

‘A professional historian in private practice’. Hugh Thomas: The Spanish Civil War and Beyond

I first met Hugh Thomas in 1968 when I arrived at the University of Reading to study for a Masters degree in Contemporary European Studies, in which he taught a course on the Spanish Civil War. I had previously been at Oxford where I was deeply disappointed by the lack of possibilities to do work on contemporary history. The opportunity to concentrate on the period that most interested me made a welcome change. What I did not realise was that studying and then working with Hugh Thomas would change my life. At the time, of course, I knew little about him other than that he was the author of the great book on the Spanish Civil War published seven years earlier. The course on the war that I took with him led to subsequent work both as his research assistant and as temporary lecturer when he was on sabbatical. More importantly, it was what opened the way to a lifetime of study of twentieth-century Spain.

Born in Windsor on 21 October 1931, Hugh Thomas was the only son of Hugh Whitelegge Thomas, a British colonial officer in what was then the Gold Coast, now Ghana. His uncle Sir Shenton Thomas had been the governor of Singapore who surrendered to the Japanese invaders in 1942. Hugh attended Sherborne School before going on to study history, not very assiduously, at Queen’s College Cambridge. However, he did attain prominence as a swashbuckling Tory president of the Union. When he came down, he led a champagne-fuelled life as a man-about-London. Before coming down, he sat the Foreign Office entrance examination and, while still awaiting the results, went to Paris to improve his French. He occasionally went to lectures at the Sorbonne and read French books at the Bibliothèque Nationale. At this time, he was also working as a research assistant for Nancy Mitford who then lived in Paris and was writing a biography of Madame de Pompadour. They had met in Cambridge in 1953. In the spring, he learned that he had not passed the exam but was encouraged by Harold Nicolson, a close friend of Nancy Mitford, to take it again which he did on a short visit to London.¹

An indication of his life in Paris can be found in a letter from Nancy to her mother, Lady Redesdale ‘My young friend Hugh Thomas has just called, rather battered after a fight with a German last night.’ An acquaintance in Paris, Walter Lees, listed as a Honorary Attaché at

¹ I am grateful to Inigo Thomas who shared with me Hugh’s own account of this period.

the British Embassy, may also have suggested to Hugh that he retake the examination for a diplomatic career. In August 1954, Harold Nicholson informed him that he had passed the Foreign Office examination, but would be given a post only with probationary status. A letter from Nancy to Hugh in November 1955, discussing the attractiveness of potential diplomatic postings, confirms that he had already started work at the Foreign Office. It was certainly the case that he was working there on disarmament thanks, it was said, to the influence of Nicholson.² The formal basis on which he was doing so is something of a mystery. His name does not appear in the Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book which implies that he was that he was undergoing a probationary period or simply attached by means of an ad hoc arrangement.

Hugh left the Foreign Office in November 1956 in solidarity with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Nutting, who was something of a mentor to him. Hugh claimed that, like Nutting, he did so out of disgust with the British role in the Suez crisis. He later wrote a brilliant book for the tenth anniversary of the events which was, to some extent, an effort to come to terms with his views at the time and since. He cited ‘personal recollections’ as one of his principal sources. In it, he describes Churchill leaving Downing Street for the last time, on 5 April 1955, to go to Buckingham Palace and relinquish the seals of office. Hugh wrote: ‘I observed this scene from an upper window in Downing Street’. There are some windows of the Foreign Office which overlook Downing Street itself so this may be taken as further confirmation of his position at the time. Based on wide reading and dozens of interviews with participants, *Suez* was a minor tour de force produced at a time when he was already embarked on writing his great history of Cuba.³

According to his son, Hugh left the Foreign Office, ‘not just because of Eden’s actions but because he recognised himself to be unsuited to institutional life. He had always wanted to be a writer, and the scope for that in the Foreign Office was limited.’ In the summer of 1956, he had managed to sell his novel on the futilities of diplomatic life, *The World’s Game* to Eyre & Spottiswood.⁴ Not long after, the publicity given to his clash with the Foreign Office made him an attractive catch for the Labour Party. He stood, unsuccessfully, as parliamentary

² Nancy Mitford to Hugh Thomas, 11 July 1954 & 18 November 1955, to Lady Redesdale, 11 April 1955, Charlotte Mosley, editor, *Love from Nancy. The Letters of Nancy Mitford* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993) pp. 327, 340, 345.

³ Hugh Thomas, *Suez* (New York Harper & Row, 1967) pp. 7, 13, 141, 223.

⁴ Inigo Thomas to Preston, 21, 25 May 2107.

candidate in 1957-1958 for Ruislip and Norwood. His altered allegiance was cemented when he edited *The Establishment* in 1959. His introductory essay was notable both for its stylistic flair and the accuracy of its criticism of an atrophied political and social élite. He denounced the Establishment as ‘the present-day institutional museum of Britain’s past greatness.’ He blamed the same public school system in which he himself had been educated: ‘It is in childhood that the men who make the present Establishment are trained; and therefore we shall not be free of the Establishment frame of mind, permeating all aspects of life and society, until the public schools are completely swept away, at whatever cost to the temporary peace of the country.’⁵

However, the success of the collective volume did not solve the issue of an income. A brief stint as a lecturer at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst did not satisfy him. He continued to try his hand as a novelist but *The Oxygen Age* (1958) did not sell. However, the previous year’s equally unsuccessful *The World’s Game* would unexpectedly solve the problem. Dedicated to Nancy Mitford, it perhaps cemented an already key connection, that with her friend Gladwyn Jebb, whom Hugh had met at the Paris Embassy. More importantly, it had been read by the well-known publisher, James MacGibbon, then a literary agent with Curtis Brown. What Hugh Thomas did not know at the time was that MacGibbon, a member of the Labour Party, had once been a Soviet agent whose prior membership of the British Communist Party had been inspired by the struggle of the Spanish Republic, although his recruitment by Soviet Military Intelligence (Glavnoe Razvedupravlenie or GRU), took place only in 1942.⁶ MacGibbon invited him to lunch and told him that the scene in his novel where the hero went to fight in Israel had reminded him of volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. Remarking that the time was ripe for a broad survey of the war and that he knew that the powerful American publisher Cass Canfield was keen to commission one, he urged Hugh to make a pitch. He duly produced a proposal and he was offered a substantial advance by Harper in the United States. The synopsis earned another substantial advance in London from Eyre and Spottiswood, the publisher of his novels.⁷ This was slightly surprising since his editor there was Douglas Jerrold, the fervent pro-Franco right-winger who had offered to acquire fifty machine-guns and half a million rounds of ammunition for the action squads of

⁵ Hugh Thomas, editor, *The Establishment: A Symposium* (London: Anthony Blond, 1959) pp. 14-17, 20.

