Beyond the Five Towns: a re-evaluation of Arnold Bennett

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Abstract

> 'I have a great deal to say, and I mean to say it. As for my work being taken seriously, we shall see about that'.
>
> Arnold Bennett, 1909[1]

Arnold Bennett occupies a somewhat anomalous position as an Edwardian realist in a century dominated by modernist aesthetics. Pigeonholed by critics who have tended to adopt an overly formalist approach when considering his fiction, Bennett's critical acclaim has predominantly been restricted to his Five Towns novels and has been advocated through readings which arrogate to him a slavish homage to nineteenth-century French naturalism and a quasi-documentary representation of particular locales. This dissertation aims to challenge Bennett's categorisation as a merely provincial author, and as an Edwardian deserving of the canonical segregation initially proposed by Virginia Woolf, which separates his work from – and subordinates it to – that of his early twentieth-century or early Modernist contemporaries. To this end, I will demonstrate that Bennett was in fact, readily incorporating early twentieth-century themes and techniques, and actively engaging with various aspects of individual, social and national politics in comparable ways to other Modernists. I will also contend – contrary to critics who have regarded the war as having killed Bennett's creativity – that the war occasioned a shift in Bennett's agenda that, though not appreciated in his time or in the years after his death, is now in need of re-evaluation.

With respect to methodology, this dissertation contextualises Bennett's artistic strategies in light of early twentieth-century aesthetic concerns, and it demonstrates that his prose techniques serve social and/or political purposes. The thesis is divided into three

[1] Bennett, letter to Pinker dated 17 May 1909, in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 123.

chapters, each of which explores a stage of Bennett's literary career. Chapter I covers 1898, the year of publication for Bennett's first novel, *The Man from the North*, to 1913, also analysing *A Great Man* (1904) and *Buried Alive* (1908). Chapter II attends to Bennett's fictional and non-fictional writings of the War years, including *The Roll-Call* (1919) – which begins in 1901 and culminates in 1914 – *Liberty* (1914), and *Over There* (1915). Chapter III examines Bennett's writing from 1919 onwards, focusing on three novels: *Riceyman Steps* (1923), *Lord Raingo* (1926), and *Accident* (1929).

Contents

Introduction

Existing Bennett Scholarship

Broadly speaking, existing Bennett scholarship can be organised into three phases: the first appeared in the years leading up to and immediately following Bennett's death (the mid-1920s through to the end of the 1930s); the second, in the 1960s through to the 1990s; and the last, as it stands today – from the year 2000 onwards. The first book on Bennett was written by F. J. Harvey Darton. It was published in 1915 and re-released with minor alterations in 1924, as part of the collection 'Writers of the Day: Studies of Modern Authors by Modern Authors'. Darton's book illustrates the general attitude towards Bennett by the time of his death in 1931. Darton portrays Bennett as a 'fluctuating artist', citing the Five Towns novels as his highest achievements and his 'non-Staffordshire works' as 'all written for pleasure and for profit'.[2] He contends that Bennett's worth lies in his ability to describe 'the very middle' of a middle-class society that 'belongs to a marked epoch of industrial evolution'[3] and anticipates Bennett's literary classification as a provincial author, whose worth lies in his ability 'to present this passionless panorama of life'.[4] When asserting that Bennett's non-Five Towns works are 'novels of ideas vigorously worked out, but not of great ideas',[5] Darton reflects the fact that the novel of ideas was less valued than a formally unified one in the early twentieth century. However, this initial dismissal of any formal experimentation which deviates from capturing 'reality' in a dispassionate manner remains an enduring presupposition in approaches to Bennett. The second book on Bennett, written by L. J. Johnson and published in 1924, closely echoes Darton's sentiments: there is the 'conviction'

[2] Darton, *Arnold Bennett*, pp. 6, 62, 52, 54.
[3] Ibid., pp. 113-15.
[4] Ibid., pp. 115-16.
[5] Darton, *Arnold Bennett*, pp. 6, 62, 52, 54.

that Bennett's Five Towns novels are 'his best literary creations' as 'they reveal the essential Bennett' or the 'real Bennett',[6] and the greatest of these are *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), the *Clayhanger Trilogy* (1910-1916)[7] and *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908). This thesis challenges this assumption: Bennett is not merely provincial, not merely dispassionately realist, and most certainly not lacking in social ideas. His novelistic craft and his sociopolitical interventions are interdependent.

Scores of reviews, general articles and studies published both prior to and immediately following the second edition of Darton's book and the initial publication of Johnson's readily adopt the idea of multiple Bennetts. In *The Problem of Arnold Bennett* (1932), Geoffrey West writes that 'upon one hand we had the author of the Five Towns tales, on the other we saw existing side by side with him, that other Mr. Bennett once so perfectly, lovingly, and damningly portrayed by "Low" – the author of the fantasias, the pocket philosophies, and the lighter novels'.[8] The conception of 'Low Bennett' books as signifying those produced solely for profit – as opposed to 'High Bennett' books which signified Art – is an enduring critique which over time would become substantiated through the perception that Bennett decided to sacrifice his artistic integrity in order to serve a mounting desire to be wealthy. West's essay addresses what he perceives to be the 'problem' of Arnold Bennett, which is the 'unprecedented' decline of his creative talent following the publication of *The Old Wives' Tale*.[9] Like Darton and Johnson, West asserts that the Five Towns novels are Bennett's most brilliant and then, by extending this observation and using *The Old Wives' Tale* as a marker, divides Bennett's literary career accordingly into three stages. The first stage, a period of 'prolonged apprenticeship', lasts from 1896 to 1907 'when the writing of *The Old Wives' Tale* was commenced', the second, a period of 'brief mastery', 'may be said

[6] Johnson, *Arnold Bennett of the Five Towns*, pp. 7, 9.
[7] The *Clayhanger* trilogy comprises *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessways* (1911) and *These Twain* (1916).
[8] West, *The Problem of Arnold Bennett*, p. 73.
[9] Ibid., pp. 17, 16.

to end with the beginning of the war' and the third, a period of 'prolonged decline', spanned the remaining years leading to his death – a time which West asserts, was one of 'spiritual discontent'.[10] This thesis also divides Bennett's career into three stages. Unlike West, however, I argue that Bennett's literary abilities underwent a distinct development – from diagnostic scientific detachment to an impetus to promote social awareness and ultimately improvement. This by no means diminished the quality of his output. In addition, as a substantial proportion of scholarship has addressed Bennett's Five Towns novels, I will focus on Bennett's metropolitan fiction. West closes by effectively dismissing much of Bennett's post-1908 work, and praises Bennett's fidelity to the ordinary, writing that '[Bennett's] writing at its finest induces this feeling of the *stream* of life flowing majestically, relentlessly, from eternity to eternity'.[11] He posits that, following the publication of *The Old Wives' Tale*, Bennett's internal struggle between artistic integrity and commercial success ended, so that the latter triumphed at the expense of the former. It is possible that a degree of antebellum nostalgia influenced these early critical attitudes, resulting in praise for texts which presented a pre-war, traditional way of life, and condemnation for those that include social unrest, class rebellion and reminders of the horrors of war. Nevertheless, this differentiation of 'High' and 'Low' Bennett was to persist for decades to come.

Criticism had followed a familiar pattern in the years leading up to and immediately following Bennett's death: general appreciation and shorthand evaluation (classification as either 'High' or 'Low' Bennett), as opposed to close scrutiny which evaluated each novel on its own terms. In the words of James Hepburn, when providing an overview of this early criticism, 'all was plain and readable, and what more was there to do than to describe and admire, describe and scorn, or describe and select? (No matter that there was often extreme

[10] Ibid., pp. 27-8.
[11] Ibid., p. 65.

contradiction about what was worthy of praise or scorn.)'[12] In the second half of the 1930s, however, formalist studies began to emerge which built closely upon these earlier observations and cemented a perception of Bennett's unflagging commitment to realism. J. B. Simons's *Arnold Bennett and his Novels* (1936), classifies Bennett as a realist, 'a copyist of life, like his French masters, Maupassant, Flaubert and Balzac',[13] and Georges Lafourcade's 1939 study also emphasises Bennett's stringent commitment to realism, paying close attention to Bennett's literary influences and psychological understanding with the 'Five Towns characters'.[14] Writing that 'it is by an accumulation of carefully-chosen details that Bennett achieves that lifelike quality of his novels', Simons heralds the pervasive and perdurable view of Bennett as a naïve realist, credited for his process of selection but faulted for his failure to bring sophisticated analysis and to sustain a conscious moral purpose. In this regard, Simons effectively sets the terms for Bennett's critical downgrading during the later twentieth century; as F. R. Leavis would state twelve years later in *The Great Tradition* (1948): 'for all the generous sense of common humanity to be found in his best work, Bennett seems to me never to have been disturbed enough by life to come anywhere near greatness'.[15] In Leavis's terms, 'common humanity' is a patronising assessment of Bennett's supposed realism and attention to the ordinary, and works in which Bennett signals his perturbance at the state of the world do not come under Leavis's radar.

When exploring literary influences, Simons quotes Percy Lubbock's analysis of Balzac's fiction in *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) as evidence for Balzac's influence on Bennett's writing:

[12] Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 425.
[13] Simons, *Arnold Bennett and his Novels*, pp. 26-7.
[14] Lafourcard, *A Study*, p. 148.
[15] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 16.

> As for the peculiar accent and stir of life, the life behind the story, Balzac's manner of finding it and expressing it is always interesting. He seems to look for it most steadily not in the nature of the men and women whose action makes the story, or not there to begin with, but in their streets and houses and rooms. He cannot think of his people without the homes they inhabit, […] Balzac is so sure that every detail must be known down to the vases in the mantelpiece or the pots and pans in the cupboard, that his reader cannot begin to question it.[16]

The quotation is largely left to speak for itself and as a consequence, the point is underdeveloped; all that Simons adds is 'when Balzac sets out to picture a character and a train of life, he achieves it in great measure by describing a house. Arnold Bennett follows in Balzac's steps in this method' and 'the miser's house in *Riceyman Steps*, the house of the Baineses in *The Old Wives' Tale*, the house of the Orgreaves family in *Clayhanger* and James Ollenshaw's home in *Helen with the High Hand*' are given as examples.[17]

Simons's comment recalls Virginia Woolf's essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1923), in which Woolf accuses Bennett, along with Wells and Galsworthy, of providing the reader with 'a vast sense of things in general; but a very vague one of things in particular'. For Woolf, Bennett's chief offence – an offence which Woolf attributes to an admittedly 'simpli[stic]' 'view' of Edwardian fiction in general – is an overzealous verisimilitude which effectively strips a character of any spiritual substance:

> Every sort of town is represented, and innumerable institutions, we see factories, prisons, workhouses, law courts, Houses of Parliament; a general clamour, the voice

[16] Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, p. 169.
[17] Simons, *Arnold Bennett and his Novels*, p. 48.

> of aspiration, indignation, effort and industry, rises from the whole; but in all this vast conglomeration of printed pages, in all this congeries of streets and houses, there is not a single man or woman whom we know.[18]

From Woolf's point of view, a commitment to realism is a banal attendance to dead objects, again with something of a lofty disdain for the workaday; it is not an investigation of the internal workings of mind that for her constitute novelistic characterisation.

Woolf's essay, published in England in the *Nation and Athenaeum* on 1 December, was prompted by the publication of an article by Bennett entitled 'Is The Novel Decaying?' published in *Cassell's Magazine* on 23 March 1923. Bennett's article addressed a 'complaint' which he claimed to have heard some 'fifty times' in the past year – 'the complaint that no young novelists are rising up to take the place of the important middle-aged'[19] – and records the two lines of thought that he experienced upon its reiteration. The first is the necessity of creating believable characters in order for an author to secure 'first-class prestige':

> Style counts; plot counts; invention counts; originality of outlook counts; wide information counts; wide sympathy counts but none of these counts anything like so much as the convincingness of the characters. If the characters are real, the novel will have a chance; if they are not, oblivion will be its portion.[20]

Bennett writes that he has encountered numerous young novelists who have demonstrated 'all manner of good qualities' ('originality of view, ingenuity of presentment, sound

[18] Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', p. 33.
[19] Bennett, 'Is The Novel Decaying?', p. 191.
[20] Ibid.

commonsense, and even style'), but that these emergent authors appear to be more interested 'in details', 'than in the full creation of individual characters'.[21] Bennett then utilises Woolf's *Jacob's Room* to illustrate his point. He writes that Woolf's novel is 'packed and bursting with originality' and is 'exquisitely written', but that 'the characters do not vitally survive in the mind, because the author has been obsessed by details of originality and cleverness'.[22] The article ends optimistically, however, as Bennett's second thought is that he is in no doubt 'that big novelists are sprouting up', that they are likely to be writing now, and, most significantly, are in the process of refining their style:

> The great did not at first abound in glitter and cleverness. As a rule they began by being rather clumsy, poor dears! Hence I am not pessimistic about the future of the novel.[23]

Unsurprisingly perhaps, Woolf's response is defensive and condemns the current 'Edwardian' conception of character. Woolf writes of an emergent generational conflict, separating Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy from those whom she regards as her contemporaries, 'the high-brows of literature in the 1920s'.[24] Accordingly, Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy are classified as 'Edwardian' authors, whereas the new generation are 'Georgian'. Woolf states that in 1910, character 'disappeared' as a consequence of the Edwardian authors' tendency to provide an 'abundance' of detail:[25]

> the Edwardian novelist scarcely attempted to deal with character except in its more

[21] Ibid., p. 193.
[22] Ibid., p. 194.
[23] Ibid., p. 195.
[24] Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 442.
[25] Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', pp. 32, 33.

> generalised aspects. […] The Edwardian novelists […] give us a vast sense of things in general; but a very vague one of things in particular. […]
>
> The Georgians had, therefore, a difficult task before them […] [:] to bring back character from the shapelessness into which it has lapsed […]. It was the consciousness of this problem […] which produced, as it always produces, the break between one generation and the next.[26]

The charge of the Georgian novelist, therefore, is to have the confidence to 'disagree about character', 'perilous[ly]' placing him- or herself 'at variance with Mr. Wells, Mr. Galsworthy, and Mr. Bennett about the character', and to possess the resilience to sprout out of the ashes of a decaying literary generation:

> it is from the ruins and the splinters of this tumbled mansion that the Georgian writer must somehow reconstruct a habitable dwelling-place; it is from the gleams and flashes of this flying spirit that he must create, solid, living, flesh-and-blood Mrs. Brown.[27]

Woolf further developed her argument in a second article entitled 'Character in Fiction', published in the *Criterion* in July 1924. Here she lists the authors whom she regards as Georgian (Forster, Lawrence, Lytton Strachey, Joyce and Eliot) and identifies Bennett's principal shortcoming as the creation of realistic characters, as in this critique of *Hilda Lessways* (1911):

[26] Ibid., pp. 34-5.
[27] Ibid., p. 35.

> we cannot hear her mother's voice, or Hilda's voice; we can only hear Mr. Bennett's voice telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines. [...] He is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there.[28]

Woolf concludes by reiterating that the task of the Georgian writer, is to develop and thus revive, this superficial approach to character (and thus, novel writing), and in so doing tentatively to herald 'the verge of one of the great ages of English literature':

> The Edwardian[s] […] have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there. […] But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it. […] the Georgian writer had to begin by throwing away the method that was in use at the moment.[29]

Woolf's articles were to have drastic implications for Bennett's reputation. Her model of Modernism, which champions the 'Georgians', is largely responsible for inhibiting recognition of Bennett's literary worth, especially in his post-1910 novels. Her contention that Bennett's emphasis on extraneous details, including physical buildings and economic facts, occluded emotional connection with, or 'knowledge of', his characters was to re-surface ad infinitum. In this thesis, I argue that 'things' are intertwined with subjectivity and that Bennett's 'method' is consciously employed so to serve social and/or political purposes.

[28] Woolf, 'Character in Fiction', p. 47.
[29] Ibid., pp. 54, 49-50.

Following the publication of the books outlined above, in addition to two collections of letters[30] and the three volumes of journals edited by Newman Flower, very little was to appear on Bennett for the next twenty years and that which did indicates his dwindling reputation. E. M. Tillyard in *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (1958) writes that *The Clayhanger Trilogy* is 'orientated' 'towards epic', but is 'good only in patches' and is hampered by the way in which it 'informs and describes without interpreting' and 'harp[s] with too open obviousness on the themes of the effect of time, the degradation of disease, and the wonder of the quotidian'.[31] *The Old Wives' Tale* is regarded as Bennett's masterpiece and, whilst acknowledging that it is 'within its limits […] past doubt an authentic epic', Tillyard concludes that it 'cannot rank among the very great novels',[32] and is blemished by Bennett's occasional 'over-explicitness', 'places he had better have left the reader to make his own comment'.[33] Most damningly, Tillyard postulates that Bennett's remaining readership are 'almost entirely from the over-fifties of the population' and that, to a younger generation, 'his undisturbed realism, his shameless obviousness, and his habits of repetition are annoying'.[34] The reference to realism recalls Woolf's chronological classification of Bennett as 'Edwardian', not 'Georgian'. Tillyard takes Bennett's exclusion even further: he does not belong with other Modernist writers, and his books do not belong in the hands of modern readers.

Woolf's influence continued into the 1960s. In an article entitled 'The Whole Contention between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf' (1967), Samuel Hynes summarises the current attitude towards Bennet, writing:

[30] Dorothy Cheston Bennett's *Arnold Bennett: A Portrait done at Home*, which includes 170 letters from Bennett, and *Arnold Bennett's Letters To His Nephew* edited by Richard Bennett.
[31] Tillyard, *The Epic Strain*, pp. 171, 170, 173.
[32] Ibid., p. 186.
[33] Ibid., p. 173, 174.
[34] Ibid., p. 171.

> For most […] readers […], Arnold Bennett's literary criticism probably exists – if it exists at all – only as a reflection in his enemy's eye. Virginia Woolf's 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' has become the standard example of her kind of impressionism; it is included in anthologies of modern criticism, and is mentioned in histories of modern literature. But who attends to Bennett's criticism? Not one of his eight critical books is in print either in the United States or in England, and his hundreds of articles have simply disappeared. The colourful, opinionated, influential artist that was Arnold Bennett has faded into the author of one Edwardian novel, and the defeated antagonist of a fierce bluestocking.[35]

Accordingly, Bennett's representation in J. I. M. Stewart's *Writers of the Early Twentieth Century* (1963) is limited to a cursory paragraph in the introduction, whereas Hardy, James, Shaw, Conrad, Kipling, Yeats, Joyce and Lawrence are afforded individual chapters. Stewart 'writes Bennett off' as 'negligible', reducing his literary career to 'a single demarcated hour for serious literary accomplishment' (*The Old Wives' Tale*), and brands him an artistic failure, stating that he ended his career 'in a total subservience to the cheapest conception of success in his profession'.[36] Whilst Bennett most certainly produced commercial novels and openly admitted to desiring financial success, the notion of a conscious choice to sacrifice art for affluence, and the consequential rendering of *all* of his work following *The Old Wives' Tale* as artistically arid, is unjustified. Bennett himself commented upon this dichotomy in his journal in 1904, but he did not regard his ambitions as an artist and his ambitions as a man to be distinct from one another:

[35] Hynes, ' The Whole Contention', p. 34.
[36] Stewart, *Writers*, p. 12.

> An artist works only to satisfy himself, and for the applause and appreciation neither of his fellows alive nor yet unborn. I would not care a bilberry for posterity. I should be my own justest judge, from whom there would be no appeal; and having satisfied him (whether he was right or wrong) I should be content – as an artist. As a *man*, I should be disgusted if I could not earn plenty of money and the praise of the discriminating.[37]

Because Bennett desired both wealth and worth, it is unsurprising that many of his novels which began as a relatively 'light' undertakings quickly became quite 'serious'. When recording the progress of *A Great Man*, for example, Bennett's journal entry for 28 February 1904 is markedly flippant and reveals a relatively hurried method of production:

> It seems amusing enough, and very good in places. But if I treated this as a draft, and really thought out types and made the book fuller, I could make it much better, however, I have a mania for producing a lot just now. And further, this sort of book, though I can do it, is scarcely my natural *genre*. I do not take quite the same terrific interest in it as I take in a serious book, nor do I get quite the same satisfaction out of a passage which I know to be well done.[38]

Less than two weeks later, however, Bennett records, 'I am more satisfied with it than I thought I should be', and that despite beginning it 'with an intention merely humorous', 'the thing has developed into a rather profound satire'.[39] Journal entries revealing self-reflection, in addition to numerous re-assessments of his own work, underpin the importance of re-

[37] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Thursday, January 28th' 1897, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 30.
[38] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Sunday, February 28th' 1904, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 157.
[39] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Sunday, March 13th' 1904, in *Journals, Vol. I,* p. 161.

evaluating the seemingly 'lesser Bennetts' and of challenging the notion that Bennett ended his career as a 'sell-out'.

1960s scholarship on Bennett took two definite forms: a continued appreciation of the Five Towns novels (in particular, *The Old Wives' Tale*) at the expense of acknowledging Bennett's other works, or an attempt to reclaim Bennett's rapidly diminishing status by arguing his worth in ways which carefully circumvented Woolf's criticism. Key examples of the latter include Louis Tillier's *Studies in the Sources of Arnold Bennett's Novels* (1969),[40] which employs a 'scientific' examination of Bennett's creative methodology, and E. J. D. Warrilow's *Arnold Bennett & Stoke-on-Trent* (1966), which promotes the value of Bennett's Five Towns novels for local historians desirous of preserving a rapidly altering landscape.

Tillier begins by acknowledging Bennett's diminishing status, citing 'the attacks to which his reputation had already been subjected […] by the spokesmen of the younger generation' and the influence of Virginia Woolf on the 'advanced literary opinion in the twenties' which 'considered [Bennett] somewhat old-fashioned'.[41] Tillier's study is intended to maintain 'a survival of interest in Bennett',[42] and it engages with Walter Allen's bleak contribution on Bennett to *The English Novelists Series* (1948). Allen had proposed that half of Bennett's forty-one novels 'represent the *Tit-Bits* side of his personality' and as such are 'worthless'; of the books which remain, 'the best and most characteristic, deal with life in the Five Towns', the only exception being *Riceyman Steps* (1923).[43] Allen alleges that the fiction which Bennett wrote between *These Twain* (1916) and *Riceyman Steps* 'is for the most part dreary in the extreme' ('one's impression is of tiredness, of his creative power at its lowest ebb'),[44] and that 'one reason' for the decline of Bennett's reputation in the years since

[40] Tillier's *Studies* was originally written in 1948 and submitted as a subsidiary thesis to the University of Paris (Faculty of Arts) in 1949; various changes (mostly additions) were made at the time of publication in 1969.
[41] Tillier, *Studies*, p. 7.
[42] Ibid., p. 8.
[43] Allen, *Arnold Bennett*, pp. 39, 42.
[44] Ibid., p. 91.

his death 'is the fact that so much of his work, especially during the last fifteen years of his life, was meretricious, so that he appeared at times a wholly commercial writer, the spokesman of the Philistines'.[45] Allen states that the influence of Woolf's criticism aside, 'time has already separated the living from the dead matter in his work. *Anna of the Five Towns*, *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Clayhanger*, *These Twain* and, in a somewhat different class, *Riceyman Steps*' are all that can be deemed 'worthwhile' and, as such, stand a chance at longevity.[46] Tillier utilises Allen's book as a means of typifying current '"Bennettian" criticism' and proposes that in order to mark a departure from this, 'a more scientific, less subjective' methodology is needed. Thus, Tillier produces a 'mainly factual' account of the sources of twelve of Bennett's novels, ranging from autobiographical material, literary influences and topographical, historical and socio-political truths. The book is invaluable With regard to elucidating Bennett's creative process, but very little is added With regard to Bennett's literary standing, other than his homage to French naturalism and commitment to realism.

Warrilow's *Arnold Bennett & Stoke-on-Trent* (1966) was prompted by distress at the architectural changes occurring in Stoke-on-Trent in the 1960s, such as the demolition of the house in which Bennett was born, and a desire to construct a vision of the city as it 'once was', during 'a period when changes in the face of the six towns are taking place more rapidly than ever before'.[47] Bennett's value as a realist author is divorced from its formal-conventional, literary basis, and he is made 'not only a novelist but a historian of great distinction', facilitating the 'preservation' of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scenes which are now 'rapidly disappearing'.[48] Warrilow chooses to focus on four of Bennett's novels – *The Old Wives' Tale*, *The Card* (1911), *Anna of the Five Towns* and

[45] Ibid., p. 101.
[46] Ibid., p. 103.
[47] Warrilow, *Arnold Bennett & Stoke-on-Trent*, p. 7.
[48] Ibid., pp. 12, 54.

Clayhanger – and a short story, 'The Feud' (1902).[49] Each is dismantled into parts so that a summary of events across various chapters can be aligned with original topography. The reductionism of Warrilow's approach is threefold: in the first instance, Bennett's narrow provincialism is to the fore; in the second, his realism is considered less an artistic choice with literary effects and more of a documentary or historical record, serviceable to local historians; in the third, the novels are mined selectively and fragmentarily for their particular topographical references, as opposed to being read holistically as articulations and analyses of a developing cultural sensibility.

Despite being written forty-four years later – and being the most recent, concentrated study on Bennett available today – Sharon Crozier-De Rosa's *The Middle-Class Novels of Arnold Bennett and Marie Corelli: Realising the Ideals and Emotions of Late Victorian Women* (2010) utilises Bennett's fiction in a similar fashion to that of Warrilow. Rosa argues that Bennett's fiction 'add[s] to historians' understanding of unmarried middle-class women's perceptions and emotional concerns during the years 1880-1914'.[50] Citing the 'wide acknowledge[ment]' that Bennett's 'uniqueness' 'rests with his detailed portrayal of the more "ordinary" or "mundane" aspects of individual lives', Rosa argues that Bennett's works 'are particularly useful […] for historians examining the thoughts, feelings and personal experiences of "ordinary" turn-of-the-century women' and commends him to social historians for providing an under-used, highly detailed, historical document (the realist novel).[51] Rosa's text is valuable so far as validating Bennett's engagement with certain social concerns,[52] but

[49] Bennett published a short story called 'A Feud' in the *Cornhill* in July 1902. This story appeared a month later in the *Living Age* and was reprinted in *Tales of the Five Towns* (1905). Both Anita Miller in her annotated bibliography and Warrilow in his book, refer to Bennett's short story as 'The Feud'.
[50] Rosa, *Middle-Class Novels*, p. 1. Whilst the thoughts and experiences of unmarried women are at the forefront of Rosa's book, there are occasions when her discussion touches upon the feelings and experiences of married women.
[51] Ibid., p. 28.
[52] For example, in exploring the depiction of the New Woman, Rosa argues that in opposition to the one-dimensional stereotype produced by newspapers and journals of the day, Bennett attempts to communicate a degree of humanity and the underlying psychological processes of his female characters; in *Hilda Lessways* (1911), Hilda is seen as representing a number of generational and social tensions pertaining to the old order.

– due simply to the fact that the period with which Rosa is concerned is 'Late Victorian' – does not advance critical recognition of Bennett's worth post-1911. And, like Warrilow, Rosa interprets Bennett's fiction as a mere reflection of its milieu, less a crafted representation.

To return from Rosa to the critical chronology, James Hepburn's *The Art of Arnold Bennett* (1963) marks a break from the formalist assessments outlined above, as it attempts to establish Bennett as more than 'simply' a realist.[53] Hepburn engages with Virginia Woolf's 1925 essay 'Modern Fiction', in which Woolf states that Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett are 'materialists' 'because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body' and 'write of unimportant things', spending 'immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear true' at the expense of 'catching life'.[54] In contrast, the 'moderns' (previously 'Georgians'), of which she offers Joyce as exemplar, are 'spiritual', 'concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain'.[55] Hepburn counters that what is 'most significant' about Bennett 'is that he does not consider the external facts of life – geographical and climatic phenomena – to be interesting in themselves but rather in relationship to human mentality. He challenges Woolf's contention that 'stress upon the fabric of things'[56] detracts from the creation of authentic characters, by posing that Bennett sees the external world impinging upon the internal world, 'not explaining it but helping to explain it'.[57] However, in spite of beginning to establish a solid argument for a re-assessment of Bennett's character-creating and a rebuttal of Woolf's abrasive dismissal, Hepburn gradually retreats from his initial assessment of Bennett's use of symbolism and allegory as distinct techniques, and ultimately places them

[53] Hepburn, *The Art of Arnold Bennett*, p. 13.
[54] Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', pp. 7, 8.
[55] Ibid., pp. 10, 11.
[56] Woolf, 'Character in Fiction', p. 49.
[57] Hepburn, *The Art of Arnold Bennett*, pp. 78-9.

below Bennett's 'primary' aim, regarding them as 'serving' the realism.[58] I will contend that Bennett utilises a diverse array of styles, many of which are Modernist and serve to address social and political issues.

The 1970s saw a resurgence of criticism concerning Bennett the realist. The title of Walter Wright's book, *Arnold Bennett: Romantic Realist* (1971), acknowledges a widely accepted description of Bennett's writing as capturing the 'romance of the common-place' and accordingly it largely concentrates on the Five Towns novels. There are two unfounded assertions made within Wright's study which colour his approach to Bennett's fiction. The first of these is the contention that 'Bennett seems to have had only a moderate interest in politics and government',[59] and the second is the declaration that Bennett 'spoke with much less assurance of London than of the Five Towns' as 'industrial matters were rather more within Bennett's range of experience and interest […] since he came from a community of mines, potteries, and factories'.[60]

The claim that Bennett had little interest in politics is misleading in the extreme, and effectively negates his work for the Ministry of Information and the hundreds of articles that he produced regarding the social, political, national and international implications of the War. For Wright to continue by stating that Bennett's 'sketches' ('a few observations on the shortcomings of the traditional governmental system and the vanities and frustrations of individual political leaders') 'depict aridity of imagination and muddleheadedness'[61] is unsubstantiated and as such, betrays only a superficial familiarity with this aspect of Bennett's career. The second chapter of this thesis concentrates solely on Bennett's War writing and serves to demonstrate the way in which this period impacted upon his development as an author and his consequential literary output. The allegation that Bennett

[58] Ibid., p. 77.
[59] Wright, *Romantic Realist*, p. 33.
[60] Ibid., pp. 55, 36-7.
[61] Ibid., p. 36.

'spoke with much less assurance of London than of the Five Towns' is equally problematic. The last of Bennett's Five Towns works appeared in 1916 (*These Twain*) and, as he continued to write up until his death in 1932, a substantial proportion of his novels are set in London – indeed, all of the fiction which is included in this thesis (with the exception of a short story) is metropolitan and is set wholly, or at the very least largely, in London. This dissertation indicates that Bennett was an astute analyst of the Modernist urban experience.

In *Arnold Bennett: A Study of his Fiction* (1974), John Lucas also persists in the endorsement of Bennett as a 'genuine realist'[62] and as '*the* novelist of the ordinary'.[63] Lucas adopts a defensive approach to Bennett's writings, countering criticism by Philip Henderson, Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf, but ultimately concedes that there are characters (such as Adeline in *The Man from the North* and Hilda Lessways) who do support Woolf's criticism, as their construction leaves the reader 'woefully short of information'.[64] Conversely, Lucas praises 'the kind of touch that is to become a Bennett hallmark': a meticulous attention to physical details which surround particular characters.[65] He contends that 'Virginia Woolf is wrong to imply that somehow you can separate people and houses – by which I take it she means the social contexts in which people live, and by which their lives must be partly shaped'.[66] However, these promising areas of investigation remain underdeveloped. For example, Lucas writes that:

> [*Anna of the Five Towns*] is a novel about a young girl [...] in her physical environment. Anna Tellwright is of the Five Towns; and as the title which Bennett eventually settled on implies; [*sic*.] Anna cannot be understood unless she is seen in

[62] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 12.
[63] Ibid., p. 26.
[64] Ibid., p. 24.
[65] Ibid., p. 19.
[66] Ibid., p. 24.

> the context of the Potteries, and their social, spiritual and working life. Not people before houses, as Virginia Woolf had wanted. Instead, people *and* houses.[67]

If this concept were extended, surely it would be here, in these characters' 'houses', that we would find the information that Lucas feels some characters are 'woefully' lacking.[68] But that next step is not taken. In contrast to Hepburn, Lucas insists that 'Bennett is not a symbolist. Nor is he a novelist who works with a number of major or dominant themes. Nor is he a formalist. In spite of his early insistence on formal perfection, he is not really interested in the pattern and structure of his novels for their own intricate sakes'.[69] I contend that Bennett is a composite author, incorporating a number of styles which undergo continuous development throughout his literary career, thereby resisting a singular classification (such as 'realist') and making him far better suited for an association with a period, as opposed to a genre or mode.

Discussions of Bennett's fictional craft and his sociopolitical interests developed separately rather than in conjunction. The 1970s saw the first of two studies which examined Bennett in connection with World War I. Kinley E. Roby, in *A Writer at War: Arnold Bennett, 1914-1918* (1972), begins by acknowledging the fact that 'some critics have seen 1914 as a terminal point in Bennett's career', 'believ[ing] that by the outbreak of war his best work was already done', and quoting Walter Allen as saying that 'Bennett was a brilliant novelist [but] after 1914 he was generally no more than a brilliant journalist'.[70] Roby proceeds 'to pass another sort of judgement on Bennett's career, one which takes more into account the actual events of his life during the crucial years 1914 through 1918'.[71]

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[67] Ibid., pp. 26-7.
[68] Ibid., p. 24.
[69] Ibid., p. 12.
[70] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 4.
[71] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Ultimately, Roby agrees with the verdict, although he attempts to demonstrate the reasons for Bennett's creative decline. Roby states that in 1914 Bennett was 'moving towards a crisis in his creative powers, the onset of which was hastened and intensified by the outbreak of war'. He writes that Bennett was 'rapidly exhausting two important sources of his inspiration'– he was 'coming to the end of his Five Towns material', and his marriage to Marguerite was rapidly disintegrating – plus he was suffering increasingly with dyspepsia and insomnia.[72] Bennett's second marriage to Dorothy Cheston, Roby believes, revived him in both an emotional and creative capacity. Whilst Roby makes extensive use of published and unpublished sources – in particular, newspaper articles and unpublished journal entries – we are left with the lingering sensation that Bennett was an ambitious, but ultimately unhappy, man, whose career ended not with a bang, but a whimper.

Peter Buitenhuis's *The Great War of Words: British, American and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (1987) explores pre-War, War-time and post-War literature produced by the Wellington House group, a collection of twenty-five authors including Bennett, gathered together by C. F. G. Masterman, the recently appointed chief of Britain's war propaganda bureau, in September 1914. Buitenhuis focuses on the ways in which these authors were employed and the effects which producing War-time propaganda was to have upon them. Whilst valuable for promoting an awareness of Bennett as a multifaceted author, Buitenhuis paints a similarly bleak picture of Bennett and makes sparing use of his War writing. Despite acknowledging that Bennett wrote 'no fewer than three hundred propaganda articles',[73] Buitenhuis incorporates only three. The first is Bennett's response to a letter to the *New Statesman* which had questioned the competence of novelists who had established themselves as authorities on 'all matters of foreign policy and military

[72] Ibid., pp. 25-7.
[73] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 40.

strategy';[74] the second is Bennett's rebuttal of G. B. Shaw's 'Common Sense about the War';[75] and the third records Bennett's 'dizzy[ing] elevation' to Deputy Minister of Information,[76] as expressed in his article 'The Greatest Moment'. Both Roby and Buitenhuis emphasise the financial motivation for Bennett becoming 'one of Masterman's most productive and effective writers',[77] and they have dismissed various portions of his non-fiction writing by regarding it as either the product of a compliant propagandist, or a detached, unmoved observer. By contrast, I argue that Bennett was neither; that he wrote with compassion and with the aim to promote the dissemination of accurate information as opposed to slavish propaganda.

The 1990s heralded Robert Squillace's radical study, *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett* (1997) which successfully situates Bennett as a 'modern' writer, who is deserving of modernist acknowledgement, despite 'develop[ing] alternative techniques to those now identified with literary modernism'.[78] Squillace covers a diverse array of Bennett's books, devoting particular attention to *The Old Wives' Tale*, the *Clayhanger* Trilogy, *The Pretty Lady* (1918), *Riceyman Steps* and *Lord Raingo* (1926). Ground-breaking With regard to Bennett scholarship, it is restricted only by a 1990s understanding of modernism, which is more restrictive (hence 'alternative techniques') than that which exists today. For example, in 1992, Marjorie Perloff compiled a list of characteristics that were to define Modernism as it was understood from the mid-1960s onwards[79] and Peter Barry in

[74] Bennett, letter to the editor of the New Statesman dated 1 September 1914, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 349.
[75] Shaw's article was published in the *New Statesman* on 14 November 1914. Bennett's response appeared three days later as 'Arnold Bennett Answers Shaw' in the *New York Times* and 'The Nonsense about Belgium according to Bernard Shaw' in the *Daily News (And Leader)*.
[76] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p 138.
[77] Ibid., p. 40.
[78] Squillace, *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett*, p. 16.
[79] These included: '(1) the replacement of representation of the external world by the imaginative construction of the poet's inner world via the mysterious symbol; (2) the superiority of art to nature; (3) the concept of the artist as a hero; (4) the autonomy of art and its divorce from truth or morality; (5) the depersonalization and "objectivity" of art, or what Joseph Frank called "spatial form"; (6) alogical structure […]; (7) the concrete as opposed to the abstract, the particular as opposed to the general, the perceptual as opposed to the conceptual; (8) verbal ambiguity and complexity: "good" writing as inherently arcane; (9) the fluidity of consciousness […];

Beginning Theory (1995), defined 'Modernism' as 'a movement' which in literature, involved 'a rejection of traditional realism […] in favour of experimental forms of various kinds'.[80] After listing a selection of the 'literary "high priests" of the movement', Barry also provides a list of some of the literary techniques practised by these writers.[81] Today, Modernism is more usually regarded as a period designator (much like Romanticism). Raymond Williams's lecture ('When was Modernism?') at the University of Bristol in 1987, is now regarded as heralding the emancipation of the canonized Modernist movement from 'the theoretic contours and specific authors', which constituted 'a highly selected version of the modern which then offers to appropriate the whole of modernity'.[82] Williams argued that Modernism should be resituated in light of a broader artistic and social history ('the earlier novelists […] make the latter work possible; without Dickens, no Joyce') and its authorial hegemony challenged by 'search[ing] out' 'an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margins of the century'.[83] This is where I want to position my research: as a compilation of 'neglected' works – or books which have yet to be 'taken seriously' – to be re-assessed in light of a contemporary understanding of Modernism and of Bennett's development as a twentieth-century author.

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(10) the increasing importance attached to the Freudian unconscious and to the dream work; (11) the use of myth as organizing structure […]; (12) the emphasis on the divided self […]; (13) the malaise of the individual in the "lonely crowd", the alienated self in the urban world […]; and finally, (14) the internationalism of modernism…' (Perloff, *Redrawing the Boundaries*, p. 158).

[80] Barry, *Beginning Theory*, pp. 78-9.

[81] These include: '(1) A new emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity […] (a preoccupation evident in the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique). (2) A movement (in novels) away from the apparent objectivity provided by such features as: omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear-cut moral positions. (3) A blurring of the distinctions between genres, so that novels tend to become more lyrical and poetic, […] and poems more documentary and prose-like. (4) A new liking for fragmented forms, discontinuous narrative, and random-seeming collages of disparate materials. (5) A tendency towards "reflexivity", so that poems, plays and novels raise issues concerning their own nature, status, and role' (ibid., p. 79).

[82] Williams, 'When was Modernism?' p. 33.

[83] Ibid., pp. 32, 35.

Bennett's Writerly Development and the Structure of this Thesis

Bennett's letters and journals provide salient reflections on his artistic as well as career objectives, and how he thought about his writing in relation to his philosophy of life and his assessments of social and political problems. In this section, I will indicate the extent of his self-reflexiveness, how this challenges so many of the characterisations elaborated in the previous section, and why attention to it justifies a re-evaluation of Bennett's metropolitan novels. In particular, I discern three more-or-less discrete stages in this development, which I shall outline in this section, and which in turn form the organising logic of this thesis.

Bennett's writing developed substantially over the course of his literary career but even in the earliest sources we see that he deserves to be regarded as as a multifaceted author. Bennett records his desire to expand beyond the confines of realism in a journal entry dated January 1899:

> The day of my enthusiasm for 'realism', for 'naturalism', has passed. I can perceive that a modern work of fiction dealing with modern life may ignore realism and yet be great. To find beauty, which is always hidden; that is the aim. If beauty is found, then superficial facts are of small importance. But they are of *some* importance. And although I concede that in the past I have attached too high a value to realism, nevertheless I see no reason why it should be dispensed with. My desire is to depict the deeper beauty while abiding by the envelope of facts. […]
>
> What the artist has to grasp is that there is no such thing as ugliness in the world. This I believe to be true, but perhaps the saying would sound less difficult in

> another form: All ugliness has an aspect of beauty. The business of the artist is to find that aspect.[84]

The first decade of Bennett's literary career is marked by the desire to remain a detached observer, so as to retain 'control' over both his personal conduct and creative output. There is an air of (largely tongue-in-cheek) youthful arrogance, and pride in pursuing an Artist's vocation and endeavouring to uphold a 'scientific (artistic) coldness'.[85] As we will see, this is carried over into his fiction during the period 1898 to 1908.

This determination to remain detached, however, begins to waver in 1908, anticipating the second stage of Bennett's literary career: the writing he produced in response to World War I. Having spent '2½ days' resting in Paris after a month-long sketching tour of France (2–30 September 1908), Bennett records the following observation in his journal:

> I was more than ever convinced of the unhappiness of the vast majority of the inhabitants of a large town – owing to overwork, too long work, and too little pay and leisure. I had more than ever the notion of a vast mass of stupidity and incompetence being exploited by a very small mass of cleverness, unjustly exploited. The glimpses of the advanced and mad luxury floating on that uneasy sea of dissatisfied labour grew more and more significant to me. I could have become obsessed by the essential wrongness of everything, had I not determined not to be so. These phenomena must be regarded in a scientific spirit, they must be regarded comparatively, or a complete dislocation of the mind might ensue.[86]

[84] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, January 3rd' 1899, in *Journals, Vol. I*, pp. 84-5.
[85] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, May 23rd' 1908, in *Journals, Vol. I*, pp. 291-2.
[86] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, October 6th' 1908, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 299.

Bennett's 'determination' to remain detached from 'the essential wrongness of everything' was to be short-lived. His increasing interest in politics was intensified by the outbreak of World War I and his involvement with the Ministry of Information and consequent visit to the Western Front in July 1915. These events rendered Bennett increasingly responsive to 'the interests of the time',[87] leading him to nurture a growing concern for 'the spirit of the age' and the 'sickness' which he perceived as permeating early twentieth-century British society.[88]

The third and final stage of Bennett's literary career began in the years immediately following the War, and it is typified by a desire to pursue a 'new manner' of writing, as expressed in a letter to André Gide dated 30 November 1920:

> As for my new manner, – well, it is not yet materialising! I have begun a novel – true, it is only a light one – and I have not been able to get the new manner into it. After writing sixty books one cannot, I find change one's manner merely by taking thought. However, I have hopes of my next novel after the present one. It will be entirely serious.[89]

Whilst Bennett never explicitly reveals what his 'new manner' entails, one can infer that it heralds a wholesale departure from the Five Towns. Bennett first articulated this intention in a letter to Newman Flower regarding his next book, *The Pretty Lady*, three years earlier, noting:

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[87] Courtney, 'in the "Daily Telegraph"', p. 377.
[88] Bennett, *Accident*, pp. 53, 5.
[89] Bennett, letter to Gide dated 30 November 1920, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 135. At the time of this letter, Bennett was writing *Mr. Prohack*; his 'next novel' therefore, must be a reference to either *Riceyman Steps* or the projected novel about Lord Beaverbrook's father which was ultimately abandoned, but is widely regarded as a partial source for *Lord Raingo*.

> I ain't going to write any more about the 5 Towns. […] The next novel I will write will be […] a war-novel and I anticipate that it will startle the public.[90]

True to his projection, all of his subsequent novels were set wholly, or partially, in London. His prediction that his 'next novel' 'will startle the public' and 'be entirely serious', however, warrants closer examination. The 'principal person' in *The Pretty Lady* is 'a professional courtesan',[91] and so it would be reasonable to deduce that Bennett's thoughts regarding the novel's reception are at least partially based upon his choice of protagonist. However, Bennett notes in his journal – just ten days prior to his letter to Flower – that he thought '[he] could tell practically everything about her existence without shocking the B.P. [British Public]'.[92] The novel does 'shock the B. P.'; Bennett acknowledges the 'hades of a racket [it has made] in the press', noting that it has 'several times been called "pornographic", "the last word in decadence", "shameful", "abominable", etc'.[93] But he records his astonishment at 'the number of critics who daren't mention that the chief character is a whore'.[94] If the novel's protagonist is – for the most part – escaping scrutiny, what then is deemed to be so 'startling' about the text?

Whilst reactions to the novel ranged from high praise to vituperation, the articles which fall into each category record very similar observations. When writing in praise of *The Pretty Lady*, reviewers acknowledged its 'up-to-date' subject matter. 'It is excessively topical; it boldly grapples with […] the dreadful reality of the titanic European struggle', wrote one reviewer.[95] Another pointed to its success as 'a social satire'.[96] The satirical

[90] Bennett, letter to Flower dated 19 May 1917, in *Letters, Vol. III*, pp. 31-2.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Wednesday, May 9th' 1917, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 196.
[93] Bennett, letter to Temple dated 27 April 1918, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 57.
[94] Bennett, letter to Walpole dated 4 April 1918, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 55.
[95] Courtney, 'in the "Daily Telegraph"', p. 377.
[96] Wallace, 'in the "Manchester Guardian"', p. 372.

interpretation takes precedence and W. L. Courtney emphasises that the text is 'more than' 'a close and penetrating study of a fille de joie […] It is equally a study, and a very brilliant one, of London society – the smartest set, bien entendu – and their behaviour in times of war'.[97] Conversely, most censorious reviews appear less concerned with the fact that the novel's protagonist is a 'whore'; rather, their chief complaint is that a novel with a courtesan protagonist has been published during the War: the text is regarded as detrimental to civilian morale and unworthy of the time. For example, James Douglas in the *Star* (5 April 1918) wrote:

> If this book had been written and published before the war, it might have been reprieved as a brilliantly hard study of decadent London life. But the war forces the critic to set up a severe standard of aim and intention for art as well as other forms of national energy. No artist has any right to fall below that standard of aim and intention. […] It is his duty to ennoble his readers and to inspire them with ideals which will make them better fit to do their part in the national struggle. If he sets out to amuse them, he must amuse them harmlessly and helpfully. Subjected to these tests, it must be said that Mr. Bennett has done his country an ill turn by writing this book in mid-war.[98]

The fact of the matter is, Bennett did not produce *The Pretty Lady* with the intention of providing 'amusement', nor indeed, to 'inspire' his readers to become 'better fit to do their part in the national struggle'. *The Pretty Lady* is a 'serious' exploration of Bennett's thoughts about the War. In the words of Francis Hackett in the *New Republic* (15 June 1918):

[97] Courtney, 'in the "Daily Telegraph"', p. 377.
[98] Douglas, 'in the "Star"', p. 375.

> nothing could so instantaneously mark a change in the whole tone of life as the instalment of a prostitute at the centre of interest […]. The significance of this choice is its definite relation to the war. […] By letting down the barriers of respectability, Mr. Bennett is enabled to represent in full measure the torrent of his sensations from the war. To him the war is more than a political exigency. It is something that has come out of the lairs of human nature […].[99]

The 'symptoms' of Bennett's 'new manner', therefore, are indicative of a change in topography (the exchange of province for metropolis) *and* a change in focus (Bennett's thoughts or 'sensations' deriving from his observations of British society and its politics). 'Another Mr. Bennett'[100] was emerging, and it is this 'new' Bennett which has 'startled' the public.[101]

The structure of this study adheres to this chronology: each of the three chapters attends to a successive phase of Bennett's career. The aim of each chapter is to analyse Bennett's work in light of his authorial development based on the schema outlined above, his inclusion of early Modernist themes and use of Modernist techniques, and his engagement with social concerns and British politics. I shall also examine the way in which particular texts align with those by authors who have been recognised as more typically Modernist, showing that Bennett utilised comparable techniques and addressed germane concerns.

[99] Hackett, 'in the "New Republic"', pp. 382-3.
[100] Ibid., p. 382.
[101] Bennett, letter to Flower dated 19 May 1917, in *Letters, Vol. III*, pp. 31-2.

Chapter Content: Bennett and Modernisms

This section gives an outline of the three chapters, each one divided into parts, and it points to ways in which Bennett, in his thematic concerns, artistic practices, and political engagement, fits into the Modernist movement more broadly, as well as pointing to how this thesis contributes to ongoing conversations about Modernism's relationships to social and political issues.

Chapter I: The early years

Chapter I concentrates on the first decade of Bennett's literary career and his preoccupation with early twentieth-century society. It is divided into three parts: Part I analyses *A Man from the North* (1898), Part II addresses *A Great Man* (1904), and Part III turns to *Buried Alive* (1908). The aim of this chapter is to refute the assumption that Bennett is an Edwardian author in the pejorative sense of the designation, and thus it rejects the canonical segregation originating with Modernists like Woolf but persisting in modern scholarship. In order to achieve this, I will provide three textual case studies which further substantiate Neil Cartlidge's claim that Bennett had 'a clear sense of the possibility and desirability of accommodating modernist themes and concerns'.[102] In the first section of chapter I, Bennett's principal concern is with the individual in relation to an urban milieu, particularly London, an enduring topic within Modernism.

Similarly to Cartlidge, Julian Wolfreys utilises *Riceyman Steps* (in addition to briefer references to *A Man from the North*, *Buried Alive*, *The Roll-Call*, *Teresa of Watling Street* (1904), *The Sinews of War* (1906), *London Life* (1924) and *Piccadilly* (1929)) in order to contend with Bennett's 'consign[ment] to a limited, reductive and therefore distorted critical

[102] Cartlidge, '"The Only Really Objective Novel Ever Written"?', p. 135.

reception'.[103] Wolfreys accomplishes this by highlighting Bennett's worth in his response to the city's 'singularities', and his consequent 'invention' of 'an *other* London'.[104] The purpose of Wolfreys' book is to explore varying 'inventions of the city' and the ways in which authors 'find and uncover' within these places 'the metamorphic and performative differences by which one comes to know London [and] every other London'.[105] Wolfreys reclaims 'forgotten or overlooked' Bennett through his concentration upon the city's 'forgotten or overlooked' locations, arguing that these impressions are invaluable when creating 'a translated *bildungsroman* for modern urban perception'.[106] Whilst vital in assisting a re-evaluation of Bennett and in underscoring that 'for Bennett, the modern, modernity, modernism' are not 'new categories' intended to replace realism 'in some formalist historical succession',[107] Wolfreys persists, however, in segregating Bennett. For example, when proposing that *A Man from the North* 'allows us a glimpse of […] what might be read as the incunabula of modernism *just as* the condition of modernity', Wolfreys argues that the text is lacking in 'more obviously *fin de siècle* concerns'[108] and cites Bennett's 'departure' from the locus of understanding shared by his contemporaries as justification for his critical neglect: Bennett's 'detailed, vividly impressionistic accounts of locality, atmosphere and experience introduce the reader to that which, in literature at least, is unfamiliar or strange in other novels of the city, precisely because it touches on whatever is habitually passed over in its familiarity'.[109]

In my analysis of *A Man from the North*, I bring to the forefront Bennett's 'close study of men and things',[110] thereby exposing 'more obviously fin de siècle concerns'

[103] Wolfreys, *Writing London*, pp. 128-9.
[104] Ibid., pp. 7, 6.
[105] Ibid., pp. 6, 7.
[106] Ibid., p. 87.
[107] Ibid., p. 134.
[108] Ibid., p. 86.
[109] Ibid., pp. 86-7, 88-9.
[110] Bennett (signed 'Sarah Volatile'), 'Books and Authors', p. 140.

(chiefly, loneliness and urban alienation), in addition to establishing the eponymous Larch as a proto-Prufrockian character, doomed to an unfulfilled existence. In relation to the latter, I argue that the 'pessimism' originally allotted to *A Man from the North*, is in fact more closely aligned with T. S. Eliot's 'rhythmical grumbling' in *The Waste Land* (1922). Scott McCracken records in the preface to his book, *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction and the Urban Public Sphere* (2007), that Modernist literature's 'primary subject' is 'the experience of urban modernity'[111] and it seems apt to begin this reassessment of Bennett, by highlighting the ways in which he engages with this central preoccupation.

My approach to Larch's experience of the modern city and urban mentality is informed by Georg Simmel's 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903) in which Simmel proposes that an individual's 'existence' in a bustling city, requires far more 'mental energy' than that which is needed in a 'small town'.[112] The metropolitan man is continually bombarded by a 'swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli' and, as a consequence, his psychology changes, 'creat[ing] a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it'.[113] The metropolitan individual becomes increasingly detached, reacting 'rationally', rather than 'emotionally'.[114] The 'capitalistic' city ('supplied almost exclusively by production for the market, […] for entirely unknown purchasers who never actually appear in the actual field of vision of the producers themselves'), in addition to 'the unceasing external contact of numbers of persons in the city', results in his cultivating an 'indifference', or increasingly, a 'slight aversion' to, the people around him.[115] 'Resistance' to 'being levelled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism', and the 'attempt

[111] McCracken, *Masculinities*, p. ix.
[112] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', pp. 103-4.
[113] Ibid., pp. 103, 104.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., pp. 104, 106, 107.

[…] to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence'[116] become increasingly difficult (although the city does allow for a greater degree of personal freedom when compared to life in a small town dominated by an overtly political or religious community). Human interaction is fleeting, and as 'self-preservation' dictates that metropolitans maintain a 'blasé outlook' and remain 'indifferent to all things personal', a feeling of alienation and of loneliness is the common result ('one never feels as lonely and as deserted as in this metropolitan crush of persons').[117]

Michael Levenson's *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* (1991) examines the 'diverse fortunes of individuality' in 'eight big novels' from the Modernist period: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Henry James's *The Ambassadors* (1903), E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910), Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* (1918), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1918), and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927).[118] Through detailed textual analysis, Levenson explores the relationship between character and narrative form ('the distinction between "intrinsic" values that characters are made to embody and the "compositional" laws to which they must conform'), and character and 'social form' ('the attempt to construct a figure of individuality from within the rigid confines of community').[119] When presenting his reasoning for Ford Madox Ford's assignment to 'an ambiguous position in the history of modern fiction', Levenson writes that Ford belongs neither 'with the stout Edwardians' – within which he includes Bennett – nor indeed, 'with the lean modernists', as Ford 'shared with the latter the sense of an irrevocable historical transformation that necessarily alters the methods of art,' but 'could never muster the conviction for a programmatic assault on traditional forms'.[120] Today, Ford Madox Ford is

[116] Ibid., p. 103.
[117] Ibid., pp. 103, 105, 104, 108.
[118] Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, p. xi.
[119] Ibid., p. xii.
[120] Ibid., pp. 78-9.

recognised by Rob Hawkes as a 'misfit modern' – a novelist 'characterised by a form of "inbetweenness" which constitutes an acute and exemplary responsiveness to the conditions of modernism', whilst failing to 'conform to our assumptions about modernism', such as pronounced formal experimentation.[121] I will demonstrate that both Levenson's and Hawkes's assessments are equally applicable to Bennett, as Bennett also 'broaches the problem of modern character' – 'a problem of lost unity' as a consequence of 'related historical pressures' such as 'urbanism'[122] – without choosing to employ an 'assault on traditional [narrative] forms'.

