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LYTTON STRACHEY AND THE ART OF BIOGRAPHY

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of Graduate Studies of the
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fulfilment of the requirements
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I should like to here record a special debt of gratitude to Dr. George Thomson of the Department of English, who first stimulated my interest in narrative theory and the Bloomsbury Group and who, as my thesis advisor, has proved a rigorous, enthusiastic, demanding, but always encouraging critic of my work.

Strachey's concept of history strongly colours his interpretative approach. All three biographies stress the contribution exceptional individuals made to the history of their times. However, although the mainspring of Strachey's interest in history is psychological, rather than sociological or economic, a recurrent theme in his biographical, as in his theoretical writings, is the reciprocal relationship between the individual history and that of the age. The cornerstone of his method is to present his subject as simultaneously the product and embodiment of his times.

If Strachey's individualistic philosophy of history largely determines the scope and focus of Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria, and Elizabeth and Essex, the degree to which Strachey feels empathy and/or antipathy for his subjects largely determines the extent to which he succeeds in illuminating what makes his subjects different from, not like other men. As the portraits of Manning, Florence Nightingale, Gordon, and Queen Victoria show, Strachey writes best from a position neither of adulation nor hostility. Too uncritical an attitude on his part, as in Elizabeth and Essex, leads to the damaging psychological and historical typecasting of his major subjects as archetypal Renaissance English queen and romantic tragic hero. Equally, the intensity of the scorn which unleashes his ironic wit in "Dr Arnold" fatally inhibits his response to the man himself, just as his distaste for

Albert's rigid sense of duty and "un-Englishness" results in a portrait which approaches caricature at many points. The portrait of Victoria is the clearest demonstration that Strachey's best work stems from ambivalence: from the balance of adulation and hostility.

Strachey did not, on the whole, choose subjects that were unsuited to his talents or temperament. With the exception of his portraits of Albert, Arnold, and Essex, he cogently articulates his point of view, without either overpowering or belittling his subjects. Whatever one's response to the values which inform his writings, and whatever one's judgement of his subjects, Strachey's great achievement is that he always challenges and stimulates his readers by the intensity and forcefulness of his insights. His real contribution to biography is therefore the nearly complete integration of mind and art he attains in his best work.

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CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SCOPE, METHODOLOGY AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY, INCLUDING A SURVEY OF THE MAJOR CRITICISM

It is something of a truism to state that a biographer's own personality determines the selection and arrangement of his material. As Coleridge put it, "When a man is attempting to describe another's character, he may be right or he may be wrong--but in one thing he will always succeed, in describing himself."[1] However, in the case of Strachey, point of view is much more than inherent in this very basic sense. He once wrote: "For us, who can hardly conceive of any art which is not the expression of an individual mind, the point of view of the pastoral writer is peculiarly difficult to understand."[2] Strachey's own art is an extraordinarily direct expression of an individuality which forms the cornerstone of his aesthetic creed and his practice alike. This is why point of view as applied to Strachey's work, may be most appropriately defined as an attitudinal rather than as a purely technical term. This is also why any serious assessment of Strachey's contribution to biography must ultimately rest on an appraisal of exactly how his attitudes and beliefs affect his art. A concern with the nature and effectiveness of Strachey's stance therefore lies at the core of this study.

In making the decision to focus on this one major aspect of Strachey's writings, I am fully aware that the subject

branches out in any number of intriguing directions. However, it is impossible to do full justice to every ramification of Strachey's art, and I have, in fact, found it prudent to restrict the scope of my study in a number of other ways. In the first place, I have limited myself to Strachey's full-length biographies: Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria and Elizabeth and Essex; partly from considerations of space, but also because any assessment of Strachey's achievements must be based solidly on these three major works, and because my main theoretical interest is the potential of the extended biographical narrative rather than the shorter essay form. Secondly, in line with the predominantly literary focus of my study, and in recognition of the conscious artistry which characterizes Strachey's writings, I have chosen to approach his work by means of close textual analysis.

My main emphasis here is on the interpretation of specific works, although a conviction about the close interrelationship of history and biography certainly forms part of the assumptions which underlie my study (indeed in many ways it may be said to have provided its initial impetus). In attempting a critical evaluation of Strachey's major biographies, I have also directed my energies towards a definition of those elements which characterize his biographic method and thus towards underlying theoretical issues of genre.

Critics who have written on Strachey have tended either to admire or detest him. In my view, this intense polarization of opinion is simultaneously a measure of the highly personal nature of his writings and of the forcefulness with which he communicates his ideas. These latter two factors may be linked not only to the strongly partisan flavour of the immediate response to Strachey's work but also to the corresponding decline in Strachey's reputation after his death in 1932. As early as 1933 Clara Stillman remarked: "Strachey's fame, since it rose like a rocket with Eminent Victorians, has undergone some vicissitudes. With Queen Victoria it soared even higher. But after that, if it did not come down like a stick, it at least floated like a feather on currents of varying altitude and warmth."[3] By 1938 the pendulum had come full swing and George Dangerfield was expressing a view still common today: "contemporary opinion regards him, if at all, as a kind of meteor, hurrying across the skies to extinction, and leaving behind it an unsavoury smell--a smell, one might say, if it were not paying the wretch too high a compliment, of sulphur."[4]

Despite the polarisation of opinion, and the ups and downs in his reputation, certain features of Strachey criticism have remained pretty constant through the years: notably the view that he was an important literary artist, that he vitally influenced the direction of English biography

after World War One, and above all, that the outstanding hallmark of his writings was his iconoclasm. Even otherwise severe judges such as Noel Annan,[5] F. R. Leavis,[6] and John Raymond[7] concede, albeit somewhat grudgingly, that Strachey was a fine prose stylist and a master of narrative, and, critics stress his historical significance even when they lament his influence.[8] The exceptions are so few[9] that the following comments about Eminent Victorians by John Clive may be cited as a neat summary of these favourable assessments of his work. He notes that the Preface to Eminent Victorians "is for some the sort of landmark in the history of biography that the Communist Manifesto is in the history of the working classes" because Strachey here "invited biographers to throw off the chains with which they had dragged those twin-boxed Victorian coffins, otherwise known as Standard Biographies, their slow length along:" Clive goes on to characterize Eminent Victorians as: "four elegantly written essays based on printed sources; crackling with wit, verve and irony, and indicating in no uncertain manner that some of the great Victorian idols had possessed feet, and on occasion, heads of clay."[10]

It was Carlyle who, in defence of Lockhart, wrote: "How delicate, how decent is English biography bless its mealy mouth! A Damocles sword of Respectability hangs forever over the poor English life-writer, as it does over

English life in general, and reduces him to the verge of paralysis."[11] It is interesting that although critics have been virtually unanimous in stressing Strachey's rebellion against the kind of Victorianism of which Carlyle complains, they have by no means been unanimous about either the desirability or even the exact extent of his iconoclasm.

Strachey's contemporaries tended to see him in the same light as Edmund Gosse who termed him simply "the English iconoclast."[12] Douglas Bush wrote a defence of Strachey's targets entitled "The Victorians, God Bless Them!",[13] and Lionel Gelber an extremely pungent attack on the "iconoclastic biographers".[14] André Maurois was the exception, in writing eulogistically of the 'New Biographers'.[15] Still, whatever their opinion of Strachey's stance, most of those who wrote before the mid-nineteen-thirties did at least usually agree in classing him as a ruthless debunker of cherished idols.[16]

There were, of course, exceptions to the trend; especially among those who knew Strachey. Raymond Mortimer remembered that "The mention of some writer or politician would suddenly reveal behind the wit and the warmth, an unpardoning sense of right and wrong."[17] In similar vein, Leonard Woolf wrote at the time of Strachey's death that he was "an iconoclast who loved traditions",[18] and Arthur Waugh, that he "stood at the parting of the ways, looking before and after: there was as much tenderness in his

retrospect as hope in his outlook."[19]

Three other early dissenters from the popular view of Strachey as a mere iconoclast were Elizabeth Drew, Guy Boas and Clara Stillman. Elizabeth Drew argued strongly that Strachey wrote from a moral standpoint, "which though it is completely different from the moral standpoint of his predecessors, is every bit as active."[20] Guy Boas remarked that Queen Victoria is "the quintessence of 'Stracheyism'" and that "whoever is offended at it can perceive Strachey the iconoclast but is blind to Strachey the idolater."[21] And Clara Stillman made the following observations: "Strachey reacted with violence against all the cultural implications of Victorian England . . . His form, as well as his point of view, was a reaction against Victorianism . . . And yet it had a strange fascination for him . . . He both laughed and shuddered; perhaps he gave to biography a new shudder, with laughter in it, but it is a mistake to think that this laughter contains no emotion."[22]

These comments aside, it is nevertheless a mark of the strength with which Strachey's reputation as an iconolast was established in his own time, that it became something of a critical cliché, echoed during the next three decades, especially in literary histories and anthologies.[23] The title of A. E. Dyson's 1955 article "The Technique of Debunking"[24] clearly announces what was the dominant strain of current

Strachey criticism. In the same year, in his influential study One Mighty Torrent: The Drama of Biography, Edgar Johnson commented that "in the nineteen-twenties, inspired partly by Lytton Strachey's acid but intelligent example, biography became for a while a dance of impish glee around scores of broken altars."[25] During the sixties, writers as various as Walter Allen, Gabriel Gersh, V. S. Pritchett, and John Wain[26] reiterated this assessment of Strachey's contribution to biography, and as recently as 1977, the well-known Yeats scholar Norman A. Jeffares complained that "the price we pay for (Strachey's) iconoclastic lively style is his cheap sneering, in Eminent Victorians, at General Gordon and the others, for instance, or his smart-aleck description of Bacon's death."[27]

Nevertheless, since the mid-thirties, as in the preceding years, there have been exceptions to the prevailing view. In his 1943 Rede Lecture, Max Beerbohm forcefully advanced the opinion that "the vulgar term, 'a debunker', the term that the average writer applies to Strachey, is not only vulgar, it is also silly", arguing that although the vein of mockery was strong in Strachey, he was not a satirist, but "always ready to mock what he loved."[28] In 1947, John Russell proffered a similarly dissenting judgement when he said: "It is still only rarely acknowledged that Lytton Strachey did not regard the Victorian Age with the eye of a superior person;

nor did he speak, as has been so often asserted, with the voice of a 'cynical and beliefless generation.'"[29] In the fifties and sixties C. R. Sanders and Michael Holroyd both stressed the ambivalence of Strachey's response to the Victorian era. They also both emphasized that Strachey possessed a very definite, if secular, set of beliefs.[30]

In their different ways Sanders and Holroyd point to major new directions in Strachey studies. So far, my summary of major critical trends has inevitably stressed the general at the expense of the particular. It is time to redress that balance, but an awareness of the constants in critical opinion on Strachey contributes to a more informed assessment of the longer individual studies which I discuss next, and to an appreciation of the unique contribution made by a number of them.

A high proportion of the book-length studies of Strachey have been either biographical in emphasis or have focussed on Strachey's relationship to his cultural milieu. One of Strachey's earliest biographers, Cyril Clemens, provides a relatively brief, but interesting insight into how Strachey appeared to his contemporaries.[31] A much fuller view of Strachey is provided by some of the extracts in S.P. Rosenbaum's valuable collection of memoirs, commentary and criticism written by and about Bloomsbury.[32] There are also some interesting glimpses of him in Quentin Bell's personal

narrative on Bloomsbury.[33] However, the definitive biography is Michael Holroyd's massive work, based on all the extant Strachey papers, and written with the active collaboration of Lytton's brother James. This is an indispensable book for any student of Strachey or Bloomsbury.[34]

In his pioneering work on literary Bloomsbury J. K. Johnstone emphasised the relation of Strachey's biographies to Bloomsbury philosophy and aesthetics in general.[35] By contrast, in his important full-length study of Strachey, published seven years later, Martin Kallich focussed on a single hitherto neglected aspect of the intellectual climate of Bloomsbury: the writings of Sigmund Freud. Kallich's central thesis was: "Knowledge of his direct or indirect indebtedness to Freud contributes to an understanding of Strachey's special insights into human nature, among the most important constituents in modern life writing, and permits an evaluation of his achievement in biography."[36]

Continuing interest in Bloomsbury as an artistic environment is reflected in B.L. Cooper's 1966 thesis on "The Cultural Milieu of Lytton Strachey"[37] and in L. A. Garber's 1973 study of Bloomsbury biography.[38] Cooper argued that "Strachey's work developed from two distinct currents in nineteenth century thought and life. The first was the tradition of Cambridge rationalism, associated with the idea of social progress and exemplified in the writing of

such figures as Leslie Stephen and G. Lowes Dickinson. The second was a tradition of social relationships based upon close personal attachment and shared intellectual interests, exemplified in the structures of such coteries as the Clapham Sect."[39] Garber's main conclusions were that "Bloomsbury biography theory involves itself with the most crucial issues" and that although "there is no uniform agreement as to the degree of artifice the biographer ought to be free to use, there is a general consensus that biography is an art rather than a science, and that the biographer's task is not a mechanical and laborious compilation of facts, nor his role that of celebrant and protector."[40]

If a significant proportion of studies devoted to Strachey focus on the biographical or cultural aspects of his work, critical studies with a strong literary emphasis form the important remainder. Most of these are, however, fairly restricted in scope, and relatively short. Such are the books by Beerbohm,[41] Boas,[42] and Scott-James.[43] Beerbohm's is based on his Cambridge Rede Lecture, and those of Boas and Scott-James were published as part of a series of literary handbooks. Boas and Beerbohm both write sensitive and appreciative analyses of Strachey's literary criticism and of his prose style. Both also comment on Strachey's attitude towards his subjects: Beerbohm to stress that Strachey's mockery is not malicious and Boas to note that Strachey's

indignation is that of a sane and serious scholar. Scott-James' survey of Strachey's career emphasizes the biographical basis of his writing, his iconoclasm and his ironic witty style.

Srinivasa Iyengar's critical study was the first full-length review of Strachey's total output, with chapters on his life, literary essays, criticism, biographies and biographical essays.[44] Iyengar also examines Strachey's irony and style, defines his career in relation to the Victorian Age, and assesses his contribution to English biography. His main conclusions are that "Strachey was a romantic by temperament, a classicist by training, and often in his literary practice, both",[45] and that the three characteristics of Strachey as a recorder of human lives were: "dramatic intensity, psychological accuracy and relevance, and an irony that is as various as nature."[46]

Since Iyengar there have only been two literary studies of Strachey of any length. The first, by Holroyd, was originally incorporated in his two-part "critical biography" of Strachey.[47] Since published separately as Lytton Strachey and the Bloomsbury Group: His Work, Their Influence,[48] its main focus and its main value remain Holroyd's insights into Strachey's life and the close relationship between his life and art. The second, by C. R. Sanders, is the major critical study on Strachey.[49] It is the only full scholarly assessment of Strachey's writings

in recent years, and is distinguished by both its thoroughness and its range. Based on articles published elsewhere, it includes sections on Strachey's life, point of view, literary criticism, drama, attitude towards the eighteenth century and the Victorian Age, and his conception of biography, together with analyses of all his biographical writings, his style, reputation and influence.

One final study deserves mention: George Simson's Lytton Strachey's Use of His Sources in Eminent Victorians.[50] Although its focus is not primarily literary, Simson's work contributes to an understanding of Strachey's biographical method. He sets out to examine "what Strachey used and how he used it in writing Eminent Victorians."[51] His thesis is that "Strachey's work is not . . . without foundation in historical fact, but that it is firmly rooted in fact, albeit highly interpreted and evaluated"[52] and his main conclusions are that Strachey's mind, "not powerfully gifted with creative imagination, nevertheless operated with great ability in reconstructing through dramatic techniques the too-long ignored personal aspects of well-known situations."[53]

As I said at the outset, my decision to emphasize point of view and close textual analysis reflects the intensely personal character of Strachey's biographies as well as a number of critical choices on my part. However, my decision also takes into account the scope and focus of the

existing full-length studies on Strachey discussed in the preceding pages. As we have seen, many of Strachey's critics have highlighted point of view, some of them at length.[54] However, most have concentrated on simply identifying the main components of Strachey's outlook on life. By contrast, my central concern is less with defining Strachey's point of view than with the implications his perspective has for his art. This is why my analysis of Strachey's mastery of the formal elements of narrative in Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria and Elizabeth and Essex is linked in each case to a discussion of the way Strachey's aesthetic creed, in combination with his cultural and moral values, profoundly affects the success of these works as examples of the art of biography.

The advantages of such an approach are several. Firstly, since Strachey's opinions are expressed directly and with considerable skill, his writings lend themselves to close linguistic and textual analysis. Secondly, by focussing on the role played by his viewpoint rather on the mere fact of his having adopted a specific stance, I hope to show that the extent to which Strachey's point of view may justifiably be termed harmful or helpful depends on the specific relationship set up between biographer and subject in each portrait. Lastly, critical judgements about Strachey's ability to provide in-depth portraits of his

subjects ought to take into account the personal factors which enable Strachey to expose, partially or otherwise, the inner recesses of his subjects' personalities. In the fullest sense of the words, it is point of view which ultimately determines success or failure in this crucial area.

The main emphasis of this study will be on Strachey's art, not on his life. However, an equally valid way of approaching his art might be through his life, and this seems an appropriate place to indicate, at least briefly, that Strachey's own writings and Michael Holroyd's biography both contain evidence which corroborate the inferences I draw about Strachey's values, on the basis of the attitudes expressed in Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria and Elizabeth and Essex. By way of illustration, I will take one important representative example and show how Strachey's ambivalent attitude towards the Victorian Age, which is a significant feature of Strachey's presence in Eminent Victorians and Queen Victoria is also a recurrent motif in his conversations, letters, autobiographical writings and critical essays.

"Lancaster Gate" is generally recognized as an extremely important revelation of the cultural roots of Strachey's intellectual and emotional heritage.[55] What his description of the family home reveals, among other things, is the immense influence that the Victorian building, whose

drawing-room was "the concentrated produce of an epoch",[56] exercised over Strachey's imagination and affections. Commenting on a recurrent dream, in which he finds himself back in this drawing-room he says:

> The strange thing is that, when I realize that this has come about, that our successive wanderings have been a mere interlude, that we are once more permanently established at number 69, a feeling of intimate satisfaction comes over me. I am positively delighted. And this is strange because, in my working life, I have never for a moment so far as I am aware, regretted our departure from that house, and if, in actuality, we were to return to it, I can imagine nothing which would disgust me more.[57]

Here is the essence of Strachey's lifelong response to the era into which he was born: a response marked by a fascination at least as compelling as his antipathy to it.

In 1906, as a young member of the Apostles, Strachey read the memoirs of a well known Victorian figure, Henry Sidgwick. His feelings were typically mixed. On the one hand he wrote to Moore: "I found it extraordinarily fascinating--

though I can't think why, as <u>every</u> detail was inexpressibly tedious."[58] (Italicised in the original) On the other hand, he remarked to Maynard Keynes: "It was the Glass Case Age. Themselves as well as their ornaments, were left under glass cases. Their refusal to face any fundamental question fairly--either about people or God--looks at first sight like cowardice; but I believe it was simply the result of an innate incapacity for penetration--for getting either out of themselves or into anything or anybody else."[59]

The emphasis and tone may vary slightly from year to year, and according to his audience, but throughout his life Strachey's comments on the nineteenth century are characterized by a unique blend of irony and romanticism, detachment and passion. Discussing "The Really Interesting Question", a paper Strachey delivered to the Apostles in 1911,[60] Holroyd says: "Near the opening of this paper, Lytton confessed his idyllic sentimentalism and the rather conservative form it took: 'I even have a secret admiration for the typical Englishman--the strong silent man with deep emotion--too deep--oh! far too deep ever to come to the surface; I can't help being impressed.'"[61] However, Holroyd also quotes from the closing section of the paper: "With us, at any rate, the old rule of the curt Englishman, who feels (so he says) that his emotions are too sacred for him to dare to do anything but hint at them--that old rule has broken down . . . but opening

the biography of our brother Maitland, I have a revulsion. Oh dear! the grey horror of those letters to our brothers Pollock, Verrall, and Jackson! The brave concealment of tragedy! The profound affection just showing, now and then, with such a delicacy--between the lines . . . What a world, what a life, passing in these dimnesses! I see once more the bleak and barren plain, and the dreadful solitary castles, with their blinds drawn down."[62]

Justifiably, Holroyd's conclusions are that "Lytton's comic and romantic sensibilities warmed to the exaggeration, the fantasy and the rhetoric of the more outspoken picturesque past; but his intelligence applauded that sober, slowly developing social justice and enlightenment which releases confidences of a more intimate human kind--those voices which had lain pathetically inarticulate under all the Victorian gush of words. And so, rather regretfully, he comes down on balance in favour of the unpoetical Age of Criticism."[63]

A year later, in 1912, Strachey's thoughts were taken up with a scheme for twelve "Victorian Silhouettes". It was at this time, after reading Meredith's letters, that Strachey wrote to Virginia Woolf about the Victorians: "They seem to me a set of mouthing bungling hypocrites; but perhaps really there is a baroque charm about them which will be discovered by our great-great-grandchildren, as we have discovered the charm of Donne, who seemed intolerable to the

eighteenth century. Only I don't believe it."[64]

At other times Strachey could be more charitable. In his essay on the eighteenth century, published in 1926, he wrote:

> Why is it that the eighteenth century so particularly delights us? Are we perhaps simply reacting against a reaction? Is the twentieth century so fond of the eighteenth because the nineteenth disliked it so intensely? No doubt that is partly the reason; but the whole truth lies deeper. Every age has a grudge against its predecessors, and generally the grudge is well founded. The Romantics and the Victorians were probably right: they had good reason to dislike the eighteenth century, which they found to be intolerably rigid, formal, and self-satisfied, devoid, to an extraordinary degree, of sympathy, adventure and imagination . . . The nineteenth century, very properly, revolted, broke those chains, and then--proceeded to forge others of its own invention. It is these later chains that <u>we</u> find distressing. (Italicized in original)[65]

In conclusion, as Beerbohm astutely said, Strachey may have "disliked the nineteenth century in comparison with its forerunner, but it appealed to him far more than could the twentieth."[66] One has only to recall Strachey's unflattering description of the twentieth century's obsession with "business", "express trains", "quick lunches", and "making a profit of ten percent"[67] to recognize the force of Beerbohm's assertion.

Although Strachey's beliefs are not in themselves the subject of my thesis, it will be helpful if, before embarking on my detailed analyses of Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria and Elizabeth and Essex, I mention two other aspects of his thinking which, like his attitude to the Victorian Age, are of fundamental significance to these works: his concept of biography, and his philosophy of history. Much has been written about Strachey's approach to biography. It is therefore sufficient here simply to reiterate the main points of Strachey's oft quoted Preface to Eminent Victorians, since this brief essay accurately reflects the basic tenets of his aesthetic theory: namely that biography should be regarded as an art, that the biographer has an onus to be judiciously selective, and that in so doing, his purpose is to illustrate rather than to explain.[68] On the other hand, since comparatively little has been written about Strachey's philosophy of history, I propose to discuss this important

facet of Strachey's intellectual equipment in more detail.

Strachey wrote that the rules of historiography were few and obvious: "a capacity for absorbing facts, a capacity for stating them and a point of view."[69] Few critics have disputed either his capacity for absorbing facts or his capacity for stating them. However, many have taken issue with his point of view, usually on the grounds that he lacked objectivity and respect for the facts,[70] or that, as Hugh Trevor-Roper put it, his interest in individual human motivation did not extend to "the analysis of impersonal or social facts which also are the material of history", as a result of which "historical problems were always and only problems of individual eccentricity."[71] Since his main subjects were historical rather than contemporary figures, the matter of Strachey's handling of factual evidence warrants serious consideration. Even those critics who concede the desirability of a clearly articulated stance on Strachey's part usually argue that, as a writer of non-fiction, he has an obligation towards the facts, from which the novelist is absolved.[72]

Although I recognise the significance of this aspect of Strachey's work, it is not my intention in this study to focus directly on Strachey's use of his sources. A number of factors contributed to this decision: First, having examined Strachey's notebooks for <u>Queen Victoria</u> in the Humanities

Research Center at Austin, Texas,[73] I fully concur with the tenor of Simson's conclusions about Strachey's research methods in Eminent Victorians and feel it would be superfluous to repeat his careful work in this area. Second, Strachey's biases are sufficiently explicit that close analysis of formal qualities such as tone, structure and sequence clearly reveals his criteria of selection. Third, and most important, since objectivity is neither Strachey's ideal nor his practice, the most pertinent question to ask about his writings is not whether he is faithful to the facts, but whether his intellectual and other qualifications are equal to the task of selection, arrangement and interpretation, and his choice of subject appropriate to his particular gifts as a biographer.

Accusations that Strachey failed to deal with impersonal or social facts are more readily answered than allegations about his lack of objectivity. To begin with, his theoretical position is by no means as extreme as that embodied in Carlyle's famous dictum: "Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here."[74] Unlike Carlyle, Strachey does not hold that all factors except Great Men were inconsequential. He is far from espousing the Hegelian view that had it not been Napoleon on horseback at Jena "it would have been someone else who would have carried out the dictates of 'the cunning of reason'--and

if not on horseback then on foot."[75] Rather, Strachey would have concurred with Leslie White's opinion that "it takes. . . more than exceptional natural endowment to make a Great Man; a certain concatenation of cultural forces and historical forces is required also",[76] as the following quotation from his essay on Voltaire and England makes abundantly clear:

> The visit of Voltaire to England marks a turning point in the history of civilisation. It was the first step in a long process of interaction--big with momentous consequences--between the French and English cultures. For centuries the combined forces of mutual ignorance and political hostility had kept the two nations apart: Voltaire planted a small seed of friendship which, in spite of a thousand hostile influences, grew and flourished mightily. The seed, no doubt, fell on good ground, and no doubt, if Voltaire had never left his native country, some chance wind would have carried it over the narrow seas, so that history in the main would have been unaltered. But actually his was the hand that did the work.[77]

In his biographies, the mainspring of Strachey's interest in history is shown to be psychological rather than sociological or economic. His approach is, as John Russell says, that of the 'intimiste'.[78] However, a recurrent and central theme in his biographical, as in his theoretical writings, is the reciprocal relationship between the individual history and that of the age. As I show in what follows, the cornerstone of Strachey's method in Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria and Elizabeth and Essex is to present his major subjects as simultaneously the product and embodiment of their age.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER ONE

[1]The Notebooks of Samuel Coleridge, ed., Kathleen Cobourn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 1, 74.

