

Literature and Textual Mediations: Pauses and Pitches in Early Modern Texts

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Authors do not write books, not even their own books, because books are not the reproduction of an autograph manuscript. The publication of any text, literary or not, implies in Early Modern times multiple mediations and multiple mediators: copyists, editors, compositors, correctors. Following the example of punctuation in English, Spanish, and French texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this article would like to show that the process of publication is always a collective one, supposing multiple decisions, and, also, that these decisions, which affect the materiality of the text, are decisive for the construction of the text's meaning.

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Edwardum occidere nolite timere bonum est. These are the six words written on the paper that Mortimer gives to Lightborne as he sends him off to Berkeley Castle, where Edward is held prisoner. Six words. But what is their meaning? If Lightborne marks a pause after the first four, he must kill the monarch: “Feare not to kill the king / tis good he die.” But if the reader divides the sentence into two equal parts, the order must be understood differently, and the king’s life must be protected: “Kill not the king / tis good to fear the worst.” Through the punctuation of this Latin sentence, no less than the life or death of a sovereign is at stake, or, to state it more “cunninglie,” as Mortimer says, the attribution of the crime not to the one that wrote the sentence and commanded the murder, but to the one that received the order and gave it one of its two possible meanings.¹

Fortunately, punctuation is not always so dramatic. However, it does always construct the meaning by guiding the eye – or the voice. As Yves Bonnefoy suggests in a short text entitled “Les deux points, c’est un peu,

en prose la poésie” (The Colon in Prose Is a Little Poetry; see Bonnefoy), we must distinguish between two systems of punctuation:

La ponctuation qui dégage les articulations d’un texte, c’est celle que réclame la syntaxe, je suppose ; et qui tend ainsi à coïncider avec les structures de la pensée ? Tandis que celle qui aiderait la lecture serait là plutôt pour comprendre les besoins de la voix, ou mettre en évidence des rythmes, des sons : en somme, non pour penser mais pour séduire ? (The punctuation that makes visible the articulations of a discourse is the punctuation that is required by the syntax and tends to coincide with the structures of the thought. On the other hand, the punctuation that would help reading would be there for understanding the needs of the voice, or for bringing to the ear rhythms and sounds: in a word, not for thinking, but for seducing.)

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was this second punctuation that was the aim of all reformers of orthography both in England and France. As shown by Jeffrey Masten, far from a mere standardization of spelling, their purpose was to approach the perfection, or at least lesser imperfection, of the Castilian language. As Antonio de Nebrija wrote in *Gramática*, printed in 1492, “tenemos de escribir como pronunciamos : I pronunciar como escribimos” (‘we must write as we pronounce, and pronounce as we write’; Nebrija 158–159). In all European languages, it was not easy to obtain such a correspondence between utterance and spelling. The first possible solution would be to pronounce all the letters of the words as is done in Latin. This pedantic manner of speaking English is praised by Holophernes who, in *Loves Labour’s Lost*, accuses (paradoxically perhaps) the Spanish Don Adriano de Armado of being one of those “rackers of ortagrophie” that have the “abominable” habit of suppressing letters in the English words they pronounce:

He draweth out the thred of his verbotie, finer than the staple of his argument. I abhorre such phanaticall phantasims, such insociable and poynt devise companions, such rackers of ortagrophie, as to speake dout fine, when he should say doubt; det, when he should pronounce debt; d e b t, not det: he clepeth a Calfe, Caufe: halfe, haufe: neighbour *vocatur* nebour; neigh abbreviated ne: this is abominable, which he would call abominable, it insinuateth me of infamie: *ne intelligis domine*, to make frantique lunatique? (Shakespeare, *A Pleasant* 5.1.15–25)

A less extravagant solution turns to the opposite approach, and proposes to reform the spelling of the words in order to adjust it to their pronunciation. The titles of the books published in England that argued for an “amendment of orthographie” indicated clearly that their central aim was not a reduction in the diversity of spelling, but the harmony between writing and “the image of man’s voice” (Hart, title-page) or the accurate orthographic rendering of “English speech” (Bullokar title-page).

