



## Introduction: Exploring the Multifaceted Faces of Punctuation

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To cite this article: Bo Andersson & Merja Kytö (2018) Introduction: Exploring the Multifaceted Faces of Punctuation, *Studia Neophilologica*, 90:sup1, 1-4, DOI: [10.1080/00393274.2018.1531255](https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2018.1531255)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2018.1531255>



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Published online: 19 Mar 2019.



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## Introduction: Exploring the Multifaceted Faces of Punctuation

Bo Andersson and Merja Kytö

This special issue of *Studia Neophilologica* offers on its cover a reproduction of a sonnet by the German Baroque poet Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664). We will discuss this sonnet in some detail to highlight aspects of importance to the present special issue. The sonnet is the introductory poem in a collection, printed in Polish Lissa in 1637. It bears the title “An GOTT den Heiligen Geist” (“To God the Holy Spirit”) and forms an *invocation*, where the poet praises the Wisdom and Light of the Third Person of the Trinity and asks for divine inspiration in his important task. For the Christian poet, the Holy Spirit has the same function as the muses in ancient literature.

The printer, Wigandus Funck, has been very careful in his typographical design, and the print evinces interesting textual features. The collection appeared in an unusually narrow format, which requires that the lines of the sonnets are consistently broken into two. This layout forces the reader to undertake slow, careful, and attentive reading. Also of interest is the use of punctuation signs. In the sonnet to the Holy Spirit, we find, for example, two clear differences in punctuation, compared to modern German usage.

One of these is immediately noticeable. In German and many other vernacular texts of the 17th century we observe the frequent use of the virgula (’), which often corresponds to the modern comma. In Gryphius’ poem, as in many other contemporary texts, we also find virgulas in places where we would now expect another punctuation mark or no mark at all. This applies, for example, to lines 3, 5, and 7 (“Gott/”, “Kunst/”, and “Taub/”), where modern usage would prefer an exclamation mark and not a comma, and line 22 (“befeuchtet/), where a modern reader would expect a period. The last example is especially interesting, since this marking of a short pause (light syntactic break) leads to the tight connection of two thoughts in the sextet of the sonnet. The inspiration of the poet, coming from the Holy Spirit, is presented as a close parallel to the incarnation of Christ in Mary, where the Spirit functions as the Divine source. The use of the virgula instead of a period, indicating a short pause in oral or silent reading, underscores the analogy between incarnation and inspiration, which is the central point of the poet’s closing prayer. The choice of punctuation mark is here – as in so many other cases – most important for the interpretation of the poem.

Unfamiliar to a modern reader of the text are not just the virgulas, but also the use of two different exclamation marks. Besides the normal mark ‘!’, the print also contains the variation ‘!’ (line 7). The latter kind of mark stands for a less intense exclamation. This means that there is a marked gradation of intensity, unknown to modern

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punctuation, which functions as an instruction for the reader's silent or oral performance. In text editions, editors often tend to normalize the use of punctuation marks (the so-called 'accidentals'), following modern usage. According to such a practice, the virgula in line 22 and the leaning exclamation mark in line 7 would most likely be replaced with a period and a normal exclamation mark. This would surely make the text more readable to a modern reader, but important textual information would irretrievably disappear in the process.

Research on punctuation is a relatively new field. For a long time, punctuation was largely seen as a problem of standardization and orthographical norms. But especially since the publication of the seminal work by M.B. Parkes, *Pause and effect* (1992), punctuation has garnered ever-greater attention in historical and reader-oriented studies. Many modern scholars also adhere to an extended concept of punctuation, which includes not just traditional punctuation marks, but also, for example, spaces in the text, the distinguishing of words or other units, the layout of the page, and other paratextual features. This extended concept renders punctuation a central aspect of text materiality.

Punctuation has indeed turned into a most dynamic area of research. In punctuation studies, a number of scholarly disciplines and research perspectives meet:

- **Linguistics and Literary Studies.** Punctuation studies are traditionally a linguistic area of research. Punctuation is, however, central to all text interpretation, especially for the analysis of literary texts.
- **Text materiality.** Punctuation is an essential feature of all text design. This particularly applies to studies informed by an extended concept of punctuation including not just punctuation marks, but also the use of space and layout. Another aspect of text materiality is the differences in punctuation between handwritten, printed, and electronic texts.
- **Historical Linguistics and Literary History.** Constant reflection is needed not just on historical systems of punctuation, but also on historical developments and changes and their possible meaning(s).
- **Text Philology.** Variation in punctuation across different textual documents is important for text editions. All normalization and modernization might distort original historical meaning.
- **Performance Studies.** Punctuation functions as an instruction to the reader regarding the oral or silent performance of a text.
- **Contrastive Studies.** Punctuation practice varies not just historically, but also across languages. Therefore, contrastive punctuation research is very illuminating.
- **Translation Studies.** The translator has to be aware of the differences in punctuation between languages and make informed choices.
- **Pedagogical and Didactic Studies.** In many languages, the system of punctuation is hard to learn. This is not just an aspect of writing, but also an important component of skilled reading.

