

H. G. WELLS AND JOSEPH CONRAD: A LITERARY FRIENDSHIP

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February 1899 marked the 1000th edition of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. The special edition of 'Maga', as William Blackwood affectionately called his magazine, opened with the first instalment of the serialisation of Joseph Conrad's 'The Heart of Darkness'.¹ In January of the same year the *Graphic* had begun the serialisation of Wells's novel 'When the Sleeper Wakes: A Story of Years to Come' and in May 1899 Harpers published it in book form.² The serialised version of 'When the Sleeper Wakes' made no mention of Conrad's work; but the book contains an explicit reference to the *Blackwood's* version. The publication dates are critical: Conrad's story appeared between February and April of 1899, and *When the Sleeper Wakes* appeared as a book in May.³ Thus Wells was probably finalising his manuscript at the

¹ The title was later changed to simply *Heart of Darkness* for publication in *Youth and Other Stories* (1902). I use 'The Heart of Darkness' only when specifically referring to the serialisation.

² The serialisation ended in April 1899.

³ See my 'A Note on *When the Sleeper Wakes* and *Heart of Darkness*' in *Notes & Queries* (June 2004), 171-75, in which I discuss whether Wells read 'The Heart of Darkness' in published form and hurriedly amended his manuscript to include a mention of the work, or whether he was in close enough contact with Conrad to have seen an early manuscript of it.

moment that Conrad was immersed in the writing of his famous tale; and Wells's mention of 'The Heart of Darkness' is striking evidence of the close literary friendship enjoyed by Wells and Conrad between 1898 and 1905.⁴

The reference to 'The Heart of Darkness' in *When the Sleeper Wakes* is an example of a self-conscious intertextuality on Wells's part; when it comes to Conrad, much more subtle Wellsian influences are seen to come into play. This paper traces some of the literary allusions that imply an acknowledgement of Wells's art and criticism in Conrad's work, especially in *Heart of Darkness*. Such a discussion brings to light a more intimate understanding of the difference in artistic vision that ultimately undermined this literary friendship.

'To Make You See'

On 16 May 1896 in the *Saturday Review* Wells hailed *An Outcast of the Islands* as perhaps 'the finest piece of fiction that has been published this year', and expressed a similar opinion of *Almayer's Folly* (1895).⁵ Notwithstanding Wells's criticisms of his style, Conrad was gratified, and an exchange of letters followed. By the autumn of 1898 the two actually met on the Kentish coast: Conrad and his family moved into Pent Farm, Postling, while Wells and his wife were installed at nearby Sandgate. The prospect of their proximity had prompted Conrad to write to Wells excitedly on 11 October 1898 that they were going to be neighbours. Regular visits to each other's homes ensued, along with much discussion on the art of literature.⁶

At Christmas 1898, while immersed in 'The Heart of Darkness', Conrad was writing to Aniela Zagórska about his new friend: 'H. G. Wells published this year *The War of the*

⁴ This relationship between Wells and Conrad has been explored before. See for example, David C. Smith, *H. G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 161-67. Smith concentrates on the difficulties the two had in communicating, and suggests that Conrad's heavy Polish accent was a barrier. He also outlines their political differences.

⁵ H. G. Wells, *H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism*, ed. Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 90.

⁶ Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Volume 2 1898-1902*, ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 100. Jessie Conrad mentions regular social

Worlds and *The Invisible Man*. He is a very original writer, *romancier du fantastique*, with a very individualistic judgement in all things and an astonishing imagination.⁷ Conrad's comments betray something of the thrill of excitement he felt in this new literary friendship, and the fact that he was fascinated by Wells's scientific romances. On 25 November 1898, for example, referring to a visit to Wells, Conrad writes: 'I intend to hoot like a sick Martian outside the station.'⁸ Wells's tales, and particularly his scientific romances, were on Conrad's mind in the winter of 1898, and thus in *Heart of Darkness*, musing on what may lie in the centre of Africa, Marlow begins to think about Martians:

I believed it in the same way one of you might believe there are inhabitants on the planet Mars. I knew once a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea how they looked and behaved he would get shy and mutter something about 'walking on all fours'.⁹

Writing his story just after *The War of the Worlds* (1898) appeared, Conrad is aware of the resonance here; and the reference would not have been lost on his early readers.¹⁰ By invoking an alien planet and its supposed inhabitants, Conrad, through Marlow, emphasises the very 'otherness' of Africa for his contemporary readers: it was as alien an environment as far off Mars, and Kurtz, squatting at its centre, seems as unknowable as an alien being.¹¹

The War of the Worlds taps the popularity of invasion fiction, at the same time as it critiques imperialism. In a response to the experiences of empire, the debilitating, even fatal,

events with Wells: 'We spent many very happy days in his home, Spade House in Sandgate' (Jessie Conrad, *Joseph Conrad and his Circle* [London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1935], 75).