[2]Lytton Strachey, "The Pastoral," The Spectator, 97 (1906), 132.

[3]Clara G. Stillman, "The Art of Lytton Strachey," Nation, 137 (1933), 686-687. (Hereafter cited as Stillman).

[4]George Dangerfield, "Lytton Strachey," Saturday Review of Literature (New York), 18 (1938), 3.

[5]Noel Annan, Introduction to Eminent Victorians (London: Collins, 1959; 1965), p.15.

[6]F. R. Leavis, "Keynes, Lawrence, and Strachey," Scrutiny, 16 (1949), 243-4.

[7]John Raymond, "Strachey's Eminent Victorians," New Statesman and Nation, 49 (1955), 545-546.

[8]A good example is T. R. Barnes, who said that Strachey's "writings reveal his snobbery and querulous inferiority feelings. Yet he is influential . . ." in "Lytton Strachey," Scrutiny, 11, (1933), 303.

[9]Charles Smyth makes about the only out and out attack on Strachey's style when he says that "the prose style of Mr Strachey is intolerable even when it is not ungrammatical and his nearest approach to humor is a dreadful sniggering vulgarity". "A Note on Historical Biography and Mr. Strachey," Criterion, 8 (1929), 647. (Hereafter cited as Smyth).

[10]John Clive, "More or Less Eminent Victorians: Some Trends in Recent Victorian Biography," Victorian Studies, 11, No 1 (1958), pp. 5, 6.

[11]Thomas Carlyle, in a review of Lockhart's Life of Scott, The London and Westminster Review, (Jan 1838), p. 299; reprinted in James L. Clifford, ed., Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 84.

[12]Edmund Gosse, Some Diversions of A Man of Letters (1919; reprinted Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 319.

[13]Douglas Bush, "The Victorians, God Bless Them!" Bookman, (New York), 74 (1932), 589.

[14]Lionel Gelber, "History and the New Biography," Queens Quarterly, 37 (1930), 135.

[15]André Maurois, "The Modern Biographer," Yale Review, 17 (1928), 227-245.

[16]See, for example: Osbert Burdett, "Experiment in Biography," Tradition and Experiment in Present-Day Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 161-178; David Cecil, An Anthology of Modern Biography (London: Nelson, 1936), pp. ix-xvi; John Cunliffe, English Literature in the Twentieth Century (New York: Macmillan, 1933), pp.281-91; Bonamy Dobrée "Books of the Quarter," Criterion, 8 (1929), 524-29; Claude M. Fuess, "The Biographer and His Victims," Atlantic Monthly, 149 (1932), 62-73; Joseph Mosher, "Some Iconoclastic Portraits," Publishers Weekly, 114 (1918),1304; Clara L. Myers, ed., Readings in Biography (New York: Macmillan, 1931), pp.ix, 382-83; and Edward H. O'Neill, A History of American Biography, 1800-1935 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), pp.12, 14, 179-85, 257-58.

[17]Raymond Mortimer, Channel Packet (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), p.180.

[18]Leonard Woolf, "Lytton Strachey," New Statesman and Nation (30 Jan 1932), 118-119; reprinted in S.P. Rosenbaum ed., The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary and Criticism (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p.180.

[19]Arthur Waugh, letter to the Editor, The Spectator, 148 (1932), 146.

[20]Elizabeth Drew, "Biography," The Enjoyment of Literature (New York: Norton, 1935), p. 100.

[21]Guy Boas, Lytton Strachey, The English Association Pamphlet No 93 (London: 1935), p. 12.

[22]Stillman, p. 687.

[23]See, for example: Leonard Bacon, "An Eminent Post-Victorian," Yale Review, 30 (1940), 310-24. (Hereafter cited as Bacon); Samuel L. Chew, "The Nineteenth Century and After," in A Literary History of England., ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), pp. 1600-01; Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promise (London: Routledge, 1938; revised edition, New York: Macmillan, 1948), pp. 32, 46-48, 97, 237; David Daiches, The Present Age in British Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), pp. 144-5, 335-36; and Edwin Muir, The Present Age from 1914 (New York: McBride, 1940), pp. 24, 161-62, 272.

[24]A. E. Dyson, "The Technique of Debunking," Twentieth Century, 157 (1955), 244.

[25] Edgar Johnson, One Mighty Torrent: The Drama of Biography (New York: Macmillan, 1937; 1955), p. 478. (Hereafter cited as Johnson).

[26] Walter Allen, "Speaking of Books," New York Times Book Review, 19 Nov. 1961, p.2. Gabriel Gersh, "Lytton Strachey: Pathfinder in Biography," Modern Age, 11 (1967), 394-99. V. S. Pritchett, "Artists on Oath," New Statesman, (2 Feb. 1962), p. 164. John Wain, "The Education of Lytton Strachey," New Republic, 152 (1965), 20-22.

[27] Norman A. Jeffares, "Brooding About Biography," The Sewanee Review, 85, 2 (1977), 305.

[28] Max Beerbohm, Lytton Strachey, The Rede Lecture, 1943 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), pp. 15, 16-17.

[29] John Russell, "Lytton Strachey," Horizon, 15 (1947), 96. (Hereafter cited as Russell).

[30] For example, virtually the whole of Chapter One of Sanders' study is devoted to the demonstration of the argument that Bloomsbury writers such as Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey were "rebellious children" of the Victorian Age who ". . . never quite succeeded in emancipating themselves from it. It

had been bred in their bones, and they loved it even while they fought with vigor against it." C. R. Sanders, Lytton Strachey: His Mind and Art, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 164.

[31]Cyril Clemens, Lytton Strachey (Webster Groves, Missouri: International Mark Twain Society, 1942).

[32]S. P. Rosenbaum, ed., The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary and Criticism (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975). (Hereafter cited as Rosenbaum).

[33]Quentin Bell, Bloomsbury, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

[34]Michael Holroyd, Lytton Strachey: A Biography, (Penguin Books, 1971). (Hereafter cited as Holroyd).

[35]J. K. Johnstone, The Bloomsbury Group (London: Secker and Warburg; New York: Noonday Press, 1954).

[36]Martin Kallich, The Psychological Milieu of Lytton Strachey (New York: Bookman Associates, 1961), p.9.

[37]Burton Leonard Cooper, The Cultural Environment of Lytton Strachey, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan, 1966. (Hereafter cited as Cooper).

[38]Laurence Arnold Garber, Bloomsbury Biography, Ph.D. Thesis University of Toronto, 1973. (Hereafter cited as Garber, Bloomsbury Biography).

[39]Cooper, p.1.

[40]Garber, Bloomsbury Biography, pp. 1-2.

[41]Max Beerbohm, Lytton Strachey, The Rede Lecture, 1943 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; New York: Alfred Knopf, 1943). (Hereafter cited as Beerbohm).

[42]Guy Boas, Lytton Strachey (London: The English Association Pamphlet No 93, November 1935). (Hereafter cited as Boas).

[43]R. A. Scott-James, Lytton Strachey, Writers and Their Work 65 (London: Longmans, 1955). (Hereafter cited as Scott-James).

[44]K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Lytton Strachey: A Critical Study, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1938; reprinted Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1967). (Hereafter cited as Iyengar).

[45]Iyengar, p. 50.

[46]Iyengar, pp. 85-86

[47]Michael Holroyd, Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1967-8; published in the U.S.A. as Lytton Strachey: The Unknown Years, 1880-1910 and Lytton Strachey: The Years of Achievement, 1910-1932, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967-8)).

[48] Michael Holroyd, Lytton Strachey and The Bloomsbury Group: His Work, Their Influence, (Penguin Books, 1971).

[49]C. R. Sanders, Lytton Strachey: His Mind and Art, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957). Hereafter cited as Sanders).

[50]George K. Simson, Lytton Strachey's Use of His Sources in Eminent Victorians, PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1963. (Hereafter cited as Simson).

[51]Simson, p.1.

[52]Simson, p.1.

[53]Simson, p.290.

[54]See Sanders, Chapter 2, and Simson, Chapter 2.

[55]Lytton Strachey, "Lancaster Gate," Lytton Strachey by Himself: a self portrait, ed. Michael Holroyd (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 16-28.

[56]Strachey, "Lancaster Gate," p. 20.

[57]Strachey, "Lancaster Gate," p. 17.

[58]Lytton Strachey, Letter to G. E. Moore, cited by Holroyd, p. 311.

[59]Lytton Strachey, Letter to Maynard Keynes, cited by Holroyd, p. 312. Strachey's ambivalence about Sidgwick is not really surprising. Obviously he found the latter's punctilious attention to detail irritatingly Victorian. On the other hand, Sidgwick had been a formative influence on Moore's critical thinking and had been strongly committed to the cause of women's rights. As in the case of Florence Nightingale, Strachey doubtless admired Sidwick's intentions while deploring his methods.

[60]Lytton Strachey, "The Really Interesting Question," The Really Interesting Question and Other Papers, ed., Paul Levy (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), pp. 123-7. (Hereafter cited as The Really Interesting Question and Other Papers).

[61]Holroyd, p. 460.

[62]Strachey, The Really Interesting Question and Other Papers, pp. 126-7, quoted by Holroyd, pp. 461-2.

[63]Holroyd, p. 461.

[64]Lytton Strachey, Letter to Virginia Woolf, 8 November 1912, Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf: Letters, ed. Leonard Woolf and James Strachey (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1956), p. 54.

[65]Lytton Strachey, "The Eighteenth Century," Biographical Essays, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948; 1960), p. 201. (Hereafter cited as B.E.).

[66]Beerbohm, p. 14.

[67]Lytton Strachey, essay on Pope, Addison, Steele, and Swift, "English Letter Writers," Literary Essays, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 242. (Hereafter cited as L.E.).

[68]Lytton Strachey, Preface to Eminent Victorians, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), pp. 6-8.

[69]Lytton Strachey, "Macauley," Portraits in Miniature and Other Essays, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), pp. 169-70.

[70]Among those who have criticized him on these grounds are: Rosalind Nash, "Florence Nightingale According to Mr Strachey," Nineteenth Century, 103 (1928), 258-65; F. A. Simpson, "Methods of History," The Spectator, 172 (1944), 7-8; and Mrs Humphry Ward, Letter to the Editor, The Times Literary Supplement, 11 July 1918, p. 325. See also the exchange of letters in The Times Literary Supplement, on the subject of Baring, between Edmund Gosse, 27 June 1918, p.301, Lytton Strachey, 4 July 1918, pp. 313-4, and Sanderson, 18 July 1918, pp. 336-7.

[71]Hugh Trevor-Roper, Review of The Collected Works of Lytton Strachey, New Statesman and Nation, 37 (1949), 157. Albert Bushnell Hart criticized Strachey on similar grounds, questioning the need" . . . to know the antechamber quarrels of Leicester and Essex, and Dudley and Queen Elizabeth" because "The purpose of biography is . . . to make clear to the reader's mind what changes were brought about in state or republic or empire by that man or woman." Albert Bushnell Hart, "The Modern Historical School for Scandal," Current History, 31 (1930), 969.

[72]See Appendix

[73]Lytton Strachey, Notebooks for Queen Victoria, Humanities

Research Center, Austin, Texas. (Nine manuscript notebooks, listed under Manuscript File: "Strachey, G.L., Works").

[74]Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), p.1, cited by Sidney Hook, The Hero in History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1943), p. 14.

[75]Hegel, cited by Hook, p. 60.

[76]Leslie A. White, "Ikhnaton: The Great Man vs The Culture Process," Journal of the American Oriental Society, 68 (1948), 114.

[77]Lytton Strachey, "Voltaire and England," B.E., p. 56.

[78]Russell, p. 93.

CHAPTER TWO: EMINENT VICTORIANS

After his final revision of Eminent Victorians Lytton Strachey is said to have realized that "this series of four biographical portraits corresponded, as they stood, to the four inter-related movements of an orchestral symphony, or perhaps more appropriately, to the intimate pattern of a string quartet."[1] It would, however, be unwise to take Strachey's post facto insight too literally. The coherence of Eminent Victorians derives less from strict formal unity than from the cogent vision which stamps every line of the work with the mark of Strachey's artistic, psychological and moral concerns as a biographer. Because the effectiveness of Eminent Victorians stems in large measure from what the portraits have in common artistically, I shall start by considering the work as an expression of Strachey's narrative skill before going on to discuss it as an expression of his psychological and moral concerns.

Above all, Strachey's mastery of narrative is evident in his meticulous control of structure, order, and pace. The arrangement of material in "Florence Nightingale", for example, skilfully underscores his central thesis that her life and personality were marked by obsessive energy. Strachey therefore opens his portrait by destroying the current image of Florence: "The saintly, self-sacrificing

woman, the delicate maiden of high degree, who threw aside the pleasure of a life of ease to succour the afflicted, the Lady with the Lamp, gliding through the horrors of the hospital at Scutari; and consecrating with the radiance of her goodness the dying soldier's couch . . ."[2] In reality, he tells us, "she moved under the stress of an impetus which finds no place in the popular imagination. A Demon possessed her"(129). He insists that Florence Nightingale's real career began after the Crimean period on which her reputation as a "genteel vision of female virtue" was based (155), and his portrait accordingly stresses the latter part of her life during the greater part of which" all the energy and all the devotion of her extraordinary nature were working at their highest pitch" (155).

His long middle chapters are as crowded and hettic as Florence's middle age. Thus, although Chapter II encompasses a single major episode in her life, the opening paragraph of Chapter III swiftly draws our attention to the spate of activities which engage her next. Similarly, although Chapter III concludes with the termination of Florence's greatest political successes, Strachey does not close the chapter with the death of Sidney Herbert, but on the forward-looking note set by Florence's reflection that, current problems notwithstanding, "there was one thing more that she would always have--her work" (176). Furthermore, at the

beginning of Chapter IV Strachey soon moves on to list the immense programmes of social work undertaken by her in the years after Herbert's death "put an end to her dream of a reformed War Office" (177). As he remarks, the organization of a training school for nurses "would have been enough in itself to have absorbed the whole efforts of at least two lives of ordinary vigour" (177). In this way Strachey retains both the momentum of his narrative and the emphasis on Florence's work obsession.

The prose style also reflects the pressure of Florence Nightingale's life, as the tight syntax, staccato phrasing and urgent rhetorical emphases of the following passage illustrate:

> Miss Nightingale arrived at Scutari-- a suburb of Constantinople, on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus--on 4 November 1854; it was ten days after the battle of Balaclava, and the day before the battle of Inkerman. The organisation of the hospitals, which had already given way under the stress of the battle of Alma, was now to be subjected to the further pressure which these two desperate and bloody engagements implied. Great detachments of wounded were already

> beginning to pour in. The men, after receiving such summary treatment as could be given at the smaller hospitals in the Crimea itself, were forthwith shipped in batches of 200 across the Black Sea to Scutari. This voyage was in normal times one of four days and a half; but the times were no longer normal, and now the transit often lasted for a fortnight or three weeks. It received, not without reason, the name of 'middle passage'. Between, and sometimes on the decks, the wounded, the sick, and the dying were crowded--men who had just undergone the amputation of limbs, men in the clutches of fever or of frostbite, men in the last stages of dysentry and cholera--without beds, sometimes without blankets, often hardly clothed (137-8).

The driving force in "Cardinal Manning" is provided by his upward progress from the small rectory in Sussex to the important diocese in London. In this portrait, too, Strachey therefore sustains a generally rapid pace. When he does pause, as in Chapter IV, it is to allow time for a closer scrutiny of the motives behind Manning's conversion. Immediately afterwards,

however, he stresses the momentum thereby imparted to Manning's career:

> For the moment, however, it seemed as if the Fates had at last been successful in their little game of shunting Manning. The splendid career which he had so laboriously built up from the small beginnings of his Sussex curacy was shattered--and shattered by the inevitable operations of his own essential needs . . . Yet it so happened that within fourteen years of his conversion Manning was Archbishop of Westminster and the supreme ruler of the Roman Catholic community in England. This time the Fates gave up the unequal struggle; they paid over their stakes in despair and retired from the game. (63-4)

The next section of the narrative moves rapidly through these fourteen years. The first part of Chapter V succintly traces Manning's early manoeuvring for power in his new Church: "There was a momentary embarassment at the outset" (64) but "after that all went smoothly." Manning hastened to Rome, and was immediately placed by the Pope in the highly select Accademia Ecclesiastica, commonly known as the nursery of the

Cardinals, for the purpose of completing his theological studies" (65). "The order of the Oblates of St. Charles was founded in Bayswater and Manning was put at its head . . . Almost at the same time the Pope signified his appreciation of Manning's efforts by appointing him Provost of the Chapter of Westminster" (65-6). "This double promotion was the signal for the outbreak of an extraordinary intestine struggle which raged without intermission for the next seven years and was only to end with the accession of Manning to the Archbishopric"(66). The remainder of the chapter summarizes this struggle and the way Manning "flung himself into the fray with that unyielding intensity of fervour, that passion for the extreme and the absolute which is the very lifeblood of the Church of Rome" (70).

In Chapter VI, Strachey chronicles Manning's swift and ruthless quashing of Newman, "the one figure, which, by virtue of a peculiar eminence, seemed to challenge the supremacy of his own" (80). Then, skimming over the years of consolidation, he simply opens Chapter VIII with the words: "In 1875 Manning's labours received their final reward: he was made a Cardinal. His long and strange career, with its high hopes, its bitter disappointments, its struggles, its renunciations, had come at last to fruition in a Princedom of the Church." (111) Chapter VIII details the way Manning "threw himself into social work of every kind" (112) and

Chapter IX his final exertions to prevent Newman's elevation to the purple. Even the last chapter describing Manning's old age is an urgent reflection of the "meetings, missions, lectures, sermons, articles, interviews, (and) letters" of his last years (122).

Above all, this portrait grips the reader strongly, because it is so skilfully constructed. The first seven chapters move steadily towards the moment at which Manning's ambitions are realized, as described in the opening sentences of Chapter VIII quoted above. In context this statement is more effective than it seems when quoted in isolation. This is because it is preceded by the first real pause in the forward movement of the story, and also coincides with the natural break at the end of a chapter. Up to this point, the narrative has continuity and flow: the reader is led straight from the events of Chapter I to those of Chapter II by the simple expedient of an "In the meantime" (18), from the events of Chapter III to those of Chapter IV by the words "Manning was now thirty-eight" (48) and from Chapter VI to VII by an artful "Meanwhile" (95).[3]

Further, the events of one chapter generally have their sequel in the next. Thus, Chapter II which outlines the genesis of the Tractarian Movement in Oxford leads into Chapter III in which Strachey discusses why Manning was attracted to the Movement. What is remarkable is the

elegance with which Strachey's transition from the general to the particular is achieved. Chapter II ends with a wickedly ironic parody of a "typical" young convert's over-earnest mode of thinking: "Really to mean every word you said, when you repeated the Athanasian creed! How wonderful! and what enticing and mysterious vistas burst upon the view! But then, those vistas, where were they leading to? Supposing--oh heavens!--supposing after all they were to lead to--!" (30) Chapter III opens: "In due course the Tracts made their appearance at the remote rectory in Sussex " (31). In one deft stoke Strachey has made the transition from the general background to the specific history, simultaneously forcing a contrast between the directions in which Tractarianism led lightweight Oxford "thinkers" and the truly profound impact Tractarianism had on the life of a man of the stature of Manning. The juxtaposition of the mocking description of the Oxford convert and the serious tone of the analysis of Manning's conversion further emphasizes the contrast.

Similarly, Chapter V moves on from Chapter IV and Chapter VI from Chapter V. Chapter IV, which ends with Manning's decision to join the Roman Catholic Church, leads smoothly into Chapter V which begins "When Manning joined the Church of Rome he acted under the combined impulse of the two dominating forces in his nature . . ." (63). The subject

of the next chapter is Manning's successful bid for the Archbishopric of Westminster, and ends with an extract from one of his letters: "To receive (the Archbishopric) from the hands of His Vicar and from Pius IX, and after long invocation of the Holy Ghost, and not only without human influence, but in spite of manifold and powerful human opposition, gives me the last strength for such a cross" (78). In Chapter VI Strachey then discusses the masterly way Manning subsequently dealt with this "manifold and powerful human opposition", starting with the observation: "Manning's appointment filled his opponents with alarm" (79).

The breaks between Chapters VIII and IX, and IX and X, are, by contrast, quite marked. This is because Manning's career has reached its zenith with his "election to the purple", and this event also forms the climax of Strachey's portrait. Although Chapters VIII, IX, and X each chronicle the continued activity of Manning's declining years, the overall momentum of the narrative is slightly less urgent. The energy and drive of Manning's life, so faithfully reflected in the formal structures of Strachey's portrait, is stilled only by Manning's death; expressed in the elaborate and apt dying cadence of the final image: "And he who descends into the crypt of that Cathedral which Manning never lived to see, will observe, in the quiet niche

with the sepulchral monument, that the dust lies thick on the strange, the incongruous, the almost impossible object which, with its elaborations of dependent tassels, hangs down from the dim vault like some forlorn and forgotten trophy--the Hat" (127).

In his portrait of Gordon, Strachey again employs a terse prose style as a measure of the restlessness of his subject's life. A good example is the vigorous account of Gordon's first years as Equatorial Governor of the Sudan and of the period immediately afterwards (241-7).[4] The extract below is a particularly fast-paced section of the narrative, built up of short phrases and sentences, and crowded with movement:

> He arrived in England early in 1880, ill and exhausted; and it might have been supposed that after the terrible activities of his African exile he would have been ready to rest. But the very opposite was the case: the next three years were the most mouvementés of his life. He hurried from post to post, from enterprise to enterprise, from continent to continent with vertiginous rapidity. He accepted the Private Secretaryship to Lord Ripon, the new Viceroy of India, and three days after his arrival at Bombay, he resigned . . . Two

> days later, he was off for Pekin . . . a few weeks later, Li Hung Chang was in power and peace was assured. Gordon had spent two and a half days in Pekin and was whirling through China, when a telegram arrived from the home authorities, who viewed his movements with uneasiness, ordering him to return at once to England. (244-5)

The above passage is also a good illustration of the way Strachey controls pace in order to mark out the peaks of activity in his subject's life. The movement of the portrait is strongly directional: it tends always towards the "End". The earlier adventures form merely the prelude to the tale of the "last great adventure". In the extract just quoted, the pace is also sharply increased over that of the preceding section, and serves to sweep the reader on towards the grand finale of Gordon's last stand at Khartoum.

Even within the generally presto framework of the closing pages, subtle variations in tempo highlight specific moments of tension. For example, the brisk announcement of Gordon's summons to Egypt (246-7) is followed by a slower-paced recapitulation of the events which led up to it (247-62). Then, having once more drawn the reader's attention to the fact that this was Gordon's last appointment (262), Strachey

proceeds to keep us on tenterhooks a little longer about the events at Khartoum. Not until he has further discussed the Government's motives in appointing Gordon (262-8) does he again take up the swifter-paced narrative of Gordon's last days.

In fact, until the very last section, Strachey consistently plays off the leisurely process of policy-making in England against the tension of the Sudan. By alternating discursive analysis of party-politicking with urgent narration of the events at Khartoum, he intensifies the aura of impending doom and underlines the increasing seriousness of Gordon's situation. The fast-paced description of Khartoum's disastrous last offensive, which culminates in the vision of Gordon mechanically and hopelessly scanning the horizon for help (289-92), is followed by a detailed analysis of how help was finally sent (292-8). Every stage of Hartington's painfully slow process of forcing the decision out of Gladstone is enumerated in Strachey's point-by-point exposition of events (296-8).

Only in the closing pages is the pace uniformly rapid. Here the prose is punctuated by dates and diary entries, the narrative propelled by the imperative of events which follow in close succession and at an ever-increasing speed (298-316) until with Gordon's death (316-7), Strachey pauses briefly to comment on how the news was received in England (317-8) before

delivering his final judgement: "At any rate, it had all ended very happily--in a glorious slaughter of 20,000 Arabs, a vast addition to the British Empire, and a step in the Peerage for Sir Evelyn Baring" (319).

I opened my discussion by noting that the coherence of Eminent Victorians derives not so much from a strict formal unity as from the cogent vision which stamps it with the marks of Strachey's artistic, psychological, and moral concerns. I have so far focussed on Strachey's meticulous control of structure, order and pace. I turn now to the way Eminent Victorians shows Strachey to be a biographer fascinated by the psychological relationship between the History of the Age and the history of the individual life; particularly by the way peoples' lives are shaped by their milieu.

