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# Raymond Carr (1919–2015)\*

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One of Britain's greatest historians, the intellectual and literary heir to Richard Ford and Gerald Brenan, died on 19 April 2015. Sir Raymond Carr, born Albert Raymond Maillard Carr on 11 April 1919 in Bath, was the grandson of a blacksmith and the son of Reginald Carr, a village schoolmaster in Dorset, and of Ethel Graham, who worked in the village post office. Raymond was brought up in the villages of Winfrith, Washford and Wooton; and he went to a state school in Brockenhurst. As was customary at the time, Raymond was obliged as a child to read the Bible aloud every evening, a habit which could have contributed to the magisterial sweep of his narrative style. When he was seventeen, his parents sent him first to Besançon to learn French and then in 1937 to Freiburg-im-Breisgau to learn German. It has been suggested that, while his time in France discouraged him from developing any revolutionary tendencies, his sojourn in Germany at the height of the Third Reich left him with a fierce abhorrence of authoritarianism in any form; from both experiences, he learned to observe and understand extremists of both the right and the left.

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\* This memoir is based on, but revises and amplifies the obituary published in *The Guardian* (see Paul Preston, 'Sir Raymond Carr Obituary: One of Britain's Greatest Historians Renowned for the Sweeping Vision of His Books on Spain', *The Guardian*, 22 April 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/22/sir-raymond-carr>> [accessed 6 March 2017]).

On his return to England, Raymond won a scholarship to Christ Church, Oxford where, as Gladstone Research Exhibitioner in the late 1930s, in an atmosphere redolent of the novels of Evelyn Waugh, he read Modern History. In later life, he described himself as ‘a scholarship boy through and through’, although he also talked of running up debts owing to his pursuit of ‘a racy social life’. He was musically gifted and while an undergraduate taught himself to play the clarinet, principally for pleasure; but he ended up playing in a jazz band as a means of helping to cover his living expenses. In 1941, having graduated with a first, he immediately tried to join the army, but he was rejected for military service on medical grounds. Throughout his life, despite his slightly stooped posture, he always gave the impression of being strong and something of a dare-devil—a reputation consolidated when he started to ride to hounds; however, the fact is that from his youth he suffered from a rare heart condition. He spent the rest of the war teaching history and English at Wellington College, Berkshire, educating the young scions of the establishment as they began their journey into the circles of social and economic power. More than twenty years earlier, though Carr may not have been aware of it, E. Allison Peers had taught French and Spanish for a spell (autumn term, 1919) at the same public school.<sup>1</sup> Neither Carr nor Peers before him, not being considered the ‘public school type’, fitted comfortably into that environment. While teaching at Wellington College, Raymond still maintained his flat in London and continued to enjoy, despite war-time conditions, an energetic and entertaining social life. Two particular friends of his during the 1940s were the Labour politician Anthony Crosland and the novelist Nicholas Mosley.<sup>2</sup>

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1 See Peers’ memoirs, in E. Allison Peers, *Redbrick University Revisited. The Autobiography of ‘Bruce Truscot’*, ed., with intro., commentary & notes, by Ann L. Mackenzie & Adrian R. Allan, E. Allison Peers Publications 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool U. P., 1996), especially pp. 116–19.

2 Mosley, however, did not get to know Raymond Carr until after the latter’s move

The return of the regular staff to Wellington College, after the war ended, left him unemployed. So he decided to sit the examination for the ferociously competitive All Souls Prize Fellowship. His knowledge of German inclined him at first to present himself as a medievalist. He was successfully elected to a fellowship, although he quickly decided to work on Sweden. A friendship with a Swedish girl whom he met while cycling in Germany had developed into a love affair. He visited Sweden and learned Swedish. A by-product of that relationship was that his earliest publications are on government finance in late eighteenth-century Sweden. He also wrote a life of Gustavus Adolphus, the manuscript of which, or so it was rumoured among his students, had been left on a railway station platform somewhere in northern Europe; but Raymond himself claimed to have burned it in the 1980s. After a brief spell teaching history at University College, London, under the departmental and reputedly dictatorial rule of Sir John Neale (1890–1975), he was relieved to be able to return to Oxford in 1952 as a Fellow of New College.

