In/visible Punctuation

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ABSTRACT

The article offers two approaches to the question of
'invisible punctuation,' theoretical and critical. The first
is a taxonomy of modes of punctuational invisibility,
identifying *denial, repression, habituation, error* and
absence. Each is briefly discussed and some relations
with technologies of reading are considered. The second
considers the paragraphing, or lack of it, in Sir Philip
Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*: one of the two early printed
editions and at least one of the two MSS are mono-
paragraphic, a feature always silently eliminated by
editors as a supposed carelessness. It is argued that this is
improbable and that one form the *Defence* may have taken
at Sidney's hands (and those of his literary executors)
was monoparagraphic, a matter affecting tone, genre and
the understanding of his argument. A short conclusion
considers the current state of punctuational invisibility
in relation to digital awareness.

The general thesis of this special issue, as of much work on punctuation drawing on the seminal studies of Malcolm Parkes,[1] might be cogently summarized in the proposition that 'punctuation remains too readily invisible.' It is of course ubiquitous, its presence before the eye co-extensive with the acts of reading and writing, but whether in textual studies or textbooks direct attention to punctuation remains unhappily rare. Two generations of post-/Parisian semioticians, loudly determined to grapple with every nuance of linguistic structure, have all but ignored it *tout court*, while the pedagogical practice of using 'fully modernized' texts, increasingly institutionalized since 1945 even at under/graduate level, obscures awareness of its historical development.

One way of seeing the issues involved is simply to ask in what ways punctuation can be 'invisible.' The idea of invisibility, seemingly simple, in any case tends to exhibit both paradox and displacement, as those who recall Poe's 'The Purloined Letter,' Freud's *fort–da* game, or any film 'showing' invisibility will understand; any taxonomy of punctuational invisibility registers similar problems. Various approaches could be adopted, but all are likely in the end to come down to five heads that might be labelled *denial, repression, habituation, error* and *absence*.

Denial (in a legal rather than psychoanalytical sense) covers invisibility by definition—that is, exclusion from received definitions and hence awareness governed by such limitation (*definire* meaning 'to limit'). The most obvious and important example of invisibility arising from such denial is spaces of punctuation, and the problem begins etymologically. 'Punctuation' derives from Latin *punctus*, a participle of *pungō*, 'to puncture, prick (a hole),' once a literal piercing of parchment with a sharpened point, most probably in tallies, but transferring to use of a stylus on wax. Most modern definitions of the English word (including *OED2*'s) consequently insist that 'punctuation' is synonymous with 'punctuation marks,' i.e., that it comprises only points and other non-alphabetic marks interspersed among words. This ignores the Latin extension of the term from a point in space to a point in time, usage reflected in modern English 'to punctuate' (*inter alia*, to "interrupt at intervals: intersperse *with*," *N.Sh.OED* 4. *v. t. fig.*), in 'punctual' and its cognates, and in the common compound noun 'punctuation marks' (or 'marks of punctuation')—which would be needless if there were no other kinds of punctuation to distinguish. Even if one is unaware that unspaced *scriptio continua* was normative for most of the first millennium CE, it is self-evident that strings of written or printed letters are

1. See especially *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (London: Scolar Press, 1992) and the essays collected in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers:* *Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Mediaeval Texts* (London: Hambledon, 1991).

now most frequently punctuated by space—simply between words, in conjunction with full-stop and capital letter between sentences, and more complicatedly between paragraphs, sections, chapters and other internal structural divisions, as well as in margins—but, paralleling the unwarrantably narrow dictionary definitions limiting punctuation to marks, these spatial features tend to be lumped together as 'layout,' and kept distinct from whatever understanding one may have of 'punctuation.'

Repression (this time in a political rather than psychoanalytical sense) covers invisibility through imposition of (supposed) unimportance—the belittlement and marginalization of punctuation as unworthy of scholarly attention, proper pedagogy and critical investigation. This was until the dissemination of Professor Parkes's work the general situation, involving the continuing lack of any proper theory and pedagogical praxis for punctuation, ridicule of those attempting work in the field, economic marginalization and denunciation, lack of resources and intellectual dismissal. Alas, almost everyone who has undertaken university-based literary work on punctuation will recognize these phenomena, from friendly joshing by colleagues ('You're working on *what*?') to a far more consequential impatience with 'pedantry' and 'minutiae' among teachers and students alike.

