Structural cohesion in Arnold Bennett's Clayhanger trilogy

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STRUCTURAL COHESION IN ARNOLD BENNETT'S CLAYHANGER TRILOGY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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Dated May 8, 1975
To
Dr. Ruth Faurot,
master teacher,
and to
Vic,
my best friend.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

When Virginia Woolf was asked to address the Heretics at Cambridge in May of 1924 on the subject of modern fiction, she re-wrote an earlier attack on Arnold Bennett.¹ The paper was another salvo in the literary war which Samuel Hynes describes as the "untidy and bitter wrangle that marred both their lives for more than a decade."² William Tindall, summarizing the address, said that Mrs. Woolf called Bennett "the bad reigning novelist, who, avoiding imagination, accumulated facts."³ She said more: that Bennett was transitional, using the outmoded Edwardian convention of recording facts about "house property" in an attempt to avoid the "drudgery" and "appalling


effort" of saying what he meant, and in an attempt to hypnotize the reader into imagining characters for himself. She also said that the "odd books" of the Edwardians were not books at all, but sociological tracts which would not be re-read, once the assuaging check was written by the reader.

James Hepburn says that Mrs. Woolf "did not really intend to put the victim out of his misery," but the attack was devastating, reenforcing as it did the criticism of Henry James, who wrote that the first two books of the trilogy *The Clayhanger Family* were monumental, but without organization and interpretation. Mrs. Woolf mentions only the second book of the trilogy, *Hilda Lessways*. Neither James nor Woolf read the complete trilogy, which may be a partial explanation of the reasons why they failed to observe Bennett's technical skill in the construction of complex characters and circumstances, the analysis of character and society, and the cohesiveness of

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5 The novels of the trilogy are: *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessways* (1911), and *These Twain* (1915). They were published together in one volume as follows: Arnold Bennett, *The Clayhanger Family* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1925). Page numbers referred to in this paper refer to that edition.

The Clayhanger Family. Two modern critics make this same mistake. James Hepburn, in his excellent study of symbolism in *Clayhanger*,\(^7\) misses much of the interlocking symbolism of the trilogy because he considers only this first volume, while Walter Allen says that the trilogy is not a trilogy at all, but a "triptych." Allen warns against looking "for a unity that was never intended"\(^8\) in the three volumes.\(^9\)

The complete trilogy, The Clayhanger Family, will be used in this thesis in an analysis of the writing of Arnold Bennett. It will be shown that the perspective granted by the passage of fifty years both affirms and refutes the judgments of Bennett's early influential critics, as follows:

Virginia Woolf's prediction that the Edwardians would not be re-read is partly true. The general public has not re-read Bennett. He is, though, increasingly popular with literary critics who read him for personal enjoyment, and for the purpose of analyzing his literary influence and contribution. Three diverse critical

\(^7\)Hepburn, *The Art*, pp. 76-94.


\(^9\)A fourth novel, *The Roll Call*, involving the son of Hilda Lessways and George Cannon is so loosely connected to the trilogy that it should be considered separately, if at all.
statements by Bellamy and Wagar, and Graver, typify the extremes of modern criticism of Bennett. It is also true that Bennett was transitional, and that he flooded his readers with detail. It is not true that Bennett's detail is without organization, imagination, and interpretation, nor is it true that his characterization fails.

This paper will demonstrate how Bennett's "circumstantial" history of his age, as it streams by the reader, is controlled, analyzed, and interpreted. The

10William Bellamy, The Novels of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy: 1890-1910 (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), pp. 1, 55. In his summary of Bennett criticism, Bellamy calls attention to W. W. Wagar's 1961 statement that Bennett had long occupied a "literary dustbin." Bellamy then goes on to say: "It might be argued that in Bennett's definition of the 'divine me' ... the stream-of-consciousness novel has its roots."

11Lawrence Graver, "A Good Book About a Man Who Wrote Good Books and Bad Books," rev. of Margaret Drabble, Arnold Bennett (Alfred A. Knopf), The New York Times Book Review, Section 7, September 1, 1974, p. 1. The statement above is a contrast to Graver's review of the latest major work about Bennett: "Interest in Bennett's work seems to be reviving in England. His best books are available in popular reprints and several have been serialized on radio and TV. In America the story is different. Not one of his books is on the current list of a major American publisher and only a scattered few are available in expensive facsimiles of older editions. With so intelligent and compassionate an advocate as Margaret Drabble, Bennett should get a more general hearing."

12Gordon Hall Gerould, The Patterns of English and American Fiction (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1942), p. 480. This word is from Gerould, indicating Gerould's opinion that Bennett's main contribution was as an historical novelist: "He left behind him ..., woven skillfully into narrative form, a magnificent record of the world he knew, rich in its portraits, illuminated with humor, circumstantial in its detail."
frameworks of characters and events stand firm, their foundations solid in the systematic working-out, through symbolism and irony, of Bennett's conviction that there is a "cause and effect" relationship between physical environment and the character and sociological evolution and the character. Bennett writes that "the spirit of literature . . . enforces a moral wisdom by the tracing everywhere of cause and effect."\textsuperscript{13} The structures of characters and events are raised, reenforced, illuminated, inspected, and photographed through the use of symbolism, irony, and multiple points of view. Organized detail bricks in the framework.\textsuperscript{14}

The theory of sociological evolution Bennett admires is that of Herbert Spencer, as detailed in Spencer's \textit{First Principles}.\textsuperscript{15} Bennett states explicitly the

\textsuperscript{13}Arnold Bennett, \textit{Literary Taste: How To Form It} (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1910), p. 12.

\textsuperscript{14}William Lyon Phelps, \textit{The Advance of the English Novel} (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1915), p. 159. The evolution of the critical evaluation of Bennett's use of detail can be traced by a comparison of the 1915 and 1963 statements of William Phelps and James Hepburn. In 1915, Phelps neatly summarized James's rambling statement concerning Bennett's detail: "It is a verification of Henry James's comment that in the work of Arnold Bennett we admire the patient and steady industry of the man, laying brick on brick, but it is impossible to guess for what object the structure is raised." Hepburn writes: "Bennett does marshall his facts very neatly, does make them do a dance, does transform them into symbols, does weave the symbols into a design." Hepburn, \textit{The Art}, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{15}Herbert Spencer, \textit{First Principles} (New York: De Witt Revolving Fund, 1958).
importance of "causation" in his Journal of September 15, 1910:

Clayhanger published in England today. In U.S.A. publication is delayed about a fortnight. When I think how First Principles, by filling me up with the sense of causation everywhere, has altered my whole view of life, and undoubtedly immensely improved it, I am confirmed in my opinion of that book. You can see First Principles in nearly every line I write.16

Bennett wrote a number of interesting declarations concerning the importance of the physical environment on human personality. His symbolism reflects his strong feeling about the importance of this interaction:

All physical phenomena are inter-related . . . there is nothing which does not bear on everything else. The whole spectacular and sensual show—what the eyes see, the ear hears, the nose scents, the tongue tastes and skin touches—is a cause or an effect of human conduct. Naught can be ruled out as negligible, as not forming part of the equation . . . .

Now, the main factor in life on this planet is the planet itself. Any logically conceived survey of existence must begin with geographical and climatic phenomena. This is surely obvious. If you say that you are not interested in meteorology or the configurations of the earth, I say that you deceive yourself. You are. For an east wind may upset your liver and cause you to insult your wife. Beyond question the most important fact about, for example, Great Britain, is that it is an island . . . . A genuine observation of the supreme phenomenon that Great Britain is surrounded by water—an effort to keep it always at the back of the consciousness—will help to explain all the minor phenomena of British existence. Geographical knowledge is the mother of discernment, for the varying physical characteristics of the earth are the sole direct terrestrial influence determining the evolution of original vital energy.

All other influences are secondary, and have been effects of character and temperament before becoming causes... Perhaps the greatest of them are roads and architecture. Nothing could be more English than English roads, or more French than French roads.\(^{17}\)

This is the crux of the disagreement between Arnold Bennett and Virginia Woolf; the dichotomy results from differences over technique in accomplishing characterization. Bennett's approach is external, and Virginia Woolf's is internal. While he is the champion of the realists against the Romantics, she is the Jeanne d'Arc of a new generation of psychological novelists engaged in exploring the uses of the stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue techniques. The extent of Bennett's belief in the importance of such a realistic fact as physical geography can be seen in the omniscient author's comment incidental to his analysis of the teaching of geography in The Five Towns of *The Clayhanger Family*: "Geographical considerations are the cause of all history."\(^{18}\)

Modern critics recognize that Bennett's symbols "shadow forth"\(^{19}\) the internal life of his characters, but

\(^{17}\)Arnold Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, ed. Samuel Hynes, pp. 9-10.

\(^{18}\)Bennett, *The Clayhanger Family*, p. 10.

\(^{19}\)The "shadow forth" phrase appears often in criticism of Bennett, due to the importance of the relationship between the external symbol and the internal life of the characters in his writings. This polarity of view, as in the inside-outside dichotomy, reappears often. In addition to the obvious method of telling the same story
a careful analysis of most of the major and minor symbolism of the trilogy does not at present exist. James Hepburn's excellent study, The Art of Arnold Bennett, apparently originated in an article he wrote about this facet of Bennett's technique. The premise of this article, "The Two Worlds of Edwin Clayhanger" is valid: Hepburn said that even though Bennett appeared to be "preoccupied with the external world ... , he was using the external world as a means of exposing the inner world." This writer will attempt a more intensive analysis of symbolism in the trilogy than did Hepburn, and will, at appropriate intervals, agree with, or contest certain interpretations Hepburn makes of Bennett's symbols. Other critics who have noted Bennett's preoccupation with environment are Ann Barnard, who says that in Bennett, characters are "caught by time and formed by environment," Walter Allen, who

from the point of view of different characters, John Wain points out that "it was an artistic necessity, for a writer of Bennett's epoch, to see provincial life with a metropolitan eye," and the major task of James Hall's Primitivism and Taste is to contrast the primitive father with the cultured son in The Clayhanger Family. John Wain, Arnold Bennett, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 40. James Hall, Arnold Bennett: Primitivism and Taste (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1959).


says that character is "formed by environment as a tree is formed by the wind," and Kenley E. Roby, who says "Bennett was almost fanatic ally concerned with making clear the relationship between his characters and their environment." Bennett's subtle and complex technique is evident in the way he uses physical and idiosyncratic symbols to indicate development and change in his characters. His symbols are not static. They meld and shift, indicating dramatic change, maturation, or dissolution of character, and interaction between characters: symbols of the two-way influence between environment and character, and of "sociological evolution through causation."

Bennett's lavish use of meticulous detail results in his writing being labeled "photographic." Hepburn calls Bennett "a human photographic machine." V. S. Pritchett most accurately describes Bennett's method of giving dimension to his characters. Pritchett says that Bennett's characterization is stereoscopic:

Bennett's characters have three dimensions; the slow but adroit changing of the light that is thrown upon them makes them stereoscopic and gives them movement. And this movement is not the swift

\(^\text{22}\)Allen, pp. 77-78.


agitation of the passions but the dilatory adjust-
ment to circumstances.25

Vision, perception, light and dark, and montage-making26
multiple exposures of the same character and/or event give
life to Bennett characters and events.

Critics have coined various phrases to describe
Bennett's attempts to encompass time, life, and death in
his novels, but Bennett's own phrase describing his theme
is the best one: he calls it the "circle of life."27 He
draws a "circle of life," rather than cutting a slice. In
so far as is practical, he pictures the lives of the gen-
erations in concentric circles, mirroring one another, with
individual lives turning always back on themselves, through
mirrored images of actual or symbolic prophetic scenes.
First, there is an actual scene, then later a recreation,
sometimes with significant differences, or an imagined or
symbolic scene, then later a realization of that antici-
pated circumstance. Structural cohesion is increased as
the omniscient author reports the workings of the minds of

25V. W. Pritchett, "The Five Towns," The Living

26Charles Clerc and Louis Leiter (eds.), "The
Expense of Spirit in a Waste of Shame; Motif, Montage, and
Structure in 'Noon Wine,'" Seven Contemporary Short Novels
first encountered the use of "montage" used to describe a
literary concept in this critical essay by Dr. Leiter. A
related concept, the "mirror scene," was introduced by
Dr. Leiter in a class I attended at the University of the
Pacific.

27Bennett, The Author's Craft, ed. Hynes, p. 69.
characters as they anticipate the results of their decisions. The anticipation is often fulfilled, but sometimes not; in either case, the faithful author insures that the reader is made aware of the reasons for the failure of the projection. Flash-backs are frequent. This is probably what Ann Barnard means when she says:

I have said that style is central to Bennett's art, because it is the tool with which he makes his portraits of Five Towns' people. These flashes of insight through the compounding of images, seen only on occasion in the lesser novels, form the basic pattern of the major work, so that each novel moves like a poem, from image to image, the theme emerging from the arrangement of the details. A point of time, giving substance to characters moving in their setting, I have called the Bennett moment; from it may grow an epic expanse of time and meaning.28

Barnard thus identifies, but does not specify the "compounding images." Specific identification of a whole range of symbolism in Bennett, from single objects and characteristics to stereographically pictured tableaux will be accomplished in this paper.

Repetitive phrases, particularly in moments of emotional stress, repeat references to symbols or symbolic situations, reenforcing the impression, strengthening the symbol, and increasing structural cohesion. Numbers, which we use as symbols to represent realities, are often repeated, in a single paragraph, for emphasis. The repetitive elements usually stress the ironic aspects of the

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28 Barnard, p. 60.
extant situation, as will be demonstrated.

Bennett believes that the major adjustments in life are those between parent and child, and between man and woman. Virginia Woolf accuses Bennett of writing a sociological tract, but the trilogy is more than a tract; it is a three-dimensional treatment of these two basic life relationships. Symbolism and irony will be revealed as the tools Bennett uses to construct and illuminate his characters, from the most insignificant to the hero and heroine of the trilogy, Edwin Clayhanger and Hilda Lessways, and Edwin's father, Darius Clayhanger, as they live the circles of their lives together in Victorian England.

29 Arnold Bennett, The Journal of Arnold Bennett (New York: The Viking Press), p. 396; see also Roby, p. 310. Roby comments on Bennett's study of the adjustment between parent and child: "The device of showing social change through the limited perspective of a single family is employed by Bennett in The Old Wives' Tale, and Thomas Hinde employs the same device in Mr. Nicholas (1952) by making a close examination of the relationship between a father and a son—a relationship that recalls Clayhanger."

Bennett's picture of Hilda is more than a study of the relationship between man and wife; it is also a study of the role of the female, as Bennett intended it should be. Bennett wrote: "Yesterday I had a goodish large notion for the Hilda book—of portraying the droves of the whole sex, instead of whole masculine droves. I think I can do something with this, showing the multitudinous activities of the whole sex, the point of view of the whole sex, against a mere background of masculinity. I had a sudden vision of it. It has never been done."
Chapter 2

STRUCTURE THROUGH SYMBOLS AND IRONY;
OMNISCIENT INSPECTION THROUGH IRONY

Symbolism and irony are not easily separated in Bennett. Thomas J. Roberts says: "It is not too much to say that each of Bennett's books is bathed in irony," and, of course, irony can be used in a number of different ways. Circumstances and events in the trilogy are often ironic; this particular usage can and will be treated


31 Dorothy Van Ghent describes how irony may be used as a structural element in the building of a novel; she here describes how an ironic contradiction in Moll Flanders becomes a structural force: "We may speak of this contradiction as an irony, and we shall wish to use the word 'irony' here as indicating one characteristic mode of relationship between elements in a novelistic structure. Irony can imply many kinds of discrepancy, contrast, contradiction; paradox is a form of irony; there is irony in a statement that appears to say one thing and actually signifies another; and there is irony in a life situation or in a story situation that contrasts with or contradicts what might be expected from certain of the circumstances . . . ." She then compares irony to one of the wedge-shaped stones, each exerting a side-ways pressure on its neighbor, so that an arch is formed: "The contrasting significances of an ironic statement or of an ironic situation may be compared with the counteracting stresses that hold the arch up and hold it together--that gives it its structure." Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1953), pp. 50, 51.
separately. The analytical use of irony in Bennett is, though, omnipresent. It ordinarily assumes the form of terse omniscient comment about personal or environmental characteristics, symbolic of some aspect of the society. The ironic observation about a symbol representing the society becomes a succinct evaluation of the society.

SYMBOLISM

Though Bennett uses much detail, none of it is haphazard. Details drive the spikes into the structure, making it firm, and also furnish the materials to close the structure in. The symbolic tableaux thus erected function as the major support-pieces of the trilogy. Small details also describe the shifting of an external characteristic from one individual to another, indicating internal changes occurring in human beings as a result of the association, one with another. These small individual symbols, and the melding, shifting, and reflecting of complex symbol montages portray on an external level the reality of what is going on on an internal emotional level between the characters, in the society, and the relationship between people and their physical environment. Symbols of all sorts weld the lengthy trilogy into one well-organized whole.

The omniscient author permits us to look into the minds of his characters as they make decisions about their lives, and as they contemplate the possible consequences of their actions, a kind of prophecy and fulfillment of that
prophecy. Their anticipations are often fulfilled; a mirror-scene relationship is established which contributes to structural cohesion. When the reasonable prophecy of character or omniscient author is not fulfilled, the author insures that the reader understands the ironic nature of the paradoxical disappointment.

The major mirror-scene relationship is established in the complex first scene, which lays out the foundation of the trilogy. Much of the symbolism on which the framework of *The Clayhanger Family* will be constructed is here introduced. This introductory tableau is mirrored near the end of the trilogy. These two scenes of quiet crises, the second a dark reflection of the bright first one, are the fulcra over which Bennett moves the life of Edwin Clayhanger.

