to the black people,”¹⁶⁸ and though at this time it was recorded that white people turned to Voodoo regularly, this was a fact the author did not wish to acknowledge. There are numerous derogatory remarks towards the mixed races of the South with the mulattoes being described as worse than blacks or whites (the ‘pure’ races). The narrative describes the mix of races as disastrous and that “[if one is to] mix a highly developed race [white] with one still on a plane of animalism [black] and the mongrels obtained show the worst of both strains.”¹⁶⁹ This colonial perspective is reflective of the non-fiction narratives of the time. The character of Mammy Mystic features throughout the narrative and her faith is described as pagan, in the rites and observances of her ancestors to which she “held dumbly but with all her superstitious, terror-loving soul.”¹⁷⁰ The character Eugénie keeps secret her mixed heritage and rather than confess eventually kills herself because of the shame. This is a miscegenation story similar to that of the film *Chloe: Love is Calling You* in which the character of Chloe is believed to be mixed race.¹⁷¹

In 1931 another novel was written that was set in New Orleans, *Voodoo 'd*¹⁷² written by Kenneth Perkins. The novel opens with a jovial discussion between characters about Voodoo and how it might be used to re-animate oneself from

¹⁶⁷ For further information on the question of colour within Haitian society see Roland Wingfield and Vernon J. Parenton, “Class Structure and Class Conflict in Haitian Society”, *Social Forces* 43.3 (March 1965) 338-347.

¹⁶⁸ McClelland, 32.

¹⁶⁹ McClelland, 171-173.

¹⁷⁰ McClelland, 68.

¹⁷¹ *Chloe: Love is Calling You*, dir. Marshall Neilan, Pinnacle Productions, 1934. This will be covered in more depth in the next chapter.

¹⁷² Kenneth Perkins, *Voodoo 'd* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1931).

the dead.¹⁷³ There are implications of cannibalism and Voodoo is described “I pointed out to him that in voodooism, and in the African religions whence voodooism came...in fact from many savage religions...A cannibal will eat a man...”¹⁷⁴ Voodoo is described as witchcraft and hocus-pocus and there is a description of the use of a Voodoo doll, even though this term is not used. When questioning whether a man could be killed by Voodoo there is a conversation within the narrative concerning Voodoo in Congo Square.¹⁷⁵ Perkins describes how a group of blacks were working all night over a wax effigy with a lock of human hair (white man’s hair) trying to kill an enemy.¹⁷⁶

These examples of fiction reinforce the issues raised by the earlier non-fiction works. *Voodoo 'd* was written before the withdrawal of the American Marines from Haiti and so would encourage the negative stereotypes that already existed.

Voodoo fiction set in Haiti began to emerge during the 1950s, even though some narratives continued to be located in New Orleans and Louisiana. Mass produced paperback books led to numerous popular novels across all genres featuring Voodoo including romance, horror, comedy, thriller and homo-erotica. A number of these novels were made into films and these will be covered in more detail in the next chapter, including Ian Fleming’s *Live and Let Die*, Fritz Leiber’s

¹⁷³ Perkins, 1-8.

¹⁷⁴ Perkins, 115.

¹⁷⁵ Congo Square was the gathering place of slaves from the seventeenth century through to emancipation; it is known that Voodoo was practiced here.

¹⁷⁶ Perkins, 148-152.

Conjure Wife, Graham Greene's *The Comedians*, John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and William Hjortsberg's *Falling Angel*.¹⁷⁷

There were a number of themes that emerged across the non-fiction narratives and the content of Vodou varied considerably. A limited number of novels contained the word *Haiti* in their titles. These had the lowest content of Vodou within the narrative and instead the focus remained on the story without digressing into a world of fantasy around Voodoo. John W. Vandercook writes of murder and the search for pirate treasure within *Murder in Haiti*.¹⁷⁸ He briefly mentions the American Occupation but chooses not to dwell on the culture of the country, whereas Stephen Becker¹⁷⁹ writes a narrative around the American Occupation that includes *Vodun*. The main character in Becker's novel jokes about Voodoo and is corrected and told that he should not mock Vodun. The conversation progresses to zombies and he is told that they have nothing to do with Vodun; he is told that "Vodun is a religion, a real religion."¹⁸⁰ Despite Becker's novel being penned in 1987 he uses the language of the occupying Marines referring to the children as "woolly headed"¹⁸¹ and refers to Africans as "niggers in the Congo."¹⁸² The use of these phrases is arguably contemporary for the characters within the narrative. This is the language of the occupying marines, the same as would be used at the time that the novel was set. It serves as a reminder to the reader of the imperialistic view of the Americans.

¹⁷⁷ Ian Fleming, *Live and Let Die* (1954; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988); Fritz Leiber, *Conjure Wife* (1953; New York: Ace, 1981); Graham Greene, *The Comedians* (1965; London: Vintage, 1999); John Berendt, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (London: Vintage, 1995); William Hjortsberg, *Falling Angel* (1978; Harpenden, UK: No Exit Press, 2005).

¹⁷⁸ John W. Vandercook, *Murder in Haiti* (New York: Macmillan, 1956).

¹⁷⁹ Stephen Becker, *A Rendezvous in Haiti* (London: Grafton Books, 1987).

¹⁸⁰ Becker, 65-66.

¹⁸¹ Becker, 103.

¹⁸² Becker, 177.

Love and romance are limited, and Voodoo and Haiti do not seem to lend themselves too well to this genre. However, the well known author Barbara Cartland combines both when she sets her 1979 novel *The Drums of Love* in Haiti in 1805.¹⁸³ The inspiration for this location came from the author visiting Haiti where she met Katherine Dunham, the dancer and author of *Island Possessed*.¹⁸⁴ There is a description of a Voodoo ceremony that the author claims to have attended and so there is an element of accuracy within this romantic historical novel.¹⁸⁵ Amanda Stevens also bases elements of her romantic novel on the elements of Voodoo that she may have knowledge of and then re-imagines them within the context of the novel. The Voodoo is sporadic and acts as a support to the story set on a fictional island without much accuracy and the practices are described as “arcane rituals” and “native customs.”¹⁸⁶ The genre of the romance novel within popular fiction brings its own controversy. There are those such as Magoulick who suggests that this genre “subscribe[s] to the dominant cultural philosophy” with others such as Radway examining the less oppressive aspects of the romance novel.¹⁸⁷

In complete contrast to Cartland’s and Stevens’ romantic fiction is Johnny T. Malice’s *Voodoo Man*. This is an explicit and extremely graphic homo-erotic

¹⁸³ Barbara Cartland, *The Drums of Love* (London: Pan, 1979).

¹⁸⁴ Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (1969; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁸⁵ Cartland, 66-75.

¹⁸⁶ Amanda Stevens, *The Seventh Night* (New York: Silhouette, 1993).

¹⁸⁷ Mary Magoulik, “Women in Popular Culture,” Georgia College and State University on <<http://www.faculty.de.gcsu.edu/~mmagouli/popculture.htm>> (entry for *Encyclopedia of Women’s Folklore and Folklife*); Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* (1987; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

novel that features Voodoo.¹⁸⁸ There are references to the religion however these are overshadowed by the adult narrative.

Although there are numerous fiction narratives that feature Vodou, very few of them accurately depict the religion as found in Haiti. Those that do include Vodou tend to have a historical or factual basis to their story with the authors having first hand experiences. One such example is *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* in which the account is of murder in Savannah and features Voodoo, not as an element in the crime, but as an integral part of life in the area.¹⁸⁹ Also in Graham Greene's *The Comedians*, a novel set during the Duvalier regime, features a Voodoo ceremony.¹⁹⁰ These two authors write with experience as they have visited the respective locations and researched the historical aspects of their novels.

The locations in Voodoo fiction vary and although predominantly set in New Orleans and, to a lesser extent Haiti, they are also set in Savannah, New York, Vancouver and fictional islands such as Columbe.¹⁹¹ There are very few references to writers of non-fiction Voodoo with occasional exception such as Ian Fleming who refers to *The Traveller's Tree* by Patrick Leigh Fermor.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Johnny T. Malice, *Voodoo Man* (London: Idol, 2001).

¹⁸⁹ For the section specifically relating to Voodoo see Berendt, 240-255.

¹⁹⁰ For the Voodoo ceremony see Greene, 178-182.

¹⁹¹ John Berendt, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (London: Vintage, 1995) is set in Savannah; Jeffery Wilds Deaver, *Voodoo* (New York: Paperjacks, 1988) is set in New York; Michael Slade, *Headhunter* (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1984) is set in Vancouver, this book was made into a film but was released straight to Video; Amanda Stevens, *The Seventh Night* (New York: Silhouette, 1993) is set in the fictional Island of Columbe.

¹⁹² Patrick Leigh Fermor, *The Traveller's Tree* (1950; London: Grey Arrow, 1961) in Fleming, 25.

Many of the fictional narratives contain the dichotomy of good versus evil, with Voodoo being the evil force that has to be defeated. Many of the popular novels are crime fiction which emphasises the illegality of Voodoo. The covers describe the religion as “magic, voodoo, ritual murder, sexual slavery,” “horrific pagan rituals” and “black magic.”¹⁹³ These constructions of Voodoo in the words of the fiction writers are creations of the imagination. Robert Lawless writes in *Haiti's Bad Press*¹⁹⁴ that there are mysteries associated with other cultures and this concept of not knowing means that writers work from “their own ethnocentric folk models.”¹⁹⁵ This ethnocentric perspective reflects that of the previous colonial viewpoints.

The popular fiction writers relied on the inaccessibility of Voodoo to create their own interpretations, as did many of the early anthropological studies. For those wishing to study Vodou it is an open and welcoming religion, it is only forced into secrecy when persecuted.

Children's Voodoo Fiction

The representations of Voodoo in children's fiction available in the English language are limited. In 1893 Mary Alicia Owen wrote *Old Rabbit, The Voodoo and Other Sorcerers*.¹⁹⁶ According to the introduction written by Charles Godfrey Leland, the book followed the presentation of a paper by Owen in

¹⁹³ These descriptions can be found on the covers of the following; Michael Slade, *Headhunter* (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1984); Hank Janson, *Voodoo Violence* (London: Compact Books, 1964) and Norman Daniels, *Voodoo Slave* (1970; New York: Warner Books, 1974). These are selected examples.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Lawless, *Haiti's Bad Press* (Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman Books, 1992).

¹⁹⁵ Lawless, 83.

¹⁹⁶ Mary Alicia Owen, *Old Rabbit, The Voodoo and Other Sorcerers* (London, 1893).

London on "Missouri-Negro traditions." It is a collection of tales aimed at very young children and assimilates the American Indian beliefs with those of the black communities in Missouri. It is claimed by Leland that in Missouri there is a mixed race of "Negro and Indian descent, who have inherited a vast stock of the traditions of both races..." He introduces Voodoo and American Indian cultures to the reader to enable them to understand the predominant elements of both within the tales. This is a rare occasion during the nineteenth century where Voodoo is not maligned. It is said that "the real or inner nature of *Voodooism* is as yet almost unknown, even to the learned," whereas the "Aryan and Red Indian magic...relies on daring that which is horrible and repulsive... it also acts greatly by the terror or influence inspired by the conjuror himself."¹⁹⁷ The collection of tales are interwoven with Voodoo. Old Rabbit (the Voodoo of the title) is depicted as a black character identified by the dialect within the tales. Written phonetically as a stereotyped interpretation of language for example "de walkin'-cane huht dem big jaws, so Ole Frog he 'gin ter baig..."¹⁹⁸ meaning 'the walking cane hurt them big jaws, so Ole Frog he's going to beg.' This use of language was frequently used when writing the dialect of black people. This book was reviewed in *The Journal of American Folklore* in April and October of 1893. The first review focuses on the book being a collection of negro tales that resemble Indian tales and suggests that the tales need a separate examination; all that can be observed is the "allusion to customs, superstitions, and dialectic words."¹⁹⁹ In the October review there was increased reference to the tribes and the description

¹⁹⁷ Leland, in Owen, vi.

¹⁹⁸ Owen, 200.

¹⁹⁹ Rev. of *Old Rabbit, The Voodoo and Other Sorcerers*, by Mary Alicia Owen, *The Journal of American Folklore* 6.21 (Apr-Jun, 1893): 161-162.

of the Rabbit making a manikin, suggesting that this is the origin of the tar baby as found in the Biloxi Indians of Louisiana.²⁰⁰

Neither of the reviews referred to Voodoo. The tar baby features in the stories of *Brer Rabbit*, made famous by the stories of Joel Chandler Harris, and the figure of the rabbit is a trickster figure that featured in African folklore, transported to the plantations in America during the slave trade. There is a similar figure within native American folklore so it is reasonable to assume that these assimilated, providing Harris and Owen the basis for their interpretations of the characters. Harris published his first tales of Uncle Remus, Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby story in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings—The Folklore of the Old Plantation*,²⁰¹ in which he also uses the dialectic approach to speech.

Many of the books available for young children in the English language are picture books that are based in Haiti, such as *Tap-Tap*, an illustrated book set in a Haitian village and *Night Owl and the Rooster: A Haitian Legend*, neither of which features Vodou.²⁰²

There are a number of books that were published for older children. Adventure stories were popular from the 1930s when *The Voodoo Stone* was published,²⁰³ and the 1940s saw the publishing of *Dick Tracy on Voodoo Island*.²⁰⁴ These examples are very much of the ‘adventure stories for boys’ genre, featuring

²⁰⁰ J.O.D. rev. of *Old Rabbit, The Voodoo and Other Sorcerers*, by Mary Alicia Owen, *The Journal of American Folklore* 6.23 (Oct-Dec, 1893): 322-324.

²⁰¹ Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings – The Folklore of the Old Plantation* (1880; London, George Routledge, 1881).

²⁰² Karen Lynn Williams, illustrated by Catherine Stock, *Tap-Tap* (New York: Clarion Books, 1994); *Night Owl and The Rooster: A Haitian Legend* retold and illustrated by Charles Reasoner (New Jersey: Troll Associates, 1995).

²⁰³ Gordon Hill Grahame, *The Voodoo Stone* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1935).

²⁰⁴ Chester Gould, *Dick Tracy on Voodoo Island* (Wisconsin: Whitman Publishing, 1944).

heroes fighting an enemy. In *The Voodoo Stone* Voodoo is described as “some kind of African religion...no white man can look on their ceremony and live. I have heard that a human sacrifice is generally made during the ceremony...”²⁰⁵ The narrative revolves around a Voodoo Stone, a gem that inflicts death on the black men and calls for the sacrifice of the white men, “ah ain’t igneram like dese niggahs heah, but dey is sumfin’ mighty peculiar about dat Blood of Voodoo...if ary niggah touches dat stone he’ll die, an’ if ary white man so much as look at it he must be killed an’ his body made sacrifice to Voodoo.”²⁰⁶ This use of dialect reflects that used in the folktales of Harris and Owen. The words ‘juju’ and ‘Obeah’ are used in *The Voodoo Stone* when Archie, one of the main characters raises the stone to frighten an approaching mob. This combination of religions, Jamaican and Haitian, may have been influenced by the work of Franck who portrayed Obeah as the ‘dark side’ of Voodoo in *Roaming through the West Indies*. Franck differentiates between the two, Obeah as witchcraft and Voodooism as religion.²⁰⁷

Chester’s *Dick Tracy* book was written during the end of World War II and has racist use of language for black people and the Japanese. This adventure is set on a little known former French colony, originally discovered by the Spanish, known as ‘Bongilla’, a country whose inhabitants were descendents of slaves, a metaphor for Haiti.²⁰⁸ The ‘Bongillians’ are represented as savages or suited menacing characters similar to the Tontons Macoutes (even though this was

²⁰⁵ Hill, 43.

²⁰⁶ This reads as “I ain’t ignorant like these niggers here, but there is something mighty peculiar about that Blood of Voodoo...if any nigger touches that stone he’ll die, and if any white man so much as look at it he must be killed and his body made sacrifice to Voodoo,” Hill, 74.

²⁰⁷ Franck, 164.

²⁰⁸ Gould, 14.

published before the Duvalier regime). The other enemies are characters with dialect stereotypical of the Germans and the Japanese, reflecting the socio-historical climate of the period it was written. It was not uncommon to see propaganda posters and other representations of the 'enemy', of German and Japanese cultures, during this time. Voodoo is represented as a confused eclectic mix of stereotypes within this narrative. There are 'hideous masks,' chanting, African magic and the Bongillians are depicted as cowardly as they are the first to run away (despite previously being described as savage).

In 1949 a representation of Voodoo for children was produced by Walt Disney Productions, a comic called *Donald Duck in Voodoo Hoodoo*.²⁰⁹ This form of popular culture production was and still is available to a mass market, affordable and cost effective to produce. The comic features a zombie, a creature who is befriended by Donald's nephews and called *Bombie*, and the story revolves around trying to return Bombie to his "Voodoo people in Africa." The narrative is very confusing and features a Voodoo doll, poison, 'Darkest Africa,' stereotyped black characters, a shrunken man, Hoodoo, South Africa and a witch-doctor, an eclectic mix of all the negative stereotypes to have been associated with the religion. Today this particular edition appears to be racist and stereotyped; however, it has to be viewed within the context of when it was produced. It was produced for children at a time when cultural and societal views were different to today. The doll has the familiar characteristics; the behaviour towards the doll is reflected on the intended victim. There are scenes where the zombie is dressed in a military jacket, within a historical perspective this appears

²⁰⁹ *Donald Duck in Voodoo Hoodoo*, No.238 (New York: Walt Disney Productions, 1949)

as a caricature of the Haitian presidents and military personnel, especially as the zombie is represented as black. Figure 19 shows the comparison between a caricature of Faustin Soulouque drawn in 1850 by Daumier and the zombie from *Donald Duck*.



Fig.19. A caricature of Soulouque from 1850 and the zombie in *Voodoo Hoodoo*.²¹⁰

There is an image with a sign for 'Darkest Africa' pointing towards the zombie and a stereotyped black character and 'Lightest Africa' pointing away, an image of Africa that had been in existence since the nineteenth century. The African locals are represented as stereotypes of the cannibal complete with spears and huts in the jungle, an image that was also featured in animated cartoons such as

²¹⁰ Fig.19. Left, a detail from a caricature of Soulouque by Daumier, 1850, in Hurbon, 53; right, the zombie from *Voodoo Hoodoo*, 1949.

Voodoo in Harlem.²¹¹ The associations made between Voodoo and Hoodoo identifies them with Africa. There is no mention of Haiti or Louisiana and yet at this point in history both children and adults would have been exposed to enough cultural representations to allocate a cultural identity under the generic term of Voodoo.

Popular series such as *The Hardy Boys* and *Charmed*, both successful television series, featured Voodoo within the titles of the associated books.²¹² *Voodoo Moon* is a tale based on the *Charmed* characters that is set on a former plantation in New Orleans. The Halliwells, who are all witches, are drawn into “a dark world of Voodoo sorcery.” *Voodoo Moon* describes how Voodoo fights Voodoo and there are many factual references to the religion in New Orleans such as its origins and ethnicity of practitioners.²¹³ In *The Voodoo Plot* the Hardy Boys are chasing thieves in Florida. In contrast to *Voodoo Moon*, Voodoo is simplified in *Voodoo Plot*. The Hardy Boys are about to spend time in New Orleans and Voodoo is described as “black magic...African worship...”²¹⁴ They discuss the fact that Voodoo is only practiced in Haiti where Creole is spoken, quickly followed by the realisation that Creole is also spoken in New Orleans and so “Maybe Voodoo is practiced there as well!!!”²¹⁵

²¹¹ *Voodoo in Harlem*, dir. Rudy Zamora, prod. Walter Lantz, Universal Studios, 1938.

²¹² Constance M. Burge, *Voodoo Moon* (London: Pocket Books, 1999) is based on the television series *Charmed*; Franklin W. Dixon, *The Voodoo Plot* (London: Armada, 1983) is one of the Hardy Boys Mystery Stories.

²¹³ For example there is a reference to Marie Laveau and an explanation of how Voodoo arrived in New Orleans. See Burge 75.

²¹⁴ Dixon 68.

²¹⁵ Dixon 68.

There is an exception to these uses of the stereotyped representations of Voodoo for the contemporary teenage fiction market. *Taste of Salt* is a warm narrative about a young boy and girl growing up in Haiti in the years before Aristide became President.²¹⁶ The references to Voodoo are integral to the story which is one of hope and love for their country. It is a story inspired by actual events.²¹⁷

The misrepresentations of Vodou, creating the commercial commodity of Voodoo, found their way into the narratives for children. One clear example of the re-imagination of the stereotyped elements of Voodoo appears in *Voodoo Island*. This work offers a confused representation of the religion featuring ghosts, a voodoo doll and ultimately ends with Voodoo being blamed for causing insanity.²¹⁸ This book was published to assist children educationally to reading in English and was chosen for its enjoyment value. This ‘enjoyment value’ tells of the dangers of Voodoo in Haiti and the use of Voodoo dolls that can ultimately result in death, not a very educational portrayal of a religion or a country.

Tim Burton’s *Tragic Toys* feature a box set titled *Voodoo Girl*. This set includes a small figure of the ‘Voodoo Girl’ of the title and a book, *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories*.²¹⁹ This collection of tragic poetic stories includes *Voodoo Girl*, the tale of a Voodoo doll. The seventeen line poem includes references to pins in the doll, a curse and zombies. Burton writes “she

²¹⁶ Frances Temple, *Taste of Salt: A story of modern Haiti* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

²¹⁷ The story was inspired by the fire-bombing of a boy’s shelter, Aristide’s speeches and young demonstrators in Haiti.

²¹⁸ Michael Duckworth, *Voodoo Island* (Oxford: OUP, 1989).

²¹⁹ Tim Burton, *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). This publication is for ages 8 and up.

has many different zombies who are deeply in her trance” and “but she knows she has a curse on her, a curse she cannot win.”²²⁰ Figure 20 below shows the illustrated doll and the figure sold as part of the set.

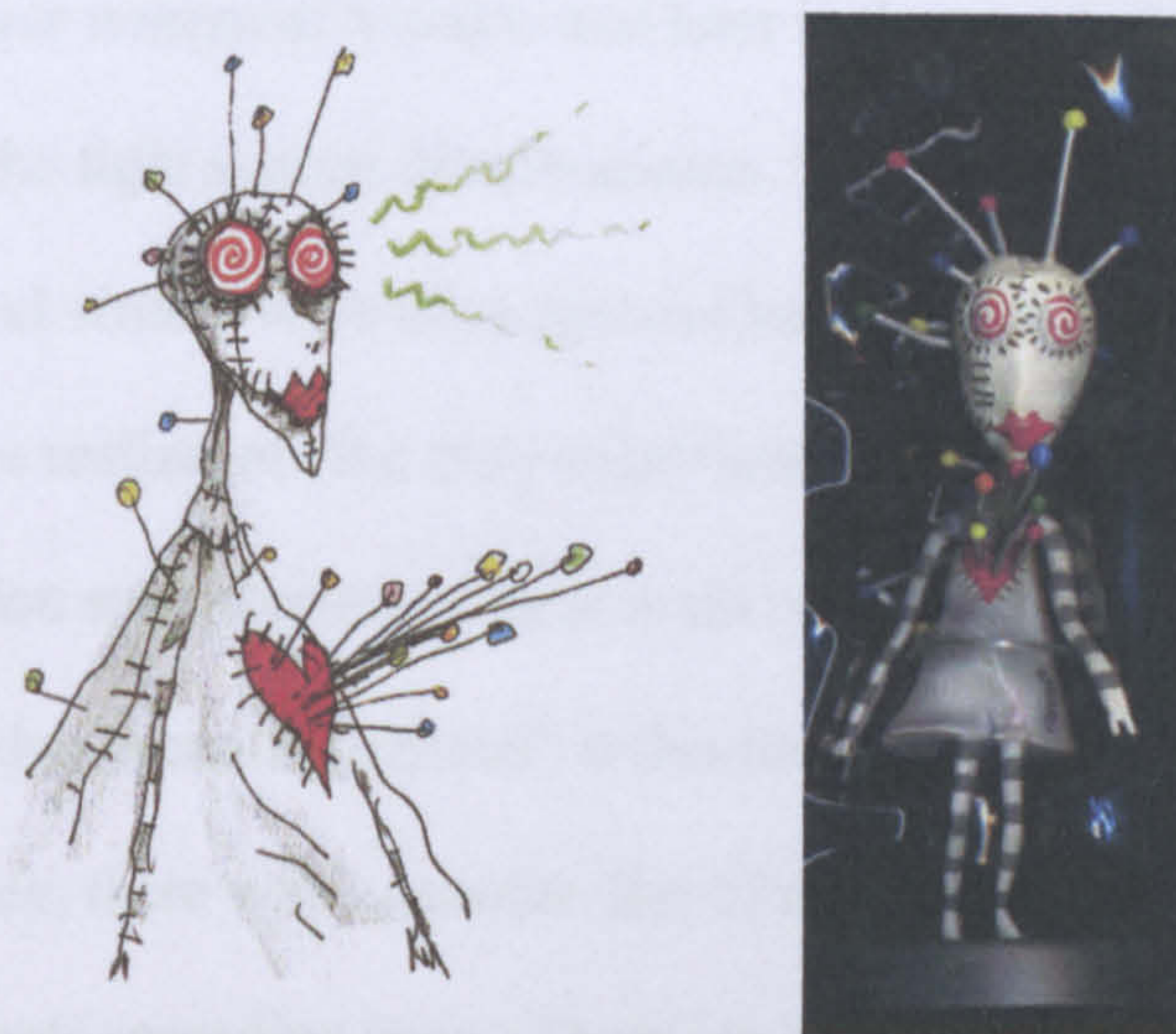


Fig. 20. Illustration and model of *Voodoo Girl*.²²¹

Children’s literature and the narratives that contain Voodoo feature many stereotypes, teaching children a biased view of the religion from a young age. The visual imagery, the illustrations in books and comics are the most powerful because the visual supports the written text which reinforces the message in the mind of the reader (and listener). They feature all the previous stereotypes including the Voodoo doll, zombies and cannibals. Occasionally there are narratives that are based in Haiti that do not focus on the religion and instead celebrate the rich colourful cultural heritage of the country, but unfortunately these are few and unless the book is read there is no mention of the subject and location within the titles.

²²⁰ Burton 50-53.

²²¹ Figure 19, left the illustration in Burton, 50, right, the model of ‘Voodoo Girl’.

Women Writers of Voodoo

Vodou is a non-discriminative religion and women play a major part, unlike other religions where women are not widely ordained there are numerous *Mambos* or priestesses. Since the travelogues of the nineteenth century began to appear women have written of Voodoo and later in the twentieth century became a major force in the fight against discrimination. Syndy T. Conger suggests that early women travel writers were often ignored but were the 'aesthetic travellers' whereas "men, we realize, are the truly superficial travellers."²²² The earliest narratives of Vodou are reflective of their male counterparts suggesting that perhaps both genders were 'superficial' at this time. Evelyn O'Callaghan writes, for the elite women, there was a genuine fear of revolutionary ideas and anti-European sentiments spreading from "Them" to "Us."²²³ It is this sentiment that formed the basis of the negative portrayals of Haiti found until the early part of the twentieth century. It could be argued that the female writers were historically a minority and as such not taken seriously by society or their male counterparts. This would not have an impact on the representations of Vodou as the negative was written by both genders.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote a section on *Vaudouxism* in Haiti in the narrative of *Sailing Sunny Seas* in which she equates the religion with murder, obscenity, crime and cannibalism. This sentiment was reflected by Winifred James a few years later in her work *The Mulberry Tree* in which she directs her fears onto the landscape, describing it as dark and sinister. She openly narrates her

²²² Syndy T. Conger, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 25.

²²³ O'Callaghan, 90.

disappointment in what she finds on the 'exotic' island of Haiti.²²⁴ There was a tendency for hostility to be directed at Haiti. This was in part because there were European colonies throughout the Caribbean but Haiti had broken away from colonial rule and become independent redefining itself as the 'other.' Haiti had become a place no longer under 'Our' control, the antithesis of this being 'Them,' the understanding being that 'Them' and 'Us' do not assimilate.

Shortly after the American Occupation Edna Taft wrote *A Puritan in Voodoo-Land*. This is an account of a journey that she made to visit the trading place of her ancestors who were slave traders of the eighteenth century. At around the same time Zora Neale Hurston wrote *Voodoo Gods*, a book examining Jamaica and Haiti.²²⁵ Taft writes a travelogue whereas Hurston writes an account of the religion. When comparing Taft and Hurston with their male contemporaries it is apparent that the approach is different, it is from a feminine perspective.

Taft takes time to consider her findings and she questions how she should raise the question of Voodoo. She writes of the history of Haiti and gives an interesting insight into the political climate of the time.²²⁶ Voodoo is treated considerately; the male perspective focuses on the sexual and aggressive. Taft endeavours to seek out the truth but does inevitably fall into discussions of cannibalism and zombies from secondary sources, ultimately though she admits her disappointment at not being a guest at a ceremony, of not witnessing

²²⁴ E.W. Wilcox, *Sailing Sunny Seas: A Story of Travel* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Co., 1909); W. James, *The Mulberry Tree* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1913).

²²⁵ Edna Taft, *A Puritan in Voodoo Land* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing, 1938); Zora Neale Hurston, *Voodoo Gods* (London: Dent, 1939) Voodoo can be found from 119-269, this book was published in the US as *Tell My Horse* in 1938.

²²⁶ Taft discusses Hitler's moves in the area and notes seeing the swastika flag flying, concluding that this position near the Panama Canal would benefit the Nazis' plans.

'Them'.²²⁷ Considering the perspective in which the decision to 'investigate' Haiti Taft takes, to explore her slave trading ancestors, there is a questionable position, however, the racist and stereotyped viewpoints are limited. Near the conclusion to the book Taft does write of a Voodoo doll that she is told a mulatto had made,

Désirée-Louise had fashioned a queer rag doll, into the stuffings of which had gone a clipping of hair from my head, parings from my nails and ravelled threads from my undershirt. The effigy was dressed in clothes simulating my own. That night, the vindictive wench had thrust a long, sharp bodkin through the middle of the doll; the following night, she had savagely driven it into the back; the next time, through the chest.²²⁸

Taft had no pain or reaction from these actions and later heard that Désirée-Louise had been murdered. In Vodou it is believed that if the finger is pointed to cause harm there are always three pointing back at you, whatever you give is returned threefold. This is the opposite reaction to that of Craige's experience of a Voodoo doll as he claimed he had pain for an extended period of time.

Hurston's work has been underestimated until recent years when there has been increase in interest and acknowledgement of her achievements and contribution to literature. Hurston writes from an ethnographic perspective, explaining the complexities of the religion in Haiti, and aware of her contemporaries she

²²⁷ Edna Taft writes of Voodoo in the chapter titled "The Black Looking Glass," 235-273.

²²⁸ Taft, 401-402.

expresses an interest in the 'White King of La Gonave' as described by Seabrook.²²⁹ There are some sad reflections on the aftermath of the American Occupation and how sacred items were stolen by the Marines and taken back to America when they left. Hurston was attempting to create an understanding of this syncretic religion within the Caribbean at a time when American forces had recently colonised the island and anti-superstition campaigns were ravaging the country. Her work was ridiculed by the intellectual community when she chose to write of zombies and Voodoo at a time of prejudice and persecution towards Haiti.²³⁰ Annette Trefzer discusses the difficulties that Hurston faced by being an American ethnographer working on Caribbean cultures, and the personal conflict she experienced. As an American citizen she was defending the imperial possession and as an ethnographer she was critiquing it by writing of Voodoo resistance to the colonial politics.²³¹ There has been much analysis of Hurston and her work and there is not the scope to address these issues within the thesis; nevertheless, she is acknowledged as a prominent writer of ethnographic literature, especially on Voodoo.

There were other prominent women writers on Voodoo including Maya Deren and Katherine Dunham. Their representations of Voodoo gave an anthropological perspective to the religion. Both of these women started their research around the dances of Haiti.²³² This interest in performance led to a

²²⁹ Hurston, 136-141.

²³⁰ Hurston writes a chapter dedicated to Doctor Reser, the white *houngan* who also helped Bach in his studies, Hurston 234-247.

²³¹ Annette Trefzer, "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*," *African American Review* 34.2 (Summer, 2000) 299-312.

²³² Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953; New York: Documentext, 1970); Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

different direction for both of them. Deren pursued her interest in performance moving into film-making. Her visual records of Haitian Vodou gave a deep insight into the religion supported by extensive knowledge gained while she lived within a Haitian village. Dunham pursued her research by becoming a Vodou initiate and *Island Possessed* is an account of her experiences. Both women share an undeniable love of the country and culture, as did some of their male counterparts from the 1950s onwards; this was an element that was lacking from the earlier texts written by both genders. Performance has been examined more recently in the work of Elizabeth McAlister when she writes of *Rara*, the annual street festival held in Haiti and contextualises it within Vodou and the transglobal migration of the religion.²³³

McAlister is just one of many contemporary women writers of Vodou. The titles of the books display the shift from the historic spelling of *Voodoo* to the more widely accepted spelling of *Vodou*. For example *The Book of Vodou* by Leah Gordon is a thoroughly illustrated book that focuses on the sacred objects, charms and rituals.²³⁴ Joan Dayan provides a historiographic account of Haiti and Vodou in *Haiti, History and The Gods*, a narrative that identifies the role that Vodou played throughout the history of the island.²³⁵ The insight that Dayan provides recontextualises Vodou for the twenty-first century. She explains how it was intricately woven into the fabric of Haitian society and, through historical, literary and anthropological viewpoints, she examines how race and colour

²³³ Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara: Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002).

²³⁴ Leah Gordon, *The Book of Vodou* (New York, Barrons, 2000).

²³⁵ Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History and The Gods* (1995; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998).

constructed the prejudices that exist today. Dayan chooses not to enter a discourse on the African heritage instead she focuses on Haiti and how Vodou evolved as a response to slavery, she explores history through the identities of the loa.

There are key figures throughout Haitian history and a number of biographies have been written. In 1991 Karen McCarthy Brown wrote *Mama Lola* in which she interprets Vodou within a narrative that incorporates ethnography and biography to examine the Vodou diaspora in New York.²³⁶ Mama Lola's approach to Vodou was very pragmatic. McCarthy Brown went through the initiation ritual and explains that she was never asked whether she believed in Vodou, instead Mama Lola is quoted as saying "You just got to try. See if it work for you."²³⁷ This is a very intimate portrayal of Voodoo within the life of a community and shows how Vodou has evolved within the diaspora and through a new generation of Haitians.

To use feminist criticism to analyse these works would mean to consider the quest for self within these narratives and it appears that this was not the exclusive direction the writers were taking. It has been suggested that the feminist critic seeks to discover a literature which represents her own experience, it is given form, and yet the subject of these narratives excludes this so there is a shift to the 'other'.²³⁸ Michelle Cliff suggests that this exploration of self within the

²³⁶ Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991).

²³⁷ McCarthy Brown, 10-11.

²³⁸ Carol P. Christ, "Feminist Studies in Religion and Literature: A Methodological Reflection," *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 44.2 (Jun., 1976) 317-325.

narratives of black women writers is an attempt to retaliate against imposed constraints.²³⁹ bell hooks discusses this within *Black Looks* and argues that Cliff's piece does not reach a conclusion, that the journey's end is not defined (according to Cliff). hooks uses examples of narratives that describe confrontations and overcoming of barriers for the writer to be self-defining.²⁴⁰ Although all female writers of Vodou were not black it could be argued that there was still a quest for self. Taft was following her ancestors within her work and so seeking self identity. Shirley Chisholm supports this when she wrote that being female caused her more difficulties than being black.²⁴¹ It could be argued that even those in the privileged positions such as James and Wilcox were still fighting to be taken 'seriously' when publishing amidst male prejudice, irrelevant to the content of their Voodoo narratives.

Mythical constructions and accurate realities provide a contradiction in the narratives, a reflection of some of their male counterparts, and the construction of 'Voodoo' followed by the deconstruction to 'Vodou' occurred at much the same time in the narratives of both genders. This indicates that it was socio-cultural and socio-political motivations to the narratives rather than a gender or cultural background influence. Interestingly, Hurston includes a chapter in her work *Voodoo Gods* discussing "Women in the Caribbean."²⁴² From a black female perspective she feels that in America she is treated more respectfully as a woman than she would be in the Caribbean.

²³⁹ Michelle Cliff, "Women Warriors: Black Women Writers Load the Canon," *Voice Literary Supplement* (May 1990).

²⁴⁰ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (London: Turnaround, 1992) in particular chapter 3 "Revolutionary Black Women," 41-60.

²⁴¹ Shirley Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed* (New York: Avon, 1970).

²⁴² Hurston, *Voodoo Gods*, 61-66.

Wade Davis

The work of Wade Davis has been frequently debated since the publication of his two narratives in the 1980s mainly because of the scientific implications of zombification. In 1985 *The Serpent and the Rainbow* was published as a scientific investigation into the documented cases of zombies. Davis was an ethnobotanist sent to research the phenomenon of raising the dead in Haiti.²⁴³ There is a dualism within the concept of the *zombi*, a *zombi* of the soul and a *zombi* of the body: Ackermann and Gauthier discuss both of the concepts within their paper “The Ways and Nature of the Zombi”.²⁴⁴ The research of the *zombi* of the soul is limited, most anthropologists and investigators chose to research the flesh and blood, the raising of the dead. The etymology of the word *zombi* is of interest to many anthropologists. Ackermann and Gauthier trace the origins of many similar words in this complex area. There are two spellings generally used which are *zombi* and *zombie*.²⁴⁵

When *The Serpent and the Rainbow* was published it contained the sub-title of “a Harvard scientist’s astonishing journey into the secret societies of Haitian Voodoo, zombis, and magic.” In Davis’ first publication on the subject of Voodoo he weaves the historical with the contemporary. Each chapter is contextualised within the narrative and he refers to many of the recognised authors including Zora Neale Hurston, Michel Laguerre, and Alfred Métraux. He criticises the work of John H. Craige, Faustin Wirkus and Sir Spenser St. John.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (New York: Touchstone, 1985).

²⁴⁴ Hans-W. Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier, “The ways and nature of the zombi,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 104.414 (Autumn 1991) 466-494.

²⁴⁵ Ackermann and Gauthier, 467-469.

²⁴⁶ Davis, *Serpent*, 206-215.

Davis makes an interesting point at this juncture when he recognises the timing of the publications as politically motivated and how prior to St. John's account the narratives had included *Vodoun* only as an element to the slave uprisings, not as the sensational. Although Davis' narrative was not particularly sensational the translation of the book to a film of the same name by Wes Craven took the work to another dimension. It re-imagined Voodoo for cinematic audiences once again.²⁴⁷

The fundamental reason for his investigation was to explore whether poison was a key to zombification and if so whether there would be an application as an anaesthetic. He appears to choose the same approach as Seabrook, not to sensationalise but to fictionalise fact and to integrate a creative narrative through an otherwise scientific study. Davis claimed that the poison tetrodotoxin found in puffer fish was the pharmacological explanation for zombification, a claim that was to bring him fame and fortune. There had been a documented case of a zombie in Haiti, Clairvius Narcisse. This was a man who was alleged to have died in 1962 only to reappear again in 1980 generating a great deal of publicity.²⁴⁸ The claims made by Davis were strongly refuted by other scientists including C.Y. Kao and Leon Roizin. William Booth outlines the criticisms to the scientific analysis that Davis cites to verify his findings in his article, *Voodoo Science*.²⁴⁹ Accused of being a fraud Davis responds to the article in the same

²⁴⁷ *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, dir. Wes Craven, Universal Studios, 1987. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

²⁴⁸ This case was widely reported during the early 1980s. For more on the case see for example Andre J. Louis, *Voodoo in Haiti: Catholicism, Protestantism & A Model of Effective Ministry in the Context of Voodoo in Haiti* (Oklahoma: Tate Publishing, 2007) 165-166. The BBC also made a short documentary about the case in 1981 although this is no longer available.

²⁴⁹ William Booth, "Voodoo Science", *Science*, 240.4850 (Apr. 15, 1988) 274-277.

journal a few months later, concluding that the issue is unresolved and not fraudulent.²⁵⁰ His is an interesting thesis on the phenomenon of zombification and could be the explanation; however, it is yet to be conclusively proven. The research undertaken into zombies in Haiti inevitably led to the research of Vodou and Davis writes that the early representations

...indulged their readers' perverse infatuation with what was known as the Black Republic, serving it up garnished with every conceivable figment of their imaginations.

He goes on to describe how Haiti was viewed as a part of Africa, "dark and foreboding, sensual and terribly naughty."²⁵¹ This condemnation of previous narratives seems hypocritical considering how Vodou was represented in the cinema after Davis sold the rights of his book to Hollywood. Leslie G.

Desmangles, a Haitian who has written with authority on the religion of his homeland for many years,²⁵² says that the film made of the book (especially with snakes slithering out of a zombie's mouth) "has taken us back one hundred years."²⁵³ The film was a success and it certainly revived the sensational: the year after the film's release Davis' second book on Haiti, a book based on his PhD thesis, *Passage of Darkness* was published.²⁵⁴ *The New York Times* is quoted on the cover of the book, "Davis manages to demystify the concepts of 'voodoo'

²⁵⁰ Wade Davis, "'Zombification (letter)", *Science*, 240.4860 (Jun. 24, 1988) 1715-1716.

²⁵¹ Davis, *Serpent*, 208.

²⁵² Leslie G. Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

²⁵³ Leslie G. Desmangles in Booth, 277.

²⁵⁴ Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

and ‘zombie’ and to make the people involved with these cultural practices seem a little more human...”, but this reviewer obviously did not see *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. This work revived an increasingly dormant subject area, thrusting it back into the spotlight and re-animating the sensational representations.

The Dark Side of Voodoo

Voodoo is a representation of the religion of Vodou that has been stereotyped and re-imagined. There have been associations with the negative and the sinister since the first accounts appeared. There has been a displacement of fear from the ‘known’, such as witchcraft and Satanism, onto the ‘unknown’, Voodoo. Voodoo has been linked to witchcraft, Satanism, black magic, and cannibalism throughout history, an association that will be shown to continue throughout the cultural productions of the twentieth century. As mentioned previously the early accounts of Vodou, such as those by St. John, Froude, Williams and Seabrook, often referred to cannibalistic practices. These were perpetuated by the cinematic representations which will be discussed in the next chapter.

There is a more sinister aspect to Vodou: groups of criminals and sorcerers who have chosen to serve the ‘evil’ spirits. These groups have different names according to the region including *Zobop* and *Bizango*. Alfred Métraux writes of “The societies of sorcerers” where he describes the nature of these sects, questioning whether they really exist or whether they are a creation of the imagination.²⁵⁵ Many writers of Vodou refer to the *Sect Rouge*, the secret society

²⁵⁵ Métraux, 292-300.

held responsible for human sacrifice, along with the *Zobop*. These groups are believed to have traits that are hideous, grotesque, cruel and obscene: fear and horror are projected onto these groups and many horrendous tales are associated with them. Hurbon argues that semantic ambiguities may have led to some of the misunderstandings. "To eat someone" he states, for example, means to capture their soul. The main reason for these associations stems back to racism, as a justification to occupation. These accounts of cannibalism and human sacrifice identify the nation as barbaric in an attempt to identify a perceived regression of the Haitian civilisation.²⁵⁶

Folk beliefs and superstition are an intrinsic element to any culture, throughout history there has been a projection of fear, in early modern Europe there were accounts of ghosts, witches and werewolves so it is not exclusive to the 'primitive' as described in narratives on Haiti.²⁵⁷ There is a hypothesis that within culture a fear of witchcraft or magic is a displacement of aggression and this occurs across societies.²⁵⁸ Superstition in Haiti was exaggerated within the narratives of the European and American observers, writers who had ulterior motives to providing an insight into Haitian culture.

Human sacrifice and cannibalism associated with Haiti were circulated into the imagination by St. John's narrative. This was repeated within the literature throughout the twentieth century and this association appeared to be the one

²⁵⁶ Hurbon, 51-63.

²⁵⁷ For further information on European folklore and beliefs see Kathryn A. Edwards (ed.), *Werewolves, Witches, and Wandering Spirits: Traditional Belief and Folklore in Early Modern Europe* (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2002).

²⁵⁸ Erika Bourguignon, "The persistence of Folk Belief: Some notes on Cannibalism and Zombis in Haiti," *The Journal of American Folklore* 72.283 (Jan.-Mar., 1959) 36-46.

favoured. Seabrook made the connection between Haiti and zombies to create the land of the living dead, a source of inspiration for cultural production to the present day. This combination perpetuated the myth. The accusation of cannibalism has raged since the fifteenth century, it has been used as an excuse for slavery, colonisation and murder. It has been documented and yet there is no proof of a black culture practicing anthropophagy. Irving Rouse writes of these accusations with specific reference to the Caribbean in *The Tainos: Rise and decline of the people who greeted Columbus*. He argues that the accounts were greatly exaggerated and although there were tribal conflicts resulting in raids for capture and revenge resulting in tales of cannibalism it was more likely that following a raid they may have killed a captive and placed pieces of flesh in a pot as a victory ritual, not as a meal. There has never been any archaeological evidence that supports claims of cannibalism in Haiti. The other consideration for these accusations is that the Conquistadores needed slaves. They were not permitted to capture the Indians of the islands but they were allowed to capture cannibals and as a result they found as many as they needed.²⁵⁹ Cannibalism was the most prolific of the negative associations followed closely by witchcraft.

In an article of 1888, William W. Newell goes to great lengths to forge a link between “the cannibalistic Voodooos of Hayti” and the Waldenses (also known as the *Vaudois*) of Piedmont, a sect that he explains were dangerous to society. He explains how etymologically the word *Vaudoise* means a witch. He discusses the links with Satanism and through a convoluted process derives the conclusion that

²⁵⁹ Irving Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise and decline of the people who greeted Columbus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

the word survives from the fifteenth century, “*vaudouelle* is a witch, and the corresponding verb is *einvaudoueller*, to bewitch, *voodoo*.”²⁶⁰ Newell’s reasoning lacks substantiation and appeared to be an attempt to confuse the reader with a mix of explanations. He had a number of theories to the origins of *Voodoo* and one alarming proposition was that there was a link between Haitians and the fifteenth century European sects because “the secret ceremonies of the sect of the Vaudois [European] (Vaudoux) [Haitian] are accompanied with cannibalism, especially the eating of children.”²⁶¹ There was also a description of these “murderers” taking the shape of wolves, supporting the folktale of the *loup-garou*, the Haitian werewolf, believed to be a ploy for the voodooists to capture children for sacrifice.²⁶² Newell and St. John established a foundation built on myth and misrepresentation, depicting a culture as cannibalistic and Satanistic rooted in European witchcraft.

Frederick Douglass spoke in Haiti’s defence in a lecture of 1893 and in response to the allegations he rightly stated that superstition and idolatry are not specific to Haiti, “even in our enlightened age, we need not travel far from our own country, from England, from Scotland, from Ireland, France, Germany or Spain to find gross superstition.”²⁶³ This speech was one of the strongest objections to the treatment of Haiti to be heard in the nineteenth century.

²⁶⁰ William W. Newell, “Myths of Voodoo Worship and Child Sacrifice in Hayti,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 1.1 (Apr.-Jun., 1888) 18-19.

²⁶¹ Newell, 20.

²⁶² Newell, 22.

²⁶³ Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Haiti,” Dedication ceremonies delivered at the World’s Fair in Jackson Park, Chicago, 2nd January 1893, see for example ‘The Louverture Project’ on <[<http://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Frederick_Douglass_lecture_on_Haiti_\(1893\)>](http://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Frederick_Douglass_lecture_on_Haiti_(1893))>

Ellis Cashmore wrote a review article in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* to question whether there is an unhealthy obsession with black culture. He argues that it has been “systematically devalued” since the fifteenth century, before the advent of racism. Ellis identifies the European iconography of Africa, the cannibalism and witchcraft, the same cannibalism and witchcraft that were appropriated by those writing of Haiti.²⁶⁴ As mentioned previously, the colonial and imperialistic views of black culture and Africa were established throughout the nineteenth century.²⁶⁵

Throughout all cultural production Vodou has been linked with identifiable objects of fear to create an imagined culture filled with the sinister described as the darkness, black magic, witchcraft and ghosts, a culture that was to be commonly known as Voodoo.

Illustrated Voodoo

Anthropological and ethnographic narratives of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were mainly supported by photographs and drawings that were specific to Haiti and Vodou. There were a number of publishers who opted for illustrations, an artist’s interpretation of the text. Images are very powerful and the reading of them complex, they can be read without context but the narrative identifies the preferred meaning. There was a regime of representation during the 1920s and 1930s, the representation of ‘otherness.’ The illustrations in the Vodou texts can be read connotatively to identify what they have to say about

²⁶⁴ Ellis Cashmore, “Black Culture: scholarly interest, or unhealthy obsession?” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24.2 (March 2001) 318-321.

