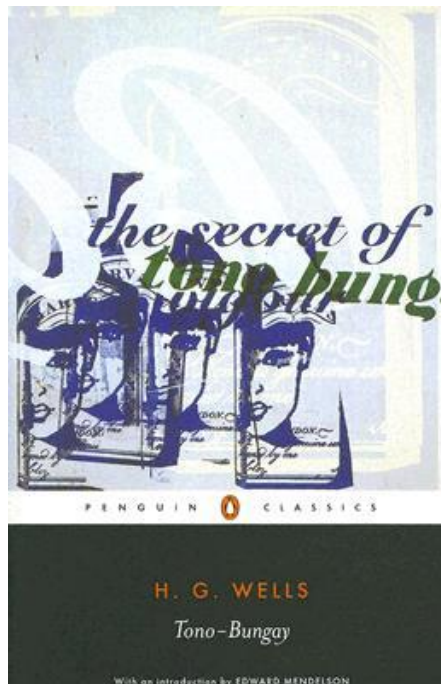




## Tono-Bungay

*H.G. Wells , Edward Mendelson (Introduction) , Patrick Parrinder (Editor)*

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# Tono-Bungay

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**Tono-Bungay** H.G. Wells , Edward Mendelson (Introduction) , Patrick Parrinder (Editor)

Presented as a miraculous cure-all, Tono-Bungay is in fact nothing other than a pleasant-tasting liquid with no positive effects. Nonetheless, when the young George Ponderevo is employed by his uncle Edward to help market this ineffective medicine, he finds his life overwhelmed by its sudden success. Soon the worthless substance is turned into a formidable fortune as society becomes convinced of the merits of Tono-Bungay through a combination of skilled advertising and public credulity.

-Includes a newly established text, a full biographical essay on Wells, a list of further reading, and detailed notes

-Edward Mendelson's introduction explores the many ways in which *Tono-Bungay* satirizes the fictions and delusions that shape modern life

## Tono-Bungay Details

Date : Published June 28th 2005 by Penguin Books (first published 1909)

ISBN : 9780141441115

Author : H.G. Wells , Edward Mendelson (Introduction) , Patrick Parrinder (Editor)

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Genre : Fiction, Classics

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## From Reader Review Tono-Bungay for online ebook

### Genia Lukin says

H. G. put that hammer you've been beating your readers over the head with down. Put it down. Now take a step away from the hammer. Good... good, just a step away--

NO! NO! Don't pick up the hammer again! Don't pick it up I said!

Oh God he has the hammer and he's chasing us with it again! Run! Run!!

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### Elizabeth (Alaska) says

A book often starts a bit slowly for me, but after 30 or 40 pages, I'll gather more interest. I did not expect this to be any different. Early, is this: *I thought of my uncle as Teddy directly I saw him; there was something in his personal appearance that in the light of that memory phrased itself at once as Teddiness -- a certain Teddidity.* Teddidity. Certainly I could look forward to more such imaginative phrasing.

Unfortunately, I never noticed another. I wonder if Wells got tired writing this, because I kept falling asleep reading it. I expected more action, or more concentration on this flamboyant Teddidity character. Nope. Instead, the first person narrator wandered off into his rather boring life and told about it completely analytically, as if he had not lived it.

My only Wells, as science fiction doesn't interest me, so I'm unlikely to read anything else by him.

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### Metaphorosis says

reviews.metaphorosis.com

3.5 stars

George, is expelled from the manor his mother serves in, and bounces around until he lands with his uncle, a chemist. He departs again, but returns once his uncle develops a successful line of snake oil. Despite his qualms, George, a talented engineer, helps out with sales and development, and their fortunes grow.

I first read this many years, and liked it, though I also misremembered it as having something to do with a potion that caused floating (which seems to be a conflation of *Mary Poppins* and a short story whose title evades me). In fact, it's a novel of social commentary and critique of English life, lightly wrapped in adventure and romance.

The introduction to my paperback edition says that George's early life is closely based on author Herbert George's, and he does seem to know the material well. The first section of the book is a sharp analysis of a system of social classes and habits largely decrepit and outdated. It's keenly observed, and it seems credible that Wells is speaking from experience.