⁶ Correspondence with Hamish MacGibbon and Thomas’s letter to Hamish of 27 February 2010. See also Boris Volodarsky, *Stalin’s Agent: The Life and Death of Alexander Orlov* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) pp. 117-18, 493.

⁷ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* Anniversary edition (London: Folio Society, 2014) pp. xxxiii – xxxv.

the Falange and later helped arrange Franco's flight from the Canary Islands to Morocco at the beginning of the war. He clearly did not expect Hugh to produce a pro-Republican work.⁸

Although at the time he did not know any Spanish, Hugh set to, reading voraciously and assiduously interviewing innumerable participants from both sides. Indeed, for the first time his capacity for sustained hard work came into play. His contacts included, on the left, the one-time members of the quasi-Trotskyist POUM, and now ferocious anti-Communists, Julián Gorkín and Víctor Alba; the Communist Manuel Tagüeña; the Republican Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Socialist Julio Álvarez del Vayo; the Republic's Ambassador to London Pablo Azcárate; anarchists such as the once Republican Minister of Health Federica Montseny and the extremist José García Pradas who had ended the war as a collaborator of Colonel Segismundo Casado; the Basque Father Alberto Onaindia and the Catalans Josep Maria Tarradellas and Pere Bosch Gimpera. On the right, his interviewees included José María Gil Robles, Cardenal Ángel Herrera, Franco's brother-in-law Ramón Serrano Súñer, Manuel Fal Conde and Don Juan de Borbón. He corresponded with well-informed war correspondents such as Herbert Matthews and Henry Buckley. In that first edition, he thanked Buckley for allowing him 'to pick his brains remorselessly'.⁹

Published in 1961, in time for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Hugh's book was quickly established in the popular mind as *the book* on the Spanish war. The ex-Communist Claude Cockburn described it as 'masterly'.¹⁰ There were numerous eulogistic reviews from liberal English pundits. Cyril Connolly, for instance, who was briefly in Spain during the war, wrote in the *Sunday Times*: 'Almost no aspect of the Civil War, however painful or unpopular, escapes him in this splendid book.' Michael Foot of the Labour Party, in *Tribune*, called it 'a prodigy of a book'. Such reviews saw the book widely accepted as a classic and it would go on to sell nearly a million copies throughout the world. Not only was it written in a vivid and highly readable style but *The Spanish Civil War* was the first attempt at an objective general view of a struggle which still excited the passions of right and left.

⁸ Douglas Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure* (London: Right Book Club, 1937) pp. 367-74.

⁹ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961) p.xxi.

¹⁰ Claude Cockburn, 'International Battlefield', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 30 April 1961.

In the *Guardian*, the young left-wing academic, David Marquand, highlighted Hugh Thomas's skill at writing a compelling story. He called it 'a masterpiece of old-fashioned history: of history as the eloquently presented record of battles, diplomatic manoeuvres, and the deed and characters of great men.' He went on to say: 'Mr Thomas excels, above all at portraiture. The flamboyant personalities which crowd his canvas spring to life, with almost too much exuberance. But social and economic history is rarely more than a background; and we get comparatively little sense of the blind, spasmodic heaving of a society in agony.'¹¹

The few dissident voices came from the extremes of right and left and, more surprisingly, from specialists on the war such as Raymond Carr and, some years later, Herbert Southworth, the great expert on the conflict. At the time, Southworth was working on his devastating demolition of Francoist crusade mythology, *El mito de la cruzada de Franco* (Paris 1963). On the right, Peter Kemp, one of the handful of British volunteers on the Franco side in the Spanish Civil War, paid tribute to 'a truly prodigious labour of research ... The result is by any standard a remarkable book – a clear, readable and carefully documented narrative of the Civil War.' However, Kemp's prejudices shone through. He commended Hugh for his efforts 'to control his own sympathy for the Republic' but alleged that he was 'not quite able to conceal his prejudice against the Nationalists and, in particular, General Franco.'¹²

Much more virulent criticisms came from the left. Among the most vehement was the review by the libertarian Vernon Richards, who was married to the daughter of the Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri. He described the book as 'the most cynical book on the Civil War that I have read'. He took issue with precisely those qualities of the book that had appealed to reviewers like David Marquand, alleging that the book did harm because it suffered from a major imbalance, with inordinate space devoted to the personalities of politicians and generals at the expense of the war's great revolutionary events: 'the inadequacy of Mr. Hugh Thomas' *The Spanish Civil War* lies in the fact that he is so fascinated by the personalities of politicians and military men, so carried away by considerations of military strategy and international political intrigues that he more or less overlooks the chief actors – the revolutionary workers – in a struggle that held the world's attention for nearly three years.' He continued: 'Apart from the fact that Mr. Thomas, a former civil servant, lacks the human

¹¹ David Marquand, 'Lessons of the Spanish Civil War, *Guardian*, 27 April 1961.

¹² Peter Kemp, "Spain and the Myth that Survives." *Daily Telegraph*, 27 Apr. 1961 Kemp, Peter. "Spain and the Myth that Survives." *Daily Telegraph*, 27 Apr. 1961

sympathy without which it is impossible even to start understanding the Spanish people, let alone writing about their actions during those momentous years, to this writer he gives the impression that he is more concerned with the techniques of writing than with the problems of writing history. For him adjectives are more important than factual accuracy.' ... 'His pen portraits are nasty caricatures, and the constructive achievements of the Revolution are dismissed in a few insignificant paragraphs dotted about the book.'¹³

Such criticisms from right and left may seem to pay implicit tribute to the work's objectivity. Certainly, the revered centrist thinker, Salvador de Madariaga, did exactly that. Influenced by the anti-Communist views of his friend Julián Gorkín, Madariaga disagreed with some matters of interpretation that later scholarship has actually resolved in Thomas's favour. Nevertheless, his admiration was unstinting: 'It is admirably documented, and from this point of view reveals not merely a prodigious industry and an outstanding ability to collect and collate facts but also a kind of passionate imagination which seems to have guided the author to search for the unthought-of source of the missing fact. It is furthermore written with an irreproachable impartiality.'¹⁴

