

Review / Reseña

De Castro, Juan E. *Bread and Beauty: The Cultural Politics of José Carlos Mariátegui*.
Boston: Brill Publishers, 2021.

Martín Camps

University of the Pacific

Mariátegui, the founder of *Amanta*, an innovative magazine established in 1926, and theorizer of Latin American socialism, is the focus of this book, which references this passage in the title: “The revolution will be for the poor not only the conquest of bread, but also of beauty, of art, of thought, of all the accessories of the spirit” (3). Mariátegui promoted the elimination of discriminatory structures in the Andes, founded the Socialist Party in Peru, started a labor union, and disseminated artistic ideas at the same time. De Castro offers a survey of *mariateguismo* in the English-speaking world. He notes that, despite Mariátegui’s opposition to American imperialism, he recognized that the wealth of the United States was in its people. De Castro points to a vast bibliography and underlines masterpieces of Latin American scholarship such as Alberto Flores Galido’s *La agonía de Mariátegui* (1980) among a panoply of works. Mariátegui’s importance was boosted after the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and culminated with a congress of *mariateguistas* at the University of Sinaloa in Mexico in 1980, where critics moved on from reading him through the lens of the Soviet interpretation of Marxism. That same year coincided with the actions of the Shining Path—which purportedly was inspired by his ideas—and concluded with the capture

of Abimael Guzmán in 1992 and a country in shambles. Mariátegui embodies an Andean indigenous rationality that diverges from Western thought, and De Castro proposes revisiting Mariátegui and reflecting on the “triumph of Capitalism” and its consequences of inequality and environmental catastrophe.

In chapter two, the author gives the intellectual biography of Mariátegui, born in 1894 in Moquegua, and who died on April 16, 1930, at the young age of 35, because of an osteoarticular tuberculosis that also confined him to a wheelchair due to the amputation of his leg in 1924. Mariátegui declared the Peruvian highlands, where most of the indigenous people lived, as the nation, and that social problems called for reform and revolution. As it was customary at the beginning of the 20th century, literary groups congregated around a literary journal. Such was the case of *Colónida*, which became an insurrection against oligarchies and a form of participating in Peruvian society. In 1917, Mariátegui was jailed for organizing a dance performance in a cemetery with the eccentric dancer Norka Rouskaya. His sojourn in Italy was deeply influential in his thinking. He met Henri Barbusse, Maxim Gorky, and witnessed the *biennio rosso*, a period of intense social conflict in Italy. The editorial work of Antonio Gramsci and Piero Gobetti had an impact on Mariátegui’s vision of politics. De Castro says that Mariátegui even spoke Italian at home, and many would call him the “Latin American Gramsci.” Mariátegui died prematurely in 1930 and, according to Mark Becker, there were long processions of workers in the streets of Lima at his funeral. After his passing, his widow and survivors would reprint his works and revitalize his influence in the 1950s, but the Cuban Revolution was the event that reintroduced marked interest in Mariátegui.

Chapter three studies the influence of French social thinker George Sorel, a follower of Proudhon, Marx, Vico and Bergson, who is remembered for his defense of violence. De Castro writes that Mariátegui came in contact with Sorel’s writings before his travels to Europe in 1919 and criticizes the illusion of progress and bourgeois modernity. Mariátegui transculturizes Sorel to Peruvian reality, and Sorel, not Lenin, became the relevant theoretical influence on the author of *Seven Essays*, particularly when defending and celebrating indigenous traditions and popular legal philosophy. Mariátegui has also been seen as the precursor of Liberation Theology, developed by Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, also Peruvian.

Chapter four studies the problematic presence of racial stereotypes in Mariátegui’s writing. Mariátegui talks about Chinese migrants to Peru as having the “defects of the decrepit Orient,” or Afro Peruvians bringing “superstition” and “primitivism.” De Castro, without minimalizing the disturbing nature of Mariátegui’s

comments, takes into account the ideas of race in Lima at the time in which he developed intellectually; the Perú of the start of the 20th Century “was a society in which racial hierarchies served to justify the existence of social inequality and the unimpeded continuance of colonial structures” (71). Mariátegui was a defender of indigenous populations in Peru, and, according to De Castro, he evaluates not racial traits but their cultural compatibility (or not) with modernity and socialism.