The novel largely follows George as he wanders on the fringes of his uncle's ventures, helpful, but disdainful and often disinterested. It recounts his distraction from study and work, his failures in love, and the partial waste of a natural talent for engineering. It's all wrapped in social critique, with comments on the class system, socialism, politics, economics, and other topics.

All that sounds dull, but it's not. As I re-discovered when reading *Ann Veronica* (a mainstream novel that immediately followed *Tono Bungay*), Wells was an excellent writer, with a fine sense for character, and an ability to convey his social opinion without overburdening his narrative. The purpose of *Tono Bungay* is clearly to express concern about England's direction, but that doesn't stop it from being a very successful novel as well.

The ending of the novel is an interesting mix. Our hero comes through bruised but whole, but the future of the country seems less bright. The result is a sad and lonely feeling, but not entirely without hope.

Unlike *Ann Veronica*, the women in this book are two-dimensional. In fact, pretty much the only full characters are George and his uncle, but it works despite that. George's aunt, Susan, is a key figure who nonetheless gets short shrift. There's a brief mention at the end that deserved a lot more space, and I was disappointed that Wells didn't make more of her and her relationship with George. Instead, she's played mostly for comic relief, and I got the feeling that Wells considered but then abandoned a larger role for her. I wish he had followed through; she deserved more time, and it would have added an interesting element to George's personal life.

Overall, a very readable, interesting novel that deserves more attention.

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### **melanie says**

At times, I almost really liked this book for its criticism of consumer capitalism (for a book published in 1909, T-B feels ahead of its time in this respect) and the realness of some of the characters, but I got fed up with the narrator/author constantly explaining his own symbolism... not to mention his random anti-semitic remarks, his problematic relationship to women/marriage, and that especially disturbing Heart of Darkness voyage into Africa, where in a typical heart-of-darkness/Quap-fevered state, he loses all his "european morality/civility/etc" and kills a totally innocent African man. I mean, shit, come on.

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### **Kim says**

"*Tono-Bungay*" is a novel written by H. G. Wells and published in 1909. It has been called "*arguably his most artistic book*." As for Wells himself he considered "*Tono-Bungay as the finest and most finished novel upon the accepted lines*" that he had "*written or was ever likely to write*." While reading the novel I also read a biography of Wells and found many interesting things about the author.

Although Wells was a prolific writer in many genres, including the novel, history, politics, and social commentary, he is now best remembered for his science fiction novels. His most famous science fiction works include "*The War of the Worlds, The Time Machine and The Invisible Man*." He has been called the father of science fiction, of course other authors have also been called the father of science fiction, so I guess we all get to pick whoever we want for the title. As to "*Tono-Bungay*", I've read at other places, including the introduction to my copy of the book that it is a "*realist satire on consumer capitalism and a commentary on*

*social injustice*", but since these are terms that sound nothing like something I would say and I would never use, I won't use them here either, I will simply take the writer of the introduction's word for it.

In 1874 when just a young boy he had an accident that left him bedridden with a broken leg. To pass the time he started reading books from the local library. He soon became fascinated with the other worlds and lives to which books gave him access; and they stimulated his desire to write. Wells spent three very unhappy years as an apprentice to a draper, he also worked as a pupil-teacher at a school in Somerset and again apprenticed for a chemist in Midhurst. Wells studied biology at the Normal School of Science earning a bachelor of science and doctor of science degrees. I wonder who decided to name the school the "Normal" School of Science. I'll have to go see if there is an abnormal school of science somewhere when I'm done with this. His first writings were short stories and articles published in journals.

Now I'm moving on to what I thought was the most interesting and puzzling thing about his life. He first married his cousin Isabel Mary Wells in 1891, they divorced in 1894 after Wells fell in love with one of his students, Amy Catherine Robbins, whom he married in 1895. For some reason that I don't know he called her Jane. Ok, here's the puzzling thing, *with his wife Jane's consent*, Wells had affairs with a number of women, including the American birth control activist Margaret Sanger, adventurer and writer Odette Keun and novelist Elizabeth von Arnim. He had a daughter with the writer Amber Reeves; and in 1914, a son, by the novelist Rebecca West. What I have a hard time figuring out is why in the world his wife gave her consent to this. Oh well, I'll probably never know so I will give up on pondering the subject and move on to *"Tono-Bungay"*.

