

THE *TITANIC* SERIES: REFLECTIONS ON CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY
PRESS'S EDITION OF THE LITERARY WORKS OF JOSEPH CONRAD

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ABSTRACT

Cambridge University Press's vast project to produce authoritative new editions of the literary works of Joseph Conrad is now well advanced; but the project is flawed. I maintain that this is the *Titanic* of editions: big, costly, important, and disastrous. I specify "the literary works", because I am not concerned with the admirable volumes of Conrad's letters.

The industrious Cambridge editors have done excellent work in correcting longstanding errors and in bringing to light much textual material which was previously lost. The edition is therefore indispensable. The editors have, however, deleted much house styling and correction: "successive layers of non-authorial intervention affecting wording and 'accidentals' – punctuation, spelling and word-division". The result of the Cambridge editorial procedures is a Conradian prose which is often impoverished and is sometimes even ungrammatical and uncouth. In removing much punctuation, the editors have often removed logical clarity and rhetorical effectiveness.

In this essay, therefore, I use a sequence of comparisons to demonstrate the presence of a pattern of flaws. The sequences are taken from *Notes on Life and Letters*, *Twixt Land and Sea / Tales, Last Essays, Lord Jim*, and *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. I compare extracts from the Cambridge texts with extracts taken from other editions.

Keywords: Cambridge University Press; Joseph Conrad; editions; editorial criteria; house styling; logical clarity; rhetorical effectiveness.

1

Cambridge University Press's vast project to produce authoritative new editions of the literary works of Joseph Conrad is now well advanced; but the project is flawed. I maintain that this is the *Titanic* of editions: big, costly, important, and disastrous. I specify "the literary works" because I am not concerned with the admirable volumes of Conrad's letters.

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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” (*Notes on Life and Letters* [2002], 307).

The result of the Cambridge editorial procedures is a Conradian prose which is often impoverished and is sometimes even ungrammatical and uncouth. In removing much punctuation, the editors have often removed poise and dignity. When you consider the many examples I offer subsequently, the terms “poise and dignity” should be sufficiently exemplified and vindicated.

Connoisseurs of irony will note that, having deleted other publishers’ house styling, the Cambridge editors have provided plenty of their own. For example, the editors of *Victory*, J. H. Stape and Alexandre Fachard, state that they have supplied commas where they thought the text needed them, and some of these commas are listed in the section headed “Emendation of Accidentals”; but other commas (e.g., in the introductions to dialogue or in a series of elements) have been supplied “silently”, so that the reader cannot locate them. Missing full stops and inverted commas have also been “silently” (undetected) supplied. Thus, “house styling”, unseen by Conrad, and not perceptible to the reader, has crept back. As not all emendations of punctuation are specified in the Stape-Fachard list headed “Emendations of Accidentals”, that list is accordingly devalued.

I am well aware that the Cambridge editors have done magnificent work in correcting long-established 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. My criteria are: *logical clarity* and *rhetorical effectiveness*.

It is obviously not my task, in this essay, to explore the great diversity of problems and principles involved in the production of the Cambridge edition. I am well aware of their extent and complexity. Such an exploration would take far too long, and would be digressive, obscuring the issue. Other Conradians are at liberty to explore that Serbonian bog. My task here is simply to demonstrate the presence of a *pattern of flaws*. If you agree that these flaws are present, I have done my job.

I mentioned one volume which forms the exception to my general strictures: *The Secret Agent*, edited by Bruce Harkness and S. W. Reid, assisted by Nancy Birk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). In this case, the editors found a paucity of manuscript and typescript material, and they were therefore obliged to make fewer departures from the historic house styling than is customary in the Cambridge series. The *Secret Agent* volume took as its “main basis” the first British edition, published in London in 1907 by Methuen & Co. It therefore accepted much Methuen styling, though sometimes that styling was over-ruled. I initially thought that *Lord Jim / A Tale*, edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), would be a similar case, for it took as copy-text the serial edition published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* from October 1899 to November 1900. On close examination, however, this edition reveals numerous flaws, which I illustrate later. Even the edition of *The Secret Agent* has some flaws, illustrated now.

Ask yourself: Which of the following sequences offers the better English? (Page numbers are in brackets.)

Sequence A:

- A1 (13) notwithstanding
- A2 (16) fat pig style
- A3 (16) his general get up
- A4 (16) a well to do mechanic
- A5 (29 and 30) sacro-sanct
- A6 (32) the very boot blacks
- A7 (36) But Mr Verloc, turning up providentially to occupy the first floor front bedroom, there had been no more question of the young butcher.
- A8 (121) Was it possible to treat a man so.
- A9 (126) Could Stevie be trusted to come all that way alone.
- A10 (137) because in her singleness of purpose had the unerring nature and the force of an instinct.

Sequence B:

- B1 (9) notwithstanding
- B2 (12) fat-pig style
- B3 (12) his general get-up
- B4 (12) a well-to-do mechanic
- B5 (25 and 26) sacrosanct
- B6 (28) the very boot-blacks
- B7 (32) But, Mr Verloc turning up providentially to occupy the first floor front bedroom, there had been no more question of the young butcher.
- B8 (116) Was it possible to treat a man so?

