# THE CRITIC ON THE HEARTH; BIOGRAPHY AS WRITTEN BY THE WIVES OF CERTAIN NOVELISTS

A Thesis

Submitted to

the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

McGill University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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September 1940

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

## ASPECTS OF BIOGRAPHY

"There is neither picture, nor image of marble, nor sumptuous sepulchre can match the durableness of an eloquent biography." - Jacques Amyot ["Aux Lecteurs" on the translation of Plutarch's Livres, 1565.]

The history of biography shows that biographies reflect the tastes and ideals of different ages.

> Over no form of literary composition have the requirements of the reading public exercised so marked and immediate an influence. The development of biography is primarily the development of the taste for biography.[1]

The Greeks were not interested in personality as we understand it. They concentrated upon deeds and theories. Plutarch was concerned with the era in which his men lived; in his works the times are brought out and the individual stands in the background. Roman biographical literature reflects that civilisation's preoccupation with truth and morals rather than with the men themselves. Above all, biography then was not regarded as a separate branch of literature but was considered a means of historical and ethical instruction.[2] The Greek heroes were conquerors, statesmen, politicians; the Roman heroes military leaders and orators. During the Renaissance people turned from public life to art for inspiration. For example, Vasari's Lives of the Painters reflects the general interest of his time

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1 Harold Nicolson, The Development of English Biography, p.135.

2 W. Dunn, English Biography, p.239.

in painting, sculpture, and architecture. Perhaps Christianity, with its emphasis on the individual, has had something to do with the slow development of biography from outward phenomena to inner personality.[3] But the lives of saints and martyrs written during the great era of the church do not however, reflect an interest in the personal but are panegyrics buried in legend and moral instruction.

The recurrence and varying popularity of biography throughout the ages seem to illustrate an interesting phenomenon. During periods of scepticism and doubt biography becomes a solace to those who feel the mistakes in their own lives, a clue to conduct for those seeking guidance, and a frank delight to those preoccupied with their fellow-man. During periods of religious and social certainty, times when Puritan ideals are paramount and men's thoughts directed to the next world, biography suffers a notable decline.[4]

In the eighteenth century, for example, scepticism prevailed among the educated, and people became more and more interested in themselves. Salons, coffee houses, routs, cards, and all manifestations of social life flourished. The number of memoirs, diaries, sketches, and confessions bear witness to the popular interest in human nature. The spread of education with the consequent enlargement of the reading public also

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3 W.R. Thayer, The Art of Biography, p.34.

4 H. Nicolson, Op. cit. pp.138-9.

contributed to the current interest in society.

That biography flourishes during periods of uncertainty is well illustrated today: no era has been characterised by more chaotic uncertainty than the twentieth century; and none has seen the publication of more biographies; in fact, biography now ranks next to the novel in popularity.

In the nineteenth century a great many biographies were written, but only a few have survived changing taste. Those few are of a very high order. There are people today who feel it would be a very good thing for biography to revert to the ideals and methods of Lockhart, Froude, and Morley. Lockhart's Life of Scott (1837-8) has been called the most perfect English biography.[5] Carlyle's Life of Sterling (1851) and his Life and Times of Frederick the Great are unquestionably outstanding biographies. The latter has been criticised for having too much of the times and too little of the life in it.[6] The publication of Froude's very complete and frank biography of Carlyle in four volumes (1882) marks a turning point in English biography. In it, says Harold Nicolson, Froude introduced the dangerous element of satire.[7] Carlyle's weaknesses are exposed for all to see. The books raised a

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5 H. Nicolson, op. cit., p. 10.

6 Ibid., p. 140.

7 Ibid., p. 131.

storm of protest. It was felt that Froude had "desecrated the sanctities of private life",[8] and scholars disagreed as to the accuracy of the facts. Morley's Life of Gladstone did not involve such controversies. Published in 1902, it is a masterly account of the great man told with much sympathy and judgment.

The nineteenth century, an age of peace, expansion, and security, again reveals the ebb and flow of the reading public's taste for biography. Although the writing of the biographies now became a business, and no person of any prominence seemed to lack a biographer, the reading of such literature was not the popular avocation it had been in the eighteenth century or would be in the twentieth.

Victorian biography suffered greatly from what Nicolson calls the "didactic element".[9] Didacticism in biography is not surprising when the general moral tone of the Victorian era is considered. These decades have been described mainly as an age of the middle classes,[10] dominated by "uncompromising earnestness and drab virtues".[11] In the utilitarian atmosphere of this age the writing of biographies with an eye to moral improvement and the consequent

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8 H. Nicolson, op. cit., p. 130.

9 Ibid., pp. 125 ff.

10 Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, Those Earnest Victorians, p.79.

11 Ibid., p. 82.

suppression or evasion of weak or unpleasant elements in the lives of the subjects would follow as a matter of course.

> How delicate, wrote Carlyle, how decent is English biography, bless its mealy mouth ! A Damocles Sword of Respectability hangs forever over the poor English life-writer ... and reduces him to the verge of paralysis.[12]

Biography was not then conceived in and of itself; it was a means to an end - an "accidental tradition given the authority of a moral law ".[13] An example of what was probably a typical Victorian attitude toward biography is found in a book, the very title of which is diametrically opposed to modern biographical ideals: The Uses of Biography, Romantic, Philosophic, and Didactic by Edwin P. Hood (1852). The main suggestions in this book are that biography forms the "Museum of Life", that there are great moral lessons to be derived from the most trifling incidents in a man's life, and that a most inestimable value of biography is its power of transfusing character into the reader. Above all, in biography, there is to be found the "moral of mistaken lives", the consolation of the power in this life for the life to come.

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12 Cited by Nicolson, op. cit., p. 125.

13 Ibid. p. 11.

Victorian biographies were written with a view to well-established patterns of behaviour- the biography of a statesman illustrated what a statesman ought to be, he was perpetually "on parade".[14] These biographies were naturally written with the idea of presenting the subject in the most favourable light possible. Tennyson emphasised this tradition in discussing Byron's life: "What business has the public to know about Byron's wildnesses ? He has given them fine work, and they ought to be satisfied."[15]

In 1918 Lytton Strachey published Eminent Victorians and threw such a strong challenge to Victorian biography that many people felt that an era of entirely "new" biography had arrived. This challenge was a product of the intellectual changes of the twentieth century, the spirit of truth and research foreshadowed by Froude's Carlyle and Edmund Gosse's Father and Son. The moral restraint and didactic purpose of the preceding age were sensationally cast aside; truth alone was to be the criterion of biography. Fearless, the researcher must face the consequences of whatever he discovers, and the present time, far more interested in personality than in deeds, does not expect

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14 W.R. Thayer, op. cit., p.109.

15 Cited by A. Maurois, Aspects of Biography, pp.17-18.

moral perfection of a hero, but does want a true picture of a human being. Lytton Strachey's intellectual honesty made of his own work, especially of Queen Victoria, a vivid and delicate analysis reinforced by his own prodigious knowledge and research. However, like the Victorian biographers that Strachey despises, he too has a thesis: to attack Victorian smugness and to show the esthetic worthlessness and the moral harm of the Victorian attitude. The manifesto of the new school of biography is the preface to Eminent Victorians:

> With us, the most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing has been relegated to the journeymen of letters; we do not reflect that it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one. Those two fat volumes with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead - who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slip-shod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection and detachment, of design.[16]

This statement seems rather sweeping when the great Victorian biographies are recalled. Also, prudery in biography is not confined to the Victorian era. In the eighteenth century Sprat refused to include Cowley's letters because he felt they were too revealing; today Mrs. Martha Bianchi will not allow the public to know Emily Dickinson's secret, and the present Longfellow family appears to maintain a squeamish attitude toward revealing details of Longfellow's private life.

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16 L. Strachey, Preface to Eminent Victorians, p. viii.

Strachey notably raised the esthetic standards of biographical writing.

> The fine balance of temper and perception, the clear formulation of the point of view, the selection, arrangement and concision are permanent forces in the world of biography.[17]

However, like Froude, Strachey opened the door to irony and satire. Too much the artist and too little the craftsman, as Virginia Woolf has pointed out,[18] Strachey gave to his portraits the over-emphasis and foreshortening of caricature. The followers of Strachey, not endowed with his wide knowledge, restraint, and delicacy, have carried frankness in biography to the extremes of casual sneering, outright falsehood, and absurdities of all sorts.

Since Strachey, the world of English letters has seen a burgeoning of biography surprising even to those who attempt to explain it. Biography is claimed as an art, as history, as psychology. There are biographies written from every conceivable point of view - psycho-analytic and sociological biographies, stream-of-consciousness, and fictional biographies, and biographies written with the technique of the drama.

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17 E. Johnson, One Mighty Torrent, p. 523.

18 Virginia Woolf, "The Art of Biography," The Atlantic Monthly, 163: 506-10, April, 1939, p.507.

Mark Longaker has suggested some reasons for the present day craze for biography.[19] We are no longer interested in man as representing an ethical system; the world today is torn by troubling and conflicting forces, so that nobody feels certain of what to believe or where to turn. We are in a nervous age, an age of "jitters". One thing that is certain is that personality exists; each individual is strongly differentiated from others.

> The modern mind subscribes largely to the belief that history does not make man, but man makes history . . . the proper study of mankind has become not necessarily the man who makes history by outward achievement, but the inner man who either defeats or conquers himself.[20]

Biography, the chronicle of individual history, offers the lonely, bewildered man of today guidance and companionship. Fiction may be an escape and relief from uncertainty and despair, but fiction does not offer the same kind of companionship and comfort that is found in biography. The reader of good biography shares the true experiences of someone who really lived and suffered.

Another reason for current interest in biography is the tremendous rise of publicity in all its forms. Gossip columns, scandal sheets, and tabloid newspapers cater to the public's avid desire to know the intimate details of people's lives. Biography today has taken advantage of the general

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19 M. Longaker, Contemporary Biography, pp. 9-21.

20 Ibid. p. 12.

craving for sensational gossip to disclose the more scandalous aspects of the lives of well known figures. "True Confessions" in this country and "Vies Amoureuses" in France are characteristic of the depths to which this literature can descend.

There is more than mere curiosity, however, in the modern taste for psychology. This interest has also turned people's minds toward self-analysis. Biography offers a fascinating field for indulging the new cult. No longer do we believe, as older philosophies did, in character as an unchanging phenomenon. "We accept the evolution of the individual spirit just as we accept the evolution of the race".[21] A good biography offers a picture of this evolution of character.

Despite the varying types of biography written today there is more or less general agreement among critics as to the aims of good biography. All say with one accord: truth is the supreme criterion of biography, thereby going back to Othello, who begged Ludovico:

> Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice. [22]

This bars the "debunking" or "re-write" school of biography, whose "purpose is not to find out and report the facts of history but to argue ex parte . . . it is at best a

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21 A. Maurois, op. cit., p. 58-59.

22 Othello, V , ii, 342-3.

prosecuting attorney."[23] Accuracy in all facts is the prime requisite to the attainment of truth.

It is in discussing the methods by which good biography is achieved that a great divergence of opinion is found. The amount of latitude given the biographer varies extremely and depends upon the creed to which the particular critic adheres. Harold Nicolson finds the most convenient definition of biography in the Oxford Dictionary: "the history of the lives of individual men written as a branch of literature." This implies three essentials: history, the individual, and literature. Further, he makes a distinction between "pure" and "impure" biography. Pure biography needs the comprehensive type of complete historical truth, involving the ideals of scientific honesty. It requires good construction, the evocation of sympathy for the subject, and the consciousness of creation.[24]

André Maurois, an avowed exponent of the "new" biography , carries his conception of biographical freedom further, finding in biography a means of creative self-expression and a work of art. Unlike Nicolson, he feels that the historical truth sought by the scholar and the

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23 B. de Voto, "The Skeptical Biographer", Harper's 166: 181-92, January, 1933, p. 183.

24 Nicolson, op. cit.,pp. 1-14.

artistic expression of the biographer can go together. He wishes to transfer the infinite complexity of human nature with all its dramatic implications to biography. A prominent person must be the subject, for obscure lives are not interesting to the general reader. A life story written dramatically has, he says, the poetic grandeur of the best tragedies; therefore the fact that biography is real does not preclude art in its composition.[25] Maurois also states some rules for the writing of good biography. Like a painter, the biographer must pick out the essential qualities in his subject without weakening the whole. The hidden unity beneath the wealth of incident must be revealed, and a consistent chronological order must be observed so as not to lose romantic interest as the tale unfolds. Maurois quotes Amy Lowell's aim in the preface to her biography of Keats :

> My object has been to make the reader feel as though he were living with Keats, subject to the same influences that surrounded him, moving in his circle, watching the advent of poems as from day to day they sprang into being.[26]

Another point that Maurois brings out, on which most critics concur, is that history should be seen only in the background and in relation to the development of the hero. Edmund Gosse put the case strongly: ". . . there is no greater literary mistake than to attempt what is called the 'Life

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25 A. Maurois, op. cit., pp. 41-73.

26 Ibid. p. 59.

and Times' of a man."[27] The "Times" become history and the individual, the true concern of biography, tends to disappear. Also for Maurois, the choice of details is most important - "everything that can give us an idea of what the man actually looked like, the tone of his voice, and the style of his conversation is essential."[28]

From Maurois it is but a step to the "psychographer", a word coined by Gamaliel Bradford, the leading exponent of this school of biography. In explaining his theories, Bradford is careful to say that a "psychograph" is not merely a portrait (a thing of a moment) but is "the condensed, essential, artistic presentation of character", and character is "the sum of qualities or generalised habits of action".[29] Bradford and his school, following Sir Sidney Lee, state that the business of biography is to transmit personality.[30] The methods of life-writing from this standpoint tend to stress the "why" rather than the "what", showing how deeds result from character.[31] To show the human appeal of the character portrayed, the man as he lived habitually, is the goal of this type of biographer. The biographical essay is

27 Cited by A. Maurois, op. cit., p. 61.

28 Ibid., p. 63.

29 G. Bradford, A Naturalist of Souls, pp. 8-9.

30 James Johnston, Biography, Literature of Personality, p. 18.

31 Ibid., p. 95.

the form most suited to psychography, allowing an author to present

> with varying degrees of completeness what he needs of the life of an individual, and with the privilege of mingling with perfect propriety his personal views and temperamental outlook...[32]

The methods of psychography have been termed

> the most intelligent of literary guessing games . . . a vehicle for wit and good writing . . . but its concern is with the soul and therefore it is not biography.[33]

Another criticism of this method of merely singling out a few dominant traits in an individual and discussing them is that

> the reader is left with no sense of intimate association, no feeling of companionship ... To watch a life and personality unfold from day to day, to suffer . . . sympathize . . . and marvel . . . these are not the least of biography's charms.[34]

Scholarship and research today do not by any means guarantee success in biography. Long and detailed researches, careful weighing and balancing of evidence, and full reference to all the primary sources are unquestionably necessary to achieve the ideal of scientific truth. Unfortunately, scholars tend to neglect literary responsibility

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32 J. Johnston, op. cit., p.183.

33 B. de Voto, op. cit., p.191

34 M. Longaker, op. cit., p.72.

in their work and become engulfed in a sea of facts which, presented to the bewildered reader in a cumbersome style, render the biography meaningless and unreadable. Also, scholars are not always motivated by a disinterested love of truth. Too often professional rivalry and personal jealousy underlie their work. A biography may become a vehicle for polemical writing and the expression of bitter scorn for the conclusions of a rival. These petty biases make impartial biography impossible.

Scholars often may be seeking above all their own personal prestige and advancement. Their haste to be the first in the field engenders trivial, incomplete work, worse than useless to the cause of good biography. An example of this type of biography is Ernest Brennecke's Life of Thomas Hardy (1925). Hardy was still living; therefore the biographer could hardly write anything but praise of his subject. No perspective was possible. A pilgrim to Hardy's shrine in Wessex, Brennecke indulges in worshipful evocation of the "Hardy spirit". For fifty pages thereafter Brennecke delves minutely into Hardy's ancestral background even going back to prehistoric life and geological history. The subsequent story of Hardy himself is the merest outline of the facts of Hardy's life, voluminously padded with description, excerpts of "autobiographical"

passages from Hardy's books, and discussion of the growth of Hardy's philosophy. The rest of the book is a long critique of Hardy's major works. As a biography Brennecke's book is a failure; as a work of criticism it is vague and ill-organised. It cannot be classified either as biography or criticism. Such a book from an alleged scholar is regrettable.

Critical writing on biography seems to indicate that there are roughly two main schools of thought: those that consider biography as a work of art, and those that view it strictly as a science or craft. The first group includes Strachey, Maurois, Ludwig, Guedalla, and Bradford. In the second group are found those that continue the nineteenth century traditions of Lockhart and Morley. Carl Sandburg, Lord Charnwood, A.B. Paine, are examples among many. One school, therefore, has infinite latitude in the presentation of character and events, the emphasis and interpretation of their biographies are entirely individual. The other type of writing is cast more in a pattern and generally attempts a complete, straightforward account of the individual from birth to death with as much description, explanation, and exposition as the author deems necessary for an accurate presentation of the subject. Between these two groups might be put some writers who are not quite under the one banner or the other.

Harold Nicolson and Virginia Woolf seem to belong in this category; they do not champion unreserved freedom in biography, yet they wish biography to go much further than a mere chronicle of events.

Virginia Woolf states the dilemma clearly. The difficulty, she says lies in the nature of truth and of personality. The "granite-like solidity of truth" and the "rainbow like intangibility of personality" to be "welded into one seamless whole" is most difficult.

> Truth being thus efficacious and supreme, we can only explain the fact that Sir Sidney Lee's Life of Shakespeare is dull, and that his Life of Edward VII is unreadable, by supposing that though both are stuffed with truth, he failed to choose those truths which transmit personality. For, in order that the light of personality may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded; yet in the process, they must never lose their integrity.[35]

But how facts may be manipulated at all without danger to their integrity is a major problem. A great many dangerously untrue biographies have resulted from manipulation of the facts.

Harold Nicolson is stricter in his discussion of biography. The whole truth must be sought. There should be as much detail as possible, arranged readably. The biographer must have no personal thesis to maintain; any preconceived ideas destroy "pure" biography. Too detached

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35 Cited by A. Maurois, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

an attitude, however, becomes patronising, as in Strachey's Eminent Victorians. "Undue subjectivity" is also to be avoided, "the undue intrusion of the biographer's personality or predilections" spoils the effect of the biography.[36] Nicolson's conception of biography is what Salvemini defines as an "intellectual hybrid" - the facts are real but the imagination, not allowed in science, is used, thus forming a successful crossbreed between history and art.[37]

These considerations show that it is most difficult to write good biography. Certainly, as Salvemini has shown, the impersonal accumulation, verification, and systematisation of facts that constitutes pure science is not possible in the fields of history and the social sciences.[38] Even in science, biases are not only inevitable but useful, because only by assumption or hypotheses on the part of the investigator can science proceed to sound conclusions.[39] Historical evidence, which is also the material of biography, can not be reënacted or verified.[40]

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36 H. Nicolson, op. cit., p. 10.

37 G. Salvemini, Historian and Scientist, p. 18.

38 Ibid., pp. 108 ff.

39 Ibid., pp. 75-76.

40 Ibid., p. 109.

> To make up so far as possible for this drawback there is no other way than to create an environment of free competition between opposite biases . . . . This objectivity results not from the absence of bias but from controversy between conflicting preconceptions, a controversy which is at bottom coöperation.[41]

The biographer must not distort facts to suit his own preconceived theory about the life and character of a man. He may be allowed his own point of view but should include all facts as well. Another biographer may then present another tenable hypothesis, and gradually a true picture of the man will be formed.

Biography also has its own distinctive problems. To what extent is the omission of biographical material permissible ? Is compromise possible ? When should a biographer apply his own judgment?[42]

Many answers to these questions have been given. There is much discrepancy between theory and practice. Critics agree that good biography should omit all that is irrelevant and nothing that is necessary. As Maurois puts it, after the biographer has read all the details,

> once his scaffolding is firm and his house built, he pulls down the scaffolding and is at pains to present to the reader the completed house and nothing more.[43]

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41 G. Salvemini, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

42 J. Johnston, op. cit., p. 16.

43 A. Maurois, op. cit., p. 62.

If the disclosure of unpleasant facts is necessary for true biography, the facts must be published and not hidden. If relatives have to be considered, at the expense of any important truth, the biography should not be written; the trouble with so many Victorian biographies is that they were inspired by worshipping relatives or keenly supervised by a watchful widow.

The problem of the biographer's personality and its place is a most debatable question. If the biographer rigidly keeps himself out, there is the danger of the biography's becoming merely a recital of events. The whole difference between "old" and "new" biography is one of emphasis; of the two elements of any biography - sequence of events and interpretation -, older biographies stressed the former and present-day biographies the latter.[44] To a certain extent the biographer obviously has to be present; the choice of detail, the angle of presentation, etc., all depend on the individual biographer. The reader's impression of the biography as a whole is entirely the work of the biographer. But when biographers feel that "an ounce of interpretation is worth a pound of facts,"[45] then a biography may become distorted.

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44 G. Bowerman, The New Biography, p. 11.

45 M. Longaker, op. cit., p. 21.

Older biography kept strictly to an account of both physical events and mental development and left the reader to draw his own conclusions, reverting to Bacon's dictum: "Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted . . but to weigh and consider."[46] Interpretive biography ranges all the way from Strachey's lightly satirical and literary manipulation of facts to the insidious "novelized" biography of Maurois and Guedalla and the scurrilous "debunking" and fictional biographies. However, interpretive biographies may be "reliable and diverting depending on the author's honesty and insight."[47] There are many examples of these which are eagerly read by a public delighted to be educated and diverted at the same time. But "where legitimate interpretation gives way to undue interference is a nice problem, which cannot be discussed in the abstract but only in particular cases."[48]

Ariel, the life of Shelley, by André Maurois, was the first of the novelized biographies. This is avowedly an example of using biography as a means of creative self-expression. Maurois describes how he identified himself with Shelley and his problems and confesses that he does not now feel this work to be the best type of biography.[49]

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46 F. Bacon, "Of Studies".

47 G. Bowerman, op. cit., p. 11.

48 E. Johnson, op. cit., p. 481.

49 A. Maurois, op. cit., pp. 121-122.

Edgar Johnson has pointed out the main difficulty involved in Ariel.

> It is not the use of imagination that is the error. Every biographer must use imagination. It is the violation of a subtle compact tacitly underlying the biographer's relation to his reader. That compact is that the biographer is to use his imagination in the creative synthesis of character but not in the invention of material . . . We are left uncertain what is fact and what is invented.[50]

After Maurois came a stream of more reprehensible examples of fictional biography, where authors, throwing all biographical responsibility to the winds, launch on an imaginary reconstruction of a person's life with no absurdities too extreme for the picture. The best one can say for this type of "biography" is that, if its purpose is frankly admitted and readers are under no illusion as to its character, fictional biography is comparatively harmless.

The methods of fictional biography are most questionable. Among them is the use of dramatic technique as in Ludwig's biographies, the recurring leit-motif as used by Maurois (the water-theme in Shelley's life and the peacocks in Disraeli's), and particularly the use of psychoanalysis.