There has been progress as the work of Professor Parkes and others following him makes inroads, and those recently trained in or practicing book history are more likely to attend to punctuation (especially if unconventional) than those who espouse more theoretical approaches to literature. Punctuation has figured in arguments about re-editing Jonson,[2] and was raised as an issue by Henry Woudhuysen in his 2003 British Academy Lecture on the 'foundations of Shakespeare's text.'[3] There are also encouraging signs of wider theoretical and contextual thinking, engaging with technology and extending to performance.[4] There has even been some explicit funding, notably in the UK by the Economic and Social Research Council of Nigel Hall's Punctuation Project, a much needed study of a neglected aspect of school pedagogy.[5] All this is to be warmly welcomed, but there is the consideration that the undoubted punctuational bestseller of recent decades, Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* (2003), if perfunctorily citing Professor Parkes, ignores his conclusions in favor of a continuing promulgation of supposed rules, absolute meanings and limited,

2. See David Bevington, Why Re-Edit Herford and Simpson?, in Martin Butler, editor, *Re-Presenting Jonson: Text, History, Performance* (London: Macmillan, 1999) and Sara van den Berg, Marking his Place: Ben Jonson's Punctuation, at http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls /01-3/bergjons.html.
3. H.R. Woudhuysen, The Foundations of Shakespeare's Text, in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 125, 69-100.
4. Naomi S. Baron, *Alphabet to Email: How Written English Evolved and Where It's Heading* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000) and *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2008).
5. Nigel Hall and Anne Robinson, editors, *Learning About Punctuation* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996).

limiting definitions devoid of theoretical thought; the book's popular success thus represents a defeat for punctuational scholarship as much as a raising of the subject's profile, and its jokey tone, however imposed by commercial presumptions, is not merely sales pitch but continuing deprecation of its topic.

Habituation covers invisibility through familiarity of convention, and is for many reasons the commonest and most complicated of these categories. As Professor Parkes and others have repeatedly shown, punctuation (in any form) does not have absolute but only relative meaning, dependent on the particular repertoire of marks, spaces and other forms employed in a given culture at a given time, and typically operates through repertoires of contradistinguished conventions and regulated display. A full-stop, for example, is differentiated from the identical suspension-mark and low decimal-point through its physical and grammatical position with associated conventions of following space and initial capital letters. A full-stop that appears falsely, even if accompanied by properly associated conventions, becomes visible—but do readers notice the mark otherwise? Was your attention equally given to those following 'capital letters' and 'falsely'? To that last question?mark and the one after it? The difference measures the habituated invisibility of punctuation-marks and spaces employed according to commonly received conventions; a further measure is offered by the subcategory of *deictic* punctuation—differential faces, fonts and display, including capitalization, italicization, bolding, underlining and color, which precisely draw particular attention through specific emphasis.

Such habituation to conventionality is a function of efficiency, much as standardized letterforms and orthography assist the rapidity and reliability of written communication, and in everyday usage that is fine; any punctuation requiring special attention imposes delay, as an unfamiliar word might, and increases the chances of miscommunication. Only in works with a literary or other aesthetic dimension, seeking to convey original and unusual perceptions, may a profit readily be turned on usage of punctuation outwith or against current conventions—as in the cases of the Shandean and Dickinsonian dashes, the work of e e cummings and the last forty or so pages of *Ulysses*. The problem, however, is that while these examples are notorious, meaning most readers are cued to pay attention, observing lesser and unpredicted deviations from or exploitations of convention is inhibited by habituation, and as Randall McLeod has often demonstrated in his witty papers a great deal about the printed page typically passes before a reader's eyes quite unnoticed.[6]

6. See especially Random Cloud, 'FIAT *f* LUX', in R.M. Leod, editor, *Crisis in Editing: Texts of* *the English Renaissance* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1994), pp. 61-172.

What this means in practice is outlined by asking whether, as someone is 'reading' a text, they 'read' punctuation as well as letters? In some sense, if words, clauses or members, periods or sentences, and paragraphs have been correctly identified, the answer must be 'yes,' but while many readers (including most students and professional critics) might be able immediately to report on the imagery, motifs or structure of a text they have 'read,' very few (I speak from experience) are able to offer any serious comment about its punctuation. The various marks, spaces, faces, etc. have (supposedly) been registered, but only in passing; they have functioned to mean but not accumulated meaning, and have neither system nor general significance beyond the conventional; just as one explicit purpose of modernization is to remove any punctuation that might oblige a reader to think, and to replace it with punctuation that will be as habituatedly invisible as possible.