²⁶⁵ See chapter one 55-57.

the subject of the religion and of race, the same argument arises that O'Callaghan discusses, the binary representation of 'them' and 'us'.²⁶⁶ Derrida argued that there is a relation of power between the poles of this binary opposition, in this case the power of white over black.²⁶⁷ His theory of deconstruction allows texts to be read for a deeper understanding or as Howells describes, "the demonstration of textual self-contradiction...this gap between authorial intention and textual meaning."²⁶⁸ When reading the Vodou (or Voodoo) narratives it is important to consider Derrida's thoughts on literature, that writers are more concerned with the aesthetic and 'fiction.' He suggests that the meanings, content and representations of the texts can "no longer account for certain very determinate effects."²⁶⁹ If this is the case then the Vodou narratives are written with the author's aesthetic and as such may read as 'fiction' rather than their determined intention.

The illustrations within the non-fiction and fiction narratives echo the sentiments of their time. They are racist, stereotyped images to illustrate the superiority of white over black, to reinforce the justification of colonialism and imperialism. The early fictional narratives contained illustrations that needed the viewer to construct meaning; they were not necessarily specific to the text. Bhabha suggests that stereotyping is "not the setting up of a false image that becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices" but that 'knowledges' or meanings are

²⁶⁶ O'Callaghan, 90-91.

²⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

²⁶⁸ Christina Howells, *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999) 3.

²⁶⁹ Derrida, *Positions* 94.

split.²⁷⁰ When referring to the representations he reminds us that the black can be both “savage” and “servant” and that it is the separation that is being shown.²⁷¹ It is this separation that is shown within illustrated Voodoo, the visualisation of colonial fantasy. According to Bhabha this separation “lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power.”²⁷²



Fig.21. Voodoo fictional characters.²⁷³

Figure 21 shows images from the fictional narratives at the end of the nineteenth century. Both images show a black man dressed in rags to identify him as poor. They are stereotypes echoing the days of slavery, on the left a cannibalistic image, on the right a lazy character who has fallen asleep. As mentioned previously, Bhabha suggests that it is the difference being represented and this is evident in Figure 21. The stirring of a cooking pot would have illustrated the

²⁷⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “The other question: the stereotype and colonial discourse” in Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (eds) *Visual Culture: the reader* (London: Sage, 1999) 370-378.

²⁷¹ Bhabha, in Evans and Hall, 377.

²⁷² Bhabha, in Evans and Hall, 378.

²⁷³ Fig.21. Left, Illustration (artist unknown) on the cover of Captain Mayne Reid’s fictional narrative *The Maroon: A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah* (1883); Right, illustration by Juliette Owen, from *Old Rabbit, The Voodoo and Other Sorcerers* (1893) by Mary Alicia Owen, 172.

fears of the white, the belief in the black 'savage' depicted here as the stereotype of the cannibal. There is no reference to the religion, in the foreground is a pair of tongs but at first glance they appear to be a bone; in the background there is a bat and a lizard, both associated with witchcraft, an opportunity for the reader to create a link. The image on the right, *The King of the Voodoos*, is described in the text as a "black, sweaty, medium sized negro...altogether innocent of soap..." and then continues "he was a self chosen disciple of his Satanic Majesty."²⁷⁴ This is from a collection of stories for children and this description of ridicule towards the black man, and the link between Voodoo and Satan, supported by this illustration would lead to a reconstruction of the black Voodooist in the imagination of the reader and listener.

Non-fiction narratives also opted for illustrations rather than photography, two of which were acclaimed as accurate accounts of Voodoo in Haiti. Alexander King illustrated *The Magic Island* (1929), an alleged pioneering eyewitness account of Voodoo in Haiti. His representations of the narrative were not sympathetic to the Haitians and encouraged the continuation of prejudice. Many of the illustrations in *The Magic Island* were direct inspirations for scenes within the films that were to be produced by Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s which will be discussed in the next chapter. The images of zombies are familiar throughout cultural production. The stereotype of blank eyed shuffling figures is repeated until the present day and it was in part due to Seabrook and King that we have these images. Seabrook also reiterated the idea of Voodoo ceremonies being "a place of writhing black bodies, blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened,

²⁷⁴ Owen, 173.

drunken...,”²⁷⁵ this can be seen in Figure 22 below on the right, while on the left are the zombies.



Fig.22. Illustrations by Alexander King from *The Magic Island*.²⁷⁶

Richard A. Loederer illustrated his own travelogue in 1935. The illustration in Figure 23 below shows the “slave caravan winding its mournful way through the African Bush.”²⁷⁷ The words in the text relate to the arrival of slaves in Haiti, taken from Africa by the French. Although he addresses the horrors of slavery he switches the focus to Voodoo, “Transplanted to a new land, the old rites and orgies were recommenced in the virgin forests of Haiti. The curse of Voodoo covered the island.”²⁷⁸ There is an interesting image in the centre; this depicts the spirit of Voodoo that stalked the caravans. Loederer has given it serpent eyes and

²⁷⁵ Seabrook, 42.

²⁷⁶ Fig.22. Illustrations by Alexander King. Left, “No one dared to stop them, for they were corpses walking in the sunlight”; right, “blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened...danced their dark saturnalia”, illustrations from *The Magic Island*. Seabrook, 98 and 42.

²⁷⁷ Loederer 27.

²⁷⁸ Loederer, 26.

skeletal features but still retains the characteristics of the black stereotype. The illustration bears a striking resemblance to Gustave Klimt's image of death in *Death and Life* (1916). Klimt's work embodies the fascination of the Viennese desire for the intellectual and in turn, arguably, Loederer was attempting to attain the same accolade for his work in colonial twentieth century.

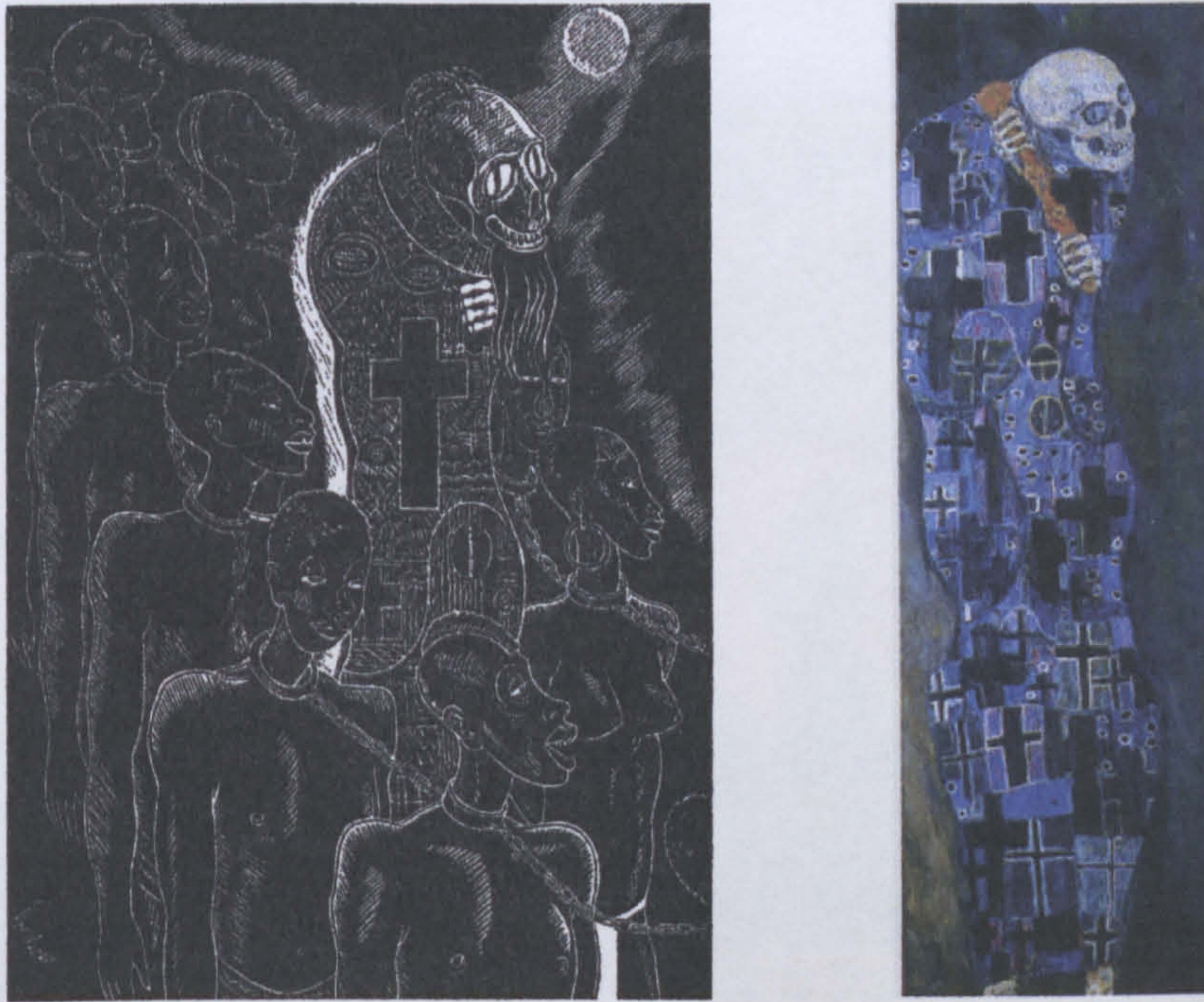


Fig.23. Left “Endless slave caravans wound their mournful way through the African bush,” illustration by Richard Loederer in *Voodoo Fire in Haiti*, right, *Death and Life* (detail), Gustave Klimt 1916.²⁷⁹

Although some of the literary narratives opted for photographs to support the text, they chose to publish illustrated covers as shown below on the memoirs from the American Occupation. Figure 24 shows the images used on the covers of *Cannibal Cousins* (1934) and *The White King of La Gonave* (1931). The

²⁷⁹ Fig.23. Left, “Endless slave caravans wound their mournful way through the African bush,” illustration by Richard Loederer in Loederer 27; right, *Death and Life* (1916), Gustave Klimt, oil on canvas.

image for *Cannibal Cousins* reflects the iconic portrayal of *Baron Samedi*, the loa of the dead; the same loa chosen by Duvalier for his inspiration (see Fig. 18, p.93). The illustration chosen for *The White King of La Gonave* represented the colonial power, the white male overseeing the black workers, a reflection of the slave structure from the previous century and a reminder to the reader of why the Americans were in Haiti.

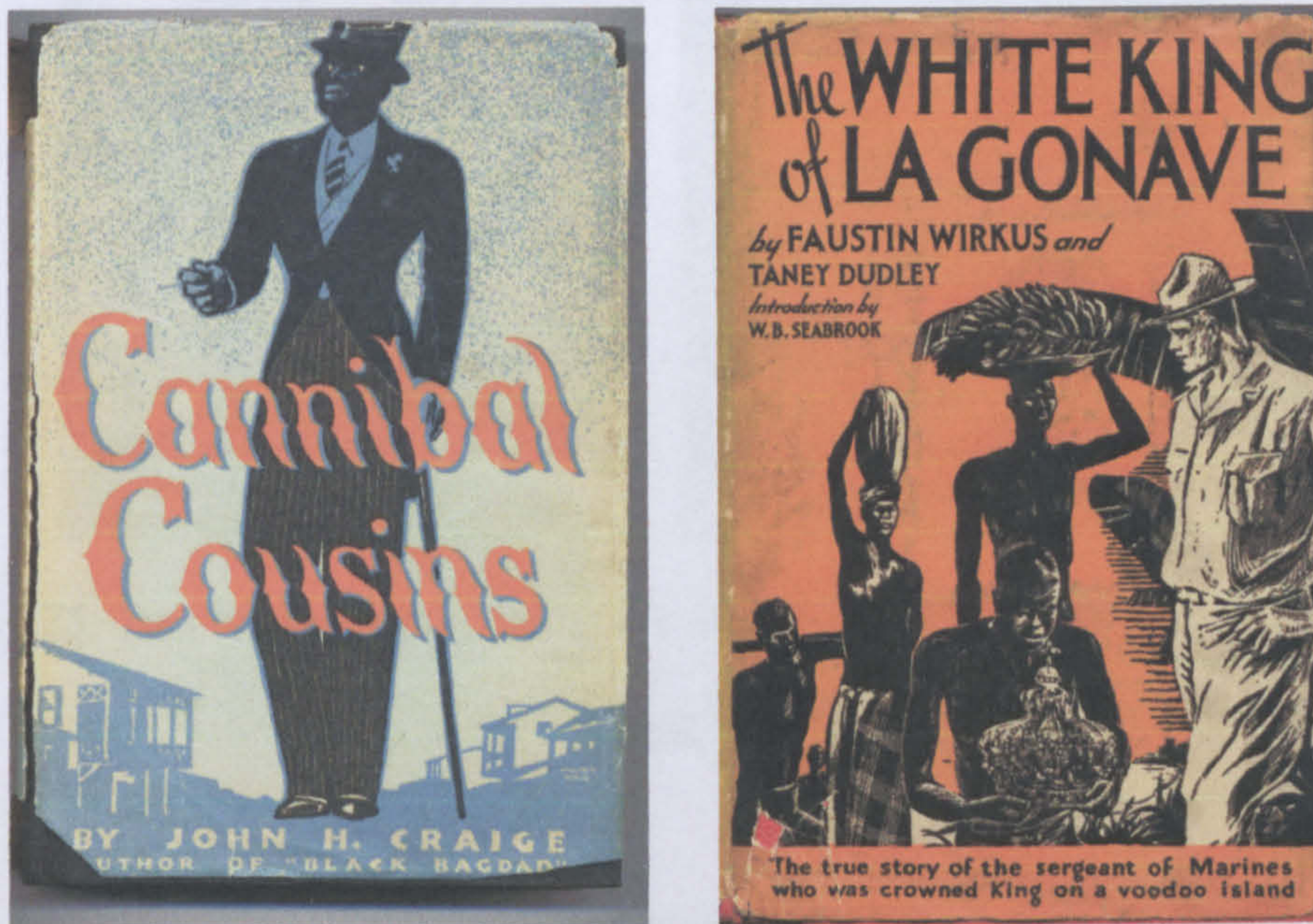


Fig.24. The covers of the books from the American Occupation.²⁸⁰

The illustrations in the children’s books and comics of the 1940s are arguably more damaging as they were being disseminated through early forms of popular culture to a mass market. Du Gay discusses cultural processes as being “ongoing”²⁸¹ and according to Harrington and Bielby meanings are “circulated

²⁸⁰ Fig.24. Left, Cover of *Cannibal Cousins*, Craige, right, cover of *The White King of La Gonave*, Wirkus.

²⁸¹ Paul du Gay, “Introduction,” *Production of Culture: Cultures of Production*, ed., Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1997) 10.

through a complex set of reciprocal processes and practices.”²⁸² The popularity of any of these visual representations relies upon the producers of the cultural object understanding the consumers. This popularity then links with the dissemination of Vodou within society without social boundaries.



Fig.25. Two images from *Dick Tracy on Voodoo Island* (1944) by Chester Gould.²⁸³



Fig.26. The Voodoo doll, zombie and ‘natives’ from *Voodoo Hoodoo* (1949).²⁸⁴

²⁸² C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby, “Constructing the Popular: Cultural Production and Consumption,” *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*, eds., C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 11.

²⁸³ Fig.25. Illustrations by Chester Gould, left, “The Negroes were gloomy, sullen” in Gould, 121, and right, “The natives brandished clubs” in Gould, 167.

²⁸⁴ Fig.26. *Donald Duck and the Voodoo Hoodoo*, pages 4, 3 and 28.

The images within both of these representations (Fig.25 and Fig.26) for the younger market feature the constructed and re-imagined 'Africa,' featuring 'natives', jungle and mud huts to depict the 'savage' of literary production. The Voodoo doll in *Donald Duck* is also pictured as a black character to represent the evil that can be done, an opportunity for the reader to add to the stereotypes already presented.

In 1997 and 1998 a series of graphic magazines, 'comics' for adults were created by Jim Lee and Brandon Choi with stories by Alan Moore. This series of four graphic magazines have titles of the loa, *Legba*, *Erzulie*, *Samedi* and *Damballah*.²⁸⁵ Alan Moore's narratives are highly illustrative and feature scantily clad sexual images of women. The Voodoo is entwined throughout with the loa being written into the story. William Seabrook is mentioned when the main character (called Voodoo) buys his book to learn about Voodoo and there is also a mention of Maya Deren's book *Voodoo Gods*. The stories feature violence, death and evil forces and are set in New Orleans; the church at the centre of the story is very similar to the St Louis Cathedral in the city. Baron Samedi appears in issue two (Fig.27) and there are other stereotyped visual representations of Voodoo such as a rag doll, a skull, serpents and written references such as mention of the *Petra* [meaning Petro] family of Gods, the dark pantheon of spirits.

²⁸⁵ Alan Moore, "Legba" (Nov., 1997), "Erzulie" (Dec., 1997), "Samedi" (Jan., 1998), "Damballah" (Mar., 1998), Pencils by Al Rio, Inks by Trevor Scott, (Fullerton, California: Image Comics, 1997-98).



Fig.27. Voodoo and the reflection of Baron Samedi in *Erzulie*.²⁸⁶

The covers of the *Voodoo* magazines are reflective of the Art Nouveau illustrations created at the end of the nineteenth century, the time of the most inflammatory Voodoo literature. Figure 28 below shows a comparison between the cover of a *Voodoo* magazine and a poster designed by Alfred Mucha at the end of the nineteenth century, the same linear forms, style of type and prominent female figure are evident in both.

²⁸⁶ Fig.27. Moore, "Erzulie," *Voodoo*, 30.



Fig.28. Alan Moore magazine cover (1998), Alphonse Mucha poster (1897).²⁸⁷

These are examples of the visualisations of the text, the reader had their imagination directed to perpetuate the stereotyped exaggerated features of the black and to demonise Voodoo. These images involve disavowal, they accommodate the powerful fascination which is both indulged and denied, that which is taboo has a displaced form of representation within these illustrations. Hall discusses how the double-focus, the looking and not looking, is evident, that which is perceived to be 'primitive' or different is at the same time being enjoyed and lingered over because it is exotic.²⁸⁸ bell hooks emphasises that this process is the exploitation of the 'taboo,' that "this is a cultural moment where white people and the rest of us are being asked...to let our prejudices and xenophobia go, and happily "eat the other."²⁸⁹ When considering the viewing of these

²⁸⁷ Fig.28. left, Moore, cover; right, Alphonse Mucha, *Bieres de la Meuse*, Paris, 1897.

²⁸⁸ Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (London: Sage, 1997) 268.

²⁸⁹ bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York, London: Routledge, 1994) 55.

images, Bourdieu suggests that there is a deciphering required. This deciphering is only possible if the 'cultural code' is understood.²⁹⁰ When considering these various theories they can all be applied to the viewing of illustrated Voodoo. We have to have a knowledge or text to 'explain' the images and then when read, we construct our own meaning. This meaning will then be applied to our understanding of Voodoo and any misrepresentations perpetuated. As Bourdieu suggests, whenever "these specific conditions [ability to decipher the code and meaning of an image] are not fulfilled, misunderstanding is inevitable."²⁹¹

Summary

The literary representations of Vodou formed the basis for the cultural representations throughout the twentieth century. Literature was the medium that introduced Voodoo across Britain and America and there was a synthesis of high and low culture, representations of Voodoo were not exclusive to any specific class or age group. Peterson and Kern discuss the breaking down of high and low culture and that culture is constantly evolving, engaging different social groups.²⁹² Harrington and Bielby suggest that historians have identified a discourse in the late 1800s when the definitions of high and low culture were established.²⁹³ What is deemed low culture is often associated with mass circulation and accessibility.

²⁹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) in particular chapter 8 "Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception," 215-237.

²⁹¹ Bourdieu, 216.

²⁹² Richard A. Peterson and Roger M. Kern, "Changing highbrow taste: From snob to omnivore," *American Sociological Review*, 61 (1996) 900-908.

²⁹³ Harrington and Bielby 6.

Voodoo first appeared in Francophone literature during the eighteenth century and although this has been mentioned the focus is on English language texts. The narratives that were to have the highest impact were those written at the end of the nineteenth century, post-emancipation and post-independence in Haiti. Victorian Britain had a renewed vigour where racism and prejudice were concerned; the Americans were also maintaining a presence around Haiti. It was at this time that those from more privileged backgrounds would have had access to the early Vodou narratives. It was believed that only those who were well educated would understand and appreciate high culture, such as these early literary works. It could be argued that this resulted in the prejudice being confined to a specific section or social strata within society, however, due to the developments in mass production and advertising the perpetuation of stereotypes was accessible to all.²⁹⁴

The early part of the twentieth century saw Haiti recolonised by the Americans during the occupation which led to a renewed focus of prejudice. Joan Pau Rubiés writes that the description of peoples in travel narratives provided entertainment through explanations of their behaviour and that there was more emphasis on interpretation than there was on 'what to describe,' there was a search for an explanation of cultural diversity.²⁹⁵ These explanations of Vodou originated in the minds of writers who interpreted the interpretations of others and so were exaggerated and removed from 'truth.' This is where Derrida's

²⁹⁴ Fred Schroeder discusses the mass produced in his edited collection *5000 Years of Popular Culture* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980).

²⁹⁵ Joan Pau Rubiés, "Travel Writing and Ethnography," *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Peter Hulme and Tim Young (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 242-260.

discourse on the author's aesthetic is prominent; the writers of Vodou depended on the aesthetic within their narratives. Herbert Gans refers to the term 'aesthetic' and suggests that it be used broadly to include not only standard and taste but also "emotional and intellectual values" which are applied when choosing content from any culture.²⁹⁶

In the mid-twentieth century there were a number of Haitian authors of note and although they have not been included within this chapter they have not been excluded from the research. Jacques Roumain, Jean-Price Mars, Philippe Marcelin and Pierre Marcelin were Haitian authors of note and there were others who wrote books for children and adults, fiction and non-fiction. There are contemporary authors who have been considered such as Edwidge Danticat and there are translations of folk tales. All of these Haitians have worked relentlessly to redress the balance of representation, to portray Haiti as it is, not as it is imagined and it is here that they are acknowledged for their contribution to literature and to Vodou.²⁹⁷

The images created across the literary, both actual and imagined, provided a lucrative resource for the future cultural productions of Vodou. There were and still are constant references to the literary works of a relatively narrow group of

²⁹⁶ Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 14.

²⁹⁷ Works include Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew*, trans. Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947); Jean Price-Mars, *So Spoke the Uncle*, trans. Magdaline W. Shannon (1928; Washington: Three Continents Press, 1983); Pierre Marcelin and Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, *Canapé Vert*, trans. Edward Larocque Tinker (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1944); Philippe Thoby-Marcelin and Pierre Marcelin, *The Singing Turtle and Other Tales from Haiti*, trans. Eva Thoby-Marcelin (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1971); Paulé Bartón, *The Woe Shirt*, trans. Howard A. Norman (1980; Washington: Graywolf Press, 1982); Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994; New York: Vintage, 1998); Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

authors that span two centuries. These references were perceived as accurate accounts of a religion that was 'exotic' and that fuelled the imagination of generations. There is a distance from the past and as such the narratives can only be interpreted, as Catherine Belsey discusses, a meaning and a culture is constructed by reading the artefacts that remain.²⁹⁸ The works should also be considered within their cultural context. To examine within a cultural context, according to du Gay, "one should at least explore how it is represented, what social identities are associated with it, how it is produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulate its distribution and use."²⁹⁹ Within the field of literary representations there are many factors to consider. Literature has been produced and consumed by all sectors of society making the Vodou information widely accessible.

Belief in fantastical and negative reports of other cultures is all too common. Haiti is almost always introduced as 'the poorest country in the Western hemisphere' and the colonial representations of Voodoo, of orgies and sacrifice, will probably linger in the imagination. As time passes and Vodou discourse is more open, documentaries and literature attempt to redress the balance so it is hoped that the fictionalised representations will be received as what they are, fiction. The following chapters will show how these literary portrayals of Vodou provided a foundation that led to Voodoo, the stereotyped viewpoint of a Caribbean religion within western Anglophone society, and its position in the cultural productions of Britain and America.

²⁹⁸ Catherine Belsey, "Reading Cultural History," *Reading the Past*, Tamsin Spargo (ed.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000)103-117.

²⁹⁹ Du Gay, 1997, 3.

Chapter Three

CINEMATIC VOODOO

Introduction

The literary representations of Vodou since the mid-nineteenth century were instrumental in creating Voodoo in the imagination of readers of popular fiction and non-fiction. The progression from page to screen was inevitable. This chapter examines the cinematic representations of Voodoo during the advent of the talking movies in the late 1920s. These representations lie predominantly in the horror genre during the earlier years before including the comedy and thriller genres later in the twentieth century. This research considers the productions of Britain and America, however, there were many other countries adding to the horror genre and the sub-genre of zombie films and these will be identified where appropriate.¹ The nature of cinematic production meant that many of the locations were imaginary so films have been included that feature Voodoo wherever they are set, in the Caribbean, America or fictional places.

Film studios in America really began to establish themselves in the period from 1919 to 1929, from the end of World War I to the Great Depression. It was at this time, even though many genres were evolving in the silent era, there was an emphasis on the historical extravaganza. *Race*² will be identified throughout this thesis as a major influence on the representations of Vodou and Haiti. It was to be incorporated into one of the first epic movies to be made during the silent era, *Birth of a Nation*.³ This film tells the story of the Civil War and the period that followed during reconstruction. Cinematically the film was a masterpiece, it had

¹ During the 1960s there was an increase in zombie films from outside America, in particular Spain, Mexico and France, in the 1970s there was an increase in Italian productions. For further information see Jamie Russell, *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema* (Godalming, UK: Fab Press, 2005).

² Race, rather than ethnicity, is the term used when referring to cinematic cultural representations.

³ *The Birth of a Nation*, dir. D.W. Griffith, Epoch Producing Corp, 1915.

costumes, battle scenes, progressive storytelling, excellent editing and photographic techniques and it really did advance film making in the early twentieth century. The film made an argument for white supremacy complete with its portrayal of stereotyped characters, its racist inference, of white actors with painted black faces playing the parts of black characters and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) portrayed as heroes. There was a representation of a black man as a rapist. Donald Bogle calls this stereotype of the black male the “brutal black buck,” the image of an uncontrollable black male who lusts after and rapes white women.⁴ This representation of the black male was accepted and in the wake of the Civil War it was seen as a justification for lynching and hate crimes against the black community. The film was denounced by the NAACP⁵ while the KKK had a resurgence in popularity, indicating the effect that the film had despite the representations of race. This was a major piece of cinematic advancement; unfortunately it was to portray racism and stereotype, key features of films to follow including many examples within Voodoo cinema. This film was released at the same time that America occupied Haiti and as shown in the literary representations there was still an aftermath of colonialism and a sentiment of white superiority.⁶ The messages may not have been so blatant in the films that followed but as this chapter will show, it was still ever present in many productions. Throughout the decades films reflect the sentiment and feelings of the time, contextualising the subject. These films allow us an insight into the socio-cultural climate at a specific time and place.

⁴ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 1989).

⁵ NAACP, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

⁶ See Chapter Two 121-131.

The horror genre was one of the earliest to be developed within cinema, from the days of silent movies there were characters and monsters derived from classic literature that appeared before audiences to terrify and enthrall. The terms 'horror' and 'thriller' describe what these films are about, they are designed to disturb, frighten and terrorise, exploiting our inner feelings and fears, focussing on our nightmares and fantasies. The term 'horror-film' began to appear during the 1930s when the phrase was mutually accepted by both filmmaker and audience, and the underlying theme of many of the films within this genre is human mortality and the fear of death.⁷

Modern horror has its origins in the gothic literature of the late eighteenth century. The stories of terror and the supernatural were widely popular. Arguably one of the most well known of this genre is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a novel that features life after death, atmosphere and the dark side of humanity.⁸ Gothic literature featured iconic symbols synonymous with horror such as dark foreboding castles and houses, isolation, towers and 'mediaevality,' symbols that would later be incorporated into Voodoo horror.⁹ Vodou began to appear in literature during the eighteenth century, colonial ideals and the expansion of the Empire made any non-European culture the target of misrepresentation. When travelling became more accessible Vodou was transformed into the more sensational 'Voodoo'. The reflection of society recurs throughout cultural production, for example, gothic literature coincided with the American

⁷ Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: Random House, 1981) 37.

⁸ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818; London: Penguin, 1992) and Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, the 1818 text* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

⁹ There were a number of important novels of the gothic genre including Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London, 1764) and Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk* (London, 1796).

Revolution and French Revolution.¹⁰ Within the genre of gothic horror literature there were rational explanations of the supernatural and this rationalisation was a precursor to the narratives within detective fiction.¹¹ The uncovering of the supernatural form as a fraud was a formula that was adopted later in 1960s animation for example, Hanna-Barbera's *Scooby Doo* cartoons end with the unveiling of the entity as someone dressed up and this is discussed in the next chapter.¹² The gothic novels incorporated fear within a fictionalised construct, demons, ghosts and vampires became the materialisation of fear and were imagined as real. Since Voodoo was already described as real, the horrors that were associated within the representations would direct the fear to Haitian culture.

The earliest feature length horror films came from German film makers and were to be a strong and lasting influence on Hollywood with their expressionist style and gothic settings.¹³ These early horror films were made in the years following World War I, a time when there was a ban on the importation of foreign films and an opportunity for the filmmakers of Germany to excel within the new body that was known as Ufa (Universumfilm Aktiengesellschaft).¹⁴ One of the most enduring of the era was *Nosferatu* of 1922, a film that has been regularly shown

¹⁰ Rick Worland, *The Horror Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 28.

¹¹ Edgar Allen Poe, *The Purloined Letter* (New York, 1845) was a move away from the gothic and is often referred to as the first work of detective fiction.

¹² *Scooby Doo* is featured in chapter four, 291-313.

¹³ There were short films that could be deemed as horror at the turn of the century but they did not have a story, for more on the early history of film see Worland, 30-43.

¹⁴ Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918-1945*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

and still influences the horror genre to the present day.¹⁵ It has all of the iconography associated with this genre of film including the atmosphere, eerie remote castles and dark forests; *Nosferatu* also made clever use of shadows, something that would be emulated in later horror films. Hollywood would entice the German directors of the gothic horror to work on the horror films of the silent era. This resulted in directors such as Paul Leni and F.W. Murnau (who directed *Nosferatu*) making the move to the US in the late 1920s.



Fig. 29. *Nosferatu*, the gothic horror about a Vampire, set in a Mediaeval Castle.¹⁶

Hollywood began to adopt the gothic horror during the 1920s with films such as *The Phantom of the Opera* which was arguably the most famous horror film of

¹⁵ *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*, dir. F.W. Murnau, Jofa-Atelier Berlin-Johannisthal, 1922.

¹⁶ Fig. 29. Still from *Nosferatu* that shows elements synonymous with gothic horror such as the pointed arched doorway, image from internet, 20 December 2006
<<http://sopranosimage.tripod.com/nosferatu/slideshowb.html>>

the silent era.¹⁷ This particular silent film was unique because the main character was not unveiled as a fraud; instead the character meets his demise as the ‘Phantom.’ Hollywood did not produce any serious supernatural horrors during the silent era fearing that audiences would either recoil at the morbidity of the gothic or otherwise not believe. This decision was unfounded and *Phantom* featured elements of the gothic and supernatural. Lon Chaney tried to be true to the original text. His persona as the Phantom represented the living dead (an element of supernatural) reflecting the German gothic horrors, but there was no explanation of his appearance or his history in this first production.¹⁸



Fig. 30. Lon Chaney as the Phantom (1925).¹⁹

¹⁷ *The Phantom of the Opera*, dir. Rupert Julian, perf. Lon Chaney, Universal Pictures, 1925.

¹⁸ Later films such as the 1943 remake and the musical give an explanation of the musical talent of the Phantom and the reason for his looks.

¹⁹ Fig. 30. Lon Chaney as the Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), image from Google Images on the internet, 16 July 2006, <<http://images.google.co.uk/images?q=lon+chaney+as+phantom&gbv=2&ndsp=18&svnum=10&hl=en&start=54&sa=N>>

There was a tendency towards the farcical and Hollywood produced a number of 'Haunted House' comedies. Although the basis for the films was laughter they were still very atmospheric, sometimes overshadowing the comedy with their dark and sombre settings.²⁰

Sadly, the directors that were brought over from Germany and the career of Lon Chaney came to an abrupt end, all died prematurely between 1929 and 1931 and the horror genre was deprived of the talent of these gothic visionaries.²¹

The first movie to feature a voice was *The Jazz Singer* when Al Jolson spoke the words "Wait a minute, wait a minute, you ain't heard nothin' yet," a prophecy of the time and the start of the talking movie.²² There was a belief by many that the demand for talking movies was a phase and many of the actors were reluctant to support these developments including Charlie Chaplin.²³ This scepticism was misplaced, they were wrong and a major evolution in cinematic history was about to take place.

It should be noted that with the advent of 'talking' cinema there was an attempt to censor films and the Motion Picture Production Code (commonly known as the Hays Code) was published in 1930 to provide filmmakers with a set of

²⁰ Haunted House comedies include *The Cat and The Canary*, dir. Paul Leni, Universal Pictures, 1927. This and many of the early horror films were remade during the 1930s and 1940s.

²¹ Paul Leni died 1929 aged 44, Lon Chaney died in 1930 aged 47 and F.W. Murnau died in 1931 aged 42.

²² *The Jazz Singer*, dir. Alan Crosland, perf. Al Jolson, Warner Bros., 1927.

²³ For more on Charlie Chaplin see Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (London: Readers Union, 1966) or Chris Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989).

guidelines to follow.²⁴ Although the use of these guidelines was voluntary they were widely followed in the film industry until the mid 1960s. They provided rules on issues such as Crimes Against The Law, Sex, Vulgarity, Obscenity, Profanity, Costume, Dances (i.e. suggestive movements), Religion, Locations (i.e. the bedroom), National Feelings, Titles and "Repellent Subjects" (extremely graphic violence).²⁵ It appears that in the context of twentieth century Voodoo cinema the filmmakers were selective with which rules to apply to the content of their films, indicating the continuance of white superiority.

The silent era provided the foundation for the horror genre to build upon and Voodoo was to be a subject matter from early in this stage of cinematic production. The audience demand surpassed expectation and the studios needed to increase their production, to satisfy the demand they were constantly seeking material. The publication of *The Magic Island* in 1929 and its subsequent success provided an opportunity for Voodoo to be entered into cinematic representations at the start of the "Golden Age" of Hollywood.

Voodoo in the Golden Age of Hollywood

Rick Worland describes the period 1931-1939 "one of the most fruitful and important periods of the American horror film came soon after the arrival of sound and the Crash of 1929."²⁶ The Great Depression did have an impact and

²⁴ The Motion Picture Production Code is also known as the Hays Code after its author, Will H. Hays.

²⁵ For more information on this see the British Film Institute screen online, 2003-2007, 4th January 2007 <<http://www.screenonline.org.uk>>

²⁶ Worland, 55.

Hollywood had to scale back production;²⁷ it was at this time that there was an increase in production from studios dubbed the 'Poverty Row' studios.²⁸ These were companies, such as Monogram and Republic, which were producing low budget movies from the end of the silent era through to the 1950s. Their films were predominantly in the horror and western genres during their early years and later included science fiction and thrillers. The Depression was a period of economic crisis and unemployment but audiences flocked to the cinema as a way of escape, it was the only luxury for many, and the demand for movies was high.

The first mention of Voodoo in a talking movie came in the 1930 production of *The Sea Bat*.²⁹ This film was set on a fictional island called 'Portuga'.³⁰ The opening credits describe the film "Through the night... the weird chant of Voodoo worship. Through the day... the weird industry of Sponge Diving."³¹ The Voodoo content is minimal and the emphasis was on sponge diving and the dangers of a giant manta ray.³² Voodoo provides a backdrop, a focus for prejudice, and an evil from which the main female character can be rescued at the conclusion to the film. The story revolves around Nina whose lover is killed by the manta ray after having his life line cut by an escaped convict from Devil's

²⁷ For more on the Great Depression see Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993).

²⁸ For more on Poverty Row see Michael R. Pitts, *Poverty Row Studios, 1929-1940: An Illustrated History of 55 Independent Film Companies* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2005).

²⁹ *The Sea Bat*, dir. Wesley Ruggles, MGM, 1930. This film features an early performance by Boris Karloff before he became famous for his role as Frankenstein in 1931.

³⁰ Film locations will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

³¹ Sponge diving was the number one industry in the Bahamas during this period which may have been the inspiration for the film, note to author from Dr John Gilmore. Sponge diving was also an industry in the Greek islands and the US, particularly Key West and Florida.

³² The 'Sea Bat' of the title refers to the giant manta ray.

Island.³³ When questioning her faith she finds the locals and participates in their ceremonies much to the disgust of her father who worries that Nina is “praying with those Voodoo devils.” The level of racism in this film is high and echoes the literary sentiment that had been published since the late nineteenth century.

Nina’s father describes her association with the locals, “Lowly, slimy natives and a white girl out there praying with them in the jungle mud.” Christianity ultimately saves Nina, invalidating Voodoo as a religion and providing the film with a reflection of morality. Thus illustrating how Christianity can rescue the “natives” from their beliefs as it did when African slaves arrived in the Caribbean to find themselves being baptised.³⁴

There are numerous references to white superiority, for example Nina does a good turn and is told “That’s white of you Nina.” Voodoo is not featured throughout the film other than a tokenistic moment of frenzied dancing although it is mentioned within the dialogue; the representations were racist and inflammatory with no tolerance towards the local inhabitants.³⁵

The first full length Voodoo film to be produced was *White Zombie* in 1932.³⁶

This was a low budget movie that borrowed sets from many of the previous gothic horrors such as *Dracula*³⁷ and *Frankenstein*³⁸ and it was made entirely on the Universal Studio film set. The film was based loosely on a play called

³³ This causes confusion as the location appears to be in the Pacific, the suggestion of Vodou and sponge diving is from the Caribbean and Devil’s Island was off the coast of South America.

³⁴ See chapter two, 37.

³⁵ There were a number of short factual films made between 1927 and 1932 which were of the documentary genre, these will be covered in chapter five.

³⁶ *White Zombie*, dir. Victor Halperin, prods. Edward Halperin Productions, United Artists, 1932.

³⁷ *Dracula*, dir. Tod Browning, perf. Bela Lugosi, Universal Pictures, 1931.

³⁸ *Frankenstein*, dir. James Whale, perf. Boris Karloff, Universal Pictures, 1931.

Zombie by Kenneth Webb which in turn was influenced by William Seabrook's book, *The Magic Island*.³⁹

Many references to *White Zombie* identify *The Magic Island* as the influence and inspiration for the narrative. Although *The Magic Island* was the basis for the play which was to inspire the film there was no acknowledged link between the film and the book. Gary Rhodes discusses an interview with Victor Halperin, the director, in which he recalled the origins of the story and the script for *White Zombie* being developed with verification from US Marines who were based in Haiti. There is no mention of *The Magic Island* or any record of him consulting with the Marines so the only true credit to the story rests with Victor Halperin himself.⁴⁰

The debate of the influence of *The Magic Island* on *White Zombie* will continue but it has to be noted that even if there was no direct influence there are striking similarities between the illustrations of Alexander King within the book and the portrayal of Murder Legendre by Bela Lugosi (Fig.31).

³⁹ This production will be covered in more depth in chapter five.

⁴⁰ Raymond J. Neilson, "Interview with Victor Halperin AETN-TV, Arkansas (1978)" in Gary D. Rhodes, *White Zombie: Anatomy of a Horror Film* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Press, 2001).



Fig.31. The image of the Voodoo-master in an illustration for *The Magic Island* and Bela Lugosi as Murder Legendre from *White Zombie* wearing a similar hat and black cloak.⁴¹

Voodoo was a word in wide use and although *White Zombie* is about Voodoo the word is not used to describe the beliefs within the film. The opening scenes show a burial at crossroads with the diegetic sounds of chanting and drumming and we see the main characters of Neil and Madeline inside the carriage. This added ‘authenticity’ to the subject as there were burials at crossroads in rural Haiti in an attempt to stop the Bokors raising the dead. The driver explains that the gathering in the road is a funeral. Neil speaks to his fiancée apologising for “not such a cheerful introduction for you to *Our West Indies*”, the colonial reference to the West Indies, of which Haiti had achieved independence many years before is indicative of the socio-cultural sentiment. Haiti was a place definitely not belonging to ‘Us’ and certainly not ‘Ours’. As O’Callaghan suggests, there was a

⁴¹ Fig.31. Left, detail from an Alexander King illustration, ‘No one dared to stop them, for they were corpses walking in the sunlight,’ in Seabrook, 99; right, Bela Lugosi as Murder Legendre in *White Zombie* wearing the same hat and cloak as in the illustration (detail), in Rhodes, 266.

fear of the ideas and “anti-European sentiments” moving from ‘Them’ to ‘Us’.⁴²

It is this fear that may have instigated the reference of Haiti belonging to ‘Us’, of being ‘Ours’ and so in the mind of the viewer there was the security of knowing that ultimately there was a structure in place of European rule, and of the perceived ‘civilised’. As Bhabha discusses when referring to the question of ‘otherness’ and colonial discourse “...is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction”.⁴³

Zombies are identified by the carriage driver who explains to Neil and Madeline that “they are the living dead, they are corpses made to work in the sugar fields at night.” The character of the carriage driver was played by an actor named Clarence Muse.⁴⁴ Muse was an African American actor/composer and although his part was a stereotypical trade for a black character, a labouring job, there is nothing demeaning about him. He wears smart clothes and is well spoken within the narrative. It was his account of zombies that gave an explanation to the audience, some of whom may not have understood what a zombie was. This description of the zombie derived from literary descriptions and unusually links them directly to Haiti later in the film. This link would be lost in the years that followed as the zombie evolved into a flesh-eating creature with little or no associations with Voodoo or Haiti.

⁴² O’Callaghan, 90.

⁴³ Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 70.

⁴⁴ Clarence Muse had a long and distinguished career as an actor, producer, composer and writer, born in 1889 he worked until his death in 1979. For further information see the internet movie database <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0615617/>>

The location would be identified as Haiti by the Doctor contextualising the zombies and ritualistic practices, when he is asked if he believes in zombies he responds “...Haiti is full of nonsense and superstition with all of it mixed up in a lot of mysteries, turn your hair curly. I’ve been a missionary here for twenty years and at times I don’t know what to think...”

White Zombie used an interesting technique of acknowledging the audience. The audience’s role is voyeuristic and yet in this film the character of Murder Legendre played by Bela Lugosi⁴⁵ is given a powerful image on the screen. The camera zooms in on his face and then onto his eyes which engage with the camera fully and subsequently with the audience. This creates a sinister air and almost makes the viewer feel as if his powers could be unleashed. His eyes are consistent as a force throughout the film; even in the opening scenes we see them as a backdrop to the unsuspecting visitors to the island. The film uses unrestricted narration, as audience we are aware of the intentions and powers that Legendre has when the other characters are oblivious. Herbert Blumer studied audience response to film during the 1930s and published his findings in *Movies and Conduct*.⁴⁶ He suggested that a successful production was one that drew in the viewer so that they became lost within the narrative.⁴⁷ The use of Lugosi’s face and eyes to connect with the audience reinforces this idea and strengthens the impact the film may have had.

⁴⁵ The horror genre also gave a number of actors their careers and the actors became as iconic as the characters and the films they played in, actors including Boris Karloff (British) and Bela Lugosi (Austria-Hungarian, now Romanian). Bela Lugosi starred in over one hundred films and Boris Karloff starred in over two hundred films (including a number of appearances in television dramas playing himself) from the late 1940s through to his death in 1969.

⁴⁶ Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

⁴⁷ Blumer 198.



Fig.32. The sinister persona of Murder Legendre, the Voodoo master.⁴⁸

Voodoo is absent within the verbal narrative yet is very evident throughout the visual narrative. Other than the dancers and chanting seen in the opening scenes the visual symbolism relating to Voodoo includes the Voodoo doll. The doll is not shown with pins but as a wax effigy seen wrapped in the scarf of Madeline to be used by Legendre. He holds it in a flame to control her; there are no altars or vèvè, and the audio reference comprises of chanting with intermittent drumming. There is an understanding that the practice is Voodoo, this film was made in the wake of *The Magic Island* and so would have sparked the interest of audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. Voodoo had been the subject of much fascination for nearly a century when this film was made.

⁴⁸ Fig. 32. Bela Lugosi as Murder Legendre in *White Zombie*, in Bryan Senn, *Drums of Terror: Voodoo in the Cinema* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, 1998) 18.

This film makes several remarks relating to slavery, highlighting the racist attitude of the time, and to the feelings towards Haiti. When referring to the zombies in his factory the character of Murder Legendre tells Mr Beaumont⁴⁹ that “You could make use of men like mine....they don’t mind long hours.” Later when discussing his options on how to rescue Madeline with the Doctor, Neil is told “There are superstitions on Haiti that the natives brought back from Africa,”⁵⁰ Neil responds with the line “Surely you don’t think she’s alive in the hands of natives? Better dead than that!” This fear of ‘natives’ is evident in a number of early films including the first mention of Voodoo in a ‘talkie’ in *The Sea Bat*. The term ‘native’ reflects back to the views and opinions of Africa and of the ‘other’. ‘Native’ was a term applied to any culture other than ‘Ours’ and the essence of colonialism and Empire was that of ‘civilising savages’.⁵¹

There is segregation within this film, and subsequent releases, with some of the characters cast being white actors with ‘blackened’ faces playing parts that are racially defined as black such as a witch-doctor identified by Legendre. During the period of the 1840s through to the 1950s the Minstrel Shows were a popular form of entertainment. The portrayal of black actors and blackened faced white actors acting as subordinates to be humiliated or beaten by the white for humour was deemed as entertainment. This popularity led to an inevitable transference to the big screen. There were some black actors cast in major film productions but

⁴⁹ Played by actor Robert Frazer.

⁵⁰ This is the second time that this character refers to the practises on the island as superstitious, reinforcing the notion in the mind of the viewer.

⁵¹ For more information see Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class, and the Victorians: A Study of English Attitudes toward the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Holmes and Meirer, 1978) and Patrick Brantlinger, “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,” *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (Autumn, 1985) 166-203.

not many, prejudice prevailed in the white dominated movie industry. There were also financial constraints. A number of cinemas catered for a “colored” population but these numbered approximately less than 2% of the total so the demand and financial viability of all black cast productions (also known as race movies)⁵² was outweighed by those for white audiences; producers had to make money.⁵³

There was a racist undercurrent to *White Zombie* but it was a film that treated Voodoo in a much less demeaning way than some that were to follow. It gave the religion some credibility even though it did represent it as an evil and harmful practice. *White Zombie* appeared to avoid using a stereotype for the evil Murder Legendre. The fact that the film was based in Haiti could have led to the villain being black; however, Bela Lugosi was a name that would bring audiences in so profit was likely to be the motivation when casting the Voodoo master and not authenticity to ethnicity. This aspect of film casting is discussed by Eugene Wong who terms this “role segregation” in which non-white actors are ineligible for certain roles because of their race.⁵⁴ The casting of a white actor in a non-white role formed part of the history of the stereotype because the white actor signifies the cultural representation, in this case of a Haitian Voodoo master. When referring to stereotype, Bhabha suggests that this process of subjectification [as in the Voodoo master being white] is made possible because

⁵² One of these, *Drums O'Voodoo*, will be discussed later in this chapter, 212.

⁵³ During the early years of cinema there were films that are now dubbed as ‘race movies,’ they were made specifically for black audiences and showed black characters in professional roles, around 500 were made between 1910 and 1950 by independent studios.

⁵⁴ Eugene Franklin Wong, *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in American Motion Pictures* (New York: Arno Press, 1978).

of stereotypical discourse. The subject is judged on its effectiveness within the realms of power and resistance, and its ‘otherness’ is based on the representation of difference within the film. As Bhabha writes “...an articulation of difference is contained within the fantasy of origin and identity”.⁵⁵



Fig.33. The film opens in New York, 1931.⁵⁶

White Zombie was a box office success, if not a hit with the critics, and the Voodoo in this film provides one of the only representations that placed the religion in Haiti. It is also one of the few films that linked zombies with Haiti and Voodoo. Victor Halperin did go on to direct another horror film in 1936, *Revolt of the Zombies*, a title that offered promise following on from *White Zombie* and yet did not feature Haiti or Voodoo.⁵⁷ The narrative features an expedition in

⁵⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 67.

⁵⁶ Fig.33. A photograph of a cinema frontage taken in the first few days of *White Zombie* opening, in Rhodes, 144.

