

Practising Criticism 3: 'Only connect...'

How to Read Punctuation

1. To dispense, with justice; or, to dispense with justice. Thus the catholic god of France, with honours all even, honours all, even the damned in the brazen Invalides of Heaven.

Geoffrey Hill, 'The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy' (1983)

2. ...one generall Affection of the whole, dispersed thorow every member thereof, as the bloud is thorow the body; and consisteth in the breathing, when we pronounce any Sentence; For, whereas our breath is by nature so short, that we cannot continue without a stay to speake long together; it was thought necessarie, as well as for the speakers ease, as for the plainer deliverance of the things spoken, to invent this meanes, whereby men pausing a pretty while, the whole speech might never the worse be understood.

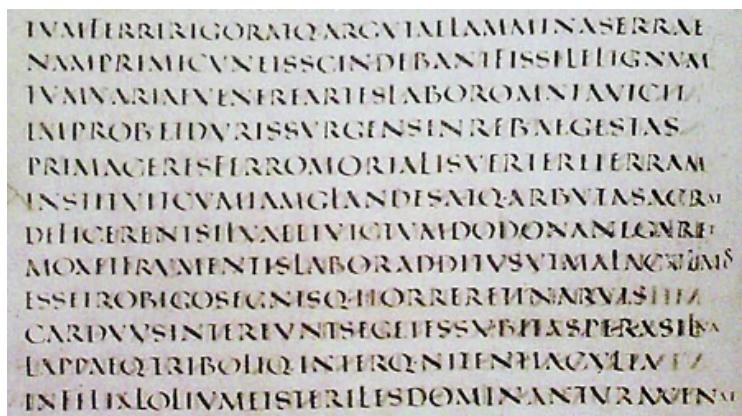
Ben Jonson, *Timber; or, Discoveries made upon men and matter* (1641)

3. *Ham.* If thou did'st euer hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicitie awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in paine,
To tell my Storie.

[...] O I dye *Horatio*:
The potent poysone quite ore-crowes my spirit,
I cannot liue to heare the Newes from England,
But I do prophesie th'election lights
On *Fortinbras*, he ha's my dying voyce,
So tell him with the occurrents more and lesse,
Which haue solicited. The rest is silence. O,o,o,o. *Dyes*

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (First Folio text, 1623)

- 4.



An early manuscript of The Gospel of St John, copied out in *scriptio continua*

- 5.

That night, that year

Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.
Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Carrión Comfort' (c.1887)

6. How does it come about that this arrow → points? Doesn't it seem to carry in it something besides itself? – "No, not the dead line on paper; only the psychical thing, the meaning, can do that." – That is both true and false. The arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (1958)

7. ... by a quick transition, as if she had settled the case, she asked him the hour.
'Oh only twelve-ten' - he had looked at his watch. 'We've taken but thirteen minutes; we've time yet.'

'Then we must walk. We must go toward them.'

Densher, from where they had been standing, measured the long reach of the Square.
'They're still in their shop. They're safe for half an hour.'

'That shows then, that shows!' said Kate.

This colloquy had taken place in the middle of Piazza San Marco, always, as a great social saloon, a smooth-floored, blue-roofed chamber of amenity, favourable to talk; or rather, to be exact, not in the middle, but at the point where our pair had paused by a common impulse after leaving the great mosque-like church. It rose, now, domed and pinnacled, but a little way behind them, and they had in front the vast empty space, enclosed by its arcades, to which at that hour movement and traffic were mostly confined. Venice was at breakfast, the Venice of the visitor and the possible acquaintance, and, except for the parties of importunate pigeons picking up the crumbs of perpetual feasts, their prospect was clear and they could see their companions hadn't yet been, and weren't for a while longer likely to be, disgorged by the lace-shop, in one of the *loggie*, where, shortly before, they had left them for a look-in – the expression was artfully Densher's – at Saint Mark's.

Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902)

8. Bernard placed one arm tightly round her. When will you marry me Ethel he uttered you must be my wife it has come to that I love you so intensely that if you say no I shall perforce dash my body to the brink of yon muddy river he panted wildly.

Oh dont do that implored Ethel breathing rarther hard.

Then say you love me he cried.

Oh Bernard she sighed fervently I certinly love you madly you are to me like a Heathen god she cried looking at his manly form and handsome flashing face I will indeed marry you.

How soon gasped Bernard gazing at her intensly.

As soon as possible said Ethel gently closing her eyes.

My Darling whispered Bernard and he seized her in his arms we will be marrid next week. [...] Oh Bernard she said little did I ever dream of such as this and she suddenly fainted into his outstretched arms

Oh I say gasped Bernard and laying the dainty burden on the grass he dashed to the waters edge and got a cup full of the fragrant river to pour on his true love's pallid brow. [...] Then arm in arm they tottered to the boat.

I trust you have not got an illness my darling murmered Bernard as he helped her in.

Oh no I am very strong said Ethel I fainted for joy she added to explain matters.

Oh I see said Bernard handing her a cushima well some people do he added kindly and so saying they rowed down the dark stream now flowing silently beneath a golden moon. All was silent as the lovers glided home with a joy in their hearts and radiunce on their faces only the sound of the mystearious water lapping against the frail vessel broke the monotony of the night.

Daisy Ashford (aged 9), *The Young Visiters or Mr Salteena's Plan* (1919)

9. *[Krapp switches off, winds tape back, switches on again.]*

— upper lake, with the punt, bathed off the bank, then pushed out into the stream and drifted. She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. [...] I asked her to look at me and after a few moments — [Pause.] — after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. [Pause. Low.] Let me in. [Pause.] We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! [Pause.] I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.

Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958)

10. RESOLUTIONS COLON ZERO STOP PERIOD HOPES COLON ZERO
STOP

BECKETT

Samuel Beckett, telegram to *The Times* (1984)

11. Now I am feeble grown; my end draws nigh;
I hope my end draws nigh: half deaf I am,
So that I scarce can hear the people hum
About the column's base, and almost blind,
And scarce can recognise the fields I know;
And both my thighs are rotted with the dew;
Yet cease I not to clamour and to cry,
While my stiff spine can hold my weary head,
Till all my limbs drop piecemeal from the stone,
Have mercy, mercy: take away my sin.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'St Simeon Stylites' (1842)

Suggestions for further reading:

David Crystal, *Making a Point: The Pernickety Story of English Punctuation* (2015)

A. Graham-White, *Punctuation and its Dramatic Value in Shakespearean Drama* (1995)

Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (1967)

John Lennard, *But I Digress* (1991)

Malcolm Parkes, *Pause and Effect* (1992)

Eric Partridge, *You Have a Point There* (1953)

Christopher Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words* (1993) and *The Force of Poetry* (1984)

Anne Toner, *Ellipsis in English Literature: Signs of Omission* (2015)

Mindele Treip, *Milton's Punctuation and Changing English Usage 1582-1676* (1970)