

H. G. Wells and J. B. Pinker: Previously Unpublished Correspondence Concerning Conrad

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Introduction

The H. G. Wells Collection at the University of Illinois, Champagne Urbana, provided a wealth of new material while researching my 2015 monograph on Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells. It thus came as something of a surprise and, it must be said consternation at my own failure to probe the holdings more thoroughly, to subsequently discover that a number of new letters concerning Conrad were contained therein. Charles Blair, an academic in Illinois, alerted me to this correspondence between Wells and his agent J. B. Pinker, and Dennis Sears from the University Library generously supplied facsimiles of the transcripts. Even a cursory glance at this collection of a dozen letters between Wells and Pinker would have quickened the pulse of any academic familiar with the literary scene at the turn of the century, and certainly that of any Conrad or Wells scholar.

This correspondence adds nuance, colour and detail to what we already know of the relationship between Conrad and Wells; and it also puts “meat on the bones” of what we already know of Conrad’s relationship with Pinker, particularly concerning his famous, tempestuous letter of January 1902. But, perhaps the most tantalizing revelation to emerge from these letters is the fact that Conrad had proposed writing a critique of one of Wells’s most provocative utopian treatises. The possibilities that this new discovery raises, the potential avenues for publication, and the implications for the negotiations between Wells, Pinker and Conrad are the focus of much that follows in this discussion.

Very few of Wells’s letters to Conrad survive, making the relationship seem like a rather one-sided affair. However, the comments in his letters to Pinker, reproduced in this article, help the literary investigator to piece together this story of Conrad, Wells and Pinker, and of a richly-coloured cultural moment.

Anticipating the Future

In November 1901 H. G. Wells published his first work of non-fiction, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought*.¹ The book, commonly abbreviated to *Anticipations*, is a chronicle of Wells's predictions about how the future will evolve along social, political, scientific and technological lines, and it turned the thirty-four-year-old Wells into something of an Edwardian celebrity, as Michael Sherborne attests:

The book was widely hailed as a triumph, in part because systematic thinking about the future was rare at that time and Wells was a gifted pioneer in the field and also because he had launched his project at an opportune moment. Not only was it the start of the twentieth century, when every thinking person knew that great changes were on their way; it was also the time of Dunne's destination, the Boer War. (Sherborne 148)

Sherborne is referring to how the struggle to recruit sufficiently able-bodied men for the Boer War had raised questions about the fitness of the British in terms of imperial rule, and how over “the next few years many groups, from the eugenics movement to the Boy Scouts, wheeled out plans to reform the British outlook and breeding stock” (Sherborne 148). The final chapters of *Anticipations*, where Wells lays out his vision for a new World Republic, chime exactly with this mood. Wells reveals his proposal for a world of uniform order and effectiveness in statements such as: “It [the new Republic] will tolerate no dark corners where the people of the abyss may fester, no vast, diffused slums of peasant proprietors, no stagnant plague-preserves. Whatever men may come into its efficient citizenship it will let come—white, black, red, or brown; the efficiency will

¹ He had, of course, already published book reviews and journalistic pieces, but *Anticipations* was his first book length non-fiction piece. The book appeared in serialised form in the *Fortnightly Review* between April and December 1901, and was published as a book in November 1901.

be the test' (*Anticipations* 340). With a fresh monarch on the throne, the zeitgeist of the new century was one of a thirst for change from the Victorian past, for a brighter future, for social and civic improvement, and for groundbreaking technologies to improve the life of all: in *Anticipations*, Wells offered a veritable “cornucopia” of ideas on how that utopian future could come about. Ranging from inspired and visionary predictions about new technologies, to the downright spine-chilling suggestion of selective breeding, euthanasia and the imposition of an inflexible “World State,” the book proffered the future of humankind as a Wellsian utopia.

Wells was acutely aware of how prescient the book was, and, keen to get it out as quickly as possible, he wrote to Pinker on 4 November 1901:

My dear Pinker

I dont want to play the anxious hen about the publishing of Anticipations, but so far as I can judge of the temper of the present time it seems the moment is now. I see the title page carries the date 1902. All the proofs are through now, we are sending off the last today & there is nothing to prevent publication in November. Do you mind putting this before Courtney?²

Wells had a point: the book duly came out in November 1901, and immediately became a bestseller, with eight editions in its first year alone. On 27 December 1901, when it was already in its fourth edition, and keenly conscious of the stir he had caused, Wells wrote to the American painter Cosmo

² This letter, and the ones that follow, are transcripts of originals previously owned by George Lazarus, but now, so far as is known, in other private hands. The only reference available at the time of writing is the typed transcription in folder W-P24b, identified as ‘Laz II 133’ in the H. G. Wells Collection at the University of Illinois. It is unclear whether any typos and missing apostrophes etc. are mistakes in the original or a result of transcription; however, the pencil corrections evident on the transcripts suggest that they were carefully proof read. I am very grateful indeed to Charles Blair at the University of Illinois for bringing these letters to my attention and to Dennis Sears for providing the transcript. William Leonard Courtney was editor of *The Fortnightly Review* from 1894 until his death in 1928.

Rowe calling *Anticipations* his “magnum opus” and two days later he boasted to the astronomer and promoter of science, Sir Richard Gregory: “The amount of latent treason I am discovering is amazing. I shall talk treason at the R.I. I am going to write, talk & preach revolution for the next five years” (*Correspondence 1*: 390-91).³ Having captured the prevailing mood of Britain, Wells began to revel in the glory and was getting carried away with the audacity of his ideas and the public acclaim they were receiving.

