

Arnold Bennett

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**Enoch
Arnold
Bennett**
(May 27,
1867-March
27, 1931)
was a British
novelist.



Arnold Bennett, British
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Life

Bennett was born in a modest house in Hanley in the Potteries district of Staffordshire.

Hanley is one of a conurbation of six towns which joined together at the beginning of the twentieth century as Stoke-on-Trent. Enoch Bennett, his father, qualified as a solicitor in 1876, and the family were able to move to a larger house between Hanley and Burslem [1]. The younger Bennett was educated locally in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Arnold was employed by his father as a rent collector, but was unhappy working for his father as he was rather mean. At age 21 he left his father's practice and went to London as a solicitor's clerk. He won a literary competition in *Tit Bits* magazine in 1889 and was encouraged to take up journalism full time. In 1894 he became assistant editor of the periodical *Woman*. He noticed that the

material offered by a syndicate to the magazine was not very good, so he wrote a serial which was bought by the syndicate for 75 pounds. He then wrote another. This became *The Grand Babylon Hotel*. Just over four years later his first novel *A Man from the North* was published to critical acclaim and he became editor to the magazine.

From 1900 he devoted himself full time to writing, giving up the editorship and writing much serious criticism, and also theatre journalism, one of his special interests. He moved to Trinity Hall Farm, Hockliffe, Bedfordshire on Watling Street which was the inspiration for his novel *Teresa of Watling Street* which came out in 1904. His father Enoch Bennett died there in 1902, and he is buried in Chalgrove churchyard. In 1902 *Anna of the Five Towns*, the first of a succession of stories which detailed life in the Potteries, appeared.

In 1903 he moved to Paris, where other great artists from around the world had converged

on Montmartre and Montparnasse. Bennett spent the next eight years writing novels and plays. In 1908 *The Old Wives' Tale* was published, and was an immediate success throughout the English-speaking world. After a visit to America in 1911 where he had been publicised and acclaimed as no other visiting writer since Dickens, he returned to England where the *Old Wives' Tale* was reappraised and hailed as a masterpiece. During the First World War, he became Director of Propaganda at the War Ministry. He refused a knighthood in 1918. In 1926 at the suggestion of Lord Beaverbrook, he began writing an influential weekly article on books for the *Evening Standard* newspaper.

He separated from his French wife in 1922 but fell in love with the actress Dorothy Cheston, with whom he remained until his death from typhoid in 1931. His ashes are buried in Burslem cemetery. Their daughter Virginia Eldin lived in France and was president of the Arnold Bennett Society.

Work

His most famous works are the *Clayhanger* trilogy and *The Old Wives' Tale*. These books draw on his experience of life in the Potteries, as did most of his best work. In his novels the Potteries are referred to as "the Five Towns"; Bennett felt that the name was more euphonious than "the Six Towns" so Fenton was omitted. The real towns and their Bennett counterparts are:

The Six Towns of Stoke-on-Trent	Bennett's Five Towns
Tunstall	Turnhill
Burslem	Bursley
Hanley	Hanbridge
Stoke	Knype
Fenton	The 'forgotten town'

Bennett believed that ordinary people had the potential to be the subject of interesting books. In this respect, an influence which Bennett himself acknowledged was the French writer Maupassant whose "Une Vie" inspired "The Old Wives Tale".

As well as novels, Bennett produced plenty of fine non-fiction work. One of his most popular non-fiction works, which is still read to this day, is the self-help book "How to Live on 24 Hours a Day". Extracts from his published diaries are often quoted in the British press. Bennett also wrote for the stage and the screen.

His novel *Buried Alive* was made into the 1912 movie *The Great Adventure* and the 1968 musical *Darling of the Day*. Over the years, several of his other books have been made into films (for example *The Card* starring Alec Guinness) and television mini-

series (such as "Anna of the Five Towns" and "Clayhanger").

Criticism

Critically, Bennett has not always had an easy ride. His output was prodigious and, by his own admission, based on maximising his income rather than from creative necessity.

As Bennett put it:

"Am I to sit still and see other fellows pocketing two guineas apiece for stories which I can do better myself? Not me. If anyone imagines my sole aim is art for art's sake, they are cruelly deceived."

