Élite Perceptions of the Victorian and Edwardian Past In Inter-War England

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by

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Will any one, a hundred years from now, consent to live in the houses the Victorians built, travel by their roads or railways, value the furnishings they made to live among or esteem, except for curious or historical reasons, their prevalent art and the clipped and limited literature that satisfied their souls?

H.G. Wells, *The New Machiavelli* [1911] (London, 1946), p. 37

Thirty years ago the late Arnold Bennett was thought eccentric, and even a little perverse, to take an interest in papier-mâché furniture with scenes of Balmoral by moonlight in inlaid mother-of-pearl. Today tables and chairs of this kind command high prices in the saleroom and are the prize pieces in cultivated living-rooms. It is, in a word, once more 'done' to admire Victoriana.

James Laver, *Victorian Vista* (London, 1954), p. 7

The past is always with us. Though whereabouts? As each of us chonks along, carrying mixed goods in his interior like a grocery van, whereabouts are the labelled parcels of the years? Difficult to locate among the joltings and the obscurity. But perhaps the labelling is on different lines. Is the past packed up not by years but by subjects, that is to say, by the preferences of the heart?

E.M. Forster, 'Recollectionism' [1937] in *The Prince's Tale and Other Uncollected Writings* (Harmondsworth, 1999), p. 322

Abstract

It is often argued by historians that members of the cultivated élite after 1918 rejected the pre-war past, or at least subjected it to severe denigration. This thesis sets out to challenge such a view. Above all, it argues that inter-war critics of the Victorian and Edwardian past were unable to reject it even if that was what they felt inclined to do. This was because they were tied to those periods by the affective links of memory, family, and the continually unfolding consequences of the past in the present. Even the severest critics of the pre-war world, such as Lytton Strachey, were less frequently dismissive of history than ambivalent towards it. This ambivalence, it is argued, helped to keep the past alive and often to humanise it.

The thesis also explores more positive estimation of Victorian and Edwardian history between the wars. It examines nostalgia for the past, as well as instances of continuity of practice and attitude. It explores the way in which inter-war society drew upon aspects of Victorian and Edwardian history both as illuminating parallels to contemporary affairs and to understand directly why the present was shaped as it was. Again, this testifies to the enduring power of the past after 1918.

There are three parts to this thesis. Part One outlines the cultural context in which writers contemplated the Victorian and Edwardian past. Part Two explores some of the ways in which history was written about and used by inter-war society. Part Three examines the ways in which biographical depictions of eminent Victorians after 1918 encouraged emotional negotiation with the past.

The approximate length of this thesis is 94,000 words.

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John Gardiner
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Introduction

In Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* a character comments that 'it's not for a son to sit in judgment on his father'. His clever young friend persuades him otherwise, and the father is left keenly aware of an emotional gulf between himself and his son which he fears 'would grow wider day by day'.[1] This thesis is about fathers and sons,[2] and the judgements of sons upon fathers, and the extent to which an emotional gulf truly opened between them. To be sure, it is focused upon the real England of the 1920s and 1930s rather than the fictional Russia of the 1860s; but Turgenev's novel articulates themes which are of particular relevance to the subject which will be pursued here.

I shall be exploring perceptions of the past after that searing set of events which became known as the Great War.[3] The war cast long shadows over many aspects of life in inter-war England, and the sense of history was certainly no exception to this. Yet this thesis derives itself from a lacuna encouraged by writings on the imaginative impact of the Great War. In recent years there has been a burgeoning of scholarship upon this theme. Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* introduced the idea that the conflict of 1914-18 represented a watershed in the twentieth century mind.[4] It gave us, he argued, not only a new vocabulary but a new way of looking at life - sceptical, ironic, disillusioned - far removed from the complacent certainties of the pre-war world. Most subsequent work has been in some way a development of, or response to, Fussell's seminal study.[5] Niall Ferguson has recently criticised our tendency to see the Great War as an inevitable and tragic prelude to the rest of the century.[6] Adrian Gregory and Jay Winter have similarly begun to adopt a more conservative estimation of the cultural impact of the war.[7] This 'memory' literature emphasises that the

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[1] Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons* [1861] (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 91, 130.
[2] And, indeed, about fathers and daughters, not to mention the relationship of children to previous generations.
[3] The terminology of the 1914-18 war is a little complicated. Contemporaries used the phrases 'World War', 'European War', 'First World War', and - with newly-acquired hindsight in the inter-war years - 'Great War'. Since I rarely need to differentiate between the First and Second World Wars, it is the last of these terms that has largely been adopted.
[4] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975).
[5] See Chapter 1 of the present thesis for brief discussion of this literature.
[6] See Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), esp. the eloquent Introduction.
[7] Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford, 1994); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995).

imaginative effects of the war were often mediated through traditional perspectives rooted both in the pre-war world and in the ordinary realities of post-war life.[8]

These recent works explore the impact of the war by reference to how people drew upon their own experience, past and present. They qualify persuasively the notion that the Great War was some universal watershed, perhaps as Fussell suggested the beginning of 'modern memory'. In order to do this the emphasis has often been placed upon popular rather than élite culture; for Gregory it is something of a shame that Fussell, Eksteins, and Hynes tend to see popular culture as only 'a backdrop for the discussion of the 'culturally significant''.[9] Yet in seeking peremptorily to move away from, or as Winter puts it to 'go beyond',[10] these standard accounts of how the war affected élite culture, certain false assumptions established by the earlier works have been allowed to stand. One of these false assumptions is the reason for this thesis.

Crucial to the argument about the élite response to the war is that it signalled a comprehensive rejection of the Victorian and Edwardian past. Winter has shown that this was not necessarily true of the art which commemorated the fallen; but what about the broader connections not just with art, but with family, biography, and history extending back to the beginning of the Victorian period? These are the areas that I shall be exploring in this thesis, and it is because historians have neglected this facet of 'high' culture that I have focused upon élite perceptions of the past. (What precisely I mean by 'élite' will be discussed later on.)

The approach that I have adopted might better be understood if I explain how I came to the topic. Several years ago I began to work on the reception of Elgar after the Great War. Although most of the biographies blithely asserted that his music was derided after 1918 as an expression of pre-war complacency, I did not find this to be the case at all. Elgar remained the most popular British composer of the inter-war period. This set me thinking about the reputation of other eminent Victorians and Edwardians after 1918. At about the same time I first read Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, and was surprised at the extent to which

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[8] For a recent overview of such works see Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'Memory, Memorials, and the Postwar Literary Experience: Traditional Values and the Legacy of World War I', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10 (1999), 235-43.
[9] Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, p. 2.
[10] Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 3.

the author engages emotionally with his subjects. This did not strike me as being simply a personal 'feud' with history, as so many commentators had suggested; such an obvious agenda would surely have given the book - for all its shortcomings - only an ephemeral value. And, I wondered, if Strachey - supposedly the arch-iconoclast of Victorianism - seemed so ambiguous, what did this suggest about how others perceived the Victorian and Edwardian past? Was it perhaps that there was a large over-generalisation in the works of Fussell, Hynes, and others about how the Great War affected people's views of the past?

This is indeed the conclusion reached in this thesis. In outlining why this is so it may be helpful to consider the basic responses which Strachey and his contemporaries could have had to the pre-war past. To my mind there are four:

1. They were indifferent to the past and to any vestiges of it in the present
2. They sat in judgement upon the past
3. They allowed aspects of the past to hold sway over the present
4. They entered into a productive 'dialogue' - or set of 'dialogues' - with the past

All of these characteristics can be found in inter-war perceptions of the past, except perhaps for the first one. It is a crucial argument within this work that inter-war observers were too close to the Victorian and Edwardian past ever to become completely indifferent to it. Many of them were, strictly speaking, Victorians or Edwardians themselves; those who had been born too late properly to remember the pre-war world had Victorian parents. They were bound to the past by what I have called an 'affective' link: that emotional connection which allows us to feel ambiguity or even hostility towards something (or someone), but which yet obviates against our dismissing it altogether. This is a case of applying not so much psychology to history as common sense: as David Lowenthal observes, 'remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity'.[11]

Implicit within this argument about an affective link with the past are the three other responses: they co-existed throughout the inter-war period. The second response, that inter-war observers sat in angry judgement on the past, is

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[11] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 197. I am not an expert on the matter, but there may nevertheless be some potential in exploring my topic from the psychoanalytic perspective: Peter Gay offers some suggestive comments on this in *Freud For Historians* (Oxford, 1985).

the most familiar one to historians. Yet this anti-Victorianism (a term which often also connotes anti-Edwardianism) is often mischaracterised, and the extent of it exaggerated. It is my contention that continuity with the past, in terms of attitudes and practices, has been greatly underrated: in that sense many people did allow aspects of the past to hold sway over the present. There is a connection here with a newly-emerging body of scholarship by Stefan Collini, Susan Pedersen, Peter Mandler, and others in which the continuing belief in such Victorian concepts as public duty have been traced through to the 1930s.[12] Others were more creative in their 'use' of the past, and drew upon it to enrich or to offer guidance in the present. This could reasonably be called engaging in a productive 'dialogue' or set of 'dialogues' with history. These are the points that I particularly want to establish in the chapters which follow.

This emphasis upon continuity with the past relates back to Jay Winter's point about the way in which post-war society came to grieve for its dead. But the present work is not really about the impact of the Great War, even though at every turn that vast shadowy presence can be discerned influencing the ways in which people viewed the past.[13] This work is more consciously broad-scale in its attempt to explore an area which curiously enough has received little attention. I have already commented upon how inter-war observers tended to view the Victorian and Edwardian past. It is perhaps now time to say something more about the way in which the subject has been tackled.

The broad issues of anti-Victorianism and nostalgia for the past are worthy of exploration in their own right, especially since the former has often been mischaracterised and the latter overlooked. Part One of the thesis therefore addresses these topics, and provides a general contextual background against which the greater specificity of Parts Two and Three can operate. Part Two examines inter-war historiography of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. It must be emphasised that the chapters which comprise it are by no means an attempt to capture the full range and complexity of historical writing on the pre-war past.

[12] See Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1991); idem, 'Victorian Values: From the Clapham Sect to the Clapham Omnibus' in *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford, 1999), esp. pp. 110-15; Susan Pedersen & Peter Mandler (eds), *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain* (London, 1994).

[13] Looking back from the perspective of 1939-40, writers saw the inter-war period as precisely that: a time bounded on both sides by the experience of war. For Robert Graves and Alan Hodge it was 'The Long Weekend'; for Virginia Woolf 'Between the Acts'.

Such an enterprise would be not only beyond my abilities but impossible to achieve within present constraints on space. Rather they are designed to explore salient *aspects* of this historiography, such as the continuation of traditional imperatives within historical study; the diversity and emotiveness of historiographical writing on the Victorians; the problems of periodisation which historians faced with the nineteenth century; the way in which immediate pre-war history was seen to be linked to the inter-war present; and running throughout all this the way in which particular historical incidents were 'used' to provide illumination on present issues. Reference to the contents page may alert the reader to the lack of a separate chapter on late Victorian historiography. This is because the late nineteenth century receives fairly extensive treatment in different guises throughout the thesis: culturally, in Chapters I and 11, and politically, in Chapter 9.

Part Three is devoted to biography. Once again, it has proved impossible to offer a comprehensive account of how the lives of the Victorians and Edwardians were written in the 1920s and 1930s. Appropriately enough, however, the dilemma which faces the modern historian in this area also faced the subjects of his inquiry. As Strachey commented, 'The history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we know too much about it.'[14] Strachey's innovative solution was to select four biographical subjects who displayed different yet subtly integrated facets of Victorianism. The method proved to be highly influential, as we shall see in Chapter 7. I also have picked four biographical subjects through which to explore the world of inter-war biography. My selection is subjective, and as such open to criticism, but it has been a justifiable choice. The subjects throw light variously upon the beneficial effects of seeing eminent Victorians in a more 'human' perspective; the limits to such processes; the way that Victorians could gain great psychological depth and interest in the post-war world; and the extent to which inter-war biographers eschewed such explorations in favour of a distinctly 'Victorian' attitude to their work.

There are several links between Parts Two and Three. One of these is best suggested by the historian G.M. Young, who in a preface to a later edition of his *Portrait of an Age*, commented on his motivations for having expanded his 1934 study of the early Victorian period into a full account of the reign two years later:

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[14]Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 1918), p. vii.

I had always been convinced that Victorianism was a myth, engendered by the long life of the sovereign and of her most illustrious subjects. I was constantly being told that the Victorians did this, or the Victorians thought that, while my own difficulty was to find anything on which they agreed: any assumption which was not at some time or other fiercely challenged.[15]

Young's revealing first attempt at deflating these myths had in fact come in 1932, when 'in a fit of wrath over what seemed to me a preposterous misreading of the age, I wrote an Essay which was intended as a manifesto, or perhaps an outline for others to fill in'.[16] That essay, published as part of an Oxford 'World's Classics' miscellany, attacked the 'misreading' of Esmé Wingfield-Stratford's *The Victorian Tragedy* (1930), a sympathetic but tendentiously neo-Darwinian account of the age. It also criticised what Young felt to be an egregious contemporary emphasis upon 'scientific history', and launched an even more virulent attack on 'the flippancy and conceit of the popular school'. The arch-exponent of this school was revealed to be Lytton Strachey, whom Young felt had 'much to answer for'.[17] Historiography and biography were therefore in sometimes acrimonious dialogue with one another.

At the same time, however, there is no doubt that new biographical insights upon the Victorians could sometimes enhance historical scholarship. Many historians paid generous tribute in their work to what they had learned from recent biographies or from newly-published editions of correspondence. Historians were not always 'professional' in the modern sense (see Chapter 3), and some - such as George Dangerfield - explicitly drew upon Strachey's prose as a model for their own approach. More generally, whether 'professional' or not, historians were often engaged in the same basic enterprise as biographers: raising awareness of life before 1914 and engaging with the past.

The act of engaging with history returns us usefully to thinking about some of the chosen parameters of this study. It is a study of élite perceptions of the past.

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[15]G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age: Victorian England* [1936] (Oxford: 2nd edn, 1953), p. vi.
[16]Young, *Portrait*, p. v.
[17]G.M. Young, 'Victorian History' in *Selected Modern English Essays* (Oxford, 1932), p. 276.

Those who feature in the following chapters do not form any community which could obviously be defined. There is a fairly wide social range, from H.G. Wells, the son of a tradesman, to Vita Sackville-West, the scion of an aristocratic family. There is similarly a wide range of occupational callings, from tenured academics such as E.L. Woodward to those elderly female memoirists who lived from independent means (and who, incidentally, had never set foot inside a university). In terms of age, sex, social background, and occupation, the people in this thesis could be fitted into all manner of overlapping categories. Yet all would arguably have recognised one another (and been recognised by society as a whole) as part of the cultivated élite. These were individuals who reflected upon human experience in an essentially thoughtful or intellectual way. They wrote not for immediate profit (even if many of them had to earn a living from their books) or explicitly to endorse any political or social power.[18] For practical purposes I have referred to them throughout this thesis as the 'élite', and where that and terms like 'élite opinion' have been used, they are intended to signify not necessarily homogeneity of belief or attitude, but merely the range of possibilities within cultivated thought.

Although the focus is primarily upon élite perceptions of the past, it is not wholly so. As we have noted, writers frequently addressed themselves to correcting or qualifying popular misconceptions about the past. In order to make sense of historiographical and biographical priorities, it is therefore sometimes important to take account of these popular views. Difficult as they are to verify with much accuracy, these views are also fascinating in themselves. There are some tantalising glimpses of a traditional world which had been, at least on the surface, relatively unruffled by the Great War. Mass-Observation in the late 1930s testified to the popularity of films about the life of Queen Victoria; society continued to use

[18] There is of course at least one definition of 'élite' which focuses upon those concerned with the maintenance of political and/or social authority. On this see Raymond Williams' discussion of 'élite' in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1988), pp. 112-5. In the present work the term 'élite' is used only in relation to 'high' culture; even here, though, there is the possibility of an attempt to 'control' emotional and intellectual responses by the élite for its own sake or for the sake of some other vested interest. Of course, it would be naive to suggest that the relationship between power and the work of certain members of the élite has ever been less than complicated: on this see for example Edward Shils, *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays* (Chicago, 1972). But it would be difficult to argue that the élite in inter-war England attempted to achieve anything like 'cultural hegemony', not least because as we have already noted it was a highly diverse body of individuals. For a rebuttal of the idea of an inter-war drive to 'cultural hegemony' see D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 14-17. Works such as Collini, *Public Moralists*, and Pedersen & Mandler, *After the Victorians*, also emphasise the essential benevolence of certain élite figures' commitment to public duty.

a respectful 'Mr' when referring to Gladstone; politicians confidently made allusions to Dickens novels in popular speeches. Even more notably, there was clearly a wide and deep belief that the Edwardian period had been some sort of prelapsarian idyll. The conservatism of this outlook complements élite drives to maintain a belief in public duty or to revive aspects of Victorianism.

Something ought to be said about the choice of sources. This thesis focuses upon *how* and *why* élite writers in particular media articulated views of the past. It is not a study of the reception of those views, though in the case of certain key works (such as Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*) it seemed interesting to investigate some of this background. Most of the perceptions discussed in this thesis come from books, and this is because books generally offered the most fulsome and influential articulations of people's views of the past. When the present topic has been so little studied, it made sense to begin with novels, biographies, memoirs, and historical monographs. Given the necessary selectivity of Part Two, the choice of books there has been accordingly selective. In Parts One and Three, on the other hand, I have tried to be more exhaustive in my treatment of the literature. In addition to human instinct and published bibliographies, the computerised catalogue of the British Library proved to be a great help here. During the course of my research almost every general book published in the 1920s and 1930s with the adjective 'Victorian' or 'Victorianism' in its title was consulted, as were all the major biographies of my four subjects in Part Three. Where possible I have also tried to investigate why people viewed the past as they did. This led me to consult a number of archival sources, though the search was not always as productive as might have been hoped. There were no relevant documents relating to the time when G.M. Young was working on *Portrait of an Age*, for example; and no registered archival sources at all for George Dangerfield.

It might have been worthwhile to explore the enormous range of inter-war newspaper and periodical writing on the past; but to do this with the thoroughness that it deserves would take another full-length Ph.D. I have nevertheless made a few structured forays into this veritable mountain of material. Newspapers like *The Times* - the obvious reading material for the élite - often had interesting things to say about how perceptions had changed by certain significant moments, such as the centenary of Victoria's accession in 1937. On occasion I have also sought not to be

straitjacketed by my main emphasis upon books, looking for example at stage and screen portrayals of historical figures where those portrayals seemed to have been influenced by biographical developments.

Still, the choice of sources often presents a dilemma to the historian. The constraints of time and space on a Ph.D. means that a balance needs to be struck between selectivity and the desire to do justice to the full range of one's potential material. I remain aware that I have focused upon particular aspects of my topic. Nevertheless, I believe that my approach and choice of sources has been justified in that it has furnished a coherent *thesis* - literally an argument - about how historians have tended to mischaracterise élite perceptions of the past after 1918.

Finally, a few comments about two features of my title which might give the reader occasion to pause. It focuses upon perceptions of the 'Victorian *and* Edwardian Past'. This perhaps implies a perceived discontinuity between the Victorian and Edwardian periods in the minds of inter-war observers. Certainly popular views of the Edwardian period as a 'sunny' time had a distinctive character, though this arguably reflects more upon its prominent place within memories of the world before 1914 than upon any especially well-defined sense of it as a break with Victorianism. In hindsight Queen Victoria's death was a more ambiguous event than it is often supposed to have been. There were strong elements of continuity between the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and in this thesis I often refer to the 'pre-war world' in the sense not only of the Edwardian period but of the legacy of Victorianism behind it as well.

The geographical focus of the thesis is also worthy of comment. Historians are now justifiably careful about generalising from an Anglocentric perspective. I have followed suit, by no means certain that Irish nationalists would have been sympathetic to the way in which English historians wrote about the Irish Question; or that many Scots living in the Highlands would have shared that peculiarly English dream of the Edwardian period as an orderly sun-dappled lawn. Again, it might be interesting for future scholars to explore the way in which the tensions of national identity affected how the legacy of Victorianism was perceived. Occasionally I have annexed foreign scholars whose work was available in English. Perhaps the most notable example here is the great French historian Élie Halévy. Halévy the Anglophile would surely not have minded; like so many of his contemporaries, he

saw in the pre-war world values which were idyllic, deplorable, and highly relevant to the present age. Not for him nor for many of his readers was the judgement of sons upon fathers a simple one-way affair.

Part One

Contexts

Chapter One

Anti-Victorianism

As we have seen, many historians have argued that the Great War led to the rejection of the values and practices of the past. It is my contention that this belief is profoundly misguided. It can be argued that in addition to underestimating the extent of continuity and nostalgia for the past after 1918, historians have not pondered the phenomenon of anti-Victorianism with sufficient thoughtfulness. The purpose of this chapter is explain why this is so, and to outline a different interpretation of perceptions of the past which will be amplified and developed in the following chapters of the thesis.

There are three main ways in which the nature of anti-Victorianism in inter-war England has been misconstrued or thrown open to confusion. These are:

1. The confusion about the extent and dating of anti-Victorianism
2. The difficulties in generalising about the focus of anti-Victorianism
3. A crude characterisation of the affective nature of anti-Victorianism

Let us take each point in turn.

The extent and dating of anti-Victorianism

The trauma of the Great War inevitably looms large in many accounts of anti-Victorianism between the wars. For those scarred by the conflict - mentally (like Woolf's Septimus Warren Smith) as well as physically (those mutilated men to be passed on every street in the 1920s) - life often seemed to have lost purpose.[1] The Bloomsbury Group was horrified by the war, and Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) was hurried along by a sense of its folly. We also know that the

[1] For two recent surveys of the physical and mental scars caused by the war see Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996); and Peter Leese, 'Problems returning home: the British psychological casualties of the Great War', *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), 1055-1067.

Great War was *the* defining imaginative moment for a number of young writers who in the 1930s became the literary avant-garde.[2] It is understandable that scholars such as Paul Fussell, Modris Eksteins, and Samuel Hynes write of the Great War as the beginning of the modern age, the point at which the complacent certainties of the past were destroyed or rejected.[3]

But placing these compelling studies alongside historiography with different scholarly priorities is a necessary and salutary exercise. Considered in comparison with much recent social and political historiography of the war, it immediately becomes apparent that there is a wide discrepancy between the two bodies of work. This is not simply the difference of emphasis which one might expect in slightly different historical disciplines, nor the inevitable and healthy disagreement over nuances of interpretation which characterises the profession as a whole. Rather it is a fundamental disunity on the subject of the war's impact. Social historians such as Paul Thompson and Gerard J. DeGroot have emphasised political and social continuity across the divide of war, while Arthur Marwick has provided the useful suggestion that we should envisage not a society transformed by war but a society *at* war.[4] This more cautious estimation is certainly consistent with the complexion of post-war society and politics. The General Election of 1918, rather than witnessing a backlash against the 'old men', saw a significant swing to the right. Between the wars some 60% of working-class voters consistently declined to support Labour, lending their support instead to traditional values of deference, patriotism, and respectability. Needless to say middle-class people retained to an even greater degree their customary restraint and respect for order. Whether they set the social and cultural tone of inter-war England, now that the power of the aristocracy had been further diminished by the war, is open to debate.[5] But there can be little doubt that quietism (even atavism) was one of the most distinctive tenors of the inter-war period.[6]

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[2] See Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London, 1976).

[3] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975); Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Passage The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London, 1989); Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990).

[4] Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians. The Remaking of British Society* (London, 1984), ch. 17; Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighty British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London, 1996); Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge British Society and the First World War* (London: 2nd edn, 1991), p. 16.

[5] See David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven & London, 1998), ch. 4.

[6] See Raphael Samuel, 'Exciting to be English' in R. Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol 1: *History and Politics* (London, 1989), pp. xviii-lxvii.

How can we account for this disparity between the two lines of interpretation? And what does it reveal to us about the difficulties of characterising the anti-Victorian reaction after 1918? The disparity is a result of writers on cultural history allowing themselves to be more than usually influenced by hindsight. A clear agenda in the works of Fussell and Eksteins (and to a lesser degree Hynes) was to trace the development of Modernism. They found the epiphany of modernity in the Great War. The introspection, confusion, and violence of Modernist art was justified and exemplified by the horrors of war. If their fine analyses of the links between Modernism and the Great War were restricted only to the artistic avant-garde - that is to say to a minority *within* the minority of élite opinion - then these studies would be less problematic. But in seeking to contextualise their comments about the effects of art upon the society of the day, audacious claims are made about what the Great War did to perceptions of the Victorians. Formulations such as the following are made: 'Even as it was being fought the war was perceived as a force of radical change in society and in consciousness. It brought to an end the life and values of Victorian and Edwardian England.'[7] For *some* people no doubt this was true; but for many others this was emphatically not the case. Adrian Gregory has written about how remembrance could accentuate long-standing differences of outlook and practice within society.[8] And as Jay Winter has established, the Great War prompted not only a leave-taking or rejection of Victorian values, but also a wider *enhancement* of those values in the search for post-war consolation and continuity.[9]

It may be that the Great War was the single most important reason for anti-Victorian feeling in the 1920s and 1930s, but it is clear that we cannot characterise it as the complete watershed it is often taken to be. The part of the Great War in accounts of inter-war anti-Victorianism can be confusing in another way too. Like Modernism - the two were, after all, in many ways complementary - anti-Victorianism had a long gestation. It can be traced back to roughly the last third of the nineteenth century, and many scholars have accommodated this sense of development within their perspectives on the phenomenon. But in envisaging an

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[7] Hynes, *War Imagined*, p. ix.
[8] Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford, 1994).
[9] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995).

approximate 'beginning' (the 1860s, say) and 'climax' (1914-18), there is an obvious temptation to write about the dynamics of anti-Victorianism in a teleological way.

Undeniably anti-Victorianism between c.1860 and c.1940 (to take the longer view) had a dynamic or dynamics to it. Those attacking the Victorians in a later age often paid homage to earlier writers, and demonstrably went further in their own attacks on the past. As Peter Keating has reminded us, the process of 'privileging' certain writers and thinkers as 'modern' or 'anti-Victorian' began at an early stage (Virginia Woolf was particularly adept at it); but this ought not to lull us into a teleological approach.[10] Though it is impossible to substantiate with any satisfactory degree of precision, it is likely that anti-Victorianism never had or eventually gained more than a small minority following. Moreover anti-Victorianism was full of tensions, contradictions, and discontinuities. Hence, if only to reject the idea that in 1914 the war exploded a ready-made and perfectly positioned 'bomb' of anti-Victorianism, let us explore the phenomenon in greater detail.

The first stirrings of anti-Victorianism might be traced to around the 1860s, the time at which the so-called 'age of equipoise' was beginning to come to an end. From the earliest it was wide-ranging and diffuse in nature: we should not envisage anti-Victorianism as a 'modern' sensibility suddenly clashing with, or imposed upon, some pre-'modern' culture. Innovative and controversial as many of its first manifestations may have been, there was no agreed 'agenda' or 'timetable' for anti-Victorianism; and as in years to come, it did not so much supplant the past as grow out of it. Indeed, we might best consider anti-Victorianism in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s as being closest in spirit to the controversies which had marked early and mid-Victorian England: as G.M. Young reminded readers in the 1930s, there had been no areas beyond belief in the family and in representative institutions about which the Victorians did *not* disagree.[11]

Yet it is a mark of the widening rifts within Victorian society that it was the family - more specifically the respectable middle-class family - which came to attract opprobrium from so many people. Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) was a powerful critique of middle-class complacency. In aesthetic terms its categorisation of the bourgeoisie as 'philistines' was to have profound ramifications

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[10]Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London, 1989), pp. 96-7.
[11]G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age Victorian England* [1936] (Oxford: 2nd edn, 1953), p. 131.

well into the twentieth century. In Arnold's wake cultural critics such as John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and William Morris (the latter with a political agenda too) attacked the sheer ugliness of early and mid-Victorian homes and art.

In a parallel development the position of women in the home and in society as a whole was also changing. J.S. Mill had already petitioned for female suffrage in 1866, and in 1869 he published *The Subjection of Women*. By 1870 legal reforms affecting the status and property rights of married women had begun to be enacted, threatening to overturn the traditional image of the 'Angel in the House' which later feminists were also to attack. As Virginia Woolf recalled in 1931, 'In those days - the last of Queen Victoria - every house had its Angel. ... Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.'[12] Novelists such as Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, and D.H. Lawrence at this time and in later years played an equally important part in attacking traditional conceptions of the role of women.

A further negation of earlier Victorian culture was the move away from religious faith. People earlier in the nineteenth century had disagreed with an extraordinary passion about belief and its varied expressions. But these debates had all nevertheless been characterised by an underlying concern for religion. The newer tones of rational scepticism and cynicism to be found in Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and Samuel Butler's *The Way of all Flesh* (completed 1885; published 1903) were scarcely a feature of this earlier discourse, though the challenge had been gathering momentum since Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-33) and German Biblical criticism of the same time. We know from works such as Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) what a painful and moving conflict could be generated by the subsequent clash of these two discourses. (On Gosse see below.)

In yet another sphere earlier Victorian orthodoxies were being challenged in the 1870s and beyond. The misery and degradation of urban poverty was being 'rediscovered' in the publications of Andrew Mearns, Charles Booth, and Seebohm Rowntree. Flying in the face of established Smilesian precept, they argued that poverty might actually be the inescapable result of the circumstances of one's birth. For an age increasingly aware of its slipping economic hegemony in the world,

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[12] Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women' [1931] in *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Harmondsworth, 1993), pp. 357-8.

questions of vulnerability to financial trends had begun to blister the smooth surface of mid-Victorian confidence. These years also witnessed the development of trade unions (the first trades union congress was held in 1868) and socialist organisations such as the Fabian Society (founded 1884).

Commentators on anti-Victorianism in the inter-war period were very aware of the diversity and energy of these developments between the 1860s and 1880s. Esmé Wingfield-Stratford suggested in 1932 that 'it would be convenient if we could speak of the Victorian Age as ending somewhere about 1870', while for G.M. Young in 1936 'Early Victorian had become a term of reproach when Victoria still had ten years to reign'. The former Prime Minister H.H. Asquith had anticipated this thought in his Romanes Lecture at Oxford in June 1918. 'That which we roughly call the Victorian', he commented, 'was over some time - a decade at least - before the end of the great Queen's reign'.[13] Yet of course anti-Victorianism had not completely supplanted Victorianism by 1870, 1880, or 1890. Elements of the anti-Victorian tradition had yet to emerge (not that the phenomenon would *ever* become an integrated movement), and features which we recognise as 'Victorian' also had yet to run their course. Perhaps most obviously, Imperialism was only just in the ascendant in the 1870s and 1880s. The success of Queen Victoria's Jubilees of 1887 and 1897 is a salutary reminder of the potency of the forces of tradition in England at this time.

The 1890s feature in many accounts of anti-Victorianism as another important watershed.[14] This is mostly because of the perceived links between *fin de siècle*, Modernism, and anti-Victorianism - a correlation which as we have seen is often felt to have reached its apotheosis in the Great War.[15] Yet the *fin de siècle* in England was as much indebted to the past as it was to the prospects of the future. Aestheticism - the chief indigenous manifestation of *fin de siècle* - had been anticipated by Walter Pater's *Studies in the Renaissance* (1873), the Conclusion of which was the first manifesto of the ethos of 'art for art's sake' (Oscar Wilde - who knew Pater at Oxford - could recite it by heart). Moreover, a number of its early protagonists - including Pater and Wilde - were in many respects typical

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[13] Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, *The Victorian Sunset* (London, 1932), p. v; Young, *Portrait*, p. 100; H.H. Asquith, *Some Aspects of the Victorian Age* (Oxford, 1918), p. 4.

[14] Cf. below, Chapter 11 on Wilde and the 1890s.

[15] This interpretation is offered, for example, by Malcolm Bradbury & James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth, 1991).

members of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Peter Gay reminds us that the iconoclasm of these individuals was in part a reaction against perceptions of their *own* Victorianness. Wilde's trial, for instance, might be seen as the determination of a man to test his own resolve in flouting the pressures he felt to conform to a respectable middle-class lifestyle.[16] We do not necessarily have to endorse such a Freudian gloss,[17] but the importance of appreciating the earnestness of people like Wilde merits closer consideration. Like later individuals whom we have characterised as 'iconoclasts', there was less incompatibility between their anti-Victorianism and their serious preoccupation with public appearance and duty than has often been appreciated.[18]

Nevertheless, Aestheticism in the 1890s did contain several characteristics which had scarcely featured in earlier anti-Victorianism. One was the sort of dangerous playfulness which challenged the nature of appearance and words; again it is the plays of Wilde which most obviously show this in operation. Another was the morbid eroticised introspection to be found in the artwork executed by Aubrey Beardsley for *The Yellow Book* or in the late canvases of Edward Burne-Jones. None of these developments have been neglected by cultural history.[19] Inevitably we have become keenly aware of the way in which these tendencies to fey aestheticism and introspection fed into early twentieth century attitudes to life. Yet just as we have until recently overlooked the Victorianness of many iconoclasts, so may the extent of the following for Aestheticism easily be exaggerated. We often think of the last decade of the nineteenth century as the 'naughty nineties' (as Sellars and Yeatman put it), but the period was also characterised by profound idealism. In particular imperialism was flourishing, and the works of Rudyard Kipling were selling at a far greater rate than issues of *The Yellow Book*, which foundered in 1897 (the year, appropriately enough, of Victoria's Diamond Golden Jubilee). Its only serious rival, *The Savoy* (edited by Arthur Symons), was similarly short-lived, surviving for only eight months in 1896. The demise of Wilde in 1895 had a particularly chastening effect upon anti-Victorian tendencies within

[16] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud*, vol 5: *Pleasure Wars* (London, 1998), pp. 135-6.

[17] Cf. below, p. 220 on Wilde's refusal to flee England.

[18] An obvious example of such a figure might be John Maynard Keynes. See Peter Clarke, 'J.M. Keynes: "The best of both worlds"' in Susan Pedersen & Peter Mandler (eds), *After the Victorians Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain* (London, 1994), pp. 170-87.

[19] An early and still very useful study is Holbrook Jackson's *The Eighteen-Nineties* [1913] (Harmondsworth, 1939).

society. This was a legacy not soon forgotten by subsequent writers on anti-Victorianism. Helmut Gerber in his overview of books on the 1890s published up to 1925 observes that the two predominant features of this literature were to label most activities under the morally reproving label 'decadent'; and to view the decade as a self-sufficient whole, or at most as a termination of earlier tendencies, rather than as the end of Victorianism.[20] This helps us to get the extent of anti-Victorianism by the 1890s into slightly better perspective. Large as Aestheticism/Modernism has loomed in our characterisation of the cultural history of the period, and important as it was to many later critics of Victorianism, it only had an active minority following. That this minority ever became substantially larger is questionable. The chapter on Wilde's reputation in the present thesis shows that people retained to a surprising extent a 'Victorian' attitude to his life and work well into the 1930s (see Chapter 11).

As the phrase *fin de siècle* suggests, some in the 1890s were deeply aware of the progress of time ('fin du globe', as Dorian Gray equates *fin de siècle*). This appreciation of transience became more widespread around the years 1900-01. Two events - or moods - converged at the time: anxiety about the new century, and shock at the death of Queen Victoria. The periodical *Nineteenth Century* altered its name to *Nineteenth Century And After*, featuring on the cover of the January 1901 issue a Janus-faced figure which, it commented laconically, 'tells ... all that need be said of the alteration made to-day in the title of the Review'.[21] Others at the time were more robust about the passing of the old century. The *Daily Mail*, perhaps since its inception in 1896 the most popular middlebrow newspaper of the day, carried a special supplement on New Year's Eve 1900 about the twentieth century. The tone was jauntily complacent. 'The genius of a masterful race', it opined, 'turns instinctively to forecast more readily than to retrospect; its leaders are ever more prone to prophesy than to search for precedent.'[22] In more sensitive, thoughtful hands, this Imperial adventure could be - and was - a great deal less confident (as the nation's desultory performance in the Boer War showed). Whether optimistic or not, people were keenly aware that they stood on the threshold of an unknown experience in the twentieth century. *The Times*, which carried a large eight-page

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[20] Helmut E. Gerber, 'The Nineties: Beginning, End, or Transition?' in Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Edwardians and Late Victorians* (New York, 1966), p. 66.
[21] *Nineteenth Century And After*, 287 (January 1901).
[22] *Daily Mail*, 31 December 1900.

feature on 'The Past Century' drawn from past editions, also allowed marketing to take advantage of the potentially arduous vistas opened on 1 January 1901: 'Begin The New Century With Forethought: Send To Your Chemist For A Bottle of Elliman's', one full-page advert for embrocation read.[23]

When Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901 this mood of ambivalence was greatly intensified.[24] Nearly every newspaper commented in precise detail on the length of Victoria's reign, and described it in terms of a completed 'era'.[25] As *The Times* commented, 'The name [Victoria] has passed into history ... Epochs sometimes find names that do not very accurately fit them, but we can speak with singular accuracy of the Victorian age.'[26] For critics and admirers alike of the Victorian period this was felt to be a dramatic watershed. As the novelist T.H. White described it in 1933, 'on the days between January 22nd and February 1st in 1901, something was passing out of England. An essence, feeling, or attitude; something, like a ghost, visible but not tangible; something indeed which seemed easy of apprehension to all the senses except the humblest one, the sense of touch.'[27] For many inter-war writers like Arthur Baumann, the death of Victoria formed part of a wider context. 'At the end of the last century, between 1898 and 1903,' he wrote, 'there died Mr. Gladstone, Queen Victoria, and Lord Salisbury, and with them was interred the Victorian tradition.'[28] Baumann was writing with nostalgic regret; but many other contemporaries recalled the turn of the century as a time of *relief* after the initial shock. Even G.M. Young, a conservative historian who had seen the old Queen twice in his life, commented on this quality in his *Portrait of an Age*.[29] It was a relief in part because a rebellion against Victorian constraints had already done much to loosen the bonds of tradition.

Anti-Victorianism was consolidated on a wide range of fronts in the Edwardian period. Virginia Woolf's comment that 'on or about December, 1910, human character changed' is extremely celebrated, a reference almost certainly to the first Post-Impressionist exhibition in London.[30] Artistically, new ways were

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[23] *The Times*, 31 December 1900, 1 January 1901.
[24] On reactions to the death of Queen Victoria see also below, pp. 171-3.
[25] See Asa Briggs, 'The 1890s: Past, Present and Future in Headlines' in Asa Briggs & Daniel Snowman (eds), *Fins de Siècle: How Centuries End 1400-2000* (New Haven & London, 1996), p. 159.
[26] *The Times*, 23 January 1901.
[27] T.H. White, *Farewell Victoria* [1933] (London, 1993), p. 92.
[28] Arthur A. Baumann, *The Last Victorians* (London, 1927), pp. 15-16.
[29] Young, *Portrait*, p. 161.
[30] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' [1924] in *Collected Essays*, vol 1 (London, 1980), p.

being found to envisage and depict human nature. Some of these drew upon the modes of thought of the 1890s and earlier, so that social satire in the plays of George Bernard Shaw and abstraction in the visual arts can be seen to have had precedents. It is also tempting to see some of the earlier motifs of anti-Victorianism - in particular the position of women in society and the status of the working-classes - brought back to a much higher level of prominence in the so-called Edwardian Crisis of 1910-14. Certainly inter-war historians such as Élie Halévy, George Dangerfield, and R.C.K. Ensor looked back on this period and with varying degrees of emphasis characterised it as a crisis long in the making (see Chapter 6). So again, in tracing the course of anti-Victorianism, we must be careful not to adopt an overly deterministic approach towards these Edwardian developments. Like many of his subjects, Edward VII was really a Victorian; after all, he was sixty when he came to the throne. When Edward died in May 1910, *The Times* sought to establish his credentials (especially as the 'Peacemaker') in order to distinguish his reign from that of his mother; yet it had to concede that 'The mourning ... will not be like the mourning for Queen Victoria'.[31] More incisively the socialist journal *New Age* commented: 'The last genuine link with the Victorian age has been broken ... Edward was spiritually the mere executor of Queen Victoria. The impulse of her epoch flowed over, as it were, and merged in his reign, begun actually before her death, colouring it with the peculiar tones of the Victorian era.'[32]

On the other hand, the *possibilities* for the expression of anti-Victorianism had undoubtedly become more intense; in this sense Woolf's comment about human character having changed in 1910 has a certain validity.[33] Diffuse as anti-Victorianism remained, more fruitful connections could now be made about different aspects of the phenomenon. Woolf's comments about human character went on to note: 'All human relations have shifted - those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature.'[34] New levels of explicit iconoclasm could now be achieved. The first

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[31] *The Times*, 7 May 1910.

[32] Quoted in Hynes, *Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p. 350.

[33] Peter Stansky ratifies this argument in *On Or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and its Intimate World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

[34] Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', p. 321.

number of Wyndham Lewis's journal *Blast* appeared in June 1914 carrying the dyspeptic motto 'BLAST years 1837 to 1900', a sentiment which would have been inconceivable within the pages of *The Yellow Book*. One can appreciate from this perspective why many cultural historians argue that it remained only for the Great War to sweep away the last vestiges of Victorianism.

Yet the war itself was fought if anything to *preserve* the values of the past, rather than to further the cause of change or 'progress'.[35] It is also worth considering the behaviour of the protagonists within the Edwardian Crisis upon the outbreak of war. Most rallied to their country, favouring patriotism above continued protest. Although the nation came after a year or two to adopt a more sober attitude to the war, this was no apotheosis of anti-Victorianism. In the light of these arguments about the role of the war, it is ironic that while most people were fulfilling what they perceived to be their 'duty', it was a solitary conscientious objector who was slowly writing the work which in hindsight did the Victorians the greater harm: Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*.

Summary. Although it might be dated back to around the 1860s, anti-Victorianism did not have a single starting-point. Nor, despite subsequent developments in the 1890s, 1900-01, the Edwardian period, and 1914-18, did it progress smoothly in intensity from one moment to the next, reaching a 'climax' in the Great War. The possibilities for the expression of anti-Victorianism became freer, though the movement always retained its diversity. The extent of anti-Victorianism was probably very small, and at all stages up to and after 1918 recognisably 'Victorian' attitudes and practices could still be found.

The focus of anti-Victorianism

Victorian. 2. *fig.* Resembling or typified by the attitudes supposedly characteristic of the Victorian era; prudish, strict; old-fashioned, out-dated.

OED Supplement

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[35] DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 13; Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, esp. ch. 3.

I want in this section to consider whether the protracted phenomenon of anti-Victorianism after c.1860 had any distinct characteristics about which we might safely generalise. Certainly dictionary definitions might be sought. Here we are heirs to the generalisations that found concrete form in the inter-war period: a promising start. The *OED Supplement* cites the first pejorative use of 'Victorian' (see above) for 1934. 'Victoriana' is attributed to Ezra Pound in 1918 ('for most of us, the odour of defunct Victoriana is so unpleasant'), and 'Victorianism' to G.K. Chesterton in 1913 (discussing in literature the 'revolts that broke up Victorianism at last').[36]

Like later scholars, many in the inter-war period identified an 'essence' of Victorianism in the early and mid-Victorian periods. D.C. Somervell in his 1929 survey of Victorian intellectual history commented on the way that a core of values in the middle third of the century (1832-67 or 1832-74 by his reckoning) came in hindsight to stand for the heart of Victorianism. 'It is only in the middle period that we are unconscious of either eighteenth or twentieth century frontiers', he wrote. 'This is the 'Victorian' period *par excellence*, and thus 'Victorian' and nineteenth century became for many of us almost interchangeable terms.'[37] G.M. Young, who was a more active enthusiast for Victorian values, similarly saw the 'compact and domestic philosophy of Victorian England' dissolved into 'all the fads and fancies' of the years beyond 1865.[38] Here he echoed Esmé Wingfield-Stratford's quasi-Freudian reading of 1930, which suggested that the 'tragedy' of the Victorians had been their inability to adjust to industrial modernity after 1870.[39] Walter Murdoch, attempting to summarise the strengths and weaknesses of the Victorian period for a Brisbane lecture audience in 1937, restricted his comments to the years 1850-70, 'because I think you will find that in those years everything that we attack as Victorian was in full growth'.[40] We might therefore with relative assurance characterise the Victorianism which these writers were discussing as a belief in progress, careful reform, laissez-faire, self-help, faith, and respectability. Of course most of these things had been contested at the time, but the overall framework would have been recognisable to contemporaries until at least 1870.

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[36] *OED Supplement*, pp. 1158-9.
[37] D.C. Somervell, *English Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1929), p. 232.
[38] Young, *Portrait*, p. 98.
[39] Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, *The Victorian Tragedy* (London, 1930), ch. 24. This reading had in fact annoyed Young: see above, pp. 9-10.
[40] Walter Murdoch, *The Victorian Era: Its Strength and Weakness* (Sydney, 1938), p. 3.

The comments by the writers above are consistent with more tendentious attacks upon the Victorians. The epithet 'early Victorian' (as Young noted) seems to have become a term of abuse by the 1890s, and kept much of its currency into the Edwardian period. Hence the Duke of Argyll in his 1901 biography of Queen Victoria noted that 'the style now called "Early Victorian" is not one that one can desire to be followed in dress, ornament, design, or any production requiring beauty as well as solidity'.[41] In 1911 Augustine Birrell dismissed John Bright as 'awful, vulgar, early Victorian'.[42] And in 1912 playgoers heard the line 'such nonsense all this early Victorian prudery' in Act 3 of Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

By the 1920s the specificity of this anti-Victorianism had become susceptible to blurring and extension. Critics now attacked the 'mid-Victorian' as well. As the literary critic Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch commented in 1922: 'what you laugh at as "Victorian", includes a great deal that we laughed at as "Early Victorian" or, later, as "Mid-Victorian"'.[43] Fifteen years later Walter Murdoch remarked to his Brisbane audience that he would not waste their time 'in proving the fact that "Mid-Victorian" has become a term of reproach'.[44]

Michael Mason suggests that this process of 'historical slippage' eventually led critics to use the general adjective 'Victorian' to attack *any* feature of life between 1837 and 1901: differentiation between early, mid, and late Victorian no longer occurred.[45] Certainly some evidence can be found to support this thesis. Many contemporaries were petulant about the lack of precision with which the Victorian period came to be discussed. E.H. Dance in a pointedly titled study *The Victorian Illusion* (1928) noted rather waspishly that 'We are beginning to realise, after all, that Victorianism is not so much the attitude adopted by the Victorians towards their world, as the attitude adopted by posterity towards the Victorians.'[46] M.E. Perugini meanwhile commented in 1932:

> It has become a convention among the unconventional nowadays to scoff at the Victorian reign and all its works; but such criticism is not

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[41] John Campbell, 9th Duke of Argyll, *VRI - Queen Victoria: Her Life and Empire* (New York, 1901), p. 203.
[42] Quoted in Donald Read, *Edwardian England 1901-1915: Society and Politics* (London, 1972), p. 6.
[43] Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Studies in Literature* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 287.
[44] Murdoch, *Victorian Era*, p. 3.
[45] Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, 1994), p. 18.
[46] E.H. Dance, *The Victorian Illusion* (London, 1928), p. 2.

> always based on intimate acquaintance with the period derided, and cavillers are apt to ignore its length. Hearing some bright young persons exclaim against something or other, in morals, manners or modes, as being "so Victorian!" one may well question to which particular phase of sixty-five years they refer.[47]

Yet an unhelpful inference might easily be drawn from Mason's thesis, and this is that England was in the grip of total anti-Victorianism by the time of the Great War; only complete denigration could have allowed such imprecision about the use of 'Victorian' to take hold of the historical imagination. But this never happened. The comments of Dance and Perugini alone show a concern with historical accuracy; *some* writers continued to be more specific about the period they were discussing.[48] More importantly, I have found little explicit denigration either of the late Victorian period or of features which might be attributed to that time. (One obvious exception is Strachey's depiction of Imperialism in the 'Gordon' essay of *Eminent Victorians*.) The Edwardian period attracted equally scant criticism after 1918.

Even works which used a generalised 'Victorian' epithet tended to focus primarily upon early or mid-Victorian values. We can see this process of elision at work in Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*.[49] The twin focus of Strachey's attack was religious zeal and a concern with worldly progress. The zeal was essentially early Victorian in its evangelicalism, explicitly so in the case of the young Manning and Gordon. Thomas Arnold - who was not really a Victorian at all (dying in 1842) - was also elevated to the status of honorary Victorian on account of his religious earnestness. All four figures in Strachey's reading were naturally ambitious. The early and mid-Victorian cult of progress furnished their deep-rooted emotional drives with the means to fulfil their ambitions. Their careers spanned most of the Victorian period, from Arnold's reforms at Rugby in the 1830s down to the death of Manning in 1892 (Nightingale lived even longer, but had by that stage effectively

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[47] M.E. Perugini, *Victorian Days and Ways* (London, 1932), p. 15.
[48] Robert Graves in *Goodbye to all That* [1929] (Harmondsworth, 1960), p. 39 described pre-war Charterhouse as being 'heavy with romance of a conventional early-Victorian type, complicated by cynicism and foulness'. Annabel Huth Jackson in *A Victorian Childhood* (London, 1932), p. 50 remarked with similar exactitude: 'Poor children of to-day, who are told that Macaulay is a rotten Early Victorian.'
[49] Cf. below, Chapter 7.

retired). Strachey's readers were thereby encouraged to see the Victorian period as a web of interwoven values which stretched from the beginning of Victoria's time to its end. As George Kitson Clark comments: 'With him ... the word 'Early' has been dropped out, and the word Victorian had come to be used by itself so that the whole reign began to shrink in people's eyes into one coherent whole to be included in one comprehensive denigration.'[50]

However generalised the language of anti-Victorianism may have become in the inter-war period, it is nevertheless arguable that society did not engage in 'one comprehensive denigration' of the period. It is impossible to reconstruct the precise focus of attack when people criticised the 'Victorians' or 'Victorianism', but there is good reason to believe that it was more specific, and more frequently directed at the values of the years before about 1870, than is often thought. If, as we suggested above, those values might be characterised as a belief in progress, careful reform, laissez-faire, self-help, faith, and respectability, then many of the motifs of anti-Victorianism might be seen in terms of their opposites: scepticism about ideals, eagerness for change, anger at social inequalities, disregard for the comfort and repressiveness of bourgeois existence, and so on.

The values of the years before c.1870 naturally lived on into the late Victorian and Edwardian periods as those who had imbibed them in youth grew to middle and old age. Some of the most moving conflicts between parents and children, as we shall see later in this chapter, were set in the last years of the nineteenth century and the opening ones of the twentieth. It must be emphasised that these conflicts, and the focus of anti-Victorianism generally, depended entirely upon the individual. This inevitably led to a great deal of variety within anti-Victorianism, and I want in the remainder of this section to try to show some of this variety in action. We shall take a single 'artefact', the Victorian home and its inhabitants, and indicate how different critics of the inter-war period drew attention to different things within it. Needless to say, this will not be a comprehensive account of anti-Victorianism - nor, given the proliferation of sources, can it even be an exhaustive study of the way in which the Victorian home was denigrated. Hopefully, however, it will accentuate the complexity and range of motifs within criticism of the past after 1918.

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[50] George Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (London, 1962), p. 29.

We would not even have got across the threshold of the middle-class Victorian home before opprobrium was heaped upon its inhabitants. Perhaps the house was built in the Gothic style, in which case fashionable people in the 1920s and 1930s would have been bound to deplore its heaviness and archaism. If it were a town house, then they may well have preferred a neo-Georgian style. The clean restrained style of neo-Georgianism harkened back to the days before Victorian materialism had grown rampant, and had the felicity of being in keeping with avant-garde tastes in architecture.[51] Perhaps instead the house was Victorian brickwork; but this too would have attracted some negative comments. 'Whatever may be said in favour of the Victorians,' quipped P.G. Wodehouse in 1937, 'it is pretty generally admitted that few of them were to be trusted within reach of a trowel and a pile of bricks.'[52] (Victorian brickwork did not in fact become popular again until the 1960s.)[53] There is a good chance too that ivy may have been growing on the exterior walls. Some inter-war critics saw in ivy a telling metaphor for Victorian taste and values.[54] A.E. Richarson in his chapter on architecture for Young's 1934 *Early Victorian England* collection commented that 'Victorian decoration, in its tenacity, resembles the smother of ivy on ancient walls'.[55] More extraordinary however was Virginia Woolf's description in Chapter 5 of *Orlando* (1928) of how the home was affected by the descent of Victorianism. Woolf here provided a fantasy in which Victorianism became anthropomorphised as a damp chill bringing florid growth and claustrophobia:

> Outside the house - it was another effect of the damp - ivy grew in unparalleled profusion. Houses that had been of bare stone were smothered in greenery. No garden, however formal its original design, lacked a shrubbery, a wilderness, a maze. What light penetrated to the bedrooms where children were born came

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[51] See John Summerson, 'Architecture' in Boris Ford (ed.), *The Cambridge Cultural History*, vol 8: *Early 20th Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 212-45; Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven & London, 1997), pp. 278-95.
[52] P.G. Wodehouse, *Summer Moonshine* [1937] (Harmondsworth, 1996), p. 17.
[53] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol 1: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), pp. 125-7.
[54] Cf. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p. 211.
[55] A.E. Richardson, 'Architecture' in G.M. Young (ed.), *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1934), II, p. 235.

> naturally of an obfusc green, and what light penetrated to the drawing-rooms where grown men and women lived came through curtains of brown and purple plush. But the change did not stop at outward things. The damp struck within. Men felt the chill in their hearts; the damp in their minds.[56]

Woolf suggested a symbolic gloss on ivy which takes us into the interior of the Victorian home. Not surprisingly, anti-Victorianism proliferated to an even greater extent here. Even fairly temperate objective historians had little to say in favour of early and mid-Victorian furnishing. Like R.C.K. Ensor they condemned it as 'costly, flashy, pretentious, insincere, preferring new ways (or archaism) which nearly always proved ugly'.[57] The popular historian J. Hampden Jackson put the charge simply: 'The mid-Victorian bourgeois lived in a state of luxury which would have startled their ancestors as much as it shocks us by its bad taste.'[58] This reference to the eighteenth century reminds us that many in the inter-war hankered after neo-Georgian simplicity in interior decoration as well as in external design. John Steegman's *The Rule of Taste* (1936) lamented the loss of a fine tradition in furnishing and painting led by a discriminating élite up to the reign of George IV. This tradition, he argued, had been overturned in the Victorian period by the coming of mass democracy and a material wealth which was both hastily acquired and ostentatiously displayed.[59] A.E. Richardson found something kind to say about the 'solid comfort' of Victorian domestic interiors, but conceded that 'by comparison with the Georgian period Victorian art in every connexion was inferior'.[60]

Often writers invested the archetypally cluttered furniture of Victorian homes with the sort of symbolism that Woolf used. Her friend Lytton Strachey, in his 1921 biography of Queen Victoria, wrote of Prince Albert's reordering of the royal court into the very model of bourgeois respectability. 'Even the very chairs and tables had assumed, with a singular responsiveness, the forms of prim solidity',

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[56] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* [1928] (Harmondsworth, 1993), p. 158. The extraordinary passage about the effects of the damp chill - too long to give here - is worth seeking out in full.
[57] R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936), p. 152.
[58] J. Hampden Jackson, *England Since the Industrial Revolution 1815-1935: A Simple History* (London, 1936), p. 142.
[59] John Steegman, *The Rule of Taste from George I to George IV* [1936] (New York, 1968), ch. 10.
[60] Richardson, 'Architecture', p. 239.

Strachey reflected. 'The Victorian Age was in full swing.'[61] Such observations were by no means the preserve of fey Bloomsbury. A writer as far removed from Bloomsbury as imaginable, D.H. Lawrence, in 1928 depicted Lady Chatterley looking through a lumber room at Wragby, where she found a medicine bag. 'The thing was wonderfully made and contrived, excellent craftsmanship of the best Victorian order. But somehow it was monstrous. ... It had a peculiar soullessness.'[62] Victorian furniture and household items were aesthetically deplorable. In some eyes, they were also manifestations of an earnestness and decorum which crippled the emotional life of the inhabitants. 'An antimacassar was on every chair ... and the beds full of bugs and disasters', Strachey concluded of mid-Victorian domesticity.[63]

The inhabitants of the Victorian home were not necessarily seen as being the victims of their age. This is particularly true of wives and daughters. One of the earliest motifs of anti-Victorianism, as we have seen, was the urge to liberate women. Often, though, women themselves proved reluctant to abandon externally the standards of behaviour prescribed for them by social convention. This became characterised, not surprisingly, as hypocrisy. As early as 1909 H.G. Wells had a character cry in exasperation at Ann Veronica: 'What is the use of keeping up this note of indignation, Ann Veronica? ... Don't frown me off now. Don't go back into Victorian respectability and pretend you don't and you can't think and all the rest of it.'[64] This theme was taken up and amplified by many inter-war writers. 'I have no reason to believe that the Victorian woman was more reticent than the modern girl', Edgar Jepson wrote in 1933. 'Not to put too fine a point on it, the Victorians were the world's greatest humbugs.'[65] The perceived need to affect innocence on the part of Victorian women was the only subject of which E.F. Benson was truly scornful in his 1930 study of past mores:

> There is a great deal to be said for any besom that sweeps away the cobwebs of Victorian conventionalism, which harboured such dusty rubbish as the axiom that no nice girl knew anything about anything till she was married, and that if she remained a spinster she

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[61] Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* [1921] (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 117.
[62] D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* [1928] (Harmondsworth, 1994), p. 148.
[63] Lytton Strachey, 'Carlyle' in *Portraits in Miniature* (London, 1931), p. 193.
[64] H.G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* (London, 1909), p. 203.
[65] Edgar Jepson, *Memories of a Victorian* (London, 1933), pp. 9, 83.

> continued to believe that babies were found under the gooseberry bushes of the kitchen-gardens of married couples, or that the chance of exposure of her calves to the lascivious gaze of men was a shock to her modesty which could only be correctly expressed by a timely swoon."[66]

A 1940 farce by Barbara Shaw entitled *A Mid-Victorian Trifle* (about the 'scandal' of a daughter marrying an apparent foreigner without her parents' permission) provided in the production notes a description of the mother: 'the acknowledged "delicate wife," the tremulous, fluttering "little woman" so beloved of Victorian fiction, who, behind all her hysterics, was as hard and self-centred a creature as one would wish to avoid'.[67]

This mention of literature brings us to yet another focus within anti-Victorianism. There is a good chance that in our hypothetical middle-class Victorian home the father would have read aloud to the rest of the family after dinner. Had we looked back at the house around 1860 or 1870 the family would probably have been working its way through Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës, Mrs Gaskell, Trollope, or George Eliot. These were the subject of Lord David Cecil's *Early Victorian Novelists* (1934).[68] The subtitle of Cecil's study, *Essays in Revaluation*, hinted at a rehabilitative intention; yet the essays themselves did not achieve such an end. With the exception of praise for *Wuthering Heights* (the existential musings of which transcend its 'Victorianness'), Cecil devoted at least half of each essay to pondering the writer's shortcomings, and relating these to a predetermined image of early Victorian novels outlined in the opening chapter. Cecil argued that novelists before about 1860 pandered to the restricted demands of a middle-class audience, creating works with a lack of organic unity and characterised by moral and intellectual squeamishness. Here he was in accord with the Leavisite school which dominated the academic study of literature between the wars. And needless to say, most of the Modernists had very little time for the emollient folds of Victorian prose.[69]

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[66] E.F. Benson, *As We Were: A Victorian Peep-Show* (London, 1930), p. 23. Admittedly Benson did have something of a reputation for misogyny: see *DNB 1931-1940*, p. 70.
[67] Barbara Shaw, *A Mid-Victorian Trifle: A One-Act Comedy for Five Women* (London, 1940), p. 20.
[68] David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* [1934] (London, 1943).
[69] Cf. below, Chapter 10 for more extensive comments on literary criticism between the wars.

