

BUTLER, HARDY, GALSWORTHY, BENNETT AND
D. H. LAWRENCE AS WRITERS OF THE FAMILY CHRONICLE NOVEL:
A STUDY OF TWO GENERATIONS OF POSSIBILITIES OF THE FORM

by
LANA SIMPSON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the Department
of
English

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September, 1971

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Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date Sept. 27, 1971

ABSTRACT

The English family chronicle novel is a comparatively recent phenomenon. It occurred as a reflection of the controversies of nineteenth-century natural science over evolutionary development—directly, in Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh, and indirectly, as English novelists felt the influence of French naturalism.

Because the emergence of the family chronicle novel is so closely bound up with naturalism, nowhere can we more clearly see the reaction to naturalism worked out than in the Victorian and Edwardian family chronicles. Very often, to understand the way in which a given novel is a family chronicle—that is, how the author has used the form for his own purposes—is to define the author's stance toward naturalism. In this thesis, I examine works of five chronicle writers—Butler, Hardy, Galsworthy, Bennett, and Lawrence—and argue that a measure of the success of the works as family chronicles is the degree to which the artists succeed in overcoming the inherent limitations of the naturalist convention, even as they used the form bequeathed by it. I suggest that D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow is the most interesting of these family chronicles because he has used aspects of the art of Butler and Hardy, in order to create in opposition to Bennett and Galsworthy. He works with the

underlying concerns of naturalism in order to transform them into a passionate denial of the determinist attitude implicit in naturalism.

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CHAPTER I

The family chronicle is a way of recounting experience that is probably as old as men's desire to understand their own lives in relation to the immediate past. Aeschylus and Sophocles fashioned tragedies within the terms of the histories of families; the writers of the Old Testament recounted their history as a series of family chronicles; Shakespeare not only gave an account of historical events in his chronicle plays, but made the form serve as a complex realization of such abstractions as the notion of kingship.

The usefulness of the family chronicle structure to the novelist who wants to give imaginative ordering to social history is obvious. It allows for a patterning of events so as to explain the characteristics of succeeding generations in terms of the first; the success or failure of the characters at social and individual fulfillment may be either explicitly measured or implicitly revealed through the juxtaposition of generations. The author's emphasis, of course, may fall in any one of several directions. He may stress the way the social fortunes of a family rise or decline, or the progress toward a personal fulfillment which is less contingent upon social forces than upon inherited personal

characteristics. At its best, the family chronicle allows for a complex portrayal of that perennial concern of the realist novel, the interaction of individual fulfillment and general social conditions.

Nevertheless, the English family chronicle novel is a comparatively recent phenomenon. It occurred as a reflection of the controversies of nineteenth-century natural science over evolutionary development—directly, in Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh, and indirectly, as English novelists felt the influence of French naturalism.

Naturalism—"realism with scientific pretensions," as it has been defined—was the literary movement which most thoroughly expressed the prevailing confidence in the methods and usefulness of contemporary science. By and large, naturalism remained an alien influence in English literature; it never became indigenous, even though its influence upon English writers—who, after all, had to come to terms with the same issues that provoked naturalism in France—was enormous. We have few thoroughly naturalist novels in English, and those that we do have—for example, George Moore's The Mummer's Wife—are carefully and consciously created after French models. Naturalism remained a strain in English realism which was either an emulation (perfectly successful, in Arnold Bennett's Riceyman Steps) of the artistic successes

of French naturalism, or equally deliberate transformation, modification, or reaction to the French sources.

Precisely because the emergence of the family chronicle novel is so closely bound up with naturalism, nowhere can we more clearly see the reaction to naturalism worked out than in the Victorian and Edwardian family chronicles. Very often, to understand the way in which a given novel is a family chronicle—that is, how the author has used the form for his own purposes—is to define the author's stance toward naturalism. In this thesis, I shall examine works of five chronicle writers—Butler, Hardy, Galsworthy, Bennett, and D. H. Lawrence—and argue that a measure of the success of the works as family chronicles is the degree to which the artists succeed in overcoming the inherent limitations of the naturalist convention, even as they use the form bequeathed by it.

To its chief theoretician, naturalism was as undebatable as a natural force—indeed, was the literary product of evolution. In Le roman expérimental, Zola confidently asserted:

...the experimental novel is a consequence of the scientific evolution of the century; it continues and completes physiology, which itself leans for support on chemistry and medicine; it substitutes for the study of the abstract and metaphysical man the study of the natural man, governed by physical and chemical laws, and modified

by the influences of his surroundings; it is in one word the literature of our scientific age, as the classical and romantic literature corresponded to a scholastic and theological age.¹

This manifesto of French naturalism expresses a confidence not only in the general direction of contemporary science, but in its direct benefits to mankind, which is unusual in its optimism even for its time:

We shall enter upon a century in which man, grown more powerful, will make use of nature and will utilize its laws to produce upon the earth the greatest possible amount of justice and freedom. There is no nobler, higher, nor grander end. Here is our rôle as intelligent beings: to penetrate to the wherefore of things, to become superior to these things, and to reduce them to a condition of subservient machinery.

Well, this dream of the physiologist and the experimental doctor is also that of the novelist, who employs the experimental method in his study of man as a simple individual and as a social animal. Their object is ours; we also desire to master certain phenomena of an intellectual and personal order, to be able to direct them. We are, in a word, experimental moralists, showing by experiment in what way a passion acts in a certain social condition. The day in which we gain control of the mechanism of this passion we can treat it and reduce it, or at least make it as inoffensive as possible. And in this consists the practical utility and high morality of our naturalistic works, which experiment on man, and which dissect piece by piece this human machinery in order to set it going through the influence of the environment. When things had advanced

further, when we are in possession of the different laws, it will only be necessary to work upon the individuals and surroundings if we wish to find the best social condition. In this way we shall construct a practical sociology, and our work will be a help to political and economical sciences. I do not know, I repeat, of a more noble work, nor of a grander application. To be the master of good and evil, to regulate life, to regulate society, to solve in time all the problems of socialism, above all, to give justice a solid foundation by solving through experiment the questions of criminality—is not this being the most useful and the most moral workers in the human workshop?²

Zola's view of the social function of the novelist—the naturalist novelist, that is—may seem somewhat grandiose. Nevertheless, it is not without precedent in its belief in the enormous social importance of the work of a conscientious realist novelist; it builds upon Balzac's Preface to La comédie humaine:

Thus Walter Scott raised to the dignity of the philosophy of History the literature which, from age to age, sets perennial gems in the poetic crown of every nation where letters are cultivated. He vivified it with the spirit of the past; he combined drama, dialogue, portrait, scenery, and description; he fused the marvellous with truth—the two elements of the times; and he brought poetry into close contact with the familiarity of the humblest speech. But as he had not so much devised a system as hit upon a manner in the ardour of his work, or as its logical outcome, he never thought of connecting his compositions in such a way as to form a complete history of

of which each chapter was a novel, and each novel the picture of a period.

It was by discerning this lack of unity, which in no way detracts from the Scottish writer's greatness, that I perceived at once the scheme and the possibility of executing it. Though dazzled, so to speak, by Walter Scott's amazing fertility, always himself and always original, I did not despair, for I found the source of his genius in the infinite variety of human nature. Chance is the greatest romancer in the world; we have only to study it. French society would be the real author; I should only be the secretary. By drawing up an inventory of vices and virtues, by collecting the chief facts of the passions, by depicting characters, by choosing the principal incidents of social life, by composing types out of a combination of homogeneous characteristics, I might perhaps succeed in writing the history which so many historians have neglected: that of Manners.³

In his estimation of the social importance of the novelist, we see that Zola needed only to substitute "natural law" where Balzac still has the ideals of truth and beauty:

The work, so far, was nothing. By adhering to the strict lines of a reproduction a writer might be a more or less faithful, and more or less successful painter of types of humanity, a narrator of the dramas of private life, an archaeologist of social furniture, a cataloguer of professions, a registrar of good and evil; but to deserve the praise of which every artist must be ambitious, must I not also investigate the reasons or cause of these social effects, detect the hidden sense of this vast assembly of figures, passions, and incidents? And finally, having sought—

I will not say having found—this reason, this motive power, must I not reflect on first principles, and discover in what particulars societies approach or deviate from the eternal law of truth and beauty? In spite of the wide scope of the preliminaries, which might of themselves constitute a book, the work, to be complete, would need a conclusion. Thus depicted, society ought to bear in itself the reason of its working.

The law of the writer, in virtue of which he is a writer, and which I do not hesitate to say makes him the equal, or perhaps the superior, of the statesman, is his judgment, whatever it may be, on human affairs, and his absolute devotion to certain principles. Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bossuet, Leibnitz, Kant, Montesquieu are the science which statesmen apply.⁴

Thus, Zola borrowed from Balzac and adapted his view of the function of the novelist as well as his plan to write a cycle of novels so as to illustrate the forces of environment as the determining factors in men's lives. Zola, however, added another determinant—that which causes us to distinguish between his sort of realism (that is, naturalism) and Balzac's realism. From his own excursions into scientific literature, he added the notion of heredity as a determining factor of equal importance to the forces of environment.

The chief scientific components of Zola's theoretical brew were Claude Bernard's Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale, upon which Le roman expérimental is

modelled so closely that "one medical reader has termed it a parody,"⁵ and Prosper Lucas' Traité philosophique de l'hérédité naturelle. The result was the plan for a vast novel-cycle, Les Rougon-Macquart: l'histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire. It is the chronicle of the two families stemming from a common progenetrix, Adelaide Foucque, through her brief marriage to the gardener Rougon, and her liason with the smuggler Macquart. The genetically determining forces are inherited alcoholism and criminality—only very dubiously "scientific" even in Zola's day. In the major novels of the cycle, they tend (mercifully) to fade into the background.

How much Zola broadened what Angus Wilson calls the "peculiarly silly" formulation of his family chronicle machinery—or rather, how much he enhanced it—is evident in Nana. It is not Zola the author, but the journalist in the novel who is concerned with the specifics of genetics in an article read by the aristocrat whom Nana, the Astarte of the Empire, will debase:

Muffat was reading slowly Fauchery's article, entitled "The Golden Fly," describing the life of a harlot, descended from four or five generations of drunkards, and tainted in her blood by a cumulative inheritance of misery and drink, which in her case has taken the form of a nervous exaggeration of the sexual instinct.⁶

Nana (who has earlier appeared as the unattractive child of the laundress, Gervaise, in L'Assommoir) is interesting not as the inheritrix of a given number of traits, but rather as the symbolic scourge of the generations of misery and degradation from which she stems. The power of the symbolic value with which Zola endows her increases toward the end of the novel. She lies dying of smallpox as the crowds, whose darling she once was, shout "À Berlin! À Berlin!" on the day of declaration of the war which was to end, not in the capture of the enemy capital, but in national humiliation and social chaos. That war and the ensuing consequences are the subject of La Débâcle:

In L'Assommoir we have to do with individuals; in Nana with society; in La Débâcle, with an entire nation. In L'Assommoir there are exhibited to us the vicious influences which beset the proletariat, the leaven of evil and uncleanness working amidst the haunts and hovels of the degraded poor. In Nana the poison spreads and eats its way like a cancer into the homes of those who live in the great world. In La Débâcle we see a chivalrous and gallant nation smitten to the earth because of the rottenness that has eaten out its manhood and destroyed its strength.⁷

This widening perspective entirely subsumes a literal-minded concern with heredity, which becomes transformed into something more potent, if less analysable—an almost mythic account of the past evils of society as they return in the

present, the heritage of the members of modern society.

Thus, from a not particularly promising initial plan, Zola went on to develop the chronicle structure of the novels so as to render not just the history of a family, but the experience of a modern society:

The complicated scheme of physical and mental inheritance, which Zola set forth in the genealogical trees he issued from time to time, became of less and less significance as the work proceeded. Nevertheless the family chronicle framework had great use in giving form and shape to the vast on-rush of ideas with which Zola was first assailed. Without its seeming limitation, he might never have dared to face his task. Apart from its subjective value, too, it must be admitted that the vision of a wandering brood, sprung from a tainted stem, burrowing and fighting its way through the shaking structure of the glittering Empire has a violent and dramatic quality which again and again returns to strike the reader, when, absorbed in the course of some independent narrative, he would think himself most remote from the family drama.⁸

In other words, Zola remains an interesting novelist (as distinct from journalist or sociologist) in his study of the "reciprocal effect of society on the individual and the individual on society."⁹ And in some instances, he was a good novelist on account of his theory and not in spite of it. The starkness of the "experimental" method can have the happiest results, as in the formal symmetry of the

beautifully designed L'Assommoir (a possibility of Zola's art, incidentally, which George Moore successfully emulated when he so beautifully rounded the plot of Esther Waters back upon itself, to end where the novel began).

Further, Zola successfully resolved other technical problems of novel-writing. He had not "invented" his subject material. The brothers Goncourt (whose Germinie Lacerteux is often used to date the beginning of naturalism in France) had, even without recourse to current scientific theories, decided that the earlier conventions of novel-writing had excluded too much of modern experience:

Living as we do in the nineteenth century, in an age of universal suffrage, of democracy, of liberalism, we asked ourselves the question whether what are called "the lower classes" had no rights in the novel; if that world beneath a world, the common people, must needs remain subject to the literary interdict, and helpless against the contempt of authors who have hitherto said no word to imply that the common people possess a heart and soul. We asked ourselves whether, in these days of equality in which we live, there are classes unworth the notice of the author and the reader, misfortunes too lowly, dramas too foul-mouthed, catastrophes too commonplace in the terror they inspire. We were curious to know if that conventional symbol of a forgotten literature, of a vanished society, Tragedy, is definitely dead; if, in a country where castes no longer exist and aristocracy has no legal

status, the miseries of the lowly and poor would appeal to public interest, emotion, compassion, as forcibly as the miseries of the great and the rich; if, in a word, the tears that are shed in low life have the same power to cause tears to flow as the tears shed in high life.¹⁰

But Zola did develop techniques of dealing successfully with the inarticulate characters which such an expansion of the subject matter of the novel involves.

First, he makes use of a slightly more articulate protagonist who is himself an alien observer (thereby, at the least, giving the author a formal reason for interpreting events)--for example, Jean in La Terre or Etienne in Germinal. Second, he manages people in the mass extraordinarily well. What he forsakes in individuality by dealing with people in a rather generalized way, he regains by the tendency of his novels toward the epic. The epic quality, it is true, is most apparent in the sheer size of his enterprise: "The grandiose suggests the epic and is akin to the mythical."¹¹ But individual novels are also epic in the very breadth of the author's social consciousness, in the seriousness of his wish to interpret modern experience in order that it might be re-ordered successfully, in his confidence that he is aligned with the scientific progress of his time.

When Zola's English disciple, George Moore, self-

consciously ushered naturalism into English literature with the publication of The Mummer's Wife, he neither felt it necessary to carry over the naturalist pre-occupation with biological determinism nor the social epic scale of Les Rougon-Macquart. For Moore, naturalism itself was a literary technique--a matter of tone, and subject matter, and aesthetic distancing. It was not a serious way of coming to terms with reality. When he wanted to work beyond its limits, he did not take pains to transform its limitations (which, indeed, he scarcely seemed to feel), but simply discarded the technique. But for all the following writers except Galsworthy, the determinism of which naturalism was the literary expression was a serious issue. Even as they used the techniques which Zola and other French naturalists had perfected, and the family chronicle forms which was the natural expression of the preoccupation with hereditary determinism, they worked out their reservations about the naturalists' fundamental assumption:

With living beings as well as inanimate ones, the conditions of the existence of each phenomenon are determined in an absolute manner.¹²

Samuel Butler, of course, reacted not to naturalism as a literary convention, but directly against the limiting notion of biological determinism which underlay it. The Way of All Flesh is an important novel not just because it

is the first family chronicle novel in English—and of all those which I shall discuss the one most thoroughly concerned with the heredity theme concomitant to the form—but also because it points the way around the confines of naturalist determinism.

Both Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure contain the marks of the controversy over biological determinism. Moreover, in its portrait of the pressures of modern urban life, Jude the Obscure shows the influence of naturalism. But Hardy seizes upon the mechanics of biological determinism for his own purposes, which are quite other than the scoring of points in the debate over natural science. He uses the whole question of biological determinism in a metaphoric way, subsuming it into a Schopenhauerian pattern of metaphysical evolution, in order to create a myth of modern experience. Determinism in these two novels is the modern guise of tragic fatalism.

Among the Edwardian writers of family chronicles, John Galsworthy is least concerned with naturalism. I will argue that The Forsyte Saga is a failure in part because Galsworthy consistently begs the questions about modern life that naturalism poses, just as he fails to make meaningful use of the heredity theme which is implicit in his material.

Where Galsworthy is furthest removed from the

naturalists, Arnold Bennett is closest to them in declared allegiance and style. But by the very tact with which he handles the questions of heredity and environment, by unifying them into a single concern—the study of a given environment at the point of evolving away from its native strengths—we are discouraged from thinking in the naturalist terms of environmental and hereditary determinism. What in a naturalist novel is determined, seems (less portentously) inevitable in the Bennett family chronicles.

Of these authors, D. H. Lawrence reacts most profoundly against any notion of determinism such as is implicit in naturalism. In the Lawrence chronicles, The Lost Girl and The Rainbow, we find the most thorough working out of an anti-naturalist stance which also rejects the anglicized naturalism of Arnold Bennett. But Lawrence, as a serious innovating artist using the family chronicle form in original ways, also held Galsworthy in contempt. It is not too much to say that Lawrence learned from Butler and Hardy ways to create in opposition to such writers as Bennett and Galsworthy.

All of these authors (however problematically in the case of Butler, however hamfistedly in the case of Galsworthy) have a common purpose—to show English society in the process of evolving away from a localized, largely

agrarian past into the centralized urban culture of industrialism. The evolution into modernity is what these chronicles of individual families represent. Hardy and Lawrence incorporate into their works a felt response to the human consequences of that evolution, in the relationships between men and women. It is perhaps for that reason—that they have the most intricate concern for the relationship between individual lives and general social change—that the Hardy and Lawrence chronicles seem the most important to us. And it is precisely because Lawrence so perfectly adapts the chronicle form to his artistic purposes, makes it seem uniquely his own as he renders a complex and interesting account of the evolution of a family into modernity, that The Rainbow is of all these family chronicle novels in English at once the most fully achieved work of art and the most interesting as a family chronicle.

Footnotes - Chapter I

¹ Émile Zola, "The Novel as Social Science," The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature, ed. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 279.

² Ibid., pp. 279-80.

³ Honoré de Balzac, "Society as Historical Organism," Modern Tradition, p. 248.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 248-9.

⁵ Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 307.

⁶ Émile Zola, Nana, trans. John C. Lapp (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 234.

⁷ Émile Zola, La Terre, trans. Ernest Dowson, Intro. Harry Thurston Peck (New York: Liveright, 1924 [1895]), Introduction, vi.

⁸ Angus Wilson, Émile Zola: An Introductory Study of His Novels (London: Secker and Warburg, 1952), p. 93.

⁹ Zola, "Novel as Social Science," Modern Tradition, p. 278.

¹⁰ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, "Clinical Realism," Modern Tradition, p. 270.

¹¹ Elliot M. Grant, Zola's "Germinal": A Critical and Historical Study (Leicester Univ. Press, 1962), p. 23.

¹² Zola, "Novel as Social Science," Modern Tradition, p. 276. Zola is quoting Bernard.

CHAPTER II

In his study of Zola, Levin comments that:

...it was not until 1859, with the argument over Darwin's Origins of Species, that it became conceivable to view man as wholly a product of natural history.¹

Maurice, in La Debacle, justifies war as a forum for the "survival of the fittest." But the humanly abhorrent aspect of Darwinian theory had already been pointed out by the anarchist Souvarine to Etienne, in Germinal:

Etienne was now studying Darwin. He had read fragments, summarised and popularised in a five-sou volume; and out of this ill-understood reading he had gained for himself a revolutionary idea of the struggle for existence, the lean eating the fat, the strong people devouring the pallid middle class. But Souvarine furiously attacked the stupidity of the Socialists who accept Darwin, that apostle of scientific inequality, whose famous selection was only good for aristocratic philosophers. His mate persisted, however, wishing to reason out the matter, and expressing his doubts by an hypothesis: supposing the old society were no longer to exist, swept away to the crumbs; well, was it not to be feared that the new world would grow up again, slowly spoilt by the same injustices, some sick and others flourishing, some skilful and intelligent, fattening on everything, and others imbecile and lazy, becoming slaves again? But before this vision of

eternal wretchedness, the engine-man shouted out fiercely that if justice was not possible with man, then man must disappear. For every rotten society there must be a massacre, until the last creature was exterminated.
(Germinal, pp. 454-5)

As has often been observed, Darwinism did not just foster social theory, but had itself arisen from it:

The grand ideal which Darwin did really originate was not the idea of descent with modification, but the idea of natural selection—the survival of the fittest.... Darwin's theory of natural selection was essentially an extension to the animal and vegetable world of laissez-faire economics and was suggested by Thomas Malthus's theory of population.... Nature, so to speak, selects the best individuals out of each generation to live; and not only so, but as these favored individuals transmit their favorable qualities to their offspring, according to the fixed laws of heredity, it follows that the individuals composing each successive generation are generally better suited to their surroundings than their forefathers.²

To people of optimistic temper, the possibilities implied in the re-application of Darwinism to social theory were practically endless:

Once it had been shown that what Huxley called the "Miltonic hypothesis" of special creation was untenable, and Darwinism ceased to draw fire from churchmen of every faith, Victorians welcomed the new theory as a bringer of glad tidings. England was growing richer year by year, and enjoying budget

surpluses in spite of diminishing taxation. Her machinery was the wonder of the world and her parliamentary government a model for the imitation of enlightened foreigners. No one could doubt that progress would go on indefinitely. In such a world, impregnated with the sense of material progress, evolution seemed only a generalization of everyday life; and the concept of gradual change, gradual progress, especially suited the British temper.³

But one of Darwin's early readers, Samuel Butler, had doubts about the wider applications of the theory of natural selection not altogether dissimilar from the revulsion which Zola's character expresses:

Further reflection and several re-readings of the Origin of Species made Butler dissatisfied with the Darwinian theory of Natural Selection. Perhaps his own fancy about the machines gave him the clue to the weakness of Darwinism —what he ultimately came to call "the Deadlock in Darwinism." The deadlock was simply that machines, having no purposes of their own, could not evolve; and since animals and plants were treated by Darwin as if they were machines, Darwinian evolution was impossible. Natural Selection might conceivably aid us to understand which forms survived, but it could never tell us how these forms had come to be. Natural Selection was an undoubted fact; it could never be a theory or a cause.⁴

Butler offered a counter-theory, based in part on the work of Lamarck and other naturalists whose view of evolution was less mechanistic than Darwin's. This was, that the

evolution of an organism was--however inexplicably, and however limited by the circumscriptions of environment--based upon individual effort, or will to change. In short, Butler was at pains to rescue man from the condition of being "wholly a product of natural history."

Further, he wrote a novel in illustration of his denial of mechanistic determinism which, without being influenced by French naturalism as a literary movement, was the flat denial of the rigorous scientific determinism underlying it. It is not too much to say that the reaction to French naturalism in the English novel began even before it was a recognized force:

The Way of All Flesh thus may be considered the graphic illustration of those ideas which are basic in all Butler's works. The origination of evolution in a sense of need and exercise of will to fill that need, the inheritance of memory and stimulation of that memory by associated ideas, the idea of intellect as an evolutionary makeshift and of unconscious memory as the consummation of intellect, were repeated, embellished, and expanded from work to work. In his return to the Lamarckian hypothesis assuming the existence and function of will in creation, we mark Butler's chief point of departure from Darwinism. The distinction between Darwin's theory and Butler's is of importance because it corresponds to a difference between the English realists and the French naturalists. The latter reflect the determinism implicit in Darwinism; to

them the individual is the resultant of heredity and environment—pre-destination is a scientific fact. English realism, on the contrary, in general reflects the freedom of the will which, illusion or not, is basic in our sense of experience.⁵

Butler's material also seems to provide a rare example among family chronicles in English of the development of the individual, Ernest Pontifex, presented as being ultimately in harmony with a reasonably cheerful view of the larger development of the race. That is, there is in the scientific theory no conflict between the general biological tendency and the fruitful development of society. After two generations of the falling away from innate hereditary energy into the sterility of middle-class values, Ernest—representing the fourth generation portrayed—is once again in the mainstream.