Such methods are used by those who desire striking literary effects in biography. One observer has even stated that in his opinion literary people should not be permitted to write biography because the literary mind is the one least

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50 E. Johnson, op. cit., p. 484 .

adapted to the handling of fact.[51] An artist "selects vivid phases of experience and coördinates them in such a manner as to give an illusion of the whole."[52] Experiences related in a novel are symbolic of universal experience; the intuition and insight of the author are necessary to render his art universal. Biography needs primarily accuracy of fact; irresponsible intuition and conjecture are hindrances to truth in biography.

Psychoanalysis is particularly dangerous in biography. There is wide divergence among the schools of professional psychiatrists. Also, as they themselves fully realise, the application of psychoanalysis to the mind of someone in the past has no possibilities of investigation or confirmation. Furthermore, psychoanalysis is used for therapeutical purposes in order to approach the norm, not for the reconstruction of past motives and abnormalities.

The methods of fictional biography introduce an even more subtle problem. How many true facts is it permissible for an author to use in a work of fiction? The moving picture industry has not been careful to keep fact and fiction apart and consequently has had to engage in lawsuits for libel and defamation of character. In the novel this problem has been exemplified in W. S. Maugham's

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51 B. de Voto, op. cit., p. 184.

52 Loc. cit.

book, Cakes and Ale. Here we have the story of an author named Driffield told by a Maugham-like observer. From the opening pages the reader cannot help substituting for the name "Driffield" that of Thomas Hardy. A great many details fit Hardy's life exactly, and there is just enough difference in the facts to allow Maugham to protest that "there was no resemblance to any character living or dead" - his work was fiction pure and simple. Nevertheless, the character of "Driffield" is presented in such an ironic light and his life rendered scandalous enough to raise an universal outcry at the publication of the book.

One feels at once the "wrongness" of a procedure such as Maugham's; nevertheless it is difficult to clarify the ethics involved in the situation. Would one feel the same if Maugham had presented "Driffield" in a favorable light? One can only go back to maintaining that fiction and biography should be distinct. It would have violated biographical standards just as much if Maugham had whitewashed a noted figure, using the same methods of thinly-veiled resemblance. As it is, the bad taste of suggesting under the guise of fiction that a great figure like Hardy was, in reality, a cynical and amoral character is more derogatory than an open accusation, for Maugham slides easily behind the defence of "fiction".

These are some of the problems of biography. It is not hard to see why there is such divergence of opinion on what constitutes good biography and how it is achieved. There are so many possible ways to write a man's life, ways that cross the boundaries of history, psychology, sociology, or fiction. Until recently, biography was not discussed as a separate form of literature. Now it is being recognised that pure biography will have to be differentiated from the host of interpretive and fictional biographies. The examples of Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, which established the first college course in biography, and that of Dartmouth, which followed suit, show that biography is now being considered a study in itself.

## CHAPTER II

## EARLIER BIOGRAPHIES BY WIDOWS

"One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought . . . One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat . . ."

- V. Woolf, To the Lighthouse.

Women have played an important part in the development of biography, particularly during periods of individualism. The seventeenth century and the nineteenth century are particularly noted for the contribution of various women to biography. In 1667 Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, wrote the Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, together with "the true relation of my birth, breeding and life." It was popular in its time and, as has been remarked, has the "charm and originality of a true precursor of Mrs. Asquith."[1] Other critics disagree. W.L. Cross terms the biography "vainglorious".[2] There was much praise lavished on the Duchess in her own time, but one contemporary opinion expressed his prejudice and shocked feelings to his diary:

> March 16, 1668. Thence home, and there in favour to my eyes, stayed at home, reading the ridiculous history of my Lord Newcastle, wrote by his wife, which shows her to be a mad, conceited, ridiculous woman, and he an ass to suffer her to write what she wishes to him and of him.[3]

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1 H.Nicolson, The Development of English Biography, p.63.

2 W.Cross, An Outline of Biography, p. 20.

3 Cited by C.H. Firth in the Preface to the Memoirs of the Duchess of Newcastle, p. viii.

Pepys was notoriously very conventional. What shocked him appealed greatly to Charles Lamb who praised the book highly. The Duchess is certainly frank, her many faults, especially her vanity and eccentricity, are there for all to see. Her book is a valuable picture of the times - manners, habits, and amusements.

The Memoirs of the Life of Col. Hutchinson, Written by his Widow Lucy were written at about the same time as those of Lady Newcastle. Colonel Hutchinson died in 1664, and soon after ,motivated by her grief, admiration, and duty, Mrs. Hutchinson undertook her account of his life. The Memoirs remained in obscurity until their publication in 1806. Mrs. Hutchinson concentrates upon her husband and all his thoughts and actions. The larger background of the Civil War is barely apparent in her book; there is merely the life of her husband and his immediate associates, a group of obscure revolutionaries. Mrs. Hutchinson shows all the passionate prejudices of her time. Harold Nicolson describes her book as pretentious and complacent; she is the widow biographer at her worst. "It is", he says, "A flat and uninteresting monochrome of adulation".[4]

In 1676 Lady Fanshawe, wife of Sir Richard Fanshawe, wrote her Memoirs for the edification of her son after the death of his father. Again, an instructive picture of the

4 H. Nicolson, op. cit., p. 59.

times as well as a work of considerable literary ability, this work is of great charm.

In the nineteenth century, as we have seen, widows were very influential in determining what sort of biographies their husbands should have. A few tried writing biographies themselves. Harold Nicolson terms the best of these Mrs. Grote's study of her husband, and the worst Lady Burton's two volumes.[5] Mrs. Grote's The Personal Life of George Grote (1873) was written, she explains, at the request of friends. Her husband had agreed that she was the only person who knew anything about his early life. The Life seems to be a straightforward account with full references to her sources. Her closing words reflect the general commemorative character of most of the biographies of the time:

> These were the concluding efforts of that noble Being, George Grote, in the path of public service ... at the end of three weeks his honourable, virtuous, and laborious course was closed..,"[6]

Isabel Burton, the wife of Sir Richard Burton, famous for his travels and translation of the Arabian Nights, published in 1893 her Life of Sir Richard Burton in two volumes. Her work has been summed up thus:

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5 H. Nicolson, op. cit., p. 126.

6 Harriet L. Grote, The Personal Life of George Grote, p. 330.

> Her romantic and exaggerated biography of her husband with all its faults is one of the most pathetic monuments which the unselfish life of a woman ever raised to the memory of her hero.[7]

Harold Nicolson is more severe. He terms Lady Burton's book "demonstrably untrue . . . it is written as a branch of parish magazine journalism."[8]

W. R. Thayer, in commenting upon the work of widow biographers, says, "I can recall only one biography by a widow which was really successful, Mrs. Kingsley's Life of Charles Kingsley. [9] Mrs. Kingsley's Life was published in 1877, at first most voluminously, containing much that was pure panegyric, and then it was abridged to one volume. Mrs. Kingsley's work is also straightforward biography of a strongly commemorative character and perhaps of an over-serious tone, in view of her husband's well known wit and humour. It is also marred by sentimental rhetoric. In conclusion, Mrs. Kingsley says of her "True and Perfect Knight":

> Some again, may be inclined to say that this character is drawn in too fair colors to be absolutely truthful. But 'we speak that we do know, and testify to that we have seen.' The outside world must judge him as an author, a preacher, a member of society, but those only who lived with him at home can tell what he was as a man."[10]

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7 Stanley Lane-Poole, "Sir Richard Burton", Encyclopedia Brittannica, 14th edition, IV, 448.

8 H. Nicolson, "Biographies; Old & New", Living Age, 352:266, May, 1939.

9 W.R. Thayer, The Art of Biography, p. 111.

10 Charles Kingsley, His Letters & Memoirs of his Life, Edited by his Wife, p. 487.

All the critics agree that for relatives to contribute to the biography of an individual is not conductive to good biography. "Relatives and debtors of great characters should not undertake to be their biographers."[11]

> Formerly, when any distinguished citizen . . . died, it was taken for granted that his clergyman, if he had one, would write his life, unless his wife, sister or cousin were preferred - a still more foolish custom.[12]

> Nowhere in English is there, I think, a first rate biography of a man by his wife. On the whole, husbands have perhaps done rather better with their wives . . . Wives and husbands cannot be outspoken of one another in print . . . Nor can a son or daughter write freely of a father or mother. Censure would be regarded as impiety, and praise, though perfectly just, would be viewed with suspicion . . . The closer the relationship, the less trustworthy the judgment.[13]

"Family biographies are rarely complete or true."[14]

"The particular charm of Lady Fanshawe's memoirs is largely adventitious and is found in the books of other widow biographers."[15]

The books of the nineteenth ^ century wives are closer to real biography than those of the seventeenth ^ century, but they remain

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11 Joseph Collins, A Doctor Looks at Biography, p. 18.

12 W.R. Thayer, op. cit., p. 111.

13 W.L. Cross, An Outline of Biography, pp. 22-23,25.

14 E.H. O'Neill, History of American Biography, p. 345.

15 H. Nicolson, The Development of English Biography, p.57

merely useful compilations for other biographers to draw upon. Their major faults are that they are conceived largely from a purely eulogistic standpoint and are lacking in artistic synthesis and literary ability.

If one agrees with Mr. Cross that the close relationship of man and wife precludes successful biography - all statements by a wife being automatically subject to suspicion - then one cannot hope to see a good biography written by a wife of her husband.

There are many fundamental changes in society which have altered entirely the aspect of marital relations. In England and America women have won their battle for suffrage and more equal rights before the law. They may choose their own husbands and divorce them, earn their own livings, and challenge men in almost every field of activity. Education, independence, and the study of psychology have tended to invade family inviolability. We do not now feel that it is a matter of censure if a wife, son, or daughter chooses to give the world a frank and impartial study of a member of the family. Deliberate malice, however, is not admirable; most people agree that it is better not to write a biography until all possibility of personal injury is gone. It is true that the biography of a relative of a man will always be subject to scrutiny, but, if it is written with insight and authority, it should surmount the obstacle.

There are many advantages and disadvantages in a wife's position as a possible biographer. Certainly, she is closest to a man; she sees him at all times of the day, in all possible circumstances. She generally shares with him all the events of their daily lives and should know something of his work, hopes, and aspirations. She may have been a prime factor in his emotional development. She should, therefore, understand something of his innermost reactions. Today, as we have seen, personality has become almost a religion, looming as a paramount raison d'être of biography. The most seemingly insignificant details in a man's life are important. Who should be better qualified to furnish such details and give a true picture of personality than a man's wife? She need no longer stand forever worshipping at his shrine but may step forward to present a sympathetic, understanding, and complete view of her husband, if she is able.

On the other hand, the disadvantages for the purpose of a comprehensive biography in being a wife seem wellnigh insurmountable. Seldom does a wife completely see her husband. Unless she shares his work, she sees him only as the man at home, not as a worker or creator. Too often, a man does not marry his intellectual equal, or his wife possesses an entirely different type of mind from his. His inner life, his aims and aspirations, are kept locked within him. Also,

in writing his biography, a wife may feel that what she says of her husband will inevitably reflect on her as having shared her life with him. In other words, if she reveals weaknesses, they will imply weaknesses on her part as well as his. Again, living so intimately with a man may well blind a woman's vision, she is in danger of not seeing the forest for the trees. Insignificant details may loom so large that she has no perspective of her husband as he really is. Repetition and closeness of contact can accentuate this tendency, be the basis for a life-long prejudice which would render good biography impossible . Personal rancor is as devastating to biography as hero worship.

The biography of men of letters is of particular interest to people today. Formerly, there was no attempt in biographies to relate the man and his art. Biographies of literary men generally consisted of the events in their lives, merely adding to the chronicle a list of their works. In fact, owing to the universal early comtempt for the career of letters, literary men were the last to be chosen for biographies. Johnson's Life of Savage (1744) is one of the earliest. Today,as has been remarked, biographies of literary men have increased to the point where it is impossible for a prominent man of letters to escape the biographer.[16] The modern interest in psychology may account for the widespread

16 W. Dunn, English Biography, p. 88.

preoccupation with analysing a man's relation to his art.

> In no respect does contemporary biography differ more from 19th century biography than in this living interest in the relationship between the character of an artist and his work, between the forces at work upon his life and his responses to them in the novels, the poems, or the paintings, or the music that he drew out of himself.[17]

We want to know why an author wrote what he did and under what circumstances he wrote it. Only then can we understand the man and the writer. The biographical work of an author's wife, therefore, is always looked upon with the greatest of interest. Whether or not the wife has attempted a full-length biography of her husband, her work will undoubtedly throw some light, unintentionally perhaps, on his problems and personality. Reading a man's books, we feel we have looked into his nature, that we know him from the picture of his mind as shown in his work. Our curiosity is heightened and stimulated, we long to know more of the details of his life that his wife should be able to furnish.

It is also valuable to check the autobiographical facts in a novel with the genuine events in the writer's life. Too often, such autobiographical writing has been relied upon completely as authentic biographical information. "This," says André Maurois, "may have an air of truth but it is

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17 E. Johnson, One Mighty Torrent, p. 474.

extremely dangerous."[18] Characters and incidents are more often composites of many people and events in an author's life. Unless the author has stated definitely that an event took place in his own life exactly as he described it in his book, it is unwarrantable for readers to assume that it did so. If a wife has discussed the genesis of a novel with her husband, or shared the experiences that inspired it, she then can be of immeasurable aid in the understanding of the relation of a man and his art.

In studying the biographical contributions of the wives of five creative writers, my desire is to see whether the present-day change in attitude toward biography is reflected in these feminine biographers, whether these women have helped to throw light on otherwise obscure circumstances in their husbands' lives, whether they are impartial or prejudiced, and finally, whether they possessed any literary ability and can rank among those tho have contributed happily to the long history of biography.

I have chosen five men, three English, one of Polish blood who became naturalised to English soil and literature, and one American. These men all were active after 1885, were all novelists, and therefore shared much the same ambitions, and were subject to many of the same problems.

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18 A. Maurois, Aspects of Biography, p. 88.

Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, D.H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, and Jack London are all outstanding literary figures whose books have been widely read and whose lives have been probed in detail. It is to be seen whether or not their wives have added to the store of biographical knowledge about these men.

# CHAPTER III

## JOSEPH CONRAD

"What sort of a man was he, Eugene . . .
Did you ever ask yourself that question ?" she insisted.

"Yes," said Réal, "But the only certain thing
we can say of him is that he was not a bad Frenchman."

"Everything's in that."

- Joseph Conrad, The Rover.

The main events in Joseph Conrad's life are well known. There is a standard two-volume biography by M. Jean-Aubry, an interesting and readable narrative of Conrad's life. It is necessary to know something of these facts to understand the man and his work. Incidents and impressions gathered from Conrad's varied and adventurous experience form the background to his stories; "his personality pervades everything he writes to such an extent that some people cannot read him."[1] Although it is possible to find an explanation for many of Conrad's traits in his heritage and career, nevertheless Conrad remained always, even for those who knew him most imtimately, an enigma. His life divides itself into three distinctly separate stages - three "completely different existences," they have been called.[2] The first is his melancholy and tragic youth in Poland. Born in the Ukraine December 3, 1857, Josef Tedor Konrad Korzeniowski

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1 R. Curle, Joseph Conrad, p.2.

2 R. Curle, Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad, p. 40.

was the only child of upper-class parents, inheriting "sweetness from his mother and from his father sombre insight and sardonic fierceness".[3] His father, a man of poetic gifts and literary talent, was, as all the Korzeniowski family had been, an ardent patriot and had been organising a secret committee to encourage resistance to Russian oppression and to seek Polish independence from Russia. The family was exiled when Conrad was five years old. Their sufferings were severe, Conrad's mother becoming so ill from the hardship that she soon died. Conrad's one escape from the lonely sadness of his life was reading; he became an introspective, nervous, precocious youth, brought up in an atmosphere of oppression. As a Pole he had no prospects. He made up his mind to go to sea in spite of all family opposition. He went to Marseilles in 1874, beginning the second period of his life, that on the sea.

After many adventurous voyages and a wild, carefree time in Marseilles, Conrad arrived at Lowestoft, England, on the steamer Mavis in 1878. Thereafter, he led the life of the typical deep-water sailor, passing successive examinations until he received his captain's certificate. He took out his English naturalisation papers in 1884. A disastrous trip to the Congo in 1890 so damaged his health that his career as a sailor was practically ended and his inward life greatly intensified.

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3 E. Garnett, Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924, p.10.

The year 1894 brought to a conclusion the story of Almayer's Folly. It had taken Conrad four and a half years to write it. It is well known how Fisher Unwin's young reader, Edward Garnett, read the manuscript, recommended it, met the young author and became his life-long friend. Conrad's career for the thirty years thereafter, the third period of his life, is the story of his books and the progress of his family life. At first, especially, these years were a bitter and unending struggle against illness, financial trouble, and the difficulties for him in creative writing. He emerged victorious, but the constant strain took its toll upon him.

At the end of March, 1896, Conrad married Miss Jessie George to whom he had been introduced by his friends, the Hopes. The couple went to Brittany for their honeymoon, returning to a cottage in Essex. They moved many times thereafter, finally settling in Kent. Conrad constantly increased his literary connections and painfully ground out his books and articles. The Conrads had two children, both boys. They made a few trips to the continent. An attempt to visit Poland in the summer of 1914 was a nightmare of anxiety and discomfort; they barely missed being interned in Europe for the whole war. Conrad's last long voyage was in 1923, this time to America. He stayed six weeks with the Doubledays at Oyster Bay, gave one reading at Mrs. Curtiss James', and motored to Boston. The trip was

a great success but Conrad was glad to return to England and his family. With them, he lived quietly until August, 1924, when he died suddenly of a heart attack after a few days' illness.

Such are the salient facts of a long,varied,and extraordinarily intense career. Conrad's life followed no set course, its different phases seem unpredictable, inexplicable. Why a person of such inland antecedents should have earnestly and steadfastly desired to go to sea, and, having been for many years a seaman, felt an urgent creative impulse, is not readily seen. Conrad himself gives us no clue. Conrad, the man, stands separate from the events in his life - his inner feelings and motives were kept rigidly within him. He himself was probably not aware of many phases in his mental life, for, despite his psychological emphasis as a writer, he was decidedly not given to self-analysis. Nowhere in Conrad's writings can one find subjective outpourings, nothing resembling the Rousseau-like attitude, rendering an author's heart, soul, and mind comprehensible to readers in terms familiar to them. The peculiar circumstances of Conrad's boyhood in Poland could have engendered many picturesque descriptions of the boy and his gloomy surroundings - how they coloured his mind and fed his emotions. There is only a most objective view of the woman "Rita" in The Arrow of Gold, instead of a Somerset Maugham's "Mildred" or a D.H. Lawrence's "Miriam". Conrad has stated

definitely that explicitness was abhorrent to him.

> It is a strange fate that everything I have, of set artistic purpose, laboured to leave indefinite, suggestive . . . should have that light turned on to it and its insignificance . . . exposed for any fool to comment upon or even for average minds to be disappointed with. Didn't it ever occur to you, my dear Curle, that I knew what I was doing in leaving the facts of my life and even of my tales in the background. Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion.[4]

All commentators on Conrad's personality agree that the key to his nature lay in his remarks in A Personal Record on fidelity and asceticism of sentiment. "I have carried my notion of good service from my earlier into my later existence."[5]

> Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas . . . It rests notably amongst others, on the idea of Fidelity.[6]

As R.L. Mégroz puts it, Conrad was a "dedicated soul".[7] Without a very clear formulation of his philosophy to himself, Conrad felt his only salvation lay in the steadfast dedication of his will to truth, loyalty, and restraint. Hence his caution, his habitual reserve.

Nearly all Conrad's friends felt something baffling about him. No matter how well they knew him they could not predict his actions. They had the feeling he seldom said all he really

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4 R. Curle, Conrad to a Friend, p. 142.

5 J. Conrad, A Personal Record, p. 15.

6 Ibid., p.19.

7 R.L. Mégroz, A Talk With Joseph Conrad, p. 13.

thought. It is not surprising that he was so amazingly misunderstood and that so many ridiculous notions concerning him were widespread. There was a real barrier between him and other people.

The picture of Conrad as a person gathered from the the writings of some of his friends is a consistent one. Next to his work, Conrad's friendships meant the most to him in life. He had great charm, extreme individuality. Nobody seems quite able to put into words the peculiar quality of his personality, but all felt its power and distinctive magnetism. He was devoted to his real friends and could not do enough for them in an expansive continental manner, but even with them was touchy and difficult to handle. Mr. Curle admits that sometimes Conrad made false estimates of people and treated them with unintentional injustice.[8] Always courteous, even painfully so, no one could mistake Conrad for other than an aristocrat.

Subject to constant illness and strain, Conrad was tremendously high-strung; some trifling mishap could be the cause of a suffocating storm of fury. Writing was always difficult and often pure torture. Conrad would spend days tormenting himself with racking self-criticism and despair.

Conrad's strong individuality stamped every act and thought. His tastes were neither entirely continental nor

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8 R. Curle, Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad, pp. 21-22.

ultra-British but a subtle combination derived from both backgrounds. His interests were extremely limited, he took no exercise except for occasional short walks, had no hobbies or love of fine things. Though his activities were few, his mental range was enormous. His friends found him profoundly well informed, a brilliant conversationalist.

Edward Garnett has remarked that such a complex, concentrated nature as Conrad's might have rendered marriage disastrous, but that Conrad instinctively chose most wisely.[9] His wife's temperament was admirably suited to bear the brunt of his nervous storms, smooth the way for him, and free him from the worry of practical details. That Mrs. Conrad was attractive, unassuming, steadfast, and calm is the impression one receives from all accounts. There are not, however, many references to her; she was distinctly in the background of her husband's life.

Since all who admire Conrad are "hungry for news of the human personality behind the great artist,"[10] it is with intense interest that we turn to Jessie Conrad's two books on Joseph Conrad. Can she throw light on some of the mysteries in Conrad's nature? One of her books is more concerned with Conrad as she knew him; the other attempts to tell more of his brilliant circle of friends. In reality, the second book is

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9 E. Garnett, op. cit., p. 17.

10 R.L. Mégroz, op. cit., p. 20.

merely an elaboration of the first - both are formless, rambling, detailed reminiscence.

Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him was published in 1926, two years after Conrad's death. Richard Curle, in an introduction to the book, recalls how important Jessie Conrad was to Conrad in every way, how mutually devoted each was to the other. Nobody else could give such personal details of Conrad's life, and all future biographers must turn to Mrs. Conrad's book for material.[11] In her preface Mrs. Conrad says that her book "will throw into stronger relief the unusual, powerful personality of Conrad - a personality at once simple and complex."[12] She also wishes to refute the assertion that Conrad hated the sea. This idea had been stated by F.M. Hueffer in his book Joseph Conrad (1924).[13] Mrs. Conrad shows that such a conception is impossible, knowing Conrad's attachment to anything connected with the sea. She realises how very apt she is to wander from the point and does not care - she hopes her book will be like a fireside chat. So it is, being merely a series of amusing anecdotes, some descriptions, and a little wifely comment.

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11 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, Introduction, pp. vii-viii.