Victorian poetry was held in similarly low esteem by many, and had been for some time before the Great War. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, introducing the *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* in 1912, had already been brought robustly to assert: 'I have thought it no insult to include any English poet born in our time, under that great name 'Victorian'; a title the present misprision of which will ... surely go its way as a flippancy of fashion'.[70] What Quiller-Couch had not taken account of was the establishment of literature as an academic subject around this time; and the most influential inter-war academic in reshaping the poetic canon was F.R. Leavis, who had a very low opinion of Victorian verse, dismissing most of it as nothing more than the creation of 'dreamworlds'.[71] W.B. Yeats's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936) contained a further snub against the Victorians by its inclusion of Victorian poetry which seemed to run counter to the general tendencies of nineteenth century verse, thereby implying that the 'Victorian' and the 'modern' were irreconcilable. The literary critic Douglas Bush in 1932 summarised many of the contemporary charges brought against Victorian literature: it was seen to be 'largely pink pills for pale people, a tissue of hypocritical compromises and evasions; it was smugly materialistic, smugly optimistic, mawkish, sentimental, timid, prudish, untrue to life'.[72]

If the inhabitants of the house were sufficiently rich then they might have invested in a canvas or two. How valuable these heirlooms would have been in the inter-war period is debatable. Locked away out of sight in a lumber room Lady Chatterley found 'bad Sir Edwin Landseer's [sic] and pathetic William Henry Hunt birds' nests ... She was determined to look through it one day, and clear it all.'[73] M.E. Perugini in 1932 recounted a young friend saying to him that he had no interest in Victorian art, and added himself that 'sentiment is supposed to be particularly Victorian, and is now out of fashion'.[74] (Wisely enough, though, Perugini added that there was never any such thing as 'Victorian art' in the first place.) Perhaps, like the process of 'slippage' noted above, critics had a clearer idea of what they were attacking than the generalised adjective 'Victorian' suggests. Many attacked what A. Paul Oppé in his 1934 overview of art described as its 'complete

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[70] Arthur Quiller-Couch (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* [1912] (Oxford, 1948), p. viii.
[71] See F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London, 1932).
[72] Douglas Bush, 'The Victorians, God Bless Them!', *The Bookman*, 74 (1932), 589-90.
[73] Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley*, p. 147.
[74] Perugini, *Victorian Days and Ways*, pp. 234-5.

predominance of subject over treatment, and of the intellectual and moral elements over the sensory and aesthetic'.[75] These were essentially features of early and mid-Victorian art: the appeal of realism, the moral-sentimental vignette, and the historical genre painting (often all combined together) was strongest during these years.[76] As on so many occasions, it was left to Strachey to say where exactly Victorian art stood in relation to much fashionable opinion: 'Its incoherence, its pretentiousness, and its incurable lack of detachment will always outweigh its genuine qualities of solidity and force'.[77]

We can see in this brief account of attacks upon the home that anti-Victorianism had no single focus; and of course we have only focused upon middle-class domestic life. A sketch of anti-Victorianism in, say, public life would no doubt have revealed slightly different priorities.[78] But my intention here has simply been to remind the reader of the sheer diversity of anti-Victorian sentiment, even within a relatively restricted frame of reference such as the middle-class home. Aesthetic tastes were contested from the shape and style of the Victorians' homes to the books they read and the paintings they had on the walls; while the lifestyle of the inhabitants was described according to chosen nuance as ignorant or deceitful, repressed or sentimental, stolid or swathed in escapism. Anti-Victorianism was very much in the eye of the beholder; as Tolstoy observed, all happy families are alike, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

Summary. Despite a tendency to generalise about the precise connotation of the adjective 'Victorian', much anti-Victorianism was focused on the values of the early and mid-Victorian periods. It is important to remember though that many of these values flourished well into the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. The focus of anti-Victorianism was more generally dependent upon the individual. There was no coherent 'programme' to the phenomenon.

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[75] A. Paul Oppé, 'Art' in Young, *Early Victorian England*, II, p. 140.
[76] See John Steegman, *Victorian Taste: A Study of the Arts and Architecture from 1830 to 1870* (London, 1970); Roy Strong, *And When Did You Last See Your Father? The Victorian Painter and British History* (London, 1978).
[77] Lytton Strachey, 'A Victorian Critic' in *Characters and Commentaries* (London, 1933), p. 187.
[78] No doubt this would have included attacks on such things as excessive concern with public respectability, industrial manipulation, the notion of self-help, and so on. Young, *Portrait*, offers many suggestions along these lines.

The affective nature of anti-Victorianism

One of the things that I am most keen to establish in this thesis is the affective nature of anti-Victorianism between the wars. This has been a neglected area of thought and discussion in many cultural histories of the period. These histories tend to be preoccupied with the discontinuities caused by the Great War rather than with the continuities across it, and accordingly draw attention to the iconoclastic and repudiative aspects of anti-Victorianism. In so doing we have tended to underestimate the affectivity of attitudes towards the Victorians after 1918, even amongst their critics. True repudiation, though it may be done with vigour or calculation, leads to genuine emotional severance. Such severance rarely, if ever, occurred within inter-war anti-Victorianism. This was because people after 1918 were not engaged in a dispassionate analysis of a distant past; they were living in an age where many recognisably Victorian features were still in place, and they were reassessing their childhood and their parents. At the very least this meant that criticism of the past - even hostile criticism - had an emotional intensity which kept the Victorian past 'alive' between the wars. More frequently, the result was subtlety of feeling and an ambivalence within writings which has been overlooked by those who make deterministic comments about anti-Victorianism. The work which has suffered most at the hands of such determinism is Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918). I shall argue in Chapter 7 for a reading of *Eminent Victorians* which takes greater account of Strachey's interest in, and sympathy for, the human nature of his subjects.

In the meantime, let us explore some of the manifestations of this ambivalence. Being an abstract concept, ambivalence can hardly be investigated on an empirical basis, and as historians today we might feel slightly uncomfortable about this. Yet, without committing ourselves fully to psychoanalytic readings of the past, we ought to recognise the validity of interpreting written evidence with a sensitivity to its emotional nuances. If we are honest about it, we would agree with Peter Gay that 'The professional historian has always been a psychologist - an amateur psychologist.'[79] Ironically, it is precisely because historians have tended to fight shy of acknowledging their status as 'amateur psychologists' that such

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[79] Peter Gay, *Freud For Historians* (Oxford, 1985), p. 6.

deterministic generalisations have been made about anti-Victorianism. Gruffness of approach begets gruffness of interpretative outcome; if we are content to look only for the most obvious emotions within history then we are bound to characterise historical figures crudely. It is time to move beyond such characterisations in studying anti-Victorianism in the early twentieth century.

As we noted earlier, some of the most compelling clashes between the generations occurred in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Given the existence of strong undercurrents of Victorianism well into the twentieth century, it is not surprising that these earliest expressions of rebellion were subtle and elusive. Perhaps the two most important books within the anti-Victorian tradition before the Great War - for so they were identified by later writers such as Virginia Woolf[80] - were Samuel Butler's *The Way of all Flesh* (1873-85) and Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907). Significantly enough, Butler only allowed posthumous publication of his work (it appeared in 1903), and Gosse published the original edition of his study anonymously. This showed a concern not only for the prevailing social conventions but for the surviving members and friends of their families. Let us consider these two works.

Butler was motivated to write his novel in part by a lingering resentment against his Evangelical upbringing. In the novel we first see severity manifested in Ernest's grandfather, who is in fact a Regency rather than a Victorian figure. Yet for many readers this sleight of hand - like Strachey's treatment of Thomas Arnold in *Eminent Victorians* - brought to life the severity of the evangelical upbringing as an essentially 'Victorian' experience. Unlike Strachey's depiction of Arnold, however, this may in large part have been how readers chose to interpret the work; for as David Grylls and Michael Mason have pointed out, *The Way of all Flesh* was no simplistic anti-Victorian tract.[81] Butler evinces a measure of sympathy for his stern father-figures in outlining an idiosyncratic neo-Darwinist view of human nature. Butler believed that memory was transmitted through the generations, and so the inescapable Pontifex family 'trait' became simply harshness towards children. The

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[80] See Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Biography' [1939] in *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life* (Harmondsworth, 1993), pp. 144-151. Cf. the presence of *The Way of all Flesh* amongst the belongings of the free-thinking Emersons in E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* [1908] (Harmondsworth, 1990), pp. 143-4.

[81] David Grylls, *Guardians and Angels: Parents and Children in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (London, 1978), ch. 5; Michael Mason, Introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *The Way of all Flesh* (Oxford, 1993).

novel also exemplifies Butler's belief that such severity was acceptable - even necessary - if parents were to lead a peaceful life. The tension of the book therefore derived itself from Butler's instinctive reaction against his own childhood memories and his more philosophical adult understanding of human nature.

Gosse's *Father and Son* is an even better example of that emotional energy generated by deep ambivalence which characterises so much anti-Victorianism. Subsequent critics such as Harold Nicolson in the 1920s gave *Father and Son* an important role in the process of moving away from Victorian biographical constraint towards Stracheyan openness.[82] Yet Gosse was in many ways writing within the Victorian tradition, convinced - theoretically at least - of the possibility of constructing biography along purely scientific lines: the words 'record', 'document', and 'study' were dwelt upon in the Preface. Again, however, Gosse had an intense evangelical upbringing, and later came to repudiate religion. And although he could repudiate religion, he could not repudiate his father. Gosse failed to maintain the poise promised at the outset, and in so doing revealed painfully ambivalent feelings towards his father. As Peter Abbs has written, this conflict between objectivity and subjectivity became 'explosive' in the Epilogue, where Gosse regretfully asserted 'a human being's privilege to fashion his inner life for himself'.[83]

Ambivalence resonated throughout inter-war literature, in which domineering or absent fathers continued to play a strikingly large role. Hugh Kingsmill, the man-of-letters and according to some the heir to Lytton Strachey, published a biography of Matthew Arnold in 1928. In it he suggested that Thomas Arnold had exerted a repressive Puritanical influence over his son, finding in this relationship an echo of his own dealings with his father, Sir Henry Lunn.[84] Kingsmill admitted four years later that the work had been 'written, it may be, too much in the spirit of a young man chasing his great-grandfather round the garden with a pitchfork'.[85] Such levity hid a deep-rooted ambivalence about father-figures, a

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[82] Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (London, 1927), pp. 140, 143-8.
[83] Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son* [1907] (Harmondsworth, 1989), p. 251.
[84] Hugh Kingsmill, *Matthew Arnold* (London, 1928). The book was not well-received by the critics, not least because of Kingsmill's irreverential habit of referring to Arnold as 'Matt'.
[85] Quoted in Michael Holroyd, *Hugh Kingsmill: A Critical Biography* (London, 1964), p. 143. 'Hugh Kingsmill' was the pen-name of Hugh Kingsmill Lunn (1889-1949), novelist, biographer, literary critic and editor. Of the oft-suggested lineage with Strachey, Holroyd observes (pp. 205-7) that Kingsmill had a less whimsical, apprehensive approach to life than Strachey. Kingsmill's robustness and mysticism nevertheless shared with Strachey's outlook a scorn for power-seekers and those

confusion made manifest in other works of the period. Virginia Woolf, whose father Sir Leslie Stephen was more of an 'eminent Victorian' than most, only managed to come to terms with his ghost in *To The Lighthouse* (1927), where he appeared as Mr Ramsay, brilliant but irredeemably self-centred, 'like a beak of brass, barren and bare'.[86] The following year Woolf reflected in her diary: 'Father's birthday. He could have been ... 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. ... I used to think of him & mother daily; but writing The Lighthouse laid them in my mind.'[87] Robert Graves in 1929 revelled in the memory of upsetting avuncular expectations when C.L. Graves had sent him a sovereign at school. 'I had written to thank him, saying that I was at last able to buy Samuel Butler's *Note Books*, *The Way of all Flesh*, and the two *Erewhons*', recalled Graves. 'This had infuriated him, as a good Victorian.'[88]

It was the very absence of such paternal or avuncular figures that troubled many younger writers. In Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930), for example, the author's difficult relationship with his father was explored through the distance of the seemingly senile Colonel Blount and the elusiveness of the Drunk Major who absconded with the hero's money.[89] Samuel Hynes has also shown how the absence of father-figures helped to generate powerful emotional undercurrents amongst the so-called 'Auden Generation' of the 1930s.[90] They were a school of writers and poets without heroes, and it is significant that they took their lead from *The Waste Land*, a work untouched by rhetoric or heroism. Again, though, the legacy of the past was never less than ambivalent. For all their criticism of the 'Old Men', younger writers of the 1930s felt a degree of guilt that they had not experienced the Great War, and as the decade moved on they became anxious that they might not live up to their own expectations. Theirs was a 'post-Victorian' morality which could not prove its independence until it was put to the test, and (apart from the Spanish Civil War) such a test did not properly come until 1939.

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engaged in the pursuit of worldly success.

[86] Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* [1927] (Oxford, 1992), p. 52.

[87] Quoted in Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London, 1996), p. 481.

[88] Graves, *Goodbye to all That*, p. 62.

[89] Money which significantly enough was returned by the Major - now a sober General - in the epilogue. Richard Jacobs comments in the introduction to the Penguin edition of Waugh's novel (Harmondsworth, 1996), p. xviii: 'The father-figures in *Vile Bodies* are individually comic, ludicrous and ineffectual, but collectively they evoke longing as well as exasperation.'

[90] Hynes, *Auden Generation*, ch. 1.

It seems probable that ambivalence coloured virtually all shades of anti-Victorianism between the wars. Élite opinion at any rate would have found the notion of filial tension an interesting and fashionable one. Freud was popular amongst intellectual circles during the 1920s,[91] and his arguments may have provided people with a further means of exploring their complex relations with the past. 'The last age, like a relation, is too close for a man to be able to view it with the detachment necessary for criticism', wrote Lord David Cecil in 1934. 'Why this should be is not clear. Can it have a Freudian explanation, some huge Oedipus complex against the father's generation?'[92] We have little way of telling; but Cecil's comment does at the very least indicate that amongst thoughtful speculators anti-Victorianism was less a simplistic repudiation of history than an attempt to negotiate an emotional compromise with an inescapable past.

Summary. The affective nature of anti-Victorianism has been underestimated by many writers who emphasise the iconoclastic and repudiative character of the movement. Anti-Victorianism was more frequently ambivalent towards the past, because inter-war critics were dealing with their parents' generation and often with their own childhoods. Writing about distant or overbearing Victorian father-figures was a particularly powerful indication of this ambivalence at work. Much anti-Victorianism might therefore better be described as an act of emotional negotiation with the past than a repudiation of it.

Concluding Thoughts

We have examined three areas of anti-Victorianism between *c.*1860 and *c.*1940 which have been susceptible to mischaracterisation by historians: the extent and dating of anti-Victorianism; the focus of the movement; and its affective nature. This is how the propositions made about each of these areas will relate to the rest of the thesis:

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[91] See Dean Rapp, 'The Reception of Freud by the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines, 1920-1925', *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, 24 (1988), 191-201.
[92] Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists*, p. 4.

1. Anti-Victorianism was not a movement with a 'beginning', 'end', or 'programme', though it became more possible as the years went by for greater explicitness of utterance. Nevertheless, its hold on national opinion - though difficult to gauge with any accuracy - was weaker than is often suggested. Continuity of attitude and practice, and nostalgia for the past, will be explored continuously throughout the thesis, but most particularly in Chapter 2.

2. Anti-Victorianism was diffuse in focus and dependent upon the individual. This inevitably led to a diversity of attitudes towards the past. Sometimes historians attempted to 'correct' these popular attitudes; often they were too personally engaged themselves, and multiplied the variety of attitudes and debates in existence. This will be explored in Part Two.

3. Anti-Victorianism was more emotive and complex than has often been appreciated. This in part accounts for the heat of debate just mentioned. The ambivalence of many critics has been underestimated and the thrust of their work mischaracterised. In particular Lytton Strachey has suffered from such readings. A more defensive reading of *Eminent Victorians*, and the way that it encouraged eventual biographical rehabilitation of many Victorians (explored in Chapters 8-11), is offered in Chapter 7.

Chapter Two

Nostalgia

As we saw in Chapter 1, anti-Victorianism was rarely uncomplicated by the ambivalence which came from affective links with the past. It should hardly surprise us therefore that many more people felt nostalgic about, or simply felt no great discontinuity with, the pre-war past. Historians have nevertheless tended to overlook this feature of inter-war society. Probably this gap in our understanding comes from the emphasis which has been placed upon the Great War as a watershed in modernity and anti-Victorianism - topics which we addressed in the previous chapter. This approach not only tends to mischaracterise anti-Victorianism, but crowds out or labels as somehow quaint or moribund the evidence of enduring 'Victorianism' after 1918. Yet in 1938 the literary critic Amy Cruse had observed that there were three co-existent 'types' of writer and reader at the time of the Great War - the Victorian, rebel-Victorian, and Edwardian - and that after 1918 the first of these remained widely active.[1] More recent historians have also begun to question the tendency to underestimate the extent of Victorianism after 1918, particularly with regard to what Raphael Samuel calls 'arguably the most substantial twentieth-century legacy of the Victorian era, the public service ethic'.[2] The present chapter will dwell upon this theme. It will also deal with other aspects of nostalgia which have been overlooked and deserve greater consideration.[3]

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[1] Amy Cruse, *After the Victorians* (London, 1938). See esp. ch. 16, called 'The Persistent Victorians'.

[2] Raphael Samuel, 'Mrs Thatcher and Victorian Values' in *Theatres of Memory*, vol 2: *Island Stories* (London, 1998), p. 331. See Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1991); Susan Pedersen & Peter Mandler (eds), *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain* (London, 1994); Julia Stapleton, 'Political Thoughts, Elites, and the State in Modern Britain', *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), 251-68. Cf. the much more tendentious attempt to focus attention on 'Victorian virtues' by Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (London, 1995), and a critique by Stefan Collini, 'Speaking with Authority: The Historian as Social Critic' in *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford, 1999), esp. pp. 85-94.

[3] I am using the term 'nostalgia' in a somewhat loose sense here, but I cannot think of a better term or a more accurate phrase which would not be cumbersome. 'Nostalgia' implies conscious regard for the past, but I have used it here also to describe an often unconscious - but no less emotive - regard for traditional values and practices.

Accordingly this chapter focuses upon five areas related to nostalgia for the Victorian and Edwardian past. These are:

1. The nature of nostalgia and its inter-war following
2. Continuity with the past
3. Revivalism of the past
4. Myths of a pre-war 'golden age'
5. The legacy of inter-war nostalgia

These points will be explored in turn.

Nostalgia and its inter-war following

The affective quality of much anti-Victorianism, as we have seen, owed itself to the temporal and emotional proximity of the pre-war world. An imaginative gap had certainly been opened up by the war, but much remained the same too. Commentators who were not under the sway of anti-Victorian fashion were willing to acknowledge this openly. G.M. Trevelyan, for example, remarked that 'We are so like our ancestors ... and yet so unlike; so near them in time and in affection, so far removed from them in habits and in experience.'[4] Robert Harling in 1938 similarly commented that his book on the Victorian home would be rather subjective 'as almost any study of the Victorians must be, for in time and sentiment we remain too near them, despite our self-assurances that we are now grown up and are far beyond these foolish things'.[5]

Perhaps we might see in these comments a weaker form of that ambivalence which characterised much anti-Victorianism. There the tension had been between the rational compulsion to reject the past and the affective link which made complete repudiation impossible; here the tension is between the feeling that the war was an imaginative chasm and the appreciation that much had not really changed at all. If we had to ponder which of the two states of mind was more widespread in the inter-war period, then it would almost certainly have been

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[4] G.M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After* (London: 2nd edn, 1937), p. xiv.
[5] Robert Harling, *Home A Victorian Vignette* (London, 1938), pp. 11-12.

the latter. The average man, as Robert Graves and Alan Hodge noted in 1940, had never really been thrown off-balance by the war or lured into anti-Victorianism. 'Few wished to 'build a new world', as the politicians promised; the general intention was merely to cleanse the old one', they noted. 'The average man thought fondly of stepping back into civvies and resuming his old job, with the sole difference that he would no longer be b———d about by people in authority.'[6] Or, as the historian W.L. Burn recalled of the inter-war period, 'To the majority of working-class people ... the mid-Victorian period was not really "history" at all. ... They retained and used without self-consciousness their direct, personal links with the past.'[7] George Orwell, admittedly not the most impartial of observers, nevertheless concluded that England in 1940 resembled 'a family, a rather stuffy Victorian family'.[8] But we can still reasonably infer from this that many - probably most - felt largely undimmed respect for tradition, or even a degree of nostalgia itself. It may have been that the changes attendant on the war of 1939-45 were more important in altering attitudes and lifestyles in England than those of the war of 1914-18.[9]

Of course this is a study of élite opinion, which was permeated to a greater degree by fashions such as anti-Victorianism. Nevertheless, it is hardly credible that nostalgia did not proliferate even within élite opinion. Indeed, it tended to be élite writers who actively articulated nostalgia after 1918 because to a greater degree than others they had internalised the war as an imaginative faultline (if not necessarily a watershed). Writers used the bitter-sweetness of nostalgia to create aesthetic narratives of the past. In his 1938 memoir, for example, Martin Armstrong recalled a drive taken in a carriage with his mother through late Victorian autumn woods, the lateness of the season perfectly complementing the lateness of the age:

> My present feelings for [the past] are different and more complex, no doubt; they have been blended with joys and griefs experienced in the years that followed; but I do not think that they can be more

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[6] Robert Graves & Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Britain 1918-1939* (London, 1940), pp. 15-16.

[7] W.L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation* (London, 1964), p. 24.

[8] George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* [1941] (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 53.

[9] See below, Conclusion for more comments on this theme.

> intense. If that autumnal drive had not been something of deep significance to me, it would not have cut itself so deeply into my memory, nor would it rise, as it does, at the least hint, in all the freshness and warmth and colours of life.[10]

How did such subtle states of mind come about amongst inter-war writers? Partly this was to do with the nature of nostalgia. In fact nostalgia in its modern sense had only relatively recently come into existence.[11] In the seventeenth century it had been used to refer to the condition of physical homesickness. It was only in the nineteenth century - the age of technology and change - that nostalgia became romanticised in the face of a disorientating present and uncertain future. That age was to make the sense (or senses) of time and space more acute, inward, and vertiginous, open to imaginative reconstruction from artists such as Picasso, Proust, and Woolf.[12] Naturally, not all inter-war writers pursued the path taken by these innovators (who were, by that definition, unusual); but it had nevertheless been established by this time that nostalgia-oriented memory was the key to personal identity. By simplifying, it made intelligible and aesthetically appealing one's past in the face of a present which was frustratingly complex and prosaic, and a future which was worryingly inscrutable. The 'country' for which the original nostalgic traveller sickened therefore became the immediate past.

Consciously or otherwise, writers often took the image of a lost 'country' when describing pre-war England[13] and invested it with all manner of anthropomorphic qualities such as innocence, leisure, and sunshine. No doubt these qualities came, in Siegfried Sassoon's felicitous phrase, from 'the sunshine of ... clarified retrospection'.[14] And they applied particularly to the Edwardian period: not on the grounds that it was objectively considered a 'better' time than the Victorian period, but quite simply because almost everyone (including the younger adults) had memories of it. Of course there was also the convenient terminal-point of 1914 around which to focus nostalgia. People accordingly overlaid their

[10] Martin Armstrong, *Victorian Peep-Show* (London, 1938), p. 157.
[11] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 4-13, 96-105.
[12] See Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (London, 1983); David Cannadine, 'Time' in *The Pleasures of the Past* (London, 1989), pp. 209-18; Peter Conrad, *Modern Times, Modern Places Life and Art in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1998).
[13] Cf. L.P. Hartley's 'The past is a foreign country...' - also, of course, given a pre-war setting in his novel *The Go-Between* (1953).
[14] Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* [1928] (London, 1975), p. 61.

memories with a religious trope. If the outbreak of the war was the Fall, then Edwardian England must have been the Garden of Eden. We will explore further these myths of a pre-war 'golden age' later in this chapter, but it is worth noting here - when considering the likely following for nostalgia between the wars - that these myths had so proliferated by the 1930s that historians felt compelled consciously to attack them.

Nostalgia for the Edwardian period has become a relatively well-known feature of inter-war society. What has been less widely recognised is the degree of nostalgia for the Victorian period amongst older (and indeed some younger) people after 1918. In the next section we will begin to explore this topic in greater detail.

Summary. The imaginative culture of inter-war England was one which favoured nostalgia. The Great War loomed large in people's memories and helped to focus their feelings about the past. Despite that trauma, many felt that the pre-war past was close in affinity to the present; the affective bond had not been lost. Whether in undimmed regard, or in more complex attitudes to the past, there is reason to believe that nostalgia of some sort was a major feature of inter-war society.

Continuity with the past

Continuity with the pre-war past was manifest in two obvious ways after 1918. One was simply a continued regard for the past untouched by anti-Victorianism. Interestingly enough, this affective link shows how perceptions of Victorianism might have been if uncomplicated by the kind of ambivalence and resentment that we examined in Chapter 1. Dora Montefiore in 1927 penned a memoir called *From a Victorian to a Modern*.[15] This might ostensibly seem to suggest a transition away from, rather than an embracing of, her upbringing. Yet Montefiore described a happy childhood, in which she was particularly close to her father Francis Fuller (a key figure in the organisation of the Great Exhibition). It soon becomes clear that Montefiore's title describes not liberation (though she did have something to say about female suffrage) but natural personal development, and a healthy awareness

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[15] Dora B. Montefiore, *From a Victorian to a Modern* (London, 1927).

of the temporal distance of the Victorian period by 1927. The tone of Montefiore's memoir was echoed by Molly Hughes, who in the 1930s wrote recollections of 'just an ordinary, suburban, Victorian family'. 'Expressions of jollity and enjoyment of life are understatements rather than overstatements', she warned the reader at the outset. 'It occurred to me to record our doings only because, on looking back, and comparing our lot with that of the children of to-day, we seemed to have been so *lucky*.'[16] William Kent was another memoir-writer who offered a salutary example of how responses to youth were dependent upon the individual perspective.[17] Kent praised Gosse's *Father and Son* as an exemplary model for autobiography, and revealed that he too had been given a very religious upbringing, subsequently losing his faith during the war. We might therefore expect the kind of ambivalence which Gosse showed towards his father; yet Kent did not feel alienated from the Victorian setting of his youth, because his faith had been lost as an adult, without any of the rancour that Gosse had experienced with his own father. The result was a lack of disaffection with history. It was, it seems, the formative emotional experiences which could make all the difference between anti-Victorianism and warm regard for the past - both stemmed from the affective link between parents and children which spanned the divide of distance and the war.

Those who believed that there was little or nothing wrong with the past often identified themselves consciously as 'Victorians'. The literary critic Walter Murdoch argued in 1937 that this phenomenon was a defiance born of stigmatisation. 'The Victorians are people who owe us an apology for having been Victorians' - that, Murdoch suggested, was the presumption which many older people were gamely challenging by calling themselves Victorians.[18] These challenges can quite frequently be found in inter-war writing. The artist James Thorpe, for example, felt moved in 1933 'voluntarily [to] plead guilty, as a proud, obstinate and unrepentant Victorian'.[19] Arthur Baumann, former Conservative MP and editor of *The Saturday Review*, called himself in 1927 'a Victorian Tory, naked and

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[16] Molly Hughes, *A London Family 1870-1900* (Oxford, 1991), p. 2. This edition brings together Hughes's *A London Child of the Seventies* (1934), *A London Girl of the Eighties* (1936), and *A London Home in the Nineties* (1937).

[17] William Kent, *The Testament of a Victorian Youth* (London, 1938).

[18] Walter Murdoch, *The Victorian Era: Its Strength and Weakness* (Sydney, 1938), p. 2.

[19] James Thorpe, *Happy Days: Recollections of an Unrepentant Victorian* (London, 1933), p. 303.

unashamed'.[20] Such a stance was also implicit within the *Amusing Reminiscences of Victorian Times* (1921) by the eccentric John Neve Masters, former mayor of Rye.[21] In 1925 a sequel appeared to which Alfred Dunster supplied an introduction, noting that 'The key-note of this book is undoubtedly the key-note of the author's character: optimistic patriotism - imperial, national, local.'[22] This parochial pride was to prove an enduring trend. By the early 1930s, the social historian Alan Bott was able to note, 'The second half of the nineteenth century has become a "period" admitted by its fondest survivors, the praisers of bygone days, to be quaint as well as golden.'[23]

A second form of continuity with the past was the enduring belief in public service. As historians such as Stefan Collini, Susan Pedersen, and Peter Mandler have argued, many intellectuals and people in positions of authority after the war felt that there was a spirit of public duty to be upheld, and that there was a strong correlation between private morality and public action. From Reith's BBC to the initiatives of John Summerson in educating middle-class taste, many of the most distinctive features of inter-war England were underpinned by a recognisably 'Victorian' ethos. As Pedersen and Mandler comment, this 'resurgent Victorianism' took the form of 'a reassertion of the civilizing or moralizing mission, often still within a recognizably political framework'.[24] Sometimes values of the past and present could coalesce fascinatingly. J.M. Keynes, eminent Bloomsberry and close friend of Lytton Strachey, was also passionately committed throughout the inter-war period to improving the lot of mankind economically and to encouraging civilised harmony where possible.[25] In *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) he had already launched a blistering attack upon the Treaty of Versailles, arguing that its vengeful reparation clauses would spell economic and political disaster in the future (which they did). It is noteworthy from the perspective of the present chapter that Keynes set up as a counterpoise the vision of a more equitable pre-war age, a 'paradise' in which 'the projects and politics of militarism and imperialism, of racial and cultural rivalries, of monopolies, restrictions, and

[20] Arthur A. Baumann, *The Last Victorians* (London, 1927), p. 16.
[21] John Neve Masters, *Amusing Reminiscences of Victorian Times* (Rye, 1921).
[22] John Neve Masters, *The Second Book of Reminiscences* (Rye, 1925), p. 4.
[23] Alan Bott, *Our Fathers 1870-1900* (London, 1931), p. 4.
[24] Pedersen & Mandler, *After the Victorians*, p. 11.
[25] See Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes*, vol 1: *Hopes Betrayed 1893-1920* (London, 1983) & vol 2: *The Economist as Saviour 1920-1937* (London, 1992); Peter Clarke, 'J.M. Keynes: "The best of both worlds"' in Pedersen & Mandler, *After the Victorians*, pp. 170-87.

exclusion ... were to play the serpent'.[26] In the 1930s his efforts to strengthen the national economy were increased with the appearance of his *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*.

There was a large number of historians who wrote with private or political 'agendas' between the wars, feeling that history had something to teach the young beyond mere facts or antiquarianism.[27] The private and professional life of G.M. Trevelyan, dedicated as it was to causes within and outside history, furnishes another good example of lifelong commitment to public service in the Victorian mould. His admiration for the Hammonds - two of those historians with 'agendas' just noted - might well be reflected back onto him: he praised their 'intellectual and scholarly power and service to the public in the rough ways of the world's arena'.[28] But this spirit of public duty might best be explained by reference to a modest memoir written in 1924 by Evelyn Hopkinson. She dedicated her recollections to 'the third generation' in the hope that they would provide 'a link with the past'. 'These personal recollections of some who, in their days, did good service as thinkers or workers,' she reflected, 'may perhaps help those whose life is still before them both to understand more completely and to act more wisely through a real knowledge of the life of those who went before.'[29] There is ample evidence to suggest that many shared Hopkinson's view, and that many also heeded it.

Summary. Continuity of practice and attitude with the pre-war past could be found amongst a number of people between the wars, particularly memoir-writers. Goaded by the fashion for anti-Victorianism, many of them defiantly identified themselves as 'Victorians'. There is also some evidence that their nostalgia was rooted in happy or unproblematic upbringings, unlike those of the anti-Victorians. Continuity could additionally be found amongst those in positions of influence or authority, and who remained committed to the Victorian ideal of public service.

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[26] J.M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London, 1919), p. 10.
[27] See below, Part Two.
[28] Quoted in David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London, 1992), p. 45.
[29] Evelyn Hopkinson, *The Story of a Mid-Victorian Girl* (Cambridge, 1924), unpaginated.

Revivalism

Close in spirit to the continuity of the belief in public duty were attempts to revive aspects of Victorianism after 1918, either literally or as a stick with which to beat the modern world. One prominent manifestation of such revivalism came soon after the Great War had ended. Monarchies had been toppled by the shockwaves of war, and in Russia a particularly ominous spectre had arisen in Bolshevism. England resisted similar catastrophe, but class relations were notably strained between 1918 and the mid-1920s.[30] In such a climate it is not surprising that a number of writers turned to the perceived stability of Victorianism as a counterbalance to modernity. One anonymous writer, calling himself only a 'later Victorian', pondered in 1921:

> Will the youth of to-day be able to look back with equal satisfaction, thirty years hence, upon the years 1918-21, or on those which seem likely to follow? Surely our grandchildren will prefer to turn for guidance to the traditions of Victorian days. ... It may well be that the issue of the present upheaval in Russia will decide the fate of European civilisation; but it is hard to believe that the England of Victoria, the England of Peel and Palmerston, of Gladstone and Disraeli will relapse into medieval barbarism. May we not hope that a future generation, grown wiser through bitter experience, will look back with envy to those halcyon days of contentment and security to restore at least some portion of their glory?[31]

Dean Inge, in his 1922 Rede Lecture at Cambridge, commented on the opprobrium heaped upon Tennyson by some of the younger critics for his antipathy towards the French Revolution. Linking the Jacobins to the Bolsheviks, Inge went on to comment: 'Years will bring a relative sanity to our young Bolsheviks; they will then, I hope (for I wish them well), begin to read Tennyson.'[32] Ten years later the Victorian period was still being invoked as a prophylactic against Bolshevism.

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[30] See Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 56-9, 142, 144.
[31] *The Victorian Age, by A Later Victorian* (London, 1921), pp. viii, 79-80.
[32] W.R. Inge, *The Victorian Age* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 42.

Annabel Huth Jackson's memoir *A Victorian Childhood* (1932) was written in conscious reaction against 'the present Bolshevistic point of view raging in England and on the Continent' which, she believed, was threatening to remove all traces of the past.[33]

Revivalism could also be passed off, given the appropriate amount of preparation, as age-old tradition. Such an approach bolstered the monarchy in the late nineteenth century, through the potentially disastrous political consequences of the Great War, and well beyond.[34] It proved to be particularly valuable in the late 1930s. 1936 was not a good year for the monarchy. On 20 January, after a short illness, George V died. The late king had been, in A.J.P. Taylor's words, 'a model of constitutional rectitude and a model of conservative respectability also in his private life' - a figure who effectively synthesised 'Victorian' domestic probity with 'Edwardian' public pomp.[35] By contrast, his successor Edward VIII proved to be less keen on the role carved out for the monarchy by tradition. He was enamoured of the 'fast' life and, more specifically, of the married American heiress Mrs Wallis Simpson. By October 1936 Mrs Simpson had obtained her divorce, but the forces of tradition were already rallying in parliament and other government circles. By December the King had abdicated. His brother, George VI, was crowned on 12 May 1937: a date very close to the centenary of the coronation of Queen Victoria (20 June).

This is particularly appropriate because the abdication crisis and George VI's subsequent coronation tell us several things about the status of Victorian precedent in the 1930s. It is clear that Edward VIII and his supporters had overestimated the extent to which a 'modern' life of morganatic marriage was viable in the 1930s. Belief in the institution of marriage - so highly valued by the Victorians - remained firmly entrenched in England before the Second World War. The new King himself - sober, diffident, duty-bound - had spoken of monarchy as 'the family firm'.[36] Hector Bolitho's biography of George VI, published in the coronation year, drove this point home succinctly. Opening with a description of

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[33] Annabel Huth Jackson, *A Victorian Childhood* (London, 1932), p. 2.
[34] See David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c.1820-1977' in E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 101-164.
[35] A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965), p. 398.
[36] Sarah Bradford, *King George VI* (London, 1989), p. 4.

the devotion of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert, Bolitho went on to observe (without any need to name names):

> The cynicism of a new, lively century has made these laws of marriage unfashionable, but it has not made them untrue. However casually they may be treated by fashionable idlers, they still hold their own with ordinary people and with those princes who care for their responsibilities and who are jealous of their integrity. The rules of marriage and the example in domestic virtue which Prince Albert set, almost one hundred years ago, have become the abiding law of the members of the British Royal Family.[37]

Not surprisingly, then, George VI's coronation ceremony was consciously designed to be integrated with the Victorian heritage and that coronation which, almost exactly a hundred years earlier, had ushered in the Victorian age. All the customary fake-archaic paraphernalia of twentieth century royal pageant was deployed. The music at Victoria's coronation had been notoriously ill-executed, but on this occasion the composer William Walton was prevailed upon to provide *Crown Imperial*, a work in his best pastiche-Elgar mode. The message was clear: with George VI the monarchy was being re-established (even, after Edward VIII, re-integrated) within a living tradition stretching back through the Edwardian period to Queen Victoria herself.[38] On the eve of the coronation *The Times* reported news of a special film called 'The King's People' - a eulogistic history of 'British character' and benevolent rule from Victoria's accession to that of George VI, to be screened throughout the Empire.[39]

This desire to re-establish a laudable political tradition echoed itself in other ways. Victorian precedent was invoked to criticise domestic politics between the wars, which seemed to many contemporaries desultory and bland in a way that had not been true of the days of Peel, Gladstone, and Disraeli.[40] Often this came close to touching on the enduring belief in public service discussed above. We have

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[37] Hector Bolitho, *George VI* (London, 1937), pp. 17-18.
[38] Some such as G.M. Young and C.K. Webster were rather sceptical of the centenary precedents made in 1937: see below, pp. 91-2.
[39] *The Times*, 11 May 1937. Other stage and screen representations of Victoria were offered in 1937-8: see below, pp. 176-7, 184-5.
[40] Cf. inter-war perceptions of Peel and Gladstone below, Chapters 4 and 9.

already seen Arthur Baumann's self-characterisation as 'a Victorian Tory, naked and unashamed'. Baumann also advocated reviving 'some of the civic virtue of the last century': a time when 'the government of the country was conducted by men round whom the confidence of the country had gathered during many years of public service'.[41] Baumann was echoed here by the historian G.M. Young, who closed his 1936 *Portrait of an Age* with quite unashamed comments on the present day and its 'daily clamour for leadership, for faith, for a new heart or a new cause'. 'But the great [early and mid-Victorian] age is not so far behind us that we must needs have lost all its savour and its vigour', Young commented, evidently urging emulation.[42] In a further essay of 1938 on 'The Greatest Victorian' (an accolade he finally awarded to Walter Bagehot on grounds of sheer Victorianness), Young wrote of 'the most precious element in Victorian civilization, its robust and masculine sanity'.[43] Robustness had been squandered in the unnecessary compromises of inter-war politics, felt people like Howard Coote, erstwhile Lord-Lieutenant of Huntingdonshire. 'Nowadays', he lamented, 'the first question which appears to leap from the lips of an industrialist, a farmer or a working man is, "What is the Government going to do for me?" Whereas the Victorian was more apt to enquire, "What can I do for myself?" - a question much more likely to produce practical results.'[44] Anticipating Margaret Thatcher by nearly half a century, this appeal to Smilesian values yet had the distinctive timbre of one who had direct acquaintance with real Victorian practice.

Victorian thinkers and writers were also beginning to be placed in better perspective, and the examples they could set the younger generations assimilated with greater readiness. Douglas Bush, writing in *The Bookman* for 1932, observed that 'When full allowance is made for all the legitimate charges against the Victorians, it is still true that ... you find great writers, writers of commanding genius, such as our age has not yielded.'[45] Also in 1932 there appeared the anthology *The Great Victorians*, a collection of forty essays by leading figures on luminaries of the past (including J.L. Hammond on Cobden; Vita Sackville-West on George Eliot; Harold Nicolson on Palmerston; and H.J. Laski on Peel).[46] In the

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[41] Baumann, *Last Victorians*, p. 17.
[42] G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age Victorian England* [1936] (Oxford: 2nd edn, 1953), p. 164.
[43] G.M. Young, 'The Greatest Victorian' [1938] in *Victorian Essays* (Oxford, 1962), p. 126.
[44] Howard Coote, *While I Remember* (London, 1937), p. 102.
[45] Douglas Bush, 'The Victorians, God Bless Them!', *The Bookman*, 74 (1932), 591.
[46] H.J. & Hugh Massingham (eds), *The Great Victorians*, 2 vols [1932] (Harmondsworth, 1937).

introduction the editors, Harold John and Hugh Massingham, remarked of the restorative intention of the work that 'to be aware of the present one must see it as part of the past, as a link in a definite, continuous chain of tradition and form which should consciously and unconsciously direct us. And the Victorian link is as vital as the others.'[47] Given the left-of-centre political orientation of many of its contributors, it is not surprising that *The Great Victorians* incorporated a degree of criticism. But as Lytton Strachey would perhaps have agreed, the enduring value of the Victorians could often only be perceived at this time by bringing them into more realistic human perspective. 'They were great men and women,' the editors reflected, 'although they emerge after analysis shorn of many of their locks'.[48]

Revivalism was also encouraged at rather less serious levels. Some simply reflected the age-old griping of older people against the bewildering fashions and practices of the young. We need not, perhaps, place too much significance in these grumblings, other than the evidence they provide of an underlying conservatism within inter-war society. The complaints focused mainly upon decorum and good taste. J.A. Bridges in 1919 argued that though Victorian crinoline was 'absurd', modern ladies could learn a thing or two from the past, since 'there is little left now to the imagination; and this is a mistake'.[49] For M.E. Perugini in 1932, the Victorian period was a 'golden age' for dancing, adding for good measure: 'The ballroom dances of the mid-Victorian era were both varied and animated; there was nothing of the monotony of the eternal tom-tom rhythm which has so afflicted the dancing of our post-War years.'[50] Lord Ernest Hamilton, whose 1933 account of Victorian society was pointedly entitled *The Halcyon Era*, argued:

> We are not shy of the ugly facts of life today. In our literature, we take passages in our stride that the Midvics [*sic*] would have reared over backwards at and never faced again. Nothing offends us now except when some mawkish writer descends to sentiment or to any mistaken appeal to the higher ideals. Then, indeed, do the little red-nailed hands fling the sloppy stuff aside and, to fill the gap so left, they dig up some modern fiction, modern films, and other

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[47] Massingham & Massingham, *Great Victorians*, vol 1, p. 12.
[48] Massingham & Massingham, *Great Victorians*, vol 1, p. 12.
[49] J.A. Bridges, *Victorian Recollections* (London, 1919), pp. 14-15.
[50] M.E. Perugini, *Victorian Days and Ways* (London, 1932), pp. 182-3, 46.

intellectual sewers that used to be closed but are now open, all the ugly facts of life that they can find and dance around them Maenad dances which are not pretty and which it is quite certain that neither Queen Victoria nor any of her ladies-in-waiting would have joined. Well, *chacun à son goût*, as the poet observed, but don't forget, Daphne dear, that ugly thoughts make ugly faces.[51]

It was not only older members of society who were interested in the past. A different kind of revivalism might be identified in the acquisition of items from the past which were gaining new-found favour. 'Victoriana' (the term was first used, significantly enough, in 1918)[52] enjoyed something of a revival after the war, most famously amongst a circle of Oxford undergraduates in the early 1920s. One of these was Henry Yorke, who recalled:

> We collected Victorian objects, glass paperweights with coloured posies cast in them, little eternalized baskets of flowers in which nothing could break ... and large piles of waxed fruits under high glass domes. ... A number of us bought spotted dogs in china from Staffordshire, one or two had figures of the Prince Consort in the same material. As to architecture we were for everything Gothic and Beckford was a writer much admired.[53]

The other leading figures in this 'revival' were Harold Acton, John Betjeman, Osbert Lancaster, and Evelyn Waugh (amongst whose first publications were studies of the Pre-Raphaelites and Rossetti).[54] The fashion did not extend much beyond this circle, but beneath its camp affectations there was nevertheless an underlying seriousness. A selective, cosy version of the past could act as a

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[51] Lord Ernest Hamilton, *The Halcyon Era: A Rambling Reverie of Now and Then* (London, 1933), pp. 8-9.
[52] *OED Supplement*, p. 1159.
[53] Quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation: Evelyn Waugh and his Friends* (London, 1989), p. 41.
[54] In the 1960s Waugh, who by this time had completely retreated into nostalgia, recalled the childhood excitement of visiting his aunts; they lived in a house full of bric-à-bric and Sheffield plates. 'I am sure that I loved my aunts' house because I was instinctively drawn to the ethos I now recognise as mid-Victorian; not, as perhaps psychologists would claim, that I now relish things of that period because they remind me of my aunts.' *A Little Learning* [1964] (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 48. I owe this reference to Professor Hugh Cunningham.

consolation to those coming of age in a disorientated post-war world. Their enthusiasm for the Georgian and early Victorian was also an implicit *reaction* against the earlier anti-Victorianism of the 1890s (which, as we saw in Chapter 1, was often directed at the early and mid-Victorian periods). They saw in the early Victorian period a jauntiness and optimism which echoed congenially their own search for confidence in the post-war world. Harold Acton, who painted his Christ Church rooms in lemon-yellow and filled them with Victorian artefacts, explained: 'The Early Victorian Era, trying to recover from the Napoleonic War, was closer to us than the 'nineties, that "Twilight of the Gods" succeeded by the Age of Muddle. We wanted Dawns, not Twilights.'[55] Harold Acton and Robert Byron also planned an early Victorian exhibition (with an introduction to be penned by Lytton Strachey), but the enterprise was blocked by wary university authorities.[56]

Enthusiasm for products of the Victorian age was not restricted to this clique. The Sitwells inaugurated a fashion for early Victorian period furnishings, which was to spread by the 1930s into fuller emulation of Victorian dress. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge referred to this in 1940 as 'neo-Victorianism', adding that 'this tendency expressed the contemporary nostalgia for the secure social life of the Victorians'.[57] Genuine connoisseurship also entered into the picture. Kenneth Clark, though not uncritical of Victorian architecture, produced a valuable study of Gothic art - the first of its kind for nearly sixty years - in 1928.[58] Nikolaus Pevsner effectively rehabilitated early Victorian engineering in the 1930s.[59] And by 1937, Molly Hughes could report, 'furniture ... of the substantial kind now called Victorian' were 'valued as period pieces'.[60]

A mixture of levity and connoisseurship can also be traced in the fashion for re-viewing the Victorians in the 1920s and 1930s. Cartoons had always been made of Victorian society, and this continued to be the case in the work of people such as Harry Furniss, who poked affectionate fun at Darwin, Jowett, and Gladstone.[61]

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[55] Quoted in Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: a narrative of 'decadence' in England after 1918* (London, 1977), p. 189.
[56] Green, *Children of Sun*, p. 190.
[57] Graves & Hodge, *The Long Weekend*, pp. 199, 278-9.
[58] Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival An Essay in the History of Taste* (London, 1928).
[59] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design* (London, 1936).
[60] Hughes, *London Family*, p. 493.
[61] Harry Furniss, *Some Victorian Men* (London, 1924). Cf. Randall Davies' *Less Eminent Victorians* (London, 1927), which illustrated satirical limericks with woodcuts taken from old periodicals 'to exploit their Victorian habit and gesture for less serious purposes than those for which they were designed'.

Cinematic depictions of individuals like Queen Victoria were also made in the 1930s and were unashamedly nostalgic and sympathetic.

Photographs of the Victorians came into wider use as historical sources or objects of nostalgia between the wars. Most photographs of the Victorians (including those used by Strachey in *Eminent Victorians*) had been posed portraits of distinguished figures. In the 1920s and 1930s, however, more informal photographs and images of less important Victorians began to hold greater appeal. One explanation for this may have been that inter-war viewers relished the hegemonic nature of photographs: the way that sight gives the viewer power over the viewed.[62] In 1926 the Hogarth Press published a limited edition (450 copies) of Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs from the 1860s and 1870s. They featured luminaries such as Herschel, Darwin, and Carlyle (often in strikingly 'spontaneous' poses), as well as a number of less well-known female subjects. Roger Fry contributed an introductory essay which pondered the fascination of 'the naive confidence of these people', concluding that 'they are so unconscious of the abyss of ridicule which they skirt'.[63] In poring over Victorian photographs and taking a slightly whimsical attitude to their subjects, people may have been undertaking subtle renegotiations with the past.

The inter-war period was also characterised by a greater degree of interest in living conditions, some of which fed into the pursuit of social and economic history.[64] Inter-war writers were particularly interested in documentary and reportage.[65] Perhaps the most famous example of a synthesis of the two concerns was George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). The work made powerful use of photography to support Orwell's revelations about the conditions in which many of the poor lived. It may therefore have been that interest in photographs of ordinary Victorian people helped to amplify, and were amplified by, contemporary social preoccupations. Needless to say, this would have been likely to heighten

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[62] See Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol 1: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), part 5.

[63] Julia Margaret Cameron, *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women* (London, 1926), p. 10. Cameron was Virginia Woolf's great-aunt. Hermione Lee writes suggestively in *Virginia Woolf* (London, 1996), p. 90 that 'Julia Margaret Cameron's impetuous, despotic energies, bursting out in letters and hospitality and (at last, at fifty) in photography, was a rich source of inspiration. Her photographs, taken from Hyde Park Gate to Gordon Square, greatly influenced the tone of *To the Lighthouse*.'

[64] See below, esp. Chapters 3-4.

[65] See Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London, 1976).

sympathy for the Victorians. Peter Quennell's collection *Victorian Panorama* (1937) featured images of working-class people in their own environments. They probably came as a surprise to inter-war readers who had conceptions of the period as a highly formal, ordered, comfortably complacent time. Quennell encouraged the reader to 'allow his imagination to wander at will across a past which, although to-day it may seem stuffy, ridiculous and superannuated, was once disturbing, exciting and troublesome as the present century. ... There is a hint of strain about many of these photographed faces, which contrasts oddly with the sobriety and dignity of their customary postures.'[66] Re-viewing the Victorians was to notice - sometimes for the first time - that they actually had human faces.

Summary. The revival of Victorian attitudes, practices, and objects was a wide-ranging and energetic phenomenon of the inter-war period. We might identify revivalism variously in responses to the modern world and modern politics, in intellectual thought, in manners, and in an acquisitive trend both camp and connoisseurial. Like anti-Victorianism, there was no overall 'agenda' to it, and no single generational focus. Nevertheless there was throughout all these manifestations of nostalgia an affective link, or act of renegotiation, with the past. For some it was a passionate call to return to the values of their youth; for younger people, nostalgia offered surrogate certainties or a way of exploring their own ambivalent feelings towards history.

Myths of a pre-war 'golden age'

Much of the revivalism discussed above was underpinned by a sense that England before 1914 had been a 'better' time than the present. The war itself acted as a convenient point of demarcation, and in hindsight was problematic: as we saw in Chapter 1, it occupied a prominent place in the tradition of anti-Victorianism. Yet by the late 1920s the shock of the war was beginning to be assimilated, and it was no longer - as Osbert Sitwell had put it in 1923 - 'Very bad form/To mention the

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[66] Peter Quennell, *Victorian Panorama: A Survey of Life & Fashion from Contemporary Photographs* (London, 1937), p. vi. Cf. Quennell's comment in a later collection, *The Day Before Yesterday: A Photographic Album of Daily Life in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (London, 1978): 'Since I was born early in 1905, I often feel, while I examine these plates, that I am revisiting my own past'.

war'. These were the years in which a large quantity of war literature flooded from the presses: Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928), Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), Sherriff's *Journey's End* (1929), Graves's *Goodbye to all That* (1929), Owen's *Poems* (1931), Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), and so on.[67] One particularly important mental change was the collapse of the platitude that the war had been fought for entirely noble causes. Although this deeply offended a number of staunch defenders of Edwardian foreign policy,[68] it also went a considerable way towards placating feelings of anger and resentment amongst critics of the past. This gave the war an aura of universal tragedy and rendered it more suitable for a place within a nostalgic view of history. The new gloss on the war found great favour amongst contemporaries: the English translation of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* was reprinted nineteen times between April and September 1929; and readers of the *Radio Times* voted the broadcast on 11 November of R.C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End* their favourite item for the same year.[69]

In such a climate anti-Victorianism began to fall into something like a historical phenomenon in itself. Advocates of continuity and revivalism were increasingly able to view a future in which they did not feel themselves to be within a submerged minority. As Sir Frederick Pollock (erstwhile Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford) pondered in a book dedicated to his grandson in 1933: 'When you read this, will there still be smart youngsters despising the Victorians? or will there be a new fashion of making out Queen Victoria's reign a golden age?'[70] Some younger critics would have answered Pollock in the affirmative at the very moment that the second question had been posed. For them anti-Victorianism had become rather dated and tedious. Lord David Cecil in 1934 rejected the fashionable tenets which had ruled literary criticism in the previous decade:

> Inevitable reactions have their inevitable ends. ... Now the first thin rays of the dawn have begun to strike the nineteenth century. ... If

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[67] See Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990), part 5.

[68] Douglas Jerrold and Cyril Falls produced respectively *The Lie About the War: A Note on Some Contemporary War Books* and *War Books: A Critical Guide* in 1930, both of which attacked the lack of idealism in the books under discussion. See Hynes, *War Imagined*, pp. 451-4.

[69] Noreen Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties* (London, 1975), pp. 244-5.

[70] Frederick Pollock, *For My Grandson: Remembrances of an Ancient Victorian* (London, 1933), p. vi.

> we like [Victorian novelists] it is not because they express "the best aspirations of our great age"; if we dislike them it is not because we think, if indeed we have ever been so foolish, that they do not show "a truly modern mind" or "values acceptable to a post-war generation" - nauseous jargon of the 1920s.[71]

Another 1930s critic of the anti-Victorian reaction was the scholar E.E. Kellett, who wrote of 'the strange caricatures of the Victorian Age drawn by Georgians, which to the survivors of the Victorian Age seem more like sketches of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar than pictures of the time they remember'.[72] There is evidence that the sentiments of Cecil and Kellett were widely echoed throughout the 1930s. Malcolm Muggeridge in 1940 looked back upon the previous decade and wrote: 'Queen Victoria had her fame renewed, perhaps because of a longing for the stability she seemed to symbolise. ... The Victorian age, so confident of its own greatness and solidity, had been regarded successively with horror, sniggering amusement, and now with romantic esteem.'[73] The appearance in the early 1940s of Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* - a lyrical evocation of late Victorian country life - was one of the peaks of this nostalgia, and a reminder to wartime readers of the consolations of the past.[74]

It was above all the late Victorian and Edwardian periods which benefited from the changes in attitude towards the Great War around the late 1920s and early 1930s.[75] As we noted earlier in this chapter, the war came to be seen in hindsight as an analogue to the Fall; this inflected memories of the immediate pre-war period - of which nearly every adult between the wars had direct experience - with prelapsarian undertones.[76] Sunshine and a life of ease were dominant features of this myth, even where people like Orwell's fictional George Bowling rationally appreciated that it could not have been so elysian:

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[71] David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* [1934] (London, 1943), p. 5.
[72] E.E. Kellett, *Religion and Life in the Early Victorian Age* (London, 1938), p. 8.
[73] Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Thirties* (London, 1940), pp. 170-1.
[74] Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford* [1945] (Harmondsworth, 1973).
[75] Cf. below, pp. 134-6.
[76] Cf. D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915), which used the same religious-apocalyptic image of the war to proclaim a hopeful beginning rather than a regretful close. See Anne Fernihough's introduction to the Penguin edition (Harmondsworth, 1995).

Before the war ... it was summer all the year round. I'm quite aware that that's a delusion. I'm merely trying to tell you how things come back to me. If I shut my eyes and think of Lower Binfield any time before I was, say, eight, it's always in summer weather that I remember it. ... What was it that people had in those days? A feeling of security, even when they weren't secure. More exactly it was a feeling of continuity."[77]

Orwell was not alone amongst novelists in consolidating the myths of a pre-war 'golden age'. Much of the inter-war popularity of P.G. Wodehouse might be attributed to nostalgia for the sunny Edwardian settings which Bertie Wooster and Lord Emsworth inhabit. The same nostalgia must in large part account for the contemporary popularity of Vita Sackville-West's novel *The Edwardians* (1930). Sackville-West's friend Virginia Woolf wrote lyrically about a halcyon pre-war age in *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925): the sunlight in the former reflected from its Greek settings, in the latter from a perfect June day. John Galsworthy embraced nostalgia for the pre-war age in later volumes of *The Forsyte Saga*. He could not help softening his portrait of Soames Forsyte - the rapacious 'man of property' in the opening book of 1906 - in the light of nostalgia. On his death in the pointedly-titled *Swan Song* (1928) he had become the benevolent patriarch. His old servant Gradman, on hearing the news of Soames's death, found his mind wandering back to Queen Victoria's 1887 Jubilee: 'A beautiful summer day - a real summer that; not like the summers lately. And everything going on, as if it'd go on for ever, with three per cents at nearly par if he remembered, and all going to church regular."[78]

A similar *volte-face* can be traced in views in the 1930s of Edward Elgar, the composer whose music more than anything else epitomised Edwardian 'pomp and circumstance'. In the 1920s Elgar had been widely attacked as an outdated jingoist. Yet perspectives began to alter around the early 1930s. His official biographer, Basil Maine, observed in 1933 that people had 'begun to discover a picturesque in an age that, because of the unbridgable chasm, now seems strangely remote and intangible.

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[77] George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air* [1939] (Harmondsworth, 1990), pp. 37, 110.
[78] John Galsworthy, *Swan Song* [1928] (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 301-2.

...The epithet [pre-war] is being endowed with an almost legendary significance."[79] Elgar's Second Symphony (1911), dedicated to the memory of Edward VII and thought by many to be a swansong for the eponymous age, began to be seen in darker and more nostalgic terms as the 1930s progressed.[80] Elgar's music was increasingly appreciated for a rural evocativeness, and in this his reputation came to nestle alongside that of English 'pastoral' composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Frederick Delius, Gerald Finzi, and Herbert Howells.

In all of these perspectives on pre-war England the recurrent trope was that of a sunlit arcadia. Partly this was the felicitous clarity of hindsight; but it also owed something to escapism from the economic and political anxieties of the 1930s. Noël Coward's *Cavalcade*, a patriotic review of the national past extending down to the turn of the century, was brilliantly timed to meet the 1931 crisis. Shortly after the election which brought the National Government to power, George V took the royal family to see *Cavalcade* and was met with an audience rising at the end to sing the National Anthem. Elgar's *Land of Hope and Glory* - until recently derided by some as outdated jingoism - was also used, and apparently reduced a number of critics to tears.[81] As the 1930s progressed an even more ominous spectre arose in fascism abroad. Just as some older writers in the 1920s had encouraged revival of Victorianism in order to counterbalance Bolshevism, so did many more people in the 1930s seek consolation in the myth of an idyllic Edwardian age (no doubt half with a mind to its fate in 1914). In casual readings selective amnesia blotted out memories of the often bitter social and political unrest in late Edwardian England. Perplexed historians of the 1930s such as R.C.K. Ensor and George Dangerfield were keen to remind people that the Edwardian period had not been so 'golden', partly it seems to alert readers to the looming crisis of the present. Their writings are discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Still, the affective bond with the past was not so easily lost. It is striking that a historian as impatient with Liberalism as Dangerfield - a man so driven by anger with contemporary England as to leave for America in 1930 - should nevertheless have concluded his 1935 study of Edwardian politics with an epilogue entitled 'The

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[79] Basil Maine, *Edward Elgar His Life and Works* (London, 1933), *Works*, p. 305.
[80] See John Gardiner, 'The Reception of Sir Edward Elgar 1918-c.1934: A Reassessment', *Twentieth Century British History*, 9 (1998), 370-395.
[81] McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 5; Maine, *Elgar: Works*, pp. 281-2. Graves and Hodge also argued in *The Long Weekend*, pp. 296-7 that *Cavalcade* was instrumental in the 'Victorian revival' of the 1930s.

