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"WHAT LIFE IS":
THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARNOLD BENNETT'S NATURALISM

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the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter One Arnold Bennett and the Principles of French Naturalism	1
Chapter Two The Theme of Failure in <u>A Man from</u> <u>the North</u>	23
Chapter Three <u>The Old Wives' Tale</u> : The Creation of a Naturalistic Heroine	41
Chapter Four <u>Clayhanger</u> : The Triumph of Compromise . . .	80
Conclusion	109
Notes	
Bibliography	

ABSTRACT

The prefaces, letters, and other writings that comprise what might be termed the "documents" of French naturalism provide an important context in judging the works of Arnold Bennett. His saturation in the thought of these documents, either as the thought is expressed in the novels for which the documents are often prefaces or as it is expressed in the documents themselves, is central to an understanding of Bennett's development as an author. The concern with style, dispassionate observation, and the ordinary details of life that Bennett gleaned from French naturalistic theory was combined with his how particular choice of subject matter--the middle class--and his own insistence on a "Christlike, all-embracing compassion."

Bennett's use of the theme of compromise and failure in four novels serves to illustrate the development of his naturalism. A Man from the North, Bennett's first published novel, shows most explicitly the effects of French naturalistic theory. In it, Richard Larch's artistic compromise in going to live in the suburbs is seen as a failure; this failure is strictly in accordance with the naturalistic conception of an unhappy ending to a novel. The Old Wives' Tale, in contrast, takes a much more balanced approach to compromise and failure. The fate of all the would-be heroes in that novel is that they miss greatness, with the possible exception of Constance Baines. Clayhanger and These Twain present the story of Edwin Clayhanger, whose compromises and

defeats at the hands of his wife, Hilda Lessways, are seen to be a victory for him; the victory, Bennett implies, arises from Edwin's recognition that romance is possible in the everyday details of middle-class existence. Thus Bennett reshaped French naturalism throughout the course of his career. Although he still relied upon naturalistic techniques of observation and narration, Bennett, at the end of his career, differed greatly from his French predecessors in his point of view on the effect of compromise and failure on the individual life of a member of the middle class.

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Chris and my parents, for everything.

to Chris and my parents

Chapter One

Introduction

Arnold Bennett and the Principles of French Naturalism

By the time Arnold Bennett died in 1931, his reputation as a serious naturalistic novelist had been overshadowed by his popularity as a critic for the Evening Standard, as a writer of popular philosophies and fantasias, and as a public representative of the world of belles-lettres. His insistence that art and profit were not necessarily antithetical annoyed the intelligentsia of his own time and inspired such attacks as Ezra Pound's caricature of Bennett in the poem "Mr. Nixon" and Virginia Woolf's essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." In the latter work, Woolf argues that Bennett fails to establish character; concerned only with externals, he cannot see into the soul of Mrs. Brown. The essay demonstrates the Georgian lack of sympathy with the literary techniques of the Edwardians. This Georgian disdain for what they saw as a preoccupation only with detail in Bennett's writing, matched by a distaste for his admitted interest in art as a money-making venture, contributed to the decline in Bennett's critical reputation after his death.

Bennett's critical reputation has since risen. Beginning with Walter Allen's Arnold Bennett in 1948, a number of books have been written in defense of Bennett's critical reputation, yet there is a basic truth in the Georgian charges that has not yet been answered.

Bennett, in his novels and in his life, was indeed a "materialist" concerned with the concrete everyday details of life, as Virginia Woolf implied in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." This materialism, if a concern with details may thus be called, is of the essence of his art, however, and not an annoying interruption of it. Bennett is above all a naturalist, concerned with capturing the realistic details of life as it is lived by the mass of common humanity. Throughout his career Arnold Bennett maintained a close affinity for the practice of literature as a form of naturalistic observation, an affinity formed through his early readings in French naturalistic authors. It is with this affinity in mind that his serious novels must be studied.

Much has been written on Bennett's debt to the novels of his French predecessors; Louis Tillier's Studies in the Sources of Arnold Bennett's Novels (1969) is one excellent example. As early as 1911 Bennett commented upon the connections between his writings and those of the French naturalists, noting that his critics had found similarities: "Moi-même, j'ai toujours suivi les maîtres français, et l'influence française qui se fait sentir dans mes ouvrages à été souvent remarquée par la critique."¹ Nevertheless few critics have related Bennett's writings to the current of naturalist dogma present in the letters, prefaces, and other expository prose of the French naturalists. A comparison of Bennett's own thought with several such documents, therefore, provides an interesting supplement to those studies, such as Tillier's, that seek to establish French naturalistic predecessors in fiction for Bennett's novels. Further, an examination of what may be termed the documents of French naturalism provides a

context for the examination of one of Bennett's central themes: the compromises and failures of life as they are experienced by the English middle class.

While works such as Tillier's concentrate on the similarities of Bennett's work to the works of the French naturalists, this thesis seeks to prove that Bennett's art is subtly of a different kind. More precisely, it is the shift in the authorial attitude toward compromise and failure that marks a departure by Bennett from his French models, a change in attitude necessitated by the equally important shift in subject. Bennett takes the middle class, rather than the lower classes, as being representative of English life. Chapter One will examine the aesthetic tenets of both the French naturalists and Bennett as revealed through their non-fiction writings. Chapter Two will analyze the theme of artistic failure as a possible structure in A Man from the North, Bennett's first published novel. An analysis of the remaking of the concept of heroine in The Old Wives' Tale will constitute Chapter Three, and an analysis of the elevation of failure into romance in the Clayhanger trilogy will constitute Chapter Four. Through these analyses, it will be possible to see just how far Bennett seems to range from his naturalistic roots while yet remaining true to the spirit of minute observation mandated by French naturalistic theory as it is propounded in what may be termed the "documents" of French naturalism.

Although French naturalism is associated primarily with Zola's writings of the 1880's and 1890's, naturalism is actually an outgrowth of the French realism of Flaubert. Maurice Larkin's Man and Society in

Nineteenth-Century Realism traces the concept of determinism back to Stendhal, but the basic tenets of naturalism as Zola conceived it have their beginnings in Flaubert.² Ironically, Flaubert himself was less than enthusiastic about being affiliated with the realist movement. In a letter to George Sand dated February 6, 1876, he wrote, "I hate what is conventionally called realism, although people regard me as one of its high priests."³ Flaubert's letters, however, describe the realistic emphases under which he strove to write his novels, and certain phrases prefigure the concerns of the later naturalists. One such concern is the impersonality of art. "Let us always bear in mind," he wrote to his mistress Louise Colet, "that impersonality is a sign of strength. Let us absorb the objective; let it circulate in us, until it is externalized in such a way that no one can understand this marvelous chemistry."⁴ Flaubert's use of the term chemistry indicates the specific direction toward which the naturalists would later turn: toward a scientific objectivity. To Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie, Flaubert gave a more specific statement on the correlation between art and scientific method: "Art ought, moreover, to rise above personal feelings and nervous susceptibilities! It is time to give it the precision of the physical sciences, by means of a pitiless method!"⁵ The objectivity here associated with the scientific method became central to the French naturalists, who sought to validate their works by insisting that the events presented were precisely documented. Through the absence of the author and the impersonality of the style, the naturalistic novel was supposed to achieve the ultimate mimetic value: a true picture of life.

Scientific method was the basis for another naturalistic tenet mentioned by Flaubert and carried on by the naturalists: an insistence upon meticulous observation. The realism that demands the absence of the judgmental author similarly demands that its subject be taken from life by direct, meticulous observation. "I am in a completely different world now, that of attentive observation to the dullest details," wrote Flaubert to Louise Colet in 1852.⁶ Flaubert felt, as did Zola and Bennett, that the "dullest details" were the means by which the author could convey real life. For Flaubert, the depiction of real life thus leads to true art:

Relief [as in painting] comes from a deep view, from penetration, from the objective. For exterior reality must enter into us, almost make us cry out with it, if we are to reproduce it well. When we have our model sharp before us, we always write well, and where indeed is the true more clearly₇ visible than in these fine exhibitions of human misery?

Thus for Flaubert as for the naturalists the value of a work of literature lies at least partly in its degree of closeness to real life.

A third tenet of Flaubert to be later adopted by the naturalists is the idea that there are no intrinsically artistic subjects. Art lies not in a particular subject but in the manner of its presentation. As Flaubert wrote, "all colors are beautiful; it's a matter of painting them."⁸ Through the proper realistic representation, any subject is artistic: "there are no fine artistic subjects; . . . consequently one subject is as good as another. It is up to the artist to raise everything."⁹ Arrangement of details and style, not subject, constitute a work of art. Although originally Flaubert's dictum appears to open

up the range of subjects for artistic treatment, in the hands of the naturalists a narrowing of subject took place. The key to this narrowing of subject appears in Flaubert's telling comment, "where indeed is the true more clearly visible than in these fine exhibitions of human misery?"¹⁰ The "fine exhibitions of human misery" to be found in the degradations of the lower classes came more and more to be considered the truest representations of life, and aspects of humanity hitherto regarded as too vulgar for fiction were elevated de facto into the newest "specimens" for the "scientific" observations of the realists and naturalists. Thus Flaubert and the naturalists both stressed objectivity as a key to true art, but a measure of selectivity in the matter of subjects was impossible to avoid. Flaubert's contribution to naturalist theory is substantial, for in his thought are synthesized the ideals of the impersonal author and the concomitant absence of didacticism, of a style suitable to portraying this impersonality, of meticulous observation, and of an unlimited choice of subject.

Three of Flaubert's contemporaries shared his concerns with scientific objectivity: Hippolyte Taine and the brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt. In the Introduction to his History of English Literature (1863), Taine described literature as a series of documents by which the thought of past ages may be known.¹¹ Literature became for him not fiction, a possible diversion from reality, but a series of artifacts that must be objectively analyzed in order to extrapolate information about past ages. This scientific approach to literature is consistent with Taine's system for evaluating literature. He applauded those writers who, like Stendhal, "[treat] of sentiments as they should

be treated--in the manner of the naturalist, namely, and of the natural philosopher, who constructs classifications and weighs forces."¹² Taine's term "naturalist" recalls Flaubert's concept of the artist as scientist. The "forces" that the artist/naturalist or natural philosopher must weigh are three: race, milieu, and epoch.¹³ The latter classification system is Taine's most important contribution to naturalist theory, for under the guise of heredity (race) and environment (epoch and milieu), Taine's categories have provided a source of continuing dispute as to which has the more power over an individual life.

The de Goncourts similarly concerned themselves with scientific objectivity. As Flaubert had done, they applied this objectivity to the choice of subject, arguing in the Preface to Germinie Lacerteux (1864) for the lower classes to be included as subjects for novels. Because the novel "is becoming contemporary Moral History," they argued, and "has undertaken the studies and obligations of science," it must therefore "demand the liberties and freedom of science."¹⁴ The "freedom of science" in Germinie Lacerteux seems from the Preface to be a freedom to choose a subject from the lower masses of humanity, Flaubert's "fine exhibitions of human misery":

[W]e asked ourselves whether what are called "the lower classes" did not have a right to the Novel, whether this world beneath a world, the people, must remain under literary interdict and the disdain of authors, who up to now have kept silence about whatever heart and soul the people might have. We asked ourselves whether in this era of equality in which we live there could still be, for writer or for reader, any dramas too foul-mouthed, any catastrophes insufficiently noble in their terror.¹⁵

There is a tone here of moral responsibility at odds with the professed objectivity of the authors. Fifteen years later in Edmond de Goncourt's Preface to Les Frères Zenganno this tone is missing, and a more dispassionate reason is given for studying the lower orders of society: "We began with the dregs of humanity because the woman and man of the people, nearer to nature and the savage state, are simple and uncomplicated creatures."¹⁶ It is this reasoning, rather than the democratic notion of literature as a right of the masses, that pervades later naturalist theory. As George J. Becker notes in his Introduction to Documents of Modern Literary Realism, realism and naturalism seem "to contain a kind of implicit Benthamite assumption that the life lived by the greatest number is somehow the most real."¹⁷

The concerns of the de Goncourts, Taine, and Flaubert were shared by Guy de Maupassant and Emile Zola. Among these concerns were the ideas that scientific observation and an impersonal author are necessary in literature. In "The Lower Elements" (1882), Maupassant suggests a reason similar to Edmond de Goncourt's for studying the lower elements in fiction: "For we should always incline to the mean, to the general rule."¹⁸ Maupassant is careful to note, however, that "the mania for the lower elements, which is decidedly the vogue, is only an excessively violent reaction against the exaggerated idealism that preceded it."¹⁹ The innovative use of the lower classes as a subject for fiction, begun as a protest against an established tradition in literature had, by the time of Maupassant's essay, itself become a tradition.

Although Bennett did not follow Maupassant in using the lower elements as a subject of his fiction, Maupassant clearly had a great

deal of influence upon him. In an 1895 letter Bennett listed Maupassant as a major influence in his writing and later used Une Vie as a model upon which to base The Old Wives' Tale. "Of 'the Novel,'" Maupassant's preface to Pierre et Jean, provides not only a synthesis of naturalist views on the novel, but a guide to Bennett's own later views:

[The novelist] will take his actor or actors at a certain period of their lives, and lead them by natural stages to the next. In this way he will show how men's minds are modified by the influence of their environment. . . . The skill of his plan [will consist] in the happy grouping of small but constant facts from which the final purpose of the work may be discerned. . . . [The novelist] will endeavor not to show us a commonplace photograph of life, but to give us a presentment of it which shall be more striking, more cogent than reality itself.²¹

The phrase "small but constant facts" and the idea of an intense picture of life recall Flaubert; the idea of environmental influences shows the current of thought in which Taine was caught up. All of these factors intrigued Bennett, who additionally worked Maupassant's idea of a "happy grouping" into his own belief in "synthetic impressionism" as a means of writing novels. Finally, the idea that the highest artistic achievement is to render the commonplace "more striking, more cogent than reality itself" clearly rings throughout Bennett's comment to Frank Harris: "If I cannot take a Petonville omnibus and show it to be fine, then I am not a fully equipped artist. (And I am)."²²

Though he is less directly an influence upon Bennett than Maupassant was, Emile Zola, as the man who codified and popularized the term "naturalist," is the central figure in the movement and represents at once the culmination of the movement and the downfall of its thought through an over-dependence upon the scientific model. Zola's essay

"The Experimental Novel" set forth the principles of naturalism and intensified the metaphor of scientific observation almost to the point of absurdity. For his model, Zola drew upon Claude Bernard's Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale.²³ In "The Experimental Novel," the author has become not merely observer but scientific experimenter; as Zola commented in another context, "Balzac says that he wants to paint men, women, and things. . . . I . . . submit both men and women to things."²⁴ The purpose of the experimental novel, as Zola explains in heavily scientific language, is "to show the working of the intellectual and sensory manifestations as physiology will explain them to us under the influences of heredity and the surrounding circumstances."²⁵ Zola's model of the novel as an experiment carries with it the implication that useful information on society's infection by corruption and moral decay may be gathered. The novelist becomes an "experimental moralist."²⁶ Zola views society as an organism, a macrocosm of the individuals through whom he traces his strains of behavior; the novelist therefore becomes its diagnostician.

"The Experimental Novel" carries the scientific spirit of objectivity to the point of absurdity: clearly the author controls the characters, so they cannot be independent organisms in an objectively set-up experiment. Much of the essay, however, provides a sound theoretical synthesis of the naturalist tenets established by earlier writers: an insistence upon heredity and environment as governing factors of human lives, the necessity of authorial impersonality, and the emphasis on the ordinary as a choice of subject. Zola is even concerned, as was Flaubert, with the matter of style. Flaubert's con-

cern with "le mot juste" finds a correlative in Zola's emphasis upon a style that suits the subject matter: "I think that the form of expression depends upon the method: that language is only one kind of logic, and its construction natural and scientific."²⁷ Zola reasoned that a clear style, an impersonal author, and the other tenets of the naturalists were not merely the result of a passing "school" of novel-writing, but were an inevitable outgrowth of the pervasive influence of science in the culture:

[T]he method . . . is an inevitable development. . . .
 [L]iterature does not exist only in the writer; it is also in the nature which it depicts and in the man whom it studies. Now if scientists change their ideas about nature, if they find the true mechanism of life, they force us to follow them. . . . The metaphysical man is dead; our whole domain is transformed with the coming of physiological man.²⁸

It is in reaction to this mode of thought, perhaps, that Bennett strove to show "metaphysical man" through the depiction of "physiological man."

From Flaubert to Zola, then, a consistency of ideology appears in the basic documents of French naturalism. Above all else, a scientific objectivity was sought. From this objectivity arose three changes in the form of novels. First of all, the scope of materials suitable for subject matter broadened to include people hitherto considered too vulgar for fiction. Later theoretical developments emphasized the importance of the lower classes as subjects for fiction, virtually to the exclusion of other subjects, as an increasing scientific bias saw lower-class man as representing essential, animalistic man. The author in the work and the style of writing were the second and third aspects of form to be altered. As the author should be impersonal, forbearing

to comment directly upon the work, so the style should be clear and devoid of excessive rhetorical flourishes; it, like the author, should demonstrate objective detachment. Scientific objectivity also dictated the method by which subjects were to be examined: through the painstaking amassing of details about everyday life. Through the collection of such data, causes may be attributed to, and effects predicted from, a given situation; foremost among the predictable causes of actions are heredity and environment, which dictate human as they do animal life. The latter emphasis on heredity and environment is perhaps most pronounced in Zola, who in describing the characters of Thérèse Racquin in his preface to that novel, declared that they were "absolutely dominated by their nervous systems and heredity, without free will, led into every act of their lives by the fatalities of the flesh."²⁹ Each of these tenets was influential in shaping Bennett's views on the art of writing fiction, and Bennett's own statements upon the art of writing clearly establish his dependence upon them.

In The Truth About An Author, an early autobiographical book, Bennett declared his dependence upon the French naturalists:

Turgenev ["because I read him always in the French translations"], the brothers de Goncourt, and de Maupassant were my gods. I accepted their canons, and they filled me with a general scorn of English fiction which I have never quite lost.³⁰

Bennett determined that his own fiction should not follow English realist models. For example, he disliked much of George Eliot, and as late as 1927 classed only Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and Silas Marner as admirable.³¹ Germinie Lacerteux by Edmond and Jules de

Goncourt, on the other hand, was a book that Bennett early admired. Somewhat sententiously, he advised George Sturt in 1896 that the sort of writing in Germinie Lacerteux "is what we in England ought to find profit and wisdom in. And I, for one, shall endeavour to imitate it--doubtless without much success, but the intention will be there."³² The close rendering of naturalistic precepts in A Man from the North, Bennett's first published novel, may well be such an attempt.

The only English author whom Bennett consistently praised is the naturalist George Moore. According to George Becker, George Moore is generally acknowledged as the British author primarily responsible for introducing the methods of French naturalism into the English novel.³³ Thus he may be considered Bennett's primary English mentor in the matter of naturalistic technique. Bennett himself made this point in a fragment of a letter written to Moore on December 24, 1920: "I wish also to tell you that it was the first chapters of A Mummer's Wife which opened my eyes to the romantic nature of the district that I had blindly inhabited for over twenty years. You are indeed the father of all my Five Towns books."³⁴ In his essay on George Moore, Bennett explained the significance of Moore in English fiction:

Steeped in the artistic theories of modern France, Moore contrasted the grave and scientific fiction of Flaubert and his followers with the novels of Englishmen, and he saw in the latter, by comparison, only so many fairy tales. . . . He sought to do, in English the thing which he had seen done in French.³⁵

In other words, Moore's contribution was not significant for Bennett because of any particularly English innovation Moore might have made in the adoption of French naturalistic principles; on the contrary, Moore's

writing is valuable because it does not deviate from French norms. Another comment that Bennett makes on Moore in the same essay reveals something of Bennett's own biases in fiction. Moore's achievement, declared Bennett, was that he "had raised upon a sordid and repellent theme [in A Mummer's Wife] an epic tale, beautiful with the terrible beauty which hides itself in the ugliness of life."³⁶ It is the latter point, of beauty hidden in the ugly or commonplace aspects of life, that was to occupy Bennett for his entire novelistic career.

