# SEMICOLON

The Past, Present, and Future of a Misunderstood Mark

## **CECELIA WATSON**

Parts of this book were previously published in Critical Inquiry.

SEMICOLON. Copyright © 2019 by Cecelia Watson. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address HarperCollins Publishers, 195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information, please e-mail the Special Markets Department at SPsales@harpercollins.com.

### FIRST EDITION

Designed by Suet Yee Chong
Illustrations by Anthony Russo

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Watson, Cecelia.

Title: Semicolon: the past, present, and future of a misunderstood mark / Cecelia Watson.

Description: First edition. | New York : Ecco, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018045968 (print) | LCCN 2018056939 (ebook) | ISBN 9780062853073 (ebook) | ISBN 9780062853059 | ISBN 9780062853066 | ISBN 9780062917935 | ISBN 9780062917942

Subjects: LCSH: English language—Punctuation. | Semicolon.

Classification: LCC PE1450 (ebook) | LCC PE1450 .W38 2019 (print) | DDC 428.2/3—dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018045968

ISBN 978-0-06-285305-9

19 20 21 22 23 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

politani etiam tractus extimantur. Niuibus per hyemem ferè totus mons canet:cacumen neq; per aestatem uiduatur. B. P. Quid, quod hyemare tantum easmeminit Strabo: B. F. Atexperien tia ita te docet, usq; ipseauctor (quod qui dem uenia illius dixerim) non deterior. Quareillud mi pater etia, atq; etiam uide; ne quid temoueat, si aliqua ex parte huius nostri de Aetna sermoniscum uetustisseri ptoribus dissentimus: nihil enim impedit fuisse tum ea omnia, quaeipsi olim tradi dere, quorum permaserint plurima in no stram diem; quaedam seimmutauerit; ali qua etiam furrexerint noua: nam (ut caete ra omittam); quod cinerosa partim esse fumma cacumina dictauere; eius rei nunc uestigium nullu apparet:cinis enim, qui queat conspici, toto mote nullus est: neq; id tamen omnibus annis fuit: nam mul torum testimonio accepimus, qui uidere, annos ab hinc quadraginta tan-



- (1) Some Writers have used Ye as the Objective Case Plural of the Pronoun of the Second Person; very improperly, and ungrammatically.
  - "The more shame for ye: holy men I thought ye."

    Shakspeare, Hen. VIII.
  - "But tyrants dread ye, lest your just degree
    Transfer the pow'r, and set the people free."
    Prior.
  - "His wrath, which one day will destroy se both."

    Milton, P. L. ii. 734.

Milton uses the same manner of expression in a few other places of his Paradise Lost, and more frequently in his

Shakespeare and Milton, both very improper!

"Oft have I feen a timely-parted ghost,
Of ashy femblance, meagre, pale, and bloodless,
Being all descended to the lab'ring heart,
Who, in the conslict that it holds with death,
Attracts the same for aidance 'gainst the enemy.'
Shakespear, 2 Hen. VI.

It ought to be,

- "Which, in the conflict that it holds"——
  Or, perhaps more poetically,
  - " Who, in the conflict that be holds with death."

Lowth giving Shakespeare a little lesson in grammar and poetry writing.\*

### PREFACE

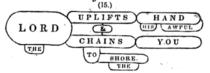
Ir is often said that English Grammar is a lifetime study, and it is a fact not to be disguised, that students usually prosecute this branch of science for years, to little practical purpose, as grammar pupils rarely speak or write more correctly than others Now, grammar is unworthy of a lifetime study; life is too important, and labor and money are too precious to be thus

invested, or, rather, wasted. "Time is money."—Dr. Franklin.
Is it not a little curious, that English Grammar should be a lifetime study? If so, who has yet mastered it? Who is competent to teach it? One would make rather an unprofitable effort, trying to teach what he did not understand himself. Would it not be more than unkind to require children to recite, and expect them to comprehend, what neither teachers nor authors understand, or

can explain?

Isaiah J. Morris, "offensive" from the very first page

### "The Lord uplifts his awful hand And chains you to the shore."



Compound sentence—transitive.

Principal Lord—Subject of "uplifts" and "chains."

Uplifts | And | Predicates of "Lord." | Chains."

You—Object of "uplifts."

You—Object of "chains."

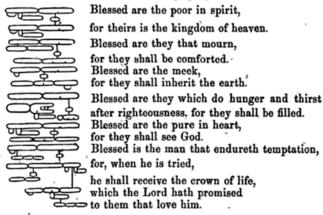
The—Adjunct of "Lord."

Adjuncts. | Adjuncts of "hand."

To the shore—Adjunct of "chains."

### EXAMPLES OF COMPLEX SENTENCES

Rem.—Let the pupil write the Diagram for each sentence on the black board and insert the words in the proper places.



466. The principal stops are the following:

The Comma (,) the semicolon (;) the colon (:) the period, or full stop (.) the note of interrogation (!) the note of exclamation (!)

467. The comma represents the shortest pause; the semicolon, a pause double that of the comma; the colon, double that of the semicolon; and the period, double that of the colon.

468. The duration of the pauses must be left to the taste of the reader or speaker.

493. When, however, these phrases are not considered important, and particularly in short sentences, the comma is not inserted; as, "There is surely a pleasure in acting kindly." "Idleness certainly is the mother of all vices." "He was at last convinced of his error."

494...\* The foregoing rules will, it is hoped, be found comprehensive; yet there may be some cases in which the student must rely on his own judgment.

Bullions and the tension between rules and taste

696. Rule I.—A semicolon must be placed between the members of compound sentences, unless the connection is exceedingly close; as "The wheel of fortune is ever turning; who can say, 'I shall be uppermost tomorrow'?"

If the members are very short, and the connection is close, the comma may be used in stead of the semicolon; as, "Man proposes, but God disposes."

- 697. Rule II.—A semicolon must be placed between the great divisions of sentences, when minor divisions occur that are separated by commas; as, "Plato called beauty a privilege of nature; Theocritus, a delightful prejudice."
- 698. Rule III.—A semicolon must be placed before an enumeration of particulars, when the names of the objects merely are given, without any formal introductory words; as, "There are three cases; the nominative, the possessive, and the objective."
- 699. Rule IV.—A semicolon must be placed before , when it introduces an example; as at the close of the last paragraph.

Quackenbos's rules for the semicolon

## POWER OF POINTS

Punctuation That Upset Work of Solons.

Comma or Semicolon Has Spoiled the Statutes.

Legal Decisions That Have Settled Colons.

Massachusetts and Ohio Cases Noted.

Baltimore Man Failed to Pay a Bill with a Semicolon.