Part II, which examines *A Great Man*, explores the way in which Bennett shifts his focus from the psychological trials of life in modern London to an exploration of 'that curious fourth-dimensional planet which we call the literary world'– an alternative reality, or higher dimensional space, which is populated by other-worldly 'beings', 'beings apart and peculiar', 'who, without the least affectation, spelt Art with the majuscule' and 'talked of beauty openly and unashamed'.[123] This section examines the depiction of emergent literary circles (such as the Bloomsbury group, which first began to meet in 1904), literary snobbery and its turbulent relationship with popular taste.

Critical debates surrounding the relationship between modernism and mass culture have fallen – broadly speaking – into two camps: one which argues that modernist writers were opposed to mass culture, and one which claims that they were opposed to mass society. Michael Tratner in *Modernism and Mass Politics* (1995), serves as an example of the former. Tratner argues that many of the literary forms employed by Joyce, Woolf, Eliot and Yeats, arose through an attempt to write in the idiom of the crowd mind, thereby producing a distinctive culture which they deemed to be better suited to a time which Gustav Le Bon

[121] Hawkes, *Misfit Moderns*, pp. 3, 2.
[122] Ibid., p. 79.
[123] Bennett, *The Truth*, pp. 5, 6, 54-5.

termed ‘the era of the crowd’. In contrast, John Carey in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) argues that, in the first half of the twentieth century, the English literary intelligentsia cultivated an unrelenting – and unapologetic – elitist hostility toward the increasingly literate public: ‘a gulf was opening, on one side of which the intellectual saw the vulgar, trivial working millions […], and on the other side himself and his companions, […] reading Virginia Woolf and the *Criterion* – T. S. Eliot’s cultural periodical, the circulation of which was limited, even in its best days, to some 800 subscribers’.[124] Aaron Jaffe further develops this particular element of elitism in *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), arguing that ‘the modernist distribution of words as scarce commodities is commensurate with the modernist sense of the scarcity of *the reading public capable of understanding*’.[125] My approach to Bennett’s portrayal of the relationship between modern literature and mass culture in *A Great Man* is informed by John Carey’s study of populism and further supports the claim that Bennett’s writings ‘represent a systematic dismemberment of the intellectuals’ case against the masses’.[126]

Part III develops Margaret Drabble’s observation that *Buried Alive* ‘foreshadows the role Bennett was to play in educating […] the English public, in castigating it, in the most amiable and persuasive fashion, for its philistinism’.[127] It serves as a culmination of the themes explored in Parts I and II, in particular, individualism and the construction of personal identity – which are developed in light of the notion of social and self ‘policing’ as informed by D. A. Miller’s Foucauldian study *The Novel and the Police* (1984) – and Bennett’s interest in the appreciation of the Arts and the assumptions and prejudices which accompany the English public’s perception of the early twentieth-century artist. Importantly, this

[124] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 9.
[125] Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*, pp. 133-4.
[126] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 152.
[127] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 161.

investigation will acknowledge Bennett's own perception of *Buried Alive* as 'a quite serious "criticism of life"'.[128]

Chapter II – The war years

Chapter II explores the second stage of Bennett's literary career – the work which he produced during World War I – and evaluates his growing interest and involvement in national politics. It serves to counter Walter Wright's insistence that 'Bennett seems to have had only a moderate interest in politics and government',[129] and Buitenhuis and Roby's implication that the work which Bennett produced during the war was financially motivated, slavish propaganda, and either preluded or heralded a decline in Bennett's creative ability. By contrast, I argue that Bennett's war writing reveals a growing responsiveness to 'the interests of the time'[130] and that his involvement in politics was to nurture a growing concern for 'the spirit of the age' and the 'sickness' which he perceived as permeating early twentieth-century British society.[131] I will also demonstrate that Bennett continued to actively engage with early twentieth-century, or Modernist, debates about mass culture: commodification versus aesthetics, entertainment versus edification, and, at this stage, propagandic influence versus individual interpretation and appreciation. This second phase of Bennett's career is marked by a shift from the 'detached observation' characteristic of the novels examined in chapter I to one of openly voiced concern. With regard to the War, Bennett actively addresses: the lack of reliable information which is readily available for the populace; the inadequacy of soldiers' pay and the subsequent lack of financial support for soldiers' dependants; and his fear that social problems would feed into and ultimately negate the swift resolution of the current international conflict.

[128] Bennett, letter to Howells dated 1 March 1911, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 274.
[129] Wright, *Romantic Realist*, p. 33.
[130] Courtney, 'in the "Daily Telegraph"', p. 377.
[131] Bennett, *Accident*, pp. 53, 5.

The chapter is divided into four parts, each of which provides a textual case study: Parts I and II evaluate, respectively, 'Part I' and 'Part II' of *The Roll-Call* (1919); Part III examines *Liberty: A Statement of the British Case* (1914); and Part IV addresses *Over There: War Scenes on the Western Front* (1915). My approach to Bennett's understanding of British propaganda in this chapter is informed by Mark Wollaeger's *Modernism, Media and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (2006), in which Wollaeger details the way in which the original 'plan' for British propaganda 'emphasized facts over overt persuasion, […] and placed literature at the heart of its efforts'.[132] The complementary relationship between Modernism and the documentary I uncover in Bennett's wartime writings is informed by Tyrus Miller's article 'Documentary/Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s' (2002). Whilst Miller tackles a later era, I argue that his claims about a conjunction of styles of presentation applies to Bennett's writings of this phase.

Part I examines Bennett's anxieties concerning his perception of the growing superficiality and materiality of society – similar to that which H. G. Wells discloses in *Tono-Bungay* (1909) – and the difficulties in seeing beyond carefully constructed social façades, which is also a central preoccupation of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915). Part II examines Bennett's views on war: namely, the personal and national obligations which drive a man to enlist, and the difficulty in choosing to serve one's country at the expense of protecting and providing for one's family. Part III argues that *Liberty* reveals Bennett's attitudes towards the role of British propaganda and serves as a realisation of his responsibility towards the British reading public. Part IV refutes the perception that *Over There* is an example of heavily tailored propaganda. I contend that it reveals a genuine,

[132] Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media and Propaganda*, p. 13.

humanitarian interest in the War, and that the instances of detached observation are a formal choice, similar to that of documentary Modernism.

Chapter III – The post-War years

Chapter III is divided into three parts: Part I examines *Riceyman Steps* (1923); Part II, *Lord Raingo* (1926); and Part III, *Accident* (1929). In this chapter, I approach Bennett's growing preoccupation with politics in light of Virginia Woolf's essay 'Why Art Today Follows Politics' (1936). In this essay, Woolf draws attention to the artist's proximity to social change ('agitation'), in addition to the 'supreme importance' of ensuring both 'his own survival' and 'the survival of his art':

> Art is the first luxury to be discarded in times of stress; the artist is the first of the workers to suffer. But intellectually also he depends on society.
>
> Society is not only his paymaster, but his patron. If the patron becomes too busy or too distracted to exercise his critical faculty the artist will work in a vacuum and his art will suffer and perhaps perish from lack of understanding.[133]

Woolf's argument recalls Part IV of *The Author's Craft* (1914), entitled 'The Artist and the Public', in which Bennett writes that 'the object of the artist is to share his emotions with others' and, as a consequence of desiring 'popularity', to 'see whether some compromise' between the artist's own 'individuality and powers' and his 'examination' of what the public wants, is possible:

[133] Woolf, 'Why Art Today Follows Politics', pp. 133-6.

> The truth is that an artist who demands appreciation from the public on his own terms, and on none but his own terms, is either a god or a conceited and impractical fool. […] He wants too much. There are two sides to every bargain, including the artistic. […] The sagacious artist, while respecting himself, will respect the idiosyncrasies of his public.[134]

The equivalent personal and social obligation to 'take part in politics' identified by Bennett[135] is echoed by W. H. Auden in a birthday poem for Christopher Isherwood (XXX), in which Auden appeals to Isherwood's moral 'commitment' to 'mankind':

> So in this hour of crisis and dismay
> What better than your strict and adult pen
> Can warn us from the colours and the consolations,
> The showy arid works, reveal
> The squalid shadow of academy and garden,
> Make action urgent and its nature clear?
> Who give us nearer insight to resist
> The expanding fear, the savaging disaster?[136]

The role of the disciplined ('strict and adult') writer goes beyond that of an ordinary citizen, as, in the words of Samuel Hynes, 'he will make men aware of the need for action, and of what action means. His insight will give men strength to resist their enemies, without and

[134] Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, pp. 99, 103, 107.
[135] Ibid., p. 136.
[136] Auden, 'Poem XXX', p. 65.

within. This is more than simply a moral theory of literature, it asserts a direct relation between literature and action in the public world; writing becomes a mode of action'.[137]

Whilst Bennett notes that a 'sagacious artist'[138] would 'respect basic national prejudices', he does concede that it is possible to 'get round' social constraints through the utilisation of 'ingenuity and guile'. When implemented successfully, these skills would allow the artist to 'go a little further than is quite safe' in his pursuit of 'one man's modest share in the education of the public'.[139] I contend that Bennett has these skills in spades and that the tools incorporated in *Accident* (1929) and *Lord Raingo* (1926) are used with the hope of educating society. In a letter to Mr. Bodkin on 22 November 1917, Bennett wrote: 'Like you, I have no first-rate interest in politics, but I have a first-rate interest in the arts'.[140] Perhaps if Bennett had written: 'I have no first-rate interest in becoming a *politician*, but I have a first-rate interest in being an *artist*', his intentions would have been clearer. In being a successful artist, Bennett would respond to socio-political concerns, and whilst unwilling to become a member of a parliamentary system which he deems to be heavily flawed, he does seek to 'educate the public' so that in the course of the 'movement of human evolution', politics will evolve for the 'better'. His message is ultimately optimistic: through an increased awareness and education, society will improve ('They were worse. They will be better').[141]

When examining Modernism after 1922, Sarah Davison writes that:

> the modernist revolution in the arts continued in the years after the War, but its character changed. While modernists still appealed to form as an arena where aesthetic, epistemological and ideological battles could be fought, their critical

[137] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 13.
[138] Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, p. 107.
[139] Ibid., pp. 107-8.
[140] Bennett, letter to Bodkin dated 22 November 1917, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 42.
[141] Bennett, 'Despising Politics', p. 50.

> writings became more explicitly concerned with social, regional and national issues, the global political and economic situation, and literature's role in shaping society.[142]

Accordingly, critics have modified their approach to 'Late Modernism' by breaking away from the 'number of different stories' which early Modernism generated, ('modernism is the liberation of formal innovation; the destruction of tradition; […] the depersonalization of art; the radical subjectivization of art') and instead, 'set[ting] the literature […] in its broad cultural and political context[s]'.[143] In this chapter, these contexts are early post-War England, the General Strike of 1926 and the Labour Movement. The chapter illustrates that by the 1920s, Bennett was wielding his art in a socially engaged manner that constitutes a new understanding of his role and responsibilities as an artist.

[142] Davison, *Modernist Literatures*, p. 76.
[143] Miller, *Late Modernism*, pp. 4, 5.

Chapter I: The Early Years, 1898-1910

This chapter examines three of Bennett's early novels which depict artist figures, exploring the relationship between the individual self in the pursuit of happiness and moral and social purpose, and in tension with larger social restrictions, including urban experience, the commercialisation of culture, and social expectations on individuals. Bennett concludes that art has a social function, as well as being a vocation or source of personal pleasure and expression, and part of that conclusion is a rejection of distinctions of high and low, elite and popular, and original and derivative. In terms of Modernism, Bennett's ideas about artistic production and modern living sometimes put him at odds with strands of Modernism that privilege experimentation and obscurantism. Bennett to a large extent adheres, in the novels written down to 1910, to the realism inherited from French schools and his Victorian precursors, but this chapter demonstrates that his formal choices are guided by the philosophical outlook – on art and on life – that he articulates in his private writings, including letters and journals. In terms of how his novels produce lessons on an ideal *modus vivendi*, Bennett decides that individuals must guard against excessive isolation and promotes proactivity as a means of personal and societal wellbeing and happiness. At this stage in his writing career, Bennett's attention to these issues is more observational than interventionist, and the kinds of ethos he promotes are limited to a sense of the individual making his way in the world, rather than addressing 'real-world' political matters, as will be the case in chapters II and III.

Arnold Bennett was born on 27 May 1867 and moved to London at the age of twenty-one. He had left school at sixteen and began work at his father's office as an unpaid lawyer's clerk in Piccadilly, Hanley. Whilst Bennett's father, Enoch, firmly believed that his son should pursue a career in the law (Enoch was an ambitious man and, having long desired to

become a solicitor, had qualified in 1876 at the age of thirty-four), Bennett chose to move to London and to work as a shorthand clerk for a firm of solicitors called Le Brasseur and Oakley.[1] In *The Truth About An Author* (1903), Bennett writes that his move to the capital was not inspired by any 'definite ambition' or 'immediate object, save to escape from an intellectual and artistic environment which had long been excessively irksome to me. Some achievement of literature certainly lay in the abyss of my desires, but I allowed it to remain there, vague and unnoticed. […] I made no attempt to storm Fleet Street. The fact is that I was too much engaged in making a meal off London, swallowing it, to attend to anything else'.[2] As a 'man of character', Bennett 'survived the initial depressions that beset lonely young clerks in London', and became firm friends with a fellow clerk called John Eland.[3] Eland was 'an ardent bibliophile' ('acquainted, I think, with every second-hand bookstall in the metropolis')[4] and a Francophile. It is widely accepted that it was Eland who introduced Bennett to the pleasures of second-hand bookshops and to the reading room in the British Museum, encouraging the development of '[Bennett's] taste for the modern French and Russian writers' (Zola, Maupassant, the Goncourt brothers and Turgenev)[5] and his interest in bindings and collectable editions of books which was to last all of his life.[6]

Whilst at Le Brasseur and Oakley, Bennett was befriended by Joseph Hill – the director of the Blackheath School of Art and art director for Goldsmith's College. He began to attend 'musical *soirees*' at Blackheath and in 1890, became acquainted with Frederick Marriott (an art teacher at Goldsmith's). The Marriotts lived in Chelsea and, needing a lodger and having become friendly with Bennett, invited Bennett to move in with them as a paying guest. This was to be – in the words of Margaret Drabble – 'a move of great

[1] Drabble, *A Biography*, pp. 27, 39, 50.
[2] Bennett, *The Truth*, pp. 43-4.
[3] Ibid., p. 48.
[4] Bennett, *The Truth*, pp. 44, 45.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Drabble, *A Biography*, pp. 50, 53.

significance', as 'in Chelsea there was more freedom, more excitement, more talented friends [and] no watchful parents. […] It was natural that in such an atmosphere his mind should turn to writing. Everybody else he met was busily engaged on some kind of creative or intellectual work, and he had to keep his end up'.[7] In *The Truth About An Author*, Bennett writes:

> I began to revolve, dazzled, in a circle of painters and musicians [and] was compelled to set to work on the reconstruction of nearly all my ideals. I had lived in a world where beauty was not mentioned, seldom thought of. […] But now I found myself among souls that talked of beauty openly and unashamed.[8] […] I began [life] again, sustained in my first efforts by the all-pervading atmosphere of ardour. My new inmates were not only keenly appreciative of beauty, they were bent on creating it […] and from me they were serenely sure of literature. […] [T]they accepted me with quick, warm sympathy as a fellow-idealist.[9]

'Warmly' encouraged by the Chelsea circle, Bennett's first attempt at literature was 'a condensation in six portions of Mr. Grant Allen's £1,000 Prize Novel' *What's Bred in the Bone,* for a competition in *Tit-Bits*. He won a twenty guinea 'condensation prize' and the parody – published on 19 December 1891 – was printed under the name of 'Mr. Arnold Bennett, 6, Victoria Grove, Chelsea S. W'.[10] Bennett proudly notes: 'this was my first pen-money, earned within two months of my change of air'.[11]

[7] Ibid., p. 51.
[8] Bennett, *The Truth*, pp. 54-5.
[9] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 57.
[10] Miller, *An Annotated Bibliography*, p. 9.
[11] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 59.

Having deemed the prize a 'favourable' 'omen', Bennett then embarked on 'the humiliating part' of his literary career: 'the period of what in Fleet Street is called "free-lancing"'.[12] (He used the term humiliating 'deliberately', in order to address the 'false aureole of romance [which] encircles the head of that miserable opportunist, the free-lance').[13] In 1892, Bennett wrote a short story 'He Needn't Have Troubled How He Looked' which was published in *Tit-Bits* and for which he received a guinea[14] and this was followed by two articles, also published in *Tit-Bits*: 'How a Case is Prepared for Trial' (20 February) and 'A Few Legal Anomalies' (7 May), which detailed a selection of the 'many absurdities' of English law.[15] His Chelsea friends persistently encouraged him to attempt a novel ('Why don't you write a novel on Sundays?'),[16] but Bennett protested that he – currently – had 'no vocation for the novel'; he 'did not regard [himself] as an artist' and his 'ambition' 'was to be a journalist merely'.[17] Bennett struggled to recognise himself as an artist, or as possessing an artistic temperament and his fluctuating disbelief and acceptance is chronicled in *The Truth About An Author*. He lacked 'the courage to believe that [he] had the sacred fire, the inborn and not-to-be-acquired vision'[18] and having written the first chapter of his first novel in 1895, observes that whilst he had 'formally bec[o]me an author', he 'didn't feel' like one, nor did he feel confident in what he was producing:

> I seemed to have an idea that there was no such thing as literature, that literature was a mirage, or an effect of hypnotism, or a concerted fraud. After all, I thought, what in the name of common sense is the use of telling this silly ordinary story of everyday life?

[12] Ibid., pp. 59, 60.
[13] Ibid., pp. 60-1.
[14] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 54.
[15] Bennett, 'A Few Legal Anomalies', p. 84.
[16] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 69.
[17] Ibid., pp. 69, 67.
[18] Ibid., p. 99.

> Where is the point? What *is* art, anyway, and all this chatter about truth to life, and all this rigmarole of canons?[19]

Bennett's acceptance of himself as an author was precipitated by the realisation that he did not have to conform to turn-of-the-century artistic expectations, nor indeed to fit comfortably within established 'literary circles' and to pursue an apotheosized 'literary life'.[20] The difficulty in his arriving at this conclusion is conveyed through his tongue-in-cheek 'ridicule' of 'the whole artist tribe' and of 'the artistic faculty' in *The Truth About An Author*.[21]

Bennett's jibes were never intended 'seriously'; they served to normalise 'that curious fourth-dimensional planet which we call the literary world' and the 'beings apart and peculiar' which inhabited it, and to remove the stigma of pursuing a literary *career* with the candid intention of achieving financial success.[22] With regard to his unashamed commercial careerism, the text also reveals Bennett's early opposition to literary snobbery, in addition to his 'dissatisfaction' with 'literary London':

> There is an infection in the air of London, a zymotic influence which is the mystery cause of unnaturalness, pose, affectation, artificiality, moral neuritis, and satiety. One loses grasp of the essentials in an undue preoccupation with the vacuities which society has invented. The distractions are multiform. One never gets a chance to talk common sense with one's soul. [23]

[19] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 95.
[20] Ibid., pp. 202-3.
[21] Ibid., p. 100.
[22] Ibid., pp. 100, 5, 7.
[23] Ibid., pp. 95, 202, 204.

Bennett's realisation that 'he could not live in [this] rarefied, watery, critical, artistic atmosphere',[24] and the liberation he experienced in gently breaking away from the 'artificiality', is expressed in a letter to George Sturt, dated 28 January 1896:

> Your agile disquisitions upon fiction as an exercise for the intellect and fiction as the presentment of feeling for the appreciation of feeling, make clear to me one great and lovely fact: I have no real interest in the theory of our sacred art. I don't give a DAM for it. Guided by an instinct which I cannot explain and on which I rely without knowing why, I seek to write down a story which I have imagined with only fitfully clear vision. Why I select certain scenes, why I make a beginning of a chapter at this point, and end a chapter at the other point, why I go into minute detail here and slur over whole months there – God only knows. The only vital part of any art can never be learned and certainly cannot be talked about with the slightest advantage. And yet one likes to talk about, and hear it talked about.[25]

This letter indicates Bennett's unconcern with finer issues of aesthetic philosophy and a rather instinctual approach to composition. Above all, he approaches his craft with pragmatism rather than preciousness, removing the mysticism that privileges the artist, and prioritising the effects on readers.

On 1 January 1894, Bennett began as assistant editor for the weekly magazine, *Woman* (becoming editor in 1896).[26] Many of his articles were signed with composite 'office signatures' – including Gwendolen, Barbara, Ada and Cecile[27] – and covered a huge array of topics, ranging from the cultivation of herbs and domestic management to pet care and how

[24] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 62.
[25] Bennett, letter to Sturt dated 28 January 1896, in *Letters, Vol. II*, pp. 32-3.
[26] Drabble, *A Biography*, pp. 54, 56.
[27] Ibid., p. 56.

to bathe a baby.[28] Bennett also created 'Book Chat' (a series of book reviews which began on 3 January 1894 and ran until 8 February 1898) and 'Music and Mummery' (a series of theatre reviews beginning on 16 January 1895 and running until 12 January 1898). John Nash proposes that Bennett's editorship at *Woman* resulted in the journal conveying 'a clear agenda of modernisation' – an 'ideology' which 'advocated the self-sufficient responsibility of the sealed unit of family life, financial prudence and "progressive" values' – and evidences Bennett's early adoption of 'his own Cartesian model of individual self-determination, asserting the dominance of rational will while acknowledging [in Bennett's own words] "the collisions of existence"'.[29] In this first chapter, my analysis of three of Bennett's early novels will investigate another way in which Bennett was 'accommodating modernist themes and concerns'[30] – one in which 'the collisions of existence' relate to the plight of the individual within the mass populous of London, and the unique difficulties faced by both the commercial writer and the revered artistic 'genius', when existing alongside and/or interacting with, the literary or artistic intelligentsia.

[28] Nash, 'Arnold Bennett and Home Management', p. 212.
[29] Ibid., pp. 212-13, 214, 216. The quote is taken from Bennett's article 'The Secret of Content', the final essay in the series, 'The Savoir-Vivre Papers', published in *T. P.'s Weekly* on 21 September 1906 and reprinted in Bennett's *Mental Efficiency* (1911).
[30] Cartlidge, '"The Only Really Objective Novel Ever Written"?', p. 135.

1. *A Man from the North* (1898)

At 'noon precisely' on 15 May 1896 Arnold Bennett finished his first novel.[1] Having spent a little over twelve months fitfully writing and extensively re-writing his manuscript, Bennett's completion of *A Man from the North* (1898), originally entitled 'In the Shadow', signified his mastering of 'the damnedest, nerve shattering experience as ever was': writing a novel.[2] To date, most critics have appraised *A Man from the North* through autobiographically informed analysis supported by Bennett's (anonymously published) *The Truth About An Author* (1903). The most comprehensive study is Louis Tillier's 'The sources of *A Man from the North*' (1969). Tillier details various 'autobiographical elements' in order to demonstrate that the 'general outline of the story […] provides an obvious and close parallel to the author's own early years', and tabulates Bennett's 'unconscious borrowings' from Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* (1885), writing that the 'resemblances' between the two 'make Maupassant's influence on *A Man from the North* an unquestionable fact' and serve to 'show […] how steeped [Bennett] was in French naturalist fiction'.[3] Whilst there can be no doubt that *A Man from the North* was inspired in part by personal experience and that the formal choices within it were influenced by Bennett's extensive reading of French Naturalistic fiction, an exclusively autobiographical reading of the text is reductive, as it excludes Bennett's own regard for the text as a psychological study of character, reduces the plot to an embellished chronology, and limits an examination of Bennett's formal choices to an imitation of the writings of Maupassant and Flaubert.

Whilst most critics have conformed to Tillier's autobiographical approach to the text, there are three notable exceptions, all of which are rooted in an analysis of Bennett's

[1] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Friday, May 15th' 1896, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 6.
[2] Bennett, letter to Sturt dated 11 November 1895, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 25.
[3] See Tillier, *Studies*, pp. 13-24.

'pessimism'.[4] In *Arnold Bennett: Romantic Realist* (1971), Walter Wright explores Bennett's preoccupation with 'the darker muse', death and physical decay, whether gradual, as the result of the accumulation of years, or accelerated through illness, an accident, or misfortune, which preludes and ultimately overshadows the final chapter of man's existence:

> in spite of the warm winds and sunshine in Bennett's serious novels, there is somewhat more of the melancholy of gray, chill late afternoons. Summer's lease is temporary and insecure, and the year belongs to the seasons of decay and death.[5]

Wright argues that Bennett's 'melancholy view' is formulated through a desire to explore the 'miraculous interestingness of the universe', of which death is an intrinsic part.[6] In his introduction to the Churnet Valley edition of *A Man from the North*, John Shapcott argues that within the recollection of Adeline Aked's childhood, the position of the empty room next to Adeline's own constitutes the prototype for Bennett's 'nihilistic calling card, the textual nature of nothingness prefiguring his belief in the meaning of life as meaningless'.[7] Shapcott posits that Bennett is inviting the reader to consider 'what they place within their own closed rooms' and if, like Adeline, it is 'childhood ghosts thought safely banished to the dark corners of the house', to realise that this is an irrational, infantile, and unfounded fear: there are no ghosts; the room is empty because there is nothing (left) after death.[8] When discussing Bennett's agnosticism, Robert Squillace examines the similarities and consequential significance behind the way in which the majority of the characters in Bennett's 'serious novels' expire. Squillace suggests that ('the art of') dying represents 'the collision of the

[4] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 19.
[5] Wright, *Romantic Realist*, p. 164.
[6] Ibid., p. 188.
[7] Shapcott, 'Introduction to *A Man from the North*', pp. v, vii.
[8] Shapcott, 'Introduction to *A Man from the North*', p. viii.

universe's indifference with the human illusion of its concern', but is quick to add that it 'took years for Bennett to understand the symbolic significance of dying patriarchs' and, as a consequence, Bennett's first 'extended deathbed scene' (that of Mr. Aked) is 'an impressive spectacle', but one which 'symbolises nothing'.[9] Shapcott counters that it is exactly this 'nothingness' which is at the heart of Bennett's philosophy 'of the meaning of life, nihilism, and nothingness'; it is death which ultimately 'brings nothingness into being'.[10] I do not believe that Bennett was nihilistic – indeed, I believe that he had a great deal of faith in humanity, but was conscious that most people were in need of guidance. With regard to the air of 'pessimism' which is thought to permeate the novel, I will argue that this is in fact more closely aligned with T. S. Eliot's 'rhythmical grumbling' in *The Waste Land* (1922); 'the relief of a personal […] grouse against life',[11] which in Bennett's case, stems from an individual's lack of initiative and consequential wasted opportunities.

In his own review of *A Man from the North*, printed under the pseudonym 'Sarah Volatile' in *Hearth and Home*, Bennett writes that 'there is an air about "A Man from the North" of a close study of men and things'. 'Volatile' goes on to state that 'if Mr. Bennett had felt the need of a sub-title to his book, he might have found a fitting one in his own pages' ('The Psychology of the Suburbs'), and that the protagonist 'interests the reader' because 'one might meet Richard Larch on an omnibus top any morning of the year. His weaknesses are those of our common humanity'.[12] A little over nine months later, Bennett, in a letter to Mrs. H. H. Penrose, labels *A Man from the North* a 'psychological treatise'.[13] My

[9] Squillace, *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett*, pp. 164-5.
[10] Shapcott, 'Introduction to *A Man from the North*', p. ix.
[11] When Valerie Eliot edited and published *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcription of the Original Drafts, Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* (1971), the materials were prefaced with a comment by T. S. Eliot concerning the poem's meaning: 'Various critics have done me the honour to interpret the poem in terms of criticism of the contemporary world, have considered it, indeed, as an important bit of social criticism. To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling' (in Miller, 'Personal Mood Transmuted into Epic', p. 54).
[12] Bennett (signed 'Sarah Volatile'), 'Books and Authors', pp. 139-41.
[13] Bennett, letter to Penrose dated 24 January 1899, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 118.

analysis of the novel is written in light of Bennett's own critique. I will bring to the forefront Bennett's 'close study of men and things', exposing 'common' sources of social anxiety in *fin de siècle* London – chiefly, loneliness and urban alienation – which in turn will substantiate my claim that Wolfreys fails to recognise within it 'its more obviously *fin de siècle* concerns'[14] – and will demonstrate that Richard Larch, the eponymous character in *A Man from the North*, serves as a proto-Prufrockian character who fails to find meaning in the modern world. As I will argue that Larch's individuality is compounded by life in the city,[15] I will also examine Bennett's representation of London.

In 'Imagining the Modernist City' (2010), Scott McCracken writes that 'the distinction between the *modern* city and the *modernist city* lies in the difference between the historical city of the industrial age and the ways in which that city was imagined'. The 'modernist city' is 'best captured by startling perspectives and images of movement' and '[m]odernist aesthetics might be understood as an attempt to represent the modern city on the move: the flows of traffic along its streets; in and out of the city; between the urban and the rural'.[16] Predominantly, Bennett achieves the sensation of movement via his numerous representations of trains. Railways, in the words of Ian Carter, 'link [Bennett's] two worlds in a single structure of feeling – intimately compounding North with South, province with metropolis, business with pleasure, production with consumption'.[17] In *Whom God Hath Joined* (1906), this unification and the excitement which anticipates the journey from country to town, is likened to a cross-continent excursion to Western Asia:

> 'Next stop Euston!' The worlds of pleasure and of business meet on that platform to await the great train with its two engines. The spacious pavement is crowded with the

[14] Wolfreys, *Writing London*, p. 86.
[15] Ibid., p. 79.
[16] McCracken, 'Imagining', pp. 637-8.
[17] Carter, *Railways and Culture*, p. 144.

> correctness of travelling suits and suit-cases; it is alive with the spurious calm of those who are about to travel and to whom travelling is an everyday trifle. 'Going up to the village?' the wits ask, and are answered by nods in a fashion to indicate that going up to the village is a supreme bore. And yet beneath all this weary satiety there lurks an anticipatory eagerness, a consciousness of vast enterprise, that would not be unsuitable if the London train were a caravan setting forth to Bagdad. You can see Bagdad written on the foreheads of even those weary second-class season-ticket holders who go first-class by arrangement with the Grand Vizier of the train.[18]

London is envisioned as tantalisingly exotic when contrasted with the provinces, and the 'great train', which is to convey even the most 'wearied' of passengers, represents more than a pinnacle of industrial accomplishment: it is a mechanised flying carpet, commanded by the hand of an all-powerful diwan, which is to fly this 'eager' assemblage of 'travelling suits and suit-cases' to the 'world of pleasure'. In *A Man from the North*, London is a pervious hub of activity. Bennett writes that for Richard Larch, 'the metropolis, and everything that appertains to it, that comes down from it, that goes up into it, [holds] an imperious fascination'; it 'is the place where newspapers are issued, books written, and plays performed'.[19] Prior to his move to the metropolis, Richard is drawn to the station: 'long before schooldays are over he learns to take a doleful pleasure in watching the exit of the London train from the railway station'.[20] So eager is he to join the 'men and women who in a few hours will be treading streets called Piccadilly and the Strand', he 'finds it difficult to keep from throwing himself in the guard's van as it glides past him; and not until the last coach is a speck upon the distance does he turn away'.[21] The station's lively atmosphere, the

[18] Bennett, *Whom God Hath Joined*, p. 53.
[19] Bennett, *A Man*, pp. 1, 2.
[20] Ibid., p. 1.
[21] Ibid.

movement of the passengers on the platform and of the train itself, is heightened by Richard's physical stillness. He is not unlike a clockwork car, wound to capacity and desperate for his wheels to touch the ground and to speed him away to Town, and the barely contained desire to 'throw himself' onto the train, affiliates him with London's bustling populous.

The outward apathy exhibited by the male passengers is initially incongruous when paired with the animated atmosphere of the station. This behaviour, however, exemplifies the expectation that men in the late nineteenth century were expected to feel 'at home' in the city. In the words of Amy Milne-Smith: 'Victorian men's ability to stroll across all areas of any city established their right to that city. […] The ability to understand, inhabit, and interpret the urban environment was a key trope of middle and upper class masculinity'.[22] In an essay entitled 'London' in *English Hours: A Portrait of a Country* (1905), Henry James writes that 'it is a kind of humiliation in a great city not to know where you are going',[23] and Richard's eagerness to feel 'at home' in, and to master, the capital, is manifested in his 'frequent study' of 'maps and an old copy of Kelly's directory' prior to his relocation to the city.[24] Having 'visited London but once before, and then only for a few hours, he was not unfamiliar with the topography of the town' and the leisurely walk he takes 'up Park Side and through Piccadilly' is accomplished with an air of satisfaction which stems from his ability to correctly identify markers which border his walk: 'He walked slowly […] picking out as he passed them the French Embassy, Hyde Park Corner, Apsley House, Park Lane, and Devonshire House'.[25] Whilst this outwardly insouciant façade could be consciously employed in order exude a sense of belonging, it was also a symptom of 'intellectualistic' protection, cultivated in response to life in a city. In his 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben' ['The Metropolis and Mental Life'] (1903), Georg Simmel observed that 'big

[22] Milne-Smith, 'Men on the Town'.
[23] James, 'London', p. 2.
[24] Bennett, *A Man*, p. 7.
[25] Ibid.

cities' created an 'intensified' 'emotional life' for the metropolitan individual, 'due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli'.[26] Overwhelmed by ever-modifying sensory input, urbanites react defensively by adopting an attitude of 'indifference':

> the metropolitan type […] creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it. Instead of reacting emotionally, […] the reaction of the metropolitan person to those events is moved to a sphere of mental activity which is least sensitive and which is furthest removed from the depths of the personality. This intellectualistic quality which is thus recognized as a protection of the inner life against the domination of the metropolis, […] [manifests in] an unrelenting hardness. The purely intellectualistic person is indifferent to all things personal.[27]

In 'Imagining the Modernist City', McCracken, like Simmel, states that the modernist city is consistently imagined 'in relation to other cities' and 'never just on its own terms'. For London, the most recurrent link is to Paris.[28] Paris has been described by various cultural historians as the 'capital of the nineteenth century'[29] or 'the capital of modernity',[30] and McCracken affirms that 'Paris's status as a modern city was achieved because it was a key node in a network that linked it with the rest of France and the world'.[31] When writing about central European cities in the same period, Steven Beller states that: 'the lines which are drawn around territories are not as important […] as the lines which link cities. […] Urban

[26] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 103.
[27] Ibid., p. 104.
[28] McCracken, 'Imagining', p. 638.
[29] See Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century'.
[30] See Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity*.
[31] McCracken, 'Imagining', p. 638.

culture is […] as much about networks as it is about boundaries'.[32] Bennett's narrative is peppered with 'links' to France illustrating the comparative approach to urban experience McCracken identifies. Richard's first-floor room has 'two nice French windows' which open out onto a balcony, and when walking 'through Piccadilly', the first prominent building that he 'picks out' is the French Embassy.[33] Upon entering 'the brass-barred swinging doors of the Grand Circle entrance' to the Ottoman Theatre of Varieties, 'a girl passed out, followed by a man who was talking to her vehemently in French', and in the course of his primary interaction with Mr. Aked, Mr. Aked 'pull[s]' a French novel out of his pocket and Richard, 'determined to exhibit an acquaintance with "La Vie de Bohème"', mentions the French novelist and poet, Henri Murger.[34] As Richard becomes better acquainted with Jenkins, and as it becomes more common for them to lunch together, Richard suggests that they should 'try one of the French restaurants in Soho which Mr. Aked had mentioned'.[35] When Richard accepts the position of cashier in the office (essentially doubling his income), he 'prepare[s] a scheme for educating himself in the classical tongues and in French' and whilst he fails to implement 'a definite course of study', 'his acquaintance with modern French fiction […] widen[s]' and he 'continue[s] to consume French novels with eagerness'.[36] When Richard first enters Mr. Aked's front room in Fulham, he notices several framed prints 'depended by means of stout green cord from French nails with great earthenware heads' and 'a dwarf bookcase filled chiefly with French novels whose vivid yellow gratefully lightened a dark corner next the door'. Richard 'pick[s] up "L'Abbé Tigrane," which lay on the table by the sewing' and asks Adeline if she, too, reads French.[37] In addition to these passing allusions,

[32] Beller, 'Big-City Jews', p. 145.
[33] Bennett, *A Man*, pp. 4, 7.
[34] Ibid., pp. 9, 10, 30-1.
[35] Ibid., p. 48.
[36] Ibid., pp. 55, 58, 219.
[37] Ibid., pp. 85, 86-7.

there is an extended meditation, when Richard eventually has dinner with Mr. Aked, which effectively merges the two cities – Paris and London.

Richard and Mr. Aked dine at 'a good French place in Soho', where the old waiter greets Mr. Aked 'with a flow of French, and received a brief reply in the same language'.[38] Richard notes that the 'plain little restaurant' seems 'full of enchantment'; its atmosphere is tangibly Parisian and indeed, it is described as a self-contained 'little Paris'.[39] Francophilia saturates the senses – Richard can hear 'musical' 'French voices', see (and later, read) French newspapers and is about to taste French bread and wine – and yet the scene remains punctuated by Englishness. Richard notices both 'a black and yellow' English sign and 'a blue and red' French sign; Mr. Aked converses in both French (to the waiters) and English (to Richard); and whilst we do not know the origin of the 'barrel organ' nor indeed, of its vociferous music, if we regard the individual languages as two intertwining melodies, the barrel organ merely intensifies the harmony, either accompanying the 'musical' French dialogue or supporting the English counter melody.[40] At the close of his meditation, Richard notes that the atmosphere appears 'strangely, delightfully unsubstantial'.[41] This is unsurprising, as he is currently residing in a sort of megalopolitan space in which Paris and London overlap. The fusion of the two cities culminates in Richard's perusal of the 'Echo de Paris' – an ironic choice, seeing how we are being presented with an echo of 'big Paris' – and his recognition that whilst he skims the 'enticing' 'descriptive paragraphs' of the feuilleton and begins his dinner, 'Half Paris' may also be reading that same article and the distinguished contributor, Catulle Mendès, 'eating his dinner […]!'[42] In this instance, it is the 'skyline' or

[38] Ibid., pp. 74, 76.
[39] Ibid., p. 76.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., p. 77.
[42] Ibid.

'byline' on the first page of this Parisian newspaper which acts as the 'link' between the two cities.[43]

With regard to the sensations experienced whilst immersed in this bustling, interurban environment, McCracken points to the tension felt by the urbanite, the result of a 'contradictory' combination of liberation and disorientation. The former manifests in 'the opportunity […] to break free from family ties, religious supervision, social prejudices, and the inhibiting oversight of one's neighbours', whereas the latter is a consequence of the severance from 'social anchors' and 'the fear of isolation and exploitation'.[44] McCracken's summation of 'the experience of the urban' is very much the experience of Bennett's protagonist. Following the death of his brother-in-law, William – Richard's last living relative – Richard is struck by the following 'thought': 'he was now a solitary upon the face of the earth. It concerned no living person whether he did evil or good. If he chose to seek ruin, to abandon himself to the most ignoble impulses, there was none to restrain, – not even a brother-in-law'.[45] Feeling little remorse at William's death, Richard's chief sensation is of 'liberation' – of having 'no living person' to answer to, and to be able to live his life 'unrestrained' by social 'propriety' – and in turn, an alleviation of his guilt at his 'constantly broken' 'resolutions':

> For several weeks past, he had been troubled about his future […]. Nearly a year had gone, and he had made no progress, except at the office. Resolutions were constantly broken […] He had not even followed a definite course of study […]. Evening after evening […] was frittered away upon mean banalities […]. But now, hurrying to the

[43] Beller, 'Big-City Jews', p. 145.
[44] McCracken, 'Imagining', p. 643.
[45] Bennett, *A Man*, p. 58.

> funeral of William Vernon, he lazily laughed at himself for having allowed his peace of mind to be ruffled. Why bother about 'getting on'? What did it matter?'[46]

Richard experiences a similar sense of relief after Adeline has left for San Francisco. Some nine hours after his 'sole friend' had left him, Richard 'had unceremoniously dismissed the too importunate image of Adeline, and […] was conscious of a certain devil-may-care elation'.[47] His newly acquired 'liberty' results in his engaging a prostitute. The death of William Vernon may have heralded a lack of accountability, but it is only after Adeline has left the country that Richard can freely indulge his more 'ignoble impulses'; after all, 'he must discover solace, poor blighted creature!'[48]

These comforting moments of liberation are short-lived and contrast starkly with Richard's recurrent feelings of loneliness and alienation. Richard spends a sizeable proportion of the narrative on his own (either walking, visiting the theatre or dining alone), longing for society, and 'lament[ing] his […] solitariness'.[49] His first night in the city, which he had 'determined to spend […] quietly *at home*', is 'momentarily' interrupted by 'a peculiar feeling of isolation'. This 'feeling' is so intense, that the external sounds of the city – 'the piano organs, children shouting, and a man uttering some monotonous unintelligible cry' – 'seemed to recede'.[50] The sensation that the city has been – momentarily – muted, transforms Richard's 'feeling' of isolation into a physical state of isolation; he is rendered momentarily deaf, sequestered from the auditory sensations of the metropolis. The height of Richard's distress occurs in Chapter XXVI when, 'disgusted' with his lack of progress with his story 'Tiddy-fol-lol', he is 'assailed' with 'morbid fancies' such as 'what would happen to

[46] Ibid., pp. 58-9.
[47] Ibid., p. 215.
[48] Ibid., p. 216.
[49] Ibid., p. 227.
[50] Ibid., pp. 6, 5-6.

him if he lost his situation', and he retires to bed 'sick with misery'. He awakens in the night to the following cogitation:

> Why had he no congenial friends? How could he set about obtaining sympathetic companionship? He needed, in particular, cultured feminine society. Given that, he could work; without it he should accomplish nothing. He reflected that in London there were probably thousands of 'nice girls,' pining for such men as he. What a ridiculous civilisation it was that prevented him from meeting them! When he saw a promising girl in a bus, why in the name of heaven should he not be at liberty to say to her, 'Look here, I can convince you that I mean well; let us make each other's acquaintance'? … But convention, convention! He felt himself to be imprisoned by a relentless, unscaleable wall. …[51]

Whilst the absence of 'family ties […] and the inhibiting oversight of one's neighbours' had at once been liberating, 'the lack of […] social anchors' is now deemed inhibiting to Richard's progress, having a detrimental effect on his 'work' (his writing), and restricting his interactions with the fairer sex and his place within 'cultured […] society'. When he falls back asleep, he dreams 'that he was in a drawing-room full of young men and women, and that all were chattering vivaciously and cleverly. He himself stood with his back to the fire, and talked to a group of girls. They looked into his face, as Adeline used to look. They grasped his ideals and his aims without laborious explanations; half a word was sufficient to enlighten them; he saw the gleam of appreciative comprehension in their eyes long before his sentences were finished'.[52]

[51] Ibid., pp. 227-8.
[52] Ibid., p. 228.

It is significant that Richard dreams of an 'enlightened' party of 'young men and women' holding discourse in 'a drawing room', as this was to become one of the two influential 'conversational spaces' which manifested at the *fin de siècle* 'as a stimulus to creativity'.[53] Edward Timms writes that 'the English modernists and their American allies tended to meet either in stylish restaurants or in private houses'.[54] Ezra Pound first met Wyndham Lewis at the Vienna Café; Frank Flint and Pound 'often met, most likely in company at the ABC in Chancery Lane or at the Tour Eiffel Restaurant';[55] and the Bloomsbury Group 'met in the comfort of private houses, starting in 1904 at 46 Gordon Square, the home of Adrian Stephen and his sisters Virginia [Woolf] and Venessa [Bell]'.[56] Timms adds that there were only 'half a dozen' of these houses in Central London, and that inclusion in 'their general tea parties and animated evening conversations' was by invitation only.[57] Richard's loneliness and consequent longing for 'vivacious' company and 'clever' conversation stems from a variety of sources. These are: the desire for platonic friendship and romantic companionship; the longing for acceptance, recognition, and admiration as a learned and successful individual; and the eagerness to belong to an exclusive and educated group of his peers. Bennett was aware of London's emergent creative landscape. This is not only revealed through the setting of Richard's dream, but the fact that Richard's first meeting with Mr. Aked – a meeting in which Richard first voices his creative aspirations and the driving force behind his decision to relocate to London – occurs in an 'A. B. C. shop'.[58] In 'Voyages by Teashop: An Urban Geography of Modernism', McCracken writes: 'The teashop became a standard reference point in the literature of the time and seems to have had a particular interest for many early twentieth-century writers. George Gissing, H. G. Wells,

[53] Timms, 'Coffeehouses', p. 199.
[54] Ibid., p. 203.
[55] Brooker, 'Our London', p. 62.
[56] Timms, 'Coffeehouses', p. 204.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Bennett, *A Man*, p. 73.

Somerset Maugham, Dorothy Richardson, Ezra Pound, Jean Rhys, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf all mention the chains by name or make the teashop a key locus for urban encounters'.[59] Arnold Bennett needs to be included in that list, and I argue that in Bennett the teashop is a creative space, the first location in which Richard articulates his desire to be a writer and in which he plots collaborations with Mr. Aked.

Despite Richard's lofty aspirations and repeated attempts to achieve 'great things',[60] he ultimately fails, climactically abandoning his creative aspirations and electing a career and a wife which offer immediate comfort but are ultimately regarded as a compromise. His sexual frustration, a corollary of his social isolation, is tied intrinsically to his failure to master the city and satisfactorily conquer his urban alienation. Indeed, his relationship to the city is rendered in figuratively sexual terms, with Richard in a humiliated submissive position. London does 'accept him' – he is granted the means to carve out an existence – but this is 'on probation'; she will only 'make an obeisance' to the 'bold and resolute' and 'her heel' remains 'all too ready to crush the coward and hesitant'.[61] Richard, of course, belongs to the latter, and so whilst 'he was hers', 'she' was by no means, 'his'.[62] Unable to 'own' the city and desperate to secure some sort of future – to cling to the 'one green spot' in the 'waste of London', to possess '[a] woman … his, his own!'[63] – Richard marries Laura Roberts, 'obstinately shut[ting] his eyes' to 'the bitter, ineffectual regret which he was laying up; hours when he admitted that his passion had been, as it were, artificially incited, and that there could be no hope of an enduring love'.[64] It is this romantic and vocational hesitancy, coupled with the knowledge that his life will eventually become 'bitter' and 'ineffectual', that aligns Richard Larch with T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock.

[59] McCracken, 'Voyages', p. 86.
[60] Bennett, *A Man*, p. 66.
[61] Ibid., p. 2.
[62] Ibid., p. 7.
[63] Ibid., pp. 254, 259.
[64] Ibid., p. 256.

Bennett's novel resembles 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915) not only With regard to subject but in terms of creative influence and composition. Both texts underwent titular revisions, in which the original refers to a key aspect of the protagonists' existence (Eliot's poem was initially titled 'Prufrock Among the Women') and both underwent a lengthy period of composition followed by a delay in publication. In a letter to John C. Pope (8 March 1946), Eliot writes that 'the poem of Prufrock was conceived some time in 1910' but 'was not completed until the summer of 1911'.[65] The poem was not published until 1915. The central characters in each piece are also thought to have element of autobiographical influence – B. C. Southam notes that 'the name "J. Alfred Prufrock" follows the early form of the poet's signature "T. Stearns Eliot"',[66] and other commentators have argued that there is evidence of self-portrayal. Conrad Aiken recalls Eliot's 'agonies of shyness' and his insistence on 'the necessity, if one was shy, of disciplining oneself, lest one miss certain varieties of experience which one did not naturally "take" to. The dances, and the parties, were part of this discipline …'.[67] In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', the speaker is 'overwhelmed' to the point of inaction at the thought of initiating, or entering into, a discourse with a woman. The speaker is inhibited by a lack of confidence ('Do I dare | Disturb the universe?), an inability to conquer his vacillating intent ('In a minute there is time | For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse'), and a paranoid apprehensiveness which stems from an acute awareness of his physical and social inadequacies ('So how should I presume?').[68] Fearful of breaching social etiquette, the speaker regresses into a fantasy world, fully aware of the fact that when he does return to reality ('Till human voices

[65] Eliot, quoted in Southam, *Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, p. 43.
[66] Southam, *Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, p. 47.
[67] Cited by Southam, *Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, p. 48.
[68] Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', ll. 45-6, 47-8, 54.

wake us'), the 'moment' – should he 'have the strength to force [it] to its crisis' – will engulf and ultimately, destroy him ('and we drown').[69]

With regard to women, Richard in *A Man from the North* is constantly plagued with regrets as a consequence of his inaction and moral cowardice: when returning home after his first evening at the Ottoman ('Why the dickens didn't I say something to that girl, with her *chéri*?'); when observing and failing to approach a 'nice girl' on the bus; and when scrutinising his relationship with Adeline ('Am I happy? Is this pleasure?' […] was he really, truly in love? Was she in love?').[70] When attempting to write, Richard fails to extricate himself from predetermined literary and personal expectations. He is persistently unoriginal – all of his work derives from novels, short stories or articles that he has read, or conversations that he has had – and his 'strength of purpose' oscillates widely, before ultimately disappearing completely: 'perhaps things had been ordered for the best; perhaps he had no genuine talent for writing. And yet at that moment he was conscious that he possessed the incommunicable imaginative insights of the author. … But it was done with now'.[71] When settling for a domestic union with Laura, Richard acknowledges that it is a marriage of convenience. Laura will satisfy his sexual desires and afford him companionship, but he knows that he merely 'liked' her and, as such, 'there could be no hope of an enduring love'.[72] Their relationship is doomed in part as a consequence of the abandonment of a sacred portion of his personality – his literary aspirations: 'His ambitions floated out of sight and were forgotten. […] He knew that he would make no further attempt to write. Laura was not even aware that he had had ambitions in that direction. He had never told her, because she would not have understood. […] In future he would be simply the

[69] Ibid., ll. 131, 80, 131.
[70] Bennett, *A Man*, pp. 14, 228, 196-7.
[71] Ibid., pp. 262, 264.
[72] Ibid., p. 256.

suburban husband'.[73] Whilst Prufrock retreats from reality, Richard opts for a temporary and unsatisfying fix. Both lives are destined for spiritual death, however, as Richard's decision to settle for a rudimentary existence, will result in a life which is to mirror that of the faceless, 'hollow' characters which populate London in Eliot's later poems.

In his sketching of squalid environments or 'waste lands', Eliot tried to suggest something of the moral and spiritual condition of England in the early twentieth century, a 'land' which Eliot believed culturally and spiritually 'dry' and populated by depersonalised men and women – often, clerks and typists – who have failed to find meaning in the modern world. In a number of his poems, notably, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (1911), 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915), 'Preludes' (1917), *The Waste Land* (1922) and 'The Hollow Men' (1925), Eliot deploys speakers that are drifting through their lives in the 'Unreal City'[74] and who exist in a 'waste land' that is both physically and spiritually 'dry'.[75] Eliot's vision of the modern world, is of a civilisation populated in its entirety by 'hollow men' – individuals who, in their moral and spiritual destitution, resemble nothing more than a 'stuffed' scarecrow, an 'Old Guy' thrown onto a bonfire every 5 November.[76] In Part I of 'The Hollow Men', the rhythm of free verse is similar to that of a chant ('We are the hollow men | We are the stuffed men'): a meaningless incantation which men might utter when they are 'walking round in a ring'[77] without purpose or direction. Part V of 'The Hollow Men' opens with a nursery rhyme, similar to 'Here we go 'round the mulberry bush', which illustrates the recurrence of mankind's problem: inaction, which condemns each man or woman to an existence of spiritual enervation. In 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', there is a

[73] Ibid., pp. 257-8, 263.
[74] Eliot, 'The Waste Land', l. 60.
[75] 'what branches grow | Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, | You cannot say, or guess, for you know only | A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, | And the dead tree gives no shelter […] And the dry stone no sound of water' (ibid., ll. 19-24).
[76] Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', l. 2, epigraph.
[77] Eliot, 'The Waste Land: I. The Burial of the Dead', l. 56.

Prufrockian character wandering through the 'certain half-deserted streets' of a gas-lit city.[78] Streaming through his mind are sensations of dilapidation and desolation, reflecting both physical decrepitude and spiritual debilitation. Eliot's focus on the tedium of existence manifests in the character's sole ambition to get some 'sleep' so that he has the energy to endure another day just like the one before: 'The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall, | Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life'.[79] Echoes of 'muddy feet' tramping towards 'coffee stands', and 'the hands […] raising dingy shades | In a thousand furnished rooms'[80] belonging to de-personalised individuals who measure out their lives with coffee-spoons, are audible. Without spiritual motivation or direction, characters are only half-alive and their existence is empty, or 'hollow'; they merely drift in and out of the speaker's consciousness, robotically moving in and around London's bedsit land.

