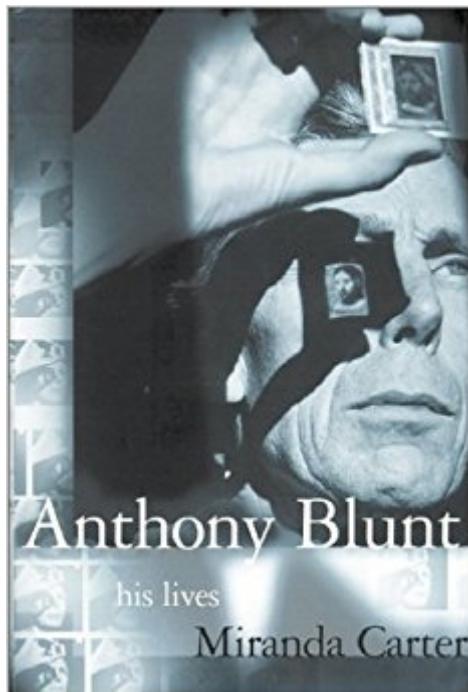


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# Anthony Blunt: His Lives



## Synopsis

The first full biography of the notorious spy "and an X-ray of the British ruling class that produced him. Once an untouchable member of England's establishment "a world-famous art historian and a man knighted by the Queen of England" in a single stroke Anthony Blunt became an object of universal hatred when, in 1979, Margaret Thatcher exposed him as a Soviet spy. In *Anthony Blunt: His Lives*, Miranda Carter shows how one man lived out opposing trends of his century "first as a rebel against his class, then as its epitome" and yet embodied a deeper paradox. In the 1920s, Blunt was a member of the Bloomsbury circle; in the 1930s he was a left-wing intellectual; in the 50s and 60s he became a camouflaged member of the Establishment. Until his treachery was made public, Blunt was a world-famous art historian, recognized for his ground-breaking work on Poussin, Italian art, and old master drawings; at the Courtauld Institute he trained a whole generation of academics and curators. And yet even as he ascended from rebellion into outward conformity, he was a homosexual when homosexuality was a crime, and a traitor when the penalty was death. How could one man contain so many contradictions? The layers of secrecy upon which Blunt's life depended are here stripped away for the first time, using testimony from those who knew Blunt well but have until now kept silent and documents from sealed Russian archives, including a secret autobiography Blunt wrote for his controllers. *Miranda Carter's Anthony Blunt* is the first full biography of the mythical Cold War warrior, and is at once an astonishing history of one the century's greatest deceits and a deeply nuanced account of fifty years in the British power elite, as experienced by one deep inside who wished to bring it down.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This engaging and important biography examines the many masks of the infamous Anthony Blunt (1907-1983), the Cambridge art historian turned spy who worked simultaneously for British Intelligence and the Soviet Union during WWII. Why did he betray his country? Carter provides an exhaustive psychological study of Blunt's early life. His brutalizing public school (where he was unhappy and unpopular), Carter argues, "inadvertently fostered a questioning and subversive attitude and a profound distrust of authority." When the Depression hit England in the 1930s and the specter of fascism threatened Europe, communism became fashionable among left-leaning intellectuals like Blunt and his Cambridge friend Guy Burgess. Blunt's homosexuality, like Burgess's, also appears to have alienated him from the establishment. During WWII, Blunt was assigned to British intelligence, giving him easy access to military secrets, which he smuggled to the Soviets. After his Cambridge spy friends Burgess, Donald MacLean and Kim Philby defected to the Soviet Union after the war, British Intelligence began investigating Blunt. In 1964, he was granted immunity in exchange for his confession and full cooperation. British intelligence worked hard to keep "the Blunt affair" a secret. He wasn't publicly exposed until 1979, when Margaret Thatcher denounced him. The biggest challenge any Blunt biographer faces is Blunt himself, a man of almost legendary emotional detachment. Blunt revealed little about his personal life, yet Carter has managed to bring readers as close to this enigmatic man as humanly possible. Thoroughly researched and carefully crafted, this is sure to be the definitive biography. 16 pages of photos not seen by PW.

