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The Madness of Things Peruvian: Democracy Under Seige

Alvaro Vargas Llosa

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This book describes the demise of Peruvian democracy as a metaphor for the challenges facing the cause of freedom in Latin America in the 1990s. Vargas Llosa describes how and why Peru's democracy collapsed in April 1992, after 12 years of precarious existence. As he explains, in Peru and elsewhere in the region, the destitute have always been skeptical about the virtues of democratic systems. Vargas Llosa sees the forces hostile to democracy in Peru as paralleled elsewhere on the continent, as democracy's enemies work energetically to undermine democracy in the name of order.

Vargas Llosa argues that the failure of democracy in Peru is a result of historic vices and deficiencies in institutions constructed during the long years of dictatorship in Latin American nations. In the short intervals of democratic government that interrupted those years, elected leaders never dared to attempt reform of state institutions or state/society relationships. The resulting absence of political, economic, or cultural freedoms in all aspects of Latin American society is the root cause of the region's failure to build a democratic tradition.

The collapse of democracy in Peru stunned its neighbors hi Lathi America because they saw its crisis reflected in their own institutions. Despite the bleak present Llosa describes, he is not pessimistic. He is concerned that reforms have been too timid, more rhetorical than real. He warns that just as democraticization in the eighties was greeted with euphoria, events of the nineties are replacing that euphoria with the fear that change is elusive. Tune may be running out.

The book's vivid, accessible writing will invite interest hi *The Madness of Things Peruvian* from anyone interested in Lathi American affairs. Mr. Vargas Llosa's unique perspective as an insider in Peruvian politics provides those who have political or economic interests in the region with unusual insight into developments there.

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