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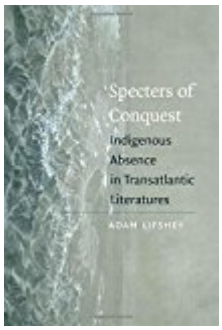

Adam Lifshey. *Specters of Conquest: Indigenous Absence in Transatlantic Literatures.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2010. 192 pp. $55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8232-3238-3.

Reviewed by Monica Diaz

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Commissioned by Dennis R. Hidalgo (Virginia Tech)

Adam Lifshey's *Specters of Conquest* offers an original reading of a corpus of texts that consider, in one way or another, the idea of the Conquest. In his introduction, Lifshey discusses the production of absences in certain foundational narratives of what came to be "America," and advances the notion that these narratives are part of America's "transatlantic commencement" (p. 5). *Specters of Conquest* aims to underscore the indigenous absences that became so prevalent in Conquest narratives and in the narratives that followed, paying particular attention to what the author calls "spectral resistance." The originality of *Specters of Conquest* lies in the merging of texts, separated in time and place and never before read together, to reveal a wide variety of absences that represent an unacknowledged resistance in the literatures of the Conquest.

Chapter 1 promises to read Christopher Columbus's diary of the first voyage together with William Carlos Williams's "The Discovery of the Indies" (published in his *In the American Grain* [1925]). Yet the majority of the chapter is dedicated to a close reading of numerous passages in Columbus's diary, in which he considered absences by indigenes to be performances and acts of resistance, such as the absenting of indigenous peoples from the island and the jumping out of the boats to escape the newly arrived Europeans. Lifshey's reading of the diary also emphasizes the performative act by Columbus of being present in the Americas while naming the absences of the expulsed moors from the Iberian territories. Lifshey uses a passage of "The Discovery of the Indies," taken from Columbus's dairy and loosely reworked by Williams, to illustrate how the two texts, although centuries apart, complement each other to construct a master narrative of "foundational spectralities and their inherent potential for resistance" (p. 37).

In "Indigenous Atextualizations: The *Popol Vuh* and *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*," Lifshey takes the reader through the genealogy of the *Popol Vuh's* (c. 1701) original text, now lost, and its many translations. Lifshey identifies a point of conjuncture between the two

Guatemalan texts: a deliberate withholding of information that functions again as resistance, and embodies absence. In the case of the ***Popol Vuh*** there is the absence of the antecedent text, a textual space that exists but can never be seen. In a similar manner, Menchú, in her work published in 1983, explicitly withholds information in order to keep a cultural space where the K'iche's identity can remain inscribed, and where colonial power cannot reach. In this way, Menchú re-performs the rhetoric of absence.

The third chapter, "Castaways Colonialism: Daniel Defoe's ***Robinson Crusoe*** and Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Account," is a detailed exegesis of Defoe's novel of 1719 as a colonial narrative with an emphasis on Crusoe's island as a microcosm of the transatlantic. This chapter also offers a detailed analysis of absence and presence throughout the novel, paying particular attention to the conquering of bodies and the hunting of the spectral, a direct reference to the "enigmatic" footprint on the sand. The author could have more exhaustively read Cabeza de Vaca's ***Castaways*** (1528-36); instead, he makes a brief mention of one passage to show how the narratives complement each other as colonizing narratives hunted by absent colonial subjects.

The fourth chapter contains the most important contribution of the book, for it introduces into discussions of transatlantic literatures a little-known and scarcely studied work, ***When the Combes Fought*** (1953) by Leoncio Evita from Equatorial Guinea. Lifshey places the novel in its historical context and stresses the way in which the absence of Africa from the discussion of conquest and colonization of America proves to be again a specter of the transatlantic. A detailed reading of the novel and its preface by Carlos González Echegaray shows that the original text had been altered and edited by González Echegaray, similar to the manner in which the ***Popol Vuh*** had been altered, and revealed an explicit parallel between the two colonized cultures and their resistance strategies of absenting. Lifshey arrives at the conclusion that rather than representing a collaborationist work from a colonized place, ***When the Combes Fought*** is ultimately a transatlantic critique of a struggle among imperialist world powers.

The last and fifth chapter is devoted to Thomas Pynchon's novel ***Mason & Dixon*** (1997) as well as to a fragment of Gabriel García Márquez's ***Love in the Time of Cholera*** (1985). The reimagining of the mapping of the New World in the novel gives way to the ghosting not only of peoples but also of landscapes, which is the contact point between Pychon's and García Márquez's works in Lifshey's analysis. ***Mason & Dixon*** is read as a commentary of the actual historical events that gave rise to the drawing of the line, and the line is viewed as one of destruction and of imperial advancement. Lifshey ends the chapter by reminding the reader that his book seeks to "reimagine the Conquest through its hauntings" (p. 136).

Lifshey closes the book with a curious epilogue in which he proposes that ***Frankenstein*** (1818) of Mary Shelley is the great American novel, although he adds that it is rarely read as an American text. As a way to destabilize canonical readings and the delimiting of literature fields, Lifshey provocatively reads Shelley's novel by underscoring the references made to America, which are fundamental to the development of the monster. By listening to a lesson on the other side of the wall, the monster learns of imperialism and empathizes with absent indigenous peoples in the Americas. He even requests a companion to go live in those depopulated lands at the other side of the Atlantic. As Lifshey notes, Frankenstein cannot bear the idea of the monster haunting him by absenting.

Specters of Conquest will be of interest to scholars in literary and cultural studies; its evocative and simple style makes it accessible to the general public as well. Lifshey offers a fascinating project that engages with spatial considerations,

both hemispheric and transatlantic. Although, for the most part, the analysis of the texts remains at a descriptive level, leaving the reader hoping for a deeper interpretation of the basic premise, *Specters of Conquest* offers an enriching reading that reveals what was already there but was never before made evident: the ghosts that haunted our every reading of transatlantic literatures.

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