⁵⁷ *Revolt of the Zombies*, dir. Victor Halperin, Edward Halperin Productions, 1936.

search of a spell to create zombies, this materialises in the form of a hypnotic spell, the zombies were not the living dead, they were living people in a hypnotic trance. This was a weak follow up to what was arguably one of the best Voodoo films ever made.⁵⁸

In 1934 there was a 'race movie' that portrayed Voodoo as a benign religion, *Drums o'Voodoo*.⁵⁹ *Drums o'Voodoo* was written by Augustus Smith, a black playwright whose Broadway play *Louisiana*⁶⁰ was converted into a film script and taken up by one of the Poverty Row studios.⁶¹ The budgets for the race movies were very small so to keep costs down the cast that had performed Smith's play on Broadway were hired for the film. Smith himself played the character Amos Berry (comically known as Elder Berry), and this decision meant that the film had the appearance of a play rather than a movie.⁶² There is an attempt at exploring Voodoo in this film rather than opting for the exploitation so familiar in later films. Voodoo is represented as a religion that is followed by the community and is as valid as Christianity. Voodoo ultimately accomplishes the aims of the community in *Drums o'Voodoo* and was shown being supported by those who chose to return to their heritage. The narrative tells of the arrival of an evil character (Tom Catt) who wishes to seduce a young girl (Myrtle) and who is blackmailing the Minister (who he knows was on a chain-gang for murder). This

⁵⁸ For further information see Senn, 236.

⁵⁹ *Drums O'Voodoo*, dir. Arthur Hoerl, Sack Amusement Enterprises, 1934. This film has been subsequently released with various names including *Louisiana*, *She Devil* and *Voodoo Drums*.

⁶⁰ *Louisiana* ran for just eight performances closing after a scathing critique by the highly respected [white] critic, Brooks Atkinson, this play will be featured in chapter five.

⁶¹ *Drums o'Voodoo* is a lost film, there is only one copy available that unfortunately has sections missing and in places is a bit disjointed, nevertheless it does contain nearly all of the film and enough to warrant inclusion within the research.

⁶² *Drums o'Voodoo* was a film made with an all black cast written by a black dramatist and yet an all white crew were hired for production.

is not a typical combination that strikes terror into the viewer as would be expected from a film from the horror genre.

Although there are missed opportunities within the narrative of this film it has merit for providing an insight into the religion of Voodoo rather than the Hollywood version of Voodoo. The emphasis is on Voodoo as a spiritual religion rather than an evil force for zombification as in *White Zombie*. The Voodoo first materialises within the written narrative at the start of the film when ‘we’ the viewers are told that “...a struggle between the White God and the Black Gods still goes on – to the steady beat of the Voodoo drums.” The drums are a feature of the soundtrack throughout, especially in the ceremonial scenes which show half naked black men, dancing to the beat of the drums. They are being led by the character of Aunt Hagar (Laura Bowman) dressed in a black cape which is reminiscent of the stereotype of a witch, indeed, within the film she is referred to as a ‘Voodoo witch.’⁶³ *Drums o’Voodoo* was the first Voodoo film to be written by a black dramatist and the first blaxploitation Voodoo movie,⁶⁴ even though it was not a critically good film it offered a unique perspective into Voodoo and so merits a mention.

⁶³ The character of Aunt Hagar is made up so heavily she appears to be a white actress in blackened face, even though she is black.

⁶⁴ ‘Blaxploitation’ is defined as the exploitation of black people, particularly in relation to stereotyped roles in films; it is also a term used for the films that targeted urban African Americans during the 1970s with predominantly black casts, featuring funk and soul music soundtracks they were incredibly popular with black audiences.

The 1930s offered over fifteen films that were described as containing Voodoo⁶⁵ such as *Black Moon*, *Ouanga* and a remake of the same film a few years later called *The Devil's Daughter*.⁶⁶

Black Moon represents Voodoo in much the same way that the literature of the late nineteenth century did, not as a religion but as a practice of frenzied dancing and human sacrifice. *Black Moon* featured the talents of Clarence Muse (the coach driver in *White Zombie*) playing a boat driver and Fay Wray (following on from *King Kong* fame).⁶⁷ *Black Moon* did nothing to portray Voodoo in anything other than a negative stereotype. *Ouanga* was a British production in the sense that it was an American company backed British picture.⁶⁸ The story was based around a plantation owner (Clelie) who is also a Voodoo priestess. When she discovers that her neighbour (whom she desires) becomes engaged (to Eve) she sends a ouanga to cast a death spell on his fiancée. When this fails to work she sends two zombies to kidnap Eve and return her for a sacrificial Voodoo ceremony. The zombies are not menacing in any way and the Voodoo dialogue is limited. There is an attempt to link the *Ouanga* Voodoo with Haiti, the film is set on a plantation called 'Paradise Island' in the West Indies and within the film there is a written narration that informs the viewer "After a visit to New York Adam Maynard starts back to his Haitian Plantation."⁶⁹ This film was remade for

⁶⁵ There were a further sixteen films that were described as zombie movies. These are listed in the Filmography.

⁶⁶ *Black Moon*, dir. Roy William Neill, Columbia, 1934; *Ouanga*, dir. George Terwilliger, British Paramount, 1935; *The Devil's Daughter*, dir. Arthur Leonard, Sack Amusement Enterprises, 1939.

⁶⁷ *King Kong*, dir. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, RKO, 1933.

⁶⁸ Britain would only usually import around five American films for each British made film so the American studios funded some British productions to increase the British output and so increasing the importation of American films.

⁶⁹ Bryan Senn describes *Ouanga* as vengeful Voodoo on a Haitian plantation, Senn, 41.

the race movie circuit under the new title *The Devil's Daughter* and is the only Voodoo remake to date, it had an all black cast and yet sadly it failed to improve on *Ouanga* and in many ways it was more misrepresentational of Voodoo. The religion was dismissed as superstition and shown to be fraudulent.⁷⁰

Issues of race were prevalent during 1930s America with widespread segregation and the 'horror' of miscegenation, especially in the Southern states where slavery had been more widespread. Miscegenation was, as O'Callaghan suggests, "the blurring of racial boundaries...whites behaving like blacks".⁷¹ These fears were shown developing years earlier in literary works such as Mrs Carmichael's account of the population of the West Indies⁷² and *Mammy Mystic* which was written in 1895.⁷³ In cinematic production *Chloe, Love is Calling You* was arguably the most racist contribution to Voodoo films. It tells the story of a Voodoo woman (Mandy) who returns to the Deep South seeking revenge for the lynching of her husband.⁷⁴ Voodoo is scattered throughout the narrative emphasising the importance of the religion as a backdrop to the story, which is predominantly a love story. The religion is rarely seen and is included within occasional dialogue and superstitious comments. The only visible manifestations are a scene where the viewer sees Mandy sticking a wooden pin into a clay doll, with no consequence, and a ceremony in the woods at the climax to the film. The

⁷⁰ The story was altered and Obeah was the religion rather than Voodoo, this made no difference to the representation of the religion which was still portrayed as superstitious nonsense.

⁷¹ O'Callaghan, 134.

⁷² Mrs A.C. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies*, 3 vols (London: Whittaker, Treacher & Co., 1969; New York: Negro University Press, 1833).

⁷³ M.G. McClelland, *Mammy Mystic* (New York: The Merriam Company, 1895).

⁷⁴ *Chloe, Love is Calling You*, dir. Marshall Neilan, Pinnacle Productions, 1934. This was a lost film that only re-appeared at the end of the 1990s and although racially prejudiced it is an example of how society felt towards miscegenation.

ceremony is not exciting or representational of Voodoo, the people are sat around a fire in rows waving their arms and Mandy is dressed in a hat and coat in homage to Baron Samedi. The essence of the film is racism and fear of miscegenation.⁷⁵ Chloe is believed to be mixed race and the narrative makes comment to this throughout with various characters telling her how a white man would “have her but would never marry her” and “you is as black as your blood.” It transpires that Mandy, the Voodoo woman, stole Chloe from her father (the Colonel) at birth when she lost her own daughter. This is uncovered by the exhumation of the baby’s grave when the doctor indicates that the hair of the dead child is “scaly,” and therefore the hair of a black child. Once identified as completely white Chloe transforms from a very unflatteringly dressed mixed race woman into Betty Anne (her given name at birth), a beautifully presented white woman. The Voodoo practitioners within this film are treated with contempt. The religion is discussed in the factory when the black workers have been “Voodooing all night down in the swamp.” Their behaviour is discussed “don’t know but they’ve got their eyes on someone they don’t like, probably working themselves up to a sacrifice party” and although this is questioned it is reaffirmed “sure they does sometimes kill them on the altar and feed them to the gators.” This dialogue continued to reinforce the stereotype that had been instilled into the imagination.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ For more on miscegenation in Hollywood see Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁷⁶ There are some brutal scenes of violence towards animals in this film with the beating to death of a snake and the killing of an alligator.

The Hays Code addressed miscegenation, apparently overlooked by Marshall Neilan,⁷⁷ and Courtney discusses this at length based on the fact that Hollywood had been responsible for the cultural production and dissemination of visible race and stereotypes.⁷⁸ *Birth of a Nation* had been the catalyst for miscegenation in cinematic production, fantasising the stereotype of the black man wishing to rape a white woman; this perceived fear was expanded to the early cinematic productions during the Golden Era of Hollywood. Lola Young argues that even the term ‘miscegenation’ relates to the conjunction of racial difference and is in itself problematic.⁷⁹ This is arguably correct for the use of any postcolonial and early racist discourse and requires further discussion beyond the scope of this thesis. Rich highlights the fact that in the UK during the 1920s there was a fear that interracial relationships would lead to “hundreds of half-caste children with vicious tendencies...”⁸⁰ Young responds to this by adding “it was believed that interracial sexual activity would lead to social, moral and physiological decay.”⁸¹ If this was the view of society at the time of many of the early cinematic releases it explains that the ‘horror’ was beyond that of the unexplainable. The fear invoked would be that which could affect white society, miscegenation.

There was a comedy entry to the Voodoo films of the 1940s called *The Ghost Breakers* which featured the comic talents of Bob Hope. This film will be

⁷⁷ *Chloe, Love is Calling You* was a low budget racist film made by a major director of silent films, Marshall Neilan. Unfortunately he made this film at a time when his alleged alcoholism had impacted on a previously successful career.

⁷⁸ Courtney, 143-190.

⁷⁹ Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark* (London: Routledge, 1996) 87.

⁸⁰ P. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986) 189.

⁸¹ Young, 88.

discussed in more detail in Chapter Four as it was to have an influence on the animated Voodoo of the 1960s.⁸² Monogram was the most prolific of the studios during the 1940s to contribute to the genre producing three Voodoo films between 1941 and 1946.⁸³ The subject matter of these films varied but was based around a central Voodoo theme.⁸⁴ The first of this decade reflected the socio-political climate of this era, *King of the Zombies* tells a tale of a Nazi attempting to create a Zombie army, thwarted by the British. *Voodoo Man* continues with the zombie theme, it has a narrative that revolves around a mad doctor (Bela Lugosi) who is kidnapping young women in an attempt to restore life to his zombified wife and *The Face of Marble* combines science and Voodoo with experimental ways of raising the dead.⁸⁵

White Zombie was one of the best Voodoo films ever made, the other was *I Walked with a Zombie*, and they both illustrated the potential for this genre of horror.⁸⁶ Val Lewton ran RKO's horror unit for three years between 1942 and 1945 producing some of the best films of the decade. His first, very successful, film *Cat People* was followed in 1943 by *I Walked with a Zombie*, both of these were directed by Jacques Tourneur and the team of Lewton and Tourneur was a formidable force in the cinematic industry.⁸⁷ Lewton had integrity and believed

⁸² *The Ghost Breakers*, dir. George Marshall, perf. Bob Hope, Paramount, 1940.

⁸³ Monogram was one of the Poverty Row studios that produced numerous low budget movies, the quality tended to be lower than that of their contemporaries.

⁸⁴ Monogram also produced a zombie film called *Bowery at Midnight*, dir. Wallace Fox, perf. Bela Lugosi, Monogram, 1942. This film features Bela Lugosi as two characters, a gangster and a psychologist, as a murderous gangster he hides his victims' bodies in the Bowery Mission unaware that his sidekick is re-animating the dead but there is no mention of Voodoo or Haiti.

⁸⁵ *King of the Zombies*, dir. Jean Yarbrough, Monogram, 1941; *Voodoo Man*, dir. William Beaudine, perf. Bela Lugosi, Monogram, 1944; *The Face of Marble*, dir. William Beaudine, Monogram, 1946.

⁸⁶ *I Walked with a Zombie*, dir. Jacques Tourneur, prod. Val Lewton, RKO, 1943.

⁸⁷ *Cat People*, dir. Jacques Tourneur, prod. Val Lewton, RKO, 1942.

in the films he was making and when he was informed by the RKO executive, Charles Koerner, that his second feature was to be based on an *American Weekly* article called *I Walked with a Zombie* he was dismayed.⁸⁸ Lewton did not wish to compromise his integrity and so decided that if he had to make the film he would base it on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, this would give some integrity to his film.⁸⁹ Although based on the Brontë novel the story was reworked extensively and bears little resemblance to its inspiration.

The narrative of *I Walked with a Zombie* is based around the arrival on a Caribbean island of a nurse (Betsy) who has been employed to take care of Paul Holland's (the plantation owner) wife (Jessica) who is described as a 'mental case.' Jessica had fallen in love with her husband's half brother Wesley Rand. Voodoo is an integral part of the story from the outset. Betsy is soon made aware that Jessica has been turned into a zombie and is encouraged by the maid to seek help at a Voodoo ceremony. Betsy takes Jessica to a ceremony and the journey features visual Voodoo elements. There is a sacrificial goat suspended from a tree and the striking figure of Carrefour, a black zombie who is guardian of the crossroads, who lets them pass without incident. The sacrificial goat seen hanging from a tree in this section of the film bears a striking resemblance to one of the photographs in *The White King of La Gonave* (Fig.34), a book which would have been in wide circulation when *I Walked with a Zombie* was made.

⁸⁸ Inez Wallace, "I Walked with a Zombie," *American Weekly* [c.1942]. For more information on this incident see Joel E. Siegel, *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror* (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

⁸⁹ Lewton was familiar with this story as in 1942 he had helped prepare the 1944 version of the film, *Jane Eyre*, dir. Robert Stevenson, perf. Orson Welles, Twentieth Century Fox, 1944.



Fig.34. Left, Betsy takes Jessica to the Voodoo ceremony and sees a sacrificial goat in *I Walked with a Zombie*; right, a photograph of a sacrificial goat from *The White King of La Gonave*.⁹⁰

At the ceremony Betsy finds Jessica's mother-in-law (Mrs Rand) exploiting the beliefs of the locals by posing as *Damballah*, one of the Voodoo spirits. Jessica is subsequently proven to be a zombie when she is stabbed but fails to bleed.⁹¹ The Voodooists wish to rescue Jessica from her state and they send Carrefour to return her to the ceremony but Mrs Rand intervenes. It then transpires that it was Mrs Rand who was responsible for the zombification of Jessica.⁹² The film features the iconic figure of a Voodoo doll being used to draw Jessica back to the ceremony, the doll is seen with a string around it and as it is pulled Jessica rises and heads back to the Voodooists. The intention of the Voodooists was to end the

⁹⁰ Fig.34. Left, a scene showing the journey to the Voodoo ceremony illustrating the sacrificial goat (top right of image), in Senn, 52; right, a sacrificial goat photographed by Taney Dudley for Faustin Wirkus, in Faustin Wirkus, *The White King of La Gonave* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1931) 158.

⁹¹ This unawareness to pain when being stabbed by a blade is indicative of spirit possession, when the loa mount their host it is believed that the human form is impervious to any pain or blood-shed.

⁹² Zombification in this film is not based on the death and subsequent resurrection of Jessica, instead it is the outcome of a curse placed on her by Mrs Rand following a request at a ceremony. Mrs Rand became possessed by the loa and asked that the spirit make Jessica into a zombie.

zombie curse on Jessica. This is achieved by the use of the Voodoo doll: when the Bokor (the Voodooist who practices the dark side of the religion) is seen at the ceremony piercing it with a needle Wesley Rand is seen stabbing Jessica (and so ending the curse). Wesley carries Jessica's corpse into the ocean watched by Carrefour and when both bodies are washed up it leaves Paul and Betsy free to pursue their developing relationship.

This is one of the most atmospheric films made in the horror genre, and undoubtedly one of the strongest movies on Voodoo. Lewton meticulously created the sets and employed Voodoo experts such as LeRoy Antoine to advise on authenticity.⁹³ Voodoo is treated sensitively in the most part without human sacrifice or over zealous dancers; it is shown as a religion integral to the lives of the inhabitants on this island in the Caribbean. Siegel writes of the research that was undertaken for *I Walked with a Zombie*, Lewton found every book he could on the subject to ensure the cast and crew had a basic (although a somewhat biased) knowledge of Voodoo. This film had good intentions and put the mechanisms in place to present a serious representation of Voodoo.

Unfortunately, as was reflective of the time, there were a number of inappropriate comments within the dialogue. Mrs Rand displays disdain for the Voodooists and demeans their beliefs; she pretends to be the voice of a spirit presenting them as gullible which does momentarily undermine the otherwise positive representation of Voodoo. There is a refreshing representation of the

⁹³ In 1938 LeRoy Antoine and Laura Bowman (an actress from *Drums o' Voodoo*) wrote a book on Haiti, Laura Bowman and LeRoy Antoine, *The Voice of Haiti* (New York: Clarence William Music Publisher; 1938).

zombies in this film. Carrefour is a docile black zombie who is not feared and Jessica is a cursed white woman turned into a zombie, again, not feared, as would be the case in Haiti (Fig.35).



Fig.35. The white zombie of Jessica on the left, Carrefour the zombie on the right, from *I Walked with a Zombie*.⁹⁴

The tag line for the film was “SHE’S ALIVE... YET DEAD! SHE’S DEAD... YET ALIVE!” with no mention of Carrefour, the emphasis was on what Voodoo had done to the ‘beautiful white woman’ which gave no real diversion from the years of prejudice prior to this production. Throughout the film Carrefour does not look or ‘gaze’ at the white characters. Both of these points emphasise the relations of power explored by Foucault, that there is a system of domination and still a real possibility of resistance. As hooks explores, slaves were punished for ‘looking’ and so this power/domination [within *I*

⁹⁴ Fig.23. is a still from *I Walked with a Zombie* that shows the two zombies within the film, Jessica on the left who has had a curse placed on her to turn her into a zombie, and Carrefour (played by Darby Jones) who is an ‘actual’ zombie, image from <<http://www.sensesofcinema.com>>

Walked with a Zombie] exists within societal viewing. Emphasising the fact that most black people would only ‘gaze’ at whites on screen and that white audiences would not wish to empathise with the black zombie.⁹⁵

This film was followed later in the decade by *Zombies on Broadway* which was made as a ‘comedy’ parody to *I Walked with a Zombie*. RKO had made large profits with the earlier film and decided to exploit this success with another zombie venture.⁹⁶ The audience was introduced to the comedy duo of Alan Carney and Wally Brown.⁹⁷ RKO decided to use some of the same characters from *I Walked with a Zombie*. Darby Jones returned as an imposing zombie, the calypso singer Sir Lancelot sang the same tune with different lyrics and the film was set on the same fictional Caribbean island. The limited presence of Bela Lugosi lifts this film but the Voodoo content is minimal, focussing on the creation of zombies. There is one ceremonial sequence which promises to be an atmospheric representation but unfortunately it is overshadowed by the ‘comedy.’ Brown and Carney are in blackened face disguise, falling over and generally distracting. The title of this film was changed for British audiences to *Loonies on Broadway*. According to Senn this was because the British “frowned on horror” during World War II.⁹⁸

Val Lewton went on to produce one of the last zombie films of the 1930s and 1940s for RKO with the 1945 film *Isle of the Dead*. This film rejected the

⁹⁵ hooks, *Reel to Real*, 198.

⁹⁶ *Zombies on Broadway*, dir. Gordon Douglas, RKO, 1945.

⁹⁷ Universal were having huge success with Abbott and Costello and so RKO wished to parallel this success, Brown and Carney lacked the on-screen comic chemistry of Abbott and Costello and so did not remain on the large screen as a duo for many years.

⁹⁸ Senn, 79.

association with Voodoo in favour of the more sensational; it links zombies with a vampiric demon. The island of the film was based on the painting of the same name by Arnold Böcklin (Fig.36) and provided a haunting backdrop.⁹⁹ This painting was inspirational throughout cultural production as well as for RKO's film it inspired Sergei Rachmaninov's twenty-one minute symphony and the novel by Roger Zelazny, all taking the same title.¹⁰⁰

By the mid 1940s cinematic horror productions were in decline with no further representations of Voodoo for nearly a decade. This could arguably be a response to World War II, as mentioned previously, British audiences were thought to be too sensitive for horror at this time. There were also other political and social issues which will be explored in the following section.



Fig.36. Arnold Böcklin, *Isle of the Dead*, 1880.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Isle of the Dead*, dir. Mark Robson, prod. Val Lewton, perf. Boris Karloff, RKO, 1945.

¹⁰⁰ Vladimir Ashkenazy, cond., *Symphonic Dances: Isle of the Dead*, by Sergei Rachmaninov, Concertgebouw Orchestra, Decca, 1999; Roger Zelazny, *Isle of the Dead* (London: Arrow Books, 1963).

¹⁰¹ Fig.36. Arnold Böcklin, *Isle of the Dead*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This painting was commissioned by Marie Berna following the death of her husband and was given the title *Isle of the Dead* by the Berlin Art Dealer, Fritz Gurlitt. This painting was the first in a series of five.

Cinematic Decline

Between 1946 and 1960 there were just four Voodoo films made: this was a period of cinematic decline. There were a number of reasons for this demise that began during the mid 1940s, surprisingly following such a profitable time through the Golden Age of Hollywood. There was no single cause. In 1948 there was a landmark court case commonly known as the 'Paramount case' in which the Government ruled that it was illegal to hold a degree of market control which gives the "power to exclude competition" or to fix prices. This was one of many similar cases, and it was ruled irrespective of whether this power had been exercised or not. This case affected all of the large studios.¹⁰²

In the late 1940s television broadcasting began with American households embracing this new technology into the 1950s. The American family was less likely to go out to the cinema with less disposable income and they now had entertainment at home. There was a decline in the horror monsters that had featured predominantly during the depression and war years because of the real life horrors that were unfolding. The death toll from the war totalled millions, the Nazi holocaust and atomic bombing of Japan provided new terrors, all of which impacted on the production output from Hollywood. America still led the film industry and although encountering an economic boom there were other tensions, especially with the Soviet Union who were now a nuclear force. The focus of American fear had shifted; the horror film was being replaced with the new genre of science fiction. It is worth considering the wider context: Mao was victorious

¹⁰² "The Columbia Steel Case: New Light on Old Antitrust Problems," *The Yale Law Journal*, 58.5 (Apr., 1949) 764-773.

in China, the Soviet Union was testing nuclear weapons and America entered the Korean War, these were the immediate threat and not the monsters of previous decades.¹⁰³

The Voodoo films of the 1950s were of a much lower quality than their predecessors. *Voodoo Tiger* was one of the 'Jungle Jim' adventures set in the jungle and combines head-hunters, a Voodoo tiger god, a witch-doctor and a German War criminal. Young discusses adventure films and how Africa (the jungle in this case) is portrayed with exoticism in a location to be found far removed from Britain [or the US].¹⁰⁴ The representations of 'Otherness' in *Voodoo Tiger* are based on an archive of knowledge held by the viewer of the 'native,' a 'witch-doctor' and the more recent 'Other' of the German War criminal. By having Jim take control we see the reinforcement of 'masculinity' and colonial 'power'. Shohat suggests that Western cinema was a conduit for the dissemination of colonial discourse and created a "system of domination" because of the monopoly of film distribution and exhibition.¹⁰⁵ Despite the title of the film Voodoo is only used to label the 'natives,' stereotyped light-skinned loincloth-wearing 'savages' and nothing else.¹⁰⁶ Richards examines this representation from a British perspective and suggests that within the film of

¹⁰³ The themes of science fiction films were mainly based around world invasion by aliens, a metaphor for China and the Soviet Union invading America, and the dread of atomic weaponry taking the form of giant creatures affected by radiation. See films such as *Them!* dir. Gordon Douglas, Warner Brothers, 1954, and *Tarantula*, dir. Jack Arnold, Universal International Pictures, 1955.

¹⁰⁴ Young, 68.

¹⁰⁵ E. Shohat, "Gender and the Culture of Empire: Toward a feminist Ethnography of the Cinema" in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. Vol 13: 45-84.

¹⁰⁶ *Voodoo Tiger*, dir. Spencer G. Bennet, perf. Johnny Weissmuller, Columbia, 1957.

empire “The British do not exploit the native. They stand between him and exploitation,” this ‘rule’ being for their own good.¹⁰⁷

The other three ‘Voodoo’ films were made in 1957 and did little to improve on *Voodoo Tiger*. *Voodoo Island*, *Voodoo Woman* and *The Disembodied* all moved away from the Haitian religion and zombies in an attempt to integrate current trends with a Voodoo element.¹⁰⁸ *Voodoo Island* represents Voodoo in a superficial manner, there are visual elements such as Voodoo dolls but the film concentrates on the killer plants. It was described by one of the characters as a “practice to superimpose fear on superstitious people,” much the same as the film, despite starring Boris Karloff.

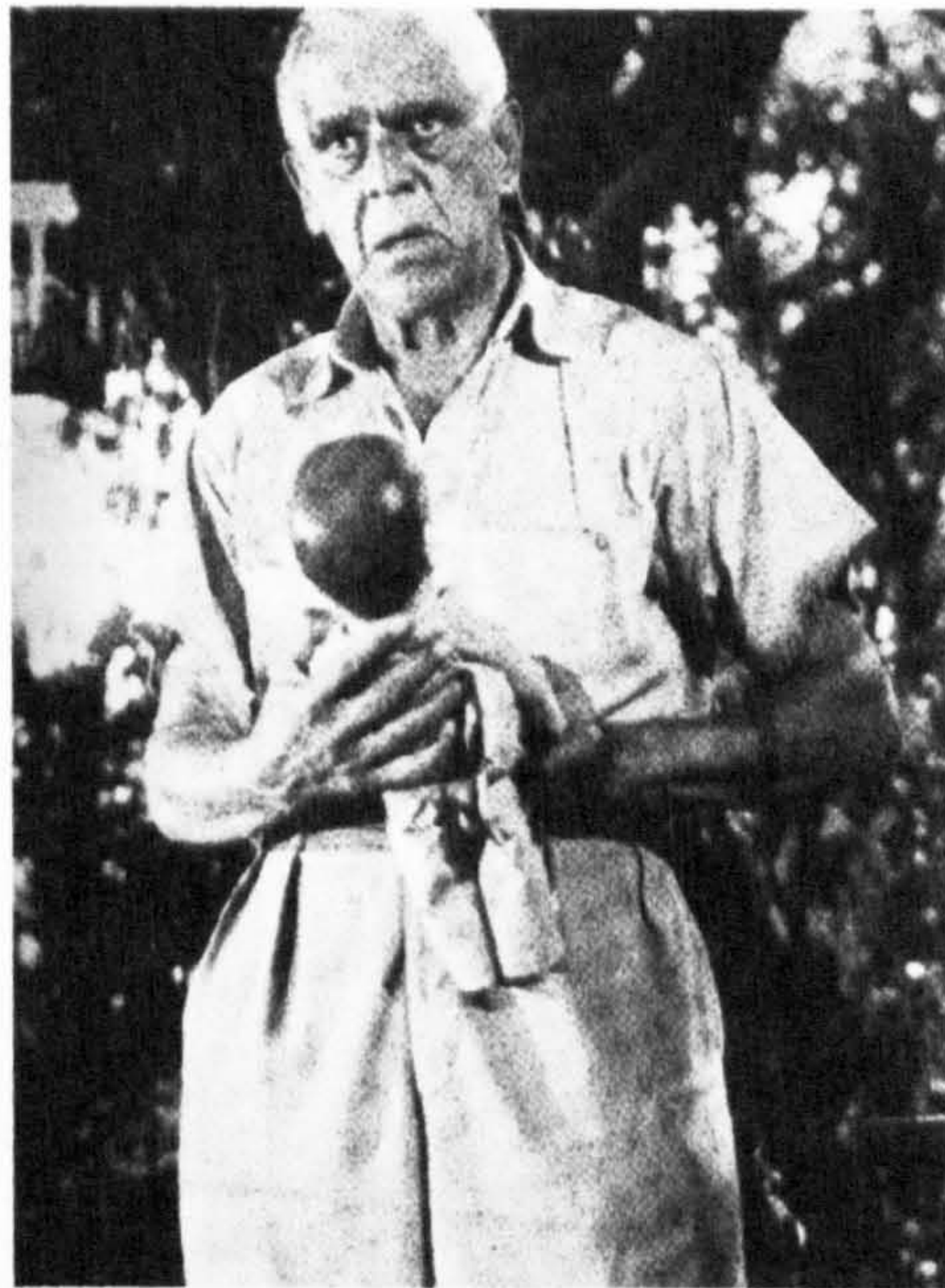


Fig.37. Boris Karloff in *Voodoo Island* with a larger than normal Voodoo doll.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ J. Richards, *Visions of Yesterday* (London: Routledge, 1973) 200.

¹⁰⁸ *Voodoo Island*, dir. Reginald Le Borg, perf. Boris Karloff, United Artists, 1957; *Voodoo Woman*, dir. Edward L. Cahn, American International Pictures (AIP), 1957; *The Disembodied*, dir. Walter Grauman, Allied Artists, 1957.

¹⁰⁹ Fig.25. Boris Karloff in *Voodoo Island*, in Alan G. Frank, *The Movie Treasury: Horror Movies* (London: Cathay Books, 1974) 87.

Voodoo Woman links Voodoo with science when in a jungle setting two men decide to use ‘white man’s science’ and ‘black man’s Voodoo’ to make a creature that would be indestructible. There are overt tones of imperialism when considering the visual representations of the film. The female is not black but of Polynesian descent and is being ‘created,’ a metaphor for male superiority. As hooks writes in *Ain’t I A Woman*, the black male sexism existed before American slavery and so the white male and black male have a perceived superiority over the ‘Voodoo Woman’ within the film.¹¹⁰ The film starts with a Voodoo ceremony and sets a promising tone but this is brief and it soon degenerates to stereotype. Caricatures of angry ‘natives’ are shown hopping from foot to foot brandishing their spears and there are several mentions of sacrifice. The costumes are ridiculous and the Voodoo element is represented by the doll on the ‘victim’ and numerous skulls in the scenes (Fig.38).



Fig.38. Science meets Voodoo in *Voodoo Woman*.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 88.

¹¹¹ Fig.38. The two characters, Chaka (left) and Gerard (right) deciding on their experiment, in Senn, 97. Note the Voodoo doll on the victim and the skull on a pillar in the background.

The Disembodied features a white Voodoo queen who has the power to inflict pain by using a Voodoo doll; she sacrifices a girl and takes her heart. There are a number of ceremonies to kill and to re-animate victims but ultimately this is not a Voodoo film, it is a film that is a Voodoo cliché.

Jimmy Vaughan wrote a critique of 1950s colonialist cinema and states that the representations do a “disservice” to Africa.¹¹² He argues that the motive behind these representations and the construction of these narratives is to “extol the virtues of her [Africa’s] colonisers, police officers, District Commissioners and settlers”.¹¹³ There were numerous claims that the ‘natives’ would not progress without colonial intervention, this is seen repeatedly in the cinematic Voodoo offerings of the 1950s.¹¹⁴

These films show a change in direction for Voodoo cinema as they were evolving from ‘horror’ to science fiction. This was the case for Hollywood. In the 1950s the genre system was challenged which allowed films to be more diverse and varied.¹¹⁵ Audience demographics were also changing which led to many studios adopting a new approach by making films for younger audiences, none of which initially featured Voodoo.¹¹⁶ During this period of uncertainty in America, Britain was reviving their film production when Hammer Films was

¹¹² Jimmy Vaughan, “The Dark Continent in the Wrong Light” in *Films and Filming*, January 1959, 10.

¹¹³ Vaughan in Young, 69.

¹¹⁴ For example see Jeffrey Richards, 200 or W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle L’Ouverture, 1988).

¹¹⁵ See Peter Hutchings, “Genre Theory and Criticism,” in Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich (eds.), *Approaches to Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

¹¹⁶ For more on the demographics see Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 142-178.

revived and the first major production was *The Quatermass Xperiment*. This was soon followed by horror films in the gothic tradition.¹¹⁷

This increase of interest in science fiction was the time when zombies began to be disassociated from Voodoo. There were a number of films during the 1950s that exploited the threats of atomic power, alien invasion and the cold war, a complete contrast to the colonial anxieties that had driven the previous Voodoo films.¹¹⁸ Part of this reason could be that the public fear was no longer of death but of dehumanisation, the state between life and death with sensory deprivation, a state provided by the zombie without the need for Voodoo. During the 1950s there were a few attempts to incorporate the zombie into the science fiction realm without identifying their origin but these were exploratory. The zombie movie was rooted in the rising of the dead, not in global destruction. The *Zombies of Mora Tau* provided a last attempt to loosely link zombies and Voodoo to their West African roots, a link that was not emphasised with a predominantly white cast. The one unique aspect of this zombie movie was that the colonial fear came from the local inhabitants who use their 'Voodoo witchcraft' to oppress the white invaders rather than the reverse but there was no visual Voodoo evident.¹¹⁹

In America Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Lon Chaney were the famous names associated with horror; in Britain it was to be Peter Cushing and Christopher

¹¹⁷ *The Quatermass Xperiment*, dir. Val Guest, Hammer Films, 1955. This was a science fiction film but was to pave the way for a renewed interest in horror of the gothic tradition the spelling of the title used the 'X' to reflect the newly appointed censorship system in Britain. X-rated films were suitable for those over 16 years old.

¹¹⁸ For more on the 1950s horror see Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968).

¹¹⁹ *Zombies of Mora Tau*, dir. Edward L. Cahn, Columbia, 1957.

Lee.¹²⁰ Hammer Horrors (as they soon became known) pursued the gothic tradition paying meticulous detail to their sets especially in the remaking of many classics such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*.¹²¹

This period saw an increase in non-fiction literature with writers such as Alfred Métraux, Harold Courlander and Milo Rigaud writing narratives that were representing Vodou as a religion, reducing the sensational inspirations at this time.¹²² Towards the end of the decade films were being made in colour and televisions began to show the classics of the 1930s and 1940s to new audiences, reviving the interest in horrors of the gothic tradition. While Hammer pursued the gothic the American films were evolving. In 1959 Robert Bloch wrote a novel that was based on the life of serial killer Ed Gein.¹²³ The book was called *Psycho*, and Alfred Hitchcock, already known for his thrillers, directed a horror film that was to move from the gothic to the domestic in a film that brought unprecedented violence to the screen.¹²⁴ This shift was to be the beginning of violent extremes in cinematic production.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ For more on the Hollywood stars see Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991) and Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

¹²¹ For more on the Hammer Film history see Dennis Meikle, *A History of Horrors: The Rise and Fall of the House of Hammer* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1996).

¹²² The non-fiction narratives of these authors are examined in chapter two, 100.

¹²³ Ed Gein was a necrophiliac serial killer who was captured in 1957, he lived in a quiet community in Wisconsin and was well known and liked by many (before they knew that he was killing and gutting local people), for more on this see for example Harold Schechter, *Deviant: The True Story of Ed Gein, the Original Psycho* (New York: Pocket Books, 1989). His case epitomised the new move in the horror genre providing inspiration for *Psycho* and later *The Silence of the Lambs*. *The Silence of the Lambs*, dir. Jonathan Demme, perf. Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins, Orion Pictures, 1991.

¹²⁴ Robert Bloch, *Psycho* (1959; London: Bloomsbury Books, 1997); *Psycho*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount, 1960.

¹²⁵ For more on the history of film between 1945 and 1960 see Worland, 76-85.

Zombies, Blaxploitation and Domestic Deterioration

Psycho led the way for the new horror genre, the film that placed the horror within the community and within the domestic setting. The 'old' horror genre would be more appropriately termed the 'terror' genre as horror has metamorphosed into something completely different with graphic depictions of killing, death and violence. These violent extremes were apparent from early in the 1960s especially when the Hays Code became obsolete, being replaced by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) classification system.¹²⁶

Voodoo was not abandoned completely despite there being very few films for over a decade. The 1960s saw a steady return to this genre of horror film.

Macumba Love links ritualistic murder with Voodoo when a body is washed up on a beach where there are tales of a serpent goddess (linked to the Vodou spirit Damballah within the narrative).¹²⁷ There is the use of a Voodoo doll and when the priestess stabs it with a pin another character shows pain. Within the narrative one of the characters identifies Voodoo as a religion, comparing it to Christianity, but this is not explored any further by the filmmakers who missed an opportunity to examine Vodou. The poster that was used to promote *Macumba Love* sends confusing messages: "blood-lust of the Voodoo Queen; weird shocking savagery in native jungle haunts; thrill to the demon-rites of the witch goddess." This linked savagery, demonic rites, and witches so there is minimal affiliation to the religion. The terminology used is also that which would

¹²⁶ This classification system was introduced on 1st November 1968. The categories were G (general audiences), M (mature audiences), R (restricted, those under 16/17 were not admitted depending on local mandates) and X (no-one under 17). For more on the history of the classification system in America see <<http://www.mpa.org>>

¹²⁷ Damballah and Aida are the spirits in Vodou represented by the snake. The use of serpents, or more specifically snakes, is common in West African Voodoo and in New Orleans. The snake is seen as high in the New Orleans pantheon as that which epitomises fusion and transformation.

be 'familiar' as relating to white superiority. The "blood lust of the Voodoo Queen" followed by "weird shocking savagery in native jungle haunts" continues to devalue black womanhood. As hooks argues, "the designation of all black women as sexually depraved, immoral, and loose had its roots in the slave system...from such thinking emerged the stereotype of black women as sexual savages."¹²⁸ *Macumba Love* reinforces this stereotype by using the colonial terminology on the publicity material.

American companies backed many British films and lion-worshipping Africans were the manifestation of Voodoo, crossing continents between Africa and London, in *The Curse of Simba*.¹²⁹ Otherness was usually associated geographically as away from the viewing audience, in Africa, the Caribbean or fictional exotic locations in the case of Voodoo films. Africa epitomised Otherness and as Young suggests, "Was still conceptualised as belonging to prehistory, its peoples supposedly uncivilised".¹³⁰ The bringing of the other to London places the colonial fear on familiar territory; it was no longer out 'there' but was 'here'. This is at a time when the black population in Britain was increasing and would have assisted in perpetuating racism. It is worth considering at this point the reaction of the increasing black viewing audience of such films. As Fanon explains when discussing this, viewing a Tarzan film, "...this is much more difficult for him [the black viewer] in a European theater, for the rest of the audience, which is white, automatically identifies him with the

¹²⁸ hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 52.

¹²⁹ *The Curse of Simba*, dir. Lindsay Shonteff, Galaworld Films (released by AIP), 1965. This film was released as *Curse of Voodoo* in America.

¹³⁰ Young, 68.

savages on the screen.”¹³¹ There is a typically phallogentric representation of Africans with two loin-clothed clad ‘natives’ chasing a man across a London park waving their spears.¹³² This is reminiscent of the cannibal and the ‘native savage’ stereotypes seen across cultural production. There is an adaptation of the Voodoo doll in this film when instead of a small effigy the Voodooists use a ‘human-doll’ tied to a wooden frame to inflict pain on their enemies. Although this film makes a serious attempt to represent Voodoo this is diluted with an echo back to colonial representations.

The first fully fledged British Voodoo zombie horror came from Hammer productions in 1966, *The Plague of the Zombies*.¹³³ A spate of mysterious deaths within a Cornish village provokes one of the inhabitants to contact his former professor (Sir James Forbes) asking him to visit in an effort to help.¹³⁴ After discovering an empty coffin and hearing a tale of a zombie carrying a dead body Sir James Forbes familiarises himself with Voodoo. He then undertakes a night vigil over a dead woman’s grave; she rises from the cemetery and is subsequently decapitated by a shovel. Sir James Forbes discovers that the squire had visited Haiti and he makes the link between this and the zombies. He later discovers a series of small coffins and dolls. The zombie in this film was one of the most distinctive and terrifying to be seen in cinematic representations as shown below.

¹³¹ F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann (1952: London: Pluto Press, 1986) 152-153.

¹³² Young argues that there were many phallogentric representations in colonial cinema, especially in the choice of weapons. The Africans often carried spears while the white man carried a pistol, revering white masculinity. Young, 66.

¹³³ *The Plague of the Zombies*, dir. John Gilling, Hammer Films, 1966.

¹³⁴ It is unknown if the decision to locate in Cornwall rather than elsewhere in the UK had any significance to links to witchcraft in the region. There were many associations between witchcraft and Voodoo throughout cultural production.



Fig.39. A zombie from *The Plague of the Zombies*.¹³⁵

The original treatment for this film was based on *The Magic Island* and was to be called *The Zombie*. The intention was to open the film in Haiti with the Haitians being responsible for the deaths but due to pre-production problems Hammer focussed their attention on other productions. When the studio returned to the idea it was revised and the racial focus removed. The story moved to the nineteenth century and the relationships between a squire and the peasantry, a metaphor for the white plantation owner and the slaves.¹³⁶ It was made in the gothic tradition, instead of the Haitians taking the leading role they were replaced by a white robed, white squire.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Fig.39. A zombie from *The Plague of the Zombies*, a detail from an image in Senn, 'Roy Ashton's horrific makeup make this *Plague's* zombies some of the most frightening in the voodoo canon,' 136.

¹³⁶ The zombies in this film are used to provide slave labour within the mines; they are used much in the same way as they would be if created in Haiti.

¹³⁷ For full details of the original treatment of *The Plague of the Zombies* as *The Zombie* see Peter Bryan, "Zombie! Original Synopsis," *Dark Terrors*, 16 (Dec., 1998) 36-37.

This movie did contextualise Voodoo within Haiti and even though the race element was dropped it established itself within the cultural trend of placing the horror within the family and local community. The zombies had been transplanted from the Caribbean into the English countryside. This meant that the horror was personal, it still exploits the ‘otherness’ that was so familiar across cultural production, it was just shifting to a new dimension, the Other was not ‘out there’ it was ‘here’.

The rising of the dead in this film was one of the pivotal moments in the new era of the zombie genre and was to be an inspiration for many future productions long after the Haitian origins had been forgotten.

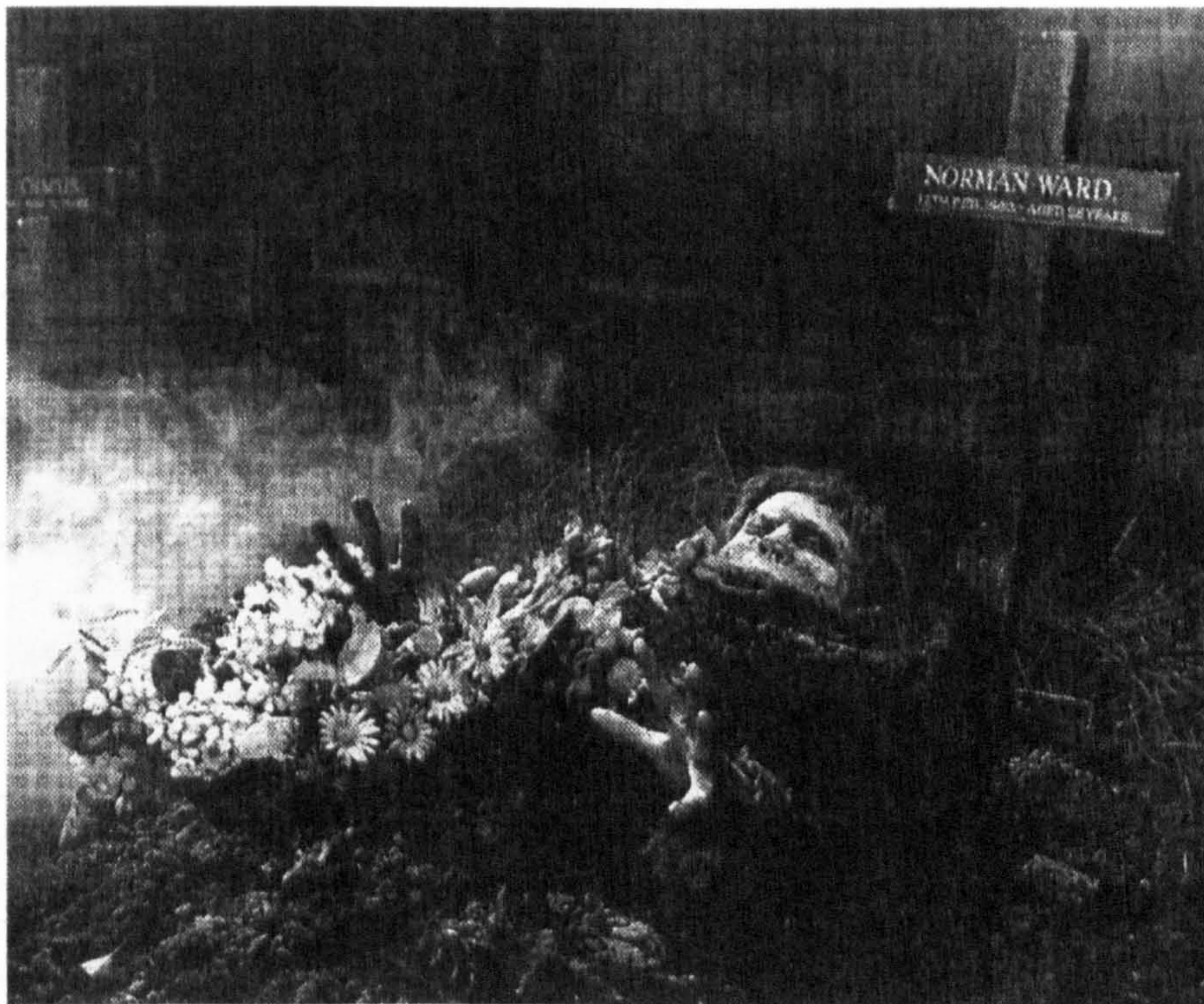


Fig.40. The dead rising in *The Plague of the Zombies*.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Fig.40. Shows the dead rising from their graves in *The Plague of the Zombies*.

In America the 1960s saw a period of decline in censorship, following the demise of the Hays Code. Films were showing increased sex, blood, violence and nudity with many being made in colour. This was a time of change and cinema moved with these times. One of the most iconic films of the decade, and the most influential zombie film ever made, was *Night of the Living Dead*.¹³⁹ This was the film that transformed the living dead into flesh eating creatures. It could be argued that the zombies became the metaphor for the 'savage'. The attribution of cannibalism to Otherness was a justification for colonialism and of white supremacy. Young argues that cannibalism is a metaphor for colonial exploitation, exploitation that would be perpetuated in the new genre of zombie films.¹⁴⁰ *Night of the Living Dead* was a pivotal point in cinematic horror as it was to make the break between zombies and Voodoo. This disassociation removed the supernatural and the magical to place the creatures away from Haiti and into contemporary society, the Other of Voodoo had been re-invented.

George Romero directed this film in reaction to many of the socio-political issues of the time. The ending is one of the most shocking and poignant of any horror, leaving the viewer in a state of disbelief and contemplation. The death of the black character in the film was seen by many as a response to the Civil Rights issue and yet Romero claims that the part was never culturally defined; the film could be read as an antithesis to the Vietnam War as much as it could to the Civil

¹³⁹ *Night of the Living Dead*, dir. George A. Romero, Image Ten, 1968. This film was made in black and white even though colour technology was available, making this film particularly atmospheric.

¹⁴⁰ Young, 82.

Rights movement.¹⁴¹ American horror at this time had changed from having optimistic endings to endings that displayed the demise and crumbling of society. The violent extremes that had begun in the cinematic productions of the 1960s continued into the next decade. Society was witnessing horrors at home in America. The Civil rights movement was gaining momentum with high profile cases such as the murder of Medgar Evers in 1963 and the 1964 murder of three civil rights workers.¹⁴² The Vietnam War continued despite attempts at peace negotiations, Cuba was embargoed by the US when Castro announced he was a communist and the Cold War had begun.¹⁴³ Crime had increased nine fold from the previous decade with high profile cases such as the Manson murders in 1969 shocking a nation.¹⁴⁴ There were assassinations including those of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the summer of peace and love ended, drugs were prevalent throughout society and social values were declining.¹⁴⁵

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not immediately implemented in the Southern States as was clearly indicated by continuing segregation and racial prejudice but race was represented in some of the films of the 1970s, a new genre of film known as 'Blaxploitation.'¹⁴⁶ This new film genre was a product of white writers,

¹⁴¹ George Romero directed sequels to *Night of the Living Dead* called *Dawn of the Dead* in 1978 (Laurel Group) which focussed on American consumerism by setting the film in a shopping mall, there is no link with Voodoo or Haiti, he made this disassociation with his first film. There have been two more films in the Romero series, *Day of the Dead*, dir. George A. Romero, Dead Films Inc, 1985; *Land of the Dead*, dir. George A. Romero, Universal, 2005.

