Looking at Novels

Typography, Punctuation, & Spelling
in Some Contemporary Fiction

By Francis Leahy

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a Doctoral degree in English Literature

Trinity College Dublin
25th May 2020
Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work. I agree to deposit this thesis in the University’s open access institutional repository or allow the library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.
Summary

This is a study of the visual appearance of some contemporary novels. The thesis uses an interdisciplinary approach, combining literary criticism with perspectives derived from linguistics. Individual chapters consider typography, punctuation, and spelling. Novels by Roddy Doyle, Irvine Welsh, Mark Haddon, and David Mitchell, as authors who make particular use of these dimensions of meaning, constitute the main primary source material. The discussion is primarily focussed on how these writers exploit these dimensions of meaning within the medium of print and genre of the novel, but some broader points about how these elements developed and function within the medium and genre more generally are also made. Other primary texts are sometimes used where they display particularly revealing or influential usage of the features under discussion.

The chapter on typography discusses the essential integration of text with typography, with a case study on italics. The chapter on punctuation examines how punctuation relates to phonology in this genre, with a case study on ellipsis points. The chapter on spelling discusses how the novel is a genre which provides a space for non-standard spellings, with a case study on dialect-spelling. This thesis argues that novels are fundamentally a printed genre, and because print is a medium which presents language in a visible form, that to understand novels it is necessary to consider in particular those dimensions of meaning that are inherent to the medium – namely, typography, punctuation, and spelling. This means novels must be looked at, not just read.
Acknowledgements

I am first and foremost indebted to Professor Aileen Douglas, who has been a fastidious, generous and very patient supervisor throughout the PhD process. From my first, trepidatious interview hoping to be accepted as an undergraduate at the School of English Trinity College, she has been an ever-present support and influence throughout my academic career. I am immensely grateful for all her advocacy on my behalf. Diane Sadler and Brenda Brooks, also at the School of English, have always been particularly helpful too, despite the numerous times I have made their jobs harder. I must thank also my co-supervisor, Dr. Breffni O’Rourke, whose course on Language and Technology as part of the M.Phil in linguistics at the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences went a large way to inspiring this thesis. My colleague and friend, Dr. Des Ryan, in his boundless enthusiasm and energy for this subject matter, also provided much in the way of inspiration. Dr. Robin Fuller deserves a special thanks for cheerfully assisting me at moments of particular crisis, and for his friendship and support. I’ve been lucky to be able to rely on old friends like Gary Glennon, who since we were rudely stamped teenagers has always encouraged the good in me, and discouraged the bad. The ultimate thanks, as always, goes to my Ma, Eileen, without who nothing I’ve ever achieved would have been possible.
Contents

Introduction.........................................................................................................................1

Chapter 1: Typography........................................................................................................69

Case Study: Italics.............................................................................................................104

Chapter 2: Punctuation.....................................................................................................147

Case Study: Ellipsis Points.............................................................................................181

Chapter 3: Spelling...........................................................................................................236

Case Study: Dialect Spelling.............................................................................................258

Conclusion.......................................................................................................................299

Bibliography....................................................................................................................305
List of Figures

Figure 1. *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell, 2004: 327) ................................................................. 93
Figure 2. *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell, 2004: 329) ................................................................. 94
Figure 3. *Filth* (Welsh, 1998: 69) ............................................................................. 101
Figure 4. *Filth* (Welsh, 1998: 107) .......................................................... .......................... 102
Figure 5. *Filth* (Welsh, 1998: 13) ............................................................................. 138
Figure 6. *Filth* (Welsh, 1998: 14) ............................................................................. 139
Figure 7. *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (Welsh, 1995: 39) ............................................. 179
Figure 8. Sheet Music for Drums ........................................................................... 201
Figure 9. *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne, 1761: 56-7) ......................................................... 211
Figure 10. *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne, 1761: 1) ......................................................... 210
Figure 11. *Curious Incident* (Haddon, 2004: 208-10) ............................................... 299
Figure 12. *Dead Men’s Trousers* (Welsh, 2018: 277, 280, 279) ............................... 300
Introduction

Samuel Beckett famously proclaimed that *Finnegans Wake* “is not only to be read, it is to be looked at and listened to” (qtd. in Astro 1990: 29). Beckett was pointing out that graphic and phonic elements of language are both present in Joyce’s masterpiece, and must be appreciated as distinct. It is an instruction to consider not only the language of the work, but also the sound and appearance of that language. It is also an injunction to pay attention to the relationship between appearance and sound, because while language has traditionally been primarily spoken and auditory, texts encode language in a visual medium. As such, they must always be looked at. By examining novels in these terms – as material objects to be engaged with visually – this thesis aims to help address a well-recognised deficit in literary studies. This will be achieved by articulating a linguistic understanding, through the lens of a small range of contemporary texts, of how these visual features function within the genre today. This analysis will also contribute to debates in linguistics about the elements that constitute the writing system of English.

It may seem like stating the obvious, but it is an important point to remember: we read books with our eyes, not with our ears. The dominant conception of language within the discipline dedicated to its study (linguistics), however, remains very much in terms of speech. Language can appear and be understood in different media, not only sound. Sign language, handwriting, print – and latterly a huge variety of electronic forms of text – all are examples of language in visible forms. Even those phonic aspects of *Finnegans Wake* that prompted Beckett’s injunction to “listen” must be
communicated visually. The fact that writing/print is processed visually has a variety of implications that influence the form of the language presented in this medium. There are always choices to be made about how the words appear, just as we must always make choices about how loud, or with what intonation we speak. Even when these choices are not consciously made, they contribute to how meaning is delivered. To “look at” (as opposed to read) written or printed material is to engage with precisely those dimensions of meaning that are a function of the medium. Spelling, punctuation, typography – all of these textual elements are visual. Unlike the words, sentences, characters, plot, setting, etc., spelling, punctuation and typography are not present in audio versions of the text. They are of a different order from these other elements of storytelling, confined as they are, within the original medium of the novel – written language, but more specifically print.

Finnegans Wake has been described as the ultimate “anti-novel” (Fordham 2007: 62). It is in many ways an aberrant text, eschewing norms of plot, character, and style, and thereby defying boundaries of categorisation. Joyce achieved this novelty in multiple dimensions primarily by creating a unique language, an ephemeral palimpsest dialect comprised of many languages, constantly shifting to evade any reader trying to obtain precise meaning. It was not this linguistic novelty, however, that prompted Beckett to issue his instruction. It was instead much more established novelistic practices in Finnegans Wake that demanded it be examined in novel ways: looking and listening. The novel from its inception is a genre which often exploited these
dimensions of written language in its printed form. There are numerous instances of punning and sound symbolism in *Finnegans Wake* that can only be appreciated phonically, just as there are unusual formatting choices and cryptic drawings which can only be appreciated visually.¹ Although the prominence of these features demanded that the book be “looked at, and listened to” along with being read, the same rubric can be usefully applied to any novel. Although this may not be immediately apparent with novels which are more restrained in these dimensions, the fact remains novels almost always contain dialogue – which is written language purporting to be speech, and thus has an intrinsic phonic element. They also inevitably contain spelling, punctuation, typography, and all the other visual apparatus present as a matter of course in books – precisely those elements Beckett insisted must be “looked at”. There are significant variations in these practices between all novels. The publishing industry would not require professional typesetters and graphic designers were this not so. Where there is variation – and considered variation at that – there is a need for analysis.

This thesis aims to conduct such analysis by “looking at” novels, utilising a small range of key contemporary texts to examine how visual elements function within the genre. Novels by Roddy Doyle, Irvine Welsh, David Mitchell, and Mark Haddon – all of whom exploit visual dimensions of the text in different and interesting ways –

¹ For example, the item “mememormee!” (Joyce, 1939: 628), depending on how it is pronounced could convey sounds that are suggestive of “remember me!” or “me, me, more, me!”, both of which accord with its position in the book, part of the final passage, corresponding to ending, or death. This is not, however, as apparent from considering it devoid of its sound. The drawings, footnotes, and marginalia (308), on the other hand, must be scrutinised visually to be understood, and would not translate well (if at all) into an audio version.
will form most of the primary source material. Historical texts will also be used at some points to chart the development of features over time. The thesis is organised thematically around these visual features of texts, rather than around individual works or authors. As such, where they display a particularly revealing usage of an item under discussion, some works from outside the main corpus will also be used for illustrative purposes. There is a chapter each on spelling, punctuation, & typography, and each chapter contains a case study of one element of those categories (for example, the chapter on punctuation will contain a case study of ellipsis points). This thesis aims to form a linguistic understanding of the visual items of which novels are comprised, emphasising the necessity of recognising the materiality of the book, as an object designed to allow people to consume narrative language visually.

*Looking at Novels: An Interdisciplinary Approach*

Despite being a relatively neglected area of study, there are many secondary sources which are useful to the aims of this study. These materials, however, must be drawn from across different disciplines, namely literary studies, linguistics, and book history. Although visual elements of the text are a relatively under-studied area of literary criticism, prominent critics such as Janine Barchas have worked to remedy this. Advocating vociferously for a critical approach that integrates the visual appearance of texts into the understanding of literature, Barchas has been consistently vocal about the deficit of such an approach in literary criticism generally. While her 2003 monograph
*Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* deals with a particular sub-set of literature, much of her argument and methodology is applicable to fiction and indeed writing much more generally. She acknowledges from the outset her “approach to literary texts is by no means new” and situates her work very firmly within a tradition of criticism and theory that recognises the materiality of the book as a visual printed object (2003: 7). In particular, she pays tribute to predecessors who contributed to the development of the field, and asserts “the study of print culture has already forced literary scholars to expand their definition of ‘text’ to include a work’s visual makeup and graphic design” (7). This case is perhaps most convincingly made where she discusses Richardson’s *Clarissa*, insisting previous critics have “neglected his instincts to encode meaning in the material production of his fiction” (116). This observation cannily sheds light on a crucial element of discussions around these lesser-studied textual elements: authorial intent. This subject will be explored in more detail further on, but Barchas cites the fact Richardson was a printer himself as something that encouraged her to scrutinise visual elements of this text. This is despite the fact, as she asserts, Richardson does not “project the same kind of preoccupation with the materiality of the book Sterne does” (116). Yet throughout her monograph Barchas’ arguments about the utility of examining the graphic elements of the text support the case that, irrespective of visual exuberance or authorial intent, the book is a material object with its own unity and is engaged with visually, and must be understood as such. Barchas also insists approaches which emphasise visual elements of the text remain
under-employed and under-developed within literary studies more generally. She argues that the examination of visual elements shouldn’t be confined to works which demonstrate obvious exuberance in those dimensions (2003: 9). Barchas’ conviction that this approach needs to be applied much more widely can be seen in her assertion that the ongoing development of the field “has virtually guaranteed that the circumscribed canon of authors who have hitherto enjoyed the graphic spotlight will soon be subject to expansion – if not explosion” (2003: 9).

From its playful title on, the collection of essays *Ma(r)king the Page: The Presentation of Meaning on the Literary Page* (2000) boldly announces its concern with visual dimensions of meaning. Edited by Anne C. Henry, Miriam Handley, and Joe Bray, this volume presents a number of papers that are useful not just for insights on specific works, but for the methodology they employ to understand the aforementioned marks on the page. John Lennard’s essay (“Space, Axis, Function: Towards a [New] Theory of Punctuation on Historical Principles” [1-11]), which opens the collection, is particularly useful, not least for its simple but effective rebuttal of the editorial concept of “substantives” v “accidentals”, the idea that the variation of some textual features (the “accidentals”) across editions is inconsequential, while others (the “substantives”) must be preserved across editions. As will be discussed in detail in relation to copyright guidelines, the conceptual division of the text between these different elements is a useful way of thinking for a certain segment of the industry. However, it has permeated the reader’s consciousness more generally, and encouraged some misunderstandings
about texts. This way of thinking about texts is not without rationale for editors, but it has entrenched the false division between the text and its appearance, which is an obfuscatory way of thinking for literary scholars, as it encourages a narrowing of the critical lens, and even the disregard of some elements of the text. While Lennard is specific about addressing “punctuation”, his definition of punctuation is more expansive than just the marks (including letter-forms and the like). The eight levels he posits as a framework to understand punctuation can be extrapolated to other features (5). It is significant in that it seeks to establish levels of meaning in a way analogous to the traditional linguistic levels of analysis (phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, etc), and as such demands an integrative holistic understanding of text which is a counterpoint to the dominant conception of the text as a particular pattern of words isolated from its appearance.

Literary critics have for some time argued that the visual dimensions of print are under-studied. This recognition has often taken the form of criticism which itself aims to address this deficit, offering approaches that that do examine texts firmly in terms of the visual medium of print. For example, Barchas (2003: 9) rightly hails the aforementioned collection of essays in *Ma(r)king the Text* (Bray et al. 2000) as an important step in expanding the horizon of literary criticism to examine previously neglected aspects of the medium. This vibrant anthology provides a variety of examples of how visual elements in literature can be fruitfully examined. In particular, Bray et al. (2000) reject Gerard Genette’s theory, as elaborated in his influential work *Paratexts*
Positing textual levels of interpretation analogous to paralinguistics (which deals with pitch, volume, duration, etc in spoken language), Genette argues that the analysis of title-pages, dedications, prefaces, epilogues and such, is an essential task for critics, but that these elements lie outside of the text itself, which is composed of “a more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance” (1). While Genette’s theory casts a welcome spotlight on neglected elements of books, it also recasts an artificial division between the text and its material reality as a beneficial critical approach. The essays Bray et al. present are collectively framed as “questioning the terms of this opposition”, or indeed in some cases “refuting this view” (Introduction). There are essays on the metrical association of 16th century punctuation, Richardson’s use of italics in *Pamela*, ellipsis points in literary texts, and the role of footnotes and other marginalia in Stendhal.

All of these valuable contributions demonstrate the value of looking at the novel as an object that is meant to be engaged with visually. However, Barchas’ assertion that the “new graphic awareness” created by Bray et al. marks the establishment of a “burgeoning field” is perhaps premature (2003: 9). She herself acknowledges that the lack of a shared terminology and theoretical approach demonstrate clearly that a unified field of study has yet to be developed, and this situation persists (9). Nonetheless, as previously mentioned Lennard’s contribution to the collection does offer an effective methodology for approaching the various textual elements that are a function of the visual medium of print, even if his terminology is up for debate (ie. designating letter-
forms and other textual features as forms of “punctuation” [5]). His adumbration of textual features nicely delineates the field, listing textual dimensions which are ripe for study. Throughout his work, Glynn White makes a thoroughly convincing argument, by pointing out the semantic corruption that can occur when visual elements are altered between editions, that the integrity of individual editions must be respected, and visual elements analysed in order to fully understand a text (2000, 2005). He repeatedly proposes that literary works be evaluated in terms of their material reality, including their visual appearance. He does so most convincingly in the case of *Tristram Shandy*, where he argues the need for a facsimile edition of the original in order for the novel to be fully appreciated (2005: 30). These concerns correspond with the aims of this study.

Interestingly, while White is firm that there has been a lack of attention paid to visual elements of literary texts, he does not frame this negatively. He sees it not as a lack of due diligence, but rather an overly acute concern for other linguistic levels:

> Paradoxically, this situation is partly a symptom of critical reverence for text at a verbal, orthographic level. It seems impossible for editors to change a word in order to retain an intended effect, despite relative freedom with other aspects of the text [. . . ] The neglect of elements of the graphic surface, all far more significant than the difference between semicolon and comma, makes a stark comparison. (2005: 30)
This is true in terms of the transmission of texts through different versions. However, it is important to note many aspects of orthography have not been fully articulated not only in literary studies, but in linguistics, where comprehensive theories of English spelling are only now becoming established.² Although White is unequivocal about the conceptual separation of the words from their appearance, he is less clear about the causes of this. The simple fact that speech predates writing may have encouraged an understanding of literature in terms already extant before literacy, and thus devoid of many elements that are a function of the medium. While White doesn’t explore these possibilities, his focus on the visuality of the text is incisive and refreshing. For example, his argument about the primacy of the edition as an object for literary (and not individual copies) neatly summates the issue:

The result of mechanical production is, indeed, the reproduction of a uniform text; one copy being functionally the same as the next. It may be suggested that every individual copy is different, but without obvious damage or marks this is not a functional difference: the uniformity of mechanical reproduction holds good. (30)

² *The Routledge Handbook of the English Writing System* (2016), edited by Des Ryan and Vivian Cook, collates the most up to date orthographical theories of English. It is surprising that such a systematised approach to English spelling had not been carried out before, as most of the theoretical tools employed in conducting this impressive study have been extant in linguistics for some time.
The simplicity of this quotation belies its heuristic value. The text remains the same text throughout multiple copies, but different editions must be considered, at least to some extent, different texts. This is a conception of the text which cuts to the quick in terms of highlighting both the integrity of the book as an object, and the unity of the sequence of words on the page with their appearance. This is not as obvious as it should be, due to the entanglement of speech with writing in the popular consciousness. These two forms of language need to be understood as distinct.

Linguistic features are inevitably influenced by the medium in which they occur. Spoken language is primarily aural and ephemeral, written language primarily visual and (semi-) permanent. The form language takes can of course also be shaped by the method of its production. For example, the development of print led to the invention and evolution of new features and conventions within the writing system, such as different letter-forms from handwritten language and new marks of punctuation. There have been many linguistic, historical and philosophical studies of these distinctions.3 Less often considered than medium in terms of its effects on the writing system as a visual system is the further influence of genre. The conventions and characteristics that define a novel are not only a product of its historical development, but also the limits of

---

the writing system, and the manifestation of the writing system in print is a further
restraining factor. In *The Stuff of Literature*, E.A. Levenston asserts the primacy of print
to understanding the novel as a genre:

Novels are meant to be read; their primary mode of existence is in print.
“Primary” here means both first in time and first in importance: a secondary
mode of existence for a novel would be a complete oral performance available
on tape for the blind. Novels first see the light of day (the Hebrew term for
“publish” means literally “to bring out into the light”) when they appear on the
bookstall. Later they can be read aloud—or, more precisely, parts of them can.
Charles Dickens and Mark Twain were both famous for their public
appearances. reading aloud from their works. But I doubt if either ever
performed an entire novel. And I know of no case of a novel first presented
orally to the public and only later appearing in print. (1992: 2)

As perhaps the characteristic product of print, the novel should be studied with
particular respect to those features that are peculiar to its medium. This has not usually
been the case. One of the most valuable ways to redress this imbalance is a linguistic
approach, focussing not on language in the traditional sense (phonemes, morphemes,
words, sentences), but on the specifically visual features of written language (spelling,
punctuation, font, format) that are defining characteristics of the medium. Yet just as
literary studies has often neglected the appearance of texts, traditional linguistic
definitions of the English writing system often ignore crucial communicative devices
(such as font style, layout, non-standard orthography [see Ryan, 2011]).

As linguist Vivian Cook points out, many features of writing “do not depend
upon spoken English”, but arose independently of written language’s spoken
predecessor, exploiting newly available visual dimensions of meaning upon the
invention of writing (2014: 89). We do not choose, for example, what “size” our words
will be when we speak, spoken language doesn’t occupy space in this way. The writing
system is typically defined in terms of the letters of the alphabet, marks of punctuation,
and conventions of formatting (indenting new paragraphs etc). This of course fails to
consider font size (or indeed style), which in practice can confer meaning on the text
contrastively (eg. enlarged initial capitals to begin a chapter) or supra-segmentally (eg.
larger font throughout a book of pulp-fiction). In order to examine the full breadth of
communicative conventions that are a product of written language specifically, the
definition of the writing system needs to be expanded to encompass these visual
dimensions of the medium. An analysis of the novel in terms of those features that are
peculiar to the medium in which it occurs (written language), as well as its method of
production (print), and even mode of manual production (handwriting v type), offers to
contribute to debates in linguistics surrounding the relationship between language and
media, and to address a well-recognised gap in literary studies (Barchas 2003: 9;
While linguistics has traditionally focussed primarily on speech, there are many valuable sources that can be applied to written language. Vivian Cook in his 2004 textbook the *English Writing System* asserts that “so far as most linguists are concerned, written language has no existence in its own right, but is a shadow cast by speech” (31). Citing various examples of linguists who depict writing as purely a means of representing speech (and another form of language derived from speech) from Saussure on, Cook makes the case that such conflations of speech with writing are as endemic as misleading in linguistics, and that ensuing misconceptions have permeated popular consciousness. Cook explores the complex and counterintuitive relationship between speech and writing and refutes the dominant crude conception of writing as simply a means to preserve speech in a visual medium (emphasising for example that there is nowhere near one to one mapping between phonemes and letters [26]). He also shows how the hegemony of standard English spelling continuously influences how we conceive of the language itself. His argument incorporates his own experimental data, much of which explores differences in speech and writing. For example, he performed an experiment in which he gave test-subjects a choice between pairs of spellings like “fense” and “felce” (asking which one sounded most like a real English word), and measured response time compared to subjects hearing examples of pairs like “room” and “rume” (then asking which one was spelled right [26]). Cook concluded from these experiments that the respondents coped better with the lexical route (ie. the visual processing of written language), which resulted both in faster response times and a higher percentage of correct answers than the phonological route (ie. the aural processing of spoken language). While the margin was narrow, the very similarity in results for phonological and lexical processing seems to demonstrate that we at least adapt easily to language in its visible form, and don’t have to translate written language to spoken language in order to process it mentally.
visually, but as language in a different form.⁵ The differences between speech and writing pointed out in such experiments are important – the distinction between phonemes and letters, for example, is fundamental and widely misunderstood, and demonstrates prior to the results of any experiments that writing must be understood as quite distinct from speech. The case that Cook builds – primarily that writing is misunderstood in linguistics, and should be reconceived as a form of language quite distinct from speech – is lucid, astute, and important.

_Studying Writing: Linguistic Perspectives_ (1986), edited by Charles Raymond Cooper and Sidney Greenbaum, presents a collection of papers tackling a diverse range of subjects and methodologies which all aim to understand writing through linguistics. Collectively these essays contribute to the case that writing has not only been sorely neglected, but often severely misunderstood by linguists. They note in their introduction that written language is of interest to, and can be studied productively by, disciplines as diverse as “as literary theory and computer simulation” (8). However, they argue that the methodological resources available in the field of linguistics provide an indispensable repertoire of tools that are essential to developing a full understanding of what is after all one specific type of language. It is linguistics, they argue, that provides

---

⁵ This is borne out by the latest theories of sign language, which emerges among communities of deaf people without instruction, is possessive of the full range of syntax and other linguistic features of spoken language, and cannot be thought of as intrinsically related to speech, but as language in a visual form (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language#1, accessed 12 January 2019. While writing developed closely in tandem with written language, the example of sign language demonstrates that language can exist in a visual medium independently of speech, and develop its own features to exploit the available dimensions of meaning within that medium.
the best framework for understanding writing – quite naturally, as linguistics is the discipline dedicated to understanding language, and writing is one form of language. As such, they argue, it is incumbent on linguists to treat written language as it is found; as language in a visible form with a host of characteristics that are peculiar to the medium, and not, as has often been the case, simply a cipher or substitute for speech.

In his contribution to the collection, Wallace Chafe in particular asserts that linguistics as a discipline suffered as a result of severely neglecting the study of writing, not just in terms of a medium somewhat independent of speech, but at all. There is an extent to which this deficit in the field is understandable, given that writing is a technology developed relatively recently in human history, whereas speech is a fundamental and perhaps defining characteristic of humanity. Chafe’s comparisons between speech and writing make use of experimental data to build a solid foundation for his argument, and his assertions about the distinctions between these two forms of language are convincing and instructive. 6

The material reality of books, that they are objects that are manufactured within various technological and sociological constraints that affect their form (and must thus be considered in their interpretation) has been best recognised in the fields of book history and bibliography. Some older works, such as Margaret Spufford’s superb Small

---

6 For example, in one experiment, Chafe compares individual’s speech versus their writing in order to learn what linguistic differences manifest themselves in different media as spoken/written by the same person (38). The differences made apparent neatly illustrate that the divergent media engender distinct linguistic practices, and that neither is a simple reflection of the other.
Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Seventeenth-Century Readership (1981), for example, have dated well, and offer a useful perspective on the historical development of prose fiction, and a framework for analysis which understands the book very much as a material object to be engaged with visually. While concerned primarily with the sociology of print culture in the period, Spufford cannot help but engage with the exuberant visual aspects of her source material. She also offers an impressively nuanced glimpse at the formation of the genre which goes much further than other critics in recognising the importance of “small merry books” of “courtship, sex, and songs” (157) in creating the market which was eventually consolidated by the novel. It is this holistic approach, considering the book as object, but also the readers who engaged with books, and indeed why and how they did so, that encourages Spufford’s analysis of visual textual elements. Spufford understands books as manufactured commercial objects, to be consumed visually. In approaching the subject of how the chapbooks were marketed, for example, Spufford includes many facsimile images, that illuminate how the proto-novel gave rise to the novel, and how its appearance evolved from earlier forms. For example, the frontispiece from “The Pleasant History of the Miller of Mansfield” (223) demonstrates a burgeoning appetite for realism of a sort (the subtitle is “Shewing how the King was lodged in the Miller’s House, and the mirth and Sports he had there”) that is akin to Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, in presenting an imagined scenario with an illusion of realism. The “pleasantness” of this “history” is derived from imagining the sequence of events described therein really happening, and
this is achieved not least by presentation which accords with journalism, letter-writing, and other forms of non-fictional writing. Spufford’s historical contextualisation and analysis of these examples of early print culture is second to none.

D.F. McKenzie, described by Robert Darnton as “the greatest bibliographer of our time” was a pioneer in this regard, and the collection of his articles in his posthumously published *Making Meaning: “Printers of the Mind” and Other Essays* is an invaluable resource in contextualising the novel as a printed object, and understanding the historical development of publishing processes (and the impact on the final form of books of same). “Speech—Manuscript—Print” (2002) is unusual not only for its in-depth examination of the distinction between the very different linguistic media named in the title of the essay, but for its masterful explanation of the ways in which they functioned in parallel not only as antagonistic, but often as complementary modes of expression. From its inception the novel relied heavily on portraying both speech and handwriting, encapsulating and absorbing rather than supplanting the forms of language that existed prior to print. As McKenzie puts it, “we did not stop speaking when we learned to write, nor writing when we learned to print, nor reading writing or printing when we entered the ‘electronic age’” (238). This essay stands as an example of how an approach that recognises the relationship between content, form, medium, and genre, is essential to fully understanding printed material. However, McKenzie operates at the macro-level of interpretation – offering historical, cultural, and sociological context as an aid to the traditional task of literary exegesis. There remains
much work to be done at a more micro-level, in examining how textual minutiae, such as specific punctuational items, for example, developed, and deliver meaning today. This is where the field of linguistics, which McKenzie does not fully engage with, becomes indispensable. Linguistic methodology offers a means to formally evaluate how meaning is carried and delivered in context. McKenzie’s interdisciplinary approach, nevertheless, remains a benchmark for interpreting books as material objects, and understanding that they are/were engaged with by readers as such.

Darnton himself has taken up McKenzie’s mantle, and made numerous significant contributions to this field. With a methodology established in *The Business of the Enlightenment* (1979) Darnton in his numerous books and essays deftly utilises primary historical documents to trace the development of print culture in painstaking detail. He offers information on everything from the economics of individual printing houses, to the political and sociological impact of their output. Of more acute relevance to the aims of this study, is Darnton’s latterly arguments in favour of appreciating books as material printed objects. In *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (2009), he has collected a range of his own writings towards that end. Darnton stoutly argues both for a recognition of the distinctions between electronic and printed books, and an appreciation of the value in, and distinct benefits distinct of each form. This concern stems of course from his life’s work, but also the predominance of electronic texts, which do not usually retain the integrity of the original texts (losing font style, punctuation and formatting conventions, and even altering spelling in the translation
from the page to the hard-drive). Darnton’s argument is to a large extent motivated by the arrival of the book in new digital forms. It is perhaps only with the advent of the various varieties of e-text that we have gained the hindsight to develop a full understanding of print – the characteristics of new media throw the fundamental properties of the old media into sharper focus. Darnton argues that one medium must not “displace another”, and that a physical repository of printed books “still deserves to stand at the center of the campus”.

He also, however, explores the nature of books in the contrastive light of these new media. Inherent throughout his work is a demand that every aspect of a text with which a reader comes into contact must be critically engaged with by any academics attempting interpretation.

Contributors to the field of book history such as Darnton often demonstrate such a concern – a focus on those elements of the text liable to be lost in translation. This is probably because their very remit is to examine texts firmly within historical contexts. Those same very features that are prone to be eroded by reproduction and transmission through time form the focus of this thesis also. Book history, by virtue of its necessary focus on the book as material object, offers many resources in this regard which literary criticism or linguistic treatments of written language often do not.

---

7 The google books version of Darnton’s *The Case for Books* does not follow one of the most basic formatting conventions, that of numbering its pages, which itself bolsters his polemic on the indispensable utility of a hard-copy: https://books.google.ie/books?id=sxI5DgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+case+for+books&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiwt-e5vObYAhXID8AKHXAIAVUQ6AEIJzAA#v=snippet&q=center%20of%20the%20campus&f=false, accessed 19th January, 2018.
Richard McIntosh’s peculiar little book *Hyphenation* (1990), appears at first glance to treat only a minor sub-field of punctuation. However, McIntosh of necessity wades into theoretical discussion of the distinction between speech and language, and makes a surprisingly substantive contribution for such a slim volume and esoteric subject. While dealing with morphological issues related to word splitting in print formatting (where hyphens are often used as a marker to connect syllables across a line break), McIntosh conceives of writing and print in terms of a visual medium. McIntosh charts the process of translating speech onto the printed page, offering “analysis of what the skilled printer knows and how he acts in various circumstances” (59). McIntosh is aware of the pitfalls of applying and misapplying ill-thought theories of the distinction between speech and writing to literary analysis. He observes, for example, that “there is a mismatch between what the academic linguists and aspiring hyphenators expect from the elementary syllable” (39). His unusual perspective, both descriptive and prescriptive, forms a compelling analysis not only of his chosen subject, but of the printing process more generally (and its interpretation).

The advent of the e-book, often consumed in different ways on different devices (Kindle, tablet, smart-phone, etc), has cast a spotlight on the defining characteristics of the book as an object, and the novel as a type of book. The development of these new technologies, and the transfer of novels from print to electronic devices, raises a number of questions about what aspects of the medium are fundamental and definitive. Anna Wiegel (2018) provides a valuable case-study on Marisha Pessl’s thriller *Night Film*
(2013), a novel published alongside an app that made available a number of audio and visual elements that complement the text. Wiegel argues that the integration of these augmentations presents a new horizon for the novel:

Recent developments in the publishing world have shown that reading becomes a new kind of activity when it is combined with viewing and listening. Hence, more and more print, as well as electronic books make use of new technological devices by relocating the reading process to the internet, or by using various media to narrate the story. Because this form of transmedial and interactive literature across multiple media formats is on the verge of becoming an integral part of contemporary writing. (2018: 74)

Wiegel makes astute observations about the new marketing opportunities afforded by new technology, pointing out publishers can now provide easy access to a variety of appendices in different media. This can be a relatively low-cost initiative, given its scalability. Once the app is built, there aren’t costs per user, as there are costs to print a physical book. However, the augmentation of the novel with, and adaptation into, different media is not an entirely new development, rather the ease of access is. The recordings of Tolkien reading excerpts from *Lord of the Rings* (1988), for example, may be seen in terms of a process of making available supplementary materials to enhance the reader’s experience, and could be seen as analogous to the app Wiegel
discusses in her essay. Furthermore, despite much easier access to such supplementary materials and media via the internet existing for some time now, the practice has not become common, let alone generally integrated with the traditional publishing industry. At the start of her essay Wiegel quotes Umberto Eco, from his “conversation” with Jean Claude Carrière, published as *This Is Not the End of the Book*:

> One of two things will happen: either the book will continue to be the medium for reading, or its replacement will resemble what the book has always been, even before the invention of the printing press. Alterations to the book-as-object have modified neither its function nor its grammar for more than 500 years. The book is like the spoon, scissors, the hammer, the wheel. Once invented, it cannot be improved. (2012: 4)

However, despite the creative ingenuity Wiegel enthusiastically describes, what is more striking is the accuracy of Eco’s verdict, in that fundamental features of the book like pagination in strict sequential ordering, cohesion within a single volume, and the absence of audio or video elements, have been retained to such a remarkably high degree even in the transition to new media. As Wiegel argues, e-readers, smart-phones,

---

8 This recording was available in cassette from the 1980s on, and featured the excerpt “Riddles in the Dark” from *The Hobbit*, alongside poems and songs from *Lord of the Rings* all read by Tolkien himself. Tolkien gave a very short impromptu introduction for some excerpts, but without the context of having read the books, it would be difficult to fully appreciate either the prose or poetry, and this was presumably marketed almost exclusively to fans of the books.
and tablets do provide opportunities for the integration of new media, but what is remarkable is despite the increasing engagement of the public with novels in these formats, the reading experience remains remarkably stable across these media. The integrity of the book has been retained beyond its essentiality due to the limits of print. While Eco is open to challenge on the perfection of the book as an object given the high take-up of books in these new media, what is most notable about this phenomenon (contrary to Wiegel) is that it has largely rejected the multifarious opportunities this development presents. The novel, for the most part, remains a long-form fictional prose narrative presented with the accoutrements of print (pagination, punctuation, typography, layout, etc), even when consumed electronically.

The advent of the novel in new, non-material forms sheds light on two things that are salient to this thesis. The traditional materiality of the genre, but also the fundamental stuff of which it remains composed: language. The novel as a genre retains its conceptual cohesion even in digital media not only because it retains the apparatus of the book, but because they still communicate meaning linguistically. It is a holistic understanding of the novel such as this, in terms of the semantic content of its language, but also the form this language takes, that offers to reveal the true properties of the genre. While written language has traditionally been neglected by linguists (Cook 2004: 31; Cooper & Greenbaum [eds.] 1986), in literary studies the nature of the medium under examination has been correspondingly neglected (Barchas 2003; Bray et al. 2000). In examining visual elements of texts, the tools of the linguist, though readily
available, have not been often enough applied. The integration of linguistics with approaches from literary criticism and book history offers to form a truly interdisciplinary approach, and better understand how the novel delivers meaning. Examining the novel in these terms promises not only to illuminate the genre itself, but form an ideal crucible for developing an understanding of these issues more generally.

Why Novels?

The novel is a notoriously difficult genre to define. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it thus: “novel, n. A long fictional prose narrative, usually filling one or more volumes and typically representing character and action with some degree of realism and complexity; a book containing such a narrative.” This is of necessity simplistic, but promising enough a conception to be closely echoed by E.M. Forster, who famously defined the genre as “a fiction in prose of a certain length”. The dictionary entry is revealing of the difficulties facing those attempting to formulate a definition. These problems are demonstrated not least by the fact the terms offered in the *OED* are qualified from the outset (i.e. “usually filling one or more volumes”, “some degree of realism and complexity”). It is useful, however, in that it explicitly makes the distinction between the narrative, and the book containing that narrative. This division,

---

9 Apparently in delivering this maxim, Forster was himself quoting Abel Chavelley (Hassan, 2017: 23).
while firmly entrenched in dominant conceptions of the genre, is usually implicit and
assumed rather than consciously deployed or explicitly acknowledged.

In his influential *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Walter J. Ong argues that the
predominance of writing has occluded its distinction from speech, and both linguistic
forms have become conflated and confused in the popular consciousness. The
differences of these two linguistic media, and how they each influence each other, has
become invisible due to the modern ubiquity of writing. Ong asserts that what he calls
“the relentless dominance of textuality in the scholarly mind” (10) inhibits a full
understanding or perhaps even a basic awareness of the differences between oral and
chirographic cultures. The conceptual division between the book as an object, and the
linguistic content of that book, is similarly unacknowledged, but particularly acute
when dealing with literary texts that exist in many copies and editions. The distinction
is sustained by copyright law, where it remains enshrined. For the author, copyright law
protects only the arrangement of language at the lexical and syntactical levels,
privileging the unique sequence of words as a “form of intangible property” (British
Copyright Guidelines). Copyright law, however, recognises separately the materiality of
the book as an object, in particular the visual appearance of the text: “An author may
own literary copyright in the words, while a publisher may own typographical copyright
in a published edition”. While this conception of a novel might be useful in law, the
artificiality of this division, between words and their appearance, needs to be recognised
to interpret novels as they actually occur in the world. As such, the dictionary
definition, along with many scholarly attempts to define the genre, fall short in this respect also. The provision for the legal protection of the appearance of the narrative itself demonstrates that the appearance of novels is neither insignificant nor accidental, but this conceptual separation of the author’s pattern of language from how that language appears in books occludes full understanding of same.

The *OED* does well to couch its demand for “realism” with the qualification “some degree of”, though this would seem a difficult quality to quantify. The difficulty with assuming this characteristic is quite glaring at this particular historical moment, emerging as we now are from a period when magic-realism became one of the most dominant trends in the genre, and perhaps the most fashionable. Thus, as Margaret Anne Doody argues, in terms of being a defining characteristic of the novel as a genre, “realism has faded away like the Cheshire cat [. . . ] when novels [. . . ] deal with barons living in trees and girls born with green hair, it is time to drop the pretence that the primary demand of a long work of prose fiction is that it be realistic” (1997: 16).

The disconnection between realism and the novel is not, however, a new phenomenon. There are many distinguished antecedents to this trend, from Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) right back (those who would accept Margaret Anne Doody’s contentions about the “classical novel” might argue) to the *Satyricon* (c. 50AD). While these works do contain “some degree of realism”, as per the definition, few literary works of any genre do not. Even the intentionally indecipherable *Finnegans Wake* (1939) permits the reader to divine identifiable characters and events if they have the
will and imagination. Maurice Shroder, in his 1963 essay “The Novel as Genre” offered a different timeline for this development, but also argued that realism had become a chimera in terms of genre criticism:

> With such authors as Zola and Hardy, the novel opens itself to a process that we might call “remythification,” the tendency to see human life in terms of myth and legend, to appropriate the processes and effects which earlier novelists had avoided as the province of poetry. (306)

What is certain is that, as Doody argues, dividing the novel from the Romance in these terms will not do. Given the number of notable exceptions, and the extent to which it is applicable to all genres to a greater or lesser degree, “realism” as a defining characteristic of the novel must be heavily qualified. It is of dubious utility at all as a characteristic in attempting to draft a definition of the genre. The proposal of characteristics, only for them to be qualified out of existence, is a recurring theme in attempting to define the novel. Shroder also long ago acknowledged the inadequacy of many proposed definitions of the genre due to the manifold exceptions that contradict them, and the many qualifications needed to sustain them. As he asserts:

> An adequate definition of the novel would, of course, have to be totally comprehensive, exhaustive, and infallible. It would have to borrow at once from
the history of literature, the study of external form, and the study of the fictional
matter of novels in general. (292)

The definition he does go on to offer rests on the peculiar narrative content of the novel,
which he contends “would then seem to be an essentially ironic fictional form,
occupying a middle position between the non-ironic romance, and the philosophical
tale” (1963: 299). While Shroder’s argument is compelling, the external form of the
narrative is less discussed than narrative style, but is no less relevant. “Prose” as a
defining characteristic rests on firmer ground, as it can of course can be defined in
terms of its external form – the arrangement of the text on the page in which clauses and
sentences are continuous and justified, in comparison to verse arranged in lines aligned
to the left. Yet this of course too remains an inadequate characteristic to define the
genre, as many forms are written in prose, both fictional and non-fictional. As Shroder
hints, those who attempt to draw boundaries in this arena, can end up like Cervantes’
hero, tilting at windmills.

Yet in attempting to define the novel, prose is certainly part of the story, and the
presentation aspect of prose only part of that story itself. In his article “History of the
Novel, Theory of the Novel” (2010) Franco Moretti puts forward some tantalising
counterfactual histories of the genre, posed in the form of questions like “Why was
there a European but not a Chinese rise of the novel in the course of the eighteenth-
century?” (1). He begins his essay by asserting this defining characteristic of the novel
offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, that it is in prose, “wasn’t inevitable” (1).

Moretti points to historical antecedents such as the *Tale of Genjii* as exemplars of successful long form narrative fiction in verse. Yet as he concedes himself, even ancient predecessors of the novel were “certainly in prose”, merely containing the long form verse that he uses to make his point. Moretti argues that the reason for prose’s efficacy in the novel form has to do with its essentially contiguous nature. Lines of verse, he argues, can stand alone in ways that lines of prose cannot, claiming ”consecutiveness is a good starting point for a stylistics of prose” (2). According to Moretti, this informs novels as a structural whole. Novels demand:

> [ . . . ] foresight, memory, adequation of means to ends – but truly productive: the outcome is usually more than the sum of its parts because subordination establishes a hierarchy among clauses, meaning becomes articulated, aspects emerge that didn't exist before. (2)

According to this view the novel might be in part definable by its indivisibility, but indivisibility is another questionable and unquantifiable characteristic given the possibility of division into smaller parts has been demonstrated (at least for certain novels). For example, literary critic Eileen Battersby (2015) encourages reluctant readers of *Ulysses* to engage with this text via a selection of non-sequential segments, to be read as stand-alone pieces of prose. Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (2000)
had its final chapter removed entirely for the American market, yet it remained not only intelligible, but worked perfectly well with this alternate (albeit pre-contained) ending.¹⁰

A more workable definition of the genre may be at once less obvious and more simple, and account somewhat for the utility of the genre as an object for those interested in the study of written language more generally. There is another entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the novel. While it is historical (and essentially obsolete), it remains useful. It reads “novel, n. Any of a number of tales or stories making up a larger work; a short narrative of this type, a fable. Usually in plural. Now *hyst*”. The historical examples are particularly revealing:

> c1500 G. Banester *Guiscardo & Ghismonda* (Rawl.) 5 in H. G. Wright *Tales from Decameron* (1937) 3 (MED) Bocas in cent nouellys witnessyth þe same.

> 1566 W. Painter *Palace of Pleasure* I. Ded. sig. *iiij* In these histories (which by another terme I call Nouelles) be described the liues.,of great Princes.

> 1578 in T. Thomson *Coll. Inventories Royal Wardrobe* (1815) 244 The first buik of the novallis of Ronsard.

> 1624 R. Burton *Anat. Melancholy* (ed. 2) ii. ii. iv. 230 Such as the old women tolde Psyche in Apuleius, Bocace Nouells and the rest.

---

¹⁰ Blake Morrison writes in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *A Clockwork Orange* that “Burgess’s US publishers were W.W. Norton, whose vice-president Eric Swenson, had been disinclined to publish the book unless the affirmative ending – in which Alex renounces violence – was dropped [. . . ] the twenty-first chapter was therefore cut – and not restored in the US until 1988” (1996: xvii).
1674 J. Evelyn *Mem.* (1857) III. 245 Marguerite of Valois..whose novels are equal to those of the witty Boccaccio.