Anticipations may have thrilled many of Wells’s early Edwardian readers, but reading some of the passages in the concluding chapter today is a difficult experience. For example, he speaks of the “swarms of black and brown and dirty-white and yellow people”, who, if they “do not come into the new needs of efficiency,” he says, “I take it they will have to go,” because “the world is a world, and not a charitable institution” (*Anticipations* 342).⁴ Wells’s notion of a “New Republic” as expressed in *Anticipations* is indeed, as Sherborne argues, based on “a bogus appeal to Darwinism” and he notes that while many readers greeted Wells’s pronouncements with enthusiasm, “others such as Conan Doyle and Chesterton denounced his ideas, a reaction that seems to have quickly set him rethinking his position” (Sherborne 149). Indeed, as W. Warren Wagar points out: “To Wells’s credit he would soon abandon such thoughts, but they were all here in plain English in *Anticipations* and we have no power or licence to wish them away” (Wagar 90-91). And even though he soon distanced himself from some of the more distasteful ideas in the book, years later in *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), conveniently sidestepping his more outrageous statements, the older and more tolerant Wells still maintains that *Anticipations* “can be considered as the keystone to the main arch of my work” (*Experiment in Autobiography* 643).

³ The R.I. reference is to a talk he was to give at the Royal Institute entitled “The Discovery of the Future” on 24 January 1902. The talk further propelled Wells into superstardom and was published by Gregory in *Nature* in February of that year, appearing later that year in book form.

⁴ I have written at greater length about the outrageous statements in *Anticipations* in my article “*The Inheritors*, H. G. Wells and Science Fiction: The Dimensions of the Future” (forthcoming in a special edition of *Conradiana* 2019).

Sherborne observes that “Nothing has done more damage to Wells’s reputation than the concluding chapter of *Anticipations*. Much of it sounds like an ill-advised collaboration between the Artilleryman from *The War of the Worlds* and Mr. Kurtz from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” (Sherborne 148-49). Indeed, Kurtz’s exhortation to “Exterminate all the brutes” pretty much catches the tone of Wells’s prognosis for non-white peoples, and anyone who does not conform to his idea of “efficiency” (*Youth* 134). It is thus hardly surprising that Conrad himself took exception to *Anticipations* and indicated to Wells his desire to write a critique of it in a journalistic article, as the following discussion will show.

Critiquing Anticipations

Pinker must have responded by return of post to the letter of 4 November asking for immediate publication because Wells wrote, on 5 November 1901, from his home, Spade House in Kent:

Dear J. B.

Don’t while you cultivate the political & practical side of Anticipations, make any mistake in conceding that it does not interest “literary” men. It’s got to. You know the little greasers will all try & say “motor-car” “machinery in motion” to it, and what you have to point out is that theres nothing about “motor cars” after the first and that the last for example & most of the middle stuff deal almost exclusively with religious and moral problems. There’s a good lot of literary criticism in it too. And in a way its not bad art to draw a hundred divergent issues together into one big thesis as I have done.

Yoursever

HG⁵

⁵ University of Illinois, Wells Collection, folder W-P24b, MS Laz II 128.

Wells's evaluations of both the literariness of *Anticipations* and the "art" informing his "big thesis" are hubristic to say the least—from his last sentence in this letter it is clear that he has vaulting ambitions.

There is no doubt that Wells writes the text with brio and considerable imaginative invention, but the challenges to his "thesis" belie its persuasiveness. What is more, the lack of compassion and sweeping generalizations in its concluding chapters raise fundamental ethical questions. In his excitement with his own ideas, Wells misses the human factor, making efficiency paramount in place of compassion. So, in Wells's new utopia, the humanity of the future "will have an ideal that will make killing worth the while; like Abraham, they will have the faith to kill, and they will have no superstitions about death." Euthanasia will offer a utilitarian answer to mental illness and disease: "They will naturally regard the modest suicide of incurably melancholy or diseased or helpless persons as a high duty rather than a crime" (*Anticipations* 325). Addicts, the mentally ill and even those with genetically transmitted illnesses will be dealt with ruthlessly:

the small minority afflicted with indisputably transmissible diseases, with transmissible mental disorders, with such hideous incurable habits of mind as the craving for intoxication—exists only on sufferance, out of pity and patience, and on the understanding that they do not propagate; and I do not foresee any reason to suppose that they [the people of the New Republic] will hesitate to kill when that sufferance is abused. And I imagine also the plea and proof that a grave criminal is also insane will be regarded by them not as a reason for mercy, but as an added reason for death.
(*Anticipations* 324)

Capital punishment will be the expedient, "humane" alternative to a life in prison: "People who cannot live happily and freely in the world without spoiling it for others are better out of it," says Wells, breezily (*Anticipations* 302). Wells's certainties are truly frightening and arrogant, and it is little wonder that some of his more sensitive, less idealistic readers took exception to the book.

Conrad was one of those early more critical readers of *Anticipations*, and a letter of 20 November 1901, from Wells to Pinker, who was also Conrad's literary agent, reveals his adverse response:

Dear J.B.

