It has been the central argument of this dissertation to examine how Bennett transmuted his social, historical, journalistic, literary and personal experience to a viable realism. The questions that have persistently been raised concern with literature and life, society and self, tradition and individual will, theory and experience. With a firm grasp Bennett achieves a coherent expression of everyday experience through several stages: his novel is not reducible to a handful of tenants; at the same time, it does not simply strive to capture the plenitude of human experience in the closed world of Victorian England; it actually depicts man's struggle for existence and his gradual evolution. This praxis distinguishes Bennett from other realists; in him the new generation is in revolt against the old generation:

Here is the natural man versus the urban man, the large-minded man versus the small-minded, the rebel and individual versus the hapless conformist, the passionate man versus the patty, the lover of freedom versus the lover of comfort, the anguished soul versus the anxious.1

We can now recapitulate the conclusions to which this investigation of a few of these problems have led.

Throughout his literary career, Arnold Bennett never allows himself to forget that all "literature is the expression of feeling, of passion, of emotion, caused by a sensation of the
interestingness of life"; and that the "book is nothing but the man trying to talk to you, trying to impart to you some of his feelings." Underlying these pronouncements, which he means to be complementary rather than contradictory, there are others too: "The foundation of good fiction is character-creating, and nothing else." "The single motive that should govern the choice of a principal figure is the motive of love for that figure." These conceptions, evidently, aim to strike a balance between Art and life, aesthetics and experience, or in the light of foregoing discussion, a synthesis between 'literary realism' and 'realism of life'. Repudiating conventional, frigid, hypocritical and humbug notions of Victorian society, he starts with Wordsworthian crude 'feelings', 'passions' and 'emotions' —with a romantic and unobtrusive way of French realists. Opposed to the theoretical prescriptions of Victorian morality, code of conduct, philistinism, and complacency, Bennett aspires to know empirically 'What Life Is! His empirical conception of life springs from the soil of his own experience and from an insight into the life of the Potteries, where he was born and brought up. The feelings, emotions and sentiments he talks about are of romance, grandeur, beauty, amusement, compassion, experience, learning and interestingness in life.

His starting point is the delineation of the Five Towns life which he knew instinctively. To start with, on an epistemological standpoint, he discovers that the provincial people are philistines, unobservant, unintelligent, ignorant,
stupid, blind, unheroic, spiritually bewildered and inexperienced. Bennett's aim, therefore, is to correct their errors of complacency; to remove their prejudices, lamentable idealism, sentimentalism, and whims of hypocrisy which endanger happiness and progress; to make them substantially happier and better. Throughout his works Bennett seeks to reveal their latent wisdom, courage and confidence, to raise their humbler virtues to their proper importance by illustrating their effectiveness in everyday experience. It is a consistent belief with Bennett that the sordidness of provincialism can be transmuted into interestingness, romance and beauty, provided man acquires a few aesthetic, experiential virtues — the virtues of anticipating, judging rightly, acting thoughtfully and diligent learning. The experiential attitude which determines Bennett's realist view tends to transcend moral sanctions of the tradition-bound world. What we see, eventually, Bennett's protagonists rebel against the religious sanctified notions of life, reject family codes, repudiate social restrictions and strive for self-help. In this, in fact, Bennett is deeply concerned with fundamental experience of an individual. However, before proceeding to manifest his pragmatic attitude to life, Bennett, like any other literary realist, aims to represent life as it is — historically. From this point, a point of transition, Bennett makes man's experience a fundamental part of his growth, learning and realization; it eventually leads to a 'realism of assessment'— 'What Life Is'
In the very general sense, when we say Bennett's novels are realistic, we mean that they exhibit a social conscience: a truth to historical facts, dates and years of the occurrence of major incidents, a truth to life, verifiable facts, in a particular time and space. From the point of view of epistemology, then, a more profitable approach is surely to study Bennett's novels on several levels — historical, environmental, naturalistic, romantic and empirical in order to know persons, places and things in their proper perspective. In sum, Bennett's realism is more extended in view of its referential dimension, its concern with a larger range of life, a relationship of history, novel, environment, external development of the Five Towns linked with internal changes and evolution of life. The great strength of Bennett's realist novel lies in its grasp of the Five Towns history, its society as a constantly evolving totality and man as both product of philistine, deterministic environment and a producer of his own world. Bennett's stress on the provincial character, sure knowledge of place and persons, a faculty for approximate values, research for collection of data, not only solidify and concretize his realism of presentation but also validate it with an element of human experience.