⁷ Conrad, *Collected Letters* 2, 138.

⁸ Conrad, *Collected Letters* 2, 123.

⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (London: Norton, 1988), 29.

¹⁰ Patrick A. McCarthy takes this even further: 'The reference would have been stronger for having been phrased in terms of what one "might believe," for Wells had begun his novel with a similar question of belief: "No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own." That contrast between great intelligence and mortality forecasts the deaths not only of Wells's colonists – the Martians – but of Conrad's Kurtz as well' (Patrick A. McCarthy, 'Heart of Darkness and the Early Novels of H. G. Wells: Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy', *Journal of Modern Literature* 13.1 [1986], 37-38).

¹¹ Cedric Watts also draws parallels between the ending of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and *Heart of Darkness*, whilst suggesting in addition, that '*The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* may have had some slight influence on *Heart of Darkness* and *The Inheritors*' (Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Conrad* [London: Longman, 1982], 94; 184).

effect of an alien environment on the invader is graphically depicted in the demise of the Martians. Conrad and Wells infused their fictions of empire with the scepticism of the *fin de siècle*, and their tales of imperial invasion subvert the romance genre and its heroes. Like Wells's Martians, Kurtz brutalises those he enslaves, but is corrupted and destroyed by the alien environment in the process. Just as Africa is, in the old cliché, the 'White Man's Graveyard', so London is the graveyard of the Martians. The parallels are obvious: in the closing years of the nineteenth century, 'united by their Victorian (and anti-Victorian) inheritance',¹² Wells and Conrad were drawing on a shared cultural legacy in their fiction. Consequently, their early critiques of empire reflect a convergence of ideas and a will to establish a new type of artistic vision. As a result, inscribed in *Heart of Darkness* are traces of Conrad's consciousness of Wells's art.

Wellsian influences on the novel can be detected when Marlow sees Kurtz 'open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him' (59). Here Paul Kirschner sees parallels with Griffin, the invisible man, when his muffler is removed and his landlady glimpses the void that is his face: 'But for a second it seemed to her that the man she looked at had an enormous mouth wide open, a vast and incredible mouth that swallowed the whole lower portion of his face.'¹³ The images are startlingly similar. Cruel tormentors with a grudge against the world, Griffin and Kurtz terrorise their own communities. They share a status as crazed outsiders; but they are both extraordinary intellectuals who have 'run amok'. As Patrick A. McCarthy observes, Griffin and Kurtz are "'hollow men" with great intelligence but an underdeveloped or degraded moral centre.'¹⁴ *The Invisible Man* (1897) intrigued Conrad, and may well have influenced his conception of Kurtz, whose hollowness and invisibility – he is 'indistinct like a vapour exhaled by the earth' (64) and 'very little more than a voice' (48) – are indeed suggestive of Griffin's insubstantiality.¹⁵

On 3 January 1899 Conrad had been working on 'The Heart of Darkness' for about ten days and wrote to Wells: 'I haven't looked into *W[heels] of C[hance]* yet. I can't till I am

¹² McCarthy, 'Heart of Darkness and the Early Novels of H. G. Wells: Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy', 60.

¹³ H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* in *H. G. Wells: The Science Fiction Vol. 2* (London: Dent 1996), 10. See Paul Kirschner, *Conrad: The Psychologist as Artist* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1968), 283.

¹⁴ McCarthy, 'Heart of Darkness and the Early Novels of H. G. Wells: Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy', 49.