Whilst contemplating 'for the hundredth time how futile was his present mode of existence, how bare of all that makes life worth living', Richard regards Laura Roberts as 'the one green spot in the waste of London'.[81] This is decidedly carefully phrased by Bennett, as London – most certainly in Richard's case – has availed him of a score of 'wasted' opportunities. In 1903, Bennett published a seven-part series of articles in *T. P.'s Weekly*, collectively titled 'Alone in London', within the longer series the 'Savoir-Faire Papers'. 'Alone in London' was directed at 'the young man alone in London'[82] and offered an assortment of advice, ranging from information about lodgings to guidance about clothes. Part III concentrates on the formation of friendships. Bennett writes that 'the young man alone in London soon makes the surprising discovery that he is lonely. […] The idea that he will always remain thus solitary is monstrous and unthinkable to him, and he continues to

[78] Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', l. 4.
[79] Eliot, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', ll. 76-7.
[80] Eliot, 'Preludes', ll. 17-8, 21-3.
[81] Bennett, *A Man*, p. 254.
[82] Bennett, 'Alone in London. III', p. 24. This article is reprinted in *Arnold Bennett: Sketches for Autobiography* under the title 'Alone in London – I'. Page references refer to *Sketches*.

nurse his hope. Meanwhile, the months slip by and the years slip by; and he falls into the habits of solitude […] liv[ing] in crowded London like a hermit'.[83] Bennett recognises that solitude results from inaction, and is maintained by complacency. He asserts: 'to make friends that are worth making means hard work; it is a manufacturing operation not to be performed by strolling up and down the Embankment […], musing upon the stony indifference of a great city'.[84] Richard is a ruminator, and his inability to commit to a definite course of action is his downfall. In 'Alone in London. III', Bennett cautions that a 'plan of inactivity, is all wrong'[85] and warns of two common 'mistakes' which, if the young man makes, will hinder his ability to establish connections and, in turn, damage the wellbeing of the 'soul'.[86] These mistakes are failing to 'put himself to any real trouble in the quest of friends' and being 'infinitely too particular in his choice at the beginning'.[87] Richard is undoubtedly guilty of the latter. He is a literary snob, judging most of the people that he interacts with by the books they read, their overall knowledge of literature, and their ability to produce something worthy of publication. For example, Richard 'acquire[s] the habit of mentally regarding Mr. Aked with admiration' as he is 'a representative of literature', and feels superior to Jenkins, as he believes that Jenkins could never become an author: 'that poor, gay, careless, vulgar animal would always be a clerk. The thought filled him with commiseration, and also with pride. Fancy Jenkins writing a book called "The Psychology of the Suburbs"!'[88] The irony, of course, is that Richard never will. The greatest forfeiture caused by Richard's self-conceit is his relationship with Adeline. Richard is 'disappointed' upon meeting Mr. Aked's niece because she is 'an ordinary girl': she is 'not a great reader', does not read French, is wholly uninterested in poetry, and is evidently 'quite unsusceptible

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., p. 25.
[86] Ibid, p. 24.
[87] Ibid., p. 25.
[88] Bennett, *A Man,* pp. 51, 144.

to the artistic influences which subtly emanated from [her uncle]'.[89] The irony here, is that Adeline's book, *East Lynne*, an English sensation novel by Ellen Wood published in 1861, whilst indicating perhaps that she is a little behind the times with regard to contemporary novels, would not have been regarded as any less of a literary accomplishment than Faber's French novel, *L'Abbe Tigrane*, published twelve years later. The apparent ignorance on Richard's part reveals his position as a cultural charlatan, and his inability to see past Adeline's supposed shortcomings (and to come to a definite decision as to how he feels about her) results in her slipping out of his life. In this respect, Bennett is anticipating clashes of high- and low-brow art that he will tackle more fully in *A Great Man*; and because Richard loses the opportunity to marry Adeline, his creative shortcoming and personal unhappiness are thematically linked.

In 'Alone in London. VI',[90] Bennett continues that not only does the young man have to make a concentrated effort to establish and maintain friendships, he must also take initiative With regard to book-buying and the pursuit of literary study:

> The individual alone in London has a special need for books. It is only the solitary man who really appreciates the full significance of that extraordinary word *book*. Books he must have, books he must understand, and books he must love – or it will be better for him that he had never been born, or at least that he [had not come to London].[91]

Bennett emphasises the importance of 'literary study' in *Literary Taste* (1909), writing that:

[89] Ibid., p. 89.
[90] Reprinted in *Arnold Bennett: Sketches for Autobiography*, under the title 'Alone in London – II'. Page references refer to *Sketches*.
[91] Bennett, 'Alone in London. VI', p. 27.

> the aim of literary study is not to amuse the hours of leisure; it is to awake oneself, it is to be alive, to intensify one's capacity for pleasure, for sympathy, and for comprehension. It is not to affect one hour, but twenty-four hours. It is to change utterly one's relations with the world. An understanding appreciation of literature means an understanding appreciation of the world […]. Not isolated and unconnected parts of life, but all of life, brought together and correlated in a synthetic map! The spirit of literature is unifying […].[92]

When the narrator of *A Man from the North* – commenting upon Richard's failure to 'follow a definite course of study' – states that Richard 'had by no means grasped the full import and extent of this retrogression',[93] Bennett is referring to the adverse impact unsuccessful 'literary study' will have on Richard's life. Richard is 'frittering' away the opportunity to become a fully-rounded, socially and spiritually satisfied man. He is restricting himself to a 'wasted' and thus 'hollow' existence, and Bennett's frustration is compounded by Richard's inability to 'persevere'[94] – to pursue and maintain the means to happiness, rather than to indulge in self-pity.

In a letter to George Sturt dated 28 January 1897, Bennett states that he 'knew all along that a novel must have a purpose; to look at the matter from another side, it must "expose" some aspect of existence in which the author is deeply interested'. Bennett goes on to state that 'it mustn't be didactic – at least it must only teach in the same way as experience teaches' and, having asserted that 'all of [his] novels will have purposes', that 'the purpose' of *A Man from the North* was to '"expose" a few of the hardships and evils of the life of the young celibate clerk in London'.[95] By aligning Bennett with T. S. Eliot, I have argued that

[92] Bennett, *Literary Taste*, p. 20.
[93] Bennett, *A Man*, p. 59.
[94] Bennett, 'Alone in London. III', p. 27.
[95] Bennett, letter to Sturt dated 28 January 1897, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 75.

Bennett's 'interest' – and consequential 'grumblings' – pertain to the ease with which any man (a man whom 'one might meet […] on an omnibus top any morning of the year')[96] can unwittingly 'waste' his life. Success is dependent on strength of character, not strength of place: 'what is desired is, not opportunities, but the enterprise to use them, […] to use them at once with persistency and with discretion'.[97] The 'bold and resolute'[98] – those who 'persevere'[99] – are rewarded by the chance to live, and 'if after years of expectancy [a man] finds himself practically solus in a place like London, he may with perfect confidence call himself either a ninny, a coward, or a boor'.[100]

[96] Bennett (signed 'Sarah Volatile'), 'Books and Authors', pp. 139-41.
[97] Bennett, 'Alone in London. III', p. 26.
[98] Bennett, *A Man*, p. 2.
[99] Bennett, 'Alone in London. III', p. 27.
[100] Ibid., p. 26.

2. *A Great Man* (1904)

Similarly to *A Man from the North*, many critics have asserted that 'much of the material' in *A Great Man* 'is very clearly drawn from Bennett's own experiences'.[1] Margaret Drabble affirms that the interactions with literary agents, publishers and theatrical directors, 'the attraction of the chic of being "at home in two capitals", the lionization [and] the double attitude from the establishment of patronage and envy', are 'all' 'things' which Bennett had experienced himself.[2] Whereas critics have interpreted Richard Larch as representing 'a failed Arnold Bennett',[3] the eponymous character in *A Great Man*, Henry Shakspere [*sic*.] Knight, has been perceived as both 'a caricature'[4] or 'parody'[5] of Bennett ('a comic sketch of Bennett's own nature' which 'sums his ambitions for the cheaper sort of literary fame, for money, [and] for sexual success'),[6] and as an amplification of a portion of Bennett's personality. Henry 'the lawyer's clerk' and 'lawyer's clerk turned purveyor of popular fiction' is thought to represent 'Bennett the man of business',[7] whereas Henry's cousin Tom – 'who observes Henry's success with a jaundiced eye' – has been interpreted as typifying 'Bennett the artist'.[8] Henry Knight is in many ways the counterpart to Richard Larch. Both are clerks and occupy similar positions, but whilst Richard's literary aspirations fail to come to fruition, Henry, when he tries his hand at writing a novel whilst bedridden with a mild case of measles, produces a highly successful novel and becomes a huge success. This antithesis, I argue in this section, allows for Bennett to shift his focus from the psychological difficulties of life in the modern city to exploring the character of emergent literary circles (similar to the

[1] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 115.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 67.
[4] Barker, *Writer by Trade*, p. 114.
[5] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 114.
[6] Ibid., pp. 177, 114.
[7] Pound, *A Biography*, p. 143.
[8] Ibid.

Bloomsbury group, which first began to meet in 1904), in conjunction with literary snobbery and its turbulent relationship with popular taste.

Bennett's interests are analogous to Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), in which Rachel Vinrace reads 'modern books'[9] – books which constitute 'a kind of composite, deliberately imprecise, notion of […] 1890s book[s]', and which allude 'in a vague, poetic, and comprehensive way to Bodley Head publications, as well as to non-Bodley Head productions, such as the bound volumes of the *Savoy*'.[10] Rather than being allowed peacefully to peruse her *fin de siècle* books, Rachel is actively encouraged to read something *better*. Her fiancé Terence Hewet labels her 'modern books' 'trash' and accuses Rachel of being 'behind the times': 'No one dreams of reading this kind of thing now – antiquated problem plays, harrowing descriptions of life in the east end – oh, no, we've exploded all that. Read poetry, Rachel, poetry, poetry, poetry!'[11] Ann Ardis suggests that Terence's 'we' may refer to the 'men of 1914': 'the coterie of writers and artists centered around James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis who credentialed themselves, each other, and the literary field through reference to the scientific precision of poetic observation, the a-politicization of aesthetics, and the elevation of individual consciousness over social action/interaction'.[12] Ardis continues that Terence's 'linked binaries' create 'hierarchies within the contemporary social world (poetry versus the novel, high art versus "trash," aesthetics versus politics)' and serve to position the 'poetry' that Terence so highly values 'as *the* aesthetic of modernity'.[13] Woolf's novel charts the 'voyage' '*into* a modernist world view'[14] and, in illustrating 'the elite positioning of "high" modernist art in relation to its

[9] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p. 137.
[10] Stetz, through private correspondence with Ardis, in Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, p. 10.
[11] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, pp. 137, 341.
[12] Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, p. 2.
[13] Ibid., p. 3.
[14] Ibid.

"others"',[15] serves to illustrate John Carey's observation that there was a growing divide 'between highbrow and lowbrow culture' in the years following 1900.[16]

Bennett's preoccupation with this cultural 'division' is articulated in *Fame and Fiction* (1901). In an attempt to diminish the 'breach' between the 'two classes' – one consisting of the literary intelligentsia or 'minority', the other the 'less artistic' general public or 'majority' – Bennett establishes himself in the position of 'friendly' mediator.[17] He concentrates upon the reception of 'popular novel[s]', writing that, rather than forming 'a basis of mutual comprehension', they 'invariably', are 'turned into a fresh *casus belli*':

> the champions of the minority fall on the book with all arms of satiric analysis and contempt; the champions of the majority defend it […]. The minority says curtly, 'This is not art'; the majority answers, 'Never mind, it is what we like. Besides, it *is* art. Who are you that you should define art? Anyhow it is popular.' The minority sneers; the majority retorts a single word, 'Envy.' The breach is widened.[18]

In an effort to 'comprehend' the division in opinion – and therefore facilitate some form of reconciliation between the two classes – Bennett champions two potentially 'inflammatory' concepts.[19] The first is the proposition that it is the duty of the minority to connect with and 'lead' the majority, thereby promoting an appreciation of *literature*: 'the missionary does not make converts by a process of jeers; he minimises the difference […], assumes a brotherhood, and sympathetically leads forward from one point of view to another'.[20] The second is to diminish the *artiste*'s contempt for popular or commercial literature and to abate

[15] Jacobs, 'Feminist Criticism', p. 277.
[16] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 154.
[17] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, pp. 3, 5, 6.
[18] Ibid., pp. 4-5.
[19] Ibid., p. 6.
[20] Ibid., p. 5.

the demonisation of popular fiction, asserting that modern novels should not automatically equate in the eyes of the minority to 'trash': [21] 'to admire the less admirable in art is not a crime, nor the fruit of a mischievous intention to overthrow the august verdict of the centuries: nor is it a mere vagary'.[22] Bennett uses the remainder of *Fame and Fiction* to analyse a number of 'extremely popular novel[s]', demonstrating that popularity arises from the possession of 'qualities which demand respect, and which few except those who are wholly preoccupied with the dandyism of technique could fail to admire'.[23]

Bennett was to remain an advocate of popular fiction and hopeful of a 'high-brow' and 'low-brow' rapprochement until his death. In a review of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in which Bennett playfully acknowledges the 'feud' which he has 'often been informed by the elect […] exists between Virginia Woolf and [himself]', Bennett writes: 'true, she is queen of the high-brows; and I am a low-brow. But it takes all sorts of brows to make a world, and without a large admixture of low-brows even Bloomsbury would be uninhabitable'.[24]

The plot of *A Great Man* (1904) follows the successes of an extremely popular 'modern' novelist. In the first instance, it serves to illustrate Bennett's conviction that 'everyone is an artist, more or less' and that 'there is no person quite without the faculty of poetising, which by seeing beauty creates beauty, and which, when it is sufficiently powerful and articulate, constitutes the musical composer, the architect, the imaginative writer, the sculptor and the painter'.[25] Bennett's conviction is evident in the character of Henry's father who, 'though he wrote letters instead of sonnets, […] was nevertheless a sort of poet by temperament',[26] and in Henry, who represents a 'serious [and] industrious' man who 'bought

[21] Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, p. 137.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. 6.
[24] Bennett, 'Queen of the High-Brows', pp. 326-7.
[25] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 3.
[26] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 11.

books, including encyclopædias and dictionaries', 'wrote essays which were read and debated upon at the sessions of the Debating Society', ate 'bacon for breakfast every morning like ordinary men', and 'had himself been visited by the notion for a story'.[27] In the second instance, the novel serves to reconcile the 'two camps' by promoting an uninhibited enjoyment of popular fiction, and by satirising the imprudent snobbery of the 'artistic' elite.[28] Henry's novels *Love in Babylon* and *A Question of Cubits* exemplify Bennett's conviction that art is a democratic pursuit available to all, a source primarily of pleasure as well as a means of improvement, and that it can potentially bridge social divisions of class.

Following an account of *Love in Babylon,* the narrator of *A Great Man* interjects that 'the extreme subtlety of the thing must be obvious to every reader'.[29] When placed in conjunction with the earlier aside that *Love in Babylon* 'was a love tale, of course',[30] the previous comment has been interpreted as suggesting that Henry's novel was 'a spoof on the kind of romance which at the time was bringing Elinor Glyn so much money and fame',[31] and that Bennett was thus satirising the inferior calibre of popular fiction. I contend, however, that the true nature of the 'subtlety' to which Bennett is referring, is to be found in the outline as opposed to the genre of Henry's novels. The 'love story' follows the relationship between Enid Anstruther, a penniless member of the working class, and Adrian Tempest, a wealthy and successful barrister. At the beginning of their courtship, Adrian takes Enid to the Crystal Palace. They become separated 'in the tremendous Babylonian crowd' and, 'unused to the intricacies of locomotion in Babylon', Enid loses her position at the emporium as she arrives home at the store 'at an ungodly hour on Sunday morning'.[32] Adrian is unable to locate Enid and the story then divides into two parts, 'one describing the

[27] Ibid., pp. 44, 45, 86, 51.
[28] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 3.
[29] Bennett, *A Great Man,* p. 56.
[30] Ibid., p. 54.
[31] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 58.
[32] Ibid., p. 55.

life of Adrian […] on the heights of Babylon, and the other life of Enid, reduced to desperate straits, in the depths thereof'.[33] The lovers are reunited when Adrian attends a 'private viewing' at the Royal Academy and recognises a portrait which has been painted with Enid serving as the 'artist's model'; he contacts the artist, and obtains Enid's address.[34] Once with Enid, Adrian proposes, but Enid declines 'for the reason that her father, though innocent of a crime imputed to him, had died in worldly disgrace'.[35] It is revealed that Adrian 'happened to be the real criminal' although he was unaware that 'Enid's father had suffered from him, and he had honestly lived down that distant past'.[36] Enid 'forg[ives] and accept[s] Adrian. They were married […] and the story end[s]'.[37] The narrative culminates in forgiveness, and the reconciliation between representatives of the 'two classes' after what had appeared to be an insurmountable divide: Adrian (a 'celebrity', and thus a representative of the 'minority') had caused undue distress to Enid's father (an 'innocent', and representative of the 'majority'), yet Enid – recognising that Adrian is remorseful and has seen the error of his ways – forgives him. It is Adrian's viewing of a painting ('The Countess') that facilitates his being reunited with Enid, his subsequent admission of fault, and the couple's reconciliation. The painting typifies a middle ground between 'high-brow' Avant-Garde art, and the more traditional, easily comprehensible, 'low-' or 'middle-brow' art. 'The Countess' has been exhibited in the Royal Academy but is readily comprehensible, as Adrian instantly recognises Enid's face. This contrasts with Tom's 'Portrait of my Aunt', which is probably representative of Avant-Garde art, as Henry Shakspere senior and Aunt Annie fail to 'understand' the 'thing', nor perceive within it any kind of likeness.[38]

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., pp. 55-6.
[35] Ibid., p. 56.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., pp. 28-9.

A Question of Cubits is less 'subtle'. The protagonist, Gerald, desires to become 'a very great' Shakespearean actor; 'he's got the artistic temperament' and is in fact 'a great actor', but he is prevented from achieving his dream because he is deemed too tall for the stage.[39] Unable to conform to predetermined expectations, Gerald, 'who has the soul and brains of a great artist[,] is reduced to taking sixpences for opening cab-doors' and eventually expires 'in the snow outside the [West End] restaurant' which is filled with wealthy patrons.[40] Society is denied the opportunity to enjoy Gerald's stagecraft, because 'nobody' will give him a chance to prove himself, nor grant him the right to be judged on his own merits.[41]

In previous critical accounts, Bennett's 'tongue-in-cheek' humour in *A Great Man*[42] has been interpreted as being directed at 'the cheaper sort of literary fame'[43] and 'as a satire of the popular novelist'.[44] As a consequence, critics have regarded Henry as 'a successful fool', who has 'no notion that his clearly dreadful novels are not the height of literary talent'.[45] Lucas, for example, labels Henry 'an utter mediocrity' who 'lacks any kind of talent and cannot help succeeding because of it',[46] and Lafourcade regards Henry's novels as 'cheap', 'commercial', and 'the most absurd trash'.[47] At no point, however, does Bennett belittle Henry's fiction. After recounting the beginning of *Love in Babylon*, the narrator states that 'the contrasts were vivid and terrific' and the book is repeatedly referred to as an example of 'wholesome fiction'.[48] Following the anticipated success of Henry's second novel, *A Question of Cubits*, Bennett notes that 'at the back of it all, supporting it all, was […] the genuine enthusiasm for it of the average sensible, healthy-minded woman and man',

[39] Ibid., pp. 132-3.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., p. 132.
[42] Lafourcade, *A Study*, p. 72.
[43] Barker, *Writer by Trade*, p. 114.
[44] Lafourcade, *A Study*, p. 73.
[45] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 115.
[46] Lucas, *A Study*, pp. 57, 58.
[47] Lafourcade, *A Study*, pp. 73, 72.
[48] Bennett, *A Great Man*, pp. 55, 60.

and that *The Plague-Spot*, Henry's final novel, 'combined a tremendous indictment of certain phases of modern life with an original love-story by turns idyllic and dramatic'.[49] In condemning Henry's novels because they are thought to represent popular fiction as opposed to 'high-brow' literature, Drabble, Lucas and Lafourcade have all committed the same transgression as the 'minority' chastised by Bennett in *Fame and Fiction*: they have 'curtly' dismissed Henry's books because they are 'not art'.[50]

When Bennett does needle Henry, it is to facilitate his satire of the elitist and egocentric artist – the visionary genius or other-worldly 'being'[51] in possession of 'the sacred fire, the inborn and not-to-be-acquired vision'.[52] For example, when recording Henry's thoughts as he returns to Powells' following the successful publication and distribution of *Love in Babylon*, Bennett writes:

> Eighteen thousand persons had already bought *Love in Babylon*; possibly several hundreds of copies had been sold since nine o'clock that morning […]. And yet here was the author, the author himself, the veritable and only genuine author, going about his daily business unhonoured, unsung, uncongratulated, even unnoticed! It was incredible.[53]

Free indirect speech captures Henry's sense of incredulity and self-regard and serves to humanise him. The fact that, in spite of his success, Henry remains 'modest' and 'with the aid of his natural diffidence' refrained from 'dragging *Love in Babylon* bodily into the miscellaneous conversation of the office',[54] demonstrates that whilst it is expected that Henry

[49] Ibid., pp. 155, 204.
[50] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 4.
[51] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 6.
[52] Ibid., p. 99.
[53] Bennett, *A Great Man*, pp. 82-3.
[54] Ibid., p. 83.

should be proud of his achievement, it is possible (and in Bennett's eyes, both preferable and laudable) to remain as an approachable and relatable human being.

It is worth recalling that, in *The Truth About An Author*, as quoted above, Bennett articulates his 'dissatisfaction' with 'literary London' and the members of the 'literary circle[s]' which he has encountered within it, writing:

> There is an infection in the air of London, a zymotic influence which is the mystery cause of unnaturalness, pose, affectation, artificiality, moral neuritis, and satiety. One loses grasp of the essentials in an undue preoccupation with the vacuities which society has invented. The distractions are multiform. One never gets a chance to talk common sense with one's soul.[55]

Bennett gently satirises 'genteel Bohemia, the world of informal At-Homes that are all formality, where the little lions growl on their chains in a row against a drawing-room wall, and the hostess congratulates herself that every single captive in the salon has "done something"'[56] in his portrayal of Henry's attendance at one of Mrs. Aston Portway's 'Wednesdays'.[57] Chapter XXI, 'Playing the New Game', chronicles Henry's 'first entry' into this new 'world'.[58] The title of the chapter is double-edged, as it refers to a literal 'game' which is introduced towards its close ('Characters'), and alludes to Henry's uncomfortable integration into a previously unexplored subdivision of London society.

When Henry arrives at Mrs. Portway's house – located in the highly fashionable, Lowndes Square – the building and the atmosphere which has been carefully cultivated within it is overtly ostentatious. As Henry approaches the 'Grecian portico', he notices a

[55] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 204.
[56] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 203.
[57] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 145.
[58] Ibid., p. 157.

'crimson cloth cover[ing] the footpath' and, once inside, has his 'outer garments' 'taken forcibly from him, and a ticket given to him in exchange' – 'as at the Louvre'.[59] At the top of the stairs, he is 'suavely accosted' by 'a young and handsome man, faultless alike in costume and in manners', who requests his name before 'throwing open' the door and announcing 'in loud, clear tones, which Henry deemed ridiculously loud and ridiculously clear: MR. KNIGHT!'[60] The passage's humour stems largely from Henry's discomfort at being graciously manhandled (in itself an amusing notion due to its oxymoronic nature) and the 'ridiculous' level of flamboyance which has been granted to an 'interesting' Wednesday evening. There is also an undercurrent of exclusivity. Once inside, 'a servant respectfully but firmly closed the door after him, thus cutting off a possible retreat to the homely society of the cabman'.[61] Henry is physically separated from the outside world – a world which contains 'homely' and as a consequence, inadmissible, individuals – and forcibly enveloped in the 'truly great world' inside Mrs. Ashton Portway's house.[62] Bennett's usage of 'truly great' is unquestionably tongue-in-cheek as the evening is to fall quite short of that.

After introducing Henry to her husband, Mrs. Ashton Portway asks how he has spent his day. Henry begins to reply, but Mrs. Portway interrupts him:

> 'I dropped into the National Gallery this afternoon, but really it was so – '
> 'The National Gallery?' exclaimed Mrs. Ashton Portway swiftly. 'I must introduce you to Miss Marchrose […]'.[63]

[59] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 157.
[60] Ibid., p. 158.
[61] Ibid., p. 157.
[62] Ibid., p. 146.
[63] Ibid., p. 159.

Mrs. Portway's abrupt interjection serves a dual purpose. It preserves the highly cultured nature of the evening – the gathering has been designed to celebrate artistic accomplishments and the National Gallery is an unassailable example thereof. And it serves to satirise the exhibitionary element of upper class social interaction. Henry's mention of the National Gallery facilitates his introduction to a second person of 'interest', Miss Marchrose, 'the author of that charming hand-book to *Pictures in London*'.[64] Mrs. Portway is not really interested in how Henry has spent his day; rather, she is waiting for a conversational hook which she can then utilise to attach Henry to one of her other, carefully selected guests. Her rudeness is especially ironic when we consider that it stems from an eagerness to adhere to the conventions of polite conversation – to 'accomplish the task of receiving' and to facilitate dialogue.[65] Mrs Portway's introduction is unoriginal (she uses the exact same phrasing as Henry uses, despite it being incorrect as Henry has 'just' arrived at her home) and commercialises the character of Miss Marchrose, by introducing her as 'the author of that book'. Both elements are particularly satirical when we recall that these persons have gathered together in a space which has been designed to celebrate innovation.

Henry and Miss Marchrose are left together 'in a nook between a cabinet and a phonograph'.[66] Both of these objects allude to fundamental constituents of a 'truly great' artistic gathering.[67] The cabinet exemplifies a process of selection and display, and the phonograph, the ability to produce sound on command. The guests at Mrs. Portway's 'Wednesday' have been approved, collected together, and are in the process of being put on display by their hostess. Each person is provided with an opportunity to examine and in turn, to be examined by, the other guests, and is then to be provided with a carefully orchestrated point in time in which they can talk about themselves and their work. Bennett's alignment of

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., p. 161.
[66] Ibid., p. 159.
[67] Ibid., p. 157.

Henry with the cabinet and Miss Marchrose with the phonograph, underpins the notion of Henry being put on display and Miss Marchrose being provided with the opportunity to speak.

At the start of the evening, Henry is introduced to 'poetesses, paragraphists, publicists, positivists, penny-a-liners, and other pale persons'.[68] Bennett's exhaustive alliteration in the compilation of this list evokes the notion of recursive interchangeability; each 'pale person's' individual spiel is not unlike a record, played and paused at the command of Mrs. Portway. The observation that every one of these persons is 'pale' plays on the literary trope that artists and academics alike shut themselves away in studies and studios, dedicating hours to research and composition, thereby wilfully depriving themselves of sunlight. The decision to begin each of these titles with the letter 'P' is especially interesting, as the sound 'p' is produced by briefly obstructing airflow in the vocal tract. The repetitive alliteration of this particular sound – a sound which begins with a minute pause – parallels the number of interruptions which are to occur throughout the evening.

In the midst of Henry and Miss Marchrose's stilted conversation, 'a young lady got up in the middle of the room' and 'began to recite Wordsworth's "The Brothers"'. The performance is uninspiring (the narrator writes simply that 'she continued to recite and recite until she had finished it'), but it is met 'with universal joy' and a man 'near the phonograph' justifies the spontaneous outpouring by remarking that 'Matthew Arnold said that was the greatest poem of the century'. It is at this moment that Miss Marchrose attempts to speak again and in doing so correct him: 'You'll pardon me, […] if you're thinking of Matthew Arnold's introduction to the selected poems, you'll and –', but she is promptly interrupted by Mrs. Ashton Portway. If Miss Marchrose was referring to Matthew Arnold's essay, 'Wordsworth' (originally published in 1879 and included as an introduction to a number of

[68] Ibid., p. 161.

editions of Wordsworth's 'selected poems'), she would be correct in attempting to redress this gentleman's comment. Arnold mentions the *Excursion* and the *Prelude*, but adds that these 'are by no means Wordsworth's best work',[69] and writes that '*Lucy Gray* is a beautiful success'.[70] Arnold professes a 'warm admiration for *Laodameia* and for the great *Ode*' and that if he 'had to pick out poems of a kind most perfectly to show Wordsworth's unique power, [he] should rather choose poems such as *Michael*, *The Fountain*, *The Highland Reaper*',[71] but there is no reference to 'The Brothers', nor indeed, to any poem being 'the greatest poem of the century'. Mrs. Ashton Portway is akin to a censoring jack-in-a-box, 'suddenly looming' both physically and verbally, in order to smooth over (or better yet, steamroll) any potential 'creases in the web of social life'.[72] The fact that she prevents Miss Marchrose from correcting the man whom she overhears, further underpins the desire to first address style, rather than substance.

Bennett's critique of 'the business men who write from ten to fifty thousand words a week'[73] and are 'unduly preoccupied' with social stigmas is more pointed, and is evident in Mr. Heeley's approach to, and completed review of, Henry's second novel. The evening before *A Question of Cubits* is to appear in booksellers' shops and 'to shine […] on the counters of libraries',[74] Henry 'dream[s] of the reviews':

> he saw a hundred highly-educated men, who had given their lives to the study of fiction, bending anxiously over the tome and seeking with conscientious care the precise phrases in which most accurately to express their expert appreciation of it. He dreamt much of the reviewer of the *Daily Tribune*, his favourite morning paper,

[69] Arnold, 'Wordsworth', p. 7.
[70] Ibid., p. 18.
[71] Ibid., p. 21.
[72] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 165.
[73] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 204.
[74] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 149.

> whom he pictured as a man of forty-five or so, with gold-rimmed spectacles and an air of generous enthusiasm.[75]

Whilst Henry is dreaming of his benevolent, bespectacled reviewer, we learn that the editor of the *Daily Tribune* has in fact lost the proof of the completed review and having also lost the 'copy' of the text, orders Mr. Heeley, a contributor to the paper, to locate a second copy, and to hurriedly produce 'fifteen inches on it' for tomorrow's paper.[76] Heeley initially protests on the basis that Henry's novel is an example of popular fiction, stating: 'you know I hate messing my hands with that sort of piffle'.[77] As a published poet who has previously worked for the *Whitehall Gazette* ('the distinguished mouthpiece of the superior classes') and as a journalist who needs to be reminded to write without 'antics' or spleen',[78] Heeley is similar to Woolf's Terence Hewit in his deference to the elitist literary 'hierarchies' – particularly 'poetry versus the novel [and] high art versus "trash"'[79] – or in Bennett's words 'the vacuities which society has invented'.[80] When Heeley does comply and obtains a copy of Henry's novel, he unceremoniously rips the book into thirds, keeping the first fifty pages for himself and depositing two piles of fifty pages each in front of Jack and Clementina, 'two other young men who were already there'.[81] The finished review is a combined effort of three partial readings, accompanied by 'laughter' and 'unseemly language' (with comments no doubt somewhat stronger than 'piffle'), which culminates in the decision to 'praise it' and 'to take it seriously' as a 'delicious' joke: 'just for us three, and a few at the club'.[82] Jack and Clementina relight their pipes 'with select bits of *A Question of Cubits*, and threw the

[75] Ibid., p. 150.
[76] Ibid., pp. 150, 151.
[77] Ibid., p. 151.
[78] Ibid., pp. 153, 151.
[79] Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, p. 3.
[80] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 204.
[81] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 151.
[82] Ibid., p. 152.

remaining débris [*sic*] of the volume into the waste-paper basket';[83] the chaotic and inelegant escapade is over by twenty past midnight. The book is physically mistreated on account of its genre and the review compiled in order to serve an elitist or highbrow joke. 'Common sense'[84] would dictate that the book should have been read in its entirety, judged independently and its 'qualities' reviewed accordingly;[85] instead, 'pose' and 'affectation' prevail.

When compiling a summary of the reviews, Bennett writes that the 'great majority' were 'exceedingly favourable, and even where praise was diluted with blame, the blame was administered with respect'; 'a mere handful of papers scorned him' and 'prominent among this handful was the *Whitehall Gazette*'.[86] By titling the *Whitehall Gazette*'s cursory paragraph 'Our Worst Fears realized' – a paragraph which is limited to a summary of the plot and concludes 'So he expired, every inch of him, in the snow, a victim to the British Public's rapacious appetite for the sentimental'[87] – Bennett is continuing to emphasise unwarranted literary snobbery which condemns both a 'low-brow' book (a popular novel) and a 'low-brow' reader (the presumed 'less artistic' affiliate of the general reading public).[88] The reference to 'appetite' creates an analogy between consumerism and consumption – the literal act of eating – and of impropriety (in this instance, gluttony). The comparison underpins the intellectuals' acceptation that commercial fiction, or popular fiction 'rapaciously' read by the masses, is deserving of 'satiric analysis and contempt'.[89]

Having spent a day of ineffectual study at the British Museum, Richard Larch observes the 'diversified company of readers' which 'radiat[e] in long rows from the central

[83] Ibid., p. 153.
[84] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 204.
[85] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 6.
[86] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 153.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 3.
[89] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 4.

fortress of learning' (the centre of the reading room). Bennett adds that 'vague, reverberating noises roll heavily from time to time across the chamber, but no one looks up; the incessant cannibal feast of the living upon the dead goes speechlessly forward; the trucks of food are always moving to and fro, and the nonchalant waiters seem to take no rest'.[90] The episode recalls Marian's unproductive and disturbed visit to the British Museum's Reading Room in George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891):

> In a moment the book-line circumference of the room would be but a featureless prison-limit. […] [T]hen flashed forth the sputtering whiteness of the electric light, and its ceaseless hum was henceforth a new source of headache. It reminded her how little work she had done to-day; she must, she must force herself to think of the task in hand. A machine has no business to refuse its duty.[91]

In *Margins of Desire: The Suburbs in Fiction 1880-1925* (2005), Lynne Hapgood posits that Bennett 'shared elements of […] Gissing's […] literary and social thinking' – in particular, 'some of Gissing's fears about the commercialisation of culture',[92] foregrounding her assertion in Bennett's comparison of research to 'a cannibal feast', which 'is even more savage' than Gissing's industrialised 'writing factory'.[93]

I would argue that this simply is not the case. Bennett determined to make his livelihood through literature in 1898 when he decided to write serial novels. His second novel, *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902), was a profound success, selling 50,000 copies in hardback.[94] The enterprise represented just the sort of literary commercialisation which was

[90] Bennett, *A Man*, p. 69.
[91] Gissing, *New Grub Street*, p. 96.
[92] Hapgood, *Margins*, p. 219.
[93] Ibid., p. 197.
[94] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 154.

lamented by George Gissing. Bennett, however, satirises this discrimination, and defends himself – and accordingly, other commercial writers – in *The Truth About An Author* (1903). Bennett writes that *A Man from the North* had been 'composed' in the vein of the '*écriture artiste*'[95] but failed to make any money:

> my profits from this book with the exceptional style and the exceptional knowledge of human nature, exceeded the cost of having it typewritten by the sum of one sovereign. Nor was I, nor am I, disposed to grumble at this. Many a first book has cost its author a hundred pounds. I got a new hat out of mine.[96]

Bennett wanted money – and felt no shame in admitting as such – and so embarked upon the 'business' of serial writing:

> I had sworn solemnly that I would keep the novel-form unsullied for the pure exercise of the artist in me. What became of this high compact? I merely ignored it. I tore it up and it was forgotten, the instant I saw a chance of earning the money of shame.[97]

Bennett's classification of commercial earnings as 'the money of shame' is not to be taken seriously; it is unequivocally tongue-in-cheek. Earlier in *The Truth About An Author*, Bennett 'goads the apostles of art'[98] by writing:

> when I am working on my own initiative, for the sole advancement of my artistic reputation, I ignore finance and think of glory alone. It cannot, however, be too

[95] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 88.
[96] Ibid., p. 112.
[97] Ibid., pp. 148, 150.
[98] Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 154.

> clearly understood that the professional author, the man who depends entirely on his pen for the continuance of breath, and whose income is at the mercy of an illness or a headache, is eternally compromising between glory and something more edible and warmer at nights. He labours in the first place for food, shelter, tailors, a woman, European travel, horses, stalls at the opera, good cigars, ambrosial evenings in restaurants; and he gives glory the best chance he can. I am not speaking of geniuses with a mania for posterity; I am speaking of human beings.[99]

In the first instance, Bennett's acknowledgement of the need for financial security in order to physically survive (to have food and warmth), and to live comfortably (to have 'tailors', 'stalls at the opera' and 'good cigars'), debunks the aureole of pretention which surrounds the apotheosized 'literary life'.[100] In 'This "Bosh" About Art For Art's Sake' (1929), Bennett wrote that 'the public hates to think that any artist works for money': 'It knows, or ought to know, that the majority of the world's masterpieces, in all the arts, were commissioned by exacting patrons, done to order, and done for money. Yet let not the disgraceful truth be so much as whispered!'[101] Bennett writes that 'men are praised for earning money by broking stocks and shares, by building houses, by manufacturing tobacco, artificial silk, soap, champagne, refuse-destructors', but 'to the public' the artist 'is in a different category'; he was 'consistently frank' about the absurdity of the 'notion' for 'thirty years' (and 'none of [his] assorted candours […] incurred […] half so much odium as this candour').[102] In the second, the passage serves to unite the avant-guard and popular author through recognition of the fact that 'all sorts of brows'[103] – with the exception, of course, of the geniuses – share

[99] Bennett, *The Truth*, p. 142.
[100] Ibid., p. 202.
[101] Bennett, 'This "Bosh"', pp. 297-8.
[102] Ibid., p. 298.
[103] Bennett, 'Queen of the High-Brows', p. 327.

common, 'human' aspirations: to dress well, to socialise, and to meet and court a romantic partner. The 'geniuses' are an exception, as they *can* subsist on 'glory alone' – through the aid of a wealthy patron. In his controversial study, *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), Lawrence Rainey argues that 'long before textbooks about it were written, popular and critical understandings of modernism had already been configured by the specific dynamics of transmission that characterized modernism's productive processes and grounded its extraordinary success'.[104] Rainey posits that Modern authors – such as H. D., Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce – were able to uphold the 'conviction that "one must confine one's self to works of art" independent of social or moral considerations', and to restrict their work to journals which 'rejected […] mass circulation [and] instead returned to the kind of direct relationship with readers that had typified literary magazines in the genteel tradition', if supported by 'patronage'.[105] 'Patronage', Rainey asserts, 'was the foundation of the institutional structure known as the avant-garde'.[106]

Henry's cousin, Tom, '*is* a genius'.[107] He is also guilty of 'the "monstrous conceit" of some Modernists' which Bennett outlines in his article of the same name in 1928.[108] As 'a formidable pioneer', Tom 'suffer[s] from the sense of being all alone, and utterly right, in an utterly wrong world of [art]'.[109] When Tom takes Henry to the Luxembourg Gallery to see his 'life-sized statue of Sappho', Henry asks – after 'the stream of explanations [of 'all the beauties of the work'] had slackened' – 'what else is there to see here?' Tom replies, 'dejectedly', that 'there's nothing much else' and thus Tom's sculpture provides 'the beginning and the end of Henry's studies in the monuments of Paris'.[110] Tom also 'rejoice[s]

[104] Rainey, *Institutions*, p. 78.
[105] Ibid, pp. 95, 92, 107.
[106] Ibid., p. 108.
[107] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 240.
[108] Bennett, 'The "Monstrous Conceit"', p. 132.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Bennett, *A Great Man*, pp. 188-9.

too richly and too contemptuously in [his] apartness' – 'which is a roundabout way of saying that [he is] a monstrously conceited [person]'.[111] He is 'always producing intellectual discomfort' and although he is 'a shocking liar', he is 'lavish of truth whenever truth happened to be disconcerting and inopportune'.[112] Disregarding 'social or moral considerations',[113] Tom persistently belittles Henry's work on the grounds that Henry is a commercial artist and not 'a great artist' (which is what Tom 'honestly reckon[s]' himself to be),[114] and wilfully takes advantage – or simply accepts as a matter of course – monetary support. When Tom resigns from his position at Bollingtons Limited – a stationary firm at which 'his task was to design covers for coloured boxes of fancy notepaper' – he steals ten pounds from Henry Senior's shop, before 'departing for ever from the hearth and home of Mr. Knight'.[115] When Tom takes Henry to Paris, Henry pays 'the entire bill at the Grand Hotel' and reflects that, having 'lent Tom a sovereign, another sovereign, and a five-pound note,' he would 'certainly have been mulcted in Tom's fare on the expensive train de luxe [to Monte Carlo] had he not sagaciously demanded money from Tom before entering the ticket-office'; 'without being told, Henry knew that money lent to Tom was money dropped down a grating in the street'.[116] When describing his life in Paris to Henry, Tom 'mentioned the Salon as if the Salon were his pocket'[117] and, 'confesse[s], with a fine appreciation of the fun, that he lived in Paris until his creditors made Paris disagreeable, and then went elsewhere, Rome or London, until other creditors made Rome or London disagreeable, and then he returned to Paris'.[118] Whilst Bennett acknowledges that commissioned work and patronage is a welcome facet in the economic life of an artist, he condemns an abuse of power. Tom

[111] Bennett, 'The "Monstrous Conceit"', p. 132.
[112] Bennett, *A Great Man*, pp. 25, 27.
[113] Rainey, *Institutions*, p. 95.
[114] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 191.
[115] Ibid., pp. 28, 39.
[116] Ibid., pp. 190-1.
[117] Ibid., p. 178.
[118] Ibid., p. 191.

typifies an artist who, 'determined to be original at any cost, [is] original at the cost of [his] friends and their tradesmen'.[119] It is this which is Tom's greatest fault, not his elitism, nor the fact that he is 'not "nicely disposed"',[120] his greatest failing is that he is a poor citizen. Bennett believed that 'an artist should be a citizen before he is an artist' ('I esteem more highly a man who is an honest citizen at the expense of art than a man who is an honest artist at the expense of citizenship').[121] The duty of the artistic minority – indeed, of an individual 'pioneer' – is to set a socially advantageous example. By abusing Henry's consistent good nature, and determining to keep 'apart' from the world, Tom – whilst believing that he is upholding the principles of true highbrow or avant-garde art – is shirking his duty to the public and is ironically, perpetuating his dissatisfaction with the world of art.

[119] Bennett, 'This "Bosh"', p. 298.
[120] Bennett, *A Great Man*, p. 17.
[121] Bennett, 'This "Bosh"', p. 298.

3. *Buried Alive* (1908)

Bennett began *Buried Alive*, originally entitled *The Case of Leek*, on 2 January 1908. He completed his 'humorous novel' exactly eight weeks later and it was published on Wednesday 3 June. Bennett was decidedly pleased with what he had written. Upon its completion, he noted in his journal that he thought it 'all pretty good'[1] and when re-reading it twelve months later 'smiled the whole time', commenting, 'I don't think I have ever read a funnier book than this'.[2] He also enthusiastically recommended it to a number of his correspondents. Bennett's '"palpable hit" at contemporary journalism',[3] his 'skit on English law and the procedure of the English courts',[4] and his treatment of 'the external absurdities of human character'[5] culminated in the creation of *Buried Alive*'s tag line: an 'entertaining farce'.[6]

Whilst early reviews praised 'the author's skill in whimsical satire' and the way in which the 'frankly impossible and extravagant' story served as 'an ingenious vehicle for satarising [*sic*] the social life of the twentieth century,'[7] the novel 'was received with majestic indifference by the English public'[8] and sold surprisingly poorly. *Buried Alive*'s tepid reception has been ascribed to its having been eclipsed by the success of *The Old Wives' Tale*, the fact that *Buried Alive* is widely regarded as 'an act of interruption' – a novel which Bennett wrote whilst 'on holiday […] from the exhausting labour of *The Old Wives' Tale*'[9] – and Bennett's decision to substitute a 'serious theme' for one of 'improbable' 'whimsy',

[1] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, February 29th' 1908, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 278.
[2] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, November 9th' 1909, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 338.
[3] Unsigned review in the 'Spectator' dated 4 July 1908, in Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 201.
[4] Harris, letter to Bennett dated 12 November 1908, in *Letters, Vol. II*, pp. 202-3.
[5] Unsigned review in 'The Morning Post' (undated), in Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 41.
[6] Unsigned review in 'Nation' dated 20 October 1908, in Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 41.
[7] Unsigned review in the 'Spectator' dated 4 July 1908, in Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, pp. 201-2.
[8] Bennett, 'Preface to *The Old Wives' Tale*', p. 33.
[9] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 96.

impeding his skill as a humourist and consequently, the novel's impact as social satire.[10] To date, little has changed; the majority of criticism on *Buried Alive* was produced in the early 1970s and very little after 1974. John Lucas asserts that the novel 'is not very good […] it is no more than a faintly humorous anecdote spun out to novel length'.[11] The sole critic who touches upon the novel's value as a social critique is Margaret Drabble, who states that:

> Bennett's achievement as a communicator, as a popularizer, as a breaker-down of prejudice, has not been much recognized, but it is very real. The book may be preposterous and far-fetched: he would never have said that it wasn't. But it is dealing in realities of attitude […]. *Buried Alive* may be written for a popular audience, but it rings true at the most surprising points […].[12]

The purpose of this section is to examine three points of interest which have been neglected in earlier analyses of the text, and in so doing, substantiate Margaret Drabble's observation that *Buried Alive* 'foreshadows the role Bennett was to play in educating […] the English public, in castigating it, in the most amiable and persuasive fashion, for its philistinism'.[13] This study will continue to explore Bennett's interest in individualism and the construction of personal identity, in conjunction with the notion of social and self 'policing' as informed by D. A. Miller's Foucauldian study *The Novel and the Police* (1984). It will also relate *Buried Alive* to Bennett's growing appreciation of the Arts and the assumptions and/or prejudices which accompany the English public's perception of the early twentieth-century artist. This

[10] Frank Harris wrote to Bennett voicing his frustration at the latter ('I wanted to shake you for it'): 'My god, sir, if you had done it with reality behind you, if you had broidered this laughter on to the stern face of fact, everyone in England would have recognized you for the greatest living humourist. No laughter in Dickens at all like it, not of the same quality. […] But why did you not do it on a serious theme? Don Quixote did attack the windmill, and his coming to utter grief is the climax of the humour. I still want to shake you; but I shook with you first…' (Harris, letter to Bennett dated 12 November 1908, in Hepburn's *Critical Heritage*, pp. 202-03).
[11] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 94.
[12] Drabble, *A Biography*, pp. 160-1.
[13] Ibid.

investigation is not only overdue, but will acknowledge Bennett's own perception of *Buried Alive* as 'a quite serious "criticism of life"'.[14]

John Lucas is greatly disappointed with Bennett's protagonist, writing that Priam Farll 'is typical of what happens to a Bennett hero when the author isn't greatly interested in his own subject'. Lucas claims that Priam 'is merely sketched in', a 'hazy outline', and it is this 'woefully incomplete' 'view' of 'Bennett's hero' which reduces the novel to 'poor stuff': 'we know far too little about [Priam] to find Bennett's fiction at all convincing'.[15] Lucas's criticism recalls Virginia Woolf's essay 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' (1923), in which Woolf asserts that Bennett provides the reader with 'a vast sense of things in general; but a very vague one of things in particular'.[16] Bennett's chief offence is an overzealous verisimilitude which effectively strips a character of any spiritual substance and has been regarded as having pre-empted a connection with, or 'knowledge of', his characters. Recalling Bennett's review of *A Man from the North* as Sarah Volatile, Bennett regards 'men and things'[17] as intimately connected and as such, Bennett's meticulous inclusion of 'things' – in this instance, clothes – is crucial in his techniques for developing his characters' interior subjectivities.

Bennett establishes a link between clothes and personal identity – and society's acceptance of this association – throughout *Buried Alive*. When Priam escapes into the 'chilly' December rain after being confronted with his alleged first wife, Mrs. Henry Leek, his physical body is likened to a waterlogged coat: he is 'forced […] to admit that his tortured soul had a fleshy garment and that the fleshy garment was soaked to the marrow'.[18] Alice asserts that 'matrimonial agencies are the most sensible things – after dress-shields – that's

[14] Bennett, letter to Howells dated 1 March 1911, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 274.
[15] Lucas, *A Study*, pp. 96, 62.
[16] Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', p. 34.
[17] Bennett (signed 'Sarah Volatile'), 'Books and Authors', p. 140.
[18] Bennett, *Buried Alive*, p. 128.

ever been invented', and when Priam 'dwelt' on his 'unimaginably inept' proposal to Lady Sophia Entwistle, he imagines the union as one in which he would become domesticated and consequently emasculated: 'to bow his proud neck under the solid footwear of Lady Sophia Entwistle!'[19] When noting 'a leading article['s]' decision to refer to Westminster Abbey as 'National Valhalla', Priam's subsequent thought is that '[i]t seemed to make a point of not mentioning Westminster Abbey by name, as though Westminster Abbey had been something not quite mentionable, such as a pair of trousers' and when Priam is considering meeting with the Dean, he cajoles himself with the following thought: 'After all, a Dean – what was it? Nothing but a man with a funny hat!'[20]

The way in which clothes are perceived as intricately linked to the personality of their wearers manifests in Bennett's journal within days of his beginning *Buried Alive*. On 5 January 1908, Bennett recorded the following:

> Chatted with a policeman at the corner this morning. Evidently very young. So young and fresh that the only really policemanish thing about him was his uniform. A sort of man dressed up as a policeman. I have noticed this before in young policemen, but have never defined it so well.[21]

Bennett's observation of the way in which external presentation (in this instance, authoritarian attire) has the ability supersede, or at the very least disguise, personal truths (youth and inexperience) is indicative of an outlook Bennett was to address in *Buried Alive*. In the first instance, the narrative is peppered with policemen: Priam's first painting is of life-size policeman; the 'bevelled portals' of the restaurant in which Priam has 'his first public

[19] Ibid., pp. 40, 32.
[20] Ibid., pp. 57, 61.
[21] Bennett, journal entry dated 'January 5th' 1908, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 275.

meal in modern London' are regulated by 'imitation' policeman; and it is 'a youthful policeman' who removes Priam from the cloister of Westminster Abbey following his emotional outburst in the organ loft.[22] An 'older policeman' convinces his junior to release Priam, and upon his release, for Priam to purchase a new hat. It is this final interaction which underpins the importance of the constabularies' presence. Once outside the Abbey, Priam locates his ticket in one of his pockets and confidently presents it to the senior officer. The 'elder', upon inspecting 'the official document' and ascertaining Priam's sobriety ('He don't look as if he'd had 'ardly as much drink as 'ud wash a 'bus does he?'), releases Priam, and offers the following advice: 'Look here, Mr. Henry Leek […] do you know what I should do if I was you? I should go and buy myself a new hat […] and quick too'.[23] As Priam leaves, he overhears the senior say to the junior, 'he's a toff, that's what he is, and you're a fool' and Bennett closes the episode by writing: 'such is the effect of a suggestion given under certain circumstances by a man of authority, that Priam Farll went straight along Victoria Street and at Sowter's famous one-price hat-shop did in fact buy himself a new hat'.[24] The role of 'the watch-dogs of justice' is twofold; to keep the peace – emphasised by the stock vernacular 'What's all this?' and 'Will you come quietly?' – and to symbolise the importance of self-policing within society.[25] In *The Novel and the Police*, D. A. Miller examines a 'series of "micro-powers"' which act as 'modes of "social control"'.[26] Michel Foucault had previously labelled 'this series' 'discipline', and its 'most pertinent general propagations' are: 'an ideal of unseen but all seeing surveillance, which, though partly realized in several, often interconnected institutions, is identified with one'; 'a regime of the norm, in which normalizing perceptions, prescriptions, and sanctions are diffused in discourses and practices

[22] Bennett, *Buried Alive*, pp. 12, 37-9.
[23] Ibid., p. 70.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., p. 69.
[26] Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. viii.

throughout the social fabric'; and 'various technologies of the self and its sexuality, which administer the subject's own contribution to the intensive and continuous "pastoral" care that liberal society proposes to take of each and every one of its charges'.[27] Miller labels these precedents 'the police' and his examination of the nineteenth-century novel exposes the substitution of the physical, authoritarian presence of policemen – evidenced by the 'limitations placed by the novel on the power of the police […] as in the long tradition of portraying the police as incompetent or powerless'[28] – with that of internalised, social conventions which govern (or 'police') both an individual's identity, and their place within and as part of the practices of 'normal' society. The younger policeman assumes that Priam is drunk. Priam undoubtedly looks dishevelled – he has been crying and has been manhandled ('dragged') out of the Abbey – but it is his lack of headgear which cements this supposition. Priam doesn't look like a 'toff' (a toff would have a hat) and so he is assumed to be a vagrant. Once the senior policeman has ascertained that Priam is a gentleman, however, he recommends that Priam correct his appearance by purchasing a new hat. The acquisition of a hat will facilitate a clearer indication of Priam's social status, subsequently nullifying any additional, potentially embarrassing, altercations, whilst simultaneously compelling Priam to compose himself. It is this notion of self-awareness and social 'surveillance' – recognition of the fact that the society is acutely aware of each individual in occupation of it, and whether or not each individual aligns with predetermined societal expectations – which I believe forms the crux of Bennett's novel. Priam's chief offence is not that he has made a disturbance, but rather, that he is failing to comply with 'a regime of the norm'. This is supported by the fact that the senior policeman undermines his junior by calling him a 'fool', and that Priam's sole penalty is to adhere to the senior policeman's advice: to purchase a hat.

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, p. 2.

As has been demonstrated in the two previous case studies in this chapter, *A Man from the North* and *A Great Man*, Bennett is rebelling against a number of cultural assumptions about the relationship of the individual to society, and of the artist to the world which he sets out to debunk: that it is the duty of oneself to achieve success (it is not enough to blame one's environment and passively wish for change); that popular 'modern' fiction is 'trash' because it is not 'literature'; and that the general public is ignorant. The fact is, Bennett has been denied recognition as a Georgian as a consequence of his *form* and by disregarding his *content*. If Richard Larch were our 'failed Arnold Bennett' and Henry Knight our 'commercial conqueror', Priam Farll is the Bennett who is desirous to be left alone to get on with things, without being judged in light of predetermined preconceptions.

To a certain extent, Lucas's criticism of Bennett's protagonist is correct. Priam is an enigma. He is 'Priam Farll, the great and wealthy artist' and 'Priam Farll the private human creature'; he is also a man whose 'character' is further divided into 'two men'.[29] 'No. 1' is a social recluse, 'the shy man, who had long ago persuaded himself that he actually preferred not to mix with his kind, and had made a virtue of his cowardice', and 'No. 2', 'a doggish, devil-may-care fellow who loved dashing adventures and had a perfect passion for free intercourse with the entire human race'.[30] To complicate matters further, neither of these men perfectly corresponds with the two Priam Farlls above. Additionally, we are made aware that at the outset of the novel, Priam is a 'sad' man – in spite of his 'unique success in life' – who is, through choice, disconnected from the world and desires nothing more than to be 'free, utterly free', to 'escape from any kind of public appearance as Priam Farll'.[31] Rather than assuming authorial indifference and that the composition of *Buried Alive* (an allegedly 'bad book') simply provided respite from 'a good one' (*The Old Wives' Tale*),[32]

[29] Bennett, *Buried Alive*, p. 15.
[30] Ibid., p. 34.
[31] Ibid., pp. 11, 12, 21.
[32] Howells, 'Editor's Easy Chair', pp. 633-6.

suppose we consider the following questions: *why* do we know so little about Priam Farll, and why does the little that we do know, surround Priam's desire to 'escape' his identity?[33]

I contend that our 'view' of Priam is limited because Priam's own sense of identity is 'hazy'. We can only know what he himself knows, and he knows – or is confident in – decidedly little beyond his age (50), occupation (artist) and current emotional state. He is 'a standing side-dish of a riddle' and, most damningly, is determined to remain as such.[34] In the opening chapter 'The Puce Dressing-gown', 'the principal, the startling thing' which dominates the scene, is 'a dressing-gown'. It is later revealed that 'within the dressing-gown there was a man', but it is only in the closing sentence of this first chapter that we learn that 'the inhabitant of the puce dressing-gown' is our protagonist: 'the gifted and glorious being known to nations and newspapers as Priam Farll'.[35] Bennett's sardonic introduction belittles Priam and foreshadows his apparent failings With regard to pre-determined societal expectations of the British Artist in 1908.