Lofty Shade'. (The phrase itself came from A.E. Housman's nostalgic *A Shropshire Lad*, hugely popular after the war.) Dangerfield used the life of Rupert Brooke as a means of exploring what he felt about the Edwardian period in which he had grown up. In its themes of retrospective clarity and order, its present-mindedness in counterposing certainty and whimsy against the unpredictability and harshness of the present, and in the ambivalence of its own self-awareness, this is a powerful example of the nature of nostalgia for the pre-war past between the wars:

> Standing beside that moonlit grave, one looks back. All the violence of the pre-war world has vanished, and in its place there glow, year into backward year, the diminishing vistas of that other England, the England where the Grantchester church clock stood at ten to three, where there was Beauty and Certainty and Quiet, and where nothing was real. Today we know it for what it was; but there are moments, very human moments, when we could almost find it in our hearts to envy those who saw it, and who never lived to see the new world.[82]

Summary. Changing perspectives on the Great War from the late 1920s, and economic and political anxiety in the 1930s, encouraged nostalgia for the past. Anti-Victorianism began to fall into sharper perspective as a historical phenomenon mainly of the previous decade. But most importantly, new views of the war emphasised its place within a romantic version of history which made it something like a secular Fall. Consequently, late Victorian and Edwardian England - of which most people had memories - often came to be seen as a prelapsarian idyll. Sunlight, leisure, innocence, and certainty were its main motifs, reflecting the clarity and yearning of hindsight and the desire to escape from a troublesome present. Some historians attempted to correct these popular views, but even they could not help being frequently touched by nostalgia.

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[82] George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* [1935] (London, 1997), p. 354.

The legacy of inter-war nostalgia

As George Dangerfield's work testifies, even those who set out to correct popular misconceptions about the pre-war period could fall prey to nostalgia. This should not be surprising in the least. If active denigration of the past was rarely without the ambivalence created by an affective link, then better-disposed views of the past were bound to be equally, if not more, susceptible to emotiveness. The nostalgia which we have been exploring in this chapter was underpinned by an affective quality which came from direct connections with the past. However romanticised this nostalgia may have been, it was at least based upon a degree of intimate familiarity with the past in question. This may seem rather obvious, but it is worth noting because readers may have in mind more recent politicised attempts to resurrect nostalgia for the Victorians. Margaret Thatcher's nostalgia for 'Victorian values' in the England of the 1980s, and Gertrude Himmelfarb's esteem for 'Victorian virtues' in the United States of the 1990s, were based upon an essentially selective view of the past. Thatcher may have boasted a Victorian grandmother and a father of exemplary Smilesian character, but by the early 1980s the affective link seems to have been fairly weak; this was more an act of political annexation than a true emotional dialogue with the past. It also exemplifies the line of demarcation which separates inter-war nostalgia from much post-1945 enthusiasm for the Victorians.

Yet there are some links between inter-war nostalgia and this post-1945 enthusiasm. Victorian antiques were popular in selected circles in the 1950s, and this esteem blossomed in the 1960s and 1970s into a full-blown 'heritage industry'. As we have seen, Victoriana first attracted a small following in the 1920s and 1930s, often in a slightly blasé way which anticipates the style of much of the 'heritage industry'. Perhaps more importantly, though, inter-war writers anticipated some of the most sophisticated themes within post-1945 scholarship on the Victorian period. My point here is that though the affective quality of links with the Victorians died out around the 1960s and 1970s, much of the thinking which was generated by this emotionally-engaged dialogue with the past in the inter-war period has had an enduring contribution to our understanding of the nineteenth century.

The 1950s were a notably happy time for the scholarly reputation of the Victorians. In this decade there appeared the second edition (1953) of G.M. Young's *Portrait of an Age*,[83] Asa Briggs's *Victorian People* (1954), and Walter E. Houghton's *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957). What Young's book and its successors shared was an appreciation that many of the Victorians' shortcomings were not (as anti-Victorians might have suggested) the result of conscious hypocrisy or smallness of heart, but simply over-compensatory qualities in an age disorientated by modernity. Hence, for example, Houghton's suggestion that the Victorian sanctification of the home reflected not so much prudery and materialism as the quest to create a stable 'haven' against a hostile modern world.[84] (Sensitive readers of Dickens between the wars had always appreciated this anyway.)[85]

Such anticipations of later scholarship can often be found in nostalgic writings of the inter-war period. The socialist thinker and historian Ernest Belfort Bax in his memoirs of 1918 incisively but sympathetically judged most Victorian hypocrisy to be 'unconscious'. 'By unconscious hypocrisy', he wrote, 'I understand an attitude of mind which succeeds in persuading itself that it believes or approves certain things as it professes to do, while really *in foro conscientiae* this profession is dictated by a sense of its own interests, real or supposed.'[86] This theme of an unintentional disparity between Victorian precept and practice was echoed most influentially by Young in the 1930s:

> What potent agencies of dissolution [there] were working in the early Victorian years. English society was poised on a double paradox which its critics, within and without, called hypocrisy. Its practical ideals were at odds with its religious professions, and its religious belief with its intelligence. ... [The Victorian industrialist], like most of us ... may have been something in between [benevolent and exploitative]: borne along partly by conviction, partly by

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[83] With a particularly illuminating Introduction on Young's motivations in the 1930s. This is also the edition used for this thesis: the main text itself appears to follow exactly that of 1936.

[84] Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven & London, 1957), pp. 341-8.

[85] See below, Chapter 10.

[86] Ernest Belfort Bax, *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian* (London, 1918), pp. 17-18.

> example, and neither disposed nor able to analyse ideas which proved themselves by their material results.[87]

This example was to be taken up and developed within a couple of decades by historians like Briggs, who 'knew G.M. Young well' and testifies to Young's 'big influence' on his work.[88]

Those who argued in favour of reviving Victorian manners also built into their comments a defensive element, evidently keenly aware of the charges made against the Victorians. E.E. Kellett reflected that the discretion of certain Victorian authors owed itself not to prudery but to practical awareness of the age range within their likely audience. This was, after all, the period in which after-dinner family readings proliferated amongst the middle-classes. 'Much of the (largely imaginary) Victorian prudery and reticence is probably due to this habit', Kellett noted. He could not resist adding: 'It would take a tough man to read some novels of to-day aloud to his children.'[89] M.E. Perugini lighted on much the same theme in 1932:

> To-day we vaunt our vices and dramatise our diseases, freely discussing matters considered in Victorian days unfit for conversation, especially before the young and inexperienced. Their minds were not to be soiled or saddened by too early acquaintance with that worldly vice and sorrow from which it was ever the parental hope they might be spared. In all this the Victorian parents were not humbugs but merely kind elders, trying, for the sake of the coming generation, to keep the flag of traditional English decency a-flying.[90]

And this, of course, was precisely the reason why so many people sought to revive Victorianism between the wars. We might remind ourselves of Young's comment

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[87] Young, *Portrait*, p. 14.

[88] Letter to the present writer, 19 March 1999. See Asa Briggs, *Victorian People A Reassessment of Persons and Themes 1851-1867* (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 15; idem, 'G.M. Young: The Age of a Portrait' in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs*, vol 2: *Images, Standpoints, Forecasts* (London, 1985), pp. 253-71.

[89] E.E. Kellett, 'The Press' in G.M. Young (ed.), *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1934), II, p. 48 fn. 1.

[90] Perugini, *Victorian Days and Ways*, p. 88.

(see above) that while Victorianism was distant, 'the great age is not so far behind us that we must needs have lost all its savour and its vigour'. To re-member the Victorians in the 1920s and 1930s was, as that verb literally indicates, to attempt to bring back an essential part of the life and body with which people had been born.

Summary. Nostalgia for the Victorians between the wars was not simply a selectively romantic phenomenon. Unlike a great deal of later nostalgia, it was grounded in more intimate familiarity with the past. Though this affective link was subsequently lost, there were enduring effects to inter-war nostalgia. It could sometimes accommodate the charges of anti-Victorianism and provide some of the basis on which more 'mature' scholarship of the last fifty years has rested.

Concluding thoughts

The implications of this discussion of inter-war nostalgia for the rest of the thesis are as follows:

1. Nostalgia almost certainly had as large, if not larger, a following as anti-Victorianism between the wars. Like anti-Victorianism, it was rooted in an affective link with the past.

2. Though nostalgia appealed to a variety of people in different ways, we might identify certain tropes. One was the simple belief in continuity of practice and attitude. More innovative, and reflecting to a greater degree changing perspectives on society, politics, and memory of the Great War, was revivalism of the objects and manners of the past, and myths of a 'golden' pre-war age (particularly the Edwardian).

3. Inter-war historians often attempted to correct popular misconceptions about the past which had arisen out of nostalgia, though frequently they were susceptible to nostalgia themselves. This will be explored in Part Two.

4. A general mood of nostalgia often complemented rehabilitative trends within biography. This will be explored in Part Three.

5. The warmth of disposition to the Victorians within nostalgia had an enduring legacy. Defensive comments on the nature of Victorianism sometimes anticipated the insights of more recent scholarship.

Part Two

Historiography

Chapter Three

Inter-War Historiography: Change and Continuity

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introductory overview of the historiography which will be explored in greater detail in Chapters 4-6. Here I shall dwell upon three interconnected themes which are of particular relevance to historiographical perceptions of the Victorians and Edwardians after 1918. The discussion inevitably will be dominated by the topic of 'professionalisation', a phenomenon which many historians suggest had occurred within the study of history by the inter-war period. First, then, a brief account of 'professionalisation' will be given. This leads to some suggestions about the ways in which this enlivened study of the Victorians and Edwardians.

However, it will be suggested that our understanding of the 'professionalisation' of history between the wars is problematic. A second aim will be to explore the limits of 'professionalisation'. Connected to this, a third aim will be to unravel further the ways in which inter-war historians drew upon the practices and attitudes of the past. This will have implications not only for how the pre-war past was perceived in the 1920s and 1930s, but indeed for how the pre-war past continued to influence those very modes of perception.

Let us begin with the important topic of 'professionalisation'.

The 'professionalisation' of history

'Professional' history is usually described as such in contradistinction to the 'Whiggish' historiography which dominated most of the nineteenth century. A reaction against anachronism in historical narrative - studying the past too much through the lens of the present - set in during the late nineteenth century as confidence in the modern world began to wane.[1] Not surprisingly, this lack of

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[1] See P.B.M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague, Boston, & London, 1978).

confidence was accentuated by the trauma of the Great War, and in the 1920s and 1930s historians in hindsight have often identified the final establishment of 'professional' history. 'Professional' history in this sense might be defined as that which strives for complete objectivity, which is painstaking in its pursuit of detail (based on primary sources where feasible), and which is academically-organised and given to internal specialisation.[2] Inter-war historians did not themselves use the term 'professional', but it is arguable that some would have been sufficiently in sympathy with the definition just given to warrant use of it in this discussion (albeit in inverted commas). I shall suggest later in this chapter that inter-war historical practice was not always as 'professional' as its theory might lead us to believe. But in the meantime it is the purpose of this section to account for how 'professionalisation' developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to outline some of the ways in which it enriched study of the Victorians and Edwardians in the inter-war period.

The first task, outlining this conventional account of 'professionalisation', is easily enough done. Most nineteenth century scholars were amateurs of independent means unattached to any academic establishment. But towards the end of the nineteenth century the historical profession began to be organised more systematically.[3] Part of this no doubt reflected the larger number of people involved in state-provided education. Another motivation was the fascination with, and perceived need for, a distinctive national identity in the heyday of Imperialism. In 1868 the Royal Historical Society was founded, achieving a recognisably 'modern' scholarly status (reflected in its *Transactions*) in the late 1880s with the marginalisation of its early dilettante style by an influx of academic historians.[4] In 1872 and 1875 the history tripos was set up at Oxford and Cambridge respectively. The appointments to Regius chairs of Sir John Seeley (Cambridge, 1869) and William Stubbs (Oxford, 1871) is generally taken to signify the beginning of the quasi-scientific study of history in those universities. In 1886 the *English Historical*

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[2] A self-evidently basic definition which I yet hope is recognisable to present-day historians.

[3] This paragraph is heavily indebted to Llewellyn Woodward, 'The Rise of the Professorial Historian in England' in K. Bourne & D.C. Watt (eds), *Studies in International History* (London, 1967), pp. 16-34; Herbert Butterfield, 'Some Early Trends in Scholarship 1868-1968, in the Field of Modern History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 19 (1969), 159-84; Doris Goldstein, 'The Organizational Development of the British Historical Profession, 1884-1921', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 55 (1982), 180-93.

[4] J.W. Burrow, 'Victorian Historians and the Royal Historical Society', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 39 (1989), 125-40.

Review was inaugurated, while in 1896 Lord Acton began presiding over what was intended to be the summation of Victorian historical knowledge, written by the finest professionals in their field, *The Cambridge Modern History*.[5] The Historical Association was founded by A.F. Pollard in 1907 to stimulate an integrated sense of national and imperial identity amongst teachers of history at all levels, its journal *History* being published from 1916.[6] A plethora of new universities (such as Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, and Sheffield) was set up in this decade, while in 1917 and 1920 doctorates of philosophy were finally introduced at Oxford and Cambridge respectively. Also in 1920 the Institute of Historical Research, attached to the University of London, was created; its *Bulletin* was published from the following year. The Cambridge Historical Association and its *Journal* came into existence in 1922.

Hence by the early 1920s it can be seen that history had begun to achieve a 'professional' status in terms of academic organisation. These changes were consolidated and exemplified by the writings of people like R.H. Tawney, Lewis Namier, and Herbert Butterfield. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926) drew attention away from the Whiggish concentration on the political and constitutional foundations of power in the seventeenth century, emphasising instead the role of economic factors in history.[7] Namier's *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1929) and *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (1930) showed new 'professional' standards at work by focusing not on Whiggish watersheds but on the agency of individuals and the role of everyday practice in history.[8] Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931) launched a coruscating attack on the tendency of historians to study the past for contemporary concerns, in the process omitting inconvenient details, and adopting a moral stance towards the past.[9]

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[5] Josef L. Altholz, 'Lord Acton and the Plan of the *Cambridge Modern History*', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 723-36.

[6] Keith Robbins, '*History*, The Historical Association and the "National Past"', *History*, 66 (1981), 413-25.

[7] On Tawney see below, p. 100.

[8] See Linda Colley, *Namier* (London, 1989); David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London, 1992), pp. 204-8; John Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London: 2nd edn, 1993), pp. 268-85; Stefan Collini, 'Idealizing England: Élie Halévy and Lewis Namier' in *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 77-84.

[9] See Kenyon, *History Men*, pp. 276-80; Cannadine, *Trevelyan*, pp. 208-13.

How did this 'professionalisation' of history enrich the study of the Victorians and Edwardians? At several points in the following chapters we will encounter 'professional' history clashing with more tendentious assertions about the past. Social and economic history was one of the specialised fields of interest to be given a spur by 'professionalisation' and by modern living conditions generally.[10] G.M. Young used social history to counteract what he felt to be the invidious generalisations 'that the Victorians did this, or the Victorians thought that'.[11] J.H. Clapham similarly led the attack in the 1920s with his use of real wage statistics on the 'pessimist' school of historians who argued impressionistically that the Industrial Revolution had had a disastrous impact on standards of living.[12]

The careful study of diplomacy also became imperative in an age haunted by war and its aftermath. One of the casualties of war was the liberalism which had been the driving-force of the Whig interpretation of history. R.G. Collingwood, perhaps the leading philosopher of history in the inter-war period, became anxiously preoccupied with accommodating post-Whiggish historical study with the rise of left and right-wing militancy in Europe after the war.[13] By the 1930s this compulsion became more widespread as Nazism flourished in Germany. It gave E.L. Woodward new perspectives on the outbreak of the Crimean War; and it made R.C.K. Ensor think hard about the outbreak of war in 1914 and who was to blame for it.[14] Neither drew particularly optimistic conclusions. The 'professionalisation' of history, the move away from the confident teleological tread of nineteenth century historiography, could at times scarcely have found a more receptive age.

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[10] See N.B. Harte (ed.), *The Study of Economic History: Collected Inaugural Lectures 1893-1970* (London, 1971); David Cannadine, 'The Present and the Past in the English Industrial Revolution 1880-1980', *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), 131-72; Maxine Berg, 'The first women economic historians', *Economic History Review*, 45 (1992), 308-29; Maxine Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power, 1889-1940* (Cambridge, 1996); Stuart A. Weaver, *The Hammonds: A Marriage in History* (Stanford, 1997); Rohan McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1998), pp. 14-16.

[11] G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age: Victorian England* [1936] (Oxford: 2nd edn, 1953), p. vi. On Young see below, Chapters 4-5.

[12] See below, pp. 101-2.

[13] See Christopher Parker, *The English Historical Tradition Since 1850* (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 119-26.

[14] See below, pp. 130-2, 150-1.

The limits of 'professionalisation'

There are two obvious problems with the outline of 'professionalisation' given above. These are the problems of how far inter-war historians would have recognised our definition of 'professionalism'; and, closely to related to this, the extent to which 'professional' values were pursued within historical study. We shall explore these problems in the present section.

Herbert Butterfield, as we have seen, attacked the tendency of Whig historians to investigate the past in the light of contemporary concerns. How, then, are we to defend the comments of Woodward and Ensor on diplomatic history from a charge of Whiggishness? While it would be inappropriate to suggest that these historians adopted an explicitly partisan stance towards their subjects,[15] we can nevertheless see a tension developing between our definition of the 'professionalisation' of history in the early twentieth century and contemporary practice. Woodward and Ensor were by no means alone in having an 'agenda' to part of their work. In Chapters 4-6 we will encounter a wide range of personal motivations for writing history, many of them rooted in memories or feelings about the period in question, and many of them coming from supposedly 'professional' historians or writers who had no affinity with Whiggish precept (like, for example, the Hammonds or George Dangerfield). This interconnects directly with the theme of the affective link with the past explored in Part One.

This tension between definition and practice derives itself from the way in which we have envisaged how theory translated itself into action. The notion that 'professional' history replaced Whiggishness after the Great War owes itself to modern-day readings of the work of Namier and Butterfield. It is easy, however, to exaggerate the influence of these writers' works on the practice of historiography in the 1930s. P.B.M. Blaas has suggested that Namier's example was not fully integrated into the historical profession until the 1950s, and that 'at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties there was no sign at all that there might one day be talk of a 'Namier revolution' or of 'Namierism''.[16] (And for our purposes it is worth noting that Namier was writing about the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth

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[15] Cf. however David Eastwood's description of 'the ponderous Whiggism of Llewellyn Woodward's Oxford History' in 'The Age of Uncertainty: Britain in the Early-Nineteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 8 (1998), 93.

[16] Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism*, p. 4.

century.) Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* also had relatively few reviews after its appearance in 1931, and those that did appear were not as enthusiastic as might have been expected from the book's subsequent reputation. D.C. Somervell commented dismissively that 'he worries round and round, repeats himself again and again, and expands into a small book material which could have been packed into an article in *History*'.[17] Carl Becker felt that Butterfield's attack on the Whig historians was, in its tone of 'emotional revulsion', almost Whiggish in itself.[18] They also remarked upon the fact that the 'professional' ideal expounded by Butterfield was never ultimately attainable, as he himself had conceded in the book. Commenting honestly, but in the light of his attack on the Whig historians not very consistently, Butterfield acknowledged that some detail *always* had to be omitted, and that 'the art of the historian is precisely the art of abridgment'.[19] As Somervell noted laconically, 'he hardly seems to be master of his thesis'.

Early reviewers therefore anticipated many of the criticisms of *The Whig Interpretation* which have resurfaced within the last twenty years.[20] This suggests that it may not have been as influential in the inter-war period as we have often believed. It has been in part our own assessment of the historical place of Butterfield's work that has led us to overestimate the degree of 'professionalisation' in history between the wars. Many historians did not live up to the 'professional' standards advocated by Butterfield and his like. Even Butterfield himself did not use the term 'professional', and it is significant that he went on to produce a candidly Whiggish book called *The Englishman and his History* in 1944. It is ironic to reflect on how Whiggish we have been in believing that the 'professional' ideals of the inter-war period - ideals with which we tend to be in sympathy - translated themselves directly into universal practice.

Nevertheless, the changes in outlook and method which had affected the study of history by the 1920s and 1930s should not be overlooked. The comments in the section above about the way in which social, economic, and diplomatic history enlivened study of the Victorians and Edwardians therefore stand. But we

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[17] *History*, 17 (1932-33), 86. Cf. the rather more favourable review by 'B.H.S.' in *English Historical Review*, 48 (1933), 174-5, which nevertheless hinted that Butterfield might invest his time more profitably in a book on a solid historical topic such as Napoleon or the Reformation.
[18] *Journal of Modern History*, 4 (1932), 278-9.
[19] Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* [1931] (New York & London, 1965), p. 102.
[20] See for example Parker, *English Historical Tradition*, pp. 146-8; G.R. Elton, 'Herbert Butterfield and the Study of History', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 729-43; Cannadine, *Trevelyan*, pp. 208-9.

need also to acknowledge that the standard definition of 'professional' history in these years is problematic. It may be, as John Burrow has suggested, that we should redefine our sense of how 'professional' in the modern sense historiography had become by the inter-war period, or at least to acknowledge the co-existence of different practices.[21]

Having noted the problem of defining 'professional' practice, let us return to the issue of how far 'professional' values were pursued in historical study around the time of the Great War and after. The fact is that it is often difficult to recognise within inter-war academia a wide following for these 'professional' values. Rather than accentuating the reaction against the practices and attitudes of the past, the Great War may actually have *intensified* their appeal. Amongst other things the war was a cultural one. During the early stages of the conflict intellectuals in England and Germany drew themselves up on different sides of a cultural faultline.[22] The Germans attacked the English as immoral and self-serving; the English criticised the Germans as pedants and obscurantists. Inevitably this threw into sharper perspective the differences between English and German scholarly practice. What many English academics such as Gilbert Murray (Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford) derided about German scholars was the way that they were prepared 'to spend their lives in narrow and absorbed pursuit of some object which, viewed in cold blood, possesses no very great importance and no particular illumination or beauty'.[23] We need, perhaps, to take some account of the heightened emotions of wartime; but even so, such comments hardly suggest that methods of German scholarship had been assimilated into the humanities in England by 1914. Indeed, Reba N. Soffer argues that most historians (on the right and left) after 1918 looked back on the war with a marked degree of complacency, believing that Britain was bound to be victorious because of its august tradition of liberty and constitutionalism - qualities of which Germany could not boast.[24] R.G. Collingwood, in one connection an implacable critic of Whiggish positivism, in

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[21] Burrow, 'Victorian Historians', 138-40. Cf. Michael Bentley's comments on how early twentieth century 'professionalisation' would not seem all that professional by modern standards in 'Approaches to Modernity: Western Historiography Since the Enlightenment' in M. Bentley (ed.), *Companion to Historiography* (London, 1997), pp. 442-9.

[22] See Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990), pp. 67-74. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), pp. 233-4.

[23] Quoted in Hynes, *War Imagined*, p. 71.

[24] Reba N. Soffer, 'The Conservative Historical Imagination in the Twentieth Century', *Albion*, 28 (1996), 1-17

another yet believed in the moral superiority of the British Empire over German expansionism. He believed that it was the responsibility of thinkers to educate the future rulers of nation and Empire.[25]

Consequently, it remained an orthodoxy in academia that an historical education provided an invaluable liberal education in citizenship. Brighter pupils might also eventually take up civil service and colonial appointments. The training of minds to this end began at school. Historians such as Valerie E. Chancellor have shown how school textbooks in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were used to inculcate children with a number of nationalist, racialist, and imperialist assumptions about Britain's destiny in the world.[26] Around the time of the Great War, progressive educationalists advocated a move away from this style of drum-and-trumpet history. However, as Patrick Brindle has recently shown, elementary classroom practice in the inter-war period was not greatly influenced by these initiatives. This was partly because teachers had no special training and allowed pre-war memories of classroom learning to influence their own style of teaching.[27] Even a supposedly more pacifistic emphasis upon social history quickly degenerated into Whiggishness: books like John Finnemore's *Social Life in England* sketched out the path from misery at the beginning of the nineteenth century to ease and pomp at the close.[28] More generally, textbooks retained the values and practices of old: one work written in the 1930s included separate indices for battles, wars, and peace treaties.[29] It is difficult, then, to endorse Raphael Samuel's suggestion that Sellar and Yeatman's *1066 And All That* (1930) was the classic example of neo-Stracheyan debunking in the classroom. David Cannadine's observation that the jokes worked on the premiss that readers would have been familiar and comfortable with this way of viewing the national past carries greater credibility.[30]

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[25] Parker, *English Historical Tradition*, pp. 119-21.
[26] Valerie E. Chancellor, *History for their Masters - Opinion in the English History Textbook: 1800-1914* (London, 1970); Stephen Heathorn, '"Let us remember that we, too, are English": Constructions of Citizenship and National Identity in English Elementary School Reading Books, 1880-1914', *Victorian Studies*, 38 (1995), 395-427.
[27] Patrick Brindle, 'Past Histories: History and the Elementary School Classroom in Early 20th Century England', unpublished Cambridge Ph.D. thesis (1998).
[28] John Finnemore, *Social Life in England: An Elementary Historical Reader* (London: 6th edn, 1930).
[29] E.W. Green, *A School History of England* (London, 1937).
[30] Raphael Samuel, 'One in the Eye: *1066 And All That*' in *Theatres of Memory*, vol 2: *Island Stories* (London, 1998), pp. 208-13; David Cannadine, 'The Past in the Present' in Lesley M. Smith (ed.), *The Making of Britain: Echoes of Greatness* (London, 1988), pp. 9-20.

Of anti-Victorianism in school textbooks (and indeed in *1066 And All That*, where the tone was affectionate rather than waspish) there was not a trace. Indeed, some writers went beyond the call of duty in the warmth of their descriptions of the late Queen. One textbook wrote of her in 1939: 'Queen Victoria was the best, the noblest, the purest, the kindest-hearted sovereign that ever sat upon the throne of the country.'[31] By the standards of Sellars and Yeatman, then, Victoria's status as a 'good' Queen had indisputably been established amongst schoolchildren by the late 1930s. The motivations for such an approach are exemplified by G.H. Blore's *Victorian Worthies* (1920). Blore was an assistant master at Winchester, and his study of figures such as Shaftesbury, Bright and Rhodes was designed to show children the 'spirit of public service' in operation. He hoped that 'the younger generation ... [would] find it not uninteresting to 'praise famous men and our fathers that begat us".[32]

The *raison d'être* of studying history at university was perhaps even clearer. 'Self-reliant and self-propelled,' writes Reba N. Soffer, 'the graduate who translated his education into specific public service would continue to give the university its principle of justification until the nineteen-thirties.'[33] This was particularly true of history at Oxford and Cambridge.[34] The cultivation of sound judgement was considered more important than acquiring research techniques or knowledge for its own sake. Many undergraduates were content simply to take the pass degree, or even no formal qualification at all, and as late as 1913 only 62% of Cambridge undergraduates were honours candidates.[35] More ambitious or accomplished Oxbridge students stood a good chance of coming to influence public opinion after graduation. Of the 543 (out of 7852) Oxford graduates who took Firsts in Modern History between 1873 and 1929, 56 went on to attain *DNB* entries, and at least a further 27 - in Soffer's opinion - became 'major figures, especially in the teaching and writing of history'.[36]

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[31] J.M.D. & M.J.C. Meiklejohn, *A School History of England and Great Britain* (London, 1939), p. 447.
[32] G.H. Blore, *Victorian Worthies* (Oxford, 1920), p. v.
[33] Reba N. Soffer, 'The Modern University and National Values, 1850-1930', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 60 (1987), 172.
[34] See Rosemary Jann, 'From Amateur to Professional: The Case of the Oxbridge Historians', *Journal of British Studies*, 22 (1983), 122-47.
[35] Woodward, 'Rise of Professorial Historian', pp. 29-30; Burrow, 'Victorian Historians', 138-9; Kenyon, *History Men*, pp. 170-1.
[36] Soffer, 'The Modern University', 175 fn. 19. Soffer also offers striking figures for the future careers of Manchester History graduates by the 1920s (of whom there were 231 by 1922): by 1927 some 138 - probably about half - were involved in teaching and/or research of one kind or another.

John Kenyon arguably overstates the case that the opening years of the twentieth century witnessed academic specialisation in history, with the careful selection of books for reading lists in degree courses and the restructuring of papers in these courses.[37] The history tripos in inter-war Cambridge indicates instead an enduringly broad-brush approach to history with not a few residual traces of the time when history had been shackled to jurisprudence. Victorian history as studied in inter-war Cambridge focused predominantly upon the constitutional, economic, and imperial development of Britain. Undergraduates were directed in reading lists to works such as Bagehot's *The English Constitution* and similar studies by W.R. Anson, A.V. Dicey, S. Low, and E. and A.G. Porritt. The only more general books recommended for 'consultation' were Halévy's *History of the English People*, Queen Victoria's Letters, Morley's Life of Gladstone and Buckle's of Disraeli, and 'other political biographies of the period'. Only in 1940 were Woodward's *Age of Reform* and Ensor's *England 1870-1914* included on the reading list.[38] Inevitably students would also have turned to the relevant chapters of *The Cambridge Modern History*,[39] and there they would have discovered that although their predecessors had foreseen difficulties with Germany, Irish Home Rule, and the future impact of Socialism, all historical experience pointed to continuity of development. Nowhere was this more so than in the Empire, where they would have read that 'Great Britain has built up a model system for the administration of an oversea empire' which conferred upon its subjects 'the benefits of Western knowledge and Western ideals of government'.[40] To be sure, many of the works to which undergraduates would have turned made for eminently respectable reading; but it was hardly 'specialised' in the modern sense, or embraced fully social and economic history. Small wonder that one undergraduate of the 1920s, W.H.B. Court, lamented that 'the chief want of the Cambridge Historical School in our day' was 'general ideas on man and society adequate to explain historical change'.[41]

By definition Part II Special Subjects were more tightly focused than the papers taken in Part I. Undergraduates could choose amongst the Victorian topics

[37] Kenyon, *History Men*, pp. 189-91.
[38] File on recommended reading and related correspondence 1933-40 in the archives of the Seeley Historical Library, Cambridge. It appears that reading lists for before 1933 have not been preserved.
[39] viz. those in *The Cambridge Modern History*: vol 11: *The Growth of Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1909); vol 12: *The Latest Age* (Cambridge, 1910).
[40] P.E. Roberts in *Cambridge Modern History*, vol 12, pp. 498-9.
[41] Quoted in Parker, *English Historical Tradition*, p. 132.

'Utilitarianism and Tory Democracy, 1815-1846' (1938-9); 'The Last Five Years of Peel, 1845-1850' (1924) - a slightly odd topic, perhaps;[42] and 'The Formation of the Anglo-French Entente, 1890-1904' (1936-9) - one imagines, at such dates, a popular and keenly-emotive topic, and one almost certainly offered for its contemporaneity. Otherwise it was not possible to study Victorian or Edwardian history as a separate entity in itself. Until 1936 students could study English constitutional history from 1485; after this the period narrowed slightly to 1688 onwards, and students now had the option of an economic history paper, which suggests that the results may have been a portrait of modern English history biased towards constitutional matters until late in the 1930s.[43] Tripos questions seem to support this idea: the impact of the French Revolution on England was frequent, and appeared in full Whiggish dress (or was this a trap for the slow-witted?) in 1936: 'Comment on the results of the outbreak of the French Revolution on English constitutional development and the dangers which it threatened to that development'; Peel was a near-perennial, as were party politics after 1870, and the Lords crisis of 1909-11. Questions on social, economic, and diplomatic history seemed to have an eye to the future vocations of many Cambridge graduates. Answers were invited to Britain's economic decline, colonial affairs, and the rise of trade unionism.[44]

The study of history as a separate subject at university was in itself relatively innovative, and we should not lose sight of such newer trends in thinking, even if they did not immediately have a great impact upon scholarly practice. It is possible, of course, that history dons and lecturers may have taught students in one way while pursuing their own research in a different, more 'professional', way. But this seems somewhat unlikely given the obvious ideological zeal of the history tripos at Oxford and Cambridge between the wars. Moreover, it is possible to trace in the work of many historians - even 'professional' ones - the vestiges of pre-war practice. Let us look at some examples of the enduring influence of tradition in the following section.

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[42] Though it does fit in with new perspectives on Peel at this time: see below, pp. 108-14.
[43] File on Tripos reform, 1932-8, Seeley Library.
[44] Tripos examination papers in the Seeley Library. Only papers for 1920-4 and 1934-9 have been kept.

The influence of tradition

Historians of the inter-war period did not reject the lessons of earlier writers. Even 'professional' historians such as Woodward and Ensor rarely eschewed fully the models of the past, so that in terms of style (and sometimes emphasis) we can identify a co-existence of practices within one individual. Given that inter-war historians had been born in Victorian or Edwardian England, and were often also politically-motivated, this might hardly surprise us. We have already suggested that this affective link may have coloured their views of the past. Ironically, the past also provided part of the means by which this link might be explored; inter-war historians often wrote about the Victorian period in a peculiarly 'Victorian' way.

The historiography of the past furnished writers with several models which could be adapted for the modern post-war world. Historical endeavours in the nineteenth century had been underpinned by two basic models of exposition: the linear and the cyclical.[45] The linear model - history as the onwards march of progress - was the more obviously tendentious of the two, and as we have seen, it came under attack after the Great War. But it did not entirely fade out. G.M. Trevelyan, Regius Professor of History at Cambridge from 1927 and one of the great 'popular' historians of the inter-war years, wrote unashamedly linear studies of the march of liberty in the seventeenth century, referring to himself as 'the last Whig historian in the world'.[46] His 1922 volume *British History in the Nineteenth Century*, expanded in 1937 to incorporate the years up to the Treaty of Versailles and republished as *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After*, enters into the discussion in Chapters 4 and 5 of the present thesis.

The cyclical model, on the other hand, allowed for a greater degree of complexity in historians' views of the past. Thomas Carlyle drew upon it to portray his apocalyptic vision of divine vengeance and emotional rebirth in *The French Revolution* (1837); it underpinned Marx's neo-Hegelian theory of historical change; and later historians such as Sir John Seeley and J.A. Froude in the 1890s used the neo-Hegelian idea of the state as an evolving life-cycle to bolster belief in England's imperial 'destiny'.[47] The cyclical model introduced anxiety and ambiguity into the

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[45] Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress* (London, 1989), pp. 17-39; John Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 21-22.
[46] Kenyon, *History Men*, p. 241. See also Cannadine's rehabilitative *Trevelyan*.
[47] See Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge, 1980); Burrow, *Liberal*

Victorian historical consciousness. If, as many believed, the state were an organic entity, then it was also susceptible to decline and decay. Inevitably the impact of evolutionary theory played its part here. Educated Victorians knew their Gibbon well and were concerned - as good social Darwinists - that their Empire might go the way of that of the Romans.

When the cyclical model became further anthropomorphised, it allowed historians to probe into the 'psychology' of the living past. The decline and fall or tension and release explored by some writers could in other hands become a description of emotional release, or even of nervous breakdown within the fabric of history. J.A. Froude, described by John Kenyon as having been 'shipwrecked on the reef of the Oxford Movement' and a disciple of the apocalyptically-minded Carlyle, sought to exorcise some of his personal frustrations through his writings on Elizabethan England.[48] Here he found catharsis and escapism, describing the period as 'the vigorous expansion of long-imprisoned energy, springing out in bounding joyous freedom'.[49] It is hardly surprising that such tendencies should subsequently have proved enduring in an age even more preoccupied with introspection and psychology. George Dangerfield enthusiastically married a cyclical, unambiguously apocalyptic view of Edwardian England with Jungian theory, writing in *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935) about death-instincts, individuation, and so on.[50]

The linear and cyclical models could also effectively be synthesised. Macaulay's *History of England* (1849-61) was a prime example of how the drive of linear political narrative could be enriched by the human detail of horizontal digression into social customs. Although such digression is as old as historiography itself (witness Herodotus), it might be appropriate, as Robin Gilmour suggests, to think of Macaulay as England's 'first modern social historian'.[51] It was the effectiveness of such traditional practice, allied to fresh interest in social and economic concerns, that fed into the style of the *Oxford History of England* in the 1930s. R.C.K. Ensor's volume on late Victorian and Edwardian England was praised especially for its felicitous integration of cultural and mental aspects with political

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Descent, chs 9-10.

[48] See Kenyon, *History Men*, pp. 118-29.

[49] *The Nemesis of Faith*, quoted in Burrow, *Liberal Descent*, p. 275.

[50] See below, Chapter 6.

[51] Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830-1890* (London, 1993), p. 40.

narrative - an important feature when so much anti-Victorian and anti-Edwardian sentiment had been directed towards these areas (though as we saw in Chapter 1, Ensor was not uncritical of it either).[52]

If the models of the past were not rejected, still less did inter-war historiography cast off its mantle of *belle-lettrism*. H.A.L. Fisher spoke approvingly of this quality of the past in his 1928 Raleigh Lecture 'The Whig Historians':

> There is a grasp of reality in all their work which is absent from many learned publications of the cloister. ... So long as a taste for good letters survives among those who use our English tongue, the reader in search of enjoyment will never resort in vain to the two Whig kinsman [Macaulay and the recently-deceased G.O. Trevelyan] who have transmitted to posterity in a vestment of fresh and glowing colours one of the governing traditions of English public life.[53]

Fisher's comments contradict much of the more recent discussion about the 'professionalisation' of historical prose in these years. This has tended to be overly black-and-white here, seeing a scientific, dry-as-dust approach replace the comfortable contours of earlier literary historiography. But as Rosemary Jann has usefully noted, debates about the practice of 'professional' history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were as much preoccupied with questions of good taste as they were with questions of sound scholarship.[54] To be a good historian was to have standards in an age of supposedly debased aesthetic values. Many historians - 'amateur' and 'professional' by contemporary and even modern standards - fulfilled this criterion, possessing the baggage of a classical-literary education and investing large amounts of care in their prose and the allusions it made. Often this co-existed with an awareness, even a practical use of, more modern scientific scholarship.

Partly because Lytton Strachey is not (for justifiable reasons) considered a sound historian, it has rarely been pointed out that his celebrated Preface to

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[52] See Paul Knaplund's review in the *Journal of Modern History*, 9 (1937), 100-102.
[53] H.A.L. Fisher, 'The Whig Historians' in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol 14 (London, 1928), pp. 31, 45.
[54] Jann, 'From Amateur to Professional'.

Eminent Victorians (1918) stated a quite serious methodological dilemma facing historians of the Victorian age around 1918. The problem, Strachey observed, was that there was too much material to assimilate rather than too little. 'Our grandfathers have poured forth and accumulated so vast a quantity of information', he reflected, 'that the industry of a Ranke would be submerged by it, and the perspicacity of a Gibbon would quail before it'.[55] These were not simply names plucked at random: here Strachey offered Ranke the 'professional' and Gibbon the 'amateur'. Neither approach, Strachey argued, would have yielded success. A new way of sifting the material was called for. Strachey's immediate solution to this was the method used in *Eminent Victorians* of alighting on telling details, or as he put it, lowering a bucket into the 'great ocean of material ... which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen'.[56]

It is also rewarding to read Strachey's less well-known thoughts on the writing of history in his pieces on Hume, Gibbon, Macaulay, Carlyle, Froude, and Creighton published in *The Nation and the Athenaeum* and *Life and Letters* between 1928 and 1930.[57] Strachey argued that 'the qualities that make a historian' are threefold: 'a capacity for absorbing facts, a capacity for stating them, and a point of view'.[58] Time and again it was the eloquently poised and opinionated that called forth Strachey's approval. Hence, while enjoying the gusto of Macaulay's Whiggery, he deplored its origins because party politics he considered to be 'a bore'. In the 1929 piece on Creighton, Strachey regarded the rise of dry-as-dust 'professional' historiography with some ambivalence, neither unaware of its benefits nor of its lamentable dullness:

> Born when the world was becoming extremely scientific, he belonged to the post-Carlyle-and-Macaulay generation - the school of Oxford and Cambridge inquirers, who sought to reconstruct the past solidly and patiently, with nothing but facts to assist them - pure facts, untwisted by political or metaphysical bias and uncoloured by romance.[59]

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[55] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 1918), p. vii.
[56] Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. vii.
[57] Collected together as 'Six English Historians' in *Portraits in Miniature* (London, 1931), pp. 141-218.
[58] 'Macaulay' in 'Six English Historians', pp. 169-70.
[59] 'Creighton' in 'Six English Historians', pp. 208-9.

Strachey might at first glance seem to be an isolated case writing this in the era of Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History*. Yet there were many other 'professional' writers who adopted a *belle-lettrist* style, partly to overcome the intractability of the material before them, but also from a genuine belief in the artistic merits of well-turned and absorbing historical narrative. Indeed, we might map out a nebulous community of people before 1945 whose shared belief in the literary value of historical writing delineates them from many modern 'professional' historians.

Often these middle-class professional writers, usually Oxbridge-educated, knew one another personally. This could generate some telling dialogues about the art of writing history. Nowhere is such a dialogue more striking than in the correspondence of G.M. Trevelyan with Lytton Strachey (Trevelyan was a young Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge when Strachey matriculated in 1899; both were members of the Apostles). Strachey wrote to Trevelyan in 1913 about the difficulties of writing history, probably in response to the appearance of Trevelyan's *Clio: A Muse* (1913), a version of the essay initially written in retaliation against J.B. Bury's advocacy of scientific history in his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor at Cambridge in 1903. Trevelyan replied with warmth to Strachey, who was on the brink of writing *Eminent Victorians*:

> I agree with what you say about history, thus far at least that I think it would be more difficult now to write a large scale history of all the aspects of a neat period, especially of course a modern period. But by limitation of scope great things could still be done if there were men like Gibbon, Macaulay or Carlyle. Meanwhile, even if the age and the future be unfavourable to decent history, it is all the more reason to do the best we can before we fall into [the] utter barbarism of unenlightened learning. I expect you agree with this.[60]

It is noteworthy that when *Eminent Victorians* was finally published in May 1918 Trevelyan wrote again to Strachey: 'I read it at one long sitting in the train across

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[60] Trevelyan to Strachey, 16 December 1913. British Library Add. MS 60732, f. 193.

North Italy with the most intense pleasure, approval and admiration. ... You have got a real historical sense which few professional historians have ... You have got not only historical *sense* - as Carlyle & Belloc have - but historical judgement which they have not."[61] Trevelyan's enthusiasm for Strachey's work waned somewhat in hindsight,[62] but as a comment on the art of writing narrative in a climate of supposedly 'professional' history, his remarks are revealing and not unique. Trevelyan and Strachey were both admirers of the Hammonds, who built into their influential writings on the Industrial Revolution manifold allusions to classical civilisation. Writers like Philip Guedalla, who had important things to say about Queen Victoria, Palmerston, and Gladstone, placed similarly large store in literary finish.

A slightly surprising inclusion in this community of literary-minded writers is G.M. Young, the historian who is alleged to have said 'We're in for a bad time' when he read *Eminent Victorians*. It is deeply ironic that Young's *Portrait of an Age*, which was is in part a response to the anti-Victorianism generated by *Eminent Victorians*, should itself be marked by a style far closer to that of Strachey than to later, more dry-as-dust studies of the Victorian period. This is evident not only in the elegant poise of its prose and breadth of allusion but also - it has to be noted - in Young's frequent reliance on (and occasional lapse of) personal memory.[63] Sheldon Rothblatt, writing shortly after the appearance of the annotated version of *Portrait of an Age*, actually noted how disconcerted younger readers of the 1970s were by Young's 'Victorian' mode of writing:

> Whatever the truth of the present situation, the Uncle Toby obsession with old battles and battlefields may well inhibit the development of an appreciative audience for Young. As Victorian England goes, so goes Young. He may be too closely associated with

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[61] Trevelyan to Strachey, n.d. (?May 1918). BL Add. MS 60732, f. 195.

[62] Cannadine, *Trevelyan*, pp. 43-5. For all Trevelyan's private and professional reservations he nevertheless maintained sufficient warmth to write to Strachey's sister about him following his death in January 1932: 'I suppose he was never granted more than a frail tenure on life and health. The use he made of what little he had was, truly, heroic. How much he accomplished with his quietly planned use of his rare talents knowing always so well what he could and would do.' BL Add. MS 60732, f. 202.

[63] See John Clive, 'The Victorians from the Inside: *Portrait of an Age*' in *Not By Fact Alone Essays on the Writing and Reading of History* (London, 1989), pp. 135-45.

> it to be apprehended on his own terms. It would be easy, if boorish and wrong, to fasten upon him the charge of guilt by association.[64]

One only has to look at the last page of *Portrait of an Age*, with its nostalgia for 'the lights of argument and reason' to see how far Young preferred the Victorian period to his present. This was not Whiggish historiography by a long measure, but it was writing which was prepared to be warm and artistic, and to see the past as an exemplar for the present.

Concluding thoughts

A degree of 'professionalisation' certainly took place amongst historians of the inter-war period. Yet taking into consideration too the extent of continuity with the practices and attitudes of the past, it is difficult to see any full-scale 'professionalisation' before the Second World War. In this respect John Burrow's formulation seems the most satisfactory: inter-war historiography was marked by what appears to be a co-existence of practices, 'amateur' and 'professional', even within the same individual. I would suggest that this vibrant interplay of past and present had the following implications for historiographical perceptions of the Victorians and Edwardians, which will be explored in Chapters 4-6:

1. Discussion of the Victorian and Edwardian periods was varied and intense. This intensity of debate often owed itself to the affective links historians felt with or about the past. Some of these were personal, some political.

2. 'Professionalisation' - though not complete in the modern sense - intensified historical debate further by providing correctives to over-generalisations (some of which were biographical: see Part Three), and by opening new fields of study such as social, economic, and diplomatic history.

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[64] Sheldon Rothblatt, 'G.M. Young: England's Historian of Culture', *Victorian Studies*, 22 (1978-9), 415.

3. This affectivity and partial 'professionalisation' led many historians to find within the past very clear parallels or even continuities with the present. I have labelled as 'Uses of the Past' in the chapters that follow a number of examples of writers finding contemporary resonances in history. This is not, of course, to suggest that they add up to any especially coherent whole; perceptions of the past were too diverse for that. Direct continuities with history will also be explored, perhaps most extensively in Chapter 6.

4. The pre-war past was also literally kept 'alive' after 1918 by historians' use of traditional literary models and styles. Sometimes these were adapted to accommodate newer fashions or 'professional' values, but more generally a belief in good literary style remained.

Chapter Four

Early Victorian Historiography

The main purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the variety and intensity of attitudes which inter-war historians could feel about the past. Like the two chapters which follow, it aims not to provide any comprehensive overview of the mountainous volume of historiography on the pre-war past produced after 1918. Rather it aims to dwell upon particular aspects of this historiography which tell us something about the nature of élite perceptions of the past at this time.

The variety and intensity of the attitudes towards the early Victorian period explored here owed itself not merely to disagreements over method at a time when historians were semi-'professional'. It can also be explained by differences over the ends to which these methods were put. The pre-war past remained 'alive' in the minds of those who had personal and political feelings about it. Others managed to achieve a greater degree of impartiality and were critical of these emotive stances towards history. These diversified and intensified historiographical debate yet further.

In the case of the early Victorian period, historians inevitably wrote against the backdrop of two great themes: the extent to which Victorianism was born in 1837, and the impact of the Industrial Revolution. Victorianism was a residual force in society after 1918, and the realities of life in an industrialised nation were if anything still more powerful. They will be the first two themes to be examined in this chapter. By 1918 these realities had attracted much left-of-centre political comment, and this agenda spilled over into a marked attention towards early Victorian radicalism. We shall focus upon this towards the end of the chapter. However, left-wing priorities did not entirely dominate this historiography. At the close of the chapter we will explore another strand within this diversity of attitudes towards the past, the extent to which the history of Peel's Tory party was used to reflect upon the nature of Conservatism in the inter-war years. This will constitute one of the recurrent themes in Part Two which I have labelled 'Uses of the Past'.

1837: The birth of Victorian morality?

As we noted in Chapter 1, derogatory comments about 'early Victorian' artefacts and attitudes tended to underpin anti-Victorianism, and played upon recurrent ideas such as excessive moral zeal, prudery, and vulgarity. Critics of the Victorian period often wrote as if a spirit of moral censure and philistine materialism had suddenly descended in 1837, a mood reflected anthropomorphically in the furniture and buildings of the early Victorians. Lytton Strachey's comment on the effects of Queen Victoria's marriage in 1840 to Prince Albert exemplifies this attitude, and bears repeating: 'Duty, industry, morality, and domesticity triumphed [at Osborne] ... Even the very chairs and tables had assumed, with a singular responsiveness, the forms of prim solidity. The Victorian Age was in full swing.'[1]

The historian G.M. Young (1882-1959) consciously set out to correct such overly deterministic notions, and his views came to dominate historiography during (and for some years after) the 1930s.[2] Young was a conservative, and strictly speaking not a professional historian at all (until the 1920s he was a civil servant); but he was nonetheless very much part of that middle-class professional élite which saw its duty in upholding and propagating civilised values within a framework of public duty. Young felt not only that dispassionate thought owed the Victorians the right to a more careful reading than had hitherto been the norm, but that the very values he most prized could be seen in early and mid-Victorian England, and ought to be recalled in the present.[3] This is the context in which Young's *Portrait of an Age* (1936) - an extended version of the essay originally published in the two-volume collection *Early Victorian England* (1934) - should be understood. Young opened *Portrait of an Age* with a famously arresting observation that 'a boy born in 1810' would have grown to maturity with memories of the end of the Napoleonic Wars, of the vividness of Regency monarchy, of romanticism, and of the tremblings of the

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[1] Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (London, 1921), pp. 141-2.

[2] On Young's determination to prove Strachey *et al* wrong see above, Introduction. On Young generally see W.D. Handcock's introduction to Young's *Victorian Essays* (Oxford, 1962); George Clark's biographical memoir in the annotated version of *Portrait of an Age*, ed. George Kitson Clark (Oxford, 1977); Sheldon Rothblatt, 'G.M. Young: England's Historian of Culture', *Victorian Studies*, 22 (1978-9), 413-29; Asa Briggs, 'G.M. Young: The Age of a Portrait' in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs*, vol 2: *Images, Problems, Standpoints, Forecasts* (London, 1985), pp. 253-71; and John Clive, 'The Victorians from the Inside: *Portrait of an Age*' in *Not By Fact Alone: Essays on the Writing and Reading of History* (London, 1989), pp. 135-45.

[3] See above, pp. 9-10, 54, 66-7.

1830 Revolutions. As a result it might justifiably be wondered whether this typical early Victorian, in his late twenties when Victoria came to the throne, might not have been in something of a parlous emotional condition. That he was not owed itself, in Young's mind, to the prevailing cultural climate: 'whichever way his temperament led him, he found himself at every turn controlled, and animated, by the imponderable pressure of the Evangelical discipline and the almost universal faith in progress'.[4]

In Young's mind, evangelicalism[5] and Utilitarianism - both features which pre-dated the accession of Victoria - lay at the heart of early Victorian identity. He denied that Victorianism had been born in 1837. Here it is worth dwelling slightly upon an irony, for it is revealing of the diversity and nuances within élite perceptions of the pre-war past. Young's call to revive Victorian values of leadership and clarity of thought was in its intellectual fastidiousness at odds with more populist trends within revivalism. The conscious appeal to the precedent of Queen Victoria's coronation upon that of George VI almost exactly a century later was anathema to Young.[6] On 11 May 1937 *The Times* carried a long article by Young entitled '1837-1937: Centenary of Queen Victoria's Accession'.[7] The piece must have made for disconcerting reading amongst those relishing the prospect of a celebration of tradition and Empire. Young commented on the 'dry, bleak and critical' popular attitude to the monarchy at William IV's death, and to the fact that 'for the Queen herself there was little feeling of any kind'.[8] More generally, Young was at pains to point out that 1837 was not the opening of a 'golden age'; that in political hindsight the year was midway between 1832 and the coming of the Tories in 1841; that there remained little to distinguish between the aristocratic Whigs and the Tories; that Ireland was still an exhausting difficulty; and that the tone of public life was quite low, with a notable barbarity in the continuing popularity of public executions.[9]

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[4] G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age Victorian England* [1936] (Oxford: 2nd edn, 1953), p. 1.
[5] In this discussion of evangelicalism, following inter-war and later practice, I have used a small-case 'e' to denote Church of England as well as nonconformist tendencies.
[6] On the appeal to Victorian precedent in George VI's coronation see above, pp. 52-3.
[7] Reprinted in Young, *Victorian Essays*, pp. 13-35. Further references to this version.
[8] Young, '1837-1937', p. 26.
[9] Young's view that Victorianism had not been born in 1837 was echoed in another piece appearing at this time, C.K. Webster's 'The Accession of Queen Victoria', *History*, 22 (1937-8), 14-33. 'It is easy to imagine another Queen emerging out of these peculiar and dangerous circumstances', wrote Webster of politics upon Victoria's accession.

There were, however, the benefits of evangelicalism and Utilitarianism, and in *Portrait of an Age* Young had already celebrated the rich legacy they bequeathed to Victorianism. He argued that they instilled an energy and optimism, and a readiness to criticise society when necessary. Young conceded that the critical faculty of the early Victorians was not infallible; in particular their religious impulses towards the lower orders were too often ignored when it came to considerations of industrial progress, and the result was hypocrisy.[10] Only in the mid-Victorian period would these contradictions begin to be resolved. An example of Young's lyrical description of the early Victorian period ought perhaps to be given. This is a view which begins with an inflection which must surely have been intended for readers of the 1930s:

> Cynicism and superciliousness, the stigmata of a beaten age and a waning class, were alien to the hopeful, if anxious, generation which had taken the future into its hands. In their exuberance and facility, the earlier Victorians, with their flowing and scented hair, gleaming jewellery and resplendant waistcoats, were nearer to the later Elizabethans; they were not ashamed; and, like the Elizabethans, their sense of the worthwhileness of everything - themselves, their age, and their country: what the Evangelicals called seriousness; the Arnoldians earnestness; Bagehot, most happily, eagerness - overflowed in sentiment and invective, loud laughter, and sudden reproof.[11]

Young's emphasis on the importance of evangelicalism and Utilitarianism in the make-up of Victorianism was not, in fact, new. Young almost certainly knew the work of the great French historian Élie Halévy (1870-1937), and it was he who most influentially put forward the idea that evangelicalism and Utilitarianism acted as a stabilising influence in the early nineteenth century. Halévy, an anglophile and liberal intellectual, had trained as a philosopher in the Platonic tradition and was preoccupied with delineating the ideal standards by which human existence might be lived. In 1912 he turned his attention to nineteenth century England, finding

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[10] Young, *Portrait*, pp. 14-15.
[11] Young, *Portrait*, p. 12.

there a more congenial alternative to the history of tyranny and revolution which marked his own nation's past. By 1923 he had published the first three volumes of his *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, covering the years 1815-1841. Then the trauma of the Great War led Halévy to jump ahead to write the 'Epilogue' covering the years 1895-1914 - a diagnosis of how the failure of reason and liberalism led to the outbreak of the war. (Halévy did not live to complete his study of the years 1841-1895, and though a version was subsequently constructed using his notes, I have not included it in discussion in this thesis.)[12]

The 'Halévy thesis' expounded in these opening volumes sought to explain what in his view was the admirable state of moderation, order, and progress in the early nineteenth century. It suggested that the evangelical revival interacted with the Industrial Revolution, Benthamite thought, and the shock of the French Revolution to create the 'distinctive character' of liberalism in the early nineteenth century. The result was a persuasively three-dimensional theory, the sophistication of which might well explain the influence it came to exert on subsequent historical writings. For Halévy, evangelicalism encouraged a variety of characteristics: a sense of personal responsibility and respectability; a belief in individualism (which easily translated into radicalism, though of a Puritan rather than Jacobin character) which coincided with a respect for the law; and a concern with personal progress which, complemented by Benthamite precept, underpinned the business ethic of early industrialists. These forces combined to make an unusually resilient historical scenario:

> We shall explain by this movement [evangelicalism] the extraordinary stability which English Society was destined to enjoy throughout a period of revolutions and crises; what we may truly term the miracle of modern England, anarchist but orderly, practical and businesslike, but religious, and even pietist.[13]

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[12] On Halévy see Ernest Barker, 'Élie Halévy', *English Historical Review*, 53 (1938), 79-87; Charles C. Gillispie, 'The Work of Élie Halévy: A Critical Appreciation', *Journal of Modern History*, 22 (1950), 232-49; Myrna Chase, *Élie Halévy: An Intellectual Biography* (New York, 1980).

[13] Élie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, vol 1: *England in 1815* [1913; English trans. 1924] (London: 2nd edn, 1949), p. 387.

Halévy and Young were echoed by other writers of the period. R.C.K. Ensor in his influential *England 1870-1914* (1936) saw the energies unleashed by the evangelical revival still aglow in the 1880s, and a key to understanding the Victorian period as a whole: 'No one will ever understand Victorian England who does not appreciate that among highly civilized ... countries it was one of the most religious that the world has known.'[14] An American scholar, Maurice J. Quinlan, in 1941 similarly emphasised the importance of the morality and restraint derived from religion to the Victorian identity, pointedly calling his study *Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners 1700-1830*.[15]

These works stood in contrast to those writers who exaggerated the sordidness of life before Victoria's accession. This exaggeration is true particularly of the popular biographers of Queen Victoria - Lytton Strachey, E.F. Benson, and Edith Sitwell - all of whom relished the opportunity to play up the dysfunctional nature of Victoria's relations.[16] These writers accentuated the significance of Victoria's accession and her harmonious marriage to Prince Albert in bringing about the descent of a desultory atmosphere of seriousness, prudery, and respectability. Some historians, without necessarily endorsing the belief that Victorianism was a bad thing, seem to have been lured into adopting a similar approach. L.E. Elliot-Binns' *Religion in the Victorian Era* (1936), for instance, made use of Strachey's *Queen Victoria* (1921) without any apparent qualms as to its reliability as a historical source. Elliot-Binns suggested that at the beginning of the nineteenth century 'the state of religion in England seemed parlous', and that Victoria's accession led to 'a gradual but certain strengthening and revival of the religious life of the nation'.[17] As if by magic, religious life after 1837 - be it in nonconformity or the Oxford Movement - lost its 'Pre-Victorian' (Elliot-Binns' telling adjective) complacency and became aware of unresolved disputes and problems.

Perhaps more surprising was the distinguished historian E.L. Woodward's characterisation of the years before Victoria's accession in *The Age of Reform* (1938). For him, 'Victorian' conventions began not in 1837 but in 1832, with the triumph of a moralistic middle-class sensibility in the Reform Act. 'The structure of

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[14] R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936), p. 137.
[15] Maurice J. Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners 1700-1830* [1941] (Hamden, Connecticut, 1964).
[16] See below, Chapter 8.
[17] L.E. Elliot-Binns, *Religion in the Victorian Era* [1936] (London, 1964), pp. 36, 65.

an orderly society,' he wrote, 'the safeguards of family life and honour, depended upon the observance of ... Christian standards; they were in danger of collapse during the last years of the eighteenth century and the licence of the regency. Hence the reaction after 1832.'[18] Needless to say, 1832 was also the turning-point of modern society for G.M. Trevelyan.[19] Gamaliel Milner, writing in 1934, fixed 'the beginning of the Victorian Age at 1830', noting the significance of the fall of the Tories in that year and the coming of the Whigs who would pass the Reform Act.[20] Other writers in the 1930s, such as M.E. Perugini and Mrs C. Peel, deplored the influence of middle-class sobriety in the move away from 'the colour and grace of masculine garb in Georgian days' to Victorian 'stiffness', and the contrast of 'exquisitely simple and well-proportioned eighteenth-century rooms' with 'heavy, overloaded and crowded' Victorian interiors.[21] Whatever the motives of these various writers, all felt the need to delineate a version of history in which bourgeois seriousness replaced frivolity. That transition, they felt, could be dated with a fair degree of precision: either to 1830-2 or to 1837.

There was another school of thought which was sceptical about the impact of evangelicalism on the putative restraint of the Victorian period. Woodward was one of these sceptics. He suggested that the avoidance of revolution in the early nineteenth century had less to do with religion than with patriotism during the war with France and a natural conservatism - 'Wellington's judgement that the people of England were 'very quiet' may explain the character of English religion; to some extent, the English were religious because they were quiet, and not quiet because they were religious'.[22] On the other hand, R.F. Wearmouth in *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England* (1937) suggested several different perspectives

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[18] E.L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* (Oxford, 1938), p. 513. Cf. David Eastwood's criticism of Woodward's Whiggishness: above, p. 75 fn. 15.

