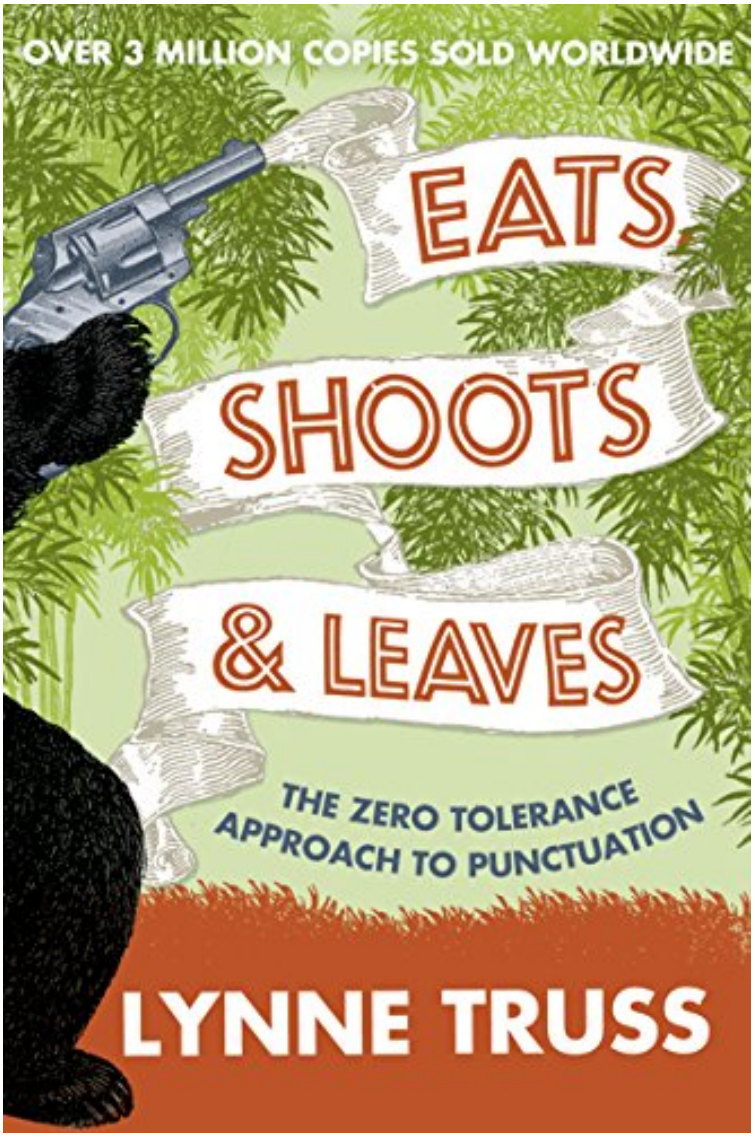
Eats, Shoots and Leaves



Par Lynne Truss
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(Ebook free) Eats, Shoots and Leaves

Par Lynne Truss : Eats, Shoots and Leaves before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Eats, Shoots and Leaves:

Description : Description du produitA bona fide publishing phenomenon, Lynne Trusss now classic #1 New York Times bestseller Eats, Shoots Leaves makes its paperback debut after selling over 3 million copies worldwide in hardcover. We all know the basics of punctuation. Or do we? A look at most neighborhood signage tells a different story. Through sloppy usage and low standards on the Internet, in e-mail, and now text messages, we have made proper punctuation an endangered species. In Eats, Shoots Leaves, former editor Truss dares to say, in her delightfully urbane, witty, and very English way, that it is time to look at our commas and semicolons and see them as the wonderful and necessary things they are. This is a book for people who love punctuation and get upset when it is mishandled. From the invention of the question mark in the time of Charlemagne to George Orwell shunning the semicolon, this lively history makes a powerful case for the preservation of a system of printing conventions that is much too subtle to be mucked about with.

