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Lecturas del legado español en la Europa ilustrada. Ed. José Checa Beltrán. Madrid/Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2012.

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José Checa Beltrán has assembled a collection of essays resulting from the work of a research group in Europe whose charge was that of finding, and tracing, a counter-intuitive discourse that was favorable to Spain in the eighteenth century, eschewing the facile application of the label “leyenda negra” to everything that Spain represented. While American and Latin American scholars have repeatedly addressed the need to retread the well-worn vehicles of criticism and scorn that were heaped upon the Spanish nation and its culture in the eighteenth century, this volume is among the first to reflect a Spanish research agenda set to respond to the many questions that eighteenth-century Spain bashing has left unresolved. Despite the innovative nature of the task, however, the results are mixed, suffering from a lack of consideration of more recent scholarship and secondary sources, which would have certainly sharpened the focus of the volume. It is surprising, for example, that the groundbreaking work of Jorge Cañizarres-Esquerro or Gabriel Paquette receive not a single citation in the entire volume. While defined as specifically European in scope, *Lecturas del legado español* could nonetheless have benefited from a greater influx of cross-cultural material beyond the only article to include a discussion of a non-European source, Esther Martínez Luna’s “La cultura literaria española en el primer cotidiano novohispano: el *Diario de México*.”

While the themes of canon, nationalism, and ideology were selected as the guiding principles of investigation for the authors of these essays, we note that these topics are not particularly helpful for rethinking Spain’s legacy in the European eighteenth century, since they are among the most obvious and are no different from those that have informed research in the past. Nonetheless, several of the contributions deepen our understanding of European reactions to the Spanish empire by expanding the number of source texts beyond those normally considered. A case in point is Françoise Etiènvre’s “Montesquieu y Voltaire: sus visiones de España” which goes far beyond the well-known diatribes against Spain contained in the *Lettres persanes* or in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* to explore the philosophes’ oeuvre, showing the extent to which Spain informed a comparative view of France and Spain in texts such as Montesquieu’s *Mes pensées*, in which Montesquieu ponders what the outcome might have been had Descartes gone to Mexico a hundred years before Cortez, or how Voltaire is equally critical of Spain’s expulsion of the Moors and France’s ejection of the Huguenots, offering a more nuanced view of the French critique of Spain. José Checa Beltrán has also brought new sources to our attention in

“Lecturas sobre la cultura española en el siglo XVIII francés” in which he discusses the presence of Spanish culture in the periodicals *L’Espagne Littéraire*, the *Tableau de l’Espagne Moderne*, and the *Mémoires de Trévoux*, noting, in particular, how *L’Espagne Littéraire* had taken a thoroughly proactive position on Spanish culture. He points out that the positive reviews of Spanish culture that appeared in these periodicals were written by journalists who had little to no contact with the philosophes and whose views ran counter to what we consider to be the French view of Spain. Checa’s line of research is promising and can be amplified to include other journals, such as the *Esprit des Journaux* published in Belgium that takes Masson de Morvilliers to task for the unsubstantiated claims made in his writings about Spain in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*.

Beltrán’s introduction to the volume reminds readers of the politics involved in France’s push for European literary hegemony and how ultimately France, Italy, and Spain were locked into a debate over present and past glory as they jockeyed for position both in the future and for posterity. To this end, the essay by Maurizio Fabbri, “No solo polémicas. La difusión de la cultura española en la Italia de la Ilustración” adds new voices to the standoff that had developed between the former Italian Jesuits Saverio Bettinelli and Girolamo Tiraboschi and Spanish Jesuits Francisco Xavier Llampillas and Juan Francisco Masdeu. They debated whether Spanish literature was responsible for the bad taste in Italian letters in the eighteenth-century. Their deadlock was broken by Juan Andrés from Valencia, and Giambattista Conti whose objectivity assigned responsibility for literary decadence to both parties, while at the same time recognizing the literary attributes of each.

Contributions on the discussion of Spanish letters in the German periodical press and in Romanian libraries also furnish fresh sources that demonstrate the vitality of Spanish culture and networks, often established through translation. In closing, Fernando García Lara’s “Importancia de los materiales paraliterarios en la imagen de España en el siglo XVIII” opens up one of the potentially richest avenues of study for better understanding the status of Spain in eighteenth-century Europe. Letters, travel writing, encyclopedias, and dictionaries constitute the corpus labeled “paraliterario” (a term that despite the author’s claims to the contrary, immediately lowers the status of this material). While Lara describes in general terms the extent and potential impact of this material, it would have been more satisfying to read a more in-depth article on one of the “paraliterary” genres, i.e., encyclopedias or travel literature. Among the overlooked sources in this category is Masson de Morvillier’s 1776 *Abrégé élémentaire de la Géographie universelle de l’Espagne et du Portugal*, which already contains in embryonic form the negative characterizations of Spain and the Spanish people that would fill the pages of the article “Espagne” in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* some seven years later.

Lecturas del legado español en la Europa ilustrada is a valuable reference work for the sheer number of new sources that it identifies and brings to our attention for further consideration and study.