Bennett's talent lies in his character portrayal, which is historically true. Throughout his novels, he displays unusual skill in delineating the foibles and follies, hypocrisy and selfishness prevailing in the provincial world. His men and women
their crudity, their grim smiles, humour, pathos and catastrophes. Because Bennett knew Staffordshire intimately, he depicts their manners, morals and habits with their striking peculiarities of provincialism. Provincialism forms one of the various stages of the development of Bennett’s realism. Like Hardy’s Wessex, Brontë’s Yorkshire and Trollope’s Barsetshire, Bennett’s Five Towns is a notable addition to topographical novel. It is in this region that his men and women spend their lives. In this regard Bennett’s realism “is a relic of his provincialism. He strove with much success to become the sophisticated man of the world who knows all the ins-and-outs of life, and to reach that degree of knowingness when each sly dig is comprehended.” In his A Human Idiom, William Walsh recalls “the dry, mortuary flavour of the work of Bennett” but he observes that “in a serious sense” Bennett “accepted its premises as axiomatic.” Bennett’s insistence on ‘history’ aims to provide man with some direction to learn from his past life and experience, about his own world; in this way to inculcate a sense of belonging and individual consciousness. The pragmatic realist in him proclaims not simply what life is like but what man is making of it or what he is becoming and thus provides the broad spectrum of experience necessary to help his provincial man recognize his own potential. Several historians of novel and critics attest conventional view of Bennett as a realistic novelist, and suggest rather that his representation of the external world is a means to shadowing forth the inner world of human character and consciousness.
This amounts to the prevalent unwarranted denigration of Bennett's art of realism. Bennett does not simply wallow in representation of reality or recording social history; he aims to expose man to his milieu and goes beyond to examine how the milieu impinges on the individual. He himself writes that "in the sense meant by the average critic, I am not photographic." And elsewhere he calls the "business of writing a novel as the carrying upstairs of a mass of human life from the ground-floor of the daily common place to the higher region of imaginative beauty." Bennett's own concepts of literature, life, beauty, romance, naturalism and realism rest upon a sure knowledge and faith in the history of the Five-Towns life and reality of human experience. Bennett's realism at the outset springs from the transitional stage in the evolution of the Five Towns life, its provincial milieu conditioning man, who eventually rebels against the society and tries to compromise with it. If we accept a historical frame, it solely gives us a milieu of Bennett's novels and a social context. In this sense, Bradbury's conclusion that "to acquire a view of human need, a sense of relevance in human experience" is essential.

Partly this comes from the individuality, the concern with lived life, the responsiveness to experience and the intense creation of experience, which is an attributed of any particular literary work, poem, novel or play. And partly it has to do with the way the tradition of literature tends to accrete to itself certain broader values, forms of belief and of knowledge, which encourage us to see the literary intelligence as in some ways a distinct, special and illuminating intelligence. It is at this point that it is illuminating to look at and infer his realism from historical dimension for he has been
condemned to possess a philistine mind. From this particular standpoint, Bennett's realism exists in response to the historical conditions and English tradition but his position is a curious one. His French critic, Lafourcade, comparing Bennett to other realists, has tried to place him in a proper perspective, that other critics have failed to do.

His is a curious position; he was in acute reaction against the early Victorian novel and underwent the direct influence of Moore and the French realists. But his real affinity was with Stendhal, Jane Austen, Trollope on the one hand; with Gissing and Dostoievsky on the other. He disliked the slovenly technique of Dickens, the sentimentality of Thackerary; but he could feel that Meredith's psychological digressions and Henry James' elaborate technique were not enough to make them great novelists... Bennett's influence is undoubted and will be permanent. He secured, by his courage but also by his skill, more freedom, moral and religious, for the novelist.

Lafourcade has in mind the French tradition of realism and naturalism while studying Bennett's novels. The present study does not end with Bennett's literary realism or period realism, although, Bennett started writing in the high years of Victorianism, but he embraced the prevalent French naturalistic movement as well. To situate him in the present light, Lafourcade concludes that Bennett stands halfway between the Victorians he disliked and the young generation he mistrusted, related to both, a mighty link in the chain of the English novel. Not quite in the English tradition—he was too frankly realistic, too technically perfect, too unsentimental for that... And yet the final decision of posterity is by no means certain... But there is nothing artificial or insincere in his immense gallery of novels, nothing that will be exposed, exploded, found out as wrong, impossible, hollow; and even in his forlorn books there is artistic honesty and comparative
technical excellence. For he was a critic as well as a novelist (which others were not) and he could see himself with admirable impartiality. One thing at least is sure: he cannot yet definitely be given his proper rank among the... great novelists of the early twentieth century. And he can afford to wait. 13

As an innovator, Bennett delves deep into the Victorian philistinism and gives a truthful account of the real nature of life. In the first, Bennett's realist response lies in giving a historical account of the Potteries which he later makes immortal as the Five Towns; in the second, his realism is manifested in his refusal to owe allegiance to Victorian philistinism. In many ways, he shows a high awareness and increasing concern with social, physical, religious and environmental conditions limiting the individual freedom. The greatest barriers in the ways of his men and women are their inherent complacency, pressure of materialistic environment, thrust of narrow views of religion and society and family codes of obedience, parental authority and discipline. Man is thus a victim of various forces within and without him. In Bennett the two generations are—the old order and the new order—in perpetual revolt. But in this too, as Lafourcade puts it, Bennett's "realism was not only frank; it was also admirably subtle and cleverly introduced." 14 In the revolt theme Bennett's realism differs from other novelist say Samuel Butler, in several respects.