B9 (122) Could Stevie be trusted to come all that way alone?
 B10 (133) because in her the singleness of purpose had the unerring nature
 and the force of an instinct.

Sequence A is taken from the Cambridge text, 1990. Sequence B is taken from the Everyman paperback text which I edited (London: Everyman Dent Orion, 1997). This took as copy-text the first British edition. B7 includes an editorial emendation, “But, Mr Verloc” replacing “But Mr Verloc.”

In A1 and A5, “notwithstanding” and the hyphenated “sacro-sanct” seem archaic; in B2, B3, B4 and B6 the hyphens clarify the sense. B7, with a comma accurately located after “But”, is clearly grammatically correct, whereas A7 is incorrect. B8 and B9 supply grammatically-essential question-marks. In B10 the addition of the definite article before “singleness of purpose” clarifies the grammar, because in A10 the pronoun “her” is likely to be initially mistaken for a possessive adjective.

3

My article entitled “The Stricken Series” is being published in Issue 10 of *Conrad Studies: Journal of the Joseph Conrad Society of Japan* (2019). In that article, I listed flaws that I postulated in the following parts of the Cambridge University Press series of the literary works of Joseph Conrad: *Almayer’s Folly*, *A Personal Record* (in particular “A Familiar Preface”), *Heart of Darkness*, and *An Outcast of the Islands*. My criticisms of the Cambridge *Victory* volume are being published in a forthcoming issue of *Conradiana*. In the present article, therefore, having discussed *The Secret Agent*, I consider some other volumes which have appeared in the Cambridge series: *Notes on Life and Letters*, *Twixt Land and Sea / Tales*, *Last Essays*, *Lord Jim*, and *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*.

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First: I consider *Notes on Life and Letters*, edited by J. H. Stape with the assistance of Andrew Busza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). In particular, I select the important essay, “Autocracy and War”. Again, I invite the reader to adjudicate between the following two sequences.

Here is Sequence A:

A1 (72) the stream of reports, appalling in their monotony of tens of thousands decaying bodies ...

A2 (76–77) It has vanished for ever at last and as yet there is no new Russia to take the place of that ill-omened creation which being a fantasy of a madman’s brain could in reality be nothing else than a figure out of a nightmare ...

A3 (78) A glance back at the last hundred years shows the invariable, one may say, the logical powerlessness of Russia.

A4 (80) There is a removal of that latent feeling of restraint which the presence of a powerful neighbour, however implicated with you in a sense of common guilt is bound to inspire.

A5 (80) And, besides the way to the Baltic provinces leads over the Niemen

A6 (82) The government of Holy Russia arrogating to itself the supreme power to torment and slaughter the bodies of its subjects like a God sent scourge has been most cruel ...

A7 (83) To pronounce in the face of such a past the word evolution which is precisely the expression of the highest intellectual hope is a gruesome pleasantry.

A8 (83) In face of the events of the last four months this word has sprung instinctively as it were on grave lips and has been heard with solemn forebodings.

A9 (84) Yet with all that, the thrones still remain and what is more significant perhaps, some of the dynasties too have survived.

A10 (85) We in Europe having gone a step or two further have had the time to forget how little that freedom means.

A11 (87) This illustration of the new war temper is artlessly revealed ...

A12 (87) the good first Emperor William's tears shed so abundantly after every battle by letter, by telegram and otherwise, during the course of the same war, ...

A13 (88) European peace, with its alliances based on mutual distrust, the preparedness for war for its ideal and fear of wounds, luckily stronger so far than the pinch of hunger, for its only guarantee.

A14 (91) Whether such a principle exists – who can say.

A15 (92) aggrandisement of territory and influence with no regard to right and justice either in the East or in the West.

A16 (93) He gazes upon the land and upon the sea with the same covetous steadiness for he has become of late a maritime eagle and has learned to box the compass.

Sequence B:

B1 (84) the stream of reports, appalling in their monotony, of tens of thousands of decaying bodies ...

B2 (91) It has vanished for ever at last, and as yet there is no new Russia to take the place of that ill-omened creation, which, being a fantasy of a madman's brain, could in reality be nothing else than a figure out of a nightmare ...

B3 (92) A glance back at the last hundred years shows the invariable, one may say the logical, powerlessness of Russia.

B4 (95) There is a removal of that latent feeling of restraint which the presence of a powerful neighbour, however implicated with you in a sense of common guilt, is bound to inspire.

B5 (96) And, besides, the way to the Baltic provinces lies over the Niemen

B6 (98–99) The Government of Holy Russia, arrogating to itself the supreme power to torment and slaughter the bodies of its subjects like a God-sent scourge, has been most cruel ...

B7 (99) To pronounce in the face of such a past the word Evolution, which is precisely the expression of the highest intellectual hope, is a gruesome pleasantry.

B8 (99) In the face of the events of the last four months, this word has sprung instinctively, as it were, on grave lips, and has been heard with solemn forebodings.

B9 (101) Yet, for all that, the thrones still remain, and what is more significant, perhaps, some of the dynasties, too, have survived.

B10 (103) We, in Europe, have gone a step or two further, have had the time to forget how little that freedom means.