Our main character and narrator of the story is George Ponderevo, the son of the housekeeper at a great estate called Bladesover. When as a boy he has a fist fight with a young aristocrat he is sent by his mother, first to her cousin Nicodemus Frapp, and after he runs away from there, he is sent as a fully indentured apprentice, to his uncle Edward Ponderevo. Uncle Edward dreams of making it big, and after years of failure he succeeds with his patent medicine he names *"Tono-Bungay"*. Uncle Edward is bottling a sham tonic, it is completely devoid of any actual medicinal benefit, but he is advertising it with a flair and succeeding very well. Edward is a genius at marketing, Tono-Bungay advertisements are everywhere. On billboards all over the city of London, newspaper advertisements and posters. And as the advertisements tell us Tono-Bungay could do just about anything. Eventually we have:

*"Tono-Bungay Hair Stimulant"*

*"Concentrated Tono-Bungay" for the eyes*

*"Tono-Bungay Lozenges"*

*"Tono-Bungay Chocolate." "You can GO for twenty-four hours," the ad tells us, "on Tono-Bungay Chocolate."*

*and finally, Tono-Bungay Mouthwash. "You are Young Yet, but are you Sure Nothing has Aged your Gums?"*

And so Tono-Bungay grows and grows and Uncle Edward gets richer and richer. However, like all businesses that grow and grow eventually it stops, at least that's how business seems to me. Except maybe McDonalds come to think of it. I'll have to give some thought to see if I come up with any other businesses that just grow and grow and never stop growing.

Now skipping over what happens to Tono-Bungay, whether it keeps growing and has now taken over the world, you will have to find out for yourself, I am moving on to quap. Somewhere in the middle of the novel an explorer named Gordon-Nasmyth appears in the Tono-Bungay offices telling a strange story about a substance called quap, *"the most radio-active stuff in the world."* Now if I found the most radio-active stuff

in the world my first move wouldn't be to run to a company that makes medicine, even if it is fake medicine, but that's what Gordon-Nasmyth does and uncle Edward and George both seem to be interested. Godon-Nasmyth tells them this about quap:

*"I'm sorry I came. But, still, now I'm here.... And first as to quap; quap, sir, is the most radio-active stuff in the world. That's quap! It's a festering mass of earths and heavy metals, polonium, radium, ythorium, thorium, carium, and new things, too. There's a stuff called Xk—provisionally. There they are, mucked up together in a sort of rotting sand. What it is, how it got made, I don't know. It's like as if some young creator had been playing about there. There it lies in two heaps, one small, one great, and the world for miles about it is blasted and scorched and dead. You can have it for the getting. You've got to take it—that's all!"*

He then shows them a sample telling them:

*"Don't carry it about on you," said Gordon-Nasmyth. "It makes a sore."*

As for where you get this stuff in the first place:

*"....within the thunderbelt of Atlantic surf, of the dense tangled vegetation that creeps into the shimmering water with root and sucker. He gave a sense of heat and a perpetual reek of vegetable decay, and told how at last comes a break among these things, an arena fringed with bone-white dead trees, a sight of the hard-blue sea line beyond the dazzling surf and a wide desolation of dirty shingle and mud, bleached and scarred.... A little way off among charred dead weeds stands the abandoned station,—abandoned because every man who stayed two months at that station stayed to die, eaten up mysteriously like a leper with its dismantled sheds and its decaying pier of wormrotten and oblique piles and planks, still insecurely possible. "*

I can't quite remember why anyone would actually want to touch this stuff, or carry it around, or turn into a leper getting it among the dead trees, or buy it for that matter, but as I said they do seem interested and it does take the book in another direction, at least for awhile anyway. Now why I am mentioning quap other than it is an interesting though creepy section of the book, is because I decided to look up the word - like I usually do - and was actually surprised to find there was a definition for it. Here's the first definition:

*"a hypothetical nuclear particle consisting of a quark and an antiproton"*

There wasn't too much in this definition that made sense to me so I looked up the words quark and antiproton, and as I suspected would happen, after reading the first line or two I just gave up and moved on. So I am now done with the quap, whether anyone is stupid enough to go get this stuff I'm not telling. In fact, I'm about done telling anything as far as the story goes. There are love affairs, marriages, divorces, deaths, and lots about aeronautical experiments with gliders and balloons. There's even a flight and I do mean flight from the authorities.