1697 Dryden *Ded. Æneis* in tr. Virgil *Wks.* sig. a1 The trifling Novels, which Aristotle, and others have inserted in their Poems.

1717 Lady M. W. Montagu *Let.* 1 Jan. (1965) I. 293 Would you have me write novelles like the Countesse of D'Aunois?

1772 *Philos. Trans.* (Royal Soc.) 62 309 (note) In one of Boccace's Novels, a lover, who lives at Florence, dresses a falcon for the dinner of his mistress.

1834 J. L. Motley *Let.* 2 June in *Corr.* (1889) I. iii. 35 Tieck’s novels (which last are a set of exquisite little tales, novels in the original meaning of the word).

This, as Motley puts it, “original meaning of the word”, refers to collections of disparate works presented together (though not necessarily encased in a meta-narrative), but may not be so foreign to the true limits of the genre as it stands. It is the novel’s potential to contain within it examples of every other written genre which may be the only characteristic not possessed also by other literary genres. A novel may contain a poem, or short story, or even another novel, but, contrary to Dryden above, a poem or short story cannot contain a novel as understood today.

This combinatory potential is not inconsequential. In his 1935 essay “Discourse in the Novel” Mikhail Bakhtin argues that within any given language there exist a diverse array of practices and conventions that transcend traditional linguistic ideas.
about dialect and idiolect; in particular he argues that within the boundaries of what has traditionally been perceived as a single language/dialect there is still huge variety in a wide range of dimensions. This is dependent on various different forms of context, and these contexts (for example a particular industry in terms of technical jargon) are the defining in delimiting the bounds of these linguistic practices. This multiplicity of styles within any given language for Bakhtin embody “socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth” (1981: 291). It is in the genre of the novel, Bakhtin goes on to argue, that the true diversity of linguistic practices within any particular language is most likely to be brought together. The novel is the genre in which these stylistic varieties are:

[. . . ] all able to enter into the unitary plane [. . . ] which can unite in itself parodic stylizations of generic languages, various forms of stylizations and illustrations of professional and period-bound languages, the languages of particular generations, of social dialects and others. (1981: 292)

In other words, a novel may contain within itself any other linguistic practice, style, and genre. This “heteroglossia” that makes the novel an excellent object for linguistic inquiry, providing material for analysis which encapsulates the true diversity of language in both spoken and written forms.

Indeed, Bakhtin saw this linguistic diversity as the defining characteristic of the novel as a genre itself. Furthermore, he posited a linguistic diversity peculiar to each
individual novel, which was unified within the integrity of each novel as a set of singular printed objects. For Bakhtin, this is what constituted a novel as a book:

The stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of these subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its “languages.” Each separate element of a novel's language is determined first of all by one such subordinated stylistic unity into which it enters directly, be it the stylistically individualized speech of a character, the down-to-earth voice of a narrator in skaz, a letter or whatever. The linguistic and stylistic profile of a given element (lexical, semantic, syntactic) is shaped by that subordinated unity to which it is most immediately proximate. (262)

This is what Bakhtin calls the novel’s “heteroglossia”, the expression of a diverse array of styles of language within the unity of a single linguistic object. As Bakhtin points out, this is often achieved through the stylistics of lexicon, semantics, and syntax, which he explicitly mentions in the above quotation. The “unitary plane” to which Bakhtin refers consists of the two-dimensional surface of the pages upon which different linguistic practices are represented. While a diversity of speech-sounds of may be represented there, this must be achieved through the visual medium of print. It is on the flat graphic surface of the page, restrained by the limits of typography, that chaotic and ephemeral speech sounds can be contained and preserved. The novel, however, is indeed capable of expressing elements of phonology along with the full linguistic
variety of lexicon and syntax which also occurs in spoken language. It may also include, however, all other written genres, such as letters, newspaper articles, or technical manuals, and even within itself examples of every other literary genre (including itself). Bakhtin’s theory is applicable not only to the arena of traditional linguistic study (phonology, lexicon, syntax, semantics, etc), but also to these visual elements of the text: punctuation, and typography.

In his monograph *The Appearance of Print*, Christopher Flint argues that this such textual collage is an integral characteristic of the genre, as novels habitually include “experimentation with the physical layout of the page and the deployment of different fonts and typographical marks” (2011: 1). Flint’s argument is particularly interesting because he makes a link between such typographical practices and the semantic content of the novel, bridging a theoretical gap between critics such as Levenston, who focus on the visual, and Eagleton, who focusses on the social role the genre occupies. His contentions here about the visual exuberance of the eighteenth-century novel remain salient to contemporary fiction which exploits these dimensions:

[... ] a genre supposedly invented to make mundane reality transparent, visibly recorded the self-conscious manipulation of its typographical nature. As a collective effort to reproduce everyday experience, what made a great deal of eighteenth-century fiction culturally effective was its capacity to circulate intimacy and affect without appearing to be a self-conscious or self-consciously public artifice. I stress the word “appearing” because, in fact, popular fiction,
customarily about private lives, was inevitably a highly public form of
discourse. That is, “the novel” was not so much a record of privacy and
individualism as a vehicle by which such elusive concepts could be publicly
mediated. (1)

Because reading, unlike music, radio, cinema, or television, is usually a solitary act, the
inclusion of textual forms is always conducive to communicating interiority. Flint
makes well the point that this capability of the novel to relate intimate individual
experience, perhaps its dominant function as a genre, is inextricably intertwined with
the practice of collating various textual forms within its pages.

The spoken “heteroglossia” on which Bakhtin builds his own case is not
constrained to lexicon, syntax, or semantics either. Bakhtin refers to “the stylistically
individualized speech of characters’ as one of the “basic types of compositional unities”
(1981: 262), presumably referring to stylistic variation demanded by the portrayal of
different characters’ unique idiolects. When this argument is extended to the dialects of
different speech communities, visual elements of the text must again come to the fore.
The phonology of different dialects, for example, demands unique punctuation and
spelling if the author wishes to convey non-standard speech-sounds through the
medium of print. Bakhtin saw the representation of linguistic diversity as a defining
characteristic of the novel:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even
diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically
organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purposes of the day, even the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases), this internal stratification present in every language of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. (262)

Bakhtin’s rubric, to understand the novel in terms of its capacity to bring together various linguistic styles and practices, is eminently applicable to those visual elements of meaning not traditionally understood as linguistic in the same way that lexicon, syntax, and semantics are. Many of the various types of language Bakhtin lists here are differentiated from one another within novels primarily through the use of visual elements of text, namely spelling, punctuation, and typography. Indeed, Bakhtin’s heteroglossia is more immediately apparent when achieved through typography and punctuation. Because each written genre has its own stylistics in these dimensions, and these visual stylistics are more immediately obvious than the peculiar lexicon, syntax, and semantics of different genres, they can be usefully employed to represent examples of other textual practices as they occur within the novel. To recognise Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia” in the novel, therefore, we must look at the text as well as read it.

Engaging with the novel explicitly as a visual medium is a useful critical tactic. To conceive of any particular novel as an abstracted stream of language is to isolate it
from its appearance, deprive it of those visual aspects of meaning, and to risk losing precisely the semantic content that is specifically integral to the medium itself. The medium is of course writing in its printed form. The characteristics of this mode of communication influence the content in meaningful ways that must be engaged with. Print presents its own particular linguistic opportunities and limitations for those who create novels, not only in relation to spoken language, but also when compared to handwriting. These distinctions must be recognised.

Although these questions are pertinent to the study of other literary forms (and indeed “the book” and print culture more generally), the novel is an ideal crucible for those concerned with visual elements of the text. As David Crystal points out,

In a pragmatic approach, it’s important to ensure that the choices are presented within a single genre. It would make no sense to consider together the use of a comma in a newspaper and the use of a colon in a legal text. (2015: 355)

Each genre of writing has its own set of expectations and rules, and some are more clearly defined and more scrupulously delineated than others. As creative fiction, the novel is unconstrained by some of the limits other forms of writing must operate within – for example journalism or academic writing must conform to a house style in parameters which novels need not (such as formatting or footnoting), and usually have clearly defined rules set in advance by editors and publishers. This freedom may not
seem as obvious or often exploited when it comes to layout, typography, or other visual aspects of the text as it is in terms of plot, characters, and style. Nonetheless, the simple fact it is a fictional genre affords the novel much room for creativity not only in terms of linguistic content, but also when it comes to how the text is presented. Also, in a novel quick and clear communication is not necessarily a prerogative; there is the time and space to develop within each novel its own peculiar usages, and to explore variant and experimental uses.

This length, though difficult to precisely quantify, is not an inconsequential characteristic of the novel. In *Precarious Labour and the Contemporary Novel*, Liam Connell wrestles with some of the same issues of selection as this thesis. His commentary is apposite:

With cultural texts of work so readily and incessantly available, the decision to limit the present book to a study of the novel might seem to be perversely limiting. However, there are good reasons governing this choice [. . . ] the novel may possess additional aesthetic features that allow these ideas to be more fully worked through. The length of novels as texts, the commitment of time that the writer has allowed to develop the story, characters or ideas, pushes past the condensed forms of much of popular culture [. . . ] Formally, too, the novel offers something different still to film and television genres, which are more suited to action, or to dialogue, or to the silent, impressionist, limbic meaning of
the image. Long stretched out meditations that would be tiresome on screen find
a comfortable space in the novel that allows the text to develop conceptual ideas
more immediately than its audio-visual counterparts. (2017: 5)

While Connell does not conceptualise the novel’s text explicitly as visual, he does make
the salient point that despite the imprecision of length as a characteristic, or indeed the
blurred boundaries of the novel more generally, it remains a viable and valuable object
for study. As Connell points out, this is due in part to the space the genre does afford to
more effectively establish practices and conventions particular to each book, granting a
stylistic integrity to novels that is more difficult to achieve effectively in shorter forms.
Furthermore, as among the most expansive of literary genres, contained within a single
novel there may be examples of every single other written genre: letters (eg. Pamela)
written dramatic forms (eg. Ulysses, “Hades” episode), snatches of newsprint (eg.
David Mitchell’s Black Swan Green), poetry or lyrics (eg. Roddy Doyle’s The
Commitments), signage (eg. Mark Haddon’s The Curious Incident of the Dog in the
Night-Time), or even a novel itself (eg. Bulgakov’s The Master and Margarita). Such
literary collage is often introduced and differentiated from the rest of the narrative
purely with punctuational and typographic changes, further emphasising the importance
of considering these elements when analysing literature.

Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay “The Storyteller”, sees the novel very much
as markedly distinct from other narrative forms, oral or written:
The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes the novel from the story (and from the epic in the narrower sense) is its essential dependence on the book. The dissemination of the novel became possible only with the invention of printing. What can be handed on orally, the wealth of the epic, is of a different kind from what constitutes the stock in trade of the novel. What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular.

Benjamin’s remarks on the relationship between print and the novel as a genre highlight an important point. Literary language predates writing. Storytelling and poetry, in which narratives are structured and language presented in unusual forms, in so far as we can tell, date back to the beginnings of language itself. But writing and speech demand different approaches to creative linguistic expression. Many puns, for example, only work when spoken aloud – when simply spelled out on a page they lose their impact.11

11 The restraints of the genre are sometimes most evident in contrast. While a play-script is also a written form, its intended mode of consumption is speech and drama performed by live actors. As such, written words which would not obviously indicate a pun in a novel, may do so in a performance from a script. In Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet for example, “from forth the fatal loins” puns on <lines>, as in lines of ancestry, and also perhaps lines of text. The phonological resemblance between these words could be further emphasised by the actors, through emphasis in pronunciation, or actions (in this case, thrusting, for example). The writer of a novel could not bank on their reader making the leap from the text to the sound in the same way a playwright could (It should be noted that due to a phonological shift this pun is no longer
Conversely, many features of a text are entirely visual, wholly absent from spoken versions. These must be “looked at” to be understood. “Looking at novels” offers to reveal interpretive layers peculiar to the medium, but also the genre. Benjamin argues that what distinguishes the novel from other genres is that it is fundamentally a product of print, and its form is more intricately linked to this medium than other genres, even those which may also appear in print. So a short story is closer in form to the oral storytelling tradition, and printed verse has its precursors in poetry and song, various texts existed in the manuscript tradition, but the novel is a product of print. Margaret Anne Doody (1997) would disagree profoundly with this interpretation, yet Benjamin’s point must be taken seriously, even if only in terms of the novel as popularly conceived.

In contending that, unlike epics or short stories, the novel may not be effectively transmitted orally, Benjamin is asserting that the plot of a novel is inextricable from the language that it is presented in. Although he does not make the point explicit, the fact immediately apparent even when spoken in many English dialects (in which lines/loins are no longer homophones: https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/five-shakespeare-puns-ruined-by-modern-english-a6876931.html, accessed 1st February 2019).

Fantasy novelist Terry Pratchett’s popularity in part rests on the “deftness of his puns” (Colin Smythe, qtd in Irish Times, 26th June 2016). The title of Pratchett’s 1987 novel, Equal Rites, for example, tells the story of a wizard who intends to pass on his magical staff (a symbol of his office) to a baby who will fulfil a prophecy. The expectation is that this baby will be an eighth son of an eighth son. However, the wizard belatedly notices he has passed on his staff to a girl, and the novel deals with the politics of a woman occupying a man’s position. The phrase “equal rights” when spoken would not deviate at all from the expected phonology given the frequent collocation of the words <equal> and <rights>. The pun is immediately apparent on the page because these words are spelled differently.

In her monograph The True Story of the Novel (1997), Doody robustly makes the case for the existence of a “classical novel” long prior to print, and sees the separation of fiction in print from the manuscript tradition as artificial, and retrospectively imposed.

It is important to note Benjamin is not referring to audio versions of the novel, but to storytelling. In other words, his claim is that epics and short stories may be communicated through storytelling and retain their essential form, but a novel may not.
Benjamin argues that the novel can only exist in print, and print is a visual medium, means he is arguing that the appearance of the language is a crucial feature. It is ironic, therefore, that Benjamin cites *Don Quixote* as the first novel, given the inextricable relationship of that text to epic and romance forms (even in parody).

Jonathan Arac, in aiming to reach a definition of the novel that integrates its material reality with its narrative content, sees the visual appearance of novels as a crucial factor in defining the genre. “The theory of the novel that I seek”, writes Arac, “requires a global media history articulating the relations between the age of the novel and what Benedict Anderson calls ‘print-capitalism’” (2009: 190). Arac tries to provide a framework for developing a more reliable and useful theory of the novel than his forbears, nevertheless building his foundation on the integration of theories from distinguished predecessors. Situating the novel firmly as a product of print, Arac deftly develops an argument from Schlegel:

Friedrich Schlegel in 1799 offered the first statement I know specifically proposing a “theory of the novel” [. . .] This disruption of the play of voices in conversation by a written text mimics what is for Schlegel the crucial fact about novels. For Schlegel, “[a] novel is a romantic book” (“Letter” 78). The acknowledged “tautology” here (Ein roman ist ein romantisches Buch [Kritische Schriften 515]) allows the final word to come as climax; weight falls on the book, the material means, and its implications. The “manner of presentation” of a novel will differ from that of drama because it is “reading,” not for viewing; in thinking of a book, one thinks of “a work, an existing whole” (“Letter” 78).
Here Schlegel anticipates the “rhetorical” basis of Northrop Frye's theory of genre, in which prose “fiction” is the genre of the written word and the novel only one of its four major varieties (246-48). Schlegel's point also resonates with the work of Frye's Toronto colleague Marshall McLuhan. Other important theorists of the novel, notably Lukács and Bakhtin, have drawn inspiration from Schlegel but have not reckoned with this fundamental insight. (190)

It should be noted that Arac is explicitly arguing here, following Schlegel, that the appearance of dialogue interspersed with narrative is possibly the most fundamental defining feature of the genre. While this is almost mentioned as an aside, Arac grants Schlegel’s insight the status of “crucial fact”. Arac goes on to make a case for the novel in terms of societal function that echoes more established definitions of the genre. However, he remains wise to the importance of medium in truly understanding the genre:

The dual perspective of world history and media transformations makes clear the contours of mid-twentieth-century arguments about the “death of the novel.” These were Western lamentations, and they had to do with the tremendous shift by which popular narrative passed from print to cinema and then to television, even as the paperback revolution brought the thrill of high literacy to far wider readerships. (193)

Instead of seeing the novel as defined by its societal function, or other mutable characteristics, Arac is positing a sort of separate substratum identity for the novel that exists over and above genre in the limited sense. In other words, there is a societal
function the novel as a genre can fulfil, that can nonetheless be fulfilled by other genres, and indeed other media. This should not be confused with the stability of the novel itself, as a fundamentally printed genre, which must be understood in terms of the available communicative dimensions of the medium in which it occurs. The rise of the “boxed-set” (latterly streamed online in much the same manner) demonstrates this possibility. HBO series like The Wire (Simon, 2008) and The Sopranos (Chase, 2008) do fulfil many of the functions of a novel. They are fictional long-form narratives with the space for character development and to establish distinct conventions within each series. Crucially, they are consumed at will, when, where, and for how long the viewership wishes, not necessarily at set broadcast times (as television was originally consumed). However, there are many crucial differences, such as the potential for communal consumption (i.e. with partners, spouses, or family all watching at once), which is very different from the phenomenon of a number of people who know each other enjoying the same novel. Ultimately, the novel must be understood at least as a textual genre. Unless one were to follow Doody’s minority conception of the novel as a genre dating to antiquity, it would be wise to make the proviso also, that the novel is a product of print, or at least print culture (the appearance of novels rendered in electronic text derives from print). As such, this substratum element posited by Arac which may exist in multiple media, could be a useful component understanding the novel, and how it relates to other genres and media. Arac’s idea of a broader category into which the novel and other genres and media may fall, defined by content and societal function, allows for a more precise and specific understanding of the novel in relation to the particularities of the medium itself. It allows a distinction between essential components the genre that nonetheless may be shared with other forms of storytelling, and those components of the genre that are unique to the medium of print. Yet the gulf between
dominant ways of conceiving of texts more generally, and theories which seek to understand texts in material terms, continues to pose problems. It is important to try and understand what sustains these ideas, and from whence they derive.

What copyright law protects is “a form of intangible property” (British Academy Copyright Guidelines), a particular sequence of language without material existence, the unique pattern of letters and punctuation. It is thus the illusion of the authoritative text is conjured into existence. In reality, this pattern only actually occurs in individual editions – and these are owned by publishing houses, shops, libraries and individuals. The artificial division between the Platonic ideal of the abstracted pattern of written language imagined by copyright law, and the actual material books which people buy and read, expresses the misleading conception of literature more generally. This has contributed to something of a critical oversight in literary studies, where the text is imagined in terms of the sequence of words rather than the reality of printed material. That much academic discussion of literature could be applied to versions of the primary sources in different media points to a simple problem in the conception of literary works: that a literary work is usually thought of in terms of an arrangement of words, not a material object. This is why a novel is considered the same novel across many different editions, with different typesetting, in different covers. There is, however, truth to this picture. Forgetting for the moment texts like Ulysses, which have an unusually fraught publishing history (and a concomitant high level of variation between editions), a reader usually takes much the same from a particular novel,
whatever the cover, font, or typesetting of the particular edition. However, there is a prevailing conception that there exists some sort of authoritative master-text of which these editions are but examples, but this is not the reality.

Plato postulated an abstract, idealised realm, which he argued had greater reality than the material world, which was subject to change and decay. There is a concordance between this ancient theory, and the dominant conception of literary works today. Plato argued that “particulars” should be understood merely as imperfect manifestations of “universals”:

The universals which are detached from sense are reconstructed in science. They and not the mere impressions of sense are the truth of the world in which we live; and (as an argument to those who will only believe “what they can hold in their hands”) we may further observe that they are the source of our power over it. To say that the outward sense is stronger than the inward is like saying that

---

15 *Ulysses* was first serialised in *The Little Review* (1918-20) then published by Shakespeare & Co. (1922), after which various editions followed, most notably the Bodley Head edition (1936). Each new edition introduced new mistakes into an already corrupted text. The labyrinthine history of its publication was also complicated by Joyce’s hand in the process, as he inevitably made oversights and mistakes in his own corrections, working on simultaneously existing different versions and sometimes offering emendations and corrections that contradicted earlier or later versions. Although Joyce himself proclaimed errors to be “the portals of discovery”, the text became so corrupted that Hans Walter Gabler was prompted in the 1980s to compile a “synoptic” edition, working from what manuscripts and proof pages existed, along with all previous editions of the book in the hope of creating a master-text with more authority, in being at least consistent with itself, than earlier editions had been imbued with, even with the author’s imprimitur. The Gabler edition (1984) has become the standard scholarly edition, despite some dubious elements of its own (there is still furious debate over the price given for a bar of Fry’s chocolate [for an account of this debate see *Who Reads Ulysses?* by Julie Sloan Brannan, 2013: 89).
the arm of the workman is stronger than the constructing or directing mind.

(2008: 1962)

Plato’s posited idealised perfect “forms” are separate from, and different to, the objects and phenomena in the world to which they were related. The essence of the form might manifest in its many “particulars”, but for Plato, the form exists separately in an idealised realm (Welton, 2002: 195). This enormously influential concept still resounds, not least in the reluctance to consider literary works as objects. It is an attractive proposition to imagine that a canonical novel, for example, has a permanent and immutable existence over and above its manifestation in the particulars of actual books, which stain, tear, and otherwise degrade over time. This concept, however, may mislead us into neglecting the features of “particulars”, ie. how the pattern of language that according to this conception constitutes a novel, actually appears in books. It also may lead us to disregard the variation between editions. Platonic universals have been defined as “non-spatial, non-temporal objects” that are “inert” and “unchanging” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). This corresponds closely to the abstract conception of literary works, not only in the popular consciousness, but enshrined in law, as isolated from their material reality in actual books. But Plato’s theory makes provision also for “particulars”. He urged his audience to “suppose that there are two sorts of existences, one seen, the other unseen [. . . ] the seen is the changing, and the unseen is the unchanging” (1019). Given that the unchanging form is but a postulation,
the focus must fall on the changing form, the editions and individual copies of novels which readers actually engage with. Books are tangible objects, not imaginary patterns of language. They do not exist in some sort of abstract sphere, Plato’s realm of “universals”, they are physical objects that we interpret visually.

Terry Eagleton opens his introduction to the English novel with a chapter asking the question “What is a novel?” (2004: 1). In this instance Eagleton offers a largely descriptive definition, charting the development of the genre over time, rather than a prescriptive, immutable definition which focuses on defining characteristics. This may be due to a focus on function over form, perhaps derived from his Marxist dialectical understanding of the development of the novel as a genre over time. As Adam Ellwanger notes, Eagleton’s dominant interpretation of the relationship between art and the masses more generally is in terms of alienation from the fundamental experiential aspect of its consumption.16 This would seem to encourage a critical approach which does not interpret visual aspects as of primary importance to understanding the genre, despite readers engaging with novels visually. Eagleton sees more significance in the linguistic content of novels in terms of how the genre should be understood:

[The novel] would grow in importance as poetry became increasingly privatized.

As poetry gradually ceases to be a public genre somewhere between Shelley and

16 Ellwanger asserts that in Eagleton’s understanding “capitalist rationality has diminished the human ability to experience the aesthetic as bodily sensuousness” (2012: 52).
Swinburne, its moral and social functions pass to the novel, in a new division of literary labour. By the mid-nineteenth century, the word “poetry” has become more or less synonymous with the interior, the personal, the spiritual or psychological, in ways which would no doubt have come as a mighty surprise to Dante, Milton and Pope. The poetic has now been redefined as the opposite of the social, discursive, doctrinal and conceptual, all of which has been relegated to prose fiction. (2004: 12)

Eagleton offers a chimeric vision of the novel as a genre, not only defined by its content and societal role, but subject to change – and even to switch places with other genres over time (in this case poetry). Even critics who stoutly reject this familiar definition of the novel often reaffirm the idea that semantic content is the ultimate defining characteristic.

For example, Margaret Anne Doody rails against the idea that the novel is a product of modernity, declaring “one of the most successful literary lies [. . .] is the English claim to have invented the novel [. . .] One of the best-kept literary secrets is the existence of novels in antiquity” (1997: 1). Doody does not see the novel as a product of print at all, but argues it existed in the manuscript tradition. Her argument is predicated on claims of continuity of characteristics (such as length, characterisation, and function) across these different media, and such she necessarily dismisses those visual properties that are specifically a function of the medium of print. Although
Doody doesn’t explicitly refer to them as “accidentals”, that is the implication. Such conceptions of the novel are emblematic of dominant ways of theorising the genre previously discussed, in that they consider the genre to be defined in terms of semantic content, and not in materialist terms, through its form as an object.

To conceive of a novel as an object, however, doesn’t mean to disregard its linguistic content, but rather to understand how this content is produced, stored, and delivered – and the consequences these particular dimensions and constraints have for the form of the genre. There has been a traditional focus on semantic content – plot, subject-matter, and style – over and above the book as an object, and the appearance of the language the book contains. Perhaps an understanding of the novel is needed that is chimeric not in the sense that it is fantastical or fleeting, defined by characteristics which aren’t stable over time, but in the sense that it is composed of a combination of different organisms. As Bakhtin put it:

The stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of these subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities [. . . ] into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles. (1981: 292)

Style must be understood not just in terms of lexicon, syntax, and rhetoric, but also the graphic conventions which are a necessary function of communicating in a visual
medium. As Robert Darnton, one of the world’s most prominent bibliographers, observes, in order to understand literature, it may be necessary to also understand “how texts became imbedded [sic] in paper as typographical signs and transmitted to readers as pages bound in books” (2009: 106). Eagleton’s interrogation of what defines the genre while astute, is almost totally devoid of reference to the appearance of the novels he discusses, or to graphic conventions within the genre more generally. Yet these offer a way to understand the genre that is at once perhaps more accurate, stable, and obvious.

When we pick up a book that is unfamiliar to us, it is often its appearance that initially betrays it for a novel if that’s what it is. This may be as simple and explicit as the title or cover on modern novels, or as subtle and implicit as the visual stylistics of font and chapter headings. In ambiguous cases we may have to read a passage to ascertain whether we are holding a novel or a work of biography or other non-fiction, or a short story collection. However, there are many signs in the visual accoutrements that we are accustomed to which should give us clues before we settle down to reading. Perhaps prime among these are the visual apparatus for representing dialogue: quotation marks, dashes, spacing, ellipsis points, etc. These certainly differentiate fictional from non-fictional genres. Although Eagleton’s definition of the novel is based primarily on its social role rather than features such as these (2004: 12), he also reaffirms Bakhtin’s emphasis on the novel as a sort of linguistic collage, as a genre fundamentally composed of other elements:
Bakhtin is surely right to see the novel as emerging from the stream of culture dripping with the shards and fragments of other forms. It is parasitic on the scraps and leavings of “higher” cultural life-forms; and this means that it has only a negative identity. In its mixing of languages and forms of life, it is a model of modern society, not simply a reflection on it. (6)

This potential makes the novel an unassailable object in terms of the diversity of material it can provide for the linguistic analysis of language in the written form. Many of the features that will be discussed appear also in short stories, poems, and in the many new digital forms of writing. Some of what is said about the novel will be true of other forms also. This does not detract from the importance of examining these items within the context of their appearance in primary sources from the genre under discussion, or indeed the fact that novels may contain examples of these other literary forms in their entirety. Given its ability to incorporate and imitate other forms, the novel possesses all their creative potential, and adds some of its own.

*Primary Sources*

This thesis will “look at novels”, specifically those features of novels which are inherently visual: spelling, punctuation, and typography. Visual aspects of the writing system of English will be analysed and appraised in terms of how they function
linguistically today within the context of the novel as a genre through a small range of key contemporary texts. Popular contemporary fiction by David Mitchell, Roddy Doyle, Mark Haddon, and Irvine Welsh will provide the dominant primary source material. However, a variety of other novels will also be utilised to provide relevant examples of the features under discussion where necessary. In some cases historical texts will need to be examined, in order to trace the development of particular features and their conventions of usage over time, where variation over time is pertinent to understanding the item in question as it is used today (for example, a selection of novels from around the Edwardian era are used in an attempt locate the rise of the ellipsis points in time). It will also be necessary at certain junctures to discuss novels such as *Ulysses*, or *Tristram Shandy*, that were influential within the genre in their use of visual elements, and established precedents or set new standards for the use of typography, punctuation, and spelling in novels that still resonate. In some cases contemporary fiction by authors other than those listed above will be utilised where a particularly interesting or revealing usage of an item under discussion occurs (for example, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is cited, as it displays a particularly useful example of contrasting usages of ellipsis points in the opening paragraph). At all times the dominant focus of this thesis will be on the visual elements under discussion (not authors, or particular works), and this will inform the choice of examples chosen for discussion.
While some of the primary sources chosen conform closely to the standard in their use of typography, punctuation, and spelling, the works relied on most heavily have more in common with *Finnegans Wake*, and thus Beckett’s injunction to “look and listen”, than might be obvious at first glance. Irvine Welsh and Roddy Doyle are both highly attentive to the sound of the language they present, transliterating the phonology of their respective dialects with non-standard spelling. Welsh also employs experimental typographical elements throughout his texts. David Mitchell coins novel compounds and portmanteaus in a decidedly Joycean fashion, and also represents various forms of text (e-texts, letters, diaries) differentiated from the rest of the text through font and layout. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* Mark Haddon complements the text with graphic images and design. He also includes mathematical formulae, appendices, and other textual apparatus more commonly found in academic writing. Within the corpus of each these authors, those works have been chosen which are particularly useful to the aims of this thesis. Mark Haddon’s *A Spot of Bother*, for example, is discussed briefly for its usage of ellipsis points. *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, however, is afforded much more attention due to it experimenting with typography, punctuation, and spelling much more so than Haddon’s second novel. Similarly, while Roddy Doyle’s later work is discussed to provide contrast with his earlier work, *The Barrytown Trilogy* is afforded more attention than his later novels, as his early words employ more extreme and frequent dialect spelling to analyse. In terms of typography and spelling, there are useful
examples from throughout Irvine Welsh’s career, and this is reflected in the amount of his novels cited.

There might not be a direct lineage, from *Finnegans Wake* to these popular contemporary novels – there are other distinguished predecessors for all these practices (most obviously *Tristram Shandy*). Although the texts that form the locus of primary source material for this study are less extreme in their experimentation than Joyce’s masterpiece, the rationale behind Beckett’s injunction is applicable not only where they employ similar textual practices, and beyond. Even apparently mundane visual features (such as the default font within any particular novel) can carry semantic weight, and are profitably analysed using such an approach. However, the novels chosen to focus most acutely on avail in particular of the opportunities afforded by the visuality of the medium of print. David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004) uses different formatting to distinguish the very different narratives of which the novel is comprised (these narratives range from the retrospective journal of a mariner, to the diary of a geriatric, to a futuristic interrogation of a cloned worker). *Black Swan Green* (2006), as the first-person narrative of Jason Taylor, a 13 year old “covert stammerer and reluctant poet” (rear cover), presents a range of relevant features, from non-standard spelling (eg. “Now Tom Yew’s body jerkjerked judderily jacknifed” [120]), to facsimile Newspaper headlines (eg. “GOTCHA” [125]). It also offers a novel and interesting system of italicisation that is intimately related to the speech patterns of the adolescent narrator and his peer group (eg. “Telephones|? Liarphones I call ‘em. Eye to eye’s the only
way” [280]). Ostensibly a comparatively straight-forward and easy-to-read bildungsroman, *Black Swan Green* demonstrates masterfully the depth of meaning which can be conveyed by the subtle utilisation of these oft neglected visual elements of the text.

Mitchell is too contemporary a writer to have amassed a large body of critical work dedicated to analysing his novels. However, his importance as an innovator is not unrecognised, and there are already some useful secondary sources. The most obvious resource in this regard is the collection of essays edited by Sarah Dillon (2011), arising from a conference on Mitchell’s work in 2009. This includes valuable papers on a number of Mitchell’s novels, and various aspects of his approach. However, predictably, despite the fact visual dimensions of meaning are crucial to understanding Mitchell’s texts, spelling, punctuation, or typography are not explicitly addressed by any of the critics who contributed to this collection. However, Samuel James Waldron’s 2012 paper, “Challenging Narrative Hierarchies: Embedded Narrative Structure in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* and Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*”, recognises the crucial role of typography in Mitchell’s work. In its discussion of Mitchell’s use of typography to differentiate his subtly complex system of narrators, this paper is an important contribution to the field, which recognises the crucial role of such visual textual elements, not only in Mitchell’s work, but in the novel more generally.

Although Roddy Doyle utilises dialect spelling less and less as the years go on, his debut *The Commitments* (1987) set a new standard for the portrayal of Dublin
English in literature. Much of his work provides fertile ground for analysis of dialect spelling, which has a long history in both the print and manuscript literature in English. Chaucer’s use of dialect spelling before the arrival of print is well-recognised, but standardisation was not immediate upon the advent of print, and indeed dialect spelling may have more impact when it can be contrasted with a uniform standard supra-regional form. Spufford notes a lively though mostly derogatory tradition of dialect spelling in the chap-book tradition. One example she offers is the stylised rendering of a “Somerset man” in one seventeenth-century chapbook: “I received a piece of Paper from you, which I think folks cal a Letter; but when I pull it open, I am zure I could not read wun word in it” (56). Doyle’s use of dialect spelling must be understood as flying in the face of a long tradition in English literature of utilising such deviations from the standard almost solely to mock low prestige dialects, and the associated speech and spelling of disfavoured social groups.

Counter-intuitively, while Doyle is rightly renowned for his representation of Dublin English, his approach to this task is decidedly deferential to the standard. Doyle apostrophises deviations from standard spelling (eg. “fuckin’” [1996: 39]), and neglects to compound dialectal forms (eg. “your man” [24]), not to mention the fact the English of his third person narrators is entirely standardised – not only in spelling, but in lexicon, and syntax. Despite the fact Doyle displays this deference to the standard throughout his corpus, his faithful representation of a maligned minority dialect has encouraged other writers in this regard, and not only those wishing to portray Dublin
English (Irvine Welsh, for example, has cited Doyle as an influence). As such, Doyle’s own portrayal of Dublin English has been widely praised, and there is a wealth of critical material on Doyle that almost uniformly applauds Doyle’s portrayal of Dublin English. This is true of literary scholars such as Caramine White, Linden Peach, Michael Pierse, and Declan Kiberd, but also linguists such as Raymond Hickey. These sources provide much useful commentary on the sociolinguistics of Dublin English in a literary context. However, Doyle’s methodology in translating Dublin English from speech into the visual medium of print is rarely, if ever, scrutinised at all. There have been many pronouncements made about the fidelity of Doyle’s representations of the dialect, but little or no commentary on how this representation is achieved. A close look at the spelling and punctuational choices Doyle makes offers to illuminate the process of dialect spelling, and the implications such decisions about how to render a dialect’s peculiar phonology and lexicon on the page can have.

Irvine Welsh is also justly celebrated for his representation of dialect (primarily but not exclusively working-class Edinburgh English). This is achieved not only through non-standard spelling which reflects the phonology of the characters’ speech, but also through punctuational choices which assert the legitimacy of written forms of dialect. Welsh provides a useful contrast to Doyle in this regard, his markedly different methodology highlighting the subtle elements of spelling and punctuation in the representation of dialect that tend to go unnoticed by readers and critics alike. Working within a peculiarly Scottish literary tradition of typographic experimentation, Welsh is
also a typographic trailblazer, employing a wide range of non-standard typography throughout his corpus. From the vignettes in *Trainspotting* ("Junk Dilemmas"), to facsimiles of handwritten narrative in *Skagboys*, Welsh uses typography not only to differentiate segments of text, but to enhance this contrast by imbuing the differentiated text with connotation through canny use of typography. Welsh also engages in more exuberant experiments with both intrinsic and extrinsic typography, such as the use of the repeated em dash to convey the sound and display of a life support machine in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, or the interpolated passages representing the thoughts of a tapeworm residing in the narrator of *Filth* (1998). Welsh eschews convention in a multiplicity of visual dimensions of his novels, providing a valuable array of features to analyse the limits of the medium. There is a large corpus of criticism treating Welsh’s work, although much tends to focus on the fertile ground of political and gender issues in his novels. Of course these subjects provide room for discussion of dialect also, though as with Doyle the focus tends to fall on the sociolinguistics of same, rather than the author’s methodology. The *Edinburgh Companion to Irvine Welsh* (2010) provides a collection of essays which discuss Welsh’s cultural impact, offer political readings of various works, and provides some useful discussion of dialect. Gavin Miller’s contribution to the collection does discuss, albeit briefly, Welsh’s methodology in representing non-standard spoken Englishes. There is, however, surprisingly little treatment of Welsh’s experimental typography in the collection. However, more general
criticism such as Robert Morace’s *Irvine Welsh* (2007) cannot avoid some discussion of typography such is the extent of Welsh’s reliance on these devices.

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in The Night-Time* (2004) by Mark Haddon is an unusual novel, not least in the fact that it is narrated (or indeed, “written”) by a character, Christopher Boone, who has Asperger’s Syndrome, a form of autism. The character thus possesses various obsessions, among them is accurately representing detailed and seemingly irrelevant minutiae when relating an incident, and a poignant fixation with the relationship between symbols and meaning. This makes for exciting and vibrant material for those concerned with analysing visual elements of literary texts. Haddon includes facsimile images of signage, utilises typography to frame the narrative in inventive and novel ways that reflect his narrator’s personality (eg. numbering the chapters using prime numbers), and employs punctuation to create sentence structure that mimics the speech patterns of someone who has, to say the least, a peculiar relationship with language. Ruth Gilbert (2005) has written about this novel in terms of its relationship to the detective tradition, but also with regard to its peculiar narrative structure. Bill Greenwell astutely observes that “some of the devices Haddon uses are straight out of the Laurence Sterne handbook” (2004: 281), and this context proves a more useful way to consider this unusual text. James Bucky Carter argues convincingly that the unusual level of concern for accurate graphic representation of extraneous textual items (such as signage) in this novel must be seen in terms of a literalism that stems from Christopher’s autism, and that the *Curious Incident* needs to be reconceived
in terms of what he describes as an “imagetext” (2007: 18). The approach being formulated by Carter is valuable in terms of the wider aims of this study also, providing not only a useful secondary source for this text, but going some way to establishing a methodology for conceiving of and analysing literature holistically, without the artificial separation of the stream of words from their appearance. Mark Haddon’s second novel, A Spot of Bother (2006), is far more visually restrained than Haddon’s debut, but continues the theme of atypical cognitive states, focussing on the descent into insanity of George Hall, a 57 year-old husband and father. A Spot of Bother does not display the images, variety of fonts, mathematical equations, and other stylistic peculiarities of Curious Incident. However, in its integration of more traditional visual elements with a narrative that experiments with the representation of cognitive disorder, it does provide useful material for analysis also.

The incorporation of other textual forms – language that is inherently visual – is a stable characteristic of the novel in English, from its very origins to today. As Maurice Couturier puts it, “the modern novel paraded its printhood and its bookhood from the start; by countless signs, it acknowledged the medium through which it would circulate until it reached its target, the reader” (1991: 52). The significance of this tradition from can be seen from the disparate array of texts and textual frames that comprise William Baldwin’s Beware the Cat (1584), to epistolary novels such as Richardson’s Pamela (1740), to the sermon and marginalia in Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy (1761), amongst others. This strand was reinvigorated by modernism –
perhaps most significantly and comprehensively with the playscripts, advertisements, scribbled notes, newspaper standfirsts, music-hall programmes, shopping and debtors’ lists, song lyrics with musical notation, and erotic letters, that all appear in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. It would be remiss to discuss these issues without some references to Joyce’s masterpiece given his enduring influence in these dimensions. These practices in the novel not only remain, but continue to develop – not least in the aforementioned novels by Roddy Doyle, Irvine Welsh, David Mitchell and Mark Haddon. The key authors and texts have been chosen for their particularly exuberant exploitation of visual elements within the novel as a genre. They will be utilised, however, to make some broader points about how such items deliver meaning. This material will be augmented with historical primary sources where it is necessary to understand the historical usage or development of an item, and some other primary sources that display particularly useful illustrative examples. While the range of examples is narrow, the aim is not to provide a comprehensive audit of the work of any author, set of authors, era, or indeed genre, but rather to utilise these texts to examine the ways in which elements of visual meaning – typography, punctuation, and spelling – function within the material, technological, and conventional constraints of the novel as a linguistic object. Just as a linguistic study might utilise a small corpus of utterances (or even postulated sentences), to make general points about a language, this thesis utilises a small range of key texts to discuss how certain features of visual language communicate meaning through the medium of print.
The novel as a genre has responded to ongoing changes within this medium, not least due to technological advances, both in terms of print itself, and the rise of new textual forms. As Wiegel points out, “The rise of new media does not only determine the text’s materiality, it can also influence the way contemporary novels are read” (2018: 74). Writers today have at their disposal new technology which makes the incorporation of non-standard graphic elements cheap and easy in comparison to the past, and they also have an audience that are au-fait with new forms of text, forms which can now be represented on the page. Liam Connell speaks to the utility of the contemporary novel as an object for analysis due to this ability to build upon the traditions of the genre:

The Bildungsroman, the key genre in the evolution of the novel, offers a genre for depicting characters’ capacity or incapacity to shape a life in the modern workplace. Similarly, the novel of sensation and the Modern novel’s inward turn have left formal legacies in the contemporary novel [. . . ] (2017: 5)

While this ability of contemporary novels to include and build upon tradition is true of plot, structure, and sub-genre as Connell points out, it is equally true of typography, punctuation, and spelling. Novels today can include visual elements from any moment in literary history alongside the graphic representation of new forms of text on the surface of the page. This is perhaps best exemplified in certain avenues heavily
explored by the novels chosen for this study. Philip Tew argues that a related aspect of many contemporary novels is the focus on the urban and suburban experience, and the increasing visibility and prestige of hitherto neglected voices:

If the contemporary novel has done anything consistently since the mid-1970s it has been to radicalize the traditional understanding of the late capitalist cityscape and urban environment. In contrast to its abjectification of an increasingly alienated and commodified Thatcherite city, critiqued within a range of novels considered [...] new voices have emerged and cartographized the complexity and heterogeneity of urban existence. (2007, xi)

It is in this sense the term “contemporary” is used in this thesis, not to draw a boundary around any specific period of time, but to express the fact that the writers chosen to form the focus of this study are all still writing, and have responded/are responding in different ways to the emergence of new media. They employ a variety of textual strategies to represent technological developments and often disparaged dialects on the page. The graphic elements of Mark Haddon, David Mitchell, and Irvine Welsh’s work reflect an increasing ease of production and reproduction of graphic devices and the integration of digital textual forms. Conversely, Roddy Doyle’s novels display a diminution of non-standard elements over time, demonstrating a parallel reassertion of the standard in the face of these changes while representing the same community of
speakers. Through this combination of the social and technological, the contemporary novels in this thesis make exuberant use of the writing system, offering useful material to explore how visual elements can function within the genre and medium more generally as it stands today.