12 Ibid., Preface, p. ix.

13 F.M. Ford [Hueffer], Joseph Conrad, A Personal Reminiscence, p. 109.

Mrs. Conrad assumes that the reader is familiar with Conrad's work and reputation. She has also only the briefest references to Conrad's life before his marriage. The reminiscences follow broadly the course of their married life from the first days of their acquaintance through the war years. Then Mrs. Conrad speaks of her connection with Conrad's books which, she ways, "were to me as so many children,"[14] but as usual she is led on to all sorts of irrelevant details. For her, each publication meant a present of some sort from Conrad.

Mrs. Conrad did not appear to give Conrad many ideas or suggestions for his work. It was probably just as well that she did not attempt to criticise or aid the temperamental author, for Conrad was most hyper-sensitive to anything connected with his work. Mrs. Conrad recounts the painful experience of trying to read aloud the manuscript of the Outcast of the Islands soon after their first meeting. Even when he was courting, Conrad could not conceal his impatience and irritation with what he considered faulty enunciation. Mrs. Conrad also says that Conrad never quite forgave her for urging him not to dramatise The Secret Agent. She felt that a dramatic adaptation of that sort would never be as successful as a work conceived purely as a play. The play was not a success. However, during their honeymoon and for many years afterwards, Mrs. Conrad

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14 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, p. 100.

was a faithful amanuensis and preserver of manuscripts.

Mrs. Conrad describes Conrad's working habits as most erratic. He could write only if in the right mood, staying up for days on end if necessary. In later life, he became more eccentric, taking little pieces of paper to remote corners, and in one house he appropriated the only bathroom to everyone's discomfort. Or he could work only in the conservatory clad in an old bathrobe so that someone had to be posted to give warning of callers. Conrad smoked incessantly, leaving stumps and burns everywhere. His bedroom was a perfect litter of cigarettes, books, and papers.

It is in connection with his work that Mrs. Conrad wishes to make very clear the relationship between her husband and Ford Madox Hueffer, later Ford Madox Ford. After the publication of Lord Jim, the Hueffers came to live with the Conrads. It was not very easy.

> I had often to hold myself in strict restraint, but I had a motive in my self sacrifice. I knew that in those days Conrad found F.M.H. a mental stimulus but he was not the literary godfather he claims to have been at any time.[15]

Mrs. Conrad does not feel that The Inheritors in which Conrad collaborated with Hueffer, is typical of her husband's work; she says she cannot even understand it. She goes on to show that Hueffer's claim to have originated the plot for Amy Foster is ridiculous.

The greater part of Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him is taken

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15 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, p. 113.

up with descriptions of incidents in her life with "Joseph Conrad" as she usually styles him. His characteristics, as she describes them, are essentially the same as his friends' accounts, but there is no attempt at analysing his complex nature, or any indication that she could understand or appreciate Conrad's intellectual life. One gets merely a clear picture of the physical events of a typical day in the Conrad household and her reactions to them.

Mrs. Conrad differs with other observers in some of her conclusions about Conrad's character. For instance, all Conrad's friends marvelled at his victory over adversity, illness, and poverty. Mrs. Conrad, in referring to these comments, says "There were many years too lean not to be without grave anxiety for us, but I will never admit that he suffered much in that way."[16] The feeling Conrad gave his friends in his letters to them during difficult times was one of extreme mental anguish with the bare possibility of his pulling through. Paradoxically, says Mrs. Conrad, Conrad could not bear to see suffering of any kind, yet anticipated trouble long before it came. She adds that these characteristics are peculiar to the Polish temperament. Conrad's vivid imagination and emotional pessimism contributed to render his difficulties more intense. Occasionally he was almost childishly morbid. During the war when his son was at the front, Conrad announced to all that the

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16 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, pp. 1-2.

boy was dead. He had "a presentiment" he said; nothing would persuade him to the contrary. He had to be soothed, fed,and put to bed.

Mrs. Conrad was eminently a practical person. She learned not to take him too seriously.

> Few artists are well fitted to deal with the ordinary difficulties of life, and Conrad had far too lively an imagination for everyday events. He lived life as a novel; he exaggerated simple trifles, though quite unconsciously.[17]

Conrad would tell the same story in many different ways, but any correction drew from him peremptory commands to cease the discussion. In fact, with Conrad, as Violet Hunt remarked, paraphrasing a friend: "Mine is to be the only temper in this house !"[18] Conrad had always been extremely sensitive, and his wife wondered how he could have led the rough life of a seaman. "In his later years he carried fastidiousness to a degree that bordered on the fantastic."[19] Mrs. Conrad describes how, disgusted when a joint was put on the table, Conrad promptly turned his back on it. Conrad also had a most unfortunate table habit, that of making little bread pellets and throwing them around the room. Sometimes the bombardment was so severe as to make his guests very nervous. When his wife tried to signal to him on one occasion, he could not see her purpose and grew very angry.

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17 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, p. 16.

18 V. Hunt, I Have This To Say, p. 22.

19 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, p. 18.

Mrs. Conrad, as a bride, realised the hasards of marrying a man already settled in his ways. She describes her first and miserable channel trip and their honeymoon in Brittany. The couple evidently were very happy, he writing, and she triumphantly typing each page on a most rickety machine. Her account of these days is most valuable; in no other way could these facts have been revealed. Conrad's letters to Edward Garnett during this period are most brief and unsentimental. "She [Jessie] is a good comrade and no bother at all. As a matter of fact, I like to have her with me,"[20] is Conrad's reference to his bride.

The next chapters tell briefly some of the good things and bad that happened to the Conrad family during their early years. Mrs. Conrad was very shy, but all Conrad's friends accepted her. Things went fairly well for a time. Then Mrs. Conrad suffered a disastrous fall, badly injuring her knee. After that came much anxiety and misfortune - an operation for Mrs. Conrad followed by a most difficult and strenuous trip to Italy. "Poor Conrad ! Looking back on that journey I see how very little fitted he was to have had such a responsibility even in those days."[21] The start was inauspicious, Conrad being furious because his favourite glasses were left behind.

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20 E. Garnett, op. cit., p. 48.

21 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, p. 128.

Mrs. Conrad, completely helpless and dependent on stretcher-bearers, was nearly dropped in the Channel, and once, while Conrad was elsewhere, was left hanging by her arms from the train window until the Italian bearers ran up at the last moment of her strength. Conrad's teeth tortured him ( he would never go to a dentist) and he lay all night holding cold water in his mouth and spilling it on his wife. In the morning he complained of the damp bed. On the return trip Conrad announced the loss of his wallet. His wife secretly searched his clothes and exercised great tact in telling him of her success. At the Pent Farm after this, Conrad's disappointment at the reception of Nostromo and Mrs. Conrad's crippled knee did not result in a cheerful or easy household.

On another and more appalling trip when both children nearly lost their lives, Mrs. Conrad gives her husband great credit for his fortitude under the circumstances. He nursed one child and managed to rewrite The Secret Agent at the same time.

At Someries, in Bedfordshire, was assembled the first number of the English Review, a literary magazine designed, as Hueffer humorously remarked, "mostly as a means for putting money into the pockets of Conrad,"[22] was put together. Hueffer, his secretary, and sub-editor, all arrived to stay at the Conrad's. The resultant confusion must have been considerable.

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22 F.M. Ford, "Thomas Hardy", American Mercury, 38:438-88, August, 1936, p. 443.

"Nobody slept a wink except the children and the servants . . . the consumption of lamp oil and candles was prodigious."[23] Mrs. Conrad goes on to say that the inconvenience was worth it because the English Review was responsible for Conrad's writing A Personal Record.

These comments aroused Violet Hunt who sarcastically refers to them in her memoirs. She is not very accurate for she places the Conrad home in Leicestershire. Referring to Mrs. Conrad she says :

> As the wife of the bosom who always bears the brunt, remarks (in the public press) 'no birth could have been more painful or more expensive in the matter of food and light and output of nervous energy.' Whose energy? And what would the lady have ? . . . while men work and put together masterpieces their women must grieve and keep the house going . . . Of course they were tiresome . . . they sat up all night . . . they wrote in every room in the house . . . if the bathroom was considered a better study than the parlour, people must wait to wash until the divine furor had passed.[24]

One wonders what Miss Hunt would have felt about it had she been crippled and made to play errand-boy to the violent geniuses. One feels sure the divine fire would not have been as well tended by her as by the capable Mrs. Conrad.

Whereas for Conrad, the trip to Poland is an occasion for relating his recollections and associations,[25] his wife's

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23 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, p. 57.

24 V.Hunt, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

25 J. Conrad, Notes to Life and Letters, pp. 197-8.

account enables one to share the trip day by day with the Conrads. The chronic uncertainty of Conrad's plans, his sudden fury because the boy, John, was not wearing his gaiters in spite of the July weather, the worry when the friends with all their tickets almost failed to appear, all produced a typical Conradian start. Conrad wanted to economise, then fulminated at the cheaper accommodations. Mrs. Conrad found in Poland clues to her husband's unfathomable nature - all Poles seemed to have these inexplicable characteristics. Her recital of the ensuing exciting events is most detailed and absorbing. The refuge the family took at an health resort, the eleven-hour wait in the Cracow station jammed with wounded soldiers, the two endless nights in the dirty train, gave the Conrads more than enough of adventure. One wonders how Mrs. Conrad could have survived so well, for her sick knee swelled so badly that the bandages disappeared entirely. Conrad too was worn out with worry and crippled with gout.

Joseph Conrad And His Circle, published in 1935, is a far fuller, franker, and more detailed expansion of the material contained in Mrs. Conrad's first book. Mrs. Conrad follows a stricter chronological order from her first meeting with the sailor-author to his last day. But again Mrs. Conrad wanders freely over the past; the long book of detailed memoirs lacks any structure or form.

The details of the meeting, engagement and marriage of Conrad and his wife are amusingly told with great detachment. The young girl was greatly in awe of the foreigner. "His strangeness was very noticeable, almost oriental in its extravagance, both in gesture and speech."[26] At the very first there occurred the type of ludicrously unfortunate incident that accompanied nearly all their future undertakings. After taking Miss George to the National Gallery and there announcing that they "had better get married"[27], Conrad decided on lunch and an excursion. But after the lunch they both fell suddenly and most painfully ill and had to go home as fast as possible. After this, Conrad suddenly invited Miss George and her mother to dinner. There he poured out his declaration, adding that there was necessity for haste since he would not live long and that there would be no children. Mrs. George was utterly mystified but took it very well. On the wedding day, Conrad reversed the usual procedure and kept his bride waiting half an hour. He then signed his will and had it witnessed.

In Brittany, the first of Conrad's many attacks of fever and gout initiated Mrs. Conrad to her rôle as nurse, a rather terrifying experience for a bride alone in a cottage on the French coast. At first she seems to have been quite timid with her strange husband. She did not dare tell him that she was

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26 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 9.

27 Ibid, p. 12.

sorting out the papers and manuscripts that she had rescued from the grate. Among these were Conrad's naturalisation papers which proved to be of the utmost value to him later during the war.

From the very first, Mrs. Conrad had a sure grasp of her problems and how to cope with them. Such a mature attitude seems to belie her statements as to her extreme youth and inexperience. She prides herself greatly on winning over completely Edward Garnett who had been so doubtful of a successful marriage for Conrad.

> I take some credit to myself even from the first, for I entered that compact with the full determination that I would leave my husband virtually as free as if no symbol of a wedding ring had passed between us. It came as a kind of intuition that this man would find any demand upon his liberty both irksome and galling, and because of my understanding I was able to hold his interest and fidelity to the end. His reaction to this rule . . . differed according to his mood. Sometimes he was absent for only a few hours and would bombard me with long and anxious telegrams; at others he took refuge in his 'liberty' and refused to let me know even where he was or when he might return. [28]

This wise decision on Mrs. Conrad's part, together with the fact that she became at once most maternal with Conrad, is the key to her success. She reiterates in this book her extraordinary maternal attitude towards her husband:

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28 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, pp. 17-18.

> In a very short time all my maternal instincts were centered upon the man I was to marry and he became to me as much a son as a husband. And this state of accord lasted all our married life.[29]

Again, after Conrad's death, she concludes:

> He had been to me as much a son as a husband. He claimed my care and indulgence in the same manner as the smallest infant would have done.[30]

Mrs. Conrad's description of her constant difficulties and trials is hard to reconcile with the serene success and happiness she declares is the sum-total of their married life. She is so extremely frank that incident after incident piles up to show how ridiculously unreasonable Conrad was. Seldom does Mrs. Conrad give instances of the generosity and charm that counterbalanced Conrad's difficult side. She merely says several times how devoted she was to him and he to her. One is left to infer how the better aspects of Conrad's personality made it all worthwhile for her.

Certainly no ordinary soul could have long endured the trials of living with Conrad. From the very first, things were not easy; later instances of Mrs. Conrad's difficulties seem almost fantastic. Nearly every page of her book reveals some new eccentricity or unreasonableness on Conrad's part. On their return from their honeymoon, Conrad gave his wife fifty pounds with which to buy all the furniture. He himself had spent far

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29 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 16.

30 Ibid, p. 278.

more on the cutlery and china. She did the best she could and then tried to follow the minute instructions he had left at to his arrival, including the menu for dinner and where she was to be stationed until called for. Excited by his ring at the door, Mrs. Conrad ran down and was soundly scolded for spoiling the effect and then criticised for the look of the rooms.

Trips of any kind were most hasardous.

> The date fixed for any excursion unless taken at a moment's notice was sure to be unlucky. I used to wonder how my erratic husband had ever discharged his duties at sea to schedule time when I discovered that now a fixed date was fatal . . . This peculiarity grew infinitely worse as he grew older.[31]

Yet he would expect everyone to be punctual to the minute. Mrs. Conrad sounds very sceptical when she sums up by saying:

> One accepts the many vagaries when one is dealing with a genius but I have often wondered with is the dividing line between 'a bit peculiar and the claim to being a genius .[32]

Mrs. Conrad has no hesitation in recounting Conrad's most exasperating actions upon any and all occasions. He thought nothing of asking thirty friends to an impromptu supper, although it was the night before Mrs. Conrad's first knee operation. Yet when their peasant friends at Capri had showered fruit and flowers on them at their departure, Conrad didn't even

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31 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 46.

32 Loc. cit.

wait until the friends had reached shore before throwing it all overboard, thinking only of the inconvenience of carrying it. Another time, stumbling against a bundle on the floor of a train, Conrad promptly threw it out of the window. It contained a full set of his son's clothes that Mrs. Conrad had made after months of hard work. Always after such happenings he would promise money to repair the damage and request that nothing further be said about it.

Mrs. Conrad's complacency of disposition and indulgent attitude of a guardian to her charge upheld her through these vicissitudes.

> There must be many women who, like myself, have found themselves . . . mother to the man they have married and have found, too, how very exacting that overgrown baby can become. This is not said unkindly or in any way bewailing my fate . . . wifely service . . . must be rendered in a certain way, without any suspicion of self satisfaction, and the wife must be content with reflected glory if married to a famous man.[33]

Conrad certainly had some very peculiar and inexplicable traits. His wife maintained that the violence of his irritation, in nine cases out of ten, caused his gout; whereas he held that it was the gout that caused the irritation.[34] In any case, in almost every difficult situation Conrad could be counted on to have an attack of gout. Demonstrations of his nervous fury were once followed by a severe illness during which Conrad behaved in a most peculiar and secretive fashion. Without telling anyone,

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33 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 85.

34 Ibid., p. 67.

he took quantities of aspirin; then he did not hesitate to call two other doctors from London, so that three men were treating Conrad unbeknownst to each other. Mrs. Conrad explained finally, and all three doctors consulted together without Conrad's knowledge.

Conrad appears most childish at times.

> One of his most outstanding characteristics was a habit of doing the very thing you would quite reasonably wish him not to do, even when he must have known very well that what he did would cost him both money and inconvenience. I had only to remind him that he had left one electric light burning for him to fly down the stairs and put on every light in the house.[35]

Conrad's friends never saw the lengths to which his sense of drama and self-pity could go. Two ludicrous incidents are given by Mrs. Conrad as illustrative of this side of Conrad. When a groom they had disappeared one evening, Conrad was convinced that he had committed suicide. Solemn and grave, Conrad insisted that both he and his wife walk to the village to tell the groom's father. The whole village was aroused, and there was much merriment when the "suicide" was discovered to have gone to help look for some dogs. The other incident is even more fantastic. After the death of a maid they had had (Conrad had gone to the hospital to see her when she was ill but since he had refused to give either his name or the girl's he had to return in a rage), Conrad retired to his room. He remain upstairs for three weeks and wrote his wife pathetic notes telling of his loneliness, illness, and

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35 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 188.

devotion to his family. One would have thought he was suffering miles away instead of in another room. It was very difficult for his wife, for she was really helpless, and the boys were curious. It was, she says, sometime before she could forgive him.

Another episode is referred to rather obliquely by Mrs. Conrad and gives the impression that Conrad underwent a mild case of wandering fancy. An "American friend", a woman who had undergone severe war experiences and had been ill, convalesced at the Conrad's. She "made an interesting invalid" comments Mrs. Conrad. Conrad evidently met her frequently and wrote her unsigned letters in lofty vein. The lady then did something to make "a deliberate attempt to spoil our long, understanding affection." Conrad finally grew annoyed with the lady and did his usual penitence - something nice for his wife.

Conrad's son Borys has himself written about his father and corroborates the picture of their daily life that his mother gives.[36] He emphasises Conrad's total inability to understand tools or machinery and adds that his father's power of complete detachment from his surroundings sometimes became grotesque. Once in a restaurant Conrad saw a man in uniform standing by the checkroom and draped his hat, coat, and stick on him, leaving his son to apologise to an outraged American admiral.

In this book Mrs. Conrad shows even more her annoyance

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36 A.B. Conrad, "As His Son Saw Conrad", New York Herald Tribune, August 24, 1930.

at F.M. Hueffer than she did eleven years before. In contrast to Violet Hunt who says:

> I think that Joseph Leopold [Hueffer] who began so many tales and stories with him [Conrad] ought to have finished the one he left. No one else would know by instinct and habit how he had wanted it to end.[37]

Mrs. Conrad emphatically asserts:

> No one could finish it Suspense as the author intended to finish it, much less F.M.H. who dared to declare that his book, Little Less Than Gods, was that book completed. He knew perhaps less than most people in the literary world what my husband intended to be the finish, because for the years from 1909, the two had been as far apart in thought as in personal contact.[38]

From the very first Mrs. Conrad was not enthusiastic about Hueffer. She is perfectly willing to admit that Hueffer provided a very necessary and effective mental stimulus for Conrad for which she was very grateful, but she is disgusted with certain boastful statements made by Hueffer after Conrad's death in 1924. She quotes scornfully a long obscure passage from Hueffer's Joseph Conrad, A Personal Reminiscence, in which Hueffer refers to himself as the "finest stylist in England," describes his ideas as hidden treasure shared by Conrad, and pictures Conrad as insulting him with "groans, sighs, and God's contortions."[39]

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37 V. Hunt, op. cit., p. 263.

38 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 221.

39 F.M. Ford, Joseph Conrad, A Personal Reminiscence, p.25.

When the Hueffer family stayed with the Conrads at the Pent,

> there were days when the two artists with their vagaries, temperaments, and heated discussions made it seem rather a warm place. Still, to give F.M.H. his due, he was the least peppery of the two.[40]

Conrad would often rebuke his wife unjustly, nearly always taking the Hueffers' side against her. "I boiled inwardly and my sense of justice was outraged but I prided myself on my complete self-control, and did not lose my temper."[41] From many other incidents told by Mrs. Conrad the impression gained is that the Hueffers were generally selfish and inconsiderate. But during the disastrous trip to Belgium when Conrad's son was very ill, Mrs. Conrad has nothing but praise for Hueffer's kindness and efficiency. She also admits that he was of the greatest help during the writing of the Mirror of the Sea.

The weekend the Conrads spent with the Hueffers at Winchelsea "was a fit punishment for any sins I might have ever committed or even contemplated."[42] Finally "the next weekend put the 'lid' on it even for my dear ostrich who had his eyes opened with a vengeance."[43] F.M.Hueffer had hung a blanket over the window of his bedroom to shut out the light. Then,

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40 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 66.

41 Ibid., p. 70.

42 Ibid., p. 113.

43 Ibid., p. 114.

feeling cold, he simply pulled all Conrad's carefully pressed dress clothes out of a bureau drawer onto his bed, reducing the garments to a sad state. After this, states Mrs. Conrad, "my husband, being much the elder, grew tired of the younger's insufferable air of superiority."[44] Evidently John Galsworthy also lacked enthusiasm for Hueffer.

> I found John Galsworthy's attitude of toleration, his distant politeness in all matters connected with F.M.H. at once understandable . . . Never for one second was John Galsworthy hoodwinked by the other's style or pose.[45]

One of the main impressions received from Mrs. Conrad's books is that Conrad entirely lacked a sense of humour. He was always disgusted with what he termed his wife's "over-developed sense of humour." It was this sense of the ridiculous and incongruous which bore the sorely-tried lady up during adversity, but Conrad could never understand or appreciate it. Probably he could not have written as he did if he had not taken himself so seriously. Richard Curle says Conrad was capable of a bubbling and boisterous type of nonsense, somewhat forced, and not quite English.[46] If a sense of humour can be conceived as a sense of proportion, then Conrad utterly lacked it.

In spite of Mrs. Conrad's avowed affection and admiration for her husband, she has markedly emphasised the disagreeable incidents in their life together. Possibly in her naïveté Mrs.

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44 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 116.

45 Ibid., p. 87.

46 R. Curle, Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad, p. 112.

Conrad had no idea of the effect she was producing. Perhaps she felt her husband's greatness so unquestioned that she thought her anecdotes would be received only in the spirit of amusing revelation. She saved herself a great deal of worry by regarding Conrad's antics as merely funny. She admits that in looking back she may not be entirely fair - trifles may have seemed unduly important.[47] Most of the incidents she relates, however, can hardly be called "trifles", and they were important enough for her to remember with great clarity.

Mrs. Conrad did not pretend to understand Conrad or follow the peculiar indirect workings of his thoughts. It is doubtful that anyone did. She, therefore, had no insight whatever into her husband's mental life, no conception of the agonies for him of creative writing. There is no sympathy in her books for his struggles. She simply kept out of sight and saw to his material wants.

A psychologically-minded wife might have found occasion for a fascinating study of Conrad's obscure motives and intricate mental workings. He was so complex, so obviously suffering from certain repressions and obsessions, that an observation of him from this point of view would have had great interest. The use of psychoanalysis in biography is treacherous, but a wife might have brought out Conrad's psychology in a more orderly and

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47 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him, p. 155.

intelligent fashion than did Mrs. Conrad.[48]

Also, Mrs. Conrad unwittingly betrays frequent smugness and complacency. She seems to have progressed from a timid, shy bride to a self-assured mistress of the household. Nearly every emergency found her calm and efficient. "As usual, any discomfort or inclination to laziness left me immediately occasion arose."[49] She corrected Conrad frequently with more than a hint of patronising. Nothing she ever cooked, even under the most impossible circumstances, was anything but "dainty" and "appetising." Her personality seems redolent of a limited and Victorian attitude.

