

Twentieth-Century  
Literary Criticism

TCLC

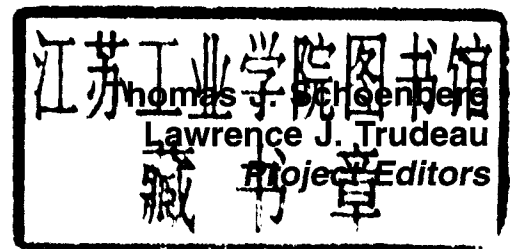
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Volume 198

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Commentary on Various Topics  
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary  
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and  
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys  
of National Literatures**



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## Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” *TCLC* “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

### Scope of the Series

*TCLC* is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

*TCLC* is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism, (CLC)* which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

### Organization of the Book

A *TCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

## Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 127, edited by Janet Witlec, 3-8. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

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# Arnold Bennett

## 1867-1931

(Full name Enoch Arnold Bennett; also wrote under the pseudonym of Jacob Tonson) English novelist, short story writer, playwright, essayist, autobiographer, critic, journalist, and children's writer.

The following entry provides an overview of Bennett's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *TCLC*, Volumes 5 and 20.

### INTRODUCTION

An extremely prolific writer, Bennett is credited with bringing techniques of nineteenth-century French realism to the English novel. Bennett is best known for his novels set in the Potteries, the industrial West Midlands district in which he grew up; in these writings he strove to reveal beauty and significance in ordinary, mundane lives. Critics agree that his tremendous literary output is of uneven quality. While a small number of his works were serious artistic endeavors, he was primarily a pragmatist who wrote with an eye toward popular taste. Critics commonly consider his greatest works to be the novels *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), a sympathetic portrait of the lives of two sisters, and *Clayhanger* (1910), in which a young man contends with his controlling, puritanical father. Bennett is viewed as a traditionalist; while other English authors of his era, such as Virginia Woolf, utilized groundbreaking, modernist techniques such as impressionistic narration and in-depth consideration of characters' psychology, Bennett's writings are detached and descriptive, in the manner of Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant. Since the 1990s critics have reconsidered Bennett's place in literature and suggest that he has been unfairly overlooked in favor of the more innovative authors of his time.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bennett was born on May 27, 1867, into a middle-class family in Hanley, one of five Potteries towns he would incorporate into his fiction. He attended local schools and read the works of such writers as Émile Zola, George Moore, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, and Ivan Turgenev, which would influence his own writings. At age eighteen he joined his father's law firm, working as a rent collector. In 1888 he moved to London and took a job as a solicitor's clerk.

He began to seriously consider writing fiction as a career after a parody he wrote in 1891 won a prize from the periodical *Tid-Bits*, and one of his short stories was published by the prestigious *Yellow Book* in 1895. In 1894 he had secured a position as an assistant editor with the fashionable weekly periodical *Woman*, writing reviews as "Barbara" and a gossip column as "Marjorie"; he was promoted to editor in 1896. While working at *Woman*, he contributed many articles to other journals, began writing potboiler serials, and composed his first novel, the semi-autobiographical *A Man from the North*, published in 1898 to largely favorable reviews. This book was the first of many that would portray the Potteries district of Bennett's youth, which he referred to as the "Five Towns." Two years later Bennett resigned from *Woman* to devote himself fully to writing.

In 1902 Bennett published two novels, *The Grand Babylon Hotel*, a sensationalistic work that sold well and established his reputation as a writer, and *Anna of the Five Towns*, which was less commercially successful but considered finely crafted. That same year, Bennett fulfilled his ambition of moving to France, where he would live for nearly a decade. With apparent ease he produced an average of one novel a year, in addition to writing short stories, plays, criticism, essays, and "pocket philosophies" or self-help books. In 1907 he married Marguerite Soulié, a Frenchwoman who had become his secretary. Later that year, he began writing *The Old Wives' Tale* which, following its publication in 1908, earned Bennett—already a respected author—acclaim as one of England's foremost novelists. While working on *The Old Wives' Tale*, he wrote one of his most popular light works, the satire *Buried Alive* (1908). Bennett's most successful pocket philosophy, *How to Live on Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, also appeared in 1908. In March of that year, Bennett had begun writing a weekly column for the periodical *New Age*, which he would produce for three years.