[19] G.M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After* (London, 1937), p. 241. Admittedly Trevelyan's argument related less to the triumph of morality than to the moral triumph of politics: the Reform Act 'asserted the power of the whole nation, franchised and unenfranchised, because it had been carried by the popular will against the strenuous resistance of the old order entrenched in the House of Lords'.

[20] Gamaliel Milner, *The Threshold of the Victorian Age* (London, 1934), p. 12.

[21] M.E. Perugini, *Victorian Days and Ways* (London, 1932), pp. 101-2; Mrs C. Peel, 'Homes and Habits' in G.M. Young (ed.), *Early Victorian England 1830-1865* (Oxford, 1934), I, p. 111. Cf. Peel's two jaunty accounts of the Regency period: *A Hundred Wonderful Years: Social and Domestic Life of a Century, 1820-1920* (London, 1926) and *The Stream of Time: Social and Domestic Life in England, 1805-1861* (London, 1931). The latter she described in the author's note as being an account of the 'glorious squalors of the Georgian era'. The Victorian era, by contrast, was characterised by 'ugliness', 'respectability', and 'humanitarianism'.

[22] Woodward, *Age of Reform*, p. 484.

on evangelicalism and Victorianism. In one sense, Methodist leaders could be seen to have encouraged obedience and respect for the law; but in a less conservative reading than Halévy, Wearmouth also suggested that many future radicals - such as those involved in Chartism - had gained their 'political' apprenticeship in Methodist organisations.[23] This suggests a slightly different tradition of envisaging the relationship between evangelicalism and the values of the establishment at the time of Victoria's accession. Rather than emphasising the contiguity of evangelical restraint with the orderliness of the early nineteenth century, this interpretation saw evangelicalism as a potentially disruptive force: it was the moral conscience of society against the entrenched powers of privilege and industrial exploitation. Such writing encouraged the sense that the early Victorian years were - in contrast to Young's ebullient portrait - the continuation of a period of unprecedented grimness in history.

But perhaps the classic formulation of evangelicalism - and in particular Methodism - being an outlet for potentially revolutionary tensions at the beginning of the nineteenth century came in the work of John L. (1872-1949) and Barbara (1873-1961) Hammond. This married team - authors of textbooks, journalists, polemicists for advanced Liberal causes - put forward their views on the impact of the Industrial Revolution in a series of books published around the time of the Great War.[24] In *The Town Labourer* (1917) they suggested that Methodism was a consolation to the working-classes which the established Church could not provide; it 'helped to build up a democratic structure for society by the life and energy and spiritual awakening that it brought to the first victims of the Industrial Revolution'.[25] A writer like E.E. Kellett, who explicitly acknowledged his debt to the Hammonds, developed their comments about the sense of injustice which evangelicalism could articulate amongst critics of industrialisation. His 1938 study of *Religion and Life in the Early Victorian Age* saw little direct connection between evangelicalism and the widely accepted characterisation of early Victorian England as a country preoccupied with industrial progress (though admittedly he did comment on the business acumen of many Methodists); rather, his few references

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[23] R.F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850* (London, 1937).

[24] On the Hammonds see Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), passim; Stuart A. Weaver, *The Hammonds: A Marriage in History* (Stanford, 1997).

[25] J.L. & Barbara Hammond, *The Town Labourer* [1917] (London: new edn, 1978), p. 195. See also *The Village Labourer* (1911) and *The Skilled Labourer* (1919).

to Victorianism tended to play off evangelicalism against the establishment. Here, for example, is his discussion of Macaulay's social conscience:

> I spoke a little time since of Macaulay's youthful advocacy of 'laissez-faire'. Within fifteen years he, the most 'Victorian' of men, whose famous Third Chapter is a glorification of material progress, was strongly supporting the Ten Hours Bill, crying out for the education of the masses, and proclaiming that Government must be something more than a mere hangman...[26]

These arguments anticipate the liveliness of historical debate re-awakened by the appearance of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963. The debate was clearly going on before then; inter-war historians diverged widely in opinion about the antecedents of the Victorian moral code. One thing, however, was fairly certain: few were happy with Lytton Strachey's mischievous suggestion that a censorious moral code suddenly descended on the nation when Victoria came to power. In part this was simply the result of good historical sense; but, as we have seen, it also owed much to the invigoration caused by debates about the impact of the Industrial Revolution. It is to these debates that we must now turn.

The Impact of the Industrial Revolution[27]

As we noted in Chapter 3, one of the most powerful motivations for historical re-evaluation of the pre-war past was the preoccupation with social and economic history. This may have had something to do with a move away from political narratives of a Whiggish nature in the wake of the Great War, though historians after 1918 never became fully 'professional'. Nor should we forget the lead in the writing of social history famously provided by Macaulay in the Third Chapter of his *History of England*. It is highly appropriate, then, that the most celebrated 'Whig'

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[26] E.E. Kellett, *Religion and Life in the Early Victorian Age* (London, 1938), p. 94.
[27] This topic has received some coverage from historians before, perhaps most notably in Cannadine's 'Present and Past' article (see below, fn. 31).

historian of the inter-war period (and Macaulay's great-nephew) - G.M. Trevelyan (1876-1962) - should have devoted himself energetically to this subject in his *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After* (1937).[28] Trevelyan's view of the social and economic events which collectively comprised the Industrial Revolution was stated unequivocally at the outset. The early Victorians took on a grim legacy:

> In the first fifty years [Trevelyan's book opened in 1782], ending with the Great Reform Bill of 1832, the Industrial Revolution is, in its social consequences, mainly destructive. It destroys, in town and country, the forms and pieties of the old English life, that could not be harnassed to the new machinery. ... By 1832 there was scant provision for the political, municipal, educational or sanitary needs of the population, most of whom were not even tolerably clothed or fed.[29]

This is an easily recognisable version of the Industrial Revolution. It was one forged from the social conscience of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when confidence in laissez-faire had begun to break down under the impact of the rediscovery of poverty and the undermining of Britain's status as the leading industrial nation. Some of the contemporary works to appear out of this setting were Arnold Toynbee's *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England* (1884) and Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *History of Trade Unionism* (1894): both, to judge from footnote references, still widely-read in the 1920s and 1930s. As the *Times Literary Supplement* commented in 1927: 'The ordinary cultivated person's view is probably an outline derived from Toynbee, with a few horrors drawn from the Life of Shaftesbury and the 1834 Poor Law Report.'[30] Economic hardship in the 1930s kept the pessimistic view of the Industrial Revolution alive until the Second World War.[31]

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[28] The work had originally appeared in 1922 as *British History in the Nineteenth Century*, closing in 1901. The 1937 edition took the account down to 1919.
[29] Trevelyan, *British History*, p. xvi.
[30] *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 March 1927.
[31] See Rohan McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1998), pp. 14-15; David Cannadine, 'The Present and the Past in the English Industrial Revolution 1880-1980', *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), 131-172.

Indeed, it is important to bear in mind that inter-war discussion of nineteenth century living standards was less a cool historical appraisal than a direct continuation of heated Victorian and Edwardian debate. Trevelyan was just one of a number of historians who attempted to combine scholarly rigour with a recognisably Victorian sense of public duty. Another was the economic historian R.H. Tawney (1880-1962), who in *The Acquisitive Society* (1921) and *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926) deplored the social irresponsibility of the modern individualist ethic of property. In tracing the loss of a moral and cultural framework to economic gain (a framework, he argued, previously supplied by the Church) Tawney took up the mantle of such Victorian luminaries as John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold.[32] But Tawney was no dilettante. From his base at the London School of Economics he was to prove a leading figure in the development of economic history between the wars. Amongst his colleagues and students at the LSE during this period were to be found Lilian Knowles, M.M. Postan, and Eileen Power - all advocates of the 'new' field of social and economic history.[33]

However, following the pathbreaking work of Toynbee and others, it was principally John L. and Barbara Hammond who formulated the pessimistic view of the Industrial Revolution which fed into Trevelyan's work. (Trevelyan was to write in 1943: 'I admire and love the two Hammonds immensely.')[34] The thrust of the Hammonds' argument - pursued in *The Village Labourer* (1911), *The Town Labourer* (1917), *The Skilled Labourer* (1919), and *The Rise of Modern Industry* (1925) - was that the Industrial Revolution had happened too quickly, and that in the absence of effective government intervention the poor had been brutalised and many of the cherished values and traditions of the past needlessly destroyed. In *The Age of the Chartists* (1930) they extended their arguments about the impact of the Industrial Revolution down to the early Victorian period.[35] The 1830s and 1840s, in this portrait, were a time of quickening class consciousness as a result of the changes

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[32] On Tawney see Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, pp. 160-1, 218-21; John Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London: 2nd edn, 1993), pp. 246-7, 252-61; Stefan Collini, 'Moral Mind: R.H. Tawney' in *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 177-94.

[33] See the inaugural lectures given by Tawney (LSE, 1932), Power (LSE, 1933) and Postan (Cambridge, 1939) in N.B. Harte (ed.), *The Study of Economic History: Collected Inaugural Lectures 1893-1970* (London, 1971); Maxine Berg, 'The first women economic historians', *Economic History Review*, 45 (1992), 308-29; Maxine Berg, *A Woman in History - Eileen Power, 1889-1940* (Cambridge, 1996).

[34] Quoted in David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London, 1992), p. 45.

[35] A slightly shorter version of this work was later published as *The Bleak Age* (1934).

brought about by precipitous industrialisation. Life became regulated by a rigid factory régime; custom endorsed by tradition was lost; and the response to this was a conscious sense of modernity and oppression on the part of the poor. The failure of government intervention - particularly in educational initiatives - was repeatedly pressed home, usually by means of an unflattering comparison with classical Greece or Rome. The Hammonds felt that therein could be seen the 'power of disinterested emotion to lighten the dark misery that man suffers when shut up within the narrow circle of selfish aims and cares'.[36] This was not a new ploy on their part: a comparison between English and Greek history had been made in the Conclusion to *The Village Labourer*.[37]

Despite the Hammonds' compulsion to use such extreme parallels, their pessimistic view of the Industrial Revolution had gained considerable currency by the 1920s and 1930s. Its prominence aroused resistance, and as a result an important feature of *The Age of the Chartists* became its defensive nature. In 1926 there appeared the first volume of J.H. Clapham's *Economic History of Modern Britain*, dedicated to *The Early Railway Age 1820-1850*. Clapham (1873-1946), an economic historian based at Cambridge,[38] set out explicitly to attack 'the legend that everything was getting worse for the working man, down to some unspecified date between the drafting of the People's Charter and the Great Exhibition'.[39] In such an approach Clapham was following in the footsteps of L.C.A. Knowles and paving the way for work in the late 1920s and 1930s by P. Mantoux, D. George, A. Redford, H. Heaton, and E. Lipson.[40] Irritated by the success of the Hammonds' *Rise of Modern Industry* (which was recommended reading for students of R.H. Tawney and Eileen Power at the London School of Economics)[41], Clapham launched a powerful array of qualifications to history as practised by the pessimists. Regional variety had

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[36] J.L. & Barbara Hammond, *The Age of the Chartists 1832-1854: A Study of Discontent* (London, 1930), p. 8.

[37] J.L. & Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832: A Study in the Government of England before the Reform Bill* [1911] (London: 4th edn, 1936), p. 306. The Hammonds praised here the 'great body of principle by which to check, refine and discipline the gross appetites of national ambition. ... In all this ... it is not fanciful to see the ennobling influence of the Greek writers on whom every eighteenth-century politician was bred and nourished'.

[38] On Clapham see the *DNB 1941-1950*, pp. 153-4; Roderick Floud, 'Words, Not Numbers: John Harold Clapham', *History Today*, 39 (April 1989), 42-7.

[39] J.H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain*, vol 1: *The Early Railway Age 1820-1850* (Cambridge, 1926), p. vii.

[40] Their work is discussed in Maxine Berg & Pat Hudson, 'Rehabilitating the industrial revolution', *Economic History Review*, 45 (1992), 24-50; and in Cannadine, 'Present and Past'.

[41] Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, p. 244.

been too often overlooked; social historians often did not make effective use of statistics; trade unionism had not been greatly encouraged by the Industrial Revolution (a direct attack on the Webbs' *History of Trade Unionism* - 'which created that history' - as Clapham disdainfully commented).[42] But perhaps most cogently, Clapham threw into question the belief that the working-classes before the mid-Victorian period really had suffered a setback in their quality of living. Between 1790 and 1850, he argued, real wages had risen markedly; for most urban workers they had improved by about 40%.[43] Clapham instead proposed a progressive view of the effects before and during the early Victorian period. 'Because no single British industry had passed through a complete technical revolution before 1830,' he wrote, 'the country abounded in ancient types of industrial organisation and in transitional types of every activity.'[44] The *Times Literary Supplement* applauded this corrective to the long-held pessimistic view of the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the body of the nation. 'It is now possible, thanks to Dr. Clapham,' it commented, 'to correct this pathological view by a study of normal physiology.'[45]

The Hammonds, inevitably, were not so easily beaten. They responded to Clapham's argument about the gradualism of the Industrial Revolution in *The Age of the Chartists* - somewhat wanly, it might be added:

> Now the Industrial Revolution seen in the perspective of the life of the world may seem a gradual process, so gradual that economists find fault with the phrase as inexact. But as an experience in the individual and family lives of the men and women drawn into Manchester and Bradford, the Industrial Revolution was sudden and its consequences sweeping.[46]

The controversy has rumbled on long after this, and different approaches have since been adopted to studying the impact of industrialisation.[47] These do not

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[42] Clapham, *Early Railway Age*, p. 205 fn. 2.
[43] Clapham, *Early Railway Age*, p. 561.
[44] Clapham, *Early Railway Age*, p. 143.
[45] *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 March 1927. The *TLS* remained on Clapham's side for *The Age of the Chartists*: see its attack on this 'one-sided' work on 23 October 1930.
[46] Hammonds, *Age of Chartists*, p. 20.
[47] See Cannadine, 'Present and Past'; Berg & Hudson, 'Rehabilitating the industrial revolution'.

concern us here: but it is worth reminding ourselves that inter-war writers were by no means agreed upon the nature of the industrialising society in which the early Victorians lived. For some it was sorely regrettable that the early Victorian establishment failed to counteract the invidious effects of industrialisation. The extent to which this led the discontented masses to make the early Victorian period a particularly unsettled time ought now to be considered.

Early Victorian radicalism

In an era of mass democracy it is hardly surprising that inter-war historians turned to the radical movement which attracted the most widespread popular support in the early nineteenth century, Chartism. Surprisingly enough, given the growth in trade union membership since the late nineteenth century, the topic of Chartism had received relatively scant historiographical treatment by the time of the Great War. There had been personal accounts from old Chartists such as Robert Gammage in his *History of the Chartist Movement* (reprinted in 1894) and G.J. Holyoake in *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* (1892) - both of which were drawn upon as sources by later historians. As Richard Brown has pointed out, works like this already showed a concern with linking Chartism to later Victorian radicalism, emphasising variously the antecedents of socialism or Gladstonian Liberalism within the movement.[48] These were priorities which, as we shall see, early labour historians were later to develop. But it was not until Mark Hovell's *The Chartist Movement* (1918) and Julius West's *History of the Chartist Movement* (1920) that the topic became fully reintgrated within English scholarship.[49] As R.W. Postgate commented in the *Socialist* in 1919, 'The Chartist movement has received nothing like the attention that it deserved.'[50]

The renewed interest in Chartism after 1918 might be attributed to a number of factors. It may have been the natural outcome of an era when the most

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[48] Richard Brown, *Chartism* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 3.

[49] A number of works appeared in America around this time: F.F. Rosenblatt's *The Social and Economic Aspects of the Chartist Movement* (1916); P.W. Slosson's *The Decline of the Chartist Movement* (1916); and H.V. Faulkner's *Chartism and the Churches* (1916). To judge from the bibliographies of contemporary English writing they appeared to have had little or no impact. There had also been E. Dolléans' rather more influential *Le Chartisme, 1830-1848* (1912-13).

[50] *Socialist*, 13 March 1919.

important point of the Charter - universal male suffrage (and by 1928 female suffrage too) - had finally been realised. Hugh Gaitskell in a 1929 work placed Chartism explicitly within the context of electoral reform. The future Labour leader characterised the passage of reform as painfully slow but nevertheless evident: 'Set going in the calm discussions of 18th century middle-class circles, for many years almost an excuse for revolution, [parliamentary reform] has reached its latest triumph in the apathetic presentation of the "Flapper Vote."'[51]

Another reason for the new-found interest in Chartism was the gathering momentum of labour history in the inter-war period. Many of its earliest scholars, as we have already seen, had passionate political agendas to their writing, and the travails of the Great War had certainly made the international political situation more volatile. The Russian Revolution may have made it seem to Marxist historians that the aims of Chartism, which had received numerous references in the writings of Marx and Engels, were more realisable than ever. Few were so crude in their enthusiasm as Salme A. Dutt, who in 1938 wrote a pamphlet celebrating the centenary of the Charter. Dutt's belief was that Chartism was the prototype working-class movement, the experience of which 'reached its clear formulation in Marxism':

> The struggle for the People's Charter is the most glorious chapter in the history of the people of England. It abounds with experience and inspiration for our present struggle for freedom. ... They failed in their attempt, but they did not fight in vain. Enriched by their experience, the march of the people towards freedom continues.[52]

More subtle polemicists were the Hammonds, who in *The Age of the Chartists* also claimed for the movement a vitality beyond its apparent demise in 1848. 'To regard Chartism as an episode,' they wrote, 'as an effort that failed, a flash in the pan, something to which you can give date of birth and death, is to misread the history of the time.' For them 'The Chartist movement, like Owen's movement, was imagination in action. And when Chartism flickered out this force

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[51] Hugh Gaitskell, *Chartism: An Introductory Essay* (London, 1929), p. 1.
[52] Salme A. Dutt, *When England Arose: The Centenary of the People's Charter* (London, 1938), pp. 64, 5-6.

was not lost."[53] Julius West, the journalist, literary scholar and one-time clerk of the Fabian Society, had anticipated all of these thoughts in 1920 by commenting that Chartism had been 'a prominent feature in the political education of the English people'. Here is a view of Victorian history written evidently for an audience still reeling from the legacy of Edwardian labour unrest and the suffrage issue:

> From a purely middle-class agitation, it developed into a working-class campaign; woman suffrage entered to a certain extent into the programme; many of the present-day problems of trade unionism, industrial unionism, and syndicalism took shape; and organized labour became for the first time a factor of importance in the life of the nation.[54]

For left-wing writers of the 1920s and 1930s it was important to trace their roots in labour history. But the belief in a quickening of the conscious sense of exploitation as a result of industrialisation posed an intractable problem for writers such as West, Dutt, and the Hammonds. How were they to explain the apparent failure of radical movements such as Chartism? One way - implicit in all of the quotes above - was to proclaim that it had scarcely been a failure at all, and that the spirit which motivated it had flourished beyond 1848 into the present. As West concluded in a celebrated passage:

> Judged by its crop of statutes and statues, Chartism was a failure. Judged by its essential and generally overlooked purpose, Chartism was a success. It achieved, not the Six Points, but a state of mind. This last achievement made possible the renascent trade union movement of the 'fifties, the gradually improving organization of the working classes, the Labour Party, the co-operative movement, and whatever greater triumphs labour will enjoy in the future.[55]

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[53] Hammonds, *Age of Chartists*, pp. 274, 276.
[54] Julius West, *A History of the Chartist Movement* (London, 1920), pp. 5, 11.
[55] West, *History of the Chartist Movement*, pp. 294-5.

Meanwhile, they could argue that Chartism had foundered because of the problems of leadership and the divergent aims of 'moral' and 'physical' force Chartists. The short discussion of Chartist leaders in Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *History of Trade Unionism* (1894) had concluded in recognisably angry terms that Chartism 'was disgraced by the fustian of many of its orators and the political and economic quackery of its pretentious and incompetent leaders whose jealousies and intrigues, by successively excluding all the nobler elements, finally brought it to nought'.[56] Gradualist labour historians such as Mark Hovell and Julius West, both of whom used the Francis Place manuscripts (which emphasised the role of London artisans), tended to be more sympathetic to William Lovett's London Working Men's Association than to the extremist regional variations of Chartism.

Opprobrium was most frequently heaped upon Feargus O'Connor, the leading 'physical force' Chartist. Fabians such as Julius West wrote that he had 'all the defects of the lower-grade politician', thereby placing O'Connor beyond the pale altogether.[57] The Hammonds were relatively reticent about individual leaders in *The Age of the Chartists*, though with their gradualism and frequent appeals to the order and beauty of ancient civilisation it is unlikely that they felt much sympathy with the 'physical force' Chartists. It is notable that they wrote of O'Connor's initiatives leading up to the Land Scheme as the 'final catastrophe' of Chartism.[58] But hostility was not exclusive to the Fabians and gradualists. Marxists such as Reg Groves in *But We Shall Rise Again* (1938), instead of deploring O'Connor's violence, lamented if anything its opposite: O'Connor's lack of true revolutionary zeal.[59] The verdict of more neutral observers was equally damning: G.M. Young called him 'pitiful'; E.L. Woodward referred to him as 'the ruin of the Chartist movement'.[60] As G.D.H. Cole commented in 1941: 'Hardly one of the historians of Chartism can write about O'Connor except in terms of acrimonious dislike.'[61] Over questions of leadership we can see a deep division within the ranks of politically-committed labour historians of the inter-war years - that relating to the efficacy of violence. In the quest to integrate Chartism within a living tradition of labour history both

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[56] Sidney & Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* [1894] (London: revised edn, 1920), pp. 174-5.
[57] West, *History of the Chartist Movement*, p. 84.
[58] Hammonds, *Age of Chartists*, p. 271.
[59] Brown, *Chartism*, p. 5.
[60] Young, *Portrait*, p. 31; Woodward, *Age of Reform*, p. 130.
[61] G.D.H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits* [1941] (London, 1965), p. 300.

detractors and supporters of violence had nevertheless to contend with the short-term failure of Chartism. Both groups found it expedient to scapegoat some of the leaders of Chartism, while claiming for the movement as a whole long-term success and inspiration for the present.

The role of individual radicals was not the only new area of interest within the historiography of early Victorian radicalism. Mark Hovell in his 1918 study of Chartism placed it in a dignified tradition of radical pressure on parliament dating back to the Elizabethan period, but suggested that the movement was unsuccessful primarily because it was a negative 'revolt ... against intolerable conditions of existence'.[62] Hovell did nevertheless make the insightful observation that the political agenda of the Charter - still so highly esteemed by people like Dutt in years to come - was 'a means to an end, and the end was the social and economic regeneration of society'.[63] This showed a sensitivity to another way of approaching radicalism, which was through the study of economic trends: a scholarly perspective with deepening contemporary resonances during the depression-ridden years of the 1920s and 1930s. This topicality was complemented by the desire amongst a number of writers to attack the assumptions of the Webbs and Hammonds. They had suggested that a spirit of oppression and exploitation had encouraged trade unionism and working-class consciousness generally in the early nineteenth century. More impartial historians attempted to fragment such notions by pointing to the way that economic trends affected different people in different ways. Not surprisingly, it was historians like J.H. Clapham who pointed out that support for radicalism was heavily dependent upon economic trends.[64] Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law movement flourished in times of economic depression, and with the return to economic prosperity in 1843 support for these movements declined. Simon Maccoby's influential 1935 study of early Victorian radicalism noted, for instance, that the Anti-Corn Law League achieved a major spur from the 'distressful winter of 1841-2', and that 'the short semi-revolutionary Charter strike of August 1842 represented a revolt of industrial workmen against the continuous fall of wages which had been going on unchecked during nearly five years of

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[62] Mark Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (Manchester, 1918), p. 1. Hovell was a promising young scholar who was killed during the Great War. The last portion of the book, dealing with the years after 1842, was completed by Professor T.F. Tout of Manchester University. R.W. Postgate in the *Socialist* on 13 March 1919 criticised Tout's contribution as 'superficial in the extreme'.
[63] Hovell, *Chartist Movement*, p. 7.
[64] Clapham, *Early Railway Age*, p. 584.

depression'. Chartist support, Maccoby added, subsequently wavered with the short-term return to prosperity in 1843.[65] Even the author of a popular history could write in 1936: 'One sometimes hears it said that the Early Victorian Age was an age of tranquillity. The very opposite is the truth. It was an age like our own of turmoil, an age of booms and slumps, of profiteering and bankruptcy, of plenty and poverty.'[66]

Heightened sensitivity to the tendentiousness of much left-wing historiography cannot alone account for this new economic emphasis within writing on early Victorian radicalism. Equally important was an awareness of the nation's profound vulnerability to economic trends. The Hammonds' choice of title for the later version of *The Age of the Chartists* was as applicable for the Depression-ridden 1930s as anything else: *The Bleak Age*. Even J.H. Clapham, in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Economic History at Cambridge in 1929, conceded: 'It has been burned in on us these last ten years that nothing makes history, exalts and abases men and classes and kingdoms, like changes in the value of money.'[67]

Uses of the past: (1) parliamentary politics

As we have seen, the Reform Act in 1832 continued to preoccupy inter-war historians of the nineteenth century, especially those of a Whiggish hue such as Trevelyan. The other Whig reforms of the 1830s received wide treatment as well, and the discussion of legislation such as the New Poor Law was coloured to an even greater degree by the political and social priorities of individual writers. (For the Hammonds it was the nadir of civilised governmental responsibility; they compared the dignity afforded by Roman burial societies with the squalor of a pauper's funeral in the 1830s.)[68] Most others tended to see the reforming impulse of the Whigs as having run down by 1835;[69] Halévy in the first place attributed the drive to reform not to the Whigs' political ideology, as far any such thing existed,

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[65]Simon Maccoby, *English Radicalism 1832-1852* (London, 1935), pp. 226, 237, 254.
[66]J. Hampden Jackson, *England Since the Industrial Revolution 1815-1935: A Simple History* (London, 1936), p. 78.
[67]J.H. Clapham, 'The Study of Economic History' in Harte, *Study of Economic History*, p. 59.
[68]Hammonds, *Age of Chartists*, pp. 74-5.
[69]See for example Young, *Portrait*, p. 25.

but to the zeal of the evangelicals within government.[70] Woodward was not the first historian to comment on Melbourne's apparent indifference to politics.[71]

But what strikes the present-day historian as innovative about inter-war study of early Victorian politics is the emphasis placed upon Sir Robert Peel and the Tory party. For most of the nineteenth century, as Boyd Hilton has noted, writers tended to take Disraeli's lead in characterising Peel as able but fatally incapable of original thought. This made him, in the opinion of Walter Bagehot, Thomas Doubleday, G.H. Francis, and other writers of the 1850s, far too prone to follow the swings of public opinion. (E.L. Woodward was almost arguing as much as late as 1938.)[72] The consequences of this were made plain in Peel's two great 'betrayals' of the Tory party in 1829 and 1846. As late as the turn of the twentieth century, writes Hilton, Peel was often felt to have belonged to the wrong party, 'an honorary though not especially honoured Whig'.[73] A.J. Balfour, refusing to compromise over proposals to reform the House of Lords in 1910, declared: 'I cannot become another Robert Peel in my Party.' A Peel memorial scheme to supply books for working-class educational organisations had been set up in the 1850s and was still in operation (albeit with greatly dwindling force) in the 1930s. In the 1890s its committee members had included Sidney Webb: hardly a scion of the Tory party.[74]

This perspective on Peel and Toryism changed markedly during the inter-war period. Instead of Peel the hapless Whig *malgré lui* there began to emerge the view of Peel as the master Tory pragmatist, not perhaps brilliantly far-sighted, but certainly capable of intelligent and resourceful political manoeuvring based around a core of clear and consistent personal beliefs. One concomitant of this was the formulation of the question which to students and teachers of the last three or four generations seems fixed in time immemorial: whether Peel placed greater store in his nation or party. There was a Special Subject on Peel's last years in the Cambridge Tripos during the 1920s, and questions to the effect of considering Peel as great national leader or as great party leader regularly crept

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[70] Élie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, vol 3: *The Triumph of Reform 1830-1841* [1923; English trans. 1927] (London: 2nd edn, 1950), pp. 62-70, 81, 84-5, 137, 195-6, 228-9.

[71] Woodward, *Age of Reform*, pp. 93-4.

[72] See Woodward, *Age of Reform*, p. 105.

[73] Boyd Hilton, 'Peel: A Reappraisal', *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), 586.

[74] Donald Read, *Peel and the Victorians* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 309, 287-94.

into the papers on English Constitutional History after 1485.[75] Examples of this change in attitude to Peel may be found in work by A.A.W. Ramsay ('Peel was an opportunist'); H.W.C. Davis (whose posthumous *The Age of Grey and Peel* was based on the ground-breaking 1926 Ford Lectures delivered as Professor of Modern History at Oxford); and the young George Kitson Clark ('like an able artificer, Peel often thought with his hands').[76]

One of the great problems in assessing Peel had been the complexity of his character. To many he had seemed aloof and indecisive, yet occasionally (as in 1829 and 1846) given to passionate displays of individualism which might be characterised variously as arrogant, destructive, or ruthlessly ambitious. This changed in the early twentieth century partly as a result of the publication of many of Peel's private letters. C.S. Parker in his three-volume biography *Sir Robert Peel* (1891-9) had drawn upon the extensive collection (some 300 volumes of correspondence) held in the British Library. George Peel in 1920 published a further volume emphasising Peel's domestic life, and Kitson Clark in 1929 was to make more use of the British Library holdings in his first book on Peel.[77] These initiatives were to humanise Peel, to show in George Peel's words that he had sufficient 'internal resources' from his family, friends, contentment in work, and religion to counteract successfully any vulnerability to public opinion and political criticism with which he had so long been charged. Moreover he was shown to be a man of considerable warmth and integrity. 'He was frequently accused of egotism by his contemporaries', Ramsay noted in 1928. 'There is, however, no trace of egotism in his private letters: self-confident, even arrogant, he might be, but no man was less preoccupied with himself and his feelings.'[78] Kitson Clark also commented on the 'problem of personality, the personality of a man warm to his friends, passionately attached to his home and his wife, yet often to outsiders cold, distant and disagreeable ... with

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[75] For example: '"You have been prime minister in a sense in which no other man has been since Mr. Pitt's time." W.E. Gladstone to Sir R. Peel, 24 July 1846. Explain fully what Gladstone meant and how far you would agree with him' (1923). 'Compare the influence of Peel and Disraeli on the development of the Conservative Party' (1935). Tripos Papers in the Seeley Historical Library, Cambridge.

[76] A.A.W. Ramsay, *Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1928), p. 370; Davis, *Age of Grey and Peel*; George Kitson Clark, *Peel* (London, 1936), p. 31. Though all of these historians indicated that their views of Peel were essentially revisionist (and there is no reason to doubt their word), there had been some rehabilitation of Peel as a Tory pragmatist by writers in the late nineteenth century. Most, however, overlooked the mechanics of party politics. See Read, *Peel and Victorians*, pp. 304-12.

[77] George Peel (ed.), *The Private Letters of Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1920); George Kitson Clark, *Peel and the Conservative Party A Study in Party Politics 1832-1841* (London, 1929).

[78] Ramsay, *Peel*, p. 366.

undoubted limitations and yet endowed with such abilities and integrity as are seldom brought to the public service'.[79] This process of humanising figures from the past is an important theme in the present thesis, and will dominate Part Three (see below).

Yet there appear to have been other more pressing reasons why Peel and Toryism became a topic of renewed historical interest between the wars. Many historians, without descending into overt Whiggishness, wrote about Peel's political values and practices, and how he related to the wider Tory party, from a distinctly modern perspective. Kitson Clark, for instance, suggested that the essential modernity of Peel's Toryism derived itself from having been forged in an era of mass-democracy which itself was still evolving a century later. The passing of the First Reform Act had generated a number of constitutional and political developments at the time and in subsequent decades. 'None of these problems are obsolete', commented Kitson Clark. 'The House of Lords might become again an important issue, men still claim to maintain Conservative principles, party is still the most important piece of the English political machine.'[80] Kitson Clark's remark about the House of Lords would undoubtedly have been read with deeper resonance by those old enough to remember the passing of the Parliament Act in 1911.

Kitson Clark's comments also hint at two further motivations for inter-war historians in examining Peel's Toryism. First - and this can ultimately only remain a speculation on our part - it may be that the demise of Liberalism after 1918, so keenly felt by many observers, encouraged a move away from seeing Peel as a 'misguided' Whig. Whiggery and Liberalism were seen in many eyes to have faltered. At least George Peel - admittedly as Sir Robert Peel's grandson a not disinterested critic - felt that Peel's integrity and energy provided a model in combatting 'the arrears of statesmanship in a period of inertia', arrears that 'are very far from being made good to-day'.[81] Was this a voice of disillusionment with the Liberal-dominated coalition which had run the war and which, in 1920, was still in power? We cannot be sure. But, in altered circumstances, such voices can still be found later in the decade. Ramsay's 1928 study of Peel contained a number of

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[79] Kitson Clark, *Peel and Conservative Party*, p. xii.
[80] Kitson Clark, *Peel and Conservative Party*, p. xi.
[81] Peel, *Private Letters*, p. 1.

telling comparisons between past and present. One of these related very much to Peel's *Toryism*, at any rate if that Toryism was felt by contemporaries to have been the antithesis of Socialism:

> To the present day, two solutions have been devised for the problems of the industrial State: on the one hand, there is the remedy offered by the Socialist, the remedy that Germany first applied upon a large scale. Such a remedy would not have commended itself to Peel. Strongly individualistic, he believed that the aid and protection of the State, too freely offered, would sap the independence and moral health of the nation. The other remedy was that devised by Peel himself - to lower the cost of living, and above all the cost of food. He applied it, and for the time it obtained almost complete success.[82]

Ramsay concluded that Peel's 'greatest attraction for our minds to-day' was as 'the statesman who set the interest of the nation above every class or individual'.[83] As we have seen, it came to be debated during the 1920s and 1930s whether the first loyalty of Peel's Toryism was to party or nation. Kitson Clark's remark above about party still being 'the most important piece of the English political machine' alludes to this debate. Together with Ramsay's comment it suggests another motivation for examining Peel's Toryism. Here was an interpretation which placed greater emphasis than before upon the *nature* of party politics in the early Victorian period: Kitson Clark's 1929 study, after all, was subtitled 'A Study in Party Politics'. How were parties organised? What part did pragmatism and consensual politics play in the wielding of power? What were the effects on politics of a strong-willed and individualistic party leader?

All of these questions could be - and were - asked of Stanley Baldwin and the Conservatives in the 1920s and 1930s. Toryism emerged as the most viable political creed for the majority of people in England during the inter-war period. The complexion of inter-war politics was distinctly Conservative, with the National Government after 1931 dominated overwhelmingly by the Tories. In such a climate

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[82] Ramsay, *Peel*, p. 372.
[83] Ramsay, *Peel*, p. 375.

the preoccupation with tracing political lineage may have been understandable, especially given that the Conservatives were now effectively the single oldest political party in existence. Something of this appreciation of political lineage is suggested by H.W.C. Davis's 1926 Ford Lectures on the early Victorian Whigs and Tories, published posthumously three years later with an introduction by G.M. Trevelyan. Trevelyan noted that the two parties 'were essential parts of the machine of English liberty and government', and that this machinery was not much known about in contemporary England.[84] With the Liberal tradition fading, it may have been felt more urgent to probe further the existing Tory tradition. This was the purpose of R.L. Hill's *Toryism and the People* (1929) - a work, Keith Felling noted in its Foreword, 'undertaken with the encouragement of the late Professor Henry [W.] Carless Davis':

> To prove the continuity of forces that enlist passionate support over generations is a natural piety, and the intellectual genealogy of Toryism has been dissected of late with as much ardour and diversity as that of Communism or the English Church. But two gaps in this postulated continuity always catch the eye: the one between the Harley-Bolingbroke *débâcle* of 1714 and the younger Pitt, which Professor Trevelyan has done something to fill - the other, that hiatus between Pittite Toryism ... and Disraeli's Tory democracy. It is at this later point that Mr. Hill's work suggests clues of considerable value.[85]

Davis's reading of Peel, and of early Victorian Toryism generally, was in fact a fairly bleak one. 'There was nothing altruistic in the relation between the Tory party and the people during the period covered by this survey', he concluded matter-of-factly.[86] This allowed emphasis to be put upon the way that the Tories had reformulated their party identity and politics after 1846, thereby creating in Peel's wake a recognisably modern middle-class party. In such readings of Peel's Toryism the beneficiary, in purely political terms, was the party itself. This

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[84] Davis, *Age of Grey and Peel*, p. viii.
[85] R.L. Hill, *Toryism and the People 1832-1846* (London, 1929), pp. v-vi.
[86] Hill, *Toryism and People*, p. 258.

contrasted sharply with the arguments of people like George Peel and A.A.W. Ramsay that Peel's politics benefited above all the nation, and were worthy of emulation in contemporary England.

Many of these ambivalent attitudes towards Peel as party leader were formulated in a period during which there was considerable ambivalence towards Baldwin as party leader. It is tempting to conclude that contemporary concerns were echoed and reinforced by modes of viewing the past. People did not, admittedly, comment on the irony that Baldwin in the 1920s became an advocate of moderate tariffs (Cobden's ghost was more frequently invoked in this connection),[87] but they did comment on the nature of Baldwin's political leadership. After the 1924 election victory, Wickham Steed wrote in 1930, 'The question arose whether Mr. Baldwin was the luckiest of incompetent politicians or the subtlest of competent statesmen.'[88] A more hostile commentator on contemporary politics was John Green, whose 1933 book asked whether Toryism - at the time of writing subsumed within the National Government led by Ramsay MacDonald - was 'something more or less than party interests', and also posed the question whether Baldwin was 'an honest blunderer or a crafty cynic'. Green concluded that Baldwin had been attempting to play at party politics but was 'too honest for the course' and so had been led to abandon Tory principles.[89] At the very least it is clear that the type of questions asked of early Victorian politics were also being asked of contemporary politics - no inconsiderable compliment to the enduring power of the past.

Concluding thoughts

The early Victorian period presented inter-war historians with a rich diversity of subjects with which to debate the past. New standards of 'professional' historiography undoubtedly extended these debates yet further, but much of their energy derived itself also from highly personal motivations. The resulting variety

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[87] This might also help to explain the apparent absence of reference to Peel in Baldwin's speeches. On Baldwin and protection see Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Major* (London, 1997), pp. 218-22, 233.

[88] Wickham Steed, *The Real Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1930), p. 5.

[89] John Green, *Mr Baldwin A Study in Post-War Conservatism* (London, 1933), pp. 163, 219.

and intensity of discussion is a sure sign of the 'aliveness' of the Victorian past after 1918. These basic themes will inevitably recur in Chapters 5 and 6, but there I shall seek to explore other facets of inter-war historiography.

There nevertheless remains one unique feature to the historiography explored in this chapter. The highly emotive debates discussed above achieved a level of intensity without any of the participants actually having grown up in the early Victorian period. Although they clearly had affective links with the later consequences of the period, this is a noteworthy feature of the historiography. Perhaps the dramatic profile and enduring legacy of the early Victorian period helped to compensate for this slight distance. At any rate we will discover in the next two chapters that historians of England after the 1850s also had to accommodate living memory within their work, and this presented new challenges of its own.

Chapter Five

Mid-Victorian Historiography

After having seen in Chapter 4 just how diverse and emotional debates about the past could be, this chapter seeks to explore two further aspects of inter-war historiography. The first of these is the problem of period. What we call the mid-Victorian - that period spanning roughly the years 1850 to somewhere between 1865 and 1875[1] - has always been crucial to historical characterisations of the nineteenth century. In part this is because it helps to define what came before and after; without the central panel, the triptych would not make sense. But although the term 'mid-Victorian' was used by a number of inter-war writers, it is not always clear that they envisaged a distinctive period in the way that later historians have done. We will therefore explore how inter-war historians negotiated a sense of structure within the Victorian period as a whole.

This process of negotiation may have been complicated further by the presence of living memory. Elderly members of society after the war had been born or had even grown up during the 1850s and 1860s. Many of them were keen to record memories of their own youth, partly no doubt because of their advanced age, but also because the mid-Victorian period seemed after 1918 so distant. The extent to which historiography was affected by such memories will form a second theme of this chapter. Finally two further striking instances of 'Uses of the Past' will be explored.

The problem of period

We know that the term 'mid-Victorian' was already being used by commentators before 1914 to distinguish something - a period or set of values - from the 'early' and 'late' Victorian.[2] This, and subsequent uses of it, could be positive as well as

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[1] Cf. K. Theodore Hoppen's recent formulation of *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford, 1998). The outer limits of the period, particularly the later one, remain as openly contestable as ever.

[2] There is no *OED* citing, but it is probable that the term was in use from at least the 1890s. The

negative. On one hand, it could denote a nation which had grown to industrial maturity and achieved a period of calm after the unrest of the 1830s and 1840s, as in the popular historian J. Hampden Jackson's comment that 'the Mid-Victorian era was a Golden Age of English history'.[3] On the other hand, the 'mid' of mid-Victorian might be used to signify a society only half-complete, lacking in experience and tolerance, not yet modern.[4] This resulted in what E.F. Benson called 'early and mid-Victorian frigidities',[5] or in Lytton Strachey's florid description of a time of ill-adjusted aspiration and lassitude:

> A most peculiar age: an age of barbarism and prudery, of nobility and cheapness, of satisfaction and desperation; an age in which everything was discovered and nothing known; an age in which all the outlines were tremendous and all the details sordid; when gas-jets struggled feebly through the circumambient fog, when the hour of dinner might be at any moment between two and six, when the doses of rhubarb were periodic and gigantic, when pet dogs threw themselves out of upper storey windows, when cooks reeled drunk in areas, when one sat for hours with one's feet in dirty straw dragged along the streets by horses, when an antimacassar was on every chair, and the baths were minute tin circles, and the beds full of bugs and disasters.[6]

These uses of 'mid-Victorian' were self-evidently value-laden. They took their cue more from an impression about the age than from any recognisably objective historical standard such as chronology. As one observer noted in 1934: 'It is on the

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earliest use I have come across is in Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* [1908] (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 112: 'John Baines had belonged to the past, to the age when men really did think of their souls, when orators by phrases could move crowds to fury or to pity, when no one had learnt to hurry, when Demos was only turning in his sleep, when the sole beauty of life resided in its inflexible and slow dignity, when hell really had no bottom, and a gilt-clasped Bible really was the secret of England's greatness. Mid-Victorian England lay on the mahogany table. Ideals had passed away with John Baines.' I owe this reference to Professor Hugh Cunningham.

[3] J. Hampden Jackson, *England Since the Industrial Revolution 1815-1935: A Simple History* (London, 1936), p. 131.

[4] Clara G. Stillman wrote a suggestively titled biography *Samuel Butler: A Mid-Victorian Modern* (London, 1932) which used the idea that Butler was ahead of his time in his intuitive grasp of psychoanalysis and evolutionary theory.

[5] E.F. Benson, *As We Were: A Victorian Peep-Show* (London, 1930), p. 170.

[6] Lytton Strachey, 'Carlyle' in *Portraits in Miniature* (London, 1931), pp. 192-3.

Mid-Victorian period that the critics and admirers of Victorianism fix their eyes. To the admirers of Victorianism it is the golden age, the summit of our prosperity. Hostile critics point to its smugness, its drabness, its self-complacency, its Philistinism, its provinciality."[7]

Historians with more of a claim to 'professional' objectivity used the term 'mid-Victorian' less frequently. Surprisingly enough, there were no studies of the nineteenth century published between the wars with the phrase 'mid-Victorian' in their titles.[8] As late as 1954 Asa Briggs could comment: 'The period of English history which begins with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and ends with the Second Reform Bill of 1867 is one of the least studied and least understood chapters in English history."[9] Why was such an impression given by inter-war historians? It may partly have been because they were all very conscious of the coming of modernity in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. This focused their attention upon that time as *the* great watershed within Victorian history. G.M. Trevelyan and E.L. Woodward saw the deaths of Palmerston and Derby, the Second Reform Act, and the accession to party leadership of Gladstone and Disraeli in the late 1860s as the great turning-point in modern history.[10] This is not to say that historians did not have any sense of a mid-Victorian period. R.C.K. Ensor was slightly more specific about what came before modernity, identifying it explicitly as mid-Victorian: 'The homogeneous England of the mid-Victorian decades broke up at the end of the eighties. In spite of its sharp divisions into classes, parties, and creeds, it had for over forty years been strongly united by fundamental identities of outlook."[11]

But it is G.M. Young who offers the most interesting example of an attitude towards the mid-Victorian period. He too was preoccupied with modernity, deplored late Victorian England, and identified the moment of England's demise as the mid-1860s. By contrast, Young viewed the period 1830-1865 as a golden span in national history. In 1934 he edited the famous two-volume history dealing with

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[7] Gamaliel Milner, *The Threshold of the Victorian Age* (London, 1934), p. 17. Cf. the discussion of the focus of anti-Victorianism in Chapter 1, above.

[8] At least, no record of them remains in the catalogue of the British Library. An obvious exception was C.A. Bodelsen's *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (1924), but it is noteworthy that Bodelsen was writing as an 'outsider'.

[9] Asa Briggs, *Victorian People A Reassessment of Persons and Themes 1851-67* (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 9.

[10] G.M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After 1782-1919* (London: 2nd edn, 1937), p. 340; E.L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* (Oxford, 1938), p. 184.

[11] R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936), p. 304.

these years under the title *Early Victorian England*.[12] (In this he was echoed by people such as Arthur Baumann, who wrote of 'the early Victorian period, between 1840 and 1880'.)[13] At first glance this suggests that Young had little or no sense of the mid-Victorian. Yet he used that term quite distinctly within this span, writing of 'the serene and splendid noon of mid-Victorian prosperity' and of the new spirit of intellectual refinement following reform of the public schools and ancient universities as 'a brief moment of equipoise'.[14] It has been suggested that Young's use of the word 'equipoise' may have given W.L. Burn the inspiration for the title of his famous study *The Age of Equipoise* (1964), a work which has been highly influential in post-1945 scholarship.[15] Young was Janus-faced in his use of the term 'mid-Victorian'. Less comfortable with it than he was with 'early Victorian', his characterisation of the 1850s and 1860s as a time of greater ease, civility, and refinement nevertheless anticipated later perceptions of these years. It is yet another often overlooked way in which the inter-war period lastingly enriched views of the Victorian period.

Young's unconsciously ambivalent attitude towards the mid-Victorian arguably embodied within one individual the wider trends noted above. Many general commentators used the term mid-Victorian to signify - approvingly or otherwise - that time of relative calm and prosperity in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Historians also used the term, well aware of the overall profile of this period, yet were often curiously reticent about identifying it as anything like a separate span. Inter-war writers might therefore be said to have been slowly negotiating a sense of the mid-Victorian. Élite perceptions of the past did not necessarily begin with any preconceived sense of historical structure or content; time and again they were formed under the sway of all manner of mediating factors beyond that basic preoccupation with the origins of the modern.

We might identify four such factors which influenced historians to have this slightly tentative attitude towards the mid-Victorian period. First, there was less of the incentive of controversy provided by the 1850s and 1860s. Early Victorian historiography, as we saw in Chapter 4, was an area of particularly heated debate.

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[12] G.M. Young (ed.), *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1934). Young's own contribution was expanded and published as *Portrait of an Age* two years later: see below, fn. 14.
[13] Arthur A. Baumann, *The Last Victorians* (London, 1927), p. 17.
[14] G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age: Victorian England* [1936] (Oxford: 2nd edn, 1953), pp. 24, 87.
[15] See Asa Briggs, 'G.M. Young: The Age of a Portrait' in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs*, vol 2: *Images, Problems, Standpoints, Forecasts* (London, 1985), p. 263 n. 50.

However, historians of left-wing orientation such as the Hammonds had less to complain about when they compared, for example, working-class incomes in the 1870s with those twenty years before: however poor many might have remained, real wages had indisputably risen. J.H. Clapham's 1932 volume covering the mid-Victorian period also did not clash with left-wing readings, though not of course for any convergence of outlook or method. In it he downplayed the idea of the mid-Victorian period as a time of golden prosperity sandwiched between phases of austerity at the beginning and close of the century.[16]

A second factor was the historiographical terrain itself. Élie Halévy had not lived to complete his volume for the *History of the English People* on the mid-Victorian years, and this may have accounted for a considerable gap in contemporary perceptions of, and interest in, the period. The young scholar W.E. Williams, writing about Gladstone in the 1860s, pondered in 1934 'the tendency, in English historical writing on the nineteenth century, to neglect investigation of the sixties' - the reason, he felt, being that it was too easily seen as a calm period in which not very many 'modern' things happened.[17] But by this time perceptions were beginning to change. Young's *Early Victorian England* collection and his own *Portrait of an Age* were published in 1934 and 1936 respectively. Young noted that for many contemporary readers early and mid-Victorian England would seem alien, no doubt in part because of its lack of modernity. It was the purpose of *Early Victorian England*, he argued in the Preface, to recall that time: 'The sixties are a decade of swift, decisive transformation. In front of them lies the world in which we were born. Behind them is a world which has passed out of memory, and which it is the purpose of these chapters to call back to life.'[18] Here was recognition for the complexity and the ebb and flow of the mid-Victorian period; but it was belated recognition. The volumes by Ensor and Woodward for *The Oxford History of England*, divided along this line of a watershed around 1870, also did not arrive until late in the day: 1936 and 1938 respectively. Only in 1940 were they assimilated into the list of recommended reading for Cambridge undergraduates.[19]

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[16] J.H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain*, vol 2: *Free Trade and Steel 1850-1886* (Cambridge, 1932).

[17] W.E. Williams, *The Rise of Gladstone to the Leadership of the Liberal Party 1859 to 1868* (Cambridge, 1934), p. 2.

[18] Young, *Early Victorian England*, I, p. v.

[19] File on recommended tripos reading and related correspondence 1933-1940 in the archives of the Seeley Historical Library, Cambridge.

Thirdly, the mid-Victorian period may not have been intrinsically appealing to many contemporary writers. It was to those like Strachey, who found in it rich potential for mockery; and it was to Young, who believed that its values were worthy of emulation. These qualities of free discussion, prosperity, social accountability, and so on, later came to be praised by Briggs in the 1950s. Perhaps, as David Cannadine suggests, this may in part have been a reflection of the changed mood of the 1950s, when living standards were rising and society seemed to have become more caring through the creation of the NHS.[20] Between the time of Young and Briggs, however, lay the Depression and the austerities of the Second World War. Economic historians, as we have seen, responded to this climate, writing pessimistic studies which emphasised the cyclical, volatile nature of the economy rather than solidity such as might have been perceived in mid-Victorian England. Clapham's more objective 1932 study, emphasising long-term trends rather than sudden fluctuations, hardly gave into nostalgia about the mid-Victorian period either. Indeed, its essential sober message was that there had been no significant mid-Victorian boom. Perhaps though there would have been an audience for mid-Victorian nostalgia, if writers could have brought themselves to contemplate a happier time. In this connection W.L. Burn's comment on nostalgia for the mid-Victorian period in the 1920s and 1930s is suggestive, even if we cannot entirely agree with its sweeping 'many'. 'To many members of the middle and upper classes', he wrote, 'the mid-Victorian age began even between the wars to acquire a nostalgic charm which the war of 1939-45 and the post-war difficulties intensified. ... They identified England of those days with their "gold and amber shore," with that mourned and vanished world where the present was complacently prosperous and the future comfortably predictable'.[21]

What Burn's comments do not take account of is the presence of living memory amongst those who thought about the mid-Victorian period at this time. Some recollections were undoubtedly nostalgic; others were much less so. This is the fourth factor which may have affected the way in which the mid-Victorian years were perceived. In fact, it is arguable that these recollections failed to clarify or make a particularly strong impression upon historians' perceptions of the period. The reasons why this may have been so will be considered in the next section.

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[20] David Cannadine, 'Welfare State History' in *The Pleasures of the Past* (London, 1989), pp. 172-83.
[21] W.L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation* (London, 1964), p. 25.

Mid-Victorian memories

A perusal of just a few memoirs by mid-Victorian writers tells us two things. First, it suggests that their sense of being mid-Victorian was essentially qualitative rather than chronological. Second, it reminds us that the variety of attitude to be found within these accounts made easy characterisation of the period impossible. These accounts both played off and informed those general impressions - positive and negative - of the mid-Victorian period mentioned near the beginning of this chapter.

Why did some people produce memoirs in the first place? Partly it was the prerogative of age. People who had been born in the 1840s or 1850s would have been in their seventies or eighties by the early 1920s. No doubt it was natural for many to want to record their memories for posterity, especially since the Great War had made the days of their youth seem so distant. But as we saw in Chapter 2, there were also tendencies amongst older people after 1918 both to identify themselves explicitly as Victorians, and to revive some Victorian values. Mid-Victorians here could play upon the idea that they grew up in an age of especially intensified Victorianism, before the fragmentation and listlessness of the late Victorian period. Their sense of being mid-Victorian, even amongst those who were ambivalent towards their childhood, was therefore qualitative before it was chronological.

An example of this belief in having been born in a particularly concentrated time of Victorianism is offered by Evelyn Hopkinson, who in 1928 identified herself as a 'Mid-Victorian Girl'.[22] Hopkinson wrote that she had been born in 'that austere and fine air' when Queen Victoria was 'at her commanding mid-career'.[23] The memoirs of the popular middle-class novelist Matilda Betham-Edwards (1837-1919) offer another example.[24] Introducing this posthumously published work, Sarah Grand wrote that Betham-Edwards was a mid-Victorian on account of 'the high sense of the dignity of her calling, and of its moral responsibility common to the choicer spirits of her day'.[25] Betham-Edwards would doubtless have approved of such a definition. Her memoirs must have reinforced negative stereotypes of the

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[22] Evelyn Hopkinson, *The Story of a Mid-Victorian Girl* (Cambridge, 1928).
[23] Hopkinson, *Story*, p. 3.
[24] Matilda Betham-Edwards, *Mid-Victorian Memories* (London, 1919).
[25] Betham-Edwards, *Mid-Victorian Memories*, p. xlviii.

mid-Victorian period, coming just a year after *Eminent Victorians* and the extension of the vote to women over thirty. On that subject she had to say: 'in advancing years I am more and more struck with the littleness and self-seeking of my sex, and less and less desirous of seeing them either in Parliament or holding any public office of responsibility whatever'.[26]

Mid-Victorian writers were sometimes more canny more this. The barrister and novelist R.E. Francillon, for example, defined his mid-Victorianness in the usual qualitative terms; yet his memoirs also contained an element of irony which was lacking in Betham-Edwards. 'Mine, then,' he asserted, 'are the eyes, the spectacles, and the point of view of a mid-Victorian who has not cared to move with the times: who dislikes all change, and is hard to convince that any given case of it can be for the better.'[27] Francillon's work was published slightly earlier than the others discussed here, and anticipated *Eminent Victorians* too. Had Francillon been writing a decade later he might possibly have adopted a rather more cautious style; but as it was, the work seemed deliberately and attractively to parody its own elder reactionary mood. Francillon in fact did pay tribute to the technological advances of the twentieth century; and in another piece of mock exasperation conceded that while not to his personal approval, Cambridge seemed to have survived the decision to admit female undergraduates.

Some embraced even less enthusiastically memories of their mid-Victorian youth. The socialist thinker and historian Ernest Belfort Bax (1854-1926), who published his memoirs in 1918, might indeed almost be described as an anti-Victorian.[28] Certainly the mixed feelings towards his mid-Victorian upbringing is characteristic of that ambivalence which we noted amongst many critics of Victorianism in Chapter 1. Bax grew up in what he described as a claustrophobic religious home. 'It was my lot to grow up under no very favourable conditions for intellectual development', he observed. 'A severe censorship in the matter of literature that was allowed into the house was maintained. ... The most cruel of all the results of mid-Victorian religion was perhaps the rigid enforcement of the most

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[26] Betham-Edwards, *Mid-Victorian Memories*, p. 118. Presumably she was unaware of the extent to which she echoed the faux-pas committed by Mrs Wilcox in E.M. Forster's *Howards End* [1910] (Harmondsworth, 1989), p. 87: "I sometimes think that it is wiser to leave action and discussion to men. ... I am only too thankful not to have the vote myself."

[27] R.E. Francillon, *Mid-Victorian Memories* (London, 1914), p. 3.

[28] See Robert Arch, *Ernest Belfort Bax: Thinker and Pioneer* (London, 1927).

drastic Sabbatarianism.'[29] In consequence Bax's recollections of youth were tarnished:

> Though my youthful days were passed towards the end of the period in question, I experienced quite enough for it to have left an enduringly unpleasant reminiscence behind it. This is the more to be regretted as it affects one's memories of persons long since dead, whom one cannot altogether dissociate in one's mind from the at once morally repulsive and intellectually foolish beliefs they held, or professed to hold, and expected other people to hold. In themselves doubtless excellent, good-hearted people, their characters were poisoned and warped by the foulness and follies of their creed.[30]

Living memory can only have complicated further the emerging sense of a mid-Victorian period amongst historians who paid attention to it. Ironically, though, it is not at all clear that historians did turn to living memory in order to clarify or support their own scholarly perceptions. This disinclination to engage with surviving 'mid-Victorians' may only have kept the period further in the shadows, the subject more of derogatory humour and unreflecting nostalgia than of sustained analysis. Why was this? In part it reflected that slight lack of interest in the mid-Victorian period noted in the previous section. Yet it was probably also because the period was felt in many respects to be so distant; it had relatively few parallels with the present. Moreover, the influence of living memory was not unduly large, and as we have seen, it was not sufficiently homogeneous to lend itself to any easy characterisation. This contrasts markedly with the way in which historians of the Edwardian period responded to popular memories of that time. These memories focused almost exclusively upon the idea of the Edwardian period as a mythical 'golden' time before the deluge. And they were popular in the full sense of the word; there were of course far more people in the 1920s and 1930s with vivid memories of the Edwardian period than there were surviving 'mid-Victorians'.

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[29] Ernest Belfort Bax, *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian* (London, 1918), pp. 12-13

[30] Bax, *Reminiscences*, p. 20.

This is not however to say that the mid-Victorian period always failed to impinge upon the consciousness of inter-war society. It was upon such occasions that the full extent of the affective link with the past was demonstrated. We looked in Chapter 4 at one 'use' of early Victorian history in inter-war discussion of politics. Here we shall look at two further 'uses' of the past - this time the mid-Victorian past - in anxious 1930s perceptions of Britain's place in the world.

Uses of the past: (2) The twilight of the gods?

On the night of 30 November 1936 thousands of Londoners hurried by every possible means of transport to get to the site of what promised to be one of the most memorable events of the decade. At Sydenham the Crystal Palace was burning down. The Duke of Kent motored to the scene of the conflagration, while from afar off politicians strained to get a better glimpse of the leaping flames. In one neighbouring district, the *Daily Mail* reported, there was a traffic jam two miles long caused by people trying to get close to the action.[31] The Crystal Palace had been built to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, emblem of the nation's mid-Victorian prosperity and strength. How did people respond to its destruction eighty-five years later? Was it felt to be akin to some mid-Victorian *Götterdämmerung*?

In fact the Crystal Palace had long been home only to fallen idols. By 1936 it had been allowed to fall into a rather dilapidated state. Only shortly before the war had it been saved from being turned over to building developers. For the remainder of its existence it had been used as the first home of the Imperial War Museum, and for such things as brass-band competitions and religious rallies. Many were less admiring than Nikolaus Pevsner about the construction of the building. Sir Edwin Lutyens had already remarked wryly that it 'should be preserved in a glass case for posterity'.[32] W.R. Inge, for all his sympathy towards the Victorians generally, referred to it as an 'architectural monstrosity ... the mausoleum of

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[31] *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1936.
[32] Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (London, 1940), p. 362.

certain generous hopes'.[33] It may have been that the grounds, used for football matches and firework displays, had become more popular than the building itself.