In contrast, an exiled Spanish Republican academic from the American University in Washington, D. C., Angel Palerm, summed up the reactions of those who looked for genuine objectivity when he wrote that 'Indifference and lack of comprehension, not objectivity and impartiality, are what we find in Thomas' book.' He also found what he called 'a certain cold contempt, derived from inherited prejudices' in the dramatic resort to stereotypes in attributing the lack of dispassionate calm in Calvo Sotelo so characteristic of the rainy Galicia of his birth to his 'gipsy blood' or in repeating the rumour that Dolores Ibárruri had cut a priest's throat with her own teeth. Palerm wrote that the book 'enables the outsider to view the war in Spain much in the same way as, with horrified fascination, he looks upon such other Spanish peculiarities as the bullfights or the flagellant processions' and that 'to me, Thomas's book is nothing more than another link in the chain of "black" literature about Spain, all the more irritating whenever it is hypocritically sympathetic.'¹⁵ Thomas replied to

¹³ Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1972) p. 220; 'July 19, 1936: Republic or Revolution?', *Anarchy*, vol.1, no.5, 1961, pp. 129-136.

¹⁴ Salvador de Madariaga, 'The Spanish Civil War', *The Contemporary Review*, 1 June 1961, pp. 325-6.

¹⁵ Angel Palerm, Letter to the Editor, *The Americas*, Vol. 20, No. 1, October 1962), pp. 212-220. The comments by Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 6 & 8.

Palerm in 1963 but he did nothing to amend the passages concerned in the revised edition of 1965.¹⁶

The review by the Oxford historian Raymond Carr was rather cool. He commended it as a ‘balanced account’ but implied that Thomas’s liking for amusing anecdotes diminished the overall picture: ‘My quarrel with Mr Thomas is one of proportion and detail. In a long book, the war itself gets short shrift. Military history is the most exacting of disciplines and little can be learnt from rough maps and broad arrows. ... Perhaps Mr Thomas wastes too much space on the minutiae of the International Brigades, fascinating though he makes them, Nathan’s gold-tipped cane, Clive’s position in the Oxford boat are all very well but there are no portraits of comparable intimacy devoted to Spanish officers.’¹⁷ In fact, the relations between the two were never warm.¹⁸

At the suggestion of the economic historian, Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz, José Martínez Guericabeitia, an exiled Spanish anarchist, agreed to commission a translation of the book as the first title of the publishing house that they were trying to establish in Paris, Éditions Ruedo Ibérico. This decision led to one of José Martínez’s friends, the Marxist historian Manuel Tuñón de Lara writing him a vehement letter of protest. Martínez himself had told Sánchez-Albornoz, ‘without reading it, I just know that I will not agree with his interpretations’ (sin leerlo sé que no estaré de acuerdo con sus interpretaciones). When the book came out, it carried an editorial preface stating that ‘Ruedo Ibérico neither rejects nor endorses the contribution of Hugh Thomas to contemporary Spanish history’ (Ruedo Ibérico ni rechaza ni suscribe la aportación de Hugh Thomas a la historia contemporánea Española).¹⁹

Although banned in General Franco’s Spain, the translation became a clandestine best-seller, sent in by various methods ranging from conventional post to being smuggled in by train drivers. Southworth, who helped finance Ruedo Ibérico, wrote to his friend Jay Allen: ‘For

¹⁶ Hugh Thomas, Letter to the Editor, *The Americas*, Vol. 20, No. 1, July 1963, pp. 89-92. The comments about Calvo Sotelo and Dolores Ibárruri could still be seen in Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* 2nd edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) pp. 27 & 29; *The Spanish Civil War* 3rd ed. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), and in *The Spanish Civil War* 4th edition (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 7 & 9.

¹⁷ Raymond Carr, ‘The Graveyard of Ideals’, *The Observer*, 30 April 1961.

¹⁸ For an example, see María Jesús González, *Raymond Carr. The Curiosity of the Fox* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press/Cañada Blanch, 2013) pp. 308-9.

¹⁹ Albert Forment, *José Martínez: La epopeya de Ruedo Ibérico* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2000) pp. 188-9, 198-200,

the moment, we send copies to the Canaries, there the customs are slack, and from there entry into the mainland is easy.’ Apparently, the book cost double what it did in France with the substantial profits going to the smugglers.²⁰ The dictator’s propagandists had never ceased proclaiming that the war had been a crusade against communist barbarism. However, the impact of foreign works by Thomas and Southworth, smuggled in despite the efforts of the frontier police, entirely discredited the standard regime line. In particular, the way that Thomas’s book recounted the history of the war in a readable and objective style was a devastating blow for the partisans of what they called Franco’s crusade and was therefore devoured hungrily by anyone who could get hold of a copy. The first edition of 5,000 copies sold quickly but a much bigger second edition met more stringent frontier controls. An example of the regime’s efforts to stifle the impact of Hugh’s book was the case of Octavio Jordá, a 31-year old working-class Valencian who was arrested at the French frontier with two suitcases packed with copies of *The Spanish Civil War*. At his subsequent trial, he was found guilty of ‘illegal propaganda’ and ‘spreading communism’ and sentenced to two years imprisonment.²¹ One of the book’s importers informed Martínez that two clandestine distributors had been imprisoned for contraband.²²

In response to Thomas and Southworth, Franco’s then Minister of Information, Manuel Fraga, set up an official centre for civil war studies to streamline crusade historiography. It was too late. So successful was the book that even Franco himself was regularly asked to comment on statements therein. At first, the Caudillo was under the impression that Thomas was American and told his cousin Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo: ‘the majority of those who write in the United States about Spanish matters are, if neither reds nor leftists, just clueless’ (la mayoría de los que escriben en los Estados Unidos sobre asuntos de España si no son rojos o izquierdistas, son unos despistados). Salgado-Araujo wrote that when he asked Franco specific questions regarding Thomas’s account, ‘in general, he replies that much of what this writer says is a lie’ (en general, me contesta desmintiendo muchas afirmaciones de este escritor). Interestingly, while accepting responsibility for the bombing of Barcelona, he claimed that ‘the various bombing raids on Barcelona were carried out against the port and did not hit the population’ (los diversos bombardeos sobre Barcelona se hicieron sobre las actividades del puerto, sin alcanzar a la población). Denying that there were any mass

²⁰ Southworth to Allen, 29 January 1964, Southworth papers, Centro de Documentación del Bombardeo de Gernika, Gernika; Forment, *José Martínez*, pp. 223-4.