In "Florence Nightingale", for example, Strachey attributes his subject's obsessive energy to the situation of women in Victorian society. He represents her life as a series of energetic confrontations with a society that had no place for an able woman who, in rejecting the notion of marriage as her sole life's work, demanded the opportunity to realize all aspects of an "active nature" (133). He lays stress, therefore, on the way society's call to Florence to do her duty in that state of life unto which it had pleased God to call her--in other words, by marrying, after a fitting number of dances and dinner parties, an eligible gentleman,

and living happily ever afterwards" (129-30) conflicted savagely with her compulsive drive to "minister to the poor in the cottages, to watch by sick-beds . . ." (130), and with her dreams of "the country house at Embley turned, by some enchantment, into a hospital, with herself as matron moving about among the beds" (130). Given Florence Nightingale's unconventional aspirations, Strachey interprets her ultimate rejection of an otherwise desirable and personable suitor as a rejection of "the inevitable habiliments of a Victorian marriage" (133).

Strachey argues that Florence's idealistic vision of a nursing career brought her up against Victorian convention on two counts: "For not only was it an almost unimaginable thing in those days for a woman of means to make her own way in the world and to live in independence, but the particular profession for which Florence was clearly marked out both by her instincts and her capacities was at that time a peculiarly disreputable one" (131). Thus, says Strachey, Florence could not avoid coming into conflict with the Victorian establishment, despite her network of allies within the pale. The Queen might well express the wish that she had her at the War Office, but as Strachey pointedly remarks: "Miss Nightingale was not at the War Office, and for a very simple reason: she was a woman" (157).

Florence Nightingale is therefore driven to working behind the scenes: "There was one thing only which Miss Nightingale lacked in her equipment for public life; she had not--she never could have--the public power and authority . . . Sidney Herbert possessed . . . She took hold of him, taught him; shaped him, absorbed him, dominated him through and through" (162). Such was the rigidity of the age, contends Strachey, that the self-evident competence, experience and authority of Florence Nightingale in matters relating to Army Medical Services never received full recognition, even on the Royal Commission to report on the Health of the Army, whose report was largely based on her "Notes affecting the Health, Efficiency and Hospital Administration of the British Army" (167). As Strachey puts it: "Today she would, of course, have been one of the Commission herself; but at that time the idea of a woman appearing in such a capacity was unheard of; and no one even suggested the possibility of Miss Nightingale's doing so" (167).

Under these circumstances, says Strachey, it is no wonder that in the middle of a pamphlet ostensibly directed to improving the souls of the artisans of England, Florence Nightingale plunges the reader into "something particular, something personal, something with intense experience--a virulent invective upon the position of women in the upper ranks of society" (181-2). Strachey's own stance is also

not surprising, given his lifelong concern about women's rights. As early as 1904, he wrote the dramatic polemic "He, She and It",[5] in which his female speaker very eloquently rebuts the male speaker's attempt to deny responsibility for the late Victorian institution of marriage: "The whole thing's your doing. The whole arrangement of marriage, of society, of women. There's nothing in it that hasn't been carefully regulated by your commands, to suit your own convenience. You've tried by every means in your power to make it impossible for a woman to think by herself, or to act by herself; you have forbidden her to earn her own living; and now you complain because when she marries, we think it right that her husband should earn it for her."[6]

If Strachey's subjects are defined by their milieu, they also embody it. In his Preface to Eminent Victorians Strachey announced that he had chosen to describe "characteristic specimens" of the age (6), and this he certainly did. Gordon, for example, is presented as a perfect exemplification of "the mingling contradictions of the English spirit" (224) and the opening description of him focusses on the "enigmatic and attractive" contrast "between the unburnt brick-red complexion--the hue of the seasoned traveller--and the large blue eyes, with their look of almost childish sincerity" (223). Throughout the portrait Strachey

emphasises this antithesis. He tells us, for example, that the boyish "high spirits, pluck and love of mischief" (224) is offset in later life by Gordon's religious convictions (225). On the one hand, Gordon is the "kind Colonel" of Gravesend (233); on the other, the remorseless Colonel who condemns Slatin to death because he "denied his Lord", in an attempt to placate his Mahommedan troops (307-8). "The pious visionary of Gravesend" is also "the restless hero of three continents" (237). The "mystic of Gravesend" is "an English gentleman, an English officer" (292), and "the hermit and the fakir", "an English gentleman, an officer, a man of energy and action" (236).

In sum, Strachey's Gordon is an incoherent "whirl of contradictory policies" (287), in the depths of whose soul "there were intertwining contradictions--intricate recesses where egoism and renunciation melted into one another, where flesh lost itself in the spirit and the spirit in the flesh" (237). Unlike Cardinal Manning, that other Strachey ~~an re~~presentative of the ambigious spirit of Victorianism, who soon subjugated the devotional to the secular side of his nature, and pursued a successful career as Prince of the Church, Strachey's Gordon never truly resolved the inner conflicting calls of flesh and spirit. Thus it was that "though Death came slowly, struggling step by step with that bold and tenacious spirit, when he did

come at last the Cardinal was ready" (125-6); whereas of Gordon's death Strachey writes: "But it is only fitting that the last moments of one whose life was passed in contradiction should be involved in mystery and doubt." (316)[7]

Strachey also creates patterns of interpersonal conflict as a means of highlighting the antagonistic forces in Victorian society. In "Cardinal Manning", for example, he deliberately constructs his narrative in such a way that the worldly ecclesiastical side of Manning appears destined from the start to clash with the intellectual naivety of Newman. By alternating the focus on the two men during Chapters I-VIII he sets up parallel and antithetical histories, with Manning's star rising as Newman's falls. Strachey's narrative thus emphasises the elements in each man's makeup which will lead to conflict. Manning's friendship with Newman is shown to last only so long as the spiritual or "apocalyptic element" in Manning's nature holds him "under the spell of the Oxford theories of sacramental mysticism" (31). The reassertion of ambition brings the friendship to an end, when Manning seeks an opportune rapprochement with Archdeacon Hare (32-4). Manning's capacity for politicking is consistently contrasted with the artless logic of Newman who, when a child "wished that he could believe the Arabian Nights were true" (40). Of this desire Strachey drily remarks:

"When he came to be a man his wish seems to have been granted" (40). Thus, the histories of the two men are presented as comprehending the spirit of the age. Their struggle, Strachey infers, is the contention of the contradictory values of a society at once religious and secular.

Other characters in this portrait are also presented as dominated by one or other of the elements of the age. Wiseman, for example, "So far from being a Bishop Blougram (as rumour went) was, in fact, the very antithesis of that subtle and wordly-wise ecclesiastic" (69). He is later described as a "comfortable, easygoing innocent old man" whose last years were "distracted and embittered by the fury of opposing principles and the venom of personal animosities" (70). He falls prey to Manning for the same reasons as Newman, and the drama of each man's confrontation with Manning rests on the same counterbalance of opposing religious and secular concerns.

Unlike Newman and Wiseman, Dr. Errington, Mgr Talbot, the Cardinal, and the Pope are all guided by political expediency. Manning's closest ally is Mgr Talbot, "a priest who embodied in a singular manner, if not the highest, at least the most persistent traditions of Roman Curia . . . He could mingle together astuteness and holiness without any difficulty; he could make innuendos as naturally as an ordinary man makes statements of fact, he could apply

flattery with so unsparing a hand that even Princes of the Church found it sufficient; and, on occasion he could ring the changes of torture on a human soul with a tact which called forth universal approbation" (73). Mgr Talbot's demeanor is a faithful reflection of the Papal milieu in which he and Manning function so comfortably, and a mark of his subtle influence over the Pope he serves. The Cardinals, it will be remembered, were described by Strachey as having "shrewd eyes and hard faces" (81) when Newman, unaware of the hard reality that "ideas in Rome, were, to say the least of it, out of place" (80), attempted to win their support by means of purely intellectual argument. As Strachey has already pointed out, the days of this "throng of busy Cardinals and Bishops" were enjoyably spent "amid the practical details of ecclesiastical organization, the long-drawn out involutions of papal diplomacy, and the delicious bickering of personal intrigue" (80).

In the portrait of Gordon, as in the portrait of Manning, confrontation is used as a means of highlighting the contradictory facets of the age. In particular, Gordon's opponent, the Mahdi, is presented as an ironic reflection of certain aspects of Gordon himself. Like Gordon, he "acts with the Puritannical zeal of a Calvin" (247-8); like Gordon, he considers himself a visionary (247-8); and just as Gordon believes implicitly in the efficacy of God's will (236-7), so

the Mahdi believes that "Allah whose servant he was, who had led him thus far, would lead him onward still, to the glorious end" (251). Strachey even speculates that had Gordon been prepared to be receptive to the tone of the Mahdi's letter offering him escape from Khartoum, he would have recognized a voice which might "well have awakened some familiar echoes in his heart" (292). As it is, Gordon the English gentleman denies his other mystic self. (292)

Conversely, in his dealings with Gladstone and Baring, Gordon the ascetic clashes with worldly English opponents. His "restless conscience" continually challenges the "salamander conscience" of Gladstone and the "diplomatic conscience" of Sir Evelyn Baring (293). Gordon's unsympathetic view of the last named as "the embodiment of the English official classes, of English diplomacy, of the English Government with its hesitations, its sincerities, its double-faced schemes" is more or less endorsed by Strachey himself who comments that Gordon's "profound antipathy" and "instinctive distrust" of Baring "were not without their justification" because Baring, unlike Gordon, "felt no temptation to express everything that was in his mind" (285).

By contrast with Manning, Florence Nightingale, and Gordon, there is nothing ambiguous or contradictory about Arnold or about Strachey's attitude towards him. He is simply an amalgam of what Strachey disliked most about the

Victorians: an embodiment of the "singular solemnity", industriousness, "high moral tone", lack of humour, failure to see life realistically, and "self-complacency" of which he complained in his review of Lord Morley's Recollections, published in the same year as Eminent Victorians.[8]

Arnold is earnest: "His outward appearance was the index of his inward character; everything about him denoted energy, earnestness, and the best intentions " (193-4). He is also solemn: "Doubtless it was important to teach boys something more than the bleak rigidities of the ancient tongues; but how much more important to instil into them the elements of character and the principles of conduct!" (195) He is hard-working: "He had been educated at Winchester and Oxford, where his industry and piety had given him a conspicuous place among his fellow-students" (191). His concern with setting a high moral tone is matched only by his lack of humour: "One boy could never forget how he drew a distinction between 'mere amusement' and 'such as encroached on the next day's duties', nor how the Doctor added 'and then it immediately becomes what St Paul calls revelling' " (198). His behaviour consistently shows him to be lacking in any realistic understanding of the world as it is: "He would treat the boys at Rugby as Jehovah had treated the Chosen People: he would found a theocracy; and there should be judges in Israel . . ." (197). Last, but by no means

least, he is complacent: "The smooth and satisfactory progress of his life" being only once interrupted by religious doubts, upon which he followed Keble's advice to pray more earnestly and ". . . the result was all that could be wished. He soon found himself blessed with perfect peace of mind, and a settled conviction" (192).

The fact that Strachey sees Arnold as the archetypal Victorian has a marked impact on the design and the effectiveness of the portrait. Despite Strachey's insistence on Arnold's "unhasting unresting diligence" (211-12) his narrative lacks the decisive linear push which characterizes the other three portraits, and which so effectively communicates the energy with which Manning pursues his ecclesiastical career, Florence Nightingale her goals of social and theological reform, and Gordon his life of adventure. By contrast, despite Strachey's repeated assertions about Arnold's forceful career as headmaster and "public man",[9] he fails to convey any real sense of an energetic life because his narrative style is on the whole so discursive.

Strachey's real subject is educational reform rather than the man himself. Not only is a large part of the portrait devoted to this topic, but Strachey's analyses are couched in terms of the general issues rather than in the

specifics of Arnold's career. The portrait opens not with a description of Arnold's early life but with a discussion of the influence of the general climate of reform at the time of his appointment to Rugby (191). We therefore read the description of his early life (191-3) in the light of this discussion. Even the characteristically well-orchestrated death-scene in "Dr. Arnold" (220) is unlike those in the portraits of Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, Mme du Deffand, Lady Hester Stanhope, and Mme de Lieven[10], in that it neither forms the fitting cadence for the life, nor intensifies the reader's emotional response to the subject of the biography.

Furthermore, the portrait ends not with Arnold's death but with Strachey's damning indictment of what he believes to have been Arnold's pernicious influence as an "educational authority": "After Dr Arnold, no public school could venture to ignore the virtues of respectability . . . The earnest enthusiast who strove to make his pupils Christian gentlemen and who governed his school according to the principles of the Old Testament has proved to be the founder of the worship of athletics and the worship of good form" (221).

"Dr. Arnold" is an outstanding illustration of the fact that the criteria by which we judge a piece of writing to be an effective work of art are, in themselves, insufficient criteria by which to judge its merits as biography.

Above all, it demonstrates that the biographer's relationship to his material is a delicate and crucial matter. In this case, as we have seen, there is a marked contrast between Strachey's relative indifference to Arnold as an individual, and his intensely emotional response to the educational system Arnold represents.[11] In a review of a recent biography of George Eliot, Dan Jacobsen wrote: "Of course all biography has to be interpretative but . . . no biographer should ever assume . . . that his post-facto insights are more interesting or important that his subjects' words and actions."[12] It seems to me that Strachey's portrait of Arnold is seriously damaged by precisely this defect. The biographer's insights are allowed to assume more importance than his subject's words and actions, and the pungency of his point of view obscures rather than illuminates Arnold's character.

By contrast, the success of the portrait of Manning rests on Strachey's much happier choice of subject. The inherent contradictions of his psyche are a fruitful choice for a biographer whose imagination and interest are fired by complex personalities. Furthermore, Strachey feels sufficient respect for Manning that his depiction of him (though arguably not his cameos of the Pope and Mgr Talbot) never degenerates into caricature. In these circumstances the incisiveness of Strachey's perspective illuminates the

ambiguities which he relishes, even if he does not exactly admire them unreservedly.[13]

Although Strachey's thesis in "Cardinal Manning" is that the essence of Manning's character may be simply stated in terms of fundamentally contradictory elements in his nature, the actuality of Manning's inner and external life, as portrayed in Eminent Victorians, is far from simple. For one thing, Strachey is alive to fluctuations in the extent to which Manning's behaviour is dominated by one or other of these traits during his life. Thus, having noted that in Manning's boyhood "the worlds of danger" of schoolboy Harrow compete unsuccessfully with the "audible voice" of the spiritual life (14), Strachey goes on to drily remark that thoroughly secular considerations dominate Manning's decision-making a short while later when, faced by the necessity to choose a career, he opts for the Church "only when the offer of a Merton Fellowship seemed to depend upon his taking orders" (16).

For another, Strachey carefully traces the dynamics of the resulting conflicts, by highlighting crucial moments of decision in Manning's life, such as his conversion to Catholicism (48-62). He is fascinated by the intricacies of Manning's mind, and makes a detailed examination of the subtle mental gymnastics which precede his conversion. What makes Manning interesting to the reader is Strachey's

insistence that the reality of his inner history is complex. Having commented, for example, that at the age of 38 Manning "lived to the full the active life of a country clergyman. His slim athletic figure was seen everywhere"(49), Strachey then remarks: "Such was the outward seeming of the Archdeacon's life; but the inward reality was different. The more active, the more fortunate, the more full of happy promise his existence became, the more persistently was his secret imagination haunted by a dreadful vision--the lake that burneth for ever with brimstone and fire" (49).

The discussion of Manning's diary at the time of Errington's ignominious "liberation" from the Coadjutorship of Westminster is another key passage of analysis which shows Strachey's engagement with the complexities of his subject's inner life. He starts by commenting on the telling discrepancy between Manning's outward profession of disinterested zeal for the cause, and his inmost desires which are for a successful career. However, he is concerned lest we too hastily judge Manning to be a mere crass adventurer or simple hypocrite, and therefore draws our attention to the fact that the extracts quoted from his diaries not only reveal discrepancies between the outward seeming and inner reality, but also reveal ambiguities deeply rooted in Manning's unconscious. He is intrigued by the paradox that Manning's "scruples deepened with his desire; and he could

satisfy his most exorbitant ambitions in a profundity of self-abasement" (75).

Strachey's treatment of Manning is in strong contrast to his one dimensional treatment of the subordinate figures such as Newman, Wiseman, Mgr Talbot, the Pope, and the Cardinals. Unlike Manning, these men appear to have little or no inner history. Strachey's interest in them, it is clear, is in the ambiguity which the conjunction of their personalities represents. He may sympathize with the simplicity of Wiseman and respect Newman's integrity.[14] He may despise the out and out duplicity of the Pope and Cardinals. But it is the combination of simplicity and duplicity within the single person of Manning which really captures Strachey's interest and which inspires his fullest response as a biographer.

Florence Nightingale, unlike Manning, is portrayed as a fundamentally unambiguous figure. Only in the short first section dealing with her early life is there the slightest hint of inner turmoil, and even at this point the only real conflict is between Florence's aspirations and the means whereby she may realize them. In any case, the portrait effectively begins when Strachey's subject is in her early twenties, by which time "the want" to become a nurse "absurd, impractical as it was, not only remained fixed immovable in her heart, but grew in intensity

day by day" (132). As we have seen, the remainder of the portrait is firmly structured around Florence Nightingale's single-minded pursuit of these goals, and the pattern of conflict which ensues when she is baulked by those in authority.

However, even though Florence Nightingale is not presented as an inherently ambiguous figure, and although conflict is essentially dramatic and external, Strachey's eye is quick to detect the ironic discrepancy between myth and reality, and to perceive the ironic conjunctions of people, time, and place in her life.[15] Most important of all, his stance towards Florence herself is decidedly ambivalent; a mixture of admiration and dislike, fascination and revulsion.[16]

As I noted earlier, Strachey opens his portrait of Florence Nightingale by demolishing the popular conception of his subject. However, I think it is thoroughly misleading to categorize this as merely the work of a "debunking" biographer.[17] Strachey's portrait of Florence may well have been sparked by his well-known irreverence for the inhumanly perfect images of Victorian notables, current in his day[18] and he certainly had a penchant for scandal and a thorough dislike of hypocrisy, "stuffiness" and pomposity.[19] Still, the richness of his portrait of Florence Nightingale comes not from the biting edge of his exposé of the hollow Victorian

image of her, but from his own perceptive analysis of the psychology of the woman the myth obscured. Whereas Strachey found the idealised saintly Florence Nightingale abhorrent, he found to his delight that "in the real Miss Nightingale there was more that was interesting than in the legendary one" (129).

It is true that he is appalled by her Victorian aggressiveness: the demon that possesses her makes the real Miss Nightingale less "agreeable" than the legendary one (129). Although "to the wounded soldier on his couch of agony she might well appear in the guise of a gracious angel of mercy . . . the military surgeons, and the orderlies, and her own nurses, and the 'Purveyor', and Dr Hall, and even Lord Stratford himself could tell a different story . . . Beneath her cool and calm demeanour lurked fierce and passionate fires." (147-8) Strachey, with a perceptible shudder, tells us that the discerning onlooker "perceived something more than that--the serenity of high deliberation in the scope of the capacious brow, the sign of power in the dominating curve of the thin nose, and the traces of a harsh and dangerous temper--something peevish, something mocking, and yet something precise--in the small and delicate mouth . . . As for her voice, it was true of it even more than of her countenance, that it 'had that in it one must fain call master' "(148).

Furthermore, he quite obviously feels that her single-minded crusading zeal led her to behave with unforgivable ruthlessness towards others. The emotive charge of the language used to describe her conduct towards Sidney Herbert effectively conveys his strong moral reservations about this kind of behaviour: "She took hold of him, taught him, shaped him, absorbed him, dominated him through and through . . . that terrific personality swept him forward at her own fierce pace and with her own relentless stride . . . If Lord Panmure was a bison, Sidney Herbert, no doubt was a stag--a comely gallant creature springing through the forest, but the forest is a dangerous place. One has the image of those wide eyes fascinated suddenly by something feline, something strong; there is a pause; and then the tigress has her claws in the quivering haunches; and then . . .!" (162-3)

Florence Nightingale's lack of compunction in using her friends to the uttermost must have been anathema to the man who described the salon of Mlle de Lespinasse as a place where one found "a sense of freedom and intimacy which was the outcome of real equality, a real understanding, a real friendship such as have existed, before or since, in few societies indeed."[20] This was also the man who was capable of enthusing over a Hogarth scene because it conjured up" . . . all the good things of civilization,--tranquillity, and easy talk, and familiar friendship, and

smiles, and the happiness of love."[21] The words recall Leonard Woolf's definition of Bloomsbury as a group based on "friendship, which in some cases developed into love and marriage"[22] and Desmond MacCarthy's comment that "'Bloomsbury' is neither a movement, nor a push, but only a group of friends; whose affection and respect for each other has stood the test of nearly thirty years and whose intellectual candour makes their company agreeable to each other."[23]

Certainly Strachey's harshest criticism of Florence Nightingale is on the score of her heartless manipulation of others. As he unforgivingly remarks:

> "Devoted, indeed, these disciples were, in no ordinary sense of the term; for certainly she was no light task-mistress and he who set out to be of use to Miss Nightingale was apt to find, before he had gone very far, that he was in truth being made use of in good earnest--to the very limit of his endurance and his capacity. Perhaps, even beyond those limits; why not? Was she asking of others more than she was giving herself? Let them look at her lying there pale and breathless on the couch; could it be said

> that she spared herself? Why, then, should she spare others?" (163)

It is, of course, this trait in Florence Nightingale which, in Strachey's view, pushed Sidney Herbert beyond the limits of his endurance, and which elicits his scornful "'Blessed are the merciful! 'What strange ironic prescience had led Prince Albert, in the simplicity of his heart, to choose that motto for the Crimean brooch?" (174)

Nevertheless, even this criticism of Florence is at least partially muted by Strachey's underlying appreciation of the social realities which shaped her fanaticism. Whilst never excusing her treatment of her old friend, his inference that she might not have been fully cognisant of the human toll consequent on her blind pursuit of victory because "the strain upon (Herbert) was greater even than she perhaps could realize" (174) modifies the severity of subsequent moral judgement passed upon her. Thus, even though Strachey's description of the dying Sidney Herbert is full of warmth and compassion, his assessment of Florence's conduct towards him is notably restrained: "When the onward rush of a powerful spirit sweeps a weaker one to its destruction, the commonplaces of the moral judgement are better left unmade. If Miss Nightingale had been less ruthless Sidney Herbert would not have perished; but then, she would not have been

Miss Nightingale. The force that created was the force that destroyed. It was her Demon that was responsible. When the fatal news reached her she was overcome by agony" (175).

Although Strachey does not, in this instance, totally absolve Florence Nightingale from guilt, he is pleading the case for mitigating circumstances with some vigour, arguing that Florence herself was as much a victim of her "Demon" as was Sidney Herbert. This judgement is reinforced by the remainder of the paragraph, in which Strachey, as well as conveying a sense of Florence's unpleasantly egotistical anger also conveys a sense of the inadequacy of her emotional response to others. This leaves the reader with a feeling of waste, and of regret for a life so imbalanced by unfulfilled potential.

The portrait as a whole is by no means as negative as many critics have argued.[24] Quite a positive tone is set at the very start when, discussing Florence's struggle to be independent of her family, Strachey admiringly comments: "A weaker spirit would have been overwhelmed by the load of such distresses--would have yielded or snapped. But this extraordinary woman held firm, and fought her way to victory. With amazing persistence, during the eight years that followed her rebuff over Salisbury Hospital, she struggled and worked and planned" (132). Later on, having given a graphic outline

of the enormity of the task facing her at Scutari, (136-140) Strachey makes the following remarks: "Miss Nightingale came, and she, at any rate, in that inferno, did not abandon hope" (140). "With consummate tact, with all the gentleness of supreme strength, she managed at last to impose her personality upon the susceptible, overwrought, discouraged, and helpless group of men in authority who surrounded her" (142).

Strachey's description of her work in the Crimea is particularly flattering:

> (For) to those who watched her at work among the sick, moving day and night from bed to bed, with that unflinching courage; with that indefatigable vigilance, it seemed as if the concentrated force of an undivided and unparalleled devotion could hardly suffice for that portion of her task alone. Wherever, in those vast wards, suffering was at its worst and the need for help was greatest, there, as if by magic, was Miss Nightingale. Her superhuman equanimity would, at the moment of some ghastly operation, nerve the victim to endure and almost to hope. Her sympathy would assuage the pangs of dying

> and bring back to those still living something of the forgotten charm of life. Over and over again her untiring efforts rescued those whom the surgeons had abandoned as beyond the possibility of cure. (146-7)

Strachey also evidently approves the aims of the social work she undertakes on her return from the Crimea. For example, after noting the low reputation the nursing profession enjoyed in her time, he adds: "Certainly, things have changed since those days; and that they have changed is due, far more than to any other human being, to Miss Nightingale herself" (132).[25] He also recognises the value of her committee work. About her "Notes affecting the Health, Efficiency, and Hospital Administration of the British Army" he says: "This extraordinary composition, filling more than eight hundred closely printed pages, laying down vast principles of far reaching reform, discussing the minutest details of a multitude of controversial subjects, containing an enormous mass of information of the most varied kinds--military, statistical, sanitary, architectural--was never given to the public, for the need never came; but it formed the basis of the Report of the Royal Commission, and it remains to this day the leading authority on the medical administration of armies" (167). Although Strachey pokes

fun at the laboriousness of her methods, there is no question about the sincerity of his respect for her achievements.

We note a similar tone of respect in the way he sums up her contribution towards the reform of hospitals: "she was able to improve the conditions in infirmaries and workhouses; and one of her most remarkable papers forestalls the recommendations of the Poor Law Commission of 1909" (171). I use the word 'respect' advisedly, however, for in stressing the positive aspects of Strachey's attitude towards Florence Nightingale I do not wish to imply too close an emotional engagement on his part. At their most positive, Strachey's feelings towards her are of admiration rather than of love or affection, and his image of her as an "eagle" (134) aptly summarizes the way his respect for her strength is always tinged by an uncomfortable awareness of her ferocity. She is, after all, an arch-Victorian as well as an arch-rebel.