As for the actual word or words, I don't know which, I have been trying to figure out since I picked up the book what *"Tono-Bungay"* is. I could say it is the title of a book. No kidding. I could say it is a "patent medicine" that is just a sham, no kidding. But what is Tono-Bungay? I never found a clear answer. From what I've read the name is a play on words. It has been suggested it stands for "ton of bunk" -- but other possibilities are "tonic bunk", or even "tonic Ben-gay." Regardless of what it stands for, it is clear that Tono Bungay is not entirely good for you, and certainly does nothing to help you in the long run. I'm having trouble believing the tonic Ben-gay one because the only Bengay I know is that cream you buy at the drug store that is supposed to temporarily relieve muscle and joint pain, backaches; stuff like that, and I don't think it was around when the book was written, but of course, I'll have to go look it up.

I liked the book. I read at several different places that Wells with *"Tono-Bungay"*:

*"is able to claim a permanent place in English fiction, close to Dickens because of the extraordinary humanity of some of his characters, but also because of his ability to invoke a place, a class, a social scene."*

I liked the book alot, but for me anyway, it's not Dickens at all. Read it for yourself and see what you think.

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## Frumenty says

I took this up for some light relief during the reading of a long and serious novel in French which I am still reading. I wasn't disappointed. Wells held my attention without monopolising it to the detriment of my French reading.

Tono Bungay is the name of an elixir with no verifiable health value, but made immensely popular by clever marketing: today it would be called Red Bull. The narrator is the nephew of its inventor and promoter, and he goes along for the ride with his uncle from provincial obscurity to fame and huge financial success, and down again to financial ruin. The scenario serves Wells admirably as a vehicle for social and political commentary. His narrator (George Ponderevo) gives us Wells' opinions of the condition of England, the corruption of the financial system, the irrelevance of the old class system, and so on. The novel isn't preachy. George is a likeable narrator with a bent for science and technology. He has his reservations about the probity of his uncle's enterprise, but acquiesces out of a mixture of family loyalty and his need for the financial means to marry (the marriage is not a success). There are no villains in the novel. Uncle Edward Ponderevo is an amiable dreamer with a gift for publicity and sales, but mildly unscrupulous about foisting a worthless product on a gullible public. His kindness to his homeless nephew, starved of love and intellectual stimulation, recommends him to the reader's favour. George's opinions seem quite natural for a young man with an enquiring mind and the opportunity from the vantage points which the financial success of Tono Bungay affords him.

There are elements of the science fiction adventure in Tono Bungay: George invents a flying machine, and uses it to pluck uncle Edward out of the reach of his creditors; he also leads an unsuccessful expedition to darkest West Africa to obtain radioactive "quap". However, it is basically a social novel in the vein of Kipps or Mr Polly, but with the central theme being the power of clever publicity to mislead the masses, very prescient in 1909, before the two world wars and the Bolshevik Revolution.

Tono Bungay is a little quaint and dated, but an enjoyable read nevertheless, and I found much to admire in Wells' bold reflections on his times.

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## Jim Dooley says

I'd first heard of TONO-BUNGAY when recently reading a biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Apparently, this book by H.G. Wells was one of his favorite books. (H.G. Wells ... you mean THE WAR OF THE WORLDS and THE TIME MACHINE H.G. Wells? Yes, that's the one.) While I enjoy much of Wells' writing, I had a difficult time conceiving his creating a tale that would be one of Fitzgerald's favorites.

Well, TONO-BUNGAY is very different from what I would imagine from the pen of the distinguished

English author ... and it had a great many elements that would have appealed to Fitzgerald. It has distant, attractive women who are difficult for men to fathom, a world in which money opens doors as long as it flows, and the glamor of adventure for anyone willing to pursue it.

The central story revolves around the creation of a "quack" revitalizing medicine that takes the country by storm and keeps growing as sideline projects are intermixed. The main character repeatedly questions the ethics of making and selling something that can't deliver what was advertized, but is consoled that if people are buying it, it must be doing something good.