¹⁵ That Conrad was preoccupied with *The Invisible Man* in the autumn of 1898 is further evidenced by his letter of 25 November 1898 asking to borrow Wells's copy (Conrad, *Collected Letters 2*, 123). In January 1899 he even sent a copy to Aniela Zagórska (Conrad, *Collected Letters 2*, 177).

done with my infernal tale. It grows like the genii from the bottle in the Arabian tale. Seventy pages – pencil pencil – since I saw you.’¹⁶ He is, of course, referring to ‘The Heart of Darkness’; and the mention of his ‘infernal tale’ indicates Wells’s awareness of the story, implying some prior discussion. Indeed, at this point Conrad was courting Wells’s approval. In September 1898, just before they actually met, he wrote to Wells: ‘I have lived on terms of close intimacy with you, referring to you in many a page of my work, scrutinising many sentences by the light of your criticism.’¹⁷ Some of that criticism appeared in Wells’s review of *An Outcast of the Islands*: ‘Mr Conrad is wordy; his story is not so much told as seen intermittently through a haze of sentences.’¹⁸ Conrad probably had Wells’s rebuke in mind when he says that Marlow was not ‘typical’, and that to him ‘the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze’ (48).¹⁹ Conrad is acknowledging Wells’s point, while simultaneously offering a justification of his own art.

During the writing of ‘The Heart of Darkness’ Conrad was debating points of style with Wells. In *Experiment in Autobiography* Wells speaks of ‘All this talk that I had with Conrad and Hueffer and James about the just word, the perfect expression, about this or that being “written” or not written.’²⁰ He famously reminisces about lying on a beach at Sandgate, discussing how to describe a boat:

¹⁶ Conrad, *Collected Letters* 2, 146. Conrad often uses the ‘genii from the bottle’ in his letters about *Heart of Darkness*. Robert Hampson notes Wells’s use of *The Arabian Nights* in a number of his fantastic tales, and notably in *The Time Machine* (1895) (Robert Hampson, “‘The Genie out of the Bottle’: Conrad, Wells, Joyce and *The Arabian Nights*”, in *The Arabian Nights in English Literature: studies in the reception of ‘The thousand and one nights’ into British Culture*, ed. Peter Caracciolo (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 226.

¹⁷ Conrad, *Collected Letters* 2, 92.

¹⁸ Wells, *H. G. Wells’s Literary Criticism*, 88.

¹⁹ It is also noteworthy that Virginia Woolf picked up on such differences in artistic styles when she wrote in ‘Modern Novels’ (1919) ‘The mind, exposed to the ordinary course of life, receives upon its surface a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant showering of innumerable atoms, composing in their sum what we might venture to call life itself; and to figure further as the semi-transparent envelope, or the luminous halo, surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not perhaps the chief task of the novelist to convey this varying, this incessantly varying spirit with whatever stress or sudden deviation it may display, and as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?’ (Virginia Woolf, ‘Modern Novels’, in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie [London: Hogarth, 1988], 33). Essentially Woolf’s challenge is to the practice and assumptions of writers like Wells, in his realist fiction, and Arnold Bennett; and her ideas about the possibilities of fiction certainly seem to favour Conrad over Wells.

²⁰ H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)*, 2 vols. (London: Gollancz / Cresset: 1934), II, 623.

it was all against Conrad's over-sensitized receptivity that a boat could ever be just a boat. He wanted to see it and to see it only in relation to something else – a story, a thesis. And I suppose if I had been pressed about it I would have betrayed a disposition to link that story or thesis to something still more extensive and that to something still more extensive and so ultimately to link it up to my philosophy and my world outlook.²¹

Vision, *seeing* one's 'world outlook', was critical to the artistic debates that the two engaged in: vision united them as artists, but also defined their differences in terms of artistic expression.

Having read Wells's personal copy of *The Invisible Man*, Conrad writes appreciatively on 4 December 1898:

One can always *see* a lot in your work – there is always a 'beyond' to your books – but into this (with due regard to theme and length [sic]) you've managed to put an amazing quantity of effects. If it just misses being tremendous it is because you didn't make it so – and if you didn't there isn't a man in England who could.²²

Conrad's tone is strikingly frank – there is none of his characteristic politeness here – suggesting an intimacy in his conversation with Wells that is spilling over into his correspondence.

