

THE EVERYDAY, ESCAPE, AND THE ONGOING WORK OF UTOPIA IN THE ENDINGS OF *THE HISTORY OF MR. POLLY* AND *KIPPS**

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Abstract. This article examines the conclusions of *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* and *The History of Mr. Polly* and seeks to position these lyrical endings within a reading of H. G. Wells's understanding of the relationship between the everyday and escape, reading between his Edwardian fiction and non-fiction. On the one hand, everyday life has been critiqued by Henri Lefebvre as symptomatic of capitalism's reach over modern life, a contingency requiring urgent redress. On the other, Laurie Taylor and Stanley Cohen posit escaping the everyday as the inevitable response to life's repetitions. Wells's thinking mediates these two approaches: escape as determined response to a specific everyday and an ongoing endeavour. Though *Kipps* and *Polly* are subjected to the daily miseries of Edwardian capitalism, their escapes do not constitute a final reprieve. The equanimity of both novels' conclusions is interrupted by a return to the everyday and Wells signals that permanent repose is anathema to the constitution of utopia.

The conclusions of *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* (1905) and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910) are notable for a lyrical density and sublime calm that extant critical accounts struggle to explain, negotiate, or frame within H. G. Wells's thinking. The endings can be read in a framework alert to the novels' articulation and explicit advocacy of escaping the everyday. Such a reading opens up a new means of understanding Wells's approach to everyday, namely that he saw the work of escape and perhaps the constitution of utopia as requiring ongoing endeavour. Permanent repose is anathema to realising 'the human power of self-escape', and the final efforts of *Polly* and *Kipps*, which are predicated on a necessary return to the everyday, ratify Wells's commitment to the process of escape rather than its inert attainment.¹

Critics have signalled the importance of the ordinary in Wells: Richard Higgins indicates that Wells 'chronicles the material conditions of everyday life', and Bernard Loing notes that Wells has an 'ability to express the tenderness that can lighten up the drabness of everyday life'.² Others alight on the theme of escape: Jefferson Hunter posits Wells's Edwardian works as formed by 'similar plots of entrapment and escape'; Michael Schmidt describes the 'movement' of Wells's fiction as 'toward release or escape'.³ Jonathan Wild argues that *Kipps* 'demonstrate[s] the liberation of an ordinary man', and Simon J. James notes that *Polly* seeks 'escape from everyday tedium'.⁴ Some have even critiqued Wells's conception of escape. R. P. Weeks discusses the theme of disentanglement in Wells's work, highlighting the existence of an escapist impulse found in the scientific romances and the Edwardian comedies.⁵ Weeks notes the ubiquity of individuals in Wells's work refusing to submit to, and struggling against, the given limits of their environments, from which they eventually disentangle themselves. Weeks relates this disentangling instinct to the 'rigidly stratified society' into which Wells was born

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¹ H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1905), 19.

² Richard Higgins, 'Feeling like a Clerk in H. G. Wells', *Victorian Studies* 50.3 (2008), 459; Bernard Loing, 'Love and Mr. Lewisham: Foundations and Sources for a First Social Novel', in *H. G. Wells: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Steven McLean (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 82. This conception of Wells's work has a long history; see, for example: *H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 78. In 1900, the *Daily Telegraph* commended Wells's 'infinite tenderness for the ordinary' (78).

³ Jefferson Hunter, *Edwardian Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 16; Michael Schmidt, *The Novel: A Biography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 575.

⁴ Jonathan Wild, 'Introduction', in *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul and The History of Mr. Polly* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2017), 21; Simon J. James, *Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity, and the End of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 122; see also: Michael Draper, *H. G. Wells* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987), 74, 103.

⁵ Robert P. Weeks, 'Disentanglement as a Theme in H. G. Wells's Fiction' [1954], in *H. G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 25-31.

and his vision of science's emancipatory potential.⁶ Within this framing, the endings of *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly* are seemingly coherent. Weeks's conception of autonomous individuals simply bursting out of stultifying confines should be measured against its underlying assumptions, however, and Christopher Caudwell's criticism of Wells's politics outlines the novels' implicit advocacy of bourgeois ideology.⁷ Yet neither Weeks's nor Caudwell's arguments wholly account for the mindless tranquillity and lyrical updraft of the conclusions because they overlook the pivotal and nuanced connection Wells posits between the everyday and escape. The former is not reducible to the historical context into which Wells was born, as Weeks implies; the latter is not offered as a final breaking out of the everyday, as Caudwell's criticism argues. This article contends that placing escape in causal relation to the everyday is the only way to elucidate the true complexity of Wells's understanding of escape as both a response to daily life under Edwardian capitalism and an ongoing task which precludes a final or ultimate liberation. Indeed, the 'blissful release' Weeks describes is explicitly temporary, and the impermanence of disentanglement from the day-to-day implicates the processual work of escaping the everyday and, moreover, realising utopia.⁸

Wells indicates the importance of escaping the everyday in his autobiography: 'I believe this craving for a release from – bothers, from daily demands and urgencies [...] is shared by an increasing number of people'.⁹ He returns to this in a moment of telling self-apprehension:

it is only now as I bring facts and dates together that I realise the importance of fugitive impulses throughout my own story. At phase after phase I find myself saying in effect: 'I must get out of this. I must get clear. I must get away from all this [...]. These daily routines are wrapping about me, embedding me in a mass of trite and habitual responses.'¹⁰

Starting from Wells's lucid self-appraisal, this article outlines distinct theoretical articulations of the everyday: the sociological work of Laurie Taylor and Stanley Cohen, who argue that escape is an inviolable response to the everyday, and critiques that posit a link between quotidian life and capitalism. Wells's articulation of escape involves a repudiation of the everyday under capitalism, manifest for *Kipps* and *Polly* as live-in drapery work. The protagonists escape these 'wrapped' confines: *Kipps* through serendipitous plotting and *Polly* through violent self-affirmation. Though distinct, these different routes affirm the importance of individual autonomy in Wells's critique of everyday life. Hence, Caudwell's critique is seemingly endorsed by conclusions which implicitly aggrandise bourgeois agency over the true, proletarian-driven engine of history. The logic of escape which underwrites the novels can also be found in modern theoretical accounts which posit the everyday as both consequence and evidence of capitalist hegemony; that is, that the everyday can be definitively broken out of. This article argues that Wells's approach to escape is much broader, implicating a desire to 'smash the world of everyday' and, simultaneously, recognising the manifest necessity of ongoing effort.¹¹ Consequently, the endings refuse the rhapsodic stasis they seemingly endorse, revealing the true scope of Wells's conception the everyday.

1. The everyday and escape

This section outlines theoretical framings which clarify Wells's conception of the everyday: escape as an inviolable consequence of human experience and a response to the everyday under capitalism. Having outlined the theoretical issues at stake, this section traces *Kipps*'s and *Polly*'s everyday experiences which prompt escape.