"To find beauty, which is always hidden; that is the aim," wrote Bennett in his journal on January 3, 1899.³⁷ In the same entry he stated that his purpose in fiction was to "depict the deeper beauty while abiding by the envelope of facts."³⁸ As Flaubert had stated that "all colors are beautiful; it's a matter of painting them," so Bennett proclaimed in his journal that "there is no such thing as ugliness in the world. . . . All ugliness has an aspect of beauty. The business of the artist is to find that aspect."³⁹ The phrase "envelope of facts" and the idea that ugliness is a fit subject for fiction belies Bennett's assertion in the same passage that his enthusiasm for "naturalism" has passed. Indeed, Bennett's journal entries, letters, and expository essays on the art of writing fiction all demonstrate his debt to French naturalistic theory. He shares, in fact, the concern for objectivity that is the cornerstone of French naturalism, and his areas of interest coincide with theirs: an insistence upon objectivity of style, including authorial impersonality; a professed objectivity toward subject matter; and an adherence to a complex system of scientific observation.

The first of these areas of interest, style, was modified through-

out Bennett's career as a novelist. At first Bennett was more concerned with style than with subject matter. Invoking the "passion for words" found in Flaubert, the de Goncourts, and Maupassant, he deplored the British realists' lack of concern for the art of composition.⁴⁰

Bennett, echoing Flaubert, asserted that "an artist must be primarily interested in presentment, not in the thing presented."⁴¹ Later in life, however, he ceased to be intrigued by style as a purely aesthetic exercise. Instead, style became for him the means of elevating the subject to an intensity of emotion rather than an end to be sought in and of itself. Style is the means by which one can take the ordinary-- a Petonville omnibus, if necessary, as he mentions in his letter to Frank Harris--and "show it to be fine."⁴² The difference between Bennett's earlier and later conceptions of the role of style is subtle, but the later view demonstrates a concern with subject, particularly the elevation of a subject to artistic status, that is missing in the earlier statements. For the later Bennett, style and subject both are grounds for judging achievement.

The importance of subject, the second area of shared interest between Bennett and the French naturalists, is discussed in Bennett's writings primarily in terms of the wide range of possible subjects available. All of human life was Bennett's province: "To me the difference between one form of human life and another is insignificant," Bennett wrote to Frank Harris. "It is all almost equally exciting."⁴³ The only restriction that Bennett acknowledged was that the subject be taken from real life. For him, ideal art was inherently limiting: "whatever [the ideal artist] creates I will say to him: 'But I can

imagine something more grand than that. Why the devil did you stop there?"⁴⁴ The elevation of an ordinary subject into the realm of the extraordinary by means of the stylistic devices used and the transforming power of the imagination was to Bennett the greater challenge, and it is this idea, which originated with Maupassant, that dominated his later fiction.

Maupassant, in the preface to Pierre et Jean, described the process whereby the artist may be original:

There is an unexplored side to everything, because we are wont never to use our eyes but with the memory of what others before us have thought of the things we see. The smallest thing has something unknown in it; we must find it. To describe a blazing fire, a tree in a plain, we must stand face to face with that fire or with that tree, till to us they are wholly unlike any other fire or tree. Thus we may become original.⁴⁵

It is precisely this attitude, applied to the English middle class, that creates Bennett's brand of originality. Maupassant also prefigures Bennett's interest in humanity; in "The Lower Elements," Maupassant wrote, "I do not wish anything human to be alien to me."⁴⁶ In "The Author's Craft," Bennett criticised what he called the "morbid Flaubertian shrinking from reality." He concluded that "human nature is. And the more deeply the creative artist, by frank contacts, absorbs that supreme fact into his brain, the better for his work."⁴⁷ Thus Bennett, in his interest in all human life, takes not its lowest common denominator, the lower classes, as a subject, but the subject about which he was able to gather the most objective information: the middle class. In emphasizing the human elements, Bennett shied away from the animalistic emphasis common to French naturalism.

The third area of interest that Bennett shared with the naturalists is a strict adherence to an objective method of gathering and presenting the facts. The method of observing details became important for Bennett. An 1897 journal entry speaks of the necessity for "casting off all memory of use and custom" and beholding an object "like a baby or a lunatic, who lives each moment by itself and tarnishes the present by no remembrance of the past."⁴⁸ Such an approach appears to be Bennett's resolution of the problem put forth by Maupassant, of considering the object so long and attentively that one is able to see something that had remained unseen and unexpressed by previous authors. Elsewhere, however, Bennett wrote of the necessity for trained observation, in contrast to the idea of naive observation proposed in his journal. He considered the idea of trained observation to be of such significance that he devoted the opening pages of "The Author's Craft" to the concept. Apart from the inherent difficulties in perceiving an object, there is a danger that the resulting viewpoint, however objective, will fail to stress the significant details of a scene. Thus good observation is not necessarily indiscriminate:

Good observation consists not in multiplicity of detail, but in co-ordination of detail according to a true perspective of relative importance, so that a finally just general impression may be reached in the shortest possible time. . . . An ugly deed--such as a deed of cruelty--takes on artistic beauty when its origins and hence its fitness in the general scheme begin to be comprehended.⁴⁹

It is impossible to recognize the importance of what one sees without a relative system of values into which a new experience can be fitted.

The term that Bennett used to convey the idea of what he attempted

as a novelist is "synthetic impressionism." As early as 1896 he spoke of this as being the primary tendency of his art. He classed Conrad's The Nigger of the Narcissus as being in this style, although he did not see himself as writing in emulation of Conrad.⁵⁰ Bennett provided an explanation of the term in a letter to H. G. Wells: "[W]hat I aim at is the expression of general moods, whether of a person or a whole scene, a constant "synthesizing" of emotion."⁵¹ Detail alone is both over-inclusive and insufficient to carry out the author's intent. There is in any description a double process of selection that occurs, first in the mind of the observer and then in the retelling of the incident. If omissions and inadvertent emphases are unavoidable, how much more reasonable it is to exercise the selection process consciously, so that the resulting description, although deliberately manipulated, will at least fulfill the author's purpose. This argument, a familiar one to French naturalists, had been absorbed by Bennett at an early stage of his writing career. He did not question the necessity for the selection process, but that did not make it easier for him to exercise it in synthesizing his impressions. "It is the arrangement that kills one, the mere arrangement of sensation and event which--in a manner o'speaking, one knows by heart," he wrote in an 1895 letter.

Bennett, then, clearly followed the French naturalists in his use of an objective style to describe the incidents of ordinary life, in his non-didactic treatment of all subject--not merely those thought to be appropriate to literature--and in his emphasis on observation rather than invention as the primary process through which art is created. For Bennett, however, the creative artist must possess in

addition to these characteristics compassion, a sense of romance, and an interest in the individual. It is in these ways that he departs from French naturalistic tenets and in so doing creates his own form of naturalism.

Although he was an early advocate of form and technique in the novel, by the publication of "The Author's Craft" (1913) Bennett confessed that he attached "less and less importance to good technique in fiction."⁵³ What wins out over form in Bennett's mind is an attribute that he had mentioned in passing in an 1896 journal entry: "Essential characteristic of the really great novelist: a Christlike, all-embracing compassion."⁵⁴ This idea contrasts sharply with Flaubert's "pitiless method." Bennett's beliefs that novels should not preach did not stop him from believing that "all great stories have morals," an idea closer in spirit to George Eliot than Bennett would have cared to admit.⁵⁵

In addition to his departure from the French naturalists in his defense of compassion as essential to great literature, Bennett also implicitly stressed the importance of the middle class as subject matter for fiction. The middle class is almost by definition the largest and most representative class in Bennett's experience of English society; too, this emphasis arose out of his insistence that the individual life contains elements of romance, and for Bennett this is certainly characteristic of the English middle class. The examination of Zola's "bête humaine" had lent itself to the study of men in masses rather than men as individuals. In studying the middle classes, Bennett reversed the trend of French naturalism, although in one sense he remained true to the ideals of objectivity in observation and of writing

only about what one knows. A middle-class observer, however gifted, who writes about lower-class situations lacks an intimate knowledge of the details he observes. His experience can never be the same as that of the people whom he observes, and, while his observations will have the freshness of detachment, they will also have the lack of context, of an evaluative faculty, that hampers Bennett's naive observer who sees as "a baby or a lunatic." Bennett, writing of a class that he knew well, but with a self-imposed detachment of time and distance, could provide an accurate vision of his subject.

Bennett's interest in the individual is allied to his concern with the middle class and his reaction against seeing only "physiological" or only "metaphysical man": "Soul in the Abstract isn't interesting, at any rate in a novel; you must show the flesh [and] blood; while, on the other side, the flesh and blood without the soul is mere weariness."⁵⁶ Bennett was determined to show both. Since man has aspirations beyond the merely physical, it is logical that there are elements of romance in his life, and these, too, Bennett was determined to portray. He did not see romance as antithetical to realism. On the contrary, as he explained to Hugh Walpole:

All the big realists are romantic, no one more so than Balzac or Dostoevsky or Chekhov. The only sense that I can attach to the word as you use it is "sentimental"--meaning a softening of the truth in order to produce a pleasant impression on people who don't like the truth. It is quite possible to be romantic and truthful at the same time. All untruthful romance is vitiated. There is no ⁵⁷opposition or mutual excluding between romance [and] realism.

It is the romance of life, coexisting with and arising from the drab reality, that is the subject of Bennett's fiction. In finding romance

in an individual life, Bennett achieves his goal of finding "beauty, which is always hidden."

In examining the individual life, in treating his characters both compassionately and ironically, and in perceiving the romance and moments of greatness that invest even commonplace lives, Bennett departed from his French naturalistic predecessors. In his meticulous piling up of facts, his detached style, and his choice of a commonplace subject, he reflected the influence of the French naturalists. The transformation that Bennett worked upon the tenets of French naturalism is especially apparent in his treatment of the theme of compromise and failure. Conquered by his passions, the naturalistic hero lacks redemption or indeed any quality of recognition that might lead him to greatness. Bennett's heroes, on the other hand, are viewed very differently in their failures to attain their ultimate goals in life. In Bennett's novels, characters are defeated in small ways, and yet in most instances are able to perceive their lives as successful, as containing "romance." The degree to which the characters are able to see their lives as successful corresponds to Bennett's increasing disavowal of the naturalistic outlook on life. Thus the following examinations of A Man from the North, The Old Wives' Tale, and Clayhanger and These Twain of the Clayhanger trilogy will serve to illustrate Bennett's naturalism throughout his career. A Man from the North shows Bennett's early close adherence to French naturalism, just as The Old Wives' Tale shows his mid-career detached style and the Clayhanger books show Bennett's increasing predisposition toward what William Dean Howells called the "smiling aspects" of life. An examina-

tion of these works will demonstrate in what ways, and to what extent, Arnold Bennett redefined French naturalistic theory into a way of writing more suitable for his choice of subject matter.

Chapter Two

The Theme of Failure in A Man from the North

Critical opinion of A Man from the North (1898), Arnold Bennett's first published novel, has often echoed Walter Allen's early assessment of it. Although he does not totally dismiss the work--it is, after all, "an attractive work, because of its seriousness and honesty"--Allen sees it as the novel least typical of Bennett's later work, partially, one suspects, because of its close adherence to French naturalistic principles.¹ Bennett's commitment to following the subject and style of the French naturalists takes the form of imitation in A Man from the North, rather than the modified naturalism of his later novels. The novel has in consequence been regarded as a type of apprentice fiction. Such appraisals, however, do not reflect the true value of the novel, for contained within it are the first expressions of two persistent Bennett themes: the inevitability of compromise and failure as a part of middle-class life, and the difficulty of reconciling artistic desires with domestic responsibility. In A Man from the North these themes are skilfully merged, in that the ultimate sign of the artist-protagonist's failure, and, in this case, compromise with life, is seen to be his marriage and acceptance of suburban life. What is remarkable about this work is the way in which these themes are combined and developed through a limited set of symbols, which in turn provide an internal structure for the work. Through a careful examination of

the theme of failure as it is depicted through Richard Larch's irreconcilable desires for the artistic and domestic sides of life, it is possible to understand the significance of the novel in relation to Bennett's later works.

Although A Man from the North is more than a mere imitation of the French naturalists, it would be difficult to appreciate fully the complexities of the work without some understanding of the literary movement that inspired it. Naturalism, a movement begun in late nineteenth-century France, had as its basic precept a desire to observe meticulously the details of everyday life as it is lived by the majority of people. The French naturalists were also committed to reporting these details in a scrupulously objective manner. This emphasis on objective observation reached a peak in Emile Zola's "The Experimental Novel." Zola details the principles by which human beings, generally of the lower classes of society, may be used as "subjects" within the novel in order that the effects of forces such as heredity and environment upon them might be observed. Generally, depicting life as it really was meant depicting failure and despair.

Bennett specifically states his debt to the French naturalists in The Truth About An Author when he writes, "I sat down to write my first novel, under the sweet influences of the de Goncourts, . . . Flaubert, and de Maupassant. . . . Life being grey, sinister, and melancholy, my novel must be grey, sinister, and melancholy."² Louis Tillier states that the events of A Man from the North are drawn from Maupassant's Bel-Ami, but such identification with a particular author is not necessary in order to establish the theoretical background of the work.³

The naturalistic roots of the work are evident throughout, in the quiet, pessimistic tone; in the abundance of detail, much of it, like "a faint, sour odour escaped from the house,"⁴ unsavory; in the struggle between Richard's artistic ambitions, his "higher" nature, and his inherited tendency toward inertia and his sensual desires, his "lower" nature; and in the sense of inevitable failure that pervades the whole. The novel is, in Zola's sense, a scientific study, for the prefatory first chapter warns the reader that A Man from the North is less the study of an individual than a type, "a certain kind of youth . . . [who] is born to be a Londoner" (p. 1). Naturalistic in tone, too, is the authorial warning in the first chapter: "Let him be bold and resolute and [London] will make an obeisance, but her heel is all too ready to crush the coward and hesitant; and her victims, once underfoot, do not often rise again" (p. 2). The language here is naturalistic ("to crush the coward and hesitant"), as is the Zolaesque concept of the city as a single predatory organism. Since the outcome is thus foreshadowed, the reader's interest shifts from suspense about the ending to suspense about how the events in the novel will conspire to create the outcome. The incidents leading to Richard Larch's downfall become as important as the fact that he does eventually fail, and the structure within which his failures progress becomes additionally important.

In The Novels of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy 1890-1910, William Bellamy comments that A Man from the North "is structured upon the progress of spiritual defeat, accepting adaptation as a process inevitably involving capitulation to process and the status quo."⁵ Bellamy sees A Man from the North, like The Old Wives' Tale, as being structured by

four deaths: the actual deaths of Richard's sister Mary, her husband William, and Mr. Aked, and the metaphoric death that occurs when Adeline leaves for America. He further notes that such a structure divides the novel into four "units" of approximately eight chapters each. Bellamy's assessment is essentially correct; Bennett, a meticulous craftsman, was concerned throughout his career with balanced and coherent structures for his novels. In addition, the symbolic value of having deaths mark off structural segments in this pessimistic novel would not have escaped Bennett.

A Man from the North possesses this structure, which may be termed the "external" structure or structure of events in the novel, but it possesses another sort of structure as well. Richard's progress toward spiritual defeat is delineated somewhat differently, in what may be called the "internal" structure. The novel is the story of a young man's attempts at authorship, and as such the story, as well as his life, is structured by its relationship to his writing attempts and his subsequent failures. Richard Larch attempts to find his métier in four types of writing, each arguably more difficult to master than the one previous to it: the essay ("Memories of a City of Sleep"), the sociological treatise (The Psychology of the Suburbs), the short story ("Tiddy-fol-lol"), and the novel. Although he writes several other pieces during the course of the novel, the circumstances surrounding the writing of these four are shown in detail. Furthermore, each of these attempts is juxtaposed with an episode in which Richard encounters a woman. Thus the juxtaposition of episodes serves to heighten the reader's sense of Richard's conflict between women and his artistic

ambitions. Through an examination of this internal structure it is possible to appreciate the dynamic tension of character and incident that gives life to the novel.

The first section of the novel, which culminates in the writing of Richard's essay "Memories of a City of Sleep" in Chapter Six, establishes Richard as a character and subtly foreshadows one of the reasons for his eventual failure. In the second chapter the reader is given a perspective on Richard's character that makes his ultimate success seem unlikely. Richard's determination to spend the evening quietly at home gives way to his desire for more immediate excitement, and, with very little hesitation, Richard goes out into the "delicious streets, going east" (p. 6). This exposition of Richard's character is heightened by Bennett's symbolism at the beginning of Chapter Three: "He was [London's]; she his; and nothing should part the. London accepted him. . . . Filled with great purposes he straightened his back, and just then a morsel of mud thrown up from a bus-wheel splashed warm and gritty upon his cheek" (pp. 7-8). The "mud" or the more sensual part of his nature will indeed serve to distract him from his "great purposes" throughout the novel. Ironically, the mud is from a bus-wheel; it is on a bus that Richard reencounters Laura Roberts, the agent of his downfall. The impression of Richard's sensuality is reinforced throughout the rest of the chapter, in Richard's early dreams of the "Ottoman ballet . . . all legs and white arms" (p. 9) as well as in his passing encounter with a prostitute.

As the earlier chapters establish Richard's sensual interests, the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters establish his artistic and literary

interests. Here his lack of firm resolution is more evident. Although his father had left a house full of books, Richard "never troubled himself to look into them" (p. 16). The novels and magazines that he does read are doubtless those inspired by the Aesthetic movement, as they have the "covers of mystic design" (p. 18) and "eccentric" style of printing characteristic of that type of literature. Although he has gained a reputation in Bursley as "a great reader," he does not decide to become an author until after his luncheon meeting with Mr. Aked. (p. 18)

Mr. Aked represents Richard's idea of a man of culture. Himself an author, albeit a failed one, Mr. Aked, like Richard, is interested in French literature, as shown by his acquaintance with La Vie de Bohème. It is in this meeting that Bennett introduces the motif of food and restaurants that pervades the novel, a motif that functions as a metaphoric context of sensuality and attachment to life by which the characters of the novel may be judged. Mr. Aked sees himself as "an author of repute, but for a wayward stomach" (p. 29). His bad digestion is not merely his excuse for his failed career; it is a metaphor for his sterile, disappointed life, ruined by occasional sensual excesses. Richard is nonetheless inspired rather than depressed by his meeting with Mr. Aked, and sets about writing an essay entitled "Memories of a City of Sleep." In a detailed description of a scene echoed later in . . . Bennett describes Richard's initial procrastination over his writing and his later abandonment of it in favor of an evening at the Ottoman. As earlier in the novel Richard's imagination had strayed from the "rigours of a long sermon" (p. 9) to fantasies of

the Ottoman, so now he strays in actuality from his professed devotion to writing to the show at the Ottoman. Although Richard later finishes the essay, his failure to do so at once as he had intended is significant. This first literary failure is followed by Richard's encounter with a woman, a prostitute, who is described in greater detail than the prostitute he had earlier encountered. This time, however, Richard's connection with the prostitute is made explicit; he dreams of kissing the "Ottoman girl" and of tossing sovereigns into her lap. (p. 38)

The second episode in Richard's development, culminating in his collaboration with Mr. Aked on The Psychology of the Suburbs, is distinctive in that within it Richard is offered a choice for domesticity and literature--a compromise--in the person of Adeline Aked, Mr. Aked's niece. This section opens with an overview of Richard's literary progress. After Richard's essay is returned to him and he fails to rewrite it, he ignores his writing until he reads by chance an article demonstrating that "a mastery of the craft of words [is] only to be attained by a regular series of technical exercises" (p. 52). The author of this article refers to Flaubert, Maupassant, and Robert Louis Stevenson as models; throughout A Man from the North Bennett's own favorite naturalistic authors appear as models for Richard Larch. The reading of this article and the mention of his beloved French authors causes Richard's "cooling enthusiasm for letters" to leap into flame. (p. 52) The results of Richard's enthusiasm are several attempts at essays and a short story; the latter is "offered to an evening daily, and never heard from again" (p. 53). Richard's attempt at dramatic criticism also fails, but the failure ceases to trouble him when his salary is

raised. This incident suggests a shift in Richard's system of values, and indeed shortly after this he undergoes an existential crisis of sorts.