¹⁴² For more on the murders of these activists see William Bradford Huie, *Three Lives for Mississippi* (1965; New York: WWC Books, 2000). The young men who were killed were James E. Chaney, 21; Andrew Goodman, 21; and Michael Schwerner, 24.

¹⁴³ For more on the history of America during the 1960s see for example David Farber and Beth Bailey, *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁴ For more on the Manson Murders see Vincent Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter: the true story of the Manson murders* (1994; New York: W.W.Norton and Co., 2001).

¹⁴⁵ Terry H. Anderson, *The Sixties* (New York: Longman, 1999).

¹⁴⁶ The term blaxploitation derives from combining the words black and exploitation.

studios and directors and featured predominantly African-American casts.

Blaxploitation films were condemned by black leaders because of the portrayal of criminal stereotypes but they proved highly popular with the targeted black urban audiences.¹⁴⁷ This targeting of black audiences began with films that primarily focussed on violent urban thrillers such as *Shaft* but were soon followed with horror, and more specifically Voodoo horror, including *Scream Blacula Scream* and *Sugar Hill*.¹⁴⁸

The Voodoo in *Scream Blacula Scream* was introduced to add a new twist to an already successful franchise. *Blacula* was a box office success and so to exploit this trend AIP decided to resurrect the vampire using a Voodoo ceremony.¹⁴⁹

This film starts and ends with Voodoo but has little in between, the ceremony is used to resurrect the vampire at the beginning and then at the end a Voodoo doll is repetitively stabbed with a wooden weapon to terminate his existence. The other vampires in this film are very static in their demeanour giving the impression that they are vampire zombies and so reinforcing the link between vampirism and Voodoo. Again there was an opportunity to explore Voodoo further and yet the writer and director provided a superficial exploitation of the stereotype. This film links the historical experience of African-Americans when vampirism becomes a metaphor for slavery and the mediation of African heritage within Westernised vampirism is a parallel for the historical deculturation

¹⁴⁷ The CAB (Committee against Blaxploitation) and the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) were outspoken against these films, see Kevin Thomas, "Blacula has effect on Marshall." *Los Angeles Times*, 9 September 1972.

¹⁴⁸ *Shaft*, dir. Gordon Parks, MGM, 1971; *Scream Blacula Scream*, dir. Bob Kelljan, AIP, 1973; *Sugar Hill*, dir. Paul Maslansky, AIP, 1974.

¹⁴⁹ *Blacula*, dir. William Crain, AIP, 1972.

process of the slave industry. As discussed by Benshoff, this concept is reinforced when African Voodoo fails to cure his European vampirism.¹⁵⁰

Sugar Hill provided a more serious attempt at Voodoo horror due to the writer having a keen interest in Haiti. This film is a tale of revenge. After her fiancé is killed Diana 'Sugar' Hill asks Baron Samedi for help and the iconic figure raises an army of the dead to assist. The zombies are deemed to be slaves who died on their journey to the new world, they are cobweb covered and dusty giving a new appearance to the walking corpses now familiar in cinema production. The Voodoo methods used in this film vary. There are uses of the Voodoo doll to inflict pain and death but there is also the use of a coffin full of snakes, a scene more familiar to many in *Live and Let Die* which was made a year earlier in 1973.¹⁵¹ The setting of *Sugar Hill* is identifiable through the signifying elements such as the 'jive' talk and the fashion of 1970s urban black America, yet despite this the film does incorporate Voodoo in a sophisticated way. This was the first of the blaxploitation movies to feature zombies and it did attempt to contextualise Voodoo in a less exploitative way.

¹⁵⁰ For more see Harry M. Benshoff, "Blaxploitation Horror Films: Generic Reappropriation or Reinscription?" *Cinema Journal* 39.2 (2000) 31-50.

¹⁵¹ *Live and Let Die*, dir. Guy Hamilton, United Artists, 1973. This film will be discussed later in this chapter under the section 'Voodoo: from small pages to the big screen,' p192.



Fig.41. The cobweb covered zombies in *Sugar Hill*.¹⁵²

This period in the horror genre saw very mixed representations of Voodoo on the big screen from serious attempts to represent a religion to the ridiculous costumes and associations with non-Caribbean cultures.

Big Budgets

The 1970s saw an increase in the ‘slasher’ movie. Films such as *Last House on the Left* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* left audiences shocked with the level of extreme violence and blood-shed, delivering horror to their doorstep. The slasher movie cycle continued through the 1980s with films such as *The Evil Dead*.¹⁵³ This was a decade that saw the Poverty Row and Independent films infiltrate the mainstream with films such as *The Exorcist* being taken up by the larger studios and having box office successes.¹⁵⁴ From the 1940s Voodoo

¹⁵² Fig.41. The zombies in *Sugar Hill*, in Russell, 77.

¹⁵³ *Last House on the Left*, dir. Wes Craven, Lobster Enterprises, 1972; *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, dir. Tobe Hooper, Vortex, 1974; *The Evil Dead*, dir. Sam Raimi, New Line Cinema, 1981. *The Evil Dead* did include the resurrection of the dead but not as the cinematic zombie.

¹⁵⁴ *The Exorcist*, dir. William Friedkin, Warner Bros, 1973.

representations faltered and were influenced less by their Haitian origins and sensational narratives and more by the socio-cultural developments that occurred over the following three decades. Voodoo was linked to science, aliens, vampires and nuclear threat sending out a message to the audiences that Voodoo was an intrinsic element to these 'horrors.' Although this did not change dramatically in the 1980s the big budget investments raised the profile of Voodoo and moved the subject into mainstream cinema. This investment by Hollywood revived the interest in Voodoo. There had already been an increase in interest in the occult and the supernatural, and the publication of fiction and non-fiction narratives about Voodoo revived the subject in the minds of the American and British audiences.

The first of this new generation of Voodoo horror was arguably *Angel Heart*, a film that was produced by one of the major studios. It had sensitive direction and the largest budget of any Voodoo film.¹⁵⁵ Alan Parker had read William Hjortsberg's novel *Falling Angel* and had decided that it would make a good film. He modified the narrative for the movie by expanding the location from New York to include New Orleans and by working on Mickey Rourke's character, Harry Angel.¹⁵⁶ The story is set in 1955 and Parker creates the steamy atmosphere of New Orleans impeccably. He deliberately wished to find authentic locations and succeeded within this production. The basis of the story is that Louis Cyphre (Robert De Niro) hires Harry Angel (Mickey Rourke) to find a musician called Johnny Favorite with whom he has a contract. The narrative

¹⁵⁵ *Angel Heart*, dir. Alan Parker, perf. Mickey Rourke, Robert De Niro, Lisa Bonet and Charlotte Rampling, Tristar, 1987. It had an estimated budget of \$17,000,000, for further details see <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092563/business>>

¹⁵⁶ William Hjortsberg, *Falling Angel* (1978; Harpenden: No Exit Press, 1996).

twists and turns between New York and New Orleans to a powerful unforgettable ending. The film integrates Voodoo and Satanism throughout the narrative but they are identifiable as separate entities, Voodoo as an integral part of life in New Orleans and Satanism in the form of Louis Cyphre ('Lucifer'). *Angel Heart* is an outstanding example of atmospheric cinema with every scene evoking a sense of time (1955) and place, whether in grimy New York or steamy New Orleans. The Voodoo in this film is a backdrop but it has been treated predominantly realistically and clichés were avoided despite the underlying narrative being that of a character selling his soul to the Devil. The essence of the film is 'real', a detective story. *Angel Heart* is described as a Voodoo film and yet the Voodoo content is secondary to the Satanistic element. There are gruesome deaths in this film and yet the actual killing is not seen on screen, as the viewer we see the aftermath and the effect each death has on Harry. The sacrificial element and the soul transference are carried out by the Satanists and not the Voodooists. This makes a clear distinction between the two, a detour from the historical perspective taken by many directors; this approach was also taken in *The Believers* of the same year when the child sacrifice is separated from the religion of Santeria.¹⁵⁷ *Angel Heart* still represents Voodoo as the exotic other and the black female character as having a 'savage' and overtly sexual side to her in much the same way as decades of black female stereotypes have gone before. The ceremonial scenes seem excessive to the narrative showing a savage, blood-soaked (sensational) and sinister side to the religion.

¹⁵⁷ *The Believers*, dir. John Schlesinger, Orion Pictures, 1987. Santeria is the syncretic religion found in Cuba and the Cuban diaspora, it is portrayed as similar to Voodoo in this film but there is a clear distinction between the sacrificial elements and the religion.



Fig. 42. Lisa Bonet as Epiphany in *Angel Heart*.¹⁵⁸

This is counter-balanced within the narrative when Voodoo is treated as a benign, misunderstood religion. This is demonstrated when Epiphany (Lisa Bonet) extricates it from the current murders that are taking place, thus creating a disassociation. Visually Voodoo is present throughout and although there is no explanation this is more accurate to the Voodoo that is present in the Deep South and unless as a visitor the signs are known it would pass unnoticed.¹⁵⁹

Unfortunately at the end of the film a child known to be the son of the Voodoo priestess is shown with glowing yellow satanic eyes. This undermines the representations and reinforces the link between Satanism and Voodoo after attempting to disassociate the two.

In 1984 the supernatural was linked with the slasher movie when Wes Craven made *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, a film that featured surreal horror and gore

¹⁵⁸ Fig. 42. The Voodoo ceremony in *Angel Heart* < <http://www.pajiba.com> >

¹⁵⁹ For example there is a chickens foot placed to frighten a New Orleans musician, Toots Sweet, this scene exhibits the fear aspect of the religion without prolonged explanation. When visiting communities where Voodoo is present it would be usual to see red brick dust by doorsteps or lucky charms near doorways but unless there is an understanding of these practices they would be overlooked.

with supernatural occurrences.¹⁶⁰ This was a huge box office success and when Wes Craven read *The Serpent and the Rainbow* he was fascinated by the Harvard ethnobotanist's tale of Voodoo and zombies in Haiti. It was his success with *A Nightmare on Elm Street* that secured him this film.¹⁶¹

In 1988 the scientific account of the Haitian religion was given the Hollywood treatment in a film of the same name and Wade Davis, the author of the book, was employed as technical advisor. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* appears to represent Voodoo, Haiti and zombies in as culturally accurate way as can be in a fictional Voodoo film (with a slight Hollywood style deviance in the climactic ending). Craven chose not to change the narrative extensively and instead he produced a film that explored Haiti and the zombie phenomenon accurately, focussing on these aspects for much of the story. The film opens with a funeral ceremony that is led by a person dressed as Baron Samedi. This association with death is important to establish at the onset as the Baron appears in later sequences. Throughout the film Voodoo is in conflict with itself being shown to deliver good as well as evil. When the chief of police (who is a bokor) is seen with the Sect Rouge, his skull filled altar room has a far more sinister atmosphere than the other Voodoo scenes. Visually Voodoo is continuous, the vèvè are accurate and in the ceremonies Craven has incorporated his own Haitian and Voodoo experiences to enhance the authenticity.¹⁶² There is a historical

¹⁶⁰ *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, dir. Wes Craven, New Line Cinema, 1984.

¹⁶¹ *A Nightmare on Elm Street* has grossed over \$25,000,000 from a film made with a budget of \$1,800,000 (source www.imdb.com). Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985; New York: Touchstone, 1997).

¹⁶² Wes Craven and his team asked for protection on arrival in Haiti and a Voodoo priest performed a ceremony. He attended Voodoo ceremonies while in the country and saw people eating broken glass and leaning on machetes without cutting themselves, elements he brought to *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, for more on this see Stanley Wiater, *Dark Visions: Conversations with the Masters of the Horror Film* (New York: Avon Books, 1992).

perspective representing the corruption of the police and the Tontons Macoutes in Haiti. It shows their association with the dark side of Voodoo, leading to scenes showing the demise of the Duvalier regime and subsequent celebrations. Craven included his trademark horror and dream-killer sequences made famous in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Despite this slight (obvious) deviation from authenticity *The Serpent and the Rainbow* stands as one of the most accurate, atmospheric and enjoyable films of the Voodoo horror genre.

Voodoo continued to be incorporated into a number of major Hollywood productions as a minor element to the narrative, in *Child's Play* Voodoo appears intermittently, mainly at the start and end, and is used to perform a soul transference ceremony, this film plays on childhood fears of toys animating in the darkness.¹⁶³ The words 'Damballah' and 'Santeria' are used and there is the obligatory Voodoo doll but there is nothing to link Voodoo to the ceremony or the characters and the word 'Voodoo' is not mentioned until the sequel, *Child's Play 2* when the murders are identified as Voodoo killings.¹⁶⁴ There were others in the same vein that continued into the 1990s, in *Major League* a Cuban player sets up an altar and his religion is identified as Voodoo, it is ridiculed and proven ineffective; in *Weekend at Bernie's II* a Voodoo priest (on St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands) re-animates Bernie as a zombie with no other reference to Voodoo and in *Predator 2* the drug lords are known as the Voodoo Kings with no further mention.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ *Child's Play*, dir. Tom Holland, United Artists, 1988.

¹⁶⁴ *Child's Play 2*, dir. John Lafia, Universal, 1990.

¹⁶⁵ *Major League*, dir. David S. Ward, Mirage, 1989; *Weekend at Bernie's II*, dir. Robert Klane, Tristar, 1993; *Predator 2*, dir. Stephen Hopkins, Twentieth Century Fox, 1990.

In the 1990s the inclusion of Voodoo into films became more subtle and it was used as an integral element to narratives rather than the focus of horror. In both *Eve's Bayou* and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* Voodoo is not sensationalised, it is represented as part of the lives of the characters, it is not doubted, ridiculed or dismissed, it is accepted.¹⁶⁶ These films are set in the South and depict the steamy atmosphere. *Eve's Bayou* is fictional and portrays the complexities of life. The Voodoo element is minimal but gives a glimpse of the belief within Southern communities. *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* was based on the true story of Jim Williams who was accused of the murder of Billy Hanson and features the character of Minerva, described as a spiritualist. She performs graveyard rituals, again without sensationalism.¹⁶⁷

The 1980s and 1990s had seen big budgets invested into Voodoo cinema and a number of quality productions were made, this was also the time of many sequels when profit led to the perpetuation of a theme. Many of these productions did provide a respite from the slasher movie that came into prominence in the late 1970s and although this genre of horror continued to be made it was not so high profile during these decades.

As cinematic production moves into the twenty-first century there has been a revival of zombie movies, slasher movies and (occasionally) a Voodoo movie. These have evolved with more sophistication into new genres of terror. *The Skeleton Key* focuses on 'Hoodoo,' a form of Voodoo recognised within the

¹⁶⁶ *Eve's Bayou*, dir. Kasi Lemmons, Addis Wechsler Pictures, 1997; *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, dir. Clint Eastwood, Warner Bros, 1997.

¹⁶⁷ For more on this account see John Berendt, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1994; London: Vintage, 1995).

Southern states as rooted in African-American folk magic and integrates the theme subtly throughout the narrative, returning to the gothic atmosphere of earlier films. Caroline Ellis (Kate Hudson) is employed to care for a man at a former plantation house and while there she discovers a secret room containing bones, blood and herbs conducive to practicing Hoodoo. It transpires that former slaves were lynched because of their beliefs. The Hoodoo element is evident with subtle explorations of the beliefs throughout the film, even when Caroline is away from the house there are signs such as when she visits a garage there is red brick dust at the doorway.

There has been a revival in zombies such as in *28 Days Later* and *Shaun of the Dead*, and they feature in *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* and *The Haunted Mansion* in various guises.¹⁶⁸ The Voodoo link is not explored within these films although it does feature in the plot of the *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. It is not mentioned by name although there are references to the abilities of the Priestess Tia Dalma. The evidence is purely visual leaving it to the viewer to make the association (Fig.43).

¹⁶⁸ *28 Days Later*, dir. Danny Boyle, British Film Council, 2002; *Shaun of the Dead*, dir. Edgar Wright, Big Talk Productions, 2004; *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, dir. Gore Verbinski, Walt Disney Pictures, 2003; *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, dir. Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema, 2003; *The Haunted Mansion*, dir. Rob Minkoff, Walt Disney Pictures, 2003.



Fig.43. Tia Dalma, the Voodoo priestess.¹⁶⁹

Voodoo: From Small Pages to the Big Screen

Since cinema began there has been a reliance on literary sources for the film narrative, with discourse on the relationship between the literary and the visual but less attention to the adaptation of literature to film. George Bluestone identified the fundamental difference between the two media as being that there are two ways of seeing, when reading there is a concept of a mental image, a verbal image, and when watching a film a non-verbal image is presented, a visual image.¹⁷⁰ It could be argued that the result becomes almost indistinguishable and yet the approach is completely different. It must be stressed that the verbal image is a powerful concept and if the visual image is not portrayed appropriately this can lead to disappointment with the adaptation. Brian McFarlane considers the cinematic codes and describes when a film is read there are four considerations,

¹⁶⁹ Fig.43. Tia Dalma (Naomie Harris), the Voodoo Priestess in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, dir. Gore Verbinski, Walt Disney Pictures, 2006, on http://www.pirates.ugo.com/girls/pirates_naomie/default.asp >

¹⁷⁰ George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957).

language, visual, non-linguistic sound and cultural.¹⁷¹ In Voodoo cinema these codes are more exaggerated than in many films. Diegetic sounds of drums and the cultural (mis)representations enhance the reading of the films and clearly identify Voodoo to the audience. It is this reliance on the viewer to understand the filmmaker's codes that makes the interpretation of adaptation so difficult to define. The knowledge and awareness of one person may be completely different to the next and so the construction of the meaning of a Voodoo film may vary. Many filmmakers strive to displace the pre-existing reality of a novel rather than to obliterate the written narrative. Morris Beja studied the success of adaptation from novel to film and writes that over three quarters of the Academy Awards for 'best picture' between 1927 and 1979 were adaptations.¹⁷² Literature and cinema have been the most popular forms of cultural production in the twentieth century so it was inevitable that the latter would exploit the success of the former. A successful novel provided a proven interest and a much lower risk than a new screenplay.

Early Voodoo films relied predominantly on one text, *The Magic Island* by William Seabrook, and even though there was no direct adaptation (it was a non-fiction narrative) it was a major influence. Throughout the history of Voodoo cinema there has been a reliance on the fictional novel as source material, many of which have been successful literary works. One of the earliest was *Conjure Wife*, originally written as a serial in 1943. It was later published as a novel in 1953, and adapted to film as *Weird Woman* in 1944. It was remade later in 1962

¹⁷¹ Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 28-29.

¹⁷² Morris Beja, *Film and Literature* (New York: Longman, 1979) 78.

as *Night of the Eagle* (*Burn, Witch, Burn!* in the US).¹⁷³ One of the main considerations of an adaptation is whether it has been faithful to the text, and if not to what extent were the changes made. In the first adaptation, *Weird Woman*, the textual narrative is transposed to the big screen where the novel is adapted with minimum interference. The story is based on a college Professor, an ethnologist, who met his wife on 'the islands' and Voodoo appears from the onset.¹⁷⁴ This film was made at a time when racism was still prevalent in Hollywood and the Voodoo scenes are set in Polynesia rather than the Caribbean and the ethnicity of the participants appears to be European rather than Polynesian or of African descent. The original text of *Conjure Wife* had Voodoo as the basis to the story. Norman (Lon Chaney Jr.) returns to his college with his new wife Paula (Anne Gwynne) who had been brought up by a Voodoo priestess. She continues to practice her beliefs until Norman discovers her 'silly superstitions' and demands that she burns all of her Voodoo items. Once this has been done things start to go wrong, indicating that Voodoo was protecting them. It transpires that the misfortune has been orchestrated by Norman's former lover and so invalidates the power of the religion. This adaptation was faithful to the novel; however, this was to change with the British remake in 1962 with *Night of the Eagle*. A commentary of the original in which the story remained the same but Voodoo was removed and replaced with Satanism and witchcraft, backed by the Jamaican religion of Obeah. These were thought more suited to the British audiences than the more 'exotic' religion of Voodoo. The black and white film is

¹⁷³ Fritz Leiber, *Conjure Wife* (1943; New York: Twayne Publishers, 1953); *Weird Woman*, dir. Reginald Le Borg, Universal Pictures, 1944; *Night of the Eagle*, dir. Sidney Hayers, Independent Artists, 1962, this film was released in the US with the title *Burn, Witch, Burn!*

¹⁷⁴ Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1975) 200-224.

atmospheric and adapts the novel well, the linear narrative of the novel is transferred to the spatiality of the screen and this creates a far superior film to the original *Weird Woman*, even though Voodoo was eliminated.

In 1965 Graham Greene wrote a novel set in Haiti, a country still in the grip of the Duvalier regime and the Tontons Macoutes, *The Comedians*.¹⁷⁵ Greene had visited the country and his novel was written with brutal honesty and compassion for those who were living in an oppressed country. The 'Comedians' of the title were actors hiding behind their masks, not wishing to disclose their true selves. Greene masks them with the names 'Brown,' 'Smith' and 'Jones.' The three meet on a boat bound for Haiti and the story begins to unfold. The Voodoo within the novel is described accurately and shown as an integral part of the lives of Haitians, explaining that people can be good Catholics as well as Voodooists.¹⁷⁶ This is the first novel that really explores Voodoo and how it is entwined within Haitian culture and society. It also gives an insight into the political climate of Haiti under the Duvalier regime and the oppression and cruelty of the Tontons Macoutes in the 1960s.¹⁷⁷ This novel was transposed to the screen with the same title and the verbal narrative was faithfully portrayed in the visual narrative which was arguably due to Greene writing the screenplay and the excellent direction of Peter Glenville.¹⁷⁸ The characters were played by major Hollywood stars, Richard Burton, Alec Guinness, Elizabeth Taylor and Peter Ustinov, and yet the quality of the writing meant that the characters were seen

¹⁷⁵ Graham Greene, *The Comedians* (1965; London: Vintage, 1999).

¹⁷⁶ Greene, 53 and 172.

¹⁷⁷ The politics of Graham Greene are discussed in Anthony Burgess, "Politics in the Novels of Graham Greene," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2.2 (Apr., 1967) 93-99.

¹⁷⁸ *The Comedians*, dir. Peter Glenville, MGM, 1967.

and appreciated instead of showcasing the actors. Voodoo on the screen was as subtle as it was in the novel, there was no sensationalism and intelligent questions were raised throughout around faith and belief. The location of Benin created a similar climate to that of Haiti and so added to a sense of reality.¹⁷⁹ When the film was screened on television by CBS there was strong opposition from the Haitian Government. Haitian Embassy officials wrote to the *New York Times* accusing the Americans of “propaganda intended to adversely affect tourism and Haitian efforts to improve their economy.”¹⁸⁰ This same article in the *New York Times* indicates that Haiti protested internationally with the publication of the novel and the original film release but to no avail. The Haitian Embassy still feels strongly that this film was propaganda and that it misrepresented Haiti.¹⁸¹ Although there is irrefutable evidence of the violence and ill-treatment of the Haitians under Duvalier there is also an element of suspicion towards the Americans, a nation that had repeatedly occupied and interfered with their independence.

Another popular author to include Voodoo was Ian Fleming in his James Bond novel, *Live and Let Die*.¹⁸² The novel was adapted for screen in 1973 as the eighth in the Bond series with the same title.¹⁸³ The film embraces many of the traits of the time, especially with the increase in blaxploitation movies. The location was partly set in Harlem, New York, a city suburb shown as a menacing

¹⁷⁹ Benin is viewed as the home of Voodoo in Africa.

¹⁸⁰ *New York Times*, 30 October 1971, 63 (col.3)

¹⁸¹ Haitian Embassy New York, letter to the author, 22 July 2002.

¹⁸² Ian Fleming, *Live and Let Die* (1953; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988).

¹⁸³ *Live and Let Die*, dir. Guy Hamilton, United Artists, 1973.

threat which relates directly to the race riots that happened there in the 1960s.¹⁸⁴ In the adaptation the Voodoo is confused and fails to make the links with Haiti to which the novel continuously makes reference. Throughout the novel Voodoo is explored and explained with paragraphs from *The Traveller's Tree* by Patrick Leigh Fermor, a contemporary account of the Caribbean with a large section on Haiti and Voodoo.¹⁸⁵ The Voodoo spirit of Baron Samedi does transpose to the screen and arguably, as played by Geoffrey Holder, is one of the most iconic characters of Voodoo cinema (Fig.44).



Fig.44. Geoffrey Holder as Baron Samedi.¹⁸⁶

The novel explores the link between Voodoo and Haiti and this contextualises the characters. There are more explanations in the verbal narrative of the spirits within Voodoo and of zombies and Fleming makes direct reference to a non-

¹⁸⁴ For more on the Harlem race riots see Stanley Lieberson and Arnold R. Silverman, "The Precipitants and Underlying Conditions of Race Riots," *American Sociological Review*, 30.6 (Dec., 1965), 887-898.

¹⁸⁵ Patrick Leigh Fermor, *The Traveller's Tree* (London: John Murray, 1950) 245-333.

¹⁸⁶ Fig.44. Geoffrey Holder as Baron Samedi in *Live and Let Die* (1973).

fiction narrative as a source of information.¹⁸⁷ The novel was set in Jamaica, an island no longer British, and the evil character who relies on Voodoo was a threat to America, not Britain. This film represents America as a vulnerable nation and as Jeremy Black explains, “the film linked black power in the cities with crime and implied that a failure to control both black neighbourhoods and a small Caribbean island could undermine America.”¹⁸⁸ The character of Dr. Kananga (Yaphet Kotto) could be a metaphor for Haiti, seen in the film as corrupt and destructive to the very fabric of American society and the underground activities of Kananga in Harlem painted a misrepresentative portrayal of this black neighbourhood.

The selection of Voodoo novels to be adapted to film were, in the majority of cases, successful in their own right, and as discussed previously this was due to a proven track record. If the book was a success it could be assumed that the cinematic production would be as well. In many cases the film titles remained the same as the corresponding novel, there were a few exceptions such as *Angel Heart* and *Weird Woman*, but many would be recognised from the novel.¹⁸⁹

The Voodoo films of the 1980s and 1990s also stayed true to their corresponding novels as discussed previously, many of the filmmakers adopting the approach that if it worked as a verbal narrative they made few changes for the spatial narrative of the cinema.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ The recommended text was Patrick Leigh Fermor, *The Traveller's Tree* (1950; London: Penguin Books, 1988).

¹⁸⁸ Jeremy Black, *The Politics of James Bond: From Fleming's Novels to the Big Screen* (Westport: Greenwood, 2005) 134.

¹⁸⁹ *Angel Heart* was taken from the novel *Falling Angel* and *Weird Woman* was taken from the novel *Conjure Wife*.

¹⁹⁰ *Angel Heart*, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* were examined on pages 186-188.

Locations

Vodou originates in Haiti, a syncretic religion that evolved from the forced displacement of West African peoples. The locations for Voodoo films have varied with very few offering true origins of Haiti or even West Africa.

Throughout Voodoo cinematic history there has been a consideration of imagined over real in relation to the locations. Early production budgets had an impact and many sets had to be created from available material or in some cases existing sets were re-used.

The first film to mention Voodoo was *The Sea Bat* and the location for this was the fictional island of 'Portuga.' This could be a variation on the name of the island that can be found off the coast of Haiti, Tortuga. Tortuga was known to have been inhabited by Spanish colonists and yet in this film the locals speak with French accents. The local inhabitants were referred to as 'natives,' a favoured generic term that identified the white superiority and colonial attitude. The narrative also makes suggestions that the location could be off the South American coast (by mentioning Devil's Island penal colony) or within the Pacific, reinforcing the fictional setting.

This film was soon followed by the first full Voodoo (and zombie) film, *White Zombie*, that identified the location as Haiti, an association that would be seldom made throughout cinematic production. Although *White Zombie* verbally associated Voodoo with Haiti the sets used included those of *The Cat and the Canary*, *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. In using these sets the filmmakers created a

gothic atmosphere with influences of German Expressionism and Romanticism, echoing the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich.¹⁹¹



Fig.45. Caspar David Friedrich, Monastery Graveyard in the Snow, (1817-19).¹⁹²

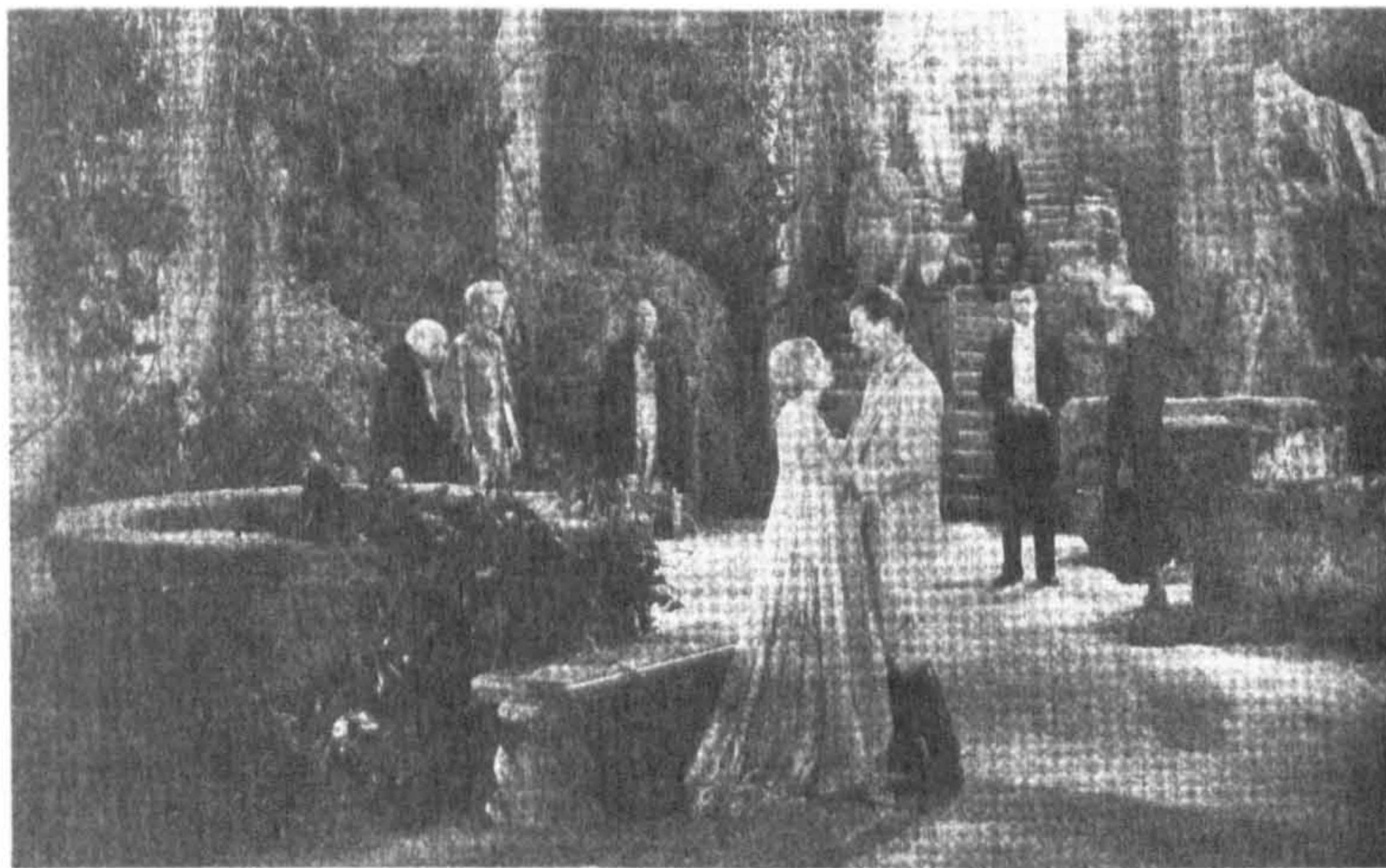


Fig.46. The gothic location of Hollywood Haiti for *White Zombie*.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ *The Cat and the Canary*, dir. Paul Leni, Universal Pictures, 1927; *Dracula*, dir. Tod Browning, Universal Pictures, 1931; *Frankenstein*, dir. James Whale, Universal Pictures, 1931. For more on Friedrich and how he was perceived in the 1930s see Hermann Beenken, "Caspar David Friedrich," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 72.421 (Apr., 1938) 170-173 and 175.

¹⁹² Fig.45. Caspar David Friedrich, 'Monastery Graveyard in the Snow,' 1817-19. This painting was exhibited in the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, but destroyed in the air raids of World War II, image on <<http://www.bd.edu>>

¹⁹³ Fig.46. The exterior set of a recreated Haiti in Hollywood for *White Zombie*, echoing the painting of Friedrich, in Rhodes, 280.

There were locations for cinematic Voodoo identified as islands in the West Indies, either with fictitious names such as ‘St. Sebastian’ in *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) and ‘San Monique’ in *Live and Let Die* (1973) or occasionally without identification as in *King of the Zombies* (1941). *Live and Let Die* was made in Jamaica, the location identified in the novel, but there was an inconsistency within the story. A number of scenes on the Caribbean island show the growing of opium poppies even though this would not occur.¹⁹⁴ The villain is known to be a black drug baron and this exploitation of the island to grow his crops creates a somewhat prejudicial portrayal, another stereotypical association between the black community and their Caribbean roots. This attempt at constructing the Caribbean within the spatial narrative of the big screen to accommodate Voodoo is detrimental to the representation of the religion. The wide variety of locations causes confusion and so the only constant is Voodoo, in whatever form that takes. The viewer adds their own previous understanding or mental concept that would disassociate the religion from Haiti.

Voodoo originated in Haiti and despite few filmmakers addressing this fact many at least attempted to situate the religion either in the Caribbean or identify it with African origins. There were many films that were located outside Haiti and to escape the historical ‘exoticness’ of the Caribbean and provide audiences with a less ‘savage’ representation filmmakers decided to ignore the origins. Instead they opted for more bizarre locations such as Cambodia in *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936) and Polynesia in *Weird Woman* (1944) and *Voodoo Island* (1957).

¹⁹⁴ Opium poppies are mainly grown in China, Southeast Asia, Mexico, Turkey and Lebanon. For more on this see <<http://opioids.com/jh/gardening.html>>

Haiti was used as the filming location for two films but unfortunately neither was completed in their original setting, they had to be relocated. The first, *Ouanga* (1935) originally titled *Drums of the Night*, was to be made in Haiti because the director (George Terwilliger) wished to have an authentic setting for his Voodoo film. Despite this being filmed during the American occupation the Haitians were initially conducive to this new invasion, supporting the cast and crew. This soon changed though when Terwilliger irritated Voodoo priests with his persistent attempts to film Voodoo ceremonies and a ouanga was left for him as a warning. Before filming moved to Jamaica to finish the movie the production encountered numerous problems. Sheldon Leonard, one of the actors, writes at length about what went wrong during filming in Haiti including an account of how the prop man wished to buy 'authentic' Voodoo items for the sets. These were sacred objects and not for sale so he decided to steal them showing disrespect and contempt to the Haitians and their religion.¹⁹⁵ It was after this theft that a series of events occurred; the following four weeks saw a series of deaths caused by a barracuda attack, yellow fever, and a fall causing a broken neck, hornet attacks resulting in numerous hospitalisations, and a fall onto cactus causing injury. These events created more interest than the film itself and there was speculation of a Voodoo curse.¹⁹⁶ Leonard's account gives an insight into how important Voodoo was to the Haitians, even though it is stereotyped in parts, and it features a mention of the Voodoo doll.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Sheldon Leonard, *And the Show Goes On: Broadway and Hollywood Adventures* (New York: Limelight, 1995). George Terwilliger, who was believed to be an expert on Voodoo, condemned the actions of his prop man concluding that it would bring very bad luck on them.

¹⁹⁶ This is possibly an urban myth or exaggerated series of events to create interest in the film through publicity. Sheldon Leonard was present on the set so his is a voice from the location, unsubstantiated at this time.

¹⁹⁷ Leonard mentions being warned not to leave nail clippings or hair in his hotel room in case someone decides to make a Voodoo doll of him.

According to Senn, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* was another film fraught with problems when filming in Haiti.¹⁹⁸ Wes Craven relied on Wade Davis as his technical advisor and they attended Voodoo ceremonies and talked with local Voodoo priests, asking for protection before any filming took place. The problems of late twentieth century Haiti were not much different to those encountered in the 1930s, poverty was rife and with poor sanitation disease was prevalent. The main difference was the level of desperation of Haitians. When filming began Craven employed extras but as the news spread of this opportunity to make money whole villages were depopulated in an attempt to find work, there were over two thousand people on set. These crowds began to demand more money and when it wasn't forthcoming they allegedly went on strike and threw stones at the crew. There was an account of a hallucination and temporary insanity following a visit to a ceremony but these have not been substantiated and no names were given. It seems almost obligatory to include a Voodoo curse or ceremony story and could arguably be the result of Urban Myth making or publicity seeking filmmakers.

Other locations for Voodoo include London, Africa and Louisiana as have been identified throughout this chapter but sadly the Haitian origin is the least represented across cinematic production. White audiences constructed their own cultural 'civility' and that was not anything associated with Voodoo. These exotic locations created a perceived distance of the 'other' and when that distance is reduced 'white superiority' prevails. The linking of Voodoo with Polynesia and Cambodia was an amalgamation of East and West. Mimi Sheller

¹⁹⁸ Senn, 216-217.

identifies that this blending of East and West enables “Western subjects to distance from themselves those who may be all too close.”¹⁹⁹ In much the same way as Said suggests that for Orientalism we must accept a confusing amalgam of imperial vagueness and precise detail, Voodoo locations are the vague and the aspects of religion the precision.²⁰⁰ As long as Voodoo was represented as the ‘other’ in an ‘exotic’ location it was acceptable and the audience could construct their own meaning.

Summary

Voodoo in cinematic production has followed waves of popularity and has been directly affected by the socio-political and socio-cultural issues of the times the films were made. Films offer an insight into a time and a place, even if set in a historical context there was still a direct influence from contemporary society, especially evident when considering colonial cinema. Literature has been a primary source material for many filmmakers, in the Golden Age of Hollywood the reliance was on the non-fiction narrative (or fictionalised fact in many cases) for Voodoo and the films were offered as accurate portrayals of an ‘exotic’ religion.

Many of the Voodoo films of the 1930s remained true to their locations and were set in Haiti or Louisiana, primarily because of the reliance on non-fictional accounts and awareness of Voodoo within America. These films were permeated with the racism which was symptomatic of American attitudes of the time. The sets of these films were heavily influenced by the silent movies of the 1920s;

¹⁹⁹ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003) 142.

²⁰⁰ Said, 50.

they echoed the German Expressionistic and gothic style as many were directed by the German directors who had been brought over to Hollywood. The popularity of Voodoo, and horror generally, continued into the 1940s with these two decades producing the most enduring and accomplished films of the Voodoo genre for many years. World War II gave Hollywood the Nazi zombie-making villain in films such as *King of the Zombies* and cinema gave people an escape from the misery of war and the economic crisis in Britain.²⁰¹ Voodoo was embedded into the horror genre during this era but this was about to change as it faced a decline in popularity during the 1950s.

The 1950s saw an increase in non-fictional Vodou narratives but these were not sensationalised and were missing the fictionalisation approach taken by many of the authors who were previously so influential such as Seabrook and Wirkus.²⁰²

This decade saw an increase in the nuclear threat, the cold war and science fiction which diverted the attention away from previous colonial sentiment.

These were real life horrors that could directly affect society and this is the fear that audiences wished to see. This combination of the lack of literary inspiration and the increasing interest of science fiction led to a cinematic Voodoo decline.

Hollywood began to make films in the 1960s that were violent and sadistic, graphically showing killing and death. Reflecting the society that had been exposed to such killings in real life, such as the Manson murders in America and the Moors murders in Britain, society was changing. This led to the new genre of

²⁰¹ *King of the Zombies*, dir. Jean Yarbrough, Sterling Productions, 1941.

²⁰² William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (1929; New York: Paragon, 1989); Faustin Wirkus, *The White King of La Gonave* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1931).

horror now termed the slasher movie. The 1960s was also the time that the zombie was displaced from Voodoo and Haiti and turned into a flesh-eating creature that would spawn future generations of the cannibalistic living dead.²⁰³

Many societal changes occurred throughout the 1960s including the Civil Rights movement which gained momentum throughout the decade. This led to more films being made specifically for black audiences dubbed 'blaxploitation' and although condemned by the NAACP they were hugely popular. It was this period that saw an increase in Voodoo in cinema. The 1970s introduced Voodoo to mass audiences when it featured visually in *Live and Let Die*, and this was arguably the most memorable representation of the religion even though not accurate. Voodoo had a revival in the 1980s when a number of successful novels were made into films with big budget investment, including *Angel Heart* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. The pattern of Voodoo cinema correlates with the pattern of successful Voodoo literature and audiences appear not to have tired of this genre of horror. The 'horror' element is more accurately described as 'terror' because horror now has an association with the blood and gore slasher movies of more recent times.

The distinguishing elements, or symbols, of Voodoo films are the diegetic sound of the Voodoo drums and the Voodoo ceremonies. These appear without exception in every film made based on or including the religion. Many films incorporate the use of the Voodoo doll. The drums and dance are the focus of Voodoo worship and filmmakers saw these not for their spiritual value but for

²⁰³ *The Night of the Living Dead* is the film that took zombies away from their Haitian origin and turned them into flesh-eating creatures.

their aesthetic cinematic value. These component parts of Voodoo are instrumental in perpetuating the myths around the religion and as Claude Lévi-Strauss claimed the mythical value of the myth is preserved however bad the translation is, the substance lies in the story.²⁰⁴ This mythical translation can be adapted to the screen from the novels that inspired the productions and if following Lévi-Strauss's theory then the myths that are written within the story, whether fiction or non-fiction, will be preserved. Other myths that are represented on the screen are the associations between Voodoo and other practices such as Satanism and witchcraft which are supported by a supernatural vocabulary. Tanya Krzywinska argues that Voodoo films are in the main ambivalent and hinged not only on fear but on curiosity and fascination.²⁰⁵ This curiosity and fascination evolved during the nineteenth century with the colonial discourse of 'civilised' and 'savage,' Voodoo cinema was a conduit for exploiting these further. It would be too simplistic to argue that the representations of Voodoo lie in the colonial and imperialistic viewpoints or that they are ethnocentric. As shown there are more complexities to Voodoo cinema. The associations with other practices deemed as 'uncivilised' in the West increased the misunderstanding of Voodoo; it was being linked with a wider concept and so lineated within the mind of the viewer as part of the association whether witchcraft, black magic or Satanism. Outsiders often confuse Voodoo with Obeah and other Caribbean religions even though they are quite distinct.

²⁰⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963) 202-212.

²⁰⁵ Tanya Krzywinska, *A Skin for Dancing In: Possession, Witchcraft and Voodoo in Film* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000) 157-200.

Obeah is written about but not widely understood and when appearing in books and films it is often associated with Voodoo which negates the differences.²⁰⁶

Representations of locations have varied as much as those of Voodoo. The Caribbean has been a favoured location for decades but rather than portraying the beautiful beaches and swaying palm trees so stereotypical of the region, and the image that many filmmakers believed they were capturing, those containing Voodoo are more sinister and oppressive and seen by a growing number as negative.²⁰⁷ Kennedy Wilson described the Caribbean islands as lawless playgrounds and that filmmakers had opted for themes, including black magic and Voodoo, throughout Hollywood history.²⁰⁸ Voodoo certainly was a recurring theme that was constantly being re-invented by Hollywood and creating the ever popular sub-genre of horror, the zombie movie.

It is worth considering the work of Jacques Derrida at this point as his expanded sense of writing in *Of Grammatology* can be applied to film.²⁰⁹ Derrida argues that meanings are disseminated in many directions; they are not linear and as such cannot have a single meaning. When considering the representations within Voodoo film, there are many repetitions from previous films within the visual and auditory narrative. Derrida has explored this notion of iterability and argues

²⁰⁶ Associations are made in books such as Joseph J. Williams, *Voodoo and Obeahs: Phases of West India Witchcraft* (New York: The Dial Press, 1932) and films such as *Pirates of the Caribbean: At Worlds End*, dir. Gore Verbinski, Walt Disney Pictures, 2007.

²⁰⁷ For more on locations see Keith Q. Warner, *On Location: Cinema and Film in the Anglophone Caribbean* (London and Oxford: Macmillan, 2000).

²⁰⁸ Kennedy Wilson, "On Location," *Caribbean Travel and Life* (June, 1996) 93.

²⁰⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. (1967: Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

that each time something is repeated it has a different meaning depending on its context. Brunette and Wills explore Derrida's application of theory and how thought tends to focus on the meaning within the films.²¹⁰ This can be applied to Voodoo as he argues that the texts within a film are not traceable and meanings change depending on context. The meanings of Voodoo have changed throughout the first three decades of cinematic representation and have been recontextualised repeatedly.

Voodoo has historically been seen as a system of strange beliefs and Haiti as the exotic, a place that could not be colonised and so was deemed 'dangerous' and 'savage.' Filmmakers have rarely explored the religion; instead they have opted for exploitation and sensationalism. Cinema audiences had a thirst for zombies and ritualistic sacrifice, not to see a legitimate religious ceremony. The fascination with Voodoo is with its difference and the contact it has with the spirit world. Vodou has seldom been taken seriously, and was generally seen as a primitive superstition. Many anthropologists of the mid-twentieth century, including Alfred Métraux, felt that it may disappear altogether: "I am not its [Voodoo] apologist and I know sooner or later it must disappear."²¹¹ Voodoo has not disappeared, it has recurred throughout cinematic production and although representations have varied immensely over time it is still very much in the public domain. It still faces misrepresentation but there is an increasing interest through literature and cinema for this Caribbean religion that continues to fight oppression and misunderstanding into the twenty-first century.

²¹⁰ Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

²¹¹ Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (1959; New York: Schocken Books, 1972) 22.

Chapter Four

ANIMATED VOODOO

Introduction

The term animation tends to be associated with cartoons but it is important to understand that it covers a much broader spectrum. The term 'cartoon' inevitably strikes a reference to Disney with their studios arguably being the most well known over the past seventy years; however, there are many more studios, and many more characters, well known and well loved by millions. The word cartoon has an association with children's entertainment. Although historically this was the case, particularly in the years when animation and cartoons moved to television, animation is an art form embracing other genres. Cartoons have always held an appeal to all ages, especially in the pre-television years when they were shown as part of a cinema programme. Their appeal was retained when later in the 1950s and 1960s they were shown as sitcoms for primetime family viewing on television. Historically, animation can be divided into three eras, cinematic, televisual and digital.¹ Paul Wells suggests that in this digital age the line between 'animation' and 'live action' is narrow and it is difficult to distinguish between the two.² He continues to discuss that the question of 'what is animation' has led to fresh debate. Animation is the art of the impossible, it signals difference and particularity.³ Norman McLaren suggests that traditional methods are not the "art of drawings that move but rather the art of movements that are drawn".⁴ Throughout this chapter other animators will be discussed who have contributed to the filmic qualities of the genre.

¹ Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (eds.), *Prime Time Animation: Television animation and American culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) 2-6.

² Paul Wells, "The Language of Animation" in Jill Nelmes (ed.) *Introduction to Film Studies* (1996; London & New York: Routledge, 2007) 193-218.

³ Wells in Nelmes, 195.

⁴ Norman McLaren in C. Solomon (ed.), *The Art of the Animated Image* (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1987) 11.

Cartoons were programmes that families could watch together and there are many theories of 'double-coding'. Double coding is the layering of meaning within a cartoon. The theory does not necessarily take into account socio-economic backgrounds. There may be a lack of alternative distractions for children, over familiarity in adults, or numerous other factors that may influence response. The theory does however go some way to explain the enjoyment of cartoons by all ages. Double-coding explains that children can respond to and enjoy a cartoon in a purely visual context; with sound turned down they will still take pleasure from the images on the screen in an unsophisticated way whereas adults will not necessarily enjoy the simplistic drawings within a cartoon but will appreciate the humour and the textual content. There is a difficulty in accepting such a simplistic approach due to so many other factors and also the polarisation of two very different groups, adults and children. As an adult watching and enjoying cartoons on every level, some of the theories are found to be too defined. Cartoons can just be enjoyed for what they are, an animated escape for leisure and entertainment, regardless of the ideas and images being fed to the viewer.⁵ The double coding theory is very simplistic and when it is considered that images and sound are viewed in unison the representations of Voodoo are going to be reinforced to the viewer. Hodge and Tripp apply semiotics to their analysis of children and television which also supports the idea of double coding. They suggest that when applying semiotics to reading a cartoon, the meaning is constructed by the signifier (the cartoon) as well as the text and so can be 'read' by any age group.⁶

⁵ Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁶ R. Hodge and D. Tripp. *Children and Television: A Semiotic Approach* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986).