In fact most of them are frankly Victorian: marriage and the relation between the sexes, parents and children, money and worldly success. True he treated them in a spirit which was not that of Victorian orthodoxy. But the obsession of Victorainism: Butler and Swinburne are as Victorian as Dickens or Tennyson though in a very different manner. In the 'father
and son's relation however he introduced a note of reckless realistic courage which is even more striking than the somewhat oversentimental preaching heard in *The Way of All Flesh*. Indeed the measure of his originality is the measure of his realism.15

Bennett is of the opinion that man can act freely, but the success of his acts depends upon his intelligence, judgement, wise choice and thoughtful decision. For Bennett, man in the complacent situations is bound not by his environment but by the weaker side of his own nature. Too ignorant to know himself, too weak to reform himself, too stupid to take initiative, too unaware to realize his potential, man suffers. In such a condition Bennett's man cannot totally reject his family code of obedience. The very fact is responsible for a gradual evolution of man in the transitional period. One thing is clear that such an "environment provides a field for action" and "the order of experience", says William Bellamy, "which lies behind the mature novels of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy."16 Bennett views life as a process of continual change—it is beset only by the static attitudes of Victorian society. But Bennett continues to deal with the action.17

As a realist, Bennett has a dual purpose: he sees his men and women not only in relation to external reality but against the historically important provincial pride and love with their native culture; second, he sees his protagonists in a stage of transition—he does not leave them sticking to their static history. But, before such a move is made, Bennett intends to give them individuality of their own educate them to accept or
reject what society and its religion offer them. Thus, Bennett's men and women, because they are ignorant, stupid, simple and normal human beings, move in two directions — they submit to the prevailing complacent view of life or they move out of the constrictions. Both ways — as it is evident — are not absolute — manifest in a gradual transition. The concreteness of Bennett's realism lies in the fact that his people should act out their drama of life against a clearly defined background. It is perhaps here that Watt's distinction between 'realism of presentation' and 'realism of assessment' begins to be felt. In this, once again, Bennett's world is something real and abiding and not as transtory, ephemeral, trifling or unreal, as some critics have supposed. He first puts ordinary people in the historical process of the development of the Five Towns, moulding and being moulded by the transitional forces. Having gained the solidity and concreteness of place and time, however, he goes deeper into the prevailing Victorian philistinism that shapes and influences man's conduct. Put in such a background his people fall in love and exercise their free will in the constricting naturalistic forces.

In this respect, Bennett tends towards the naturalism of the French school. Laying stress on objectivity of a naturalist "Arnold Bennett's principle is, to show life going on but not to analyse it"; secondly, he aims to "interpret the unseen by the seen, the mind by the features, characters and motives by behaviour." This is not all about Bennett's naturalistic endeavour. His real interest, however, is in the
internal struggle of his people and their efforts to adjust themselves to such unsatisfactory and pessimistic environment. Although frustrated in their ambitions, they struggle for seeking some meaning in existence. According to Bellamy, the novels of Arnold Bennett along with those of Wells and Galsworthy are primarily concerned "with the existential predicaments of individuals living beyond the cultures which nurtured them." Bennett's naturalistic view gives his protagonists much more freedom to exercise their will in their tradition-bound set-up. His men and women before they are bound to their careers are given opportunity to choose freely and act accordingly. Although they are caught in a cultural crisis of their period and are apparently in the blind alley of Victorian philistinism, their timely exercise of their freedom enables them at least some of them, to get out of the traditional grooves and act in a way which eludes the hypothetical moral system. Bennett's naturalism is distinct from the pessimist naturalists in that he has a meliorative outlook, on the possibility of change and improvement and, if it does not hold out a promise, as in our own lives, it offers at least some hope. It makes room for human endeavour to make the best of life. With endurance and vitality, Bennett's individual "struggles to impose himself against those factors of family and station in life that stand against the face of happiness." In this, man is unheroic because he is powerless against society, circumstance and environment.