The superiority of the present over the immediate past (of Ernest, over his damaged parents) lies precisely in an ability to abandon the sort of idealism that obscures the actual nature of man as a biological entity—that is, in its ability to "forget." But because the biological state of grace is a state of unconsciousness, in which "habit" has become so ingrained, so thoroughly learned as to have become part of the unconscious memory, Ernest never entirely partakes of it. Hence, even after Ernest has "seen the

light" in prison, he still avoids closer contact with his adored university friend, because he recognizes that they are different sorts of persons:

"I see it all now. The people like Towneley are the only ones who know anything that is worth knowing, and like that of course I can never be. But to make Towneleys possible there must be hewers of wood and drawers of water —men in fact through whom conscious knowledge must pass before it can reach those who can apply it gracefully and instinctively as the Towneleys can. I am a hewer of wood, but if I accept the position frankly and do not set up to be a Towneley, it does not matter."6

The Way of All Flesh may seem to contain the characteristic defects of the roman à thèse. It is certainly true that the underlying theory allows for the worst lapses of the novel, such as Overton's meditations on old John Pontifex's pictures. As a first statement of the main theme of the novel, this seems disastrous:

I wonder how they will actually cease
and come to an end as drawings, and into
what new phases of being they will then
enter. (Flesh, p. 1)

The address from Ernest's unconscious to his conscious self is a sufficiently awkward way of presenting a theoretical foreshadowing of the actual events of Ernest's life. When we remember that it is Overton who is the ostensible creator of this ungainly method of prophecy, we lose patience altogether:

"You are surrounded on every side by lies which would deceive even the elect, if the elect were not generally so uncommonly wide awake; the self of which you are conscious, your reasoning and reflecting self, will believe these lies and bid you act in accordance with them. This conscious self of yours, Ernest, is a prig begotten of prigs and trained in priggishness; I will not allow it to shape your words for many a year to come. Your papa is not here to beat you now; this is a change in the conditions of your existence, and should be followed by changed actions. Obey me, your true self, and things will go tolerably well with you, but only listen to that outward and visible old husk of yours which is called your father, and I will rend you in pieces even unto the third and fourth generation as one who has hated God; for I, Ernest, am the God who made you."
(Flesh, p. 128)

Ironically, the aims of art and of natural science often seem at odds simply because Butler succeeds so perfectly at endowing the narrator with an individual personality. Overton is opposed above all to imposing theoretical systems (late in the novel, he views Ernest's efforts along these lines with comic suspicion). Therefore, we know at times that we are hearing not Overton's, but Butler's voice. Even the diction changes:

Embryo minds, like embryo bodies, pass through a number of strange metamorphoses before they adopt their final shape. It is no more to be wondered at that one who is going to turn out a Roman Catholic, should have passed through the stages of being first a Methodist, and then a free thinker, than that a man should at some

former time have been a mere cell, and later on an invertebrate animal. Ernest, however, could not be expected to know this; embryos never do. Embryos think with each stage of their development that they have now reached the only condition which really suits them. This, they say, must certainly be their last, inasmuch as its close will be so great a shock that nothing can survive it. Every change is a shock; every shock is a pro tanto death. What we call death is only a shock great enough to destroy our power to recognize a past and a present as resembling one another. It is the making us consider the points of difference between our present and our past greater than the points of resemblance, so that we can no longer call the former of these two in any proper sense a continuation of the second, but find it less trouble to think of it as something that we choose to call new.
(Flesh, p. 231)

But Overton is in no real danger of being a sacrifice to natural science. In places, Butler succeeds marvellously in combining characterization of the crustily intractible personality with theoretical "message," so that the one informs and enriches the other. One thinks, for example, of the disapproval with which Overton views Ernest's marriage. Everything works together: the marriage is an obvious outrage to common sense, to freedom from bourgeois restrictions, and—splendidly—to the sensibilities of a confirmed bachelor.

Further, it should not be forgotten that the theory directly allows for such fine comic touches as the briefly mentioned incident which might be read as a parody of

Darwinian sexual selection:

The next morning saw Theobald in his rooms coaching a pupil, and the Miss Allabys in the eldest Miss Allaby's bedroom playing at cards, with Theobald for the stakes.

The winner was Christina, the second unmarried daughter, then just twenty-seven years old, and therefore four years older than Theobald. The younger sisters complained that it was throwing a husband away to let Christina try and catch him, for she was so much older that she had no chance; but Christina showed fight in a way not usual with her, for she was by nature yielding and good tempered. (Flesh, p. 42)

The theory can also be transformed into moving detail, as in the description of old Mr. Pontifex's "successful" son:

His father, as I have said, wondered at him and let him alone. His son had fairly outdistanced him, and in an inarticulate way the father knew it perfectly well. After a few years he took to wearing his best clothes whenever his son came to stay with him, nor would he discard them for his ordinary ones till the young man had returned to London. I believe old Mr. Pontifex, along with his pride and affection, felt also a certain fear of his son, as though of something which he could not thoroughly understand, and whose ways, notwithstanding outward agreement, were nevertheless not his ways. Mrs. Pontifex felt nothing of this; to her George was pure and absolute perfection, and she saw, or thought she saw, with pleasure, that he resembled her and her family in feature as well as in disposition rather than her husband and his.

(Flesh, pp. 8-9)

Curiously, the most interesting issue in the novel—at

any rate, to a reader unmoved by the nineteenth-century controversy over evolution—is the one which is most blurred. When Ernest arrives at his closest proximation to the state of grace, his lack of vitality is his most noticeable characteristic:

With a fortune left to him by his aunt, he retires to live the ideal Butlerian life—one where a calm, passionless bachelorhood, and an ample income enable him to pursue a literary career of genteel unorthodoxy.⁶

Bissell points out that Towneley is finally an uninteresting hero. But if Towneley is amiable rather than interesting, surely Ernest is almost less than alive. He has no interests other than his writing and music (and the latter interest confined to Handel), no friends other than the octogenarian Overton's circle. Overton himself, perhaps significantly, has always avoided any very active participation in life. Ernest has none of the vitality of the very much older John Pontifex at the beginning of the novel.

Ernest's children—who scarcely exist in life—have more energy:

Ernest's daughter Alice married the boy who had been her playmate more than a year ago. Ernest gave them all they said they wanted and a good deal more. They have already presented him with a grandson, and I doubt not will do so with many more. Georgie though only twenty-one is owner of a fine steamer

which his father has bought for him. He began when about thirteen going with old Rollings and Jack in the barge from Rochester to the upper Thames with bricks; then his father bought him and Jack barges of their own, and then he bought them both ships, and then steamers. I do not exactly know how people make money by having a steamer, but he does whatever is usual, and from all I can gather makes it pay extremely well. He is a good deal like his father in the face, but without a spark--so far as I have been able to observe--of any literary ability; he has a fair sense of humour and abundance of common sense, but his instinct is clearly a practical one. I am not sure that he does not put me in mind almost more of what Theobald would have been if he had been a sailor, than of Ernest.

(Flesh, p. 390)

It is important that, by their upbringing, they have been kept out of the middle class to which Ernest, after the accession to Alethea Pontifex's fortune and the growth of his literary reputation, has been once again admitted. It will be remembered that old John Pontifex, originally a carpenter, was the first Pontifex to own land. It is hard to tell how seriously we are to take all this, since Butler never returned to the final shaping of the last part of the novel. But it does seem that we are being shown the products of the middle class evolving themselves, as a class, out of existence.

Early in the novel, Overton has drawn attention to the genuine advance in well-being of the rural working class

(the occasion of the meditation is the boredom of one of Theobald's sermons):

Even now I can see the men in blue smock frocks reaching to their heels, and more than one old woman in a scarlet cloak; the row of stolid, dull, vacant plough-boys, ungainly in build, uncomely in face, lifeless, apathetic, a race a good deal more like the pre-revolution French peasant as described by Carlyle than is pleasant to reflect upon—a race now supplanted by a smarter, comelier and more hopeful generation, which has discovered that it too has a right to as much happiness as it can get, and with clearer ideas about the best means of getting it. (Flesh, p. 91)

Perhaps the last generation of the Pontifexes has worked its way back to the family's pre-bourgeois state in order to advance with the rest of the rural society from which the family originally stemmed.

In this case, the first and last generations of the novel—old John Pontifex and Ernest's children—function as a sort of frame to the period covering the three generations of the family's lapse into middle class values. If this is so, then Ernest and Overton are even more qualified successes at life than critics usually assume. The further possibility exists that Towneley is such an uninteresting hero only because Ernest is incapable of recognizing a more complex one, and that we are not supposed to share Overton's tempered approval of Ernest's later life.

John Pontifex's "successful" son, George, was the first

of the Pontifexes to go to the city. Ernest and Overton are seen at the end of the novel as thoroughly products of the city. Ernest may fail at life because the effort of reversion to the family's old strength has dissipated the capacity for enjoyment of that life. But equally, John Pontifex's milieu has changed, just as the milieu of the Brangwens has changed radically by the end of Lawrence's The Rainbow. The limitations of Ernest's success may be a comment upon the limited possibilities for fulfillment which modern urban society—as opposed to the semi-rural village life seen at the opening of the novel—provides. Butler may well be working with a double notion of evolution—(not unlike the one Lawrence inherited from Hardy) of time-as-recurrence, as bodied forth by the heredity theme, and of time as social "progress," or evolution into modernity, as worked out in the chronology of the story. Hence, The Way of All Flesh may not be so completely a roman à thèse as is commonly assumed.

It may have more in common with The Rainbow than an anti-determinist vitalism; it may be pushing toward an achievement of the same kind—a depiction of the human consequences of the shift from an agrarian society (in which man is an organic part of the natural world) to modern urban society (in which men are mechanically connected to each other and to the natural world).

In the absence of evidence, this is only speculation. But it remains an interesting possibility that the first family chronicle novel in English, besides representing the initial victory over the biological determinism of the naturalists, was meant to be a far more sophisticated attempt to register the effects of the evolution of English society as a whole than it is usually given credit for being.

Footnotes - Chapter II

¹ Levin, Gates of Horn, p. 307.

² Leo J. Henken, Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860-1910: The Impact of Evolution on Victorian Fiction (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), pp. 46-8.

³ Ibid., p. 142.

⁴ Jacques Barzun, Darwin, Marx, Wagner: Critique of a Heritage (New York: Doubleday, 1958), pp. 107-8.

⁵ Henken, Darwinism in the English Novel, p. 215.

⁶ Samuel Butler, The Way of All Flesh (New York: Rinehart, 1948), p. 321.

⁷ Claude T. Bissell, "A Study of The Way of All Flesh," Nineteenth-Century Studies, ed. H. Davis, William C. DeVane, R.C. Bald (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1940), p. 301.

CHAPTER III

Thomas Hardy's friend and first serious critic, Lionel Johnson, took exception to the prevailing concern with natural science:

Astrology is indeed discredited: but is heredity proved? Doubtless, from the days of Ezekiel and Aeschylus, men's minds have been occupied by the thought of transmitted tendencies and of vicarious suffering: but only in our day has the creed of 'determinism' taken body and form: and that, with a somewhat premature decision.¹

In focussing on what he considers a serious flaw in Hardy's works, Johnson raises the question of the way in which we are to understand the purpose of Hardy's use of the family chronicle structure in Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure.

By one of the quirks of literary history, Hardy began work on Tess only a short time after Samuel Butler abandoned work on The Way of All Flesh.² Butler's novel is a family chronicle in the most thorough-going sense; he requires the portrayal of five generations, four of them drawn in quite carefully, in order to depict the underlying concern with the changing manifestations of heredity. Hardy, on the other hand, quite deliberately generalizes the chronicle structure in the process of transmuting the whole idea of evolution,

of change from one generation to the next, into something that approaches myth. He takes as his main purpose, in other words, what we have already seen as a tendency of Les Rougon-Macquart. He is using the chronicle structure in a way that has less to do with natural science than with the aims of the very much earlier writers of chronicles—ones touched upon by Johnson.

Where Butler employs the chronicle structure to work out a specific instance of a scientific theory of heredity, Hardy exploits the chronicle structure to show not the evolution of a particular family, but of modern man in general. That is, he is really quite uninterested in the science of heredity in the Butlerian sense, but rather is working out a metaphysical theory (albeit an evolutionary one). Thus, Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure are not primarily family chronicles, as is perfectly clear when we realize how briefly sketched in are the first and last of the three generations which are dealt with in both novels. Rather, they are family chronicles as the Sophoclean tragedies are family chronicles, dealing with human families in order to expand the significance beyond individuals or particular cases to point toward the inclusion of all humanity. And, as in the Greek plays, the vision is tragic—that man is the victim of an inevitable and inexorable

combination of forces (both within himself and without). Hence, the biological determinism of the naturalists is metamorphosed into something much older, the fatalism of the tragic poets. Hardy is carefully working out a possibility of naturalist determinism—that is, tragedy—which was mentioned by the brothers Goncourt in their preface to Germinie Lacerteux.

It might be objected that Hardy could have taken his model directly from the Greeks, that there is no need for reference to hereditary determinism. But the point is that Hardy was trying to create a myth for modern experience, in modern terms; hereditary determinism functions as the specifically modern guise of fatalism, allowing him to put his myth into a form so that recognizable events could be interpreted in at least two ways at once—as a study of social evolution, which is in turn only the concrete instance of abstract metaphysical evolution.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, for all its wealth of "topical" details, defies categorization as a realistic novel, as is recognized by all the critics who grumble about Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare as cardboard figures. But what the dissatisfied critics (with some honourable exceptions) have failed to realize is that the novel's lack of realism is not a fault of, but rather is fundamental to, Hardy's

method:

Both Angel and Alec are metaphors of extremes of human behavior, when the human has been cut off from community and has been individualized by intellectual education or by material wealth and traditionless independence.³

The Durbeyfields themselves—once d'Urbervilles—who exist in Marlott are no less than a metaphor for mankind ("somewhat debased," like the Durbeyfield nose) as it evolves into modernity. It is only Parson Tringham and Angel Clare—not Hardy—who see this evolution in the narrow sense of inherited personal characteristics. Tess is heedless and forgetful at crucial times in her life, like her parents before her, not because dreaminess is an oddity of the family, but because that is a fundamental aspect of human experience ("harmless as the Durbeyfields were to all except themselves"⁴). Hardy takes some pains to show his readers that he does not mean us to interpret the family's fortunes as being peculiar to them, by specifically dismissing a notion of personal or familial responsibility:

One may, indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the father upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter. (Tess, p. 91)

We are never to attribute Tess's fortunes to the fact of the Durbeyfields being descended from the d'Urbervilles in any but the most general way—that is, as she is a member of the human family. To do otherwise would be to commit the mistake of Mr. Durbeyfield and Angel Clare, of interpreting events as being literally caused by heredity. Lest we miss the point, Hardy is careful to point out that most of the milkmaids at Talbothays are descended from "great families." That is, the Durbeyfields are by no means unique.

Although Huxley is mentioned in Tess, the underlying view of evolution in Hardy's last two novels clearly stems from an earlier source than Darwin. The works of Arthur Schopenhauer, which were not published in English until 1883, provide a notion of evolution which is less scientific, more metaphoric (and hence, perhaps, more imaginatively useful) than that of the natural scientists. Schopenhauer is concerned with the evolution of humanity away from the animal (physical) toward the spiritual. Hardy was quick to seize upon this more generalized notion of evolution:

In Hardy's eyes, those heroes who incarnate the disgust for life are forerunners. They are the chance emissaries, coming in advance of the more highly developed generations which will definitely incarnate the as yet sporadic desire not to raise up seed....For this writer as for

Schopenhauer, to elude the desire to live is to give proof of a deeper knowledge of the real nature of life! It is the sign whereby one may recognize the ultimate triumph of liberty over Immanent Will. This superior attitude is akin to asceticism in its neutrality and its doctrine of renunciation.⁵

D'Exideuil comments that Hardy's work "rose like a pagan protest against all theology." But in Tess, at least, there is an overwhelming sense of loss, and the protest is against the ultimate consequence of Schopenhauerian philosophy—the denial of life.

Only Tess and Angel Clare partake of this large pattern of slow change, of gradually increasing disembodiment. In Tess, no less than in Jude, many of the disasters to human lives occur because time, in the sense of this philosophical evolution, is "out of joint," because the various individuals within a society are all at different points of evolution:

We may wonder whether at the acme and summit of the human progress these anachronisms will be corrected by a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social machinery than that which now jolts us round and along; but such completeness is not to be prophesied, or even conceived as possible. Enough that in the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of a perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness until the late time came. Out of which maladroitness delay spring anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies. (Tess, pp. 53-4)

Played off against this notion of time is the one of cyclical change—in Schopenhauerian terms, of life as it is informed by the Immanent Will:

Thus the Durbeyfields, once d'Urbervilles, saw descending upon them the destiny which no doubt, when they were among the Olympians of the county, they had caused to descend many a time, and severely enough, upon the heads of such landless ones as they themselves were now. So do flux and reflux—the rhythm of change—alternate and persist in everything under the sky. (Tess, p. 394)

The intimate relation between "old" and "new" is drawn by Tess herself:

'I thought we were an old family; but this is all new!' she said, in her artlessness. (Tess, p. 48)

After hearing this caricature of Clare's opinions poor Tess was glad that she had not said a word in a weak moment about her family—even though it was so unusually old as almost to have gone round the circle and become a new one. (Tess, p. 151)

The notion of process in this second sense—not evolutionary but cyclical—is closely tied to the landscapes of the novel, in which Tess functions as the Persephone figure. We are always to keep in mind the fact that to evolve away from the land is, in Hardy's novels, to remove oneself from the very source of human fulfillment. Hence, Tess's willingness to abrogate her symbolic function as Persephone gives birth to Sorrow.

Tess's child is an interesting forerunner of Father Time in Jude. In both cases, the technique is the same. The main characters of the novel (the second generation portrayed) have children so abstractly symbolic as to be overtly allegorical. Their total lack of human attributes bears the weight of the force of Hardy's response to the denial of the earth-bound, cyclical process of human life. To evolve into disembodiment is simply to be less than human.

The chief irony of the novel derives from Tess herself—that which she most radiantly is, is that which she denies. She is at once the earth figure (whom we first see in the "local Cerealia") and, as the "highest" representative of the agrarian milieu, the most akin to Angel Clare. She is modern in her pessimism, in her revulsion from the life of irresponsible breeding that her parents enact. Her first general statement occurs as a prelude to the incident (the killing of the horse) from which follow all the other events of her life:

'Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?'

'Yes.'

'All like ours?'

'I don't know; but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubborn-tree. Most of them splendid and sound—a few blighted.'

'Which do we live on—a splendid one or a blighted one?'

'A blighted one.'

''Tis very unlucky that we didn't pitch on a sound one, when there were so many more of 'em!'

(Tess, p. 149)

It is in the weariness of life in the flesh, more than in common experiences in their past lives, that Angel Clare "seemed to be her double." (Tess, p. 225) But she is not so disembodied as he; she shrinks from his idealizing adoration:

The mixed, singular, luminous gloom in which they walked along together to the spot where the cows lay, often made him think of the Resurrection hour. He little thought that the Magdalen might be at his side. Whilst all the landscape was in neutral shade his companion's face, which was the focus of his eyes, rising above the mist stratum, seemed to have a sort of phosphorescence upon it. She looked ghostly, as if she were merely a soul at large. In reality her face, without appearing to do so, had caught the cold gleam of day from the north-east; his own face, though he did not think of it, wore the same aspect to her.

It was then, as has been said, that she impressed him most deeply. She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman—a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them.

'Call me Tess,' she would say askance; and he did. (Tess, pp. 153-4)

Angel has first been attracted to Tess by her description of how "our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when we are alive." The danger of disembodiment is clear when one recalls that it is in this way that all Tess's misfortunes occur, from the death of the horse (while she is asleep), to the rape, to the murder of Alec. Holloway points out that,

Tess at the dairy says that "our souls can be made to go outside our bodies" if we "lie on the grass at night and look straight up at some big bright star." (This is exactly what she does at the end of the book, on her fatal last night on Salisbury plain.) Meanwhile, Dairyman Crick was balancing his knife and fork together "like the beginning of a gallows."⁶

It is, of course, Tess's greatest misfortune that Angel does not even come up to the mark as a humanist, much less as an Apollo figure (playing badly upon a second-hand harp!). If Alec is a travesty of the Byronic hero, Hardy explicitly draws Angel Clare as a Shelleyean character. As we have seen, he is more concerned with the spiritualized ideal that Tess represents in his mind, than the actual person who exists for us in a larger dimension than himself. When he realizes that she is not "a pure woman" in the conventional sense, he reacts back into the convention which he had prided himself on eschewing:

'O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another. My God—how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque—prestidigitation as that!'

'I thought, Angel, that you loved me—me, my very self! If it is I you love, O how can it be that you look and speak so? It frightens me! Having begun to love you, I love you forever—in all changes, in all disgraces, because you are yourself. I ask no more. Then how can you, O my own husband, stop loving me?'

'I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you.'

'But who?'

'Another in your shape.'

(Tess, p. 260)

The shock (we are reminded of Samuel Butler's description of a shock as a small death) causes him to recoil altogether from physical being:

His thought had been unsuspended; he was becoming ill with thinking; scourged out of all his former pulsating flexuous domesticity.

(Tess, p. 275)

...She was appalled by the determination revealed in the depths of this gentler being she had married—the will to subdue the grosser to the subtler emotion, the substance to the conception, the flesh to the spirit. Propensities, tenderness, habits, were as dead leaves upon the tyrannous wind of his imaginative ascendancy.

(Tess, p. 278)

When, after the sleeping-walking incident, he allows Tess to lead him back, "he fancied she had risen as a spirit, and was leading him to Heaven." It is only Tess's "soul," as he has imagined it, that he is capable, that he is capable of loving. Where Alec offers eros, Angel—the Apollo figure who managed the kine at Talbothays rather badly—can only offer agape (Hardy applies the term to the ruins of the supper on the wedding night). What Tess—poised between life in the flesh and the spirit, radiant with the possibilities of each—offers to Angel is both. The implications of Angel's inability to respond to her passion for him reverberate throughout the rest of the novel.

Significantly, the marriage is consummated only after the murder of Alec. Angel himself has realized that Tess is less than she was:

But he had a vague consciousness of one thing, though it was not clear to him till later; that his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers—allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will. (Tess, p. 425)

This, I think, adds point to what Holloway calls the "résumé" of Tess's earlier life, which closes the novel:

...Hardy reinvites us to register the total movement of Tess's career, in all its integration, by an ingenious and vivid resume of it, toward the close of the book. He does this through the final days that Tess and Angel spend together—partly a psychological fugue, partly a kind of total recall, partly both. Leaving her sin with Alec behind her, she rejoins Angel, and the rich woodland of the first two days together corresponds to the rich vale of the dairies. The empty manor house they sleep in corresponds to the ancient house where their marriage was so nearly consummated before. Barren Salisbury Plain corresponds to the uplands of Flintcomb-Ash. The scene at Stonehenge corresponds both to Tess in the vault, and to the moment when she hung on the wayside cross to rest and looked like a sacrificial victim.⁷

Such spiritual disembodiment can only lead to death.

The scene at Stonehenge, even more importantly, takes us back to another early scene, in the fields where Tess

first ventures forth after the birth of her child:

The sun, on account of the mist, had a curious sentient, personal look, demanding the masculine pronoun for its adequate expression. His present aspect, coupled with the lack of all human forms in the scene, explained the old-time heliolatries in a moment. One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky. The luminary was a golden-haired, beaming, mild-eyed, God-like creature, gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth upon an earth that was brimming with interest for him.