⁶ Weeks, 29-30.

⁷ Christopher Caudwell, *Studies in a Dying Culture* (London: John Lane, 1938), 73-94.

⁸ Weeks, 27.

⁹ H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)*, in 2 vols. (London: Victor Gollancz and The Cresset Press, 1934), vol. 1, 15.

¹⁰ H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, vol. 2, 738; see also: H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* [1909] (London: Penguin, 1968). In *Ann Veronica*, the same complaint is made in the same terms: 'All the world about her seemed to be [...] in wrappers' (11), and: 'the wrapped world at its best [...] a life restrained, kindly, beautiful, a little pathetic and altogether dignified; a life of great disciplines and suppressions and extensive reserves' (228).

¹¹ Wells, *Modern*, 347. Emphasis in the original.

In their sociological study of everyday life, Cohen and Taylor posit escape as an inevitable response to the familiar. *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life* (1976) argues that the everyday constitutes the moment at which activities – work, hobbies, family life – are dissociated by self-consciousness. Once activities cross the threshold of everydayness and are driven beneath the need for conscious attention, a notional ‘real’ self intercedes.¹² Activities are compartmentalised as one part of existence; work is something to which one attends, if thoughtlessly, creating an internal distinction between the ‘automaton’ performing the task and a self-conscious, ‘real’ identity. *Escape Attempts* begins with prisoners’ strategies to fend off

the insidious process which attacked personal identity. If you did not constantly attend your own state of mind then you might drift into that condition which characterized some of those in the prison who already had served long sentences, men who now appeared to be more dead than alive, ‘zombies’.¹³

Cohen and Taylor contend that by capitulating to routines, individuals risk deteriorating into automatons that simply obey everyday patterns. The prisoners’ resistance to enforced routines implicates a general mode of experiencing the everyday, and the ‘scripts’ ordering social experiences, such as family meals, are qualitatively similar to the regularities of work or prison.¹⁴ Repetitive social existence means that nominally variegated experiences are fundamentally similar, produce a sense of the familiar, and induce the desire to (re)assert one’s ‘real’ self, to escape.

Individuals undertake efforts to escape their everyday by different means, such as hobbies, holidays, drugs, therapies, art, communes. Unfortunately, such efforts are not outside the logic of the everyday:

A sense of *déjà vu* can always invade [...] novel circumstances, and that which was spontaneous becomes only a variant of an old theme; the new partner begins to speak familiar lines, and the acts unfold predictably. [...] As their awareness of the script increases, so do they strike different attitudes towards it in order to demonstrate their freedom.¹⁵

Escape strategies often contain rhythms and continuities which become visible after repeated efforts, and, moreover, they support the everyday, enabling individuals to endure the conditions which produced the desire to escape. Wells recognised the necessity and inefficacy of imaginative flights: ‘sooner or later the mind had to return to its needy habitation and its fated limitations. Temporary escape and alleviation by reverie [are] the easier substitutes for positive effort to get out of the imprisoning conditions’.¹⁶ Paradoxically, people remain trapped in the routines of escape. Yet, despite the everyday constituting a series of ever expanding and enclosing concentric circles with no hope of ultimate release, *Escape Attempts* concludes with a rousing assertion of the human necessity of its title. Individual escape attempts signify and manifest ‘the self as a construct which only becomes alive by being wary, elusive, mobile’.¹⁷

Whereas Cohen and Taylor posit escape as a necessary response to the familiar, and this model is not strictly confined to their cited examples, Wells invokes specific everyday intimately related to life under capitalism. Henri Lefebvre, a formative thinker in the critique of everyday life, stresses the need ‘to think about what is happening around us, within us, each and every day’, because the everyday is not simply the benign predicate of escape.¹⁸ The everyday contains a logic, ‘a power concealed in [the] apparent banality, a depth beneath [the] triviality’: it signifies the reach of capitalism over modern life.¹⁹ Though Lefebvre’s critique emerged as a response to the influence of American capitalism

¹² Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor, *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*: second edition (London: Routledge, 1992), 214-15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 80-3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁶ Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 1, 143.

¹⁷ Cohen and Taylor, 236.

¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre *Critique of Everyday Life. Volume I: Introduction* [1947], trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2008), 14-15; see also: *Critique of Everyday Life. Volume I*, 183, 5, 85, 105, and Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* [1938], trans. John Sturrock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 36, 47, 116.

¹⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* [1968], trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (London: Bloomsbury,

following WWII, his apprehension of the everyday's relationship to capitalism builds on ideas reaching back to the Edwardian period, such as Georg Simmel's work on urban neurasthenia.²⁰ The experience of everyday life is marked by alienation and fatigue; the daily repetitions of work denote a banality and predictability which is felt across all experience, even as such experiences are dulled by iterative routine. Lefebvre contends that the exploitative logic of work is echoed in leisure through consumption. These dynamics are exacerbated by the total administration of life by capitalism, denying agency to those living under its auspices. Lefebvre argues that the everyday's cyclical rhythms have been subjected to acquisitive linearity of capitalism and thoroughly colonised, organised: 'working life, private life, leisure [all] rationally exploited'.²¹ Whereas Cohen and Taylor posit leisure activities as vulnerable to self-consciousness, Lefebvre argues that leisure is compromised by capitalism, rather than providing an inevitably brief reprieve from everyday life: it completes the circuit back to labour, as it ostensibly makes work bearable and is subject to capital accumulation. Lefebvre's approach, much like Michel de Certeau's description of strategy's domination in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), posits capitalism's hegemony as a tentacular grasp which invades, exploits, and diminishes the potential of everyday life but which is contingent and might be overcome.²²

A distinction need to be drawn between the quiet ubiquity of Cohen and Taylor's model of escape and Lefebvre's teleological critique, one explicitly premised on the viability of non-everyday, disalienated modes of experience. The latter's mode of engagement is echoed in other accounts of everyday life, including, for example, John Roberts, Raoul Vaneigem, Harry Harootunian, Guy Debord, and Agnes Heller, all of whom advocate escaping the everyday.²³ A notion of final escape informs Lefebvre's critique of everyday life; that is, that the everyday will be sublated.²⁴ In *Critique of Everyday Life. Volume I*, Lefebvre invokes a French medieval peasant's disalienated enjoyment of *la fête*, which entailed an 'enormous orgy of eating and drinking', cross-dressing, contests, 'comical taunts', and parodies of medieval tournaments ending in 'scuffles and orgies'.²⁵ In step with the cycles of mortality and the seasons, and the relations of society and nature, there existed a pre-alienated equilibrium, according to Lefebvre. Despite the limits of his chosen example, Lefebvre nonetheless discerns and offers a possible, emancipated post-everyday future.