While riding on the train on the way to his brother-in-law's funeral, Richard confronts and excuses his inability to maintain a course of writing and study. He dismisses his concern over his lack of progress not with a positive resolution to succeed, but with the nihilistic questions, "Why bother about getting on? What did it matter?" (p. 59) In the morning his pessimism has vanished without being satisfactorily explored, and Richard is ready to be reaffirmed in his faith in life. Glancing out the window, he sees a farmer's wife and finds solace in "this suggestion of peaceful married love" (p. 61). Richard's response to this woman differs somewhat from his previous response to the prostitutes, for he is affected as strongly by this woman's domesticity as he is by her sensuality. In this way Richard's eventual marriage to Laura Roberts is foreshadowed, for in the character of Laura Roberts are combined these two traits of sensuality and domesticity.

The second section of the novel in particular displays several possible options for Richard, all of which are embodied in specific character types, like the aforementioned Laura Roberts. Richard's fellow clerk Jenkins, for example, represents the extreme of sensuality to which Richard could sink. Jenkins is a young dandy whose artistic taste in clothing balances his plain taste in food and restaurants. Unlike Richard, who for a time prefers the more ascetic fare at the vegetarian restaurant, Jenkins prefers the solid steak and baked potatoes that are served in the grill room. Richard's delicate nature is

offended by "the gross and ribald atmosphere which attended Jenkins' physical presence," an atmosphere created by Jenkins' unabashed delight in the physical pleasures of "restaurants . . . billiards, the turf, and women . . . usually described as 'tarts'" (p. 46).

Jenkins' sensuality is in marked contrast to Mr. Aked's withered spirituality. Mr. Aked's association with the world of culture is signified by his preference for French restaurants, where, ironically, he is often forced to eat the blandest foods because of his chronic indigestion. Although he is linked to Jenkins and to Richard by his supposed sexual relationship with Laura Roberts, Mr. Aked represents for Richard the world of intellect, even though his intellect has produced no literary work of substance. Richard feels more kinship with Mr. Aked than he does with Jenkins. Indeed, in Mr. Aked the reader discerns a picture of Richard Larch in thirty years' time. Richard, too, sees the resemblance; the measure of his ignorance is shown by the fact that the resemblance pleases him: "They were very much alike . . . and the fancied similarity pleased him" (p. 119). Significantly, their responses to The Psychology of the Suburbs are also similar. While Mr. Aked dwells upon the price that the book is to bring rather than upon its subject matter, Richard thinks of the book in similarly physical terms, although his vision of the volume bound in blue buckram is aesthetic rather than monetary. It is the finished appearance and the success of the book upon which they dwell, rather than the opportunity for expressing their creative impulses. Mr. Aked's death is thus an ambiguously received event for Richard. The flawed model of an author that Mr. Aked represents is gone, leaving Richard free to make

a fresh, and presumably better, start, but at the same time his second major attempt at literature fails.

As a representative of a choice of possible lifestyles for Richard, Adeline Aked presents a middle course between domesticity and the artistic life. Richard's demanding standards, however, place her only in the context of domesticity. Richard's indecision about choosing a life of literature over a life of suburban domesticity shows itself clearly in his relationship to Adeline. He himself sees this in Chapter Fourteen. As he contrasts the vision of Mr. Aked and himself as successful authors of The Psychology of the Suburbs with the vision of himself comforting a lonely Adeline after Mr. Aked's death, "the two vistas of the future clashed with and obscured each other, and he was overcome by vague foreboding" (p. 122).

At first Richard envisions Adeline as a possible mate; he fantasizes about "Mr. Richard Larch, the well-known editor, and his charming wife" (p. 88) in much the same fashion as he envisions the completed volume of The Psychology of the Suburbs. Adeline, however, shows herself to be deficient in taste according to Richard's standards: "Adeline was no artist" (p. 121). He condescends to Adeline because she prefers popular sentimental literature such as East Lynne and music such as "The River of Years" to Schubert and L'abbé Tigrane. But it is to the popular Illustrated London News and not The Yellow Book that Richard refers when he speaks of seeing Whistler's Portrait of His Mother. In addition, he seems unaware of the more formal title of the work--Arrangement in Black and Grey: A Portrait of the Artist's Mother--and hence may be equally unaware that Whistler's purpose was the arrangement

of line and shade and not an expression of filial sentiment. Richard's remark to Adeline that she reminds him of the picture suggests strongly that he has mistaken Whistler's work for one of the more conventional moralistic drawings of the Victorian age. Thus is Richard's concept of himself as an aspiring artist subtly undercut by Bennett. In terms of actual artistic achievement, Adeline is virtually Richard's equal.

Richard's attitude toward Adeline appears initially to change after the death of her uncle. At Mr. Aked's deathbed, Richard feels that his experience is expanded, "that till that moment he had been going through the world with his eyes closed. . . . Art was a very little thing" (p. 145). This marks a departure from his previous assumption that art is all in all to him, and that Adeline is therefore unworthy of his affections. This idea of the relative importance of art is reinforced when Richard looks at Mr. Aked's case of French books and sees no titles, only "a blur of yellow" (p. 153). Life itself, and not the naturalists' literary presentation of it, engrosses him now.

The proof of Richard's new attitude lies in his response to yet another possible "choice" offered to him. Soon after Mr. Aked's death, Richard meets another sort of woman from Adeline Aked and Laura Roberts--the female intellectual. Mr. Aked's nurse confesses herself to be a poet and the daughter of a prominent novelist, two characteristics that, according to Richard's previous standards, should cause him to prefer her to Adeline. Richard, however, is uncomfortable when confronted with this intellectual woman: "Her self-reliance somehow chafed him, and he directed his thoughts to Adeline's feminine trustfulness with a slight sense of relief" (p. 155). His predisposition toward the

unintellectual woman is shown as early as the incident on the train when he sees the cottage woman. On the train, he imagines that "the woman and her hypothetical husband and children were only peasants . . . their intellects dormant," yet they awaken in him "a feeling of envy" (p. 61). Richard's unspoken acknowledgement of his preference marks a step in his progress toward self-knowledge, and renders logical his ultimate decision to marry the least intellectually and artistically inclined woman in the novel, Laura Roberts. At this point, though, Richard is still involved with Adeline. With his initial objection to her lack of literary taste removed, their relationship proceeds on a new, more serious level.

The renewal of Richard's relationship with Adeline after the death of her uncle, and the consequent death of his and Richard's literary project, is rendered symbolically by Bennett. Richard, at Littlehampton, fails to recognize the smartly dressed woman "belonging to another sphere" (p. 166) as Adeline. Quite literally, he sees before him a new woman. Adeline's station in life is here seen to be above that of the "clerks and shopgirls around her"; by implication, Adeline's station is also far above that of Laura Roberts, a cashier. Now, at least, Adeline appears to be all that Richard could wish for in a wife, but he still hesitates. Richard's irresolution in his attempts at authorship is paralleled by his indecision about his relationship with Adeline. Like Flaubert's Emma Bovary, he is enchanted by the possibilities of life only as long as they appear closed to him. No event in his life can possibly live up to his expectations of it. Much of Richard's attitude toward life in general is summed up in his thoughts about

Adeline: "Often, when actually in [Adeline's] presence, he ventured to ask himself, 'Am I happy? Is this pleasure?' But as soon as he had left her, his doubtfulness vanished, and he began to long for their next meeting" (p. 196).

Bennett's naturalism is much in evidence in the way that Richard's idealism appears to hinder, rather than to help, his attempts to make his life satisfactory. In allowing Adeline to sail out of his life Richard makes impossible his dream of literature, for Adeline, if not an aid to his literary career, at least would not be a hindrance to it as Laura Roberts would. Significantly, it is once more at a restaurant that Richard's life takes an important turn. His choice of Laura over Adeline is hastened by his lunch with Adeline at the Crabtree vegetarian restaurant. Although he still sees Miss Roberts as commonplace in comparison with Adeline, his sympathy is with her and not with Adeline as he sees them together in the restaurant. Richard still refuses to take action to keep Adeline from going, a fact entirely in keeping with what the reader has seen of his character. Bennett describes Richard's state of mind in naturalistic terms: "He felt as if some object was rapidly approaching to collide with and crush him, and he was powerless to hinder it" (p. 209). This sentence recalls the metaphor of crushing in the first chapter. In a sense, not only Adeline's departure but all events are more powerful than Richard. As a naturalistic protagonist, he is the victim of heredity and events.

Richard is not significantly "crushed" by Adeline's departure, although he is momentarily downcast. After leaving Adeline he encounters yet a third prostitute, and this time he has "no resistance" (p. 217).

This plunge into sensuality precedes fourteen months of lethargy, during which he gradually gives up writing and studying. The beginning of the new year rouses him to undertake his third major sustained attempt at writing. The short story, as the narrative voice comments ironically, has "fortunately" been on Richard's mind "for several months" (p. 224). As he sets about writing "Tiddy-fol-lol," Richard forgets his previous failures. Richard's inability to learn from his previous failures is yet another aspect of his general self-deception. After studying Maupassant he makes three attempts at writing the story, all of them unsuccessful. In a pattern of rationalization with which the reader is now familiar, Richard excuses his failure on the grounds of his lacking "cultured feminine society" (p. 228). Like Mr. Aked, he prefers excusing himself on a flimsy pretext to making an honest effort. The next morning he meets Laura Roberts, who cannot be called "cultured feminine society," on an omnibus. His meeting with Laura after his third failure contrasts unfavorably with his meeting with Adeline after his second failure, for even the setting--a bus--is less filled with romance than a meeting at a seaside resort.

Throughout the novel Laura Roberts has been contrasted in subtle ways with Adeline. She is clearly of the lower middle class; Bennett, in describing her, comments that "any person of ordinary discernment would have guessed her occupation without a great deal of difficulty" (p. 230). In contrast to Adeline's alert expression, Laura Roberts has a facial expression that projects "amiability"; she is described as "passive, animal-like, inert," a description that recalls the description of the cottage woman. (p. 230) Bennett's curious choice of epithet

to describe Richard's thoughts about Laura--"a breathing woman"--even more strongly suggests Laura's physical appeal for him. (p. 231)

Richard, however, is still not ready to settle into her type of life. Like the Crabtree restaurant with which she is associated, Laura has become much improved in Richard's eyes, but he is for the moment unwilling to resume his connection with either one of them. He still wishes to become an author.

Richard's fourth and final attempt at the literary life culminates in the decision to write a novel. In reporting Richard's train of thought, Bennett makes clear the connection between this latest endeavor and the earlier ones: "Having failed in short stories and in essays, it seemed to him likely that the novel, a form which he had not so far seriously attempted, might suit his idiosyncrasy better" (p. 239). His new resolution is in part sparked by Mrs. Clayton Vernon's New Year's card. Throughout the novel Mrs. Clayton Vernon, Richard's cousin, has functioned as a representative of public opinion in Bursley, Richard's home town. Mrs. Clayton Vernon's high expectations of Richard cause him to resume his attempts at authorship after his first failure, and, once again, he decides to prove "to her and to Bursley that they had not estimated too highly the possibilities of Richard Larch" (p. 238). In a manner of speaking, one woman provides an impetus for Richard's literary career as another woman is the ostensible cause of its demise. Richard sends Mrs. Clayton Vernon a New Year's card in response to the one she has sent him, an action that he had not performed the previous year in his state of lethargy. He resolves to write a novel and to give up women until he has made a reputation for himself.

Through juxtaposition, however, the reader's belief in Richard's resolution is undercut. The next day he begins once again to dine at the Crabtree, the restaurant where Laura Roberts works. That night, Richard once again demonstrates his lack of perseverance as he writes the minimum number of words he has set for himself, sighs, and abandons his reading in favor of yet another evening at the Ottoman, the symbolic locus of sensual pleasure within the novel. The book that he stops reading is Paradise Lost, the title of which ironically names the renunciation of Richard's literary "paradise."

Richard's novel, the most serious attempt at writing that he makes, is also the source of his greatest discouragement at its failure. Not through an impersonal rejection slip does he recognize his failure this time. Richard has by now gained enough insight to recognize his own failures, of which this novel is unmistakably one. As he reads through the manuscript, "the unrelieved mediocrity" horrifies him, and "the certainty that he had once more failed" sweeps over him "like a cold, green wave of the sea" (p. 246). Once more his imagination turns to women, specifically to Laura Roberts. The possibility of Adeline's religious orthodoxy at one time made Richard uneasy; now he dismisses with a laugh the same possible objection to Laura. As it had once done with Adeline, his fancy now sets to work on Miss Roberts, "idealizing and ennobling her" (p. 250). It is ironic that this deliberate step toward his own ruin, his successful attempt to involve himself with Laura Roberts, is Richard's only successful decisive act in A Man from the North. Once more, too, he seeks out Jenkins, as if acknowledging the sensual part of his nature. Richard is this time aware of where

his true interests lie, as he had not been in his conflicting dreams about Adeline and Mr. Aked: "He had lost interest in his novel. On the other hand, his interest in the daily visit to the Crabtree was increasing" (p. 254). He clearly begins to understand his choice for domesticity, and his dreams of a literary life vanish rapidly as he falls in love with Laura. The naturalistic gift of detached perception is now his, but he is unable to use it to artistic advantage. His awareness of his own motives develops only when the self-knowledge he gains by the awareness can no longer help him.

There is no hint here that the marriage of Richard and Laura will resemble the traditional happy ending of less realistic novels. The sight of Laura's sister causes Richard to reflect with resignation that Laura, too, will soon be "a typical matron of the lower middle class" (p. 262). Richard's slender hope that his children will inherit literary ability is undermined by the certainty that Richard's lack of purpose will also be inherited. The ending suggests that neither in his marriage nor in his children will Richard be satisfied. Bennett, writing later about the work, comments that he sees Richard's marriage as "infallibly disastrous."⁶ In essence, then, Richard's unrealistic expectations cause him to abandon Adeline, with whom some sort of compromise might have been possible, for Laura, a woman who fulfills far fewer of his original expectations. His passivity leads him to the destiny that he fears for himself, to become one of the anonymous men from the north whom London crushes not into suicide, in itself an extraordinary act, but into the ordinary obscurity of the role of suburban husband. He will experience but never write about the

psychology of the suburbs.

A Man from the North can thus be seen to combine the plain style and detached, pessimistic tone of the French naturalists with several of the predominant themes of the movement: the conflict between "spirit" and "flesh," generally won by "flesh" in naturalistic novels; the inevitability of failure or compromise, seen as the same in this novel; the preoccupation with the lives of the middle and lower classes; and the influence of heredity and environment. Richard uses his environment as an excuse for his shortcomings; at several points in the novel he rationalizes his lack of literary productivity as being a result of a "lack of harmonious surroundings" (p. 238). Yet the naturalistic basis of A Man from the North does not prevent the use of recurring symbolic themes and characters. The theme of women as representatives both of sensuality and of banal middle-class values in conflict with artistic life is enhanced by Bennett's use of symbolism, such as the food and restaurant motif, and symbolic characters, such as Mr. Aked and Jenkins. In addition, Bennett retains these themes in his later works. A Man from the North is important in that it prefigures not only the domesticity versus adventure conflict and the theme of compromise and failure in The Old Wives' Tale, but the themes and basic subject matter for Clayhanger and These Twain as well.

Chapter Three

The Old Wives' Tale:

The Creation of a Naturalistic Heroine

In "Middle Class," an essay published nearly a year after the publication of The Old Wives' Tale, Arnold Bennett expresses a point of view on the middle class markedly different from that which had concluded A Man from the North. Characterizing the "solid bloc of the caste"¹ as being possessed of a blindness toward "nearly every form of beauty,"² a "grim passion for the status quo,"³ and a "heavy and half-honest stupidity,"⁴ Bennett yet ruefully acknowledges his ambivalence toward the middle class:

And I truly sympathize with the bloc. I do not blame the bloc. I know that the members of the bloc are, like me, the result of evolutionary forces now spent. My hostility to the bloc is beyond my control, an evolutionary force gathering way. Upon my soul, I love the bloc.

And although he further denigrates the middle class in later installments of the essay, claiming that the middle class as a subject matter for fiction "lacks interest . . . essential vitality . . . and both moral and spectacular beauty," the fact remains that it is from this apparently uncongenial material that Bennett's finest novel, The Old Wives' Tale, is fashioned.⁶ Seeing in middle-class life not death in life, as does his protagonist Richard Larch, nor yet romantic adventure, as does Edwin Clayhanger, Bennett maintains a balanced attitude toward

his subject in The Old Wives' Tale, and thus comes closer to the naturalistic ideal of disinterested reporting than he was to do in any of his other books.

What Bennett does outstandingly well is to take the ordinary details and people of middle-class provincial life, rather than the members of the lower class so often shown by the French naturalists, and make them interesting. Constance and Sophia Baines, Samuel and Cyril Povey, might each be traditionally heroic--that is, might reach out of themselves and their circumstances toward some common good--if handled differently; in Bennett's patient portrayal of their compromises and failures, however, none wins or loses on a totally heroic scale. Bennett's concern is with ordinary life, a strength noted by Henry James:

The canvas is covered, ever so closely and vividly covered, by the exhibition of innumerable small facts and aspects, at which we assist with the most comfortable sense of their substantial truth. The sisters, and more particularly the less adventurous, are at home in their author's mind, they sit and move at their ease in the square chamber of his attention, to a degree beyond which the production of that ideal harmony between creature and creator could scarcely go, and all by an art of demonstration so familiar and so "quiet" that the truth and the poetry . . . melt utterly together and we see no difference between the subject of the show and the showman's feeling, let alone the showman's manner.

The "quiet" method, the blending of matter and manner, the "innumerable small facts and aspects," the remarkably unremarkable characters, and the ambivalent, ironic tone all serve to underscore Bennett's basic theme: the ordinary is, as Constance reflects upon occasion, "what life is." Compromise and failure neither destroys nor ennobles any one

of his four major characters. Bennett's presentation of his characters is ironic, but it is important to understand the context of the irony with which he treats the characters. With the same sort of ambivalence that characterizes his view of the middle class, Bennett alternates between outright sympathy for his characters and ironic comment about them. The irony with which he treats them is itself undercut by the underlying sympathy Bennett feels for the characters. Thus a comment on Constance's heroism, for example, may strike the reader in two ways. At first only the outright irony is perceived: how could any deeds as ordinary as those that constitute Constance's life be perceived as heroic? The assumption is that Bennett is indulging in hyperbole for ironic effect. Yet the underlying sympathy adds another dimension to Bennett's hyperbolic term "heroism." Because of his naturalistic roots, Bennett is committed to the depiction of the ordinary, and who is to say that Constance's deed is not as truly heroic in her own life as the deed of an Oedipus or a Lear is to his correspondingly noble life? Thus does Bennett blend ironic detachment and sympathy in The Old Wives' Tale; through this method, he captures "the truth and the poetry" of everyday life.

