In the midst of his work on the story that was to become *Heart of Darkness* Conrad was collaborating with Ford on *Seraphina*, a draft of the novel that would eventually be titled *Romance*. Conrad and Ford worked together on a total of three projects: *The Inheritors*, *Romance* and *The Nature of a Crime* (1909), a short story that was first published in Ford’s *English Review* in 1909. *The Inheritors* is not generally considered to be a genuine collaboration, as Raymond Brebach confirms: ‘Conrad readily admitted that *The Inheritors* was for the most part Ford’s work, and that he put his name on it only to insure [sic] its publication. His role in its composition was more that of editor or critical reader than collaborator’ (Brebach 35). Conrad states as much in a letter of 26 March 1900 to Edward Garnett about Ford and the revisions to *The Inheritors*: ‘O Lord. How he worked! There is not a chapter I haven’t made him write twice – most of them three times over. This is collaboration if you like!’ (Collected Letters 2: 257).¹ Jocelyn Baines calls *The Nature of a Crime* a ‘worthless fragment’, which may be harsh, but captures the mood of most critical responses to this short, quite odd story (Baines 277). As Najder confirms, Ford also wrote most of this semi-autobiographical story himself (A Life 367). *Romance*, on the other hand, was a genuine and prolonged collaboration between Conrad and Ford, which, despite its lack of critical or commercial success, at least had a positive effect on the career of both authors, as Brebach explains:

For Conrad it provided a kind of trial run for scenes and situations which he would employ with greater success in *Nostromo*, and it may have turned his attention to political themes. For Ford it provided an opportunity to learn much of the craft of writing under the (often not very sympathetic) guidance of a skilled writer. (Brebach 108)

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¹ Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells*
However, Conrad and Ford’s friends were appalled by the prospect of the pair collaborating on a literary venture. On hearing of the plans for *Seraphina*, Henry James apparently declared: ‘To me this is like a bad dream which one relates at breakfast! Their traditions and their gifts are so dissimilar. Collaboration between them is to me inconceivable’ (Baines 277). James was not alone in his concerns: Conrad’s most recent friend, H. G. Wells, was similarly aghast at the suggestion and begged Ford not to proceed with it, as we shall see.

Brebach has charted in meticulous and fascinating detail, through manuscript evidence, how this collaboration developed and how *Romance* evolved. It is not the intention here to revisit that process, but rather to look more closely at the objections that Wells made to the collaboration as a means of understanding his relationship with Conrad. Along the way I will consider the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson and the publishing success of *Treasure Island* (1883) on the authors’ approach to the romance and adventure genre. For, as Brebach rightly concludes: ‘Conrad’s difficulties in accommodating himself to the demands of the novel’s genre, and especially to the attitudes toward romance required by the story, provide one of the primary reasons why the novel is less than satisfying’ (Brebach 3). The following discussion will thus tease out some of the reasons for the relative failure of the novel, proving that Wells and James had been prescient in their warnings. Such a discussion illuminates Wells’s opinion of Conrad’s potential as a writer and reveals his own response to the romance genre in general, including his objections to the work of Robert Louis Stevenson.

**Conrad, Wells and the strange case of Robert Louis Stevenson**

As a critic, H. G. Wells was not inclined to sycophancy, whoever or whatever the subject of his review. Thus, while otherwise praising Robert Louis Stevenson in an article, ‘The Lost Stevenson’, for the *Saturday Review* on 13 June 1896, about the posthumously published *Weir of Hermiston* (1896), Wells mourns the loss ‘of all that Stevenson might have been had not the Scott tradition laid hold of him’ (Parrinder and Phimls 101). It is the Scottish romantic tradition as exemplified by Walter Scott that Wells decries, a tradition that he regards as debased and superficial. Wells himself was a writer of ‘romances’, but his were scientific romances that ‘distort perceived reality in order to address something that he seeks to change within it’ (James 37). Essentially, Wells was concerned that literature should speak to the present about