

Richard PRICE and Sally PRICE, *Two Evenings in Saramaka*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. xvi+417, ISBN 0-226-68062-2).

Kay Stone

Volume 14, Number 2, 1992

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082490ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082490ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Stone, K. (1992). Review of [Richard PRICE and Sally PRICE, *Two Evenings in Saramaka*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. xvi+417, ISBN 0-226-68062-2).] *Ethnologies*, 14(2), 190–192. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082490ar>

remains a mystery.) And surely only the most devoted reader could recall the 22 versions individually characterized in a single paragraph on page 123!

The problem of summary is shared by anyone who would compare long, little-known, or hard-to-get texts — such as folk narrative or ephemeral popular literature — which cannot be presented to the reader in totality; unlike the critic of “elite” literature, the writer does not have the luxury of the reader’s knowledge of the texts as a starting point, and so has the double job of supplying enough text to “hook” the reader and to make her commentary intelligible. (The reader of this book should start with Appendices Two and Three — a facsimile version of Beaumont’s tale and a twentieth century oral French version.) Numerous illustrations are reproduced throughout the book, with the sometimes curious effect of being paired with a text from another time and place; a picture from “Aunt Mavor’s Toy Books” series of the late 1800s, for example, faces a discussion of Angela Carter’s story, with the result that now the two are paired (rather compellingly) in my mind. There is also a certain incongruity in the introduction of another authorial voice, with the appended essay by Larry DeVries, “Literary Beauties and Folk Beasts: Folktale Issues in *Beauty and the Beast*”, Hearne gave a marvellously solid and personable tour through several centuries of “Beauty and the Beast”, and it was satisfying to take leave of her at the end.

Barbara RIETI
University of Newfoundland
St. John’s, Newfoundland

Richard PRICE and Sally PRICE, *Two Evenings in Saramaka*,
(Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp.
xvi+417, ISBN 0-226-68062-2).

The two evenings referred to are “storytelling events” that take place in the complex of activities surrounding two wakes in central Surinam. This is not a collection of stories, but rather an attempt to recreate these evenings in full within the context of the broader social scene. Individual stories are presented as they actually developed, interspersed with bits and pieces of other narratives (called “tale nuggets” by the Prices), enlivened with music and dance, interrupted by conversation and commentary from active listeners.

The modest title leads us to expect far less than what the Prices have to offer after many years of personal and academic work in Surinam.

For almost three decades they lived in Saramaka villages inhabited by survivors of slaves who escaped into the forests in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, carrying a rich heritage of African traditions with them.

To emphasize the serious nature of their quest the Prices open the book with a supposed conversation between two scholars debating the merits of a collection of "mere folklore", to which they respond:

In Saramaka, folktales are neither children's stories nor cosmological charters. Rather, they combine for Saramakas many of the rewards that Americans, Germans, or Brazilians find in television, novels, movies, and theater. They are — albeit oral — adult imaginative literature par excellence, with all the emotional and moral depth of a long cultural tradition that remains alive and vibrant, constantly renewed but always re-flecting its links with the past. (p. xi)

This study is intended for general readers as well as for academic specialists. The authors present the Saramaka as members of their larger communities and as individuals, using both words and photographs. Their detailed introduction describes the broad cultural pattern within which the various storytellers function as "collective fabulists". By this they do not mean the vague, romantic "communal creativity" popularized by nineteenth century writers (the Grimm brothers, for example); instead they emphasize the communally shared experience of natural exchanges in which boundaries between tellers and listeners are flexible, fluid, and constantly shifting.

The actual storytelling sessions take up most of the 400-odd pages of this study, each preceded by detailed reports of the two separate wakes. We "hear" several stories told wholly or in part, as well as accompanying songs and other responses — conversations, commentary on the stories and tellers, complaints that listeners are not responding enough, requests for other stories. Speakers are identified when possible even when they contribute only a single word. For readers who wish to see the stories in their original language, the Prices include an interlinear translation of one of these in a lengthy appendix.

We are told that "to participate in an evening of Saramaka tale-telling is to join speakers and listeners in the collective creation and maintenance of a fictional but richly significant separate reality" (p. 10). The Prices attempt to provide a sense of being *almost* present at these sessions — almost, because of course the printed word cannot fully convey the experience of an oral event no matter how carefully presented the material might be.

At first glance the book seems excessive in its ethnographic correct-

ness, with every response carefully set down in proper ethnopoetic style. However, the Prices' sincere admiration for the people and their stories makes this as much a work of art as an ethnographic document.

Kay STONE
University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba

R. COSANDEY, A. GAUDREAU et T. GUNNING (sous la direction de), *Une invention du diable? Cinéma des premiers temps et religion/An Invention of the Devil? Religion and Early Cinema* (Québec, Lausanne, Presses de l'Université Laval, Éditions Payot, 1992, 383 p.).

Depuis une dizaine d'années, le cinéma des premiers temps suscite l'intérêt dans le milieu des études cinématographiques d'une façon beaucoup plus marquée qu'il ne l'avait fait auparavant. Une association internationale a été créée en 1987 afin d'établir des liens entre les individus, universitaires ou non, préoccupés par le sujet. Elle a pour nom Domitor. Nous ne reviendrons pas sur le parcours généalogique de cette dénomination; les éditeurs le font mieux que nous dans l'introduction de ce recueil. Disons d'emblée que nous avons affaire ici à une sélection des communications du premier colloque de liaison de cette association qui s'est tenu à Québec en juin 1990.

Comme peut le laisser croire le titre, le cinéma des premiers temps, même s'il ne fut pas partout considéré comme une «invention du diable», fut inévitablement confronté à la religion, à son système de pouvoir et à ses représentations. Par opportunisme au départ, les organisateurs de cet événement avaient choisi ce thème en raison justement des débuts conflictuels que connut le cinéma dans le paysage social québécois fortement catholique du début du siècle et, de façon plus anecdotique, parce que l'une des premières projections du cinématographe Lumière au Canada avait eu lieu, en 1897, dans les locaux du Séminaire de Québec devant plusieurs autorités ecclésiastiques de la province. Ils ont été dépassés par la pertinence du sujet qui avait été imposé.

Ce livre contient 26 articles répartis sur quatre parties. La première est confinée à une histoire narrative de type institutionnel. Les éditeurs ont préféré y placer les articles qui abordent les rapports entre l'Église et le cinéma, du point de vue de la censure autant que de celui de la propagande, tant il est vrai que, selon les lieux, le cinéma balbutiant ne connaît pas le même