Prsentation de l'diteurAnxious about the apostrophe? Confused by the comma? Stumped by the semicolon? Join Lynne Truss on a hilarious tour through the rules of punctuation that is sure to sort the dashes from the hyphens.We all had the basic rules of punctuation drilled into us at school, but punctuation pedants have good reason to suspect they never sank in. Its Summer! screams a sign that sets our teeth on edge. Pansys ready, we learn to our considerable interest (Is she?) as we browse among the bedding plants.It is not only the rules of punctuation that have come under attack but also a sense of why they matter. In this runaway bestseller, Lynne Truss takes the fight to emoticons and greengrocers apostrophes with a war cry of Sticklers unite!ExtraitIntroduction The Seventh Sense Either this will ring bells for you, or it wont. A printed banner has appeared on the concourse of a petrol station near to where I live. Come inside, it says, for CDs, VIDEOs, DVDs, and BOOKs.If this satanic sprinkling of redundant apostrophes causes no little gasp of horror or quickening of the pulse, you should probably put down this book at once. By all means congratulate yourself that you are not a pedant or even a stickler; that you are happily equipped to live in a world of plummeting punctuation standards; but just dont bother to go any further. For any true stickler, you see, the sight of the plural word Books with an apostrophe in it will trigger a ghastly private emotional process similar to the stages of bereavement, though greatly accelerated. First there is shock. Within seconds, shock gives way to disbelief, disbelief to pain, and pain to anger. Finally (and this is where the analogy breaks down), anger gives way to a righteous urge to perpetrate an act of criminal damage with the aid of a permanent marker.Its tough being a stickler for punctuation these days. One almost dare not get up in the mornings. True, one occasionally hears a marvellous punctuation-fan joke about a panda who eats, shoots and leaves, but in general the sticklers exquisite sensibilities are assaulted from all sides, causing feelings of panic and isolation. A sign at a health club will announce, Its party time, on Saturday 24th May we are have a disco/party night for free, it will be a ticket only evening. Advertisements offer decorative services to walls ceilings doors ect. Meanwhile a newspaper placard announces FANS FURY AT STADIUM INQUIRY, which sounds quite interesting until you look inside the paper and discover that the story concerns a quite large mob of fans, actually not just the lone hopping-mad fan so promisingly indicated by the punctuation.Everywhere one looks, there are signs of ignorance and indifference. What about that film Two Weeks Notice? Guaranteed to give sticklers a very nasty turn, that was its posters slung along the sides of buses in letters four feet tall, with no apostrophe in sight. I remember, at the start of the Two Weeks Notice publicity campaign in the spring of 2003, emerging cheerfully from Victoria Station (was I whistling?) and stopping dead in my tracks with my fingers in my mouth. Where was the apostrophe? Surely there should be an apostrophe on that bus? If it were one months notice there would be an apostrophe (I reasoned); yes, and if it were one weeks notice there would be an apostrophe. Therefore two weeks notice requires an apostrophe! Buses that I should have caught (the 73; two 38s) sailed off up Buckingham Palace Road while I communed thus at length with my inner stickler, unable to move or, indeed, regain any sense of perspective.Part of ones despair, of course, is that the world cares nothing for the little shocks endured by the sensitive stickler. While we look in horror at a badly punctuated sign, the world carries on around us, blind to our plight. We are like the little boy in The Sixth Sense who can see dead people, except that we can see dead punctuation. Whisper it in petrified little-boy tones: dead punctuation is invisible to everyone else yet we see it all the time. No one understands us seventh-sense people. They regard us as freaks. When we point out illiterate mistakes we are often aggressively instructed to get a life by people who, interestingly, display no evidence of having lives themselves. Naturally we become timid about making our insights known, in such inhospitable conditions. Being burned as a witch is not safely enough off the agenda. A sign has gone up in a local charity-shop window which says, baldly, Can you spare any old records (no question mark) and I dither daily outside on the pavement. Should I go in and mention it? It does matter that theres no question mark on a direct question. It is appalling ignorance. But what will I do if the elderly charity-shop lady gives me the usual disbelieving stare and then tells me to bugger off, get a life and mind my own business?On the other hand, Im well aware there is little profit in asking for sympathy for sticklers. We are not the easiest people to feel sorry for. We refuse to patronise any shop with checkouts for eight items or less (because it should be fewer), and we got very worked up after 9/11 not because of Osama bin-Laden but because people on the radio kept saying enormity when they meant magnitude, and we really hate that. When we hear the construction Mr Blair was stood (instead of standing) we suck our teeth with annoyance, and when words such as phenomena, media or cherubim are treated as singular (The media says it was quite a phenomena looking at those cherubims), some of us cannot suppress actual screams. Sticklers never read a book without a pencil at hand, to correct the typographical errors. In short, we are unattractive know-all obsessives who

