Sarah Juliet Lauro

The Transatlantic Zombie: Slavery, Rebellion, and Living Death. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015. 288 pp. (Paper US\$ 28.95)

Zombies, zombies, zombies! It seems like the world is increasingly full of zombies and that people everywhere are obsessed with them. Literally hundreds of scholars have recently taken up the topic in a wide range of academic disciplines: philosophy, neuroscience, sociolinguistics, critical race theory, anthropology, history, religious studies, literary criticism, and so on. And though much of this work is indeed exciting, the field of zombie studies has until now lacked any serious conversation between the best in relevant Caribbeanist scholarship and the best in relevant U.S. cultural studies. Case in point, the Zombie Research Society is steered by an impressive group of scholars and artists, and yet there is not a single Haitianist, Caribbeanist, or Africanist among them.

Enter Sarah Juliet Lauro's important new book, *The Transatlantic Zombie*, which offers the most thorough single "cultural history" of the zombie to date and an intelligent analytical statement about "zombie dialectics." Trained in the humanities and social thought, Lauro is at her best when writing about zombic representations in Anglophone fictional literature and film and in the conceptual, performance, and visual arts; her incisive social commentary on the zombie in general is also particularly valuable. The range of sources that she engages is remarkable, and her often lyrical narrative takes readers on a gripping historical tour—Africa, the Caribbean, Hollywood, and beyond—to consider the zombie's prolific valences (past, present, and future), keeping questions of empire and resistance at the heart of the interpretation. Though at times I lost the plot and wasn't sure where we were going next, that is more the result of the zombie's ghoulish sprawl than the effect of any organizational flaw in this finely written study.

Following an introduction outlining her intriguing "zombie dialectics," Lauro presents a chapter entitled "The (Pre)History of the Zombi/e," followed by one on the "cultural theft" of the zombie and its transformation in American cinema, another on Haitian reappropriations/reimaginings of the zombie, and finally an analysis of "textual zombies in the visual arts." This last chapter contains particularly interesting reflections on the work of artists Jillian McDonald and George Pfau. There is also a wonderful conclusion that opens with a lively "synchronic snapshot of zombies in the early twenty-first century" (p. 189). Given such range and sophistication, the book would probably not work well in undergraduate classrooms, though it surely would in graduate seminars. It is also imaginable that some people will just read or teach

parts of the text and forego the rest, as the intended audience for Lauro's project is not entirely clear.

The chapter on the Haitian Revolution and early zombic history, for instance, does not seem intended so much for historians of the Caribbean as for members of the Zombie Research Society and like-minded Americanists, to provide them with a deeper understanding of the zombie's Afro-Caribbean roots. As historiography, however, this chapter unfortunately is not based on any original archival research, and though Lauro does work with selected published primary sources in French, she sometimes relies on secondary sources in English for access to them, occasionally as excerpts. To me, these methodological shortcomings result in a surface reading of the epoch that Lauro uses to make a shaky case for the zombie being as much about resistance as it is about capitalism or empire. The historical evidence that she presents to support this claim is rather slim and thus she has not in fact "shown here that the zombie is symbolically legible, too, as a symbol of slave rebellion" (p. 50). That herbs and poisons were used by insurgent slaves and that they were/are also used to zombify people in Haiti hardly amounts to any symbolic legibility of resistance in the zombie, for example. Moreover, in the Dominguean/Haitian context, where the idea/reality is almost always about black people ensorcelling other black people, one can hardly see how people who are robbed of their agency or soul are anything more or less than victims—victims who are nothing at all like the black insurgent rising up against white power that Lauro tries to squeeze out of the zombie and into her dialectic.

But none of that changes the fact that Lauro is one leading American zombie studies scholar who actually did fieldwork in Haiti, studied Haitian Creole, spoke with a leading Haitian Vodou priest, and went to great lengths to provide some vital historical context. The end result is a great book that should be a go-to source for years to come. It is the most holistic study yet of why zombies are all around us, where they come from, where they are going, and where they might be taking us. Lauro's is a voice that anyone interested in zombies should listen to carefully.

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