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Lytton Strachey, A Rebellious Man of Peculiarity: A Review of Holroyd's Lytton Strachey: The New Biography

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ABSTRACT

Lytton Strachey: The New Biography is an important biography by Michael Holroyd, portraying the extraordinary life of Lytton Strachey, who is also a biographer, in detail. Based on reading the text of Lytton Strachey: The New Biography, this paper analyzes Lytton Strachey's most distinct character - rebel combined with the social background and the theory of "the New Biography" in three aspects. First, Strachey's rebellious character in his daily life is analyzed. His beating falsetto, ironic tone and ambiguous silence make him mysterious; his unique dressing style makes him different in the Victorian Age when people tended to wear similar clothes with others in dark suits; and at this time people were all optimistic because of their powerful country while Strachey was always surrounded by a mysterious pessimistic air. Second, Strachey's view of love is analyzed. He had a strong tendency of homosexual and most of his lovers in his life were males. While, in the Victorian Age, homosexual was illegal. Under the pressure of morality and law, Strachey still followed his heart and fell in love with his boys. His life interprets what love really is — his love is a kind of humanistic love, rather than simple lust. Third, this paper analyzes Strachey's feminist and religious view. He was one of the supporters and participants of the feminist movement in the 19th century. In the society which was dominated by males, Strachey realized that human are born equally. Therefore, he started to fight for the females' rights. In addition, in order to think independently, Strachey did not follow the crowds blindly to believe in God.

Keywords: Conduct, Feminist View, Love, Rebel, Strachey.

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1. Introduction

Lytton Strachey: The New Biography is one of the greatest English biography. Its author, an intelligent modern biographer Michael Holroyd, portraits the extraordinary life of Lytton Strachey, who is also a biographer, in detail. As the father of "the New Biography", after James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, Strachey creates a subversive trend of biography. Therefore, Strachey is an eminent

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figure in the history of literature. As the heir of “the New Biography”, Holroyd provokes a new trend of biographical revolution, for he characterizes his biographies by focusing on the description of the personality of the biographical subject and the background of the time. In *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, Strachey’s rebellious character is clearly described by Holroyd.

1.1 Lytton Strachey’s life

Lytton Strachey: A New Biography portrays the life of Lytton Strachey comprehensively.

Giles Lytton Strachey was born at Stowey House, Clapham Common on March 1, 1880. During his childhood, his fascinate imagination and talents started to show out. He always told bizarre stories in his mind and his mother Lady Strachey claimed that “Giles is the most ridiculous boy I ever saw” (Holroyd, 1995:4) and his little brother called him “the little funny creature”. In the summer of 1886, he was sent to the Hyde Park Kindergarten School by his mother who highly valued the education for her children. And from then on, the school life of Strachey began. Before collage, Strachey attended in a serious of schools: about 1887, he found his enthusiasm to French in his first school the Hyde Park, where he was initiated by Marrie Souvestre into French and French literature; then, he entered Parkstone probably in the summer term of 1889 (see Holroyd, 1995:22) where he started to form his unique style, showed his special gift for literature and formed the feminine part in his character because of his impersonating many female roles in the school’s plays; on September 1893, Strachey was sent to a new school- Abbotsholme where he suffered from lots of manual works; because of his ill body, Strachey transferred to Leamington College and was bullied there when he was a freshman. After he adapted to the atmosphere there, he started to show his literary talent and experienced the first awakening of love which was quite Platonic and from then on, the thirst for love haunted his whole life. Strachey was a brilliant student and always did good work at examinations. As Holroyd recorded in the book, Strachey had confidently claimed that “it is AGAINST HIS PRINCIPLE to fail in an examination” (Holroyd, 1995:43). However, after he graduated from the next school Liverpool, his confidence in examination was always frustrated. The first failure was in the Christ church school examination of Oxford. Nevertheless, by chance he noticed that Cambridge was more suitable for him. Therefore, he entered Trinity and branded as a “Cambridge man” during his whole life. In Cambridge, he formed the Midnight Society with his friends, joined the Apostles and gained life-long friends. He much adored the cultural atmosphere in Cambridge, read and discussed questions with his kindred friends. He gained his name in Cambridge quickly, partly because of his strange appearance and ironic tone, partly because of his outstanding brilliance. And even, he won the Chancellor’s Medal for his “Ely: An Ode” (Holroyd, 1995:71). It was his best time. When achieving graduation, he wrote to Leonard Woolf, “after Cambridge, blank, blank, blank” (Holroyd, 1995:75). Despite his great adoration for Cambridge, his mood is always pessimistic. His failure continued: his job hunting for Civil Service failed; his essay on Warren Hasting failed to win the Greaves Prize twice; his reckless love to Duncan Grant was betrayed and he lived in poverty until the great success of the publication of *Eminent Victorians* when he was 38.