(Tess, pp. 104-5)

It is here that Hardy also remarks,

A field-man is a personality afield; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it.

(Tess, p. 106)

Tess, charming though she is in personality, never loses this dimension beyond the personal—it is her symbolic stature, the important sense in which she is "a pure woman." It is therefore a condition of her humanity—of evolving away from the earth—that she only finds her symbolic fulfillment in acting out the role of sacrificial victim:

The wind, playing upon the edifice, produced a booming tune, like the note of some gigantic one-stringed harp.

'It is Stonehenge!' said Clare.

'The heathen temple, you mean?'

'Yes. Older than the centuries; older than the d'Urbervilles!...'

'One of my mother's people was a shepherd hereabouts, now I think of it. And you used to say at Talbothays that I was a heathen. So now I am at home.'

(Tess, pp. 440-1)

During the night at Stonehenge, Tess puts forth her sister—a Durbeyfield of Angel's own stature—as his appropriate mate:

'...People marry sister-laws continually about Marlott; and 'Liza-Lu is so gentel and sweet, and she is growing up so beautiful....If you would train her up for your own self!...She has all the best of me without the bad of me....'

(Tess, pp. 441-2)

It is Angel and 'Liza-Lu whom we see walking away, hand in hand, at the end of the novel. Perhaps it is unwise to argue that it is no more possible to take seriously a character named "Liza-Lu" than one named "Angel Clare." At any rate, they are the diminished characters—neither great nor evil—who traditionally survive tragedy. They leave behind them the body of Tess at "Wintoncester, that fine old city, aforetime capital of Wessex." (Wintoncester is, of course, Winchester, the ancient capital of England.)

Morton Zabel makes large claims for Hardy (although chiefly with regard to The Dynasts) as one of the cheerful proponents of the new biology:

Hardy was, in fact, more than is generally assumed a pioneer defender, with Butler and Shaw, of the creative principle in evolution. The will to live, as he dramatizes it, persists through every apparent confusion of local and individual purposes. It is never without its consolations. Momentarily it instructs man in accepting nature as the refuge of his tormented spirit. Prophetically it lends him the hope that his life will be harmonized

with the unconscious or instinctive energy of nature. It even advances to a higher plane and glimpses a victory of intelligence, a release of the higher Will from the cosmic condition of "immanence," so that it may become assimilated to the conscious energy and vision of human beings.⁸

But this is a vastly more optimistic view than one can reasonably find either in Tess of the d'Urbervilles or Jude the Obscure. In Tess, the Will is released from immanence in life only at the cost of the quality of life. The victim of this process, Tess, is so immeasurably more attractive than those who will supplant her, Angel Clare and 'Liza-Lu, as to reflect upon the whole nature of the evolutionary process toward the spiritual. Tess so dominates the book as to overshadow completely the fact that the situation at the end of the novel is much the same as at the end of The Way of All Flesh. We do not care that there is hope for 'Liza-Lu and Angel Clare, just as there is hope for Ernest's children. We care about Tess.

In Jude the Obscure, there is no equivalent of the celebration of life in nature which surrounds Tess; the war between the flesh and the spirit is even more deadly, the result even more devastating. Whereas in Tess the chief character—indeed, the only character in the novel whom we take seriously—offers in her own person the capability of fulfilling the claims of both the flesh and the spirit, in Jude we are shown only the terrible human consequences of

the irreconcilability of the demands of the body and spirit. Jude, the last of Hardy's novels, is the one closest to naturalism in tone and method. Nevertheless, the specific causes of Jude's and Sue's failures, "the forced adaption of human instincts to rusty and irksome moulds that do not fit them"—that is, the "tragic machinery of the tale,"⁹ the concern with such things as university entrance requirements and marriage laws—are secondary. As in Tess, such conditions are the result of the unevenness of the evolutionary process.

Always in Hardy's novels, it is worth looking closely at the setting of the various incidents. The opening of Jude takes place not in the rich Vale of Blackmoor, but closer to the bleakness of Egdon Heath (the setting of Tess's times of greatest agony). Unlike the valleys, this region embodied nature in its most brutal aspect. In an early incident not unlike the beginning of Great Expectations (where the convict up-ends the young Pip), Farmer Troutham whirls Jude about in punishment for his delinquency as a human scare-crow. By this, Jude is symbolically dislocated from his landscape (to which, in any case, he had been only an unwanted adjunct). The consequences of separation from his environment follow even more quickly for Jude than for Pip, and the results are even more disastrous.

The immediate consequence of the incident is a sense of revulsion from the natural world:

Jude went out, and, feeling more than ever his existence to be an undemanded one, he lay down upon his back on a heap of litter near the pigsty. The fog had by this time become more translucent, and the position of the sun could be seen through it. He pulled his straw hat over his face, and peered through the interstices of the plaiting at the white brightness, vaguely reflecting. Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it.

If he could only prevent himself growing up! He did not want to be a man.

(Jude, pp. 22-3)

Significantly, what follows is Jude's vision of the distant Christminster as the "Heavenly Jerusalem." His vision is from the beginning founded upon illusion (the imagined success of his schoolmaster, Phillotson). The dangers implicit in the vision become apparent early in the novel, when we discover that the hill from which he sees Christminster is the place where his parents separated. This

serves to link Jude's dream—long before he has met the temptations of the flesh in Arabella—with the Fawley curse.

Although Jude the Obscure is so markedly different in many important ways from Tess of the d'Urbervilles, it is at this point that I would suggest that Hardy's last novel can be read as a sequel to the preceeding one. Tess herself is Hardy's poignant memorial to English pastoral, of life in the flesh just as it emerges, or individualizes out, from consonance with the surrounding natural world. As such, she is appropriately associated with the ancient capital of Wessex—with the English past. But in Jude he turns his attention toward the new order of England—where Tess cannot exist—and adjusts the moods and values accordingly. The same things are invested with a different order of importance—railways, for instance, are just railways in Jude, and not symbolic threats to a way of life—simply because the characters have already become detached from their natural surroundings.

The method, although less obvious, is the same. The Fawley curse is taken by the characters of the novel to pertain strictly to marriage. It is, that there is a spirit of perversity (analogous to the forgetfulness or dreaminess of the d'Urbervilles, in its function in the novel) in the family that thwarts all marriages. Drusilla Fawley, the

rustic priestess of doom, says,

'...Jude, my child, don't you ever marry. Tisn't for the Fawleys to take that step any more....'

(Jude, p. 18)

'...The Fawleys were not made for wedlock; it never seemed to sit well upon us. There's sommat in our blood that won't take kindly to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not bound....'

(Jude, p. 77)

In the case of Jude and Sue, the misery will be compounded because they are cousins, as Jude perceives:

...in a family like his own where marriage usually meant a tragic sadness, marriage with a blood relation would duplicate the adverse conditions, and a tragic sadness might be intensified to a tragic horror.

(Jude, p. 97)

As this works out in Sue's refusal to go through the legal procedure of marriage with Jude, it seems little more satisfactory than Zola's hereditary alcoholism and criminality. But when the Widow Edlin relates the story of the first of the disastrous Fawley marriages, Sue comments,

'...It makes me feel as if a tragic doom overhung our family, as it did the house of Atreus....' (Jude, p. 301)

And, in fact, what we have again is the endeavour to mythologize human experience in the account of one family, to raise it to the stature of tragedy. The curse of the Fawleys is the curse of modern man—inexplicable, and unavoidable.

Father Time—the symbolic issue of Jude's and Sue's marriage, the representative of the last generation in the evolutionary pattern—kills their own children. Jude quotes Aeschylus:

'Nothing can be done,' he replied,
'Things are as they are, and will be
brought to their destined issue.'

Father Time is the fulfillment of Sue's real forbodings about marriage:

Sue still held that there was not much queer or exceptional in them: that all were so. 'Everybody is getting to feel as we do. We are a little beforehand, that's all. In fifty, a hundred years the descendants of these two will act and feel worse than we. They will see weltering humanity still more vividly than we do now as

Shapes like our own hideously multiplied,
and will be afraid to reproduce them.'
(Jude, p. 296)

He carries the process to its conclusion:

'It was in his nature to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us—boys of a sort unknown in the last generation—the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live. He's an advanced man, the doctor: but he can give no consolation to—'
(Jude, p. 348)

How carefully Hardy has patterned the process is seen by

the circumstances of the first generation under the curse. The man and wife quarrel over their child, which leads to the man's hanging and the wife's suicide; Jude and Sue do not want to have children; finally, Father Time not only does not want to live (as the childish Jude did not, either), but also murders that others may not have to live.

Jude, the character caught between the claims of flesh and spirit (where Tess, in her love for Clare, is so beautifully poised—thus the important shift in tone), assents to the process of disembodiment. He requires sexual as well as spiritual union with Sue, but never questions that she is the "higher" type:

'...People go on marrying because they can't resist natural forces, although many of them may know perfectly well that they are possibly buying a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort. No doubt my father and mother, and your father and mother, saw it, if they at all resembled us in habits of observation. But then they went and married just the same, because they had ordinary passions. But you, Sue, are such a phantasmal, bodiless creature, one who—if you'll allow me to say it—has so little animal passion in you, that you can act upon reason in the matter, when we poor unfortunate wretches of greater substance can't. (Jude, p. 268)

In the brief time of their happiness, Jude and Sue maintain a delicate equilibrium of compromise. Sue submits to Jude's sexual demands, which he in turn tempers so as

not to cause a revulsion in her. But even in the happy day at the fair, Arabella and Father Time are present, embodying the inescapable threats to their relationship in the respective natures of Jude and Sue. (It is also important that Father Time arrives almost immediately after Sue first yields to Jude.)

Sue's function in this novel is almost identical to Angel Clare's in Tess. But she is a complex and interesting character; Hardy's portrayal of her is so sympathetic that one hesitates to infer the sort of judgment of her that one is invited to make against Clare. The "counterparts" theme which figures in Tess recurs here, but is more fully developed, and is much more credible in terms of the personalities of the two main characters (besides which, of course, it is provided for by the significance of their familial connection). As the two most "advanced" characters of the novel, Jude and Sue are recognizably kindred, and, unlike Tess and Clare, they exist within the same dimension of characterization.

Havelock Ellis, in his early defence of the novel against its more scurrilous reviewers, declares:

Sue is neurotic, some critics say; it is fashionable to play cheerfully with terrible words you know nothing about. "Neurotic" these good people say by way of dismissing her, innocently unaware

that many a charming "urban miss" of their own acquaintance would deserve the name at least as well.¹⁰

Without seeming to realize it, Ellis exactly hits the mark. Sue, the most thoroughly urbanized character of the novel, represents modernity. She is further than Jude along the direction of social change. For her, as for Angel Clare, the yearning for the rustic is largely a pose:

...They...drew up and shared with the shepherd and his mother the boiled bacon and greens for supper.

'I rather like this,' said Sue, while their entertainers were clearing away the dishes. 'Outside all laws except gravitation and germination.'

'You only think you like it; you don't; you are quite a product of civilization,' said Jude, a recollection of her engagement reviving his soreness a little.

'Indeed I am not, Jude. I like reading and all that, but I crave to get back to the life of my infancy and its freedom.'

...'An urban miss is what you are.'

(Jude, pp. 145-6)

The urban miss—the "new woman"—embodies the increasing sublimation of sexual impulse (that is, the working of the will to live) into disembodied emotion. And Hardy understands that this process will produce neurotic behaviour in the present state of general human development. Sue is at times really decadent in her sensation-seeking—notably, when she put Jude through the gruesome rehearsal of her wedding to Phillotson.

Even more than the need to love (and she is capable of

great tenderness), Sue has the obsessive need to be desired. She finds Phillotson physically repulsive and intellectually rather tiresome; his sole attraction is that he loves her. So, also with Jude:

'At first I did not love you, Jude; that I own. When I first knew you I merely wanted you to love me. I did not exactly flirt with you; but that inborn craving which undermines some women's morals almost more than unbridled passion—the craving to attract and captivate, regardless of the injury it may do the man—was in me; and when I found I had caught you, I was frightened. And then—I don't know how it was—I couldn't bear to let you go—possibly to Arabella again—and so I got to love you, Jude. But you see, however fondly it ended, it began in the selfish and cruel wish to make your heart ache for me without letting mine ache for you.'

(Jude, p. 365)

Sue prides herself on being pagan in opposition to the medievalism that Christminster represents. But her paganism (so unreal and bodiless compared to Tess's) is carefully defined. When Sue and Jude are discussing the furor which resulted from their expedition from Melchester, she comments about the more conventional members of society:

'...Their philosophy only recognizes relations based on animal desire. The wide field of strong attraction where desire plays, at least, only a secondary part, is ignored by them—the part of—who is it?—Venus Urania.'

(Jude, pp. 176-7)

This off-hand reference to Venus Urania is interesting in

more than just as it is the only manifestation of Venus with which Sue would associate herself. Although it would be foolish to make too much of such a minor point, it is perhaps worth observing that

The Athenians called Aphrodite Urania 'the eldest of the Fates' because she was the Nymph-goddess, to whom the sacred king had, in ancient times, been sacrificed at the summer solstice.¹¹

Sue, the femme fatale of the new order (Jude has before him the unnerving example of the Christminster undergraduate), is as deadly to Jude as her counterpart of the old order:

For here Hardy was not trying simply to write an unhappy love story; he was trying to show that love is the inevitable instrument of the destruction of the individual. The merely physical part of love is symbolized by Arabella, and the aspiration to wholly spiritual and intellectual companionship by Sue; and the destruction of Jude is accomplished by them both.¹²

Arabella makes of Jude a modern Sampson; Sue, representing the values of idealization, or abstraction, makes him a Christ figure by sacrificing him to her spiritual ideal.

In her grief after the death of the children, Sue experiences a violent revulsion from sexuality. Her sense of guilt throws her off all intellectual balance, and she takes to religion as many a naturalist heroine takes to drink. The tragedy, which has destroyed the last of Jude's old illusions and dreams about Christminster, has made Sue

superstitiously religious. In the process, she convinces herself of the sanctity of the marriage contract and returns to Phillotson, advising Jude to return to Arabella:

The blow of her bereavement seemed to have destroyed her reasoning faculty. The once keen vision was dimmed. 'All wrong, all wrong!' he said huskily. 'Error—perversity! It drives me out of my senses. Do you care for him? Do you love him? You know you don't! It will be a fanatic prostitution—God forgive me, yes—that's what it will be!' (Jude, p. 373)

After her departure, Jude is passively drawn into the second marriage to Arabella. In the tormented atmosphere of Jude the Obscure, Hardy surrounds Arabella with macabre humour as she appears and reappears to offer comments and advice on the tortured lives of Jude and Sue. She is a splendid comic creation, and she has many defenders—D. H. Lawrence among them. But she is Circe, associated always with pigs; she reduces sexual passion to grossness and bestiality.

Untroubled by ethical or metaphysical questions, Arabella bends to her satisfaction the very social conventions that press so hard upon Jude and Sue. Jude and Sue endlessly discuss the ethics of the marriage contract; Arabella simply goes off to Australia and commits bigamy. She hands Father Time over to Sue and Jude, and stands aside while their lives are destroyed by the relentless combination

of heredity, environment, and the uneven progression of civilization. Jude is reduced to passivity by the agony of his relationships with the two women, but his death does not so much as stop Arabella from watching the procession of boats. Sue is made "quite a staid, worn woman" by her ghastly submission to Phillotson; Arabella, the skilled survivor of the novel, cheerfully embarks upon a third marriage.

The nightmare vision of Jude the Obscure—so much more intense than in any "depressing" naturalist work such as The Mummer's Wife—offers no relief in any view of beneficent nature:

'...I said it was Nature's intention,
Nature's law and raison d'etre that we
should be joyful in what instincts she
afforded us—instincts which civiliza-
tion had taken upon itself to thwart.
What dreadful things I said! And now
fate has given us this stab in the back
for being such fools as to take Nature
at her word!' (Jude, p. 350)

There cannot be any sense of oneness with the natural world when the fields are black and frozen, where an Arabella is the fertility figure. There can be no going back. This is not the least of the "family" curse.

In the attempt to render the experience of modern man in the history of the Durbeyfields and the Fawleys, Hardy may not be altogether successful—even when we understand

why Sorrow and Father Time are aborted characters, we may still wish that either they were more recognizably human, or their parents less so. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the intensity, the sense of ultimate significance with which Hardy endows his chief characters. And it is hard to name an English novelist who manages to encompass so much, even aside from the tragic fatalism into which he transforms the determinist mechanics of heredity and environment (including, also, in Jude those determinants as well). In his endeavour, he extends the family chronicle form toward its most ambitious limits; he tries to body forth a myth of modern experience. Along the way, he quite ignores inherent possibilities of the form which such a much less ambitious writer as Arnold Bennett will exploit so finely in The Old Wives' Tale. And I think we look to Lawrence for the perfection of the attempt to express a large pattern of human development within the terms of a recognizable social context. Even so, Hardy's effort to invest his "families" with a larger significance claims our admiration. It is a part of Hardy's achievement that Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure do so much to make The Rainbow possible.

Footnotes - Chapter III

¹ Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1928 [1894]), p. 243.

² Butler worked sporadically on The Way of All Flesh between the years 1873 and 1885, although the novel was not published until 1903, after his death.

³ Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Tess of the d'Urbervilles," in Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 89.

⁴ Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman (New York: Macmillan, 1966 [1891]), p. 347.

⁵ Pierre d'Exideuil, The Human Pair in the Work of Thomas Hardy, trans. Felix M. Crosse (London: Humphrey Toulmin, n.d.), p. 180.

⁶ John Holloway, "Hardy's Major Fiction," in the previously cited Critical Essays, p. 52.

⁷ Ibid, p. 61.

⁸ Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Hardy in Defense of His Art: The Aesthetic of incongruity," Critical Essays, p. 35.

⁹ Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (London: Macmillan, 1966 [1895]), Author's Preface, vii-viii.

¹⁰ Havelock Ellis, "Concerning Jude the Obscure," "Savoy": The Nineties Experiment, ed. Stanley Weintraub (London: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1966), p. 209.

¹¹ Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 49.

¹² William R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), pp. 254-5.

CHAPTER IV

In turning from Hardy's two novels to John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Chronicles*, we do not mark the differences of a generation in style and preoccupation. Indeed, Galsworthy in many important respects seems less modern than his elder, greater contemporary. Critics frequently classify him as the last of the Victorian novelists, singularly untouched by the influence of naturalism, as Daiches does in his discussion of The Forsyte Saga:

But in dealing with the book, whatever aspect we choose, we shall not have to enlarge our conception of fiction or pause to consider whether it is a novel in the accepted sense of the word. Nor shall we have to worry about what the author is endeavouring to do, or what his view of the novelist's art is, or to what extent the nature of his achievement is implied in earlier writers. Galsworthy does not belong to the pioneers in literature.

He is, in the sense of the term common at the beginning of this century, a realist: he is concerned with epitomizing the ordinary activities of ordinary people by closely observing and recording their most typical features. And at the same time—and this distinguishes his type of realist—he is a moralist and a humanitarian, and his ethical and humanitarian interests are rarely lost sight of.¹

One of the reasons that he seems so dated is surely that Galsworthy was apparently oblivious to the fact that it was

late in the day for his sort of realism (without the transforming energy of something important to express, at least) to be a vital expression of social history. Wilful ignorance was, finally, not a very fruitful stance to take toward naturalism, when it had provided Galsworthy with his form.

It is tempting merely to dismiss Galsworthy as a second-rater, a man who published one interesting novel in 1906 (The Man of Property) and who, at a loss for new material at the end of the war, decided to capitalize on the earlier success. Marrott, his friend and biographer, recounts the advent of this decision as a great epiphany; the Forsyte Chronicles were to be Galsworthy's gift to the coming peace.

The second trilogy, A Modern Comedy, which deals with Soames Forsyte in his old age, hovering uncomfortably about the world of his daughter, Fleur, scarcely qualifies as a family chronicle except that the novels are about characters who belong to the Forsyte family. To Let (published in 1921), the last novel in the first trilogy, opens in 1920. From this point, Galsworthy writes in his immediate present, and abandons the attempt to control his material with respect to time. In the second trilogy, he is reduced to have Soames make pronouncements about "the times we live in," and the novels degenerate into a flaccid record of current events. The general strike of 1926, for instance, which figures in

the last of the three novels, Swan Song, is not used—cannot be, for Galsworthy has no notion of its historical significance—to the effect that Victoria's death is used in In Chancery. The second trilogy ends with Soames's death after his visit to the locale of the "primeval Forsytes." He is, appropriately if not very skilfully, killed by the fall of one possession (a painting) as he saves another, more precious one (his daughter).

The third trilogy, The End of the Chapter, is one of Galsworthy's disastrous moves into the sphere of the aristocracy, in this case the Cherwell family (relatives of Fleur's husband, Michael Mont). Galsworthy seems quite to forget the reason for the whole enterprise. His ostensible purpose is the depiction of the "service class" in its waning days, presumably as an analogue to the Saga, which depicts the decline of the middle class. But in the central issue of A Maid in Waiting, the trial of Dinny Cherwell's brother, Galsworthy himself does not seem to understand what is involved. Dinny's brother has killed a Bolivian muleteer in self-defense, after beating the man, who had been beating his mules. The question of whether the killing of a man isn't more reprehensible than the discomfort of a mule never seems to arise. But the judge, whom we know to be one of the elect because he knows how to pronounce the Cherwell name, rules that Hubert has not committed an extraditable offense

—after which, Hubert and his bride depart to defend British values in other parts of the world.

In the next novel, The Flowering Wilderness, the poet Wilfrid Desert reappears (he was best man at the Monts' wedding, and a candidate for the bored Fleur's favours in The White Monkey) as Dinny's suitor. The engagement is broken when it becomes common knowledge that Desert has recanted under threat of death, and turned Moslem. A man at Sir Lawrence Mont's club comments that he feels sorry for any other Englishman travelling in the same part of the Arabian desert. For all its echoes of T. E. Lawrence, 1932 seems late indeed for this sort of concern for British imperium. In the last novel (published after Galsworthy's death), he mercifully abandons this grotesque stereotyping (which is not satiric—he had announced to Garnett and others that he had abandoned the satiric mode of The Man of Property for the lyrical) of the values of the English aristocracy, and confines himself to such manifestations of social change as divorce cases and the victory of the Conservative Party at the polls.

But if, at the last, social history in Galsworthy's hands came to be a mere shuffling together of cliches, The Forsyte Saga—The Man of Property, In Chancery (published in 1920), and To Let—is a family chronicle worth attention

for the way in which Galsworthy works with the notion of time as it involves social change, and plays it against a notion of time as it works through recurring events. It is basically Hardy's technique of playing off a linear notion of time (as the evolution into disembodiment) against the cyclical notion of time implicit in the rhythm of the organic world, but it is finely adapted to Galsworthy's purpose. The fact that the evolution into disembodiment is reduced in his work to the evolution of a class out of existence (rather as we see that happening in The Way of All Flesh)—that is, the constricting of the significance of what the linear notion of time represents—does not detract from the interest of the actual handling of the theme (although one could argue that it detracts from the novel as a whole—the Schopenhauerian substructure of Buddenbrooks, for example, immeasurably enhances the depiction of social history by adding another dimension to it).

We are told at the beginning of The Man of Property what we see, and its significance:

Those privileged to be present at a family festival of the Forsytes have seen that charming and instructive sight—an upper middle-class family in full plumage. But whosoever of these favoured persons has possessed the gift of psychological analysis (a talent without monetary value and properly ignored by the Forsytes), has witnessed a spectacle, not only

delightful in itself, but illustrative of an obscure human problem. In plainer words, he has gleaned from a gathering of this family—no branch of which had a liking for the other, between no three members of whom existed anything worthy of the name sympathy—evidence of that mysterious concrete tenacity which renders a family so formidable a unit of society, so clear a reproduction of society, in miniature. He has been admitted to a vision of the dim roads of social progress, has understood something of patriarchal life, of the swarmings of savage hordes, of the rise and fall of nations. He is like one who, having watched a tree grow from its planting—a paragon of tenacity, insulation, and success, amidst the deaths of a hundred other plants less fibrous, sappy, and persistent—one day will see it flourishing with bland, full foliage, in an almost repugnant prosperity, at the summit of its efflorescence.