Although there are many satirical moments, I had the sense that the writer was steeped in this literary realm he created. For instance, the class-system is skewered, but it is no longer eternally closed to anyone not born with a golden spoon. Indeed, when anyone acquires enough money, they can roam in virtually any class circle. Yes, England was changing.

There were three general themes that greatly influenced the actions of the various characters. First, men (by their very nature) need an audience. Their accomplishments, their dreams, and their failed attempts are all done with the expectation that someone important to them will notice.

Women are uncertain about their emotions versus what is proper to do. However, they also have the wisdom that men lack. When allowed, they can be the guides that add substance to the wild flights of fancy from men.

Finally, over all of Life is a very real sense of Fatalism. People may strive and endeavor all they wish, Whether or not they will be successful has already been determined. If actions head in a different direction from what is meant to be, the perpetrator will run into a blockade.

These themes, while ably presented, were not a strong draw for me. TONO-BUNGAY (the name of the revitalizing medicine) is a long book with many rewards scattered throughout. There are also times that the story will dwell extensively on details. As I'd mentioned, some of this had to be very personal for the writer.

My biggest complaint was the tendency to tell the Reader what was going to happen and what the result would be BEFORE entering into the narrative. There would be statements similar to, "I then entered into this enterprise which would eventually result in my failure" ... and then the story of that particular enterprise is told in great detail. All the while, the Reader knows the final result, but not specifically what happened to cause the failure. That happens multiple times in the course of the book.

I cannot give it a strong recommendation. There are many worthwhile elements and concepts. However, I cannot see myself reading this one again.

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## Nadya Yurina says

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## Mike Puma says

I read this one before reading "'Tono-Bungay' and the Condition of England" in David Lodge's *Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel*; they're both good books. Not the kind of thing I was expecting from Wells

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## Arukiyomi says

The last of Wells' works that was on my tbr list for the 1001 books. Wells occasionally delights me, but, on the whole, though I do regard him a genius and a mind a century ahead of his time, his writing doesn't really grab me too much. *Tono-Bungay* was just such a novel.

George is lured into working for his uncle who has concocted some potion that he is flogging off as a cure-all. It's nothing of the sort though; as the business grows exponentially, like most things these days, rather than this demonstrating a superior product, it simply demonstrates superior marketing.

Eventually, the ethical skeletons come out of the closet of morality and give George nightmares he can't escape from without his whole life imploding. Or can he?

What I did appreciate about this book, coming as it does between those classics of sci-fi *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*, was that it was Wells turning his brilliant mind to something less alien: our everyday capitalist lives. I'm used to him dealing with more esoteric subjects like... well, like time travel or alien invasions. But this novel revealed that he very much understood not only his times but those to come. Quite a few of those who grace the front covers of our magazines might want to read a copy of this.

There's much more character development in this novel than in any other I've read of Wells. In other works, his characters seem to be dominated by the crisis at hand. In this one, it's very much the impact of crises on a character that is the focus. It's like Wells suddenly realised you can see through both ends of a telescope.

The weakness in the novel was, for me, the style. However, I'll put this down, not to any lack on Wells' part, but to the fact that while he is a writer ahead of his time, I'm a reader very much in or quite possibly behind my own time.

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## Marts (Thinker) says

H.G. Wells' bit of a satirical look at the effects of wealth, power and enterprise on ordinary lives... The tale follows the experiences of George Ponderevo who is 'encouraged' by his uncle to work with him on marketing a new product, a sort of 'miracle cure' thing, it also greatly expounds on George's experiences from childhood, to university, to the heart of London, then wealth, fame, his inventions and intentions, the uncle's eventual bankruptcy, and oh yes his various 'loves', etc, etc...

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## Jim says

I have read a number of H.G. Wells's early sci-fi novels. This is the first time I have read one of his "other" novels, and I am surprised to see that it is by far his best work. Tono-Bungay is a *bildungsroman* about growing up poor in Victorian England and making one's way in the world by a combination of luck, good and bad.

The good luck is hero George Ponderevo's association with his uncle Edward, the inventor of a nostrum called Tono-Bungay. He brings his nephew George in with him and becomes a fantastically rich financier -- until ... until the whole thing comes undone.