Holroyd found that, after Strachey had graduated from Cambridge, without a secure job, he worked for both St Loe Strachey’s *Spector* and Desmond MacCarthy’s *New Quarterly* (Holroyd, 1995:126). Because of his exquisite skill of writing and voluminous knowledge of French and French literature, he was required to write a book for the history of French literature. Then he composed *Landmarks in French Literature*. After that came the World War II. As a firm pacifist, Strachey strongly rejected the conscription and refused to do anything that might help the war to continue. And because of his revolt and agitative pamphlet, he was even sent to the Hampstead Tribunal. But finally, he won the game. During the war time, with the inspiration of writing a biography for the influential Victorians, Strachey started to study and dig the large amount of historical material of the Victorian Age. With his hard work, the *Eminent Victorians* came out. It was the first real success Strachey had achieved. Encouraged by the success of *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey started his next biography — *Queen Victoria*, which was also a great success. However, the later *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History* was not highly praised. And also, Strachey had composed many criticisms, prose, poems and several dramas during his life time.

Strachey’s illness accompanied him during his whole life. In 1931, his health declined quickly. Unlike the longevous Stracheys, Strachey died of gastric carcinoma on 21 January 1932 surrounded by his closest friends.

1.2 The study of Lytton Strachey and *Lytton Strachey: The new biography*

As the father of “the New Biography”, Lytton Strachey is often concerned by biographical critics. Michael Holroyd is also a leading figure of modern biography, and his work *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* is under great attention.

American scholar Charles Sanders’s *Lytton Strachey: His Mind and Art* analyzes Strachey’s personality and his work from the view of the new biography. In Julie Anne Taddeo’s *Lytton Strachey and the Search for Modern Sexual Identity: The Last Eminent Victorian*, Taddeo compares the difference between modern and Victorian regimes. In Roy Halttersley’s *a Polemic Against Greed and Religion*, Roy Halttersley and Jason Cowley explains that, Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* was a powerful attack to the decadent traditions.

In china, in *Lytton Strachey and “the New Biography”*, taking Strachey as a typical example, Tang Xiumin studies “the new biography” from the historical perspective. She concludes the influences of Moore’s ethicism, Roger Fry’s asceticism and Dostoyevsky and Freud’s psychoanalysis on “the new biography” and mainly analyzes the rebellious and experimental characters of “the new biography”. In her another book *The History of the Development of English Biography*, she concludes the development of the new biography and analyzes Strachey and Holroyd’s writing skills and their influence. In Zhao Baisheng’s *A Theory of Auto/Biography*, he introduces the theory of “the New Biography” and analyzes the traits of it and Strachey’s works. In *A Modern Poetics of Biography*, professor Yang Zhengrun analyzes the biographical theory in taking Strachey and his works as examples. He finds that Strachey has focused on the interpretation of the heroes and their humanity in using the artistic skill of writing, psychoanalysis and material selecting. And also, Yang Zhengrun concludes that, although *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* is treated as a great inheritance of Strachey’s “the New Biography”, it has violated one of the most important rules of Strachey – briefness, for it is nearly as long as the total length of Strachey’s 3 biographies.

Above all, scholars mainly focus on the breakthrough of Lytton Strachey and his works not only in literature, but also in morality and the traits of new biographies. Although the study of “the New Biography” is hot and becoming a new trend, the researches of the leading figures such as Lytton Strachey and Michael Holroyd and their works are very limited. And most of the interrelated materials of studying *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* are only introductory articles. Because of the lack of studies, based on close reading and the theory of biography, that is, biography is the representation of personality, the present paper will probe into reading the text of *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, aiming at analyzing the rebellious character of the biographical subject mainly in three aspects: his life style, his view of love, and his feminist and Religious view.

2. Lytton Strachey’s life style

As an outstanding man of rebellious character, Lytton Strachey shows his individuality in every aspect of his life: he speaks in an ironic way and his penetrating voice strengthens his tone; he dresses differently and has formed his unique dressing style in an early age; he is much taller and thinner than the ordinary with a beard which is a symbol of his “more challenging attitude to life” (Holroyd, 1995:231). His life is permeated with pessimism. However, he never stopped fighting with the inequalities in the society. In his own way, Strachey conflicts with the ordinary restrictions of standards and tastes and brings a new trend.