Conrad came along today with Anticipations on the train. He doesn't like it in a friendly & respectful way & would like very much to go for it in two or three articles. I think the remarks about the Slavonic future are the barbs of the arrow. I said nothing would please me better than for him to go for it—him with his wonderful & unique point of view. He won't however do two or three articles & said indeed he would not do one.⁶

- (i) because he does not think he could manage a reasoned article
- (ii) because he cannot afford the time to set his fiction aside.

As regards the latter does he know how much he could get for such an article? I suppose he could be got £30 or £40 for the English & American rights, could he not. And as regards the former point I suggested & he was greatly struck by the idea of calling the article

'Apropos of Anticipations'

& making it an article of five to six detached & separate paragraphs separated by stars—each par of from 600 to 2000 words. Of course I'm tremendously keen on his doing such an article, from every point of view. He's such a unique and forceful chap. Couldn't you fix it up say for the Fortnightly & the N.A.R. & tell him I've let on to you & make him the offer. What would Courtney say to it? I'm afraid it's a case of him or noone. The Contemporary has got water on the brain or something lately.

⁶ Of course this is a contradictory sentence, but I assume, given the second sentence of the letter, two or three articles are what was proposed.

Among other points such an article would let out J.C. in a new direction. It might come easier to do than he thinks and it could make instead of marring his reputation like this damn collaboration with F. M. Hueffer.

I'm sending these cuttings & articles to Harpers direct.

Yoursever

HG⁷

The letter is fascinating for a number of reasons: it demonstrates Wells's eagerness to promote *Anticipations*, while at the same time revealing his opinion of Conrad, and his generous efforts to help his friend financially and professionally. Furthermore, it is also the first extant indication of how the relationship between Conrad and Wells will ultimately founder.⁸

I have cited Conrad's famous last words to Wells before, but nowhere is his statement more apt than in the context of *Anticipations*. According to Hugh Walpole, at their last meeting Conrad summed up his problem with Wells thus: "The difference between us, Wells, is fundamental. You don't care for humanity but think they are to be improved. I love humanity but know they are not" (Walpole 168). Conrad's overarching sympathies lay with a humanity that is inescapably flawed, and reading Wells's ruthless solutions to human frailties in *Anticipations* must have incensed him. In the Preface to his very first novel, *Almayer's Folly* (1895), Conrad unequivocally affirmed his solidarity with his fellow human beings:

⁷ This letter is a transcript in folder W-P24b, identified as "Laz II 127"]. The contradictions about Conrad's intentions are, of course, frustrating, but reading the whole letter makes it clear that he proposed writing one article.

⁸ I have shown how Conrad and Ford's collaborative novel, *The Inheritors* (1901), is also a response to Wells ideas around this time—see "*The Inheritors*, H. G. Wells and Science Fiction: The Dimensions of the Future", forthcoming in *Conradiana*, 2019.

I am content to sympathise with common mortals, no matter where they live: in houses or in tents, in the street under a fog, or in the forests behind the dark line of mangroves that fringe the vast solitude of the sea. For, their land—like ours—lies under the inscrutable eyes of the Most High. Their hearts—like ours—must endure the load of the gifts from Heaven: the curse of facts and the blessing of illusions, the bitterness of our wisdom and the deceptive consolation of our folly. (*Almayer's Folly*: Preface)

The author who wrote with such inclusiveness and compassion could never have accepted Wells's crude nostrums for a utopian future for humanity. As far as can be ascertained, the article Conrad had suggested was never written, but there can be no doubt that he would have targeted Wells's callous and cavalier proposals for the betterment of humankind at the expense of "common mortals". However, as Wells points out, the politics of the "Slavonic" region were also the focus of his attention in *Anticipations*, striking another raw nerve with Conrad.

"I am a Pole": Wells, Conrad and the "Slavonic Future"

Wells claims that "the barbs of the arrow" in Conrad's objections to *Anticipations* were his comments about the "Slavonic future"; and on this, too, it is understandable that Conrad would be piqued. Eschewing racial and cultural differences, Wells speaks of the Slavic nations as one entity:

To a large extent, I believe, the Western Slavs will follow the Prussians and Lithuanians, and be incorporated in the urbanization of Western Europe, and the remoter portions of Russia seem destined to become—are indeed becoming—

⁹ In this section, as elsewhere, I am grateful as ever to Laurence Davies for his generous suggestions and insights.

Abyss, a wretched and disorderly Abyss that will not even be formidable to the armed and disciplined peoples of the new civilization, the last quarter of the earth, perhaps, where a barbaric or absentee nobility will shadow the squalid and unhappy destinies of a multitude of hopeless and meaningless lives. (*Anticipations* 249-50)

Wells rules out the possibility of Pan-Slavic dreams of a united Slav nation, predicting instead the integration of Poland and its neighbours into a wider European synthesis, alongside western Russia, with eastern Russia gravitating towards China. Conrad may have been gratified to contemplate the disintegration of an imperial Russia, but on the issue of Poland's assimilation into a wider unified Western Europe he would have been combative. Furthermore, Wells makes gross cultural and political generalizations about countries and peoples of which he had no firsthand knowledge or experience—at this point in his life, apart from a tour of Italy in 1898, Wells had not stepped outside of the British Isles. Conrad, the transnational, cosmopolitan, world-travelled seaman would have gawped at the temerity of Wells's pronouncements.