Wells mediates the divide between *Escape Attempts* and Lefebvre's teleology, and this is intimated in the conclusions of *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly*: the everyday is not strictly benign – indeed, it is tangibly injurious – but a final emancipation ignores the intractability of escape. Crucially, Wells's utopian ambitions, figured as escape for Kipps and Polly, are tempered or infused by processual, constructive endeavour; escape is, in the first instance, nonetheless motivated by the contingencies of capitalism which requires an immediate determination to 'smash the world of everyday'.²⁶ In the novels themselves, Wells focuses on the dissatisfactions of the everyday under capitalism. Unlike Lefebvre, he did not analyse the organising prowess of capitalism. Instead, Wells outlines the material conditions of a global polity moving beyond capitalism's 'immense process of disorganisation', castigated by

2016), 31.

²⁰ Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' [1903], trans. Edward A. Shils, in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 324-39.

²¹ Lefebvre, *Everyday Life*, 49; see also: Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life. Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday* [1961], trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2002), 85-91.

²² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* [1980], trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xiii-xiv, 36-7, 92-3.

²³ John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 83, 123; Raoul Vaneigem, 'Aiming for Practical Truth' [1967], trans. Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Anthology*: revised edition, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 280; Guy Debord, 'Perspectives for Conscious Changes in Everyday Life' [1961], trans. Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Anthology*, 99; Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 126; Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life* [1970], trans. G. L. Campbell (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 258.

²⁴ Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, 150-2.

²⁵ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life. Volume I*, 202-7.

²⁶ Wells, *Modern*, 347. Emphasis in the original.

George Ponderevo as ‘one spectacle of forces running to waste’, and by Wells himself as ‘an absence of system’, a vitiating force of ‘uncontrolled acquisitive energy [...] wasting life’.²⁷

The conditions which mandate escape for Kipps and Polly are the realities of live-in drapery work, an experience Wells tellingly described as ‘the prison’.²⁸ The early section of *Kipps* is ‘suffused with a sense of [...] impotent immobility’ induced by ‘the stasis of the shop’.²⁹ The merely ‘dreary waste’ of school is supplanted by ‘cosmic disaster’: ‘the great, stupid machine of retail trade [...] caught his life into its wheels, a vast irresistible force [...] caught – they were all caught. All life took on the hue of one perpetual, dismal Monday morning’.³⁰ *Kipps* is grimly totalising: the repetition of ‘caught’ and ‘all’ across clauses intimates the inexorability of a common fate broadened to envelop all life. Everyday uniformity – what Joshua Clover calls the ‘long Monday of the world’ – is indicated by the singular, comprehensive ‘perpetual’, and the closing alliteration, echoing the second, preparatory syllable of ‘dismal’, realises a continuity threatened by the semantics.³¹ Kipps laments the tangibility of this ‘grey of common life’: ‘A vague dissatisfaction with life drifted about him and every now and again enveloped him like a sea fog. During these periods it was greyly evident that there was something, something vital in life, lacking’.³²

The organisation of Shalford’s Folkestone Drapery Bazaar, planned around a simple ‘philosophy of life – [...] always to hustle and save’, induces a sense of confinement.³³ Shalford’s economic dictates are ‘System’ and ‘Efficiency’, and Shalford informs Kipps: ‘We’ll soon get y’r into better shape than that. Make you Fishent. [...] System! System everywhere. Fishency’.³⁴ Shalford’s idiom betrays the limits of his ambition. ‘Fishent’ is an anagram and near homophone of fishnet, and there is a suspicion that, despite his designs, inefficiencies will slip through the porous net. In fact, Shalford’s decision to allow always for small accounting errors in the name of expediency inspires his ledger clerk to open ‘a private one of his own account with the stamp box that never came to Shalford’s knowledge’.³⁵ Stock-taking is similarly inept: “‘System!’” he would say [...] and issue sharp, confusing, contradictory orders very quickly’.³⁶ If Lefebvre posits capitalism’s organisation of the everyday as enervating, *Kipps* indicates that its bathetic realisation is no less tedious. Kipps’s colleague offers a limpid assessment of their predicament: ‘we’re in a blessed drainpipe, and we’ve got to crawl along it till we die’.³⁷

Antipathy for drapery life saturates *The History of Mr. Polly*, too. Polly’s situation in Port Burdock means that he is ‘doomed to toil behind counters’, and, trapped in Fishbourne, he despairs that life ‘had no further happiness for him [...] there was toil and struggle, toil and struggle’.³⁸ Lawrence Jay Dessner describes Polly as ‘a helpless and passive cog in the social and commercial system’, but this should be framed explicitly as a problem of everydayness: ‘every day and all the days, just the same, echoing his [...] stagnation’.³⁹ Polly endures ‘Boredom indescribable’: he is ‘bored and bothered’ in Fishbourne, and time spent in the shop leaves him ‘bored to death’.⁴⁰ As Lefebvre’s critique indicates, everyday life’s dissatisfactions are not restricted to work: ‘cards [...] bored him to death’.⁴¹ The everyday’s weight drives Polly to the precipice of existential crisis: ‘[he] felt himself the faintest underdeveloped simulacrum of man that had ever hovered on the verge of non-existence’.⁴² By posing Polly as a mere intimation of ‘the faint underdevelopment’, a diminished imitation, Wells indicates that

²⁷ H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* [1909] (London: Everyman, 1994), 338, 346; Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 1, 179.

²⁸ Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 1, 116-17; see also: Brian Murray, *H. G. Wells* (New York: Continuum, 1990), 22-3.

²⁹ Higgins, 461.

³⁰ H. G. Wells, *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* [1905], ed. Simon J. James (London: Penguin, 2005), 16, 43-4.

³¹ Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2016), 77.

³² Wells, *Kipps* 318, 49.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁸ H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr. Polly* [1910], ed. Simon J. James (London: Penguin, 2005), 23, 137.

³⁹ Lawrence Jay Dessner, ‘H. G. Wells, *Mr. Polly*, and the Uses of Art’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 16.2 (1973), 125; Wells, *Polly*, 129.

⁴⁰ Wells, *Polly*, 13, 128-9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 127.

the everyday slowly, implacably effaces individuals, and one recalls Cohen and Taylor's prisoners, wary of automation under routine. Polly reprimands himself for 'fifteen years of passive endurance of dullness', but his malaise is engendered by the everyday, subsumed as one constituent part, and ensures its continuation: 'he submitted to things'.⁴³ Hence, Polly decides to purchase the drapery in Fishbourne, even after enjoying unemployment, and is distraught: 'It was like the end of the annual holiday, only infinitely worse. It was like a newly arrived prisoner's backward glance at the trees and heather through the prison gates. He had to go back to harness, and he was as fitted to go in harness as the ordinary domestic cat'.⁴⁴ Going beyond a mere prison, Wells indicates that the everyday, signalled through 'ordinary domestic', threatens a dehumanisation, undermining the individual autonomy that is so central to his utopian vision. In *First and Last Things* (1908), Wells avers that socialism 'is to me no more and no less than the realisation of a common and universal loyalty to mankind [...] out of which finer individualities may arise forever in a perpetual series of fresh endeavours and fresh achievements for the race'.⁴⁵ Being a response to the everyday's manifest miseries and threats, escape becomes a prerogative.