2.1 The conduct in daily life: Talking style and dressing style

“The Strachey’s are most strongly the children of their fathers, not their mothers” (Holroyd, 1995:3). At the very beginning of *Lytton Strachey: A New Biography*, Holroyd quotes Amy St Loe Strachey’s words. The Strachey family is a unique one. Its inheritance of agnate part is extremely dominated, so that whoever Mr. Strachey married, their children are all Strachey-liked. The family members are all mavericks in a Stracheyesque way with high intelligence. Certainly, Strachey has all the characteristics of the Strachey family.

“Since most of the Strachey’s had peculiarly penetrating voice, and Lady Strachey’s children inherited all her Scottish love of argument, the general volume of noise, or turmoil and excited chatter at these weekly gatherings was terrific”(Holroyd, 1995:13).

Strachey was not an exception. He inherited all these traits of voice and talking style and developed it into his unique style. By the autumn of 1895 when Strachey was 15 and at the time he was allowed to be the head of his house. At that time, he started to find that his voice was agile but it was not always convenient to use, for it sometimes went very low and sometimes very high, and it could alarm the congregation. In the role of a house leader, he started to know how to control his voice and made full use of his words. In this way, gradually, Strachey attained maturity.

During the period of preparing for his university life, Strachey suffered from the extreme loneliness, after leaving Leamington Collage. His desire for comradeship was extremely intense. On the contrary, he mistrusted strangers and hardly made any friends. He could not adapt to the new circumstance, for he was always bad at it, and rejected all the strangers around. In considering their mediocrity, Strachey felt superior to the strangers around him. Therefore, at the age of seventeen, he already had the thought of jeering at people to make them feel embarrassed. This is the embryo of his ironic tone, which became a powerful “arm” for his debates.

Strachey’s life was filled with debates. Influenced by the disputative character of his mother, his skill of debate developed in a very early age. And during his school years, he attended lots of debating society and debates and also argued with the members of the cultural groups, which he belonged to, on topics they were interested in. Therefore, the debating style penetrated in his talking styles. Strachey was not talkative, but his quick mind and ironic tone could always help him to get to point quickly when he was discussing. And because of that, his ability of thinking independently developed quickly. It pushed him to dig new ideas and rebel to the old traditions.

When Strachey entered Cambridge, his personality and talking habit became steady and mature. As Holroyd put in the book, he objected the opposite idea in using his falsetto voice to cry out “Utterly ridiculous” (Holroyd, 1995: 93). However, Lady Ottoline Morrell felt that, Strachey was shy because he did not talk much and thought in an unordinary way. And he spoke in a low and faint voice that made Morrell feel a far distance from him, but his stress of tone was very definite. Partly because of his illness, Strachey was too weak to speak loud. And with his inborn shrilly voice, or in other words, beating falsetto and ironic tone, Strachey was distinguished by his unique talking style — a non-mainstream manner which gained himself much prejudice.

Another unique Stracheyesque characteristic, which could be classified as talking style, was their silence. As Holroyd recorded that, when Lady Strachey’s children invited a friend to have lunch in 69 Lancaster Gate, where a bunch of Stracheys lived in, none of them would pay any attention to the guest. Holroyd described the scene in the book: “Innumerable Stracheys would sit in solemn silence round the dinner table, Sir Richard wrapped in a shawl at the centre of them reading a novel, and everything proceeded with a ceremonious absence of communication” (Holroyd, 1995:13). And When Holroyd interviewed James Strachey for *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, he found that James shared many of Strachey’s qualities — humor, depth and especially ambiguity of silence that James produced spontaneously confused Holroyd a lot.

In all Stracheyesque traits, the most dismaying part is their silence. Strachey completely inherited the silence from his family and made it more ambiguous. His silence also disconcerted E.M. Forster. As Forster recalled, the alarming silence of Strachey, spread like an eiderdown over frivolous chatter, and the piercing little shrieks with which he would greet any vaguely mystical observation unnerved Forster who was already, as Maynard Keynes described him, “the elusive colt of a dark horse” (Holroyd, 1995:70). The ambiguous silence made Strachey become more mysterious, inexplicable and inaccessible. In his later years, it also terrified Carrington and made her fail to guess Strachey’s real thoughts.