Between January and June of 1910, Bennett wrote *Clayhanger* which, like *The Old Wives' Tale*, was met with critical acclaim. Bennett's *The Card*, a popular satire, appeared in 1911. During a six-week tour of the United States he was greeted as a celebrity. In 1912 Bennett moved back to England, and his most successful play, *Milestones*, began a long run. During the First World War Bennett wrote articles supporting the Allies' cause and asserting the necessity of adequate pay for soldiers,

but denouncing war. He was employed by the Ministry of Information, met with war leaders, toured the trenches, and came under fire. Little of his war experience was incorporated into his fiction, however. In 1921 he and his wife, after years of marital strife, were legally separated. The following year, he began living with Dorothy Cheston, an actress who would become his common-law wife and with whom he would have a daughter in 1926. His literary reputation declined in the postwar years, but it revived with the publication of *Riceyman Steps* (1923), which earned Bennett a James Tait Black literary prize. Between 1926 and 1931 he wrote an influential weekly column for the *London Evening Standard*. During a visit to France in November 1930, Bennett contracted typhoid fever; he died of the disease on March 27, 1931.

## MAJOR WORKS

Bennett's serious works of fiction, such as *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Clayhanger*, *Anna of the Five Towns*, *A Man from the North*, and *Riceyman Steps*, are characterized by realism and an emphasis on environment. His Five Towns novels portray provincial life in the Potteries, while his later novels are primarily set in London. Bennett, who strongly believed that people are products of their environment, offers detailed descriptions of setting and background to illuminate his characters. Plots are character driven and frequently possess a leisurely pace. *The Old Wives' Tale*, follows two sisters who have taken different paths in life—one stays in Bursley, the small industrial town where they were raised, while the more adventurous sister moves to Paris. The novel is renowned for its sensitive portrayal of the daily lives of its characters. Bennett has acknowledged that the book was inspired by Maupassant's 1883 novel *Une Vie*.

*Clayhanger*, the first volume of a trilogy called *The Clayhanger Family*, deals with ongoing conflict between its protagonist, Edwin, and his overbearing father. Edwin aspires to become an architect, but instead joins his father's printing business. He falls in love with the exotic Hilda, whose own story—her coming of age, work experiences, brief marriage to a bigamist, motherhood, and relationship with Edwin—is the subject of the second volume of the trilogy, *Hilda Lessways* (1911). The third volume, *These Twain* (1916), focuses on Edwin and Hilda's married life. *Anna of the Five Towns* is the story of a woman whose life is constrained by her father and by their Methodist faith. She marries a respectable man, though she does not love him. In the semi-autobiographical *A Man from the North*, a young clerk aspires to be a writer; however, unlike Bennett, the character is unable to produce a first novel. *Riceyman Steps*, considered Bennett's finest postwar novel, is

a gloomy tale tinged with elements of humor. Set entirely in an unkempt bookshop in London's working-class Clerkenwell district, the work chronicles the last year in the life of a bookseller who marries a widow. A very miserly couple, they become increasingly wretched due to their reluctance to spend money.

Bennett also wrote a large number of nonfiction pieces, light novels, plays, and short stories. He wrote nearly three thousand journalistic pieces. A highly respected and influential literary critic, he wrote book reviews for *New Age* that made writers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky and Turgenev known to the English general public. Some of these pieces were gathered and published as *Books and Persons* (1917). Bennett's articles for the *Evening Standard*, collected in *Arnold Bennett: The Evening Standard Years* (1974), brought attention to promising, little-known authors such as William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. Bennett's most popular pocket philosophy, *How to Live on Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, provides practical advice on making the most of one's spare time. Bennett commented that this book "has brought me more letters of appreciation than all my other books put together."

