

María Jesús González, *Raymond Carr. La curiosidad del zorro. Una biografía*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de lectores, 2010. Prologue by Paul Preston. 679 pp.¹

The faces of British Hispanism: Raymond Carr²

It has been more than two years since publishers Galaxia Gutenberg / Círculo de lectores released the biography of Professor Raymond Carr, who is now over ninety years old and currently living in peaceful retirement back in his own country. The biography was written by María Jesús González, a professor at the University of Cantabria (Spain) and an expert in political history and English culture. Owing to the importance of the biographee, the work has not gone unnoticed by Spanish public opinion. Shortly after its publication, several articles appeared in the press (some of them written by well-known historians), reporting such news or adding a few comments. However, the impact of the book in academic journals has been much weaker than expected and has yet to receive the attention it deserves. In other words, a critical analysis, along with comments on potential avenues of research that spring to mind when reading it.³

Even if we accept the fact that Spanish academic reviews are sometimes more influenced by the exchange of favours than by the model of book review and its derivatives, it is possible that this relative indifference displayed by the academy was due to the special characteristics of Spanish historiography itself. It may be that Carr's well-known *Spain 1808-1939* (1966), which was published in Spain in 1969 and updated to 1975 (and recently further updated by Juan Pablo Fusi to 2008), has become such a classic reference work for Spanish historians that they might conclude there is not much more left to say. But it is also possible that, in the last decade, the scattered intellectual references in Spanish historiography (which are not so very different from international references) have reached the point in which Raymond Carr's work no longer represented for younger generations what it represented for those who carried out their work throughout the period of the transition and the nineteen eighties. In any case, the present biography by no means has the purpose of rescuing anybody. This kind of pretention has, nevertheless, led some Spanish authors to draw attention to historians whose intellectual importance is highly debatable. But this is not Professor González's case. Her book is a research work on a high-profile intellectual, namely the life of Raymond Carr, his public activity, intellectual work, historical thought, hobbies, journeys, as well as his social, academic and political milieu. The examination of these aspects creates a full picture of the figure considered to be the foremost British Hispanist. To assemble them all, the author uses an extraordinary range of primary sources. The personal archives of various professors ("dons" in the Oxbridge argot) and public figures, including Carr's family papers, the St Antony and All Souls College archives, the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, documents declassified by the CIA,

¹ A version in English of *The Curiosity of the Fox* is expected to be published in March 2013.

² Gonzalo Pasamar is in charge of the Project "The memory of the Spanish Civil War during the transition to democracy", depended upon the Secretary of State for Innovation, Development and Research of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (Spain). Reference HAR2011-25154 (2012-2014).

³ Only Julio Crespo MacLennan in *Revista de Occidente*, 359 (2011), pp. 153-156; and Ángela Cenarro, *Siglo XX. Revista Catalana de Historia*, 4 (2011), have commented on it.

more than eighty interviews and some interesting correspondence with various public figures (in addition to journals) make up the bulk of those sources. But this complex inquiry does not fly in the face of light reading. On the contrary, the reader will find a book that knows how to harness a readable and pleasant style with the characteristics of an academic monograph – a book whose style in Spanish, according to the author, has been revised time and again to avoid any structural interference from the English language.

However, it is true that, notwithstanding the popularity of *Spain 1808-1939*, Carr's life was still relatively unknown until the publication of this biography. Throughout thirteen chapters plus an epilogue, the author constructs the lineaments of a complex personality, an optimistic intellectual, good conversationalist and enemy of bureaucracy, but nonetheless a person whose involvement in this kind of task was obligatory – a person who was very interested in politics but even more protective of his own intellectual independence.

First, the book presents a young man coming from the lower middle classes, a rural teacher's son that spent all his childhood in the countryside and that, thanks to the hard work of study and to his father's support, succeeded in entering the exclusive world of college and the ruling classes. He undertook this "journey" in a natural way, but in order to learn about the habits of high society, he also invested several years, for example, in acquiring the "received pronunciation" typical of the upper classes and visiting France and Germany. Furthermore, his obsession with this form of "social migration" was long-standing (for example, in a letter sent in 1950 to his fiancée and future wife, Sara Strickland, Carr writes: "Now I do not have the slightest feeling of shame [...] about revealing my class origins to anyone", p. 179).