In the tradition of naturalism he acknowledges the French naturalistic current, Moore's and Gissing's naturalism and
Darwinian principles. In this tradition, Bennett differs from Zola and Hardy in their total dependence of character on heredity, environment and fate. He shares with Zola, the individual's struggle for existence. Like Zola, Bennett gives his men and women strength enough to fight, to rebel and to strive for achieving their ends. Bennett presents his individuals as men and women limited in intellect, innocently and ignorantly trying to surpass their inherent limitations. Bennett portrays the grim struggle of his men and women against the background of narrow philistinism of Staffordshire district. The final impression in both the naturalist is to achieve a secure and hopeful future. The individuals of Zola are shaped by environment and heredity and that of Bennett, by philistinism and complacency. Bennett's naturalism conceives man as a part of the evolving historical process and as a vital element in the social organism, but he consistently illustrates the evolution of life in the cultural transformations. In particular, in naturalistic terminology, Bennett concentrates on the innocence, foolishness, stupidity, irrationality, ignorance, incongruity and pride inherent in his individuals. The main cause underlying individuals' behaviour, failure, frustration and unhappiness is that he is caught up in a frightening world, unable to penetrate beneath the surface, forced always by family, and his extremely unlimited lack of knowledge, continually incapable of choosing the wisest, most beneficial course of action. In a way, this is necessary in Bennett's world; it decides the epistemological limits of their learning, gaining knowledge and experience.
Precisely, Bennett does not believe in the philosophic determinism: his men and women have their individuality and free will, though in a limited degree. Consequently, they exercise this will romantically. They escape Victorian prudery and orthodoxy, fall in love and make their own world. Thus, in pursuit of varying manifestations of life Bennett repudiates the traditional notion that the naturalists’ formula to ensure “truth to life is ridiculous.” He proclaims “himself a materialist with a belief in human improvement through slow evolution.”

We find a convincing link between his historical process and naturalistic evolution. He does not simply draw characters like a photographic, objective naturalist but sees them emerging as human beings from their actions. As he himself writes:

“Characters cannot be drawn, they can only be shown in action” and the action of the novel “should spring out of the characters and the characters should spring out of the general environment.”

On empirical standpoint, Bennett’s concern is with people and not with mere characters. Bennett’s historical-naturalistic approach can be summed up in the following words:

This is precisely what he does. He accumulates the motives that his chief characters may have to act, or he reconstructs the causes of their past actions, but he gives us no permanent clue as to the inner secret of their soul. They are not clear to themselves as to what they think or are and quite realistically Bennett preserves this uncertainty, which is the uncertainty of life itself. . . describing them as they seem to themselves and not as an almighty creator might know them to be. If we were asked how these characters would behave in given circumstances we should be at a loss
to answer. . . Bennett's technique is here nearer to that of the modern novelists than to the Victorians.

The two terms 'romantic' and 'realistic', as the foregoing analysis reveals, represent Bennett's ways of viewing experience; as a romantic he leads his people through a series of trials and frustrations to the realities of life, when man gains self-knowledge. As a realist, he views experience as essentially sordid and he accepts and reflects this truth with a mixture of his romance and existential view of life. In Bennett, it is quite possible to be romantic and truthful at the same time. All untruthful romance is vitiated. There is no opposition or mutual excluding between romance and realism. Bennett's novels contain a more positive response to the romantic cult of individualistic response to experience. By so doing he reveals a progressive unfolding of a world-view peculiar to English writing and realism growing from romanticism. In discussing Bennett's realism therefore, we cannot necessarily turn away from the romance genre. His romance is not far removed from actuality for the areas that he visits imaginatively as well realistically are remote and unfamiliar to other novelists. What Bennett actually does to have a true glimpse of the real nature of life and things is this: he temporarily withdraws his attention from practical mundane affairs and concentrates upon the inner life. He calls such a romance a psychological creation, "the power . . . to conceive oneself in a situation that one is not actually in, for instance in another person's place." Flaubert, a romantic realist, probably does not mean anything very
different when he says that "poetry is just a way of perceiving the things outside us, a special instrument which sifts material things, and without changing them, transfigures." Bennett's imaginative escape leads to a realistic grasp of life and things. In Bennett, the tendency of his protagonists is to rebel against or escape from the prevailing boredom, fall in love, yet frustrated and as a result of their vain, futile, romantic attempts discover the realisties of life. Their romantic adventures break the illusions of life and bring them in touch with the real world of experience. Thus, man enmeshed in Victorian philistinism and engaged in a relentless struggle, modifies his sensibility. This evolutionary realism gives a new dimension to his literary realism. In a word it helps us to see how we acquire our knowledge of human experience. This also hints at the development of realism of life from literary realism. Bellamy calls it, in the post - 1900 fiction of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, a "transition from art for art's sake to art for life's sake." This transition is summed up by Scott-James in the following words:

He has shown us people born in one world and growing old in another. He has presented to us the fantastic but true panorama of certain persons who were young and idealistic, who became middle-aged and practical, who are now old and acquiescent; of persons who were born mid-Victorian, who became late-Victorians, who to this day survive grotesquely among the moderns -- and again young men and women of to-day who themselves will survive to a derelict old age among people as unlike us as we are unlike.