Voodoo began to feature in animated cartoons in the 1930s when cinematic shorts were enjoyed by moviegoers prior to the main feature. Racism was initially a factor within animation. Many of the early cartoons evolved from newspaper strips and there was little restraint by the artists. The comic strip in newspapers was to provide initial developments for animation with speech bubbles, jokes and sequential narrative. The well-known characters were translated to the moving pictures but they maintained the stereotypes and the associated prejudices, despite the recommendations of the Hays Code.⁷

Animation provided an alternative media for the representation of Voodoo and it appeared in many variations. There were echoes of colonial cinema and colonialism of the nineteenth century and this will be explored throughout this chapter.

History of Animation

Animation began to develop with the emergence of 'flipbooks' in the sixteenth century.⁸ The idea of moving image was somehow magical and made possible with technological developments throughout the nineteenth century.⁹ The predecessor to animation was early 'trick' live-action filming. Artists such as George Melies and J. Stuart Blackton produced live-action films with 'special effects'.¹⁰ Blackton produced the first recognised full animation in 1906 with

⁷ The Hays code, formally known as the Motion Picture Production Code is discussed in the previous chapter, 201.

⁸ Usually containing erotic drawings which when 'flipped' show sexual acts being performed, Wells in Nelmes, 197.

⁹ The phenakistoscope was developed in 1831 (this consisted of two rotating discs which appeared to make an image move); in 1861 the kinematoscope was developed (the mounting of a sequence of images on a wheel which was then rotated); in 1877 the praxinoscope was developed (a rotating drum with the use of mirrors).

¹⁰ These artists were known as lighting cartoonists and used a variety of techniques which would later be applied to animation.

Humorous Phases of Funny Faces.¹¹ It was the work of Blackton that interested investors initially. He helped them realise that this medium would provide huge potential when he integrated his animation skills with live action in *The Haunted Hotel* in 1907.¹² Narrative animation followed when Blackton supervised a famous comic strip artist to animate one of his most well known strips. In 1911 a former newspaper cartoonist turned animator called Winsor McCay presented his first animated cartoon, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*.¹³ In 1912 he made his second, *The Story of a Mosquito* and is widely acknowledged for his contribution to the genre, being the predecessor to the 'fluid motion' that is recognised as the cartoon tradition.¹⁴ In 1914 McCay presented *Gertie the Dinosaur* to cinema audiences in the United States.¹⁵ This cartoon was presented at a time when audiences were still trying to accept moving images in motion pictures so the idea of a drawing coming to life was in some ways more unbelievable than real life action.¹⁶ The experience was enhanced by the fact that the drawing was a dinosaur, a creature that had been extinct for millions of years but Winsor McCay made Gertie come to life; she was to be the first recognisable animated character (Fig.47).¹⁷ This development of character animation and anthropomorphism was a major part of animated cartoon evolution.

¹¹ *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, dir. J. Stuart Blackton, Vitagraph, 1906.

¹² *The Haunted Hotel*, dir. J. Stuart Blackton, Vitagraph, 1907. This short film shows a dinner being prepared without anyone being in the room through the use of stop motion animation techniques.

¹³ *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, dir. Winsor McCay, Vitagraph, 1911. There were earlier animations when Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith discovered stop-action animation to create the effects of ghosts in 1907 but Winsor McCay is considered the pioneer of fluid motion animation.

¹⁴ *The Story of a Mosquito*, dir. Winsor McCay, Vitagraph, 1912.

¹⁵ *Gertie the Dinosaur*, dir. Winsor McCay, Vitagraph, 1914.

¹⁶ *Gertie the Dinosaur* was advertised as a living creature, the poster states that "She eats drinks and breathes! She laughs and cries! Dances the Tango, answers questions and obeys every command! Yet she lived millions of years before man inhabited the earth and has never been seen since!!"

¹⁷ For more see John Canemaker, *Winsor McCay: His Life and Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005).



Fig.47. A drawing of Gertie.¹⁸

Gertie was given a personality and the characteristics of a child, traits that were applied to many characters in the years to follow in numerous cartoons through to the present day. *Gertie the Dinosaur* is often listed as the first animated cartoon and it is believed that the creator, Winsor McCay, stakes the claim of inventing the animation process.¹⁹ Winsor McCay presented his work at Vaudeville appearances and he inspired others to follow his lead in making cartoons. When *Colonel Heeza Liar in Africa* was released in 1913 as the first of a cartoon film series, it marked a turning point in animation history.²⁰

¹⁸ Fig.47. A drawing of Gertie taken from the early animation by Winsor McCay.

¹⁹ It is undoubtedly the most well known early animation but J. Stuart Blackman had already worked on an animation called *Humorous Faces of a Funny Face* in 1906 and Emile Cohl had made a film six years before *Gertie* in 1908 called *Drame Chez Les Fantoques*. McCay has not been recorded as acknowledging the achievement of Cohl. Cohl has not been recorded as acknowledging the achievements of Blackton. Many scholars in the field still argue that McCay was the pioneer of animation due to his technique being more advanced and his characters being given a much more 'fluid' movement than those of his contemporaries. Despite these arguments continuing into the twenty-first century it is agreed that animation was truly born at the turn of the twentieth century.

²⁰ Vaudeville was a popular type of entertainment, particularly in the US at the turn of the twentieth century. It usually featured a variety of speciality acts and McCay preferred to present in this format rather than develop his work for cinema; he also continued to draw his cartoon strips for newspapers. *Colonel Heeza Liar in Africa*, animated by Walter Lantz, prod. J.R. Bray, Bray Productions, 1913. J. R. Bray pioneered the use of cell animation in 1913.

Methods in cartoon production evolved and changed over the next few years to reduce the labour intensive techniques and increase the range of effects available to the animator. Animation was, and still is, viewed as an art form even though some would argue that when animation made the leap to television the art began to suffer for the sake of business. When Winsor McCay was making his animations it would take him up to a year to make a single five minute cartoon but as cinema began to boom the demand for more cartoons meant that animations needed to be produced much more quickly.

To satisfy this demand cartoon production techniques changed and more people worked on each cartoon, it was no longer the work of one artist. When this happened Winsor McCay was recorded as saying “Animation should be an art... what you fellows have done with it is making it into a trade... not an art, but a trade... bad luck.”²¹ It may have been bad luck for the traditionalists but for the studios it was to prove very lucrative.

In the early days of animation many of the characters are drawn as black, such as *Felix the Cat* (Fig.48), this was not race related and at the time there were other all-black characters with white facial features, including Mickey Mouse. It was simply easier to draw solid black characters than outlines.²² This also shows the influence of McCay with the use of anthropomorphism.²³

²¹ Gianalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (1994; London and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 18.

²² For more on animation history see Gianalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (1994; London and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

²³ For more on anthropomorphism and the early developments within animation see Wells in Nelmes, 197-98.

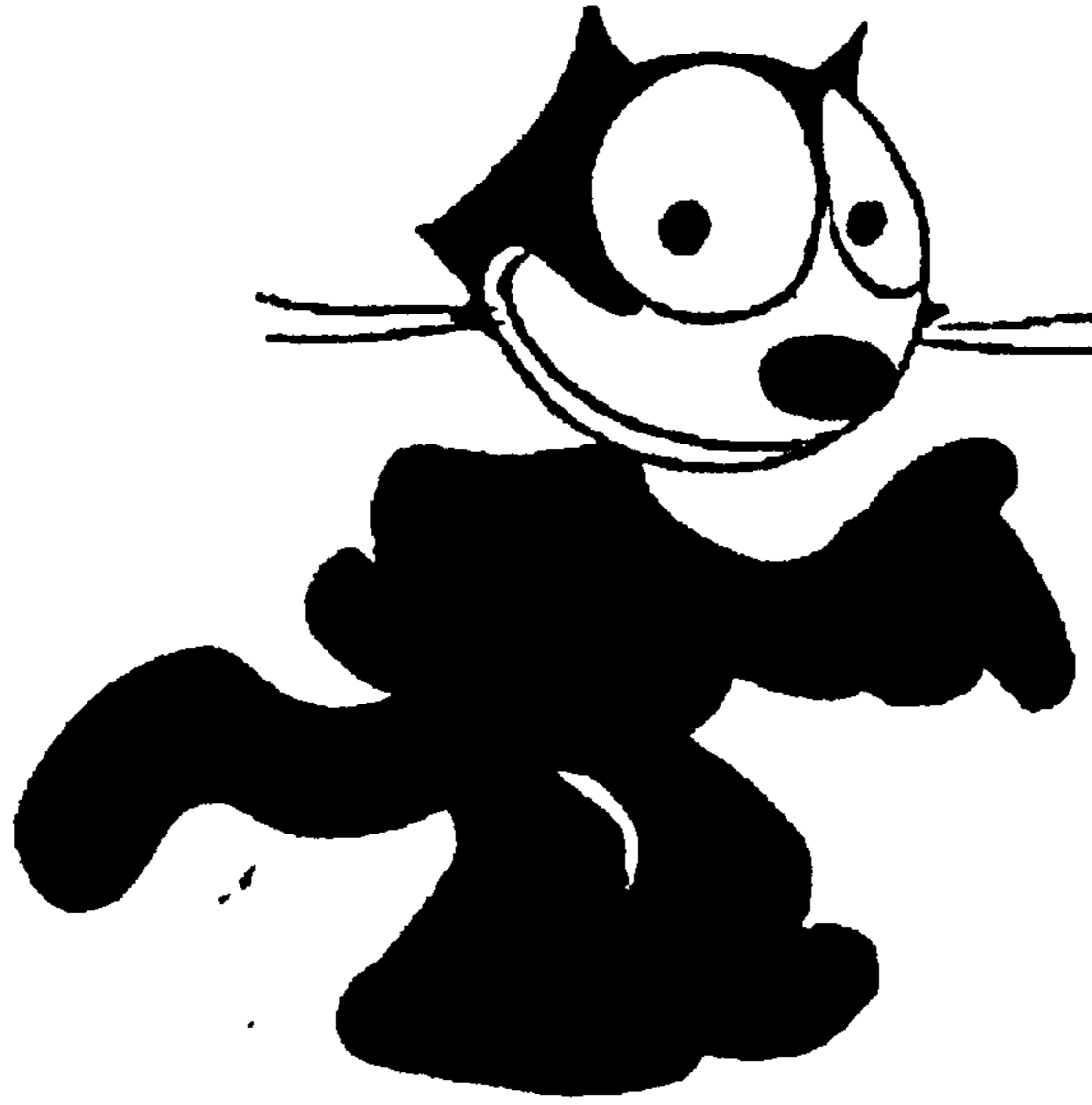


Fig.48. Felix the Cat.²⁴

Animation has transformed over the last century. As Paul Wells states “Animation is arguably the most important creative form of the twenty first century,”²⁵ with the development of computer generated imagery (CGI) this appears to be the case. Animation is continuing to develop and break through new boundaries.²⁶ Animation cuts across various media including feature length films, prime time sit-coms, television, World Wide Web and new media technology, and is being increasingly recognised by the industry.²⁷ CGI is being used more widely to produce the special effects in demand by the studios in films such as *Matrix* and for the living dead in *Pirates of the Caribbean*.²⁸ CGI has more recently been used in the film *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*.²⁹

²⁴ Fig.35. *Felix the Cat*, first shown in 1919, drawn by Otto Messmer and named by John King.

²⁵ Paul Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002).

²⁶ CGI means that film budgets are a fraction of the cost in comparison to live action films. The reality is arguably compromised.

²⁷ Animation had previously received awards for best animated short by a studio but was finally recognised officially as a movie genre by the industry when it received its own category at the Academy Awards in 1991.

²⁸ *Matrix*, dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski (as the Wachowski Brothers), Warner Bros, 1999; *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, dir. Gore Verbinski, Walt Disney Company, 2003

²⁹ *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*, dir. Kerry Conran, Paramount, 2004.

This was an experimental and revolutionary use of the technology, a film made entirely in front of a blue screen. There have been mixed reactions from the critics, some feel it is revolutionary and some feel it has taken something away from action movies because it does look animated, cheating the viewer of the escapism and experience that movies offer.³⁰ The pinnacle of CGI was with *Monsters Inc* from Pixar and this was to lead the way for an animation revolution.³¹ CGI is still being used and developed for live action special effects but full length animated films using this technology are fewer even though there is a steady output.³² Animation embraces many techniques including clay and puppets but drawing is still the preferred medium of many animators. Voodoo has not directly been given the CGI treatment although it has been used in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series and in the live action Scooby Doo movies, *Scooby Doo* and *Scooby Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*.³³

Animation has constantly adapted and evolved to meet the demands of an ever-changing industry. From the inception in cinemas to the mass media of television, Voodoo has featured throughout as will be shown in the rest of this chapter.

³⁰ Blue screen technique is where actors perform in front of a blue screen so that effects can be added at a later stage. Apart from a few small props the whole film was shot with the actors performing to imagined scenery and characters, all of which was computer generated.

³¹ Even though *Toy Story* was the first full length CGI animated film. *Toy Story*, dir. John Lasseter, Walt Disney Studios, 1995.

³² *Monsters Inc.*, dir. Pete Docter, David Silverman and Lee Unkrich, Pixar, 2001. During the early 2000s CGI was rapidly being developed and used for a majority of special effects for both film and television. Even though studios have the availability of CGI they are increasingly opting to make their animated films using proven techniques such as drawing and clay.

³³ *Scooby Doo*, dir. Raja Gosnell, Warner Bros., 2002; *Scooby Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*, dir. Raja Gosnell, Warner Bros., 2004.

Animated Voodoo: The Beginning

Before considering Voodoo in cartoons it is important to try and understand how issues of race and black stereotypes featured and evolved in this media. This may in some way show how Voodoo developed a shroud of myth, misunderstanding and misrepresentation not only in animation but throughout cultural production. Negative racist stereotypes were featured in newspaper cartoon strips with the black characters often being shown as protagonists and this had been evident in newspapers since 1887.³⁴ When many of the artists responsible for the storylines and for drawing these strips moved to the field of animation it was no surprise that the stereotypes moved with them and continued in cartoons. Below (Fig.49) is an example from *The Times Picayune*, it is racist and sexist in its narrative and it concludes with the male character complaining of a headache and stomach ache because of his experiences of chasing a female.



Fig.49. Detail from “You Never Can Tell By The Perfume,” a cartoon published in *The Times Picayune*, New Orleans, USA, 1914.³⁵

³⁴ *The Katzenjammer Kids* was published in 1887 and portrayed Africans as either lazy or having cannibalistic tendencies.

³⁵ Fig.36. “You Never Can Tell By The Perfume,” *The Times Picayune* [New Orleans] 1914.

In 1915 Pat Sullivan created *Sammy Johnsins*, the very first black character to appear in an animated cartoon. This was an adaptation of his newspaper strip called *Sambo and His Funny Noises*.³⁶ The first cartoon was released in 1916 and a total of thirteen were made from 1916-1917, proving more successful than the cartoon strip which was phased out fairly soon after its inception. The cartoon strip character was unable to speak with any clarity; a comedic character that did occasionally get the better of the white characters but who was ridiculed continuously and featured in a minor role. He was fictional and depicted as such but this silent character was to pave the way for many more to follow. The inability to spell is shown and it emphasised the illiteracy of the black character, the speech bubbles of the white characters are all correct. Despite the overt racism *Sammy Johnsins* was a popular cartoon in the UK and it was regularly reviewed in *The Bioscope*, a weekly periodical for film. *Sammy (or Sammie) Johnsins* was the only ethnically black series to be made in the silent era. The stream of racist animation would continue into the UK from America over the following decades, encouraging white viewers to view non-whites with contempt. Sampson also suggests that it is “hard to underestimate the negative impact that these stereotypical animated caricatures had on black audiences”.³⁷

In 1917 there was a review of animated cartoons in *The Bioscope* which states “The animated cartoon has so firmly established itself in popular favour that no programme can be considered complete which cannot find occasional space for one of these highly ingenious forms of artistic entertainment.”³⁸ This was written

³⁶ The name of the character was changed from ‘Sambo’ to ‘Sammy Johnsins’ to avoid copyright infringement.

³⁷ Henry T. Sampson, *That’s Enough Folks* (Lanham & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1998) 4.

³⁸ *The Bioscope*, November 15, 1917 p.51 *The Kine Comedy Kartoons*.

at the dawn of animated cartoons, a time when cartoons were becoming popular in the USA and featuring more regularly in cinemas.

One of the first cartoons to feature a black character in a lead role was *The Escapades of Estelle* from 1916.³⁹ She was a character drawn in black with broad white lips. Superstition was a recurrent characteristic continuously associated with black characters throughout animation history and repeatedly used as a source of humour.⁴⁰ In this animation there is reference to a rabbit's foot, and so to superstition.⁴¹ The character of Estelle feels that it's about time that the rabbit's foot does something for her, indicating her belief in superstition as opposed to her belief in religion, weakening her moral characteristics. She is seen stealing some fabric from an awning to make herself a dress which she is wearing at the end of the cartoon. This is an action that relating back to the rabbit's foot has nothing to do with superstition or luck; it is an action relating directly to the character. This action implicates the lack of morals and the criminal tendencies of Estelle. These characteristics were familiar in cinema production, whether film or animation, and in society generally racism was prevalent. As the cartoon series began to develop into the sound era the first black character to be featured with sound was *Bosko* in 1929.⁴²

The first cartoon to feature Voodoo was *Voodoo in Harlem* in 1938.⁴³ This cartoon was being introduced to an audience used to seeing racism in animation

³⁹ *Escapades of Estelle*. 1916. Henry Palmer; released by Gaumont America Film Co.

⁴⁰ Superstitions are prevalent in all cultures and yet were not represented as such.

⁴¹ Superstition was just one of many racially stereotyped characteristics.

⁴² *Bosko* was created by Hugh Harman and Rudolph Ising.

⁴³ *Voodoo in Harlem* (1938), Frank Tipper, Merle Gibson, Walter Lantz; released by Universal Pictures. A combination of live action and animation.

and to whom Voodoo had been introduced in Hollywood productions and literature. This animation was released ten years after the publication of *The Magic Island*, a book that had a huge impact on cinema and animation and a very popular piece of literature sensationalising Haiti. There are two live characters in *Voodoo in Harlem*, the cartoonist and the black maid.⁴⁴ The cartoon is set in the animator's studio with small black animated characters coming to life from the ink, materialising from the ink well. The story starts with the cartoonist leaving his desk as the clock strikes ten and as the wind blows through an open window a bottle of ink is knocked over. The ink then drips onto the floor and forms a puddle and four characters emerge (Fig.50). As they dance around the studio, being joined by more of the black characters out of the inkwell, they sing a song called 'Black Rendezvous.' The lyrics include "...a new religion is found that's Voodoo", and "Boys and girls down Haiti way throw away their clothes and say that Voodoo", this reference to throwing away clothes has the implication that Haitians are uncivilised and so links Voodoo as an 'uncivilised' culture. As Terri Francis suggests, the camera and or the filmmaker's [animator's] eye is "aligned with a white hero or heroine's perspective".⁴⁵ Richard Dyer examines the issue of whiteness, that white characters are portrayed as individuals whereas the stereotypes of non-whites are limited to one characteristic.⁴⁶ There are references to superstition via a rabbit's foot throughout the song, similar to *The Escapades of Estelle*. The superstition this time is mentioned as a protection against Voodoo rather than being part of it.

⁴⁴ This was a popular method of early animation to integrate live action with the drawn image.

⁴⁵ Francis in Nelmes, 289.

⁴⁶ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997) 12.

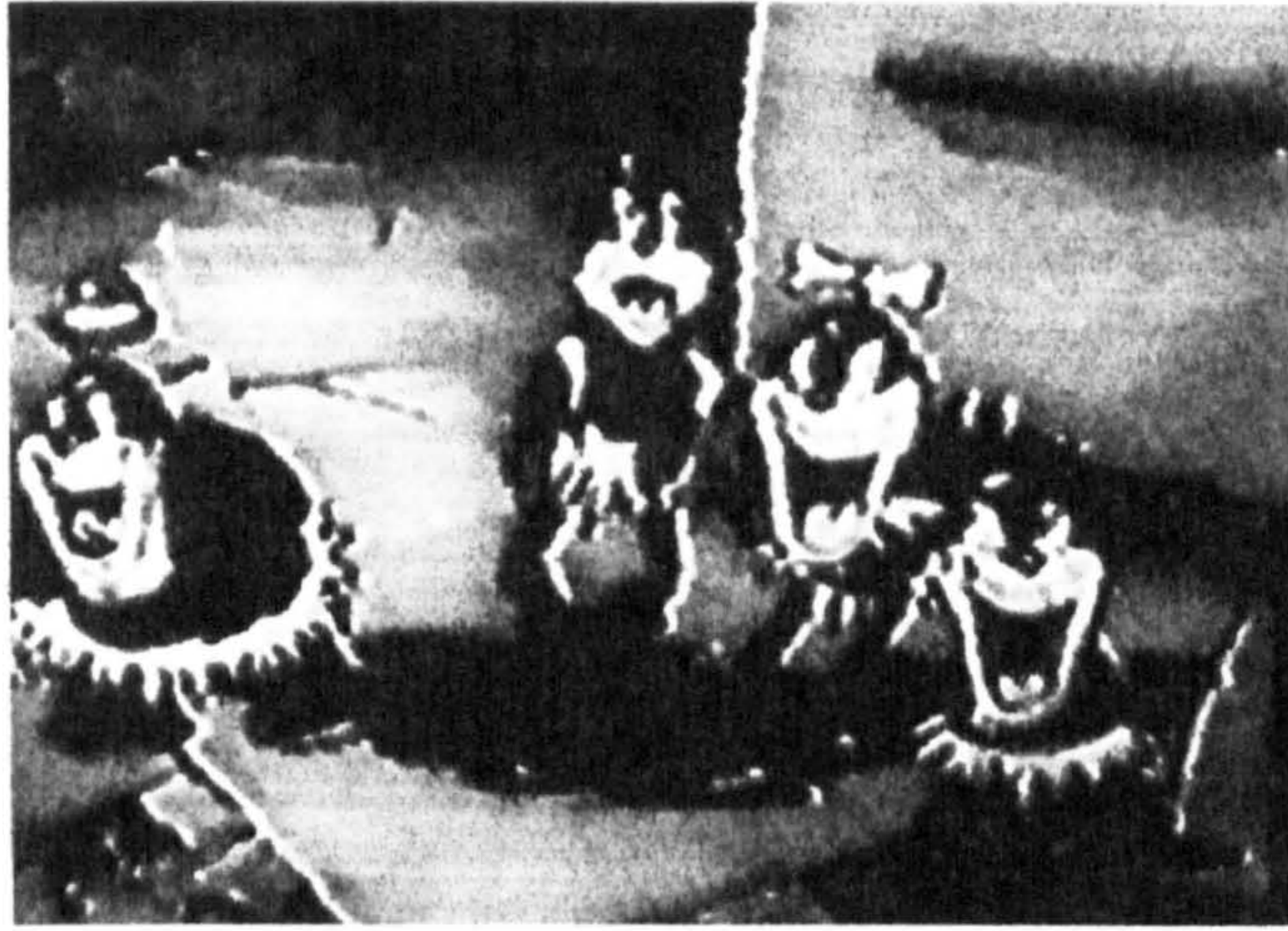


Fig.50. An opening scene from *Voodoo in Harlem*.⁴⁷

The lyrics also say “...be prepared to kick the gong”, a phrase first found in the 1920s, now obsolete, which means to smoke opium, originating from Malay and once again linking the ‘otherness’ of the East with black culture.⁴⁸ Larry Portis argues that under the influence of Said Orientalism is “generally taken to be an ideological bias typical of European cultures. On the other hand, Orientalism can be understood as representing a fascination with the non “occidental” world”.⁴⁹

As dawn arrives the characters jump back into the ink bottle and the scene moves back to live action with the entrance of the maid, She looks at the mess and picks up papers from the floor, seeing a large inkspot on one of the sheets of paper she puts the rubbish in an incinerator and we see the dark smoke coming out of the chimney as the cartoon ends. As the dark black smoke rises from the chimney, the implication is that the black inkspot on the discarded paper is in fact a black

⁴⁷ Fig.50. The four figures that emerge from the inkwell in *Voodoo in Harlem*.

⁴⁸ For more on the early etymology of this phrase see David W. Maurer, “The Argot of the Underworld Narcotic Addict,” *American Speech*, 11.2 (Apr., 1936), 116-127.

⁴⁹ Larry Portis, ‘Arabs and ‘Jews’ as Significant Others : Zionism and the Ambivalence of ‘Orientalism’ in the United-Statesian Imagination, *Middle Ground. Journal of Literary and Cultural Encounters*, number 1, 2007, 75-96.

character that may not have made it back to the inkpot and so has been set alight. This element of the cartoon appears to reflect the treatment of an escaped slave and the treatment of blacks within contemporary America. The 'lynching era' which occurred from the late nineteenth century through to the 1930s saw thousands of black people murdered.⁵⁰ Lynch Law was in force as a method for whites to control the black communities with terror, killing for an alleged offence without a legal trial, or any form of trial in many cases, especially by hanging or burning.⁵¹ There were constantly examples of lynching making the front pages of Newspapers during the early 1900s such as *The Times Picayune* in New Orleans with headlines such as "Mob Slays Negro Who Assaulted Shreveport Girl,"⁵² "Negro Sways from Tree Waiting Burial"⁵³ and "Tie Negro To Auto Then Throw On Speed."⁵⁴ These three headlines appeared in the same newspaper in a period of just fourteen weeks. Racism in cartoons was a reflection of these aspects of contemporary American society and culture. At the time of the early cartoons segregation was commonplace across the US, signs to separate 'coloreds' and 'whites' were seen frequently, especially in the Southern States, ironically even in the cinemas where black audiences had the privilege of watching these racist cartoons.

⁵⁰ Lynching was predominantly in the Deep South, often linked to the economic climate in research, it was fundamentally a hate crime. For more on this see Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933) or E.M.Beck and Stewart E. Tolnay, "The Killing Fields of the Deep South: The Market for Cotton and the Lynching of Blacks, 1882-1930," *American Sociological Review*, 55.4 (Aug., 1990) 526-539.

⁵¹ Lynch Law has its origins in the mid nineteenth century from Lynch's Law, named after Captain William Lynch, head of a self-constituted judicial tribunal in Virginia circa 1780.

⁵² *The Times Picayune*, New Orleans, Wednesday 14 May, 1914, p.1.

⁵³ *The Times Picayune*, New Orleans, Wednesday 13 July, 1914, p.1.

⁵⁴ *The Times Picayune*, New Orleans, Thursday 6 August, 1914, p.1.

The link between Haiti and Voodoo was less common in cinema, television and cartoons. *Voodoo in Harlem* does at least make that link, however tentative, within the lyrics of the chant. The introduction to Voodoo in cartoons was enhanced by the lyrics in *Black Rendezvous* which paint a picture of drug-taking wild people, living without taboos and of Voodoo as a new religion which should be feared. This is at a time when Voodoo would be increasingly more familiar throughout the diaspora. The characters shown in this cartoon represent the stereotypes that were commonplace by this time. As they first appear the characters are black, seen wearing grass skirts and one has a bone in his hair (Fig.50, p281) placing Voodoo within the context of cannibalism even with the absence of a verbal reference.

The image of the black cannibal had been seen in previous cartoons as early as 1916 in *Colonel Heeza Liar's African Hunt* and then later in animations such as *Tee Time*, one of the Felix the Cat animated series (Fig.51 below) and *The Isle of Pingo Pongo* (Fig.52, p285).⁵⁵ There were many images of the black cannibal in animated cartoons and they featured in the most popular productions during the 1930s and 1940s including those from the studios of MGM, Warner Bros. and RKO.⁵⁶ These images were a direct response to the notion of 'darkest Africa' and the nineteenth century colonial opinion. The ethnicity of the cannibal is often associated with Africa or the Caribbean; stereotyped images of palm trees and straw huts place the characters in 'identifiable' or 'familiar' locations. It should be questioned why black was the chosen colour of the cannibal, despite the fact

⁵⁵ *Tee Time*, dir. Pat Sullivan, Pat Sullivan Studios, 1930; *The Isle of Pingo Pongo*, dir. Tex Avery, Vitaphone, 1938.

that most cultures worldwide have exhibited cannibalistic tendencies in their history.⁵⁷ If cannibals weren't shown as savages whose only intention was to cook and eat the main character then they were shown as docile and naïve, easily led and nearly always with a human bone in their hair or through their nose. The white characters in the cartoons featuring cannibals always manage to trick the black cannibal or tribe leader, thus reinforcing the image of superior intelligence of white over black.

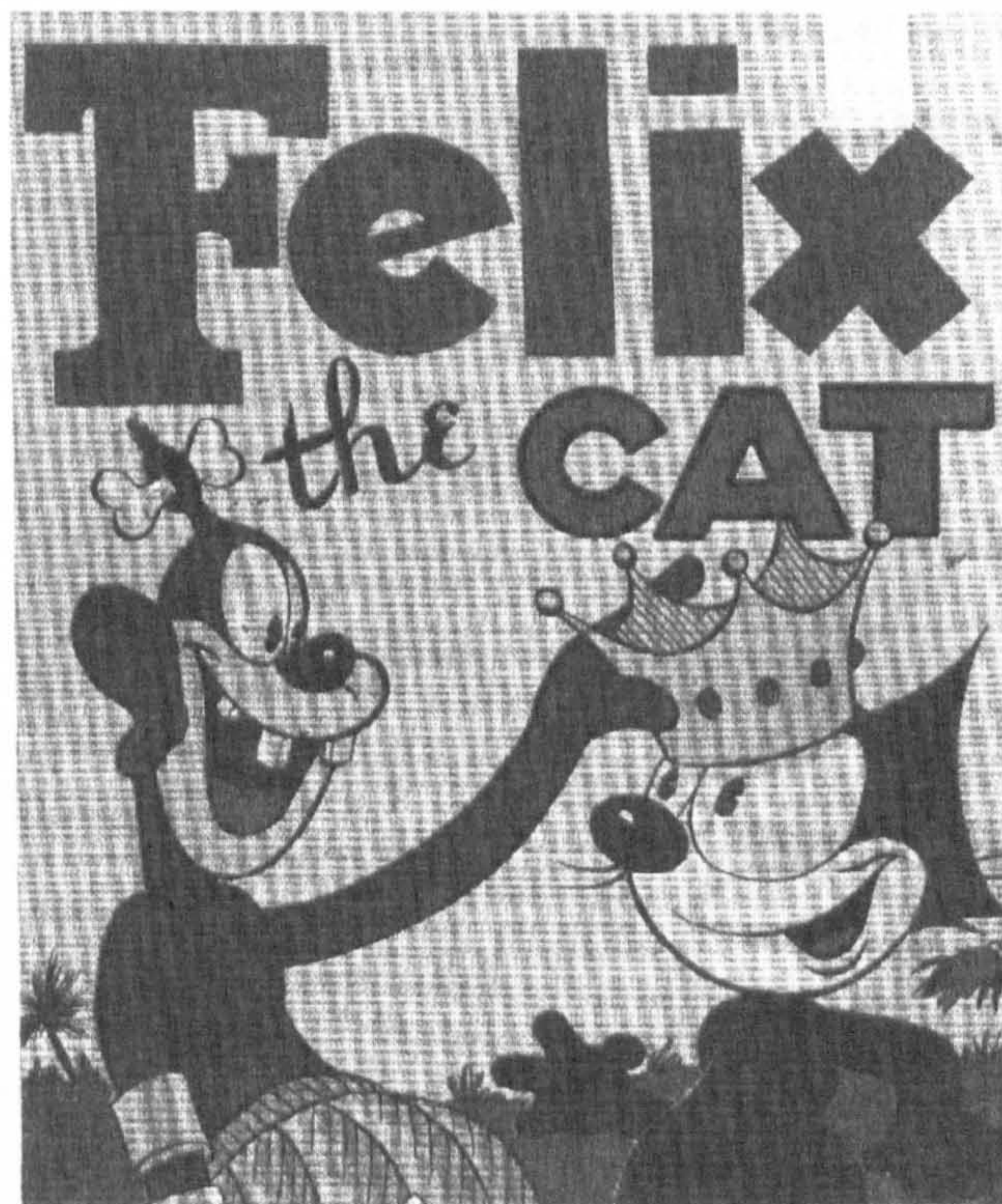


Fig.51. Felix the Cat in *Tee Time*, 1930.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Most of the major film studios produced animated cartoons as well as the Hollywood films, the animations were generally shown prior to the main feature and were predominantly for adult audiences.

⁵⁷ For more on anthropophagy see Laurence R. Goldman (ed.), *The Anthropology of Cannibalism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), particularly chapter one, 1-26, this focuses on the use of cannibalism as cultural xenophobia.

⁵⁸ Fig.51. "A black cannibal crowns Felix the King of the Cannibals in TEE TIME, circa 1930," in Henry T. Sampson, *That's Enough Folks: Black Images in Animated Cartoons, 1900 – 1960* (Lanham, Maryland and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1998) Fig.35 between pages 130 and 131.



Fig.52. A black cannibal in *The Isle of Pingo Pongo*, 1938.⁵⁹

Voodoo in Harlem was the first cartoon to represent Voodoo and it was disappointing in its portrayal. The characters dance around, reaching a frenzy, wearing grass skirts and doing very little to educate the viewer about Voodoo other than representing it as a few minutes of entertainment.⁶⁰ Of course it could be argued that this is precisely what a cartoon is, entertainment. This is so, however, when that entertainment is degrading and portraying a race as subordinate the 'entertainment' value is diminished. There are no visual elements pertaining to Voodoo and even the characters themselves have no resemblance to Voodoo practitioners or followers. There is no exploration of the religion other than in the lyrics and the description of Voodoo as a "new" religion in Harlem is inaccurate considering Voodoo had been practised in the US for many decades prior to this cartoon. Linking Voodoo to Harlem would link the cannibal

⁵⁹ Fig.52. "A black cannibal eyes his dinner in THE ISLE OF PINGO PONGO, circa 1938," in Sampson, Fig.28. between pages 130 and 131.

⁶⁰ Black characters dancing for entertainment was also a feature of earlier cartoons featuring slaves, it was also a feature of society with the minstrel shows touring the South.

characters, their behaviour and the lyrics of the song to a specific area and to a specific black community; this would not have helped race relations within Harlem or the wider American society.

Even though America was a multi-cultural society there was a white majority and cartoons were the ideal opportunity for these animators to express many of the prejudices to be found towards minorities. This prejudice was not directed only at African-Americans, others were stereotyped in these early cartoons: Jews, Irish, Italians, Asians and American Indians were also targeted for humour.⁶¹ Racist terminology was prolific at the time of these early cartoons; it was also recognised as a legitimate source of humour. As it was produced by the white majority there was little resistance until the civil rights movement began to gain strength and oppose in the 1940s.⁶² Images in cartoons were not a high priority in the early years of civil rights but changes were being made because the reviewers of the animated cartoons and other cinematic releases regularly used words such as *nigger* and *pickaninny*.⁶³ These were not isolated incidents and this vocabulary was both commonplace and accepted by the readers of the articles and within day to day dialogue.

⁶¹ For more on issues of race within animated cartoons see Hugh Klein and Kenneth S. Shiffman, "Race Related Content of Animated Cartoons", *Howard Journal of Communications*, 17.3 (Sept., 2006) 163-182.

⁶² Civil Rights emerged as a National Issue in the post World War II years but it wasn't until the 1960s that major changes were to take place. The Ku Klux Klan was revived in the 1940s, terrorizing blacks particularly in the South of America.

⁶³ *The Bioscope* (London), 15 November, 1917. p.59. In a review of *Sammy Johnsin in Mexico* the reviewer writes "Sammy Johnsin, that delightful nigger mite created by..." and then after describing the story, ends with the line "...and a sadder and wiser nigger wanders into the unknown." Ending with the acclaim that the cartoon is "delightful." *The Bioscope* (London), 26 December, 1918. p.29. In a review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the reviewer writes "Naughty Topsy, a piccaninny who has been..." and also describes Uncle Tom as "the Old Nigger."

Derogatory representations of black characters and descriptions only declined when the press began to take issue with more racial stereotyping within cartoons, around the same time that the Civil Rights movement was gaining strength.⁶⁴ As Henry T. Sampson writes “within the first decade of animated cartoons black characters had appeared as a coon, a cannibal and a thief,” not a very positive start to the decades of animation to follow.⁶⁵

Plantation Animation

Another disturbing representation of African-Americans and their culture was in the animated versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in cartoons based around slavery and life on plantations.⁶⁶ The cartoons shockingly make fun of the institution of slavery in the United States. They show the selling of slaves, slaves picking cotton on the plantations and the pursuit of runaway slaves in a comedic and light hearted way. It is difficult to understand how humour was found in a scene showing a black slave being chased by a pack of hounds. Voodoo was known to have been practiced in America from the late eighteenth century and yet it was absent from the animated cartoons based on the plantations of the South.

Uncle Tom was the main character and has been shown in a number of ways, as the happy slave, eager to please, or as a tired old man, bent over and sad. The

⁶⁴ Racism is an issue in the earlier cartoons and to explore it fully, along with the behaviour of those who accepted and supported the humour, is beyond the scope of this study.

⁶⁵ *Coon* was a lightning sketch animation by James Stuart Blackton in 1907 and *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, a 1911 animation by Winsor McCay, included Impy, a black cannibal, Estelle was portrayed as a thief in *The Escapades of Estelle*.

⁶⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851; New York: Bantam Classics, 1982), life on the slave plantations of the south.

variety of characters all have the same racist feature of the thick white lips (Fig.53).



Fig.53. Images of Uncle Tom.⁶⁷

One of the early animations within this genre was *Dixie Days*.⁶⁸ The cartoon opens with scenes of a plantation, slaves skipping and singing as they pick cotton. A character arrives carrying a large whip and because he is unhappy with Uncle Tom. He is seen marching Uncle Tom and his daughter to the slave auction. Another scene shows a group of smiling slaves, chained together, happily heading to the place where the sign reads “Slave Auction Today”, slaves are then seen dancing on the auction block (Fig.54).

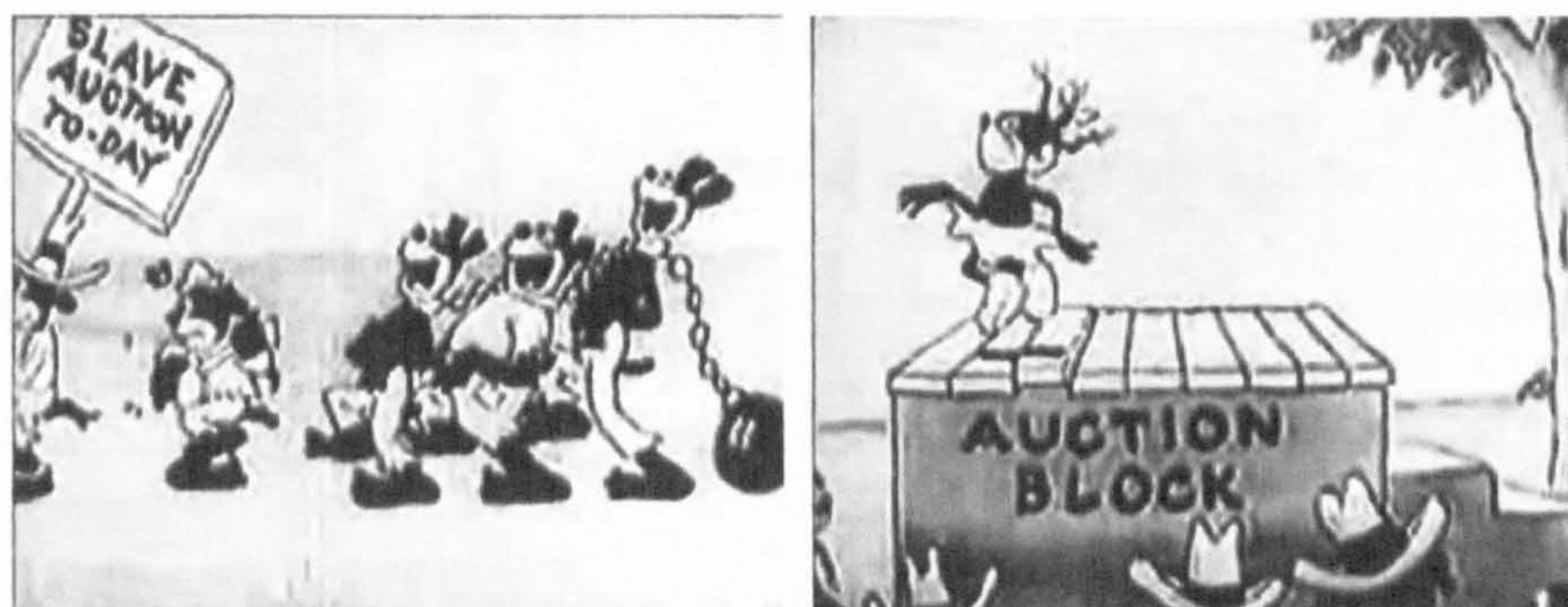


Fig. 54. Stills from *Dixie Days*.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Fig.53. Left, Uncle Tom from *Dixie Days*, 1930, right, Uncle Tom from *Uncle Tom's Bungalow*, 1937, both in Sampson, fig.36 and 37, between 130 and 131.

⁶⁸ *Dixie Days*, dir. John Foster and Mannie Davis, Van Beuren Studios (RKO), 1930.

⁶⁹ Fig.54. Images of the slaves and slave auction from *Dixie Days*.

The fact that slavery was used as the comedic element of the story painted a picture of black people being happy to sing in chains and dance for the white man, reinforcing stereotypes that were already in the public domain. Slavery was trivialised and with the repetition of the stereotype, the black characters were becoming dehumanized. These representations were being disassociated from the horror that slavery was and accepted as comedy. These cartoons contained racial stereotyping that was intentionally directed at African-Americans in the first half of the twentieth century, and were to be seen by audiences in cinemas for many years.⁷⁰

The cartoons set in the plantations of the Southern States of America did not make accurate referrals to slavery, religion or life in general for those forced to work on them. Many of the slaves on the plantations in Louisiana were known to practice Vodou, yet this was not featured. It appears that the animators focussed on burlesquing slavery and in this particular genre Voodoo was omitted.

Animation moves to the small screen

Winsor McCay's prophecy was to come true with the advent of television. Artists from the 1930s through to the 1950s had produced cartoons because of a genuine interest and motivation for making films but as television animation houses evolved in the 1960s onwards, money and profit was the incentive. Cartoons

⁷⁰ Even the more well known studios and their characters were guilty of the unbelievable depictions of slaves and slavery. In *The Steeple Chase* (1933) two black stable boys are seen being dressed as a horse and ridden by the main character. They are needed to win a race due to the real horse being incapable of running. The black stable boys win by running backwards which they had to do because they were being stung fiercely by a swarm of bees. The main character in this cartoon is Mickey Mouse and the cartoon came from the Walt Disney studios.

made specifically for television started with *Crusader Rabbit* in 1949.⁷¹ Production for television really took off in the 1960s when most of the cinematic cartoon studios closed down. It was inevitable that as television evolved then animation would also evolve. Animation needed to be repositioned following the decline of the cinematic shorts. There are many debates around animation for television as an art form and around the quality of the work produced but there is no escaping the popularity of this new generation of animation.

After being the directors and creators of *Tom and Jerry* for twenty years, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera dominated the television market in the late 1960s and 1970s. When they left MGM they formed the studio now known as Hanna-Barbera.⁷² *Tom and Jerry* had been particularly well written and well animated for cinema. They did feature the stereotype of the 'black Mammy' in the form of the housekeeper, and it is argued by some that Hanna-Barbera cartoons for television are of a lesser quality. Whether this is the case or not there is no disputing their popularity. In 1960 the first half hour cartoon show was commissioned and a new genre of prime time animation was born. *The Flintstones* premiered on ABC, *Top Cat* appeared soon after and *The Jetsons* followed in 1964 giving Hanna-Barbera the record of having three prime-time animated series on the air simultaneously.⁷³

⁷¹ *Crusader Rabbit*, dir. Jay Ward, Creston Studios, 1949.

⁷² MGM closed down their cartoon division in 1957, see Michael Mallory, *Hanna-Barbera Cartoons* (London: Virgin, 1999) 18-22.

⁷³ *The Flintstones*, Hanna-Barbera, premiered 30 September 1960 on ABC, USA; *Top Cat*, Hanna-Barbera, premiered 27 September 1961 on ABC, USA and *The Jetsons*, Hanna-Barbera, premiered 23 September 1962 on ABC, USA. The "primetime" relates to the popular slot that the animation series took in programming, for some popular primetime slot is more commercial; when manufacturers were selling television sets they were selling this primetime slot as family time for family entertainment.

The first glimpse of animated Voodoo delivered to audiences via the medium of television was in the Hanna-Barbera studios fourth prime time series, *Jonny Quest*.⁷⁴ This was the first successful animated cartoon to leave behind the comedy and tell straightforward adventure stories. It was realistically drawn (Fig.55) and a genuinely exciting action adventure series, the likes of which had not been seen before and it would go on to define a whole new style of television animation. The main character, Jonny Quest, is an eleven year old boy who satisfies his thirst for knowledge, adventure and excitement by travelling with his father, Benton Quest, a scientist and inventor who also works on behalf of the government. Aiding Dr. Quest is Roger 'Race' Bannon, a former secret agent who serves as the doctor's bodyguard, companion, and tutor to Jonny. Along with these is Hadji, a boy from the streets of India and Bandit, the family dog.⁷⁵



Fig.55. Race, Jonny Quest, Hadji, Dr Quest and Bandit.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Jonny Quest* premiered 18 September 1964, ABC, USA.

⁷⁵ Jonny's mother died some years earlier

⁷⁶ Fig.55. The realistically drawn image of Jonny Quest, in Mallory, 177.

There were many villains and madmen for the Quest team to face throughout the storylines, making *Jonny Quest* a critical hit.⁷⁷ Only twenty-six episodes were made and Voodoo featured in the twelfth, *The Dreadful Doll*.⁷⁸ The location suggests the Caribbean; this suggestion is reinforced with the storyline which includes plantations and the presence of Voodoo, strengthening the link between the Caribbean and Voodoo. The synopsis for this episode is that Dr Quest goes to investigate reports of Voodoo among “island planters”. He is initially called in to check on a little girl who appears to have been influenced by Voodoo through the use of a Voodoo doll. When he meets the little girl she appears to be delirious, speaking with a French accent, adding to the authenticity of Voodoo as Haiti is a francophone nation.⁷⁹ Dr. Quest discovers that people are being drugged by a witchdoctor called Korbay through the use of tiny blow darts. Korbay’s employer, Harden, is using the fear of Voodoo to scare everyone off the island so he can construct a secret submarine base. This storyline takes a dismissive approach to the religion. Harden and Korbay are ultimately arrested. The island that the episode is based on is called “Todago”, a picturesque island in the Caribbean so although fictional there is an association with Haiti. The story doesn’t focus on Voodoo as a religion, it is used as a negative force, a threat and the emphasis in this cartoon is on a witch doctor and not a Voodoo priest. The “Voodoo” that is used by Korbay consists of a blowgun which shoots tiny darts that are dipped into a drug, a drug that induces a paralytic trance that locals believe is a Voodoo curse. The paralytic trance induced is not linked to

⁷⁷ It set a record as it was the only cartoon to have aired on all three networks in the United States. Even though the first season was not particularly successful, four years after its first showing it was brought back for a Saturday morning slot and continued for eleven years.

⁷⁸ *The Dreadful Doll*, dir. Hanna-Barbera, released 4 December 1964.

⁷⁹ Officially Haiti is Francophone, however, only around 5% of the population speak French with the National language being Creole.

zombification or zombies. Zombies are not mentioned in this cartoon even though the trances and curse are reminiscent of earlier films and cartoons featuring them. In reality there is no reference to a Voodoo priest or priestess, good or bad, ever using a blowgun to sedate enemies. A blowgun or blowpipe has more associations with tribal cultures and perhaps a step back to the cannibal representations of early cartoons. It could also be argued that this echoes back to the tendency to confuse the 'East' with black culture, combining as the 'other' as in Said's Orientalism. This representation of Voodoo is yet another towards a constructed meaning for the viewer. The use of blowguns, not a weapon of choice by Voodoo practitioners, gives an additional strand to what Voodoo is understood to be.

Jonny Quest introduced Voodoo to the prime time viewer in 1964 in an inaccurate and misrepresentative way. As will emerge in the rest of this chapter, little was done to rectify this.