The chapters of this thesis are organised thematically, based on visual features (rather than by period, author, or sub-genre, etc). There is a chapter each on typography, punctuation, and spelling. Each chapter features a large case study that examines in detail one specific element of these dimensions as it functions within the novels (for example the chapter on punctuation features a case study on ellipsis points). The chapters take a broad look at the macro level of one visual area in the context of the novel as a genre, utilising a broad range of primary and secondary sources to discuss this textual dimension. The case studies take a microscopic look at a sub-field of each area, utilising specific examples in context for analysis.

The first chapter discusses some of the ways in which typography (text placement, font-size, font-style, etc) functions within novels, and some of the ways in which text can integrate with typography to deliver meaning. The case study in this chapter focusses on italics, discussing the history and development of this style of type, comparing and contrasting with capitalisation, and using primary sources to examine how italics function in novels. The second chapter discusses the semantic function of punctuation specifically in the terms of how it operates within the novel as a genre.
Punctuational items are intensely context dependent, and as such genre has a large influence over the meaning of such items in practice. The case study in this chapter examines ellipsis points, their development, and semantic function within novels. The third chapter analyses how spelling functions differently in the novel than in other writing, specifically addressing the neglected literary tradition of non-standard spelling. The case study looks specifically at dialect spelling, and some of the sociolinguistic implications of spelling decisions when representing non-standard speech in dialogue.

It is the critical and theoretical integration of words and their appearance that is the central concern of this study. Although these works discussed offer only a snapshot of the possibilities for harnessing visual dimensions of print in the novel, they do provide a useful corpus to explore the type of features that come under this rubric. Focussing on the visual features in these works offers to establish how such items deliver meaning. While they are in some cases aberrant texts (ie. not representative of typical use and usage), the extremes can offer an opportunity to explore how visual features can communicate meaning, and they do usually also include the dominant conventions of typography, punctuation, and spelling alongside their more unconventional elements. Exploring the outer limits of these dimensions can cast light on how visual features function more regularly.

All printed texts are visual, they all function by communicating from author to reader using the medium of language in a visible form. It is this simple fact that encourages us to pay attention to the features that only occur in written/printed
language, those very dimensions of meaning that are peculiar to the medium. The novel is of course a typographical genre rather than a product of the manuscript tradition, arising in the form we understand it only after the advent of the printing press. It has its own visual conventions and traditions within that medium. “Looking at the novel” is a task not only essential to understanding each particular text, it is essential to understanding the genre, and the medium of print. Our understanding of language itself is impoverished too, unless we properly understand those linguistic practices that are a significant part of a culture – and novels most certainly are a significant part of ours.
Chapter 1: Typography

Typography can be defined as “the structuring and arranging of visual language” (Baines & Haslam, 2001: 1). It is a term that applies specifically to print (and latterly electronic forms of text) rather than handwriting. A useful distinction can be drawn between intrinsic typography (the form of the characters), and extrinsic typography (the placement of the characters on the page). Thus, while extrinsic typography covers the “arrangement” in the quotation from Baines & Haslam above, intrinsic typography covers the “structuring” – in other words the shape, size, colour, etc of the letters themselves. Typography, as with many visual elements of text, is intensely context dependent – typographic conventions and expectations vary depending on the type of text. This makes the subject fertile ground for those concerned with discussing literary genre. This chapter will commence with a general discussion of typography in the novel, mainly utilising examples from the work of Irvine Welsh and David Mitchell. This will be followed by a large case study on italics, examining their various functions within the genre.

It may seem as though there is not much significant utilisation of intrinsic typography within most novels. In comparison to the vibrant eclecticism of font styles in advertising, for example, the fonts that are typically used in novels appear homogenous and sombre. Yet looking deeper, meaningful choices are made by those involved in the composition of a novel regarding intrinsic typography. Even within a particular “font” there are options (such as capitalisation and italicisation) available to
enhance the construction of meaning. These are of course visual devices without direct spoken counterparts. Unlike words, and sentences, italics and capitals do not exist within spoken language. Nevertheless, as we shall see, there are important correspondences between these elements of intrinsic typography and certain aspects of speech. It is important to note also, that novels have represented other written/printed forms from the inception of the genre, and these are often marked out using typography. Indeed, this may be one of the defining characteristics of the genre. The current ubiquity of digital forms of text in day-to-day life has led inevitably to their incorporation within novels too, again distinguished by typography. There is also a tradition of exuberant typographic experimentation within the genre, dating back to at least Sterne. Although it may not be the norm, this is nonetheless essential to consider when trying to understand the novel as a genre.

Despite this potential for enhancing meaning via typography, literary studies have neglected this textual dimension. This is due not least to the conceptual separation of the text from its appearance. One of the foremost critics to challenge this orthodoxy is Edward Levenston. In *The Stuff of Literature* (1992) he argues from the outset that traditional theories, not only of literature, but of meaning itself, are inadequate to fully understanding how language works:

Meaning, according to one dictionary definition, is “the intended sense of a person’s words.” This [. . . .] does accurately convey the popular conception of
meaning as essentially a property of words. It is words that convey meaning—if sentences and 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 can ultimately be derived, one assumes, from the dictionary meanings of its words.

Such a naïve 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 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 manifestations of language, whether as speech or writing. In other words, by the stuff of language. (2)

Levenston’s clear rejection of “wordbound” theories of meaning is an essential contribution to the subject, clarifying that dominant conceptions of literary works, both in the popular consciousness and in academia, lead not only to critical oversights, but fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of literature. “Poetry”, contends Levenston, “is the most difficult of literary genres to assign unequivocally to either one mode of realization or the other, to speech or to writing” (10). Conversely, he sees the
novel very firmly in terms of an inherently written form: “Novels are meant to be read; their primary mode of existence is in print” (10). The essential point made by Levenston is that “wordbound” theories of meaning fail to consider the impact the form of the language has on its interpretation, and an integrated approach is essential to forming a full understanding of any piece of language. In the example from *Cloud Atlas* above, not only the contrasting fonts, but the font choice provides clarity and context to the exchange, forming an integral part of the reader’s experience. Elements such as these, Levenston contends, must be considered by the critic also.

Levenston also sees spelling, punctuation, and typography in terms of different levels of meaning analogous to the levels of linguistic analysis (phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, etc). “The total meaning of a text”, he asserts, “comprises all the meanings conveyed at all the levels” (10). This issue is particularly acute in the domain of typography, perhaps because it is an essential characteristic of any text, yet traditionally remained somewhat outside the control of the author. As such, typography in literature tends to go relatively unscrutinised, even more so than spelling and punctuation. Levenston contends that even when partial theories on the topic were laid

---

17 It is regrettable Levenston does not draw a distinction here between the manuscript tradition and print. The unqualified conflation of “written” and “printed” is misleading, strikingly so given his unusually acute awareness of a variety of other distinctions which relate to the visual appearance of texts. This is a rare recurring misstep in *The Stuff of Literature*, to which Maurice Couturier’s *Textual Communication: A Print Based Theory of the Novel* (1991 [discussed elsewhere in this thesis]) provides the perfect antidote. Although it precedes Levenston’s (1992) book, the two monographs were published in such close succession Levenston was unlikely to have been able to avail of Couturier’s different angle on the same subject. It seems remiss to demand an emphasis on the formal implications of different media (speech and writing), without granting sufficient recognition to the impact of further technological developments (the transition from writing to print).
out by linguists, “nobody was interested in following the trail” (102). Levenston argues that the utility of italics in literature in particular is obvious, for example allowing “two worlds, real life and imagination” to be “completely kept apart by typography” (101).

It is not only in the representation of digital media on the printed page, or even in the use of contrastive fonts in which intrinsic typography is employed to enhance meaning. Virtually every novel employs contrastive intrinsic typography of some description (even if only capitalisation), and all must present the text in some font, which will have its own history and connotations. Basic intrinsic typographical practices, such as capitals and italics, are used in almost every novel.

Before undertaking more detailed analysis, it is important to first contextualise typography in the novel within a broader understanding of writing/print, and in relation to popular conceptions of same. One prevalent (but basic) conception of the linguistic material that goes into making a given text is something like follows: sentences, composed of words, composed of letters, these ingredients being then organised in certain ways on the page depending on genre. For a novel, you can add paragraph, chapter breaks, wrap it in a cover, and it may seem as if that’s all there is to it. It may also seem as if the remit of an author is confined to choosing the words of a sentence, breaking the sentences into paragraphs and dividing the novel into chapters. And there is an extent to which this is true – these elements are generally all that is included in the manuscript an author submits to their publisher. The conceptual division of the text into the stream of language versus the appearance of that language mirrors the division of
labour between author and publisher/editor/printer etc. Typesetting, font choice, layout, cover-design – the macro level of the text – are generally decided upon at a later stage, and involve contributions from additional professionals (the editors, graphic designers, typesetters, etc). For example, Anne Toner contends that traditionally “authors were encouraged to leave punctuation to printers because of their expertise in pointing” (2015: 14). Thus, the traditional view (emanating not least from copyright law) of any particular novel as consisting of the “unique pattern of words”, isolated from the actual physicality and appearance of the text, is perpetuated by the usual process of composition. The author chooses the words, paragraphs, chapter breaks, etc., the rest is done at a later stage (with or without their input). Through this process of composition itself, the conceptual division between the words of a text and the appearance of those words, becomes reinforced.

At a deeper level of magnification, there are issues which can also obscure the fundamental nature of the novel as a visual object. Spelling, for example, is largely restricted by intensely prescriptive convention. Each word has a certain array of letters, and each letter has a prescribed slot into which it must be placed. There are exceptions to this (phoneticised dialect spelling, eye-dialect, and so forth), which will be discussed in detail within the chapter on spelling. Excepting such circumstances, however, the rules of spelling are significantly more likely to be adhered to than the “rules” of grammar – which are ill-defined and variant by comparison (and in any literary genre, word order is altered for rhetorical and aesthetic purposes as a matter of course). The
sequence of letters within a word cannot be altered to anything approaching the same extent the sequence of words within a sentence can, certainly not while retaining the same meaning. All this limits the options available to a writer, and makes it seem as if the writer’s only responsibility is to choose the words of the text. The typography of the text is also thought of in this way – as something separate, outside the remit of the author, but for different reasons. While spelling is thought of as devoid of choice, as an area where the author simply follows the rules, the choices in relation to typography are not thought of as an integral part of the plot, an essential component of the text. They are not thought of as significant, they are merely “incidental”. Again, the popular conception of a literary work is confined to consisting merely of the stream of words chosen by an author (Nørgaard, 2009: 141).

Yet the author is faced with other choices. **Bold-face, italics, CAPITALS**, or the use of a **different font** are available options for rendering precisely the same array of letters. Such variations in the letter-forms themselves are all aspects of intrinsic typography. Devices like these are almost exclusively used suprasegmentally. That is, they are used *across* a segment of language to inflect the interpretation of the segment as a whole\(^\text{18}\) – and are used to augment meaning rather than convey meaning in and of themselves (in contrast to punctuational devices, such as `<;>`, which fill a single particular slot). The suprasegmental nature of intrinsic typography is analogous to

---

\(^\text{18}\) A segment may be a word, a clause, a sentence, or any larger segment of text. This may include the text as a whole; for example, the choice of font a novel is printed in will convey some associations to the reader, even if it is not contrasted against another font within the same book.
volume or intonation in speech, which used contrastively can emphasise certain segments, or inflect an entire utterance with a particular meaning.

As Nørgaard explains, the significance of these devices, ubiquitous in print, is occluded by the “general tendency” within literary studies to “focus monomodally on word-meaning only” (2009: 141). Natural language is replete with various features that contribute to meaning (aside from the sequence of words). Volume, duration, intonation, and physical gestures all combine, to communicate meaning holistically. While these dimensions may be absent from print, a variety of features supplement words, not least of all intrinsic typographic features such as those under discussion. This should not, however, be taken to imply that a feature from print (such as italicisation) maps directly on to a feature from speech (such as intonation). As Macdonald-Ross puts it, “the relationship between language and graphics is complex and subtle” (1982: 49). Correspondences between spoken and printed features are far from absolute – the relationship is one of analogy, not equivalence.

Of course, while all novels utilise typography, some texts exploit these dimensions of meaning more than others. My choice of primary sources in this chapter is informed by these considerations. Irvine Welsh and David Mitchell, both contemporary authors of popular literary fiction, utilise standard devices in novel ways. They take advantage of the space offered by the novel genre as a large canvas to

---

19 This is assuming the print-based theory of the novel argued for previously, if one were to accept Doody’s case for a “classical novel” (1997) it would follow that novels could exist in handwritten script, devoid of typography, though it would be difficult to sustain that claim for the contemporary novel as a class.
establish conventions of usage not only unique to themselves, but unique to individual works. The fact that Welsh and Mitchell are both so widely read (while relying so heavily on unorthodox typographic strategies to construct meaning), demonstrates the potential of the genre to successfully deploy non-standard visual elements which would prove less coherent in shorter literary forms. The novel also offers a platform where an author is not confined by many of the prescriptive conventions of other genres of writing (such as journalism or non-fiction). This is of course well-recognised when it comes to considering narrative voice, for example, but less so when it comes to considering the visual form these narratives take. The works of Welsh and Mitchell demonstrate the ability of these typographic dimensions to very effectively communicate meaning, and these two authors will provide the key material for the discussion of intrinsic typography in this chapter. While both authors make use of typographic dimensions in a way that makes visual analysis indispensable to fully understanding their novels, they do so in very different ways. Mitchell tends towards recreating existing typographic conventions from a variety of textual media. Welsh also sometimes makes use of such textual collage, but regularly repurposes existing elements and invents new idiosyncratic uses via a diverse array of textual strategies. In their different approaches, from Mitchell’s inventive but formally conservative approach to Welsh’s unorthodox style, each author demonstrates the variety of purposes to which these elements can be put.
Irvine Welsh is perhaps the most popular contemporary author engaging in extreme typographic experimentation. *Filth* (1998) in particular, is a very useful text in this regard – both in displaying idiosyncratic experimental usage, and in terms of understanding the boundary of intrinsic typography. This is not least because Welsh combines intrinsic typography with spelling towards the one end. His dominant trademark as a novelist is the enthusiastic representation of the dialect of working-class Edinburgh. To translate various phonological dimensions of this dialect into the visual medium of the novel, Welsh relies heavily on intrinsic typographical techniques (such as capitalisation, italics, and contrasting fonts). When integrated with non-standard spelling, these tactics offer information usually lost in the translation from sound to print. Given the utility of this approach and the accessibility of the technology to achieve it, it is remarkable it is not more frequently utilised. Its relative rarity demonstrates the dominance of the standard form of written English, even in genres (like the novel) that have no inherent obligation to conform to that standard. Such approaches must be understood in relation to and contrast with that standard. Alan Riach attributes Welsh’s transgressive content in part to the influence of punk rock:

We can trace another line of ancestry from Welsh back through punk rock. To paraphrase Steve Watts and Steve Xerri, punk rock was a release of dark energies, a feast of inversion in which all the positive, socially proper values of youth – freedom from cares, beauty, innocence, and so on – were transformed
into parodic carelessness, incomprehensible canons of attractiveness, and a knowingness that transcended sexual precociousness and became a sort of gestural ennui: a scary carnival. (2005: 41)

It is certainly easy to imagine connections between Welsh’s often disturbing violent and sexual content, and the exhibitionist faux-violence associated with punk concerts, or the fetish-gear worn with the intention to shock that initiated the British punk scene. Welsh himself, however, firmly asserts the influence of a different musical tradition as formative in his approach to writing: acid house. For all its exuberant hair-styles and clothing, punk music represented a conscious retreat from the experimentation and pyrotechnics (literal and metaphorical) of progressive rock, and the adoption of a self-consciously prosaic musical style that, while it might encourage a DIY attitude, does not necessarily align with formal innovation.20 It is notable therefore that Welsh draws attention in particular to the stylistic influence of acid house on his novels:

I wouldn't have been a writer if it hadn't been for acid house. When I started to write, I wanted to try and capture the excitement of being in a club, on E, dancing to a 4/4 beat. I wanted to capture that on the page. That's why I went

20 This was not just the rejection of a musical style, but of what was perceived as the excessive utilisation of technology in progressive rock. As Stuart Borthwick and Ron Moy point out, “British punk rock was, in many ways, a reaction to the progressive rock of the early 1970s. In particular, punks objected to the overt displays of musicianship inherent within progressive rock, where prog-rock bands employed an array of musical technologies to produce a complex and intellectualised musical form” (2004: 82).
from writing in a standard English to writing *Trainspotting* in a kind of performative language – but language is meant to be spoken rather than written. A performative language actually has beats, so that kind of Celtic oral lowland Scots, that was my 4/4 beat basically and my typographical experiments on the page, like in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, with texts weaving in and out and different kinds of texts and different fonts and words falling off the page. These were my FX on top of the beat basically. I wanted the pages to turn, I wanted people to go "fuck" when they saw this thing coming out at them. It very much set the template for my sensibilities as a writer. ("Interview", 2018)

The employment of such experimental techniques, these “FX”, demand that Welsh eschews orthographical, punctuational, and typographical conventions at will. Just as acid house music exploited all available technology to create new sounds and reimagine old ones, Welsh utilises all the available dimensions of print to make text with intense visual impact. To do so he frees himself to explore the medium unfettered by many of the usual subscriptions to the “rules” of standard written English.

While Welsh employs non-standard and experimental elements throughout his corpus with an apparent disregard for the rules of English, as structuralist critic Tzvetan Todorov argues, conscious acts of breaking the rules often reference those very same rules. Todorov makes this point in relation to genre, however the argument can be applied more generally also to the rules of standard written English. Todorov writes:
[...] in order to exist as such, the transgression requires a law—precisely the one that is violated. We might even go further and observe that the norm becomes visible—comes into existence—owing only to its transgressions [...] One has to think that every time, in these exceptional works where a limit is reached, the exception alone is what reveals to us that “law” of which it also constitutes the unexpected and necessary deviation. (1990: 14)

A very similar sentiment is articulated by Welsh himself in Filth (1998), a novel which explores the transgressiveness of a rule-enforcer. The protagonist, profoundly corrupt detective Bruce Robertson, justifies his own transgressions by the insouciant invocation of his catchphrase “same rules apply”. This maxim is repeated on numerous occasions as Robertson flouts social conventions, from refusing to tip a taxi-driver (38), to viciously insulting Liverpudlians about their home-town’s reputation for grievance bearing (176). It is in Robertson’s exploitation of his friend and brother Freemason “Bladesy”, however, that he most explicitly invokes concepts of rules and standards as the very rationale behind his behaviour:

Bladesy’s hedge is cut more precisely than any of the others in the street. He’s neat, that’s what he is, Brother Blades. Probably from a posh family but thick, and thus only suited to prole white-collar work. Then again, could have come
from an upwardly mobile, working-class home where neatness and obedience is stressed as a virtue. And it is. Serve them all my days. This means that the same rules apply. (295)

This rumination on the mores and standards that have shaped his slavishly rule-observant companion is a preamble to Bruce’s initiation of an affair with Bladesy’s wife. The puzzling invocation is juxtaposed with a facile and flippant justification for his actions, repeating the mantra again: “This is too much of a woman for your Brother Blades. I’m sorry, but yes, the same rules do apply” (295). This contrast speaks to an orderliness of rule-breaking, but also that the very motivation for the behaviour is bound intimately with the prohibitions against it. The contradiction inherent in the character of Bruce is stark: as a policeman he is an enforcer of the law, as a Freemason an upholder of tradition. Yet precisely as Todorov predicts, Robertson explicitly invokes rules as he breaks them.

The conceptual link for Welsh between transgression and the rules themselves can be seen at play elsewhere in his work also. For example, in Glue (2001), the cast of characters includes professional thieves, violent football hooligans, and a plethora of habitual illicit-drug users. Yet this seemingly lawless ensemble abide scrupulously (for the most part) by their own rules. This often involves unspoken and imprecise behavioural expectations, but sometimes means hard and fast rules. Either way, it is clear despite revelling in breaking establishment laws, there will be penalties for
breaking the internal mores of their group. At one point a coda is explicitly articulated by one character, remembering his father’s “Ten Rules”:

1. NEVER HIT A WOMAN
2. ALWAYS BACK UP YOUR MATES
3. NEVER SCAB
4. NEVER CROSS A PICKET LINE
5. NEVER GRASS FRIEND OR FOE
6. TELL THEM NOWT (THEM BEING POLIS, DOLE, SOCIAL, JOURNALISTS, COUNCIL, CENSUS, ETC.)
7. NEVER LET A WEEK GO BY WITHOUT INVESTING IN NEW VINYL
8. GIVE WHEN YOU CAN, TAKE ONLY WHEN YOU HAVE TO
9. IF YOU FEEL HIGH OR LOW, MIND THAT NOTHING GOOD OR BAD LASTS FOR EVER AND TODAY’S THE START OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE
10. GIVE LOVE FREELY, BUT BE TIGHTER WITH TRUST

(407)

Whereas in dialogue capitalisation generally indicates increased volume/shouting, there is no indication this list is being spoken, the capitalisation here is acting as an emphatic
marker. This use is related to the use of capitalisation to indicate increased volume, as increased volume often itself indicates emphatic marking in speech. Capitalisation is used here perhaps to signal the urgency and importance of observing this working-class ordinance, or maybe signposting the potential severity of the penalties for failure to follow these dictums. Infractions of rule 5 and 6 promise to be particularly harshly punished in the milieu of the characters in *Glue*. It is no accident that these are rules about rule-breaking. There would be no need for a prohibition on informing if certain acts weren’t classified as crimes to inform upon. The prohibition on refusing to disclose information to the relevant authorities of course references that same authority and those very rules. Again, rule-breaking is portrayed by Welsh as itself codified, referencing the rules which it breaks. This actually accords with Welsh’s own literary rule-breaking, in, for example, his orthographical approach – which although it is decidedly non-standard follows rigorously the rules of its own system (see chapter on spelling).

Todorov’s conception of genre is intimately linked with his ideas about the relationship between rules and rule-breaking. In a sense, he sees rule-breaking not so much as an absolute transgression, but almost in terms of a register shift. Just as Welsh portrays different rules in different social domains, Todorov sees different genres as being defined by their rules, and thus the breaking of the rules (these are inseparable for Todorov). There are also echoes of Bakhtin’s ideas about heteroglossia in his ideas about genre, proposing parallel sets of conventions for different circumstances with the
potential to be combined in an over-arching meta-system. However, Todorov does not just see the novel, even when wholly conventional, as comprised of different genres, but in a relationship with the rules of other genres which it will not observe:

[ . . . ] everyone knows that one must not send a personal letter in the place of an official report, and that the two are not written in the same way. Any verbal property, optional at the level of language, may be made obligatory in discourse: the choice a society makes among all the possible codifications of discourse determines what is called its *system of genres*.

The literary genres, indeed, are nothing but such choices among discursive possibilities, choices that a given society has made conventional [ . . . ] from the perspective of the constitution of a discourse, it is always a matter of more rules, not fewer. (1990: 10)

Despite how formally radical Welsh’s work often seems, as per Todorov, this non-conformity itself speaks of and to convention, and as seen above this is sometimes explored thematically, and sometimes explicitly articulated through his characters. Tom Toremans sees Welsh as operating within a specifically Scottish tradition of literary transgression, citing Alasdair Gray and James Kelman as Welsh’s most obvious precursors (2003: 564). Welsh’s non-conformity, therefore, is an established convention of its own within this sub-genre. In his extensive preface to an interview with Gray and Kelman, Toremans asserts these two authors “prepared the ground for Welsh”, partially
attributing even Welsh’s commercial success to foundations laid by these predecessors. In his review of Gray’s *The Ends of Our Tethers* for *The Guardian* Welsh himself is unequivocal about Gray’s literary significance, asserting “if any contemporary author can be described as a ‘writer's writer’ then it's the massively influential Glaswegian” (2003b). Further reinforcing Toremans’ argument, Welsh expressly presents Gray’s earlier work as a useful exemplar to follow:

> When teaching Chicago graduate and post-graduate fiction students a module in Scottish contemporary fiction earlier this year, I was gratified (though not surprised) to witness the ecstatic impact Gray's first book, the magnificent *Lanark*, had on the aspiring American writers. (2003b)

It is interesting that Toremans sees a link also between class and this aesthetic, pursuing a line of argument that suggests representing such lives on and outside the margins demands transgression in style and form. To conform to conventions established by and for the middle- and upper-classes would be discordant while representing the lives of the working-class. This explanation for the formal similarities with Welsh tempers the claims Toremans makes about Gray and Kelman’s status as founders of the mode in which Welsh writes. While influence is inarguable, Toremans acknowledges similarities in the material conditions encouraged the specific stylistics employed by these authors. The idea that Welsh could not have produced similar work without their inspiration, therefore, becomes difficult to sustain. Yet Toremans also does caution that the mores of commercial publishing cannot be discounted in

---

21 Welsh, if less polite, is no less enthusiastic about Kelman: “He’s one of the greatest fucking Scottish writers ever and they should be battering down his door to get at his stuff” (Interview, 2006).
accounting for literary trends, citing “a change in publication policy and an adjusted critical view on Scottish writers” as being perhaps more significant than some sort of newly emerged class-consciousness in accounting for the stylistics of “the Scottish Revival”. “The proliferation of urban working-class work on the literary market”, he argues “had more to do with changes in the market than with a sudden emergence of literary talent and/or cultural self-awareness” (2003: 565).

Interestingly, conforming closely to Todorov’s interpretation of literary transgression, the non-standard style of these authors too, Toremans argues, is inextricably linked to precisely the prescriptions they eschew: “One could say that their work generally remains fettered by precisely the narrowly defined stylistic and cultural boundaries that it transgresses” (568). In assessing the influence of precursors like Gray and Kelman, however, it is essential to differentiate between dialect-spelling and typography. While a willingness to engage in non-standard modes of writing facilitates both, they are quite different phenomena, and are by no means inter-dependant. The typographical experimentation employed by Welsh varies wildly in form and function, meaning not only each novel must be considered separately, but often each item. There may be a more direct formal influence from Gray and Kelman in terms of orthographical choices (perhaps similar to the manner in which Welsh cites Doyle as influencing him to use the em dash to introduce dialogue).22 Such a direct relationship with precursors is unlikely when considering typographical practises, such as the representation of the worm in Filth (1998: 69), for example. These can generally be placed in a tradition established by Sterne, but not in the iterative way in which dialect spelling can evolve. This of course does not preclude an influence, it just means the

---

22 Writing of the manner in which he introduces dialogue using the em dash, Welsh tweeted “I nicked it from Roddy Doyle” (2016).
influence on typography would have to be of a different nature to any orthographical influence. The functions are quite separate, the non-standard spellings in Gray’s, Kelman’s, and Welsh’s work generally being used to represent the phonology of dialect, and establishing an internally consistent methodology of so doing. In other words, the system of spelling employed by Welsh to represent working-class Edinburgh English parallels standard English spelling (as representative of a prestige dialect of English at the time of standardisation). It is a system which produces predictable results once its internal rules are understood. Welsh’s experimental typography requires constant inventiveness, varying in form and function not only from novel to novel, but from page to page, and could not evolve from precursors in the direct manner his orthography might. Whatever the origin of Welsh’s typographic techniques, analysis of same offers to demonstrate the outer limits of the medium, demonstrating how the novel offers a space that can differ significantly from other genres in terms of the possibilities it affords to establish idiosyncratic usages.

The more formally restrained work of David Mitchell is nonetheless notable for its astute utilisation of many visual dimensions of the medium of print. Mitchell’s usage of intrinsic typographic devices is less challenging to the reader than Welsh’s (Mitchell’s devices more often reference well established precursors). Yet in seeking to find ways of representing the increasing textuality of life, Mitchell pushes the boundaries of convention. The internet age is an era of unprecedented textual communication\textsuperscript{23} – social media and messaging services remain primarily text based.

\textsuperscript{23} The infographic “Data Never Sleeps” offers statistics on the astounding level of data now being created moment by moment. Much of the information produced directly by humans is textual (eg. Facebook comments, Whatsapp message, etc.). On one of the platforms where more extended pieces of text are typically posted, Tumblr, users write 27,778 new blog posts every
Humans now engage with more text daily than they have at any point in history. It is less obvious, but previous technological developments in printing and computing also increased the amount of text presented to people in their daily lives in a similar fashion. While the advent of the printing press is recognised as revolutionising society, there were many other incremental steps subsequent to this in increasing the frequency of textual engagement. For example, technological developments facilitated cheaper methods of both composition and production for print throughout the 20th Century. Mitchell shows a particular awareness of this trend in his novel set in the 1980s, *Black Swan Green*, in which the narrator references home-typewriters and developments in personal word processors, and also includes reproduced printed ephemera. Throughout his work Mitchell goes beyond the standard in terms of layout, utilises italics and capitalisation in novel ways, and does not confine himself to only one font within a single text. Mitchell employs different fonts to represent different narrative voices, but also to recreate pieces of printed material and digital type his characters encounter.

The ever-increasing textuality of life due to these ongoing technological advances presents opportunities for authors to exploit the medium of print by framing their narratives in new ways, and including snippets and collage representing other textual mediums, such as journalism, social media, and the like. From the inception of the novel the genre has incorporated other written genres within itself – for example,
Richardson’s epistolary novel *Pamela* was conceived as an exemplar of letter writing, and its narrative is constructed from a series of faux letters by the title character and others. The typical apparatus of the letter is used, both to convey a sense of realism, and to provide the reader with information about who is writing to whom, etc. David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004), demonstrates these tendencies, composed as it is of a ship’s log, an electronic text of an interrogation, a diary/biography, a series of letters, etc. Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2004), not only includes various textual ephemera, from mathematical questions (269) to the postmark from a letter (123), it also refers to the writing of the text itself at numerous times, a task it attributes to its narrator Christopher Boone, and it is presented typographically in accordance with this conceit.²⁴ Irvine Welsh is renowned for his textual experimentation, but *Skagboys* (2012), his prequel to *Trainspotting* (1993), rejuvenates the practice of presenting the text as a personal journal by presenting large segments not printed in type at all, but in facsimiles of handwriting. Roddy Doyle’s *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993) emphasises the potentially talismanic significance of writing and letter-forms when the protagonist and his friends inscribe large letter V’s connecting their nipples with their belly-buttons as a symbol of the word “vigour” (58).

Ian Watt, in his seminal work *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), very explicitly asserts the connection he sees between these practices and the genre itself. He prefaces

---

²⁴ For example, the chapters are numbered in sequential prime numbers, (2, 3, 5, 7, 11, etc.), which is attributed to a choice on behalf of the narrator himself as a consequence of his mathematical obsession, or as Christopher explains it “because I like prime numbers” (14).
a discussion of Richardson’s approach to punctuation by asserting the primacy of print to understanding the novel:

The literary importance of the new medium is difficult to analyse. But it is at least clear that all the major literary forms were originally oral, and that this continued to affect their aims and conventions long after the advent of print. In the Elizabethan period, for instance, not only poetry but even prose were still composed primarily with a view to performance by the human voice. That literature was eventually to be printed was a minor matter, compared to pleasing patrons whose taste was formed on the old oral models. It was not until the rise of journalism that a new form of writing arose which was wholly dependent on printed performance, and the novel is perhaps the only literary genre which is essentially connected with the medium of print: it is therefore very appropriate that our first novelist should have been a printer himself. (199)

Watt goes on to argue that Richardson’s printerly style, making use of various typographical devices to recreate different writing practices, allowed him to create more convincing fiction, or in Watt’s words “to convey the impression of a literal transcript of reality” (200).

Similarly, in *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell, 2004), presents numerous narrators, and frames these various narratives in a number of different ways, making use not only of
the textual technology of today, but also conjectural technology of an imagined future.

*Cloud Atlas* is a novel composed of narratives from various eras (including the future) presented in a variety of different formats (eg. letters, diary, interview, etc.). The thread interweaving these disparate pieces of text is the idea that the narrators are various incarnations of the same eternal soul, as indicated by the recurrence of a peculiar birthmark on the dominant character in each narrative. Mitchell employs a variety of textual strategies to differentiate the chapters, lending each one a distinct format, albeit united by recurring elements throughout. This mirrors the narrative of the book itself, in that very different pieces of text are in fact united by visual elements, just as the disparate cast of characters are united by the birthmark. Intrinsic typography often forms part of Mitchell’s approach. For example, the chapter entitled “An Orison of Sonmi~451” is set in the future, and portrays an interrogation between an artificial intelligence inquisitor and a genetically modified servant who is now imprisoned having gone rogue (327-451). The chapter is introduced with a title-page offering the name of the chapter (which references its format also, as this is the putative title of the interrogation itself). This is rendered in a futuristic, style sans-serif font that is reminiscent of a computer monitor display (see Figure 1), as are the questions delivered by the AI inquisitor (see Figure 2).
Figure 1. *Cloud Atlas* (Mitchell, 2004: 327).
The use of this font contributes to the impression the questions are being delivered textually, via a screen, while the reversion to the default font (the font the majority of the narrative of the novel is presented in) for Sonmi’s answers reinforce the impression that these are verbal. While other narratives in *Cloud Atlas* that are explicitly textual are delivered in this font, because it is a default font there is no specifically textual implication. When combined with stylistic cues (the questions being more formal and constrained, while Sonmi’s answers are conversational) it confers an impression of speech, contrasted to the definite visual element implied by the relation of the question font to computer text.
The font used for the inquisitor’s questions is “Cholla” by Emigre. While the professed inspiration for the design of this font is a species of cactus of the same name,\textsuperscript{25} the modularity (precise repetition of shapes across characters) is much more suggestive of digital than organic forms. Indeed, Emigre spearheaded a digital type explosion in the 1990s, and Cholla was a late addition to this portfolio (designed in 1998-9 by Sibylle Hagmann).\textsuperscript{26} Emigre are a “digital type foundry” who quite explicitly tailor their fonts for electronic media.\textsuperscript{27} Cholla accords with this rubric, designed to work as well in optimum rendering (where all nuances are visible), as on low resolution interfaces. It is noteworthy that Mitchell uses this very obviously digitally designed font for this episode set in the future, even though the design is somewhat recherché, even today. The massive increases in resolution on all kinds of electronic visual displays have rendered the concerns that lead to this type of design essentially obsolete. Yet it is in the firm association with digital media (an association derived from an earlier time with more technological constraints on design), in which Mitchell finds the utility of this font. This is because it immediately suggests a digital monitor – even if there would be no need for a digital monitor now, let alone in his more technologically advanced future, to employ a font that can function well in low resolution. His use of this font thus works due to the connotations of this font style – the historical connection between the origins of such design and computer displays conjure

\textsuperscript{25} https://www.emigre.com/PDF/Cholla.pdf, accessed 21\textsuperscript{st} April 2019.
\textsuperscript{26} https://www.emigre.com/PDF/Cholla.pdf, accessed 21\textsuperscript{st} April 2019.
\textsuperscript{27} https://www.emigre.com/About, accessed 21\textsuperscript{st} April 2019.
forth this association in the reader, even though such a link is no longer by any means
inextricable.

While intrinsic typographic devices like italics and capitalisation are a well
understood aspect of print, there is wide variation in their usage, particularly within the
novel. Even among authors that do rely on such devices, there is variation in how they
are used, and, as is typical of the visual dimensions of print, what they mean. Some
authors use them wholly conventionally, according to the same set of rules prescribed in
more typographically restrained genres of writing, such as journalism and academic
writing, and others experiment exuberantly with these features, putting them to unique
new uses, and exploring the limits of their functionality. Still others forge an approach
which perhaps sets out to expand their conventional remit, and even establish new
conventions.

Typographic choices like italics communicate meaning by being contrasted with
the surrounding text. Take, for example, this sequence from David Mitchell’s Cloud
Atlas, in which two patients of an old folks home commandeer a visitor’s car and
attempt an escape, eliciting vociferous objections from the car’s owner: “Get your bony
carcasses out of car or I sue – DAMMIT I’LL SUE ANYWAY!” (2004: 396). This
sequence is of course framed as dialogue within the text. The lower-case first sentence
is contrasted with the upper-case second sentence. The uppercase segment indicates
increased volume (as also indicated by the exclamation mark). While different
renditions of the word <sue/SUE> are formed with the same sequence of letters, the use
of contrasting type allows a further interpretive layer to be expressed. This explanation of how such devices function (contrastively) might seem obvious, or even banal, but Crystal argues that this is by no means the situation as a matter of necessity, and sometimes the devices do not operate in this way:

Not all uses of case contrast in English are semantically relevant. When we use uppercase I for the first person pronoun, there is no semantic contrast, because there is no lowercase i used as an isolated word which means something different. To use an i would just look odd. (1997: 14)

While there is certainly truth in this analysis, the assertion that initial capitalisation, for example, does not express any semantic content is questionable. It is true, certainly, that initial capitalisation does not have a correspondence in speech, and does not alter the meaning of the item in question in the same way italicisation for emphasis does. Crystal proceeds to offer another example: “Most proper names, likewise, convey no semantic contrast if their capitalization is altered: london is still the same London, john smith is still the same John Smith. However, if we were to run with the Christian name chosen by Crystal for his example, consider the following sentence: “I’m looking for a John”, to be contrasted with “I’m looking for a john”. The first sentence suggests a search for a man named John, the second an informally expressed quest for a toilet in

28 It is worth noting that an aberrant lowercase <i> has earned worldwide ubiquity in its trademark usage by the Apple company for various products such as the iPhone, iPod, iPad, etc.
American English, and may even encourage us to imagine what accent the attributed speaker has. This might seem like an aberrant example, but it points to a key feature of how initial capitalization works: by *augmenting* other contextual and semantic clues to deliver meaning.

Strictly adhered to conventions surrounding capitalisation are a relatively late phenomenon in print. Prior to that there was, as Crystal puts it, “great uncertainty” surrounding their use, and “during the seventeenth-century, virtually any word might be capitalized, if it were felt to be significant” (2004: 262). The practice of “discretionary” initial capitalisation is, however, effectively redundant, and in almost all writing initial capitalisation is now restrained within prescribed, conventional boundaries. This, for the most part, includes the novel. Yet as usual, the novel as a genre provides a space for usages which do not conform to general convention or wider usage.

For example, in *Cloud Atlas*: “It would be a better book if Hilary V. hush weren’t so artsily-fartsily Clever” (Mitchell, 2004: 164). Here the initial of “Clever” is capitalised in a manner resembling the practice of seventeenth-century writing. It is difficult to offer a precise meaning for this, but it might be interpreted as follows: the capitalisation works as an emphatic marker, echoing how the word might be pronounced in speech. The narrator, the acerbic publisher “Timothy Cavendish”, is marking the word *clever* as it is not being used in its ordinary sense – in this instance the word is being used as a pejorative; it is clear from the preceding sentence that the
narrator does not approve of this “cleverness”, and thus the word is marked to further signpost the fact it is being used to convey disdain as opposed to praise.

As a snobbish (albeit unscrupulous) publisher, Cavendish revels in the esoteric mores of the industry. The initial capital references the arcane practice of routinely rendering chosen words with initial capitals. Although this practice was haphazard, it often did represent some sort of emphatic marking in the past. Cavendish communicates a sort of elitist insider knowledge with this device, reinforcing his expression of superiority over the author. He also bemoans the author’s own rejection of established, traditional formats of writing: “She’d written it in neat little chapteroids, doubtless with one eye on the Hollywood screenplay” (164). Cavendish finds the author’s pandering to modern sensibilities by eschewing typographic traditions distasteful. This stands in neat contrast to his own use of an esoteric and outdated mode of literary expression with the initial capital.

While Irvine Welsh employs visual experimentation to a much greater extent than is usual, many of his noticeable uses of visual elements are in fact quite conventional. For example, although Welsh’s regular use of supra-segmental capitalisation to convey increased volume in dialogue (shouting) is striking, this is a well-established practice. Welsh’s heavier reliance on this strategy than many other authors must be seen in more general terms of his more unusually acute concern with accurately translating phonological aspects of speech into the visual medium of print (which also finds more obvious expression through his peculiar non-standard spellings).
Despite his status as an innovator, Welsh had distinguished immediate progenitors, most notably Alasdair Gray and James Kelman, who were close to Welsh both in space (being also Scottish, albeit from Glasgow rather than Edinburgh) and in time (forming part of what Tom Toremans refers to as “the Scottish Revival [. . .] of the 1980s” [2003: 564]). While Welsh’s work might not seem pioneering given the proximity of these other Scottish trailblazers, the non-standard is innovative in and of itself, by its very nature. This is true in the case of dialect spelling until it is popularised to the extent something of a local standard is reached, and similar can be said about typography. Welsh’s stand-alone experimentations there, however, seem far less likely to approach such status, given their contextual dependency on the intricacies of the particular individual texts in which they appear.

Welsh also cannily utilises aspects of intrinsic typography in innovative ways. For instance, *Filth* (1998), is narrated by the corrupt detective Bruce Robertson, but contains interpolated passages throughout the text, narrated by a tapeworm that has taken up residence in the intestines of this bent cop. These segments are differentiated from the surrounding text by heavy borders. The borders are a graphic device specifically created for the book, and not part of the standard repertoire of type. However, the separation between the worm’s narration and Bruce’s also emphasised by the use of a different font, and further reinforced by the fact this font is rendered in italics (see Figure 3).
Coarse Briefings

Up the club, the lads are all raring to go as it's a big induction night. The would-be new recruits look nervous, as they well might. There's a couple of baby polis to be done, as well as some other young cunts; I don't know where they come from.

I'm already feeling a wee bit pished as I've eaten nothing, so I decide to hold back a bit until all the boring stuff is over, then I'll get myself charged up for our little specialist club's activities.

I have to keep it 

000000eat000000000000000
tedious ritual of putting Alfie Orr's
000000eat000000000000000
Grandmaster
000000eat000000000000000
Bill Crozier's still
000000i eat.000000000000
handshake, the
0000000Eat.000000000000
young boy looks like
000000Eat.000000000000
something like that.

I eat. I eat through my skin and
000000I hold on with my jaws.000

I'm shaking like an

000000Slowly, so slowly, I'm

000000I'm consuming the matter that

000000surrounds me0000000000

000000and excreting through my body,

000000through my skin.00000000

000000I have
to eat to move on, to consume
to live, to consume to grow. I can

000000feel myself growing. Eat. Eat. Eat.

000000Eat.000000000000000

A load of
t0000000eat0000000eat0000000

in a state of fear
Welsh’s determination to accurately portray the form of the language he represents is not confined to the phonology of speech. In *Filth*, an anonymous member of the police force scrawls slanderous graffiti in the toilets of the station where the narrator, Bruce Robertson, is based. This graffiti is not rendered using one of the handwriting style fonts that would form part of the repertoire of intrinsic typography. Welsh steps outside the bounds of type, including facsimile images of actual free-form writing (see Figure 4).