Yet newspapers after its destruction quickly testified in editorials and correspondence pages to regard and even affection for the Crystal Palace. *The Times* reported that 'everywhere could be heard genuine expressions of regret for the end of "the poor old Palace"', and itself referred to 'the loss of an old friend'.[34] Two correspondents to the *Daily Telegraph* wrote in with wistful childhood memories of an earlier fire in 1866.[35] The *Daily Express*, initiating an appeal to have the Crystal Palace rebuilt as a sports stadium, noted that 'the memories of millions must have been stirred when the newspapers told the story yesterday of the destruction by fire of the Crystal Palace', the writer adding his own memories of recent cup finals, cricket with W.G. Grace, concerts in which Clara Butt had performed, and so on.[36]

But it was only on 3 December that a special selection of letters in *The Times* on the subject of the Crystal Palace revealed the full historical import of its destruction. Edward W. Meyerstein, appalled at the 'catastrophe' of losing 'a link with the Victorian era', offered to pledge £100,000 for a convalescent home as a coronation 'gift' to Edward VIII. (An interesting example of the Victorian past being used to bolster a contentious present: the abdication crisis was then reaching its height, and the King was to abdicate exactly a week later.) Another correspondent, J.B.S. Cooper, argued that the Crystal Palace, 'already interesting as giving the atmosphere of the 1850s, ... would in time to come have been of ever-increasing value as the monumental relic of the Victorian "golden age," and I for one feel strongly that we should set about rebuilding it at once, while we still may'. If Cooper's letter was implicitly pessimistic then that of Henry E. Armstrong was explicitly so, setting past against present and seeing the Crystal Palace as an emblem of the transience of glory:

> The historian has a hard task to appraise the influence the Exhibition had upon our industrial fortunes. It probably marked the loss of our industrial supremacy, as we surprised the world by the evidence we

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[33] W.R. Inge, *The Victorian Age* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 33.
[34] *The Times*, 1 & 2 December 1936.
[35] *Daily Telegraph*, 2 December 1936.
[36] *Daily Express*, 2 December 1936.

gave of our engineering skill: we made outside nations jealous and spurred them into action - Germany especially. ... We were at the height of our glory in 1851 - where are we to-day? Let us hope that the disappearance of the Palace may not be an omen. If possible, we are worse educated than we were in Prince Albert's day. Had he lived, we could not well have neglected our own development as we have.[37]

Such a view may help to explain why the mid-Victorian period attracted less attention than, say, the early Victorian period. The 1850s and 1860s not only failed to present a flattering contrast with the 1930s, but might also be symptomatic of that loss of industrial dominance which had contributed to the parlous state of the inter-war economy.[38] Perhaps the answer, as E.W. Meyerstein, J.B.S. Cooper, and even G.M. Young suggested, was to revive those other values which had stood society in such good stead up to the end of the mid-Victorian years.

Uses of the past: (3) The appeasement crisis, 1854[39]

Inter-war historians took considerable interest in mid-Victorian foreign policy. This was partly because the stage which had earlier been occupied by post-war depression, internal unrest, and reform issues seemed to have been cleared by the late 1840s; and, wrote G.M. Young, 'from 1850 onwards the focus of interest is overseas'.[40] It also hardly surprises that for a neo-Whiggish historian such as G.M. Trevelyan, more interest was to be found in the way that Britain opposed tyranny abroad rather than in its embarrassingly slim record of domestic reforms in the mid-Victorian period. Pinning his liberal colours to the mast, he claimed that 'England's part in the creation of the Italian kingdom in 1859-60 was the most important and well-deserved success of British diplomacy between the Belgian

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[37] *The Times*, 3 December 1936.

[38] Cf. however Christopher Hobhouse, *1851 and the Crystal Palace* (London, 1937), pp. 149-50: 'As for the importance of the Great Exhibition, it had none. ... First and foremost it was just a glorious show.'

[39] Cf. below, pp. 200-2 on the possible influence of Gladstonianism on the appeasement crisis of the 1930s.

[40] Young, *Portrait*, p. 71.

settlement of Grey and Palmerston, and the close of the Victorian era."[41] Trevelyan's feeling for international liberal causes had been accentuated by the trauma of the Great War. In the 1930s he was to be a supporter of appeasement.[42]

Trevelyan was far from alone amongst inter-war historians in his perturbed response to the Great War. In the midst of the attempt to attribute blame for the war historians increasingly turned to the study of diplomacy. One of the most notable contributions to this new historiography was C.A. Bodelsen's *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (1924). It examined the way in which the dominance of the early and mid-Victorian separatist mentality gave way in the 1870s to an imperial agenda driven by economic interest, politics, and ideology. Bodelsen (a foreign scholar) kept his distance on the topic, but it might be argued that he was concerned with putting late nineteenth and early twentieth century Imperialism in sharper perspective, so that contemporary readers had a clearer notion of where the post-war Empire stood. But while critical of 'crude Jingoism', Bodelsen was not advocating a return to mid-Victorian values, for there too he found a 'self-assurance and complacency' born of 'the belief that England was wiser and stronger than all others and above the petty rivalry of other powers'.[43] The Great War had shown that such beliefs were completely groundless. H.L. Beales, introducing a 1960 reprint of the work, commented that 'it was an early example of the newer scepticism about British imperialism'.[44]

Most historians, however, continued to take a marked interest in mid-Victorian foreign policy, especially in relation to the Crimean War.[45] It is not difficult to understand why the Crimean War should have interested them. It was, after all, the most important military engagement (the Boer War aside) undertaken by Britain before its entry sixty years later into the Great War. The recurrent theme was a marked concern with the causes of the war in the Crimea. Much of what was written would, if quoted in isolation, have applied directly to the summer of 1914; and while we can ultimately only speculate that contemporary readers would have been sensitive to such resonances, it seems highly likely that they were.

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[41] Trevelyan, *British History*, p. 327.
[42] See David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan. A Life in History* (London, 1992), pp. 119-34.
[43] C.A. Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* [1924] (London, 1960), pp. 71, 82.
[44] Bodelsen, *Studies*, p. 5.
[45] The Indian Mutiny - the other notable upset in foreign policy in this period - by comparison received understated treatment from most historians. This may possibly have been because of the difficult political situation after events such as the Amritsar Massacre of 1919.

Kingsley Martin (1897-1969), the journalist and future editor of the *New Statesman*,[46] published in 1924 a study of Palmerston in relation to public opinion, determining 'to discover how it happened that so large a proportion of the people came to possess a common image of a distant situation which made war seem the only honourable and generous policy'.[47] Blaming Palmerston, but conceding that he genuinely believed 'that the interest of England consistently coincided with the eternal principles of morality',[48] Martin attributed the outbreak of war to the political manipulation of public opinion. There was an unmistakable disillusionment here, as there was in Martin's pointed conclusion that the Crimean War was not only a worthless sacrifice but helped Prussia to gain ascendancy in Europe. The spirit of Lytton Strachey - who himself had written scathingly of the Crimean War in his famous portrait of Florence Nightingale - hovered over this book, and appropriately enough Martin acknowledged Strachey's help in the preface.[49] Like Strachey, Martin was a pacifist and had registered as a conscientious objector during the Great War.

Palmerston's role in the Crimean War was also a theme in a biography published in 1926 by Philip Guedalla. Here Palmerston was given gentler treatment. Guedalla concluded that rather than manipulating public opinion, he was pulled along by it in the clamour for war. The analysis was again rather neo-Stracheyan, this time in its emphasis on the subconscious: 'for some occult reason, buried deep in the English heart, this wary, active, humorous old man of vast experience and limitless industry shared at sixty-nine the irresistible appeal of fearless midshipmen and gallant drummer-boys'.[50] Indeed, there had long been a tradition of defending Palmerston and arguing that public opinion had been the prime cause of the war. This opinion had been put forward most influentially by W.F. Reddaway in his contribution to *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy*.[51] In years to come it

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[46] See *DNB 1961-1970*, pp. 733-4.

[47] B. Kingsley Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston: A Study of Public Opinion in England Before the Crimean War* (London, 1924), p. 22.

[48] Martin, *Triumph of Palmerston*, p. 54.

[49] Cf. also Martin's use of metaphor with that of Strachey: 'When the plot is too thickly entangled and the characters all seem were puppets, helpless in the midst of great events, public opinion is discovered as the *deus ex machina* - mystic, impalpable, and unexplained' (p. 26). Strachey: 'One catches a vision of strange characters, moved by mysterious impulses, interacting in queer complication, and hurrying at last - so it almost seems - like creatures in a puppet show to a predestined catastrophe' (essay on Gordon in *Eminent Victorians*).

[50] Philip Guedalla, *Palmerston* (London, 1926), p. 351.

[51] A. Ward & G.P. Gooch (eds), *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy 1783-1919*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1923), vol 2, p. 381.

was ratified by scholars of a less Stracheyan hue. R.W. Seton-Watson in 1937 commented that 'If ever a war was made by an ill-informed but ardent public opinion, against the better judgement of a divided Government, it was the Crimean War. It is the classic disproof of the view that peoples are always pacific and only the statesmen or financiers warlike.'[52]

But the clearest demonstration that historiography was being undertaken in the awareness of contemporary concerns came, not surprisingly, from the later 1930s. A 1937 study of British foreign policy by Raymond Postgate and Aylmer Vallance made no bones about describing the mid-Victorian attitude to foreign policy in unflattering - not to mention exaggerated - terms:

> This enormous and continual self-laudation which so astonishes us in the Nazis and Fascists has been the ruling *motif* in British commentaries on foreign affairs. The parallel that we have suggested may serve to remind us that a trumpeting of one's superiority to foreigners is not a sure guarantee of peacefulness. Before long good-humoured contempt had turned to ill-humoured interference [in the Crimea]; and that interference was advocated on moral grounds to which after-history gives the oddest appearance.[53]

As this extract suggests, the question of appeasement had by this stage become more important in British politics. Postgate and Vallance's attitude to the issue was not entirely clear; but then neither was that of many contemporaries contemplating the European situation in the late 1930s.

The urgency of the issue is however clear - surprisingly so - in a work which is otherwise fairly impartial: *The Age of Reform*, by E.L. Woodward (1890-1971). This Oxford historian had fought in the Great War. On being invalided home in 1918, he had been employed by the Foreign Office; his task, strikingly enough, was to write a short study of the 1878 Congress of Berlin in preparation for the forthcoming peace conference at Versailles. Woodward was subsequently to become one of the most vocal critics of appeasement, resigning

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[52] R.W. Seton-Watson, *Britain in Europe 1789-1914: A Survey of Foreign Policy* [1937] (Cambridge, 1945), p. 325.

[53] Raymond Postgate & Aylmer Vallance, *Those Foreigners: The English People's Opinion on Foreign Affairs as reflected in their Newspapers since Waterloo* (London, 1937), pp. 80-1.

from the League of Nations Union on account of his views. He believed in the importance of historical awareness, partly because 'a society without this knowledge lacks depth and dignity', but also for practical reasons. 'History does not repeat itself,' Woodward observed, 'but historical situations recur.'[54] In his 1942 autobiography he wrote of his unsuccessful attempts in the previous decade to warn contemporaries of the menace of Germany.[55] These efforts consisted of a more thorough study of diplomatic history than had previously been essayed, *Great Britain and the German Navy* (1935), and of several letters to *The Times*, one of which noted as early as 1933:

> Events in Germany, and proposals for the revision of treaties, make it necessary for us to remind ourselves and to inform a younger generation (which is for the most part unaware of the facts) of the deeper reasons which determined the attitude of the democratic Governments of England and France towards Germany in the era of William II. ... Are we to regard the present nationalist movement, in its deepest aspect and not merely in the form given to it by Herr Hitler and his colleagues, as no more than a by-product of the economic depression? ... Is it, then, a safe and easy matter for the pacific democracies of Great Britain and France to deal with Germany as an "equal," to give up their present superiority of armed force, to regard as a matter of indifference to international relations the re-establishment in Germany of the type of rule which maintained itself with ease, arrogance, and terrible consequences between the fall of Bismarck and the War of 1914?[56]

Woodward was clearly implying that Britain should not adopt a relaxed stance towards Germany. This studious, careful, but ultimately uncompromising approach very much marked the way that Woodward came to write in 1938 about Britain's role in the Crimean War. Woodward felt that though Britain had 'drifted' into conflict with Russia in 1854 it had been a 'just' war. This alone might not be

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[54] E.L. Woodward, *Short Journey* (London, 1942), pp. 127, 140. On Woodward see also *DNB 1971-1980*, pp. 926-7.
[55] Woodward, *Short Journey*, ch. 10.
[56] *The Times*, 27 March 1933.

especially striking; but it is the long series of 'ifs' which Woodward appended that gives pause for thought about the climate in which this history was being penned: *if* Aberdeen had been more resolute; *if* Palmerston had succeeded in making Russia back down; *if* the Russians had not alienated British public opinion by the destruction of the Turkish fleet at Sinope; and so on.[57] Mid-Victorian history gave later scholars the means through which to reflect on the present; later scholars, with the advantage of hindsight, increasingly appreciated the human dilemmas facing their once-vilified forbears. It was perhaps a not unhappy arrangement.

Concluding thoughts

Despite the presence of living memory it appears that the mid-Victorian period was slightly dwarfed by the great historiographical controversies on either flank: the impact of the Industrial Revolution on one hand and the crisis of Edwardian England on the other. People certainly wrote of a mid-Victorian period in both positive and negative ways. Historians too identified a period of relative calm and prosperity, but fought shy of writing studies specifically devoted to the period. This slight lack of interest did not begin to be corrected until the writings of Young and others in the 1930s. We might therefore conclude that a sense of period was being slowly 'negotiated' for the mid-Victorians in the inter-war years.

In other ways, however, the mid-Victorian period did command historical interest. We have already encountered calls to 'revive' aspects of Victorianism in Chapter 2, and responses to the destruction of the Crystal Palace provide further examples of this (though as we have seen, not all of them were positive). But the supreme example of the mid-Victorian period providing a mirror to the present came in attitudes to appeasement. Historians had the hindsight not only of 1914 but of 1854 before it; the long perspective was gratefully and earnestly pressed into use in the late 1930s. In a period famed for its calm prosperity, historians ironically found the Victorians most 'alive' when they were contemplating war.

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[57] Woodward, *Age of Reform*, pp. 253-4.

Chapter Six

The Edwardian Crisis

Inter-war historians often 'used' aspects of the past, as we have seen, to illuminate crises of the present. But what happened when the problems of the past were seen to be directly linked to those of the present? And how did historians draw attention to this link when most people seemed content to look back nostalgically upon that period of history? These are the themes which will be explored in the present chapter. It focuses upon only three historians. Two of these were highly influential at the time, and the other (the youngest) is rightly remembered as being one of the most distinctive historiographical voices of the inter-war period. These writers are Élie Halévy,[1] R.C.K. Ensor,[2] and George Dangerfield.[3]

All three historians were preoccupied with the so-called Edwardian Crisis, that conglomeration of problems which faced the pre-war Liberal government, including constitutional reform, labour unrest, female suffrage, Irish Home Rule, and the coming of war. They were fascinated by the topic not only out of historical interest, but because all three were personally motivated by a sense of what had happened to liberalism in the intervening years.[4] The Great War was a crisis of liberalism, and - whether for reasons connected to it or not - the Liberal Party in Britain had foundered in its wake. By the 1930s liberalism was under threat again in Europe with the spectres of fascism and communism; another war seemed to loom on the horizon. What had gone wrong? Thoughtful commentators of a liberal or left-wing disposition turned their attention to the immediate pre-war years in order to trace the origins of the present.

In doing so, they were faced by a perception of the past amongst élite (and indeed popular) audiences which was at marked variance with historical experience. People remembered the Edwardian period as a sort of prelapsarian idyll, and this view needed to be countered, perhaps by extreme means. We shall

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[1] *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, Epilogue, vol 1: 1895-1905 [1926; English trans. 1929] (London, 1929) & vol 2: 1905-1914 [1932; English trans. 1934] (London, 1934).
[2] *England 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936).
[3] *The Strange Death of Liberal England* [1935] (London, 1997).
[4] In this chapter I have used 'Liberalism' to denote the political creed, and 'liberalism' the more general ideology.

begin by outlining this view of the past, and these historians' dismay at it, before exploring further how and why they wrote about different elements of the Edwardian Crisis.

The Edwardian idyll[5]

'What was it that people had in those days?', ponders George Bowling of his Edwardian youth in Orwell's 1939 novel *Coming Up For Air*. 'A feeling of security, even when they weren't secure. More exactly it was a feeling of continuity.'[6] However much people may have followed traditional practices and attitudes after 1918, it is true that the war was a dividing-line in the imaginative consciousness of many thoughtful observers. It left the past distant, and the impression of its inviolability made it ideal for nostalgia; clocks stood forever at ten to three contrasted dramatically with the prosaic whirr of post-war life. They reminded people too that age would not be wearying hundreds of thousands of young men who had rushed enthusiastically to war in 1914. Many people in the 1920s may have believed, or professed to believe, that the war had been fought for noble reasons; but they found consolation nonetheless in myths about lost innocence. Like the Fall, this loss of innocence was also an expulsion from a land of certainty in which there were no material concerns.

Yet this was not the Edwardian period at all. Life for the majority had still been hard; the gap between rich and poor obscenely wide; the difficulties of modernity more present than ever; and political and social unrest had flared up dramatically in the closing years of the era. Perhaps this was why George Bowling - which is to say the passionately-democratic George Orwell - felt ambivalent about the pre-war age, remembering the feeling of security even when life was equally, if not more, insecure. Bowling came from humble stock; but for those with more comfortable backgrounds there may have been less incentive to feel ambivalence. Of course there were always individuals like Harold Nicolson, who suggested in 1937 that 'the Edwardians were vulgar to a degree', but went on to add that he did

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[5] Cf. above, Chapter 2 on nostalgia for the Edwardian period.
[6] George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air* [1939] (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 110.

not regret being 'old enough to touch the fringe of Edwardian luxury'.[7] Compared with anti-Victorianism, however, there was little systematic denigration of the Edwardian period between the wars: there were no recurrent tropes of, say, prudery, sentimentality, or hypocrisy. For many élite observers it was simply order and certainty that was offered by remembrance of things past. Ironically enough it was Vita Sackville-West, the wife of Harold Nicolson, who provided just such a view in her novel *The Edwardians*. Therein she described an aristocratic world of 'warmth and security, leisure and continuity ... an order of things which appeared unchangable to the mind of nineteen hundred and five'.[8] Many English readers, class-ridden to the last, were enamoured of such a version of the past; the novel sold 20,000 copies within three months of its publication in May 1930.

Memories of Edward VII played a crucial part in many of these perspectives. This was because, as the historian R.H. Gretton had prophesied in 1914, 'King Edward's reign was not long; yet his personality may prove to be sufficient to attach his name to a period.'[9] It is therefore not surprising that those historians who sought to criticise inaccurate perceptions of the age (as well as the age itself, in some respects) should have used Edward VII as one of their starting-points.[10] For Dangerfield, Edward VII led the tone of complacency amongst his subjects; he was 'the living excuse for their own little sins'.[11] Halévy also attacked those 'commonplace' views of his which he shared with clubmen 'who, completely ignorant of public affairs, lament every day as they puff at their fat cigars that the country is going to the dogs'.[12] Ensor, who followed Halévy in downplaying the role of Edward VII in forging the *Entente Cordiale*,[13] moved the discussion on to the

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[7] Harold Nicolson, *Small Talk* (London, 1937), quoted in Asa Briggs (ed.), *They Saw It Happen: An Anthology of Eye-Witnesses' Accounts of Events in British History 1897-1940* (Oxford, 1962), p. 39.

[8] Vita Sackville-West, *The Edwardians* [1930] (London, 1983), p. 51. Cf. her friend Virginia Woolf's more subtle attempt to write about the Edwardian period in the central chapters of *The Years* (1937). Woolf wrote with more of an eye towards social and political, as well as personal, unrest; one of the characters, Rose Pargiter, was made a suffragette.

[9] R.H. Gretton, *A Modern History of the English People 1880-1922* [3 vols: 1912, 1914, & 1929] (London, 1930), p. 774. The adjective 'Edwardian' had in fact already been used as early as 1908. *OED Supplement*, p. 909.

[10] Cf. E.M. Forster's waspish 1925 review of Sir Sidney Lee's official biography of Edward VII, which concluded that to the rest of the world 'nothing matters ... except distinction of spirit, and this King Edward VII did not happen to possess'. See 'Edward VII' in *The Prince's Tale and Other Uncollected Writings* (Harmondsworth, 1999), pp. 75-9.

[11] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 38.

[12] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, p. 331

[13] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 1, pp. 121, 127-8; Ensor, *England*, p. 343. This approach was made possible especially by the publication between 1926 and 1938 of the *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, edited by G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley.

wider significance of false notions about the age to which the monarch gave his name:

> Personal memories of Edward VII have transferred to [the reign] something of the king's own character and atmosphere. Men think of the decade as one of calm and contentment, of pomp and luxury, of assured wealth and unchallenged order. Court splendour apart, it was none of these things. It was an era of growth and strain, of idealism and reaction, of swelling changes and seething unrest. At home, politics had never been so bitter; and abroad, the clouds were massing for Armageddon.[14]

In all of these correctives there was a tone of irritation which owed itself not simply to the feeling that the Edwardian period was being misrepresented after 1918. The irritation was also a reflection of urgency: the apprehension that the crisis was still unfolding itself or had not gone away. Edwardian history fed directly into the post-war present. It is now time to see how this was perceived to be so.

The death of liberalism?

All three writers under consideration were concerned about the status of liberalism in the inter-war years. Like many other educated observers, they felt that liberalism was in crisis after the Great War, and they were preoccupied with tracing the origins of this malaise. That is not to say that all of them came to the topic from the same perspective, or that they reached the same conclusions; indeed, it is the variety and intensity of their assessments which testifies to the vitality of the pre-war past in the minds of observers after 1918 - a phenomenon we have already observed in Chapter 4. Edwardian politics, however, provided an added incentive: their consequences shaped directly many aspects of the culture in which these historians were writing. It is this twin perspective which I want to draw out in the remainder of the chapter: the reasons why Halévy, Ensor, and

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[14] Ensor, *England*, p. 421.

Dangerfield came to the subject of the Edwardian Crisis, and how they wrote about it in the context of their day. Neither detailed exposition of their theses nor sustained criticism of their findings in the light of subsequent research will be offered; both can be found elsewhere. We are concerned here only with the nature of their perceptions.

It may be helpful to begin by offering a brief overview of what the three historians felt about Edwardian England. The notion of the 'death' of Liberal England came originally from George Dangerfield (1904-86). Dangerfield read English at Oxford (where he was a contemporary of Waugh) and subsequently became a literary critic. He felt that the moment of which English politics might have taken advantage - the self-destruction of traditional liberal values in the years before 1914 - had not been pressed home after the war. In 1930 he left England for the United States in disgust at the languidness of contemporary politicians such as Baldwin and MacDonald (whom he considered 'scared and shifty figures'), and would remain there as a literary editor and historian for the rest of his life. *The Strange Death of Liberal England* was published in an American edition in 1935, and in an English version a year later. The work's basic thesis was that England revolted against its own constraints, reflected in the dominant liberalism. (He used the term 'Liberal' - at times rather confusingly - to denote both the party and the general ideology of pre-war England.)[15] In part, as Carolyn White has argued, this wide-ranging thesis was a reflection of Dangerfield's own need to liberate himself from a comfortable but oppressive upbringing as the son of an Anglican minister.[16] Dangerfield argued that 'death' was necessary for the modern age to begin, drawing directly upon Jungian theory to suggest that pre-war society achieved individuation by rejecting security and exploring its darker, more instinctive impulses.[17]

Perspectives were very different for the two other historians considered here. Élie Halévy (1870-1937), the French philosopher and liberal, idolised the

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[15] As the *Times Literary Supplement* noted on 4 July 1936: 'What is this Liberal England which strangely died? Mr. Dangerfield uses the description to mean Liberalism, the Liberal Party and the pre-War world.' Cf. Dangerfield's own comment in the Foreword that "Liberal' will always have a meaning so long as there is one democracy left in the world, or any remnant of a middle class; but the true pre-war Liberal - supported, as it still was in 1910, by Free Trade, a majority in Parliament, the ten commandments and the illusion of Progress - can never return' (p. 14).

[16] Carolyn W. White, '*The Strange Death of Liberal England* in Its Time', *Albion*, 17 (1985), 435. Like so many other critics of the pre-war age, Dangerfield was ambivalent: see the frankly nostalgic epilogue to the work, 'The Lofty Shade'.

[17] See White, '*Strange Death*', 439-40. The work is in fact dedicated to Frances G. Wickes, the distinguished Jungian analyst who wrote *The Inner World of Childhood* (1927).

steady development and progress of England in the nineteenth century.[18] For him its apogee had been reached in Gladstonian Liberalism. Writing his *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, he had reached 1841 by the time the Great War broke out. Halévy was so traumatised by the war that he jumped ahead and turned his attention to the years between 1895 and 1914. It was here that Halévy in the 1920s and 1930s saw the origins of the unsatisfactory present: the war had created the Scylla of 'caesarist *étatisme*' and the Charbydis of 'democratic *étatisme*'. Halévy felt that as far as England was concerned, the Edwardian period had only encouraged these tendencies with its aggressive foreign policy and its rejection of Gladstonian Liberalism. The rise of socialism was one inevitable and unhappy consequence of this loss of traditional social and economic individualism. Though critical of the past, Halévy's view was therefore more elegiac than that of Dangerfield. Not for him was there any excitement about a 'death' of liberal England; he provided only, within measured, thoughtful, and more consciously 'professional' prose, obsequies for certain values which had seemed to pass by 1914. He still however saw a basic continuity of character across the divide of war, even if this 'instinctive groping, mutual tolerance and compromise' was less exalted than in its Victorian heyday.[19]

R.C.K. Ensor (1877-1958), on the other hand, was more positive about liberalism after 1918.[20] With his fullness of coverage and generally objective sweep, Ensor was the most obviously 'professional' of the three historians discussed in this chapter. Ironically, however, he read Classics rather than History at Oxford, and was primarily a journalist rather than a tenured academic. (A salutary reminder of the limits of 'professionalisation' in history during these years.) But this job as a leader-writer on the *Daily Chronicle* between 1912 and 1930 was to play an important role in his conception of history. Shortly before the war he had been unable to write as fully as he wanted about the menace of Germany; this he would not have to repeat in the 1930s, looking back not only to 1914 but forward to the prospect of another war too. The knowledge which Ensor had gained about Germany came in large part through being a Fabian and secretary of the foreign

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[18] On Halévy see above, pp. 93-4.
[19] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 1, p. xii.
[20] On Ensor see *DNB 1951-1960*, pp. 334-6.

policy committee organised by leading Liberals. His Fabian leanings and interest in foreign policy would inevitably later feed into how he perceived that time.

Ensor's view of the Edwardian period was less sensational than that of Dangerfield, and less pessimistic than that of Halévy. 'Not all of us believe progress to be an illusion or Liberalism to be dead in England', he commented, reviewing Dangerfield's book in 1936.[21] He was echoed by other reviewers.[22] But Ensor's own study, published in that year, also showed in places an anxiety about the future of liberalism in the modern world. As a reviewer of his book noted, 'It seems as though he regretted to find classical Liberalism losing its grip'.[23] Like Dangerfield and Halévy before him, Ensor was clearly preoccupied with the extent to which this liberalism of his earlier years had passed away. That he denied that liberalism was dead no doubt was correct; but he nevertheless perceived that it was still in danger. The Edwardian Crisis had dealt liberalism both a historical blow and a contemporary one, for many of its issues remained unresolved by the time at which these historians were writing.

With these outline sketches of how the three historians perceived the crisis of Edwardian liberalism, let us explore in greater detail their attitude towards particular aspects of the immediate pre-war past.

The constitutional crisis

The constitutional crisis between the rejection of the 'People's Budget' by the House of Lords in 1909 and the passing of the Parliament Act in 1911 loomed large in accounts of Edwardian history between the wars. This is hardly surprising; after all, the elections of 1910 had rendered the Liberals dependent upon the support of

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[21] *Manchester Guardian*, 3 July 1936. Several of Ensor's criticisms - Dangerfield's comments about Prince Metternich's 1912 visit and a speech made by Lloyd George - were factual, though the gist of the review was that he found the tone of the book too neo-Stracheyan and 'tiresome'. Dangerfield's English publisher, Constable, invited him to respond to Ensor's criticisms. He conceded the factual mistakes but was unapologetic about the work's style, commenting blithely 'I have reviewed so many books myself that I can't help admiring a good attack, and [yours] was a good one'. Dangerfield (via Constable) to Ensor, 5 August 1936. Ensor Papers, Bodleian Library.

[22] For example H.N. Brailsford in the *New Republic*, 4 December 1935: '[Liberalism] survives in the main body of the Labour Party, in the Nonconformist churches, in a still influential press, and even in a wing of the Tory Party.' The anonymous reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 July 1936, concurred: 'The most noble traits of the England he buried can be studied in last week's Hansard.'

[23] *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 February 1936.

Labour and the Irish Nationalists. Dangerfield was eager to emphasise the interconnectedness of things. 'By these elections of January 1910, the Act of Union killed itself', he suggested. 'Killing itself, it killed the Liberal Party.'[24] It would be easy to assume that similar - if less dramatic - conclusions were reached by other early commentators on Edwardian history; certainly the consequences of the constitutional crisis received the wide coverage they deserved.

Yet what for Dangerfield was a nail in the coffin for the Liberal party was not so in the eyes of other commentators; his verdict was not shared by contemporaries sensitive to the provisionalities and possibilities within modern politics. The arrangement with the House of Lords in 1911 was not seen as a great historical watershed because it had gone largely untested in the years since its enactment (Irish Home Rule had of course been sidelined by the outbreak of the war). Ensor wrote of the Parliament Act as a salutary check on Conservative extremism;[25] but he knew as well as anyone else that post-1918 Conservatism had eschewed its earlier style of politics, partly because it was no longer in fierce contention for power with Liberalism.[26] This meant not only that the Parliament Act was difficult to place in historical context, but that it was also a source of potential political division in the present. As Halévy pondered in 1932: 'We are too remote, we feel, from the event, yet too near it. For up to the present the statute has never yet been put into operation and the Parliament Act, twenty years after it became law, cannot be regarded as a living element of the British Constitution.'[27] In at least one respect, then, a question mark was still felt to hover over the past and its possible ramifications in the present.

The rise of Labour

The arrival of Labour as a serious political rival to the dominant Conservatism was another phenomenon which post-war historians could identify as a legacy of the

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[24] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 34.
[25] Ensor, *England*, pp. 430-1.
[26] Cf. David Powell, *The Edwardian Crisis* (London, 1996), p. 64: 'The durability of the 1911 settlement and the absence of long-term conflict between Lords and Commons owed more to the Conservative dominance of politics in the inter-war period than it did to the shape of the settlement itself.'
[27] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, p. 346.

Edwardian period. They were writing too in a context where partisanship could complicate the picture. After 1918 Labour sympathisers were prone to edit, exaggerate, and romanticise the origins of their party. G.D.H. Cole, for example, went as far as to argue that the Taff Vale decision 'created the Labour party'.[28] After Ramsay MacDonald's 'betrayal' of Labour in 1931, his role in the early history of the party was downplayed, while that of a recently vilified figure - Keir Hardie - was favourably reassessed.[29] It is in such a context that Dangerfield's attack upon MacDonald should be understood. '[MacDonald] seemed well content to be a Liberal three quarters of the time and a Socialist only when occasion arose', he wrote. 'He was quite unable ... to ignore the good in anything anywhere - an inability which subsequently led him through all the transmutations of his singular career to the no less singular post of Socialist Prime Minister in an aggressively Tory government'.[30] For Dangerfield there was no place for liberal prevarication in politics: MacDonald was a shibboleth, and indeed provided one of the reasons why he left the country in 1930.

More generally, Dangerfield was keen to emphasise that the 'workers' rebellion' was symptomatic of a rejection of security in Edwardian England. Of this he vigorously approved; Liberalism was a moribund creed, and the shackles of it needed to be thrown off. Dangerfield played up the role of Syndicalism in this, finding added support for his thesis in Fabian Ware's suggestion that Syndicalism was 'an assertion of instinct against reason'.[31] This complemented Dangerfield's Jungian gloss on the Edwardian period. While sympathetic to the lot of the workers and to the Marxist model of historical explanation, it is nevertheless important not to characterise Dangerfield as a Marxist historian; like Strachey - his self-confessed hero - Dangerfield was primarily interested in human psychology and what he thought of as the motivating spirits of the soul. As he explained, 'Beneath the political and economic motives in the disintegration of Liberal England, there lies the psychological motive - the abandonment of security.'[32]

One of Dangerfield's great counterfactual speculations was that this impulse to abandon security would have led to 'a General Strike of extraordinary violence'

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[28] Quoted in E.H. Hunt, *British Labour History 1815-1914* (London, 1981), p. 316.
[29] Dennis Dean, 'The Character of the Early Labour Party, 1900-14' in Alan O'Day (ed.), *The Edwardian Age Conflict and Stability 1900-1914* (London, 1979), p. 98.
[30] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 188.
[31] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 192.
[32] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 125.

in September 1914, organised by a Triple Alliance of transport workers, miners, and railwaymen, had the war not intervened.[33] This seemed a not unreasonable proposition to some contemporaries, perhaps with the General Strike of 1926 in recent memory. In hindsight it could also appear to be a tenable proposition to certain individuals who themselves had been heavily involved in Edwardian politics. David Lloyd George, writing in 1938, concurred that 'in the summer of 1914 there was every sign that the autumn would witness a series of industrial disruptions without precedent'.[34] But Lloyd George was not, of course, a historian; and like many erstwhile politicians of prominence, he was not unknown to give a distinctly partial view of the past in his memoirs.[35]

Dangerfield's hypothesis about the certainty of a General Strike was not echoed by either Ensor or Halévy, for reasons perhaps equally indicative of their own ideological priorities. Ensor's Fabianism gave him a slower view of the rise of Labour. The party itself was still highly dependent upon the Liberals, he observed; and though this may have encouraged activists to seek other outlets such as Syndicalism, most working-class people were not interested in revolution. Even the trade unions were essentially conservative: the Miners' Strike of 1912, for example, had collapsed even while union leaders were urging further action.[36]

Halévy, a native of the country from which Syndicalism had originated, took a more regretful but almost equally sceptical view of the possibility of revolution. Syndicalism he considered to be in more senses than one an 'alien' intrusion into English culture, and as such he felt that it was unlikely to foment revolution, even when considered in tandem with the Irish problem in 1914.[37] Industrial and suffragette unrest in themselves, he argued, were 'a source of embarrassment rather than a serious threat to the Government' in 1914.[38] By contrast, he emphasised the extent to which Guild Socialism (a movement to affiliate producers to regulatory guilds: dismissed brusquely by Dangerfield as 'a mysterious combination of consumers and producers')[39] reflected more accurately than Syndicalism the nature of the English spirit even as late as the Edwardian period:

[33] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 191.
[34] David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (London, 1938), p. 1141.
[35] A point recently reiterated about Lloyd George and others by Niall Ferguson in *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), pp. xxxvi-xxxvii, xxxix.
[36] Ensor, *England*, pp. 437-8, 443-4.
[37] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, pp. 482-6.
[38] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, p. 527.
[39] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 191.

> Did not this Guild Socialism simply restate in another form the liberal and anti-authoritarian doctrine of the division of powers which for two centuries the English had become accustomed to regard as the most essential feature of their political constitution? And did it not express in the form of a modified syndicalism that old spirit of self-government, of voluntary discipline, of which the English had once been so proud and which was still strong enough to counterbalance the excesses of popular anarchy and the abuses of governmental authority?[40]

Even if Guild Socialism did not gain any notable purchase upon Edwardian England, it was for Halévy indicative of the long-term trends which underpinned history and could still be found, if one looked hard enough, in the present. Despite Dangerfield's contention that liberalism had been killed in part by the rise of Labour, Halévy did not believe that this was so. Some of this was simply good historical sense; but as Halévy's elegiac comments about traditional resistance to the excesses of democracy and authoritarianism suggest, he also did not *want* it to be so. Halévy thought of the post-war world as 'the age of tyrannies', both right-wing and left-wing.[41] The spectre of left-wing tyranny in particular exercised Halévy's mind in the 1920s: in *La Doctrine de Saint-Simon* (1924) he argued that the seeds of authoritarianism could be found in Socialist theory. There was of course little chance of such authoritarianism developing in England; but still, Halévy felt gloomy about the future direction of the Labour Party, the natural repository of much liberal belief. He thought it ineptly led and doctrinally unsound, with too much emphasis upon illiberal bureaucracy.[42] Liberalism had not been killed by the rise of Labour; but the relationship between the two ideologies, forged combatively in the Edwardian period, had yet to become fully clear.

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[40] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, p. 481

[41] Charles C. Gillispie, 'The Work of Élie Halévy: A Critical Appreciation', *Journal of Modern History*, 22 (1950), 247.

[42] See Myrna Chase, *Élie Halévy: An Intellectual Biography* (New York, 1980), pp. 215-9.

The suffragettes

A shared context of the three historians being considered in this chapter is that they were all educated middle-class men. This, and traditional assumptions about gender which continued to play a part in society even at a time when the vote was being extended to women, affected the way in which they wrote about the female suffrage movement. With varying degrees of approval they saw it as a rather strange phenomenon, perhaps best explained by recourse to psychology. There was a fruitful interaction of old and new here: the old presumptions about women as the linchpins of domesticity, 'angels in the house', and the new opportunities provided by psychology to understand why women should want to take on putatively masculine responsibilities such as voting and earning a wage in the public workplace. This is not to suggest that the three historians adopted anything like the reactionary attitude of Sir Almroth Wright, who wrote to *The Times* in 1912 questioning the sanity of the suffragettes; they were too left-of-centre for such an approach, and no doubt had also been influenced by developments with women during the war and since.

Still, some of their attitudes nevertheless suggest that a broader ambivalence towards female liberation remained an influential factor in perceptions of the past during the 1920s and 1930s. Certainly there was a notable anti-feminist reaction between the wars, with many men, and not a few women, calling for a return to pre-war standards of femininity.[43] There was, after all, the Empire to maintain, and women were supposed to fulfil their duties as mothers fit both in body and mind. Another strand of the anti-feminist argument - deployed not least by feminists themselves - was that those who flaunted their equality with men by wearing trousers and cropped hairstyles were renouncing their femininity altogether. Probably the historians under consideration here did not care greatly for the imperial argument; but the psychological one may have proved more compelling when it came to interpreting the motivations of the original suffragettes. It may well have given them a means to explore a dramatic - even perplexing - change which had occurred since the time of their own birth.

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[43] See Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (London, 1992), esp. ch. 4.

Dangerfield, perhaps significantly a generation younger than Halévy and Ensor, seemed to be the least personally troubled by the concept of female suffrage. But Dangerfield being Dangerfield, this was not to stop him being the one to write about the suffragettes in the most flamboyant fashion. He integrated the 'women's rebellion' within that general renunciation of liberal tradition which would have kept them meek and mild in the home; it was a 'strange, unlovely, but valuable phenomenon'.[44] Dangerfield argued that this renunciation was instinctive and rooted deep in the minds of women. Applying Jungian theory, he suggested that in attempting to gain equality with men, the suffragettes were seeking to recover their 'long-neglected masculinity'.[45] Dangerfield found in the Pankhursts the exemplar of women driven by 'unrecognized fantasies and unremembered nightmares ... the slaves of a vital but timid desire for freedom; they were its puppets, its projections'.[46]

Curiously enough, the usually temperate Halévy was even more explicit in outlining a psychological explanation for the behaviour of the suffragettes. 'We are ... compelled to ask how far the women's revolt must be interpreted as an attempt to achieve equality with men', he pondered, 'or on the contrary as an attempt to reform society according to the ideal of their sex, to make themselves masculine or society feminine.'[47] To their credit Halévy identified somewhere within the suffragettes the true spirit of Victorian liberalism, for while rejecting the Marxist interpretation of the industrial exploitation of women, he argued that Edwardian feminism might best be seen operating within that tradition of 'Anglo-Saxon' individualism and liberty. The reaction against the Contagious Diseseas Acts of the 1860s, for example, made sense once Halévy explained that they were (like Syndicalism) an 'alien' imposition from Napoleonic France.[48] But the suffragettes pushed things too far, reacting against the very liberalism which had empowered them originally; eventually this resulted in 'a painful conflict ... between British toleration and the fanaticism of the suffragettes'.[49] Ensor was of broadly similar mind in all this. For him too there was a curious psychological quality to the

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[44] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 127.
[45] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 125.
[46] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 156.
[47] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, pp. 509-10.
[48] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, pp. 487-91, 498.
[49] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, p. 527.

suffragettes; they were 'obsessed by an inferiority complex'.[50] By 1913, he argued, they had been taken over by a kind of 'madness'.[51]

Both Halévy and Ensor were more generous than Dangerfield to the attempts of Asquith's government to appease the female suffrage movement. To their minds the Conciliation Bill of 1910 and the Franchise Bill of 1912 were sincere efforts to give some measure of political influence to women. Dangerfield, on the other hand, saw them as an underhand delaying tactic on the part of the establishment.[52] This suited Dangerfield's purpose in describing the last gasps of Liberal England. Eventually of course the establishment had to give way, and women had been included in the franchise by the time at which all three historians were writing. Yet it is clear too that the extension of the vote to women by 1928 was not the end of the feminist issue in England. Many people remained perplexed by the phenomenon, and it is arguable that historians like Halévy and Ensor explored some of their own ambivalence towards it by writing about its pre-war antecedents as they did.

Irish Home Rule

Of all the crises menacing the Liberal government, that involving Irish Home Rule was considered by Halévy, Ensor, and Dangerfield to be the most serious. There was indeed good cause for considering the Irish crisis as a nexus of many of the problems facing the Liberal government up to the outbreak of war. After 1910 the government was dependent upon the support of Labour and the Irish nationalists in the Commons. Driven inescapably towards a Home Rule policy, it encountered ever more implacable opposition from a Conservative party determined to exploit Ulster unionism as a powerful weapon against its rival. By 1914 Ireland seemed almost to be on the verge of civil war, and Dangerfield, donning his coroner's garb, declared the Curragh mutiny in March of that year to be 'the precise moment of Liberal England's death, the end of pre-war history, the occasion upon which - suddenly, stealthily, unknown to itself - a new and terrible England took the place

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[50] Ensor, *England*, p. 398. On Ensor's interest in psychology - perhaps evinced by the sections on 'Mental and Social Aspects' in his study - see White, '*Strange Death*', 437-8.
[51] Ensor, *England*, p. 461.
[52] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, pp. 138-41, 161.

of the old.'[53] Liberal England, the England which had grown out of the Glorious Revolution, was dead; symptomatic of this for Dangerfield was the fact that until 1914 the army had never refused to obey its orders since 1688.[54]

The seriousness of the Irish crisis drawn out by inter-war historians has not - unlike some of their judgements - been called into serious question by subsequent historiography. In part, perhaps, this was because they themselves were writing in a revisionist vein. As Alan O'Day has pointed out, literature on Home Rule between 1886 and 1914 tended to be dominated by a Unionist stance.[55] A.V. Dicey was typical of such writers, though there were dissident voices, chief amongst them perhaps John Morley in his 1903 *Life of Gladstone*, the arguments of which were later developed in J.L. Hammond's *Gladstone and the Irish Question* (1938). Halévy's concerned comments about the Irish problem are also best seen from the perspective of an admirer of Gladstone. Yet for the most part it was the political settlement of 1920-21 which took the wind out of the sails of this pro-Unionist literature. Together with the publication of important biographies such as Denis Gwynn's *Life of John Redmond* (1932), there was sufficient distance and evidence by the 1930s for the initiative to pass to left-wing writers, such as Dangerfield and Ensor, convinced of the lost merits of Home Rule. And, of course, the political climate by then was becoming re-charged by developments in Europe. To Dangerfield, O'Day argues, the Unionists were the 'forerunners of the inter-war menace of fascism and intolerance'.[56]

Andrew Bonar Law, leader of the Conservatives after 1911, was given particularly unfavourable treatment by Dangerfield and Ensor. In Dangerfield's mind, Bonar Law's personal acerbity complemented the cynical tactics about to be deployed by the Conservatives. 'He was exactly suited to the particularly brutal policy the Unionists were about to adopt', Dangerfield remarked. 'When attacked by men more subtle in dialectics than himself, he generally took refuge in a remarkably unpleasing rudeness'.[57] For Ensor, Bonar Law led his party on a reckless course, for which reason Ensor felt that posterity would not be kind to him. 'It is

[53] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 298. This was one of several inconsistencies within the work; as the *Times Literary Supplement* noted on 4 July 1936, Dangerfield seemed to have got carried away in proffering at least three separate times of death for Liberal England.
[54] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 280.
[55] See Alan O'Day, 'Home Rule and the Historians' in D. George Boyce & Alan O'Day (eds), *The Making of Irish History* (London, 1996), pp. 141-62.
[56] O'Day, 'Home Rule', p. 150.
[57] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, pp. 76-7.

difficult to imagine a Disraeli or a Peel,' he argued, surveying the pantheon of great Tory leaders, 'a Salisbury or a Balfour, so abdicating control.'[58] Even Lord Blake did not succeed entirely in rehabilitating Bonar Law's name after these first exacting historical critiques.[59]

Prominent in Ensor's study was a great sense of lost opportunity over Home Rule. This may, perhaps, have coloured his interpretation of the Irish crisis; certainly one reviewer noted that 'The one cause to which the writer does less than justice is that of the Irish loyalists.'[60] The same reviewer was also not convinced by Ensor's argument that had a general election been held in 1914 over the coercing of Ulster, 'the unionist party would have been swept away'.[61] Yet it is also true that Ensor was critical of Asquith's prevarications over Home Rule, which suggests that partisanship - if any - was not simply a matter of party adherence but of regret over something which he had hoped to see happen within his own lifetime. As we saw in Chapter 3, Ensor was one of those historians who were both 'professional' in their lack of overt Whiggishness and 'amateur' in their style and level of personal engagement with the past. History, he argued, was about responsibility: not only to the past, but to the present and future too. Its study should therefore not fight shy of noting missed opportunities such as he had seen happen over Ireland between the Edwardian period and the years after 1918. As he put it in 1944, in the midst of another human calamity, history 'can make people aware that the chain of human obligation, in and by which we live, binds us not only to our contemporaries, but to those who went before and those who will come after'.[62]

The outbreak of the War

The declaration of war in August 1914 was considered, in hindsight, to have brought the Edwardian period to a peremptory close. For Dangerfield, as for many

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[58] Ensor, *England*, p. 455.
[59] See Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law 1858-1923* (London, 1955).
[60] *English Historical Review*, 52 (1937), 379.
[61] Ensor, *England*, p. 479.
[62] Ensor's contribution to *Why We Study History*, Historical Association Pamphlet no. 131 (London, 1944), p. 5.

other post-war writers, the coming of the war was envisaged as a sudden climatic change: a cloud, a fog, or a humour in the air. Winston Churchill referred to 'a strange temper in the air', and Caroline Playne, who in 1928 anticipated Dangerfield in her belief that war had been caused by a sort of nervous breakdown in the nation, wrote of an airborne 'crowd infection' in the summer of 1914.[63] Dangerfield himself, echoing Grey's celebrated comment about the lamps going out all over Europe, suggested a 'terrible twilight ... creep[ing] reluctantly westward' from Germany.[64]

War was neither hankered after nor, when it came, less than surprising to the vast majority of people. For all the invasion scares and literature which had flourished sporadically throughout the Edwardian period, remarkably little attention was paid by the public at large to the European situation in 1914 until it became clear that Belgium was threatened. Even the army was not fully prepared for war; and within the cabinet a neutral stance predominated until the eleventh hour. How, then, were inter-war historians to explain the sudden *volte-face* and near-universal enthusiasm for war? What were the causes of the war?

These were not, of course, purely academic questions. The Great War remained a highly emotive subject, especially after the late 1920s, when the publicly-accepted notion that it had been a worthy sacrifice began to be more openly challenged. Anger and alienation could be found in the works of writers like Graves, Remarque, and Sassoon appearing around this time. It could also be found in historical studies, as the normally temperate R.H. Gretton showed in his 1929 fulmination against those urging men to war in 1914: 'much of the pressure in pulpits as well as platforms was sentimental and often revoltingly complacent ... [this] is the kind of senseless and cruel pomposity which the younger generation of the war time cannot be expected to forgive'.[65] And from an international perspective, the attribution of blame for the outbreak of the war remained a bone of contention amongst historians and contemporary politicians alike.

Within such a context it is hardly surprising that many pre-war politicians chose to justify their actions in hindsight.[66] Allegations had, after all, been made that the war had been started by greedily speculative financiers, and that Sir Edward

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[63] Caroline Playne, *The Pre-War Mind in Britain* (London, 1928), pp. 19, 329.
[64] Dangerfield, *Strange Death*, p. 327.
[65] Gretton, *Modern History*, p. 935.
[66] On this tendency see Ferguson, *Pity of War*, pp. xxxv-xxxix.

Grey's 'weakness' towards Germany contributed to the escalation of hostilities.[67] Asquith and Lloyd George, who had both been in favour of intervention (the latter especially) in 1914, adopted the high moral line arguing that the German violation of international law over Belgian independence was the British *casus belli*.[68] This idea was not fully accepted by many inter-war historians; and such a view was, in any case, made less tenable after the publication of the *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, edited by Gooch and Temperley, beginning in 1926. As these documents revealed, Britain's actual diplomatic influence in 1914 was relatively weak. This put paid to the argument that any diplomatic diffidence on the part of Grey contributed to the outbreak of war. As Asquith had already asserted, Britain could not have dissuaded Germany from its course of action even if she had been a more powerful player within the alliance system.[69]

Other explanations needed to be found. Halévy blamed 'the collective passions of the masses' rather than individuals or governments as the cause of war.[70] But given the disinclination of the Foreign Office to be informed by (and keep informed) public opinion, this was not an entirely credible explanation. Historians have argued that at best the eruption of enthusiasm for war was taken as verification by those already wavering on an interventionist stance within the Liberal cabinet. Political shrewdness may have had something to do with this. The journalist Harold Begbie noted as early as 1920 that 'A House of Commons that had hesitated an hour after the invasion of Belgium would have been swept out of existence by the wrath and indignation of the people.'[71]

But more than almost anyone else it was Ensor who drew out the complexity of the diplomatic situation in 1914, observing that Belgium held as much strategic as it did moral significance to Britain.[72] Britain simply could not afford to remain neutral on military, political, or economic grounds. And this argument was not simply derived from the *British Documents*. As the leading Fabian expert on foreign affairs before the war, Ensor claimed to have known about German war preparations at a time when little attention was otherwise being paid to the

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[67] Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, p. 74; H.H. Asquith, *The Genesis of War* (London, 1923), p. 201.
[68] Asquith, *Genesis of War*, ch. 27; Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, pp. 51, 66-74.
[69] Asquith, *Genesis of War*, p. 202.
[70] Halévy, Epilogue, vol 2, p. 620.
[71] Quoted in Michael Brock, 'Britain Enters the War' in R.J.W. Evans & H. Pogge von Strandmann (eds), *The Coming of the First World War* (Oxford, 1988), p. 161.
[72] Ensor, *England*, p. 491.

subject. He noted that his colleague on the *Daily Chronicle*, George Renwick (the Berlin correspondent), had 'pointed out to [me] privately as early as December 1913, that the date on which all signs [of military action by Germany] clearly converged was the beginning of the following August'.[73] Ensor's criticisms of the unpreparedness of Asquith's government for war,[74] and his unequivocal attribution of responsibility for the war to Germany, had deep resonances when his book appeared in 1936. One enthusiastic reader wrote in April of that year commenting: 'I think you prove beyond a shadow of doubt the prime responsibility of Germany for the war ... Surely this is a very important point at the present juncture of affairs? ... It knocks the bottom clean out of Hitler's case.'[75] In the year that Hitler marched into the Rhineland, it was beginning to appear that one liberal crisis was eliding via the pages of history into another.

Concluding thoughts

For much of the inter-war period myths about the Edwardian period as a prelapsarian idyll lingered in many people's minds. Historians of a broadly left-of-centre persuasion such as Halévy, Ensor, and Dangerfield attempted to correct such notions by accentuating the degree of unrest in pre-war England. But we should not simply envisage this as a clash between popular misconception and 'professional' exactitude. These historians were also motivated by personal responses to the past: personal responses which had been honed by the influence of history upon the post-war present. They perceived in the constituent elements of the Edwardian Crisis many unresolved issues; past and present were seen to overlap, whatever imaginative gap the Great War may have constituted.

Above all they were preoccupied with the crisis of contemporary liberalism. We saw in Chapter 5 that historians of the mid-Victorian period such as E.L. Woodward could trace in the origins of the Crimean War pre-echoes of the Great War; we shall see in Chapter 9 a similar concern amongst Gladstone biographers and scholars in examining how his foreign policy, had it been properly emulated,

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[73] Ensor, *England*, p. 484 n.
[74] Ensor, *England*, pp. 469-71, 481-2.
[75] Ensor Papers. Gideon Clark to Ensor, 21 April 1936.

might have prevented the Great War. Clearly the war and its consequences - the toppling of European monarchies, the foundation of illiberal régimes in Russia, Germany, and Italy - much exercised the historical imaginations of scholars contemplating the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Crucially, however, they perceived that history had not yet run its course, and that the present and future might be shaped positively in the light of what study of the past could show.

Part Three

Biography

Chapter Seven

Eminent Victorians and the Art of Biography

Biography may have been the most important medium by which the Victorians were reassessed in the inter-war period. If what I have been suggesting about affective links with the past is true, then this should hardly surprise us. Biography deals with human beings; and it was above all the human dimension of history which compelled attention from those still living with its legacy after 1918. It is unlikely though that biography would have been quite so influential had it not been revivified to accentuate the affective relationships which people had with the past. These changes within the biographical genre can be attributed almost singly to one person and one work: Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, published in May 1918. The style of *Eminent Victorians* has received wide treatment,[1] but the nature of its innovations, and its implications for the reputation of the Victorians, have attracted disappointingly ungenerous comment. It is usually characterised as a savage repudiation of the Victorians, in Peter Clarke's words, a work which subjected the conventions of the past 'to an exquisite literary assassination by a thousand digs'.[2] Any lingering signs of esteem for the past were delivered the *coup de grâce* by Strachey's numerous and sometimes less nimble imitators.[3]

This is an unfair and inaccurate estimation of the place of *Eminent Victorians* in history. Certainly the book had its crude imitations which did not do the Victorians a service; and certainly, with all these lesser versions in tow, it encouraged a salutary counter-reaction amongst historians. (A theme which links Parts Two and Three of this thesis.) But to leave it at this is to lend credence to an account which privileges selective hindsight. It is my intention in this chapter to put

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[1] See for example J.K. Johnstone's fine discussion in *The Bloomsbury Group* (New York, 1963), pp. 273-300; and Michael Holroyd's in the Introduction to the Penguin edition (Harmondsworth, 1986).
[2] Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory Britain 1900-1990* (London, 1996), p. 166.
[3] Works which included Harold Nicolson's *Tennyson* (1923); Philip Guedalla's *Palmerston* (1926); André Maurois' *Disraeli* (1927); Hugh Kingsmill's *Matthew Arnold* (1928); and Percy Colson's *Victorian Portraits* (on Prince Albert and Stockmar) (1932). One can trace Strachey's preoccupation with psychology and artistic selection of material in these works, but upon consideration it is difficult to envisage a neo-Stracheyan 'school' or to generalise that these writers were any less sympathetic to aspects of the Victorians than Strachey. Guedalla is a case in point: see below, Chapters 8 and 9 for his positive contribution to biographical awareness of Queen Victoria and Gladstone.

Eminent Victorians back into something like its original context. I shall argue that Strachey's contribution to the art of biography was ultimately to prove beneficial to the reputation of the Victorians - and not just indirectly, in the counter-reaction of G.M. Young and later writers. Like most critics of the Victorians, Strachey had too many emotional links with the pre-war age to repudiate its figures completely. He was also too interested in them as human beings to indulge in the flippant caricatures with which he has often been charged. Indeed, part of his irritation with the past was caused by the way that the Victorians themselves had failed to discuss the human vitality of their peers in their own biographies; the iconoclasm of *Eminent Victorians* was generic as much as much as anything else. Once the genre had been reinvented, the Victorians - for better or for worse - would come to stand in clearer light for reassessment.

Such a conclusion will be reached by focusing upon the context in which Strachey was writing; re-examining the affective link inherent within his technique of 'debunking'; and dwelling upon the changing reputation of *Eminent Victorians* up to the 1950s. It will close with some reflections on how this relates to the case-studies presented in Chapters 8-11.

Strachey and the 're-invention' of biography

The Preface to *Eminent Victorians* has been described as of 'a manifesto for modern biography'.[4] In it Strachey advocated psychological probing, an absence of 'tedious panegyric', 'a becoming brevity' based upon artistic selection, and a 'freedom of spirit' on the part of the biographer.[5] This was a response to the standard two-volume biographies of the nineteenth century - works which Strachey acknowledged as having provided him 'not only with much indispensable information, but with something even more precious - an example'.[6] Such biographies made little attempt at authorial intervention in the sources used. Still less was there any strong inclination to probe beneath the surface of the subject or

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[4] Leon Edel, *Literary Biography* (Bloomington, 1973), p. 157.
[5] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 1918), pp. viii-ix.
[6] Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. viii. In the draft version Strachey had originally written 'dreadful example', but later omitted it, evidently sensing that his antipathy was sufficiently clear without the adjective. British Library Add. MS 54219, f. 103.

to court controversy. These biographies were consciously written as a record of worthy endeavour which readers might emulate.[7]

Strachey waged war on all this. It is important, though, to put the innovativeness of *Eminent Victorians* into proper perspective. In terms of the biographical genre it was less an act of iconoclasm than one of restoration. Strachey idolised the eighteenth century, and in *Eminent Victorians* he attempted to return to Johnsonian principles. As he had commented as early as 1906: 'It is sufficient for us to recognize that [Johnson] is a mountain, and to pay all the reverence that is due.'[8] Indeed, the extent to which Strachey's directives had been anticipated by Dr Johnson nearly two centuries earlier is striking. Like Strachey, Johnson believed that it was 'the business of the biographer' to avoid 'uniform panegyrick', 'to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies', and to avoid narratives assembled only from 'publick papers' so that the work degenerated into 'a chronological series of actions or preferments'.[9]

Since Johnson's day things had changed in two respects. First, the Victorian period had interposed itself and presented biographers with a long stretch of time unprecedented in its complexity and documentation. As Strachey put it in the arresting first sentence of his Preface, 'The history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we know too much about it.'[10] The second change offered writers like Strachey the solution.[11] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, perceptions of 'domestick privacies' had been revolutionised by psychological realism and Sigmund Freud. Strachey's own response was to write biography which cut a swathe through the mass of material to get at the 'essence' of his subjects by alighting on particular aspects of their personalities. His own celebrated metaphor - lowering a bucket into 'that great ocean of material' and bringing up 'to the light of

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[7] See A.O.J. Cockshut, *Truth to Life The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1974).

[8] Quoted in Charles Richard Sanders, 'Lytton Strachey's Conception of Biography', *PMLA*, 66 (1951), 302 fn. 25.

[9] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, No. 60 (13 October 1750), in W.J. Bate & Albrecht B. Strauss (eds), *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol 3 (New Haven & London, 1969), pp. 318-23. James Boswell quoted from this as an expression of his own belief and intention near the beginning of his *Life of Johnson*.

[10] Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. vii.

