

GARY THORN, *The Locusts. British Critics of Portugal before the First World War*. Brighton: Sussex University Press, 2019. 324 pp.

Gary Thorn's volume is the latest addition to the collection on the Portuguese-speaking world recently launched by Sussex University Press, and it will certainly contribute to enhance its reputation.

This monograph, written in a captivating style, deserves the attention of everyone with an interest in the broader theme of twentieth-century Portugal, but also on other 'subdomains', such as the history of the Portuguese first Republic (1910-1926), Anglo-Portuguese cultural and political relations, as well as the history of social movements, the media and European imperialism.

The author's chance encounter with an old pamphlet about Portuguese political prisoners in the early stages of the first Republic was later followed by the discovery of the private archive of Eva Mabel Tenison (1880-1961), an historian and novelist who at some point in her life became the secretary of the British Protest Committee (BPC), a 'civil society' platform which devoted its energies to denounce what nowadays one would call 'human rights abuses' in Republican Portugal. Tenison's papers, and especially an unpublished autobiography, illuminate a fascinating web of connections that were mobilized in a campaign for the release of the two thousand political prisoners (round numbers) incarcerated by the first Republic between its inception in October 1910 and February 1914.

Actually, the story of the BPC and its public initiatives is just part of a larger narrative woven by Thorn. Given the dearth of English language studies on this period of Portuguese history, the author took the option of providing a great deal of context and perspective to the events which unfolded from the overthrow of the Bragança dynasty to the eve of the Great War – the period coinciding with the setting up of the Republican institutions and the 'cultural wars' that accompanied it. Thorn offers a sober and finely balanced assessment of the first Republic's tumultuous advent, allowing the reader to familiarize itself with the quite polarized versions conveyed by the historical literature (here, however, some limitations are evident since canonical works by such authors as Vasco Pulido Valente or Rui Ramos are absent from his survey).

While its 'excesses' are never euphemized, the Republic is presented here as a relatively 'normal' liberal experiment with political modernity, notwithstanding the 'illiberal' idiosyncrasies of its founding elite. This illiberal behaviour, very reminiscent of the Jacobin methods of Revolutionary France, manifested itself in several political and cultural persecutions, either encouraged or sanctioned by the state authorities. The author at times betrays a certain exasperation with the condescending, patronizing, self-righteous or even hypocritical stance of Britain's conservative critics of the Republic. He draws a bit from 'postcolonial' theorizing to make sense of the sort of remarks and commentaries which could be found in British diplomatic reports, newspaper coverage and polemical literature, but I am not really sure if the use of 'neo-colonial' analogies is pertinent in this context. It seems to me that, all things considered, 'plucky little Portugal' always had more leverage in its relationship with Britain than most former colonies vis-à-vis their old imperial metropole. Thorn, however, is careful enough not to turn this comparison into a caricature, adverting the reader that 'unlike the social subaltern, the State of Portugal retained the autonomy to source and write its own history' (18), even if the narratives produced by the patronizing Brits would always found greater audiences throughout the world (a recent example of such asymmetries was provided by the British press reporting of the events surrounding the disappearance of Madeleine MacCann in the Algarve in 2007, including the xenophobic remarks directed against Portugal's Ambassador in London).

*The Locusts* is built as a collection of narratives centred upon a cast of 'colourful' characters (not all of them British; there's one Goanese journalist who made his name writing for British conservative journals), most of them of liberal-conservative inclinations, who wrote tirelessly about 'mob rule' and political bigotry in Republican Portugal. Thorn relies on a significant array of sources to tell how each of these characters came to play an important role in the vilification of the Republic, but what is most impressive is his mastery of the Edwardian press as well as his ability to contextualize it and interpret it. The result is a very engaging narrative, densely packed with lively vignettes and perceptive remarks. The author displays a genuine empathy towards most of the figures under appreciation, even if it is patent that he doesn't sympathise with their political views and cultural prejudices (overt

racism, and even anti-Semitism, being prominent features of British discourses on the Portuguese during this period).

To sum up, besides illuminating a hitherto neglected episode of Anglo-Portuguese cultural relations, *The Locusts* has a lot to offer to anyone wishing to expand his or her knowledge of the background influences on British 'official' attitudes vis-a-vis Portugal and its empire (echoes of the Cadbury affair were still very much present in 1913), as well as on the intellectual context in which British Lusophiles operated in the Edwardian period.

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