2. Escaping the everyday

In *Mankind in the Making* (1903), Wells laments the necessity of individual sacrifice to socioeconomic forces: 'it is a shameful and embittering fact that a gifted man from the poorer strata of society must too often buy his personal development at the cost of his posterity'.⁴⁶ This section examines the means of escape in *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly* which guard against such compromise, superseding what might be seen as Lewisham's final capitulation to the daily demands of work and domesticity, arguing that Polly's violent self-affirmation represents a marked development from Kipps's good fortune.⁴⁷ Polly's success prompts the narrator to demand action of the reader, underscoring Wells's commitment to escaping the everyday.

Kipps facilitates escape with singularly fortuitous plotting. Initially, this takes the form of Chitterlow, an aspiring playwright, who crashes into the narrative, and Kipps, as he crosses 'Tontine Street heedless of all mundane things. And there it was that Fortune came upon him'.⁴⁸ The details of the accident are significant. Kipps crosses 'Tontine Street' and is waylaid by Fortune: he moves from the conventional, everyday tontine as a collectivised provision of annuities to the random and considerably more expedient and lucrative inheritance of twelve hundred pounds a year.⁴⁹ J. R. Hammond argues that in Wells's novels 'a relatively stable environment is fractured by the introduction of a catalyst [...] akin to a chemical reaction in a laboratory experiment'.⁵⁰ Chitterlow is catalytic. After their initial coming together, Chitterlow plies Kipps with whisky and detains him beyond lockout, leaving him unemployed. Kipps is reticent when Chitterlow reappears with a newspaper advertisement seeking 'Arthur Waddy or Arthur Kipps', but this intervention facilitates escape from the drapery.⁵¹ In *Kipps*, escape is a miraculous, capricious intercession in the everyday.

⁴³ Ibid., 142.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵ H. G. Wells, *First and Last Things: A Confession of Faith and Rule of a Life* [1908]: revised edition (London: Cassell and Company, 1917), 102. See also: Krishan Kumar, 'Wells and "the So-Called Science of Sociology"', in *H. G. Wells under Revision: Proceedings of the International H. G. Wells Symposium*, London, July 1986, ed. Patrick Parrinder and Christopher Rolfe (London: Associated University Press, 1990), 206, 210; David Y. Hughes, 'The Mood of *A Modern Utopia*' [1977], in *Critical Essays on H. G. Wells*, ed. John Huntington (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991), 68.

⁴⁶ H. G. Wells, *Mankind in the Making* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1903), 69.

⁴⁷ H. G. Wells, *Love and Mr. Lewisham* [1900] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946), 235-40.

⁴⁸ Wells, *Kipps*, 66.

⁴⁹ Tontine: 'A financial scheme by which the subscribers to a loan or common fund receive each an annuity during his life, which increases as their number is diminished by death, till the last survivor enjoys the whole income' (*OED Online*, June 2019, Oxford University Press, accessed on 16 August 2019).

⁵⁰ J. R. Hammond, *H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988), 23; see also: James, *Maps of Utopia*, 129-30.

⁵¹ Wells, *Kipps*, 94.

Subsequently, Kipps discovers that Young Walshingham had speculated and lost his funds and faces beginning again: ‘back to work, *day* after day – I can’t stand it’.⁵² The threat of the everyday is alleviated by another improbable intercession:

Chitterlow returned, appeared suddenly [...]. It was the most unexpected thing in the world. [...] It was amazing beyond the powers of Kipps. [...] For a long second everything was quietly attentive. Kipps was amazed to his uttermost; had he ten times the capacity he would still have been fully amazed.⁵³

The description of Chitterlow’s return is notable: ‘an altogether astonishing spectacle’, ‘that most extraordinary person’, his ‘tremendous speech’, ‘his extraordinary facial changes’, and leaves with a ‘buoyant walk, buoyant almost to the tottering pitch’.⁵⁴ Kipps’s reiterated amazement and the lavish superlatives test the reader’s credulity: Chitterlow reveals that a play in which Kipps had invested is now an established and lucrative success. The narrative’s buoyancy is certainly commensurate with the felicity of the novel’s denouement, floating free of strict plausibility and ensuring the success of Kipps’s risky independent bookshop venture. Chitterlow’s gait quietly sends up the conclusion’s credibility; Kipps’s amazement is stressed because his escape is incredible.

Though the means is serendipitous, the novel depends on Kipps’s ultimate escape: from the drapery, the financial insecurities of the bookshop, and, moreover, the vexatious harness of middle-class mores. The desired ‘transformation into an English gentleman, Arthur Cuyps’ proves chastening.⁵⁵ A proscriptive set of social codes replaces Shalford’s with another, equally exacting and arcane ‘System’. Ultimately, Kipps rejects this misconceived escape route. His marriage to Ann, his childhood neighbour, indicates Kipps’s resistance to cynical social climbing. Attending the perplexing and utterly inane Anagram Tea, where Kipps is reduced to repeating ‘oo rather’, he feels ‘the smouldering fires of rebellion [leap] to flame again’.⁵⁶ Kipps’s repudiation of ‘the Argus eyes of the social system’ reiterates Wells’s concern for individual autonomy.⁵⁷ *A Modern Utopia*, published in the same year as *Kipps*, confirms this conviction. ‘To have free play for one’s individuality is [...] the subjective triumph of existence’, the narrator avers, and this is the ideal function of the state: ‘our political and economic order is becoming steadily more Socialistic, [and] our ideals of intercourse turn more and more to a fuller recognition of the claims of individuality’.⁵⁸

Polly, too, endures the everyday ‘like a creature which has been beaten about the head and left for dead but still lives’.⁵⁹ However, Wells locates the opportunity for escape within the everyday. In his autobiography, he records his father being ‘reduced to a blind ecstasy of rage in an attempt to get a small sofa’ upstairs.⁶⁰ *The History of Mr. Polly* deploys the symbol of a sofa ‘jammed’ in ‘the narrow winding staircase’, too:

his father had coaxed, [...] sworn, kicked and struck at the offending piece of furniture, and finally, with an immense effort, wrenched it upstairs, with considerable incidental damage to lath and plaster and one of the castors. That moment when self-control was altogether torn aside, the shocked discovery of his father’s perfect humanity, had left a singular impression [...] as if something extravagantly vital had come out of his father [...]. A weakly wilful being struggling to get obdurate things round impossible corners – in that symbol Mr. Polly could recognise himself and all the trouble of humanity.⁶¹

The efforts of Polly’s father distil the confrontation of individual agency and collective struggles against impediments; Polly indicates the pivot of this relation: ‘[he] could recognise himself and all the trouble of humanity’. The memory discloses ‘the shocked discovery’ of Polly’s ‘father’s perfect humanity’.⁶²

⁵² Ibid., 316.