What is more, Wells bundles together a group of countries and peoples into a generic Slavonic region and culture, and Conrad was no apologist for Pan-Slavism. He tells Edward Garnett in October 1907: “You remember always that I am a Slav (it's your *idée fixe*) but you seem to forget that I am Pole” (*Selected Letters* 217). Later, in 1916 in “A Note on the Polish Problem”, he is even clearer about the distinction:

The Poles, whom superficial or ill-informed theorists are trying to force into the social and psychological formula of Slavonism, are in truth not Slavonic at all. In temperament, in feeling, in mind, and even in unreason, they are Western, with an absolute comprehension of all Western modes of thought, even of those which are remote from their historical experience [...] between Polonism and Slavonism there is not so much hatred as a complete and ineradicable incompatibility. (*Notes on Life & Letters* 135-36)

The entire essay is an argument for the separate identity and independence of the Poles and Poland from any kind of Pan-Slavic state. Indeed, in a letter to George Keating in December 1922 Conrad allies Poland more closely with Italy and France, but ultimately asserts the unique Polish mentality:

Racially I belong to a group which has historically a political past, with a Western Roman culture derived from at first Italy and then from France; a Roman tradition situated between Slavo-Tartar Byzantine barbarism on one side and the German tribes on the other; resisting both influences desperately and still remaining true to itself to this very day. (*Selected Letters* 464)

Thus, whilst Wells may dismiss the prospect of a Pan-Slavic future as not feasible, his proposals for the absorption of these nations into a unified Europe would be incendiary to a Conrad who argued passionately for the unique preciousness of all life, and who would have balked at Wells's subsuming of Poles into an undifferentiated Slavic people. Some of the "barbs" of Conrad's "arrow" would thus indeed have been aimed at Wells's predictions for the future of Poland and its neighbours.

*Intellectual Abstractions, Systems and Utopianism: Wells's Nostrums*¹⁰

Conrad's Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* makes clear his distrust of the systems and abstractions that distinguish philosophers and scientists from artists: "Impressed by the aspect of the world the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into facts—whence, presently, emerging they make their appeal to those qualities of our being that best fit us for the hazardous enterprise of living" (*Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* vii). This was written before Conrad had met Wells, and long before

¹⁰ In this section I am repeating part of an argument made in *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells*, but this is necessary because the newly discovered letter adds more detail to the discussion.

the writing of *Anticipations*, but it is a curiously appropriate critique of the kind of scientist-thinker that Wells aspired to in that radical treatise.

As the Preface continues it is almost as if Conrad had foreseen the aspirational content of *Anticipations*: “And their words are heard with reverence, for their concern is with weighty matters: with the cultivation of our minds and the proper care of our bodies, with the attainment of our ambitions, with the perfection of the means and the glorification of our precious aims” (*Nigger of the “Narvissus”* vii). Conrad’s disdain is palpable: he talks about the truth of humanity that “knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspiration, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn” (*Nigger of the “Narvissus”* viii). The Preface lays bare Conrad’s acute sensitivity to the tension between the intellectual abstraction of ideas and the realities and struggles of human existence—a tension that seems to elude Wells in the opening years of the twentieth century.

In light of all the above, Wells’s utopian agenda in *Anticipations* would inevitably rankle with Conrad. As I have argued in *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells*, we can trace the seeds of the rift between Conrad and Wells to the publication of *Anticipations*, *The Discovery of the Future* (1902), and *Mankind in the Making* (1903), where, in moving from narrative virtuosity to utopian polemic, Wells abandons the humanity and compassion that had attracted Conrad to his early scientific romances like *The Invisible Man* (1897). On 2 August 1901 Conrad had written to the *New York Times* that fiction “demands from the writer a spirit of scrupulous abnegation”: “The only legitimate basis of work lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so fascinating, so dangerous – so full of hope” (*Collected Letters* 2: 348–9). By contrast, Wells’s was, at the same moment, formulating his vision for his “New Republic”. It could not have been further from Conrad’s position. Wells’s “Republic” “will aim to establish, and it will at last, though probably only after a second century has passed, establish a world-state with a common language and a common rule. All over the world its roads, its standards, its laws, and its apparatus of control will run” (*Anticipations* 340). This kind of absolutism and the notion of a panacea for the ills of the world were anathema to

Conrad. By contrast, he writes to Cunninghame Graham in 1898 that “The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence” (*Selected Letters* 89). Where Wells imagines control and uniformity as the solution to the ills of the world, Conrad sees the humanity in imperfection: where Wells sees human progression towards utopia, Conrad sees only apocalypse.

As a result, by 1905 Conrad had begun to despair of the direction Wells had taken. Writing to Cunninghame Graham on 16 February from Capri, he alludes to Wells’s prognostications of scientific advances when he speaks of a sanitized “dull world of perfected municipalities and WC’s (sic) sans peur et sans reproche”, before concluding: “The grave of individual temperaments is being dug by GBS and HGW with hopeful industry. Finita la comedia! Well they may do much but for the saving of the universe I put my faith in the power of folly” (*Selected Letters* 191). The strain between utopian thinking and human frailty that Conrad is so acutely attuned to, conversely, was being exploited by Wells for his own idealistic ends. The kind of pronouncements in *Anticipations* that come perilously close to advocating eugenics, and his predictions of a unified, ordered world constructed upon utopian ideals would have incensed Conrad at least as much as the comments about the “Slavonic future”. It is in many ways regrettable that Conrad never did manage to write the proposed article, but we can glean from his other writings what the tenor and argument of the piece would have been.