His mention of the ability to 'see' is an echo of the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), where Conrad outlines his artistic purpose: 'My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, above all, to make you *see*. That – and no more, and it is everything.'²³ Wells's comment about the meaning of *An Outcast of the Islands* being 'seen intermittently through a haze of sentences' seems to have struck home, and in this preface Conrad is at pains to express his artistic intention, almost as though he were conducting a covert conversation with Wells through his

²¹ Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, II, 619.

²² Conrad, *Collected Letters* 2, 126.

²³ Joseph Conrad, 'Preface', in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,' Typhoon, The Shadow-Line* (London: Dent, 1956), 5.

writing. The growing tensions in their literary friendship begin to show through this debate about vision. Many years later Wells outlined Conrad's objections: 'the frequent carelessness of my writing, my scientific qualifications of statement, and provisional inconclusiveness, and my indifference to intensity of effect, perplexed and irritated him.'²⁴ Their differences amounted to a disagreement over how to view the world. At one level this was political, but at another it was a difference over how to express one's vision in literature.

Wells took the notion of vision as the basis of his short story 'The Country of the Blind' (1904) where his protagonist, Nuñez, stumbles across a race of blind people in the Andes of Ecuador. The inhabitants of this lost world have a fundamentally different approach to the world from that of the sighted Nuñez. Having acculturated themselves to a life of blindness, these people function perfectly contentedly using their other senses. Although he arrives at a fragile understanding of how to survive in a blind community and agrees to be blinded himself, Nuñez ultimately cannot reconcile himself to losing his own vision. To the blind community Nuñez seems delusional; to Nuñez it is they who are mad. Exploring the gulf of understanding between people with differing views of the world, 'The Country of the Blind' pits sight against interpretation through the other senses: it could almost be read as a parable for the growing differences between Wells and Conrad. For Wells, like Nuñez, vision is a matter of clarity, style a matter of simplicity; Conrad, like the community of the blind, wants us to 'see' through our senses, to interpret meanings that are often slippery and elusive. Such a conflict of vision amounted to a radical disagreement over epistemology.

The Best Stories in the World

Despite his differences with Conrad, Wells was sufficiently impressed with 'The Heart of Darkness' to assume that over a hundred years later it would feature in futuristic libraries, as proven by his mention of the story in *When the Sleeper Wakes*. Graham, the eponymous sleeper, explores his futuristic surroundings and finds himself in a room full of curious cylinders:

²⁴ Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, II, 618.

The lettering on the cylinders puzzled him. At first sight it seemed like Russian. Then he noticed a suggestion of mutilated English about certain of the words.

‘oi Man huwdbi Kin,’

forced itself on him as ‘The Man who Would be King.’ ‘Phonetic spelling,’ he said. He remembered reading a story with that title, then he recalled the story vividly, one of the best stories in the world. But this thing before him was not a book as he understood it. He puzzled out the titles of two adjacent cylinders ‘The Heart of Darkness,’ he had never heard of before nor ‘The Madonna of the Future’ – no doubt if they were indeed stories, they were by post-Victorian authors.²⁵

Chapter seven of the *Graphic* serialisation mentions Kipling’s ‘The Man Who Would be King’ but not Conrad’s or James’s stories. Wells is being playful here: he was familiar with James’s story ‘The Madonna of the Future’ (1873), and the mention of ‘The Heart of Darkness’ implies some knowledge of Conrad’s story, which, at the time, would have been familiar only to readers of *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Wells’s mention of stories by James and Conrad reflects the fact that a literary fraternity had gathered on the Kentish coast at the turn of the century: James at Lamb House, Rye, Conrad at Pent Farm, Ford Madox Ford at Aldington and later Winchelsea, and Stephen Crane at Brede Place, and many other literary figures were frequent visitors. Kipling was nearby, at Rottingdean on the East Sussex coast but remained aloof, never visiting the gatherings in Kent. All of the writers mentioned in *When the Sleeper Wakes* were in the same vicinity and thus, in a further example of the kind of cross-referencing that we have seen taking place in Conrad’s work, Wells honours some of his friends through his knowing allusions to their stories.

