

have argued that the writers of classical antiquity were brought in as mere window dressing are clearly wrong,” precisely because ancient writers kept “alive the memory of self-government through a long epoch in which despotism was the norm” (256).

Is the use of classicism by early Americans a formative paradigm or merely illustrative of a descriptive language employed to explain modern revolutionary situations? Attempting to answer the question of “influence,” these essays reflect the methodological problems of assessing the impact of classical writers (and their ideas) upon generations of people far removed from them. In the end, scholars will make up their own minds with regard to the “influence” of classicism. Nonetheless, Jennifer Roberts, in perhaps the most methodologically provocative essay in the collection, traced the modern reception of the Thucydidean Pericles. Most important, Roberts, rather than asking if Americans were “influenced” by classicism, asked instead what Americans’ engagement with antiquity reveals about modern “developments in contemporary history and ideology,” concluding that as American thinking evolved, so too did Americans’ interpretation of Pericles (266). To be sure, Roberts offers scholars a unique methodological approach for investigating the modern reception of antiquity, thereby pointing the way for future scholarship in this field.

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Adam Lifshey, *Specters of Conquest: Indigenous Absence in Transatlantic Literatures* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, \$55.00). Pp. xii + 182.

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The idea that absent indigenous peoples haunt the spaces now occupied by the descendants of their conquerors, that their absence therefore constitutes a paradoxical presence, is not new. In 1854, Chief Sealth of the Dwamish, or perhaps his translator, declared that “when your children’s children think themselves alone in the field, the store . . . upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone . . . The white man will never be alone.” D. H. Lawrence, in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), applied this notion, among others, to map the American “spirit of place” as represented in major “white” texts produced in the preceding century or so. In *the American Grain* (1925) by William Carlos Williams, an important US study that paralleled Lawrence’s work, although ostensibly oblivious to the spectral indigenous presence, is itself, as Adam Lifshey shows, also haunted. And, more recently, in *Fugitive Poses* (1998), Gerald Vizenor cast a searching indigenous eye over “Native American scenes of absence and presence” as represented in a range of North American texts.

But there is much that is new in Lifshey’s book. First, in responding to “the transatlantic turn” in American studies, especially the hemispheric reach of such works as Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), Lifshey conceptualizes his subject very broadly and, if we accept his premises, coherently. His book “posits ‘America’ as not a particular country or continent or hemisphere but as a reiterating foundational narrative in which a conqueror arrives at a shore determined to overwrite local versions of humanity, culture, ecology and landscape with inscriptions of his own design” (1). The outcome of “the Conquests” is that we are all, worldwide, Americans now. He thus reads Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), written in London on the back of a Pacific shipwreck, and Leoncio Evita’s *When the Combes Fought* (1954), the first

African novel in Spanish, as “American” texts. And in an epilogue he claims that Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), set in Switzerland and the Arctic, is, despite its English author, “the great American novel.” Second, several of Lifshy’s readings are based on impressive textual or archival scholarship – his accounts of the literature surrounding the explorer Álar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, for example – and offer fresh insights, some of them profound. I learnt much from his knowledgeable and sensitive handling of the great Mayan “bible” the Popul Vuh. Third, *Specters of Conquest* is thematically organized to strike sparks by linking texts from very disparate historical periods and geographical contexts. Thus Columbus’s logbooks are seen alongside *In the American Grain*; the ancient Popul Vuh is paired with a twentieth-century text, the autobiographical *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*; and Thomas Pynchon’s historical novel *Mason & Dixon*, about the two eighteenth-century British surveyors who mapped what was to become the North–South divide in the US, is juxtaposed with Gabriel García Márquez’s *Love in a Time of Cholera* (1985), set in Colombia in the fifty years from 1880 onwards.

These disjunctions are, of course, deliberate, and constitute part of Lifshy’s claim that all of his texts participate in a continuous process – the making of “America” – that arises from specific historical acts but subsumes and, ultimately, transcends them. He is not cavalier. For example, in discussing *Frankenstein* he is at pains to acknowledge the book’s Europeaness, its ideological point of origin in Romanticism, and as he alerts his readers to contemporary New World sources he also admits their peripheral status. But, at bottom, he is not really interested in the specificities of tracing a genealogy; he is ahistorical and his “America” is a myth or archetype.

This stance provides an explanation for some of the idiosyncrasies of his close readings. I accept that it is not possible, or even desirable, to read any text in its entirety, and on occasion it may be enriching to restrict discussion to choice extracts, but Lifshy sometimes chooses so selectively as to strain credibility. The discussion of the lengthy García Márquez novel, for instance, concentrates almost exclusively on just two short river journeys, and that of *Frankenstein* hangs on the novel’s couple of very brief references to “the New World.” True, there are latent riches in such selections, and Lifshy exploits them with a grace and erudition that almost makes us miss the sleight of hand involved. But his powerful and provocative thesis would have been all the stronger if he had granted more attention to the problematics of his chronology, disciplined his explanations, and exercised more restraint in his claims.

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Andrew Taylor, *Thinking America: New England Intellectuals and the Varieties of American Identity* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2010, \$55.00). Pp. ix + 226. ISBN 978 1 58465 862 7.

More than half a century after Perry Miller explored the traditions of the “New England mind,” intellectual historians and literary scholars are still preoccupied with this somewhat nebulous entity, although it now appears in a less homogeneous form. In this suggestive study, Andrew Taylor interrogates five major figures: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, William James, and George Santayana. The stated aim is to think “about the location and responsibilities” of this