B11 (106) This illustration of the new war-temper is artlessly revealed ...

B12 (106) the good First Emperor William's tears, shed so abundantly after every battle, by letter, telegram, and otherwise, during the course of the same war, ...

B13 (107) European peace, with its alliances based on mutual distrust, preparedness for war as its ideal, and the fear of wounds, luckily stronger, so far, than the pinch of hunger, its only guarantee.

B14 (111) Whether such a principle exists – who can say?

B15 (113) aggrandisement of territory and influence, with no regard to right and justice, either in the East or in the West.

B16 (113) He gazes upon the land and upon the sea with the same covetous steadiness, for he has become of late a maritime eagle, and has learned to box the compass.

Of the two sequences, Sequence B is clearer, more grammatical and more dignified. This sequence was taken from *Notes on Life and Letters*: London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1924 (the “Uniform Edition”). Sequence A was taken from the Cambridge edition of *Notes on Life and Letters*. The extracts represent only a small sample of the volume containing this essay; a full list of the apparent faults of the Cambridge text would fill several pages.

The punctuation of B1 is correct, and clarifies the sense; A1 has insufficient punctuation. The phrase “thousands of decaying bodies” is correct; “thousands decaying bodies” in A1 is not. In B2, the punctuation invites a steady, assured reading; whereas, in A2, the absence of commas invites a reading which is more rapid and which, indeed, may resemble a gabble. In B3, B4 and B5, the second comma is correct and clarifies the sense. In A6, the absence of punctuation solicits a hasty reading, and “God sent scourge” lacks the clarity of “God-sent scourge”. In B7 and B8, the punctuation is correct and steadies the pace of reading, which otherwise becomes too hasty. In B9, the “for all that” is more precise than the “with all that” of A9, and the heavier punctuation of B9 is clarifying. The “having” of A10 is an improvement on the “have” of B10, but the heavier

punctuation of B10 is again correct and preferable. In B11 the hyphen clarifies the sense; A11, without the hyphen, momentarily invites the false interpretation “the temper of the new war”. The “every battle by letter” of A12 is confusing; the comma in “every battle, by letter” of B12 is clarifying. Similarly, in A13 “the preparedness for war for its ideal and fear of wounds” is confusing; B13 is clear. A14 obviously needs the question-mark that B14 supplies. The prose of B15 and B16 is simply better-paced and more dignified – rhetorically more effective – than that of A15 and A16.

5

Next, I consider the Cambridge text of *'Twiixt Land and Sea / Tales*, edited by J. A. Berthoud, Laura L. Davis and S. W. Reid (2008). In particular, I examine “The Secret Sharer”, a very important item in the Conrad canon.

Here is Sequence A:

- A1 (82) The tide of darkness flowed on swiftly and with tropical suddenness a swarm of stars came out above the shadowy earth, ...
- A2 (82) But with all that multitude of celestial bodies staring down at one the comfort of quiet communion with her was gone for good.
- A3 (82) We sat down at once and as I helped the chief mate I said:
- A4 (82) “Were you aware that there is a ship anchored inside the islands. ...”
- A5 (82) He raised sharply his simple face overcharged by a terrible growth of whisker and emitted his usual ejaculations “Bless my soul sir! You don’t say so.”
- A6 (86) He seemed to struggle with himself for I heard something like the low bitter murmur of doubt: “What’s the good.”
- A7 (86) “Look here my man. Could you call him out quietly.”
- A8 (96) “May I come in to take the empty cup away sir.”
- A9 (104) “... ‘Wouldn’t you like to look for him in our coal hole.’ ...”
- A10 (104) “You have no doubt in the matter sir.”
- A11 (105) “Did you hear everything,” were my first words ...
- A12 (109) Had my second self taken the poor wretch by the throat.
- A13 (86) However that much was enough, for the horrid frostbound sensation which had gripped me about the chest to pass off.
- A14 (86) I thought the time had come to declare myself.
“I am the captain.”
- A15 (89) It was too much for them; it seems they rushed us aft together gripped as we were screaming Murder! like a lot of lunatics and broke into the cuddy.
- A16 (91) It contained some lockers surmounted by a bookcase and a few clothes, a thick jacket or two, caps, oilskin coat and such like hung on hooks.
- A17 (92) You know that foresail saved the ship.

A18 (92) By Jove if I had been he wouldn't have trusted himself like that into my room.

A19 (93) When we anchored here they thought I suppose it was all right.

A20 (93) I don't know how it was but to-night that steward after bringing me my supper went out to let me eat it and left the door unlocked.

A21 (98) He did so as noiseless as a ghost and I then rang for the steward and facing him boldly directed him to do my stateroom while I was having my bath – and be quick about it.

A22 (98) Now and then glancing over my shoulder I saw him far back there sitting rigidly on the low stool, ...

A23 (99) A spiritless tenacity was his main characteristic I judged.

A24 (100) And as I gazed at him certainly not prepared for anything original ...

A25 (100) and then, just as it was in its oilskins and long boots, they launched it ...

A26 (101) "Not at all the style of man you understand," he insisted superfluously looking hard at me.

A27 (103) I desired my mate who had joined us to see to the captain's boat.