Voodoo and a dog named Scooby Doo

Jonny Quest was not to be the only time that Hanna-Barbera featured Voodoo in their cartoons and as the main studio for the production of television animation their work was seen by millions. Two writers, Ken Spears and Joe Ruby, came up with the idea for a new set of characters and in 1969 *Scooby Doo* premiered.⁸⁰

This programme came in an effort to replace the harder edged cartoon characters of the time with a show that would still be exciting and thrilling, but also funny

⁸⁰ *Scooby Doo*, dir. Hanna-Barbera, premiered 13 September 1969 on CBS.

and non-violent. Hanna-Barbera pursued the idea. The horror genre and mystery genre were well established in cinema productions but had not been explored (or exploited) in television animation. What began as a potential risk quickly became a creative franchise spawning numerous sequels and spin-offs and has entered the record books as one of the longest running cartoons produced for television. *Scooby Doo* involved a group of teenagers who travel around with a Great Dane, becoming involved in and eventually solving mysteries that have a supernatural theme. The format for *Scooby Doo* follows the original format for gothic literature with the villain, ghost or supernatural element being proven to be fake.⁸¹ Subsequent 1970s series from the Hanna-Barbera studios such as *Funky Phantom*, *Speed Buggy*, *Goober and the Ghostchasers* and *The Galloping Ghost* would be variations of the same format.⁸²



Fig.56. Scooby Doo, Shaggy, Velma, Daphne and Fred.⁸³

⁸¹ Gothic literature in this case refers to the genre of novels of the late eighteenth century through to the early twentieth century. The first recognised within this genre is Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* of 1764.

⁸² *Funky Phantom*, dir. Hanna-Barbera, premiered 11 September 1971 on ABC; *Speed Buggy*, dir. Hanna-Barbera, premiered 8 September 1973 on CBS; *Goober and the Ghostchasers*, dir. Hanna-Barbera, premiered 8 September 1973 on ABC; *The Galloping Ghost*, dir. Hanna-Barbera, premiered 3 February 1979.

⁸³ Fig.56. The Scooby Doo team, in Mallory, 189.

Scooby Doo is known the world over and has had a surge in popularity with the making of two live action films, *Scooby Doo* and *Scooby Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*. In both of these films *Scooby Doo* and the ghosts were created using CGI (see p275-276). *Scooby Doo* was the ideal basis to include Voodoo, with its spooky mysteries, tales of ghastly goings on, and supernatural basis. Voodoo featured for the first time in the episode called *Which Witch is Which?*, episode thirteen from the first series.⁸⁴

The synopsis at the start of a showing of this episode in the UK reads “While driving through a swamp the gang encounter a zombie and a witch and decide to investigate the strange events driving people away from the small town.”⁸⁵ Even though Voodoo is featured throughout this episode, there is no mention in the description for the UK audience in 2004. In cinema and cartoons of the 1950s and 1960s there was a practice of protection towards the British audience, that the British would be too sensitive to accept the word ‘Voodoo’ in any title. This did change in the 1980s when, especially with cinematic releases, titles were the same on both sides of the Atlantic.⁸⁶

Scooby Doo was spooky and mysterious and it was inevitable that zombies, Voodoo and witchcraft would appear. Unfortunately, in the first *Scooby Doo* episode to feature Voodoo it was linked to witchcraft and zombies, all three appeared together and gave a link between them to the viewer. This created a

⁸⁴ *Which Witch is Which?* Episode 13 of *Scooby Doo Where Are You!* Hanna-Barbera, 1969.

⁸⁵ Shown on Boomerang with this synopsis on 11th August 2004, 6.00pm as part of the *Scooby Summer* series.

⁸⁶ There were a number of cinematic productions released under different titles, for example *Burn, Witch, Burn!* released in America was released as *Night of the Eagle* in Britain, dir. Sidney Havers, AIP, 1962.

complex framework and context for Voodoo. It was being shown in a variety of ways and with different plots and meanings. It is therefore not surprising that key elements have been extracted to construct a meaning of Voodoo. Elements such as the Voodoo doll, drums and zombies which were continuously repeated and so reinforced the stereotype. During the first decade of Scooby Doo, Voodoo featured in three cartoons, *Which Witch is Which?*, *Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo* and *Shiver and Shake, That Demon's a Snake*.⁸⁷ Each treated Voodoo in a very different way. *Which Witch is Which?* opens with a zombie dressed in ragged clothes with hollow eyes and grey pallor. This was now a familiar sight for adult audiences with over thirty years of cinematic images of the living dead.

When the gang arrives they are told that the witch brought the zombie to life with her Voodoo magic, all three were linked within the narrative and set the context of Voodoo for the rest of this and future episodes. An early scene shows the witch performing a spell by a fire enabling the zombie to appear from the flames. She is shaking her rattle and wearing clothing stereotypical of a witch, the tall pointed hat and a long gown. There is no relationship to Voodoo within this ceremony. The witch is seen using Voodoo paraphernalia, at this point a rattle, or *asson*. This is used in Vodou ceremonies although it is unknown whether the writers would have known this fact or whether it was added to enhance the 'ceremony'. The location of this mystery is in a swamp (the actual location is not

⁸⁷ *Which Witch is Which?* Episode 13 of *Scooby Doo Where Are You!* Hanna-Barbera, 1969; *Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo*, episode 16, series 1, *The Scooby Doo Show*. Hanna-Barbera, 1976; *Shiver and Shake that Demons a Snake*, episode 5, series 1, *Scooby and Scrappy Doo*, Hanna-Barbera, 1979.

identified) and the witch's home is a wooden shack that has skull lined railings, suggesting cannibalism.⁸⁸

Voodoo manifests in different ways: initially there is a mention of Voodoo within the dialogue and then the appearance of an effigy of Zeb, one of the missing local people. The effigy is a small Voodoo doll with pins sticking out of it (Fig.57). This is the first visual element of Voodoo and Velma points out that “it is a Voodoo doll made to look like Zeb” thus reinforcing the image in the mind of the viewer and ensuring clarification of the item.⁸⁹

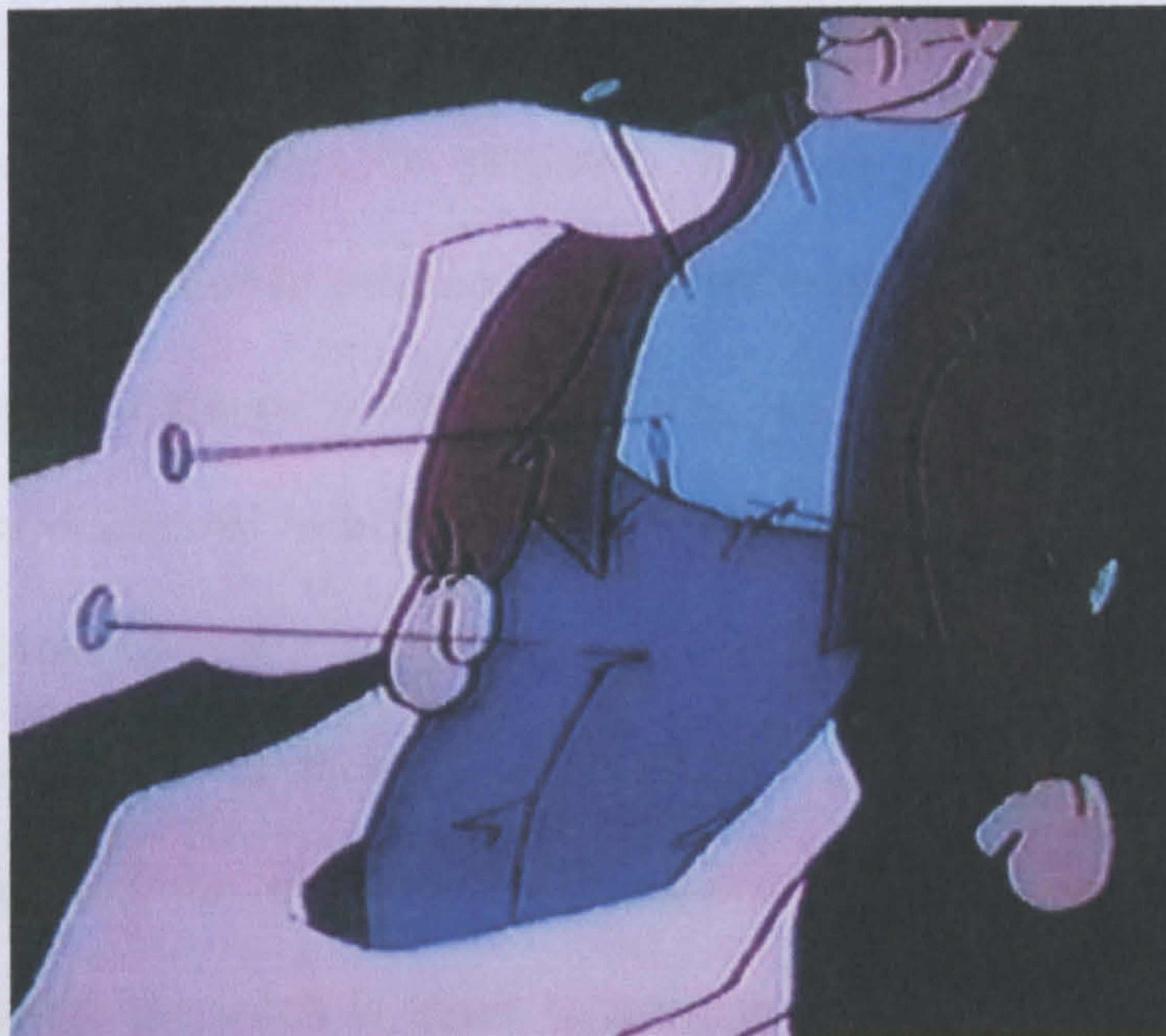


Fig.57. A Voodoo Doll of Zeb as seen in *Which Witch is Which?*⁹⁰

⁸⁸ In other Scooby Doo cartoons the locations are identified, even in the Voodoo episodes. The swamp is reflective of the Deep South and this would be viewed as the American home of Voodoo.

⁸⁹ The dolls with associated pins had become an established part of Voodoo in Britain and America even though the dolls were not initially part of Vodou practice. Dolls are associated with European witchcraft and it is likely that during slavery the dolls were used as a justification of this cultural fear, linking Voodoo to witchcraft..

⁹⁰ Fig.57. A still from *Which Witch is Which?*, episode 13, *Scooby Doo Where Are You*, 1969.

The gang enter the Witch's shack that contains what are described as 'Witch's wares'. There is a table made to look like an altar with a lit candle, a skull and an extinguished candle, eerily covered in cobwebs. These visual references show no reference to Voodoo. The characters find even more Voodoo dolls inside placed on the fireplace, one made to look like each of them. To reinforce the stereotype of using pins in dolls to inflict pain, Scooby puts a pin into the Shaggy doll, following which we hear Shaggy yelp with pain. It transpires that Shaggy had backed into a fork and the Voodoo doll had nothing to do with the pain. The association had been made and would be remembered.

Voodoo has been treated with a dismissive approach in film and television, or as Tanya Krzywinska describes, the 'nonsense' approach where Voodoo is rejected as a childish superstition to enable a superior distancing. Krzywinska suggests there are two other groups to which the otherness of Voodoo can be categorised. The 'counter-discourse' which includes identification with Voodoo and the 'satanic' approach where it is regarded as a form of black magic to create a moral distance.⁹¹ All three of these groups appear in varying degrees throughout Voodoo animation, the 'nonsense' approach is seen when Velma tells the group that even though the witch is trying to scare them off the Voodoo dolls won't work because "that Voodoo stuff is just a bunch of phoney baloney." The 'satanic' approach is incorporated with the link between Voodoo and witchcraft.

In *Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo*, the second Scooby Doo episode to feature Voodoo, a band unwittingly calls up a Voodoo priest by basing one of

⁹¹ Krzywinska, 159.

their songs on an ancient Voodoo chant.⁹² The use of repeatedly saying a name to summon a ghost or entity is used within cinema too in films such as *Candyman* (1993, dir. Bernie Rose).⁹³ Voodoo is represented by the Voodoo dolls again but this time without the pins (Fig.58).



Fig.58. A Voodoo Doll from *Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo*.⁹⁴

Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo is set in and around an old plantation house and so does contextualise Voodoo with the location. This particular episode differs from the first because Voodoo is shown as a practice with a ritual ceremony; there is a Voodoo priest with a gourd, also referred to as a rattle within the cartoon and there is (slightly) more exploration of the religion. Instead of the dolls being used with pins for the infliction of pain, this time they symbolise the disappearance and the likelihood of zombification. These

⁹² This is not an authentic chant, lyrics include the words “Mamba, Wamba, doing that Voodoo, doing that Hoodoo...”

⁹³ *Candyman*, dir. Bernie Rose, Polygram, 1993.

⁹⁴ Fig.58. A still from *Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo* showing the Voodoo doll without the pins, this effigy was used to identify the disappearance of a character.

representations were reinforcing the stereotypes associated with Voodoo but not making associations with Haiti.

The appearance of the dolls signifies the disappearance of the corresponding person. In the background we hear the Voodoo drums each time someone goes missing. The drums are a representation often found in Hollywood films that feature Voodoo. The drum is shown being played by Lila when in her zombified state; her eyes are glazed over as she beats out the rhythm. Interestingly, Lila knows she is a zombie and warns other band members of their potential fate, something that 'real' zombies would be completely unaware and unable to do. Figure 59 shows Lila playing a drum on her own as a zombie, in Vodou ceremonies there are predominantly three main drummers who strike up a beat to evoke the spirits, they tend to be male so again the scenario is imagined and not based on fact.



Fig.59. Mamba Wamba and Lila in *Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo*.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Fig.59. A still from *Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo* showing the character of Mamba Wamba and the zombified Lila playing the Voodoo doll.

These are animated cartoons and it could be argued that they need not be authentic or accurate. They are however representing a culture, a religion, and were viewed by millions, providing a basic level of knowledge to those consuming the visual and verbal narrative. There is an echo back to the early cinematic cartoons representing cannibals in this episode when we see Shaggy and Scooby in a clearing inside straw-roofed mud huts, an unusual form of habitation for the [Louisiana?] swamps. They are tricking the Voodoo Priest by dressing up and telling him that they are witch-doctors. Scooby Doo is dressed in a costume comprising a grass headdress and neck garment embellished with a human bone and Shaggy is wearing a piece of cloth tied at the shoulder corresponding to a common stereotype of the cartoon cannibal and 'savage' costume (Fig.60).



Fig.60. Shaggy and Scooby dressed as stereotypical cannibals.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Fig.60. A still from *Mamba Wamba and the Voodoo Hoodoo* showing two of the characters dressed in the same way as former cannibal representations.

This particular representation reflects the cinematic racist treatment of cannibals, with the main characters managing to trick the leader of the tribe, or in this case the Voodoo priest. The costume of the priest is an imaginary construct consisting of a fur head-dress and ankle garments with gold coloured bangles and arm decoration with a skull on a stick. There is no obvious inspiration for this creation. When the villain, in this case Mamba Wamba the Voodoo priest, is unmasked Voodoo is dismissed with the line “Roger! Then this whole Voodoo business was a fake!” this then ridicules the religion and questions its ‘reality’. The Hays Code had provided guidance for the production of film and cartoons, including the portrayal of religion. This was abandoned in 1968 due to many of those using it ignoring its recommendations; its use had been devalued.⁹⁷

In the third episode to feature Voodoo, *Shiver and Shake: This Demon’s a Snake*, the gang are on a cruise from Miami to Haiti. Hanna-Barbera took the unusual step of locating part of this episode in Haiti; the other locations in this episode are also of the Voodoo Diaspora, in New Orleans and Miami. This episode was filmed in 1979, a relatively quiet time politically between the United States and Haiti which may explain the favourable portrayal of island. Shaggy and Scooby plan to have a day on “the beautiful beaches of Haiti”. As the yacht arrives the sun is shining and palm trees are swaying above blue waters, a Caribbean cliché, and as Sheller describes, “a more generic, global, and empty signifier of ‘the tropical island’ could hardly be imagined.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ It was replaced with the Motion Picture Association of America’s code (MPAA) which came into effect that same year.

⁹⁸ Sheller, 36.

Previous episodes of Scooby Doo had rarely featured black characters and with the exception of the Harlem Globetrotters, many episodes had yet to feature key black figures.⁹⁹ Surprisingly there is a Haitian bazaar in *Shiver and Shake This Demon's a Snake* with numerous stalls belonging to black traders, women walking around with baskets on their heads, many barefoot, men wearing straw hats and women wearing headscarves. This is a more positive portrayal, if a little inaccurate. Haiti is shown without any poverty and the streets relatively clean. The subject of Voodoo is not treated as favourably. One of the passengers on the boat, Miss Audrey, is writing a book about Voodoo and she announces that she is off to interview a witch doctor. This gave an opportunity to mention a Mambo or a Houngan, a Voodoo Priest or Priestess but instead the term 'Witch doctor' is used, reflecting earlier representations.¹⁰⁰ It could be argued that the writers chose to use 'safe' and familiar terminology for Voodoo, associations that were acceptable and already understood and so not challenging in anyway. It is more likely that this was the writers' preferred choice of terminology and it was not challenged as the same reference had been used previously in *Jonny Quest*. Once in Haiti the gang walk around the bazaar and when they meet up again Shaggy has found a key and Daphne has bought a snake sculpture. Shaggy is told that "the key is an excellent good luck charm against Voodoo". This is sending out the message that protection is needed against Voodoo, without it harm may be

⁹⁹ The Harlem Globetrotters appear in *The New Scooby Doo Movies*, dir. Hanna-Barbera, premiered 9 September 1972, CBS.

¹⁰⁰ The definition of witch-doctor is (among tribal peoples) a magician credited with the power of healing, divination, and protection against the magic of others, however, because of the cinematic portrayals a witch-doctor is seen as any religious practitioner within other cultures.

inflicted. There are protective items sold and made for protection against evil in Voodoo, items such as *gris-gris* or *mojo* bags are very popular in New Orleans, they do not feature a key as a symbol for protection so once again there is a fictional construct.¹⁰¹ The way that Voodoo is introduced to the viewer is as an integral part of the location and within dialogue, there is no shock element or further explanation. It is only when the snake demon repeatedly appears. Miss Audrey makes the link by saying that “writing a book is one thing but seeing a real Voodoo demon...” So Voodoo is quite literally demonised in this cartoon, described as a religion that requires protection and that has a demonic force.

The veracity of the representations in Scooby Doo is questionable. This may seem to be a harsh statement when considering that these are cartoons that are primarily for entertainment. It is the fact that they are misrepresenting a culture, race and religion that is at issue. It should be questioned that if the same treatment were given to Judaism or Christianity in the 1960s would the response have been so positive? They are based on the animators’ own experience of cinematic Voodoo and are not accurate. Ruby and Spears were the partnership behind the writing of the Voodoo episodes and when asked where their information came from they openly admitted in their email response that “no, we didn’t do any Voodoo research for that episode [*Which Witch is Witch?*], just made up a bunch of stuff out of our heads and swiped some stuff from a few old movies, like the Bob Hope one with Voodoo and zombies called *Ghost*

¹⁰¹ This may be another case of European witchcraft confused with Voodoo. In the Witchcraft Museum, Boscastle UK, there are several exhibits that suggest keys are used as a good luck charm.

Breakers".¹⁰² A Bob Hope comedy Hollywood movie was used as the basis for the portrayal of Voodoo and so it is not surprising that it was inaccurate. The link with this film is most obvious in the portrayal of the zombie, Noble Johnson's acting and character was paid homage to by the creators of *Which Witch is Which?* with a strikingly similar zombie (Fig.61).



Fig.61. Noble Johnson as the zombie from *The Ghost Breakers* (left) and the zombie from *Which Witch is Which?* (right).¹⁰³

Scooby Doo was not as popular during the 1980s but in the late 1990s a new generation of audiences discovered the mysteries and all of the series were shown again with a renewed enthusiasm. This rise in popularity led to feature length movies, computer games and for the first time in twenty years, a new series called *What's New Scooby Doo?*¹⁰⁴ In the late 1990s Hanna-Barbera started to produce feature length animated Scooby Doo films and in 1998 *Scooby*

¹⁰² Joe Ruby and Ken Spears, email to the author, 20 August 2003. *The Ghost Breakers*, dir. George Marshall, Paramount, 1940.

¹⁰³ Fig.61. shows stills from *The Ghost Breakers* and *Which Witch is Which?*, these images indicate the influence that the film had on the cartoon.

¹⁰⁴ *What's New Scooby Doo?* Hanna-Barbera, premiered on 14 September 2002, Kids WB.

Doo on Zombie Island was released.¹⁰⁵ The cover of the 2003 DVD release does not mention Voodoo even though all of the other elements within the film are included; the pirates, the zombies, the cat creatures, the ghosts and the location. This does mean that zombies are not placed in the context of Voodoo and that the content of Voodoo is almost superfluous to the film, though relevant to the location.

The location for Voodoo in this film is in the swamps and bayous of Louisiana. Despite the title of the film the depiction of Voodoo is quite limited. Despite this being released in 1998 the representations continue to promote the stereotypes seen throughout cartoons since the first appearance of Voodoo in animation in 1938. The film sees the reuniting of the gang following the disbanding of Mystery Inc. and they set off on an adventure.¹⁰⁶ They arrive in New Orleans to scenes showing the French Quarter and a market. They are looking for haunted locations and are offered the opportunity to visit an old haunted house in the bayous, so they go. The location of the plantation house is representative of the Louisiana swamps. The gang travels through wet, misty swamp land with alligators and Spanish moss draped trees. On arrival at the house they meet the proprietor, Simone, who confirms that they are on a former plantation that houses restless spirits. This was one of the first cartoons to show a plantation house since the flurry of animations from the 1930s based on plantations and slavery. Ghosts appear early in the film when writing is scratched onto walls warning the gang to 'get out' and to 'beware,' and as this happens the location becomes very

¹⁰⁵ *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island*, dir. Hiroshi Aoyama, Kazumi Fukushima and Jim Stenstrum, Hanna-Barbera, 1998.

cold. These supernatural encounters are not unusual for Scooby Doo apart from the fact that they are usually linked to a costume-clad villain and not an accurate portrayal of a haunting. There is evidence of a ghost on one of the video tapes that Freddy has been filming; the ghost appears to be Morgan Moonscar, a pirate.¹⁰⁷

Freddy takes on the dismissive approach in this film. He constantly tries to rationalise the appearance of ghosts as trickery, something that proves increasingly difficult as events unfold. The ghosts are not linked to Voodoo and Voodoo is not mentioned in the early part of this film. Zombies first appear in the bayou when Shaggy inadvertently uncovers a skeletal hand, a green mist swirls around and a skeleton takes shape, as the mist continues to swirl, decomposing flesh forms on the bones covered by ragged clothes and the figure of a pirate wearing a hat and carrying a cutlass appears. The figure has hollow red eyes and, raising his arms and groaning, staggers towards Shaggy.¹⁰⁸ Another ghost appears, a Confederate soldier, and confirmation is given that this could be the 'true' as there were barracks on the island in the Civil War. The appearances of the ghosts are explained, rationalised and accepted throughout. There is always a reason why they should be there which is in complete contrast to the previous Scooby Doo episodes. These same justifications are not applied to the zombies, or later in the film to Voodoo, even though an explanation is given.

¹⁰⁶ The reason given for them going their separate ways was the fact that monsters and ghosts were drying up and proving to be fake, people dressed up in costume, echoing the construct of the gothic novel.

¹⁰⁷ When ghosts and spirits have allegedly manifested themselves there is a marked drop in temperature of the exact locale, for more on ghosts see Karen Ramsland, *Ghost* (New York: St. Martins Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁸ Shaggy and Scooby tell the others that they were being "chased by a dead guy" and then go on to say "he was like a zombie."

When zombies appear again the green mist begins to swirl and as it hits the water in the swamp many rise from the water and the ground, some are soldiers and some are pirates. This particular scene is very reminiscent of the zombie films from the 1950s and 1960s, especially *Night of the Living Dead* and *Zombies of Mora Tau* with large numbers of the living dead rising from the ground and water and staggering towards the central characters.¹⁰⁹ The rest of the gang encounter the living dead when Daphne tackles a zombie.¹¹⁰

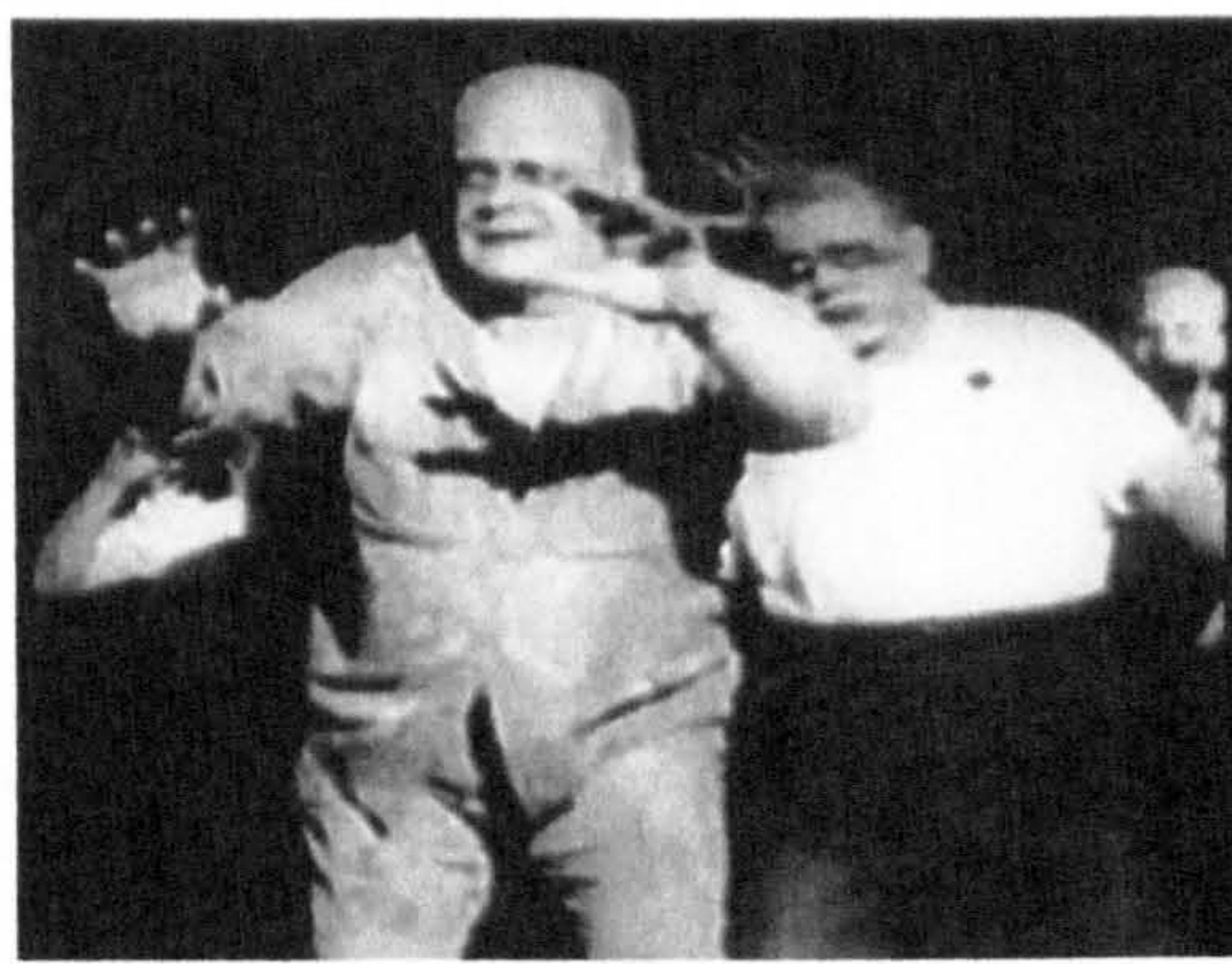


Fig.62. Left; Zombie Pirates in *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* and right; the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead*.¹¹¹

The appearance of zombies is not placed within the context of Voodoo which appears very late in the film. Wax dolls are found in a cave and they have been made to resemble the characters, this is the first representation of Voodoo and

¹⁰⁹ *Night of the Living Dead*, dir. George A. Romero, Image Ten, 1968; *Zombies of Mora Tau*, dir. Edward L. Cahn, Columbia, 1957.

¹¹⁰ Believing that it is just some 'guy in a mask' both Daphne and Freddy pull at the head to prove the villain is the gardener, fisherman or ferryman. As Freddy pulls again the head comes off in his hands and they realise it's real. The zombie places his head back on his own shoulders animating himself once more.

¹¹¹ Fig.62. Stills from *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* (left) and *Night of the Living Dead* (right) showing the zombies with outstretched arms.

there are no pins in the dolls; they are just made to look like Velma, Daphne and Freddy (Fig.63).



Fig.63. Wax dolls in *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island*.¹¹²

There is an inconsistent portrayal of the zombies throughout these cartoons. This film has yet another 'type' of zombie different from those previously included. There is no consistency in the portrayal of the Voodoo dolls in Scooby Doo, they are seen with pins, without pins and made of wax. These are the different methods of making poppets within witchcraft and have little resemblance to Voodoo dolls. In New Orleans and Louisiana Voodoo dolls are sold to tourists and believers and are widely available as comical souvenirs or as authentically made dolls that are blessed during a ritual or ceremony.¹¹³ It is unlikely that a doll in this area would be made of wax as wax dolls have their history in European witchcraft.¹¹⁴ While, as has been stated previously, Voodoo dolls are

¹¹² Fig.63. A still from *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* in a scene showing the wax effigies.

¹¹³ The base material for almost all authentic New Orleans and Louisiana Voodoo dolls is Spanish moss as this is widely available, the dolls sold as tourist souvenirs are not generally made of Spanish moss but are wooden, plastic or foam filled with painted faces.

¹¹⁴ There is speculation that during the fifteenth century European witches would sacrifice humans, allegedly babies who had not been baptised, and collect the body fat as part of the dark arts. This body fat would solidify after being infused with herbs and be made into a 'wax' effigy

not an authentic part of Haitian Vodou, in New Orleans, however, Voodoo dolls are popular. They feature on altars and as a symbol, for example, for luck, good fortune, health and happiness. The authentic New Orleans Voodoo Dolls are carefully crafted and made for individual requests but the tourist souvenirs which are sold for dealing with a troublesome boss or to attract love are crudely made and not always in New Orleans as the “Made in China” label will testify (Fig.64).



Fig.64. Souvenir Voodoo Dolls bought in New Orleans (left) and authentic Voodoo dolls (right).¹¹⁵

The word Voodoo has not been spoken up to the point that the dolls are found, the writers rely on the associations with Voodoo dolls to carry this part of the story line without explanation. As Shaggy lifts the dolls the three corresponding characters levitate, as he moves the leg on the Daphne figure we see Daphne uncontrollably move her leg, as he moves the arm on one so does the arm move

of the person to be cursed. These wax dolls may have hair or fingernails of the person to be harmed inserted into them and may be pierced with pins and they would be used ceremonially to inflict harm.

¹¹⁵ Fig.64. These images show the difference between souvenir Voodoo dolls (made in China) and the authentic hand made dolls (made in New Orleans) which show the use of Spanish moss, the authentic dolls on the right are used for altars. These dolls are the author's own.

on the character, this extended scene emphasises the effect that dolls have. To escape the zombies the gang are led down a secret passageway until they reach a door at the end, they then enter a cave. Inside the cave there are fires burning in alcoves, it is very dark and the shapes of an altar and a stone basin or font can just be made out. Daphne asks “where are we?” and Velma replies “it looks like a place for Voodoo rituals”. Yet again this pictorial representation of Voodoo is inaccurate, but, as Homi Bhabha suggests, stereotypes are still effective even when inaccurate and distorted.¹¹⁶ Eugene Franklin Wong also explores the issues of stereotype in *On Visual Media Racism*. As Bhabha discusses pictorial representations, Wong also elaborates on this in his earlier work.¹¹⁷ Wong suggests that the visual stereotypes were initiated and strengthened during the silent era of cinema when the ‘essence’ of the ‘non-white’ groups had to be simplified visually and as such a stereotype formed.

Voodoo is rarely practised inside dark caves with an altar, apart from in the Hollywood movies of the previous decades. There is no symbolism to identify the contents of the cave with Voodoo or any other religious practice.¹¹⁸ Velma’s comment that it looks like a place for Voodoo rituals implies that this is exactly the kind of place that Voodoo ceremonies would be held without any evidence or explanation. In the cave the character of Simone appears holding two wax figures, as she moves them the gang are thrown against a wall. Velma gasps

¹¹⁶ Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question...The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,” *Screen*, 24.6 (1983) 18-36.

¹¹⁷ Eugene Franklin Wong, *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in American Motion Pictures* (New York: Arno Press, 1978).

¹¹⁸ As in chapter three, locations varied within film and this continued in the animations.

out “Voodoo Dolls!” thus qualifying her assessment of the cave earlier being a place for Voodoo rituals.

The stereotype of the Voodoo doll being used to inflict pain on an enemy is reinforced in this film when the wax figures are being used to control the actions of the gang. When we see the dolls get knocked near a fire the gang starts to get hot, as they move so does the corresponding gang member, and while there are no pins the actions provide the same associations. As Velma manages to escape she uses a piece of Lena’s blouse to turn the power of the dolls and make them control Lena and Simone. There is no process, just an item from the victim and a wax doll is enough to cause harm and control in this instance. This devalues the authenticity and accuracy of the power that Voodoo is perceived to have. The practitioners of Voodoo in *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* turn out to be cat creatures. The two women were cursed two centuries previously when calling on their cat god to help them avenge the pirates who had invaded their island. It is not clear how and when Voodoo is incorporated into their being, it is just part of the evil force of the cat creatures, again without explanation. The creation of zombies becomes apparent when Simone explains that to remain immortal both she and Lena need to drain the life force out of their victims. They do this by placing their hands on the victim. As the life force is drained the zombie is created. It is not a deliberate act of creation, the zombie is merely a by-product of the process and not used for any purpose. This does place the zombie within the context of Voodoo at this stage of the film but not as part of it. Unlike so many previous Hollywood portrayals, this method of creation disassociates zombies

from the cinematic stereotypes where zombies are created for the specific purpose of serving a master.¹¹⁹

It transpires that the ghosts and zombies were just trying to alert the gang to the danger that awaited them on Moonscar Island. When the cat creatures miss their chance to retain their immortality they decompose and turn to dust and as the spirits of the zombies and the ghosts are avenged they too disappear. The final ghost to go is that of the Confederate soldier who salutes and thanks them. At the end of the film there is no unmasking and even though it breaks with the tradition of Scooby Doo it retains the same humour and 'spookiness'.

There was a refreshing approach to zombies in this film. Cinematic history has seen the horror genre launch the living dead in various guises over the previous six decades. Sometimes zombies are placed within the context of Voodoo and many times not, they are usually shown as flesh-eating creatures or as slaves to an evil master.¹²⁰ In *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* the zombies are the 'good guys', they are trying to help the gang escape and end the reign of terror by Lena and Simone. They have not been created for a purpose; they are just there, like ghosts, seeking to avenge those responsible for their metamorphosis from human to zombie.

There was a link to pirates in this movie. The association with Voodoo, zombies and the Caribbean is also seen in the animated computer games from Lucas Arts,

¹¹⁹ In Haitian Vodou zombies are created as a form of punishment or as a malicious act and it has never been suggested that a 'life force' is achieved by their creation.

¹²⁰ See Chapter Three for more on the evolution of the zombie in film.

The Monkey Island series, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In the first film of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* there is no association with Voodoo. This changes with the second and third films when Voodoo and Obeah are integrated into the narrative. Zombies, or more accurately for these films, the living dead also appear in the first of the trilogy.¹²¹

Scooby Doo has incorporated Voodoo across the decades and although the series has regained its popularity the representations have not become more 'accurate' or 'realistic'.¹²² The Scooby Doo episodes containing Voodoo were released just after the replacement code to the Hays Code was brought into effect but this cannot be regarded as a considered move. It was not due to the freedom of expression now awarded to the motion picture and television production industries that Voodoo appeared as a stereotyped superstition. Animators had already chosen to disregard the Hays Code for decades and promote racism and misrepresentation within their cartoons. Satellite and cable television has meant that there is a new outlet for animation and there are specific stations that have branded themselves specifically for cartoons, channels such as Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon and Boomerang. These channels regularly feature the prime time animation series from the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. In the summer of 2004 Boomerang ran *Scooby Summer*, Scooby Doo cartoons were shown back to back every week day during the school holidays in the UK, indicating their

¹²¹ *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*, dir. Gore Verbinski, Walt Disney Pictures, 2003; *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, dir. Gore Verbinski, Walt Disney Pictures, 2006; *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, dir. Gore Verbinski, Walt Disney Pictures, 2007. The Voodoo lady, Tia Dalma, is also referred to as an Obi-woman. See Chapter Three, 191.

popularity.¹²³ The writers of *Scooby Doo*, Ruby and Spears, left Hanna-Barbera and set up their own cartoon studio, Ruby-Spears Productions. This meant that there were now two studios with an interest in representing Voodoo in their cartoons, although it appears that it was Ruby and Spears that had the interest in this area.

Beyond Scooby Doo: Voodoo infiltrates mainstream cartooning

From 1964 there were monster families appearing on primetime television in the United States such as *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family*.¹²⁴ These cartoons were more funny than scary and they started the trend of live action television programmes being developed into cartoons. These new live action monster shows led to animated monsters, nearly every new trend in the field of television was capitalised by the animation studios. There are a number of cartoons that have the word Voodoo in the title and it appears that this does not necessarily mean that there is a large Voodoo content; it is used as a hook, a word to attract potential audiences.¹²⁵ The term Voodoo has become a generalised vocabulary item referring to black magic, Satanism or witchcraft as well as referring to the religion. In the Ruby-Spears production of *Rambo* there is an episode titled 'Night of the Voodoo Moon.' This was not an isolated case of the word Voodoo

¹²² *Scooby Doo* was not the only production from the Hanna-Barbera studios to feature Voodoo, though it was arguably the most popular.

¹²³ Boomerang has the back catalogue rights for *Scooby Doo* in the UK.

¹²⁴ *The Munsters* inspired *The Mini-Munsters*, Universal television productions, premiered 27 October 1973; *The Addams Family* inspired *The Addams Family* cartoon, Hanna-Barbera, premiered 8 September 1973.

¹²⁵ In 1965 Hal Seeger Productions sold *The Milton the Monster Show* to ABC for the 1965-1966 season. Milton was a Frankenstein-type monster, not scary, just good-hearted. One of Milton's friends was Abercrombie the Zombie and although information is limited about Milton, the series did feature an episode called *Who Do Voodoo?* released in 1965, just one example of a Voodoo title.

being used in the title of a cartoon, as mentioned previously, there are numerous examples. 'Deja Voodoo' is an episode from *Police Academy: The Series*; 'The Voodoo Vampire' an episode from *Superfriends* and 'A Voodoo Spell' is an episode from *James Hound*.¹²⁶

In 1973 *The Addams Family* featured an episode that placed Voodoo and Haiti in context called 'The Voodoo Story'.¹²⁷ Apart from the lyrics in *Voodoo in Harlem* this is the first cartoon found to associate a Voodoo character with Haiti. In this episode Madame Hoodoo is trying to scare the Addams Family, unfortunately all her curses and spells fail to frighten them and she decides she must return to Haiti for 'advanced Voodoo lessons'. This does mean that Voodoo is again trivialised and the complex systems and beliefs are reduced to being resolved with a few advanced lessons. Voodoo is seen to be used to strike fear into a family consisting of a vampire, a Frankenstein type monster, and a ghoul, ranking itself very high in the 'scare' levels above these other familiar frightening characters. There is no expansion on the association with Haiti or any description of the country, just that it is the location to gain Voodoo knowledge.

Voodoo was firmly placed in films, television, literature and cartoons by the 1980s. Voodoo would have been seen by millions in films such as *Live and Let Die*, James Bond being very popular at this time.¹²⁸ This is most people's first and earliest recollection of Voodoo and so it is not surprising that it continued to

¹²⁶ *Police Academy the Series*, Ruby-Spears Productions, premiered 10 September 1988; *Superfriends*, Hanna-Barbera, premiered 9 September 1978; *James Hound*, Terrytoon Studios, circa 1967.

¹²⁷ *The Addams Family*, "The Voodoo Story," Hanna-Barbera, premiered 1 December 1973.

¹²⁸ *Live and Let Die*, Dir. Guy Hamilton. 1973, United Artists.

appear in cartoons. Voodoo in *Live and Let Die* is not a major part of the film, it is merely a backdrop and yet the limited representation had a massive impact. The Voodoo character in *Live and Let Die*, Baron Samedi, is a very well known image from cinematic history, laughing maniacally on the back of a train at the end of the film and repeatedly returning from the dead.¹²⁹ He is particularly remembered for coming back from the dead although this only actually happens twice. The face of *Baron Samedi*, painted strikingly in black and white is reflected in an episode of *Mona the Vampire* from 1993 called 'The Dastardly Doctor Voodoo'.¹³⁰ There is a striking similarity between the characters of Baron Samedi and Doctor Voodoo (Fig.65). Doctor Voodoo is announced by Mona as "the most powerful Voodoo priest" and he is shown dancing next to his altar. Mona also identifies several "Voodoo things", items such as a skull, snakes, a wax doll and a heart, all of which identifies him as a Voodoo priest.



Fig.65. Baron Samedi and Doctor Voodoo.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Geoffrey Holder played the character of Baron Samedi, he was also responsible for the choreography of the 'Voodoo' dancers in *Live and Let Die*.

¹³⁰ *Mona the Vampire*, "The Dastardly Doctor Voodoo," dir. Louise Piche, New Films International, 1999.

¹³¹ Fig.65. Stills from *Live and Let Die* showing Geoffrey Holder as Baron Samedi (left) and from *Mona the Vampire* showing Doctor Voodoo. The cartoon adaptation of the Baron features the same black eye make-up, black on the end of the nose and white faces.

The character that Mona refers to as 'Doctor Voodoo' is shown in some scenes with his face either painted black and white or wearing a black and white mask. He is seen in a room featuring elements of Voodoo, including a picture of two snakes that become alive and slither down to his arm and an image resembling a vèvè. Again, Voodoo is seen as an evil force, the Doctor is out to steal a woman's heart (quite literally as it is seen in a box) and is only thwarted by a chant that Mona performs. The iconic image of Baron Samedi materialises once again in this cartoon, and replicates the appearance of the Baron in *Live and Let Die* almost exactly.¹³²

During the 1970s animation capitalised on the success of live action sitcoms by transforming the characters into cartoons. In the same way feature films such as *Rambo* and *Police Academy* and music bands such as The Beatles and The Osmonds were given the same treatment. It was possible for animation studios to produce these cartoons at a fraction of the cost because they could be made without the Hollywood stars or the musicians; they were also very profitable because of the existing fan base.¹³³ Comic strip heroes were also made into animated series and during the 1980s any contemporary popular character may have found its way into a cartoon.

¹³² For more on the 'demonic' Baron Samedi, one of the most powerful of the Vodou spirits see Donald Cosentino, "Divine Horsepower," *African Arts*, 21.3 (May, 1988) 39-43.

¹³³ There was no objection from the featured famous as they acted as a powerful marketing tool being seen by millions.

Eddie Murphy is best known for being a Hollywood actor; however, in 1999 he launched *The PJs*.¹³⁴ Set in a big city housing project, Eddie Murphy plays the part of Thurgood Stubbs, superintendent of the Hilton-Jacobs Projects. The series is a sitcom based around the residents who live in the Projects.¹³⁵ *The PJs* is made in 'foamation', all of the characters are made in foam and a stop motion method is implemented for the filming. With Eddie Murphy's comedy skills this animation series is refreshingly different.¹³⁶

One of the residents is Haiti Lady, also known as Mambo Garcelle. In the animation information she is referred to as 'the resident Voodoo expert' with a dislike of Thurgood. This is a satirical look at life in a housing project and despite the trials and tribulations there is a strong sense of community with Voodoo being included as an integral part of daily life. Racism was not limited to early cartoons or satire to *The PJs*. Ralph Bakshi, the director of a television cartoon series called *James Hound*, was responsible for a feature length animation and live action film called *Coonskin* from 1975. This was an earlier satirical look at the lives of African-Americans, classed by some as overtly racist and by others as pure satire. When it was released in the UK the title was changed to *Streetfighter*, as *Coonskin* was felt to have racist overtones.¹³⁷ In *The PJs* Voodoo is linked with Haiti and 'Haiti Lady' is also referred to as 'Mambo'. The character is beautiful (for a foamation character) and intelligent, and creates a positive image for a Voodoo practitioner (Fig.66).

¹³⁴ *The PJs* stands for The Projects.

¹³⁵ *The PJs*, dir. John Payson, Eddie Murphy Productions, premiered 10 January 1999, Fox.

¹³⁶ It was the first primetime series to use this technique.

¹³⁷ *Coonskin*, dir. Ralph Bakshi, Bakshi Productions, 1975.

There is unfortunately still the association with Voodoo dolls, Haiti Lady has a Voodoo doll of Thurgood that she happily sticks pins in due to her dislike of him but it is packaged as satire and not shown in every episode.¹³⁸



Fig.66. Haiti Lady, Mambo Garcelle from *The PJs*.¹³⁹

The description of Haiti Lady is given as “Haiti Lady, also known as Mambo Garcelle, is the resident Voodoo goddess no project would be complete without. Whether it’s a hex, a curse, or just some good old-fashioned evil, she’s your Gal Friday the 13th.” *The PJs* was an animation aimed at an adult audience and was first shown on FOX network in the United States on a Tuesday evening. It did remarkably well in its first season and revived the popularity of other adult cartoon series such as *King of the Hill*.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ The satirical nature of Voodoo representations is once again open to debate. Is it entertainment only or should it be viewed with unacceptability.

¹³⁹ Fig.66. Shows an image of Mambo Garcelle from *The PJs*, she is carrying a stick with what appears to be a human skull on the end (although this is not mentioned), otherwise this is one of the more positive images of a Voodoo practitioner seen.

¹⁴⁰ *King of the Hill*, dir. Wes Archer, Twentieth Century Fox Television, premiered 12 Jan 1997.

This favour was not to last and early in the twenty-first century the major networks began to axe new cutting edge animation in favour of reruns of other older network shows. *The PJs* was shown on Channel 4 in the UK, at 2.30a.m. and then had a regular slot on Bravo channel on Sky at 8.00pm.¹⁴¹ The reason given in the US for this cut by the networks was that *The PJs* was considered to be unpopular with white audiences due to its setting in the mainly black populated housing projects and its edgy social commentary. It is alarming to find that even in the twenty-first century there is such a consideration for white audiences rather than to black socio-commentary. If cultural heritage and social comment is not 'acceptable' for white audiences, this would appear to be a mask for subliminal racial segregation.

Zombie Pirates and Voodoo Priestesses

As time has passed and new technology has evolved, cultural producers have found new media in which to incorporate Voodoo. Into the twenty-first century there has been a huge shift in technology, the digital has taken over from analogue. This new technology is not restricted to developments in animation and cartoons for television, cinema or computers, it is much more widespread. There has been an aesthetic digital shift. Once restricted to the small screen digital imagery can now be found on virtually anything which has the capacity for the moving image. As animation has become more sophisticated in the digital age; it is far more widespread in its use.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ *The PJs* was shown in Britain during 2000 and 2001.

¹⁴² For more on the history of computer gaming see Rusel Demaria and Johnny L. Wilson, *High Score! The illustrated history of electronic games* (Emeryville, California: McGraw Hill Osborne, 2004) 1-27.

Zombies appeared before Voodoo and were used for an educational programme for personal computers (PC) to learn how to type, called *The Typing of the Dead*.¹⁴³ This is sold as an educational game to teach keyboard typing, the faster the keys on the keyboard are struck, the more the living dead can be destroyed and the less likely the player is to be killed. This is an entertaining way to learn a skill however the zombies are not contextualised, they are there to be destroyed and there is no reference to Voodoo.

Voodoo was represented in the *Monkey Island* series of computer games by Lucas Arts.¹⁴⁴ Voodoo Lady is the character to help the aspiring Pirate, Guybrush Threepwood. Voodoo Lady is portrayed as a friendly character and always pleased to offer help although her name is never revealed. This character has appeared in each of the *Monkey Island* series and moves around to ensure she is close by to offer assistance when needed. This follows the trend in more positive representations of Voodoo characters. Lucas Arts set all of these games in the Caribbean in beautiful fictitious locations but following on from decades of stereotypes they perpetuate the association between pirates, Voodoo, zombies and cannibals. The characters in *Monkey Island* games do leave some of the stereotypes behind. The Voodoo Lady is friendly and the cannibals are vegetarian, even though they are seen wearing sarong-style skirts and carrying cutlasses they have heads of fruit and do not eat humans (Fig. 67).