get things out of proportion and are in continual peril of being disowned by our exasperated families.I know precisely when my own damned stickler personality started to get the better of me. In the autumn of 2002, I was making a series of programmes about punctuation for Radio 4 called Cutting a Dash. My producer invited John Richards of the Apostrophe Protection Society to come and talk to us. At that time, I was quite tickled by the idea of an Apostrophe Protection Society, on whose website could be found photographic examples of ungrammatical signs such as The judges decision is final and No dogs. We took Mr Richards on a trip down Berwick Street Market to record his reaction to some greengrocers punctuation (Potatoes and so on), and then sat down for a chat about how exactly one goes about protecting a conventional printers mark that, through no fault of its own, seems to be terminally flailing in a welter of confusion.What the APS does is write courteous letters, he said. A typical letter would explain the correct use of the apostrophe, and express the gentle wish that, should the offending BOB,S PETS sign (with a comma) be replaced one day, this well-meant guidance might be borne in mind. It was at this point that I felt a profound and unignorable stirring. It was the awakening of my Inner Stickler. But thats not enough! I said. Suddenly I was a-buzz with ideas. What about issuing stickers printed with the words This apostrophe is not necessary? What about telling people to shin up ladders at dead of night with an apostrophe-shaped stencil and a tin of paint? Why did the Apostrophe Protection Society not have a militant wing? Could I start one? Where do you get balaclavas?,Punctuation has been defined many ways. Some grammarians use the analogy of stitching: punctuation as the basting that holds the fabric of language in shape. Another writer tells us that punctuation marks are the traffic signals of language: they tell us to slow down, notice this, take a detour, and stop. I have even seen a rather fanciful reference to the full stop and comma as the invisible servants in fairy tales the ones who bring glasses of water and pillows, not storms of weather or love. But best of all, I think, is the simple advice given by the style book of a national newspaper: that punctuation is a courtesy designed to help readers to understand a story without stumbling.Isnt the analogy with good manners perfect? Truly good manners are invisible: they ease the way for others, without drawing attention to themselves. It is no accident that the word punctilious (attentive to formality or etiquette) comes from the same original root word as punctuation. As we shall see, the practice of pointing our writing has always been offered in a spirit of helpfulness, to underline meaning and prevent awkward misunderstandings between writer and reader. In 1644 a schoolmaster from Southwark, Richard Hodges, wrote in his The English Primrose that great care ought to be had in writing, for the due observing of points: for, the neglect thereof will pervert the sense, and he quoted as an example, My Son, if sinners intise [entice] thee consent thou, not refraining thy foot from their way. Imagine the difference to the sense, he says, if you place the comma after the word not: My Son, if sinners intise thee consent thou not, refraining thy foot from their way. This was the 1644 equivalent of Ronnie Barker in Porridge, reading the sign-off from a fellow lags letter from home, Now I must go and get on my lover, and then pretending to notice a comma, so hastily changing it to, Now I must go and get on, my lover.To be fair, many people who couldnt punctuate their way out of a paper bag are still interested in the way punctuation can alter the sense of a string of words. It is the basis of all Im sorry, Ill read that again jokes. Instead of What would you with the king? you can have someone say in Marlowes Edward II, What? Would you? With the king? The consequences of mispunctuation (and re-punctuation) have appealed to both great and little minds, and in the age of the fancy-that email a popular example is the comparison of two sentences:A woman, without her man, is nothing. A woman: without her, man is nothing.Which, I dont know, really makes you think, doesnt it? Here is a popular Dear Jack letter that works in much the same fundamentally pointless way: Dear Jack,I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when were apart. I can be forever happy will you let me be yours?Jill Dear Jack,I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men I yearn! For you I have no feelings whatsoever. When were apart I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?Yours,Jill But just to show there is nothing very original about all this, five hundred years before email a similarly tiresome puzzle was going round:Every Lady in this Land Hath 20 Nails on each Hand; Five twenty on Hands and Feet; And this is true, without deceit.(Every lady in this land has twenty nails. On each hand, five; and twenty on hands and feet.)So all this is quite amusing, but it is noticeable that no one emails the far more interesting example of the fateful mispunctuated telegram that precipitated the Jameson Raid on the Transvaal in 1896 I suppose thats a reflection of modern education for you. Do you know of the Jameson Raid, described as a fiasco? Marvellous punctuation story. Throw another log on that fire. The