![Graffiti Image](image-url)

*Figure 4. Filth* (Welsh, 1998: 107).
The text is rendered through inserted images of handwritten letters. Although there are numerous fonts that aim to simulate handwriting, the artificiality of same is betrayed by the exact repetition of letter-forms. While the letters may be rendered in a rough, imprecise style to recreate the effect of handwriting, when the same letter is repeated it is clear that there is a copying process at work. Imprecisions are repeated precisely, and exact repetition is an obvious hallmark of type/print. This is not the case in Welsh’s representation of the graffiti. This demonstrates the limits of intrinsic typography, which is – paradoxically – often more adept at conveying accurately phonological aspects of language (through capitalisation and italicisation) than it is graphic aspects of writing/print.

The old adage “Don’t judge a book by its cover” would not be a necessary rule if it were not, to some extent, impossible to obey. Images can influence interpretation. But this is not only true of pictures – for example, the often figurative art placed on the front of novels with the aim of luring readers to the text. It is true of the rest of cover design too, for example the font style of the title and other text on the cover. Different fonts have a whole host of connotations, and subtly signal to potential readers what may be contained in the text within. But of course, all text must appear in some font. The text of the interior of any novel itself must also be set in a particular font, then arranged on the page in a certain manner, and so on. Furthermore, the words of the text within this font will almost always vary in terms of capitalisation, and usually italicisation also. These conventions might not vary to the same degree cover designs do, but they
are considered choices nonetheless. There are individuals employed to take care over these decisions, to choose how the text will be presented visually. As such, these choices must be fully engaged with by critics attempting to fully understand the text. Analysing literature in isolation from its visual appearance neglects the reality of books as cultural artefacts – real objects, not abstracted streams of words. This is not to mention it neglects the actual experience of readers, who engage only with books as they occur in the world, as objects to be enjoyed visually. Typography is a large part of that story.

**Case Study: Italics**

Our greatest living phonetic expert (wild horses shall not drag it from us!) has left no stone unturned in his efforts to delucidate and compare the verse recited and has found it bears a striking resemblance (the italics are ours) to the ranns of ancient Celtic bards.


Italics are a device used to distinguish segments of text. Although derived from a medieval script style (Crystal, 2015: 320), italics “became a partner with the Roman alphabet in in print in the sixteenth century” (Cook, 2004: 109). Italics are rarely used in handwriting today, and while they were originally sometimes used to set entire books, now they are rarely viewed as a script in themselves, but as a supplement to
Roman. Italics are a suprasegmental feature of the writing system: that is, they are used to distinguish and inflect the interpretation of entire segments of text, much as intonation or pitch can be used to distinguish segments of speech. Italics have well-defined usages within non-fiction genres (such as to mark the titles of books or essays in academic writing). Within the novel, the ability of italics to distinguish one segment of text from another without interrupting layout offers various possibilities to the writer.

“Italics”, as Patt (2013: 93) observes, represent a “modification of the default form”. This means they can be noticed because they are different from the surrounding text. Yet as a modification rather than a distinct form in their own right, they fit within the stream of text without interrupting its flow. There is no need to alter the layout of surrounding text to include italics (as with an enlarged capital, for example), and italics can convey precisely the same linguistic content as Roman type. In novels, use of italics is largely discretionary. There isn’t the same level of compulsory prescriptive usage as there is with capitalisation for example.

“The orthographic system of a language”, asserts David Crystal, includes “spelling, capitalization, layout and typography, and these should never be seen in isolation from each other” (2015: 319). This assertion might seem obvious, or self-evident, when stated so succinctly, but Crystal emphasises the point precisely because such a conception of the orthographic system is far from the standard within linguistics. This situation is similar in literary studies, as Nørgaard points out, “there is a general tendency in literary criticism” as well as linguistics, “to disregard the semiotic potential
of typography” (2009: 141). While italics have not gone totally unscrutinised, they fall into the above under-studied realm of typography, and have not received their due attention from linguists or literary critics. Yet italics are an integral and indispensable part of the writing system.

David Crystal argues for the versatility of italics, which he asserts “has in its long history developed a remarkable range of functions” (2015: 321). Both roman and italic typefaces derive from humanist scripts. The former derives from the more formal humanistic book script, which was primarily derived from the Carolingian miniscule script, with capitals derived from Roman inscriptionals. Italic typefaces stem from the more casual and quicker to produce humanistic cursive (Brown, 1990: 126–127). The first italic was produced for Aldus Manutius by Francesco Griffo, and was originally used as a stand-alone script to set entire books, the first being a 1501 edition of Virgil (McNeil, 2017: 33). While both italic and Roman typefaces originate in manuscript calligraphy, italics bear an intrinsic iconicity that is suggestive of handwriting because of their present appearance, slanting to the right as most handwriting does. Levenston asserts that “by the end of the sixteenth century” the function of italics “in all texts” could be divided into two categories:

i) invariably—any parts of the text in languages other than English:

Latin quotations; the Jew of Malta’s remarks in French and Spanish; even Welsh in Patient Grissil, included in Thomas
Dekker’s collected works, though William Haughton and Henry Chettle were collaborators;

ii) usually—acknowledged quotations from other sources—this includes not only the Bible or Greek philosophers in translation (see Bacon’s Advancement of Learning), but also those occasions in plays when characters are reading messages or letters.

(1992: 93)

The early functions of italics, therefore, bring our attention to the appearance of writing in another register – external sources and languages imported into the main text. It is important to note, however, that this was not necessarily the representation of handwriting. Yet these functions may still have derived from the association, both historical and visual, of italics with writing. This would operate by drawing attention to the textuality of the language through associating it with the act of writing, creating a stronger link between the italicised text than text in the default font, which would, for the most part, go unnoticed by comparison, the reader having become accustomed to it. These two functions derive, according to Levenston, derive straightforwardly from earlier literary antecedents:
[... ] it was the printers, not the authors, who first developed separate functions for different typefaces; the conventions that governed the use of italic or roman could easily be followed by the compositor without any need to consult the author. In dramatic texts, one type—black letter or Roman—was used to indicate stage directions and speakers, and another type—Roman or italic—for the actual text spoken by the actors. (93)

When attempting to delineate the potential meanings/functions of visual elements of the text, however, it is important to remember that non-lexical elements usually lack definitive and stable definitions. In practice the meaning of visual elements of the text are often heavily variable and context dependent. As Crystal contends, not all of the functions of italics “are easy to formulate as rules” (2015: 321).

Pinker asserts that italics are “particularly useful in emphasizing contrast, which echoes what we do in conversation” (2014b). Although the comparison with emphasis in speech is a fair analogy, the borders between segments of text in italics and the surrounding type are much more clearly delineated than words or phrases emphasised in speech. In speech there is a greater variety of emphatic marking available – for example, pitch may combine with volume and tempo to create emphasis. Because italics can’t be combined with other methods of emphasis in this way, and do not blend into the surrounding language in the way that units (words, clauses, etc.) of speech do, conventions for italicisation do not correspond precisely with emphatic marking in
speech. The differentiation of segments of text by contrasting italics against standard Roman type can have a variety of meanings. Some meanings obtain across genres, some are more prevalent in the novel than other genres, and some are almost wholly confined to the novel. Some, but not all, have counterparts in spoken language. It is worth visiting these categories of usage in turn.

In *The Stuff of Literature* (1992: 94), Levenston contends that originally words and phrases were italicised based on a semantic rationale, rather than to convey any prosodic, rhythmic or intonational aspect. Such usages persist. Title marking (as in “Chariots of Fire”, *Black Swan Green*, 2006: 175) doesn’t possess any correspondence with speech. But italics are also commonly used as an emphatic marker (as in “Acne and Codgirl even *smelt* guilty” [244]), a usage which carries a direct correspondence to spoken language. Considering usage of italics in the contemporary novel, Levenston posits two primary uses: “foregrounding and alternative” (1992: 97). In his definition “foregrounding” is when “single words” (97) are italicised, whereas “alternative” is when a larger segment of text is italicised. He is correct in noting that there is a difference between italicisation for emphasis (“foregrounding” in his definition), which is analogous to stress in speech, but this practice is by no means necessarily confined to single words – whole clauses, sentences, or even larger pieces may be italicised towards precisely this end.

His definition of “alternative” usage of italics is useful. He contends italics may be used in a way that does not mimic stress in speech, but instead contrasts with roman
type to present “alternative worldviews, logical levels, or states of consciousness” (98).

But again, such usage can occur in shorter segments also, such as interpolated single words, headings, or sudden brief switches of perspective. Although the division into two categories he offers is lucid, and does explain two very different functions italics may be used for, his criteria for categorising real world examples does not stand up to scrutiny. Levenston is apparently arguing that the primary factor in determining which category usage falls into should be the amount of italicised text. Usage of italics could be divided into categories in a number of ways. Semantic versus phonological marking might be a more straightforward and firmly delineated categorisation, recognising that text that aims to recreate speech sounds is quite different than text that is written to be read bereft of any phonological content (which is the majority of text). But such simplistic divisions neglect to consider the enormous differences in conventional usages within such categories, as the examples below will demonstrate.

After some discussion of the various uses of italics within the novel, an alternative binary division of usage will be offered. While these macro-categories are useful, they are better applied after visiting real usage on a more detailed scale. The categories proposed are illustrated primarily with examples from David Mitchell’s Black Swan Green (2006), a bildungsroman narrated by 13 year old schoolboy and stammerer Jason Taylor. This novel displays a useful range of uses, demonstrating the versatility of italics within a single text. However, where the usages under discussion do not occur in Black Swan Green, other primary sources are used.
There is a convention to mark the titles of newspapers, journals, books, films, albums, etc., by italicizing same. This usage is a prescribed convention of non-fiction genres, but also appears in fiction. Throughout Black Swan Green Mitchell follows this convention: “The tunnels been lost since olden times so its discoverer’d make the front page of the Malvern Gazzateer” (87). Here Mitchell italicises the title of a fictional local tabloid. This practice contributes to the illusion of textual reality, lending an air of authenticity to the invented newspaper. This is a convention of written language alone, it has no spoken counterpart. The second usage of italics to be discussed here (emphatic marking) can be seen alongside title marking in this sentence: “Wished I hadn’t nagged mum to take me to Chariots of Fire” (Mitchell: 250). Titles of films, books, etc., are distinguished of course, not only by italicisation, but also by initial capitalisation. This avoids confusion between these two distinct usages, but also demonstrates how typographic choices can augment or be augmented by other conventions within the writing system to reinforce the same meaning.

Italics can also be used to mark words, clauses, phrases, sentences, or longer segments of text, for emphasis. Such usage is highly analogous to pitch or volume shift, or intonational marking in speech. Take the following example:

“Art,” she put another cigarette in her mouth and this time I was ready with her dragon lighter, “fabricated of the inarticulate is beauty. Even if its themes is [sic] ugly. Silver moons, thundering seas, clichés of cheese, poison beauty. The
amateur thinks his words, his paints, his notes makes the beauty. But the master
knows his words is just the vehicle in who beauty sits . . .” (186)

Even in a book so consistently evocative of speech as Black Swan Green, this type of
italicisation occurs more frequently in dialogue than elsewhere. The trend confirms the
intimate relationship of this use of italics with the sounds of speech. The items chosen
for italicisation in this way correspond precisely with items marked phonologically
within speech.

It is worth noting, however, that even within a genre as open to experimentation
as the novel, the convention to restrain italicisation to at minimum single words is
firmly entrenched. Outside of experimental uses, single letters or morphemes are almost
never italicised. This is not the case at all with emphasis in speech. Otherwise the
convention closely follows spoken counterparts. It is by examining an exception to this
rule, however, that the convention can best be explained. Amongst the disparate array
ageing publisher’s account of his sectioning to an old folk’s home and subsequent
escape. This is rendered in first person prose which at first glance seems standard and
unremarkable. Yet there are interesting visual elements at play here also. Take this
segment of dialogue, for example (please note the narrator refers to himself in the third
person but this remains first person narrative):
Anger sparked in Timothy Cavendish like forks in micro-waves. “I want you to evolve problem-solving intelligence and sell me a ticket to Hull!”

“I ain’t standing for being addressed in that tone.”

“I’m the ruddy customer! I won’t be addressed like that! Get me your ruddy supervisor!”

“I am my supervisor.” (161)

While the italicised segment in “I am my supervisor” is conventional in terms of representing phonological emphasis in dialogue in literature, the italicisation of only the <I> in “I’m the ruddy customer” is much more unusual. It is unconventional to italicise segments of words, but it makes semantic and phonological sense in this context, because the character is emphasising only that segment of the word. This is a development of the practice of italicisation to represent stress, pushing at the boundaries of conventionality to enhance precision in meaning. While this natural progression from the practice of italicising entire words may not have been established by Mitchell, it must be seen in terms of his unusually acute concern with the parts of speech, in particular phonology. This may be due not least to his own struggles as a stammerer, undergoing extensive speech therapy, which no doubt would encourage a high sensitivity to the complexities of pronunciation (he fictionalised these experiences in
Another example shows more clearly it is a phonological aspect Mitchell is aiming to convey using this non-standard approach to italicisation: “Two, no, three, Dobermanns jostled and slammed, standing on their back legs, barking *insanely*” (88). Here, Mitchell italicises only the root lexeme and affix, leaving the prefix unitalicised. If the intent was merely semantic emphasis, stressing <i>sanely</i> alone would have the opposite effect to the one intended. Semantically, it is the prefix <i>in</i> which is the salient syllable for stress, but actual phonological practice doesn’t always accord neatly with such logic. It is clear that the voice of the character – 13 year-old Jason Taylor – is being communicated. A trademark penchant for exaggerated rhetorical emphasis conveys the young teenager’s near permanent sense of awestruck wonder at the events to which he is subjected. It also indicates his keenness to make an impression upon his audience. Emphasising the final two syllables in this manner would not be uncommon in speech, and would communicate the desired meaning.

29 Mitchell has spoken about how these experiences informed his writing in several interviews. An array of useful quotations from him on the subject can be found on the website Stuttering Help (https://www.stutteringhelp.org/content/david-mitchell, accessed 21st March 2019), including the following: “Like Jason, I would go [to therapy], and my stammer would vanish in the presence of the therapist, but come the next day, I’d be stammering again [. . .] One very pleasing result of *Black Swan Green* is that the book now appears on course syllabi for speech therapists in the UK. I hope that the book is useful for anyone wanting to understand an insider’s account of disfluency. For most of my life, the subject was a source of paralyzing shame, scrupulously avoided by family and friends. They were being kind, but to do something about a problem it must be named, discussed, and thought about. After writing the second chapter of *Black Swan Green* I realized, ‘This is true, real, and liberating.’ Now I’m more able to feel that if people have a problem with my stammer, that problem is theirs and not mine [. . . if Jason comes back in a future book] he’ll be an adult speech therapist.”
effect despite the semantic discord. Such use of italics in writing is decidedly non-
standard, and demonstrates decisively that the author is aiming to replicate a speech
phenomenon through the medium of print. As a marker corresponding to some
phonological aspect of stress, this perfectly captures the enthusiastically emphatic voice
of his narrator, the 13 year old Jason Taylor. That such usage is aberrant seems merely
to be a matter of convention.

Italics, as an entire alternative set of type, possess contrastive potential that
surpasses their use for emphasis. Italics form part of the standard repertoire of
characters. That is to say, every font contains an italic alphabet of characters “within”
its inventory, alongside a standard (or “Roman”) set. Yet italics are effectively a
duplicate set of letters – an entirely separate font. This can be seen clearly by comparing
letter-forms. For example, standard <a> v italic <a>. Capitals are also a different set of
letter-forms conceived as existing within a single font. However, because italics
encompass capitals and lowercase, italics can contrastively perform precisely the full
range of functions as the standard set of characters (capitals cannot do this).

In other words, italics and standard Roman type could in theory have their roles
reversed without any consequences for interpretation. To take a previously used
example, the sequence, “Art . . . fabricated of the inarticulate is beauty” (186), could be
rendered “Art . . . fabricated of the inarticulate is beauty” (186). The practice of using
italics to mark the emphasised segment (and standard for the rest) is merely
conventional – it is in terms of this “modification of the default form” (Patt: 93) that
meaning is communicated. Because italics are identifiably different from the default form, while being capable of performing precisely the same functions, they can inflect the interpretation of text without detracting from any existing semantic content. Italics produce meaning contrastively – italics are contrasted with the standard set, differentiating segments of text, and it is this *differentiation* which produces meaning.

The capacity to differentiate segments of text supra-segmentally allows italics to be used to mark changes in narrator, or changes in narrative register. Italics are often used to indicate interior monologue. This practice is common enough to verge on convention. Many websites offering advice for budding authors, for example, recommend this approach to signalling interior monologue. Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting*, which presents multiple perspectives, presents a perfect example of this usage of italics to signal a shift in narrative viewpoint: “Renton’s mind was working overtime. *Stoat the baw, they call it. Ye kin get put away fer it*” (148). The utility of italics to directly communicate differentiation between types of narration is best understood by comparing it to the more prosaic technique of simply stating explicitly that a shift has taken place. In this case, such contrast can be seen almost immediately, as further on in the same paragraph, the relation of Renton’s thoughts is explicitly signalled verbally: “Fuck me, he thought”. There is no italicisation when the switch to interior thought is announced like this. The latter (explicitly stating that these are the

---

thoughts of a character), is not peculiar to print, and is possible not only within the manuscript tradition, but in oral storytelling. The former can be thought of in terms of the tradition of free indirect speech, and the italicisation a means of clarifying this narrative switch, while retaining the stylistic advantages of a less mediated interior narrative segment. This allows the reader immerse themselves more directly in the thoughts of the narrator than when those thoughts are signalled within the text, which inevitably announces the process of mediation.

As a typographic technique, this is certainly a narrative strategy peculiar not only to print, but as Christopher Flint argues, established by the novel. Flint points out in The Appearance of Print (2011), free indirect discourse as a narrative technique is very intimately bound with the novel as a genre. He attributes the development of stylistic manoeuvres used to achieve this illusion to wider philosophical trends at the time. “In Britain (as in Europe generally)”, Flint writes, “the advent of print coincided with new conceptions of psychological introspection and national consciousness that became enshrined in popular fiction” (2). While atomisation, from society to the individual, could be seen as the remarkable aspect of these developments, unification within the nation was its corollary – and was equally paradigm shifting. At the same time the borough, town, and family were being broken down into their constituent parts, these constituent parts were coalescing to join the much larger unit of the nation state. To achieve cohesion, this greater diversity had to be recreated culturally – the aristocracy could no longer stand alone. Not only the head of the polity, but the body
politic demanded representation. Alan Riach argues that there is an element of moral
obligation in undertaking this task:

Realism, for Welsh, might be described as a responsibility to the characters he
represents both in their social contexts and – crucially – in their language,
combined with a responsibility to a readership which knows little of these things
experientially. (2005: 43)

Yet in representing the interiority of a derided and underprivileged groups within the
context of a nation (in this case drug addicts in Scotland), Welsh is building on a well-
established tradition within the novel, providing a glimpse into the lives of others and
establishing unity between seemingly disparate groups. As Flint points out, the
utilisation of typography to achieve this illusion of interiority towards these aims, is
also a formula firmly enshrined in the canon of the genre.

Achieving such an illusion demands its own methodology, and alongside
narrative techniques, typographic devices established themselves to an extent as the
“special effects” of the genre. Ian Watt describes Samuel Richardson’s propensity for
employing typographical embellishments in these terms, asserting “Richardson’s
freedom with italics, large letters, and the dash to indicate an incomplete sentence,
certainly help to convey the impression of a literal transcript of reality” (1957: 200).
There certainly seems to be a more immediate and direct interiority that comes such an
unannounced switch to the direct thoughts of a character that is perhaps due to the fact that we are used, in conversation (or storytelling), to hearing people say “he thought”, but not to entering the directly quoted “unmediated” linguistic stream of someone’s own consciousness in the manner that a long segment of italicised text can indicate. The practice of framing thoughts with phrases such as “he thought to himself” is familiar to us, and because of its direct analogy with quoting someone in speech it signals that the thoughts are mediated by a narrator. Italicised interior monologue without linguistic signalling purports to relate the actual experience of the individual who is thinking.

Welsh utilises various strategies, of narration, typography, and punctuation, to signal such switches in interiority. Although the dominant narrative mode in his novels is first-person, Welsh’s first-person narration takes many forms, from the faux-handwritten journals of Skagboys (2012), to the typographically bounded interior monologue of a tapeworm in Filth (1998). The italicisation in Trainspotting is among the more established practices Welsh uses to convey interior monologue, and unlike the aforementioned examples, its utility rests more in its unobtrusiveness than its conspicuousness. The predominance of such modes within the novel speaks to some of the most fundamental characteristics of the genre.

As Flint contends, the novel in particular demanded a pretence of the direct representation of thought (2011: 2). The representation of thought in italics can, of course (in theory if not often in practice), occur the other way around – ie. in first person narrative, the text may switch to italics for a segment in third person omniscient,
although this is rare. The reason the practice of rendering interior monologue in italics perhaps shouldn’t be yet considered a convention, is that the switch to italics can more generally signal any switch in register. For example, in this excerpt from *Black Swan Green* the narrator enters a hall of mirrors. The imagined personalities of Jason Taylor’s distorted selves are distinguished from the rest of the text via the use of italics:

> Halls of mirrors are usually crummy affairs . . . But *these* mirrors melted you to self mutants . . . an African tribesman with a neck girraffed by iron rings waded towards me from the depths of the first mirror. His ears were droopy and dripping. It was a dreamish sight. *Can a person change,* asked the tribesman, *into another person?* . . . in the second mirror was a gelatinous cube. All face, no body, just twiggy limbs waving at its corners. By puffing out my cheeks I nearly doubled its size. *No,* answered the cube. *You can only change superficial features. An Inside You must stay unaltered to change the Outside You. To change Inside You you’d need an Even More Inside You, who’d need an Inside the Even More Inside You to change it* . . . In the third mirror was Maggot. My waist and legs got squished into a tail. My chest and head flared up into a big shimmering glob. *Don’t listen to them. Ross Wilcox and Gary Drake and Neal Brose pick on you because you don’t blend in. If you had the right hair and right clothes and spoke the right way and hung out with the right people things’d be fine* . . . (315-6)
This cannot exactly be considered internal monologue, as the narrative is in the first person in any case, and the African tribesman can’t really be considered one of Taylor’s own personas in the same way that the voice of “Maggot” can. Maggot is an ever-present dual personality lurking in Jason’s subconscious, the self-hating facet that emerges at times of stress, embarrassment, or moral weakness. The tribesman is simply a function of the mirror’s distortion, a temporary whimsical fancy. The italics here emphasise conflicting elements of Jason’s psyche, internally championing opposing arguments. This clash is represented visually by contrasting roman type with italics.

As seen from the first sentence of this piece, while italics are used to mark narrative voices that are in some way distinct from the protagonist’s, they are also still used for emphasis: “But these mirrors melted you into self-mutants” (315). So within a single paragraph, italics can be used to indicate for two wholly different purposes. The reason this does not become confusing is because the switch in narrative voice is indicated in the text (“asked the tribesman”), but also because the different usages of italics are correlated with the length of the segment. Using italics as emphatic markers quickly loses its efficacy over long periods of text – if everything is emphasised, nothing is emphasised. But large segments in italics can still be differentiated effectively when contrasted as a whole against the rest of the text.

Italics are useful in this way for indicating shifts in perspective – distinguishing one voice or register from another without the need to laboriously interrupt the narrative to acknowledge a changeover has taken place. Once the significance of this
differentiation has been established, whether explicitly or by implication through context, italics and roman type can alternate, facilitating efficiently the reoccurring appearance of different narrative voices. For example, in the “Circe” episode of *Ulysses* (Joyce, 1984: 350-499), which is presented in playscript format, italics are used throughout for the “stage directions” (a standard convention for theatrical scripts [Crystal, 2015: 322]). “Circe” is far from a straightforward playscript, and the “stage directions” also represent a privileged perspective akin to an omniscient narrator. Jason Taylor’s multiple personas in *Black Swan Green* are given a different level of weight and volition, and italics can signal these layers to the very concept of one stable narrator by presenting the same font in a slightly altered form. In his essay “Four Centuries of Typography in the King James Bible”, Paul Gutjahr points out italics were used in *Harper’s Illuminated* Bible of 1847, to differentiate human interpretation from “the word of God” (2001: 32). As Gutjahr points out, this is a not insignificant example of how parallel but profoundly distinct narratives can be unified within the pages of a single book, but also kept distinct through italicisation. In literature, however, italics are typically used to demonstrate interiority, although this point of view itself may take many different forms. The practice of using italics for differentiation, however, remains effective across a wide scope of potential narrative perspectives. Italics are used within the interior monologue of “Ronald Checker” in Irvine Welsh’s 2015 novel *A Decent Ride*, for example, when the character is praying, but are not used for the rest of this stream of consciousness narrative. This is to mark the fact that prayers of a believer are,
in a sense, a sort of “directed speech”, rather than the unmediated “thoughts” which the
rest of the narrative represents itself to be. The use of italics maintains a continuous
linguistic flow while differentiating one segment of text from another, and therefore
allows such narrative nuances to be conveyed while maintaining the conceptual
integrity of an overarching narrator.

There is a declining convention (by no means a rule) to italicise quotations of
verse and poetry. Quotations of prose are also sometimes italicised to distinguish them
from the rest of the text as with narrative marking discussed above, and as Crystal
points out, to a certain extent, usage of italics “overlaps with that of quotation marks”
(2015: 320). In Ulysses, snatches of songs and poetry are italicised, as so:

Smile. Smile Cranly’s smile.

First he tickled her

Then he patted her

Then he passed the female catheter

For he was a medical

Jolly old medi ....

—I feel you would need one more for Hamlet. Seven is dear to the
mystic mind. The shining seven WB calls them. (151)
Of course, verse is inevitably further distinguished from the rest of the narrative by layout (spaced and indented line by line). There may be something of a relation to the emphasis usage of italics, as for song or verse there is an expected shift in pronunciation also. However, quotations of prose are also sometimes italicised, as in this instance, also from *Ulysses* on the subsequent pages: “*Hamlet, I am thy father’s spirit*” (155). It is difficult to discern what relationship the usage of italics as an emphatic marker has to the usage of italics to distinguish quotes from the surrounding text. However, even quotations which are not sung, or in verse, are often accompanied by marked shift in intonation in speeches and such, and these usages of italics may be analogous to this practice.

“The use of italics . . . has in its long history developed a remarkable range of functions, not all of which are easy to formulate as rules” (Crystal, 2015: 320). This is certainly true for the comparatively loose and haphazard convention in English writing of rendering untranslated “foreign” words or phrases in italics (usually French, Latin or German). For example, in *Trainspotting*: “He wondered if Diane would like it, and started sniggering, uncontrollably, through nerves, at his own hideous *double entendre*”. The practice isn’t universally applied. It is haphazard in part because it is usually only words or phrases that are generally understood which are given this treatment. If they are in general usage – usually much more frequent usage than many of the more esoteric words accepted as “English” – in what sense can they be considered “foreign” and worthy of marking in this way? The inherent contradictory nature of this practice
can be seen in the following example from *Black Swan Green*: “‘*Lytoceras Fimbriatum.*’” Dad nodded at the spiral fossil in my hand. ‘Its Latin name. Ammonite family . . . ’” (230). There is little rationale (or consistency) behind italicising the species but not the group, class, phylum or kingdom, which all have names similarly derived from Latin or Greek roots. More importantly, there is scant justification for singling out “foreign” words for marking at all – the overwhelming majority of English words entered the language from “other” languages. Singling some words out for special treatment is doomed to inconsistency. *Double Entendre*, for example, can of course be found in even the most abridged version of the *OED*. The marking is merely conventional, and more or less random, in that some words tend to be marked in this way and others not, with little rationale or equanimity to the process, beyond perhaps being more frequent for words that have not been orthographically Anglicised – although the English spelling system itself remains famously erratic. Crystal succinctly expresses the lack of clear convention on this matter: “How long does a loan-word have to be in English before it stops ‘looking foreign’? . . . . This is a domain full of ‘probabys’, ‘mays’, and ‘mightys’” (2015: 323-4).

This practice can have stark political implications – or at least stark politico-linguistic implications. Roddy Doyle has been widely lauded for his representation of a minority dialect: the English of working-class Dubliners. More detailed discussion of the critical consensus and related issues surrounding Doyle’s representation of Dublin English is included in the case study on dialect spelling in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
corpus Doyle displays a deference to standard English through punctuational and formatting choice (eg. apostrophising deviations from the standard such as “fuckin’” for `<fucking>` [1996: 39]). Doyle’s penchant for using standard English as the benchmark against which other forms must be measured can also be seen in his practice of italicising words which form part of the Hiberno-English lexicon, but retain aspects of Irish phonology and orthography. In reality such words would form part of normal usage for the characters Doyle portrays. Yet because they are not part of the standard dialect, Doyle marks them out through italicisation. For instance, in Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, the teacher demands a reply from a boy in class: “The answer, you amadán*” (263). “Amadán” is glossed at the bottom of the page as “eejit”, itself a dialectal form of the standard English word idiot. In reality there is no such firm division between languages, this is an artificial construct of orthographical choices, reinforced by italicisation. Where a word is slotted into a construction which follows English syntax, is used by a significant minority of speakers in this way, and understood by the overwhelming majority of Hiberno-English speakers, any such divisions are meaningless. 32 Most words come to us through other languages. Usage defines language, nothing else, yet particularly in print such conventions convey the illusion that there is clear line of demarcation between dialect, standard, and other languages.

32 It is striking in this context that Doyle does not italicise or gloss the French phrase “pied-à-terre” in his 2017 novel Smile (157), while he does italicise the Irish “Bráthair” (33).
This need not be so, particularly in literary writing – all the more so in literary writing which recreates non-standard speech. Yet as Crystal puts it: “the norms of the standard language act as a glass through which we can see other dialects but darkly” (2004: 194). Although italics are treated in David Crystal’s monograph on English punctuation, it is perhaps inaccurate to characterise italics in terms of punctuation. They don’t so much punctuate the text as inflect it – they are a suprasegmental feature, they do not fill a slot in the way that the comma, dash, or semi-colon do. Nevertheless, they share with such punctuational items a lack of “absolute value and function” (Parkes, 1993:2) that lends them a versatility, and facilitates the communication of a multiplicity of meanings.

As the first-person, written narrative of an autistic boy, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2004) by Mark Haddon, employs a variety of textual techniques to convey the characterisation of the narrator. These range from numbering the chapters in prime numbers, to including mathematical formulae in the appendices, to the inclusion of flow charts to visually represent his decision-making process at crucial junctures in the book. There are also various typographic elements that contribute to creating a cohesive text that creates the illusion of a text written by this peculiar narrator. This includes the sans serif font (associated with clarity and accessibility), but also the unusual use of capitalisation, boldface, and italics.

Italics are sometimes used in *The Curious Incident* as a sort of conceptual marker. This is quite distinct from their usual usage as an emphatic marker, which
corresponds to speech-practices. Haddon, through his narrator Christopher Boone, however, uses italics to identify distinct and significant concepts that aren’t necessarily being emphasised. For example, at one point he writes, “I decided I would not think about it anymore that night because I didn’t have enough information and could easily Leap to the Wrong Conclusions” (124). “Leaping to the wrong conclusions” is a concept we learn he has identified and adopted from a Sherlock Holmes novel, as he asserts “Athelney Jones of Scotland Yard” has fallen into this error and it “is a dangerous thing to do because you should make sure you have all the available clues before you start deducing things” (124). Similarly, he recommends constant vigilance by warning, “This is what is called Relaxing your Guard, and it is what you must never do if you are a detective” (101). Throughout the novel Christopher Boone struggles to understand the thought-processes and motivations of other characters, indeed much of The Curious Incident is focussed on his attempts to ameliorate the effects of his autism by figuring out methods to allow him better relate to other people. Labelling significant concepts might assist in this task, in a similar manner to how Christopher’s teacher Siobhan attempts to assist him in labelling people’s emotions, using simple drawings of smiley and sad faces (2). This division of text using italics to mark distinct concepts must be seen in this context, as representative of the writing of a person who is consciously engaged in the task of attempting to parse the decisions of actors in the world around him.
There is a sense also that these concepts derive from quotation. For example, “And another thing was that I helped Mother paint her room *White With a Hint of Wheat*” (263). Although “Wheat” is a colour sold by Dulux, “*White With a Hint of Wheat*” is not, and it’s reasonable to assume that Christopher is quoting his mother here, who has ordered or mixed a custom colour. Marking these phrases in this way emphasises Christopher’s literalist and pedantic tendencies – the colour must be recounted precisely as it has been related to him (not, for example, simply as “off-white”), and that sequence alone becomes the moniker for this concept in his mind. Again, marking this phrase with italics (in this case augmented by bold-face) contributes to creating a fuller picture of the linguistic implications of this character’s disability: unable to navigate ambiguity and polysemy, he isolates individual phrases in their entirety, and attributes an invariable meaning to them. Being bombarded by a polysemic jumble of language is too much for Christopher (he often is overcome and covers his ears and moans to shut out the outside world). As such, he must divide language into distinct constituent parts, and assign meaning to phrases in a similar way a dictionary does to words. The use of italics is combined with capitalisation and sometimes bold-face to separate these these phrases from the rest of the text, marking them as distinct linguistic items in their own right. Haddon’s subtle use of italics here very effectively communicates the linguistic implications of his narrator’s disability.

---

33 This is reinforced by the fact that Christopher similarly uses italics for the direct quotation of established mottos. For example, “And it shows that something called Occam’s razor is true. And Occam’s razor is not a razor that men shave with but a law, and it says *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*” (113).
Similarly, in *Smile* (2017), Roddy Doyle marks certain phrases in the narrative with italics. The determining factor in this marking seems to be that these phrases are emotionally charged, or of particular significance to the plot. These phrases are often snatches of speech, yet they are not marked off with indentation and em dashes as with the rest of the dialogue. They are differentiated from the narrative by the italicisation, but also differentiated from the spoken language of conversation by this lack of formatting. This is perhaps an attempt to emphasise their position as memories (in a novel which is first-person and often retrospectively told) – these particular phrases have become divorced from their conversational context, instead becoming ensconced in the mind of the narrator as discrete units which he has recalled repeatedly. For example, remembering a teacher who sexually abused him, the narrator Victor Forde flits between italics and Roman type:

I couldn’t see why he’d picked on me. I wasn’t like a girl or a man. I’d no big brothers; no one had warned me about him. *Never smile back at him. Never get ten out of ten. Never get below five – don’t give him any excuse to keep you back after the bell.*

I’d gone into a school that was a row of big, detached houses, with black gates, a neat hedge and trees that looked as if they’d been planted hundreds of years ago. (2017: 25-6)
It’s unclear in this instance if the segment of italicised text is remembered speech of the protagonist, or of someone else subsequent to this incident, or perhaps even conjectured speech he wishes he had heard (given the reference to the fact “no one had warned” him). Elsewhere it seems clear that this italicised segments are remembered speech, but either of a hackneyed phrase (“You’re never off the telly” [44]), a memorable description (“Here’s a lovely lady and she’s not going to be talking about fashion” [90]), or a significant utterance (eg. the ominous “I can never resist your smile” from the aforementioned abusive teacher [26]). There may also be an element of the author not wishing to disrupt the flow of narrative with indentation and em dashes while interpolating these snatches of dialogue, as they are generally brief asides cogent to the thrust of the narrative at the point in which they appear, rather than recreated conversations per se. The italics seem to grant them a particular status as pieces of language that are at once self-contained units, but units which are deemed crucial to the story being told.

This situation is complicated by the fact that the narrator is writing his own story. Aída Díaz Bild argues for correspondences between Smile and The Woman Who Walked Into Doors (1996) in this respect: “Stylistically both novels also share certain similarities. Both are narrated in the first person [. . .] The fact that both narrators are writing their own story allows Doyle to introduce metafictional elements” (2018: 6). The ambiguity of the italicisation in Smile contributes to this metafictional aspect, particularly when it occurs in relation to the subject of writing itself: “Research. The
word bumped about in my head, back where Fitzpatrick had been tapping my skull. *I’m going to write about this. I’m going to write – I’m going to keep writing*” (144). Here the word “Research” is marked as significant by the italics supplemented with the assertion that the word “bounced around in his head”, reinforcing the idea that it is phrases of particular significance, spoken or otherwise, that the narrator has fixated upon in some way that are marked in this way. It is unclear whether this indicates the narrator making a mental note of this word with the intention of writing it down.

However, as Aída Díaz Bild notes, elsewhere the impression is conveyed that certain italicised segments form written material for the book Victor is writing (2018: 6). One segment of text appears first in Roman type: “She pulled me to the floor by the sleeve of my jumper. Then she knelt in front of me – she wasn’t smiling” (110), then again verbatim but in italics, preceded by the intimation that the narrator is writing: “I sat at the table, and wrote. *She pulled me to the floor by the sleeve of my jumper. Then she knelt in front of me – she wasn’t smiling*” (146). This utilisation of italics immediately raises the question, however, of whether or not the book we are reading is the book the narrator is writing, or a different a book about the narrator writing a book. This is a vertiginous hall-off-mirrors effect created by a prosaic textual convention employed creatively. The reception of the text by the reader is reflected and distorted semantically by this framing in the same way italics visually present as a distorted version of Roman type. What is unambiguous in the use of italics throughout *Smile* is,
unsurprisingly, that they are utilised to differentiate segments of text, providing a different narrative level for interpretation through this staple convention of print.

In Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993) perspectives often shift from chapter to chapter without obvious marking – the reader must infer from the content who is narrating. As Bronwen Tomas puts it:

[ . . . ] first-person vernacular narrators interchange with a third-person narrator employing Standard English, challenging the reader’s preconceptions both about the character narrators and about the relationship between Standard English and the Scots dialect. In the chapters narrated in Scots the reader does not have to engage in the same kind of “gear shifting” as in the chapters narrated in Standard English, but the effect of switching is to remind the reader of the tensions and gaps existing between the different varieties of speech and the implications of this in terms of their relative status. (2012: 106)

Some forms of narration within *Trainspotting*, however, are signposted for the reader in various ways beyond the semantic and orthographic. For example, the text is also interrupted at various junctures by numbered interludes, titled “*Junk Dilemmas*”. The short parables that follow these italicised titles are also presented in italics. There is not necessarily any shift in narrative perspective involved – for example, “*Junk Dilemmas No. 63*” (14), related from the perspective of Mark Renton, is also preceded (and
followed) by first-person narrative from the same character. Combined with the headings, the italics isolate these snatches of first-person narration from the rest of the text. While they do contribute not only to the general ambience, they also augmenting the plot, yet still work as self-contained segments (hence their titling and numbering being independent of the rest of the text). They offer a snapshot of the disjointed thought-process of a drug addled mind, relate samples of the individual challenges faced by heroin addicts, but also provide information on Renton’s life that is pertinent to the broader story itself. The *Junk Dilemmas* punctuate the text at semi-regular intervals, forming a separate collection of vignettes, a recurring sub-text that enhances the main narrative by providing a deeper understanding of the predicament of heroin addiction. Again, it is the fact the entire set of typographic characters can be represented in italics that allows this differentiation to occur while delivering linguistic content in much the same manner as elsewhere in the text.

Crucially, these vignettes eventually emphasise precisely the manner in which italics function at a linguistic level within the writing system, that is both contrastively (by differentiating segments of text) and iconically (by communicating particular connotations derived from their form). The final numbered dilemma in *Trainspotting* is not a *Junk Dilemma*, instead it is a Straight Dilemma. “*Junk Dilemmas No. 67*” (222) is not succeeded by a 68th instalment in the series, the sequence is abandoned and “*Straight Dilemmas No. 1*” appears near the denouement of the novel (299). By reverting to standard type for this episode (in which Renton uncharacteristically resists
the offer of “Grass, with some opium in it” [300]) Welsh creates a visual pun, the straightness of the text very obviously representing Renton’s attempt to get clean from drugs and earn his money legally – ie to “go straight”. This confirms that the italicisation of the previous dilemmas not only served to mark these interpolated segments of text from the body of the narrative (somewhat divorced and disembodied as they are from the appearance and chronotope of the rest of the text), but also symbolically through their visual appearance to communicate the skewed perspective and priorities of a drug addict. As Renton asserts in “Junk Dilemma No. 67”, “Thir’s nivir any real dilemmas wi junk. They only come when ye run oot” (223).

In his 2015 novel, A Decent Ride, Welsh employs italics for an unusual form of narrative marking. Chapter 11, “In God We Trust”, is the first-person narrative of “Ronald Checker”, an obnoxious Trumpian American businessman. It begins with an italicised passage (not indented or separated from the text in any other way): “Gracious Lord, eternal saviour, I am so, so sorry, for I know I have sinned against your profligate wastrels!” (83). When Checker’s prayer is completed, the text returns to standard Roman type: “Spare me Lord! I drop the Bible back on to the nightstand hoping to hell that he’s listening to me” (83). Italics are used here to separate Checker’s prayers from the stream of his first-person narrative, the differentiation conveying Checker’s sincere belief he is able to communicate with his creator. The prayers are a form of silent speech rather than stream of consciousness thought, in that they are directed with the presumption they will be heard. This italicisation is combined with the
reverent use of traditional Christian typographic conventions: the capitalisation of the words “Lord”, “Father” etc., and not italicising “the Bible” (perhaps the only single-volume book not to receive italicisation as a matter of convention). This stands in stark contrast to the insouciant monologues of the main protagonist “Juice Terry Lawson”, delivered in Welsh’s typical form of working-class Edinburgh English, and blasphemously irreverent throughout. Checker’s first-person interior monologue is formatted to accord with how he might write (or at least the writing of his religious background), an interesting example of the conceptual barrier between writing and natural language being crossed in fiction. And it works – the capitalisation of synonyms for God in particular glaringly testify to Checker’s steadfast and traditional faith, as does the rest of this formatting associated with the dominant position Christianity formerly held in the Western world. Checker clings on to this brand of Christian ideology, but it is no longer culturally or politically unassailable, as demonstrated by the decline of these practices in written English (implicitly referenced in *A Decent Ride* by the fact they are employed in Checker’s narrative, but not in the narratives of other characters). In these ways, Welsh pastiches the childish religiosity of this bombastic clown Checker not only through content, but also through typography.