Importing stories by his friends into *When the Sleeper Wakes* is Wells’s witty acknowledgement of their artistic power. Citing Kipling’s story as ‘one of the best stories in the world’, Wells implicitly makes similar claims for Conrad and James. This is also a clever reference to Kipling’s ‘The Finest Story in the World’ (1893) which has subtle undertones of James’s ‘The Madonna of the Future’.²⁶ In both tales a masterpiece is never completed: in

²⁵ H. G. Wells, *When the Sleeper Wakes*, in *The Science Fiction Vol. 2* (London: Dent 1996), 166.

²⁶ Interestingly, the imperial assumptions of Kipling’s ‘The Man Who Would Be King’ are later obliquely referenced in ‘The Country of the Blind’ when Nuñez believes that, as in the old proverb, ‘In the Country of the

Kipling's case, a story; in James's case, a painting. 'The Finest Story in the World' deals with a kind of time travelling whereby a young man, Charlie Mears, has vivid flashbacks to previous incarnations as a Greek galley slave and a Viking sailor.²⁷ This was to be the story that would rock the world, and Kipling's narrator even envisages a posterity for the tale that anticipates Graham's discovery of the cylinders in *When the Sleeper Wakes*: 'The mind leaped forward a hundred – two hundred – a thousand years', and then just as Graham realises that the phonetic garbling on the cylinder refers to 'The Man Who Would be King', Kipling's narrator of 'The Finest Story in the World' 'saw with sorrow that men would mutilate and garble the story'.²⁸

In James's story an ageing American artist roams the streets of Florence with a young compatriot expounding upon the glories of Renaissance artistic masterpieces, but fails to produce his own 'Madonna of the Future'. The past and the future are critical to James's story because his artist is trying to reproduce the glories of past art for the sake of the future, much as Kipling's narrator thinks of the future impact of his story. Wells may have chosen this particular story because of its preoccupation with art and posterity: in many ways *When the Sleeper Wakes* is not just a political treatise, but a reflection on what might endure in the future. Its emphasis on taste complements the centrality of art in James's story. Kipling's 'The Finest Story in the World' and James's 'Madonna of the Future' deal with protagonists who are bound to each other through the production of art: in Kipling's case.

The mention of 'The Heart of Darkness' arrests our attention even more. Graham fell asleep in 1897, the year of Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, so he could not have heard of Conrad's tale. The reference has a significance beyond the in-joke: Wells is demonstrably aware of the proximity of these publishing dates. Placing 'The Heart of Darkness' beside 'The Man Who Would Be King', Wells offers us indications that he knew more of Conrad's tale than merely the title. These are both stories of imperial failure, of flawed imperial adventurers: the connection would not have escaped Wells. He could have chosen any of Conrad's novels and short stories: 'An Outpost of Progress' (1897) would have been particularly appropriate. However, he chose a story that in theme and setting develops upon that earlier tale, and contains thematic similarities to Kipling's story. The result is a neat,

Blind the One-Eyed Man is King' (H. G. Wells, 'The Country of the Blind', *Strand Magazine* [April 1904], 405).

²⁷ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Finest Story in the World', in *Twenty-One Tales* (London: Macmillan, 1946), 175-206 (200).

²⁸ Kipling, 'The Finest Story in the World', 193.

thematic interweaving of texts and an astute recognition of the future impact of the work of his friends, particularly Conrad and James.

Graham's assumption that Conrad and James are post-Victorian writers is Wells's ironic mark of respect, signalling his opinion that their works are ahead of their time. Critics have frequently commented on the dynamic of the relationship between Wells, Conrad and James: the inclusion of their stories in *When the Sleeper Wakes* is further testimony to the intensity of their friendship at the turn of the century.²⁹ Despite their disagreements over artistic style, Wells recognised and celebrated the power of 'The Heart of Darkness' in *When the Sleeper Wakes*, and he may have been deliberately perpetuating their tacit 'literary conversation.'

The Shape of Literature to Come

In 1903 Conrad read Wells's *Twelve Stories and a Dream* (1903) and wrote to express his appreciation, albeit somewhat tinged with doubt: 'The last thing is in the tone of the *Sleeper* – absolutely – with all the high qualities – and that something subtly wanting – that one felt in the big book.'³⁰ It is clear that Conrad had read and admired *When the Sleeper Wakes*, despite feeling that there was something missing; and he would have found the mention of his own story flattering and amusing. Again, suggestions of artistic discussions and a mutual understanding are implicit in Conrad's frankness and conversational style in these comments. One of the extant Wells letters³¹ written in mid- or late-September 1906, concerning *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), reveals his open appreciation of Conrad's style:

²⁹ Jocelyn Baines avers that Wells 'never had the respect for Conrad that he had for James, whereas it is doubtful whether Conrad ever gave as much of himself to Wells as did James' (Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960], 232-34). Smith, in a similar vein, avers that 'Conrad liked Wells immensely, and Wells returned the feeling although probably not with as much fervour' (Smith, *H. G. Wells*, 167).

