

college photograph, alongside the better-known photograph of Amber and her daughter. Even the Acknowledgements pages are of scholarly interest, as Snyder mentions her acquaintanceship with Amber's granddaughter, Dusa McDuff. In sum, this is a hearty and accomplished edition of Wells's novel, replete with scholarly verve and personality.

**LINDA DRYDEN, JOSEPH CONRAD AND H. G. WELLS: *THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE LITERARY SCENE* (LONDON: PALGRAVE, 2015) ISBN 978-1-137-50011-3 (HB) £55.00 [JOHN BATCHELOR]**

One of the most striking of Joseph Conrad's many reflections on the nature of his own art is in this letter to William Blackwood, written on 27 May 1902, in which he defends himself from the charge that his writing is excessively slow. A recent conversation with Blackwood has stung, clearly. Conrad protests that his writing is 'as good as I can make it' and designed so that 'the whole story in all its descriptive detail shall fall into place' (when the reader has reached the last page). 'This is my method based on deliberate conviction. I've never departed from it.' He is neglected by a vulgar commercialised literary market (in the age of 'Besants, Authors' Clubs and Literary Agents') but he refuses to be as swift 'as the present public (incapable of fixing its attention for five consecutive minutes) requires us to be at the cost of all honesty, of all truth, and even the most elementary conception of art.' His own work, by contrast, is scrupulously attentive and observant, 'nothing but action – action observed, felt and interpreted with an absolute truth to my sensations (which are the basis of art in literature).'<sup>1</sup>

He does not here refer to the difference between his sales and those of his young friend H. G. Wells, but the contrast was plain to see, and it must have hurt. Since his sensational debut with *The Time Machine* (in 1895), Wells had by 1902 written and published some fifteen further volumes which included some of his most famous titles, including *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds* and *Love and Mr. Lewisham*. It was natural for Conrad to take refuge in the defence that his relatively slow progress, as against someone like Wells, was a penalty for his dedication to high art. Henry James felt the same. Both of these more mature men were initially bowled over by Wells's personal charm, puppy-like

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, eds. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, in 9 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983-2007), vol. 2, 416, 418.

exuberance and obvious brilliance. Both would in due course be hurt and disillusioned.

Linda Dryden's book takes in the story of James's hurt in relation to Wells and explores in rich and careful detail the more complex and fruitful Conrad/Wells relationship. Conrad was indeed grateful for Wells's appreciative remarks about *Almayer's Folly*, and Zdzislaw Najder is right, I think, in his suggestion that the more economical style of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* is a direct consequence of Wells's complaint in a review about the dense writing of *An Outcast of the Islands* (cited by Dryden, 14, 15). But Conrad would not be shaken from his preferred method. In the same 1902 letter to Blackwood, he writes: 'I am long in my development'; but then, he points out, so are Scott, Thackeray and George Eliot, and so, by implication, is any serious writer. Conrad continued to express fondness and enthusiasm for Wells. In 1907, he dedicated *The Secret Agent* ('this simple tale of the sixth century') to Wells ('the historian of ages to come'), and I agree with Dryden's assessment that this dedication is 'presented in the spirit of friendship and admiration' (84). It also invites us to think about the extent to which the two writers had common ground. Earlier in her book, Dryden writes that

Conrad shared with Wells an inheritance from the British, and European, realist tradition in the novel, and like Wells, he used his understanding of the art of the nineteenth-century novel to take his writing in new directions. Yet, neither author could be said to be 'Victorian' in their method or their outlook: Wells's sights were set firmly on where the novel could take us in terms of the future, and what it could tell us about the conditions of the present; Conrad's sights were set on what the novel could tell us about ourselves and about our relationship with the rest of humanity. (41)

Linda Dryden's book is full and well-considered, and is particularly strong in the section in which she sees *Tono-Bungay* as an extended response to Conrad's work. There could perhaps have been closer comparison of the defining early masterpieces, *The Time Machine* and *Heart of Darkness*. As I have argued elsewhere, there is a great deal in common between these two extraordinary and revolutionary texts.<sup>2</sup> They both confront cannibalism as marking the degeneration of man as a species. Also, both texts share current and urgent preoccupations of the decadence: the biological decline of

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<sup>2</sup> John Batchelor, *The Life of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 92-3, and John Batchelor, 'Conrad and Wells at the End of the Century', *The Critical Review* 38 (1998), 69-82.

humankind, the evening of the century, the acknowledgement of entropy as a force in the universe (and thus of the end of the world as an inevitability) and terror of primitive forces at work within the self. In his excellent founding study, *The Early H. G. Wells* (first published in 1961) Bernard Bergonzi brought out Nordau's *Degeneration* as a key text of the decadence. *The Time Machine* and *Heart of Darkness* can be seen in the context of Nordau's *fin du globe*: 'A dusk of the nations, in which all suns and all stars are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is perishing in the midst of a dying world.'<sup>3</sup> The Fin de Siècle was decidedly fashionable when Bergonzi wrote his study, with an edgy truancy which was both appealing and topical. It continues to stir good literary studies, including this one on Wells and Conrad by Linda Dryden, and another, newly published by Oxford University Press, by Alexander Bubb on Kipling and Yeats. The Decadence is alive and well.

**MICHAEL MACK, *CONTAMINATIONS: BEYOND DIALECTICS IN MODERN LITERATURE, SCIENCE AND FILM* (EDINBURGH: EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016) ISBN 978-1-4744-1136-3 (HB) £70.00 [OLGA ANTSYFEROVA]**

A new book by the prolific scholar Michael Mack of the University of Durham embraces the problematic of five major studies he authored before: on classic German philosophy, Hanna Arendt, Spinoza, and interactions of philosophy and literature. However, he propels his field of research to a new level of interdisciplinary analysis to include, among other things, medical biology and neuroscience. *Contaminations* deals simultaneously with ethics of literature, film studies, intellectual history and sciences. Mack is a truly interdisciplinary scholar whose writings demonstrate undoubtable merits and occasional faults of this approach and fruitful methodology to which the future might belong. Undoubtedly, in the current situation of a post-postmodern crisis manifesting itself in philosophy, sciences and humanities, to say nothing of politics, one feels the great need of a synthesising theory, especially if that theory seeks to appropriate and analyse today's most contradictory and hot topics by putting them in dialogue with both classical literary texts and the latest scientific innovations. Mack finds a rationale for his rather inclusive theory in the figure of *contaminations*.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), 5.