**The Bridges**

The two bridge scenes, one at either end of the trilogy, are the mirror scenes concerned with the two major adjustments Edwin must make: the first with his father, and the second with his wife.

In the first scene Edwin stands on a bridge, absorbed in preparing himself to challenge the authority of "that powerful enemy, his father." In the second scene, twenty-four years later, he stands on the same

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bridge, deciding whether or not to divorce his wife, of whom he thinks: "She is the bitterest enemy I have." 33

In both decisions Edwin yields to the will of the other; 34 the prophetic sentence describing the boy Edwin "shadows forth" the condition of the man Edwin in the second bridge scene:

... It seemed rather a shame, it seemed even tragic, that this naïve, simple creature, with his straight-forward and friendly eyes so eager to believe appearances, this creature immaculate of worldly experience, must soon be transformed into a man, wary, incredulous, distracting. 35

Bennett's cause and effect are apparent, as each tableau encapsulates symbols of the past and present, projecting an image of the future.

In the second bridge scene, 24 years later, the man Edwin stands in the same spot on a cold Christmas night, wary, incredulous, and distracted. A faint echo of the unusual language occurs between the mirror scenes, pulling them together. Seven years after the first bridge scene, as Edwin falls in love with Hilda, "within him all was incoherent, wild, and distracting." 36

33 Ibid., p. 1063.

34 Bennett writes that much of his fictional material is autobiographical, including certain aspects of The Clayhanger Family. Bennett's life differs from that of Edwin in several important aspects, however. He elects to leave home, rather than accept the profession and leadership of his father, and he also divorces his wife.

35 Bennett, op. cit., p. 3.

36 Ibid., p. 290.
The bridge on which the boy Edwin stands on his way home from school for the last time is symbolic of many things. For him personally, the bridge symbolizes the break between childhood and adulthood, and it separates the world of labor from the world of wealth and education. Edwin is an initiate who instinctively resents being sent on a business errand the moment he arrives home:

... Edwin ... saw something symbolically ominous in his being sent direct to the printing office. It was no affair of his to go to the printing office. He particularly did not want to go to the printing office.37

Edwin correctly reads the symbolism of his father's command that he go to the printing office (note Bennett's repetitive emphasis); from that moment on for the rest of his life the printing office will be his chief occupation.38 As he arrives home, Edwin is aware that he carries with him another symbol of defeat: the report card in his pocket reveals that he has lost his No. 2 position in the class to Charlie Orgreaves. Charlie, the son of the architect who has inspired Edwin with the desire to become an architect himself, is, on the bridge, a symbol of the upper class which Edwin will not soon be permitted to join.

Charlie's speech is symbolic of this superiority:

37Ibid., p. 22.

38Other symbols of Edwin's defeat will be discussed after consideration of the second bridge scene.
The Sunday's accent was as carelessly superior as his clothes. Evidently the Sunday had someone at home who had not learnt the art of speech in the Five Towns.\(^{39}\)

The first bridge scene occurs on a sunny June afternoon, and though it contains symbols presaging the defeat of Edwin, it also contains symbols of birth and new beginnings. The second bridge scene, filled with symbols of death, occurs, ironically, on Christmas night,\(^{40}\) after the Clayhangers have celebrated the birth of Christ. Edwin is angrily thinking of divorcing Hilda. The symbolism describing their marriage is typical of war and death. The marriage had deteriorated into "conjugal warfare,"\(^{41}\) and the events of this Christmas day have demonstrated to Edwin that Hilda means to have her way in areas he considers to be his exclusive provinces: his house, and his business. As he stands on the bridge in the cold, dark bridge scene, Edwin resolves that:

Compromise was at an end . . . . The battle would be joined that night . . . . In his grim and resolute dejection, there was something almost voluptuous.\(^{42}\)

\(^{39}\) Bennett, op. cit., p. 4.

\(^{40}\) The symbolism of black and white, and dark and light will be considered later.

\(^{41}\) Bennett, op. cit., p. 40.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 1263. All the internal elipses in this quotation are Bennett's, used as a sort of punctuation, rather than the customary use, to indicate omissions. This is one of the peculiarities of Bennett's writing style.
When they return home, the icy condition of the dark home, and the lack of warmth and fire are symbolic of the possible death of the marriage:

The front-doorway yawned black like the portal of a tomb. The place was a terrible negation of Christmas. Edwin felt for the radiator; it was as cold to the touch as a dead hand. He lit the hall lamp, and the decorations of holly and mistletoe contrived by Hilda and George with smiles and laughter on Christmas Eve stood revealed as the very symbol of insincerity. Without taking off his hat and coat, he went into the unlighted glacial drawing-room, where Hilda was kneeling at the grate and striking matches. A fragment of newspaper blazed and then the flame expired. The fire was badly laid. 43

It is evident that "deadly war was imminent;" 44 Edwin's words are "murderously resentful." 45 He leaves, to walk in the cemetery, and onto the bridge to consider his situation.

Edwin does not divorce Hilda. As he stands on the bridge in the second bridge scene, the memory of a symbol of romance he encounters, ironically, in the cemetery, turns the tide of his anger. This symbol illustrates the fine organization of Bennett's detail. The symbol is a young couple, estatically in love, their youth and romance a contrast to their surroundings. The young woman, transformed by her love, her vision altered so that she is oblivious to all excepting her lover, is Hilda's maid. She had neglected Hilda's drawing-room fire to pursue her own romance. The symbols of dark cold death and the house had

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come together in the returning-home Christmas scene. Now the symbols of light, love, and the house come together as Edwin begins to think of letting Hilda have her way:

He saw the beatific face of Emmie against the churchyard gates under the lamp. The ellipses are Bennett's. Why not humour Hilda? Why not let her plant their home according to her caprice? Bennett frequently addresses his reader directly, as he does to comment on the aftermath of each of the two bridge scenes. When Edwin capitulates to his father's will Bennett says: "You may call him weak or you may call him strong," and when Edwin considers capitulating to Hilda, the author again addresses the reader: "Then, the pleasure, the mere pleasure--call it sensual or what you like--of granting a caprice to the capricious creature!"

In the style of Bennett, this writer offers the following comment on the relationship of Hilda and Edwin: You may describe their relationship as emasculating, chauvinistic, or merely as representative of the normal adjustments incident to marriage. In any case, the study of the temperamentally dissimilar Edwin and Hilda, caught up in Victorian traditions already changing, is fascinating. Edwin yields to Hilda, and finds both virtue and victory in the yielding, while the constant litany of Hilda is

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46 Ibid., p. 1183.  
47 Ibid., p. 143.  
48 Ibid., p. 1283.
opposite:

Edwin thinks: If Hilda had not been unjust in the assertion of her own individuality, there could be no merit in yielding to her. He yielded on the canal-bridge. And in yielding it seemed to him that he was victorious.

Hilda thinks: "I submit, and yet I shall never submit."

Edwin wants "to live only in Hilda" and thinks "this woman will kill me, but without her I shouldn't be interested enough to live." In Edwin's mind, the "wild animal," and the "primeval cave-woman" are the symbols for Hilda.

Hilda's attitude is very different. As she struggles for power against Edwin, "she felt all her weakness and all his strength, but she was determined. At bottom she knew well that her weakness was the stronger."

Walter Allen believes that Jung's philosophy can be used to explain Hilda:

We are, to use Jung's concept, in the presence of Edwin's anima, the male unconscious, which finds its mirror-image in the mysterious person of the loved woman—mysterious because it reflects the unconscious and has been singled out, from so many thousands of possible partners, by it.

The study of Edwin from this point of view could be the subject of a separate study, but it is interesting to

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49Ibid., pp. 1285, 1286, 1152.
50Ibid., p. 1161.
51Ibid., pp. 1129-1130.
52Ibid., p. 1102.
53Ibid., p. 1166.
54Ibid., p. 1106.
55Allen, p. 82.
note here briefly that when Hilda comes back to the
Orgreaves' household ten years after meeting Edwin there,
Edwin experiences a kind of divided consciousness. While
Edwin waits downstairs and Hilda watches over her gravely
ill son in a darkened room upstairs:

... Edwin seemed suddenly to have two indvidualities, and the new one, which was the more
intimate one, watched the other as in a dim-lighted
dream... Bennett's ellipses She was there in
the room above.56

Symbols of Edwin's Maturation, His Defeats and Victories:
Tracing Bennett's "Cause and Effect" Relationships

While he is on the bridge the first time, Edwin is
surrounded by symbols prophesying his defeat. His friend
Charlie, ironically, brings him several small symbolic
defeats (see pages 17 and 18), and Edwin identifies with
the losing horse in a betting contest between Edwin and
Charlie. After his confrontation with his father, Edwin is
branded with a personal characteristic, the wistful expres-
sion of his eyes, which forever symbolizes his wounded
state.

As his father, Darius, ages and loses strength, Edwin
matures, and the son gradually assumes some of the physical
characteristics and possessions symbolic of the father. In
the second bridge scene there are also symbols prophesying
Edwin's defeat.

56 Bennett, op. cit., p. 528.
Edwin, Charlie, Hilda, and the Horse. When Charlie joins Edwin on the bridge on Edwin's last day of school, each boy selects a boat being pulled by a horse walking on the adjoining tow-path. The boats are coming from opposite directions, and the boys agree that the winner will be the boy who selects the horse reaching the bridge first, and that the winner will be rewarded with the marbles belonging to the loser. "It . . . soon [Became] . . . apparent that Edwin's boat was going to be handsomely beaten . . . . [End] Edwin handed over the ten marbles even before the other boat had arrived at the bridge."57 The marbles are not toys, they are . . . not the paltry marble of today, plaything of infants, but the majestic 'rinker,' black with white spots, the king of marbles in an era when whole populations practised the game.58

Bennett comes back to this symbol, and the reader is again assured that the marbles are not just trifles from childhood. On the way home the boys stop to watch six "celebrated marble-players," three partners owning a "manufactory," and three of their employees:

. . . they shot the rinkers from their stubby thumbs with a cannon-like force and precision that no boy could ever hope to equal.59

Edwin identifies with the horse pulling the losing boat in the canal beneath the bridge. The patient horse

57 Ibid., p. 4.  
58 Ibid.  
59 Ibid., p. 7.
loses, even though it receives "a frequent tonic from a bare-legged girl of seven who heartily curled a whip about its crooked large-jointed legs." The girl is, ironically, being "rewarded for good behavior by the unrestricted use of a whip for the first time." Edwin is horse-like in this scene:

. . . He had left school that day, and what his eyes saw as he leaned on the bridge was not a willing beast and a gladdened infant, but the puzzling world and the advance guard of its problems bearing down on him . . . . He was not merely untidy and dirty—at his age such defects might have excited in a sane observer uneasiness by their absence; but his gestures and his gait was untidy . . . . He had gawky knees and elbows . . . . He did not mind how he walked. All his sprawling limbs were saying: "What does it matter, so long as we get there?" The angle of the slatternly bag across his shoulders was an insult to the flame of his ambition.

As Edwin stood on the bridge a second time, he saw no horse being driven by a girl in the canal below, but he had just been an unwilling passenger in a horse-cart driven by Hilda. Hilda does not use a whip on the horse, but she does plan to assume the driver's seat in her husband's affairs. This Christmas afternoon drive into the country is but a preliminary to a permanent move, according to Hilda's plan. A number of symbols come together in this scene: the horse, the house, earth, and the battle.

60 Ibid., p. 2. 61 Ibid. 62 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
Hilda asks Edwin to make a holiday visit to an invalid friend, Tertius Ingpen. Soon Edwin discovers that the excursion is an excuse to take him through a mansion Hilda wants to buy. Hilda's machinations to accomplish transportation into the country have been complex, extending over a period of weeks. Edwin sees that Hilda means to have her way in areas he considers to be his provinces: their house, and his business. Edwin thinks he has purchased from Hilda the freedom to make all the decisions concerning house and business, by granting her a horse and trap, but to Hilda, the horse and trap are but the means of ensuring that her own will will be carried out. Ironi­cally, Edwin has just purchased the family home from his sister for Hilda, but Hilda decides, for several different reasons, that she wants a home in the country. She wants it so that Edwin will be financially crippled, and so unable to build a new lithography plant. Hilda feels that Edwin's business is "the successful rival of her bou­doir;" she wants to get Edwin out into the country-side, away from her rival, and so she needs the horse and cart. As she schemes, Hilda wonders "whether she will ever be able to work her will on Edwin in the matter of a dog-cart." After he grants Hilda the use of the company mare, and buys her the cart, Edwin falsely assumes that he will have peace:

63 Ibid., p. 1254. 64 Ibid., p. 1257.
And though he had left Trafalgar Road moody and captious, thinking all the time of the deserted and cold home, he had arrived in Stockbrook tingling and happy, and proud of Hilda,—proud of her verve, her persistency, and her success. She had carried him very far on the wave of her new enthusiasm for horse-traction. She had beguiled him into immediately spending mighty sums on a dog-cart, new harness, rugs, a driving-apron, and a fancy whip . . . .

When she had announced that she would herself drive her husband and son over to Stockbrook, Edwin had absolutely negativated the idea; but Unchpin had been on her side . . . . And Hilda had triumphed . . . . "This is to be a day of triumph for Hilda," Edwin would have given all his savings to please her caprice, and been glad. A horse and trap, or even a pair of horses and a landau, were a trifling price to pay for her girlish joy and for his own tranquility in his beloved house and business. [Italics mine]

Hilda jumps down into Edwin's arms from the driver's seat, and as he holds her:

...All Hilda's happiness seemed to pass into him, and that felicity sufficed for him. He did not desire any happiness personal to himself. He wanted only to live in her. His contentment was profound, complete, rapturous . . . .

Hilda envisions that she and Edwin will flash around the country-side, side by side in the cart. That is the way the day begins, but before it is over, the vision is shattered. Hilda asks Edwin to walk across the fields to see a mansion.

Edwin's heart misgave him. Ingpen and Hilda looked like plotters, very intimate and mischievous. He had a notion that living with a woman was comparable to living with a volcano—you never knew when a dangerous eruption might not occur.

65 Ibid., p. 1261. 66 Ibid.
Within three minutes the first and minor catastrophe had occurred.

They were all four slithering about in brown clay under a ragged hedge in which a few red berries glowed.

"It was as hard as iron the day before yesterday," said Hilda. 67

Hilda had been on firm ground with Edwin, but it is now obvious to him that she is challenging his authority. He perceived that "all the time [Hilda] had been merely pursuing a private design—with what girlish deceitfulness." 68 Edwin resolves that:

He would give no more rope. Compromise was at an end . . . The battle would be joined that night . . . [Bennett's elipses] In his grim and resolute dejection there was something almost voluptuous. 69

Now that Hilda is a lawful wife, she is free to maneuver her husband with her kisses. Hilda's approach to romance is pragmatic:

"We are in love. And we love. I am yours. You are mine. Life is very fine after all. I am a happy woman. But still—each is for himself in this world, and that's the bedrock of marriage as of all other institutions." 70

As Hilda talks to her friend Janet about moving Edwin to the country, Bennett supplies several more symbols for Edwin:

67 Ibid., p. 1262.  
68 Ibid., p. 1264.  
69 Ibid., p. 1263.  
70 Ibid., p. 986.
"Of course it's settled, my dear. I'm determined to take him away:" Hilda spoke of her husband as of a parcel or an intelligent bear on a chain, as loving wives may---"right out of all this. I'm sure it will be a good thing for him."71

Edwin senses that Hilda takes ". . . strength from him in order to maintain the struggle against him."72 He never really understands that in the "great passionate war of marriage . . . those kisses were the only true logic of their joint career."73

Hilda's Victorian world is too narrow for her impulsive and undisciplined nature. Her trip into the country with Edwin is typical of her life-long habit of maneuvering family members by absenting herself precipitately from the family scene; she thus also explores new environments which would otherwise be outside her periphery. The journey as a symbol for Hilda will be more fully discussed later. In maturity, the only real challenge Hilda can find in her sphere is to maneuver her husband. Though she was one of the first females to gain entry to the business world by learning shorthand, she still feels alienated from the world of men, as they feel alienated from her. Her estrangement is symbolized by the glass prison in which she feels she is entrapped:

71 Ibid., p. 1295.  72 Ibid., p. 1067.  73 Ibid., p. 1068.
"She had been in the male world, but not of it, as though encircled in a glass ball which neither she nor the males could shatter."\(^{74}\) As a young woman, imagining herself married to George, she thinks: "She would be the wife of a great and wealthy man. And in her own secret ways she could influence him, and thus be greater than the great."\(^{75}\)

This is a mirror scene never completed; Hilda is mistaken in her evaluation of the potential and past of George, and marriage to him results in a far different future for her. Later, as an older woman married to Edwin, Hilda has more success in this area. Then: ". . . it was the realization of her power over her husband that gave her the profoundest joy."\(^{76}\)

Both Hilda and Edwin chafe against the imposition of the will of the other, and make their adjustments to that imposition. Walter Wright explains Edwin's adjustment to his wife:

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\text{. . . Her kissing him marks the end of the life he has known and hints of a troubled, but exciting future. He is not suddenly freed from oppressive circumstance, but, to borrow Hardy's phrasing, he has changed suddenly from a mere restive creature to a "fettered god." It is his love of Hilda that will sustain him and even help him to break loose, so far as man is capable of doing so, from the circumstantial bonds. By the end of Clayhanger Edwin has come to know Hilda for a bewildered, suffering}
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\(^{74}\text{Ibid., p. 804}\)\(^{75}\text{Ibid., p. 785}\)\(^{76}\text{Ibid., p. 1299.}\)
mortal who has not even played fairly with him. But she has recompensed him by drawing him out of himself, and as the book ends, "He braced himself to the exquisite burden of life."77

Edwin and his father: "The agony of the older generation watching the rise of the younger."78

After Darius's illness incapacitates him, Edwin has some difficulty securing from him those items necessary to the conduct of the business. Darius reluctantly parts with the check book, the keys to safe and buildings, and the proper authorizations from the bank. He finally surrenders these symbols of his authority only when he is helpless against the force of Edwin's will. Then, after Edwin has tended to Darius's personal needs for some time, the emotional Darius, now physically and symbolically voiceless, involves the whole family in a ceremony symbolizing the transfer of authority. Excessive emotion has made Darius temporarily voiceless as he gives Edwin his gold watch while the family watches. Family members try to interpret the old man's gestures. Edwin is offended by the exhibitionism. "The outrage was complete. Edwin removed his own watch and dropped it into the pocket of his


78J. R. Ford, "Arnold Bennett, An Appreciation" (tribute written in honor of the Arnold Bennett centenary celebration, published by the City of Stoke-on-Trent, May, 1967), p. 21. This is a second-hand quote from Marcel Schwob, by J. R. Ford. Ford says: "Very early in his career Bennett discovered the themes which were to unify
trousers, substituting for it the gold one."\textsuperscript{79} This is another mirror-image scene which is shattered by reality. An enraged younger Edwin, insulted by his father when he had asked for a raise so he could marry Hilda, had vowed to take revenge when age defeated his father. The mature Edwin, presented with the opportunity to humiliate his father, is filled with compassion.