¹⁴³ *The Typing of the Dead*, Sega Dreamcast video game, 2001.

¹⁴⁴ There have been four in the *Monkey Island* series, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*, *The Curse of Monkey Island* and *Escape from Monkey Island*, LucasArts Entertainment.

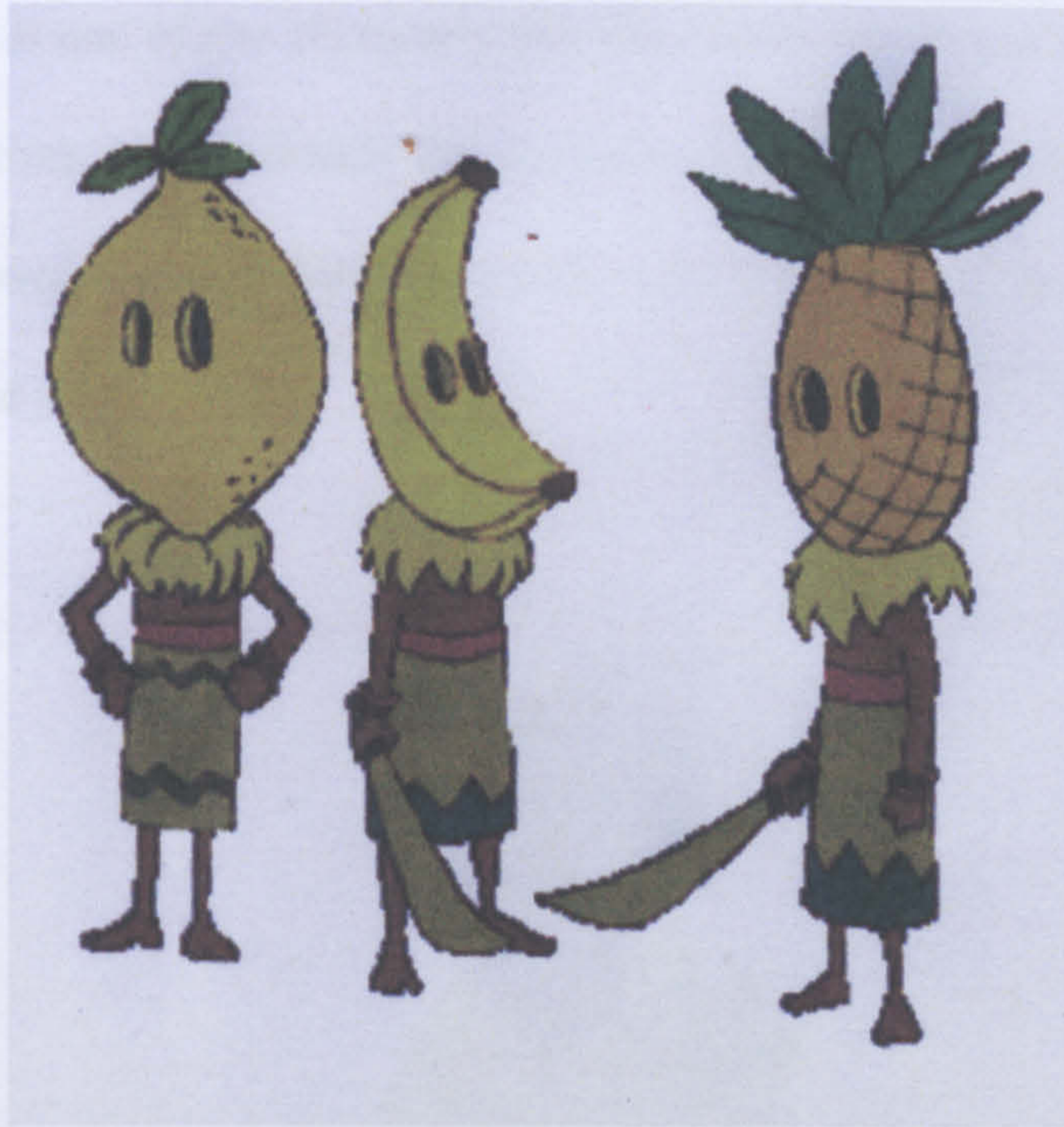


Fig.67. Vegetarian cannibals in *The Curse of Monkey Island*.¹⁴⁵

Voodoo Lady is described within the user journal of *The Curse of Monkey Island* as follows “She is the mysterious wielder of uncanny otherworldly power. She also makes a killer gumbo. Whenever Guybrush is really stumped, she usually comes through with the help he needs to figure things out – sort of like a personal Tech Support Line that sells shrunken heads.” *Voodoo Lady* is a positive black character. She is instrumental in the success of Guybrush in each instalment of *Monkey Island* and although she moves around the islands in the Caribbean, and there is no mention of Haiti, she appears to be linked to Louisiana Voodoo. The description given of her makes reference to her “killer gumbo”, a traditional dish from Louisiana, and New Orleans, the familiar home of Voodoo in America.

¹⁴⁵ Fig.53. This is a still from *The Curse of Monkey Island*, the third in the series, image from <<http://www.worldofmi.com/thegames/monkey3/index.php>>

Voodoo Lady is one of the characters that have been repeatedly brought back in each of the series. Unfortunately the description of her also mentions shrunken heads which have nothing whatsoever to do with Voodoo and are not an obvious inclusion in the games.¹⁴⁶



Fig.68. Voodoo Lady from *The Curse of Monkey Island*.¹⁴⁷

The villain in the *Monkey Island* series is LeChuck, the zombie pirate. This character, LeChuck, is the personification of the evil side of animated Voodoo; he is either a green swirling figure or a flaming figure with a crew of skeletal pirates. All of the powers bestowed upon LeChuck are evil. Examples of this being a Voodoo cannonball that he wishes to use for destruction and a Voodoo

¹⁴⁶ This reference to shrunken heads has no link with Voodoo, for more on this practice and the associated peoples see David J. Vandyke-Lee, "The Conservation of a Preserved Human Head," *Studies in Conservation*, 19.4 (Nov., 1974) 222-226.

¹⁴⁷ Fig.68. The Voodoo Lady in *The Curse of Monkey Island*, image from <http://www.worldofmi.com/thegames/monkey3/index.php>

cursed ring that turns another of the characters into a gold statue. This green swirling mist was also used in *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* to indicate the imminent appearance of zombies. In direct contrast to this character is the Voodoo Lady who has helped Guybrush with a good Voodoo potion and a Voodoo doll.¹⁴⁸ The main character, Guybrush, is directed to seek help from the Voodoo Lady because she deals with the curses. It is interesting that within this animated series of games Voodoo is used for both good and evil, that zombies are the evil side of Voodoo whereas the soft-spoken Voodoo Lady who introduces herself as a Priestess provides support and help to defeat the evil - Voodoo fights Voodoo. This is reflective of Vodou, Bokors are represented by LeChuck and Mambos are personified in Voodoo Lady. There are comparisons to the storyline in *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* where both Voodoo and zombies appear as good and evil. Interestingly a complete reversal between the two, *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* shows Voodoo as evil and zombies as good and in the *Monkey Island* series they are found to be reversed.

In 2003 Beep Industries developed a game for Microsoft game studios called *Voodoo Vince*, with the subtitle 'feel his pain'. This animated Xbox game has arguably the highest Voodoo content of any animation ever developed.

The description of the game reads

No Pain, No Gain!

Vince was just a voodoo doll in a French Quarter shop, but when his

¹⁴⁸ Voodoo potion was used in the first of the Monkey Island Series, *The Secret of Monkey Island*. A Voodoo doll was used to help Guybrush in the second of the series, *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*.

maker was kidnapped, he became a vengeful doll on a mission! Using voodoo powers, Vince must kick his own butt to beat his enemies! If he stands under a falling safe, bad guys get flattened! Stick a pitch fork in him, and his enemies are done!¹⁴⁹

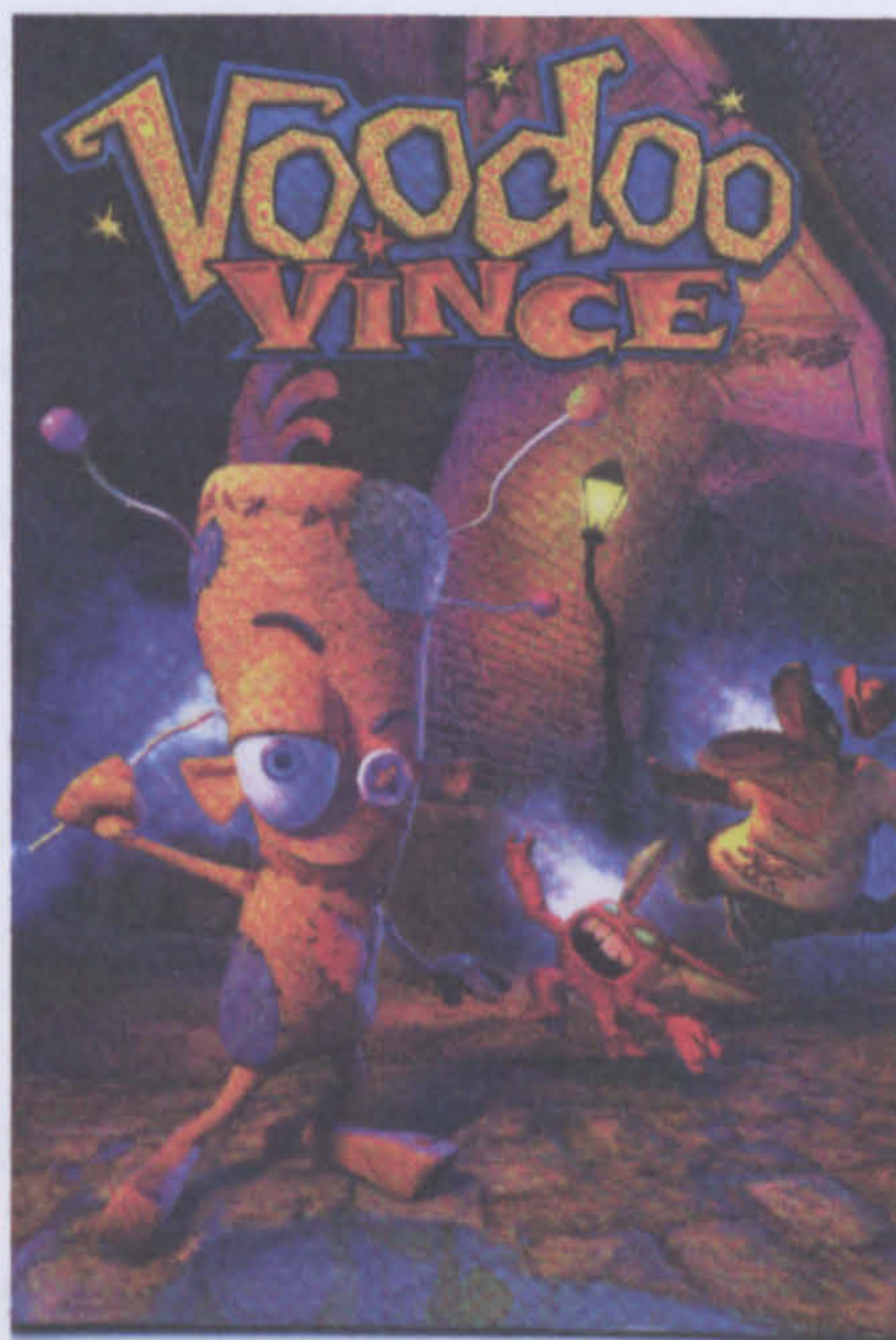


Fig.69. Voodoo Vince.¹⁵⁰

Even though this game delivers the stereotype of the Voodoo doll inflicting pain and harm on enemies, it also delivers a wide variety of Voodoo symbolism and positive Voodoo characters. The game is set in and around New Orleans and does reflect the area with bayous, the French Quarter and a cemetery. The villains in this game include, not surprisingly, zombies, but also an alligator, an armadillo (with explosive properties) and frogs. The good character is the

¹⁴⁹ This is the description as it is found on the game box, *Voodoo Vince*, Beep Industries, publisher Microsoft Game Industries, released 23 September 2003.

¹⁵⁰ Fig.69. Image of Voodoo Vince as shown on the instruction booklet published with the game by Microsoft Game Industries.

Voodoo doll, Vince, even though he does have the ability to inflict harm on enemies he is represented as fighting for good.

There is a Voodoo priestess and not unlike Voodoo Lady in the *Monkey Island* games she is there to help and advise when required. The Voodoo priestess is described as a 'Voodoo High Priestess' born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, called Madame Charmaine. This contextualises Voodoo with Haiti and as this game is set in New Orleans and hinterland it makes the link between America and the Caribbean. Her reputation is very positive as she is known for protecting those around her; she owns a Voodoo shop in the French Quarter and has great knowledge. She makes protective charms and powerful dolls, both well known elements to be found in New Orleans in the twenty-first century. Madame Charmaine also has supplies of zombie dust delivered from Haiti; in the context of the game zombie dust is used for energy. This is very similar to the *Monkey Island's* Voodoo Lady, a positive black female character looking after the main character. This is one of the rare occasions that Voodoo is the focus; even the symbolism has been reflected within the stages of the game (Fig.70).

These positive portrayals of black women are unusual. bell hooks concludes her work *Ain't I A Woman* with the lines "...[we as black women are] no longer victimized, no longer unrecognized, no longer afraid..."¹⁵¹ Although this is not generally apparent throughout cultural production these animated woman provide a glimmer of change.

¹⁵¹ hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 196.



Fig.70. Voodoo symbolism from within *Voodoo Vince* (left) and a Haitian Vèvè (right).¹⁵²

As gaming moves into the twenty-first century it is refreshing to find that Voodoo is included and not forgotten and even though the sensationalist aspects of Voodoo are still being exploited, elements are more accurate. Racism appears to have diminished and some of the key human characters are black with a positive image. The stereotypes have been reduced with an attempt to explore the religion to provide authenticity to this new media rather than a complete exploitation so this may be a new direction for Voodoo.

¹⁵² Fig.70. Shows a comparison between the symbolism of Voodoo in *Voodoo Vince* (left) and a Haitian vèvè (right); note the similarity between the swirls and the stars. *Voodoo Vince* image from the booklet accompanying the game, Microsoft Games Industries, 2003, Haitian vèvè from Nancy Turnier Férère, *Vèvè: Ritual Art of Haitian Vodou* (Boca Raton, Florida: Reme Art Publishing, 2005) 43. Vèvè is the name of the symbols drawn in flour, soot or other powder on the ground prior to a Vodou ceremony taking place, used to invoke the loa.

Summary

Cartoons have had a mass appeal since the cinematic shorts aimed at adult audiences through to the modern age of computer gaming. Digital television has provided numerous new channels where cartoons can be found, Nickelodeon brands itself on 'putting kids first', and Cartoon Network has mass appeal. These channels show cartoons for twenty-four hours a day, every day. The popularity of cartoons has not diminished and Cartoon Network holds a large library of over eight-thousand titles from the cinematic shorts to the television series from Hanna-Barbera such as *The Flintstones* and *Scooby Doo* which are frequently re-screened in the twenty-first century.

Research has been undertaken in the fields of cartoons and animation and racism in cartoons but there appears to be no specific research around animated Voodoo. The representations of Voodoo have been sporadic and have featured in very specific genres of cartoon, particularly those that could be linked to monsters, ghosts or the supernatural. Voodoo can be linked to the horror genre and to racism in cartoons; it has been misrepresented and placed within the context of witchcraft, cannibalism and zombies. The writers and animators of the cartoons containing Voodoo took their inspiration and information from Hollywood films, even though there were many literary resources available. This is particularly evident in *Scooby Doo* and *Mona the Vampire* where the factual and informative content of Voodoo is inaccurate and inappropriate and the writers have opted for a Hollywood Voodoo as opposed to Haitian Vodou. In these particular examples there is undeniable evidence that images were taken directly from the films and used as a source of information.

In over a century of animation the representations of Voodoo have been inaccurate and placed out of context, the religion has been treated with dismissal, intolerance, ridicule and racism. Even though procedures were in place with the Hays Code, Voodoo appears to be exempt from being considered as a religion or a culture to be treated with respect. Cartoons are instantly recognised as a source of humour, as entertainment for both children and adults, however, when that humour is targeted at a specific culture and, in the early years of cartoons, as an outlet for racism with the black characters being portrayed as illiterate, criminal or stupid it is difficult to see them as funny, but they are a useful insight into the society of their own time.

The representations of Voodoo are deep rooted from the early literature published to cinema releases in the early part of the twentieth century and it has been referred to as a cult or a sect, terminology which provided an identity that could be used against it. Representations within cartoons are heavily reliant upon film imagery and comparisons can be found between them, voodoo dolls, zombies, locations, racism, cannibals and even characters. Voodoo Dolls remain a consistent image representative of Voodoo, they vary in their appearance but symbolise the same meaning, an object used for the infliction of pain on an enemy. Hanna-Barbera features dolls in all but one of their *Scooby Doo* cartoons containing Voodoo, the dolls are not the same, there are dolls with pins, dolls without and wax dolls and even though dolls have their roots in European witchcraft they continue to be associated with Voodoo (and indeed Vodou) and the image continues to reinforce the stereotype.

Zombies in cartoons are very reminiscent of the Hollywood living dead, the way they are made to move, the sounds they make and their motive. Scooby Doo did change this stereotype somewhat by having the zombies as the 'good guys' in *Scooby Doo on Zombie Island* although this is not discovered until the end of the film. The zombie has featured in many different ways both in cinema and cartoons and is generally used to suit a purpose and not very often integrated as an authentic Haitian practice.

Race has played a major part in cartoons and cinematic productions since the turn of the century. Segregation stopped black audiences from sitting with white audiences to watch the racist cinematic shorts at the advent of animation. There was no sensitivity to the black cinema goers of the 1930s and 1940s when the most overtly racist cartoons were shown. In more recent times there was the termination of *The PJs* because of the sensitivity of the white audiences. It appears that there is still subliminal racism within the industry; it just has a different approach.

Cartoons continue to disseminate information, or the sign, of Vodou. Bhabha discusses dissemination and suggests that "interdisciplinarity [in this instance Voodoo cartoons] is the acknowledgement of the emergent sign of cultural difference...that repetition of the sign is, in each specific social practice, both different and differential."¹⁵³ This refers back to the reading of signs. If the audience has limited knowledge then the sign will be read differently and cultural difference exacerbated. When considering this cultural difference, and the issue

¹⁵³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 163.

of 'race', Gilroy challenges that since Immanuel Kant associated the "figure of the 'Negro' with stupidity and connecting differences in color to differences in mental capacity...race has been a cipher for the debasement of humanism and democracy."¹⁵⁴ Cartoons are often referred to as 'harmless entertainment' and yet they are the conduit to show racism and the imagined cultural difference. Whatever the media a culture and a religion is being debased and perpetually misrepresented.

Voodoo has and will continue to provide a wealth of source material for the creative mind. It is one of the most enduring religions despite the hostility and prejudice it has faced because it adapts and evolves. Hopefully the changing times will recognise Haitian Vodou and Hollywood Voodoo will become part of the history of animation, not its future.

¹⁵⁴ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or convivial culture?* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004) 9. See also Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. Trans. John T. Goldthwaite (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), section 4.

Chapter Five

VOODOO ON STAGE AND (Small) SCREEN

Introduction

This chapter addresses the appearance of Voodoo on the stage and the small screen of television. Spanning the cultural productions of the religion from the 1930s to the present day there have been a variety of representations across these media including, drama, documentary and comedy. The appearance of Voodoo on the stage, such as in the production *Zombie*, was influenced by the literary works of the early part of the twentieth century.¹ These theatrical works then in turn inspired cinematic productions of the 1930s and 1940s. The appearance on television has been diverse and examples will be explored from many genres.

The representation of Voodoo in theatre is limited and material available scarce but those that have remained provide an insight into this unique genre of theatrical production.² Many of the works for stage focussed on the more serious (although not necessarily accurate) aspects of Voodoo and Haitian history but these were not generally presented to mass audiences. Much more recently though, in Britain, Vodou was the inspiration for a stage production called *Vodou Nation* and this will be examined in detail.³ This production combined contemporary Haitian music performed by RAM,⁴ the historic dance work of Katherine Dunham and contemporary writers of Haitian culture and history such as Ian Thompson and Leah Gordon. This creative foundation culminated in a

¹ *Zombie*, writer Kenneth Webb, prod. George Sherwood, opened at Biltmore Theatre, New York, 10 February 1932.

² It could be argued that many of the early theatrical productions had limited runs and played to small audiences. This may be why very little material exists today.

³ *Vodou Nation*, written by Brett Bailey, directed by Brett Bailey and Geraldine Connor, opened in February 2004 in London and Liverpool; it was presented by UK Arts Productions.

⁴ RAM is the resident band at The Oloffson Hotel in Haiti performing Haitian and Vodou inspired music.

celebration of Haiti's history and culture which was appreciated by full theatres across the country.

It is important to consider theatre audiences as well as the productions themselves. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz describe the limited role that the audience has when spectating a performance. They suggest that although the audience role is clearly defined and may interact with the performance it is not part of it. They further suggest that what there is to see is clearly exhibited with a distinction between the performers and the audience.⁵ There are complex connections between the theatre goer and the experience they encounter. There are a number of researchers who have provided empirical data such as Baumol & Bowen and Throsby & Withers.⁶ In both of these research studies it was found that theatre audience demographics were strikingly similar.⁷ They tended to be "middle aged, high income, high education, professional and managerial".⁸ Susan Bennett addresses the question of audience when she discusses a range of research both in traditional and non-traditional theatre.⁹ Bennett's theories relate to the traditional [narrative] theatrical productions containing Voodoo such as *The Emperor Jones* and the less traditional [cultural music and dance] such as *Vodou Nation*. This chapter will consider viewing a culture out of context, as Roland Barthes questions "can we Westerners really consume a fragment of

⁵ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992) 16-17.

⁶ William Baumol and William Bowen, *The Performing Arts: The Economical Dilemma* (1966; Michigan: MIT Press, 1968); C.D. Throsby and G.A. Withers, *The Economics of the Performing Arts* (1979; US: Ashgate Publishing, 1993).

⁷ These studies were concerned primarily with audiences of the 1930s.

⁸ Throsby and Withers, 96.

⁹ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1997) 86-125.

civilization totally isolated from its context?”¹⁰ In many of the theatrical productions to contain Voodoo, both Vodou and Haiti are out of context.

Voodoo has featured on television in a diverse breadth of programmes from comedy to documentary and still appears frequently in contemporary dramas including shows such as *The Dresden Files* and *Supernatural*.¹¹ This section will start by examining the documentaries that have been produced to explore Vodou as a religion and those that continued to exploit the more sensationalist aspects such as in *Jacques Cousteau: Haiti- Waters of Sorrow*.¹² The Voodoo in documentary production will be followed by the dramatical representations that include some of the most popular television shows in Britain and America in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

As with theatrical audiences it is important to consider television audiences. Jonathan Bignell suggests that television viewers fall into one of three categories, primary, secondary and tertiary involvement.¹³ This means that the attention afforded to a programme may be limited, in which case the information gained and the representation consumed would also be limited. This should be considered throughout this chapter as to whether the misrepresentations of Voodoo are in fact being consumed by the audience.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes in Bennett, 101.

¹¹ *The Dresden Files*, writer Jim Butcher, Lions Gate Entertainment, first released 21 January 2007; *Supernatural*, writers Brad Buckner and Eugenie Ross-Leming, Warner Bros. Television, first released 13 September 2005.

¹² *Jacques Cousteau: Haiti- Waters of Sorrow*, filmed on and around Haiti, released 22 November 1977. Although this documentary is sympathetic to the plight of the Haitian people the five minute section on Voodoo shows such a brief part of a ceremony it perpetuates the stereotypes of orgiastic ritual.

¹³ Jonathan Bignell, *An Introduction to Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004) 279. Primary viewing meaning complete attention, secondary watching while doing another activity and tertiary while doing something else and momentarily looking at the television.

Television is available to a global audience, as Bob Mullan states “the reach of television is unparalleled in the history of media: both in terms of numbers and geography”.¹⁴ Despite the varying levels of engagement with the programme there is still unparalleled access to the representations of Voodoo. The viewing of programmes globally, in different cultures, have different meanings. Voodoo shown to US audiences may be viewed differently to the same programme being shown to European audiences. As Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz found, the meanings of television programmes are understood in relation to the environment and expectation of the viewer.¹⁵

Part I: Theatre

Voodoo appears on the stage

In 1920, a few years after the start of the American Occupation in Haiti, a play opened in Provincetown, Massachusetts called *The Emperor Jones* by a then unknown writer, Eugene O’Neill.¹⁶ This play was based on an island in the West Indies (without the white marines) that operated as an Empire. Some feel it was based on the life of Henri Christophe and inspired by a comment by Guillame Sam,¹⁷ others that it is a reflection on the playwright’s life.¹⁸ O’Neill had many influences for this play, he travelled in Honduras and so knew the jungles, and he

¹⁴ Bob Mullan, *Consuming Television: Television and its Audiences* (London: Blackwell, 1997) 5.

¹⁵ Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-cultural Readings of ‘Dallas’* (New York: OUP, 1990).

¹⁶ *The Emperor Jones*, written by Eugene O’Neill, opened in 1920 in Provincetown.

¹⁷ Henri Christophe was a former leader of Haiti and Guillame Sam was president just prior to the American Occupation. It was his death that was the catalyst for the invasion, see 45-47.

¹⁸ See for example Glenda Frank, *Review of The Emperor Jones* <www.eoneill.com/reviews>

had heard of the Congo religious Feasts, the impact of the drum-beat and had read of the political situation in Haiti.¹⁹ Although Voodoo did not feature by name, there was a ‘Congo Witch-Doctor’ and many of the scenes were set in the jungle. There were other aspects that would be associated with Haiti following previous literary descriptions such as the slaves, planters, a ‘Native Chief’ and a ‘Crocodile God’.²⁰ There is no known ‘Crocodile God’ in Voodoo but previous representations had featured a variety of deities associated with the Hollywood version of the Haitian religion. *The Emperor Jones* was an overnight success, after playing to sell out audiences at the Provincetown Players the play moved to Broadway for a further 204 shows. It has been remade as a film and was performed at the National Theatre in 2007.²¹ Travis Bogard suggests that the play reads as a “theological melodrama rather than as a play about the racial heritage of the American Negro.”²² The play’s style seemed highly experimental and can still be looked upon as the first major American drama in the expressionist mode. Eugene O’Neill went on to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936, and died in 1953 aged 65.²³

In 1932 a play called *Zombie* appeared on a Broadway stage marking the first production inspired by William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island*. The plot features

¹⁹ For more see Ruby Cohn, “Black Power on Stage: Emperor Jones and King Christophe”, *Yale French Studies*, 46, From Stage to Street (1971) 41-47.

²⁰ For the characters and scenes see <<http://www.eoneill.com/texts/jones/contents.htm>>

²¹ *The Emperor Jones*, dir. Dudley Murphy, United Artists, 1933. This production saw an early appearance of the black actor Paul Robeson, one of a few that managed to cross over into mainstream cinema. The play was performed at the Olivier Theatre in London from 22nd August 2007 to 31st October 2007, dir. Thea Sharrock.

²² Travis Bogard, *Contour in Time* (1972; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²³ For more on his life see Barrett H. Clark, *Eugene O’Neill: The Man and his Plays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933).

American plantation owners who live on the edge of the Haitian jungle. When one of them dies an overseer brings him back to life as a zombie to secure the family fortune. The narrative follows the pursuit of the zombie masters and concludes with a twist in the storyline. The location and the zombies are realistic but Voodoo is included as the 'Great God Voodoo'. The reviews for the play were not favourable in New York and the initial run in this city was short. In Chicago, however, reviews were good with positive comments made about the backdrop of folklore and *Zombie* was a huge success. Some of the critics felt that the subject would rival *Dracula* for terror drama.²⁴ *Zombie* was seen by a limited audience and so cannot be credited with the dissemination of the zombie phenomenon. For those who did see it they would have a better understanding of zombification. The play was an inspiration for the film *White Zombie* and it evidenced the potential of Voodoo, Haiti and zombies for future cultural productions.²⁵

Haiti was in the imagination of the public and US forces were still occupying the island when *Zombie* ran. When the US forces withdrew from Haiti in 1934 there was an increased interest in the country. This inspired some interesting cultural productions such as Josephine Baker's staged musical portrayal of a caged Haitian songbird in the 1934 film *Zouzou*. There were two major plays dealing with black political intrigue in Haiti, John Houseman's and Orson Welles's *Black Macbeth* in 1936 and William DuBois's *Haiti* in 1938.²⁶ This production of

²⁴ Charles Collins, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 March 1932.

²⁵ *Zombie* was the inspiration for the film *White Zombie* but it did not provide the narrative.

²⁶ *Zouzou*, dir. Marc Allégret, Les Films H. Roussillon, 1934, the plays were produced following the US occupation of Haiti and gave the audiences in Harlem hope, by seeing the Haitian revolutionary leaders on the stage they were inspired to gain their own independence from white oppression.

Macbeth was released during the depression and as Wendy Smith wrote, the African-American community in Harlem had been waiting in anticipation for the 'Federal Theater Project's Negro Unit's' production.²⁷ By opening night at the Lafayette Theatre on 14 April 1936, "ten-thousand people stood jamming the avenue for ten blocks and halting northbound traffic for more than an hour."²⁸

The location for this production was the jungle with drums and witches, an opening that pleased the first audience immensely. This was an all-black cast and the play was set in Haiti. This production of *Macbeth* was successful on a number of counts: very few opportunities were available to black actors other than dancing for the enjoyment of the white man so it was a great boost to morale when there was a chance to tackle one of the classics. It also brought fame to the young director Orson Welles. Voodoo did feature in the play in a minor role but with the setting of Haiti and the drums and witches it soon became affectionately known as *Voodoo Macbeth* (Fig. 71). The drummers were from Sierra Leone and were led by a genuine witch-doctor. Gary Wills suggests that Voodoo substitutes the Elizabethan belief in witches.²⁹ As has been discussed in previous chapters, throughout cultural production there has been a substitution of Voodoo with witchcraft and vice versa.

²⁷ The Federal Theater Project was launched in 1935. During the Great Depression President Roosevelt's Administration created the Works Progress as part of the New Deal economic recovery program. Negro units, also called The Negro Theatre Project (NTP), were set up in 23 cities throughout the United States. This short-lived (1935-1939) project provided much-needed employment and apprenticeships to hundreds of black actors, directors, theatre technicians, and playwrights. For more information see <www.blackpast.org>

²⁸ Wendy Smith, "The Play that Electrified Harlem," *Civilisation Magazine* (Jan-Feb., 1996).

²⁹ Gary Wills, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth* (Oxford: OUP, 1996).



Fig. 71. A scene from *Voodoo Macbeth*.³⁰

Plays from the Caribbean were also performed in London and although not cultural products of Britain or America they have a significant importance in the evolution of Voodoo and Haiti on the stage. Derek Walcott has been a prolific writer since the mid-twentieth century and his play, *Henri Christophe*, was brought to the London stage in 1953.³¹ This is part of *The Haitian Trilogy* which comprises the plays *Henri Christophe* (1949), *Drums and Colours* (1958) and *The Haitian Earth* (1984). It tells of the turbulent history of Haiti through the revolutionaries, Henri Christophe, Jean Jacques Dessalines and Toussaint L'Ouverture. Voodoo does feature within the narrative but as an integral part to the story, as it is in the lives of Haitians. For example in *The Haitian Earth*

³⁰ Fig. 71. The all black cast performing *Macbeth*, directed by Orson Welles.

³¹ This play was originally performed at St. Joseph's Convent in Castries, St. Lucia, in 1949, directed by the writer, Derek Walcott and was later produced at Hans Crescent, London, 1952, directed by Errol Hill. Derek Walcott, *The Haitian Trilogy: Plays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002).

(scene sixteen) the character of Boukman holds up a Voodoo fetish as he addresses his guerrillas and calls upon the spirits before they charge into battle.³² Audiences in the Caribbean would have been more familiar with the concept of a fetish for luck, or for calling on the spirits for assistance, than the British audiences of the 1950s and yet Walcott's plays transcend all cultures and have been enjoyed by generations for decades.

In the latter part of the twentieth century Voodoo steadily re-appeared in theatrical productions. In 1995 a small regional theatre group called 'Stan's Café' produced a play called *Voodoo City*, which was described "[that] Voodoo City was inspired by two black cider bottles found lying in a road aligned in such a way as to suggest they were not litter but a hex."³³ This is a contemporary piece of theatre that still exploits the stereotypes of Voodoo without much exploration of the culture. The scenes feature possession and magic but are used as a metaphor for the desperation of living in a city rather than constantly referring to the religion. This was a cutting edge piece of theatre that bears little resemblance to the Haitian culture but instead uses Voodoo as an inspiration for creative synthesis.

This treatment of Voodoo was adopted by a company formed in the late twentieth century called *Voodoo Vaudeville*. Voodoo Vaudeville embraces the contemporary performance culture, in the same way as Stan's Café. They specialise in modern vaudeville. Their publicity material features symbols of

³² Walcott, 347-8.

³³ For more information on this production see the Stan's Café website at <<http://www.stanscafe.co.uk/voodoocity/index.html>>

Voodoo such as elements of the vèvè, the top hat of Baron Samedi and a snake. Although their performances may not feature the religion they promote their performances using the 'otherness' and 'exoticism' often associated with Voodoo (Fig.72).



Fig.72. Promotional image for *Voodoo Vaudeville*.³⁴

A different approach was taken in the 2005 production of *The President of an Empty Room*, a narrative that revolves around Voodoo, Heroin and Tobacco in Cuba.³⁵ This play is set in a cigar factory in Cuba so Santeria would be the appropriate religion and yet Voodoo is featured. This is possibly because it would have been more widely understood in the mind of the potential audience. There is an association with the drug heroin in this play which alienates the viewer from Voodoo; both of these aspects are seen to be the causes of weariness and fatigue within human existence. The religious content is minimal but the

³⁴ Fig.57. Promotional image for *Voodoo Vaudeville*, on their website <<http://www.voodoo-vaudeville.com>>

³⁵ *The President of an Empty Room*, written by Steven Knight, dir. Howard Davies, opened at the Cottesloe Theatre, London, June 2005.

word 'Voodoo' features in publicity material which demonstrates the pull of the term even today in the twenty-first century.

Hollywood enticed audiences into cinemas and away from theatres and Voodoo and Haiti was seen less frequently on the stage. Live performance restricted the ability to portray the sensational aspects in the same way that cinema could and so although it was being carved as a stereotype on the big screen it was receiving a different treatment for stage. These early theatrical productions were inspirational for the influence they had on cinematic productions, to the audiences and young black actors of Harlem. Voodoo has been sporadic in theatres throughout the twentieth century and as demonstrated the inclusion of Voodoo was minimal. This was to change with one major exception when in 2004 *Vodou Nation* was toured across Britain to critical acclaim.

Vodou Nation

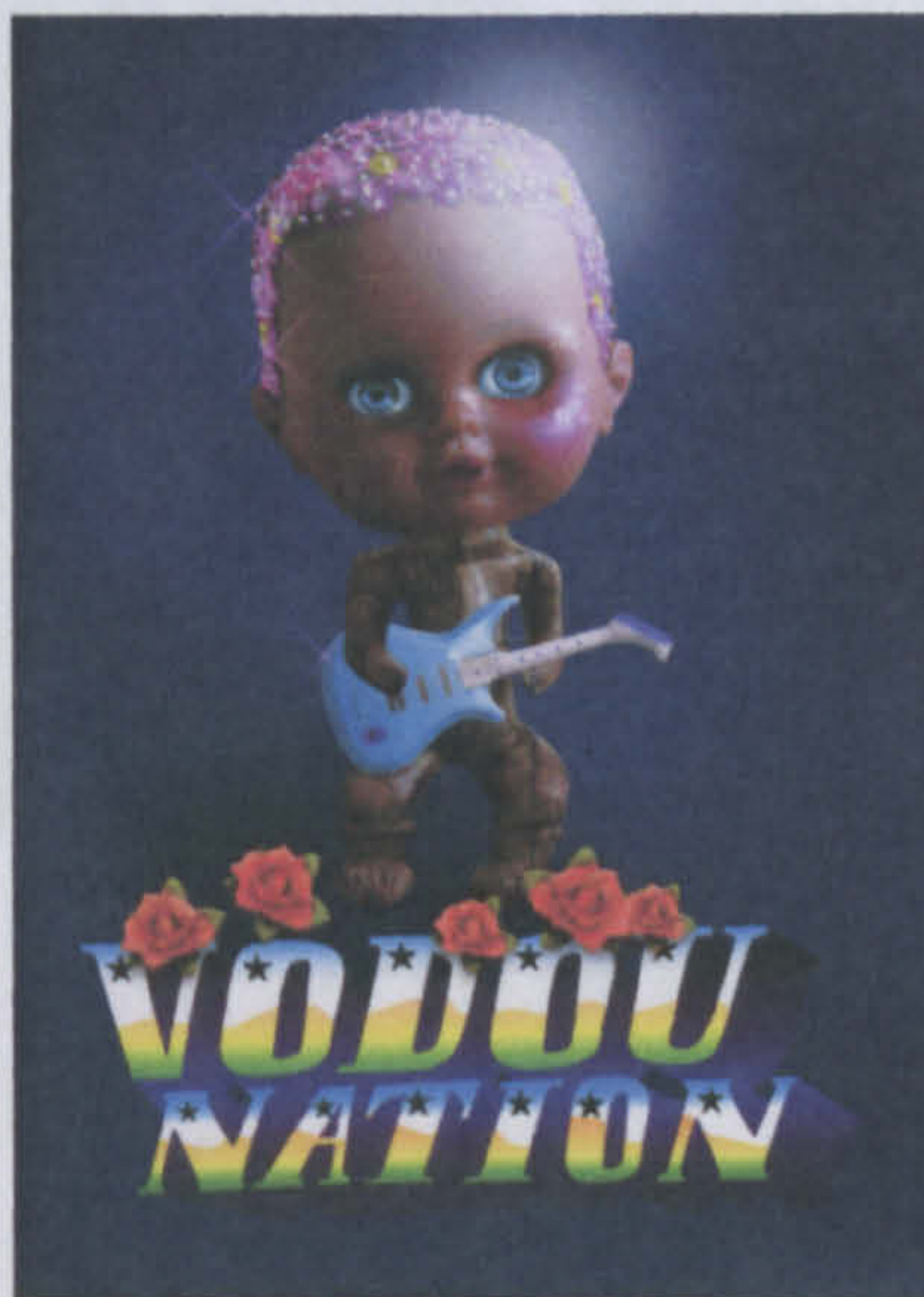


Fig.73. The cover of the programme for *Vodou Nation*.³⁶

³⁶ Fig.73. The front cover does not have a credit for the art work but it is likely to be, or inspired by, the work of Pierrot Barra and Marie Cassaise.

Vodou Nation is a powerful piece of theatre celebrating Vodou and Haiti and is a collaboration between some of the leading contemporary writers of Haitian history and culture. When purchasing a programme there is a level of expectation that it may contain a breakdown of the acts and a few photographs but for *Vodou Nation* there is much more. The programme gives an introduction to Haiti and Vodoo, with photographs, as well as many images from the performance which increases the anticipation for the show and raises awareness of the country and culture. The poverty and political turmoil has not been avoided, this production material offers a glimpse into all aspects of Haitian history (Fig.74).



Fig.74. Poverty in Haiti.³⁷

³⁷ Fig.74. These photographs appear in the publicity material for *Vodou Nation* as it is important to understand the poverty and living conditions of a nation that has such a vibrant and unique cultural heritage.

The idea for this performance originated from the music of RAM, a band that plays Vodou inspired rock music, and a band that is gaining an international reputation.³⁸ The producer aimed to make a show that would present Vodou to counter the stereotype and to mark the bicentenary of the country in 2004. The political climate was to change in Haiti in the same year with the then president Jean-Bertrand Aristide fleeing the country. The show took on a slightly different dimension.

The narrative of this performance begins with the spirit of Haiti personified as a murdered poet, awoken by a priestess, and the audience is taken back to the arrival of European settlers. This aspect is unique. Apart from non-fictional literature there is rarely a reference to the invasion of the island by the Europeans, other than the colonial perspective of 'ownership.' The synopsis outlines this period in Haitian history and the massacre of the entire native population.³⁹ The first act follows a journey from the arrival of the Europeans through slavery and concludes with the expulsion of the Europeans. The second act begins with the free nation and then tells of dictators and Haitians fleeing to Miami before concluding with optimism, hindsight and how Haiti's life must go on.

This is a work about Vodou, each song is based around the loa including Erzuli, Damballah, Papa Simbi and Baron Samedi. Within the songs further loa are included and each scene has been carefully considered. The team who made

³⁸ The founder of the band, Richard Morse, originates from New York and moved to Haiti in 1987, he is the owner of the Hotel Oloffson, the hotel that is featured in the Graham Greene novel *The Comedians* as the Trianon.

³⁹ The full synopsis can be found in the centre spread of the programme for *Vodou Nation*, 2004.

Vodou Nation have considered every aspect of the visual. There is a sense of reality throughout which is not surprising when considering those involved. Katherine Dunham inspired the dance with her passion for the country she first visited in 1936. She was also a Vodou initiate and so incorporated elements of ceremony to her work and she is known throughout the world for her work on dance anthropology and her own unique style of dance and choreography.⁴⁰ Ian Thomson wrote of Haiti in his highly acclaimed book *Bonjour Blanc*; Leah Gordon is a photographer and author of *The Book of Vodou* and Andy Kershaw is a journalist and broadcaster who has a fascination for Haitian music.⁴¹

The cast are all Haitian. Auditions were held in Haiti to find the performers, which again adds to the accuracy of the representations. They have a passion for their country which is evident when *Vodou Nation* is performed. Within the scenes the essence of Vodou is captured. The scenes featuring Baron Samedi are dark and atmospheric and those featuring Ogou are powerful (Fig.75), both are supported by the Vodou inspired sounds of the music from RAM. The colours associated with the loa are also featured, for example red for Ogou⁴² and black and purple for Baron Samedi.

⁴⁰ For more on Katherine Dunham's work see Joyce Aschenbrenner, *Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

⁴¹ Ian Thomson, *Bonjour Blanc* (1992; London: Vintage, 2004); Leah Gordon, *The Book of Vodou* (New York: Barrons, 2000); *Rough Guide to the Music of Haiti*, compiled by Andy Kershaw, Rough Guides, 2002.

⁴² Ogou may also be seen written as Ogun or Ogoun.



Fig.75. Images from *Vodou Nation*, showing Baron Samedi (left) and Ogou (right).⁴³

This contemporary theatrical production is unique in terms of performance. It is a piece that is based on Vodou with Haitian history as the thread for the story and this representation of Vodou is based on historical fact. Every aspect of the show has been considered from the dance moves to the drum beats, the colours and the costumes. There is no escape from the tumultuous times that Haiti has had and the company has not hidden this. They feature images of contrast, palaces and power, poverty and poor sanitation within their publicity material, but they go on to show the vibrancy and the beauty of Haiti within the show. Despite the history of Vodou and Haiti the show ends optimistically with hope for the future of this country with such a unique cultural heritage.

⁴³ Fig.75. These photographs are courtesy of UK Arts Productions from the photographs taken by Keith Pattison. Note the black and red colours around Ogou, representational of the Sect Rouge.

Part II: Television

Documentary

The documentary tradition has evolved throughout the twentieth century as a method for relaying realism, focussing on representations of actual people and places rather than imagined. A documentary is designed to educate the viewer, to inform about aspects of life that are unfamiliar and to make the 'other' familiar. Jonathan Bignell suggests that to obtain realism in a television documentary a number of unnatural procedures have to take place. He continues by suggesting that the final product has been through a methodical process thus creating a tension between a documentary that is representative and accurate and the audience expectation of narrative.⁴⁴ When considering Vodou, more frequently represented as Voodoo, there is an editing process taking place and it has to be questioned whether the documentary has been edited for accuracy or the sensational.

Before television began there were a number of cinematic documentaries, short pieces that were shown in the session before the main feature, including a number on the subject of Voodoo. In the early 1930s Columbia Pictures produced a series called *Laughing with Medbury...* and in 1933 they released *Laughing with Medbury on Voodoo Island*, narrated by John P. Medbury. The series was described as a comical travelogue, released when the US forces were still in Haiti.⁴⁵ Another documentary made at this time, following the success of

⁴⁴ Jonathan Bignell, *Television Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 195.

⁴⁵ These shorts were released as a one or two reel film, unfortunately this one is now lost and the only information available is within archives such as the Internet Movie Database at <<http://www.imdb.com>>

his book *The White King of La Gonave*, was made by Faustin Wirkus. When he returned from America he made a short factual film called *Voodoo* which was an account of his experiences as King of the small island off the coast of Haiti.⁴⁶ Despite being crowned the King of La Gonave his view of the Haitians and Vodou was less than favourable both within his written narrative and his documentary. The short film he made would have been seen as real and factual so would be 'read' by audiences as an accurate portrayal and as such would perpetuate the stereotypes.⁴⁷

In the late 1960s Jacques Cousteau was a popular figure on television and his successful series, *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* included an episode called 'Haiti: Waters of Sorrow.' The main focus of Cousteau's documentaries was the underwater marine life and the ecological impact of human existence. In this particular episode he ventures onto land to visit a Voodoo ceremony. Voodoo ceremonies last for hours, and sometimes days, and yet with the editing process this inclusion was just over five minutes focussing on the naked bodies of the dancers representing Voodoo as an orgiastic ritual, conforming to the stereotypes of the previous decades.⁴⁸ These earlier documentaries would be the first opportunity for audiences to see 'real' Voodoo as opposed to the Hollywood version. It was an opportunity for the makers to be unbiased and accurate but with the need for a story, even within the realm of realism, the sensational was favoured.

⁴⁶ *Voodoo*, directed, written and narrated by Faustin Wirkus, Sol Lesser Productions, 1933.

⁴⁷ Wirkus's documentary used the spelling 'Voodoo', this is different from his publication which used 'Voodoo' and the only source that uses this unusual spelling.

⁴⁸ *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau, Haiti: Waters of Sorrow*, narrated by Jacques Cousteau, David L. Wolper Productions, 1966.

Voodoo generally appeared as part of a strand, a series of documentaries under a shared identity, such as *Divine Magic* and *Taboo*. In 1995 *Divine Magic: The World of the Supernatural* there is an episode called 'The Power of Voodoo.' Narrated by a Voodoo priestess, Ann Brache, it explores the religion from its origins in Africa and Haiti and considers the links between nature and the spirits. This is a similar approach to the one taken in *Taboo: Voodoo* which was made for the National Geographic Channel in 2002. *Taboo* was a series that according to a synopsis "crosses the barriers of modern society and explores the diversity of the human race where the secret, sacred, and eccentric are part of the everyday experience of humanity."⁴⁹ The series title and description indicate that the content is 'exotic' and that the viewer will consume the unattainable. *Taboo* features Wade Davis as one of the experts. His reputation and fame spiralled following the production of *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. It explores the origins of the religion in Africa and Benin but again there seems to be a missed opportunity. The viewer is led through the Vodou journey but the episode still leans towards the sensationalistic elements rather than the spiritual.⁵⁰ The synopsis of this episode describes the rituals and traditions "so shocking that you can't help but be attracted to them." This is representing Voodoo once again as the 'other' and could be mistaken for the description of any of the sensationalist Voodoo films produced by Hollywood. The History Channel commissioned a documentary called *Voodoo Secrets* which explored the origins of Vodou from Benin, the same as *Taboo*, but the synopsis for this programme assures the

⁴⁹ This description can be found on the Amazon.com website at <<http://www.amazon.com>>

⁵⁰ *Taboo: Voodoo*, series one, episode four, for the National Geographic Channel, first aired on 1 January 2004.

potential viewer that “Voodoo Secrets looks past the clichés of Voodoo.”⁵¹ This documentary examines Vodou and substantiates the representations in the context of the religion as it is in the twenty-first century. It also addresses the slave rebellion and Voodoo in New Orleans. There is one aspect that could be disputed. This documentary considers the systematic persecution and suggests that Voodoo was nearly wiped out completely. There is no evidence of this. The practice of Voodoo has been driven into secrecy on many occasions in many places for self-preservation but throughout history it has always emerged stronger and more resilient than before and on no occasion has there been found evidence to support its eradication.

There are factual productions that have received limited airing on television such as Maya Deren’s *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*.⁵² This film took a different approach to other factual representations of Vodou; it explains each of the loa and the associated offerings, rituals and signs in a sincere and respectful manner in Deren’s unique experimental filmmaking style. She found her way to Haiti when she was awarded the Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1947 for her work in moving image so she decided to film Vodou rituals and dances (Fig.76).⁵³

⁵¹ *Voodoo Secrets*, The History Channel, first aired 2005.