His involvement in Spain began shortly after his marriage in 1950 to Sara Strickland, a granddaughter of the eleventh Earl of Wemyss. He and Sara were to have three sons and a daughter; one of his sons, Matthew Carr (d. 2011) became a renowned portrait painter. On their honeymoon Raymond and Sara visited the then tiny and still picturesque fishing village of Torremolinos. He was so intrigued by the poverty and the oppressive atmosphere of Franco's Spain that he began, unsystematically, to read Spanish history. In 1953, two Oxford colleagues, Alan Bullock and F. W.

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from Wellington College to become a fellow of All Souls. See the obituary by Nicholas Mosley, 'An Education to Know: Remembering Raymond Carr', *The Spectator*, 25 April 2015, <<http://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/04/an-education-to-know-remembering-raymond-carr/>> (accessed 6 March 2017).

Deakin,<sup>3</sup> who were editors of the recently established series on the Oxford History of Modern Europe, asked him to commission Gerald Brenan to write the volume on Spain. So, in 1953, accompanied by the Oxford anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers (1919–2001), Raymond visited Brenan at his home in Churriana, near Málaga. Brenan declined the commission on the grounds that he had already written *The Spanish Labyrinth* and no longer wanted to write anything requiring footnotes.<sup>4</sup> Brenan suggested that Carr write the book himself. The result was to be Carr's greatest book, *Spain 1808–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966) which established his enduring international reputation. One reviewer, writing in the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, justifiably described it as follows:

Este libro [...] es sin ningún género de dudas el mejor intento de síntesis de la historia contemporánea de España que se ha realizado hasta el presente, no ya en lengua inglesa, sino en cualquier otro idioma, incluido el castellano [...] En este sentido el libro de Carr supera con mucho a todos los intentos anteriores; los supera, en primer lugar, por la amplitud de su información, pero los aventaja, sobre todo, por su acierto en elegir y resumir las líneas principales de cada período, sin omitir ninguno de sus datos esenciales.<sup>5</sup>

Raymond spent much of the next fifteen years reading and travelling in Spain during his vacations. During the Franco period, he conversed at length with many of Franco's generals, and he knew many of the monarchist opposition. After Franco's death, he came to know many of the

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3 Alan [Louis Charles] Bullock [Baron Bullock] (1914–2004), Tutorial Fellow in Modern History, New College, Oxford (1945–1952). Bullock was later to be the founding master of St Catherine's College, Oxford (1962–1981); he was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University (1969–1973). F. W. Deakin [Sir Frederick William Dampier Deakin] (1913–2005) was founding head & warden of St Antony's College, Oxford (1950–1968).

4 See Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1943). On Brenan and this book in particular, see Gabriel Jackson, 'Gerald Brenan As Historian: An Appreciation of *The Spanish Labyrinth*', *BHS*, LXII:3 (1985), 289–90.

5 See the review of *Spain 1808–1939*, by Josep Fontana i Làzaro, *BHS*, XLV:1 (1968), 60–63 (pp. 60, 62).

post-dictatorship political elite, most of whom had devoured his history of Spain while at university. At no point did his work centre exclusively on Madrid, since he was every bit as likely to be found in Bilbao or Barcelona. In Oxford, he was teaching European and Latin-American history at St Antony's College; and he briefly held Oxford's first chair in the latter subject. This was at the time when he was in charge of a Centre for Latin American Studies which he had initiated there in 1964. But Latin American Studies was soon to be much further developed at Oxford, thanks to the Parry Committee, set up in 1962, which, after several years of deliberation, was to recommend that five interdisciplinary postgraduate Centres for Latin American Studies were to be funded and established in the UK, one of them at Oxford University. It is not widely known in Spain that Carr published articles on Mexican history and a major book, *Puerto Rico: A Colonial Experiment* (New York: New York U. P., 1984). He was also, for nearly twenty years (1968–1987), Warden of St Antony's College, Oxford, which had been created in the most difficult years of the Cold War as an institute devoted to research on the politics of the contemporary world. St Antony's was as far removed from Christ Church as 'The House' was from New College and as all three were from All Souls. The intellectual debates and subtle links between academe and politics in the Oxford of the fifties and sixties was a world in which Carr moved easily.

