

The Symbolic Blending of Science and Magic in Cabiya's *Wicked Weeds*

In this paper, I explore the wonderfully seamless blending of science and magic in Pedro Cabiya's *Wicked Weeds*. The premise of the story, made clear from the start, proclaims this seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition: the narrative follows a pharmaceutical executive who believes that he is a zombie. His quest is to find a combination of herbs – a scientific remedy – that will reverse his arguably magical condition. Throughout the novel, herbs and weeds are introduced not just in terms of their taxonomic classification and composition, but also in light of their magical properties and ties to folklore. Thus, the merging of the scientific and the marvelous becomes a plot device.

This interplay of science and magic is also communicated by the structure of the novel. It is set up as a compilation of various documents – a scrapbook that anthologizes the voices of different narrators. Some of the chapters pertain to tales of enchantment, while others are transcripts of police interviews. The “Scrapbook Contents” includes the sections “Records,” “Laboratory,” “Vacuus,” and “Field Journal,” a mixture of the straightforward reporting of facts (science) and subjective musings interspersed with descriptions of supernatural occurrences (magic). The last section is an appendix of herbs and weeds, though what looks like a Linnaean list is also rife with references to occult phenomena.

Set on Hispaniola, this story reflects other blends as well: of languages, mythologies, and traditions. The confluence of science and magic may be symbolic of the interflow of cultures, and function as a trope that conveys the underlying themes of displacement, otherness, and assimilation. Through its plot, structure, and devices, *Wicked Weeds* offers a compelling comingling of notions that typically seem to behave like oil and water. Both science and magic engage with nature in this tale, providing a language with which to describe the often nonsensical, even traumatic facets of alterity – ones that may otherwise be incommunicable.