⁵³ Ibid., 326.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 326-30.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 251-3.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 280.

⁵⁸ Wells, *Modern*, 41, 92.

⁵⁹ Wells, *Polly*, 14.

⁶⁰ Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 1, 41.

⁶¹ Wells, *Polly*, 47-8.

⁶² Ibid.

Everyday confinement, however, reveals the potentially immediate efficacy of action: its ‘perfect humanity’ involves the deliberate, volitional overcoming of impersonal obstruction. The crux of this symbol, the reason it imprints ‘a *singular* impression’, is the flare of agency that inhibitions might provoke. Polly’s father reveals the contradiction of what Lefebvre calls the ‘dialectical movement’ of the everyday: ‘it tends to overwhelm and crush the (individual) proletarian under the weight of the toil, [...] [but] at the same time [...] the proletarian is endowed with fundamental health and a sense of reality’.⁶³ These tensions are collapsed by Polly’s father. Moving the sofa explodes into compelling efficacy and signals a ‘perfect humanity’ constituted by demonstrative and ‘extravagantly vital’ action.

Given the vitality explicitly associated with ‘the human power of self-escape’, Polly’s emancipation emphasises greater autonomy than Kipps’s.⁶⁴ Polly’s habitual neologisms evolve Kipps’s ‘clipped defective accent’.⁶⁵ There are different explanations of Polly’s idiolect. John Batchelor relegates the habit to a ‘subversiveness [...] entirely playful’, describing Polly as ‘a comic novelist manqué [whose] anarchic phrase-making is one of the pleasures of his inner life’.⁶⁶ When Polly feels himself ‘the faintest underdeveloped intimation of a man that had ever hovered on the verge of non-existence’, his rejoinder is startling: ‘[Polly] called [Hinks] the “chequered Careerist”, and spoke of his patterned legs as “shivery shakys”’.⁶⁷ Language is Polly’s guard against quotidian misery and self-doubt: the mercurial neologistic brio is outside the limits of ‘vocabulary and grammar’.⁶⁸ Such language misuse is beyond the purview of predictability. Polly’s diction constitutes an active resistance to the everyday’s stolid passivity: ‘Queer incommunicable joy [...] of the vivid phrase that turns the statement of the horridest fact to beauty’.⁶⁹

Polly’s eventual escape is also foreshadowed by the dismissal of his colleague Parsons from the Port Burdock Drapery Bazaar. Parsons desires to revolutionise window dressing at the Bazaar and does so without permission, turning utilitarian displays into ‘a huge asymmetrical pile of thick white and red blankets [...], heaped up in a warm disorder, with large window tickets inscribing blazing red letters’.⁷⁰ Parsons’s efforts appal the Bazaar’s manager and a scuffle ensues. Polly’s response is crucial: ‘[his] heart [...] leapt and the world blazed up to wonder and splendour. [...] Parsons was beyond all control – a strangeness, a marvel [...] infuriated, active, like a figure of earthquake’.⁷¹ Parsons’s concerted, fraught assertion of his will, similar to that of Polly’s father, constitutes a seismic revelation: ‘The fabric of Mr. Polly’s daily life was torn, and beneath it he discovered depths and terrors’.⁷² Despite this expanse of potentialities, Polly opens a drapery in Fishbourne. The subsequent fifteen years is ruptured by violence: Polly crashes into Ruser’s assorted wares in a bicycle accident, the two disagree over culpability and come to pathetic blows. At this point, the narrative returns to the opening scene of Polly being dyspeptic, miserable, and facing insolvency. Whether the brawl was a sublimated response to financial anxieties, Polly goes further than Parsons, proposing a radical act of violent self-control: ‘Kill myself’.⁷³ Repudiating the ‘toil and struggle’ of the day-to-day, suicide forms the ‘bright attractive idea of ending for ever and ever and ever all the things that were locking him in’.⁷⁴ The plan to burn the shop and

⁶³ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life. Volume I*, 143.

⁶⁴ Wells, *Modern*, 19.

⁶⁵ Wells, *Kipps*, 155. Some of Polly’s coinages are verbal mishaps: ‘benifluous influence’ (190), ‘Meditatious’ (88), ‘intrudacious’ (78), describing a bicycle as ‘my friskiacious palfrey’ (73). Some are humorous: ‘Soulful Owner of the Exorbiant Largenial Development [...] [an] Adam’s Apple being in question’ (37). Others are suggestively ambiguous. Describing Uncle Jim as a ‘noosance’ (189), Polly’s intimation of noose presages Jim’s death and his experiences of carceral reform.

⁶⁶ John Batchelor, *The Edwardian Novelists* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 138; John Batchelor, *H. G. Wells* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 89. See also: Patrick Parrinder, ‘*Tono-Bungay* and *Mr. Polly*: The Individual and Social Change’ [1970], in *Critical Essays on H. G. Wells*, ed. John Huntington (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991), 47; Hunter, 72.

⁶⁷ Wells, *Polly*, 127.

⁶⁸ Cohen and Taylor, 95.

⁶⁹ Wells, *Polly*, 119.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30-1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 28-32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 137-8.

commit suicide fails miserably. Abandoning his endeavour, Polly rescues his neighbour's mother-in-law and is commended by the assembled crowd, returning to 'the world again out of the conflagration he had lit to be his funeral pyre, moist, excited, and tremendously alive'.⁷⁵ As Polly himself was inspired by Parsons, Polly's actions allow his fellow shopkeepers, aided by their insurance policies, to glimpse beyond the everyday: 'a great door had opened [...] in the opaque fabric of destiny [...]. Life was already in their imagination rising like a Phoenix from the flames'.⁷⁶ Polly assumes the catalytic function of Chitterlow: he simply leaves Miriam and Fishbourne. The narrator expounds the implications:

when a man has once broken through the paper walls of everyday circumstance, those unsubstantial walls that hold so many of us securely prisoned from the cradle to the grave, he has made a discovery. If the world does not please you *you can change it*. Determine to alter it at any price, and you can change it altogether.⁷⁷

The earnest intensity of this injunction is remarkable, and critics have alighted on the importance of Polly's escape.⁷⁸ The repetition and italicisation of 'you' makes a solemn claim on the reader's attention, enjoining action over contemplation. Not only does *The History of Mr. Polly* distil Wells's antagonistic conception of the everyday to a manifesto of personal efficacy, the laconic directive is commensurate, explicitly, with the overcoming of 'everyday circumstance'.

