



Social and philosophical aspects of H.G. wells Tono-Bungay

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Abstract

Herbert George Wells was a prolific writer and he is chiefly remembered for his science fiction but in his social novels he experimented with realism in Edwardian era. He threw light on common people and survival of the people in the modern world.

Tono-Bungay is one of the most important novels of modern times and the novel combines the theme and technique of Well's earlier work in a vast cohesive narrative of ambition, triumph, dissolution and loss. It is the story of country hectic with a wasting aimless fever of trader, money making, pleasure seeking and a story of activity and urgency and sterility. Tono-Bungay is concerned not only the social change but with the perplexity of the individual, contained and controlled by his social environment.

Keywords: dissolution, sterility, humbug, ebullient, rejuvenation, rapacious, alleviate, debenture, ostensibly

Introduction

Herbert George Wells better known as HG Wells was a prolific writer. His works largely fall into the three genres 1. Science Fiction 2. Social commentary and critique and 3. Popular summaries of history and Science topics. Today he is mainly remembered for his science fiction but in his social novels he experimented with realism in Edwardian era. He focused his attention on the common people and survival of the people in the modern world. In his fresh and valuable studies of the time he was a writer with a purpose who dealt in problems. Wells presented a revolutionary but humane philosophy of life in new narrative forms and perfect technique.

Tono-Bungay is one of the most significant novels of modern times, one of the sincerest and the most unflinching analysis of the dangers and perils of our contemporary life. The novel combines the theme and technique of wells' earlier works in a vast cohesive narrative of ambition, triumph, dissolution and loss. It is a story of country hectic with a wasting aimless fever of trader, money making, pleasure-seeking and a story of activity and urgency and sterility.

Patick Parrinder comments

"Tono-Bungay is patent medicine, invented by a provincial chemist, Edward Ponderevo and upon its shoulders the inventor rises to universal repute and incalculable fortunes. And Tono-Bungay is taken by Wells as symbol of all the ugly reality of modern commerce the greedy trade, the base profit seeking, the bold shameless advertisement of the age the push and boom by which a gross imposture can be foisted upon the public."^[1]

Tono-Bungay exposes the hollowness of capitalism and superiority of socialism. This novel adopts the special subjective view point which became the norm of 20th century. Tono-Bungay is the history of rise and fall of humbug-the

fortunes of almost every side of modern society. Well's ability to hold himself up to judgement adds to the moral authority with which he judges the economic and social world around him.

The success of Tono-Bungay, is based on Coca-Cola, which wells probably learned about during his visit to the United States in 1906, Coca-Cola had been invented by and Atlanta Pharmacist in 1886, contained stimulating extracted of Kola nut and Coca leaves (Including traces of Cocaine) was marketed as a brain and nerve tonic and had unprecedented commercial success.

Roughly, the story is the life history of the narrator George. At the age of fourteen George finds refuse with his uncle Edward Ponderovo, an ebullient country chemist who dreams of huge commercial success. He has made a smashing success with Tono-Bungay, A patent medicine that promises rejuvenation. Those days Tono-Bungay was selling like hot cakes. At first, George balks at his uncle's plea that he needs George to run the company. Because it is the one that assails the kidneys. It is pretty intoxicating cocks their tails. George thinks it a dammed swindle. But his uncle tells that it gives people confidence against an epidemic and there is no harm in the stuff.

Edward wants to know what short of trading not a swindle in its way. Everybody who does a large advertised trade a selling something common on the strength of saying its uncommon. The romantic side of the mad game of modern commercial and the journalistic adventure; the dodges of forcing worthless wares on a gullible public and getting rich quick all this described with utmost verve and strange mixture of contempt and tolerance. The story of Tono-Bungay established the idea of the diseased life of the whole social body.

Edward Ponderovo's business career offers the occasion for a satirical portrait of late Victorian and Edwardian England. Although George Ponderovo knows (and Edward Ponderovo

half tried not to know) that Tono-Bungay is a mischievous trash, slightly stimulating, aromatic and attractive and insidiously dangerous to people with defective kidney. Morally and intellectually George is the opposite of his uncle Edward, but Edwards too is a self-portrait of wells, although in a far more secret and ambiguous way. Though Edward's fraudulent public persona, through his ill won status as financial giant among rapacious plutocrats, wells comments sardonically on his own increasing fame as social prophet.

George thinks that there is a way of living without either fraud or lying. He does not succumb without a struggle to his uncle's allurements. He held out for a week while he contemplates life and its prospects. From first to last, he sees the business with his open eyes, he sees its ethical and moral values quite clearly. A thing that deters him from the outset for more than the sense of dishonesty in this affair, is the supreme silliness of the whole concern.