In addition to *The Grand Babylon Hotel*, Bennett's most successful light novels include *The Card*, which concerns a charming, ambitious young man who exploits those around him, and *Buried Alive*, which satirizes the English court system. Bennett's plays, as with his light novels, appealed to the mass market. *The Great Adventure* (1913), a dramatization of *Buried Alive*, enjoyed a run of 673 performances. *Milestones*, perhaps Bennett's most popular play, is a saga considered a spin-off of *The Old Wives' Tale*. Spanning the years from 1860 to 1912, it focuses on generational differences within a family. Bennett's short stories, collected in such works as *Tales of the Five Towns* (1905) and *The Grim Smile of the Five Towns* (1907), tend to be fanciful and light. In "The Death of Simon Fuge," which appeared in the latter collection, a ceramics expert travels to the Five Towns shortly after the death of the title character, a well-known, fashionable artist who had often reminisced about a romantic interlude of his youth: a moonlit boat ride with two sisters. The ceramics expert meets these sisters, who prosaically recall that Simon had lost an oar and talked excessively.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Bennett has received a mixed response from critics. His willingness to tailor some of his writings to popular taste, his ability to write a novel in a matter of months or even weeks, and his open appreciation for the finer things in life, caused some to question whether he was a serious artist or merely a social climber. While his se-

rious novels, especially *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Clayhanger*, and *Riceyman Steps*, were hailed by critics, Bennett's periodic publication of fanciful works was viewed disapprovingly. In the 1920s critical regard for even Bennett's finest works suffered a decline; as an author of the realist school, he was perceived as "old guard" by young, innovative authors, who criticized his writings as irrelevant. Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and others attacked the detached style of his writings. This line of criticism would have a lasting impact. For decades some critics perceived even Bennett's best writings as artless chronicles overly filled with detailed description. But Bennett also had defenders who pointed out thematic consistency and subtle and highly effective character development in Bennett's serious works. These critics hailed *The Old Wives' Tale* as a masterpiece and placed *Clayhanger* not far behind. This judgment is now the prevailing view of Bennett's work. Some critics have reevaluated his light novels and regard *The Card*, *The Grand Babylon Hotel*, and *The Pretty Lady* (1918) as notable examples of their genre. Among his short stories, "The Death of Simon Fuge" is highly regarded. Bennett's plays are considered inferior to his other writings. Critics find that Bennett's style does not lend itself to the compression of action typical of drama. Bennett's book reviews are today admired for bringing knowledge of little-known, burgeoning authors to the English public.

