



The Image of Spain in Dutch Travel Writing (1860-1960)

A.J.L. Coenen

SUMMARY

“Spain is brute, anarchistic, egocentric, cruel, Spain is prepared to destroy itself for nonsensical reasons, it is chaotic, it dreams, it is irrational.” This quote from Cees Nooteboom’s *De omweg naar Santiago* (Detour to Santiago) stands in a long tradition of stereotyping Spain and the Spaniards as typically Southern European – a country and a people with qualities towards which people from the North of Europe have adopted an, alternately, critical and admiring attitude.

In this study, the images pertaining to Spain are researched, such as they appear in travel accounts that have been written and published by Dutch travellers who visited the country between 1860 and 1960. The objective of this study is not only an inventory of the stereotypes, but also, and in particular, an analysis of the underlying factors which determine the formation of the image content.

In the **Introduction**, the theoretical premises of this study are described. Firstly, the genre of travel writing is discussed and, within this comprehensive genre, the travel account, written in prose, is chosen as the subgenre of travel writing which is the subject of the research described in this thesis. Next, the imagological relevance of travel writing is considered.

From the early 1700s, it has been a distinctive characteristic of travel accounts that they not only talk about Elsewhere and about the Other, but also, and from the Age of Romanticism predominantly, about the traveller himself. It is, amongst other things, for this reason that travelogues are an interesting source for a study of both the auto- and the hetero-image of the travellers and of the relation between the two. Also, as a consequence of the growing interest in national typologies and a predilection for the exotic, the difference between the Self and the Other was strongly emphasized.

Furthermore, the attitude towards travelling itself has influenced the travel experience from the Romantic period onwards. The emergence of organized tourism in the mid-1900s led to an anti-tourist mentality that made travellers look for original experiences, seeking adventures and shunning comfort and preconceived travel plans.

For the purpose of the analysis of the travelogues a model has been used that was presented in 1997 by the Israeli social-psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal. Bar-Tal’s model aims to explain the formation and change of the content of ethnic and national stereotypes. To this end three determining categories of underlying factors are suggested: background variables, transmitting mechanisms and personal mediating variables. Based on this model six variables have been selected for this research as particularly relevant for the image formation of Dutch travellers visiting Spain: the Dutch self-image; past relations between Spain and The Netherlands, in particular the inheritance of the Eighty Years War in the 16th and 17th century; direct contact with Spaniards

during the trip and the travellers' knowledge of the Spanish language; the authors' attitude towards (touristic) travelling; their political and religious convictions and, finally, the role of intertextual references.

In **Chapter I**, the evolution of the image of Spain in the rest of Europe is described, from the Middle Ages until the end of the researched period. Generally, two main corpuses of images are distinguished: the so-called Black and White, or Rose-tinted, legends. The Black Legend refers to a series of negative stereotypes that originated in Italy in the 14th century, and were further developed in Germany, The Netherlands and England, as a result of political and religious conflicts, as well as economic rivalry, with Spain. In the 18th century, when Spain's prestige diminished, the country was predominantly characterized as a backward appendix of Europe, where Enlightenment and progress had not found a foothold. The beginning of the 19th century, with its context of Romantic ideology, showed a growing interest in Spain. As a consequence new stereotypes were formed and old ones were revalued.

In the last part of Chapter I, the evolution of the image of Spain in The Netherlands is discussed separately. A noticeable Dutch contribution to the Black Legend was the identification of the arrogance, intolerance and fanaticism of King Philip II and his representative in The Netherlands, the Duke of Alba, with the Spanish national character as a whole. Nevertheless, partly as a consequence of commercial relations between the two countries, the black picture has always been nuanced and the interest in Spanish language and culture survived the eighty years of conflict.

While the Romantic idealization of Spain was much less pronounced in The Netherlands than in countries like Germany and France, there was a growing interest in the country from the second half of the 19th century. Journalists and writers visited Spain for touristic purposes and painters followed the example of Jacobus van Looy, who, in the late 1800s spent a year in Spain and greatly admired its colours and light.