Though Edwin differs in temperment from his father, Bennett's "causation" is evident in Edwin's assumption of physical characteristics symbolic of Darius. Edwin says "tut-tut, ... imitating a trick of his fathers's."\textsuperscript{80} He "braces his intellect to a task," the same as his father had done to the same task,\textsuperscript{81} and he takes his "watch out of his pocket with an absent gesture and look exactly like his father's."\textsuperscript{82} Edwin enjoys abandoning himself to his anger, as had his father,\textsuperscript{83} and he taps "the weather-glass, after the manner of his father."\textsuperscript{84} Edwin walks like his father, and in maturity develops his dypseptic stomach.

As he watches over his father's death bed, the chilled Edwin assumes more characteristics and artifacts

\textsuperscript{79}Bennett, The Clayhanger Family, p. 426.
\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., p. 56. \textsuperscript{81}Ibid., pp. 63-64.
\textsuperscript{82}Ibid., p. 112. \textsuperscript{83}Ibid., pp. 330, 945.
\textsuperscript{84}Ibid., p. 395.
symbolic of his father. He winds up the watch. He puts on his father's slippers. As the hours pass, he puts on "his father's patched dressing gown."\(^{85}\) His father is dying of a breathing malady. Edwin "knew now what the will to live was. He saw life naked, stripped of everything unessential. He saw life and death together."\(^{86}\)

It is to be expected that in his attempt to picture the full "circle of life," Bennett would also picture death. His reputation includes the acknowledgement that he wrote careful descriptions of death-bed scenes. In The Clayhanger Family, he also describes the final illness of Auntie Hamp. These two human deaths, and that of the ox roasted in the village square, are symbolic of the passing of the Victorian era. This symbolism will be described later.

**Edwin's wistful eyes, and other small symbols.**

After Edwin accepts his father's decision that Edwin shall be a printer, the disappointment marks him permanently with a characteristic symbolic of his wounded state:

\[\ldots\] He knew not that he would never be the same man again, and that his lightest gesture and his lightest glance were touched with the wistfulness of resignation.\(^{87}\)

\(^{85}\)Ibid., p. 426. \(^{86}\)Ibid., p. 424.  
\(^{87}\)Ibid., p. 68.
This symbol for Edwin, the sad and wistful eyes, is a good example of how Bennett achieves the structural cohesion James thought Bennett lacked, and one of the ways characters achieve dimension. Though Edwin is destined to become a prosperous and influential man, there is a boyishly pathetic facet to his personality symbolized by the expression in his eyes. Bennett makes at least sixteen allusions to Edwin's sad and wistful eyes in the trilogy, and through this symbol the reader can discern the reaction of other characters to Edwin. Ironically, this symbol of his defeat attracts Hilda to him, and it attracts the sympathy of the other women in his environment. Bennett found here an adequate symbol to depict the pain caused by Edwin's father. Tracing this symbol through occasions when it affects the relationship between Edwin and Hilda provides a good example of Bennett's "causation." As a maiden, Hilda thought of Edwin:

But with all his masculinity there remained the same wistful, honest, boyish look in his eyes.
And she thought: "If I marry him it will be for the look in his eyes."

After her disastrous marriage to the bigamist George Cannon, before she realizes she is pregnant, Hilda considers marrying Edwin. Edwin's wistful eyes elicit from her a different emotion than the physical attraction she felt for George:

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Ibid., p. 861.
Nor had George Cannon ever evoked the tenderness which sprang up in her from some secret and inexhaustible source at the mere sight of Edwin Clayhanger's wistful smile.89

After her marriage, some ten years later, Hilda thinks: "The fact was that she had married him for the look in his eyes. It was a sad look, and beyond that it could not be described."90 Even during moments of shared happiness, Hilda feels

... saddened because she could not enter utterly into his impenetrable soul, and live through all his emotions, and comprehend like a creator the always baffling wistfulness of his eyes."91

Bennett recognizes that every human being is a mixture of feminine and masculine characteristics, and provides symbols for these characteristics. The stories of Hilda and Edwin begin in adolescence, and viewed against their Victorian backgrounds, he tends toward the feminine, and she toward the masculine. Their stormy relationship is partly the result of their attempt to define their roles in marriage, and though each remains a mixture of the traditional feminine and masculine attributes, the symbols for Edwin become steadily more masculine, and those for Hilda more feminine.

The strongest symbols for Edwin's masculinity, his houses and his printing plants, with their offices, leaven the entire trilogy, and will be considered shortly. There

89Ibid., p. 848.  
90Ibid., p. 849.  
91Ibid., p. 1259
are a number indicating his weakness, aside from his wistful smile. He is called "a girl; almost a school girl; and his blamed himself for his effeminancy." "He held himself like a startled mouse;" and he was "like a fawn." He was a "housewife;" and often called an "old maid." In the company of a group of aggressive men, Edwin was a "demure cat among a company of splendid curly dogs." After their marriage, Edwin appears to be both a "brute" and a "baby" to Hilda. She also "saw Edwin as an instrument to be played upon and herself as a virtuoso." Edwin is also described as a "timid man" who glories in yielding to the caprice of his wife: "And the weak husband said like a woman: "What does it matter?"

Hilda's rudeness first challenges, then attracts Edwin: "She roused the brute in him, and perhaps no one was more astonished than himself to witness the brute stirring." He forces himself to make a date with her, even though "he knew that inaction suited much better his instinct for tranquillity." After Edwin makes his date with Hilda, he is a hand-printed captive, but a man:

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92 Ibid., pp. 87, 91, 131, 148, 172, 467, 149, and 414.
93 Ibid., p. 983.
94 Ibid., p. 1250.
95 Ibid., pp. 393, 895.
96 Ibid., p. 237.
97 Ibid., p. 270.
He hastened away, with a delicate photograph of the palm of her hand printed in minute sensations on the palm of his.

"I did it, anyhow!" he muttered loudly, in his heart. At any rate he was not shamed. At any rate he was a man. The man's face was burning, and the damp noxious chill of the night only caressed him agreeably. 98

Though she jilts him, and ages more than the intervening ten years would ordinarily justify, Hilda still arouses Edwin's masculinity as he rescues her from dire financial straits in her boarding house. The omniscient author comments: "Curious, how she, and she almost alone, roused the masculine force in him!") 99

Edwin lacks self-confidence, and when he is attracted to Hilda, but unsure of her feeling toward him, any discouragement comes out in his disparagement of her for liking anyone like him. After Hilda seeks him out, after a party, to talk with him, Edwin

... despised her because it was he, Edwin to whom she had taken a fancy. He had not sufficient self-confidence to justify her fancy in his own eyes. His argument actually was that no girl worth having could have taken a fancy to him at sight. 100

Eventually Hilda and Edwin realize they are attracted to one another. Bennett's "stereoscopic" photographing of the same event from several points of view sometimes

98 Ibid., p. 275. 99 Ibid., p. 484. 100 Ibid., p. 214.
reveals divergent impressions of the same occurrence, and sometimes reveals that his characters have the same impression of an event. When Hilda and Edwin meet for their date, their physical attraction for one another is evident in the symbolism Bennett uses to report each of their reactions. Edwin’s reaction is reported in *Clayhanger*:

> They shook hands. He suggested that she should remove her mackintosh. She consented. He had no idea that the effect of the removal of the mackintosh would be so startling as it was. She stood intimately revealed in her frock. The mackintosh was formal and defensive, the frock was intimate and acquiescent.101

Hilda’s reaction to the same event is reported in *Hilda Lessways*:

> The young, fair man, with his awkward and constrained movements, took possession of her umbrella, and then suggested that she should remove her mackintosh. She obeyed, timid and glad. She stripped off her mackintosh, as though she were stripping off her modesty, and stood before him revealed. To complete the sacrifice, she raised her veil, and smiled up at him, as it were, asking "What next?"102

The symbolism confirms that the attraction between them is mutual, but Hilda jilts Edwin, and he again flages himself:

> . . . And this, too, he had always felt and known would come to pass: that Hilda would not be his. All that romance was unreal; it was not true; it had never happened. Such a thing could not happen to such as he was . . .103 [Bennett’s italics.]

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101 Ibid., p. 280.  
102 Ibid., p. 846.  
103 Ibid., p. 312.
George Cannon has charmed Hilda away from Edwin. George and Edwin almost meet the day of the great Sunday School Centennial celebration, but Hilda keeps them apart. Bennett's stereoscopic method of reporting the event demonstrates how Edwin misunderstands Hilda's motivations when she hangs back from the group going to watch the Centennial celebration. She and Edwin become separated from the rest of the party. Edwin thinks that she arranges it so that she can be with him. In Clayhanger we read Edwin's thoughts: "I'll take my oath she stayed behind on purpose!" Hilda does stay behind on purpose, but that purpose is to avoid George Cannon. In Hilda Lessways we read Hilda's reasoning, as she prepares to follow her friends out of Edwin's shop:

Edwin Clayhanger waited respectfully for Hilda to pass. But just as she was about to step forth she caught sight of George Cannon coming along the opposite side of Wedgwood Street. She kept within the shelter of the shop until Cannon had gone by. She did not want to meet George Cannon.

When they first meet, Edwin is at first repelled, then challenged by Hilda's masculine rudeness. (Symbols for Hilda will be considered in the next section.) Bennett's stereographic reporting of the Centenary scene shows how the prime symbol for Hilda's femininity is introduced into Edwin's consciousness, and how Hilda, being

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104 Ibid., p. 226. 105 Ibid., p. 714.
forced to give up her heroic image of Edwin, compromises, and accepts in its place the image of an honest and wistful man.

Edwin's book, Clayhanger, reports the vision of Hilda's femininity which ensnares Edwin. Hilda gives comfort to a doddering old Sunday School superintendent, who, ironically, is partly responsible for Edwin's existence. He had rescued Edwin's father when Darius was in dire need as a child, but Edwin never hears the story of the childhood of Darius, and of the rescue by Mr. Shushions. As Hilda talks to the old man, Edwin sees the feminine woman that she is. This is the vision of Hilda that Edwin will carry with him during all the years that are to part them:

The transformation in her amazed Edwin, who could see the tears in her eyes. The tableau of the little, silly old man looking up, and Hilda looking down at him, with her lips parted in heavenly invitation, and one gloved hand caressing his greenish-black shoulder and the other mechanically holding the parasol aloft, --this tableau was imprinted forever on Edwin's mind. It was a vision blended in an instant and in an instant dissolved, but for Edwin it remained one of the epochal things of his experience.\textsuperscript{106}

Hilda's book \textit{Hilda Lessways}, shows how her assessment of Edwin is altered by this incident. While Edwin is charmed by Hilda's action, Hilda is disgusted when Edwin does nothing to help the old man being teased by young ones. Hilda had heard the story of how Edwin had saved his father's printing plant by preventing the collapse of the

\textsuperscript{106}Ibid., p. 242.
floor as a new machine was being moved in. Now, however, Edwin "seemed to be incapable of a heroic action,"\textsuperscript{107} and when she complained to the police about the abuse to the old man, the policeman addressed Edwin, instead of Hilda. "Hilda was infuriated."\textsuperscript{108} As they part, Hilda, disillusioned about the heroic qualities of Edwin Clayhanger, thinks:

Nevertheless, his wistful and honest glance, as he parted from her, had its effect. If he had not one quality, he had another.\textsuperscript{109}

Some ten years later, Hilda and Edwin are united in marriage. In the bliss of his triumph, Edwin at first sees only the feminine Hilda. As she descends the stairs to be the hostess at an "at home" celebrating the marriage, Edwin is entranced:

The mere fact that this woman with no talent for coquetry should after years of narrow insufficiency scowl at dressmakers and pout at senseless refractory silks in the yearning for elegance was utterly delicious to Edwin. Her presence there on the landing of the stairs was in the nature of a miracle. He had wanted her, and he had got her. In the end he had got her, and nothing had been able to stop him—not even the obstacle of her tragic adventure with a rascal and a bigamist. The strong magic of his passion had forced destiny to render her up to him mysteriously intact, after all. The impossible had occurred, and society had accepted it, beaten. There she was, dramatically, with her thick eyebrows, and the fine wide nostrils and the delicate lobe of the ear, and that mouth that would startlingly fasten on him and kiss the life out of him.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid., p. 717. \hfill \textsuperscript{108}Ibid. \hfill \textsuperscript{109}Ibid., p. 718. \hfill \textsuperscript{110}Ibid., pp. 895-896.
Before this evening is out, many of the changes in the household which come as a result of Hilda's entering into it are evident. Edwin's elder sister had been Edwin's housekeeper. She had, somehow, over the years, assumed the role of a deferring younger sister. Edwin's position as the Victorian master of the house had been carefully preserved. This very long scene is here quoted, because it contains many symbols of what Edwin's new life will be. The scene is played through twice, but this time in the same book, as the lives of Edwin and Hilda together are joined in These Twain. The scene is played through once, without Hilda, with Edwin making all the decisions, and then again, after Hilda enters the room. Hilda is no longer the pouting female. Her strong qualities emerge; Edwin's masculinity is "ever so little wounded." The scene clearly indicates how Hilda means to participate in Edwin's life.

As the scene begins, Edwin is "at bay" as a representative of the "forces of reaction" against the "forces of evolution." He has been cornered by the minister and Auntie Hamps. He does not want to be a "slave," but a "reckless ensign of freedom." He plans to utter a sentence which will symbolically wither up and burn the minister, but does not do so. Horse symbolism appears again, as Auntie Hamps attempts to "check" the runaway Edwin. As always, the omniscient author comments ironically on the idiosyncracies of the religion particular to this society.
Symbolic of the passing of female power in the family from Auntie Hamps to Hilda is the manner in which Auntie Hamps set up the "cast" for the original scene; then Hilda redistributes the characters for her own purposes. At the party Auntie Hamps suggests that the family group join the guests:

Auntie Hamps held back, and Edwin at once perceived from the conspiratorial glance in her splendid eyes that in suggesting a move she had intended to deceive her fellow conspirator in life, Clara. But Auntie Hamps could not live without chicane. And she was happiest when she had superimposed chicane upon chicane in complex folds.

She put a ringed hand softly but arrestingly upon Edwin's arm, and pushed the door to. Alone with her and the parson Edwin felt himself to be at bay, and he drew back before an unknown menace.

"Edwin, dear," said she, "Mr. Peartree has something to suggest to you. I was going to say 'a favour to ask,' but I don't put it like that. I'm sure my nephew will look upon it as a privilege. You know how much Mr. Peartree has at heart the District Additional Chapels fund--"

Edwin did not know how much; but he had heard of the Macclesfield District Additional Chapels Fund, Bursley being one of the circuits of the Macclesfield District. Wesleyanism finding itself confronted with lessening congregations and with a shortage of ministers, the Macclesfield District had determined to prove that Wesleyanism was nevertheless spiritually vigorous by the odd method of building more chapels. Mr. Peartree, inventor of Saturday Afternoon Bible Classes for schoolboys, was one of the originators of the bricky scheme, and in fact his lecture upon the "Mantle and Mission of Elijah" was to be in aid of it. The next instant Mr. Peartree had invited Edwin to act as District Treasurer of the Fund, the previous treasurer having died.

More chicane! The parson's visit, then, was not a mere friendly call, inspired by the moment. It was part of a scheme. It had been planned against him. Did they (he seemed to be asking himself) think him so ingenuous, so simple as not to see
through their dodge? If not, then why the preliminary pretences? He did not really ask himself these questions, for the reason that he knew the answers to them. When a piece of chicane had succeeded, Auntie Hamps forgot it, and expected others to forget it,--or at any rate she dared, by her magnificent front, anybody on earth to remind her of it. She was quite indifferent whether Edwin saw through her dodge or not.

"You're so good at business," said she.

Ah! She would insist on the business side of the matter, affecting to ignore the immense moral significance which would be attached to Edwin's acceptance of the office! Were he to yield, the triumph for Methodism would ring through the town. He read all her thoughts. Nothing could break down her magnificent front. She had cornered him by a device; she had him at bay; and she counted on his weak good-nature, on his easygoing cowardice for a victor.