Conrad: “such a unique and forceful chap”

The letter to Pinker also reveals much about Wells’s attitude to Conrad. When he speaks of Conrad’s “wonderful & unique point of view” and the fact that he is “such a unique forceful chap” we sense Wells’s admiration, tinged, perhaps, with some degree of condescension. The fact that he uses “unique” twice in his assessment points to his recognition of Conrad’s virtuosity. We know from his mention of “The Heart of Darkness” in *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) that Wells admired the story, and his review of *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) signaled his early recognition of Conrad’s

extraordinary talent.¹¹ By 1901 Conrad was being fêted in literary circles at least, and Wells was aware that an article by Conrad on his own work would grab attention, which is exactly what he desired for *Anticipations*.

However, there is also a clear indication that Wells is actively promoting Conrad, providing him with an opportunity to channel his writing in a “new direction”. Wells had championed Conrad from the beginning of his writing career, and we have evidence here of his concern to nurture what he saw then as a singular talent. Wells may have been dismissive of Conrad after the publication of *Nostromo* (1904), which he labeled unaccountably as “dессicated (sic) conglomerate” but he was ever generous with his help, both financially and in terms of working tirelessly to promote him (*Correspondence 2*: 58).¹² Thus Wells sees the proposed article as an opportunity for Conrad to earn some much-needed cash and it is evident from the letter that Conrad, always keen to supplement his income, had quizzed Wells on what such an article would be worth in monetary terms; and, at the same time, he sees the article as an opportunity to develop Conrad’s literary talents.

Pinker, however, could not convince W. L. Courtney, the editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, as he explains to Wells on 29 November 1901 in this extract from another newly discovered letter:

Courtney did not take very kindly to the idea of the Conrad article, but he may like it better on reflection. He seems to think that Conrad would not be effective; but he quite admitted the advantage of a provocative article.¹³

¹¹ As I have argued elsewhere, we know from the publication dates that Wells had seen the manuscript of “The Heart of Darkness” before its serialization in *Blackwood’s*, or at the very least that he and Conrad had discussed the tale at length. See Linda Dryden, ‘A Note on When the Sleeper Wakes and Heart of Darkness’: and for a discussion of Wells’s review of *An Outcast*, see *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells*, pp. 10-14.

¹² See *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells*, chapter 5, ‘Conrad, Wells and the Art of the Novel’, pp. 131-168, for a full discussion of Conrad and Wells’s differences over approaches to novel writing, which may have prompted Wells’s derogatory remarks about *Nostromo*.

¹³ Illinois P1790-258

Pinker goes on to suggest that George Gower, European editor at the *North American Review* might take the article and pay “a decent sum”, adding “If we could only get the ball rolling I believe it would go like the devil”.¹⁴ However, at this point he is mentioning names other than Conrad, such as the influential poet, critic and editor W. E. Henley and Ivan Muller, assistant editor of *The Telegraph*: he is clearly thinking beyond the idea of the Conrad article.

Courtney’s feeling that Conrad ‘would not be effective’ is also revealing. By 1901 Conrad was known chiefly as a fiction writer by the general public: his only forays into any kind of journalistic opinion pieces had been his articles in appreciation of fellow artists like Maupassant and Henry James. Courtney would therefore have had no prior indication of Conrad’s ability to undertake a critique of a book of ideas such as *Anticipations*, and, he may well have been right about Conrad not being “effective”. Aware of Conrad’s prose style, Courtney may have felt that the article on *Anticipations* would be too prolix and elaborate for his readers, rather than getting straight to the point and engaging with Wells’s ideas. Indeed, Courtney eventually published Conrad’s long article “Autocracy and War” in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1905, but penetrating and extraordinary though the piece is, it is also stylistically complex, and a challenging read.

Wells, on the other hand, was very used to conversations with Conrad upon all manner of topics and was well aware of what a “unique and forceful chap” he was.¹⁵ Using the word “forceful”, Wells is surely pointing to Conrad’s strong opinions and enigmatic manner of expressing them. Indeed, in *Tono-Bungay* (1909) Wells caricatures Conrad as a “Roumanian” sea captain with some affection and offers a comic representation of his distinctive voice and extravagant mannerisms.¹⁶ The fact that he is “tremendously keen on his doing such an article, from every point of view” signals Wells’s confidence in Conrad’s ability; he seems also to have felt that an article attacking the ideas in *Anticipations* would stir up some welcome controversy, as Courtney had recognized when he saw the “advantage of a provocative article”. And, as Wells

¹⁴ As above.

¹⁵ See *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells* for a full discussion of their conversations.

¹⁶ See *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells*, pp. 82-3, for further discussion of this.

notes, “it might come easier than he thinks”, suggesting that Wells had more belief in Conrad than did Conrad himself. Indeed, it is a measure of the esteem in which Wells, the seasoned literary journalist, held Conrad at this time that he was willing to let him loose on a public critique of his “magnum opus”.