Transvaal was a Boer republic at the time, and it was believed that the British and other settlers around Johannesburg (who were denied civil rights) would rise up if Jameson invaded. But unfortunately, when the settlers sent their telegraphic invitation to Jameson, it included a tragic ambiguity:It is under these circumstances that we feel constrained to call upon you to come to our aid should a disturbance arise here the circumstances are so extreme that we cannot but believe that you and the men under you will not fail to come to the rescue of people who are so situated.As Eric Partridge points out in his Usage and Abusage, if you place a full stop after the word aid in this passage, the message is unequivocal. It says, Come at once! If you put it after here, however, it says something more like, We might need you at some later date depending on what happens here, but in the meantime dont call us, Jameson, old boy; well call you. Of course, the message turned up at The Times with a full stop after aid (no one knows who put it there) and poor old Jameson just sprang to the saddle, without anybody wanting or expecting him to.All of which substantiates Partridges own metaphor for punctuation, which is that its the line along which the train (composition, style, writing) must travel if it isnt to run away with its driver. In other words, punctuation keeps sense on the rails. Of course people will always argue over levels of punctuation, accusing texts of having too much or too little. There is an enjoyable episode in Peter Halls Diaries when, in advance of directing Albert Finney in Hamlet, he fillets the text of practically all its punctuation except what is essential to sense and then finds he has to live with the consequences. On August 21, 1975, he notes, Shakespeares text is always absurdly over-punctuated; generations of scholars have tried to turn him into a good grammarian. All of which sounds sensible enough, until we find the entry for the first rehearsal on September 22, which he describes as good but also admits was a rough and ready, stumbling reading, with people falling over words or misplaced emphases.,What happened to punctuation? Why is it so disregarded when it is self-evidently so useful in preventing enormous mix-ups? A headline in todays paper says, DEAD SONS PHOTOS MAY BE RELEASED the story relating to dead sons in the plural, but you would never know. The obvious culprit is the recent history of education practice. We can blame the pedagogues. Until 1960, punctuation was routinely taught in British schools. A child sitting a County Schools exam in 1937 would be asked to punctuate the following puzzler: Charles the First walked and talked half an hour after his head was cut off (answer: Charles the First walked and talked. Half an hour after, his head was cut off). Today, thank goodness, the National Curriculum ensures that when children are eight, they are drilled in the use of the comma, even if their understanding of grammar is at such an early age a bit hazy. For Cutting a Dash we visited a school in Cheshire where quite small children were being taught that you use commas in the following situations:1 in a list2 before dialogue3 to mark out additional informationWhich was very impressive. Identifying additional information at the age of eight is quite an achievement, and I know for a fact that I couldnt have done it. But if things are looking faintly more optimistic under the National Curriculum, there remains the awful truth that, for over a quarter of a century, punctuation and English grammar were simply not taught in the majority of schools, with the effect that A-level examiners annually bewailed the condition of examinees written English, while nothing was done. Candidates couldnt even spell the words grammar and sentence, let alone use them in any well-informed way.Attending a grammar school myself between 1966 and 1973, I dont remember being taught punctuation, either. There was a comical moment in the fifth year when our English teacher demanded, But you have had lessons in grammar? and we all looked shifty, as if the fault was ours. We had been taught Latin, French and German grammar; but English grammar was something we felt we were expected to infer from our reading which is doubtless why I came a cropper over its and its. Like many uninstructed people, I surmised that, if there was a version of its with an apostrophe before the s, there was somehow logically bound to be a version of its with an apostrophe after the s as well. A shame no one set me right on this common misapprehension, really. But there you are. I just remember a period when, convinced that an apostrophe was definitely required somewhere, I would cunningly suspend a very small one immediately above the s, to cover all eventualities. Imagine my teenage wrath when, time after time, my homework was returned with this well-meant floating apostrophe struck out. Why? I would rail, using all my powers of schoolgirl inference and getting nowhere. Hadnt I balanced it perfectly? How could the teacher possibly tell I had put it in the wrong place?Luckily for me, I was exceptionally interested in English and got there in the end. While other girls were out with boyfriends on Sunday afternoons, getting their necks disfigured by love bites, I was at home with the wireless listening to an Ian Messiter quiz called Many a Slip, in which erudite and amusing contestants spotted grammatical errors in pieces of prose. It was a fantastic programme. I dream sometimes they have brought it back. Panellists such as Isobel Barnett and David Nixon would interrupt Roy Plomley with a buzz and say