Following the success of Priam's first painting, Bennett's narrator states that:

> every one naturally expected that in the following year […] Priam […] would, in accordance with the universal rule for a successful career in British art, contribute another portrait of another policeman to the New Gallery – and so on for about twenty years, at the end of which period England would have learnt to recognize him as its favourite painter of policemen.[36]

Priam in fact, does nothing of the sort. He 'contributed nothing to the New Gallery' and 'instead' 'adorn[s] the Paris salon with a large seascape showing penguins in the

[33] Bennett, *Buried Alive*, p. 21.
[34] Ibid., p. 14.
[35] Ibid., pp. 10-2.
[36] Ibid., p. 13.

foreground'.[37] Furthermore, 'he omitted to comply with the regulations ordained by English society for the conduct of successful painters':

> He ought, first, to have taken the elementary precaution of being born in the United States. He ought, after having refused all interviews for months, to have ultimately granted a special one to a newspaper with the largest circulation. He ought to have returned to England, grown a mane and a tufted tail, and become the king of beasts; or at least to have made a speech at a banquet about the noble and purifying mission of art. Assuredly he ought to have painted the portrait of his father or grandfather as an artisan, to prove that he was not a snob. But no! Not content with making each of his pictures utterly different from all the others, he neglected all the above formalities – and yet managed to pile triumph on triumph.[38]

Edwardian London's 'normalizing perceptions, prescriptions, and sanctions'[39] should dictate, and in so doing secure Priam's 'compliance' with, a preordained, 'successful painter's' appearance, personality and process of behaviour. The notion that Priam 'ought' to have secured his birth in America reveals the absurdity of these stringent regulations, and Bennett's feigned, ironical surprise at Priam's success – which is achieved in spite of his refusal to conform ('But no! […] and yet …') – reveals his scorn for this social practice and his disdain at British society's continued reverence of it: when Priam's first painting is 'refused by the Royal Academy', 'the culture of London' revolts, and 'the affair even got into Parliament and occupied three minutes of the imperial legislature'.[40] The consensus that Priam should 'become a king of beasts' as opposed to 'a king of men', dehumanises him and,

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p. 14.
[39] Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. viii. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.
[40] Bennett, *Buried Alive*, p. 12.

when placed in conjunction with 'England['s]' desire to have him 'as its favourite painter of policemen',[41] dismisses his individuality. He is being reduced to a 'favourite' pet – a performing monkey (he should 'at least […] have made a speech at a banquet about the noble and purifying mission of art') or an anthropomorphic one-trick pony, encouraged to 'grow a mane and a tufted tail', and to trick out 'another portrait of another policeman' with relative regularity, for the next 'twenty years'.

The intensity of the social pressure which has been focused upon Priam as a result of his pursuing and becoming successful in, his chosen occupation, is revealed in the following paragraph:

> Young artists, mute in admiration before the masterpieces from his brush […] dreamt of him, worshipped him, and quarrelled fiercely about him, as the very symbol of glory, luxury and flawless accomplishment, never conceiving him as a man like themselves, with boots to lace up, a palette to clean, a beating heart, and an instinctive fear of solitude.[42]

Having been denied his individuality, Priam is now denied his humanity. He has become a celestial 'symbol', to be 'dreamt of […], worshipped […], and quarrelled fiercely about', and deemed capable of deific abilities ('flawless accomplishment'). These exorbitant compliments serve to exemplify the unreasonable expectations prescribed to Priam by society; Priam has been elevated beyond the bounds of earthly London and as he has had difficulty in 'complying' with temporal expectations, it is not surprising that when faced with such impossible standards he ardently wishes for anonymity.

[41] Ibid., p. 13.
[42] Ibid., pp. 14-5.

Priam's self-perception, his fervent desire to disappear and to be 'free' from scrutiny, in addition to his relationship with his valet, Henry Leek, are exemplified through his interactions with clothes. In the opening chapter, the puce dressing-gown supersedes Priam; it becomes a physical extension of his body, defining his dimensions and blurring the distinction between figure and fabric: 'had he stood erect and looked perpendicularly down, he would have perceived, not his slippers, but a protuberant button of the dressing-gown'.[43] A description of the dressing-gown precedes a physical description of our protagonist, and indeed, inaugurates the novel. The dressing-gown is 'light as hydrogen […] and warm as the smile of a kind heart; […] a dressing-gown to dream of', whereas Priam is 'a man', 'the inhabitant of the puce dressing-gown'.[44] The precedence which Bennett grants the dressing-gown is not as a consequence of his being more interested in the article of clothing than in his protagonist; rather, the discrepancy serves to highlight Priam's inobtrusive personality and the desire to conceal himself, to avoid (or 'escape') 'any kind of public appearance as Priam Farll'.[45] Rather than revelling in his notoriety (he is, after all, 'the envied of all painters, the symbol of artistic glory and triumph'),[46] Priam is overwhelmed and burdened by his success. He detaches from himself; referring to himself in the third person, and imagining 'Priam Farll' as a separate 'being'. He literally fades into the background, or in this instance, into the dressing-gown. The morning after Henry Leek's death, Priam glances at himself in 'the dirty mirror over the fireplace' and sees 'a frowsy, dishevelled, puce-coloured figure'.[47] It is unclear as to whether 'puce-coloured' is referring to Priam's complexion, or to the dressing-gown. This ambiguity, coupled with the fact that Priam looks at himself in a 'dirty' mirror, and imagines himself as having various codifications ('a man', 'two men', 'a being', 'the

[43] Ibid., p. 11.
[44] Ibid., pp. 10, 12.
[45] Ibid., pp. 12, 21.
[46] Ibid., pp. 17.
[47] Ibid., p. 23.

inhabitant of' etc…) underscores Priam's lack of self-assurance and the discomfiture which imbues his identity. The fact that the dressing-gown belongs in fact to Priam's valet, anticipates the way in which Priam ultimately escapes his own identity: by assuming that of Henry Leek's, and securing this disguise by dressing himself in Leek's clothes.

Ironically, Leek '[had] been accustomed to clothe himself entirely from his master's wardrobe' and so, whilst the clothes 'were the property of the late Henry Leek, they […] had recently belonged to [Priam]'.[48] The communal nature of these clothes (they initially belonged to Priam, were adopted by Henry and then reclaimed by Priam) exemplifies Priam's relationship with his valet. Henry is intricately connected to Priam. He is deemed 'indispensable', because, as a consequence of his master's chronic shyness, he 'saw every one who had to be seen, and did everything that involved personal contacts'.[49] He is also described in overtly intimate terms: he is 'Priam Farll's bad habit' and Priam 'could not conceive himself without Leek'.[50] It is only when Henry is dying that he becomes detached from Priam, 'ceasing to be a valet and deteriorating into a mere human organism'.[51] Bennett's scientific language ('deteriorates', 'organism') evokes a biological/physiological affiliation, akin to a symbiotic relationship, which further emphasises the fact that Henry's death results in Priam losing not only an 'indispensable' manservant, but what he would regard as a physical component or extension of, himself. Priam is terrified by the prospect of direct, human interaction: 'to call the world's attention visually to the fact of his own existence was anguish to him'; 'the immediate prospect of unknown horrors of publicity in connection with the death of Leek overwhelmed him. […] He felt that it would kill him'.[52] His acute anxiety, coupled with the fact that he is already desperately unhappy as 'Priam

[48] Ibid., p. 25.
[49] Ibid., p. 16.
[50] Ibid., pp. 16, 21.
[51] Ibid., p. 17.
[52] Ibid., pp. 16, 21.

Farll, the great and wealthy artist',[53] results in Priam abandoning his already frangible identity and assuming Henry's:

> all the sensitive timidity in Priam Farll's character seized swiftly at the mad chance of escape from any kind of public appearance as Priam Farll. Why should he not let it be supposed that he, and not Henry Leek, had expired suddenly in Selwood Terrace at 5 a.m.? He would be free, utterly free![54]

Whilst Priam's disguise as Henry Leek facilitates much of the novel's humour, and a long-overdue acquisition of happiness (anonymity, and his marriage to Alice Challice), his 'freedom' is short-lived. Whereas Henry's death catalysed Priam's assumption of a new identity, the desire to re-gain the part(s) of himself which he lost in the act of becoming Henry, ultimately impel Priam to reclaim his name.

Alice's companionship and their quiet life in Putney make Priam happy, but he ultimately falls into a groove. His new life is described as 'heavenly', but there are troubling undercurrents which accompany this analogy, suggestive of restriction, spiritual stagnation, and abeyant monotony: 'Heaven is the absence of worry and of ambition. Heaven is where you want nothing you haven't got. Heaven is finality. And this was finality'.[55] Whilst Priam has successfully escaped the pressures of social scrutiny, he has stopped painting and is devoid of intellectual stimulation; his stagnation is underscored by the lingering presence of the dressing-gown. When Priam does return to painting in order to provide financial security for himself and his wife, he is re-invigorated: 'he had become a different man, a very excited

[53] Ibid., p. 15.
[54] Ibid., p. 21.
[55] Ibid., p. 86.

man. "By Jove," he exclaimed, surveying the picture, "I can paint!"'.[56] And when visited in his attic by Mr. Oxford, rediscovers his delight in discussing 'pictures':

> it was years since Priam had listened to the voice of informed common sense on the subject of painting. It was years since he had heard anything but exceeding puerility concerning pictures. He had, in fact, accustomed himself not to listen; he had excavated a passage direct from one ear to the other for such remarks. And now he drank up the conversation of Mr. Oxford, and perceived that he had long been thirsty. And he spoke his mind. He grew warmer, more enthusiastic, more impassioned. And Mr. Oxford listened with ecstasy. Mr. Oxford had apparently a natural discretion. He simply accepted Priam, as he stood, for a great painter. No reference to the enigma why a great painter should be painting in an attic in Werter Road, Putney! No inconvenient queries about the great painter's previous history and productions. Just the frank, full acceptance of his genius![57]

Priam is made to feel exceptionally 'comfortable'.[58] He has been granted the opportunity to talk about a subject which 'impassions' him, and one which he has sorely missed debating; most importantly, he has been granted the opportunity to hold this discourse with a man of 'natural discretion'. Mr. Oxford 'simply accept[s] Priam' and as a consequence, Priam is 'free' to be himself ('to [speak] his mind') and to enjoy a conversation without fear of having to explain his 'abnormal' behaviour ('No reference to the enigma why a great painter should be painting in an attic in Werter Road, Putney! No inconvenient queries about the great painter's previous history and productions. Just the frank, full acceptance of his genius!'). It

[56] Ibid., p. 120.
[57] Ibid., pp. 134-5.
[58] Ibid., p. 135.

is the combination of both of these elements which encourage Priam to accompany Mr. Oxford back to his Club. Once in London, however, Priam's discovery that Mr. Oxford has lured him back to the city under false pretences, in addition to his conveying him to an environment in which he is made to feel incredibly uncomfortable, compel Priam to reclaim his identity.

Priam feels 'comparatively safe' in hotels because of the anonymity they afford him: once checked in, he becomes 'a […] number' and can '[trust] to the floor-valet and to the telephone for avoiding any rough contact with the world'.[59] He is also immeasurably reassured by the fact that he can control the space that he is currently occupying: 'the entire enormous hotel' creates 'a nest for his shyness', and his room offers additional protection through the inclusion of 'a massive oak door with a lock and a key in the lock'; Room 331 becomes Priam's 'castle' and, as Priam is the 'absolute ruler' of this space, he has 'the right to command the almost limitless resources of the Grand Babylon for his own private ends' (ibid.).[60] Whilst both establishments – the hotel and Mr. Oxford's club – are described as 'big', the largeness of the former creates a literal comfort zone for Priam ('keep[ing] him in cotton wool'), whereas the size of the latter 'alarm[s] and intimidate[s]' him.[61] Thus, it is not the size of Mr. Oxford's club which threatens Priam, but rather, what it represents. Bennett writes:

> all the façade was black, black with ages of carbonic deposit. […] You perceived that Mr. Oxford's club was a monument, a relic of the days when there were giants on earth, that it had come down unimpaired to a race of pigmies, who were making the best of it. […] Priam found himself in an immense interior, under a distant carved

[59] Ibid., p. 45.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., pp. 145, 140, 145.

> ceiling, far, far upwards, like heaven. He watched Mr. Oxford write his name in a gigantic folio, under a gigantic clock. […] Mr. Oxford led him past enormous vistas to right and left, into a very long chamber, both of whose walls were studded with thousands upon thousands of hooks […]. […] he led Priam forwards into another great chamber evidently meant to recall the baths of Caracalla. Priam scrubbed his fingernails with a nail-brush larger than he had previously encountered, even in nightmares, and an attendant brushed his coat with a utensil that resembled a weapon of offence lately the property of Anak. […] [In the dining room] one had six of the gigantic windows in a row, each with curtains that fell in huge folds from the unseen into the seen. The ceiling probably existed. On every wall were gigantic paintings in thick ornate frames, and between the windows stood heroic busts of marble set upon columns of basalt. […] At one end of the room was a sideboard that would not have groaned under an ox whole, and at the other a fire, over which an ox might have been roasted in its entirety, leaped under a mantelpiece upon which Goliath could not have put his elbows.[62]

The recurrent emphasis on size and solidity, longevity and history (the allusions to biblical figures, roman baths and the 'gigantic clock') underpins an air of endurance; the club is an institution, embodying long-established rules and codes of practice which are, to all intents and purposes, 'set in stone'. These rules are, of course, those which inform social policing: the 'series of "micro-powers"' which act as 'modes of "social control"'.[63] The concept of an 'unseen but all seeing surveillance'[64] is evoked by 'the gigantic windows […], each with curtains that fell in huge folds from the unseen into the seen'. This is supported by the fact

[62] Ibid., pp. 140-1.
[63] Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. viii.
[64] Ibid. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

that as Priam enters the building, Bennett notes that 'your head was certainly lower than the feet of a being who examined you sternly from the other side of the glass' and that 'your head was also far below the sills of the mighty windows of the ground floor'; if an individual were to look upwards, 'a projecting eave of cavern stone […] threatened the uplifted eye like a menace'.[65] Bennett underscores the fact that this notion of being observed (or 'examined') and modifying one's appearance and behaviour accordingly, is imposed through fear: 'the uplifted eye' of the individual who is being scrutinised, is 'threatened' into passive compliance. His protagonist is a personification of this social anxiety, and Priam's discomfort at being in Mr. Oxford's club, serves to highlight Bennett's estimation of this social practice as outdated and as a consequence, laughable:[66] the club members are 'a strange and sinister race' who 'looked as though [they were] in the final stages of decay' and the more animated members are repeatedly referred to as 'midgets';[67] 'the club was like an abode of black magic […]; it seemed so hideously alive in its deadness, and its doings were so absurd and mysterious'.[68] As a result of being re-exposed to this 'absurdity', Priam becomes desperate to return to Putney: 'the total effect on Priam's temperament was disastrous. […] It induced in him a speechless anguish, and he would have paid a sum as gigantic as the club – he would have paid the very cheque in his pocket – never to have met Mr. Oxford. He was a far too sensitive man for a club'.[69] It is the conversation with Mr. Oxford which follows in the smoking-room, however, which initiates Priam's defiance and eventually surpasses his deference.

The revelation of Mr. Oxford's 'knowledge of Priam's [true] identity',[70] terrifies him; the sensation of 'the universe […] caving in about [his] ears' anticipates the end of his

[65] Bennett, *Buried Alive*, p. 140.
[66] Ibid., p. 152.
[67] Ibid., pp. 142-3.
[68] Ibid., p. 152.
[69] Ibid., p. 142.
[70] Ibid., p. 145-6.

disguise as Henry Leek and his untroubled life in 'idyllic Putney' ('the universe which was comprised in Werter Road and the sky above').[71] Priam's 'misery' is 'intensified' further by Mr. Oxford's admonition that 'there may be an action in the courts' and that he will require Priam's 'testimony' – a public admission of his identity.[72] It is the 'fury of the artist against the dealer – of the producer against the parasitic middleman', however, which prompts Priam to leave the table and the building 'without the slightest regard for the amenities of clubs':

> Priam Farll reflected that he had received […] vastly less than one per cent of what the shiny and prosperous dealer had ultimately disposed [his pictures] for, the traditional fury of the artist against the dealer – of the producer against the parasitic middleman – sprang into flame in his heart. Up till then he had never had any serious cause of complaint against his dealers. (Extremely successful artists seldom have.) Now he saw dealers, as the ordinary painters see them, to be the authors of all evil! Now he understood by what methods Mr. Oxford had achieved his splendid car, clothes, club, and minions. These things were earned, not by Mr. Oxford, but *for* Mr. Oxford in dingy studios, even in attics, by shabby industrious painters! Mr. Oxford was nothing but an opulent thief, a grinder of the face of genius. Mr. Oxford was, in a word, the spawn of the devil, and Priam silently but sincerely consigned him to his proper place.[73]

Bennett draws attention to Priam's naivety and pretentiousness with bathetic grandiloquence. His petty jealousy is exposed through free indirect style. Priam takes no stock of his own role

[71] Ibid., pp. 146, 86.
[72] Ibid., pp. 148, 152.
[73] Ibid., pp. 150-1.

in this, merely blaming others, casting himself entirely as a victim. The narrative voice intervenes to provide a more measured assessment of the transaction:

> It was excessively unjust of Priam. Nobody had asked Priam to die. Nobody had asked him to give up his identity. If he had latterly been receiving tens instead of thousands for his pictures, the fault was his alone. Mr. Oxford had only bought and only sold; which was his true function. But Mr. Oxford's sin, in Priam's eyes, was the sin of having been right.[74]

Having left the club, Priam deposits his cheque at the bank and walks 'aimlessly' through the 'crowded pavements' of the city.[75] He finds himself outside the 'new Picture Gallery', an aftereffect of his will ('his palace, his museum!'), whereupon a 'fat, untidy' foreman mistakes him for 'a workman cadging for a job'.[76] This final interaction culminates in Priam taking 'a cab to […] a firm of tailors with whose Paris branch he had had dealings in his dandical past'.[77] This 'impulse' symbolises Priam's decision to 'return to the world';[78] he can no longer maintain his disguise as Henry Leek as Mr. Oxford has correctly identified him, and he is 'furious' at his misidentification by the foreman who has judged him solely by external markers – 'his greenish hat' and 'his baggy creased boots'.[79] It is the combination of these unjust transgressions which act upon Priam's soul and prompt the reclamation of his identity: 'he wanted wealth and glory and fine clothes once more. It seemed to him that he was out of the world and that he must return to it'.[80]

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., p. 154.
[76] Ibid., pp. 156, 157.
[77] Ibid., p. 157.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., p. 156.
[80] Ibid., p. 157.

The novel's climax – 'the unique case of Witt v. Parfitts'[81] – serves a dual purpose. Bennett's 'skit on English law and the procedure of the English courts'[82] highlights the 'unwritten law of the English constitution': 'that a person prominent in a *cause célèbre* belongs for the time being, not to himself, but to the nation at large. He had no claim to privacy. In surreptitiously obtaining seclusion he was merely robbing the public and the public's Press of their inalienable right'.[83] The irony here, of course, is that Priam has never had a 'claim to privacy'. Whether called to court or pursuing his profession, Priam has always 'belonged' 'to the nation' as a consequence of the simple fact that he exists within it. His desire for a 'quiet life' (a life of 'seclusion') is not only irregular, it is criminal: he has been 'robbing the public and the public's Press'. Bennett satirises this 'inalienable' code of practice in two ways. Firstly, he reduces England's judicial system to 'theatre', likening the case to an 'emotional drama' and casting 'costumed' 'leading actors' (the barristers) alongside 'a fairly able judge' (whose 'rare talent for making third-rate jokes would have brought him a fortune in the world of musical comedy').[84] Secondly, he diminishes the case by centring these 'noble' 'legal minds' on 'the problem [as to] whether the law and justice of England could compel a free man to take his collar off if he refused to take his collar off': 'A nice thing, English justice – if it had no machinery to force a man to show his neck to a jury! But then English justice *was* notoriously comic'.[85] At this stage in the narrative, Priam has adopted an air of defiance:

> He had sworn to himself that he would be cut in pieces before he would aid the unscrupulous Mr. Oxford by removing his collar in presence of those dramatic

[81] Ibid., p. 164.
[82] Harris, letter to Bennett dated 12 November 1908, in *Letters, Vol. II*, pp. 202-3.
[83] Bennett, *Buried Alive*, pp. 165-6.
[84] Ibid., pp. 166-8.
[85] Ibid., pp. 177, 182.

> artistes. He had been grossly insulted, disturbed, maltreated, and exploited. The entire world had meddled with his private business, and he would be cut in pieces before he would display those moles which would decide the issue in an instant.[86]

It is his realisation that his actions may prove injurious to another human being, which prompt him finally to remove his necktie: 'the joke of every man in the street would be to the effect that Priam Farll, rather than marry the skinny spinster [Lady Sophia Entwistle], had pretended to be dead. […] she had cut him in pieces'.[87] This is the moment in which Priam becomes truly 'free': he is physically released from 'the net of the law' upon proving he is 'Priam Farll, the […] artist',[88] and the literal exposure of a symbolically vulnerable part of his body signifies that he is now comfortable in his own skin.

His freedom is precipitated by the realisation that he does not have conform – it will have no effect on his painting, nor on his happiness; whereas being true to himself, will. Bennett's overarching message – recognition and acceptance of, individuality – is conveyed in a paragraph addressed directly to the reader in the closing chapter of the novel:

> [Priam] was not a being created for society, nor for cutting a figure, nor for exhibiting tact and prudence in the crises of existence. He could neither talk well nor read well, nor express himself in exactly suitable actions. He could only express himself at the end of a brush. He could only paint extremely beautiful pictures. That was the major part of his vitality. In minor ways he may have been, upon occasions, a fool. But he was never a fool on canvas. He said everything there, and said it to perfection, for those who could read, for those who can read, and for those who will be able to read

[86] Ibid., pp. 187-8.
[87] Ibid., pp. 186-8.
[88] Ibid., pp. 189, 15.

> five hundred years hence. Why expect more from him? Why be disappointed in him? One does not expect a wire-walker to play fine billiards. You yourself, mirror of prudence that you are, would have certainly avoided all Priam's manifold errors in the conduct of his social career; but, you see, he was divine in another way.[89]

Priam is 'different',[90] and that is a fact to be celebrated. He should be recognised for his talents, not for his failings, and be accepted for who he is. Bennett's direct address underpins the novel's purpose: to convey 'a quite serious "criticism of life"'.[91] The novel is 'dealing in realities of attitude'[92] and I would argue that the text does more than '[foreshadow] the role Bennett was to play in educating […] the English public'; it *achieves* it, successfully 'castigating [society], in the most amiable and persuasive fashion, for its philistinism'.[93]

[89] Ibid., pp. 191-2.
[90] Ibid., p. 15.
[91] Bennett, letter to Howells dated 1 March 1911, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 274.
[92] Drabble, *A Biography*, pp. 160-1.
[93] Ibid.

Chapter II: The War Years

This chapter examines a selection of Bennett's writings which concern World War I. Part I and Part II analyse a novel, *The Roll-Call* (1919), which begins in 1901 and culminates in the protagonist's enlistment in 1914. Part III looks at *Liberty: A Statement of the British Case* (1914), a pamphlet detailing Bennett's understanding of the causes of the War and why Britain has become, and should remain, involved. Part IV addresses *Over There: War Scenes on the Western Front* (1915), a series of observations recorded during Bennett's visit to the Western Front in June 1915. Supported by his private writings, including letters and journals, and published articles, this chapter illustrates Bennett's growing social consciousness and social conscience. Whereas the novels in the preceding chapter demonstrate Bennett's attitude toward the importance of cultivating and preserving the individual self so as to secure happiness comprising a moral and social purpose, the novels in this chapter demonstrate Bennett's promotion of the necessity of taking responsibility as an individual, so as to contribute to the cultivation of social and, in turn, national stability. Bennett's criticism of societal superficiality and the spiritual and moral implications of mass culture and greater commercial choice, in addition to his critique of the popular press, point to his sustained recognition of 'other smaller wars, already raging in London',[1] 'social and cultural conflicts' for which – as evidenced in the work of Pound and Lewis in *Blast* – '*war* was the appropriate metaphor'.[2] My reading of Bennett's work during this stage of his career as illustrative of his realisation of his own responsibility towards the public, supports my case for his alignment with what Walsh calls Modern '"artist[s] turned warrior[s]"'. By this he means 'artists […] ideally prepared to use the vocabulary of modernism to analyse, assess, interpret and depict

[1] Walsh, *London, Modernism, and 1914*, p. 1.
[2] Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 10.

the first industrial conflict',[3] who prioritised 'social responsibility and erudite cultural responsibilities' and thus heralded 'the next logical step in the modernist experiment'.[4]

[3] Walsh, *London, Modernism, and 1914*, pp. 6, 7.
[4] Ibid., pp. 8, 14.

4. *The Roll-Call* (1919) "Part I"

The Roll-Call (1919) is a transitional novel. In the first instance, it heralds a decisive break from the Five Towns, 'supplying a transition between Bennett's regional work and his later novels in which the Five Towns hardly appear'.[1] The novel is largely regarded as the fourth and final addition to the Clayhanger 'trilogy', focusing on the life and career of George Edwin Cannon, Hilda Lessways's son and Edwin Clayhanger's stepson. *These Twain*, the third instalment published in 1916, was the last of Bennett's Five Town novels and culminates with a social gathering at Edwin Clayhanger's house in Trafalgar Road, Bursley. The event is attended by practically all of Bennett's Five Town characters who were – fictionally speaking – still alive, and serves to some extent as a farewell party, in respect of Hilda's determination to 'take [Edwin] away' to Ladderedge Hall in 'the country'[2] and Edwin's subsequent sale of their house to Manna Höst. Whilst unquestionably connected to the Clayhanger trilogy – in a letter to Pinker dated 28 July 1911, Bennett concedes that this novel will chronicle the 'history of the son of Hilda Lessways'[3] – Bennett emphasises that *The Roll-Call* is decidedly separate from the Clayhanger series. In his journals and letters, Bennett persistently referred to it as his 'London novel' and in a letter to Pinker, insists on 'the fact […] that *The Roll-Call* is not a Clayhanger novel. It is not a Five Towns novel. It is wholly a London and Paris novel […] utterly complete in itself. And to argue that it is not so because the adult hero was a child, and of merely episodic interest, in the Clayhanger series, is, to say the least, disingenuous'.[4] *The Roll-Call*'s misplacement as a sequel underpins one of the ways in which it has been repeatedly misinterpreted, fuelling the criticism that it fails

[1] Lafourcade, *A Study*, p. 145.
[2] Bennett, *These Twain*, p. 424.
[3] Bennett, letter to Pinker dated 28 July 1911, in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 159.
[4] Bennett, letter to Pinker dated 9 June 1917, in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 253.

to provide ‘a fitting ending to the *Clayhanger* trilogy’ and that ‘the four books together don’t feel like a quartet’.[5]

In the second instance, *The Roll-Call*’s protagonist illustrates the development in Bennett’s leading London characters. Whereas the metropolitan novels in the preceding chapter incorporated successful – or at the very least, aspiring – artistic protagonists (writers and painters), George is an architect. Architecture is a multifaceted profession, falling, in Margaret Drabble’s words, ‘halfway between the world of the arts and the world of business’.[6] Whilst Major Tumulty refers to George as a ‘student of bricks and mortar’,[7] architecture, as Drabble notes, is simultaneously ‘a profession which involves creativity, style [and] imagination’.[8] This amalgamation of industry and artistry is reflected in the text. On the one hand, there is equal insight into George’s examinations, his desire to secure both fame and fortune in the face of ‘open competitions’, and his ‘struggles with committees and with contractors’.[9] On the other, there are reflective intermissions of artistic appreciation (for example, George’s view of the new Roman Catholic Cathedral at Westminster as a ‘masterpiece’),[10] and lamentation at the fate of architects as the neglected, or ‘forgotten’, artists:

> few, while ignorantly admiring the monument, would give a thought to the artist. Books were eternally signed, and pictures, and sculpture. But the architect was forgotten.[11]

[5] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 226.
[6] Ibid., p. 75.
[7] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 392.
[8] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 75.
[9] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 54.
[10] Ibid., p. 45.
[11] Ibid., pp. 336-7.

Bennett certainly regarded architecture as an important branch of the Arts: his journals are peppered with his observations on and reactions to the architecture of various countries – he regards the unfinished Roman Catholic Cathedral in Victoria Street, for example, as 'a work of great and monumental art'[12] – and one of his closest friends for a great many years was the architect E. A. Rickards, whom he considered to be a 'great artist'.[13] By utilising an artistic protagonist with ambitious professional and social aspirations, and one which facilitates experiences of the Chelsea art scene in addition to the bourgeois, leisured classes, *The Roll-Call* facilitates a shift in Bennett's focus from a more individualistic ethos, to one which explores social issues on a much wider scale, such as community- or class-based thinking (in particular, condescension towards the lower classes and the increasing shallowness of relationships), and the responsibility of British citizens to their country in the midst of war.

Finally, the novel is in two parts and as such, facilitates both a chronographic and thematic transition. 'Part I' – consisting of nine chapters – begins in 'early July, 1901'[14] and recounts the first four years of George's career and his experiences following his introduction to and integration in various social scenes and circles in London. This part is most closely related to the novels of the preceding chapter – most significantly, With regard to the lives of the struggling artists whom George encounters in Chelsea. 'Part II' is considerably shorter – consisting of just three chapters – and is markedly different. It is set a decade later – in 1914. George has married Lois Ingram, who is now pregnant with their third child, and they are living in a house which George has owned 'for ten years' in Elm Park Road.[15] In the penultimate chapter (chapter XI: 'The Roll-Call') George decides to join the army, and in the

[12] In a journal entry dated 'Wednesday, May 22nd' 1901, Bennett records his visit to the unfinished Roman Catholic Cathedral in Victoria Street which was designed by Bentley – 'a magnificent artist' who makes an appearance in *The Roll-Call* – and writes that he '[finds] it distinguished, impressive, a work of great and monumental art' (*Journals, Vol. I*, pp. 111-2).
[13] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, December 28th' 1909, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 346.
[14] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 9.
[15] Ibid., p. 300.

final chapter, becomes part of 'the machine'.[16] The second part serves to illustrate Bennett's expansion from individual concerns, to those of national and international interest.

The plot of *The Roll-Call* underwent substantial modification prior to publication. In a synopsis Bennett submitted to Doran via Pinker in August 1916, George achieves professional success as an architect and secures personal happiness by leaving his wife Lois and returning to Marguerite. In the published novel, George remains married to Lois, eventually joining the army, and Marguerite is happily married to Mr. Prince. Kingley Roby interprets Bennett's decision to 'abandon his [original] scheme' as a result of his 'commercial instincts' which 'warned him that public sentiment would be against a man who walked out on his responsibilities'.[17] Roby also asserts that Bennett's 'ill health, exhaustion, and the distractions of his crumbling marriage and of his social life' meant that he was 'unable to find either material or inspiration to support his effort' and thus 'abandoned all hope of writing a really first-class novel and [gave] himself the task of grinding out a book with some hope of commercial success'.[18] Many critics have adopted a similar stance With regard to the novel, emphasising either personal difficulties, which were deemed to have had a detrimental effect on Bennett's creative output,[19] or by labelling the book a 'sell-out',[20] or a 'rent-paying novel which increased [Bennett's] fame and diminished his reputation'.[21] Whilst it cannot be denied that the period during which Bennett composed *The Roll-Call* was one of both personal and global disruption, I do not believe that the novel is the result of aborted or unattainable ambition. Roby's interpretation of the length of time which elapsed between

[16] Ibid., p. 382.
[17] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 189.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Dudley Barker, for example, cites Bennett's moribund marriage as 'perhaps the most important part' 'of the reason for the failure of Bennett's literary impetus' (Barker, *Writer by Trade*, p. 190).
[20] Margaret Drabble affirms that 'there is a curious feeling of sell-out about the whole story' (Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 226).
[21] Pound, *A Biography*, p. 297.

Bennett's conception of the novel (Autumn 1910)[22] and the start of composition (16 October 1916), as signifying a culmination of problems which resulted in the abandonment of his original, 'serious' design,[23] neglects to acknowledge that when writing to Rickards of his idea for a book in 1910, Bennett had yet to publish *Hilda Lessways* (1911) or *These Twain* (1916), had yet to fully realise his intention of not 'sticking exclusively to the Five Towns',[24] and had yet to become absorbed by the outbreak of World War I and the myriad of commitments which arose as a result of it. I contend that Bennet's decision to redesign the novel's plot was a conscious choice – one which was influenced by a wider social consciousness. The transitional elements outlined above did not occur in isolation – they are influenced by Bennett's authorial evolution.

In this section of the chapter, I will examine Bennett's anxieties concerning what he perceived as the growing superficiality and materiality of society – similar to those which H. G. Wells discloses in *Tono-Bungay* (1909) – and the difficulties in seeing beyond carefully constructed social façades – a central preoccupation of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915). In the chapter's second section (*The Roll-Call* 'Part II'), I will examine Bennett's views on war; namely, the personal and national obligations which drive a man to enlist, and the difficulty in choosing to serve one's country at the expense of protecting and providing for one's family.

George is, on the whole, an unlikeable character. He is an egotist and self-centred: 'in the very centre […] occupying nearly the whole of [his mind], was the vast thought, the obsession, of his own potential power and its fulfilment'; 'for him, the entire created universe

[22] In a letter to Rickards, Bennett acknowledges Rickards' inspiration for the character of George Edwin Cannon, and his intention to make this character the 'hero' of his 'fourth book': 'it is a pity that, having criticised it, you can't now read it. I mean for your sake. Because you make your first appearance in the last part of it, as an infant, and you may recognise one or two things. You will appear in the following two novels of the 'trilogy' (as the publishers and critics love to call it) and then you will be the hero of the fourth book, about London. You can't possibly understand yourself unless you begin at the beginning' (Bennett, fragment of a letter to Rickards dated Autumn 1910, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 266).
[23] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 189.
[24] Bennett, letter to Garnett dated 23 November 1908, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 233.

was the means to his end'.[25] Whilst George would have us believe that his ambition is to be 'a great architect' (and to be publicly recognized as such), and that the resultant wealth would merely represent a pleasant 'by-product' of this success, the emotion which we see George experience most often is that of envy and jealousy originating from the desire for other people's wealth. When walking through Tite Street with Marguerite after revealing to her that her father has discovered and confronted him about their secret engagement, George spies 'a crimson carpet stretched across the pavement to the gutter' leading to a 'highly illuminated house'.[26] George not only 'hates' the carpet for the simple fact that 'it was not his carpet', but is driven to 'stamp' on it, and to irrationally '[swear] to himself to possess that very carpet or its indistinguishable brother'.[27] When George is returning home during a Christmas holiday, his mother collects him from Axe Station in a motor-car. George is 'thunder-struck' that his mother and step-father have 'conspired to buy a motor-car in secret from him' and his resultant 'jealousy' prompts the decision to 'punish' his 'plotting' parents by demanding – both 'discontentedly and menacingly' – that they 'give [him] a decent motor-bike'.[28] Despite being in receipt of substantial financial support from his step-father, when George decides to leave the Orgreaves' and to take a room at Mr. Haim's in Chelsea, he moves 'without asking or even informing his parents', and expects his funds to be maintained regardless: in his next letter home 'he would no doubt inform them, casually, of what he meant to do or actually had done, and if objections followed he would honestly resent them'.[29] Similarly, when learning 'from various signs that his stepfather was steadily and rapidly growing richer', 'George [acts] accordingly, not only in the matter of the motor-bicycle, but in other matters'.[30] These 'other matters' no doubt apply to clothes, as George

[25] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 16.
[26] Ibid., p. 129.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., p. 138.
[29] Ibid., p. 16.
[30] Ibid., p. 138.

takes great care in 'imitating' 'the elegant figures […] he had observed airing themselves round about Bond Street' with the desire that 'most people' should then 'class' him 'as a callow pleasure-seeking person in the act of seeking pleasure'.[31] In addition to possessions, George is equally jealous of other people's capabilities. At a dinner hosted by Miss Irene Wheeler at her ostentatiously expensive London flat, George finds himself 'absurdly envious of those who could speak two languages' (part of the conversation had been in French) and feels 'intensely' 'humiliated' as a consequence.[32] George's envy of M. Defourcambault differs from the jealousy he experiences as a consequence of greed and the intense desire for material gain. In this instance, George's resentment – and consequential private 'humiliation' – originates in a sense of self-inadequacy.

Whilst Bennett's language is largely tongue-in-cheek when highlighting the 'absurdity' of George's childish behaviour, George serves to emphasise Bennett's disapproval of the increasing reverence of material possessions. Our distaste at having an obnoxious man-child as our protagonist lays the foundation for Bennett's critique of the increasingly superficial upper-middle and leisured classes. George is not only imitating the outward appearances of 'callow pleasure-seeking person[s]' by wearing the appropriate clothes and occupying the appropriate environments, he is also imitating their values. When discussing the competition for 'the great municipal building in the north' with Lois Ingram, 'the luxury by which he was surrounded whipped his ambition till it writhed'.[33] He decides to enter, driven by the notion that he 'requires luxury' and 'a position enabling him to meet anybody and everybody on equal terms'.[34] The irony here, of course, is that George is becoming embedded within a societal group which will not want to associate with just 'anybody'. The 'equal terms' relate to George's desire to align himself with the hereditarily

[31] Ibid., p. 87.
[32] Ibid., p. 217.
[33] Ibid., pp. 233, 234.
[34] Ibid., p. 227.

wealthy, men like M. Defourcambault, who are perceived to have 'an immense and unfair advantage' over George – namely, powerful and wealthy 'forbears', a 'father, mother, and grandfather [who] were all in the middle of things' and thus, provided a 'worthy' 'heritage'.[35] A 'black' 'mood' descends on George when comparing himself to M. Defourcambault, and his fear that he 'would always have to stand alone, […] to fight for all he wanted' and, when it comes down to it, 'would always be a nobody',[36] does little to evoke our sympathy. We simply cannot take George's anxieties seriously as we are fully aware of the fact that he uses people and as such, has never had to 'fight' for anything. This portion of the narrative could be interpreted as a straightforward mockery of a parvenu, or indeed, as criticism of a class system which privileges people in receipt of a congenital advantage, whilst cultivating jealousy and covetousness in those who are not. I believe that it can be taken further. In this chapter, I will examine Bennett's condemnation of the sacrifice of individuality in order to emulate a perceived superiority. This will ultimately lead to Bennett's interest in the effects of mass consumerism on British culture, and his critique of state discrepancies which are dependent on class (for example, the insufficient provision of a basic education for the lower and lower-middle classes).

George is a terrible snob and his likes and dislikes are heavily influenced by the opinions and tastes of the people that he wishes to emulate. For example, when at the promenades with Marguerite, George's enjoyment of the music is not decided by what he hears, but rather, by the fashionability of the composer:

> He listened, ready to put himself into the mood of admiration if it was the Glazounov item. Was it Glazounov? He could not be certain. It sounded fine. Surely it sounded

[35] Ibid., p. 219.
[36] Ibid.

> Russian. Then he had a glimpse of a programme held by a man standing near, and he peered at it. 'No. 4. Elgar – Sea-Pictures.' No. 5 was the Glazounov.
>
> 'It's only the Elgar,' he said, with careless condescension, perceiving at once, by the mere virtue of a label, that the music was not fine and not Russian.[37]

Through the narrator's artful understatements and dry comments, Bennett cultivates ambiguity and undercuts George, exposing his ignorance and self-delusion. Whilst it is possible to attribute George's pretentiousness to his age and the desire to comply with elite expectations ('he really loved music, but he happened to be at that age […] at which the judgment depends almost completely on extraneous suggestion'),[38] Bennett is also alluding to cultural ignorance – the willingness to be led, at the expense of formulating a personal opinion. George is to be one of those 'people' who will 'never emerge' from this restrictive thinking, allowing their opinions to be decided 'by the mere virtue of a label'.[39] George's decision to re-locate to Chelsea is wholly influenced by a 'few words' from Mr. Enwright which 'sufficed to turn Chelsea into Elysium, Paradise',[40] and it is Lois who has the final (and arguably the only) say in where she and George are to live. Bennett's account of the latter serves to emphasise the absurdity in basing decisions upon 'labels':

> George had had the house for ten years […]. [It was a]n ugly house, utterly without architectural merit! A strange house for an architect to inhabit! George […] had never liked it. Before his marriage he had discovered a magnificent house in Fitzroy Square, a domestic masterpiece of the Adams period, exquisitely designed without and within, huge rooms and many rooms, lovely ceilings […]; a house appreciably

[37] Ibid., pp. 56-7.
[38] Ibid., p. 57.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., p. 17.

> nearer to the centre than the one in Elm Park Road, and with a lower rental. George would have taken the house, had not Lois pointed out to him its fatal disadvantage, which had escaped him, namely, that people did not live in Fitzroy Square.[41]

The obvious advantages of the house in Fitzroy Square contrast starkly with the description of the 'small' and 'narrow' house ('a miracle of compression!') in Elm Park Road. The fact that George discovers his preferred abode 'before his marriage', underpins the sacrifices that he has made – and will continue to make – in order to please his bourgeois wife. These sacrifices are to come at a price, and the price is George's soul. He forgoes the 'forged-iron stair-rail out of Paradise', in favour of a playhouse, in which 'space was employed in complying with custom, in imitating the disposition of larger houses, and in persuading the tenant that he was as good as his betters'.[42] The irony is palpable; despite George's aversion to the house in Elm Park Road, the house in Elm Park Road is the perfect house for George as it is the architectural equivalent of his carefully constructed persona.

The exact moment in which George relinquishes his individuality, occurs when he joins Lucas, Lois and Laurencine for a performance of the musical comedy 'The Gay Spark'. George despises the show, finding the music and the comedy's themes exasperatingly repetitive:

> George listened in vain for an original tune, even for a tune of which he could not fortell the end from the beginning […]. The disdainful, lethargic chorus was the same; the same trio of delicious wantons fondled […] the same red-nosed comedian, who was still in the same state of inebriety, and the gay spark flitted roysteringly

[41] Ibid., p. 300.
[42] Ibid., p. 299.

> through the same evolutions, in pursuit of the same simple ideals. The jocularity pivoted unendingly on the same twin centres of alcohol and concupiscence.[43]

This sense of repetition – the word 'same' occurs seven times in this extract alone – is amplified when we recall Lucas's affirmation that the show is occurring simultaneously in 'St. Petersburg, Berlin, Paris, Brussels, and […] Rome'.[44] George's 'distress' does not originate from the topic ('a ribald sexual display'), but rather from the delivery: 'the grossness, the poorness, the cheapness, the dullness, and the uninventive monotony of the interminable entertainment'.[45] He feels 'suffocated by tedium' and as he 'yawns' ('he could not help yawning') 'he yawns his soul away'.[46] Mass culture is diminishing the importance of originality and thus, the individual, and greater commercial choice is encouraging compliance and complaisance. George's soul signifies his individuality and by feigning 'adoration' for a show that he clearly abhors, George is choosing to respond in accordance with the reactions of the people around him, at the expense of expressing an authentic (and as such, individual or original) opinion. George has an almost identical experience when visiting the Empire music-hall in place of the 'grand ballad concert' held in celebration of the opening of the new Town hall which he designed:

> The same stars that he could see in London appeared on the gigantic stage in the same songs and monologues […]. And all proceeded with inexorable exactitude according to time-table. And in scores and scores of similar Empires, Hippodromes, Alhambras, and Pavilions throughout the provinces, similar entertainments were proceeding with the same exactitude […]. George laughed with the best at the inventive drollery of

[43] Ibid., p. 256.
[44] Ibid., p. 254.
[45] Ibid., p. 257.
[46] Ibid.

> the knock-about comedians […]. But there were items in the Empire programme that were […] awful in their tedium […] – moments when George could not bear to look over the footlights. And these items were applauded in ecstasy by the enchanted audience.[47]

Bennett writes that the multiple, simultaneous performances are 'another example of the huge standardization of life'.[48] This phrase, when coupled with George's repression of his individuality (the loss of his soul), recalls Andrzej Gąsiorek's analysis of Ford Maddox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915). Gąsiorek writes that in Ford's novel, the 'exposure of the repression required to maintain the image of perfection is part of its wider anxiety about social standardization and the extirpation of individualism'.[49] A symptom of this 'standardisation' and consequential loss of individuality, is an increase in superficiality. As such, a 'key preoccupation' in *The Good Soldier* is 'the difficulty of seeing through apparently convincing social appearances'.[50]

The narrator of *The Good Soldier* is John Dowell, a 'leisured American'[51] who strives to describe his and his wife Florence's relationship – and the history thereof – with Captain Edward Ashburnham and his wife, Leonora. Despite 'knowing' the Ashburnhams 'for nine seasons of the town of Nauheim', it fast becomes apparent that Dowell's assumed 'extreme intimacy', amounts in reality, to very little intimate knowledge: 'my wife and I knew Captain and Mrs. Ashburnham as well as it was possible to know anybody, and yet, in another sense, we knew nothing at all about them'.[52] The Dowell and Ashburnham relationship originates from the fact that both couples are socially compatible. The Ashburnhams are part of 'the

[47] Ibid., p. 335.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Gąsiorek, 'Class Positions', pp. 181-2.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 7.
[52] Ibid.

society of the nicer English',[53] and 'the given proposition was, that we [both the Dowells and the Ashburnhams] were all "good people"'.[54] As such:

> We took for granted that we all liked beef underdone but not too underdone; that both men preferred a good liqueur brandy after lunch; that both women drank a very light Rhine wine qualified with Fachingen water – that sort of thing. It was also taken for granted that we were both sufficiently well off to afford anything that we could reasonably want in the way of amusements fitting to our station – that we could take motor cars and carriages by the day; that we could give each other dinners and dine our friends and we could indulge if we liked in economy.[55]

This performance of insouciance, in addition to the concept of accelerated intimacy built exclusively on assumed similitude, is present in *The Roll-Call*, most noticeably, in the revelation expressed to George that he was 'always intended' to marry Lois, and our understanding that if this objective was indeed, inexorable and as such, independent of actual interaction, it would have been based solely on social compatibility. 'The difficulty in seeing through apparently convincing social appearances'[56] is emulated in Mr. Ingram's shock upon learning the history of Irene Wheeler – namely, the source of her money, and the reasoning behind her suicide. Despite knowing Irene for nineteen years, Mr. Ingram had 'not the slightest suspicion' that Irene's lifestyle was being funded not by a generous uncle who had adopted her,[57] but rather, by a married man of fifty-five who lived in America and periodically visited her in 'Paris or London every year'.[58] Mr. Ingram is equally ignorant of

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., p. 42.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 279.
[58] Ibid., p. 277.

the fact that Irene had fallen 'very deeply in love' with M. Defourcambault and had killed herself upon receiving a letter from him, indicating that a relationship would be impossible: 'on the pillow was a letter from this man Defourcambault – well, saying good-bye to her'.[59] Mr. Ingram did not even know Irene's real name; the only knowledge he had which proved to be true was that Irene had wealthy relatives in Indianapolis: 'It was true that they had money, as Irene said; but as for anything else … ! The real name was not Wheeler'.[60]

As stated at the start of this study, *The Roll-Call* is a transitional novel, and I would argue that the exploration of the social anxieties outlined above originated in the evolution of Bennett's growing social consciousness and social conscience. Whilst in Brighton during the first 'People vs. Peers' election (January 1910), Bennett writes:

> I walked with joy to and fro on this unequalled promenade. And yet, at this election time, when all wealth and all snobbery is leagued together against the poor, I could spit in the face of arrogant and unmerciful Brighton, sporting its damned Tory colours.
>
> I heard the door-keeper of this hotel politely expostulating with a guest: 'Surely, Mr. – , you don't mean to say you're anything but a conservative!' Miserable parrot. After reading some pessimistic forecasts of the election I was really quite depressed at tea-time.[61]

The January 1910 general election was held between 15 January and 10 February and occurred in the midst of a constitutional crisis caused by the rejection of Lloyd George's 'people's budget' in November 1909 by the House of Lords. The 'people's budget' was a

[59] Ibid., p. 279.
[60] Ibid., p. 278.
[61] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, January 11th' 1910, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 353.

proposal by the Liberal government which sought to introduce taxes on the land and high incomes of Britain's wealthy, in order to fund new social welfare programmes. Lloyd George argued that the 'people's budget' was a 'war Budget': a means of 'raising money to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness'.[62] Bennett attempted to remain detached and to view the forthcoming election simply, as an inescapable fact: he continues in his 11 January entry that Brighton, the 'symbol of a system that is built on the grinding of the faces of the poor', 'would take a lot of demolishing' and that he 'couldn't expect to overset it with a single manifesto and a single election, or with fifty. So […] even if the elections are lost, or are not won, [he doesn't] care'. Bennett's language, however, betrays a subconscious preoccupation with the consequences of losing ('not winning'), and just ten days after his attempt to 'not care', writes that 'merely to hear the opposite side discussing politics and agreeing with one another makes me furious and also coldly self-contemptuous. No doubt the elections are genuinely on my nerves. Depressed about them; preoccupied by them. […] And I suppose that no politics, however idiotic, can make a great difference to the situation of middling, comfortable persons like me. Yet I continue to worry because the fools won't vote right, and I lie awake at night thinking about their foolishness'.[63] The 'foolishness' Bennett decries With regard to politics is akin to the imprudently complaisant attitude toward mass culture Bennett critiques in *The Roll-Call*. In both instances, social groups are 'parroting'[64] what they believe to be universally accepted verities, at the expense of formulating personal opinions, which Bennett holds to be crucial for moral and social responsibility.

As Bennett's socialist sympathies continued to increase, so did his exasperation at class-based contempt, as a journal entry from November 1913 illustrates:

[62] Lloyd George in Fraser, *Evolution of the British Welfare State*, pp. 145-6.
[63] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Friday, January 21st' 1910, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 254.
[64] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, January 11th' 1910, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 353.

> Walking last night for exercise along the Station Road (6.30p.m.) I saw the light of Clacton (not the lights – the light) and of Frinton, over the brows; a reflection in the sky … Idea of a desolate coast (relatively) with the human settlements rather precariously here and there upon it. Darkness everywhere and just those lights on the clouds from below. Sense of the adventure of living on the earth at all; and of the essential similarity of all human existences. Idiocy of loathing or scorning a different kind of existence from your own.[65]

This 'idiocy' is manifest in George. When voicing his desire to take lodgings in Chelsea, George remembers that Mr. Haim – 'the factotum'[66] – lives in Chelsea and so asks his address. When Mr. Haim reveals that he in fact owns his property, George is astounded: 'he saw a new and unsuspected Mr. Haim'.[67] The revelation that Mr. Haim is 'a property-owner [and] a tax-payer' elevates him from something almost inhuman (a 'shuffling, rather shabby, ceremonious familiar'), to that of a person ('a human being'). George's increased 'curiosity' at this 'living phenomenon' standing before him is patronising in the extreme, and his new-found recognition of Mr. Haim as a fellow human is thoroughly obnoxious. Our distaste at George's attitude is exacerbated by the fact that Mr. Haim is 'captivated by George's youthful charm', responding to his questions 'confidentially and benignantly', and the revelation of George's relief at upholding 'the office tradition of treating Mr. Haim with a respect not usually accorded to factotums'.[68] Bennett's 'profound disillusion[ment] with what he might have called the power of decency in human affairs'[69] culminated not only in an

[65] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Friday, November 21st' 1913, in *Journals, Vol. II*, pp. 73-4.
[66] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 9.
[67] Ibid., p. 12.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Swinnerton, *An Autobiography*, p. 147.

anticipation of a class war, but in a staunch belief that unattended national unrest would impact the resolution of international conflict:

> The impulse of civilised nations is to-day towards the abolition of war as being the greatest world-evil. But no nation whose citizens do not foster in themselves, in the conduct of their private affairs, the ideals of justice and goodwill can possibly hope to work effectively for the abolition of war. The same is to be said of class-war. To practice individual injustice and ill-will is to make inevitable the triumphs of national and international injustice and ill-will. Righteousness begins at home. If it has not begun at home, it cannot prosper in the chancelleries, or in the conference-rooms of capital and labour'.[70]

The preceding chapter argued that Bennett's pre-War novels conveyed the importance of cultivating and preserving the individual self, so to secure happiness and moral and social purpose. Here in *The Roll-Call*, Bennett is emphasising the necessity of taking responsibility as an individual, so to contribute to the cultivation of social and, in turn, national stability. The readiness to accept 'the grossness, the poorness, the cheapness, the dullness, and the uninventive monotony' of commercial entertainment,[71] is spiritually damaging because it encourages a mindset which is open to 'the defects of the present epoch, which […] sins by luxury and self-indulgence and arrogance',[72] and is closed to individual (or independent) thought, and thus the improvement of social ethics.

In line with his assertion that Bennett abandons his original conception of the novel so to comply with 'public […] demand', Roby postulates that George 'escapes' his unhappy

[70] Bennett, *The Religious Interregnum*, pp. 29-30.
[71] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 257.
[72] Bennett, *The Religious Interregnum*, p. 30.

marriage to Lois not by returning to Marguerite (as in the original synopsis), but 'by way of the army'.[73] I would contend that whilst George does indeed utilise his enrolment as an 'escape', the motivation behind his desire to answer 'the roll-call' of which he dreams is fuelled by a need to extricate himself from a society that he has become thoroughly disillusioned by.

[73] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 189.