In France, the desire to mandate “oral writing,” to use the expression of Nina Catach, went beyond the transformation of spelling. With Ronsard, it led to a profound revision of the alphabet itself, introducing a new character borrowed from the Spanish alphabet (the *ñ* or the *ll*) and rendering useless letters such as *c* or *q*, which were systematically substituted with *k* and *z* (e.g., for writing *kalité* or *rozé*)

Quant à nostre esriture, elle est fort vicieuse et corrompue, & me semble qu'elle a grand besoin de reformation, & et de remettre en son premier honneur, le K, & le Z, & faire des caracteres nouveaux pour la double N, à la mode des Espagnols *ñ*, pour escrire *Monseigneur*, & une L double pour escrire *orgueilleux*. (Our manner of writing is deeply vicious and corrupted, and it seems to me that it needs a profound reform that would restore the K and the Z, introduce new characters for the double N, in the manner of the Spanish *ñ*, for writing *Monseigneur*, and a double L for writing *orgueilleux*.) (Ronsard, “Preface”).

The practices of printing houses proved not to follow such radical and audacious propositions. However, they did introduce a decisive innovation for developing better correspondence between textual inscription and oral delivery: they did determine the different lengths of the pauses. The fundamental text is that of printer (and author) Etienne Dolet, entitled *La punctuation de la langue françoise* (Punctuation of the French Language) and printed by Dolet himself in 1540 in Lyon. Each sentence or *période* addressed to “human breathing” is structured by three lengths of pauses, each indicated by different punctuation marks: the *point à queue ou virgule* (i.e., the English comma), the *comma* (which for Dolet is a colon “placed in a suspended sentence”), and the *point rond* or period, which “is always placed at the end of the sentence”:

Tout argument, & discours de propos, soit oratoire, ou poëtique, est deduit par periodes. Periode est une diction Grecque, que les Latins appellent *clausula*, ou *compraehensio verborum*: c'est a dire une clause, ou une comprehension de parolles. Ce periode (ou aultrement *clausule*) est distingué, & divisé par les points dessusdicts [*point à queue ou virgule*, *comma*, *point rond*]. Et communement ne doit avoir que deux ou membres: car si par sa longueur il excède l'aleine de l'homme, il est vicieux. (Every argument or discourse, be it oratory or poetic, is divided into periods. Period is a Greek word that the Romans called *clausula*, or *compraehensio verborum*, viz. a sentence. This period or sentence is complete and divided by the afore-mentioned punctuation marks: comma, colon, and period. Usually, it must have only two or three parts because it is vicious if its length exceeds the capacity of human breathing.) (Dolet)

A similar nomenclature, with different manners of designating punctuation marks, was proposed by Jean Gérard in his edition of Olivétan's

Instruction des enfans (Instruction of Children) published in 1537 in Geneva. Gérard distinguished between the *virgule ou point à queue*, the *deux points*, and the *point final*.

French dictionaries from the end of the seventeenth century exhibited the success of the system imposed by sixteenth-century printers, which included greater use of the semicolon, a rarity until 1550 that indicated a pause whose duration was intermediate in comparison to those indicated by the comma and the colon. These dictionaries, however, showed that a distance had been established between what the reader says and the punctuation, which was formerly considered by Furetière's dictionary as a "grammatical observation" marking the syntactic and logical divisions of discourse.

What was missing in this system of punctuation was the ability to indicate not the lengths of the pauses, but the intonations of the voice – hence the unexpected usage of some punctuation marks, deprived of their original meaning and appropriated instead for indicating vocal emphasis. In such a manner, Ronsard used the exclamation mark in his address to the reader that opened the first of four books of his epic poem *La Franciade* in 1572:

Je te supliray seulement d'une chose, lecteur, de vouloir bien prononcer mes vers & accomoder ta voix à leur passion, & non comme quelques uns les lisent, plus-tost à la façon d'une missive, ou de quelques lettres Royaux que d'un Poëme bien prononcé : & te suplie encore derechef où tu verras cette marque ! vouloir un peu eslever ta voix pour donner grace à ce que tu liras. (Reader, I will ask you but one thing: to pronounce carefully my lines and to accommodate your voice to their passion, not as some read them, in the manner of a letter or some Royal edict, but more of a well-read poem – and I also ask you once again that whenever you see this mark ! you raise your voice a little so as to give grace to what you are reading.) (Ronsard, "Au lecteur".)

In the case of Racine, as suggested by George Forestier (lix–lxiii), the unexpected presence of a question mark in a sentence that is not interrogative may indicate the exceptional use of this punctuation mark as a signal of intensity; for example, in the first edition of *La Thébaidé* (III, 3): "Parlez, parlez, ma Fille ?" Conversely, the absence of a question mark at the end of an interrogative sentence indicates that the voice must remain without any emphasis at all: "Ma Fille, avez-vous vu l'excès de nos misères" (I, 2).

