

“I HAD RATHER BE CALLED A JOURNALIST THAN AN ARTIST” – AN
ASSESSMENT OF THE ARTISTIC CREDIBILITY OF THE NOVELS OF
H. G. WELLS

by

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ABSTRACT

As the perceived loser of the debate, the fallout from H. G. Wells's quarrel with Henry James concerning the aesthetic of the novel has had disastrous ramifications for Wells's literary reputation. Whilst Henry James is considered a hugely influential figure in the development of modernist fiction, Wells's work is often regarded as synonymous with the nineteenth-century Realist novels that modernist novelists were attempting to usurp. This thesis will suggest that whilst Wells's novels are clearly not written to parallel the aesthetically charged narratives characteristic of James and other modernist writers, they are written with an artistic purpose commensurate with a fictional aesthetic personal to Wells himself. Through an analysis of *Kipps* (1905), the first chapter will argue that whilst aspects of Wells's fiction do suggest that Wells was committed towards writing in the Realist tradition, he ultimately strained the limits of the form in an attempt to fulfil his own aesthetic ambitions. The second chapter will consider Wells's break from the Realist tradition in the novels *Tono-Bungay* (1909) and *The Bulpington of Blup* (1932) and will show that whilst Wells turned away from the literary establishment following his quarrel with James, he continued to write with a sense of himself as a conscious artist throughout his literary career.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Jean Mary Barnett, who sadly passed away in November 2007, and is greatly missed.

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INTRODUCTION: H. G. WELLS – JOURNALIST OR ARTIST?

H. G. Wells's assertion in a letter to Henry James, dated July 1915 that, "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist" (Edel and Ray 264) has had disastrous consequences for Wells's literary reputation. The reason for this is essentially two-fold. Firstly, it is the remark of a writer who in a single sentence appeared to turn his back on the literary world in which he had built up a status of considerable credibility alongside such figures as James, Arnold Bennett and Joseph Conrad. Secondly, it is critically perceived as the resigning comment of a novelist who espoused the losing side of an aesthetic debate that has come to be recognised as crucial to our understanding of the development of modernist fiction. The letter itself is addressed in the terms of an apology for the lack of tact Wells had shown in his cruel caricature of James in the pages of his 1915 novel *Boon*. Here, James is referred to as a producer of "tales of nothingness", a "magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea which has got into a corner of its den" (Edel and Ray 249).

The ruthlessness of Wells's portrayal of James was not without provocation. Since 1898 the pair had shared a close correspondence, and whilst comments such as, "You can so easily avenge yourself by collaborating with *me!* Our mixture *would*, I think, be effective" (Edel and Ray 81) suggest that James never fully approved of Wells's fictional technique, the generally felicitous tone of James's letters indicate that he regarded Wells as a writer of considerable potential and fascination. For instance, in a letter dated March 3rd 1911, James refers to Wells as "the most interesting and masterful prose-painter of your English generation" and outlines how Wells's work has "long claimed my unstinted admiration" (Edel and Ray 127). However, the same letter also highlights that James's appreciation of

Wells was by no means absolute. James outlines to Wells his belief that Wells's novels are the product of a writer who rides "roughshod and triumphant" (Edel and Ray 127) over the formal considerations that James passionately perceived as central to "the art we practice" (127), thereby showing the unease with which James received Wells's work. However, the approving tone carried by such strong assessments as "you being...the most interesting and masterful prose-painter of your generation" (Edel and Ray 127) cannot be ignored and it would be easy, as it likely was for Wells, to conclude that whilst James adopted an approach to fiction that was "alien" (127) to Wells, this did not mean he regarded his work as irrelevant and trite.

Wells would have felt considerably slighted then by the damning public indictment James gave to his novels in his article 'The Younger Generation', published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in March 1914. In this article, James takes Wells and Arnold Bennett to task for the "superficial measure of life" (Edel and Ray 179) proffered by novels in which "mere presentation of material, mere squeezing of the orange, when the material happens to be "handsome" or the orange to be sweet" (196) appears the only treatment of the theme with which such novels worked. On Wells himself, James disparagingly writes, "[i]t is literally Mr. Wells's own mind, and the experience of his own mind, incessant and extraordinarily various, extraordinarily reflective, even with all sorts of conditions made, of whatever he may expose it to, that forms the reservoir tapped by him, that suffices for his exhibition of grounds of interest" (Edel and Ray 189-190). Such open criticism of his technique, from a fellow-novelist whom he believed had respect for his work angered Wells greatly. It is no surprise that Wells responded with *Boon* a year later, a fierce attack not only on James, but on a literary establishment who increasingly viewed the novel as the

exclusive territory of those who saw the consciously artistic attention paid to questions of technique and style as central to the novelistic process. As Anthony West, Wells's son by Rebecca West, summarises in a biography of Wells, "*Boon* was my father's...considered rejection, once and for all, of the elitist values of the English literary establishment" (47).

Henry James himself was deeply hurt by Wells's cruel parody of him and informed Wells as much, with a letter that was to mark the beginning of the end of their friendship. Wells's response in July 1915 was one of repentance, and it is in this letter that one can clearly see the aesthetic difference that separated the two writers and which has dogged Wells's reputation as a novelist ever since. Wells asserts to James that his intention with *Boon* had never been to insult James on a personal level and that, "I have regretted a hundred times that I did not express our profound and incurable difference and contrast with a better grace" (Edel and Ray 264). For Wells, *Boon* was principally a means of highlighting "a real and very fundamental difference in our innate and developed attitudes towards life and literature" (Edel and Ray 264), one that Wells views as resting on the axiom that to James "literature like painting is an end" (264), whereas to him, "literature like architecture is a means, it has a use"(264). For James, the novel could not be separated in such a manner and in his final letter to Wells, James advocates that he finds such a distinction "wholly null and void" (Edel and Ray 267) and concludes with a statement confirming his own position in the debate that "[i]t is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance...and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process" (267).

When one considers the evaluative comments of Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray in their introduction to the volume drawing together the history of the correspondence, literary articles and novel extracts that highlight the divergent approaches to fiction practiced by both James and Wells, it is clear that Wells provides an effective summary of the crux of the aesthetic difference that divided the two novelists. As Edel and Ray state, the “documents in which the troubled relationship of the two famous novelists is recorded” (39) retains significance because of “the illumination they provide of the aesthetic of the novel” (39). On one hand there is H. G. Wells, a novelist who appears to view fiction as “something to be used for specific ends” (39), a novelist who appears “wholly unconcerned with aesthetic matters” (39) because for him literature is ‘journalistic’, merely “one way of communicating and advancing his ideas” (39). On the other hand there is Henry James, a novelist whose dedication to the aesthetic principles of his craft led him to view the novel as “the most characteristic art-form of our time...to be practiced with professional skill and all the resources of the artist’s imagination” (Edel and Ray 39) and it is clear that James would have considered the lack of consideration Wells appeared to pay to the aesthetic principles he espoused to have greatly undermined the artistic integrity of Wells’s fiction.

Of course, highlighting that Wells and James adopted fictional approaches that were wholly opposed does not in itself explain why the debate and subsequent quarrel has had such a negative impact on Wells’s literary credibility. For instance, it is arguable that the differences between James and Wells are the inevitable result of the collision between two aesthetic approaches that are themselves rooted in divergent epistemological perspectives. With his insistence that in the “force and beauty” (Edel and Ray 267) of artistic creation it is “art that *makes* life” (267), James is arguably betraying a subscription to a view of reality

predicated upon a ‘coherence’ theory of truth. Using a definition provided by Damian Grant, reality or truth is to a novelist such as Henry James revealed, discovered, or created by the artistic process (9-11). In contrast, with his insistence that literature shares with architecture a functional purpose, Wells can be regarded as a novelist working from a ‘correspondence’ theory of truth. Again, using a definition provided in the work of Grant, Wells is in this sense a novelist who believes reality is external and observable, and can therefore be corresponded to within the novel itself (9). The point is strongly supported by Edel and Ray, who suggest that another way of explaining the “fundamental difference” (18) between the divergent approaches to the novel advocated by Wells and James “is to describe the manner in which they experienced reality” (18).

It would be unfair to conclude that the damage to Wells’s novelistic reputation that followed the cessation of his friendship with James is the direct result of Wells’s decision to advocate a fictional approach that diverges from that championed by James. It is clear that the epistemological outlooks upon which James and Wells’s fictional attitudes were predicated makes it inevitable that their approaches to the novel should be so divided. It is perhaps puzzling, therefore, that whenever the debate is reflected upon critically, it is unanimously viewed as a debate from which Henry James emerges as the clear victor, as well as the debate that underlines that Wells was not a writer who wrote with a sense of himself as a conscious artist. For instance, in calling attention to the significance of the James-Wells quarrel in terms of the opposing fictional approaches that their strained friendship reveals, Edel and Ray proceed to conclude that the debate also indicates that in spite of being a man “whose imagination could soar through space and time and create tales

of wonderful new worlds” (39), Wells was “limited and earth-bound when it came to understanding the true nature of art” (39).

Undoubtedly, the assumption that Henry James emerged as the victor of the quarrel stems from the influence James’s fictional approach is perceived to have had on the development of modernist fiction. Peter Childs writes that James’s narrative experiments “with the mind as an ‘active reflector’ of life, with the representation of consciousness, and with symbolism” (146) have seen critics classify the trajectory of his output as one that moves “from the realism of his early novels to an enormously influential if commercially unsuccessful nascent Modernism by the turn of the century” (146). Consequently, as the champion of a ‘materialistic’ or ‘journalistic’ approach to the novel wholly at odds with Jamesian aesthetics, H. G. Wells is perceived as the loser of the debate because in comparison to the esteem in which James’s fiction is held by modernist critics, Wells’s approach has had little influence on the development of the modernist novel. It is this conception of Wells as the loser of the quarrel with James that has had an enduring effect on his literary credibility. Mark Schorer argues in his influential 1948 essay *Technique As Discovery* that Wells “disappeared from literature into the annals of an era” (72) following the cessation of his friendship with James, because in the context of the development of the modernist novel, it has become clear that “technique is not the secondary thing that it seemed to Wells, some external machination, a mechanical affair, but a deep and primary operation” (72). Furthermore, the dominance of the perception has led to Wells becoming marginalized as an exemplar of the nineteenth-century Realist tradition that modernist novelists such as James, Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf are judged to have been positioning themselves against. As Paul A. Cantor summarises, whilst “James emerged as

the champion of modernist fiction...Wells, who valued content over form and social message over artistic technique, seemed like a throwback to the nineteenth century, incapable of appreciating the epistemological subtlety of the avant-garde novel” (89-102).

It is perhaps unsurprising in light of both Wells’s advocated commitment to journalism above artistry and in the certainty with which critics assume Wells was a blind exponent of outmoded Realist techniques because of his refusal to conform to the Jamesian narrative aesthetics that influenced the development of modernist fiction, that Wells is perceived as a literary figure who cannot be considered a conscious artist. Such an evaluation is only further compounded by the critical studies supporting the suggestion that Wells’s scientific education led him towards writing with a dedication to the Naturalist branch of the Realist tradition. For John Hammond, “perhaps the most important single factor militating against his (Wells’s) acceptance as a serious and relevant novelist is the dominance of the received view that he belongs firmly with the naturalist school” (11). Whilst studies such as Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie’s biography *The Time Traveller* (1973), Peter Kemp’s *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape* (1982) and in particular Rosalyn D. Haynes’ *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future* (1980) do support such a view, given that they emphasise the extent that Wells’s scientific education instilled in him an objective epistemological outlook that aligns him with the Naturalist school, there are other critical works on Wells that complicate this perspective.

For instance, Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus’ *H. G. Wells’s Literary Criticism* (1980) draws together Wells’s critical work, largely as a literary critic for the *Saturday Review* at the turn of the twentieth century, and argues that “[i]t would be wrong, however,

to assume...that he approved of the ‘documentary’ approach to realism practised by the naturalists” (51). Furthermore, Parrinder and Philmus suggest that whilst this critical work highlights that Wells was a fan of Realist fiction because it allowed a novelist to produce socially representative works, it is also clear that at this stage of his career at least, Wells believed that a novel’s social message “should be conveyed by artistic means” (51). More recently, there have been articles produced that make the reading of Wells as a naïve ‘materialist’ comfortably aligned with the much maligned tradition of nineteenth-century Realism problematic. For instance, William Kupinse’s essay ‘Wasted Value: The Serial Logic of H. G. Wells’s *Tono-Bungay*’ (1999) has argued that because the narrative of Wells’s 1909 novel *Tono-Bungay* assumes and dismisses “various identifiable literary styles” in a “pattern of quite deliberate failures”, we should view the novel as “tending closer to the vein of high modernism” (66). Moreover, Paul A. Cantor and Peter Hufnagel’s essay ‘The Empire of the Future: Imperialism and Modernism in H. G. Wells’ (2006) identifies Wells’s famous scientific romance *The Time Machine* as “a prototypical modernist narrative” that structurally “raises serious questions about our access to truth” and in its use of the technical device known as “delayed decoding” anticipates “the modernist narrative technique of Joseph Conrad” (36-57). Elsewhere, critical studies focussing on Wells’s later fiction, such as Robert Bloom’s *Anatomies of Egotism* (1977) and William Scheick’s *The Splintering Frame: The Later Fiction of H. G. Wells* (1984) have convincingly demonstrated that Wells, in spite of his own protestations to the contrary, produced works after 1915 that betray the characteristics of a writer who continued to be agitated by the questions of artistic technique and the true nature of art that had characterised his friendship with James, making the view of Wells as a writer who wrote without a sense of himself as a conscious artist inherently problematic.