Although a significant intellectual figure within England, Carr's greatest influence was in Spain, where, as Alasdair Fotheringham has commented, 'he had almost the status of a national hero'.<sup>6</sup> The biography by María Jesús González Hernández provides the key to the immense

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6 See Fotheringham's obituary, 'Professor Sir Raymond Carr: Celebrated Scholar Whose Work Explained and Illuminated Spanish Society before, during and after the Franco Regime', *The Independent*, 5 May 2015, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/professor-sir-raymond-carr-celebrated-scholar-whose-work-explained-and-illuminated-spanish-society-10227243.html>> (accessed 6 March 2017).

influence enjoyed by Carr among Spain's educated elite.<sup>7</sup> As Andrew Walsh says in his recent review, this biography 'offers a coherent account of the reception of his *magnum opus* in Spain and a particularly valid analysis of its totemic status for Spanish historians who were "starved of any account of contemporary history that was not propaganda" (142)'.<sup>8</sup> Because of the existence of a censorship apparatus committed to preventing the scrutiny of the dictatorship and its origins, Spain's modern and contemporary historiography conceded a disproportionate importance to foreign and particularly to Anglo-Saxon historians. Among them, Raymond Carr played a central role. Through his supervision of doctoral theses, he created a veritable Oxford 'school' of historians of contemporary Spain. As a result of his own work and then that of his English pupils, Carr ensured that the study of modern Spanish history and politics became a flourishing academic activity in a number of British universities. In Spain, his Spanish pupils also obtained university chairs. The Spanish translation of his great history of contemporary Spain influenced a whole generation of the country's students.

The influence of *España 1808–1939* in Spanish university circles was a consequence of several factors. It covered 131 years; and in the 1982–83 revision, 168 years.<sup>9</sup> The book presented Spain's twentieth-century

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7 María Jesús González Hernández, *Raymond Carr: The Curiosity of the Fox*, trans. Nigel Griffin, with a prologue by Paul Preston (Brighton/Portland/Toronto: Sussex Academic Press in association with the Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies, 2013). The book was first published as *Raymond Carr: la curiosidad del zorro. Una biografía*, prólogo de Paul Preston (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 2010).

8 For this review of González Hernández's biography, see Andrew Walsh, *BSS*, XCII:2 (2015), 296–97.

9 For the version in Spanish of Carr's *Spain 1808–1939*, see *España, 1808–1939*, ed. española corregida y aumentada por el autor, trad. Juan Ramón Capella, Jorge Garzolini & Gabriela Ostberg (Barcelona : Ediciones Ariel, 1969 [2<sup>a</sup> ed., *España 1808–1975*, 1983]). For an interesting review of the revised and updated 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in English, titled *Spain 1808–1975* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1982), see Joan-Lluís Marfany, *BHS*, LXII:3 (1985), 310–11.

disasters in terms of the long-term historical failures of the middle classes to overcome the resistance of a recalcitrant landed oligarchy to the political, economic and intellectual modernization of the country. In doing so, Carr broke with the romanticism of Richard Ford and even the legacy of Brenan. He saw the essence of Spain not in bullfighters and bandits, nor in civil guards and anarchists. Like Napoleon, he believed that ‘Spaniards are people, just like any others’. Accordingly, he illuminated the history of Spain by examining rainfall and soil patterns, religion and railways, population structure and property relations, farming and freemasons, schooling and civilian-military relations, as well as the constitutional conflicts, revolutions and civil wars which have characterized its history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Work of such sweeping vision and long historical span dealing with the contemporary period of Spain’s history was virtually unknown during Franco’s regime. That lack was largely a consequence of the unceasing activities of the censors. It also reflected the fact that such an adventurous approach ran counter to an academic tradition which placed greater value on the massive accumulation of empirical data about relatively narrow topics rather than on interpretative boldness or methodological novelty. In the 1960s, Spanish historians wrote largely for their fellow professionals and countrymen whom they had to impress in order to do well and gain worthwhile academic posts in the all-important and obligatory system of *oposiciones*. The graceful readability and prodigal insights of Carr’s work ensured that, in contrast to many of the dour productions of their own professors, it would be read and thought about by students.