Further, in Bennett we notice a definite balance of two realisms: 'literary realism' and 'realism of life. Since Bennett's
experiential and pragmatic attitudes are closely interrelated with his naturalistic aesthetics, his artistic realism or literary realism becomes an integral part of his total vision of life. Eric Heller's dictum that "external reality has no claims anymore to being real. The only real world is of human inwardness", corresponds to Bennett's relationship between external history and internal development, outward reality and individual experience, society and self, character creation and character revelation. Such a 'middlemarch', followed by Bennett, has been, but briefly touched by some critics, for example, Bruce McCullough finds a 'spirit of compromise' in Bennett and Muller calls his realism as 'realism of the centre'. Such innovations, in the light of establishing a plausible balance between two realisms, and then transcending the traditional realism, not only distinguish Bennett from other realists but also give a fillip to his brand of realism. A singular achievement of Bennett as a realist is summed up by Muller:

With the elaborate care he dresses his characters and sets his stage, but his characters do not then proceed to lose themselves in the scenery. He stands them on their own feet in the foreground, as individuals and not merely as provincial types, and he sacrifices as little of their substance to milieu as to plot or thesis. Few novelists, in fact, keep so firm a grip on the essential elements at once of character and of environment, so just a balance between the individual and society that moulds him. emission added

Briefly, Bennett's realism extends beyond the mimetic, imitative, representative of external nature and reality,
photographic, to life and its evolution in the Five Towns. In the present discussion, based on the subtle use of the words 'life', 'manner', 'conversation', 'grasp', 'courage', 'initiative', 'boldness', 'apprehension', 'anticipation', 'understanding', 'learning', 'realization', 'feeling', 'decide, apprehend', 'trial', 'success', 'failure', 'desire, ignorance', 'discover', 'gain', 'romance', 'love', 'compromise', 'rebel', 'judge', 'growth', 'youth', 'age', 'disease', 'death', indicates the effects of experience on his individuals in the process of their evolution and maturity into life. As we have seen, these words also define 'realism of assessment', 'realism of life' and measure Bennett's epistemological realism. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Wagenknecht calls Bennett a novelist of being. 35

Borrowing a phrase from Kenneth Burke, Bennett used "literature as equipment for living." 36 Burke's main argument in this essay is to use literature as an instrument of learning to live. He argues that "there is no 'realism for its own sake'. There is realism for promise, admonition, solace, vengeance, foretelling, instruction, charting, all for the direct bearing that such acts have upon matters of welfare." To be realistic in this sense, then, "one must size things up properly. One cannot accurately know how things will be, what is promising and what is menacing, unless he accurately knows how things are. 37

The most dominant spirit working in Bennett is his urge towards completion, fulness and perfection, what Freud calls "a dynamic need within the self to realize itself as a harmonious whole." 38 But the predicament of Bennett's young men and women
is that they remain ignorant and inexperienced as ever. When awareness comes, romantic illusions are shattered, they are too late to realize and capture the worthwhile moments of life. The individual wonders at this malaise and at his position in the cosmos: "Am I, a portion of the Infinite Force that existed billions of years ago, and which will exist billions of years hence, going to allow myself to be worried by any terrestrial physical or mental events? I am not." 39

In addition to being romantic, Bennett's is the temperament of an epistemologist. In his serious novels Bennett has tried to investigate and understand the origin, nature and limits of learning and knowledge of provincial man. It is this 'dynamic need' with which he intends to equip a provincial man to Jamesian 'awareness' and 'cosmopolitanism' (if we may use this expression for him). Man's failure, before the pressure of Victorian philistinism, prevailing materialism, religious methodism, complacency, and above all, his own diffidence lack of initiative, assertive will and determination, lead to his experiential predicament. Bennett gives his protagonists existential vitality to endure these pressures. Those who fail to inculcate these virtues become the inevitable victims (as it happens in pessimistic naturalists) and, those who strive with self-reliance and determination to face the realities of life, are put on an epistemological process. They are, precisely, on a way to transform their ignorance to knowledge, stupidity to wisdom, complacency to assertion, narrowmindedness to broadmindedness, imperfection to perfection, being prosaic to
romantic, provincial to cosmopolitan. The central universal element is human experience that makes Bennett's realism viable. Bennett's protagonists do not achieve absolute fulfilment or perfection—which is however impossible—because they/normal human beings. In a way, Bennett's aim is to see man despite his provincial lineaments, transcend his native limitations to broaden the horizon of his learning far beyond the geographical domain. He views man, and indeed often enables us to see him as we see our limited lives, not as pitiable creature in the face of grim struggles but as an existential being.

