

Uncouth Conrad Again: The Cambridge Edition, *The Shadow-Line*, “An Outpost of Progress” and *Under Western Eyes*

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Part 1

I am concerned to demonstrate that although Cambridge University Press’s vast project to produce authoritative new editions of the literary works of Joseph Conrad is now well advanced, the project is flawed. I refer to “literary works” because I am not concerned with the admirable Cambridge edition of Conrad’s letters.

In recent articles for periodicals I have drawn attention to the flaws in various literary volumes so far published in the Cambridge series. In this essay, I summarise my criticisms, and I augment my case by using examples chosen from *The Shadow-Line*, the tale “An Outpost of Progress”, and *Under Western Eyes*. I reiterate that I do not discuss the numerous criteria involved in the production of a Conrad edition, for my concern here is simply to demonstrate the presence of a pattern of flaws. If I succeed in demonstrating to you the presence of those flaws, I shall have done my job.

With the exception of one volume, *The Secret Agent*, the immensely industrious and conscientious editors of the Cambridge series made a big mistake. They thought they knew better than Conrad. The Cambridge editors show that Conrad usually accepted, by choice or acquiescence, the house styling and corrections that various publishers imposed on his work (sometimes he saw the changes at the proof stage, sometimes he did not);

but these editors think that, on the whole, he should not have accepted the changes. They have therefore deleted much house styling and correction: “successive layers of non-authorial intervention affecting wording and ‘accidentals’ – punctuation, spelling and word-division”. I quote p. 307 of the Cambridge edition of *Notes on Life and Letters*, edited by J. H. Stape with the assistance of Andrew Busza, 2002. The result is a Conradian prose which becomes uncouth: impoverished and sometimes even ungrammatical. (I initially thought that *Lord Jim* would, like *The Secret Agent*, be an exceptional text; but, on closer examination, *Lord Jim* also proves to be flawed.)

I am well aware that the Cambridge editors have done magnificent work in correcting longstanding errors and in bringing to light Conradian words, phrases, sentences and even passages which otherwise would have been lost. Nevertheless, I deplore what, all too often, they have done to Conrad’s style. Too much punctuation has been removed, and the choice of words is sometimes unfortunate. My criteria are: *logical clarity* and *rhetorical effectiveness*.

Part 2

I now turn to *The Shadow-Line*.

Here is an experiment. Read the following Sequence A and Sequence B, and ask yourself: “Which sequence is better? Which offers the better English?” (The page-numbers of the extracts appear within brackets.)

Sequence A:

A1 (12) For isn’t it said that “The charitable man is the friend of Allah.”

A2 (14) By that time however I was more discontented, disgusted and dogged than ever.

A3 (15) The fellow had hung enormously ample, dusty, cheap lace curtains over his windows which were shut.

- A4 (17) An expert in – how shall I say it – in intricate navigation.
- A5 (19) He gave me a searching look and in a benevolent heavy uncles manner asked point blank:
- A6 (19) I said to myself I ought to shut up that moralist and to him aloud I said with a challenging politeness:
- A7 (19) But he retired in good order under the cover of a heavily humorous remark that he too was getting soft and that this was his time for taking his little siesta – when he was on shore.
- A8 (21) Then there was [...] plaintive expostulations from the steward who was pursuing Hamilton even out of doors through the main entrance.
- A9 (22) And I was about to turn away, withdrawing my privacy from his fatuous objectless attempts to test what sort of stuff it was made of when he laid down his pipe [...]
- A10 (23) Now what could Captain Ellis, the master attendant want to write to the steward for.
- A11 (24) “Aye. But do you remember every word,” he insisted tactfully.
- A12 (24) What did I think of it then – he wanted to know.
- A13 (25) The whole thing strengthened in me that obscure feeling of life being but a waste of days which half-unconsciously had driven me out of a comfortable berth away from men I liked to flee from the menace of emptiness...
- A14 (27) I found myself growing angry and that, I believe, because my quarry looked so woebegone.
- A15 (28) “Who wants you to,” I cried.
- A16 (29) I didn’t see why it should n’t be Captain Giles himself, a man of age and standing and a permanent resident.
- A17 (29) “Nothing!” repeated Capt Giles giving some signs [...].
- A18 (30) the head shipping master
- A19 (30) He had a Scotch name
- A20 (30) He asked confidentially:

“You want to see Him!”