Mr. Peartree talked. Mr. Peartree expressed his certitude that Edwin was 'with them at heart,' and his absolute reliance upon Edwin's sense of the responsibilities of a man in his, Edwin's position. Auntie Hamps recalled with fervour Edwin's early activities in Methodism--the Young Men's Debating Society, for example, which met at six o'clock on frosty winter mornings for the proving of the faith by dialectics.

And Edwin faltered in his speech.

"You ought to get Albert," he feebly suggested.

"Oh, no!" said Auntie. "Albert is grand in his own line. But for this, we want a man like you."

It was a master-stroke. Edwin had the illusion of trembling, and yet he knew that he did not tremble, even inwardly. He seemed to see the forces of evolution and the forces of reaction ranged against each other in a supreme crisis. He seemed to see the alternative of two futures for himself--and in one he would be a humiliated and bored slave, and in the other a fine, reckless ensign of freedom. He seemed to be doubtful of his own courage. But at the bottom of his soul he was not doubtful. He remembered all the frightful and degrading ennui which when he was young he had suffered as a martyr to Wesleyanism and dogma, all the sinister deceptions which he had had to
practise and which had been practised upon him. He remembered his almost lifelong intense hatred of Mr. Peartree. And he might have clenched his hands bitterly and said with homicidal animosity: "Now I will pay you out! And I will tell you the truth! And I will wither you up and incinerate you, and be revenged for everything in one single sentence!"

But he felt no bitterness, and his animosity was dead. At the bottom of his soul there was nothing but a bland indifference that did not even scorn.

"No," he said quietly, "I shan't be your treasurer. You must ask somebody else."

A vast satisfaction filled him. The refusal was so easy, the opposing forces so negligible.

Auntie Hamps and Mr. Peartree knew nothing of the peculiar phenomena induced in Edwin's mind by the first sight of the legendary Abel Peartree after twenty years. But Auntie Hamps, though puzzled for an explanation, comprehended that she was decisively beaten. The blow was hard. Nevertheless she did not wince. The superb pretence must be kept up, and she kept it up. She smiled, and, tossing her curls, checked Edwin with cheerful, indomitable rapidity.

"Now, Now! Don't decide at once. Think it over very carefully, and we shall ask you again. Mr. Peartree will write to you. I feel sure . . ."

Appeasements were preserved.

The colloquy was interrupted by Hilda, who came in excited, gay, with sparkling eyes, humming an air. She had protested vehemently against an At Home. She had said again and again that the idea of an At Home was abhorrent to her, and that she hated all such wholesale formal hospitalities, and could not bear "people." And yet now she was enchanted with her situation as hostess--delighted with herself and her rich dress, almost ecstatically aware of her own attractiveness and domination. The sight of her gave pleasure and communicated zest. Mature, she was yet only beginning life. And as she glanced with secret condescension at the listless Mr. Peartree, she seemed to say: "What is all this talk of heaven and hell? I am in love with life and the senses, and everything is lawful to me, and I am above you."

And even Auntie Hamps, though one of the most self-sufficient creatures that ever lived, envied in her glorious decay the young maturity of sensuous Hilda.
"Well," said Hilda, "what's going on here? They're all gone mad about missing words in the drawing-room."

She smiled splendidly at Edwin, whose pride in her thrilled him. Her superiority to other women was patent; she made other women seem negative. In fact, she was a tingling woman before she was anything else—that was it! He compared her with Clara, who was now nothing but a mother, and with Maggie, who had never been anything at all.

Mr. Peartree made the mistake of telling her the subject of the conversation. She did not wait to hear what Edwin's answer had been.

She said curtly and with finality:

"Oh, no! I won't have it!"

Edwin did not quite like this. The matter concerned him alone, and he was an absolutely free agent. She ought to have phrased her objection different. For example, she might have said: "I hope he has refused."

Still, his annoyance was infinitesimal.

"The poor boy works quite hard enough as it is," she added, with a delicious caressing intonation of the first words.

He liked that. But she was confusing the issue. She always would confuse the issue. It was not because the office would involve extra work for him that he had declined the invitation, as she well knew.

Of course Auntie Hamps said in a flash:

"If it means overwork for him I shouldn't dream..." [Bennett's ellipses] She was putting the safety of appearances beyond doubt.

"By the way, Auntie," Hilda continued, "what's the trouble about the pew down at chapel? Both Clara and Maggie have mentioned it."

"Trouble, my dear?" exclaimed (sic) Auntie Hamps, justifiably shocked that Hilda should employ such a word in the presence of Mr. Peartree. But Hilda was apt to be headlong.
To the pew originally taken by Edwin's father, and since his death standing in Edwin's name, Clara had brought her husband; and although it was a long pew, the fruits of the marriage had gradually filled it, so that if Edwin chanced to go to chapel there was not too much room for him in the pew, which presented the appearance of a second-class railway carriage crowded with season-ticket holders. Albert Benbow had suggested that Edwin should yield up the pew to the Benbows, and take a smaller pew for himself and Hilda and George. But the women had expressed fear lest Edwin 'might not like' this break in a historic tradition, and Albert Benbow had been forbidden to put forward the suggestion until the diplomatic sex had examined the ground.

"We shall be only too pleased for Albert to take over the pew," said Hilda.

"But have you chosen another pew?" Mrs. Hamps looked at Edwin.

"Oh, no!" said Hilda lightly.

"But--"

"Now, Auntie," the tingling woman warned Auntie Hamps as one powerful individuality may warn another, "don't worry about us. You know we're not great chapel-goers."

She spoke the astounding words gaily but firmly. She could be firm and even harsh in her triumphant happiness. Edwin knew that she detested Auntie Hamps. Auntie Hamps no doubt also knew it. In their mutual smilings, so affable, so hearty, so appreciative, apparently so impulsive, the hostility between them gleamed mysteriously like lightning in sunlight.

"Mrs. Edwin's family were Church of England," said Auntie Hamps in the direction of Mr. Peartree.

"No great church-goers, either," Hilda finished cheerfully.

No woman had ever made such outrageous remarks in the Five Towns before. A quarter of a century ago a man might have said as much, without suffering in esteem—might indeed have earned a certain intellectual prestige by the declaration; but it
was otherwise with a woman. Both Mrs. Hamps and the minister thought that Hilda was not going the right way to live down her dubious past. Even Edwin in his pride was flurried. Great matters, however, had been accomplished. Not only had the attack of Auntie Hamps and Mr. Peartree been defeated, but the defence had become an onslaught. Not only was he did the treasurer of the District additional Chapels Fund, but he had practically ceased to be a member of the congregation. He was free with a freedom which he had never had the audacity to hope for. It was incredible! Yet there it was! A word said, bravely, in a particular tone,--and a new epoch was begun. The pity was that he had not done it all himself. Hilda's courage had surpassed his own. Women were astounding. They were disconcerting too. His manly independence was ever so little wounded by Hilda's boldness in initiative on their joint behalf.

"Do come and take something, Auntie," said Hilda, with the most winning, the most loving inflexion.

Auntie Hamps passed out.

Hilda turned back into the room: "Do go with auntie, Mr. Peartree. I must just--" (sic) She affected to search for something on the mantelpiece.

Mr. Peartree passed out. He was unmoved. He did not care in his heart. And as Edwin caught his indifferent eye, with that 'it's-all-one-to-me' glint in it, his soul warmed again slightly to Mr. Peartree. And further, Mr. Peartree's aloof unworldliness, his personal practical unconcern with money, feasting, ambition, and all the grosser forms of self-satisfaction, made Edwin feel somewhat a sensual average man and accordingly humiliated him.

As soon as, almost before, Mr. Peartree was beyond the door, Hilda leaped at Edwin, and kissed him violently. The door was not closed. He could hear the varied hum of the party.

"I had to kiss you while it's all going on," she whispered. Ardent vitality shimmered in her eyes.\

\[\textit{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 908-913.}\]
Ownership of the pew is, of course, symbolic of the person exercising the leadership position in church affairs. Edwin had long wanted to abrogate this position. Under the leadership of Hilda, it is easily accomplished, but as their marriage proceeds, Edwin discovers that this tendency of his wife to arrange affairs in her own way is a potent force, not easily dealt with. This mirror scene, played through twice, with the role of Hilda as clearly defined as if the negative for one tableau had been laid over the other, is but prelude to the second bridge scene, when Edwin decides whether or not to divorce Hilda.

Symbols for Hilda

There are a number of symbols for Hilda. Some are uniquely hers, and some merge with other, larger symbols. Hilda's impulsive journeys are symbolic of her, as are the houses and furniture she uses. Since her journeys often result in the opening or closing of houses or boarding houses, these symbols will be treated together later, as will another symbol for Hilda which is used in many contexts in the trilogy, that is, the symbolism of light and dark.

Hilda's veil is a symbol uniquely her own. Another symbol, her habit of shrugging her shoulders, is one which forms a link between Hilda, George, and Edwin. Symbols for Hilda's masculine and feminine traits have already been mentioned. Hilda's masculine traits are strongest at the
beginning of her book, *Hilda Lessways*, and symbols for her become increasingly feminine, but the long quote above demonstrates that she will never give up her tendency to domineer, and to "tear at the veil of conventional formality." 112

**Masculine symbols for Hilda.** Edwin, George, Mr. Ingpen, and Hilda herself all comment on Hilda's masculine attributes. After marriage, Edwin is rather dismayed to discover in Hilda some unstable characteristics he believes to be typically feminine:

. . . previous to marriage he had regarded Hilda as combining the best feminine with the best masculine qualities. In many ways she had exhibited the comforting straightforward characteristics of the male. 113

George Sr. compliments Hilda by telling her that "you're absolutely the only woman I ever met that I'd trust like a man." 114 Mr. Ingpen is able to get Hilda to sit still for a lecture on her wifely duties by asking her:

"Are we talking man to man?" he asked suddenly, in a new tone.

"Most decidedly!" She rose to the challenge.

"Then I'll tell you my leading theory," he said in a soft polite voice. "The proper place for women is the harem." 115

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112 Ibid., p. 773  
113 Ibid., p. 1024.  
114 Ibid., p. 701.  
115 Ibid., p. 1022.
Hilda notices that she is lacking in feminine graces: "Each gesture of Janet's showed seductive grace, while her own rare gestures were stiffened by a kind of masculine harshness."\textsuperscript{116} As he speaks with her, Edwin can find no trace of "common girlish conversation;"\textsuperscript{117} instead, "she spoke just like a man of business, immersed in secret schemes."\textsuperscript{118} Edwin decides that he doesn't like Hilda: He was confirmed in his hostility to her. She had no charm . . . ; her eyes were hard, even cruel. She was less feminine than masculine. Her hair was not like a girl's hair.\textsuperscript{119}

Edwin's attitude toward Hilda changes, though. In this short passage there are several symbols for Hilda, and in the reference to the tableau of Hilda and Mr. Shushions there is an oblique hint that Hilda's feminine charm is dawning in the consciousness of Edwin (He is thinking of the night Hilda followed him into his father's unfinished house):

. . . She had seen him . . . in the street, and had obviously discussed him with Janet . . . . and then, at nearly midnight, she had followed him to the new house! And on the day of the Centenary she had maneuvered to let Janet and Mr. Orgreave go in front . . . . He did not like her. She was too changeable, too dark, and too light . . . . But it was exciting. It was flattering. He saw again and again her gesture as she bent to Mr. Shushions; and the straightening of her spine as she left the garden-porch on the night of his visit to the Orgreaves . . . . Yet he did not like her. Her sudden departure, however, was a

\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., p. 701. \textsuperscript{117}Ibid., p. 224. \textsuperscript{118}Ibid., p. 297. \textsuperscript{119}Ibid., p. 209
disappointment; it was certainly too abrupt...Probably very characteristic of her...120

Edwin's vision of the symbols for Hilda altered by love. Edwin falls in love with Hilda, and his love alters his vision of her; the symbolism is that of a mirror, ground by his love so that it idealizes the beloved person:

He was in love. Love had caught him, and had affected his vision so that he no longer saw any phenomenon as it actually was; neither himself, nor Hilda, nor the circumstances which were uniting them... The processes of love were at work within him. Silently and magically by the force of desire and of pride, the refracting glass was being specially ground which would enable him, which would compel him, to see an ideal Hilda when he gazed at the real Hilda. He would not see the real Hilda any more unless some cataclysm should shatter the glass.121

Though he tries to see the real Hilda, and analyze his reaction to her, Edwin "was baffled. Far from piercing her soul, he could scarcely even see her at all; that is, with intelligence."122

Ten years later, when Edwin finds Hilda again, she places a lamp on the table between them. Instead of illuminating the scene, the lamp hides "him from her by its circle of light."123 Edwin still sees Hilda through the refracted mirror:

... He looked round the lamp at her furtively, and seemed to see in her shadowed face a particular

120 Ibid., pp. 262-263. 121 Ibid., pp. 276-277.
122 Ibid., p. 279. 123 Ibid., p. 468.
local quality of sincerity and downrightness that appealed strongly to his admiration. That this quality should have survived in her was a proof to him that she was a woman unique. Unique she had been, and unique she still remained. He did not know that he had long ago lost forever the power of seeing her with a normal vision . . . . Her face, when he avoided the lamp, shown in the midst of a huge dark cloud of impenetrable mystery.124

Even Hilda's vision of Edwin is altered by his granting her a horse and trap:

She thought that no other man could be as deeply romantic as Edwin. She despised herself for ever having been misled by the surface of him. And even the surface of him she saw now as it were, through the prism of passionate affection, to be edged with the blending colours of the rainbow.125

After their marriage, Edwin comes to see Hilda as "an equal, and a dangerous equal."126 He visits the printing office, where they had first kissed. Though the light is poor, Edwin's vision of Hilda is finally clear:

As he went into the shutter-darkened interior he thought of Hilda, whom many years earlier he had kissed in that very same shutter-darkened interior one Thursday afternoon. Life appeared incredible to him, and in his wife he could see almost no trace of the girl he had kissed there in the obscure shop.127

Hilda's veil. Hilda's veil is another feminine symbol which helps her to ensnare Edwin, through making her appear to be more mysterious. As she comes to tour the printing plant, Edwin is charmed by her veil:

124 Ibid., pp. 468-469. 125 Ibid., p. 1258.
... The veil was supremely charming. She had half lifted it, exposing her mouth; the upper part of her flushed face was caged behind the bars of the veil; behind those bars her eyes mysteriously gleamed... Spanish! ... No exaggeration in all this! He felt every bit of it honestly, as he stood at the counter in thrilled expectancy. By virtue of his impassioned curiosity, the terraces of Granada and the mantillas of señoritas were not more romantic than he had made his father's shop and her dripping mackintosh. He tried to see her afresh; he tried to see her as though he had never seen her before; he tried desperately once again to comprehend what it was in her that piqued him. And he could not. He fell back from the attempt. Was she the most wondrous? Or was she commonplace? Was she deceiving him? Or did he alone possess the true insight? ... Useless! He was baffled.

Arnold Bennett's ellipses.

Tertius Ingpen, whose mistress is carefully hidden away, advocates the veil of the harem for women, and as his conflicts with Hilda increase, Edwin sees Ingpen's dalliance as "the realization of a dream that was to marriage what poetry is to prose." Edwin begins to dream of the single life:

He saw the existence of males, with its rationality and its dependability, its simplicity, its directness, its honesty, as something ideal. And as he pictured such an existence--with or without the romance of mysterious and interesting creatures ever modesty waiting for attention behind the veil--further souvenirs of Hilda's wilful (sic) naughtiness and injustice rushed into his mind by thousands ... .

The veil of the eastern harem woman is not for Hilda, though Hilda is often veiled in the trilogy. Her

128 Ibid., p. 279. 129 Ibid., p. 1223.
130 Ibid., pp. 1280-1281.
feminine use of the veil is always evident, as in this scene when she enters Edwin's office as the mysterious and pampered wife of the owner. She raises her veil to charm her husband, and enjoys his replacing it after he had communicated the knowledge that he has saved her from an encounter with her former husband, who had come to ask Edwin for money.

Hilda is understandably emotional in the discussion over whether or not George Sr. should be told of the existence of George Jr. Edwin insists that the man should not be told. Hilda's reaction is not that of the eastern harem woman. She wears her veil to entice, not to conceal, but impulse this time does not give her time to raise her veil:

Hilda moved reluctantly towards the outer door like a reproved and rebellious schoolgirl. Suddenly she burst into tears, sprang at Edwin, and, putting her arms round his neck, kissed him through the veil.\textsuperscript{131}

\textit{Hilda's proud shrugging of her shoulders: a link between George, Hilda, and Edwin.} Another symbol for Hilda is, ironically, the gesture of straightening her spine and throwing back her shoulders, which she learned from George. As Hilda is attracted to Edwin by his weakness, symbolized by his wistful expression, she is attracted to George by another gesture, which also seems wistful to her. The

\textsuperscript{131}Ibid., p. 1145.
first time Hilda notices George shrug his shoulders, it is in the office as they struggle to get out the first issue of a newspaper George is sponsoring to rival "that powerful monopolist, 'The Staffordshire Signal.'" The proud gesture, the straightening of the shoulders, is one of the reasons that Edwin falls in love with her. When Hilda first sees the gesture, she is afraid that George will fall ill, and the newspaper will fail:

They were perhaps all doing too much, but the others did not matter. Nevertheless, Mr. Cannon advanced to the table buoyant and faintly smiling, straightening his shoulders back, proudly proving to himself and to them that his individual force was inexhaustible. That straightening of the shoulders always affected Hilda as something wistful, as almost pathetic in its confident boyishness. It made her feel maternal and say to herself (not in words) with a sort of maternal superiority: "How brave he is, poor thing!" Yes, in her heart she would apply the epithet 'poor thing' to this grand creature whose superiority she acknowledged with more fervour than anybody. As for the undaunted straightening of the shoulders, she adopted it, and after a time it grew to be a characteristic gesture with her.133

Presently Hilda is using George's gesture as does he: she is proudly delivering the unwilling Sarah from the London boarding house to one in Brighton, "and, by the side of George Cannon on the platform, she was aware of her shabbiness and of her girlish fragility. Nevertheless, she put her shoulders back in a gesture like his own."134

132Ibid., p. 608. 133Ibid., p. 611.
134Ibid., p. 734.
Once George wavered on the edge of telling Hilda that he is married. She can see that he is struggling with his emotions. "She smiles; and set her shoulders back—the very gesture that she had learned from him." Instead of telling her the truth, George proposes, and Hilda accepts.

