



The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge

Carlos Castaneda

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A Yaqui way of knowledge.

The teachings of don Juan is the story of a remarkable journey: the first awesome steps on the road to becoming a "man of knowledge" -- the road that continues with *A Separate Reality* and *Journey to Ixtlan*.

"For me there is only the traveling on paths that have heart, on any path that may have heart. There I travel, and the only worthwhile challenge is to traverse its full length. And there I travel, looking, looking, breathlessly." -- Don Juan

The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge Details

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11- The Wheel of Time: The Shamans of Mexico Their Thoughts About Life Death & the Universe (The Teachings of Don Juan #11), Carlos Castaneda

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Ninja says

This obscure writer has a huge cult following who believe that Castaneda's semi-fictional stories about Don Juan and the indigenous peoples of Mexico hold the keys to power and enlightenment. Ninja is a skeptic. She doesn't believe in any of that rot – but they are best books being peddled as non-fiction that I have ever read.

Years ago, I caught an edition of “Imprint” on our local public television station TVO. The host, Daniel Richler, was leading a panel discussion about native spirituality and its literature. At one point during the discussion Richler held up a copy of Carlos Castaneda's first book *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. He said with great confidence and certainty that Castaneda's works about the Yaqui Indians of Mexico represented the greatest hoax since the Piltdown Man. With that, he seemed to dismiss the book out of hand. I had already, if truth be known, dismissed Castaneda as a new age phony long ago so I too moved right along with Richler to the next item of discussion. I was surprised then when one of the panel members, Medicine Grizzly Bear Adams, brought the discussion back to Castaneda. He said that Castaneda must have really been trained under a traditional man of knowledge, (as Castaneda referred to don Juan). Otherwise, Adams insisted, he must be “one of the greatest philosophers or genius’ of your time...” to be able to synthesize the information he presents in his books from his sources, whatever they may be.

That made me revisit the body of work Castaneda wrote, and since then I have read all the books about his so called tutelage under the nagual, Don Juan. They are most entertaining and thought provoking and many quotes from the book have come down to us into the popular culture. The most well-known of these is has come down as something in the form of following a path with heart.

“...a warrior must always keep in mind that a path is only a path; if he feels that he should not follow it, he must not stay with it under any conditions. His decision to keep on that path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. He must look at every path closely and deliberately. There is a question that a warrior has to ask: ‘Does this path have a heart?’”

There are many more gems like this in the books. He was a spiritual genius. Whether or not he made it up, he weaved the work into a self-contained reality in its own right.

? Sh3lly - Grumpy Name-Changing Wanderer ? says

Amazing. Essential reading for any deep thinker and open-minded person who has experienced "non-ordinary realities."

This book spoke to my soul. I have had out of body experiences and know firsthand that our physical reality is not the only one. I have personally experienced some of what is described here - and not from ingesting peyote, but from spontaneous OOBES.

I don't know why I did not read this sooner as I've heard of Castaneda well before now. It's comforting to have your personal experiences verified. I guess this has been referred to as both fiction and non-fiction. Maybe it's a combination of both, but I know some of it is not merely fiction.

A lot of it is just descriptions of preparing hallucinogenics, but there are some truly special nuggets of spiritual wisdom here. It's interesting to watch Castaneda fight his logic and rationalism as he experiences these shifts in consciousness. A little infuriating at times if you've already moved beyond the denial. :)

In general, I found this very pleasantly accessible and easy to read. Maybe I'm not so Classics Stupid™ after all?

Miguel Mayher says

You may find this book has a lot of chaff on how they prepare peyote and other drugs, mundane descriptions in diary... yet when you less expect it, they hit you with a boulder of wisdom that leaves you freezed.

There is ONE core idea in the book that makes the price tag disappear. You cannot pay for it. It goes like this:

"Anything is one of a million paths. Therefore you must always keep in mind that a path is only a path; if you feel you should not follow it, you must not stay with it under any conditions. To have such clarity you must lead a disciplined life. Only then will you know that any path is only a path and there is no affront, to oneself or to others, in dropping it if that is what your heart tells you to do. But your decision to keep on the path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. I warn you. Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary.

This question is one that only a very old man asks. Does this path have a heart? All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush, or into the bush. In my own life I could say I have traversed long long paths, but I am not anywhere. Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey; as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong; the other weakens you.