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Journalism for Women: A Practical Guide* (essay) 1898  
*A Man from the North* (novel) 1898  
 \**Polite Farces for the Drawing Room* (plays) 1899  
*Sidney Yorke's Friend* (juvenilia) 1901  
*Anna of the Five Towns* (novel) 1902  
*The Grand Babylon Hotel: A Fantasia on Modern Themes* (novel) 1902; also published as *T. Racksole and Daughter: Or, The Result of an American Millionaire Ordering Steak and a Bottle of Bass at the Grand Babylon Hotel, London*, 1902  
*The Gates of Wrath: A Melodrama* (novel) 1903  
*How to Become an Author: A Practical Guide* (nonfiction) 1903  
*Leonora* (novel) 1903  
*The Truth About an Author* (autobiography) 1903  
*A Great Man: A Frolic* (novel) 1904  
*Teresa of Watling Street: A Fantasia on Modern Themes* (novel) 1904  
*The Loot of Cities: Being Adventures of a Millionaire in Search of Joy* (*A Fantasia*) (short stories) 1905; enlarged as *Loot of Two Cities: Being the Adventures of a Millionaire in Search of Joy* (*A Fantasia*) and *Other Stories*, 1917  
*Sacred and Profane Love* (novel) 1905; also published as *The Book of Carlotta*, 1911  
*Tales of the Five Towns* (short stories) 1905  
*Hugo: A Fantasia on Modern Themes* (novel) 1906  
*Whom God Hath Joined* (novel) 1906  
*The Ghost: A Fantasia on Modern Themes* (novel) 1907  
*The Grim Smile of the Five Towns* (short stories) 1907  
*The Reasonable Life: Being Hints for Men and Women* (nonfiction) 1907; revised as *Mental Efficiency, and Other Hints to Men and Women*, 1911  
*Buried Alive: A Tale of These Days* (novel) 1908  
*Cupid and Commonsense* (play) 1908  
*How to Live on Twenty-Four Hours a Day* (nonfiction) 1908  
*The Human Machine* (nonfiction) 1908  
*The Old Wives' Tale* (novel) 1908  
*The Statue: A Story of International Intrigue and Mystery* [with Eden Phillpotts] (novel) 1908  
*The Glimpse: An Adventure of the Soul* (novel) 1909  
*What the Public Wants* (play) 1909  
 †*Clayhanger* (novel) 1910  
*Helen with the High Hand: An Idyllic Diversion* (novel) 1910  
*The Card: A Story of Adventure in the Five Towns* (novel) 1911; also published as *Denry the Audacious*, 1911  
 †*Hilda Lessways* (novel) 1911  
*The Honeymoon* (play) 1911  
*The Matador of the Five Towns, and Other Stories* (short stories) 1912  
*Milestones* [with Edward Knoblock] (play) 1912  
*The Great Adventure* (play) 1913  
*Paris Nights and Other Impressions of Places and People* (essays) 1913  
*The Regent: A Five Towns Story of Adventure in London* (novel) 1913; also published as *The Old Adam: A Story of Adventure*, 1913  
*The Author's Craft* (criticism) 1914  
*The Price of Love: A Tale* (novel) 1914  
*The Lion's Share* (novel) 1916  
 †*These Twain* (novel) 1916  
*Books and Persons: Being Comments on a Past Epoch, 1908-11* (journalism) 1917  
*The Pretty Lady* (novel) 1918  
*The Roll-Call* (novel) 1918  
*The Title* (play) 1918  
*Judith* (play) 1919  
*Sacred and Profane Love* (play) 1919  
*Body and Soul* (play) 1921  
*Lilian* (novel) 1922  
*The Love Match* (play) 1922  
*Mr. Prohack* (novel) 1922  
*How to Make the Best of Life* (essay) 1923  
*Riceyman Steps* (novel) 1923  
*Elsie and the Child* (short stories) 1924  
*London Life* [with Edward Knoblock] (play) 1924  
*The Bright Island* (play) 1925  
*Lord Raingo* (novel) 1926



*Things that Have Interested Me.* 3 vols. (essays, sketches, journals) 1921-26  
*Flora* (play) 1927  
*Mr. Prouhack* [with Edward Knoblock] (play) 1927  
*The Vanguard: A Fantasia* (novel) 1927; also published as *The Strange Vanguard: A Fantasia*, 1928  
*The Savour of Life: Essays in Gusto* (essays) 1928  
*The Imperial Palace* (novel) 1930  
*The Night Visitor and Other Stories* (short stories) 1931  
*Dream of Destiny: An Unfinished Novel and Venus Rising from the Sea* (novella) 1932; also published as *Stroke of Luck and Dream of Destiny: An Unfinished Novel*, 1932  
*The Journals of Arnold Bennett.* 3 vols. (journals) 1932-33; revised edition, 1971  
*Don Juan de Marana* (play) 1959  
*Arnold Bennett: The Evening Standard Years. Books & Persons, 1926-1931* (journalism) 1974  
*Arnold Bennett: Sketches for Autobiography* (sketches) 1979  
*The Letters of Arnold Bennett.* 4 vols. (letters) 1966-86

\*This work is a collection of three one-act plays: *The Stepmother*, *A Good Woman*, and *A Question of Sex*.

†These novels were collected as *The Clayhanger Family* in 1925.

## CRITICISM

### H. G. Wells (letter date November 1908)

SOURCE: Wells, H. G. "Wells to Bennett." In *Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells: A Record of a Personal and a Literary Friendship*, edited by Harris Wilson, pp. 154-55. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960.

[In the following letter, originally written in November 1908, Wells offers high praise for *The Old Wives' Tale*.]

Spade House  
 Sandgate  
 [November 1908]

MY DEAR BENNETT.