Because of the beating falsetto, ironic tone, debating style and spontaneous ambiguous silence, Strachey’s presence always makes others feel uncomfortable easily. Unlike the ordinaries who would at least try to pretend to be polite and gain others’ adoration and respect, Strachey never cares about the critiques from others. He follows his heart and is always straightforward to the point. He tears off the covers of hypocrisy and falsehood which most people hold tightly, and tries to show the real personality he has. The Victorian age is a glorious time, the success of the UK makes people become more vainglory than ever before. They want to be perfect men in others’ eyes while they could not get rid of the selfish desire in the heart. Therefore, under the superficial appearance of politeness, gentleness, gratefulness and nobility which they pretend to be, their inner hearts which are full of

selfishness, greed and desire have already rotten. Under this mainstream of always “pretending” to be nice, Strachey stands out to face up to humanity and human beings — the combination of virtue and weakness. Instead of always saying big words of blindly praising, in his shrilly voice, Strachey forces people to see what the world really is.

When Strachey was 4 years old, his family moved to 69 Lancaster Gate which was built for all brunches of the clan. The Strachey was a big family, and the most distinct thing was that, it had a large quantity of paternal members. Uncles of Strachey were all outstanding Mr. Stracheys. They read, discussed and played music and influenced Strachey in their own Stracheyesque way. Among these uncles, the most outlandish one was William Strachey. Holroyd found that, at the age of 70 William impressed his nine-year-old nephew Strachey as being an utterly fantastic figure, dressed always in spats and a coat and waistcoat of quaint cut and innumerable buttons — the very same that he might have worn in the 1840s — and, whatever the weather, attired in a pair of galoshes (see Holroyd, 1995:12). This is the beginning of Strachey’s unique dressing style. In addition, when Strachey was young, his mother always dressed him in petticoats, for she thought Strachey was more suitable for that than the knickerbockers. And this also contributed to Strachey’s feminist style in his character and dressing style.

As Holroyd wrote in this biography, in May 1919, when Max Beerbohm first caught sight of Strachey, he saw “an emaciated face of ivory whiteness above a long square-cut auburn beard, and below a head of very long sleek dark brown hair. The nose was nothing if not aquiline, and Mature had chiseled it with great delicacy. The eyes, behind a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, eyes of an inquirer and cogitator, were large and brown and luminous... He wore a jacket of brown velveteen, a soft shirt, and a dark red tie” (Holroyd, 1995:250). Unlike other Victorian man who always wore in dark color, Strachey always dressed in a bright way. Holroyd also found that, once Ottoline pictured that when Strachey was prancing the streets, he was flaunting a purple coat with green velvet collar (see Holroyd, 1995:254); and once on his travels, he sported a conspicuous yellow coat worn over a new suit of “mouse-coloured corduroys” and a bright orange waistcoat (see Holroyd, 1995:265). And even, on hot summer days, he would appear in an enormous sun-hat and wear baggy trousers (see Holroyd, 1995:538). In the Victorian age, men’s clothes got rid of the chains of the gorgeous French style and started to become neat, formal and make them look gentle. And during that time, the clothes with lattice and stripe were treated as bagger or fraud’s suits (see Chen, 2005, 37). Under the social circumstance that people tended to wear similar clothes with others in dark suits and unremarkable color to hide their identity, Strachey did not follow the suit. He pursued his personality and dressing style firmly. Even his mother was influenced by him. As Holroyd recorded in *Lytton Strachey*, Lady Strachey grew more “advanced” in her old age than she had been in her youth —for Strachey was partly responsible (see Holroyd, 1995:6). And Sir George Stowell, as a member of the elder generation, was also inspired by Strachey’s “daunting” appearance.

Strachey was always taller than his peers. Holroyd described little Strachey as “tall for his age and terribly thin, he looked odd but was not unpopular with the boys” (Holroyd, 1995:23). As he grew up, his long figure still remained as his most distinct symbol. The long body, which had for years proved such an embarrassment to him, was more coordinated, his ungainliness manipulated into part of a stylized personality. The extraordinary figure and dressing style made him look more wired. What’s more, after graduated from Cambridge, Strachey lived in an instable life. When he finally dropped out of the idea of using marriage to get a settled life, he started to grow his beard for he regarded it as a sign of his more challenging attitude to life (see Holroyd, 1995:231). With the long body and conspicuous beard, and colorful clothes, Strachey became a more different figure.

In the involuntary intention to the formal, neat and simple mainstream clothes, Strachey’s unique dressing style reflects his rebel to the mainstream customs directly. In the Victorian age when people tended to look same and unremarkable, Strachey’s presence, whatever in street or drawing-room, lifted the new taste to a new plane and raised a kind of new caricatural interest.

2.2 Pessimistic mood of life

“We begin life in a very odd manner — like shipwrecked sailor. The world is our desert island.” Lytton Strachey wrote to Leonard Woolf in July 1904 (Holroyd, 1995:2).