²¹ González, *Raymond Carr*, pp. 157, 409.

²² Forment, *José Martínez*, pp. 230.

executions, he asserted that ‘the majority of death sentence laid down by courts martial were commuted by me’ (la mayoría de las sentencias de muerte firmados por los consejos de guerra fueron conmutadas por mí).²³

Inevitably, given the regime’s efforts to frustrate the distribution of the book, the Centre’s director Ricardo de la Cierva wrote a long and contradictory but, ultimately, hostile account of it. He acknowledged its skilful synthesis and importance but denounced it as naïve, riddled with errors of detail and of interpretation, grotesquely sensationalist and withal ‘un monstruo histórico’. Because Hugh’s account was not openly pro-Francoist, La Cierva claimed that the book was written ‘from the Republican side’ (desde el lado republicano). His stance derived as much from his defective understanding of English as from his own position as a Francoist propagandist. For instance, in the book’s account of the battle of the Ebro, Hugh describes Republican difficulties and then comments ‘worse was to follow’. Those four words were seen by La Cierva as evidence of Republican bias. He implied that the problem particularly derived from the influence of Herbert Southworth.²⁴ Years later, reviewing the third edition, he called Thomas’s book a ‘Vademecum for simpletons’ (un vademecum para papanatas).²⁵ Much to La Cierva’s chagrin, the notoriety of Thomas’s book occasioned by his and other Francoist denunciations would underlay colossal sales after the dictator’s death in 1975.

Southworth and Thomas were on cordial terms in the 1960s. After the publication of the first edition, Southworth ‘wrote to me out of the blue in 1962 telling me that he very much liked my book. We subsequently met and had a long correspondence’.²⁶ As La Cierva had been quick to note, Thomas had asked Southworth to check the proofs of the second edition of *The Spanish Civil War* and made alterations to his text in response to some, but not all, of Southworth’s advice. He also twice visited Southworth’s home in France. Hugh also tried, unsuccessfully, to find an English publisher for Southworth’s *El mito de la cruzada de Franco*.²⁷ However, a clash was slowly brewing. In private correspondence, Southworth

²³ Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mis conversaciones privadas con Franco* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1976) pp. 375-6, 484-5, 494, 504, 507.

²⁴ Ricardo de la Cierva, *Cien libros básicos sobre la guerra de España* (Madrid: Publicaciones españolas, 1966) pp. 121-36. ‘Worse was to follow’, *The Spanish Civil War* 2nd edition, p. 703.

²⁵ Ricardo de la Cierva, ‘El vademecum de los papanatas’, *Nueva Historia*, febrero 1977, p. 102.

²⁶ Thomas to Preston, 8 May 1975.

²⁷ Southworth to Allen, 18 November 1964, Southworth papers. Southworth’s help is acknowledged in *The Spanish Civil War* 2nd edition, p. 15.

commented: ‘Thomas is really a bit timid about his knowledge and quite willing to change. But, every time I look deeply into a story in his book, some facts are wrong.’²⁸ Allen echoed Southworth’s concerns commenting that he found ‘Thomas terribly fuzzy about a lot of things.’²⁹ Southworth commented ‘Very little has been written about Galicia, for obvious reasons, little real fighting, lost in the corner, etc. Thomas has almost a page, and all wrong. A curious thing, every time I check up closely on Thomas, the facts are all wrong; hence the interpretation also. He says that warships were engaged in Vigo and La Coruña, whereas in reality, nary a warship took part in the fighting in either port. He says there was heavy street fighting in all Galician cities, which was false because the people had nothing to fight with. He says Asturian miners came to the aid of the people in La Coruña, a physical impossibility. In reality, the miners came from the tin mines in the province of Lugo. Etc. Etc. What Thomas did was to pay someone to make short resumes of certain books; the result is a bit like the facts in TIME magazine, everybody changed one word and finally’³⁰ Elsewhere, Southworth complained that having got facts about the Falange correct in his first edition, Thomas had mistakenly changed the text in his second edition to agree with the study by Stanley Payne.³¹

One of the things that would eventually lead to public polemic with Herbert Southworth was Hugh allowing his penchant for florid prose to get the better of him. This was to be a crucial difference between the two. Southworth had worked for the Spanish Republic in Washington during the war and spent much of his life trying to establish the truth of the conflict. Hugh did not share his commitment, having been prompted by James MacGibbon to see the Spanish Civil War simply as a good subject. He would often describe himself as ‘a professional historian in private practice’. He told a Spanish journalist, Jesús Pardo, that Douglas Jerrold had said that the way he wrote novels suggested that he was really an historian and that he would pay him an advance and permit him to choose the subject: ‘I chose your civil war but I might equally well have plumped for the Turkish revolution.’ This would suggest that the meeting with James MacGibbon was doubly fortuitous.³²

²⁸ Southworth to Allen, 2 January 1964, Southworth papers.

²⁹ Allen to Southworth, 6 January 1964, Southworth papers.

³⁰ Southworth to Allen, 23 January 1965, Southworth papers.

³¹ Southworth to Allen, 21 December 1965, Southworth papers.

³² González, *Raymond Carr*, pp. 164, 410.

However, the gripping style of *The Spanish Civil War*, a style that would be his hallmark, would be the cause of the falling out with Southworth. In the first and second editions, with regard to the Republican siege of the sanctuary of Santa María de la Cabeza in Jaén, he wrote: ‘The defenders were surrounded by 20,000 Republicans, who seemed likely to be as savage as Red Indians. Doubts and difficulties arose. The attacks began again. Aircraft and artillery led the way. The heroic Cortés was wounded on April 30, and on May 1 the International Brigade and the militia of Jaén broke into the sanctuary. For a while slaughter was general. The sanctuary was burned. Flames engulfed the Sierra.’³³ Herbert Southworth pointed out in his book on Guernica that ‘However, in reality, the vanquished were treated with a generosity rare in the Spanish Civil War, and certainly nothing like it can be found in the accounts of Nationalist treatment of Republican prisoners. . . . In Thomas’s book, this account followed that of Guernica, and the English historian doubtless credited the Republicans with this atrocity in order to keep things in balance.’³⁴ In Hugh’s third edition, the references to Red Indians and the general slaughter were removed but not the colourful phrase about the flames engulfing the sierra.