5. *The Roll-Call* (1919) "Part II"

Citing Bennett's prefatorial note to *The Roll-Call* which states that the novel 'is the first of the author's war-novels' (the second being *The Pretty Lady* and the third *Lord Raingo*), Lucas states his 'difficulty' in understanding 'why Bennett should have used the phrase ["war-novel"] at all'. In a similar vein to Roby, Lucas argues that Bennett's initial conception of *The Roll-Call* – which was 'as early as 1910' – and his persistent referring to it as his 'London novel' (deciding on a title only when it was nearly complete) 'suggest that Bennett was still thinking along lines he had laid down six years earlier and that the later description of it as a "war-novel" is something of an afterthought'.[1] Lucas supports this last assertion by stating that 'the substance of the novel isn't about war at all, though it is true that the last pages indulge some mild propaganda about the glory of fighting'.[2] Lucas is not alone in denigrating the part of the novel which addresses the war. Buitenhuis simply states that '*The Roll-Call* [has] little to do with the war'[3] and, as is noted in the previous section of this chapter, Roby writes that George's enlistment and initial experiences once 'in the machine', were decided by Bennett's 'commercial instincts' – which drove him to produce 'a popular novel […] suited to the hour' – and his decision to 'abandon' his original, more 'serious' work:

> by introducing the war, which is never more than a peripheral interest in the book and a shaky machine for getting George out of his marital dilemma, Bennett divided the centre of interest in the novel and provided himself with a weak alternative to having George face up to and deal with the problem of his unhappy marriage.[4]

[1] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 176.
[2] Ibid., p. 177.
[3] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 124.
[4] Roby, *A Writer at War*, pp. 188-207.

In contrast to Roby's interpretation, Drabble writes that the 'motives' behind George's decision to enlist are the 'the pressure of history' and 'see[ing] his brother-in-law in uniform': '[George] doesn't want to be less impressive than a man he doesn't really respect' and these 'convincing' though 'dispiriting' factors contribute to 'a curious feeling of sell-out about the whole story'.[5]

The notion that Bennett produced material 'suited to the hour', and had his protagonist meet expectations dictated by 'the pressure of history', illustrates yet another example of *The Roll-Call* being misunderstood and/or misrepresented.[6] A reading of the novel as mere propaganda contradicts both Bennett's and George's attitudes towards the War and negates the central focus of the second part of the novel. In this section, I shall argue that *The Roll-Call* is without question a 'war-novel' as it provides a substantiation of three of Bennett's chief anxieties about the war: the lack of reliable information which is readily available for the populace; the inadequacy of soldiers' pay and the subsequent lack of financial support for soldiers' dependants; and Bennett's fears that social problems will feed into and ultimately prevent the swift resolution of the current international conflict. In conjunction with this final point, I shall also incorporate Bennett's 'fear of revolution or serious Social uproar after the war'.[7]

George is largely uninterested in politics and shows little willingness to better educate himself With regard to England's national and international affairs. In 'Part I' we learn that he is 'slightly worried concerning the '[British] Mediterranean Fleet. He knew nothing about

[5] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 225.
[6] One of the most startling of these misinterpretations is recorded in a letter from Bennett to Pinker dated 15 January 1919, in which Bennett 'object[ed] strongly' to various aspects of Hutchinson's copies of *The Roll-Call*, in particular, 'the description of the book inside the jacket' which implies that the book is a romance novel. Bennett writes: '"Can a man love two women is the theme of this book," is perfectly ridiculous and extremely misleading. Really Hutchinsons ought to have more sense than to make fools of themselves and of me in this style' (Bennett, *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 271).
[7] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Monday, August 10th' 1914, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 98.

it, but as a good citizen he suspected in idle moments, like a number of other good citizens, that all was not quite well with the Mediterranean Fleet'.[8] Public concern could be attributed to the Royal Navy's transformation which occurred between 1901 and 1913, during which it changed from 'an imperial policeman' – whose primary interests as of 1900, were 'to protect and defend the Empire', 'to patrol and protect the trade routes', and 'to show a British naval presence in areas of concern, such as the Mediterranean' – to that of a 'battle fleet designed and prepared for conflict in the North Sea'.[9] Anxiety may also have been intensified by Admiral John Fisher (who became commander of the British Mediterranean Fleet in 1899) who was determined to improve torpedo performance and in February 1901, ordered an annual 6,000-yard practice (four times its previous range).[10] From the 1880s, public discussion of naval issues increased in Britain,[11] and, as stated by Norman Friedman, 'the push for increased range was widely reported'. In 1901, Brassey's naval annual, for example, 'reported on trials conducted the previous year in the Channel and in the Mediterranean at previously unheard of ranges between 3,000 and 7,000 yards'.[12] Despite the increase in public awareness of naval issues and the availability of reports, George remains ignorant of the navy's transformation and its growing focus on cultivating a more effective means of attack. The admission that George does not actually know *why* he feels 'slightly worried' – and has no desire to understand the source of the emotion which he has adopted as he only allows it to occupy his thoughts at 'idle moments'– reveals the way in which Bennett is satirising a complacent, wilfully ignorant public, and emphasising the responsibility of the

[8] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 15.
[9] Watson, 'The Evolution of British Naval Deployment 1900-1914'. In order to best fulfil this role, the Royal Navy was divided into various topographical stations including the East Indies Station, the China Station, the Australian Station, the Africa Station, the America and West Indies Station and the Pacific Station. The Mediterranean was the only station to be described as a 'Fleet'. Prior to 1840, the Royal Navy had 'little or no peer rival or competition'; however, 'the rise of France as a potential rival from 1840 through to the Crimean War', in addition to 'concern about Russia in the 1880s' and 'further concern about rivals with the rise of the German navy in the 1900s', is thought to have prompted the British Navy's transformation (ibid.).
[10] Friedman, 'The Gunnery Problem', p. 22.
[11] Black, 'The Victorian Maritime Empire', p. 183.
[12] Ibid.

individual truly 'good citizen' to take an active interest in England's affairs. Immediately after acknowledging his 'slight worry' concerning the Mediterranean Fleet, George also admits to knowing 'nothing' about the Boer War – indeed, 'he had had only begun to be interested in the War within the last six months and already he was sick of it' – and is willingly distracted by other, more frivolous thoughts, such as 'the victory of the brothers Doherty over the American lawn-tennis champions in the Gentlemen's Doubles at Wimbledon':[13]

> George had most painfully feared that the Americans would conquer [in the Gentleman's Doubles at Wimbledon], and their overthrowing by the twin brothers indicated to George, who took himself for a serious student of affairs, that Britain was continuing to exist, and that the new national self-depreciative, yearning for efficiency might possibly be rather absurd after all.[14]

George's wilful ignorance disqualifies him as a knowledgeable man of the world and it is underpinned by the absurdity of using sporting success, as opposed to international relations, as the basis for his sense of national stability. The way in which conventional language concerning war is being bathetically applied to the everyday ('already he was sick of it', 'the Americans would conquer [Wimbledon]') demonstrates the way in which superficiality is impeding a 'serious' understanding 'of affairs'.

In 'Part II' of the novel, George's knowledge of the outbreak of the European War is only marginally less vague – 'he knew almost nought of the progress of the fighting […] he could not make the effort necessary to acquire a scientific conception of the western

[13] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 15.
[14] Ibid., p. 16.

campaign – not to mention the eastern, as to which his ignorance was nearly perfect'[15] – and is supplemented by the regurgitation of information which he has picked up from his step-father: yet another example of George's decision to mimic, as opposed to self-educate and maintain his originality. In this instance, however, Bennett takes care to emphasise that, in regards to the European War, George's lack of knowledge is not entirely his own fault; Bennett writes: 'he knew almost naught of the progress of the fighting. […] Yet he read much about the war'.[16] George's ignorance therefore, serves a dual purpose, one characterological, one political: his thoughts in 'Part I' serve to highlight the necessity of taking the initiative to self-educate in order to become a 'good citizen' and 'a serious student of affairs'; his lack of knowledge despite 'read[ing] much about the war' in 'Part II', is indicative of a wider national ignorance criticised by Bennett in both his private journals and published articles.

Whilst it is clear that George's decision to enlist is not influenced by a 'serious' interest in England's political and national affairs, neither is his joining the Army wholly decided by his 'see[ing] his brother-in-law in uniform'[17] – although George does admit that he 'could not stand' the thought that 'they would all say that he had been influenced by Lucas' uniform', 'because it would be true'.[18] Bennett stresses the social pressure exerted on his enlistment through George's dream of the roll-call. In his dream, George sees 'thousands and tens of thousands of men stood on [a] plain, which had no visible boundaries' and when he hears his name called, and neither directly responds to it or sees a construction of himself respond to it, 'trembles' as 'an awful stillness and silence followed'.[19] The boundless plain no doubt hosts what George perceives to be all of the men of England, and the 'awful stillness and silence' coupled with the sensation of being on the plain 'and yet […] not there'

[15] Ibid., p. 340.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 225.
[18] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 359.
[19] Ibid., pp. 360-1.

encapsulates his suspected isolation, should he not comply with the behaviour of all of the other men who, upon hearing their name ('the summons'), '[step] briskly from the crowds and saluted and walked away'.[20] Lois also alludes to the element of societal expectation, when admitting that she 'couldn't have borne it if Everard had gone and [George] hadn't'.[21] When processing his decision to enlist, George 'did not trouble to marshal the reasons in favour of his joining the Army. He had only one reason: he must! He quite ignored the larger aspects of the War – the future of civilization, freedom versus slavery, right versus wrong, even the responsibilities of citizenship and the implications of patriotism. His decision was the product, not of argument, but of feeling'.[22] I would contend that this 'feeling' is the desire to escape.

Both the private and professional burdens which George has accrued through his pursuit of what he deems to be success have taken their toll. He is emotionally and spiritually drained: 'the mere human weight of the household oppressed him terribly'; he felt like 'Atlas supporting a vast world' and should he choose to 'shirk the burden, not a world but an entire universe would crumble'.[23] Overwhelmed by responsibility, George feels desperately alone ('all was upon his shoulders and upon nobody else's') and trapped by the life which he has fashioned for himself: 'he was bound, he was a prisoner, he had no choice'.[24] Enlistment provides George with a much longed-for 'choice' and consequential liberation. Once he is in uniform and having begun his official duties, George finds that 'the illusion of home' becomes 'very faint' and 'the various professional and family matters which in his haste he had left unsettled […] diminish[ed] hourly in their apparent importance';[25] he finds himself to

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., p. 366.
[22] Ibid., p. 362.
[23] Ibid., p. 359.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., p. 393.

be ‘astoundingly happy. […] He simply could not comprehend his state of bliss’.[26] In listing the potential sources for George’s joy, Bennett writes that it could ‘perhaps’ be attributed to ‘the far, thin sound of bugles […], or the fresh air blowing in through the broken pane of the hut, or the slanting sunlight’ – all of which could be labelled, quite fairly, instances of ‘mild propaganda’[27] – but it is the final hypothesis, an unmitigated sensation of relief, which we ‘feel’ to be the primary reason for George’s elation: ‘the feeling that he had no responsibility and nothing to do but blindly obey orders’.[28] This is supported by the fact that when accompanying Major Tumulty in buying and collecting stores and equipment in ‘a scarlet London-General motor-bus’, George ‘[feels] like a parcel; he had no choice of movement, no responsibility, no knowledge’ and ‘the mentality of a parcel was not disagreeable to him’.[29] George has surrendered his self-determination and thus, all forms of responsibility. Despite his dissatisfaction with ‘the uninventive monotony’ of commercial entertainment,[30] and the social ‘defects’ which venerate ‘luxury and self-indulgence and arrogance’,[31] George has been conditioned to desire to ‘blindly’ follow orders. His happiness results from the ability to guiltlessly abandon the need for independent thought.

George’s responsibility to his family is alleviated with the knowledge that they will ‘be alright’ (survive financially whilst he is in the army), as he has ‘Edwin Clayhanger at the back of him’.[32] Thus, when Lucas affirms that that he should not let his business affairs ‘stop [him]’ from enlisting and Lois responds with hostility ‘yes, it’s all very well for you to talk like that! […] You’ve got partners to do your work for you, and you’ve got money’, the reader experiences little concern for the subsistence of George’s family. However, Lois’s

[26] Ibid., p. 397.
[27] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 177.
[28] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 397.
[29] Ibid., p. 387.
[30] Ibid., p. 257.
[31] Bennett, *The Religious Interregnum*, p. 30.
[32] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 362.

trepidation voices a concern felt – arguably, far more acutely – by less fortunate families, in which the decision to enlist would be 'risking' their family's 'immediate welfare'.[33] Whilst only a passing remark in *The Roll-Call*, Lois's comment recalls the numerous articles which Bennett dedicated to the inadequacy of soldiers' pay and the provision for their dependents. In 'Patriotism and Pay' (1 September 1914), and 'I Told You So' (11 September 1914), Bennett accentuates that in the first instance, soldiers, and in the second, their families, are underpaid; and in 'What Cabinet Ministers Ought to Say' (16 September 1914), he reveals the extent of mismanagement of the way in which the Prince of Wales's Fund was being used and his dismay upon discovering that the Fund, 'which was instituted to relieve the distresses of war',[34] was being used to supplement the grossly inadequate pay of 'the State's […] defenders and their dependents'.[35] Bennett concludes that an act of parliament should be passed to improve the scale of military and naval pay. This article prompted a response by William Wedgwood Benn (Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Prince of Wales' Fund). In his response to Benn's letter,[36] Bennett maintains that despite Mr. Benn's insistence that 'the scales have been raised to "an adequate level"', he does not agree with him – 'nor has [he] yet come across anybody who [does agree] with him' – and that 'the allowances are in nearly every category still grossly inadequate'.[37] Bennett concludes:

> I have no desire to hold fast to a good strategic position for mere dialectical purposes. The danger, when outside criticism encounters an official reply, is that each party will attempt to score points. I do not wish to score points, and I am sure that Mr.

[33] Bennett, *The White Feather*, p. 353.
[34] Hepburn, editorial note in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 356.
[35] Bennett, letter to the editor of the *Daily News (And Leader)* dated 23 September 1914, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 354.
[36] This letter appeared as 'The Grave Peril of the Fund: Inefficiency and Uncharitable Charity' in the *Daily News (And Leader*) on 8 October 1914.
[37] Bennett, letter to the editor of the *Daily News (And Leader*) dated 23 September 1914, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 354.

> Wedgwood Benn does not. My sole desire is that the Prince of Wales's Fund should be administered with generosity and common-sense. I admit the difficulties.[38]

The letter illustrates Bennett's prioritisation of humanitarianism – and the fear that this will be lost through petty, 'point-scoring' party politics. There is something classically liberal humanist about the appeal to common sense, and his decided effort in continuing to strive for an increase in aid for 'needy families' is not too far removed from a sense of paternalism. Though his responses are in some respects traditional rather than radical, it is clear that Bennett has abandoned his initial 'determination' to remain detached from 'the essential wrongness of everything'[39] and is leading by example in the exposure and condemnation of injustice.

The inadequate provision of a sustainable wage compounds the difficulty in deciding whether to pledge one's allegiance to one's country or to one's family. This dilemma is the central subject of Bennett's short story 'The White Feather' (1915). Upon entering his place of work (the Imperial Blank Manufacturing Company, Limited) the protagonist Cedric Rollinson, spies a copy of a notice reassuring employees that should they 'join the colours', the company will, 'so far as practicable', 'keep his place open for him, and in addition will pay to the family of the employee (should such a family be dependent upon him for support) the difference between his salary from the Company and his pay as a soldier'. The notice adds that 'this arrangement will hold good as long as the war lasts' and that the Directors 'hope for an excellent response to the […] offer'.[40] After speaking to his wife, Cedric decides to enlist and meets with 'the only director then in London', Mr. Hawker Maffick.[41] In this meeting, it is made abundantly clear that Cedric will not 'have his place kept for him',

[38] Ibid., p. 355.
[39] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, October 6th' 1908, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 299.
[40] Bennett, 'The White Feather', p. 351.
[41] Ibid., p. 353.

and that his wife will receive no portion of his salary. When alluding to the promises of the printed notice, Mr. Maffick offers further clarification that the intention to retain places applies only to 'the hands' and that 'in these times, […] it would be impossible [to make up any part of Cedric's salary] – having regard to the interests of [the] shareholders'.[42] Having now to 'choose between his country and his wife and family', Cedric chooses his family. Upon leaving the Manufactory, and having decided to keep his job and thereby preserve the wellbeing of his wife and child, he is met by 'three smartly dressed girls', one of whom 'jabs' 'a large white feather […] into his waistcoat' and adds in a 'fierce and scornful' tone: 'That's all you're short of, you Koward! [*sic*.] – Why don't you enlist?' The story ends with 'the trio' walking off, 'laughing' as the narrator adds: 'this was the latest sport of bright and pretty creatures in London'.[43] The story highlights yet another example of ignorance, and a lack of understanding With regard to individual circumstances. The girls have relinquished the responsibility attached to their actions – 'blindly' following an established social practice at the expense of considering the larger moral implications of it. Bennett's modification of the description of the women – referring to them first as 'girls' and then as 'creatures' – implies the dissolution of human empathy, and his use of 'trio' implies the universality of this short-sighted judgement: these women are not three individuals, but rather, an amalgamated harpy, myopically following the latest trend (or 'sport').

Bennett was sympathetic to the familial obligations which may prevent a man from enlisting. In a journal entry dated 29 August 1914, he admonishes 'Mrs. W's' treatment of a young man who 'offered certain sorts of help'.[44] Based on Miss Nerney's report, Bennett records the following:

[42] Ibid., pp. 355-6.
[43] Ibid., p. 356.
[44] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, August 29th' 1914, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 102.

> [Mrs. W. responded:] 'you can help in one way. You can enlist.' As parson's wife, and familiar with the village, she knew or ought to have known that the young man had a widowed mother depending on him. Mrs. W. is a very decent woman, and that she should have said such a thing shows how far the feeling of the middle-classes will carry them.[45]

Bennett was intensely aware of the class prejudice surrounding enlistment. Two days later, he records an uncomfortable conversation with 'H.'. H. insists that the 'one thing "to save this country" [was] vastly increased recruiting'. When Bennett responds that 'soldiers could be had quite easily if we would pay fairly for them', H. replies: 'Bounty? Yes, the U.S.A. paid a bounty of £20'. Bennett scorns H.'s answer, writing that it was 'the usual charitable idea, not a proper salary', and is equally dismissive of H's insistence that 'it was the middle classes that shirked, not the lower and not the upper', writing that: 'it did not seem to occur to [H.] that the whole organisation of the army was such as to keep the middle-classes out of it – save as privates'.[46] In *British Culture and the First World War*, George Robb states that 'in many ways the Army […] recreated the British class system in miniature: aristocratic generals, middle-class officers, and a working-class rank and file. The Army structured itself around class, the military authorities trusting background rather than experience in forming the officer corps in the newly raised battalions' and 'until the last year of the war, […] a rigid class-structure was in place for recruiting, training, and field service'.[47]

In 'The White Feather', Cedric relates his 'difficulties' in 'offer[ing] himself' to the War effort; in particular, the problems surrounding his rank.[48] He is 'successful', 'conscientious, […] with a considerable sense of responsibility', and 'had been well-

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Robb, 'Class, Labour, and State Control', p. 47.
[48] Bennett, 'The White Feather', p. 352.

educated, and scientifically trained for his job'.[49] 'The attitude of the War Office officials', however, 'was such as to engender the belief that they did not want officers at all, that in particular they did not want him, and that it was like his infernal impudence to fancy that he could get a commission in the British Army'.[50] He is eventually '"given to understand" that if he could obtain a recommendation from a person of consequence he might conceivably get his commission'. Thus, despite knowing 'a very well-known artist', Cedric utilises this artist's connection to a 'sporting peer' in order to obtain his recommendation; he is all too aware that 'the recommendation of the sporting peer would be more valuable at the War Office than the recommendation of ten thousand artists, professors, or philanthropists', 'having had for years an intelligent notion of what the average mentality of the War Office was'.[51]

The idea that it is not what you know, but rather, *who* you know persists in *The Roll-Call*. George secures his commission from Colonel Rannion and, despite admitting to being 'absolutely ignorant of the Army', having only ridden a horse during the 'holidays' and having 'never' hunted (and as such, we can assume that he has never handled a gun), Colonel Rannion believes that he '[will] make a good officer' and so George is made an officer in the No. 2 Battery of the Second Brigade.[52] Once in the Battery, George perceives a distinct class divergence, testifying to Robb's point but illustrating Bennett's critique of the adherence to outmoded social hierarchies in the military context. The degree of comfort afforded to the aristocratic generals is alluded to when George, accompanying Major Tumulty on his errands, purchases 'three pairs – suits' of pyjamas for Colonel Hullocher at Swan & Edgar's, and when after riding for several hours, 'a tiny embryo of a thought that it might be agreeable to ride in a car' – like 'the Almighty himself' Major-General Gramstone, who 'rushed' past in a

[49] Ibid., p. 351.
[50] Ibid., p. 352.
[51] Ibid., pp. 352-3.
[52] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, pp. 370-1.

motor-car and overtook the Battery 'in a blinding storm of dust' – manifests.[53] George is also exposed to a form of hierarchal bullying. He is 'victimized' by 'a chance impulse' of the Colonel, who sends him to search for a missing convoy. George acknowledges that 'the whole affair was fantastic; […] unreal, in addition to being silly', but Bennett prevents him from finishing the thought as to whether 'that madman the Colonel had packed him, George, off on such a wild and idiotic errand in the middle of the night, merely out of caprice'.[54] The decision is left to the reader: we must decide whether or not the Colonel is capable of such 'ruthless' 'tyranny', and we are to process the subsequent realisation that one man has a deific power over so many young lives:

> [George] had been put to school again; deprived of the right to answer back, to argue, even to think. If one set in authority said that black was white, his most sacred duty was to concur and believe. And there was no escape.[55]

The prevalence of social unrest leading up to the outbreak of War and then continuing within the ranks, fortifies Bennett's anticipation of 'serious Social uproar'. In a journal entry dated 10 August 1914, Bennett observes how nationalism (and the identification of an enemy without), is detracting from overthrowing the enemy at home (ignorance and injustice):

> At the back of the mind of everyone is a demi-semi fear lest the Germans should after all by some *coup*, contrive an invasion. And that is the only fear. The fear of revolution or serious Social uproar after the war does not trouble anybody. Few even think of it.[56]

[53] Ibid., pp. 391, 402.
[54] Ibid., p. 412.
[55] Ibid., p. 398.
[56] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Monday, August 10th' 1914, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 98.

The purpose of *The Roll-Call* is to encourage its readers to 'think', to consider the implications of the current state of affairs – at home, and not just overseas – and the readiness with which great swathes of the populace sacrifice their individuality and their principles. If there is to be any hope of a swift resolution to the European War – and the negation of a social 'war' – justice and good-will must first be practiced 'at home'.[57]

[57] Bennett, *The Religious Interregnum*, p. 29.

6. *Liberty: A Statement of the British Case* (1914)

Bennett had written twelve non-fiction books prior to the publication of *Liberty*. These were: *Journalism for Women: A Practical Guide* (1898), *Fame and Fiction: An Enquiry into Certain Popularities* (1901), *How to Become an Author: A Practical Guide* (1903), *The Truth About An Author* (1903), *The Reasonable Life: Being Hints for Men and Women* (1907),[1] *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day* (1908), *The Human Machine* (1908), *Literary Taste: How to form it, with detailed instructions for collecting a complete library of English Literature* (1909), *The Feast of St. Friend* (1911),[2] *Those United States* (1912),[3] *Paris Nights and Other Impressions of Places and People* (1913), and *The Plain Man and His Wife* (1913).[4] Bennett also had a small number of the first, second and third series of *Things That Interested Me* privately printed and released to friends in 1906, 1907 and 1908, respectively.[5] The texts are, broadly speaking, concerned with the Arts (literature, authorship, journalism), often in conjunction with self-improvement and/or self-actualisation, or as part of a vocation; or contain an eclectic mix of experiences and observations, including personal impressions of geographical regions, celebrations (Christmas), and social movements, conventions and oddities. *Liberty* marks a departure, not only because it is designed to address a matter of national and international importance (an exploration of what led to the outbreak of war, and why Britain has become and should remain, involved in it), but because it reveals Bennett's

[1] This book was revised and reprinted as *Mental Efficiency, and Other Hints to Men and Women* (1911).
[2] This book was later released as *Friendship and Happiness: A Plea for the Feast of St. Friend* (1914).
[3] The American title for this book was: *Your United States: Impressions of a First Visit* (1912).
[4] This book was reprinted as *Marriage (The Plain Man and His Wife)* (1916).
[5] *Things That Interested Me: Being Leaves From A Journal Kept By Arnold Bennett* (1906) was privately printed and numbered, as were the Second and Third Series: *Things Which Have Interested Me*: *Being Leaves From A Journal Kept By Arnold Bennett, Second Series* (1907) and *Things Which Have Interested Me, Third Series* (1908). The three books were reprinted by Chatto and Windus as *Things That Have Interested Me, Things That Have Interested Me, Second Series*, and *Things That Have Interested Me, Third Series*, in 1921, 1923 and 1926 respectively.

own thoughts on the War and his attitudes towards the role of British propaganda, and as such, presents his realisation of his responsibility towards the British reading public.

'Liberty: A Statement of the British Case' first appeared as an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* on 17 October 1914. By the end of the month, the article had been expanded and readied for book publication, and the commercial publishers Hodder and Stoughton released it onto the English book market before the end of the year. Peter Buitenhuis refers to the text as Bennett's 'first major propaganda effort' and writes that '[it] is a characteristic tract of the time, devoted largely to proving that the War was the culmination of an extended German plot'. Buitenhuis asserts that 'Bennett's major concern is to attack Germany's conception of war' and whilst he concedes that 'most of these charges against Germany are not completely false', he hastens to add that 'Bennett's strategy was to ignore all the problems that the country faced before the war, to whitewash the policies of the Allies, to blacken German acts, exaggerate her atrocities, and distort her objectives'.[6] Kinley Roby's assessment is largely similar, if not a little more lackadaisical, and closes with the assertion that 'it is not necessary to insist that Bennett believed that *Liberty* was a complete and wholly unbiased statement of the English position. […]. Bennett obviously felt that *Liberty* would help the English government to rally support for its policies, but he had not had to agonize over his fiddling with the "truth" in *Liberty*'.[7] The emphasis which has been placed on *Liberty* as 'a superficial piece of journalism'[8] in which the truth has been 'distorted' or at the very least 'fiddled with', negates Bennett's desired aims for propaganda – and indeed, those of the British propaganda bureau as they were when Bennett was recruited by C. F. G. Masterman in September 1914 – as a means of education and as providing the means by which the British public could remain informed. Moreover, these readings nullify Bennett's

[6] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, pp. 40-2.
[7] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 45.
[8] Lafourcade, *A Study*, p. 221.

thoughts on the responsibility of the press, and his fierce opposition to the idea of opinion manipulation. My analysis of *Liberty* is informed by Bennett's response to the larger cultural attitude towards journalistic information, and is fortified by Bennett's idiosyncratic but principled positions With regard to educational reform and the popular press, and his readiness to articulate his 'own opinions on important and highly controversial subjects'.[9]

The current definition of propaganda is 'information that is often biased or misleading, used to promote a political cause or point of view'; its origin is from the Latin 'congregatio de propaganda fide' ('congregation for propagation of the faith') and it was originally understood in terms by which we currently understand the verb 'propagate': 'to promote an idea or knowledge widely'.[10] In *Modernism, Media and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (2006), Mark Wollaeger details the way in which the 'plan' for British propaganda was 'unique among its European counterparts' in that – most certainly 'at the beginning' – 'it emphasized facts over overt persuasion, disguised the official origins of its propaganda, and placed literature at the heart of its efforts'. The 'British factual emphasis' is thought to have originated in response to Germany's already well-established campaign, which had, for decades prior to the outbreak of war, utilised official propaganda bureaus – openly identified as such – 'to ply the world with its version of political tensions in Europe'. Wollaeger summarises that:

> the most benign view of British propaganda is that it was designed primarily to disseminate factual accounts to counter rumors, gossip, incomplete stories, and fabrications already in circulation. To the extent that German propagandists, confident of a quick victory, sometimes resorted early in the war to lies or

[9] Bennett, letter to the editor of the *Daily News* dated 24 January 1918, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 46.
[10] OED.

> misrepresentations concerning enemy losses, landmarks destroyed, or territory captured, counterpropaganda could respond effectively by means of factual enumeration.[11]

Masterman was certainly 'committed to facts', as were many other British officials who 'sincerely believed that factual enlightenment and persuasion amounted to the same thing'.[12] Bennett was no exception.

Following the outbreak of war, Bennett became increasingly frustrated with the lack of readily available, reliable information. His journal entries are peppered with annotations to the effect that there has been 'no definite news',[13] 'only […] indirect news'[14] or what he dismissively calls 'newspaper news'.[15] His contempt for the latter emerges briefly in 'Part II' of *The Roll-Call*. When an orderly brings a newspaper, George notes that 'nobody would do more than disdainfully glance at it. The usual daily stuff about the war!'[16] Bennett also concedes in a letter to Oswald Davis, that 'intelligent people […], though civilian, well understand that most of the stuff printed in the dailies about the army is largely tosh'.[17] Bennett tries to promote the availability of information in his local area, by asking if the postmaster would like to display his Central News service of War telegrams in the post office window. The ignorance of his neighbours is illustrated by Miss Nerney's report that when people were reading a copy of Bennett's telegram, one man was heard to ask: '"Who is Arnold Bennett?" The reply was: "He's the war minister." Then the correction, "Oh no, he

[11] Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda*, pp. 13-4.
[12] Ibid., p. 14.
[13] See Bennett, journal entries dated 12th, 13th, 17th August 1914 and 20th September 1914 in *Journals, Vol. II*, pp. 99-100, 105.
[14] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, August 25th' 1914, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 100.
[15] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Sunday, October 25th' 1914, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 107.
[16] Bennett, *The Roll-Call*, p. 399.
[17] Bennett, letter to Davis [who at the time of this letter was a dispatch rider in the X Corps of the B. E. F.] dated 8 June 1917, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 33.

isn't. He's the actor chap that lives down the road"'.[18] Bennett quickly perceived that one of the greatest hindrances to the circulation of dependable information was the readiness to propagate rumours or hearsay, and the lack of reliable information relayed through newspapers. He addresses the latter in a number of his War articles. In 'Public versus Censor: Tactics in the Daily Struggle' (22 October 1914), Bennett encourages the populace to rebel against the government's provision of misleading information about the war, stating that the public's willingness to accept facts at face value (thereby demonstrating a lack of 'courage' to pause and consider their reliability first) is akin to joining in with the conspiracy.[19] In 'Recruiting: Some Agencies Against its Success' (5 November 1914), Bennett admonishes the inept dissemination of public information about the war,[20] and in 'The Antidote: To the Toxin of Officialism' (18 August 1915) he affirms that government secrecy should be abolished, writing that the government should publish a total list of numbers so that the public can make an informed decision on conscription.[21] Articles calling for a better dissemination of information about the War are supplemented by others which address the insufficient provision of a basic education. In 'In the Midlands: A Visit to the Workers' (15 December 1915), Bennett writes that what is lacking in the people is simple education[22] and in 'Think the Worst: And Yell for your Life' (1 March 1916), chastises the Government for its neglect of education.[23] In 'Our Very Existence as an Empire' (2 February 1916), Bennett writes that the closing of museums illustrates the ruling classes' contempt for education[24] and in 'The Next Campaign: Missions to the Poor and the Rich' (8 March 1916), criticises the way in which education – in addition to museums and infant hygiene – is

[18] Bennett, journal entries dated 7 and 8 August 1914, *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 96.
[19] Bennett, 'Public versus Censor', p. 4.
[20] Bennett, 'Recruiting', p. 4.
[21] Bennett, 'The Antidote', p. 4.
[22] Bennett, 'In the Midlands', p. 4.
[23] Bennett, 'Think the Worst', p. 4.
[24] Bennett, 'Our Very Existence', p. 4.

deprived of funding whilst activities such as hunting and 'beer-drinking' remain.[25] In 'Some Thoughts on War-Saving: The New Committee's Work' (15 March 1916), Bennett writes scathingly that the education of the young, the health of the nation and the welfare of the fighting man are clearly improper subjects for economy.[26] Bennett was demanding a better informed populace With regard to both culture as well as topical news, as a requirement for liberal democracy.

On the one hand, Bennett's preoccupation with the failings in the provision of education points towards larger and longer-standing demands for educational reform. At the turn of the century, authorities exempted roughly forty per cent of all children from the school-leaving age of fourteen and education remained a privilege for those with wealth. Attempts at reform encountered arduous opposition: the Conservative Party chose to uphold existing privileges whilst the Labour Party often deferred to traditional notions of pedagogy; most politicians were in agreement, however, that the country could not afford a more equitable education system and the result was a population whose formal education seldom extended beyond basic skills.[27] Furthermore, a good education did not guarantee a particularly well-designed, serviceable curriculum, nor indeed, adherence to the cultivated arts. In *Clayhanger* (1910), Bennett unreservedly chastises 'the curriculum of the Oldcastle High School' and Edwin's '"good education"', writing that:

> [Edwin] had received, […] as some said, 'a thoroughly sound education'; assuredly as complete an equipment of knowledge as could be obtained in the country […].
> He knew, however, nothing of natural history, and in particular of himself, of the mechanism of body and mind, through which his soul had to express and fulfil itself.

[25] Bennett, 'The Next Campaign', p. 4.
[26] Bennett, 'Some Thoughts', p. 4.
[27] LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, pp. 9-10.

> Not one word of information about either physiology or psychology had ever been breathed to him, nor had it ever occurred to anyone around him that such information was needful. […] And as for philosophy, he had not the slightest conception of what it meant. […] He had great potential intellectual curiosity, but nobody had thought to stimulate it […]. History […] resolved itself into a series of more or less sanguinary events arbitrarily grouped under the names of persons who had to be identified with the assistance of numbers. Neither of the development of national life, nor of the clash of nations, did he really know anything that was not inessential and anecdotic. […] And as he had acquired absolutely nothing about political economy or about logic, and was therefore at the mercy of the first agreeable sophistry that might take his fancy by storm, his unfitness to commence the business of being a citizen almost reached perfection.[28]

On the other hand, Bennett's preoccupation with education reveals a palpable anxiety that British propaganda – if it were to fail to release dependable information, and to keep the public informed – could become another example of educational failure. In a letter to Beaverbrook dated 24 October 1918, Bennett writes 'is not propaganda education?' and states his opinion that 'the show' should be 'put […] under' H. A. L. Fisher, the President of the Board of Education (1916-22), 'a man of modern ideals with whom it would be possible to work'. [29] Bennett's view of propaganda as a form of education remained throughout the War, and in a minute paper sent to Beaverbrook in November 1918, Bennett argues that if the Ministry of Information were to be abolished, its central purpose – to keep the British public

[28] Bennett, *Clayhanger*, pp. 22-4.
[29] Bennett, letter to Beaverbrook dated 24 October 1918, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 75.

informed through accurate and accessible means ('propaganda methods') – should be continued elsewhere:

> Few people will dispute that even after the signature of the Treaty of peace there will still be an urgent need to place before the world by propaganda methods, the British point of view on the inseparable subjects of politics and commerce. […]
>
> The question is not: Shall the Ministry of Information continue to exist? The question is a much larger one: Shall the already existing satisfactory working machine of propaganda be destroyed or even stopped before it is known whether or not British propaganda has a future? The Cabinet might well decide to abrogate the Ministry of Information while continuing propaganda.[30]

When the Ministry of Information was closed by the War Cabinet with almost no discussion of its potential for future use nor indeed, 'the slightest reference to the Director of Propaganda'[31] or following any kind of 'consult[ation]' with Bennett,[32] Bennett was deeply upset; the fact that he learnt of the Ministry's abolition through gossip, could only have added insult to injury.[33]

In addition to his disdain for unreliable 'newspaper news', Bennett found the increasing sensationalism associated with New Journalism distasteful. The phrase 'New Journalism' was first introduced by Matthew Arnold in the late 1880s. The style became

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[30] Bennett, minute paper to Beaverbrook dated 4 November 1918, in *Letters, Vol. III*, pp. 76-7.
[31] Bennett, letter to Beaverbrook dated 14 October 1918, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 79.
[32] Bennett writes: 'My resignation from the Ministry took effect yesterday. Buchan, the liquidator, came down to see me, and was very explanatory and apologetic. The behaviour of the Cabinet to me was of course scandalous. But they have treated many others similarly, so I was not surprised. The only notice I got was a Roneo'd [mimeographed] copy of the War Cabinet. I was never consulted in any way' (Bennett, journal entry dated 'Friday, November 15th' 1918, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 242).
[33] Bennett writes: 'I have now pieced all the tales together, & I conclude that the future of the Ministry was discussed and decided yesterday in the Cabinet without the slightest reference to the Director of Propaganda. I don't think Stuart had conspired, but I am fairly sure that Buchan had' (Bennett, letter to Beaverbrook dated 14 October 1914, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 79).

characterised by a decrease in verbatim coverage of political speeches and an increase in 'snappier news stories'[34] with a 'heavier emphasis on crime, scandal, disaster, and sports along with bolder and more lurid headlines and subheads'.[35] As Stephen Koss observed, New Journalism 'existed by calling attention to itself. What was new about it was the extent to which it evoked comment, invited speculation, and engendered passions';[36] what came to be a cause for concern about it, was that it 'thr[ew] out assertions' based on 'wishful' thinking as opposed to facts, and neglected to 'correct either them or itself' should they be found to be baseless. As Matthew Arnold observed in the May 1887 issue of the *Nineteenth Century*, this 'new journalism […] has much to recommend it; it is full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one great fault is that it is feather brained. It throws out assertions at a venture because it wishes them true; does not correct either them or itself, if they are false; and to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no concern whatever'.[37]

In 1908, and in a little under two months, Bennett's attitude towards the popular press – chiefly, *The Daily Mail* – changed from regarding it as harmless entertainment (he writes that he had 'great fun' in 'reading the account of the 200-million franc *krach* by a financial swindler in all the papers'),[38] to considering it as distasteful, and a disappointment:

> Learnt this afternoon that we are cut off from telegraphic communication with Paris; yesterday's storm blew down two kilometres of telegraph poles on the other side of Melun. Not a word about these disasters in the Continental *Daily Mail*, of course. It

[34] Griffiths, *Plant Here The Standard*, p. 147.
[35] Curtis, *Jack the Ripper*, p. 61.
[36] Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press*, p. 343.
[37] Arnold, 'Up to Easter', p. 638.
[38] Journal entry dated 24 March 1908, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 283.

was full of its third anniversary and of the horrible agonies of a man in U. S. A. who died slowly of hydrophobia.[39]

The Education Act of 1879 had produced a vast new reading public, 'with simple tastes and eager for enlightenment', and the popular press had responded accordingly, with commercial sensationalism, and not enlightenment.[40] Bennett's disappointment derives from the altered purpose of the popular press – the ways in which it had changed from a 'novel experiment in educating the newly literate lower classes' to a 'threat to good taste'[41] – and its indifference towards moral and educational benefit for the British public (favouring instead, 'tosh').[42] This cultural 'threat' had been issued forth by 'the modern press baron',[43] 'a powerful pressman who could print, for the consumption of millions, horror stories and scandals which would previously only have reached the local papers'.[44] Unsurprisingly, Bennett grew to regard Lord Northcliffe (originally Alfred Harmsworth) as a 'dangerous' individual,[45] a man more concerned with the accumulation of power through the provision of what he believed to be what the public wants (sensationalistic stories and trivia), as opposed to what Bennett may have argued, the public *needs* (reliable, accurate, and thus educational, information). In a journal entry dated 17 October 1896, Bennett observes that 'one would take [Harmsworth] for a *Saturday Reviewer* or the editor of some *Yellow Book*, a young lion of the people-despising kind, a contemner of popular taste and everything that caught the public fancy. Never did a man's appearance so belie his true character'.[46] In 1907, he refers to

[39] Journal entry dated 22 May 1908, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 291.
[40] Griffiths, *Plant Here The Standard*, p. 147.
[41] Lonsdale, '"I call my cancer"', p. 135.
[42] Letter to Davis [who at the time of this letter was a dispatch rider in the X Corps of the B. E. F.] dated 8 June 1917, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 33.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 167.
[45] Messinger, 'The Dangers of Illusion', p. 229.
[46] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, October 17th' 1896, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 19.

Harmsworth's 'newspaper office' as 'ultraplutocratic',[47] and writes of 'Northcliffe's lust for power' in 1918.[48]

Bennett lampoons Northcliffe and critiques the question of newspaper ethics in *What the Public Wants* (1909), a 'humorous study of Harmsworthian manners and morals'[49] and 'the mentality of the Yellow Press'.[50] Sir Charles Worgan – modelled on Lord Northcliffe[51] – personifies traits which a West End audience would expect of a press baron. He regards himself as 'a business man'[52] and runs his newspaper business – in which he controls 'about forty different publications' – in accordance with only 'one principle': 'Give the public what it wants', not 'what you think it ought to want, or what you think would be good for it; but what it actually does want'.[53] His newspapers – in particular, the 'leading line of [his] Company', the *Mercury*[54] – represent a popular press designed to appeal to the 'masses' that, in the eyes of British elites, are like 'children' who lack 'selective judgement'[55] – Emily, for example, likens the *Mercury* to 'bread and jam, without the bread' and regards it as 'a sort of delicious children's paper'[56] – and epitomise the 'pessimism about the mental life and social behaviour of the British populace'.[57] Sir Charles divulges that 'writing is no part of [his] job'[58] and, when confused at Macquoid's horror that his article – having had a sentence which contains a split infinitive added to it – is no longer grammatically correct, admits that he does not know what a split infinitive is and is shocked to discover 'that […] cultured people care about that sort of thing'.[59] Sir Charles is equally unconcerned with factual

[47] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, July 20th' 1907, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 237.
[48] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Wednesday, October 23rd' 1918, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 237.
[49] Bennett, letter to Pinker dated 12 November 1908, in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 108.
[50] Bennett, letter to Ford Madox Ford dated 22 November 1908, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 229.
[51] Bennett, letter to Pinker dated 12 November 1908, in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 108.
[52] Bennett, *What the Public Wants*, p. 22.
[53] Ibid., pp. 19, 22.
[54] Ibid., p. 11.
[55] LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, pp. 107-8, 109.
[56] Bennett, *What the Public Wants*, pp. 11, 53.
[57] LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 109.
[58] Bennett, *What the Public Wants*, p. 36.
[59] Ibid., p. 31.

accuracy – he dismisses a mistake in the *Mercury* leader in which Cettinje is mentioned as the capital of Bosnia, directing Kendrick to simply ignore it ('don't refer to it at all, then. Sit tight on it')[60] – and is not averse to scaremongering and sensationalism:

> *Francis*: I suppose the question in Parliament that Mr. What's-his-name mentioned is about the Anglo-German crisis that I see in both these papers. […] I read both the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* this morning, and I hadn't the least idea that there was any war scare at all. Everything seemed calm. But now I've looked at your *Mercury* and your *Courier*, I feel as if the world was tumbling about my ears. I see that not merely is Germany mobilising in secret, but the foundations of Westminster Abbey are in a highly dangerous condition, and, according to seven bishops, the sanctity of the English home is gravely threatened by the luxury of London restaurants. Also you give on page seven […] a very large portrait of a boy aged eleven who weighs two hundred pounds. […] I've counted the word 'amazing' twenty-three times […] to say nothing of Germany. Do you keep it up to that pitch every day?
>
> *Sir C*. They like it.
>
> *Francis*. You ought to serve a liqueur brandy with every copy of these papers.
>
> *Sir C*. Of course, superior people may laugh – but that's what the public wants. I've proved it.[61]

Sir Charles' reverence of a 'culture that measured success by popularity rather than aesthetic merit'[62] results in his being shunned by the intelligentsia: 'your intellectual, your superior

[60] Ibid., p. 28.
[61] Ibid., pp. 33-5.
[62] LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 3.

people won't have anything to do with me […]! There seems to be a sort of boycott among 'em against me!'[63] His eschewal of a moral responsibility to the public ('I'm not a guardian of public morals', 'I'm not a blooming reformer. I'm a merchant')[64] issues in the dissolution of his engagement and alienation from his family. Sir Charles does, however, possess redeeming qualities. He has 'rare flashes of humour, and of charm', and is generous to his employees: 'a thousand people earn their bread and butter in this building, and wages run from five bob on to a hundred pounds a week'; 'I've never sweated my chaps. They have to work hard, and I give 'em pepper […] but they are well paid […]. The price of labour in journalism has gone up, and it's thanks to me'.[65] Additionally, Sir Charles does not believe in the elitist regard for the general public as lacking in 'individuality or personal distinctiveness'.[66] His success can largely be attributed to his catering to diversity. His numerous publications include 'two London dailies, three provincial dailies, five popular penny weeklies, two sixpenny weeklies, three illustrated monthlies, four ladies' papers, six sporting and athletic, five religious papers, two Sunday papers', 'four halfpenny comic papers', and 'four boys' papers'[67]. These serve a heterogenous, rather than the assumed homogeneous, mass readership: 'I give each [of the 'different publics'] what it wants', he says.[68] Equally, the aesthete Holt St. John, whilst possessing 'the finest artistic taste' and championing various cultural ideals, such as desiring to 'produce masterpieces', and modern plays which are 'true', 'original' and 'beautiful', is 'a brute, especially in manner', 'cares for nothing and nobody when his artistic ideas are at stake',[69] and thus epitomises the artistic snobbery and reverence of 'alienation from common humanity' attributed to 'the

[63] Bennett, *What the Public Wants*, p. 46.
[64] Ibid., pp. 117, 122.
[65] Ibid., pp. 7, 16, 22.
[66] LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 108.
[67] Bennett, *What the Public Wants*, pp. 18-9.
[68] Ibid., p. 122.
[69] Ibid., pp. 58, 67, 71, 58.

conventionally [culturally] sophisticated'.[70] In satirising both representatives of the popular press and the artistic elite, Bennett's 'balance[d]' assessment[71] serves to emphasise the need for a mutually beneficial middle ground, one which retains the underlying democratic tendencies of the popular press, and – in line with Bennett's hope for continually improving, standardised education – one willing to adapt when 'the day when the public wants something better' comes.[72]

When recording in his journal one of Lloyd George's speeches on conscription in the House of Commons, Bennett scorns the PM's delivery – 'cheap effects of […] looking round as if challenging; trick of dropping his voice for last, rather unimportant word of sentence' – and writes that his 'oratorical effects' were 'very poor – like a Lyceum melodrama'. Most damningly, Bennett regards the contents of Lloyd George's speech as 'muddled' ('he did not know his case, and having made a muddle, deliberately left the muddle') and overly reliant on dicta: 'truisms about values and will-to-win cheered. […] The whole thing a vast make-believe, with an audience of which a large part was obviously quite unintelligent and content with the usual hollow rot'.[73] Bennett did not restrict controversial material to his private writings. On 29 August 1914, a little over a week after receiving 'a request from the *Daily News* to write on the war',[74] Bennett records in his journal that he had written an article 'telling some incontrovertible truths about this recruiting question'. Bennett notes that whilst Mrs. Sharpe '"agreed with every word of it", [she] did not think it ought to be published', and 'Marguerite did not like it at all. Both were afraid of it'. He continues that he 'should not be at all surprised if the *Daily News* is also afraid of it', but if that should prove to be the case, he would 'send it to the *New Statesman*'.[75] In response to a portion of letter from Hilaire

[70] LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 2
[71] Ibid., p. 111.
[72] Bennett, *What the Public Wants*, p. 151.
[73] Bennett, journal entry dated 'April 4th' 1918, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 226.
[74] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Monday, August 17th' 1914, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 99.
[75] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, August 29th' 1914, in *Journals, Vol. II*, p. 102.

Belloc to the editor of the *Daily News*, in which Belloc refers to '"individual publicists" who write from time to time for the Harmsworth Press, but "apologise in private for their action"', Bennett is quick to affirm that when he had written for the Harmsworth Press, he had 'never apologised for [his] action':

> I doubt whether even Mr. Belloc has written more severely about the methods of the Harmsworth Press than I have. If in the face of what I have written the Harmsworth Press invites me to express in it my own opinions on important and highly controversial subjects, I see various good reasons why I should not refuse the invitation. […] That the advisability of my action is arguable I freely admit, but the advantages of it, such as they are, seem to me greatly to outweigh the disadvantages such as they are.[76]

In an article published in 1927, Bennett records Lord Beaverbrook's revelation that before Bennett would 'sit down with him', Bennett read out an article which attacked both Beaverbrook and his policies, and was to be published the following day (November 1917). Incidentally, 'Beaverbrook still invited him to sit down, […] the article duly appeared, and the two men became great friends'.[77]

Liberty is divided into three parts: 'Part I: The Surface', 'Part II: Beneath the Surface', and 'Part III: A New Conception of War'. 'Part I' offers a broad, historical overview of the events leading up to the outbreak of war. It begins with Austria's seizure of Bosna-Herzegovina, facilitated by the Austrian Nationalist Party headed by Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and the Archduke's and his wife's murder on 28 June 1914 during their visit to

[76] Bennett, letter to the editor of the *Daily News* dated 24 January 1918, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 46.
[77] Hepburn, *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 41.

Sarajevo. This is followed by an account of Austria's conviction that the assassination had been planned through Belgrade and her accusation that Servia [*sic*.] had been 'fostering a general secret campaign against the cohesion of Austrio-Hungary',[78] Russia's subsequent mobilisation on the Austrian frontier, Germany's announcement that she 'would stand by Austria', and the anticipated implication that France 'would have to stand by Russia'.[79] Bennett closes with Sir Edward Grey's futile attempts to retain peace via mediation, Germany's refusal, the incursion of German soldiers into Luxembourg as 'others took possession of a Belgian railway station',[80] Belgium's appeal to England against Germany, England's 'ultimatum to Germany', and finally, Germany's declaration of war on Great Britain, 'having already declared war on Russia and France'.[81]

Roby regards this opening as 'a rather superficial and slightly ironic summary of the events leading up to the outbreak of hostilities'.[82] The subtitles of both 'Part I' and 'Part II', however, reveal that Bennett saw two ways in which to regard the events culminating in the outbreak of war, one which was indeed, 'superficial', and one which sought to look 'beneath the surface'. I would contend that Bennett purposely begins his text with an 'on-the-surface' summary, so to highlight the shortcomings in accepting so-called facts at face-value, and to encourage in others the desire to seek out additional information.

As stated by Michael Neiberg in *The World War I Reader* (2007), 'Europe had no single or compelling reason to go to war in 1914' and few Europeans expected the assassination in Sarajevo to lead to one year of war, 'let alone four'. [83] Europe in 1914 most certainly had 'hotspots', such as the 'British crisis' surrounding the question of Irish Home Rule and occasional colonial disagreements, but the former 'bore few wider European

[78] Bennett, *Liberty*, p. 8.
[79] Ibid., p. 11.
[80] Ibid., p. 12.
[81] Ibid., p. 14.
[82] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 44.
[83] Neiberg, *The World War I Reader*, p. 3.

implications', and 'relations between European colonies were generally good'; disputes were largely settled 'by negotiation' and whilst 'not all Europeans were entirely pleased with their share of the colonial pie, […] most had long given up the idea of going to war for the sake of enlarging their slice'.[84] Neiberg contends that in 1914, 'only two areas posed any threat to the general peace in Europe': the waning Ottoman Empire, which in its weakened state might leave the Straits of Constantinople 'dangerously exposed to a Russian power play for a warm-water port', and the increasing tension in the Balkans, wherein 'ethnic, economic and political connections between Balkan groups and several of the Great Powers' could result in the rapid expansion of an initially internal conflict arising through 'rival ethnic and religious groups'.[85] In short, the assassination in Sarajevo which 'at first glance […] seemed like just another in a long line of Balkan intrigues'[86] seems an unlikely catalyst for the outbreak of war. Bennett was fully aware of this. He alludes to the need to look beyond 'the surface' when recounting the unreliability of the printed word. His account of superficial (and ultimately purposeless) diplomatic niceties, parallel the shortcomings of newspapers which slavishly reproduce 'affectionate' platitudes and issue 'desirable' statements, rather than scratching the surface and promoting tangible change:

> every Power asseverated the same ardent desire for peace. Emperors thee'd and thou'd each other, and sent their affectionate letters to the papers [and yet] within ten days of Austria's ultimatum to Servia, five of the greatest European Powers, each protesting that its sole passion was peace, and that it hated war, were at war.[87]

[84] Ibid., p. 4.
[85] Ibid., p. 5.
[86] Ibid., p. 6.
[87] Bennett, *Liberty*, pp. 12-3, 14.

Bennett's closing statement – 'And spiders spun their webs in the empty halls of the Peace Palace at the Hague'[88] – serves a dual purpose. Outwardly, the phrase refers the decision to pursue open warfare (the Peace Palace remains 'empty', thus disused and neglected). Beneath the surface, there is a sense of entrapment and falsity (recall the axiom 'to spin a web of lies'), coupled with the knowledge that time has not been utilised effectively nor advantageously.

In 'Part II', Bennett openly states that 'the Austro-Servian difficulty was the occasion, not the cause, of the European war. […] It was like a match, picked out of a box of matches by an incendiary, to set light to a house previously well-soaked in kerosene. To study the half-burnt match, to stick it under a microscope and differentiate it from other matches, would be a supreme exercise in absurdity'.[89] In this second portion, Bennett makes a determined effort to challenge xenophobia, separating the German autocracy from the remaining German citizens. He writes of the 'exploit[ation]' of the German people ('a people docile, ingenuous, studious, industrious, idealistic, and thorough') by the German autocracy, the conscription of German citizens into an army which resembles an armed 'cult', and the ability of the German 'military caste' to initiate a national fever or 'obsession' with 'the unique grandeur of their army, and of the indomitable resolve of rulers and of God never to let Germany be crushed by her enemies'.[90] Bennett also details the inflammatory factors (the so-called kerosene-soaked house) which would culminate in a barely contained state of urgency,[91] drawing attention to an increase in the 'literature of bellicosity'[92] and Russophobia: 'it is possible that the caste was a year or two struck by a sort of panic in contemplating the growth of Russia – not only in numbers, but also in intelligence'.[93]

[88] Ibid., p. 16.
[89] Ibid., p. 17.
[90] Bennett, *Liberty*, pp. 20-2.
[91] Neiberg, *The World War I Reader*, pp. 8-9.
[92] Bennett, *Liberty*, p. 23.
[93] Ibid., p. 30.