The gesture had seemed "wistful" to Hilda when George used it, but when she uses it, it appears to be a proud gesture to Edwin:

There was one thing he had liked about her; that straightening of the spine and setting back of the shoulders as she left him. She had in her some tinge of the heroic. 136

When Edwin finds Hilda in the boarding house, he is amazed to see how her hard life has aged her, but, as she lights a candle, he sees the old Hilda for a moment:

Having at length subjugated the wick, she straightened her back, with a gesture that he knew, and for one instant she was a girl again. 137

Hilda and her journeys versus Edwin and his houses and printing plants.

Edwin early noted that Hilda's "sudden departure" was typical of her (see page 49). As the Hilda Lessways book opens on a quarrel between Hilda and her mother, both remember a shameful errand she had performed as a child. She had ruthlessly bullied her mother, by refusing to eat,

135Ibid., p. 784. 136Ibid., p. 115. 137Ibid., p. 466.
until the mother finally threw money down so the child Hilda could go out and buy what she wanted to eat. Hilda went out and bought tripe, and tripe is what she gets on most of her journeys.

The symbols of Hilda's journey and Edwin's house often conflict with one another, because when the mistress and the maid depart from a house, the Victorian gentleman cannot occupy it. He has to find other quarters, where he can be properly served. When Hilda takes her son to London, to see the eye doctor, "Edwin, solitary, had been forced to perform the final symbolic act, that of locking himself out of his own sacred home! The affair transcended belief."¹³⁸

Hilda insists on taking her son to a London eye specialist because he squints and complains of headaches. Edwin opposes the journey, saying a local doctor will do as well. The reader is not surprised that George Jr. has an eye problem. The careful Bennett had noted that the first time Edwin saw the boy George, he was squinting.

Hilda has quarreled with her maids, and if she is to take a journey, Edwin must live for a few days in one of the other family homes. She schemes with the relatives, and presently Edwin is disenfranchised: "... his wife would have her capricious, unnecessary way, and he would

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 1213.
be turned out of his own house."139 Hilda had been "determined to defeat him and was then, so to speak, standing over his prostrate form."140 Edwin continually fights against Hilda's impulsive short and long journeys. When she would perform a short errand of mercy at dinner time, the staid Edwin is upset. He asks that she not do this, so that "the whole house won't have to be turned upside down."141 Edwin thinks Hilda has capitulated, and they will have a peaceful meal, but the deceitful Hilda departs quickly as soon as the meal is on the table. Before too many days have elapsed, Hilda is proposing a move to the country. Edwin is determined that they will not move.

He looked about the room, and he imagined all the house, every object in which was familiar and beloved, and he simply could not bear to think of the disintegration of these interiors by furniture removers, and of the endless rasping business of creating a new home in partnership with a woman whose ideas about furnishing were as unsound as they were capricious. He utterly dismissed the fanciful scheme, as he dismissed the urgings towards public activity. He deeply resented all these headstrong intentions to disturb him in his tranquillity. They were indefensible, and he would not have them. He would die in sullen obstinancy rather than yield. Impulse might conquer common sense, but not beyond a certain degree. He would never yield.142

This is Edwin's theme for some time, that "he would never yield," until on the brink of divorce, on the bridge the second time, he changes his mind, and decides that he

139Ibid., p. 1187. 140Ibid.

141Ibid., p. 1072. 142Ibid., p. 1188.
will be the winner in his marriage if he does make the move:

He yielded on the canal-bridge. And in yielding, it seemed to him that he was victorious.

He thought confidently and joyously:

"I'm not going to be beaten by Hilda! And I'm not going to be beaten by marriage. Dashed if I am! A nice thing if I had to admit that I wasn't clever enough to be a husband!" 143

The proprietorship of buildings is almost always symbolic in the writings of Bennett. Virginia Woolf said that "house property was the common ground from which the Edwardians found it easy to proceed to intimacy." 144 Houses are also symbolic of what is happening in that particular society, as they are in any society. Furniture within the houses, and light and dark in the houses is also symbolic.

Bennett begins to build the house symbolism at the close of the first scene of the book, as Edwin comes home from school the last time. He considers whether or not to symbolically "plant his flag in the other attic, to... rule over it in addition to his bedroom." 145 He discards a beautiful schooner, because it now symbolizes

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143 Ibid., p. 1186.
144 Virginia Woolf, Collected Essays, p. 331.
145 Bennett, The Clayhanger Family, p. 38.
childhood; it is a "toy as silly as a doll." He decides he will need a table and a lamp to symbolize his serious adult study plans. Edwin's bedroom is important to him:

It had been his room, his castle, his sanctuary, for at least ten years, since before his mother's death of cancer. He did not know that he loved it, with all its inconveniences and makeshifts; but he did love it, and he was jealous for it; no one should lay a hand on it to rearrange what he had once arranged.

The years strengthen Edwin's love for his own retreat. He introduces heat, light, and a comfortable chair, making his bedroom serve also as a study, instead of the traditional chilled sleeping chamber of the Victorian; Edwin is disdainful of the ordinary English bedroom, which he said was as comfortable as an Alpine hut.

It is a measure of Edwin's devotion to Hilda, then, when he defers to her romantic caprice that they share his smaller room, rather than the 'principal' bedroom in which Edwin's father had died. Edwin had proposed that they occupy the larger room:

But Hilda had said "no" to him privately. Whereupon, being himself almost morbidly unsentimental, he had judiciously hinted that to object to a room because an old man had died in it under distressing circumstances was to be morbidly sentimental and unworthy of her. Whereupon she had mysteriously smiled, and called him sweet bad names and kissed him, and hung on his neck. She sentimental! Could not the great stupid see without being told that what influenced her was not an aversion for his father's bedroom but a predilection for Edwin's? She desired that they should

\[146\text{Ibid.}\]  \[147\text{Ibid., pp. 37-38.}\]
inhabit his room. She wanted to sleep in his room; and to wake up in it, and to feel that she was immersing herself in his past... [Bennett's ellipses] (Ah! The exciting flattery, like an aphrodisiac!) And she would not allow him to uproot the fixed bookcases on either side of the hearth. She said that for her they were part of the room itself. Useless to argue that they occupied space required for extra furniture! She would manage! She did manage. He found that the acme of convenience for a husband had not been achieved, but convenience was naught in the rapture of the escapade. He had 'needed shaking up,' as they say down there, and he was shaken up.

Nevertheless, though undoubtedly shaken up, he had the male wit to perceive that the bedroom episode had been a peculiar triumph for himself. Her attitude in it, imperious superficially, was in truth an impassioned and outright surrender to him. And further, she had at once become a frankly admiring partisan of his theory of bedrooms.148

The house he lives in, and his room are important symbols in a study of Edwin, reflecting the true state of his internal life. He is flattered that Hilda wants to share his small room. He picnics in the small areas she leaves for his things, and enjoys the picnic; presently Hilda is in charge of the whole house:

The whole house was her affair. It was no longer his house, in which he could issue orders without considering another individuality—orders that would infallibly be executed, either cheerfully or glumly, by the plump spinster, Maggie. He had to mind his p's and q's; he had to be wary, everywhere. The creature did not simply live in the house; she pervaded it. As soon as he opened the front-door he felt her.149

Though he has purchased this home from his sister Maggie for Hilda, Hilda will not be content in it. She will insist on the purchase of Ladderedge Hall. Ladderedge

148Ibid., pp. 885-886. 149Ibid., p. 885.
Hall will become the ladder up which Hilda and Edwin will climb to social and political prominence. Edwin makes this move under the influence of Hilda; the only other move he makes in his life he makes under the influence of his father.

Home and business share the same building as the book opens on the day Edwin leaves school. When the needs of the business force Darius to build a new house, it is more than a new house to Darius Clayhanger; it is a sign that he is "achieving the supreme peak of greatness—he was about to live away from business." The house has even more significance to Edwin: "It was a work of art, it was an epic poem, it was an emanation of the soul." A modern critic, Margaret Drabble, paraphrases Bennett: "To Bennett, as to Lawrence, houses expressed souls." The new house, as it is being built, comes to be a symbol for Edwin:

As he grows older, Edwin is "house-proud," and

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150 Ibid., p. 163.  
151 Ibid.  
153 Bennett, The Clayhanger Family, p. 163.
more and more he was growing to look upon
his house as an island, cut off by a difference of
manners from the varnished barbarism of multitudi-
nous new cottages, and by an immensely more profound
difference of thought from both the cottages and the
larger houses.\textsuperscript{154}

Edwin watches carefully over his house. To contem-
plate the perfections of the pipings, and the newly pointed
brick-work:

\ldots would put the householder Edwin into a sort
of contemplative ecstasy. Perhaps he was comical.
But such inner experiences were part of his great
interest in life, part of his large general passion.\textsuperscript{155}

Edwin's house remembers what happens in it. No
matter how Edwin might "transform it, repaper it, refurnish
it,—the mysterious imprint remained."\textsuperscript{156}

Though Edwin claimed that he was unsentimental
about the room in which his father died, the dining room
had never been the same to him again after his father's
infirmity had there been fully exposed:

The dining room had seen Darius Clayhanger fed
like a baby. And it had never been the same dining
room since \ldots. And each room bore the myster-
ious imprints of past emotion.\textsuperscript{157}

Even the hated Ladderedge Hall is filled, for Edwin,
with "the invisible vapour of human memories!"\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{154}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 883. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{155}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 882.
\textsuperscript{156}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 884. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{157}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 884, 883.
\textsuperscript{158}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 1264.
Other houses and their furnishings are as symbolic of their owners as is Edwin's. The houses and furnishings have lives of their own. When Hilda returns home from work, her mother fills her in on "the life of the house, hour by hour and minute by minute."\textsuperscript{159} When they quarrel "the very life of the house seemed for an instant to be suspended."\textsuperscript{160}

The description of the furnishings of the Orgreaves house is the best example of the way Bennett humanizes artifacts. The cost of luxuriously raising the large family has been staggering, and

\begin{quote}
... the long and varied chronicle of it was somehow written on the drawing-room as well as on the faces of the father and mother—on the drawing-room which had the same dignified, childlike, indefatigable, invincible, jolly expression as its owners. Threadbare in places: And why not? The identical Turkey carpet at which Edwin gazed in his self-consciousness—on that carpet Janet the queenly and mature had sprawled as an infant while her mother, a fresh previous Janet of less than thirty, had cooed and said incomprehensible foolishness to her... I say it was a miraculous drawing room. Its chairs were humanized... The cottage piano could humanly recall the touch of a perfect baby... The two carpets were both resigned, grim old humanities, used to dirty heels, and not caring, or pretending not to care. What did the curtains know of history?\textsuperscript{161}
\end{quote}

Several symbols come together when the chair of Darius in the old living room is considered. It had to be

\textsuperscript{159}Ibid., p. 624.  \textsuperscript{160}Ibid., p. 555.

\textsuperscript{161}Ibid., pp. 192-193.
placed so as to catch the best of the inadequate light. Mr. Clayhanger, sitting in his chair, dominates the lives of his family as the chair dominates the living room:

The position of Mr. Clayhanger's easy chair—a detail apparently trifling—was in reality a strongly influencing factor in the family life, for it meant that the father's presence obsessed the room... If by chance, as sometimes occurred, he chose to sit on the sofa, which was between the fire-place and the door, the room was instantly changed into something larger, freer and less inconvenient.¹⁶²

Hepburn notes that this same chair is the one in which Darius sits when he denies Edwin the increase in salary he needs in order to marry Hilda. Ten years later this is the chair in which the heir Edwin is sitting when Hilda comes to effect a reconciliation with him. Edwin smiles within himself as he reflects "... that he, in his father's place, in his father's very chair, was thus under the spell of a woman whose child was nameless."¹⁶³

When the novel Hilda Lessways opens, Hilda is rich in property, but is driven by boredom into attempting to wrest control of the family properties from her mother. She quarrels with her mother over the collection of the rents. As noted before, the house in which they live has life: as they quarreled, "they were close together in the narrow lobby, of which the heavy pulse was the clock's ticking."¹⁶⁴ Hilda's mother suspects Hilda will seek out

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 41. ¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 553. ¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 565.
a lawyer. She refers obliquely to Hilda's girlhood humiliation of her mother, when the child had refused her mother's cooking, and journeyed forth from the home to eat "tripe." Both women understand the symbolism of this betrayal, but Hilda is not deterred. Her mother is deceived by Hilda's unexpected sentimental kiss (perhaps there are here overtones of Gethsemane); Hilda goes out to find the ersatz lawyer-newspaperman, George Cannon, the man who will through her become a bigamist.

Hilda delivers her mother, her property, and herself into his hands. Hilda's mother goes to London to aid George Cannon's elderly sister in the establishment of a boarding house which is supposed to become the cornerstone of George's fortune, and Hilda takes a job in George's newspaper office. Though Hilda is prone toward taking impulsive journeys, she does not quickly answer a telegram summoning her to her mother's sickbed. Impaled on the twin horns of pride in her job and fascination with the man, Hilda delays her departure, and when she arrives at the boarding house, the blinds are symbolically lowered. Hilda's mother is dead.

Hilda is devastated by this turn of events. She knows that she was wrong to delay her departure. As she waits in the railway station for a relative to take to her mother's funeral, the mere sight of a stranger, a malformed and drugged youth, shocks Hilda, and precipitates her nervous breakdown. To her he is the symbol of her sin.
George assumes control of all of Hilda's properties. He talks to her of the wisdom of selling everything, and presently: "All houses seemed to her to be a singularly insecure and even perilous form of property."165 As she signs the papers giving control of her property to George, she idealizes him, though she notes that he continues, as he had in the newspaper office, to hide behind the name of another man as he conducts business.

One of the symbols for George had always been, in Hilda's eyes, the immaculate wristbands of his shirts, but now she "noticed that his wristband was frayed."166 She is not dismayed by George's strange business anonymity:

As she signed, she saw the name "Karkeek" in the midst of one of the documents, and remembered, with joyous nonchalance, that George Cannon's own name never appeared in George Cannon's affairs.167

Hilda, still in the grip of a nervous breakdown, "wanted to trust herself to George."168 She wants to help "him in his adversity,"169 because his newspaper has failed. Hilda idealizes him, and feels that even the furniture wants to help him:

When he gave her the Eagle pencil, and pointed to the places where she was to sign, she took the pencil with fervour, more and more anxious to atone

165 Ibid., p. 675. 166 Ibid., p. 676.
169 Ibid.
to him... if only as a mystic reparation of her odious rudeness at the beginning of the interview. For a moment she stood bewildered, in a dream, staring at the scratched mahogany top of the bookcase. And the bookcase seemed to her to be something sentient, patient, and helpful, that had always been waiting there in the corner to aid George Cannon in this crisis—something human like herself. She loved the bookcase, and the Eagle pencil, and the papers, and the pattern on the wall. George Cannon was standing behind her. She felt his presence like a delicious danger... 

He took her place in front of the little bookcase, and folded the documents. There he was, beside her, in all his masculinity—his moustache, his blue chin, his wide white hands, his broadcloth—there he was planted on his massive feet as on a pedestal!170

In her mother's house, Hilda had "vehemently objected to the squalid mess of the business of domesticity... [but she revels] in the squalid mess of... business."171 Hilda is betrayed. After her false marriage to George, housework will be her vocation, and the boarding house will be her symbol.

When Hilda assumes the name of "Cannon," it is twice false; first, because George is already married, and second because George has neglected to legally change the name from that of Canonages, which was his immigrant French father's name. When Hilda and George's sister Sarah first see the boarding house, workmen are attaching a brass plate with the false name of Cannon on it. Ten years later, when Edwin comes to find her, Hilda is stealthily polishing the false name in the night. The secret of her

170Ibid.  
171Ibid., p. 610.
false marriage had been found out by the ever-watching Watchett sisters the night Hilda returned from her honey-
moon. Now, to protect herself and her child, she must secretly polish her false name.

Hilda learned of George's bigamy when she returned from her honeymoon, because an elderly maid, who knew the secret Hilda did not know, was asked to change the bed sheets of Florrie, who had taken one of the boarders as a lover. To the angry maid, the sheets are a symbol of Florrie's sin, and also of the sin of the master and mistress of the boarding house, George and Hilda. Hilda believes she is married, and George pretends that the marriage is legal. The boarding house is violated in the resulting quarrel, as Hilda is violated by the supposed marriage:

"I ain't going to touch her sheets, not for nobody!" Louisa proclaimed savagely . . . . Her undisciplined voice rang spinsterishly down the staircase, outraging it, defiling the whole interior . . . . Hilda peered along the landing from her lair, and upstairs and downstairs; she could see nothing but senseless carpets and brass rods and steps and banisters; but she knew that the entire household—she had the sensation that the very house itself—was alert and eaves-dropping . . . .

"And what's this about Mrs. Cannon?" Louisa shouted, beside herself.