In *Filth* (1998), Irvine Welsh utilises various typographical elements to create unusual narrative effects through the placement of text. This is achieved most obviously through the use of extrinsic typography, placing the text on the page in unusual formats. The most notable device is the first-person narrative of a tapeworm repeatedly intruding
over the main text (see Figure 3). But it is important to note also that the contrast created by the border separating the tapeworm’s narrative from that of protagonist Bruce Robertson is enhanced by the use of a different font, which is also italicised. This lends a very different tone to the narrative of the worm, more immediately and firmly distinguishing it from Bruce Robertson’s narrative voice. Again, in radio, theatre, or film, narration can be distinguished purely by the actors’ voices – even if it is the same actor playing different roles. Of course the multiplicity of aural dimensions – volume, pitch, duration, etc., which make this possible are not available in the novel. Yet typography can fill that gap, and Welsh makes use of the resources at his disposal in order to create an effect of distinction between two “voices”.

More prosaically, on one occasion in Filth Welsh also distinguishes between the actual voices of different human characters, when he represents two separate conversations occurring simultaneously (13-14). As is usual for Welsh, dialogue is introduced with a dash, and the reader is largely left to infer who is speaking from the process of turn taking. This does not of course reflect how conversations actually occur, where there is much overlap between speakers, and much more hesitations, ellipses (in the linguistic sense of the word), and interruptions than the idealised forms of dialogue we encounter in the novel. Nevertheless, Welsh is particularly astute at capturing “speech” in the medium of print. The representation of two conversations happening simultaneously (Figures 5 & 6), which is common in real life, is rare in literature.
for a minute... she bleats, all embarrassed. That was the mistake you silly old fucker.

Ray gives a practised, tired shake of the head. – What I’d like to suggest...

I cut in. This cow’s irritated me. I want sport. – I don’t think you quite understand what the lady’s saying D.S. Lennox. She’s claiming that the paperweight vanished after the investigating officers arrived, I point at myself and then at him. – The inference is that the investigating officers have expropriated this property.

I curse inwardly, that was a mistake using the term expropriated. Stolen would have been better, for obvious reasons.

– I didn’t mean that... the dopey cow apologises. She’s buckling inwards, shrinking like a crisp packet flung into a pub fire, diminishing before it combusts. She’ll be offering us financial compensation for upsetting us soon. Keep backpedalling you old spazwit. I’m savouring this.

– If I could proceed with my suggestion, Ray says, his tone practical, – I think that you should go through the inventory again. List the lot, make sure that nothing’s left out.

My pager goes. It’s control. Fuck me, Taul wants me. – Excuse me, I smile. I point to the phone. – May I? I dial his direct line. I’m only half listening to him, I’m half tuned in to Ray’s performance, which I’m enjoying very much.

– Toal speaking...

– It’s D.S. Robertson.

– Bruce, good. I’m needing you on this murder case. Busby’s put another note in long-term sick. We’re stretched to our limit.

– I see.

Toal is getting uppity. The bastard’s always resented my pull with the lads; my status as Federation rep, but also the fact that I’m more prominent in the craft than he’ll ever be. That’s what

Figure 5. *Filth* (Welsh, 1998: 13).
cuts the ice with the boys in the canteen, not fucking name, rank or serial number. The basic fact of it is that nobody tells me what to do. I’m listening to Toal rabbeting on about this wog being topped and I’m thinking: fucking great! Another one bites the dust, and then I’m thinking of my forthcoming winter’s week’s holiday in Amsterdam and my favourite hoors d’oeuvres and I’m thinking of two vibrators, one up her arse and one up her cunt. The technology of love, deployed on a massive scale. I’ve got a semi; I’ve got a semi and I’m talking to Toal!

- The last thing we need now’s a stiff, Toal sniffs.

- Evening News got it yet?

- Right up her fuckin hole.

- Not so far.

- So why the hassle? It’s just a nigger. Not exactly a shortage of them, is there? I joke.

- Listen, I don’t want any canteen culture bullshit on this investigation. I want you briefed properly by Lennox, he snaps. Toal is known for having no sense of humour. He’s taking this equal opps bullshit too far.

- What about Lennox doing it? I whisper,

- He was first on the scene.

- I understand how terrible this is, Mrs Dornan. Especially with something so valuable to you.

- I was sure it was there though. I could have sworn!

- That’s what I always find, Mrs Dornan. Sometimes when the thing that you want most to be there is away, you can’t believe it, so you do actually visualise it there in your mind’s eye. A classic shock reaction. Burglary can be very traumatic. It might be an idea to call your GP. Shall I do that now?

- Oh no, I’m sorry, I’m making such a fuss . . .

- Make out the inventory Mrs Dornan. I think that’s the best move . . .

Figure 6. *Filth* (welsh, 1998: 14).
Welsh achieves this by juxtaposing two columns of text, both of which follow the usual Welsh’s usual format for dialogue. However, along with the two separate conversations appearing in two separate columns, Welsh leaves the conversation of his protagonist (Bruce Robertson) in roman type, while italicising the conversation of Robertson’s colleague. The existence of italics as a “secondary set of characters” makes this work quite well – the italicised conversation is secondary, it is not one the protagonist is engaged in, the italics may even convey a sense of faintness in comparison to the sturdy roman type of the primary discussion. It is perhaps in such contrasts against roman type the true semiotic potential of italics is realised.

Van Leeuwen posits two principles for interpreting typography: “connotation” and “metaphor” (2005: 136). Connotation is simply the associations a particular font or item calls forth – such as the archaic sense a gothic font might summon. Metaphor, in Van Leeuwen’s conception, operates on the principle of similarity, and might more aptly be defined as iconicity. The distinction between associative and intrinsic meanings is a useful division to apply when interpreting graphic items, and a useful way to conceive how meaning is attributed and communicated through them. Italics are not simply a style of font, but an alternate set of characters constituting part of the standard repertoire. As such, the “connotation” function can be subdivided – into conventional functions, and associative functions. The associative functions will be difficult to delineate, and very imprecise. These elements are essentially iconicity that has been attached (but not intrinsic) to italics, based not upon appearance, but on practice. Use of
italics may call to mind a certain style or type of text, which traditionally relied upon similar usages, for example. Dividing italic usage into different categories, or indeed the categorisation of any aspect of the writing system, should not be allowed to distract us from the fact that no element of the system can be fully understood in isolation from the whole. In practice, the functions performed by italics usually augment, or are augmented by, other practices which reinforce the meaning/s communicated. For example, italicising quotations of verse is augmented by line spacing and indentation – all of which contribute to marking verse as distinct from prose. To examine how italics convey meaning in the context of the writing system as a whole, it is useful to consider broader categories into which the usages already explored may be divided.

Bringhurst, noting that italics contain different letter-forms to roman type, contends that “flow not slope is what really differentiates the two” (1992: 56). As Cook observes, the shape of italics to some extent “preserves the lines that a pen would make” (2004: 110). As such they may recall handwriting, in particular elegant forms of the same. This can be thought of in terms of iconicity – a meaning that is intrinsic to the form of the image (as opposed to meaning which is arbitrarily attached – as with sound value to individual letters of the alphabet). Yet contra Bringhurst, it may be the sloping aspect (when contrasted with roman type), that makes italics so well adapted to conveying emphasis. The difference in letter-forms between italics and roman type goes unnoticed by most people until they are explicitly shown an example of two contrasting characters (such as ,<a> and <a>). The popular conception of italics is as precisely just
the sloped version of roman type Bringhurst argues against. And it may be in terms of a distorted, compressed, version of standard text that italics achieve their dominant iconicity. This corresponds neatly with the process of intonational emphasis marking in speech, where the integrity of the sound is retained so it is recognisable while it is distorted along certain dimensions (eg. pitch or volume).

When it comes to understanding italics, or analysing typographic devices in the novel more generally, it is important to remain aware of how the historical development of the genre in this dimension can imbue certain devices with meaning, but also how the versatility of graphic elements of the text allows them to carry various meanings dependent on context. In his essay “The Formation of Genres in the Renaissance and After”, Alastair Fowler makes a similar argument to Bakhtin, in that he sees the novel as defined particularly by its propensity to amalgamate a variety of different linguistic practices, beginning with the epistolary:

Attributes or associations of the novel (suitably literalistic, even transparent) include letters and letter-writing; diaries; notebooks; autobiographical journals; and unfinished drafts, not impossibly of a novel. Again, modern novels are sometimes presented as the diary of someone (a rapist, perhaps, or a nobody). Doubtless, letters sometimes allude to the genre's originary variant, the epistolary novel of Richardson and Smollett. More generally, however, the letter implies intimacy—once, an intimacy greater than that of speech. At critical
stages of Richardson's *Pamela* and his *Clarissa*, writing a letter or journal figures prominently in the action. In the romantic, and still in the Victorian novel, the emotional commitment a letter represented was a valuable association [. . .] In realistic novels, it may be the documentary status of letters or official records that is more prominent as a genre indicator. (2003: 196-7)

It is noteworthy that it is from direct interpersonal communication in writing, not speech, from whence the novel derives its intimacy. Intimacy can encourage informality, and it is from this quality the novel also derives its propensity to include non-standard forms of speech. Yet for Fowler the emphasis continues to be rest much more on the combination of various written forms (including the novel itself), than on different spoken varieties. It is an important point that Fowler sees this preoccupation with writing in terms of self-referentiality and meta-fiction, and that while other genres may explore these themes, this is true of the novel as a genre in particular. The novel, argues Fowler, often announces the fact it is a written form through this concern for writing, and the inclusion of various other written forms:

All the associations just mentioned may still be operative, together often with an implication that the pages presented are mere jottings—“papers,” “notes,” and the like. Novels may be deprecatingly titled “Chronicles” or “A Tale of Such and such,” even when they are not actually in chronicle or tale form. Or, an espionage novel will be called something like The Ipcress File, where “file,”
however, does not merely suggest an early draft or the raw material of fiction. It is associated specifically with classified information, confidentiality leaks, and the open or closed society. The writing metaphor is most prominent in self-referring, self-conscious, or “self-begetting” novels: in “metafiction.” This genre or subgenre has commonly been related to that seminal antecedent of novel genres, Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy: a work that itself introduces, more than once, the metaphor of autobiographical writing [. . .]. The culmination or reduction of this tendency may be found in Robert Grudin’s thoughtful Book: A Novel (1992), where every stage of writing—and of editing, publication, bookselling, and pulping—has been assimilated to the fiction. (197)

Italics are an indispensable tool for these ends, one in a repertoire that includes font variation (in size and style), capitalisation, and bold-face. These elements may be used individually or combined in order to achieve the illusion of other textual practices which Fowler sees as essential to the genre.

Although he does not cite Bakhtin, Fowler’s argument is similar to Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, the idea that the novel can be defined by its propensity to unite different linguistic practices in a single object. Fowler sees the tendency of the genre to include different varieties of language as particularly acute when it comes to textual linguistic practices. He further argues that these devices do not just enhance realism and provide variety (as the inclusion of varieties of spoken registers in a novel might), but as often imputing an extra interpretive layer. For Fowler, in including different varieties of writing (and indeed writing about writing), the novel is a uniquely self-aware genre.
In terms of typography, italics contribute perhaps most significantly to this dynamic in
the genre. They visually reference manual writing with their rightward slant and letter-
forms (<a> v <a>). Because they are utilised as a matter of convention for practical
purposes in many genres, their use can recreate those genres within a novel. They can
also recreate elements of speech (eg. phonological stress), not only by suprasegmental
differentiation, but also through iconicity (via their appearance, as a stretched version of
the default form). Despite this iconicity, as with many other visual elements of the text,
their utility is in no small part derived from their versatility. Their conventional
prescribed usages (to mark the titles of books) are of a different order than their
discretionary uses. Other meaning/s are highly context dependent, and often peculiar
not only to a particular author, but an individual novel, or even an individual use within
a single novel.

Within the novel as a genre, there is a further interpretive layer added by the
pronounced propensity for self-referentiality, often expressed typographically.
Although authors habitually build upon what has gone before, taking inspiration from
and referencing the canon in this, as in every other dimension of meaning, it is crucial
to note that this is a dynamic process, marked by evolution and change. The lack of a
precise and fixed meaning may occlude to some degree the analysis of typography, but
it is also what lends these devices their expansive utility. Bereft of some of the various
strategies for enhancing communication within speech, print retrieves what is lost in the
translation from speech to writing, and from writing to print, and finds new meanings of
its own along the way, exploring multiple dimensions of meaning to fill the expanse of the page.
Chapter 2: Punctuation Marks

In this chapter the functions and development of punctuation marks will be examined within the context of the novel as a genre, with a focus on their role in the representation of speech. It will be argued the relationship between writing and speech is crucial to understanding the marks, and that the novel (as a genre which demands the representation of informal speech in a visual medium) is of particular relevance to the discussion of certain elements of punctuation from the development of print to today. First, linguistic theories of the marks themselves will be discussed (along with how they function more generally in writing/print). This will be followed by a substantial case study of ellipsis points < . . . >. This case study will be informed by a range of relevant historical primary sources, but will also utilise the core texts of this thesis (works by Roddy Doyle, Irvine Welsh, David Mitchell, and Mark Haddon). As the primary concern will be the function of the marks within this genre today (rather than certain sub-genres, authors, or historical periods), other contemporary texts from outside this corpus will of necessity be used where they display interesting or novel functions. This is in order to provide requisite examples for discussion of a fuller breadth of uses and usage of the marks. The case study will also examine the potential for an intrinsic iconicity to the points (and punctuation marks more generally) – this discussion will address the potential for a relationship between their form and function, aiming to discern whether or not their meanings are intrinsically related to their appearance. It will also examine the relevance of this to the novel as a genre of text which places
particular demands on the writing system, especially in regards to the translation of speech-sounds into the visual medium of print.

While the distinction between spoken and written language is discussed at length elsewhere in this thesis, and is relevant here also, this chapter demands a further related focus on the distinction between handwriting and print. The technological transition from the manuscript tradition to print is well-recognised in terms of its impact on the form of the writing system (acutely so when it comes to the discussion of the marks of punctuation). The further influence of method of authorial production (handwriting v type) on form and usage has not been similarly scrutinised. Discussing this under-studied area demands the use of historical sources from outside the field (such as works on the history of advertising, and the technological history of the typewriter), but is a topic which offers promising insights into how certain forms came to predominate. In terms of the history of punctuation in particular, it is an essential aspect to consider. As a popular and influential form of writing, the role of novels in mediating the relationship between such new technologies and the writing system should not be underestimated either, and some aspects of this potential influence (as they relate to punctuation) will be explored in this section. There are various definitions, however, of punctuation. These vary from the expansive (treating everything from to word-spacing even to the letters of the alphabet), to the restrictive (treating only the discrete characters available in type, and not marks composed of a combination of characters [such as < . . >]). This chapter will address primarily the
most common marks of punctuation used in print. It is necessary at the outset to discuss some theories of their definition and functions.

The marks of punctuation are an array of symbols used in writing and in print. They are traditionally catalogued separately from the letters of the alphabet which map onto sounds of speech. The origins of punctuation marks lie in the manuscript tradition, where they served initially as signposts to the orator, signalling prosodic and rhythmic effects to be translated into speech for reading aloud. As David Crystal puts it, “early manuscripts had no punctuation or, even, spaces between words. The earliest conventions were introduced as a guide to phrasing when reading aloud became an important activity, such as on literary and liturgical occasions” (2004: 261). This element remains an important function: punctuation marks can be used to translate written language more effectively into speech. Those who must orate pieces of writing (for example, authors who give public readings to promote their work) often add further marks by hand from outside the conventional repertoire of type, demonstrating how non-alphabetic marks can operates as a form of annotation to guide speech. They do this in order to remind themselves where to pause, enunciate more clearly, raise their voice,

34 It is important to distinguish between punctuation marks, and punctuation more broadly. The former treats only marks such as < , ; . ! >, the latter refers to inter-word spacing, paragraph breaks etc. Indeed Lennard (2000: 5) offers a definition of punctuation which is expanded to include the sequence of letters, pagination and foliation, chapters, and even the book itself ‘as an object punctuating space’.

35 This is a vastly simplified model of alphabetical spelling in general, and English spelling in particular, but will suffice in the context of this discussion. Also, while the alphabet and marks of punctuation are often seen as separate entities, the apostrophe can form part of the orthography – that is the internal structure of words (as in contractions such as don’t), in which instance it performs a function quite different from the manner in which the marks usually convey meaning.
or introduce other rhetorical elements. Punctuation marks can likewise serve to supply information on how written language should sound when read aloud. They can help translate visual language of writing into the sounds of speech. It is obvious, therefore, that they can also be used to help record the sounds of speech in writing/print.

The novel, perhaps more than any other printed form, utilises punctuation marks to express phonological aspects of speech. While it might seem like the play-script is the most dialogue heavy literary form, it is not so straightforward, because in the intended form of consumption for a play, actors supply the phonological dimensions of speech just as a speaker would in real life. As Levenston puts it:

If novels are meant to be read in private, plays are meant to be heard in public; their primary mode of existence is on the stage. The printed text of a play, its script, is a set of directions from which the play itself can be realized. It bears the same relation to the finished production as a musical score bears to a performance of the work. Professional musicians—and literary critics—can “read” symphonies—and plays—from the written score, or script; the rest of us cannot fully experience the work of art without the live performance. Again we can claim that the spoken medium is primary for drama, though perhaps with somewhat less conviction. Most plays that get published do so only after a successful performance. (1992: 3)
While information about how a character is speaking may be indicated by punctuation in a play’s script, they can be augmented by directions or improvisation which do not form an integral or indispensable part of the play as a text. In a novel, references to how a character pronounces a word are analogous to directions or improvisations that actually supply that information on the night, but the references will remain a stable part of the work across texts and editions, whereas in a play these remain extra additions and may not even persist across different performances let alone different stagings.

It is useful to contrast the different strategies to represent phonological dimensions of speech which can be used in plays versus those used in novels. For example, in playscripts directions such as these in Shaw’s *Pygmalion* are not unusual: “MRS. HIGGINS [putting her fingers in her ears, as they are by this time shouting one another down with an intolerable noise]” (2012: 84). This can be contrasted with this description of speech from Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: “Then he gave me recipe for what he calls *risotto alla bergamasca*. When he pronounces a soft o he protrudes his full carnal lips as if he kissed the vowel” (1916: 196). There is a stark contrast – Shaw’s directions are functional, vague and minimal (and refer to multiple characters and multiple preceding and succeeding statements). The effect is to be achieved essentially in what is a process of translation or mediation, carried out by the actors on the night of production. Joyce’s description is precise, the language is literary. Unable to rely upon others to contribute an actual sound to his audience, he offers a
subjective value judgement on the sound itself ("soft o") and goes so far as to describe, quite poetically, the actual manner of articulation ("he protrudes his full carnal lips as if he kissed the vowel"). The author of a novel, if he wishes a certain auditory effect to be conveyed, is fundamentally faced with a more complex task than the author of a play-script, who can at least hope to rely on the actors to fill in the gaps as instructed. This contrastive example is reflective of the fact that of the two forms, the novel requires more elaborate detail in translating phonological aspect of speech in its representation of dialogue, because the reader must always make the interpretive leap all the way from graphic device to sound alone. In theatre there can be collaboration between the writer, producer and actor in utilising the full range of phonological dimensions of speech.

While novels are often heavily reliant on dialogue, all the desired phonological dimensions must be communicated by strictly visual means: by describing the sounds within the narrative, indicating them via spelling, or by utilising punctuation.

Despite the primacy of spoken language (which exists in all human societies, and all individual adult humans without a severe disability), writing has become so firmly established as a distinct form of linguistic communication it can sometimes be forgotten it is a technology that developed at a specific point in time, and must be taught intentionally to persist. Writing has developed its own linguistic conventions that are a function of it being a visual medium, utilising many dimensions of communication unavailable to speech. For example, individual punctuation marks may carry an iconic force which adds a further element to how they convey meaning. In certain instances,
such iconicity may also serve to explain the evolution of the form of marks over the centuries. It is important to recognise that these visual elements have no counterpart in spoken language, and as such they contribute to distinguishing writing as a medium independent of speech. It is also crucial to pay heed to any differences in usage or in form caused by the distinction between handwritten language, printed language, and typed language (rather than to rely on a single theory of “writing”, as is the norm within linguistics).

The transition from manuscript to print, as well as the less recognised transition from handwriting to type, influenced both the form and function of punctuation marks. Changes in the mode of production meant changes in the product for consumption. Different genres too, place different demands on the writing system – just as they place different demands on the stylistics of language. As a genre which demands that dialogue be translated into print, requiring the transliteration of speech-sounds into writing, the novel is a literary form suited to developing experimental and idiosyncratic usages of punctuation. Quick and clear communication is not necessarily a prerogative; there is the time and space to develop within each novel its own peculiar conventions, and to explore variant and experimental usages. Novels also often contain samples of every other genre from literary collage to poetry, encapsulating the entire range of literary usage – the novel can display every variety of written language. All this makes novels highly useful objects for the linguistic analysis of language in its written variety.
In order to do this, however, the distinctions between speech and writing must be considered.

Throughout history different value judgements have been placed on these different forms in which language can exist, and these value judgements are generally justified with reference to various characteristics of the two different forms of language. This tendency goes right back to Plato’s *Phaedrus* (360 B.C.E.) in which Socrates famously privileges speech. Discussing the permanency of writing, Socrates claims it will have the opposite to the intended effect, creating “forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves”. Yet latterly writing is often seen as the exalted form, relative to which many forms of speech are stigmatised. As writing has found near ubiquity in modern society it has become further elevated, and, as N.F. Blake argues, in many circumstances speech is denigrated in comparison. With the unassailable position of the standard, this is now true even of writing that obviously references speech, such as the dialogue found in novels. As Blake puts it:

Because of the association of the written language with high culture, when a work is not associated with a lofty theme it is often dismissed as “popular”. This appears to mean that it is fit only for the lower reaches of society and contains elements, including language, which can be linked with the less educated. “Popular” is linked with the folk and they in their turn are thought to use
colloquial language including slang. This dichotomy is a prejudice which runs throughout the history of English and is attributable to the association of standard English with education and with a written variety of the language. Hence speech is linked with the absence of education and is often represented in writing through the deviation from the standard. There is, however, no necessary association between speech and certain sections of society, since all people use the spoken language no matter what their rank. (1995: 11)

Blake is arguing here that the conception of speech as a more imprecise, impermanent, and indeed immature form of language in comparison to writing has pervaded the popular consciousness to the extent that even writing which explicitly attempts to recreate speech is stigmatised. The reason Blake cites for this, are the fundamental differences between the two media discussed above. There is an extent to which attempts to recreate spoken language do not share some of the properties other writing does. Some of the traditional properties of written language are that it is deliberate, considered, and carefully composed, because it is intended to be permanent (this has changed dramatically with the advent of texting, email, and social media). Even in so far as these characteristics objectively apply, value judgements based on them are inevitably subjective, not least because speech has its own qualities which writing lacks. In a medium that demands the representation of speech, such as the novel, these gaps often require filling. This can most obviously be achieved linguistically – by utilising
language to describe the missing features (as in “he said loudly”). There are multiple communicative dimensions afforded by different combinations of volume, pitch, duration – all of which are absent from writing. Punctuation is a useful tool in this respect, and can stand in for some phonological features of speech.36

One of the distinctions often drawn between speech and writing among theorists is that speech is temporal (occurring in time), and writing is spatial (occurring in space) (see, Haas, 1970, Ong, 1982, Blake, 1995, Gnanadesikan, 2009, etc). While this conception of the two different media appears to have some truth in it, under closer examination it is a curious division to draw. Speech and writing are both perceived diachronically – language is processed one word after the next in either format. There is a definite order in which the words are arranged. This is unlike a painting, for example, in which the entirety of the work may be taken in all at once, or individual parts examined in any order that takes the audience’s fancy. Yet speech requires space as well as time to exist, just as writing requires time as well as space to be processed – so speech and writing both occur in both space and time. This idea perhaps arose from the fact that writing is stored on the two-dimensional space of the page, whereas speech is invisible, usually ephemeral, and not thought of as occupying any particular space. This indeed points to one of the most significant distinction between speech and writing –

36 A suprasegmental linguistic feature is one which can occur across a segment of language, such as volume. One whole clause of a sentence may be shouted for emphasis as in “Will you please SHUT THAT DOOR!”. Suprasegmental features don’t occupy a slot in the way that morphemes, words or clauses do, but rather can inflect the pieces of language which fit within slots. In terms of written language, the word <that> fills a slot of predetermined length, but the font Rockwell is suprasegmental as it can occur across an entire segment of indeterminate length containing more than one item (as in <that door>).
writing is stored visual/visible language, speech is ephemeral audio/audible language.\textsuperscript{37}

Linguist Vivian Cook most succinctly summates the most salient differences between the two forms on his website:

- sound versus letters
- permanency
- first and final drafts
- interactions between listener and speaker\textsuperscript{38}

Despite the brevity of this list, it cuts to the heart of the matter, highlighting the most consequential distinctions that must be made when considering language in these two different forms. Many approaches, although they bear the influence of the rich philosophical and theoretical tradition of discussing the differences between speech and writing, do not provide simple and useful heuristics such as this.

For those concerned primarily with novels, a genre that arose only after the advent of the printing-press, a more important distinction is that between handwriting and print. While the social and political consequences of the development of print garner much critical attention, the consequences of print in terms of the writing system

\textsuperscript{37} Writing is sometimes described as “permanent language” but this is not necessarily so (think of a child writing in the air with a sparkler, or the scrolling electronic text used in signage), and it is manifestly not so in the long term – all things deteriorate, not least books.

\textsuperscript{38} http://www.viviancook.uk/EnglishSpellingSystem/Speech&Writing.htm, accessed 1\textsuperscript{st} August 2019.
are less discussed. As Maurice Couturier puts it, “the bookhood of the novel is ignored since the only medium is held to be l’écriture (writing) and not print” (1991: 52). The most obvious difference between handwriting and print is that handwriting is analogue and printing is digital. A scribe can allow the pen to flow over the page in any direction, whereas the printer must arrange pre-made individual characters. Nevertheless, as Gavin Ambrose and Paul Harris point out in *The Fundamentals of Typography*, “many of the characteristics of type are based on the characteristics of handwriting” (2019: 63). They cite serifs (the small lips that adorn the edges of letter-forms in some fonts), stemming as they do from the tendency of the pen-stroke to vary in thickness depending on hand position or to leave a small mark at the end of a stroke as the pen leaves the page, as an example of “innate human characteristics” directly transferred from handwriting and still visible in print today (63). In essence, however, printing is a technology to remove the labour of painstakingly recreating repeated symbols anew each time they have to be used. Printing by press, however, not only requires the manipulation of these discrete symbols, the symbols must fill definite slots. Meaning can only be conveyed by choosing which symbol to fit in which slot. One of the more immediate consequences of this distinction was the disappearance of many of the traditional marks of punctuation immediately after printing came to prominence (Crystal, 2001: 261). The creation of pieces of type is an expensive manufacturing process, and the setting of type a fiddly and expensive labour. Limiting the amount of punctuation marks represented a natural cost-saving exercise on behalf of the publisher.
Such economising was possible because punctuation marks often have interchangeable functions, and indeed generally lack a single definite function. This is true all the more so in literary writing such as novels, as while a publisher may have a house-style, the creative mandate can (at least in theory) be extended to every level of meaning, including repurposing existing items. In the case study on ellipsis points, the potential for unique and diverse uses of punctuation marks within the genre will be explored in more detail.

Despite their ubiquity and versatility, as visual elements of the text, the marks of punctuation have, generally, not been given as much attention as they deserve within literary studies. A number of critics, including Barchas (2003), Bray et al. (2000), Levenston (1991), and White (2003), for example, point out this deficit within the discipline – and also provide literary analyses which do address these items. Yet, as they point out, this critical concern has yet to become an established approach for analysing texts. While focussed attention is often paid to these features by those who study poetry, novels are sometimes discussed in isolation from the appearance of the language on the page – as if there were no distinction between audio books and printed books. Janine Barchas argues that within editorial practice too, punctuation marks being considered among “accidentals” – elements not considered actually part of the literary work, but only relatively inconsequential features of individual editions – has theoretical implications beyond nomenclature within that industry. Barchas describes accidentals as “that dense nebulae of printed signs that occupies neglected space in the
better-charted galaxies of grammar and graphic” that can be “of critical importance in reading a novel” (2003: 154). In his monograph on editorial practice, Gaskell explains that “ordinarily the words of the early versions of texts are found to be more authoritative than its spelling, punctuation, etc., . . . the editor’s first priority must always be to get the words of the text right” (1999:2). Punctuation marks, however, are integral features of individual texts and the artistic work alike. They inevitably contribute to the communication of meaning, and often provide crucial information for semantic processing. An oft repeated example is the sequence “A woman without her man is nothing” contrasted with the sequence “A woman: without her, man is nothing”. Levenston (1992: 64) offers the examples “Can you pass me some honey?” versus, “Can you pass me some, honey?” It is clear the marks of punctuation in some instances are crucial to understanding semantic content. They are, therefore, deserving of the critical status afforded to other elements (such as authorial emendations to the words of texts between editions, which are usually considered “substantive”). As Barchas puts it:

[ . . . ] when it comes to modern editions and reprints of the eighteenth-century novel, editorial practice has not been attentive to the genre’s original appearance as a printed book, ignoring its layout, prefatory puffs, end matter, and graphic design and dismissing its punctuation and ornamentation as “accidentals.”

(2003:6)
The above quotation could as well be applied to new editions even of contemporary works, revealing a common conception of punctuation as undeserving of critical attention. Barchas is here referring specifically to new editions of classic texts, but it could be argued that some modernisation is necessary when translating a text through time— in order to provide an experience which meets the expectations (and competencies) of modern readers. However, it would be inconceivable to apply this rationale (which is accepted for punctuation) to other elements of the text. For example, typical literary flourishes (such as shifts in word order) will not be readjusted to aid comprehension no matter how recherché or recondite they are.

While there aren’t many literary studies focussed on marks of punctuation, there does exist a significant body of linguistic work which address the subject. Linguistic analyses of punctuation offer to illuminate the true meaning/s and function of the marks in a way that prescriptive grammars cannot hope to emulate—because the meaning/s of the marks are often counterintuitive, or contrary to commonly held beliefs regarding usage. For example, when it comes to the form of the marks (the constituent characteristics of their appearance—shape, size, etc.), there exist uniform correspondences between the appearance of different marks and the de facto “rules” of usage (e.g., marks which rest on the line [such as < , . ! ? > etc], always appear unspaced from the character to their immediate left). Bredel (2011), charts these form/function correlations (this will be discussed in more detail further on).
In terms of syntactical conventions of usage, the punctus < . > , to offer another example, is traditionally defined as a sentence boundary marker – a symbol used to “end” a sentence. However, the concept of a sentence has a strictly delineated meaning, not only within linguistics, but in terms of how most people unconsciously conceive of and construct actual sentences in practice. As Carter & McCarthy point out, although the punctus certainly has a terminal function, in practice it very often performs this function on sentence fragments (2006: 839). Consider this example, which appears in Roddy Doyle’s *Smile* and offers a good illustration of this phenomenon: “I heard something. A zip. The low groan a zip made when it was being opened slowly.” (2017: 34). This fragment (“A zip.”), lacks the minimal syntactic SUBJECT/VERB structure necessary to complete a sentence in English. The use of the punctus therefore, as Kirchhoff & Primus put it, is motivated not by “the completeness of the sentence”, but rather “the end of syntactic processing” (2016: 97). Fragments such as these, while ubiquitous in speech, are usually absent from journalism (apart from some less formal op-ed pieces), academic writing, non-fiction and other genres – but they remain relatively commonplace within novels or other forms of creative writing. To analyse, therefore, the full range of meaning attributable to the marks, it is essential to consider the context of medium and genre. To understand how literature is composed, it is also necessary to consider the proper linguistic definitions of how these pieces of language fit together and function.
Unfortunately, within linguistics, such items are often considered in isolation from the context of their actual usages in written language. Also, while linguistic analyses do offer useful conceptions of punctuation for the literary critic (see for example Nunberg, 1990, Crystal, 2015, Bredel, 2011), the distinction between handwriting and print is rarely observed, and the further distinction between type and handwriting is usually ignored. The neglected transition from handwritten composition to typewritten composition may, in certain instances, have had significant implications for the appearance and usage of written/printed/typed language, and its communicative function, in particular where punctuation is concerned. Genre is a crucial factor in determining actual usage, and can influence the form, function and meaning/s of the marks in context. One of the most pertinent aspects of punctuation marks is their ability to convey prosodic and intonational aspects of speech within a visual medium. As Levenston asserts, “the primary purpose of punctuation is to compensate for the deficiencies of writing systems” (1992: 63). The novel is a genre which often demands this, because of how frequently it represents dialogue in a solely textual form.

That such demands are placed on punctuation in the novel is evidenced by the higher frequency of certain marks within dialogue than the rest of the text. For example, ellipsis points are often used to indicate a pause in speech, and occur much more frequently in dialogue than narrative (where phonological dimensions are not necessarily present – this will be discussed in more detail within the case study). For dialogue in the novel, the most common usage of punctuation marks is to indicate just
such a break of some sort, either a shift of tone, or more usually a pause, or both.

Typical usage of the comma, for example – to separate clauses within sentences – need
not always be marked by a pause in speech; clause differentiation within speech is often
achieved simply by altering tone. But it can represent a pause. For example, in Irvine
Welsh’s *Glue*, the sequence, “ — One wee kiss, goan” (2001: 44), the comma suggests
a pause between *kiss* and *goan*, which is how the sequence would be pronounced.

These pauses themselves can have various meanings – they can be ellipses, interruptions, rhetorical flourishes, pauses for thought, stammers, and so forth. Marks
may be combined, or interchanged. For example, in Irvine Welsh *Glue*: “ — That’s
fuckin dangerous, Gally, — ye kin git hepatitis fae that!” (2001: 107). In this instance it
appears that the second dash has been used to provide a stronger separation between
two clauses than the comma alone would have – perhaps because the speaker is
emphasising the emotive statement, as evidenced by the exclamation mark. Precise
rationale behind punctuational choices may be difficult to define in many cases, but
context and other marks may combine to encourage a particular interpretation, as in this
case. It is worthwhile to remember that many authors agonise over minute details
which, although they may seem inconsequential, can be crucial to accurate
interpretation.

---

39 *Not ellipsis points* but rather linguistic ellipsis: the omission of a word or clause usually retrievable from context.
While Roddy Doyle made his reputation with an irreverent style, he asserts that “every comma, what seems like a casual decision – they’re all important” (“Interview”, in Smyth, 1998: 103). It is noteworthy that in his 2017 novel *Smile*, Doyle breaks with convention (and his own tradition of usage) in employing both the em dash and en dash for different functions. As with his other works, in the em dash is used to introduce dialogue. The en dash, however, is also used within the same novel (for pauses or interpolated clauses, both in the narrative and dialogue). For example, the following piece of dialogue displays both types of dash, demonstrating how Doyle makes use of the differentiation afforded by the availability of two slightly different marks: “—What are you up to? You creative types – fuckin’ writers. You must always be working on some fuckin’ book” (35). This approach makes sense, as the different functions often fulfilled by the same mark are sometimes contradictory (for example, there is no pausal aspect to the use of the em dash to introduce dialogue). In order to consider more deeply how punctuation conveys meaning within the genre, it is necessary to examine both the general function/s of punctuation marks, and different individual marks in more detail, and to consider their meaning/s in real usage within actual novels.

To understand them it is essential to read the marks in the context of the genre, and it is also crucial in many cases to consider the precise context in which they occur. Given that there are widely accepted and quite uniformly adhered to (though not centrally imposed) “rules” of punctuation, even for a genre as diverse as the novel, deviations away from the norm can convey their own distinct messages. There is one
important, distinct, albeit inconspicuous method, for example, by which the marks may convey meaning: through their absence. As John Scaggs (2000: 54) astutely argues, the relatively sparse punctuation in Pat McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy* (1992) communicates peculiar connotations and messages within this novel. From its opening line *The Butcher Boy* is delivered in a style that by using long sentences and few commas, conveys a sense of speed of narrative and immaturity of narrator: "When I was a young lad twenty or thirty or forty years ago I lived in a small town where they were all after me on account of what I done on Mrs. Nugent” (1).

Scaggs offers three distinct functions for the sparsity of punctuation in the specific example of *The Butcher Boy* (as delivered by the eponymous narrator). It is worth quoting from Scaggs’ list:

(1) It creates a surging narrative, which pushes the reader forward at a break-neck pace [. . . ]

(2) It diverts emphasis, shifting the focus within a scene from what would normally be considered the central image:

I lifted her off the floor with one hand and shot the bolt right into her head thlok was the sound it made, like a goldfish dropping into a bowl.
The single comma in this sentence creates a pause before the simile of the
goldfish, diverting attention from the physical act of murder [. . .]

(3) It forces the reader to gloss over the uncertainties and inconsistencies [. . .]
which are most frequently a result of the lack of dialogue indicators in the novel
[. . .] The voice we hear is always Francie’s voice [. . .] There are no clear
indicators that what any character other than Francie says is real or imagined.
(2000: 54-5)

This intensive focus on the complex, context-dependent, communicative function of
these punctuational choices is a refreshing departure from the norm within literary
studies. However, Scaggs’ adumbration of the variety of functions the paucity of
punctuation performs in The Butcher Boy omits the most obvious one: it conveys
Francie’s immaturity. The genre this narrative is most reminiscent of is a schoolchild’s
essay. For example, take the following sequence: “I heard a girl singing it was in a
church so I went in” (40). This evokes a narrator who has yet to learn fully the
conventions of writing, and displays a childlike excitement in their urgency to relate the
story (not pausing to punctuate their narrative), precisely as in a young schoolchild’s
essay. This correspondence is evident not just in the language and the style in which the
narrative is presented, but in the content too, as Francie repeatedly relates childish
daydreams: “I had a name for him. I called him The Boy Who Could Walk For Ever
and that was what I wanted to do now—become him once and for all” (39). Francie’s childlike concerns and conceits are successfully related through this immature style: “I stood looking at him for a while and then I said to him what would you do if you won a million trillion flash bars” (40). McCabe may have been inspired in this respect by the years he spent reading such essays as a primary school teacher in Balbriggan. He utilises this motif to its full effect, consistently constructing the narrative with a sparse punctuational style that evokes the writing, language, and thoughts of a child: "I stuck out my face and scrunched up my nose and made my eyes as small as I could then I gave a big grunt" (58).

It is the fact that such fancies are retained beyond an appropriate age (after Francie’s friends have matured), and then become conflated and confused with his real experiences that confirms Francie’s descent into madness. The juxtaposition created by this childish essay-like narration relating the eventual horrific murder of Mrs Nugent is a masterful deployment – or rather lack of deployment – of punctuation to enhance the impact of the narrative. The other dimensions of meaning delineated by Scaggs actually flow from this point. The similarity with children’s essays accords with the age given for Francie has become frozen at, explaining a narrative voice retaining such immaturity even while recounting events from a perspective many decades ahead. This is even further from the age he is at when relating the tale, as this is a retrospective from

---

Note the unorthodox spelling of <forever> as “For Ever” here, further suggesting a childlike writing style.
adulthood. The immature language is augmented by the lack of punctuation to convey an impression of a child-like narrator, anchoring Francie at a particular stage of development, past which he does not mentally progress. The example of *The Butcher Boy* demonstrates how, within the confines of a particular novel, a usage can be developed peculiar to it which is appropriate to the plot, style, or narrator. Punctuation marks (or in this instance the absence of same) can, in the context of a specific narrative frame, communicate meaning in a manner distinct from the usual purpose of the items in question. Context is all important to interpreting the meaning of marks in practice.

There is a traditional hierarchy of marks (<, ; : .!/? >), with each mark interpreted as indicating a stronger pause or break than the last. David Crystal sees this hierarchy in terms of various forms of punctus, which he asserts: “has a subtle presence in most of the other separating marks we see it within the form of the question mark, exclamation, semi-colon, and colon. Even the comma can be thought of as a period with a tail” (2015: 135). Crystal is correct in his observation that the conception of the marks articulated in this hierarchy is too limited. This sequence neglects the variegated communicative possibilities of each mark, and does not treat the dashes, apostrophe or quotation marks at all. Yet it is not without valuable insight. Ursula Bredel differentiates punctuation from the letters of the alphabet partly on the basis that punctuation marks are not “recodable” in speech (2011: 27). 41 While punctuation marks do not usually have a directly translatable spoken counterpart in the way letters often

41 And indeed distinguishes letters from digraphs such as <th> or <ng>.
do, they can indicate phonological information such as pauses of varying duration
(think of <, > vs <.> vs <. . . >), or increased volume <!>, or rising intonation <?>.

Malcolm Parkes, in his formidable introduction to punctuation in the West, *Pause and Effect* (1992), situates the origin of punctuation marks firmly as guides to reading aloud. It was as phonological markers, Parkers argues, the marks of punctuation came to prominence:

Since the second century B.C. the basic unit in a western text has been the paragraph or capitulum. This identifies a principal topic in a text, or point of focus in an argument or narrative. Within the paragraph constituent somatic and grammatical structure are linked to a continuum of relationships. Ancient discussions of the process of reading (written at a time when the attitude towards a text was dominated by the ideal of the orator) indicate that, when a reader was declaiming or reading aloud, he was expected to introduce pauses at the ends of larger structures and certain shorter ones within the paragraph. According to the grammarian these pauses were assigned arbitrary time values, the main feature of which is that they were graded in relation to each other. Different time values would produce a minor medial pause when the sense is incomplete, a major medial pause when the sense is complete but the independent idea or sententia is not, and a final pause when the idea or sententia is complete. (65)
There is an extent to which the different marks remain indicators of different pausal durations. However, the function of these pauses in speech is generally the same as the function of the marks in writing. Even where there is no phonological aspect to the use of a mark, its usage will be related to elements of speech that are syntactic markers. The relationship between punctuation marks and reading aloud, therefore, is not just historical. Even if they had never been used to assist orators, or to represent phonological elements of speech in writing (such as duration) there would still be a link between punctuation marks and the parts of spoken language they are often used to represent, in that they would both serve the same purpose. Pausing is an integral characteristic of speech, essential for syntactic processing, not just rhetorical effect. Punctuation marks usually fulfil this function in writing, whether or not they are trying to recode phonological information or not.

This pausal function in particular goes some distance in explaining the necessity of punctuation marks for accurate linguistic processing. People are often surprised when it is pointed out to them that there are no pauses between words in everyday speech; speakers blend words seamlessly into each other, generally only breaking this uninterrupted flow to pause between clauses and sentences. Part of the reason people find this so surprising is that this stream of sound is separated into words cognitively, albeit automatically and subconsciously. Further reason is perhaps due to the ubiquity of writing in modern culture, where visually, there are spaces between every word.
These gaps, however, were not supplied until many millennia after the invention of writing itself. Indeed, while writing is believed to have originated in Near East during the Bronze Age, inter-word spacing is a practice that was initiated by medieval Irish monks (Parkes, 1993: 23). Since, in its written printed/typed form, the English language is replete with these “pauses” between words, some method is required to indicate the points at which actual pauses would occur in speech. In writing as in speech, these junctures occur at grammatical boundaries, and require marking for accurate linguistic processing. Punctuation marks can perform this function in writing, just as pauses can perform this function in speech. As David Crystal points out, punctuation marks originated as phonological signposts for reading aloud (indicating pausal duration, intonation, etc):

Influenced by Irish monks, some Anglo-Saxon scribes began to use multiple marks to show pauses – the more marks, the longer the pause and the more ‘final’ the intonation [ . . . ] Distinguishing between major and minor pauses is probably enough if you are reading silently and simply need some help to see where one unit of sense ends and another begins. But if you are reading aloud, you need more than this.