The bad luck consists of George's three attempts at love. He marries, but it ends in a kind of listless divorce. Then there is a bright affair with a secretary, but that goes nowhere. Finally, there is Beatrice Normandy, whom George knew from his childhood. Unfortunately, she had made her accommodation in a lazy ongoing relationship with an English lord.

There are times when the novel seems to lose its way, as if Wells was not used to writing a 400-page novel, but he keeps coming back:

Don't imagine that I am coming presently to any sort of solution of my difficulties. Here among my drawings and hammerings NOW, I still question unanswering problems. All my life has been at bottom, SEEKING, disbelieving always, dissatisfied always with the thing seen and the thing believed, seeking something in toil, in force, in danger, something whose name and nature I do not clearly understand, something beautiful, worshipful, enduring, mine profoundly and fundamentally, and the utter redemption of myself; I don't know—all I can tell is that it is something I have ever failed to find.

I will continue to read more of Wells's sci-fi novels, but I think I will also check out **Kipps** and **The History of Mr. Polly**.

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## Scarlett says

only halfway through this one, but am loving it. once again a white male british protagonist (must read more women writers soon!), but the protagonist/author is incredible with writing descriptive detail. a great social commentary on class systems, industrialization in london, exploitation of the masses through marketing/advertising, etc. and an incredible vocabulary builder. SO many words i didn't know, but so well used i can discern their meaning contextually.

update: as with most satire, i "got the point" and started to get bored with it. but that was well into the novel.

i may lack patience.

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## Rebecca says

This is a novel that deserves to be read more. Wells turns his sociologist's eye to the modern social structure and shows the absurdity and ruthlessness at the heart of modern society. A real novel of its moment, Tono-Bungay covers the opening days of modern advertising, the "bubble" and then the financial crash of 1908,

exploitation of colonial mineral resources, the invention of airplanes, and a whole host of other things. If you thought Wells was only about science-fiction, give this book a try and see what everyone has been missing.

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### **Ian says**

A real curate's egg of a novel. I was never quite sure which direction it was heading in. If you have only read Wells' Sci-Fi, it's hard not to expect the technological future as imagined in 1909 appearing. When the novel gets going and gets into the story of the narrator's crackpot scheming uncle and his liquid panacea Tono-Bungay that makes his fortune, I felt either some miraculous placebo effect was going to occur or the tale would double back into an hilarious expose of the hucksters, shysters and advertising confidence tricksters of the time. In the end it does neither, but mildly exposes the limitations of the crude capitalist and equally crude class-driven society. When a hobby in aeronautics and a heart-of-darkness style excursion to steal some radioactive African guano are thrown into the mix, the result is interesting, but uneven.

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### **Apryl Anderson says**

(7.01.1994), This was such a sad story, but brilliantly written. Is this how Wells felt about his life? His dealings with women were rather strange. Did he prefer them to be unpredictable? Seems that way; or was it that he knew that the best ones were just as intelligent as himself, therefore just as flighty? I was disgusted with his excusing away an affair. It was his fault that he ruined his relationship with his wife. Why are men trained to think so differently about marriage? After the conquest, they get lazy, while the woman has to work to keep him around. Is it worth it?

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### **Tiffany says**

It seems to be the way with books (sci-fi books?) of this era that the premise is one thing, but then the story drifts this way and that to include other major plots.

For example, the main story here seems to be George and his uncle, Edward, creating a tonic that everyone just HAS to have. Fabulous. But then... George and flying machines? George and some substance in Africa that is going to make his business rich? I mean, sure, people's lives aren't just one thing, but this is a \*story\*, and the story seems to stray from the original plot.

It's still a decent book, though; I just don't always understand why writers from this era seem to start down one path, then take huge turns down other paths, so that by halfway through, we're no longer reading the same story we started with. I certainly didn't mind the portions of the story about George's personal life: growing up, his studies, his love life; I didn't even so much mind the subplot about him inventing a flying machine. But when we started getting into the secret element/substance that could be found in Africa, that's when I realized we were straying WAY far from the original plot. Luckily, that portion wasn't very long, and we returned back to the story of Edward and his tonic.