Second, once we see how he is admitted to the world of the upper classes, which is by no means an easy task, the biography highlights Carr's talent and growing ability to blend in with this kind of society and establish social contacts. It is within this elitist world that he will marry, pursue his academic career, take up the post of college warden, go on journeys, establish ties with English politicians, and leaders and intellectuals in other countries, and cultivate hobbies typical of the upper classes. The very subtitle of the book, for example, "the curiosity of the fox", not only refers to one of the traits attributed to this animal, it also refers to fox hunting, a pastime typical of the English upper classes that Carr cultivated and about which he came to publish a history in 1976. But, as other critics of the present book have pointed out, the author was not happy with writing a typical biography. The current rekindling of the biographic genre is characterized today by its ability to use the importance of the biographee to draw attention to the elements of the context, which enables the genre to be turned into a point of convergence for different analyses and fields of study. Professor González's analysis is concerned at least with these four topics: 1) the cultural history of the British upper classes; 2) the process of modernization of humanistic culture in Great Britain and the role of US influence during the Cold War; 3) the peculiarities of British Hispanism; and 4) the memory and history of the Spanish Civil War.

The customs of the ruling classes is a topic analyzed by the author in several chapters of the book, especially by insisting on the class-conscious character of English

education in the years leading up to the Second World War, that is, the enormous cultural barrier that separated the upper from the lower classes. The issue perhaps might not have so much importance in a book only addressed to the English reading public, since it is more familiar with this historical problem. However, to historians and Hispanic readers the topic is of paramount importance for understanding the variety and significance of the relationships Raymond Carr established throughout his life. For example, we can see this importance when the author looks at the types of school and stops to examine the so-called “public schools” (pp. 39-41). Their name will surprise the Hispanic reader because this kind of centre “was absolutely private and moreover extremely expensive”, to quote the author (p. 123), and served to educate the economic and political elite. Also very interesting is the glimpse of the Oxonian atmosphere before the nineteen thirties, which was represented by Christ Church College, where Carr enrolled as a student in 1938 thanks to a scholarship (pp. 93-116); or the first centre where Carr gave his classes, between 1941 and 1945, namely Wellington College, a public school near London (pp. 122 ff.); or the details about how All Souls College, “the Oxford of Oxford” (p. 146), where Carr spent seven years working with a fellowship (1946-1953) (pp. 148 ff.). No less interesting is the picture drawn of the family of Carr’s wife, Sara Strickland, a rich banker’s daughter, who descended from the nobility (pp. 172-79); and the pages where the presence of the Carrs in London’s most famous salon, belonging to the aristocrat Ann Charteris, who was his cousin’s wife, is described (pp. 275-76).

The topic concerning the modernization of Humanities in British academia is another of the leitmotifs of the book. The theme is crucial not only because Raymond Carr was a concerned follower of such modernization, but also because this entailed the convergence of the traditional English syllabus in history with international parameters – thanks to the influence of the social sciences. The Spanish reader will be surprised, for instance, about how, still at the end of the nineteen fifties at Oxford, obtaining a “first” in the final exams was more important than defending a doctoral thesis (p. 248). But things had already started to change in this decade thanks to the patronage of US foundations such as the Ford and the Rockefeller, institutions that generously funded the birth and development of what was considered Oxford’s most international college: St Antony’s. This college, founded in 1950, was a “fascinating microcosm” (p. 296), in which Raymond Carr became a fellow in 1964, replacing the previous warden, William Deakin, in 1968, working hard to maintain it, and retiring during the 1989-90 academic year.

