

AN ADMIRABLE POINT



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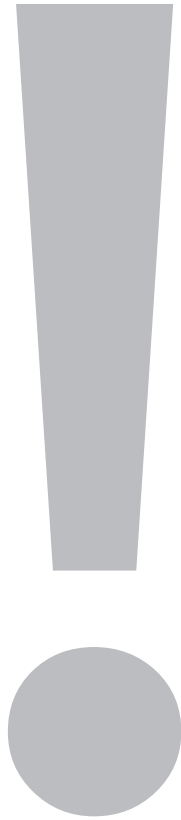
A BRIEF HISTORY OF
THE EXCLAMATION MARK!



FLORENCE HAZRAT

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PROFILE BOOKS



This book is dedicated to those who give attention to small things. And to Alpoleio, who invented a new mark of punctuation to make us wonder and admire more – if possible with abandon!

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INTRODUCTION

The spiked delights of !

On 21 January 1788, a triplet of !!!s nearly brought down the project of the United States of America before it got off the ground. The *Boston Gazette* printed an attention-commanding headline in capital letters followed by three hysterical exclamation marks, inflaming public concerns about the future of the fledgling nation: ‘BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION!!!’, the title read. Below, readers were told that the ‘most diabolical plan is on foot to corrupt the members of the Convention, who oppose the adoption of the New Constitution’. Massachusetts politicians were being offered ‘large sums of money’ from a ‘neighbouring State’ to put aside their concerns about the most crucial document of the young country, the Constitution.

Although the American Constitution was born in an inspired four-month spell, it needed ratification in at least

nine of the thirteen states. This process was arduous, involving the local assemblies in heated debates of the very same issues over which the states had split from their mother country: taxation, overseeing commerce, the distribution of legal and executive powers, personal liberties. By January 1788, five states had ratified, but the process had stalled in Massachusetts. This was fertile ground in which to sow doubt, and the *Gazette's* article duly fanned the flames of unrest and mistrust. The power of those !!!s was so great in whipping up public emotion that George Washington had to step in. He sent word to the state's convention that they absolutely must agree to the Constitution, but that there could be a set of amendments to address the delegates' reservations. These amendments would become the Bill of Rights, enshrining the individual's rights in relation to the government in the heart of American political identity.

The Massachusetts convention then approved the proposed Constitution and the United States of America was born. All thanks to a string of exclamation marks.

— !!! —

! makes us cry out – so much so that it's been called the screamer, the slammer, the bang, the gasper, and the shriek. It's bubbly and exuberant, an emotional amplifier whose flamboyantly dramatic gesture lets the reader know: *here be feelings!* As such, ! has received undue amounts of flak: in 2016, the UK Department of Education issued a new guideline for primary school learners that caused

public outcry: teachers would be tasked with downgrading pupils who used what was seen as an excessive number of exclamation marks. An ! should only follow a sentence starting with ‘how’ or ‘what’ (as in ‘How silly!’ and ‘What nonsense!’). Public and media alike protested at what they saw as dictatorial language policing, although the government was of course just trying to protect the young citizens from what the urban dictionary calls ‘bangorrhæa’.

It’s not only conservative government agents who dislike !. Many writers have warned against using the mark, claiming it provides cheap emphasis. F. Scott Fitzgerald declared that exclamation marks are like laughing at your own jokes; Terry Pratchett had a character in *Discworld* say multiple !!!s are a ‘sure sign of a diseased mind’ (five being a ‘sign of someone wearing his underpants on his head’). ! is all things ‘too’: too noisy, too attention-grabbing, too powerful, too present. Journalist Philip Cowell sneers at its confident self-referential *thereness*, calling it ‘the selfie of grammar’. There’s a blog called ‘Excessive Exclamation’ that posts photos sent by geeks upset by the inflationary intrusion of!, !!! or even !!!!!!!!!!!!! into the public sphere.