Before you embark on any path ask the question: Does this path have a heart? If the answer is no, you will know it, and then you must choose another path. The trouble is nobody asks the question; and when a man finally realizes that he has taken a path without a heart, the path is ready to kill him. At that point very few

men can stop to deliberate, and leave the path. A path without a heart is never enjoyable. You have to work hard even to take it. On the other hand, a path with heart is easy; it does not make you work at liking it."

Ever since I read the book I have followed that advice. Life blossoms with a feeling of realness.

Mladen says

Svakako da bi mi ova knjiga mnogo više legla da sam dvadesetak godina mlađi i siguran sam da bih pronašao mnogo više paragrafa vrednih da zastanem i pročitam ih ponovo.

Kao, na primer, ovaj:

"No! I'm never angry at anybody! No human being can do anything important enough for that. You get angry at people when you feel that their acts are important. I don't feel that way any longer."

Poslednja trećina je suvoparna strukturološka analiza koja ubija svu čarobitanja i magiju celokupnog opisanog doživljaja, tako da sam odlučio da taj deo apsolutno ignorišem, ne samo u čitanju, nego i u ocenjivanju.

Malo je prevagnula i nostalgija.

Shodno tome, 4 zvezdice.

kaelan says

Back in the 70's, Carlos Castaneda—a young anthropologist from the University of California—was *the shit* amongst hippies, new-agers and wanna-be-cool academics desperate to shed their stuffy tweed. Now? Not so much. For many readers, Castaneda's death knell sounded when most of his accounts turned out to be—*factually speaking*—complete and utter BS. To which diehard Castanites objected: "But, like, what is truth anyways, man?"

I don't wish to get terribly enmeshed in the debate. But to my logical, unenlightened mind, the following statement seems like it should hold: namely, that since *The Teachings of Don Juan* purports either to be non-fiction or fiction, and since these possibilities are mutually exclusive (or at least could easily be defined as such), then we can inquire into which accolades and/or criticisms apply to each, and whether any apply to both.

Accordingly, we should be able to forward a general appraisal of the book that doesn't rely upon any dodgy factual corroboration. Let us begin...

Case #1: It's non-fiction.

Ever since it was first published in 1968, *The Teachings of Don Juan* has been marketed as non-fiction. Yet as a work of non-fiction, Castaneda's exploration of hallucinogens and spirituality suffers from several major defects. Perhaps the most glaring of these involves the description of Don Juan as a "Yaqui sorcerer," despite the fact that the actual Yaqui culture of Mexico is absolutely nothing like that described by Castaneda. I mean, the Yaqui don't even use peyote (although the Huichol do). Major awk! And for those interested, Richard DeMille has devoted two entire books to the chronicling other such factual gaffes.

So Castaneda makes a pretty piss-poor anthropologist, a flaw which extends to his treatment of alternate

epistemologies. Apart from some recurrent and annoyingly sophomoric discussions on the nature of objectivity, he doesn't even attempt to broach the political and social dimensions of "Yaqui" (or whatever) knowledge. Like, the Native Americans of Mexico have had a pretty rough time with oppression, colonialism and whatnot. Couldn't this be relevant to Don Juan's lament for the lost Golden Age of "Indian" sorcerers, or his individual preference for knowledge over power? And as an anthropologist, shouldn't Castaneda have made more of the (sexist) gender norms that pervade much of his benefactor's teachings?

Finally, I ought to briefly mention the "Structural Analysis" that makes up the last quarter of this book. Holy academic posturing, Batman! If sentences like "Corroboration of the rule meant the act of verifying it, the act of attesting to its validity by confirming it pragmatically in an experimental manner" prove anything, it's that the UCLA professors that originally allowed this drivel to pass for Castaneda's MA thesis are guilty of gross charlatanry and intellectual dishonesty.

Case #2: It's fiction.

Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed reading *The Teachings of Don Juan*. While Castaneda isn't the best of writers, he ain't half bad; and the various hallucinatory experiences that he describes tend to be wonderfully bizarre enough to make up for any weaknesses in his prose style. And sure, the fundamental claim of the book—that reality is far more malleable than we may first think—is probably true in a rather general sense.