A21 (31) Our deputy Neptune had no beard on his chin and there was no trident to be seen standing in a corner anywhere like an umbrella.

Sequence B:

B1 (5) For isn't it said that “The charitable man is the friend of Allah”?

B2 (7) By that time, however, I was more discontented, disgusted, and dogged than ever.

B3 (9) The fellow had hung enormously ample, dusty, cheap lace curtains over his windows, which were shut.

B4 (12) An expert in – how shall I say it? – in intricate navigation.

B5 (14) He gave me a searching look, and in a benevolent, heavy-uncle manner asked point blank:

B6 (14) I said to myself that I ought to shut up that moralist; and to him aloud I said with challenging politeness:

B7 (14-15) But he retired in good order, under the cover of a heavily humorous remark that he, too, was getting soft, and that this was his time for taking his little siesta – when he was on shore.

B8 (17) Then there was [...] plaintive expostulations from the Steward, who was pursuing Hamilton, even out of doors, through the main entrance.

B9 (19) And I was about to turn away, withdrawing my privacy from his fatuous, objectless attempts to test what sort of stuff it was made of, when he laid down his pipe [...]

B10 (23) Now what could Captain Ellis, the Master Attendant, want to write to the Steward for?

B11 (21) “Aye. But do you remember every word?” he insisted tactfully.

B12 (21) What did I think of it then? he wanted to know.

B13 (22-3) The whole thing strengthened in me that obscure feeling of life being but a waste of days, which, half-unconsciously, had driven me out of a comfortable berth, away from men I liked, to flee from the

menace of emptiness...

B14 (25) I found myself growing angry, and that, I believe, only because my quarry looked so woe-begone.

B15 (26) “Who wants you to?” I cried.

B16 (27) I didn’t see why it shouldn’t be Captain Giles himself, a man of age and standing, and a permanent resident.

B17 (28) “Nothing!” repeated Captain Giles, giving some signs [...].

B18 (29) the head shipping-master

B19 (29) He had a Scottish name

B20 (29) He asked confidentially:

“You want to see Him?”

B21 (31) Our deputy-Neptune had no beard on his chin, and there was no trident to be seen standing in a corner anywhere, like an umbrella.

Part 3

Sequence A was taken from *The Shadow-Line / A Confession*, edited by J. H. Stape and Allan Simmons, with Introduction and Explanatory Notes by Owen Knowles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Sequence B was taken from the double volume, *The Shadow-Line / A Confession / “worthy of my undying regard” / Within the Tides / Tales* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1950: the “Collected Edition”). For the sake of brevity, I have chosen examples from only the first twenty pages of the Cambridge text, which begins on p. 11, and I offer only a selection of possible examples. I submit that Sequence B is better.

Extracts A1, 4, 10, 11, 12, 16 and 21 illustrate a widespread failing in the Cambridge text. Questions should end in question-marks; but Cambridge omits the question-marks, giving an air of incompleteness or uncouthness. The Dent text, at B1, 4, 10, 11, 12, 16 and 21, correctly supplies them. The full punctuation of B2 is precise and gives poise to the prose; A2 is inadequately punctuated. In B3, the comma after “windows”