(2015: 21-2)
As these elements of speech indicated by punctuation marks are intimately linked with grammar in any case (e.g. a long pause may indicate a sentence break, a change in intonation may separate clauses), it is not difficult to see how the present multidirectional relationship between punctuation, phonology, and grammar developed.

Punctuation marks may also inflect preceding text with some suprasegmental phonological aspect unavailable to writing. For example, while writing does not inherently possess volume, ending a sentence with an exclamation mark < ! > often suggests the entire preceding statement has been shouted – the phonological dimension of volume is thus translated into the visual medium of writing. It is important too, to note that the exclamation mark and question mark are essentially varieties of punctus.\(^\text{42}\) They are rarely if ever used apart from sentence terminal position, at which point they inflect the preceding sentence (or fragment, or larger segment of language) with meaning. This operation conforms quite closely to the traditional limited view of punctuation (as standing in for phonological aspects). Within dialogue, the exclamation mark quite simply replaces/indicates increased volume, and the question mark replaces/indicates interrogative intonation. There are exceptions, but this holds true for the majority of examples. Increased volume itself can have many context dependent meaning/s (as can the interrogative intonation), but the mapping between these spoken

---

\(^{42}\) Ellipsis points < . . . >, which often occur within sentences, are composed of a repeated punctus, but do not bear a strong semantic relationship with < . >. The ellipsis points < . . . >, although composed by repetition of the standard punctus, are definitely not a variety of punctus. The points may be used mid sentence, to start a sentence etc. This will be discussed in more detail in the case study on ellipsis points.
functions and the typographic characters is close, and it is from this usage they derive their meaning when used outside of dialogue.

Consider this example from Roddy Doyle’s *Smile*: “She marvelled at it, this walking proof of female perfection chewing and slurping, and throwing her head whenever my mother said something funny. My mother *was* funny!” (2017: 117). This is in narrative, so the exclamation mark not intended to convey a sense of actual increased volume. No phonological aspect is at play at all, yet the mark performs the same function in print as increased volume would in speech in this context (ie. the associated enthusiasm of increased volume). This can be contrasted with an example from Irvine Welsh’s *Glue*: “GIT DOON FAE THAIRE GALLOWAY YA WEE RADGE!” (2001: 340), which appears in dialogue. In combination with the capitalisation of letters, in dialogue, in the context of a highly emotive moment where the speaker’s friend is some distance from the speaker (who is climbing precariously on a dangerous roof), this unequivocally indicates increased volume/shouting. These examples display different possibilities for the same mark, from private and cheerful enthusiasm to desperate public remonstrance.

Another characteristic Bredel uses to distinguish punctuation marks from letters and numbers is the contention that punctuation marks are not readily “combinable”. As Kirchhoff & Primus point out, “different quotation marks, eg. ‘*and*’, “*and*”, brackets, eg. *(and)*, <*and*>, [*and*], and different variants of hyphens and dashes” must be combined in order to fulfil their function (2016: 94). In response to this it might be
argued that those marks count as single items (composed of two identical but reversed symbols of indeterminate distance apart). However, it is possible to combine different marks, such as the repetition of the exclamation mark for emphasis (“!!!”), or the combination of the question mark and exclamation mark (“?!”) to indicate alarmed inquiry.

The first principle of language laid out by Ferdinand Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* is that the relationship between a word (or other linguistic sign) and its meaning is arbitrary:

The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.

Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary.*

The idea of "sister" is not linked by any inner relationship to the succession of sounds *s-ð-r* which serves as its signifier in French; that it could be represented equally by just any other sequence is proved by differences among languages and by the very existence of different languages. (1959: 68)

This is one of Saussure’s most influential insights about language – that language is generally a means of communication which operates on the basis of mutually agreed
upon signs within a linguistic community. These signs are conventional and arbitrary, there is no intrinsic relationship between the form the signs take and what they signify. Saussure qualifies this assertion by dismissing counterarguments about onomatopoeia and interjections, which, Saussure argues, don’t hold up to scrutiny as they are not only exceptional, but are themselves variable in form (69). Saussure argues that the variability of onomatopoeic words between languages belies claims there is an intrinsic relationship between these words and what they refer to. The meaning/s or function/s of punctuation marks are largely, but not wholly, arbitrary also. Individual marks convey a consistent meaning by virtue of the fact that this meaning is agreed upon by readers.43

Because punctuation marks lack “absolute value and function” (Parkes, 1993: 2), they also possess the ability to convey variegated meanings. This is seen not least in aberrant and experimental usages of the marks, where the visuality of the marks comes to the fore. The marks can be combined and utilised to create graphic items on the page which are not translatable into speech, their impact remaining purely visual.

43 Such conventions may be enforced to some extent by style guides, editorial prescription and the like, but English language of course lacks any sort of centralised governing body like the Académie Française (the state sponsored body which governs the French language in France). Yet many English speakers (and writers) retain the notion of “correct” usage v “incorrect” usage, which is a myth. Correct usage in reality, is usage which well performs the function for which it was intended. Given the overwhelming predominance of written interpersonal communication after the advent of social media, it may be that the majority of written English being today produced is “incorrect” under this definition (informal communication often pays scant regard to punctuating, proper spelling, or uses “slang” dialectal forms not widely agreed to be part of the standard language). There are of course varieties of usage which are seen as the “standard”, but these are dependent on the medium and genre, and the rules are nebulous and dispersed among a body of literature and many authorities. This is an important point to consider in particular when it comes to punctuation, as the so-called “grammar nazis” of today primarily take issue with orthographical/punctuational mistakes/non-standard usage, rather than the syntactical aspect of language from which they derive their name.
The fact much of the meaning of the marks of punctuation is arbitrary should not occlude the fact it is highly systematised. Bredel (2011) provides a rigorous system of inventory for the marks of punctuation based on their form. Marks are defined based on the absence or presence of three features: ±EMPTY, (whether or not the marks is in contact with the bottom of the “line”, as the punctus is < . > but the dash is not < – >), ±VERTICAL (whether or not the mark reaches the top of the “line”, as the exclamation mark does < ! > but the semi-colon does not < ; >) ±REPLICATED, (whether not the mark is composed of two or more identical elements, as the ellipsis points are < . . . > but the question mark is not < ? >). The ellipsis points, for example, are therefore defined in Bredel’s system by the characteristics [+EMPTY, +REDUP, –VERT].

As noted by Nunberg (1990: 58), this type of analysis reveals a regularity between form and usage, in that certain features correspond to how some marks cliticize – that is, how some items must attach to another item (as in the punctus must immediately follow a letter without any space). So marks that are [+EMPTY] in Bredel’s definition (that is marks like the punctus < . > that are in contact with the bottom of the line) always cliticize leftward, whereas certain marks that are [+VERT] (that is marks such as the quotation mark < “ >), can cliticize left or right. Also, Bredel distinguishes between marks that cliticize, and marks that fill their own segmental slot (marks which require spacing as a word would, such as the en dash < – >), and notes that these also conform to limitations in form that are function dependent.
These form/function correlations are not obvious – it is doubtful even the most proficient writers recognise these distinctions between the different marks. Yet standard usage of the marks stringently conforms to the analysis laid out by Bredel. It is important to remember, however, that this type of correlation between form and function cannot be considered in the same terms as iconicity – an inherent and intrinsic relationship between form and function. The relationships although regular, are conventional – that is to say, there is an arbitrary relationship between the abstract “rules” that seem to govern the form of the different marks and the particular features in question. To put it more simply, the rules could be reversed without any effect – marks that reach the top of the line could always cliticize left instead of marks that reach the bottom of the line.

Another important aspect when considering Bredel’s analysis in the context of literature, is that this catalogue neglects experimental usage. When creating graphic items through the use of the standard set of characters, a not uncommon practice since the inception of the novel, these rules do not apply. The distinction between writing and speech as two distinct linguistic forms is important observe here, because such graphic devices are generally more complex than sound symbolism. They convey a much more precise meaning than an emotive sound, such as a musical tone would. For example, in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, Irvine Welsh utilises a repeated en dash to indicate the display on his unconscious narrator’s life support machine (see Figure 7).
In this idiosyncratic usage the relationship between form and function is not arbitrary – the dash is chosen because when repeated it looks like the life support machine display. While this is a unique usage, the linear sequential representation of a regular temporality may be a common punctuational device. This possibility will be discussed in detail further on in this chapter. However, the non-arbitrary nature of this relationship displays the potential of marks to carry an iconicity integral to their form.

“An exclamation point”, claims Theodor Adorno, “looks like a finger raised in warning [ . . . ] a question mark looks like a flashing light or the blink of an eye” (1990: 
While there is a superficial resemblance between the exclamation point < ! > and a raised finger, it is difficult to see how a question mark < ? > can be said to resemble either a flashing light or the blink of an eye. The iconic significance of a finger “raised in warning” could easily be nullified by precisely the same resemblance to a finger raised to the lips in a “shhh” motion – which would contradict rather than enforce one of the exclamation points most common usages in practice, the indication of shouting!

Adorno carries on to describe the semicolon < ; > as a “drooping moustache”. While Adorno may not be quite serious here, there have been numerous comparisons like these, by turns exotic, fanciful and anthropomorphic, treating not only the marks of punctuation, but letters, numbers and other characters. If individual punctuation marks do have iconic symbolism, it operates more subtly than such crude pictographic conceptions. Yet it is probable that at least some of the marks do possess some intrinsic iconicity that enhances their function (that is iconicity derived directly from their form and not the conventions of usage). For example, it may be true that the exclamation and question marks < ! ? > convey a sense of urgency or immediacy, demanding attention.

A larger segment of these symbols hovers unattached above the punctus, creating a precarious visual imbalance. Nevertheless, even such a simple iconicity is vague, and remains speculative. Just as it is impossible to attribute a precise semantic value to the marks of punctuation, so it is impossible to fix a stable and definitive iconicity.44

44 Although true, this statement needs qualification: a precise semantic meaning of the marks is impossible to state because they have variant, context dependent meanings. Nevertheless, in individual instances a precise meaning will usually be recoverable and definable, whereas the
Evaluating the potential of punctuation marks to carry an iconicity is best achieved through a detailed case study, combining book history, linguistics, literary theory and of course examples of actual usage from novels.

**Case Study: Ellipsis Points**

Different genres place different demands on the writing system, and, as David Crystal argues, when examining particular features it is necessary to consider them in the context of genre (2015: 355). While novels do not usually display the exuberant use of multiple fonts, sizes, and colours of text that advertising, political pamphleteering, or children’s books do, the novel does demand that various thought processes, phonological aspects of speech, as well as a host of other written genres be represented on the page. While this may be true of other genres also, such as short stories, or some types of poetry, the ability of the novel to contain these forms, along with its own tradition, conventions, and reader’s expectations mean that these features can usefully be discussed as they occur within this genre alone. Among the repertoire of strategies used by authors to create these illusions visually are the points of suspension, or ellipsis points. Anne Toner’s monograph *Ellipsis in English Literature: Signs of Omission* (2015) immediately asserted itself as the definitive work on the subject of marks of ellipsis in literature. She is firm on the capacity of such marks to fulfil phonological precise iconicity of the marks is difficult to define because it will be *by its nature* inherently impressionistic and subjective.
functions absent from text, and latterly to evolve new usages (such as representing "human interiority, including its incoherencies and blanks" [67]). Toner links what she sees as crucial elements of the genre to functions performed by these points of punctuation. “The typographical sign”, Toner writes, “can very subtly bring a reader imaginatively closer to experiencing, suffering human beings” (43-4). Toner’s analysis is astute not least in that she recognises that representing interiority required not only new narrative techniques but also distinct presentation, and that ellipsis became a useful tool in this regard (particularly for conveying uncertainty, which again, is a pausal function). As she puts it, “the intrinsic difficulty of conveying a non-verbalized internal state is expressed typographically by the ellipsis” (13).

Toner’s work is motivated in part by the fact that, as with other punctuational devices, the points are more complex and versatile than is generally perceived. It is surprising that the meaning/s of ellipsis points have yet to be comprehensively delineated by linguists. This is a theoretical deficit – Toner’s study, for example, would have benefitted from drawing on linguistic sources with a scientific basis. These could perhaps provide a less subjective theoretical framework for establishing the meaning of the points in context, than the sources from book history and literary theory upon which she draws. Toner offers a definition of ellipsis marks based on the general concept of “signs of omission” rather than treating a specific item (such as < . . . >). As Kevin Borque, in his review, points out: “Ms. Toner might have written a very different book. Other textual critics revel in discrete marks, devoting self-contained chapters, for
example, to commas or exclamation points” (2018). While Borque is positive about this choice on Toner’s behalf, her decision to treat (as she puts it herself) “various dots, dashes, series of hyphens and asterisks” (2015: 1) under the same heading leads to problems also. In practice, the signs Toner studies (such as the dash) can have very different connotations from ellipsis points. Treating them under the same auspices makes it difficult to conceptually delineate the study. The marks of punctuation are notoriously versatile, as Toner herself often points out, so is no surprise they can perform the same or similar functions. Treating them as graphic items, defined as distinct characters (rather than attempting definitions based on function), allows clearer discussion of their historical development, and any intrinsic iconicity they might have. Nevertheless, Toner’s work is a timely addition to the general field. It wisely emphasises the importance of hitherto neglected visual elements of the text, and identifies and astutely analyses some of the more obscure primary texts that may prove key to understanding the development of certain marks – not least the actual ellipsis points < . . . >.

Due to the ubiquity of social media, ellipsis points (and typewriting in general) are today utilised more than ever (Pinker, 2014: 3). Because of the personal, informal, and immediate nature of electronic textual communication, these media demand methods to express various features of spoken language otherwise unavailable to its written counterpart (Crystal, 2013). When communicating directly with another human being immediately and interactively (as opposed to the unidirectional and delayed
nature of traditional text media), it is often essential to definitively convey a particular tone, avoiding ambiguity, or – crucially – indicating good will. This requirement is especially acute when employing sarcasm or other rhetorical devices ubiquitous in speech. This is not an easy task when dimensions of spoken language, such as volume and intonation are wholly unavailable. Various strategies have been devised to fill this gap, from simply noting the tone (“[joke]”) to emoticons and emojis, which indicate the mood of the author and the intent of the text. Such concerns come also to the fore for the author of prose fiction, though the various methods used by novelists to overcome this deficiency in written language are more restrained (i.e. they utilise the traditional repertoire of characters), formal, and complex.

Levenston points out that there does, however, exist a writing system with the ability to communicate with absolute precision the features of speech, but it is not the writing system of English, or the writing system of any other particular language for that matter: the International Phonetic Alphabet, or IPA.\textsuperscript{45} The IPA demonstrates powerfully the full extent of the communicative dimensions lost to the writing system of English.\textsuperscript{46} As Levenston puts it:

\textsuperscript{45} IPA stands for International Phonetic Alphabet, which is a system of marks that each indicate a distinct phoneme allowing for much more accurate transcription of speech-sounds than the conventional alphabet – not to be confused with the NATO Phonetic Alphabet, which is not a system of transcription. A spelling alphabet uses words to stand for letters (Alpha, Bravo, Delta, Echo, etc.) in circumstances such as aviation where clear communication is vital, but may be difficult due to noise.

\textsuperscript{46} This is not only true not only for users of the English writing system, but also Eastern syllabaries, and ideographic forms of writing (Levenston, 1992: 63)
[... ] arrows can be added to show the directions of pitch change, varying number of dots can suggest varying lengths of pause, marginal comments—husky, breathy, glissando—can give details of change in voice quality. But all such systems are known only to phoneticians. The rest of us have to make do with what help we can get from punctuation. (1992: 63)

Aside from such systems phonetic transcription, punctuation must be utilised to imitate many of the rhythmic or prosodic effects of speech. Prior to the revolution in information technology, the prime medium that demanded such features was the novel. Indeed, it seems probable that the novel was the crucible in which the ellipsis points formed and developed.47 Technological advances also played a crucial role in this evolution. The interaction between mode of production, medium, and genre in this development has not received the attention from scholars that it deserves. An approach which integrated these factors would illuminate wider considerations about how meaning is communicated within novels, and why certain conventions have come to predominate. An inventory of the different roles ellipsis points fulfil will further reveal why the mark is used so extensively, how the mark conveys meaning in context, and also the relationship between the form of the mark and its function.

47 Anne Toner, in her monograph on symbols of ellipsis, Ellipsis in English Literature, argues that not only the points, but signs indicating ellipsis more generally, have literary origins.
A variety of primary sources have been used in this case study to illustrate these communicative functions in practice, and to chart to some extent the history of the development of the marks. The core primary texts of the study have also proven very useful to considering ellipsis points, not least as they characteristically rely heavily on visual elements of the text, and < . . . > forms part of this repertoire. Some influential canonical texts (such as *Tristram Shandy*) have been considered, in order to contrast the ellipsis points with earlier forms of marking ellipsis. There is, however, a crucial historical juncture in the development of the points, and sample texts from this period have been examined (such as works by Jack London, H.G. Wells, and Joseph Conrad) in order to consider when and why the ellipsis points arose in novels in the form we are familiar with today. 48 Because the study is thematic, focussing on certain features and their functions rather than individual texts, authors, or certain time periods, other contemporary texts have been chosen because they display useful examples of certain uses of the marks which could not be found in the core texts. All actual functional usages within novels would be relevant to considering the meaning/s, development and usage of the points, but the examples used are chosen for their particular utility towards the aims of this chapter – not only understanding how ellipsis points developed and

---

48 In the section exploring the history of the mark, I have striven to choose editions from close to the original date of publication (for example I have used facsimiles of the first edition of *Tristram Shandy*). This has been less of a concern where examples from primary texts are used to explore the various functions of the mark in context. I have used the 1984 *Ulysses* edited by Hans Walter Gabler, for example, as despite much controversy this remains the standard scholarly edition.
function within the novel, but understanding the range of potential use and usage within the genre today.

The greatest misconception regarding the mark (perhaps the greatest misconception about any mark of punctuation) is that the primary use of ellipsis points is to indicate omission. This is true only in certain instances, and, within the novel, other uses are in fact much more frequent. It is unclear if the origin of the points < . . . > even lies in signalling linguistic ellipsis. The fact that they have come to be known as “ellipsis” points makes this idea somewhat irreversible, and it remains oft repeated in prescriptive grammars. Parkes (1993: 2) explains that punctuation can become a “feature of the ‘pragmatics’ of the written medium” conveying information which “in spoken language . . . can be conveyed in various ways both linguistic and paralinguistic – such as a repertoire of intonations, or gestures and facial expressions”. The traditional hierarchy of classification when it comes to punctuation marks (which goes something like <, : ; . >, with each mark interpreted as providing a stronger division than the previous) can be misleading. As Levenston points out, these by no means necessarily indicate simply successive pauses of longer duration – although this may have been the case historically (1992: 64). They do usually indicate breaks of successively stronger force (breaks which may, for example, separate units such as clauses to ease semantic processing). The ellipsis point, however, escapes this hierarchy completely, fulfilling a more versatile role than any of these items. Fundamentally, as with all punctuation, ellipsis points are used to separate segments of text from each other. However, ellipsis
points nearly always contribute meaning to the preceding or succeeding text in a way in which many other items do not.

Nunberg (1993: 11) too, asserts that “punctuation is usually regarded as a (highly imperfect and limited) device for transcribing certain of the prosodic and pausal features of speech”. However, he goes on to argue that this “picture is both empirically unwarranted and theoretically incoherent” (1993: 12). While it is indeed a heavily simplified portrayal of punctuation that needs to be challenged, this traditional conception of punctuation does express some truth. An example from a prescriptive grammar, although misleading in its definition, is nevertheless revealing:

The three dots at the end of that last paragraph are called an ellipsis. The sense is of something more to be said, but left out because the reader either knows it already, or can guess. It is sometimes overused in literary writing to sound profound – which it can do the first few times an author uses it. (West, 2008: 24)

Despite the cautionary tone, the use of the word “sense” (as opposed to a more rigid “meaning”) neatly captures a key feature of punctuation in practice: versatility and context dependent meaning/s. Nevertheless, the emphasis in this instance, as is often the case, lies too heavily on ellipsis as a marker of omission. Guides to style betray commonly held misconceptions that influence real-world usage. As Childs, argues,
ellipsis points fulfil a variety of functions. Criticising the limited usage delineated in style guides he observes: “A survey of some 20 different English style books [. . . ] that deal with ellipsis points yielded two traditional uses: to indicate omissions from quoted material, and to indicate hesitating or faltering speech” (1993: 84). While ellipsis points that may carry out a variety of functions, this also works the other way around – as Parkes points out, a defining characteristic of the marks of punctuation is their versatility (1993: 2). As such, other marks, such as the dashes, may be substituted for the ellipsis points. Roddy Doyle’s *Smile* (2017), for example, does not use the ellipsis points at all, instead using the en dash for a variety of pausal functions.

Having sold over 3 million copies worldwide, the most popular prescriptive grammar of the new millennium, Lynne Truss’s *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* (2009), is solely devoted to the usage of punctuation. While it is humorous in tone, it is serious in intent. It is a pedant’s manifesto, which advocates for standard usage. Truss bemoans modern usage of ellipsis points:

[. . . ] also the ellipsis (...), which is turning up increasingly in emails as shorthand for “more to come, actually ... it might be related to what I’ve just written ... but the main thing is I haven’t finished ... let’s just wait and see ... I could go on like this for hours ...” (123)
Truss misses the fact that this is not a new development – similarly ambiguous, heterogeneous usage of the ellipsis mark is a distinguished, indeed, canonical literary tradition. The usage which Truss sees as defining, and which the marks are most well-known for, is to signify omission. Lexical and syntactical *ellipsis* is a ubiquitous linguistic feature (McShane, 2005:3), and it is from this rhetorical term that the ellipsis points receive their name. Rhetoricians and linguists use the term *ellipsis* to refer to a group of related syntactic phenomena. To borrow a definition from Wilson (2000: 18), the common denominator among these constructions are “structural gaps that can be related to omitted elements recoverable from (a) linguistic context, (b) other potential syntactic forms, (c), the situational context”. Because ellipsis points are sometimes used within literature to mark the gaps left by such linguistic *ellipsis* all this can be true of ellipsis points also. As mentioned earlier, in journalistic and academic writing this is the most common function the mark performs – signalling an omission or elision of quoted language (whether from a spoken or written source). However, the situation is more complex with ellipsis points for two reasons: linguists usually only use the word *ellipsis* to refer to omissions of information that is recoverable from context, and ellipsis points can also mark linguistic features other than, and totally separate from, *ellipsis* in the classical sense. It is important, therefore, not to conflate ellipsis points with linguistic *ellipsis*, despite the fact they are related and share nomenclature and features. This sequence from *Ulysses* illustrates a usage of the points indicating a form of ellipsis which is not uncommon in novels:
—That can be explained by science, says Bloom. It’s only a natural phenomenon, don’t you see, because on account of the …

And then he starts with his jawbreakers about phenomenon and science and this phenomenon and the other phenomenon. (250)

In this case the ellipsis points clearly do represent an omission – the narrator of this episode refrains from relating the remainder of Bloom’s speech, instead describing it in the narrative.

However, in prose fiction the marks commonly do not signal any omission at all: “— We’ll see tae they cunts . . . ah’ll git ma fuckin shotgun now . . . ”. In this sequence, taken from dialogue in Irvine Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995: 193), the ellipsis indicates a temporal pause, assisting the reader to imagine the tempo of the conversation realistically. This is perhaps the most common function of ellipsis points in the novel. Here, the points are purely pausal, although the pause combines with the semantic content of the language, augmenting this sinister statement to collectively communicate an ominous air. There is no language missing, but the pause communicates meaning nonetheless. This works because the pause signalled by the points indicates that the speaker is not speaking hurriedly or flippantly (as someone would in the heat of passion), but is instead calculatedly discussing the action planned, indicating thoughtful premeditation and serious intent. Thus, while ellipsis points may
simply mark a pause in speech, within context this could have significant implications for the entire plot of a novel. Such usage differs somewhat from ellipsis in third person narration, which does not necessarily reference an actual temporal pause, but rather causes one, in that the reader is delayed in their reception of the stream of language (usually for some dramatic effect). Although this can also true of ellipsis in dialogue, the fact that dialogue necessarily references speech in a way that narration does not, provides a more directly translatable element to the mark. The fact that ellipsis points appear much more frequently in dialogue, which is a representation of spoken language occurring in real time, emphasises the temporal element of the mark.

The opening of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* provides a very useful example, because two different uses of the points are contrasted in the opening lines:

I was born in the city of Bombay . . . once upon a time. No, that won’t do, there’s no getting away from the date: I was born in Dr. Narlikar’s Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it’s important to be more . . . On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. (2008: 3)

The first instance above is pausal, communicating the passage of time to indicate that the narrator is choosing his words carefully (as borne out by the subsequent text). The second instance, however, also indicates omission, probably of the word *specific* or
precise. As is usual in cases of grammatical ellipsis, the meaning (or even the precise
word) can be retrieved from context. The second instance also carries a pausal aspect,
as in speech the start of a new sentence after trailing off in this way would need to be
indicated with a pause, and also the preceding pause conveys the suggestion the narrator
is composing the text while he thinks, replete with pauses. The situation is confused a
little, as pauses may coincide with omissions, or it may be unclear if a phrase or word is
indeed being omitted. While the two uses are different in that one indicates an omission
and the other does not, both indicate pauses and contribute to a sense of a narrator
taking their time to carefully choose their words. Even different functions of the points
can be used towards the same ends. This is because the ellipsis mark does not have a
fixed meaning, but carries instead various “senses”, such as the “profound” sense
referred to by West (2008: 24). For example, Rushdie also utilises the points to create
the effect as so: “I became the chosen child of midnight, whose parents were not his
parents, whose son would not be his own . . . ” (157). This (and other senses) need not
be separated from the pausal aspect of ellipsis. Indeed, the “pause for dramatic effect”
element is what facilitates the use of ellipsis to inspire such profundity. This accords
with spoken language, in particular oration, where a pause precedes or follows an
important statement separating it from the surrounding language, allowing more time
for its reception.

Even in their main domain in the novel – within dialogue – the points have
variegated functions, among them to signal interruption. When the ellipsis points are
used to mark an interruption in speech, they do not represent an actual omission of spoken language, but rather the omission of what was intended to be said. It is certain that modern ellipsis marks usually convey a temporal aspect of pause – whether to communicate profundity or some other emotional element, or to mark the temporal gap left by an omission. Yet it remains important to remember that another common usage of the ellipsis points, to signal interruption, does not carry a pausal dimension at all, quite the contrary. The following example from Ulysses illustrates such practice:

—What? Mr Dedalus asked. That confirmed bloody hobbledehoy is it?

—Yes, Mr Bloom said, they were both on the way to the boat and he tried to drown...

—Drown Barabbas! Mr Dedalus cried. I wish to Christ he did!

Mr Power sent a long laugh down his shaded nostrils.

—No, Mr Bloom said, the son himself ....

Martin Cunningham thwarted his speech rudely:

—Reuben J and the son were piking it down the quay next to the river on their way to the Isle of Man boat and the young chiseller suddenly got loose and over the wall with him into the Liffey. (78)

In instances such as this the ellipsis points are used to signal the interruption of one person’s speech by another. Here there is literally no temporal element at play – in
reality the speech of Bloom would overlap with that of his interrupter. The ellipsis mark refers to actual lexical elision caused by the intrusion of one speaker over another, demonstrating that Bloom had more to say had his speech not been “thwarted”. This emphasises the versatility of the marks, as this usage essentially contradicts the most common usage (representing pause), yet the relationship between the two functions (pause can indicate omission) sustains the semantic integrity of the symbol when conveying meaning in this very different role.

The ellipsis points can not only convey various meanings in different contexts, they can sometimes convey multiple meanings in a single instance. The first occurrence of an ellipsis mark in *Ulysses* is, predictably, in dialogue: “There is something sinister in you ….” (5). The immediately subsequent return to narrative references the elision: “He broke off and lathered again lightly”. In this instance, however, the ellipsis mark doesn’t reference a lexical or syntactical elision – the sentence is complete as it stands. Rather, it simultaneously indicates the fact that precisely what it is that Buck Mulligan finds sinister about Stephen Dedalus has not been revealed (a sort of semantic elision conveyed by the noun “something”), and the pause as Mulligan proceeds to lather himself. It also reinforces the paragraph break in separating the narrative from the dialogue, and flags the fact that there is an abrupt change of subject and tone when Mulligan resumes speech. The ellipsis points cohere with the dialogue and narrative to collectively communicate an image of what’s physically happening in the scene, along with semantic content related to what the characters are saying, and thinking.
Their next appearance in *Ulysses* occurs in a very different context, complicated by the narrative’s ascent into Stephen Dedalus’s consciousness: “To ourselves .... new paganism .... *omphalos*” (7). At this point the narrative is effectively coterminous with Stephen’s consciousness, and the ellipsis marks here can be taken both to indicate a temporal aspect of Stephen’s linguistic thought process (essentially a pause between words), and also perhaps a suggestion of melancholy or despondency. While there can be said to be elision in this sequence, this style within *Ulysses* (stream of consciousness) as a matter of course neglects personal pronouns and other clauses (without signalling their absence with punctuation of any sort), for example:

— I PAID MY WAY. I NEVER BORROWED A SHILLING IN MY LIFE. Can you feel that? I OWE NOTHING. Can you?

Mulligan, nine pounds, three pairs of socks, one pair brogues, ties.

Curran, ten guineas. McCann, one guinea. (27)

The musing on Stephen Dedalus’ debts, prompted by his interlocutor’s boast is technically ungrammatical, lacking subject or verbs. It is intelligible because the reader has become accustomed to this stylistic convention within the book, and can retrieve the data that the subject is Dedalus himself (“I”), and the verb is “owe”. In an instance of a list such as this, the subject and verb would typically be discarded as redundant after the first example in any case. Peter Wilson cites such linguistic ellipsis as a defining feature
of Joyce’s *Ulysses* style, arguing that Joyce relied on “sentence-initial and telegraphic ellipsis” to capture the “truncated structures of inner-speech” (2000: 203-5). It is only on its third appearance in *Ulysses* that the ellipsis mark is used in its traditionally perceived, uni-dimensional role to indicate the omission of a word or clause: “—I’m melting, he said, as the candle remarked when .... But hush! Not a word more on the subject!” (10). Other usages seem purely pausal, not referencing any omission, for example: “I am surrounded by .... intrigues, by .... backstairs influence” (27). The points can perform multiple functions within a single novel, and even within a single instance.

Parkes sums up a characteristic of punctuation crucial to its communicative role, arguing that different symbols may be used in the same places, or different values may be attributed to the same symbol:

> The fundamental principle for interpreting punctuation is that the value and function of each symbol must be assessed in relation to the other symbols in the same immediate context, rather than in relation to some supposed absolute value and function for that symbol when considered in isolation. (1993: 2)

By “symbols” here Parkes means letters, numbers, and any other marks on the page, not only punctuation. While he is referring to the scribal and manuscript tradition, his assertion holds true today. One of the main problems in trying to provide definitive meanings for punctuational items is precisely that different marks can be used to
convey the same meaning, and the same mark can mean different things in different contexts. While uses generally are confined within a certain range of meanings for each mark, the marks must be assessed in context in order to divine which of their many functions they are performing, if they are performing more than one function, and if the surrounding text confers another level of meaning on them. As Levenston writes (1992: 64), the range of semantic [...] information given by such signs is astonishingly wide”.

For example, the pausal and elisional functions of ellipsis points may combine to allow its use to convey confusion or bewilderment. The first appearance of the conventional ellipsis mark (< . . . >) in Irvine Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (5) displays such a meaning: “Sandy is masturbating in the back of the jeep and she is just laughing . . . eh . . . what the fuck’s gaun on here . . . what’s she daein here . . . it’s just supposed to be Sandy n me . . . ”. Here the marks give an impression of a stalled narrative process due to the confusion of the narrator (Roy Strang). The narrative breaks as Roy struggles to understand what is happening – he cannot continue his speech/narration as, since he does not understand the situation himself, he has not got the language to communicate it to the reader. The ellipsis points communicate this absence of language, and the temporal gap caused by the time it takes for him to attempt to process the situation and express it with words. Ultimately, while it is possible to delineate the most common meanings for the ellipsis points within the genre, in individual instances which meaning is communicated will depend utterly on context
within novels themselves. The marks are so versatile that they can also easily convey aberrant or new meanings as and when they appear.

There are numerous strands to understanding the versatility of this particular mark. Contending that he had identified a “new use for ellipsis points”, Childs asserts that what he describes as “Interest Usage” is “probably the most common usage of ellipsis” (1993: 83). He offers numerous examples (mainly from advertising sources), and points out that the usage he describes remains largely uncatalogued by style manuals (84). He does, however, rely on a style manual to provide a precise definition for his particular interpretation of such incidents of ellipsis points: “Ellipses are sometimes used as a device to catch and hold the reader's interest” (American Heritage Dictionary, 1983: 60). This definition is far too vague and general to be useful – it could be applied not only to ellipsis points, but to any use of text whatsoever. More difficult and illuminating questions are how and why ellipsis points perform such functions. Punctuation has traditionally been considered as “paralinguistic” in comparison to the stream of letters that forms the “truly linguistic” element of alphabetical writing systems. Challenging this interpretation by applying the traditional levels of linguistic analysis (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) to specific items proves enlightening. Our understanding of the ellipsis points, as one of the more complex units of punctuation (at least in terms of its functions), can certainly

49 That is a usage which has been previously undocumented by linguists (Childs traces the usage he describes as far back as the mid-twenties).
benefit from the application of these levels of analysis. This approach, although
unorthodox, might successfully be applied to the other marks of punctuation.

Applying the lens of phonology to the ellipsis points is essential to
understanding their development and function. Although Childs provides an accurate
timeline for the rise of ellipsis points, he fails to trace their development and identify
the prime motivating factors of their adoption and usage, their many other varied
meanings, and the reason/s they communicate such meanings. As this linguistic analysis
of the points will demonstrate, these origins lie primarily in the ellipsis points’ ability to
signify the passage of time. While it may seem that the ellipsis point, due to its most
widely recognised usage (as a marker of omission), could not possibly have any
phonological aspect, this is not the case. As Crystal asserts, “Ellipses, I suspect, are
there chiefly for phonetic reasons too, not semantic ones” (2013).\textsuperscript{50} While this perhaps
claims too limited a definition of the points, their iconicity most certainly does convey
at least one dimension of phonological analysis: duration. The ellipsis points, appearing
most commonly in dialogue, usually mark a pause, certainly representing a specific (if
not actually countable) period of time in such instances. This duration is regularly
punctuated, the repetition of the point rhythmically marking the passage of time (much
as in musical notation). This functional iconicity is readily demonstrated by a
comparison with simple sheet music for percussion (see Figure 8). The passage of time

\textsuperscript{50} While Crystal here uses the general linguistic term “ellipses”, he is in this instance referring
solely to usage of ellipsis points.
is represented spatially on the left to right axis, with beats marked at regular intervals by dots.

![Sheet Music for Drums](image)

Figure 8. Sheet Music for Drums.

As such, the repetition of dots has long been used to represent the passage of time in print. It is also possible that the iconicity of ellipsis points can in this way convey some impression of those common audible temporal markers (which are most audible precisely at moments of conspicuous silence marked by ellipsis points). The ticking of a clock, or the beating of one’s heart, neatly accord with the rhythmic repetition conveyed through the image of the points. Such synchronicities reinforce the iconicity of the ellipsis points in their representation of the passage of time.

As Crystal further points out, ellipsis points also contribute to the phonological interpretation of the text as a whole. He explains that ellipsis points can convey information lost in translation from the spoken to written medium, particularly the element of spontaneity in informal spoken language, in which you can:
[... ] hear the pauses, the continuative intonation patterns, the variations in tempo (allegro, lento) which would show me actively processing what I want to say. Prosody is the main way of showing people 'thinking on their feet' [... ] In speech, these decision points are there for everyone to hear. And if (unconsciously) you want your writing to reflect speech, ellipsis dots are an easy way to show it. (2013)

Here Crystal is arguing that the temporal element conveyed by the points allows the reader to infer information about the mental processes of the narrator. The quotation mentioned earlier from the opening passage of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is a perfect example of this (“I was born in the city of Bombay . . . once upon a time. No, that won’t do, there’s no getting away from the date” [2008: 1]). Because the narrator subsequently changes his mind about the information he will offer on the subject of the date of his birth, it is clear that the ellipsis points preceding “once upon a time” are being used to indicate a pause as he chooses his words. In this way, simply by indicating the passage of time, a writer can transmit information about the thought processes of his characters, and even the emotions driving those processes. As usual, it is how the use of the points combine with the surrounding text that lends them such specific meaning within context.

At the next linguistic level (morphology), it could be argued that the ellipsis points can semantically modify and inflect preceding or succeeding lexemes. In much
the same way the suffix -s modifies the lexeme *dog* into a plural (dog-s), a word succeeded by ellipsis can be modified to convey greater profundity, melancholy, or a whole host of connotations. This is inspired by the practice of rhetorical pauses in speech, and it is questionable to say the least to suggest that the ellipsis points actually form part of the word (as would be required for them to be considered truly a part of the morphology). Nevertheless, it is an instructive heuristic to consider the item in this way – as being more intricately bound with language in its spoken form, not just a purely graphic item extraneous to the surrounding words. When conceiving of ellipsis points as representing elements of speech, however, it is important to remain cognisant that they function not simply as a guide to pronunciation (as in the limited, classical conception of punctuation as an aid to reading aloud). They may also serve as semantic markers, often modifying preceding or succeeding lexemes. The points may modify not just words, but clauses, sentences, etc.

For example, in this passage from *A Spot of Bother* (2006), Mark Haddon utilises ellipsis points within the narration to inflect preceding and/or succeeding sequences with gravitas by semantically augmenting the text:

Her life with George was not an exciting life. But wouldn’t her life with David go the same way eventually?
Perhaps the secret was to stop looking for greener grass. Perhaps the secret was to make the best of what you had. If she and George had talked a little more. If they went on a few more holidays . . .

The rain had stopped. (2006: 342)

Given the ruminations which precede it, the ellipsis points here are highly suggestive of the trailing off of free indirect discourse. They signal the return to third-person omniscient narration after the brief immersion in this character’s vacillatory, flitting thought process – due either to that thought-process terminating, or becoming stuck in a loop. The reader (and perhaps the subject) is snapped back into time and place of that moment with “The rain had stopped”. A full stop in place of the ellipsis points here would fail to demarcate to the same extent the standard third person narration and the free indirect discourse. It would also fail to emphasise the trailing off/looping of the thought process, and suggest the issue had been simply resolved and abandoned by the character in question. As such, the ellipsis points inflect the previous sequence with more weight, contributing to creating the impression this issue is troubling the character in question – that the questions are a recurring intrusive thought, rather than an idle rumination. The ellipsis points, in this instance, modify the surrounding text, and despite filling a definite slot, they operate in a manner analogous to supra-segmental features, such as volume in speech, or choice of font in print, imbuing the language in which they are placed with a particular connotation.
Within dialogue, the ellipsis points, in their function to indicate the omission of a word, can also communicate the syntactic integrity of a sentence which otherwise would be ungrammatical. Indeed *ellipsis* (from which the points take their name) is primarily a syntactical feature. In *Ulysses* Mr Dedalus says “I was with him this morning at poor little Paddy Dignam’s.... ” (276). The ellipsis marks here communicate an omission, indicating that “Dignam’s” is possessive rather than the noun derived from the proper name combined with the clitic *s* often used in informal English to someone’s abode. “Dignam’s” could quite easily stand alone, as a noun meaning “Dignam’s house”. This is a common abbreviation in informal English, but this meaning does not fit with the context. As an unabbreviated possessive, “Dignam’s....” of course wants its own noun, and the ellipsis points represent the omission of this word. They in fact stand here for “Dignam’s funeral”. The word “funeral” has been omitted due to natural anxieties surrounding words associated with death, which are often taboo. A different grammatical construction entirely would be suggested if the ellipsis points were not included. The poignancy of the moment would not be marked, the touching reverence of the speaker in demurring from pronouncing the word “funeral”, and the accurate communication of events would simply be impossible were there were no punctuation mark to signal the omission, conveying the real syntactic structure of the sentence.

---

51 The exception to this rule is where it represents an omission in spoken language due to an interruption – this is usually easily identifiable in the text, but can lead to some confusion.
Crystal (2013) sees semantic content as at best a secondary function of ellipsis, arguing the primary role is to assist in the communication of elements of spoken language lost to its written variant (primarily pauses, but also associated shifts in tone, etc). In practice, however, the element emphasised is utterly context-dependent, and often there is no phonological aspect at play (in the case of interruptions in dialogue, or where the points appear in narrative, or other textual forms within a novel, such as text messages, etc). Very often both semantic and phonological aspects may be carried simultaneously by a mark, while in other instances the mark may perform some other function entirely. They have the various specific meanings delineated above (markers of omission, pause, etc). In terms of semantics, they can, however, also indicate the meaning of an omitted word or phrase which can be retrieved by inference (eg. “funeral” in the example from *Ulysses* above). While punctuation developed as a cue to reading aloud, the indications it provides regarding pausing and prosody are often necessary to convey or clarify meaning, and these remain no less important considerations when a reader directly processes written language (ie. even if it is not read aloud). In many instances (such as Bloom’s interruption in the earlier passage from *Ulysses*), the removal of marks would destroy meaning (it wouldn’t be apparent that Mr. Cunningham was interrupting Bloom, or what Bloom intended to say, were it not for the ellipsis points).