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## Laura says

Free download available at Project Gutenberg.

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## James says

This is Wells writing stylistically like Dickens in a mode of novel-writing that aims at the nineteenth century version of social justice (even though it was published at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century). Today he is mainly remembered for his science fiction. "Tono Bungay" is an unusual work in that it straddles two of these genres: it is both science fiction and social commentary. The novel follows the rise and fall of an empire built on a quack medicine. The medicine, Tono Bungay, gives the book its title. Regardless of what it stands for, it is clear that Tono Bungay is not entirely good for you, and probably harmful in the long run. The short-term effects are however sufficiently pleasing so as to make a fortune for its inventor. The novel is narrated by a young man, George Ponderevo, who, while not as appealing as the best of Dickens' heroes, has a certain charm. His rise along with that of his Uncle Teddy is chronicled with wit and an ear for the details of turn of the century commerce that make the book rewarding to the interested reader. Wells was able to write deeper and had a greater palette than those who may have only read his early science-romances might imagine. However Wells does add instances of science fiction even in this novel and often they are only remotely related to the main topic. Such is the case for the various experiments in air travel which make up a substantial part of the book. Yet another science fiction episode concerns a mysterious ore, which appears to be radioactive. Ostensibly, the purpose of this ore is to provide Tono Bungay a new infusion and lease on life. Radioactivity had only recently been discovered when Wells wrote this novel, and indeed was very mysterious. Wells treats the radioactive ore as something that fundamentally corrupts all that it touches.

The result is an unusual book that as a whole is better than most of Wells' many works of science fiction.

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## James says

'Tono-Bungay' is a story of the English class system, social mores and social climbing. More specifically, it is a story of capitalism, the advertising industry and the generation of income / creation of wealth based on the sale and promotion of pointless, ineffective products that the buying public never knew they 'needed' until they were actually told that they (apparently) did. The novel explores the moral dilemmas intrinsic to this process and looks at the very thin line between advertising / creative marketing and fraud.

It is against this backdrop that 'Tono-Bungay' follows the emotional life and development of main protagonist George Ponderevo, his various relationships and their associated challenges. It looks at George's disillusionment with religion and the moral questions thrown up by the business 'opportunities' offered to him throughout. Along with his entertaining aeronautical adventures and endeavours, the parts of 'Tono-Bungay' concentrating on George's relationships are for me the most convincing and compelling parts of the novel.

Where 'Tono-Bungay' works less well is as political / social satire, an attempt that for me isn't quite as successful as perhaps it could be. The metaphors here (e.g. village / estate / London / voyage down the Thames) as microcosms of society / life etc, are either too obvious, blunt or just don't work as well as they should do.

Where the novel is more successful is as a critique and deconstruction of capitalism and the free market economy. 'Tono-Bungay' looks at the deceptions of the advertising industry, the wealth consequently generated and the discomfort of George Ponderevo with that underlying premise. Wells looks at society as seemingly built almost entirely on this basis and the resultant disparities and inequalities in wealth. To some extent, it is here where the novel is most revealing, enlightening and thought-provoking.

Whilst it is appreciated that (for example) 'The History of Mr Polly' and 'Kipps The Story of a Simple Soul' are more entertainment, less serious and satirical in nature than 'Tono-Bungay' – it just doesn't work as well as either of those two novels (likewise with Wells classic science fiction novels) – 'Tono-Bungay' doesn't engage, compel or convince in the same way and doesn't have the same sense of authenticity.

Undoubtedly there are some powerful messages contained here in 'Tono-Bungay' – seemingly: 'none of this is real' – ('this' presumably being a society being run on a capitalist, wealth based system with all its intrinsic inequalities) and that in life we should be looking for 'truth', the 'heart of life' and what Wells character refers to as 'reality science'.

Wells talks in this novel of the voyage of life and about becoming trapped and restrained in life by the meaningless distractions, contrived processes, relationships, falsehoods, false premises – with the deceptions inherent in a society based on capitalist free market economy, but isn't ultimately clear on what the answer or alternative would be?

'Tono-Bungay' has been referred to as Wells most artistic novel, which indeed it may well be. But for me, despite some excellent sections and passages in this novel it is ultimately somehow less than the sum of its parts.