



Forgotten Conquests: Rereading New World History from the Margins

Gustavo Verdesio

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Borrowing from the old adage, we might say that to the victor belongs the history. One of the privileges gained in colonizing the New World was the power to tell the definitive stories of the struggle. The heroic texts depicting the discovery of territories, early encounters with indigenous peoples, and the ultimate subjection of land and cultures to European nation-states all but erase the vanquished. In *Forgotten Conquests*, Gustavo Verdesio argues that these master narratives represent only one of many possible histories and suggests a way of reading them in order to discover the colonial subjects who did not produce documents.

Verdesio read the key texts relating to the struggles for possession of River Plate's northern shore -- present-day Uruguay. He probes them for traces of conflicts in meaning and the agency of Amerindians, gauchos, Africans, and women -- the subjected peoples that the texts try to silence. The narrators, speaking for their culture, assume the role of knowing subject, repressing all other voices, epistemologies, and acts of resistance. Verdesio's tasks are to listen for those that the Europeans represented as an unintelligible Other, to draw them into the foreground, and to decolonize their histories.

By unpacking these texts, Verdesio shows that from the European point of view, the colonial encounter draws the New World into historical time and ushers in a new concept of knowledge. For the first time, the historian's role is to discover, to interpret eyewitness testimonies and first-hand experience, to write 'a new history of admirable things.' Even in this reconstruction of historical truth, Old World ideology drives the narratives, whose chief purpose is to justify conquest. *Forgotten Conquests* lays bare the discursive strategies that generated the founding texts of Latin American history and engulfed its subjected peoples in silence for 500 years.

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