"And what about his other wife?"

. . . .

/Hilda/ . . . heard a loud snort of shattering contempt from Louisa; and then a strange and terrifi-
fic silence fell on the stairs . . . . The empty
landing lay, as it were, expectant at Hilda's door.172

The boarding house is a symbol for Hilda; Hilda is the one who is expectant. Ironically, after Hilda sends George away, she thinks of her marriage as a "sterile adventure," not yet realizing that she is pregnant, and will be delivered of a healthy baby boy.

Before she realizes that she is pregnant, Hilda returns to the home of the Orgreaves, and betrothes herself to Edwin. Hilda's influence in her relationship with Edwin is later symbolized by her activities concerning his household, but even more symbolic of her power is her intrusion into his business offices, and the honor paid her there. They first pledge their troth in that most masculine of symbols, "a square glazed structure of ebonized wood that had been insinuated and inserted into the opposite corner of the shop."173 This office had been planned by Edwin for his personal use. Both he and Hilda sense the significance of Hilda's entry into "the open door of the cubicle, a black erection within the shop."174

Through Bennett's stereoscopic reporting of the sequence of events, in the two parts of the trilogy Clayhanger and Hilda Lessways, the reader sees that Hilda has used as her excuse to return to Edwin's office that

172 Ibid., pp. 807, 808, 809.
173 Ibid., p. 147. 174 Ibid., p. 865.
traditional symbolic invitation to romantic dalliance, the dropped handkerchief, and the reader also sees that Edwin understands Hilda's motivation.

Later, as the wife of Edwin, Hilda visits his office, intent on winning from him the horse and trap she needs to accomplish their removal to the country. She feels confident of her power:

She was happy, even if apprehensive for the immediate future. There she was, established and respected in his office, which was his church and the successful rival of her boudoir. Her plans were progressing.\textsuperscript{175}

Symbolism and Imaginary Structures

Structures do not have to be real to perform symbolic functions in Bennett. The imagined destruction of structures to symbolize human disappointment occurs often in \textit{The Clayhanger Family}. The boy Edwin is distressed when Hilda fails to keep an appointment with him:

He had been building a marvelously beautiful castle, and with a thoughtless, careless stroke of the pen she had annihilated all his labour; she had almost annihilated him.\textsuperscript{176}

Before Hilda consummates her marriage with George Cannon, there are a multitude of signs that he is false, but Hilda takes great pride in making independent, impulsive decisions, and she ignores both the instinct, and the overt occurrences which warn of George's falseness. Even as he proposes, Hilda is aware of a lack of

\textsuperscript{175}Ibid., p. 1254. \textsuperscript{176}Ibid., p. 288.
solidarity in this relationship: Bennett uses the roads he feels to be the true reflectors of the society and its people to express this instability. George has taken Hilda into a small office in a hotel to propose to her. As they walk home, Hilda is entranced with the idea that something so important should happen in a room she had never seen before, but George cannot understand her amazement:

"Why! I never knew there was such a room!" She could not define how she was affected by this fact, but she regarded the fact as tremendously romantic, and its effect on her was profound. And George saw in it no significance! She was disconcerted. She felt a tremor; it was as though the entire King's Road had quivered, for a fraction of a second and then, feigning nonchalance, resumed its moveless solidity. 177

Ten years after she jilted him, Edwin hears that Hilda is a widow, and is hopeful that she will resume their relationship. Hilda tells him that her husband is in jail. Edwin's disappointment is expressed in terms of the destruction of structures: "There was a deafening roar in his head. It was the complete destruction by earthquake of a city of dreams." 178 Hilda cannot bring herself to admit that her marriage is a fraud. She long ago lost affection for the man who deceived her. Pride keeps her from telling Edwin that she is a free woman; the same pride that led her to wordlessly jilt him rather than reveal her fraudulent marriage and illegitimate pregnancy.

177 Ibid., p. 788. 178 Ibid., p. 488.
Bennett often reverses the process of humanizing artifacts; sometimes he gives to the human structure the attributes of the artifacts, as in this instance, as Edwin considered the possibility of divorcing Hilda: "Edwin's brain throbbed and shook like an engine-house in which the machinery was his violent thoughts."  

The Symbolic Women

Bennett photographs a variety of women, and projects for the reader their diverse performances as daughters, wives, mothers, and servants in the household, business, and church. The relationship between the middle-class mistress and the woman servant is carefully delineated, and is an important factor in the Lessways and Clayhanger households. Bennett's Journal verifies that he intended Hilda Lessways to be a feminist statement:  

179 Ibid., p. 1178.

180 Bennett writings show an interest in themes still modern: the decay of the central cities, conflict between the English and the Irish, labor problems, and especially the roles of men and women. Other books take up the adjustment problems between the generations and between the sexes. Bennett says, in his preface to The Book of Carlotta: "I note that I have made Carlotta say: 'There are only two fundamental differences in the world—the difference between sex and sex, and the difference between youth and age.'" Arnold Bennett, The Book of Carlotta (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1911), p. ix.
Sunday, October 2nd. (1910)

Yesterday I had a goodish large notion for the Hilda book--of portraying the droves of the whole sex, instead of whole masculine droves. I think I can do something with this, showing the multi-tudinous activities of the whole sex, against a mere background of masculinity. I had a sudden vision of it. It has never been done. 181

Bennett keeps his promise. Individual women of almost every temperament and condition are portrayed, and when he photographs women in groups, he pictures them as "a foreign race," 182 and as "specimens of a foreign race encamped among the men." 183 When Edwin tries to reason with Janet and Hilda together, they suddenly are not two women, but 2,000, 184 and then those 2,000 women hem him in. 185 Edwin is amazed to find him glum sister Maggie giggling over the back fence in a tableau symbolic of neighborhood women. On another occasion, as Edwin enters his home unexpectedly, he hears his wife and a group of women laughing and talking excitedly, symbolizing a relationship and an experience of which he had previously been unaware. As always, Bennett's irony adroitly illuminates the flaws in all relationships. The perversity of women who enjoy news of illness, death, and tragedy "like ripe

182 Bennett, The Clayhanger Family, p. 1003.
183 Ibid., p. 1016. 184 Ibid., p. 1040.
185 Ibid., p. 1044.
fruit" is pictured as Bennett portrays all these things in the "circles of life" of Clayhanger family members. 186

Edwin's two sisters, Clara and Maggie, the girl next door, Janet, Auntie Hamps and Hilda represent different types of women in the Victorian society, while Florrie and Mrs. Nixon represent women with a uniquely different experience, that of being servants. Of Edwin's two sisters, Clara is the lively sass-box, turned professional mother, and Maggie is the unmarried elder sister, who becomes the contented plump household supervisor drudge. Neighbor Janet is the pretty unmarried girl who waits in vain for Edwin, spending her youth on her parents. Auntie Hamps, a widow, is a watch-dog for the Victorian society, and Hilda is the rebel who marries twice, the first time to a bigamist.

Florrie and Mrs. Nixon, the servant women. The best symbol for female servants is the kneeling new servant of the Lessways, the 13-year-old Florrie. The description is an excellent example of Bennett's picture-taking abilities:

She [Florrie] wore a large foul apron of sacking, which made her elegant body quite shapeless, and she was kneeling on the red-and-black tiled floor of the kitchen, with her enormous cracked boots sticking out behind her. At one side of her was a pail full of steaming brown water, and in her red coarse little hands, which did not seem to belong to those gracile arms, she held a dripping

186 Ibid., p. 1034.
clout. In front of her, on a half-dried space of clean, shining floor, stood Mrs. Lessways, her head wrapped in a flannel petticoat. Nearer to the child stretched a small semicircle of liquid mud; to the rear was the untouched dirty floor. Florrie was looking up at her mistress with respectful, strained attention. She could not proceed with her work because Mrs. Lessways had chosen this moment to instruct her, with much snuffling, in the duties and responsibilities of her position.187

In introducing Florrie, Bennett explains her background and how she came to work for Mrs. Lessways at such a young age: "Mrs. Lessways took Florrie in order to save her from slavery."188 The kneeling girl will work hard for long hours, but the work will be easy compared to the alternatives of work on the potbanks, or in the pub. A prophecy is made concerning Florrie's future which does not come true; Bennett says that she is destined to become a disfigured drudge, but the pretty Florrie will be rescued from the world of servant women by masculine attention. Hilda is soon surprised to see that Florrie is receiving envelopes addressed "in a coarse, scrawling masculine hand."189 Florrie's blushing face reminds Hilda of a "burning peony."190 The flower's beauty will rescue her from the drudgery of working in the homes of other women. Several years later Florrie ensnares (or in ensnared by?) a middle-aged dog at Hilda's boarding house. Florrie "was

187Ibid., p. 582. 188Ibid.
189Ibid., p. 655. 190Ibid.
an amazing blossom to have come off the dunghill of Calder Street."

The human duplicity of servants who are submissively polite to their mistresses, but who try on the clothes of the mistresses after they have gone out is shown. The servants are also shown rollicking like children in the swings after they have ceremoniously escorted the mistress out the door. Bennett pictures another side of the relationship when he shows Edwin's pride in Maggie when Maggie is compassionate with a servant girl who is pregnant; the essential difference in character between Auntie Hamps and Maggie will be seen below when the reaction of Auntie Hamps to the girl and her plight is recounted. Though Edwin sympathizes with the girl, the relationship between the master and the female servant in a Victorian household permits no expression of that sympathy: "Suddenly Minnie caught sight of Edwin through the doorway, flushed red, had the air of slavishly apologizing to the unapproachable male for having disturbed him by her insect- woes, and vanished." 192

Bennett dryly puts the servant woman "in her place," as he categorizes those who will attend the great Sunday School Centenary celebration. It includes all of those well enough to go, excepting possibly the servant:

191Ibid., p. 790.  
192Ibid., p. 1208.
Mrs. Nixon, if she had time, would snatch half an hour in the afternoon to see what remained to be seen of the show. Families must eat. And if Mrs. Nixon was stopped by duty from assisting at this Centenary, she must hope to be more at liberty for the next.\textsuperscript{193}

Edwin joins a boyish debating society, which meets early Sunday mornings. This affects Mrs. Nixon:

The next day being the day of rest, Mrs. Nixon arose from her nook at 5:30 a.m. and woke Edwin.\textsuperscript{194}

In her old age, though, Maggie is nursed by the good Maggie in the Clayhanger home.

Maggie, the drudge-type house-mistress. The house of which Edwin is so proud really belongs to his sister, by inheritance, but Edwin's payment of room and board is an amicable arrangement for both of them; Edwin is in effect the "householder," and he issues the orders obeyed by Maggie. Greengage jam is the symbol for the tartly-sweet Maggie, not houses. She does not identify with the house, but with the housekeeping. When there is a forced discussion in the family about selling her house to Edwin, Maggie's mind is engaged with jam, and she is unable to think about real estate. Real estate is "not real to her."\textsuperscript{195}

Maggie had been making jam for Auntie Hamps, and had been forced to leave it to attend the birthday party

\textsuperscript{193}Ibid., p. 217.  \textsuperscript{194}Ibid., p. 127.  \textsuperscript{195}Ibid., p. 981.
of a young nephew. When the house-selling discussion begins she leaves, even though her brother-in-law Albert, who has his own plans for profit in the transaction, tries to stop her:

He could not stop her. Finance, houses, rents, were not real to her. She owned but did not possess such things. But the endangered jam was real to her. She did not own it, but she possessed it. She departed.196

Maggie had gone to live with Auntie Hamps when Edwin married Hilda. Maggie is the kind of women who will not too much offend Auntie Hamps. As Hilda sits in the living room of Auntie Hamps and sniffs Maggie's jam, she is appalled at the "wide-spread messy idolatrous eternal domesticity of which Auntie Hamps was the classic example:"

You might walk from one end of the Five Towns to the other, and not see one object that gave a thrill—unless it was a pair of lovers. And when you went inside the houses you were no better off—you were even worse off, because you came at once into contact with an ignoble race of women who themselves were serfs with the mentality of serfs and the prodigious conceit of virtue . . . . /Arnold Bennett's ellipses./7 Talk to Auntie Hamps at home of lawn-tennis or a musical evening, and she would set you down as flighty, and shift the conversation on to soaps or chapels. And there were hundreds of houses in the Five Towns into which no ideas save the ideas of Auntie Hamps had ever penetrated, and tens and hundreds of thousands of such houses all over the industrial districts of Staffordshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire,—houses where to keep bits of wood clean and to fulfill the ceremonies of pietism, and to help the poor to help themselves, was the highest good, the sole good . . . . Yes, she took oath that her house should at any rate be intelligent and agreeable before it was clean.197

196Ibid.
197Ibid., pp. 959-960.
Maggie has understood, though, from her youth, the extent of the hypocrisy of her aunt.

Auntie Hamps, the "watchdog of society."198 Though Edwin is estranged from his church, he is forced to acknowledge, as he watches over his aunt's death-bed, that "he and she were anyhow at one in the profound and staggering conviction of immortality."199 Small meanness contrasts with lofty thought in this death scene: Auntie Hamps protests against the waste when the chilled Edwin adds a few lumps of coal to the fire. The "great darknessing curtains"200 over her bed are symbolic of approaching death for Auntie Hamps. The "last conscious moments ... of satisfaction"201 for this "Wesleyan ... pillar of society"202 result, ironically, from her belief that her pregnant maid will be thrown into the street after her work is done, before dinner, and without her pay. Though Edwin and Maggie will not carry out Auntie Hamps's final orders, this situation finally brings Edwin to a better understanding of his sister Maggie. Auntie Hamps orders that the maid be turned out the next morning:

She can turn out the sitting-room, and clean the silver in the black box, and then she can go—before dinner. I don't see why I should give her her dinner. Nor her extra day's wages either."203

198Ibid., p. 1064. 199Ibid., p. 1211.
200Ibid., p. 1231. 201Ibid., p. 1234.
202Ibid., p. 1196. 203Ibid., p. 1202.
The stereoscopic structuring of Bennett's materials can be seen even in this picture of death: as an old woman lies dying, Edwin appreciates more the lives of three younger ones, the maid Minnie, Maggie, and Hilda. As Maggie and Edwin make arrangements for the care of Auntie Hamps during her last hours, Edwin acquiesces to Maggie's desire that Clara should not be sent for until morning:

Maggie was so friendly, suave, confidential, persuasive, and so sure of herself, that with pleasure he copied her accents. He enjoyed thus talking to her intimately in the ugly dark house, with the life-bearing, foolish Minnie on the one hand, and the dying old woman on the other.204

Edwin seems rather insensitive as he thinks of Hilda and pictures "the secret tenderness of their reunion amid the conventional gloom of Auntie Hamps's death-bed."205 A small nephew also furnishes contrast between youth and age: "The mere contrast between the infant so healthy and the dying old woman was pathetic to Edwin."206

Clara, the professional mother, and the next-generation Auntie Hamps. As a child, Clara had been merciless in her criticism of the hypocrisy of Auntie Hamps; in her maturity she fully adopted Auntie Hamps's attitudes.

204Ibid., p. 1204. 205Ibid., p. 1214.
206Ibid., p. 1232.
Hilda is instinctively hostile to Clara, but finds it difficult to maintain her hostility against this symbol of motherhood:

... the fair fragility of Clara's face, with its wonderful skin, and her manner, at once girlish and maternal ..., holding fast the child's hand, reacted considerably against Hilda's prejudice. 207

Hilda's chief complaints against Clara and Albert Benbow are their hypocrisy in pretending to be religious, while defrauding other family members in financial transactions, and their insensitive lack of compassion.

Money given to the Benbow children for gifts is taken immediately to the bank "in order to bury it." 208 Bennett's best ironic analysis of this "religious" branch of the family, and the mother of the family, Clara, is an account of son Bert's birthday party. Bert had given his younger sister a flower from his birthday bouquet: "Mysterious relations existed between Bert and the benignant acquiescent Amy." 209 A small guest arrives, and admires the flower. The mother insists that the young daughter give the flower to the guest. Amy wipes away her tears and offers the flower; the guest accepts it.

Amy, gravely lacking in self-control, began to whimper again.

"That's my good little girl!" muttered Clara to her, exhibiting pride in her daughter's victory.

207 Ibid., p. 960.  
208 Ibid., p. 970.  
209 Ibid., p. 972.
over self, and rubbed the child's eyes with her handkerchief. The parents were continually thus "bringing up" their children. Hilda pressed her lips together.

Immediately afterwards it was noticed that Flossie was no longer eating.

"I've had quite enough, thank you," said she, in answer to expostulations.

"No jam, even? And you've not finished your tea!"

"I've had quite enough, thank you," said she, and folded up her napkin.210

Sarah, the sterile seed. As the Biblical Sarah was sterile, so is Sarah Gailey, the elder half-sister of George Cannon; Sarah is neither happy nor gay.

Hilda finds Sarah starving, and reminds George of his obligation to her. George impresses both Sarah and Hilda into helping him build his empire. He makes use of Hilda's money and her talents, and Sarah is to manage two boarding houses for him. He intends that she shall be the seed of his fortune, and he gives her, in each building, a small basement room in which to live. She does not live, but dies slowly, and with much pain. The environment in which he plants her does not support her life; she attempts suicide by trying to "make a hole in the water."211 When Hilda, exerting all possible moral force on the elderly woman, delivers her from one

210Ibid. 211Ibid., p. 756.
boarding house to the next, Sarah stands in front of the second building, looking like the corpse she will soon become.

Hilda, symbol of the "modern woman." Barnard and Allen say that the structural cohesion of *The Clayhanger Family* fails over the characterization of Hilda. This writer sides with Pritchett, who feels that in the story of Hilda, Bennett writes two full-length portraits, resulting in a thoroughly believable character.  