Another manner for "toning and laying" emphasis upon a word in printed text was to set the word in italics and give it a capital letter. Moxon emphasizes the point in *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing*:

Words of great Emphasis are also *Set in Italick*, and sometimes begin with a *Capital Letter*. If the Emphasis bear hard upon the Word to be exprest as well as the Thing to be exprest, it ought to begin with a Capital. I shall bring for instance an

Observation I made above forty years ago on the Word that, viz. that that Word may be reiterated five times, and make good Sense: If it be set thus it will seem nonsense, that that that, that, that; but if it be *Set* thus, that that That that that Man would have stand at the beginning of the *Line* should stand at the end; it will, by toning and laying Emphasis on the middlemost That become good Sense. Now all the thats ought to be *Set* in *Italick*; and the middlemost That ought to begin with a *Capital*, because it is both the Thing and Word. (Moxon 216–217)

Such use of capital letters to indicate that the readers or players should raise their voices and detach the word is given in the first editions of Racine's plays; for example, in this line from *Bajazet*: "J'ai cédé mon **A**mant, **T**u t'étonnes du reste" (see Forestier lxi, note 4).

A superb example of musical use of pause lengths and capital letters is given in the last edition of La Bruyère's *Caractères*, revised by the author and published in 1696. The original aim of this edition, as followed by Louis Van Delft's edition of the text, shows clearly that La Bruyère regarded the composition of all *caractères* or *remarques* as a sole musical phrase, unbroken by periods and alternating agitated and stable sequences. The rhythm of the phrase was shown through a rapid succession of commas along with longer sequences without punctuation. The text was treated as a score with punctuation marking the different "tempi" of the arias: staccato, allegro, largo. This mode of textual composition, in which punctuation marks must guide "breathing" and vocal tone, was clearly intended for reading aloud, or for parts of it to be read aloud, either for oneself or for a selected audience of listeners.

La Bruyère's musical punctuation, however, was not the only device that governed the aesthetics and reception of his text. The capital letters of words within sentences affected the construction of meaning by giving dignity to some words – and consequently to the individuals, institutions, or concepts they designated. The capital letters also suggested that the reader must set those words apart by making a pause before them or raising the voice when reading them. These capital letters thereby contributed to the visual and semantic effect produced by the various forms of text inscription and attested to La Bruyère's typographic sensitivity. In order to perceive such a sensitivity, it is necessary to return to the punctuation of seventeenth-century editions and free *Les Caractères* from the anachronistic, misleading, and heavy punctuation that since the nineteenth century has introduced periods and quotation marks while suppressing the capital letters.²

Can we suppose that all the authors were as attentive as Ronsard or La Bruyère to the punctuation of the printed editions of their works? Is punctuation the task and responsibility of the author? As Malcolm Parkes stated, "Printed punctuation may reflect that of the author, that of the

person who prepared the copy for the press, that of the compositor, or all three” (5). We could add to this list the reader, who was often invited to correct the punctuation of a book according not only to a list of errata printed in the edition but also to his or her own judgment, as in the 1543 London edition of Saint Chrysostom’s *Homiliae*: “Whenever you find punctuation missing and accents either wrongly positioned or else omitted altogether, it will be an act of kindness on your part, gentle reader, to emend them according to judgement” (Binns).³

During Spain’s Golden Age, this pointing or *apuntuación* was the task of the compositors or correctors. In 1619, Gonzalo de Ayala, himself a printing-shop corrector, affirmed that a corrector “must know grammar, spelling, etymologies, punctuation, and the position of accents” (Ayala). In 1675, Melchor de Cabrera, writing in defense of fiscal exemptions for printers, emphasized:

El componedor percibe el concepto, y discurso. [...] Debe] hazer interrogacion, admiracion, y parentesis porque muchas veces la mente de los Escritores se confunde, por falta de estos requisitos, necesarios, è importantes para el entendimiento y comprehension de lo que se escribe, ò imprime; porque qalquiera que falte, muda, truëca, y varia el sentido. (The compositor understands the meaning as well as the argument. [...] He must] take care of the question marks, exclamation marks, and parenthesis because often the writer’s expressions become confused if these elements, which are necessary and important for the intelligibility and comprehension of what is written, are missing; because, if they are absent, the meaning is transformed, altered, and different (Cabrera)

