

Tutor's report of the M.A. thesis:

Martin Branda, „Image of Spain and Portugal in English written travelogues in 1750” (ÚSD FF UK/ Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest), 2017, 68 pp.)

Martin Branda decided to pursue his research in the field of the intellectual history. He chose the problem of the “image of the other” and the implicit image of self, constructed within Europe in the course of the Modern Era, and as his sources opted for the travelogues, concretely the English travelogues on Spain and Portugal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His thesis aimed at seeing how some of the English intellectuals in the studied period saw themselves after seeing the world and, also, to deal with the very specific position of the Iberian Peninsula in the European imagery. In fact, this was the very reason for the choice of the topic. The theme of the “Black Legend” attached especially to Spain, is frequently mentioned in the works of history. Martin decided to explore the concrete manifestations of prejudices inspired by this stream of thought in several widely read sources published in England, but also noted the fact that the “Black Legend” was far from uniform.

The study of travelogues is almost a tradition in the historians dealing with otherness in various historical moments. Therefore, Martin could have been able to make use of relatively abundant secondary literature, containing many interesting conceptual frameworks and methodologies. But he relied on secondary literature mostly as a source of factual information rather than for theories to be tested and argued with; also his approach to his sources is more descriptive than analytical. He defined his key concepts (especially “identification” and “commonality”, drawn from the texts of Brubaker and Cooper, p. 11) and referred to them, although rather sparsely, throughout his work. But it is obvious that he considered his principal task to dissect thoroughly the three texts that he chose as his principal sources - travelogues of Giuseppe Baretti (although not English by birth, his inclusion into the analysis is convincingly justified), Arthur Young and Robert Southey. In fact, the work is not so much about the “self” as about the “other”, about the reality observed and presented. Martin did his best at summarizing the contents of the three texts and noting their similarities and differences. He also did a good job in identifying possible sources of information for these travelogues, as the authors relied on other published books as well as their personal impressions. It is a pity he did not carry his curiosity further beyond these strict limits. (This problem will be further discussed below.)

As his principal method Martin chose textual analysis, mostly qualitative, with strong accent put on individual biographies and the imprint of personalities of the authors and their specific objectives into their literary work. Also, even though the analysis of the three travelogues chosen in fact didn't give him too much opportunity for comparison, due to the specific interests of their authors (music, agriculture etc.) as well as the places visited, he applied comparative method with success. It was possible to draw some conclusions from the topics that were shared by two or all three of the authors, of various aspects of everyday life in Spain and Portugal and the supposed characteristics of their inhabitants. Rather stimulating is the chapter dedicated to the comparison of itineraries, revealing the existence of well-trod paths for foreign visitors to the Iberian Peninsula as well as shared preferences for certain places and cities. Interesting is also the consideration of the view of centers vs. “provinces” or marginal areas visited by the three authors.

Another comparison was that between the image of Spain and Portugal. Both countries shared their position on the westernmost margin of Europe and the historical burden of reconquest, Islamic influence and militant Catholicism that constituted the basis of the Black Legend. But due to political and economic ties, the image of Portugal in England differed from that of Spain, as the analyzed travelogues clearly show.

The text is well arranged. It is written in comprehensible English, although a correction by native speaker would be beneficial. All the sources used are precisely quoted in passing and in the final bibliography. The text is concise; the author resisted the tempting for pursuing diverging paths and partial problems.

However, this is as well the strength and the weakness of the thesis. As I already indicated above, the brevity is sometimes exaggerated, especially when it combines with what I might with certain degree of overstatement label as “positivist” approach of Martin Branda to historical study. There is not much to be reproached in those parts of the text that deal with the sources themselves. But the thesis certainly lacks an overlap towards more general questions of historical study. It seems as if Martin was afraid to leave the secure ground of his sources and move towards any form of generalization, be it the extent of the Black Legend in England, the transformation of the literary genre of travelogue throughout the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century or the problem of race in European thought. (All these questions are touched, but not developed, in the text.) The formulation of the research question is rather brief, and in fact does not explain the choice of the topic further than by the topic itself. Very sketchy is also the introductory chapter, giving the overview of the changes of 18<sup>th</sup> century English travel; and the conclusion is strictly limited to the three texts under consideration.

But even though the results of the research are limited by this narrow approach, they offer – besides proving the capacity of the author to realize independently a thorough historical analysis – a solid basis for others interested in the same topic. In spite of my criticism, or rather a wish for more boldness in dealing with the source material, I can thus state that the thesis of Martin Branda fulfills all the necessary requirements.

I recommend the thesis for defense and propose its evaluation by **grade B** (Czech scale: velmi dobře; Hungarian scale: 4).

Prague, August 29, 2017

Doc. Markéta Křížová, Ph.D.  
Center for Ibero-American Studies  
Philosophical Faculty  
Charles University in Prague