So, is the exclamation mark only for the irrational, the deranged and Gen Z self-display addicts? Is it a hot and messy extra dish that we don’t really need at the already plentiful banquet of language? If so, it is astonishing that it exists in nearly every language from Persian to Mandarin. It’s also surprising for how many likely and unlikely cultural functions we have enlisted !. Its concise and expressive ta-da!-quality provided a shortcut for Victor Hugo’s publisher, who, in answer to the author’s anxious

telegraphed ‘?’ concerning the sales of *Les Misérables*, wired back a triumphant ‘!’. German writer Christian Morgenstern casts an exclamation mark as an emphatic preacher in his ‘Realm of Punctuation’, a humorous poem on the murder of semicolons.

A straight downwards stroke, a crisp dot underneath: the exclamation mark packs a punch, with its uniquely assertive shape. In 2010, the American children’s TV show *The Electric Company* had none other than hip-hop legend LL Cool J rap different punctuation rules while meeting outsized animated versions of each individual mark. The first one popping out behind him, and growing



to twice the singer’s height, was the exclamation mark, its imposing shape exuding a boss-like presence. The German version of the literary detective trio ‘The Three Investigators’ is called *Die drei ???* (‘The Three ???’); the trio ask question after question until they have cracked even the toughest

secret. In 2006, the German publisher introduced the (overdue) female counterpart, *Die drei !!!*, neatly capitalising on the vertical aspect of the punctuation in its logo.

— !!! —

If any punctuation mark has the potential to look like a phallus, it must be !. Beloved French humorist Pierre Desproges comically admonishes us to avoid ‘such facile

punctuation whose cocky one-balled design can only hurt modesty’. Perhaps that’s why Henry Miller, a pioneer of sexually explicit literature, cautioned over-eager erotica writers: ‘Keep your exclamation marks under control!’. There may be a lot going on in the narrative, but ! should not be the source of the excitement. One of the greatest female entertainers of the first half of the twentieth century (and also one of the highest-paid women in the world at the time), French cabaret artist Mistinguett, explained that ‘a kiss can be a comma, a question mark, or an exclamation mark.’ The !-ed kiss is certainly not a peck on the cheek.

The exclamation mark (and its shape) also has a certain shock value: ! signifies high alert and protest. These made it an effective tool for representatives of the European Parliament who, in a Strasbourg session in 2013, expressed their discontent with Hungary’s authoritarian changes to its constitution with a silent sea of !!!s.

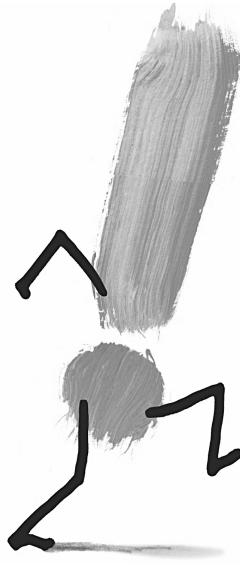


Hungary’s assault on democracy provokes the European Parliament.

! keeps us on our toes, and when we see it we know something noteworthy is going on, quite possibly something dangerous or provocative. In the lists used by professional Scrabble players, an exclamation mark denotes a word that is considered offensive but may be played in some, if not all, circumstances. In 1978, the Merriam-Webster dictionary published the first Scrabble list, but later encountered criticism regarding its inclusion of racial and sexual slurs as well as rather more innocent scatological terms. Under pressure from various interested parties, from anti-defamation leagues to Scrabble player associations, the dictionary publisher and the toy maker Mattel have produced revised lists that reflect the socio-linguistic sensitivities of the moment. Currently forbidden are insults such as LEZ, but also words living on the edge of politeness, such as FARTED, BOOBIE and PISSED (although FUCK seems to have been spared). Mattel's vice-president Ray Adler reflects that 'in Scrabble – as in life – the words you choose matter'. And so does the punctuation.

There's something about the exclamation mark that makes us move. With three simple black lines, motivational author James Victore transforms a splurge of shouting orange into a determined matchstick figure, encouraging us to 'Just start' instead of overthinking a project, letting it stall before it has even lifted off.