Near the end of The Old Wives' Tale, Constance Baines Povey reflects that while she has remained "just Constance," Sophia, in the thirty years of her absence from Bursley, "might have grown into anything."⁸ Sophia Baines, beautiful, passionate, and adventurous, is as close as the book comes to having a conventional romantic heroine. According to Literary Terms: A Dictionary, a romantic hero is one who "rejects all social ties in his yearning for ultimate truth."⁹

With the modification that Sophia searches if not for "ultimate truth" then for some existence better than that she has known in Bursley, the term "romantic heroine" would at first seem to suit her well. Her elopement and turbulent life in foreign places help to foster this impression. Certainly the major event of her life is outwardly the stuff of romance, or at least of the novels of Bennett's early favorite, the novelist Ouida: elopement with a well-to-do young man to the exciting capital of artistic life and moral decadence, Paris.

Yet Bennett refrained from allowing Sophia's story to develop along conventional romantic lines, although that had been his first impulse. In his original conception for the novel, recorded in his journal entry of 18 November 1903, Sophia was to "have become a whore and all that; 'guilty splendour.'"¹⁰ The conception took on more specific shape a few months later when Bennett heard again "the story of the life, death, and burial of the mysterious pretty Englishwoman from Liverpool who gave lessons in English to a constant stream of messieurs chics, and expired alone at 7 rue Breda after being robbed by a Spanish male friend."¹¹ In The Old Wives' Tale, the more unsavory details are eliminated, however, and only the "mysterious pretty Englishwoman" and the location remain the same.

The romantic possibilities in Sophia's situation similarly intrigued Frank Harris, who berated Bennett for her prosaic end. Harris wanted Sophia "seduced and abandoned, and then . . . to take her life in her hand and go on . . . determined to grow . . . and to reach the heights: . . . You give her a muck-rake instead of a soul."¹² Bennett was himself more strongly drawn to another extreme, the conventional

naturalistic rather than the conventional romantic ending. Upon seeing an old French peasant woman harnessed to a cart, "'little more than a brute,'" he "felt a tremendous naughty temptation to make the daughter of the most respectable Bursley draper sink in the world and end her days as the companion of dogs in front of a cart."¹³ Sophia and Constance both end as companions of dogs, but definitely not in such sordid circumstances. Bennett instead chose to represent what, given her "Baines blood," would have been the most reasonable course for Sophia to follow: self-denial, thrift, and a return to her birthplace. In his letter responding to Frank Harris's criticism of the novel, Bennett accused Harris of preferring the "spiritually expensive"--in this case, excessive sentimentality--to the realistic.¹⁴ Bennett's idea that the "spiritually expensive" type of plot should be used sparingly explains perhaps why he refused to yield to the melodramatic on either end of the scale by refusing to show Sophia's fall and rise, as Harris wanted, or her complete animalistic degradation, as required by some of the extreme French naturalists. By placing his heroine between these two extremes, by disappointing the readers both of Ouida and of Zola, Bennett took a step forward in defining naturalism on his own terms instead of following either traditional romantic or traditional naturalistic conventions.

From the very beginning of the book it is clear that Sophia is destined for something greater than Bursley and the fate of her "less adventurous" sister Constance. Although "those two girls," as Bennett calls them at the very beginning of the book, are at first indistinguishable, their characters are established in the second part of the

first chapter. While waiting for her mother to return, Constance dutifully begins stitching on the "monotonous background" (p. 9) of a firescreen while Sophia wanders aimlessly about, "a prey ripe for the Evil One" (p. 10). Such actions foreshadow Constance's life--Bennett later characterizes it as "laborious tedium . . . never-ending and monotonous" (p. 141)--and Sophia's as well, for her restlessness causes her to meet Gerald Scales and eventually to elope with him. And during the same short scene, in a characteristic challenge to her mother's authority, Sophia, not the obedient Constance, tries on her mother's sacred best dress and is ignominiously toppled by it, as she will on some later occasions be toppled by Mrs. Baines's august presence.

The tooth-pulling episode, too, is telling as regards Constance and Sophia's future relationship. When Samuel Povey complains of a tooth-ache, both girls minister to him with laudanum and shawls, but Sophia goes a step further in pulling a tooth--the wrong tooth, as it turns out--while Mr. Povey sleeps. Sophia's risk-taking meets its match in Constance, however. The real struggle between the sisters occurs after they have retired for the night. Sophia taunts Constance, who already shows a marked partiality toward Samuel, by keeping the tooth in her treasure box; Constance, roused to fury in what Bennett describes as the "battle," commits an "inconceivable transgression of the code of honour" (p. 29) by rescuing the tooth from Sophia's treasure-box and pushing it out the window. The incident foreshadows their later life together, for Constance is later the only character in the book who can effectively "defeat" Sophia.

The next few episodes develop the conflict between Sophia and an

adversary who, unlike Constance, she is able to defeat: her mother. As the first phase of her increasing separation from Bursley, Sophia decides to become a teacher not purely, as James Hall suggests in Arnold Bennett: Primitivism and Taste, out of a desire for "taste" or higher culture, but, as any adolescent might, out of a desire to get away from home.¹⁵ She is set against going into the shop, yet "she knew that she would be expected to do something, and she had fixed on teaching as the one possibility" (p. 44). Too, teaching might, in Sophia's view, take her as far away as London. Though first her mother and then her father forbid the idea--as the representatives of middle-class tradition they can do nothing else--Sophia is undaunted. She begins to challenge and defeat her mother on her mother's own ground. By refusing to take the castor oil, she wrings from Mrs. Baines the admission that she cannot be forced to take it, and by walking out on the Square without permission, the first of her independent travels in the book, Sophia defies her mother's ability to keep her confined, literally and figuratively, to the house and shop. Sophia's third triumph in this section occurs in her absence. Miss Chetwynd persuades Mrs. Baines to allow Sophia to train as a teacher, an idea that both Sophia's parents had dismissed as impossible but a short time earlier. Miss Chetwynd acknowledges silently, however, that it is not her own persuasiveness but the fact that Sophia has already got the better of her mother that causes Mrs. Baines's acquiescence.

Thus far Sophia's adventures have been rather tame, serving primarily to show her desire to separate herself from her middle-class background, although her success at getting what she wants marks

her as extraordinary. The next two events in her life, however, contain elements of romance. As Constance and Mrs. Baines go off to see the dead elephant in the Square, they leave Sophia in charge of her father John Baines, "Mid-Victorian England," lying in bed. (p. 69) She impulsively deserts her duty, something the tradition-preserving Constance would never do, to talk with Gerald Scales. Symbolically and literally, she rejects mid-Victorian England and its values in favor of the romance and the world beyond Bursley that she associates with the commercial traveller Gerald Scales. Her choice of romance over duty reverses itself in the later Paris sequences of the novel, but her choice early in the novel is consistent with Sophia's incarnation as a romantic heroine.

Sophia is not yet free, nevertheless, from the toils of duty. Her revolt is soon suppressed as, "with an invalid's natural perverseness," John Baines dies during her absence; his death is described naturalistically in its emphasis on details such as Mr. Baines's "black, swollen mucous lips" (p. 66). The incident, though it may seem contrived, originates in an observation Bennett made in his journal years before:

. . . an authentic story about an old man of ninety. For thirty years one or other of his aged daughters had always been at the old man's side. . . . One day both daughters happened . . . to be away together for a quarter of an hour. They left the old man apparently quite well, but he took advantage of their absence to die.¹⁵

It is worth noting that Bennett, the naturalistic reporter of the journal account, gives way to Bennett, the ironist, in the fictional account, thus minimizing the tragedy of the death by emphasizing the comedy surrounding its occurrence. In the novel, the last sentence of

the journal account is transmuted into a more elevated diction for comic effect: "he had . . . taken advantage of Sophia's brief dereliction to expire [emphasis mine]" (p. 66). Thus the death of her father becomes yet another of Sophia's comic triumphs over the existing order. Her triumph over her father parallels her earlier triumph over her mother, another representative of the existing order.

Through symbolism and an attention to detail Bennett undercuts the romance of Gerald and Sophia's courtship, just as he has earlier undercut the tragedy of John Baines's death through the use of comedy. Although it is technically romantic, the courtship of Gerald and Sophia decidedly lacks the elements of romance as they are generally pictured in fiction. Gerald is handsome but is somewhat shorter than Sophia. He lacks the polish and elaborate plans of a seducer: "the classic device of the seducer" (p.252) that he tries fails miserably when put up against the common sense of the "fragile slip of the Baines stock, unconsciously drawing upon the accumulated strength of generations of honest living" (p. 259). The romantic seduction scene disintegrates into a conflict of wills between two young rebels against the middle class who fail to see that even in their rebellion they cannot escape its values. As much as she tries, Bennett suggests, Sophia cannot separate herself from her heredity. In his analysis of the cavern symbolism in the novel, James Hepburn sees Sophia's refusal to look into the railway pit during their courtship as foreshadowing her later refusal to "look into the pit [of corruption] with him."¹⁶ Although she does not mind walking with Gerald in the "clayey marl" and getting her feet muddied to a certain extent, Sophia's refusal to look into

the pit may be seen as an early manifestation of her fundamental Baines conservatism. She is ready to rebel, but never will she do so past the limits set by her Baines common sense. Her "rebellion" is as ordinary in its way as Constance's devotion to duty. The seduction story in The Old Wives' Tale thus ends, not with seduction and abandonment, as in Frank Harris's preferred version of the story, but in a decidedly prosaic marriage.

Sophia's life in Paris similarly does not live up to its promise of romance, though, as James Hall suggests in Arnold Bennett: Primitivism and Taste, Paris represents for the characters in Bennett's novels the epitome of culture and romance.¹⁸ Abandoned by Gerald after some mean-spirited squabbling about money, Sophia falls ill of mucous fever. Hall sees the illness as a relic of the illnesses suffered by heroines in Victorian novels.¹⁹ Reality intrudes upon romance as Sophia is forced, in her illness, to depend upon Madame Foucault. Madame Foucault, the magnificent woman in the vermilion cloak Sophia had last seen at Sylvain's, is four years later merely a blousy, aging prostitute, embarrassing in her hysteria over the loss of her young lover. In one of the symbolic scenes in the novel, Sophia walks through the apartment after her illness, impressed at first with the apparent lavishness of her surroundings as she had been impressed by Madame Foucault at Sylvain's. Almost immediately, however, she is repelled both by the dirt and the "horrible welter of a cabinet de toilette" as she "peeps," literally and figuratively, "behind the screen" (p. 315). Earlier, Sophia has reflected on the emotional change that the geographic transition of moving to Paris has made in her self-perception:

In the Square she was understood to be quite without common sense, hopelessly imprudent; yet here, a spring of sagacity seemed to be welling up in her all the time, a continual antidote against the general madness in which she found herself. (p. 261)

As a culmination of this process Sophia becomes a "tragic masterpiece" (p. 293) of Gerald's devising, a woman of experience but little compassion. The look behind the screen helps to complete her education: "And now Sophia knew that she, Sophia, knew all that was to be known about human nature" (p. 321). The seeming irony--she cannot, after all, know everything, even though she assumes that she does--does not negate the fact that this is indeed the major step she takes toward understanding human nature.

What saves Sophia from Mme. Foucault's fate is not this knowledge, nor yet the native sagacity that causes her to reflect that even as a courtesan she would surely have saved money. Once again instinct saves Sophia from herself. Wondering at her refusal of Laurence's offer, which would surely have led her into the demi-monde, Sophia decides that it was "the result of some tremendously powerful motive in herself, which could not be questioned or reasoned with--which was, in fact, the essential her" (p. 333). Bennett leaves tantalizingly ambiguous here the issue of whether "the essential her" results from the Baines blood in Sophia, or possibly some environmental or social pressure. Indisputable is the fact that once again the inevitable course of a romantic novel of seduction and abandonment has been transformed to create a more realistic picture of life as it is really lived.

Sophia's essential "Bainesness" emerges as a combination of the commercialism of her forefathers and the middle-class domestic instincts

of Mrs. Baines and Constance. Her native "spring of sagacity" causes her to rebel against what she sees as the improvidence and extravagant emotionalism of the French just as she has earlier rebelled against the stolidity of British provincial middle-class life. The sexual atmosphere of the rue Bréda, its haphazard and easygoing style of life, epitomizes one aspect of the nineteenth-century English attitude toward France in general and Paris in particular. Sophia's unconscious response to the rue Bréda is to exaggerate her Englishness, something she accomplishes by reverting to more typically "Baines" behavior. Rejecting selling her body as a courtesan as she has years earlier rejected the respectable sort of selling involved in being a shopkeeper, she becomes an entrepreneur in a different line: the pension.

Sophia's entry into the world of commerce is accidental. When Mme. Foucault runs away with a lover, leaving Sophia in possession of the flat and furniture, Sophia takes on the responsibility of creating a pension. In allowing herself to be housebound, she begins to lead a life more and more like that of her sister Constance. In a sense, Sophia becomes as much a slave to her rickety furniture as Constance is to the "supremely 'good'" pieces from the Baines and Maddack households. As Constance dislikes leaving her house, so, too, does Sophia refuse to leave her furniture during the siege, though she can well afford to do so. For both sisters, housekeeping becomes a passion. In their pride about their houses, both sisters ignore the outside world. For Constance, "newspapers did not exist. She never had the idea of opening one, never felt any curiosity which she could not satisfy, if she could satisfy it at all, without the powerful aid of the Press" (p. 203).

Sophia ignores newspapers for months at a time, and even the momentous events she lives through stir her not at all: "Her ignorance of the military and political situation was complete; the situation did not interest her" (p. 345). Yet the siege affects Sophia by rousing in her the commercial spirit of the new age. In buying low and selling high, ruthlessly charging all that the traffic will bear, she reflects the new acquisitiveness of the Midland Clothiers Company that eventually takes over the Baines shop. Her acquisitiveness also is a "reversion" to what E. M. W. Tillyard calls the "vigorous mercantile Non-conformism" of her forefathers.²⁰

Sophia confirms her choice of business over romance when she rejects Chirac. In Chirac, Bennett has again amended the traditions of the romantic novel to tally more closely with real life. From his initial appearance in The Old Wives' Tale, Chirac performs deeds consistent with the role of lover by rescuing Sophia on several occasions: in the restaurant when the drunken Gerald fails to come back for her; in helping her to settle with the landlady after the execution at Auxerre; and in taking her to Mme. Foucault's instead of a hospital when Sophia falls ill. Yet in person he is even less prepossessing than Gerald, and Sophia ultimately finds him ridiculous. The instinct that enables her to defeat Gerald and refuse Laurence again asserts its power. She refuses Chirac not because she wants to, but because she can do nothing else: "the instinct which repulsed him was not within her control (p. 360) She wanted to love him. . . . But this obstinate instinct held her back" (p. 361). Instinct is, of course, a favorite catchword of the French naturalists, since they often use it to describe

the animalistic drive that motivates the physical behavior in naturalistic novels. How ironic, then, for Bennett to reverse the naturalistic use of the term by using "instinct" to characterize Sophia's feeling of self-preservation that takes the form not of self-indulgence, as might be expected, but self-denial. (p. 256) At the Gare du Nord before the balloon ascent, Sophia realizes that the situation with Chirac is romantic, but allows him, and, it is understood, all hope of romance to sail away in a balloon, never to be heard from again. Early in the novel, during her walk with Gerald to the pit-shaft, Sophia feels as "helpless as though she had been in a balloon with him" (p. 100). Here she rejects the "balloon-ride" of a romance with Chirac. The narrator states flatly that "this was the end of Sophia's romantic adventures in France"; it is also, in fact, the end of her residence in France as epitomized by the rue Bréda. (p. 373) Shortly afterward she buys the Pension Frensham, situated on the English-named rue Lord Byron, though nothing of the romance of Byron's life seeps into hers. She takes over the pension from an English couple and spends the next thirty years catering to English tourists, neither reading a French book nor seeing a French play. Instead she creates a miniature Bursley in the heart of Paris. As James Hall remarks, she symbolically becomes "Mrs. Frensham";²¹ she is married, as Constance is, to her house.

When Sophia returns in fact as well as in spirit to Bursley in Book Four, she has fulfilled the letter if not the spirit of Gerald's comment on Claudine Jacquinet, who "made a lot of money, and retired to her native town" (p. 266). Unlike Claudine Jacquinet, however, Sophia has not become a "wrong 'un"; the tragedy of her life lies in a different

quarter. She is constitutionally unable to be satisfied in her surroundings and continually rebels against the status quo, whether it be established in terms of English or French life. She is impatient and restless with St. Luke's Square and Bursley early in life; indeed, this forms the basis of her friendship with Gerald Scales, as they band together to look down on Bursley's provincial excitement over a dead elephant. Yet during her sojourn in Paris, Bursley and things English become "good," and the desire for romance and appreciation of things French that characterizes her in Bursley give way to exasperation when she is confronted with the real France. Conversely, on her return to Bursley she reflects on the virtues of the French:

She had always compared France disadvantageously with England, always resented the French temperament in business, always been convinced that "you never knew where you were" with French tradespeople. And now they flitted before her endowed with a wondrous charm. (p. 429)

Sophia's renewed condescension toward Bursley is matched by a resumption of her earlier struggle with Constance. Shortly after Sophia arrives in Bursley and perceives its limitations, she initiates a campaign to make Constance travel with her. The action is ironic in light of what the reader has seen of Sophia in Paris. That the Sophia who only by a serious illness can be persuaded to give up the Pension Frensham, and who refuses to leave her furniture during the siege of Paris should now chide Constance for refusing to leave her house is ludicrous. The narrator reinforces this impression by commenting that "Sophia's life, in its way, had been as narrow as Constance's. Though her experience of human nature was wide, she had been in a groove as

deep as Constance's. She had been utterly absorbed in doing one single thing" (p. 460). Like her sister, Sophia is stubborn, and she fails at first to see that her triumph in getting Constance to Buxton is an extraordinary, never-to-be-repeated event. She does not understand that she cannot best Constance, a preserver of tradition, as she has bested those earlier traditionalists, her parents. In reasoning with Constance, Sophia echoes Aunt Harriet Maddack's bullying of Mrs. Baines. Aunt Harriet's boast that there is "no smoke at Axe! No stuffiness at Axe!" (p. 108) prefigures Sophia's disgust that Constance must live "'in all that smoke! and with that dirt!'" (p. 464). But Constance, unlike her mother, will not be dragged away from her home in order to be endlessly instructed by her more energetic sister. Sophia, as Aunt Harriet's protegee, has tried and failed to play the part her predecessor has played previously in the relationship between elderly sisters, and to her credit realizes her defeat immediately, saying to herself, "'You've made a mess of this. You've not conquered this time. You're beaten'" (p. 466). After a lifetime of taking charge, Sophia is at last vanquished though Constance's sheer inertia, reduced to indulging in petty wars with servants who once would never have dared to defy her.