(Jan.) Forecast: Blunt's story isn't quite the sensation here that it is in England; devotees of spy tales and contemporary British history will read this. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Publisher and journalist Carter's first book is a massive and meticulously researched study of "the lives" of Anthony Blunt arguably the most enigmatic of the Cambridge-educated spies associated with Burgess, Maclean, and Philby. Before his exposure in 1979, Blunt was known primarily as an art historian and director of the Courtauld Institute. Carter's 18-chapter biography begins with "Son" and closes predictably with "Traitor." The way stations in between present not only a multifaceted portrait of the man but also a panorama of 50 years of British intellectual life. Carter presents vivid accounts (enlivened by the recollections from scores of interviews with Blunt's friends and colleagues) of Blunt's public school experiences at Marlborough College, his companions and escapades at Cambridge, and his transformation from left-wing intellectual rebel and homosexual into an outwardly conforming member of the establishment. However, even this flow of information fails to explain Blunt's acts and motives. Not surprisingly, many of those interviewed have markedly

different recollections of crucial events. Indeed, if this biography has a fault, it is that the writer presents the reader with too many versions of the elusive Blunt's remarkable lives. For large public libraries and academic libraries with an interest in espionage. Robert C. Jones, Central Missouri State Univ., WarrensburgCopyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Miranda Carter's intriguing new book has everything one would want if this had been merely a spy novel. The good news is that Anthony Blunt was the real thing. Carter's in-depth approach and occasional analysis takes what could have been an ordinary book and raises it several notches. She gives the reader an astounding amount of the rich detail of Blunt's life from his birth to his death while still allowing one to judge Blunt's actions in the context of his times. How one man could move so effortlessly through the upper crust of British society (he maintained good relations with the Royal family) while passing documents to Russia over a period of years without the knowledge of his family and many of his friends is a mystery deserving of a book like this one. Unfortunately, the narrative sometimes suffers. Carter's writing style, while informative, tends to be dry and overloaded with names that have little bearing on Blunt's life. With often minimal introduction to the large cast of characters she tends to dive into paragraphs as if she were in the middle of an explanation. I found myself on many an occasion wanting to reach for a roster of names as I tried to remember how each one fit in to the story. It has the tendency of slowing down the reading almost to a point of disinterest. That being said, this book is well worth it. Carter has given us a unique look at a man whose double life (in so many ways) was extraordinary. Her service to her subject and to us lies in her research. Each reader may come to different conclusions about Anthony Blunt but it is to Miranda Carter's credit that she has taken the time and the care to present him to us.

Anthony Blunt was a brilliant art authority, teacher and critic. He also betrayed his country -England - to the Communist world. Just about every angry British and American biographer able to rent a typewriter has blasted the man. And you can waste an awful lot of time, and ingest an awful lot of fiction and misinformation reading them. The only definitive biography of this very complex man has been written by Ms. Miranda Carter who has given the world the most encyclopedic and completely balanced account of Anthony Blunt and his extraordinary life and the curious path it followed. It's all here. The good and the bad. Brilliantly detailed and balanced. The only book on Anthony Blunt that is really worth reading.

Carter is a very talented writer. In any biography, there is a lot to slog through before getting to the

juicy parts, but Carter makes the world in Blunt's early days come alive. You can imagine being there. This is a rare skill.

this is a terrific book which I am reading in preparation for a Road Scholar tour, *The Spying Game*. Well beyond the topical interest of the five Cambridge spies, Carter rebuilds the entire pre to postwar world that I grew up with, never quite able to understand how the Anglo European world was coming apart. The treatment is heavily British, as one would expect, and the clubby familiarity of the text can be wearying when it centers on Cambridge and Trinity Hall in particular. But it is nothing if not a denser portrait of the world Waugh made come alive and with which millions of Americans are familiar through the PBS *Brideshead Revisited*. Carter's work, through its broader almost exhaustive sweep makes it all far more grim, tawdry, frantic. It feels very uncomfortable to an American born in 1936, so far removed, isolated, from the desperation of Europe in the 30's, bankrupt and prostrate in the 40's and 50's. It is a sad story from beginning to end.

Exhaustingly detailed to the point where I would often skip pages. Blunt was not all that interesting as an individual, but Carter's book fills in the story of the Cambridge spies and provides a fascinating account of The Apostles (as they called themselves) as students and student life during the years between World War 1 and WW11.

Excellent condition. Pleased with experience.

Anthony Blunt (1907-1983) deserves a longish footnote in the history of modern Britain. Son of a low-Church clergyman, educated in a British "public" (i.e. private) school, he rose to the very heights of British academia, as an art historian, apparently mainly by dint of high intelligence, talent, and hard work. One of the Cambridge group of young Communists in the 1930's, he also became a spy for Soviet Russia, but was not exposed until many years later, during the Thatcher years. He was also famously, promiscuously homosexual. His story allows for a variety of treatments. One would be low-brow, highlighting its inherent prurience. Carter's book isn't that, I am happy to report. Another treatment would be high-brow, with informative discussions of the British worlds of art and politics in the 20th century. Carter's book isn't that, either, I am sorry to say. It lies somewhere in between, and that is an opportunity lost.

A bit slow at times

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