In General Gordon, Strachey once more chose a subject well-suited to his particular skills as a biographer. The life of Gordon obviously fired Strachey's imagination quite as much, if not more so, than the lives of Manning and Florence Nightingale, and in a way that the life of Arnold, equally obviously did not. At one point, for example, Strachey described how, in the final days of Khartoum, Gordon "sitting late into the night . . . filled the empty telegraph forms with the agitations of his spirit, overflowing ever

more hurriedly, more furiously, with the lines of emphasis, and capitals, and exclamation marks more thickly interspersed, so that the signs of his living passion are still visible to the inquirer of today on those thin sheets of mediocre paper and in the torment of the ink" (303). The tone of these lines is characteristic of the portrait. Strachey's own fascination with Gordon is as palpable as the "living passion" of Gordon himself. In fact, Gordon would seem to have been a near-ideal subject for Strachey's pen: an inherently subtle and ambiguous man, the inconsistencies of whose life and character Strachey finds intriguing, but also a man of tremendous energy, a colourful, romantic, profoundly unconventional man, to whom he is warmly attracted.[26]

Strachey clearly finds Gordon's irreverence towards stuffed shirt officialdom an endearing trait. His own contempt for Colonial bureaucracy is reflected in his remark: "That the English authorities should have seen fit to recognise Gordon's services (in China) by the reward usually reserved for industrious clerks was typical of their attitude towards him until the very end of his career" (233). It is thus with evident relish that he so fully reports the vitriolic contents of Gordon's diary entries which "lay bare the ineptitude and the faithlessness of the English Government" (301). Indeed, despite his horror of Gordon's fanatical brand of religion, Strachey very favourably

contrasts Gordon's personal integrity with the "convenient" diplomatic and political consciences of Gladstone and Baring, and with the corruption of the Sudanese and Egyptian administrations Gordon served.

It is also obvious that Strachey was strongly attracted by the restless energy of Gordon, in the same way that he found himself awestruck by the energy of Florence Nightingale. There is admiration in the description of Gordon's work in the Sudan, in which Strachey speaks of "the agonising nature" of his task (239), and of the way he "struggled with enormous difficulties--with the confused and horrible country, the appalling climate, the maddening insects and the loathsome diseases, the indifference of subordinates and superiors, the savagery of the slave-traders, the hatred of the inhabitants" (239) and still succeeded in meeting his objectives. Furthermore, Strachey clearly saw this restless man of action as a colourful and supremely romantic figure; the "complete antithesis" of Sir Evelyn Baring whose temperament he emotively describes as "all in monochrome, touched in cold blues and indecisive greys" and "eminently unromantic" (285). Evidently he views full-blooded commitment to anti-establishment or unconventional causes by persons such as Gordon and Florence Nightingale as greatly preferable to the cautious espousal of convention by a Baring or a Panmure, or the vigorous conservatism of an

Arnold.[27]

Above all, Strachey is drawn to the English subtlety of Gordon's character. Had he perceived Gordon either as totally conventional and matter of fact, or as totally eccentric and romantic, instead of as a mixture of these different elements, his imagination would have been less fully engaged and his own response as a biographer more simplistic. As it is, Strachey remains fascinated by his subject's "inner history" and by the individual spirit which is never completely explicable, but always interesting. The opening paragraphs of the portrait may be read as both an indication of its scope and of the reasons for its success; "The circumstances of that tragic history . . . remain full of suggestion for the curious examiner of the past. There emerges from those obscure, unhappy records an interest, not merely political and historical but human and dramatic" (224).

In sum, Strachey's focus in Eminent Victorians is on the Victorian English. In all four portraits he explores the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the age. His subjects both define and are defined by their historical and cultural milieu, whether this be the Oxford Movement (Manning), the Victorian Establishment (Florence Nightingale), the mid-century movement for educational reform (Arnold) or British Colonialism in Egypt and the

Sudan (Gordon). An important trait they have in common is their dynamism. There is, however, a marked contrast between Strachey's relatively sympathetic presentation of the busy career of Florence Nightingale on the one hand, and his highly critical presentation of that of Arnold, on the other.[28] The former, he evidently views as an example of Victorian dynamism harnessed for good, the latter as an example of the same dynamism harnessed for utterly conventional (and therefore utterly despicable) Victorian ideals. By contrast, the careers of Manning and Gordon he interprets as embodying, in their contradictory facets, both the constructive and destructive potential of the age.

Although he presents all his eminent Victorians as "characteristic specimens of the age" (6-7), Strachey is more fascinated by what makes them unique than by what they have in common. In his Preface he says: "I hope . . . that the following pages may prove to be of interest from the strictly biographical no less than from the historical point of view. Human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past. They have a value which is independent of any temporal processes--which is eternal, and must be felt for its own sake " (7).

The evidence of the work as a whole is that Strachey's statement constitutes a realistic appraisal of his practice in Eminent Victorians as well as of his principles. I don't

think it generally true that in Eminent Victorians Strachey's "irony . . . was so acid that he partly dehumanised his subjects"[29], nor that he was, on the whole, "writing about people whom he disliked."[30] I also part company with the legion of critics who, like Mark Longaker, argue that Strachey "was peculiarly equipped . . . to see the foibles of mankind."[31]

On the contrary, Strachey's portraits of Manning, Florence Nightingale and Gordon clearly display the kind of sensitivity to the uniqueness of the human spirit to which he aspired. As I have shown, these portraits do not merely "debunk", but successfully illuminate what makes the person different from and not like others. Only in the portrait of Arnold does Strachey truly dehumanise his subject. In this case alone, Strachey's ironic presence reduces his subject to a sort of Victorian Aunt Sally.

The most important conclusion to be drawn about Eminent Victorians concerns the precise limits within which Strachey produces his best biographical writing. All four portraits are skilfully constructed narratives, but Strachey's success as a biographer is dependent on the existence of a very specific type of rapport with his subject. The subject who really fires his imagination is one whose life he perceives in subtle and ambiguous terms, such as Manning, Florence Nightingale or Gordon. Strachey's ideal subject

is almost, but not quite his equal. He or she is perceived as sufficiently his inferior that the ironist in him mercilessly illuminates the inconsistencies in his or her character. Nevertheless, as we have seen, given the passionate and romantic side of Strachey's nature, his subject must, like Manning, Florence Nightingale or Gordon, stand sufficiently high in his esteem that, ironical observations notwithstanding, his portrait may be respectful of the person's individuality.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER TWO

[1]This information is given by Holroyd, p.710.

[2]Lytton Strachey, Eminent Victorians (London: 1918; 1974), p.129.
The 1974 Chatto and Windus edition has been used.
For convenience, page references are included in the text in parentheses.

[3]As George Johnston so rightly remarked about the 'New Biography' of Ludwig, Maurois and Strachey: "However episodic its structure may sometimes appear, the episodes are never isolated. They are always carefully coordinated. Style, it has been said, consists in the art of moving easily and convincingly from point to point, supplying the needful correlations without clumsiness. These three writers all excel in their transitions." George A. Johnston, "The New Biography: Ludwig, Maurois and Strachey," Atlantic Monthly, 143 (1929), 340-41.

[4]See also the action-packed description of Gordon's supression of the Taiping Rebellion. (229-30)

[5]Lytton Strachey, "He, She and It," The Really Interesting Question and Other Papers, p.93.

[6]See also Strachey's portrait of Mary Berry, for whom he felt a similar degree of sympathy, because "a man she should have been; with her massive practical intelligence, she was born too early to be a successful woman." Lytton Strachey, "Mary Berry," B.E., p.208. There is also Strachey's vitriolic attach on the way Carlyle used his wife "without scruple, to subserve his own purposes" because "She was his wife, and that was the end of the matter", in which he laments the "woman's tragedy" to be traced in Mrs. Carlyle's letters and deplores the "barbarism and prudery" of Victorian England. Lytton Strachey, "Carlyle," B.E., pp.254, 255.

[7]In his own way, however, Manning is also riven by typically Victorian contradiction. He is a "tall gaunt figure, with the face of smiling ascetism" (11). He is also a great "Prince of the Church" (122) whose "preoccupation with the supernatural" is matched by "his preoccupation with himself." (63)

[8]Lytton Strachey, "A Statesman: Lord Morley," B.E., p.283.

[9]See the references to Arnold's "decided opinions upon a large number of topics . . . in pamphlets, in prefaces, and in magazine articles" (205), his planned "great work on Church and State" (206-7), his theological activism (208-11), and his extensive scholarly endeavours. (178-9)

[10]Lytton Strachey, Queen Victoria (London: Chatto and Windus, 1921; 1969), pp.253-4.

Lytton Strachey, Elizabeth and Essex (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928; 1972), pp.277-80.

Lytton Strachey, "Madame du Deffand," B.E., p.186.

Lytton Strachey, "Lady Hester Stanhope," B.E., p.218.

Lytton Strachey, "Madame de Lieven," B.E., p.228.

[11]See Michael Holroyd's discussion of Lytton Strachey's schooling, especially the following comments: "At school I used to weep--oh! for very definite things--bitter unkindness and vile brutality.' So wrote Lytton in a letter to Leonard Woolf, comparing the intense unhappiness he experienced as a schoolboy with his vaguer, more generalised feeling of sadness at university. The brazen religiosity of Abbotsholme, which so devastatingly inflamed his natural timidity was soon succeeded in the summer of 1894 by the more traditional philistinism of Leamington College, then ranked as one of the minor public schools." Holroyd, p.93. See also Strachey's outright attack on this type of education in "Froude," B.E., pp.257-8.

[12]Dan Jacobsen, Review of George Eliot: The Emergent Self, by Ruby V. Redinger, in The Manchester Guardian Weekly, 114, 12 (1976) 22.

[13]Simson convincingly demonstrates that Purcell's life of Manning, which was Strachey's chief source, "was so unwittingly condemnatory of its subject that it presented a picture far worse than Strachey's." (3)

[14]Consider, for example, the image of Newman: "an old man, very poorly dressed in an old grey coat with the collar turned up, leaning over the lynch gate, in floods of tears. He was apparently in great trouble and his hat was pulled down over his eyes, as if he wished to hide his features."(94)

[15]See, for example, Strachey's analysis of the alliance between Florence Nightingale and Sidney Herbert (138-9).

[16]Strachey's response to Cook's official biography of Florence Nightingale, only a short while before writing his own portrait of her was to remark that she ". . . was a terrible woman--though powerful." Lytton Strachey to James Strachey, 16 January 1914, quoted by Nigel Nicolson The Collected Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II: 1912-1922 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p.38.

[17]See especially: Iyengar, pp. 57-8; Johnson, pp.510-11; Scott-James, p.21; and Edmund Wilson, "Lytton Strachey," The New Republic, 72 (1932), 146-8. (Hereafter cited as Wilson).

[18]We know that Strachey turned down the offer of writing the official biography of Florence Nightingale, but was so appalled by Edward Cook's deferential approach that he almost immediately set about writing the portrait which was ultimately published in Eminent Victorians. Nigel Nicolson The Collected Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol II, p.38.

[19]See Strachey's comments in his essay on Macauley that "A certain a priori stuffiness which seems to hang about that atmosphere is in reality a Victorian innovation." Lytton Strachey, "Macauley," Portraits in Miniature and Other Essays (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931, p.172.

[20]Lytton Strachey, "Mlle de Lespinasse," P.E., p.158.

[21]Lytton Strachey, "The Old Masters at Burlington House," " The Spectator, 100 (1908), 61-2.

[22]Leonard Woolf, Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p.25.

[23]Desmond MacCarthy, "Bloomsbury, An Unfinished Memoir," Memories (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1953) reprinted in Rosenbaum, p.27.

[24]See footnote 17.

[25]Passages such as these show the extent to which Edmund Wilson fails to do justice to Strachey's large sympathies with the situation of women such as Florence Nightingale. Neither in this portrait, nor in those of Mme du Deffand, Queen Victoria, or Queen Elizabeth does Strachey, as Wilson suggests, take pleasure in humiliating his women subjects. Quite the reverse is the case. Wilson, p.147.

[26]In what follows I part company with Simson, who argues that "the particulars about the characterization of Gordon are all presented unsympathetically" (Simson, p.234), and with critics such as Leonard Bacon, who have argued that the portrait of Gordon is mere caricature. (Bacon, pp.317-18).

[27]It also seems likely that Strachey believed Gordon to be unconventional in his sexual preferences, though this aspect of Gordon's life is only briefly hinted at in the published biography, when Strachey alludes to Gordon's relations with his street Arabs. (234)

[28]As Sanders remarked, Strachey did not object to the man of action as such, but to two types of men of action: "Those who were deluded and those who were too fervid and zealous in pursuing a good cause." (169)

[29]Wilson, p.146.

[30]Scott-James, p.6.

[31]Mark Longaker, Contemporary Biography (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934), p.43.

CHAPTER THREE: QUEEN VICTORIA

In Queen Victoria Strachey chose a subject he identified as being central to the history of an era; a figure whose personality decisively impinged on the imagination of her people, on the policies of her government, and on the general direction of Victorian cultural life. As Harold Nicolson aptly said, Strachey was not only faced with "eighty-one solid years, each one crowded with intricate and important events", but also with "vast national movements, with vital developments in imperial, foreign and domestic policy."[1] I believe that Strachey's talents were more than equal to the task.

I shall start by examining the skill with which Strachey chronicles those "eighty-one solid years", because on these terms alone Queen Victoria is an impressive achievement: a tribute to Strachey's ability to put his artistic ideals into practice. Recognising the scope of his topic, he provides a chronological framework which orients the reader to key events. His narrative is fluent and well constructed, the dynamics surely orchestrated, and the reader's interest carefully maintained by a judicious balance of discussion and drama.

Strachey's handling of chronology is varied and effective. He retains a broadly sequential structure which follows Victoria from birth, through "Girlhood", "Marriage", and "Widowhood", to "Old Age" and death; and from "Antecedents" and accession, to the end of her long reign. After the richly documented opening chapters, he for a time abandons sequence in favour of a largely impressionistic approach, for reasons which I discuss below.

In the start, Strachey's main aim is to outline the historical context which shapes the personality of the future Queen. The first chapter therefore progresses from one important event to the next: "The allied sovereigns--it was June 1814--arrived in London to celebrate their victory"[2]; "In January 1816 (Prince Leopold) was invited to England, and in May the marriage took place"(2); "When, in the spring of 1817, it was known that the Princess was expecting a child, the post of one of her physicians-in-ordinary was offered to (Stockmar) and he had the good sense to refuse it"(3); "The Duke of Kent, selecting the Princess of Saxe-Coburg in preference to the Princess of Baden, was united to her on May 29, 1818"; and "The authorities provided a set of rooms in Kensington Palace; and there, on May 24, 1819, a female infant was born"(14).[3]

By contrast, Strachey's aim in Chapters VII, VIII, and IX is to convey the uneventful nature of Victoria's years of seclusion. He accordingly adopts a more impressionistic approach than before. In the final chapters which describe the Queen's return to public life he again employs predominantly sequential narration. The extent to which Strachey stresses chronology is thus related to what he perceives as the dominant quality of his subject's day to day existence. As he remarks at the beginning of Chapter VII, in assessing the importance of the death of the Prince Consort: "She herself felt that her true life ceased with her husband's and that the remainder of her days on earth of a twilight nature--an epilogue to a drama that was done. Nor is it possible that her biographer should escape a similar impression" (179).

In other respects, too, Queen Victoria is a skilfully structured narrative. Chapter I flows into Chapter II, as Strachey smoothly turns the reader's attention from Victoria's "antecedents" to the history of her early years. The means he employs to effect this are simple enough. He ends Chapter I with the announcement of Victoria's birth, and commences Chapter II with the words: "The child who, in these not very impressive circumstances, appeared in the world, received but scant attention. There was small reason to foresee her destiny"(15).

Not all the transitions from one chapter to the next are as smooth as that between the first two, but in all cases they are appropriate to Strachey's purpose. For example, Chapters III and IV mark the opening of new phases in Victoria's life: first her accession to the throne, then her marriage to Albert. Chapter III thus begins: "The new queen was almost entirely unknown to her subjects" (42), and Chapter IV: "It was decidedly a family match" (60). In each case, Strachey concludes the preceding chapter with a brief indication of the change to come: in Chapter II, with the death of William IV and Victoria's very first acts as Queen (40-41), and in Chapter III with Victoria's announcement of her engagement (79).

A more abrupt interruption in the narrative thread comes between Chapters VI and VII. Strachey ends Chapter VI on a note of dark finality: "As Victoria knelt by the bed, Albert breathed deeply, breathed gently, breathed at last no more. His features became perfectly rigid. She shrieked--one long wild shriek rang through the terror-stricken Castle--and understood that she had lost him for ever" (178). He opens Chapter VII with the words: "The death of the Prince Consort was the central turning-point in the history of Queen Victoria" (179). By this break Strachey intensifies the drama of Albert's death and announces the climax of the work.

Pace complements sequence and structure as Strachey's means of imparting artistic order to the chaos of his subject's life. The speedy rhythms of the first chapter, for example, impel the reader towards the true focus of Strachey's interest: the birth of Victoria. Background explanation is also usually fast-paced. Representative passages are: the description of the changed political circumstances of the Duchess of Kent and her daughter (22-3), the discussion of Albert's rôle as Prince Consort (91), the summary of the personality and career of Palmerston (123-6), the explanation of Albert's unpopularity in 1854 (146-51), and the survey of the English Republican Movement in the early 1870's (203-6).[4]

By contrast, passages of psychological analysis are usually reflective in tone and tempo. A characteristic example is Strachey's discussion of Albert's malaise which opens with the rhetorical question: "And yet--why was it?--all was not well with him. He was sick at heart" (170). This question breaks into the forward thrust of the narrative line, which is building up towards Albert's death, and sets the tone of horrified fascination with which Strachey circles around the spectacle of the Prince's "almost morbid appetite for work" (171).[5]

Strachey also frequently varies the pace for dramatic effect. At the beginning of Part V of Chapter II, for example,

he intentionally slows the narrative in order to heighten the reader's anticipation of Victoria's accession (37-40). The pithy sentences describing this event are all the more telling because of the discursive paragraphs on King William's final illness which precede them:

> But there was scant time for resolutions and reflections. At once, affairs were thick upon her. Stockmar came to breakfast, and gave some good advice. She wrote a letter to her Uncle Leopold, and a hurried note to her sister Feodora. A letter came from the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, announcing his approaching arrival. He came at nine, in full court dress, and kissed her hand. She saw him alone, and repeated to him the lesson which, no doubt, the faithful Stockmar had taught her at breakfast. 'It has long been my intention to retain your Lordship and the rest of the present Ministry at the head of affairs.'; whereupon Lord Melbourne again kissed her hand and shortly after left her. She then wrote a letter of condolence to Queen Adelaide. At eleven, Lord Melbourne came again; and again at half past eleven she went downstairs into the red salon to hold her first Council. (41)

Examples abound of Strachey's skilful control of pace for dramatic effect[6], but Chapters IV and V are a particularly fine illustration of his sustained use of pace to record contrasting themes, and the ebb and flow of mood. For example, Chapter IV consists of a leisurely account of Victoria's family life. The dominant pace of the chapter is as regular as her domestic round. However, the crises which punctuate the otherwise smooth course of her marriage are marked by a corresponding increase in the tension of Strachey's prose. One good example is the passage describing Victoria's emotional state in the months immediately preceding the wedding (86-90). Another is the description of the "struggle of angry wills" between Victoria and Albert in the early days of marriage (95-6).

By contrast, the tempo of Chapter V, which concerns political brinkmanship, is predominantly fast. Relaxations in tension or pace in this chapter are mere lulls between one confrontation with Palmerston and the next. Strachey's narrative pushes forward energetically towards Palmerston's "first diplomatic crisis" (126), through the "diplomatic struggle of great intensity" (127) which follows, to the climax of the royal marriages. The first pause comes only with the dénouement of the Queen of France's letter to Queen Victoria (130). Almost immediately we are rushed on into the story of renewed conflict between Victoria and Albert and

Palmerston, and from this point on, the pace scarcely lets up. Even the structural break between Parts II and III of the chapter is lessened by the way in which Albert's question at the end of Part II: "Could he believe, in his blind arrogance, that even his ignominious dismissal from office was something that could be brushed aside?" (143) is answered by the first sentence of Part III: "The Prince's triumph was short-lived" (143).

A brief indication of the larger role of conflict in Queen Victoria is in order here, because I have so far focussed solely on the way the moments of high drama function as climacticfocal points which break into the narrative flow and act as foils to discursive passages of psychological analysis or historical explanation. What his comments on the confrontations between Victoria and her mother, uncle, ministers and husband also show is that conflict is not simply a convenient artistic device but a cornerstone of Strachey's biographic method. Given a multiplicity of data, his approach is always to seize upon what he takes to be the significant dramatic patterns of the life, and from these to distil the essence of his subject's personality. This is the true importance of conflict in Queen Victoria.

To recognize the mastery of chronology, structure, and pace in Queen Victoria is to appreciate the qualities which make it an impressive narrative. Other factors

contribute to its success as a piece of biographical writing. As the preceding comments on Strachey's handling of conflict indicate, one of the most important of these is the interpretative framework he employs as a means of highlighting the significant features of his subjects' lives. This reminds us that Queen Victoria is more than simply a tribute to Strachey's mastery of narrative. It is also an immensely effective expression of the philosophical, psychological, and moral values which inform his judgement as a biographer. Since Strachey's mediating presence in Queen Victoria is so pervasive and so explicit, I turn now to an explanation of his point of view: firstly to his continued emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between the history of the individual and the history of the age; and secondly, to the overall impact of his stance on the nature and effectiveness of the portraiture in Queen Victoria.

As in Eminent Victorians, Strachey stresses the way individuals are defined by their milieu. In so doing, he demonstrates a gift for succint exposition of the key issues and events of the age. A few representative examples can be cited; the outline of political and constitutional issues in the first two chapters (1-41); the sketch of Lord Melbourne's career before he became Prime Minister (49-53); the resumé of Palmerston's career (123-6); the summary of the crisis of the Spanish Succession (126-30); the

characterization of 1818 as "that year of revolutions, when, in all directions and with alarming frequence, crowns kept rolling off royal heads" (131); and the discussion of Albert's death (179-80).

His skill at outlining general political and social trends notwithstanding, it is obvious that the mainspring of Strachey's interest in history is psychological. He again gives prominence to the activities of a few influential figures: men such as Stockmar, who knows all "the momentous secrecies of European statecraft" (170), and Prince Albert, whose death "was an event of national, or European importance" (179).[7] In fact, it would be true to say that in Queen Victoria Strachey usually explains the operation of historical forces in terms of individual influence; whether it be that of Lehzen, Stockmar, Melbourne, and Albert over the Queen, or that of Victoria over the direction of British policy at home and abroad.

Thus, in Chapter III we find Strachey noting that changes in the royal household after Victoria's accession "marked the triumph of one person--the Baroness Lehzen"(45), that "When the Queen's Ministers came in at one door, the Baroness went out by another; when they retired she immediately returned" (45), and that "No doubt it was true that technically she took no part in public business, but the distinction between what is public and what is private is

always a subtle one, and in the case of a reigning sovereign--as the next few years were to show--it is often imaginary" (45).

Strachey goes on to remark: "the influence wielded by the Baroness, supreme as it seemed within its own sphere, was not unlimited; there were other forces at work. For one thing, the faithful Stockmar had taken up his residence in the Palace" (46). He elaborates: "With Lehzen to supervise every detail of her conduct, with Stockmar in the next room, so full of wisdom and experience of affairs, with her Uncle Leopold's letters too, pouring out so constantly their stream of encouragements, general reflections, and highly valuable tips, Victoria, even had she been without other guidance, would have stood in no lack of private counsellors. But other guidance she had; for all these influences paled before a new star, of the first magnitude, which, rising suddenly upon her horizon, immediately dominated her life" (48).

The "new star" is Melbourne, but Strachey's account goes on to stress that Melbourne is in turn supplanted by Albert, the dominant influence in Victoria's life. He tells us that with the fall of Melbourne's Whig Ministry, the Queen "could hardly bring herself to speak to Peel" (98), and that she decided to "discuss everything with Albert now" (98). Furthermore, within a year of Melbourne's

resignation "another and an equally momentous change was effected--the removal of Lehzen . . . At length (Albert) perceived that he need hesitate no longer--that every wish, every velleity of his had only to be expressed to be at once Victoria's. He spoke, and Lehzen vanished for ever" (100).

Of course, in Strachey's account, the influence of Albert is but an extension of Stockmar's potent influence over Victoria. Left to himself, says Strachey, Albert "would almost certainly have subsided into a high-minded nonentity, an aimless dilettante busy over culture, a palace appendage without influence or power" (93). However, "For ever at his pupil's elbow, the hidden Baron pushed him forward, with tireless pressure, along the path which had been trod by Leopold so many years ago" (93-4). Stockmar "incessantly harped upon the two strings--Albert's sense of duty and his personal pride" (94). Even on holiday Stockmar's "solicitude, poured out in innumerable letters, still watched over his pupil from afar" (96). Albert "listened as to the voice of a spiritual director inspired with divine truth" (97). Stockmar, who had returned to England, therefore"watched the departure of Lord Melbourne with satisfaction. If all went well, the Prince should now wield a supreme political influence over Victoria" (98). Following the demise of both Melbourne and Lehzen, "The

Baron, in spite of his dyspepsia, smiled again: Albert was supreme" (100).