On June 15, 1886, about four of the afternoon, the observer who chanced to be present at the house of old Jolyon Forsyte in Stanhope Gate, might have seen the highest efflorescence of the Forsytes.²

Soon, we learn about the father of the first generation portrayed in the novel:

'Superior Dosset Forsyte,' as he was called by his intimates, had been a stone-mason by trade, and risen to the position of a master-builder. Towards the end of his life he moved to London, where, building on until he died, he was buried at Highgate. He left over thirty thousand pounds between his ten children. Old Jolyon alluded to him, if at all, as 'A hard, thick sort of man; not much refinement about him.' The second generation of Forsytes felt indeed that he was not greatly to their credit. The

The only aristocratic trait they could find in his character was a habit of drinking Madeira. (Saga, p. 17)

From which, we are led back to the earliest generations of Forsytes (Galsworthy's handling of whom, incidentally, foreshadows Lawrence's treatment of the early, undifferentiated Brangwens):

James once went down to see for himself what sort of place this was that they had come from. He found two old farms, with a cart track rutted into the pink earth, leading down to a mill by the beach; a little gray church with a buttressed outer wall, and a smaller and grayer chapel. The stream which worked the mill came bubbling down in a dozen rivulets, and pigs were hunting round that estuary. A haze hovered over the prospect. Down this hollow, with their feet deep in the mud and their faces towards the sea, it appeared that the primeval Forsytes had been content to walk Sunday after Sunday for hundreds of years.

Whether or no James had cherished hopes of an inheritance, or of something rather distinguished to be found down there, he came back to town in a poor way, and went about with a pathetic attempt at making the best of a bad job.

'There's very little to be had out of that,' he said; 'regular country little place, old as the hills.'

Its age was felt to be a comfort. Old Jolyon, in whom a desperate honesty welled up at times, would allude to his ancestors as: 'Yeoman—I suppose very small beer.' Yet he would repeat the word 'yeomen' as if it afforded him consolation. (Saga, p. 18)

Even though the family seems at its most invincible at

This party celebrating the engagement of June to Phillip Bosinney, a rift has already occurred by the earlier (temporary, as it turns out) defection of her father from the ranks of the Forsytes, and it is soon to widen drastically. These fundamental changes are, early in The Man of Property, counterpointed with things no more important than Swithin's "primeval impatience" for dinner. Swithin, always leering at Irene, seems quite arbitrarily chosen by Galsworthy to embody the "rumbling violence of primitive generations."

(Saga, p. 55) But with the first of the succession of funerals that punctuate the Saga, time-as-recurrence makes its appearance, and gives significance to the theme of reversion to hereditary strength as counterpoint to the etiolation of social change:

She was spared the watching of the branches just out beyond the point of balance. She could not look into the hearts of her followers. The same law that had worked in her, bringing her up from a tall, straight-backed slip of a girl to a woman strong and grown, to a woman old, angular, feeble, almost witch-like, with individuality all sharpened and sharpened, as all rounding from the world's contact fell off from her—that same law would work, was working, in the family she had watched like a mother.

She had seen it young, and growing, she had seen it strong and grown, and before her old eyes had time or strength to see any more, she died. She would have tried, and who knows but she might have kept it young and strong, with her

old fingers, her tembling kisses—a little longer; alas! not even Aunt Ann could fight with Nature. (Saga, p. 111)

In In Chancery, the family is losing its self-confident powers of reproduction:

Thus, of the ten old Forsytes twenty-one young Forsytes had been born; but of the twenty-one young Forsytes there were as yet only seventeen descendants; and it already seemed unlikely that there would be more than a further unconsidered trifle or so. A student of statistics must have noticed that the birth rate had varied in accordance with the rate of interest for your money. Grandfather 'Superior Dosset' Forsyte in the early nineteenth century had been getting ten per cent. for his, hence ten children. Those ten, leaving out the four who had not married, and Juley, whose husband Septimus Small had, of course, died almost at once, had averaged four to five per cent. for theirs, and produced accordingly. The twenty-one whom they produced were now getting barely three per cent. in the Consols to which their fathers had mostly tied the Settlements they made to avoid death duties, and the six of them who had been reproduced had seventeen children, or just the proper two and five-sixths per stem. (Saga, p. 414)

Soames, the atavistic Forsyte of the "young" generation, divorces Irene so as to marry again, in a mixture of emotions which does not include any real feeling for his new wife:

It was intricate and deeply involved with the growing consciousness that property without anyone to leave it to is the negation of true Forsyteism. To have an heir, some continuance of self, who would begin where he left off—ensure, in fact, that he would not leave off—had

quite obsessed him for the last year and more. (Saga, p. 442)

In an encounter with Soames, young Jolyon (who has an insufferable penchant for this sort of thing) underlines the difference between their generation and their fathers'. The development of the Forsytes has much in common with those other middle-class families, the Pontifexes and the Buddenbrooks:

"We aren't the men they were, you know." Soames smiled. 'Do you really think I shall admit that I'm not their equal'; he seemed to be saying, 'or that I've got to give up anything, especially life?'

"We may live to their age, perhaps," pursued Jolyon, "but self-consciousness is a handicap, you know, and that's the difference between us. We've lost conviction. How and when self-consciousness was born I can never make out. My father had a little, but I don't believe any other of the old Forsytes ever had a scrap. Never to see yourself as others see you, it's a wonderful preservative. The whole history of the last century is in the difference between us...." (Saga, p. 470)

The Forsytes, near the end of the novel, watch the funeral procession of Queen Victoria. It is their Age that is passing:

There it was—the bier of the Queen, coffin of the Age slow passing! And as it went by there came a murmuring groan from all the long line of those who watched, a sound such as Soames had never heard, so unconscious, primitive, deep and wild, that neither he nor any knew whether they had joined in uttering it. Strange sound, indeed! Tribute of an Age to its own

death....Ah! Ah!...The hold on life had slipped. That which had seemed eternal was gone! The Queen—God bless her!
(Saga, p. 691)

The book finishes with the birth of Soames's daughter, Fleur, who in the next trilogy will represent Modernity (the whole question of modern experience being relegated to the depiction of a flapper) as crassly as Irene represents Beauty in this. But for the moment, Soames seems at last to possess something worth having:

The sense of triumph and renewed possession swelled within him.
By God! this—this thing was his!
(Saga, p. 721)

To Let opens nineteen years after the ending of In Chancery. Soames is now an old man, and Galsworthy accelerates the process begun toward the end of the previous novel. Soames becomes an entirely sympathetic figure—and, so far as it exists, the norm of the satire. At the end, he is granted a sudden vision of the recurrence of events in recompense for his realization that the security of ownership for which he stands is a thing of the past:

The waters of change were foaming in, carrying the promise of new forms only when their destructive flood should have passed its full. He sat there, subconscious of them, but with his thought resolutely set on the past—as a man might ride into a wild night with his face to the tail of his galloping horse.

Athwart the Victorian dykes the waters were rolling on property, manners, and morals, on melody and the old forms of art—waters bringing to his mouth a salt taste as of blood, lapping to the foot of this Highgate Hill where Victorianism lay buried. And sitting there, high up on its most individual spot, Soames—like a figure of Investment—refused their restless sounds. Instinctively he would not fight them—there was in him too much primeval wisdom, of Man the possessive animal. They would quiet down when they had fulfilled their tidal fever of dispossessing and destroying; when the creations and the properties of others were sufficiently broken and dejected—they would lapse and ebb, and fresh forms would rise based on an instinct older than the fever of change—the instinct of Home.
(Saga, p. 1041)

Galsworthy makes claims for The Forsyte Saga which seem deliberately anti-naturalist:

...this long tale is no scientific study of a period; it is rather an intimate incarnation of the disturbance that Beauty effects in the lives of men.
(Saga, Preface, viii)

But the Saga doesn't begin to work through the problems posed by naturalism—Galsworthy doesn't even recognize that they are relevant to his work. Similarly, we are cheated by his positive claim. The simple equation of Irene with Beauty is so crudely done that we remain unconvinced by it. After praising the initial satiric impulse of The Man of Property, D. H. Lawrence goes straight to Galsworthy's weakest point:

Perhaps the overwhelming numerousness of the Forsytes frightened Mr. Galsworthy from utterly damning them. Or perhaps it was something else, something more serious in him. Perhaps it was his utter failure to see what you were when you weren't a Forsyte. What was there besides Forsytes in all the wide human world? Mr. Galsworthy looked, and found nothing. Strictly and truly, after his frightened search, he had found nothing. But he came back with Irene and Bosinney, and offered us that. Here! he seems to say. Here is the anti-Forsyte! Here! Here you have it! Love! Pa-assion! PASSION....

Alas! this is the Forsyte trying to be freely sensual. He can't do it; he's lost it. He can only be doggishly messy. Bosinney is not only a Forsyte, but an anti-Forsyte, with a vast grudge against property. And the thing a man has a vast grudge against is the man's determinant. Bosinney is a property hound, but he has run away from the kennels, or been born outside the kennels, so he is a rebel. So he goes sniffing round the property bitches, to get even with the successful property hounds that way. One cannot help preferring Soames Forsyte, in a choice of evils.

Just as one prefers June or any of the old aunts to Irene. Irene seems to me a sneaking, creeping, spiteful sort of bitch, an anti-Forsyte, absolutely living off the Forsytes—yes, to the very end; absolutely living off their money and trying to do them dirt....

It is when he comes to sex that Mr. Galsworthy collapses finally. He becomes nastily sentimental. He wants to make sex important, and he only makes it repulsive.³

The inability to extricate himself from the Forsytes—to straighten out the authorial point of view towards his material—seriously damages Galsworthy's work. After being

the villain, it ought not to be possible for Soames to be the norm for the social satire—at least, not without more subtlety of characterization than Galsworthy in fact gives us. We look in vain for an approximation of the passion of Butler's satire—or his clear-headedness about what he is satirizing. Old John Pontifex is the social norm who stands outside the area of Butler's attack. But Old Jolyon Forsyte is really different from the rest of the family only in age. (To be an old Forsyte, evidently, is to be a good Forsyte—a view reinforced by Soames's metamorphosis.) The hopelessly muddled point of view encourages the suspicion that the author somehow has developed a vested interest (or rather, an emotional investment) in his material.

The Saga invites comparison with Mann's Buddenbrooks, which was published in Germany five years before the appearance of The Man of Property. Unfortunately, for all its detail, Galsworthy's work seems mediocre art even as a rendering of social change when we compare it to the German family chronicle. Mann makes his depiction of the past an elegaic tribute to nineteenth-century realism, before turning to the problem of finding ways to express modern experience—indeed, the shift in style from the early part of the novel to the part dealing with Hanno's life is a reflection of the turning-point in Mann's artistic career.

In very much the same way, D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow (building upon Hardy's achievements) pays tribute to the past, even while it moves toward an expression of modern experience. But in the Saga, the understanding and respect for the past comes to seem more sentimental indulgence, because there is no artistic shaping to the movement forward, and because Galsworthy's considerable technical resources are too often played out in purely decorative detail.

Buddenbrooks—among a wealth of other things—does precisely the same thing as the Saga. That is, it portrays the full flowering of one class of society (the old burgher class) and its decline as the new bourgeoisie gains power. But Mann never tells us this, never even has one character tell another this. Rather, we watch the despised Hagenströms gain wealth and prestige within the community as the Buddenbrooks slowly lose both.

Perhaps it is even worth looking briefly at the most minor of details, the way in which the two authors date their events. Galsworthy tells us—as he tells us so much—the date on the first page of The Man of Property (and of To Let; in In Chancery, he does manage to weave the date into his opening more skilfully) in the baldest way possible. In Buddenbrooks, we also are told the year on the first page,

but as a part of a scene (with which the novel opens directly) around which crystallizes the difference between old Johann Buddenbrook and his son:

She was in smooth waters now, and rattled away, beaming with joy, through the whole Article, reproducing it word for word from the Catechism just promulgated, with the approval of an omniscient Senate, in that very year of grace, 1835.⁴

Throughout the novel, it is easy to place the time by historical events, as in the Galsworthy novels. But we never really require it; Mann has superbly—so perfectly that I think one takes Buddenbrooks as the classic paradigm of the family chronicle novel—rendered social change within the personalities of his characters. The differences between generations are there to be seen—not only through the comparisons of characters made by the reader (the differences, for example, between Johann and Hoffstede, and Jean and Gosch—which entail the whole change of sensibility from the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century), but in the dramatic interaction of the characters. In the English novel, we find something approaching the same achievement, not in the work of Galsworthy, but in Arnold Bennett's Old Wives' Tale.

Footnotes - Chapter IV

¹ David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 37.

² John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (London: Heinemann, 1922), p. 3.

³ D. H. Lawrence, "John Galsworthy," Phoenix I: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence (London: Heinemann, 1936), pp. 544-5.

⁴ Thomas Mann, Buddenbrooks, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1924), p. 3.

CHAPTER V

It is that other Edwardian "professional writer," Arnold Bennett who perfected the realistic mode of the English family chronicle novel by anglicizing naturalism (in the process, tactfully smoothing away the scientific concerns of naturalism). Bennett was castigated by his younger contemporaries (who were willing merely to ignore Galsworthy) as the apotheosis of the vulgar journalist-turned-novelist--as we see him, for instance, as Mr. Nixon in Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," or in Virginia Woolf's critical essays. This view has been modified by time, and the differences between his aesthetic and Virginia Woolf's own¹ are less important now than they seemed at the time of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" controversy:

For Bennett, it must be remembered, was one of the first conscious highbrows in the novel; he, almost as early as any Englishman, had heard the good news that Henry James and George Moore brought back from Paris, that the novel was an art form.²

It was, in fact, as much the influence of Moore's A Mummer's Wife as his own experience of life in the Midlands which provided the impetus for the series of novels about the "Five Towns":

It is natural, if futile, to speculate if Bennett ever saw that production of Les Cloches de Corneville in Hanley, but he certainly knew, by the time he was settled in London, the novel in which George Moore set down his experiences and observations of the town. A Mummer's Wife remains an impressive work. In the 'nineties, and for Bennett especially, it must have been even more so. For at that time Moore, the friend of Zola and the disciple of Flaubert ...was the only novelist in England who was attempting to write fiction in the manner of the French writers whom Bennett so greatly admired. He looked upon Moore, as may be seen from his early book Fame and Fiction, with the reverence due to an immediate ancestor.³

Bennett inherited naturalism from Moore as Moore used it himself—as a stylistic convention, rather than as an accepted version of reality. This is to say that Bennett is influenced by naturalism exactly in those ways in which Hardy is virtually immune to the foreign influence. On the other hand, Bennett is unmoved by the consequences of hereditary determinism (although, as we shall see, he does work with biological determinants), the impassioned reaction to which (in very different ways) underlies The Way of All Flesh and Hardy's Schopenhauerian metaphysic. The aesthetic naturalism of Moore and Bennett is altogether a more manageable commodity, and the gain to Bennett in sheer ease or gracefulness of his art at its best is considerable. What is lost is the sense of purpose implicit in Zola's chronicle—or, for that matter, in the study of environment which

predates naturalism in English, Middlemarch. Bennett's art is capable of technical perfection; of its significance beyond technique, we are not always so confident.

The influence of Moore and the French authors was a lasting one, despite Bennett's later, rather incongruous, profession of admiration for the "universal sympathy" of Dostoievsky. It was toward the end of his career that he wrote the fine novel, Riceyman Steps, which seems so much a part of the tradition of French realism. Nevertheless, Bennett's allegiance to the new realism (as imported from France) did not blind him to the usefulness of the older tradition of English realism. His second novel, Anna of the Five Towns owes much to Dickens in its study of an individual at the mercy of a hostile environment. Anna Tellwright closely resembles those Dickensian heroines (for example, Florence Dombey, or Louisa Gradgrind) who are metaphorically orphaned by capitalism; Anna of the Five Towns is a novel about money (which is at all points the catalyst of plot action) just as Dombey and Son or Great Expectations is.

Similarly, The Old Wives' Tale shows English influences as well as those of Bennett's French masters. The novel was initially planned along the lines of Maupassant's Une Vie, as a study of a woman as she declines from youth into

raddled old age. However, it came to be expanded even beyond the introduction of a second major character:

...this defeat of youth and personality by time seemed too individual to Bennett and he considerably widened the range of his story by associating the growth, decline and fall of the two sisters with the passing of the old order of things and the coming of the new one.⁴

It is a measure of how perfectly successful Bennett is in this novel in making the naturalist style seem indigenous that Walter Allen, in what is still one of the best books on Bennett, points out the essential Englishness of the novel:

For in The Old Wives' Tale Bennett is no longer in any real sense a follower of the French naturalists. He has retained their sense of form; but that is all. He has become an English humourist even though he is more disciplined than the English humourists tend to be. His affinities are at once obvious and unexpected: dwelt upon a little more and allowed to break the restraints that Bennett imposes upon him, Mr. Critchlow would become a Dickens type. Similarly, Mr. Povey, in the toothache episode especially, might be a character in early Wells. What is remarkable—and it is the index of Bennett's artistic integrity—is just the restraint with which he holds such glorious traditionally English characters, characters in the double sense, in check; they might so easily have spilled over and swamped the book.⁵

Curiously, the most famous criticism of The Old Wives' Tale seems to have more to do with Bennett's first intention

(that is, an English version of Une Vie) than with the actual result. In Aspects of the Novel, E. M. Forster says:

Time is the real hero of The Old Wives' Tale. He is installed as the lord of creation—excepting indeed of Mr. Critchlow, whose bizarre exemption only gives added force. Sophia and Constance are the children of Time from the instant we see them romping with their mother's dresses; they are doomed to decay with a completeness that is very rare in literature. They are girls, Sophia runs away and marries, the mother dies, Constance marries, her husband dies, their old rheumatic dog lumbers up to see whether anything remains in the saucer. Our daily life in time is exactly this business of getting old which clogs the arteries of Sophia and Constance, and the story that is a story and sounded so healthy and stood no nonsense cannot sincerely lead to any conclusion but the grave. It is an unsatisfactory conclusion. Of course we grow old. But a great book must rest on something more than an 'of course' and The Old Wives' Tale is strong, sincere, sad, but it misses greatness.⁶

Now, there is a sense—although not Forster's—in which Time is the hero of the Hardy novels. That is, Hardy's characters are caught in an intolerable dilemma which can only be resolved (horribly, for Hardy) by time, by the completion of the evolution from life in nature to a state of spiritualized contempt for the life of the body. And time can be said to be the central concern of a much later family chronicle, Virginia Woolf's The Years (which, incidentally, succeeds where the later parts of the Forsyte Chronicles

failed, in being cast into the lyric mode). But it is not the hero of The Old Wives' Tale. Bursley—that is, the environment as it exists in itself and as its special characteristics work through the characters of the novel—is the "hero" of The Old Wives' Tale. The characters become the special characteristics of Bursley.

Indeed, the greatest achievement of Bennett's art in this novel is the way in which he makes "la double question des temperaments et des milieux"⁷ of the naturalists into one unified concern. He places his characters at what he depicts as a social turning-point:

The novel is as much as anything else a study in the decay of values. The very symbol of mid-Victorian provincial values is Sophia's father, John Baines, whom the reader sees only as a paralyzed old man, "far gone in decay and corruption." When John Baines dies, "Mid-Victorian England lay on that mahogany bed."⁸

The changes work through, as well as around, the characters (even though they are for the most part unconscious of them—appropriately, they themselves register the effects of change). So, it is Sophia who hastens the death of her moribund father, whereas at the end of the novel, it is Constance who dies a martyr to the cause of Bursley's independence:

The last scene of the poll for or against Federation is symbolical. The old municipal liberties are threatened

by the new need of centralization. Constance stubbornly votes against the new law thus securing an ephemeral victory for the old order and incidentally killing herself by leaving her sick room. The circle has been run full length. With the death of the last of the two sisters one cycle of history closes and another begins. Alone old Critchlow marks the permanency of commercial instincts and the Five Towns will to live.⁹

The family chronicle structure is so perfectly organic to the novel that change is marked by generations more than it is achieved by the efforts of any individual within one generation. We are literally watching social evolution. Thus, at the end of the novel, we see Sophia and Constance, for all their differences of personality, as a pair of old wives. They are in conflict with the next generation (represented by Constance's son, Cyril, and her husband's nephew, Dick Povey) just as Mrs. Baines and her sister had been in conflict with Sophia at the beginning of the novel. The difference, of course, is that Sophia and Constance's generation was a natural development from Mrs. Baines' generation. But Cyril is not Bursley (and Dick is in favour of the consolidation of the Five Towns) in the same way, simply because Bursley will cease to exist. After Sophia and Constance, there is—Fossette. That is, there is even actual proof of Constance's suspicion that Bursley

is going to the dogs of change.

Sophia in Bursley, at the opening of the novel, is the family rebel. But when the values of Bursley surface in her under the pressure of her experiences in France, we see that her differences from his sister are only those of personality, not of character. Constance, we must remember, had also thought Gerald Scales attractive, and it is she who (through her marriage to Samuel Povey) effectively displaces her mother.

Indeed, when Sophia goes to France—and this is surely the reason why Bennett sends her to France—she undergoes a process of self-discovery. And what she discovers is Bursley. When Gerald Scales first appears in Bursley, he is a figure of romance to Sophia. But when they go to Paris, she realizes, first, that he is really not a romantic ideal, and, second, that she does not want romance. The episode at Auxerre is a crucial experience; the hanging (significantly, of a romantic hero) precipitates her enlightenment:

She felt like a lost soul, torn too soon from shelter, and exposed for ever to the worst hazards of destiny. Why was she in this strange, incomprehensible town, foreign and inimical to her, watching with agonized glance this cruel, obscene spectacle? Her sensibilities were all a bleeding mass of wounds. Why? Only yesterday, and she had been an innocent, timid creature who deemed the concealment of letters a supreme excitement.

Either that day or this day was not real. Why was she imprisoned alone in that odious, indescribably odious hotel, with no one to soothe and comfort her, and carry her away?¹⁰

Sophia makes no attempt to come to terms with her sudden perception of a whole new order of reality; she reacts into the old Bursley version of reality. When Gerald deserts her, the Bursley values—the common sense, energy, and instinct for money which she displays to such a remarkable degree—are at first merely survival tactics. But she discovers that, after the aimless years with the spend-thrift Gerald, she likes being a landlady, and is a notably successful one:

And she went up to her room every night with limbs exhausted, but with head clear enough to balance her accounts and go through her money. She did this with thick gloves on. If often she did not sleep well, it was not because of the distant guns, but because of her preoccupation with the subject of finance. She was making money, and she wanted to make more. She was always inventing ways of economy. She was so anxious to achieve independence that money was always in her mind. She began to love gold, to love hoarding it, and to hate paying it away.

(OWT, p. 348)

When Sophia at last returns to Bursley, she is keenly aware of the differences between Bursley and Paris:

She longed to stretch her lungs in Paris. These people in Bursley did not suspect what Paris was. They did

not appreciate and they never would appreciate the marvels that she had accomplished in a theatre of marvels. They probably never realized that the whole of the rest of the world was not more or less like Bursley.
(OWT, p. 429)

But the differences that she bemoans are only superficial ones. Bursley, in her absence, has been more susceptible to change than she has (it is a comic example of culture lag):

Times had changed in Bursley. Bursley was more sophisticated than in the old days.
(OWT, p. 493)

Cyril and his friend Matthew Peel-Swynnerton are far more cosmopolitan than Sophia is. Sophia herself has registered the momentous (for Bursley) change implicit in the mere fact that a Povey and a Peel are friends:

Impossible that the Peels should be on terms of friendship with Samuel Povey or his connections! But supposing something utterly unanticipated and revolutionary had happened in the Five Towns!