The exclamation mark generates excitement, and also transmits it. Folklore has it that the twelfth-century German bishop Johannes Fugger, travelling to Rome for the inauguration of the Holy Roman Emperor, sent his prelate ahead in order to identify the inns with the best



Just start! James Victore's motivational exclamation mark.

wines. The prelate would mark the doors of the approved inns with a chalked Latin 'est' ('there is', as in 'there is good wine'). Arriving in the village of Montefiascone, the prelate found such amazingly delicious wine that he exclaimed on the door 'est! est!! est!!!'. The bishop himself was so taken with the stuff that he abandoned his trip although barely sixty miles away from Rome, and spent the rest of his life quaffing Montefiascone wine with his prelate. The story is a legend (! was invented hundreds of years later), but the wine's reputation stuck. Today, you can still buy *Est! Est!! Est!!!* white wine, although it leaves connoisseurs rather less ecstatic than Fugger's sidekick.

Beware those not excited enough! In a notable scene between Elaine (the female lead character from *Seinfeld*)

and her then-boyfriend Jake, Elaine notices the glaring absence of ! at the end of a note Jake had taken for her from a friend who'd called to say she'd had a baby. Elaine wonders if such punctuational neglect might indicate a lack of emotional interest in her life (although she never tells her boyfriend as much). Rapidly escalating, the exclamation mark conflict leads to a hot-headed break-up, with Jake storming out of the apartment, shouting at Elaine to go ahead and put an air-sliced !-gesticulation on his parting statement: 'I'm leaving!'.

There's a small but select strand of punctuation jokes in TV comedy: in the US version of *The Office*, for example, Jim and Dwight are planning a birthday party for their colleague Kelly, and getting everything wrong, including the poster. Dwight puts up a plain black-and-white 'IT IS YOUR BIRTHDAY.' sign, eliciting exasperation from Jim, who believes an affectionate exclamation mark is the least they could do for their co-worker. 'It's a statement of fact,' Dwight counters: 'This is more professional. It's not like she discovered a cure for cancer.'

—!!!—

You don't have to patent a ground-breaking medical innovation in order to ride the wave of !. Plenty of bands, brands and shows know the difference between a dot and a dash: while singer P!NK explodes the power of ! in mid-name, Yahoo!, *Jeopardy!*, *Moulin Rouge!* and *Mamma Mia!* jump off the exclamation mark springboard. German fashion designer Wolfgang Joop even wanted to



copyright the punctuation of his logo JOOP!, embroiling himself in a three-year lawsuit with the European trademark office, which eventually dismissed his claim. ! belongs to everyone. There's a sense of declarativeness in !, a sense of urgency which pins the reader onto the page of now. Jazz musician Jackie McLean doubles that hurry by tilting the orientation of typeface on the cover of his 1964 album, letting ! run wildly across line after line after line.

Half a century later, ! can still ruffle our feathers when we see it in a close cluster of brothers and sisters. In 2010, punk rock collective Bomb the Music Industry! released an album under the catchy title *Adults!!!: Smart!!! Shithammered!!! And Excited by Nothing!!!!!!!!*. That's seven marks at the end. Nothing gets us as excited as !. And how does one pronounce a free-falling exclamation?

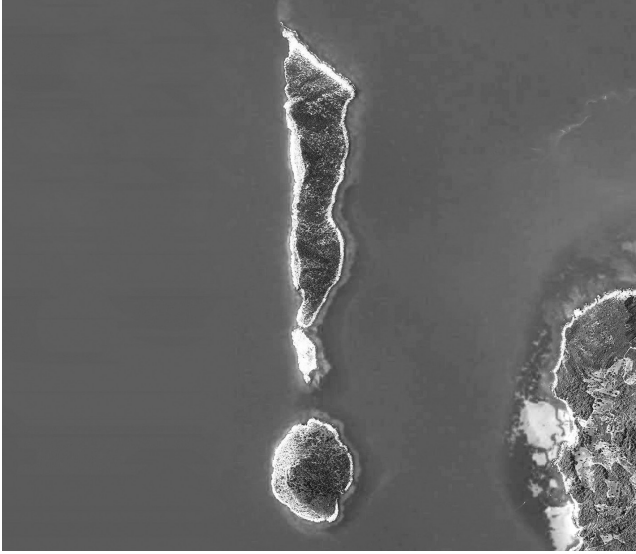


Low Wham transformed!