Wells further consolidates violence's place in the attainment of non-everyday happiness: the Potwell Inn 'seemed to [Polly] to touch a pleasant scene with a distinction almost divine'.⁷⁹ The qualifiers are crucial as the Inn is haunted by Uncle Jim, whose expulsion is necessary to the success of the escape. Two pitched battles are fought, and Jim leaves after breaking into the Inn and ransacking Polly's room. Having fled with Polly's clothes, Jim's corpse is discovered in the River Medway. Miriam receives Polly's life insurance policy; Polly is absolved of culpability, and returns to the Inn, twice overcoming mortal danger. Indeed, when Jim first threatens Polly, he leaves 'seeking agreeable and entertaining things, evading difficult and painful things'.⁸⁰ This defence collapses in a moment of stark self-apprehension: 'Man comes into life to seek and find his sufficient beauty, to serve it, to win and increase it, to fight for it, to face anything and dare anything for it, counting death as nothing so long as the dying eyes still turn to it'.⁸¹ The predicate of Polly's self-assertion is his newfound 'sufficient beauty'. The beautifying propensity of his idiolect and Parsons's desire for improved window-dressing foreshadow this justification, and the novels certainly bemoan the everyday's pallor: Kipps is caught in a 'sea fog'; Polly's prospects in Fishbourne are 'utterly hopeless and grey'.⁸² The Inn is characterised by a profusion of colour: 'sun-blistered green bench and tables, [and] shapely white windows', 'pleasing red blinds', 'a beautifully coloured hunting scene framed and glazed', and 'three bright red-cheeked wax apples'.⁸³ If the everyday is etiolated, the Inn constitutes a radiant alternative, offering a variety of work; in one block paragraph, the narrator lists seventy-seven of Polly's responsibilities, finishing with an ellipsis suggestive of an ongoing profusion.⁸⁴ This is less a question of the Inn's singular charm than the fulsome apprehension it affords Polly. Although Kipps and Polly manage to escape the everyday misery of the drapery by different means, the novels are coherent in advocating the necessity and viability of escape. The next section indicates that the narratives' clear demands for escaping the everyday's miseries lead to immaterial bliss, mindless inactivity, and, finally, a crucial return to the everyday.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 159. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁸ See, for example: Draper, 86, 114; Hammond, *H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel*, 105; J. R. Hammond, 'Wells and the Discussion Novel', in *H. G. Wells: Interdisciplinary Essays*, 96; Parrinder, 45-50; James, *Maps of Utopia*, 11, 31, 99, 80-81.

⁷⁹ Wells, *Polly*, 164.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸² Wells, *Kipps* 49; Wells, *Polly*, 121.

⁸³ Wells, *Polly*, 164-5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 168-9.

3. Lyrical endings, utopian beginnings

Given the detailed everydays invoked by the novels and the protagonists' successful escapes, one might expect that the conclusions would offer a vision of straightforward finality: escape ensuring personal happiness. Instead, the everyday's material exigencies are counterpoised by lyrical resplendence and the elision of thought. Polly 'ends up in an abstract utopian space'; *Kipps* interrupts its relatively straightforward realism with metafictional ambiguity.⁸⁵ While the futurologies are anchored by 'the trend of present forces', and given that *Kipps* and *The History of Polly* endorse escape, the novels' conclusions simply forgo a veneer of plausibility.⁸⁶ The magical quality of Polly's and Kipps's final repose implicates Caudwell's demanding critique of what he deems Wells's misconception of bourgeois agency. When read through the novels' framing of the everyday's causal relationship to escape, Caudwell's criticisms of Wells appear to make sense, but this reading relies on a narrow conception of escape predicated on positing the everyday as coextensive with capitalism. Wells does not presume that escape operates in this way – that it unlocks a non-everyday future. An approach such as Caudwell's ignores Wells's more capacious sense of escape, one implicating of Cohen and Taylor's conception of escape as inexorably ongoing and of the everyday as intractable, if not necessarily injurious. This reading can be productively situated within an account of Wells's utopian vision, as the strange quiet and bliss at the end of *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly* are implicit warnings against any hope of permanent respite. Utopia is not static and will be 'made of the sort of people you meet every day': Kipps or Polly.⁸⁷ Moreover, it is liable to harden into the everyday and, therefore, requires ongoing escape attempts.

After Chitterlow's propitious return, *Kipps*'s narrator directly engages the reader: 'The bookshop of Kipps is on the left-hand side of the Hythe High Street [...] it is quite easy to find – and there you may see him for yourself and speak to him and buy this book of him if you like. He has it in stock, I know. Very delicately I've seen to that'.⁸⁸ This apparently straightforward invitation is complicated twice: the reader is prohibited from disclosing the novel's source, and the narrator indicates that *Kipps* is available to buy. The first constraint implies that the Hythe High Street bookseller might dissent from or deny *Kipps*'s narrative, thereby disabusing the adventurous reader of the novel's avowed veracity. The second indicates that the narrator has ensured that *Kipps* is in stock. For this to be the case, the 'real' bookshop is under the narrator's auspices, shifting from real life prospect to textually secured fabrication. The narrator's claims cannot be tested. *Kipps* melds the fictional, metafictional, and ostensibly 'real' and displaces the condition of escape from coherent possibility into intangible ambiguity. Real and fictional, the bookshop is beyond cogent apprehension, flitting between these categories, residing in neither. The uncertain conditions of escape indicate the novel's turn from the viability of reasoned progress to the exceptional: the auspicious bookshop circumvents the weight of plausibility.

The 'bookshop' precedes a turn towards further unreality. During 'a row on the Hythe canal', Kipps and Ann enjoy 'a glorious evening':

The sun set in a mighty blaze and left a world warm, and very still. The twilight came. And there was the water, shining bright, and the sky a deepening blue, and the great trees that dipped their boughs towards the water [...]. [Kipps] had ceased from rowing and rested on his oars, and suddenly he was touched by the wonder of life – the strangeness that is a presence stood again by his side.

Out of the darkneses beneath the shallow, weedy stream of his being rose a question, a question that looked up dimly and never reached the surface. It was the question of the wonder of the beauty, the purposeless, inconsecutive beauty, that falls so strangely among the happenings and memories of life. It never reached the surface of his mind, it never took to itself substance or form; it looked up merely as the phantom of a face might look, out of deep waters, and sank again to nothingness.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Higgins, 472.

⁸⁶ H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1901), 1.

⁸⁷ H. G. Wells, *New Worlds for Old* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), 225.

⁸⁸ Wells, *Kipps*, 333.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 334.

The reflective pause in which Kipps ‘dimly’ reckons with ‘the question of the wonder of the beauty’ is apposite to the circumambient calm. It is also facile, posing no meaningful question at all: at a moment of auspicious calm, a resplendent stillness reflects the contingent, ‘purposeless, inconsecutive beauty’ of one evening transposed across memory. *A Modern Utopia* contends that ‘all beauty is really [...] kinetic and momentary’, and the very absence of such dynamism in *Kipps* precipitates lethargic reflection.⁹⁰ The question ‘never reached the surface of his mind, it never took to itself substance or form’, and its inaccessibility implies that apprehension lies below the threshold of Kipps’s intelligence; his musings on ‘what a Rum Go everything is [...] I don’t suppose there ever was a chap quite like me’ are appropriately asinine.⁹¹ Yet the unuttered query challenges the novel’s escape from the everyday. Enveloped by the ‘wonder of the beauty’ which ‘falls’ accidentally amongst ‘happenings and memories’, Kipps, now secured by the success of Chitterlow’s play, forgets material contingencies. Serendipity and beauty are ‘purposeless [and] inconsecutive’, and might be revoked. It was capricious fortune that ensured the Kippses’ security rather than ‘the wonder of life’ constructed easily in retrospect. Draper celebrates Wells’s belief that the ‘daydreams of small tradesman can be somehow more real than the harsh world’.⁹² Kipps’s reverie is expressly unreal: a final equanimity precludes thought and all threats of precariousness are disbarred from ‘a world warm, and very still’. This is not a world but a moment. Transcending the everyday by occluding the material conditions which facilitated escape, *Kipps* intimates that its final emancipation is impossible, a pure fiction.