Despite Pinker’s misgivings, Wells did not let up on his attempts to secure a publisher for the Conrad critique of *Anticipations*. On 13 December 1901 he writes to Pinker:

I have seen Conrad again. He will certainly let off some good stuff in a paragraph article if Newbolt would make the offer. He’d do it for £15 – or love – I fancy if he was asked. He’s full of it & it prevents his working at other things. You could remind Newbolt it is the first appearance of JC in any thing but fiction.¹⁷

Here Wells is referring to the poet, novelist and historian Henry Newbolt, who was the editor of the *Monthly Review* from 1900 to 1907. It is not clear if Newbolt had made the offer, or if Pinker had approached him, but certainly no article by Conrad appeared in the magazine in the following months, and this, so far as extant correspondence is concerned, is the last mention of the issue of Conrad’s critique. It would seem that after this last attempt, the whole project had run out of steam. However, what this letter does reveal is that *Anticipations* had fired Conrad up, albeit “in a friendly & respectful way”, and the conversation between him and Wells over its ideas went on for some time.

Wells’s motivations are not wholly altruistic: many of his letters to Pinker concerning *Anticipations* discuss various means of getting publicity for the book, and his eagerness for the Conrad article is largely due to the fact that, as he points out here, it would be a new type of writing for Conrad and thus would grab attention. But, Wells was also promoting Conrad in a spirit of generosity and genuine interest in the furtherance of his career, as the following discussion will show.

¹⁷ University of Illinois, Wells Collection, folder W-P24b, MS LAZ II 117.

Conrad's Reputation: to "make instead of marring"

On 8 January 1902, Conrad wrote to Pinker at length and in high dudgeon over Pinker's refusal to give him an advance on *Seraphina*. Conrad's tone is aggrieved and outraged, emphasizing how he felt slighted by Pinker's comments and how offended he was that his value as an artist had not been recognized:

If you don't want the bother of my stuff saddled with my other imperfections tell me to go to the devil. That won't offend me and I'll go as soon as ever you had your money back. But don't address me as if I were a man lost in sloth, ignorance or folly. Were you as rich as Croesus and as omnipotent as all the editors rolled into one I would not let such a tone pass without resenting it in the most outspoken manner. And don't write to me of failure, confound it! because you and I have very different notions of failure. (*Selected Letters* 147)

The entire letter displays Conrad's unbridled anger and runs to several pages. It is easy to understand Pinker's reticence, however: the collaboration with Ford over what would become *Romance* was a protracted and rather tortuous one lamented by Conrad's literary friends, including Wells and James, and Wells, at least, had shared his misgivings with Pinker.¹⁸

Wells's letter of 20 November 1901 to Pinker concerning Conrad's article on *Anticipations* where he speaks of "this damn collaboration with F. M. Hueffer"—i.e. *Seraphina*, and possibly including the recently published *The Inheritors* (1901)—indicates that he views the collaboration as

¹⁸ See *Joseph Conrad and H.G. Wells*, pp. 39-68, for a detailed discussion of the gestation of the project and of the objections raised by various friends, especially Wells.

squandering Conrad's talent, and has no compunction about letting Pinker know this. Yet, just two months later, on 12 January 1902, he was actively and enthusiastically urging Pinker to take on the project:

My dear J.B.

Seraphina is extraordinary gorgeous melodrama and stuff for a boom. It's romantic, eventful & popular. Just now when there is an opening for a new departure in romance, it might do great things. Can't you get an offer for it soon? It will be a richly coloured serial and you let J.C. on to this stuff he'll be as popular as Stanley Weyman. I'm quite sober. You know I doubted when I saw you but I'm really convinced. J. C. isn't no E. P. or S. C. Back him. Let him have that other £50 now and press him for delivery to negotiate & keep on – if these are delayed. Not for money but negociation.

When I saw him he was in a stew about you. –had written you a violent letter he said & was afraid you'd not go on with him. He believes in you.

Yoursever

HG¹⁹

Of course Wells is being tactically disingenuous here. The letter makes clear that he had discussed his doubts with Pinker, and years later, in 1920 he wrote a letter to the *English Review* in which he refers first to *The Inheritors* and then *Romance*, stating: "That and a second book, of which I forget the title – it was an entirely stagnant 'adventure' story, festering with fine language – were an abominable waste of Conrad's time and energy" (*Correspondence 3*: 38).²⁰ To be fair, Wells wrote this whilst in the throes of a bitter row with Ford, but it nevertheless chimes with his earlier critical

¹⁹ University of Illinois, Wells Collection folder W-P24b, Laz II 42.

²⁰ For a full discussion of Wells's disdain for Conrad's collaborations with Ford see *Joseph Conrad and H.G. Wells*, pp. 45-53.

comments about the collaboration. Therefore, whilst Wells is feigning enthusiasm in promoting *Seraphina* to Pinker, he is also in fact, against his own better judgment, going out of his way to help a friend. It is typical of Wells's generosity that he is willing to compromise his own reputation as a discerning literary critic to promote Conrad's career. He even goes so far as to claim that he has changed his opinion of the collaboration, which is patently not the case.

Wells and Conrad had become extremely close over the previous two or three years. In a letter to Wells at the end of 1900 Conrad claims: "Seriously I much rather talk with you than write, as in the last case one tries to be brief and thus runs the risk of being misunderstood" (*Letters* 2: 314).²¹ Comments like this confirm the intimacy of their discussions, and the intensity of their friendship around this time. Hence, when Wells writes to Pinker, "When I saw him he was in a stew about you" we understand that Conrad had confided in Wells about the impetuous letter cited above. Furthermore, we learn that Conrad regretted the letter, fearing that Pinker would drop him as a client. Thus Wells, the conciliator, reassures Pinker that "He believes in you", and just in case Pinker had any doubts, he adds, wryly, "I'm quite sober". Acting as go-between and peacekeeper, Wells demonstrates true friendship and respect for Conrad, and a willingness to compromise his own integrity for his cause. Without the context of Conrad's letter to Pinker, and Wells's pronouncements on the Conrad/Ford collaboration, one would assume that Wells was being perfectly genuine; but of course he was being anything but frank and honest.

