Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation
by Lynne Truss, Frank McCourt (a review by Ceridwen)

Summarise the review in 300 words; do not quote.

Remember that academic style is required.

Recently, the boy made a sign for the door of his bedroom that reads "Keep Out. Not for baby's." His spelling is largely self-taught, as he is not yet in kindergarten and I am a somewhat lazy parent-educator. This made me have a Noam Chomsky-ish melt-down about the concept of generative punctuation. Lord, is the grocer's comma innate? Is it mapped on our brains like the double negative? Am I really his mother?

This book has been sitting on my bedside table for no less than two years. I read it only when I can't be bothered to go in search of my real book or the book with which I'm cheating on my real book. For some reason, I don't think of this book that fondly when I'm not reading it, and then I'm pleasantly surprised whenever I pick it up again. But I have this jarring sensation when I read it, akin to the feeling I get when I read articles about neuroscience: holy buckets, I'm using my brain to think about my brain! She's using punctuation in a book about punctuation. Hey, don't bogart that.

This book makes me feel weird because I don't think of myself as a stickler. I am both lazy and exuberant when it comes to punctuation. I have an unfortunate love affair with the semi-colon; it cannot be helped. I also overuse parentheses because I think they are funny. (I tried, and failed, to not type a parenthetical comment here; oh crap, and there's the semi-colon.) My comma use borders on the Henry Jamesish. Why make simple declarative statements when things can be jammed together into one enormous run-on sentence, comma splices everywhere, and...my word, what has she done with the verb? This is the kind of writing this book provokes from me, and I'm not sure that's a good thing.

When I was living in a dorm my first year of school, the housekeeper would put up missives with the most tortured punctuation all over the building. She was a kindly woman, older, and cleaned up our crap for probably not much more year than was required for tuition. (Unsurprisingly, I only spent a year at this institution.) Regularly, jerk students would correct her signs and laugh about how bad the punctuation was – and it truly was bad. This has always bothered me. Of course good punctuation provides a clarity of expression when attempting to convey a clarity of ideas. Of course. But sometimes you should just pick up your fucking towel's, jackholes, regardless of whether they possess anything.

It was a relatively painless way to brush up on the punctuation rules I've now largely forgotten, and will no doubt forget again in roughly fifteen seconds. I usually have the attention span of a very distracted raccoon when it comes to non-fiction, so it is saying something that I finished this book at all, even if it took two years. Oh, look! something shiny! And that does it for my three exclamation points for the year, alas.