is precise, telling the reader that curtains covered all the windows. A3, lacking a comma there, permits the false reading that curtains covered only those windows which were shut (and not those which were open). In B5, the commas and the hyphenation of “heavy-uncle” give the prose a precision lacking in A5. A6 needs punctuation after “moralist”; B6 provides it. The absence of “a” from B6 appears to make no noticeable difference. B7 is correctly punctuated; A7 is so under-punctuated as to invite a hasty (even rushed) reading. Similarly, B8 is correctly punctuated, whereas A8 is under-punctuated. Regrettably, like B8, A8 preserves the erroneous singular verb “was” instead of correcting it to “were”. A9 is inadequately punctuated, producing the false reading that he was attempting to test “what sort of stuff it was made of when he laid down his pipe”. B9, linking “when he laid down his pipe” to “I was about to turn away”, averts that false reading. A10, A11 and A12, as noted previously, wrongly omit question-marks. The absence of commas from A13 confuses the sense: the phrasing from “which half-unconsciously” to “berth” appears, wrongly, to describe “a waste of days”, whereas, as B13 shows, it describes “that obscure feeling”. In B13, the comma after “liked” is essential to clarify the syntax. In B14 the addition of “only” gives precision, showing that there is an element of excess in the growing anger. As noted, A15 is another instance of the missing question-mark. B16 corrects A16’s inconsistent “should n’t”, and B16’s second comma correctly links “age” and “standing”. In A17, “Capt” is erroneous and inconsistent (because “Captain” is used consistently elsewhere), and a comma is needed after “Giles”; B17 corrects these errors. The hyphen gives B18 more precision than A18. B19’s “Scottish” is correct; “Scotch” should be used only to describe items of food or drink. B20, as noted, supplies the correct question-mark. (The capital H in “Him” is explained in the text: “This emphatic He was the supreme authority, the Marine Superintendent”.) In B21 the commas provide precision and poise lacking from A21.

Part 4

I now turn to the tale “An Outpost of Progress” in the volume *Tales of Unrest*. Again, ask yourself which sequence offers the better English: by which I mean, English which is logically lucid and rhetorically effective.

Sequence A:

A1 (77) However for some reason or other the natives down the river had given him the name of Makola and it stuck to him through all his wanderings about the country.

A2 (77) The plank floor was littered with [...] all the things dirty, and all the things broken that accumulate mysteriously round untidy men.

A3 (78) Perhaps he had propitiated him more white men to play with by and by.

A4 (79) Kayerts and Carlier walked arm in arm – drawing close to one another as children do in the dark and they had the same not altogether unpleasant sense of danger which one half suspects to be imaginary.

A5 (80) They did not know what use to make of their faculties being both through want of practice incapable of independent thought.

A6 (81) The river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life were like a great emptiness.

A7 (83) He came up with long strides of his skeleton legs swinging a staff as long as himself [...].

A8 (84) the women of Gobila’s village walked in single file through the reedy grass bringing every morning to the station fowls, and sweet potatoes and palm wine and sometimes a goat.

A9 (92) When Kayerts and Carlier retired a big bonfire was flaring before the men’s huts.

A10 (88) Kayerts turned out also yawning.

A11 (89) Then with sudden suspicion and looking hard at Makola he

added “What do you know about it?”

A12 (90) They stood still contemplating one another with intense eyes as if they had been looking with effort across immense distances.

A13 (90) The worst is some of Gobila’s people were there and got carried off too, no doubt.

A14 (91) But they were only mourning for those they had lost by the witchcraft of white men who had brought wicked people into their country.

A15 (95) Then, weak and desperate, he thought: Before I finish the next round I will die – he heard the other man stumble heavily, then stop.

A16 (96) After a few moments of an agony frightful and absurd he decided to go and meet his doom.

Sequence B:

B1 (86) However, for some reason or other, the natives down the river had given him the name of Makola, and it stuck to him through all his wanderings about the country.

B2 (87) The plank floor was littered with [...] all the things dirty, and all the things broken, that accumulate mysteriously round untidy men.

B3 (87) Perhaps he had propitiated him by a promise of more white men to play with, by and by.

B4 (89) Kayerts and Carlier walked arm in arm, drawing close to one another as children do in the dark; and they had the same, not altogether unpleasant, sense of danger which one half suspects to be imaginary.

B5 (91) They did not know what use to make of their faculties, being both, through want of practice, incapable of independent thought.

B6 (92) The river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness.

B7 (95) He came up with long strides of his skeleton legs, swinging a staff as tall as himself, [...].

- B8 (96) the women of Gobila's village walked in single file through the reedy grass, bringing every morning to the station, fowls, and sweet potatoes, and palm wine, and sometimes a goat.
- B9 (102) When Kayerts and Carlier retired, a big bonfire was flaring before the men's huts.
- B10 (102) Kayerts turned out also, yawning.
- B11 (103) Then with sudden suspicion, and looking hard at Makola, he added: "What do you know about it?"
- B12 (104) They stood still, contemplating one another with intense eyes, as if they had been looking with effort across immense distances.
- B13 (105) The worst is, some of Gobila's people were there, and got carried off too, no doubt.
- B14 (107) But they were only mourning for those they had lost by the witchcraft of white men, who had brought wicked people into their country.
- B15 (112) Then as, weak and desperate, he thought, "Before I finish the next round I shall die," he heard the other man stumble heavily, then stop.
- B16 (113) After a few moments of an agony frightful and absurd, he decided to go and meet his doom.