Besides believing that the influence of Lehzen, Stockmar, Melbourne, and Albert crucially shaped Victoria's attitude to the monarchy, Strachey also sees her as being in the same Stockmar mould of "constitutional sovereign" as Leopold (46). He summarizes Leopold's aspirations in the following way: "To be a Majesty, to be a cousin of Sovereigns, to marry a Bourbon for diplomatic ends, to correspond with the Queen of England, to be very stiff and very punctual, to found a dynasty, to bore ambassadresses into fits, to live on the highest pinnacle. . ." (47). The principles of conduct to which Victoria owes allegiance are remarkably similar. She also exercises considerable personal control over British domestic and foreign policy. It is her intervention alone which secures the return of the Whig Ministry to power: "The Queen would not be soothed; and still less would she take advice" (71), "She was adamant" (72), "The venerable conqueror of Napoleon was outfaced by the relentless equanimity of a girl in her teens. He could not move the Queen an inch" (72).

If he stresses the way individuals shape and are shaped by their environment, Strachey also treats his subjects as, in varying degrees, embodiments of their age. Victoria is the prime example.[8] Early in the portrait he

comments on her childhood meeting with George IV in the following way: "The old rip . . . received the tiny creature who was one day to hold in those same halls a very different state. 'Give me your little paw', he said; and the two ages touched" (22). He continues this theme in his account of the first two days of the young Queen's reign "What, above all, struck everybody with overwhelming force was the contrast between Victoria and her uncles. The nasty old men, debauched and selfish, pig-headed and ridiculous, with their perpetual burden of debts, confusions, and disreputabilities--they had vanished like the snows of winter, and here at last, crowned and radiant, was the spring" (42-3).

Furthermore, he correlates Victoria's popularity with the extent to which she successfully embodies the predominantly middle class values and aspirations of nineteenth century England. Thus, in his analysis of the crucial social and political changes which herald the Victorian Age, he emphasizes that "The centre of gravity in the constitution was shifted towards the middle classes" (23), and that "The Princess Victoria was henceforth the living symbol of the victory of the middle classes" (23).

His comments about the period of Victoria's greatest popularity provide the most explicit statement of his position:

> The public looked on with approval. A few aristocrats might sniff and titter, but with the nation at large the Queen was now once more extremely popular. The middle classes, in particular, were pleased. They liked a love-match; they liked a household which combined the advantages of royalty and virtue, and in which they seemed to see, reflected as in some resplendent looking-glass, the ideal image of the very lives they led themselves . . . (Victoria)was . . . the embodiment, the living apex of a new era in the generations of mankind. The last vestiges of the eighteenth century had disappeared: cynicism and subtlety were shrivelled into powder; and duty, industry, morality, and domesticity triumphed over them. Even the very chairs and tables had assumed, with a singular responsiveness, the forms of prim solidity. The Victorian Age was in full swing. (116-7)

Elsewhere in the biography Strachey speaks of Victoria's "garish middleclass garments" (164), and of the solid bourgeois values which caused her to write to the editor of the Times

"asking him if he would 'frequently write articles pointing out the immense danger and evil of the wretched frivolity and levity of the views and lives of the Higher Classes!" (222). His closing judgement is: "The middle classes, firm in the triple brass of their respectability, rejoiced with a special joy over the most respectable of Queens." (249)

Despite the fact that Strachey's Victoria is presented as the supreme embodiment of the age to which she gave her name, she is never presented as completely defined by it. She is more than the simple apotheosis of Victorianism. As in his portrait of that other single-minded lady Florence Nightingale, Strachey shows himself intrigued by a uniquely forceful subject. Even though he believes Victoria's character to be inherently uncomplicated,[9] his attitude towards her is decidedly ambivalent: he is as irritated at her limitations as he is attracted to her strengths. His Queen Victoria is as simple in her virtues as in her faults.

Those faults are, of course, glaringly highlighted by the searching beams of Strachey's irony. The traits which he exposes most mercilessly are her obstinate refusal to attempt to improve her understanding of current political and social issues, and her "singular intellectual limitations" (207). He points to the inadequacies of Victoria's education as at least partially responsible (27), but he nonetheless mocks such things as her "short uneasy colloquies"

with her after-dinner guests, during which "the aridity of royalty was apt to become painfully evident" (57). He also says that "Of the wider significance of political questions she knew nothing" (68).[10]

He is particularly scathing about Victoria's mental capacities. He makes the damning comment that Albert was unable to "summon distinguished scientific and literary men to his presence" (95) in order to alleviate the tedium of life at Windsor because "Victoria had no fancy to encourage such people" knowing that she was unequal to taking part in their conversation (95). As he also later remarks, Victoria "was no philosopher" (103); nor, despite "the vigour of inspiration" (186) which led her to take upon herself "that vast burden of toil which (Albert) had taken upon his shoulders" (185) did she possess Albert's logical capacities and administrative talents.

However, Strachey's fullest commentary on Victoria's "singular intellectual limitations" occurs in his analysis of her handling of Gladstone's Ministry of 1869-74 (200-203). During this period she was faced with "an agitating atmosphere of interminable reform" (200).

> She disapproved, she struggled, she grew very angry; she felt that if Albert had been living things would never have happened so; but her

> protests and her complaints were alike unavailing. The mere effort of grappling with the mass of documents which poured in upon her in an ever-growing flood was terribly exhausting. When the draft of the lengthy and intricate Irish Church Bill came before her, accompanied by an explanatory letter from Mr. Gladstone covering a dozen closely-written quarto pages, she almost despaired. She turned from the Bill to the explanation, and from the explanation back again to the Bill, and she could not decide which was the most confusing. But she had to do her duty; she had not only to read, but to make notes. At last she handed the whole heap of papers to Mr Martin who happened to be staying at Osborne, and requested him to make a précis of them. When he had done so, her disapproval of the measure became more marked than ever. (200)

Strachey brutally underlines Victoria's limitations by juxtaposing this account of her response to the complex Irish Bill with a description of her detailed correspondence over the more readily comprehensible issue of whether R.N. sailors

should be allowed to wear beards (200-201).

He also severely censures those aspects of her behaviour which he attributes to Albert's influence over her: most notably her inflexible sense of duty, and her firm refusal to yield to sentiment (at least during his lifetime). He tells us, for example, that the "early discords" of their life together were "resolved into the absolute harmony of married life" (76) because Victoria "had surrendered her whole soul to her husband" (100). This "new happiness" Strachey tells us "was no lotus-dream. On the contrary, it was bracing, rather than relaxing. Never before had she felt so acutely the necessity for doing her duty. She worked more methodically than ever at the business of State; she watched over her children with untiring vigilance" (103).

Interestingly, Strachey clearly believes that Melbourne's influence very nearly won the day: "Humanity and fallibility are infectious things; was it possible that Lehzen's prim pupil had caught them? That she was beginning to listen to siren voices? That the secret impulses of self-expression, of self-indulgence even, were mastering her life? For a moment the child of the new age looked back and wavered towards the eighteenth. It was the most critical moment of her career. Had those influences lasted, the development of her character, the history of her life would have been

completely changed" (76). However, as events turned out, "The seriousness of Albert, the claims of her children, her own inmost inclinations and the movement of the whole surrounding world combined to urge her forward along the narrow way of public and domestic duty" (115). Strachey's use of the word "narrow" in this context tellingly indicates his view that this particular concept of "duty" was a misguided and inappropriate channelling of Victoria's natural energies.

Despite his merciless exposure of the Queen's intellectual limitations, and inflexibly Victorian sense of duty, Strachey's account is not, on balance, an utterly ruthless one. As we have seen, he blames some of her worst faults on Albert. He also feels a good deal of affection for her.[11] However misguided her zeal, however unpardonable her sense of duty, her genuineness wins Strachey over to such an extent[12] that his final assessment of her runs in part:

> . . . in the impact of a personality, it is something deeper, something fundamental and common to all its qualities, that really tells. In Victoria it is easy to discern the nature of this underlying element; it was a peculiar sincerity. Her truthfulness, her single-mindedness, the vividness of her

> emotions, and her unrestrained expression of them were the varied forms which this central characteristic assumed. It was her sincerity which gave her at once her impressiveness, her charm, and her absurdity . . . (Her people) felt instinctively Victoria's irresistible sincerity, and they responded. And in truth it was an endearing trait. (250-51)

Strachey also feels considerable admiration for the way Victoria fulfilled her duties as Queen. The account of her first Council is utterly free of irony and emphasises the unexpected "grace and dignity" with which she performed in her new role:

> The great assembly of lords and notables, bishops, generals, and Ministers of State, saw the doors thrown open and a very short, very slim girl in deep plain mourning come into the room alone and move forward to her seat with extraordinary dignity and grace; they saw a countenance, not beautiful, but prepossessing--fair hair, blue prominent eyes, a small curved nose, an open mouth

> revealing the upper teeth, a tiny chin, a clear complexion, and, over all, the strangely mingled signs of innocence, of gravity, of youth, and of composure; they heard a high unwavering voice reading aloud with perfect clarity; and then, the ceremony over, they saw the small figure rise and, with the same consummate grace, the same amazing dignity, pass among them, as she had come in, alone. (41)

A similarly positive tone characterizes the description of Victoria's reception of the Tsar: "But in that wealth of splendour, the most imposing spectacle of all was the Queen. The little Hausfrau . . . suddenly shone forth without art, without effort, by a spontaneous and natural transition, the very culmination of Majesty" (104). And Strachey's admiration shines through in every line of his account of Victoria's reception of Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie: "The true majesty was hers, and she knew it. More than once when the two were together in public, it was the woman towards whom, it seemed, nature and art had given so little, who, by sheer force of an inherent grandeur, completely threw her adorned and beautiful companion into the shade" (164).

In Strachey's view, Victoria not only fulfils her obligations with dignity (unlike her predecessors) but also

takes great pride in doing so (again unlike her predecessors). He therefore recounts with approval the story of how "one day, without thinking, Lady Lyttleton described someone to her as being 'as happy as a queen', and then grew a little confused" (103) and of how Victoria responded, "'Don't correct yourself, Lady Lyttleton, a queen is a very happy woman'" (103). He also comments in his final summing up that Victoria's "attitude towards herself was simply regal" (250), and that "There she was, all of her--the Queen of England, complete and obvious; the world might take her or leave her; she had nothing more to show, or to explain or to modify; and, with her peerless carriage, she swept along her path" (250).

Another aspect of Victoria's personality for which Strachey shows respect is her humanity. He speaks warmly of her compassion for her troops in the Crimea (161) and South Africa (253), of her fondness for her Highlanders (157, 223), of her concern for her servants (235-6), and of her deep-felt love for her subjects (251). It is significant that even though Strachey remarks ironically on Victoria's pleasure in being "patriotic" and "pugnacious" during the Crimean War, he still recognises the genuineness of her compassion for her wounded troops; favourably comparing her feelings, misguided and "superabundant emotionalism" though they are (207), to Albert's disabling "austerity" (161).

And last, but by no means least, Strachey consistently comments admiringly on Victoria's tremendous vitality and capacity for enjoying life. He reads in her journal, for example, ample evidence of an "eager consciousness" (159), and the record of "hallowed moments" (160) and "memorable", "delightful" and "exciting" expeditions (160). Similarly, he notes that her letters, "in the surprising jet of their expression remind one of a turned-on tap. What is within pours forth in an immediate spontaneous rush. Her utterly unliterary style has at least the merit of being a vehicle exactly suited to her thoughts and feelings" (250).

Above all, Victoria's instinctive vitality is, Strachey argues, the vitality of a survivor. This crucial point is most fully expounded in his analysis of the reasons for Albert's physical and mental deterioration in middle age:

> His appearance in itself was enough to indicate the infirmity of his physical powers. The handsome youth of twenty years since, with the flashing eyes and the soft complexion had grown into a sallow, tired-looking man, whose body, in its stoop and its loose fleshiness, betrayed the sedentary labourer, and whose head was quite bald on the top . . . Beside Victoria, he presented a painful contrast.

> She too, was stout, but it was with the plumpness of a vigorous matron; and an eager vitality was everywhere visible--in her small fat capable hands. If only, by some sympathetic magic, she could have conveyed into that portly flabby figure, that dessicated and discouraged brain, a measure of the stamina and the self-assurance which were so pre-eminently hers! (173-4)

The passage just cited is representative of the way Strachey consistently makes unfavourable comparisons between Victoria's genuine and vital humanity and Albert's inflexible devotion to duty. It also illustrates the profound differences in his treatment of his two major subjects. Whereas his attitude towards Victoria is, as we have seen, essentially ambivalent, his attitude towards Albert is almost unrelievedly critical. As in the case of Arnold, this has important implications for the success of the portrait.[13]

Despite the predominantly critical tone in which Strachey speaks of Albert, one senses that he did not regard him with the same kind of contempt he reserved for Arnold. Indeed, there are a number of indications that he respected

many of Albert's achievements. Of the Great Exhibition, for example, he writes:

> Without consulting anyone, he thought out the details of his conception with the minutest care. . . .
> For two years the Prince laboured with extraordinary zeal. . . .
> The Prince with unyielding perseverance and infinite patience, pressed on to his goal. . . .
> The value of his labours grew more prodigious every day; he toiled at committees, presided over public meetings, made speeches, and carried on communications with every corner of the civilised world--and his efforts were rewarded. On May 1, 1851, the Great Exhibition was opened by the Queen before an enormous concourse of persons, amid scenes of dazzling brilliancy and triumphant enthusiasm. (117-19)

He also applauds Albert's reform of the Royal Household. Having explained that "discomfort and alarm were not the only results of the mismanagement of the household" (111)

since there were also "preposterous perquisites and malpractices of every kind" (111), he then comments: "After much laborious investigation, and a stiff struggle with the multitude of vested interests which had been brought into being by long years of neglect, the Prince succeeded in effecting a complete reform . . . There were outcries and complaints; the Prince was accused of meddling, of injustice, and of saving candle ends; but he held on his course and before long the admirable administration of the royal household was recognised as a convincing proof of his perseverance and capacity" (111-12).

Strachey forcefully argues that Sir Theodore Martin's hagiographic biography of Albert failed to do him justice. He remarks that the public, when it "saw displayed for its admiration a figure resembling the sugary hero of a moral story-book rather than a fellow man of flesh and blood, turned away with a shrug, a smile, and a flippant ejaculation. But in this the public was the loser as well as Victoria. For in truth Albert was a far more interesting personage than the public dreamed" (191).

Why, then, does one come away from Queen Victoria with such a negative impression of Albert? In the first place, the structure and emphasis of the biography leads pointedly in the direction of Albert's demise. Thus, immediately after his account of the successful Great

Exhibition, Strachey wastes no time in underlining the fact that "In 1851 the Prince's fortunes reached their high-water mark." (122) In the second place, Strachey diminishes Albert's achievements by his constant reminders that he is the product of Stockmar's indoctrination, and his political tool.[14] Thirdly, and most significantly, critical commentary far outweighs the more positive judgements so far cited.

A good example of Strachey taking away with one hand what he appears to give with the other, occurs in his discussion of the relationship between Albert and Palmerston. At first he builds up a degree of sympathy for Albert's situation as a foreigner in England, by ridiculing the pretensions and narrow chauvinism of the English aristocracy (122-3). However, the impact of any sympathy one might begin to feel for Albert is thoroughly weakened by Strachey's admiring portrait of Palmerston, the "typical Englishman", who becomes Albert's "adversary".[15] Of Palmerston, Strachey glowingly writes: "He was very bold, and nothing gave him more exhilaration than to steer the ship of state on a high wind, on a rough sea, with every stitch of canvas on her that she could carry" (124). He stresses that he was a "devoted servant" of the public (125), who responded to his countrymen's feelings with "genuine intensity" (125). Strachey's descriptions of Albert are anaemic by comparison.

Even when he does give due recognition to Albert's achievements as Prince Consort, Strachey's account makes it evident that his respect for Albert's undoubtedly capable execution of his duties is more than counterbalanced by his dislike of the direction in which he is leading the English monarchy. True, Strachey shows his approval of the way in which, at the time of his death, Albert was "accepted as a necessary and useful part of the mechanism of the State" (179-80), and remarks: "Who can doubt, that, towards the end of the century, such a man, grown grey in the service of the nation; virtuous, intelligent and with the unexampled experience of a whole lifetime of government, would have acquired an extraordinary prestige? If, in his youth, he had been able to pit the Crown against the mighty Palmerston and to come off with equal honours from the contest, of what might he not have been capable in his old age?" (180) However, these more favourable comments are outweighed by the emotive tone of Strachey's severely critical summing up:

> It is easy to imagine how, under such a ruler, an attempt might have been made to convert England into a State as exactly organized, as elaborately trained, as efficiently equipped, and as autocratically controlled, as Prussia herself . . . The

> English Constitution--that indescribable entity-- is a living thing, growing with the growth of men, and assuming ever-varying forms in accordance with the subtle and complex laws of human character . . . The wisdom of Lord Grey saved it from petrifaction and destruction, and set it upon the path of Democracy. Then chance intervened once more; a female sovereign happened to marry an able and pertinacious man; and it seemed likely that an element which had been quiescent within it for years--the element of irresponsible administrative power--was about to become its predominant characteristic and to change completely the direction of its growth. But what chance gave, chance took away. The Consort perished in his prime; and the English Constitution, dropping the dead limb with hardly a tremor, continued its mysterious life as if he had never been. (180-81)

Here is the crux of much of Strachey's antipathy to Albert. He sees him as a very real threat to English liberties, believing that "a Constitutional question of the most profound importance was raised by the position of the Prince of England"

(147), and that Stockmar's theory, which the Prince so fully endorsed, "ran counter to the whole development of English public life since the Revolution" (149). He also says that "the public, painfully aware of Albert's predominance, had grown, too, uneasily conscious that Victoria's master had a master of his own. Deep in the darkness, the Baron loomed. Another foreigner! Decidedly there were elements in the situation which went far to justify the popular alarm. A foreign Baron controlled a foreign Prince, and the foreign Prince controlled the Crown of England" (150-51).

The ironic manner in which Strachey comments on the public's attitude in the extract above, is undercut by the emotional terms in which he speaks of Stockmar as "an ambiguous and potent figure" who disturbs "the ancient, subtle and jealously guarded balance of the English Constitution" (150). Consciously or not, Strachey evidently associates much that he dislikes in Albert's personality with his German heritage. There are more than a few hints elsewhere in Queen Victoria that, his disclaimers to chauvinism notwithstanding, Strachey shared some of his countrymen's hostility to foreigners.[16] One such hint is his account of the relationship between Albert and Palmerston already discussed. Another is his ironic description of Albert's farewells to "a sea of friendly German faces" and "good gutteral sounds" (89). Yet another is in the very first

description of high society's response to Albert:

> Though in the eyes of Victoria he was a mirror of manly beauty, her subjects, whose eyes were of a less Teutonic cast, did not agree with her. To them-- and particularly to the high-born ladies and gentlemen who naturally saw him most--what was immediately and distressingly striking in Albert's face and figure and whole demeanour was his un-English look . . . Really, they thought, this youth was more like some kind of foreign tenor than anything else. (92)

Although, in adopting an ironic tone, Strachey here ostensibly dissociates himself from the English aristocrats' views, his irony also works against Victoria, and he does not, in any case, make much of an effort to defend Albert against the English. In addition, in a later discussion he allows the upper class judgement of Albert to stand unchallenged, and even gain in force, when he says: "Unkind critics, who had once compared Albert to an operatic tenor, might have remarked that there was something of the butler about him now. Beside Victoria he presented a painful contrast" (174).

The other major source of Strachey's antipathy to

Albert is his quintessentially Victorian qualities: his arrogance, lack of humanity, blind devotion to duty, inability to relax, extreme moral earnestness, and meticulous attention to detail. Thus, he is somewhat unsympathetic about Albert's early days in England, noting: "Nor was the Prince happier in his social surroundings. A shy young foreigner, awkward in ladies' company, unexpansive and self-opinionated, it was improbable that, in any circumstances he would have been a society success" (92). He will return to the theme of Albert's arrogance a number of times. For example, in assessing his character as a young husband, he remarks: "Albert was, he knew very well, his wife's intellectual superior, and yet he found to his intense annoyance, that there were parts of her mind over which he exercised no influence" (94). Later, he drily comments on Albert's over-confident response to the failure of his sewage plan: "but Albert's intelligence was unrebuffed, and he passed on, to plunge with all his accustomed ardour into a prolonged study of the rudiments of lithography" (154).

One of the characteristics of the Victorians which Strachey dislikes most is their fanatical sense of duty. He criticizes Albert severely on this score. For example, of his efforts to bow to people on his arrival in England, despite being in the throes of seasickness, he says: "His sense of duty triumphed. It was a curious omen: his whole

life in England was foreshadowed as he landed on English ground" (90). Elsewhere, he notes that Stockmar successfully keeps Albert on his appointed course by harping "upon two strings--Albert's sense of duty and his personal pride" (94), and that Stockmar's advice to Albert "never to relax" (97) had "something in it which touched the very depths of Albert's soul" (97).

The underlying reason for Strachey's condemnation of the Victorians' addiction to duty is undoubtedly the human suffering it caused. The tone of the following extracts conveys his horror at the way Albert's earnest assumption of parental duties blinds him to the emotional needs of his son:

> A family of nine must be, in any circumstances, a grave responsibility; and the Prince realised to the full how much the high destinies of his offspring intensified the need of parental care . . . .
>
> How tremendous was the significance of every particle of influence which went to the making of the future king of England! . . . The boy grew up amid a ceaseless round of paradigms, syntactical exercises, dates, geneological tables, and lists of capes . . . every possible precaution was taken, every conceivable effort

was made. (154-5)

He later concludes: "Yes, everything had been tried--everything . . . with one single exception. The experiment had never been made of letting Bertie enjoy himself. But why should it have been? 'Life is composed of duties'. What possible place could there be for enjoyment in the existence of a Prince of Wales?" (169)[17] Strachey's constant ridiculing of Albert's memoranda constitutes a further condemnation of the Prince's intellectual rigidity, and of his insensitivity to the human element in political and social matters.[18]

The conclusions to be drawn about the effectiveness of Strachey's portrait of Albert shed considerable light on the success of the work as a whole, particularly on the question of whether, in Queen Victoria, the interplay between the sensibility of biographer and subject is generally a fruitful one. In the case of Albert, Strachey's deep-rooted distaste for Victorian elements in his character, and his discomfort at aspects of his "un-Englishness", result in a portrait which approaches caricature at many points. Because he also insists on viewing Albert as the creature of Stockmar, but does not explore the nature of the relationship between master-mind and pupil, it is hard for the reader to avoid feeling that Albert is something of a cipher. Strachey's failure to do justice to Albert is all the more disappointing

in view of his own characterization of Albert as a "real creature, so full of energy and stress and torment, so mysterious and so unhappy, and so fallible, and so very human" (191).

The portrait of Victoria is far more satisfying. In the first place, it is warmly human: Strachey's Victoria, stubborn, opinionated, autocratic, unsubtle and sincere, is far more interesting than the idealised myth he destroys. In the second place, it avoids either caricature or hagiography, because Strachey's attitude towards the Queen is distinctly ambivalent; his affection for her virtues matched only by his irritation at her failings. In Victoria, Strachey has once more chosen a subject whose personality intrigues his ironic intellect while still retaining his emotional allegiance and respect.

In view of my contention that Strachey's portrait of Victoria is far more balanced than some critics have argued, I find Lady Strachey's response to the news of her son's projected biography particularly interesting: "I don't much fancy you taking up Queen Victoria to deal with. She no doubt lays herself open to drastic treatment which is one reason I think it better left alone. She could not help being stupid, but she tried to do her duty, and considering the period she began in, her upbringing, her early associations, and her position, this was a difficult matter and highly to her

credit. She has won a place in public affection and a reputation in our history which it would be unpopular, and I think not quite fair, to attempt to bring down."[19] Lytton's assessment is not so different in spirit, despite his lack of reverence for her public reputation. Of all his portraits, Queen Victoria demonstrates most clearly that Strachey's strengths as a writer stem as much from his attachment to his roots as from his rejection of them. As André Maurois rightly remarks, although Strachey is French in his style and Voltairean in some of his prejudices, he "remains at bottom extremely English."[20]

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER THREE

[1]Harold Nicolson, The Development of English Biography (London: Hogarth Press, 1928; 1959), pp.148-9.

[2]Lytton Strachey, Queen Victoria (London: Chatto and Windus, 1921; 1969), p.1. The 1969 Chatto and Windus edition has been used. For convenience, page references are included in the text in parentheses.

[3]Similarly, the second chapter traces the series of events which marked Victoria's growth to womanhood; and the third chapter, the years of her apprenticeship to the monarchy.

[4]See also the account of the factors which led to Victoria's being brought up by the Duchess of Kent at Kensington Palace (15-17) and Strachey's evaluation of Theodore Martin's biography of Albert (146-51).

[5]For other examples of passages of slow-paced analysis, see the description of the relationship between Victoria and her mother (23-7), the discussion of the inferences to be drawn from Victoria's diaries (27-31), the assessment of the nature and extent of the influence of Lehzen and Stockmar over Victoria (45-9), the examination of the relationship between Melbourne and the Queen (49-55), the account of Albert's life before his marriage (81-6), and the review of Victoria's personality and achievements (244-51).

[6]See, for example, the contrast between the sense of movement in the account of Victoria's epistolary confrontation with Leopold (60-65) and the reflective passage of analysis which follows (65-6); or the contrast between the measured prose of Strachey's assessment of Victoria's sentiments about marrying (76-8), and the "excited" prose with which he describes Victoria's own rapturous reception of Albert.