Clearly, the popular conception of Wells as a novelist whose association with the nineteenth-century Realist tradition stems from his commitment to a materialist approach to fiction that advocates an emphasis on content over the ‘artistic’ preoccupation with form needs re-evaluating. The purpose of this thesis is to show that whilst H. G. Wells cannot be considered a novelist in the mould of Henry James, or such high modernist figures as Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, he championed and pursued an approach to the novel that was undertaken with a seriousness of artistic purpose. The first chapter will consider Wells’s place within the Realist tradition through an analysis of his 1905 novel *Kipps*. By examining and rejecting the notion that Wells’s scientific background makes him a natural advocate of Emile Zola’s French Naturalism, the chapter will explore the narrative of *Kipps* in conjunction with his work as a literary critic. To this extent, the chapter will suggest that at the outset of his literary career, Wells considered the narrative techniques synonymous with nineteenth-century classic Realism as ideal for ensuring that the aesthetic goals he espoused as both a critic and young novelist could be fulfilled in a consciously artistic manner. However, the chapter will ultimately show that *Kipps* represents the work of a novelist straining at the limits of the Realist tradition and who arguably needed to distance himself from a commitment to Realism if he wished to create works of fictional art that also fulfilled his personal aesthetic of fiction. The second chapter will consider Wells’s break from the Realist tradition in the pages of *Tono-Bungay* (1909), a novel that when examined in the context of the Wells-James quarrel is clearly the antithesis of a Henry James novel, but a coherent work of art produced by a novelist with a distinctive and individual artistic voice nonetheless. The chapter will finish with a discussion of Wells’s 1932 novel *The Bulpington of Blup*, and will be examined in the context of Wells’s apparent renunciation of artistry in 1915 to suggest that rather than cease to write with a

sense of himself as a conscious artist, Wells was merely retreating from the aestheticism that characterises the definition of 'the novel' and the 'artist' provided by Henry James and the literary establishment.

CHAPTER 1: H. G. WELLS AND HIS PLACE IN THE REALIST TRADITION

At the time of the publication of *Kipps* in 1905, H. G. Wells had already established himself as a writer of considerable merit. As the author of such ‘scientific romances’ as *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Wells had propelled himself into the literary environment. However, Wells did not wish to limit himself to the status of a writer famed only for his success, however notable, in the genre of romance and it is critically acknowledged that Wells regarded his early successes with the ‘scientific romances’ as merely “a means of realizing his true vocation, which lay in realistic fiction” (Parrinder and Philmus 5). For Wells to have held aspirations towards writing in the realistic form is for Parrinder and Philmus no surprise given “the awe in which the ‘classical’ nineteenth-century novelists, notably Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, and Balzac, were held by his generation” (5-6).

However, it is significant in the context of judging the artistic credibility of Wells as a novelist that at the time when he was beginning his literary career, the realistic novel was a form in transition. Whilst the practitioners of nineteenth-century ‘classic realism’ remained highly respected by novelists and critics alike, the dominance of the form was being seriously questioned from within by twentieth-century novelists who, despite perceiving themselves as realistic novelists, judged the traditional methods of ‘classic realism’ to be too simplistic for the novel to be judged an art form with a legitimate capacity for evoking reality. As Parrinder and Philmus outline, at the time of Wells’s ascension into the literary milieu, the “informality of method” (6) deemed characteristic of the nineteenth-century classic realists “was being challenged by the new doctrines of realism, from Zola’s ‘scientific’ naturalism to James’s concern with the refinement of narrative method” (6).

Thus, it can be observed that at the turn of the century, when Wells began producing novels professing to be credible attempts at ‘realistic fiction’, the form itself had divided into two; the Naturalist novel as exemplified by the work of Emile Zola and the novel as it was defined by Henry James, a writer whose “fascination with inner consciousness, intense perception and the nature of individual vision” (Stevenson 21) has established him as the archetypal transitional figure in the movement from nineteenth-century Realist fiction to modernism, “as much a forerunner of modernist initiatives as a central figure in the movement itself” (22). For the vast majority of critics, the novels of H. G. Wells are unquestionably evocative of Naturalist fiction. As John Hammond argues, “the dominance of the received view that he belongs firmly with the naturalist school” remains “the most important single factor militating against his acceptance as a serious and relevant novelist” (11), when he is considered alongside his modernist contemporaries.

The critical assumption that Wells was a novelist who can be comfortably aligned with the Naturalist school appears credible when one consults both a definition of Naturalism and the novelistic aims of Naturalism’s chief practitioner Emile Zola, and examines Wells’s intellectual background and aspects of his fictional style in light of them. For Furst and Skrine, whilst Naturalism shares with Realism “the fundamental belief that art is in essence a mimetic, objective representation of outer reality” (8) and cannot be considered as ontologically independent of Realism itself, as a concrete realist doctrine Naturalism differs because it “elaborated on and intensified the basic tendencies of Realism” (8) by imposing “a certain, very specific view of man on Realism’s attitude of detached neutrality” (8). In this sense, Naturalism can be viewed as more limited than Realism because whilst Realism purports to establish knowledge of the external world through

observation undertaken without pre-determined expectations, Naturalists adopt a more analytical and experimental approach to their observation in the sense that, “[t]heir biological and philosophical assumptions” (Furst and Skrine 8) presuppose that when Naturalists come to observe life, they “already expect a certain pattern” (8).

The pattern Naturalists expect to find when observing life in order to generate knowledge is predicated upon a theory of man rooted in Charles Darwin’s 1859 publication *Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection*. As Furst and Skrine acknowledge, in “the development of Naturalism Darwin’s theory is without doubt the most important single shaping factor” (16) because the view of man to which Naturalists subscribe is “directly dependent on the Darwinian picture of his descent from the lower animal...stripping him of higher aspirations” (16). To the Naturalist, man is an animal “whose course is determined by his heredity, by the effect of his environment and by the pressures of the moment” (Furst and Skrine 18). As a consequence of this perspective man is robbed “of all free will, all responsibility for his actions” (Furst and Skrine 18) because to the Naturalist, any action undertaken by man is “merely the inescapable result of physical forces and conditions totally beyond his control” (18). That H. G. Wells subscribed to Darwin’s theory is a possibility given credence when one analyses Wells’s educational background and the influence this had upon the shaping of his intellectual thought.

It is widely acknowledged that the year Wells spent under the tutelage of T. H. Huxley at the Normal School of Science at South Kensington from the summer of 1884 had a profound influence upon his intellectual development. In her comprehensive study *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future*, Rosalyn D. Haynes traces the extent Wells’s scientific

training during this period shaped both his epistemological thought and the techniques that characterised his fiction, stating that Huxley's biology classes were both "the turning point in Wells's life" (12) and in effect "nothing less than that of a religious conversion" (12). For Huxley, the evolutionary theory Darwin outlined in *Origin of Species* was revolutionary, and where Darwin was of too retiring a disposition to defend his theories in the immense backlash (both religious and scientific) that his theories provoked, Huxley stepped forward to become what Haynes has termed the "quickly styled 'Darwin's bulldog' ...the leader in the impartial search for scientific truth against the reactionary forces in biology, geology and theology" (14). That Huxley's belief in the Darwinian concept of man central to that which Naturalists apply to their observation of the objective world was passed onto Wells is for Haynes undoubted. Indeed, as much can be concluded from Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography*, written thirty-three years after Wells finished Huxley's biology class with a first-class pass, where he describes the year he spent under Huxley's tutelage as "beyond all question, the most educational year of my life" (Wells 'Experiment' 1:201), when even the fact that, "I was underfed and not very well housed" (1:204) did not matter "because of the vision of life that was growing in my mind" (1:204).

Clearly, the influence Huxley had upon the development of Wells's ontological outlook was immense, and similarly, the centrality of the Darwinian concept of man to Wells's outlook appears beyond doubt. According to Haynes "[e]volutionary theory then seemed to Wells...the nearest approach to a unifying factor in contemporary thought" (16) and consequently "[n]o other concept ever made an equivalent impact" (16). However, whilst Wells may be said to share with the advocates of the Naturalist school of Realism a belief in a specifically Darwinian view of man, this is not enough to immediately qualify Wells as

a Naturalist novelist. For Furst and Skrine, the Naturalist novel is defined as “one in which an attempt is made to present with the maximum objectivity of the scientist the new view of man as a creature determined by heredity, milieu and the pressures of the moment” (42). Furthermore, because “[a]ll too often the label ‘Naturalist’ is attached to a work...merely because its subject is of a type associated with Naturalism, such as slum life or alcoholism or sexual depravity” (Furst and Skrine 42-3), it is important to understand that labelling a novel a legitimate work of Naturalist fiction requires one to pay attention to the manner with which the subject matter is dealt with by the novelist, as much as the subject matter itself.

For Haynes, Wells can, in this respect, be regarded as a successful Naturalist novelist. Not only did the teaching of Huxley impress upon him the centrality of the Darwinian concept of man as a creature of heredity and environment, but this became “his yardstick to measure the claims of all other disciplines – astronomy, physics, sociology, politics, even theology and art” (16). Haynes perceives that Wells dealt with all aspects of his intellectual life with the analytical objectivity he had developed under Huxley’s tutelage and that consequently “it is clear that in virtually all the scientific romances and novels...Wells’s method of looking at the world was almost ruthlessly objective” (16). For Haynes, Wells’s ontological outlook had a direct influence on the formal style of his fiction, because Wells’s manner of viewing reality necessitated a fictional style complementary to the scientific faith he placed in observation and experiment as the primary method with which truthful knowledge of reality is attained. Haynes states that, “Wells’s style of writing...was the direct, perhaps inevitable, result of his scientific training” (7) because the formalistic qualities of his work are themselves centred upon a “[b]elief in an ultimate truth which may

be discovered by diligent research and experimental pursuit” (7). To this extent, the perception that Wells adopted an attitude to the formal qualities of the novel that necessitates the novelist adopt a ruthlessly objective and experimental approach to the manner in which he handles his material places Wells in line with Emile Zola, the chief practitioner of the Naturalist novel in France. Indeed, Haynes advocates that, “there is little doubt that he (Wells) would have been in accord with Zola’s conception of the novelist as a scientific experimenter” (169).

For Zola, Naturalism in the novel, “consists uniquely in the experimental method” (191), that is to say “in observation and experiment applied to literature” (191). By ‘the experimental method’, Zola, in viewing Naturalist novelists as “the examining magistrates of men and their passions” (168), refers to the formal method such novelists must use in order to fulfil the task of converting “the doubt which they hold concerning obscure truths” (169) into knowledge, a task that can be only realised scientifically when “an experimental idea suddenly arouses their genius and impels them to make an experiment, in order to analyze the facts and become master of them” (169). Resultantly, whilst Zola acknowledges that “the question of form...is what gives literature its special quality” (191), form must necessarily play a secondary role to the experimental method itself. For Zola, whilst “the question of rhetoric and the question of method are distinct” (191), the experimental method is so explicitly central to the Naturalist vision, that when applied to the novel “the method reaches to form itself” (192). To this extent, Zola’s vision for the Naturalist novel is of a literary form that subordinates questions of aesthetic style beneath the material that the novelist, as observer and experimenter, must apply to the experimental method in order to obtain a truthful document of life. Zola acknowledges as much when he

states plainly that “[i]f anyone wants my forthright opinion, it is that today an exaggerated emphasis is given to form” (192) and that the most successful novelist “will not be he who sets off on the wildest gallop among hypotheses, but he who walks straight among truths” (192). As Furst and Skrine summarise, such an attitude “leads to an emphasis on content and a concomitant neglect of form and style” (47) because in aiming “for truth, not artistry; the novel...must offer a ‘slice of life’, not a structured artifice” (47).