Error covers invisibility through misreading—the failure to register punctuation or to register it correctly, either through tiredness of mind and/or eye, or through failure of display in the text being read. The habit of putting spaces *before* as well as after colons, semi-colons and sometimes other marks, common in higher-quality editions of fiction and nonfiction before the mid-twentieth century, was a means of forestalling such error ; its efficacy is especially evident if letter- and interword spacing is in any way reduced (as often in columnar text). The commonest errors are almost certainly missing a colon, misreading one as a full-stop, or misreading a semi-colon as a comma, when the mark follows a letter that has a minim on the (far) right of the letterspace, as 'n' and 'm' do, or a minim, limb, or headstroke that terminates close to the mark's upper point, as 'r,' 't,' 'k,' 'w' and 'f' may. In serifed fonts a full-stop may also be lost through proximity to a terminal minim. Font design and quality of printing may of course lessen or compound the difficulty, while reading on backlit screens typically increases it, especially if ergonomics have not been considered and the screen is being read at an awkward angle or is small. If a reader is being consistently careful in parsing grammar the error should rapidly be manifest, and prove correctable with backtracking—if s/he bothers to do so, a bigger 'if' than scholars and teachers might care to think. The modern decline of the colon and semi-colon may reflect the loss of typographical practices intended to make them easily identifiable, but their abandonment seriously impairs the possibilities of meaning and does nothing to help us with the prose of Jane Austen, Henry James, William Faulkner or Paul Scott.

Finally, *absence* covers the particular circumstance described by T.S. Eliot when he insisted that punctuation in *Four Quartets* "includes the absence of punctuation

marks, when they are omitted where the reader would expect them."[7] Only conventional punctuation can be so invisible, for if there is no reason to expect a given mark—or space, or other punctuation—the absence of that punctuation cannot sensibly be registered. The problems mentioned under 'habituation' and 'error' also apply, for such absence may be misidentified as error, consciously or otherwise, and so ignored, or may wrongly pass unseen—as anyone will understand who has had the experience of discovering a typo only on re-reading a particular copy, and thought through what such a discovery implies about the quality of first reading and the handy-dandy of eye and mind when dealing with expectable conventions and their observance.

These five categories are, at root, ontological, modes in which invisibility may manifest, and as such subject to the epistemological variations of technology—as some of my examples register. Although in a broad sense the clarity of display of written and printed texts has risen over time, with discontinuous improvements occasionally introduced by new technologies, the process has not been regular or consistent. In some places particular considerations apply—the German retention of Fraktur into the 1970s, for example—but in all there was and is a commercial trade-off between desirability and cost. As a general rule, greater clarity in cold- or hot-metal printed material requires (within practical limits) larger fonts, heavier leading and/or higher quality paper; which mean more pages and/or greater page-size and weight, and hence higher costs of production and distribution. During the British eighteenth century, when the means of production was still the hand-press (limiting print-runs) and printers enjoyed the extraordinary advantages of high monopoly,[8] books of exceptional clarity were produced—including *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), the conception, execution and reception of which *depend* on such clarity. By the mid-nineteenth century, conversely, with machine-presses at work, monopolistic advantage diminishing, and interior lighting improving by orders of magnitude, many books show far smaller, cramped type in which the possibility of invisibility by error is massively greater. It has yet to be proven, but the great nineteenth-century development of the combinate marks (dubbed by Nicolson Baker the colash, commash &c.[9]) was probably partly a response to that problem, as were the increased use by mainstream publishers of additional spacing before certain medial punctuation marks, and the evolution of such conventions of typewriting

7. Sleeve-notes to the recording of *Four Quartets*, quoted in Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 342.
8. See William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially chapters 1-4.
9. See Nicolson Baker, The History of Punctuation, in *The Size of Thoughts* (London: Chatto, 1996).

as the double-space sentence break; certainly the fairly abrupt demise of combinate marks during the first third of the twentieth century coincided with a renewed attention to space characteristic of Modernism as well as mass re-setting of older texts occasioned by the forced melting down for munitions, during WWI, of many tens of thousands of stereotype plates.

