

Bare 'Love' Between Writer, Economist

BY ARTHUR VEYSEY
[London Bureau Chief]
(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

LONDON, Oct. 7— A long, tempestuous homosexual relationship between Lytton Strachey, English writer, and John Maynard Keynes, sometimes described as the century's most influential economist, is revealed in the publication here of a selection of Strachey's 30,000 letters.

Strachey and Keynes met as students at Cambridge university. Twice, the letters reveal, Keynes stole a man from Strachey, temporarily splitting the pair.

Busy Letter Writers

Strachey died in 1932 at the age of 51. He became famous with the publication in 1917 of a book, "Eminent Victorians," which debunked prominent figures of the earlier generation and set a style of witty biographies that many less capable writers have tried to copy. Keynes died in 1946 after being made a lord.

Both were busy letter writers, sometimes writing each



John Maynard Keynes and Lytton Strachey

other three times in one day. The correspondence has been sorted by Michael Holroyd, a young Briton, and provides a core to the first part of a two-volume biography of Strachey.

The letters, Holroyd comments, "uncover a state of affairs at Cambridge that would have provoked curiosity in Gomorrah and caused the inhabitants of Sodom to sit up and take notice."

A. P. Ryan, a reviewer for the Times of London, puts it this way:

"Strachey's Cambridge was a bed of highbrow pansies, with

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Bizarre Relationship Told in Biography

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Strachey and Keynes as the tallest blooms."

An Elaborate Explorer

Michael Foot, socialist member of Parliament, writing in the Evening Standard, says Strachey made "an elaborate exploration of the agonies and absurdities of homosexual love, and Keynes was his most distinguished companion in these nether regions."

Strachey's brother, James, says Strachey was a pioneer in the movement for sexual freedom and gives him credit for the present tolerant climate in Britain. Parliament passed in its final days last summer a new law permitting homosexual practices between consenting adults in private.

In sharp contrast, at the time of the long affair between Strachey and Keynes "society regarded homosexuality as more grave than 'murder,'" Holroyd recalled.

Flares of Passion

The affair continued for years after both men had left Cambridge. Passions flared most tempestuously when Strachey discovered that his artistic cousin, Duncan Grant, with whom he was "in love," had gone to live with Keynes. Strachey had introduced the pair and thus felt doubly betrayed by Keynes.

"Of all the darkly amorous crises, this was perhaps the most wretched," Holroyd recounts. "It came as an explosive shock, a kind of death . . . destroying in a few moments the whole structure of his last three years . . . he could not be sure he would ever recover from the calamity. Yet, there was the aching realization he had been made to look impossibly ridiculous . . . the world was indeed more immensely queer than he had recognized."

Strachey wrote Keynes he didn't hate him but rather "if you were here now I should probably kiss you, except that Duncan would be jealous, which would never do."

A Marriage Proposal

In his despondency, Strachey proposed marriage to Virginia Stephen, a young writer with whom he had a long, platonic friendship. She impulsively accepted but both immediately realized their mistake. She later married Leonard Woolf, a mutual friend from college days.

Strachey and Keynes deplored the then unsympathetic public opinion toward homosexuality which Strachey called "the love that passes all Christian understanding."

"It is madness for us to dream of making dowagers understand that feelings are good," Strachey wrote. "When we say in the same breath that the best ones are sodomitical. If we were crafty and careful, I dare say we could pull it off. But why should we take the trouble? On the whole, I believe our time will come about a hundred years hence."

40 Years Pessimistic

In the case of Britain, he was 40 years too pessimistic.

Holroyd's biography, "Lytton Strachey, the Unknown Years, 1880-1910" was published here this week by William Heinemann.

The second volume is due in the spring. An American edition of both volumes is scheduled for late spring by Holt, Reinhart, Winston.