After the Spanish Civil War and World War II, Dutch tourists began to visit Spain once more in the 1950s, although initially on a small scale. The non-conformist and anti-bourgeois intellectuals of this period showed a strongly neoromantic tendency to idealize Spain as a country that had not been spoilt by modernity.

In **Chapters II, III and IV**, a total of fifteen Dutch travel accounts are described, which were published between 1860 and 1960. This period of one hundred years has, subsequently, been subdivided into three shorter stages: 1860-1900, 1900-1936 and 1950-1960. The period 1936-1950 has been excluded from this study, because in the context of, successively, the Spanish Civil War and World War II, touristic travel to Spain practically came to a standstill.

In the description of the travel accounts, firstly, information is given about the itinerary of each author, followed by specific narrative features of each travelogue. Two fixed points on the touristic agenda are discussed separately: a visit to the bullfight and to the Gypsy community in Granada. Both experiences can be seen in the light of the so-called 'typicality effect'; the tendency to emphasize aspects of a country that are considered to be particularly different and, as such, pre-eminently typical for the country in question.

Subsequently, for each travel account, the six chosen background variables are discussed.

In **Chapter II**, five travelogues from the first period, 1860-1900, are described. In the last decades of the 19th century, the number of tourists visiting Spain increased, amongst other reasons, as a result of infrastructural improvements. The choice of travel guides was still limited and the announcement of the publication of Karl Baedekers *Spanien und Portugal*, in 1897, was enthusiastically received in The Netherlands.

Amongst the accounts from this first period - two writers, one journalist and one painter - the position of Abraham Capadose was somewhat exceptional. The main purpose of Capadose's journey was to visit fellow Protestants who were unable to profess their religion freely in Roman Catholic Spain. Nevertheless, he behaved, on occasion, like a tourist – according to him, to camouflage his religious mission.

In **Chapter III**, seven travel accounts from the period 1900-1936 are described, amongst them the only one written by a female author: Cornelia Vissering. During these first decades of the 20th century, the Spanish government began to take an active part in the organization of tourism, resulting in, amongst other projects, the construction of a chain of state-run hotels. In The Netherlands, foreign travel was still the exclusive privilege of those who had money as well as spare time. Travellers with less property were, in most cases, either commissioned by newspapers or magazines, or received an advance from a publisher to cover the costs.

From the 1920s, the political context began to play a bigger part in the travelogues. Separatist actions in Spain, as well as workers' protests, and in the 1930s the political unrest during the Second Republic, were regularly mentioned and commented on.

In **Chapter IV**, three travel accounts from the 1950s are described. The number of Dutch tourists visiting Spain steadily increased in this decade and the supply of informative books and booklets about the country, often richly provided with photographs, grew correspondingly. A typical phenomenon of this period was the 'personalized travel guide', a combination of travel guide and travelogue, in which an author who presented himself as an expert on Spain virtually accompanied the tourist. The first book described in this chapter, Bert Schierbeek's *Op reis door Spanje* (On a Trip through Spain, 1952) is an

example of this hybrid genre. This last period was characterized by a markedly neoromantic admiration of everything that distinguished Spain from what the authors saw as bourgeois and boringly uniform in their own country.

Chapter V offers an inventory and analysis of the stereotypes that have been found in the corpus as a whole.

A first conclusion is that the list of characteristics assigned to the Spanish by the Dutch travellers does not deviate far from the combined list of Black and White Legend stereotypes that had general currency in Northern Europe since the Age of Romanticism. It is, however, necessary to take a closer look at what these characteristics meant for different authors. For example, the adjective 'proud', for some, referred to 'national pride' and this meaning was often negatively viewed as an unjustified chauvinism of the Spaniard. For others, pride meant a personal sense of dignity, which was sometimes appreciated, when it referred to an absence of class consciousness, and sometimes condemned, when it was related to an aversion to manual labour. Furthermore, some of the stereotypes, mentioned by one and the same author, seem contradictory, such as hospitality and the tendency to deceive the gullible foreigner. These contradictions are in line with the general view that Spain was, essentially, a 'land of contrasts'.