When Southworth’s book was published in Paris, I was a temporary lecturer at the University of Reading standing in for Hugh while he was on sabbatical. I well remember his annoyance, not to say fury, at Southworth’s claim that he had over-dramatized the siege of Santa María de la Cabeza in order to create an atrocity as a counter-balance to the bombing of Guernica. We had agreed that I would review the book when it came out in French and that he would wait and do so when it appeared in English. However, when he saw what Southworth said about him in the first French edition, he decided to go ahead and review it. He was equally irritated by Southworth having pointed out that he had changed the figures of the victims of the bombing of Guernica without giving any source. This was, in fact, the case.³⁵ In his first edition, Thomas had used the figure of 1,654 dead issued by the Basque Government but, in the 1965 edition, this was drastically reduced to nearer one hundred’.³⁶

³³ Thomas, 1961 edition, p. 423; 1965 edition, p. 537; 1977 edition, pp. 630-1; 2003 edition, pp. 612-13.

³⁴ Herbert Rutledge Southworth, *La destruction de Guernica. Journalisme, diplomatie, propagande et histoire* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1975) p.342, nota 106.

³⁵ Southworth, *La destruction*, p. 329. Letter from Hugh Thomas to me, 8 May 1975.

³⁶ Thomas, 1961 edition, p. 419; 1965 edition, p. 537. In the 1977 edition, he had amended this to ‘Perhaps 1,000 died’, p. 625, note 2. In the fourth edition of 2003, p. 607, this had become ‘Many people, perhaps as many as a thousand, were killed, though subsequent events make it impossible to be quite certain how many.’

In *The Times Literary Supplement*, Thomas wrote an interesting and, while far from ungenerous, rather prickly review of the French edition of Southworth's book.³⁷ In the review, he inclined to show more respect to pro-Franco propagandists, such as his friend Douglas Jerrold, Arnold Lunn or Luis Bolín, than Southworth or other pro-Republican scholars would have done. In his review, his pique about Southworth's criticisms shone through. He had written: 'Some of Mr Southworth's mud splashes almost everyone who has written about modern Spain. Friendship has not stood in the way of scholarship. I, for example, am described as capricious, in my changes in estimate of those killed at Guernica.'³⁸

This referred to Southworth asking rhetorically 'pour quelle raison capricieuse', Thomas had reduced his estimate of those killed to a mere one hundred.³⁹ In the Spanish edition of mid-1977, this was rendered as: '¿Pero por qué capricho, cuando revisó su libro en 1965, desmintió esas cifras y escribió en una nota a pie de página...' and in the English edition as 'But for some whimsical reason, when he revised his book in 1965, he reneged on these figures [the 1,654 of the Basque government] and wrote in a footnote that it was impossible to establish the number of persons killed: "Estimates vary from 1,600 to 100. The lower estimate is likely."⁴⁰ Hugh was right that the number of victims will never be known for certain because of the chaos and the fact that the rebels had captured the town before the debris was cleared but was off the mark in suggesting that it might be as low as 100. Indeed, the most recent research suggests that the truth lies near to or even higher than the figures estimated by the Basque government at the time of 1,654 dead and 889 injured.⁴¹

Southworth was annoyed by the fact that Hugh started his review as follows: 'One day in the mid-1930s, a self-educated Texan, Herbert Southworth, arrived in Washington and found himself a job in the Library of Congress. In the evenings, he studied and made himself a socialist'. In fact, when he arrived in Washington, Southworth already had a degree from

³⁷ Hugh Thomas. 'Heinkels over Guernica', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 April 1975.

³⁸ The original review appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 11 April 1975 and the subsequent correspondence on 13 and 20 June 1975.

³⁹ Herbert R. Southworth, *Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War. The Brainwashing of Francisco Franco* (London: Routledge-Cañada Blanch Studies, 2002) pp. 54-7. The offending comment in Southworth, *La destruction*, p. 464 and Herbert Rutledge Southworth, *La destrucción de Guernica. Journalisme, diplomatie, propagande et histoire* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1977) p. 475.

⁴⁰ Southworth, *La destruction*, p. 464 and Herbert Rutledge Southworth, *La destrucción de Guernica. Journalisme, diplomatie, propagande et histoire* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1977) p. 475

⁴¹ Xabier Irujo, *El Guernica de Richthofen. Un ensayo de bombardeo de terror* (Guernica-Lumo: Guernicako Bakearen Museoa Fundazioa, 2012) pp. 257-301.

Arizona University and a Masters Degree from Columbia University. By the time of the review, he held a doctorate from the Sorbonne. Moreover, the book had a preface praising its methodology by the great French historian by Pierre Vilar of the Annales School.

Southworth believed, as did others who read the review, that Thomas presented a picture of an eccentric and obsessive amateur and that he did so in order to play down his seriousness. This impression was cemented by a passage in the review about Franco's British supporters: 'These Christian gentlemen had, however, been fundamentally affected by the terrible atmosphere of a witch's Sabbath which characterized Nationalist Spain in those days. To understand this atmosphere requires a more equable spirit than that of Mr Southworth who approaches his victims with all the generosity with which the Count of Monte Cristo approached his enemies. Was the origin of Danglar's treachery to be sought in the number of pregnant girls in the Rue du Chat Qui Pisse in Marseilles in the Napoleonic era? Such pedantry would have been swept aside by Edmond Dantes with contempt, just as Herbert Southworth, the Count of Anti-Cristo, tries to sweep aside sceptical historians of the next generation. With Dantes, as with Mr Southworth, you must take a side.' With regard to Thomas's remark about the splashing of mud, Southworth replied in the *Times Literary Supplement* that he saw himself 'as someone who has spent many years busily scraping away the mud that has been thrown at the Spanish Republic.' Regarding being called 'the Count of Anti-Cristo', Southworth wrote 'I have been called worse names, and if this is the penalty I must pay for denouncing the moral bankruptcy and the intellectual mediocrity of the Guernica texts of Roman Catholic spokesmen, I accept the nomination.'⁴²

Thomas was furious when he read Southworth's reply. Whether in intellectual or social circles, Hugh could be charming and generous but he was quite thin-skinned. He did not take criticism lightly or, indeed, at all, as the conflict in the *TLS* demonstrated. I asked him to consider that to reply in the same tone would merely give succour to Ricardo de la Cierva and other Francoists who regarded them both as 'the enemy' and persistently attacked them. His reply was relatively restrained. He restated his views on the casualties at Guernica and the siege of Santa María de la Cabeza. He ended ironically saying: 'I am sorry that I described

⁴² The first quote about the mud is from *TLS*, 13 June 1975. The second about 'the Count of Anti-Cristo' is from Southworth's letter to the editor of the *TLS* which was printed in abbreviated form on 13 June 1975 but without this sentence.