It is rather appalling to think of what Conrad's own opinion of his wife's intimate disclosures would have been. He, who shuddered at the thought of ever being discovered "en pantoufles", is here revealed with a frankness of detail seldom found in any descriptions of great men. Being a person devoid of imagination,

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48 An attempt has been made to give a Freudian analysis of Conrad. The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad by Gustav Morf, contains many suggestive ideas, including the thesis that the key to Conrad's character is that, being a super-sensitive romantic patriotic Pole and prevented from his natural outlet of defending his country, Conrad's chronic despairs and repinings found symbolic expression in his work. Lord Jim is a symbol of Conrad's desertion of Poland, Nostromo a vehicle for repressed Polish reminiscences, etc. Edward Garnett says that during his first evening with Conrad, the latter spoke of himself as under a stigma for expatriating himself and deserting Poland. The subject of Poland was most painful to him. (E. Garnett, Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924, p. 6.)

49 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 118.

Mrs. Conrad simply states the facts as she remembered them, unaware of the effect she is creating, possibly never thinking of her revelations as virtual desecration.

Mrs. Conrad's books are certainly of immense biographical value. Conrad's friends, though intimate with him and his family, never saw him as his wife did. They could appreciate his mind, his personality, and his work; Mrs. Conrad completes the picture of him as a private individual. True, her books may be criticised as misleading, that Conrad was infinitely more than she can show. The biography of Conrad must be supplemented by those who could observe him from his own intellectual level. One has to draw one's own conclusions as to the different aspects of Conrad's character. His literary friends found him touchy but also generous, sympathetic, courteous, stimulating, and honest; after reading Mrs. Conrad it must be added that he was tiresome, unreasonable, and exacting. To Richard Curle, Conrad was never "histrionic or self-conscious. He had no pettiness of that sort."[50] To Mrs. Conrad, Conrad and his son Borys were "consummate actors. Both liked to live in the world of make-believe, both were fond of crying wolf." [51] It is plain that Conrad was so complex that all sorts of contradictory characteristics could exist side by side in him. People have been known to be charming and unreasonable, courteous and abusive, at the same time.

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50 Richard Curle, Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad, p.34.

51 Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad And His Circle, p. 213.

It is hard to classify Mrs. Conrad's books from the point of view of biography. They seem at first to belong to the commemorative nineteenth century type of biography written by widows, yet Mrs. Conrad's amazing frankness places her in line with present-day liberty and realism of detail. The books lack any attempt at form or literary ability; Mrs. Conrad's grammar is peculiar in places, and she is occasionally rather obscure. The work is, however, of great interest, possessing what Harold Nicolson terms "adventitious charm".[52]

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52 H. Nicolson, The Development of English Biography, p. 57.

# CHAPTER IV

## ARNOLD BENNETT

"The curiosity of the public about the private lives of men and women is so great, that the man with two Talents as well as the man with five has reason to fear that his imaginary merits may be disclosed, and his frailties dragged from their dread abode, to tickle the ear of the groundlings when he is no longer there to defend himself."

- Vale by Dean Inge.

No greater contrast to Joseph Conrad than Arnold Bennett can be imagined. In their habits, temperaments, philosophies, and writing, they are exact opposites. Where Conrad was shy, nervous, and unpredictable, Bennett was forthright, robust, and meticulously methodical. Conrad's writing was wrung from him in agonised fits and starts; Bennett was extremely proud of his mind-over-matter attitude, writing regularly and voluminously. He could have several projects in the making at the same time, to to lunches, teas, and dinners, and always turn out his average of 1500 words a day. His work was constantly in his mind - walks, talks, and scenes gave him much material upon which to draw.

Born in May, 1867, at Shelton, Hanley, one of the Five Towns, Bennett's youth seems to have been uneventful, typical of an English lower middle-class environment and family. He was educated at Newcastle Middle School and became a solicitor's clerk in his father's office. He gave this up and went to London in 1893. After law work he tried journalism with some success. He then became a sub-editor on a journal entitled Woman. As his

writing became more successful he left the journal and lived in France from 1900 to 1908. There he pursued a busy routine of writing, reading, walks, and piano and Italian lessons.

In 1906 Bennett became engaged to the sister of Julian Green, Eleonora Green, but shortly after, Miss Green broke the engagement. In July, 1907, Bennett married Mlle. Marguérite Soulié. After 1908 the couple came to England and lived at "Comarques", Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex. Thereafter, Bennett's social and literary pace increased its tempo with the years. He knew nearly everyone of note in politics, arts, and letters. He travelled extensively, often on his own yachts. During the latter part of the war he had a place in the Ministry of Propaganda, supervising British propaganda in France. In 1921 Bennett and his wife had a formal separation. Fearfully sensitive, Bennett did not wish a divorce; later, Mrs. Bennett would not consent to one. Bennett met the actress, Dorothy Cheston and he lived with her until his death in 1931. Their daughter, Virginia Mary, was born in 1926.

As a character, Arnold Bennett was distinctive. Many have described him, emphasising the same general traits. A completely self-made man, Bennett shook off all connection with the Potteries and his bourgeois background. Steadily and earnestly he had written his way to fame and wealth. As Frank Swinnerton puts it, Bennett lived a "rich, benevolent and truly disinterested life."[1]

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1 F. Swinnerton, Preface to Arnold Bennett's Letters to His Nephew, p. xi.

He was, according to all, extremely generous and never superior. Inwardly shy, Bennett stuttered a little. He was frankly dependent on luxury - dinners, hotels, theatres, travel, and clothes. During his later years a note of fulsomeness seems to come into his Journals as he speaks of caviar and champagne and his rounds of theatres, clubs, and cabarets. The "baroque exterior", says Rebecca West, was not the real Bennett.[2] Like Conrad, Bennett possessed great charm and magnetism. "As a man he was great; he was grand; he was Coquelin's Cyrano de Bergerac, but tenderer, more loveable."[3]

There are many details available of Bennett's outward life but none of his inner, nothing about what he was really like to live with nor anything of his attitude towards his wife and Dorothy Cheston. Bennett mentions them only in the briefest and most impersonal way. The Journals were written so that people should see him as Bennett wanted them to see him. There is no enlargement on his weaknesses or virtues; there are merely statements of fact. Bennett, like Conrad, was not given to any emotional outpourings. Self-control dominated his personality, caution and reserve his actions.

In 1924, three years after their separation, Mrs. Marguérite Bennett wrote a series of articles about her husband and offered them to the Daily Express. Bennett mentions this

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2 R. West, Arnold Bennett Himself, p. 19.

3 Ibid., p. 21.

in his Journals, saying merely that after Lord Beaverbrook told him of his wife's intention he reasoned that if the articles were refused, Mrs. Bennett would then blame him. If they had to be published, he would rather it was done by someone friendly to him.[4] Later, he comments, "All deplore her bad taste."[5]

Mrs. Bennett's articles, published in book form in 1925, gave Bennett nothing to worry about. Outwardly, she has nothing but praise for her famous husband with only occasional veiled implications of their difficulties. "A wife cannot be absolutely impartial, but she may succeed in writing about her husband, whether in praise or in criticism, without any exaggeration."[6]

Mrs. Bennett begins with a description of their first meeting. She does not mention the fact that she had been sent to Bennett as a possible secretary. She describes him as "a tall, elegant Englishman"[7] and was most impressed with his clothes and furnishings. She fell completely under his spell, the "peculiar fascination which he had and still has for women."[8] After briefly dwelling on her own circumstances, Mrs. Bennett suddenly says she gave up all her ambitions for the man she loved, hoping to remain forever his faithful helpmeet.[9]

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4 A. Bennett, Journals, III, 56.

5 Ibid., p. 58.

6 M. Bennett, Arnold Bennett, Introduction, p. 5.

7 Ibid., p. 16.

8 Ibid., p. 14.

9 Ibid., p. 26.

Mrs. Bennett divides artists into two classes: the bohemian and the bourgeois. The first is the irregular and eccentric type, of which we have found Conrad to be an example, and the second is Bennett's, with his discipline and order. Mrs. Bennett, like Mrs. Conrad, married a man of forty, autocratically settled in all his habits, but unlike Mrs. Conrad, Mrs. Bennett struggled continually for her own self-expression. She describes Bennett's exact schedule and the rigorous care with which he disposed of all his possessions. She prided herself that she did not fear him as a domestic tyrant and thereby gained his respect.

After describing Bennett's working habits, Mrs. Bennett devotes a chapter each to his hobbies, friends, tastes, achievements, health, and influence. In this she is far more orderly and coherent than Mrs. Conrad, but she too lets her memory wander freely.

Mrs. Bennett makes no attempt to study her husband but gives a simple account of some of the main aspects of his life. She felt he preferred as friends people of lesser mental strength than his own so that he could dominate them and they rely on him. This statement might be questioned in view of Bennett's wide and varied friendships with outstanding people such as Lord Beaverbrook, Rebecca West, H.G. Wells, Otto Kahn, and many another well-known person.

Some interesting details of Bennett's earlier life are

told by Mrs. Bennett. She describes how he crushed his hand in a mangle, an accident which caused him much nervous shock and which may have been partially responsible for his defect in speech. She tells how careful Bennett was of his health and adds that he was always extremely robust, his rare illnesses being caused mostly by his nerves. Even more than Mrs. Conrad, Mrs. Bennett remained in the periphery of her husband's life. She was unaware of his motives and mental preoccupations. One has the feeling that Bennett led an almost separate existence.

The latter part of Mrs. Bennett's memoir is taken up mostly with herself. A modern woman, she feels, expects to be treated as an equal. Bennett's domination of her personality was too great for her to bear, and consequently she had a nervous breakdown. But she prides herself on her reaction to Bennett's cool and neglectful attitude, remarking that she developed greatly in self-reliance, that her dramatic talents became such that critics felt her to have great possibilities.

The later book, My Arnold Bennett, by Marguérite, his Wife (1932), seems to emphasise by its title Mrs. Bennett's possessiveness and her resentment at being left out of Bennett's last years. The material is much the same as in her first book with some added details. Very reminiscent of the Conrad menage is Mrs. Bennett's description of the dinner they gave in the early days for George Doran, Bennett's American publisher. Bennett left the paraffin lamp smoking in the living room so

that clouds of smoke and grime had to be quickly removed by Mrs. Bennett while she was dressed in her best clothes. Then Bennett upset the coffee. He would, however, admit nothing of his own fault in the disasters but reproached her.

The greater part of this book is coloured by Mrs.Bennett's conceit and jealousy. She explains that she, an artiste with a future, renounced all personal ambition because she craved to devote herself to an intelligent man.

> "Alas, circumstances have not allowed me to spend the last few years of his life with him, but my mind, my heart, have been with him ever since we married . . Man could not separate the essence of us, which God had joined. Death leaves me his widow and I am proud to be his widow . . . But how sad I feel that with comfort and care, he might have lived much longer."[10]

This passage shows how completely ignorant Mrs. Bennett remained of Bennett's true circumstances. She could not see the inner compulsion driving him on, his absolute need of luxurious surroundings, making ever more demands upon his fortune. She could not see "on the brow of the wealthy author, the society man . . . the shadow of impotence and exhaustion."[11] It never seems to have occurred to her that Bennett's quixotic gesture in securing upon her a most liberal allowance intensified the strain of his last years. Mrs. Bennett sees nothing of this, merely recounting her own loneliness and suffering after having been abandoned.

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10 M. Bennett, My Arnold Bennett, p. 26.

11 G. Lafourcade, Arnold Bennett, A Study, p. 51.

There is no attempt by Mrs. Bennett to conceal her vanity and self-pity. Speaking of their early days, she says "he loved my ways . . . my dark eyes, my small head with its quick, unexpected movements . . . my Madonna type."[12] Later she says proudly, "at that time admiration from other women meant admiration for me as well. Was I not the favourite?"[13] She saw herself in a lofty role of martyr to the cause:

> For the love of him, for the glory of England, and for the prestige of Frenchwomen, I was ready to endure whatever I should have to endure from the sick, nervy, darling patient of mine.[14]

This noble motive is rather counteracted by her lamentation, "No ! He had not time for Marguérite, for his wife. He felt sorry for her but it could not be helped."[15] She tells of Bennett's cutting remarks which hurt her greatly. Her Latin temperament, she says, did not allow her to understand that a loving husband could be sharp.

In spite of the injuries she sustained, Mrs. Bennett seems peculiarly tenacious. She never seemed to desire a release from the difficult partnership. " I did not want any woman, any man to ruin his talent by leading him astray and taking him away from me."[16]

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12 M. Bennett, My Arnold Bennett, p. 29.

13 Ibid., p. 70.

14 Ibid., p. 116.

15 Ibid., p. 102.

16 Ibid., p. 75.

Some mysterious person, she felt, was causing the rift between Arnold and her. Then, at the request of his solicitor, she says, she left their flat, "like an ignorant fool," and was never allowed to return to it.[17] During his last illness she waited for him to ask for her, but no one suggested that she come. She "hated" her freedom and concludes on a note of great complacency:

> I think my husband came to the conclusion . . . that our separation was a great mistake, but circumstances overwhelmed him . . . We felt no resentment . . . but I still claim that our separation was a great mistake which could have been easily avoided if other people had minded their own business and if my husband had not been an influential man that people played up to.[18]

She assures us that "Arnold and I were born for each other. That has been pointed out by a famous writer . . . Hugh Walpole."[19]

Lafourcade has briefly referred to Bennett's marriage in a very detached and impartial manner. In summing it up, one must not, he says, be prejudiced by the Bennett's separation after fourteen years.[20] Bennett's marriage certainly stabilised him and gave him the opportunity to write his great work, The Old Wives' Tale . Undoubtedly Bennett gained much knowledge of psychology by his marriage. In spite of the inevitable clashes of

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17 M. Bennett, My Arnold Bennett, p. 102.

18 Ibid., pp. 159-160.

19 Ibid., p. 160.

20 G. Lafourcade, op. cit., p. 43.

personality between an Englishman and his French wife, the couple managed very well.

It is not hard to picture the gradual widening of the gulf between Bennett and his wife. It would be almost impossible for any wife to present this aspect of their history impersonally; both were at fault, but Mrs. Bennett would not admit that continuation of the marriage was impossible. Bennett's own brief references to the affair speak volumes:

> Oct. 30, 19. But here, owing to conjugal worries, I could not possibly keep this Journal. I determined that nothing should be done until after M's recital. Braby [his solicitor] sent for her on the Thursday. She wrote him on Thursday night confirming her desire for a separation. Yet on Friday she asked me to take her to a concert.[21]

> May 2, 1926. F. Marriott called . . . told me a lot about Marguerite but I told him more about M. including various things that startled him somewhat.[22]

Nowhere in her books does Mrs. Bennett admit that the separation was by mutual consent. She wished rather to give the impression that she was forced away from her husband and that her loyalty was undying.

There is not a great deal of biographical value in Mrs. Bennett's books. Apart from some description of Bennett's parents and home and some references to his early life, there is nothing new for the reader to learn. Most of Mrs. Bennett's

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21 A. Bennett, Journals, II, 290.

22 Ibid., III, 107.

description of Bennett's daily life and personal habits is merely corroboration of Bennett's own careful Journals and the many accounts of him by others. Mrs. Bennett does, however, show him in some of his aspects as a husband. Indirectly, as we have seen, she sheds some light on Bennett's life and problems.

Outwardly, in 1921, Arnold Bennett was a famous figure of considerable wealth leading an incredibly full life. With great adaptability he had developed his powers of journalism and adjusted his talent to changing post-war conditions.[23] The strain of Bennett's terrific pace would have been difficult for a young man, and Bennett was past middle life. Inwardly, he was in a state of critical uncertainty and anxiety. The quarrels with his wife had racked his nerves and held up his work, and after their separation, he lived tensely, fearful of possible ridicule to which he was abnormally sensitive. Lafourcade refers to the next development in Bennett's life as nothing less than a miracle, an illustration of the great resources latent in him.[24] In 1922, Bennett met the actress Dorothy Cheston, a person of talent and charm. In a footnote to the third volume of Bennett's Journals, Dorothy Cheston Bennett explains how, owing to Marguérite Bennett's refusal to divorce Bennett, she and Arnold could not be married, but that she was granted permission to use his name, and that they were accepted openly by all as man and wife.[25]

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23 G. Lafourcade, op. cit., p. 52.

24 Ibid., p. 54.

25 A. Bennett, Journals, III, 18.

Dorothy Cheston Bennett has told hers and Bennett's story in her book, Arnold Bennett, A Portrait Done At Home, published in 1935, three years after Marguérite Bennett's last book.

Dorothy Bennett, in her Foreword, states that in spite of her own feeling of inadequacy for a study of Bennett and his own hatred of personal revelation, she feels that the psychology of Bennett has been neglected, his motives not sufficiently understood. She remarks shrewdly: "It is by what a man does not want to say to the public, and by his failures to express himself, that a world of truth about him is revealed."[26] Bennett, himself, she says, shrank somewhat from knowing too much about himself but that he approved of her penchant for analysis and of the notes she took. She feels that she has not praised him unduly nor belittled his essential nobility but has merely presented her vision of him.

There is no definite plan to Dorothy Bennett's book. Her picture of Bennett's character is interwoven with the building up of the dramatic elements that, to her, caused the Greek tragedy of Bennett's life. Dorothy Bennett found Bennett's character infinitely complex, fugue-like, an inexhaustible source for psychological analysis, but in the end, like Joseph Conrad, an enigma. She never tires of trying to find the mot juste, to pin down her elusive mental impressions. Some of her phrases

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26 D.C. Bennett, Arnold Bennett, Foreword, p. 5.

are very effective: "He was a reserved man with an aesthetic taste partly baroque and partly methodistic."[27] When she first saw him at his home she says:

> There was his majestic and rather rigid poise, the power, the sense of fundamental simplicity, goodness and kindness, overlaid by a medley of personal idiosyncrasies all held in check and under control.[28]

She found Bennett at once a person of extreme tact, understanding, and sympathy with no sense whatever of self-importance. A boyish sense of humour and the "soft radiance" and "limpid quality" of his glance gave him great charm.[29]

Like Marguérite Bennett, Dorothy Bennett noticed Bennett's furnishings and taste at their first meeting at his house. A comparison of the reactions of the two women is illuminating. Where the Frenchwoman was frankly inpressed by luxury and ashamed of her own setting, the artist in Dorothy Bennett noted at once the appropriateness to his personality of Bennett's things. She saw that "his taste found expression in curves and flowingness", and that the whole was "highly individual, mellow, subtle."[30]

From the moment she saw him Dorothy Bennett says that the legend of the hard, worldly, materialistic author out for money, was dispelled. Bennett was far more complex than that, and it became her absorbing interest to trace out the many strata in

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27 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., Foreword, p. 7.

28 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., p. 20.

29 Ibid., p. 15.

30 Ibid., p. 19.

his character which "were welded together by his strong personality."[31] From his forbears had probably come his air of rigidity, the "methodistic" devotion to exactitude, the deliberation over the smallest details in his life. This ritualistic attitude, she, like Marguérite Bennett, found to be the fundamental difference between Bennett and herself. She visualises him as a ship in its berth overlaid with countless ropes and chains which would have to be discarded before it could drift on a more intuitional tide toward spiritual peace.

Dorothy Bennett occasionally saw a Bennett that nobody saw, a being racked with strain, whose taut nerves were stretched to the breaking point. She attributes this tenseness to his "over-developed objectivity" meaning that Bennett, having repressed any spontaneity in his life had reduced his senses to exhaustion; he was "a man living in a peculiar hell as of twisted spun glass, which over-reflected too much of outward reality."[32] These moods were accompanied by black depression. She felt that Bennett's chronic sleeplessness was an indication of the unnatural strain he felt forced to maintain. Where Joseph Conrad felt the key to life lay in fidelity, for Arnold Bennett it lay in supreme mental control.

The first year of Bennett's life with Dorothy Cheston was, as in any marriage, one of readjustment. Dorothy Bennett is frank

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31 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., p. 31.

32 Ibid, p. 68.

in admitting that there were inevitable clashes between them. She, like Marguérite Bennett, was overwhelmed by the immutability and tremendous detail of Bennett's schedule. Her own personality suffered from a lack of self-determination. Like her predecessor, Dorothy Bennett found it impossible to do anything for Bennett, as his life was already so perfectly regulated. She could not bear the thought that she was to be merely another objective item in his life, but in this she found that she had greatly misjudged him. His attitude seemed unyielding during that first year, but by 1925 she found that Bennett had undergone a noticeable change. They had their one real holiday together in Italy in the winter of 1924-25, and it was then that they achieved what she calls "a mutually subjective contact."[33] At this time, it was he who chose the nickname "Little" for himself, tacitly revealing his contact with and dependence on her. The stony something in his soul, she felt, began to dissolve, and if the other forces of necessity in Bennett's life had not been so overwhelming, she feels sure the tragedy would have been averted.

Another hidden aspect of Bennett's character was an unsuspected fragment of superstition, the "premonitions", beneath the great structure of his reason - a compartment of his mind that would be briefly opened, then shut. One of his premonitions was that he would die in his early sixties as his father had done. He also once spoke of several supernatural happenings in his

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33 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., p. 77.

experience. He did not try to explain or support them, but simply stated the circumstances.

Dorothy Bennett's grasp of their problems and her power of analysis is a great contrast to Marguérite Bennett's attitude and was probably one of the reasons for the success of her relationship with Bennett. She had always sought to face her character frankly and try to understand her own personality and her own sense of values. When the time came for her to take a new and vital step, she had the power to project her imagination to cover all possibilities and not do something she would regret. She was hurt because she did not then understand Bennett's analysis of their situation which was along his own lines. Her ideal of marriage was the exact opposite of Marguérite Bennett's. Dorothy Bennett was no all-practical Parisienne desiring to merge her life with that of her husband; she did not care about housekeeping and liked the idea of a separate establishment for she felt that Bennett was, as his wife had said, too much of a bachelor to live with comfortably. Later, however, he changed and became a far more domestic person.

Bennett's letters to her which Dorothy Bennett has added to her book, show how the two thrashed things out to their ultimate satisfaction. She decided that they should take a platonic holiday together to decide the problem. Although she prided herself on her rational approach, it was in the end a purely emotional factor which decided her. Every day in Paris

the shrewd, worldly Arnold Bennett solemnly presented her with faded flowers that he had allowed to be foisted on him. This touched her extremely, for it seemed to her that it was symbolic of his real core of helplessness and naïveté.

As has been remarked, Bennett's life was, for Dorothy Bennett, a Greek tragedy. She begins the drama with what she feels was the turning point in Bennett's life - the incident of his broken engagement with Eleonora Green. He had unreservedly let his emotions have free play in this case and when abruptly hurt, he had, therefore, to build defenses so as never to be found vulnerable again. He had to repress spontaneous emotion forever and concentrate upon the deliberate application of his reason in all things. Thus began the building up of "the psychic and physical necessities,"[34] which were the cause of Bennett's later strain. For, following the breaking of his engagement, Bennett, influenced only by rational motives, chose Mlle. Soulié "on the rebound." Dorothy Bennett says this was the opinion of all "those who knew the facts."[35] Bennett never intended to shut his wife out of his life, but it so turned out, for, in setting himself purely material goals, Bennett "let the bigger issues slide by";[36] and thus unleashed the forces of his epic drama. He and his wife drew apart; the strain increased;

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34 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., p. 28.

35 Ibid., p. 93.

36 Ibid., p. 92.

his habits became fixed. In later life he could not adjust those habits. Upon their separation Bennett made an enormous settlement on his wife of two-thirds of his estate, a large sum upon his death, and a large income during his life. This became a tremendous burden as Bennett had to work harder than ever to maintain two establishments when he should have taken a more leisurely pace.