⁵² *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, Maya Deren, Mystic Fire Video, 1985. The original footage for this film was shot during the 1940s but wasn’t compiled into a film until after Deren’s premature death in 1961. She was aged just 44.

⁵³ Bill Nichols (ed.), *Maya Deren & the American Avant Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

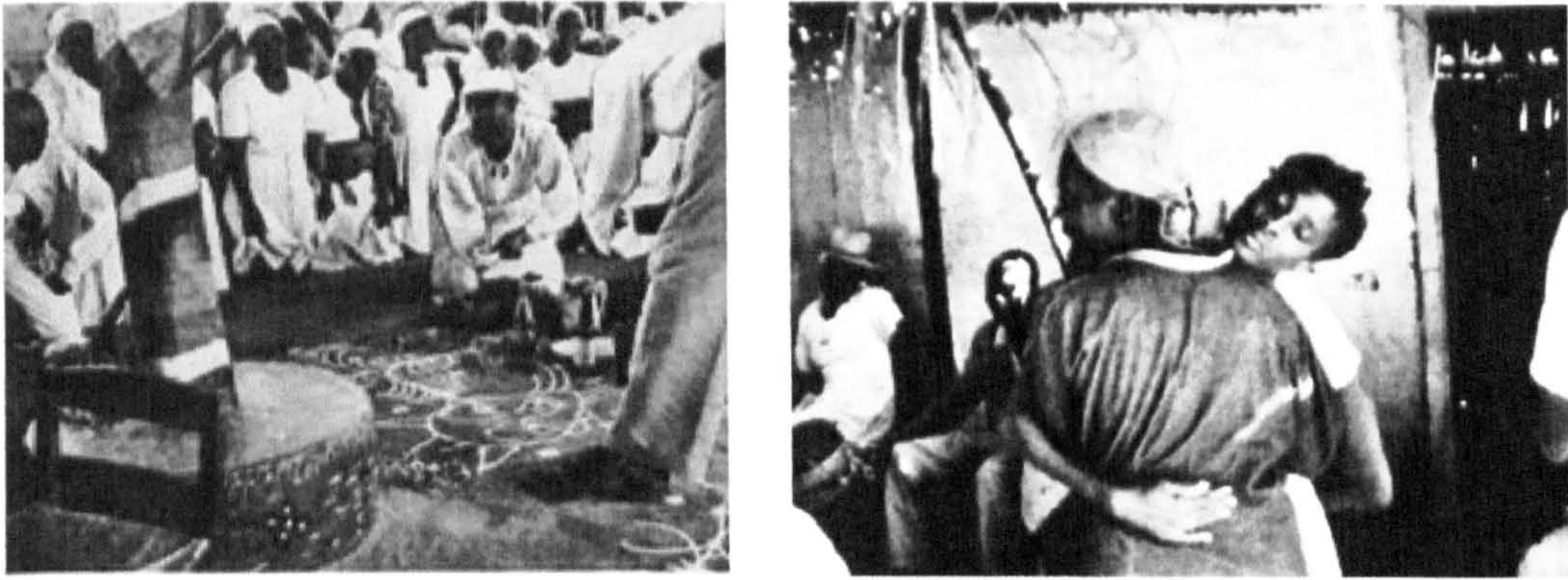


Fig.76. Stills from *Divine Horsemen* by Maya Deren.⁵⁴

When considering these documentaries there are questions around the production, about who is doing the representing, and about what is being represented. It is this textual analysis that identifies the Vodou components and their portrayal. There are few documentary makers of Haitian origin and the meanings are constructed from a predominantly white perspective, mainly American and so it has to be argued that the selection of the content is biased. The representations of Vodou in these Voodoo documentaries do not function in isolation, they are relative to other representations in other media both contemporary and historically. There is a reliance on the viewer having a pre-conceived idea of what Vodou is, the documentary should then either reinforce or deconstruct the meaning. The meaning of Vodou can also differ depending on the context of representation; even subtle influences would have an impact. There is not an extensive list of representations of Vodou in the documentary tradition. Those that do exist are repeatedly screened and do attempt to give an accurate portrayal of the religion, even if this is supported by over extended scenes of sacrifice and more animated elements of the rituals.

⁵⁴ Fig.76. the image on the left shows the drawing of the vèvè, from <http://www.sensesofcinema.com> and on the right a possession by the loa, from <http://www.greylodge.org>

Drama

Since television began there has been an influx of drama and from the 1960s onwards Voodoo has appeared in a wide variety of programmes from comedy to the supernatural and in many of the most popular series.⁵⁵ One of the first and least accurate representations of Voodoo on television was found in the series *Gilligan's Island*, in an episode called 'Voodoo Something To Me' which aired in 1964.⁵⁶ *Gilligan's Island* was about a group of people who had been stranded on a deserted island in the Pacific, the people were from different walks of life who spend their days trying to get off the island.⁵⁷ In 'Voodoo Something To Me' the Voodoo content is minimal, edging on non-existent, a chimpanzee dresses in Gilligan's clothes and one of the characters, Skipper, believes that the island is under a Voodoo spell and that Gilligan has been turned into a chimp. This representation reflects the Voodoo content of the cinematic productions that preceded the television era with no exploration of the religion just straightforward exploitation to gain increased audience figures.

Another highly successful series in America was *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, a tongue in cheek spy thriller that combined humour with action.⁵⁸ In the second series there was an episode called 'The Very Important Zombie Affair' which reflects the dictatorship of Papa 'Doc' Duvalier in Haiti.⁵⁹ The two main

⁵⁵ Voodoo also appeared in the animated cartoons that occupied the primetime slot in television programming during the 1960s and this is discussed in the previous chapter.

⁵⁶ *Gilligan's Island*, Series 1: Episode 3, "Voodoo Something To Me," first aired on CBS 10 October 1964.

⁵⁷ The people were stranded on the island following a boat trip that became caught in a storm resulting in a shipwreck. Each episode is based around people trying to leave the island and Gilligan foiling the plans.

⁵⁸ *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* first aired on 22 September 1964, NBC.

⁵⁹ *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, Series 2: Episode 44, "The Very Important Zombie Affair," first aired on 31 December 1965, NBC.

characters, Napoleon Solo (Robert Vaughn) and Illya Nikovetch Kuryakin (David McCallum), travel to an unidentified location in the Caribbean to help a doctor who is under a Voodoo curse. The curse has placed him in a zombie trance. The Voodoo curse has been invoked by the local dictator (El Supremo) and his chief of police (Captain Ramirez).⁶⁰ This appears to be a metaphor for Duvalier and his Tontons Macoutes who worked in close collaboration and used Voodoo as a fear tactic to control the people. The situation is eventually resolved when they find a Voodoo priestess called Mama Lou who fights Voodoo with Voodoo. This is a humorous thriller drama that includes Voodoo with some elements of accuracy. The programme was released at a time when the eyes of the world were on Haiti in the midst of the Duvalier regime the social comment is evident in its treatment of the dictator and chief of police using Voodoo for control. It is this contextualisation of the subject of Voodoo that relies on meaning being taken from other media sources so that the audience can relate this show to the plight in Haiti. In the same way that cinematic productions reflected contemporary society, television did the same; the difference was that with television there was a much faster turnaround time so programmes were completed much more quickly than the films and so could respond to situations more immediately.

In the 1970s there was an interest in crime drama on both sides of the Atlantic and the genre was known at this time as the 'cop show.' *Starsky and Hutch* was a series that was based on partners, two 'cops' who had a unique bond and a

⁶⁰ It has been suggested that the use of the title 'El Supremo' may refer to the Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo although the allusion is to Haiti and Duvalier.

relationship that was popular with fans for decades.⁶¹ At the start of the third series there was an episode that was called ‘Starsky and Hutch on Playboy Island.’ It was also known as ‘Murder on Voodoo Island.’⁶² A two-part special, it found the characters undercover on a tropical island, the cliché of the Caribbean, investigating mysterious happenings linked to the life of a reclusive billionaire whose associates are being killed by what appears to be ‘Voodoo magic’. The Voodoo is dismissed by the characters to begin with but as more events unfold the pair decides to take it seriously, eventually having to battle with (as described in the episode) a powerful witch-doctor to overturn the ‘black magic.’ The Voodoo content is realistic, there are charms and symbols throughout the episode but the conclusion indicates once again that Voodoo is ‘black magic’ and used for evil. The combination of crime and Voodoo was one that was to continue and in the 1980s, the ‘cop show’ was a popular genre with *Miami Vice* attracting large audiences. In the second series the episode ‘Tale of the Goat’ features a gangster with the name of the loa, Legba, whose body has been shipped back to Miami from Haiti. This places Voodoo within the Diaspora but then proceeds to lose all aspects of realistic accuracy. The body is not a corpse, the gangster has returned for revenge.⁶³

The cop drama took an unusual turn in the 1990s when Fox television studios opted for a different style of drama, renowned for producing comedies. The channel commissioned *The X-Files*, a series about the FBI and their pursuit of the

⁶¹ *Starsky and Hutch* was based on an idea by William Blinn, a writer and producer, it first aired in America on 10 September 1975 and in the UK on 23 April 1976.

⁶² This episode, series 3: 49 and 50, was first aired on 17 September 1977.

⁶³ Legba is a powerful Vodou spirit, keeper of the crossroads and also protector of the home; he is not a spirit that would be associated with a gangster.

unexplained. There had been very little science fiction since the late 1960s and so this new genre was difficult to place. It featured the supernatural and the unexplained; the genre became known as 'crime drama'. This new series was not in the same vein as *Starsky and Hutch* or *Miami Vice*. The main difference was that the endings were seldom conclusive and they didn't have the hard edged 'chase and shoot' narrative, they were more intellectually challenging and featured less mindless violence. In the second series there was an episode called 'Fresh Bones' which was based on Vodou (termed Voodoo in the episode).⁶⁴ Vodou appears early in the episode when a soldier crashes into a tree which has vèvè symbols drawn onto the trunk. He is killed and then reappears, believed to be as a zombie, and when his coffin is exhumed there is no body inside. This incorporates the Vodou within the visual and verbal narrative.⁶⁵ The visual narrative explains the zombie phenomenon without the need for excessive explanations as it relies on a previous knowledge obtained from other media sufficient enough to understand the story unfolding.

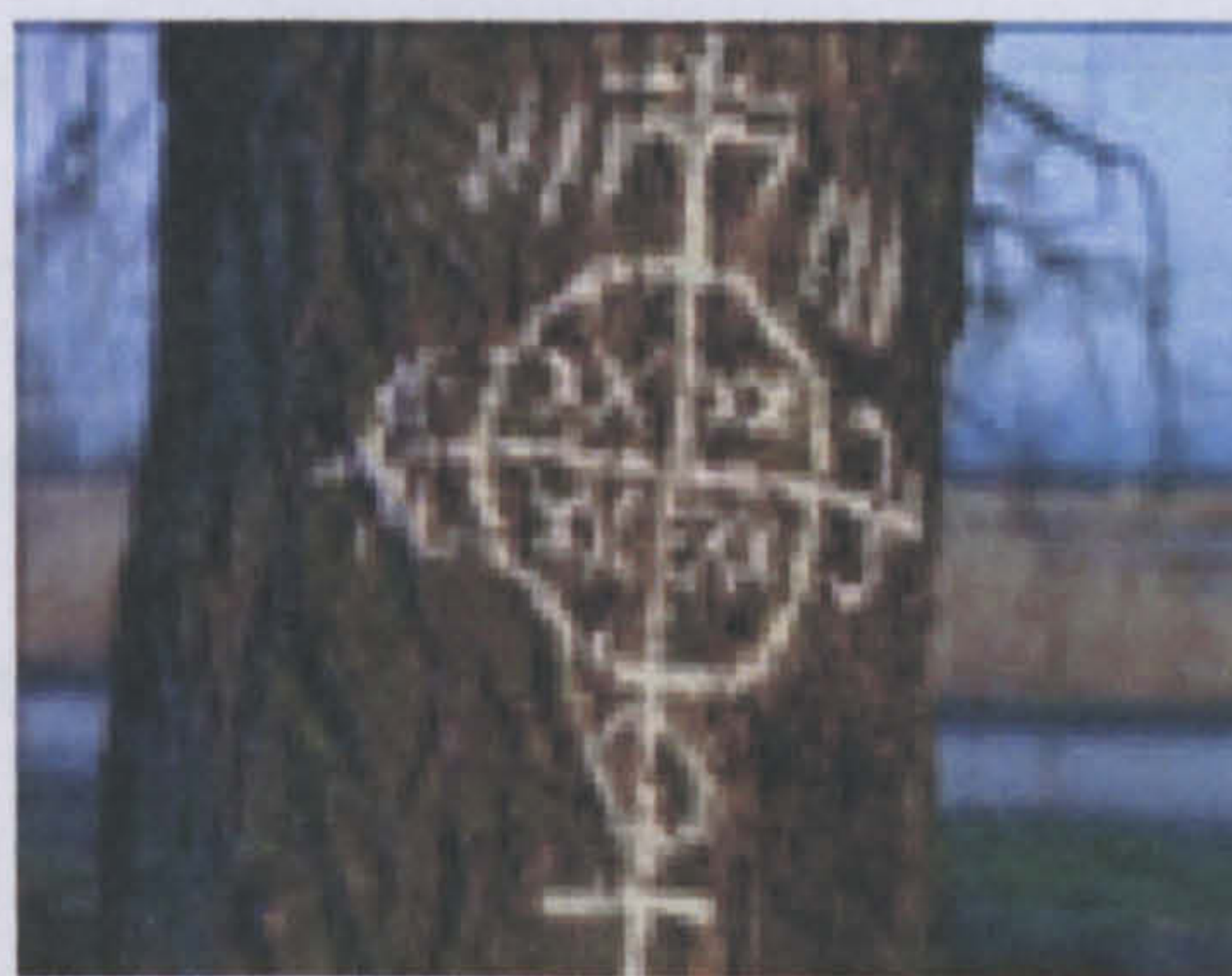


Fig.77. The vèvè as it features in *The X-Files*.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *The X-Files*, "Fresh Bones," dir. Rob Bowman, written by Howard Gordon, first aired 3 February 1995.

⁶⁵ Vèvè is described as pronounced and written as vever in this episode; it is described by one of the characters as a loco-miroir, mirror of the soul.

⁶⁶ Fig.77. The vèvè is usually painted on the floor although they can be found drawn on any surface.

'Fresh Bones' highlights the plight of the Haitians who are being incarcerated within a detention centre. Over the previous decade there was much coverage of the mistreatment of Haitian refugees and of the 'Haitian Program' run by the Immigration and Naturalization service (INS) in America and this episode illustrates the situation.⁶⁷ The representations of Voodoo are some of the most 'accurate' to be found in a television programme. There is a sub-plot within the narrative with a young boy who appears early in the episode. He gives one of the main characters a gris-gris bag for good luck, this ultimately saves her life. It later transpires that the boy was killed in a riot at the detention centre and it was his ghost that was guiding and protecting the FBI agents, Mulder and Scully. Soldiers at the centre are dying and although the Haitians are blamed (for hating the US military) the deaths are eventually attributed to a white Captain (Wharton) and not to the black Voodooist (Bauvais). Voodoo is shown as a system of beliefs that fights evil forces. In the final scenes, following the death of Bauvais, Captain Wharton is found performing a Voodoo rite over the grave. When Bauvais appears to destroy him, the FBI discovers both bodies but when Wharton's coffin is lowered into the ground he is very much alive. This scene is reminiscent of the 'burial alive' scene of *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. 'Fresh Bones' was the highest rated episode in the second series and the inspiration from the story came from newspaper articles reporting the suicides of US military personnel and the plight of the Haitian refugees.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For more on the Haitian Refugee situation in America during the 1980s see Jake C. Miller, *The Plight of the Haitian Refugees* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

⁶⁸ Brian Lowry, *The Truth is Out There: The Official Guide to the X-Files* (London: Harper Collins, 1995) 196-198.

Canadian drama also featured Voodoo soon after *The X-Files* in *Due South*, a series that had featured supernatural elements but had not opted for a serious approach. *Due South* mixed comedy with the chilling moments and in the Voodoo episode called 'Mojo Rising' the two are balanced.⁶⁹ 'Mojo Rising' reflects the same story as 'Fresh Bones', identifying the plight of Haitian immigrants and showing sensitivity to their beliefs. The comedic element takes the form of a Voodoo curse on the Police Station, the serious element comes from an escaped Voodoo priest (Lafayette) who is wanted for the attempted murder of two immigration officials. Fraser, the police officer, manages to save the Voodoo priest and sympathises with the Haitian refugees. He eventually finds out that Lafayette's daughter has been kidnapped and won't be released until the immigration officials are killed. Gutman, the person holding the girl is described as practicing 'black magic,' and this is associated with Voodoo when his flask is obtained which contains his 'Voodoo powers.' The flask containing the 'Voodoo powers' is almost identical to the 'mojo' in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* which was made in the year before 'Mojo Rising,' indicating the inter-media influences that still exist.⁷⁰

Voodoo was included in British television productions for example in *Jonathan Creek*, a series based on a magician who also solves crime. In the third series there was an episode called 'The Three Gamblers.' Unusually the title did not use the Voodoo connection.⁷¹ This starts with a murder of a man called Geiger, a man being met for his drugs connections in the Caribbean who can give three

⁶⁹ *Due South*, "Mojo Rising," Season 2: Episode 4, first aired 28 October 1998.

⁷⁰ *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*, dir. Jay Roach, New Line Cinema, 1997.

⁷¹ *Jonathan Creek*, "The Three Gamblers," written by David Renwick, series 3: episode 6, first aired 2 January 2000.

young people work. After he is killed and his body is sealed in the cellar of an abandoned house, his contact book is stolen. The three young people, Karen, Floyd and Joe, decide to use his contacts and fly out to the Caribbean. When Joe is killed Floyd believes that the power of Voodoo is to blame. He thinks that Geiger has caused the death from beyond the grave, while in the Caribbean he heard many stories of Voodoo and witchdoctors. The mystery becomes apparent when after confessing to killing Geiger, Floyd is taken back to the house where they find Geiger's body at the top of the cellar steps. He had apparently returned from the grave to crawl up the stairs. His body is made to look like the zombies of many cinematic productions (Fig.78).



Fig.78. The body of Geiger in *Jonathan Creek*.⁷²

Floyd is convinced that Voodoo is at work and the main characters, Jonathan Creek and his assistant Maddy, do joke about the subject before dismissing it completely. They prove that it was flood waters that moved the body and not the power of Voodoo.

⁷² Fig.78. A drug dealer and criminal, Geiger, climbs the stairs from a cellar after he has been murdered in a still from "The Three Gamblers."

Another British production representing Voodoo in a more serious way was *Sea of Souls* in an episode called 'Voodoo Nights.'⁷³ Disappointingly the Voodoo element is linked with human sacrifice, returning to the representations of the nineteenth century. It was probably influenced by a high profile case regarding human sacrifice in the UK in 2002, commonly known as the 'Torso in the Thames.' The torso of a young boy was found in the river Thames in 2002 and initially it was reported that this could be a 'Muti' killing but within a few days this was amended and it was felt the killing could be linked to Voodoo because of the ethnicity of the boy.⁷⁴ The BBC in Britain reported that the police had not discounted the possibility that the murderer may have been a paedophile or a stranger but they needed "to confront the possibility of a human sacrifice." They then went on to quote the leading officer, Detective Inspector Will O'Reilly on Voodoo "we will be up against it, if it is Voodoo they are by nature a very secretive sect."⁷⁵ This white colonial approach to the stereotypes of Voodoo caused outrage; the association with human sacrifice without any evidence (supported by a self-styled expert) recreated a similar situation to that of the Satanic Rites Abuse Panic of 1988.⁷⁶ This theme is exploited in 'Voodoo Nights' which begins when the son of a dying man goes missing and his sister believes that he has become embroiled in a cult that practices human sacrifice. *Sea of Souls* is about a team of parapsychologists who investigate the supernatural. In this episode it is emphasised that they are dealing with Voodoo even though the

⁷³ *Sea of Souls*, "Voodoo Nights," dir. Richard Laxton, season 1: episode 5 (in two parts), first aired on 16 February 2004 (part one) and 17 February 2004 (part two). This series was also shown in America on ABC, first aired 28 October 2004.

⁷⁴ Muti is associated with Southern Africa and the boy was of Afro-Caribbean origin.

⁷⁵ BBC news, 2 March 2002.

⁷⁶ See David Frankfurter, "Ritual as Accusation and Atrocity: Satanic Ritual Abuse, Gnostic Libertinism, and Primal Murders," *History of Religions*, 40.4 (May, 2001) 352-380.

cult is described as East African and is called 'Shango.' These associations cause confusion, firstly Voodoo is not practiced in East Africa, and secondly Shango originated in Nigeria. It is worshipped in Candomblé in Brazil and Santería in Cuba and not associated with Voodoo. The perpetrators of the human sacrifice are middle-class white people and not the expected black community (which had been implied throughout the episode), and the programme is completed with special effect enhanced weird happenings. The deviant 'Voodoo' cult that is featured is capable of creating 'black magic' and with the visual elements such as robes it also has connotations of witchcraft which historically has been deemed as more 'suitable' for British audiences. This is one of few occasions where the practice itself is not dismissed even though the practice described is far removed from Voodoo.

Summary

Voodoo on the stage and small screen has been treated in a wide variety of ways. The theatrical productions include Haiti as much as Voodoo and often link the two, something that happened less often in the cinema. There were fewer sensational aspects possible to perform on the stage and with less reliance on special effects the stage plays were more true to the subject matter, even though occasionally there was a strange combination of deities and location. The production of *Vodou Nation* and the revival of *The Emperor Jones* indicate that the interest in Vodou is very much apparent and whether positive or negative it is rarely out of the public domain.

The documentaries which were supposed to provide a realistic representation of Vodou rarely delivered; instead they focussed on the sensational elements and edited the less exotic. Documentaries were made with a 'story' or a narrative. Even though their aim was to deliver factual information and it was during the editing process that decisions were made on what was to be represented which ultimately biased the portrayal. There were exceptions such as *Divine Horsemen* and *Voodoo Secrets* where the intention was for the authentic and educational.

Voodoo in fictional drama was evident in comedy and other popular programming, particularly the crime genre and more recently the increase in programmes based around the supernatural. American representations of Voodoo in serious drama were uncharacteristically more accurate than those of their British counterparts who still favoured the sensational approach. It was the dramatical representations that seemed to leave the question open as to whether Voodoo was a genuine practice or superstitious belief and in many cases the representations were authentic and accurate, especially in the American television drama programmes.

As recently as 2000 it has been argued that there is a lack of concern with television history. John Caughie suggests that this lack of history assists in the view that television is "ephemeral by nature."⁷⁷ This may have some truth in it but there has been a considerable amount of study around television viewing such as the research by Stuart Hall. Hall considers the actual audience and

⁷⁷ John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

reading of the television programmes, particularly with his encoding/decoding model. Hall suggests that programme makers conform to narrative structures that are identifiable by audiences.⁷⁸ According to Bignell, Hall argued that television programmes contain a dominant reading and as such limit the ways that a programme can be interpreted.⁷⁹ If this is possible many of the Voodoo narratives were decided and shaped for the audience around the existing misrepresentations. Bignell suggests that there are criticisms to Hall's theories, this arguably could be substantiated. When considering Hall's encoding/decoding model it is unclear whether the dominant reading is in the programme or with the viewer and as such leads to ambiguous interpretation. There are also other factors to consider such as the demographics of the audience. Voodoo is familiar to most viewers and the programmes have added their own narratives to clarify 'fact'.

Voodoo has provided the inspiration for literature and cinema and so it was inevitable that it would be an influence on television programmes across all genres. It was also becoming more apparent the cross-influencing between the media, including newspapers and television, was taking place with Voodoo being constructed from the most contemporary source. Voodoo had faced periods of decline in television but with the increased interest in the supernatural it is faced with a long future, hopefully being portrayed as the religion it is rather than the sensational stereotype that it was made into.

⁷⁸ Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980) 128-138.

⁷⁹ Bignell, 278.

CONCLUSION

Early Anglophone writings on Haiti and Vodou are limited, primarily because of the volatile political stability of the country. In the years before the revolution and the subsequent independence which resulted in a country no longer in the grip of colonial rule, L.E. Moreau St. Méry wrote the first full account of Vodou (in French) in 1797. It was not until much later in the nineteenth century when European travellers and officials discovered more about the religion. It was at this time that they began to write sensationalist accounts for eager audiences already fascinated with the spiritual and supernatural. Travellers were visiting other islands in the region but access to Haiti was limited. Haiti was no longer an island belonging to 'us' and so was viewed with an air of mystique and suspicion, the exotic 'other' that had become the Black Republic. Vodou was different to any culture previously seen by the Europeans. Because of the origins within slavery they could assume a colonial position by referring to Haitians as 'savage' and 'barbaric' in much the same way as they did towards the Africans at this time of exploration and imperialism.

Documentary evidence of Vodou is limited as it is an oral tradition. There is no written scripture and due to the syncretic nature of it as a religion there are varying accounts of how it is practiced within Haiti and the diaspora. The influence that it has had on the cultural productions from Britain and America since 1850 has originated fundamentally from the early Anglophone texts of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. These texts were racist, bigoted and biased. A number of these narratives were written by British officials such as Sir Spenser St. John (*Hayti or the Black Republic*), the alleged 'true' accounts by journalists such as William Seabrook (*The Magic Island*) or from

memoirs of the American Occupation (*The White King of La Gonave*). There were no serious anthropological studies of Vodou until the 1950s by which time Hollywood had re-imagined the religion for the big screen and was not interested in fact or accurate portrayals. The texts relating to Vodou in the years before the talking movies were limited and so it was possible to trace the origins of many influences on the early productions. It was more difficult to identify the development through the later years when literature was produced in fiction and non-fiction genres.

Due to the wide range of representations considered within this research a variety of theories were considered. Race was evident throughout all cultural production. This was analysed considering the work primarily of bell hooks, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. This thesis engages with their theoretical frameworks around race and cultural representation. Hall suggests that black people and black culture were classified as 'different' and as such could be dominated at the time by the "white regime."¹ bell hooks takes this a step further by suggesting that white 'supremacists' "constructed images of blackness to uphold and affirm...their will to dominate and enslave."² Paul Gilroy explores the idea that race has to be constructed both politically and socially.³ These theories have reappeared across the cultural [re]production of Haiti and Vodou. There is unquestionable evidence that the 'power' of white over black filtered into cultural representations throughout the late nineteenth and most of the twentieth century.

¹ Hall in Williams and Chrisman.

² Hooks, *Black Looks*, 2.

³ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black*, 35.

The theory of power has been considered using the work of Michel Foucault initially in the context of knowledge being power. It has been shown that throughout cultural production the knowledge has been held by those disseminating the media and so having power. This power is evidenced in much the same way as the 'power' of the colonial oppressors. There is reference to Foucault's theory that power can be reversible, as was the case in Haiti.⁴ Power was considered within the narratives of nineteenth century literature. Lukes describes 'radical' power, a power that was utilised by the authors of inflammatory Voodoo literature over their readership. Radical power affected the thoughts and opinions of individuals by manipulating the 'collective forces.'⁵

As there are numerous references to the 'exotic' and 'other' Edward Said's Orientalism has been considered. The fusion between East and West in the imagination of the consumer has been evidenced throughout this thesis. In particular Chapter Three when cinematic representations often confused the narrative by merging the East and West for example when Vodou was shown located on a Polynesian Island.⁶

When slavery arrived in the country we now know as Haiti the slaves were transported from different regions of West Africa. Being forced together they blended various aspects of their beliefs and a new syncretic religion emerged, Vodou. Forcibly baptised into Catholicism the slaves hid their own beliefs by appropriating the saints and aspects of the Catholic religion in an attempt to

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).

⁵ S Lukes, *Power: a radical view* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

⁶ For example *Voodoo Woman* dir. Edward L. Cahn, AIP, 1957.

maintain their cultural practices in secret. There were occasional references to slaves practicing Vodou, particularly in New Orleans and the Southern states of America, but because these narratives were written by authoritarian figures they were unreliable and inflammatory. Although the narratives of Vodou influenced cultural production, Europeans influenced Vodou, especially in Louisiana.

Aspects of witchcraft were appropriated into the religion such as the use of the 'poppet' to inflict pain on an enemy became a feature of the Voodoo doll.⁷ There has been research in the field of representation of slavery by Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small. This is confined to representations in Southern Plantation Museums and not to the wider ranging cultural representations.⁸

The visual and aural elements of Vodou are those that were most commonly represented throughout cinema, television, and theatre. Drumming and dancing feature as a prominent part of these cultural productions. There was rarely an authentic portrayal of the religion, or an attempt to understand what Vodou was; there was more scope within the sensational to recontextualise Voodoo for the audience's demands. It was the representations of these aspects of Vodou that influenced future productions and there was much cross-cultural inspiration such as film influencing animation and literature influencing television.

It was important to include Haitian art within this research because it has provided an insight into the history and culture of Haiti and Vodou from within the community since being 'discovered' in the 1940s. The Haitian artists were

⁷ This is an area of research being pursued by the author in association with the Museum of Witchcraft in Boscastle, UK.

⁸ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

inspired by the loa, they were guided by the spirits and that is why so many of the paintings relate to the spiritual, as well as the arts directly related to Vodou such as the drapeau Vodou and vèvè. The visual arts of Haitian Vodou have featured and influenced cultural productions. The drumming and dance from the ceremonies, vèvè and altars all appear in varying forms even if they were not in context. They rarely incorporated an explanation but were incorporated to add authenticity to the visual narrative. Caribbean art has steadily increased in popularity in Europe and there have been a number of exhibitions held in Britain such as *Working Models of Heaven: The origins of the arts of Haitian Vodou* and *Haiti*.⁹ These exhibitions addressed the culture, history, arts and Vodou within Haiti by exhibiting photographs, paintings and sculpture. The arts in Vodou have been influenced from Western popular culture and many altars and paintings in public places incorporate images borrowed from the West. A Barbie doll may be found on altars to the loa of beauty, Erzuli, and Darth Vader (from *Star Wars*) and Rambo (played by Sylvester Stallone) may represent the warrior spirits of the Ogou family of loa, demonstrating the flexible nature of the religion.

When embarking on a study of such breadth there is always a concern that material may be missed or that there will be too much material to include. All material found has been included and even though there were many representations that initially appear to be Vodou focussed, especially in the area of cinema, they had no connection to the religion. There were some areas that had fewer representations and those that were not historically linked to Haitian

⁹ *Working Models of Haiti* was held at the University Gallery, University of Essex, 2002; *Haiti* was held at The October Gallery, London, 1995.

Vodou, in some cases these have been noted or have been omitted from this study. Voodoo in New Orleans has been included throughout this research because it is arguably better known than Haitian Vodou and has appeared in many films, television programmes and literary works. Voodoo has featured in other popular cultural forms such as popular music, interior design and tourist guidebooks. These areas have been recognised, however, for the purposes of this thesis visual representations that were influential on or influenced by other cultural productions were researched in more depth. These are additional areas that deserve further research beyond the scope of this thesis.

Representations of Vodou have not functioned in isolation as each method of production has relied on the audience having a pre-conceived idea of what Vodou is, obtaining their information from a variety of media. This is essentially flawed when the religion and culture of Haiti has been persistently maligned and misrepresented. Vodou has been hidden from the wider public view for over a century for fear of persecution. Despite anthropological and ethnological studies it still attracts a bad press in the twenty-first century.

Following the horrendous murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman *The Sun* newspaper printed the headlines '[Ian] Huntley's Voodoo Rituals' (Fig.79). The article alleged that the murderer used Voodoo to create dolls to stick pins in. This associated the religion with the most shocking of crimes to attract readers and gave a less than accurate account of what Voodoo is. The description refers to the film *Live and Let Die* and claims that "today's Voodoo has been mixed with many elements of Roman Catholicism to create a complicated ritual" and goes on

to reinforce the stereotypes of black magic, hexes, pins in voodoo dolls and the raising of zombies.¹⁰ The murderer's alleged behaviour is described as "eerie," "evil," and a "ghastly obsession," the article concludes with "the Devil makes work for idle hands."¹¹



Fig.79. Voodoo gets bad press in *The Sun*.¹²

This association between a newspaper and a film is a clear indication of how the media and cultural productions relate to each other and inform the reader. Many readers consume the information to construct their own meaning of what Voodoo is without knowing about the origins of Vodou. These representations are attributable to the effects of white colonisation and continued attitude towards race. As Robert Lawless suggests "favourable reports about Haiti are as rare as

¹⁰ The description of the religion was written by Tim Spanton in *The Sun*, 19 October 2004, 5.

¹¹ The main article was written by John Coles in *The Sun*, 19 October 2004, 8.

¹² Fig. 79. This article appeared in *The Sun* newspaper on 19 October 2004, pages 1, 4, 5 and 8.

positive declarations on the nutritional value of cannibalism or the healing power of black magic” and sadly this has been the case throughout the twentieth century to the present day.¹³

There are religions similar to Vodou throughout the Caribbean and South American regions including Santeria in Cuba, Condomblé in Brazil and Shango in Trinidad. This shows that there were syncretic religions other than Vodou. As Haiti achieved independence, the eyes of the white colonial world focussed on this Black Republic in an attempt to condemn everything about the country and the culture of the people. Vodou originated in slavery and then developed in the working class black community. Whereas other cultures assimilated into the twentieth-century progression Vodou remained true to its origins and grew and evolved within itself, a unique attribute in an ever changing society.

One of the aims of this research was to examine the historiography of Haiti and Vodou to contextualise the development of the representations of the religion since 1850. Narratives prior to this time were included to show the development of the myths and colonial viewpoint from the pre-Columbian era. This was apparent with the association of cannibalism with non-European peoples, an association that would subsequently transfer to Haiti. The historiography of Haiti and Vodou in Anglophone literature really began at the end of the nineteenth century as identified in the works of Sir Spenser St. John and James Froude. This continued throughout the twentieth century fluctuating between the sensational and the anthropological but it was the sensational that was favoured as an

¹³ Robert Lawless, *Haiti's Bad Press* (Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman Books, 1992), xiii.

inspiration for cultural production. There were influences from non-fiction narratives such as *The Serpent and the Rainbow* but these were sensationalised through the process of creation and adaptation and so retained the stereotypes and associated myths of Voodoo.

Throughout this research there has been an overview of the representations of Voodoo that have been created within the wider context of cultural production. These have included literature, film, animation, theatre, and television, which have been produced by the Americans or British. This overview and the relationship between the socio-political, socio-cultural and sociological influences on the representations of Vodou (and Haiti) were examined throughout to establish the origins of the works. The 'white' viewpoint has permeated these productions and has been supported by other systems of power, especially as Stuart Hall terms "the regime of race representation."¹⁴ Voodoo was found in most genres of popular fictional literature including the work of well known authors such as Barbara Cartland (romance) as a sensational and exotic distraction. Within non-fiction narratives it was widely represented in much the same way with a few notable anthropological exceptions as discussed in Chapter Two. Visitors to Haiti would be expected to write about Vodou but as they were unlikely to have encountered it many of the accounts are not from direct observation. They evolve from dinner conversations and hearsay from unknown sources. These 'stories' were retold and the cycle of misrepresenting Vodou perpetuated. Before emancipation and independence Vodou was practiced in

¹⁴ Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997) 262.

communities and on plantations away from the white gaze, visitors were few and so there were only rare encounters with the religion. Post emancipation and independence visitors to the island were initially limited and access to Vodou ceremonies rare. The only accounts to retell were those obtained from unreliable sources. There were more visitors to the islands at the end of the nineteenth century but they chose to write descriptions of a culture that was definitely not Vodou. They described a practice that was so incredible it was to ignite the imaginations of creative thinkers into the twentieth century and when cinema provided an outlet the material was readily available. Early literary representations were considered using contemporary 'scientific' work such as those by David Hume and Robert Knox.¹⁵ This provided an insight into the views of the 'cultured' class of pre and early Victorian Britain. Postcolonial theory and power are continued throughout this chapter. Leela Ghandi refers to the negation of non-whites and Nandy utilises Foucault's theory of power when considering the alteration of cultural priorities.¹⁶ These theories assist in reinforcing the idea that the early literary works were representational of the imperial power. Bhabha is considered throughout this chapter with reference to stereotyping and discrimination. He suggests that "false image becomes the scapegoat for discrimination", or in the case of Haiti, Voodoo could be considered as the false image.¹⁷

The advent of the moving image in cinematic production provided a platform on which to disseminate the re-imagined religion of Voodoo. It was possible to trace

¹⁵ Hume (1753; 1996) and Knox (1862).

¹⁶ Ghandi, 16 and Nandy, xi.

¹⁷ Bhabha, (1986) 169.

the origins of many of the inspirations for these works due to the limited range of possibilities, there were a finite number of texts written prior to the first films. When William Seabrook wrote *The Magic Island* at a time when Haiti was ever present due to the American Occupation the subject matter was even more pertinent. There were films written by black playwrights such as *Drums O'Voodoo* (Chapter Three, pp.213-214) which portrayed Voodoo as a benign religion in an attempt to redress the balance and act as a challenge to the stereotype. Unfortunately Hollywood was a powerful white entity that was to produce more sensational and more fantastical Voodoo films during the Golden Age so that the black filmmakers could not compete at a time of racial divide and prejudice. Films reflected the societal influences throughout the twentieth century. As the threat to the colonies lessened in the minds of the Americans and British the threat of nuclear war increased and so films of the horror genre were using this new fear as an influence. Other developments were echoed on the screen such as scientific advancements, Satanism and alien invasion (also a metaphor for invasion by communist states). The popularity of Voodoo films decreased, this was clearly reflected in the quantity and quality of Voodoo films during the 1950s and early 1960s as discussed in Chapter Three (pp.226-232). It was interesting to find that this decline was simultaneous to the publication of a number of serious anthropological studies of Voodoo. The 1960s was the time that the zombie was divorced from Haiti and Voodoo when George A. Romero made *Night of the Living Dead*. This film was to reshape and redirect the new horror sub-genre of zombie movies creating an inhuman sub-species capable of rising from the dead and cannibalism, traits associated with Voodooists. The zombie became the focus for the prejudice previously directed at Haitians and

Vodou although it was not to be completely disassociated. Hollywood, and later the British film industry, appropriated Vodou and used it as an influence for productions and yet rarely were any Haitians consulted or employed to assist in any way, the white imperialistic attitude prevailed. There are a number of theories considered throughout this chapter. Homi Bhabha and Lola Young are referenced for their research around race and cinematic representation. Bhabha suggests that “difference is contained within the fantasy of origin and identity”¹⁸ This idea of fantasy is explored further when considering the subliminal, and occasionally overt, sexual activity within cinematic representations. Young suggests that “it was believed that interracial sexual activity would lead to social, moral and physiological decay,” sentiments echoed across film.¹⁹

Voodoo in animated cartoons was influenced directly from the cinematic productions and it was discovered that there are clear visual representations between the characters in films and those created in the animated cels (Chapter Four). Voodoo was restricted to a specific genre of cartoons that featured ‘scary monsters’ but the most memorable were those in the *Scooby Doo* series. A series that has been updated and constantly aired in the twenty-first century. Animation was influenced by many of the prejudices of the early twentieth century and as was shown the animators ignored the guidelines laid out in the Hays Code producing cartoons that mocked race and religion. Henry T. Sampson identifies this “[because] the animation studios considered the collective sensitivities of African Americans to be insignificant.”²⁰ One of the major problems with the

¹⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 67.

¹⁹ Young, 88.

²⁰ Henry T. Sampson, *That's Enough, Folks: Black Images in Animated Cartoons, 1900-1960* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1998) vii.

creation of the stereotypes around Voodoo and black people in animation was not the fact that they should not have been made but that audiences were enjoying them. There was a mass audience behaviour that supported the production of these works and so the makers were under no pressure to cease this aspect of cultural production. Bhabha and Wong are considered throughout this chapter for their research on visual representations and the formation of stereotypes. As Wong argues, the 'essence' of the 'non-white' groups had to be visually simplified and thus a stereotype formed.²¹ It was this simplification that has been found in animated Voodoo. Although animation and cartoons are deemed as harmless entertainment and of a certain time they are debasing Vodou and Haitian culture (as well as many other cultures).

The theatrical productions focussed more on aspects of black history with Vodou written as an integral part to the culture of the country rather than recontextualising the religion in isolation. These plays have been popular for decades with *The Emperor Jones* being remade for the London stage in 2007, indicating a renewed interest in Haitian history for new audiences in the twenty-first century. A production of significance was *Vodou Nation*. This was the most elaborate and celebratory Vodou performance to be staged for British audiences. The accompanying literature gave readers an insight into the history and culture of Haiti (Chapter Five, pp.344-348). This was unusual as many preferred to let audiences construct their own meaning from the representations before them.

²¹ Wong (1978).

Television provided an opportunity to show the films of the previous decades. There were new audiences absorbing the misrepresentations that had been constructed previously, perpetuating the stereotypes and renewing the Voodoo discourse. Documentaries were the ideal place to represent 'facts' but these facts were compiled through a process of production that allowed individual viewpoints and the exploitation of the subject due to the need for a narrative. Drama was an area that evolved throughout the twentieth century and consistently improved on previous representations. This genre eventually allowed Voodoo to feature as an aspect of Haitian or Louisiana culture such as in *The X-Files*. Rather than being a solitary entity, this integration did not prevent the exploitation even though there appeared to be a more conscientious attempt at authenticity. A number of researchers were considered when referring to audience, writers such as Dayan and Katz and Throsby and Withers.²² It was important to consider how the Voodoo related performances would be viewed by the audience and how a 'live' performance has a different interaction to a cinema audience. Voodoo and Haiti related theatrical productions were accepted and reviews good, despite their limited numbers.

There are over a million Haitians living in North America and arguably the most well known association with Voodoo is in New Orleans. This was the first location for displaced Haitians. Slaves arrived with their masters when they came to work on plantations in the Southern states and then thousands of Haitians arrived after fleeing Haiti during the revolution. From this mix evolved Creole culture, Creole being a person of "non-American ancestry, whether African or

²² Dayan and Katz, 16-17; Throsby and Withers, 96.

European, who was born in the Americas.”²³ Voodoo is known to have been in New Orleans from the eighteenth century although it may have been there before but there were no records to substantiate this. Voodoo gained a profile in the city through newspaper reports, in the *Daily Picayune* in 1874 there was an account that claimed to describe ‘The Birth of Voudouism,’ during 1723. The article alludes to Voodoo but does not mention it by name; it is referred to as “supernatural business.” This does indicate that it was during the eighteenth century that people became familiar with the religion.²⁴ Cultural productions have featured New Orleans as a location, especially in literature and film. New Orleans is an important focus for Voodoo research because it permeates every aspect of life and is arguably more accessible than Haitian Vodou. New Orleans Voodoo does differ from Haitian Vodou because of the syncretic nature of the religion but there are many similarities. The altars are as beautiful and eclectic and the ritualistic practices of every day life the same. One of these practices is the placing of red brick dust at the entrance to a building to ward off evil, a practice described by Haitians and Creoles and a visual element included in the film *The Skeleton Key* (Fig.80), also note the placing of the chicken foot, a symbol associated with good and bad luck in Voodoo and Hoodoo. This is an area of research to be included in future publications being prepared by the author.

²³ Gwendolin Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995) 157.

²⁴ *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), “A Wild Story - 1723 - The Birth of Voudouism,” 28 June 1874.



Fig.80. Red brick dust in a still from *The Skeleton Key*.²⁵

New Orleans Voodoo appears to have attracted less misrepresentation than Haitian Vodou. This may be because the religion is in America as opposed to on an island in the Caribbean that was perceived to need 'civilising' by the force of the US.

Vodou is an important aspect of Haitian cultural heritage and Haitians have continued to celebrate their own culture through their festivals and arts. It is the West that has allowed itself to be influenced by the Western discourse on a Caribbean religion leading to stereotypes, myth and misunderstanding. This research examined cultural production since 1850 to establish the influences of Haitian Vodou but the study was much wider, there were other issues such as politics and prejudice within the works that needed to be considered.

²⁵ Fig.80. This still is taken from the film *The Skeleton Key*, dir. Iain Softley, Universal Pictures 2005.

Setting out to establish whether Voodoo has been re-imagined in post-twentieth century productions involved examining the evolution of representations for over a century. There have been shifts in bias throughout the last hundred years particularly in the areas of film, television and animation and yet each new piece of work appears to reflect an aspect of a previous. William Seabrook is still being quoted as the one who brought zombies to popular culture and into the mass imagination and yet others before him had written of the phenomena (Chapter Two, pp 134-136). The Voodoo doll has appeared in many forms and yet many of the early descriptions were written at the time of the American Occupation of Haiti. This was a time that required the US forces and Government to justify their colonial stance and so gave the American public an indication from what they were being saved.

Haiti has received persecution, misunderstanding and misrepresentation since Columbus landed in 1492, and Vodou has faced the same treatment since first being mentioned in the eighteenth century. As each generation passed the stereotype was perpetuated through a variety of different media and each strengthened the next. It is unlikely that the sensationalism associated with Vodou will be replaced by a more 'authentic' portrayal when audiences still crave the exotic and otherness that Voodoo provides.

This research has engaged with and analysed contemporary and historical theories of race, representation, colonialism and post-colonialism. The methodologies have been varied as was the nature of the research. This thesis brings together an extensive body of representations of Vodou since 1850, from

early literary works through to cutting edge digital gaming. Research of this nature enhances our understanding and encourages further analysis and discourse. The representations of Voodoo provide a framework for further critical and analytical debate. Many of these representations are still in circulation and with the political, environmental and economical situation Haiti faces this is a time to reflect on our Western interpretations of this culture.

Vodou is a unique cultural heritage that should be celebrated. It has faced oppression, persecution and prejudice and yet has continued to thrive as a religious force that is practiced by millions into the twenty-first century.

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**Films featuring Voodoo
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Films featuring Voodoo

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The Believers. Dir. John Schlesinger. Orion Pictures International, 1987.

The Big Easy. Dir. Jim McBride. Columbia Pictures, 1987.

Black Moon. Dir. Roy William Neill. Columbia, 1934.

Blood of Ghastly Horror. Dir. Al Adamson. Independent International Pictures, 1971.

Buttcrack. Dir. Jim Larsen. Troma Entertainment, 1998.

Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh. Dir. Bill Condon. Polygram, 1995.

Childs Play. Dir. Tom Holland. United Artists, 1988.

Childs Play 2. Dir. John Lafia. Universal, 1990.

Chloe Love is Calling You. Dir. Marshall Neilan. 1934. DVD. Alpha Video Distribution, 2005.

Comin' Round the Mountain. Dir. Charles Lamont. Universal International, 1951.

Curse of the Voodoo [aka The Curse of Simba]. Dir. Lindsay Shonteff. 1965. DVD. Elite Entertainment. n.d.

Dead and Breakfast. Dir. Matthew Leutwyler. Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2004.

The Devil's Daughter. Dir. Arthur Leonard. 1939. DVD. Alpha Video Enterprises, 2005.

Drums o'Voodoo. Dir. Arthur Hoerl. 1934. Videocassette. Sinister Cinema, 1996.

Eve's Bayou. Dir. Kasi Lemmons. Trimark, 1997.

The Face of Marble. Dir. William Beaudine. Monogram Pictures Corporation, 1946.

French Quarter. Dir. Dennis Kane. Crown International Pictures, 1977.

The Ghost Breakers. Dir. George Marshall. Paramount Pictures, 1940.

Headhunter. Dir. Francis Schaeffer. DVD. Ilc, 2001.

The House on Skull Mountain. Dir. Ron Honthaner. Twentieth Century Fox, 1974.

I Eat Your Skin. Dir. Del Tenney. 1964. DVD. Alpha Video Distribution, 2003.

I Walked with a Zombie. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. Prod. Val Lewton. RKO. 1943. Videocassette. Polygram, 1998.

Interview with a Vampire. Dir. Neil Jordan. Warner Bros, 1994.

King of the Zombies. Dir. Jean Yarbrough. Monogram, 1941.

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Scream Blacula Scream. Dir. Bob Kelljan. American International, 1973.

The Sea Bat. Dir. Wesley Ruggles. MGM, 1930.

The Serpent and the Rainbow. Dir. Wes Craven. Universal, 1987.

The Skeleton Key. Dir. Iain Softly. Universal Pictures, 2005.

Sugar Hill. Dir. Paul Maslansky. American International, 1974.

Valley of the Zombies. Dir. Philip Ford. Republic Pictures Corporation, 1946.

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Red Dragon. Dir. Brett Ratner. Universal Pictures, 2002.

Rosemary's Baby. Dir. Roman Polanski. Paramount, 1968.

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