[11] Strachey envisaged the problem in Boswellian - which is effectively to say Johnsonian - terms. In 1923 he wrote: 'A biography should be either as long as Boswell's or as short as Aubrey's. The method of enormous and elaborate accretion which produced *The Life of Johnson* is excellent, no doubt; but, failing that, let us have no half-measures; let us have the pure essentials - a vivid image, on a page or two, without explanation, transitions, commentaries, or padding.' 'John Aubrey' [1923] in *Portraits in Miniature* (London, 1931), p. 29.

day some characteristic specimen'[12] - suggests a Freudian agenda. Lytton Strachey was familiar with Freudian theory, not least via his brother James, who was to be Freud's principal English translator. But in fact Strachey was ambivalent about psychoanalysis.[13] It was Dostoevsky's psychological realism which was to prove the more formative influence. Reviewing Constance Garnett's celebrated translations in 1914, Strachey approved of the way that the novelist's lacerating humour was 'the key to his sympathetic treatment of character'.[14]

This state of human understanding reached through biting character analysis and caustic humour was what Strachey achieved in *Eminent Victorians*. By reviving Johnsonian values, and adapting them for the twentieth century, he managed to get closer to the Victorians than had often been the case before. Strachey deserves - and was given by contemporaries - credit for this. But his 're-invention' of biography also needs to be seen from the perspective of the longer tradition of attacks on the Victorians traced in Chapter 1. This is not to downplay Strachey's innovativeness. Rather it is to put it into context with earlier works which had begun that process of emotional negotiation with the past which we call anti-Victorianism. Looking back from 1939, Virginia Woolf traced a line of descent through J.A. Froude's *Carlyle* (1882-4) via Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) to Lytton Strachey.[15] Harold Nicolson in 1927 had similarly suggested that the 'Victorian fog' of earnestness which descended on biography with Arthur Stanley's 'egregious' *Life of Arnold* (1844) had begun to lift by the 1880s.[16] Many works after the 1880s eschewed hagiography and embraced ambivalence, using selectiveness and sometimes irony to shape narratives which were essentially *portraits* of the subject. By producing portraits, biographers were liberated from the expectation to provide works which were both eulogistic and exhaustive in external detail. As portrait-painters they involved themselves in the artistic process, thereby making it

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[12]Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. vii.

[13]In early 1924 he spent an 'appalling' weekend at Garsington, where conversation was dominated by a German psychoanalyst offering 'cures' for homosexuality. Strachey escaped to his room at one point, writing to Dora Carrington (then Mrs Ralph Partridge): '"Psycho-analysis" is a ludicrous fraud'. BL Add. MS 60721, f. 112. Cf. however Strachey's apparently Freudian reading of Prince Albert as a repressed homosexual in *Queen Victoria* (1921).

[14]Lytton Strachey, 'A Russian Humorist' in Michael Holroyd & Paul Levy (eds), *The Shorter Strachey* (London, 1989), pp. 183-7.

[15]Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Biography' [1939] in *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life* (Harmondsworth, 1993), pp. 144-51.

[16]Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (London, 1927). Cf. Cockshut's suggestion that there was a 'moral parabola' to Victorian biography in which prudery and servility were at their worst between 1840 and 1875.

possible to explore their own feelings about the subjects to an even greater degree. We have already seen, for example, how Gosse's account of relations with his father took on deeper emotional tones as the work progressed, almost against the wishes of the writer.

Strachey had no such compunctions about his own portraits of the Victorians, partly perhaps because they were not his own parents. Nevertheless, we must see *Eminent Victorians* from the perspective of these earlier writings and within a climate of particular excitement about the art of biography.[17] Increasingly it was becoming clear that a history - or histories - of the Victorian age *could* be written, if the task were approached through biography. Of course, the truth-telling in this new biographical format would be selective, and in less accomplished hands could degenerate into mere caricature. It is significant however that the great exemplar of this new style, *Eminent Victorians*, stopped short of such crudity. It remains, perhaps, best characterised as an anti-Victorian work; but its quintessential anti-Victorianism embraced that ambivalence which lay at the heart of criticism of the past and which could be found in those earlier biographies. It was an ambivalence which - intentionally or otherwise - was allowed freer rein for Strachey's 're-invention' of the biographical genre.

The affectivity of *Eminent Victorians*

'Human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past', Strachey wrote in the Preface to *Eminent Victorians*. 'They have a value which is independent of any temporal processes - which is eternal, and must be felt for its own sake.'[18] Strachey's deep preoccupation with human nature may be traced in large part to G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, the appearance of which in 1903 heralded what Strachey called 'the beginning of the Age of Reason'.[19] In *Principia Ethica* Moore argued that good exists but is not analysable; and that ethics - for want of full understanding of the best course of action - should proceed by common sense. The final two chapters, which created in Strachey the kind of

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[17] See Waldo H. Dunn, *English Biography* (London, 1916); Nicolson, *Development of English Biography*; André Maurois, *Aspects of Biography* (London, 1928).

[18] Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. viii.

[19] See Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey* (London: revised edn, 1994), pp. 89-92.

reaction that the Conclusion to Pater's *The Renaissance* had created in Wilde, argued that the only sure sources of intrinsic value were 'certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects ... it is only for the sake of these things - in order that as much of them as possible may at some time exist - that any one can be justified in performing any public or private duty'.[20] Such beliefs were of course to become central to the Bloomsbury identity. But they struck a particularly resonant chord with Strachey's curious blend of rationality and human warmth. Strachey's belief in rationality - in part a reflection of his enthusiasm for the eighteenth century - is well-known, and was demonstrably intensified by the Great War.[21] Strachey's discreetly affectionate nature is less widely recognised, especially amongst historians intent on characterising him as a cynical denigrator. Others such as Charles R. Sanders have commented more kindly upon this aspect of his personality:

> What he liked was a way of life characterised by unaffected simplicity, by individual freedom, by that highest exercise of intelligence which he often calls "sanity," by a sensitiveness to beauty in both nature and art, by an interest in people and a proper respect for the high potentialities of humanity, and by the glorification of the qualities of experience made possible by friendship and love.[22]

These qualities of rationality and warmth combined to make Strachey what John Russell has dubbed 'the great *intimiste* among historians'.[23] Not only did he follow the example of Hume and Gibbon in admitting readers into a state of implied equality; he also judged historical subjects by his own exacting standards and those of Bloomsbury and Moore. In so doing, he confirmed the contemporaneity and emotional proximity of the Victorians. In this sense he was literally a 'debunker': one who sets out to remove the bunkum from something or

[20] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* [1903; revised edn, 1922] (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 237-8.
[21] In August 1918 Strachey declined an invitation to write for the *New Statesman*, criticising its 'blackguardly' policy of 'unconscious jingoism'. He also objected to its treatment of Lord Lansdowne, who in the previous year had attacked government propaganda. Strachey felt that he was 'an honest man, and a man who is at any rate trying to use his reason'. Strachey to J.C. Squire, 3 August 1918. BL Add. MS 60721, f. 12.
[22] Charles R. Sanders, 'Lytton Strachey's "Point of View"', *PMLA*, 68 (1953), 76.
[23] John Russell, 'Lytton Strachey', *Horizon*, 15 (1947), 91.

someone without necessarily doing away with the vital essence. It was the human essence of the Victorians which Strachey felt to be timeless and open to direct scrutiny by the values of a later (or any) age. Here, for example, is Strachey's unashamedly personalised charge against Thomas Arnold:

> Was he to improve the character of his pupils by gradually spreading round them an atmosphere of cultivation and intelligence? By bringing them into close and friendly contact with civilised men, and even, perhaps, with civilised women? By introducing into the life of his school all that he could of the humane, enlightened, and progressive elements in the life of the community? On the whole, he thought not. Such considerations left him cold, and he preferred to be guided by the general laws of Providence. It only remained to discover what those general laws were.[24]

This tone of mixed regret and derision at the close is characteristic of *Eminent Victorians*. Historians - at least modern 'professional' historians - should try to avoid expressing disappointment with their subjects. But this is not something which Strachey sought to avoid; and even had he wanted to do so, it is not clear that he would have succeeded.

For like so many critics of the Victorians, Strachey's feelings about the past were deep and complicated. He had been born in 1880 into a well-connected upper-middle-class family. His father, General Sir Richard Strachey, was sixty-three when Lytton was born, and had spent an active career in India in Imperial administration. He was to prove, in Michael Holroyd's words, a paragon of 'benevolent remoteness', perpetually with open novel in hand, even at the dinner table.[25] Lady Strachey, shrewd, literary, and absent-minded, was devoted to her children but - like many good Victorian wives - modestly allowed her husband to set the tone within family life. In 1884 they moved to 69 Lancaster Gate, Kensington. This large, gloomy, ramshackle house, furnished in mid-Victorian style, was to be Strachey's formative encounter with Victorianism. And how revealing were Strachey's comments in hindsight on that encounter. With that same blend of

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[24] Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, pp. 188-9.
[25] Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, pp. 5, 13.

rationality and warmth which he deployed in *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey was yet unable to form any clear-cut emotional attitude towards his childhood. In a 1922 paper read to the Memoir Club, Strachey spoke of recurrent dreams about being back at Lancaster Gate:

> We are in the drawing-room, among the old furniture, arranged in the old way, and it is understood that we are to go on there indefinitely, as if we had never left it. 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 waking 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. So, when I wake up ... I have the odd sensation of a tremendous relief at finding that my happiness of one second before was a delusion.[26]

For Strachey the drawing-room at Lancaster Gate represented 'the riddle of the Victorian Age'; and in hindsight he conceded that 'it is almost impossible for me to come to an impartial judgement on it. I know it far too well.'[27]

This affective link was equally evident in *Eminent Victorians*. Strachey had in fact originally planned a work called *Victorian Silhouettes*, which was to have been a study of the lives of a dozen eminent Victorians, some of whom - scientists and men of action - he actively admired.[28] We may reasonably assume that the course of the Great War sharpened Strachey's critical instincts and led him to write a more integrated denunciation of Victorianism. But the actual nature of the anti-Victorianism retained its close concern with human experience. *Eminent Victorians* was in one way an elegy for those human values which Strachey felt had

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[26] Lytton Strachey, 'Lancaster Gate' [1922] in Michael Holroyd (ed.), *Lytton Strachey by Himself: A Self-Portrait* (London, 1971), p. 17.
[27] Strachey, 'Lancaster Gate', pp. 20-1.
[28] Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, p. 269. On Strachey's admiration for some eminent Victorians see Richard Sanders, 'Lytton Strachey and the Victorians', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 15 (1954), 329-30.

been sacrificed by the age: intelligence, humour, intimacy. He implied that the Victorians had diverted their emotional energies into almost exclusively public concerns. The pull of ambition and religion were the two central themes running through *Eminent Victorians*, complemented by a counterpoint of respectability, humanitarianism, public school education, and imperialism. But, it might be suggested, the key to the enduring popularity of the work lies in its exploration of human motivations and dilemmas. For in addition to being the perpetrators of Victorianism, Strachey also depicted his subjects as its *victims*. Victorianism - above all ambition and religion - presented a means of escape from their repressive upbringings for Manning, Arnold, Nightingale, and Gordon; but given the lack of rationality and intimacy within the public face of Victorianism, it served only to accentuate their underlying psychological problems. Manning's need to worship someone or something overflowed into barely concealed wordly ambition. Nightingale threw herself into humanitarian work to resist the attempts of her family to turn her into an 'angel in the house'. Arnold never recovered from his father's excessively high expectations - exemplified by having been given Smollett's twenty-four volume *History of England* to read at the age of three. Gordon struggled to appease demons of evangelical religion and ambition, finally driving himself to the situation which resulted in his own immolation. By interweaving these common themes, Strachey came to paint an integrated and ultimately tragic portrait of the Victorian period. His eminent Victorians were foolhardy, rather regrettable people; but they were also individuals buffeted around by fate and their own weaknesses. The description of the Gordon affair might in this respect stand as an epitaph for the book as a whole. 'There emerges from those obscure, unhappy records an interest,' Strachey wrote, 'not merely political and historical, but human and dramatic. One catches a vision of strange characters, moved by mysterious impulses, interacting in queer complications, and hurrying at last - so it almost seems - like creatures in a puppet show to a predestined catastrophe.'[29]

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[29]Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. 218.

The reception of *Eminent Victorians*

On its appearance in May 1918 *Eminent Victorians* scored a remarkable success. So unanimous was the praise that Strachey initially felt suspicious. 'I'm getting rather nervous,' he wrote in June, 'the reviewers are so extraordinarily gushing that I think something must be wrong.'[30] Reviewers relished the book's style and pithiness, and while not unaware of its shortcomings as historical scholarship, did not feel it to be especially anti-Victorian. Rather, they expressed delight and relief that Strachey had resisted hagiography and attempted to penetrate into the minds of his subjects. Even the former Prime Minister H.H. Asquith spoke of his admiration for 'Mr Strachey's subtle and suggestive art' in the Romanes Lecture at Oxford that summer.[31] The *Daily Telegraph* felt that it 'illustrate[d] in very vigorous and striking fashion the interval which seems to divide the twentieth century from the nineteenth'. The *Times Literary Supplement* commented on Strachey's 'very sincere and scholarly attempt to understand the generation which preceded his own', and that in this 'brilliant and extraordinarily witty book ... there is something almost uncanny in the author's detachment'. 'The only fault', the anonymous reviewer reflected, was that it might be just a little too witty: 'for, after all, the Victorian age was something more than a joke'.[32]

The *Nation* was enamoured of the innovations within this 'delightful book', quoting no fewer than thirty lines from the Preface. It admired also the way in which Strachey had used 'Reason' as an organising principle, noting only (and it was a good criticism) that the author had been careful to avoid selecting any Victorian rationalists who might have compromised his thesis.[33] Later in the inter-war period other critics came to appreciate even more fully what Strachey had set out to achieve in biography. Edwin Muir in 1926 remarked that 'In *Eminent Victorians* Mr. Strachey did two things for biography; he humanized it by irony, he gave it form. He went out in search not of great figures and noble characters, but of human nature, and he always found it.'[34] A.C. Ward concurred in 1930, after Strachey had also produced *Queen Victoria* (1921) and *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928). 'Between Lytton

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[30] Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, p. 422.
[31] H.H. Asquith, *Some Aspects of the Victorian Age* (Oxford, 1918), p. 7.
[32] *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 May 1918.
[33] *Nation*, 1 June 1918.
[34] Edwin Muir, *Transitions: Essays on Contemporary Literature* (London, 1926), p. 119.

Strachey and most Victorian biographers there is a marked difference', he wrote. 'Victorian biographers dehumanized their great men. We attempt to lay bare the humanity and leave the greatness to take care of itself, as it always will if the humanity is preserved.'[35] By the time of Strachey's death in 1932 *Eminent Victorians* had sold 35,000 copies in England and 55,000 copies in America. It had been translated into six other languages, including Polish, Romanian, and Japanese.[36]

Dissenting voices had by then long been raised. In fact, they were present from the outset, but had been strangely muted and rather inconsequential. The suffragette Mary Ward restricted herself to a largely ephemeral criticism by commenting in July 1918 that Strachey's levity was unpatriotic (indeed, even rather Teutonic).[37] Most of the other early criticism focused upon particular characters without reflecting on the book's wider import. This strongly suggests that contemporaries did not in 1918 have any especially coherent sense of an anti-Victorian culture into which *Eminent Victorians* might fit. Critics instead wondered whether the room in which Nightingale died really had been gloomy; or added speculations on the real length of Arnold's legs; or whether Gordon truly had been too fond of the bottle.[38] Edmund Gosse initially began in the same vein, writing to the *Times Literary Supplement* in June 1918 to criticise the depiction of his friend Sir Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer), the principal intermediary with Gordon and characterised in the book as 'cautious, measured, unimpeachably correct' - 'the embodiment of the English official classes, of English diplomacy, of the English Government with its hesitations, its insincerities, its double-faced schemes'.[39]

Gosse went on however to become a more serious critic of *Eminent Victorians*, feeling that its first readers had failed to identify beneath the surface wit Strachey's real intention 'to damage and discredit the Victorian Age'.[40] The perception and foresight of this criticism may perhaps tell us something about

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[35] A.C. Ward, *The Nineteen-Twenties. Literature and Ideas in the Post-War Decade* (London, 1930), pp. 169-70.
[36] Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, p. 427.
[37] *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 July 1918.
[38] See Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, p. 422.
[39] *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 June 1918; Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. 277. See Strachey's spirited riposte to Gosse in the *TLS* on 4 July 1918. 'Unfortunately, in this world,' he wrote, 'it is not always a man's friends who know him best.'
[40] Edmund Gosse, 'The Agony of the Victorian Age' [1918] in *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters* (London, 1919), p. 318.

Gosse's own ambivalence to the past which we have already traced in *Father and Son*. At any rate, Gosse avoided the *volte-face* which people like G.M. Trevelyan executed over *Eminent Victorians*. Trevelyan was initially enthusiastic about it, defending Strachey from any charge of cynicism. This was less a response to any accusation of conscious anti-Victorianism than a positive estimation of what Strachey had achieved in biography: 'I don't think the book 'cynical'; Gordon and the Bird both emerge heroes, far more living than other treatment would make them. Manning was what you represent him, - and so, by God, was the Oxford Movement!'[41] Trevelyan's feelings seem to have changed in the wake of the 'cheap ... nasty ... absurd one-volume biographies' which were penned during the 1920s in imitation of *Eminent Victorians*.[42] In hindsight Strachey became characterised, perhaps rather inaccurately, as the architect of anti-Victorianism.

Strachey died in 1932, at a time when the Victorians were beginning to find new-found favour. It was therefore not simply the usual process of stern reappraisal following a writer's death that led to his variable reputation in the 1930s. 'He died in 1932', John Russell recalled slightly later, 'and fell at once into a deep trough of disregard'.[43] G.M. Young felt that Strachey had 'much to answer for', and was a spur to his own writings in the 1930s.[44] In 1936 D.S. Freeman condemned Strachey as 'one of the most pernicious influences in modern biography'.[45] Such supporters as Strachey had - Guy Boas, Virginia Woolf, Max Beerbohm - were obliged to take the defensive.[46]

The tide did not begin to turn until the 1950s and 1960s, at the end of which period Michael Holroyd was writing his superb biography of Strachey and Bloomsbury was beginning to attract new interest.[47] But before then Strachey had been rehabilitated by scholars such as John Clive, who in 1958 argued that the counter-reaction against *Eminent Victorians* had gone too far and that it was time to acknowledge its lasting influence. In Chapter 2 it was suggested that nostalgia for

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[41] Trevelyan to Strachey, 12 August 1918. BL Add. MS 60732, f. 195.
[42] David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London, 1992), p. 44.
[43] Russell, 'Lytton Strachey', 91.
[44] G.M. Young, 'Victorian History' in *Selected Modern English Essays* (Oxford, 1932), p. 276.
[45] Quoted in Sanders, 'Strachey's Conception of Biography', 310.
[46] Guy Boas, *Lytton Strachey* (Oxford, 1935); Woolf, 'Art of Biography'; Max Beerbohm, *Lytton Strachey* (Cambridge, 1943).
[47] Holroyd's biography first appeared in two volumes in 1967-8; he writes about its reception in the 'Double Preface' to the 1994 edition. On the renewed interest at this time in Bloomsbury see Regina Marler, *Bloomsbury Pie: The Making of the Bloomsbury Boom* (London, 1997).

the Victorians created an enduring legacy which paid off in the scholarly sympathy of historians in the 1950s like Asa Briggs and Walter E. Houghton. Taken on its own merits, without regard for the imitators which Strachey unwittingly encouraged, or the counter-reaction of the 1930s, the same might be suggested of *Eminent Victorians*. As John Clive put it in 1958, on the fortieth anniversary of the publication of *Eminent Victorians*: 'We have discovered new dimensions in the great Victorians. Figures once irritatingly ebullient, confident, and self-satisfied we now find more and more frequently staring at us in anguish out of some strange and awful chiaroscuro. And our hearts go out to them.'[48] Whatever liberties Strachey may have taken with history, and however mixed his feelings may have been about his forbears, there is little doubt that his innovations within biography and his underlying interest in human nature contributed powerfully to getting the Victorians back into sympathetic perspective.

Concluding thoughts

As Richard D. Altick has recently suggested: 'It was under the auspices of biography that the redemption of the Victorian age began.'[49] Strachey's impatience with dull, evasive Victorian traditions in biography led to his 're-invention' of the genre within a streamlined Johnsonian format. This in turn allowed him in *Eminent Victorians* to explore his own ambivalent feelings towards the past. His example was to prove highly influential within inter-war biography, as will be seen at many turns in the following case-studies. Of course Strachey did not influence *all* biographers, and given my arguments in this thesis about continuity of attitudes and practices after 1918, it is only to be expected that many lives continued to be written along traditional lines. This variety enlivened rather than diffused perceptions of the past as neo-Stracheyans and Victorian traditionalists vied for control of their subjects. By the same token, Strachey's influence cannot alone account for the interest taken in psychology by many writers in the age of Freud. Nor did Strachey - who

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[48] John Clive, 'More or Less Eminent Victorians' [1958] in *Not By Fact Alone: Essays on the Writing and Reading of History* (London, 1989), p. 231.
[49] Richard D. Altick, 'Eminent Victorianism: What Lytton Strachey Hath Wrought', *The American Scholar*, 64 (1995), 84

believed that biography was artistic rather than scholarly - revise his works in the light of new factual evidence as other biographers fruitfully did.

The characteristics of biographical representation of the Victorians in the inter-war period might therefore be outlined as follows:

1. There was a continuation of traditional styles and priorities within biography, with the consequence that many lives were still treated discreetly and respectfully - and, in the case of Oscar Wilde, harshly (see Chapter 11).

2. The Stracheyan legacy could be found in many works: this included the deliberate selection of material; artistic shaping; an assumption of intimacy with the subject; and a tone of 'debunking'.

3. A deeper interest was often taken in the psychology of biographical subjects.

4. Biographical understanding was enriched by the assimilation of new factual material (eg. letters) and critical trends (eg. in literary criticism: see Chapter 10).

5. The net result of points 2, 3, and 4 was arguably a humanisation of Victorian figures which contributed eventually to the scholarly sympathy of the 1950s and beyond. There was a cost of a certain levity and occasional crudity - which other biographers and some historians (see Part Two) resented; but at its most accomplished, as in the work of Strachey, it was characterised by affectivity and a profound interest in human nature.

Chapter Eight

Queen Victoria

Queen Victoria was perhaps the most eminent Victorian of them all. The longest-reigning monarch within living memory, she presided over the most tumultuous century of change, weathered the course of twenty ministries, become head of an Empire upon which the sun famously never set, mothered a huge family, and set standards of behaviour in respectable society which were to last well into the twentieth century. Her very longevity had been artfully used, particularly in later years, to mask the disorientation of modernity in Britain;[1] and her death in January 1901 was felt to be traumatic by a great many people. But this was only one side of the story. As we saw in Chapter 1, the death of Queen Victoria was also felt by others to be overdue and a release from the unwelcome burden of the past. If in hindsight 1901 can be seen to have sharpened nostalgia for the pre-war age, then it was also a key moment in the history of anti-Victorianism. We might expect anti-Victorianism to have intensified greatly by the 1920s and 1930s, and for inter-war biographies of Queen Victoria to exemplify this trend. Yet this did not happen, and the present chapter aims to explain why this was so.

Inter-war lives of the Queen show the basic possibilities of what might be called the humanisation of the Victorians through biography. As we saw in the previous chapter, the biographical genre was being 'reinvented' around this time, principally by Lytton Strachey. This 'new' biography was dependent upon a degree of emotional distance, the use of new biographical material, and the assumption of an intimate tone towards the subject. It can be seen eventually to have flourished in the films of Herbert Wilcox made during the late 1930s. These are the areas on which we will therefore focus; but before this it may be useful here (and it will not be repeated in subsequent chapters) to look at the type of biography which hindered reassessment of the Victorians. As we shall see, nobody suffered from respectful reverence more than Queen Victoria.

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[1] See David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c.1820-1977' in Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 101-64.

Pre-war views of Victoria[2]

Like virtually all biographies of Victorian worthies, early lives of Victoria were laudatory, depicting her as a latter-day Gloriana presiding over the unblemished success-story of nineteenth century Britain. Inevitably this was a habit accentuated by the Jubilees of 1887 and 1897. L. Valentine, making little attempt to disguise his own Unionist and Imperialist affinities, concluded his 1887 biography with an elaborate roll-call of the areas in which progress had been made throughout the century.[3] The fervently patriotic journalist W.T. Stead in 1897 dubbed Victoria no less than the female 'high-water mark of realised success in the Evolution of Humanity'.[4]

As far as reverence would allow, many biographers also adopted a mawkishly sentimental attitude towards their subject. Titles such as *Victoria the Good* (1901), by Clare Jerrold, and *Victoria the Well-Beloved* (also 1901), by W.F. Aitken, speak for themselves. Much of the sentimentality was directed towards Victoria's earliest years, and this was because biographers thought that they could detect the origins of Victoria's subsequent benevolence as Queen and Empress in anecdotes about her childhood. David Campbell, for example, told readers in 1901 that he would recount 'delightful little stories' so as to 'give promise of that generous humanity which was a notable feature of Victoria's maturer years'.[5] The Duke of Argyll, who penned a biography of Victoria in 1901, went further, saying that these childhood stories 'cannot be passed over and omitted as mere nursery tittle-tattle ... They indicate character; they often show the germs of that excellence which became afterwards apparent to all the world.'[6] L. Valentine, who was another supplier of 'pretty stor[ies] belonging to this period', went on to shape the story of Victoria's adolescence as a Walter Scott romance. He presented Prince Albert as a latter-day knight-errant:

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[2] This is by no means an exhaustive treatment of the theme; it is, however, hopefully representative of the type of biographies produced before 1914.
[3] L. Valentine, *The Queen Her Early Life and Reign* (London, 1887).
[4] W.T. Stead, *Her Majesty the Queen Studies of the Sovereign and the Reign* (London, 1897), p. 2. For an account of this once highly influential journalist see Neil Berry, 'The Napoleon of Newsmen', *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 April 1998, 14-15.
[5] David Campbell, *Victoria, Queen and Empress* (Edinburgh, 1901), p. 52.
[6] John Campbell, 9th Duke of Argyll, *V.R.I.. Queen Victoria: Her Life and Reign* (New York, 1901), p. 53.

> The moment had arrived to send the Prince to the rescue of the maiden Princess whom he had loved from boyhood. ... enchantments of all kinds, evil tongues, and the plots of self-interested courtiers, would all vanish at the touch of that Ithuriel's spear - true love. And what maiden could help loving this perfect knight, spotless as Launcelot? - bringing with him, too, the memory of first affection and girlish hopes.[7]

Such sentimentality was not extended so widely to the rest of Victoria's life, though many could not resist the temptation to write purple prose about the Queen's last years, when she seemed to be the benevolent mother of her people - or 'a fairy of the awe-inspiring sort', as Campbell imagined, echoing Disraeli.[8] There was in fact good practical reason for such obsequiousness. Biographers and scholars knew relatively little about the inner workings of monarchy or about Victoria's private life, especially after her widowed seclusion in the 1860s and 1870s. Victoria's correspondence did not begin to appear until after 1907, and such sources as biographers could draw upon - most notably the autobiographical *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands* (1868) - only extended up to the year of Albert's death, 1861. It is notable that these writers tended to downplay the effects of Victoria's seclusion, not just from lack of knowledge about the precise role played by the monarch in politics during these years, but also perhaps because it fitted better their predominantly laudatory accounts of the reign. At its worst anti-Victoria feeling in 1871 ran to republicanism, and Argyll's comment that 'people ... were inclined to grumble at the representation of the royalty not being adequately brought before the public' was decidedly understated.[9] We can detect more of a hint of petulance in Valentine's 1887 observation that 'The nation have been proud of their Queen's voice - too long, alas! now silent.'[10]

These comments on traditional ways of viewing Victoria do not mean to suggest that all pre-1914 biography was 'backwards' by subsequent standards. The possibilities of biography at its best around this time were shown by Sir Sidney

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[7] Valentine, *The Queen*, pp. 33, 71-2.
[8] Campbell, *Victoria*, p. 232.
[9] Argyll, *VRI*, p. 273.
[10] Valentine, *The Queen*, p. 54.

Lee's *Queen Victoria*.[11] His approach was respectful but less sentimental than that of many of his predecessors. Lee sought particularly to shed new light on the years after 1861, and though he was only partially successful in doing so (being able to consult 'fragments' alone of Victoria's unpublished correspondence - potentially a 'rich mine', he commented), the biography drew attention to the paradox that Victoria was expected to rule effectively at a time when the powers of the monarchy were being progressively curtailed. The drama of Lee's work derived itself from the way in which his subject's essentially ordinary intellect fitted into the ever-changing political context in which she reigned. To emphasise Victoria's normality was an innovative approach, even if Lee failed to engage properly with her private life. In hindsight, however, the biography can be seen as a turning-point towards later perceptions of the monarch. These perceptions would take some time to coalesce, partly because Victoria's shadow continued to cast itself over views of the past for some time after her death.

An 'interval of indifference'

Reactions to Queen Victoria's death, as we have already noted, were mixed. Some felt traumatised by her passing, especially as it came at the uncertain turn of a century.[12] Others however were conscious that she had reigned too long. Even G.M. Young, that most sympathetic of commentators on the age, noted in 1936 that though an 'idol' to her people, Victoria 'had come to press with something of the weight of an idol, and in the innermost circle of public life the prevailing sentiment [at her death] was relief'.[13] The novelist T.H. White also looked back on 1901 from the perspective of a generation later and recalled that 'after an interval of sincere regret, the audience breathed again, began to talk'.[14]

As we saw in Chapter 1, there followed in the Edwardian period a time of greater reaction against many aspects of Victorianism. This appears to have been

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[11] Sidney Lee, *Queen Victoria* (London, 1902). See also Lee's dry-run for this in the entry on Victoria for the Third Supplement to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1901. On Lee himself see *DNB 1922-1930*, pp. 497-502.

[12] See Elizabeth Longford, *Victoria R.I.* (London, 1964), p. 562; Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 15-17.

[13] G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age: Victorian England* [1936] (Oxford: 2nd edn, 1953), p. 161.

[14] T.H. White, *Farewell Victoria* [1933] (London, 1993), p. 98.

reflected in biographical interest in the Queen herself. After Lee's 1902 biography it is striking that there did not follow a major study of Victoria's life for some years. This is not to say that Victoria was ever forgotten. Sir Theodore Martin, the biographer chosen by her to write the life of Prince Albert, produced a memoir of the late monarch in 1908. Access to Victoria's private diaries enabled Viscount Esher to write *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria* (1912) and Clare Jerrold her trilogy *The Early Court of Queen Victoria* (1912), *The Married Life of Queen Victoria* (1913), and later *The Widowhood of Queen Victoria* (1916). Yet these works maintained the distance which had always separated readers from the Queen, and which had been confirmed by her death. While avoiding the sentimental excesses of earlier biography, they were too respectful to engage analytically with their subject, and were still sketchy on her later years.

It was in such a climate that Edward VII attempted to encourage greater awareness of his mother's personal achievements. A.C. Benson and Viscount Esher were authorised to produce an edition of Queen Victoria's letters in 1907.[15] The aim of this collection, the editors wrote, was 'to bring out the development of the Queen's character and disposition ... to produce, in fact, a book for British citizens and British subjects, rather than a book for students of political history'.[16] This distinctly Victorian emphasis upon character ironically did not stop political historians and biographers subsequently from making highly productive use of the letters. But more relevant here is Edward VII's attempt to emphasise Victoria's personal nature, and the curious failure to do so in an edition which covered the years only up to 1861. Readers were already well-acquainted (albeit in sentimental depictions) with Victoria's early years, and it was the controversial period after Albert's death which remained obscured to view. No doubt part of the reason why further work was not immediately undertaken on this period of her life was because it was so near to the present. It is unlikely that Edward VII relished having his private life discussed in print, and of course many of the other people discussed in Victoria's letters would still have been alive.

Whether revelations about Victoria's later years would have encouraged more biographical work to be undertaken in the Edwardian period it is difficult to

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[15] A.C. Benson & Viscount Esher (eds), *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1st series: *1837-61*, 3 vols (London, 1907).

[16] Benson & Esher, *Letters*, 1st series, I, p. vii.

say. One is tempted to think not. The dynamics of emotional distance were such that although Victoria was never forgotten, her life was yet too close to be considered appropriate for analysis, and certainly too close for nostalgia. Both of these were to change within a generation. By the 1920s and especially by the 1930s, as we shall see, people were far more interested in her life, and this interest went hand-in-hand with new biographical revelations and perspectives. In short, it was necessary for society to have a period in which to contemplate the nature of its relationship with Victorianism and its eponymous ruler. As the essayist, aspiring politician, and biographer Philip Guedalla commented on Victoria and Gladstone in 1933: 'There was an interval of indifference, almost of disrespect, in which their names were greeted with a thin derision. But increasing distance restores a just perspective; and as the age recedes, its two leading figures resume their true proportions.'[17]

The increase in biographical knowledge

A greater level of knowledge about the private lives of the Victorians was one of the crucial factors in their eventual rehabilitation. It can easily be forgotten that many people in the 1920s and 1930s had only the sketchiest knowledge of the lives of many of the most eminent Victorians, not least because some were still alive or were awaiting the first detailed or impartial biographies. Even where good biographies had already been written, there could be surprising lacunae.

A case in point was the widowhood of Victoria. When Lytton Strachey came to write his 1921 biography *Queen Victoria*, he was disarmingly honest about the difficulty of depicting his subject after 1861:

> The first forty-two years of the Queen's life are illuminated by a great and varied quantity of authentic information. With Albert's death a veil descends. Only occasionally, at fitful and disconnected intervals, does it lift for a moment or two; a few main outlines, a few remarkable details may be discerned; the rest is all conjecture

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[17] Philip Guedalla, *The Queen and Mr Gladstone*, 2 vols (London, 1933), I, p. 4.

> and ambiguity. ... We must be content in our ignorance with a brief and summary relation.[18]

This problem was addressed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and these are consequently the key years when it comes to locating a recognisably 'modern' view of Victoria's life. Above all it was the publication of the Second and Third Series of *Letters of Queen Victoria*, edited by G.E. Buckle, between 1926 and 1932, which transformed contemporary scholarly views of Victoria.[19] It is scarcely an exaggeration to use the term 'transformed' because these letters dealt with the hitherto shadowy period in Victoria's life after the Prince Consort's death in 1861.[20]

The *Letters* were not an isolated offering in these years. A number of other works also focused on the years after 1861. In 1930 Frederick Ponsonby published his *Sidelights on Queen Victoria*, a collection of royal 'episodes' between 1869 and 1894 drawn from his father's correspondence. Sir Henry Ponsonby had been Victoria's private secretary between 1871 and 1895, and the 'sidelights' offered by his papers illuminated nostalgically a world where life was slower and simpler. But this also meant a world where 'the political waters were so unruffled that a small ripple was often mistaken for a storm'.[21] Some of the incidents described - a dispute about naval precedence, the use of the royal ponies - were entertaining, designed to illustrate the mores of an earlier society. Others made a more serious contribution to historical knowledge: readers learned about the unenviable constraints on royal power over the Queen's Speech for 1881, heightening sympathy for Victoria; and about the unofficial ways in which she influenced politics over the Irish University Bill of 1873 and the Franchise Bill of 1884. Over a third of the book was devoted to this last crisis, which came to involve the threat of a reform of the House of Lords. Victoria's role was fully fleshed out, and Ponsonby

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[18] Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (London, 1921), p. 218.

[19] G.E. Buckle (ed.), *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd series: *1862-85*, 3 vols (London, 1926-8); *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 3rd series: *1886-1901*, 3 vols (London, 1930-2). Cf. the controversial effect that the publication of these letters had upon Gladstone's posthumous reputation, discussed in Chapter 9, below.

[20] For a contemporary acknowledgement of the importance of the publication of these letters, see the introduction to Frank Hardie's *The Political Influence of Queen Victoria 1861-1901* (London: 2nd edn, 1938), esp. pp. 14-17. Cf. R.B. Mowat, *The Victorian Age* (London, 1939), ch. 13: 'Queen Victoria as a Letter-Writer', based on an assessment of all three series of *Letters*.

[21] Frederick Ponsonby, *Sidelights on Queen Victoria* (London, 1930), p. viii.

noted: 'while the public was quite unaware that she was taking any part in this controversy, she continued to employ every means in her power to affect a compromise'.[22] Significantly enough, G.M. Young would later describe Victoria's intervention in the 1884 crisis as one of the three instances where royal intervention had a 'decisive effect' on politics after 1861.[23] Views of Victoria's industriousness only seemed to improve with age.

Several years after Ponsonby's *Sidelights*, Philip Guedalla published *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*. This had the same interrelated aims: to increase historical knowledge, and to serve as a corrective to anti-Victorianism. In these two volumes Guedalla collected together and commented upon 1480 documents, of which only 326 had previously been published in whole or in part.[24] The story was, of course, that of the growing disaffection between Victoria and Gladstone, particularly as Victoria fell under Disraeli's influence in the 1870s. A fuller than usual portrait of Victoria emerged in the second volume (dealing with the period 1880-1898), by which point she was fully in what Guedalla called her 'third' reign - the great Imperial matriarch who had emerged under Disraeli's aegis.[25] Indeed, Guedalla was keen to emphasise Victoria's constantly changing status and character, to make her a more convincing human being where more recent 'irreverent dissections' had 'caricatured' her by reducing her to one fixed characteristic. 'No figure of the past requires this recognition more than Queen Victoria', he reflected. 'It is so tempting to simplify the facts by rendering her in a single formula, to portray one small, unchanging figure which remains the same from the first summer dawn at Kensington to the last thundering salutes of her triumphant jubilees.'[26]

Frank Hardie's *The Political Influence of Queen Victoria* (1938), revisited much of the ground covered by Stead forty years before. This time, however, the author was able to draw upon the complete *Letters*, supplemented by Ponsonby, Guedalla, and the biographies published in the interim. This scholarly work was far removed from the questions of approbation or reproach which tended to occupy earlier biographers. Instead it offered a detailed examination of Victoria's unpopularity in the 1860s alongside reflections on her eventual public veneration. Hardie's real

[22] Ponsonby, *Sidelights*, p. 244.
[23] Young, *Portrait*, pp. 123-4.
[24] Guedalla, *Queen and Mr Gladstone*, I, pp. v, ii, v.
[25] The two previous 'reigns' had been as unmarried Queen and as wife to Albert. This was not a new observation: Stead, *Her Majesty*, p. 68 made the same divisions.
[26] Guedalla, *Queen and Mr Gladstone*, I, p. 7.

theme was the political power of the Queen once she was free from strong influences such as those of Melbourne and Albert. His conclusion that Bagehot greatly underrated the effective powers of the monarchy probably counted less to readers interested in Victoria's person than the observation that 'Queen Victoria was an extremely industrious ruler, with a really remarkable power of attention to detail.'[27] With such comments writers had come full circle to a sense of Victoria's greatness; only by this stage the greatness was humbler and had been built up from surer foundations across the span of the last three decades.

Biographical intimacy

Emotional distance and the growth in knowledge about Victoria could, of course, have brought double-edged consequences. As Laurence Housman wrote when introducing his series of royal plays brought together as *Victoria Regina* in 1934:

> As successive volumes of her letters and diaries are made public, with a frankness hitherto unexampled in the official editing of Royal remains, it becomes more and more evident that she was the mourning widow, not only of a beloved and worthy Consort, but of a whole set of cherished notions, which in the 'sixties and 'seventies were already moribund ... the mind of Victoria was sedentary, and did not move.[28]

Potentially this offered rich opportunity for sarcasm, and certainly the Victoria who emerged from these thirty miniature theatrical pieces was temperamental, inflexible, and all too easily flattered. But she was also shrewd, hard-working, and often touchingly vulnerable, such that the last image audiences saw was of a 'great, wonderful, little old Lady' being slowly wheeled away after the celebrations of 1897.[29] It is noteworthy that images such as these proved to be very popular when finally *Victoria Regina* was granted a stage licence in 1937.[30] (Stage and screen

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[27] Hardie, *Political Influence*, pp. 224-5.
[28] Laurence Housman, *Victoria Regina: A Dramatic Biography* [1934] (London, 1949), pp. 11-12.
[29] Housman, *Victoria Regina*, p. 470.
[30] Cf. the off-stage death of Queen Victoria in Noël Coward's 1931 *Cavalcade*: it was this 'of the

depictions of Queen Victoria had been prohibited until then.) There had, admittedly, been a certain amount of trepidation about the impact the play would have upon perceptions of the past. 'A magnified and distorted picture of the Queen will be conveyed to the British people, and indeed to the whole world', the historian C.K. Webster prophesied. 'It may influence profoundly their attitude not only towards the Crown as an institution, but towards the whole Victorian age.'[31] But in the event the play proved to be a critical and popular success. *The Times* referred to it as 'a sketch at once candid and affectionate ... a brilliant pageant, quick in emotion, but as restrained as it is just'.[32] Housman is reputed to have made £15,000 from the centenary performances which opened on 21 June 1937 at the Lyric Theatre.[33]

The work of Housman was characteristic of the tone of much of the inter-war biographical treatment of Victoria. The distinctive breakthrough here was one of *sympathy*. For the first time Victoria came to be seen as a fully human being - a status which, if necessarily entailing a sense of her fallibility, also would prove more enduringly positive than the eulogies offered by earlier biographers. As George Bernard Shaw had commented as early as 1886, in the midst of all these eulogies, 'A few faults are indispensable to a really popular monarch.' The move away from Victorian biographical reverence could paradoxically do the Victorians a great service.

As we saw in Chapter 7, Lytton Strachey was the key-figure in the attack on the Victorian biographical genre. It will come as little surprise, then, that it was Strachey's 1921 biography of Victoria which proved to be the most important work in setting the tone for later studies of the Queen. Strachey's *Queen Victoria* came to inform virtually all inter-war perceptions of Victoria, and there is reason to believe that Virginia Woolf's prophesy had already come into effect long before 1939: 'In time to come Lytton Strachey's Queen Victoria will be Queen Victoria, just as Boswell's Johnson is now Dr. Johnson.'[34] The biography sold well from the outset. In Britain the book went through five impressions within a year.[35] The

many incidents of public affairs portrayed ... which seemed most to touch the chords of memory of older members of the audience'. Frank Hardie, *Political Influence*, p. 219 n. 2.

[31] C.K. Webster, 'The Accession of Queen Victoria', *History*, 22 (1937-8), 14.

[32] *The Times*, 22 June 1937.

[33] *DNB 1951-1960*, p. 514.

[34] Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Biography' [1939] in *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life* (Harmondsworth, 1993), p. 147.

[35] Holroyd, *Strachey*, p. 495.

American edition, published by Harcourt, Bruce & Co., proved so popular that Strachey regretted having sold them the copyright for a fixed sum of $10,000. 'The sale has been much larger than expected,' Strachey wrote in September 1921, 'and promises to continue.'[36] So iconic did the work become that the so-called 'Oxford wits' - those avid collectors of Victorian artefacts - planned a ballet of Victoria's life, with Martin Harvey as the Queen and Harold Acton as Strachey. Part of the choreography was to include the Strachey character (appropriately red-bearded) secreted beneath a couch in the act of observing and taking notes on Victoria's private life.[37]

Strachey's Victoria, although hampered in conception by customary ignorance about the years after 1861, was a fundamentally sympathetic figure. Indeed this was how Strachey consciously set out to portray her; he wrote to his cousin Edith Plowden that he considered Victoria to have been a 'great queen'.[38] Strachey was not uncritical of his subject. He deplored especially her bourgeois mentality, but his portrayal was essentially temperate, even affectionate. As Michael Holroyd suggests, that this may have been because Strachey associated Victoria with his own mother; when the biography was published in 1921 Lady Strachey was 81: exactly the age to which Queen Victoria had lived.[39] There is some evidence that Strachey's friends - including Virginia Woolf, to whom the work was dedicated - had been expecting a more bracing affair, and were rather taken aback by the mellowness of Strachey's tone.[40] Others found the book not sufficiently reverential. To these people Guy Boas responded in 1935: '*Queen Victoria* is the quintessence of 'Stracheyism': whoever does not like it does not like Strachey, and whoever is offended at it can perceive Strachey the iconoclast but is blind to Strachey the idolater.'[41] Strachey as idolater may seem a strange prospect; yet it is nevertheless evident that his biography helped to rehabilitate Victoria's reputation after that period of relative indifference considered above. Max Beerbohm made

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[36] Strachey to the Society of Authors, 22 September 1921. British Library Add. MS 63334, f. 17.
[37] Martin Green, *Children of the Sun a narrative of 'decadence' in England after 1918* (London, 1977), p. 190.
[38] Holroyd, *Strachey*, p. 490.
[39] Holroyd, *Strachey*, p. 495.
[40] Holroyd, *Strachey*, p. 496. The warmly favourable *Times Literary Supplement* review on 7 April 1921 also commented on how Strachey had disappointed satirical 'expectations'. The anonymous reviewer preferred the book to *Eminent Victorians*. Of its general tone the reviewer concluded: 'Far better is a Queen no longer muffled by the veils and trappings of her state - far better, certainly, to read about.'
[41] Guy Boas, *Lytton Strachey* (Oxford, 1935), p. 12.

this point in his 1943 Rede Lecture at Cambridge. 'Her faults had become known, and her virtues were unheeded', he observed. 'This is not so now; and it is not so by reason of Lytton Strachey's fully judicial presentment of her with all the faults over which her virtues so very much preponderated.'[42]

The most controversial aspect of Strachey's biography was its focus on Victoria's sexuality.[43] He resolved the tension between fact and fiction by making Victoria's psyche a centripetal ordering presence; the energy used to relate every other character and historical incident towards her more often than not was emotional or sexual. Other characters and incidents were included in a way which shed new light upon Victoria's personality. Clearly Strachey as a homosexual empathised with, and took vicarious pleasure in, Victoria's feminine traits. He particularly enjoyed writing about Victoria's adoration of handsome Prince Albert. Here the biography suggests something intriguing about Strachey's affective relationship with history. He chose to portray Albert as a repressed homosexual.[44] There can be no question of hostility here; indeed, it seems highly likely that Strachey identified personally with Albert, for as well as being an outsider by birth and (putative) sexuality, the Prince Consort found himself intellectually isolated in the royal household. It seems likely that Strachey told us more of himself than he knew in writing of Albert: 'He was lonely, not merely with the loneliness of exile but with the loneliness of conscious and unrecognised superiority.'[45] This is very much the arch, provocative tone of the man who took a defensively superior view of life, and who on his deathbed commented, 'If this is dying, then I don't think much of it.'

Strachey's treatment of Albert did not go uncriticised, though it is interesting that it was not the implications of his homosexuality to which readers objected. It seems probable that many people failed to see this at all. Late in 1921 Strachey received a letter from a reader who suggested that Strachey had unkindly 'revived' certain ideas about the Prince Consort, apparently those relating to his lack of popularity. Strachey retorted robustly, arguing that this had long been a matter of 'common knowledge', and was in any case to be found in the *DNB*.

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[42] Max Beerbohm, *Lytton Strachey* (Cambridge, 1944), p. 20.
[43] For an excellent interpretation of the work see Holroyd, *Strachey*, pp. 489-96, to which the following paragraph is greatly indebted.
[44] Holroyd, *Strachey*, p. 493.
[45] Strachey, *Queen Victoria*, p. 208.

'Considering what has already been said by others upon that subject,' he added, 'and what I might have said, it seems to me a little sad that I should be upbraided by you, Madam, the widow of a clergyman of the Church of Scotland, for my lack of Christian charity.'[46] Few writers, except Lee, had dared to broach the difficult topic of the Prince Consort's unpopularity in England; nobody had gone one step further and empathised with him as Strachey did.

Enough has been said, hopefully, to indicate the extent of Strachey's sympathy with Queen Victoria. Certainly it was not always an uncritical sympathy, but with this biography - the first major one for nearly twenty years - Victoria more fully than ever before became a human being. This process of putting Victoria into human perspective is characteristic of her post-war biographical treatment. Humanising a subject previously treated as almost perfect has two basic consequences: it opens the subject for varying degrees of criticism, even ridicule; but in its honest portrayal of fallibility it also provides a better context for coming to reassess the subject's positive qualities. In the strident adulation of late nineteenth century biographies of Victoria there was a certain underlying coolness, the distance of perceived greatness; with Strachey the formula was reversed: a sceptical distance was maintained from panegyric, but this restraint testified to a more genuine affection towards the subject.

The heightened potential for different attitudes to Victoria suggested by Strachey was intensified by the publication of the Second and Third Series of *Letters* between 1926 and 1932 (see above). Although Strachey lived until 1932, he did not revise his biography in the light of the new information provided by these letters. Other biographies did, however, draw extensively on the letters, and two of these - E.F. Benson's *Queen Victoria*[47] and Edith Sitwell's *Victoria of England*[48] - will be considered here.

Benson's work was less obviously neo-Stracheyan than Sitwell's biography, though his knowledge of the earlier book was evidently close. He followed Strachey's lead of writing about Albert as a repressed homosexual,[49] but on other points (the influence of Stockmar and Lehzen; the Queen's role in foreign affairs) Benson's text acted as a historical corrective based upon the new insights offered

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[46] Strachey to Jane Anne Prentice, 4 December 1921. BL Add. MS 60721, f. 69.
[47] E.F. Benson, *Queen Victoria* (London, 1935).
[48] Edith Sitwell, *Victoria of England* (London, 1936).
[49] Benson, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 39-40.

by the letters.[50] Benson also attacked what appears to have been to have been a newer trend in speculation about Victoria, the use of the *Greville Memoirs* to suggest a liaison between the Queen and Sir John Conroy, the Controller of the Royal Household.[51] (As we shall see, Edith Sitwell was less discriminating in her treatment of the Conroy rumours.)

This generally punctilious attitude to historical accuracy is impressive, perhaps indicating Benson's emotional distance from the subject. But historical corrective was only one part of a curious mixture of styles adopted for the years up to 1861. The first half of the biography was by turns an exercise in historical revision, fairy-tale, Wagnerian drama, and Freudian exegesis. Needless to say this bewildering range of approaches did not add up to a convincing whole; one is tempted to regard this as the product of a man who 'wrote too much and too quickly'.[52] The overall impression, however, was one uniformly sympathetic towards Victoria. Taking her comment about a 'sad and lonely childhood' as a starting-point, Benson built up a portrait of the royal family as a dysfunctional group - something historically valid enough and characteristic of later writing on Victoria. George IV, for instance, appeared as a lascivious, obese, mendacious, bewigged, grease-painted old man - a cardboard cut-out, to be sure, but at least there in the background where pre-war writers had tended to leave him out.[53] If this placed George IV in the position of a pantomime dame, one of the ugly older sisters, then Victoria became Cinderella. She was bossed around by her mother, organising her education by a regiment of tutors with Teutonic military precision.

The fairy-tale approach allowed another of Benson's *bêtes-noires*, Germany, to be introduced. Writing in 1935 with the hindsight of the Great War and perhaps some sense of the conflict to come, it is not surprising that a writer should be so sensitive to the German influences in Victoria's life. Benson, at any rate, was hostile towards them. Victoria's uncle Leopold of Belgium (originally of Saxe-Coburg) was compared to Wotan in *The Ring*, manipulating Victoria and Albert from above through his Loge-like executant Stockmar. Albert also never quite escaped the taint of his Teutonism, and his death was taken as an opportunity for some

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[50] Benson, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 115, 122, 318.
[51] Benson, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 57-9. Significantly enough, Strachey had started work on a complete edition of the *Greville Memoirs* in 1927; he had consulted unpublished passages in the British Library while working on *Queen Victoria*, but did not use them against her as others did.
[52] *DNB 1931-1940*, p. 70.
[53] Benson, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 18-20.

counter-factual speculation about how his concern for 'a united and powerful Germany' would have made him even more unpopular had he lived longer.[54] Benson instead celebrated the release of Victoria from these Germanising influences once her grief had passed in the 1870s: 'the Albertian age had passed, and the Victorian age had begun'.[55] This search to 'find' herself - by which Benson seemed to mean the beloved Queen of late Victorian England - was one of the main motifs of the first half of the book. Many of the attempts at liberation were, not surprisingly, treated in Freudian terms. Of the relationship between Melbourne and Victoria, Benson even noted: 'Sometimes [their] conversations resemble nothing so much as the topics introduced to a patient by psycho-analyst'.[56]

Benson was on better form in the second half of the biography, where he drew upon the evidence released only a few years earlier by the complete publication of Victoria's letters. Other information, such as that to be found in Guedalla's *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*, was also deployed.[57] The sharper picture which emerged of Victoria was both more critical and more sympathetic. Benson was impatient with the pleas of nervous disorder made by Victoria in many of the letters of the 1860s. But these same letters were used to foster a more tolerant understanding of this shadowy period; it was clear, Benson argued, that Victoria was genuinely grief-stricken and uncertain of the esteem of her subjects. This misconception on her part was happily dispelled by the two Jubilees, the occasion of which allowed Benson to wax lyrical about a woman who, for all her faults, had eventually attained greatness.

Turning to Sitwell's biography, it is initially this historical and emotional distance which most strikes the reader. The book, Sitwell observed, was intended as much as 'a record of social conditions' in the nineteenth century as it was a portrait of the Queen; the perceived need to fill in the historical background for those 'new' to the period is indicative of the mental gap which had opened with time.[58] Nor was this simply a case of setting the record straight. Given Sitwell's use of Sidney Lee, Hector Bolitho, Philip Guedalla, Frank Hardie, and G.M. Young, not to mention the Second and Third Series of *Letters*, it is surprising that the level of

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[54] Benson, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 204-5.
[55] Benson, *Queen Victoria*, p. 286.
[56] Benson, *Queen Victoria*, p. 63.
[57] Benson, *Queen Victoria*, p. 341.
[58] Sitwell, *Victoria*, p. 7.

erudition was not higher. She passed through the 'I will be good' story unquestioningly; used the *Greville Memoirs* to hint at the liaison with Conroy; and soon after that the treatment of Melbourne - often so revealing about the biographer's overall approach - was uncommonly critical: 'There are times when I see dear, good, kind whimsical Lord M. wearing a devil's mask, and bearing a devil's grin.'[59] Other examples of partisanship were the rounded condemnation of foreign policy, an unusual concentration on Chartism, and a distinctly Marxist account of the horrors of industrial exploitation and poverty.[60] Behind all this, and the biography's highly novelistic style, lay Sitwell's veneration of Strachey, who was given a special acknowledgement in the author's note.

Given the extent of Sitwell's debt to Strachey, it is not surprising that the overall view which emerged of Victoria was a positive one. The outlines of this sympathy will already be familiar. On one hand, Sitwell did not refrain from writing about Victoria's limitations, or about the public ramifications of her seclusion; on the other hand, she followed Benson's lead in portraying Victoria as courageous in the face of her self-generated problems, eventually finding a certain greatness therein. It might also be significant that Sitwell was a woman writer. This might have given her a greater empathy with Victoria, for her perceptive handling of the period of mourning - 'the empire of shadows', as it was evocatively called - was seen very much from the heroine's perspective.[61]

Sitwell's biography is a salutary example of the way in which an unfavourable view of the Victorian age did not necessarily mean an unfavourable view of Victoria. The over-generalised statements on historical context by Sitwell were a weak link in the book, but they usefully remind us that a negative impression amongst writers of the previous century was not necessarily incompatible with warmer feelings about specific individuals.

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[59] Sitwell, *Victoria*, pp. 43, 56, 65-7, 93.
[60] Sitwell, *Victoria*, chs 12-13. Sitwell cited Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England* as a source.
[61] Sitwell, *Victoria*, ch. 21.

Victoria on celluloid

Many of the factors which contributed to the humanisation of Queen Victoria also made their influence felt in stage and screen representations of her life. The Lord Chamberlain had in fact prohibited such representations until 1937. A variety of factors might explain why the ban was lifted in this year. Most obviously it was the centenary of Victoria's accession. But as we saw in Chapter 2, this centenary also happened to fall close to the coronation of George VI, an event which consciously sought to echo tradition amongst other things by producing a film which celebrated the integrity of the national and Imperial past extending back to Victoria's day. More generally, it is arguable that the establishment was sufficiently certain of the Queen's good standing to countenance portrayals of her life, especially when nostalgia for the pre-war world could be further utilised to bolster the uncertain present. We have already noted the success of Laurence Housman's *Victoria Regina* on stage in 1937, and it is noteworthy that the man who was to have been king - Edward VIII - actively encouraged the director Herbert Wilcox to make a film based on the palace plays.

Wilcox in fact produced two films, *Victoria the Great* and *Sixty Glorious Years*, released in 1937 and 1938 respectively. They provided, in Jeffrey Richards' words, 'the definitive hagiographical account of Queen Victoria' - a version of the monarch long-familiar to people in biographies and now consolidated on screen.[62] *Victoria the Great* emphasised the domesticity of Victoria and Albert, and their affinity with the ordinary people; *Sixty Glorious Years* - as the reference to the Diamond Jubilee in the title suggests - played notably upon the Imperial aspects of Victoria's reign.[63] But the apparent conservatism of these films masked two important innovations.

First, both works offered the consolation of nostalgia at particularly difficult junctures in contemporary history: in 1937, the abdication crisis; in 1938 the appeasement question. Significantly enough, Robert Vansittart of the Foreign Office - a leading critic of appeasement - collaborated on the script for *Sixty Glorious Years*, and the film's advocacy of readiness to oppose aggression if necessary (Gordon being the ironically un-Stracheyan exemplar here) was intended to make audiences

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[62] Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London, 1984), p. 264.

[63] For readings of the films see Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp. 264-9; and Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London, 1994), pp. 53-5.

draw contemporary parallels. The film hit its mark. *Today's Cinema* noted on 14 October 1938 that 'in addition to recreating the past in fascinating detail it has a message for today that cannot be ignored'. The *Plymouth Evening News* concurred four days later: 'the film will hearten those who are heartweary over England's position in Europe today'.[64]

The second innovation of Wilcox's films was the pressing home of the precedent made in Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, released in 1933. For the first time this had presented the monarchy in an intimate, humanised light. Wilcox presented an intimate domestic portrait of Victoria and Albert in *Victoria the Great*. People saw the film in large numbers: the *Star* in November 1937 reported that seats for schoolchildren were being block-booked in collections of 350 a time.[65] And, on one of the very rare occasions for this period, we have clear empirical evidence of what ordinary people thought of a particular version of the past. Mass-Observation at Bolton in 1938 revealed that *Victoria the Great* was the most popular film amongst patrons at three cinemas - no mean feat given people's general preference for more lively American productions, and powerful testimony to the appeal of the Victorian past amongst ordinary people between the wars.

Concluding thoughts

A degree of emotional distance, the innovative use of new biographical sources, and the assumption of an intimate tone towards the subject were the three crucial factors in new biographical approaches towards the Victorians after 1918. This is not to suggest that all biographers adopted such an approach, or that all Victorians were susceptible to such treatment (we shall see in the following chapter that this was not so). But the case of Queen Victoria provides a revealing example of how perceptions of the past could positively change after the Great War. It is not at all true that the inter-war years were marked by the straightforward denigration of eminent Victorians; rather, in many respects, the innovations of neo-Stracheyan

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[64] Quoted in Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 267.
[65] Harper, *Picturing the Past*, p. 194 n. 37.

biography were directly to encourage the eventual rehabilitation of many figures from the pre-war world.[66]

Even by the 1930s the Victorians generally stood in a more favourable light. It is worth quoting what *The Times* had to say about the prospect of the first night of Laurence Housman's *Victoria Regina* on 21 June 1937, the day after the centenary of Victoria's accession. These observations reflect not only changes within writings on Queen Victoria, but the new possibilities which inter-war biography held for her subjects and peers:

> A hundred years have allowed time for the memory of Queen Victoria to survive that period of depreciation which follows excessive adulation for all the great; and her true eminence may be taken as firmly established. Her correspondence has been published, illuminating her faults as well as her virtues, her narrowness and prejudices as well as her commanding breadth of mind. To-night for the first time authority permits her person to be represented on the public stage. She no longer needs protection from the risk of calumny. She abides our question, and we may welcome the aid of any help that science or art can give for the illumination of her character.[67]

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[66] Ironically enough, it has been suggested that the *intimiste* strain of writing on Victoria has been so influential that recent biographers have tended to overlook the public aspects of her reign, such as her role as the figurehead of a powerful army and navy. See Walter L. Arnstein, 'The Warrior Queen: Reflections on Victoria and Her World', *Albion*, 30 (1998), 1-28.

[67] *The Times*, 21 June 1937.

Chapter Nine

Gladstone

As we saw in the previous chapter, eminent Victorians could be humanised by a certain emotional distance, the assumption of an intimate tone, and the thoughtful use of new biographical information. There were, however, limits to this phenomenon. The reputation of W.E. Gladstone shows these limits in action. This should not be taken to mean that Gladstone enjoyed a less favourable reception than Queen Victoria between the wars; indeed, of the four figures who constitute Part Three of this thesis, it was Gladstone who was given the most explicitly reverential treatment by biographers and society as a whole after 1918.