Dr. Stirling has read Zola, but Sophia has not:

'I've just been reading Zola's Downfall,' he said.

Her mind searched backwards, and recalled a poster.

'Oh!' she replied. 'La Déba[^]cle?'

'Yes. What do ye think of it?'

His eyes lighted at the prospect of a talk. He was even pleased to hear her give him the title in French.

'I haven't read it,' she said, and

she was momentarily sorry that she had not read it, for she could see that he was dashed. The doctor had supposed that residence in a foreign country involved a knowledge of the literature of that country. Yet he had never supposed that residence in England involved a knowledge of English literature. Sophia had read practically nothing since 1870; for her the latest author was Cherbuliez. Moreover, her impression of Zola was that he was not at all nice, and that he was the enemy of his race, though at that date the world had scarcely heard of Dreyfus. Dr. Stirling had too hastily assumed the opinions of the bourgeois upon art differ in different countries. (OWT, pp. 441-2)

Indeed, as a messenger from the world of great events, Sophia is a failure:

'And ye actually were in the siege of Paris?' he questioned, trying again.

'Yes.'

'And the Commune?'

'Yes, the Commune too.'

...She responded as well as she could to his eagerness for personal details concerning the siege and the commune. He might have been disappointed at the prose of her answers, had he not been determined not to be disappointed... Those events, as they existed in her memory scarcely warranted the tremendous fuss subsequently made about them. What were they, after all? (OWT, p. 442)

There only remains for her the discovery that in Buxton (linked with Bursley by the fact that Constance and Samuel went to Buxton for their honeymoon) there is even a better pension than the Hotel Frensham, filled with people who have a broader knowledge of Paris than she has.

Sophia is the more interesting of the two main characters, as all the other characters of the novel, starting with Mrs. Baines, would agree. But it is Constance who is the success of the novel—who becomes at the end the actual personification of the old Bursley, as her father had been the symbol of the previous generation—simply because she has found fulfillment within Bursley. It is through Bennett's characterization of Sophia's placid (and for the most part dull, like Bursley itself) elder sister that we have the clue to the manner in which The Old Wives' Tale is epic.

An early critic of Bennett was the first to point out this quality of the novel:

The Old Wives' Tale is an epic of lower middle-class life in a small town and it is an invaluable record of the breadth and narrowness, strength and weakness and cheerful optimism and splendid endurance of this class.¹¹

E. M. W. Tillyard, in The Epic Strain in the English Novel, gives a more thorough study of it as a measure of the novel's achievement:

That, then, is the virtue of The Old Wives' Tale, its successful rendering of a choric feeling, the feeling of provincial puritanism....He gives us the entry into a community. He also validates his choric theme by brining to life the people who act it.¹²

In this novel about Bursley, Bennett, if he does not actually

accept its values, concedes them as facts of life (a stance, however, which allows us to see them with detachment; Constance is Bursley, but she is also a figure of comedy). Therefore, the characters who most fully live out those values are shown to be most successful.

Clearly, it is easier to live out the values of Bursley in Bursley than elsewhere. Sophia has had no real fulfillment of her life partly because the alien environment could not provide fulfillment in her (Bursleyan) terms. Chirac loved her as devotedly as any romantic heroine could wish, and for that reason she rejected him:

But all the time she knew that she wanted love. Only she conceived a different kind of love: placid, regular, somewhat stern, somewhat above the plane of whims, moods, caresses, and all mere fleshly contacts. Not that she considered that she despised these things (though she did)! What she wanted was a love that was too proud, too independent, to exhibit frankly either its joy or its pain. She hated a display of sentiment. And even in the most intimate abandonments she would have made reserves, and would have expected reserves, trusting to a lover's powers of divination, and to her own! The foundation of her character was a haughty moral independence, and this quality was what she most admired in others.

Chirac's inability to draw from his own pride strength to sustain himself against the blow of her refusal gradually killed in her the sexual desire which he had aroused, and which during

a few days flickered up under the stimulus of fancy and of regret. Sophia saw with increasing clearness that her unreasoning instinct had been right in saying nay. And when, in spite of this, regrets still visited her, she would comfort herself in thinking: 'I cannot be bothered with all that sort of thing. It is not worth while. What does it lead to? Is not life complicated enough without that? No, no! I will stay as I am. At any rate I know what I am in for, as things are!' And she would reflect upon her hopeful financial situation, and the prospect of a constantly sufficient income.

(OWT, pp. 364-5)

In short, she wanted—so far as she was capable of close relationship with anyone—a Samuel Povey:

A photograph of Samuel in the year before his death was really imposing. Sophia stared at it, impressed. It was the portrait of an honest man.

(OWT, p. 420)

The cost of deracination is what one critic calls Sophia's "retreat from life" into the miserliness that is metaphor for her emotional state no less than an actual condition:

Riceyman Steps makes clear Bennett's attitude toward the miser. His condemnation of Sophia's gradually growing asceticism practised in the name of money is equally unsparing, and explains why he permits Constance to have the last word on Sophia's "wasted and sterile life." Although he devotes an entire book of The Old Wives' Tale to what he considers Constance's meaningful and

rich life in Bursley, five pages suffice him after Sophia rejects Chirac. "This was the end of Sophia's romantic adventures in France....For Sophia the conclusion of the seige meant chiefly that prices went down." The last five pages present an increasingly unpleasant portrait of Sophia "employing two servants, working them very hard at low wages," a Sophia "who has acquired the landlady's manner," and who, with typical Bennett symbolism, is known as Mrs. Frensham, a woman who has "forgotten the face of love," who is "the landlady: efficient, stylish, diplomatic, and tremendously experienced," that Bennett brings back to Bursley, involved at last, caught by the mild Constance....13

Even Sophia's regret that she has no child is phrased with reference to the theme of miserliness. Like Soames Forsyte, Sophia thinks of a child as a valuable possession:

If thirty thousand pounds or so could have bought a son like Cyril, she would have bought one for herself. She bitterly regretted that she had no child. In this she envied Constance. A child seemed to be the one commodity worthy having. She was too free, too exempt from responsibilities.

(OWT, p. 430)

If Paris offered Sophia no viable opportunity for fulfillment beyond the Hotel Frensham, Bursley, on the other hand, can even offer its inhabitants opportunities for real heroism beyond the commercial goals which lead to Sophia's purely economic success. Samuel Povey, "to whom Heaven had granted a minimum share of imagination," dies in the

defence of an imaginative ideal, as embodied in his cousin, Daniel Povey. As values always are in this novel, that ideal is shown in historical perspective. Daniel was

...one of the remnant who had kept
alive the great Pan tradition from
the days of the Regency through the
vast, arid Victorian expanse of years.
(OWT, p. 151)

The significance of Samuel's actions in defence of his cousin is stressed, with immense effect, by the single place in the novel in which Bennett breaks into the first person:

A casual death, scarce noticed in the reaction after the great febrile demonstration! Besides, Samuel Povey never could impose himself on the burgesses. He lacked individuality. He was little. I have often laughed at Samuel Povey. But I liked and respected him. He was a very honest man. I have always been glad to think that, at the end of his life, destiny took hold of him and displayed, to the observant, the vein of greatness which runs through every soul without exception. He embraced a cause, lost it, and died of it.
(OWT, p. 215)

This may seem a desperate case of special pleading by Bennett, inasmuch as Samuel Povey hitherto appears a most unlikely candidate for heroism. But Samuel's lack of individuality is to be contrasted with Sophia's "haughty moral independence," and is in keeping with the epic nature of the novel. He acts within the community, finding in it

his larger stature.

The events of the first three section of the novel are carefully patterned so as to fall into parallels from book to book. But when Bennett brings the two sisters together again in the fourth book, "What Life Is," he forms parallels within the book itself so as to make explicit the essential differences in the lives of the sisters. The important thing is not that they die, but the way in which they die. It is the gauge by which we finally measure their success as human beings.

Sophia suddenly apprehends the horror of life when she stands beside the body of her husband:

Sophia then experienced a pure and primitive emotion, uncoloured by any moral or religious quality. She was not sorry that Gerald had wasted his life, nor that he was a shame to his years and to her. The manner of his life was of no importance. What affected her was that he had once been young, and that he had grown old, and was now dead. That was all. Youth and vigour had come to that. Youth and vigour always came to that. Everything came to that.... He and she had once loved and burned and quarrelled in the glittering and scornful pride of youth. But time had worn them out. 'Yet a little while,' she thought, 'and I shall be lying on a bed like that! And what shall I have lived for? What is the meaning of it?' The riddle of life itself was killing her, and she seemed to drown in a sea of inexpressible sorrow.

(OWT, p. 485)

This vision of life is literally annihilating; she dies a few hours later. Her despair does not grow inevitably out of life, but out of her own incapacity to respond to life, as we see even by what she most regrets. She laments only the condition of being young:

Could she excite lust now? Ah! the irony of such a question! To be young and seductive, to be able to kindle a man's eye—that seemed to her the sole thing desirable. Once she had been so! (OWT, p. 485)

It is worth noting the difference between Constance's grief for Sophia and Sophia's own regret:

In spite of the fact that Sophia was dead she still pitied Sophia as a woman whose life had been wasted. The idea of Sophia's wasted and sterile life, and of the far-reaching importance of adhering to principles, recurred to her again and again....And yet there had been something so fine about Sophia! Which made Sophia's case all the more pitiable! Constance never pitied herself. The invincible common sense of a sound nature prevented her, in her best moments, from feebly dissolving in self-pity. She had lived in honesty and kindness for a fair number of years, and she had tasted triumphant hours....True, she was old! So were thousands of other people. With whom would she be willing to exchange lots? She had many dissatisfactions. But she rose superior to them. When she surveyed her life, and life in general, she would think, with a sort of tart but not sour cheerfulness: 'Well, that is what life is!' (OWT, p. 516)

This robustness in the face of death arises directly out of Constance's imperviousness to change:

The ideas of her parents and her grandparents had survived intact in Constance. It is true that Constance's father would have shuddered in Heaven could he have seen Constance solitarily playing cards of a night. But in spite of cards, and a son who never went to chapel, Constance, under the various influences of destiny, had remained essentially what her father had been. Not in her was the force of evolution manifest. There are thousands such. (OWT, p. 492)

But these cannot exist much longer. St. Luke's Square is as decrepit as John Baines was at the beginning of the novel, and Constance is dispossessed. The shop—the focus of the family life, which we have seen absorbing infinitesimal changes from the beginning of the novel—has been swallowed at a gulp by a new sort of commercialism just as (it is the same thing) Bursley's position has been usurped by Hanley. Maria Critchlow is the casualty of progress:

She had seen Baines's in its magnificent prime, when Baines's almost conferred a favour on customers in serving them.... She had fought, and she kept on fighting, stupidly. She was not aware that she was fighting against evolution, not aware that evolution had chosen her for one of its victims! (OWT, pp. 503-4)

Significantly, Cyril is completely removed from the values of Bursley (and thereby causes Constance much suffering)—how far, is shown by his indifference to money:

Cyril showed no emotion whatever on learning himself the inheritor of thirty-five thousand pounds. He did not seem to care. He spoke of the sum as a milloinaire might have spoken of it. In justice to him it is to be said that he cared nothing for wealth, except in so far as wealth could gratify his eye and ear trained to artistic voluptuousness. But, for his mother's sake, and for the sake of Bursley, he might have affected a little satisfaction. His mother was somewhat hurt.

(OWT, p. 495)

He is sketched in as a portotype of Edwin Clayhanger (or, rather, as a prototype of Edwin's ideal of existence):

He had now reached the age of thirty-three. His habits were as industrious as ever, his preoccupation with his art as keen. But he had achieved no fame, no success. He earned nothing, living in comfort on an allowance from his mother. He seldom spoke of his plans and never of his hopes. He had in fact settled down into a dilettante, having learnt gently to scorn the triumphs which he lacked the force to win. He imagined that industry and a regular existence were sufficient justification in themselves for any man's life. Constance had dropped the habit of expecting him to astound the world. He was rather grave and precise in manner, courteous and tepid, with a touch of condescension toward his environment; as though he were continually permitting the perspicacious to learn that he had nothing to learn—if the truth were known! His humour had assumed a modified form. He often smiled to himself. He was unexceptionable. (OWT, p. 494)

Since Bursley itself is the focus of the novel, it is only appropriate that this refugee from the Five Towns is pale

in comparison with the least inhabitant of the town. (If Constance is usually rather comic, Cyril is positively asinine.) But in Bennett's next important novel, Clayhanger, this sort of character, still decidedly pale, is the author's chief concern—in this sense, Clayhanger is sequel to The Old Wives' Tale.

Most of the earlier critics of Bennett treat the Clayhanger trilogy as a rather inferior performance. Walter Allen complains about its formlessness as an inherent danger of the chronicle structure. But, while it would be foolish to claim that the Clayhanger novels taken either as a trilogy or separately are the same sort of virtuoso performance as the earlier novel, a more recent critic, James Hall, has shown that they are meaningfully arranged around a preoccupation that runs through most of Bennett's important work. This is the conflict between the values of what Hall calls "primitivism" and "taste"—that is, between the values represented by the native environment (Bursley) and those of a more varied cultural life which is often represented by London or Paris (but can be embodied for Edwin, at least, even by Brighton).

Each of the Clayhanger novels is a working out of some phase of this conflict. In Clayhanger, the different values are represented for Edwin by his father, Darius Clayhanger,

and the Orgreave family, respectively. In Hilda Lessways, we see a struggle similar to Edwin's, enacted by the woman whom he will eventually marry. In These Twain, the conflict of loyalties to the opposing sets of values is worked out between Edwin and Hilda themselves. Thus, it can be seen that this primarily social conflict (occurring when the community begins to fragment) is cast in the form of those even more fundamental conflicts of which Bennett was so acutely aware: the conflict of youth with dominating age, and of male with female.

Only the first three books of Clayhanger, which deal with the relationship of Edwin with his father, are primarily family chronicle, although the chronicle form re-emerges toward the end of These Twain, when Edwin opposes his stepson's plan to go to London to become an architect. But the chronicle structure, such as it is, functions in the same basic way as in The Old Wives' Tale. It is, of course, the generation represented by Edwin's step-son which finally and forever shakes the dust of Bursley from its feet. In terms of The Rainbow, it is only this generation which is thoroughly individualized out from its environment. Unlike Lawrence's novel, the Clayhanger trilogy is least concerned with the persons who are free of environmental determinism. To be free of one's environment is, in the

terms of Bennett's family chronicles, to cease to exist (which is, in turn, only a reflection of the fact that the environment has ceased to exist as a separate entity).

The Clayhanger trilogy are still novels "about" Bursley. It is worth noting that Edwin and Cyril Baines are more or less contemporaries (both characters, as young men, patronize the tailor who has introduced London fashions; the shop in St. Luke's Square, mentioned in the Centenary episode, still belongs to the Baineses). That is, Bennett is working with the same concept of change; it is the same generation which attempts to move out of the orbit of the values of Bursley. However, we do not see Bursley itself as a slowly changing organism as we do in The Old Wives' Tale. The most vividly significant changes have occurred a generation earlier. It is Darius whom we are shown as the product of change. Edwin, on the other hand, is defined in the first three-quarters of Clayhanger not so much by what he embodied (it is his fate—given the history of the environment—not to embody very much) but by the way in which he reacts to the people around him.

And, while the conflict of youth with age is worked out within the Clayhanger family (and is only resolved in the inevitable biological way, when Edwin gains the upper hand during his father's illness), the presence of the conflicting

sets of social values within the environment is not arranged in a strictly chronological way. Mr. Orgreaves (the member of the family whose hold on Edwin's imagination is strongest) is the contemporary of Darius—although it should be said that the personalities of his children are rather dim in comparison with him, as Edwin is to Darius (and Cyril to Constance and Sophia).

We are allowed an altogether wider vision of the possibilities of Bursley than suited Bennett's purpose in The Old Wives' Tale. The town is, after all, larger than St. Luke's Square. Bursley, at one time at least, could produce things of real beauty—as evidenced by the Sytch pottery (although that is accounted for by the fact that it is Georgian, much as Daniel Povey is in the earlier novel accounted for by the fact that he is the spiritual heir of the Regency). The native culture, with which the Orgreaves have no more contact than the Bainses had, may not be very highly developed, but in Edwin's youth it still has richness and vitality—as we see in the glee-singers, the clog-dancer, the "Blood-Tub." Bursley does not, as we might infer from The Old Wives' Tale, die principally from anaemia and Wesleyan sexual mores.

The point of all this is that the focus has changed. In The Old Wives' Tale, we have John Baines, whose function

is chiefly symbolic, followed by Constance and Sophia who are fully developed characters in whom we see the special characteristics which Bennett posits as the strengths of the environment, followed by Cyril who is totally unlike the previous generation, just as St. Luke's Square itself has changed beyond recognition. And we know as much about the minute changes of the Square, as they occur, as we do about the lives of the characters—they are aspects of the same thing. But in Clayhanger the differing sets of values of the earlier Baineses and of Cyril are presented side by side, in conflict with each other. It is the difference between depicting Bursley in its time of strength through the chief characters and in depicting Edwin as he is confronted by such a character in his father. That there could be such a difference of values is, of course, a function of Bursley's disintegration. Only now are there characters sufficiently differentiated out from the environment to feel it as a determining pressure.

Like Cyril Baines, Edwin is "artistic" in temperament. This temperament is rather carefully delineated by Bennett as more than a matter of cultural taste:

The impartial and unmoved spectator
that sat somewhere in Edwin, as in
everybody who possesses artistic sensi-
bility, watching his secret life as
from a conning tower....14

Even the boorish Darius recognizes Edwin's difference from himself:

Edwin, his own son, had a personal distinction that he could never compass. He had an original grace. In the essence of his being he was superior to both his father and his sisters.

(Clayhanger, p. 92)

There is no attempt to account for Edwin in terms of heredity. In Cyril's case, one could, I suppose, find hereditary justification for his tastes (if not his temperament) in such small things as Sophia's love for reading as a girl (which she abandons when she gets down to the serious business of living)—we are carefully told that her mother, like Darius Clayhanger, read absolutely nothing but a religious weekly. In Buddenbrooks, Mann incorporates the increasing sensitivity to immaterial values into the history of his family as a hereditary symptom of the family's declining vitality—"art emerges as the destroyer of life."¹⁵

Although Edwin's artistic proclivities are not accounted for with such thoroughness in terms of heredity, he and Hanno Buddenbrook have much in common. Edwin is a natural spectator:

For it is Edwin's greatness, his flair, to be particularly sensitive spectator at the crises of others. Darius—watching-at-Edwin's-death-bed would

fail in a double sense—there would be nothing impressive about the death of Edwin, and if there were, Darius would not be artist enough to perceive it.¹⁶

Like Hanno, what Edwin watches as his father dies is the end of a way of life. Bennett achieves a different sort of force, but in its way as fine as Mann's, by refraining from the attempt to show that Edwin is just the embodiment of hereditary tendencies. The dramatic value of the situation is enhanced by the very fact that Darius and Edwin are so alien to one another, that each is so little implicated in the other.

In Clayhanger, Edwin's conflict is specifically with his father (and that buttress of partriarchal authority, Auntie Hamps). But Bennett makes the reader entirely clear on the point that Darius himself (as thoroughly as any character in Zola) has been formed by his experience of the environment. He is wholly the product of nineteenth century economics. That he is, when he had come so near to being their victim, is a perpetual source of wonder to him:

Darius had never spoken to a soul of his night in the Bastille. All his infancy was his own fearful secret. His life, seen whole, had been a miracle. But none knew that except himself and Mr. Shushions. Assuredly Edwin never even faintly suspected it. To

Edwin Mr. Shushions was nothing but a
feeble and tedious old man.
(Clayhanger, p. 38)

Darius's sense of the "miracle" is what makes him a sympathetic character to the reader. Bennett engages our sympathy by the Zola-esque sketch of Darius's career as a child labourer in the potteries. But the new generation has grown too far away from its roots to recognize them:

Edwin's grand misfortune was that he
was blind to the miracle. Edwin had
never seen the little boy in the
Bastille. But Darius saw him always,
the infant who had begun life at a
rope's end. Every hour of Darius's
present existence was really an
astounding marvel to Darius.
(Clayhanger, p. 39)

To Darius, Edwin is simply perverse in not wanting to perpetuate the miracle by working in the printing shop.

Bennett gives a picture of the Clayhangers' family life which is as intense as anything in The Way of All Flesh. Edwin loathes Darius's domestic tyranny with a passion equal to Ernest Pontifex's hatred for his parents. It is, in both cases, the hatred of the slave for the master—an exacerbated form of youthful resentment at the domination of age. One of the attractions of the Orgreaves is that their family life is quite different. The supper at their house on the night he meets Hilda is carefully set out as a contrast to the description of the ghastly

meals in the Clayhanger household that punctuate the novel. The Orgreaves manage through their multiplicity of shared tastes and concerns to escape the horrid intensity of the Clayhangers' life together:

He was disgusted more comprehensively by the tradition...universal in his class and in most classes, according to which relatives could not be formally polite to one another....They had been too brutally intimate, and the result was irremediable. (Clayhanger, pp. 228-9)

From the beginning of Darius's illness, Bennett uses this rendition of provincial domestic manners at their worst to portray a subtly delineated change in Edwin. If Edwin cannot understand his father, he does begin to understand the process by which one becomes a domestic tyrant:

...compassion and irritation fought an interminable guerilla. Now one obtained the advantage, now the other.

For all their pity, Edwin and Maggie feel the impatience of the healthy for the debility of illness:

And as the weeks passed his children's manner of humouring him became increasingly perfunctory, and their movements in putting right the negligence of his attire increasingly brusque. Vainly they tried to remember in time that he was a victim and not a criminal; they would remember after the careless remark and after the curt gesture, when it was too late. His malady obsessed them; it was in the air of the house, omnipresent; it weighed upon them, corroding the nerve and exasperating the

spirit. Now and then, when Darius had vented a burst of irrational anger, they would say to each other with casual bitterness that really he was too annoying. (Clayhanger, p. 386)

Edwin is incapable of being the sort of bully that his father was. But he tyrannizes over Maggie as completely, if not so brutally, as his father before him. The time comes when he is thoroughly capable of goading his sister to tears; mealtimes in the household improve only marginally after Darius's death. Bennett seems to be underlining the fact that we are biologically determined in another than the usual hereditary sense of the naturalists—that, despite the politeness of social conventions, we exist in a state of nature in which the strong prey on the weak, the young against the old. The picture of the domestic life of the Clayhangers approaches Gissing's vision in New Grub Street, of a Darwinian struggle for survival. Edwin is by no means more fit than his peers, but within the household he has the rudimentary advantages of health and maleness, and he does not fail to exploit them.

Nevertheless, Edwin's attitude toward his father grows more complex during Darius's illness. The illness provides his longed-for revenge, but he has too much imaginative sensitivity to exult:

Once Edwin looked forward to a moment when he might have his father at his

mercy, when he might revenge himself for the insults and the bullying that had been his. Once he had clenched his fist and his teeth, and had said, "When you're old, and I've got you, and you can't help yourself....!" That moment had come, and it had even enabled and forced him to refuse money to his father—refuse money to his father!...As he looked at the poor figure fumbling towards the door, he knew the humiliating pettiness of revenge. As his anger fell, his shame grew. (Clayhanger, p. 409)

Similarly, Edwin's relationship to Bursley itself is more complex than might be indicated by sheer hatred of his father and affection for the Orgreaves. His attitude toward his environment is as ambivalent as his feelings for his dying father, simply because they are the same things. The finest source of irony in the novel is the way in which Edwin moves toward the values of Bursley as he assumes dominance over his father, even while remaining sensitive to the values with which Hilda is more firmly aligned. This is not a process of the buried values surfacing, as they do in *Sophia in Paris*. It is, rather, the inevitable result of remaining in Bursley when he is cursed by the ability to see both sides of everything.