Some years later (around 1680), Alonso Víctor de Paredes in *Institución y origen del arte de la imprenta* writes,

[El corrector debe] entender el concepto del Autor en lo que manda imprimir, no tan solamente para poner la apuntuacion legitima; sino aun para ver si padeciò algun descuido el dueño, para advertirselo. ([The corrector must] understand the intention of the author of the text he sends to the printing house, not only for marking the right punctuation, but also for checking the author’s mistakes in order to advise him.) (Paredes)

Decisions concerning the materiality of the text were clearly assigned to multiple agents involved in the publication process. Today, however, according to differing traditions in textual criticism, the main responsibility is not given to those same individuals.

The bibliography emphasized the role of the compositors. The compositors of early modern printing shops did not have the same manner of spelling words or marking punctuation. This is precisely the reason why

“spelling analysis” allows one to attribute the composition of a book form to a specific compositor, and it constitutes the basis for reconstructing the actual process of making a book as either *seriatim* or according to *formes*. From this analytical perspective, punctuation is like spelling in that it results from the decisions of compositors that, according to Moxon, must “make the Indenting, Pointing, Breaking, Italicking [of a work] the better sympathize with the Authors Genius, and also with the capacity of the Reader” (211–212). As recorded by Alonso Víctor de Paredes, spelling and punctuation can also be guided by necessity when the copy creation has been wrongly done because “no son Angeles los que cuentan” (‘they are not Angels who cast off the copy’). In this case, compositors must alter the layout of the page, the size of the type, and the punctuation for saving space or filling space left for composition of the last page of the quire (see Masten 75–107). To resolve these difficulties, sometimes the compositors used what Paredes called “medios feos y no permitidos” (‘ugly and forbidden means’). That is, they added or left out words or sentences in the text they were composing.

From another, more philological perspective, the essential role in punctuation was played, not by the composition process, but in copy preparation by correctors that added accents, capital letters, and punctuation marks. Whereas this work was linked with the printing-house, the choices regarding punctuation were assigned to clerics, university graduates, or schoolmasters employed by publishers and printers. Paolo Trovato emphasized how important it was for publishers of the Cinquecento to insist upon the “correctness” of books published by them. On many title pages was the expression *con ogni diligenza corretto*, ‘corrected with utmost diligence’ (Trovato). This was the decisive role of these copyeditors, sometimes called proofreaders, whose textual interventions are shown throughout the several stages of the publishing process: copy preparation, proofreading, stop-press corrections, and the compilation of various errata (i.e., pages of errata printed in the book, on loose slips of paper, or handmade corrections in each copy). At every stage of the process, the text could be enriched and transformed.

In the sixteenth century, texts that underwent pointing by correctors belonged to various repertoires: classical works from Greek or Latin (see Grafton), texts written in the vernacular that circulated as manuscripts and were standardized in terms of spelling and sometimes language (as is the case in Italy with Tuscan; see Richardson), and works by contemporary authors whose handwriting was often very difficult to read. In his *Orthotypographia*, printed in 1608 in Leipzig, Hieronymus Hornschuch complained about the negligence and carelessness of authors that gave printers:

faulty manuscripts that cannot be read except with extreme difficulty [...]. Therefore I should like, not so much in the name of the correctors as of the printers, earnestly to advise and request all those that ever intend to publish anything in print to present it in such a way that the question need never be asked in the printer's office that the slave in comedy [in Plautus' *Pseudolus*] asked: "Do even hens have hands?" (Hornschuch)

Going against the usual distribution of roles, Hornschuch urged authors to be mindful of their punctuation:

What is almost the most important of all, let him punctuate his writing. For every day many mistakes are made by many people because of this; and in poetry nothing is more tiresome or blameworthy than the number of people that leave out punctuation marks. [...] Moreover, correct punctuation produces great elegance and leads more than anything else to a clear understanding of subject matter, whereas inconsistent punctuation seems to be the product of a disorderly mind. (Hornschuch)

The author is thus asked to send the printing house not his autograph manuscript ('actual rough copy') – the foul papers – but a clean copy "re-written as neatly as possible either by himself or an amanuensis, on firm, non-absorbent paper, and checked again with utmost care" (Hornschuch).