You know what life is. I have really wanted badly to write you at length about *The Old Wives' Tale* and make you understand that it isn't simply just genial mutual flattery and so forth that I want to send you this time. And days slip by and all sorts of things get in the way of that really satisfying old style letter. I think the book a quite pre-eminent novel so that it at least doubles your size in my estimation. It is far too big, too fine and too restrained to get at first anything like the recognition it is bound in the long run to bring you. It is the best book I have seen this year—and there have been

one or two very good books—and I am certain it will secure you the respect of all the distinguished critics who are now consuming gripe-water and suchlike, if you never never write another line. It is all at such a high level that one does not know where to begin commending, but I think the high light for me is the bake-house glimpse of Sam Povey.<sup>1</sup> But the knowledge, the detail, the spirit! from first to last it *never* fails.

I wish it could have gone into the *English Review*. Well, I go round telling everyone I meet about it—I wish Chapman & Hall would do the same. Go on great man!

Yours ever

H. G.

### Note

1. Book II, Chapter V.

### Dorothea Price Hughes (essay date November 1916)

SOURCE: Hughes, Dorothea Price. "The Novels of Mr. Arnold Bennett and Wesleyan Methodism." *Contemporary Review* 110, no. 611 (November 1916): 602-10.

[In the following essay, Hughes asserts that Bennett's novels express a negative view of Wesleyan Methodism, the creed of many of his characters.]

The novels of Mr. Arnold Bennett are not only acknowledged masterpieces but are among the most widely read books of our day. Their author's choice of subject, and his treatment of that subject, are both full of significance. He is determined to face the facts of modern democracy as he sees them, and finds his inspiration in the grimy thoroughfares and suburban residences of a great manufacturing centre, "The Five Towns." He does not regale his readers with stories of princesses and diplomats and aristocratic adventurers, for he knows, as Whitman knew, that their tale has often been told before and in the best way, and that the tale of the milliner, the draper, and the adventurous clerk has seldom been told as it should be. He strips it of all make-believe and sentimentality, showing milliners and clerks as they act and speak in everyday life, not melodrama, and revealing those grim social facts which do much to explain their lives. His stern realism is the more impressive because he is an artist. To find and express beauty is a craving of his nature, and he discovers it often in unlikely places where it is hidden from lesser artists. He has the French love of the apt word and the fitting phrase; and in an age when novelists are careless about form and methods of presentment, he gives pleasure by providing marvels of technique.

Merely to indicate his sensibilities and achievement would require a space which the present article does not permit. But could full acknowledgment be paid to them,

a further question would still arise, a question surely which must finally be asked of every novelist. How far does he truly represent humanity? Do his portraits of the men and women of commercial England convince us by their truth, revealing human nature to us as we see it in ourselves and recognise it in others? The writer's aim in this article is to answer the above question by considering Mr. Bennett's treatment of a portion of the life of commercial England, "Wesleyan Methodism," partly because the writer knows something of Wesleyan Methodism, and partly because a novelist's treatment of a subject as vital as the creed and religious expression of a people, throws light on other aspects of his treatment.

Wesleyan Methodism is a form of religion that is either liked or disliked, loved or hated. People who know something of it or have been brought up in it, seldom feel neutral towards it as they do towards less pronounced forms of religious life and belief. Mr. Bennett certainly does not feel neutral; he hates it. Even if he did not go out of his way to say so, we should discern this hatred after reading his first description of a Methodist official or of any ceremonial in which Methodists take part. We scarcely need the following admission concerning Edwin Clayhanger:

It was at the sessions of the Bible Class that Edwin, while silently perfecting himself in the art of profanity and blasphemy, had in secret fury envenomed his instinctive mild objection to the dogma, the ritual, and the spirit of conventional Christianity, especially as exemplified in Wesleyan Methodism. He had left Mr. Peartree's Bible class a convinced anti-religionist, a hater and despiser of all that the Wesleyan Chapel and Mr. Peartree stood for. He deliberately was not impartial, and he took a horrid pleasure in being unfair. He knew well that Methodism had produced many fine characters, and played a part in the moral development of the race; but he would not listen to his own knowledge. Nothing could extenuate for him the noxiousness of Methodism.

