

***Civilization and the Stolen Gift: Capital, Kin, and Cult in Eastern Peru.* JACQUES M. CHEVALIER. Foreword by Ernesto Laclau. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982. xvii + 467 pp., tables, maps, figures, bibliography, Index. \$49.50 (cloth).**

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It is certainly difficult in a brief review to do justice to this big, complex book of 467 dense pages and almost US\$50. At a time not especially noted for financial or intellectual risk taking, its publisher has surely made a bold venture. Yet the book is permeated with honest toil and good intentions: barely an argument or an author seemingly relevant to what appear to be its major concerns is left unexplained or undigested (e.g., Max Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic), tables of "data" abound even for what one would normally think of as highly contextualized features of society such as "love-spell rites"; and earlier ethnography such as that of Gerald Weiss and John Bodley on the Campa provides the author with a surfeit of matters to discuss—a task no doubt made easier by his one year of fieldwork in 1974–75 in the Peruvian *montaña*.

As far as I understand this book it is about structuralism and poststructuralism and Marxism and neo-Marxism and what the author calls the "complex articulation" of capitalist with non-capitalist practices in the frontier of the once rain-forested foothills of the eastern Andes of a small part of Peru. Thus the book swells the illustrious company of the formidably formalistic Great Debate concerning the "modes of analysis of the modes of articulation of the modes of production." In doing all this the author quite obsessively never lets an opportunity slip to remind us readers that although capitalism dominates, noncapitalist institutions coexist with it, and dogmatic Marxism has to face up to the complexities of social life.

This book is also about complexity. Indeed, that seems to be its main concern, for everything is very complex when you stop to think about it. Take the Catholic Church, as a random example, down there in the Peruvian *montaña*: "The Catholic Church is by no means in constant harmony with the social forces of capital, science and the state, let alone the traditional practices of non-western societies; nor does it produce an unproblematic, or non-conflictual and non-contradictory, vision of the overall integration of material, intellectual, and spiritual forces, and of culture with nature (as defined by western man) . . ." (p. 197).

It's all very complex, it seems, because Louis Althusser is as much a problem as a solution:

when put together with Claude Lévi-Strauss he generates all sorts of special complexities called "contradictions" vis-à-vis the weighty relationship of "the base" to "the superstructure." Now while it is true that this can be somewhat assuaged by taking, or rather "borrowing critically," from Pierre Bourdieu's "theory of practice," the gargantuan theoretical contraption to which all this name dropping and contradiction solving has given birth still has to be moved over oceans and along the rivers and into the trees of social life and history of eastern Peru.

Everything is complicated because although you shouldn't separate base from superstructure or mind from action (and therewith cleave a practice), in practice it seems awfully hard not to. Yet in practice everything also seems so well synthesized; automatically one and fusing. But out of obstinate habit one has to wreck it all by analyzing into constituents. Maybe this is more of a problem of theoretical practice than of practice? In any event it is complex—as any one of the book's 467 megapages of clenched-fisted prose will show you at a glance.

In practice it seems very hard to break with old practices, and this book depends on all too conventional categories and modes of presentation from its incongruous cover design by a Canadian Indian artist—whose prints, we are informed (lest we dare to think for ourselves), "are appreciated for their vivid colours, elegant lines, a sensitive vision of nature, and the unique stencil or *pochoir* technique developed by the artist"—to the intellectual scheme determining the organization of its chapters. First there is Oecology, then Social Relations, and last (but not least?) Spirit—nothing more or less than the heady ascent from the base to the superstructure! How oddly and sadly this fundamentalist practice of basic organization of presentation, this practice of representation, contrasts with authorial desire and theory: "Much like elsewhere, economic factors cannot be fully understood without reference to the systemic interpenetration of economic and non-economic instances within the social whole" (p. 11).