One aspect of that attention, the advent of the typewriter, is a primary example of technology influencing epistemology, but while there is some awareness among scholars of the consequences of typewritten quantization of the page-measure, and of some proto-/Modernist literature as profoundly revealing the presence of typewriters and typescripts in its processes of composition,[10] that awareness has not been much extended. Even scholars of contemporaneous work, perforce aware that digital technologies may radically affect literary composition, publication and/or distribution and reception, often fail to consider the effects of differing screen technologies and sizes on rate and accuracy of data-absorption and -retention.[11] In other words, it seems universally assumed that ink-on-paper (handwritten, typewritten or printed), electron-beam projection, LED, LCD, e-ink and all other reading platforms are uniformly equivalent, transparent, neutral media without effect of any kind on data-production, -transmission, or –reception—and this despite commercial experience plainly demonstrating that 'identical' texts do not fare equally in deadtree, PDF and re-flowable formats, nor on laptops, iPads and equivalent, e-readers like the Iliad and Kindle and palmtop devices like the Blackberry and iPhone. Nor does anything much seem yet to have been said about the kinds of easy, web-mediated contacts that are increasingly normative between writers and readers of fiction as a standard aspect of digitally-based marketing, and that exhibit a reversion from the relative isolation of authors and top-down control of twentieth-century publishing to models variously resembling subscription and serial publication.

The technological context, in other words, is as critical for scholarship as for scholars, for authors as for readers. Professor Parkes, born in 1930, learned to see punctuation primarily as a palaeographer, but there have down the centuries been many palaeographers who did not so learn, and it is not coincidental that he had the advantage of living in an age of photographic (and latterly digital) facsimiles and rapid, affordable long-distance travel. Most who have followed him in punctuation studies are of the digital age, and have long internalized the kind of control over

10. Leon Edel devoted a chapter to the advent of partly typewritten composition, A Fierce Legibility; see *The Life of Henry James* (definitive edition, in 2 vols, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), II. 230-4. There is a useful chapter, What Remington Wrought, in Baron's *Alphabet to Email*, pp. 197-215; for technical detail see Wilfred A. Beeching, *Century of the Typewriter* (Bournemouth: British Typewriter Museum Publishing, 1974). 11. See, for example, David Ciccoricco, *Reading Network Fiction* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007).

display that word-processing makes possible. From this point my argument could be pursued in many directions, but serious investigation of punctuational invisibility in digital texts is grossly complicated—the effects of what happens if you tell your word-processing program to 'reveal formatting' provide one set of problems, and the variegated multitude of hardware and software involved many more. I therefore turn to a different analytical approach, taking a specific example of a punctuation that has been rendered all but wholly invisible, with deleterious consequences for readings of the host text.

Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* (or *Apologie for Poetrie*, or, latterly, *Defence of Poetry*) is the most widely cited (and frequently read) work of sixteenth-century English criticism. A founding document of Anglophone literary studies, much edited and anthologized, it survives in two manuscripts and two early editions that Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten, in their Clarendon *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney* (1973), label 'Pe,' 'N,' 'P' and 'O.' Pe is a scribal manuscript (De L'Isle 1226) once belonging to Robert Sidney and still owned by Viscount De L'Isle of Penshurst Place, N a scribal manuscript (MS10837) once belonging to the antiquarian Francis Blomefield and now in Norfolk County Record Office, P an edition titled *The Defence of Poesie* printed by Thomas Creede for William Ponsonby in 1595 (STC 22535) and O an edition titled *An Apologie for Poetrie* printed (anonymously) by James Roberts for Henry Olney in the same year (STC 22534). Introducing the *Defence* in the *Miscellaneous Prose*, van Dorsten says "variants prove [...] that no known text descends directly from one of the other three, and that no simple stemma can be reconstructed," and the Clarendon editors adopted Pe and P as "the two most authoritative texts"—Pe as an MS close enough to the original to have remained in the Sidneys' possession, and P because Ponsonby was "the established printer of Sidney's literary remains," who "obtained his copy [...] directly from the author's sister and [...] literary executor, Greville," and whose legal claim to the text was explicitly recognized when Olney's entry in the Stationers' Register was cancelled sometime in the summer of 1595.[12]

Ponsonby's *de facto* 'authorized' edition is not adopted as sole authority because (says van Dorsten) "Regrettably, P is such a carelessly produced book that it cannot be used independently" and must be "handled with particular caution because of its tendency towards sophistication"—by which is meant P's repetition (relative to Pe) of a quotation to illustrate the figure of repetition, correction of a phrase, addition of

two more and addition of a gloss. Elsewhere van Dorsten remarks that "Unlike [P, O] was edited and printed with great care. The text is divided into paragraphs, the punctuation is fairly accurate, mistakes and misprints are rare, and a short *errata* list and some preliminary matter were added."[13] This is the only direct reference by the Clarendon editors to punctuation, but is sufficient to invite some pointed questions.