Wells is clearly "over-egging the pudding" here. Even in its final published version as *Romance*, *Seraphina* is neither "extraordinary" nor "gorgeous", as Wells knew only too well. By the early twentieth century Wells was a respected literary critic and reviewer, and he is obviously looking to exploit this reputation in order to help Conrad. When he talks about popularity and mentions Stanley Weyman, he is implying that he knows what will sell and thus, in his opinion, by backing *Seraphina* Pinker would be making an astute business decision.²² In citing Weyman, Wells

²¹ The letter is undated but Karl and Davies suggest that was written in late 1900 or 1901.

²² Stanley Weyman was a hugely popular writer of historical romance in the last decade of the nineteenth century who has now been largely forgotten. It is a striking irony that Wells should be trying to sell Conrad

is trying to push the historical romance credentials of Conrad and Ford's novel, but his comment that it could be a "new departure" in the genre is unaccountable, and comes across as almost desperate. After all, the opening sequence of the book is a direct and unashamed mimicry of the opening pages of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), a book published nearly twenty years earlier.²³

However, it is clear that Conrad had persuaded Wells to write to Pinker and argue for the book's popularity and unique take on the romance. Just six days prior to Wells's letter to Pinker, and two days before his own petulant missive, Conrad himself had written to reassure Pinker that the book was progressing. Whilst playing up the adventure romance of its content, he is also keen to promote its popular appeal, stating that "here at least we hold something with a promise of popular success", and goes on to claim that it is a new take on the older genre of romance through its "artistic care of the execution." And Conrad lays his and Ford's reputations on the line by claiming that "You may take my word for it that it is a piece of literature of which we are neither of us at all ashamed" (*Collected Letters* 2: 366). In echoing these claims in his letter to Pinker, Wells must have been guided by Conrad; indeed, it is quite likely that he and Wells sat down and composed it together.

Wells pursues Conrad's cause by advocating him over Stephen Crane (S.C.), and Edwin Pugh (E.P.). Pinker represented both men, and was very much aware of their unreliability.²⁴ Crane had the habit of disappearing for months on end, and was notoriously irresponsible when it came

as a popular artist as that is probably the last reputation Conrad would actually have sought. He wanted the sales that popularity would bring, but did not want the perception that he wrote only popular fiction. After all, in a letter to be discussed later in this article, he famously declared: "I am no sort of airy R. L. Stevenson who considered his art a prostitute and the artist as no better than one" (*Selected Letters* 148).

²³ See *Joseph Conrad and H. G Wells* pp. 61-3, for an explanation of how Conrad and Ford copied Stevenson's style and rhythm in these pages.

²⁴ Philip Waller notes that 'Arnold Bennett, Stephen Crane and Barry Pain were all with Pinker; so was Ford Madox Ford' (Waller 622).

to deadlines. Bettina L. Knapp notes that “Crane could never stay in one place for any length of time” and details how, in 1898 while staying in England, he determined to return to the States to enlist in America’s war with Spain over Cuba: “Conrad, who saw Crane’s ‘white-faced excitement’ at the thought of leaving, lent him some money, though he could ill afford it [...] He learned in time that he was not the only one who had lent Crane money” (Knapp 28). Pugh was similarly undependable: he seemed to have a promising career as a novelist for a short while in the late 1890s, but his type of working-class subject fell out of favour and he ended his days in drunkenness and poverty (Cross 235-37). What Wells is implying by mentioning Crane and Pugh is that Conrad was reliable, and advancing him money on *Seraphina* would make sound business sense, unlike subsidizing Crane, for example: Pinker would not be taking a gamble if he backed the novel because it would be delivered on time. Of course the book was not to appear for another two years, being published in March 1904, and no doubt Wells was already aware of the collaborator’s struggles over the manuscript, further proof of his willingness to go out on a limb for Conrad.

On 13 January 1902, the day after Wells’s intervention, Pinker writes back in a measured and conciliatory fashion:

My dear H.G.

Thank you for your letter. I’m glad to have your opinion on Seraphina, for I have seen only scraps. You’re a brick to take so much trouble. I shall not try to get an offer for it until I get the whole MS. I should only spoil its chances. I’ll get up curiosity about it while I’m waiting. I sent him £50 on Friday, and I should have written to answer your telegram, but I was called away to my mother who is dying.²⁵

So, Pinker had already acknowledged Conrad’s plight and relented on the £50 advance before Wells’s intervention. Furthermore, the postscript is very revealing: “P.S. You will, of course, have assured J.C. His letter was particularly violent and foolish, but one makes allowances. If ‘Seraphina’

²⁵ University of Illinois, Wells Collection, MS P1790-267.

is all you think her we may do things. She shall be worked for all she's worth."²⁶ All of this makes it quite clear that Conrad's concerns were unnecessary, and that he had underestimated Pinker's commitment and willingness to support his authors, particularly himself.