Bennett has an absolute genius for handling point of view, and nowhere does it work better than the way in which as Edwin shifts alignment, even our view of the Orgreaves

(which earlier is nearly always through Edwin) changes. (If one were to ask why this is different than the changing point of view about Soames in the Saga, the reply would obviously be that there it is Galsworthy's mind which seems to be changing.) Indeed, the beginning of this change is implicit in the first scene at the Orgreaves' house. Mr. Orgreaves' family preys on him for the support of their richly varied lives. If Darius is the tyrant in his family, Mr. Orgreaves is the financial victim of his. This theme, at first merely comic, gathers a note of desperation later in the novel. And tyranny in the name of family ties is not a speciality of a particular set of values. Janet Orgreave, an exact parallel to Maggie Clayhanger, spends her youth tending her parents. But like Edwin, she is avenged by her power in their weakness of old age.

Because Edwin hates his father in his strength, he is incapable of sympathy for Bursley as represented by Darius. But we are given a wider view of the town through another representative of Bursley's past, James Yarlett (who, in turn, provides another perspective of Darius), for whom even Edwin has respect and admiration. It is Big James who takes Edwin to the meeting of the Burial Society where he sees the clog-dancer. It is important that this performance of one of the minor arts of the region (growing directly out

of the local industry, as Bennett points out with more care than strictly necessary) becomes Edwin's symbol of sexuality. Edwin himself is conscious of the vitality inherent in the values of Bursley. And he knows he hasn't got it:

He was afraid because he knew, vaguely and still deeply, that he could neither buy nor sell as well as his father. It was not a question of brains; it was a question of individuality. A sense of honour, of fairness, a temperamental generosity, a hatred of meanness, often prevented him from pushing a bargain to the limit. He could not bring himself to haggle desperately. And even when the price was not the main difficulty, he could not talk to a customer, or to a person whose customer he was, with the same rough, gruff, cajoling, bullying skill as his father had done naturally, by the merely blind exercise of instinct. His father, with all his clumsiness, and his unscientific methods, had a certain quality, unseizable, unanalysable, and Edwin had not that quality. (Clayhanger, p. 392)

Edwin's involvement with Bursley beyond his father had been by chance, when he saved his father's printing shop from disaster:

By his own act of cool, nonchalant, unconsidered courage in a crisis, he had, it seemed, definitely proved himself to possess a special aptitude in all branches of the business of a printer and a stationer. Everybody assumed it. Everybody was pleased. Everybody saw that Providence had been kind to Darius and to his son. The

fathers of the town, and the mothers, who liked Edwin's complexion and fair hair, told each other that not every parent was so fortunate as Mr. Clayhanger; and what a blessing it was that the old breed was not after all dying out in those newfangled days. Edwin could not escape from the universal assumption. He felt it round him as a net which somehow he had to cut. (Clayhanger, p. 115)

He never does manage to cut the net. Entrapped "by something without a name in the air which the mind breathes," (Clayhanger, p. 225) he does not even try very hard. In a feeble enactment of his father's role, he will finally oppose the plan of his step-son to go to London to become an architect, in These Twain. The important difference between himself and his father—the difference which is a comment upon Bursley's weakening hold upon her inhabitants—will be that he does not manage to make his opposition felt.

The Centenary celebration is a splendid set-piece, the equivalent in Clayhanger of the hanging at Auxerre in The Old Wives' Tale, or of the revival meeting in Anna of the Five Towns. As in the earlier novels, the feelings of the chief characters of the novel crystallize around it. Edwin, at first disdaining the whole performance, is only drawn to it (in the teeth of his own family's enthusiasm) by the tepid interest of the Orgreaves. The effect of the episode is immeasurably heightened (it is, of course, Zola's

technique of dealing with people in the mass) by Edwin's divided feelings as spectator. Keenly aware of the comedy of the sweating crowds vicariously bathing in the blood of the Lamb, he is moved chiefly because Hilda is engrossed in it:

...all this made something not merely impressive, but beautiful, something that had a true if narrow dignity; something that ministered to an ideal if a low one. (Clayhanger, p. 259)

When Mr. Shushions appears, Edwin is unconscious of his importance:¹⁷

Thus was the doddering old fool who had given his youth to Sunday schools when Sunday schools were not patronized by princes, arch-bishops, and lord mayors, when Sunday schools were the scorn of the intelligent, and had sometimes to be held in public houses for lack of better accommodation, thus was he taken off for a show and a museum curiosity who had not even the wit to guess that he had sown what they were reaping. And Darius Clayhanger stood oblivious at a high window of the sacred Bank. And Edwin, who, all unconscious, owed the very fact of his existence to the doting imbecile, regarded him chiefly as a figure in a tableau, as the chance instrument of a woman's beautiful revelation. Mr. Shushion's sole crime against society was that he had forgotten to die. (Clayhanger, p. 252)

The Centenary is a communal tribute to one of the foundations of Bursley's past. The Sunday schools, in

providing the first free schools for the children of the potteries (Mr. Shushions taught Darius to read), brought about the first fragmentation of the economic structure of the community—as Darius's own career attests. We are invited to compare the Centenary with the other occasion of public celebration which occurs in the novel, the Jubilee. It is carefully linked with this one. Darius does not notice Mr. Shushions at the Centenary, and is unaware of the old man's poverty. He does not know until too late that the old man has gone to the workhouse from which he had, as a young man, rescued Darius's family. As on other occasions, Edwin has no comprehension of the causes of his father's feeling for Mr. Shushions:

What he did not suspect was the existence of circumstances which made the death of Mr. Shushions in the workhouse the most distressing tragedy that could by any possibility have happened to Darius Clayhanger. (Clayhanger, p. 334)

Darius collapses immediately after Mr. Shushion's funeral; the organization of the funeral (which Darius regards as a sacred obligation) is his last public act.

Darius's illness prevents Edwin from going to London with the Orgreaves for the Jubilee celebrations. He wanders through the deserted town with James Yarlett to see Bursley's forlorn attempt at local celebration of the event. The

ox is an interesting analogue to the elephant in The Old Wives' Tale. It is allowed no such symbolic value, but Bennett pushes toward symbolism by a comic juxtaposition of ideas: .

"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. Then suddenly, in a different tone, sniffing the air, "I doubt it's turned! I'll step across and ask Mr. Day."
(Clayhanger, p. 394)

If the first celebration is a tribute to Bursley's own past, this second one indicates how greatly the town is changed in the present. The attraction exerted by London on this occasion is felt by the whole community. Bursley as a way of life is as dead as the ox. We have been brought to the same point, in terms of the family chronicle, as the last section of The Old Wives' Tale. Therefore, Darius dies (although we may lose sight of the symbolic aspect of his death in the process of learning more than we want to know about Cheyne-Stokes breathing). His slow death is the analogue of Sophia's and Constance's ineffectual old age. After all the years of suppressed rebellion, Edwin is free. But, caught in the no-man's-land between conflicting sets of values (in terms of the novel, between periods of social history), he is incapable of using his freedom:

The prospect of freedom, of release from a horrible and humiliated servitude—this prospect ought to have dazzled and lifted him, in the safe, inviolable privacy of his own heart. But it did not....

(Clayhanger, p. 350)

In the terms of these novels, to be free is to lack identity, to have nothing to do.

If Cyril Baines is a dilettante artist, Edwin is a dilettante at life, "so involved in living that he doesn't make much of a life of it after all,"¹⁸ Hilda begins his ostensible rescue when she "sends him a message" in the person of her son. He will marry Hilda (she, of course, is the one who proposes), and he sees that as a victory scored against Bursley:

Somewhere within himself he smiled as he reflected 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. He smiled grimly at the thought of Auntie Hamps, of Clara, of the pietistic Albert! They were of a different race, a different generation! They belonged to a dead world! (Clayhanger, p. 573)

But that world existed most importantly to Edwin in his father, and Edwin's victory over Bursley has really only occurred by virtue of his father's death. It is a very minor one. The child is not his child. And no one, after all, will care very much when he marries Hilda. Bursley

ultimately triumphs in Edwin not because it is still strong, but because he is so weak.

At the beginning of The Old Wives' Tale, Bennett makes large claims for Bursley:

It has everything that England has, including thirty miles of Watling Street; and England can show nothing more beautiful and nothing uglier than the works of nature and the works of man to be seen within the limits of the country. It is England in little, lost in the midst of England, unsung by searchers after the extreme; perhaps occasionally somewhat sore at this neglect, but how proud in the instinctive cognizance of its representative features and traits!

We are convinced of the importance of what Bursley represents in English experience while we read The Old Wives' Tale and the first three books of Clayhanger. Given the unpromising nature of the material, it is no mean achievement that Bennett's art convinces us. The art of The Old Wives' Tale is always interesting—so much so, that the chief pleasure of reading the novel is the recognition of the manner of the achievement. But it is one of the peculiarities of the novel as an art form—even after James, and Moore, and Bennett himself—that we make judgments upon it beyond the purely aesthetic. And we come eventually to feel that Bursley, characteristically, assumes too much for itself.

It was never all of England, and the range of experience it provided for was limited. As Bennett was perfectly aware, one Constance Baines is enough. No one laments her passing. By the nature of his subject, Bennett cannot free the Five Towns novels from the limitations of the "regional novel."¹⁹ In the very perfection of his technique, by which everything fits so harmoniously, Bennett leaves us feeling he has given too little in his epic of English life. Even allowing for its deficiencies, Bennett has given us less of Bursley than George Eliot gave us of Middlemarch. And, just as Bennett refuses to acknowledge the fact that Bursley is not all of England, he also avoids the implications of Lawrence's fundamental conviction that an individual is not merely the personification of his environment, that no human being worth the trouble of delineating in a novel can be defined in such terms without loss to truth (and, ultimately, to art). Only Lawrence, among these two generations of chroniclers, manages at once successfully to render in the account of a family the evolution of a particular part of English society (as Bennett does), and to invest it with significance beyond time and place (as Hardy does).

Footnotes - Chapter V

¹ As has been pointed out by two recent articles: Irving Kreutz, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf," Modern Fiction Studies, VIII (Summer, 1962), 103-115, and Samuel Hynes, "The Whole Contention Between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf," Novel, I (1967-68), 34-44.

² Walter Allen, Arnold Bennett (London: Hom and Van-Thal, 1948), p. 24.

³ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

⁴ Georges Lafourcade, Arnold Bennett: A Study (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), p. 113.

⁵ Allen, Arnold Bennett, pp. 70-1.

⁶ E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962 [1929]), pp. 45-6.

⁷ Zola's preface to the first volume of Les Rougon-Macquart, quoted by Levin in Gates of Horn, p. 335.

⁸ James Hepburn, The Art of Arnold Bennett (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 14-15.

⁹ Lafourcade, Arnold Bennett, p. 114.

¹⁰ Arnold Bennett, The Old Wives' Tale (London: Dent, 1935 [1908]), p. 287.

¹¹ J. B. Simons, Arnold Bennett and His Novels: A Critical Study (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), p. 101.

¹² E. M. W. Tillyard, The Epic Strain in the English Novel (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 185.

¹³ James Hall, Arnold Bennett: Primitivism and Taste (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1959), p. 69-70.

¹⁴ Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger (London: Methuen, 1947 [1910]), p. 230.

¹⁵ Eric Heller, The Ironie German: A Study of Thomas Mann (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), pp. 51-2.

¹⁶ Hall, Primitivism and Taste, p. 103.

¹⁷ Darius's position in the scene is very important.

¹⁸ Frierson, The Novel in Transition, p. 153.

¹⁹ That Bennett was at his best as a regional novelist—a theory beloved of his early critics who came from the Midlands themselves—is disproved by Riceyman Steps.

CHAPTER VI

The Lost Girl is usually labelled as D. H. Lawrence's attempt to capitalize upon Bennett's popular success:

Lawrence did not want to be poor, though he could always make the best of poverty. It was natural, then, that as he brooded over England's best-seller of 1912, he should wonder why he with his gifts as a writer and even closer to the bone knowledge of industrial England than Bennett, should not also write a best-seller of realism.¹

But that attempt—which only after the war became The Lost Girl—has its beginnings inextricably mingled with those of Lawrence's finest novels, The Rainbow and Women in Love. In Lawrence's letters of the period, it is often difficult to tell whether he is referring to The Lost Girl or to the other work. At other times, what now seems the lesser artistic achievement, then seemed greater in its importance to the author:

I have written 130 pages of my newest novel, The Sisters. It is a queer novel, which seems to have come by itself. I will send it you. You may dislike it—it hasn't got hard outlines—and of course it's only first draft—but it is pretty neat, for me, in composition. Then I've got 200 pages of a novel which I'm saving—which is very lumbering—which I'll call, provisionally, The Insurrection of Miss Houghton. That I shan't send you yet, but it is, to me, fearfully

exciting. It lies next my heart, for the present. But I am finishing The Sisters. It will only have 300 pages. It was meant for the jeunes filles, but already it has fallen from grace. I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about: and that, at present, is the relation between men and women. After all, it is the problem of to-day, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between men and women. In a month The Sisters will be finished (D.V.).²

Moreover, the pot-boiler view of the novel tends to obscure the crucial point that it was formed, even initially, at least as much out of a reaction against Bennett's realism, as out of the desire to write a successful realist novel. In thanking his friend, A.W. McLeod, for sending him Anna of the Five Towns, Lawrence wrote:

I hate England and its hopelessness,
I hate Bennett's resignation. Tragedy
ought really to be a great kick at
misery. But Anna of the Five Towns
seems like an acceptance—so does all
the modern stuff since Flaubert. I
hate it. I want to wash again quickly,
wash off England, the oldness and
grubbiness and despair.³

Indeed, I should like to argue in this chapter that The Lost Girl is not an emulation of Bennett's realism, but a deliberately "anti-Bennett," or anti-naturalist, novel in form as well as subject.

Lawrence was not, of course, opposed to the native

English realism of the nineteenth century. We know from Jessie Chambers' book that he was a youthful admirer of George Eliot, and in a letter to A. W. McLeod he mentions Mark Rutherford with admiration even as he points in the direction of his antipathy:

I think Hilaire Belloc is conceited.
Full of that French showing-off which
goes down so well in England, and is
so smartly shallow. And I have always
a greater respect of Mark Rutherford:
I do think he is jolly good—so thorough,
so sound, and so beautiful.⁴

He is passionately opposed to the "new realism" (as imported from France), in which failure is built into the determinist conception of the characters' lives. At the same time, he perceives the aesthetic concomitant to this dreariness of view:

Thomas Mann seems to me the last sick sufferer from the complaint of Flaubert. The latter stood away from life as from a leprosy. And Thomas Mann, like Flaubert, feels vaguely that he has in him something finer than ever physical life revealed. Physical life is a disordered corruption, against which he can fight with only one weapon, his fine aesthetic sense, his feeling for beauty, for perfection, for a certain fitness which soothes him, and gives him an inner pleasure, however corrupt the stuff of life may be. There he is, after all these years, full of disgust and loathing of himself as Flaubert was, and Germany is being voiced, or partly so, by him. And so, with real suicidal intention, like Flaubert's, he sits, a last too-sick disciple, reducing himself grain by grain

to the statement of his own disgust, patiently, self-destructively, so that his statement at least may be perfect in a world of corruption.⁵

That is, there is a sort of aesthetic determinism which accompanies the new realism, which Lawrence is quick to isolate. Zola, in his quasi-scientific enthusiasm for his social "experiments," is too briskly keen to get on with the job of dissecting society to consider seriously anything so rarified as the aesthetics of the novel. But the subject matter of naturalism has other sources, in Huysmans and the brothers Goncourt. And they, like Flaubert and his circle, were concerned with form as something distinct from subject. This preoccupation with style is central to their English heirs, George Moore and the Bennett of The Old Wives' Tale and Riceyman Steps. Now, Lawrence himself is brilliantly capable of virtuoso performances, as The Rainbow and Women in Love attest. Nevertheless, as the proponent of the novel as the "book of life,"⁶ Lawrence was thoroughly committed to the subjection of form to matter—that is, in his work matter always dictates form. All Lawrence's technical innovation is toward the promotion of this, his cardinal tenet—that the novelist is committed not to formal art, but to life.

Lawrence's quarrel with the formal art of the new

realism is worked out very thoroughly in The Lost Girl. At the outset, any pretense of that authorial objectivity which is the hallmark of the naturalists is abandoned in this intensely self-conscious work. On one of the most important of the many occasions when the author comes forward, he denounces the chosen subject matter of the naturalists. It is worth noticing how markedly the tone lifts after he has dispensed with "ordinariness":

There have been enough stories about ordinary people. I should think the Duke of Clarence must even have found malmsey nauseating, when he choked and went purple and was really asphyxiated in a butt of it. And ordinary people are no malmsey. Just ordinary tap-water. And we have been drenched and deluged and so nearly drowned in perpetual floods of ordinariness, that tap-water tends to become a really hateful fluid to us. We loathe its out-of-the-tap tastelessness. We detest ordinary people. We are in peril of our lives from them: and in peril of our souls too, for they would damn us one and all to the ordinary. Every individual should, by nature, have his extraordinary points. But nowadays you may look for them with a microscope, they are so worn-down by the regular machine-friction of our average and mechanical days.

There was no hope for Alvina in the ordinary. If help came, it would have to come from the extraordinary. Hence the extreme peril of her case. Hence the bitter fear and humiliation she felt as she drudged shabbily on in Manchester House, hiding herself as much as possible from public view. Men can suck the

heady juice of exalted self-importance from the bitter weed of failure—failures are usually the most conceited of men: even as was James Houghton. But to a woman, failure is another matter. For her it means failure to live, failure to establish herself on the face of the earth. And this is humiliating, the ultimate humiliation.
(L. G., pp. 107-8)

In Lawrence's view, society (in the sense of ordinary people) must not be allowed to swamp the individual. Ironically, in the novel it is the bourgeoisie French-woman who objects to the literary heroines who submit unwillingly to society. But there is no doubt that she voices Lawrence's own view⁷:

'But your Sue now, in Jude the Obscure—is it not an interesting book? And is she not always too practically practical! If she had been impractically practical she could have been quite happy. Do you know what I mean?—no. But she is ridiculous, Sue: so Anna Karenine. Ridiculous both. Don't you think?...Why did they both make everybody unhappy, when they had the man they wanted, and enough money? I think they are both silly. If they had been beaten, they would have lost all their practical ideas and troubles, merely forgot them, and been happy enough. I am a woman who says it. Such ideas they have are not tragical. No, not at all! They are nonsense, you see, nonsense. That is all. Nonsense. Sue and Anna, they are—nonsensical. That is all. No tragedy whatsoever. Nonsense. I am a woman. I know men also. And I know nonsense when I see it. Englishwomen are all nonsense:

the worst women in the world for nonsense. (L. G., pp. 178-9)

Therefore, we cannot take the leisurely opening of the novel as the promise of a naturalist study of milieu, cast into the family chronicle form, that the second sentence seems to suggest:

Take a mining townlet like Woodhouse, with a population of ten thousand people, and three generations behind it. This space of three generations argues a certain well-established society. The old 'County' has fled from the sight of so much disembowelled coal, to flourish on mineral rights in regions still idyllic. Remains one great and inaccessible magnate, the local coal owner: three generations old, and clambering on the bottom step of the 'County', kicking off the mass below. Rule him out.

A well established society in Woodhouse, full of fine shades, ranging from the dark of coal-dust to grit of stone-mason and saw-dust of timber-merchant, through the lustre of lard and butter and meat, to the perfume of the chemist and the disinfectant of the doctor, on to the serene gold-tarnish of bank-managers, cashiers for the firm, clergymen and such-like, as far as the automobile refulgence of the general-manager of the collieries. Here the ne plus ultra. The general manager lives in the shrubberied seclusion of the so-called Manor. The genuine Hall, abandoned by the 'County', has been taken over as offices by the firm.

Here we are then: a vast substratum of colliers; a thick

sprinkling of tradespeople intermingled with small employers of labour and diversified by elementary schoolmasters and nonconformist clergy; a higher layer of bank-managers, rich millers and well-to-do ironmasters, episcopal clergy and the managers of collieries: then the rich and sticky cherry of the local coal-owner glistening over all.

Such the complicated social system of a small industrial town in the Midlands of England, in this year of grace 1920. But let us go back a little. Such it was in the last calm year of plenty, 1913.
(L. G., p. 11)

This opening passage rewards attention on several counts—not least, because its details contain Lawrence's historical account of how such places as Woodhouse came to be as they are (note that the old Hall is now the office of the mining firm, for example). But most of all, it is interesting for the emphasis on dates. Woodhouse, we are told, is now (in 1920) as it was in 1913. That is, the community has not been affected by the war (a fact which will form an important contrast to Alvina's position at the end of the novel, when she herself is so appallingly vulnerable to the forces of modern history). The irony of the opening is reinforced when we discover that Woodhouse now is as it was in the 1880's—when the action of the novel actually begins. Thus, we are shown as clearly as possible that—appearances to the contrary—this novel will not be about Woodhouse in the

the way that the Bennett novels which have been discussed are about Bursley. Woodhouse, apparently incapable of change, has congealed; Lawrence makes us feel that it is no longer interesting in itself.

Given the fact that this is a novel by an author who elsewhere excels at creating a "sense of place," we are justified (indeed, encouraged by the relaxed tone of the opening) in refusing to take the environment over-seriously as a threat to individuals. Throughout the novel, Lawrence gets a good deal of comedy out of Woodhouse's intractability. But, finally, we feel that James Houghton is a human (as opposed to commercial) failure not on account of blows dealt to his sensibility by the Woodhouse louts, but because of the flaws inherent in his "romantic-commercial"⁸ nature.

Lest we miss the point of his refusal to subscribe to environmental determinism, the author launches into what promises to be a naturalist description of Alvina's training period in the Islington hospital. The details are distressing enough for the most hardened naturalist, but Lawrence merely abandons them:

Surely enough books have been written
about heroines in similar circumstances.
There is no need to go into the details
of Alvina's six months in Islington.
(L. G., p. 46)

There does follow, however, one naturalist set-piece. It is interesting that the emphasis falls not on the sufferer's social being, but upon her animality:

It would be useless to say she was not shocked. She was profoundly and awfully shocked. Her whole state was perhaps largely the result of shock: a sort of play-acting based on hysteria. But the dreadful things she saw in the lying-in hospital, and afterwards, went deep, and finished her youth and her tutelage for ever. How many infernos deeper than Miss Frost could ever know, did she not travel? the inferno of the human animal, the human organism in its convulsions, the human social beast in its abjection and its degradation.

For in her latter half she had to visit the slum cases. And such cases! A woman lying on a bare, filthy floor, a few old coats thrown over her, and vermin crawling everywhere, in spite of the sanitary inspectors. But what did the woman, the sufferer, herself care! She ground her teeth and screamed and yelled with pains. In her calm periods she lay stupid and indifferent—or she cursed a little. But abject, stupid indifference was the bottom of it all: abject, brutal indifference to everything—yes, everything. Just a piece of female functioning, no more.

(L. G., p. 47)

It is Lawrence's point (however much the reader may want to question it) that this woman's situation is no different than that of Mrs. Tukes later in the novel, for all the differences of their respective environments.

What this interlude in Alvina's life provides is a necessary inoculation against gentility which serves her well when she goes back to Woodhouse. For, even if we are not to take Woodhouse at its own estimate, Keith Sagar underestimates Alvina's environment:

Lawrence goes 'really a substratum deeper' because he has created his Woodhouse world in all its 'reality' in order to have an absurd troupe of phony Indians make it disappear at the toss of a feathered head. The unreality, absurdity of the circus troupe is essential to the satire; they must share none of the standards of society they invade.9

Alvina is never actively threatened by society in its Woodhouse or Lancaster manifestations. Its restrictiveness is dangerous only in the sense that it does not seem likely to provide any opportunity for escape. The sort of fulfillment which involves at once a personal relationship and vital inter-action with society at large is never regarded as possible—nor, Woodhouse being what it is, desirable. Alvina will have to seize upon unconventional means of fulfilling her extraordinary (in terms of Woodhouse) demands upon life. After the experience and insight gained in Islington, Alvina is not only capable of living by other than Woodhouse standards, but (often comically) willing to abandon

conventional behaviour in order to gain her ends.