A similar buoyancy is palpable at the end of *The History of Mr. Polly*:

It was one of those evenings, serenely luminous, amply and atmospherically still, when the river bend was at its best. A swan floated against the dark green masses of the further bank, the stream flowed broad and shining to its destiny, with scarce a ripple [...]. [T]hree poplars rose clear and harmonious against the sky of green and yellow. It was as if everything lay securely within a great, warm, friendly globe of crystal sky. It was as safe and inclosed and fearless as a child that has still to be born. It was an evening full of quality, of tranquil, unqualified assurance. Mr. Polly’s mind was filled with the persuasion that indeed all things whatsoever must needs be satisfying and complete. It was incredible that life had ever done more than seemed to jar, that there could be any shadow in life save such velvet softness as made the setting for that silent swan, or any murmur but the ripple of the water as it swirled round the chained and gently swaying punt. And the mind of Mr. Polly, exalted and made tender by this atmosphere, sought gently, but sought, to draw together the varied memories that came drifting, half submerged, across the circle of his mind.⁹³

Again, the momentary beauty induces a contemplative quiet in a mind ‘exalted and made tender’. The reflections on the verities of fortune eclipse the narrative’s advocacy of violent agency; particularly galling, given his suicide attempt, is the contention that, to Polly, ‘that life has ever done more than seemed to jar’ and ‘that all things must needs be satisfying’.⁹⁴ Polly indicates as much to the Inn’s landlady: ‘I happened; things happened to me. It’s so with everyone. [...] What makes us happy isn’t our trying, what makes others happy isn’t our trying’.⁹⁵ As with *Kipps*, these obtuse resolutions ignore the narrative’s previous arresting complaints about the everyday. Happiness is proffered as inevitable, and the environment prompts notions of ‘unqualified’ tranquillity encompassed by ‘a great warm friendly globe of crystal sky’. Christie Davies points out that the ‘unrealistic happy endings’ and ‘fluvial security’ in both novels are improbably ‘exempt from [...] harsh economic’ reality.⁹⁶ The implausibility is manifest in the description of the Inn, too, underwritten by an important qualifier: ‘as if it was all securely within a great, warm, friendly globe of crystal sky’.⁹⁷ In order to aggrandise a continual repletion, the conclusion relies on a static, ‘crystal sky’. The weather’s inherent changeability, however, exposes the limits of this vision and the scene’s occluded but undeniable vulnerability. Hammond

⁹⁰ Wells, *Modern*, 228.

⁹¹ Wells, *Kipps*, 335.

⁹² Draper, 117.

⁹³ Wells, *Polly*, 206.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁹⁶ Christie Davies, ‘Making Fun of Work: Humour as Sociology in the Works of H. G. Wells’, in *H. G. Wells under Revision*, 89; see also: James, *Maps of Utopia*, 124.

⁹⁷ Wells, *Polly*, 206.

contends that once Polly has guaranteed the Potwell Inn, he is '[s]ecure in this enclosed womb of happiness and peace he lives out his life, protected against intrusions from the world outside', but the Inn is outside the world entirely.⁹⁸

Given such tranquillity, Polly and Kipps are appropriately vacant. Dessner goes as far as to contend that Polly's utopia 'entails his radical diminishment – his loss of refinement of sensibility, his loss of awareness of the subtle complication of things', decreased sexuality, and 'annihilation of personality'.⁹⁹ Polly's mind may be 'filled', and Kipps may be 'touched', but neither is duly stimulated or articulate: 'not so much thinking as lost in a smooth still quiet of the mind'.¹⁰⁰ This is not a question of a particularly alluring dusk but its consequent stupefaction; weeds receive banal praise: 'just look at the look of them!'¹⁰¹ If the bookshop was compromised by uncertainty, these idylls are mindless; Polly's repose is expressly prenatal: 'enclosed and fearless as a child that has still to be born'.¹⁰² The calm they induce is expressly dependent on the suppression of latent problems: the 'phantom question' does not surface in Kipps's mind, but sinks 'again to nothingness'; and the 'circle of [Polly's] mind' is scarcely disturbed by 'drifting' memories 'half submerged'.¹⁰³ The viability – perhaps the promise – of escape is here constituted by a serenity that deliberately conceals problems and precludes thought: a sublime luminosity, less illuminative than blinding.

Caudwell's criticisms of Wells's political thinking afford one means of accounting for this mindless quiet, one that ties escape to a misconception of agency. Caudwell argues that Wells's socialism is 'turgid and shoddy' because it 'had not escaped from the inborn bewilderment of the *petit bourgeois*'.¹⁰⁴ Whereas Marx computed historical causality with scientific rigour, Wells simply recapitulates the 'old bourgeois assumption' that

men are born, each perfectly free, and that their wants and dreams mould the world of social relations, not that the world of social relations their wants and dreams. [...] Moreover, since he assumes that the relation between mind and environment is perfectly fluid, that the mind can make of the environment anything it pleases.¹⁰⁵

Polly's self-escape is commensurate with such aggrandised notions of individual agency: the Potwell Inn is 'perfectly fluid' and equal to his individual *petit bourgeois* will.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Kipps's independent bookshop allows him to revel in illusive capitalist self-possession: 'ready to leap up and embrace goods sold [...] [Kipps] serves an imaginary customer, receives a dream seven and six-pence [...] [and] wonders how it was he ever came to fancy a shop a disagreeable place'.¹⁰⁷ The protagonists' autonomy ignores structural conditions which produce the everyday because they have summarily overcome it. Caudwell's critique illuminates the strange conditions of escape in *The History of Mr. Polly and Kipps*, as Wells substitutes 'all laws of causality [for] the free operation of the mind', hence the atemporal, immaterial stasis of the Potwell Inn. Caudwell also highlights the misguided assumption that 'the mind can make of the environment anything it pleases'.¹⁰⁸ This cognitive engagement is seemingly at odds with Polly's placidity and the 'shallow, weedy stream' of Kipps's critical myopia.¹⁰⁹ However, Caudwell argues that 'thought is being, is a part of being, developed historically as part of action to aid that action which we regard as primary'.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the Potwell Inn engenders a perpetual atemporality without praxis. On Caudwell's terms, the novels' blissful, utopian conclusions

⁹⁸ Hammond, *H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel*, 108.