During Castile's Golden Age, a manuscript handed to the Royal Council to receive license and privilege was never an autographed copy but a *copia en limpio*, or fair copy written by a professional scribe. Once approved and later corrected by censors, the manuscript was given to the publisher and then to the printer. This copy, which was not the author's foul papers but a clean copy, was called the "original" in Spanish and submitted the text to a series of alterations either in spelling or punctuation. Although authors' autographs generally had very few punctuation marks and showed great irregularity in spelling, the scribes' "originals" (which in fact were not at all original) needed to allow for better readability when given to censors and when destined for the printing house (see Rico 53–148).

In the examples he gave in his *Dictionnaire*, Furetière proposed, as expected, that "Ce Correcteur d'Imprimerie entend fort bien la ponctuation" ("This corrector understands punctuation perfectly well"), and also, more surprisingly, that "L'exactitude de cet Auteur va jusques là qu'il prend soin des points et des virgules" ("The exactness of this author is such that he even pays attention to periods and commas").⁴ The first example assigned punctuation to the technical skills of copy editors employed by printers, and the second referred back to the authors' typical lack of interest in punctuation. The second also indicated that, in some rare cases, authors were attentive to the pointing of their texts; for example, Ronsard or La Bruyère.

Let us take another case: Molière. Is it possible to find traces of his use of punctuation in the printed editions of his plays? As we know, it would be risky to attribute very directly to him the choices of punctuation found in the first editions of his plays. For example, in the 1660 edition of *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, punctuation varies from sheet to sheet, even from forme to forme, according to the preferences or habits of their compositors (see Veyrin-Forrer 338–366). Nevertheless, the differences in punctuation between the first editions of the plays (each printed shortly after their first Parisian production) and later editions allow one to reconstruct, if not his intention, at least the implied purpose of the text and its relation to the theatrical performance.

The punctuation of the first editions of Molière's plays is clearly linked with the oral delivery of the text, either because it recalled the text as it was recited on stage or because it guided a possible reading-aloud of the play. As a consequence, the original punctuation marks are more numerous and often used to portray the characters in different ways. Consider for example the comma – present in the 1669 edition of *Le Tartuffe* and suppressed thereafter – after the first word of the line: “Gros, et gras, le tent frais, et la bouche vermeille” (‘Stout, and fat, with blooming cheeks and ruddy lips’; I, 4). See also the accumulation of commas and capital letters that distinguishes the Master of Philosophy character from the Master of Dance in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (II, 3; see Hill 125–141).

This original punctuation also placed an emphasis on words charged with particular significance. A spectacular example can be found in the last two lines of *Le Tartuffe*. Modern editions print these lines of Orgon without any pauses: “Et par un doux hymen couronner en Valère / La flame d’un amant genereux et sincère” (‘With wedded happiness reward Valere, / And crown a lover noble and sincere’; 5.7.1961–1962). However, the first, 1669 edition of the play – as well as the following in 1673 – put a comma just before the last words: & *sincere*: “Et par un doux hymen, couronner en Valere, / La flame d’un Amant genereux, & sincere.” The last word of the entire play is thus clearly detached and serves as the antonym to the play’s title *Le Tartuffe ou L’Imposteur*.⁵ Whoever was responsible for this expressive and theatrical punctuation (Molière himself, a scribe, a corrector, or the compositors), it indicated a strong relation to voice, be it the voices of the actors on the stage or the voices of those that read the play out loud and shared with their listeners the pleasure of the text.

In early modern England, there were frequent games played with pointing. One example is the “punctuation poem,” whose meaning changes depending on the reader’s choice between pauses indicated by commas and pauses indicated by periods (see Parkes 210–211). Another was the effect,

either comical or dramatic, produced on stage by faulty punctuation. A more famous example is of course the prologue recited by Quince before the performance of the “Comedy of Pyramus and Thisbea” by the artisans of Athens at the court of Theseus:

Prologue

If wee offend, it is with our good will.
That you should thinke, we come not to offend,
But with good will. To shew our simple skill,
That is the true beginning of our end [...].

Theseus:

This fellow doth not stand upon points.

Lysander:

He hath rid his Prologue, like a rough Colt : hee knowes not the stoppe.
A good morall my Lord. It is not enough to speake ; but to speake true.
(Shakespeare, *A Midfommer* 5.1.1951–1964)⁶

The *captatio benevolentiae* was given the opposite meaning because of Quince’s incorrect use of pauses during his speech. The compositors of the Quarto edition of 1600, and after them those of the Folio edition, have typographically translated the artisan’s comical clumsiness by putting full stops in incorrect places and thereby reversing the intended meaning of the text without a single word changed. As Theseus concludes, when punctuation is wrongly distributed the speech is “like a tangled Chain, nothing impaired, but all disordered.”