Her ability to stand thus distinct from her environment is from the first explained in hereditary terms.

We hear a good deal about Alvina being her father's daughter.

In strictly literal terms, she is most recognizably his heir in her inability to make money:

Here was James Houghton's own daughter....Being her father's daughter, we might almost expect that she did not make a penny.... She had become a maternity nurse in order to practise in Woodhouse, just as James Houghton had purchased his elegancies to sell in Woodhouse. And father and daughter alike calmly expected Woodhouse demand to rise to their supply. So both alike were defeated in their expectations. (L. G., pp. 55-6)

But in fact, whereas James Houghton (incurably drunk upon the romance of commerce) becomes thoroughly enmeshed in Woodhouse values, Alvina's commercial failings are only a function of her superiority over Woodhouse. The suggestion that failure in the abstract might be an hereditary quality (no sillier, after all, than hereditary criminality) is only exploited for so long as Lawrence wants to create suspense over whether Alvina can find any means to fulfillment in Woodhouse.

Lawrence's serious concern with heredity in this novel is as a means of rendering a method of characterization

which also informs The Rainbow (and Women in Love). In the famous letter to Garnett, he wrote:

You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego—of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and pass through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond—but I say, 'Diamond, what! This is carbon.' And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.)¹⁰

This new concept of character allows, above all, for change; Lawrence is attempting to free himself even of the restrictions of consistency in the development of character. In The Lost Girl, its serious implications have comic overtones. Alvina, transferred from Woodhouse to Islington, changes almost beyond recognition:

Was Alvina her own real self all this time? The mighty question arises upon us, what is one's own real self? It certainly is not what we think we are and ought to be. Alvina had been bred to think of herself as a delicate, tender, chaste creature with unselfish inclinations and a pure, 'high' mind. Well, so she was, in the more-or-less exhausted part of herself. But high-mindedness was already stretched beyond the breaking point. Being a woman of some flexibility of temper, wrought through generations to a fine, pliant

hardness, she flew back. She went right back on high-mindedness. Did she thereby betray it?

We think not. If we turn over the head of the penny and look at the tail, we don't thereby deny or betray the head. We do but adjust it to its own complement. And so with high-mindedness. It is but one side of the medal—the crowned reverse. On the obverse side the three legs still go kicking the soft-footed spin of the universe, the dolphin flirts and the crab leers.

So Alvina spun her medal, and her medal came down tails. Heads or tails? Heads for generations. Then tails. See the poetic justice.

Now Alvina decided to accept the decision of her fate. Or rather, being sufficiently a woman, she didn't decide anything. She was her own fate. She went through her training experience like another being. She was not herself, said Everybody. When she came home to Woodhouse at Easter, in her bonnet and cloak, Everybody was simply knocked out. Imagine that this frail, pallid, diffident girl, so lady-like, was now a rather fat, warm-coloured young woman, strapping and strong-looking, and with a certain bounce.

(L. G., pp. 48-9)

While Lawrence is unarguably at some pains to put the explanation for Alvina's ability to enter upon this other order of experience in hereditary terms, the attempt does not seem altogether successful. High-mindedness has worked itself to its natural conclusion in James Houghton; Alvina has inherited from him the ability to react against high-mindedness. What they have in common, presumably,

is the ability to work out their own fates without accepting an externally imposed notion of what those fates ought to be.

From the first, however, we are aware that Lawrence sets up the heredity theme only in order to tinker with it. He is trying to fit into it something that (away from the cramped milieu of Woodhouse) fits more naturally into larger terms. He is clearly presenting a dualistic notion of the history of European civilization. The characters polarize around the two modes of experience, and the aptness of the two-sides-of-a-coin metaphor becomes obvious. The justification for even trying to align the polarization along a heredity theme is surely that Lawrence is portraying one mode of experience in the process of wearing out (whereas ideally both would co-exist):

She knew she was right—amply and beautifully right, her darling, her beloved Miss Frost. Eternally and gloriously right. And yet—and yet—it was a right which was fulfilled. There were other rights. There was another side to the medal. Purity and highmindedness—the beautiful, but unbearable tyranny. The beautiful, unbearable tyranny of Miss Frost! It was time for that perfected flower to be gathered into eternity. Black-purple and red anemones were due, real Adonis blood, and strange individual orchids, spotted and fantastic. Time for Miss Frost to

die. She Alvina, who loved her as no one else would ever love her, with that love which goes to the core of the universe, knew that it was time for her darling to be folded, oh, so gently and softly, into immortality. Mortality was busy with the day after her day. It was time for Miss Frost to die. (L. G., p. 51)

When Alvina encounters Cicio, the immediate concern of the novel is resolved: she has been rescued from the ranks of provincial spinsterhood. Alvina has seen fulfillment all along in sexual terms, and the action of the novel has hitherto been concerned almost exclusively with her attempts to find a mate. In the process, life in provincial England is shown as being completely inimical to any sort of individual fulfillment—"there was a terrible crop of old maids." But since it is Lawrence's whole point that Alvina ought not endure it, that finally she need not accept it, he does not have to treat it very portentously. The special sort of social comedy that is allowed for by English realism (and rendered finely by Bennett in The Old Wives' Tale) can be fully exploited and even exaggerated, since Alvina's character surpasses the limits of the usual realist concerns with life in a given environment. And so skilful is Lawrence that we can laugh at the comedy and still accept his serious concern with the issue of Alvina's life.

The standard criticism of The Lost Girl is that it falls into two distinct parts:

On The Lost Girl the first judgment is evidently the right one; the splendid conclusion cannot make up for its inconsistency with what went before, and there is no concealed thread to bind the disproportionate elements together.¹¹

The usual reason given for this apparent structural flaw is that the novel was begun in 1913, but had to be abandoned during the war, and was not finished until 1920.

It seems pointless to argue that the novel as we have it is as Lawrence planned it in 1913. But the shift into another mode toward the end of a work is an essential characteristic of Lawrence's work after Sons and Lovers.

Thus, it is not only The Lost Girl and The Man Who Died (both of which were resumed after an interval) which end very differently than they begin—so do The Rainbow, Women in Love, The Virgin and the Gypsy, and St. Mawr.

I would suggest that the decided shift in focus and tone which occurs when Alvina and Cicio depart for Italy is due not to any inability on the part of the novelist to resolve "disproportionate elements," but to a determination to differentiate them. From the beginning of the novel, Lawrence has written in two markedly different styles—

in several of the longer passages already quoted, we can see them side by side.

That Alvina is lost to Woodhouse scarcely matters. The part of English experience that Woodhouse represents is a dead issue:

For there behind, behind all the sunshine, was England. England, beyond the water, rising with ash-grey, corpse-grey cliffs, and streaks of snow on the downs above. England, like a long, ash-grey coffin slowly submerging. She watched it, fascinated and terrified. It seemed to repudiate the sunshine, to remain unilluminated, long and ash-grey and dead, with streaks of snow like cerements. That was England! Her thoughts flew to Woodhouse, the grey centre of it all. Home!
(L. G., p. 374)

However, in Italy, Alvina's inherited strengths (having nothing to do with James Houghton) are seen as English strengths, and become (on a different, but analogous, order of experience from Sophia Baines' Bursley heritage in Paris) survival values:

There is no mistake about it, Alvina was a lost girl. She was cut off from everything she belonged to. Ovid isolated in Thrace might well lament. The soul itself needs its own mysterious nourishment. This nourishment lacking, nothing is well.

Having escaped stultified provincial English life, she is confronted with the absence of all sense of civilization:

Cicio and Pancrazio clung to her, essentially, as if she saved them also from extinction. It needed all her courage. Truly, she had to support the souls of the two men.

(L. G., p. 370)

Alvina felt the curious passion in Pancrazio's voice, the passion of a man who has lived for many years in England, and who, coming back, is deeply injured by the ancient malevolence of the remote, somewhat gloomy hill-peasantry. She understood also why he was so glad to have her in his house, so proud, why he loved serving her. He seemed to see a fairness, a luminousness in the northern soul, something free, touched with divinity such as 'these people here' lacked entirely.

(L. G., p. 383)

Cicio's ability to offer Alvina a relationship unlike any other in the novel is explained in terms of his not being English. Nevertheless, he represents only imperfectly that mode of experience which, from the time of her initiation as a nurse, she has been prepared to accept:

Alvina watching him, as if hypnotized, saw his old beauty, formed through civilization after civilization, and at the same time she saw his modern vulgarism, and decadence.

(L. G., p. 265)

Added to her sense of alienation and the vicissitudes of her relationship with Cicio, is the even more terrifying possibility that Cicio may not have the courage and vitality

necessary to survive the war.

Willing as Lawrence is to tinker with the conventional naturalist mechanics of heredity and environment, he is so constitutionally hostile to the notion of determinism that he refuses to entertain the idea that Cicio might be killed for any reason other than a failure of vitality within himself. By a powerful exertion of will, Alvina can attempt to force him to the commitment to life. But we are by no means sure of her success:

To Alvina, the last of the fantastic but
pure-bred race of Houghton, the problem
of her fate was terribly abstruse.
(L. G., p. 190)

It is the fundamental assumption of naturalism that the individual is determined by heredity and environment. In The Lost Girl, as in The Rainbow, Lawrence uses the concept of heredity in a variety of ways. But it is never used as a limiting force—rather it provides possibilities for escape from the restrictions of environment. The further principle of naturalism—that if an individual stands out against his environment he is bound to be its victim—Lawrence assents to, in The Lost Girl and elsewhere, only insofar as the individual is willing to be engaged with society. His real concern is with the successful attempt of the individual to break out of his milieu in

order to achieve fulfillment. In the process of doing this, he is liable to failure at many points and for many reasons—some of them, in the broadest sense, social. But these hazards are of an entirely different order than those which appear within the restricted milieu of the naturalist convention. And even in this, his novel most directly concerned with naturalism, it is only that order of experience with which Lawrence is seriously concerned.

Footnotes - Chapter VI

¹ D. H. Lawrence, The Lost Girl (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950 [1920]), Introduction by Richard Aldington, p. 8.

² H. T. Moore, ed., The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Vol. I (London: Heinemann, 1962), letter to Edward Garnett dated 18 April 1913, p. 200.

³ Moore, Collected Letters, letter to A. W. McLeod dated 6 October 1912, p. 150.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ D. H. Lawrence, Phoenix I, p. 312.

⁶ Phoenix I, p. 532 and elsewhere.

⁷ See "Study of Thomas Hardy," Phoenix I.

⁸ This phrase is surely a dig at Bennett's oft-repeated phrase, "romance of commercialism."

⁹ Keith Sagar, The Art of D. H. Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 37-8.

¹⁰ Moore, Collected Letters, letter to Edward Garnett dated 5 June 1914, p. 282.

¹¹ Graham Hough, The Dark Sun (London: Duckworth, 1956), p. 95.

CHAPTER VII

Unlike The Lost Girl, The Rainbow is pre-eminently a family chronicle. The chronicle form, which in The Lost Girl is first altered beyond recognition and then virtually dismissed, is in this novel the structural embodiment of the primary concern of the novel:

The rendering of the continuity and rhythm of life through the individual lives has involved a marvellous invention of form, and no one who sees what is done will complain of the absence of what is not done. It is the same life, and they are different lives, living differently the same problems—the same though different—in three interlinked generations: that is how the form is felt.¹

In a letter already quoted, Lawrence wrote:

I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about: and that, at present, is the relation between men and women. After all, it is the problem of today, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between men and women.²

As we have seen, in The Lost Girl this concern is interpreted almost entirely in sexual terms. In the diminished world of Woodhouse, there is no question of any other fulfillment—only a damaged human being (that is, one determined by the environment) could find fulfillment within such an unpromising milieu. In The Rainbow, the

issue is made infinitely more complex by the increasingly conscious need of the characters for a two-fold fulfillment—both through a personal (sexual) relationship, and through meaningful social relationships (that is, through a function in society). Indeed, the promise of this latter is the growing significance of the main image of the novel;

The rainbow metaphor comes to stand for many things before the novel is finished, but finally it stands for the possibility of reconciliation between the vital self and the human community.³

Where The Lost Girl only alludes to it, The Rainbow is in a very important sense about social change. We are constantly allowed to make the sort of comparisons between the lives of one generation and another that we do in Mann's Buddenbrooks. And, just as in the German novel, the differences that we find are the reflections of social change. There are no stock characters in this novel, and yet Tom Brangwen (the yeoman farmer), Lydia Lensky (as the erstwhile revolutionary and emancipée), Will Brangwen (the Ruskinian craftsman), Ursula (the "new woman"), and Skrebensky (imperialist) are recognizable social types. In this context, the chronicle structure portrays at once the increasingly conscious demands through successive generations of individual characters upon their

environment, and the progressive failure of the environment to provide viable ways of fulfillment for the characters.

The novel begins as a sort of pastoral epic. The farmers are fulfilled by their life on the farm; their wives, by that life as it is enhanced by dreams of another life. There still are actual human embodiments of the imaginative ideal:

The lady of the Hall was the living dream of their lives, her life was the epic that inspired their lives. In her they lived imaginatively, and in gossiping of her husband who drank, of her scandalous brother, or of Lord William Bentley her friend, member of parliament for the division, they had their own Odyssey enacting itself, Penelope and Ulysses before them, and Circe and the swine and the endless web.⁴

But the intrusion of the modern world into the landscape is the start of the action of the novel. The Brangwens become a vestigial enclave, existing rather precariously in relation to the modern world:

About 1840, a canal was constructed across the meadows of the Marsh Farm, connecting the newly-opened collieries of the Erewash Valley. A high embankment travelled along the fields to carry the canal, which passed close to the homestead, and, reaching the road, went over in a heavy bridge.

So the Marsh was shut off from

Ilkeston, and enclosed in the small valley bed, which ended in a bushy hill and the village spire of Cossethay.

The Brangwens received a fair sum of money from this trespass across their land. Then, a short time afterwards, a colliery was sunk on the other side of the canal, and in a while the Midland Railway came down the valley at the foot of the Ilkeston hill, and the invasion was complete. The town grew rapidly, the Brangwens were kept busy producing supplies, they became richer, they were almost tradesmen.

Still the Marsh remained remote and original, on the old quiet side of the canal embankment, in the sunny valley where slow water wound along in company of stiff alders, and the road went under ash-trees past the Brangwens' garden gate.

But, looking from the garden gate down the road to the right, there, through the dark archway of the canal's square aqueduct, was a colliery spinning away in the near distance, and further, red, crude houses plastered on the valley in masses, and beyond all, the dim smoking hill of the town.

The Homestead was just on the safe side of civilization, outside the gate.

(Rainbow, pp. 11-12)

We must beware of over-simplification: "Progress is not the ogre that turns the Brangwens out of the pastoral Eden. It must be remembered that the generation which first feels the effects of change is also the first to be given names—that is, they are the first to be sufficiently differentiated from their landscape to be seen (however briefly) as individuals. If the inherited strengths

of the environment are what make the Brangwens unusual people as they enter into the modern world—make them a special case—yet what makes them interesting in the first place is that they do turn their faces toward civilization. However, in all the richness of this novel, the increasing impoverishment of the environment in its relation to the main characters is the one aspect of the chronicle structure which Lawrence allows to be rigidly schematized. And whether the impoverishment is not due to the differentiation of the characters from their environment is not so much a declared principle (as in Hardy's novels) as the hovering consciousness of a fearful possibility.

Like Alvina Houghton, Tom Brangwen (although unconsciously) seeks fulfillment in sexual terms, in an "innate desire to find a woman the embodiment of all his inarticulate, powerful religious impulses." (Rainbow, p. 20) But in the episode at Matlock (which is the presage of his meeting with Lydia), Tom realizes the possibilities of a two-fold fulfillment—through the encounter with the girl, and the meeting with her foreign companion. Together they provide the materials of Tom's vision of fulfillment:

The result of these encounters was, that he dreamed day and night, absorbedly, of a voluptuous woman and of the meeting with a small, withered foreigner of ancient breeding. No sooner was his

mind free, no sooner had he left his own companions, than he began to imagine an intimacy with fine-textured, subtle-mannered people such as the foreigner at Matlock, and amidst this subtle intimacy was always the satisfaction of a voluptuous woman.

(Rainbow, p. 25)

Like the women of the generations preceding him (the point is made that he was his mother's favourite child), Tom sees his imaginative ideal in terms of actual people whom he has encountered within his environment. Further, having derived the ideal from actual experience within his milieu, he finds within it the embodiment of the ideal, in Lydia Lensky. In this generation, at least, the breaking up of the old way of life, and the incursions into it from afar, are an enrichment of it—are positive gain.

Tom has not yet attained consciousness; that is, he is not modern. Therefore, fulfillment must come to him in terms of actual relationships. Thus, by marriage to Lydia, he makes a symbolic connection with the wider world in which she has had her past. But it is not a very firm link, since she has willingly and consciously renounced her past. And, in his attempt to make yet another connection with the world outside, he partially fulfills his needs in his affection for Lydia's daughter, Anna—who thus becomes his spiritual heir. But the point is, Tom needs fulfillment

of imaginative possibilities always in terms of people, and his environment provides those people—even providing foreigners as the embodiment of his needs which extend beyond the environment. Tom is only a partial success in his endeavour to come to consciousness, for all the fulfillment of his marriage to Lydia. But that marriage is one of the fundamental positives of the novel. It forms the measure to which we compare all the other sexual relationships of the book—in terms of the dominating symbol of the novel, it is one pillar of the arch.

Anna grows up within the richness emanating from Tom and Lydia's "long marital embrace." But she, more consciously than her step-father, wants also to reach out toward the world from the life at the Marsh Farm:

She was hostile to her parents, even whilst she lived entirely within them, within their spell.

Many ways she tried, of escape. She became an assiduous church-goer. But the language meant nothing to her: it seemed false. She hated to hear things expressed, put into words. Whilst the religious feelings were inside her they were passionately moving. In the mouth of the clergy man, they were false, indecent. She tried to read. But again the tedium and the sense of falsity of the spoken word put her off. She went to stay with girl friends. At first she thought it splendid. But then the inner boredom came on, it seemed to her all nothingness. And she felt always

belittled, as if never, never could she stretch her length and stride her stride.

Her mind reverted often to the torture cell of a certain Bishop of France, in which the victim could neither stand nor lie stretched out, never. Not that she thought of herself in any connexion with this. But often there came into her mind the wonder, how the cell was built, and she could feel the horror of the crampedness, as something very real.
(Rainbow, p. 106)

Fast upon her consciousness of this constriction appears Tom's nephew, Will Brangwen:

Without knowing it, Anna was wanting him to come. In him she had escaped. In him the bounds of her experience were transgressed: he was the hole in the wall, beyond which the sunshine blazed on an outside world.
(Rainbow, p. 114)

One of the reasons that Will and Anna's marriage never achieves the sort of significance represented by Tom and Lydia's is that fulfillment can no longer be wholly in terms of marriage. Will is not so appropriate a mate for Anna as Lydia was for Tom simply because marriage is now seen not so much as a fulfillment of Anna's needs for something beyond the life represented by Tom and Lydia as it is an escape from the attempt to find more appropriate means of fulfillment when they are not immediately available (or even altogether understood). Indeed, both Will and Anna undergo a sort of dialectic of escapes from such an

achievement, of which marriage is only the most important of several others. Later, Anna escapes from the complexities of the marriage into her ultimate role as mother figure. So also, Will turns toward a sort of Ruskinian craftsmanship—always imitative or restorative, always in relation to the past rather than creative of the new.

The relationship of Will and Anna is wonderfully rendered. In a few chapters, Lawrence gives us much more vividly the ebb and flow of dominance within the marriage than Bennett manages in an entire book (These Twain) devoted to the subject. The sheer economy of Lawrence's art is too little recognized—the craft whereby he makes a relatively small number of scenes convey the sense of a long period of time, and of a careful examination of a complex relationship. He never denies the complexity in the interest of simplicity, as Bennett seems so often to do in his long portrayal of Edwin and Hilda's marriage. Rather, he simply particularizes the general method of portrayal of Tom and Lydia's marriage—of the times of conflict (which are not, as in These Twain, worked out in a series of domestic spats), interspersed with hard-won moments of peace. Unlike Bennett, Lawrence makes marriage more important than just the state of being domestic. And the account is sympathetically done; I think critics have been too quick to see

Will and Anna as human failures. Nevertheless, the marriage is for both Will and Anna an abrogation of the individual search for fulfillment.

Will for a long time abandons his artistic work; Anna lapses into maternity, content with her purely biological function:

And soon again she was with child. Which made her satisfied and took away her discontent. She forgot she had watched the sun climb up and pass his way, a magnificent traveller surging forward. She forgot that the moon had looked through a window of the high dark night, and nodded like a magic recognition, signalled her to follow. Sun and moon travelled on, and left her, passed her by, a rich woman enjoying her riches. She should go also. But she could not go, when they called, because she must stay at home now. With satisfaction she relinquished the adventure to the unknown. She was bearing her children.

There was another child coming, and Anna lapsed into vague content. If she were not the wayfarer to the unknown, if she were arrived now, settled in her builded house, a rich woman, still her doors opened under the arch of the rainbow, her threshold reflected the passing of the sun and moon, the great travellers, her house was full of the echo of journeying.

She was a door and a threshold, she herself. Through her another soul was coming, to stand upon her as upon the threshold, looking out, shading its eyes for the direction to take.

(Rainbow, p. 196)

Now, from the very diction of this passage it ought

to be clear that Anna is not a failure. Indeed, this passage links directly back to the celebration of Tom's and Lydia's fulfillment:

Brangwen went out to his work, his wife nursed her child and attended in some measure to the farm. They did not think of each other—why should they? Only when she touched him, he knew her instantly, that she was with him, near him, that she was the gateway and the way out, that she was beyond, and that he was travelling in her through the beyond. Whither?—What does it matter? He responded always. When she called, he answered, when he asked, her response came at once, or at length.
(Rainbow, p. 96)

But the consciousness of what fulfillment is—or ought to be—is arranged along an evolutionary pattern of growing complexity. It is almost a sufficient reason that Tom and Lydia's marriage has been their source of fulfillment that Anna's ought not to be a regression to the biological fulfillment of parenthood. For Tom Brangwen, it will be remembered, marriage has been at once sexual fulfillment and the symbol of a reaching out beyond sexual fulfillment.

Further, maternity is for Anna just the sort of regression which she herself senses and fights in Will's religious mysticism. But as "Anna Victrix," victorious in the creative power of her biological function, she has already danced to death any individual aspiration in

herself or in Will. Will has been from the first portrayed as "stunted," or "thwarted," or "incomplete"—that is, debarred at the outset from fulfillment.

Significantly, his family is the first branch of the Brangwens to be removed from the land; Will himself has a "meaningless" job in Ilkeston. His father, Alfred, is portrayed in much the same terms as George Pontifex (the first urban character of that novel). Will aspires to a mystical life of the senses such as Tom and Lydia achieve (even as he recognizes his inferiority to Tom), perhaps because he knows—has had actual experience to prove—how little of fulfillment can be in a social role. He has already been damaged by modern society—hence his turning back toward Ruskinian medievalism (which serves, also, as a critique of that endeavour; it is an admission of defeat). But for Anna it is willful abrogation—a conscious denial of possibilities within herself.

