

BOOK REVIEWS:

The Translation of Culture. Essays to E.E. Evans-Pritchard. edited by T.O. Beidelman. £5.75p net. London, Tavistock Publications; New York, Barnes and Noble.

Beidelman is to be congratulated at having put together a fine set of essays in honour of Professor Evans-Pritchard. The articles are not always in a modern way related to the theme of cultural translation, but they cover a wide and interesting range of topics. There are purely ethnographical essays, like Needham's well chosen article on Penan Friendship-names; at the other extreme is a good article by Hallpike on cross-cultural comparison. The articles by Rivière, Fox and Hicks are basically ethnographic, but they are all extremely insightful analyses. Lévi-Strauss considers the myths and rites of two North American peoples and makes some interesting remarks on 'structure' and 'history'. Two contributors have attempted to rework some of Evans-Pritchard's field material. Beidelman's essay on Nuer priests and prophets is less interesting than his other splendid pieces on Nuer ethnography. That by Gough on Nuer kinship points out several omissions in the monographs, but one suspects some criticisms spring from a less than sympathetic reading. Her term 'paradigmatic' (p.92) is derived from the less than precise usage of Fortes and she does not grasp some of the Saussurean qualities of Evans-Pritchard's work. This volume also contains an excellent piece by Pitt-Rivers entitled 'On the Word Caste'. He is concerned with the properties a concept must possess to fit it for carrying an analytical load in anthropological investigation. It contains a lesson that many anthropologists have still to learn. The book also has a very valuable bibliography of Evans-Pritchard's writings. Altogether The Translation of Culture is a worthy tribute.

MALCOLM CRICK.

Gifts and Poison. F.G. Bailey (ed). £1.45p net. Oxford: Blackwell 1971.

This book is described as a 'micro-political' counterpart of the first volume in the Pavilion Series: Stratagems and Spoils by F.G. Bailey. There are thirteen papers, four by Professor Bailey himself and the rest by S. Hutson, J. Hudson, R. Layton, L. Blaxter, M.A. Heppenstall, P. Adams, N. Clodd, N.T. Colclough and R. Wade. The names of the writers do not appear on the papers themselves, and the reader is clearly invited to read the volume as a continuous whole. The striking thing is that this does work. The community of thought and style is such that the main body of contributors provide illustrations, from villages in France, Austria, Spain and two areas of Italy, of what is essentially one world view. It is rare for an Editor and his contributors (even where the latter are students of the former) to present such a unanimity of tone and approach. One can lose track of whose particular chapter one is reading. This has its disturbing aspects, but it is no doubt its own tribute to editorial and supervisory skill, while the tone and style are relatively straightforward and simple, thus making for readability.

Despite the clear stamp of 'moral community' on the book, it seems to me to be better than Stratagems and Spoils, its claimed exemplar. This is because of the clear difficulty that the contributors experience in using the quasi-games theory analogies of the earlier book. Somehow its 'one-upmanship' models do not satisfy in the actual village cases. The rather worn communication terms 'codes', 'messages', 'signals', and the like which the Editor now also uses seem to be applied even more metaphorically than is usual.

There is nevertheless a vein of integrity running through these papers. If Barth's mechanistic transactionalism is the 'highest stage of functionalism', one in which society is essentially a sum of all the individual pay-offs, Sussex transactionalism has passed into a zone tinged with a certain tristesse, even a reflective pessimism. Their sets of villagers are not the calculating teams of players in the game of 'micro-politics'. Some of them seem to be engaged in a nobler search for the preservation of some individuality, against the constricting pressures of envy and gossip. The Barthian transactions convey (precisely) poisons, as well as gifts.

The failure of the original Sussex transactionalism is thus signalled by a work which should have vindicated or exemplified it. The resulting theoretical void is filled by a partial return to a more Maussian view of exchange. The journey was not entirely in vain. The very unanimity of the intent and experience of the contributors (where all sought so keenly a snark, all to return instead with a boojum) accounts for that attractive integrity that I have remarked on, and which underlies the occasional confusions of the book as a whole.

At the moment the studies are poised unhappily between the 'paradigmatic' and the 'syntagmatic'. Having rejected transactional purity and an 'output' view of society, they do not have a clear apprehension of the best method to tackle the programmatic structures which will generate the meaning of their observations. (The most interesting passages occur where the authors sort out, for example - what it means to be jalous or who exactly can be called signori). Once embarked on such tasks, the next step is to drop the terminology of 'transaction'. Only more confusion will result if it joins the ranks of mere dead metaphors which encumber the social sciences. In general the book does provide a kind of negative test of half-hearted games theory applications. In so doing it also points up a sometimes neglected aspect of Mauss's own theory of exchange. Some exchanges are fatal. That is one good reason why it is not a 'functionalist' theory, even of the highest stage !

EDWIN ARDENER.