Dorothy Bennett pictures the destructive factors as proceeding majestically and inevitably to their predestined end. She herself says:

> All those eight years I lived with a sense of impending death. And this was far from being my normal outlook. The sense of death's nearness left me after Arnold died.[37]

Once the initial conditions were established, the rest was inevitable. In order to try to counteract their pressing financial need Dorothy Bennett embarked on several costly and unsuccessful theatrical ventures. It became impossible for Bennett to cut himself off from London because of his daily grind. Life in another environment Dorothy Bennett was sure would have saved him. His peculiar rigidity of thought resulted in three signigicant actions. One did not affect their destiny but was characteristic. To prove to Dorothy that her feeling of the rhythm of recurring numbers in gambling was nonsense, Bennett steadily played the number six, only to lose his thousand francs. She begged him to wait just one number. He

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37 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., p. 28.

would not. Six came up the next time, as she had said it would. The two other precipitate actions typical of Bennett's unyielding objectivity were more disastrous. He suddenly decided to take a modern flat. Two flats had to be made into one, making it a difficult one of which to dispose later. Curiously adamant, Bennett admitted his mistake, but nothing would induce him to back out, even though the environment "was inimical to our particular kind of person and to our type of existence."[38] Moving there caused Bennett to strain his heart. Dorothy Bennett felt so strongly the sinister effect of these happenings that she pointed out to Bennett that it was not a question of their being able to afford escape from the flat. "It is a matter of life and death - and it is only a matter of months," she said to Bennett.[39] Then, in Paris, declaring that it was ridiculous to worry about ordinary city water there, Bennett promptly drank some. Soon after this, he fell victim to typhoid fever and died in a short time.

Lafourcade has disagreed strongly with some of Dorothy Bennett's conclusions. Where she says Bennett was a feminist by moral and imaginative conviction,[40] Lafourcade feels that Bennett "was always strongly anti-feminist as an artist and, to a certain extent, as a man."[41] Most particularly Lafourcade challenges

38 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., p. 153.

39 Ibid., p. 155.

40 Ibid., p. 33.

41 G. Lafourcade, op. cit., p. 34.

Dorothy Bennett's analysis of Bennett's marriage. Bennett had determined to marry at forty. There is no proof, asserts Lafourcade, that Bennett's affair with Miss Green wounded him permanently. Mlle. Soulié was attractive, with a most distinctive personality, and Bennett needed to settle down in order to accomplish his work. His marriage brought him security and conviction.[42] When Dorothy Bennett tries to show that Bennett's tremendous program of work after his marriage was a relief and an escape "because in it alone he practised subjectivity beneath all this objective super-structure,"[43] Lafourcade calls this ridiculous.[44] To Lafourcade, Dorothy Bennett was dangerous to Bennett from an artistic standpoint because of her "softening" influence. He feels Bennett's real greatness derived from just the opposite - the qualities in him that she felt were so destructive.

The letters that follow Dorothy Bennett's portrait of Bennett are of great interest and value. Far more than letters to his other friends they reveal his inner life. Lafourcade finds them occasionally unpleasantly sentimental and ungrammatical. But as documents adding to Dorothy Bennett's analysis, they are indeed important. There are a half-dozen or so which clearly reveal his reactions to Dorothy and complete the picture

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42 G. Lafourcade, op. cit., pp. 34-40.

43 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., p. 119.

44 G. Lafourcade, op. cit., p. 44.

for us. He carefully states their respective positions; his mind is crystal clear in its grasp of the problem. He shows much fairness and tolerance. He is quite capable of self-analysis on his side and was just as aware as she of many an obscure implication. In one letter he says, "I know I am reserved and that it is a fault. But how to cure it? I think I should be less so if you were more so."[45]

Although Dorothy Bennett's book has much biographical value, her picture is far from complete. She gives nothing of his youth or early life, only Bennett as she knew him. In contrast to Mrs. Conrad and Mrs. Marguérite Bennett she shared more of things on the "subjective plane" with her partner. She could see things from Bennett's point of view, analyse him shrewdly, and judge him with great sympathy yet with frankness as well. She had more knowledge of the world upon which to base her opinions than did the other two. She makes out a definite case which the reader can accept or not as he chooses. She also avoids being complacent.

Dorothy Bennett could also appreciate Bennett's work. She does not criticise it in detail but makes some interesting remarks about it. His writing had been a very significant thing for her long before she met him; he had helped to change her philosophy. To her, Bennett revealed beauty of a special nature by means of his remarkable technical ability. "Without idealising life or

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45 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., p. 299.

rebelling at it, he found it passionately interesting."[46] She felt that for him outward phenomena held a symbolistic meaning, stood for his imaginative recreation. "He practically constructed a subjective mind with his objective mind."[47]

The references to Marguérite Bennett in Dorothy Bennett's book are very impartial and do not seem to show bitterness on her part. Speaking of the first days of Bennett's marriage, Dorothy Bennett says,"He surely received energy too, in those days, from the wife who gave him love."[48] Telling as she does that Bennett married as a result of the previous crisis in his life, Dorothy Bennett is ready to accord Mrs. Bennett the benefit of the difficulties for her in the marriage. However, Dorothy Bennett feels that it must be remembered that Mlle. Soulié knew all about Bennett's situation and took the step fully aware of the hasards involved. Dorothy Bennett is able to reveal a little of Bennett's own attitude, something he had so strictly kept out of his own Journals. She shows how intensely painful the subject was for Bennett and how seriously he took his responsibility towards his wife. The quotations she makes from Bennett's conversations are illuminating in view of Mrs. Bennett's assertions.

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46 Dorothy Bennett, op. cit., p. 13.

47 Ibid., p. 13.

48 Ibid., p. 95.

> She [Marguérite] wanted to leave me then, but I had been through with the whole thing for years . . . years . . . She has been saying so scores of times.

And with extreme tenseness of emotion Bennett said, "I shall never see her again."[49]

One of the greatest faults in Dorothy Bennett's book is that of the confusion and obscurity in trying to sort out her labyrinthine thoughts and get just the shade of meaning she desires. It is even difficult to follow her meaning in some places. For example:

> These remarks are my attempt to illustrate what I feel sure must be a very general experience, the way, the manner and the effect produced by our conscious realization of ideas which are our own nature's point of contact with truth (since truth is a suspect word perhaps I should say 'beingness' - our point of contact with'being-ness' .[50]

Another drawback in her book is that she has allowed herself to be carried very far along in her conception of the dramatic elements in Bennett's life. The emphasis she puts on the inevitability and direness of events in Bennett's career is very open to question. She leaves out the part played in Bennett's life by his own initiative.

The style of this book is frequently awkward which is not surprising considering the finely spun elaboration of many of Dorothy Bennett's ideas. A disciple of psychoanalysis,

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49 D.C. Bennett, op. cit., pp. 40-42.

50 Ibid., p. 51.

she uses the loosely defined terms "subjective" and "objective" so much that they almost lose their meaning entirely. Also the book is rather repetitious - the same points are emphasised over and over. A little more organisation would have rendered Dorothy Bennett's book more effective and artistic.

In a broad general sense, however, Dorothy Bennett succeeds in giving the reader a definite impression of Bennett's personality, showing aspects of him never suspected by his friends. Her analysis of Bennett's psyche can be questioned but it is individual enough to deserve consideration.

# CHAPTER V

## JACK LONDON

"If cash comes with fame, come fame - if cash comes without fame, come cash."

- Jack London

The story, or rather the saga, of Jack London reads like the scenario of an adventure film. Born in 1875 in San Francisco, the illegitimate son of the eccentric Flora Wellman and an itinerant Irish astrologer, W. H. Chaney, John Griffith London grew up amid chaotic conditions of poverty, hard work, and uncertainty. The wanderings and unstable fortunes of his family gave the boy a feeling of insecurity and indifference to his home. For him, as for Joseph Conrad, reading became a primary interest, an escape from his precarious world.

At seventeen London had tried oyster pirating with a boat of his own and seal-fishing to the Bonin Islands as well as work in a cannery and jute mill. Then followed adventures with Kelly's Army of the unemployed who sought to march on Washington in 1894. Tramping from Chicago to New York and back to California through Canada brought London in contact with the "submerged tenth" of society and fired him for the cause of socialism. At nineteen he entered the Oakland High School; his life broadened under more refining influences. He wrote, lectured, debated, and worked furiously. Cramming years of work into a few months,

he entered the University of California at Berkeley. In 1896 he gave it up and went to the Klondike. His adventures there brought him little gold but proved to be an ultimate source of great wealth, for the tales of Alaska brought him money and fame overnight. The long winter spent with books and congenial companions greatly stimulated his mental life, and when forced by scurvy to return, he knew he desired only one career, that of a writer.

The ensuing months of feverish writing with great privation for himself and his family were among the hardest in London's life. At last two stories were accepted. London became engaged to Mabel Applegarth, a refined, delicate, and timid foil to his lusty vitality. Miss Applegarth implored him to give up writing and become a postman, but London's mother, in spite of near-starvation, surprisingly encouraged him to continue writing. He slowly forged ahead, nearly overpowered with work and debts. Mabel Applegarth proved too hesitant and fearful to undertake marriage. London found a sympathetic and efficient helpmate in Bessie Maddern, a cousin of Minnie Maddern Fiske. They were married in 1900. London's mother was outraged and made a great deal of trouble for the couple. The publication of London's story, <u>The Son of the Wolf</u>, brought him national recognition as a modern realist, a successor to the tradition of Kipling and Stevenson on one side, and of Bierce, Crane, and Bret Harte on the other.

London's life began to assume the hectic character typical of his later years. A regular grind of writing to meet constant debt, prodigal hospitality for hosts of friends, and games and contests of all sorts, combined to accelerate his life to a furious tempo. London's emotional friendship with the brilliant Anna Strunsky resulted in the Kempton-Wace Letters, a series of arguments between them. In 1901, his first daughter, Joan, was born. He moved to Piedmont in the hills. The Macmillan Company backed him, and he became busier than ever. But he was restless, alternately elated and dejected, and rather bored with his loyal wife. The latter was upset at his intimacy with Anna Strunsky. London started for the Boer War as a reporter but his appointment was cancelled when he reached London. Upon his return his second daughter Bess was born. In 1903 Mrs. London took the children to Glen Ellen and London stayed in Piedmont. He hurt his leg, and Miss Charmian Kittredge, an enthusiastic member of the group of "adult Peter Pans"[1] and "yes-men"[2] surrounding London, nursed him. After this, London suddenly announced to his wife that he was leaving her, and they separated. In 1904 London went to Japan to report the Russo-Japanese War for the Hearst Examiner. After many adventures he returned to be presented with his wife's divorce complaint, mistakenly naming Anna Strunsky as co-respondent. In November, 1905, the divorce decree

1. Joan London, Jack London & His Times, p. 262.

2. Ibid., p. 216.

was granted, and London married Miss Kittredge in Chicago while on a lecture tour. His impetuous haste to accomplish the ceremony caused much scandal.

Back at Glen Ellen, the couple enthusiastically undertook a round-the-world tour in a forty-foot boat, the Snark, the expenses to be paid by articles written about the trip. Nothing but trouble and disillusion ensued, but in April, 1907, having spent a fortune on the unseaworthy boat, London, his wife, and an ill-assorted crew set sail for Hawaii. Months of wild adventuring were terminated by London's illness in Sydney, Australia. Returning, he found his affairs in an incredible tangle. Thereafter things grew steadily worse. Gigantic farm schemes, all his vast enterprises, ended disastrously. "In 1913 he was the highest paid, best known, and most popular writer in the world."[3] He ground out his stories relentlessly and was often accused of plagiarism and literary mediocrity. The mysterious burning of the great "Wolf House" that he was building for his home left him a hundred thousand dollars in debt.

After this, London went into a sort of mental and physical decline which was accelerated by his heavy drinking. Disillusion, loneliness, and every kind of illness assailed him. Dysentery ended a trip to Mexico as correspondent in 1914. He finally resigned from the Socialist Party. Visits to Hawaii in 1915 and 1916 improved him slightly but further misfortune and

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3 Irving Stone, Sailor on Horseback, p. 293.

bitterness set the seal on his life. He no longer cared, and November, 1916, brought his death, caused by morphine poisoning. Whether he deliberately or accidentally took an overdose of morphine is not established.

Jack London's personality possessed great appeal and charm, especially in his early days. Handsome, boyish, enthusiastic, he won people irresistibly. In 1898 and 1899 "he stood upright and could wear that inimitably beautiful smile of his without a touch of insincerity."[4] His good nature knew no bounds. In fact, Jack London was his own worst enemy, for prodigal in every way, he was constantly imposed on, cheated, and betrayed. During his later years, when ill-fortune dogged him, after the fiasco of the Snark had cost him his health and reputation, his personality underwent subtle changes. He became irritable, moody, and filled with self-pity; his work and intellectual integrity suffered. The self-assertiveness that had done so much for his advancement became a pompous dogmatism. In no way did the Jack London of 1916 resemble the buoyant youth of the 1890's. His life, like Arnold Bennett's, is a tragedy of the vicious circle of increasing demands and increasing debt taking their toll upon the man and the writer.

Many of the destructive factors in Jack London's life are discernible. His youth, as has been seen, had little of security or affection except for the devotion of his foster-

4 Joan London, op. cit., p. 191.

sister Eliza and his coloured nurse, Mammy Jenny. Here, perhaps, is one cause of the conflicting purposes in London's life: one to be a champion of the downtrodden - a socialist, the other to prove himself Nietzsche's super-man and conquer all obstacles - an individualist.

In spite of all his varied experiences among so many different types of people, Jack London never gained a knowledge of human nature; he remained strangely obtuse to people's characters and motives. Also he is one of the many examples of youthful adventurers who never grow up and adapt themselves to changing circumstances. The adolescent set of values he kept throughout life proved one of the sources of his undoing. For, reared in poverty, he set himself the material goals of home, prosperity, friends, and the pleasures he had not had as a boy. He talked often of writing not for gain but for artistic worth, but from the very beginning he had set himself frankly to make money. "Not once did he express a burning desire to accomplish something fine and enduring . . ."[5] Success, coming overnight, left him with no real values with which to go on. The aims he had had were realised, yet, as is so frequent, once realised, they became stale. London had nothing to prevent the horde of sycophantic admirers from undermining him. He had few real friends to guide and help him. He never gained a mature perspective on his affairs; his lack of judgment and foresight, his

5 Joan London, op. cit., p. 192.

intense love of the free and untrammelled in nature, all combined to draw him down.

Another disturbing factor in London's make-up was the canker of his illegitimacy. When he learned of it and was taunted for it, it was a great blow to him.[6] He wrote to Chaney, but the latter refused to admit his paternity. Thereafter London was never certain exactly who he was and was greatly worried over his heredity. Such a shadow in his life may well have contributed to his outward bravado and over- confidence and his inward uncertainty.

Two recent biographies of Jack London are very frank and complete. In them the whole picture of London, his great qualities and possibilities together with his fatal weaknesses, is clearly shown. A strong extrovert, London said and wrote whatever he felt, frequently embellishing and dramatising himself, so that his enormous collection of papers leaves almost nothing hidden in his life. Irving Stone's Sailor on Horseback(1938) makes the most of the romance of Jack London's life. Stone relies heavily on London's own autobiographical writing and over-emphasises the hereditary influence of Chaney on his son. It remained for London's daughter Joan to offer a more definitive biography of her father in her book Jack London and His

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6 Joan London, op. cit., p. 134.
This account does not agree with that of Irving Stone who says London knew of his origin before he was six. Otherwise the two discussions of Jack London's illegitimacy and his reactions to it are similar.

Times (1939). She says that "out of her urgent need to understand [her] father. . . she has become [his] biographer."[7] Joan London defies the school of critics who maintain that a relative cannot write an impartial and effective biography. Her work is a scholarly, singularly restrained, yet absolutely frank discussion of her father's character and environment. She completes what Stone left out in his biography, an analysis of the social, political, and enonomic trends of the era. Her book may be criticised as attempting to include so much of the times that artistic balance is lost. Both Irving Stone and Joan London corroborate each other generally. Joan London's book does not, however, suffer from the journalistic bias that mars Stone's work.

There is available from both these authors considerable knowledge of the women in Jack London's life and his attitude toward them. In contrast with the writers that have been under consideration, there is no obscurity about Jack London's home and married life. Full descriptions of Bessie Maddern London and Charmian Kittredge London are given.

Bessie Maddern is unanimously conceded to have been a staunch and loyal wife, a pathetically noble figure. Strong, phlegmatic, intelligent, and forthright, there were no subterfuges in her nature. She and London drifted naturally together. Their relationship was companionable, fraternal, affectionate.

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7 Joan London, op. cit., p. 227.

London's reasoning was that love was a sickness; therefore marriage should be a healthy, rational undertaking. Bessie London admired her husband and helped him in every way but her nature was limited; his life became too complicated for her. Amid the excitement of London's friends and activities, Bessie London was too practical, too ill at ease with people, too unresponsive.

Charmian Kittredge was the exact antithesis of Bessie London. Irving Stone is far more critical of the second Mrs. London than is Joan London who had every reason to dislike the woman who broke up her mother's home and took her father from his children. Stone describes Charmian London as distinctly homely. He says that she openly tried to snare every man she met. Her diary reveals a "saccharine, sentimentalist approach to romance."[8]

> She was between five and six years older than Jack, not attractive looking, the subject of a good deal of biting talk and comment among the Piedmont crowd who knew her well.[9]

She unhesitatingly set herself to break up London's marriage. As evidence, Stone gives Bessie London's own story. The latter describes how London said he wished to move to Southern California. Then London and Miss Kittredge sat in a hammock and talked for four hours, after which London announced his intention of separating.[10] "It apparently took Miss Kittredge four hours

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8 I. Stone, op. cit., p. 189.

9 Ibid., p. 183.

10 Ibid., p. 183.

of solid talk to change his mind."[11] So subtle were Miss Kittredge's maneuvers that Bessie London had not the least suspicion of her and from Miss Kittredge's letters quoted by Stone, Bessie London actually relied on her and begged her for help.[12] During London's last years, Stone shows that Charmian London was extremely jealous at all times and knew that her husband was unfaithful to her. The main reason for the couple's later estrangement was that "Charmian, at the age of forty-three, was still a child, preoccupied with infantile details."[13] Stone quotes the neighbours'reports on Charmian London's growing childishness, a source of acute embarrassment to London. Once London said to Eliza Shepard; "She is our little child. We must always take care of her."[14] She was no help to London in his difficulties. She "developed sullen and moody spells, interfered with his management of the ranch . . ."[15]

> The criticisms that he had made of Bessie London were that she dressed badly, that she was not a good hostess, and that she was jealous. By a twist of fate he found these same attributes in Charmian.[16]

Joan London, on the other hand, is most extraordinarily restrained on the subject of Charmian London. She does not refer at all to any of the more unpleasant details about her father's second wife and sums her up with a most astonishing amount of

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11 I. Stone, op. cit., p. 183.

12 Ibid., p. 191.

13 Ibid., p. 309.

14 Ibid., p. 309.

15 Ibid., p. 315.

16 Ibid., p. 316.

praise.

> She was in many ways a forerunner of a type of American woman of the middle class who would not fully emerge for nearly a quarter of a century . . . Perhaps her greatest gift was her ability to adapt herself good-humoredly to unpleasant circumstances and sacrifice as few as possible of her desires and ambitions in the process . . . Many of the crowd . . . did not fully appreciate that behind much of this exhibitionism lay a woman's very normal desire to attract a husband before it was too late . . . Like the wives of many famous men, Charmian has been largely misunderstood . . . She has been given credit that she did not earn, and blame that she did not deserve. As Jack London's wife she exerted little influence over him for good or for evil . . . Free of the legends that have surrounded her, she appears as a woman of average intelligence and more than ordinary courage, equipped with the usual complement of virtues and vices, who for eleven years made a better job of being Jack London's wife than anyone, knowing Jack, could have expected.[17]

Joan London places the blame of London's failure in marriage on him. He failed as a husband and a father, she says,"leaving wounds that never healed."[18] Both Irving Stone and Joan London, however, agree that Charmian London was the ideal adventuring companion for the author, that her courage and resource were truly remarkable.

Charmian London has written extensively on her husband and on some of their travels. Voyaging in the Wild Seas, A Woman Among the Headhunters, Jack London in the Southern Seas, and Jack London in Hawaii are the exciting titles of these books. The two-volume eight-hundred-page Book of Jack London (1921) is

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17 Joan London, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

18 Ibid., p. 222.

Charmian London's attempt to achieve the official biography of her husband. Knowing something of Charmian London's romantic proclivities, the reader would expect to find her carrying on the banner of the red-blooded, primitive, male ideal that Jack London had long represented for so many readers. She does this and more. The legend of Jack London is continued and intensified in her long biography in a style that is indeed "mush that would have sickened the soul of Marie Corelli."[19] Charmian London undertakes a full-length biography from her husband's birth to his death and includes many pictures and innumerable letters and quotations from London's own writings and sayings.

Mrs. London strides bravely forth in a preface trumpeting the glory of Jack London, the frankness of her biography, the divinity of their mutual love.

> I warn, therefore, that this book is written only for those sincere and open-minded folk who want to know the real and living facts that I can tell . . . I do not minimize the criticism to which I subject myself, but my philosophy is a sort that transcends fear on this score. For Jack London was my man of men, and because I have answered these many years to his call of 'my woman' I am unafraid.[20]

Despite this claim to "frankness" it is not to be expected that Mrs. London will dwell on any distasteful aspects of her subject's life. Infected by London's own lusty optimism and self-delusion, Charmian London can only constitute herself a

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19 Louis Kronenberger, Review of "Sailor on Horseback" by I. Stone, The Nation 147:420-22, October 22, 1938, p. 422.

20 Charmian London, The Book of Jack London, I, Preface, pp. vii-viii.

worshipping echo of her lord and master.

In a prologue, she states the matter-of-fact circumstances of her first meetings with the young author. Soul did not meet soul then and there; "the hour was not then."[21] She quotes London as saying later, "you came in my great need."[22] In describing her aunt's reaction to London's news of his marriage to Bessie Maddern, she down not hide that she felt it was a great mistake. Her aunt exclaimed, "a sensible, considered marriage for a love-man like that !"[23] Evidently the aunt shared much romantic emotionalism with her niece.

The next chapter, "The Stuff of Stars", is all the more preposterous because of the true facts of London's birth. Charmian London rejoices in his "British Anglo-Saxon ancestry",[24] going back to the Sir William London who fought under George Washington. She also gives a glowing picture of the talented Flora Wellman, unfortunately blighted by illness and a cruel fate. One can only wonder whether or not London's Mate-Woman was aware of his real origin. Irving Stone says that London told his circumstances to the Madderns and consulted a judge who decided that the author's right to the name of London was legal.[25]

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21 Charmian London, op. cit., I, 10.

22 Ibid., p. 10.

23 Ibid., p. 13.

24 Ibid., I, 15.

25 I. Stone, op. cit., p. 140.

Probably Charmian London was entirely ignorant of her husband's illegitimacy. It is to be hoped so, for otherwise her discussions of his "blood-drift and magical spirit-stuff"[26] is a deliberate hypocrisy at which Jack London himself would have recoiled.