Part 5

Sequence A was taken from "An Outpost of Progress" in *Tales of Unrest*, edited by Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Sequence B was taken from "An Outpost of Progress" in the double volume, *Almayer's Folly / A Story of an Eastern River / and / Tales of Unrest* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1947: the "Collected Edition"). Sequence B, I submit, is better.

The punctuation of B1 is precise. The absence of punctuation from A1 solicits a hasty reading. A2, lacking a comma after "broken", invites the

false interpretation that though the things broken accumulate round untidy men, all the things dirty do not. B2, correctly punctuated, rightly says that both the dirty things and the broken things accumulate round untidy men. B3 is correct; A3 is obviously – and even excruciatingly – wrong. A3’s “propitiated him more white men” makes no sense: different phrasing is needed, and B3 supplies the appropriate apt phrasing. B4 and B5 have precise phrasing; A4 and A5, lacking numerous commas, invite a too-hasty reading. B6, B7, B8 and B9 have precision lacking from A6, A7, A8 and A9. The full punctuation of B8 gives to the sentence a clarity and poise lacking from A8. The comma of B10 makes clear that Kayerts was yawning when he, like Carlier, turned out; whereas A10, lacking the comma, invites the incorrect reading that Kayerts was yawning like Carlier when he turned out. The commas of B11, B12 and B13 provide precision. B14, with its comma, tells us correctly that the witchcraft is that of white men generally, whereas A14 permits the false reading that the witchcraft is only that of the white men who had brought wicked people into their country. The punctuation of B15, and the addition of “as” after “Then”, make the sense perfectly clear; A15 lacks the clarity. The clarifying comma of B16 makes evident that the phrase “frightful and absurd” qualifies “an agony”, whereas A16 permits briefly the false interpretation that the phrase qualifies “he”.

Part 6

I turn finally to *Under Western Eyes*.

Sequence A:

A1 (11) Words as is well known are the great foes of reality.

A2 (12) They gather them up, they cherish them but they don’t hoard them [...]

A3 (13) This sort of trick which may arise either from intellectual

- insufficiency or from an imperfect trust in one's own convictions procured for Mr Razumov a reputation of profundity.
- A4 (17) Razumov going home reflected that having prepared all the matters of the forthcoming exam he could now devote all his time to the subject of the prize essay.
- A5 (19) Returning home on the day of the attempt on Mr de P—'s life Razumov resolved to have a good try for the silver medal.
- A6 (23) He began to walk again while Razumov sat still appalled.
- A7 (24) where would be the sense of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, of conviction, of faith – the labours of the soul.
- A8 (24) The modern civilisation is false but a new revelation shall come out of Russia.
- A9 (25) She will marry well I hope.
- A10 (25) Razumov in his chair leaning his head on his hand spoke as if from the bottom of an abyss.
- A11 (27) If to the Western reader they appear shocking, inappropriate or even improper it must be remembered that [...]
- A12 (27) I don't know that this danger occurred, specially to Mr Razumov.
- A13 (28) Thus when on arriving at the low eating house he heard that the man of horses, Ziemianitch, was not there he could only stare stupidly.
- A14 (29) What do we want with his gentleman here.
- A15 (29) The woman it seems ran away from him last night.
- A16 (30) A terrible fury – the blind rage of self-preservation possessed Razumov.
- A17 (31) After a time his cries ceased and the rain of blows fell in the stillness and shadows of the cellar-like stable.
- A18 (34) a crime my reason – my cool superior reason rejects.
- A19 (39) the lucidity of his mind of which he was very conscious gave him an extraordinary assurance.
- A20 (39) The lackeys stood up and the Prince moving with difficulty on

his gouty feet was helped into his furs.

