



# The Old Wives' Tale

*Arnold Bennett*

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## **The Old Wives' Tale** Arnold Bennett

English novelist. Bennett believed that ordinary people had the potential to be the subject of interesting books. In this respect, an influence which Bennett himself acknowledged was the French writer Maupassant whose "Une Vie" inspired "The Old Wives' Tale". Maupassant is also one of the writers on whom Richard Larch, the protagonist of Bennett's first (and obviously semi-autobiographical) novel, A Man from the North, tries in vain to model his own writing. In 1908 The Old Wives' Tale was published and was an immediate success throughout the English-speaking world.

Contemporary critics — Virginia Woolf in particular — perceived weaknesses in his work. To her and other Bloomsbury authors, Bennett represented the "old guard" in literary terms. His style was traditional rather than modern, which made him an obvious target for those challenging literary conventions. For much of the 20th Century, Bennett's work was tainted by this perception; it was not until the 1990s that a more positive view of his work became widely accepted. The noted English critic John Carey praises him, declaring Bennett to be his "hero" because his writings "represent a systematic dismemberment of the intellectuals' case against the masses".

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