Given the approach to fiction espoused by Wells in his quarrel with Henry James, where formalistic preoccupations are a secondary concern to the content of a fictional work itself, it is clear that Wells and Zola can be seen as united in this belief. However, this does not in itself allow one to conclude that Wells is a Naturalist novelist in the mould of Zola. For this to be so, Wells must be seen as a novelist who prioritises content because his belief in the Darwinian concept of man and his scientific background necessitates that for him, the novel can only be viewed as a form conveying a truthful document of life if the experimental method of the scientist is adopted by the novelist when dealing with his material. That Wells is one such novelist is argued quite extensively by Haynes, particularly in relation to the presentation of character within Wells’s fiction and the concept of the individual Wells is seen to espouse through this. Furst and Skrine outline that because the Naturalist focus is upon “man *in* his milieu” (51) all men are portrayed in the Naturalist novel as “creatures ruled by heredity, milieu and the pressures of the moment” (51) and are therefore, “shown to be fundamentally alike” (51). To this extent, the Naturalist novelist is averse to portraying the individuality of fictional characters. Instead, the novelist utilises a chosen character as an exemplar of the ordinary so that the actions they undertake in relation to their environment are viewed as a response representative of

humanity generally. In the case of Wells, Haynes states that because Wells's was an intellect shaped according to "the bias of the scientific mind which is comparatively uninterested in the multifarious differences between human beings, and the uniqueness of individuals" (165), the characters in Wells's fiction are portrayed as "average specimens of humanity" (165).

For Haynes, the effect of such an approach to characterisation is essentially two-fold. Firstly, the majority of characters in Wells's fiction are presented with a "stationary attitude...as though anaesthetised for dissection or frozen into tableaux" (Haynes 164). When Wells introduces characters to the reader, they are presented "in a characteristic pose" and we "move up to them and examine them from all sides, and are told the necessary supporting details about their family and background, while they themselves remain immobile" (Haynes 164). Secondly, the emphasis Wells places upon "individuals as units of a society" has the effect of setting "each character very firmly in his social *milieu*" with "a definite suggestion of the determinism of circumstances" (Haynes 170). Both approaches to characterisation are observable in Wells's 1905 novel *Kipps* and to this extent, go some distance towards vindicating the view that Wells is a novelist writing in the Naturalist tradition. For instance, in the second chapter of Book One, entitled 'The Emporium', which narrates the conversion of the novel's protagonist Artie Kipps from a fourteen year old boy leaving his hometown of New Romney to become a draper at the Folkestone Drapery Bazaar, into an eighteen year old man, presents to the reader two significant portrayals of Kipps that function to highlight the scientific exactness with which Wells depicts the novel's central character. The first portrayal occurs at the start of the chapter itself and the second at the close, and both are worth quoting at length:

When Kipps left New Romney, with a small yellow tin box, a still smaller portmanteau, a new umbrella, and a keepsake half-sixpence, to become a draper, he was a youngster of fourteen, thin, with whimsical drakes' -tails at the poll of his head, smallish features, and eyes that were sometimes very light and sometimes very dark, gifts those of his birth; and by the nature of his training he was indistinct in his speech, confused in his mind, and retreating in his manners. Inexorable fate had appointed him to serve his country in commerce, and the same national bias towards private enterprise and leaving bad alone, which had left his general education to Mr Woodrow, now indentured him firmly into the hands of Mr Shalford of the Folkestone Drapery Bazaar. (Wells 'Kipps' 30)

For a tailpiece to this chapter one may vignette a specimen minute.

It is a bright Sunday afternoon; the scene is a secluded little seat halfway down the front of the Leas, and Kipps is four years older than when he parted from Ann. There is a quite perceptible down upon his upper lip, and his costume is just as tremendous a 'mash' as lies within his means. His collar is so high that it scars his inaggressive jaw-bone, and his hat has a curly brim, his tie shows taste, his trousers are modestly brilliant, and his boots have light cloth uppers and button at the side. (Wells 'Kipps' 47)

Within these passages, Wells's presentation of Kipps betrays an approach to characterisation that entirely vindicates Haynes's assessment that Wells's method consists of "the careful enumeration of external details – the clothing worn, the stance, the stature,

the characteristic gestures or expressions, the normal background, a particular manner of speaking” (168). The introduction of the second passage as a “specimen minute” (Wells ‘Kipps’ 47) is both highly evocative of a scientific analysis, given that it is representative of the stationary method Haynes perceives that Wells utilises in his portrayal of characters, and indicative of the ordinariness of the character of Kipps himself. Arguably, Wells’s use of metonymy to depict the objects Kipps carries about his person serve only to re-enforce the impression that Kipps represents an ordinary man typical of his class and occupation. The “yellow tin box” and the “keepsake half-sixpence” in the first passage supplement Kipps’s “thin” (Wells ‘Kipps’ 30) stature, in order to represent the deprived background in which Kipps has been raised. Similarly, the exactness with which Wells describes Kipps’s clothing in the second passage complement the inference that they are “as tremendous a ‘mash’ as lies within his means” (Wells ‘Kipps’ 47) and function to indicate that Kipps is a representative ‘specimen’ of his occupation and class.

Furthermore, the passages quoted above reveal an emphasis placed on the deterministic factors of heredity and milieu to depict Kipps’s character and mannerisms. For instance, it is disclosed in the first passage that “[i]nexorable fate” and “national bias” (Wells ‘Kipps’ 30) are the factors militating towards Kipps undertaking a draper’s apprenticeship, thus removing any notion of personal choice and resigning Kipps to a fate dictated by social expectations out of his control. Similarly, the indistinct speech Kipps is observed as using, the confusion in his mind and the shyness of his manner are not portrayed as ‘individual’ personality traits, but as the effect of the “nature of his training” (Wells ‘Kipps’ 30). Lastly, the influence of heredity upon Kipps’s character is indicated by the explanation that his

eyes, “sometimes very light and sometimes very dark” are not symbolic of any psychological characteristics, but are mere “gifts...of his birth” (Wells ‘Kipps’ 30).

Given the extent of the evidence, the dominant critical perception of Wells as a literary figure whose novels can be aligned with the tradition of French Naturalism appears entirely justifiable. As a writer whose ontological outlook was shaped by the biological training he received under the Naturalist T. H. Huxley, Wells shares a strong link with Darwin’s theory that man is a “creature determined by heredity, milieu and the pressures of the moment” (Furst and Skrine 42), a theory central to the development of the Naturalist novel under Emile Zola. Furthermore, Wells’s scientific training is shown to have had a profound influence on his fictional style. For instance, in his presentation of character in the novel *Kipps* and the concept of the individual Wells espouses through this, it is arguable that Wells is utilising a form that is consciously objective and which allows him to focus upon the external details that can be “correlated and patterned to produce a coherent picture” (Haynes 168) with the impartiality of the scientist.

However, when one pays closer attention to Wells’s use of the narrator within *Kipps*, the validity of the assumption that Wells was purposefully conforming to the literary theories and conventions espoused by Zola’s Naturalism becomes questionable. Furst and Skrine state that for a Naturalist novel to successfully present “with the maximum objectivity of the scientist the new view of man as a creature determined by heredity, milieu and the pressures of the moment” (42), it is necessary for the narrator to function “without either moral judgment or emotional sensitivity” (45). This is a central requirement of Naturalism that heralds from Zola’s assertion in *The Experimental Novel* (1880) that for “the

impersonal nature of the method” (188) to be maintained, it is a necessity that “the personal feeling of the artist...be subject to the control of truth” (193). For Zola, the personal feeling of the novelist “is only the first impulsion” (195) and is one which is brought into line by the power of nature, “whose secrets science has delivered up to us and about which we no longer have the right to lie” (195). The success of the Naturalist novelist is determined by his ability to simultaneously show “in man and society the mechanism of the phenomena which science has mastered”, whilst controlling personal sentiment “as well as he can by observation and experiment” (Zola 195).

Arguably, if Wells was a novelist who sought to conform to Zola’s Naturalist theory of fiction, then the voice of the narrator in a novel such as *Kipps* would be wholly impersonal. It is at this point that the claim of those critics who identify Wells as an advocate of Naturalism is explicitly undermined, for there are numerous instances in *Kipps* where the authorial personality of Wells directly appears through the omniscient moral judgments of the narrator and the humour subsequently brought to the novel because of them. As David Lodge outlines, one of the most striking features of *Kipps* is Wells’s “use of the authorial voice”, utilised in a manner that “brings the characters to life, moralizes on the story and provides most of the humour” (‘Introduction’ xx). An example of this occurs in the third chapter of Book One, entitled ‘The Woodcarving Class’, in which Artie Kipps falls in love with his woodcarving teacher Helen Walshingham, and the reader is presented with a scene in which Kipps injures himself in an attempt to impress Helen by forcing open a window she is struggling to open herself:

Still the sash stuck. He felt his manhood was at stake. He gathered himself together for a tremendous effort, and the pane broke with a snap, and he thrust his hand into the void beyond.

'There!' said Miss Walshingham, and the glass fell ringing into the courtyard below.

Then Kipps made to bring his hand back and felt the keen touch of the edge of the broken glass at his wrist. He turned dolefully. 'I'm tremendously sorry,' he said, in answer to the accusation in Miss Walshingham's eyes. 'I didn't think it would break like that' – as if he had expected it to break in some quite different and entirely more satisfactory manner. (Wells 'Kipps' 56)

Obviously, the purpose of the passage is to highlight both Kipps's sense of inferiority around Helen, whom Kipps has already identified as being "in a class apart" (Wells 'Kipps' 54) from himself earlier in the chapter, on the grounds of her superior intelligence, and the foolish behaviour Kipps's poor impression of himself resultantly instigates. To this extent, Kipps's eagerness to open the window represents a desire to re-assert his threatened masculinity. As the narrator conveys, Kipps "felt his manhood was at stake" (Wells 'Kipps' 56) if he did not succeed in opening the window. Arguably, if this passage were genuinely representative of Naturalist fiction it would be delivered with an objectivity entirely devoid of any inkling of authorial sentiment, with Kipps's apparent foolishness obvious from the cold narration of the event itself. However, the insertion of the speculation "as if he had expected it to break in some quite different and entirely more satisfactory manner" (Wells 'Kipps' 56) is indicative of the strong ironic presence of Wells's personal voice in the narrative. It is as though Wells does not feel a portrayal of the event in isolation from the

mocking judgment of the narrator is enough to highlight the extent Kipps's inferior social background (that is to say, the influence of heredity and environment upon his personality) has hampered his ability to function confidently in general society. In short, Wells openly ridicules Kipps in order to highlight this more explicitly, and in doing so succeeds in supplementing the narrative with a direct layer of humour.

The extent that Wells is a writer who disregarded Naturalist fiction because it clashed with his personal view that literature should be saturated in the personality of the author is given further credence upon consultation of the body of criticism Wells regularly produced for the *Saturday Review* between 1894 and 1897. As Parrinder and Philmus, who brought together Wells's critical work for the first time in their *H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism* (1980) indicate, what is clear from this body of criticism is the degree with which Wells considered "the idea of a narrative steeped in the personality of its author" (51) to be one of literature's central values. Far from being "in accord with Zola's conception of the novelist as a scientific experimenter" (Haynes 169), as many critics assume, Wells was in reality wholly opposed to fiction written in the Naturalist tradition because such works relied for their authenticity upon the exclusion of the authorial presence that, judging by his reviews, Wells considered central to the success of a novel. As Parrinder and Philmus summarise, whilst Wells's "general endorsement of verisimilitude brings him closer in outlook to the social realists, such as Gissing, than it does to their romantic opponents...Wells was not an admirer of French naturalism or its English imitators" (51). In his reviews of the work of novelists such as George Gissing and George Moore, who were more obviously writing within the Naturalist tradition, one sees Wells consistently criticising their work for the impersonal narrative style they adopt, advocating instead "a return to the flamboyantly

personal narrative methods of Thackeray and Sterne” (135). Wells’s opposition to Naturalism’s impersonal fictional approach manifests itself most clearly in his review of George Gissing’s *The Paying Guest*, dated 18th April 1896, and is worth quoting from at length:

Mr Gissing has hitherto been the ablest, as Mr George Moore is perhaps the most prominent, exponent of what we may perhaps term the ‘colourless’ theory of fiction. Let your characters tell their own story, make no comment, write a novel as you would write a play. So we are robbed of the personality of the author, in order that we may get an enhanced impression of reality, and a novel merely extends the purview of the police-court reporter to the details of everyday life. (Parrinder and Philmus 142)

Clearly, any intent to align Wells with Naturalism is misguided given that Naturalism is a fictional style reliant on the impersonal and ‘colourless’ approach to narration that Wells is opposed to in Gissing’s novel. Wells’s lack of sympathy for Naturalism is in further evidence in his 1895 review ‘The Method of Mr George Meredith’, wherein Wells contrasts the “peculiar individuality of his (Meredith’s) style” (Parrinder and Philmus 63) with the naturalistic method. In declaring that “[t]he theory of a scientific, an impersonal standpoint, is fallacious” (Parrinder and Philmus 65), Wells establishes that whilst Meredith’s indirect and subtle approach to narrative “puzzles a decent public” (65), the fact Meredith’s approach in turn allows for the soul of a character to be “determined by its surfaces of contact with other souls” (65) makes it infinitely preferable to the cold approach to characterisation practiced by Naturalist novelists.