American rock band !!! is happy to be known as the only slightly more performable Chk Chk Chk.

! detonates on the page and our ears, and also in our mouths: the International Phonetic Alphabet employs ‘!’ to indicate the placement of the tongue on the gum’s ridge just behind the upper teeth, producing a click sound found in several Khoisan languages in south-western Africa such as ‘!Kung’. Most sign languages have punctuation mark hand movements to mimic written shapes when finger-spelling, but (as in the spoken version of the language) punctuation’s job in signed speech is done through the face, postures and gestures.

The most famous musical mark of exclamation is in the name of eternal Christmas-song artistes Wham!, created



Yılan and Siçam, punctuating the Anatolian coast.

by schoolfriends George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley. Reflecting on their trademark punctuation, Ridgeley explained that their sound of comic book collision, followed by a cheeky !, represented the duo's 'energy' and 'friendship', a 'snappy, immediate, fun and boisterous' name you wouldn't forget. Just in time for Christmas 2020, a fan turned the street sign for the village of 'Low Wham' in the north of England to 'Last Christmas Wham!'. (The manipulated sign was still there the very next day).

There are exclamation marks on signs, and there is ! in the wild. The small Turkish islands of Yılan and Siçam, seen together from the sky, create a near-perfect exclamation mark, just off the south-west coast of Antalya region. The long slender island Yılan means 'snake', the circular

foot Siçam ‘mouse’, lying curled under the menacing head of its punctuation counterpart.

A curious phenomenon of ! in geography occurs in some place names. The Devon resort of Westward Ho! is a case in point, offering its exclamation mark as a gimmick to attract tourists (the name, including the !, comes from the title of a novel by Charles Kingsley). But it’s the Québécois Saint-Louis-du-Ha! Ha! which became winner of the 2017 Guinness World Record for the town with the most exclamation marks in its name. Quite how the little Canadian town came by its name is unclear – perhaps the founding missionaries had exclaimed in surprise, when struck with the unexpected impasse of a lake.

At Princeton University, ! was employed as a path specification for early forms of email. Imitating neural connections that chunk information to encode and transmit it economically, a typical proto-email address looked like Princeton!maths!Bob. The message would go from the centre at Princeton to the maths server, and then to department member Bob; the exclamation mark represented each intersection. When mathematicians are having fun, they come up with factorials signalled by ! and so-called ‘shriek maps’ in which exceptional functors are marked with a !. In chess notation, an exceptional move is marked with !! in transcriptions; a plain ! denotes a strong move; !? signifies interesting but risky; while ?! signifies dubious.

! crops up everywhere in our daily lives, from poetry, museums and high-brow scholarship to ads, tweets and pop culture. The versatile exclamation mark effortlessly permeates social barriers, adapting to just about any and

every occasion and context. It's a chameleon whose ability to affect the mood in those encountering it is both welcome and worrisome. Intrepid fans and inveterate opponents know: ! skilfully inspires strong feelings in us readers, even as it boldly registers those feelings from the author on the written page. The exclamation mark sneaks into our brains and bodies, and it makes us nervous – as it should.

–!!!–

An Admirable Point sets out to reclaim the exclamation mark from its much maligned and misunderstood place at the bottom of the punctuation hierarchy. It argues that there is a lot of sense in flagging up textual shouting (think of the zoological 'Duck' versus the life-saving 'Duck!'), and it examines a much more nuanced understanding of the workings of ! in sentences, and our minds. It explores how ! came into existence some six hundred years ago, and will make a case for why it makes sense to cling onto it. We'll uncover the many ways in which ! has left its mark on art, literature, pop culture and just about any sphere of human activity.