The relative failure to put Gladstone into recognisable human proportion was therefore not a matter of continuing hostility. Rather, it was the tale of enduring respect for the great statesman who had died only a generation earlier, in 1898. For many - perhaps most - he remained 'Mr' Gladstone in the 1920s and 1930s. His memory was respected to the point where bringing him into fully human perspective seemed almost indecent.

This widespread veneration needs to be explained. It forms part of that continuity of attitude and conscious revivalism which we explored in Chapter 2. But this enduring respect was not maintained without certain efforts, and these efforts were undertaken primarily within the biographical genre. The subject of this chapter remained 'Mr' Gladstone more for his perceived character than anything else. The purpose here is therefore to explain how and why a respectful version of his character was successfully maintained in accounts of his life and work without any great need to humanise it. We begin by looking at what constituted standard views of Gladstone; then look at the issue of new biographical material; and finally examine how Gladstone was seen to relate to certain topics of the day.

Mr Gladstone and character

To say that Gladstone's character was still revered after 1918 raises an obvious question. *Which* version of Gladstone was it that people admired? He was of course (and remains) an unusually formidable challenge to biographers, possessing as he did an extraordinarily complex personal history: 'the rising hope of those stern and unbending Tories';[1] the high Anglican; the devout Peelite; 'the People's William'; the 'Grand Old Man'; and (to hostile critics) the 'Old Man in a Hurry'. Certain inter-war observers, to their credit, attempted to catch something of this bewildering complexity within Gladstone's life. George Edinger and E.J.C. Neep wrote in 1936 of 'a Gladstone spectrum', cleverly adopting a colour-coded scheme, so that Blue designated his Tory upbringing, Green his preoccupation in later years with Ireland, and Red 'the Empire's colour on the map, [and] his reaction to Imperialism'.[2] But this ran the risk of over-neat categorisation within Gladstone's life; and their conclusion that the spectrum of experience united coherently within him to form a 'character so mighty and so steadfast in belief' was deeply conservative.[3]

Gladstone remained in their view the Grand Old Man, the apogee of Victorian Liberalism. This was an endorsement of the view of Gladstone generated in the late nineteenth century, even during his own lifetime. Indeed, Gladstone himself had contributed to this self-fashioning through his assiduous courting from the 1870s onwards of the media and public as 'the People's William'.[4] Popular statuettes, engravings, plates, jugs, and cartoons featuring Gladstone's image proliferated, and some remained valued items in the 1920s and 1930s.[5] (It seems only fair to add that Gladstone's face also embellished late nineteenth century Unionist chamberpots; whether they were still in use a generation later it is understandably difficult to determine.)[6] The self-fashioning came with equal potency

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[1] Macauley's phrase, 1838. Often misquoted. See H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1809-1898* (Oxford, 1997), p. 29 n.

[2] George Edinger & E.J.C. Neep, *The Grand Old Man: A Gladstone Spectrum* (London, 1936), p. viii.

[3] Edinger & Neep, *Grand Old Man*, p. 263.

[4] See D.A. Hamer, 'Gladstone: The Making of a Political Myth', *Victorian Studies*, 22 (1978-9), 28-50; Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 287, 295-301, 550-7.

[5] Asa Briggs, b.1921, was left a Gladstone plate by his grandfather, who had heard Gladstone speak in Leeds and London. See 'Victorian Images of Gladstone' in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone* (London, 1998), pp. 33-49

[6] See the example in Matthew, *Gladstone*, illustration 21(c).

from Gladstone's autobiographical writings.[7] These writings, ingenuously or otherwise, did several things. They emphasised in Gladstone's life not flux and discontinuity, but evolution of thought and practice; and they allowed Gladstone to envisage himself as an instrument finely attuned to deep historical trends inscribed by God's hand. Both, of course, complemented Gladstone's very real political priorities - above all Ireland - in the last two decades of his career. These were views which fed into the host of biographies, many of them designated 'popular' and cheaply priced, which began to appear after the 1870s - works such as those by George Barnett Smith (1879), J. Ewing Ritchie (1880), Thomas Archer (1883), E.A. MacDonald (1891), G.W.E. Russell (1891), James J. Ellis (1892), and Thomas Wemyss Reid (1899).[8]

Gladstone's eye to posterity, and the popular cult of 'character' which grew up around him, reached its most powerful expression in John Morley's *Life of Gladstone* (1903).[9] This was the biography officially commissioned by the Gladstone family. It fared extremely well, amounting almost 100,000 sales before it went out of print in 1942, and nearly 50,000 sales of shortened editions (one of which appeared in 1927).[10] In Michael Bentley's words, it formed 'the consciousness of an entire generation in its image of Gladstone'.[11] Much has been written about the work,[12] and so we shall restrict ourselves to several points which are of relevance to subsequent inter-war perceptions of Gladstone. Perhaps the crucial feature of Morley as a biographer was his commitment to Liberalism and to a secular belief in progress and political evolution. This, together with his intimacy with Gladstone the 'Grand Old Man', made him peculiarly susceptible to the impression that

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[7] These included *A Chapter of Autobiography* (1868), *Gleanings of Past Years*, 7 vols (1879), and the *Later Gleanings* (1897). An autobiography, unpublished but used by John Morley as material for his *Life of Gladstone*, was started in 1892 and abandoned five years later.

[8] See the discussion of these in Hamer's 'Making of a Political Myth', 30-36.

[9] John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, 3 vols (London, 1903).

[10] M.R.D. Foot, 'Morley's Gladstone: A Reappraisal', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 51 (1969), 368.

[11] Michael Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice 1868-1918* (London, 1987), p. 129. See pp. 128-37 generally for a rewarding discussion of Gladstonian biography.

[12] See Foot, 'Morley's Gladstone'; A.O.J. Cockshut, *Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1974), ch. 10; D.M. Schreuder, 'The Making of Mr Gladstone's Posthumous Career: The Role of Morley and Knaplund as "Monumental Masons," 1903-27' in Bruce L. Kinzer (ed.), *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind: Essays Presented to J.B. Conacher* (Toronto, 1985), pp. 197-243; G.M. Ditchfield, '"Between Boswell and Strachey": Morley's *Life of Gladstone*' in David Ellis (ed.), *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography* (London, 1993), pp. 36-52.

Gladstone's life had taken a largely predetermined course, and that its occasional setbacks and false starts were corrected by character.

As an agnostic, Morley was required by the family to avoid detailed discussion of Gladstone's religious beliefs, and though he paid lip service to its importance in Gladstone's life, this scantiness of detail may have been to his advantage; for in Morley's reading Gladstone was an essentially extrovert political animal. Morley had access to the mountain of archival material jealously hoarded at Hawarden, but he eschewed dwelling upon what he called 'domesticities'. 'The point', he explained to Gladstone's daughter Mrs Drew in 1903, 'was to impress the world with his greatness.'[13] The result was Morley's famous assertion that 'nobody had fewer secrets, nobody ever lived and wrought in fuller sunlight'.[14] Character-led evolution was all. Not surprisingly, subsequent historians have attacked Morley's uncritical attitude towards Gladstone's political atavism;[15] but even for inter-war audiences this reluctance to probe into the subject's mind gave *carte blanche* to a certain amount of speculation. The surviving members of the Gladstone family, as we shall see, felt moved to act upon this in due course.

John, Viscount Morley (1838-1923) was of course an interested party within the tale of late Victorian Liberalism. He had been a Liberal MP from 1883, knew Gladstone well, and was a Cabinet member until 1914. Morley wrote his biography of Gladstone between 1898 and 1903, at a time when the Conservatives had long dominated politics and when Liberalism was in a difficult transitional stage. After Gladstone's death his political legacy had to be reassessed and viable elements of it integrated within the emerging 'New Liberalism'. With Morley's commitment to anti-imperialism and free trade, the *Life of Gladstone* almost served as a manifesto for these policies in the Edwardian period. His conception of Gladstone as a great inspirer of men was also particularly pertinent at a time when the Liberals had yet to find a dynamic leader in the wake of Gladstone's retirement.

These private motivations do not explain the enduring public success of Morley's work. Indeed, the electoral following for Liberalism began to falter after the Great War, and the popularity of the *Life of Gladstone* can hardly be attributed

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[13] Quoted in Ditchfield, "Between Boswell and Strachey", p. 39.
[14] Morley, *Life*, I, p. 6.
[15] One perceptive early critic, Walter Phelps Hall, commented in *Mr. Gladstone* (New York, 1931), p. 7 that Morley's biography was 'tinged with the delightful though hardly appropriate atmosphere of the eighteenth century *Aufklarung*'.

to biased supporters of the party alone. As we saw in Chapter 6, there was felt to be a more general crisis of liberal values in Europe between the wars, and Gladstone's beliefs certainly came to be favourably viewed within this light (see below). The emphasis of Morley and others on Gladstone's uprightness of character arguably appealed more widely to readers who respected the great figures of the past. Character and commitment to public duty still counted in an essentially conservative post-war society.

Naturally not all post-war observers were so easily impressed with Gladstone's solid uprightness of character, and it is as well to deal with these now. Morley's reticence about Gladstone's mental processes positively encouraged a degree of suspicion about the subject's true inner nature. Lytton Strachey, not surprisingly, was one critic to attempt to probe further into Gladstone's mind. The essay on General Gordon in *Eminent Victorians* contained a brilliant five-page vignette of Gladstone in 1884-5. It was not at all clear, Strachey reflected, whether Gladstone was 'the perfect model of the upright man' or 'a crafty manipulator of men and things for the purposes of his own ambition'.[16] Strachey espied both qualities within Gladstone; he was, he contended, rather like an 'ingenuous child', penetratingly intelligent yet strangely incapable of reflection about his inner motivations. Strachey's assessment was echoed in later works such as Osbert Burdett's *W.E. Gladstone* (1927). 'His aspirations confess an inner emptiness', he remarked, 'for you cannot have the strength and want it too.'[17] This was one of the few ways in which Gladstone was brought into more ordinary human perspective after 1918. Like the humanisation of Queen Victoria explored in the previous chapter, this did not necessarily preclude new-found affection for Gladstone.[18] Other commentators were less generous in their analysis of Gladstone's unselfconscious vigour. For them the years after Gladstone's surprise return to politics in 1876 were marked not by a sense of God-driven endeavour but by the

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[16]Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 1918), p. 272.
[17]Osbert Burdett, *W.E. Gladstone* (London, 1927), p. 31.
[18]Consider E.F. Benson's sharp but kindly recollections of Gladstone in *As We Were: A Victorian Peep-Show* (London, 1930), pp. 105-14. 'At lunch there was a discussion about the dismal task of packing a bag, when one was leaving by an early train in the morning; the sponge was wet from the traveller's ablutions and it always oozed dampness into neighbouring linen. Then came the oracle: "You none of you know how to pack your sponge. The only way of packing a sponge is first to wrap it up in your bath towel, and then stamp upon it." Surely he had never done anything all his life but pack sponges in bags for early morning travel! ... Everything that he was engaged in for the moment was of supreme importance' (p. 107).

hunger - conscious or otherwise - for power. André Maurois, consciously looking at Victorian politics through 'the Disraelian lens', characterised the Midlothian Campaign as 'noise', an 'impious and conceited claim to represent the Divine will'.[19] G.E. Buckle, a distinguished Disraeli scholar, in like mood cynically suggested that 'the attitude of moral superiority which Gladstone constantly assumed was, in the Britain of the nineteenth century, worth much in votes'.[20] (Buckle's editing of the *Letters of Queen Victoria* later provoked open warfare with the Gladstone family: see below.)

For the most part, however, Gladstone's perceived greatness of character remained untarnished in the dozen or so studies of his life and career published between the wars. His integrity and commitment to public duty was the source of much of his posthumous appeal. Nowhere was this more evident than in those who reflected on how Gladstone would have behaved in the Depression-ridden 1930s. In 1931 Henry Neville Gladstone (Lord Gladstone of Hawarden), alarmed by what he saw as the dangerously prevalent Keynesianism of the day, commissioned Francis W. Hirst to write a monograph on his father's financial policies.[21] Hirst had this to say:

> This ... study of Gladstonian finance is suggested by the circumstances of our time and by the financial straits in which our country finds itself after a great war ... For Englishmen the parallel between 1931 and 1841 is sufficiently close ... Budget deficits, bad trade, widespread unemployment, an excessive burden of taxation, are experiences common to both; and we have much to learn from the financial policy and financial reforms of Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Gladstone...[22]

The key to Gladstone's financial successes was character. 'Undoubtedly one secret of the amazing power wielded by Gladstone lay in the strength and moral fortitude

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[19] André Maurois, *Disraeli: A Picture of the Victorian Age* (London, 1927), p. 305.
[20] W.F. Monypenny & G.E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* [1910-20] 2 vols (London: revised edn, 1929), II, p. 137.
[21] See Matthew, *Gladstone*, p. 641.
[22] Francis W. Hirst, *Gladstone as Financier and Economist* (London, 1931), p. vii.

of his character'. Hirst wrote. 'This was the mainspring of his public spirit and of all the energies and activities that proceeded therefrom.'[23]

Hirst's views were amplified by Francis Hyde, who in 1934 produced a study of Gladstone at the Board of Trade. Noting the topicality of the issues of Imperial preference and transport legislation, Hyde explained that the purpose of his book was 'to show Gladstone's mental and economic development from a 'dreamer and a schoolman' to one of England's most capable and successful Chancellors of the Exchequer'.[24] Such an unashamedly Whiggish agenda testifies powerfully to the way in which the priorities of early Gladstone biographers survived up to the brink of the Second World War. As late as 1938 Francis Hirst was still urging society to move away from the protective tariffs introduced six years earlier, and to avoid expenditure and borrowing from abroad. 'If only we could revive in the House of Commons and among ministers [Gladstone's] spirit, this regard for public money', he lamented.[25] If the ghost of Morley seems to hang over this passage, then it may in part be because Hirst acted as Morley's chief research assistant on *The Life of Gladstone* over thirty years earlier.

That biography had been authorised by Gladstone's descendants. Indeed, it is clear that Gladstone's reputation for character, though genuinely felt by many, was also helped by careful manoeuvres from the Gladstone family. It is to these manoeuvres that we now turn.

Defensive manoeuvres

A large selection of Queen Victoria's correspondence, as we saw in Chapter 8, was published to generally rehabilitative effect between the wars. Its appearance was given the *imprimatur* of the royal family. Other descendants of eminent Victorians were not so sure that archival material ought to be made public, and the Gladstones - Henry Neville, Lord Gladstone of Hawarden (1852-1935), and Herbert John, Viscount Gladstone (1854-1930)[26] - rendered vigorous defence of

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[23] Hirst, *Gladstone as Financier*, p. 265.
[24] Francis E. Hyde, *Mr Gladstone at the Board of Trade* (London, 1934), p. ix.
[25] Francis W. Hirst, *Gladstonian Finance and Economy* (London, 1938), p. 7.
[26] See *DNB 1921-1930*, pp. 336-9

their father's memory. This suggests an anxiety born, perhaps, of Gladstone's continuing prominence in the public eye.

Access to the Gladstone Papers at Hawarden was tightly controlled, as a 1928 exchange with the foreign scholar Rudolf Kraemer shows. Kraemer was working on a study of 'Gladstone as a Christian Statesman' and wrote to Herbert Gladstone requesting access to his father's Diary. The family twenty-five years earlier had been wary of having John Morley probe into their father's religion, and it comes as little surprise that they were no less wary in later neo-Stracheyan times. Kraemer's intermediary, the historian G.P. Gooch, urged Herbert Gladstone to explain tactfully the reasons for his reluctance. 'I think it is for you to let him know that the Diary is too sacred & intimate to be seen by a stranger,' Gooch wrote, '*whether foreigner or not*'.[27] Herbert Gladstone subsequently rescinded on his refusal once Kraemer's good intentions had been established,[28] and Kraemer joined that favoured few - including Philip Guedalla, Francis Hirst, Francis Hyde, Paul Knaplund, and R.W. Seton-Watson - whose work was enriched by access to the Gladstone Papers in the 1920s and early 1930s. Even after many of the Papers were moved to the British Library in 1930, access to them was restricted until both brothers had died five years later (an arrangement which would otherwise have extended down to 1940).[29]

Herbert Gladstone's keen concern about the use of biographical revelations may not have been entirely misplaced. There remained a lively interest in Gladstone in the 1920s, and the close of the decade - the time at which Kraemer was hapless enough in the first instance to make his request - were particularly fraught for the Viscount. In 1928 he published *After Thirty Years* in response to what he felt were misconceptions which had accumulated about his father over the past few years.[30] The work settled upon attack as the best means of defence, and was at times over-zealous in its drive. It focused upon three areas: Gladstone's private life; his politics after 1876 (the point at which Herbert Gladstone identified the growth of ill-will towards his father); and Gladstone's troubled relations with Queen Victoria.

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[27] G.P Gooch to Herbert Gladstone, 20 November 1928. British Library Add. MS 46086, f. 160.
[28] BL Add. MS 46086, f. 171
[29] This arrangement is described in the *British Museum Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts: The Gladstone Papers* (London, 1953), pp. v-vi.
[30] Herbert Gladstone, *After Thirty Years* (London, 1928).

The first of these areas touched upon a topic which had evidently been worrying Herbert Gladstone for quite some time. In his *Life of Gladstone* Morley had been reticent about 'domesticities', and Herbert Gladstone felt that this had left a gap which enabled certain commentators to write in a 'repellent and untrue way'.[31] He defended his father's memory against the charge that he was unreflective and power-crazed, and did so by re-emphasising a view of Gladstone's uprightness of character based upon the down-to-earth and pragmatic. 'Some hold Mr. Gladstone to have been a visionary', he reflected. 'Exactly what he was not. In private as well as in public life Mr. Gladstone's objective was to get things done.'[32]

This mention of character-led achievement in Gladstone's private life bore upon another of Herbert Gladstone's concerns. In 1925 Captain Peter E. Wright suggested in his *Portraits and Criticisms* that it was Gladstone's habit 'in public to speak the language of the highest and strictest principle, and in private to pursue and possess every sort of woman'. This appeared to be a reference to Gladstone's 'rescue-work' with prostitutes, rumours about which had been so intense in the 1890s that Gladstone had felt compelled to issue his family with a 'Declaration' of marital fidelity two years before he died.[33] It is a measure of Gladstone's posthumous standing that these rumours did not resurface until nearly thirty years later. (It is interesting too that those biographers who alluded to Gladstone's 'rescue-work' after Wright did so only briefly and almost invariably with a generous spirit.)[34]

Herbert Gladstone was however incensed by Wright's comments. There was scant legal protection for the reputation of lately deceased eminent Victorians, and so Herbert Gladstone was forced to find other means of provoking a court case. He accused Wright of calumny and had him expelled from the Bath Club (of which Herbert Gladstone happened to be one of the founders). This led Wright to bring legal cases in 1927 against the club and Herbert Gladstone. The case against Gladstone soon came to turn on the veracity of Wright's original comments; not

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[31] Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. xiii.
[32] Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. 96.
[33] Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 629-30.
[34] See for example Burdett, *Gladstone*, pp. 10-11; Benson, *As We Were*, p. 110; Edinger & Neep, *Grand Old Man*, p. 263; Francis Birrell, *Gladstone* (London, 1933), p. 137. Cf. Hugh Ross Williamson's *Mr Gladstone A Play in Three Acts* (London, 1937), p. 75, which used the anecdote about Gladstone bringing 'one of those unfortunate women' to Downing Street. Upon being warned by a colleague of his extreme rashness, Gladstone remarked that the visit was so that she might be introduced to his wife, who was an energetic charity worker.

surprisingly he proved to be unable to sustain them. On 3 February the jury members declared their unanimous agreement that 'the evidence that has been placed before them has completely vindicated the high moral character of Mr. W.E. Gladstone'. The public reaction to the verdict was telling. There was cheering as the Gladstone brothers emerged from court, and they later received hundreds of letters of congratulation and support from a wide range of correspondents, one of them even coming from the Prime Minister.[35] As Roy Jenkins comments, 'Rarely has a statesman been able to arouse a favourable public demonstration twenty-nine years after his death.'[36]

Another adversary whom Herbert Gladstone pursued in *After Thirty Years* was G.E. Buckle (1854-1935), the Disraelian biographer and editor of the Second Series of the *Letters of Queen Victoria* which had appeared by 1928.[37] Herbert Gladstone argued that both the Disraeli biography and the selection of Victoria's letters showed Buckle's anti-Gladstone stance. The letters covered the years 1862 to 1885, dwelling upon such contentious matters as the Eastern Question, Gladstone's troubled ministry of 1880-5, the developing Irish issue, and more generally Queen Victoria's dislike of Gladstone. Herbert Gladstone suggested that Buckle had selected correspondence deliberately to show his father in an unflattering light and the Conservatives in a flattering one. An important accusation was that Buckle had suppressed the correspondence between Queen Victoria and Lord Salisbury relating to the Conservative cabinet's increasingly favourable attitude towards Home Rule in 1885. Why had Buckle done this to the Conservatives? Was it, Herbert Gladstone suggested, 'for the purpose of making their subsequent opposition to Mr. Gladstone seem consistent and sincere?'[38] This sparked a lively debate in *The Times* when *After Thirty Years* appeared towards the end of 1928.[39] Professor D.L. Savory contended that Buckle had not been at fault in his editorial selection, and that 'Victoria's distrust was caused exclusively by Mr. Gladstone's own conduct'; while Buckle personally responded to Herbert Gladstone's accusation about the Victoria-Salisbury correspondence by observing

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[35] On the Wright case see Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, appendix V; Charles Mallet, *Herbert Gladstone: A Memoir* (London, 1932), pp. 299-302; Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London, 1995), pp. 105-6; Matthew, *Gladstone*, p. 630 n.
[36] Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p. 106.
[37] On Buckle see *DNB 1931-1940*, pp. 116-7.
[38] Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. 416.
[39] See *The Times*, 14, 15, 17, and 19 December 1928.

that no such thing could be found in the Windsor archives, even after scrupulous double-checking once the charge had been made. This was a riposte which Herbert Gladstone attempted to parry, somewhat feebly it must be said, by commenting that this did not prove that the exchange had never happened. Buckle emerged with the upper hand.

What the Gladstone brothers were attempting to do in all these manoeuvres was to control the flow of new historical and personal insights on their father. They feared that these fresh perspectives might compromise Gladstone's long-established reputation for moral integrity and political acumen. Accordingly, in addition to attacking directly those who seemed to bring their father's memory into disrepute, they encouraged writers to produce works which told the 'other half' of the story. Impressed by Philip Guedalla's edition of the Gladstone-Palmerston correspondence,[40] Henry Gladstone commissioned him after the appearance of the Third Series of Victoria's *Letters* in 1932 to produce a more balanced account of Gladstone's relations with the Queen.[41] If his neo-Stracheyan credentials seems to make Guedalla a somewhat unlikely choice as the editor charged obliquely with the task of upholding Gladstone's reputation, he fulfilled his commission conscientiously. The edition was based partly upon the Gladstone Papers, which is to say beyond the direct control of Windsor. The royal household was by all accounts chastened by Victoria's treatment of Gladstone when it was sent the proofs of the work in 1933. Subtle pressure was placed upon Guedalla to be more discreet in his selection of material ('she needs a little "protection from herself", wrote George V's secretary to Guedalla), but he evidently resisted these advances.[42]

The Gladstones' anxiety about their father's memory was therefore not entirely misplaced. It is difficult to tell whether Gladstone's reputation as a man of great nobility of character would have been dramatically challenged without his sons' zealous protectiveness. But the tenor of most biographies, and the response to the Wright case in 1927, suggests that his good reputation was powerfully ingrained in the imagination of people between the wars. In 1930, when many of his

[40] Philip Guedalla (ed.), *Gladstone and Palmerston, being the correspondence of Lord Palmerston with Mr. Gladstone, 1851-1865* (London, 1928). Herbert Gladstone wrote to Guedalla on 6 November 1928 to say that he thought it 'an admirable bit of work ... with great skill you have brought out the contrasts and affinities through that curious comradeship'. BL Add. MS 46086, f. 143.
[41] Philip Guedalla (ed.), *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*, 2 vols (London, 1933).
[42] Matthew, *Gladstone*, p. 513 n.

papers were given to the British Library, their cataloguer A. Tilney Bassett wrote a series of pieces about the material within the collection.[43] These appeared with notable prominence in *The Times* between May and June 1930.[44] The close of the series prompted an interesting set of letters to the newspaper.[45] One called for a national collection of portraits of the 'great statesman'. Another, from a member of the Indian Civil Service who as a boy had met Gladstone, called for a return to Gladstonian standards of courtesy and consideration in government. A third told the story of how Gladstone had taken an interest in a young shop-assistant with academic aspirations who was employed by the writer's father in the 1880s. Gladstone arranged for the boy to be coached in Greek and he went on to pursue a successful university career. 'The incident is a striking illustration of the willingness of this great man,' the correspondent wrote, 'burdened with all the cares of a great Empire, to pause in the midst of his work to interest himself in one struggling student.' Need Henry and Herbert Gladstone really have been concerned that their father would not remain in popular memory the 'Grand Old Man'?

Gladstone and the liberal crisis

Gladstone's character, as we have seem, was widely respected for its own sake. But as we have also seen, his commitment to public duty - in particular to economic restraint - could credibly be proposed for revival in the 1930s as a corrective to contemporary practice. Even more pertinent in a number of writers' minds was Gladstone's charismatic lead (he might have felt 'charismatic' in the literal sense) in liberal causes as they related both to Britain and to the rest of the world. Many of these causes had need still of championing.

The Irish Question was one of the most tortuous political legacies of the late Victorian period. Home Rule, which Asquith's Liberals seemed to have been on the verge of achieving in 1914, was rerouted by the outbreak of the Great War

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[43] He later produced an edition of letters called *Gladstone to his Wife* (London, 1936), based upon the family papers left at or returned to Hawarden after the British Library move.
[44] *The Times*, 27, 28, 30 May, 2, 5, 6, 9, and 10 June 1930. They were republished as A. Tilney Bassett (ed.), *The Gladstone Papers* (London, 1930).
[45] *The Times*, 11, 12, and 13 June 1930.

into the bloody path of the Easter Uprising and the forced division of Ireland in 1920. The loss of life and lingering political resentment cast a long shadow in many minds for the remainder of the inter-war period. Even those of a conservative hue lamented it. 'What fools we were not to have accepted Gladstone's Home Rule Bill', George V remarked to the Prime Minister in 1930. 'The Empire now would not have had the Irish Free State giving us so much trouble and pulling us to pieces.'[46]

But it was amongst surviving Liberals and those sympathetic generally to liberal causes that Gladstone's Home Rule policy seemed one of the great missed opportunities of the Victorian period. For all Gladstone's failure to accept the intransigence of Ulster and the mishandling of his own party over Home Rule, this did not tarnish the view of him as something of a visionary. J.A. Spender commented soberly in 1937 that 'there must be very few to-day who do not regret that the country left unheeded his warnings that the sands were running out on the question of Ireland'.[47] Francis Birrell (the son of Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland between 1908 and 1916) envisaged Gladstone the lone hero beset by radical and Whig recalcitrance, and marvelled 'at the self-confidence with which this old gentleman of seventy-six grappled with a shattering position'.[48] But this characteristically heroic view of Gladstone and Ireland was embraced with greatest enthusiasm by J.L. Hammond in his long study of 1938.[49] Hammond, as we saw in Chapter 4, was for the most part a highly critical commentator on the nineteenth century. He preferred the ideal of responsible patriarchal authority which he saw in classical civilisations. This connected felicitously with an important strand in Gladstone's own personality: his veneration of classical writers and of Homer in particular. Gladstone became, in Hammond's view, a kind of Homeric protagonist in the Irish Question, fated to incomplete understanding of his situation but battling with a 'large imaginative understanding' for civilised values.[50] 'Gladstone saw the whole Irish problem with very different eyes from his contemporaries', Hammond explained. 'He saw on the horizon the shadows of the evils that fill the mind of all liberal Europe today; the dangers of an age in which the organized

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[46] Quoted in Matthew, *Gladstone*, p. 436.
[47] Spender, *Gladstone*, p. 22.
[48] Birrell, *Gladstone*, p. 118.
[49] J.L. Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* (London, 1938).
[50] Hammond, *Gladstone and Irish Nation*, p. 721.

worship of the power of the State threatens to destroy all sense of spiritual values.'[51]

Hammond was clearly alluding here also to the international tensions of the 1930s. With regard to this, Gladstone's belief in self-determination and international arbitration had powerful resonances after 1918. Direct parallels were made between Gladstone's ideal of a Concert of Europe and the League of Nations set up in 1919 to preserve world peace through arbitration. Writers were also painfully aware of the way in which Gladstonian foreign policy had been sidelined in the late nineteenth century by Bismarckian *Realpolitik*; the eventual consequences of this scarcely needed pointing out. 'His principles are now accepted as commonplace at Geneva, the Hague, and Washington', Herbert Gladstone commented of his father in 1928. 'Had the truth of them been realised earlier the world would have been spared the catastrophe of the Great War.'[52] R.W. Seton-Watson also reflected that 'the whole subsequent history of the Near East bears witness to the prophetic vision of Gladstone ... to the clear-sighted in 1878 [Balkan nationalism] was bound to end as we in 1934 see that it has ended'.[53]

It had ended in the bloodiest war yet known to man, and the shockwaves of that conflict toppled monarchies and tested severely the political and economic integrity of empires. Though still powerfully present and energised by an ethos of 'gentlemanly capitalism', the British Empire responded to this challenge, coming increasingly to emphasise the paternalistic colonial aspects of rule.[54] Here again Gladstone's thoughts on imperialism attracted some attention, especially from the Norwegian-born scholar Paul Knaplund.[55] Knaplund, who came from a community

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[51] Hammond, *Gladstone and Irish Nation*, pp. 721, 716.

[52] Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. 108. Cf. R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936), p. 86: 'In the harsh Bismarckian age [Gladstone] stood for the humaner liberalism of the mid-nineteenth century; and the value of that attitude can be appreciated to-day, when we see to what Bismarckianism led.' Cf. also a scene in Williamson's 1937 play *Gladstone*, p. 81:

> GLADSTONE: If Germany announced her intention to dominate Europe by arms in the cause of peace, should we allow it?
> MORLEY: No, I suppose not.
> GLADSTONE: You *suppose* not? You know not. Why, then, should we expect them to allow us? If we arm, everyone arms; and the end of that is war.

[53] R.W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question: A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics* (London, 1935), p. ix. Again, cf. Ensor, *England*, ch. 2 for a view of the eventual consequences of the Treaty of Berlin.

[54] See P.J. Cain & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction 1914-1990* (London, 1993); Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London, 1994), part 4.

[55] On Knaplund see Schreuder, 'The Making of Mr Gladstone's Posthumous Career', esp. pp. 219-25. Cf. Bodelsen's work on mid-Victorian Imperialism, discussed above, p. 128.

which valued morality and family integrity, saw Gladstone as an exponent of advanced colonial benevolence, just as other biographers saw him as the apogee of Liberal progressiveness. In 1927 he suggested that 'Gladstonian doctrines' had been endorsed by the Imperial Conference of the previous year, and that 'when his work and achievements are studied and evaluated it stands clearly revealed that William Ewart Gladstone must be reckoned among the great architects and builders of the British Commonwealth of Nations'.[56] (The Conference of 1926 had issued a declaration that the Dominions were equal with Britain, in voluntary association under the monarchy.)

A later study of 1935 examined Britain's place in Europe partly in the context of the growing domination there of 'Nazis, Fascists, and Bolsheviks'. These were darkening years, and Liberalism as led by a man of Gladstone's stature was felt to be more needed than ever before. 'In this age of uncertainty, distrust, depression, and war scars,' Knaplund ruminated, 'it may be well to study how he hoped to lead mankind in the path of justice and peace.'[57] But, wrote J.A. Spender of Gladstone two years later, 'how far and feeble are the voices raised in Europe to-day for this essential Liberalism, how many and strident those which decide it as a decadent survival from a past age'.[58] This makes us ponder how Gladstone would have responded to Hitler in the late 1930s; we can only speculate that Gladstone would have become one of the 'Guilty Men'. Of course, it is inappropriate to transfer Gladstone to the 1930s and judge him by its standards. However, it is not inappropriate to consider the role of Gladstonianism in the 1930s, for this was one of the ways in which inter-war society drew upon the legacy of the pre-war past. Did it play any role in the appeasement process? It is difficult to say. Certainly Neville Chamberlain was a rather 'Victorian' figure and had been appalled by the waste of life, money, and order in the Great War. He sought to gain 'peace for our time' through an old-fashioned gentlemanly agreement with Hitler, whom he privately described in language strikingly reminiscent of Gladstone as 'a demon figure sprung from the abyss'. On the other hand, historians have emphasised the complex motives for appeasement, including concern for the impact of war upon the Empire, the need to complete rearmament, the anxiety of becoming dependent

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[56] Paul Knaplund, *Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Policy* (London, 1927), p. 164.
[57] Paul Knaplund, *Gladstone's Foreign Policy* (London, 1935), p. xviii.
[58] Spender, *Gladstone*, p. 25.

upon the United States, and so on. These practical concerns harkened back to a long tradition of appeasement which predated the high moral tone of Gladstone's last years.[59] Chamberlain himself appears not to have been a particularly keen admirer of Gladstone, and was if anything more Disraelian in his wily attitude to politics: Goebbels described him as the 'English fox'.[60] Appeasement no doubt owed something to the high moral purpose of the League of Nations, which in turn echoed liberal thinkers such as Gladstone; but we should be careful not to exaggerate the extent of revivalism in an age which Gladstone himself would probably have found alien and deeply perplexing.

Concluding thoughts

Gladstone's biographical standing remained high between the wars, and this was partly because his sons were so protective of it. Their efforts to control the posthumous image of Gladstone contrast naturally with the humanisation of Queen Victoria explored in Chapter 8. There we saw the basic possibilities of humanisation at work: emotional distance, the assumption of an intimate tone, and the use of new biographical sources all contributed to her general rehabilitation. Nevertheless, Victoria was a more distant figure than Gladstone - the 'People's William' - and had more to gain from attention being drawn to the individual behind the royal façade. For all his assiduous self-fashioning as a man whose career had been one long evolution towards the Liberal stance of his old age, Gladstone had little or no façade. To emphasise the private nature was to detract from the cornerstone of the man's identity: the decision to commit himself to public service, and through that to God.

Ironically, though, Gladstone scarcely needed the defence of his sons. This shows the limitations of humanisation. It was not always necessary in the post-Strachey biographical world to bring subjects into more realistic human perspective. Gladstone's posthumous reputation was maintained in a culture which - for all its anti-Victorian snipings - respected greatness of character and dedication to public duty. Gladstone in this respect exemplifies that tendency to emulate

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[59]See Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp. 94-5.
[60]On Chamberlain see Keith Fielding, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946).

aspects of the past explored in Chapter 2. By the 1930s Gladstone's character-led politics were also particularly valued by those who saw a general crisis of liberalism developing in Europe. As with so many other Victorians, the hindsight of the Great War and the apparent course of contemporary affairs did not discredit their memory so much as enhance its appeal.

Chapter Ten

Dickens

Charles Dickens stocked the imaginations of readers with unforgettable characters and scenes more prodigiously than any of his contemporaries. Allowing for the shifting sands of literary reputation, he was possibly the most celebrated of Victorian novelists. But how was his life and work seen after that war which seemed to have put an end to Dickensian *bonhomie* and melodrama? Was it perhaps that the very adjective 'Dickensian' was used as a stick with which to beat the complacencies of the pre-war age? For the most part this was not the case. Many critics dismissed Dickens as a trite Victorian sentimentalist, but a much larger number continued to value and enjoy his novels. This happened in a variety of ways. Some simply read with pleasure as before, or drew fresh consolation from Dickens in the often difficult circumstances of the inter-war years.

Others, however, eventually perceived darker messages and themes within the novels. This is how Dickens stands out from the other subjects in Part Three. Darker readings of Dickens exemplify the depth of which inter-war consideration of the lives of the Victorians was possible. These perceptions of Dickens depended initially upon his humanisation by biographers and critics; but it eventually went far beyond this, into realms of deep artistic and psychological speculation which have placed all subsequent scholarship in its debt. The route to this perception of Dickens was a long one, and we shall begin by considering first the popular view of the novelist and then the critical assessments which finally gave way in the 1930s to the darker Dickens.

The fireside Dickens

There is substantial evidence to show that Dickens - or rather a particular view of Dickens - commanded great popularity between the wars. 'Probably there are copies of one or two of his books lying about in an actual majority of English homes', George Orwell said of Dickens in 1940. 'To a surprising extent all this has entered even into

the minds of people who do not care about it. A music-hall comedian can (or at any rate could quite recently) go on the stage and impersonate Micawber or Mrs Gamp with a fair certainty of being understood, although not one in twenty of the audience had ever read a book of Dickens's right through.'[1] The literary critic Amy Cruse said much the same thing in 1938: 'Dickens, by the persistent Victorians [i.e. those who were still 'Victorian' after 1914], was regarded not as a seer or prophet, scarcely as a writer, but as an intimate and well-loved friend who entered, through his characters, so closely into their lives that they could not think of him with any sort of detachment.'[2] A few years later Sir Ernest Barker concurred with this estimation of Dickens's place in the national culture. 'Some of the novels of Dickens', he argued, were in 'the permanent channels of English reading'.[3]

This was not mere hyperbole. One investigation of reading habits in the public libraries of Newcastle during 1920 showed that 53 out of their 75 copies of Dickens novels were in use on the randomly selected day of survey. *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, and *David Copperfield* were the most popular novels amongst London readers of the time, and *Great Expectations* the least. *David Copperfield* was a bestseller in Dent's Everyman series, outselling all 900 other titles in 1935, the year of the film adaptation starring W.C. Fields as Mr Micawber.[4] On that note, eighteen cinema adaptations were made in England or the United States between the wars, the most popular subjects being *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.[5] These films, it is worth adding, evinced not stigmatisation of 'Dickensian' squalor or the brutality of Victorian working-class life, but veneration of a particular view of history. In their lyricism and pastoral settings they acted as conscious 'heritage' alternatives to the slick *parvenu* style of Hollywood. (Even though, ironically, they often drew upon Hollywood techniques and personnel.)[6]

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[1] George Orwell, 'Charles Dickens' [1940] in Michael Hollington (ed.), *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*, vol I (Mountfield, 1995), p. 746.
[2] Amy Cruse, *After the Victorians* (London, 1938), p. 228.
[3] Ernest Barker (ed.), *The Character of England* (Oxford, 1947), p. 573.
[4] Michael Slater, 'Dickens and Fame 1870-1970: 1920-1940: 'Superior Folk' and Scandalmongers', *The Dickensian*, 66 (1970), 125.
[5] See Ian F. Finlay, 'Dickens in the Cinema', *The Dickensian*, 54 (1958), 106-9. The adaptations were: *Pickwick Papers* (1921); *Twist* (1921, 1922, 1933: all US); *Curiosity Shop* (1921, 1934); *Rudge* (1921); *Christmas Carol* (1935, 1938: US); *Cricket on Hearth* (1922: US); *Dombey* (1931: US); *Copperfield* (1935: US); *Bleak House* (1919); *Dorrit* (1920); *Two Cities* (1925, 1936: both US); *Great Expectations* (1934: US); *Drood* (1935: US).
[6] Jeffrey Richards, 'Dickens - our contemporary' in *Films and British National Identity* (Manchester, 1997), p. 331.

Newspaper tycoons attempted to harness this enthusiasm for Dickens for their own ends. In 1933 there was a battle between Fleet Street rivals to boost their papers' circulation. The *Daily Herald* hit upon the idea of offering registered readers a sixteen-volume set of Dickens. This was a challenge to which the *News Chronicle*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Daily Express* all felt obliged to rise. Over 300,000 readers took up their offer of Dickens sets for ten shillings each, constituting a huge but apparently justifiable short-term loss to the papers concerned.[7] There was at least one interesting outcome to this strange - not unDickensian - series of events. Neville Chamberlain, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, used Dickensian references in 1934 to boost morale about Britain's economic prospects. 'Chamberlain announced that the country had finished the story of Bleak House and could now sit down to enjoy the first chapter of Great Expectations', writes A.J.P. Taylor. 'The public, their houses stocked with free copies of Dickens after the newspaper war, no doubt took the allusion.'[8] (They may also just have seen or heard about the American film version of *Great Expectations* made that year, directed by Stuart Walker.)

There are two points worth making about this clear enthusiasm for Dickens in the 1920s and 1930s. First it was not only, or perhaps not even primarily, élite in nature: Dickens always had commanded a popular audience, and once film versions of the novels began to appear it is evident that his audience relied even less upon contact with the original works. (Though it is noteworthy that the cinema appears also to have encouraged renewed acquaintance with the books, as sales of *David Copperfield* suggest in 1935. It should also be remembered that stage adaptations long preceded film adaptations: many stage performers went on to become actors in Dickens films, such as Seymour Hicks, who had played Scrooge on stage two thousand times before committing his performance to celluloid in 1935.) The second point to make is that this esteem rested upon a particular view of Dickens. Readers preferred the early Dickens novels to the late ones; cinema-goers were given generally lyrical adaptations of similar works; and, as Orwell commented, patrons of the music-hall were most likely to have recognised amongst an array of Dickensian characters Mr Micawber or Mrs Gamp. All this amounted to a view of Dickens which valued the humorous, warm-hearted, and optimistic. The most widely celebrated Dickens between the wars was the fireside Dickens.

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[7] Slater, '1920-1940', 128-9.
[8] A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965), p. 351.

This promises to tell us something about the way in which the pre-war past was used to reflect and explore contemporary concerns. We might suggest that there were three different ways in which Dickens was felt to reflect the popular concerns of inter-war society: his insularity, his homeliness, and his respect for individuality. Of course these do not reflect the sum of inter-war social and cultural life; but they are easily identifiable attributes of a society which for most of the inter-war period voted Conservative, which retained its belief in public duty, decency, suspicion of foreigners, and distinctions of status and class (of one type or another). Middle-class quietism mingled for the most part harmoniously with working-class fatalism to produce a mood which respected individuality within a loose framework of expectations.[9] George Orwell (a perceptive critic of Dickens, incidentally) commented in 1941 on the essential '*privateness* of English life ... the liberty to have a home of your own, to do what you like in your spare time'.[10] His vision of Englishness encapsulated those concerns commonly found in Dickens - insularity, homeliness, and individualism. Though Orwell himself did not take such a simplistic view of Dickens, others did find enduring value in these priorities.

Let us begin with Dickens's insularity. The inter-war period in some senses - certainly in terms of geographical spread - witnessed the climax of Empire. Yet the tenor of Imperialism was changing in the aftermath of the Great War. Increasingly the Empire came to be seen (and was marketed) as a benevolent entity which extended progress and protection throughout its constituent parts.[11] This more thoughtful tone encouraged a degree of introspection. Others were simply less interested in the Empire, or were critics of it. Together this fostered a recognisable Little Englander attitude between the wars. As J.B. Priestley, one of the left-wing critics of Empire, put it in 1934: 'I thought about patriotism. I wished I had been born early enough to have been called a Little Englander. ... That *little* sounds the right note of affection. It is little England I love.'[12] By the 1920s it was recognised that Dickens himself had been

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[9] See Raphael Samuel, 'Exciting to be English' in R. Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol 1: *History and Politics* (London, 1989), pp. xviii-xxviii; David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven & London, 1998), ch. 4; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998).

[10] George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* [1941] (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 39-40.

[11] See Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London, 1994), pp. 428-50; John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), esp. the essays by Richards, MacKenzie, and Constantine.

[12] J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* [1934] (London, 1994), p. 416.

something of a Little Englander in an earlier age. In *The Pickwick Papers* he had succeeded in tapping into a nascent middle-class nationalism; Mr Pickwick was the early Victorian John Bull.[13] And as James Joyce noted in 1912, 'Whenever [Dickens] went far afield - to America (as in *American Notes*) or to Italy (as in *Pictures from Italy*) his magic seems to have failed him, his hand seems to have lost her ancient cunning.'[14] Dickens was always best at writing about English people in English settings. 'Dickens is a production altogether and peculiarly English, as English as Shakespeare or Pope', wrote Osbert Sitwell in 1932. 'All the racial characteristics are to be traced in his work: and this, added to the excitement of his plots, is the explanation of the hold he has always maintained upon a large public, not usually given to reading'.[15]

Dickens's insularity was centred firmly upon the home and reached its climax every year at Christmas. 'Few periodicals', writes Michael Slater of the inter-war period, 'dared to let the season pass without some feature on 'The Spirit of Dickens' or (in more secular mood) 'The Very Dickens of a Christmas'.'[16] It was G.K. Chesterton who before the war had most influentially drawn attention to the link between Dickens, the home, and Christmas. For Chesterton the Dickensian Christmas was redolent with symbolism and meaning. It reflected the triumph of light against darkness, warmth against cold, and kindliness against meanness. But this was no ostentatious triumph; it was too understated and too whimsical - above all too *English* - to fit such a description. 'This ideal of comfort belongs peculiarly to England', he reflected, 'it belongs peculiarly to Christmas; above all, it belongs pre-eminently to Dickens ... One, at least of the essentials of it is smallness, smallness in preference to largeness, smallness for smallness' sake. The merry-maker wants a pleasant parlour, he would not give twopence for a pleasant continent.'[17]

Critics such as André Maurois, who was an admirer of Chesterton,[18] later developed this theme about the link between homeliness and idealism. In his study of 1927, Maurois wrote: 'Dickens believes ... that by preaching a gospel of kindness and by abolishing poverty, men will attain a kind of everlasting Christmas, when all good

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[13] Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London, 1990), pp. 197-8.
[14] James Joyce, 'The Centenary of Charles Dickens' [1912] in Hollington, *Critical Assessments*, p. 632.
[15] Osbert Sitwell, *Dickens* (London, 1932), pp. 35-6.
[16] Slater, '1920-1940', 128.
[17] G.K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* [1906] (London, 1960), pp. 125, 126-7.
[18] Maurois wrote to Miss Collins, a publisher's assistant, on 21 March 1935 to thank her for sending a favourable review of one of his works by Chesterton: 'Personally, I consider his *Dickens* and *Browning* to be two of the best biographies ever written, especially since they are not just biographies alone'. (My translation.) British Library, Add. MS 73237, f. 180.

Englishmen will eat plum-pudding for centuries, drinking punch and making good-natured jokes.'[19] These perspectives deepened in the Depression-ridden 1930s, when the gulf between rich and poor widened sharply. The *Daily Worker* in 1932 exclaimed: 'Scrooge still lives! ... The modern Scrooge is a monster, whose malice far surpasses that of his miserly namesake.'[20] Most commentators, however, celebrated the Dickensian Christmas as a fantasy in which they momentarily escaped economic need. 'Thanks to Dickens Christmas still lives', wrote Max Pemberton in 1931; the Dickensian Christmas relied upon priceless cosiness rather than expensive materialism. Links with Dickens's own age became valuable commodities as people born in the 1860s recalled Christmases of their youth for children of the 1930s.[21] In like manner, many of the brightly-lit, cheerful film adaptations of Dickens in the 1930s appear to have been conscious responses to those grim economic circumstances which hit many homes so hard. Jeffrey Richards refers to them as 'fantasies of goodwill'.[22]

Dickens's concern with individualism was a further strand of his popular appeal. Readers enjoyed Dickens's respect for the common man and his eccentricities, finding in it a congenial reflection of national character. This was, after all, the age of universal suffrage. It was also an age which had vanquished (at least for the meantime) the threat of foreign oppression. Indeed, during the Great War a feel for those qualities which could be characterised as Dickensian had played its part. Maurois recalled in 1927 that 'Frenchmen were often surprised, observing English officers and soldiers, by this innocent, almost childish, cheerfulness, that joy of action, that urge to organize a game in any circumstances - all Dickensian traits'.[23] The wartime president of the Dickens Fellowship, W. Walter Crotch, also wrote two engrossingly hyperbolic studies at the time, *The Soul of Dickens* (1916) and *The Secret of Dickens* (1919). In the latter, completed in the month of the armistice, he wrote that:

> In summoning the public interest once more to the greatest novelist of modern times, I feel that I am doing the specific work of our Western

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[19] André Maurois, 'The Philosophy of Dickens' [1927; English trans. 1931] in Hollington, *Critical Assessments*, p. 682.
[20] Quoted in Paul Davis, *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven & London, 1990), p. 136. I am grateful to Professor Malcolm Andrews for bringing this fascinating work to my attention.
[21] Davis, *Lives and Times*, p. 143.
[22] Richards, 'Dickens', p. 334.
[23] Maurois, 'Philosophy of Dickens', p. 683.

civilisation against the hated reactionaries of Germany. ... Any study of Dickens means a spiritual arming of the people for Democracy. His multitudinous portraitures of the common man, his delineations of the common soul, his revelations of the common heart, constitute, *in toto*, the most powerful vision of Democracy that was ever conceived.[24]

Politics did not subsequently lose their debt to Dickens. Many new readings played upon his putative left-wing tendencies. Chesterton had already talked of Dickens's 'patriotism' in the eighteenth century sense of a critic of 'Old Corruption'.[25] One Labour MP later spoke in 1924 of the hope of 'making our great nation into one great family', and that behind this aspiration 'stands the form of Charles Dickens'.[26] George Bernard Shaw claimed in 1937 that *Little Dorrit* was 'a more seditious book than *Das Kapital*'.[27] Perhaps the most influential Marxist reading of Dickens, Thomas A. Jackson's *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical*, also appeared in this year. Jackson claimed that Dickens might easily have become 'with a little outside aid' a Socialist or Communist.[28] These left-wing perspectives inevitably commanded a smaller following in the inter-war period. Almost certainly the less confrontational conservative gloss on Dickens was held, consciously or otherwise, in higher esteem. This was a view which played upon Dickens's affection for individualism within a naturally hierarchical society. 'Each of us that has gone through this world with his eyes and his heart open,' commented Stanley Baldwin, a Vice-President of the Dickens Fellowship, 'has met every one of Dickens's characters in some position or another in life'.[29] In his attraction to Dickens's love of personality, Baldwin was at one with left-wing writers such as Orwell and Priestley. For Priestley, Dickens's appeal could simply be explained by the fact that 'We English have always had a zest for character, for sharply defined and vivid personalities.'[30]

This was the fireside Dickens, the writer who dwelt upon cosiness, good cheer, and lovable eccentricity. For many people Dickens remained as valid - perhaps more valid - after the Great War as ever. This has important things to tell us about

[24] W. Walter Crotch, *The Secret of Dickens* (London, 1919), pp. xiv-xv.
[25] Chesterton, *Dickens*, pp. 115, 211.
[26] Quoted in Slater, '1920-1940', 132.
[27] On Shaw and Dickens see Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw* (London, 1997), p. 24.
[28] Thomas A. Jackson, *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical* [1937], in Hollington, *Critical Assessments*, p. 693.
[29] Stanley Baldwin, *On England* (London, 1927), p. 5.
[30] J.B. Priestley, *The English Novel* [1927] (London, 1935), p. 3.

continuity of attitudes across the years, particularly with an audience which was popular as well as élite. But what do these perspectives tell us about the role of biography in perceptions of Dickens's novels? In a way not very much. People tended to assume that Dickens's beliefs were reflected unproblematically in the earlier, generally more optimistic novels. The state of Dickensian scholarship did little to rectify this. Most Dickens experts were amateurs concerned primarily with the anecdotal and arcane, such as identifying original settings for scenes from the novels or solving the mystery of Edwin Drood. With the notable exception of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, King Edward VII Professor of English at Cambridge in the 1920s, academics equally paid little attention to Dickens.[31] This was partly because English Literature remained as yet a relatively 'new' academic subject;[32] but it was also because biographical perspectives had yet to enter into that fruitful dialogue with literary criticism, the course of which we shall trace in the next sections.

Dickens and the critics[33]

There had always been widespread critical disparagement of Dickens's work. During his lifetime the novels had been attacked for their lack of realism; after his death in 1870 these attacks were redoubled. Critics like G.H. Lewes saw Dickens as a peddler of often defective goods. Some of his less successful characters, Lewes notoriously suggested in 1872, were like 'frogs whose brains have been taken out for physiological purposes'.[34] Dickens's confidence in tradition placed him even further beyond the pale with the growing popularity of realists such as Ibsen, Zola, and Dostoevsky in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The nadir of his reputation came between his death in 1870 and the turn of the century, at which point studies by George Gissing (1898) and G.K. Chesterton (1906) did something to begin the reversal of critical opposition.[35]

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[31] See Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Charles Dickens and Other Victorians* (Cambridge, 1925). It is only fair to add that Quiller-Couch saw Dickens in traditional terms, as the prophet of good cheer.
[32] See Brian Doyle, 'The Invention of English' in Robert Colls & Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness 1880-1920: Politics and Culture* (Beckenham, 1986), pp. 89-115.
[33] This is a necessarily brief overview of the subject. For much greater detail see George H. Ford, *Dickens and his Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism Since 1836* (Princeton, 1965); Philip Collins (ed.), *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1971); Hollington, *Critical Assessments*.
[34] G.H. Lewes, 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism' [1872] in Hollington, *Critical Assessments*, pp. 454-67.
[35] See K.J. Fielding, '1870-1900: Forster and Reaction', *The Dickensian*, 66 (1970), 85-100; Ford, *Dickens*

Much opposition nevertheless remained. Subsequent literary criticism became imbued with a recognisable anti-Victorianism which depicted Dickens as very much the man of early and mid-Victorian sensibility. Critics argued that he was complacently optimistic, tastelessly sentimental, condescending towards women, and unreflective about human nature and experience. Aldous Huxley levelled the charge of sentimentality.[36] Arnold Bennett disliked Dickens's lack of realism. Bloomsbury had little time for the lack of interest in psychology evinced by Dickens's novels.[37] Lord David Cecil praised his fantastic turn of mind but thought him 'sensationally unequal'.[38]

But like Cecil, almost all critics felt moved to acknowledge - sometimes grudgingly - Dickens's greatness in one area or another. One of the most important themes of this thesis has been the ambivalent nature of anti-Victorianism. It ought therefore to come as little surprise that some of the criticism of Dickens suggests a private attack on the past. For Stefan Zweig it was Dickens's outstanding qualities of imagination and humour which transcended 'the vapid emotional content of the work'. His comments suggest a personal agenda, though Zweig did not have an English Victorian upbringing himself. Perhaps though he found in anti-Victorianism some connection with his own feelings. 'It is only when one is able to hate the insincerity and narrow-mindedness of the Victorian era with one's whole heart and soul', he fulminated, 'that one can fully appreciate the amazing genius of the man who could make this smug and detestable world, make it not only interesting but even lovable'.[39] Evelyn Waugh offers an even more striking example of the exploration of filial ambivalence through Dickens. His father Arthur was once an editor of Dickens and took the chair at meetings of the Fellowship. He also rewarded (or subjected) the young Evelyn to after-dinner readings of his most revered author. Father and son did not get on well.[40] Some years later Evelyn exacted his revenge at the end of *A Handful of Dust* (1934). Semi-autobiographical in its depiction of marital collapse, the novel closed with the hero Tony Last wandering lost through the Brazilian jungle. There he

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and Readers, Part 3.

[36]Huxley attacked Dickens's depiction of the death of Little Nell. See Aldous Huxley, 'Vulgarity in Literature' [1930] in *Music at Night* (London, 1994), pp. 224-8.

[37]E.M. Forster in his 1927 Clark Lectures at Cambridge, subsequently published as *Aspects of the Novel* [1927] (Harmondsworth, 1990) famously criticised Dickens's characters for being 'nearly all flat' (p. 76). Virginia Woolf in 1925 wrote that she found Dickens amongst great novelists 'the least personally present in his books'. Quoted in Slater '1920-1940', 123.

[38]David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Rehabilitation* [1934] (London, 1943), p. 27.

[39]Stefan Zweig, 'Dickens' [1920; English trans. 1931] in Hollington, *Critical Assessments*, p. 646.

[40]See Selina Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography* (London, 1994), pp. 13, 278-9, 316-7.

met Mr Todd, who persuaded his young guest - in a strange inversion of the filial relationship - to read aloud to him every day from a set of Dickens novels. Tony went from being a guest to a captive as Mr Todd deliberately frustrated every attempt at escape or rescue. Waugh's grim joke - as the proximity of 'Todd' to the German 'Tod' underlined - was that it was purgatory to have to read Dickens. Dickens on this count was part of the moribund old order; to attack him was to attack the novelist of cloying Victorian constraints.

It is clear that these perspectives continued to rely upon a rather indistinct sense of Dickens the artist. Like the popular fireside view of Dickens, critics tended to see him as a reflection of his age rather than one who responded to it. Literary observers had yet to integrate Dickens within the canon of serious artists. With English Literature as yet still a fledgling subject, observers felt tentative about identifying the enduring qualities of his work. 'We are beginning to discover that Dickens *was* an artist,' John Middleton Murry observed in 1923, 'but, of course, only in part. When we have discovered which are the parts we shall breathe again.'[41] This project did not get very far with the dominant trend of criticism in the 1920s. A generation of young critics rejected accessibility and overt moral, political, or social 'messages' in favour of a concentration on formal aspects and abstraction as the basis of literary merit. This in itself was a repudiation of the pre-war past and what was seen to be its corrupting belief in various forms of 'progress' in literature.[42] Needless to say, this did not stand Dickens's populism and moralising tendencies in particularly good stead. Percy Lubbock, a Jamesian disciple, gave Dickens a mixed press in *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) for his tendency towards being an omniscient narrator. Confidence in omniscience had been undermined by Modernism and especially by the Great War.

A better opportunity to view Dickens's collected novels as more than a row of Victorian antiques was potentially offered in the 1930s. Advanced literary thought was dominated then by a group of critics led by I.A. Richards and his pupil F.R. Leavis. Leavis's *Scrutiny* group was committed to upholding an Arnoldian perspective on modern life, deploring the cheapening of morality and the impact of industrial capitalism on traditional modes of existence. It was widely known that Dickens too had been a critic of many aspects of modernity, but again his sentimentality was seen

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[41] John Middleton Murry, 'Dickens' [1923] in Hollington, *Critical Assessments*, p. 677.
[42] See Chris Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present* (London, 1996), ch. 3.

to get in the way of things. Indeed it was this sentimentality which, in Q.D. Leavis's mind, strengthened the hold which the industrial middle-classes had commanded over nineteenth century England. For her, Dickens was a purveyor of 'crude emotional exercises' to the middle-class audience which spent its new-found disposable income on cheap serials.[43] Her husband F.R. Leavis had slightly more ambivalent feelings about Dickens, thinking him in some respects 'great', but usually lacking in 'concentration and flexibility in the interpretation of life'. He later excluded Dickens from the 'great tradition' in his eponymous study of 1948, but included a favourable closing chapter on *Hard Times*. This was a work which impressed Leavis as a serious attempt to stand outside Victorian society in order to criticise it.[44]

This gradual placing of Dickens in relation to the literary canon suggests that critics often took a rather simplistic view of his Victorianism. Some simply ignored it as irrelevant to aesthetic criteria. Many others characterised him as a fairly straightforward embodiment of his age. To a popular audience his 'Victorian' sentimentality and optimism might be appealing; to many literary critics it was less so. There was however eventually something of a breakthrough in perspectives on Dickens as an artist and commentator on Victorian society, and this breakthrough owed itself to changing views of Dickens the man. It is to these changes that we now turn.

The darker Dickens

The humanisation of Dickens was, like that of other Victorian figures between the wars, amongst other things the result of emotional distance and the use of new biographical knowledge. The latter could be a delicate matter. The royal family, convinced of its favourable outcome, had encouraged greater awareness of Queen Victoria's life; Gladstone's sons, less convinced and in the event needlessly anxious, had attempted to restrict access to new material. Awareness of forgotten or previously unexplored aspects of Dickens's life proved more difficult to control. He was too famous for such an approach to be viable. Revelations were consequently

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[43] Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* [1932] (London, 1965), pp. 156-8.

[44] See Ian MacKillop, *F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (London, 1995), pp. 254-8. Interestingly enough, MacKillop notes that Leavis, like Waugh, experienced weekly Dickens readings in the family home from an enthusiastic father (p. 31).

made through a combination of defensive admission and press exposé. As this suggests, Dickensian biography sold copy between the wars, especially when it related to a private life previously considered to be unimpeachably decent.