Tautology! Around this same time, when other girls of my age were attending the Isle of Wight Festival and having abortions, I bought a copy of Eric Partridges Usage and Abusage and covered it in sticky-backed plastic so that it would last a lifetime (it has). Funny how I didnt think any of this was peculiar at the time, when it was behaviour with Proto Stickler written all over it. But I do see now why it was no accident that I later wound up as a sub-editor with a literal blue pencil.But to get back to those dark-side-of-the-moon years in British education when teachers upheld the view that grammar and spelling got in the way of self-expression, it is arguable that the timing of their grammatical apathy could not have been worse. In the 1970s, no educationist would have predicted the explosion in universal written communication caused by the personal computer, the internet and the key-pad of the mobile phone. But now, look whats happened: everyones a writer! Everyone is posting film reviews on that go like this:I watched this film [About a Boy] a few days ago expecting the usual hugh Grant bumbling ; character Ive come to loathe/expect over the years. I was thoroughly suprised. This film was great, one of the best films i have seen in a long time. The film focuses around one man who starts going to a single parents meeting, to meet women, one problem He doesnt have a child.Isnt this sad? People who have been taught nothing about their own language are (contrary to educational expectations) spending all their leisure hours attempting to string sentences together for the edification of others. And there is no editing on the internet! Meanwhile, in the world of text messages, ignorance of grammar and punctuation obviously doesnt affect a persons ability to communicate messages such as C U later. But if you try anything longer, it always seems to turn out much like the writing of the infant Pip in Great Expectations:MI DEER JO I OPE U R KRWITE WELL I OPE I SHAL SON B HABELL 4 2 TEEDGE U JO AN THEN WE SHORL B SO GLODD AN WEN I M PRENGTD 2 U JO WOT LARX AN BLEVE ME INF XN PIP.Now, there are many people who claim that they do fully punctuate text messages. For Cutting a Dash, we asked people in the street (outside the Palladium Theatre, as it happens, at about 5pm) if they used proper punctuation when sending text messages, and were surprised not to say incredulous when nine of out ten people said yes. Some of them said they used semicolons and parentheses and everything. Im a grammar geek, explained one young New Zealand woman. Im trying to teach my teenage son to punctuate properly, said a nice scholarly-looking man. I kept offering these respondents an easy way out: Its a real fag, going through that punctuation menu, though? I mean, it would be quite understandable if you couldnt be bothered. But we had evidently stumbled into Grammar Geek Alley, and there was nothing we could do. Of course I punctuate my text messages, I did A-level English, one young man explained, with a look of scorn. Evidently an A level in English is a sacred trust, like something out of The Lord of the Rings. You must go forth with your A level and protect the English language with your bow of elfin gold.But do you know what? I didnt believe those people. Either they were weirdly self-selecting or they were simply lying for the microphone. Point out to the newsagent that DEAD SONS PHOTOS MAY BE RELEASED is not grammatically complete and he will hastily change the subject to the price of milk. Stand outside a Leicester Square cinema indicating with a cut-out apostrophe on a stick how the title Two Weeks Notice might be easily grammatically corrected (I did this), and not a soul will take your side or indeed have a clue what your problem is. And thats sad. Taking our previous analogies for punctuation, what happens when it isnt used? Well, if punctuation is the stitching of language, language comes apart, obviously, and all the buttons fall off. If punctuation provides the traffic signals, words bang into each other and everyone ends up in Minehead. If one can bear for a moment to think of punctuation marks as those invisibly beneficent fairies (Im sorry), our poor deprived language goes parched and pillowless to bed. And if you take the courtesy analogy, a sentence no longer holds the door open for you to walk in, but drops it in your face as you approach.The reason its worth standing up for punctuation is not that its an arbitrary system of notation known only to an over-sensitive elite who have attacks of the vapours when they see it misapplied. The reason to stand up for punctuation is that without it there is no reliable way of communicating meaning. Punctuation herds words together, keeps others apart. Punctuation directs you how to read, in the way musical notation directs a musician how to play. As we shall see in the chapter on commas, it was first used by Greek dramatists two thousand years ago to guide actors between breathing points thus leading to the modern explanation of why a cat is not a comma:A cat has claws at the ends of its paws. A commas a pause at the end of a clause.Words strung together without punctuation recall those murky murals Rolf Harris used to paint, where you kept tilting your head and wondering what it was. Then Rolf would dip a small brush into a pot of white and to the deathless, teasing line, Can you guess what it is yet? add a line here, a dot there, a curly bit, and suddenly all was clear. Good heavens, it looked like just a splodge of colours and all along it was a kangaroo in football boots having a sandwich! Similarly, take a bit