Is it unfair or daring to point out that a far simpler and convincing manner of capturing the synthetic unity aimed at by the author lies closer to hand, namely, in the fieldwork experience itself? Why is it that a book so clearly aimed at showing the complexity of everyday life and how that complexity upsets and creatively upsets theory, so utterly fails to convey the feel of peoples' lives? Note that the point here is most definitely not description versus theory, in so many ways a silly opposition, but the ways by which description enriches theory, and vice versa. I myself cannot but think that what I find

shallow and even a little pretentious in much of the author's discussion of topics like slavery, debt-peonage, shamanism, and Campa conquest-mythology (topics in which I have a deep and long interest in my studies of *montaña* society and history) is due precisely to this particular defect. The author's abstractions prove to be feeble stuff indeed when confronted with the very real complexity of Upper Amazonian slavery and debt-peonage, let alone the shamanic representation of these and other colonialist practices. How far are we supposed to give our gift of time and trust as readers to an author who, in the Althusserian jargon of the mental mortician, states: "At best a slave is constituted as a contradictory being, that is a 'human subject and a legal non-subject, a man-thing' (Hindness and Hurst . . .). The contradictory status that may be attached to the slave position produces an element of confusion or complexity that may have a direct effect upon the enslaved workers' relation to the means of production" (p. 201). And how! The only thing worse than this, in my opinion, is the sentimental but still abstract defense of the Indians that the author indulges in, worse than the mawkish Liberal condemning *la leyenda negra*.

There is such a painful need for something like the extended case method in this work. But amid so much theoretically contrived complexity it is difficult to know what the author's problematic is meant to be. Nor does Ernesto Laclau's strangely incongruous introduction in praise of deconstruction provide enough of an excuse for this confusion—which is how Laclau seems to understand deconstruction; anything goes.

In the final analysis, as a particular and also Marxist view of language ranging from Mikhail Bakhtin to Raymond Williams would contend, language and style are not separate from, secondary to, or a mere instrument of reality; to the contrary, language and style are constitutive of reality. Hence, poorly written works such as this do more than offend against etiquette. They offend, and grievously so, against the constituting of everyday life. From which it surely follows that a theory of practice has as its pressing obligation to attend first to its own chief practice—writing.

Civilization and the Stolen Gift makes me reflect how the gift of intellection was bestowed and fought about so as to simplify complexities with which our forms of life unreasonably confuse, hurt, and occasionally delight us, and on the other hand, how this gift is also a weapon with which we fight the vicious simplicities (such as racism, sexism, and reification . . .) that disguise complexity and exploitation. To create complexity may be often no less a politically oppressive act than to simplify in these ways, and the responsibility of intellectuals, as of university presses, guardians of this gift of intellection, is to constantly foster the critical eye with this in mind. But if this publication is a guide, it is to remind us that academic culture thrives on practices which are deeply invested in being complex and not critical. Or is that too simple?

The Invention of Tradition. ERIC HOBBSBAWM and TERENCE RANGER, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. vii + 300 pp., tables, Index. n.p.

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If there is a unifying theme in this collection, it is that history is very likely not what we think it is but has quite probably been invented by individuals to serve some political, ethnic, or personal end. This idea, as it recurs in the various chapters, is sometimes significant and alarming, as when Terence Ranger argues persuasively that much of what passes for African precolonial history is the result of "invented traditions" imposed by European colonies to legitimize their rule to themselves and to their colonized subordinates.

The other chapters, such as Hugh Trevor-Roper's dissection of the Highland tradition in Scotland or Prys Morgan's account of the fabrication of a Welsh past, the idea appears more the arch and slightly supercilious demonstration by the learned that both the masses and most scholars entertain amusingly mistaken notions about the origins of the kilt or the antiquity of folk festivities. Both of these latter authors seem most concerned with the personalities and foibles of the colorful individuals who invented these traditions and with the naivety of those who accepted them. Ranger and Bernard S. Cohn, in his analysis of rituals of incorporation and dominance in Victorian India, are far more concerned with the ways that traditions are invented as instruments of power and legitimacy. They both show clearly how such traditions, once invented, may be invoked by the people they were designed to intimidate or control, ultimately serving as a mobilizing ideology against their original inventors. David Cannadine's analysis of monarchic ritual in England falls somewhere between these two extremes. His attempt to do "thick description" of ritual diminishes the comparability the book appears to call for, but he does attend as well to the questions of the changing relations of power that ritual change emerges from and serves to modulate.

Hobsbawm's introductory chapter is a tantalizing statement of what he hopes the book can do to open a field of inquiry he admits is still relatively unformed, but his concluding chapter is a hodgepodge of things he labels "tradition"—ranging from monarchy, democracy, and political party through the organization of public education to the proletarian wearing of caps and the class basis of public sport. While it is possible to see how he would like to relate all of this to the broader questions of nationality, social order and control, political struggle, and class identity and mobilization, it comes out as little more than bits and pieces of social history from different times and places.

Cohn's and Ranger's topics do, it is true, offer them easier cases for demonstrating how history as tradition is created by specific individuals and