A28 (106) The same strung-up force which had given some twenty four men, a chance at least for their lives had, in a sort of recoil, crushed ...

A29 (108) The fourth day out I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam tack for tack in light winds and in perfectly smooth water) the fourth day I say of this miserable juggling ...

A30 (111) "... What does it say? 'Driven off the face of the earth.' ..."

A31 (111) The ship might have been moored in dock so gently and on an even keel she slipped through the water that did not murmur even ...

A32 (114) out of here into the sail-locker which communicates with the lobby.

A33 (116) Already she was I won't say in the shadow of the land but in the very blackness of it, ...

A34 (117) I hadn't let go the mate's arm and went on shaking it. "Ready about – do you hear. You go forward – shake – and stop there – shake – and hold your noise – shake – and see these head-sheets properly overhauled – shake – shake – shake."

A35 (119) Walking to the taffrail I was in time to make out on the very edge of a darkness thrown by a towering black mass like the very gateway of Erebus, yes I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts as though he were my second self had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment – a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny.

Sequence B:

B1 (92) The tide of darkness flowed on swiftly; and with tropical suddenness a swarm of stars came out above the shadowy earth, ...

B2 (92–93) But, with all that multitude of celestial bodies starting down at one, the comfort of quiet communion with her was gone for good.

B3 (93) We sat down at once, and as I helped the chief mate, I said:

B4 (93) "Are you aware that there is a ship anchored inside the islands? ..."

B5 (93) He raised sharply his simple face, overcharged by a terrible growth of whisker, and emitted his usual ejaculations: "Bless my soul, sir! You don't say so!"

B6 (99) He seemed to struggle with himself, for I heard something like the low, bitter murmur of doubt. "What's the good?"

B7 (99) "Look here, my man. Could you call him out quietly?"

B8 (112) "May I come in to take the empty cup away, sir?"

B9 (123) "... 'Wouldn't you like to look for him in our coal-hole?' ..."

B10 (123) "You have no doubt in the matter, sir?"

B11 (124) "Did you hear everything?" were my first words ...

B12 (129) Had my second self taken the poor wretch by the throat?

B13 (98) However, it was enough for the horrid, frost-bound sensation which had gripped me about the chest to pass off.

B14 (99) I thought the time had come to declare myself.

"I am the captain."

B15 (102-3) It was too much for them. It seems they rushed us aft together, gripped as we were, screaming 'Murder!' like a lot of lunatics, and broke into the cuddy.

B16 (105) It contained some lockers surmounted by a bookcase; and a few clothes, a thick jacket or two, caps, oilskin coat, and such like, hung on hooks.

B17 (106) You know, that foresail saved the ship.

B18 (106) By Jove! if I had been he wouldn't have trusted himself like that into my room.

B19 (107) When we anchored here they thought, I suppose, it was all right.

B20 (108) I don't know how it was, but to-night that steward, after bringing me my supper, went out to let me eat it, and left the door unlocked.

B21 (114) He did so, as noiseless as a ghost, and I then rang for the steward, and facing him boldly, directed him to tidy up my stateroom while I was having my bath – "and be quick about it."

B22 (115) Now and then, glancing over my shoulder, I saw him far back there, sitting rigidly on the low stool, ...

B23 (116) A spiritless tenacity was his main characteristic, I judged.

B24 (117) And as I gazed at him, certainly not prepared for anything original ...

B25 (118) and then, just as it was, in its oilskins and long boots, they launched it ...

B26 (119) "Not at all the style of man. You understand," he insisted, superfluously, looking hard at me.

B27 (121) I desired my mate, who had joined us, to see to the captain's boat.

B28 (124–125) The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed ...

B29 (127) The fourth day out, I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam, tack for tack, in light winds and smooth water) – the fourth day, I say, of this miserable juggling ...

B30 (132) “... What does the Bible say? ‘Driven off the face of the earth.’ ...”

B31 (132) The ship might have been moored in dock, so gently and on an even keel she slipped through the water, that did not murmur even ...

B32 (136) out of here into the sail-locker, which communicates with the lobby.

B33 (140) Already she was, I won’t say in the shadow of the land, but in the very blackness of it, ...

B34 (141) I hadn’t let go the mate’s arm and went on shaking it. “Ready about, do you hear? You go forward”—shake—“and stop there”—shake—“and hold your noise”—shake—“and see these head-sheets properly overhauled”—shake, shake—shake.

B35 (143) Walking to the taffrail, I was in time to make out, on the very edge of a darkness thrown by a towering black mass like the very gateway of Erebus—yes, I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts, as though he were my second self, had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny.

Again: it is surely obvious which sequence of passages is the better. It is Sequence B, which uses the text of *’Twixt Land and Sea / Tales*: London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1923. Sequence A was taken from the Cambridge 2008 text of *’Twixt Land and Sea*. The lists are not exhaustive: I could have chosen more examples.