Time is the other adversary that Sophia cannot defeat. Even as a young girl she detests Mr. Critchlow, the only character in the book who successfully defies time and thus comes to be associated with it. It is the recognition of what time can do, rather than the fact of Gerald's death, that causes Sophia's second stroke and her death. Looking at Gerald's body, Sophia is struck by "the riddle of life; he had once been young, and . . . he had grown old, and was now dead. That

was all. Youth and vigour had come to that. . . . Everything came to that" (p. 485). Sophia does not have the equanimity that Mrs. Baines and Aunt Harriet experience when looking at the body of John Baines, or the rational thought that Constance has after Samuel's death, that every marriage must end with a widow or a widower. Like her father, Sophia dies of a stroke, thus completing the repetition of her past against which she has for so long struggled. The education of Sophia Baines, which began with Gerald Scales, thus comes full circle by ending with him. It is appropriate that, since each shock of experience that Sophia undergoes further defines the "tragic masterpiece" of her life, the ultimate knowledge to which she can attain should kill her. Her final understanding is an epiphany, for she understands her own life in the context of eternal time.

In weighing the triumphs and failures of this would-be romantic heroine, it is possible to see how completely Bennett has undercut the potential emotional excesses of the novel. Against all the wishes and advice of her parents, Sophia gets the romance she dreams of, as represented by Gerald Scales and a life in Paris. Yet her marriage is not a success and, as she early reflects, she performs a sort of penance by staying with Gerald. Her other great desire is to run a first-class pension and to make money; she achieves both aims at the same time. But the cost of her effort is considerable: a life of monotony and self-denial, devoid of romance and human affection. Even this limited success is undercut by Sophia's recognition at Buxton that there are other ways than hers to run a first-class boardinghouse, and that the art to which she has devoted most of her life is an art that she has

never finally mastered. In a characteristic Bennett irony, Sophia's successes as a romantic heroine--her elopement, her life in Paris--turn out to be the source of her greatest failures. Bennett's relentless examination of how a member of the middle class can make the most extraordinary events ordinary, of how a rebel like Sophia creates for herself an ordinary life instead of the grand life she envisions, creates a picture of the intensity of life without resorting to melodrama.

In opposition to Sophia exists a character whose every movement seems mundane, whose life is almost an exercise in middle-class values, yet whose life encompasses a moment of greatness: Samuel Povey. If Sophia represents Bennett's ironic treatment of the romantic heroine, then surely Samuel receives an equally ironic treatment as an idealistic hero, although Bennett's ultimate judgment of Samuel, like his final judgment of Sophia, rests not in irony but in ambiguity. Sophia begins by rebelling against Bursley and ends by internalizing Bursley so completely that it is indistinguishable from her own values. Samuel begins in outward conformity to Bursley's staid commercial values, yet ends by leading the town in championing his cousin Daniel, a man whom Bursley likes but mistrusts somewhat because of his adherence to the "cult of Pan." Samuel's "Povey" heredity determines much of his behavior, just as Sophia's "Baines" blood determines hers. As he matures, Samuel becomes more and more true to his Povey blood. "Povey blood" is characterized by a spirit of adventure. In Daniel Povey, it expresses itself through Daniel's adherence to the cult of Pan. In Daniel's son, Dick, the Povey blood appears as an obsession with progress, symbolized in a series of new and progressively more dangerous

machines: boneshaker, automobile, and balloon.

At the beginning of The Old Wives' Tale, Samuel is presented primarily as a comic character. As is Gerald Scales, Samuel is unprepossessing physically, and the expository description of his character scarcely suggests his potential greatness:

He was Mr. Povey . . . a quiet, diffident, secretive, tedious, and obstinate youngish man, absolutely faithful, absolutely efficient in his sphere; without brilliance, without distinction, perhaps rather little-minded, certainly narrow-minded; but what a force in the shop! (p. 14)

The final phrase captures exactly a characteristic Bennett ambivalence about Samuel, as does the paralleling of virtues such as faithfulness and efficiency with their attendant deficiencies. What a narrow and crass sphere, suggests Bennett the artist, in which to excel, yet Bennett the naturalist recognizes that greatness is indeed found primarily in such mundane places. Excessive, perhaps, is the application of the label "narrow-minded," for Samuel alone of the major characters in the novel is able to rise above his original fixed perceptions of the world in defense of his cousin Daniel. Yet the description is in keeping with the initial characterization of Samuel as an unexceptional Everyman: he is first seen after all, as a comic coward, avoiding a visit to the dentist. The tooth-pulling episode is nevertheless the last instance in which Samuel is seen as purely comic.

Samuel soon begins to establish his individuality within the confines of what Bennett suggests is his natural sphere: the shop. Chapter Five of Book One introduces the respective courtships of Sophia by Gerald and Constance by Samuel; the courtship of the latter pair begins,

appropriately, over the making of tickets for bolts of cloth. This trivial activity is identified as "revolutionary" by the narrative voice, which comments that "they were the forces of the future insidiously at work to destroy what the forces of the past had created" (p. 75). Samuel is not only a revolutionist; he is, as is his son after him, an artist. Already acknowledged to be "the best window-dresser in Bursley," he brings what is described as "his little parcel of imagination" to the invention of adjectives to describe cloth. (p. 75) He, like Sophia, is confined by the limitations of "instinct," but unlike her, he uses to the utmost the artistic talents in his nature. Like Sophia, too, he attempts to vanquish the forces of tradition in the person of the formidable Mrs. Baines, with only indifferent success at first: "exquisite" on a window ticket, she tells Constance in his hearing, is "not suitable," and Samuel is disturbed enough to blush. (p. 78)

Mrs. Baines has not won her battle for tradition and Constance yet, though. Love rouses Samuel to feats of unusual courage, as it does Constance when she rifles Sophia's treasure box for his stolen tooth. Mrs. Baines and her reinforcement, Aunt Harriet Maddack, momentarily daunt him; they go "over Mr. Povey like traction-engines," leaving him "lying crushed there in the road" (p. 107). Jealousy, however, compels him to put aside his fears and confront Mrs. Baines over his right to be engaged to Constance. The confrontation is an act of bravery undercut by a narrative comment that "he might have appeared somewhat grotesque to the strictly impartial observer of human nature"---in short, to a naturalistic author. This somewhat coy evasion of authorial respon-

sibility in commenting upon Samuel paradoxically calls more attention to the author's judgment than the undadorned adjective "grotesque" would have. There is need for the appeal to the "impartial observer," however. The scene marks a turning point in the conversion of Samuel from a comic to an heroic figure; in deference to Samuel's former characterization, the author must concede, as the reader is probably doing, the grotesquerie inherent in Samuel's challenge to the formidable Mrs. Baines, yet the emphasis in the paragraph is on Samuel's genuine emotions, which are not to be laughed at. By showing the reader an unexpected depth of feeling and tenacity in Samuel, Bennett prepares the reader for Samuel's extraordinary fight to save Daniel. Samuel retains some comic characteristics, but never again is he treated with the same condescension.

With his old adversary Mrs. Baines safely at Axe after his marriage to Constance, Samuel allows more of his individuality to surface. Constance at first encourages the change, suggesting that he wear linen collars rather than the cheap paper ones he is accustomed to wearing. The switch to linen collars, his earlier conversion from Primitive Methodism to Wesleyan Methodism, and his increased contact with Daniel, a shop-owner, mark Samuel's transformation from shop assistant to shopkeeper, and his attendant entrance from the working into the middle class. As Hall remarks, "the Baineses are an old family compared to that of Samuel Povey, and Bennett often suggests that . . . in the matter of paper collars . . . they could teach Povey a thing or two."²² The changes Samuel himself makes are less indicative of his change in class than of his emerging spirit of adventure. He buys a terrier,

though no dog has ever before invaded the Baines household, and smokes openly rather than secretly, thereby coming "out in his true colours as a blood, a blade, and a gay spark" (p. 134) much as Cyril "comes out" later as a dandy. Replacing the sign over the Baines shop is the most monumental of the changes Samuel makes, and it, even more than his success in getting Mrs. Baines to come to Bursley for Christmas, shows that the household has entered a new era. Yet in his dealings with his family, notably the "criminal" Cyril, Samuel is not noticeably different from Mrs. Baines, the former ruler of the house.

With his son, Samuel behaves like the Jehovah of the Old Testament, ruling precisely by the letter of the law. He is the "high invisible god" that determines the precise time of Cyril's feeding, ignoring the mute emotional appeals of Constance and Miss Insull. Similarly, the rude four-year-old Cyril who hits Mr. Critchlow's grandniece and runs to the coal cellar is punished by Samuel in his guise of "a god who is above human weakness" (p. 169). Cyril's greatest crime, the stealing of a silver florin from the till to buy a pipe and cigarettes, causes Samuel to reflect on his own possible bad influence on Cyril. He does not see Cyril's smoking as the "Povey blood" coming out in his son. Rather, he blames himself for the bad example he has set his son. His Old Testament righteousness thus turns upon him as much as upon his son. As Samuel sees it, the "sins of the father" have been visited upon the son, and the son must be punished accordingly.

Other traits of Samuel are carried on in his son. As Samuel's smoking is carried on in Cyril, so too is his artistic sense, though Cyril's art is not, like his father's, useful. Cyril further shows

traces of his father by finally getting the ugly bull-terrier that Samuel earlier wants but denies himself because of the cost. Samuel is occasionally indulgent with Cyril, but in his punishment of Cyril's crimes, he is exacting and unremitting, lacking, or so Constance thinks, in a sense of proportion: "'After all,' she would whisper, 'suppose he has taken a few shillings out of the till! What then? What does it matter?'" (p. 186) The spirit of repression that Samuel shows in his dealings with Cyril is appropriate to his position as a middle-class Victorian father and as an upstanding member of the Bursley community. The "Povey blood" that he allows to surface only occasionally in himself is exactly what he seeks to stamp out in his son, instilling in him instead a rigid respect for Law.

The "high invisible god" in Samuel gives way when he deals with his cousin Daniel, a "priest" in the Hellenic pre-Christian cult of Pan, according to the narrative voice. With Daniel, Samuel becomes transformed from Everyman into a type of Christ, dying in a futile attempt to redeem his cousin. The body of Gerald Scales teaches Sophia what life is, and the body of Sophia teaches the same lesson to Constance. Samuel has a similar education: he comes to understand through his conversations with Daniel that "life was, and must be, life" (p. 151). His education through Daniel is completed when he, like his wife later, and like his sister-in-law, gazes over a naturalistically described body:

Mrs. Daniel Povey lay stretched awkwardly on a worn horsehair sofa, her head thrown back, her face discoloured, her eyes bulging, her mouth wet and yawning. . . . Her scanty yellow-grey hair was dirty, her hollowed neck all grime, her hands abominable, her black dress in decay. . . . Time and the slow

wrath of God had changed her. (p. 192)

The distortion that death brings to the features first of John Baines and Mrs. Povey, and later to Sophia, echoes the negation that death brings to their lives. Worthy tradesmen like John Baines and worthless drunkards like Mrs. Povey are alike grotesque in death; even as imposing a man as Samuel appears in his coffin to lack dignity. As in the experiences of Constance and Sophia, Samuel's recognition of the power of time does not long precede his own death. It is fitting that as his life comes to have meaning through Daniel, so too should his death follow from a connection with Daniel.

The murder of Mrs. Povey brings about a change in Samuel, both in his character and in the way in which he is presented. Even in the moment of his solemn punishment of Cyril's stealing he is undercut through authorial description; not yet an imposing figure, he is a "little fat man over fifty, with a wizened face, grey-haired and grey-bearded" (p. 182). Yet in his attempt to save Daniel he is at last no longer ridiculous. Seeing in Daniel a "living refutation of the old Hebrew menaces," Samuel reflects that indeed "God is not mocked," an idea that does not confirm him in the Jehovah-like strictness of his views, but instead causes a "revulsion in himself towards that strict codified godliness from which, in thought, he had perhaps been slipping away" (p. 194). He has exchanged the legalistic "codified godliness" of the Old Testament for the merciful attitude toward humanity contained in the New Testament. He sees Daniel, in fact, as "a sort of Christ between thieves" as Daniel is led from the courtroom, and the narrative voice comments that "the captive is more sacred even

than a messiah. The law has him in charge!" (pp. 197-198) Samuel's revulsion from the Law becomes complete as he understands Daniel's plight. Finally, "he [sees] things as they [are]" (p. 198).

Freed now from his belief in the Law, he is free to become the ultimate hero, a Bursley type of Christ. His mission to save Daniel is "religious in its solemn intensity"; he is even willing to set aside the sacred commercial stricture of saving money, instead "pouring out money in preparation" for the trial. (p. 199) He merges his own identity with Daniel's, becoming not merely "Daniel's avenging angel" but "indeed, Daniel" and thereby assuming Daniel's Christlike attributes. (p. 199) Paradoxically the cause that leads to his death also gives him the "eternal youth of the apostle" (p. 200). But this eternal youth exists only in his spirit, in his absolute unwillingness to give up his cause even for the sake of his physical health. His optimism manifests itself first in his unwillingness to believe that Daniel can be condemned, and then in his wish to get twenty-five thousand signatures on the petition; he is disappointed on both counts. Nor has he spared the indignity of fighting a continual battle with Constance, who ingloriously wages war with boots, hot bricks, and mufflers. As there is irony in Constance's death, so too is there irony in Samuel's: having survived the worst of his travels, he is felled by a "journey of five hundred yards to the rectory," a trifling distance. (p. 215) Thus even in the manner of his death Samuel appears more ignominious than heroic, despite his heroic, Christlike attempts at saving Daniel. There is no unalloyed triumph granted to Samuel Povey.

Since he has "become Daniel," it is not surprising that Samuel

cannot live long after Daniel's death. Samuel's death, though called "casual," is one of the few occasions in the book when the implied author judges a character in the first person:

He lacked individuality. He was little. I have often laughed at Samuel Povey. But I liked and respected him. . . . I have always been glad to think that, at the end of his life, destiny took hold of him and displayed, to the observant, the vein of greatness which runs through every soul without exception. He embraced a cause, lost it, and died of it. (p. 215)

There is a curious contradiction here. The reader is told that Samuel lacks "individuality," as he is earlier told that Samuel lacks "imagination" (p. 196). Yet surely the heroism he shows, the fact that "destiny [takes] hold of him" and causes him to behave more selflessly and act in a better cause than any other character in the book, designates him as a true hero in The Old Wives' Tale. Both Sophia and Samuel, however, are denigrated as heroes by the multitude of belittling physical details that surround them all of their lives. Too, Bennett's explicit commentary on Samuel cannot be ignored. It is as if Bennett needs to provide the same sort of balance in assessing Samuel that he provides in assessing the other characters. Hence his eulogy of Samuel undercuts the character's potential greatness. Thus is Samuel Povey presented naturalistically: the balance that Bennett strikes between irony and sympathy allows the reader to see not an idealized portrait, but the character as a real human being.

Samuel's son Cyril Povey represents an altogether different sort of potential hero for the novel. As Hall suggests, he is the spiritual descendent of his Aunt Sophia.²³ He, like Sophia, leaves Bursley, and

in his looks and his secretiveness Constance sees that he and his aunt resemble "one another" (p. 451). Nevertheless Cyril more closely resembles a type of hero found in A Man from the North and Clayhanger: the aesthetic or artistic young man, represented in those novels by Richard Larch and Edwin Clayhanger, respectively. Although Cyril cannot seriously be considered as the hero of The Old Wives' Tale because of his subordinate role in the work, his character is an important link in tracing the development of this type of Bennett hero.

From almost his first appearance, as a baby aged ten months, Cyril displays both the narcissism he later adopts in his incarnation as a dandy and traces of his father's adventurous Povey blood. The description of Cyril's world from his own point of view is not merely perceptive observation, on Bennett's part, of a baby's consciousness. As the baby Cyril's complete self-absorption renders objects such as Fan or the India-rubber ball as tangential to his existence, so the grown Cyril regards Constance as "merely a dim figure in the background" of his universe. (p. 239) Unlike most babies, Cyril never outgrows his infantile appetites and perceptions. As a child he displays a similar selfishness when he snatches cake away from Mr. Critchlow's grandniece at a children's party. The latter incident marks the beginning of his career in "crime," as the chapter title suggests.

Cyril's crimes show, as Samuel fears, the Povey influence. The boldness that Cyril shows in lighting a candle in the coal cellar after the debacle of the children's party prefigures his willingness to smoke, a vice for which Samuel guiltily sees that he has provided the model. More serious than smoking and the petty theft Cyril commits,

however, is the impulse underlying these actions. By failing to regard the till as sacrosanct, Cyril announces his difference from his Victorian capitalistic forebears and strikes, as Bennett's narrator comments, "at the very basis of society" (p. 185). Although he has inherited Samuel's artistic bent, Cyril, unlike Samuel, does not attempt to put his imagination to work on anything more practical than his schoolboy's map of Ireland. Throughout his life Cyril's artistic leanings serve to separate him from the middle-class commercialism of the Five Towns. Art and freedom from the Baines sort of middle-class existence are thus linked. Samuel understands this unconsciously when he destroys not the smoking materials but the moss rose picture, "Cyril's expression of himself," as Alice Patterson puts it.²⁴ Similarly, Samuel sees in Cyril's plan to take art lessons "a plan to obtain freedom in the evenings--that freedom which Samuel had invariably forbidden" (p. 225). Patterson notes that "Samuel's use of signs and labels seems actually to have been to assert the old principles more publicly and thus to uphold the old order of things."²⁵ Cyril's art, though it will eventually deny rather than uphold the Victorian order of things, is as yet not far from his father's. In creating sentimental pictures of roses, Cyril merely echoes the Victorian taste of his parents. When Cyril cajoles Constance into letting him enroll in art classes and stay up late to finish a drawing, his dual transgression of his late father's rules is mitigated by his choice of subject: Sir Edwin Landseer's Stag at Eve, a reproduction of a popular painting by Queen Victoria's favorite portraitist.

