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Introduction

Brag...Assist me some extemporall god of Rime,
for I am sure I shall turne Sonnet. Devise Wit,
write Pen, for I am for whole volumes in folio,

Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*

"The Stuff of Literature"—I have chosen this catchy but obscure title in desperation; there is no accepted way of referring to the topic.[1] If this were a Ph.D. thesis, there would be no problem; we could put all relevant information into the subtitle: "The Stuff of Literature: A Study of the Contribution Made to the Meaning and Value of a Work of Literature at the Level of Graphic Form, with Particular Reference to Spelling, Punctuation, Typography, and Layout." Yet even with a subtitle, the topic may still remain obscure: what does spelling have to do with meaning? To answer this question—and in so doing to clarify what the book is all about—let's first look a little closer at the meaning, or some of the meanings, of meaning.

Meaning, according to one dictionary definition, is "the intended sense of a person's words." This may not be much help to philosophers concerned to define the meaning of meaning. It merely shifts the problem to defining *sense*. But it does accurately convey the popular conception of meaning as essentially a property of words. It is words that convey meaning—if sentences, or utterances, also have meaning, it is because they are made up of words. And since texts are made up of sentences, the meanings of texts also can ultimately be derived, one assumes, from the dictionary meanings of its words.

Such a naive conception of meaning clearly could not satisfy a literary critic. The meaning of a poem, he would maintain, is more than the sum of the meanings of its component words. There is value in the harmony that results from the interrelation of the component sentences; this too is part of the total meaning.

And there is also a much more mundane reason for rejecting a wordbound view of meaning: it fails to take into consideration the contributions to meaning made by punctuation, by typographical layout, by choice of spelling where choice exists, by patterns of sound—in short, by all the *physical,* substantial

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manifestations of language, whether as speech or writing. In other words, by the stuff of language. It is these physical aspects of the literary text, the "stuff" and substance of literature, and their contribution to the meaning of the text, which form the subject of this book.

The theory of meaning most appropriate for studying the substance, or "stuff," of literature is that of J. R. Firth. For Firth, meaning was conveyed at *all* levels of linguistic organization—graphic, phonological, grammatical, lexical, and contextual—and not merely by the choice of words. Whenever there is a choice—at any of these levels—it must by definition[2] be meaningful choice. The total meaning of a text comprises all the meanings conveyed at all the levels. Or, in his own words, "the meaning of language can be stated in linguistic terms if the problem is dispersed by analysis at a series of congruent levels."[3]

Lexical meaning needs no demonstration. It is that part of total meaning, listed in dictionaries, which in the popular view has taken over the function of the whole. Grammatical meaning is seen at its simplest in the choice between "I saw him leaving" and "I saw him leave," where his action is regarded respectively as incomplete or complete. Every syntactic choice, at whatever rank of analysis—verb complementation in the clause, as in the example quoted, or tense as manifested by an inflectional suffix—is also a semantic choice. And to give just one example from phonology and graphic form, "it's true" does not mean the same as "'tis true"; the suggestion of an informal rather than a literary context is for Firth an aspect of the meaning of the phrase.

The greater the standardization of spelling, the more binding the rules of punctuation are felt to be, the more rigid the norms of typography and layout, the less scope there will be for conveying meaning at the graphic or orthographic level. For most texts, conventionally spelled, punctuated, and printed, the only information conveyed graphically is the range of genres to which the text belongs. If is it printed in lines, it is poetry; if in paragraphs, it is prose. A glance is sufficient to convey this much meaning. We don't actually need to read the text.

On the other hand, when the spelling is *not* conventional, when the norms of typography are ignored, when rules of punctuation are not observed, the range and intensity of meanings that can be conveyed by the actual substance of literature is surprisingly great. But what kinds of meaning can be supplied by graphicological means, above and beyond—or below and behind—the recognizable semantic content of a text, that is, in addition to what, in Firth's terms, could be called the meanings analyzable at the lexical and grammatical levels? Or in everyday, oversimplified terms, what can the shape and appearance of a text mean more than the words already mean? Since this question has never, to my knowledge, been systematically investigated, this study is necessarily more of an anthology than a theoretical statement. In any scientific investigation a period of observation must precede the stage of theory construction. There is a need to assemble as wide a collection as possible of graphicological effects before attempting to apply to them any meaningful system of subcategorization.