To begin with, how is it possible for the punctuation of an independent textual witness to be deemed 'accurate' or 'inaccurate'? The copy-text being by definition unknown, compositorial fidelity of reproduction from copy cannot be meant—but what else is possibly in/accurate about any such punctuation? 'Common sense' suggests van Dorsten did not in fact mean 'accurate' but something like 'recognizably conventional by what I believe and understand to have been prevailing contemporary standards,' but questions remain begged and the qualification—"the punctuation is *fairly* accurate"—poses an intractably *ad hominem* problem. More generally, I confess to considerable surprise on first encountering van Dorsten's characterisation of P as "carelessly produced," for it is a text with which I am closely familiar as a reader (and owner) of the Scolar Press facsimile (1968), which photographically reproduces in original size the copy in the British Museum (shelf-mark C.57.b.38). There are certainly features I would identify as errors—an omitted full-stop or colon preceding a capitalized "But" on B1r, 'nay' for 'may' on B2r, etc.—but the text as a whole does not seem remotely to deserve such swingeing condemnation and many passages demonstrate precise, printerly care:

> Marry these other pleasaunt fault-finders, who will correct the *Verbe*, before they understand the *Nowne*, and confute others knowledge, before they confirme their owne, I would haue them onely remember, that scoffing cometh not of wisdome ; so as the best title in true English they get with their meriments, is to be called good fooles : for so haue our graue forefathers euer tearmed that humorous kinde of iesters. But that which giueth greatest scope to their scorning humor, is ryming and versing. It is alreadie said (and as I think truly said) it is not ryming and versing that maketh *Poesie* : One may be a *Poet* without versing and a versefier without *Poetrie*. [F3v, omitting ligatures and substituting short- for long-s]

Much may seem odd to modern sensibilities, but the *only* thing here that could remotely be supposed "careless" is the use of italic colons after "fooles" and "*Poesie*," and cases can be made that the second is perfectly proper (it follows an italicized word) and that the face of marks was not sufficiently policed either in

13. Duncan-Jones and van Dorsten, pp. 68, 66.

setting or redistributing type to warrant labelling any variant-faced punctuation 'in error.' The structurally emphatic upper-case letter after the second ("One") is unexceptionable in any printed Elizabethan period, such medial capitalization is practiced throughout P, and like italicization is in general, as here, exactly deployed. The other marks in this sample are equally conventional and normative, and the orthography, if mildly inconsistent by modern standards, is entirely unexceptional by contemporary ones; nor is there any manifest grammatical problem or textual crux, though one might desire a comma after the opening "Marry." Additionally one might note (though there is no instance here) that tittles (indicating omitted 'n' or 'm') appear consistently where they ought, though the difficulty of setting them (which requires type-letters incorporating the tittle that must be distinguished in composing and redistributing type from those that do not, or a second terrace of type that complicates interlineal leading) suggests they should be among the first victims of careless setting.

What, then, earns P such dismissive scorn as a witness? The probable answer is implicit in van Dorsten's observation of O that the "text is divided into paragraphs"—for it is, astonishingly, the case that the text of P is *not* so divided (*figure 1*). Excluding pre- and postlims, the text is in P arranged on 67 pages, normally of 32 lines (plus running-head and catchword), amounting in all to 2135 lines (including the two-line title and terminal 'Finis'); and all 67 pages, though justified to both margins, constitute a single paragraph, to the best of my knowledge far and away the longest in English literature.[14] *That*, one might well think, cannot be right—but it seems equally impossible to suppose, as I must presume van Dorsten to have done with Duncan-Jones's consent, that 'carelessness' is a plausible explanation. Can the same compositors and printer who deployed italics, capitals and tittles with persistent precision, who knew they were working on an 'authorized' edition that would be scrutinized by noble patrons, and who took steps to secure their legal rights against a piracy, really be supposed to have composed and imposed 2132 lines of main text on 67 pages without noticing or caring that (what would in the normal course of things be) *scores* of missing paragraph-breaks? Can the dullest compositor/s be supposed to make such an error of omission not once