Wesleyan Methodism in its origin was a challenge to men and women, and even its most conventional forms continue to make large claims on the allegiance of individuals. It is not merely that members are expected to devote large portions of their time and money to the service of their Church, but they are deprived often of social status and the opportunities that belong to it. Their religion is that of trading and artisan England, not of professional and upper class England, and it is this rather than any theological peculiarity which condemns it in the eyes of a large number of English people. It is associated in their minds with shop-assistants and agricultural labourers and the association is a right one. These were the people who joyfully received the Gospel that Methodism had to preach, and so long as that Gospel continues there will be shop-assistants and agricultural labourers among the honoured members of a Methodist Society.

Quite naturally therefore Mr. Bennett gives Wesleyan Methodists a prominent place in his picture of a democratic community. When his hero and heroine profess any religion at all it is that of the Wesleyan Methodists, the traditional religion of traders and artisans. Even when they are antagonistic to its claims like Edwin Clayhanger, they are not absolved from a lifelong contest with it. The fact that Clayhanger refuses to become District Treasurer of the Additional Chapels Fund does not end the struggle. Methodism is always on the outskirts of his life, a portentous and immovable presence, challenging and irritating him. But the majority of Mr. Bennett's characters do not criticise their Methodism or even contest it. They accept it magnificently as it is, attending its services and filling its offices, convinced that their form of worship is the best possible, and that all others are inferior to it. Their Methodism indeed has become part of the local clan life of the district, separating them from the other clans.

This assumption, like many others that appear unreasonable, had its origin in the past. The Methodist Societies of a hundred years ago lived apart from the world around them, partly because they professed aims and experienced joys which were not shared by most of their neighbours, and partly because those neighbours despised Methodists and eschewed their society. The tale of these early Methodists, their joys and sorrows, privations and heroism, though known to a few, is still unknown to the majority of their fellow-countrymen, and this ignorance is not surprising; it is the fate of most religious heroes.

But Mr. Bennett is naturally concerned with the great grandchildren of early Methodists, and sternly ignores the shades of heroic ancestors. He brings his searchlights to play on the aims and motives of persons who use phrases and sing hymns which imply supernatural standards of conduct on the part of those who utter them. So the question that forces itself on the mind of his readers is this. In what do the people of the Wesleyan Methodist clan really differ from those of other clans? Are their vital interests and occupations different from those of other human beings?

Now the vital interests of human life as pictured by Mr. Bennett are twofold, the passion for making money and the sex passion. The supreme aim of a man's life, he shows, is and should be to make money. By his ability to do this he wins both his own self-respect and the esteem of those around him. When he is a superior order of man like Clayhanger or the Card, he longs to perfect his talents or to embark on adventures, but always with the prospect of money at the end of the labour and the adventure. A labour indeed and an adventure that did not hold out this prospect would not be worth the undertaking; for the ultimate value of every activity in the Five Towns of commercial England is its equivalent in

cash. In no other British novel, surely, is the all pervading money value so predominant; and the Methodist clan, as pictured by Mr. Bennett, forms no exception to the rule. Its members are equally dominated by the passion for money getting and the prime necessity for seeing all things in their cash equivalents: Methodists who are loyal to their Church and devoted to its welfare, bring their monetary values into its affairs and councils. Occasionally the master passion of their lives breaks all restraint, and we have pictures like that of Ephraim Tellwright, the Methodist miser and the wretched Sunday-school superintendent who commits suicide in his clutches.