Not only the meaning of certain stereotypes varies; in some cases the appreciation of certain characteristics radically changed over the years. An illustrative example is the frequently mentioned Spanish laziness. Until the mid-1900s this quality was, without exception, judged negatively, while the authors from the 1950s saw this supposed characteristic of the Spanish national character as proof of an absence of typically Northern European materialism.

A similar evolution is visible in the appreciation of the bullfight, which all the authors saw as Spanish par excellence and strongly related to the Spanish national character. While the authors from the first period, although critical, generally tended to look at the spectacle with an open mind, the *corrida* was, for the travellers of the early 1900s, decisive proof of Spain's backwardness and lack of civilization. For the visitors of the 1950s, however, the bullfight showed that in Spain basic human emotions had not been wiped out by modernity.

After the inventory and analysis of the stereotypes, the six chosen background variables are discussed for the corpus as a whole.

Where the **Dutch self-image** is concerned, a first conclusion is that the stereotypes mainly reflect the North-South and Centre-Periphery opposition that has been common in European image formation since the early 1700s. From this perspective, the North is represented as more rational and further developed, and the South as emotional, traditional and static. Whether this opposition lies at the root of a more positive or negative valuation of either the North or the South, strongly depends on the personal view on modernity of the onlooker.

As typically Dutch qualities, (religious) tolerance and cleanliness were most frequently mentioned; however, the reputation of Spain and the Spaniards as particularly filthy was regularly nuanced or even refuted by the Dutch travellers.

The **inheritance of the Eighty Years War** resounds in the majority of the travelogues, however, almost exclusively when the Escorial palace was visited. In this austere building stories were remembered that were heard in school about the stern and intolerant Spanish king.

The dominant role of the **Roman Catholic Church** in Spanish society, in the past and the present, was, without exception, criticised by the Dutch authors. Protestant travellers were more severe in their criticism, but the authors who shared the same faith were also at times sceptical about the way in which the Church in Spain had acted towards the Spanish people. For many, the *Mezquita* in Cordoba where, in the 16th century, a cathedral was built inside the mosque, was a particular symbol of the intolerance of the Church.

References to the contemporary **political context** are rare, particularly in the travelogues that were written before the 1920s. In the decade of the 1950s, it was impossible to ignore the reality of the Franco regime, as the travellers during this period were well aware of the public opinion on this subject in their home country. However, the attraction of Spain was, for the anti-bourgeois neoromanticists of this period, so strong that they strove to minimize the negative aspects of the dictatorship.

Where the **attitude towards travelling** is concerned, the opposition traveller-tourist began to have a visible effect on the image formation from the early 1900s. Increasingly, the authors emphasized that Spain was a country for the 'real traveller', and not for the superficial and comfort seeking tourist. The anti-tourist mentality is strongest in the travellers of the 1950s, who were eager to distance themselves as far as possible from everything associated with organized mass tourism.

In Chapter V, the background variable of **intertextual references** gets specific attention as its influence is far reaching and profound. All the travellers began their journey with a certain amount of textual baggage, consisting of travel guides, travel accounts written by predecessors, informative books about Spain as well as literary fiction.

As regards travel guides, Karl Baedeker's *Spanien und Portugal*, available since 1897, was most frequently used. Its contents did not only determine, to a large extent, the authors' itinerary, it also played a part in the image formation, as particularly the early editions of the guide paid considerable attention to the national character.

References to other travel accounts are rarer as the authors, like all travellers from the Age of Romanticism, were looking for originality and a personal view on the visited country. Quotes from other travelogues usually

served the purpose of either supporting the author's view or emphasizing a deviating opinion. Amongst the travel accounts that are mentioned, the popularity of the travelogue *Spagna* (1873) by the Italian author Edmondo de Amicis, is noticeable. This lively, detailed and unprejudiced account seems to have been particularly inspiring, as it was quoted as late as in 1952 by the Dutch journalist Hans Alma.

