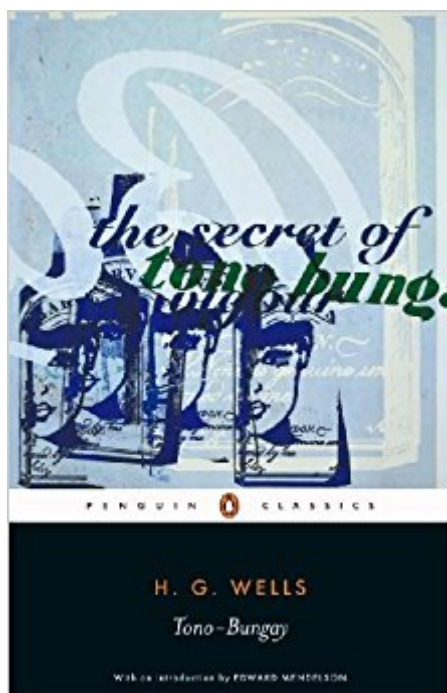


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Tono-Bungay (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

One of the greatest of all satires of the power of advertising and the modern press 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. As the newly rich George discovers, however, there is far more to class in England than merely the possession of wealth. This edition 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. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

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Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: 12 and up

Customer Reviews

Wells is less a man of letters than a literature. • ”Jorge Luis Borges

H.G. Wells was a professional writer and journalist, who published more than a hundred books, including novels, histories, essays and programmes for world regeneration. Wells's prophetic imagination was first displayed in pioneering works of science fiction, but later he became an apostle of socialism, science and progress. His controversial views on sexual equality and the shape of a truly developed nation remain directly relevant to our world today. He was, in Bertrand Russell's words, 'an important liberator of thought and action'. Edward Mendelson is a writer and critic with a particular interest in W.H. Auden. Patrick Parrinder has written on H.G. Wells, science fiction, James Joyce and the history of the English novel. Since 1986 he has been Professor of English at the University of Reading.

Honestly, I did not like Tono-Bungay in the least, but Wells clearly had something to say about society he just didn't get around to saying those things. Sections of the book are incredibly long-winded. There are too many anecdotes that, in my opinion, do not contribute to the flow of the story or any major themes or motifs in the book. This is major flaw in the book. There isn't good flow. Tono-Bungay reads as if it is a combination of different stories. This can go two ways: the book can more amazing or a disorganized mess. Tono-Bungay feels so disorganized. The narrator jumps from one story to next and then tries to make them connect but it didn't work me. The overall plot seems interesting and there are many interesting turning points in the book but the excitement of those turning points isn't delivered. The book, plain and simple, is boring. It felt like I was trying to read a textbook like a novel. Reading it made me sleepy. I barely made it through. Tono-Bungay isn't a bad book but it isn't good either. A lot could have been said about money, socio-economic status, and the values that come from them but it just didn't happen.

5 stars

Kind of sad to see only a couple other reviews of this book in all the various editions available on . It's not a forgotten "great" novel, but it's a very near miss--a scathing indictment of 20th century Capitalism that reads far more like it was written in 2009 than in 1909. George Ponderovo, whose life story closely parallels that of the author in many respects, is the rebellious son of a housekeeper for the English landed gentry. After a set-to with a social superior, George is farmed off to his uncle,

Edward Ponderovo, a small-town pharmacist who dreams of rising to the highest pinnacles of British society. To this end, Edward starts peddling a worthless patent medicine, and soon enough parlays his initial success into an ever-expanding financial empire based on little more than savvy advertising and wishful thinking. Inevitably, however, the bubble bursts and there is a price to pay for all involved. Wells's novel is a brilliant dissection of a society adrift, whose Old Order, based upon land and hereditary privilege, has been fatally undermined, but whose New Order are a bunch of rapacious, self-centered and amoral commercial hucksters preying on the credulous and greedy. A motif running through the novel is one of moral and social corruption: a society that has blindly accepted perpetual "growth" as the only desirable goal, not realizing that this same unhealthy and unsustainable cancerous "growth" is, in fact, destroying it. The resonances with 2012 are absolutely chilling. Further, Wells shows genius on the confusions and rationalizations of young love, still fettered in 1909 by very Victorian ideas of propriety and sublimation. The very long "Marion" chapter is one of the most brutally honest accounts of falling in love for the first time that I've ever read, and a highlight of the book. Regrettably, however, the novel loses focus in a very big way in its last 100 pages. Up to that point, I was prepared to hail it as a "masterpiece," but then, alas, it runs badly off the rails. The last of the protagonist's love affairs (with a member the landed aristocracy he first knew a boy) is full of wincingly overwrought, utterly implausible dialogue; and a trip to Africa on a desperate mission to rescue the Ponderovo empire seems under-written and ill-conceived, even as it glancingly touches on some of the horrors of British Colonialism. This, and a very melodramatic "escape" and death-bed scene, seriously soured me on the novel. Still, the first 2/3 of the book is so superb that the novel deserves more attention and respect. And if the ending is very flawed, it's flawed in interesting ways. More people should read this novel and see how very, very little has, in fact, changed during the last 100 years.

Wells was keenly aware of the time just passed -- with the death of Victoria -- and the time to come, with the ascension of Edward VII -- from a culture that produced tangible objects, to a culture that produced empty promises. His depiction of a dying culture is remarkable and engrossing, as the narrator blindly follows his uncle into a new, brave world of mechanized flight and snake oil. His growing disillusionment with the charlatans and nouveau riche predates Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway by 20 years. ". . . we Boomed, and for four years and a half we lived a life of mingled substance and moonshine. Until our particular unsoundness overtook us we went about in the most magnificent motorcars upon tangible highroads, made ourselves conspicuous and stately . . . ate sumptuously and had a perpetual stream of notes and money trickling into our pockets . . ." Clear-sighted and

sharply written, Wells offers a premonition which the next 100 years would sadly bear out.

On one level it's a treat to find a Wells novel I didn't know about. The main rise and fall story of making a huge success of something worthless is good and rather topical for us now but he has pasted in what looks like odd episodes from somewhere else- things he wanted to say that didn't amount to a novel, an article or even a short story and have just been chucked in. It somehow makes the central character less believable. Also in this Penguin edition Prof Mendelson's footnotes are highly suspect. Suspect on facts- Tristan & Isolde is not by a long way Wagner's 1st opera, and suspect when speculating- in the final Thames river journey "Astor's strong box" is far more likely to mean the Astor Estate Office at 2 Temple place than it being a private joke or a building in Holborn that would not be visible from the river.

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