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that explores “aspects of meaning not predictable from the linguistic structure” (Aitchison, 2010: 123). In essence, this means
examining how linguistic items express meaning differently within the context of their actual use. Pragmatic linguists are usually concerned with conversation, often the unexpected ways in which words and constructions can convey unpredictable meanings dependent on the context of a particular conversation. They also often discuss how complex meaning can be conveyed through minimal use of language, demonstrating that other hints and cues lead us to fill in blanks, allowing us to interpret much more meaning within context than would be apparent when the language is taken out of that context. This approach is equally applicable to literature, and acutely relevant to punctuational items, because the meaning/s of punctuation marks are unfixed, and therefore intensely context dependent. As Nunberg explains, “the classification of a particular graphical device [. . .] may depend on the particular written genre that is under consideration” (1993: 18). The conventions of a particular genre add a contextual frame deepening meaning, and this is magnified further by the conventions and context peculiar to each individual novel. This is all the more important when considering ambiguous words or items like punctuation. David Crystal sees this ambiguity as one of the defining characteristics of punctuation: “for such a tiny system – only a dozen marks in common use, after all – there’s an amazing amount of uncertainty over usage” (2015: xiii). This is due in part to the lack of specific semantic functions attached to the marks, or as Parkes has it, their lack of “absolute value and function” (1993: 2). Marks are used to augment and inflect the surrounding language rather than to convey meaning in isolation. It is this lack of fixed meaning that lends them their versatility, in turn
ensuring their ubiquity. Parkes also asserts that punctuation can become a “feature of
the ‘pragmatics’ of the written medium” conveying information which “in spoken
language [. . . ] can be communicated in various ways both linguistic and paralinguistic
– such as a repertoire of intonations, or gestures and facial expressions” (2). The deep
integration of punctuational devices within the contexts of their individual occurrences,
the style of the specific texts in which they occur, and of course the mores of the
broader genre, are crucial to evaluating their role in individual instances. In terms of the
ellipsis points, not only is their form also crucial to understanding why they are used,
but also the historical development of that form.

The repetition of marks to indicate omission was originally practised during the
medieval period, when scribes would often insert three stars or crosses to signal lacunae
(Toner, 2000: 138). The medieval usage of such “ellipsis marks”, however, differed
qualitatively from the modern usage of points. Scribes inserted the stars or crosses to
signal textual omissions in transcription (due to illegible or damaged documents, or to
mark passages absent due to editing), not pauses or any other associated phonological
aspect. It was only with the advent of printing that marks came to be used to indicate
rhetorical ellipsis (originally the long dash), and to translate omissions or pauses in
natural language (speech or thought) into written language. Toner would have it that
printing formalised the medieval usage (the stars evolving into the asterisk <*>),
although great variance in the usage of marks remained. Parkes too, credits the eventual
stabilisation of ellipsis marks (or ‘the sign of suspension’ as he refers to it) to the
development of printing, which allowed the “single dash, or three or more en-rules or points” to establish themselves as the conventional means of indicating elision (1993: 56). Yet the fact remains that the repeated punctus which forms the ellipsis mark today, as Toner herself concedes, did not gain prominence until the twentieth century (2015: 120). Toner also argues the use of staccato dots came to prominence as an evolution of a punctuational item known as the leader (2015: 126). This is a series of dots designed to direct the reader’s eye across the page for tables or accounts. This feature can still be commonly seen connecting chapter titles to page numbers in many tables of contents (including this thesis). Toner’s later claim of evolution from the leader (2015 126) apparently contradicts her earlier claim of descendance from the medieval stars (2000: 138). It might be argued that the reduction of the leaders’ repeated dots to three and their usage to indicate omission is the element that stemmed from medieval practice, and that the marks thus have a combined origin. If this is Toner’s position, however, this is not explicit. It is important to note also (as Toner concedes) that the asterisk has its origin in these medieval stars, and its use to indicate occluded words (for example expletives) stems from this tradition. This doesn’t rule out an influence of the stars on ellipsis points, but there is no direct evolutionary sequence as with the asterisk. The dash is used in this role for centuries before the ellipsis points replace it.

52 It must of course be remembered that while the ellipsis points derive their name from this grammatical practice, in reality they perform many other functions, and marking rhetorical ellipsis is not even prime among these.
In her monograph, Toner identifies prescriptive grammars and various primary sources which show examples of a succession of points used very definitely as a sign of ellipsis (2015: 123-151). These examples range from a succession of asterisks, to the repeated points we are familiar with today. Despite these usages, as she herself points out, the rise of ellipsis points in their present form did not occur until the early twentieth century, when it occurred suddenly and quickly came to predominate and attain comparatively strict conventions of usage. This supports her theory of a relationship with the leader, as it derives from the era just prior. There is perhaps a little contradiction, however, in Toner’s account of the evolution of ellipsis marks. A development springing from the leader does not accord with the other origin she suggests, a resurrection of the medieval markers of textual lacunae, nor does its modern meaning correspond precisely to the medieval usage of such marks (to indicate a failure in textual transmission from one manuscript to a copy, or to signal that a segment of text has been edited out). This does correspond, however, with academic and journalistic usage of the mark today, where < . . . > is used to indicate the omission from a quotation due to abbreviation. Toner’s object of research, however, is literature. Within literary contexts the mark is much more likely to perform pausal or other related roles. Furthermore, the abrupt appearance of < . . . > in the early twentieth century seems unlikely to stem from a sudden resurrection of medieval scribal practices. Up until this point the long dash was the near universal symbol used for elision, breaks within sentences stronger than a comma, and all non-syntactic pauses within dialogue.
Initially, the long dash was preferred in British printing as a mark of ellipsis (Toner, 2000: 126). In the latter instance here from Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* for example (see Figure 9: “not a passenger goes by without stopping to cast a look upon it,—and sighing as he walks on,”), the long dash very clearly represents pausal ellipsis for dramatic effect.

Figure 9. *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne, 1761: 56-7).
Elsewhere in the novel, however, the dash is used for very different purposes. Indeed, the first instance of the dash accords with its current usage (to bracket an interpolated clause within a sentence, see Figure 10).

Figure 10. *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne, 1761: 1).

In this instance, (“He flew like lightning—there was a slope of three miles and a half—we scarce touched the ground”), the clause bracketed by em dashes at each end is added information, almost an aside (one of the many digressions for which *Tristram Shandy* is notorious). The first and third clauses of this sentence could be separated naturally by a comma were it not for this intervening clause, as so: “He flew like lightning, we scarce
touched the ground.” This is not true of the first and second clauses (“He flew like lightning, there was a slope of three miles and a half”), where a period would be wanted to mark the abrupt mid-sentence change in subject. It is clear that in this instance Sterne is using the dash less to mark some temporal aspect (as in Figure 9), and more to indicate the grammatical distinction of an interpolated clause. While in this era the dash may perform a similar function to ellipsis points, it was at the time (and particularly in Sterne), a sort of catch-all mark, used very literally to punctuate the text. While Toner designates it as one of the “signs of omission”, it might be more accurate to simply call it a mark of interruption. The dash is used by Sterne wherever the text needed to be broken up, and also in some uses its application seems totally random. For example, in this sequence: “The fate, says another, of the Strasburgers, may be a warning to all free people to save their money—They anticipated their revenues—brought themselves under taxes, exhausted their strength” (217). In the first instance it seems to stand for a period, in the second a comma, even while commas and periods appear directly before and within the very same sequence. While repetition of the dash may seem different, appearing similar in form to the ellipsis points, in practice repetition of the dash didn’t indicate a fixed meaning as ellipsis points have attained. Sterne uses often uses a repeated dash, perhaps to indicate a stronger pause or break than a single one, though
again often without any discernible rationale, and with next to no consistency. Usage of the dash (even to indicate elision) and usage of the points are therefore quite distinct.

Sterne’s liberal use of the dash may demonstrate one of the reasons for its eventual abandonment as a mark of ellipsis. Although context usually allows the intended meaning to be inferred, the ambiguity of using the same mark to indicate contradictory functions is hard on the reader, in some instances actively misleading. While the points today convey a wide variety of meanings, they generally correspond with the force of its iconicity (indicating or derived from some temporal element). The use of the dash to indicate pausal ellipsis in particular contradicts its use to indicate interpolated clauses (as such clauses would more likely coincide with a quickening of pace than a pause).

Up until the mid-1930’s, the dash itself was sometimes known as “an ellipsis” in the Anglophone world (Zuidema, 1996: 135). To use the word “ellipsis” for the dash is all but unheard of today. Although somewhat belated, this change in nomenclature was not arbitrary, but rather reflected a shift away from using the dash to indicate certain functions. As Toner (2001: 144) points out, as a continuous line the dash can contribute to “a sense of abrupt or hasty speech”. The reader’s eye is carried along quickly, uninterrupted to the next segment of text. Indeed, there couldn’t be a faster way to draw

\footnote{For example: “—I am not such a debtor to the world——slandered and disappointed as I have been—as to give it that conviction— No!” (Sterne, 2000: 199). The use here of double dash doesn’t seem to accord with the sense, as the stronger semantic and phonological break should naturally occur before the exclaimed “No!” There are examples like this on almost every page of *Tristram Shandy*.}
the reader’s attention from one item to another than by connecting them with an unbroken straight line. The `<—>` carries its own iconicity then, one also intrinsic to its name. The word “dash” indicates hurried speed, a mental image that does not sit well with the usage of ellipsis points today. The force of the dash’s iconicity, however, derives not simply from these connotations, rather these connotations derive from the same source: the dash’s original method of production. As a verb, “to dash” means to “strike violently”. This neatly describes how a dash would be produced when writing with a stylus. This of course, is far from coincidental. A glance at the *OED* confirms various other swift and violent meanings for the word, also meaning “hasty stroke of the pen” with an example dating back to 1615 (“And thus by meere chaunce with a little dash I have drawne the picture of a Pigmey”).

Readers would perceive not only the intrinsic visual iconicity of the dash – as a directional device drawing the reader’s eye from one segment of text to another in the fastest way possible – but also the association of the mark with both its name, and its rapid method of production in writing. That a requirement existed for a new mark distinguishing the different functions performed by the dash is clear, but mechanical printing does not lend itself to the easy invention and incorporation of new characters. To prompt a printer to forge new pieces of type, the character must be established in the writing system, which seems like a catch-22. However, a combination of existing marks repurposed to perform a different function can bypass this barrier to innovation, and thus `< . . . >` came into common usage. Toner identifies George Eliot as an early pioneer
of the points, and offers a facsimile of a manuscript page from *Scenes of Clerical Life* written in 1856, and replete with many ellipsis points (2015: 127). Yet handwritten manuscripts may have been the very factor inhibiting general adoption of the marks, despite such illustrious trailblazers. The dash continued to be used where points are used today, despite its unsuitability for these roles. For example, in 1905, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, makes liberal use of the dash for functions which the ellipsis points < . . . > were later to perform, for example: “The man turned a shade paler and cast a malignant glance at Holmes. ‘If your Grace wishes —’ ‘Yes, Yes, you had better go.’” (149). In this instance the dash apparently marks an interruption (as in the example from *Ulysses* discussed earlier). The dash was also used to indicate parenthetical clauses within sentences, the use to which it has become largely restricted today, for example: “I feared so much that he should do Arthur — that is, Lord Saltire — a mischief, that I despatched him for safety” (155). In other instances it is ambiguous as to whether the dash marks an interpolated clause or a pause for dramatic effect, as such: “His health — well, I don’t know that it’s better nor worse from the smoking” (280). This can be read either way, demonstrating a further reason for the rise of < . . . > (to distinguish the two quite different senses encouraged by these interpretations). If the dash represents a pause in this instance, it could suggest concern on the part of the speaker for the health of the subject of the sentence. If it represents a hastily interpolated clause, however, it could suggest, on the contrary, a dismissive lack of concern with same. In practice this
information is usually recoverable from context, but differentiating between such
instances with different marks removes such ambiguity definitively.

Also published in 1905, H.G. Wells’ *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* features
ellipsis points alongside the dash. In comparison with today’s usage, appearances of the
points are unorthodox (four points appearing at the end of paragraphs with the first
point unspaced). They seem to indicate a stronger division than a normal paragraph
break, and may be read as a sort of diluted version of the three centred asterisks that
sometimes indicate a section break within a chapter. Within *Kipps* the dash is used in
instances that firmly accord with pausal ellipsis, eg. “by attempting to be friendly; and
by—all that sort of thing” (8). This reinforces the suggestion that the points used therein
are related to the section break rather than a new way to indicate pausal or syntactical
ellipsis, which continues to be indicated by the dash. During this period the usage of
ellipsis points is quite different than their usage today. It seems that over the following
two decades usage of the points stabilised quite firmly. Once they had entered the
literary lexicon, as it were, they filled a necessary niche in differentiating punctuational
functions previously performed by the dash alone, and in this way they found functions
which soon became conventions.

Nevertheless, usage remained somewhat random for a period. It is fifty pages
into *Howards End* (1910), for example, that the points make their first appearance,
where they appear twice on facing pages. Prior to this liberal use is made of the dash to
indicate functions which today would be represented by points (eg. “I’ll call you a cab.
No; wait a mo—’ He thought. ‘Our motor’s here, I’ll run you up in it’” [27]). Points appear only once more in the entire novel (chapter XIII). Similarly, it is some way into A Room with a View (1908: 46) before points are used, appearing a couple more times, only in dialogue. Joseph Conrad’s Under Western Eyes (1911), while occasionally employing the ellipsis points at the end of paragraphs in the same manner as Kipps (eg. 16), utilises the points both within dialogue and the body of the narrative (4, 14, etc.).

There appears to be some interchangeability between the marks at this stage. For example, the sequence (4): “There is a generosity in their ardor of speech which removes it as far as possible from common loquacity: and it is ever too disconnected to be classed as eloquence. . . . But I must apologise for this digression”. A dash would seem more appropriate in this instance, in order to indicate the interpolated clause.

Likewise, current stylistic norms would dictate points in this sentence which appears on the subsequent page (5): “With his younger compatriots he took the attitude of an inscrutable listener, a listener of the kind that hears you out intelligently and then—just changes the subject”. The only tenable interpretation of this dash is pausal, a function uniquely carried out by points today. Similarly, in D.H. Lawrence’s The Trespasser (1912), the dash and ellipsis point also appear alongside each other. Although there is no clear delineation of function between the two items, again the trend appears to be that the points are used more frequently within dialogue. For example, “‘Even if it’s a bitter thing to say, you have to say it: you are not dead. . . . ‘” (8). Yet even within dialogue the dash continues to be employed in instances where points would fit, eg.:
“‘You would linger for hours over a blue weed, and let all the people down the road go by. Folks are better than a garden in full blossom—’” (9). These examples suggest a transitional phase, with usage evolving rather than an abrupt adoption of the ellipsis points to carry out certain functions previously carried out by the dash.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce utilises points from the outset within the narrative itself: “Once upon a time and a very good time it was and this moo cow that was coming down along the road met a nice little boy named baby tuckoo. . . .” (1916: 1). Joyce was peculiarly (perhaps uniquely) aware that writing was in a sense an act of translating the peculiarities of sound into ink on a page. He was also cognisant of the unique communicative dimensions afforded in this respect by print. Hugh Kenner argues that Joyce (particularly in *Ulysses*), designed his work very consciously for print. As he puts it himself, “the text of *Ulysses* is not organised in memory and unfolded in time, but both organized and unfolded in what we may call technological space: on printed pages for which it was designed from the beginning” (1974: 34). It is important to consider the intrinsic iconicity of the points in the context of uses such as this, which exploit the utility of the point to its full and established precedents for usages which have become utterly conventional.

“Ellipsis points,” Toner asserts, “have developed in literary dialogue as a means of getting closer to the sounds of spoken language” (2015: 5). The strong tendency in the literature not only of the period in which they arose, but still today, is to utilise ellipsis points more frequently within dialogue than within the body of the narrative. To
take an example from the time the ellipsis points achieved prominence, in Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1907), ellipsis points don’t make an appearance until towards the end of the second chapter (38), and the marks are confined to dialogue throughout the novel. In the narrative, the use of dashes in instances which would demand points today remain frequent (eg. 114). This suggests the ellipsis points do carry a distinctly temporal iconicity. There was by no means such a clear division of usages (between narrative and dialogue) with the dash as exists with the usage of points, and indeed existed with the usage of points from their inception. Dialogue of course, unlike narrative, purports to represent speech sounds. While narrative is translated directly from printed text to meaning in the mind of the reader, the dialogue purports to be a transcription of real speech, occurring with a specific volume, pitch, and, crucially, within a distinct period of time. In order to convey an accurate experience to the reader, some impression must be given respecting this period of time. As Crystal puts it, “if . . . you want your writing to reflect speech, ellipsis dots are an easy way to show it” (2013). Crystal sees the temporal function of ellipsis points as essential not only to understanding the points, but to understanding how speech is currently represented within the writing system of English. Yet as Crystal (2013) and Toner (2015), two of the foremost theorists dealing with punctuation, both repeatedly point out, punctuation is an under-studied phenomenon, and as such misconceptions about the marks abound.

Parkes (1993), in his seminal monograph *Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*, almost wholly neglects ellipsis points. For example, the mark
receives no mention in his “Select Glossary of Technical Terms and Punctuation Symbols” (1993: 301-7). Other common symbols (e.g. the comma <,> and apostrophe <‘>) are treated at length, and even arcane marks such as the fleuron <folio> and the paraph <¶> are given detailed entries. The closest Parkes comes to acknowledging the mark in his glossary, is in the brief entry for the punctus <.>, which he mentions also forms “the basis for other symbols”. It is perhaps because of the fact that < . . . > is created by repeating another symbol that Parkes excludes it from consideration. Yet the ellipsis points’ relationship to the punctus is superficial and misleading. The punctus has very limited and clearly delineated conventions of usage in comparison to the ellipsis points, and while the points may be composed by repeating the punctus there can be no doubt that they are absolutely distinct marks in terms of usage and function.

Parkes asserts that in the medieval Irish manuscript tradition:

[. . . ] punctuation and decoration became inextricably linked. The scribes saw them as two aspects of the same thing, the presentation of a text which facilitates its use, and as one developed so did the other. (25)

Such a conception of “the text” has lost favour – the advent of print gave rise to the idea that “the text” is the sequence of words, considered in isolation from actual editions, and hence its appearance on the page. Since Saussure’s “Course in General Linguistics” was first published in 1916, it has been generally accepted also, that any relationship
between signifier and signified is arbitrary in both spoken and written language.\textsuperscript{54}

Ellipsis points, however, provide an illuminating contra-example to this conception of the written word, as they carry a stark iconicity readily relatable to their meaning/s.

Cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker asserts that we have an innate propensity for mentally representing time as segmented:

Though a continuous flow of time is the medium of our consciousness, that is not how time is treated within the division of thought connected to language [ . . . ] It is not measured with a stopwatch or a calendar, but divided into discrete regions.

(2007: 430)

This tendency is universal, and has found many expressions. Musical notation, clockfaces, graphs with a time axis, etc, display not only a useful conceptual tool in their segmentation of time, but reflect how we naturally conceptualise this dimension – not as the uninterrupted continuous flow it is, but as the granular procession we are predisposed to perceive it as. The dash does not convey these regular subdivisions. The rhythmic intervals into which we divided time are, however, neatly expressed by the series of repeated marks which form ellipsis points.

\textsuperscript{54} This is true of alphabetical writing systems, but of course not necessarily so of syllabaries and other systems which developed from pictograms.
P.G. Wodehouse’s *The Prince & Betty* (1912) offers an interesting example of the dash’s versatility that also serves as a contra-example of the temporal iconicity of the point. In this scene Mr. Scobell is frustratedly trying to catch his sister’s attention, as he wishes her to repeat information from a newspaper article she has just mentioned. Miss Scobell, however, ignores him and continues to relate news from another article:

‘A five-legged rabbit has been born in Carbondale, Southern Illinois,’

she announced.

Mr. Scobell cursed the five-legged rabbit.

‘Never mind about your rabbits. I want to hear that piece you read before. The one about the Prince of Monaco. Will—you—listen, Marion!’ (18)

Although the dash is now used primarily to mark interpolated clauses, this use demonstrates an entirely different function. The dash is used here to mark the separation between individual words. This is necessary because Mr. Scobell is deliberately pronouncing each word separately to emphasise the statement and demonstrate his annoyance. Separating written language with spaces between words is a practice established by seventh century Irish monks (Parkes, 1993: 23). While the utility of these spaces is beyond doubt (*scriptio continua* is profoundly difficult to read), inter-word spacing leads to a misconception about spoken language. In spoken language there is (generally) no pause between words, only at the end of sentences or clauses. One of the
exceptions to this rule is exactly this type of utterance: an emphasised demand

(especially one that has to be repeated for someone’s attention or comprehension). As

such the dashes here represent pauses between words (inter-word spacing cannot

convey this impression properly, because inter-word spacing doesn’t correspond to

pauses in speech at all). This function would not be well conveyed by the ellipsis point.

Consider the sentence punctuated as so: “Will . . . you . . . listen, Marion!”. The three

beats of the ellipsis point, although they mark no set period of time, make the pauses

seem too long, and convey a sense of an emotion other than mild annoyance: shock,

concern, sadness or dismay perhaps. Despite the exclamation mark, the rhythmic

element of the points preclude them from being used for intervals below a certain

duration. This links the points to durations of time of a specific length. Given the

symbolic utility of the points, and the fact they are comprised of the repetition of a well-
established mark available since the advent of print, it is notable they were not adopted

earlier. There may be a simple reason for this.

In his 1943 essay “On the Hand and the Typewriter” Martin Heidegger claims humanity

has two defining features: language, and the hand. “The hand”, he argues, “is, together

with the word, the essential distinction of man” (199). From this point, Heidegger

argues that print is a form of alienation, as it masks the process of manual writing with

generic characters. Typewriting a is thus a further alienation, in that it removes even

original act of manual writing, composition being carried out via a machine. This
machine limits the author to certain characters alone, and allows them to place these characters only in specific slots:

Mechanical writing deprives the hand of its rank in the realm of the written word and degrades the word to a means of communication. In addition, mechanical writing provides this “advantage,” that it conceals the handwriting and thereby the character. The typewriter makes everyone look the same. (199)

The apparent claim that writing is somehow natural, while print is not, is difficult to reconcile with the fact that writing is a technological development that spread through diffusion, and is by no means ubiquitous among human societies. Yet his somewhat elusive observation, that with the predominance of the typewriter the “writing-stroke disappears” (199), may prove enlightening in relation to the transition from dash to ellipsis points. Toner asserts that ellipsis points achieve prominence in the early twentieth century (2000: 120). This timeframe is borne out in the primary sources. Ellipsis points begin to appear from around 1905, initially at the end of paragraphs (seemingly as a weaker division than a section break, but a stronger division than a normal paragraph break). They then migrate into dialogue, and there is a comparatively strict division between usage in dialogue and narrative, where the points are used in dialogue, but the dash continues to be used in narrative and dialogue for multiple functions. The points are absent from narrative during this period. There may be some contra-examples to this, but this picture remains an accurate representation of

---

55 This work is attributed to Anne C. Henry, which the name under which Anne Toner’s work was formerly published. Since she has now written other works on the same topic, for the sake of avoiding confusion I will use “Toner” throughout, although the bibliographic entry is as originally published.
conventional usage of the time. In the early 1920’s, it seems the points stabilise in their meaning/s, while the dash is retained to perform the functions it does today (interpolated clauses, introducing dialogue, parenthetical clauses, etc.). The points gain separate usages (omission, pause, tone, etc.), and these are regularised throughout dialogue and narrative, though points remain much more frequent in dialogue.

Childs (1993) offers an impressionistic survey of ellipsis point usage in advertising, and the dates given accords with the timeframe outlined above. He also traces the usage of points to the mid-1920s. He asserts that once initiated, usage became widespread very quickly. Prior to that: “advertisements used dashes and other more traditional punctuation where later advertisements used ellipsis points” (84). However, Childs found not one example of ellipsis point usage in advertising prior to 1925. There are hundreds of examples in novels and short stories published well before this date, suggesting that the points were indeed a literary phenomenon at their inception, spreading to other genres from there. It is no coincidence that the transition to typewritten manuscripts gathered steam not long before the ellipsis points come to predominate.

The first commercially available typewriter was marketed by Remington in the early 1870’s, fashioned in iron and fixed atop a sewing machine table (complete with a foot pedal to operate the carriage return [Chaplain, 2007]). Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* (1876) may have been the first typewritten manuscript in literary history (Kittler, 1999:
While this auspicious moment in the history of the device is much celebrated, Twain had in fact hired an operator to type the manuscript because he grew frustrated with the still cumbersome process of typewriting (Chaplain, 2007). For decades the typewriter remained mainly a tool of civil and industrial bureaucracy. It did not achieve anything approaching status as a domestic device until mass manufacture in the twentieth century. Up until the period between 1910-20 the typewriter almost exclusively retained its initial role, solely as “an expensive piece of office equipment” (Rehrer, 1996). After this point, however, advances in technology made the mass manufacture of practically sized and priced typewriters for the home a reality.

Nevertheless, throughout the entire history of the typewriters’ use, it was marketed primarily to commercial and governmental customers (Page, 1990: 54). Because efficient typewriting is a process that must be learned separately from handwriting, typewriting machines still remained in the domain of the professional typist (although this of course included many authors). Some writers continued (and indeed continue), to submit handwritten manuscripts – but the growing trend for authors to submit typewritten manuscripts had an impact not only on the process of script production, but also on the form of manuscripts. The rise of ellipsis points provides perhaps the best example of such a process.

---

56 According to Beeching (1990: 36) there is some speculation that this claim (originally made by Twain himself), is mistaken, and that it was actually Twain’s Life on the Mississippi (1883). Beeching (1990: 370) also asserts that, the first appearance of a typewriter in fiction was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s A Case of Identity (1892).
As Heidegger contended, the act of writing does change dramatically with the move from a free ranging stylus to a digital set of characters. Typing is a radically different process from writing. Again, the difference is between a digital process and an analogue one, with all that distinction entails. Perhaps the most obvious impact of the invention of the typewriter as a writing tool, was that suddenly every single symbol became identical in terms of the effort expended in its production by the writer. So it became as quick and easy to draw the ampersand $\&$ as it was to draw the punctus $<$. This is a momentous change in the authorial process, but this revolution in mode of production has not been granted the critical weight it should. The advent of printing has of course been extensively treated by a variety of disciplines from political science to history and sociology, but the implications for the final form of written language of the advent of the typewriter has yet to achieve the significance it is due in academia.

Characteristically, Levenston points this out this deficit. He treats the subject but briefly in his *The Stuff of Literature* (1992: 93), but he is unequivocal about the implications for authorial composition:

Nowadays, of course, the manuscript is typed—on a typewriter or a word processor. And in time we may come to realize that for writers even more important than the invention of printing was the invention of the typewriter. Once authors were able to compose directly onto the typewriter, they could produce copy much closer in appearance to the printed page. In principle, if not
necessarily in practice, this brought them closer to direct responsibility for the way their work would look in print.

Levenston sees the typewriter as a way for the author to bypass previously essential stages in the publishing process, traditionally the responsibility of other people. In effect, Levenston is arguing that the typewriter, in allowing composition in a mode much closer to the final mode of presentation, allows every writer to act as Richardson: author and compositor. While this is an essential and under-emphasised point, it could be argued that word-processing software for computers was as great a leap forward in terms of making writers the author of the visual appearance of a text, and not only the words. The typewriter indeed marked the transition to writers being limited to proto-digital options for the page – that is they now arranged discrete individual pieces of type to fit particular slots, and could no longer allow their pen flow where and how they wished. However, font style and size were still limited, and the effort of revision often prohibitive (re-typing or literal copy and pasting). Word-processing facilitated an approach where many more options available traditionally available only to compositors became available to writers, and their usage cost-neutral and discretionary.

The paradigm shift in how texts are conceived of by the author with the invention of the typewriter and the transition to word-processing, has not, however, been accompanied by a corresponding paradigm shift in how texts are interpreted by the critic. Levenston goes on to astutely comment on this oversight as an opportunity to
form new heuristics about the further integration of developing technologies into the writing process:

Changes in the technology of printing must also in course of time affect the nature of written composition. The ease with which photographic processes can now be integrated into printing techniques has made it possible to reproduce an unlimited range of typefaces—or documents—within the covers of a single book. The impact of these techniques has already been felt in the genres of science fiction and the thriller. When the narrative requires an official form, a computer printout, or a handwritten note, it can now appear exactly in the appropriate typographical form. (1992: 92)

Parkes (1993: 56) asserts that “the conventions of written language had become dominated by those employed in printed texts” by the end of the sixteenth century. Yet the fact remains that the use of pencil, pen and ink continued to exert its influence up until its eventual near-replacement by new technology in the twenty-first century, and up until the early twentieth century, when people wrote, they may have written for print, but they did not write in print. The act of writing was achieved with a stylus (a pen or pencil). While the impact of printing on literature has been exhaustively documented, the impact of the typewriter on composition has almost been almost ignored in comparison.
Because ellipsis points were composed by repeating a pre-existing mark it might seem as if there were no obvious obstacles inhibiting their utilisation before the advent of typewritten manuscripts. This is not the case. Repetition of points is laborious when writing with an ink pen. Doing so at speed (before the ballpoint) might damage the point of whatever writing tool was being used. Forming a punctus was a slow process in comparison to forming a dash. It required a minute squiggle rather than a dotting action in order to avoid mishaps. Hence for those who wished to write fluidly and quickly, and retain the integrity of their page and pen, the visual symbolism afforded by the points was effectively unavailable. Given the dash’s lack of iconicity for representing pausal aspects (which is where the ellipsis points derive all their primary functions from), the usurpation of the dash’s role in representing pausal, syntactical and semantic ellipsis by a repeated symbol of some description was probably an inevitable process. As the most minimalistic of symbols, use of the punctus in unobtrusively gaining the reader’s attention had been previously established. While speculative, Toner’s contention that the origin of the modern points lies in the leader is supported by the fact that, for a typist, the composition of ellipsis points or a leader would be an identical process – quite simply: space, period, repeat. As Crystal points out, there’s “an element of convenience behind a typing usage” (2013). He makes the point more explicit in his book on punctuation: “multiple repetition is simply a matter of holding down the period key” (2015: 163). Crystal is referring here to word-processors and computers. While manual typewriters don’t allow for such automation, they do make the repetition of the
punctus much more convenient, eliminating (as per Heidegger) the marks of the hand. Crystal too notes how the process is standardised by the typewriter, contrasting typed ellipsis points with their written counterpart, which are “often erratically written, with different amounts of space on either side, and with varying amounts of spaces between the dots” (162). Crystal’s arguments support the idea that ellipsis points are inherently more suited to type than to writing.

The direct evolution of the modern ellipsis points (which Toner claims) from the three stars, or lacunae, of the medieval manuscript tradition, is difficult to reconcile with their difference in form. While there is certainly a similarity in iconicity (and meaning) between these items, printing is a digital operation. The manipulation of characters in this way cannot easily evolve in such a manner. It seems more likely that the leader, which is identical in composition, gave rise to the form of the ellipsis, even if the practise of the three stars established its meaning. So essentially the ellipsis point may have derived their meaning from the stars in manuscripts (and later the asterisk in printing [see Parkes: 57]), but their form from the leader. It was, however, not necessary for all (or even a majority of) writers to compose their scripts in type (although it is probable that subsequent to this period a majority did). It is only required that a significant number of influential writers compose their text in this manner. Because some writers were able to conveniently exploit the repeated point at will without the previous inhibiting factors of writing manually, usage could become popularised in print. Its intrinsic iconicity allowed it to easily became universally understood, and it
quickly found a firm place as a convention within the writing system. Once a
convention was established, it could override earlier inhibiting factors.

The symbol, however, had been available in print since the medium’s inception,
so why had it not been employed by printers? At certain points in literary history
printers exercised extensive creative control over such decisions. Here a modern
analogy is instructive. Emoticons such as < :) > (smiley face) and < ;( ) > (winky face),
which are now ubiquitous in social media, have been available to those composing in
type since the invention of the typewriter. They did not gain prominence, however, until
casual, informal (and essentially free) typewriting became available to the public at the
end of the twentieth century. This was due to the enormous increase in volume of
written communication with the advent of texting, email, and social media
(technologies which had been invented half a century earlier). Similarly, although
ellipsis points were available to printers from the start, it was not until authors
themselves had an effective and convenient method to construct the mark that they
came to predominate. The invention of the typewriter, initially a tool retained for use by
trained professionals did not herald a change in writing practices, but the mass
manufacture of affordable and practical typewriters did.

In summation, ellipsis points in their current form seem likely to have arisen due
to a combination of two factors. The first is the greater semantic power of repeated
points in representing the passage of time (in comparison to the dash which initially
performed these functions). This iconicity is of particular utility in genres which
textually represent speech, such as the novel. As Pinker demonstrates, we have an innate propensity for mentally representing time as rhythmically segmented (2007: 430). As such, the points visually pander to a human predisposition. They were not adopted sooner because the inconvenience of writing them by hand acted as a restraining factor. Manually producing the points was not simply laborious, dotting the page rapidly with a pencil could lead the writer to blunt, or even break the graphite tip, and with a pen would threaten the same to the nib, with the added risk of flooding the page with ink. The advent of print did not alter this situation – writers were not writing in print. Manuscripts in the first instance were ubiquitously written by hand. The dash, as a continuous stroke, is perfectly suited to this mode of production. The manner of writing when typing (the rhythmically repeated gesture of pressing identical keys), is in accordance with the imagery of the rhythmic repetition of marks. The ellipsis points, however, did not find prominence even at the advent of the typewriter because typewriting remained largely a professional occupation, and typewriters a piece of industrial rather than personal equipment. It was not until the typewriter found its way into the homes of authors that there was a real opportunity to utilise points in the composition of manuscripts themselves. At this point the transition from dash to point was quite rapid (and corresponds with the timeframe for the development of commercially viable personal typewriters).

Despite the tendency to define ellipsis points as signs of omission (which is their dominant usage in non-fiction), ellipsis points have their origins in poetry, drama, short
stories – and perhaps most notably the novel. In terms of print, they remain largely a literary phenomenon. Aside from representing omission, these are functions that are not often required in many genres of writing. This is due to the element of speech spontaneity they capture by representing pauses (for thought, for emphasis, etc). This in turn explains why ellipsis points are much more common in dialogue than in narrative – and indeed, why it seems ellipsis points were initially largely confined to dialogue. The genre of the novel, as a broad and blank canvas for the writer, provided a form in which the points found a phonological function (duration). The mark diversified from there, spreading from dialogue, to related functions in narrative, and eventually to other media. The remaining division in frequency of usage in the novel, however, between dialogue and narrative, reinforces the interpretation of the ellipsis points as carrying some iconicity that represents the passage of time. It is from this simple symbolism a depth of meaning springs.

---

57 The revolution in information technology has led to their adoption and ubiquity within a wide range of social media and messaging technologies to perform the same functions. There is a particularly acute correspondence between their use in dialogue in novels, and their use on social media and messaging apps, due to the informal and conversational nature of these forms of communication. However, while these technologies often recreate certain elements of speech (for example using emoticons to indicate tone), they do not purport to represent spoken language in the way that dialogue within a novel does, and as such there is difference in usage.
Chapter 3: Spelling

Spelling might not seem like a promising subject for literary analysis. If discussion was to be confined to standard spelling, that would be the case. Words, we are all taught at primary school, have a fixed spelling that is invariant (Bradley & Huxford, 1994: 425). This one simple idea informs not only the prevalent conception about standard spelling, but given its dominance, also establishes the benchmark against which all non-standard spellings are understood. Prior to the advent of informal textual communication via texting and social media, novels (along with short stories, poems, comics, and advertising) were one of the few genres of writing in which spellings that intentionally did not conform to this standard appeared. According to this prevalent idea, however, a word can only be spelled right or wrong, there is nothing in-between. There can, therefore, be no creative choices for an author to make, no room for individual expression, and thus, no space for critical interpretation either. Under this conception, the only deviations that make it into print are mistakes on the part of the author, “typos” (and even then, only those mistakes that subsequently went unnoticed by the editor also).

Many authors, however, are acutely aware of the inaccuracy of this picture, because they utilise non-standard spellings towards various ends. At the next level of production, professional editors of fiction will certainly have a fuller picture. They will of course be aware of the distinction between American and English spellings, for example. Like most readers, editors will almost certainly also have encountered non-
standard spelling – such as dialect spelling. They will probably also know that
standardised spelling is a relatively late phenomenon in the history of written English.
Nevertheless, part of an editor’s job is to act as a filter, in particular with respect to
spelling and punctuation, where a large portion of their task is to make the text conform
to the standard. In The Stuff of Literature, Levenston describes the relationship thus:
“Authors are normally presumed to be accurate spellers. If they are not, there are
always publishers’ copy editors to correct their manuscripts and hide their shame”
(1992: 54). The profession often demands a certain instinct for homogenising text – one
of their crucial tasks is spotting mistakes, which are to a large extent defined simply as
deviations from the standard. Despite their standardising role, editors of fiction must
engage with some forms of non-standard spelling – such as dialect spelling, eye-dialect,
or word-creation in science-fiction, etc. In this chapter, the concepts underpinning
standard spelling will be discussed in some detail, along with how the novel as a genre
can sometimes encourage spellings which deviate from this standard. Different
categories of non-standard spelling will be charted as they relate to the genre, and some
examples will be discussed. This will be followed by a case-study comparing and
contrast ing two different methodologies of dialect spelling in novels, those of Roddy
Doyle and Irvine Welsh.

The very concept of an unassailable standard – language existing in some
idealised state, above and beyond actual use – leads to misconceptions about many
dimensions of language. This issue is particularly acute when dealing with complex
language loaded with carefully considered semantic weight – which is often the case in novels and other forms of literary writing. In particular because of the assumption there is a monolithic standard that is neither in doubt nor in flux, syntax, punctuation, pronunciation, and indeed, spelling are often appraised according to binary ideas of correct or incorrect. However, as Steven Pinker puts it, the rules of English:

[ . . . ] are not logical truths that one could prove like theorems, nor are they scientific discoveries one could make in the lab. And they are certainly not the stipulations of some governing body, like the rules of Major League Baseball.

(2014a: 121)

Language is defined by usage. Words become accepted simply because they are being used. Spelling is no different. We usually see spelling through the narrow blinkers of the standard, which blinds us to the potential for creativity, innovation, and different forms co-existing with the standard.

Although this standard is dominant, the alphabetical system permits a variety of letter arrangements to represent the same sounds. A hackneyed example of the potential to render the same word with a wildly different spelling is “ghoti”, a coinage created purely to demonstrate how unpredictable the spelling system of English is. Although it is wilfully aberrant, it does retain some heuristic value. Often attributed to George
Bernard Shaw, it appears nowhere in his writings (Zimmer: 2008). “Ghoti” first appears in print in a magazine article of 1874, itself quoting a personal letter of 1855:

My son William has hit upon a new method of spelling Fish. As thus:—

G.h.o.t.i. Ghoti, fish. Nonsense! say you. By no means, say I. It is perfectly vindicable orthography. You give it up? Well then, here is the proof.

Gh is f, as in tough, rough, enough; o is i as in women; and ti is sh, as in mention, attention, &c. So that ghoti is fish.

(St James Magazine, 1874: 406)

The example itself is perhaps misleading, because in practice deviations from the standard do not obfuscate decipherment in this way. It is usually immediately clear what word is being communicated, whereas the very aim of <ghoti> is to dupe the reader into thinking of a completely different sound than the one subsequently attributed. Nevertheless, the reason <ghoti> caught on, was that the mapping of sound to spelling had become such an unconscious process in the competent reader that an unusual arrangement of standard sound to letter mapping shocked them into realising the process was far from as uniform as they imagined. The <ghoti> red-herring captured people’s imaginations, even making it into that greatest novel (or perhaps anti-novel) of non-standard spelling, Finnegans Wake: “Gee each owe tea eye smells fish. That’s U” (Joyce, 1939: 299). Joyce’s word-play here depends on a phonological resemblance to
the pronunciation of letters, drawing attention to the distinction between speech and
writing, not least because even the concept of letters is an function of language in its
written variant only. This element alone throws into focus the bidirectional interaction
between writing and speech in widely a literate world. As Walter J. Ong (1982) argues,
while writing is often seen as an imitation of speech, writing has, often imperceptibly
influenced how we conceive of language in its spoken form also. This is true not least
of spelling, which encourages the idea that words are fundamentally composed of
letters, when letters are not an essential aspect of language at all.

Shaw became associated with the <ghoti> example because of his quest to
reform English spelling. His hope was, that by demonstrating how supposedly
unpredictable and irregular English spelling was, he would motivate people to create
and codify a more sensible system. He maintained faith in this possibility until his
dying day, making provisions in his will to use his assets to “form a trust to revamp the
unwieldy English alphabet into a phonetic one of forty letters” (Oxford Dictionary of
National Biography). As Samuel Johnson could have told him two hundred years
earlier, the project was doomed from the outset. Johnson recognised the Sisyphean folly
of attempting to determine language from above. He wrote in the preface to his 1755
Dictionary of the English Language of lexicographers who would attempt to control
usage:
[. . .] their vigilance and activity have hitherto been vain; sounds are too volatile and subtile for legal restraints; to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength.

(Preface, unnumbered)

Johnson’s dictionary was written after the standardising process had already got under way. This process did not begin due to some caveat, but rather the arrival of the medium of print itself. The much wider dissemination of writing permitted by print demanded a sort of dialectal lingua franca at every linguistic level. As this was language in its written form, orthography was one of more obvious dimensions of variation. While for many years spellings varied just as in the manuscript tradition (ie. not only regionally, or between authors, but even internally within a single book), when the standard arose, it quickly attained dominance. It did so without warrant from any authority, but instead through its utility. As David Crystal put it, “Once the standard is in the hands of the printers, they do not let it go” (2004: 262). Spelling was no longer seen as a matter of choice, often no longer even noticed let alone questioned, despite the often counterintuitive or baroque conventions which arose epitomised in the <ghoti> example. Intentional deviations, therefore, became remarkable. In contrast to the folly Shaw embarked upon in his attempts to reform a largely organic and decentralised system of usage, many literary writers saw this as an opportunity. More experimental
novelists from Sterne on would play with those assumptions and expectations, referencing the rules as they broke them. As a form heavy not only in dialogue (often encouraging dialectal spelling to represent characters speaking regional varieties of English), but also prone to the incorporation of other written forms (such as letters sometimes encouraging misspelling to represent the writing of poorly educated characters), the novel is a genre which often exhibits non-standard spelling in a variety of roles and contexts.

