

Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America

Michael Taussig



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My aim in this book is to elicit the social significance of the devil in the folklore of contemporary plantation workers and miners in South America. The devil is a stunningly apt symbol of the alienation experienced by peasants as they enter the ranks of the proletariat, and it is largely in terms of that experience that I have cast my interpretation. The historical and ethnographic context lead me to ask: What is the relationship between the image of the devil and capitalist development? What contradictions in social experience does the fetish of the spirit of evil mediate? Is there a structure of connections between the redeeming power of the antichrist and the analytic power of Marxism?

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