Will and Anna's daughter, Ursula, reacts violently against the domestic muddle, "the perpetual tyranny of young children." (Rainbow, p. 301) She dreams of the sons of God coming amongst the daughters of men, but in fact it is Anton Skrebensky who comes:

She laid hold of him at once for her dreams. Here was one such as those Sons

of God who saw the daughters of men, that they were fair. He was no son of Adam. Adam was servile. Had not Adam been driven cringing out of his native place, had not the human race been a beggar ever since, seeking its own being? But Anton Skrebensky could not beg. He was in possession of himself, of that, and no more. Other people could not really give him anything nor take anything from him. His soul stood alone. (Rainbow, p. 292)

If Anna found within her environment the opportunity for a less complete fulfillment than she herself was capable of, Ursulâ is faced with a reality that has no connection with her imaginative ideal. So far from being in possession of himself, Anton possesses only a dim notion of a social role:

'...I hate houses that never go away, and people just living in the houses. It's all so stiff and stupid. I hate soldiers, they are stiff and wooden. What do you fight for, really?'

'I would fight for the nation!'

'For all that, you aren't the nation.'

'What would you do for yourself?'

'I belong to the nation and must do my duty by the nation.'

'But when it didn't need your services in particular—when there is no fighting? What would you do then?'

He was irritated.

'I would do what everybody else does.'

'What?'

'Nothing. I would be in readiness for when I was needed.'

The answer came in exasperation.

'It seems to me,' she answered, 'as if you weren't anybody—as if there weren't

anybody there, where you are. Are you anybody, really? You seem like nothing to me.' (Rainbow, p. 311)

Skrebensky departs to the Boer war, and Ursula also moves out into the world. What she finds there conduces to a fulfilled life even less than what she is determined to leave at home. The "shame" (as the chapter dealing with these events is labelled) pertains to the lives of the people she finds there as much as to the affaire with Winifred Inger. Indeed, they are part of the same thing:

Ursula was introduced by her friend to various women and men, educated, unsatisfied people, who still moved within the smug provincial society as if they were nearly as tame as their outward behaviour showed, but who were inwardly raging and mad.

It was a strange world the girl was swept into, like a chaos, like the end of the world. She was too young to understand it all. Yet the inoculation passed into her, through her love for her mistress.

(Rainbow, p. 343)

Winifred is young Tom Brangwen's appropriate mate, and they are the damned souls of the novel:

But her Uncle Tom and her mistress remained there among the horde, cynically reviling the monstrous state and yet adhering to it, like a man who reviles his mistress, yet who is in love with her. She knew her Uncle Tom perceived what was going on. But she knew moreover that in spite of his criticism and

condemnation, he still wanted the great machine. His only happy moments, his only moments of pure freedom were when he was serving the machine. Then and then only, when the machine caught him up, was he free from the hatred of himself, could he act wholly, without cynicism and unreality.

His real mistress was the machine, and the real mistress of Winifred was the machine. She too, Winifred, worshipped the impure abstraction, the mechanisms of matter. There, there in the machine, in service of the machine, was she free from the clog and degradation of human feeling. There in the monstrous mechanism that held all matter, living or dead, in its service, did she achieve her consummation and her perfect unison, her immortality.

Hatred sprang up in Ursula's heart. If she could she would smash the machine. Her soul's action should be the smashing of the great machine. If she could destroy the colliery, and make all the men of Wiggiston out of work, she would do it. Let them starve and grub in the earth for roots, rather than serve such a Moloch as this.

(Rainbow, p. 350)

Ursula herself comes to terms with the world in the teaching position at Ilkeston, at least to the extent of learning how to survive in it. But she is forced to recognize that the world of events, the world beyond her childhood—so much diminished in fact, when compared to what it had seemed to the earlier generations of Brangwen women—does not encompass the sort of fulfillment she wants. At best it is merely irrelevant; at worst, actively hostile.

Therefore, she is rather removed from its concerns:

She was isolated now from the life of her childhood, a foreigner in a new life, or work and mechanical consideration. She and Maggie, in their dinner hours and their occasional teas at the little restaurant, discussed life and ideas. Maggie was a great suffragette, trusting in the vote. To Ursula the vote was never a reality. She had within her the strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote. But her fundamental organic knowledge had as yet to take form and rise to utterance. For her, as for Maggie, the liberty of woman meant something real and deep. She felt that somewhere, in something, she was not free. And she wanted to be. She was in revolt. For once she were free she could get somewhere. Ah, the wonderful, real somewhere that was beyond her, the somewhere that she felt deep, deep inside her. (Rainbow, p. 406)

Ursula's commitment is not to society, but to life:

She was staunch for joy, for happiness, and permanency, in contrast with Maggie, who was for sadness, and the inevitable passing-away of things. Ursula suffered bitterly at the hands of life, Maggie was always single, always withheld, so she went in a heavy brooding sadness that was almost meat to her. In Ursula's last winter at St. Philip's the friendship of the two girls came to a climax. It was during this winter that Ursula suffered and enjoyed most keenly Maggie's fundamental sadness of enclosedness. Maggie enjoyed and suffered Ursula's struggles against the confines of her life. And then the two girls began to drift apart, as Ursula broke from that form of life wherein Maggie must remain enclosed. (Rainbow, p. 412)

Before Ursula escapes from the school to the university, she is given the opportunity to turn back—to renounce the effort toward the two-fold fulfillment which the novel chronicles—through marriage to Maggie Schofield's brother, Anthony. The manner of her refusal is an indication of her complete consciousness of her special requirements of life:

She turned away, she turned round from him, and saw the east flushed strangely rose, the moon coming yellow and lovely upon a rosy sky, above the darkening, bluish snow. All this so beautiful, all this so lovely! He did not see it. He was one with it. Her seeing separated them infinitely....

She liked Anthony, though. All her life, at intervals, she returned to the thought of him and of that which he offered. But she was a traveller, she was a traveller on the face of the earth, and he was an isolated creature living in fulfilment of his own senses.

She could not help it, that she was a traveller. She knew Anthony, that he was not one. But oh, ultimately and finally, she must go on and on, seeking the goal that she knew she did draw nearer to. (Rainbow, p. 417)

When Ursula is thoroughly disillusioned with university, Anton Skrebensky reappears. She willfully blinds herself to the fact that, even though the university offers a sham fulfillment, marriage to Anton would be only another escape. It would be less than marriage to Anthony Schofield. Skrebensky—a conscious being like herself—

cannot turn back to a soulless life of the senses without denying himself as a human being. It is interesting that, on the first night of their resumed courtship, we hear echoes of the water imagery that last occurred in the flood that swept away Tom Brangwen, and with him the older, less complex way of life:

The thought of walking in the dark,
far-reaching water-meadows, beside the
full river, transported her. Dark
water flowing in silence through the
big restless night made her feel wild.
(Rainbow, p. 445)

Ursula is in danger of arriving at the point at which Lydia Lensky was before she came to Derbyshire—with the crucial difference that the old life (as represented by her grandfather) is gone forever. When Ursula discovers that she is pregnant, after the engagement has been broken, she undergoes the final temptation to lapse back into purely physical life:

Her flesh thrilled, but her soul was sick. It seemed, this child, like the seal set on her own nullity. Yet she was glad in her flesh that she was with child. She began to think, that she would write to Skrebensky, that she would go out to him, and marry him, and live simply as a good wife to him. What did the self, the form of life, matter? Only the living from day to day mattered, the beloved existence in the body, rich, peaceful, complete, with no beyond, no further trouble, no further complication. She had been wrong, she had been arrogant

and wicked, wanting that other thing, that fantastic freedom, that illusory, conceited fulfilment which she had imagined she could not have with Skrebensky. Who was she to be wanting some fantastic fulfilment in her life? Was it not enough that she had her man, her children, her place of shelter under the sun. Was it not enough for her, as it had been enough for her mother? She would marry and love her husband and fill her place simply. That was the ideal.

(Rainbow, p. 484-5)

It is, of course, not the ideal. In the terms of this novel, to be fully conscious is to be self-responsible.

In the episode of the horses, Ursula works out of this modd of simple abnegation. It is important that the horses are described in the same vocabulary as the earlier description of Anthony Schofield. Insofar as they have a simple equivalent, the horses stand for purely physical being, and they represent to Ursula the temptation (which, in the face of all her thwarted efforts to find fulfillment in the world, by this time amounts to compulsion) to revert to such a mode of being when there is in fact no viable way of doing so; Anton is much less to her than her father was to Anna. Ursula, in becoming fully conscious, has evolved away from such a life. Just as important, so has the environment changed. As Ursula has become more complex, the environment has become less complete.

In keeping with Lawrence's absolute insistence upon self-determination (we are reminded of the possibility of Cicio's death, at the end of The Lost Girl), once Ursula has freed herself from the horses, the baby is miscarried. That is, her choices were only temporarily determined even by a notion of her biological role.

Critics often comment⁵ that, in the exigency of her demands upon life, Ursula ceases to be a sympathetic character to the reader—notably, in her relationship to Anton Skrebensky. But this modern St. Ursula is not to be a martyr. We are carried back to the Christian saint's mythological prototype in the scenes under the moon. The Teutonic goddess Hörsel is an Isis figure:

The goddess Hörsel was, in fact, the moon-deity, gliding in her silver skiff over the blue sea of the sky, accompanied by her train of stars.⁶

Unlike Tess, a more passive Persephone figure, Ursula is exceedingly fierce for self-preservation, even to the point of destroying such a human nullity as Anton.

After the episode of the horses, Ursula goes through a dark night of the soul in which her spiritual journeying seems unmitigatedly bleak and profitless:

She had an idea that she must walk for the rest of her life, wearily, wearily. Step after step, step after step, and always along the wet, rainy road between

the hedges. Step after step, step after step, the monotony produced a deep, cold sense of nausea in her. How profound was her cold nausea, how profound! (Rainbow, p. 491)

But out of the pain and misery of her illness, her complete individuality is forged:

Her soul lay still and permanent, full of pain, but itself for ever. Under all her illness, persisted a deep, unalterable knowledge. (Rainbow, p. 491)

And it is this—her completion in conscious individuality—which is the prerequisite for her vision of a society in which the two-fold fulfillment that has been the aspiration of all the generations of the novel is possible. The cost of arriving at this point has been very great—Ursula has not known, and is unlikely ever to know, the sort of fulfillment that Tom and Lydia achieved. But it is only she who actually sees the visionary rainbow—the seeing of which is the other pillar of the rainbow:

And then, in the blowing clouds, she saw a band of faint iridescence coloring in faint colours a portion of the hill. And forgetting, startled, she looked for the hovering colour and saw a rainbow forming itself. In once place it gleamed fiercely, and, her heart anguished with hope, she sought the shadow of iris where the bow should be. Steadily the colour gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint, vast rainbow. The

arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new houses on the low hill, its arch the top of heaven.

And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and to the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven. (Rainbow, pp. 495-6)

The vision of the rainbow, with its accompanying imagery of germination, echoes Etienne's vision at the end of Zola's Germinal—a vision which has also been won from defeat by existing social realities. The resemblance may be unintentional, but it serves as an important reminder of how much there is, in this novel that seems so far removed from naturalism, that is in fact the material of the naturalists. If we want to view the novel in this way, we can see it as rigorously "experimental" as could have gladdened the heart of Zola: given these special people in special circumstances (carefully accounted for at the

start of the novel), they have a special quest—to achieve consciousness, which in another way can be seen as the effort to become modern. Having become modern, can they find a way of existence which will enable them to live by their old strengths—those which, in terms of modern England, made them special in the first place. Where Bennett stresses the typicality of his characters ("there are thousands such," he says of Constance), where Galsworthy can see nothing in the world but Forsytes, Lawrence stresses the uniqueness, the specialness of the Brangwens. Where Hardy says that such rare people cannot exist in the modern world, Lawrence affirms that they must. When we revert to the final vision of the rainbow, we see the most important way in which Lawrence differs from Zola. For Etienne, the vision is a reward or compensation. But for Ursula, the vision—that is, the spiritual victory—is the culmination of all the endeavour of the novel.

Nevertheless, The Rainbow contains many elements that are Zola-esque. The early Brangwen men and their landscape have some of the quality and rhythm of life that Zola attempted to capture in La Terre (again, however, we see the differences—Zola's farmers are only barely different from their animals). But that which springs to mind most immediately, of course, is the Wiggiston episode, where

Zola is actually referred to. Lawrence has in common with Zola the ability to anthropomorphize the actual machine which represents modern, mechanized society, to make it monstrous, symbolic—as the still in the dram-shop in L'Assommoir, or the shaft-head in Germinal:

The pit was the great mistress.
Ursula looked out of the window and saw the proud, demon-like colliery with her wheels twinkling in the heavens, the formless, squalid mass of the town lying aside. It was the squalid heap of side-shows. The pit was the main show, the raison d'être of all.

How terrible it was! There was a horrible fascination in it—human bodies and lives subjected in slavery to that symmetric monster of the colliery. There was a swooning, perverse satisfaction in it. For a moment she was dizzy.

(Rainbow, p. 350)

But in terms of the values of this novel, which are always human ones, Wiggiston is unreal—"The whole place was unreal, just unreal." (Rainbow, p. 346)—for precisely those reasons which would appeal to the naturalist on the grounds of their reality:

No more would she subscribe to the great colliery, to the great machine which has taken us all captives. In her soul, she was against it, she disowned even its power. It had only to be forsaken to be inane, meaningless. And she knew it was meaningless. But it needed a great passionate effort of will on her part, seeing the colliery,

still to maintain her knowledge that
it was meaningless.

(Rainbow, p. 350)



The values of the machine are a metaphor juxtaposed against the values of the organic metaphor by which Lawrence's characters must live. He does not deny the power of the machine—no writer ever had a more horrified sense of the inhuman nature of modern society—but he insists that it is, by definition, humanly irrelevant. It is only the human failures (Ursula's Uncle Tom, Winifred, Anton Skrebensky) who are aligned with the social machine in this novel.

Lawrence also pays tribute to the new realism, after the manner of Arnold Bennett, in the long section of the novel dealing with Ursula's career as a teacher. The length of this section is usually judged as a structural flaw, which is ascribed to the vividness of Lawrence's memories of his own teaching career;

"The Marsh and the Flood" serves as a watershed; before it Lawrence is in control, forcing our perception of each experience into a larger series of units, and after it, as we will see, he becomes more tentative and less careful. With Ursula we come to the period in the history which corresponds to Lawrence's own youth. Lawrence now begins to introduce small characters, names of people who are mentioned but who never appear, long conversations that are not worked into the fabric of the shifting verb tenses and the continuity of time. The reason, obviously, is that Lawrence

is beginning to transcribe almost
directly from his own experience.⁷

But while the Ilkeston section of the book may be liable to a charge of undue lengthiness, it cannot be dismissed as autobiography. It is, first, a splendid example of Lawrence's ability to work strictly within the realistic mode. But it is also a very important part of Ursula's development. Awful as the school is, she feels compelled to succeed. Her determination to survive is one of the things which most markedly differentiates her from her mother. She passionately wants a place in the modern world, the "world of events" to which the Brangwen women have looked from the beginning of the novel. Therefore, the depiction of her inability to find a place there is as important as that of her abortive relationship with Anton Skrebensky.

Further, it seems to me that the Bennett-like treatment of the Ilkeston section and the Zola-esque aspects of the Wiggiston episode provide the clue to the structure of the second half of the book. That is, briefly, that Lawrence modulates the structure according to the evolution of the materials he is working with. Thus, the pastoral epic of the beginning of the novel is presented in a rhythmic, incremental, almost hypnotic style that is the stylistic

embodiment of the content:

But heaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease? They felt the rush of the sap in spring, they knew the wave which cannot halt, but every year throws forward the seed to begetting, and, falling back, leaves the young-born on the earth. They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in the daytime, nakedness that comes under the wind in the autumn, showing the birds' nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and inter-relations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away. The young corn waved and was silken, and the lustre slid along the limbs of the men who saw it. They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men. They mounted their horses, and held life between the grip of their knees, they harnessed their horses at the wagon, and, with hand on the bridle-rings, drew the heaving of the horses after their will. (Rainbow, pp. 7-8)

This generalized first portion is very brief. It is followed by the section of the book dealing with Lydia and Tom, which is also not very long—and is also a description for the most part (studded with marvellous inconographic

scenes), rather than actual dramatic rendering of their life together. The next section, dealing with Anna and Will, is appreciably longer than the preceding one, but much shorter than the last, which deals with Ursula's life. In part, the apportionment of length to the various generations is a reflection of their own degree of articulateness. Tom Brangwen has very little to actually say—as we realize when he finally, so movingly struggles into speech at Anna's wedding. But when Lawrence arrives at Ursula's section, the novel shatters into fragments, as a reflection of her experience of the world.

As a "new woman," Ursula is recognizably kind to Sue Bridehead, as has often been pointed out. The Rainbow overlaps a central concern of Thomas Hardy in Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. Moreover, that concern—the fearful consequences of the movement of modern English society away from its pastoral roots into industrialism—is much more thoroughly embodied in the chronicle structure than it is in the Hardy novels.

Many of Lawrence's social perceptions are similar—if not identical—to Hardy's. The awful sense of loss which overwhelms Tess reverberates in the latter half of The Rainbow. One of the most serious questions of the novel is whether Ursula, representative of the first

generation of her family to have struggled into full intellectual consciousness (which is to have achieved modernity, in the terms of the novel), has not lost more than she has gained—whether she is not thereby excluded from the old mode of existence wherein her grandparents lived so richly. Anton Skrebensky's failure as Ursula's lover is involved in his utilitarian creed of service to the social machine, which in turn is portrayed as part of the spiritual blight which has desecrated the very land itself:

The sun was coming. There was a quivering, a powerful, terrifying swim of molten light. Then the molten source itself surged forth, revealing itself. The sun was in the sky, too powerful to look at.

And the ground beneath lay so still, so peaceful. Only now and again a cock crew. Otherwise, from the distant yellow hills to the pine-trees at the foot of the downs, everything was newly washed into being, in a flood of new, golden creation.

It was so unutterably still and perfect with promise, the golden-lighted, distinct land, that Ursula's soul rocked and wept. Suddenly he glanced at her. The tears were running over her cheeks, her mouth was working strangely.

'What is the matter?' he asked.

After a moment's struggle with her voice,

'It is so beautiful,' she said, looking at the glowing, beautiful land. It was so beautiful, so perfect, and so unsullied.

He too realized what England would be in a few hours' time—a blind, sor-did strenuous activity, all for nothing, fuming with dirty smoke and running trains and groping in the bowels of the earth, all for nothing. A ghastliness came over him.

He looked at Ursula. Her face was wet with tears, very bright, like a transfiguration in the refulgent light. Nor was his the hand to wipe away the burning, bright tears. He stood apart, overcome by a cruel ineffectuality.

(Rainbow, pp. 465-6)

The outcome of Ursula's enterprise—first to struggle out of her milieu in order to achieve full consciousness, and then to work toward a fulfillment in which she does not deny that mode of existence, the instinctive knowledge of which is her inheritance from her grandparents and parents—is no less fraught with social implication than any of the larger significances of Hardy's novels. The promise of her vision at the end of the novel is, after all, very much the same as the promise that Tess herself embodies, if Angel Clare were only capable of accepting the responsibility of her love for him. The dangers represented by the horses in the episode which precipitates Ursula's illness (and, very nearly, her death) are those represented to Tess by Alec d'Urberville. Although in The Study of Thomas Hardy Lawrence often seems to be wilfully misreading Hardy, I would suggest that The Rainbow

provides evidence that Lawrence read Hardy very well indeed. His quarrel is only with Hardy's acceptance of what he sees about him:

This is the tragedy of Hardy, always the same: the tragedy of those who, more or less pioneer, have died in the wilderness, whither they had escaped for free action, after having left the walled security, and the comparative imprisonment, of the established convention. This is the theme of novel after novel: remain quite within the convention, and you are good, safe, and happy in the long run, though you never have the vivid pang of sympathy on your side: or, on the other hand, be passionate, individual, wilful, you will find the security of the convention a walled prison, you will escape, and you will die, either of your own lack of strength to bear the isolation and the exposure, or by direct revenge from the community, or from both.⁸

Lawrence differs from Hardy most markedly in The Rainbow not in his vision of English society (which is so astonishingly similar), but in novelistic method. Where Hardy tends toward myth, Lawrence remains more carefully aligned with the realistic mode. We may know more about the characters of The Rainbow than we can ever know about actual persons, but those characters are not given a dimension beyond the purely human. The larger significance which pertains to Lawrence's novel derives from our feeling

that the outcome of Ursula's quest affects ourselves, that her struggle toward fulfillment in increasingly hostile circumstances involves all of modern society. The mechanical deadliness of modern society poses the same threats as disembodiment in the Hardy novels, but Lawrence's terms are more immediate, less abstract.

Where Hardy has transformed the determination of the naturalists into tragic fatalism, Lawrence has created a passionate denial of all forms of determinism--for him, as for Butler, hereditary qualities may be a source of freedom in inimical surroundings. Even while using the techniques of naturalism to render a portrait of a society brought into being by an acceptance of the assumptions of nineteenth century science, Lawrence was working toward an anti-naturalist goal--the triumph of life over the restrictions of heredity and environment. But his art was immeasurably enriched, his technique diversified, by working through the issues of naturalism to get beyond it--by not merely ignoring those issue, as Galsworthy does in The Forsyte Saga.

Footnotes - Chapter VII

¹ F. R. Leavis, D. H. Lawrence: Novelist (Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1964), p. 150.

² Moore, Collected Letters, p. 200.

³ Julian Moynahan, The Deed of Life: The Novels and Tales of D. H. Lawrence (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 42.

⁴ D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949 1915), p. 11.

⁵ E.g. Graham Hough, The Dark Sun.

⁶ S. Baring-Gould, The Lives of the Saints (London: John C. Nimmo, 1908), p. 547.

⁷ Roger Sale, "The Narrative Technique of The Rainbow," Modern Fiction Studies, V (1959-60, i), 29-38.

⁸ Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy," Phoenix I, p. 411.

Historical Footnote

Women in Love is in a very real sense the sequel to The Rainbow:

The problem Lawrence apparently set himself was that of explaining the development of individuality with ever more and more complex characters, of proceeding, as it were, to a Birkin and an Ursula and a Gerald and a Gudrun through a Tom and a Lydia and a Will and an Anna. In Women in Love it becomes evident, however, that true being is more than a matter of having a day, as well as a night, goal.¹

But where the mood of the end of The Rainbow is visionary, in Women in Love it is apocalyptic. Ironically, what Birkin wants is what Tom Brangwen wanted—marriage and a friend. By a sort of miracle—for which The Rainbow is the depiction of the cause—he attains to the marriage in the death-haunted society. But it probably is not enough:

Contemplating the frozen corpse of his friend, Birkin is left with nothing to disguise from him the question that faces him and Ursula: the question of the kind of success possible in marriage, and in life, for a pair that have cut themselves finally adrift. The society in which, if they had a place, their place would be, represents the civilization that has been diagnosed in Gerald.²

Women in Love is a novel about modern history, but it is not a family chronicle. It does, however, contain within

it the chronicle of the Crich family—a chronicle of deathliness where the account of the Brangwen family was a chronicle of life and development. Women in Love, which Lawrence at one time thought of calling Dies Irae, is profoundly a war novel. So far as Lawrence—as a serious, innovating artist who was concerned with developing techniques to newly embody what he had to say—was concerned, the chronicle form was a casualty of the First World War.

The concerns underlying naturalism faded into the background as artists struggled to come to terms with the war. Like most contemporary writers, Lawrence saw the war as a watershed of historical consciousness; society seemed so fragmented, so cut off from its past, as to make such a broad ordering of experience as provided for by the family chronicle novel no longer viable. When an artist's vision of the individual's relation to society is so bleak, and his perception of the fragmentation of society so intense, there is no longer any point to an examination of even a part of that society in terms of "then" and "now." He must simply abandon the attempt to impose such an ordering. Only such a writer as John Galsworthy, who hadn't noticed the serious issues of naturalism, didn't notice that the experience of the war required new forms of expression.

¹ H. M. Daleski, The Forked Flame: A Study of D. H. Lawrence (London: Faber, 1965), p. 181.

² Leavis, D. H. Lawrence, pp. 188-9.

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