The rest of the first volume of the biography is a more or less straightforward account of the main facts of London's boyhood and youth up to and including his trip to Japan as a war correspondent. The second volume begins with his return and divorce from Bessie London and ends with his last day. Like Irving Stone, Charmian London depended a great deal on London's own autobiographical writings. The redeeming feature of the biography is that an extensive place is given to quotations from London's writings and sayings. In commenting upon London's reminiscences, his wife excuses her husband's tendency to exaggerate and dramatise past events by saying that when tired he tended to concentrate on himself and that, as a person, he felt things more acutely than others. She would never have admitted the truth of his daughter's statement:"It is wise to remember that one of Jack London's gifts as a story teller was his ability to absorb and make his own the actual or rumored experiences of others."[27]

The references to London's drinking are rather euphemistic.

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26 C. London, op. cit., I, 15.

27 Joan London, op. cit., p. 44.

It was probably true that in the early days London hated the taste of whisky, but that did not prevent him from doing more than his share with his tough roustabout and sailor friends. It is palpably impossible that

> He never in his whole life wanted to drink for drink's sake. He devoutly wished from beginning to end that drinking never had been invented as a social function.[28]

Mrs. London herself contradicts this statement later, saying that when they started for Cape Horn, London declared he would have one more bout with John Barleycorn, his last. On the boat he said his desire was to master alcohol, to be able to take it when and how he chose. Charmian London comments that he failed of perfection in his plan. Then she says, "But what counts in the end - is the end, and near that end he drank but little."[29] All other witnesses say that after 1914 London drank very heavily and continuously to dull the misery of his being. His wife says, "Never in all my years with him did I see him tipsy."[30] Irving Stone shows how London's illnesses, fatigue, and depression made him drink, and drinking made him more ill, fatigued, and depressed. "He could not handle his quart of Scotch a day. Before, people had seen him drink; now they saw him become drunk."[31]

There is not much mention of London's friends in this

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28 C. London, op. cit., I,138.

29 Ibid., II, 245.

30 Ibid., p. 230.

31 I. Stone, op. cit., p. 318.

biography. Mrs. London, however, quotes many of his letters, especially those to Cloudesley Johns. Anna Strunsky is described as "the now loved mate of a distinguished husband, mother of four glorious children."[32] The unfortunate Mabel Applegarth is disposed of as a "pallid girl."[33] Mrs. London tries to convey the impression that she and her husband lived in a rapturous world apart.

The description of her relationship with London after 1901 is rather misleading. Her own active part in the affair is left out entirely. There is, however, a slight hint of their intimacy before their marriage. She stresses London's misery and strain in his "abrupt and loveless union." His friends, she says, were ignorant of his unhappiness; he concealed it nobly and was even afraid of sleeping near his pistol for fear that he would put an end to it all. " Beaten at his own game of scientific mating", he avoided his home and fought out a desperate struggle alone, "thinking of his babies and of the radical disturbance of their mother's round of existence." [34] Bessie London's feelings evidently did not enter into it. Charmian London also ventures an analysis: London's feeling for Anna Strunsky had been a cause of his unhappy marriage. Afraid of

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32 C. London, op. cit., I, 319.

33 Ibid., p. 261.

34 Ibid., I, 395-6.

the tempestuous quality of his relationship with Anna, he had sought a more calm refuge.

In the second volume of the biography it takes eighty-odd pages of ecstasy and hyperbole for Charmian London to arrive at her marriage to the author. The visions of Jack London nursing his "Cheery One supine" of "the twain" of them "feasting and giggling like truant schoolfellows"[35] is rather sickening. Even Charmian London's flow of words fail her. "It is beyond hand of mind to draw with strong and supple strokes a convincing picture of this protean man-boy."[36] They shared months of frolicking and long hours at the typewriter. She admits that London's residence at her aunt's lodge, Wake Robin, "occasioned considerable press comment with which I was connected."[37] The version of her marriage differs notably from the account by Irving Stone. She says that she arrived in Chicago on a Sunday and that London met her with a special license in his pocket.

> The informal suddenness and speed of this termination of our courtship savored of the age of chivalry . . . when knight errant . . . slung his lady love across the saddle bow . . . Let none say that ours was less romantic.[38]

Irving Stone says that London had no license; Miss Kittredge arrived after five o'clock so that the couple had to make a

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35 C. London, op. cit., II, 25.

36 Ibid., p. 56.

37 Ibid., p. 39,

38 Ibid., II, 85.

frantic tour of the city to get the ceremony performed. London's haste made it apparent to all that he had left Bessie London for Miss Kittredge.

Charmian London represents the period of courtship before her marriage to Jack London as a state of almost continuous beatitude. She shows that she was the cure of London's "Long Sickness" by which she means presumably his depression over the problem of his wife and children. Many of the gushing letters London wrote to his "mate" are quoted by his wife. She included them because she wanted Jack London's love-nature better understood. Here one sees what Irving Stone has called "the florid-purple nineteenth century effusion"[39] which the author had absorbed from the effusive Miss Kittredge, "a manner against which he had asserted his revolt since the days of his earliest writing; a style ... which was to mar so many of his books."[40] In his wife's biography Jack London appears as the incarnation of the mad lover. That all was not unmitigated rapture during this period is shown by Irving Stone who quotes a letter from Miss Kittredge to London in 1904. In it she says that she is fully aware that he has been unfaithful to her.[41]

Charmian London's descriptions of the different aspects

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39 I. Stone, op. cit., p. 187.

40 Ibid, p. 187.

41 Ibid, p. 208.

of London's nature are given with the same romantic touch throughout. When she discusses his attitude toward women, she exclaims, "women have loved Jack London, aye, and died for love of him,"[42] but she gives no examples of the romantic tragedies. For her, also, London had great business acumen.

> Yes, Jack was always in debt, but never to the point of failing to see his way out. Which, after all, is merely good business . . . Anyone who gave voice to the opinion that Jack London was a poor business man was a source of irritation to him, such was his realization of his own efficiency. 43

Either Mrs. London remained totally unaware of the significance of his debts and obligations or she was romantically indifferent to it.

There is very little in Mrs. London's books to mar the impression that her life with Jack London was one glorious honeymoon of joy and adventure. She mentions briefly her husband's occasional gloomy spells with which she learned to cope. New York City, she felt, had a baneful influence on his personality, bringing out "the least admirable of his qualities." As soon as London regained the open spaces, however, he became her "healthy, vital boy" again.[44]

She describes the building of the Snark as "heartbreaking wastage and plain graft,"[45] but the glorious adventure of the

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42 C. London, op. cit., II, 30.

43 Ibid., p. 75.

44 Ibid., II, 105.

45 Ibid., p. 143.

trip, to her, more than paid for the trouble. Her account of London's last years do have references to his many illnesses and difficulties, but "Jack could not traffic in small things . . . All he did was in a large way."[46] It was all worth it to her. At the end, however, she did notice that in some mysterious way London was letting himself drift toward annihilation. "Was that mind . . . now longing for surcease."[47]

Charmian London shares all her husband's delusions and rationalisation on the subject of his Socialism. She did see where a conflict had arisen; "his life is the story of a princely ego that struggled for full expression . . . Hence Jack the Individualist and Jack the Socialist."[48] However, "in logic," she says proudly, "he bowed to no one."[49] Yet, as Joan London has shown, Jack London refused to face the fact that"he had created a loyal and devoted following to which, in all fairness, he owed integrity."[50] Where Charmian London quotes as an example of London's own clean ideals his protest:"I have never yet written a line of print that I would be ashamed for my two little girls . . . to see and read", Joan London says,

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46 C. London, op. cit., II, 264.

47 Ibid., p. 332.

48 Ibid., p. 321.

49 Ibid., p. 343.

50 Joan London, op. cit., p. 200.

> He had not been accused of immoral writing but merely of inconsequential slush . . . For a long time he would not see that his righteousness deceived no one but himself.
> . . . . . .
> 'Bread first and glory after' [was] incompatible with his socialism.[51]

There is quite a vivid description of London's last illness and death. Mrs. London prepares the way for London's death to be interpreted as a coma resulting from uremia. During the long hours that people worked on London trying to force him back to life, she says that when she called to him,

> He came back. Of course he came back . . . knowledge brimmed into those eyes . . . the mouth smiled . . . [it was] as great, as glorious a meeting as ever took place . . .[52]

Joan London's comment is that London's last expression was extremely doubtful.[53]

Mrs. London missed entirely the significance of London's readings in psychoanalysis.

> To him, the work of Freud and Jung . . . presented a psycho-philosophical key to the understanding and practical advancement of human life which leads to synthetic evaluation of human endeavor.[54]

He could face all analysis of his inward soul fearlessly, she says, and welcome the addition to knowledge afforded by psychoanalysis. She had no idea that, uncertain of his heredity,

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51 Joan London, op. cit., p. 200.

52 C. London, op. cit., II, 388.

53 Joan London, op. cit., p. 376.

54 C. London, op. cit., II, 355.

London was brooding desperately over the possibility of going insane,[55] that his reading of psychology was an attempt to discover why he had gone wrong in life.[56]

Mrs. London also seems to have believed all London's fervid avowals of his devotion to and dependence on her until his death. He had continued to write impassioned dedications to her in his books. She implies that her devotion to her husband increased with the years. Yet, toward the end of her narrative appear evidences of another point of view. She says that London had been upset by "certain independent manifestations" of herself - her desire to do work of her own. Then she announces:

> I have come to see it [his death] as an inevitable self-liberation after an association that had held me like one enchanted, my faculties paralyzed in every function except as toward him, and what of assistance I could be to him . . . Life-long inherited insomnia fell from me.[57]

This statement gives a suspicion of the ambition and matter-of-fact ego beneath Mrs. London's appearance as an utterly devoted and prostrate widow.

Mrs. London's biography confirms the estimate of her mentality made by Irving Stone. Incurably juvenile and excessively romantic, her style is one seldom to be encountered today in serious writing. Every noun has an adjective; every situation

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55 I. Stone, op. cit., p. 324.

56 Joan London, op. cit., p. 373.

57 C. London, op. cit., II, 358-9.

is coloured with an optimistic glow. Her stereotyped jocularity and affectation is redolent of the worst extremes of the gushing school of literature. Almost more than anything else, Mrs. London's style reveals how dated is the vogue of Jack London, exponent of Anglo-Saxon superiority. Mrs. London has no hesitation in describing Squire Jack on the Glen Ellen Ranch in these terms: "Jack, his rumpled poll sunburned yellow, was a brave and lovesome sight on his merry steed."[58] These words sound all the more hollow when it is realised that beneath his showy exterior, Jack London was a "weary, bewildered and prematurely aged man, with failing health and a dying spirit."[59]

The biography, however, is not by any means devoid of interest and value. Mrs. London has included so much of Jack London's own writings and conversations that his outward personality rises vividly from her pages. She has shown him as the world saw him - the enthusiastic and dynamic Jack London that carried all before him. There are full details given of all aspects of their daily life. Even the extraordinary printed sheet that was sent to prospective guests is included, showing how Jack London's home resembled a large sanatorium. Mrs. London also sees fit to include London's entire measurements as well as photographs of him in a loincloth.

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58 C. London, op. cit., II, 130.

59 Joan London, op. cit., p. 355.

The greatest interest of Mrs. London's biography lies in its indirect illumination of the Jack London legend, but it cannot be considered as a serious document. Mrs. London's illusions, her deliberate misrepresentations, and the vast, unorganised, emotional scope of her work spoil what might have been a genuine biography of a most unusual husband.

# CHAPTER VI

## THOMAS HARDY

"The business of the poet and novelist is to show the sorriness underlying the grandest things and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things."

- Thomas Hardy.

When Thomas Hardy died in 1928 he was easily the most preëminent figure in English literature; he has even been called "the Shakespeare of the English novel."[1] As a person Hardy was reticent to an almost abnormal degree. His quiet and retiring life remained until recently very obscure. All sorts of erroneous ideas and impressions were circulated about him, for, lacking information from Hardy himself, readers seized upon "autobiographical" passages in his books and used them as illustrations of his own life and character. Hardy continually denied such interpretations, nothing made him so angry as unfounded statements about himself. "I think [he has] no dislikes except for the people who betray his confidences and publish him to the world," wrote T.E. Lawrence.[2] Hardy's references to himself seem to have been confined mostly to reminiscences of old Dorsetshire. Since Hardy's death, curiosity and interest in him, as a person as well as an artist, have grown so widespread that

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1 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 184.

2 The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, p. 430.

any new fact, however trivial, is eagerly added to collections of "Hardyiana".

Toward the end of his life Hardy appeared to be terrified by any investigation into his personal affairs. He destroyed many papers which undoubtedly would have thrown much light upon his earlier days. He even destroyed suddenly a part of the Life of Thomas Hardy that his second wife was writing under his direction. When Mrs. Hardy wrote T.E. Lawrence of this incident, he replied:

> I'm very sorry about that MS. Always I feared something of the sort might happen to it. Of course Mr. Hardy can't see it as outsiders will. His life matters so much to him, and he is eighty; and he resents other people fussing over something of his own which he cannot himself keep. Especially as he has been reticent always.[3]

The outward course of Hardy's life was a simple one. Born in a rambling thatch roofed cottage in Upper Bockhampton, near Dorchester, June 2, 1840, Hardy belonged to an old Dorsetshire family that had seen more prosperous days. Hardy's mother, Jemima Hand, was a very gifted woman in many ways and above all was an intelligent and discerning reader who influenced greatly her son's intellectual development. Thomas Hardy, Senior, was a master mason, moderately prosperous, but his occupation labelled the family as lower middle class. Hardy always remained sensitive to his humble origin. Hardy's father continued the family tradition of giving a hand to the organisation of

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3 The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, p. 498.

the church music. Hardy attended church so regularly that he learned the services by heart. He also played the violin and was in demand at local dances and other festivities.

There was nothing remarkable about Hardy's youth. It was spent amid pleasant surroundings and congenial activities which enabled the youth to learn much of the folk ways of Dorsetshire. He was a reflective and sensitive boy who did well at school. He had been sent first to the village school in Bockhampton and then to a day school in Dorchester. He read, walked, taught Sunday School, and observed everything about him. As a university education did not seem practical or advisable, when he had completed his school term in 1856, Hardy accepted the offer of John Hicks, a Dorsetshire architect, to be his apprentice. Hardy spent four years studying architecture and reading extensively after working hours. At this time he wrote some poetry and began the study of Greek.

In 1862, his apprenticeship over, Hardy arrived in London, possessing, as Weber puts it,

> a trained draughting hand, a well-stocked mind, a keen intellect, a sympathetic understanding of life in and near Dorset, an eye and ear for the beauties of nature, a wide acquaintance with the literature of four languages, and a desire to write.[4]

Although successful as assistant to a London architect, Hardy found his mind turning more and more to matters of literature and art. He wrote more poems, sent some to editors, but the poems were all

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4 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 17.

returned. He then tried writing fiction.

His first published story, Desperate Remedies (1871) was a melodramatic tale in the Wilkie Collins tradition.

A trip to Cornwall in 1870 to restore the church of St. Juliot was the occasion of Hardy's meeting with his future wife, the sister-in-law of the rector. Hardy and Miss Gifford were both twenty-nine. They made many delightful excursions together and soon were engaged. Miss Gifford encouraged Hardy's writing and helped with his manuscripts. After the publication of Under the Greenwood Tree in 1872 and A Pair of Blue Eyes in 1873, Hardy decided he could afford to devote his whole time to literature. He married Miss Gifford in 1874.

After a honeymoon in France the Hardys lived at various places near London. Finally Hardy settled in Dorchester, and in 1883 he designed his home, Max Gate, and had it built near the town of Dorchester. There he remained for the rest of his life. Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891) became a "best seller" and rapidly made Hardy world-famous. The routine of the Hardys was to spend a few months of each year in London where they entertained and went out themselves a great deal. Mrs. Hardy's satisfaction in knowing the right people is quite different from Hardy's sceptical comments in his notebooks.[5] Hardy belonged to clubs and met many writers, and as he became well-known, was taken up by high society as a literary lion. Swinburne, Edmund

5 F.E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, pp. 15-27.

Gosse, and Meredith were among his closest friends.

Hardy's novel-writing period ended shortly after the stormy reception accorded Jude the Obscure in 1895. By this time, Hardy was the most widely read English novelist and he could afford to devote his time to his real interest, poetry. The Dynasts (1904-1908), a dramatic poem of the Napoleonic era, is Hardy's most ambitious poetical undertaking. After 1909 came his third literary period, that devoted to lyric poetry. Honours and acclamations poured steadily upon the author. In 1912 Emma Hardy died. In 1914 Hardy married Florence Emily Dugdale, a distant cousin, who had often visited Max Gate before Mrs. Hardy's death. During his last years Hardy moved about less and less, finally remaining almost entirely at Max Gate where he died at the age of eighty-eight.

The literature on Thomas Hardy is extensive and continues to grow, but there are few biographies. Mrs. Florence Hardy persuaded Hardy to let her undertake a two-volume biography. This she wrote under his guidance, probably a good deal at his dictation. The Early Years of Thomas Hardy was published in 1928, and The Later Years of Thomas Hardy appeared in 1930.

Thomas Hardy by W.A. Rutland (1938) and Hardy of Wessex by Carl J. Weber (1940) both contain the essential facts of Hardy's life together with an examination of Hardy's intellectual development. Rutland's biography has more of the story of Hardy's life; Weber emphasises the literary criticism of

individual works. Weber confirms the picture of Hardy's married life that Rutland gives, adding some new bits of evidence. It now seems as though knowledge of Hardy's life is about as complete as it will ever be.

In his youth Hardy had a few ephemeral romances. During his London years there was someone he cared for more seriously, but there are no details for any of these affairs. Hardy undoubtedly was greatly in love with the pretty Miss Gifford. In later life he was inclined to make a completely romantic idyll, "a pure fairytale", of the courtship in Cornwall.[6] His first years with his wife formed a very happy period in his life. Rutland does not feel that unhappy circumstances in Hardy's life account for the tragic emphasis in Hardy's novels. Hardy's sincere inquiry into first causes left him with the "intolerable antilogy" of an artistic perception of the individual and his emotions and a rational approach to the scientific and materialistic teachings of Darwin and Huxley.[7] It was Hardy, the artist and thinker, who arrived inevitably at a tragic view of life, his notebooks show a mind preoccupied with sombre and melancholy thoughts.

When she married, Emma Hardy was pretty and charming, loved people and animals, but "the rather limited simplicity of her nature could not comprehend all the complexities of his."[8]

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6 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 173.

7 W.R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy, p. 74.

8 Ibid, p. 55.

Gradually, as the romance of their courtship slipped behind them, Hardy and his wife drew apart. Fundamentally they did not have a great deal in common. Weber has summed up the reasons for the incompatibility of Hardy and his first wife. Hardy's origin was humble; he had no important family connections nor had he been to a university. Miss Gifford was very conscious of her background and very proud of the fact that her uncle was a canon of Worcester Cathedral and Archdeacon of London.

> When Hamlin Garland visited Hardy's birthplace, the owner repeated to him the local belief that Mrs. Hardy had taken more pride in being the niece of an Archdeacon than in being the wife of Thomas Hardy.[9]

Hardy was always keenly sensitive to his social inferiority. This sensitiveness was heightened by the fact that his wife, not at all intellectual, was very conventional and rather snobbish.

Mrs. Hardy also enjoyed polite society and wanted to know famous people. Hardy was bored by society life; it meant nothing to him.[10]

Another factor was Mrs. Hardy's coldness. She allowed herself no spontaneous expression of feeling. Hardy was very disappointed, too, that they had no children.

Mrs. Hardy had no hesitation in humiliating Hardy publicly. She also was convinced that she could write. Mr. T.P. O'Connor has described his impressions of the Hardys.[11] He met

9 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 158.

10 CC.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 169.

11 T.P. O'Connor, "Thomas Hardy As I Knew Him", Daily Telegraph, London, Jan. 13, 1928, reprinted in Living Age, 334: 454-7, March 1, 1928.

them when Hardy was middle-aged. He felt at once Hardy's essential loneliness and his deep and abiding melancholy. Mrs. Hardy was a great contrast to her frail and sombre husband, being "full-blown, with an ample figure, rubicund face, and a defiantly jolly expression."[12] She hated her husband's philosophy. She also insisted that Hardy's mother gave her the credit for the writing of Hardy's books. Mr. O'Connor concludes that for Hardy the first Mrs. Hardy was a most unfortunate partner. Hardy required comfort and tranquillity. "Mrs. Hardy's whole bitter purpose seemed to be to discourage, belittle, and irritate him."[13]

Another observer has recorded somewhat the same impression. At tea at Max Gate the first Mrs. Hardy interrupted the conversation, saying sharply "If you listen to what I am saying you will find it as well worth hearing as Mr. Hardy's remarks."[14]

A French painter, M. Blanche, denies that Mrs. Emma Hardy was "Hardy's evil genius" and responsible for his pessimism.[15] Yet Blanche goes on to describe an excursion to Windsor where Mrs. Hardy insisted that her frail, sixty-seven-year-old husband climb a hill in the hot sun whilst she and others rode comfortably up in a carriage.[16]

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12 T.P. O'Connor, "Thomas Hardy As I Knew Him", Daily Telegraph, London, Jan. 13, 1928, reprinted in Living Age, 334: 454-7, March 1, 1928, p. 456.

13 Ibid., p. 457.

14 D. McCarthy, "Thomas Hardy", Saturday Review of Literature, Dec. 1, 1928, p. 422.

15 J-E Blanche, "Memoirs of Thomas Hardy", translated from the French by C.J. Weber, The Colby Mercury, April 1937, p. 128.

16 Loc. cit.

It is also plain that the first Mrs. Hardy did not greatly appreciate her husband's work. The criticised Tess of the D'Urberville's as a story with "too many servants in it."[17] Ford M. Ford tells of how Mrs. Hardy had called on Dr. Richard Garnett of the British Museum

> to beg, implore, command, threaten, anathematize her husband until he should be persuaded or coerced into burning the manuscript of his new novel which was Jude She had written letters; she had called. She had wept; like Niobe she had let down her blond hair..[18]

To sum up the problem of the first Mrs. Hardy: it seems clear that

> Hardy's marriage sometimes caused him pain, but it never became continuous cruelty to him, and there is no ground for supposing that he wished it dissolved.[19]

There was love and loyalty on both sides. Mrs. Emma Hardy had encouraged Hardy's aspiration to be an author and had copied his manuscripts faithfully.

> Their affection had been genuine. Each had been called upon to sacrifice something to the other, but their attachment was strong enough for each to be resigned to that sacrifice. Emma's death caused him real sorrow; and in an affectionate nature like Hardy's sorrow at times assumed some of the features of remorse.[20]

Hardy himself described his feelings after his wife's death in a letter to Mrs. Henniker:

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17 C.J. Weber, Rebekah Owen and Thomas Hardy, p. 50.

18 F.M. Ford, "Thomas Hardy", American Mercury, 38:438-98, August, 1936, p. 441.

19 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 156.

20 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 172.