[7]See also Strachey's analysis of the diplomatic crisis of the Spanish Succession, with its emphasis on the key roles played by Victoria and Albert. (126-30)

[8]Note also that Strachey portrays Melbourne as "a child of the eighteenth century whose lot was cast in a new, difficult age" (52); and as a kindred spirit "bred up as a member of that radiant society which during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, concentrated within itself the ultimate perfections of a hundred years of triumphant aristocracy. (49)

[9]See, for example, Strachey's analysis of the relationship between Victoria and Disraeli. (214)

[10]See also the political naivety displayed by the Queen in her dealings with the Tsar of Russia (104), and with Napoleon III (162-4), her gross misjudgement of Louis Phillippe (128-30), her inability to realize that "the Prussia of the Prince's days

was dead, and that a new Prussia, the Prussia of Bismarck was born." (186)

[11]Although it is important to stress the positive aspects of Strachey's portrait of the Queen, I would not go so far as G.M. Trevelyan, who reportedly told André Maurois that "The most remarkable phenomenon of modern biography was the conquest of Strachey by Queen Victoria." Cited by André Maurois, Aspects of Biography, trans. Sydney Castle Roberts, (New York: Appleton, 1929), pp.24-5 and in Sanders, p.227. This view echoes a remark made by Lloyd R. Morris in "The Skepticism of Mr. Strachey," Outlook, 131 (1922), 681, and is repeated not only by Maurois, but also by Smyth, p.654, and Johnson, pp.512-13.

[12]Indeed, the genuineness of the Queen's simple "piety"(245) even exempts her from Strachey's characteristically ironic castigation of Victorian religiosity. (244)

[13]In what follows I dissent from the general tendency to view Strachey's portrait of Albert as both sympathetic and successful. Sanders' comments may be cited as typical: "Much has been written about Strachey's remarkable success in painting the portrait of Prince Albert. It is beyond any question a brilliant piece of work dealing with a subject which, ostensibly at least, brought with it many difficulties . . . Strachey's

picture succeeds mainly because it has balance" (Sanders, p.234).

[14]See Queen Victoria pp.84-6, 93-100, 112, 128, 132, 133, 138-9, 147-51, 155, 170, 172, 173.

[15]See also Strachey's admiring portrait of that other archetypally honest Englishman, Lord Hartington in "General Gordon" (Eminent Victorians, pp.293-5). As Sanders has rightly commented: "Hartington has more strength than he ever needs or shows and more culture than he is conscious of or would ever be willing to admit having . . . He is as rough and as real and as solid and as active and as hard to handle and hard to fool as Squire Western." (Sanders, p.222).

[16]Interestingly, George Simson notes in connection with Strachey's account of the impression Florence Nightingale made on Albert: "Cook has translated the Prince's remarks and there was no need for Strachey to change them back into German." (Simson, p.170). Here, as in Eminent Victorians, Strachey is at pains to emphasize that Albert is a foreigner.

[17]There are close parallels with the grounds on which Strachey censures Froude's repressive father. Lytton Strachey, "Froude," B.E., pp.257-8, 263. See also the following passage from a friend's letter to Strachey in December 1918: "You are right,

there's nothing so crushing and wretched as hard human beings without feelings." Cited by Sanders, p.67.

[18]See Queen Victoria, pp.133, 135, 137, 138-9, 152-3, 155-6, 162, 168-9, 172, 176, and 185.

[19]Cited in Holroyd, p.753.

[20]André Maurois, Prophets and Poets, trans. Hamish Miles, (1935; reprinted Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968), p.240.

CHAPTER FOUR: ELIZABETH AND ESSEX

Seven years elapsed between the publication of Queen Victoria in 1921 and Elizabeth and Essex in 1928. The latter is, however, set apart from the main body of Strachey's work by more than years alone; it is strongly marked by thematic and formal characteristics quite untypical of the earlier biographies. There is a sharp contrast between the broad sweep of the Victorian portraits and the relatively intense focus of Elizabeth and Essex; it is unique in being Strachey's only full-length Elizabethan portrait; and it is also the only one of his major biographies presented as a tragic history. Most significant of all, Strachey's interpretative method is very different from that in either Eminent Victorians or Queen Victoria.

Elizabeth and Essex undoubtedly represents a major shift in direction which poses a number of important questions about Strachey's art as a biographer. However, although Strachey breaks from previous practice in regard to focus, form and approach to character, Elizabeth and Essex, considered strictly as a narrative, is in many ways the culmination of his writing career, rather than a point of departure. Therefore, before discussing new directions in Elizabeth and Essex, I feel it is important to give due recognition to the work's considerable literary merits as Strachey's last and most

accomplished long biographical narrative.

His artistry is particularly evident in the formal shaping of the portrait. Indeed, its impressive coherence owes much to the way Strachey has skilfully modelled it on the pattern of Elizabethan drama. Not only is Essex endowed with all the attributes of a tragic hero, whose demise is consistently foreshadowed, but the rise and fall of the narrative line also follows the classic tragic pattern, with many well orchestrated dramatic scenes. This is, of course, scarcely surprising in the light of the work's precursor, Essex: A Tragedy, a blank verse play Strachey wrote in October/November 1909. As Holroyd notes, "the chief interest that Essex: A Tragedy now holds lies in its relationship to Elizabeth and Essex.[1] He also comments that "The prior composition of Essex: A Tragedy shows that Lytton believed that the enigma of the Queen's relationship with her famous courtier was ideally suited to a theatrical treatment, and helps to explain why Elizabeth and Essex was conceived in a dramatic form, unlike all his other books."[2]

The work shows Strachey to be writing out of the same intellectual tradition as his great contemporary A. C. Bradley. Essex, in particular, conforms in almost every respect to Bradley's definition of the characteristic Shakespearean tragic hero as "a person of high degree or public importance" whose

"nature also is exceptional" and whose "error, joining with other causes, brings on him ruin."[3] His fate looms over the whole tale. Even Strachey's depiction of him as the "new star, rising with extraordinary swiftness" ends with the chilling reflection: "If only time could have stood still for a little while and drawn out those halcyon weeks through vague ages of summer!" (6)[4]

The first part of the work is full of portents of disaster.[5] Strachey tells us of Essex's fine romantic "gesture of ancient chivalry" on the shores of France (39), but he immediately adds: "The spring of youth was almost over" (40). Similarly, the account of the highly successful expedition to Cadiz (101-5) ends with a pointed reference to the Earl's sonnet on the idyllic joys of simple country life in which "memory and premonition came together to give a strange pathos to the simple words" (105). This is closely followed by the information that "on the same day on which Essex sailed from Cadiz", the Earl's most powerful competitor was appointed Secretary of State (106).

Later in the work, foreshadowing is both more explicit and more emphatic. For example, Strachey draws attention to Cecil's angry assertion "Bloodthirsty and deceitful men . . . will not live out half their days" (165), then comments:" . . . there were some who recollected afterwards, with awe and wonder, the prophetic text of the old Lord Treasurer" (167). Of

the reconciliation between the Queen and Essex he says: "It appeared that the past had been obliterated, and that the Earl--as was his wont--had triumphantly regained his old position, as if there had never been a quarrel. In reality it was not so; the situation was a new one: mutual confidence had departed" (184). In the following pages he intensifies the signs of impending doom: he describes the Queen and Earl dancing "hand in hand before the assembled Court" (191) as on "that other Twelfth Night, five short years before" (191), but adds the words "and for the last time" (192).

Most telling of all is his description of the Earl's departure for Ireland. Although Strachey speaks of Essex leaving London "amid the acclamation of the citizens" (194) he ends his account with Bacon's remark: "I did as plainly see . . . his overthrow chained, as it were, by destiny to that journey as it is possible for a man to ground a judgement upon future contingents" (194). Bacon's gloomy prognosis is quickly and powerfully reiterated. First Strachey comments that "Francis Bacon was not the only observer at Court to be pessimistic" about Essex's chances for victory in Ireland (197); then he cites Robert Markham's "weighty letter of advice and instruction" to Harington, in which the opinion is advanced that "Sir William Knollys is not well pleased, the Queen is not well pleased, the Lord

Deputy may be pleased now, but I sore fear what may happen hereafter" (198). Lastly, he concludes that such a warning "expressed, with an exactness that was prophetic, the gist of the situation" (198). From this point on, the disaster so long foretold becomes reality.

Strachey's role as prophet of doom should not, of course, be considered in isolation from other artistic devices he employs in his "tragic history." Point of view and narrative structure should be viewed as complementary facets of the tragic vision which gives Strachey's story of Elizabeth and Essex its unity, intensity and coherence. The shadow of Essex's fate looms over the narrative partly because of Strachey's foreshadowing, and partly because of the shaping of the work. Not only does Elizabeth and Essex have a tragic hero, but it also has the dramatic structure of exposition (Chapters I-II), rising action (Chapters III-VIII), climax (Chapter VIII), falling action (Chapters IX-XIV), castastrophe (Chapter XV), and dénouement (Chapters XVI-XVII).

The first two chapters introduce the protagonists and set the scene. From Chapters III to VIII, Strachey's narrative line steadily follows the ascending star of the Earl of Essex as he moves from being merely the Queen's boyish favourite (30) to being "Master of the Horse and Knight of the Garter" (32) and a privileged and important member of the Queen's inner cabinet who "almost attained the position

of an alternative Foreign Secretary" (49). The climax in Essex's career, and in Strachey's narrative, is the Earl's triumphant return from the Cadiz Expedition (108). At this time, comments Strachey, "it was difficult to conceive what could prevent Essex from becoming before long the real ruler of England" (114). As in Spenser's Prothalamion "The prowess and the person of Essex stand forth, lustrous and dazzling, before all eyes" (116). In this section, the only major break occurs in Chapter V with the account of the one real setback experienced by the Earl, when he failed to secure Francis Bacon's promotion" (57-63).

During the rest of Chapter VIII and at the beginning of Chapter IX, Strachey slows the pace for reasons of dramatic suspense, by giving us detailed analyses of the characters of Essex and Bacon (116-31), accounts of Essex's reconciliation with the Queen and departure for Spain (131-4), and a description of Philip of Spain (135-8). However, this section of the narrative is a false plateau. Only a few pages into Chapter IX Strachey ringingly marks the downturn in Essex's fortunes and the turning point in his own narrative, by announcing that the tempest which destroyed the Armada "was only an ominous prologue to the tragedy" (139), remarking: "From that moment misfortune steadily deepened upon him" (139).

From this point on, Strachey's portrait inexorably charts every stage of Essex's plummeting fortunes. Furthermore,

Strachey directly attributes this fatal sequence of events to various flaws in Essex's character: his gross error of judgement in attacking San Miguel (145), his unwise struggle with the Cecils over foreign policy (165-6), his unpardonably insulting behaviour towards his sovereign (168-9), the incomplete reconciliation which follows the long breach between himself and Elizabeth as a result of this quarrel (182-5), his reckless candidature for the Lieutenancy of Ireland (186-91), his failure in Ireland (Chapter XII), the ensuing disgrace (Chapter XIII), and, finally, the Rebellion (Chapter (XIV). Essex's trial and death form the conclusion to the tragic history (Chapter XV). After the dramatic portrayal of the Earl's death, comes the anti-climactic dénouement of the last two chapters.

One of the principal reasons for viewing Elizabeth and Essex as an Elizabethan tragedy is also Strachey's dramatic handling of individual scenes, especially the well-orchestrated entries and exits. A very obvious example is Essex's arrival from Ireland. Holroyd notes that this passage "is in fact an exact description of the opening scene" of Essex: A Tragedy and that it "reads in places like the stage and costume directions for it."[6] Here, Strachey's compressed narrative style stresses details of movement, facial expression, stance, dress, and speech. Other dramatic scenes are Essex's return to Court (28), his argument with

Elizabeth about Raleigh and Lady Leicester (30-32), the confrontation between Essex and Burghley during a coach drive through the city (57-8), De Maisse's audience with the Queen (156-7), Essex's quarrel with Elizabeth over Knollys' appointment (167-9), Essex's trial (246-53), and Elizabeth's reception of the deputation from the Commons (274-5).

If there are differences between this work and Strachey's first two books, there are also similarities between them. The characteristic which most firmly links Elizabeth and Essex to Strachey's preceding biographies is his treatment of the Elizabethan Age. As in his earlier work, he shows himself fascinated by the history of the times in which his subjects lived, and yet again his narrative focus is clearly influenced by his strongly individualistic perspective on history, by his interest in the "temper" of the times, and by his preoccupation with, and admiration of, the continuity of English tradition.

There is, perhaps, more history in Elizabeth and Essex than in either of the two preceding biographies. However, Strachey is here working within very circumscribed limits. He concentrates almost exclusively on the shifting balance of power at the English Court during the 1590's and on related political moves in the Courts of Europe.[7] Just occasionally, as in his lengthy (though entertaining)

exposition of the affair of Dr Lopez in Chapter VI (66-90), Strachey's enthusiasm for intrigue carries him away from his main subject. On the whole, however, his accounts of Court politics have a direct bearing on his exploration of the relationship between Elizabeth and Essex, and form an integral part of his central thesis concerning the reasons for Essex's downfall.

It is, for example, crucial to Strachey's case that we recognize the significance of the power struggle between the Cecil and Essex parties. He accordingly devotes space in Chapter V to a discussion of this confrontation between "the two opposing factions: the new party of Essex and his followers--aggressive and adventurous--and the old party of the Cecils, entrenched in the strongholds of ancient power" (46). Likewise, in Chapter X (165-9) he gives a detailed account of the final decisive struggle between Essex and the Cecils, the outcome of which precipitates Essex's fall from power.

Not only does Strachey emphasize the importance of Court Politics, but he holds the view that a few exceptional Elizabethans exercised a disproportionately large influence over the course of English and European history. In Queen Victoria Strachey concentrated on the power wielded by Lehzen, Stockmar, Melbourne, Albert, and the Queen. In

Elizabeth and Essex he consistently draws attention to the way Elizabeth's personal mandate was backed by "the Russells, the Cavendishes, the Cecils, who ruled over England in supreme solidity" (1). Thus, in discussing how Burghley succeeded in passing on the reins of power to his son, Strachey notes: "The circumstance of a single family--it has happened more than once in English history--dominated the situation"(40). Similarly, he speaks of Elizabeth's appointment of Robert Cecil as her Secretary as being "something of the highest moment" (106). One should not, in any event, forget that the narrative ends, not with the death of Essex (although the work's emotional energy expires with him) but with the image of Robert Cecil, "reflecting upon the revolutions of kingdoms, and dreaming, with quiet clarity, of what the hours, even then, were bringing--the union of two nations--the triumph of the new rulers--success, power, and riches--a name in after ages--a noble lineage--a great House" (280).

Even more than in Queen Victoria, however, Strachey focusses on the Queen's personal influence over the course of history. Of her influence abroad, he comments: "For years she made her mysterious organism the pivot upon which the fate of Europe turned" (25). Of her far-reaching powers within her own realm, he says: "It was for the Queen to choose her counsellors. She would listen to one and then to another; she would shift, according to her adviser, from

one policy to its direct contrary; it was a system of government after her own heart. Thus it was that she could enjoy to the full the delicious sense of ruling--could decide, with the plenitude of power, between momentous eventualities--and, by that very means, could contrive to keep up an endless balance and a marvellous marking of time" (47).

As in his Victorian portraits, Strachey is far more interested in capturing the spirit of the age than in chronicling every year. He opens the work with the words: "The English Reformation was not merely a religious event; it was also a social one. While the spiritual mould of the Middle Ages was shattered, a corresponding revolution, no less complete and no less far-reaching, occurred in the structure of secular life and the seat of power" (1). Of the age as a whole he comments: "It is, above all, the contradictions of the age that baffle our imagination and perplex our intelligence. Human beings, no doubt, would cease to be human beings unless they were inconsistent; but the inconsistency of the Elizabethans exceeds the limits permitted to man. Their elements fly off from one another wildly; we seize them; we struggle hard to shake them together into a single compound, and the retort bursts" (9).

For Strachey, the affair of Dr Lopez is a prime illustration of the way the glories of Elizabeth's reign

"could never have existed without the spies of Walsingham, the damp cells of the Tower, and the notes of answers, calmly written down by cunning questioners, between screams of agony" (80). It is, Strachey argues, a "typical" case, in which can be traced "the process by which suspicion, fear, and preconceived theories were gradually, under the pressure of the judicial system, blended into a certainty which, in fact, was baseless" (80).

Another important facet of Strachey's interest in the Elizabethan Age is his satisfaction in the continuity of English tradition. As so often in his work, one is aware of his sensitivity to an English heritage which he prides himself on sharing with his subjects. Strachey's adulatory description of Elizabeth's speech at the time of the Armada, for example, has close parallels with his admiring account of Henry V's speech before Agincourt in his essay "Shakespeariana."[8] Moreover, his style of biographical writing links him firmly to that unbroken line of English narrative historians which runs through John Richard Green to Strachey's acquaintance and sometime colleague on The Independent Review G. M. Trevelyan, with whom, according to Holroyd, Strachey discussed such topics as "Cromwell, Milton, the scenery, Oxford, Cardinal Newman and the Early Christians."[9] None of which is, of course, to suggest that Strachey's was generally a narrow patriotism. His record as a conscientious objector during World War I, and his extensive writings on

French literature bear testimony to the breadth of his sympathies. One also recalls his scornful review of Mr Marriott's blindly chauvinistic study of Shakespeare, during the course of which he tartly observes: "Nothing sweetens love--even love of one's country--so much as a little common sense."[10]

In Queen Victoria, as we have seen, Strachey's love of his English heritage is manifest in his defence of the English Constitution. In Elizabeth and Essex, it is evident both in his emphasis on the way the family characteristics of the Tudors, Cecils and Devereux are passed on to Elizabeth, Burghley and Essex; and in his references to the Elizabethan documents, which he sees as forming a vital bridge between Englishmen past and present.

Of Elizabeth herself he writes: "the ordinary Englishman saw in King Hal's full-blooded daughter a Queen after his own heart" (16), noting that she "felt her father's spirit within her" (258). In analyzing her punishment of the Earl's misconduct in Ireland he comments: "Never was the cool paternalism of the Tudors so curiously displayed" (227). Of the Russells, the Cavendishes and the Cecils, he says: "For many generations they were England; and it is difficult to imagine an England without them, even to-day" (1). Robert Burghley's rise to power is ascribed to his being a member of "the old party of the

Cecils, entrenched in the stronghold of ancient power" (46). Even the character of Essex is in large measure attributed to his paternal aristocratic lineage (2) as well as to his maternal heritage from "the new nobility" (3).

The excited tone in which Strachey speaks about the Elizabethan papers he consulted shows that they had tremendous immediacy and relevance for him. He is obviously intrigued that papers "discovered among the Spanish archives" show Lopez's tale to have been "substantially true" (84), highly amused by Lord Howard's having cut out Essex's signature on their joint letter to the Queen (101), interested in the "curious" origins of the Bodleian Library (115), and fascinated by the quirks of fate which resulted in the survival of Essex's letter to Lady Bacon (123), and of Cecil's letter to Essex about the Queen's masterly Latin admonition of the unfortunate Polish ambassador (141). Here, miraculously preserved, were the familiar accents of his own and his country's past. It is with satisfaction that he remarks that the goblet Burghley presented to the University of Cambridge "still stands on the table of the Vice-Chancellor, to remind the passing generations of Englishmen at once of the tumult of the past and of the placid continuity of their history" (181).[11]

However, although Strachey's interest in the Elizabethan Age and his affection for the continuity of

English tradition are typical of his earlier biographical writings, his lively affection for the Elizabethans is not.[12] How unlike Strachey's attitude to the Victorian Age are comments such as "The earlier period was one of preparation; it was then that the tremendous work was accomplished which made England a coherent nation; finally independent of the Continent, and produced a state of affairs in which the whole energies of the country could find free scope" (7), and "the snows of the germinating winter had melted and the wonderful spring of Elizabethan culture burst into life" (8).[13]

Thus, despite what I have said so far about Elizabeth and Essex as the culmination of his skills as a master of narrative, Strachey did break a good deal of new ground in this last work. It is to these significant changes in point of view that I therefore turn now; particularly to his increased reliance on an explicitly psychoanalytical approach to character.[14]

The central figures provide ample illustration of his method. He calls Elizabeth "the supreme embodiment of Elizabethanism" (12) and Essex "the living embodiment" of the new spirit of "enormous daring, that superb confidence, that thrilling sense of solidarity which . . . had come to the English race when the smoke had rolled away and the storm subsided, and there was revealed the wreck of the

Armada" (68). He also speaks with admiration of Elizabeth as a "cultivated lady of the Renaissance" (17), and of Essex as the last flaming up of "ancient feudalism" and "antique knighthood" (2), noting that his spirit, "wayward, melancholy and splendid, belonged to the Renaissance--the English Renaissance, in which the conflicting currents of ambition, learning, religion, and lasciviousness were so subtly interwoven" (123). In the rash behaviour that led to the Earl's demise he sees "the last extravagance of the Middle Ages flickering through the high Renaissance nobleman" (178).

Furthermore, in the introductory chapter he confidently defines the contradictions of the Elizabethan Age in Freudian terms, asking:

> By what perverse magic were intellectual ingenuity and theological ingenuousness intertwined in John Donne? Who has ever explained Francis Bacon? How is it conceivable that the puritans were the brothers of the dramatists? What kind of mental fabric could that have been which had for its warp the habits of filth and savagery of sixteenth-century London and for its woof an impassioned familiarity with the splendour of Tamburlaine and the exquisiteness of Venus and Adonis? Who can reconstruct those iron-nerved beings who

> passed with rapture from some divine madrigal sung to a lute by a bewitching boy in a tavern to the spectacle of mauled dogs tearing a bear to pieces? Iron-nerved? Perhaps; yet the flaunting man of fashion, whose codpiece proclaimed an astonishing virility, was he not also, with his flowing hair and his jewelled ears, effeminate? (9)

Within this framework, Strachey analyzes the contradictions of his Elizabethan subjects in similarly Freudian terms. Arguing that the subtlety of the queen's intellect "was exactly adapted to the complexities of her environment" (12), he comments: "Nor was it only her intellect that served her; it was her temperament as well. That too--in its mixture of the masculine and the feminine, of vigour and sinuosity, of pertinacity and vacillation--was precisely what her case required" (12). He accordingly explains the contradictions inherent in Elizabeth's nature in terms of masculine and feminine "opposites juxtaposed" (26),[15] and suggests an androgynous interpretation of her psyche.

> She was a woman--ah yes! a fascinating woman!--but then, was she not also a virgin,

> and old? But immediately another flood of feeling swept upwards and engulfed her; she towered; she was something more--she knew it; what was it? Was she a man? She gazed at the little beings around her, and smiled to think that, though she might be their Mistress in one sense, in another it could never be so--that the very reverse might almost be said to be the case. She had read Hercules and Hylas, and she might have fancied herself, in some half-conscious day-dream, possessed of something of that pagan masculinity. (28)

Strachey also stresses the importance of sexual roles to the relationship between Queen and courtier. Essex for example, muses that Elizabeth was

> a preposterous, obstinate old woman, fluctuating only when she should be firm, and strong in nothing but perversity. And he, after all, was a man, with a man's power of insight and determination; he could lead if she would follow; but Fates had reversed their roles, and the natural master was a servant. Sometimes perhaps, he

> could impose his will upon her--but after what an expenditure of energy, what a prolonged assertion of masculinity! A woman and a man! Yes, indeed, it was all too obvious! Why was he where he was? Why had he any influence whatever? It was not only obvious, it was ludicrous, it was disgusting: he satisfied the peculiar cravings of a virgin of sixty three. (124-5)

Similarly, in describing the process by which the Queen comes to the decision to behead Essex, Strachey argues that she recognises the "truth" when she realizes that Essex "had betrayed her in every possible way--mentally, emotionally, materially--as a Queen and as a woman--before the world and in the sweetest privacies of the heart" (257), and that the Earl's fate is sealed by "still stranger stirrings" in "still remoter depths" of her consciousness, when she considers the way "her father's destiny . . . was repeated in hers" (258). He quotes her conclusions at length:

> There was a difference as well as a likeness, after all, she was no man, but a woman; and was this, perhaps, not a repetition but a revenge? After all the long years of her life-time, and in this appalling consummation,

> was it her murdered mother who had finally emerged? The wheel had come full circle. Manhood--the fascinating detestable entity, which had first come upon her concealed in yellow magnificence in her father's lap--manhood was overthrown at last, and in the person of that traitor it should be rooted out. (258)

The clarity of much of the portraiture in Elizabeth and Essex stems from Strachey's presentation of his main subjects as historical and psychological types. However, Essex's character is endowed with a further archetypal dimension, because he is depicted in the guise of an almost ideal tragic hero. The flaws of his rash and passionate nature are consistently contrasted with the petty malignant spirit of Francis Bacon,[16] and his faults, though admitted, are passed over relatively lightly, and in such a way that we agonise over Essex's failures rather than condemn them. His part in the Lopez affair, for example, is excused as being characteristic of an age in which "the wisest and the ablest . . . were utterly unable to perceive that the conclusions which the evidence they had collected seemed to force upon them, were, in reality, simply the result of the machinery they themselves had set in motion" (80). Even the scenes

of weakness and humiliation after Essex's trial are described as "painful" (254) and Strachey chooses not to dwell overlong on them, but to end his history with a triumphantly heroic death scene which effectively erases the earlier scenes from the reader's mind (261-3). The final image of Essex is of a young man standing "tall, splendid, bare-headed, with his fair hair about his shoulders" (263).[17]

The structure, point of view and tone of Elizabeth and Essex thus provide ample evidence of the extent to which Strachey viewed his main subjects as types, and it has in fact been argued that his approach in this work is that of "psychological character-writing" in the Theophrastian tradition.[18] However, only Strachey's minor subjects conform completely to type. His major subjects, Elizabeth and Essex, exhibit idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies which make them imperfect archetypes. Like Erik Erikson in Young Man Luther who "did not merely wish to reduce young Luther to his diagnosis",[19] Strachey's aim is to illustrate what makes his subjects special as well as typical in their behaviour. The frequently hesitant tone of his analyses is a further confirmation of his dissatisfaction with knowing only the typical externals of the age.[20]

About minor figures such as Francis Bacon and Philip of Spain, Strachey does not, of course, have any doubts.