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that whilst Wells's open admiration for the employment of a narrative saturated in the personality of the author militates against the view of him as an advocate of Naturalism, it does not directly undermine the perception that Wells was a novelist who in the context of "the great divide in English literature between 'realists' and 'modernists'...is felt to belong wholly with the realists" (Hammond 11). Furst and Skrine acknowledge that Naturalism "elaborated on and intensified the basic tendencies of Realism" (8), most notably in terms of the emphasis placed upon "the ideal of impersonality in technique" (8). To this extent, Wells's rejection of this approach in favour of the employment of a narrator who comments directly upon the events of a novel in order to moralise upon the story, pass judgement upon characters and evoke humour is arguably the approach of a novelist who is a firm advocate of the traditional Realist techniques that modernist novelists sought to usurp. To Parrinder and Philmus, Wells's rejection of Naturalism was rooted in his lack of sympathy for "its asceticism, its deliberate abandonment of the vigorous authorial presence associated with Dickens, Thackeray, and their predecessors in the English tradition" (52). In this sense, the recognition that Wells was not a writer sympathetic with Naturalist aesthetics does not discount the plausibility of aligning Wells with the Realist tradition. Wells rejected Naturalism on the grounds that it clashed with his own perception of the novel as a form that should make the author's personality central rather than exclude it.

Resultantly, the narrative of a novel such as *Kipps* relies on the employment of an omniscient narrator, a narrative device synonymous with the tradition of nineteenth-century Realism. For Paul Copley, the use of the omniscient narrator is the "specific narratorial device upon which 'classic realism' depends" (100) because it endows the narrator with a

“godlike ability to go everywhere and to possess the power and control that derives from unlimited knowledge” (101). Because the omniscient narrator is given an immediate authority over the characters and events being narrated, the narrator’s articulation and interpretation of these events can be relayed to the reader with an unquestioned reliability. An example of Wells’s use of this device in *Kipps* can again be observed in ‘The Woodcarving Class’ chapter from Book One. The second chapter, entitled ‘The Emporium’ has already established that Kipps is a character “indistinct in his speech, confused in his mind, and retreating in his manners” (Wells ‘Kipps’ 30). In order for Wells to articulate the depth of emotion Kipps feels for Helen Walshingham, and the extent he feels this love for her is futile given the class boundaries that recognise her as his superior, it is necessary for Wells to employ an omniscient narrator, because this device allows Kipps’s perception of reality to be truthfully relayed with an eloquence beyond the character of Kipps himself:

Kipps, I say, felt himself a creature of outer darkness, an inexcusable intruder in an altitudinous world...he perceived he was in a state of adoration for Miss Walshingham that it seemed almost a blasphemous familiarity to speak of as being in love.

This state, you must understand, had nothing to do with ‘flirting’ or ‘spooning’ and that superficial passion that flashes from eye to eye upon the Leas and Pier – absolutely nothing. That he knew from the first. Her rather pallid, intellectual young face beneath those sombre clouds of hair put her in a class apart; towards her the thought of ‘attentions’ paled and vanished. To approach such a being, to perform sacrifices, and to perish obviously for her, seemed the limit he might aspire to, he or any man. For if his love was abasement, at any rate it had this much of manliness

that it covered all his sex. It had not yet come to Kipps to acknowledge any man as his better in his heart of hearts. When one does that the game is played, and one grows old indeed. (Wells 'Kipps' 54-5)

Wells's use of the impositions, "I say" and "you understand" (Wells 'Kipps' 54) are clearly indicative of the presence of the authority of an omniscient narrator. Whilst the perceptions disclosed are undoubtedly those of Kipps himself ("he perceived he was in a state of adoration for Miss Walshingham"), they are conveyed to the reader through the voice of a narrator with a direct and reliable access to Kipps's impressions. Furthermore, the passage indicates how the narrator influences the reader's reaction to Kipps's impressions by directly passing judgment upon them. The assertion that it "had not yet come to Kipps to acknowledge any man as his better in his heart of hearts" (Wells 'Kipps' 54-5) portrays Kipps's sense of personal pride and is a further example of Kipps's voice being articulated through the eloquence of the narrator. However, the subsequent pronouncement that, "[w]hen one does that the game is played, and one grows old indeed" (Wells 'Kipps' 55) is the direct and personal opinion of the narrator, whose judgment of Kipps's sense of pride is positive and resultantly influences the reader's view of Kipps favourably.

The extent that Wells's use of the omniscient narrator in Kipps is synonymous with its utilisation in the work of classic realists such as George Eliot is debatable, largely because critical work on the narrative method that is most typical of classic realism is itself divided. Perhaps the most significant outline of the importance of the omniscient narrator to classic realism occurs in Colin MacCabe's *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1978). For MacCabe, the omniscient narrator in classic realism can be identified as a "meta-

language” (13); a discourse that allows for a direct “correspondence between word and world” (13) to be established because it has an objective, epistemological authority over the subjective discourses that comprise the remainder of the text. The subjective discourses in a realist text are those that are recognisably the views of the characters themselves and are presented to the reader in inverted commas. To MacCabe, “those sections in a work which are contained in inverted commas...offer different ways of regarding and analysing the world” (14). Consequently, for the reader to receive a true reflection of reality in a text it is necessary for these perspectives to be “negated as real alternatives by the unspoken prose that surrounds and controls them” (MacCabe 14). To this extent, the “narrative prose is the meta-language that can state all the truths in the object-language(s) (the marks held in inverted commas) and can also explain the relation of the object-language to the world” (MacCabe 14). Finally, the meta-language can claim to offer these interpretations with the imposition of being the truthful nature of reality because it “regards its object discourses as material but itself as transparent” (MacCabe 14).

In this sense, *Kipps* is not a text representative of ‘classic realism’ as MacCabe would define it. As the quoted passage from ‘The Woodcarving Class’ indicates, whilst the narrator addresses events with omniscience, the meta-language is not presented as distinct from the object languages upon which it comments. That is to say, because the thoughts of Artie Kipps are not contained in inverted commas, they are indistinct from the narrator’s interpretation of them, thus diminishing the extent the narrator is able to comment upon the events with a reliable claim to objectivity. However, the lack of an obvious division between object- and meta-languages in *Kipps* becomes less of a problem in relation to the question of whether Wells is conforming to conventions associated with classic realism

when one consults the work of David Lodge. For Lodge, classic realist texts betray a complex relationship between the Platonic modes of narration identified in the third book of Plato's *Republic* as mimesis and diegesis. Where mimesis is "narrating by imitating another's speech", diegesis is "narrating in one's own voice" (Lodge 'Realist' 49). To this extent, MacCabe's concept of a meta-language can be identified as diegetic and the concept of an object-language as mimetic. Lodge supports the point, stating that, "there is some advantage to be gained from substituting the Platonic distinction between mimesis and diegesis for MacCabe's distinction between language and meta-language" ('Realist' 51).

However, MacCabe's claim that a classic realist text is identifiable for the clear distinction between the diegetic voice of the narrator and the mimetic voice of the characters is for Lodge a short-sighted claim because "the diegetic element is much more problematic than he allows" ('Realist' 51). From Lodge's perspective, "[i]f we are looking for a single formal feature which characterises the realist novel of the nineteenth century, it is surely not the domination of the characters' discourses by the narrator's discourse...but the extensive use of free indirect speech, which obscures and complicates the distinction between the two types of discourse" ('Realist' 52). In this sense, a narrative can be identified as synonymous with classic realism according to the extent that the diegetic and mimetic elements are inextricably linked through free indirect speech, rather than the extent they are separated as distinct entities in order that the authority of the diegetic discourse over the mimetic voices of the characters is secured. For Lodge, "the classic realist novel 'mixes' the two discourses in a more fundamental sense: it fuses them together...through the device of free indirect speech" so that the narrator can communicate the narrative to the reader "coloured by the thoughts and feelings of a character" ('Realist' 52).

To this extent, the quoted passage from ‘The Woodcarving Class’ chapter of *Kipps* is indicative of Wells’s utilisation of the classic realist form. By mixing the diegetic and mimetic discourses of the text Wells is able to realistically portray the personal thoughts and anxieties Kipps has about his feelings for Helen Walshingham through the eloquence of the narrator. In doing so, Wells ensures that not only does he not contradict his portrayal of Kipps as a character “indistinct in his speech, confused in his mind, and retreating in his manners” (Wells ‘Kipps’ 30) by making him overly articulate, he also ensures that his personal voice is centralised in a manner that makes his authorial personality a prominent feature of the narrative. From the perspective of Lodge, Wells’s apparent desire to utilise the narrative function of free indirect speech in *Kipps* brings him sharply into line with nineteenth-century ‘classic realists’ such as Jane Austen and George Eliot. As Lodge argues, when writers “exploit the diegetic possibilities of the mixed form” in the manner that Wells does in *Kipps*, they do so “to speak very much ‘in their own voice’ – not merely reporting events, but delivering judgments, opinions, and evaluations about the story and about life in general” (‘Realist’ 50).

Wells’s decision to saturate *Kipps* with a narrative voice that moralises upon the story and provides the novel with a layer of humour militates against the critical perception that Wells advocated the impersonal fictional techniques practiced by the French Naturalists; in doing so Wells appears to be adhering to a narrative style evocative of the Realist novelists of the nineteenth century and this arguably supports the view that Wells is a literary figure unfit for academic scrutiny. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, at the advent of the twentieth century when Wells began producing realistic novels such as *Love and Mr. Lewisham* and *Kipps*, the dominance of the classic realist narrative had been challenged

from within by both the scientific Naturalism espoused by Zola, and the consciously artistic narratives of Henry James, a writer deemed hugely influential to the development of modernist fiction and its break from the hegemony of the traditional Realist novel. Consequently, Wells's apparent conformity to a fictional style that adheres to neither the novel as envisioned by Zola, or the novel as envisioned by James, has served only to allow for Wells's fiction to be evaluated as the work of a novelist whose 'realistic' novels are stylistically characteristic of all that modernist novelists sought to usurp. Paul A. Cantor summarises such a view, outlining how Wells has been classified by literary critics as "the antithesis and antagonist of modernism" (89-102) precisely because his narrative style made him appear "like a throwback to the nineteenth century" (89-102), a novelist who is "seldom taken seriously" (89-102) in academic circles because he seemed "incapable of appreciating the epistemological subtlety of the avant-garde novel" (89-102).

Synonymous with this evaluation is the critical assumption that Wells was the loser of the debate he shared with Henry James concerning the art of fiction. Certainly, Wells's assertion to James in 1915 that, "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist" (Edel and Ray 264) suggests that Wells's commitment to the traditional Realist forms deemed outmoded by his modernist contemporaries is a direct consequence of his reluctance to view his fiction as conscious works of art. Whilst James's "aesthetic perspective" (Cantor 89-102) saw him emerge from the debate "as the champion of modernist fiction" (89-102), as a writer who valued "content over form and social message over artistic technique" (89-102), Wells emerged as the loser because as a novelist who appeared to be committed only to writing for a social purpose, aesthetic questions seemed inconsequential to him. In this sense, Wells's dedication to traditional realist forms is unsurprising given that they allow a

novelist “to speak very much ‘in their own voice’ – not merely reporting events, but delivering judgments, opinions, and evaluations about the story and about life in general” (Lodge ‘Realist’ 50). Simply put, Wells utilised narrative techniques synonymous with classic realism because such techniques complement the goal of a novelist who wishes to use fiction as a tool for social commentary.

The point is propounded by Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus who in the introduction to their *H. G. Wells’s Literary Criticism* (1980) argue that Wells’s decision to write in the Realist tradition is a direct result of the suitability of the form for accommodating Wells’s own aesthetic of fiction, that is to say “a kind of fiction that would be at once socially representative in its range and highly personal in its idiom” (Parrinder and Philmus 53). Thus, it could be suggested that Wells’s utilisation of traditional realist forms as a means of communicating a contemporary social message is indicative of a writer who renounces any pretence of artistry in favour of reducing his task as a novelist to “that of a sociologist or social historian” (Parrinder and Philmus 52). From the point of view of a critic such as Mark Schorer this is definitely the case. In *Technique as Discovery*, Schorer argues that a novelist such as Wells cannot be considered a fictional artist because he privileges the material he is handling with an importance beyond that of the technique utilised to present the material as a coherent work of art. For Schorer, “the axiom which demonstrates itself so devastatingly whenever a writer declares, under the urgent sense of the importance of his materials (whether these are autobiography, or social ideas, or personal passions)...that he cannot linger with technical refinements”, is the axiom that, “[t]echnique alone objectifies the materials of art” (71). Consequently, a writer such as Wells whose “enormous literary energy included no respect for the techniques of his medium”

cannot be considered an artist at all, because “art will not tolerate such a writer” (Schorer 71).

