

Review of "Raymond Carr: The Curiosity of the Fox" by Professor Roger Louis

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***Raymond Carr: The Curiosity of the Fox*, by María Jesús González Hernández; translated by Nigel Griffin (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2013; pp. xxx + 509. £69.95 / \$99.95).**

The Spanish historian María Jesús González Hernández assesses the life of Raymond Carr not only as an historian of Spain but also as a figure in Oxford's intellectual and social life. His major works include *Spain, 1808–1939*, which was published in 1966 in the *Oxford History of Modern Europe* series. In González Hernández's judgement, he single-handedly managed to transform the history of an entire country. Its translation influenced the Spanish public as well as a generation of Spanish historians. The book's diverse subjects include rainfall and soil patterns in farming, schoolbooks and novels, ordinary soldiers as well as officers, and controversial constitutional issues along with bullfights. Since Franco lived until 1975, the book's publication in Spain was itself a significant episode because Carr subtly criticized the Franco regime. He wrote under difficult circumstances. These points and many more are made clear in a precise and perceptive introduction to the book by Paul Preston. In view of his comprehensive comment on the Spanish side of Carr's work, the present review focuses on the intellectual and cultural life of Oxford, especially Carr's part in the shaping of the academic purpose of St Antony's College, Oxford. He was Warden for nearly two decades, 1968–87. González Hernández emphasizes the development of area studies in the history of the College, itself a creature of the cold war, with the CIA in the background.

Carr was born in 1919, the son of a schoolmaster who insisted that Raymond (as he was universally known throughout his life) read aloud from the Bible each evening, thus giving much of his mature writing a biblical echo, at least in style. Christ Church became his original Oxford college, where he achieved a First in 1941. His demeanour gave the impression of dissolute idleness and carnal depravity. In fact he was ferociously intelligent and worked hard, for example, on episodes in Swedish history. He *affected* sloth, the appearance of which concealed curiosity, dedication to argument, and, above all, a willingness to listen. His personality often conveyed the opposite of his true character, thus creating a misleading impression held by many from his Christ Church days to the present.

After the war, he won a fellowship at All Souls College, where he supported the historian Richard Pares in a frustrated effort to transform All Souls into a research institution. But Raymond was never dogmatic, either in college politics or in his academic writing. From All Souls he progressed to New College, where he was regarded as a dandy. He was obliquely associated with the circumstances leading to tragic death portrayed in the film *Accident* (1967); the novel by Nicholas Mosley on which the film was based contains enough details about Raymond to represent him at least indirectly. 'Defiant Bohemianism' is the phrase used by González Hernández to describe his

style. His social life seemed to others to be as significant as his tutoring and writing. In 1950 he had married Sara Strickland, cousin of Simon Asquith (grandson of the Prime Minister and Raymond's best friend at Christ Church). His marriage brought with it social status. It allowed him more easily to break class barriers and to mix with the aristocracy as well as with his fellow academics in Oxford and London. Though the theme of Raymond as a ladies' man is treated with delicacy, his relations with women and upper-class figures emerge as a leading feature of his life. At New College in the 1950s he acquired the reputation of a don with unusual candour. 'Mirabeau was a shit!' he once exclaimed in a tutorial session. While Raymond was at New College, Alan Bullock and F. W. Deakin recruited him to write the book on Spain. With his credentials as a Hispanist, and a particular interest in the Spanish civil war, he moved to St Antony's College in 1964 to hold a position in a connected subject, Latin American history. But he was never as much at home in Latin America as he was in Spain, despite visits to Castro's Cuba and the writing in 1984 of a closely reasoned book on Puerto Rico (challenging the fatuous American view that Puerto Rico is not a colony). His true interest was the creation of an Iberian Centre at St Antony's, one of his least successful ventures.

In 1968 St Antony's elected him Warden in preference to Albert Hourani. González Hernández's judgements are almost invariably even-handed and sound. But in one of her few significant misinterpretations, she describes Hourani as little more than an Arab propagandist. The opposite was true. Hourani was fair-minded and at least Raymond's intellectual equal, developing the Middle East Centre at St Antony's into a foremost institution for research and balanced discussion. That centre was only one of several at the College, including the most famous, the Russian Centre, which supported, among others, Max Hayward (the authority on Russian literature), and the Far Eastern Centre, directed by Geoffrey Hudson (the expert on China and Japan who had gravitated from All Souls to St Antony's). The dual purpose of St Antony's at that time was modern European history and area studies—the latter subject catching the eye of American foundations. In a racy and typical passage, González Hernández quotes a Ford Foundation official as saying that 'massive interdisciplinary masturbation' might be possible. In 1966 the Ford Foundation, partly at Raymond's initiative, granted St Antony's \$3.5 million, mainly for the development of area studies. It was an immense amount, which had the approval of the CIA. At any particular time from the 1950s through the 1970s there were at least a few Fellows and others attached to the College who had connections with British and American intelligence agencies. St Antony's thus acquired the reputation of 'Oxford's CIA annexe'. The details on the CIA and St Antony's, though by no means entirely new, provide a coherent and vital part of the history of the College during the era of the cold war.

Within Raymond's two-decade tenure as Warden, the governing body expanded from 12 to 35, and its students from a handful to over 200. There is one theme that the author does not handle satisfactorily. Raymond was a committed Zionist. But the complexity of his intellectual and moral commitment was even greater than the author suggests. González Hernández is right that his principal inspiration came from Isaiah Berlin and George Weidenfeld; but Raymond was sceptical about Israel being able to stand on its own. He believed that the United States, Britain, and the United Nations—in other words the countries responsible for the creation of the new Jewish state plus the collective international community—had an obligation to ensure its survival. His pro-Zionist views are remarkable, among other reasons, because of St Antony's overall reputation as pro-Arab.

There is much about Raymond that was misunderstood at the time. He seemed to embrace social conventions of class, but his book on fox-hunting is not a paean of praise for an upper-class sport but an iconoclastic social history. He detested abstract theory, though he pretended to be interested. In the 1970s and 1980s he became increasingly pessimistic, believing England to be going the same way as Spain in 1898. He frequently lamented in a loud voice that St Antony's was 'a wreck', 'a slum'—'a bloody college' where any amount of fund-raising would never be

enough. Yet Raymond loved St Antony's and wept when he announced his resignation. As this outstanding biography makes clear, his personality remained the same, from the shabby-chic student at Christ Church to the dishevelled Warden of St Antony's. He had few enemies, though he annoyed even his friends with endless discussion. Listening closely, his method was argument by attrition, though never giving the impression of holding dogmatic views. Some regarded him as left-wing, some right-wing. Some thought he was a reactionary, some a committed reformist. He was not always a good public speaker. Yet most of the Fellows of St Antony's believed him to be the right Warden at the right time. He was willing intellectually to engage with students during the troubled years of the late 1960s and early 1970s. With considerable exasperation, he never reconciled himself to St Antony's reputation as a 'spy college', and the very idea that the college continues today to be connected with espionage is no less than ludicrous. He continued to read on his own, especially Proust, along with an array of Russian novels, in his own phrase, 'to keep the Black Dog at bay'. His breadth of knowledge, even his generosity in helping others, was rarely recognized at the time. His reputation as an historian developed only slowly, and in Spain much more quickly than in England. Yet he became a legendary figure. It may well be that he represents the end of a line, the last of Oxford's great eccentrics.

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