14. Beside whatever may happen in the last pages of *Ulysses*, Sidney's nearest competitor is probably Faulkner, especially in *Absalom, Absalom!*, wherein (in the Library of America edition) several paragraphs exceed five pages; there is also the 33-page *sentence* that begins Act III of *Requiem for a Nun*, but it is divided into multiple paragraphs. In French, Jean-Christophe Valtat's monoparagraphic and monologic novella 03 (Paris: Gallimard, 2005; Mitzi Angel, translator, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010) runs to 81 pages in translation; in German, Friedrich Christian Delius's *Bildnis der Mutter als junge Frau* (2006; Jamie Bulloch, translator, as *Portrait of the Mother as a Young Woman*, London: Peirene Press, 2010) is a single, multi-paragraphic sentence running to 117 pages in translation.

flowers,and then we muſt beleeue the ſtage to be a
garden. By and by we heare newes of ſhipwrack in
the ſame place, then we are too blame if we accept
it not for a Rock. Vpon the back of that,comes out a
hidious monſter with fire and ſmoke , and then the
miſerable beholders are bound to take it for a Caue:
while in the meane time two Armies flie in, repre-
ſented with foure ſwords & bucklers,and the what
hard hart wil not receiue it for a pitched field. Now
of time,they are much more liberall. For ordinarie
it is,that two yoong Princes fall in loue, after many
trauerſes ſhe is got with childe, deliuered of a faire
boy: he is loſt, groweth a man, falleth in loue, and
is readie to get an other childe, and all this in two
houres ſpace: which howe abſurd it is in ſence, e-
uen ſence may imagine : and Arte hath taught,
and all auncient examples iuſtified , and at this
day the ordinarie players in *Italie* will not erre in.
Yet will ſome bring in an example of *Eunuche* in
Terence, that conteineth matter of two dayes, yet far
ſhort of twentie yeares. True it is , and ſo was it to
be played in two dayes, and ſo fitted to the time it
ſet foorth. And though *Plautus* haue in one place
done amiſſe, let vs hit it with him, & not miſſe with
him. But they will ſay,how then ſhall we ſet foorth
a ſtorie, which contains both many places,and ma-
ny times? And do they not know that a Tragidie is
tied to the lawes of *Poeſie* and not of Hiſtorie: not
bounde to follow the ſtorie, but hauing libertie ei-
ther to faine a quite new matter, or to frame the Hi-
ſtorie to the moſt Tragicall conueniencie. Againe,
many things may be told which cannot be ſhewed :
if

Figure 1: A random opening from P, H4v–I1r, photoquoted from the Scolar Press facsimile
(Menston, 1968), which reproduces BM C.57.b.38. The absence of paragraph-breaks and

if they know the difference betwixt reporting and representing. As for example, I may speake though I am here, of *Peru*, and in speech digresse from that, to the description of *Calecut* : But in action, I cannot represent it without *Pacolets* Horse. And so was the manner the Auncients tooke, by some *Nuntius*, to recount things done in former time or other place. Lastly, if they will represent an Historie, they must not (as *Horace* saith) beginne *ab ouo*, but they must come to the principall poynte of that one action which they will represent. By example this will be best expressed. I haue a storie of yoong *Polidorus*, deliuered for safeties sake with great riches, by his Father *Priamus* , to *Polminester* King of *Thrace*, in the *Troyan* warre time. He after some yeares, hearing the ouerthrowe of *Priamus*, for to make the treasure his owne, murthereth the Childe, the bodie of the Childe is taken vp, *Hecuba*, shee the same day, findeth a sleight to bee reuenged moste cruelly of the Tyrant. Where nowe would one of our Tragedie writers begin, but with the deliuerie of the Childe ? Then should hee saile ouer into *Thrace*, and so spende I know not howe many yeares, and trauaile numbers of places. But where dooth *Euripides ?* euen with the finding of the bodie, the rest leauing to be told by the spirite of *Polidorus* . This needes no further to bee enlarged, the dullest witte may conceiue it . But besides these grosse absurdities, howe all their Playes bee neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies, mingling Kinges and Clownes, not because the matter so carrieth it, but

<div align="center">I   thrust</div>

the general care of the printers with regard to capitalization, italicization, tittles and other punctuation are equally evident.

but dozens of times, while attending to all other detail and justifying every line—a laborious, finicky process involving hair-spaces during which the final lines of paragraphs, requiring no right-justification, are warmly welcome?