of unpunctuated prose, add the dots and flourishes in the right place, stand back, and what have you got? My dear Joe,I hope you are quite well. I hope I shall soon be able to teach you, Joe and then we shall be so glad. And when I am apprenticed to you, Joe: what larks! Believe me, in affection,Pip ,Every language expert from Dr Johnson onwards has accepted that its a mistake to attempt to embalm the language. Of course it must change and adapt. When the time comes that Pips original text is equally readable with the one above, then our punctuation system can be declared dead and no one will mind. In the chapters that follow, we will see how it is in the nature of printers conventions (which is all punctuation marks are) to develop over time, usually in the cause of making language less fussy on the page. It is useful to remember, however as we struggle to preserve a system under attack that a reader from a couple of hundred years ago would be shocked by present-day punctuation that we now regard as flawless and elegant. Why dont we use capital letters for all nouns any more? Why dont we use full stops after everyday abbreviations? Why not combine colons with dashes sometimes? Where did all the commas go? Why isnt there a hyphen in today? Lawks-a-mussy, what sort of punctuation chickens are we at the beginning of the 21st century?Well, taking just the initial capital letters and the terminating full stop (the rest will come later), they have not always been there. The initial letter of a sentence was first capitalised in the 13th century, but the rule was not consistently applied until the 16th. In manuscripts of the 4th to 7th centuries, the first letter of the page was decorated, regardless of whether it was the start of a sentence and indeed, while we are on the subject of decorated letters, who can forget the scene in Not the Nine OClock News in which an elderly, exhausted monk unbent himself after years of illuminating the first page of the Bible, only to see that he had written, gloriously, Benesis? Nowadays, the convention for starting a new sentence with a capital letter is so ingrained that word-processing software will not allow you to type a full stop and then a lower case letter; it will capitalise automatically. This is bad news, obviously, for chaps like e.e. cummings, but good news for those who have spotted the inexorable advance of lower case into book titles, television captions, company names and (of course) everything on the non-case-sensitive internet, and lie awake at night worrying about the confusion this is spreading in young minds.Meanwhile, the full stop is surely the simplest mark to understand so long as everyone continues to have some idea what a sentence is, which is a condition that cant be guaranteed. As the original point (so called by Chaucer), it appears to occupy a place in our grammar that is unassailable. Every time the sentence ends, there is a full stop (or a full-stop substitute such as the exclamation mark or the question mark). As easy as that. If you resort to full stops all the time, by the way, and dont use anything else, and keep to very short sentences, people who have read H. W. Fowlers The Kings English (1906) will accuse you of spot plague and perhaps also assume you are modelling yourself on Ernest Hemingway, but the good news is you cant go wrong grammatically. The American name period, incidentally, was one of its original English names too. Just as the word comma originally referred to the piece of writing itself (rather than the mark that contained it), so period referred to a longer piece of writing. Shakespeare called the full stop a period in A Midsummer Nights Dream when he described nervous players making periods in the midst of sentences. This was on the occasion of one of the first (and unfunniest) scenes of someone wrecking the sense of a speech by putting the full stops in the wrong place: We do not come as minding to content you, Our true intent is. All for your delight We are not here.William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Nights Dream, Act V, scene iHo hum. But we should not be complacent even on behalf of the robust and unambiguous full stop. Young people call them dots, you know. They are now accustomed to following a full stop with a lower-case letter and no space. Ask them to write seven-thirty in figures (7.30) and they will probably either put a colon in it (because their American software uses a colon for 7:30) or write 7-30 or 730. Meanwhile, the illiterate default punctuation mark is nowadays the comma, which gives even more cause for alarm:The tap water is safe to drink in tea and coffee, however, we recommend using bottled water for drinking, it can be purchased very cheaply in the nearby shops.Sixty years ago, when he wrote Mind the Stop, G. V. Carey gave just one paragraph to the apostrophe, because there was so little to say about it. If only all marks were so easy, he sighed. But this was in an age when people had been taught the difference between Am I looking at my dinner or the dogs? and Am I looking at my dinner or the dogs? What I hope will become clear from this book is that one can usefully combine a descriptive and prescriptive approach to what is happening to this single aspect of the language. The descriptive sort of linguist tends to observe change in the language, note it, analyse it and manage not to wake up screaming every night. He will opine that if (say) the apostrophe is turning up in words such as Books, then thats a sure sign nobody knows how to use it any more; that it has outlasted its usefulness; it is like Tinkerbell with her little light fading, sustained only by elicited applause; it will ultimately fade, extinguish and die. This is a highly sane and