Extracts A1 to A4 illustrate a widespread failing in the Cambridge text. Too much punctuation has been removed. In B1 to B3, the punctuation clarifies the sense and the grammar, and imparts a speed of reading which is steady, moderate, and not hasty. In A1 to A3, the absence of punctuation sometimes obscures the sense (so that the reader, to clarify the sense, must mentally supply punctuation); and that absence solicits a reading which may become too hasty. B4 supplies a necessary question-mark, and “are” is correct; A4’s “were” is incorrect. In B5, the second exclamation-mark is obviously correct, for the text refers to “ejaculations”. In items A6 to A12, the Cambridge editors have removed necessary question-marks, lending an air of ignorance or uncouthness to the resultant prose.

A13 is incorrectly punctuated; B13 is correct. (B13’s “it” is perhaps less precise than A13’s “that much”.) A14 does not italicise the “I” in “I am the captain”. B14, by italicising the “I”, gives the personal pronoun the emphasis that is obviously required here. (To Leggatt’s surprise, the unorthodox young captain has himself taken the anchor-watch.) A15 is under-punctuated; B15 is correct.

A15 even permits momentarily the erroneous reading that the two belligerent seamen were screaming “Murder!”. A16 is so badly punctuated that it appears to say that the lockers were “surmounted by a bookcase and a few clothes”. The correct punctuation of B16 makes clear that the clothes do not surmount the lockers but are separate, hung on hooks. A17, lacking a comma, yields the incorrect sense, “You are aware that that foresail saved the ship”. B17, with its comma, yields the correct sense, “That foresail (you should be aware) saved the ship.” In B18, the exclamation-mark (sadly lacking from A18) correctly isolates the exclamation “By Jove!”.

A19, under-punctuated, lets the reader think briefly that “I suppose it was all right” is what “they thought”. B19, well punctuated, clarifies the sense: here the supposition is clearly that of the speaker. A20, being under-punctuated, encourages the reader to gabble the words or to supply mentally the commas needed to clarify the sense. B20, well punctuated, encourages a slower and more considered reading. In B21, “tidy up my stateroom” is arguably an improvement (clearer, if less colloquial) on “do my stateroom”, and the words “and be quick about it” are improved by being rendered as direct speech by the captain: it’s exactly what he would have said. A22 needs the punctuation that B22 supplies. In A23, the absence of a comma permits the false reading, “his main characteristic that I judged”; the comma in B23 clarifies the sense.

A24 solicits briefly the erroneous notion that “certainly” is an adverb qualifying “gazed”; B24 makes clear that “certainly not” is an adverbial phrase qualifying “prepared”. A25 permits the false reading, “as soon as it was in its oilskins and long boots”; B25’s superior punctuation admits the correct reading, “exactly as it was (i.e., unchanged), in its oilskins and boots”. A26 solicits the false reading, “not at all the style of man whom you understand”; B26 restores the correct reading. B27, B28 and B29 are clearly superior in precision to A27, A28 and A29. The “some” of A28 is superfluous.

A30 might have been superior in 1912, when the Bible was familiar to a larger proportion of the population than is the case today; but nowadays B30, identifying the source (of an allusion to Genesis 4:14), is better. A31 solicits a hasty reading; B31’s fuller punctuation invites a more leisurely, poised and nuanced reading. A32 implies incorrectly that there at least two sail-lockers and that one of them communicated with the lobby; B32, however, correctly makes clear that there was one sail-locker and that it communicated with the lobby. A33, like A31, solicits a rapid reading; B33 restores poise.

A34 offers a striking example of illogicality inflicted on the text by the Cambridge editors. Here the verbs “shake ... shake ... shake”, specifying actions performed by the captain, have wrongly been incorporated within the captain’s speech. Obviously, the “shake ... shake ... shake” are what the captain *does*, not what he *says*. The Dent text is clearly correct, whereas the Cambridge text is

undeniably wrong. Remarkably, the removal of the double quotation-mark after “forward – ” is actually an innovation by the Cambridge editors: their own “house styling” (see p. 422). Dent also (yet again) supplies a necessary question-mark, in this case after “hear”.

A35 offers Cambridge’s text of the tale’s final paragraph, a crucially important culmination. Inviting a hasty reading, this version of the paragraph clearly lacks the dignity and authority conferred by the fuller punctuation of B35. If you read both versions aloud, the superiority of B35 becomes obvious.

6

The ensuing item is *Last Essays*. I concentrate on the most famous of these essays, “Geography and Some Explorers”

Sequence A:

A1 (4) The greatest of them all who has presented modern geography with a new world ...

A2 (5) Not for them the serene joys of scientific research but infinite toil in hunger, thirst, sickness, battle; ...

A3 (5) It is an ugly tale which has not much to do with the service of geography.

A4 (5) The Gulf of Panama which is what he really saw with that first glance is one of the calmest spots ...

A5 (7–8) Tasman ... sailed over many thousands of miles of uncharted seas bringing with him a journal which was of much value afterwards for his exploring successors.

A6 (8) he is not comparable to Captain Cook, a humble son of the soil, like himself but a modest man of genius, the familiar associate ...

A7 (8) It is certain that at various times his patron the governor Anthony van Diemen and the Honourable Council in Batavia had employed him in some shady transactions connected with the Japan trade.

A8 (9) Geography is a science of facts and they devoted themselves to the discovery of facts ...

A9 (9) In saying this I do not forget the Polar Explorers whose aims were certainly as pure as the air ...