However, whilst Wells’s assertion to Henry James in 1915 that, “I had rather be called a journalist than an artist” (Edel and Ray 264) suggests that Wells renounced any claim to producing works of fiction with a consciously artistic purpose beyond this date, it is not to say that Wells considered his approach to fiction at the time of writing novels such as *Kipps* as artistically redundant. Arguably, Wells considered his aesthetic approach to fiction to be of high artistic relevance. The argument is best supported with reference to Wells’s high praise of the Russian novelist Turgenev in an article produced for the *Saturday Review* entitled ‘The Novel of Types’ (1896). Wells’s praise of Turgenev’s work is of great significance because through his assessment of Turgenev’s handling of character, it is clear that Turgenev’s novels represent the sort of fiction Wells wished to produce at the outset of his literary career. For Wells, Turgenev’s artistic skill lies in his ability to utilise his characters in a manner that expresses a sociological insight personal to Turgenev himself, but which does not detract from the sense that the characters he is creating are fully-developed personalities in their own right. Wells compliments Turgenev for “the extraordinary way in which he can make his characters typical, while at the same time retaining their individuality” (Parrinder and Philmus 67-8). As Wells puts it, Turgenev’s characters may be “living under the full stress of this great social force or that” (Parrinder and Philmus 68), but this does not mean that they act merely as “avatars of theories” (68), for close analysis reveals that “[t]hey are living, breathing individuals” (68), created not as typical representatives of the social force being explored, but as human beings with individual depth.

Wells's praise of Turgenev's work militates against the perception that Wells was a novelist who emphasised the importance of a novel's social message at the expense of any notion of artistic credibility. Arguably, if Wells was unconcerned with a text's artistic credibility, the question of whether Turgenev's characters are "living, breathing individuals" or "avatars of theories" (Parrinder and Philmus 68) would not have entered Wells's consideration, so long as Turgenev handled the central social theme of his novels adequately. The point is further illustrated upon consultation of Wells's 1895 review of Grant Allen's novel *The British Barbarians*. Here, Wells states his belief that "[t]o accomplish any supreme achievement in the writing of novels it is necessary that the author be an artist" (Parrinder and Philmus 60) and it is for the eradication of any pretence of utilising the fictional form in a consciously artistic manner that Wells is most critical of Allen's novel. Whilst Wells acknowledges that, "Mr Allen takes occasion to say a good many things that require saying" (Parrinder and Philmus 61), he simultaneously dismisses the credibility of Allen's work, asserting that "the sooner Mr Allen realizes that he cannot adopt an art-form and make it subservient to the purposes of the pamphleteer, the better for humanity and for his own reputation as a thinker and a man of letters" (61). From the perspective of Wells, "the philosopher who masquerades as a novelist, violating the conditions of art that his gospel may win notoriety, discredits both himself and his message, and the result is neither philosophy nor fiction" (Parrinder and Philmus 61).

In light of the manner in which Wells reviews the work of Turgenev and Allen, it is clear that in conforming to traditional Realist narrative techniques in order address contemporary social issues, a novel such as *Kipps* is the work of a literary figure who did not wish to write without a sense of himself as a conscious artist. Whilst Wells does

champion the concept of a novel written to be socially representative, it is clear that he does not consider the sacrificing of the form's primary artistic principles for the sake of the author's personal diatribe to be an acceptable approach to fiction. For Wells, a novel should be a novel, not a means of personal preaching. With this in mind, there is a surprising passage towards the conclusion of *Kipps* that threatens to undermine both the artistic credibility of Wells's novel as well as the idea that he was a novelist who worked comfortably in the limitations of the nineteenth-century Realist tradition. The passage occurs as an isolated segment of the chapter entitled 'The Callers' in Book Two of the text and is worth quoting at length:

The stupid little tragedies of these clipped and limited lives!

As I think of them lying unhappily there in the darkness, my vision pierces the night. See what I can see! Above them, brooding over them, I tell you there is a monster, a lumpish monster, like some great clumsy griffin thing, like the Crystal Palace labyrinthodon, like Coote, like the leaden goddess of the Dunciad, like some fat, proud flunkey, like pride, like indolence, like all that is darkening and heavy and obstructive in life. It is matter and darkness, it is the anti-soul, it is the ruling power of this land, Stupidity. My Kippses live in its shadow. Shalford and his apprenticeship system, the Hastings Academy, the ideas of Coote, the ideas of the old Kippses, all the ideas that have made Kipps what he is, - all these are a part of its shadow...I have laughed, and I laugh at these two people; I have sought to make you laugh....

But I see through the darkness the souls of my Kippses as they are, as little pink strips of quivering living stuff, as things like the bodies of little, ill-nourished,

ailing, ignorant children – children who feel pain, who are naughty and muddled and suffer, and do not understand why. And the claw of this Beast rests upon them!

(Wells 'Kipps' 310)

It is immediately apparent upon reading this passage that the narrative stance Wells chooses is markedly different to that which he has chosen throughout the rest of the text. David Lodge points out in his introduction to *Kipps* that at this point of the story Wells “renounces the stance of genial comic detachment which he has adopted as narrator up to this point, and adopts a prophetic, even apocalyptic tone” (‘Introduction’ xxvi). It could be suggested that in doing this Wells also renounces any claim to having the novel perceived as a work of art, for in adopting this prophetic tone Wells is arguably utilising the novel as a means of social propaganda in much the same manner that he heavily criticised Grant Allen for inartistically doing in *The British Barbarians*. The statement that it is “my vision” that “pierces the night” (Wells 'Kipps' 310) indicates that the reader is now directly receiving the central message of Wells’s novel in a manner that makes the story itself appear subservient to Wells’s castigation of the British class system in the quoted passage.

However, it is equally plausible that this passage from *Kipps* represents the work of a novelist who was straining at the limits of the Realist novel in order to realise a fictional aesthetic predicated upon the belief that “fiction should be a rational and sociologically useful art” (Parrinder and Philmus 7). To this extent, *Kipps* represents the work of a novelist who found the Realist form too restrictive for producing a novel that can be both ‘sociologically useful’ and a coherent work of art. Thus, rather than renouncing any claim towards being a writer who considered himself a conscious artist, Wells was in fact

breaking his alignment with the nineteenth-century Realist tradition he had previously championed in his role as a reviewer of literature. The point will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter through an analysis of Wells's 1909 novel *Tono-Bungay*. Here it will be suggested that *Tono-Bungay* is a novel that breaks from the Realist tradition in order that Wells could fulfil his personal aesthetic goals in a consciously artistic manner. In this context, it will be shown that whilst Wells's assertion to Henry James in 1915 that "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist" (Edel and Ray 264) might suggest that Wells was unconcerned with producing credible works of fictional art, he was in reality only averse to being an 'artist' if this meant conforming to the formalistic principles advocated by James and the establishment. Consequently, whilst *Tono-Bungay* is the antithesis of a Jamesian novel, it is a subtly coherent work of art in its own right. Furthermore, the chapter will also consider Wells's 1932 novel *The Bulpington of Blup* and will offer further credence to the argument that Wells considered himself a conscious artist in spite of his protestations to James, by showing that whilst the novel is at once an indictment of the aestheticism characteristic of the literary establishment, it is written with an objectivity that would not be typical of a novelist unconcerned with the artistic integrity of his work.

CHAPTER 2: H. G. WELLS AND HIS BREAK FROM THE REALIST TRADITION

For many literary critics H. G. Wells is a novelist whose fiction does not warrant scrutiny. John Hammond outlines that Wells is often dismissed academically “as a somewhat old-fashioned figure” (4), largely because he is regarded as a novelist “who continued to repeat until well into the twentieth century the conventions and techniques of the Victorian realist tradition” (4). Consequently, when Wells is discussed, he is often portrayed as the antithesis of the modernist writers who were his contemporaries. However, whilst a novel such as *Kipps* supports the argument that Wells conformed to the Realist tradition because he believed that this form would allow him to fulfil his personal aesthetic goals of producing fiction that is “socially representative in its range and highly personal in its idiom” (Parrinder and Philmus 53), it is also apparent that in *Kipps* Wells was straining at the limits of the Realist form and would need to break from this commitment if he was to produce novels that met his own aesthetic in a consciously artistic manner.

The point is given further credence with reference to a passage from Wells’s *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) entitled ‘Digression about Novels’. Here, Wells argues that the influence of the nineteenth-century Realist novel upon the society of its time was predicated upon the belief that the framework of the society in which a given novel is set is both established and stable. However, when Wells began utilising the Realist form to write novels that professed to be sociologically insightful works of fiction, he became consciously aware that the contemporary social framework within which novels such as *Kipps* were set had become increasingly unstable. As Wells states:

Throughout the broad smooth flow of nineteenth-century life in Great Britain, the art of fiction floated on this same assumption of social fixity. The Novel in English was produced in an atmosphere of security for the entertainment of secure people who liked to feel established and safe for good. Its standards were established within that apparently permanent frame and the criticism of it began to be irritated and perplexed when, through a new instability, the splintering frame began to get into the picture. (Wells 'Experiment' 2:494-5)

For Wells to fulfil his aesthetic aim of creating socially representative works of fiction, it became imperative for him to distance himself from a tradition that could only meet his aims if the social framework being portrayed was static and stable.

To this extent, Wells's 1909 novel *Tono-Bungay* arguably represents Wells's departure from the Realist tradition. Generically *Tono-Bungay* is best classified as a 'Condition of England' novel, with a central purpose of providing an account of the 'splintering' framework of English society. David Lodge states that in the case of *Tono-Bungay* "the frame does get into the picture; one might almost say the frame is the picture" ('England' 218) principally because the novel is organised not around the narrative of the story itself, but the "web of description and commentary by which all the proliferating events and characters of the story are placed in a comprehensive political, social, and historical perspective" ('England' 219). However, what is immediately striking upon reading *Tono-Bungay* is that these descriptions and commentaries are not provided by Wells directly, or through the omniscience of a third person narrator that might indicate Wells's authorial presence, but through the first person narrative of George Ponderevo, a fictional character

who is himself attempting to articulate the gradual disintegration of an increasingly unstable English society through the composition of an autobiographical novel. As George states when outlining his novelistic purpose at the outset of the narrative:

I suppose what I'm really trying to render is nothing more nor less than Life – as one man has found it. I want to tell – *myself*, and my impressions of the thing as a whole, to say things I have come to feel intensely of the laws, traditions, usages and ideas we call society, and how we poor individuals get driven and lured and stranded among these windy, perplexing shoals and channels.

(Wells 'Tono-Bungay' 12)

It could be suggested that Wells's decision to create the fictional character of George Ponderevo, a man whose experience of "this extensive cross-section of the British social organism" (Wells 'Tono-Bungay' 10) has left him compelled towards "writing something in the nature of a novel" (9) indicates Wells's desire to distance himself from the interpretations George makes of his life experiences. Wells's decision to tell *Tono-Bungay* from the perspective of George Ponderevo is indicative of his desire for the novel to fulfil his ideal of being a work of fiction "at once socially representative in its range and highly personal in its idiom" (Parrinder and Philmus 53), but without causing him to descend into the direct authorial preaching that would turn *Tono-Bungay* into mere social propaganda. The point is supported by Jeffrey Sommers, who argues that in writing *Tono-Bungay* Wells is seeking "a way to communicate his views without writing a treatise which will clearly be seen as bald propaganda" (76).

In presenting George Ponderevo as the fictional writer of an autobiographical novel, Wells is able to focus the reader's attention upon the analytical framework of George's novel (and ultimately Wells's own social message) without the novel obviously appearing to be a vehicle for the discussion of Wells's own social ideas. As a fictional novelist, the reader has no need to question the veracity of the events that compose George's life because these events are articulated from the perspective of a novelist who is not actually real. Sommers states that throughout the course of his narrative George "really is unconcerned with whether we accept the events of the story he tells us as true" (74) simply because he is using the novel he is writing "as a vehicle for his own views, for his commentary on modern society" (74). Consequently, in order for the reader to understand that it is the ideas present within George's commentary that are the crux of the novel, Wells depicts George as a writer who calls attention at any given opportunity to the fictional nature of his story, a novelist who appears disinterested in maintaining the illusion of reality within his narrative.