healthy point of view, of course if a little emotionally cool. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, severely prescriptive grammarians would argue that, since they were taught at school in 1943 that you must never start a sentence with And or But, the modern world is benighted by ignorance and folly, and most of modern literature should be burned.Somewhere between these positions is where I want us to end up: staunch because we understand the advantages of being staunch; flexible because we understand the rational and historical necessity to be flexible. In Mind the Stop Carey defines punctuation as being governed two-thirds by rule and one-third by personal taste. My own position is simple: in some matters of punctuation there are simple rights and wrongs; in others, one must apply a good ear to good sense. I want the greatest clarity from punctuation, which means, supremely, that I want apostrophes where they should be, and I will not cease from mental fight nor shall my sword sleep in my hand (hang on, didnt Jerusalem begin with an And?) until everyone knows the difference between its and its and bloody well nobody writes about dead sons photos without indicating whether the photos in question show one son or several. There is a rumour that in parts of the Civil Service workers have been pragmatically instructed to omit apostrophes because no one knows how to use them any more and this is the kind of pragmatism, I say along with Winston Churchill, up with which we shall not put. How dare anyone make this decision on behalf of the apostrophe? What gives the Civil Service or, indeed, Warner Brothers the right to decide our Tinkerbell should die? How long will it be before a mainstream publisher allows an illiterate title into print? How long before the last few punctuation sticklers are obliged to take refuge together in caves?So what I propose is action. Sticklers unite, you have nothing to lose but your sense of proportion, and arguably you didnt have a lot of that to begin with. Maybe we wont change the world, but at least well feel better. The important thing is to unleash your Inner Stickler, while at the same time not getting punched on the nose, or arrested for damage to private property. You know the campaign called Pipe Down, against the use of piped music? Well, ours will be Pipe Up. Be a nuisance. Do something. And if possible use a bright red pen. Send back emails that are badly punctuated; return letters; picket Harrods. Who cares if members of your family abhor your Inner Stickler and devoutly wish you had an Inner Scooby-Doo instead? At least if you adopt a zero tolerance approach, when you next see a banner advertising CDs, DVDs, Videos, and Books, you wont just stay indoors getting depressed about it. Instead you will engage in some direct-action argy-bargy! Because heres the important thing you wont be alone.Thats always been the problem for sticklers, you see. The feeling of isolation. The feeling of nerdishness. One solitary obsessive, feebly armed with an apostrophe on a stick, will never have the nerve to demonstrate outside Warner Brothers on the issue of Two Weeks Notice. But if enough people could pull together in a common cause, who knows what we might accomplish? There are many obstacles to overcome here, not least our national characteristics of reserve (its impolite to tell someone theyre wrong), apathy (someone else will do it) and outright cowardice (is it worth being duffed up for the sake of a terminally ailing printers convention?). But I have faith. I do have faith. And I also have an Inner Stickler that, having been unleashed, is now roaring, salivating and clawing the air in a quite alarming manner.,There is just one final thing holding us back, then. It is that every man is his own stickler. And while I am very much in favour of forming an army of well-informed punctuation vigilantes, I can foresee problems getting everyone to pull in the same direction. There will be those, for example, who insist that the Oxford comma is an abomination (the second comma in ham, eggs, and chips), whereas others are unmoved by the Oxford comma but incensed by the trend towards under-hyphenation which the Oxford comma people have quite possibly never even noticed. Yes, as Evelyn Waugh wrote: Everyone has always regarded any usage but his own as either barbarous or pedantic. Or, as Kingsley Amis put it less delicately in his book The Kings English (1997), the world of grammar is divided into berks and wankers berks being those who are outrageously slipshod about language, and wankers those who are (in our view) abhorrently over-precise. Left to the berks, the English language would die of impurity, like late Latin. Left to the wankers, it would die instead of purity, like medieval Latin. Of course, the drawback is implicit. When you by nature subscribe to the view that everyone except yourself is a berk or a wanker, it is hard to bond with anybody in any rational common cause.You think those thuggish chaps in movie heist gangs fall out a bit too quickly and mindlessly? Well, sticklers are worse. The Czech novelist Milan Kundera once fired a publisher who insisted on replacing a semicolon with a full stop; meanwhile, full-time editors working together on the same publication, using the same style book, will put hyphens in, take them out, and put them in again all day, if necessary. The marginal direction to printers STET (meaning let it stand and cancelling an alteration) gets used rather a lot in these conditions. At The Listener, where I was literary editor from 1986 to 1990, I discovered that any efforts I made to streamline the prose on my pages would always be challenged by one