Hilda's personal idiosyncrasies were considered above. The character of Hilda represents a larger concept; she represents the modern woman of her time, dissatisfied with the only occupations open to her: teaching, housework in her mother's house, and church work. Hilda never tried teaching: "She knew, without having tried it, that she abhorred teaching." She could not be content, as her mother was, with a day devoted "partly to sheer vacuous idleness and partly to the monotonous simple machinery of physical existence--everlasting cookery, everlasting cleanliness, and everlasting stitchery."  

Bennett's ironic summary of the worth of women to the church indicates why the independent Hilda would not

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212 Barnard, p. 83; Allen, p. 86; and Pritchett, p. 172.

213 Ibid., p. 558.

214 Ibid., pp. 556-557.
find fulfillment in church work:

The unchangeable canons of Wesleyanism permit its ministers to marry, and celibacy is even discouraged, for the reason that wives and daughters are expected to toil in the cause, and their labour costs the circuit not a half-penny.215

Books were unavailable to Hilda. She felt unready for marriage, and she never met any men. Hilda was in trouble of a kind she could not define. She had nothing to do with herself: "In 1878, unless pushed by necessity, no girl might dream of a vocation: the idea was monstrous; it was almost unmentionable."216 Hilda finds fulfillment in the business world. Then, through George Cannon, she finds disaster.

Darkness and mystery are symbolic of Hilda, because of her discontent, impulsiveness, and her dark clothing, hair, and veils. She is a contrast to her friend Janet, who is sweet and almost always dressed in white.

Janet, the conventional woman. Janet provides stark contrast to Hilda. She is agreeable, beautiful, wealthy, and almost always wears white. She never marries. She was in love with Edwin, but Edwin waited only for Hilda. Hilda seeks out Edwin for a midnight interview; Janet looks for him in the afternoon, dressed in crimson. The most striking pale portrait of Janet

215 Ibid., p. 897. 216 Ibid., p. 558.
comes between two dark "carcass" scenes, one of the roasting ox, and the other of the dying Darius.

The light scene results from a broad hint to Edwin from Auntie Hamps, bringing into the open the accepted fact that Janet is waiting for Edwin. Janet appears to announce in a challenging and excited way that her younger sister is going to be married. The next scene in the book pictures Edwin and Janet playing tennis in the sunshine. Edwin admires her vivacity and fine figure, as it appears in her white tennis clothes, and he thinks of proposing. He thinks of a life with Janet, "and even the vision of it dazzled him." But he could not propose.

He remembered Hilda with painful intensity. He remembered the feel of her frock under his hand in the cubicle, and the odour of her flesh that was like fruit. His cursed constancy! . . . [Arnold Bennett's elipses] Could he not get Hilda out of his bones? Did she sleep in his bones like a balady that awakes whenever it is disrespectfully treated?

He grew melancholy. Accustomed to savour the sadness of existence, he soon accepted the new mood without resentment. He resigned himself to the destruction of his dream. He was like a captive whose cell has been opened in mistake, and who is too gentle to rave when he sees it shut again.

This is typically Bennett: human disappointment expressed in terms of external structures.

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Symbols for the expiration of the Victorian era.

Auntie Hamps, the roasting ox, and the dying Darius all symbolize the passing of the Victorian era. Bennett omnisciently informs the reader of the truth about Auntie Hamps when he writes the beginning of the birthday afternoon story:

Auntie Hamps came in, splendidly and yet soberly attired in black to face the world, with her upright vigorous figure, her sparkling eye, and her admirable complexion; self-content, smiling hospitably; quite unconscious that she was dead, and that her era was dead, and that Hilda was not guiltless of the murder.219

The symbolism for the death of Darius starts on Jubilee Day, with the infirm Darius sobbing sentimentally over the Queen. Edwin hadn't gone to the celebration in London because his father had taken a turn for the worse. Edwin walked in the square with Big James to view the ritual roasting of the ox. Their different versions of what they saw demonstrate Bennett's skill in presenting multiple points of view. Edwin sees the ox first:

... there at the foot of the Town Hall tower, and in its scanty shadow, a dead ox, slung by its legs from an iron construction, was frizzling over a great primitive fire.220

To Big James the ox is a symbol of Victorian majesty:

219 Ibid., p. 960.
220 Ibid., p. 381.
"It's a grand sight!" said Big James, with simple enthusiasm. "A grand sight! Real old English! And I wish her well!" He meant the Queen and Empress.221

Big James discovers that in the hot weather the meat has "turned." The old folks won't have their feast, but his enthusiasm is undaunted:

"What'll the old people say?" he demanded sadly.

"But it's a grand sight, turned or not!"222

The dead ox is viewed differently by Edwin:

The vast flanks of the animal, all rich yellows and browns, streamed with grease, some of which fell noisily on the almost invisible flames, while the rest was ingeniously caught in a system of runnels. The spectacle was obscene, nauseating to the eye, the nose, and the ear, and it powerfully recalled to Edwin the legends of the Spanish Inquisition. He speculated whether he would ever be able to touch beef again. Above the tortured and insulted corpse the air quivered in large waves. Mr. Doy, the leading butcher of Bursley, and now chief executioner, regarded with anxiety the operation which had been entrusted to him.223

Edwin and Big Jim part, one content, and the other filled with black and intense gloom. Edwin anticipates with loathing the family dinner party, involving the Benbows and Auntie Hamps, planned for that evening:

He pictured the repasts with savage gloating detestation—burnt ox, and more burnt ox, and the false odious brightness of a family determined to be mutually helpful and inspiring.224

221Ibid. 222Ibid., p. 382.
223Ibid., p. 381. 224Ibid., p. 382.
The relatives are supposedly coming to cheer up Darius, but the atmosphere between family members has been strained since Edwin blocked the borrowing of money from the ailing Darius by the Benbows. The spoiled ox is symbolic of falseness and spoiled relationships within the family. It is also symbolic of the Victorian era past its prime, and the approaching death of Darius.

When Albert Benbow tries to borrow money from the addled Darius, the symbolism of the carcass begins. Edwin thinks: "But they must settle on the old man instantly, like flies on a carcass!" Within a few days, Darius must be helped up the stairs for the last time by Edwin and Albert. The image of the ox is recalled:

One on either side, they got Darius to his feet, and slowly walked him out of the room. He was very exasperating. His weight and his inertia were terrible. The spectacle suggested that either Darius was pretending to be a carcass, or Edwin and Albert were pretending that a carcass was alive . . . . It was no longer a reasonable creature that they were getting upstairs, but an incalculable and mysterious beast.\(^{225}\)

Hepburn writes that Bennett uses the symbolism of a dying carnival elephant and a dying man the same way in The Old Wives' Tale: "The elephant is John Baines, the elephant is mid-Victorian England."\(^{226}\)

\(^{225}\)Ibid., pp. 368, 399.

\(^{226}\)Hepburn, p. 59.
Birth Imagery, and the Elements

While the boy Edwin is on the bridge, he asks Charlie why clay is brought to the Five Towns instead of the coal being taken to where the clay was. The focus of the reader on the relationship between people and their environment is thus constantly adjusted by the author. The scene is mirrored, twenty years later, when the boy George, Edwin's step-son, asks Edwin the same question, and Edwin recalls the original scene.

Edwin's original inquiry, together with facts and symbols supplied by the author, explain why the community came into being on this particular spot. Imagery suggesting the parallel between terrestrial creation and human birth are strong throughout the scene. The reader is quickly made aware of the juxtaposition of earth, fire, water, and air in the community, as well as within the boys standing on the bridge.

The boys stand on the bridge over an industrial canal on a "breezy" sun-lit afternoon. Clay comes up the canal in "long narrow" boats, while the finished product, the "crates of earthenware" pass out of the canal. As the boys watch the boats, "they can see, between the whitened tarpaulins, that the deep belly of the craft is filled with clay."

The author repeatedly takes the reader back to the

227Ibid., p. 5.
basic elements, as in this commentary on the education of Edwin: "For his personal enjoyment of the earth and air and sun and stars, and society and solitude, no preparation had been made, or dreamt of."²²⁸

Water and fire symbolism. Of all the symbolism of the elements, water symbolism is the strongest in Bennett's trilogy, recalling his statement quoted on page 6 above:

... A genuine observation of the supreme phenomenon that Great Britain is surrounded by water—an effort to keep it always at the back of the consciousness—will help to explain all the minor phenomena of British existence.²²⁹

Much of the water symbolism is in the nature of subliminal reminders, but in two scenes the water symbolism is major.

The water symbolism begins with the boys on the bridge, above the murky water of the industrial canal, and continues through the novels. The boys agree that if the race between the horses pulling the boats is close, it will be settled by their spitting downward, to form a liquid finish line. When the confrontation between Edwin and his father begins, Edwin is disheartened by his father's rudeness, but that rudeness "was only like foam on the great wave of his resentment."²³⁰

²²⁸Ibid., p. 11.
²²⁹Bennett, ed. Hynes, The Author's Craft, p. 9.
²³⁰Ibid., p. 141.
The quarrel which opens the *Hilda Lessways* book finds the young bored Hilda and her contented housewife mother united by "waves . . . of hostile love." The discontented Hilda "wilfully (sic) /Gathes/ herself in grim gloom." She is happy when visiting the Orgreaves; their garden is "swimming in fresh sunshine." 231

Edwin is timid about meeting Hilda for the first time, and after the ordeal is over he feels "the surprised relief of one who has plunged into the sea and discovers himself fairly buoyant on the threatening waves." When Hilda and Edwin are reconciled after their long separation, Edwin feels he is "drowning amid the waves of her terrible devotion." 232 After they have lived together for a time, Edwin realizes the extent of his preoccupation with Hilda, even in the face of the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Orgreaves:

> And as he tried to read her mood in her voice, the mysterious and changeful ever-flowing undercurrent of their joint life bore rushing away his sense of Janet's tragedy; and he knew that no events exterior to his marriage could ever overcome for long that constant secret preoccupation of his concerning Hilda's mood. 233

In maturity Edwin realizes that he is "not unhappy on the throbbing tossing steamer of humanity," and the extra servant who is called in to help with Christmas dinner, in spite of the needs of her own house, husband,

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232Ibid., p. 195 and 553.

233Ibid., p. 1033.
and children, has made her own adjustment to life: "She lived as naturally in injustice as a fish in water."\(^{234}\)

On the morning of her mother's funeral, Hilda went to the railway station to meet an uncle of Mrs. Lessways, and the people, as they surge in and out of the station, are pictured by Bennett in terms of water symbolism. They are "a dark torrent of human beings," a "quenchless stream" which thunders in a "torrent" into the "tributaries," which are the streets.\(^{235}\) Hilda has a nervous breakdown, and is not able to attend the funeral of her mother.

She becomes an employee of George Cannon, and later marries him. The proposal scene is awash with water symbolism. As she and George walk away from the boarding house, "Hilda felt like a mariner who has escaped from a lee shore, but who is beset by the vaguer and even more formidable perils of the open sea." They walk up "Ship Street." Hilda is agonized, but "at the same time she had the desperate calm of the captain of a ship about to founder with all hands."\(^{236}\)

As Hilda is carried away by her infatuation with George, the water symbolism builds in intensity: "She was frightened. She was like some one walking secure in the night, who is stopped by the sound of rushing water . . . .\(^{237}\) an unseen and formidable river . . . . She was

\(^{234}\)Ibid., p. 1033. \(^{235}\)Ibid., p. 663. \(^{236}\)Ibid., pp. 773, 779, and 780.
thrillingly on its brink . . . She hears its swelling current plainer and plainer . . . She could feel, beating upon her, the emanating waves of his personality. She was . . . on the river, whirling . . . Colours were swimming in his eyes . . . Hilda felt the preoccupation of being whisked down the river."237

Fire symbolism. Fire, water, and birth symbolism come together in Bennett's description of streams of burning slag from the potbanks, which intrigue Edwin and Charlie as they leave the bridge. Barnard notes that this is a life symbol for this community.238 A few minutes later, Edwin, thinking of his new career, is filled with a holy fire of ambition.

After his confrontation with his father, Bennett portrays Edwin's defeat with a montage of symbols: the flame of his ambition is drowned by the strength of his father, the river; he stamps on the structure of his hopes, and sees things in their true light:

He saw how fantastic was the whole structure of his hopes. He wondered that he had ever conceived it even wildly possible that his father would consent to architecture as a career! To ask it was to ask absurdly too much of Fate. He demolished, with a violent and resentful impulse,

237Ibid., pp. 773, 779, 780, 782, 784.

238Barnard, p. 97.
the structure of his hopes; stamped on it angrily.

He was beaten. What could he do? He could do nothing against his father. He could no more change his father than the course of a river. He was beaten. He saw his case in its true light.239

Symbolism of the earth. Clay figures in the birth symbolism already mentioned: the initiate Edwin wonders why the industry that supports this community was born on this spot, and his step-son makes the same inquiry in later years. Bennett reenforces the symbolism of the earth giving birth to the community in his summary of the deficiencies of Edwin's education:

Of geology he was perfectly ignorant, though he lived in a district whose whole livelihood depended on the scientific use of geological knowledge, and though the existence of Oldcastle itself was due to a freak of the earth's crust which geologists call a 'fault.'240

Hilda is referred to, by herself, and by Clara, as being like a stone that can't be altered. Edwin, hoping that his father will let him have his way in the choice of careers, refers to his father in terms applicable to the structure of the earth: "He was convinced, almost, that passionate faith could move mountainous fathers."241

Symbolism of the air. The air of the Five Towns almost always contains water, forming fog, or products from

239Ibid., p. 141. 240Ibid., p. 10.
fire, forming smoke, as in this example, wherein Bennett is describing the route of a train: "Often it ran level with the roofs of vague, far-stretching acres of houses--houses vile and frowsy, and smoking like pyres in the dank air."\(^{242}\)

The symbolism inherent in the phrase "smoking like pyres" immediately convinces the reader that the air of the Five Towns is far from hygienic; and that breathed by the laboring children is fetid, as the reader learns in a flashback picturing the working conditions endured by the child Darius:

... He descended by twenty steps to his toil, and worked in a long cellar which never received any air except by way of the steps and a passage, and never any daylight at all. Its sole illumination was a stove used for drying. The 'throwers' and the 'turners' rooms were also subterranean dungeons. When in full activity all these stinking cellars were full of men, boys, and young women, working close together in a hot twilight.\(^ {243}\)

**Repeated Numerals as Symbols**

Phrases referring to symbols are often repeated by Bennett, reenforcing the impression, strengthening the symbol, and increasing the structural cohesion. Numbers, which we use as symbols to represent realities, are often repeated in a single paragraph, for emphasis. The story of Darius is an illustration of this point.

\(^{242}\)Ibid., p. 657. \(^ {243}\)Ibid., pp. 29-30.
Darius was obliged, at the age of seven, to try to support his family. His father had been blacklisted "by every manufacturer in the district," because he had been "too prominent and too independent in a strike." The reader comes to understand the harsh Darius as Edwin never does, as the shamed Darius keeps this history a secret from his family. Repetitions of the contrasting words "man" and "seven" furnish a picture of a horrendous childhood:

At the age of seven, his education being complete, he was summoned into the world. It is true that he could neither write nor deal with the multiplication table; but there were always night-schools which studious adults of seven and upwards might attend if business permitted. Further, there was the Sunday school, which Darius had joyously frequented since the age of three, and which he had no intention of leaving . . . . The man Darius was first taken to work by his mother . . . . As no man of seven could reach the upper shelves, a pair of steps was provided for Darius, and up these he had to scamper. He had to put plates up on the shelves to bake, and he had to mix the clay by cutting a huge lump in half with a wire. Then he lifted up one half and crashed it down on the other. At a later period it was discovered that hydraulic machinery could perform this operation more easily and more effectually than the brawny arms of a man of seven.

Many long passages in Bennett repeat words until they function almost as symbols. Much could be said about Bennett's clever use of language; perhaps a brief digression will here be permitted: When Edwin is informed that the Marrions are not coming to a concert, Edwin is not surprised, since he knew that the "Marrions were not

\[244\text{ Ibid., p. 32.} \quad 245\text{ Ibid., pp. 26-27.}\]
interested in interesting music." Another example of Bennett's short clever phrases is his reference to the advancing maturity of George Jr.: "He had grown much in twelve months, and was more than twelve months older."  

The Symbolism of Names

All of the names in The Clayhanger Family are carefully selected for their meaning; Bennett evidently consulted a book of Christian names in labeling his characters. Some of the characters, though, have names of symbolic meaning.

The repeated "sh sh" sounds in Mr. Shushions' name suggests secrecy. He knew the story of the childhood of Darius, and because Darius was ashamed to let his family know his history, his family ironically never realizes its' debt to the old Sunday school superintendent.

The names of the other men of religion in the novel are as innocuous as Mr. Shushions'; they are Mr. Flowerdew and Mr. Peartree.

The name "Clayhanger" is an appropriate choice of names in this pottery-making economy, where the father, as a child, worked in clay. Several critics think that Edwin's last name may indicate that Edwin is a Christ symbol.

When Edwin loses his betrothed to an older man named "Cannon," it is evident that the name symbolizes

246 Ibid., p. 1005. 247 Ibid., p. 1074.
lethal damage to Edwin:

When he tried to reflect, the top of his head seemed as though it would fly off. . . . Cannon! She was with Cannon somewhere at that very instant . . . . She had specially asked that he should be told. And indeed he had been told before even Mr. and Mrs. Orgreave . . . . Cannon! She might at that very instant be in Cannon's arms. All ellipses are Bennett's.