From the various modern editions one must believe so, for though their (supposed) copy-text is almost always primarily P, every one I have been able to examine is paragraphed (if variously), and no introduction or criticism that I can find among them discusses at any length (if it even mentions) what is far and away the strangest feature of that edition. The *absence* of paragraph-breaks, that ought to register forcefully, is wholly obliterated by their supply, and the question that should follow, concerning the possible reasons for such a strange invisibility, is not even asked. But if that absence is not a result of 'carelessness' it must be a fruit of care, and the only conceivable reason for a professional printer to take such strange care is an instruction to do so. One might also note at this juncture, first, that P does have one other absence, much less peculiar but in context intriguing—it prints no page-numbers and so enhances the uniformity of sequent openings, only signatures and variant catchwords registering one's reading progress; and second, that N, a folio MS of 19 leaves in a "late sixteenth-century hand,"[15] is also unparagraphed.[16] The provenance of N is unknown before it was bound with other MSS by Francis Blomefield, probably in 1722–6,[17] but it is a fair copy with neat margins, the hand is small and precise, and capitalization is carefully observed—considerations that collectively make it improbable the unknown scribe willfully omitted paragraph-breaks (without even noting them, as a space-saver might), and so suggests with some force that his or her copy-text was also unparagraphed.

There are, then, reasons (that seem compelling) to accept the single paragraph of P as intentional, to presume it authorized by Sidney's literary executors, and to believe that at least one text anterior to N (and perhaps to Pe) was also mono-paragraphic—so what purpose might such a wilfully unconventional and hyper-extended trope serve?

Paragraphing dates to at least the second century BCE, and while the relations of paragraphs with periods are considerably more uncertain and complex than those with sentences, all involve the paragraph as a unit both of argument and, in narrative, of emotion, tone, register or some combination of these. The experience of reading P's 2132-line, 67-page paragraph forcefully brings to mind the apparently

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15. *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, p. 65.
16. Pe, the Penshurst MS bearing Robert Sidney's autograph, may also be unparagraphed: I have been unable to consult it but the recollections of those who have are that it is monoparagraphic. If so, of the early witnesses *only* the pirated O would be paragraphed.
17. This dating is that of the Norfolk Records Office, which has extensive holdings of Blomefield materials because of his importance as a topographic historian of the county.

rambling style and content notoriously deployed in the slightly later prose pamphlets of Nashe. Certainly one is invited by the sheer continuity of un-paragraphed prose, and by jumping, tumbling associations amid accumulating argument, to suppose a loquacious oral discourse filled with expansive language (and gestures) rather than the closely reasoned, logically articulated treatise as which the paragraphed *Defence* is always presented and annotated in modern editions. This generic context might explain more happily than earnest logic the frequent conjunctions of high learning with vigorously colloquial phrasing ("But what? methinks I deserue to be pou[n]ded for straying from *Poetrie*, to *Oratory*," I4r), the somewhat shotgun invocation of at least 68 named authorities (as well as both Testaments) in 67 pages, and the license Sidney took to end with a "Curse" on those who despite his instruction still scorn or Platonically condemn poetry—"that while you liue, you liue in loue, and neuer get favour, for lacking skill of a Sonet, and when you die, your memorie die from the earth for want of an Epitaphe" (K2r). Against this may be set Sidney's oft-observed and very elegant deployment of the standard mediaeval model of formal scholastic argument (exordium, proposition, division, examination, refutation, digression and peroration)—but is a witty irony so inconceivable? Of a kind Sidney might presumably have intended in concealing such careful argumentative propriety within an absurd torrent of a paragraph?

The scholarship that surrounds the *Defence*, with all Sidney's work and life, is formidable, invoking and variously deploying an enormous range of supposed or demonstrated courtly necessities, social sensitivities, literary models, aesthetic ambitions and public or private agendas—so any non-specialist properly hesitates. Prominent among them, however, are responses to the tone of the *Defence* that confront a problem neatly summarized by Duncan-Jones in her biography:

> Despite the many ironical strategies used by Sidney in the *Defence*, we need not question his jokey assertion that the most powerful reason for writing it was 'self-love.' More than poesy was on trial: he was defending himself. Finding that he had 'slipped into the title of a poet' he sought to elevate the standing of this, his 'unelected vocation.' As he reached his late twenties and prepared to become Walsingham's son-in-law he was acutely conscious that 'my knowledge bring forth toys.' Writing imaginative fiction and love poetry was not what he had been primarily groomed for by his 'Dutch uncles.' An inessential social grace in a courtier had become for him a serious and central activity, lacking that 'recklessness,' or apparent carelessness, that should mark the incidental recreations of the true courtier.[18]

18. Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney:* 1991), p. 233.
Courtier Poet (London: Hamish Hamilton,

'Apparent carelessness' is a more inviting observation than van Dorsten's derogation of P, and if nuances might be eternally debated there seems to be no fundamental problem with the notion that *one* form the *Defence* took at Sidney's hand or direction—not necessarily the only form but the posthumously authorized form— was monoparagraphic; carefully seeming careless in its displayed articulation, and revealing beneath and through that levity such a gravity that levity and gravity alike commended (and in print accurately memorialized) their creator.