Does all this make it a good novel? I don't think so. Ultimately, the characters struck me as too flat, the emotional dimensions too underdeveloped. And why introduce the mysterious 'la Catalina' (complete with scare quotes) without doing anything significant with her? And why oh why subject the reader to the abject torture that is the "Structural Analysis"? Tell me that, Carlos! Tell me that!

Yet the most serious problem with the book *qua* fiction is that its author never once admitted it to be as such. And here's where things get fucked up. In the latter part of his life, Castaneda led a spiritualist cult called Cleargreen (check out their website!), and it's suspected that he convinced several of its members (attractive young women, naturally) to commit suicide upon his death. In the words of one former Cleargreen initiate: "If he hadn't presented his stories as fact it's unlikely the cult would exist. As nonfiction, it became impossibly more dangerous."

Conclusions.

As a work of anthropology, *The Teachings of Don Juan* isn't fit to wipe a monkey's ass. As a novel, it's decent enough, but potentially harmful. If this was thirty years ago, I'd maybe recommend reading Castaneda as a source of conversational fodder. But now? Just pick yourself up a copy of *The Doors of Perception* or *Hallucinations*, why don't you?

An Addendum.

But what is truth, man? In *The Teachings of Don Juan*, Castaneda puts forward an epistemology according to which the concepts of "truth" and "reality" don't mean what we think they mean. How can we refute him, then, without begging the question? Upon what standard of "truth" can his view be "wrong"?

Furthermore, Castaneda talks a lot about power, and how one's experiences in "nonordinary reality" possess "pragmatic" value in the "ordinary" world. He also displays a certain penchant for *yerba del diablo* (i.e., "devil's weed"), an "ally" which confers "superfluous power" upon the knowledge-seeker.

Where am I going with this? As far as I can tell, the following two propositions should strike most people as uncontroversial: (1) from writing bestsellers to brainwashing vulnerable babes, Castaneda certainly

usually just boils down to rich white kids that watched the matrix one too many times. Again, in the person of Don Juan, the drugs occupy a very secondary position. Foremost, most of the drug experiences are terrible, and are used for specific teaching purposes, usually some form of power. Second, Don Juan is a trickster and appears to be tripping up Casteneda in every way possible. The drugs seem more like very intuitive beatings than cool experiences. I would only hope that I might one day have someone to beat me like Don Juan beat Carlos

Adam says

A young anthropologist goes into the desert, meets an old shaman and does a bunch of peyote, DMT/salvia, and shrooms. This book is his account from one trip to another with bits of hippy-wisdom thrown in, like the oft-quoted "ask yourself if this path has a heart" passage. Beyond the tripping, the author doesn't seem to understand the spiritual aspects of what Don Juan is trying to tell him. Like when he smoked the "little smoke" and thought himself to become a bird, he asks Don Juan afterwards "did I really become a bird?" and needles him to give him an objective answer, which, in my opinion, defeats the purpose of the whole experience.

At the end of the book, Carlos Casteneda breaks down Don Juan's belief system in a very scientific yet oddly dogmatic kind of way, like a pastor of a newly found, but no-longer-sacred religion. By explaining it away he kills the mystical sense of his time in the desert and reduces it to nicely categorized names and departments; further nullifying his narrative to a simple hallucinogenic induced party time with an old Yaqui Indian man in New Mexico, all under the guise of his "Warrior's Way". His assessment of his time with Don Juan only goes as deep as his literal understanding of things, rather than any meaningful, metaphorical reflection of his "teaching". I couldn't decide if he's either really dense or just too westernized to see anything beyond his daily comprehension.

g says

The discussions on whether this book is fiction or non-fiction are rather futile, and prevent the reader from engaging with it more closely. I think a smarter move would be to suspend judgment on the matter, and look into what one can learn from this account.

The Teachings of Don Juan may be read as a bildungsroman where the narrator/anthropologist Carlos Casteneda engages with an alternative reality, under the strict guidance of Don Juan, on the path to becoming "a man of knowledge". As a means to become a man of knowledge, he experiments with peyote, jimson weed and magic mushrooms. The book constitutes of Casteneda's hallucinogen experiences and long discussions with his mentor, followed by a dull 'structural analysis'. His vivid and lengthy descriptions of an alternate reality (which may remind one of Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha) challenge the bubble of perception that the narrator has been enclosed in. At the same time, detailed dialogues between the master and his student (perhaps the most significant ethnographic tool in the book) reveal the incommensurable, yet fruitful, understandings/misunderstandings that are inherent to this learning experience (see page 101 for a good example). Unfortunately, the final structural analysis does not tell us anything new, but reveals how anthropological knowledge may be constrained by attempts at academic interpretation.