Informative books about (the history of) Spain are rarely mentioned, except by Felix Rutten, whose travelogue *Spanje* is filled with references to all kinds of textual sources. Almost without exception the authors include information about the history of Spain in their accounts, but all seem aware of the fact that this kind of information slows the pace of the narrative.

More than any other textual source, literary fiction is mentioned or quoted from. Some of the authors do this on every page and seem to walk around in a hall of textual mirrors that project their images on the reality of the visited country. Works of fiction, such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, Corneille's *Le Cid*, and particularly both Mérimée's novella *Carmen*, as well as its operatic version by Bizet, were known by all, their protagonists personalities being connected to the Spanish national character. Apart from these titles, the influence of Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* was also widespread and significant. In their endeavour to bring to life the remains of buildings that date from the period of Arab rule, many of the authors 'dress up' these buildings, as Irving had done, with stories about the days when they were occupied by their original inhabitants.

The important role of literary fiction in the formation of the images is further pursued in two separate paragraphs: *Intertextuality and Ethnotypes* and *The Discourse of Exoticism*. In the first, the reflection of literary figures on personal meetings, real or fictitious, with Spaniards during the trip is discussed. Particularly remarkable is the influence of the Carmen figure on the authors' view of Spanish women. Admiration of their Mediterranean beauty and passionate nature is, in most cases, combined with a certain fear of their seductive capacities, as well as doubts about their morals.

The Romantic image of Spain as an oriental country where time stood still, was also popular amongst Dutch travellers. Throughout the researched period, oriental characteristics were pointed out, both in the appearance of the Spaniards and in their national character. In the first decades of the 20th century, when the difference between the further developed North and the static South was more strongly emphasized than before 1900, the resignation of the exploited people was frequently linked up with the inheritance of the Moors. For the neoromantics of the 1950s, Spain's orientalness was, together with its resistance to modernity, what most positively distinguished this country from the boring uniformity at home.

Both the orientalism and the timelessness of Spain come to light in the frequent use of the literary figure of the chronotope, when historic figures make an appearance in ancient buildings or wander around like ghosts in old towns like Avila and Toledo.

In the **Conclusion** the question of how the Dutch image of Spain has evolved in the researched period and which has been the influence of the six background variables, is answered.

Firstly, marked differences have been found between the three shorter periods that have been analysed separately. The travel accounts from the first period, 1860-1900, not only show a remarkable eye for detail, but also a clear striving for objectivity, the authors being inclined to put existing prejudices to the test. The authors who travelled between 1900 and 1936, were generally more critical, emphasizing Spain's backwardness for which both the Government and the Church were blamed. Furthermore, it is during this period that the Dutch travellers began to feel the need to distinguish themselves from the common tourist, making an intentional effort to look for adventurous and original experiences. The decade of the 1950s, finally, shows a clear-cut revival of the Romantic idealization of Spain as a country that has escaped modernity and conserved multiformity, a sense of tradition and culture, as well as basic human values and emotions.

The analysis of the factors underlying the image formation shows that both personal convictions and cultural baggage played a significant role. As regards intertextual references, the reading of travel guides and travelogues written by predecessors undoubtedly played a part. However, the influence of literary fiction has been shown to be particularly strong. Characteristics of literary figures like Don Quixote, El Cid and Carmen, were not only projected on contemporary Spaniards of flesh and blood, but were also seen as essential components of the Spanish national character.

In a **Postscript**, finally, the considerable interest within Spain itself in the foreign image of the country, is discussed. From the 16th century onwards, apologetic texts refuting the Black Legend images have been written in Spain, the most famous being Julián Juderías's *La leyenda negra*, which was published in 1914. But also nowadays efforts are being made, both by governmental institutions and in the scientific community, to get rid of the tenacious slogan "Spain is different". At a time when, in Europe, the idea of a North-South opposition has not lost its currency, objective studies of the formation of auto- and hetero-images, as well as the relation between the two, can offer a useful contribution to a discussion that is often dominated by highly subjective and emotional viewpoints.