The turncoat exclamation mark accommodates meaning beyond text, and voraciously claims new functions in unexpected fields. As such, ! is vulnerable to misuse; its controversial charisma carries it into the shady places of mass manipulation as chapters on politics, advertising, cognitive science and digital communication will probe.

An Admirable Point is a proclamation of unapologetic enthusiasm for what Princeton literature professor Lee

Clarke Mitchell calls the ‘spiked delights’ of!. It encourages us to pay attention, to look closely, to pause and think. It makes supposedly transparent and self-effacing punctuation visible, so that its role in communication can be apprehended. When 280-character tweets can influence elections, chart pandemics and shift markets, it is crucial to understand the promises and pitfalls of letters, fonts, emojis and punctuation marks, most of all the paradoxical !!!.

In his 1611 English–French dictionary, Randle Cotgrave defined ! as ‘the point of admiration (and detestation)’. The parenthesis, smuggled into an otherwise straightforward definition, shows how the exclamation mark is both definite and hard to define. It can be several things at the same time, and sometimes contradictory ones – wonder as well as disgust. It’s slippery, flying from the highs to the lows on the spectrum of human emotion. The wayward ambiguity of ! has always worried us. Perhaps because the exclamation mark reached outside of its paper habitat, and into our bodies, it is an affective sign, and it asks for an affective reaction from us. Fear, anger, surprise, joy – suddenly, abstract letters become alive, magicked into feeling by the dot and the bar hovering just above. ! has agency over us. This book is an invitation to let it have it.

CHAPTER ONE

A very pathetic point *! through the ages*

Dishwashers, cars, mobile phones. How often do we stop and think about the objects we use every day that make our life significantly easier? And not just objects, but social rituals like Christmas or handshakes, and indeed writing itself, a seven-thousand-year-old accomplishment we have inherited from generation after generation. All of those things, all of those habits and intellectual achievements, at first did not exist, and had to be invented at some point, but most of us will take them for granted. We take it for granted that we tame our thoughts into a bunch of silent arbitrary squiggles squeezed into line on a piece of paper or a screen, and that those same squiggles can come to life again in someone else's thought or throat at the other end of the world, or in the distant unknowable future.

And it's not only letters themselves that have a history, but also those inky marks dotted here and there between

wayward words, attempting (but not always) to orchestrate their anarchic tendencies. The ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, understood writing as a record of speech, not a separate manifestation of language. Therefore, it didn't occur to them to put spaces between individual words likesowhichmakesreadingrathercumber someandslow. This certainly saves space (especially useful if you have to laboriously chisel each letter into marble), but it was counter-productive for inexperienced Greek or Latin readers who had no idea where a word ended and another started, let alone one of those elaborately convoluted sentences. Ancient librarians, teachers and learners developed a system of signs to help understand the anatomy of sentences, and to know where to stop for breath.

Versions of the comma, colon and the full stop (plus spaces between the words for increased clarity) became crutches for reading and writing, serving just fine for nearly a thousand years. From the fifth to the thirteenth centuries, the Church mostly took care of the business of writing, which resulted in a lack of experimentation and development. From around the thirteenth century onwards, however, Italian city states and universities started to develop, contesting the Church's right to the written word. Reading and writing became available for activities other than theology, for trade, diplomacy, even love poetry. As textual traffic increased, three marks of punctuation were no longer enough to carry the burden of communication: new signs were necessary to navigate the subtleties of writing. The question mark and the exclamation mark

joined the ranks of punctuation points, helping readers identify the tone of a sentence at first glance.

While the question mark migrated into worldly writing outside the monasteries (where it served the musical purpose of lifting the voice in chanting), the exclamation mark was a stroke of genius from one man who, sometime in the mid-fourteenth century, was seized with the desire to propose a wholly novel sign. In his treatise *The Art of Punctuating*, Italian scholar and poet Iacopo Alpoleio da Urbisaglia muses: ‘seeing that the exclamatory or admiring sentences were pronounced in the same way as continuing or interrogative discourse, I acquired the habit of pointing the end of such sentences by means of a clear point, and a comma placed to the side above that same point’. A sort of full stop with a comma or apostrophe hovering to its right. A cheeky little textual earring dangling from the top of the line.