A10 (9) another good man Sir John Franklin whose fame rests not only on the extent of his discoveries but on professional prestige ...

A11 (11) And besides the geography which I had discovered for myself was the Geography of open spaces ...

A12 (12) I could have heard of their discovery in my cradle and it was only right that grown to a boy’s estate I should ...

A13 (12) my beloved old atlas which having been published in about 1852 knew nothing of course of the Great Lakes.

A14 (16) It was not without a certain emotion that commanding very likely the first and certainly the last merchant ship that carried a cargo that way

from Sydney to Mauritius I put her head at daybreak for Bligh's Entrance and packed on her every bit of canvas ...

A15 (17) I could depict to myself the famous seaman navigator a lonely figure in a three cornered red hat and square skirted laced coat pacing to and fro ...

A16 (17) men ... with varied motives, laudable or sinful but each bearing in his breast ...

Sequence B:

B1 (4) The greatest of them all, who has presented modern geography with a new world ...

B2 (5) Not for them the serene joys of scientific research, but infinite toil, in hunger, thirst, sickness, battle; ...

B3 (5) It is an ugly tale, which has not much to do with the service of geography.

B4 (6) The Gulf of Panama, which is what he really saw with that first glance, is one of the calmest spots ...

B5 (11) Tasman ... sailed over many thousands of miles of uncharted seas, bringing back with him a journal which was of much value afterwards for his exploring successors.

B6 (11) he is not comparable to Captain Cook, a humble son of the soil like himself, but a modest man of genius, the familiar associate ...

B7 (11–12) It is certain that at various times his patron, the Governor Anthony van Diemen, and the honourable council in Batavia, had employed him in some shady transactions of their own, connected with the Japan trade.

B8 (14) Geography is a science of facts, and they devoted themselves to the discovery of facts ...

B9 (114) I do not forget the Polar explorers, whose aims were certainly as pure as the air ...

B10 (15) another good man, Sir John Franklin, whose fame rests not only on the extent of his discoveries, but on professional prestige ...

B11 (17–18) And besides, the geography which I had discovered for myself was the geography of open spaces ...

B12 (20) I could have heard of their discovery in my cradle, and it was only right that, grown to a boy's estate, I should ...

B13 (20) my beloved old atlas, which, having been published in 1852, knew nothing, of course, of the Great Lakes.

B14 (29) It was not without a certain emotion that, commanding very likely the first, and certainly the last, merchant ship that carried a cargo that way—from Sydney to Mauritius—I put her head at daybreak for Bligh's Entrance, and packed on her every bit of canvas ...

B15 (31) I could depict to myself the famous seaman navigator, a lonely figure in a three-cornered hat and square-skirted laced coat, pacing to and fro ...

B16 (31) men ... with varied motives, laudable or sinful, but each bearing in his breast ...

Sequence A is taken from *Last Essays*, edited by Harold Ray Stevens and J. H. Stape, with the assistance of Mary Burgoyne and Alexandre Fachard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Sequence B is taken from *Last Essays* in the “Uniform Edition”: London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1926.

In general, as usual, the heavier punctuation makes Sequence B superior: the prose is clearer and more dignified than is that in Sequence A. The editors defend the absence of a comma after “toil” in A2 by saying that, though it was added by Conrad, it “so vigorously disrupts sense” (p. 391). Nevertheless, to me, the punctuation of B2 seems preferable, particularly when it eliminates the confusing “toil in hunger”. Notice that in A6 the punctuation is erroneous and misleading: part of the sentence appears to mean “a humble son of the soil, and like himself just a modest man of genius”. B6 reveals the true sense, “a humble son of the soil like himself, but who was also a modest man of genius”. B7 not only has superior punctuation but also adds the clarifying phrase “of their own”, which appears in a revised text incorporating Conrad’s alterations. The Cambridge editors, preferring a different revised text, have omitted the phrase. A9, without a comma, logically means that the author does not forget those polar explorers whose aims were certainly as pure as the air – but (it is implied) he may forget those other explorers whose aims were certainly not as pure as the air. The comma of B9 liberates the correct sense: all the polar explorers had aims pure as the air.

7

Next: flaws in *Lord Jim*. (For the sake of brevity, I take examples only from the first two chapters.)

Sequence A:

- 1 (10) Jim’s father possessed such certain knowledge of the unknowable ...
- 2 (10) with an orchard at the back, a paved stable yard to the left and the sloping glass of greenhouses tacked along a wall of bricks.
- 3 (11) He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men – always an example of devotion to duty and as unflinching as a hero in a book.
- 4 (14) AFTER TWO YEARS of training he went to sea and entering the regions so well known to his imagination found them strangely barren of adventure.
- 5 (14) the criticism of men, the exactions of the sea and the prosaic serenity of the daily task ...
- 6 (15) “M’an! ...”
- 7 (5) He lay there batted down in the midst of a small devastation and felt secretly glad he had not to go on deck.

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8 (15) His lameness, however, persisted and when the ship arrived at an Eastern port he had to go to the hospital.

9 (15) The hospital stood on a hill and a gentle breeze entering through the windows ...