Bennett's epistemological realism deals with the development or growth, maturity, learning, knowledge and experience over time of individual's confronting the demands of a larger social unit and coming to terms with those demands. The provincial man grapples with such issues as religious functions, love and marriage, ambition and careers, social morality and personal honesty etc. etc. His solutions, if successful, tend to be compromises between personal desires and social acceptability, between what he wants and what his parents would allow him to do. And, within this one course, however, there are two possibilities. The conflict between individual desire and familial or parental necessity is portrayed as an internal struggle in which protagonists confront various contradictory impulses within themselves. Such is the case with Anna, Sophia, Edwin Clayhanger and Hilda. Alternatively, it is portrayed as an external conflict between man and his society or environment, a possibility which is reflected in their struggle for existence.
In the former, the arena of action and experience is the learning of the protagonists, through their romance and instinct for experience, involving their choices, decisions, judgements, self-realization and understanding 'What Life Is'. In the latter, the surrounding environment exhibits on its own terms, pressures of religion and society which they must confront. Finally it is important to realize that the two strains are not mutually exclusive, nor is there much to be gained from trying to distinguish them too completely. In both ways man learns 'What Life Is'.

The most crippling limitations and faults of Bennett's writings are rooted, perhaps, in the limitations of life lived in the historical world of the Five Towns, under the high pressure of Victorian philistinism and his own ambition to make maximum of life. Bennett himself has undergone a perpetual struggle to earn his livelihood and then become a successful writer. He wants his provincial men and women to grapple effectively with subtle problems of existence in the stranglehold of Victorian complacency. Bennett is aware of his limitation and prejudicial criticism labelled on him.

There remains the charge of pot-boiling. I have never expressed opinions that I do not hold; nor have I ever been asked to express such opinions. Life for me has many savours which I relish keenly. Therefore many subjects interest me. I never write on a subject which does not interest me, and I always write as well as heaven permits. Nevertheless, journalists who are not novelists accuse me about once a week of pot-boiling. The argument is not stated very clearly; but it seems to amount to this: first, that a man who has written long realistic novels which have met with approval ought
not, if he is a serious artist, to write anything but long realistic novels; second, that a man who can make livelihood out of writing novels ought to confine himself to novels because if he goes outside then he will make more money.40

Bennett's epistemological realism does not end with the origin, nature and limits of provincial man's knowledge; it inspires him to use his learning for practical purposes. What man intends to make of himself or what he learns about himself depends, at the deepest level, on his individual realization, so that the basic truth about man and his existence is his assessment of learning through experience. Bennett's pragmatic aims are made to serve a significant purpose in his realism— his pragmatism is authenticated by his experience and made viable. In his essay entitled "Settling Down in Life" Bennett puts himself "the old questions concerning the intrinsic value of life, the fundamentally important questions: What have I got out of it? What am I likely to get out of it? In a word, what's it worth? If a man can ask himself a question more momentous, radical, and critical than these questions, I would like to know what it is. Innumerable philosophers have tried to answer these questions in a general way for the average individual, and possibly they have succeeded pretty well.41 But in this Bennett is not interested in generalizing the answers for, he says, "each man must be his own philosopher. There is an instinct in the profound egoism of human nature which prevents us from accepting such readymade answers." Bennett deplores that "so few people put the question to themselves in time, that so many put it too late, or even die without putting it."42
In his epistemology of realism, learning and gaining knowledge of 'what life is', this question has fundamental importance. He exhorts "that existence rightly considered is a fair compromise between two instincts —the instinct of hoping one day to live and the instinct to live here and now." Further: "This that you are living now is life itself —it is much more life itself than that which you will be living twenty years hence. Grasp that truth. Dwell on it. Absorb it. Let it influence your conduct, to the end that neither the present nor the future be neglected ... In fine, settle down at once into life." To do this, man must first know "What 'Living' chiefly Is: it consists of self study, self-analysis, reason, judgement, imagination, understanding, explanation and experience. He has put his pragmatic philosophy in the following manner:

I ought to reflect again and again, and yet again, that the beings among whom I have to steer, the living environment out of which I have to manufacture my happiness, are just as inevitable in the scheme of evolution as I am myself ... Having thus reflected in a general manner, I ought to take one by one the individuals with whom I am brought into frequent contact, and seek, by a deliberate effort of the imagination and the reason, to understand them, to understand why they act thus and thus, what their difficulties are, what their 'explanation' is, and how friction can be avoided.