The topic of the influence of US foundations in Western Europe is well known, especially in the French case because of the role played by these institutions in the emergence of the Sixième Section of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, *La Maison des Sciences de l’Homme* and even the way Fernand Braudel directed both institutions.⁴ But in the British case there has hardly been any examination of that influence. Such influence is taken up by Professor González in Chapter 6, where she emphasizes the fact that the aforementioned foundations not only helped import the US model of “area studies”, they were also intended to promote the “anti-communist struggle” (pp. 295, 316-19). St Antony’s received a considerable amount of money from them (although it

⁴ Apart from the references quoted by the author on p. 575 note 66, see the French case in Brigitte Mazon, *Aux origines de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Le rôle du mécénat américain (1920-1960)* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988), pp. 119-61.

never abandoned the condition of being a “poor college”, p. 393). This fact along with its system of area studies (European Studies, Middle East Studies, Russian and East European Studies, etc.), allowed it to maintain close relationships with the British government, the Intelligence Service (MI6), becoming a “kind of think tank very useful to the Foreign Office” (p. 297). Nevertheless, at the same time, St Antony’s gained the rather deserved fame of “spy college” (pp. 309, 371-72, 381), which was very difficult to shake off. When he was appointed warden in May 1968, Carr attempted to dislodge such fame, but with not much success. Its association with the spy world, the author says, was dogged for more than two decades (p. 379).

However, all these political-academic activities also transformed St Antony’s into a centre of reception for social research. And at this point there was a need to highlight the fact, according to Professor González, that Warden Carr played a remarkable role in consolidating the spirit of a College now open to international studies and social sciences as begun by the previous warden. To Raymond Carr, philosophy was a sphere of interest stemming from the nineteen fifties (in part thanks to the influence of his friend, Isaiah Berlin) (p. 253), though it seems that he did not take part in the controversies surrounding the topics of history, determinism and freedom involving several authors, including some from Oxford, at that time (and within such context was to fall, for example, the famous work, *What is History*, 1961, by his compatriot Edward H. Carr, an author that Professor González considers “Marxist”, but whose historiographic approach is regarded to be more complex.⁵) (pp. 283-84). Nevertheless, already at the end of the nineteen fifties Raymond Carr openly defended the need for the Oxonian syllabus in history to approach the social sciences and Marxism (p. 287). In 1966, Carr would publish a historiographic reflection on these topics in a monographic issue in the *Times Literary Supplement* devoted to the relationship between history and social sciences. In this text (entitled “New ways in History”), which the author regards as essential, Carr defended the relationship between both fields, although he rejected the excesses of scientism which had invaded research in Latin America (pp. 344-45).

The topic of the origins of British Hispanism is tackled in Chapter 12. In these pages, despite the fact that historians hardly ever make comparisons between Hispanisms, thanks to its clarity and details, it is easy to see that the British Hispanism has interesting peculiarities. Its rooting in the interest in the memory of the Spanish Civil War is well-known and the author insists on this in her comments on the influence Gerald Brenan exerted on Raymond Carr (p. 222, and also p. 206). There is a need to remember, for example, the fact, which is omitted by the author, that the first history of the Spanish Civil War properly speaking (that is, the first attempt to write a historical narrative of the events – or part of them, because the book only went up to August 1937), with its corresponding examination of the “immediate and remote background”, was written by the British journalist, Frank Jellinek, between August 1936 and August 1937 (*The Civil War in Spain*, 1938). He wrote it with the intention of updating the British people’s image of Spain. However, British Hispanism presents other characteristics which are easy to uncover thanks to the present biography. In fact, in their remote origins all traditional Hispanisms were very similar (that is, the American, the English and the French versions). They all involved a curiosity for “oriental things”

⁵ See, for example, the classic by Walter Laqueur, *The Fate of the Revolution. Interpretations of Soviet History* (London, Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1967), pp. 111-33.

which was associated with Romantic taste in the first half of the nineteenth century and entailed crucial consequences for the tradition of the so-called black legend: most “hispaniolized” (this word belongs to the American tradition) and “hispanisant” scholars were fascinated by the Spanish culture, but they also showed themselves to be critical of the power exerted by the kings and the Catholic Church as did the French philosophers in the eighteenth century. On the other hand, it is during the twentieth century that the differences between Hispanisms are to emerge. These differences are brought about by the role played by the Spanish Civil War and the Republican exile, and the processes of professionalization and modernization of historical studies taking place in the academic traditions where each Hispanism is rooted.