10 (16) Nothing offered just then and while waiting he associated naturally with the men ...

11 (16) They appeared to live in a crazy maze of plans, hopes, dangers, enterprises, ahead of civilisation, in the dark places of the sea and their death was the only event of their fantastic existence that seemed to have a reasonable certitude of achievement.

12 (16) They had now a horror of the home service, with its harder conditions, severer view of duty and the hazard of stormy oceans.

Sequence B:

1 (5) Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable ...

2 (5) with an orchard at the back, a paved stable-yard to the left, and the sloping glass of green-houses tacked along a wall of bricks.

3 (6) He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men – always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.

4 (14) AFTER two years of training he went to sea, and entering the regions so well known to his imagination, found them strangely barren of adventure.

5 (10) the criticism of men, the exactions of the sea, and the prosaic serenity of the daily task ...

6 (11) "Man! ..."

7 (11) He lay there battered down in the midst of a small devastation, and felt secretly glad he had not to go on deck.

8 (11) His lameness, however, persisted, and when the ship arrived at an Eastern port he had to go to the hospital.

9 (12) The hospital stood on a hill, and a gentle breeze entering through the windows ...

10 (12) Nothing offered just then, and, while waiting, he associated naturally with the men ...

11 (12–13) They appeared to live in a crazy maze of plans, hopes, dangers, enterprises, ahead of civilisation, in the dark places of the sea; and their death was the only event of their fantastic existence that seemed to have a reasonable certitude of achievement.

12 (13) They had now a horror of the home service, with its harder conditions, severer view of duty, and the hazard of stormy oceans.

Sequence A is taken from *Lord Jim / A Tale*, edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Sequence B is taken from *Lord Jim / A Tale* ("The Collected Edition": London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1946).

B1, by capitalising “Unknowable”, gives an ironically sceptical edge to the phrasing. In theological statements, an initial capital is respectfully allotted to supernatural entities: God, the Holy Spirit, etc. By supposedly according such respect to the unknowable, the sceptical statement gains an incisive edge. A1, lacking the capital, is less combatively sceptical. B2, B3 and B4, with fuller punctuation, are clearer and rhythmically stronger than A2, A3 and A4. B5 has a better rhythm and is more precise than A5. Indeed, A5 may momentarily make the reader think that “the exactions of” may refer not only to “the sea” but also to “the prosaic serenity”, before the reader mentally supplies the clarifying comma already present in B5. The “M’an” of A6, though perceived in the manuscript, is incorrect. The apostrophe implies the deletion of a letter or of letters, but no deletion has taken place. The “Man” of B2 is therefore correct. B7, B8, B9, and B10 are more precise than are A7, A8, A9, and A10. The semi-colon of B11 is essential, to balance the sentence. Its absence from A11 mars the rhythm and reduces the clarity. In B12, the comma after “duty” strengthens the rhythm and clarifies the sense. Without the comma there, the reader of A12 may initially think that the “severer view” is not only of “duty” but also of “the hazard of stormy oceans”.

8

Finally, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*.

Sequence A:

A1 (5) Men in black jackets and stand-up collars, mixed with men bare-footed, bare-armed, with coloured shirts open on hairy chests, pushed against one another

A2 (13) I am an Englishman, I am.

A3 (13) He glared harmfully, but saw Singleton shut his book, and his little beady eyes began to roam from berth to berth.

A4 (13) “Get out, blast ye,” shouted the other, shoving him aside with his elbow.

A5 (13) He flung all his worldly possessions into the empty bed-place, gauged with another shrewd look the risks of the proceeding, then leaped up to the Finn, who stood pensive and dull.

A6 (15) Far off, Byculla way,

A7 (16) some ... used an injured intonation; for discipline is not ceremonious in merchant ships, where the sense of hierarchy is weak, and where all feel themselves equal

A8 (20) “Ah! Sonny, I am ready for my Maker’s call ... wish you all were,” the other would answer

A9 (21) Charley – but with greater caution – imitated his rolling gait.

A10 (25) Their generation lived inarticulate and indispensable, without knowing the sweetness of affections or the refuge of a home – and died free from the dark menace of a narrow grave.

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Sequence B:

B1 (11) Men in black jackets and stand-up collars mixed with men bare-footed, bare-armed, with coloured shirts open on hairy chests, pushed against one another

B2 (16) I ham a Henglishmen, I ham.

B3 (16) He glared harmfully but saw Singleton shut his book and his little beady eyes began to roam from berth to berth.

B4 (17) "Get out, blast ye," shouted the other showing him aside with his elbow.

B5 (17) He flung all his worldly possessions into the empty bed-place, gauged with another shrewd look the risks of proceeding then leaped up to the Finn who stood pensive and dull.

B6 (18) Far off Byculla way,

B7 (18–19) some ... used an injured intonation, for discipline is not ceremonious in merchant ships where the sense of hierarchy is weak and where all feel themselves equal

B8 (21) Ah, sonny! I am ready for my Maker's call ... I wish you all were," the other would answer

B9 (22) Charley – but with greater caution – imitated his walk.

B10 (25) Their generation lived inarticulate and indispensable without knowing the sweetness of affections or the refuge of a home and died free from the dark menace of a narrow grave.