On the basis of the analysis of his novels we discern that rarely does an individual recognize at an early age and admit: "'Oh dear! ... It's no use! ... We're all wrong, I'm sure!" Bennett's men and women, we have seen, live their lives unconsciously to a greater extent, but when an individual's "face showed the rough outlines of his history", he would "wonder
by what rapid descent he had reached his present levels. Perhaps 
the receding chin, the heavy pouting lower lip, and the 
ceaselessly twitching mouth offered a key to the problem. At 
this late moment he reflects: "He was a person of long and 
varied experience", but he takes "a grim, ferocious delight in 
calling up the might-have-beens and the 'fatuous ineffectual 
yesterdays' of life. There is a certain sardonic satisfaction 
to be gleaned from a frank recognition of the fact that you are 
the architect of your own misfortune." When such a realization 
comes, Bennett's protagonist admits "all the shortcomings of 
existence, will face them like a man, grimly, sourly, in a 
sturdy despair. He will mutter: 'Of course I am angry! Who 
would not be? Of course I'm disappointed? Did I expect this 
twenty years ago?... But we don't, so there you are! I'am bound 
to worry!"

Bennett's men and women are, in the initial stages of life, 
ignorant and unintelligent; however, with the passage of time they 
gain in experience and undergo a qualitative evolution and 
gradually come to acquire an understanding of 'What life Is'. 
Most men and women who have neither the strength nor the desire 
to be themselves, relapse into weakness and complacency and 
thrive on hypocrisy and selfishness. In the light of Bennett's 
pragmatism which he advocates in his pocket philosophies, and 
it which is drilled in his own struggle/becomes clear in his novels 
— he shares his concern for man's improvement. But the Five 
Towns man's limited intelligence cannot fathom the mysteries 
of life. This involves not only a rebellion or a revolt from
the set values but a perpetual grappling with the existing conditions and a pragmatic approach. This demands from a provincial man an initiative, wise choice, a thoughtful action and a diligent decision.

The characterization of the epistemological realism which has been operative in the dissertation from the start and which aims to reach its climax in this chapter may be restated. We may discern a more subtle equivalent to an element of epistemological realism in picaresque then in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries novel, where a journeying hero goes to London or abroad for financial and social success. This picaresque vein is robust in Bennett's epistemological realism —here an ignorant, average, inexperienced young man starts from complacent level, seeks his career, fortune or romance, discovers not only the world without but world within —'What Life Is'. The difference between picaresque vein and Bennett's epistemology is this: he sees life through the eyes on one who lives it or experiences it. Bennett's serious novels are touched by what Stephen Spender calls "the struggle of the modern."^50

In a way, Bennett is concerned not only with extending the range of artistic sensibility to include new dimensions of reality beginning to be felt in his time, but also in man's perennial experience. In this Bennett's efforts are epistemological. By contrast in the nineteenth century, due to the propagation and triumph of the bourgeois ideal of social mobility, we move from the crass economic adventurer who rises
through the bourgeois picar in search of security and fashionable living who achieves his goals despite or rather because of his fall and subsequent moral regeneration, to the romantic hero, to the social achiever of provinces. In Bennett also, the provincial man is in quest of the rich possibilities of life embodied in the highest civilization, who succeeds and falls back to his provincial origins, and whose failure is redeemed by his self-realization. What distinguishes Bennett's romantic climber is his self-assessment, that lacks in say Tom Jones or David Copperfield. In Bennett there is an attempt to posit a new line or tradition of novels, a line leading to a flexible category which attempts to reconcile the ideal with the real, romantic with the naturalistic, traditional with the experiential. The issue of the tension between the protagonist's aspirations and society's resistance to his ascent although still an important problem, is overshadowed by the central conflict between ambition or success and subsequent frustration—leading to his learning and compromise with 'What Life Is'. Moreover, the structure of the novel of social climber to a romantic ascender from the provinces, consists as it does of a continuum of episodes in which picar, impelled by a sustained and intense dream of success, rises step by logical step up the social ladder, is analogous to the perceptible merging of classes in the nineteenth century. It is through such analogies or reflections that we may distinguish the provincial man, who exercises his free will and pragmatic aims, rises or falls and learns through experience. Bennett expresses his
hope: "I feel intensely that we are travelling from imperfection to perfection, and that here is the sole immediate answer to the enigma of the universe." Bennett's hope has empirical support. His social climbers, the naive Five Towns men and women are introduced when they are young. They stand, at the outset, against the spirit of the age—characterized by past history, religious methodism, parental authority etc. etc. Bennett tries to exempt his men and women from the religious strictures and give them enough empirical ground to work out their personal code of conduct and personal morality. Thus Bennett's epistemology begins with the biography of the naive provincial men and women. He uses the spirit of revolt to illustrate man's development, by self-help adaptation step by step to the demands of circumstances, acquiring maturity/understanding. They enter life, come in conflict with the old order, past, static history, orthodox religion, parental authority, and seek their careers, experience love and friendship, meet people of similar taste or contradictory temperaments; inshort, they pass through a variety of experiences by which they gradually mature and learn not only about the realities of the world but about themselves—'what life is'. In this, as Margaret Drabble has observed, there 'is something... fantastic and delightful in the spectacle of Bennett, who has been born in the most provincial of the provinces, and who has become cosmopolitan through immense efforts of the will.'
Lastly, the analysis of mistaken responses may continue; the misgivings may remain but the correction of them depends on his realism. Critics may also see the growth of dissatisfaction with Bennett's realism as well. The weight of Bennett's novelistic achievement is not poised on the criticism of Mrs Woolf, or on another point singled out by Henry James or Lawrence: its weight is distributed through the whole epistemology of his realism of life and the novels under consideration help to support it. The humble conclusion reached at on the basis of such a theory suggests that the critical controversy over Bennett's intention and achievement has gone astray because attention remained fixed on certain prejudicial area. By defining afresh the thesis of epistemological realism and measuring it against his serious novels Bennett's realism will survive, it is hoped, the hindrances and difficulties.
REFERENCES