⁹⁹ Dessner, 132-3.

¹⁰⁰ Wells, *Polly*, 206; Wells, *Kipps*, 334; Wells, *Polly*, 209.

¹⁰¹ Wells, *Polly*, 209.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁰³ Wells, *Kipps*, 334; Wells, *Polly*, 206.

¹⁰⁴ Caudwell, 80, 83. This is apparent in Wells's choice of protagonist and admission that the ideal World State 'is essentially [...] an expanded middle-class' (Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 1, 94-5).

¹⁰⁵ Caudwell, 86-7.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰⁷ Wells, *Kipps*, 324.

¹⁰⁸ Caudwell, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Wells, *Kipps*, 334.

¹¹⁰ Caudwell, 89. Emphasis in the original.

aggrandise and exemplify bourgeois metaphysics and are, therefore, wholly and perhaps dangerously unreal.

Although Caudwell's critique illuminates shortcomings palpable at the end of these novels, his account should be measured against both Wells's refutation of Marxism and mediation of escape: an affirmation of autonomy against the pressures of the everyday which is not incommensurate with the processual work of building utopia. Wells was suspicious of Marx's emphasis on antagonistic class relations, the necessity of violent revolution, and his lack of coherent planning for a post-capitalist world.¹¹¹ Wells's approach to futurology mandates the careful delineation of 'a planned inter-coordinated society' that supersedes 'a record of catastrophic convulsions shot with mere glimpses and phases of temporary good luck'.¹¹² Wells's commitment to these designs is crucial to his conception of escape. His critiques of Edwardian capitalism, reaching a singular intensity in *Tono-Bungay* (1909) which is echoed by Kipps's and Polly's day-to-day miseries, intimate an escapist response to everyday life under capitalism; this aspect of Wells's thinking underwrites Caudwell's ire, of course, and it is certainly palpable in the direct address made by *The History of Mr. Polly*'s narrator to the reader.

However, Wells links the everyday to escape in a much more capacious way, and this is signalled in the closing words of both novels, as each protagonist is roused from inaction: Kipps 'reflected for just another minute. "Oo! I dunno," he said, and roused himself to pull', and: "'Time we was going in, O' Party," said Mr. Polly, standing up. "Supper to get. It's as you say, we can't sit here for ever"¹¹³ The impermanence of reprieve is signalled by the contention that the 'great, warm, friendly globe of crystal sky [...] was as safe and enclosed and fearless as a child still to be born'.¹¹⁴ Escape is gestation: idylls secluded from the everyday, inviolably temporary, but still bounded by the cyclicity of birth and rebirth. The mantle of day-to-day pulling and getting is resumed once more, if only to be transcended and, inevitably, returned to. The recapitulation of this logic is peculiar in *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly*. They might close with the everyday firmly displaced, but they actually disclose the quotidian; there is nothing more everyday than sunset. Through their return to daily banalities, Polly and Kipps intimate that escape is not a telos but an immutable axiom. Cohen and Taylor celebrate this 'wary, elusive, mobile' condition, positing escape

as a homage to the self, a celebration of the struggle to rise above our social destiny. None of our scepticism or pessimism should hide our continual amazement and delight at how people keep up this struggle, how they keep trying to dislodge the self from society – not in spectacular ways but in the infinite number of ordinary and short-lived ways we have recorded. [...] 'I escape, therefore I am,' is ultimately the only ontological message we can manage.¹¹⁵

Wells, too, revels in the seditious energies of his protagonists. The sublimity at the end of *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly* glimpses a mindless, transcendent calm anathema to the processual work of escaping. Weeks notes that escape attempts – or efforts towards disentanglement – often leave Wells's protagonists chastened but optimistic.¹¹⁶ Polly and Kipps present a challenge to Weeks's framing: they are not chastened and, consequently, might enjoy permanent repose. Wells's perspicacious vision of the everyday's relationship to ongoing escape is crucial to understanding the capaciousness of his vision. Individuals manifest their autonomy through escape, and such endeavours irrevocably depend on an everyday momentarily overcome, which has an explicitly political dimension for Wells: 'A State where all are working hard, where none go to and fro, easily and freely, loses touch with the purpose of freedom'.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ See, for example: Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 1, 180, 254-5, 262-3; Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 2, 731-2; H. G. Wells, 'To the Editor of *The Freewoman*: The Policy of *The Freewoman*', *The Freewoman* 42.2 (5 September 1912), 312; Wells, *Mankind in the Making*, 357-60; Wells, *New Worlds for Old*, 247-8; John S. Partington, *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H. G. Wells* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003), 39-40.

¹¹² Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 1, 238, 243.

¹¹³ Wells, *Kipps*, 335; Wells, *Polly*, 209.

¹¹⁴ Wells, *Polly*, 206.

¹¹⁵ Cohen and Taylor, 234-6.

¹¹⁶ Weeks, 30-1.

¹¹⁷ Wells, *Modern*, 155. *A Modern Utopia*'s narrator finds himself 'going between [...] work and the room in which I sleep and the place in which I dine, very much as I went to and fro in that real world' (219). See also: James,

This axiom propels Wells's 'repudiation of the rigid universal solutions of the past' and *A Modern Utopia*'s 'optimistic enterprise': 'not static but kinetic', not 'a permanent state but [...] a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages'.¹¹⁸ Wells averred that 'the world is a world, not a charitable institution', demanding endeavour and collective effort.¹¹⁹ His futurologies are constitutive components in this ongoing task, proffering 'no presumption of finality', no balmy stasis: there 'is no perfection, there is no enduring treasure'.¹²⁰ In their pulling and getting, Polly and Kipps tacitly acknowledge that the everyday lurks in their idylls, that escape is (and will be), therefore, necessary. Their continued work actuates the praxis of utopia; these possibilities must be realised: they are not glittering unreality. Although Lefebvre posited a post-everyday, post-history sociality as an 'open totality, perpetually in the process of being transcended', Wells's recognition that escape does not depend on the everyday's subjugation by capitalism is more profound.¹²¹ Wells harnesses the ontological problem of everydayness to the necessity of escaping and ameliorating capitalism's iterations of the quotidian, but such processual work, manifest as escape from the everyday, will continue, too. Wells admitted as much, noting, towards the end of his autobiography, that any 'fugitive mood' necessarily entailed 'a break away to a new type of work'.¹²²

Maps of Utopia, 60-1, 125-9, 130-2.

¹¹⁸ Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 2, 469; Wells, *Modern*, 16-17.

¹¹⁹ Wells, *Anticipations*, 317.

¹²⁰ Wells, *New Worlds for Old*, 355; Wells, *Modern*, 228.

¹²¹ Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, 99.

¹²² Wells, *Experiment*, vol. 2, 738.