Not until his incarnation as a dandy does Cyril break free from the

taste of his parents, and even then his adoption of Aesthetic ideas smacks rather of bondage to a ready set of ideas than to free thought. The break between Cyril and Victorian taste is signalled by his re-introduction and hence symbolic rebirth as a new character: "In the year 1893 there was a new and strange man living at No. 4 St. Luke's Square" (p. 237). Though he wears no green carnations or yellow gloves, emblems of dandyism, there can be no doubt that Cyril has embraced its sartorial excesses:

Very few of his like had ever been seen in Bursley before. One of the striking things about him was the complex way in which he secured himself by means of glittering chains. . . . Then there were longer chains, beneath the waistcoat, partly designed, no doubt, to deflect bullets, but serving mainly to enable the owner to haul up penknives, cigarette-cases, match-boxes, and key rings from the profundities of hip pockets. (p. 237)

Cyril's raiment is significant. By becoming a dandy, Cyril is freed from Victorian convention but becomes figuratively and literally chained to himself, an indication of the narcissism dandyism favored. Lest there be any doubt as to Cyril's conversion, the author comments that Cyril is both "a reversion, conceivably, to a medieval type" (p.237) and the "exemplar of the excessively modern" (p. 238). The former characteristic suggests perhaps the roots of dandyism in Aestheticism and its admiration of Pre-Raphaelite art; it may particularly refer to the song "The Aesthete" in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta Patience: "Though the Philistines may jostle, you will rank as an apostle in the high aesthetic band,/ If you walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in your medieval hand."²⁶

Nor is Willam Morris's concern with the object beautiful in its

usefulness lost on Cyril. Of the many things that Constance does for him, he most appreciates the smock that she makes and embroiders for him. The following passage sums up the difference between the Victorian and Aesthetic views on art:

When the smock was finished he examined it intently; then exclaimed with an air of surprise: "By Jove! That's beautiful! Where did you get this pattern? . . . I must show that to Swynnerton [one of his artistic friends]," he said. As for her, the epithet "beautiful" seemed a strange epithet to apply to a mere piece of honest stitchery done in a pattern, and a stitch with which she had been familiar all her life. The fact was she understood his "art" less and less. (p. 240)

The "art" that Constance fails to understand is Cyril's Japanese print, an Aesthetic piece of art that strikes her as "entirely preposterous, considered as a picture" (p. 240). Like any proper Victorian, Constance prefers the more sentimental early works of Cyril, the "early drawings of moss-roses and picturesque castles--things that he now mercilessly contemm[s]" (pp. 240-241). Like Richard Larch's appreciation of magazines like The Yellow Book with "covers of mystic design" and Whistler's painting, and Edwin Clayhanger's appreciation of poetry, Cyril's artistic tastes establish him solidly as one of Bennett's artistic heroes.²⁷

As an artistic or aesthetic hero, Cyril should signal the coming of a new, less rigidly structured age to St. Luke's Square. Alice Patterson sees Cyril's defiance of structure, symbolized by his opposition to time and schedules (he is habitually late--for tea, in going to bed, in rising in the morning) as an affirmation of appetite over structure in contrast to the denial of appetite and adherence to structure shown by his father, Samuel, and by the Victorians in general.²⁸

Cyril is not a respecter of familial connections or class boundaries, as his relationship with Constance and with Peel-Swynnerton shows.²⁹ True, he is free, and yet he is also rootless, bound only to himself and his fellow Aesthetes. In one sense he is the most successful, hence most heroic, of Bennett's artistic young men. He does, after all, devote his life to art in the great capital of London, something that Richard Larch and Edwin Clayhanger both fail to do. Yet his existence is as mundane as theirs; at the time of Sophia's funeral, he has "in fact settled down into a dilettante, having learnt gently to scorn the triumphs which he lacked the force to win" (p. 494). The sterility of his life as a solitary, mediocre artist, who will eventually die without even being remembered through children, as is Richard Larch, suggests that Cyril is not one stage in a continuum of historical progress, but an artistic and historical dead end, as is the dandyism he affects. Like his Aunt Sophia, whose funeral, unlike his mother's, he arranges and attends, Cyril accomplishes his objectives only to have them seem failures in the eyes of the reader. He reverses the career of his father by declining into mediocrity from a brilliant start as his father rises from mediocrity to the selflessness of a hero. Thus Cyril, like his father and aunt, is simultaneously a hero and an anti-hero. Cyril breaks free from his Victorian past only to become stuck in the spiritual anomie of the decadent years of the nineteenth century. Cyril and his dandyism are the products of a dying culture and cannot make the transition into the twentieth century.

The very ordinariness of Constance Baines Povey, in contrast with her adventurous sister and son, would militate against her being con-

sidered a heroine in any but a naturalistic novel. Yet the character Constance was the original impetus behind the book, as Bennett explains in his 1911 Preface to the American edition: "Constance was the original; Sophia was created out of bravado."³⁰ His journal entry for 18 November 1903 gives the details of the conception of the story. Struck by the contrast between a fat old woman and a beautiful young waitress, Bennett realized that this was material for a story:

[The old woman] was repulsive; no one could like her or sympathize with her. But I thought--"she has been young and slim once." And I immediately thought of a long 10 or 15 thousand words short story, "The History of Two Old Women." I gave this woman a sister, fat as herself. . . . One should have lived ordinarily, married prosaically, and become a widow. The other should have become a whore and all that. . . . And they live together again in old age, not too rich, a nuisance to themselves and others. Neither has any imagination.³¹

Nowhere does Bennett clarify whether this woman was the model for Constance or Sophia. In describing this incident in the 1911 Preface, the only one that Bennett wrote for this novel, he seems to suggest, through his references to Une Vie in connection with the stout old woman, that she is the original of Constance. His assertion that "Constance was the original" bears this out. What is certain is that Bennett immediately recognized the power in what was to become one of his great themes: the contrast between youth and age, and the tragedy that youth inevitably and heedlessly must come to age and death.

Constance is qualified by her very ordinariness to be the heroine of The Old Wives' Tale, at least in a naturalistic sense. If the goal of naturalism is to depict life as it is really lived, how better to

do so than to choose a heroine who exemplifies the ordinary? Her most prominent attribute, next to her kindly nature, is her resistance to change, a resistance that contrasts with Samuel's, Cyril's, and Sophia's desire for change. Constance's resistance contrasts as well with the evolution and mutability that is a persistent theme in the book. One prominent image that Bennett uses to show this aspect of Constance is her physical "constancy" to her geographical surroundings. From the very beginning Constance is at the center of the book, geographically and figuratively. It is she who remains in Bursley while Sophia elopes to Paris, Mrs. Baines joins Aunt Harriet at Axe, Samuel journeys to save Daniel Povey, and Cyril moves to London. Her "dark house" in Bursley becomes for her a symbol of tradition, to be defended against the onslaughts of those who, like Samuel, would smoke or bring dogs into its rooms, or who, like Sophia, would seek to pry her from it. Her placidity and her willingness to stay in her house contrast sharply with Sophia's early restlessness in venturing out into St. Luke's Square. Indeed, she even finds her husband within the confines of the house and shop, whereas Sophia can only be attracted by a man from foreign parts. When Constance sells the shop after Samuel's death, the walling-up of the door between the shop and the house is the source of as much grief as Cyril's leaving, and nearly as much grief as Samuel's death. Samuel's death she sees as an "amputation"; at the walling-up of the shop she sees that "though the house remained hers, the root of her life had been wrenched up" (p. 235).

Sophia's defeat at Constance's hands arises precisely because she coaxes Constance from her house to her home-away-from-home, Buxton,

and foolishly imagines that she can keep Constance there, never reckoning with Constance's attachment to her house. Ultimately, however, Constance's tenacious loyalty to her house kills her. Though her death is directly caused by her going out to vote against Federation, her death has already been foreshadowed. Although she thinks of giving up her house when the Midland Clothiers Company takes over the shop, she is shocked to receive a notice to vacate the premises; the blow, says Bennett, was "an exceedingly severe one. . . . The enterprise of finding a new house and moving into it loomed before her gigantic, terrible, the idea of it was alone sufficient to make her ill" (p. 507). Her death, then, results not only from her action to support the status quo in voting against Federation, but from the threat to separate her from the house that represents her life to her. To Constance, only the threat to the status quo represented by Federation is an important enough reason for her to leave her house. Federation is for her the visible symbol of progress; although she does not see Dick Povey's pro-Federation balloon flying overhead, the analogy between the two kinds of dangerous progress is clear. Federation threatens to subordinate Bursley, with its traditional ways of doing business, to the "pushing" town of Hanbridge. Federation, for Constance, thus symbolizes the decline of the Square and her way of life, and she refuses to accept it.

As none of the other characters are able to move her from her house, so none of the other characters are able to change Constance in the slightest. James Hall, in Arnold Bennett: Primitivism and Taste, explores The Old Wives' Tale through the metaphor of battle that Bennett uses so often: words like "triumph," "defeat," "battle," and "revolution"

abound in the novel.³² Hall sees Constance as being in a series of adversary relationships, which he terms "marriages"--first with Samuel, then Cyril, then finally Sophia--and he carefully analyzes each battle and its outcome. Constance may be the "winner" and heroine of the novel by virtue of her having the last word on Sophia. But the issue of the battles Constance wins or loses is less important, finally, than the fact of her complete consistency of behavior during them. The furious side of Constance, for example, that so astonishes Sophia when she steals Samuel's tooth, and Samuel when he tries to save Daniel, becomes understandable when her motive for fury is considered. Her fury is used only in the defense of someone--or, in the case of anti-Federation, something--that she holds dear. Technically, as Hall says, all of her battles are lost except the major one of where to live;³³ but even though Sophia is forced to give way over this issue, Bennett suggests that Constance has won the battle but lost the war: "Certainly Constance had fought Sophia on the main point, and won; but on a hundred minor points she had either lost or had not fought" (p. 496). In naturalistic terms she is a heroine not because of her thoughts over Sophia, but because of her sheer survival.

Constance's survival is important in terms of the themes of the novel because she epitomizes the middle class; like the middle class, she resists change. In fact, in her obsession with home and family--an obsession with a perfect family that ironically produces a wastrel son--her middle class ideas of art and morality, and her slow progress from a slim girl into a heavy old widow perpetually dressed in black, she is not unlike Queen Victoria, the emblem of middle-class virtues for

Victorian England. She shares the Victorian--and Victoria's--passion for photographs, too, showing pictures first to Sophia, who stares, impressed, at a picture of Samuel taken shortly before his death, and then to Lily Holl, who is similarly impressed by a picture taken of Sophia. Like the middle class whose values she represents, Constance struggles in vain to preserve the status quo. As Samuel dies in trying to change the status quo from a law of justice to a law of mercy, so Constance dies in trying to preserve the Five Towns as they are; her effort at preservation, like Samuel's effort at change, renders no result. Yet Constance's triumph is not in her doing but in her being. By reason of her very survival, essentially unchanged, she triumphs over the other characters in the book.

Constance is not only heroic in her sheer survival, but in the quality of recognition she shows about her life, as well. Near the beginning of the novel she becomes aware of "how serious life [is]-- what with babies and Sophia" (p. 40). After her marriage she decides that "what with servants, chasms, and signboards . . . her life as a married woman would not be deficient in excitement" (p. 130). As far as Constance is concerned, her life is rich in excitement. She, more than the other characters in the book, displays a stoicism toward events that causes the reader to recollect that Marcus Aurelius was Bennett's favorite philosopher, though stoicism as an approach to life is later undercut in Clayhanger and These Twain. At the time of Daniel's murder of his wife, Samuel reflects that "God is not mocked" and rebels against the harshness of that law. (p. 194) His recognition leads him into action rather than acceptance. Sophia, in looking at

the body of Gerald Scales, recognizes that despite her earlier assumptions that she knew life, the "riddle of life . . . was puzzling and killing her" (p. 485). She is unable to assimilate the recognition that she experiences and dies of a combination of her recognition and, like Constance, of too much progress: "the attack [Sophia's stroke] had ultimately been determined by cold produced by rapid motion in the automobile" (p. 490). Cyril ponders not the world but himself and accepts his state of mediocrity. Constance, however, in the main accepts life on its own terms, despite her fight against Federation. She accepts Sophia's death by reflecting, as Samuel has done, that "God is not mocked," but the thought gives her comfort rather than causing her to rage against life as Samuel does. She reflects near her own death that "Well, that is what life is" (p. 516). As time changes her only in the slow course of evolution, so too does she generally not attempt to change events. Her acceptance of "what life is," more than any other single factor, makes Constance the heroine of The Old Wives' Tale. The presentation of events in the novel, after all, is an attempt to recreate exactly what life is, as the title of the last book suggests. Thus Constance is, given the naturalistic premise of the novel, the most logical heroine, paradoxically because she is the least likely heroine. Unwilling to grant even Constance an unadulterated triumph, however, Bennett ends the novel with an image of Fossette, the ancient French poodle that Sophia brings from Paris, shuffling toward her dinner. The book ends as it began, not with the end of something but with the continuation of life. Life, even if ridiculously embodied in an ancient, smelly dog, does go on, and while Constance's death is

the "end of Constance," as the chapter title indicates, it is not the end of life.

Thus the romantic heroine, as represented by Sophia, the Everyman-turned-Christ, as represented by Samuel, and the artistic young man, as represented by Cyril, give way in The Old Wives' Tale to a different sort of heroine, the naturalistically presented ordinary woman. Constance rises to heroic stature because of, not despite, her ordinariness. Since naturalism seeks to represent life as it really is, the possibilities of romance embodied in Sophia, or of greatness embodied in Samuel, or of artistic achievement embodied in Cyril, must be undercut. Bennett's achievement in The Old Wives' Tale is to take a figure absolutely ordinary, a figure who might well have been relegated to the background in another work (as are other middle-class matrons such as Mrs. Clayton Vernon of A Man from the North), and examine the workings of her character. Yet, since to apotheosize the ordinary would be equally to distort life, Bennett has undercut even Constance; her death, he implies, deserves consideration, but so does Fossette's dinner. Though the detail in the novel, as Henry James implies, is carefully selected, the sheer quantity of it forces a certain leveling of great and small events, as, for example, when Cyril's crime is equated with Daniel's. In her leveling of these events through her acceptance of them, Constance is a representative middle-class heroine. She, like the middle class, has a passion for the status quo that should cause her to reject time as a bringer of change, but that instead causes her to accept time as a part of the status quo. She triumphs over the defeats and changes forced upon her by her acceptance of them and her

final perspective on them. Only in her recognition of change, an outgrowth of her middle-class common sense, is she distinguished from the bloc. In his depiction of Constance Baines, Bennett shows more sympathy than antipathy toward the bloc of the middle class. His overall detachment and ironic tone, however, preserve that objectivity that a naturalist must try to maintain. Finally, the book presents a balanced judgment on the middle class and its heroine, Constance Baines. It shows, quite simply, "what life is."

Chapter Four

Clayhanger: The Triumph of Compromise

The Clayhanger trilogy, consisting of Clayhanger (1910), Hilda Lessways (1911), and These Twain (1915), continues Arnold Bennett's exploration of the themes that occupied him in A Man from the North and The Old Wives' Tale: the ultimate acceptance of the details of ordinary life, the necessity for compromise and an acceptance of failure in life, and the inevitability of aging and death. Clayhanger is the story of Edwin Clayhanger, whose artistic ambitions are stifled by his tyrannical father Darius; the novel takes Edwin from the end of his school days through the death of his father and his losing and winning of Hilda Lessways. Hilda Lessways covers Hilda's background before she meets Edwin, their courtship from her point of view, and her bigamous marriage to George Cannon. The novel ends, as does Clayhanger, with Hilda and Edwin about to be married. These Twain is the story of their married life; it picks up where the other novels leave off. It concerns primarily the epic battles for dominance that Edwin and Hilda fight over the possession of a new printing works, a new horse and cart, a country house, and so forth. A fourth novel, The Roll Call (1918), nominally concerns the Clayhanger family since its protagonist is George Edwin Clayhanger, Edwin's stepson and Hilda's son, but it is set in London and it is otherwise divorced from the action of the trilogy. Of the three novels in the trilogy, Clayhanger and These

Twain are the most important in terms of gaining an understanding of Bennett's naturalism. The reason for this is that these two novels center on Edwin Clayhanger, a hero who combines the placidity of a Constance Povey with the artistic yearnings of a Richard Larch and learns, as they do, the lessons of compromise. Edwin's story, therefore, rather than the trilogy as a whole, invites examination as a study in the gradual change of Bennett's naturalism.

Both Clayhanger and These Twain explore the conflict of one of Bennett's artistic young men, Edwin Clayhanger, with a formidable opponent; in the former novel the opponent is his redoubtable father, and in the latter the opponent is his emotional and, to use Bennett's favorite adjective when describing her, mysterious wife Hilda Lessways. What is significant in these novels is not the fact of the conflict; Richard Larch, after all, struggles with a similar conflict between art and a mundane life and finally accedes to the latter. Edwin Clayhanger is unusual because he submits to the overpowering forces of middle-class life, as they are exemplified first in his father and later in his wife, with an acceptance that contains less regret than joy. His progressive recognitions of the wonder of life, of its romance, are similar to those recognitions experienced by Constance and Sophia Baines. But whereas Constance and Sophia gain a sort of rueful acceptance of the status quo, Edwin comes to understand that in the ordinary lies the heroic. Through an examination of Edwin's successive recognitions, then, Bennett's attitude toward the middle class and the mundane life that its members customarily lead may be seen to be considerably different from the grim hopelessness exempli-

fied in Richard Larch, in the earliest rendering of the same themes, A Man from the North.

Although the basic conflict in Clayhanger is autobiographical, Bennett relied less strongly on his recollections and more strongly on research than he had in writing The Old Wives' Tale. Clayhanger reflects a more socially conscious Bennett than does The Old Wives' Tale, particularly in the story of Darius Clayhanger. In preparation for Clayhanger, Bennett not only returned to Burslem but read widely in books describing the period 1872-1892:

I find that if I am to begin my new novel on 1st Jan. 1910, I must make a series of small preliminary enquiries. . . . I have read When I was a Child, and all I need of Shaw's North Staffordshire Potteries, and to-night I reread the Social and Industrial Section of the Victoria History, which contains a few juicy items that I can use.

Bennett also noted discussions with a man named Joseph Dawson, a bookseller in Burslem,² and on December 15 wrote that he "did part of the walk that Clayhanger must do as he comes finally home from school in the first chapter of Clayhanger."³ His visit to Burslem also provided him with one of the novel's notable set pieces: the clog-dancing. In his journal entry for December 8, 1909, Bennett noted that he was "profoundly struck by all sorts of things. In particular by the significance of clog-dancing, which had never occurred to me before."⁴

Despite the research, Bennett worried about the quality of this novel more than he had done about the quality of The Old Wives' Tale. The success of the latter book had, of course, much to do with his trepidation:

Impossible to finish the second part of Clayhanger. If I had finished it I should have spoilt it. . . . Moreover I was frightened by a host of extraordinary praise of The Old Wives' Tale that I have recently had. I was afraid Clayhanger was miles inferior to it, and that by going on blindly I might lose a chance of bucking it up in Switzerland.

And after finishing the second section, Bennett noted that he found "the penultimate chapter a bit dull."⁶

Bennett came to appreciate the series, however, as P. G. Wodehouse relates in an anecdote:

"It would be affectation to say that the Clayhanger trilogy is not good," said Bennett. . . . "Either I'm a good writer or I have been deceiving myself as well as trying to deceive the public. I place it upon record frankly--the Clayhanger trilogy is good. . . . The scene, for instance, where Darius Clayhanger dies that lingering death could scarcely be bettered And why?" said Bennett. "Because I took infinite pains over it. All the time my father was dying, I was at the bedside making copious notes. You can't just slap these things down. You have to take trouble."⁷

Despite the comic exaggeration with which Wodehouse reports the incident, Bennett seems clearly to have recognized the value of Clayhanger. The anecdote additionally confirms Bennett's journal in its description of Bennett's naturalistic, detached method of recording events even in times of great emotional stress. He had employed this same method of naturalistic observation years before, when his sister Tertia suffered the loss of her fiance by drowning, just as he later noted the details when his father died. The death and burial of Auntie Hamps in These Twain was drawn from Bennett's experience of the death of his mother during the writing of that book. Whatever the reason for his initial concern about the success of Clayhanger, Bennett's

later and more positive judgment has been borne out by critics since his death. Most critics rank Clayhanger as second only to The Old Wives' Tale, though they do not rank the other works in the series as highly.

Like The Old Wives' Tale, Clayhanger is divided into four books, each book corresponding to a particular stage in Edwin Clayhanger's development: "His Vocation," in which Edwin's choice of vocation is denied; "His Love," in which he meets and loses his love, Hilda Lessways; "His Freedom," which supposedly comes about as a result of his father's death; and "His Start in Life," in which Edwin comes to understand somewhat the meaning of his life. Within each book Edwin progresses from relative states of blindness to relative states of seeing, according to the metaphor that Bennett uses most frequently. The phrase that appears most often, as if Bennett had borrowed from Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy, is "seeing things as they really are," or variations upon that phrase. Often, too, the states of seeing are somehow correlated with one of Edwin's battles with his father or other representatives of the middle-class established order; on occasion, the battles occur as a result of his new "seeing." As A Man from the North is the study of Richard Larch's learning to "see" or recognize life as it really is, so Clayhanger and These Twain trace the progression of Edwin's growth from blindness into insight.