The exclamation mark was a rebel even at its birth. It would take another half-century, however, and the imaginative effort of another punctuation fan, to register the first visual form of the exclamation mark. In 1399, the Florentine lawyer and politician Coluccio Salutati transformed Alpoleio’s words into the ! we know today, in his text *De nobilitate legum et medicinae* (1399). Picking a

ul' ebarationis / aut artis industria prohibere? Sgo temet et
 alios medicos / obtesto et rogo / responde mihi precor / quid
 tibi uult pernixta medicaminum multatio / nisi quia ne-
 scis / quod magis proprie potesse possit / et am uob occinat

Coluccio Salutati introduces the exclamation mark (near the end of line 2) in his *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, 1399.

humorous bone with medical doctors, Coluccio contends that medicine is not knowledge but conjecture, unlike the law. Replying to Bernhardinus Florentinus, who had praised medicine, Salutati bursts into mock-emotion: ‘I earnestly urge you and other doctors, please reply to me!’. The same manuscript also contains the first brackets, sectioning off additional matter within the sentence. Although the text was noted down or copied from drafts by Coluccio’s secretary, it shows his own handwritten changes, including punctuation marks wedged between the narrow string of words.

Such attention to the minutiae of language was a hallmark of a new love for words, their sound, their style. Coluccio spearheaded what we now call humanism, the Renaissance zeitgeist that venerated the culture and the stories of ancient Greece and Rome, their gracefully poised sentences and their celebration of the ideal man as persuasive orator. Imitating the ancients in all things except their pagan religion, writers of the Renaissance sought to import this oratorical ideal from Classical Athens and Rome into the pages of their letters of diplomacy, trade and scholarly disputes.

Attempting to control how their readers would understand their written words, humanists invented and formalised more and more signs of punctuation, such as the semicolon, the apostrophe, the ellipsis (...), various kinds of brackets (round, curly and angular), the dash, the hyphen and quotation marks. Our current punctuation marks largely developed within a mere two hundred years between 1400 and 1600, remaining pretty much

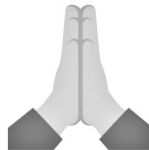
unchanged since and sharing an enormous amount of textual duty between them, as workhorses of the written word, unthanked but also uncontested – at least until very recently, when the internet hijacked their ability to separate sentences, and emojis began to compete with punctuation’s skill in conveying and creating emotions.

Back then, of course, there was no such thing as a red-cheeked smiley, or eggplant, or sheepish monkey-face to thread feelings into one’s text (it’s hard to imagine the likes of Luther or Erasmus sending prayerhands). Instead, writers harnessed punctuation to capture and evoke emotion, well aware that the naked content of words without the dress of feelings would have a hard time convincing anyone. It’s no surprise, then, that Alpolecio, Coluccio and company engineered an effectively affective new sign that