Chapter five studies the identification of Mariátegui as a Peruvian nationalist. He wrote about the issue of women’s rights and feminism in 1924, but Peru would not grant voting rights to women until 1955, 36 years after the United States. Mariátegui recognized in the Indian the foundation and the formation of the Peruvian nation, and that true nationalism is linked to cosmopolitanism by changing colonial modes of thinking and reconceptualizing the nation. For him: “The nation lives in the precursors of its future more than in the survivors of its past” (107).

Chapter six revises Mariátegui’s politics and literature. The Peruvian intellectual can be considered the first practicing literary critic in Latin America as he promoted proletarian realism and imagined an *indigenista* literature that would flourish later with Ciro Alegría and José María Arguedas. He saw cultural products as maintaining and reproducing social and economic structures. His cultural praxis was invested in criticism, editorial and publishing work, besides being a union organizer even when facing government censorship and criticism from his APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) comrades. His last completed work was the experimental novel *La novela y la vida. Siegfried y el profesor Canella*, set in Italy. For him, “political change was impossible without a cultural revolution” (131).

In Chapter seven De Castro traces the politics of culture in Mariátegui’s attempts to create a political movement suited to Peruvian reality, working against his former friend Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who transformed APRA into a political party. APRA was a radical pan-Latino Americanist movement. For Mariátegui, revolution was like a construction of new social structures built on new subjectivities.

Chapter eight studies Mariátegui’s frustrated trip to Argentina after living in a state of siege because of his function as a political organizer; he believed in educating and organizing for even the most radical movement. In that time, Mexico and Argentina were the two cultural dynamos. He preferred Argentina to improve his physical recovery and also to enhance the visibility of *Amauta*. His relocation was thwarted because of his sudden death in 1930 and mariáteguistas question: was his trip to Buenos

Aires a relinquishment of his political activity outside of the Comintern (the Communist International)?

Chapter nine reflects upon the movie *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), directed by Walter Salles, to establish connections between the two revolutionaries, Mariátegui and Che Guevara. In the movie, the protagonist Guevara receives the *Seven Essays* by Mariátegui, and transforms Mariátegui's phrase: "Nothing divides us. Everything unites us" into a poignant toast in the film version where he (Gael García Bernal) says "that the division of America in uncertain and illusory nationalities is a complete fiction" (187). Indeed, Mariátegui created a set of expectations regarding what it means to be a radical in Latin America.

The epilogue analyzes the "Prólogo" to the *Seven Essays*, written by Aníbal Quijano (1928-2018), that shows the changes of the intelligentsia and social frames in the region and the mainstream reception from the 1970s to the present. De Castro contextualizes the readings in the different social movements in 1979 when the Ayacucho edition was published. Quijano saw the colonial modes of production determining Peruvian social classes that defined the tactics for revolutionary change. De Castro reviews the evolution of politics in Peru, from the uprising of the Shining Path to Fujimori's victory, and as Cornejo Polar says: "Mariátegui enables us to see Peru 'as a contradictory totality'" (220).

Bread and Beauty: The Cultural Politics of José Carlos Mariátegui is a thorough study of Mariátegui that does not leave any stone unturned in the works and influence of the Peruvian Marxist. As De Castro writes, after seeing the "failures of all hopes," the works of Mariátegui remain a relevant and necessary resource. This book is a well written and researched work that can benefit students or seasoned scholars, just like his books, *Writing Revolution in Latin America* (Vanderbilt, 2019) or *Mario Vargas Llosa: Public Intellectual in Neoliberal Latin America* (U of Arizona P, 2011), among others. De Castro offers a deep analysis of political and cultural products of Peru and their connections to Latin America and international movements, and helps us understand the urgency of readings of these seminal works, in this case, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*.