Proper names and their prefixes are always symbolic in Bennett, a factor which will be noted at appropriate intervals. Edwin's errand as he comes home from school for the last time, takes him to Big James, the chief printer. This time he calls Edwin "Mister," instead of the usual "Master," a clear symbol to Edwin that the adults in the business expect him to stay in the business.

Hilda gives her child, born of a fraudulent marriage to George Cannon, a name symbolic of what he hopes her future, and the future of the child will be. She names the boy George Edwin Cannon. When Edwin hears the boy's name, he understands the significance of it, and responds to Hilda's desires.

Prophecy and Reality

Structural cohesion is increased by the stated thoughts about the future of every character. The careful author always follows through, so that the reader is aware of the fulfillment or the shattering of the prophetic

248 Ibid., p. 312.
vision. The prophecies for the marriage of Hilda and Janet are the best examples of this. Hilda first thinks of marrying Edwin before she meets him. She has only seen him in the window of his shop, and asks Janet about him:

Without being in the least aware of it, and quite innocently, Janet had painted a picture of the young man, Edwin Clayhanger, which intensified a hundred-fold the strong romantic piquancy of Hilda's brief vision of him. In an instant Hilda saw her ideal future—that future which had loomed grandiose, indefinite, and strange—she saw it quite precise and simple as the wife of such a creature as Edwin Clayhanger.

... It did not occur to her to think of Janet as in the future a married woman. 249

Janet is, on other occasions, described as a "destined queen of the home," but the author is later forced to explain that though Janet waits for Edwin, Edwin waits only for Hilda, and Janet's youthful beauty and energy are expended in caring for her aging parents.

Edwin dreams of marriage to Hilda, years after she had jilted him, but without conviction; he compares the falseness of that vision with the unreality of political situations, as he reads the paper:

... The Irish members withdrawn from Westminster! A separate nation! Surely Gladstone could not mean it! The project had the same air of unreality as that of his marriage with Hilda. It did not convince. It was too good to be true. It could not materialize itself. And yet, as his glance... jumped /From column to column of the newspaper/... the sense of unreality did depart... 250

249 Ibid., p. 687. 250 Ibid., p. 319.
Hilda watches Edwin at the home of the Orgreaves', and wonders who will be at the foot of the table he will head:

It was strange to think that this wistful and apparently timid young man, this nice boy, would one day be the head of a household, and of a table such as this! Yes, it would assuredly arrive! Everything happened. And the mother of that household? Would it be she? 251

Hilda seeks Edwin out in the garden of his new home, and then is uncomfortable about her impulsive behavior. She makes a true prediction of the trouble her impulsive behavior will bring her in the future, though the trouble will come through George, rather than Edwin:

... She had said nothing to anybody of the deliberately sought adventure in the garden. And with the strangest ingenuous confidence she assumed that Edwin Clayhanger, too, would keep an absolute silence about it . . . . She did not blame herself--it never occurred to her to do so--but she rather wondered at herself, inimically, prophesying that one day her impulsive-ness would throw her into some serious difficulty. The memory of the night beautifully coloured her whole daily existence. 252

Many years later Hilda remembers having the vision of being married to Edwin, and her dreams are fulfilled.

251 Ibid., p. 702.
252 Ibid., p. 712.
Chapter 3

IRONY

Bennett's irony permeates the entire structure of his trilogy. The use of irony to analyze small incidents as they occur has been pointed out as those incidents were discussed. Circumstances are also often ironic in the writings of Bennett, and ironic comments on individuals, religion, and the society are often made.

The irony of Mr. Shushions' death, that he should die in the workhouse he saves Darius from, has already been pointed out. The relationship of Janet and Hilda has ironic overtones; Hilda meets Edwin through Janet, and the news of George's starving sister, which results in Hilda's loyalty to George and the sister, is brought by Janet to Hilda. Hilda marries twice, while Janet does not marry. Hilda is aware that she is coming between Edwin and Janet, when she has already been secretly married to, and separated from George Cannon:

... She thought: "I am here on false pretences. I ought to tell my secret. That would be fair—I have no right to intrude between her and him."

But she instinctively and powerfully resisted such ideas; with firmness she put them away, and yielded herself with a more exquisite apprehension to the anticipation of tomorrow.253

253Ibid., p. 843.
Hilda is, however, forced to return to the boarding house, because Sarah needs her. Hilda writes a passionate note to Edwin, which will be her last communication with him for ten years. She does not realize that she is pregnant when she writes him: "Every bit of me is absolutely yours."254

Religious people are often pictured in Bennett as either hypocrites (as Auntie Hamps, and the Benbows), or as captives. At the great Centennial celebration, the children are not the contented lambs of Christianity, but belabored sheep; the officials are "rosettes":

... The thousands of perspiring children, penned like sheep, and driven to and fro like sheep by anxious and officious rosettes, nearly all had the air of poverty decently putting the best face on itself; ... they were wistful with the resigned fatalism of the young and of the governed.255

The minister is also ironically pictured; he must make a career of diplomacy, and must not question intellectually:

... Again, the canons rigorously forbade him to think freely for himself on the subjects which in theory most interested him; with the result that he had remained extremely ignorant through the very fear of knowledge, that he was a warm enemy of freedom, and that he habitually carried intellectual dishonesty to the verge of cynicism ... He was so sick of being all things to all men that he even dreamed diplomatic dreams as a galley-slave will dream of the oar.256

256Ibid., p. 848. 257Ibid., p. 1039.
When the religious Albert swears, and his son overhears the oath, "he at once began to make Bert suffer." 257

There are ironic aspects to the society considered as a whole, and also in individual behavior. In the first bridge scene, Bennett skillfully relates the environment to the human community. His ironically repeated phrase, "the fine and ancient borough" eventually convinces the reader that though the borough may be ancient, it is far from being fine. The omniscient author calls the attention of the reader to the stupidity of a populace which requires a "vicious Parliamentary fight" before the canal can be built. The populace is also puzzled by its provincialism, at the same time that it requires the railroad to stay away from the Five Towns, running instead through vacant fields five miles away. The reader soon understands the relationship between people and their environment: the people are blighted by their political and educational systems, as the landscape and buildings are blighted by smoke and an attitude of slovenly "make-do."

As Edwin returns home from school that last time, the ironic Bennett comments on the difference in the way animals and children are typically treated in this society:

... And now his education was finished. It had cost his father twenty-eight shillings a term, or four guineas a year, and no trouble. In younger days his father had spent more money and far more personal attention on the upbringing of a dog. His father had enjoyed success with dogs through treating them as individuals. But it had not happened to him, nor to anybody in authority, to treat Edwin as an
individual. Nevertheless it must not be assumed that Edwin's father was a callous and conscienceless brute, and Edwin a martyr of neglect. Old Clayhanger was, on the contrary, an average upright and respectable parent who had given his son a thoroughly sound education, and Edwin had had the good fortune to receive that thoroughly sound education as a preliminary to entering the world.

Bennett pictures a society and individuals who, ironically, enjoy their discomforts. Hilda plans to accompany the ailing Janet on a journey: "And the prospect of the long, jolting, acutely depressing drive through the mud and rain to Knype Vale, and of the interminable train journey with a tragic convalescent, braced her." English society as a whole (at least as represented by the Five Towns) behaves the same way: "The hardy inhabitants of the Five Towns, Hilda among them, were bracing themselves to the discipline of winter, with its mud, increased smuts, sleet, and damp, piercing chills; and they were taking pleasure in the tonic prospect of discomfort."

Edwin's pride in his household managerial skills is ironically pictured: "He regarded himself as ... superior in wisdom, and he was relieved that anyone so wise and balanced as Edwin Clayhanger had taken supreme charge of the household organism." Even Edwin enjoys the bad luck of others: ". . . And in a moment, with

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258Ibid., p. 12. 259Ibid., p. 1083.
260Ibid., p. 1153. 261Ibid., p. 1209.
eagerness, with that strange, deep satisfaction felt by the
carrier of disastrous tidings, he told Ingpen all that he
knew of the plight of Janet Orgreave." 262 (Her parents had
both died, and left her penniless.)

At the celebration of the marriage of Hilda and
Edwin, Clara, Albert, and Auntie Hamps enjoy explaining
Hilda's previous marital mishap. As they walk of it with
the guests, they are pictured as "lucciously bathing in
the fluid of scandal." 263 When they bring their son Bert
to the Clayhanger house, and are preparing to force him to
apologize to George for some boyhood prank, they "could
not have been more pleased and uplifted had the occasion
been a mourning visit of commiseration or even a fun-
eral." 264

Auntie Hamps also wanted to convey the news of
Janet's bad luck to someone. The family had been visiting
the new plant, and Clara had left before the bad news was
brought in. Auntie Hamps was "secretly panting to dis-
close the whole situation to dear Clara. What a scene
had Clara missed by leaving the works too soon." 265

Auntie Hamps had enjoyed magnificent health, but
then her heart began to fail her. News of her first attack

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262 Ibid., p. 1045. 263 Ibid., p. 905.
264 Ibid., p. 1034. 265 Ibid., p. 1066.
is ironically expressed: "This was the first of Mrs. Hamps's fatal heart-attacks ... Edwin and Hilda had the same thought: 'At last something has happened to Auntie Hamps!' And it gave zest." 266 George's recitation is disturbed by the excitement of Auntie Hamps's illness: "His elocution to-night was unusually bad, for the reason that he had been pleasurably excited by the immense news of Auntie Hamps's illness ... such notable events gave a sensational interest to domestic life which domestic life as a rule lacked." 267

The name "George" means "husbandman," in the "farmer" connotation; 268 but the fey irony of Arnold Bennett may here be discerned, since George Cannon was twice married, the second time falsely, and the first time only temporarily. Bennett's attempt at subtle irony gave him problems with the naming of Clayhanger:

Today in the forest I practically arranged most of the construction of the first part of the novel. Still lacking a title for it. If I thought an ironic title would do, I would call it A Thoughtful Young Man. But the public is so damned slow in the uptake. 269

266Ibid., pp. 1142, 266.

267Ibid., p. 267.


Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

When Virginia Woolf and Henry James attacked Arnold Bennett, it was no one-sided battle; Bennett gave as good as he got. Because he was the foremost critic of his day, he no doubt initiated many of the arguments.

Bennett's criticism of Woolf's Jacob's Room was the opening gun in their battle over characterization. Though the conflict became personal, both Bennett and Woolf recognized that the real cause of their dispute was a literary generation gap. Bennett said that he regarded Jacob's Room as characteristic of the new novelists who had recently gained the attention of the alert and the curious. He said that he could detect no embryonic great novelists.270

Mrs. Woolf replied that his statement was all to the good--a symptom of the respectful hostility which she considered to be the healthiest relationship between young and old writers.271 Later she said that the Edwardian tools were the wrong ones for young authors to use.272

270 Bennett, The Author's Craft, ed. Hynes, p. 88.
271 Woolf, The Author's Craft, ed. Hynes, p. 269.
272 Woolf, Collected Essays, p. 332.
Vestiges of romantic traits in the realistic Bennett are, in this year of 1975, more visible than formerly, and some offend the modern reader. Virginia Woolf said that Bennett attempted to hypnotize the reader with a stream of unorganized detail. Bennett acknowledged his fondness for facts. This thesis has demonstrated that the detail was not unorganized. Bennett's technique was effective with the Edwardian reader, but the hypnotic trance is shattered for the modern reader by the omniscience of the author, the uneven meld of romantic and realistic, the obvious attempts to "buck up" the trilogy here and there, and the use of melodramatic language. Bennett's stoic English characters, especially Edwin, strive continually to achieve zest, in spite of the "melancholy of life," and the "deep sadness which pervades all romance, beauty, and adventure." His characters search for wonder, and the omniscient author frequently reminds the reader of the lack of perceptiveness in his characters when they fail to note the beauty of nature, architecture, or the uniqueness of a situation.


274 Bennett, The Truth About an Author, p. 7.
Bennett set for himself an impossible goal. He believed that "all ugliness has an aspect of beauty. The business of the artist is to find that aspect." Though Bennett's search for beauty led him to some omniscient excesses, he did not by any device isolate himself from his readers or his story, as he felt James did. The reverse of the picture of James's weaknesses as outlined by Bennett provides a picture of Bennett's own strengths. Bennett pictured all of life, the full circle. He says that because the personal life of James was so strictly circumscribed, his novels are also. James's writings did not keep the attention of Bennett:

James was a man without a country. He never married. He never, so far as is commonly known, had a love-affair worthy of the name. And I would bet a fiver that he never went into a public-house and had a pint of beer—or even a half-a-pint. He was naive, innocent, and ignorant of fundamental things to the last. He possessed taste, but his taste lacked robustness. He had the most delicate perceptions; but he perceived things with insufficient emotion. He was mortally afraid of being vulgar, and even of being carried away. My notion is that most first-rate creative artists simply do not know what vulgarity is. They go right on, and if it happens to them to be vulgar in the stress of emotion, well, it happens to them—and they are forgiven.

Bennett was, on occasion, vulgar, and he did not fear "being carried away." Occasionally Bennett is carried


away to the point that he lacks credibility, as in the following instances. When George Jr. was seriously ill of the flu, Maggie's eyes "gleamed" with tears of sympathy. A moment later, when Maggie is told that the vicar, in whom she is romantically interested, has died, Bennett would have us believe this biological impossibility: "The tears vanished from Maggie's eyes, forced backwards by all the secret pride that was in her."277

Another scene, typical of many which seem to be romantically overblown, is the reconciliation scene with Hilda. Bennett stereographically pictures Hilda's infatuation with George, furnishing an impression of the young woman's emotions when the romance is blooming, and a totally different picture when Hilda initiates a reconciliation with Edwin ten years later. The Hilda Lessways story pictures Hilda being carried away on a sea of desire as she dreams "only of the union."278

Ten years later, the story is different. As Hilda kneels before Edwin, who is sitting in his father's old chair, she tells him:

"My heart never kissed any other man but you!" she cried. "How often and often and often have I kissed you, and you never knew! . . . It was for a message that I sent George down here--a message

277 Bennett, The Clayhanger Family, p. 521.
278 Ibid., p. 798.
to you! I named him after you . . . . Do you think that if dreams could make him your child—he wouldn't be yours?"279 Bennet's elipses.

Hilda's reaction to her pregnancy is expressed in the melodramatic language which occurs often in Bennett:
"She bit her lips. Grief! Shame! Disillusion! Hardship! Peril! Catastrophe! Exile! Above all, exile!"280

Because he was a critic, a writer, and a student of literature, Bennett knew that his techniques were transitional. He stated this in impersonal terms in 1913, as he composed an article giving advice to young authors:

No novelist has yet, or ever will, come within a hundred million miles of life itself. It is impossible for us to see how far we still are from life. The defects of a new convention disclose themselves late in its career. The notion that "naturalists" have at last lighted on a final formula which ensures truth to life is ridiculous. "Naturalist" is merely an epithet expressing self-satisfaction.281

Bennett had already noted signs indicating that his techniques would perhaps be superseded by new techniques. He was an amateur painter, and when he first encountered impressionistic painting at an exhibition, he saw implications for literature. He writes here of how impressionism in art made him impatient with his usual writing techniques:

279Ibid., p. 553. 280Ibid., p. 785.
281Bennett, ed. Hynes, The Author's Craft, p. 23.
Noting in myself that a regular contemplation of these pictures inspires a weariness of all other pictures that are not absolutely first-rate, giving them a disconcerting affinity to the tops of chocolate-boxes, or to "art" photographs, I have permitted myself to suspect that supposing some writer were to come along and do in words what these men have done in paint, I might conceivably be disgusted with nearly the whole of modern fiction, and I might have to begin again. This awkward experience will in all probability not happen to me, but it might happen to a writer younger than me. At any rate it is a fine thought. The average critic always calls me, both in praise and dispraise, "photographic"; and I always rebut the epithet with disdain, because in the sense meant by the average critic I am not photographic. But supposing that in a deeper sense I were? Supposing a young writer turned up and forced me, and some of my contemporaries--us who fancy ourselves a bit--to admit that we had been concerning ourselves unduly with inessentials, that we had been worrying ourselves to achieve infantile realisms? Well, that day would be a great and a disturbing day--for us.282

Virginia Woolf read the above essay, and finally wrote a tribute to Bennett, saying that because he can acknowledge that the new techniques coming in may be better, he thereby proves that he is a "creative artist":

And suppose . . . Mr. Bennett has to admit that he has been concerning himself unduly with inessentials, that he has been worrying himself to achieve infantile realisms? He will admit it, we are sure; and that he can ask himself such a question seems to us certain proof that he is what he claims to be--a "creative artist."283


Virginia Woolf's tribute would, naturally, contain a drop of gall: the repetition of Bennett's reference to "infantile realisms." Bennett began to have doubts about his extensive use of detail, but there is no doubt that his detail is organized and systemized. He gives us a picture in depth of a society, and of ordinary individuals within that society. Bennett says that his photographs of society and individuals are deliberately underdeveloped. 284 Though he feels no shame in writing for money, he also wants to create classics. According to his own definition: "The beauty of a classic is not at all apt to knock you down. It will steal over you, rather." 285

Bennett accomplishes this in The Clayhanger Family. The reader presently finds himself under the spell of the "four-square gospeler" 286 who loves life, but looks at it unblinkingly. Structural cohesion results from the use of detail organized through symbolism, irony, and the mirror scenes which round out the circles of life. The reader lives through the "slow muddle, murmur and diurnal perturbation" 287 of the circles of life of that small segment of humanity known as the Clayhanger family.


285 Arnold Bennett, Literary Taste, p. 63.

286 Pritchett, p. 169.

287 Ibid., p. 172.
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