The proof of the pudding lies, as ever, in the eating. Before publication of the Scolar facsimile of P, and even then, access to the idea of a monoparagraphic *Defence* was extremely restricted, not least because in taphonomic bias far fewer copies of P than of O survive; but P has been known to serious scholars for decades, if not centuries, and in these web surfing days the problem is in any case obsolete. As early as 1992 Risa Bear transcribed P as a monoparagraphic text for Renascence Editions, and—with the possible advantage of no page-breaks—the monstrous whole can be read in scrolling view online.[19] I urge readers, especially those long familiar with paragraphed modern editions, to try Sidney's argument—diatribe? tease? performance?—in monoparagraphic form, preferably at a sitting and at speed. In a modern font, with backlighting, Elizabethan orthography and punctuation, if unfamiliar, need present no serious obstacle; and there is a good case (as with the poetry of Donne and more complex speeches in Shakespearean drama) that it is easier to parse the intricacies of periodic grammar reading at speed (thus building up the authorities and analogies at a clip that allows them to chime) than proceeding at a plod. Then compare the experience with that of encountering the (supposedly) logical modern progression of paragraphs; at the least there should be, amongst it all, a renewed appreciation of the invisible again made visible by removing the visible invisibilities of the paragraph-breaks ... or to that effect.

Argument by example brings me full circle, returning from cultural and personal to technological factors determining the visibility and nature of invisibility, and so to digital in/visibility. In many ways any punctuationist—'one who studies or treats of punctuation'—has prolific occasions for hope in the digital revolution; certainly the availability and accessibility of such transcriptions as Bear's trumps technological, financial, commercial and practical limitations on intellection, making possible as never before a genuine, sustained scholarship of punctuation. Yet there is little sign of any desire to abandon automatic modernization, or to do our past the favor of

19. See http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/
resour/mirrors/rbear/defence.html.

understanding that it punctuated things differently, with all that implies about how it formulated observation and argument.

One good thing is that an ever increasing percentage of scholars and students are regularly exposed to displays of text that, in one or another way, make (irritatingly) visible punctuation that has long been invisible, in one or another modality. It might be the process of onscreen proofreading, with medial dots, paragraphs, arrows, etc. indicating inter-word spaces, returns and tabs, or the appearance of an ' ' or equivalent in an email; creating one's own texts in html rather than rtf, reverting to laborious parenthesization of '<i>' and '</i>' (as when Amstrads were king), is also sensitizing, as every contributor to Wikipedia knows. But in conversation and teaching it often seems that for every student or critic of literature who has become aware of these considerations, there are several others for whom ' ' is immediately familiar once mentioned, but to whom it has never occurred that it is a straightforward abbreviation (in this case for 'non-breaking space') and readable source of information.[20] Close attention to text is yet in some disfavor, close attention to its metasystems a step beyond and attention to invisible metasystems taken as patently absurd, the authorities of T.S. Eliot and Professor Parkes notwithstanding. Most potent opportunities remain, but the powers of denial, repression, habituation and error remain more than sufficient silently to compromise Sidney and the critical tradition descended from him, in his absences as in his presence.

20. The problem arises because html uses angled brackets, ampersands, slashes and various other marks as part of its metalanguage and therefore requires a special means of indicating such characters when they occur in the language of a text; thus, an ampersand becomes '&', where the actual ampersand and the semi-colon merely indicate the beginning and end of a character definition, and the abbreviation 'amp' is what actually causes an ampersand to be displayed—or not, if the character-string has become corrupted (which may affect *everything* downstream) or the client software controlling textual display for whatever reason fails to recognize an html code and therefore displays the whole character-string as text. A comparable problem with a LISP bug is reported in Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 626 (ch. XVIII). I am grateful to Michael R. N. Dolbear for this reference and for technical advice about the workings of e-mail systems.

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