Apple



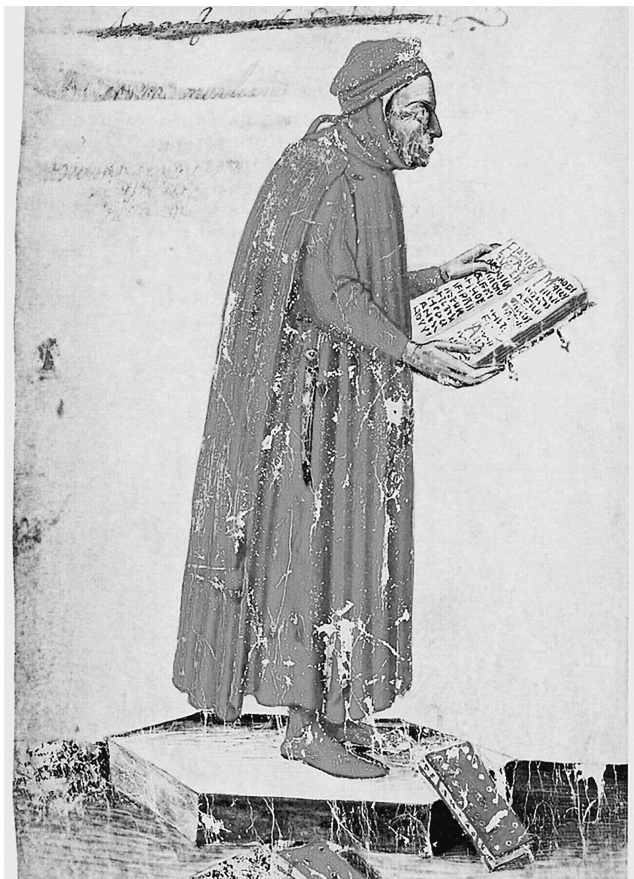
Google



Microsoft



Prayer hand emojis from the big tech companies.



Coluccio Salutati – scholar, humanist, bibliophile ... and exclamation mark pioneer.

embodied the voice and feeling of the speaker in the hope that it would work its magic within the reader, too.

Coluccio was an influential writer and literary patron, and his exclamation mark and brackets began to trickle into other texts by other writers. But they might have

drifted into oblivion had they not been picked up by the first printers, who in the fifteenth century established shops in Mainz and Frankfurt, and shortly after in Basel, Lyon, Venice and other cities. The technological advances of the printing press enabled the fast duplication of texts that were carried into all corners of early modern Europe. Standard versions of books started to appear, from the Bible to schoolbooks; Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars* was a favourite. But it was not only the words that became uniform: the appearance of the page also crystallised through the work and experimentation of a few master printers. Punctuation marks were not exempt, and thus the now-upright form of ! entered all European languages.

Presence, however, does not mean universal use, nor comprehension. The French scholar and writer Rabelais would have benefited from some !s in his scatological tales of gluttonous giants producing huge amounts of farts and piles of poo. Telling of the pregnant lady giant who has devoured buckets of tripe and wine in spite of warnings that she will burst, the narrator wryly comments: 'O, the beautiful faecal matter that's blowing up inside of her!' Such inflation certainly deserves that astonished !, but it remains one of the few in Rabelais's gigantic oeuvre. This particular exclamation mark appears in his own corrected copy of the 1542 edition, but is absent in many others before and after. The exclamation mark could have been the perfect point to encapsulate the excess of body, food, shit and hilarity Rabelais bounced off one another; yet ! was not well enough known and understood to truly impact readers in their experience of the tales.

Readers, writers and printers were certainly aware of the exclamation mark, but they weren't quite sure how to apply it, resulting in a wild lack of consistency from writer to writer (and even within individual texts). The growth and usage of punctuation marks was erratic at best and messy at worst, as was the development of European languages at the time.

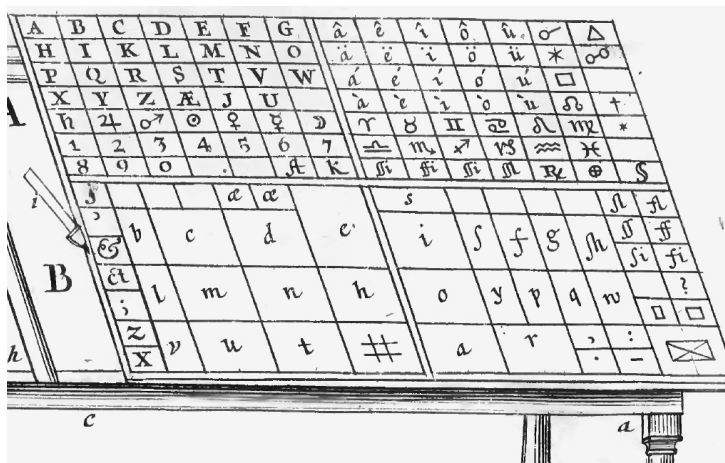
The British Isles were far behind the continent in terms of paper and printing technology and know-how – but also progress with their native English (or Scots) as a language that could compete with the perceived richness and nuance of Latin as a medium of power at the court, chancery and universities. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, English writers experimented and explored, inventing new words or borrowing them and Anglicising them more or less successfully. They also introduced and discarded new punctuation marks, and pushed for language reform. One such writer was the educator John Hart, who worried about inconsistent spelling, based on the vastly differing dialects of English, from Cornwall to Cumbria, and on the essentially medieval orthography of English, whose sounds had since moved on.