They are presented as the blackest of villains and are the butt of some of the heaviest irony employed anywhere in Strachey's biographies, with the possible exception of the portrait of Arnold. Bacon, for example, is consistently depicted in the role of Essex's clever but meanly calculating adversary. At one point Strachey argues that Bacon intentionally blew upon the Queen's "smouldering suspicions" about Essex's actions in Ireland (205-6). At another, he says of him: "He had long since decided that in all human probability Essex was a ruined man; he owed the Earl something--much; but it would be futile to spoil his own chances of fortune by adhering to a hopeless cause; it was essential to win the good graces of Robert Cecil; and now, there was this heaven-sent opportunity--which it would be madness to miss--for acquiring something more important still--the confidence of the Queen. Besides--he could doubt it no longer--Essex was a mischievous person, whose activities were dangerous to the State" (218-9).

From the start, Strachey's emotive use of language restricts the extent to which the reader is intended to respond sympathetically to Bacon.[21] Despite his assertion of Bacon's "extraordinary courage and profound wisdom" in writing Essex a letter of "warning and exhortation" right at the apex of the latter's career (116) (advice which Strachey describes as "brilliant" and "pertinent"), Bacon

is variously described as having a "cold viper-like gaze" (116), and a "Machiavellian temperament (118), characterized by "crooked ways" (119), "dissembling" (119), and "the persistent practice of some profoundly calculated stratagem or the momentary trickery of petty cunning" (120).

In the final chapters Bacon is unsympathetically depicted in a number of odious roles: attempting to dissociate himself from the proceeding of the Star Chamber which met to consider Essex's case (223-4, 228), acting as one of the Crown lawyers against Essex (228), making his humble apologies to the Earl (229), and functioning as one of the Counsels for the prosecution in Essex's State trial (243-5). About Bacon's participation in the trial Strachey scathingly concludes: "It was an occasion for the broad grasp of humanity, not for the razor-blade of a subtle intelligence. Bacon could not see this, he could not see that the long friendship, the incessant kindness, the high generosity, and the touching admiration of the Earl had made a participation in his ruin a deplorable and disgraceful thing" (244-5).

Whereas one senses that Strachey's hostility to Bacon stems from his Bloomsbury allegiance to the ideal of loyalty to one's friends, his hostility to King Philip appears to stem from his patriotism. Philip is the caricature of a Spain seen as a "dying organism" (16) hidebound by tradition and by religion. He is consistently presented

as the unequal adversary of Queen Elizabeth, "the fierce old hen . . . brooding over the English nation, whose pullulating energies were coming swiftly to ripeness and unity under her wings" (16). Thus, only a few pages after his mocking account of the Spanish preparations for the Fourth Armada (153-4), Strachey skilfully highlights the contrast between the two nations by a description of the English response to the news of Philip's invasion force which both consciously recalls the earlier account and is an ironic foil to it: "There was not a moment's hesitation in London. The consultations were brief and to the point: orders were sent out in every direction and no one asked the advice of the theologians" (162).[22]

One of the best illustrations of Strachey's effective counterpointing of the two nations occurs at the end of Chapter VIII, where he draws attention to the contrast between the scene at Burghley's death-bed and that at the King of Spain's. His description of the former is lyrical in tone, emphasising the Queen's tender solicitude for "Her Spirit", and her grief at his passing (169-70). His description of the latter, is heavily ironic, emphasising the unwholesome details of the sick bed and, by innuendo, strongly attacking the man who, "dying as he had lived--in absolute piety" was troubled only by the doubt as to whether he had burnt enough heretics (171). Thus, "in ecstasy, and

torment, in absurdity and in greatness, happy, miserable, horrible and holy, King Philip went off, to meet the Trinity" (172).

These two scenes are also a good illustration of the difference in Strachey's method of portraying his major and minor characters. Because his ironic presence everywhere intrudes between the reader and the King of Spain, Philip emerges as no more than a moribund body; the cruelly caricatured representative of Spanish Catholicism. But, because Elizabeth is permitted to come to life in her own right, she emerges as a compassionate and complex human figure. It is generally true that although Elizabeth and Essex are both presented in part as historical and psychological types, the individual flavour of their character is also, in varying degrees, dramatically revealed through direct quotation and anecdote.

In particular, Strachey's liberal quotations from the Queen's sayings and correspondence convey the pungency both of her humour and her anger. Her "last gay message" to Essex as he embarks for Cadiz (101), is counterbalanced by her rebuke of Drake for Essex's unauthorised trip to Spain (33-4), her anger at Lord Cecil for appearing to support Essex (112), her rage at the obstinate refusal of Essex to come to Court (128), and her outburst to the

unfortunate Harington on his return from serving with Essex in Ireland (216-7).

Most effective of all in conveying a sense of Elizabeth's personal qualities are the letters and speeches quoted by Strachey,[23] such as her "regal and enigmatic" letter to Essex during the expedition to the West Indies (142-3), her vituperative letters to James of Scotland (159-60), her scathing letter to Essex during the campaign in Ireland (206-7), or her speech to the deputation from the Commons (274-5). As Strachey puts it:

> . . . her crowning virtuosity was her command over the resources of words . . . Her letters she composed in a regal mode of apothegm and insinuation . . . but her greatest moments came when, in public audience, she made known her wishes, her opinions, and her meditations to the world. Then the splendid sentences, following one another in a steady volubility, proclaimed the curious workings of her intellect with enthralling force; while the woman's inward passion vibrated magically through the loud uncompromising utterance and the perfect rhythms of her speech. (18)

Essex is closer to a typecast than the Queen: in his rashness he is the typical feudal aristocrat; in his learning he is the typical Renaissance man; and in his strengths and weaknesses he is the complete tragic hero. However, even Strachey's characterization of Essex as the "spirit of ancient feudalism" (2) is at least vividly illustrated in the two letters he quotes at the beginning of Chapter XI (35). Even more important, Strachey's ample reference to Essex's words and deeds imparts recognizably human dimensions to the otherwise archetypally tragic quality of the man. Thus, one catches a vivid glimpse of Essex's impetuous and careless nature in the description of him giving "his legs and arms to his ordinary servants to button and dress him, with little heed, his head and face to his barber, his eyes to his letters, and ears to his petitioners" (120), something of his unpolitic directness in his hasty words to Burghley as they drive together through London (57-8), a good deal about his hot temper from the quarrels between Essex and Elizabeth over Raleigh (30-33), and Knollys (168-9), and much about his passionate nature in the numerous quotations from his correspondence with Bacon (110), his mother (122-3) and the Queen (133-4, 149, 150, 202-3, 208-9).

Interestingly, whereas Strachey's consistently ironic attitude towards minor figures such as Bacon and

Philip of Spain results in caricature, it is precisely the same ironic detachment which rescues his major figures from the quite opposite fate of hagiography. Strachey's fervent admiration of Elizabeth and Essex thus has significant implications for the success of the biographer's method in this last work. Most notably, and in marked contrast to his earlier writings, the greatest danger inherent in Strachey's approach to his main subjects in Elizabeth and Essex lies in the direction of idealization rather than in that of caricature.

Like the direct quotations from their conversations and correspondence, Strachey's occasionally ironic comments about Elizabeth and Essex serve to render them more than simple embodiments of historical or psychological types, often by highlighting incongruities and inconsistencies in their behaviour. Thus, despite his immense admiration for the Queen, as the epitome of a dynamic culture, Strachey is not above poking fun at her absurdities. Conversely, although he conceives of Essex in essentially tragic and heroic terms, he is not unaware of the larger ironies of Essex's particular brand of heroism.

Strachey's wry amusement at Elizabeth's sexual skirmishing is writ large in every line of the following passage, which forms the conclusion to his otherwise quite sober analysis of the origins of her physical infirmities,

and her attitude to the all-important question of marriage.

> Though, at the centre of her being, desire had turned to repulsion, it had not vanished altogether; on the contrary, the compensating forces of nature had redoubled its vigour elsewhere. Though the precious citadel itself was never to be violated, there were surrounding territories, there were outworks and bastions over which exciting battles might be fought, and which might even, at moments, be allowed to fall into the bold hands of an assailant. (25)

He is also not unaware of the situation whereby "Her clear-sightedness, so tremendous in her dealings with outward circumstances, stopped short when she turned her eyes within."(26)

Strachey returns to the theme of the patent absurdity of the old queen's "requiring and receiving" from her courtiers "the expressions of romantic passion" (26) in his comments on Anthony Standen's description of the Twelfth Night Celebrations, of which he remarks: "The courtiers gazed in admiration with no sense of incongruity" (57). He also returns to the occasionally incapacitating effect of

Elizabeth's vanity in his ironic reference to her choice of Mountjoy as Lord Deputy in Ireland: "The Queen believed that she had found the right man--Lord Mountjoy. Besides admiring his looks intensely, she had a high opinion of his competence" (187).

Nor is it only Elizabeth's vanity which provokes his mirth. Although he admires the "dissimulation, pliability, indecision, procrastination, parsimony" (11) which enable her to outmanoeuvre England's enemies, and appreciates that "the subtlety of her intellect was exactly adapted to the complexities of her environment" (12), Strachey can also be quite irreverent about these same qualities, as the tone of the following comments on Elizabeth's reaction to the fall of Calais shows: "This was too much, even for the hesitancy of Elizabeth. She could not conceal from herself that, in this instance, at any rate, she had failed; that the beautiful negation which was the grand object of all her policy, had eluded her; that, in fact, something had actually occurred. She was very angry, but the necessity for some sort of action on her own part gradually forced itself upon her" (96).

Despite his tremendous respect for Elizabeth's leadership in times of crisis, Strachey is even capable of poking fun at what he elsewhere, with equal sincerity, terms her "greatest moments" (18). A good example of this occurs in the discussion of the preparations for the Cadiz

expedition (98-102). On the one hand, he admiringly comments that, preliminary confusion notwithstanding, "all at once, the fog rolled off, and certainty emerged. Elizabeth, as was her wont, after being buffeted for so long and in so incredible a fashion by a sea of doubts, found herself firmly planted on dry land. The expedition was to go--and immediately" (99). On the other hand, he also makes some less than respectful observations about her royal prayer for the troops, drily remarking: "The words, addressed by one potentate to another, with such a diplomatic mixture of flattering devotion and ornate self-confidence were, apparently, exactly what was required. At any rate, the expedition was crowned with success" (102).

To a somewhat lesser extent than in the case of Elizabeth, Strachey's use of irony also softens even the harshly archetypal lines of his portrait of Essex, for, despite his evidently strong emotional engagement with the romantic figure of the brave but impetuous Earl, Strachey is not unmoved by certain ironic aspects of his story. He is distinctly amused by the general ineffectualness of Essex's noisy and unsubtle attempts to advance his own causes, on one occasion describing the way "Essex raved and implored with his usual energy" while the Spaniards took Cadiz (96); on another, speaking of "the loud violence . . . the brio of an Essex and a Raleigh, the rush

and flutter of minor courtiers, and the loquacious paroxysms of Elizabeth" (107).

He is not blind to his hero's intellectual limitations, either. "Essex," he says at one point, "could never distinguish very clearly between a personality and an argument" (251). Nor is he unaware of the larger ironies of Essex's particularly rash brand of heroism. About the Earl's triumphant return from Cadiz, he remarks: "A shattering blow had been dealt to the hated enemy, and in the popular opinion it was to the young Earl, so daring, so chivalrous, so obviously romantic, that the victory was due. The old Lord Admiral had played no great part in the affair, and the fact that the whole expedition would have been a failure if the advice of Raleigh had not been followed at the critical moment was unknown" (109).

Elsewhere, in discussing Essex's letter to the Queen on the eve of disaster in Ireland, he not only comments: "Never were his words more gorgeous and his rhythms more moving" (208), but also adds: "It was very fine--thrilling, adorable. But the sequel was less so" (209). Such ironic remarks, relatively few though they are, inevitably diminish Essex's stature, making him seem less tragic.

Not only do Strachey's major subjects conform imperfectly to type, but the frequently hesitant tone of his analyses is further confirmation of Strachey's

dissatisfaction at knowing only their external image. He complains that "over the doings of Elizabeth there hovered . . . a vast interrogation" (23), and that "Burghley, no doubt, was selfish and wily; but perhaps his influence was not always as great as it seemed; and perhaps, also, he genuinely mistrusted the singular characters of his nephews" (41-2). Discussing one of Essex's absences from Court he writes: "The nature of his ailment was dubious: was he sulking, or was he really ill? Perhaps he was both" (128). And about the happy reconciliation between Elizabeth and Essex on the eve of the latter's departure for Ireland he says: ". . . those two figures were together in their passion and their mystery, while the viols played their beautiful tunes and the jewels glittered in the torchlight. What was passing? Perhaps, in that strange companionship, there was delight, as of old" (191-2).

As a biographer whose aim is to penetrate the inner recesses of his subjects' minds, it is not surprising that Strachey often expresses his frustration at incomplete or non-existent documentation about the Elizabethans.[24] Even about an event as crucial as the Queen's visit to Essex on the eve of his humiliation before the Star Chamber, he is drawn to comment: "And so, at four o'clock in the evening of November 28th, accompanied by Lady Warwick and Lord

Worcester, she stepped into her barge and had herself conveyed to York House. We know no more. Essex was in truth very ill--apparently dying. Was he conscious of her visit? Were there words spoken? Or did she come and look and go, unseen? Unanswerable questions! The November night falls, gathering her up into its darkness" (223).

A close examination of Elizabeth and Essex has thus again highlighted the vital impact of Strachey's point of view on both the nature and effectiveness of his art. In this case, the partially archetypal treatment of his main subjects apparently owes more to his unusually intense emotional response to his material than to his aesthetic or psychoanalytic theories.[25] As I have shown, the tone of the portraits of Elizabeth and Essex is uncharacteristically warm, and even approaches hagiography at times. However, whereas Strachey's complimentary presentation of Elizabeth is closely associated with his pride in his English heritage, the lyrical tone and sympathetic focus of his portrait of Essex stems from his romantic conception of the Earl as a classic tragic hero. Thus, insofar as Strachey's main subjects are presented as archetypal figures, they are formulated, not in the Theophrastian sense, but as idealized objects of Strachey's admiration and affection.

In sum, although Strachey's innovations in focus, form and interpretative method are interesting, they cannot be considered his greatest achievement in Elizabeth and Essex. As a biography, the book is distinctly less effective than its predecessor Queen Victoria, because Strachey has conspicuously failed to present a fully individualized image of his main subjects. On the other hand, considered simply as a narrative, Elizabeth and Essex is in many ways the culmination of Strachey's writing career. It is a dramatically coherent and effective work of art, characterized by that meticulous craftsmanship which marks all his best writing.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

[1]Holroyd, pp.430-31.

[2]Holroyd, p.430.

[3]A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London: Macmillan, 1904; 1960), pp.19, 20, 21.

[4]Lytton Strachey, Elizabeth and Essex (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928; 1972), pp. 5, 6. All subsequent references will be to this edition. For convenience, page references are included in the text in parentheses.

[5]See the jarring note in the description of Essex's successful power struggle with Raleigh, which ends uncomfortably with Strachey's comment: ". . . though the cloud had vanished, the sky had subtly changed. A first quarrel is always an ominous thing." (32)

[6]Holroyd, p. 430.

[7]In this respect, Strachey's focus owes an obvious, and acknowledged, debt to John Harington's descriptions of the closing years of Elizabeth's reign, published in Nugae Antiquae, Vol I (London: 1804; New York: Ams Press, 1966).

[8]Lytton Strachey, "Shakespeariana," The Spectator, 100 (1908), p.536-7.

[9]Holroyd, p.146.

[10]Lytton Strachey, "The Claims of Patriotism," War and Peace, July 1918, p.293.

[11]This enthusiastic response to documentary evidence of a still vital past is characteristic of Strachey. In his biographical essay on Hume, for example, he writes: "In the absence of the Ambassador he was left in Paris for some months as chargé d'affaires, and his dispatches still exist to show that he understood diplomacy as well as ratiocination." Lytton Strachey, "Hume," B.E., p.48. See also his long essay, "English Letter Writers," L.E., pp.234.

[12]It is not, however, untypical of his critical writings. As Sanders rightly points out in his discussion of Strachey as a critic of Elizabethan drama: "It has been a mistake to assume, as some critics of Elizabeth and Essex have done, that when Strachey ventured out of the Victorian period he was getting out of his element. Actually, the Elizabethans were his first love." Sanders, p.97.

[13]In his essay on "Voltaire and England", Strachey had expressed similar sentiments about "the great achievement of the Revolution and the splendid triumphs of Marlborough" which he described as having "brought to England freedom, power, wealth and that sense of high exhilaration which springs from victory and self-confidence." Lytton Strachey, "Voltaire and England," B.E., p.68.

[14]Over the last twenty years, psychohistorians have, of course, explored the potential of psychoanalytical studies of historical subjects much more fully than Strachey was in a position to do, given the pioneering state of the art in his day. In a recent article, Joseph M. Woods remarks that "psychoanalysts are agreed in criticizing the biographer who goes beyond the evidence and fabricates unconscious desires and fantasies". He notes the considerable controversy generated by analyses which are based on postulates about the childhood of a historical figure, and comments that "there is rarely enough reliable and available evidence about any given childhood, and about a subject's feelings about the significant figures in childhood", concluding that the biographer is therefore hardly "entitled to assume causes", but that ". . . psychoanalytic theory enables the biographer to see, in examining the mature life of a character, behaviour that he might not otherwise notice." Joseph M. Woods, "Some Considerations on psycho-history," The Historian, 36 (1974), 727-9.

[15]There are striking parallels between Strachey's thesis concerning Elizabeth's androgyny, and some of Freud's analyses, particularly his study of Leonardo da Vinci. The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey, Vol XI (London: Hogarth Press, 1910), pp. 93-98.
For a slightly different interpretation, see J. E. Neale's comments about the estimates the Cecils made of the Queen, in which he notes that it was the "less astute" Robert Cecil who judged Elizabeth to be ". . . . more than a man, and, in troth, sometimes less than a woman." J. E. Neale, Queen Elizabeth I (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934, 1958), 386. (Hereafter cited as Neale).
Also: G. B. Harrison, "Elizabeth and Her Court," The Spectator, 141 (1928), 777.

[16]Strachey variously asserts that Essex's "enthusiastic nature leapt out to welcome the scintillating wisdom and profound wit" of Bacon (50), that he was a "gallant nobleman" whose "first thought was for the friend whom, perhaps, he had served ill through over-confidence or lack of judgement" (63) and that even when pressed and harassed on every side, Essex still "found the time and energy to write three letters to the leaders of the Bar, pressing upon them, with tactful earnestness, the claims of his friend" (100).

[17]Strachey's account contrasts greatly with J. E. Neale's much less sympathetic description of Essex's death, which like the rest of his study, emphasizes Essex's folly and treachery. Neale, pp. 374-6.
See also Robert Lacey, Robert, Earl of Essex: An Elizabethan Icarus (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), especially pp. 115-20.

[18]Lawrence Garber, "Strachey's Elizabeth and Essex," Dalhousie Review, Autumn 1976, p.414.

[19]Erik Erikson, Young Man Luther (New York: W. W. Norton, 1948; 1962), p.14.

[20]In the opening pages of Elizabeth and Essex, Strachey asserts: "The age--it was that of Marlowe and Spenser, of the early Shakespeare and the Francis Bacon of the Essays--needs no description: everyone knows its outward appearances and the literary expressions of its heart. More valuable than descriptions, but what perhaps is unattainable, would be some means by which the modern mind might reach to an imaginative comprehension of those beings of three centuries ago--might move with ease among their familiar essentials--might touch, or dream that it touches (for such dreams are the stuff of history) the very 'pulse of the machine'" (8).

[21]In this respect, note the parallels with Strachey's treatment of Baring in "The End of General Gordon".

[22]See also the way Chapter IX ends with the defeated leader of the third Armada returning to a king "almost unconscious with anxiety and disease" (146), whereas Chapter X opens ebulliently with the words: "Essex, too, had come back, and had to face a mistress who was by no means dying" (148).

[23]It is interesting that although Virginia Woolf was somewhat less sanguine than Strachey concerning the usefulness of the information to be culled from Queen Elizabeth's correspondence, she, too, appeared to believe that the letters contained the very marrow of history, in that they expressed "the temperament of the woman who ruled England from the time she was twenty-five, and whose whims and qualities lay at the very centre of the vast expansion of the Elizabethan age." Virginia Woolf, "The Girlhood of Queen Elizabeth," Books and Portraits (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), p.174.

[24]In Elizabeth and Essex Strachey often refers to the problematic nature of his sources. Other representative examples are: "The details are hidden from us, we do not know the terms of the peace; we only know that the pretext for it was yet another misfortune in Ireland" (183);

"We cannot trace all the moves--complicated, concealed, and fevered--that passed at the Council table; but it seems probable that Essex, when pressed to name a substitute for Mountjoy, remembered Bacon's advice" (187-8); "We do not know of Cecil's other faint imperceptible movements. We only know that, in the Council, there were some who still pressed for the appointment of Mountjoy, that the Earl's indication of himself was opposed or neglected, and that then the candidature of Sir William Knollys was suddenly revived" (188-9).

[25]This interpretation is further strengthened by the information we have about Strachey's life at the time. Holroyd, for example, writes that "in the story of Elizabeth and Essex Strachey saw much that poignantly reflected his own tragic history." Holroyd, p. 948. He has also acknowledged using in his biography of Strachey, "a phrase or two from Elizabeth and Essex", because "After he read the book (Elizabeth and Essex) Roger Senhouse confirmed that there was a fantasy element in their relationship that went into, and came out of, the book." Letter from Michael Holroyd, 12 January, 1977.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

It is logical to open this assessment of Lytton Strachey's contribution to the art of biography in Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria, and Elizabeth and Essex by recognizing the literary merits of these works. Strachey was a painstaking writer and all three biographies are characterized by apt organization, coherent formal structures, skilful control of pace, and a fluent prose style.

Although Eminent Victorians lacks the close formal unity of Queen Victoria or Elizabeth and Essex, Strachey's mastery of prose narrative is evident in the way the structure and pace of the narrative lines in "Cardinal Manning", "Florence Nightingale", and "The End of General Gordon" forcefully convey the energy with which Strachey's subjects pursue their lives as "an ecclesiastic", "a woman of action", and "a man of adventure", respectively. In addition, variations in pace highlight emotional climaxes or underscore tension. Even "Dr Arnold", which lacks the vigorous narrative drive of the other three portraits, and which conspicuously fails to illuminate its subject, is a tour de force of ironic writing.

In Queen Victoria, Strachey chose a subject whose life he believed to be central to the history of a whole

era. His biography is an impressive chronicle of her eighty one years. Recognizing the scope of his topic, he provides a chronological framework which orients the reader to key events. Although his narrative is broadly sequential, his handling of time is flexible enough to reflect the varying tempi of Victoria's world, just as his control of pace ably communicates his conception of the significant patterns of her life. One device used to particular effect is the creation of moments of high drama as climactic points which break into the narrative flow and act as foils to discursive passages of psychological analysis or historical explanation.

Considered strictly as a narrative, Elizabeth and Essex is in many ways the culmination of Strachey's career. It is written in the form of a "tragic history", and its impressive coherence owes much to its dramatic structure. The central figure, Essex, is presented as a tragic hero, whose demise is consistently foreshadowed; and the narrative line follows the classic pattern of rising action, climax, falling action, catastrophe and dénouement. Within this framework, the scenes of confrontation by which Strachey so adroitly creates moments of particular dramatic intensity are handled with considerable theatricality.

It was logical to begin by emphasising the works' literary merits. However, as the case of Elizabeth and Essex so graphically illustrates, the criteria by which we

judge a piece of writing to be an effective narrative are in themselves insufficient criteria by which to judge its merits as biography. An impressively coherent work of art, Elizabeth and Essex is a far less effective piece of biographical writing than Queen Victoria. As the former work shows, the biographer's interpretative approach to his subject is crucial in determining not only the nature but also the effectiveness of his art. Furthermore, this intersection of writer and subject assumes particular importance in the case of a biographer such as Strachey, whose books bear so personal an impress of his artistic, historical, psychological, moral, and social concerns.

Strachey's concept of history strongly colours his interpretative approach to his subjects and has significant ramifications for his art. All three biographies stress the contribution made by exceptional individuals to the history of their times. Thus, in Eminent Victorians, Strachey's account of the Crimean War scarcely touches the broader canvas of European political and social history, but concentrates on how, at that specific moment, "the desperate need of a great nation came" and Florence Nightingale "was there to satisfy it" (135). Similarly, the portrait of Gordon turns on the fact that "he plunged into the whirl of high affairs; his fate was mingled with the frenzies of "Empire and the doom of peoples"(223). Strachey assesses

Arnold's career as follows: "There can be little doubt that what he had achieved justified the prediction of the Provost of Oriel that he should 'change the face of education all through the public schools of England'" (220).

A central motif in both Queen Victoria and Elizabeth and Essex is the influence these two queens exercised over the course of events at home and abroad. In the case of Victoria, Strachey attaches considerable importance to her contribution to British domestic policy, and to the fact that she and Albert were at the hub of European statecraft up to the time of the Prince Consort's death in 1861. In the case of Elizabeth, Strachey's portrait everywhere emphasises the Queen's pivotal position at Court, especially the way her favour could make or mar a man's fortunes; her far-reaching powers as absolute monarch; and her prestige and influence abroad, especially in the decade following the defeat of the Armada in 1588.