particular sub-editor, who would proof-read my book reviews and archly insert literally dozens of little commas each one of which I felt as a dart in my flesh. Of course, I never revealed the annoyance she caused. I would thank her, glance at the blizzard of marks on the galley proof, wait for her to leave the room, and then (standing up to get a better run at it) attack the proof, feverishly crossing out everything she had added, and writing STET, STET, STET, STET, STET all down the page, until my arm got tired and I was spent. And dont forget: this comma contention was not a matter of right or wrong. It was just a matter of taste.Eats, Shoots Leaves is not a book about grammar. I am not a grammarian. To me a subordinate clause will for ever be (since I heard the actor Martin Jarvis describe it thus) one of Santas little helpers. A degree in English language is not a prerequisite for caring about where a bracket is preferred to a dash, or a comma needs to be replaced by a semicolon. If I did not believe that everyone is capable of understanding where an apostrophe goes, I would not be writing this book. Even as a book about punctuation, it will not give all the answers. There are already umpteen excellent punctuation guides on the market; there is even a rather delightful publication for children called The Punctuation Repair Kit, which takes the line Hey! Its uncool to be stupid! which is a lie, of course, but you have to admire them for trying.The trouble with all of these grammar books is that they are read principally by keen foreigners; meanwhile, native English-speakers who require their help are the last people who will make the effort to buy and read them. I am reminded of a scene in Woody Allens Small Time Crooks when an oily Hugh Grant offers to help ignoramuses Allen and Tracey Ullman (newly wealthy) with any sort of cultural education. Is there anything you want to know? he asks Allen, who has been sullen throughout the interview. And Allen says reluctantly, Well, I would like to learn how to spell Connecticut. What a great line that is. I would like to learn how to spell Connecticut. If youve similarly always wanted to know where to use an apostrophe, it means you never will, doesnt it? If only because its so extremely easy to find out.So if this book doesnt instruct about punctuation, what does it do? Well, you know those self-help books that give you permission to love yourself? This one gives you permission to love punctuation. Its about how we got the punctuation we have today; how such a tiny but adaptable system of marks allows us to notate most (but not all) types of verbal expression; and how (according to Beachcomber) a greengrocer in days of yore inspired Good Queen Bess to create the post of Apostropher Royal. But mainly its about making sticklers feel good about their seventh-sense ability to see dead punctuation (whisper it in verge-of-tears tones: It doesnt know its dead) and to defend their sense of humour. I have two cartoons I treasure. The first shows a row of ten Roman soldiers, one of them prone on the ground, with the cheerful caption (from a survivor of the cull), Hey, this decimation isnt as bad as they say it is! The second shows a bunch of vague, stupid-looking people standing outside a building, and behind them a big sign that says Illiterates Entrance. And do you want to know the awful truth? In the original drawing, it said, Illiterates Entrance, so I changed it. Painted correction fluid over the wrong apostrophe; inserted the right one. Yes, some of us were born to be punctuation vigilantes.From Publishers WeeklyWho would have thought a book about punctuation could cause such a sensation? Certainly not its modest if indignant author, who began her surprise hit motivated by "horror" and "despair" at the current state of British usage: ungrammatical signs ("BOB,S PETS"), headlines ("DEAD SONS PHOTOS MAY BE RELEASED") and band names ("Hear'Say") drove journalist and novelist Truss absolutely batty. But this spirited and wittily instructional little volume, which was a U.K. #1 bestseller, is not a grammar book, Truss insists; like a self-help volume, it "gives you permission to love punctuation." Her approach falls between the descriptive and prescriptive schools of grammar study, but is closer, perhaps, to the latter. (A self-professed "stickler," Truss recommends that anyone putting an apostrophe in a possessive "its"-as in "the dog chewed it's bone"-should be struck by lightning and chopped to bits.) Employing a chatty tone that ranges from pleasant rant to gentle lecture to bemused dismay, Truss dissects common errors that grammar mavens have long deplored (often, as she readily points out, in isolation) and makes elegant arguments for increased attention to punctuation correctness: "without it there is no reliable way of communicating meaning." Interspersing her lessons with bits of history (the apostrophe dates from the 16th century; the first semicolon appeared in 1494) and plenty of wit, Truss serves up delightful, unabashedly strict and sometimes snobby little book, with cheery Britishisms ("Lawks-a-mussy!") dotting pages that express a more international righteous indignation.