Holroyd wrote in *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* as follows: “In Lytton Strachey’s life,

comedy and tragedy were not separated, nor does his sense of humor imply a lack of seriousness — indeed quite the contrary” (Holroyd, 1995: XXXI). Though his sisters remembered Strachey was a fairly little boy who always giggling during the age of 3 and 19, he was always surround with darker emotions. Strachey explained that, it was better to explain it as the restriction and oppression rather than unhappiness. Pressed by the somber atmosphere of Lancaster Gate, Strachey always felt oppressed and could not cheer his heart up. As he entered school, because of his incapacity of adaptability, he was afraid of the new circumstance and always in solitary. Like his appearance, his mind is also more mature than his peer. With a clear understanding of the then society and life, Strachey’s realistic view always makes him feel pessimistic. However, traveling and literature give him a great relief. When he was young, the most pleasurable experience of him was traveling. He spent holidays in the Scottish Highlands, visited the sea a lot for his mother thought the effects of Victorian marine air could benefit him, visited his Uncle Charlie in Gibraltar and went to Egypt with Charlie’s family, and traveled in France and Italy a lot for he loved its cultural atmosphere. The beautiful scenes and exotic culture satisfied him and provoked his desire to writing.

What’s more, the Great War strengthened Strachey’s pessimistic mood. However, fortunately, his rebel heart of fighting against the unfairness and wrong-doings in society never declined. He joined in the feminist movement to fight for women’s suffrage, wrote pamphlet against conscription for he thought it would push the progress of the war, objected to autocracy, and also, refused to add politic elements in his literary writing. His body was still sick but his estheticism to literature never faded. In his point of view, life had always been utterly dull and punctuated by hectic frenzies, as he wrote to Carrington on his 42nd birthday, but his love to his friends and lovers was always positive. Therefore, it was still reasonable to believe that, although Strachey’s life was filled with the taste of pessimism, Strachey’s love to life was not weaker than anyone. As he believed that, the most important thing in the world is passion. Definitely, he had.

During the 19th century, the two industrial revolutions first have finished in the UK, the London International Exhibition of 1851 has held and the UK has gained its name as “the empire in which the sun never sets”. With the rising of the UK, she establishes hegemony all around the world. At that time, because of the success of their country, the English men are all optimistic with a great confidence. However, compared with the high spirit of the Victorian age, Strachey is a queer man. Unlike most people who have high spirits in the Victorian age, Strachey is easy to feel pessimistic. Though he has got relief in traveling and writing, it never “cures” his pessimistic mind. He always holds sentimental emotions and is easily influenced by the environment. The pessimistic air surrounds him and never liberates his spirits. But his pessimism is not like most of the pessimists, for it never weakens his desire to change the decadent society and customs. His particular pessimism makes his character more unique and reinforces his rebellious traits.

3. Lytton Strachey’s view of love

Lytton Strachey is a humanist, for he holds humanistic love to human. During his life time, he fell in love with many people and most of them were men. Of course, he could be declared as a homosexual. However, his love to his lovers is out of their merits and personality, not only sexual attraction. In his love affairs, he shows his humanistic love to humanity and human kind, especially in his love with Dora Carrington. When *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* comes out, Strachey’s homosexuality and unconstrained love crashes the traditional morality and astonishes the world. In his days when homosexual was illegal, Strachey’s love to his lovers was brave and rebellious. Although it is prohibited by the law, Strachey still fell in love with his boy’s remediless.

3.1 Homosexuality

Lytton Strachey is a homosexual for his stronger sexual attraction of the same sex than the opposite sex. Unlike most men who love to filter with females, Strachey always felt uneasy when he talked to women. In his love experience, most of his lovers are males, such as Thoby Stephen, John Sheppard, Arthur Hobhouse, Benard Sweinthinbank, Duncan Grant, Henry Lamb, Ralph Partridge, Roger Senhouse and so on.

As a homosexual, Strachey always paid highly attention to the legitimate rights, equal

treatment and rational cognition of the minor group. When he was in Cambridge, he reprinted the history of the Apostles and dug their potential homosexuality to fight against the Victorian morality. Strachey could not speak out his sexuality publicly, but he could confine it in the letters and his groups: he wrote love letters to his lovers, composed love poems and confined his feeling to his close friends. At his time, if a male was found homosexual, he would be thrown into prison for two years' imprisonment with hard labor. What's more, some homosexuals had an inhumane medical treatment to "cure" the homosexuality which was accepted as a disease. After the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde, the homosexuals became more notorious. They were treated as perversion, lunatic, and always looked down upon, discriminated and discarded by the society. However, Strachey loved his boys sincerely, deeply and boldly. He knew what love really was and so that he could persist to love his lovers and never change his sexual orientation for he loved the person rather than their sex. Holroyd recorded that, at the last part of Strachey's life, he determined to "write a biography then 'burn his boats' by declaring his homosexuality and campaigning for sexual egalitarianism — even if it meant casting drift from society and living abroad" (Holroyd, 1995:632). And as Holroyd revealed Strachey and his friends' homosexuality to the world, many people thought it was a great progress to humanity, for it was a liberation of love and sex. On the contrary, some enthusiasts put that, Holroyd showed us the humanity by depicting how far degradation can go. Homosexuality is not on its way to civilization or ration and it is the most sordid trick ever created by human beings: it is an anti-social movement that could cause cancer.