What Edwin Clayhanger learns in Clayhanger and These Twain, however, is different from what Richard Larch learns in A Man from the North. In A Man from the North, middle-class life is represented as being sterile, and submitting to sterility can only be seen as a

failure in that novel. Middle-class life in much of Bennett's work is seen as being in opposition to the desire for romance, for an artistic life, or for beauty; the three ideas--art, romance and beauty--are often linked in Bennett's works. Richard's acceptance of middle-class life marks the end of any possibility for romance in his life. For him, recognizing the opposition between middle-class life and romance is "seeing things as they really are." Edwin Clayhanger, on the contrary, begins by seeing the opposition between middle-class life and romance but ends by understanding how romance may pervade the events of middle-class life. Edwin's recognition, his "seeing things as they really are," is thus directly opposed to the recognition that Richard Larch gains at the end of A Man from the North. Edwin's initiation into life consists of a series of episodes in which he learns first to recognize beauty, art, or romance, and then to find them in his own life. He must reconcile the opposing poles of art and middle-class existence that Richard Larch has had to learn to separate. Clayhanger and These Twain celebrate this joining of opposites; Edwin Clayhanger's initiations into the world of romance are seen as incomplete until he is equally initiated into the world of middle-class existence. In Edwin Clayhanger are successfully combined the desire for romance of a Sophia Baines and the middle-class placidity of a Constance Baines; like the former character, Richard is set apart from the "bloc of the caste" by the quality of his perception, but like the latter character, his success in life occurs through his successful integration into the middle-class world of his father. An examination of Edwin's successive initiations, therefore, will show how Edwin achieves

romance through middle-class life and thus successfully finds romance with a middle-class existence.

Book One establishes Edwin's "blindness" by describing his inadequate education and by contrasting Edwin's ignorance of the realities of life with his father's superior experience of life. Edwin is introduced to the reader as having already attained a milestone in his formal education. As the novel opens, Edwin has just left school for the last time and is presumably now ready to enter the world. But upon the reader's introduction to him, Edwin is by no means fitted to enter the world of his father, as Bennett makes abundantly clear. First of all, Chapter Two begins with a long exposition of the deficiencies in Edwin's education. Edwin is described as being ignorant of natural history, philosophy, history after the Middle Ages, political economy, and a host of other subjects. Secondly, Edwin's education is contrasted unfavorably with his father's experience of life. The reader is introduced to Darius Clayhanger and at the same time to an ancient man, Mr. Shushions; both Edwin and the reader are initially ignorant about the relationship between the two men. As Darius's story unfolds, however, the irony of Edwin's considering himself fit for life becomes apparent. Born into the working class, Darius is forced to begin work on the potbanks at the age of seven, working as a mold-runner and then as a clay-wedger for inhumanly long hours every day. Even this work, however, cannot keep his family from the workhouse, the "Bastille," and they are forced to go there because Darius's father, "having been too prominent and too independent in a strike, had been black-listed by every manufacturer in the district; and Darius, though nine, could

not keep the family."⁹ Bennett's irony here is worthy of Dickens; it is evidence of an outrage at social injustice somewhat at odds with naturalistic objectivity but effective nonetheless. The family is rescued by Mr. Shushions, then a Sunday School teacher, and for this reason Darius considers Mr. Shushions his benefactor. Knowing nothing of this rescue, Edwin is still complacent in his knowledge of himself as a man of some education. Throughout the novel Bennett repeatedly points out the tragedy of misunderstanding that exists between Darius and Edwin because of the latter's ignorance. Thus Edwin is unfitted for life in any sense, something of which he is unaware and in which his father takes pride. That he can afford to keep Edwin in school instead of having Edwin work is a source of pride for Darius, the little boy from the Bastille.

Edwin's ignorance in the area of human relationships is similarly profound. On returning home from school, he is confronted with the formidable Auntie Hamps, a Victorian matron cast in the same mold as Mrs. Clayton Vernon of A Man from the North and the imposing Aunt Harriet Maddack of The Old Wives' Tale. As often occurs in Bennett, the women of the family are seen to be mysteriously intuitive about feelings and motives, and Edwin's sisters are no exceptions. The older sister, Maggie, is placid and a homebody, rather like Constance Povey; the younger sister, Clara, is mischievous like Sophia Baines, but she has a nasty sarcastic streak missing in Sophia. Clara alone is able to intuit Edwin's thoughts; she understands his resolve to claim the other half of the attic for his own room almost before he does, and she also knows that Osmond Orgreaves is partially responsible for

Edwin's desire to be an architect. Both sisters unite in despising the Victorian hypocrisy of Auntie Hamps, a hypocrisy that Edwin does not see. Only vaguely does he recognize Auntie Hamps's insult to Maggie's jam ("They do say gooseberries were a tiny bit sour this year") and not until after Auntie Hamps has gone does he realize that she has alerted his father to his new, lowered status in his class at school. Edwin has developed no satisfactory way of dealing with his father after all these years, either. His characteristic response to his father's dominance is silence, for Darius is a formidable--and seemingly unconquerable--opponent. Thus Edwin's ignorance in the realities of life, in intellectual matters, and in emotional matters, could scarcely be more complete. Though at this point he would not agree, at the beginning of Clayhanger Edwin has no idea "what life is."

But within Edwin exists something that Bennett implies will overcome this ignorance. Innate in Edwin is a special quality that allows him to transcend his ignorance: "In that head of his a flame burnt that was like an altar-fire, a miraculous and beautiful phenomenon, than which nothing is more miraculous nor more beautiful over the whole earth" (Clayhanger, p. 27). In Edwin the flame first manifests itself in Edwin's recognition that there might be something "in him." Glancing at an architecture book the first day in the shop, Edwin reflects, "Now, if there is anything in me, I ought really to be interested in this, and I must be interested in it" (Clayhanger, p. 68). Three elements of the scene are of particular significance. First of all, Edwin is unaware of any beauty that surrounds him when he leaves school. Only when he enters the shop, the place that will vie with

art for his attentions, is he drawn to art. Secondly, the book he is drawn to is another signal of his "flame," for it is Cazenove's Architectural Views of European Capitals. Art, for Edwin, is still something literally "foreign"; through the book he is carried to foreign places as well as to a point of view foreign to his own. Finally, the book leads him irresistably toward the art supplies cabinet; this movement indicates his progression from a contemplation of art to the achievement of it.

Edwin's first experience of art is paralleled by his first experience of the two things that will conspire to keep him from art: business and sensuality. In his visit to the Dragon in the company of Big James Yarlett, Darius's foreman, Edwin has his first encounter with business and sensuality. Darius entrusts Edwin with a minor business transaction, and in order to complete the transaction Edwin goes to the Dragon, a local taproom, with Big James. After he has finished his business, Edwin becomes aware of the sensual atmosphere of the place. His companion, Big James, is the first indicator of sensuality: James is large and powerfully muscled, the possessor of a fine singing voice. His physical nature contrasts with the flame in Edwin's nature, especially since Big James "had seldom known a violent emotion. He had craved nothing, sought for nothing, and lost nothing" (Clayhanger, p. 75). Bennett here seems to disapprove of Big James's stoicism, although he seems to approve of Constance's stoicism in an earlier novel, The Old Wives' Tale. As is Constance, Big James is both stoical and a preserver of the existing social order. Both spiritually and politically--he is completely loyal to his employer--

he lacks Edwin's "flame." The second and more explicit indicator of sensuality is the clog dancer, Florence Simcox, whose "rounded calves" bring Edwin to a recognition of what love means. He sees new reasons for the relationship between Miss Ingamells, the shop assistant, and her lover, for the clog-dancing has caused him to see "those things in a new light," the "things" in question being sensuality. (Clayhanger, p. 88) The recognition of sensuality is important for Edwin, since it causes him to reflect on the "unforeseen chances of existence"; his reflection shows his growing awareness of the world. (Clayhanger, p. 89) Too, Edwin's sensual impulses prevent him from seeing Hilda as she really is, both in Clayhanger and in These Twain.

Though he sees himself as having gained knowledge of what the world is about, Edwin still is unable to appreciate the beauty in middle-class life. Despite his ability to see beauty in things foreign to him, like Florence Simcox's clog-dancing and an architecture book, he cannot yet see the beauty around him: "He sat and vaguely gazed at the slope of Trafalgar Road with its double row of yellow jewels . . . and he thought how ugly and commonplace all that was, and how different from all that were the noble capitals of Europe" (Clayhanger, p. 91). Just as Richard Larch's thoughts in A Man from the North are diverted from his writing by a recollection of the sensual dancers at the Ottoman, so Edwin's thoughts are diverted from his drawing to a memory of Florence Simcox's dancing. Though an understanding of sensuality seems at first to awaken both Edwin and Richard to the possibility of beauty in their lives, the net effect of their encounters with sensuality is actually to drive them further from their

artistic aims.

The initial opposition of art and the works set forth on Edwin's first day in the shop (the printing works has both a shop and a works) is followed by another set of contrasting events in the first book. The first event is Edwin's saving of the printing press. Darius's recollection of his days of poverty causes him to follow a pattern of "making do" with what he has rather than investing in something new; thus he buys a piece of machinery too heavy for the existing second floor of the works. As a crowd of people watches, including Edwin, the floor begins to give way under the weight of the machine. Edwin attaches a pulley on the machine to the ceiling, redistributing the weight and literally saving the works from a disaster. Because the workshop is Darius's "religion" (Clayhanger, p. 107), Darius sees Edwin's intervention as being prophetic of Edwin's future at the shop. Edwin, however, sees the second event--his meeting with Osmond Orgreave--as shaping his destiny. Although he had feebly informed his father of his desire to be an architect after reading Cazenove's book, Edwin had acquiesced in the idea that some business experience in the shop could only help his career. His dreams of architecture, however, are rekindled after Osmond Orgreave, the town's architect and arbiter of culture, points out to him "the most beautiful window in Bursley" (Clayhanger, p. 120). Again Edwin experiences an awakening: "It had never occurred to him to search for anything fine in Bursley" (Clayhanger, p. 121). As in A Man from the North, the desire for art (architecture being ideal, since it is both artistic and practical) is confused by the character with the desire for something different

from what the character already knows. Thus Edwin dreams "of a romantic life--he knew not what kind of life, but something fundamentally different from his own" (Clayhanger, p. 130). Edwin is not yet ready to understand that he must reconcile the opposing ideals of an artistic or romantic life and middle-class existence.

The final chapter of Book One resolves the conflict between art and the printing works. Because Edwin lacks the courage to approach Darius about his desire to be an architect, he decides to mail Darius a letter. Darius becomes furious at Edwin's insensitivity, and father and son tacitly agree to drop the whole idea of Edwin's vocation as an architect. In describing the situation between Edwin and his father, Bennett refuses to assign blame to either party for the mistake; he remains sympathetic to both sides. Though the reader's sympathies lie more naturally with the oppressed Edwin and his aspirations, Bennett balances the emotional score by again reminding the reader of the fundamental tragedy in human relationships: "Edwin's grand misfortune was that he was blind to the miracle. Edwin had never seen the little boy in the Bastille" (Clayhanger, p. 140). To Darius, his own existence is little short of miraculous; that he should own a printing works at all is cause for great pride. Edwin's desire to, as Darius sees it, throw aside all that Darius has worked for is an intolerable affront, and the reader comes to understand the affront as Edwin cannot from his limited perspective. His father's outburst over the letter leaves Edwin "beaten. . . . He could no more change his father than the course of a river. He was beaten. He saw his case in its true light" (Clayhanger, p. 144). Darius, like a river,

is indeed a natural force that Edwin cannot beat; only another natural force, old age and the effects of time, can conquer Darius. Edwin's vision is doubly limited: he cannot see into his father's past, nor can he see into the future to recognize that his greatest ally, time, can eventually defeat Darius. Edwin is not especially downhearted about his defeat even without a recognition of possible victory. He reflects that "after all the sources of happiness [are] not yet exhausted" (Clayhanger, p. 146).

Edwin has seemingly embraced defeat at the beginning of Book Two. As the book opens, he is settled into the routine of the printing works. The only trace of his former defiance is that he overrules Darius on the question of art by breaking Darius's rule against ordering books for customers. The title of the book is "His Love," and it is primarily around his love that the events of the book revolve. There is an ambiguity in the title: it logically refers to Hilda Lessways, whose courtship by Edwin occurs largely in this section, yet it also refers to Edwin's love of his father's new house. Constance and Sophia Baines are not the only houseproud characters in Bennett's novels. Edwin's fussiness and his pride in the house mark his spiritual kinship with the two sisters and his fundamentally middle-class aspirations. The "bloc of the caste" is as much a part of him as the "flame," though he has yet to recognize both components within himself. Edwin's pride in the house is the same sort of pride in possession that Darius and the Baines girls might have, yet he sees his pride as resulting from the "flame" of his architectural ambitions.

Edwin's life has become exemplary of the middle class's cultural

lethargy, too. His cultural aspirations have withered with his increasing role at the works. His situation is strikingly similar to that of Richard Larch. Despite his overall satisfaction with his life, Edwin recognizes that he has not achieved his artistic goals:

What had he done for himself? Nothing large! Nothing heroic and imposing! He had meant to pursue certain definite courses of study, to become the possessor of certain definite groups of books, to continue his drawings and painting, to practise this, that, and the other. . . . And yet he had accomplished nothing. His systems of reading never worked for more than a month at a time. And for several months at a time he simply squandered his spare hours. (Clayhanger, p. 175)

Edwin still looks to a "foreign" world of art and romance to provide him with a sense of life. He cannot as yet discover his mistake because he has not yet achieved those "foreign" ideas of romance and found them empty.

Edwin stirs from his lethargy when Hilda Lessways enters his life. Significantly, the new house that is "for Edwin . . . the beginning of the new life" is the place where Edwin first gets to know Hilda. (Clayhanger, p. 173) After a visit to the Orgreaves' house, during which he meets Hilda formally, Edwin experiences a sort of epiphany in the garden of their house, the garden adjoining the garden of the Clayhangers' new house. Culture and new growth are thus linked in Edwin's mind, and he reflects that "never had he been so intensely alive as then!" (Clayhanger, p. 205) Hilda makes her way through the hedge and joins him at the half-finished Clayhanger house; appropriately, the house and their relationship are at similar stages, each in the process of being built. It is in this house that

they will live together after their marriage in These Twain, and this house that Hilda will try to get Edwin first to buy, and then to leave, in her assertions of dominance over him. At present, however, Edwin is both shocked and delighted by Hilda's actions, although he does not dare admit the delight to himself. The Sunday School celebration at which he sees her the next day provides an occasion for Hilda to display her surprising individuality still further. Though she had slipped through the hedge in order to commend Edwin's courage in speaking as an agnostic, she fiercely defends the feeling that manifests itself among the Sunday School crowd. As the crowd sings a hymn, Hilda says, "It's worth while believing anything, if you can sing words like that and mean them!" (Clayhanger, p. 232) For Hilda, the intensity of feeling rather than the cause of the feeling is what counts. Despite Edwin's conscious feelings of disdain for Hilda, she arouses in him an admiration for her intense feelings: "She was not half alive; she was alive in every particle of herself" (Clayhanger, p. 225). Hilda's presence stirs in Edwin the true "flame" that generally lies dormant in him. Neither sensuality nor purely aesthetic ambition, the "flame" is actually a desire for something fine and extraordinary, a zest for life that Edwin does not always have. Through his contact with her, Edwin comes to be "unusually alive" (Clayhanger, p. 256).

Edwin's capacity for living intensely, which is nurtured by his contact with Hilda, remains with him only partially after she leaves him. The love/hate idyll in which Edwin and Hilda are engaged ends abruptly. After the Sunday School celebration, Hilda visits the printing works and it is only there, in the place where he has for so

long been little more than a slave to his father, that Edwin becomes masterful and wins Hilda with an embrace. In Darius's shop, however, Darius has the final word. He refuses to allow Edwin enough money to marry on, thereby causing one of Edwin's increasingly frequent, although still unspoken, outbursts against him: "When you're old, and I've got you . . . when I've got you and you can't help yourself, by God it'll be my turn!" (Clayhanger, p. 298) The question of the marriage is rendered moot in any case, for Hilda, after writing him a single passionate letter, abruptly suspends communication with him. Janet Orgreave, Osmond's daughter and a friend of Hilda, tells him that Hilda is married, and after this Edwin sinks into his accustomed emotional lethargy. The night of the broken engagement, however, is a revelation to him. Of it, the narrative voice comments that "it could be said of Edwin that he fully lived that night. Fate had at any rate roused him from the coma which most men call existence" (Clayhanger, p. 301). His capacity for being "roused" distinguishes him from the more stoical characters like Big James. Edwin's capacity for suffering becomes a component--along with his desire for romance--that separates him from the "bloc" at the same time that he becomes more integrated into it.

If initiation is the subject of Book One and love the subject of Book Two, then death is the subject of Book Three. The two deaths that dominate the book are those of Mr. Shushions and Darius Clayhanger. It is fair to say that the death of Mr. Shushions is the cause of Darius's death. Like Charles Critchlow of The Old Wives' Tale, Mr. Shushions defies time, but as early as the Sunday School celebration

he had been treated shamefully by younger people too callous, as Edwin thought at the time, to see their own eventual old age in the elderly man. What makes the death so terrible for Darius is that Mr. Shushions dies in the workhouse. Although he hurries to the workhouse, Darius cannot save Mr. Shushions as Mr. Shushions had saved him. The rest of the book chronicles Darius's long decline, begun with his guilt about the fate of Mr. Shushions, into death from a "softening of the brain."

Some of Bennett's finest naturalistic writing occurs in the death scenes in his novels--the deaths of John Baines, Mrs. Daniel Povey, and Gerald Scales in The Old Wives' Tale are three examples--and the death of Darius Clayhanger is no exception. Bennett is at his best in describing the slow effects of time and decay, and no detail of Darius's illness is spared. At first his actions are merely strange; for ~~example~~ example, he comes to Edwin's bedroom, something that he has never done before. In Edwin, placid acquiescence to the status quo is a normal state; in Darius, however, it becomes a sign of his mental degeneracy. He hands over his keys to Edwin with scarcely a struggle, and later does not demur when his meat is cut up for him. Although he has flashes of his old spirit--he refuses to accede at first to Edwin's request for a power of attorney--there is never any doubt that the slow downhill slide, once begun, cannot be reversed. In Book Two Darius denied Edwin money and a woman; now the tables are turned. Darius asks Edwin for money with which to grow mushrooms in the cellar, and a major part of this scheme involves the aid to Darius of the young and pretty servant girl, Jane, to whom Darius has made advances. Edwin

refuses Darius, telling him that he has to behave "in this house" (Clayhanger, p. 379). Edwin now has taken over Darius's works, Darius's house, and Darius's position as head of the family. Yet his triumph over his father, the one fierce desire of his life besides Hilda, is empty. Age and the slow, inevitable effects of time allow Edwin to triumph. It is not that Edwin is finally strong enough to stand up to Darius, but that Darius has become weakened to a level where even mild Edwin can domineer over him.