Bennett becomes increasingly impassioned towards the close of the text ('Part III'), particularly when relating his aversion to bullies: 'we declare it to be absurd that half the world should be overrun with ruin in order that a great race may prove its greatness'.[94] He scorns dishonourable conduct ('[the] invasion [of Belgium] was not only an appalling and inexcusable crime – the foulest crime against civilization since Napoleon – but a shameless violation of a treaty to which England was a party')[95] and exposes the fact that atrocities have been allowed to occur through the neglect of straight-forward, pre-emptive measures which should have been decided upon at the 'Hague gathering' (including 'regulations' for 'war at sea', 'the use of the Press', and 'the conditions of travel for non-combatant prisoners of war').[96] All of these prompts are elicited by a strong sense of justice – be it for the German conscript, or a non-combatant prisoner of war – and a typically Bennettian respect for common-sense and the right of every individual to personal happiness and liberty:

> If Germany triumphs […] slavery will be reborn; for under the German ideal every male citizen is a private soldier, and every private soldier is an abject slave – and the caste already owns five millions of them. We have a silly, sentimental, illogical objection to being enslaved. We reckon liberty – the right of every individual to call his soul his own – as the most glorious end. It is for liberty we are fighting.[97]

In contrast to Peter Buitenhuis' assertion that Bennett chose to 'ignore all the problems that the country faced before the war',[98] I would contend that – certainly With regard to the larger cultural attitude towards the reliability of journalistic information and the role of the popular

[94] Ibid., p. 56.
[95] Ibid., pp. 38-9.
[96] Ibid., pp. 47-50.
[97] Ibid., pp. 57-8.
[98] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 42.

press – *Liberty* is both informed by and responsive to the damaging effects of unreliable 'newspaper news', xenophobia, and literature which promotes bellicosity and jingoism. *Liberty* serves to promote a greater understanding of the circumstances which have led to war whilst remaining sympathetic to the difficulties faced by the average German conscript and encouraging shared moral values (justice and liberty for all peoples), and, when placed in conversation with Bennett's war articles, encourages the average reader to have the 'courage' to question the accuracy of what it is that they are reading; to decide whether they are really well-informed, or if they have simply grasped 'the surface'.

7. *Over There: Scenes on the Western Front* (1915)

On 2 September 1914, C. F. G. Masterman, a cabinet minister who had recently been appointed chief of Britain's war propaganda bureau, convened a secret meeting of 'Britain's most famous authors' to discuss 'the ways and means by which they could contribute to the Allied war effort'.[1] Arnold Bennett was one of 25 authors in attendance who were to be employed in varying capacities.[2] Bennett was chosen by Wellington House and the War Office to be taken on a supervised tour of the Western Front in June 1915, accompanied by G. H. Mair (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling were to undertake similar visits in June 1916 and June 1917, respectively). Whilst in France, Bennett compiled notes for six 'Front articles' which commenced publication on 21 August in the *Illustrated London News* and the *Saturday Evening Post* and ran until 23 October 1915.[3] These essays were compiled in *Over There: War Scenes on the Western Front*, published later that year. *Over There* has been written off by critics as a propagandist distortion of the reality of the warfront, a simultaneous failure of Bennett as an independent commentator on important issues and a failure as an artist to capture essential truths about the experience of conflict. My analysis claims for Bennett an autonomous and perceptive attitude to the scenes he describes, as well as demonstrating that the narrative perspective employed in *Over There* was selected to attain polemical and artistic effects. In this respect, Bennett's *Over There*, and his war journalism more broadly, anticipates what has been described as 'documentary modernism'.

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[1] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. xv.

[2] The remaining authors included William Archer, Sir James M. Barrie, A. C. Benson, R. H. Benson, Robert Bridges, Hall Caine, G. K. Chesterton, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Anthony Hope Hawkins, Maurice Hewlett, W. J. Locke, E. V. Lucas, J. W. Mackail, John Masefield, A. E. W. Mason, Gilbert Murray, Sir Henry Newbolt, Sir Gilbert Parker, Sir Owen Seaman, George Trevelyan, H. G. Wells and Israel Zangwill. Rudyard Kipling and Sir Arthur Quiller Couch were unable to attend, but sent messages offering their services (ibid., p. 14).

[3] The six Front articles are as follows (dates refer to publication in the *Illustrated London News*): 'The Zone of Paris' (21 August 1915); 'Scenes of War: On the French Front' (28 August 1915); 'Scenes of War: Ruins' (4 September 1915); 'Scenes of War: At Grips' (11 September 1915); 'The British Lines' (9 October 1915); 'The Unique City: Ypres' (23 October 1915).

In ‘Believing in the Thirties’ (1997), Peter McDonald asserts that this decade ‘entailed at every stage a self-historicising habit of interpretation and presentation’, and is made significant by way of ‘the relation between the writer and society, the individual and history, art and commitment’ (in which ‘commitment’ relates to both social and political engagement).[4] Accordingly, the 1930s witnessed the amalgamation of ‘two seemingly incompatible branches of creative activity’: 1930s Modernism and the emergent British documentary tradition.[5] Tyrus Miller, in his article ‘Documentary/Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s’ (2002), argues that there is in fact a ‘complementary’ relationship which exists between Modernism and the documentary.[6] Miller’s theory is informed by Georg Lukács’ ‘naturalism-modernism continuum’, which encourages a reading of Modern literature that is attuned to the ‘basically *naturalistic* character of modernist literature’;[7] the summation being that both the documentary and Modernism ‘reduce details to the level of mere particularity’[8] and ‘through this concentration on detail seek to reveal the previously unseen’.[9] Stephen Spender’s review of a contemporary play *The Ascent of F6* (1936) concerns ‘the problems of the artist in the modern world – his isolation, his obscurity, and his difficulties in reaching an audience’ and chooses to address these problems ‘as problems of literary strategy, to be solved by finding *literary* ways of responding to urgent issues’.[10] It is this ‘literary strategy’ which effectively epitomises Miller’s retrospective unification of the documentary and Modernism. Spender states:

> Perhaps the best feature of the Auden-Isherwood dramatic style in *The Ascent of F6*

[4] McDonald, ‘Believing’, p. 71.
[5] Gillies and Mahood, *Modernist Literature*, p. 135.
[6] Miller, ‘Documentary/Modernism’, p. 227.
[7] Lukács, ‘The Ideology of Modernism’, pp. 294-5.
[8] Ibid., p. 304.
[9] Gillies and Mahood, *Modernist Literature*, p. 136
[10] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 207.

> is the rhythmic contrast which the writers maintain between two entirely different methods of presentation: firstly, realistic scenes of political reportage; secondly fables. There are two approaches to the contemporary political scene: the one is direct, or partially satiric, external presentation; the other is fantasy or allegory.[11]

As summarised by Hynes: 'either the writer could record external actuality as strictly and objectively as possible, or he could compose a symbolic version of it'; Spender terms the first literary method 'reportage' and the second, 'fable', and whilst each approach differs dramatically, their objective remains the same: 'not to describe the world, but to change it'.[12]

Elements of reportage, evincing the 'direct' and 'objective' attention to particulars as well as the invitation to a symbolic significance characteristic of the documentary modernist mode, are evident in *Over There*. 'Realistic scenes of political reportage' are coupled with anecdotes and direct quotations, acquired through Bennett's overtly neutral style of questioning, which demonstrate equally both grudging admiration ('It is necessary, all the same, to admire those cursed Germans')[13] and criticism of the German army. Diplomacy persists throughout and it is clear that Bennett is mourning the 'senseless' loss of life on both sides of the war. The text could be regarded as an early attempt of creative journalism in the documentary modernist vein, rather like George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). Critics have not been sufficiently attentive to how Bennett demonstrates an understanding of the artist in relation to society, and how he develops a 'literary strategy' from the challenges of engaging readers on urgent issues.

Over There has received little critical attention to date and has largely been 'written off' as an example of unremarkable British propaganda. Reginald Pound, for example, writes

[11] Spender, 'Fable and Reportage', p. 197.
[12] Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 208.
[13] Bennett, *Over There*, pp. 16-7.

that it is 'not a book that mattered and the dust of another war has settled thickly upon it'.[14] Accordingly, the majority of critics who have written about *Over There* contend that Bennett's account of the Front is 'highly selective'[15] and reads as 'patriotic, cheerful, false'.[16] Their reasoning behind Bennett's decision to tailor the truth, however, varies. Margaret Drabble emphasises Bennett's position as a 'responsible citizen, keenly aware of his role as a public figure',[17] writing that:

> He was above all a responsible man: he had been allowed out on a special errand, with special permission; and the last thing he wanted to do was report truly on the desolation he had seen. Like a good citizen, he did not wish to spread alarm and despair. So his reports are diplomatic. It is easy to say that he should have told a different truth. What good would it have done? [...] Bennett had accepted a role, and he played it.[18]

In this capacity, Drabble asserts that 'it's not that they're [the articles] unreadable, nor that they are positively dishonest; it's simply that one knows he is not telling the whole truth'.[19] Drabble's sentiment is echoed by Randall Stevenson, who comments euphemistically on 'the occluded honesty informing Bennett's *Over There*' and the 'measure of restraint' which is evident throughout,[20] and James Hepburn, who states that: 'There is no doubt that the articles themselves suppress and distort much of what he saw. [...] The rhetoric is more patriotic than felt'.[21] Peter Buitenhuis develops this supposition further and draws attention to the

[14] Pound, *A Biography*, p. 255
[15] Ibid.
[16] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 217. Drabble adds: 'what he really made of his visit we shall never know. [...] What he thought and felt, we cannot tell. His style is perfectly calculated to conceal emotion' (ibid.).
[17] Ibid., p. 207.
[18] Ibid., pp. 217-8.
[19] Ibid., p. 218.
[20] Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War*, pp. 35, 32.
[21] Hepburn, editorial note in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 230.

economic and, on occasion, egotistical motivation which encouraged British authors to turn towards propaganda. Buitenhuis states: 'Though his enthusiasm for the war was as fervent as anyone else's, the workman-like and practical Arnold Bennett also needed money at the outbreak of war since revenues from his novels and plays dropped off'.[22] I would contend that neither financial nor vainglorious motivation influenced the composition of Bennett's articles. Whilst Bennett was paid for his literary contributions throughout the War, the sum he received was well below his normal price (as Hepburn notes, '[Bennett] would have been opposed on principle to giving articles to editors')[23] and, in anticipation of the unavoidable fall in income to be experienced by his fellow writers, he readily offered financial aid to those in need; the latter was privately and philanthropically motivated and not in response to a request. J. B. Pinker wrote to Bennett on 7 August 1914 as – on account of the international crisis – Methuen wanted to defer payments to authors unless the money was absolutely needed. Bennett responded accordingly:

> With reference to the 'absolute necessity' of certain authors, of which you speak; if later there should be any really bad cases within your knowledge you can use £100 of mine entirely according to your discretion in meeting distress. Of course in the form of loans. If they are never repaid, it won't be a life-and-death matter. I should not necessarily want to know the names of those helped.[24]

Bennett also publicly opposed the insinuation that financial and egocentric motivation had propelled British authors into print. In a letter to the editor of the *New Statesman* (1 September 1914), Bennett writes:

[22] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, pp. 39-40.
[23] Hepburn, editorial note in *Letters, Vol. II*, pp. 349-50.
[24] Bennett, letter to Pinker dated 8 August 1914, in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 212.

> In your issues of August 29th, reviewing war literature, you say: 'Almost without exception during the last fortnight our eminent novelists have rushed into print as authorities on all matters of foreign policy and military strategy.' Can you name these novelists? I have noted that H. G. Wells, who has written on foreign policy and whose articles have been of a stimulating and valuable character, was careful to state that he did not write as an authority. As war is pre-eminently an affair of human nature, a triumph of instinct over reason, it seems to me not improper that serious novelists (who are supposed to know a little about human nature and to be able to observe accurately and to write) should be permitted to express themselves concerning the phenomena of a nation at war without being insulted. You say, as to writing about the war: 'For our popular authors who have made their name and their money already there is no excuse.' The insinuation is clear. My opinion is that this sentence ought not to have appeared in the *New Statesman*, and that some expression of regret is due for it.[25]

The indignation expressed in the letter above, is further supported by Bennett's decision to determinedly reject requests for articles which required him to address topics that he felt unable to comment upon, as opposed to submitting an ambiguous and evasive piece of writing simply to secure his salary.[26]

In a letter to Frederick Wicken, Bennett prophesises that 'in all probability' his 'subjects will relate to the effect of the war on the average Englishman at home'.[27] His articles, both before and after his visit to the Front, honour this. By November 1914, Bennett

[25] Bennett, letter to the editor of the *New Statesman* dated 1 September 1914, in *Letters, Vol. II*, p. 349.
[26] See Bennett's letter to Pinker dated 17 August 1914, and to Frederick Wicken (Pinker's managing clerk) dated 26 August 1914, in *Letters, Vol. I*, pp. 213, 214.
[27] Bennett, letter to Wicken dated 26 August 1914, in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 214.

was ‘devoting 1½ days a week to the prevention of conscription’ and ‘the proper treatment of soldiers’ dependents, in this country’[28] and by May 1915, his ‘War work’ had increased to three days a week.[29] Whilst Bennett’s articles address a vast array of topics, the majority demonstrate an unequivocally humanitarian interest in the war. For example, Bennett reported that soldiers – and their families, including the dependents of unmarried soldiers – were underpaid,[30] and that support for disabled veterans was inadequate.[31] He wrote in opposition to the inequitable attitude directed towards the working classes,[32] the need to abolish class discrimination in the Diplomatic Corps and the Foreign Office – in addition to the question of the exemption of men by military tribunals for reasons of class and family position[33] – and his advocacy of national self-education in order to avoid future war.[34] He also criticised the ruling classes’ contempt for, and the Government’s neglect of, education.[35] Bennett was strongly opposed to conscription[36] and wrote in favour of its abolishment from an economic perspective – contending that it was too expensive for the country[37] – and a humanitarian perspective – challenging the War Office’s recruitment of older men, and skilled workers who would be of greater use outside of the Army.[38] Bennett expressed a

[28] Bennett, letter to Hersog dated 6 November 1914, in *Letters, Vol. II,* pp. 358-9.
[29] Bennett, letter to Hersog dated 27 May 1915, in *Letters, Vol. II,* pp. 365-6.
[30] See Bennett, ‘Patriotism and Pay’ p. 4; ‘Democracy Justified’, p. 4; ‘Mothers, Sisters, Etc’, p. 4; and ‘Some Wrongs’, p. 4.
[31] See Bennett, ‘Our Debts’, p. 4; ‘National Gratitude’, p. 4; ‘A National Responsibility’, p. 2; and ‘A Different National Debt’, p. 4.
[32] See Bennett, ‘An Act of Patriotism’, p. 4; ‘Prejudice’, p. 4; and ‘Enervation’, p. 4.
[33] See Bennett, ‘Playing the Enemy’s Game’, p. 4.
[34] See Bennett, ‘Foreign Policy’, p. 4.
[35] See Bennett, ‘Our Very Existence as an Empire’, p. 4; ‘Think the Worst’, p. 4; and ‘The Next Campaign’, p. 4.
[36] See Bennett, ‘The British Way’, p. 4; ‘Military Efficiency’, p. 4; ‘The Situation’, p. 4; ‘The Sense of Reality’, p. 4; and ‘Clatter and Racket’, p. 4.
[37] See Bennett, ‘England Can Afford No More Men’, p. 10; ‘Soldiers and Stability’, p. 4; and ‘The Larger-Army-At-Any Price Party’, p. 4.
[38] See Bennett (signed ‘Sardonyx’),‘Observations’ [No.86], pp. 290-91; Bennett, ‘Sentimentalism’, p.4; and ‘King Coal’, p. 4.

desire for truth[39] and freedom of the press;[40] he criticised the lack of public information released by the War Office, and repeatedly emphasised the need for disclosure of British war aims[41] and how it is the duty of the general public to remain well-informed about the war.[42] Bennett also demonstrated a marked diplomacy With regard to the German populace (highlighting the need for differentiation between the German masses and their military autocracy)[43] and Germany's need for support following the Armistice.[44] He was also a firm advocate for the formulation of a League of Nations which he believed, should include Germany.[45]

Whereas Buitenhuis references the possibility of egotistical motivation in broad terms, including Bennett within a collective (as one of 'the writers' who were 'flattered by being asked by the government to lend a hand in the great cause'),[46] Roby attacks Bennett directly, alleging that he allowed his 'vanity' to impact upon his writing whilst in France. Roby states:

> [Bennett was pleased] by the elaborateness of the preparations which the French had made for them. [...] He was more pleased than he should have been by the attention, and more flattered. But it was precisely this sort of official recognition that most tickled his vanity. At times his self-satisfaction prevented his seeing clearly what was happening to him. It was not so much that he distorted in his front articles what he

[39] See Bennett, 'Official Journalism', p. 4; 'Public versus Censor', p. 4; and 'The Public and the Censor', pp. 508-10.
[40] See Bennett, 'Insidious Pacifist Propaganda', which was signed by Bennett, Arthur Clutton Brock, J. B. Bury, Courtney of Penwith, Thomas Hardy, Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Parmoor, Edan Philpotts, Arthur Quiller-Couch, Graham Wallas and Josiah C. Wedgwood.
[41] See Bennett (signed 'Sardonyx'), 'Observations' [No. 42], pp. 539-40; and 'Observations' [No. 44], pp. 586-87.
[42] See Bennett, 'The Double Duty', p. 4.
[43] See Bennett, 'Our Greatest Blunder', p. 5.
[44] See Bennett, 'First Thoughts on Victory', p. 4.
[45] See Bennett (signed 'Sardonyx'), 'Observations' [No. 85], p. 270; Bennett, 'Bennett Outlines League of Nations', p. 3; 'The Next Stage', p. 4; and 'That Inconclusive Peace', p. 2.
[46] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 7.

> had seen as that he tended to accept without question that he had in fact, seen the reality of war.[47]

This final assertion is unjust as there are numerous instances in which Bennett openly acknowledges that he is witness to only a 'fragment' of life at the Front. Indeed, a prevailing technique of *Over There* is a self-conscious acknowledgement of the limitation of the narrative perspective, which is a means of doing justice to the complexity of particular events in relation to larger-scale issues characteristic of documentary Modernism. For example, Bennett concedes that:

> When you are with a Staff officer, you see almost everything. I doubt not that certain matters are hidden from you; but, broadly speaking, you do see all that is to be seen. Into the mind of the General, which conceals the strategy that is to make history, of course you cannot peer. The General is full of interesting talk about the past and about the present, but about the future he breathes no word. [...] You are not disappointed at his attitude, because you feel when putting them that such questions as yours deserve such answers as his. But you are assuredly disappointed at not being able to comprehend even the present – what is going on around you, under your eyes, deafening your ears.[48]

The inclusion of 'almost' prior to 'everything' and the decision to write 'all that is to be seen' as opposed to 'all that can be seen' suggests a clear awareness of the limitations of his observations. In addition, despite his proximity to a portion of the action ('what is going on

[47] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 125.
[48] Bennett, *Over There*, pp. 98, 95-6.

around you, under your eyes'), Bennett writes that the sensory input is overwhelming (it 'deafens') and consequently, 'a mere fragment of it defeats the imagination, and the bits of even the fragment cannot be fitted together'. Military taciturnity, in addition to his inability to fully 'comprehend' what he is seeing, or to 'imagine' the way in which this 'fragment' is connected to the whole ('the present'), is freely articulated; if Bennett were to regard his observations as accurately conveying 'the reality of war', concessions such as these would prove superfluous.

Recognition of his being privy to only a 'tiny' portion of life at the Front persists in Bennett's observations of both French and British soldiers. Bennett writes:

> You see soldiers – you see soldiers everywhere; but the immense majority of them are obviously engaged in attending to the material needs of other soldiers, which other soldiers, the fighters, you do not see – or see only in tiny detachments or in single unit.[49]

On the sole occasion when Bennett spies 'a whole brigade, five or six thousand men', he deems it 'a fine, very picturesque display of Imperial militancy', but immediately concedes that it is 'too marvellously spick-and-span to produce any illusion of war' and concludes that the Army was to remain 'obstinately in-discoverable'.[50] Bennett's awareness of war's 'illusory' qualities is revealed in his observations of 'the preparations which the French had made' for his visit. Bennett writes:

[49] Ibid., p. 139.
[50] Ibid., pp. 143-4.

> Never once at any moment of the day, whether driving furiously along somewhat deteriorated roads in the car, or walking about the land, did I lack a Staff officer who produced in me the illusion that he was living solely in order to be of use to me. All details of the excursions were elaborately organised; never once did the organisation break down.[51]

Roby insists that this extract serves as 'a revealing example of how [Bennett] was led astray', stating:

> Such uncritical acceptance of surface appearances on Bennett's part amounts to a deliberate act of self-deception. Given his experience as a novelist and as an observer of life, it is difficult to accept his blindness as being wholly ingenuous.[52]

By contrast, I would contend that Bennett's choice of language clearly communicates his awareness that particular interactions have been fashioned ('elaborately organised') to produce a desired image ('illusion'). This is not naïve documentation of experience, but a conscious mediation of events through a voice that subtly recognises the elusive nature of complex phenomena. The decision to attach an 'apparent vagueness' and 'mystery' to subsequent observations reaffirms this.[53] Roby does concede that one comment could be read as indicative of an awareness that certain scenes were being kept from him, stating 'after a brief tour of the trenches, [Bennett] was forced to conclude that one could "find everything in the British lines except the British Army"', but he swiftly negates the significance of this, by immediately affirming that this 'is the only hint in the Notes or the articles that [Bennett] was

[51] Ibid., pp. 33-4.
[52] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 125.
[53] Bennett, *Over There*, pp. 95, 103, 104.

not being allowed to see what he had come to the fronts to see'.[54] The evidence I have collated above suggests otherwise. It must be acknowledged that Bennett omitted sensitive information; he was fully aware that his writing would come under scrutiny and that the censor would restrict what he would be allowed to take to print. In a letter to John Squire dated 29 July 1915, Bennett admits that 'certain […] criticisms' had been left on the cutting room floor[55] and in a second letter to Squire dated 4 August 1915, writes: 'of course all the most interesting things are left out'.[56] When sensitive material is disclosed in *Over There*, the need for discretion is self-explanatory; to divulge pertinent information in a text which would be readily accessible to the public would be injudicious, perhaps even detrimental to the Allied cause. When observing weaponry, for example, Bennett writes, 'you can discern every device in connection with warfare. (To describe them might be indiscreet)', and when observing the 'elaborately organised' land behind the front, notes, 'to describe the situation would be impolitic'.[57] Nonetheless, the decision to omit sensitive ('interesting') information, and to retain criticism for a subsequent opportunity ('I am quite prepared to let Sharp know what [the 'certain number of criticisms'] are if he cares to use them on their own, incidentally, in commenting on the war'),[58] should not be misinterpreted as indicative of a decision to wilfully 'distort' the contents of his articles, nor indeed, to blindly accept his observations at face value ('self-deceive').

Despite accentuating self-serving motivation, Buitenhuis concedes that Bennett has a genuine, humanitarian interest in the War. In response to Roby's affirmation that *Over There* is the product of an 'insensitive' man writing about events he knew little about and with no

[54] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 136.
[55] Bennett, letter to Squire dated 29 July 1915, in *Letters, Vol. II,* p. 368. Bennett acknowledges that 'there are a certain number of criticisms which I could make on the Front, but which certainly would not be allowed to pass the censor over my signature' (ibid.).
[56] Bennett, letter to Squire dated 4 August 1915, in *Letters, Vol. II,* p. 369.
[57] Bennett, *Over There*, pp. 138, 110.
[58] Bennett, letter to Squire dated 29 July 1915, in *Letters, Vol. II,* p. 368.

particular concern about the situation in which he found himself reporting,[59] Buitenhuis supports Swinnerton's view that 'Bennett felt [...] all too deeply' but wrote with a great deal of control, and produced *Over There* with decidedly good intentions: 'to sustain the illusion of present glory and coming victory that the High Command wished to present for the government and people of Britain as well as for the neutrals'.[60] Similar to Drabble's inference that Bennett's writing was conditioned by an acute awareness of his influence as a 'public figure' and a desire to fulfil his 'role' as a 'responsible citizen', Buitenhuis refers to the influence of the belief shared by many British writers (within which, Bennett is doubtless included) that 'the cause of civilisation itself was at stake in this conflict, […] thus justify[ing] their greatest and most passionate efforts to help'.[61] Buitenhuis also emphasises the influence of cultural and linguistic conditioning:

> It did not require much effort of imagination on the part of these writers to transform the platitudes of the British idea, the worship of French culture, and the dislike of German militarism into a propaganda rhetoric embodying unconscious prejudices and stereotypes. They were willing to believe the worst about the enemy and accepted that worst unhesitatingly when it came in the form of rumours and reports of atrocities. Moreover the German invasion of Belgium and France broke into a placid dream of peace – a dream which had held sway in Europe for nearly fifty years.[62]

With regard to predetermined 'language conditions', Bennett states in a letter to John Squire dated 25 September 1914, that he 'deeply agree[s]' with Squire's 'objection' to that 'infernal word "Hun"', continuing: 'the word is a damnable cliché, especially when used in

[59] Roby, *A Writer at War*, pp. 133, 112-3.
[60] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 80.
[61] Ibid., pp. 6-8.
[62] Ibid.

combination with other words beginning with H'.[63] There is only one instance of truly derogative terminology within *Over There* and it is used consciously, not casually:

> While admitting, as all the officers I met admitted, the great military qualities of the enemy, [the French officers] held towards him a more definitely contemptuous attitude than I could discover elsewhere. 'When the Boches[64] attack us,' said one of [the French officers], 'we drive them back to their trench, and we take that trench. Thus we advance.' But, for them, there was Boche and Boche.[65]

Bennett takes care to emphasise that the intensity exhibited by these French officers is an anomaly (yet to be 'discover[ed] elsewhere'), and when pressured to offer his own opinion ('Tell me! Sincerely – do they *hate* the Germans in England? Do they *hate* them, veritably? Tell me'), he is markedly uncomfortable; he laughs 'rather awkwardly, as any Englishman would', and makes light of the 'transient episode' by remarking that it 'was very detrimental to literary talk'.[66] Prior to his interrogation, Bennett notes that 'Schumann, though German enough, was played'.[67] This seemingly trivial aside serves an important purpose. Schumann was – and indeed, remains to be – widely regarded as one of the greatest composers of the Romantic era and as such, is a prominent example of a German who dedicated his life to the production and propagation of beauty. The reference to his music serves to remind readers that it is imprudent to define an entire populace based upon the actions ('brains') of a relative, albeit profoundly influential, few. In such scenes, Bennett invites readerly reflection as a polemical means of cultivating a humanitarian and internationalist response to the war, which

[63] Bennett, letter to Squire dated 25 September 1914, in *Letters, Vol. II,* p. 356.
[64] 'Boche' is a French colloquialism, which is not too far removed from 'that infernal word "Hun"'.
[65] Bennett, *Over There*, p. 114.
[66] Ibid., pp. 18-19.
[67] Ibid.

subordinates national differences to class ones. This intervention is achieved through the apparently detached, documentary-style which purposely leaves certain things unsaid.

In 'Our Greatest Blunder of the War', an article published in the *Sunday Pictorial* on 9 December 1917 in which Bennett strives to promote a distinction between the German autocracy, whom he regards as responsible for the war, and the German masses, who have been swept up in it. The principle aim of the article is to remind the British people that after the war, British and German peoples will have to live together on an earth made 'small' by the 'progress of science' and 'social development'.[68] Bennett likens life on earth to that of a family, writing that: 'when one member of a family [a nation] gets seriously at loggerheads with the rest of the family [other nations]', when he definitely 'outrages the family standard of right and wrong', the family has two choices; either 'the family gets rid of the offending member by shipping him off to Peru itself, or the family keeps its nerve and, while insisting on its rights, behaves with moderation and restraint in the hope of ultimate peace and an all-round improvement of relations'.[69] As it is impossible to 'ship the German race off to Peru' or to 'effectually shut the Germans behind a wall', 'the sole hope is the hope of ultimate peace and an all-round improvement of relations'.[70] Bennett goes on to state that 'anybody who, in order to gratify the passions of resentment and revenge, says or does things which tend to make good relations in the future impossible or unnecessarily difficult is guilty of the greatest of all crimes – crime against humanity' and reasons that 'the charitable interpretation of the conduct of the German nation' would be to view the German populace as 'suffering from a disease', a disease of 'military autocracy':

[68] Bennett, 'Our Greatest Blunder', p. 5.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

> as the war has proceeded, […] the German military autocracy has gone on from abomination to abomination [and] the theory has spread – perhaps not unnaturally – that all Germans are alike, that all Germans are as bad as the worst Germans. This theory is opposed to commonsense. Undoubtedly all or nearly all Germans have certain racial characteristics in common: but that they all hold the same ideal of brute force, blood-and-iron and so on and so on is simply contrary to the facts.[71]

Bennett stresses that it is the German autocracy which started the war to close the cleavage between the Kaiser and the Social Democrats and that the war was a means of 'divert[ing] the German masses from the contemplation of the slavery under which they suffered'. Whilst acknowledging that the German people 'yielded, as people too frequently do yield in war, to their worst instead of their best instincts', Bennett emphasises that the German autocracy, by nurturing a 'fear of Russia' through the creation of a 'Russian bogy', forced the populace to comply. Once committed to the war, 'the German masses were caught in a mesh from which they could not escape. They had to follow their leaders'.[72] Bennett refers to Lord Lansdowne's 'wisdom' and reiterates that whilst military victory is important, it is not essential: 'beat[ing] the Germans is not an end in itself'; 'the end' will only come when 'the right sort of peace – the just peace and the peace with permanent security' has been procured.[73] Bennett also incorporates President Wilson's assertion that a 'break' must be produced 'between the German masses and the German military autocracy' and stresses that the refusal to accept this notion will only serve 'to cement them together, to bind them with the fear of a common danger':

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

> Every wild charge or threat, whether it is uttered by politicians or journalists, responsible or irresponsible – every wild charge or threat against the German people, as distinguished from the German autocracy – is worse than clumsy, it is wicked, and it is silly and against our own interests.[74]

Bennett is also strikingly sympathetic towards the difficulties faced by the German Conscript. In 'What the German Conscript Thinks' – Bennett's first 'War article', published in the *Daily News and Leader* on 24 August 1914 – Bennett writes of socio-political unrest in Germany and the tangible problems which are present in the 'system',[75] and of the effects of 'bullying' and the way in which national, socio-political dissatisfaction has been deflected away from its source and channelled into war.[76] Bennett's sympathetic attitude towards the German conscript is evident in *Over There*, when referring to the lower ranks of German soldiers as 'slaves':

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Bennett, 'What the German Conscript Thinks', p. 4.
Bennett writes: 'the lower classes have an even more tremendous grievance against the upper classes in Germany than in England or France is a certitude. But the existence and power of the army is their reward, their sole reward for all that they have suffered in hardship and humiliation at the hands of the autocracy. It is the autocracy's bribe and sweetmeat to them. [...] The war may be autocratic, dynastic, what you will; but it is also national, and it symbolises the national defect. [...] An enormous number of conscripts must also know that there is something seriously wrong with a system that for the sake of its own existence has killed freedom of the press. And the million little things that are wrong in the system he also knows out of his own daily life as a conscript' (ibid.).

[76] Ibid.
Bennett writes: 'Take the average conscript, the member of the lower middle class. He is accustomed to think politically, because at least 50 out of every 100 of him are professed Socialists, with a definite and bitter political programme against certain manifestations of the autocracy. (It is calculated that two fifths of the entire army is Socialistic.) He may not argue very closely while in the act of war; indeed, he could not. But enormous experience is accumulated in his subconsciousness – experience of bullying and cowardice, of humiliation, of injustice, of lying; and of his own most secret shortcomings – for he, too, is somewhat of a bully, out of self-aggrandisement, as well as for self-defence, and his conscience privately tells him so. The organisation is still colossal, magnificent, terrific. In the general fever of activity he persuades himself that nothing can withstand the organisation; but at the height of some hand-to-hand crisis, when one-hundredth of a dogged grain of obstinacy will turn the scale, he may remember an insult from an incompetent officer, or the protectionism at home which puts meat beyond his purse in order to enrich the landowner, or even the quite penal legislation of the autocracy against the co-operative societies of the poor, and the memory (in spite of him) may decide a battle. Men think of odd matters in a battle, and it is a scientific certainty that, at the supreme pinch, the subconscious must react' (ibid.).

> A few miles on the opposite side of the town were the German artillery positions […]. Around these guns were educated men who had spent years – indeed, most of their lives – in the scientific study of destruction. Under these men were slaves who, solely for the purposes of destruction, had ceased to be the free citizens they once were. These slaves were compelled to carry out any order given to them, under pain of death. They had, indeed, been explicitly told on the highest earthly authority that, if the order came to destroy their fathers and their brothers, they must destroy their fathers and their brothers: the instruction was public and historic. The whole organism has worked, and worked well, for the destruction of all that was beautiful in Ypres […]. The shells did not come into Ypres out of nowhere. Each was the climax of a long, deliberate effort originating in the brains of the responsible leaders. One is apt to forget all this.[77]

Bennett's pathos is tangible, and is controlled by a combination between the material particularity of the destructive shells and the abstract organic metaphor which clashes with the mechanistic activity described. This conjunction of naturalistic specificity and the fable coheres with Hynes's reading of Spender. The subsequent reference to 'the savage leaders of the deluded'[78] anticipates his empathy for ordinary soldiers and his criticism of the paramountcy of military elites ('the responsible leaders'), expressed in 'Our Greatest Blunder of the War':

> The German people may be sinners, but it can be asserted without possibility of contradiction that they have been terribly sinned against. And every departure from

[77] Bennett, *Over There*, pp. 73-4.
[78] Bennett, *Over There*, p. 181.

> the strictest justice in Allied demands helps to keep in power the gang of villains who have mesmerised and intimidated the German people.[79]

In spite of the evidence outlined above, Roby maintains that Bennett 'was not particularly concerned about [the War]' and throughout the composition of *Over There,* remains a detached ('insensitive') narrator, moved only by the sight of 'shattered streets'.[80] Roby contends that Bennett:

> actually saw almost nothing in the trenches to excite his imagination with horror [...] he never allowed himself to speculate on the possibilities for individual suffering which trench warfare held for those caught up in it. He was shaken by the sight of shelled towns, but he remained strangely unmoved by the sight of men shooting at one another. He may have suppressed his feelings because he found them intolerable; or, what is more likely, he may have refused his imagination to work in a way that would have diminished his powers of observation.[81]

Buitenhuis rebuts the first portion of Roby's statement by citing Bennett's journal and the 'horrific' entries recorded therein (including Bennett's observation of wheat growing out of a German corpse).[82] Buitenhuis fails, however, to effectively reject Roby's claim that Bennett 'seems to have been more moved by the destruction of buildings than by the killing of men', adding simply: '[c]ertainly the destruction he saw released aggressive emotions in him';[83] any postulation as to *why* Bennett reacted in the way that he did however, is omitted.

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[79] Bennett, 'Our Greatest Blunder', p. 5.
[80] Roby, *A Writer at War*, pp. 113, 132.
[81] Ibid., p. 133.
[82] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 81.
[83] Ibid.

It must first be acknowledged that Roby excludes specifics – Bennett's reflections are not directed solely towards 'shelled towns', nor indeed, simply any synthetic structure that is to be found within them; at the height of his distress, Bennett is considering people's homes. In Chapter Three ('Ruins') there is a conscious shift from Bennett's observations of 'large shops, large houses, small shops, and small houses' to those of 'the material of a home'.[84] As Briganti and Mezei state: 'the home, although it may possess the material characteristics of a built dwelling, implies a space, a feeling, an idea'.[85] In *The Poetics of Space* (1958) Gaston Bachelard states that 'our house' (which we interpret as 'our home') is 'our vital space', 'our corner of the world' and constitutes 'a community of memory and image' which is capable of instigating the feeling of 'comfort';[86] in the words of T. S. Eliot, '[h]ome is where one starts from'.[87] When examining Bennett's observations of shelled houses in *Over There*, it becomes apparent that he shares this perspective.

Upon arriving in Meaux, Bennett engages a driver who offers to drive him to Barcy. Whilst travelling towards the village of Penchard, Bennett reports:

> we came to a farmhouse by the roadside. It was empty; it was a shell [...]. The Germans had gutted it. [...] This farmhouse was somebody's house, just as your home is yours, and mine mine. To some woman or other every object in it was familiar. She glanced at the canister on the mantelpiece and said to herself: 'I really must clean that canister to-morrow.' There the house stood, with holes in its roof, empty. And if there are half-a-million similarly tragic houses in Europe to-day, as probably there

[84] Bennett, *Over There*, p. 64.
[85] Briganti and Mezei, *The Domestic Space Reader*, p. 5.
[86] Bachelard continues: 'We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. [...] Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home' (Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 4-6).
[87] Eliot, *Four Quartets: II. East Coker*, l. 203.

> are, such frequency does not in the slightest degree diminish the forlorn tragedy of that particular house which I have beheld.[88]

Bennett's description of the farmhouse as a shell serves a dual purpose: it is both an ironic allusion to the source of its ruin, and – when read in conjunction with 'gutted' – underpins the violent expulsion of its inhabitants. Banality adds pathos to the destruction; the quotidian and familiar intention to 'clean that [object] to-morrow' remains unfulfilled and fortifies the idea that tragedy does not stem from scale ('frequency'), but rather, from our recognition that each 'tragic house' represents a destitute (if not dead) household ('this [...] was somebody's house').

When in Rheims, Bennett writes:

> the shells have revealed the functioning of the home at its most intimate, and that is seen which none should see. Indignation rises out of the heart. Amid stacks of refuse you may distinguish a bath, a magnificent fragment of mirror, a piece of tapestry, a saucepan.[89]

The use of 'intimate', when paired with this specific array of 'material',[90] indicates that the source of Bennett's 'indignation' is humanitarian, not architectural, in nature. The bathtub is symptomatic of a private ritual (washing), contained within a private space within the home, which 'none' (i.e. the public) 'should [otherwise] see'. The fragment of mirror recalls moments of self-reflection and the piece of tapestry, either self-expression or an accepted human pleasure – an appreciation of art, and the desire to personalise our home with things

[88] Bennett, *Over There*, pp. 24-5.
[89] Ibid., p. 64.
[90] Ibid.

that we find aesthetically pleasing and/or have sentimental value. The saucepan is momentarily incongruous, until we consider its association with an uniquely human behaviour (cooking). The scene is both poignant and, to a degree, unsettling with its an array of common household components devoid of the people who had so recently handled them. Bennett continues:

> This material devastation, this annihilation of effort, hope, and love, this substitution of sorrow for joy – is just what plans and guns were laid for, what the worshipped leaders of the Fatherland prepared with the most wanton and scientific solicitude. It is desperately cruel.[91]

If Bennett were wholly detached and mourning simply 'the destruction of buildings',[92] the use of 'cruel' would be nonsensical; its inclusion implies recognition of the fact that this destruction has been deliberately inflicted, with the intention of causing human suffering. These 'tragic houses' represent more than bricks and mortar; they epitomise humanity and the way in which civilisation itself (evidenced by 'effort', 'hope', 'love' and 'joy'), is 'under fire'.[93]

In contrast to 'the destruction of buildings', Roby states that 'the graves of the dead soldiers served only to provoke in [Bennett] hackneyed expressions of honor, glory, and patriotism'.[94] The allegation that Bennett's 'expressions' are tired or clichéd discounts Bennett's humanitarian response to the War and negates his ostensive difficulties in articulating the scale of destruction he is witness to ('Nobody can realise the whole of the

[91] Ibid., p. 66.
[92] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 133.
[93] Towards the close of this chapter, Bennett refers to the War as an 'attack on civilisation' (Bennett, *Over There*, p. 72).
[94] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 133.

tragedy. It defies the mind. […] The perfect idiocy of the thing overwhelms you').[95] When surveying a metaphorical sea of graves on the slope between Barcy and Chambry, Bennett writes:

> These tombs were very like the others – an oblong of barbed wire, a white flag, a white cross, sometimes a name, more often only a number, rarely a wreath. You see first one, then another, then two, then a sprinkling; and gradually you perceive that the whole plain is dotted with gleams of white flags and white crosses, so that the graves seem to extend right away to the horizon marked by lines of trees. Then you see a huge general grave. . . . Much glory about that spot![96]

The sensory input is overwhelming. The graves fill Bennett's field of vision ('seem[ing] to extend right away to the horizon') and the rapidity with which he becomes aware of the growing number of them, results in momentary ineffability (the ellipsis) and a closing statement which effectively conveys the inadequacy of human response in the face of disaster. What else could be said about 'that spot'? How could anyone begin to put into words the 'immense tragedy',[97] the 'obscene' and senseless loss of life, the 'monstrosity' that is 'one population' – or, if we recall 'Our Greatest Blunder of the War', one member of 'Earth's family' – attempting to 'overrun another with murder and destruction from political covetousness'?[98] The phrase is consternated rather than clichéd.

Roby has contributed significantly to the assumption that *Over There* is written by an 'insensitive' man. By contrast, this study has addressed the portions of text which include overtly personal ('sensitive') impressions. The final portion of this chapter will re-evaluate

[95] Bennett, *Over There*, pp. 65-6.
[96] Ibid., pp. 28-9.
[97] Ibid., p. 65.
[98] Ibid., p. 66.

Bennett's more 'detached' observations, in light of his character and arguably experimental writing style.

Pauline Smith's personal memories of Bennett as recorded in *A. B.* (1933), are of an outwardly brisk character, a 'product of the Potteries', whose personality, in addition to his writing style, resulted from a consolidation of cultural upbringing and self-preservation:

> A., not yet called to the Ministry of Information, remains in my memories of him almost obstinately his ordinary, everyday, well-balanced self. Upheld by his blunt Five Towns grit and sincerity against both the assaults of war and its feverish social activities he makes, against the background of those first three years of upheaval, a sturdy yet somewhat withdrawn and solitary figure, doggedly pursuing his own set course in the midst of those whom the call to arms had brought so strangely as guests to his house. […] His interest in every phase of the life around him, and in the men and women, young and old, who played a part in it, was the interest of a detached observer, almost of an outsider, with a note-book. Yet behind this detachment lay the quick-sympathy and understanding, the rare patience and tolerance which came increasingly to be, throughout the years, his gifts to those around him.[99]

Smith's allusion to Bennett's 'interest' as being that 'of a detached observer, almost of an outsider, with a note-book' anticipates my contention that Bennett was experimenting with an early form of documentary Modernism. In this respect, it is not merely that *Over There* has polemical aims beyond mere pro-British propaganda; it is that Bennett's underrated work exhibits an awareness of the limitations of perspective and uses that to artistic effect, creating sympathy for the experience of ordinary victims of war and condemnation of military elites.

[99] Smith, *A. B.*, pp. 41-3.

Aware that reality is mediated by the observer and in turn by language, Bennett attends to the elusive and illusory qualities of complex phenomena, producing what amounts to a meta-commentary on the role of the writer as an agent in relation to public events. The mere reportage of naturalism may be adopted as a stance, but readers have to be invited to see through its apparent neutrality; overt propaganda might be the ostensible demand of the situation because of urgent exigencies, but the writer must find formal strategies, ranging from irony to symbolism, to maintain an individuated perspective. In this respect, Bennett's war years were crucial in his development, setting the stage for his post-war experimentations with style and willingness to use narrative as a means of social commentary.

Chapter III: The Post-War Years, 1919 onwards

The years which followed the resolution of the War are widely regarded as the least successful of Bennett's literary career. The disintegration of his marriage to Marguerite, financial security or conversely financial fears, overwork during the War, and a deterioration in his physical health, have all – both in isolation and cumulatively – been regarded as underpinning Bennett's collapse from brilliance to bathos. As Frank Swinnerton states:

> work, work, work, involvement in the affairs of others (C. F. G. Masterman, for instance, said to Mrs Mastermann, 'if you're in serious trouble, go to Arnold Bennett. He's the one.') and all sorts of business complications, coupled with a lack of tranquillity at home, had beaten him at last. He was at the end of his strength.[1]

The fact that Bennett – by his own admission – produced comparatively little in the final four months of 1919 has been widely regarded as 'a bad sign'.[2] I would contend, however, that Bennett's *literary* inactivity during that quarter was a conscious choice as, when writing to Hugh Walpole on 12 December 1919, Bennett states, 'I am still doing no work, – haven't done any for 3½ months. I could work but I won't',[3] and in February of that year, records in his journal that his 'chief occupation' lies 'with the stage'.[4] Despite his unceremonious dismissal from the Ministry of Information, Bennett remained acutely invested in national

[1] Swinnerton, *A Last Word*, p. 30.
[2] Ibid., p. 248.
[3] Bennett, letter to Walpole dated 12 December 1919, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 116.
[4] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Sunday, February 16th' 1919, in *Journals, Vol. II*, pp. 246-7. In 1919 Bennett produced *Judith: A Play in Three Acts, Founded on the Apocryphal Book of 'Judith'* which he completed within a month, and *Sacred and Profane Love: A Play in Four Acts Founded Upon the Novel of the Same Name*; he also dedicated a 'considerable amount of time' (ibid.) to the Lyric, Hammersmith which, in the words of Margaret Drabble, was to offer 'some of the finest productions and some of the best plays of the period, all warmly supported by Bennett' (Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 241).

and international affairs following the Allied victory, dedicating forty percent of the forty articles published in 1919 to a diverse array of topics. These include, amongst many others: the behaviour of the French reactionary press after the victory;[5] the continuing exploitation of soldiers in camps;[6] the petition for the release of conscientious objectors;[7] his disapproval of the decision made by 'the authorities controlling the Camps Library' to 'refuse' 'rationalist literature' ('books by Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Mill, Spencer, Matthew Arnold, Lecky, Ray Lankester, and other illustrious champions of man's right to think for himself');[8] and the need for realistic peace terms.[9] Bennett also took steps to re-establish his interest in the arts, writing long letters of encouragement to Hugh Walpole, Pauline Smith and Frank Swinnerton, praising T. S. Eliot's poetry in the *Criterion*, and producing an introduction for an exhibition of modern art at the Mansard Gallery (August 1919), which included paintings by Soutine, Matisse, Picasso and Modigliani; in the words of Margaret Drabble, Bennett 'was continuing faithfully in his role of popularizer of high art and educator of public taste'.[10]

With regard to his own literary output, Bennett had yet to decide where to invest his attention now that the 'officialism which the war had imposed upon [him]'[11] had ended. This was to begin to materialise in his articles of 1920. Nine of a total of twenty-three articles relate to what Bennett terms 'the sex-discord'. These comprise a ten-part series in *Cassell's Magazine of Fiction* entitled 'Women: To-day and Tomorrow'.[12] Whilst the subject matter is undeniably significant With regard to gender politics (for example, Bennett's advocacy of a woman's right to work and to financial or 'economic' emancipation), a number of the ideas

[5] Bennett (signed 'Sardonyx'), 'Observations' [no. 99], pp. 277-8.
[6] Bennett (signed 'Sardonyx'), 'Observations' [no. 100], pp. 297-8.
[7] Bennett (signed 'Sardonyx'), 'Observations' [no. 101], pp. 321-2.
[8] Bennett, 'Orthodoxy', p. 249.
[9] Bennett (signed 'Sardonyx'), 'Observations' [no. 108], pp. 492-3.
[10] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 247.
[11] Bennett, 'After the Armistice', p. 244.
[12] The first article in this series was published in December 1919 and the last in October 1920. Six of these were reproduced in the same year, in a series in *Harper's Bazar* ('A New Series of Brilliant Essays on Women') and two in *Hearst's* ('The Married Life of Jack and Jill'). The original ten articles are reprinted in *Our Women: Chapters on the Sex-Discord* (1920).

contained within these articles are not dissimilar to those expressed in a six-part series published in *T. P.'s Weekly* a decade previously ('The Revolt of Youth' (1909))[13] and in *The Plain Man and His Wife* (1913).[14] What is most interesting is the disclosure of Bennett's purpose in writing them, and in turn, the advancement of his perceived responsibility to the public as an adviser 'interested in […] the spiritual life of peoples'.[15]

In the first article of this series ('The Perils of Writing about Women'), Bennett writes that his 'object' is 'to assist a little in the development of the altercation' (by which he means the 'Sex-Discord').[16] Acknowledging that 'life is a movement from imperfection towards perfection',[17] Bennett affirms that 'the progress of mankind has need of every method that is sincere and instinctive' and whilst the world 'owes much to Bacon and Newton', it owes no less to 'Wordsworth and Dr. Johnson – or even Charles Lamb'. Bennett writes:

> is it not notorious that the most successful prophets have been, not men of science and scholars, but men of letters? […] There is room, in the thick crowd of truth-seekers, for honest people who, lacking the qualities fundamental in a philosopher and a man of science, yet share with them the qualities of imagination and possess other qualities generally denied by nature to philosophers and men of science. Everybody may help.[18]

The 'method' by which Bennett is offering his 'help', is 'the impressionist, fanciful, unscientific, wayward, leaping, philosophically indefensible method, my method'.[19] It is this

[13] See in particular 'The Girl' (Part IV) and 'The Problem of the Girl' (Part V), both of which advocate female interaction with the world beyond the home, and the necessity of having definite pursuits.
[14] This book was issued in America under the title *Married Life: The Plain Man and His Wife* (1913) and reprinted in England as *Marriage (The Plain Man and His Wife)* (1916).
[15] Bennett, *The Religious Interregnum*, p. 21.
[16] Bennett, *Our Women*, p. 10.
[17] Ibid., p. 12.
[18] Ibid., pp. 19-20.
[19] Ibid., p. 22.

offer of guidance, the decision to actively promote (or 'assist') change and to contribute to the social 'movement' as an established 'man of letters', which influences this final portion of Bennett's literary career. Bennett is returning to 'the human dailiness of life', 'the daily habits and polity of the human beings who are intimately sharing with him the adventure of life',[20] but he is no longer content merely to observe.

This chapter examines Bennett's desire to quash sustained ignorance – the reluctance, in large swathes of the populace, to acknowledge instances of societal injustice – and in so doing, actively cultivate societal improvement with the aim of securing a spiritually prosperous world for future generations. I argue that *Riceyman Steps* (1923) serves as a fictionalized account of the worst possible outcomes which can arise when one determines not to make 'the best of life'; that *Lord Raingo* (1926) is preoccupied with governmental shortcomings and culminates in the realisation that the chief goal, particularly for those who can effect change, should be to establish a better world for the next generation; and that the tension of the impending train crash in *Accident* (1929) is an allegory, illustrative of Bennett's fear of an impending class war, influenced in part by the social unrest culminating in, and remaining unresolved by, the General Strike of 1926.

[20] Ibid., p. 20.

8. *Riceyman Steps* (1923)

In 1922 Bennett published a ten-part series of articles in *Strand Magazine* under the collective title 'How to Make the Best of Life'. These include: 'Temperament and Habits', 'Establishing Good Humour: Three Aids', 'The Business of Education', 'Starting in Life', 'Falling in Love', 'Marriage', 'The Continuation of Marriage', 'Children', 'Not for the Young', and 'Being Interested in the Community'. All of these articles contain pertinent pieces of advice, many of which are neglected in *Riceyman Steps* (1923); the purpose of this section is to examine the novel as a counterpart to Bennett's series and in relation to larger social-political contexts, arguing that the novel provides a fictionalised representation of what can happen when men and women fail to make 'the best of life' and as a diagnosis of cultural malaise.

In 'Temperament and Habits', Bennett stresses the importance of acknowledging one's temperament when deciding upon which 'path' to pursue in life (in particular, when choosing a career), but warns that 'a total surrender to temperament is likely to result in both individual and general unhappiness' as 'most temperaments have in them the seeds of both good and evil'.[1] Bennett also cautions against 'fixed habits' ('fixed habits are to wrought iron what wrought iron is to putty. They can be neither bent nor broken; they develop into the prison-cell of the man who has formed them …') as these 'are nearly always the sign that the sense of proportion has gone or is going, and that one part of the mental organism is flourishing at the expense of another'.[2] Life, states Bennett, 'ought to be a feat of balancing, guided by a sense of proportion' and 'commonsense must draw a line'.[3]

[1] Bennett, *Best*, p. 13.
[2] Ibid., pp. 36, 37.
[3] Ibid., pp. 37, 13.

Henry Earlforward typifies a man imprisoned by fixed habits and an unchecked temperament. Henry's temperament, naturally inclined toward thriftiness, has developed into miserliness, and his habit of stringent economy into a fetishisisation of money, which renders him incapable of spending what is required in order to sustain his physical health (significantly, depriving himself of food in order to lessen the cost of housekeeping).[4] His unconstrained temperament and habits have developed into a mental illness, as they exude a 'monstrous' level of control over his life which neither he – nor the woman he loves – is able to conquer. When on his one-day honeymoon, for example, Henry takes Violet to Madame Tussaud's and is 'hurt' to discover that their admittance into the famed Chamber of Horrors requires an additional fee:

> His secret passion fought against his love. He turned pale; he could not speak; he was himself amazed at the power of his passion. Full of fine intentions, he dared not affront the monster.[5]

With the 'most magnificent and extravagant heroism' Henry does manage to temporarily quell 'the monster', whispering, with a 'dry and constricted' throat, 'I hardly think we ought to consider expense on a day like his', which prompts Violet to pay the one and fourpence entry fee.[6] The victory is short-lived, however, as when Violet suggests a cup of tea in the café prior to their going to the 'big cinema', Henry's monster resurfaces with a vengeance, compelling Henry to lie about the lameness in his knee:

[4] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 131.
[5] Ibid., pp. 95-6.
[6] Ibid., p. 96.

> His knee was not troubling him in the least, but […] he must either go home or go mad. The monster had come back upon him in ruthless might. To placate the monster he must at any cost bear Violet down.[7]

Upon their return to T. T. Riceyman's, Henry discovers Violet's 'wedding present' to him: a professional vacuum-cleaning of his shop. Henry again, turns pale; he 'could not like the cleanliness' as he feels that he 'had been robbed of something'.[8] Fantastically, all that has been taken from him is the accumulated dust, yet Henry is compelled to ask what will happen to the dirt that the cleaners have collected and if they will 'get anything for it'.[9] His interest in and sensation of loss for the grime is bizarre and adds to the reader's growing suspicion that 'there was something wrong in [Henry's] mysterious head'.[10]

Violet also has a psychological martinet, and this makes her vulnerable. Violet has a 'secret abiding terror' that 'she might be incapable of managing her possessions', thereby losing all of her money and ending her life 'in poverty and solitude'.[11] In 'Establishing Good Humour: Three Aids', Bennett writes that 'we are a nation of secret worriers' (positing that 'most of us live in expectation of some catastrophe that never occurs'), but if worry is 'bereft of common sense' and 'lacks balance and perspective', it 'makes for mischief' and 'to act according to its conclusions is perilous, and sometimes fatal'.[12] In short, 'worrying is a bad habit of mind' and needs to be 'broken' by means of 'regular discipline'.[13] Violet's 'secret terror' (or 'worry') is similar to Henry's 'bad habit of mind' in that it compels her to adopt a similarly strict economy. Having 'coaxed' Elsie into performing three hours of overtime, she

[7] Ibid., pp. 97-8.
[8] Ibid., pp. 100-1.
[9] Ibid., p. 102.
[10] Ibid., p. 174.
[11] Ibid., p. 28.
[12] Bennett, *Best*, pp. 60, 61, 65.
[13] Ibid., p. 66.

compensates her with just sixpence and 'an exceedingly thin slice of ham', and after placing an advertisement for her confectionary shop in the *News of the World*, has 'no desire to buy a paper' in order to check the ad's appearance, choosing instead to surreptitiously 'stoop' and 'pick up' a folded paper from a stranger's doorstep.[14] Violet's 'horrible' fear of 'solitude, celibacy, spinsterishness, eternal self-defence [and] eternal misgivings about her security'[15] causes the greatest 'mischief', as this colours her initial impressions of Henry's character. After the death of Mr. Arb, Violet is bereft of 'masculine guidance or protection' and is 'thoroughly disorganised'; 'she lived in suspense, undecided what to do and not quite confident in her own unaided wisdom'.[16] The appearance of 'Mr. Earlforward, and his gift [of the cookery book], […] suddenly lightened her horizon',[17] and her determination to maintain her 'illusion' of Henry as an exemplary man, at the expense of listening to her 'common sense' and 'reason' – a frequent failing, which Bennett warns against in 'Marriage'[18] – detains her in a union devoid of both physical and spiritual nourishment.