There is a sense here of Pinker's indulgence of Conrad and of the care that his friends were taking to ensure that Conrad was not left in financial distress. When Pinker says "one makes allowances", it is fair to infer either that he is joining Wells in saying that their affection for Conrad is such that they forgive him his temperamental excesses, or that he is such a supremely talented writer that they will overlook his temper—probably both reasons for the "allowances" are true. Moreover, Pinker's tone is paternalistic: his comment that Conrad's letter was "violent and foolish", combined with "one makes allowances", suggests a genial conspiracy between Pinker and Wells to protect and nurture Conrad, almost as though he were a precocious, but much-loved adolescent.

The tenor of Wells letter, almost begging Pinker to go out of his way to accommodate *Seraphina*, confirms that Conrad had implored him to intervene with Pinker, citing financial difficulties. This is alluded to in a letter from Conrad to Pinker of 12 January 1902 thanking him for relenting and sending the cheque that he had requested:

Your refusal before was quite justified; Your compliance now is the more kind; for I don't suppose you had heard from Wells when you dispatched the money. The offer came from Wells (I assume you have *now* his letter). What I had asked him to come to me for was to show him the MS of *Seraphina*. I recognized so much your point of view, that I wanted him to give you his fair judgment as to the sort of thing that was being produced. (*Collected Letters 2: 372-73*)

That letter from Wells, of course, is the one now cited here for the first time. So, when Wells says to Pinker "Let him have that other £50" it is obvious that Conrad had unburdened himself to

²⁶ University of Illinois, Wells Collection, MS P17902-144.

Wells about a lack of funds, and had asked him to persuade Pinker to agree to the advance.²⁷ Furthermore, Conrad claims that he only wanted to show Wells the manuscript of *Seraphina* and get his opinion, but his tone is wheedling, and one senses that he is now trying to excuse or mitigate the extreme language of his own letter, and also Wells's intervention. In light of all of this, Wells's promoting of *Seraphina* to Pinker may not have been necessary—one gets the sense from his letter of 12 January that Pinker would have taken it forward in any case.

Conclusion: Loose Ends

The letters recently unearthed in the Wells archives at Illinois have added further light and shadow to the picture we have of Conrad's relationship with H. G. Wells; and they also reveal the measures taken by Wells and Pinker to protect and nurture Conrad. In an early letter to Wells, dated 15 November 1898, Pinker writes, "I suppose you have seen Conrad."²⁸ By this point Wells may have met Conrad for the first time—I have already proven that they met each other for the first time in Kent in early November 1898, and certainly before 17 November.²⁹

Pinker's enquiry thus suggests that he is keen to discuss Conrad with Wells, a fact that is reinforced by a further letter of August 20, 1899. This letter is to Jane Wells from Pinker's wife, Elizabeth, and Pinker adds a footnote asking Jane to pass on a message about *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). In the middle of this message he speaks of meeting the American publisher S. S. McClure and continues: "I lectured him on the wickedness of neglecting Conrad's work, and I think he would take it up if Conrad wished."³⁰ The following August, in 1900, Pinker writes to Jane Wells concerning Cora Crane and Conrad:

²⁷ In his letter to Pinker Conrad says, "I had asked you for £40 I believe", but I think Wells and Conrad are speaking of the same request (*Selected Letters* 148). Possibly Conrad reduced the requested sum in his intemperate letter in order to make it appear that he was being reasonable.

²⁸ University of Illinois, Wells Collection, MS P1790-39.

²⁹ See *Joseph Conrad and H.G. Wells*, p. 16.

³⁰ University of Illinois, Wells Collection, MS P179-111.

I am afraid Mrs Crane has been sponging on poor Conrad. I wouldn't give her sixpence. She has been trying to get more from Henry James. In a letter yesterday telling me of it he says

“I can do very little indeed more, & my heart, I fear, is, generally, hard to her.”

While I was reading the letter she came in and when I would not give her any money she produced a cheque of Conrad's and asked me to cash it!³¹

Thus, even Wells's wife is drawn into the efforts to protect Conrad. It should be noted, however, that Stephen Crane had died, aged 28, in June of that year in a sanatorium in Germany, leaving Cora an impoverished widow. Pinker's letter reveals both her very understandable and justified desperation and Conrad's generosity and humanity: his generosity to Cora is testimony to the fact that he loved and admired Crane.

The letters and fragments of letters discussed here cast a fascinating light on the relationships between authors and their publishers at the turn of the century. The literary world at the time was a very small, close-knit, community, and thus most authors knew each other. These new found letters between Wells and Pinker mention a number of the most prominent male authors of the day--Conrad, Ford, James, Crane, Weyman, W.W. Jacobs, Kipling, G. B. Shaw—many of whom were living near Wells at the time. Despite some of the gossipy tone of this correspondence, there is a strong sense of a supportive community surrounding Conrad, and a sense, too, that Wells and Pinker formed a conspiracy to protect and promote him both financially and in terms of reputation.

The correspondence revealed throughout this article sheds an interesting light on an intricate web of literary relations at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Rivalries and artistic differences aside, these new-found letters impart a sense of a supportive

³¹ University of Illinois, Wells Collection, MS P-17902-50.

community of artists and their agents. Despite Wells's later negative, and sometimes derogatory, statements about Conrad, he made some quite extraordinary gestures to promote his friend and his interests. Wells was the younger and less experienced man, but working together with Pinker, he showed humanity, benevolence and a genuine interest in the fortunes of an author who was beginning to break the mould of the English novel, even when he disapproved of the directions that novelist was taking.

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