For Sommers, the reader is constantly reminded of the novel's status as artifice because "George uses the terminology of the stage...to call attention to his performance as a novelist" (73). For instance, in the second chapter of Book 1, entitled 'Of My Launch Into The World', George uses theatrical diction to underline the significance of George's childhood experiences as the son of a lady's maid at Bladesover House, not only in terms of the influence of the Bladesover system upon the shaping of his own life, but for the conclusions concerning the 'condition of England' that George has been able to make as a result of his experiences there. As George states:

That is the last I shall tell of Bladesover. The drop-scene falls on that, and it comes no more as an actual presence into this novel...But in a sense Bladesover has never left me; it is, as I said at the outset, one of those dominant explanatory impressions that make the framework of my mind. Bladesover illuminates England; it has become all that is spacious, dignified, pretentious and truly conservative in English life. It is my social datum.

(Wells 'Tono-Bungay' 65)

The theatrical inference is obviously apparent in George's use of 'drop-scene' to draw attention to the conclusion of Bladesover as a physical setting in the novel. The use of such diction automatically draws the reader into questioning the veracity of the events being narrated. However, the effect is intended, because in bringing the legitimacy of the events into doubt, George is able to show the reader that the story is written less to give a truthful rendering of his background so as to illuminate how his character develops *within* the setting of England, but to underline that it is the framework of England itself that George (and therefore Wells) wishes to discuss in *Tono-Bungay*. As George himself declares, the "impressions" he has of Bladesover are important to "the framework of my mind" only because, "Bladesover illuminates England" (Wells 'Tono-Bungay' 65). To this extent, it could be suggested that the framework of George's mind *is* England. The point is supported by Lodge, who states that "[t]he England of *Tono-Bungay* is not merely an appropriate setting for the gestures of Wells's characters, not merely a means of symbolizing their inner lives...[i]t is simply the central character of the novel" ('England' 218).

In *Tono-Bungay* Wells has arguably written a novel that represents the fulfilment of the aesthetic ideals he championed as a reviewer of literature for the *Saturday Review*. As a ‘Condition of England’ novel whose analytical framework has become the ‘splintering’ focus of the text’s picture, *Tono-Bungay* is at once a discussion of contemporary social issues, clearly saturated in the ideas and personality of its author, but without those ideas being articulated to the reader in the form of direct preaching. George Ponderevo himself relays that *Tono-Bungay* “is a novel, not a treatise” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 204). However, whilst *Tono-Bungay* reflects Wells’s belief that the stable framework of English society to which nineteenth-century novels were set had become increasingly unstable, it is perhaps not explicitly obvious how *Tono-Bungay* can be considered a novel that represents Wells’s break from the Realist tradition through the use of George’s first-person narrative alone. For instance, when one places the aesthetic vision realised within *Tono-Bungay* alongside the work of Henry James, a novelist with an accepted “transitional role...between nineteenth-century and modernist fiction” (Stevenson 21), it becomes less clear as to how one might argue a similar role for Wells. Certainly, the approach to the novel championed by Wells would have drawn no sympathy from James. As Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray state, Wells was clearly “an exponent of a materialistic kind of artistry to which James was utterly opposed” (18).

The opposition is only further enhanced when one considers the type of novel that *Tono-Bungay* is. For Wells himself, *Tono-Bungay* “was an indisputable Novel, but it was extensive rather than intensive” (‘Experiment’ 2:503) and it is because of this that the novel can be seen as the antithesis of a Jamesian alternative. As an ‘extensive’ novel dealing with the ‘Condition of England’ question, it bypasses the need for an intense scrutiny of

character by placing the commentary that traditionally constitutes the framework of the novel as its structural centre. For Randall Stevenson, such an approach would be unthinkable for a novelist such as Henry James whose ‘intensive’ novels share “modernism’s fascination with inner consciousness, intense perception and the nature of individual vision” (21) explicitly because they are structured around the organic consciousness of a single character; “a character through whose perceptions the material of the fiction could be carefully shaped and focused” (19). Indeed, Wells himself seems to have anticipated James’s dislike of the aesthetic approach he adopts in writing an ‘extensive’ novel like *Tono-Bungay* because he depicts George Ponderevo as a “lax, undisciplined storyteller” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 13) who apologetically declares that his “ideas of a novel all through are comprehensive rather than austere” (11) because novel-writing “is not my technique” (12).

However, whilst Wells adopts a fictional approach in *Tono-Bungay* that is wholly antithetical to that which is espoused by James, this does not mean that Wells’s novel does not signal a departure from the Realist tradition. Benita Parry discloses that there are an increasing number of critics who “have singled out *Tono-Bungay* as marking a break with nineteenth-century fictional tradition” (92). Invariably, such critics focus their analysis on the innovations resulting from Wells’s employment of George Ponderevo as narrator to support their arguments. For instance, Lucille Herbert suggests that Wells portrays George as a novelist who must “sprawl and flounder, comment and theorize, if I am to get the thing out I have in mind” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 13) because the traditional nineteenth-century narratives available to George as fictional models that a first-time novelist might replicate are insufficient for expressing the truths that George wishes to communicate in his novel.

For Herbert, because George's "deepest intuitions are of a still unrealised reality that cannot be revealed through personal and social history or conveyed in ordinary language", then "the essential and unifying form of *Tono-Bungay* becomes that of a search for expression which inheres in the process of composition itself" (142). William Kupinse similarly argues that George's narrative consists of the adoption of traditional fictional styles that might minister to his indictment of England's waste-driven capitalist system, only for these styles to be dismissed as incompatible with such an aim. For Kupinse, "*Tono-Bungay's* assumption of various identifiable literary styles is equally notable for its eventual dismissal of these styles" (66) and in this sense the novel should be viewed "as tending closer to the vein of high modernism" (66) because "Wells's practice of literary sampling neatly anticipates Eliot's strategy of high and low cultural ventriloquism in "The Waste Land"" (66).

However, whilst it is important to acknowledge the critical work suggesting that *Tono-Bungay* can be read as a novel that anticipates elements of modernist fiction so as to support the notion that Wells was a novelist keen to break from the narrative constraints that a commitment to the nineteenth-century Realist tradition imposes, it is also important to highlight that Wells was not sympathetic to the fictional approaches of novelists such as Ford, Henry James and Joseph Conrad; novelists critically esteemed for their significant contributions to the development of modernist fiction. The point is outlined explicitly by Parrinder and Philmus who state that, "Wells's literary attitudes...are not those of modernism" (10) simply because the educational background that had bestowed a commitment to scientific principles, also impressed upon Wells an epistemological outlook that made it impossible for him to sympathise with the aestheticism that is the hallmark of

his modernist contemporaries. Parrinder and Philmus argue that because modern art “tends to assert the privileged insight of the artist and his right to use a personal language which defies immediate or widespread comprehension” (11), the artistic movements comprising modernism are “really characterised by an extreme aestheticism” (10). As a novelist whose epistemological outlook was shaped by his scientific background, Wells considered the writer to be merely “the creature of his time and place” (10), a cultural figure whose responsibility lies not towards the aesthetic coherence of the work he produces, but to members of contemporary society whose understanding of reality the writer should try to enhance.

It is in the context of his epistemological opposition to aesthetically oriented writers such as James and Conrad that the reason for Wells’s decision to narrate *Tono-Bungay* from the perspective of a character who asserts his need to “sprawl and flounder, comment and theorize” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 13) becomes most clear. George, like Wells, approaches the writing of a novel from the epistemological perspective of a scientist. In the opening of the novel, George confesses that, “I like to write, I am keenly interested in writing, but it is not my technique. I’m an engineer with a patent or two and a set of ideas” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 12). Furthermore, George openly admits that having such a background militates against his being able to write a novel in the manner that a writer with an aesthetically motivated epistemological outlook would. For George, “most of whatever artist there is in me has been given to turbine machines and boat-building and the problem of flying” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 12-13), which consequently means that George is “writing mine – my one novel – without having any of the discipline to refrain and omit that I suppose the regular novel-writer acquires” (12). In this sense, because George is a character

whose epistemological outlook is inherently scientific, it follows that George places a commitment to aesthetic unity as a secondary concern to the responsibility he feels towards communicating the unique social insights that have been afforded him through the success of the medicine 'Tono-Bungay'.

Consequently, it could be suggested that in having George open *Tono-Bungay* with remarks that operate as an epistemological concession to the obvious stylistic differences with 'the novel' as defined by James, Wells is indicating both his break from the Realist tradition he had championed as a critic for the *Saturday Review*, and from any pretension towards composing fiction with a sense of himself as a conscious artist. Certainly, early reviews of the novel conclude that Wells's tendency to have George interrupt his narrative with social commentary adhering to the views Wells himself had expressed elsewhere in his work, undermines the artistic credibility of both Wells and *Tono-Bungay*. For instance, Charles L. Graves's review for the *Spectator* in February 1909 states that the narrative of *Tono-Bungay* is "freely interspersed with digressions, reflections, monologues, and essays, which so closely accord with the views expressed by Mr. Wells in his other works that it is difficult to avoid identifying the views of the author with those of the narrator" (Parrinder 151). Consequently, Graves asserts that the novel is characterised by the lack of "self-effacement deliberately practised by some of the greatest artists in fiction" and ultimately "disclaims all pretensions to artistic presentation" (Parrinder 151).

However, a closer reading of the text reveals that whilst Wells is writing *Tono-Bungay* in a manner that deliberately sins against the aesthetic commandments espoused by Henry James, he is doing so not with the intention of renouncing his credibility as a conscious

artist, but to show novelists such as James that fiction can prioritise a discussion of contemporary social issues above the aesthetic concern with style and characterisation, and still be a coherent work of literary art. The point is partially supported by Wells himself, who in the ‘Digression about Novels’ chapter of his *Experiment in Autobiography* states that his side of the disagreement he shared with Henry James concerning the art of fiction was rooted in his belief that “the novel of completely consistent characterization arranged beautifully in a story and painted deep and round and solid, no more exhausts the possibilities of the novel, than the art of Velazquez exhausts the possibilities of the painted picture” (‘Experiment’ 2:493). Clearly, Wells’s decision to write novels that do not conform to Jamesian standards does not mean that Wells wished to renounce the artistic credibility of his work. For Wells, his disagreement with James lies in the belief that the type of novel James perceived to be the standard against which all novels that sought to claim artistic credibility should be judged, was too limiting a standard for writers who were concerned with issues beyond the aesthetic unity of the novel to follow. From Wells’s perspective, the novel could be “more and less than...this real through and through and absolutely true treatment of people more living than life” (‘Experiment’ 2:491) and still be a coherent work of art.

It is at this juncture that Wells’s declaration to James in 1915 that he “had rather be called a journalist than an artist” (Edel and Ray 264) can be truly understood. As has been made clear, Wells’s words are commonly held to be those of a man who openly turned his back on the literary world because he did not wish his fiction to be considered as the work of a conscious artist. However, they are in fact the remarks of a writer who wanted to produce coherent works of literary art, but who had become overwhelmingly frustrated

with the assumption that to be both a novelist and a conscious artist meant strict conformity to the aesthetic formalism espoused by both James and the literary establishment. Wells's first priority was to produce fiction that fulfilled his desire to widen the scope of the novel and incorporate a discussion of contemporary social issues into the fictional fabric, a priority that a commitment to the Jamesian novel of exhaustive character study militated against. For instance, in a talk to the 'Times Book Club' in 1911 entitled *The Scope of the Novel* Wells asserts his belief that "the novelist is going to be the most potent of artists, because he is going to present conduct, devise beautiful conduct, discuss conduct, analyse conduct, suggest conduct, illuminate it through and through. He will not teach, but discuss, point out, plead, and display" (Edel and Ray 154-155). Thus, Wells declared himself a 'journalist' rather than an 'artist', not to abandon his status as a literary artist *per se*, but out of a desire to see his own works of fiction assessed for their artistic credibility in the context of the aesthetic principles he had been espousing since his days as a critic for the *Saturday Review*, rather than in the context of 'the novel' as defined by James. Wells confirms as much in 'Digression about Novels', stating how "I admitted that my so-called novels were artless self-revelatory stuff" ('Experiment' 2:494) in order that they be moved "away from a stately ideal by which they had to be judged" (2:494).