"Keeping away from the social circumstance, if we are in a society which all the social problems are connected with moral, it is ineludible to use moral dogma to treat sexual problems" (Briggs, 2015:314). Victorian Age is such a time. However, Strachey believes that the change is based on the need of people. Holroyd reveals that, living in Victorian time, Strachey wishes for a New Age, which could cure all their woes, give them new ones, and make them happy enough for death (Holroyd, 1995:87). Strachey is a rebel. He never follows the customs and respects the real desire in his heart, even though his wish cannot accomplish when he was alive.

3.2 Love

As Holroyd wrote in the book, Clive Bell once wrote that, "To anyone who knew him [Strachey] well, it is obvious that love and lust and that mysterious mixture of the two which is the heart's desire played in his life parts of which a biographer who fails to take account will make himself ridiculous" (Holroyd, 1995:XII).

Strachey's desire for love haunted his whole life. In the book, Holroyd focused on the emotional experiences of Strachey and his friends. Under the law of monogamy, people highly praised loyalty to their partners. As for Strachey, his loyalty had manifested in another way: it was not to the single person, but to love. The emotional part of Strachey's life was never peaceful, not only for his sexual drive, but also for his humanistic love to human. After the unrequited love at Leamington, Strachey was attracted by the masculinity of Thoby Stephen, the theatricality of John Sheppard, the charming facial expression of Arthur Hobhouse, the wonderful and massive frame of Benard Sweinthinbank, an ideal union of sex and affection, fantasy and companionship of Duncan Grant and so on in sequence. And even, Strachey was involved in the triangle relationship twice — once with Ottline and Henry Lamb, another with Dora Carrington and Ralph Partridge. Strachey was amorous, but he was not a playboy. His love was quite platonic, vehement, sincere, deep and loyal. His figure did not attract much people but his intelligence was extremely adorable. Usually, he would fall in love with the person who had the opposite personality with him, for he did not like his own. And, he would domesticate his lovers to match with his ideal type as well, such as he had led the way of Ralph Partridge, who was supposed to be completing his law studies, to literature. On the other hand, in all his infatuations, Strachey was trying to "relinquish his own personality and assume the identity of the person loved" (Holroyd, 1995:131).

In addition, Strachey's desire for love was only limited in the love affairs. As Holroyd wrote in the book, when Strachey was studying in Leamington Collage, his life was in blank and loneliness. As he confined himself, he wanted an intimate companion "for affection, an answering smile, the eye that understood and the secret touch of someone special" (Holroyd, 1995:42). And fortunately, he got the companion in Cambridge and the Bloomsbury Group.

When Strachey was getting older, he loved to stay with young people who could help him to forget his “antique spirit”. During that period, he met Dore Carrington, the young painter. Carrington was deeply fallen in love with Strachey and also, Strachey adored the boy-liked Cardington a lot. And then came Ralph Partridge who fell in love at the first sight with Carrington and attracted Strachey a lot. They three all held a completed love towards each other, as a result, their triangle relationship formed. Sometimes, Strachey felt sexual attraction from Carrington. But most of time, he played a paternal role in her life. He gave her advices when she was in trouble, he completely understood her emotions especially the love to him. And even when he was dying, he comforted her by saying the words: “Dear Carrington. I love her. I always wanted to marry Carrington, and I never did” (Holroyd, 1995: 678). That moved Carrington a lot for she knew Strachey well that he would never marry with anyone and she never wished to marry him because it was a too extravagant hope.

For Strachey, love was the things that he could not write down during his whole life. Holroyd claimed that, another word could define their situation better: attachment, for “they were attached to one another by many ties of understanding, affection, need” (Holroyd, 1995: 546). Strachey’s love is not the simple sexual attraction, not because the person is a male or female, what he had loved was his or her personality, individuality, merits, brilliance, beautiful figure and temperament. He loved the person because who they really were. Unlike most people in the society who pursuit a stable marriage and love in life, Strachey follows his heart and free his love. The essence of Strachey’s love is a kind of humanistic love, for he loves mankind and humanity. In the age when love could never be spoken out, Strachey breaks the ice. He respects human’s natural desire for love and follows his heart. He breaks up with the Victorian creed of oppressing love between common people and shows the way to freedom.