But athwart this passion for hard cash gleams the attraction and the passion of sex. The hero on his quest has to meet the heroine on hers. Now the women characters of Mr. Bennett are exceedingly interesting, and quite the most significant in his portrait gallery. They merit examination not only because many of them profess the religion of Methodism, and are therefore relevant to the purpose of this article, but because ordinary women have seldom received the dispassionate and minute treatment of Mr. Bennett. Ordinary women, as a rule, do not interest the male novelist except in so far as they touch the lives and meet the needs of the men around them. But Mr. Bennett's heroines have a history apart from the heroes. Many of them have to earn their own living, and, contrary to established opinion, take a distinct pleasure in doing so. Into the struggle and adventure for cash they enter, often with much of the zest of the hero, keeping their own counsel and hardening their hearts, as he does. Should marriage relieve them from bearing the brunt of the battle, they still participate in it, because they, too, need money to spend or to save, and always acquiesce in those methods which seem likely to obtain it.

Heroines like Leonora, who neither toil nor spin, are careful to bestow their favours on men of means; and when the hero keeps a shop his wife can actively share in the business. She becomes then, in a true sense, the life-long partner of her husband. The ecstasy of their early married life fades into a memory of the past, but neither differences of temperament nor of point of view can dissolve the golden link which makes their financial interests one.

The sex passion therefore does not seriously clash with the hero's financial prospects, as the heroine either shares his passion or is imbued from her youth up with an immense respect for cash values; and the heroines who profess Wesleyan Methodism form no exception to the rule. Methodism cannot deliver Anna Tellwright from the sway of a miserly father or prevent her from carrying out his merciless precepts. As an heiress she is a financial asset to the man who loves her, but beyond that cardinal fact she has no influence on his business

methods and no interest in the human beings whom he employs, and that is the case with most wives of wealthy men in the Five Towns. Even if they were not there, their husband's business would go on just the same, as that business is a prime necessity and an end in itself.

But there are other sides of men's lives which they do affect very much. No other English novelist has devoted so much care and attention to the middle-class woman in her home.<sup>1</sup> The Card, as well as Edwin Clayhanger, knows on opening his own front door, that he is entering a realm which he no longer controls. Yet his wife is the reverse of assertive, and is the very opposite of Clayhanger's masterful wife. As a girl she was a sweet, clinging creature who evoked the sympathy and the chivalrous instinct of the man who married her. But as wife and mother she has become a woman of power. Most of the women who preside over the domestic realm are in Mr. Bennett's eye women of power, and their power often is in inverse proportion to their ability to use it.

What pictures of powerful and incompetent mothers he gives in those professing Methodists, Mrs. Baines and her daughter Constance. Constance can never say "No" to her only son, who disregards in consequence all her wishes; and when her husband throws himself into the cause of a fellow-citizen she impedes him to the best of her power, because she cannot understand why he should imperil his health and personal ease for one who does not belong to the family circle. The four walls which had always confined her, draw closer about her as she grows old, until she becomes a prisoner within them. Yet the four walls are merely the shell of what was once a home, and she has both the means and the opportunity to procure change of scene as well as domestic improvement. But she clings to the shell and knows no life outside its senseless routine, yet she is a member of the Wesleyan Communion, and on the day before her death the minister pays her a visit. The religion that he represents, however, is powerless either to comfort her heart or to enlarge and beautify her life.

Religion also is unable to curb and guide the powers of women like Auntie Hamps and Aunt Harriet, against whom the novelist bears a special grudge, and who work havoc in households which are not theirs. The fact that such persons profess to "lean hard" on certain tenets of their religion increases their repulsiveness. They "lean hard" on the unfortunate young people whom they crush and misunderstand, and worship heathen gods, the conventions and prejudices of people who are ignorant and well-to-do.

Through sheer observation of the facts, therefore, Mr. Bennett has depicted a certain equality between men and women. Women have disabilities and limitations

imposed upon them, but they also have special privileges and powers. The hunger for money and the desires of sex belong to them as well as to men, and religion cannot deliver either men or women from excess in these cravings or atone for any lack in their satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> Both hero and heroine are in bondage to the master passions, and from their heart at times goes up a cry for deliverance. Anna Tellwright at the Revival Service prays in vain for a power that will lift her above herself, and in so doing is typical of the novelist's better characters. But the religion which they profess has no power to deliver or heal. It is part of their everyday life, an inseparable adjunct of it, like the streets of the Five Towns and the furniture of their best parlours, but it has no concern with the most absorbing things in their lives, money and sex.