The development of French Hispanism concerns four factors: 1) the early professionalization of historical studies in France (which takes place at the end of the nineteenth century); 2) the rise of strategies of cultural rapprochement to Spain promoted by French diplomacy from the early twentieth century onwards; 3) the presence of numerous Spanish exiles fleeing from Francoist repression; and 4) geographical proximity. US Hispanism, however, is more linked, from the period of the First World War on, to an economic and cultural interest in Latin America, an interest which was mirrored in two cultural fields that helped professionalize the trend: on the one hand, the interest in seeking a second language to replace the German language on the US syllabus (German had been seriously discredited because of the First World War); on the other, the emergence of a historiographic “school”, interested in Latin America, intending to explain the importance of the Spanish Empire and the Latin American subcontinent in the origins of the United States. Unlike other Hispanisms, British Hispanism is a late professional activity and does not show, at least in its beginnings, an interest in Latin America on a par with the interest shown by US Hispanism.

But these characteristics can be illustrated in a way by following Raymond Carr’s trail, because the present biography also shows that the rise of British Hispanism – understood as a scientific interest in Spanish history and culture – is facilitated by this outstanding figure. This fact is thus crucial to understanding its own peculiarities. It is true that from 1962 Carr was very interested in Latin America, and in fact we do not know to what extent this interest in Spain influenced his interest in American matters (since Professor González does not relate the two topics), but we do know that Latin American studies emerged at New College and at St Antony’s because of the outbreak of the Cuban revolution in 1959 (pp. 329-41), and that Carr began to abandon this field at the end of the nineteen sixties; hence it has nothing in common with the Latin American interest of US Hispanism.

And with respect to Carr’s concern with Spain, it is interesting to note, according to Professor González, that Carr discovers our country almost by chance. This is by no means to say he ignored the Spanish Civil War. In Oxford, when Carr joined Christ Church College in 1938, the War of Spain was contemplated with great concern and students campaigned against the Munich Pact, which was seen as a serious threat for peace (pp. 79-80). However, Carr make contact with Spain on his honeymoon when he and Sara visit Torremolinos, Malaga, Seville, Madrid, etc. on a tour in which Carr is struck by the social and cultural conditions of this country: its poverty and under-

development, the unrest against the régime, the weight of the Catholic Church, and the “psychological presence of the civil war” (pp. 180, 182-86).

From that trip on, as the author shows, Carr’s interest in the topic of Spain will grow quickly. Shortly afterwards, we can see him involved in its study, which, at that time, was such an exotic occupation that it soon came to the attention of Warden Deakin, head of the newly founded St Antony’s College. Deakin, who was involved, along with Allan Bullock, in the project of a modern history of Europe backed by the University of Oxford, proposed Carr’s name to the editor of Clarendon Press. Once Brennan’s participation with a volume on Spain had been discounted, declining for reasons clearly explained by Professor González (pp. 187, 192-94), the task fell to Raymond Carr, and took him fifteen years to finish. The result was the famous *Spain, 1808-1936*. In the present biography, the reader will find numerous details on how this work was put together (pp. 208-37). But perhaps, what will attract our attention most is the empathy Carr developed, through his manifold trips to Spain, with Spanish customs and the numerous conversations he struck up with all kinds of people (albeit only seeming to represent the Spain of exile by Republican General Vicente Rojo, whom Carr met in Madrid and who lived ostracized in Spain from 1957 in extremely pitiful conditions.) This empathy plus the style of writing, displaying a distant and dispassionate respect for the main events, may explain the positive reception of the book. But why was this reception beyond the academic world?