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Nevertheless, since I am writing this introductory chapter after having culled the anthology, I feel it may be worth suggesting some more abstract principles of classification that seem to me to emerge from the detailed analysis of the examples. Rehearsing these ideas in a prologue rather than an epilogue to the book should provide the reader with a useful tool. He can test its usefulness on the texts as he meets them—and possibly come up with an even sharper implement.

First of all, then, let us revert to the more naive dictionary definition of meaning quoted earlier: "the intended sense of a person's words," that is, the combination of grammatical meaning and lexical meaning, without considering either phonology or graphic form. To this basic meaning, all graphicological devices are either *additive* or *nonadditive*. Additive devices provide further information, or semantic content, that is not available at the levels of grammar and vocabulary. Nonadditive devices provide no more information, but they may be *iconic, clarifying,* or *mystifying.* As for the further information provided by additive devices, this may be relevant to the referential meaning of the *text,* the implied *author and/or narrator,* or the implied *reader.* These six categories can be neatly diagrammed along the two dimensions in a way that hints at interrelations among them:

Nonadditive	Additive
Iconic	Text-Relevant
Clarifying	Author-Relevant
Mystifying	Reader-Relevant

How far these hints are justified should become clearer as more texts are studied. Here to start with is at least one example of each category, chosen from the texts studied in later chapters, to which the reader is referred for further discussion.

i) Iconic graphicological devices *repeat,* or echo, the conceptual content of the text at the graphic level. Obvious examples are the shaped poem, the prayer to an altar that looks like an altar (see p. 22), and the concrete poem that usually enacts the message of the words of which it is composed (see p. 27 and p. 124).
ii) The use of italics in contemporary fiction, by contrast with roman type, to distinguish a character's thought from his words and actions merely *clarifies* the meaning of the story (see pp. 99–100). Hemingway and Dorothy Parker make it easier for the reader to tell words from thoughts, but Virginia Woolf achieves similar effects—in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*—without benefit of typography.
iii) Laurence Sterne's system of punctuation in *Tristram Shandy* often seems to serve no purpose other than to mystify the reader (see p. 72)—or if

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nothing else, at least to tease him. A further example, not discussed in the chapter on spellings, is E. E. Cummings's poem *oil tell duh woil doi sez:*

> oil tel duh woil doi sez
> dooyuh unnurs tanmih eesez pullih nizmus tash, oi
> dough un giv uh shid oi sez. Tom
> oidoughwuntuh doot, butoiguttuh
> braikyooz, datswut eesez tuhmih. (Nowoi askyuh
> woodundat maik yurarstoin
> green? Oilsaisough.) Hool
> spairruh luckih? Thangs keed. Mairsee.
> Muh jax awl gawn. Fur Croi saik
> ainnoughbudih gutnutntuhplai?
> HAI
> youzwidduhpoimnuntwaiv un duhyookuhsumpnruddur
> givusuhtoonunduhphugnting

If at first glance this text appears impenetrable, the following alternative spelling of the underlying utterance may be more accessible:

> I'll tell de woild I says
> do yer understan' me 'e says pullin' 'is moustache, I
> don't give a shit I says. Tom
> I don't want to do't but I gotta
> break youse, dat's what 'e says to me. (Now I ask yer
> would'n dat make your arse
> toin green? I'll say so.) Who'll
> spare a Lucky? Thanks kid. Merci.
> My jack's all gone. For Christ's sake
> ain't nobody got nuttin' to play?
> HEY
> youse wid de poimanent wave 'n de uke-sumpn-or-oder
> give us a tune on de fuck'n ting.

In rewriting the text I have preserved nearly all the spellings that genuinely indicate phonological forms characteristic of the dialect Cummings is trying to suggest: the replacement of interdental fricatives (normally spelled "th") by dental stops (spelled "t" or "d"), the diphthongization of the stressed central vowel ("oi" for "or/ur/er"), the loss of aspiration ("'is," "'e"), and the occasional simplification of consonant clusters. I have however restored the normal spellings in all those eye-dialect forms (see p. 55) which Cummings wilfully misspells—and in the second line wrongly segments—without suggesting any difference in pronunciation ("maik" for "make," "sez" for "says," and so on).