> In spite of the differences between us, which it would be affectation to deny, and certain painful delusions she suffered from at times, my life is intensely sad to me now without her.[21]

The "painful delusions" may possibly refer to his wife's aspirations to authorship or might mean her rather exalted spiritual beliefs. In her diary she wrote:

> An Unseen Power of great benevolence directs my ways. I have some philosophy, and mysticism, and an ardent belief in Christianity and the life beyond this present one . . . A strange, unearthly brilliance shines around our path, penetrating and dispersing difficulties with its warmth and glow.[22]

The death of Emma Hardy left Hardy helpless to cope with the problems of housekeeping and protecting himself from the swarms of visitors who constantly invaded his privacy. His marriage to Florence Dugdale, in spite of the thirty-nine years between their ages, brought them both happiness. To him, the marriage meant peace, security, understanding, and sympathy. Rutland describes Mrs. Florence Hardy as

> young and gracious . . . Her whole-hearted devotion gave Hardy the truest happiness that he ever knew. She could not take away his scars but she softened his bitterness.[23]

T.E. Lawrence confirms this description of Mrs. Florence Hardy.

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21 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 172.

22 Cited by F.E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 96.

23 W.R. Rutland, op. cit., pp. 110-11.

In a letter to her he says,

> One thing in your letter pleases me very much: you say you have failed him at every turn. Of course you did; everybody did . . . T.H. was above and beyond all men living, as a person . . . you did everything you could: more than any other person did: surely that is not a bad effort? You thought him worth more: I agree. [24]

The second Mrs. Hardy apparently worshipped Hardy and asked only to serve him. Hardy's friends realised that Florence Hardy's loving care of her husband was of great help to him in his later work.

No one has described the second Mrs. Hardy. A drawing of her in The Later Years of Thomas Hardy shows a pleasant, intelligent, capable face. This picture is a great contrast to the picture of Miss Gifford in 1870 who wore masses of elaborate curls above her pretty and determined features. Once Arnold Bennett remarked tersely about Mrs. Florence Hardy: "Mrs. Thomas Hardy came for tea on Sunday. She is a very lively, podgy piece."[25]

Hardy could be said to have lived two distinct lives. When he was young, unknown to the world, unsure of himself and his ideas, he was carried away by a pair of blue eyes. His courtship in Cornwall was thoroughly romantic. The Hardy of this period is very remote from the aged, quiet, world-famous author whom Miss Dugdale revered and loved. When she met Hardy around

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24 The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, p. 592.

25 Arnold Bennett's Letters to His Nephew, p. 311.

1900 he had already become a venerable institution. There was nothing to recall the ardent ambitious young man of 1870.

There are innumerable descriptions of Hardy's appearance and personality by friends, interviewers, and visitors. Hardy was a very shrewd observer and had much humour and sense of irony. He could always penetrate humbug at once. In his younger days he had not tried to conceal his impatience with sham and hypocrisy and offended many people, particularly his wife, by his deliberate blasphemy. Although he was not a particularly strong person, he remained active far into old age. Sober, reflective, quiet, Hardy's manner did not impress outsiders, but those who knew him well profoundly respected the range and depth of his mind.

As Hardy's second wife met him so late in life she could not have been expected to understand what Hardy had been as a young man. She could, however, have thrown light on many aspects of him which had remained matters for speculation. The relation of Hardy's character and philosophy is one that has fascinated his readers, very many of whom have made pilgrimages to "Wessex" and Max Gate. Hardy's modesty stimulated curiosity about him all the more. A description of Hardy in private life - his likes, dislikes and idiosyncrasies, more details of his personality - would have been received with keen interest. Hardy's wife undoubtedly could have shed much light on Hardy's friendships and first marriage and their effect on his work.

But a devoted wife could only respect Hardy's wishes in these matters, and Mrs. Hardy's two-volume Life is a typical example of the Victorian official biography. Hardy having been so closely concerned with the writing of the books, the work stands midway between biography and reminiscence - a sort of memoir in the third person.

Mrs. Hardy tells us in the preface to The Early Life of Thomas Hardy that Hardy outlined the chapter headings and jotted down various memories of his youth. Observations that he made from time to time in his notebooks have been included, and wherever possible his own phrases have been used. Mrs. Hardy also says that many trivial things were recorded because they are typical of old country customs, probably in accordance with Hardy's own wish.

The first chapters of Mrs. Hardy's Life includes a great deal of family background given with much detail. The reader does not gain much real insight into Hardy's youthful nature from this most brief and objective account. She recounts how once, as a boy, Hardy lay on his back in the sun, his face covered with his straw hat, through with the sun's rays filtered, an incident used by Hardy in Jude the Obscure. Lying there, Hardy reflected on the world and its ways and suddenly felt an overpowering conviction that he no longer wished to grow up. Mrs. Hardy concludes that he showed thus early his strange lack of social ambition, a state of mind which remained with him

forever. Rutland feels that Mrs. Hardy missed the significance of this experience. Hardy really sensed then, he supposes, the complete futility of life, the tragic burden that our civilisation has acquired. It was the beginning of Hardy's fundamentally melancholy view of things.[26]

Hardy also felt that his immaturity was a clue to his character. He had once said that he "was a child till he was sixteen, a youth till he was five-and-twenty, and young man till he was nearly fifty."[27] Weber expresses it more truthfully:

> While this was true as far as experience and the development of initiative and resourcefulness are concerned, Hardy's mind and sympathies, like his knowledge and insight, were far from being those of a child when his schooling came to an end . . .[28]

Rutland's most serious criticism of Mrs. Hardy's biography is that she did not understand her husband's true position in relation to religion. She felt that beneath his assumed coldness he was a true and orthodox member of the church. The first Mrs. Hardy had also suffered from Hardy's lack of faith but had had no illusions about it. No reference to the burning of Jude the Obscure by the Bishop of Wakefield, Rutland's comment is:

> The truest touch of comedy in the whole business was provided long afterwards in The Later Years of Thomas Hardy where it is stated that if the Bishop could have known Hardy he would have found a man whose views of the 'vital facts' of religion hardly differed from his own![29]

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26 W.R. Rutland, op. cit., p. 9.

27 F.E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 42.

28 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 12.

29 W.R. Rutland, op. cit., p. 92.

Almost certainly Mrs. Hardy overestimated the Bishop's broad-mindedness. Mrs. Hardy makes no direct reference to Hardy's loss of faith. She says that he had long had a leaning toward the Church and around 1865 had thought of taking orders, so that literature could be connected with his livelihood.

> This fell through, less because of its difficulty than from a conscientious feeling after some theological study that he could hardly take the step with honour while holding the views which on examination he found himself to hold.[30]

She adds that although he abandoned the idea of becoming a clergyman, he "practised orthodoxy", quoting a note from his journal to the effect that he once stayed for the Sacrament in Westminster Abbey. But Hardy's own comment after the entry is: "a very odd experience, amid a crowd of strangers."[31] He was obviously making an experiment. Ford Madox Ford also believed Hardy was devout.

> Criticize as he [Hardy] might the temporal disposition of the Anglican Church, he remained a Believer . . .[32]

Ford also says that "Thomas Hardy made the curiously shy avowal that he was a practising and believing communicant of the Church of England."[33]

Yet all this is not consistent with Hardy's own remarks or later statements by Mrs. Hardy. Hardy says, "I have been

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30 F.E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 66.

31 Loc. cit.

32 F.M. Ford, op. cit., p. 446.

33 Loc. cit.

looking for God for fifty years, and I think if he had existed far I should have discovered him."[34] Another entry is also from "orthodox".

> The conception of a First Cause which the theist calls 'God', and the conception of the same that the so-styled atheist calls 'no-God' are nowadays almost exactly identical. . .[35]

Hardy discusses the problem again in connection with a critical article on his writing:

> I have never understood how anybody can be one [an atheist] except in the sense of disbelieving in a tribal god, man-shaped, fiery-faced and tyrannous, who flies into a rage on the slightest provocation . . . Fifty meanings attach to the word 'God' nowadays, the only reasonable meaning being the Cause of Things, whatever that cause may be. Thus no modern thinker can be an atheist in the modern sense, while all modern thinkers are atheists in the ancient and exploded sense.[36]

Hardy felt he should have been called "churchy" instead of infidel, heretic etc. because from childhood on he had been so imbued with the atmosphere and ritual of churches. Mrs. Hardy does allow a qualification of the idea - "churchy", she says, "not in an intellectual sense, but in so far as instincts and emotions ruled".[37] Here again, although Hardy possessed a thorough knowledge of the form and content of the church ritual

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34 F.E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 293.

35 F.E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 82.

36 Ibid., p. 176.

37 Loc. cit.

the reader wonders what to make of Mrs. Hardy's conviction that Hardy's instincts and emotions were sympathetic to the church.

It seems also as if Mrs. Hardy wished to place Hardy in a category of great thinkers who are beyond the confines of any particular creed.

> It may be here recalled, in answer to the writers who now and later were fond of charging Hardy with postulating a malignant and fiendish God, that he never held any views of that sort, merely surmising an indifferent and unconscious force at the back of things 'that neither good nor evil knows'. His view is shown in fact to approximate to Spinoza's - and later Einstein's - that neither Chance nor Purpose governs the universe but Necessity.[38]

This statement reveals Mrs. Hardy's very superficial understanding of Hardy's philosophy. Hardy never achieved the detachment of a Spinoza; he was filled with bitterness at the grimness of "Necessity" and the folly of the optimists of this world.

These aspects of Hardy's religious development are referred to most briefly by Weber. In youth, though Hardy "did not enter the Church, the Church entered him", Its rhythms and forms had tremendous influence on his poetry.[39] Hardy had, says Weber, completely rejected "the doctrine and dogma of the Established Church."[40]

In any case, it does seem that, as Rutland says, Hardy's pessimism was distasteful to Mrs. Florence Hardy, "who persuaded herself and did her best to persuade others that his

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38 F.E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 128.

39 C.J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 217.

40 Ibid., p. 163.

writings were full of optimism."[41] After her statement that the Bishop of Wakefield would have found in Hardy a man of the same religious and moral views as his own, Mrs. Hardy adds in a footnote that many of the clergy today wholly approve of Hardy's work. She quotes from an article in Theology, August, 1928, advising anyone interested in becoming a village rector to read the works of Thomas Hardy and learn of the dignity of country people and the deep interest of individual life. "The author of this article," concludes Mrs. Hardy proudly, "is an eminent clergyman of the Church of England."[42] Mrs. Hardy brings out constantly Hardy's interest in the church.

> Through the years 1920 to 1925 Hardy was interested in conjectures on rationalizing the English Church. There had been rumors for some years of a revised Liturgy, and his hopes were accordingly raised by the thought of making the Established Church comprehensive enough to include the majority of thinkers of the previous hundred years who had lost all belief in the supernatural.[43]

There is most noticeable restraint in the biography on the subject of Emma L. Gifford, Hardy's first wife. Emma Hardy's own recollections, found after her death, are quoted to describe aspects of Hardy's stay in Cornwall. The diary reflects her youthful enthusiasm but adds little to what is already known.

Before they were married, it is shown that Miss Gifford

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41 W.R. Rutland, op. cit., p. 111.

42 F.E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 49.

43 Ibid., p. 225.

worked faithfully for Hardy. Her help and encouragement of Hardy in his literary ambition are duly stressed. Emma Hardy wrote of her pleasure in helping him: "I copied a good deal of manuscript . . . and I was very proud and happy doing this."[44] During Hardy's long illness in 1880 he was able to continue the chapters of The Laodicean for Harper's Magazine by dictating them to his wife. "She worked bravely both at writing and nursing."[45]

After these passages there is absolutely no reference at all to Emma Hardy except as accompanying Hardy on some outing or trip. The reader receives no impression at all of what sort of wife Emma Hardy was. Aside from references to social life, there is little to indicate what were the habits and tastes of the first Mrs. Hardy. She was an excellent horseback rider and could go almost as far on a bicycle as Hardy. She liked gardening and playing the piano. Finally, Mrs. Florence Hardy gives a very brief description of Emma Hardy's last illness and death.

It is very possible that Mrs. Florence Hardy's treatment of Emma Hardy in the biography is a reflection of Hardy's own loyalty and restraint. Rutland, in speaking of Hardy's more unhappy years, says:

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44 F.E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 95.

45 Ibid., p. 188.

> When, long afterwards, his second wife was consulting him about the details of his life, she found the greatest difficulty in connection with this period, and for the years immediately following 1895 he wished no record to be made.[46]

Anecdotes, thoughts, and observations from Hardy's notebooks are used to fill out this portion of the biography. Hardy's entries are frequently most despondent.

> November 17 - 19. In a fit of depression, as if enveloped in a leaden cloud . . .
> December 21. The Hypocrisy of things. Nature is an arch-dissembler . . . Nothing is as it appears.
> December 31. This evening, the end of the old year 1885 finds me sadder than many previous New Year's Eves have done . . .[47]

Around 1890 Hardy went constantly to music halls observing dancing girls. No comments on these facts are offered by Mrs. Hardy. One can only infer something of Hardy's state of mind from his own remarks.

Concerning herself and the circumstances of her acquaintance with Hardy, Florence Hardy is almost laughably reticent. The only reference to the entire situation is the abrupt statement: "In February of the year following (1914) the subject of this memoir married the present writer."[48] Thereafter, she refers to herself as "Hardy's wife", and describes how she rectified "the muddle of Hardy's unmistressed housekeeping" after Emma Hardy's death.[49] The reader also learns that Florence

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46 W.R. Rutland, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

47 F.E. Hardy, The Early Years of Thomas Hardy, pp. 230-31.

48 F.E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 159.

49 Ibid, p. 158.

Hardy accompanied her husband on excursions, did secretarial work for him, and nursed him to the last. There are no clues whatever as to her character.

Mrs. Hardy's work, though undertaken as Hardy's official biography, and as such approved by him, is by no means a definitive biography. There is so much left out that it is far from being an accurate picture of Hardy's life. This is particularly true as regards the treatment of the first Mrs. Hardy. Only favourable or very neutral items about her are recorded, and there is very little given about her at all. The second Mrs. Hardy had been a member of the Hardy household for long periods before the first Mrs. Hardy's death. She therefore could have supplied information from her own knowledge.

Most of the biography is characterised by Hardy's own style. Mrs. Hardy had been herself a writer of children's stories and her own words are direct and simple, even naïve at times. So much material having been omitted probably accounts for her occasional abruptness.

It is difficult to evaluate Mrs. Hardy's biography, since it was so largely the work of Hardy himself. As representative of the nineteenth century school of biography the work possesses the virtues of that type of life-writing and not all of the faults. It contains a large amount of information and will always be valuable as source material for the student of Hardy. Painstakingly and sympathetically Mrs. Hardy tried to write

Hardy's life exactly as he would have preferred it. She has included so much of Hardy's own thoughts that the narrative retains the directness and appeal of Hardy's own presence.

Mrs. Hardy had previously considered having Hardy's diary published by itself, as is shown by T.E. Lawrence:

> A distinguished person's wife has asked me if I would care to edit or 'ghost' her husband's diary, written quite intimately before he became famous but showing, very wonderfully, the growth of his mind and the slow accumulation of its knowledge. 'No', probably, since I haven't much desire to undertake so difficult a scissors-and-paste job.[50]

Some may feel that this diary published by itself might have been more effective than letting excerpts of it ramble through a biography. It is not possible to see clearly the evolution of Hardy's mind because so much other material is interspersed with the diary entries.

Although the objective record of Hardy's quiet life could hardly be other than a rather dull chronicle, Mrs. Hardy's biography is far more colourless than necessary. Her two volumes constitute little more than a relation of Hardy's thoughts and movements very loosely strung together. There is no cohesive effort, no symmetry, no attempt at any analysis of Hardy's character. A few lively anecdotes of Hardy or his family would have helped to offset the plainness of the narrative. A vast amount of inconsequential tales and remarks fill out the periods over which Hardy drew a veil.

Mrs. Hardy did not use her position as Hardy's wife to add

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50 The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, pp. 474-475.

anything of her own to biographical knowledge of Hardy except in her attempt to show his writings and religious ideas in the most optimistic and orthodox light possible. There is nothing to distinguish this biography from the work of anyone capable of being Hardy's secretary.

# CHAPTER VII

## D.H. LAWRENCE

"Human life is not to be estimated by what men perform but by what they are."

- J.A. Symonds.

If ever a man needed rescuing from his biographers, that man is D.H. Lawrence, novelist and poet. Since his death in 1930, books and articles about him have appeared in ever increasing numbers, each adding to the already emotionalised Lawrence legend. Most of them illustrate "the crush as a form of literature... In life nobody could save Lawrence from his friends; in death nobody can save him from his biographers."[1] It is not a question of discovering anything new about Lawrence's life; it is time and perspective that are needed to sift out and evaluate all the conflicting descriptions and impressions of Lawrence, the man and the artist.

Lawrence is primarily an example of the subjective artist. His books are inseparable from the mental and physical course of his life. The characters, settings, and plots of his novels are taken from Lawrence's own background and experience. It has been remarked how treacherous to true biography is a reliance on

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1 E. Boyd, "Lorenzo in Chaos", Saturday Review of Literature, 9: 663-664, June 24, 1933, p. 664.

autobiographical material in a writer's work, for it is impossible to estimate how much the experiences in the books are projections of the author's ideals, or how much the characters may be blends of different real people. Followers of Lawrence have felt little restriction in their wholesale reconstruction of his life from his books. Hugh Kingsmill, for example, in his biography of Lawrence, gives lengthy synopses of many of Lawrence's novels in order to emphasize how literally Lawrence's life was put into his books. Yet Kingsmill says later in connection with Frieda Lawrence:

> The reader of Lawrence's novels should remember that the delirious phantoms in whom he from time to time embodied Frieda are no more like Frieda than Poe's Eleanora and Ligeia are like the Wife of Bath.[2]

It is hard to see why the same reasoning cannot be applied to the representations of Lawrence himself in the novels.

Lawrence's letters, however, are incredibly voluminous and frank. "Few men have more of themselves in their letters."[3] In them Lawrence is found in every mood and circumstance. The letters, combined with all the writings in Lawrence, give us more information about him than about any other writer of his time.

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2 Hugh Kingsmill, The Life of D.H. Lawrence, p.73.

3 A. Huxley, Introd. to the Letters of D.H. Lawrence, p. xxxii.

Lawrence's sister Ada has written her impressions of Lawrence's home and background, confirming the accounts of others. Lawrence was born in 1885 in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. His father was a coal miner. His mother prided herself on her more genteel background. The couple drew apart, and the four children grew up in a tense and violent atmosphere. As Mrs. Lawrence grew to despise her husband, she turned her love to her youngest son. Lawrence hated his father and later admitted he had been unjust; he had not appreciated his father's well-meant joviality and healthy animal spirits. Lawrence was a sensitive and intelligent boy and did well at school, but his health was never very good. His life of this period, and particularly his friendship with "E.T." and her family, is reflected in Sons and Lovers. From the time he was seventeen until he was twenty-three he trained to be a teacher. In 1908 he left Eastwood for Croydon where he had a position in a school. There he lived with a Lancashire family, wrote poems, and explored London. "E.T." encouraged his writing and effected a meeting between him and Ford Madox Hueffer. Lawrence indulged in some desultory affairs of the heart and finally broke with "E.T." over the story of Sons and Lovers. She says, "He burked the real issue... His mother had to be supreme and for the sake of that supremacy every disloyalty was permissible."[4]

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4 "E.T.", D.H. Lawrence, A Personal Record, p.201.

Lawrence's later years are fully described by many of his friends. He was very efficient as a teacher, but after a bad attack of pneumonia he resigned from the school and devoted all his time to writing. F.M. Hueffer published some of his verses and stories and sent him to William Heinemann. Lawrence also wrote to Edward Garnett who helped him greatly in his literary career.

In 1912 Lawrence met Frieda von Richthofen Weekley who was some years older than he, the daughter of a German baron, the wife of a professor at Nottingham University, and the mother of three children. At once Frieda and Lawrence realised their attraction for each other, and it was arranged that Lawrence was to go to Germany with Frieda when she made a visit to her parents. There, the suspense and mental anguish for both was great, but finally Frieda cast her lot in with Lawrence's. They began their life together in a village in Bavaria and then took a walking trip to Italy. After a winter on Lake Garda they returned to England to face the problem of Frieda's divorce. After another winter in Italy they were married in London in June, 1914.

The years 1914-19 were the darkest in Lawrence's life and turned him away from England forever. There were several factors which contributed to his bitter unhappiness and intensified his desire to escape somewhere and live ideally with a few chosen

friends. First, the Lawrences were extremely poor and were somewhat dependent on the kindness of others. Second, Lawrence's book The Rainbow was condemned in 1915 as an obscene book. Lawrence was powerless to fight the many bitter attacks made upon him. Finally, an attempted refuge in Cornwall, far from eliminating persecution, merely intensified it. The local inhabitants looked suspiciously upon the activities of the author and his German wife, causing them so much annoyance, that the Lawrences were forced to go back to London and Derbyshire.

In 1913 Lawrence and his wife had met and liked tremendously John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield. The Lawrences urged their new friends to come and live with them in Cornwall. The experiment was not a success. The climate did not appeal to their guests. Murry claims that Lawrence's friendship demanded too much of him; he was not prepared to sacrifice his individuality to the older man. Lawrence's letters to Murry and others on the subject show that he found Murry unstable, unreliable, and over-emotional.

In 1919 Lawrence began the long and unsatisfying Odyssey which took him to Italy, Capri, Sicily, Ceylon, Australia, New and Old Mexico, and finally back to Italy and southern France. His health failed noticeably after Mexico where he had been seriously ill. In desperation, Lawrence went from low altitudes

to high in an endeavor to check his tuberculosis. In March, 1930, Lawrence died at Vence, near Antibes on the Riviera.

During the post war years, Lawrence had emerged as a prophet and seer, preaching a rather vague gospel of belief in the instinctive and irrational as against the material and scientific. "My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect."[5] He felt that science and material progress destroyed the only things of value in the world — "the immediate perception and artistic rendering of divine otherness."[6] He believed in the rule of the "dark gods", in other words, the guidance of instinctive forces and his personal version of mystic experience. Aldous Huxley calls Lawrence's philosophy "mystical materialism." "Matter must be intrinsically as lively as the mind which perceives it and is moved by the perception."[7] Huxley goes on to show how Lawrence's intuitive gift, "an extraordinary sensitiveness to what Wordsworth called 'unknown modes of being'",[8] affected his art and his life. As a person he was condemned to spiritual solitude. His long, restless wanderings

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5 The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, p.94.

6 A. Huxley, Introd. to Letters of D.H. Lawrence, p.xv.

7 Ibid., p. xx.

8 Ibid., p. xi.

"were at once a flight and a search, a search for some society with which he could establish contact... and a flight from the miseries and evils of the society into which he had been born."[9] It was to no avail. "In a kind of despair he plunged yet deeper into the surrounding mystery, into the dark night of that otherness whose essence and symbol is the sexual experience." [10]

Lawrence had gathered around him a miscellaneous group who approved of his philosophy with varying degrees of enthusiasm. His personality held his friends almost under a spell; he became the focal point for a distinct group of post war artists. Huxley has related how, although usually most cautious, he found himself consenting at once to join Lawrence's projected colony seeking a better life, this time in Florida. [11]

Lawrence's role of revealer and his devotion to the instinctive as against the intellectual made great demands upon his friends. He wanted them to be loyal to ideals that he felt intuitively rather than conceived rationally; they had to endure much perversity and inconsistency on his part. Unfortunately, many of Lawrence's friends were so unstable themselves that

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9 A. Huxley, Introd. to Letters of D.H. Lawrence, p.xxvi.