The point is given further credence by David Lodge, who in an article focussing upon *Tono-Bungay's* status as a 'Condition of England' novel, argues that Wells's apparent dismissal of his artistic credibility in light of his quarrel with Henry James was clearly the result of Wells being "irritated by James's mandarin gestures into doing *himself* injustice, affecting a literary barbarism which the skill of his own work belies" ('England' 215). Lodge asserts that whilst *Tono-Bungay* cannot be considered a novel that is comparable

with a Jamesian novel, it must also be remembered that Wells never intended for the novel to be compared as such. In this sense, the admissions of artistic failure that characterise the opening chapter of George Ponderevo's narrative are "not an admission of failure on Wells's part, but a rhetorical device to prepare the reader for the kind of novel *Tono-Bungay* is" ('England' 220); that is to say, a novel written by a novelist who writes with the intention of producing coherent works of fictional art, but not in the manner that is dictated to him by either James, or advocates of Jamesian principles. For Lodge, Wells's utilisation of George Ponderevo as the narrator of *Tono-Bungay* is effectively an example of "artlessness concealing art" ('England' 221), because it is clear when one pays close attention to Wells's use of language in the novel that rather than being the product of a "lax, undisciplined storyteller" (Wells 'Tono-Bungay' 13), as George claims, *Tono-Bungay* is written "with more discrimination and a firmer sense of artistic purpose and design than critics have usually given him (Wells) credit for" (Lodge 'England' 220).

Whilst it can be suggested that George Ponderevo's episodic and discursive narrative gives the impression that the novel has been written without the attention given to coherence that a fictional artist practices, it does not mean that Wells himself wrote *Tono-Bungay* in an inartistic manner. For Lodge, it is in Wells's decision to invest "his most powerful literary resources" ('England' 221) in the areas of the novel dedicated to George's "intention of commenting, describing, and theorizing" ('England' 221) that Wells is able to bring *Tono-Bungay* into a coherent artistic whole. In this sense, whilst *Tono-Bungay* might appear episodically disparate on the narrative surface, its episodes are all closely linked to the overall theme of showing England as a slowly 'splintering' social organism. Lodge argues that in utilising the "frame of architectural and topographical description" as the

“principal vehicle for the themes of the novel” (‘England’ 238), Wells is able to fulfil his literary strategy of presenting England “as an organism undergoing a process of change and decay” (‘England’ 239-240). For Lodge, this is achieved by inserting “a strain of disease and decay imagery” (‘England’ 219) into the “descriptions of landscape and townscape, of architecture and domestic interiors” (‘England’ 218) that frame the various episodes of George’s narrative, enabling Wells to draw these episodes into a coherent whole by “setting up verbal echoes” (‘England’ 220) within the change and decay imagery itself.

The point can be illustrated through examples from the text. Arguably, the change and decay imagery that runs throughout the scenic framework of George’s episodic narrative initially manifests itself in George’s depiction of his childhood experiences at Bladesover House. Whilst George first introduces the reader to Bladesover with a topographical description depicting Bladesover’s position “on the Kentish Downs” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 13) and how this position enables “its hundred and seventeen windows” to look “on nothing but its own wide and handsome territories” (13), George soon makes it known that such a description is included to emphasise that as the physical representation of a great social order, Bladesover has long ceased to have relevance as the representative order of English society. As the following digression from George indicates, Bladesover stands as a relic for a society that has undergone an extensive process of change and decay without the inhabitants realising:

There are times when I doubt whether any but a very inconsiderable minority of English people realize how extensively this ostensible order has even now passed away. The great houses stand in the parks still, the cottages cluster respectfully on

their borders, touching their eaves with their creepers, the English countryside – you can range through Kent from Bladesover northward and see – persists obstinately in looking what it was. It is like an early day in a fine October. The hand of change rests upon it all, unfelt, unseen; resting for a while, as it were half reluctantly, before it grips and ends the thing for ever. One frost and the whole face of things will be bare, links snap, patience end, our fine foliage of pretences lie glowing in the mire. (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 15)

It is in this passage that Wells begins to invest *Tono-Bungay* with the imagery of change and decay that will come to characterise the commentary framing George’s episodic narrative. The autumnal image used to portray Bladesover as the physical manifestation of an English social system set to “snap”, “end” and “lie glowing in the mire” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 15) introduces Wells’s literary strategy of utilising the narrative framework to portray the ‘splintering’ framework of English society. It is clear that Wells wishes to place emphasis on the permanent physical dominance of the Bladesover system to show that the inhabitants of English society are unaware that their social system has changed beyond recognition. The point is supported by Lodge, who argues that the fact that “the architecture and layout of Bladesover can continue to dominate the surrounding country long after the social order on which it was built has become obsolete, eloquently represents the failure of society to come to terms with the changes it has experienced” (‘England’ 222).

It is the verbal echoing of the imagery of change and decay present within George’s portrayal of Bladesover House at the outset of *Tono-Bungay* that enables Wells to produce a novel that is at once discursive and episodic in its status as a ‘Condition of England’ text,

and a coherent and individual work of fictional art. Perhaps the greatest example of this occurs in the episode where George journeys to the African jungles of Mordet Island; an expedition undertaken by George in an attempt to steal the substance ‘quap’, because it contains a rare element whose marketability might save his Uncle Edward from financial ruin. For many critics, it is this episode that highlights how disconnected George’s narrative is, and resultantly, how lacking Wells is in the ability to produce coherent works of fictional art. Bernard Bergonzi outlines that many “[c]ritics have been inclined to regard this section as an improvisation or afterthought on Wells’s part; an exciting enough narrative interlude, but having very little to do with the main outlines of the story” (87). Even George himself seems to view the episode as lacking relevance to the central themes of the novel as a whole, stating that the “expedition to Mordet Island stands apart from all the rest of my life, detached, a piece by itself with an atmosphere of its own” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 320) and should therefore be read as “merely an episode, a contributory experience” (320). However, critics such as Edward Mendelson have argued that, “Wells gives the whole African episode far greater significance than George understands in narrating it” (xviii), principally because the episode functions to capture “all the varieties of disconnectedness and indifference” (xviii) that George has experienced as a member of English society in other episodes of his life, and in doing this becomes “the imaginative and moral centre of *Tono-Bungay*” (xvii).

Mendelson’s point is vindicated when one pays close attention to the language used by George to depict Mordet Island, the substance known as quap and the effects of the quap itself, showing that Wells is concealing the artistic importance of the episode to his analysis of English society behind George’s protestations of irrelevance. For instance, George

depicts how his memories of arriving at Mordet Island are “woven upon a fabric of sunshine and heat and a constant warm smell of decay” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 325), with the use of the word “decay” giving the reflection an obvious connection to the theme of societal decay present throughout the text. However, it is not until George digresses into a reflection of the substance known as quap itself that the centrality of the Mordet Island episode to the text can become fully apparent. For George, “there is something – the only word that comes near it is *cancerous* – and that is not very near, about the whole of quap, something that creeps and lives as a disease lives by destroying; an elemental stirring and disarrangement, incalculably maleficent and strange” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 329). The key word in this passage is “cancerous”. Earlier in the novel, when George first moves to London as a student, he describes his new setting as one marked by “blind forces of invasion, of growth” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 102) and proceeds to give a topographical depiction of the urban sprawl that has resulted from London’s recent industrialisation. George observes how the industrialisation of London has had devastating effects both topographically and socially, because it has undermined the Bladesover system upon which English society was traditionally ordered and left “undistinguished industries, shabby families, second-rate shops, inexplicable people who in a once fashionable phrase do not ‘exist’” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 102). For George, the un-chartered growth of industrialism in London that he observes in the topography and architecture of his new surroundings is indicative of the largely unnoticed decay of the English social system and is expressed by him as “some tumorous growth-process”, as a visually “cancerous image” (Wells ‘Tono-Bungay’ 102).

It is in George's depiction of the quap as "cancerous" that the Mordet Island episode becomes a part of a coherent artistic whole, rather than be the disconnected adventure that George depicts it. Through the use of the pathological term 'cancer', quap becomes a metaphor for the forces of industrialism and capitalism that have invaded English society, expanded covertly, and altered the social fabric by eroding the traditions upon which society had functioned, without most of the inhabitants noticing. For Lodge, cancer in this sense becomes "the perfect metaphorical diagnosis of the condition of England" ('England' 228) because in having "an organic life of its own, which is however unnatural and malignant", the term 'cancerous' "draws together the two predominant strains in the language of descriptive comment in the novel: words suggestive of growth, change, and movement; and words suggestive of decay and death" ('England' 228). These two strains are clearly present in the passage where quap is described as cancerous. For instance, where "creeps" and "lives" (Wells 'Tono-Bungay' 329) echo the association with growth and change, so "destroying", "stirring" and "disarrangement" (Wells 'Tono-Bungay' 329) echo the association with decay and death. It is clear that far from being an episode of George's life that can be seen as an unrelated intrusion upon the novel, the Mordet Island expedition is arguably the episode that binds *Tono-Bungay* into a coherent artistic whole. In having George depict the quap as 'cancerous', Wells finds a metaphor for the 'splintering' framework of English society that draws together the otherwise detached strands of language evoking 'change' and 'decay' that dominate George's descriptive commentary throughout the novel.

It should be clear, therefore, that whilst it is a 'Condition of England' novel that will not parallel the aesthetically charged narratives characteristic of literary figures such as Henry

James, Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad, *Tono-Bungay* is a subtly coherent work of fictional art in its own right. Certainly, in his utilisation of imagery connotative of the central themes of change and decay, Wells deftly draws together the digressions and commentary characterising George's narrative into an artistic whole commensurate with the overall aim of showing England to be a social organism in terminal breakdown. At the same time Wells shows himself to be a novelist with a distinctive and individual artistic voice. Nonetheless, in the context of Wells's declaration to Henry James in 1915 that "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist" (Edel and Ray 264), it could be argued that if *Tono-Bungay* is the artistic culmination of the aesthetic principles he had espoused at the outset of his literary career, it also represents the pinnacle and end of Wells's artistic endeavours. Brian W. Aldiss comments on how, in light of the vehemence of his commitment to promoting the concept of a world state after 1915, Wells has become critically established as a figure "who became the hollow apostle of world order, who exchanged the cloak of imagination for the tin helmet of instruction" (28) and in so doing "went off the gold standard" (28) artistically.

However, it must be remembered that the withdrawal from the literary establishment that Wells's declaration is seen to represent can also be interpreted as the careless remark of a novelist who wished to be considered a conscious artist, but not if it meant conformity to the standards of literary formalism espoused by Henry James and the establishment. In this context, there is an interesting line of critical study examining Wells's fiction of the 1930s, which argues that not only did Wells continue to write with a sense of himself as a conscious artist throughout his career, but that this later fiction betrays an aesthetic approach enabling the novels of this decade to be classified as legitimate novels of

character. The point is partly vindicated by Wells's own comments in 'Digression about Novels', where he outlines his belief that intensive character study of the type a novelist such as James wished to execute could only be undertaken once the framework in which their personality is to be examined has been constructed to authentically reflect modern social reality. As Wells states:

Exhaustive character study is an adult occupation, a philosophical occupation. So much of my life has been a prolonged and enlarged adolescence, an encounter with the world in general, that the observation of character began to play a leading part in it only in my later years. It was necessary for me to reconstruct the frame in which individual lives as a whole had to be lived, before I could concentrate upon any of the individual problems of fitting them into this frame. I am taking more interest now in individuality than I ever did before.

(Wells 'Experiment' 2:501-2)

In this regard it is obvious that from the perspective of Wells, the novel of intensive character study would have been impossible to write in the period in which he was writing *Tono-Bungay*. As has been made clear, Wells's primary aim when writing any novel is to produce a work that is socially representative in thematic range, and because he considered the social framework to be 'splintering' at the time of *Tono-Bungay*, it would have been unthinkable for him to have concentrated primarily on the exploration of individual character when the framework in which the character would be placed was in a process of profound change.

It is for this reason that Wells came into conflict with Henry James and the rest of the literary establishment, because from Wells's point of view the aesthetic formalism characteristic of a Jamesian approach to the novel ministered to an extreme aestheticism that hampered the ability of literature to both reflect and influence the forces of social change for the better. Robert Bloom outlines that, "because Wells is urgently interested in changing the world, he is passionately interested in the forces that on one hand resist, and on the other encourage, change" (57). For Bloom, the significance of Wells's 1932 novel *The Bulpington of Blup* lies in the fact that the protracted descent of the aesthete protagonist Theodore Bulpington into the subjective reality of his own romantic conception of the world, highlights the extent Wells considered the aestheticism that characterised the literary values of James and the establishment to inhibit beneficial social change. Within the novel Theodore Bulpington is presented as a fully formed aesthete. His father, Raymond Bulpington is presented as "a poet and critic with a weak chest" who had "neglected his final studies at Oxford for the aesthetic life" (Wells 'Bulpington' 14), and the home at Blayport on the Blay in which Raymond and his wife Clorinda, a "dark, sturdy, well-built girl of great energy" whose "mind was unusually broad" (Wells 'Bulpington' 14), raise Theodore is presented as one in which art "and, still more, talking about art" is the most "powerful reality in that little Blayport home" (Wells 'Bulpington' 32). Consequently, Theodore himself is presented as an adolescent with "precocious" (Wells 'Bulpington' 33) taste:

He pronounced judgments in a style closely resembling Raymond's...He was smilingly severe upon the architecture of Blayport and the fashions in Blayport shops. He begged for two Japanese prints to put up in his bedroom to replace a

Madonna of Raphael's that he found "tedious"...For his present on his fourteenth birthday he asked for a really good book about the Troubadours.