George describes here his uncle's view where Tono-Bungay shouted at him from a hoarding near Adelphi Terrace. He thought over it- "Trade rules the world wealth rather than trade! The thing was true too was my uncle's proposition that the quickest was to get wealth is to sell the cheapest thing possible in the dearest bottles. He was frightfully right after all."^[2]

Patrick Parrinder comments

"Edward Ponderevo is an absolute imposter, of every narrow wit, but of inveterate opportunism, who so thoroughly deceives himself into crediting his own lies that the reader...finds his sympathy compelled to take the impostor's side against the very world he wrongs. Specious, slippery, enthusiastic, born with the quick mastery over circumstances which helps very village Napoleon to control his own fate up to certain fatal point, Ponderevo is a masterpiece of whim, the very conception of which would have been impossible to the novelist of fifty years ago. He is entirely a product of later day competition, of the Americanization (perhaps) of English business morality^[3]".

For George knows that the product is bogus, kept float by aggressive advertising and not by inherent positive property. He is troubled by what he sees as modern life's tendency to market goods of no intrinsic values, products that contribute nothing substantial to the economy or to the health of country. The invention of Tono-Bungay brings them wealth, influence, respect and the confidence of endless people. They advertise their tonic and its various offshoots. Such as here H.G. Wells shows the cheap way of advertisement to humbug the people.

In the evening paper it was usually a quarter column, "Hilarity- Tono-Bungay like Mountain Air in the vein.' The penetrating trio of question: Are you bored with your business? Are you bored with your dinner? Are you bored with your wife?" And they had their first poster- THE Health, Beauty and Strength One^[4]."

Even they do admirable things with their next subsidiaries, Tono-Bungay Lozenges and Tono-Bungay Chocolate. These they urge upon the public for their extraordinary nutritive and recuperative values in cases of fatigue and strain. They give them posters and illustrated advertisements showing climbers hanging from marvelously vertical cliffs "You can go for twenty-four hours," they declared on Tono-Bungay chocolate.

And for the Tono-Bungay mouthwash they declared" You are

young yet but are you sure nothing has aged your gum^[5]".

"The medicine Tono-Bungay has not intrinsic beneficial qualities. It cannot fulfill the claims of its inventor to restore vitality and alleviate fatigue and boredom. In this sense, therefore, it provides an appropriate image for the nothingness underlying Ponderevo's achievements. But in another way, the particular desires and needs it appeals to be also significant- its success depends upon a powerful general urge to create identity through the intensification of individual experience.

Edward becomes a sort of vertex to which wealth flowed at its own accord, his possessions, increased by heaps, his shares, his leaseholds and mortgages and debentures. He keeps on shopping to astonish. He starts to construct a building to crest hill a twentieth century house. Edward spends million on the project and dismay until the magnificent smash of crest hill ended his shopping forever.

It is curious how many of these modern financiers of chance and bluff have ended their career by building. It was not nearly him. Something happens to the great schemes of Edward's affairs, people were beginning in security. Edward was going to collapse as a result of his fraudulent practices.

So due to business crises George has to go to West Africa to steal the heaps radioactive quap. The island on which quap has risen from the earth is called Mordet Island, a name that alludes to death. It is forbidden ground- a place where trade with foreign countries is barred by colonial authorities.

Ostensibly the purpose of this mysterious 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 mysteriously- Wells treats the radioactive ore as something the fundamentally corrupts all that it touches – not unlike in the 50's film- "The Blob."

George describes Radioactivity is a real disease of matter. Moreover, it is a contagious disease and spells out its metaphoric connection with his social theme. It is a matter exactly what the decay of our old culture is in society, a loss of tradition and distinction, and assured reaction.

The expedition is unsuccessful. He returns empty hand to Lady Grove. The withdrawal of public support inevitably brings about the destruction of Edward's financial empire. He finds his uncle bankrupt. George eventually sees his uncle not as a highly individualistic adventurer but as a spectacular image of contemporary life, his desire to accumulate wealth no more than reflecting the selfishness and materialism of his age.

Wells' writing both reflects and unruly and unwholesome growth of modern life, but also focuses the problem of how social instability must affect the inner ability to create order. Tono-Bungay is concerned not only with social change and scene but with the perplexity of the individual, contained and controlled by his social environment.

Edward's life is one vast panorama of human waste, and that is, indeed, the theme of entire story. For waste-dire, irremediable human waste this is the black angle which spreads its wings over the whole record of Tono-Bungay. The story end in facility and failure and the novel as a whole is a vision of disintegration personal relations, a disintegration society, even a disintegrating universe. Tono-Bungay better has called it waste.

William Bellomy comments

"Tono-Bungay is the remarkable tour de force, that it is for the very reason that it engenders cultural disintegration in the reader's experience of reading the novel. By the end of the novel the reader is able more nearly to share the experience of post cultural man, because he has been sharing in the process by which a confused mind has set out, analytically, the grounds of its confusion^[6]."

It is dark reflection darkly imagined, but it is Wells' contribution to philosophy and in Tono-Bungay it is embodied in actual life, with all the intense conviction of a masterpiece.

References

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