*Spain 1808–1939* was based on enormous reading and indefatigable travel, and showed a deeply sensitive knowledge of modern Spanish literature, particularly the works of Galdós. The uncommon humanity which is the hallmark of Carr’s work derived from his avid consumption of

the novels of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spain. Raymond had an uncanny ability to be able to find the one telling anecdote in the most boring tome. The success of his book in capturing Spain was a reflection, too, of his incessant journeys through the highways and byways of Spanish towns and villages in the course of which he met many of the protagonists of his own books. During the Franco years, he had long conversations with important military figures of the Civil War such as Generals Martínez-Campos, Alfredo Kindelán, Antonio Aranda and the Republican Vicente Rojo. Afterwards, he was also able to talk to key personalities of the post-Franco political elite. In 1979, he won the prestigious non-fiction prize, the Premio Espejo de España with the Spanish version of *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*, written together with his one-time pupil, the brilliant Spanish historian, Juan Pablo Fusi.<sup>10</sup> In it, he was able to demonstrate his sensitivity to the shifting preoccupations and kaleidoscopic variety of Spanish popular culture. Football and bullfighting, television and soap operas were sources of information as fruitful for him as were newspapers or the memoirs of politicians. After all, this is a man interested in observing people of every kind and class, and who participated in diverse human activities including fox-hunting, which he loved; he rode for many years with the Exmoor Foxhounds. His books actually include a major history of fox-hunting. Well received by the critics, *English Fox-Hunting: A History* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1976), to be followed by *Fox-Hunting*, written with his wife Sara (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1982), was an iconoclastic work of social history.

On 7 November 1990, nearly the entire British community of scholars who devote their efforts to understanding Spain's history gathered in Oxford to pay homage to the man who taught and inspired them. Collectively, they

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<sup>10</sup> *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979). The Spanish version was titled *España: de la dictadura a la democracia* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1979).

had produced in his honour a volume on the subject of *Elites and Power in Twentieth-Century Spain* published by Clarendon, a specially bound copy of which they presented to him.<sup>11</sup> The event passed unnoticed in the British press, since Carr was more famous in Spain than in his native land; nevertheless, he was made a Fellow of the British Academy in 1978; and, on his retirement as Warden of St Antony's, in 1987 he received a knighthood. Recognition and tributes abounded in Spain and culminated, in 1999, in the prestigious Príncipe de Asturias award—a kind of Hispanic Nobel prize—, given to the then eighty-year-old historian in recognition of his contribution to world understanding of contemporary Spanish history, of the Spanish Civil War,<sup>12</sup> and of Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy. He had already had other awards. In 1983 he had received the Grand Cross of the Order of Alfonso el Sabio. He was a corresponding member of the Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid; and, in 1999, he received an Honorary Doctor of Letters, Madrid. Other honours included the Order of Infante Dom Henrique received from Portugal in 1989. In Spain, he became a household name, delivering lectures to standing-room only audiences. In them, as in his droll and amusing interviews in the press and on radio and TV, he would mask penetrating comment by speaking Spanish with an exaggerated English accent. It was a trick that he would often use, pretending to speak appalling Spanish; in Oxford, he would pretend to be slightly drunk. It was both entertaining and purposeful; for he lulled his interlocutor into being more revealing than he perhaps intended.

Raymond Carr was an amiable and eccentric nonconformist, a man

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11 *Elites and Power in Twentieth-Century Spain: Essays in Honour of Sir Raymond Carr*, ed. Frances Lannon & Paul Preston (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). This book contains a detailed list of Raymond Carr's publications; see pp. 287–97.

12 His major studies of the Civil War include *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977).

fascinated by ideas but not tied by ideologies, a sceptic, perhaps even a full-blown cynic, but full of unwavering enthusiasm for Spain. Carr managed to excite the affection of his pupils, his colleagues and, above all, his readers whether they were Spanish or English. In her magnificently researched biography, María Jesús González Hernández demonstrates why this was so. Placing her protagonist within a vivid recreation of the society in which he moved and the extraordinary generation to which he belonged, she deconstructs then reconstructs, in its many facets, the life of this extraordinary Englishman in all his complexity and profundity, an egotist capable of great generosity, a profound thinker capable of wit and humour. Raymond Carr was an intellectual, a traveller (in both geographical and social terms), an academic administrator, and an endlessly curious and avid explorer of both life and history.\*

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