Mr Southworth as self-educated if he regards that as an insult. I regarded it as a compliment.’⁴³

Southworth would return in his final work to what he continued to see as Hugh Thomas’s fence-straddling. The book was a study of the falsification by right-wingers of four ‘secret documents’ that, in order to justify the forthcoming military conspiracy, appeared ‘to prove that the Spanish Communist Party, in collusion with Spanish Socialists and even anarchists, as well as foreign communists and socialists and Comintern leaders, was plotting, on the eve of the military revolt in July 1936, to seize control – through an armed uprising – of the Spanish government, then already in the hands of the Popular Front.’ Shabbily produced, the documents were sent to the Foreign Office in London but not considered to be genuine.⁴⁴ In his book, Southworth recalled that, in his first edition, Thomas had seemed to take the documents at their face value. Hugh had written: ‘I have come to the conclusion that the three documents alleged to have been found in four separate places after the start of the Civil War, and making plans for a Socialist-Communist *coup d’état* by means of a simulated rising of the Right are not forgeries.’ Thomas went on to say that, if they were forgeries, they were ‘clever forgeries’ and, ‘in deciding that the ‘documents’ were ‘genuine’, rashly concluded that they were Republican plans and not the production of the military rebels’. Thus, he interpreted the documents as ‘dreams more than blueprints, or rather plans for hypothetical circumstances which might never arrive’.⁴⁵ In fact, as a result of correspondence with Southworth, in the second edition, Hugh described them as forgeries and wrote: ‘I am particularly grateful to Mr H. R. Southworth for helping me see the light.’⁴⁶

Whatever the future polemics might bring, the success of his book permitted Hugh, now financially more secure, in 1962, to marry the beautiful Honorable Vanessa Jebb, daughter of Lord Gladwyn Jebb. They had three children, Inigo, Isambard and Isabella. A serene influence on her sometimes irascible husband, Vanessa was the jewel of the glittering social circle that met at their home in Ladbroke Grove. In 1966, Hugh was made Professor of History at the University of Reading. He was a thoroughly entertaining and popular teacher, as I saw for myself first as a Masters student and some years later as a colleague. He was

⁴³ Preston to Thomas, 13 May 1975; *TLS*, 20 June 1975.

⁴⁴ Southworth, *Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 1-5

⁴⁵ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1961 edition, p.108, n.1; Southworth, *Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 51-3.

⁴⁶ 1965 edition, p. 150, note 2.

never comfortable with the creeping administrative demands of academic life and I substituted for him in 1974-1975 when he took a sabbatical to concentrate on his writing, in this case his history of the world. Within a year of his return to the University, Hugh resigned his chair. Before this time, I had been his research assistant on the third edition of *The Spanish Civil War*. My good fortune in working with him meant that I was often invited to his home and met hugely interesting people. Thanks to that, I met and became friends with the great Cuban writer, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and made the contact with Franco's brother-in-law Ramón Serrano Súñer which opened the door to my many later interviews with him while I was working on my biography of the Caudillo.

Even before going to Reading, he had begun research for his gigantic history of Cuba.⁴⁷ At nearly 1700 pages, it was not a commercial success. Its long early survey of the Island's history, beginning with the British occupation of Havana, was found to be hard going by many readers. Only when it reached Castro's revolution did it match the confident sweep of the Spanish book, teeming with anecdote and aperçus. After his work on Cuba, he was commissioned by President Rómulo Betancourt to do a similar job on Venezuela but never really got started. Moreover, he felt constrained after spending, as he put it, 'seven years in the study of a short period in the history of a small society and it is, therefore, natural that I should wish to write on a more generous scale.'⁴⁸ The result was *An Unfinished History of the World* published in 1979. Its tone reflected the fact that Hugh had by now moved to the right. Tom Nairn compared the book to Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. He wrote: 'As with Spengler, the history of the species is solemnly conjured up and interrogated in the hope of forging a new moral basis for conservatism. Pernicious fantasies like socialism are tracked down and castigated. Though the decay is advanced, there are still healthy, traditional forces – mercifully prominent in the writer's own nation – which can be rallied and nourished with intellectual fodder.' The central message of the need 'to revive the West' was lost in the cornucopia of fascinating but often unrelated anecdotes.⁴⁹

The change in Hugh's political position followed an unhappy experience in the Labour Party. At the behest of his friend Roy Jenkins, he had another unsuccessful attempt to secure a Labour seat, in North Kensington, but was not selected as a candidate after being undermined

⁴⁷ Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971).

⁴⁸ From the original proposal.

⁴⁹ Hugh Thomas, *An Unfinished History of the World* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979); Tom Nairn, 'Mrs Thatcher's Spengler', *London Review of Books*, 24 January 1980.

by members of the Militant Tendency on the selection committee. Thereafter, if not in consequence, he publicly declared his abandonment of the Labour Party and his embrace of Thatcherist free-market economics. The bombshell came in an article in the *Daily Mail*. Under the headline ‘Why I’ve changed sides’, he denounced the ‘grey sea of state socialism’ and praised ‘the more turbulent but brighter waters of free enterprise’. The article as printed stated: ‘The Conservatives seem to be primarily a party of privilege’. In a letter to the editor three days later, he wrote: ‘It should of course have read ‘The Conservatives seem *to have ceased* to be primarily a party of privilege.’⁵⁰ The omission may have been the work of a left-wing type-setter or copy-editor.

He became one of Thatcher’s unofficial advisers and was made Chairman of her think-tank, the Centre for Policy Studies in succession to Keith Joseph. In line with his new political vocation, when *An Unfinished History of the World* was awarded a £7,500 Arts Council Literary Award in April 1980, he refused to take the cheque. Saying that his bank manager would be aghast, he made the gesture on the grounds that the final chapters of the book argued that ‘the intervention of the state (leads) to the decay of civilisation and the collapse of societies.’ In *History, Capitalism and Freedom*, a pamphlet published with a foreword by Mrs Thatcher, he argued that the decline of Britain was the consequence of the encroachment of the state. At the Centre for Policy Studies, he tried to help Keith Joseph, now Minister of Education, to re-establish a sense of the glories of English history which they both believed had been obscured by the works of Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson and others. It was a project that belied his own works on Spain and Cuba and led to accusations that a first-class historian was trying to turn a subject on which he had never worked into ‘hollow, pseudo-patriotic indoctrination’.⁵¹ In his 1983 pamphlet *Our Place in the World*, he attributed the decline of Britain to the transformation of ‘the old England of individualism and *laissez-faire* into an England organised from above’.⁵²

Within a short time of joining the Conservative Party, he was drafting notes for Mrs Thatcher’s speeches.⁵³ The closeness of his relationship with her was revealed in a manuscript note to the Conservative Party chairman Michael Thorneycroft about

⁵⁰ *Daily Mail*, 23, 26 November 1976.