4. Lytton Strachey’s feminist and religious view

As a man with strong feminist view, Lytton Strachey rebels the Victorian creeds violently. Surrounded by many brilliant women, Strachey holds a strong respect to females in his mind. He joins in the feminist movements, equally treats them and even forms a strong feminist element in his character. As for his religion, Strachey is baptized and educated as a Christian. However, he is much unlike a religious believer. He never goes to church for keeping his independent mind and his desire for romantic love and his sexuality completely betray the doctrine of Christianity. In his rebel to the traditional morality and customs, Strachey promotes the establishment of the modern moral standard.

4.1 Feminist view

Strachey’s character is strongly dominated by a mysterious feminine part. When he was a child, he spent most of his time with his mother and sisters who were enjoyed dressing him as a girl. A remained photography of Strachey, taken when he was about 3 years old, showed a beautiful little “girl” with longhair in a dress. Surrounded by some females, Strachey grew up. When he entered Parkstone, he was active in the plays of school. With his talent in performance, Strachey played many parts of female, such as Romeo, and leaved a strong impression on all his teachers and schoolmates as a “fascinating female”. As Holroyd found that, Strachey’s impersonation of female parts was specially convincing and sometimes over flowed into real life (see Holroyd, 1995:24). It was true. When he dressed in short skirt, cape and bonnet to pretend to be “Miss Miller” on weekends, all people there were confused. And even sometimes, he said and did all the things that women could do as if he was a woman. In the view of his objectors, Strachey was always a bitchy woman with beard. Therefore, as a man who was lacking of masculinity, his womanized personality became a much rebellious character of himself.

Strongly influenced by the females, especially by his mother Lady Strachey who was an open-minded feminist, unlike most men in the 19th century, although Strachey was not good at getting acquaintance with women, he was not a sexist and had a strong respect for the females. And also because of Marie Souvestre’s long-lasting influence, during Strachey’s adulthood, when he was nearly critical to every person around him, he never talked about “the great females” cynically. Holding the idea that the rights of vote should be given to women, Strachey joined the nation-wide campaign for the emancipation of women and was a member of the men’s league for the promotion of female suffrage. During the World War II, the females started to play an important role in social life: some of

them were trained as nurse and sent to the front line, some worked for arsenals, and some were employed by services which never employed the females before (see Briggs, 2015:336). From then on, the society started to realize that, the role of women was becoming more and more important than ever before. And also because of the efforts of the large number of feminists, finally, in 1918, women gained their voting limited rights — the female householders and the wives of the male householders who are aged over 30 could vote equally as men (Briggs, 2015:336).

As a firm supporter of feminist movement, Strachey shows his rebel to the parental society. In Victorian age, the society is still dominated by the males and the females could hardly get their rights. However, under this main trend, Strachey realizes that, human beings are born equally, whatever men or women. Without prejudice to the sex, Strachey could see the charm and brilliance of women and use his tenderness to complete the life of ladies who surrounded him, especially Dore Carrington and Virginia Woolf. He cares about Carrington as a parental role and loves her in a more than sexual way; he praises the intelligence of Virginia and comforts her as a spiritual friend. He treats them equally and opposes to the unfair circumstance of social life. In his special way, he fights against the old doctrine to free women. And also, it is his way to liberate humanity and promote social progress.

4.2 Religious view

In the biography, Holroyd wrote that Strachey's mother, Lady Strachey, was brought up as a Christian. However, when she was nine-year-old, she read John Stuart Mill's work—*On Liberty*, and changed to a fervent disciple of him. She did not go to church and was open-minded; she read books with obscure plots to her children when they were still in their early age. Her influence on Strachey was long lasting. Although she sent Strachey to the school which focused on the Christian education, Strachey was still like an aggressive pagan. Another influential figure who affected Strachey's religious thoughts deeply was Marie Souvest. She was "a declared atheist, a humanist and, in politics, a fervently pro-Boer" (Holroyd, 1995:16). Though she never attempted to indoctrinate Strachey, she influenced him imperceptibly and especially responsible for Strachey's anti-religious convictions.