In addition to influencing their age, Strachey's subjects also define it, in varying degrees. In Eminent Victorians, he purposely chose to write about the "characteristic specimens" of an age. All four of his subjects are very English as well as very Victorian. All of them exhibit the dynamism Strachey associated with the Victorians. The careers of Manning and Gordon are also presented as exemplifying the contradictions of a period which Strachey considered

to be at one and the same time strongly religious and energetically secular. Manning's personality is, to a large extent, riven by this schism, and the two opposing facets of the age are represented in the confrontations between the astute Manning and those two wordly innocents: Wiseman and Newman. Gordon, who embodies "the mingling contradictions of the English spirit" (224) is torn between his ascetic ideals and his love of adventure, and comes up against an opponent who is an ironic reflection of one side of his own nature. Although they embody certain characteristics of their age, Manning, Florence Nightingale, and Gordon are in no way presented as being totally explicable in terms of these traits. Arnold, by contrast, is an archetypal amalgam of all Strachey hated most about the Victorians: their religious fervour, moral earnestness, solemnity, complacency, and inhumanity.

In Queen Victoria Strachey's approach is again such as to give prominence to his view that parallel forces might be perceived in the individual psyche and society as a whole. From the start he introduces Victoria as the embodiment of a new era, favourably comparing her to her disreputable predecessor, George IV. He also correlates her popularity with the extent to which she succeeded in reflecting the predominantly middle-class values and aspirations of nineteenth century England. Although constantly presented as

the "apotheosis" of her age, Strachey's Victoria is, however, never viewed as completely defined by it. As in his portrait of that other singleminded lady of the period, Florence Nightingale, Strachey is intrigued by, and sensitive to, the unique qualities of a singularly forceful subject.

In Elizabeth and Essex Strachey conceives of his subjects largely, though not exclusively, as definite historical and psychological types. The Queen he views as "the supreme phenomenon of Elizabethanism" (12), and Essex as the last flaming up of "ancient feudalism" and "antique knighthood" (2), whose "spirit, wayward, melancholy, and splendid, belonged to the Renaissance" (123). He defines both the contradictions of the Age and those of his subjects, in psychoanalytical terms. In attributing the contradictions in Elizabeth's personality to masculine and feminine opposites juxtaposed, he suggests an androgynous interpretation of her psyche.

The strongly psychological impulse of every aspect of Strachey's interest in history reminds us that he writes first and foremost as a biographer, not as an historian. As such, his overriding concern is with the uniqueness of the human spirit. Everything said so far about the vital impress of Strachey's view of history on the nature and scope of his biographies applies with even greater force to the impact on

his work of the stance he adopts towards his chosen subjects. If his individualistic concept of history largely determines the nature and scope of Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria, and Elizabeth and Essex, the degree to which Strachey feels empathy and/or antipathy for his subjects largely determines the success or failure of these works as biography.

Strachey's most successful biography is Queen Victoria. Significantly, this is a warmly human portrait, as well as a far from uncritical one. Victoria is presented as the epitome of the English bourgeoisie not only in her vices, but in her virtues. However misguided her sense of duty, Strachey clearly feels a deal of affection for her innate good-heartedness, and is impressed by her vitality and dignified execution of her official duties. Furthermore, his iconoclastic approach to the matter of Victoria's popular image as perfect Queen, wife, and mother turns out to be a distinct advantage in this case. His Victoria, stubborn, opinionated, warm-hearted, autocratic, unsubtle, and sincere is far more interesting than the idealized myth he destroys.

However, as we have seen, too uncritical an attitude on Strachey's part, as in Elizabeth and Essex, leads to the damaging psychological and historical typecasting of his major subjects as archetypal Renaissance English Queen, and romantic tragic hero, respectively. Equally, Strachey's

most critical portrait, that of Arnold, is even more flawed than Elizabeth and Essex. The very intensity of the scorn which makes him such an effective ironist and debunker of educational myths fatally inhibits his response to Arnold the man. This is also the case in Queen Victoria, where his deep-rooted distaste for Albert's Victorian earnestness, stern sense of duty and "un-Englishness" results in a portrait which approaches caricature at many points.

In sum, the degree to which Strachey is effective in illuminating what makes his subjects different from, and not like, other men is dependent on a very specific kind of rapport between the biographer and his material. Strachey's ideal subject, as the portraits of Manning, Florence Nightingale, Gordon, and Queen Victoria show, is almost, but not quite, his equal. The subjects which really fire his imagination are those whose lives he perceives in ambiguous and subtle terms. His best writing stems neither from a position of adulation nor from one of hostility. As we have seen, Strachey's partisan pride in his English heritage in Elizabeth and Essex inhibits the sensitivity of his response to his subjects just as seriously as the extreme iconoclasm which unleashes his ironic wit in "Dr Arnold". Strachey's most effective portraits in Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria and

Elizabeth and Essex are marked by a palpable tension between the opposing facets of Strachey's own personality: between Strachey the ironist and Strachey the romantic. His very successful presentation of Queen Victoria is the clearest demonstration that his best work stems from ambivalence; from his passionate attachment to tradition just as much as from his stern rejection of it.

Given Strachey's assertive presence as a biographer, the moral and social values which determine the nature and extent of his rapport with his subjects may be deduced with some assurance. Furthermore, his explicit commitment to a very positive code of values in Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria, and Elizabeth and Essex is at least as pervasive as his iconoclasm, and of far greater significance to a balanced assessment of his art as a biographer.

It is true of course, as critics have never tired of pointing out, that Strachey did harshly attack Victorian values wherever he perceived them: Albert's rigid adherence to duty, Queen Victoria's stuffy sense of decorum, Florence Nightingale's religiosity, the dogmatism and pomposity of both Albert and Arnold, and the arid assiduity of that Victorian-like Elizabethan, Philip of Spain. It is also true that he delighted in the way Florence Nightingale and Gordon rebelled against the Victorian Establishment, social and political.

However, a major reason Strachey writes so well about Victorian Englishmen and women lies in the way his stern emotional and moral detachment from the age, born of his personal revolt against the values of his parents' generation, is so often counterbalanced by his equally warm pride in what he perceives as the continuity of the English tradition of independence and individualism. Strachey admires these two qualities in Victoria, Florence Nightingale, Gordon and Palmerston, just as he admires them in Elizabeth I. Conversely, it is Albert's "un-English" conventionality and blind subservience to what Strachey sees as Stockman's Germanic ideals which so alienates his affections from the Prince Consort.

The related English bourgeois virtues of energy and perseverance also consistently elicit an admiring response from Strachey. He is irresistably fascinated by the spectacle of Florence Nightingale working ceaselessly for over half a century "with all the devotion of her extraordinary nature" (E.V., p. 155), by Gordon, "the man of energy and action" (E.V., p. 236), by Victoria's "eager vitality" and "stamina" (Q.V., p. 174), and by Elizabeth, "the fierce old hen . . . brooding over the English nation whose pullulating energies were coming swiftly to ripeness and unity under her wing" (E & E., p. 16). He is even capable of being fascinated by the

utterly wrong-headed exertions of the romantic Earl of Essex. If Strachey is harsh in his assessment of the labours of Arnold and Albert, it is mainly because his hostility to the causes for which they worked overrides his admiration for their perseverance. Similarly, the conviction that Manning's energies were woefully misdirected, explains why Strachey is at least as repelled as attracted by the way his "powerful spirit . . . worked on undismayed through all the vicissitudes of his career" (E.V., p. 13).

Last, but by no means least, Strachey's attitude towards his subjects is strongly conditioned by the matter of their integrity in personal relationships. He despises the "diplomatic conscience" of Sir Evelyn Baring, and the way "blande suaviterque Dr Newman's spirit had been crushed" by Manning (E.V., p. 92). Equally, he applauds Essex's foolish loyalty to his friends, while deploring Francis Bacon's well-timed defections. Tellingly, his harshest criticism of Florence Nightingale is reserved for her ruthless exploitation of Sidney Herbert. Furthermore, it is the inhumane consequences of Victorian dogmatism as practised in the education of the Prince of Wales, or at Rugby, which distress Strachey most of all. Even though he ridicules Victoria's emotionalism as naive or misguided, he greatly prefers her instinctively compassionate nature

to Albert's less foolish restraint.

In sum, my study has revealed the complexity of the elements which contribute to Strachey's stance as a biographer in Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria, and Elizabeth and Essex. It has also shown how point of view is absolutely explicit in the narrative tactics Strachey adopts. I have argued throughout, that although it is rarely safe to accept the face value of what Strachey says, the evidence of these three works is that while he is frequently ironic, he is never covert about his allegiances. I disagree with the critics who, like Christopher Hollis, argue that Strachey is devious, accusing him of failing to warn the reader "when he is about to sing his siren song."[1] I concur with Scott-James' judgement: "We know well that Strachey was not, in his own mind, in the least detached; that he was really an ardent partisan . . ."[2]

Since objectivity was neither Strachey's ideal nor his practice, and since his biases are so clearly announced, the most pertinent question to ask about his writings is whether the intellectual and other qualifications he brings to the tasks of selection, arrangement and interpretation are equal to the subjects about whom he chooses to write. My contention has been that Strachey did not, on the whole, choose subjects that were unsuited to his talents or temperament. Certainly he had emotional, philosophical,

and moral blind spots, but as my analysis of his three major biographies has shown, these were a severe handicap only in the case of his portraits of Albert and Arnold. On the other hand, his astute choice of major subjects in his portraits of Manning, Florence Nightingale, Gordon, Victoria and Elizabeth enabled him to exploit to the full his natural affinity for subtle personalities, his fascination with dynamic individuals, his ambivalent but strong ties with the Victorian era, and his warm pride in his English heritage.

Only the spiritual dimension of his subjects' lives is manifestly outside the sphere of Strachey's sympathetic comprehension. It is true, for example, that he does not adequately recognize the part religion played in the lives of Florence Nightingale and Gordon.[3] On the other hand, Lord Elton's biography of Gordon, which does accord a central place to the latter's fervent Christianity, singularly fails to account for the impulses which led Gordon to the battlefields of China and the Sudan, or for Gordon's periodic bouts of deep melancholy.[4] The fact is that the forces which motivated the actions of leading Victorians were often complex, and sometimes contradictory. The recent publication of Gladstone's diaries reminds us that, in an age which placed a high value on social propriety, the upright public spokesman for Christian

morality and stalwart supporter of the virtues of family life all too often led another quite different existence in the shadowy but pervasive demi-monde of Victorian life. As a topic, the age of Victoria thus demands a combination of interests and sympathies scarcely considered compatible since that time. In fairness to Strachey, his writings do reveal a sensitivity to the irreconcilable tension between religious and secular values within Victorian society, his antipathy to conventional religious feeling notwithstanding.

This having been said, I believe that there is one aspect of Strachey's approach to his art which does place certain constraints on the universality of its appeal. Impressive as are Strachey's intellectual, emotional, and moral qualifications for his chosen tasks, the fact that his values are both overtly stated and central to his method, makes the question of shared assumptions between writer and audience of outstanding significance. Strachey's biographies are therefore peculiarly vulnerable to criticism from readers innately hostile to his ideas. This is particularly evident in the writings of critics such as Noel Annan, T. R. Barnes, F. R. Leavis, Dmitri Mirsky, Charles Smyth, Frank Swinnerton, Geoffrey Wagner, and Edmund Wilson, all of whom actively disliked Bloomsbury.[5] Furthermore, substantial changes in social attitudes may increase the number of such readers by widening the gap

between the "authorial audience" for whom Strachey wrote, and the "actual audience" of current readers.[6]

An acute gap between "authorial" and "actual" audiences is created by the intense clarity of the world view which informs Strachey's art. Certainty is not a fashionable state of mind in the 1970's. Even in 1932 Joseph Wood Krutch wrote: "Modern man is extraordinarily involved in things which he hopes, or senses, or half knows. He is aware of the inadequacy or incompleteness of his knowledge concerning things which he believes to be extremely important. Hence in his writings he is bound to be always qualifying and always inserting provisos. But all this, no matter how necessary it may be, is bad for his style. It clutters up his sentences and it blurs his effects. Strachey would have none of it." He concluded his assessment with the remark that in Strachey's work one is sure of finding "a beginning, a middle and an end, and no loose threads left dangling."[7] Few people today regard such clarity as a virtue, and many consider it at best a measure of naive optimism, at worst an expression of blind faith. Thus, in the most basic sense, Strachey's style of biography is currently "out of style".

Whatever one's response to the values which inform his writings, and whatever one's judgement of his subjects,

Strachey's great achievement is that he always challenges and stimulates his readers by the intensity and forcefulness of his insights. His most effective portraits, such as those of Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, General Gordon, and Queen Victoria, are those which cogently articulate his quintessentially ambivalent perception of the world, without either overpowering or belittling their subjects. Strachey's real contribution to biography is not his iconoclasm, but his disciplined and acknowledged subjectivity; the nearly complete integration of mind and art he attains in his best work.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER FIVE

[1]Christopher Hollis, "Elizabeth and Mr. Strachey," Dublin Review 186 (1930), 33.

[2]Scott-James, p.15. It is interesting that in his recent structuralist analysis of Eminent Victorians, Perry Meisel makes similar observations about Strachey's tactics (although from a different critical perspective), when he defines Strachey's method in terms of a "reflexive" counterplot. Perry Meisel, "Strachey's Counterplot," Structuralist Review 2 (1978), 3-12.

[3]See, by way of contrast, Cecil Woodham Smith's full analysis of Florence Nightingale's faith in Florence Nightingale (Glasgow: Collins, 1951; Fontana Books, 1964).

[4]Lord Elton, General Gordon (London: Collins, 1954).

[5]The writings of Noel Annan, T. R. Barnes, F. R. Leavis, Charles Smyth, and Edmund Wilson have already been referred to in the Introduction. See also: Dmitri Mirsky, The Intelligentsia of Great Britain (London: Gollancz, 1935); Frank Swinnerton, The Georgian Literary Scene, 1910-1935; A Panorama (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1934; 1951); and Geoffrey Wagner, "Bloomsbury

Revisited," Books and Bookman, 11 (1957), 12.

[6]The terms are those of Peter J. Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction: A Re-examination of Audiences," Critical Inquiry (Autumn 1977), pp.121-141.

[7]Joseph Wood Krutch "Lytton Strachey," The Nation (New York) 134 (1932), 200.

APPENDIX: NOTES CONCERNING SOME THEORETICAL PROBLEMS OF BIOGRAPHY AND ITS RELATION TO FICTION AND HISTORY.

As I discuss in the Introduction, criticism levelled against Strachey's undue subjectivity and disrespect for the facts helps to elucidate the premises of his art by drawing attention to his avowedly partisan conception of biography. His opinion that "any history worthy of the name is, in its own way, as personal as poetry"[1] has consistently provoked the wrath of professional historians. As recently as 1974, Ragnhild Hatton wrote of Eminent Victorians: "Here was a most unhistorical approach to the past, if not a guying of the personalities put under the microscope."[2] This kind of criticism raises important theoretical questions: not only about the role of partiality in historical writing but also about the validity of classifying literary genres on the basis of distinctions between "truth" and "fiction". In my view, to demand total objectivity from the historian is neither desirable nor feasible. Nor, despite their obvious appeal, do genre classifications based on distinctions between the factual and the fictive adequately reflect the diversity and complexity of the features which characterize non-fiction writing, especially in the fields of history and biography.

Warner Berthoff's article "Fiction, History, Myth"[3] may be quoted as a lucid representative of traditional genre criticism. Berthoff argues that fiction "describes

something made up", and that when we term a piece of writing fiction "we have in mind works about which we usually know (or would know if we had the evidence) who did the making up; we assume the presence, we recognise the workmanship, of an individual maker. His variations and elaborations on the story materials he exploits interest us as much, in reading, as the particular human action he rehearses." The term history, by contrast, "is reserved for that species of narrative in which we try to describe something that happened according to the discoverable testimony about it and by means of certifiable techniques for gathering and identifying such testimony." Berthoff concludes: "Ideally, then, history is descriptive, and its problem verification. Fiction is constitutive or inventive, and its problem is veracity. Both, as modes of narrative, are composed. But in the first case, the order of the narrative is meant to reveal a pre-existent order of actuality; in the second, though the narrative may imitate the form of a history, it is known from the first to be a particular writer's invention."

Unfortunately, the reality of human experience is not as tractable as the literary theorist might wish it to be. Even the simplest "facts" about people's lives may turn out to be more "fiction" than "fact". Georges Gusdorf tells a delightful story about the "truth" behind Lamartine's

avowedly autobiographical poem "La Vigne et La Maison". This poem describes Lamartine's childhood home and the vine growing up the front of the house. A historian discovered that no vine actually grew there at the time Lamartine was a child. The vine, it seems, was planted in later years by Madame Lamartine "pour reconciler la poésie et la verité." The moral of the tale, explains Gusdorf, is that in autobiography the factual truth is less important than the truth about the man.[4] Or to use Berthoff's terminology: the truth of Lamartine's poem resides in its veracity not in its verifiable historical accuracy.

In historical, as in autobiographical writing, literal truth is a questionable absolute. Much historical narrative, including some of the best, is neither solely descriptive nor solely concerned with verification. In his famous attack on "scissors and paste history" (which he defines as History constructed by excerpting and combining the testimonies of different authorities) Collingwood staunchly advocates the ideal of interpretative history, arguing that "the important question about any statement contained in a source is not whether it is true or false, but what it means."[5] I would further contend that interpretation is not only desirable, but also unavoidable, because historical

narratives are verbal structures, and language is an innately value-laden and connotative medium. As Hayden White has convincingly argued, all histories contain both a "manifest" or "surface" level (consisting of data, theoretical concepts for explaining them and a narrative structure for their presentation) and also a deeper "metahistorical" content which is "generally poetic and specifically linguistic in nature."[6] In addition, most of the "facts" in a historian's sources are in any case themselves embedded in words, and are thus already interpretation.

Although the essentially verbal nature of their dicipline has been largely ignored by historians, certain aspects of the so-called Speculative-Critical Dichotomy would in fact appear to derive their substance from the sharp division of philosophers of history into two opposing and, until comparatively recently, mutually exclusive camps: the one concerned with the totality of man's actions: the other with the verbal account we construct of such actions.[7]

The continuing critical preoccupation with literal truth in history, biography, and autobiography reflects the still powerful influence of certain aspects of nineteenth century thought: particularly the influence of "scientific history", with its conviction that social and psychological phenomena were subject to ascertainable laws and therefore,

on principle, subject to the systematic treatment of the natural sciences.[8] Leo Braudy, in his study of Hume, Fielding and Gibbon, notes that "in the course of the eighteenth century the factual world of historical interpretation and the fictive world of the novel gradually achieved more distinct identities."[9] By the end of the nineteenth, this trend towards what Russel B. Nye terms "the divorcement of history and literature"[10] had certainly become much more pronounced.

However, coincident with the nineteenth century's growing concern for morphology, other forces were shaping the direction of historical thinking:[11] most notably the movement which has since been labelled "Historicism". Rejecting the formulation of sets of human laws valid for all times and places, writers such as Dilthey, Meinecke and Croce viewed human nature in dynamic rather than static terms.[12] Consequently, as Calvin Rand observes: "Contextualism is an elemental historicist concept."[13]

Even by the early years of this century, historians were in strong reaction against the so-called objectivity of what Strachey's friend G. M. Trevelyan, in 1913, called "pseudo science".[14] Since Strachey's time, in a world increasingly unsure of absolutes, literal truth has become a less and less attractive critical concept. Twentieth

century novelists have written history into fiction, and biographers have produced fictional biographies.[15] Following Northrop Frye's pioneering work,[16] literary theorists have developed increasingly complex models of genre classification;[17] and interdisciplinary approaches to narrative have proliferated.[18] The most significant development in relation to the present study is the emergence of psychohistory.[19]

Writers on the Humanities have also gradually come to realize that the affinity between the methods of the social scientist and those of the natural scientist is greater than they have generally assumed. As Carroll Quigley, an eminent convert expresses it: "When my interests shifted from the physical sciences to the social sciences . . . I found a curious situation. The social scientists usually had erroneous ideas about the methods and theories of natural science, believing them to be rigid, exact, and invariable."[20]

In the field of historical biography, as in all areas of human endeavour, man's knowledge is in a state of perpetual flux. Fresh information and changing perspectives constantly create the necessity for reappraisal. As Emery Neff has aptly said: "The science of the human intellect means the history of the human intellect."[21] In the light of current literary practice and recent developments in genre theory, it seems neither feasible nor appropriate

to continue to uphold the old ideal of history as a completely factual and objective narrative which is absolutely and literally true.

Nevertheless, one important point remains to be made: the foregoing discussion is not intended as justification for a completely relativistic aesthetic. To argue that partiality is an inescapable feature of historical narrative is not to condone either the deliberate falsification of evidence or the wanton suppression of information. Rather, it is to argue the desirability of full acknowledgement, on the writer's part, of the nature and extent of his engagement with his subject. Biographers and historians do have an obligation not to intentionally misrepresent their materials. As Schoenbaum rightly remarks, in passing judgement on the notorious Victorian forger, John Payne Collier:

> He forged in deadly earnest, for glory, and staked his reputation on his 'discoveries'. He deserves the judgement, from De Quincey's Secret Societies, passed on him by the man who did as much as anyone to topple him: 'Now, reader, a falsehood is a falsehood, though uttered under circumstances of hurry and sudden trepidation; but certainly it becomes, though not more a falsehood, yet more

> criminally and hatefully a falsehood, when prepared from afar, and elaborately supported by fraud, and dove-tailing into fraud, and having no palliation from pressure and haste.[22]

In conclusion, it is worth reiterating, in the context of the above remarks, that a commendable feature of Strachey's biographical writing is the degree of certainty with which his criteria of selection may be inferred. As I comment at the outset of this study, Strachey's explicitly partisan tactics leave the reader in no doubt as to the highly personal nature of his art, and it is greatly to his credit that his biases are for the most part so clearly avowed, his espousal of causes so frankly admitted.

FOOTNOTES TO APPENDIX

[1]Lytton Strachey, Review of Guglielmo Ferrero's The Greatness and Decline of Rome, in The Spectator, 102 (1909), 20.

[2]Ragnhild Hatton, in a review article entitled "Biography by Non-Professional Historians," European Studies Review (July 1974), p.261.

[3]Warner Berthoff, "Fiction, History, Myth," Harvard English Studies 1: The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory and Practice, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp.265-276. The quotations which follow are from pp.269-70, 272.

[4]Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie," in Formen der Selbstdarstellung: Analekten zu einer Geschichte des literarischen Selbstportraits, ed., Reichenkron and Haase (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1956), p.118.

[5]R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (1946; Oxford University Press, 1956), pp.256, 260.

[6]Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1973), p.ix.

[7]For a succint summary of the Speculative-Critical controversy see W. H. Walsh, Philosophy of History: An Introduction (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), esp. pp.9-28.

[8]This type of "scientific history" is, of course, most strongly identified with the work of Ranke.

[9]Leo Braudy, Narrative Form in History and Literature: Hume, Fielding, and Gibbon (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp.4-5.

[10]Russel B. Nye, "History and Literature: Branches of the Same Tree," Robert H. Bremner, ed. Essays on History and Literature (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966), p.126.

[11]These divergent streams of nineteenth century historical thought are well represented in anthologies such as Patrick Gardiner's Theories of History (New York: Free Press, 1959).

[12]See, for example, Friedrich Meinecke's classic work: Historicism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook, trans. J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

[13]Calvin G. Rand, "The Meaning of Historicism in the Writings of Dilthey, Troeltsch and Meinecke," Journal of The History of Ideas, 25 (1964), p.517. See also Robert A. Pois, "Two Poles Within Historicism," Journal of the History of Ideas, 31 (1970), pp.253-272.

[14]G. M. Trevelyan, "Clio, a Muse," in Clio, a Muse, and Other Essays (London and New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1930).

[15]See, for example: Richard Adams, The Plague Dogs (Penguin Books, 1978), and Norman Mailer, Marilyn: a Biography (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973).

[16]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[17]Hernadi, for example, partly bases his case for "polycentric classifications" on the argument that we need several systems of co-ordinates in the more-than-three dimensional universe of verbal art. Paul Hernadi,

Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), Chapter 5.

[18]See for example:

Elizabeth and Tom Burns, eds., Sociology of Literature and Drama: Selected Readings (Penguin Books, 1973).

Jacques Ehrmann, ed., Structuralism (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1970).

Norman N. Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Simon O. Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1970).

[19]For a comprehensive review of the field, see Donna Arzt, "Psychohistory and Its Discontents," Biography 1:3 (1978), pp.1-36.

[20]Carroll Quigley, "Scientific Method and the Social Sciences," in The Evolution of Civilizations (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p.2.

[21]Emery Neff, The Poetry of History: The Contribution of Literature and Literary Scholarship to the Writings of

History since Voltaire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), p.156.

[22] Samuel Schoenbaum, Shakespeare's Lives (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.332-3.

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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that Strachey's writings are an extremely direct expression of his aesthetic, philosophical and moral vision, the main focus of this study is on point of view in his three major biographies. The emphasis on close textual analysis is directed towards a definition of the elements which characterize his art, and is allied to an interest in underlying issues of genre; particularly the inter-relationship of history and biography.

My study shows that Eminent Victorians, Queen Victoria and Elizabeth and Essex are all characterized by apt organization, coherent formal structures, a skilful control of pace, and a fluent prose style. However, as the case of Elizabeth and Essex graphically illustrates, the criteria by which we judge a piece of writing to be an effective narrative are in themselves insufficient to judge its merits as biography. The author's stance is always crucial in determining the effectiveness of his art, but the intersection of biographer and subject assumes particular significance in the case of a writer such as Strachey, whose writings bear so forceful an impress of his personality and values.