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Although the emphasis so far has initially been on the visual aspects of a text, strictly speaking the "stuff" of literature is both visual and aural, both speech and writing; in chapter 2 the relationship between the two, and the extent to which a work of literature can be said to exist in one or the other, will be considered in detail, particularly insofar as poetry is concerned. Paradoxically, though literature, as we shall see, has for centuries been regarded primarily as something written down, by men of *letters,* it is the sound patterns which have been most intensively studied. There is a wealth of material on what poetry sounds like: rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, and so on. Very little has been written about what it looks like.[4] So although the stuff of literature is both visual and aural, this study will be restricted to the visual aspects of written texts in a systematic attempt to define the bounds of this unduly neglected[5] topic.

It is also possible to define the scope of graphicology by way of semiotics, the study of sign-systems in general rather than language in particular. For the semiotician a book conveys messages at many levels in addition to the linguistic meaning of the text: by its binding and dust jacket (which may be at odds with the text); by its illustrations; by the presence or absence of preface, introduction, index, and appendixes; and by the choice of a title, with or without a subtitle (and this list is by no means exhaustive). Graphicology takes its place as one level of semiotic organization in this totality of meaning-systems, linguistic and nonlinguistic, that constitute a book.

Two other views of the relation between language and literature may also help to clarify the aims of this study. Firstly, literary discourse has been characterized as differing from nonliterary discourse by its tendency to *deviate* from norms. Conventional wisdom recognizes one aspect of this same insight in the term *poetic license;* the poet has freedom to ignore the rules which constrain the rest of us in our use of language. And just as meaning may be conveyed at all levels of analysis, so poetic license may be exercised in every aspect of a text, from lexical choice to syntactic structure, from spelling to pronunciation. To a considerable extent this study will be concerned with deviations from the norms of spelling, typography, and punctuation. More will be said about misspelling than correct spelling, about lack of punctuation than normal punctuation. But since deviations cannot be fully appreciated unless we have a clear idea of what norms are being deviated from, the development of standard spelling and standard punctuation will also be briefly sketched.

Secondly, according to the Czech linguist Mukarowski, poetic language differs from ordinary language to the extent that linguistic features are *foregrounded.* Foregrounding is perceptual; it occurs when a reader or listener becomes consciously aware of an aspect of language that normally remains part of the background. Regular rhyme foregrounds the phonological features—so would a polysyllabic word in a largely monosyllabic text. But like meaning and deviation, foregrounding can occur at all levels of linguistic analysis. The term includes deviation, but is altogether broader in scope; nondeviant features of

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language can also be foregrounded by artful placing in unexpected contexts. Many of the examples to be studied will exemplify foregrounding of nondeviant features of spelling, punctuation and typography. And though Mukarowski coined the term in an attempt to characterize poetic language, it clearly holds good for any text, poetry or prose, literary or not, in which language is used creatively, for effect. Or as Jakobson has defined the term, in which language is functioning poetically.

Chapter 3, after a brief survey of the development of standard English orthography and the permissible variation within that standard, surveys the contributions to the meaning of a literary text that can be made through spelling: diacritics, archaism, social and geographical dialect, immigrant speech and interlanguage, eye dialect, eye rhyme, and the idiosyncrasies of *Finnegans Wake*. Chapter 4 similarly discusses first the conventional systems of punctuation in English and then looks at some of the ways punctuation has been exploited in literary texts: iconically, symbolically, through patterning, by omission, and in relation to closure. Chapter 5 deals with typography, especially the choice of typeface, and its contribution to the meaning and value of a literary work. Chapter 6 considers the effect of layout, the appearance of the work on the page, as an aspect of meaning. Throughout these four chapters, the main concern is with the literary purpose and function of the features described, not with linguistic classification for its own sake. Almost all the examples are taken from literature in English.

Finally, chapter 7 considers the implications of graphicology, or the "stuff of literature," for the study of *translation,* especially translation into English.

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