The final nail in Violet's coffin is her passivity. At the beginning of their relationship (before realising the full extent of Henry's illness), Violet 'take[s] pleasure in yielding to [Henry]', but pleasure is superseded by 'self-preservation', as she utilises her 'intense acquiescence' to nullify confrontation, and as a 'cure' for her fear of Henry's peculiar 'individuality'.[19] Her acknowledgement of Henry's miserliness comes too late and the combination of two personalities that are dominated by 'bad habit[s] of mind' proves fatal, as the unchecked vices of one spouse sequentially affect those in the other. Violet's passivity expedites Henry's deterioration ('my husband is a miser. I've encouraged him for the sake of

[14] Bennett, *Riceyman*, pp. 28-9, 61.
[15] Ibid., p. 73.
[16] Ibid., p. 27.
[17] Ibid., pp. 27-8.
[18] Bennett, *Best*, p. 175.
[19] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 78.

peace. And so now you know, doctor!')[20] and Henry's preoccupation with saving gives Violet's own worries credence. For example, when Henry uses the alleged spread of communism to excuse his self-starvation and his hoarding of money, Violet – against her better judgement – allows herself to be equally convinced. Showing Violet the contents of his safe after his reading of the article, Violet finds the sight of the money 'a very marvellous and reassuring sight. […] It reassured her against communism. With that hoard well gripped, what could communists do to you after all? […] Ah, how she admired Henry! How she shared his deepest instincts! How she would follow his example! How right he was – always!'[21] That same evening, Violet reveals to Elsie that she knows Henry's invocation of the newspaper article on communism was a ruse:

> 'What's the use of saving if you're killing yourself to do it?' […]
>
> Violet was referring, and Elsie knew that she was referring, to the master's outburst on communism, with all its unspoken implications. They had both been impressed at the time […]. But now they were both femininely scornful of the silent argument of the illogical male. What, indeed, was the use of fatally depriving yourself now in order not to have to deprive yourself later on?[22]

Whilst both characters are bad for one another, it is Henry's personal failings (and as such his failings as a husband) which beget the deaths of both characters. Bennett argues that 'a husband does not belong solely to himself, and he will not make the best of his life or of his wife's by thinking exclusively of himself'.[23] In allowing himself to become enslaved by

[20] Ibid., p. 192.
[21] Ibid., p. 164.
[22] Ibid., pp. 173-4.
[23] Bennett, *Best*, p. 188.

his ‘grand passion’, Henry is ‘fulfil[ling] himself at the cost of inflicting undue privation and suffering on his wife’ and is thus committing ‘a social crime’:[24]

> [Henry] was in love with [Violet], but he was more in love with his grand passion and vice, which alone had power over him, and of which he, the bland tyrant over all else, was the slave.[25]

Henry fails at ‘the first and chief duty of the husband’ which is ‘to provide for the household the physical means of subsistence upon the scale which the wife is reasonably entitled to expect and which he has led her to expect’.[26] Violet’s eating habits are constrained by those of her husband and when emotions are particularly high and Henry refuses to eat, Violet also fails to eat. Violet is naturally ‘slim’, but when Dr. Raste sees her after a twelve month interval (the majority of which, has been spent wedded to Henry) he sees a ‘shrunken woman’, and as Violet is so drastically ‘under-nourished’ when she is admitted to hospital, she ‘ha[s]n’t the strength to rally’ after being placed under the anaesthetic and dies.[27] Violet is not only physically malnourished, she is also starved of intellectual stimulation and emotional attention. Violet is ‘brilliantly’ innovative – she constructs a bookcase from loose planks stored in the cellar, ‘improvis[ing] supports for the shelves out of […] old volumes of *The Illustrated London News*’, and takes a set of casters ‘off the back legs of an old arm-chair […] screwing them on to two legs of the [outdoor] bookstand’ so that it ‘could now be moved, fully loaded, by one person with ease’.[28] Henry takes quiet pride in the latter, but this instance is atypical as he fails to nourish Violet’s ‘individuality’[29] in any other capacity. In

[24] Ibid., p. 187.
[25] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 151.
[26] Bennett, *Best*., pp. 184-5.
[27] Bennett, *Riceyman*, pp. 40, 183, 288.
[28] Ibid., pp. 116, 132.
[29] Bennett, *Best*, p. 205.

'The Continuation of Marriage', Bennett writes that 'the woman's intellect and intelligence […] require food' and if the husband 'omits to see that [her individuality] is variously nourished' the 'wife's zest' will 'wither' 'in a vast desert of sameness'.[30] Bennett writes that the 'remedy' is quite straightforward: 'more contacts with the world, not excepting the world of ideas', and stresses the importance of cultivating a circle of friends so that the wife is 'stimulated' by 'change, variety, fresh experience of human nature [and] the broadening of ideas'.[31] 'Tens of thousands of homes', suggests Bennett, 'remain solitary unto themselves, like impregnable islands in the social sea, because the husband absurdly and wickedly forgets to energize the wife to the performance of those useful mind-enlarging activities for which she is fitted, but which she will not undertake save under the masculine stimulus'.[32] T. T. Riceyman's is one of these impenetrable homes. In marrying Henry, Violet is severed from the outside world, and as a consequence of Henry's subservience to his parsimonious temperament and his determination to close himself off from any external scrutiny, Violet 'sink[s] into a dullness more and more flat':[33]

> The atmosphere of the sealed house was infected by the strangeness of the master, who himself, in turn, was influenced by it. Fresh air, new breath, a great wind, was needed to dispel the corruption. The house was suffocating its owners.[34]

Violet is not only cut off from the world, she is also cut off from her husband. Henry does not engage with Violet – he lies to her about his eating habits, 'seldom [told] her anything until he had to tell her',[35] and, with the presumed exception of his wedding night

[30] Ibid., pp. 206, 202.
[31] Ibid., pp. 205, 207.
[32] Ibid., pp. 207-8.
[33] Ibid., p. 223.
[34] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 174.
[35] Ibid., p. 125.

when he indulges himself with Elsie's gift of a wedding cake, denies her sexual intimacy ('Love? A lot you know about it! Cold by day and cold by night!' 'Why should I come back to bed? You're ill. You've got no strength, and haven't had for weeks. What do you want me to come back to bed for?')[36] Henry also fails to notice that Violet is ill ('I didn't know there was anything particular wrong with you'),[37] and after she is admitted to hospital, neglects to ask after her, writing only when prompted to do so by Elsie. All of Henry's energy is dedicated to his true passion, parsimony, and in his consequential servitude to this dangerous 'habit', he constructs an impenetrable façade ('what Henry was thinking no one could guess. Henry's mind to him a kingdom was, and a kingdom never invaded').[38] When Elsie calls at the shop outside of her usual hours of employment, Henry is convinced that she has come to hand in her notice (he is 'disturbed by apprehension').[39] In revealing her reason for calling (to enquire about the purchase of a cookery book on Violet's behalf), relief – and the prospect of 'mak[ing] a link with Mrs. Arb' – 'raised [Henry] into heaven', but his 'demeanour reflected no change in his mood'.[40] When Violet first greets Henry, revealing that 'she knew his real name [and] that his name did not accord with the sign over his shop', Henry is 'uplifted to a higher plane of existence' and 'secretly, [is] a bit flurried, but his demeanour did not betray this'.[41] Henry's impassivity appears to originate in an inclination towards privacy and propriety. Similarly to his thrifty temperament and frugal habits, however, this aspect of his personality (no doubt fed in part by 'the monster') develops into a harmful foible. When at Madam Tussaud's with his new bride, Henry experiences an uncanny sense of pride in successfully concealing his 'situation' from the outside world: 'he was convinced, and rightly, that none in the ingenuous crowds could guess the situation of

[36] Ibid., pp. 150, 225.
[37] Ibid., p. 190.
[38] Ibid., p. 183.
[39] Ibid., p. 14.
[40] Ibid., p. 15
[41] Ibid., p. 22.

himself and Violet. Such a staid, quiet, commonplace couple. He savoured with the most intense satisfaction that they were deceiving all the simple creatures who surrounded them. He laughed at youth, scorned it'.[42] Having married Violet just hours earlier, one would expect his 'satisfaction' to derive from the nuptials. Henry instead fosters a sense of superiority (satirised by Bennett's interjection that it is 'quite right' that no one guessed that Henry has just gotten married as none of the visitors are particularly interested in scrutinising Henry).

In 'Being Interested in the Community', Bennett challenges the 'at once fatal and absurd' maxim that 'it's every one for himself in this world'.[43] Bennett writes that 'nothing is more fatal to the quest for earthly happiness than a general antipathy to, and contempt for, one's fellow-creatures':

> such a state of antagonism […] is like the ceaseless poisoning of the body from some cause whose irritating activity never slackens. […] It means that in your opinion all mankind is wrong and you are right, and heaven has for some reason or other singled *you* out to be the sole repository of wisdom. It makes you self-righteous, and here in my view is the very worst of it. Self-righteousness is an affliction of the deadliest kind.[44]

In Henry's case, self-righteousness is 'deadly'. When Dr. Raste greets Henry after not seeing him for a year, he is 'astonished' by Henry's 'emaciated' appearance and 'amazed' that he had not been called to see him 'weeks earlier'.[45] Henry has regarded Dr. Raste as 'impudent' from the start, and is 'repulsed' by the thought of paying someone to help him. When Dr.

[42] Ibid., p. 183.
[43] Bennett, *Best*, pp. 312, 291.
[44] Ibid., pp. 292, 294-5.
[45] Bennett, *Riceyman*, pp. 183-4.

Raste suggests that Henry see Barker to fix his limp – a 'ten minute' appointment which might mean he never limps again – Henry's first thought is of the 'charge'. When Dr. Raste counters that surely any amount of money is worth the investment if it means 'to be cured' ('What's money?' he asks), Henry cannot bring himself to respond to such a 'silly question' and 'the doctor understood himself to have been definitely repulsed'.[46]

As Henry deteriorates, he alienates himself – he has no friends ('nobody ever calls' and he and Violet 'never go out'), has only 'bland relations with customers which were not such as to permit any kind of intimacy', and has worn Violet down to such an extent that her own health is failing.[47] It is only Elsie's courage in stepping beyond the bounds of a servant in approaching Dr. Raste without first securing permission from her master and mistress ('Do you mean to say you've come up here to tell me about your master and mistress without orders? […] Did you suppose that I can come like that without being called in? I never heard of such a thing. What next, I wonder?'),[48] which creates an occasion for the doctor to call at the shop in order to secretly review Henry. It is Henry's 'self-righteousness' – the delusion that he alone in the world is sane – which confines him to his home and ultimately, kills him:

> there was no sound reason for going into a hospital. […] The doctor evidently desired to make something out of nothing. They were all the same. And women were all the same, too. He had imagined that Violet was not like other women. But he had been mistaken! She had lost her head – otherwise she would never have sent for the doctor in the middle of the night. […] He saw himself in the midst of a vast general lunacy and conspiracy, and he alone maintaining ordinary common sense and honesty. He felt the whole world against him; but he could fight the whole world.[49]

[46] Ibid., pp. 189-90.
[47] Ibid., pp. 180, 184.
[48] Ibid., pp. 180, 184, 180.
[49] Ibid., p. 218.

Many critics have extrapolated that 'the shop is an image of Earlforward'.[50] The bookcases and piles of books can be interpreted as representative of the sulci (fissures) and gyri ('bumps') of Henry's brain, and the contrast between the 'well lighted and tidy' bay at the front of the shop with the progressively 'darker and […] untidier' bays which recede 'into the gloomy backward of the shop', as illustrative of the controlled façade which Henry maintains, behind which, 'the monster' reigns.[51] Henry is disturbed by Violet's interference in the arrangement of his shop, as the shop is representative of his mind. Despite both Violet and Elsie's 'regular periodicity' in cleaning 'the whole establishment, section by section', they could not get over the surface fast enough to cope with the unceasing deposit of dirt'. The 'resistless' 'accumulation of dirt'[52] symbolises Henry's 'resistance' to Violet's attempts to connect with him, 'to wrench out and drag up from hidden depths the inaccessible secrets of his mind'.[53] Whilst the state of the shop and of the home is undoubtedly representative of Henry, it is also very much linked to Violet. In 'Marriage', Bennett writes that 'the household machinery reacts on intimacy, and vice versa. Everything that occurs in the household affects, and is affected by, the intimacy'.[54] Henry's distancing of himself precludes intimacy; the shop grows steadily dustier, darker and colder (lightbulbs blow and fail to be replaced, fires are laid but fail to be lit) because Henry's and Violet's relationship is decaying and Violet – 'imprisoned in everlasting shade […] deprived […], hopeless, resigned, martyrized' – is dying.[55]

Violet and Henry are not the only characters struggling to master damaging 'mental habits'.[56] Elsie suffers from depression ('she had a great grief, the intensity of which few

[50] Hepburn, *The Art of Arnold Bennett*, p. 36.
[51] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 6.
[52] Ibid., p. 127.
[53] Ibid., p. 195.
[54] Bennett, *Best*, p. 172.
[55] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 6.
[56] Bennett, *Best*, p. 37.

people suspected and still fewer attempted to realize and none troubled about'), and Joe is a 'shell-shock case'.[57] Unlike her master and mistress, Elsie refuses to allow her mindset (sadness) to conquer her. Pragmatic, honest, kind and obliging, Elsie demonstrates ample instances of 'common-sense' and has the right 'attitude towards society' and her 'fellow-creatures'.[58] In 'Being Interested in the Community', Bennett writes 'not to live in a real accord of esteem, friendship, and understanding with your community is fundamentally wrong'; 'every member of the community [should] set himself to improve the community' and thus engage in 'public work'.[59] 'Public work' is not limited to 'electioneering, speechifying, canvassing, campaigning, conspiring, lobbying, and a general prominence in the local newspaper', it signifies 'anything' which comes 'from an unselfish motive' and is 'for the betterment of the community or a part of the community'; 'no effort is too humble to produce an effect worth producing. No effort is wasted'.[60] Elsie willingly spends her limited free time helping others. She yields 'with a mild and pure kindliness' to Violet's request to stay longer at her shop as she senses that Violet is lonely ('She's all by herself, and strange to it. And I couldn't find it in my heart to refuse. You have to do what's right, haven't you?'),[61] and after moving in to T. T. Riceyman's, 'generally began half-holidays by helping her friends, to whom she was very faithful, in Riceyman Square, either by skilled cleansing labour in the unclean dirty house or, as occasion might demand, by taking children out for an excursion into the more romantic leafy regions of Clerkenwell'.[62]

John Lucas 'cautiously' argues that Elsie 'doesn't really belong to the shabby world that Bennett so finely evokes in the best pages of the novel', contending that Elsie 'fits a shade too neatly into the novel's patterning' – providing simply, a 'sentimental' counterpart

[57] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 8.
[58] Bennett, *Best*, p. 292.
[59] Ibid., pp. 300, 305, 308.
[60] Ibid., pp. 309, 307.
[61] Bennett, *Riceyman*, pp. 29, 31.
[62] Ibid., p. 176.

to Henry and Violet – and that 'there are moments when she seems not far from caricature', as 'try as he may to make her a real person in a real place, [Bennett] cannot always dispel the haze of sentimentality which surrounds her'.[63] Elsie undoubtedly provides a stark contrast to Henry and Violet, but if we are to regard the novel as didactic (as exposing the dangers in cultivating 'bad habits of mind' and allowing oneself to become alienated from the community), Elsie's characterisation is no more exaggerated than that of her mistress and master. Henry and Violet's diseased states of mind manifest in eating disorders and physical tumours – Henry develops stomach cancer (located 'at the junction of the gullet and the cardiac end of the stomach') and Violet, a 'fibroid growth' in her 'matrix' (womb).[64] The pair 'shrink' and die as a consequence of physical malnutrition, and this is simultaneously caused by and symbolises, mental, emotional and spiritual desiccation. Elsie maintains her physical health by eating and this in turn symbolises her determination to nourish her mind – to savour the good (maintaining friendships and striving to keep a positive disposition and to be helpful) and to process or digest, the bad (combatting her 'sorrow').[65] As observed by Neil Cartlidge:

> Elsie's willingness to accept any guilt for her need to be properly fed only underlines her fundamental honesty, as against the unscrupulousness of employers who can pay her so little […] and yet feed her so badly that she is eventually reduced to eating bacon raw. Far from being 'in the grip of [a] tyrannical appetite' […] as Elsie feels […], she is actually only seeking the sustenance that the physical nature of her work demands – and to which she also has a right as a servant 'living in.' At the same time,

[63] Lucas, *A Study*, pp. 202-3, 201.
[64] Bennett, *Riceyman*, pp. 309, 266.
[65] Ibid., p. 123.

> Elsie's self-criminalization contributes to the fetishization of starvation that is the index of the ill-health of the household […].[66]

Bennett refers to Elsie as the 'heroine' of his novel in letters to Thomas Bodkin, George Doran and André Gide[67] and in his letter to Doran, writes that Elsie 'is a fine person' and that he 'hopes' that Doran 'will like her'.[68] With regard to the reception of *Riceyman Steps*, Bennett writes that he is 'sick of the praise of Elsie […] [a]s if the sympathetic quality of Elsie had anything whatever to do with the quality of the book',[69] and is exasperated by the psychology of the public which celebrates Elsie, as opposed to the 'excellence' of the novel as a whole:

> my bourgeois public was considerably disgusted by those very innocent works *The Pretty Lady* and *Lilian*. So that I was being counted as a back number. *Riceyman Steps* has altered all that, and I am suddenly the darling of the public – not because of the excellence of *Riceyman Steps*, but because the heroine thereof is a sympathetic, *good*, reliable, unselfish and chaste character! She is a domestique, and all London and New York is wishing that it could find devoted servants like her! 'Psychologies des foules' ['Psychologies of crowds']![70]

Bennett's frustration at the 'haze of sentimentality' which encompasses Elsie, should not be regarded as indicative of his inability to make her a appear 'real'.[71] I would contend that

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[66] Cartlidge, '"The Only Really Objective Novel Ever Written"?', p. 128.
[67] Bennett, letter to Bodkin dated 7 November 1922; letter to Doran dated 14 May 1923; and letter to Gide dated 25 February 1924, in *Letters, Vol. III*, pp. 176, 189, 213.
[68] Bennett, letter to Doran dated 14 May 1923, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 189.
[69] Bennett, letter to Swinnerton dated 12 February 1924, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 210.
[70] Bennett, letter to Gide dated 25 February 1924, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 213.
[71] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 201.

Bennett designed Elsie to be representative of what should be the norm; she is an exemplar of a '*good*' citizen – not just a 'good' servant – a woman who is striving and succeeding 'to make the best of life'. In celebrating Elsie's character at the expense of situating her in the context of the 'excellent' novel, the public reveals its ignorance in failing to recognise an 'average fellow-creature […], inspired by a fair amount of kindliness and a quite active conscious and sense of duty' and in turn, the fundamental message of the novel, which is to master the 'dangerous' impulses of the mind in order to live, and to live well.

In her essay 'Modern Fiction' (1925), Virginia Woolf contends that 'the point of interest' for 'the moderns' 'lies very likely in the dark places of psychology': modern authors are 'task[ed]' with 'convey[ing]' the 'varying', 'unknown' and 'uncircumscribed' 'spirit', and 'to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain'.[72] Psychoanalysis has been awarded 'a privileged place within histories of modernism', occupying a category of 'reform' facilitating 'the need to bring the dark places of the self to light'.[73] Within the last decade, our understanding of the relationship between modernism and psychoanalysis has grown substantially, extending beyond 'the typical associations of Freud with the sexual' to encompass 'a huge range of experiments, interventions, and developments of psychoanalytic ideas happening across a range of international experimental cultures, and in response to diverse points of contact with the theory itself', and by engaging with 'a more diverse set of viewpoints than has often previously been allowed'; it is through following 'these kinds of routes' that one 'get[s] a powerful sense of just how much the period *belonged* to psychoanalysis' and 'how broadly and variously it infiltrated the culture of its day'.[74] One of the examples of this 'permeation of psychological knowledge' includes the 'unprecedented' emergence 'of a series of

[72] Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', pp. 11, 9, 10.
[73] Armstrong, *Modernism*, p. 72.
[74] Ffytche, 'The Modernist Road', pp. 410, 412-3, 413.

everyday practices for the management and development of this psychological self'.[75] Bennett's series of articles which were collectively published in *How to Make the Best of Life* provides an effective illustration of this, with particular regard to the emergent 'recognition' that 'the human mind [had] a mind of its own: it was now a purposive agent, not simply reacting to its environment, but dynamically interacting with it as instinct and emotion were tamed and channelled by will, sentiments, and ideals'.[76] *How to Make the Best of Life* is primarily concerned with 'mental habits' and touches upon a range of 'important' psychological 'discoveries'[77] including an implied familiarity with the Freudian division of the mind (via Bennett's brief discourse on the 'Ego') and reference to the 'progress in the practice of both hetero-suggestion (suggestion from another person) and auto-suggestion' at the 'new Nancy school' in France.[78]

In *How to Make the Best of Life*, Bennett recognises that psychoanalysis and varying branches of psychotherapeutic techniques are still in their very early stages ('we know little of the physical part of the organism. We know far, far less of the mental part')[79] and as such acknowledges the difficulty in processing new concepts and the reluctance to pass judgement on the effectiveness of others. For example, recognition of the realisation that 'the human mind [has] a mind of its own' is paired with the Freudian concept of the Ego, but Bennett's use of rhetorical questions and ambivalent phrasing conveys a still unfurling comprehension:

[75] Thomson, 'Psychology', p. 97.
[76] Ibid., p. 100.
[77] Bennett, *Best*, pp. 37, 40.
[78] Ibid., pp. 66-7, 68-71. The Nancy School – so-called due to its location in Nancy, a city in the north-eastern region of Grand Est, France – is where T. Liébault and H. Bernhein revived the practice of hypnotism in the 1860s, ultimately establishing what they termed, 'the Nancy School'. Bernheim 'rejected the "animal magnatism" theories of Mesmerism, explaining hypnotism in terms of suggestion' and a number of French therapists, including Charles Baudouin and Emily Coué, revived Bernheim's approach in the early twentieth century, referring to themselves as 'the New Nancy School' (Richards, *Psychology*, p. 223).
[79] Bennett, *Best*, p. 40.

> The mind has a limited monarchy over the body. What is the force that has even a very limited monarchy over the mind? Is the mind the Ego, or is the mind merely the servant of the Ego? If it is merely the servant, it is a very unreliable, capricious, inefficient and disobedient servant. At this point one is apt to tumble into quagmires of psychological speculation […]. We may as well keep carefully out of them and just assert as a dogma that the 'I,' the Ego, whatever it is, can and does as a matter of daily fact exert some sort of control over the mind. And when the need is acute the control usually increases.[80]

Mathew Thomson writes that post-1910 'confidence in a unitary, rational self was on the wane [and] belief in a multidimensional and potentially irrational self was on the rise' and that this 'shift' was 'further encouraged' 'by the rejection of a merely introspective approach to the study of the mind (which was naturally predisposed to focus on conscious rational thought)'.[81] This transition is evident in Bennett's own writings – particularly if we compare the model of Bennett's *The Human Machine* (1908) with that of *How to Make the Best of Life* published fifteen years later. Both texts are designed to aid the improvement and/or effective management of the self. The former addresses the 'brain' – by which Bennett means 'the faculty which reasons and which gives orders to the muscles', 'the diplomat which arranges relations between our instinctive self and the universe' and 'a majestic spectacle of common sense' – and it is viewed as a singular component (or 'instrument') of 'the human machine'.[82] The latter is concerned with various facets of the 'mind', 'the mental part of the [human] organism', including elements such as temperament, habits, 'imagination' (empathy), and 'persistent' thoughts.[83] In the first instance, Bennett's choice of language demonstrates a

[80] Ibid., pp. 66-7.
[81] Thomson, 'Psychology', p. 100.
[82] Bennett, *The Human Machine*, pp. 26-7.
[83] Bennett, *Best*, pp. 40, 44, 60.

shift in understanding from a mechanical and externalised comprehension, to one which is organic, interconnected and multifaceted. In the second, Bennett modifies his advice With regard to mental 'training', moving from a concept of autonomous control, to one which promotes the refinement of various mental habits. In *Best* (when divulging the 'first' of 'two details of mental practice in auto-suggestion which in my opinion might be advantageously accepted from the Nancy School by all of us'), Bennett stresses that one should not attempt to 'bully the mind' – instead, one should 'persuade it'[84] – adding that 'for many years' he 'was an advocate of compulsion for the mind' but that he has 'now abandoned compulsion, owing to the arguments of the Nancy school'.[85] In *The Human Machine*, Bennett had written that 'your brain is not yourself. It is only a part of yourself, and not the highest seat of authority',[86] and that 'the brain must be put into training' as 'obedience can only be taught by imposing one's will, by the sheer force of volition. And the brain must be mastered by will-power'.[87]

Bennett's opinion of Freud and the new Nancy school of psychology was influenced by W. H. R. Rivers – an 'ethnologist and psycho-analyst'[88] whom Bennett regarded as a 'very intimate friend […], & a really great man'.[89] Bennett was introduced to Rivers by Siegfried Sassoon (whom Rivers had treated for shell shock) in 1919, and 'really g[o]t to know [him]' after inviting him aboard his yacht for a three-week cruise in the summer of 1921. Bennett found Rivers to be an exceptionally 'reward[ing]' companion, describing their early morning 'talks' as having 'constituted the most truly educational experience I have ever had'.[90] Whilst Bennett admits that he 'cannot remember many of his judgements' ('W. H. R. Rivers:

[84] Ibid., p. 69.
[85] Ibid., p. 70.
[86] Bennett, *The Human Machine*, p. 25.
[87] Ibid., p. 29.
[88] Bennett, letter to Walpole dated 12 December 1919, in *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 116.
[89] Bennett, letter to Dorothy Cheston dated 14 November 1923, in *Letters, Vol. IV*, p. 408.
[90] Bennett, 'W. H. R. Rivers', pp. 3, 4.

Some Recollections' was published almost a year after their voyage),[91] he does recall that Rivers 'criticised Freud freely, but always insisted that he was a great man', and 'on the new Nancy school […] was rather cautious; but […] mistrusted it. He would say, with an indescribable mild causticity: "I bet you some of those fellows are suggesting things to themselves all day"'.[92] Bennett incorporates this final phrase almost verbatim in *Best,* writing: 'I suspect that some of those Nancy specialists and their pupils are suggesting things to themselves all day and every day'.[93] In 'Some Recollections', Bennett also notes that Rivers 'was thrilling on the subject of the self-protective nature of shell-shock and kindred disorders'[94] and in light of Rivers' influence on the previously mentioned areas of psychology, it is very likely that Bennett's discourse with Rivers on the 'nature of shell-shock' shaped Bennett's portrayal of Joe – a 'shell-shock case' in the service of, and receiving treatment by, Dr. Raste.[95]

In 'The Repression of War Experience' (1918), Rivers writes that 'symptoms often arise in hospital or at home which are not the immediate and necessary consequence of war experience, but are due to repression of painful memories and thoughts, or of unpleasant affective states arising out of reflection concerning this experience'[96] and in *Instinct and the Unconscious: A Contribution to a Biological Theory of the Psycho-Neuroses* (1920), explores the 'intimate connection' between 'hysteria' and 'suggestion'.[97] In the latter, Rivers concurs with the Freudian understanding of the symptomatic 'manifestations' of hysteria as resulting from 'the conversion of the energy engendered by conflict' (Freud proposes 'suggestion-neurosis' 'as a term for the state'),[98] and poses the construction of 'two definite classes' of

[91] In a letter to Marguerite dated 5 July 1921, Bennett writes 'here we are in the open sea, on our way to Plymouth. […] Doctor Rivers is delightful, […] and his knowledge amazes me' (*Letters, Vol. IV*, p. 302).
[92] Bennett, 'W. H. R. Rivers', p. 5.
[93] Bennett, *Best,* p. 69.
[94] Bennett, 'W. H. R. Rivers', pp. 5-6.
[95] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 8.
[96] Rivers, 'The Repression', p. 2.
[97] Rivers, *Instinct*, p. 130.
[98] Ibid., p. 127.

'the[se] instinctive tendencies which manifest themselves in the psycho-neuroses'.[99] The first of these 'is composed of the tendencies which in a state of nature would promote the happiness of the individual […], but are in conflict with the traditional standards of thought and conduct of the society to which the individual belongs'.[100] It is this class which most closely accords with Joe's reaction to seeing his 'old divisional general' in Piccadilly:

> 'We used to call him the Slaughterer. That was how we called him. We never called him nothin' else. And there he was with his two rows o' ribbons and his flash women […], and I didn't like the look of his face – hard, ye know. Cruel. We knowed him, we did. And then I thought of the two minutes' silence, and hats off and stand at 'tension, and the Cenotaph, and it made me laugh. I laughed at him through the glass. And he didn't like it, he didn't. […] And he lets down the glass and says something about insultin' behaviour to these ladies, and I put my tongue out to him. […] I felt something coming over me – ye know. Then there was a crowd, and I caught a policeman one on the shoulder […] and they marched me off'.[101]

Joe's laughter and face-pulling manifests as a response to seeing a man whom he 'knows' to be a deficient leader enjoying a level of success and respect which he is not morally entitled to, juxtaposed with memories of his fallen comrades who have been awarded a comparatively meagre 'two minutes' silence' in acknowledgement of their service. Joe's scorn of 'the two minutes' silence, and hats off and stand at 'tension', recalls Bennett's chastisement of the treatment of ex-soliders in his article 'Armistice and All of Us' (1921):[102]

[99] Ibid., p. 138.
[100] Ibid., p. 138.
[101] Bennett, *Riceyman*, p. 302.
[102] This article was reprinted in *Things* as 'The Fourth Armistice Day'.

> This morning we shall all cease work or play, and meditate upon the heroism and the tragedy of the War. The overcoatless ex-soldier will cease begging his bread in the gutter of Regent Street, and the maimed warrior will cease selling chocolates, in order to meditate upon the heroism and the tragedy of the War. A solemn two minutes![103]

Had it not been for Elsie, the 'overcoatless ex-soldier' could easily have been Joe, as Joe had not returned to his former employer to collect his possessions ('a bag and some things'), and had sold all that he had left – his identification papers – in order to buy food.[104]

Bennett continues his diatribe, expressing his contempt for the siphoning off of money in preparation for future wars, at the expense of helping British citizens who are, at present, desperately in need of aid:

> while we are pondering over the dreadful and magnificent past, we should do well also to think clearly about the practical aim of those immense campaigns whose victorious conclusion we now celebrate. Their aim was to abolish militarism and the menace of the gun. […] Heaven knows – the Chancellor of the Exchequer certainly doesn't – how much we shall spend this year on preparing for fresh wars; but, anyhow, last year we spent £230,429,000 to this pleasant end. […] We grudge milk to babies, we starve children of elementary education, the country is ridden with hunger and idleness and cold, […] but at the fourth Armistice Day we are grandly spending millions every week in preparing for future wars.[105]

[103] Bennett, 'The Fourth Armistice Day', p. 181.
[104] Bennett, *Riceyman*, pp. 301-3.
[105] Ibid.

Having criticised the governance of the country, Bennett shifts his attention to the populous and assumes a significantly more positive approach. He addresses the populous – 'Everybody knows that war is idiotic, futile, calamitous, and settles nothing. And yet nearly everybody says, "There must always be war." Why must there always be war?' – and, in accordance with the structure of *Our Women, How to Make the Best of Life* and *Riceyman Steps*, he 'assist[s] a little' in the cultivation of positive progress,[106] by illustrating the means of achievable change:

> War is contrary to common sense, and it is therefore absolutely certain that the institution of war will one day be ridiculed and shrivelled out of existence. Whether that day shall arrive in our time, or long after we are ruined and dead, depends on ourselves. It depends on you and me and the ordinary fellow next door. […]
>
> Human nature will change in its attitude to war by casting out fear. War is not the product of courage; it is the product of fear. […] If you prepare for bankruptcy, you will have bankruptcy; if you prepare for war you will have war; and equally if you prepare for peace you will have peace.[107]

In *How to Make the Best of Life*, Bennett writes that his 'only aim' 'is to kill dangerous illusions'.[108] He achieves this by promoting an advancement in 'human nature' – whether this be the 'courage to confront the risks [of disarmament]', [109] or an improvement of the mind with the intention of becoming a happier person and a constructive member of the community. Bennett acknowledges that the 'over-cautious' and the ignorant may be resistant

[106] Bennett, *Our Women*, p. 10.
[107] Bennett, 'The Fourth Armistice Day', pp. 182-3.
[108] Bennett, *Best*, p. 21.
[109] Bennett, 'The Fourth Armistice Day', p. 183.

('"But this is dangerous advice you are giving!"'),[110] but his underlying 'faith'[111] in his 'fellow-creatures'[112] and in the power of an 'educated' and united 'public opinion',[113] maintains his passion: 'public opinion (your opinion and mine) can be strong enough to stop guns from going off. It *can* be strong enough, you know'.[114]

[110] Bennett, *Best*, p. 35.
[111] Bennett, 'The Fourth Armistice Day', p. 183.
[112] Bennett, *Best*, p. 43.
[113] Bennett, 'The Fourth Armistice Day', p. 184.
[114] Ibid., p. 183.

9. *Lord Raingo* (1926)

Lord Raingo's serialisation began in the *Evening Standard* on 20 September 1926 and it was published in book form on 8 October 1926. 18,450 copies were sold 'within ten days of publication'[1] and by June 1927 over 29,900 copies had been sold.[2] The boom was unsurprising, as the serial began amid a storm of controversy. For two and a half weeks prior to serial publication, *The Evening Standard*, the *Daily Express* and the *Sunday Express* published items which raised two questions – 'who was the original of Lord Raingo?' and 'was it right for a novelist to depict political figures alive or dead?'[3] – and 5,000 'large posters on the hoardings of London and suburbs'[4] paired Bennett's portrait with the legend: 'Who is Lord Raingo?'[5] Immediately following publication, *The Saturday Review of Literature* enumerated 'similarities between Lord Raingo's and Lord Beaverbrook's respective careers'[6] and the New York *Bookman* openly stated that Andy Clyth was Lloyd George, Tom Hogarth was Winston Churchill, Lord Ockleford was Lord Curzon, and Sid Jenkins 'the late Will Crooks'; Lord Raingo was allegedly 'easily identifiable, but no reviewer would care to say who the original was'[7] (the London *Bookman* vacillated between Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Riddell as the source).[8] An interview with Lord Birkenhead published in the *Daily Mail* on 23 November 1926, to which Bennett readily responded with letters addressed to the editor, prolonged interest. Lord Birkenhead's chief 'objection' to

[1] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Monday, October 18th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III*, p. 164.
[2] Bennett, journal entry dated Friday, June 24th' 1927, in *Journals, Vol. III*, p. 219.
[3] Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 100.
[4] Bennett, letter to his nephew dated 27 September 1926, in *Arnold Bennett's Letters to his Nephew*, p. 180.
[5] In a letter to his nephew dated 9 September 1926, Bennett revealed that 'Max' (Lord Beaverbrook) intended to 'spend £4,000 in advertising [the novel]'(*Arnold Bennett's Letters to his Nephew*, p. 178) and in a letter to Harriet Cohen dated 15 September 1926, wrote that the cost of the 'terrific advertisements' had increased to £5,000 (Bennett, *Letters, Vol. III*, p. 274). Bennett found the posters 'very vulgar' but openly acknowledged his 'hope' that it would 'have the effect of much increasing the sale of the book' (Bennett, *Arnold Bennett's Letters to his Nephew*, p. 180).
[6] Unsigned review in *The Saturday Review of Literature* dated 16 October 1926, in Tillier, *Studies*, p. 155.
[7] Unsigned review in the New York *Bookman* dated November 1926, in Tillier, *Studies*, p. 155.
[8] Unsigned review in the London *Bookman*, dated December 1926, in Tillier, *Studies*, p. 155.

Bennett's novel was Bennett's failure to 'contradict' the 'widely stated' belief 'that the principal character was modelled on a member of the Coalition Government', and that the novel had been 'vulgarly advertised upon this basis'.[9] In a letter addressed to the editor of the *Daily Mail* (dated 23 November 1926), Bennett asserts that his 'Lord Raingo was modelled on no statesman, and is the result of no attempts at portraiture'.[10] He continues, in a subsequent letter that:

> if a novelist is indeed entitled to deal with modern politics, then in order to obtain verisimilitude he must devise, for some of his personages, individuals who bear some resemblance to individuals in real life. […] He is bound to draw a Prime Minister who is somehow like a Prime Minister, and since there is only one Prime Minister at a time he must draw a Prime Minister who is somehow like, or reminiscent of, *the* Prime Minister. And so on.[11]

The extensive research compiled in Louis Tiller's *Studies in the Sources of Arnold Bennett's Novels* (1949), which presents persuasive evidence for Lord Rhondda as the original of Bennett's character, suggests otherwise. It is also worth noting the inclusion of two journal entries (Friday 23 and Wednesday 28 January 1925) in the American edition of Bennett's journals which are written in code ('Last night Y. told me about Lord X.')[12] and are omitted from the English edition, edited by Newman Flower. Two 'facsimile page[s] of Arnold Bennett's Journals' are included in their stead (falling approximately before and after the pages on which these entries would appear), which are an atypical occurrence (these are the

[9] Birkenhead, 'Trifling with Reputations', in Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 476.
[10] Bennett, letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail* dated 23 November 1926, in Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 476.
[11] Bennett, 'Trifling with Reputations', in Hepburn, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 477.
[12] Bennett, *The Journal of Arnold Bennett*, pp. 803-4, 806-7.

only instances of an inclusion of this kind in this volume) and unlikely to be complete coincidence.

The 'identity' of Lord Raingo and of other political characters, in addition to the novel's political bent, has retained fascination for critics of the novel. In the words of Lafourcade: 'it is with the "public" life of Raingo that the critic is chiefly concerned' and 'the novel will always be of interest mainly as a satirical and realistic study'.[13] This has, for the most part, held true. Simons, Pound, Roby and Swinnerton assert that Bennett's 'job at the Ministry of Information […] was to provide material for *Lord Raingo*'[14] and that 'he could hardly have written his much talked-of political novel […] without it'.[15] Buitenhuis further develops this supposition, suggesting that the novel was written 'in part' as 'revenge for the treatment accorded Lord Beaverbrook and himself by Lloyd George's government'.[16] Buitenhuis proposes Lord Rhondda as the source for Raingo, in addition to examining traits which the character shares with Bennett himself. Both Lafourcade and Hepburn affirm that 'Raingo is pre-eminently Bennett – the real Bennett […] the ideal Bennett'[17] and Roby claims that 'it is *Lord Raingo* which provides the strongest indication of how autobiographical Bennett could be'.[18] The Routledge *Dictionary of Real People and Places in Fiction* (1993) lists Lord Raingo as a composite character drawn from personal experience and Bennett's knowledge of Lord Rhondda, in addition to David Lloyd George as the basis for Andy Clyth and Winston Churhill for Tom Hogarth. Most critics note that the members of the War Cabinet constitute 'composite characters, while others are, if not portraits, at least readily recognised caricatures of prominent statemen and politicians of the first Great War'.[19] Many

[13] Lafourcade, *A Study*, p. 199.
[14] Swinnerton, *A Last Word*, p. 27.
[15] Pound, *A Biography*, p. 280.
[16] Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 174.
[17] Lafourcade, *Arnold Bennett: A Study*, pp. 201-2.
[18] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 253.
[19] Tillier, *Studies*, pp. 164-7.

include Churchill's acknowledgement of his portraiture as additional evidence, citing that, on 2 December, Bennett records in his journal that when at the Savoy Hotel 'for the dinner of the Other Club', Churchill said, referring to Bennett's 'row with Birkenhead': 'Receive the congratulations of Tom Hogarth'.[20]

Lord Raingo is a bipartite novel and critics have affirmed that in the first instance – Part I, Chapters 1 through 60 – it is a political novel and in the second – Part II, Chapters 61 to 87 – it is a novel about death. It is widely accepted that the second portion was intended for a wholly different book and that *Lord Raingo,* as a consequence, is the amalgamation of two different novels. The book was initially conceived as an account of the career of Lord Beaverbrook's father and this is recorded in Bennett's journal between 15 and 20 August 1919:

> Max gave me the history of the last 15 years of his father's life, beginning with the old man's phrase when he retired from the pastorate at the age of 70: 'The evening mists are gathering,' – meaning that doubts had come to him about the reliability of the doctrines he had been preaching. He died at 85, and in his last years he spent 55,000 dollars of Max's money. It is a great subject for a novel.[21]

It is also included in two letters to Eric Pinker, written on 1 and 9 April 1920:

> The novel will be the story of an old Nonconformist minister with a millionaire son. The father retires and gradually becomes very worldly under the influence of the son.

[20] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Thursday, December 2nd' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III*, p. 175.
[21] Bennet, journal entry dated 'August 15th to 20th' 1919 in *Journals, Vol. II*, pp. 254-5.

> There is a love interest, but it is of minor importance, and has nothing to do with the old man. The book ends with the death of the old man, done on a magnificent scale.[22]

Whilst this book was never written, it is widely accepted that 'the death of the old man' became Part II of *Lord Raingo*.[23]

With regard to form, few critics deviate from a realist reading. Christopher Harvie briefly mentions that Bennett 'used a "modernist" narration similar to that of Ford: "a third-person-subjective"'.[24] Kinley Roby states that:

> Bennett makes his one concession in the novel to the revolution in presentation of character evident in such works as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Pilgrimage*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which character is illuminated from the inside outwards rather than from the outside inwards as in such novels as *The Man of Property* or *The Old Wives' Tale*. Aside from the concession mentioned ['following Sam's thoughts through the long hours of his illness'] *Lord Raingo* is written in a style that was conventional to the point of being nearly archaic.[25]

In contrast to the assessments outlined above, my analysis will move away from a political 'who's who', prioritising Bennett's continued emphasis on the importance of ascertaining purpose, and his communication that the chief goal – particularly in those who can effect change – should be to establish a better world for the next generation, in addition to his disillusionment with British Government – as illustrated in his depiction of the Prime Minister and inter-party politics within the House of Lords in 1917. My examination of the

[22] Bennett, letter to Pinker dated 9 April 1920, in *Letters, Vol. I*, pp. 280-1.
[23] Hepburn, editorial note in *Letters, Vol. I*, p. 281.
[24] Harvie, *The Centre of Things*, p. 159.
[25] Roby, *A Writer at War*, p. 286.

former is informed by Bennett's formal choices which relate in some particular ways to aspects of the literary epiphany as understood by Virginia Woolf, and is thought to have originated in William Wordsworth's *Two-Part Prelude* (1798-99).

Wim Tigges states that the literary epiphany of the modern novel originated in the Romantic period,[26] beginning with Wordsworthian 'spots of time':

> There are in our existence spots of time
> Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
> By trivial occupations and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, or minds
> (Especially the imaginative power)
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired.[27]

These memories can be consciously recalled, or subconsciously 'triggered off by a random "meeting" with a person whose significance rises well beyond ordinary expectation',[28] and offer spiritual ('fructifying') nourishment to a mind which is 'depressed' by routine or 'trivial' pursuits and is thus in need of invigoration. Wordsworth also establishes this embryonic epiphany's relationship with time, drawing attention to the way in which a fleeting moment or 'spot' can become both concretised (frozen or 'retained' in time), and made timeless (in this instance, transcending the years between childhood and adulthood).

Bennett establishes a palpable link between Samuel Raingo and William Wordsworth from the outset of the text. In the opening paragraph, Bennett writes that 'there was a

[26] Tigges, 'The Significance of Trivial Things', p. 11.
[27] Wordsworth, *The Two-Part Prelude*, ll. 291-7.
[28] Tigges, 'The Significance of Trivial Things', p. 15.

speechless poet hidden somewhere in Mr. Raingo, that died often and came back to life, and was authentic'.[29] Sam's literary classification as a poet implies that there is a thoughtful or philosophical dimension to his character. The acknowledgement that the 'hidden' poet is transitory ('died often and came back to life'), recalls Wordsworth's 'poetry of questioning, of gleams, flashes, intimations, visionary moments',[30] in addition to his periods of self-doubt and subsequent writer's block ('speechlessness'). Wordsworth's 'object […] to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society',[31] and in so doing, to remain true to life, is recalled through the inclusion of 'authenticity'. Sam's 'spots of time' are memories of his mistress, Delphine. 'The thought of Delphine' is Sam's 'balm';[32] he consciously draws upon memories of her to revitalise himself when at work ('the sweet, agitating sound of her voice lived in his ears. He listened to it, summoning it back when it left him, throughout the arid afternoon of hard, detailed work')[33] and, after her suicide, as a means of deflecting his thoughts away from his worsening health: '[Sam] took his memories of [Delphine] and crushed them laceratingly to his breast – closer, closer. The torture was exquisite, but he wanted nothing else; he was determined to be indifferent to his temperature'.[34] Robert Langbaum dubbed the epiphany 'the Romantic substitute for religion'[35] and Sam – who indulges in superstition and regards Nurse Kewley's prayers with incredulity – certainly imagines Delphine as a means of escape from the physical world:

> Delphine was drawing him away from earth. Not on high, towards any chimerical paradise. Not even towards the precipice and river beneath. […] No! She was merely

[29] Bennett, *Lord Raingo*, p. 11.
[30] Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, p. 146.
[31] Wordsworth, extract from a letter to James Losh dated March 1798, in Gill, *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, p. 75.
[32] Bennett, *Lord Raingo*, p. 175.
[33] Ibid., p. 186.
[34] Ibid., p. 358.
[35] Langbaum, 'The Epiphanic Mode', p. 356.

> drawing him away, no whither. The conception which he had was not one of an ultimate arrival, but simply of a departure, an escaping of loosed bonds.[36]

Sam's memory of 'the delicious weight of [Delphine's] soft body and the scent of her hair on his face'[37] is one of his final thoughts before he dies. In light of Wordsworthian 'spots of time', however, the text's conclusion frustrates expectation. Bennett writes:

> His respirations became more and more deliberate. Each one threatened to be the last. The onlookers could scarcely breathe in the tension. But Sam was sitting in the easy-chair in Delphine's little silk-hung drawing-room. He was leaning back in the chair. And Delphine, telephone in hand, sank into his lap, and pressed herself against him. He could feel the heavenly weight of her form, smell the scent of her hair. Enchanted moments. … She had vanished. He was all alone again in the awful void. He murmured appealingly in the final confusion of his mind:
>
> 'Adela!'
>
> His jaw fell.[38]

The reader anticipates that Sam will cling to this 'enchanted moment' in order to experience some small degree of comfort ('security') before he dies; he instead, murmurs 'Adela' – the name of his wife. Whilst it is plausible to hypothesise that marital guilt and mental exhaustion are the sources of Sam's final word, the fact that Sam is plunged 'again in the awful void' emphasises the ultimate impermanence of these 'moments' and the way in which 'security' though understandably desirable, is ultimately unobtainable. This transience

[36] Bennett, *Lord Raingo*, p. 318.
[37] Ibid., p. 31.
[38] Ibid., p. 393.

recalls the epiphanies experienced in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). In Woolf's novel, epiphanies relate to a character's sense of self and the 'fleeting vision of the correctness of things restores their sense of wholeness, albeit briefly'.[39] Mrs. Ramsay's realisation of her purpose, to unite spiritually 'remote' individuals ('they all sat separate. […] the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her'),[40] and her ability to create social harmony and thus facilitate the production of a pleasant memory, is phrased thus:

> Everything seemed possible. Everything seemed right. Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots) just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; […] this profound stillness […] seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, […] of eternity; […] there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out […] in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after. This would remain.[41]

Mrs. Ramsay's desire for this 'moment' to 'remain' frozen in time is Wordsworthian in nature; this 'spot of time' has a 'fructifying virtue', offering 'security' 'in the face of […] the fleeting' nature of life and in understanding and accepting one's place in the 'order' of the

[39] Day, *Modernist Literature*, p. 112.
[40] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, pp. 114, 113.
[41] Ibid., pp. 141-2.

universe.[42] However, she describes the moment in equally transient terms ('like a smoke, like a fume') and consequently, the reader experiences the realisation that 'security' is in fact, ultimately unobtainable. In the words of Margaret Drabble: 'The world is for a moment struck into stability […] but only for a moment. […] Nothing remains for ever after. The vision passes. This is the nature of it. The great revelation will never come. And this itself is the revelation'.[43]

In 'Epiphany and Its Discontents: Coover, Gangemi, Sorrention, and Postmodern Revelation' (1989), Arthur Saltzman notes that Morris Beja's 'operational definition' of the literary epiphany fails to differentiate between 'points of origin': that is, 'whether the epiphany is a manifestation external to the imagination that is privileged to receive it, or whether it is a product of the imagination itself'). Saltzman addresses this by emphasising the verbal/aural component which is essential for the inauguration of the 'experience':

> It is my contention that […] epiphanies are made, not born […] revelations are primarily linguistic rather than spiritual. Words do not commemorate the experience; they constitute it. Even if epiphany begins with enchantment, or a desire for enchantment, it is authenticated only through the process of articulation.[44]

Whilst Saltzman's article is directed at Postmodern texts, his attention to the significance of the spoken word, the presence of 'longing' in (Post)modern fiction – which has evolved from a Modernist desire to ascertain meaning ('a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary

[42] 'it was impossible to resist […] the extraordinary stimulus to range hither and thither in search of some absolute good, some crystal of intensity, […] something alien to the processes of domestic life, single, hard, bright, like a diamond in the sand, which would render the possessor secure' (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, pp. 179-80).
[43] Drabble, 'Introduction to *To the Lighthouse*', p. xxviii.
[44] Saltzman, 'Epiphany and Its Discontents', p. 499.

history')[45] – and the inclusion of the 'wary reader' as 'an effective accomplice in the making of revelation', makes Saltzman's theory applicable when assessing the type of verbal or 'aural' epiphany present in Bennett's text.

Upon the discovery of Mrs. Blacklow's pregnancy with a man who had lodged with her whilst on ten days' leave, Sam reacts accordingly:

> Good God! Only three months ago and she was the prize, the prey, the ravished, the bride, all soft and yielding. And now she was sitting gloved and hatted in front of him. And he had been harrying her about newspapers. . . . And he had never spoken to her in his life before. He realized overwhelmingly the meaning of war, and felt that he was realizing it for the first time. This was the meaning of war. The meaning of war was within her. . . . One man fast in the arid routine of a prison-camp; the other in a trench under fire. She had no home, only a lodging. The child ruthlessly, implacably growing, growing. And at the end of the war she would have to face the released prisoner; with the child. […] He became a speechless poet for a few minutes.[46]

Sam's realisation is accompanied by a spiritual 'outburst' ('Good God!'), signifying 'the act of the mind noticing its own activity, commenting on its ability to perceive objects or experience emotions, remarking on its power to process the data of consciousness'.[47] In 'Cognitive and Pragmatic Linguistic Moments: Literary Epiphany in Thomas Pynchon and Seamus Heaney' (1999), Ashton Nichols writes that 'contemporary authors use language to produce meaning: they present 'powerful verbal [epiphanic images] that are never

[45] Eliot, '*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth', p. 177.
[46] Bennett, *Lord Raingo*, pp. 55-6.
[47] Nichols, 'Cognitive and Pragmatic Linguistic Moments', p. 468.

'explained''; these epiphanic images are left to 'speak' for themselves'.[48] What, then, are we to infer from the following image: 'One man fast in the arid routine of a prison-camp; the other in a trench under fire. She had no home, only a lodging. The child ruthlessly, implacably growing, growing'. What has Sam suddenly become 'conscious' of? I would contend that it is the realisation that war is not about individual prestige; 'the meaning of war' is to secure a better world for the next generation. In the words of Margaret Drabble: 'There is no certainty of personal survival […]. But we can, if we toil hard, become part of the onward march of progress, we can contribute to the ascent and illumination of humanity'.[49]

At the outset of the novel, Sam is without purpose: 'He was on the way to being an invalid, a disappointed man and a failure in life when the war began. The war hid his failure and did nothing to help him morally or physically'. Meaningful 'employment' rouses him ('first Delphine had stirred his coma, and now Andy Clyth had quickened him suddenly into eager life') and the desire to 'put the whole of himself into the Ministry of Records', to 'work for the country at war as nobody had worked', results in elation.[50] Sam's involvement in the Ministry, however, revitalises him only to an extent. His sense of self remains swathed in grey as his turbulent emotions and periods of self-doubt (often initiated through interactions with Delphine) contrast sharply with his carefully constructed social 'mask'. It is clear that Sam still needs to 'progress' – he needs to act on his epiphany, to strive for the betterment of the world for the next generation. In this however, he fails. Sam remains trapped in the past and this is evidenced in Bennett's treatment of both Raingo the character and *Raingo* the text.

The progression of the narrative is consistently punctuated with throwbacks to earlier periods of time; we learn that Sam had bought Moze Hall in 1911, that his son Geoffrey had been made a prisoner of War in 1916, and that his affair with Delphine began in 1917.[51] At

[48] Ibid., pp. 468-9.
[49] Drabble, 'Introduction to *To the Lighthouse*', p. xxx.
[50] Bennett, *Lord Raingo*, p. 47.
[51] Ibid., pp. 16, 20, 28.

'the Luncheon Party', the past is evoked through Sam's 'vague' observation of 'the collection of portraits […] of former Prime Ministers, on the wall'.[52] When enquiring if any man present at the 'Party' be an authority on prisoners of war, Sam overhears Tom Hogarth, 'at the distant other end of the table, describing at length to the Prime Minister and the Colonial Premier and whoever might care to listen how in 1899 he too had been a prisoner of war and how he too had escaped […]. Then the Colonial Premier quietly reminded people that he too in the same year 1899 had been taken prisoner and had escaped – from the British'.[53] When 'the closing stages of the meal were […] at hand', Lord Ockleford engages Sam in conversation, recalling – 'far better than Sam' – 'the characteristics and price of a pedigree bull which Sam had sold in somewhat sensational circumstances in 1914'.[54] It is not until Sam – purely by chance – discovers Delphine's birth certificate in '[a] drawer in the writing-desk in the sitting-room' that the reader learns the year in which the story takes place:

> He pulled out a paper at random. It happened to be her birth-certificate. She was born in 1889, at Hackney. 1889? She was therefore twenty-nine. Whereas she had told him that she was thirty-two.[55]

This revelation takes place towards the close of Chapter 20, roughly a fifth of the way into the text. Past dates and events take literal precedence over the here and now. The year in which the narrative takes place is unimportant, as Sam has yet to fully realise his purpose, to grasp the initiative to 'progress'. The reasons on which he hangs his purpose/sense of worth cannot sustain him, because they are superficial reasons. Sam is working for the Ministry for the wrong reasons: to receive a Peerage without paying for it, to be granted access to the

[52] Ibid., p. 61.
[53] Ibid., p. 63.
[54] Ibid., pp. 68-9.
[55] Ibid., p. 98.