Holroyd wrote in the book that, once Strachey confined to Virginia, he was not a Christian, and fortunately, he never believed in God and he thought the whole paraphernalia of prayer was one of the weirdest things in human psychology. Unlike most of the Victorians who believed in God, Strachey seems to have no religious believes. He did not believe in Christianity or the Roman Church, and even acted like a radical who was strongly against the religious doctrines. As Holroyd recorded in *Lytton Strachey*, when Strachey was in Leamington, once he wrote in his diary: "We've had rather a painful missionary down here, converting us to the true faith! He religiously presented me with tracts, which I religiously presented to the waste paper basket! The general opinion here is that the man has done more harm than good by making the boys think of things they would never have before, and which they'd do very well without" (Holroyd, 1995:38). However, his religious opinion eased in his old age. He did not consider Christianity as a monstrous enemy of humanity any more, and thought it was a spent force: "no longer controversial or even interesting" (Holroyd, 1995:539). And obviously, Strachey was not a puritan, for he had confided that compared with Puritanism, he was rather like to stand on the side of anarchism.

Strachey is an individualist, a pacifist and a humanist. When considering questions, he is based more on moral consideration than religious consideration. During the World War II, Strachey strongly opposed the conscription and because of the opposition, he was brought to trial. As Holroyd recorded that, on the trial he said, he would not violate his own moral standard that he would never took part in any conceivable war. And as for the conscription, it would make more people join in the war. Hiding by the pretext of patriotism, the essence of conscription enlarged the scale of the war. Out of the humanistic love of human, Strachey never joined in the conscription for he wanted to stop the slaughter in every way.

Strachey is not a religious believer, but he has his moral standard as his faith. He does not believe in Christianity or Catholicism, because he thinks belief is a manacle of humanity. In the society of the majority are Christians, as an irreligious man, Strachey is rebellious. He inspires people to break the chain of God and lives in a real free life, especially holds a free mind to think everything. His creed makes him think independently and never follows the crowd blindly. As a steadfast supporter of anti-War movement, he writes pamphlets to publicize pacifism and tries to free all the people who are

suffered from war. His rationality makes him a rebel and so that he can stand by the side of minority groups which are neglected by most of the people.

5. Conclusion

In Michael Holroyd's *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, the rebellious figure of Strachey is clearly shown. His rebellious character is mainly reflected in three aspects. First, his rebellious character is shown in his daily life. He talks abnormally, dresses differently and even his figure is not quite common in the society. The caricatured style he has formed leads the lifeless and dull society to a vivid world. The second trait of his rebel is reflected in his view of love. He has loved many people during his life time but he holds his loyalty to love in his own way. He has strong homosexual tendency so he always wants to change the social prejudice to gays and lesbians. His love to people can be defined as a general humanistic love to all human beings, including his love to his extra lovers, for it is not a single sexual desire but the appreciation of human's merit and humanity. The third part of his rebellious character is shown in his feminist and religious view. Strachey devotes his life in the fighting with the decadent social and moral traditions. As a feminist, he supports and participates in the feminist movement to help the women live as equal as men. And also, as a pacifist, he strongly objects to the conscription and autocracy because he wants to avoid every kind of slaughter in the world. Dominated by his firm belief, in his own way, he tries his best to promote social equality and helps to create a more humane circumstance for the society.

Obviously, Strachey is a rebel, a person of peculiarity. Although Strachey's rebellious character has its weak points, for example just as his dissenters have said that his ironic tone is extremely unsatisfactory; his homosexuality makes the disorder of moral standard; his caricatural description of the eminent would cause blasphemy of the classic and history and so on, we cannot ignore the efforts he has made in the social progress. And from then on, the old values of Victorian Age have reformed, it remains the essence, discards the dregs and transforms into a liberated, humanistic, equal and energetic new notion. As John Rothenstein commented in the *New York Times*, "It is impossible to suppose that this 'Life' will ever be superseded... the best literary biography to appear for many years. It may well prove revolutionary" (Holroyd, 1995: title page). Of course, it is a revolution. *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, as it weaves the social background and the life of Strachey into a whole picture, presenting a rebellious and peculiar character of Victorian age.

The present paper mainly discussed Lytton Strachey's rebellious character, in fact, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* also shows the influence of the atmosphere of Cambridge and the Bloomsbury Group on Strachey. Strachey's life with the member of the Bloomsbury Group was full of happiness. Certainly, the group members' brilliant thoughts influenced Strachey a lot, such as the ethical idea of Moore and the aesthetic thought of Roger Fry; the detailed description of Strachey's cultural life makes this biography an invaluable resource for the study of the group. The biography is hiding much treasure that is worth exploring. However, the present study of *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* is very limited. Under the tendency of the rising of non-fictional works, the study of *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* will attract more readers' attention. Lytton Strachey is a controversial person, his character needs a further analysis.

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