³⁰ Conrad, *Collected Letters* 3, 80. It is unclear whether this letter was written in November or December 1903. 'The last thing' refers to Wells's 'A Dream of Armageddon' (1903), the final short story in the collection, which is set in a future very similar to *When the Sleeper Wakes*.

³¹ While many of Conrad's letters to Wells have survived, only two of Wells's responses exist, leaving an oddly one-sided feel to the letters and suggesting an aloofness on Wells's part that is at variance with the extant facts about their early friendship. It is typical of Conrad that he kept very little of his early correspondence.

My dear Conrad

I've been reading first *in* and then through from beginning to end your delightful (it's the right word) talk of seas and winds and ships. It's talk, good talk, discursive yet not without point, admirably expressive without at any time becoming deliberately and consciously eloquent, full of the wonderful calm, a quality that never deserts you. A fine book [...] the sea under my eyes most wonderfully. I shall for all my life be the wiser for it. I see better as I go to and fro.³²

Wells's tone echoes that of Conrad, similarly suggesting a real conversation, and an affectionate familiarity. Again the reference to 'seeing' suggests their debate about style and meaning. Wells's praise of the lack of deliberate and conscious eloquence registers a slight disapproval of what F. R. Leavis called Conrad's 'adjectival insistence',³³ a characteristic notably present in *Heart of Darkness*. Yet the restraint in Wells's tone in this letter is perhaps indicative of the fact that the excitement of their early days, debating literary art on the Kentish coast, is over.

Conrad and Wells had found it difficult to communicate, partly because of Conrad's imperfect spoken English, but also because of fundamentally opposed views about their art as writers. Although Conrad famously strove to make people 'see', the meaning of his writing was often deliberately obfuscated: part of his artistic purpose was to make his reader strive for understanding. Wells, on the other hand, wrote fiction designed to galvanise the reader into political and social consciousness through its clarity of expression: the meaning is more obvious and its purpose almost invariably social or political. Inevitably such a divergence in artistic vision was to have an influence on their friendship.

At their last meeting Conrad and Wells discussed 'the meaning of literature' and 'agreed to disagree and not to meet again, it seems'.³⁴ Wells was critical of Conrad in his autobiography, suggesting that Ford Madox Ford was the greater writer. Conrad was more philosophical. He told Hugh Walpole that at their last meeting he had said to Wells, 'The difference between us, Wells, is fundamental. You don't care for humanity but think they are

³² J. H. Stape and Owen Knowles, eds., *A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 53.

³³ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), 177.

³⁴ Smith, *H. G. Wells*, 162-63.

to be improved. I love humanity but know they are not'.³⁵ They had differed over the question of vision, and those differences were irreconcilable.

Conrad and Wells were writers on the cusp of a literary transformation. Their end-of-century tales are landmarks in literary history. With *Heart of Darkness* Conrad inaugurated modernism in the novel; with *The Time Machine* (1895), *The War of the Worlds* and *When the Sleeper Wakes* Wells established himself as the foremost writer of English science fiction, following in the footsteps of European counterparts such as Jules Verne. It is intriguing, but hardly surprising, that these two men should find so much to fascinate them in each other's work. They were free of the shackles of the tradition of the triple-decker that forced writers into expressing their ideas over three published volumes. They were thus experimenting with the economy of narrative threads and the intensity of purpose that such liberation brought. Each admired the other's intelligence and commitment to their art and style; yet they were writing a very different form of fiction. Their references and allusions to each other in their correspondence, as well as in their literature, is proof that, despite their reservations, each man saw in the other a quality of writing that would influence generations to come.

³⁵ Conrad, quoted in Rupert Hart Davis, *Hugh Walpole: A Biography* (Macmillan, 1952), 168.