Contemporary critics (Virginia Woolf in particular) perceived weaknesses in his work, which they partly attributed to this factor. This may have been unfair - did critics search for weakness on the assumption that writing for financial gain must give rise to it? Did they attribute a genuine weakness in Bennett's

work to an unrelated factor? Or were they making an unbiased and valid point? It must also be recognised that Bennett represented the "old guard" in literary terms. His style was traditional rather than modern, which made him an obvious target for those challenging literary conventions.^[1] ^[2] Max Beerbohm criticized him as a social climber who'd forgotten his roots. He drew a mature and well fed Bennett expounding "All to plan, you see" to a younger tougher version of himself, who replies: "Yes- but MY plan".

His reputation, for much of the 20th Century, was tainted by this perception, and it was not until the 1990s that a more positive view of his work became widely accepted.

Works

Fiction

- *A Man from the North* - 1898
- *The Grand Babylon Hotel* - 1902
- *Anna of the Five Towns* - 1902

- *The Gates of Wrath* - 1903
- *A Great Man* - 1904
- *Teresa of Watling Street* - 1904
- *Sacred and Profane Love* - 1905
(Originally published as *The Book of Carlotta*)
- *Tales of the Five Towns* - 1905 (short story collection)
- *Whom God Hath joined* - 1906
- *Hugo* - 1906
- *The Grim Smile of the Five Towns* -
(short stories 1907)
- *Buried Alive* - 1908
- *The Old Wives' Tale* - 1908
- *The Card* - 1910
- *Clayhanger* - 1910
- *Helen with a High Hand* - 1910 (Serial title: *The Miser's Niece*)
- *Hilda Lessways* - 1911
- *Milestones* - play written with E.Knoblock
- *The Matador of the Five Towns* - (short stories 1912)
- *The Regent* - 1913 (US Title: *The Old Adam*)
- *These Twain* - 1916
- *The Pretty Lady* - 1918

- *The Roll-Call* - 1918
- *Mr Prohack* - 1922
- *Riceyman Steps* - 1923
- *The Clayhanger Family* - 1925, the complete trilogy consisting of *Clayhanger*, *Hilda Lessways*, and *These Twain*
- *Lord Raingo* - 1926
- *The Strange Vanguard* - 1928
- *Imperial Palace* - 1930
- *Venus Rising from the Sea* - 1931

Non-fiction

- *Journalism For Women* - 1898
- *Fame and Fiction* - 1901
- *How to Become an Author* - 1903
- *The Reasonable Life* - 1907
- *Literary Taste: How To Form It* - 1909
- *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day* - 1910
- *Mental Efficiency* - 1911
- *Those United States* - 1912 (Also published as *Your United States*)
- *Self and Self-Management* - 1918
- *The Human Machine* - 1925
- *How to Live* - 1925, consisting of *How*

to Live on 24 Hours a Day, The Human Machine, Mental Efficiency, and Self and Self-Management

- *The Savour of Life* - 1928

For further guidance consult *Studies in the sources of Arnold Bennett's novels* by Louis Tillier (Didier, Paris 1949), and *Arnold Bennett and Stoke-on-Trent* by E. J. D. Warrilow (Etruscan Publications, 1966).

Quote

"In front, on a little hill in the vast valley, was spread out the Indian-red architecture of Bursley - tall chimneys and rounded ovens, schools, the new scarlet market, the high spire of the evangelical church... ...the crimson chapels, and rows of little red houses with amber chimney pots, and the gold angel of the Town Hall topping the whole. The sedate reddish browns and reds of the composition all netted in flowing scarves of smoke, harmonised exquisitely with the chill blues of

the chequered sky. Beauty was achieved, and none saw it".

—*Clayhanger* (1910)

Notes

1. ^ Seminar - "Mr Bennett and Mrs. Brown"
2. ^ Essay on the debate between Woolf and Bennett including comments on poor modern reputation of Bennett

External links

- Works by Arnold Bennett at Project Gutenberg
- Arnold Bennett's biography by his biographer Frank Swinnerton
- The Potteries
- Omelette Arnold Bennett A late supper dish that was created at the Savoy Hotel specially for Mr. Bennett
- The Literary Debate Between Arnold Bennett and Virginia Woolf
- Stoke-on-Trent Museums cares for an historic collection of Benett's letters and

- personal effects
- Free book downloads in HTML, PDF, text formats at ebooktakeaway.com

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