We meet Casteneda on a bus stop, and this bus stop is the first and the last secular space that we encounter in the book. After Casteneda begins developing a relationship with Don Juan, his sense of space and time is challenged by the alternative reality that he becomes inundated within. He is still attached to the calendar, and notes the date for each of his diary entries; yet, his sleep patterns transform, his capacity to judge

durations is hindered, and the reader does not care for the dates of his entries anymore. His movements in space cannot be coherently traced either: even though he seems to be spending most of his time on Don Juan's porch, he may as well be flying away. After the first few pages, his everyday accounts become disengaged from UCLA graduate student life, and except for a few moments (such as when he thinks about Georg Simmel), the reader does not glimpse any trace of his prior history. In this sense, Don Juan, like Carlos Castaneda, is constructed as an a-historical character, and the reader does not learn much about the mentor other than his experiences with his benefactor. Rather, the reader develops an understanding of both characters in relation to their mutual learning process.

In this learning process, the narrator portrays himself as a curious young man, and suspends any judgment on the Yaqui way of knowledge. Even though it is not difficult to notice his New Age admiration towards his master, the starkness of his descriptions eliminates any sense of exoticism, and rather evokes an attempt at cultural relativism. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that there are only two characters in the book: the narrator mentions the presence of others in various instances, but does not pay much attention to such conversations. The ethnographic account becomes, therefore, an account of explorations within a particular alternative learning session where the anthropologist is present with all his senses, rather than an exploration of Yaqui culture, and it is this particular focus that makes this book so strong. The absence of any conclusion, or judgment, regarding the Yaqui way of knowledge directs the reader to read this book as 'a path with a heart' rather than a conclusive argument on shamanism, and perhaps brings the author to a different understanding of anthropology.

Hyun-mi says

The Best Advice that anyone has ever given me is all in this book. This book is my spiritual guidance.

"A warrior acknowledges his pain but he doesn't indulge in it.

The mood of the warrior who enters into the unknown is not one of sadness; on the contrary, he's joyful because he feels humbled by his great fortune, confident that his spirit is impeccable, and above all, fully aware of his efficiency. A warrior's joyfulness comes from having accepted his fate, and from having truthfully assessed what lies ahead of him.

The basic difference between an ordinary man and a warrior is that a warrior takes everything as a challenge, while an ordinary man takes everything as a blessing or as a curse.

The self-confidence of the warrior is not the self-confidence of the average man. The average man seeks certainty in the eyes of the onlooker and calls that self-confidence. The warrior seeks impeccability in his own eyes and calls that humbleness. The average man is hooked to his fellow men, while the warrior is hooked only to infinity."

Laura says

I am going to give the same review to all the Carlos Castaneda books I read in that series, simply because

they are all outstanding. I was lucky to come across Castaneda very early on my magickal path. My spells and rituals have always relied on the power of intent, and I have found no better education on how to focus your intent than in this series of books. Back then (1994) they were classified as nonfiction. Lately, they say they are fiction. All I know is much of what is in these books works. And having been a Wiccan Faery Witch now for 13 years I know much of what is real to us is fiction to those not walking a magickal path. These are life-changing books you will never forget, and their teachings still influence my life today. Can't get any better than that!

Rich Flammer says

I found this book in my friend's house in Spring Lake, New Jersey about 20 years ago. Flipped through it, started reading, and couldn't put it down. Since then I've read all of Carlos Castaneda's books, but this is by far the best. Sadly, the power of this work is often diminished by readers who mistakenly, and obtusely, attribute his experiences solely to tripping through the use of psychotropic plants in Mexico. "That's a book about tripping," people have told me. But no, it really has nothing to do with that, and whether Castaneda ever actually met Don Juan, or experienced any of what he pens in this and his other books, who cares? His writing is profound, fun in a perverse way, and entirely engaging. If nothing that he has written about never actually happened, he's gotta have one of the best imaginations in the history of civilization. Somehow the New Age movement adopted his fine work and insightful observations as their own, but I feel this represents another sad marginalization of what he has done. All that aside, this book is stunning in its detail, suspense, flow, and message. One of my all-time favorites.