It is usual for Hispanists to be more well-known and influential in Spain than in their own countries. Less normal is the fact that they stepped over the boundaries of the academic field and reached public influence. Only some of them, such as John Elliott and Pierre Vilar, can be said to have achieved it. Elliott’s works, for example, were a symbol of modernization in the studies of the Spanish Empire and its epoch, and help discredit the historical epics covered up by the Francoist memory; and the work of Pierre Vilar extended the academic field thanks to his outstanding *Historia de España*. Nevertheless, *Spain: 1808-1936* by Carr, and the following updating of this book, became a political symbol of the new reading on contemporary Spain that was emerging throughout the years of “desarrollismo” and consolidated during the Transition to Democracy and the socialist era. This impact, which Professor González illustrates properly (pp. 226, 232-35), is not simply explained because of the precariousness of Spanish historiography over Francoism, as suggested by the exiled historian Manuel Tuñón de Lara (p. 234); it is also explained because of the memory and historiographic needs of learned strata of Spanish society over the late nineteen sixties and seventies. In the core of these social segments a new generation had emerged that “did not wage the war” and who needed an image of Spain showing a country involved in a process of modernization which was expected to generate a climate of reconciliation to soften the wounds of the civil war (although, at the beginning of the nineteen seventies, except for some dissenting politicians in inland Spain and some political leaders in exile no one knew very well how this might happen.)⁶

On the other hand, it is difficult to talk of a “normalization” of the studies in contemporary history, within which Carr’s work falls, throughout the Francoist era. There were no conditions that were propitious for it. In fact, the publication of Carr’s

⁶ With the expression “a new generation that did not wage the war” I am referring to a very significant book by Rafael Borràs Betriu entitled *Los que no hicimos la Guerra* (Barcelona: Nauta, 1971).

book at Oxford coincides with the enactment in Spain of the famous “Ley de Prensa e Imprenta” (1966) by the minister Manuel Fraga Iribarne, a law which, despite the expectations it raised among intellectuals and editors, would end up becoming a real headache to the publishers and press in the years to come. Furthermore, permission to publish Carr’s history in Spanish in 1969 was not a simple sign of government tolerance; it also played a role in the strategy orchestrated by the Ministry of Information and Tourism in order to cast a “desarrollista”, normalized and even European Spain to promote the so-called “Franco peace”, and to counteract the interpretations circulating in foreign countries spread by most Hispanists and exiles.⁷ Thus, the Francoist “aperturistas” liked Carr’s work, and the opposition did not dislike it (save a few exceptions). Otherwise, without the official permission and the feeling of a mix of fear and expectation that pervaded public opinion at the end of the nineteen sixties, the Barcelona publishing house Ariel would never have dared to publish Carr’s history in its famous series “Horas de España”, where an attempt was made to collect texts from other Hispanists, including *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell, and the memories of some of the exiles.

To summarize: Professor González’s volume is a book that is highly recommended. Readers interested in biography and in English culture will find an exciting narrative of the life of an outstanding figure who knew how to climb the social ladder in his country, along with an overview of aspects of the world of the English upper classes, intellectuals and politicians. Moreover, they will discover the importance of British Hispanism for Spanish Culture during the Franco era and the Transition to Democracy. To historians, the book offers the possibility of gaining an in-depth knowledge of Raymond Carr’s life and historiography, in addition to having a model of biography to follow.

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Fecha de recepción: 22 de octubre de 2012

Fecha de aceptación: 15 de noviembre de 2012

Publicado: 31 de diciembre de 2012

Para citar: Gonzalo Pasamar, “The faces of British Hispanism: Raymond Carr. Review of María Jesús González, *Raymond Carr. La curiosidad del zorro. Una biografía*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de lectores, 2010. Prologue by Paul Preston. 679 pp.”, *Historiografías*, 4 (julio-diciembre, 2012): pp. 137-143, <http://www.unizar.es/historiografias/historiografias/numeros/4/pasamar.pdf>

⁷ See Paloma Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia. The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 112-134.