(Wells 'Bulpington' 33)

However, from an early age Theodore becomes conscious that the romantic conception of reality idealised by the artistic upbringing provided for him by his *fin-de-siècle* parents is insufficient when epistemologically brought to bear upon his experiences in the real world. For instance, when Wells is narrating the story of Theodore's adolescence, sex is described as "a more powerful and perplexing influence" that was "no longer simply lovely and romantic", but which was "entangling itself with unclean and repellent processes in life" (Wells 'Bulpington' 63). Rather than seek to face up to the reality of his sexual urges however, Theodore retreats into a subjective reverie, creating an ideal self, 'The Bulpington of Blup', and allowing the image of Michelangelo's 'The Delphic Sybil' to manifest itself as "the ruling heroine of his adolescent reveries" (Wells 'Bulpington' 66), an ideal beloved for 'The Bulpington of Blup' because in his reveries "they embraced and kissed, but everything between them was always clean and splendid" (66). Thus, even in the narration of his adolescence, the aesthetic atmosphere in which Theodore is raised is deemed to have negative consequences for the protagonist, because it encourages him to use the imaginative reality he creates through his romantic second self to retreat from the complexities of actual life. Bloom neatly summarises how "art in general nourishes his (Theodore's) inwardness and dreaming, authorizing and even implementing his impulse to fend off reality" (40).

It is in Theodore's clashes with the scientifically oriented Broxted family that the aestheticism espoused by Theodore begins to become apparent as a force that stifles the development of beneficial social change in Wells's own conception of reality. For Bloom, "*Bulpington* is about the pursuit of reality and flight from it" (54) and in Teddy Broxted, Theodore encounters a personality whose epistemological conception is wholly distinct from his own. As much is obvious upon their first meeting, when Teddy Broxted shows Theodore his microscope and the boys share a disagreement that degenerates without resolution on the ability of the microscope to enable one to interpret the world. For Theodore, reality is not something that exists to be measured or understood in the manner that Teddy attests, because he believes that, "'The world exists for Art'" (Wells 'Bulpington' 82). The epistemological opposition between Theodore and Teddy is clearly meant to mirror the opposition between Wells and Henry James. However, just as Wells was aware in his comment to James that theirs was "a real and very fundamental difference" (Edel and Ray 264), so he portrays the opposition between Theodore and Teddy Broxted as one that is irresolvable. The point is supported by Bloom, who states that "[t] here is no more reason for Henry James's champion, Theodore, and his friend, Teddy, to compose their differences in the novel than for Wells and James to do so in life" (57).

It is with the outbreak of the First World War in the novel that the epistemological outlook espoused by Theodore's aesthetic temperament is shown to have detrimental consequences. To begin with Theodore struggles to decide whether to enlist for battle. The narrative discloses how Theodore's second self 'The Bulpington of Blup' "had accepted the ostensible values of the war from the outset, had adopted the role of a patriot in a spirit of unqualified gallantry and courage" (Wells 'Bulpington' 210), whilst Theodore himself

has “a very strong desire to go on with life in London, which had been shaping itself...upon very tolerable and interesting lines” (Wells ‘Bulpington’ 211). When Theodore does enlist, he abandons his post on the front line and narrowly avoids being shot for cowardice. However, instead of confronting the deficiencies in his own personality he merely retreats further into his own subjectivity, reciting over dinner at the end of the novel a tale in the guise of ‘The Bulpington of Blup’ that tells of how he took the Kaiser himself prisoner. At the novel’s close, Theodore recognises that the reality which he has built for himself is one predicated upon lies, but he offers no apology for this because he is also aware that the epistemological view to which he subscribes views truth as something created by the subjectivity of the individual:

“I am a liar in a world of lies. Lies? Dreams! World of dreams. Hidden world...World of self-delusion. But most of us never find out it is self-delusion. I happen to know. And because I know it, I shape my life as I like, past and future, just as I please. What wasn’t true is true now. See? I *make* it true.”

(Wells ‘Bulpington’ 403)

It is clear that Theodore is characterised by an aestheticism that Wells views as a force that will inhibit the inevitable social upheaval created by the war from developing into an event with the potential to initiate positive social progress. As Bloom summarises, “[h]ad there been no war, Theodore might have escaped reckoning; but it is part of the intimation of the novel that given enough Theodores, there had to be a war, and inevitably the war had to call in question much of what Theodore represents” (65).

However, whilst it is obvious that the portrayal of Theodore is intended to represent Wells's own critique of the aestheticism to which he had been opposed for the duration of his creative life, it is less discernible how *The Bulpington of Blup* can be considered a work of artistic merit in this context. For instance, it could be suggested that Theodore is merely a 'type', a caricature who is created so that the novel can function as a more considered extension of the portraits that were so offensive to Henry James in *Boon*. For critics such as John Batchelor though, *The Bulpington of Blup* stands out as a credible work of fictional art because whilst it is clear that Theodore is to be condemned by Wells's narrative as a 'type', Theodore's consciousness has been presented to the reader with an objective detachment that makes it impossible for the reader to conceive of Theodore as anything other than an individual whose fate exacts sympathy. For Batchelor, the novel "explores exhaustively, and with great sensitivity, the consciousness of a figure who is repudiated and condemned by the novel's dramatic organisation" (152-3), to the extent that Theodore becomes "like George Eliot's Rosamund Vincy or Gwendolen Harleth, a figure who is fully and exhaustively known before he is adversely judged" (148-9).

Whilst it is the events of the First World War and Theodore's cowardly and retreating response to both the war itself and the society of its aftermath that enables the reader to become aware of Wells's contempt for the aestheticism inherent within Theodore's personality, Wells extends the possibility for the reader to sympathise with Theodore to an extent that he probably would not because he allows Theodore to form as a character free from adverse judgment until the outbreak of war. To put it simply, it is the events of the narrative itself, rather than a condemning, intrusive authorial voice that allows the reader to see the adversity that can stem from individuals in society who subscribe to purely

aesthetic tendencies. To this extent, a novel such as *The Bulpington of Blup*, although written in 1932 at a time when Wells is long considered to have turned his back on the literary establishment, represents a considerable artistic achievement on the part of Wells. To Batchelor, “[t]he younger Wells was incapable of such artistic detachment” (153) as the type demonstrated in his construction of Theodore’s personality, and in this regard it is clear that Wells remained a novelist who wished to explore his ideas for the furtherance of society in fiction with a sense of himself as a conscious artist beyond the date of 1915.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this thesis, it was made apparent that H. G. Wells's assertion to Henry James in 1915 that, "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist" (Edel and Ray 264) had done considerable damage to Wells's literary and artistic reputation. In the decades following the cessation of the friendship of both writers, Henry James's academic stock has only increased, largely due to the influence the body of work he produced is deemed to have had upon the formalistic development of the modernist novel that dominated the early decades of the twentieth century. However, as an advocate of an approach to fiction that was epistemologically divergent from that which James practiced, Wells is critically considered to be the loser of their quarrel. Consequently, Wells is often classified as a novelist whose materialistic fictional approach left him naively disposed towards a conformity to the fictional techniques synonymous with the Realist novel of the nineteenth-century, the very form that modernist novelists such as Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce were attempting to usurp. To this extent, Wells is generally considered to be a novelist who wrote without a sense of himself as a conscious artist.

The purpose of this thesis has been to highlight that contrary to his own protestations, Wells composed his novels with a seriousness of artistic purpose and whilst his novels are clearly not written to parallel the aesthetically charged narratives characteristic of a figure such as Henry James or the modernist writers he influenced, they are an attempt to deliver fictional art commensurate with an aesthetic vision for fiction that is wholly personal to Wells himself. For Wells, the novel form represented the ideal medium in which the major social problems bedeviling contemporary society could be highlighted and discussed, and whilst his early work as a critic for the *Saturday Review* shows that Wells was disparaging

towards novelists who traded their artistic responsibility as writers of fiction for the sake of producing mere social propaganda, he was clearly a figure for whom the presence of the authorial voice in a novel was of central importance. Wells was clearly a writer dedicated towards “realizing his ideal of a kind of fiction that would be at once socially representative in its range and highly personal in its idiom” (Parrinder and Philmus 53).

It is for this reason that Wells cannot be aligned with the French Naturalism espoused by Emile Zola. One of the most popular misconceptions of Wells is that because he was ontologically influenced by the Darwinian theory of man articulated to him by T. H. Huxley during his days as a student, a theory central to Zola’s conception of the Naturalist novel, Wells is himself a novelist who “belongs firmly with the naturalist school” (Hammond 11). However, for a writer to be considered a Naturalist novelist, it is necessary for the author to detach themselves from the material they are working with in the novel, something to which Wells was utterly opposed. To this extent, whilst at the beginning of the twentieth century Realism was being questioned from within by both the aesthetic formalism associated with Henry James and the scientific Naturalism espoused by Emile Zola, Wells appeared to be a novelist who continued to subscribe to fictional techniques synonymous with ‘classic realist’ novelists such as George Eliot because these were the methods most suited for enabling Wells to fulfil his own aesthetic goals.

However, whilst the first chapter of this thesis has shown that a novel such as *Kipps* (1905) does contain strong associations with the Realist tradition in its use of omniscient narration, Wells ultimately found the Realist form to be too inhibitive for achieving his novelistic aims in a manner that was tantamount to producing coherent works of fictional

art. For instance, there is a passage from one of the closing chapters of *Kipps*, entitled 'The Callers' where Wells renounces the narrative tone bringing him into line with the Realist tradition in favour of an apocalyptic voice that conveys the central message Wells wishes to articulate within the text, but in a manner that brings him into line with the propagandist writing he was so against in his critical work. Arguably, Wells's 1909 novel *Tono-Bungay* is the artistic fulfilment of the aesthetic goals he established at the turn of the century as a critic for the *Saturday Review*. In employing George Ponderevo as a narrator given the freedom to digress into social commentary, Wells is able to conduct an analysis of the 'Condition of England' that is both socially representative and highly personal to Wells himself, but without causing him to descend into the type of commentary that undermined the artistic consistency of *Kipps*.

In succeeding here, Wells necessarily sins against the stylistic commandments to which Henry James believed that all novelists who wish to be considered serious fictional artists should subscribe. This is because, rather than produce an intensive novel of well-rounded characterisation, Wells produces an extensive novel whose discursive and episodic narrative allows the impressions, judgments and ideas of its narrator concerning the society in which his story is placed to become the novel's 'picture', as opposed to simply the novel's 'frame'. However, this does not mean that *Tono-Bungay* represents the work of a novelist who wrote without a sense of himself as a conscious artist. In choosing to narrate the novel through a character who must "sprawl and flounder, comment and theorize, if I am to get the thing out I have in mind" (Wells 'Tono-Bungay' 13), Wells appears to have written a novel whose disparate episodes lack consistency. However, a close analysis of the text reveals that *Tono-Bungay* is a subtly coherent work of fictional art. It is only when

close attention is paid to the imagery connotative of the central themes of change and decay that one realises that Wells has deftly drawn the digressions and commentary that characterise George's narrative into an artistic whole commensurate with the overall aim of showing England to be a social organism whose uncharted modernity has caused the breakdown of the traditions and value systems upon which English society functions. In turn, Wells shows himself to be a novelist with a distinctive and individual artistic voice.

Of course, it could easily be suggested that *Tono-Bungay* represents the artistic pinnacle of Wells's literary career, given that it was written before Wells appeared to renounce his artistic status to Henry James in 1915. However, it should be clear that Wells's comments to James are those of a novelist who as David Lodge summarises, "was plainly irritated into doing *himself* injustice, affecting a literary barbarism which the skill of his own work belies" ('England' 215). Thus, rather than cease to write with a sense of himself as a conscious artist *per se*, Wells was merely turning his back on a literary establishment whose overtly aesthetic approach to fiction meant that to be considered a credible 'artist' in the eyes of the establishment, meant a conformity to a manner of viewing 'the novel' that Wells was both ideologically and epistemologically incapable of achieving. It is for this reason that Wells's 1932 novel *The Bulpington of Blup* is so important. Not only is it Wells's most effective critique of the aestheticism predominant within Henry James's view of both reality and fiction, it represents through the objective detachment with which Wells develops and ultimately refutes the personality of Theodore Bulpington, the extent that Wells continued to write with a sense of himself as a conscious artist throughout his literary career.

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