In early March 2017, a symposium was organized at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities in Stockholm. We would like to take the occasion to express our warmest gratitude to the Academy for its generous financial and administrative

support. Papers were presented by punctuation scholars from Finland, Germany, and Sweden. The papers treated topics of punctuation from a number of different past and present perspectives; among the languages treated were English, German, and Swedish. The opening address and seven of the papers appear in a slightly revised form in this volume. The study by Javier Calle-Martín and Laura Esteban-Segur was produced especially for this publication on invitation. In what follows, we briefly outline the contents of the contributions included in the volume.

In his opening address, Anders Cullhed, President of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, pointed to the importance of the conference theme by referring to perhaps the most controversial comma in Swedish literary studies, a line in Erik Johan Stangelius' poem "Endymion." Here, a comma or not a comma makes all the difference for text interpretation.

The paper by Ursula Bredel, "Das Interpunktionssystem des Deutschen", takes a theoretical approach to punctuation research. It presents a systematic discussion of the punctuation marks in modern German. Important is its focus on language processing on the reader. The paper also points to the importance of punctuation didactics, especially for the mostly neglected aspect of learning an adequate understanding of punctuation marks in reading.

Alva Dahl's contribution on "The Graphic and Grammatical Structure of Written Texts" utilizes an extended concept of punctuation in an important study of the interplay between grammatical and graphical units in three contemporary Swedish novels.

Lars Wollin combines a historical and a contrastive approach in his paper on "Punctuation: Providing the Setting for Translation?" He shows that Swedish translators surprisingly often follow the punctuation of their source texts.

The paper by Matti Peikola, "'Hit is false poynted in many places': Paratextual Communication on Punctuation in Early English Prologues, Title Pages, and Errata Lists", explores references and comments regarding punctuation. The study includes both handwritten and printed texts. His findings show the importance afforded to correctness, for example in devotional and liturgical texts intended for oral delivery.

Javier Calle-Martín and Laura Esteban-Segura apply a diachronic and variationist approach to punctuation in their paper on "'The Egiptians adored the Sun, and called it the visible sone of the invisible God': Clausal Boundaries in Early Modern English Scientific Handwritten Texts." They analyze the standardization of scribal punctuation as well as its variation in three kinds of clauses: coordinate clauses, adjectival clauses, and *if*-clauses. They note differences not just across these kinds of grammatical units but also across text types.

In "Andreas Gryphius' Sonette: Eine Interpunktionsgeschichte," Bo Andersson utilizes an extended concept of punctuation in his analyses of the different prints of Gryphius' sonnets during the poet's lifetime. The book printers – and not the poet – are most likely responsible for the wide variation in the punctuation.

Questions of the graphical rendering of voice are discussed by Mats Malm in his paper on "Punctuation, Voice, and Gender in 19th-Century Negotiations: Two Swedish Examples." The first example is a poem by the Swedish female poet Anna-Maria Lenngren. The original text contains a number semi-colons; in later editions, one finds a frequent use of affective markers instead. The character of the text thereby

changes from ironic to sarcastic. The second example comprises interesting reflections on punctuation by Carl Jonas Love Almqvist.

The last contribution to the volume, Gesine Esslinger's "Sprachreflexive Zugänge zur Interpunktion des Deutschen durch Interpunktionsgespräche – Hintergründe und Möglichkeiten einer leserorientierten Interpunktionsdidaktik," shows that the processing of punctuation is an important and integral component of general reading competence. The paper quotes and discusses a number of conversations, taken from an empirical study, where German elementary school students try to solve different problems regarding the interpretation of punctuation signs.

Punctuation is a dynamic field of research, where rewarding exchanges between scholars from different areas of linguistics and literary studies take place. This volume is intended to function as an inspiration for further discussion and research.

## REFERENCE

Parkes, Malcolm Beckwith. 1992. *Pause and effect. An introduction to the history of punctuation in the West*. Aldershot: Ashgate.