“Mortimer the treacherous” and “Quince the clumsy” remind us that punctuation affects the meaning. Must we accept the classical thesis, according to which since the eighteenth century grammatical and syntactic punctuation has replaced rhetorical punctuation that indicated pauses and sometimes intonation (see Nelson)? Or are we to consider, together with Malcolm Parkes (Parkes 5), that the balance between “delineating the rhetorical structure of a period and drawing attention to the logical relationships expressed by its syntactical structures” has dominated the use of punctuation since the Renaissance, so that both the rhetorical and the syntactical can be found in the same period or even in the same text?

Is it legitimate to assume that all individuals to whom punctuation decisions were assigned shared the same norms and the same expectations? Or, should we follow the hypothesis formulated by Philip Gaskell (Gaskell 28–61) and trace variations in punctuation within the “same” work to various text purposes or uses? Such a hypotheses might be confirmed by examining the profound difference between the actor’s part and the printed edition in the case of Edward Alleyn’s role of Orlando in Robert Greene’s *The Historie of Orlando Furioso*, published in 1594, or the

manuscript punctuation added by John Ward in his printed copy of the 1676 edition of *Hamlet* (see Chartier).

The final question might be how to elucidate the reasons and modalities for the attempts to restore oral and rhetorical punctuation during the eighteenth century. It was in 1754, and only in 1754, in the second edition of its *Ortografía de la lengua española*, that the Real Academia introduced the inverted question mark and exclamation mark to Spanish in order to guide the reader's intonation:

Despues de un largo exâmen ha parecido á la Academia se pueda usar de la misma nota de interrogacion poniendola inversa antes de la palabra en que tiene principio el tono interrogante, ademas de la que ha de llevar la cláusula al fin de la forma regular, para evitar así la equivocacion que por falta de alguna nota se padece comunmente en la lectura de los periodos largos. (After a long examination, the Academy thought it was possible to use the same question mark turned upside down and put it before the word that begins the interrogative intonation, in addition to the regular question mark at the end of the clause, in order to avoid the confusion that the lack of such a punctuation mark often produces during the reading of long sentences; *Ortografía*.)

Thirty-five years later, in 1789, Benjamin Franklin proposed to English a question mark at the beginning of interrogative sentences, as Spanish printers do, so that an “expressive typography” could properly order the modulation of the voice:

Farther to be more sensible of the Advantage of clear and distinct Printing, let us consider the Assistance it affords in Reading well aloud to an Auditory. In so doing the Eye generally slides forward three or four Words before the Voice. If the Sight clearly distinguishes what the coming Words are, it gives time to order the Modulation of the Voice to express them properly. But if they are obscurely printed, or disguised by omitting the Capitals and long s's, or otherwise, the Reader is apt to modulate wrong, and finding he has done so, he is obliged to go back and begin the Sentence again; which lessens the Pleasure of the Hearers. This leads me to mention an old Error in our Mode of Printing. We are sensible that when a Question is met with in Reading, there is a proper Variation to be used in the Management of the Voice. We have therefore a Point, called an Interrogation, affix'd to the Question in order to distinguish it. But this is absurdly placed at its End, so that the Reader does not discover it, 'till he finds he has wrongly modulated his Voice and is therefore obliged to begin again the Sentence. To prevent this the Spanish Printers, more sensibly, place an Interrogation at the Beginning as well as at the End of a Question. [...] The Practice of our Ladies in meeting five or six together to form little busy Parties, when each is employed in some useful Work; while one reads to them, is so commendable in itself, that it deserves the Attention of Authors and Printers to make it as pleasing as possible, both to the Reader and Hearers. (Franklin)

Consequently, not only ladies' parties can be organized around the oral delivery of a speech, but also, or mainly, a public space based on reproduction of oral speeches and not necessarily enclosed within the confines of the city state of Antiquity. On stage, the life or death of a king could depend on the placement of a comma. But punctuation's importance does not end there. It is also important in framing the new democratic sphere.