Sequence A was taken from *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* published in London by J. M. Dent & Sons, 1950. Sequence B was taken from *The Nigger of the "Narcissus" / A Tale of the Sea*, edited by Allan H. Simmons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For the sake of brevity, I chose examples only from the first twenty-five pages of the Dent and Cambridge versions.

In example A1, the comma after "collars" is grammatically correct, clarifying the syntax. B1, lacking the comma, is syntactically unclear, so that the main verb "pushed" comes as a surprise, for without the comma the main verb appears to be "mixed". Many times in the novel, the Cambridge edition removes punctuation that Conrad had accepted or acquiesced in at the proof stage, and the result of the removal is an inferior prose. Various sentences, losing commas, lose a measure of dignity or poise. (There are some exceptions. Occasionally, and certainly in a small minority of cases, the Cambridge text has more punctuation than the Dent text.) Later, a very clear example of the erroneous removal of commas comes on p. 87, where Cambridge has:

"Not bad fellows either in a way," he conceded slowly;

Dent (p. 115) has:

"Not bad fellows, either, in a way," he conceded, slowly;

There the commas add the slowness that the sense requires.

B2 offers one of hundreds of instances in which the Cambridge edition preserves incorrectly-aspirated words (“hup”, “has”, “hignorant”, “hintymate”, etc.) As Professor Simmons reports (p. 284), Conrad told a Heinemann editor in 1920, “a real cockney drops his aspirates – but he never adds one... What I ought to have done was to take every initial *h* out of his [i.e. Donkin’s] speeches... It’s too late now to chase all those *hs* out of the text”. In fact, in 1916 Conrad made a list of corrections to the text (reproduced by Simmons on pp. 270–279 of the Cambridge edition), and in this list he removed many of the added aspirates. Thus “I ham a Henglishman, I ham” became “I am an Englishman, I am”. Whereas Dent respects Conrad’s avowed intention and inscribed corrections, Cambridge reinstates the errors that Conrad had rightly disavowed and corrected. (With the exception of “aitch”, which cockneys and working-class folk commonly pronounce “haitch”, cockneys indeed do not add aspirates.) The Cambridge text is consequently sprinkled with hundreds of errors of this kind: “you hignorant hass” (p. 16), “’arf has ’ealthy has ’e his” (p. 82), “hany”, “hever” (p. 112), “hare” (for “are”), “heverybody”, “hain’t”, “hairs” (for “airs”), “hon”, “heat” (for “eat”), “hymperor”, “hall” (for “all”), and “hi” (for “I”) (p. 113). Sometimes wrongly-aspirated words which eluded Conrad’s vigilance remain in the Dent text, but that is no reason to preserve the aspirates which Conrad planned to remove.

In A3 and B3, we see that the commas of A clarify the sense, whereas B, lacking the commas, momentarily makes the reader take “Singleton shut the book and his little beady eyes” as one sense-unit before correcting the syntax. A4 and A5 are correctly punctuated; B4 and B5 are not. A6, correctly punctuated, give the appropriate sense, “Far off, in the direction of Byculla,”. B6 gives the inappropriate sense, “Far from the Byculla direction,”.

The correct punctuation of A7 yields, after the phrase “is not ceremonious”, the correct meaning, “in all merchant ships, because in those merchant ships the sense of hierarchy is weak [etc.]”. B7, under-punctuated, yields, after the phrase “is not ceremonious”, the incorrect sense “not in all merchant ships but in those merchant ships in which the sense of hierarchy is weak [etc.]”.

A8 is obviously correct in beginning the uttered speech with a quotation-mark; B8 erroneously omits it. On p. 123, Dent correctly ends a speech with a quotation-mark: “If you do oot ageen I wull tell!”, but Cambridge (p. 93) omits it. Incidentally, on p. 35 of the Cambridge edition, a passage of dialogue with two speakers is enclosed within just *one* pair of quotation-marks, whereas, on p. 40 of the Dent edition, the dialogue is correctly allocated *four* pairs of quotation-marks, thus:

“Ah! Will you!”...“Don’t!... Don’t!”... “Then behave.”... “Oh! Oh!...”

Much the same happens on p. 76 of the Cambridge text, where dialogue to which Dent (p. 98) correctly ascribes three sets of quotation-marks is given only one inclusive set. Oddly, on p. 52 of the Cambridge text, the reverse happens:

numerous speakers are correctly allotted quotation-marks, whereas on p. 64 of the Dent edition, one set of quotation-marks encloses the dialogue of the speakers.

A9's "rolling gait" is more precise and expressive than B9's "walk". A10's punctuation gives an appropriate variety of tones to the sentence, whereas B10 reads rapidly, less expressively, and with less dignity.

This was a small selection from hundreds of possible examples; but even this small selection should suffice to show that the Cambridge edition is marred. Too much punctuation has gone, and the result is a prose which is often weaker and sometimes simply incorrect.

9

To conclude. I submit that what is needed now is an 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 logical clarity and rhetorical effectiveness which, at times, have unfortunately been removed by those editors. If you agree that my comparative sequences reveal a pattern of flaws, I have made my point. I leave to others the myriad problems of a new edition.

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