A21 (39) Then the Prince rose to ring the bell and Razumov making a short bow said with deference:

A22 (47) he said that being conscious of some small abilities and confident in his power of work he trusted his future to his own exertions.

A23 (53) Of course it was a case of conscience but the material facts such as these brought about the solution...

A24 (53) As to ties the only ties I have in the world are social.

A25 (53) And don't you think I am working for progress too.

Sequence B:

B1 (3) Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality.

B2 (4) They gather them up; they cherish them, but they don't hoard them
[...]

B3 (5-6) This sort of trick, which may arise either from intellectual insufficiency or from an imperfect trust in one's own convictions, procured for Mr. Razumov a reputation of profundity.

B4 (11) Razumov, going home, reflected that having prepared all the matters of the forthcoming examination, he could now devote his time to the subject of the prize essay.

B5 (14) Returning home on the day of the attempt on Mr. de P—'s life, Razumov resolved to have a good try for the silver medal.

B6 (19) He began to walk again while Razumov sat still, appalled.

B7 (22) where would be the sense of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, of conviction, of faith – the labours of the soul?

B8 (22) The modern civilization is false, but a new revelation shall come out of Russia.

B9 (22) She will marry well, I hope.

B10 (23) Razumov, in his chair, leaning his head on his hand, spoke as if from the bottom of an abyss.

- B11 (25) If to the Western reader they appear shocking, inappropriate, or even improper, it must be remembered that [...]
- B12 (25) I don't know that this danger occurred specially to Mr. Razumov.
- B13 (27) Thus, when on arriving at the low eating-house he heard that the man of horses, Ziemianitch, was not there, he could only stare stupidly.
- B14 (28) What do we want with his gentleman here?
- B15 (28) The woman, it seems, ran away from him last night.
- B16 (30) A terrible fury – the blind rage of self-preservation – possessed Razumov.
- B17 (30) After a time his cries ceased, and the rain of blows fell in the stillness and shadows of the cellar-like stable.
- B18 (35) a crime my reason – my cool superior reason – rejects.
- B19 (41) the lucidity of his mind, of which he was very conscious, gave him an extraordinary assurance.
- B20 (41) The lackeys stood up, and the Prince, moving with difficulty on his gouty feet, was helped into his furs.
- B21 (42) Then the Prince rose to ring the bell, and Razumov, making a short bow, had said with deference –
- B22 (52) he said that, being conscious of some small abilities and confident in his power of work, he trusted his future to his own exertions.
- B23 (60) Of course, it was a case of conscience, but the material facts such as these brought about the solution...
- B24 (60) As to ties, the only ties I have in the world are social.
- B25 (60) And don't you think I am working for progress too?

Part 7

Sequence A was taken from *Under Western Eyes*, edited by Roger

Osborne and Paul Eggert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Sequence B was taken from *Under Western Eyes* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1947: the “Collected Edition”). For the sake of brevity, I have used examples from only the first forty-two pages of the Cambridge text, which begins on page 11; and, of the possible examples, I have given only a selection.

Examples A7, A14 and A25 show that Cambridge fails to put a question-mark at the end of a question. Dent, at B7, B14 and B25, provides them. In the other examples, it is generally the case that the fuller punctuation of Sequence B provides clarification, and is often rhetorically enhanceive when the words are read aloud. One anomalous comparison is provided by A12 and B12. Here, A12 has a comma that B12 lacks: but the comma is clearly erroneous. As B12 shows, the narrator means that he does not know that this danger occurred explicitly to Razumov, but it was certainly part of Razumov’s general sense of crisis. A12 can be taken to mean, quite incorrectly and contrary to the context, “I don’t know that this danger occurred at all: particularly not where Mr Razumov was concerned.” In B21, the use of the pluperfect (“had said”) is justified by the context, in which we find, a few lines previously, “He had said”, and, a few lines subsequently, “The Prince had exclaimed”.

Part 8

To conclude. I reiterate that what is needed now is a new edition of Conrad’s literary works which not only includes the new textual matter admirably revealed by the Cambridge editors but also restores to the prose the lucidity and dignity, the logical clarity and rhetorical effectiveness, which, unfortunately, have often been removed by those editors.

(セドリック・ワッツ)