Writing in the 1550s and 1560s, Hart believed that 'vicious' spelling 'bringeth confusion and uncertainty in the reading', especially then where there was enough confusion and uncertainty in religious and political terms already. His proposals for a phonetic spelling reform didn't catch on, but he offers possibly the earliest mentions of ! in English. In his 1551 manuscript, *The Opening of the Unreasonable Writing of our English Tongue*, Hart calls !

‘the wonderer’, and deals with it together with its brother ? (‘the asker’) because of their identical grammatical function of ending a sentence and offering direction on its tone. He recommends prefacing questions and exclamations with the two signs, because they ‘tune the voice’. This anticipation of the Spanish practice of initial upside-down marks did not catch on, nor did many others of Hart’s suggestions, although he did have an impact on the way scholars and educators thought about English grammar and spelling. If lexicographers were unsure quite how to use the mark, it’s no surprise writers and printers alike struggled. What made matters worse was the close kinship between ! and ? in terms of rhetorical questions: is it more of a question, or an exclamation? Or is it both?!

Apart from the confusion over tone and style, very practical circumstances also came into play over the looks and effect of the exclamation mark. Until the Industrial Revolution, printing was a slow laborious craft that meant text would be read out to the typesetter (or skimmed by the setter), who would sit at a desk with two cases, containing boxes with the individual letters of the alphabet, punctuation marks and space signs. The typesetter would balance an oblong tray in one hand, filling it with the required type with the other, and then arrange the trays line by line in big frames. The frames would be bound tightly, inked and pressed onto sheets of paper, which were dried, folded, cut, stitched together and sold, or bound with sturdy covers before sitting on the stalls of booksellers.

Printing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was expensive, because buying type and paper demanded



Upper and lower case type for printers – but no exclamation mark. From Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick exercises, or, The doctrine of handy-works: applied to the art of printing* (London: 1683).

considerable advance investment for uncertain returns. Printers bought type sets from a handful of foundries across Europe. Some sets included !, some didn't, as the mark was not yet established. Whether an exclamation mark could be used (if there was one in the manuscript) thus depended on the availability of type, although printers could (and did) help themselves by repurposing existing type, building an exclamation-tower from a dot and a comma much the same way as Alpoleio proposed. Whether ! was included in the type a printer owned also depended on the kinds of works they habitually produced: a printer of theology or natural sciences would not need type that contained markers of emotion like !. A printed play, on the other hand, or poetry, was a different textual creature altogether, necessitating emotive punctuation.

In the late seventeenth century, the printer Joseph Moxon released the first English instructional manual for printers, containing information on the craft, including woodcuts of type cases. Moxon was an educated tradesman who contributed to the advancement of science through printing maps and mathematical papers, as well as making globes and measuring instruments. As a member of the Royal Society and the king's own hydrographer, responsible for the survey of British rivers and lakes, Moxon was not in the business of producing emotive texts. As was to be expected, the cases in the image of his manual have no designated boxes for ! (unlike specially cut type for the signs of the zodiac, still part and parcel of Renaissance science).

By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, ! had become an accepted member of the punctuation family, and was included, for example, in John Smith's *The Printer's Grammar*.

ct	[]	æ	æ	ç	'		s	()	?	!	;	fl	ff
&						e	i	f	f	g	fh	fi	fi
ffl	b	c	d									fi	fi
j													
HS	l	m	n	h			o	y	p	q	w	n	m
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Here it is! A designated exclamation mark box appears in the lower case box (top row) in John Smith's *The Printer's Grammar* (London: 1755).