10 Ibid., p. xxvii.

11 Ibid., p. xxix.

social gatherings at the Lawrences' were occasionally of a most volcanic nature.

> "Lawrence's friends usually disliked, and frequently loathed, one another. Most of them had both talent and self-love above the average, and so were attracted to him by conflicting impulses, which corresponded with the division in his own nature." [12]

Rebecca West, who with Norman Douglas, met Lawrence in Florida, was annoyed at the bitterness and misapprehension shown in the obituary notices of Lawrence's death. She brought out in contrast the richness and enchantment of Lawrence's personality, the unaffected gaiety and vitality of which he was capable. The picture of Lawrence as gloomy and tragic she felt to be the creation of critics whose own ego can only find support by presenting Lawrence in this manner.[13]

John Middleton Murry is one of the strongest adherents of the "tortured Lawrence" school. In 1931 he published Son of Woman which is an extreme example of psychoanalytic biography. Huxley calls this study of Lawrence "a curious essay in destructive hagiography" which completely ignores the fact that Lawrence was primarily an artist.[14] Murry propounds that Lawrence was "sex-crucified";[15] never free from spiritual

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12 H. Kingsmill, op. cit., p. 98.

13 R. West, D.H. Lawrence, pp. 6-7.

14 A. Huxley, Introd. to Letters of D.H. Lawrence, p.x.

15 J.M. Murry, Son of Woman, p.21.

bondage to his mother, and therefore doomed to failure in all his relations with women. He always hated women because of the humiliation they caused him. According to Murry, Lawrence was drawn ever more deeply toward a doctrine of death and disintegration; he became "Jesus-haunted",[16] a victim at the end of "vicious and inverted sentimentality."[17]

Mabel Dodge Luhan, maliciously described by Lawrence as rich and much-married,

> a little famous in New York, and little loved, very intelligent as a woman, another 'culture carrier', likes to play the patroness... has a terrible will-to-power — she wants to be a witch and at the same time a Mary of Bethany at Jesus' feet, [18]

published her reminiscences of Lawrence in 1932. This self-consciously frank account of Lawrence in New Mexico is a revelation of clashing personalities and unbridled egos seen through a fantastic Freudian mist. Lawrence becomes a rather silly figure of querulousness and irrationality, and Frieda Lawrence is seen as a mountain of dull animal antagonism. Occasionally Mrs. Luhan makes some pertinent observations — "Lawrence and Frieda did not know how to live easily and casually with people."[19] "When he Lawrence did not like

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16 John M. Murry, Son of Woman, p.351.

17 Ibid., p. 336.

18 Frieda Lawrence, Not I., but the Wind, p.159.

19 M.D. Luhan, Lorenzo in Taos, p.86.

what he was doing he became ill."[20] She and Frieda Lawrence soon became locked in combat over Lawrence. Mrs. Luhan lashes out at Frieda, saying that Lawrence lived in fear of her, that his was a "desperate and hopeless bondage to one who was the antithesis to himself... an enemy of his life, hateful destroying female."[21] When the Hon. Dorothy Brett appeared on the scene with her "paranoiac glare",[22] the situation became even more chaotic. Mrs. Luhan finally had to retire altogether from the field and find consolation in her writing.

Another feminine admirer of Lawrence's, Catherine Carswell, used her biography of Lawrence to vent her wrath upon Middleton Murry for she felt that he had failed Lawrence in every way and added insult to injury by his heartlessness and vanity. Lawrence, the "savage pilgrim," is for Mrs. Carswell "a non-Christian saint",[23] possessing a "swift and flame-like quality."[24] Frieda Lawrence she judges more impartially than does Mrs. Luhan, but for her, too, Mrs. Lawrence was an obstacle.

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20 M.D. Luhan, op. cit., p. 128.

21 Ibid., p.61.

22 Ibid., p. 288.

23 C. Carswell, The Savage Pilgrimage, Introd., p. ix.

24 Ibid., p. 15.

> His marriage with Frieda was a step which inevitably created a morass about the paths of friendship. I saw one person after another flounder in that morass. For me, I preferred to signal across it.[25]

In speaking of the persecution of the Lawrences during the war, Mrs. Carswell shows that some of it could easily have been avoided. "Frieda was not only German but loudly provocative and indiscreet."[26] Mrs. Carswell's book as a whole is typical of those who worshipped Lawrence without question. At a dinner for him at the Café Royal they appeared like the disciples around the Master at the Last Supper.

The Hon. Dorothy Brett was not to be outdone in praise of the Master. Lawrence and Brett, A Friendship, appeared in 1933. Here is found hero-worship, pure and simple, the narrative being directly addressed to the dead Lawrence. Written in a rather affectedly naïve style, the account takes in the Lawrences' return to Taos in 1923, their stay in Mexico, and a final glimpse of Lawrence in Capri in 1926. Amid the difficulties, "Brett" appears as extremely obtuse. She says she never realised that some of the violent quarrels of the Lawrences concerned her.[27] She, too, was vanquished by Mrs. Lawrence. The description of

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25 C. Carswell, op. cit., p.38.

26 Ibid., p.90.

27 The Hon. D. Brett, Lawrence and Brett, p.206.

Mrs. Lawrence in this book is most unpleasant. In Capri "Brett" found Lawrence in despair over the situation with his wife. "Brett" quotes Lawrence as saying, "My life is unbearable."[28] "Brett" could never understand why Lawrence did not free himself of his impossible partner. "Brett's" story gives added details of the Lawrences' daily life, confirming the impressions of others.

A more impersonal biography of Lawrence (1938) by Hugh Kingsmill was welcomed as a salutary change in the literature on Lawrence. Kingsmill belongs to the "de-bunking" school of biography. Although he does not indulge in actual denunciation, it is very plain that Lawrence as a person did not appeal to him, nor did a great deal of Lawrence's writing. His book tends to emphasise Lawrence's weaker aspects. Kingsmill shows that Lawrence was ungracious toward those who helped him, particularly as regards Edward Garnett and Ford M. Hueffer. Lawrence would become very enthusiastic over people and then drop them. When Garnett disapproved of The Rainbow there occurred "the rift which immediately opened between Lawrence and any friend whose enthusiasm for Lawrence showed signs of fatigue."[29] As to the

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28 The Hon. D. Brett, op. cit., p. 271.

29 H. Kingsmill, op. cit., p. 81.

Lawrence-Murry controversy Kingsmill feels that Murry behaved more logically than did Lawrence. Kingsmill brings out all Lawrence's social weaknesses and petty affectations. This biography is very helpful in rounding out the picture of Lawrence's personality, but it is a good example of Harold Nicolson's thesis: a biography undertaken without sympathy for its subject cannot be a successful biography.

A person who agreed with Kingsmill's view of certain aspects of Lawrence's personality is Col. T.E. Lawrence. After reading The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, Col. Lawrence's comment to F. N. Doubleday is:

> D.H. wrote some lovely novels... I had a regard for the silly angry creature. And his letters lack generosity so sadly: couldn't he have said one decent thing about some other man of his profession. Also he was too much on the make.[30]

Another study of Lawrence aids in gaining perspective on this much publicised author. W.L. Tindall's Lawrence and Susan His Cow includes a critical estimate of Lawrence's work and a study of Lawrence in relation to his times. Reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's intellectual dilemma is Tindall's statement of Lawrence's problem, namely, that reason compels scepticism and emotion demands faith. Lawrence therefore had to invent his own religion, whereas Hardy remained aloof. Tindall is

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30 The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, p. 755.

frank in discussing the unpleasant aspects of both Lawrence and his wife, but in general his work is motivated by respect for and sympathy with his subject.

After leaving Mrs. Luhan's ranch at Taos, the Lawrences took two Danish artists with them to the Del Monte Ranch. One of these artists, Knud Merrild, felt he could help to clear up some of the misapprehensions about Lawrence if he described the months that he and his friend Gótsche spent with the Lawrences. A Poet and Two Painters (1938) is an avowedly frank and simple notation of facts with no pretense at critical or literary ability. Aldous Huxley calls this portrait of Lawrence "the most vivid, the most objective, and one might say the most disinterested yet produced."[31] In simple, even slangy, language Lawrence is seen almost as a camera would record him. The Danes could not follow Lawrence entirely; they could not understand him at all times but they greatly admired him.

What then is the sum-total of impressions of Lawrence, the man ? Almost everything, one might say. Attractive, hardworking, moody, nervous, sensitive, perverse, vital, and brilliant, together with the indefinable quality of genius. He presented different aspects to different people; he varied

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31 A. Huxley, Introd. to A Poet and Two Painters, p.xvii.

from day to day and contradicted himself constantly but he was never dull. Like so many brilliant people, Lawrence was very difficult to live with. In spite of being himself a practical and efficient housekeeper, small daily problems as well as deeper conflicts found him irrational and unpredictable. The fact that Lawrence was a victim of tuberculosis may well account for much of his character. It is a well-known medical fact that those suffering from tuberculosis are apt to be more intense than others — their defects more marked and their talents more brilliant.

It is rather remarkable that a person like Lawrence could have achieved a durable marriage.

> It was a stupendous feat of Frieda's to live for close on twenty years with the author of The Rainbow and emerge still solidly planted on the earth, quite apart from the material worries which harassed them for many years and were acute during the war.[32]

Like Lawrence, Mrs. Lawrence's outstanding characteristic seems to have been her pronounced individuality, and it is surprising that her marriage with Lawrence could have survived the terrific shock of their violent egos.

In appearance Mrs. Lawrence resembled "the Germania above the Rhine at Rüdesheim."[33] Enormous, blond, uninhibited,

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32 H. Kingsmill, op. cit., p. 94.

33 F.M. Ford, "D.H. Lawrence", American Mercury, 38: 167-79, June, 1936, p. 179.

Lawrence
Frieda seems to have been a sort of atavism, feeling everything instinctively and physically. She was very adaptable, putting up with hardship and discomfort in spite of her aristocratic origin. Occasionally she showed jealousy of Lawrence's prestige and would often angrily protest that she was every bit as noteworthy as he. Lawrence would not help her decide her problem of whether to leave her husband and children for him. She made her own decision, left her family but tenaciously kept in contact with her children. She was finally rewarded by being able to have her daughters visit her in Italy. Mrs. Lawrence knew how to eat her cake and have it too. She was of some help to Lawrence in his work, especially in the early days, discussing his books with him at length. She much preferred Lawrence's poetry to his prose.

The quarrels between Lawrence and his wife were such as to make many of their friends doubt that the marriage was a happy one. In violence and self-love Frieda Lawrence was a match for Lawrence. The spectacle of the recurrent bitter abuse and flying crockery is not a pretty one, yet these things did not seem to affect the Lawrences as they did more sensitive observers. Knud Merrild maintains there was nothing really serious about the outbreaks between them, that the quarrels,

though violent, were more in the nature of hysterical outbursts.[34] On the other hand, Lawrence himself has shown in his letters that the conflicts between him and his wife were most intense.

Since everyone interested in Lawrence was curious to know what Frieda Lawrence derived from her marriage with Lawrence, and whether or not it was worth the struggle with him, her book, Not I.. But the Wind... (1934) was received with the greatest interest. Does she give a final clue to Lawrence's personality; what is her opinion of Lawrence's friends and their conflicts; what does she reveal of her own character and abilities ? Such questions arise at once, and some of them are answered by Mrs. Lawrence in her book.

The title is from one of Lawrence's poems in the sequence, Look ! We Have Come Through, a poetic expression of their first months together. When obstacles between them were overcome, Lawrence can say:

> Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me,
> A fine wind is blowing the new direction of time.
> If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me.

It was ever Lawrence's desire to surrender to experience and let it flow through him. So Mrs. Lawrence also wishes to let her memories blow at random through her mind.

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34 K. Merrild, A Poet and Two Painters, p. 136.

In her Foreword Mrs. Lawrence states her aims and feelings. Frank as always, she says, "Do I want to blow my own trumpet ? Yes, I do." But beyond this she seeks to "hear the real song" of their life. Also, honesty is her goal. "It was a long fight for Lawrence and me to get at some truth between us; it was a hard life with him, but a wonderful one."[35] She analyses some of the reasons for the conflict between them: man against woman, class against class, race against race. She says she does not pretend to understand or explain Lawrence; she took him as he came, both his good side and bad. Just as in his writing he tried to free man from his past, so Mrs. Lawrence says, he freed his wife from all that had held her in bondage.[36]

The description of her first meeting with Lawrence is typical of her peculiarly outspoken and original attitude. "I hardly think I could have been a very loveable woman at the time."[37] Tersely she relates how their minds met and conversed, he understanding her through and through at once. She was profoundly moved by his tenderness toward her children. It was he who insisted that she make a clean break with her

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35 F. Lawrence, op. cit., Foreword, p. vi.

36 Ibid., p. viii.

37 F. Lawrence, op. cit., p.3.

husband and not resort to subterfuges. After a brief description of their difficult days in Metz with her family there follow some letters from Lawrence to her during this period.

"I shrink from remembering and putting down that almost too great intensity of our life together."[38] But Mrs. Lawrence feels that she must attempt it in view of the absurd claims by Lawrence's feminine admirers about his unhappy marriage. "I laugh when they write of him as a lonely genius dying alone. It is all my eye."[39] Nor was Lawrence really brutal. The forthright Mrs. Lawrence says, "What does it amount to that he hit out at me... I hit back or waited... I preferred it that way."[40] To her, their relationship was deeper than ordinary and required struggle and violence. She concludes: "Healthy in soul he always was. He may have been cross and irritable sometimes but he was never sorry for himself and all he suffered."[41]

Mrs. Lawrence could not let things become too intense for long. She was always ready with some pointed sarcasm to

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38 F. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 33.

39 Ibid., pp.33-34.

40 Ibid., p. 34.

41. Ibid., p. 44

bring Lawrence back to earth. The writing of Sons and Lovers was a great strain and much was demanded of her. Toward the end she says, "I got fed up and turned against all this 'House of Atreus' feeling, and I wrote a skit called 'Paul Morel, Or His Mother's Darling.'" Lawrence did not see the joke. "He said coldly, 'This kind of thing isn't called a skit.'"[42] Another time, in Lerici, when Lawrence was struggling precariously in a boat through the surf, Mrs. Lawrence shouted in a fury, "If you can't be a real poet you'll drown like one anyhow."[43]

There is not much discussion of Lawrence's friends in Frieda Lawrence's book. In speaking of Katherine Mansfield and Middleton Murry, Frieda does not go into any of the difficulties Lawrence had with Murry. She evidently liked them both, especially Katherine. "I think theirs was the only spontaneous and jolly friendship that we had."[44] She does not mention the Murrys' going away in Cornwall but merely describes some of the happy days they all had together, "days of complete harmony."[45] Referring to Lady Ottoline Morrell, Frieda Lawrence says

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42. F. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 56.

43. Ibid., p. 59.

44 Ibid., p. 67.

45 Ibid., p. 85.

that her culture and social power meant a great deal to Lawrence and that she even thought of leaving Lawrence to Lady Ottoline's influence. Mrs. Lawrence is also willing to accord Mabel Luhan the honour of being at least a worthy opponent. "She has eyes one can trust...people are what they are whatever they may do...There was a fight between us: I think it was a fair fight."[46] Mrs. Lawrence challenged all Lawrence's feminine admirers in her retort to Mabel: "Try it yourself, then, living with a genius, see what it is like and how easy it is, take him if you can."[47] The Hon. Dorothy Brett evoked for the most part Mrs. Lawrence's pity and irritation, although the latter is very fair in that she admits that "Brett" had good qualities and worked amazingly hard. But "Brett's" slavish admiration of Lawrence and constant presence was too much. Like Mabel Luhan, Frieda found "Brett" a sort of spying menace. Lawrence, says Mrs. Lawrence, was really relieved when "Brett" was finally sent away from Oaxaca, Mexico.

The description of Lawrence's last days is most poignant. Mrs. Lawrence nursed him faithfully, and the couple

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46 F. Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 135-6.

47 Ibid., p. 136.

drew much closer together. "So the dreary passages in our lives were wiped out and he said to me: 'Why, oh why did we quarrel so much?...I answered...'how could we help it?'"[48] Above all, "Lawrence never lost his dignity, he fought on and never lost hope."[49] The end was supreme torture for them both. It seemed impossible that anyone so vividly alive as Lawrence could die.

"Not I..but the Wind...," though by no means a complete biography or even portrait, has, however, a distinct unity in that it is primarily the story of Lawrence and his wife, their relationship and its meaning to them. There is no attempt to describe Lawrence, the writer, the thinker; one sees only Lawrence as his wife saw him. The book is, therefore, an unique contribution that only a wife could have written, for it has an authority and conviction not possible for anyone else. The picture of Lawrence, the man, is completed, as Mrs.Lawrence is able both to appreciate and express the peculiar quality of his personality.

Mrs. Lawrence's book is also valuable for its undeniable proof of Lawrence's essentially happy life. That he suffered

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48 F. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 288.

49 Ibid., p. 293.

greatly, was ignored and abused, is not denied, but at least he did what he wanted to do and went where he wanted to go. He enjoyed a great many things and could profit by all kinds of experience.

> "Of his short life didn't Lawrence make the most ! It was his deep sense of the reality of living... with real genius he got out of the quick of living the abiding values and said so in his writing.[50]

The life that Mrs. Lawrence chose with Lawrence was, to her, well worth its difficulties. "I believe the chief tie between Lawrence and me was always the wonder of living."[51] "I hadn't lived before I lived with Lawrence. It was drudgery... before."[52] Though at times things were very hard, she never regretted giving up her children and devoting her life to the erratic genius. Her reward was self-expression and development of her own character.

It would be hard to imagine anyone else but Frieda Lawrence as Lawrence's wife. Her faults were many; she caused Lawrence much pain and distress but on the whole she gave him what he needed badly at times — strength and a belief in himself. Had she been conventional or interfering or less adaptable, Lawrence might have been irretrievably ruined.

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50 F. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 74.

51 Ibid., p. 70.

52 Ibid., p. 74.

Mrs. Lawrence's own individuality is most clearly brought out in her book. She shows her amazing candor and directness, her uncompromising view of people and things. She has not tried to be literary. Her style is most naïve, unaffected, and colloquial. Above all, she shows herself to be completely realistic.

Mrs. Lawrence has included in her narrative of Lawrence some poems, an article entitled The Nightingale, and many unpublished letters of Lawrence's to herself, to her mother and to her sister. These letters reveal Lawrence even more intimately than do the collected Letters; they show Lawrence in his own family circle. The friendship between Lawrence and his mother-in-law, a German baroness, was remarkable. His letters to her show how extraordinarily understanding and sympathetic he could be.

# CHAPTER VIII

## CONCLUSION

"Husband and wife — how much in common, how different in type."

- Ruffini.

There are a number of conclusions suggested by a review of the foregoing material. Since men do not usually choose wives for their merit as possible biographers, and women also do not as a rule pick out husbands for their value as subjects for biography, wives of authors are inevitably amateurs. The ideals of good biography have been evolved from the work of professional biographers, people of knowledge and talent who apply themselves long and seriously to their difficult task. Amateurs cannot be expected to compete with professional biographers in matters of scholarship, organisation, and literary ability.

Wives of authors, however, do have a possible advantage over other biographers. The evidence they can submit is derived from a prolonged and direct contact with the subject of the biography, a contact possible to no one else. Other biographers, even if close friends, can only view their subjects from time to time; their evidence is more casual, fragmentary,

and indirect. Therefore wives may offer contributions of great value to biography. Mrs. Conrad showed a Joseph Conrad that his friends could never see, the Conrad of intimate family life. She could also correct misapprehensions about Conrad — for instance, she was able to give the true facts of the relationship between Conrad and F. M. Hueffer. Marguérite Bennett contributed a few new facts about Arnold Bennett's youth and family. Dorothy Bennett reveals an inner, psychological Bennett, adding much to the understanding of the outward man and author. Mrs. Hardy contributes the ground-work for other biographers of Thomas Hardy, consisting of all the facts that Hardy himself wished to give to the world. Frieda Lawrence, though confining herself to a partial portrait of D.H. Lawrence, could write of him with an assurance possible to no one else and thereby help to clear the fog of conflicting ideas and impressions concerning Lawrence.

Such contributions are only valid in so far as a wife is honest. Mrs. Jack London deliberately set out to further the legend of an optimistic and virile Jack London. Her biography is manifestly untrue in its implications and is a hindrance to the proper evaluation of Jack London, the man and the artist. Mrs. Hardy also biased her biography by her desire to present

Thomas Hardy as an optimistic writer and an orthodox member of the Church of England.

A wife's long and intimate contact with her husband is also only valuable if they are temperamentally suited to one another. It was impossible for Marguerite Bennett to write impartially of Arnold Bennett; their natures remained mutually unsympathetic. To compensate for her psychological humiliation Mrs. Bennett wrote of her husband with a definite purpose in mind: to show that she was a deserted and neglected wife unjustly separated from a husband who really loved and needed her. Sympathy between husband and wife is absolutely necessary before a wife can understand her husband and write of him with truth.

There also seems to be some correlation between the value of these women as wives and as biographers, though so many factors are involved that there is danger of over-simplification. Mrs. Conrad was, perhaps, the only person that could have lived with Joseph Conrad; she was so indispensable to him that it is quite possible that but for her Conrad might never have written as he did. Though her work is faulty and incomplete, she contributed many facts about Conrad as a man and a husband. Dorothy Bennett provided her husband with the

sympathy and help that he needed at a crucial time in his life. Her study of her husband is the most ambitious, as it attempts a real penetration of his character. Mrs. Hardy was all that a devoted and unselfish wife could be. Her work is a typical nineteenth century official biography — a faithful reflection of her husband's wishes. Frieda Lawrence was indispensable to Lawrence emotionally; she helped release his creative powers, and she, too, achieved a more successful interpretation.

There seems to be one element in the relationship of wife and husband that is intensified by the fact that the husband is an author — the adjustment of the two personalities one to the other. An artist being commonly a very self-centered person (though naturally there are exceptions), his ego tends to dominate that of his partner. With the exception of Marguerite Bennett, Dorothy Bennett, and Frieda Lawrence, these wives were absorbed by their husbands. Mrs. Conrad obeyed her husband implicitly and made herself his slave. Mrs. Hardy was a loving nurse and companion for Hardy's last years. Mrs. London also was a companion to her husband, not influencing him in any way. The others asserted themselves. Marguerite Bennett struggled to assert her own personality and lost; Dorothy Bennett and Frieda Lawrence struggled and won, each

retaining both their husband's love and their own individuality.

Finally, we may ask whether these wives threw light on their husbands' domestic life, on their quality and character as men, and on their aims and performance as artists. Mrs. Conrad, Dorothy Bennett and Mrs. Lawrence, as we have seen, add considerably to knowledge of Conrad, Bennett, and Lawrence as men and husbands. Marguérite Bennett, Mrs. Hardy, and Mrs. London did not contribute anything new about their husband's domestic life or show much insight into their characters. And none of these wives contributed to an understanding of the relationship between the author and his art. Dorothy Bennett and Mrs. Lawrence alone possessed the capacity to do so but were primarily concerned with the more personal aspects of their husbands' lives.

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