Mr. Bennett cannot conceive of Methodism as a positive power delivering men and women in the hour of their Destiny; he does perceive it as a force that is able to restrain them. Sophia Baines is not saved in the hour of her Destiny, but when she has taken the fatal step, the inherited instincts of Methodist forbears prevent her from sinking into the mire. With a passion that surprises herself as much as the reader, she retains her purity and self-respect in the world of Paris, driving hard bargains with the sinners around her. In the Siege of Paris she makes a corner in provisions, and when it is over runs a boarding-house famous for its first-rate management and unimpeached respectability. She takes a grim pleasure in her own business acumen, but she lives joyless and self-centred, a splendid icicle in the glittering life of Paris. Yet she is full of glorious capacity for joy—joy that her pride and youthful sin make for ever impossible.<sup>3</sup>

Methodism, therefore, in the Five Towns restrains the actions of certain people and finds employment for a smaller number. But it is quite exceptional for men and women to take joy in their religion. That it is possible to experience true delight in its service or anything approaching poetic rapture, never occurs to them. Its officials are either creatures of routine or apostles of gloom. Yet it is the ecstasy, the emotional excess of Methodism that distinguishes it from other forms of religious life. In temper often it has been Catholic and Southern rather than Protestant and British, for which reason it has never quite won the approval of many sober, clear-headed people. There were terrors in early Methodism, but the terrors had corresponding joys, though these unfortunately have attracted less attention, just as the joys of Dante's *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* have been overshadowed by the more sensational horrors of his *Inferno*.

In Mr. Bennett's picture of the people called Methodists there is only the terror, the terror not of a distant theological hell but of a judgment here and now on the sins and frailties of men:—

It is strange how Fate persists in justifying the harsh generalisations of Puritan morals, of the morals in which Constance had been brought up by her stern parents. Sophia had sinned. It was therefore inevitable that she should suffer. An adventure such as she had in wicked and capricious pride undertaken with Gerald Scales, could not conclude otherwise than it had concluded. It could have brought nothing but evil.

(*Old Wives' Tale*.)

This view of human life might be described as an obsession with him. Not only does he frequently reiterate it but it is stamped on every tale that he tells. When the sinner himself is unable to pay the full penalty, his child or some other innocent person does it in his stead. On the pure soul of Annunciata falls the burden and guilt of her father's sin. She atones for that which the previous habits and dulled consciences of her parents do not permit them to expiate. Even in those cases where his men and women seem to evade all those penalties which they should rightly incur, we feel that their fate is only postponed. Leonora has extraordinary luck and secures perhaps a temporary respite, but she no more than anybody else will evade judgment or obtain peace of mind and the satisfaction of her cravings.

Such, then, is the picture that the novelist paints of Methodist people in commercial England, and no truthful person can deny the accuracy of his portraiture. What he has seen he has faithfully reproduced, and Methodists who do not blind their eyes to the facts, know that he has seen a good deal. He sees money values dominating the councils of that Church just as they dominate other councils of men, and he observes men and women conducting their love affairs like their business transactions, in watertight compartments which deny their own hymns. He sees routine and triviality in places where they need not exist and in the sheltered homes of well-to-do people he perceives beautiful young life, rich in promise of power and joy, but doomed by parental selfishness and its own frailty to incur terrors of judgment in the future. Sombre and gloomy as the picture is, it is scarcely a surprising one. No careful observer of modern Methodism could fail to perceive what Mr. Bennett has so brilliantly depicted.

But what is astonishing is that which the novelist has not seen. He only sees the rich people sitting in the front pews and those clients who sit behind them. There are Methodist heroes and heroines of whom he knows nothing; who lack indeed the instinct for cash values but are alive with other instincts. For every parody of Methodism pictured by Mr. Bennett it is easy to name a dozen persons who are a credit to it. But the dozen are often unknown people who do not proclaim their own virtues, though they are to be found everywhere, even in the chapels of the Five Towns. There are unselfish dressmakers and shop-assistants, cheery carpenters and