⁵¹ Edward Countryman, letter to the editor, *The Guardian*, 25 June 1983.

⁵² Hugh Thomas, *Our Place in the World* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1983) p. 8.

⁵³ Thomas, notes ‘The Renewal of Britain’, 25 June 1979, Thatcher MSS (Churchill Archive Centre): THCR 5/1/4/3/2.

appointments in the party organization, ‘We must first consult with Prof. Hugh Thomas.’⁵⁴ On one of his drafts, she wrote ‘excellent – and has all Hugh's usual historical perspective which is so refreshing.’⁵⁵ He was a frequent lunch guest at Downing Street and at Chequers. He also wrote reports on Gibraltar.⁵⁶ Indeed, the work of the Centre for Policy Studies, ‘for the cause’ as he put it in a report to her, was considerable.⁵⁷

For his efforts on behalf of Mrs Thatcher, he was rewarded in 1981 by being ennobled as Lord Thomas of Swynnerton and there were rumours that she might send him to Madrid as ambassador to replace Sir Richard Parsons, although the deficiencies of his Spanish might have rendered the job difficult.⁵⁸ During the Falklands War, Hugh advised Mrs Thatcher and was able to do so effectively because of his relationship with the Prime Minister of Peru, Manuel Ulloa, who was trying to broker peace between London and Buenos Aires. He wrote long memoranda for her in mid-April 1982.⁵⁹ And again on 5, 6, 7, 11, 13 May (twice) and 17 May.⁶⁰ When the British forces in the south Atlantic were victorious, he wrote her a fulsome – some might say sycophantic – letter. In it, he wrote: ‘It seems to me that with this defeat of the Argentines you have turned the tables too on the defeatism, negativism and spirit of withdrawal in our own country.’ He went on to compare her to Sir Francis Drake and Admiral Nelson.⁶¹

During his extremely busy time at the Centre for Policy Studies, he was also working a massive book on the early years of the Cold War. Indeed, whatever his political activities, he never relaxed his gruelling work rate. *The Armed Truce* was a brilliant and highly readable work of nearly one thousand pages. Wide-ranging and bejewelled with sparkling anecdotes, it was acclaimed both by critics of right and left and by participants such as Zbigniew Brzezinski. In his preface, he announced that it was to be the first of several volumes on the

⁵⁴ 14 May 1979, Thatcher MSS (Churchill Archive Centre): THCR 2/6/2/38

⁵⁵ Letter from her private secretary Ian Gow, 16 July 1979, Thatcher MSS (Churchill Archive Centre): THCR 2/6/2/170-2

⁵⁶ Thomas, Gibraltar, 12 December 1979, TNA PREM19/769 f129.

⁵⁷ Thomas, report, 3 July 1980, Thatcher MSS (Churchill Archive Centre): THCR 2/11/3/1 part 1 f101

⁵⁸ *The Observer*, 6 November 1983.

⁵⁹ Thomas minutes, 15 April 1982, THCR 1/13/26 f32; 16 April 1982, THCR 1/13/26 f31

⁶⁰ Thomas to Thatcher, ‘A Future Settlement in the Falklands Crisis’, 5 May 1982, TNA, PREM 19/624/f23; Minutes to Thatcher, 6 May 1982, THCR 1/13/26 f22; 7 May 1982, THCR 1/13/26 f10; 11 May 1982, THCR 1/13/26 f87; 13 May 1982, THCR 1/13/26 f9 and THCR 1/13/26 f10; 17 May 1982, TNA PREM19/648 f150. *The Guardian*, 21 August 1983.

⁶¹ Thomas to Thatcher, 16 June 1982, THCR 1/13/27 f174

Cold War.⁶² However, they never appeared because he, or perhaps his publisher, wanted a more exciting subject.

After the defeat of Mrs Thatcher in 1990, his prominence in the Tory Party diminished and he was increasingly disillusioned by what he saw as a festering Euro-scepticism. Finally, in search of a greater public protagonism, on 17 November 1997, he crossed the floor of the House of Lords to the Liberal-Democrat benches. He announced: 'I have resigned the Conservative whip in the House of Lords because since the election of May 1st last, its attitudes towards the European Union as it is presently constituted, and as it is likely to develop, have become ever more critical and sceptical.'⁶³

Hugh spoke frequently in the House of Lords in a tone that suggested that, even if he had left the Conservative Party, he had not left his conservative views behind. On 9 June 1999, he declared: 'I shall also visit Chile for the first time since I visited it during the lamentable regime of President Allende. When I was there in 1970, it seemed to me that the country was on the brink of civil war with an ancient democracy, as the noble Viscount described it, being subverted by a popular front government very comparable to what existed in eastern Europe immediately after 1945; in other words, a kind of foretaste of the eastern European communist governments. Of course the coup d'état of 1973 had, as we all know well, a dark side. However, the recollection of that should not blind us to the fact that the change from the Allende regime was a benefit to Chile, the continent and perhaps the world.'⁶⁴

Finally free of the party politics that had never really fulfilled him, he had returned to his real metier and began to write a series of flamboyant works on Imperial Spain. The narrative drive of *The Spanish Civil War* and *The Armed Truce* was carried over first into his massive history of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico. It was easy to see why he would be attracted by the audacity of Hernán Cortés and his reckless band and almost as much by that of the role of Montezuma and the Aztecs. A book that he had started while still at the Centre for Policy Studies was yet another testament to his energy and hard work as well as to the efforts of his research assistants. John Elliott's review praised Hugh's industry and flair: 'He has done an enormous amount of work, not only sweeping into his capacious net the vast secondary

⁶² Hugh Thomas, *Armed Truce. The Beginnings of the Cold War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986) pp. 17-19.

⁶³ Press release from Liberal Democrat Party, 17 November 1997; Anthony Bevin, 'Europhile defects from Tories to Lib-Dems', *The Independent*, 18 Nov 1997; *The Times*, 18 November 1997.