1 Hepburn, Art of Arnold Bennett, p.176.


3 Bennett is greatly influenced by Wordsworth's poetry, criticism, sense of romance, beauty and grandeur. James G. Hepburn has devoted a full chapter to suggest comparison with Lyrical Ballads and How to Become An Author — both deal with their theory of writing. Hepburn has made a considerable thematic use of The Prelude. See "To Discover Beauty", The Art of Arnold Bennett, pp.125-142.

4 Sidney Hayes Cox, for instance, in a generally judicious estimate of Bennett's romance, says that his romance is the "romance of the real" that leads to a "struggle to understand and grasp life": it is "a persistent yearning for wisdom" that helps them "to establish and adjust themselves" — See "Romance in Arnold Bennett", Sewanee Review, 28 (1920), 358-66.

5 See Kinley E Roby, "Arnold Bennett's Social Conscience", 513-24, Bennett, to use Buckley's phrase, captures 'the Victorian temper' in its transitional stage.


13 Lafourcade, pp.262-63. Although 'naturalism' comprises one of the major aspects of Bennett's writings, until now no truly critical analysis of the naturalistic genre has been attempted. Everyone knows what 'naturalism' is; perhaps that is why no scholar has volunteered to attempt a naturalistic study of Bennett's work. I have devoted a full chapter and made an attempt toward filling this gap.

14 Lafourcade, p.250.

15 Ibid., pp.250-51.

16 William Bellamy, *The Novels of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy*, pp.20,44.

17 Galsworthy is also a firm believer in free will. He says: "However certain it was from the beginning that a man shall act in such a way, it is never known by that man in what way he is going to act until after he has acted. Hence, there is no deadening of the springs of individual action in a philosophic Determinism" — Cited by E.A. Baker, "Bennett and Galsworthy", *The History of the English Novel*, p.290.

18 Of for example George B Dutton's belief that Bennett is a 'showman': he takes delight in showing life in its humorous, fantastic, glittering and thrilling aspects — "Arnold Bennett, Showman", *The Sewanee Review*, 33 (1925), 64-72; Elizabeth D Wheatley sees Bennett as a writer of ' trifles' and gives an elaborate account of "Arnold Bennett's Trifles", *The Sewanee Review*, 42 (1934), 180-189.

Further, Bellamy notes that Bennett's first novel, "A Man from the North," presents a similar pattern of post-cultural crisis, as its title suggests. It shows the hero, who has suffered cultural parturition, beginning to define himself as suffering malady and as existentially deprived" (pp. 26-27).


Bennett, The Author's Craft. p. 23.

Lafourcade, p. 240.

Cited by Lafourcade, pp. 250, 253.

This reminds us of Forster's difference between 'flat' and 'round' characters as distinct from his 'people'. See Aspects of the Novel (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 51-89.

Lafourcade, p. 250.


Cited by Lafourcade, p. 244.


Bellamy, p. 23.

R.A. Scott-James, "Arnold Bennett", p. 82.


See Herbert J Muller, Modern Fiction, pp. 223-43.

Ibid., p. 228.


37 Ibid., pp.131, 133.

38 Cited by Pound, Arnold Bennett, p.28.


42 Ibid., p.47.

43 Ibid., pp.50, 51.


45 Ibid., p.56.

46 Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger, p.192.


48 Ibid., p.142.


51 Cited by Pound, Arnold Bennett, p.28.

52 Arnold Bennett, p.161.