House of Lords, to be called 'Lord Raingo' of Essex ('one-uping' the PM) and to receive the prestige which surrounds the title. He fails to grasp that what he should striving for, is to be part of a collective which is working towards the creation a better world, a safer Britain – for his son, and for all of the other children (the next generation). If he had recognised the magnitude of his epiphany resulting from Mrs. Blacklow's pregnancy, this may well have given him the 'security' he so desired before he died, and he wouldn't have felt 'lost in the void'.[56]

The reader's understanding of Sam's spiritual 'stall', is further supported by the fact that clocks are featured throughout. Sam is acutely conscious of the passing of time, when examining the car in which Adela dies, he observes that 'the clock was going, as indifferent as a god to human woe'.[57] When sitting with Adela's body, a clock rouses Sam from his reverie: 'The clock on the mantelpiece went ting-ting. Sam had been with his wife for three hours'.[58] When Sam is gravely ill, the Empire clock on the mantelpiece has a 'faint, refined, sardonic, Gallic tick' and as Sam lies dying, 'the big clock on the landing insisted on being heard'.[59] What Sam has yet to realise, is that time carries on regardless of individual existence; it is the responsibility of the individual to give their life purpose. Whilst Sam fails to realise the significance of his epiphany, the reader does not. This literary device is not wholly unlike the use of delayed decoding in *Accident,* explored in the subsequent section of this chapter. In both texts, the hope remains that the reader's 'epiphany' will inspire a change for the better.

Though Sam is fifty-five and thus belongs to an earlier 'generation', the source of his 'discontent' is equivalent to that of the generation described in 'Discontented Youth' (1928). In 'Discontented Youth', Bennett writes that the youth of post-war Britain 'is

[56] Ibid., p. 393.
[57] Ibid., p. 169.
[58] Ibid., p. 173.
[59] Ibid., pp. 292, 391.

discontented' and that the principal reason behind this unhappiness stems from 'idleness'. Idleness stems from unemployment, and propagates ennui and sloth:

> Imagine getting up in the morning, day after day, with nothing to do […]! The strongest character could not emerge unimpaired from such an experience. […]. Youth which is thus condemned to sloth, even if it comes to prefer sloth, has a real grievance against fate.[60]

Contrasted with those who desire work and cannot secure it, Bennett condemns the diminishing work ethic of post-war Britain, produced by the 'decline of the apprentice system' – which allows for 'large numbers of employed persons' to 'pretend to possess skill which they do not possess', as they have been allowed to bypass a probationary period of training, thus, 'youth, at the very beginning of its career, falls into the way of expecting something for nothing' – and the circulation, 'in many industries', which 'deliberately' teaches this 'latest generation' that 'the minimum possible is the ideal, not the maximum possible'. Bennett takes care to emphasise that this 'grievance' is 'not […] confined to one class' and 'that no post-war government has made any sustained attempt to handle the very difficult problems involved'.[61] In spite of these grievances, Bennett assures his readership that the future is not bleak:

> If youth were not discontented, to-day or any other day, the outlook for Britain would be worse than it in fact is. Only the old have a certain limited right to be content.

[60] Bennett, 'Discontented Youth', pp. 82-3.
[61] Ibid., pp. 83-5.

> Content means going back, for nobody can stand still; whereas discontent is the mother of progress. Therefore let youth be discontented.[62]

Bennett's essay promotes 'zeal and assiduity'; having purpose, and taking pride in one's purpose ('employment'), is thought to correlate directly with happiness or 'contentedness'. 'Discontent' should be a temporary measure, and necessary only as far as to promote change on an individual and societal level.

Whilst the deaths in *Riceyman Steps* are physically linked to wasted opportunities and diseased states of mind – Henry and Violet develop tumours, 'shrink' and die as a consequence of physical malnutrition, which is simultaneously caused by and symbolises, mental, emotional and spiritual desiccation – the deaths in *Lord Raingo* are equally symbolic of unrealised potential. Delphine is motivated (she 'had tried the stage and had called herself an actress, but had never got further than the chorus. […] Then she had learnt typewriting'),[63] and determined to retain her independence in spite of Sam's willingness to financially support – indeed, spoil – her. She is also shrewd and unquestionably bright – particularly With regard to her 'political sense and the weighing of human motives'.[64] She predicts that Sam is to be made a minister and, later, that he will be castigated for refusing his salary, astutely 'sum[ming] up the basic psychological truth of the affair' 'in two sentences': 'The truth is that politics is a trade union and you aren't in it. They'd sooner help their enemies that are in the game, than you'.[65] Whilst Delphine modestly protests that she 'like[s] to read about politics, because [Sam is] interested in them', she nevertheless '*understand[s]*' them and undoubtedly would have proved to be an intelligent and insightful partner had she agreed

[62] Ibid., p. 82.
[63] Ibid., p. 30.
[64] Ibid., p. 227.
[65] Ibid., pp. 29, 226.

to marry Sam.[66] Delphine is an anomaly in a society filled with women who are realising their potential. The narrative includes female bureaucrats, typists, motorists and the 'celebrated' Miss Packer, the Prime Minister's personal secretary, who 'had the air of being familiar with every variety of human character and experience and knowledge'.[67] Delphine, however, is separate from this world. She is, without doubt, a victim of circumstance. She is working class, when Sam first meets her he ascertains that she is 'very poor' and almost completely alone in world, and Sam swiftly decides that he would rather make her his mistress than employ her (when taking her out to a tea-shop under the pretence of ascertaining if she had 'an instinct for finance', Sam has 'only one thing in his mind': an affair).[68] Delphine initially resists Sam's advances, but he eventually wears her down (he 'won his victory only after a really terrible, ugly, messy affray').[69] Once 'installed' in Orange Street, Delphine 'allow[s] all her interests to wither away in subservience to [Sam] and her affection for him'. The narrative states that, 'she seemed to have completely lost interest in the stage; her canteen-work, on three days a week, had become chiefly a tiresome task to get through; her operations in the office below were a trifling diversion',[70] and she becomes increasingly solitary. Her seclusion is accompanied by an escalation in her 'tendency toward melancholy', which is further intensified by the war: 'the war made her gloomy and pessimistic. The casualty rolls reduced her to the very depths of blank, prostrate despondency'.[71] Delphine's ultimate 'fault', however, is that 'she had every quality except that of ambition': 'She had no ambition at all, save to please [Sam] in her own way. Her temperament was not active but contemplative, and nothing could change it'.[72] Her suicide is

[66] Ibid., pp. 228, 229.
[67] Ibid., p. 33.
[68] Ibid., p. 30.
[69] Ibid., p. 28.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., p. 230.

understood as a consequence of a type of 'war neurosis' and could be viewed simply as another example of Bennett's broadening understanding of psychology:

> She was yet another victim of the war. And [Sam] had failed to appreciate that her melancholia was the symptom of some grave and disconcerting disease, a disease which was just as much a disease as his own pneumonia.[73]

Her half-sister Gwen's admission, however, which reveals that Delphine blamed herself for the death of her jilted lover Harry Point and plants the seed in Sam's mind that in killing herself she had left him 'free to marry as he ought',[74] exposes a greater significance behind Delphine's death. Delphine had lost her sense of purpose and in estimating her worth only in relation to other people – a source of anguish for Harry Point, an unwilling participant in Sam's vision for his future ('Me the wife of a Lord! […] Let me stay as I am, please Sam. *Please!*')[75] – her spiritual state becomes unsustainable. Her suicide is a literal waste of life (it is ended prematurely), and simultaneously symbolic of a wasted opportunity to interact with and to contribute to, the world.

Adela's death is equally significant. Adela is 'cursed with a mind that darted to and fro and crossways like a minnow', and, as such, she 'could never do one thing at a time'.[76] She is 'self-absorbed, placid, tepid, vague', 'bland', emotionally 'nonchalant' towards Sam and 'a snob in certain directions'.[77] She is unpleasant towards their servants, 'glanc[ing] […] with latent hostility' at a waitress who enters the room whilst she is conversing with her husband, and when Sam reveals that he is to receive a peerage, Adela's surprise is transmuted

[73] Ibid., p. 320.
[74] Ibid., pp. 351, 353.
[75] Ibid., p. 230.
[76] Ibid., p. 19.
[77] Ibid., pp. 20, 22, 30, 91.

into the question: 'Shall I have a coronet? Do I wear one?'[78] Similarly to Violet and Henry, she and Sam have 'no intimates, and hardly any friends […] [b]ecause [Adela] would not nourish friendships', and despite engaging with war-work, she fails to be consider the possibilities of broadening her efforts and implementing a wider-reaching course of action as she lacks vision or 'ambition':

> Their son Geoffrey had been made a prisoner in 1916, and since then her war-work had been confined to British prisoners' aid. The countryside was dotted with German prisoners employed on farms, but she never even mentioned them.[79]

Adela is redeemed through her love for their son. When Sam reveals that he has been 'talking to Jenkin about Geoffrey' Adela's 'eyes gazed at him instead of through him', and 'when Adela thought of Jeff her heart and mind were white-hot with emotion'.[80] Raising Geoffrey had given Adela a definite purpose, but when Geoffrey is drafted Adela retreats into a 'dreamlike' existence: 'When Geoffrey went away she lived in a dream, played bridge in a dream, drove cars in a dream. Her home was part of the dream, seen dimly and negligently'.[81] Returning to Moze Hall from 'a bridge party' in Frinton, she overturns 'Sam's big car' and dies 'crushed underneath it'.[82] As Sam sits with her body in her room, he regards her as a 'symbol' for grieving mothers ('For [Sam] she was the […] mother of his child')[83] and for lost time: 'On the bed lay the symbol and summing up of all the war-grief and fatigue of the world. The universe was old and spent'.[84] Adela's death is both caused by

[78] Ibid., pp. 89, 91.
[79] Ibid., pp. 94, 132, 20.
[80] Ibid., p. 90.
[81] Ibid., p. 172.
[82] Ibid., p. 168.
[83] Ibid., p. 171.
[84] Ibid., p. 173.

and simultaneously symbolises negligence, and when placed in conjunction with Delphine's suicide serves as an equivalent 'symbol' of a wasted life, in this instance, one in which the individual was unable extricate herself from 'her dream'[85] and thus better serve 'the community'.[86]

In contrast to Delphine's and Adela's deaths, Sam's pneumonia could be interpreted as a metaphor for Britain's social and economic losses as a consequence of the War. In Chapter LXIV, Sam requests an explanation of his illness as pneumonia is currently, 'only a name' to him. The Doctor obliges, stating:

> The lungs are engorged – congested with blood. At least, one of them is, in your case. The air has to make room for the blood, and so the lung is put partially out of action. This means that the part that isn't out of action has to work harder. That's why you're breathing quicker. And it's the heart that has to bear the strain. That's about all there is to it.[87]

The blood in Sam's lungs is representative of the deaths of soldiers and his heart, Britain's economy. The portion of his lungs which 'isn't out of action' but is consequentially having 'to work harder', alludes to the P. M.'s acknowledgement earlier in the novel that 'it is idle to imagine […] that we have got an unlimited reserve of man-power in this country' and his subsequent proposal to extend conscription, 'throw[ing] men of fifty to the tyranny of sergeant-majors', 'desolat[ing] homes and destroy[ing] businesses', and 'applying conscription to Ireland'.[88] The title of the chapter ('The Situation Made Clear'), in addition to Sam's eagerness to understand his 'situation' – 'what's the treatment? Tell me exactly.

[85] Ibid., p. 89.
[86] Bennett, *Best*, p. 308.
[87] Bennett, *Lord Raingo*, p. 276.
[88] Ibid., pp. 82-3.

The more I'm told the more I shall help you all I can. I suppose you want me to help you?'[89] – recalls Bennett's repeated emphasis upon the importance of taking an active interest in Britain's political affairs in order to make informed choices. At this stage in the 'situation', however, no amount of information can alter the final outcome and Sam's death, which is caused by over-exertion of the heart, signifys the devastating social and economic strain accrued in securing Britain's victory over Germany.

In 'After Asquith' (1916), Bennett recounts a conversation with 'a prominent banker'. The banker says 'gloomily' to Bennett: 'It is discouraging, though, when for Prime Minister we have to be content with a mere manipulator of men'. Bennett replies, 'but hasn't a Prime Minister just got to be chiefly a manipulator of men?' adding, in light of his understanding of the source of the banker's discouragement: 'the real complaint against the new Prime Minister is that he does not manipulate men sufficiently, but rather leaves them alone, with a resulting delay and failure to co-ordinate'.[90] In 'Always Read With An Open Mind' (1929), Bennett writes that to form an original opinion is 'exceedingly difficult' – 'as with politics, so with books, the majority of the citizens are far too inclined to believe what they are told, and to think what they think they ought to think'.[91] He adds that:

> [to] totally […] eliminate prejudice is out of the question. But by taking thought one can achieve more sincerity of judgement than can be achieved without taking thought. The final difficulty, when a sincere judgement has been arrived at, is to express that judgement fearlessly. Are we not all moral cowards?'[92]

[89] Ibid., p. 276.
[90] Bennett, 'After Asquith', p. 47.
[91] Bennett, 'Always Read', p. 299.
[92] Ibid., p. 301.

Andy Clyth looks upon his parliamentary 'audience' as 'simple sheep' and they respond accordingly: they 'scurri[ed] forward at the onrush and yelp of the trained dog'[93] and 'baa'd in unison' when responding to Andy's clichéd nationalistic 'phrases': '"We're fighting for all that is most sacred in our national existence". Loud cheers. "Our men retired, but were never routed, and once more the pluck of the British soldier, which refuses to acknowledge defeat, has saved Europe". Loud cheers'.[94] Andy, conversely, is granted predatory qualities. He has 'smooth grey hair', 'big ears', 'cruel teeth that displayed themselves formidably when he laughed or smiled' and 'darting yellowish eyes'.[95] When disturbed by 'the course of the events at the Front', Sam observes that 'the dictator in Andy was tiger-ishly functioning', and when Andy visits Sam on his deathbed, he comes 'striding swiftly into the bedroom, yet with a cat's tread: tall, scraggy, authoritative, his big ears as it were cocked to catch the slightest indications of whatever may be useful to him'.[96] Whilst few would want the responsibility of being Prime Minister during a time of national crisis, Andy rises to the challenge in a way befitting a 'bully'. He becomes 'the embodiment of the will-to-win'; despite losing 'his chief weapon, original rhetoric', and having 'no scruples, no sense of justice or of decency, no loyalties', he 'fights' for his 'foolish cause', 'dominating and bullying hundreds of pure-bred Englishmen' to support his Man-Power Bill (which will extend conscription to include men up to the age of fifty and from Ireland). Andy Clyth is not a particularly effective manipulator of men, however, having a reasonably malleable flock, he is able to win 'a majority' and whilst the 'absurdity'[97] (the destruction of families, businesses, and compulsory Irish conscription) did not come to fruition, Bennett's representation of the Prime Minister

[93] Ibid., p. 86.
[94] Ibid., p. 82.
[95] Ibid., p. 35.
[96] Ibid., pp. 239, 339.
[97] Ibid., p. 84.

and inter-party politics within the House of Lords in 1917, serves to highlight the possible dangers which arise from lack of ‘thought’ and moral cowardice.

10. *Accident* (1929)

The estimation of *Accident* as one of Bennett's poorer compositions has been collectively maintained throughout decades of cursory assessment and neglect. Immediately following circulation in volume form as *Train de luxe* in January 1929, it fast became evident that Bennett's contemporaries largely regarded *Accident* as a disappointment – a 'minor Bennett'[1] – and 'not Bennett at his best'.[2] Reviews released in various newspapers and cultural magazines expressed uncertainty as to the motivation behind the novel's composition[3] and doubt as to whether any single character within it would ever be worthy of note.[4] All regard the accident as altogether superfluous[5] and Bennett's 'Train de luxe', despite acting as the stage to almost the entirety of the plot, is predominantly ignored. Whilst Cyril Connolly does acknowledge it, he somewhat bizarrely regards it as a figure of fun: 'the chief comic character, clowning its way from the Channel to the Mediterranean'.[6] Most damningly, Connolly infers that Bennett has lifted James Joyce's technique of interior monologue for both 'the origin of Alan's thought process and a like obsession with the reality of the obvious', but that he has failed to implement it with any real effect, stating:

[1] B., 'in the "Manchester Guardian"', p. 491.
[2] Drabble, *A Biography*, p. 352.
[3] MacCarthy insists that whilst there 'was something there, something which urged him to write the book, and is glimpsed in it here and there by the reader', Bennett's 'idea' ultimately and irretrievably 'escapes' him and subsequently renders 'the conclusion [...] limp and inconclusive' (MacCarthy, 'in the "Sunday Times"', pp. 485-6).
[4] B. poses the following question to 'the contemporary reader': 'what, if any, character does "Accident" create to hang on the line in its author's grand gallery of portraits?' The unspoken answer is none as it contains only 'the palest Bennett hero' (B., 'in the '"Manchester Guardian"', pp. 490-1). Connolly states that 'Mr. Bennett's hero [...] is far inferior to the millionaires and maîtres d'hôtel of his minor novels' (Connolly, 'in the "New Statesman"', p. 495).
[5] MacCarthy writes: 'That 'accident,' too, which the reader anticipates so impatiently is really unimportant; the principle characters are neither the worse nor the better for it. Its importance, if any, is in connection with an old man and his wife, who are also travelling on the train' (MacCarthy, 'in the "Sunday Times"', p. 486).
[6] Connolly, 'in the "New Statesman"', p. 493.

> The mind of Alan Frith-Walter, seedy as the bottom of a bird cage, is not the vehicle which can bring home to the reader so truthful and painstaking a study of the beauty of personal relations.[7]

The majority of subsequent critics have maintained this derogative appraisal into the late 1990s. Robert Squillace, for example, refers to *Accident* as a 'trifling' novel 'about a railway disaster that […] clearly showed the influence of Joycean interior monologue'. Having little else to add, Squillace also notes that *Accident* was written 'more than two decades after comparing the dislocations of modernity to the derailment of a train in [*The*] *Rising Storm of Life*'. What is surprising here, however, is that Squillace does not investigate further the implication that *Accident* may have paralleled – or at least have been motivated by – the age within which Bennett was writing; instead, he merely insinuates that Bennett is recycling a tired analogy.[8] Nearly all of the writing concerning *Accident* – whether biographical, anecdotal or critical[9] – aligns Bennett's novel with personal experience, sharing the consensus that the 'nature of the accident, the way in which it affected the car and compartment of the characters concerned, even the collector's preposterous request for Frith-Walter's ticket when he walked up the line to the nearest station'[10] were 'identical' to – or at least heavily influenced by – Bennett's own experience of a railway accident.[11]

Whilst there are undoubtedly similarities between Bennett's account of the railway accident at Mantes on 7 July 1911 and Alan's experience of the railway accident 'right in the mountains'[12] (between Aix-les-Baines and the village of La Praz), there is no indication in

[7] Ibid., p. 495.
[8] Squillace, *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett*, p. 24.
[9] For biographical and anecdotal inclusions, see Drabble, *A Biography*, pp. 318-20, Miller, *An Annotated Bibliography*, p. 466, and Gordan, *The Centenary*, pp. 113-5.
[10] Lafourcade, *A Study*, pp. 167-9.
[11] Bennett recorded this incident in his journal and wrote about it in *Books and Persons* (1917) and *Things That Have Interested Me* (1921).
[12] Bennett, *Accident*, p. 175.

any of Bennett's published private writings (either his journals or his letters) that he consciously chose to use this experience as inspiration for his novel. Thoughts pertaining to the construction of *Accident* entered in Bennett's journal between 20 October 1926 and 19 July 1927 state his intention to implement a 'moral background': 'the dissatisfaction of a successful and rich man with his own secret state of discontent and with the evils of the age' and to contain 'the entire time-space of the novel' in 'about thirty hours or so'.[13] Very little else in the way of content is recorded. There are several entries pertaining to the number of words written in a day and the need to take 'reflective walks' so to afford time to 'think up' ideas, and whilst Bennett acknowledges that he wrote 'the complete chapter describing the railway accident […] at great speed, and was rather pleased with it',[14] there is no real evidence to support the conviction that Bennett's novel was consciously influenced by his own experience. Yet this is the most commonly circulated interpretation of the novel. The information collated here is by no means an attempt to disprove the view that Bennett draws on his experience; rather, it is to highlight the way in which this linear analysis has proven a distraction from what I believe to be the novel's central focus: socio-political unrest and the potentially catastrophic ramifications of this during the period within which Bennett was writing (the years preceding and ultimately culminating in the 1926 General Strike).

John Lucas was the first critic to interpret Bennett's careful construction of 'a brooding, menacing sense of imminent disaster'[15] – that Alan's train will ultimately crash and/or derail – as an effective allegory for 'the spirit of the age'[16] – 'a world about to go smash'.[17] Lucas's initially high estimation of the text, however, is short-lived and his

[13] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, October 30th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III*, pp. 167-8.
[14] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, March 22nd' 1927, in *Journals, Vol. III*, p. 198.
[15] Lucas, *A Study*, p. 213.
[16] Bennett, *Accident*, p. 53.
[17] Lucas asserts that as we read the first half of *Accident* we feel that it is surely about the 'vast smug surface' of society, below which are obscure, persistent and increasingly powerful rumblings that at any moment will erupt into violent destructiveness' (Lucas, *A Study*, pp. 217-8).

commentary on the second half of the novel is markedly unenthusiastic, stating: 'For something like half its length it feels on the way to becoming a very fine, perhaps even great, novel. But then it abruptly changes course and trails off into triviality'.[18] Lucas alleges that after the crash, 'Bennett more or less throws his own subject away'. The decision to 'cheerily resolve' all 'domestic' difficulties, to reunite the Lucasses with each other and the other passengers, and to reconcile Pearl and Jack, is at the expense of further developing the train/time allegory and essentially triggers *Accident*'s 'sudden collapse from brilliance to bathos'.[19] Lucas's explanation for this 'abrupt about-turn' is surprisingly shallow, suggesting that Bennett did not fully comprehend where his novel was headed and when the emergent socio-political connotations became 'too uncomfortable',[20] he decided to abruptly change course.[21] This is an unfounded assumption and it disregards Bennett's intentions which are detailed in his journal prior to beginning *Accident*. Whereas Lucas suggests that Bennett feared aligning his text with the 'spirit' of the General Strike, Ian Carter argues that a return to 'normality' encourages 'thoughtful citizens and passengers [to] ponder […] what if the 1926 general strike should prove to be not the last episode in nationwide working-class action, but the first?'[22] What if Bennett's 'cheery resolution' is not indicative of cowardice or incompetence, but rather a shrewd scepticism which anticipates that 'normality' is to be short-lived? Neither Lucas nor Carter examines the way in which the events leading up to and culminating in the General Strike affected Bennett and consolidated his political inclinations – both as an individual and as an influential member of the middle class. The

[18] Ibid., p. 213.
[19] Ibid., pp. 218-21.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Lucas states: 'My own guess is that Bennett did not quite realize where his novel was leading him, and that when he came to understand its direction he decided to call a halt. [...] the subject of *Accident* proved altogether too uncomfortable for him to handle, perhaps because it raised any number of troubling questions about its author's conscious stance as a political man, determined to keep apart. The novel breaks down because Bennett wasn't prepared to face up to the vision of catastrophe for which half its length *Accident* subtly and discomposingly assembles' (Ibid., p. 221).
[22] Carter, *Railways and Culture*, p. 154.

next section of this study, therefore, will provide an examination of the General Strike in line with Bennett's observations of it.

The years immediately following the First World War saw the instigation of colossal socio-political change in the Western World. In 1918, the Labour Party issued the following manifesto:

> We of the Labour Party […] recognize in the present world catastrophe, if not the death, in Europe, of civilisation itself, at any rate the culmination and collapse of a distinctive industrial civilisation, which the workers will not seek to reconstruct.

This statement was issued in recognition of 'the will of the people', a refusal to 'reconstruct' a capitalist society in favour of pursuing vehemently desired Socialist legislation; the latter was to be initially 'defined by the purpose of attaining the public ownership of the means of production'.[23] In the British lower-working classes, social upheaval manifested through an increasing number of lock-outs, strikes and hunger marches, a rapidly increasing readership of left-wing newspapers and increases in trade union membership. In the higher classes, unrest became evident through a marked preoccupation with the threat of socialism. This was fuelled by fears of a socialist revolution akin to the insurgencies taking place in Germany, Italy and Russia, with which many left-wing newspapers openly sympathised.[24] Revolutionist apprehension is perhaps best conveyed through William Butler Yeats's and T. S. Eliot's almost apocalyptic poetry published at the turn of the decade. In 'The Second Coming' (1920) Yeats anticipates 'anarchy […] loosed upon the world'[25] and T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* (1922) foresees 'swarms' of 'hooded hordes' 'stumbling in cracked earth'

[23] The Labour Party Manifesto (1938), quoted in Laski, *Parliamentary Government in England*, p. 184.
[24] Lucas, *The Radical Twenties*, pp. 137-73.
[25] Yeats, 'The Second Coming', l. 4.

towards London, where 'London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down'.[26] The catchword 'anarchy', coupled with conspicuous fragmentary imagery, leached into the addresses of many right-wing Conservative members: Stanley Baldwin pronounced the General Strike 'the road to anarchy and ruin' and Winston Churchill declared that 'either the country will break the General Strike, or the General Strike will break the country'.[27]

For the duration of the War, both the railways and the mines came under government control. After the War, both industries separately requested nationalisation and whilst some amalgamation took place With regard to the railways (with the formation of the 'Big Four' UK railway companies: LNER, LMS, GWR and SR), the appeal on behalf of the miners was rejected. The miners believed that nationalisation would solve the multitude of problems found within their industry and provide much-needed security through the implementation of a national wage, which would replace district wage agreements negotiated independently by the managers and miners of each colliery. Despite recommendation by the Sankey Commission in favour of nationalisation in 1919 and the establishment of a second investigatory commission (the Samuel Commission) in 1925, proposals in favour of nationalisation were continually rejected and wages continued to be cut; in the words of John Lucas, 'the General Strike was inevitable. The only surprise was that it took so long to arrive'.[28] Following a number of small strikes in response to fluctuating wages (none of which resulted in any significant, permanent change) and the discouraging collapse of the 'Triple Alliance' of miners, railwaymen and transport workers on 'Black Friday', at midnight on 3 May 1926, all transport and railway workers, printers, building workers and gas and electricity company employees were called out on strike in a previously unrivalled demonstration of unity.[29] The General Strike, however, was to be short-lived and came to an

[26] Eliot, 'The Waste Land: V. What the Thunder Said', ll. 369, 370, 427.
[27] Churchill, quoted in Rundle, 'The General Strike', p. 210.
[28] Lucas, *The Radical Twenties*, p. 149.
[29] Rundle, 'The General Strike', p. 210.

abrupt halt after only nine days. Effective governmental precautions, the development of road transport and the minimal preparation put in place by trade unions – which had enthusiastically supported the strike, but in actuality had never expected it to come to fruition – resulted in Herbert Samuel's primary proposal for a national wages board for the coal industry being accepted by the General Council. The miners remained on strike, but following the passing of an Act to prevent miners' families from receiving poor relief, many surrendered and were forced to accept longer hours and lower pay through the despised district agreements. The comparative absence of strikes after 1926 was largely due to a permanently high level of unemployment, rather than acceptance by the more lowly paid workers; unemployment figures were never below one million and so there were simply too many men ready to take a striker's place.[30]

Contemporary critics assume that Bennett's attitude to the striking miners was condescending. For example, Bashir Abu-Manneh states:

> Bennett, although never volunteering for the OMS [Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies], was vehemently opposed to the strikers, as his journal entries of this period clearly demonstrate. […] There is no sympathy towards the miners here, even though their position was widely acknowledged as just by the liberal press and by the *NS* [*New Statesman*] itself. Their miserable wages and conditions don't even get a passing mention in Bennett's *Journals*. The issue is represented as a revolutionary breach of authority which has to end.[31]

[30] Ibid., p. 212.
[31] Abu-Manneh, *Fiction of the New Statesman*, p. 52.

Temperamentally speaking, Bennett was regarded as non-Party ('not disposed to "join" anything'),[32] but possessing both Liberal[33] and Socialist[34] convictions, and an evident dislike of the 'snobbery' which appeared to characterise and indeed, overlie many Tory ideas.[35] Writing in 1910, a General Election year, an entry from Bennett's journal reads:

> As I looked at all the splendid solidity of Brighton, symbol of a system that is built on the grinding of the faces of the poor, I had to admit that it would take a lot of demolishing, that I couldn't expect to overset it with a single manifesto and a single election, or with fifty. So that even if the elections are lost, or are not won, I don't care. Besides, things never turn out as badly as our fears.[36]

Bennett's declared uninterest is not to be equated to a disregard for the condition of 'the poor'; rather, it is to be seen as substantiation of his disenchantment with the current state of politics and his recognition of the fact that until what he regarded as fundamental flaws were acknowledged and rectified, improvement was simply impossible. As early as 1906, Bennett expressed his distaste for the 'shameless theatricality' which tarnished British politics. In an article for *T. P.'s Weekly,*[37] and in 'Politics and Morals' published in *Things That Have Interested Me* (1921), Bennett castigates the way in which a 'deluded' approach to political

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[32] Pound, *A Biography*, p. 20.
[33] In a letter from Bennett to Wells dated 18 April 1905, Bennett writes: 'Your analysis of political parties in England fills me with awe. It is A1, and the indictment of Liberalism is excellent, though I *am* a Liberal, like yourself' (*Arnold Bennett & H. G. Wells*, p. 119).
[34] In Kinsley Martin's autobiography *Father Figures*, Martin describes his appointment as editor of the *New Statesman* in 1930 as follows:

> Arnold Bennett was a director of the *New Statesman* and immensely proud of being a director of the Savoy Hotel as well. […] He gave a lunch party to the other directors at the Savoy, at the same time rather embarrassingly putting me through my paces.
>
> 'What are your… p-p-politics?'
>
> I said, rather too timidly, for I did not know his politics, that I should call myself a Socialist. 'I should hope so,' said Bennett, as if it would be disgraceful to be anything else (Martin, *Father Figures*, p. 190).

[35] See Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, January 11th' 1910 in *Journals, Vol. I: 1896 – 1910*, p. 353.
[36] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, January 11th' 1910, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 353.
[37] Bennett, 'Despising Politics', p. 50.

parties (focused on amassing support on one side through discredit of the other) is at the expense of uniting in a singular aim: what is 'best' for the world.[38] Bennett also berates the 'delusion' – which he believed to be held by the majority of the populace – that politics are 'white and black', when he by virtue of 'common sense', saw them as 'grey':

> To attempt to divide mankind into white sheep and black sheep, or into sheep and goats, is infantile. […] Nor can one assert that a special honesty or dishonesty is connected with any brand of political opinion. Nevertheless, I am constantly meeting men otherwise apparently intelligent, sometimes very intelligent, whose whole attitude towards politics is falsified by this truly singular delusion. All their conversation implies that the best and the straightest men are on their side and the crookedest and least competent men are on the opposing side. Of course they make exceptions, but in making exceptions they only emphasise their delusion […] If you told them that one set of political opinions is just as 'good' as the other – that one makes for progress while the other makes for stability, both aims being perfectly laudable – they would freeze you with a righteous disdain, and in their hearts accuse you of wanting the best of both worlds. There is only one world.[39]

In spite of his frustration with this two-dimensional outlook, Bennett recognised that politics were continually 'evolving' ('Politics are what they are by the inevitable and splendid movement of human evolution. They were worse. They will be better') and so encouraged his readers to go to the polling booths and to persevere in the hope that 'things never turn out as badly as our fears'.[40] This being said, Bennett was by no means apathetic and Abu-

[38] Bennett, 'Politics and Morals', p. 93.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

Manneh's statement that Bennett was decidedly opposed to the strikers is misleading. Published references to the strike are limited to eight journal entries and the contents of each are more inclined towards distance as opposed to direct opposition.

Upon learning that 'the miners' strike was on' Bennett 'prophesised' 'great gloom […] [in] a settlement of the coal trouble' and, writing four days later, observed 'a noticeably increasing gravity in the general demeanour'.[41] The 'gravity' of the current situation is conveyed through Bennett's incredulity that the Yacht Club is attempting to enforce evening dress 'in the middle of a General Strike'[42] and (writing the day before the strike was prematurely called off) denial of the Strike as 'revolutionary': 'How can this be denied when the Unions Council has the infernal cheek to issue permits of goods and vehicles to use the roads and railways, I cannot understand. As if anybody could possibly need permission to use roads except in a revolution'.[43] Bennett's penultimate 'strike' entry, written on Wednesday 12 May, is particularly revealing:

> The general strike now seems pitiful, foolish – a pathetic attempt of underdogs who hadn't a chance when the over-dogs really set themselves to win. Everybody, nearly, among the over-dogs seems to have joined in with grim enthusiasm to beat the strike.[44]

The qualification through 'nearly' and the oxymoronic 'grim enthusiasm' implies a degree of hesitancy and discomfort at the outcome; this is not 'vehement opposition' but rather, deflation, and now seems reminiscent of Bennett's reflections on 'a system that is built on the

[41] Bennett, journal entries dated 'Saturday, May 1st' 1926 and 'Tuesday, May 4th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III*, pp. 131, 132.
[42] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Thursday, May 6th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III*, p. 132.
[43] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Tuesday, May 11th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III*, p. 134.
[44] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Wednesday, May 12th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III*, p. 134.

grinding of the faces of the poor' whilst in Brighton. The inclusion of 'pathetic' is double-edged, as the image of underdogs and over-dogs is laden with pathos, veering away from the more obvious meaning of 'pathetic'.

On 7 May 1926, The *New York Herald-Tribune* 'wired'[45] Bennett requesting an article on the General Strike, which, when published two days later, was accompanied by a large front-page photograph of him and the headline: 'Labour's Strike Policy Suicidal in Opinion of Arnold Bennett'. His opinions were not in fact, particularly extreme. He wrote of solidarity on both sides, but also that Labour leaders lacked common sense and 'political sagacity'; that being said, the strike was thought to have made an unpopular government 'amazingly popular', and Bennett opined that 'all non-strikers and quite half of the strikers are very strongly in sympathy with it. The mine-owners were always unpopular and they still are'.[46] Bennett's preoccupation with the social condition manifested in his fear (thought to be shared by other 'thoughtful people'), which was not 'any success for the strike but that failure of the strike may lead to a very violent and ultimately anti-labour reaction'.[47] It is precisely this anxiety which Carter sees in Bennett's novel. Bennett is not comforted by the swift suppression of the strike; quite the opposite – he is made all the more anxious by it, anticipating further, potentially 'violent' action. *Accident*'s 'tidy conclusion' is purposely misleading; it is not to be relied upon as it is, most likely, only temporary.

In addition to elements of Alan's eventful journey, Bennett's objectification of his characters and the subsequent denial of their humanity, effectively captures an air of social unrest – not unlike the way in which Dickens designs and subsequently dehumanises his characters, so to convey the turbulent environment in which he was writing and his criticism

[45] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Friday, May 7th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III*, p. 132.
[46] Bennett, 'The General Strike', pp. 1, 3.
[47] Bennett, 'The General Strike', p. 3.

of the treatment of the lower classes in Victorian England. In her study of *Great Expectations* (1861), Dorothy Van Ghent states:

> Dickens lived in a time and environment in which a full-scale demolition of traditional values was going on, correlatively with the uprooting and dehumanization of men, women and children by the millions – a process brought about by industrialization, colonial imperialism, and the exploitation of the human being as a 'thing' or an engine or a part of an engine capable of being used for profit. […] Dickens' intuition alarmingly saw this process in motion […] and he sought an extraordinary explanation for it. People were becoming things, and things (the things that money can buy or that are the means for making money) were becoming more important than people. People were being de-animated, robbed of their souls, and things were usurping the prerogatives of animate creatures – governing the lives of their owners in the most literal sense. [48]

Bennett's train attendants are wooden, possessing demeanours which are 'shop-finished, like the polished grained woods and the upholstery and the brass and the advertisements of the gaudy car'.[49] When picturing the workers who are employed at the electricity generator, Alan envisions 'mannikins'[50] and a porter on the platform at Victoria Station is assumed incapable of imagination (a decidedly human quality). At the window for excess luggage, 'an unseen man [is] caged within',[51] where 'unseen' alludes to both his physical positioning and the fact that once he has fulfilled each request, he will, no doubt, be swiftly 'un-seen' and for all intents and purposes, 'cease' to exist. In accordance with this, machinery ('things' – the

[48] Ghent, *The English Novel*, p. 128.
[49] Bennett, *Accident*, p. 12.
[50] Ibid., p. 51.
[51] Ibid., p. 5.

trains and boat which Alan utilises) is repeatedly likened to a living 'organism' which becomes tainted through its contact with humanity, or a 'terrific monster'[52] – 'some leviathan beast'[53] – which is being 'tended' throughout the course of its journey.[54]

Objectification is by no means restricted to the lower classes. Alan's social equals – the Pullman's 'luxurious travellers'[55] – and indeed, Alan himself, are stripped of their individuality and regarded as an incapable, 'opulent'[56] collective which is to be herded along each portion of their journey (both as a passenger, and in life) by a continuous and consistent stream of reliable 'serfs'.[57] When an attendant is asked why the Pullman has taken an unscheduled stop, Bennett records both his verbal response ('I really couldn't say, madam') and the unspoken rejoinder which is written 'behind the expression of his features': 'Have the goodness not to meddle with what does not concern you, and what is beyond you. If we stop, we stop. That is our affair. You are only parcels, and the convenience of parcels is not entitled to attention'.[58] Bennett's reduction of members of both classes to 'things' emphasises the extent to which the upper classes ('parcels') rely on the services of the lower classes (essentially, couriers) and as a consequence of this, how reliant and in turn, vulnerable, the upper classes are. Alan is acutely aware of this, but is unable to take a stand ('Why are we going, and why are they helping us to go? […] why do they not storm the trains and take our places by force? All have their cares, and I have not a care in the world');[59] instead, he is limited to conscious consideration (the ability to 'ponder') on the fact that 'things […] [are] all wrong for the under-dog'.[60] Jack's assertion that 'everybody knows

[52] Ibid., p. 119.
[53] Ibid., p. 92.
[54] Ibid., p. 119.
[55] Ibid., p. 8.
[56] Ibid., p. 12.
[57] Ibid., p. 19.
[58] Ibid., pp. 19-20.
[59] Ibid., p. 10.
[60] Ibid., p. 243.

that'[61] effectively supports Carter's theory that it may only be a matter of time before knowledge develops into action.

Bennett's treatment of the train itself also effectively mirrors the segregation present within current society. When the Pullman takes an unscheduled stop, Alan observes the following:

> the curve succession of coaches on the curved track […] the bright steel up-line in a corresponding curve, wedged in fish-plates that were nailed to sleeper after sleeper; thousands of sleepers stretching all the way to London and all the way to Folkestone and Dover; and the tens of millions of road-metal pebbles, smoothed out, raked flat, combed! And in the misty distance a tall, frail signal – at danger. No luxury here. Nothing but the naked bones and backbone and bottom foundation of a system.[62]

Ian Carter regards this passage as a metaphor for the General Strike. The 'bottom foundation of a system' represents the working classes and their responsibility in ensuring that the machine (representative of the economy) continues to run smoothly. The railway signal which lifts after only a short period of time, recalls how the General Strike collapsed after only nine days.[63] I believe that it is the treatment of the space which surrounds the train, however, which proves to be the most revealing. Michel Foucault states that 'a train is an extraordinary bundle of relations, since it's something through which one passes; it is also something by which one can pass from one point to another, and then it is something that passes by'.[64] What is interesting about Alan's train, however, is that despite its strict geographical placement, following a designated route dictated to by a physical 'track', Alan

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., p. 22.
[63] Carter, *Railways and Culture*, pp. 153-4.
[64] Foucault, 'Different Spaces', p. 178.

repeatedly describes the train – and himself whilst on it – as being 'lost'. When travelling through France, Alan states that he 'did not know where the train was. It was a train somewhere in space'[65] that 'had […] escaped from all geographical reality. It was going from nowhere to nowhere; it existed separate in space; nothing could be discerned through the dark windows except the reflected image of the bright, shaking car'.[66] If the journey of the train is to parallel cultural and societal changes, surely this suspension from reality speaks above all else, of the current state of things – how nothing at this moment in time is certain and that significant changes must – and will – happen to get society back on track.

I do not believe that socio-political unrest, however, is Bennett's sole concern. When detailing the design of his novel, Bennett's journal entry reveals a dual purpose: 'the dissatisfaction of a successful and rich man with his own secret state of discontent and with the evils of the age'.[67] In light of this, Bennett's exploration of the 'spirit' which surrounds the General Strike relates only to the latter.

In *The Railway and Modernity* (2007), Beaumont and Freeman state:

> In the cultural imagination of the western world the railway has figured historically both as a celebration of modernity and as a critique of it […]. A peculiar and unmistakable dream world has invariably been attached to its geometrical tracks and to the machine ensemble of which they are a constituent part. Trains have thus embodied the spirit of rationalism and invoked the spectres of irrationalism.[68]

In Bennett's novel, this dual attitude is bifurcated along generational lines. Whereas a young man, such as Alan's son Jack, is blasé about air and rail travel, older characters, such as Alan,

[65] Bennett, *Accident,* p. 41.
[66] Ibid., p. 99.
[67] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, October 30th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III,* pp. 167-8.
[68] Beaumont and Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity*, p. 13.

remain in awe of it. Jack, therefore, epitomises a 'celebratory' (or 'rational') regard for modernity, whereas Alan maintains a 'critical' ('irrational') consideration of it. When joined by Jack on the luxe in Aix-les-Baines, Alan deems Jack and his 'startling' appearance 'a miracle',[69] whereas Jack appears wholly unphased at the prospect of engaging a pilot in England and coordinating a flight so as to board Pearl's train in France, having taken the journey as a matter of course:

> Wonderful thing, youth! The lad had decided in an instant what he would do; and he had done it, successfully. Earlier in the day he had been in Newcastle – Newcastle, another world, a million miles off. Then in the sky. Then in the suburbs of Paris. Then in the sky again; and over mountains. And lo! he was here, in the same train as Pearl! Marvellous! And he was quite modest over it. No doubt he had acted as observer during the flight: but not a word from him about that. Yes, he was extremely modest.[70]

Jack and Pearl are 'cut off' from Alan 'by the vast spreading expanse of a quarter of a century'.[71] As a consequence, both have matured surrounded by a host of 'marvellous' machines that Alan in his youth, could never have anticipated and, at 50, continues to regard with an almost childlike wonder: the 'million miles' that he envisions are in fact, a 'bit less than three hundred';[72] the 'mountains' are 'nothing to speak of' as Jack states authoritatively that 'there isn't a mound till the Cote d'Or'.[73] The 'modesty' which Alan attributes to Jack is unassuming entitlement: Jack is unquestionably of a just and decent 'sort', but being very

[69] Bennett, *Accident*, pp. 143-4.
[70] Ibid., pp. 154-5.
[71] Ibid., p. 64.
[72] Ibid., p. 152.
[73] Ibid., p. 154.

wealthy and possessing the right connections, he is in a position to act spontaneously, reliant on the fact that as a member of the affluent upper class, everything – from the people he employs to the machinery which has conveyed him to Pearl – is simply a resource to be made use of to 'successfully' to achieve his end.

Despite asserting that he feels as young as he did over two decades ago (vigorously affirming that 'age was an illusion created by the calendar'),[74] Alan is conscious of the fact that he 'must inevitably' be regarded as 'old'[75] by the Jacks and Pearls of the more 'youthful' generation. This feeling is emphasised through the association of Jack and Pearl with the sleek, polished present. Both Jack and Pearl are described as 'elegant'; Pearl is described as 'elegant to the last touch, a finished product of centuries of laborious civilisation'[76] and Jack is 'elegant both in body and in his sober, simple, costly tourist attire'.[77] Alan, however, is 'behind the times'.[78] The divide increases when Jack and Pearl are outwardly unmoved ('extremely modest') when using the plethora of technology which surrounds them, whereas Alan never appears wholly comfortable, preferring to associate the 'priceless contraption[s]'[79] with magic, rather than acknowledge that they are the apogee of industrial accomplishment, or indeed, equally 'finished product[s] of […] civilisation' like that of his son and daughter-in-law. When the train suddenly stops 'in the midst of a wide, Kentish landscape', Alan describes it as 'moveless as though under an enchantment'.[80] And in the aftermath of the collision, Alan perceives that 'the entire railway accident seemed to have been conjured away by sinister magic:'[81] 'Where were the cars which had been in front of the derailed cars? Where was the big express engine? Vanished away? Strange!'[82] And, upon

[74] Ibid., p. 64.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., p. 77.
[77] Ibid., p. 143.
[78] Ibid., p. 111.
[79] Ibid., p. 17.
[80] Ibid., pp. 17-21.
[81] Ibid., p. 186.
[82] Ibid., p. 189.

boarding a replacement train, Alan muses that 'the Wagon-Lits Company had done marvels, producing magically a whole train, heated, out of a hat, with conductors and all complete'.[83] Alan's retention of an almost childlike awe as opposed to casual acceptance, is central when recognising his deviation from the new, modern 'norm' and in turn, the way in which his inability to adapt has disconnected him from the younger generation; it is his growing awareness of this which fuels his 'own secret state of discontent'.[84]

Alan's attitude towards time further supports this. The recurrent emphasis on clocks and Alan's inability to experience time without feeling that it is passing either far too quickly or too slowly, further indicates that he is overwhelmed by technological advancement or 'modernity' as a whole. When the Pullman stops very 'suddenly' 'in the midst of a wide, Kentish landscape',[85] Alan's conviction that '[f]ive hours elapsed' is swiftly rebutted by the Pullman clock which 'naughtily measured [the pause] as five minutes' (after which time, Alan is certain that 'time ceased and eternity set in').[86] Once in Dover, however, Alan learns that 'the train had arrived only a little more than twenty minutes late', and, following an exchange with one of the ship's ticket-collectors, that it is thought that 'the French train would leave Boulogne within five minutes of time'.[87] When awoken by the Lucasses' impromptu disembarkment, Alan's watch reads twenty-five minutes past eleven. He immediately 'accuse[s] the innocent thing of sloth' and checks to see if it has stopped – it hasn't: 'it was faithfully ticking. He sighed. He would have guessed the hour to be 2 or 3 a.m.'.[88] The description of the watch as 'innocent' and 'faithful', exacerbates Alan's ill-informed irritability and irrationality and re-directs emphasis towards his temporal

[83] Ibid., p. 228.
[84] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Saturday, October 30th' 1926, in *Journals, Vol. III,* pp. 167-68.
[85] Bennett, *Accident,* p. 17.
[86] Ibid., p. 19.
[87] Ibid., p. 27.
[88] Ibid., p. 125.

displacement – that is, his inability to 'keep up' with the times, even when consciously assuming the hour to be later than it is.

When compared to writing by his Modernist peers (in particular, that of H. G. Wells and James Joyce), Bennett's *Accident* invariably falls short. At best, critics acknowledge the 'influence of Joycean interior monologue';[89] at worst, Alan is simply regarded as a failed Leopold Bloom. However, stream of consciousness is not the sole criterion when identifying a modernist novel, and whilst Bennett may have produced an arguably less engaging character than James Joyce's Bloom, Alan – and in turn, *Accident* – should not be dismissed on these grounds alone. Morag Shiach defines one of the 'most distinctive innovations characteristic of the modern novel' as 'experimentation with the representation of time'.[90] Two readily recognisable examples of this are 'an increasingly marked dualism: a disjunction between public/objective and private/subjective time' and the 'magnification of its smallest units: the day, the moment'.[91] Both of these are present in Bennett's novel when condensing the duration of the plot and through Alan's obsession with clocks. Further to this, I believe that Bennett's stylistic emphasis on Alan's immediate impressions (or Bennett's observations of them), recalls Ian Watt's analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in which Watt coins the phrase 'delayed decoding':

> Long before *Heart of Darkness* Conrad seems to have been trying to find ways of giving direct narrative expression to the way in which the consciousness elicits meaning from its perceptions. One of the devices that he hit on was to present a sense impression and to withhold naming it or explaining its meaning until later; as readers we witness every step by which the gap between the individual perception and its

[89] Squillace, *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett*, p. 24.
[90] Shiach, 'Reading the modernist novel: an Introduction', p. 12.
[91] Banfield, 'Remembrance and Tense Past', p. 48.

> cause is belatedly closed within the consciousness of the protagonist. […] This narrative device may be termed delayed decoding, since it combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning.[92]

Bennett certainly admired Conrad's writing – in *Literary Taste* (1909), he acknowledges Conrad as a 'great novelist'[93] – and admits to their sharing a stylistic 'manner'. When writing on 6 December 1897, Bennett records that he has that afternoon '[read] in the *New Review* […] the conclusion of Joseph Conrad's superb book, "The Nigger of the Narcissus"' and that he 'had a mind to go on at once with [his] Staffordshire novel [*The Man from the North*], treating it in the Conrad manner, which after all is [his] own, on a grander scale'.[94] Bennett expands on what he means by 'the Conrad manner' in a letter to H. G. Wells two days later, stating: 'Where did the man [Conrad] pick up that style, and that *synthetic* way of gathering up a general impression and flinging it at you?'[95] Watt highlights a portion of Conrad's text (when Marlow's boat is attacked, just below Kurtz's station) in order to best demonstrate this stylistic device:

> I was looking down at the sounding-pole, and feeling much annoyed to see at each try a little more of it stick out of that river, when I saw my poleman give up on the business suddenly, and stretch himself flat on the deck, without even taking the trouble to haul his pole in. […] At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed. Then I had to look at the river mighty quick, because there was a snag in the fairway.

[92] Watt, *Conrad*, p. 175.
[93] Bennett, *Literary Taste*, p. 49.
[94] Bennett, journal entry dated 'Monday, December 6th' 1897, in *Journals, Vol. I*, p. 64.
[95] Bennett, letter to Wells dated 8 December 1897, in *Arnold Bennett & H. G. Wells*, pp. 38-9.

> Sticks, little sticks, were flying about – thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet – perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at![96]

The 'gap between impression and understanding'[97] (the realisation that the 'little sticks' are in fact 'arrows'), does not relate directly to specific events in Bennett's novel (for example, Alan is aware that the train he is on has derailed), but to the novel as a whole. Whereas the 'lightbulb moments' in Conrad's novel occur for the reader and Marlow in parallel (we realise what is happening as Marlow does), *Accident*'s lightbulb moment occurs when we realise that the novel is not just about a train crash, but rather, the possibility that society is travelling towards a potential (class) collision, the final result of which cannot be fully anticipated.

[96] Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 54-5.
[97] Ibid., pp. 176-7.

Conclusion

Arnold Bennett has been pigeonholed as a mechanical realist, a provincial or regional writer, and as a lingering, incongruous Edwardian in a period dominated by Modernist aesthetics. By concentrating upon Bennett's metropolitan novels and an array of his published and private writings, in addition to reading his work in relation to his moral, social, and political ideas, his contemporaries, and the development of his techniques and his social vision, I have shown that Arnold Bennett was a writer with a coherent but developing ethos, who made conscious choices which encompass different kinds of Modernisms and early twentieth-century ideas about art and society.

Bennett's formal choices – a putative adherence to realism – have historically been used to exclude him from the Modernist canon. In recent years, Bennett's Modernism has gained some recognition. John Lucas 'tentatively' suggests that:

> what Bennett has in mind is a series of fictional readings of contemporary history in a way that allows him […] to throw out perspectives onto the past and the future. […] He does not abandon realism but he adapts it to new concerns'.[1]

Neil Cartlidge is more assertive and acknowledges 'Bennett's clear sense of the possibility and desirability of accommodating modernist themes and concerns with at least some of the aims and techniques of the realist tradition'.[2] Cartlidge underscores the need for scepticism concerning canonical Modernism's own claims about breaking with tradition, stating: 'it suited modernist novelists to define their own aesthetics in opposition to those of Bennett and

[1] Lucas, *A Study*, pp. 204-5.
[2] Cartlidge, '"The Only Really Objective Novel Ever Written"?', p. 135

his generation'.[3] Bennett would squarely disagree with Eliot's famous assertion in 'The Metaphysical Poets' that 'poets in our civilisation, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*'.[4] Indeed, upon completing Laura Riding's book *Contemporaries and Snobs* (1928), Bennett writes that the 'worst fault [of 'Some Modernists'] is that they cannot write in a comprehensible fashion. When you have to read a paragraph seven times to get the hang of it, and even then don't quite get the hang of it, one conclusion is sure: the author cannot write.'[5] With regard to 'art for art's sake', Bennett rejected the notion of 'terribly hard reading' or 'inefficient writing'[6] as necessary criteria for a movement or a celebrated aesthetic. Denying Bennett's modernism on the grounds of form unduly disregards issues of theme. The fact that he chooses not to employ an experimental form should not outweigh the fact that he was actively incorporating 'modernist themes and concerns'.

If one were to label Bennett, it should reflect his enduring interest in people, and his advocacy of having a purpose and securing happiness by making 'the best of life', not only for personal gain, but for the benefit of the wider community, the nation, and subsequent generations to come. With regard to his work, it should now be recognised – in the words of W. L. Courtney in his review of *The Pretty Lady* – that:

> Mr. Arnold Bennett [has a] vivid appreciation of what is topical and up-to-date. He is remarkably clever; he possesses a keen journalistic instinct; he has ample resource and a quick divining mind; he is admirably responsive to all the interests of the time […]. Admirably equipped as a raconteur, he seems to be something more than the teller of stories; he is the august impersonator of a particular period, he is the twentieth century incarnate, giving us the very form and pressure of [the] time. We

[3] Ibid.
[4] Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', p. 65.
[5] Bennett, 'The "Monstrous Conceit"', p. 132.
[6] Ibid.

can imagine that to anyone who asks what is the twentieth century, almost without thinking we should answer, 'Mr. Arnold Bennett'.[7]

[7] Courtney, 'in the "Daily Telegraph"', pp. 376-7.

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