NOTES

¹ "Mortimer:

The king must die, or *Mortimer* goes downe,
The commons now begin to pitie him,
Yet he that is the cause of *Edwards* death,
Is sure to pay for it when his sonne is of age,
And therefore will I do it cunninglie.
This letter written by a friend of ours,
Contains his death, yet bids them save his life.
Edwardum occidere nolite timere bonum est.
Feare not to kill the king tis good he die.
But read it thus, and thats an other sence:
Edwardum occidere nolite timere bonum est.
Kill not the king tis good to feare the worst.
Unpointed as it is, thus shall it goe,
That being dead, if by chaunce to be found,
Matrevis and the rest may beare the blame,
And we be quit that caused it to be done." (Marlowe 86)

² One example of is Arrias' speech in the chapter "De la Société et de la conversation" (On Society and Conversation). The modern edition reads:

"Quelqu'un se hasarde de le contredire, et lui prouve nettement qu'il dit des choses qui ne sont pas vraies. Arrias ne se trouble point, prend feu au contraire contre l'interrupteur : Je n'avance, lui dit-il, je ne raconte rien que je ne sache d'original : je l'ai appris de *Sethon*, ambassadeur de France dans cette cour, revenu à Paris depuis quelques jours, que je connais familièrement, que j'ai fort interrogé, et qui ne m'a caché aucune circonstance." Il reprenait le fil de sa narration avec plus de confiance qu'il ne l'avait commencée, lorsque l'un des conviés lui dit : "C'est *Sethon* à qui vous parlez, lui-même, et qui arrive de son ambassade." (La Bruyère, *Les Caractères de Theophraste* 150–151)

And the 1696 edition:

"quelqu'un se hasarde de le contredire et lui prouve nettement qu'il dit des choses qui ne sont pas vraies ; Arrias ne se trouble point, prend feu au contraire contre l'interrupteur ; je n'avance, lui dit-il, je ne raconte rien que je ne sache d'original : je l'ai appris de **Sethon** ambassadeur de France dans cette Cour, revenu à Paris depuis quelques jours, que je connais familièrement, que j'ai fort interrogé, et qui ne m'a caché aucune circonstance ; il reprenait le fil de sa narration avec plus de confiance qu'il ne l'avait commencée, lorsque l'un des conviés lui dit, c'est *Sethon* à qui vous parlez, lui-même, et qui arrive de son Ambassade." (La Bruyère, *Les Caractères* 206)

The English translation reads:

"Somebody presumes to contradict him, and clearly proves to him that what he says is untrue. Arrias is not disconcerted; on the contrary, he grows angry at the interruption, and

exclaims: 'I aver and relate nothing but what I know on excellent authority; I had it from Sethon, the French ambassador at that court, who only a few days ago came back to Paris, and is a particular friend of mine; I asked him several questions, and he replies to them without concealing anything.' He continues his story with greater confidence that he began it, till one of the company informs him that the gentleman whom he has been contradicting was Sethon himself, but lately arrived from his embassy." (La Bruyère, *The Characters*)

³ Another example can be found in Binn: "The Printer to the Reader. Both the inversion and transposition of letters is very frequent; and the punctuation marks are either wholly omitted or else badly placed. You should therefore attribute the errors which have crept in to my haste and to the poorness of my type. I have listed below the errors which spoil the meaning of the poem, so that you can excuse the smaller ones and correct those that are more serious" (see also Hartwell).

⁴ See the articles "Ponctuation: Observation grammaticale des lieux d'un discours, où on doit faire de differentes pauses, & qu'on marque avec des points & petits caracteres pour en advertir les lecteurs. Il y a plus de difficulté qu'on ne pense à faire bien la ponctuation. Ce Correcteur d'Imprimerie entend fort bien la ponctuation." and "Virgule: Terme de grammaire . . . L'exactitude de cet Auteur va jusques-là, qu'il prend soin des points et des virgules" in Furetière.

⁵ Seventeenth-century editions: "Et par un doux hymen, couronner en Valere, / La flame d'un Amant genereux, & sincere." (Molière, *Le Tartuffe* [1669]); "Et par un doux hymen, couronner en Valere / La flame d'un Amant genereux, & sincere." (Molière, *Le Tartuffe* [1673]). The modern edition: "Et par un doux hymen couronner en Valère / La flame d'un amant genereux et sincere." (Molière, *Oeuvres* 180)

⁶ The modern English rendition of the Prologue reads: "If we offend, it is with our good will / That you should think, we come not to offend. / But with good will to show our simple skill: / That is the true beginning of our end."

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