It was speculation on Dickens's amorous relationships with three women - Maria Beadnell, his sister-in-law Mary Hogarth, and the actress Ellen Ternan - which proved to be most controversial. All these relationships were interconnected emotionally, for the composite thesis was that the sudden end of the love-affair with Maria Beadnell in 1833 led Dickens to marry the 'wrong' Hogarth sister Catherine three years later. (To make matters worse, Mary Hogarth caused Dickens further anguish by dying a year subsequently.) The marriage eventually foundered in 1858 amidst rumours about Dickens's liaison with Ellen Ternan. Like the rumours regarding Gladstone's 'rescue-work', speculation was widespread at the time but passed away in the immediate aftermath of the novelist's death. They returned with considerable force in the inter-war period.

The timing of these revelations - or rather recollected scandals - was intimately bound up with the intellectual and cultural tone of this period. In the wake of Freud and Jung, people were more interested in psychology, and more prepared to delve pruriently into sexual matters. (Dickens, with his emphasis upon childhood experience, offered especially suggestive material to psychoanalysts: one of Freud's favourite novels was *David Copperfield*.) The Victorians were also becoming more recognisably 'human', and though as we have seen there was widespread esteem still for Dickens's moralising tendencies, there was little reason why post-war readers should treat him as infallible. Scholarship was also gaining momentum, particularly in 'new' subjects like English Literature. Between the wars many of Dickens's letters were tracked down and eventually published, the most notable collection being the three-volume Nonesuch edition of 1937-8.

How did Dickens's relations with these women fare in such a context? Initially Sir Henry Fielding Dickens (1849-1933) attempted to restrict the availability of new biographical insights on his father, rather as Herbert Gladstone did with his own father in the 1920s and early 1930s.[45] And just as Gladstone's papers were in safe keeping at the British Library until after the death of the last of his children, so were many of Dickens's letters to his wife lodged at the British Library under the same

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[45] On H.F. Dickens see Paul Schlicke (ed.), *The Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* (Oxford, 1999), p. 91.

conditions. (In fact the two collections came into public availability within about a year of one another: the Dickens in 1934, the Gladstone in 1935.) There, however, the similarities end. Henry Dickens was fighting a losing battle against his father's appeal to scandalmongers and its consequent effect on outraged Dickensians.[46] The Dickens Fellowship put pressure on Henry Dickens to allow the record to be set straight about Maria Beadnell. He yielded, and the correspondence was published in 1936 in a collection edited by Walter Dexter. Dexter also presided over the three-volume set of letters published in the Nonesuch edition of Dickens's works in 1937-8. The only restriction here was that it was part of the complete set, and as such was only available to rich private collectors and academics with well-stocked university libraries. *The Dickensian* urged: 'They are too valuable to be kept for the select few. ... The world at large must have them as soon as possible'.[47]

This was partly because the letters were felt to serve a corrective purpose to the rumours already in wide circulation. By this stage Dickens's relationship not just with Maria Beadnell but also with Mary Hogarth and Ellen Ternan were in wide public circulation. In 1928 a biography written in the form of a novel had appeared called *This Side Idolatry*. The author - one 'Ephesian' (C.E. Bochhoffer Roberts) - played upon the traumas in Dickens's life caused by his amorous impulses. In 1934 Thomas Wright published even more extensive revelations about Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan, including the suggestion that she had given birth to a child by Dickens who died in infancy. Five years later a memoir by Gladys Storey of her friend Kate Perugini (1839-1929), Dickens's last surviving daughter, confirmed these allegations, adding that Dickens had often been an appalling father.[48] J.W.T. Ley in *The Dickensian* rather feebly tried to deny the veracity of the tale, but in doing so admitted that Dickens's experience of marriage had not been happy. It all stemmed, he suggested, from the broken love-affair with Maria Beadnell. 'Dickens was ... less able to control himself and suddenly his dreams of the Maria Beadnell that never was assumed bodily form in the shape of Ellen Ternan', Ley speculated. 'She was never the real cause of the trouble; she was simply a circumstance arising from the trouble.'[49]

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[46] See Slater, '1920-1940', 133-140; Edward Wagenknecht, 'Dickens and the Scandalmongers' in *Dickens and the Scandalmongers: Essays in Criticism* (Norman, 1965), pp. 3-49.
[47] *The Dickensian*, 35 (1939), 31.
[48] See Gladys Storey, *Dickens and Daughter* (London, 1939), esp. pp. 90-4.
[49] *The Dickensian*, 35 (1939), 252.

Hugh Kingsmill thought the revelation of Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan 'the most important contribution to the biography of Dickens in this century'.[50] More generally, it is clear that the publication of new material on Dickens in the 1930s profoundly affected critical views of his work. Alongside the fireside Dickens there came into view a much darker figure who appealed both to those interested in more 'human' Victorians and to the literary critics. No longer was Dickens considered by many to be merely the reflection of Victorian literary shallowness. This darker Dickens was a driven soul: unhappy, traumatised by his impoverished youth and unhappy marriage, often at odds with society, and a channel for all manner of dark symbolism and psychological resonance. Dickens was finally integrated into literary criticism as a result of these perspectives around 1941. We can date this so precisely because this was the year in which two studies appeared to which virtually all subsequent Dickensian scholarship has been indebted. These were the readings of Humphry House and Edmund Wilson.[51] House emphasised Dickens's anger with forms of mental control (such as evangelical religion), and his almost neurotic obsession with good and evil. Wilson went even further. Drawing upon recent revelations about Ellen Ternan and the Nonesuch edition of the letters, he presented a psychoanalytic reading of Dickens. Wilson suggested that Dickens had a riven soul. The cheerful, respectable public face - which was genuine - was belied by a deep subconscious rage against the world, and particularly against parental figures. This meant that the novels were frequently marked by sharp differences of characterisation between kindly and malevolent people. In the later novels, however, Dickens's art came to be better integrated; John Jasper in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, for example, was suggested by Wilson to be a portrait of Dickens's own divided soul. The later novels, for long underrated, accordingly began to come into their own.

All this embodied a new view of Dickens the man and artist. This interpretation of him soon came to be complemented by much darker renditions of the novels on screen. Sergei Eisenstein pointed to the cinematic possibilities of Dickens's narrative structure in a famous essay of 1944. Several years later David Lean went on to produce his superbly atmospheric and often lugubrious versions of *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948).[52] Some cinema-goers were confused by the

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[50] Quoted in Michael Holroyd, *Hugh Kingsmill: A Critical Biography* (London, 1964), p. 149.
[51] Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (London, 1941); Edmund Wilson, 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges' in *The Wound and the Bow* (Boston, 1941), pp. 1-93.
[52] See the interesting discussion of these adaptations in Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol 1: *Past*

talking cows at the beginning of *Great Expectations*. Lean defended himself: 'We were not aiming at reality. What we wanted to create all the time was the world as it seemed to Pip when his imagination was distorted with fear. That, after all, was what Dickens himself did.'[53] Dickens remained for many the novelist of good cheer; but amongst the élite he was finally coming to be accepted as an artist who offered fascinating insights into the human psyche.

Concluding thoughts

Like Gladstone, Dickens's popular reputation remained high in the inter-war years. But élite perceptions of him, mediated through the arbiters of literary fashion, often lagged some way behind in esteem. Biography however was to prove the means by which Dickens as man and artist was to be rehabilitated. Initially, of course, people did not set out with the conscious intention of altering perceptions of Dickens by drawing attention to his private life. Distinguished figures such as Dickens and Gladstone (whose private life, as we have seen, was also scrutinised) attracted scandalmongers with an eye to making lucrative publications or newspaper deals. It is interesting that the Victorians should have been so commodified: this shows the continuing appeal of the period, even if part of the appeal was the sometimes less noble enjoyment of seeing worthies of the past shrunk to more recognisable human perspective.

Yet this interest in humanisation is not to be characterised as mere *schadenfreude*. Many people wanted to make or retain connections with the past, and in an age more responsive to psychology it was often necessary to engage in what might in its purest sense be called 'debunking'. The Victorians were by no means always diminished after the event. Queen Victoria, as we saw in Chapter 8, emerged as a generally more lovable figure. Dickens did not emerge as such a lovable figure by the end of the 1930s; but he emerged as a far greater artist than had ever been thought. The depth of these new readings of Dickens, though not flawless, show the sophistication of which perceptions of the past was possible. Of all four subjects in Part Three, it is arguably Dickens who benefited most from humanisation.

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and Present in Contemporary Culture (London, 1994), pp. 419-20; Richards, 'Dickens', pp. 341-2.
[53] Kevin Brownlow, *David Lean* (London, 1996), p. 211.

Chapter Eleven

Wilde

In the previous chapter we witnessed the extent to which humanisation could open deeper perspectives on the mind and work of Victorian artists such as Dickens. Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde had relatively little in common. In fact, Wilde had been one of those denigrators who delayed Dickens's eventual rehabilitation. 'One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing', Wilde quipped in the 1890s.[1] On the other hand, both achieved remarkable celebrity in their day, and both as a result toured the United States to great acclaim. In hindsight they were seen to be amongst the most representative Victorians of their time. Wilde, never slow to advertise himself even in defeat, helped to make sure of this; in *De Profundis* he observed: 'I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age.'[2]

What were the implications of this for Wilde's inter-war standing? It might be presumed that Wilde was rehabilitated in an age more responsive to anti-Victorianism and tolerant towards deviation from the sexual norm. But this was not the case. Society remained very Victorian in its attitude towards Wilde's homosexuality, and this made it difficult to separate the life from the work; despite Wilde's own protestations about the true nature of art, critics often took a traditional attitude towards his work by judging it to be immoral. In contemplating the modernity of Wilde, some found his writings to be of lasting interest and vitality, but many others found them dated and morally reprehensible. Subjecting the private lives of the Victorians to searching psychological readings therefore did not always yield fruitful results. There were certainly rich possibilities with Wilde, but these possibilities were largely eschewed. Attempts at humanisation were avoided not for reasons of enduring esteem, as with Gladstone, but for reasons of continuing disdain which were distinctly Victorian in character. We begin by looking at the underlying reasons for this disdain, before examining how Wilde fared amongst his early biographers, and finally considering how critics viewed the modernity of his work.

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[1] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth, 1988), p. 441.
[2] *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London, 1994), p. 1017.

'The unspeakable vice of the Greeks'[3]

The history of homosexuality in the twentieth century began with an Irishman drinking hock and seltzer in gloomy silence at the Cadogan Hotel. This was the scene, recounted by the writer Frank Harris, on the afternoon in April 1895 that two detectives arrived to arrest Oscar Wilde for committing acts of gross indecency.[4] The prosecution of Wilde following an unsuccessful libel case against the Marquess of Queensberry need famously never have happened. The collapse of the suit made it inevitable that there would be a counter-reaction, and that Wilde would be tried for the accusations which had come to light concerning his relations with a number of young men. It was only a matter of time before a warrant was issued for his arrest. Wilde knew this as well as anyone, and his friends urged him to take the time-honoured route of fleeing to the continent before it happened. The police, as ever, were accommodating in such matters. Wilde chose not to go, and spent the time when he might have been making his way to Dover drinking wine in a London hotel. Biographers have never been able to establish the reasons for Wilde's reluctance to flee. Suggestions have been made that he was variously resigned, defiant, engrossed with the idea of his impending fate, or hectored by a mother of Irish nationalist sympathies into standing up to the English bullies. (Others were not so dilatory; as soon as Wilde's arrest was made public, some six hundred men travelled from Dover to Calais on a crossing which would normally have ferried only a tenth of that number.)[5] Whatever Wilde's motivations may have been, in facing the prosecution and its outcome, he effectively inaugurated the public history of homosexuality in Britain.[6] In so doing he helped to shape the public perception of homosexuality by which he and many others would be judged for the following seventy years. Wilde gave a face, a voice, and above all a style (cultured, effeminate, decadent, ironic) to the love which could be traced in English literature for centuries

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[3] E.M. Forster, *Maurice* [1914; not published until 1971] (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 50.
[4] Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde* [1916] (London, 1997), pp. 141-2.
[5] Ellmann, *Wilde*, p. 430.
[6] For such readings see Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London, 1988); Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (New York, 1993); Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Movement* (London, 1994); Hugh David, *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality 1895-1995* (London, 1997), ch. 1.

but which dared not speak its name.[7] As the hero of E.M. Forster's eponymous novel *Maurice* was to declare in 1914, 'I'm an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort.'[8]

Wilde's fall had such a dramatic impact upon society because it came at a time when the Victorians were deeply worried about their personal, national, and Imperial identities. Homosexuality itself did not attract coherent cultural and legal stigmatisation until the late nineteenth century.[9] Sodomy had been made a capital offence in 1533, and would remain one until 1861. A sin once punishable by canon law had been secularised and politicised by Henry VIII as part of his break with Rome; now, in the 1860s, the law against sodomy was being made to serve another master: Victorian middle-class morality.[10] Soon there followed Labouchère's amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which created the new category of 'acts of gross indecency' between men. It criminalised in addition to sodomy *any* sexual activity between men in public or private. This was a crucial cultural watershed. It was an attack not upon a type of activity but upon the 'type' who committed that activity; it intimated for the first time that there was a 'norm' against which deviants might be defined.

The Victorians, as Michael Mason has recently suggested, were not so much prudish about sex as obsessed with it: they were all too aware of its power and potential for social disruption.[11] The establishment increasingly attempted to police sexuality as the nineteenth century wore on. Most of this, of course, related to female prostitutes and their male clientele; indeed the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 related primarily to such prostitutes and to under-age girls. Awareness of homosexuality remained extremely patchy until the 1870s and 1880s. The work on sexuality by French and German scholars such as Casper and Tardieu was ignored, mainly because many felt that foreign depravities would never naturally occur in England. In a famous case in 1871 involving two transvestites - 'Stella' (Ernest Boulton) and 'Fanny' (Fred Park) - the doctor called upon to examine the suspects for evidence of sodomitical behaviour did not quite know how to proceed. An anonymous letter

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[7] See Mark Mitchell & David Leavitt (eds), *Pages Passed from Hand to Hand: The Hidden Tradition of Homosexual Literature in English from 1748 to 1914* (London, 1998).
[8] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 139.
[9] There is a large literature here, but see esp. Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1977); idem, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London, 1981), ch. 6.
[10] Cohen, *Talk on Wilde Side*, pp. 118-9.
[11] Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, 1994) and *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford, 1994).

suggested that he try the work of Tardieu, with which he was unfamiliar. The defence counsel subsequently attacked him for having recourse to 'the newfound treasures of French literature upon the subject - which thank God is still foreign to the libraries of British surgeons'.[12]

Not all commentators were so complacent. Many were concerned about the implications of evolutionary theory. At a personal level this encouraged closer scrutiny of whether people were behaving in the best interests of mankind: that is to say, whether they were engaging in procreative or non-procreative sex. At a broader level, the issue of social efficiency was felt to be similarly, if not more, important. There was mounting evidence after the 1870s that Britain's place in the world was being challenged by Germany and the United States. This might equally spell disaster for the Empire; the spectre of the fallen Roman Empire haunted late Victorian imaginations. The answer, many felt, was to improve the health of the young - physically, emotionally, and morally.[13] The heart of Empire was to be the healthy family. It would be necessary to regulate deviant sexuality with ever tighter control. This led homosexual apologists such as J.A. Symonds (1840-1893) and Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) to argue that male homosexuality was perfectly healthy and bore the noble *imprimatur* of Platonic thought. Carpenter, a political as well as a sexual radical, believed that tolerance of homosexuality was crucial to the achievement of a Socialist Utopia. He published his *Homogenic Love, and its Place in a Free Society* early in 1895.[14]

Its timing was unfortunate, for at this point Wilde was becoming embroiled in the legal proceedings against Queensberry which would ultimately lead him to disaster. Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1893) - an unashamedly neo-Darwinist study - had already devoted a separate chapter to Wilde and the threat his cultivated immorality posed to the health of society. The trial of Wilde was also the prosecution of a whole body of modern ideas, and the establishment of his homosexual activities was the legal means by which a verdict of 'guilty' was passed upon them. But his cleverness and his homosexuality were not the essence of what was being attacked in 1895: it was the establishment's fear of how these things might harm the virility of the

[12] Quoted in Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, p. 101.
[13] See J.A. Mangan & James Walvin (eds), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinities in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1987), esp. the essays by Springhall, Richards, Mangan, and MacKenzie.
[14] On Carpenter see Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge, 1980). For Carpenter's influence on E.M. Forster see the terminal note to *Maurice*.

generation of young men which would carry nation and Empire through to the twentieth century. It was a crucial imperative on the part of the prosecution to establish that Wilde had 'corrupted' the young men with whom he had associated. It was of course laughable to think that the morals of the 'renters' in question had not long since been 'corrupted', but that was not felt to be the point. Wilde was over-cultivated and effete, and these qualities were inimical to an establishment ardently committed to inculcating masculine vigour amongst the nation's youth; flagrantly defying its beliefs, the establishment branded Wilde immoral.

The repercussions of Wilde's scapegoating were huge. The stereotype which he and his prosecutors generated was of a deliberate flouter of conventional morality, an effeminate corrupter of the masculinity of youth. This coloured perceptions of homosexuality for decades to come. Progressive scholars from before the time of Wilde's fall had admittedly been discussing whether homosexuality was a mental affliction, and this was the line subsequently adopted by Havelock Ellis in *Sexual Inversion* (1897). But such suggestions did not get very far with the establishment or the general public. (Indeed, Ellis's book was removed from circulation a year after its publication, and did not reappear in England until 1935.)[15] The Edwardians proved equally adept at eschewing anything other than moral views of deviant sexuality, no doubt partly because the theme of national efficiency was more urgent than ever before: the Boer War had exposed the fragility of the nation's youth.[16]

Attitudes towards homosexuality had not greatly changed by the time of the Great War. The war if anything heightened a sense of moral panic about strangers and subversives in the midst of society; dachshunds were stoned in the street, and even the royal family had been forced to anglicise its surname. Stranger still - though widely supported at the time - was the case of Noel Pemberton Billing (1881-1948) and his attack on sexual deviancy.[17] Billing was the Independent MP for East Hertfordshire and editor of *The Imperialist* (formerly *The Vigilante*). In January 1918 he published in it an

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[15]See Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 154-64.

[16]Cf. G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, 2 vols [1904] (New York, 1921), I, pp. viii, 436: 'Along with the sense of the immense importance of further coordinating childhood and youth with the development of the race, has grown the conviction that only here can we hope to find true norms against the tendency to precocity in home, school, church, and civilization generally, and also to establish criteria by which to both diagnose and measure arrest and retardation in the individual and the race. ... Perversions originate in these years. Its causes are many and difficult to proportion. Prominent amongst these is precocious mental development'. Naturally, Wilde became the archetype of the dangerously precocious intellectual/aesthete.

[17]See Philip Hoare, *Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy and the First World War* (London, 1997).

article claiming that there were 47,000 sexual deviants in England whose names were kept in a Black Book by the Germans for the purposes of blackmail and espionage. Some of these 47,000 were involved in a private production of Wilde's *Salomé*, and the actress in the eponymous role sued Billing for libel. Billing was found innocent of the charges following a farcical trial presided over by Mr Justice Darling. Justice Darling magnanimously overlooked the fact that he had been revealed during the course of the trial to be one of the 47,000 in order to focus upon the real enemy. 'Well, gentlemen,' he summed up for the jury, 'it is possible to regard [Wilde] as a great artiste, but he certainly was a great beast; there is no doubt about that.'[18]

There had, however, been some advances in opinion concerning sexuality by this time. In March 1918 Marie Stopes published *Married Love*, a work influenced by the earlier calls for more openness from Carpenter and Ellis, though with an individual woman's perspective on sex. It combated traditional ignorance about the physiological aspects of sex and proved to be immensely popular, selling more than half a million copies by 1927.[19] Many educated readers were also turning in these years to Freud and what he had to say about sexuality.[20] But of course Stopes's book was vigorously heterosexual in orientation, and Freudian theory held homosexuality to be a product of arrested emotional development. This did little in the 1920s to counter the more widespread conventional opinion about the immorality of sexual deviants. 'Unspeakables of the Oscar Wilde sort' remained largely that. Home Office figures of prosecutions for 'unnatural offences' rose by 119% between 1915 and 1923.[21] At the same time, much literature from the 1890s continued to be labelled under the morally disapproving epithet 'decadent'.[22] This was the climate in which biographers - some of whom were old intimates (in several senses of the word) - had to write about Wilde. By the 1930s biography had begun to assimilate new psychoanalytic perspectives on homosexuality. This was not always a welcome 'insight' into Wilde, as we shall see; but it at least moved on some of the earlier unsympathetic discussion. It is to this discussion that we now turn.

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[18] See Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990), pp. 226-8.
[19] See Hynes, *War Imagined*, pp. 366-9.
[20] Dean Rapp, 'The Reception of Freud by the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines, 1920-1925', *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, 24 (1988), 191-201.
[21] Richard Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment: Attitudes to Sex and Sexuality in Britain since the Renaissance* (London, 1990), p. 147.
[22] See Helmut E. Gerber, 'The Nineties: Beginning, End, or Transition?' in Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Edwardians and Late Victorians* (New York, 1966), pp. 50-79.

The importance of being Victorian

With Gladstone and Dickens we saw that scandalmongers attempted to bring new biographical material to light largely for their own ends; the wider effects of these revelations compelled popular attention to various degrees. Yet with Wilde it was almost as if biographers and speculators knew too much from the beginning. The subject of Wilde's private life would not sell extravagantly; it discomfited readers, and to judge from biographies, many writers too. This suggests the paradox that 'debunking' the Victorians occurred within largely Victorian parameters - some revelations were simply beyond the pale.

Another reason why studies of Wilde were so touchy about his private life was because many of his first biographers were also former friends and intimates. Much biographical writing had the thinly disguised purpose of justifying the author's personal relationship with Wilde. As a result, the tone of these works was often querulous and combative in the extreme. Some of this no doubt was anxiety; but in credit to these writers, many were also rushing to Wilde's defence in an evidently rather hostile climate. Another reason for the querulousness was that Wilde was the kind of man to elude straightforward biographical depiction. 'The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible', was one of his *Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young*. With his elaborate set of poses, Wilde was many things to many people. We should expect violent differences of opinion about which - if any - was the real Oscar.

Battle-lines are nevertheless discernible, and they were drawn up at an early stage. Robert Sherard, a young literary friend of Wilde, entrenched himself in 1902 and held his position through to 1937. The tone adopted in his numerous writings on Wilde was overwhelmingly adulatory, and in this we can see an unmistakable urge to defend his late mentor against the universally-known charges which Sherard was initially too decorous to specify. Sherard could not accept Wilde's homosexuality as anything other than a pathological quirk, and in time would come to seize on the suggestion that Wilde died of a syphilis-related illness as a convenient explanation for his subject's bouts of temporary 'insanity' when he sought intimate male company. Sherard emphasised Wilde's refinement of manner and delicacy of conversation. 'I never met a man more entirely pure in conversation,' he wrote in 1902, 'nor one more disdainful of vice in its vulgarity and uncomeliness ... Oscar Wilde, as I knew him,

was the purest man in word and deed that I have ever met.'[23] This may seem to protest too much; though in fairness to Sherard many commented on similar qualities in Wilde's conversation.

Sherard's defence of Wilde before the war was aided by the publication in 1905 of an abridged version of *De Profundis*, a work which came as something of a revelation to critics and general readers alike. It is true that commentators like Max Beerbohm in *Vanity Fair* and E.V. Lucas in the *Times Literary Supplement* both correctly identified the element of literary 'performance' in the work, but general opinion greeted the sobriety of *De Profundis*, like that of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* before it, favourably. As Wilfrid Leadman in the *Westminster Review* noted: 'Whatever one's opinion may be as to the genuineness of the repentance shown in *De Profundis*, one may at any rate be deeply thankful for what it has undoubtedly done toward the rehabilitation of its author. He is no longer under a ban. He may eventually receive a high place in English literature.'[24]

This place was claimed for Wilde with the publication by Methuen of a sixteen-volume Collected Works in 1908. The set included a slightly expanded *De Profundis*, but had the notable omission of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the work which more than any other had been instrumental to the prosecution's case against Wilde in 1895. Again, the collection was widely welcomed and sold well.[25] G.K. Chesterton commented on the felicitous timing of the set, for 'the time has certainly come when this extraordinary man, Oscar Wilde, may be considered merely as a man of letters.'[26] At any rate it was deemed possible in 1909, for the first time since his demise, to return Wilde's name to the playbill of *The Importance of Being Earnest* without fear of offending members of the audience.

But there was to be no smooth transition from general censoriousness to a finer discrimination between the life and works. In 1912 Arthur Ransome published a

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[23] Robert H. Sherard, *Oscar Wilde: The Story of an Unhappy Friendship* [1902] (New York, 1905), pp. 11, 14.

[24] Wilfrid M. Leadman in the *Westminster Review*, 166 (1906), quoted in Karl Beckson (ed.), *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1970), p. 263.

[25] By 1923 the constituent parts of the set were in the following impressions: vol 1: *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* - 18th; vol 2: *The Duchess of Padua* - 7th; vol 3: *Poems* - 15th; vol 4: *Lady Windemere's Fan* - 19th; vol 5: *A Woman of No Importance* - 9th; vol 6: *An Ideal Husband* - 13th; vol 7: *The Importance of Being Earnest* - 13th; vol 8: *The House of Pomegranates* - 10th; vol 9: *Intentions* - 14th; vol 10: *De Profundis* - 40th; vol 11: *Essays/Lectures* - 5th; vol 12: *Salomé* - 7th; vol 13: *A Critic in Pall Mall* - 2nd; vol 14: *Selected Prose* (ed. Robert Ross) - 6th; vol 15: *Art and Decoration* - 1st; vol 16: *For the Love of the King* (Masque) - 2nd.

[26] *Daily News*, 19 October 1909, quoted in Beckson, *Wilde: Critical Heritage*, p. 311.

biography of Wilde which asserted - with good reason - that Lord Alfred Douglas had acted as a bad influence on Wilde.[27] Although he did not refer to Douglas by name, it was obvious to everyone that Ransome was alluding to Wilde's 'Bosie'. Douglas issued Ransome with a libel writ.[28] The case was heard in April 1913. Ransome won the case when the manuscript of *De Profundis* (usually in safe keeping at the British Library) was produced in court and read aloud in full. Douglas claimed astonishment. He was ignorant of the full text, he argued, having destroyed his own copy of the epistle in 1897 with all but the first few pages unread. The immediate result of this was to throw Wilde's name back into the arena of controversy from which it had lately been seeming to retire.

Douglas's rejoinder to Ransome, and to the shade of Wilde, was written in collaboration with the critic T.W.H. Crosland. It appeared in 1914 as *Oscar Wilde and Myself*. Douglas talked only elliptically about 'Wilde's particular type of viciousness', feigning all knowledge of it until the trial. With lamentable disloyalty he attacked Wilde by a subtle ploy which distanced himself from further blame yet hinted at his erstwhile friend's moral turpitude. 'The fact that he never did anything really great has been set down to his indolence. It was due really to shallowness rather than indolence,' Douglas reflected. 'His influence upon youth is undoubted and obvious, but it is equally undoubted and obvious that his influence is a bad one, and the sooner we acknowledge that the better it will be for Art and Letters.'[29]

Another player entered the scene in 1916, and the stage was set for the accusations and counter-accusations in Wildean biography which reached a climax in the inter-war years. Frank Harris (1856-1931) was editor of the *Saturday Review*, a *bon viveur*, general rake, and close acquaintance of Wilde.[30] He was therefore in a favourable position to write a bestselling book on his old friend. This he attempted to do with *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions*, privately published in the United States in 1916. It was a book full of distortions and fabrications, often inventing colourful episodes and inserting Harris as the protagonist in events which occurred to other people. And yet, for all this, the work had an honesty and focus largely absent from

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[27] Arthur Ransome, *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study* (London, 1912).
[28] On Douglas and his litigious tendencies see Rupert Croft-Cooke, *Bosie: The Story of Lord Alfred Douglas* (London, 1963).
[29] Alfred Douglas, *Oscar Wilde and Myself* (London, 1914), pp. 63, 285. Douglas's biographer Croft-Cooke partly exonerates him by observing that the book was virtually written by Crosland; but Douglas must have been fully aware of the book's contents.
[30] On Harris see *DNB 1931-1940*, pp. 404-5.

Sherard's hagiographies. The underlying tone was sympathetic and affectionate, but Harris was also prepared to criticise his subject. Like Sherard, he was uncomfortable with Wilde's 'pet vice' of homosexuality, but the discussion of it was at least clear and more forthright. Harris - himself notoriously heterosexual - was evidently aware of a homosexual underworld in London, though his comments on it tended to smack of sensationalism. 'I could easily give dozens of instances to prove that sexual perversion is a "Jacob's ladder" to most forms of success in our time in London', he commented darkly at one point.[31] It seems likely that he was attempting to cash in on the wartime hysteria about sexual deviancy.

Harris's other major criticisms of Wilde were that he was a snob and, in his last years, something of a cheat (the destitute Wilde sold the scenario for a play several times over to different buyers). Both charges have since been endorsed by subsequent biographers. But it was Harris's comments on Douglas that struck especially deep, arguing as he did that Wilde's 'liking for him had never been founded on understanding or admiration; it was almost wholly snobbish', and furthermore that 'it was not Oscar who ever misled Douglas but Lord Alfred Douglas who was driving Oscar whither he would'.[32] Again, more recent biographers have established beyond doubt that the disaffected Douglas was the driving-force in the libel suit against his father, the Marquess of Queensberry. Taking Ransome's ideas several bold (even reckless) steps further, Harris ensured that the major controversies of Wilde's life were focused by the beginning of the 1920s.

The repercussions of Harris's book rumbled down to the late 1930s. Although welcomed by Robert Ross, Wilde's literary executor, and George Bernard Shaw, the *Life and Confessions* was threatened with a libel suit by Douglas if ever it appeared in England. In 1925, however, Harris and Douglas attempted to reach an agreement over an English edition of the book; Douglas saw the opportunity to get certain passages re-written by the penurious Harris. But Harris refused to make the changes, and negotiations soon ground to a halt. Harris died in 1931, but his widow - still eager to see an English edition and in need of the money - paved the way for a revised version to appear in 1936. The revisions were undertaken by Douglas and Bernard Shaw, and not surprisingly many of Harris's comments about Wilde's relationship with Douglas were doctored or removed.

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[31] Harris, *Wilde*, p. 64.
[32] Harris, *Wilde*, pp. 313, 117.

But it should not be thought that Harris's original account of Wilde's life was unknown to English readers in the inter-war years. Adverse comments alone guaranteed the dissemination of Harris's criticisms of Wilde. These came principally from Robert Sherard, who published two major defences of Wilde in the 1930s: *Oscar Wilde Twice Defended* (1934) and *Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris and Oscar Wilde* (1937). By the time of the latter he had taken up the suggestion (first broached by Ransome in 1912) that Wilde had suffered from syphilis, and that this had contributed to his homosexual inclinations. Thirty-five years on Sherard was still worshipping at the Wilde altar:

> From the first day to the last of my contact with Wilde during seventeen years, I knew Wilde as the charming, brilliant talker, Wilde as the stimulating optimist, Wilde as the self-sacrificing and devoted friend, Wilde as the genial *leutseliger Herr*, Wilde as the wit, Wilde as the good son, Wilde as the kind husband, the affectionate father; and I think that in any of these capacities he is more worthy of the study of posterity (outside the clinics, mental and physical) than in the sole character of a pervert whom an acquired disease had rendered still more of interest to pathologists only.[33]

From his home in Corsica Sherard continued to attack the infidels in a series of closely-argued pamphlets: 'Oscar Wilde as a "Swindler"'; 'Oscar Wilde as a "Drunkard"'; 'Oscar Wilde as a "Snob"'; 'André Gide's Lies about Himself and Oscar Wilde'; 'Dr G.J. Renier as Critic, Pathologist and Biographer'.

The last of these was an attack on one of the most innovative studies of Wilde in the inter-war period, a work which showed that the Victorian embarrassment of many earlier biographies could be alleviated by contact with psychoanalysis. G.J. Renier contended in 1933 that 'Oscar Wilde's sexual psychology did not result from a sudden deviation due to insanity ... it was part and parcel of his personality.'[34] This was the first appearance of advanced medical theory on Wilde. It was to prove an attractive theory, especially for one whose earlier panic-induced petulance towards Wilde was mellowing. Lord Alfred Douglas, who had by this time become a

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[33] Robert Sherard, *Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris and Oscar Wilde* (London, 1937), p. 279.
[34] G.J. Renier, *Oscar Wilde* (London, 1933), pp. 88-9.

committed Catholic, retracted his attack of 1914, and admitted to 'familiarities' with Wilde in his 1929 autobiography, welcomed Renier's arguments. His final thoughts on Wilde were offered in 1940, and there he discussed the narrow-mindedness and prejudice which had greeted Wilde in the 1890s. Wilde's penchant for 'the usual public school boy business' Douglas explicitly linked to the idea of Wilde's arrested development as a child.[35] The critic Boris Brasol concurred, elaborating upon contemporary opinion and setting this in direct contrast to Victorian ignorance:

> There [is not] much need for invoking either Freud or Plato or Jung in order to appreciate that Oscar's entourage, the whole trend at his parents' home, the sum total of the environmental influences to which he was subjected, would eventually generate in him queer attitudes and erratic impulses of the most hazardous kind ... We are no longer content with the narrow and hypocritical Victorian attitude toward sexual digressions as manifestations of one's lack of decency.[36]

Wilde's reputation, however, was still not secure by the close of our period. Post-1945 society remained distinctly 'Victorian' in many areas, and when these areas were touched by modernity the results were often unhappily discordant. Many commentators felt concerned for family values in a more free-thinking age. The number of homosexual offences in Britain 'increased' hugely during the 1950s, from 1405 in 1948 to 2513 in 1961: 'increased' perhaps only in the sense that more were being detected in the moral panic.[37] In this light it is worth noting the counter-reaction from the pen of St John Irvine in 1951. 'There is perhaps, too much tendency to-day to make light of sodomy,' he warned, 'too great a tendency to condemn harshly and without attempt at understanding, those who were most ferocious in their denunciation of Wilde's offence.'[38] Wilde remained crucial to the notion of the homosexual in the 1950s and 1960s: between 1946 and 1966 fifteen books by or about him were published, in addition to the release of two new films about his life.[39] Some of this interest was clearly more favourable and progressive than

[35] Alfred Douglas, *Oscar Wilde: A Summing-Up* [1940] (London, 1962), p. 42.
[36] Boris Brasol, *Oscar Wilde: The Man - The Artist* (London, 1938), pp. 33-4, 53.
[37] David, *Queer Street*, p. 154. Heterosexual offences were equally, if not more, widely detected; the comparable figures were 588 (1948) to 1218 (1961).
[38] St John Irvine, *Oscar Wilde: A Present Time Appraisal* (London, 1951), p. 35.
[39] See Sinfield, *Wilde Century*, p. 143.

that of Irvine. The full version of the *Complete Works* appeared in 1966, suggestively enough only a year before homosexual acts ~~being~~ between consenting males in private ~~was~~ were decriminalised.

Wilde and modernity

It had long been difficult to separate Wilde's work from his life because of the enduring belief in the need for art to be respectable. This had profound implications for the way in which Wilde was seen in relation both to his age and to the post-war present. The modernity of Wilde is, of course, widely celebrated today. Scholars emphasise things such as Wilde's place in the history of homosexuality, his ambiguous status as an Anglo-Irishman, and his anticipation of postmodernism in his dalliance with verbal meaning and established critical theory.[40] But in the decades after his death there was a much vaguer sense of Wilde's modernity. This was because people's eyes were often drawn backwards rather forwards; inter-war society, as we have seen at many turns in this thesis, was profoundly engaged with the legacy of the past. Critics, perhaps in a search for the origins of modernity, were particularly interested in examining the *fin de siècle*, and Wilde inevitably played an important part in this process.[41] Holbrook Jackson in *The Eighteen-Nineties* (1913) divided the decade neatly into two halves: up to 1895, he suggested, there was a period of literary renaissance, culminating in the decadent movement; and from 1895 onwards there was a period of widespread patriotism culminating in the Boer War. The dividing-line of 1895 corresponded to the downfall of Wilde. Aestheticism found 'its Moscow at the Old Bailey, in 1895', wrote Jackson. 'With the arrest of Oscar Wilde the whole renaissance suffered a sudden collapse as if it had been no more than a gaily coloured balloon'.[42] The emphasis therefore tended to be upon Aestheticism as ephemeral and somewhat shallow. Many up to the 1920s retained a dismissive view of the 1890s.

However, some writers saw more lasting value in Aestheticism generally, and in Wilde's apparent anti-Victorianism specifically. Vernon Rendell, editor of the

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[40] See Peter Raby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge, 1997), esp. the essays by Gagnier, Danson, and Bristow.

[41] Sometimes rather frivolously. A small number of neo-dandies such as Harold Acton and Ronald Firbank cultivated Wildean mannerisms in speech and behaviour in the 1920s: see Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: a narrative of 'decadence' in England after 1918* (London, 1977), p. 38.

[42] Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties* [1913] (Harmondsworth, 1939), pp. 47-8.

Athenaeum, wrote to Robert Ross in 1908 about a recent article: 'I thought myself our reviewer was a little hard on Wilde, in particular under-rating his work in the Aesthetic movement, which did away with early Victorian horrors.'[43] Later writers such as Boris Brasol were even more forthright in identifying Wilde's place in the history of anti-Victorianism. His 1938 study opened with a long account of how 'mid-Victorian ... virtuous domesticity, unshaken common sense ... [and] respectability incarnate' came to be challenged by one 'who, even at the price of public ridicule, would carry the protest against Victorian conventionalism to its bitter end'.[44] *Dorian Gray* he characterised as 'a challenge to Victorianism', touching as it did on 'the subject of sex, which, in the Victorian age, was considered a mortal sin'.[45]

But suggesting that Wilde had an important place within post-Victorian life was not always easy. After all, he could be characterised as a very Victorian figure. The whole thrust of Sherard's writings, as we have seen, was to portray Wilde as the prop of respectable society, the decent family man led astray by illness and a vicious coterie of inverts. In other respects, Wilde suffered from this preoccupation with the 1890s as a particular historical period; he could be seen merely as a relic of the past. 'The wit of his 'Golden lads and girls' in those superb comedies may soon fall a little faint and thin upon our ears', wrote John Cowper Powys of the plays in 1916. 'To the next generation it may seem as faded and old-fashioned as the wit of Congreve or Sheridan.'[46] E.F. Benson was willing to confirm such a speculation about the plays in 1930, writing: 'They have aged rapidly and become out of date, their wit to us seems tight-roped and acrobatic, and now no one will listen to them.'[47] In 1936 Vincent O'Sullivan summed up these tendencies, saying: 'There is no doubt that many young men and women feel themselves as remote from Wilde as from (say!) Matthew Arnold.'[48] It did not help that Wilde had been heavily dependent upon earlier Victorian traditions in his work; this could make him seem even more old-fashioned. Even in his lifetime, Wilde's writing had been widely criticised for its derivativeness: his first book of poems in 1881 had attracted the jibe 'Swinburne and water'; his plays were accused of being reactionary and outside the theatrical *avant-garde* represented

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[43] Rendell to Ross, 12 June 1908, quoted in Beckson, *Critical Heritage*, p. 294.
[44] Brasol, *Wilde*, pp. 15, 23.
[45] Brasol, *Wilde*, p. 210.
[46] John Cowper Powys, *Suspended Judgments* (New York, 1916), quoted in Beckson, *Critical Heritage*, p. 365.
[47] E.F. Benson, *As We Were: A Victorian Peep-Show* (London, 1930), p. 225.
[48] Vincent O'Sullivan, *Aspects of Wilde* (London, 1936), p. 228.

by Ibsen and Bernard Shaw; his prose and lecture style was demonstrably indebted to Arnold and (especially) Pater. It is not surprising that none of this was forgotten by the 1920s and 1930s, and that much of it was amplified.

Yet there were defenders of Wilde's artistic originality. The critic Patrick Braybrooke argued in a 1930s study that 'the value of Wilde as a serious thinker ... has been grossly neglected'.[49] The reason for this neglect could easily be recognised in unthoughtful interpretations of what Wilde had been trying to achieve. 'The truth is,' Wilfrid Leadman had warned as early as 1906, 'Wilde's work bristles with moral advice, but - partly owing to his own oft-repeated condemnation of stories with a moral, and partly owing to the innate obtuseness of most of his readers - it is constantly overlooked.'[50] Over thirty years later this had scarcely changed. 'In the many-faceted personality of Wilde', Boris Brasol wrote, 'there was one aspect which his English interpreters have almost utterly overlooked - his idealism.'[51]

Braybrooke also argued for Wilde's innovations on the stage: 'Wilde gave a smack at the theatre: it had grown heavy; it took itself seriously; it felt quite sure of itself in the complacency of its Victorianism.'[52] *The Importance of Being Earnest* gradually emerged as Wilde's most respected play between the wars, partly because it was the funniest and least imitative, but also because critics began to identify in it deeper themes, such as its exploration of dual identity. Moreover, opinions about how Wilde's plays should be presented in the 1920s increasingly showed awareness of his underlying seriousness of purpose. Many preferred to see the plays (of late updated to the Edwardian period) in late Victorian dress, to catch what John Gielgud called 'the opulent stuffiness which the snobbish atmosphere of the Wilde text seems to demand'. Wilde was beginning to appear as a valuable commentator upon the society of his time. He was also beginning to appear as an artist capable of sustaining modern interpretations. Audiences took well to Nigel Playfair's abstract rendering in black, grey, and white of *The Importance of Being Earnest* for the Lyric, Hammersmith in 1930.[53] It would nevertheless be a long time before Wilde's ghost was fully released from the shackles of traditional expectations about what art should achieve; until

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[49] Patrick Braybrooke, *Oscar Wilde* (London, 1930), p. 33.
[50] Quoted in Beckson, *Critical Heritage*, p. 267.
[51] Brasol, *Wilde*, p. 191.
[52] Braybrooke, *Wilde*, p. 21.
[53] See Joel Kaplan, 'Wilde on the stage' in Raby, *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 257-62.

then, his modernity would have to bide its time in Epstein's grave at the Père Lachaise in Paris.

Concluding thoughts

Of the four subjects considered in Part Three it was Wilde who gained least from inter-war perspectives on biography. It was not merely that many writers felt obliged in the 1920s and 1930s to adopt a conservative attitude towards this historical figure; their very conservatism was also forged from the Victorian past. This suggests much about how the inter-war period stood in relation to Victorian and Edwardian history. L.P. Hartley suggested that the past was a foreign country; this may have been so, but people often felt that at least it was less foreign than many ideas about sexuality from contemporary Europe. Views of Wilde's homosexuality were certainly starting to change by the 1930s as writers employed psychoanalytic perspectives on biography, but many consciously rejected these new-fangled foreign ideas in favour of an emphasis on traditional morality. After all, the health and integrity of the nation and Empire had still to be preserved after 1918. As Jeffrey Weeks comments: 'The old morality rather than the new psychology retained its influence until at least the inter-war years.'[54]

At the same time, Wilde's modernity was being negotiated. We saw in the last chapter how views of Dickens's modernity deepened dramatically in the 1930s as scholars assimilated new biographical insights. Dickens became seen in hindsight as an alienated artist often standing outside society to criticise it. By a curious paradox, Wilde was also perceived to have stood outside social norms, yet his work was less obviously seen as a critique of the world to which he was a stranger. Partly that was because his plays were felt by some critics to have dated a little. But the paradox might best be explained by pointing to the traditional outlook on art and morality amongst inter-war audiences. It is ironic, though, that a society so keenly reproachful of Wilde's private life should have been insensitive to the extent of innuendo and potential subversion within a popular play such as *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In that respect, if none other, Wilde had the last laugh.

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[54]Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, p. 105.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to establish a number of points which have been overlooked or mischaracterised by historians writing about perceptions of the past after 1918. They might best be enumerated as follows:

1. Élite perceptions of the past were highly influenced by the Great War. By the 1930s the prospect of another worldwide conflict heightened the intensity of these perceptions yet further. It is important, however, that these perceptions are not characterised as having been merely hostile: the Great War was not the moment at which the pre-war world was lost.

2. The anti-Victorian reaction has been exaggerated. There was widespread criticism of the past from members of the élite, but no final rejection of it. Anti-Victorianism had no single focus or generational character; the agenda was picked by the individual within the broad constraints of the time. Hence while the tone of much anti-Victorianism grew in intensity from the late nineteenth century, it remained even at its height in the 1920s a diffuse phenomenon. Moreover, it very frequently had a quality of emotional ambivalence which meant that unequivocal dismissal of the past was impossible. Critics of Victorianism were bound by an affective link with history: they were attacking their peers or their own parents.

3. Cultural historians have lagged behind social and economic historians in failing to identify widespread continuity of attitude and practice after the Great War. Society remained committed to notions of public duty. Many people continued to think of themselves as 'Victorian'. There were also calls for a revival of selective aspects of the pre-war past. Some of this was a serious attempt to offset the problems of the modern age; but some of it, such as the craze for 'Victoriana' at Oxford in the 1920s, was more frivolous. At a wider level, nostalgia for the pre-war past - especially the Edwardian period - flourished with increasing intensity down to the 1930s.

4. Many scholars argue that historiography became 'professional' and biography 'modern' between the wars. This is only partially true. Historiography and biography did not stand commandingly in the present analysing or passing judgement upon the past. In both genres we can find persistent 'Victorian' features as well as innovations which amounted to a repudiation of tradition. This reflected a subtler dialogue between past and present than historians have often recognised.

5. Historians were involved in negotiating a sense of internal periodisation within the span 1837-1914. Sometimes this was strong, as in the case of the early Victorian and Edwardian periods, and this was in large part because controversy focused itself upon these years. There was also a fairly good sense of the late Victorian period - for better or worse - as the beginning of modernity. There was a less well-defined sense of the mid-Victorian period.

6. Historiography of the Victorian and Edwardian periods was often keenly debated and powerfully emotive. This is because many of its concerns - such as life in an industrial age and the crisis of Liberalism - were felt to be of continuing significance in the inter-war years. The Victorians and Edwardians literally became part of 'contemporary' history. Historians approached their subject from a variety of perspectives, 'amateur' and 'professional', empirical and psychoanalytic, Fabian and Conservative. They also addressed themselves not only to fellow historians but to society at large: attempts were made to correct the false assumptions about the past created by nostalgia and neo-Stracheyan biography.

7. Neo-Stracheyan biography was nevertheless one of the most important means by which the Victorians were eventually rehabilitated. Modern writers usually suggest that the growth of scholarly sympathy for the Victorians after the Second World War was the result of a reversal of inter-war trends. Yet it might be argued that neo-Stracheyan biography helped to humanise its subjects through its selection of material, use of new biographical insights, and attempt at psychological penetration. The motives of biographers were not always generous, and many contemporaries were justifiably critical of their levity and scholarly shortcomings. Nevertheless, writers like Lytton Strachey were distinguished by a genuine interest

in human nature and an emotional engagement with his subjects. This provided a salutary lead in taking the Victorians seriously, something which the earnestness of earlier biographers had curiously failed to do.

These are the broad areas which strike me as being worthy of reconsideration by historians today. But the matter can scarcely be left here. If the pre-war past was not rejected after 1918, then the obvious question arises of when the Victorian heritage *was* lost, for there can be little doubt that people do not think or behave in a 'Victorian' way today. (Margaret Thatcher's attempt in the early 1980s to revive a highly selective set of 'Victorian values', and the scant historical criticism it provoked from the public, testifies to this.) Put another way, how should we re-write the history of Victorianism in the twentieth century in the light of what has been argued in this thesis?

Britain in 1945 remained a very Victorian nation. Peter Hennessy observes that victory in the Second World War was in some respects pyrrhic: success blinded the nation's leaders - the 'Victorian' Attlee and Bevin - to the need for dynamic innovation in technological, economic, and government matters in a way that was not true of the defeated nations.[1] Society continued to look backwards in terms of public and private morality. The Festival of Britain in 1951 was planned in conscious emulation of the Great Exhibition a century earlier, and celebrated not just the prospects of change but the integrity of the national past as well. For the architectural critic John Summerson it embodied 'a new and fresh articulation of the old ideal of a common culture'.[2] The Third Programme ran a special '1851 Week' at the end of April, broadcasting music and talks which could have been heard a century before. It attracted a wide range of listeners, one of whom was a machine tools apprentice. 'The atmosphere was brilliantly achieved', he enthused, 'to such a degree that my father thought that the 1851 news item was *Today in Parliament*, till mention was made of the Rt. Hon. W.E. Gladstone'.[3] Victorian past and post-war present could still elide without too much difficulty.

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[1] Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-1951* (London, 1992).
[2] Peter Mandler, 'John Summerson: The architectural critic and the quest for the Modern' in Susan Pedersen & Peter Mandler (eds), *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain* (London, 1994), p. 237.
[3] Humphrey Carpenter, *The Envy of the World: Fifty Years of the BBC Third Programme and Radio 3* (London, 1996), p. 109.

As we have seen, the 1950s were also a notably productive period for those consciously investigating the past.[4] The second edition of G.M. Young's *Portrait of an Age* appeared in 1953, as did important studies of *Victorian People* (1954) and *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957) by Asa Briggs and Walter E. Houghton respectively. They owed much to the achievements of inter-war historiography. Although it is arguable that they also owed something to Strachey for having encouraged them to treat the Victorians as fallible human beings, it is noteworthy that this writer's reputation was at a low ebb; John Clive in 1958 made a plea for recognition of just how indebted contemporary scholars ought to feel to Strachey.[5] Meanwhile a market was beginning to develop for Victorian collectibles.[6] The journal *Victorian Studies* began in 1957, and the Victorian Society was founded a year later. Forty years after the publication of *Eminent Victorians* and the end of the Great War, it seemed that the Victorians had triumphed over their critics.

In the decades that followed came four developments which, more than anything else, dealt a fatal blow to Victorianism. The first of these was a natural calamity. The last generation of Victorians - those who were, say, twenty in 1900 - was simply dying out by the 1960s and 1970s. This is not necessarily to say that those sufficiently long-lived to have survived to this time were paragons of Victorianism. E.M. Forster, for example, who died in 1970 at the age of 91, was a waspish critic of the society in which he had grown up. His homosexual novel *Maurice* (completed in 1914) was published only posthumously because Forster was anxious about the 'Victorian' climate of his own lifetime; it is germane to our theme that reviewers in 1971 found both the novel and his anxiety touching but dated.[7]

Equally, the death of Victorian parents was not always a liberation for their children. Some of these children, like the memoirist Katharine Chorley, had enjoyed perfectly happy upbringings.[8] My own great-grandfather, George Alexander Blythe (1882-1978), provides another example of this. He lived a life of exemplary Smilesian endeavour, having turned his hand variously to deep-sea diving, greengrocery, and horse-dealing. In his nineties he is recalled as having been still a

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[4] See above, pp. 66, 121, 165-6.
[5] John Clive, 'More or Less Eminent Victorians' [orig. pub. *Victorian Studies*, 1958] in *Not By Fact Alone: Essays on the Writing and Reading of History* (London, 1989), pp. 228-50.
[6] See Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (Harmondsworth, 1990), ch. 1.
[7] See J.H. Stape (ed.), *E.M. Forster: Critical Assessments*, vol 1 (Mountfield, 1998), pp. 335-43.
[8] See Katharine Chorley, *Manchester Made Them* (London, 1950).

very 'traditional' figure, fastidious about his waistcoat and fob-watch, and liable to wield a walking stick against family recalcitrants. He remains warmly remembered amongst his surviving children.

However we choose to interpret the significance of their passing, it is indisputable that the deaths of these surviving Victorians represented the loss of a direct link with the past. As one commentator put it in 1958, using Victoria's first Jubilee as a benchmark for the end of an era: 'There is a point at which a commentator in a sense says goodbye to "history" and enters upon the "present day." There are not very many Englishmen now alive who have a vivid recollection of what life was actually like before 1887'.[9]

It may or may not be coincidental that as the last generation of Victorians began to pass away in the 1960s dramatic social changes were occurring. This is the second development which needs to be outlined. Many 'Victorian' taboos were removed in the decade which countenanced franker discussion of class and sex in the media, the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting males in private, the legalisation of abortions, and state provision of contraceptives. *Paris-Match*, discussing the Lady Chatterley trial of 1960, felt that the success of the defence testified to the 'revolution in British morals' brought about by war, technology, and cultural exchange with the continent. All these had 'liberated the British from their ancient Victorian complex'.[10] The break-up of the Empire was a further 'liberation' from tradition, and in this respect it is interesting that Michael Holroyd suggests Strachey 'might have become a folk hero of the 1960s' for his pacifism and critique of Empire in the Gordon essay of *Eminent Victorians*.[11] Certainly Strachey's sexual dissidence made him popular again in the late 1960s: the appearance of Holroyd's two-volume biography in 1967-8 was one of the key moments in the creation of the Bloomsbury boom.[12] Its timing of course was hardly a matter of chance; as Raymond Mortimer observed, this was the first 'post-Wolfenden biography'. (We might consider again the growth of writings on Oscar Wilde around this time: see Chapter 11.) Relics of the Victorian age might

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[9] Maurice B. Reckitt, 'When Did "Victorianism" End?', *Victorian Studies*, 1 (1957-8), 271.
[10] Quoted in Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 148. In an earlier book, *British Society Since 1945* (Harmondsworth: 2nd edn, 1990), Marwick entitles a chapter on this theme 'The End of Victorianism'.
[11] Introduction to the Penguin edition of *Eminent Victorians* (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. xii.
[12] See Regina Marler, *Bloomsbury Pie: The Story of the Bloomsbury Revival* (London, 1997), pp. 69-94.

also be plundered in the name of modernity. New interest was found, for example, in the 'psychedelic' paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites.[13]

This tendentious use of artefacts from the past brings us to the third development which has led to the retreat of Victorianism. Ironically, in surrounding itself with Victorian antiques and reproductions, modern society has neutralised the past in a way that all the shrill attacks of the inter-war years failed to do. Victorian bric-à-bric, as we have seen, first became popular in the 1920s amongst a minority of revivalists; the market expanded slightly in the 1950s; but it was only in the consumer boom of the 1960s that the market for memorabilia exploded. The past would eventually come to be regulated by what we call a 'heritage industry'. One of the features of the 'heritage industry' is its tendency to decontextualise the past. Objects are bought and displayed, and places of historical interest visited, often on the sole criterion of them being 'appealing' or 'evocative'. The human realities which surround these objects and locations cannot be so easily commodified because they are complex, uncomfortable, or prosaic. The solution so frequently has been to overlook these realities altogether.

Such an approach to history inevitably affected all periods; but it affected the Victorians doubly so, for it was out of a still recognisably Victorian climate that such consumerism grew. Raphael Samuel notes that this has led to a reorientation of the priorities within national life. 'It privileges the private over the public sphere', he writes. 'The grand permanences of national life are no longer those of altar and throne, nor, as in the 'Whig' interpretation of history, constitutional government, but rather those of the nuclear family.'[14] Even this nuclear family was not the same as the Victorian family. Class relations had continued to level, and the welfare state had eradicated the worst extremes of Victorian poverty, making traditional faith in the family as a safe unit within an uncertain world less relevant. Middle-class adolescents were also less dependent upon their adults for emotional guidance as consumerism and wider awareness of the world conferred adult status upon them at a younger age.[15] Richard Hoggart in the late 1950s made a similar

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[13]Stephen Jones, 'Attic Attitudes: Leighton and Aesthetic Philosophy' in Gordon Marsden (ed.), *Victorian Values* (London: 2nd edn, 1998), p. 232.
[14]Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol 1: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), p. 161.
[15]See John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Continuity in European Age Relations, 1770-Present* (London: revised edn, 1981), ch. 5; A.H. Halsey, *Change in British Society* (Oxford: 4th edn, 1995), esp. ch. 5.

point about working-class culture. Traditionally based upon community spirit and a sound appreciation of the familiar, Hoggart argued that it was in danger of being supplanted by the fatuous escapism and 'moral evasions' engendered by a modern mass entertainment industry.[16]

The fourth development *of the post-1945 period* relates to the historical profession. As we saw in Chapter 3, historiography did not become *fully* 'professional' before the Second World War. Until the 1950s works such as G.M. Trevelyan's *English Social History* (1944), which had by then amounted over half a million sales, continued to command a wide audience. R.C.K. Ensor's 1936 volume for the *Oxford History of England* influenced a whole generation of readers, professional and lay, and is still in print today. Oxford University Press and Penguin are at the moment attempting to repeat the success of series like the *Oxford History of England*; but as J.M. Roberts, the general editor of the *New Oxford History of England*, writes of his predecessor Sir George Clark: 'Of course, he and his readers shared a broad sense of the purpose and direction of such books. His successor can no longer be sure of doing that.'[17]

The problem has partly been caused by a variety of external factors: social attitudes, consumerism, government policy towards education, the inevitable post-1960s diminution of interest in the Empire,[18] and so on. But from the historian's perspective, much damage has been done by the loss of confidence in the practice of historiography and by academic specialisation.[19] As we have seen, the version of history which linked inter-war readers to the world before 1914 was one based upon a sense of the integrity and nobility of the national past. Confidence in such a view of history foundered after the Second World War. From the perspective of the present work that loss of certainty was another double blow to the Victorians: not only were their models rejected, but that core of knowledge about their great political events and achievements was also destined

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[16] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* [1957] (Harmondsworth, 1990).
[17] General Editor's Preface in volumes of the *New Oxford History of England*.
[18] Though this particular aspect is beginning to change: a number of studies, such as Lawrence James's *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (1994) and Denis Judd's *Empire* (1996), have recently scored popular successes. By the same token, interest in questions of 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' - explored to widest popular acclaim in Linda Colley's *Britons* (1994) - have resurfaced in the light of devolution and European integration.
[19] For two views of the problem at different times of the recent past see David Cannadine, 'British History: Past, Present - and Future?', *Past and Present*, 116 (1987), 169-91; Stefan Collini, 'Writing 'the National History': Trevelyan and After' in *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 9-37.

to lose prominence in the public mind. Historians have explored other ways of writing about previously neglected topics, yet as a whole have tended to avoid the challenge of filling in the central ground about national history for the general public. Some historians have followed in the footsteps of A.J.P. Taylor in flouting contemporary fashions to write accessible narrative on big themes.[20] But the point remains that it has proved difficult in the last forty or so years to sustain public interest in the Victorians and Edwardians (or indeed in almost any historical societies), beyond that is the increasingly popular genres of family and local history.

This is not necessarily to castigate without thought the present-day lack of public interest in national history before 1914. It is perfectly natural that modern society should care less passionately about the Victorians and Edwardians than did the society of the inter-war period. We lack the affective link which bonded people of that day to the pre-war past. But the emotional engagement of these views depended also upon the way in which society contemplated the past. Even disaffected writers like Strachey were used to taking a long view of history; after all, to cite the interpretative model of Gibbon in the Preface to *Eminent Victorians* was hardly to proclaim his distance from tradition.

That long view has often been eschewed by contemporary historians. Narratives tend to be fractured and provisional, interpretation often dependent only upon the very latest and academically-endorsed theories. Through the experience of war and dramatic social change in the twentieth century we have become used to the idea of abrupt historical discontinuities. No doubt this is often a more satisfactory response to the complexity of historical experience than the Whiggish postures of much pre-1945 writing. But it can also be a drawback. To return to the theme which opened this thesis, it is arguable that historians working on the imaginative impact of the Great War have fallen prey to a general misconception about how it affected the judgement of sons upon fathers. Traumatic as the war may have been, it emphatically did not signal a break with the pre-war past, as so many have implied. That their comments have mainly been brief and oblique makes it all the more important that we begin to look at the topic in greater detail. The subject also promises to yield fascinating further study upon

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[20]See Lawrence Stone, 'The Revival of Narrative: Some Reflections on a New Old History', *Past and Present*, 85 (1979), 3-24. For a post-postmodernist view of historiography see Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997).

where the real social and cultural 'watersheds' have lain in the twentieth century, if indeed any can truly be identified. It seems possible that this could be done, and that before long historians will begin to look for 'modern memory' not in the shedding of blood and the subsequent angry recriminations but in the quieter revolutions with which we have grown up in the last forty or fifty years.

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