Darius's death is a slow process, and it is only at the end that Edwin recognizes the tragedy of Darius's life. He never finds out the story of the little boy from the Bastille and so cannot appreciate his father's experiences fully. At the end, however, Edwin experiences a recognition similar to those experienced in The Old Wives' Tale by Constance, Sophia, and Samuel. Edwin has through his association with ~~Hilda~~ Hilda become more aware of the seriousness of life, and he now comes to understand still more about life. As Book One shows Edwin's initiation into a lower-class social world at the Dragon and Book Two shows his initiation into a cultural world at the Orgreaves', so Book Three shows his acceptance into a society comprised largely of successful businessmen, the "Felons." The contrast between the heedless liveliness of the Felons at the dinner and the profound seriousness of existence strikes him as he begins a death watch over Darius upon his return home:

He now knew what the will to live was. He saw life naked, stripped of everything unessential. He saw life and death together. What caused his lip to curl when the thought of

the Felons' dinner flashed through his mind was the damned complacency of the Felons. Did any of them ever surmise that they had never come within ten miles of life itself, that they were attaching importance to the most futile trifles? Let them see a human animal in a crisis of Cheyne-Stokes breathing, and they would know something about reality! (Clayhanger, p. 406)

The scene shows one aspect of Edwin's "flame," for his quality of recognition sets him apart from the "bloc" of the Felons. Looking at his dying father, Edwin resents his own harshness as he has earlier resented Darius's harshness: "Why couldn't we have let him grow his mushrooms if he wanted to? What harm would it have done us?" (Clayhanger, p. 407). The recognition, which strikes him too late, is reminiscent in its language of Constance Baines Povey's rebellion against the Jehovah-like harshness of Samuel Povey toward the thief Cyril in The Old Wives' Tale: "Suppose he has taken a few shillings out of the till! What then? What does it matter?"¹⁰ Though the actions of Darius and Cyril ostensibly pose a threat to polite middle-class society, they are inconsequential when measured against the awesome reality of death. The final recognition that Edwin experiences in this section might also have come out of The Old Wives' Tale. To Edwin, the miracle of Darius's death is that "his father was, and lo! he was not. That was all, but it was ineffable" (Clayhanger, p. 416).

According to the title of Book Three ("His Freedom"), Darius's death should signal Edwin's freedom. Ironically Edwin, though maintaining a personality quite distinct from his father's, leads much the same kind of life. Edwin does not recognize this similarity, despite his many Darius-like actions. He is a successful businessman, like his father. He becomes curt toward Clara as she becomes increasingly

deferential toward him. He refuses the chance for marriage that Janet Orgreave implicitly offers, preferring to remain a bachelor served, as is Darius, by Maggie. He even accepts Darius's watch after Auntie Hamps sees that this event is the meaning of Darius's attempts at speech. The latter act is particularly significant, for in The Old Wives' Tale neither Samuel Povey nor Cyril Povey, harbingers of a new age, will accept the traditional gold watch of John Baines when Constance offers it to each of them in turn. Thus Edwin is simultaneously free and not free. Although he can now do as he likes, Edwin has chosen the life of middle-class existence over the life of the artist. He is successfully integrated into his father's world, but still has one important lesson to learn: that despite the influence of his father's tyranny over so many years, Edwin is right to choose the way of his father. He has chosen correctly in choosing a middle-class life, though he is as yet ignorant of the value to be found in the sort of life he has chosen. His integration into the "bloc of the caste" is not alone sufficient. He must also be true to his "flame," by incorporating romance into his life.

At the beginning of Book Four, Edwin has achieved integration into the middle class but he does not as yet recognize romance in his life. He has achieved some of the artistic ambitions that he had earlier mapped out for himself, although he is now a spectator rather than a creator of art. He has become a bibliophile, a concert-goer, and an experienced traveller to London. He sees his career "as almost miraculous in its development," just as Darius had seen his own career as miraculous years before. (Clayhanger, p. 422). Yet he does not

feel alive as he had felt in the presence of Hilda: "If ever I am to be alive, I ought to be alive now. And I'm not at all sure whether I am" (Clayhanger, p. 422). Edwin has assimilated the "foreign" elements of art and romance into his life as he had not yet done in Book Two, yet he is not satisfied. He is finally ready to discover, through a renewed association with Hilda Lessways, the romance within middle-class existence.

As it does in Book Two, Edwin's experience with Hilda in Book Four rouses him from stagnation into action. In the garden at the Orgreaves' he meets George Cannon, Hilda's son by a bigamous marriage to the elder George Cannon, just as he had years before met Hilda after she came through the garden hedge. Upon finding out that Hilda lives in Brighton, he travels there almost immediately and finds her keeping a boardinghouse. Here a change in geography is used to indicate a change in behavior or attitude. The madness that grips Edwin in his search for Hilda parallels the reckless gaiety of the vacationers at Brighton; reason is left behind in the Five Towns. Hilda is perpetually reckless, regardless of her location; when Edwin asks her how she intends to survive, she simply doesn't know. Her marriage to George Cannon was impetuously begun, as was her relationship with Edwin. She alone in the book is capable of the grand gesture, something that even Charlie Orgreave, Edwin's old friend, recognizes: "There's not many women knocking about like her. . . . She gets hold of you. She's nothing at all for about six months at a stretch, and then she has one minute of the grand style" (Clayhanger, p. 511). It is precisely this

irrationality, this capacity for making the grand gesture, that endears her to Edwin. After staying up half the night watching over her seriously ill son, Edwin thinks in the morning, "What a fine thing life is" (Clayhanger, p. 522). As the novel ends, he remains ambivalent toward her. ("he was afraid of her"), but he understands that he has no choice but life with Hilda if he wishes rather to live than merely to exist. The last sentence in the book opens up a mine of possibilities for their life together: "He braced himself to the exquisite burden of life" (Clayhanger, p. 528). In choosing Hilda, Edwin rejects life on the monotonous level at which it is lived by Big James Yarlett. Bennett's term exactly illustrates the paradox: life cannot be exquisite unless it is a burden; there can be no joy without sorrow. It is the mixture of these two that is the subject of These Twain.

The struggle for dominance between Edwin and Hilda rather than the struggle for dominance between Edwin and Darius is the major conflict in These Twain. Hilda is, like Darius, a preserver of the old order; she attempts to make Edwin into a country gentleman during the course of These Twain. The use of Hilda rather than Darius as Edwin's adversary, however, allows Bennett to change slightly the emphasis of Edwin's inner struggle. Whereas Darius represents the bloc at its worst--stolid, bullying, unimaginative--Hilda has the tastes of the bloc but her own version of the "flame." She demonstrates the "flame" within her in her astonishing actions throughout Clayhanger; her championing of Mr. Shushions and the hymn-singers, her midnight conversation with Edwin, and her grand gesture in summoning Charlie

Orgreave are three examples. In *Hilda*, Bennett has created for Edwin an adversary who represents the combination of romance and middle-class existence that Edwin must come to embrace. Her irrationality and impetuosity, together with her desire to bring some culture into the Five Towns, link her with the world of art and romance, but her passion for acquisition, shown in her desire for material things like rooms and houses, marks her as one of Bennett's middle-class, houseproud characters. In each of the three books, Edwin accedes to Hilda's desire for a piece of property, and in embracing Hilda with all of her disparate character traits, comes equally to accept the mixture of romance and middle-class existence that she represents.

Book One presents a dispute between Edwin and Hilda over Maggie's house. As Book One opens, Edwin has already given in to Hilda's demands for a room of her own. Though she has already taken over Edwin's room as their bedroom, Hilda is not satisfied. She takes over the breakfast nook for herself, and Edwin's response is mild: "Edwin had had other notions for the room, but he perceived that he must bury them in eternal silence, and yield eagerly to this caprice. Thus to acquiesce had given him deep and strange joy."¹¹ A similar pattern of joyful acceptance pervades These Twain, though Edwin's reaction to Hilda's desire for the house is less placid. Technically the house that Edwin and Hilda live in belongs to Maggie, although Maggie now lives with Auntie Hamps. Hilda insists to Edwin that she cannot be happy in another woman's house. She begs him to buy it for her; he demurs, so Hilda takes matters into her own hands by mentioning the possibility of buying the house at Clara's house. Edwin is stunned at

the unfairness of her methods, but he cannot gainsay Hilda's request after it has been made public. Throughout These Twain, as throughout Clayhanger, Edwin somehow feels his rationality to be better than Hilda's impetuous irrationality, but he is never able to conquer by means of his reason. This is, or seems to be, an effect of the conflict within him between the "flame" and the dictates of his middle-class upbringing. Hilda, art, irrationality, and romance are linked in Edwin's mind, and he admires her irrationality as much as he suffers by it. In accepting Hilda, Edwin accepts the irrational "artistic" and the middle-class ideas she espouses. His submission to Hilda is symbolic of his ability to accept art and romance within the confines of a middle-class life.

Book Two introduces a similar battle about property, this time over the land for the new printing works that Edwin wants to build. Hilda thinks that Edwin has no talent for business; like the upholder of tradition she replaces, Darius, she wants Edwin to continue to "make do" at the old works. Edwin wins this time, using the only method proven efficacious against Hilda: he gets an option on the land and buys it without telling her. A human barrier as well as a barrier of property arises between Edwin and Hilda in this book. Hilda goes to visit the youngest of the Orgreave girls, Alicia, and her family, forcing an unwilling Edwin to abandon his work and join her. While there, Edwin and Hilda visit Dartmoor prison and see George Cannon, imprisoned for forgery. Through Edwin has tried to warn Hilda of just such an eventuality, she insists on going to the prison; later, Edwin's warning having come true, she relies on Edwin to comfort her.

Edwin does not mind. Reflecting on the incident later, Edwin perceives that the danger in a struggle is "of letting that particular struggle monopolise one's energy" (These Twain, p. 321). His situation is summed up by the narrative voice in the same passage: "Nobody could seem less adventurous than he seemed, with his timidities and his love of moderation, comfort, regularity, and security. Yet his nostrils would sniff to the supreme and all-embracing adventure" (These Twain, p. 321). Even the appearance of George Cannon, recently released from prison, does not stir Edwin's equanimity more than momentarily. Edwin has become capable of some grand gestures through his association with Hilda. As he had pressed sums of money on a destitute Hilda at Brighton, so now he gives George Cannon twenty pounds more than Cannon had asked for. Partly through his own experiences, partly through his association with Hilda, Edwin has come to an acceptance of the "exquisite burden of life" for which he was so ill-fitted at the beginning of Clayhanger.

The third and final book of the novel presents the death of Auntie Hamps and the final recognition of Edwin Clayhanger. The magnificent hypocrisy of Auntie Hamps is finally exposed at her deathbed: though generous with her money in public, she is miserly in private, dying in a cold, shabby bedroom on the upper floors of her grand house. Once Auntie Hamps, like his father, had oppressed Edwin. Now, however, she is as helpless as Darius was, and any sense of triumph Edwin might have had at her death is dulled as it was at his father's death. Indeed, Edwin admires her: "The sublime obstinacy of the woman had transformed hypocrisy into a virtue, and not the

imminence of the infinite unknown had sufficed to make her apostate to the steadfast principles of her mortal career" (These Twain, p. 457). Neither Darius nor Auntie Hamps, hateful though some of their actions be, is a villain. It is part of Bennett's balanced view of things, his objectivity, that he allows them a humanity and grandeur even at the moments when Edwin and the reader most despise them. They do not have a "flame" like Edwin's, but the vigor of their lives has transformed their lives into an adventure. At Auntie Hamps's funeral, Edwin sees the gravestone of an old man, Isaac Plant, who outlived three young wives. He reflects that "Isaac Plant and . . . Auntie Hamps . . . in very different ways had intensely lived!" (These Twain, p. 467). What finally counts with Edwin, and, one suspects, with Bennett, is neither political ideology, artistic success, nor profound strength of character. In order to appreciate what is early in Clayhanger called the "interestingness of existence," one must have an intense feeling for life. (Clayhanger, p. 30)

Since, as has become apparent to Edwin (and the reader), a life intensely lived is impossible for Edwin without Hilda, Edwin decides in the third book to accede to her desire for a country house. Hilda, in collaboration with Edwin's artistic friend Tertius Ingpen, tries to turn Edwin into a country gentleman by encouraging him to buy a country house. He adamantly refuses at first; his refusal, considering the tenacity with which the other houseproud characters in Bennett like Constance and Sophia refuse to leave their houses, is scarcely surprising. In the final chapter of These Twain, Edwin once again walks over the bridge that he had crossed at the beginning of Clayhanger.

Here as always, Bennett's symbolism is unobtrusive, but the meaning is clear. His stepping over the bridge in Clayhanger signalled the beginning of Edwin's search for the sort of life that would fulfill his conceptions of romance. His education has been long in the process, but at the end of These Twain it is complete. Once again Edwin sits on the parapet and reflects about his life. This time, however, he comes to understand it:

He thought:

"I know where I am!"

It had taken him years to discover where he was. Why should the discovery occur just then? He could only suppose that the cumulative battering of experience had at length knocked a hole through his thick head, and let saving wisdom in. The length of time necessary for the operation depended upon the thickness of the head. Some heads were impenetrable and their owners came necessarily to disaster. His head was probably of an average thickness. (These Twain, p. 523)

The consolation of his marriage finally becomes clear to Edwin. Even his reflection that Hilda probably thinks "It's each for himself in marriage after all, and I've got my own way" cannot mar the ecstasy he feels at this final "defeat." (These Twain, p. 542) He truly "sees things as they really are" when he perceives that for him the value of life lies not in a victory over middle-class existence, but in finding the romance inherent within middle-class existence. Hilda's idiosyncratic mixture of middle-class values and romantic qualities represents the mixture that Edwin must embrace. By accepting Hilda's dominance over him, Edwin accepts life itself.

The story of Edwin Clayhanger in Clayhanger and These Twain, then, is the story of an acceptance of defeat that is not seen as a failure

heroine in his portrayal of Constance Baines in order to reflect more accurately, as his naturalistic training ever urged him to do, the actual life of an ordinary member of the middle class. He attempts to do this sort of realistic depiction in Clayhanger and These 'Twain, but most critics see the attempt here as less successful. Bennett's relentless optimism about the romance that Edwin finds in life for most people does not ring as true as the stoicism of The Old Wives' Tale. For all of Edwin's protestations that the romance of his life with Hilda amply repays him for the compromises he must make, there is something singularly unconvincing about his protests. Hence the entire message of the novel--that compromise is necessary for the experience of romance in middle-class life--is undercut. The answer to the riddle of existence that Bennett continually poses perhaps lies between Richard Larch's acquiescence, which is seen as psychological suicide, and Edwin Clayhanger's acquiescence, which is seen as the basis of romance. Such a balance between these two opposing points of view on failure occurs in The Old Wives' Tale. The balanced point of view in The Old Wives' Tale is perhaps what makes the story of Constance and Sophia Baines the greatest of Bennett's books. In it, he has achieved the balance, perspective, objectivity, and feeling for ordinary life that is the ideal of naturalism.

Conclusion

The prefaces, letters, and other writings that make up what might be termed the "documents" of French naturalism provide an important context in judging the works of Arnold Bennett. His saturation in the thought of these documents, either as the thought is expressed in the novels for which the documents are often prefaces or as it is expressed in the documents themselves, is central to an understanding of his development as an author. The concern with style, dispassionate observation, and the ordinary details of life that Bennett gleaned from French naturalistic theory was combined with his own particular choice of subject matter--the middle class--and his own insistence on a "Christlike, all-embracing compassion." A Man from the North, Bennett's first published novel, shows most explicitly the effects of French naturalistic theory. In it, Richard Larch's artistic compromise in going to live in the suburbs is seen as a failure; this failure is strictly in accordance with the naturalistic conception of an unhappy ending to a novel. The Old Wives' Tale, in contrast, takes a much more balanced approach to compromise and failure. The fate of all the would-be heroes in that novel is that they miss greatness, with the possible exception of Constance Baines. Constance succeeds because of her obstinacy in the face of change; she, like the middle class she represents, is triumphant by virtue of her survival power, no mean feat in the face of implacable time. Bennett has remade the

heroine in his portrayal of Constance Baines in order to reflect more accurately, as his naturalistic training ever urged him to do, the actual life of an ordinary member of the middle class. He attempts this sort of realistic depiction in Clayhanger and These Twain, but the attempt here is less successful. Bennett's relentless optimism about the romance that Edwin finds in life somehow does not ring as true as the stoicism of The Old Wives' Tale. For all of Edwin's protestations that the romance of his life with Hilda amply repays him for the compromises he must make, there is something singularly unconvincing about his protests. Hence the entire message of the novel--that compromise is necessary for the experience of romance in middle-class life--is undercut. The answer to the riddle of existence that Bennett continually poses perhaps lies between Richard Larch's acquiescence, which is seen as psychological suicide, and Edwin Clayhanger's acquiescence, which is seen as the basis of romance. Such a balance between these two opposing points of view on failure occurs in The Old Wives' Tale. The balanced point of view in The Old Wives' Tale is perhaps what makes the story of Constance and Sophia Baines the greatest of Bennett's novels. In it, he has achieved the balance, perspective, objectivity, and feeling for ordinary life that is the balance of naturalism.

Chapter One

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- 2 Maurice Larkin, Man and Society in Nineteenth-Century Realism (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 21.
- 3 "To George Sand," 6 February 1876, in Documents of Modern Literary Realism, ed. and trans. George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 96.
- 4 "To Louise Colet," 6 November 1853, in Becker, p. 94.
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- 6 "To Louise Colet," 8 February 1852, in Becker, p. 91.
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- 8 "To Louise Colet," 27 July 1852, in Becker, p. 92.
- 9 "To Louise Colet," 26 June 1853, in Becker, p. 93.
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- 11 Hippolyte Taine, Introduction to History of English Literature, trans Henry Van Laun, rpt. in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), p. 602.
- 12 Taine, p. 613.
- 13 Taine, p. 607.
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- 18 Guy de Maupassant, "The Lower Elements," in Becker, p. 249.
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- 20 Letters, II, 29.
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- 22 Letters, II, 239.
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- 24 Larkin quotes Zola as commenting on this in the plan for the Rougon-Macquart series. See Larkin, p. 148.
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- 41 Journals, I, 68.
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- 43 Letters, II, 239.
- 44 Letters, II, 239.
- 45 Maupassant, "On 'the Novel,'" p. lx.
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- 47 Arnold Bennett, "The Author's Craft," in Hynes, p. 48.
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55 Letters, III, 245.

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Notes

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- ³ Louis Tillier, Studies in the Sources of Arnold Bennett's Novels (Paris: Didier, 1949), p. 20.
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- ⁵ William Bellamy, The Novels of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy 1890-1910 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 83.
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Chapter Three

Notes

¹ Arnold Bennett, "Middle Class," in Books and Persons: Being Comments on a Past Epoch 1908-1911 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1917), p. 93.

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⁴ "Middle Class," p. 92.

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⁷ Henry James, "The New Novel," in The Future of the Novel: Essays on the Art of Fiction, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 270.

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- 29 Patterson, 263.
- 30 Arnold Bennett, Preface to The Old Wives' Tale (New York: George H. Doran, 1911; rpt. London: Pan Books, 1964, 1968), p. 23.
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32 Hall, p. 72 and passim.

33 Hall, p. 71 and passim.

Chapter Four

Notes

¹ Arnold Bennett, The Journals of Arnold Bennett, ed. Newman Flower (New York: Cassell and Co., 1932), I, 333-334.

² Margaret Drabble, Arnold Bennett (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 49.

³ Journals, I, 344.

⁴ Journals, I, 343.

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⁶ Journals, I, 358.

⁷ P. G. Wodehouse in The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes, ed. James Sutherland (New York: Pocket Books, 1975), p. 411.

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⁹ Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), p. 43. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically within the text.

¹⁰ Arnold Bennett, The Old Wives' Tale (London: Dent, 1966), p. 187.

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