⁶⁴ 9 June 1999, Hansard, House of Lords Debates.

literature that has been published in the century and a half since Prescott, but also ferreting out new documentation from the archives of Seville.’ Geoffrey Parker underlined the skill with which Hugh disentangled the complexities of Cortés’s negotiations with the enemies of the Aztecs and excited his readers with lurid accounts of the savagery of the fighting at Tenochtitlan. In contrast, Frank McLynn paid tribute to the book’s ‘mighty erudition’ but was repelled by its lack of sympathy for the Aztecs and what he called ‘Cortés-mania’, made possible by systematic whitewashing of the atrocities committed by the Spaniards.⁶⁵

His move from the Conservatives to the Liberal-Democrats had coincided with the publication of his 900-page work on the slave trade, a bold narrative. Placing it firmly in the long line of Thomas’s achievements, Felipe Fernández Armesto wrote: ‘no living historian has a record like his in a particular, vital kind of scholarship – mastering vast amounts of data and reorganising them deftly in books of academic integrity and universal appeal. *The Slave Trade* is one of his most powerful yet.’ The riveting narrative covered not only the extent to which the wealth provided by the slave trade transformed cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, London and Glasgow but also the complicity of African tribal chiefs and Arab merchants in the trade. It was driven along by fascinating stories of such slavers, as well as of pirates and often less than idealistic abolitionists.⁶⁶

The book was followed by what was his crowning achievement, a trilogy about the Spanish Empire consisting of *Rivers of Gold* (2003); *The Golden Age: The Spanish Empire of Charles V* (2010) and *World Without End: The Global Empire of Philip II* (2014).

Intensely readable, the first was an account on the grandest scale of the triumphs consequent on the heroic voyage of Columbus. In glossing over the genocide carried out by the Spaniards in the first three decades of empire, it revealed more sympathy for the imperialist Spaniards than for the conquered native populations. Nevertheless, Paul Kennedy made a similar point to that made by Fernández Armesto a decade previously: ‘A book the size of *Rivers of Gold* would be an astonishing work by any author, yet its publication simply

⁶⁵ Hugh Thomas, *The Conquest of Mexico* (London: Hutchinson, 1993); J.H.Elliott, ‘Decoding the Caesar of Mexico’, *The Times*, 28 October 1993; Geoffrey Parker, *The Spectator*, 5 March 1994; Frank McLynn, ‘Epic Thuggery’, *New Statesman*, 12 November 1993.

⁶⁶ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870* (London: Picador, 1997). Felipe Fernández Armesto, ‘Of Human Bondage’, *The Sunday Times*, 23 November 1997; Ronald Segal, ‘Irons in the Fire’ *The Observer*, 23 November 1997; Fred D’Aguiar, ‘The Black Man’s Burden’, *The Guardian*, 27 November 1997; Leslie Mitchell, ‘All guilty, some more than others’, *The Spectator*, 29 November 1997.

affirms Hugh Thomas's record as one of the most productive and wide-ranging historians of modern times.⁶⁷ In Spain, however, numerous factual errors in the book were attributed to the speed of its gestation.⁶⁸

The second volume related with Hugh's customary drive the next thirty years, the creation of the empire of Charles V. Unsurprisingly, he revelled in the slaughter that accompanied Francisco Pizarro's conquest of Peru. Hugh's characteristic emphasis on larger-than-life personalities, cruel and ruthless, were at the heart of another highly readable epic with the brutality of Cortés matched by that of Pizarro.⁶⁹ The final volume did not live up to the promise of the first two. It was shorter and more condensed although still peppered with gossipy anecdotes which ensured its readability. In format, it inclined more to essays on different aspects of Philip II's efforts to keep his complex empire going. Perhaps as he moved into his eighth decade, Hugh was getting tired. The relish for savagery remained as did the enthusiastic admiration for the achievements of the Spaniards. In a typically amusing review, Malcolm Deas commented: 'He dearly loves a conquistador'. Indeed, in 2001, Hugh had published in Spain a Who's Who of conquistadores.⁷⁰ Deas went on: 'He is also partial to grandees, and here he has plenty of viceroys, archbishops, bishops and other eminences, briefly and confidently judged.' In a similar vein, Ben MacIntyre wrote: 'he writes almost as if he were himself a courtier relaying the gossip, trials and genealogy of the great men carving out, and running, Philip's empire.'⁷¹

After suffering a stroke, Hugh Thomas died on 7 May 2017 leaving behind several unfinished projects including an autobiography. This was to be based on his enormous personal archive for which he seemed to have saved every piece of paper that he ever wrote on, plus newspaper cuttings, journals, thousands of letters. His health was always poor with heart and kidney problems. Despite an obsessive concern with health, he went to a lot of trouble to

⁶⁷ Hugh Thomas, *Rivers of Gold: the Rise of the Spanish Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003). Frank McLynn, 'Conquistadors, saints and psychopaths', *The Independent*, 9 February 2004; Paul Kennedy, 'Conquerors and Missionaries', *New York Times*, 25 July 2004; Jonathan Keates, 'Tarnished heroes, but still heroic', *The Spectator*, 6 December 2003):

⁶⁸ Juan Eloy Gelabert, 'España antes de tiempo;', *Revista de Libros*, no.87, March 2004.

⁶⁹ Hugh Thomas, *The Golden Age: The Spanish Empire of Charles V* (London: Allen Lane, 2011); Ben Wilson, 'When the Spanish made off with the gold and the llamas', *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 February 2011; J H. Elliott, 'The Reign of Spain', *The Guardian*, 15 January 2011.

⁷⁰ Hugh Thomas, *Quién es quién de los conquistadores* (Barcelona: Salvat, 2001).

⁷¹ Hugh Thomas, *World Without End The Global Empire of Philip II* (London: Allen Lane, 2014); Dominic Sandbrook, 'Epic of Empire' *The Sunday Times*, 27 July 2014; Malcolm Deas, *The Spectator*, 19 July 2014; Ben Macintyre, 'The Spanish Plan to Take China', *The Times*, 19 July 2014.

keep his difficulties a secret.⁷² He was a purveyor of old-fashioned popular history on the grandest scale that was invariably based on considerable scholarship. The measure of his energy and ambition was his ability to combine the relentless production of huge books with other projects. When I last spoke to him a couple of weeks before his death, he was fulminating about Brexit, faithful to his pro-European views to the last.

⁷² Inigo Thomas, 'On Ladbroke Grove', *London Review of Books*, 15 June 2017