The most immediate distinction that needs to be drawn when discussing non-standard spelling in fiction is between dialect spelling and eye-dialect. The first alters spelling to capture the actual sounds of dialect speech (i.e. the same word but pronounced differently). Eye-dialect, towards a few different ends, offers alternative spellings that need not indicate a different pronunciation. Twain’s “warn’t”, for example, refers to a Southern American pronunciation of <wasn’t>, replacing the “s” with an “r” to indicate an actual phonological phenomenon in the dialect represented, albeit of necessity imprecisely. This must be read as dialect spelling. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “O! missis, missis . . .” in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (2007: 1707), however, does not suggest any necessary difference in pronunciation (certainly not any specific alternative pronunciation) from the standard spelling (which in this case would be the abbreviated <Mrs.>). As the <ghoti> example shows, the phonological value of vowels in English is notoriously variable, so <missis>, <Missus> or <Mrs.> might all be pronounced the same way. Stowe’s use of <missis> combines lowercase <m> with non-standard
spelling, perhaps suggesting non-standard speech, which could be dialectal, though more likely a variation based on class than region. The lowercase <m> of course, has no phonological counterpart, reinforcing the interpretation that it is not a precise phonological correspondence she wishes to convey, rather than the overall air of informality, that is a defining characteristic of eye-dialect. It may be that representing the speech of supposedly poorly educated characters such as this somehow references their writing. As they might write in a non-standard manner, their speech is represented in this way. Eye-dialect can convey this overall impression of informal, dialectal speech not by mapping sounds to letters, but rather by visually indicating a deviation away from the standard. The reader is not given cues to the particular sounds of the deviation. As Levenston puts it, offering such examples as “uv” for “of and “dun” for “done”, “the eye perceives them as non-standard forms, though the ear recognises their normality” (1992: 55). Spelling here is a sort of visual semiotic marker, communicating impressionistically general characteristics of the speaker or narrator being represented. The process of word formation – the particular arrangement of a set of symbols to form a word – therefore, is a matter of some discretion. The choices involved can carry semantic weight, and eye-dialect would not be used if this were not the case. Eye-dialect is an intrinsically textual phenomenon – it cannot be translated effectively into speech in the way that dialect spelling can.

Despite the dominance of the standard in primary school English teaching, the way children learn to spell equips them to understand dialect spelling. Laura Bradley
and Lynette Huxford contend that for the multitude of “exceptions” in English spelling, children are “encouraged to look at a word and to remember what it looks like” (1994: 425). They also explain, however, that while this is true for many of the notoriously counter-intuitive English spellings, in order to learn how to spell correctly children need to “discover the relationship between phonemes and graphemes” (425). “When they can divide a word into phonemes (sounds)”, Bradley and Huxford explain, “they use a letter (grapheme) or group of letters to reproduce each phoneme when they write a word” (425). This is clear to anyone who has corrected the misspellings of a child, as very often they deviate from the standard in a manner that conforms more regularly to the sound/grapheme mapping system than the standard itself (eg. <kat> for <cat>). It is the irregularity of English spelling that must be learned by rote, not the system of intuitively creating or reading spellings (via sound to grapheme mapping). As such, the literate are equipped not only to know which words are intended by non-standard spellings, but also to infer the sounds indicated by non-standard spellings even when these deviate from the standard dialect.

Misspelling, which must be defined differently than dialect- and other forms of non-standard spelling, can certainly have its own functions within the novel.58 Indeed, 

---

58 Misspelling in this context might be defined as intentional deviations away from prescribed spelling on the part of the author, usually portraying unintentional deviations from the standard on behalf of a character. As such, it must be seen as a phenomenon that begins after the emergence of standardised spelling, and one that functions in relation to the standard. Eye-dialect might be seen as a form of misspelling, but this is dependent on context – often eye-dialect is used to convey a vague sense of non-standard speech, where no written form is intended to be at play. Misspelling, on the other hand, should be understood as referencing writing, often used intentionally to portray poor spelling ability on behalf of a character.
misspelling has a distinguished history in the genre. As Julia Fawcett (2016) notes, Sterne played liberally not only with misspellings, but with the very concept of spelling in a newly standardised orthographical age. This tradition carries on in contemporary fiction, although some of the negative connotations of misspellings in the past may no longer be present in an era where both dyslexia and poor education are less stigmatised. Nevertheless, use of misspellings can function in much the same manner it always has, as an aid to characterisation.

Another category which also provides scope for an author to make spelling choices with interpretive consequences is word invention. Several factors may be at play when the author chooses how invented words are to be spelled. These include sound symbolism, accordance with the existing spelling system of English, or discordance with the same system (for example alien names in science fiction). Authors create new words for a variety of purposes, proper nouns being most obvious – fictional narratives often require fictional names and places. These, however, are often based on existing forms or conform to existing conventions.

In David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004), for example, one segment is set in a dystopian post-apocalyptic future, and the characters speak what seems to be a sort of devolved English: “The babbit’d got no mouth, nay no nose-holes either, so it cudn’t breath an’ was dyin’ from when Jayjo’s ma skissored the cord, poor little buggah” (254). The proper nouns are more unusual than the rest of the words and syntax (which can generally be related directly to standard forms), with places such as “Sloosha’s
“Crossing” (252) and “the Lornsome Dunes” (322), and characters such as “Wimoway” (279) and “Old Ma Yibber”. Although unfamiliar (despite incorporating standard English elements such as <Crossing> and <Old>), these invented words by Mitchell do conform to the conventions of standard English spelling in terms of letter-pairing etc. Compare, for example, proper nouns in the Irish language, with places such as “Dún Laoghaire”, and names such as “Ó Conchobhair”, which display diacritics and letter arrangements not generally used in English. As this chapter in *Cloud Atlas* progresses, we find out that the setting is the island of “Ha-why” (289), which, it becomes obvious, is the Hawaii of the future. Seemingly more unusual spellings in this chapter of *Cloud Atlas* which apparently do not derive from the English system (such as “Mauna Kea” [282] and “Kukuihaele” [298]) are simply existing place-names in Hawaii. Where Mitchell creates his own words, they are bound to the English spelling system – which is not inappropriate seeing as the characters are supposed to speak a future dialect of English. It is notable, therefore, that the character “Sonmi-451” from another chapter of *Cloud Atlas* (also set in the future) has a name suggestive of a spelling system other than English: <nm> clusters are rare in English, but the similar “Sunmi” is an English spelling of a female given name in present day Korea. It is reasonable to assume that the <Sonmi> in “Sonmi-451” is intended to represent a future evolution of the Korean form <Sunmi>, and as such deviates from usual English spelling. The spelling choices

---


60 The “-451” suffix is more obviously non-standard, as names do not usually include numbers of such an order of magnitude – those names that do incorporate a number indicating order of
Mitchell makes in word-creation accord with the setting of his novel, both
geographically, and in time (language always being subject to change). Although
spelling choices were made in all these cases, the process of word-creation does not
happen independently of existing spelling-systems. Our knowledge of current standards
inevitably influences us, either to mimic or avoid.

When considering the choices involved in the process of word formation in
writing, it must also be taken into consideration that there is a little incoherence in the
traditional theoretical boundary between spelling and certain marks of punctuation.
When they are word internal, punctuation marks must also be considered as part and
parcel of the orthography rather than punctuation per se. As such, items like the
apostrophe in <wasn’t> must be treated when examining spelling – as should the
hyphen in compounds such as <well-respected>. There is much discretion regarding
abbreviation, hyphenation and compounding, and the unavoidable choices an author (or
editor) needs to make must be given critical attention when analysing literature as a
visual medium. Such choices can also have implications for semantic content. A
<flowerpot> is a flower pot, but a <hotdog> is not a hot dog. In the aforementioned
post-apocalyptic chapter of Cloud Atlas Mitchell uses both compounding and
apostrophised abbreviation extensively to create his postulated future dialect of English.

_lineage would not usually run into three figures in Arabic numerals, and are traditionally
presented in Roman numerals in any case (for example, current British monarch, Elizabeth II). The
<451> here represents the fact the character is a clone: one of a number of “Sonmis”, all
identical servers in fast-food restaurant chain “Papa Song’s”. Such an order of magnitude makes
sense in this context, as it would be necessary in order to distinguish this particular iteration of
the Sonmi genotype from the hundreds of others._
Compounding is a common process of word-creation, and it is often easy to infer the meaning of new compounds from their constituent parts. For example, although written in this unfamiliar dialect replete with novel compounds and abbreviations, this sequence in *Cloud Atlas* does not pose any interpretive difficulties: “I din’t trust the Shipwoman but I tol’rated her ’round my dwellin’ politesome ’nuff so I could spy her better” (278). Aside from <din’t>, it is unclear whether there actually is any phonological element at play in Mitchell’s abbreviations here, but the spelling conventions differentiate this speech as dialectal, as do unusual compounds such as <politesome>. More subtle distinctions than this, however, may be inferred from an author’s choice to apostrophise abbreviations or compound words. The complexities of apostrophisation and compounding are discussed in more detail (as they relate to dialectal spelling) in the case study in this chapter. Much compounding and hyphenation is discretionary. This is not usually the case with word internal “punctuation” such as apostrophes to indicate contractions or possessives. Deviations away from the standard in this regard, which as we shall also see often have a cogent rationale, remain “misspellings” according to convention.

The dominance of the concept of “misspelling” v correct spelling can be too simplistic, particularly when compared to the growing acceptance of non-standard or dialect speech. Accidental misspelling, however, must be separated from intentional

---

61 The BBC, for example, instituted a policy of issuing news and other content in non-standard Englishes as far back as the Second World War (Eschner, 2017).
deviations from the standard. This is a distinction that is not usually instilled when
gaining literacy, indeed, it is actively discouraged by the assumed hegemony of the
standard. There is of course good reason for this – communication is facilitated because
everyone in a linguistic community follows the same rules. The closer they adhere to
these rules, the smoother the process of exchanging information runs. Concepts of
misspelling are revealing of how the standard is conceived, and what form deviations
may take. Citing a 1993 National Foundation for Educational Research study on
spelling (which examined over a thousand essays by schoolchildren), Vivian Cook,
codifies spelling errors into 5 groups:

1. Insertion of extra letters, such as the <l> added to “untill”

2. Omission of letters, such as the <r> missing from “occuring”

3. Substitution of different letters, such as <a> instead of <i> in “definate”

4. Transposition of two letters, such as <ei> for <ie> in “freind”

5. Grapheme Substitution involving more than two letters but only a single
cause, for example when an equivalent according to sound correspondence
rules is substituted for the usual form, as in “thort” for “thought”

(2004: 124)

The list above does not refer to intentional deviations from the standard, but it
nevertheless provides a useful categorisation of the forms deviations may take. It is
included here for two reasons: to provide a comparison with dialect spellings, and to show that eye-dialect is a distinct practice from dialectal spelling.

In literature, dialect spellings, while deviating from the standard in a manner that would be considered “misspelling” by the average teacher, cannot be considered in terms of category 4, but often do meet the criteria of categories 2, 3, and 5, and sometimes even category 1. Category 5 must be separated from this group, in that it is never an error in the same way 1, 2, 3 & 4 can be. This is because the correspondence between the sequence of letters and the spoken version of the word is intentional. This is true in some cases of 2 & 3 also, as omission or substitution of a single letter can be used to signal pronunciation. Eye-dialect does conform to all the above categories, bar category 5. This further demonstrates that this category must be considered separately. As soon as a deviation away from the standard offers a correspondence between phoneme and grapheme that the standard spelling does not, it ceases to be eye-dialect and must instead be considered in terms of dialect spelling. Eye-dialect further distinguishes itself from dialect spelling in that when it isn’t confined to the standard repertoire of type (for example when it is rendered in an image purporting to represent handwriting of some description), it often includes reversed letters. These have no spoken counterpart, further emphasising the delineation between dialect spelling and eye dialect. A backwards <e> bears no correspondence to any phonological aspect of speech, unlike for example the substitution of <s> for <r> in Twain’s “warn’t.”
Some of the degree of choice available to authors is actually a result of a deficit in the alphabetical system. The alphabet has only 26 letters, but English has over forty phonemes. As David Crystal explains, this is true of every variety: “whatever accent you have – Canadian, Australian, Irish, Indian, Nigerian [. . .] – you’ll be using a similar number [of phonemes], forty or so” (2012: 19). The orthography of English deals with this problem quite simply, by sometimes allowing the same letter to stand for two or more different sounds. “There may be several ways to spell a word (only one of which is conventionally correct),” explain Lennox & Siegel, “however there is usually only one way a given configuration of letters sounds” (1994: 102). So a number of different spellings can recreate the same sounds. This has more implications for eye-dialect than dialect spelling – but eye-dialect and dialect spelling can cross over, and in some cases difficult to distinguish. In certain cases it will not be clear whether a non-standard spelling in fact indicates a difference in pronunciation or not.

Eye-dialect itself might be subdivided into two types: speech and writing. Here the distinction would be quite clear. In the novel, the first purports to be a record of speech, constructed so as to convey an impression of non-standard/informal speech, but not creating the non-standard spelling on the basis of matching phoneme to grapheme (which would be dialect spelling). The second purports to be a record of writing, and as such represents plain misspelling on the part of the character. Again, the aim here is not to match grapheme to phoneme, allowing the reader to reconstruct any particular sound, but instead aiming to simulate spelling errors on the part of a character. The second
recreates accurately an actual phenomenon – people are liable to misspell words in real life. The first is impressionistic, aiming to replace the sounds of non-standard speech with a non-standard spelling that does not correspond directly with any sounds, but instead communicates some quality of deviation from the standard through non-standard appearance. The second should perhaps not be considered in terms of eye-dialect at all, however, the two may be linked in that eye-dialect may achieve its iconicity through a resemblance to the type of misspelling associated with the characters whose speech it represents. In other words, the impression of a character whose speech is represented with eye-dialect as informal, dialectal, or uneducated, may be successful because of an association in the mind of the reader between misspellings and such individuals. Readers may also perhaps conflate eye-dialect with dialect spelling, even when no phonological difference is actually being signalled (as in Stowe’s <missis>), the visual iconicity of a deviation away from the standard may alone be enough to encourage the reader to infer non-standard speech.

In Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2004), the fastidiously pedantic Christopher Boone never makes a misspelling, despite his young age. This in itself contributes to the characterisation of this protagonist as an autistic savant, giving further indication of his exceptionality. It is only when Christopher discovers a cache of letters from his mother (who, up until that point, he has been led to believe is dead), that misspellings are used to dramatic effect:
We had a lot of arguments like that. Because I often thought I couldn’t take things any more. And your father is really patient but I’m not, I get cross, even though I don’t mean too. And by the end we stopped talking to each other very much because we knew it would always end up in an argument and it would go nowhere. And I felt really lonely. (134-5)

As Christopher reads these letters, he realises his mother isn’t in fact dead, and has been trying to contact him for the duration of her absence. The misspellings contribute to the emotional impact of the moment by emphasising the vulnerability of his mother (both her profound upset at leaving Christopher, and the fact she was incapable of fulfilling her parental duty). This tragedy is portrayed as inevitable: her inability to competently fulfil her role as mother is echoed by her difficulty conforming to societal standards in terms of orthography. These misspellings are very different than dialect spelling.

Christopher’s mother’s spelling choices are not volitional, nor are they systematic – she cannot do better at the task, just as she could not do better at fulfilling her parental role. She herself recognises that this is a reality that cannot be changed: “I was not a very good mother, Christopher. Maybe if things had been different, maybe if you’d been different, I might have been better at it. But that’s just the way things turned out” (133). Her abdication of her parental role is not portrayed as her fault – as with her writing, she is simply operating at the limit of her capabilities. The spellings represent a best attempt, which poignantly parallels the shortcomings as a mother she outlines to
Christopher herself in her letters, explaining that she tried her best but was simply unable to do any better.

*The Curious Incident* purports to be a book written by Christopher Boone detailing his attempts to solve the titular mystery, and presents a variety of textual ephemera he encounters on this quest. Given the diversity of textual forms represented graphically in *The Curious Incident*, from signage, to t-shirts, to exam papers, it is interesting that Haddon did not choose to utilise a facsimile of handwriting to represent the letters by Christopher’s mother (as Irvine Welsh does in *Skagboys*, for example). The letters are presented in bold-face and italics. While the italics do carry some iconicity of hand-writing (see chapter on typography), it can only be assumed that the author felt the stylistic differences in vocabulary and syntax, when combined with the misspellings, were enough to successfully convey a convincing impression of a different author from the rest of the text. These misspellings are perhaps the most obvious stylistic dissimilarity between the language of Christopher’s mother and that of other writing in this book. The apparatus of letter writing (beginning with the date, followed by “Dear” etc) would, of course, have been enough to separate and announce these letters. However, given the duplicity to which Christopher has been subjected in relation to his mother’s whereabouts, this may not have been enough to convince him, or the reader, of their authenticity. The stylistic uniqueness of the writing, replete with her characteristic spelling mistakes, however, is.
The letters contain not only misspellings (such as <argumants> for <arguments>), but also confused spellings, substituting homophones for each other (for example, <too> for <to>). Fawcett sees this tradition as beginning with Sterne, who she asserts achieved “eccentricity and [. . . ] illegibility using words that might be found in any dictionary” (2016: 112). In Tristram Shandy, Sterne at one point has his narrator make an ironic meta-linguistic observation that draws sharp attention to the potential ambiguity of homophones:

I define a nose, as follows,—intreating only beforehand, and beseeching my readers, both male and female, of what age, complexion, and condition soever, for the love of God and their own souls, to guard against the temptations and suggestions of the devil, and suffer him by no art or wile to put any other ideas into their minds, than what I put into my definition.—For by the word Nose, throughout all this long chapter of noses, and in every other part of my work, where the word Nose occurs,—I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less. (173-4)

In this passage, Sterne is explicitly referencing the concept that words should have discrete and static definitions, and playfully dismissing the idea that there is a homophonic double-meaning at play. Yet this passage is discussing a type of knowledge, the knowledge of semantics and spelling, and it is obvious that the
misunderstanding he is creating (while ostensibly warning against) is the confusion of <nose> with <knows>. As the Introduction noted in relation to Todorov, transgression can often be best understood in light of, and relation to, the rules being violated. The ludic digression above would not have been pertinent before Johnson’s dictionary. More generally, Sterne’s use of homophonic ambiguity could not have come about pre-standardisation. Again, this emphasises the essentiality of print to the novel as a genre (print being the catalyst for the proliferation of an orthographical standard). “Tristram Shandy”, Fawcett argues,

[ . . . ] abounds, after all, with printed words that can be found “without the least variation or transposition of a single letter” within the pages of Johnson’s Dictionary but that have taken on meanings that Johnson could never have foretold (and might never have permitted). (118)

This type of misspelling (the substitution of homophones) is likely to become much more common than those misspellings which appear nowhere in a dictionary. Electronic forms of text continue to supersede manual forms, and the proliferation of spellcheckers and predictive text programs usually do not permit such deviations from the standard, but often miss the misplacement of different homophonic spellings (such as <there> for <they’re> etc). Authors who want to recreate the misspellings of their characters will reflect such changes in the practices of writing in their texts. It is noteworthy too, that
the brief increase in dialect spelling among the populace with the rise of informal
textual communication such as text messaging and social media also became subject to
the homogenising forces of technologies such as predictive text. The global influence of
new technologies on the text parallels an increasing cultural hegemony. David Crystal
notes that “the influence of American English on other countries remains far greater
worldwide than that of any other kind of English” (2004: 508). As one standard recedes,
another looms on the horizon.

Literature, however, may continue to provide an increasingly rare space for texts
which do not conform to that standard. Dialect spelling is of particular interest, because
when it is employed authors are not simply disobeying the rules (as in eye-dialect),
representing mistakes on the part of uneducated characters (as with misspelling), or
choosing between already existing systems of spelling (as with British v English). In
utilising dialect spelling (which by definition does not have a truly established
standard), they are offering their own systems of representing the language of particular
speech-communities. This means not only taking the creative act to the orthographical
level, but doing so holistically, not just for individual words (as with new coinages), but
for language in its entirety. There are many decisions involved in this process beyond
the representation of speech-sounds, and these choices and methodologies have gone
relatively unexamined. This is what the following case study discusses.
Case Study: Dialect Spelling

Non-standard spelling must inevitably be contrasted with the standard from which it departs. Given the hegemony of this standard, it may seem like the only bar against which dialect standard spellings can be measured. This would occlude the fact, however, that there are a variety of different approaches to the task of creating dialect spellings. It is not only the choice to depart from the standard that is important, how those differences are constructed can have interpretive consequences also. To try and understand the process, function, and interpretive consequences of such choices in dialect spelling demands that different methodologies be compared and contrasted.

Roddy Doyle and Irvine Welsh have both been lauded for their representation of the working-class dialects of their home cities, Dublin and Edinburgh respectively. Since neither of these dialects have an agreed upon written standard, both Doyle and Welsh use their own systems of translating those spoken dialects into the texts of their novels. The fact they represent different dialects has perhaps occluded the fact they represent these dialects very differently in terms of spelling choices. These choices are ripe for linguistic analysis.

Roddy Doyle is almost universally praised for the representation of Dublin English in his fiction. There is near consensus on this subject in the relevant literature.

---

62 It is important to note that precursors for dialect spellings of both Edinburgh and Dublin English may have influenced both authors in their spelling choices (this is discussed elsewhere in particular relation to Welsh). However, precursors alone by no means constitute a standard. Uniformity of usage, institutional acceptance, and prestige, among other characteristics, would be required to establish a standard orthography for these dialects.
For example, Christina Hunt Mahony asserts that “Doyle’s signature as an emerging novelist was his flawless recreation of working-class speech”, proclaiming Doyle’s work “gives voice to yet another previously unheard segment of the Irish population” (1998: 245). Hunt Mahony abduces no evidence (from linguistic surveys, for example) to support her claim that Doyle’s depiction of working-class speech is “flawless”. Caramine White describes Doyle’s dialogue as an “extraordinary transcription of local dialect” (2001: 103), again without discussing the compromises inherent in any transcription of speech. Dermot McCarthy refers to Doyle’s “hallmark reliance on the ‘Dub’ dialect” without defining in any way what the “‘Dub’ dialect” is, or questioning Doyle’s methodology (2003: 237). This remains the dominant critical convention surrounding Doyle’s earlier novels: that he accurately captures Dublin working-class speech in a textual form. While these critics analyse the plotlines and characters of Doyle’s novels, and deeply engage with the political implications of Doyle’s narratives in terms of nation, gender, and class, they do not scrutinise his representation of dialect beyond assertions such as those quoted above. The division between writing and speech, the differences of language in these different media, is not recognised or interrogated by these critics in their appraisals of Doyle’s representations of Dublin English. This is perhaps partly because of, as discussed earlier, how non-standard spellings are related to the standard. It is may be seen as enough to note that Doyle dispenses with the standard in utilising dialect spelling to represent Dublin English, without it being seen as necessary to examine his methodology in that process. Because
of its homogenous nature, standard spelling doesn’t encourage analysis. It might be that this has coloured critics’ perception of spelling generally, as a dimension of literary texts which does not warrant much critical attention.

For example, according to Ian Haywood “the hallmark of Doyle’s style is the granting of autonomy to his characters through the use of unmediated dialogue” (1997: 160). This statement reveals a problem with the criticism, not only of Doyle, but often of dialect in literary studies generally. Dubious assertions regarding technique and efficacy are made without recourse to the available evidence. Very often evidence from primary sources – in this case Doyle’s corpus – contradicts such claims. Neither do the literary critics (who endorse Doyle’s methodology with respect to the representation of dialect) support their assertions by engaging with the many linguists who have studied Dublin English. In any case, a claim of “unmediated dialogue” should be anathema to those analysing textual representations of speech – and fictional speech at that. Doyle’s dialogue is very obviously mediated, ubiquitously introduced with an em dash, and other typical apparatus of literary dialogue (“he said” etc.), and there is a sharp stylistic division between the standardised narrative and the dialectal spelling of the dialogue. The very fact it is presented in a written form means it is mediated. This is inevitably an act not just of transcription, but of translation. Without using close phonetic transcription afforded by the IPA, with its one to one phoneme to symbol mapping and accompanying diacritics, it is impossible to approach completely capturing the complexity of speech-sounds on the page. This discord in the criticism of Doyle’s
portrayal of Dublin English – between the terminology and analytical approaches used in literary studies, and the terminology and analytical approaches in linguistics – might not cause issues, were it not for the fact that many of the critics make claims about language in a manner that should require the type of supporting evidence that can only be found through empirical linguistic analysis. Also, at the most basic level, Doyle aims to represent the sounds of speech, but he does so in print, a medium devoid of sound. Translating between such different media must always demand some methodological choices. Critics who evaluate his success in this act of translation/transcription should engage with these choices, recognising the distinction between one medium (speech) and another (print), and making use of available linguistic sources in their appraisals of his linguistic accuracy. Among the few critics who do make explicit reference to Doyle’s methodology (and notes his move away from dialect spelling as his career progressed), is Åke Perrson. In his paper offering a “sociolinguistic” reading of Doyle’s fiction, Perrson asserts of *The Barrytown Trilogy* “Doyle makes his characters speak [. . . ] in a broad northside sociolect, indicated to a large extent through typographical devices” (2003: 51). This is to be contrasted with Doyle’s later work, in which Perrson observes “there are no sociolinguistic or typographical signals to the reader about the fact that the characters are working-class and that they live on the social and geographical outskirts of Dublin” (53). Aside from introducing the dialogue with em dashes (a well-established literary tradition), the typographical devices Perrson refers to
are presumably the apostrophes which Doyle uses to indicate deviations from the standard, and these will be discussed at greater length further in the chapter.

Bronwen Thomas makes observations about Doyle’s framing of dialogue in subsequent novels:

In *Paula Spencer*, Roddy Doyle’s follow-up to *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, the title character narrates in dialect, and the dialogue is only marked off from the surrounding discourse by dashes, such that the distance between them is minimal and they appear to blend into one another. (2012: 106)

Thomas fails to note, however, that in accordance with a general trend in Doyle’s work over time, the distance between narrator and dialogue is narrowed at an orthographical level not by providing dialectal forms within the narration, but by standardising the dialogue relative to his earlier works. Doyle might have chosen to achieve this effect vice-versa, which would have narrowed the distance not only between the narrator and the characters, but between the book itself and the speech-community he represents on the page.

As David Crystal puts it, “the norms of the standard language act as a glass through which we can see other dialects but darkly” (2004: 194). One of the reasons

---

63 Consider, for example, “I’m not goin’ to be buyin’ food for it, an’ nappies, an’ little fuckin’ tracksuits” (1998: 204), versus “I was just wondering, she says.—Because I’m going to see them tomorrow” (2006: 47).
Doyle is lauded for his representation of Dublin speech is because of his departure from the general standard in terms of spelling in order to represent the sounds of Dublin English, an often maligned and under-represented working-class dialect. Given the subordinate position of this dialect and those who speak it, it may be that there is some noblesse oblige in the praise bestowed upon Doyle, considering it is uncritical in precisely the parameters it addresses. It would appear that Doyle is sometimes being praised for the act of representation, rather than the content of those representations.

Doyle utilises non-standard spellings to represent the phonology of Dublin English because standard spelling would not convey these sounds. Once he embarked upon this task, he had much discretion in how far to deviate from the standard. For instance, Doyle’s decision to render Dublin phrases like “your man” (1998: 24) as two separate words (rather than the single lexical item they are in practice), displays a deference to the standard that goes unremarked upon in the literature. This subtle but consistent deference to the standard is evident throughout Doyle’s work, yet remains unscrutinised. The more noticeable fact Doyle peppers his prose with apologetic apostrophes warrants no attention from critics – instead he is praised for getting the Dublin accent “dead on” (Foran, 1996: 191), or for his “linguistic exuberance” (Johnston, 2000: 145) without any linguistic inquiry taking place.

William Labov’s seminal monograph, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (1964) firmly established the principle that the dialect most associated with any city is typically the working-class dialect. In his paper “Dissociation as a Form
of Language Change”, taking Dublin as his case study, Raymond Hickey (2000) demonstrated that an upper class dialect of a city might be defined in opposition to working-class speech – in other words speakers may wish to dissociate themselves from working-class people and thus subconsciously modify their accents so as to avoid precisely those sounds which define the working-class vernacular of their own city. Well-known studies such as these are of acute relevance to the discussion of working-class urban dialect, and should be the starting point for defining terms and discussing the representation of same, but they are not exploited in the literary criticism on Doyle. Value judgements are offered on the success of Doyle’s project in representing working-class vernacular, without inquiring into what that vernacular actually is.

Similarly, criticism of Irvine Welsh often flirts with tackling his representation of dialect, without engaging with his methodology (eg. spelling), or linguistic sources, either on dialect in general, or the Edinburgh dialect in particular. The critical acclaim for Welsh’s portrayal of Edinburgh English is less effusive than that for Doyle’s portrayal of the Dublin dialect. This is most probably due to Welsh having not only more immediate literary predecessors in representing Edinburgh English than Doyle in terms of Dublin English, but also an established historical literary tradition of dialect spelling in Scottish English that is unparalleled in Hiberno-English. This is particularly true in respect to orthography, where Doyle’s system does not have any obvious direct predecessor, whereas Welsh acknowledges himself his debt to specific authors proximate both geographically and in time who utilise very similar techniques (Welsh,
As discussed in the introduction, it is well-recognised that writers such as Alasdair Gray and James Kelman stylistically paved the way for Welsh. It is fair to say that Doyle, however, set more precedents in his literary representation of working-class Dublin vernacular. To this degree the critics are correct in some of their contentions about Doyle’s earlier work but more so in terms of content than methodology. It is striking that while the two authors have been compared to each other, or considered part of the same milieu, the stark differences in their renderings of their respective dialects have not been scrutinised.

Aaron Kelly, who wrote the first monograph specifically devoted to criticism of Irvine Welsh (2005), sees Welsh’s novels as building on an established tradition in their representation of Scottish-English dialect. While Kelly does understand Welsh as a writer who exploits new opportunities by going beyond the standard, he also positions Welsh as building on the work of a specific succession of Scottish writers in this respect:

[. . .] the work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Tom Leonard, James Kelman
[. . .] All of these writers refute Standard English’s claim to a monopoly

---

64 As mentioned elsewhere, Welsh also cites Doyle as an influence, specifically in relation to how he constructs dialogue. In a tweet Welsh accounted for his decision to use em dashes rather than quotation marks to introduce dialogue: “I nicked it from Roddy Doyle” (2016). It is all the more notable, therefore, that Welsh departed markedly from other stylistic choices made by Doyle (such as apostrophisation to signal non-standard spellings and reluctance to utilise non-established compounds), granting weight to the idea that these are considered choices with interpretive consequences on Welsh’s behalf.
upon thought, consciousness and intellectual reason by allowing the
voice of the vernacular to drive their narratives. (24)

Despite seeing Welsh as working within a tradition, Kelly is arguing for sociolinguistic,
and even philosophical, implications in departing from the standard by representing
dialect. Unlike those who laud Doyle’s use of dialect in dialogue, Kelly sees these
issues as particularly acute in relation to Welsh’s use of dialect outside of dialogue. He
offers some valuable observations on dialect in the novel more generally:

The superintending and authoritative register is in Standard English: it is the
language of power and objectivity, a language that can be trusted. Working-class
or regional dialects and accents never assume narrative control and where they
do appear in the conventional novel it is only as a character’s speech, which can
be regulated by the Standard English of the main narrative and safely cordoned
off with quotation marks that prevent it from assuming the elevated level of
thought or intellectual complexity. (Kelly 2005, 18)

These points are being made to emphasise the significance of Welsh’s approach, but
they can easily be repurposed to constitute a criticism of Doyle. Kelly’s general
observations about the dominance of the standard (and the subservient role of dialect) in
novels are eminently applicable to Doyle’s work, in which dialect spelling is confined
to dialogue, and standard English is the default form. The critical consensus
surrounding Doyle is all the more striking in the light of this passage from Kelly, which
describes a general trend of subordinating dialect in novels, to which Doyle conforms
almost absolutely. Another of Kelly’s observations about Welsh that can be usefully
inverted and applied to Doyle is that Welsh does not simply write in dialect, but in
idiolects (characters have individual dialects). These idiolects, what Kelly terms “the
subtleties between the registers of the diverse range of protagonists” afford Welsh’s
characters status as individuals within their city and class, not stereotypes or two-
dimensional ciphers (2005: 50). This is much less true of Doyle, whose characters are
not afforded such stylistic differences (not least because their interior voices are usually
not heard). Kelly is more interested, however, in the critical implications of where
Welsh utilises dialect (ie. within various narrative forms, not solely in dialogue) than in
how Welsh’s represents it (ie. the orthographical choices Welsh makes in transliterating
the dialect).

Gavin Miller is one of the few critics who refer explicitly to Welsh’s
methodology in this regard:

There is a view of contemporary Scottish literature in which the value of Irvine
Welsh’s work is in its contribution to the cultural diversity of the Scottish canon.
“Voice” is a keyword in the jargon of this critical approach: Welsh’s writing
matters because it gives voice to a subordinated social group – the urban
working-class – and this voice “speaks” in Welsh’s work without belittlement [. . . ] the preservation of their linguistic voices in a non-standard orthography – a spelling free from the disparaging apparatus of apostrophes that mark supposed elisions and deviations – stands for respect and celebration, rather than misrecognition and deprecation, of their cultural differences. (2010: 89)

Again, this passage on Welsh might be as usefully applied to Doyle – if Welsh’s decision to eschew the “disparaging apparatus of apostrophes” stands for “respect and celebration” then Doyle’s decision to defer to the standard orthography must be understood precisely as the “misrecognition and deprecation” to which Miller refers. The use of quotation marks in this passage suggests Miller recognises that words such as “voice” and “language” are routinely used in literary studies in a way which is nebulous verging on meaningless. He cuts through this by referring to Welsh’s methodology of transcription, and in particular the absence of the apologetic apostrophe. However, he quickly moves away from this empirical subject. Among the similarities in the critical reception of Welsh and Doyle are these references to the representation of dialect with little in the way of scrutiny in terms of examples of this dialect, or in particular comparisons with other methods of representing dialect. It is as if the hegemony of the standard has influenced the critics to disregard these choices, seeing the division between standard and non-standard as a binary without detail. However, the critics in these cases do so while explicitly referring to that very same
hegemonic and reductive conception of the standard in their appraisals of Welsh’s and Doyle’s non-standard writing.

While the correspondence between Doyle and Welsh in terms of subject matter and style has been often noted (e.g. Perrson, 2003: 51, McGuire 2012: 133, Welsh, 2016), the radically different approaches of each author to achieving their task of representing dialect has garnered less commentary. Cairns Craig has pointed out the significance of choosing the various textual accoutrements required to supplement the letters of the alphabet, particularly when representing speech:

[. . .] the written representation of the oral impels alternative typographic representations: from the appropriate conventions for transcribing particular sounds to those apostrophes that indicate missing elements of “standard” forms of words, the oral has to be marked off by a specialised set of conventions by which the limited fixities of type attempt to represent the flexible and unique forms of the individual voice. The visual effect of novels in which dialect plays a crucial role – the texture of the page – is very different from those written in standard language [. . .] for the author engaged in representing the interaction of standard written forms of language with the representation of the oral, these matters take on a far greater significance: typography itself becomes the medium of creation rather than simply the frame that holds the outcome of creation in place. Instead of language being a mimesis of the world it becomes an imitation
of the forms of language itself, in reflection of and in resistance to the condition of a country and a culture where the written language has been the medium through which the native voice of the people has been repressed. (1999: 168-9)

Although the traditional distinctions between orthography, punctuation, and “typography” have not made clear by Craig (the apostrophisation to which he refers, for example, is usually thought of in terms of punctuation, not typography), considering these visual elements holistically is nevertheless a critical strategy which makes sense. Craig’s emphasis on the standard as a repressive force in terms of dialect in this context is also useful to going beyond endorsing the fact dialect is represented on the page at all, and understanding the importance of how it is represented.

A comparative approach, contrasting the methodology of authors in representing their native dialects, offers to reveal not only the motivations behind their respective methodologies, but also many aspects of spelling in the novel usually occluded. It seems authors themselves are often a lot more cognisant of the implications of the minutiae of writing than most of their critics. Being forced to actually make these decisions – when faced with a choice of whether or not to compound two words into a single lexical item – for example, may cut through the murk of the standard dialect’s dominance, and scholastic theories of spelling. Being presented with choices in composing non-standard spellings to represent the phonology of a dialect may instil an awareness of the availability of a variety of options, options that many critics simply do
not notice. As Doyle himself puts it, in the novel form, “every tiny word, every comma, what seems like a casual decision – they’re all important” (interviewed in Smyth, 1998: 103).

Despite this undeniable attention to detail, Doyle seems unaware of the politico-linguistic implications of his deference to the standard. *The Commitments* is remarkable as a debut for its stylistic boldness: the use of song lyrics (stylised with capitalisation, dashes, and exclamation marks to indicate delivery), the heavy reliance on dialogue that saw it dismissed as a playscript masquerading as a novel, and the use of dialect spellings. There remains, however, a persistent – and perhaps undue – deference to standard English throughout the novel. *The Commitments*, with its em dashes and staccato dialogue replete with interruptions and exclamations, punctuated by only terse narrative passages, at a glance appears like a radical departure from the neat blocks of prose most novels present. However, it obeys almost every formal convention of standard presentation – apostrophisation to mark omissions of letters from standard spellings, no novel compounding, typographic homogeneity, and dialect restrained to dialogue at every linguistic level. This charge cannot be levelled at Welsh, who disregards convention in different ways in every dimension of presentation.

These differences might be attributed to Doyle and Welsh representing different dialects and milieus. However, it could be argued that Doyle and Welsh are not only part of the same tradition, but that this tradition is much more expansive than would be necessary to include both these authors. In *Devolving English Literature*, Robert
Crawford bemoans the failure of literary critics to categorise Scottish and Irish varieties of English alongside each other:

Critics have shown a reluctance to establish connections between material produced in various English-language locations that might be described as provincial. This has meant, for instance, that Scottish and Northern-Irish work tends to be seen separately. Yet there are obvious, strong shared preoccupations which make it worthwhile examining significant similarities. (1991: 286)

While he references “Northern-Irish” work here explicitly, this is part of a much broader argument that links the literary representation of non-standard dialects of many regions where English is spoken. Crawford goes on to commend Seamus Heaney for “rightly see[ing] such problems as linking ‘Americans, West Indians, Indians, Scots and Irish’” (287). It is useful to categorise literature emerging from these places – which have ineradicable cultural and linguistic connections to England, but remain divergent in these same dimensions – in Crawford’s terms of a formerly hegemonic centre versus “barbarian un-English identity” (286). Orthographic representation of different English dialects, for example, can be evaluated in the same parameters, in contrast to the same standard. That is what this chapter attempts, with Roddy Doyle and Irvine Welsh representing Dublin and Edinburgh Englishes respectively. The fact that each author is transliterating a different dialect is salient to analysis, but doesn’t prohibit the contrast.
This is in line with Crawford’s depiction of these “provincial” literatures as forming essentially part of a single tradition, a tradition which can be separated from the standard (217). It is important also, however, to recognise the particular political situation and cultural status of each of these territories when discussing the approaches taken by individual authors. As such, when considering the more confident non-standard spelling of Irvine Welsh compared to Roddy Doyle, it must be remembered that the two authors did not start on an even playing field.

As a Scottish Catholic of Irish heritage, Welsh sees many correspondences between his home country and that of Doyle. Welsh’s characters support the Edinburgh football team Hibernian F.C., founded by Irish immigrants. They sing Irish rebel songs, and some possess Irish surnames and nicknames (epitomised in recurring character “Spud Murphy”). This perhaps threatens to obscure the fact that although both nations share a traditional antipathy towards England, each country had quite different experiences with their more dominant neighbour. While the English language achieved hegemony in both Ireland and Scotland, because of the differing political status of each nation relative to England, their respective native varieties of English were not at parity. In Trainspotting Renton claims the Scots are a more subjected people than the Irish: “the Irish hud the bottle tae win their country back, or at least maist ay it” (1993: 190). This proclamation obscures the fact that up until independence the Irish were treated largely as colonial subjects, while in 1603 a Scotsman ascended to the throne. As historian of the Tudors Susan Brigden notes, Elizabeth I herself “signalled that the King
of Scots should succeed her” (2000: 356). It would have been unconscionable for an English monarch to name an Irish royal as their successor, even had the Irish royalty not been effectively abolished, dispossessed entirely or reduced to lesser titles. While Christopher Maginn sees Ireland and Scotland in many cultural and historical senses united and in opposition to England, he acknowledges the sharp political division that emerged between the two nations as early as the late Middle Ages:

[ . . . ] the general region of north (lower) Connacht/ west Ulster may be identified as the cultural and geographical centre of the Gaedhealtacht in the same way that London and Edinburgh served as the political and military centres of the kingdoms of England and Scotland. (2010: 180)

Maginn is contrasting not only the centres of political and cultural power, but perhaps most significantly the political status of the three countries. Among the most consequential differences, according to Maginn, is that “the frontier separating Gaedhil and Gaill in the kingdom of Scotland was cultural rather than political or legal and was, accordingly, much more stable than that which developed in Ireland” (181).

Historical context such as this has sociolinguistic implications that echo down through literary history, and must be considered in analysing the representation of dialect in fiction – particularly as written dialect must be evaluated in its relation to the standard. While Shakespeare mocked Welsh and Scottish dialects alongside Irish
accents in *Henry V*, as James Shapiro points out, the treatment was far from equal (2016). The Irish character MacMorris expresses contemporary attitudes towards Irish identity that persisted into modernity, and does so in sham dialect: “Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal?” (*Henry V*, 1599: iii, 2). The union between England and Scotland was formed when King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England, bringing his court from Edinburgh (Irvine Welsh’s hometown and city muse) to London. In contrast, Ireland had been granted as a fiefdom to England by Pope Adrian IV. It achieved only dominion status—a “Lordship”. Its own aristocracy swore fealty or were dispossessed. It remained as such, until 1542, when it became a Kingdom, with a foreign absentee English, King.

The poetry of Robert Burns became respected throughout the Anglosphere. These lines from “Holy Willie’s Prayer” (1785) demonstrate Burn’s committed use of dialect spelling: “That he's sae gifted;/If sae, thy hand maun e'en be borne/Untill thou lift it.” Indeed, such was the esteem in which Burns grew to be held, that his work was translated into various European minority dialects, and he thus became a standard bearer not only of Scots-English, but of dialect more generally (Barnaby, 200: 195).

Cairns Craig makes clear the disparity in status between Irish and Scottish varieties of English:

[... ] in Scotland English confronted not one but two contenders as the authentic “voice of the people”, and in Scots was a speech which was not simply
in common usage among the lower classes, but was the distinctive component of the work of Scotland's greatest writers of the previous two hundred years, the ones who had become identified with the very spirit of the nation – Burns and Scott. The language – or dialect – spoken by lower class Scots in the Lowland regions of the country – Scots – could claim to be an authentic vernacular, as Dante's Italian was in relation to Latin, and could claim to be an equal and alternative growth from the same roots as English [ . . . ] (1999: 75)

There has never been a writer of comparable stature to Burns so dedicated to Hiberno-English – nor could there have been given the contempt in which the Irish, and thus their dialect, were often held by their dominant neighbour.

Both Welsh and Doyle explore the present day social, cultural, economic, and political positions of their respective countries through the experiences and opinions of their characters. If Doyle’s debut *The Commitments* (1987) has a main protagonist, it would be Jimmy Rabbitte, the young man who forms the band which gives the novel its title. It would be easy to see him as a cipher for Doyle himself – a young man from a working-class community on the Northside of Dublin, who uses artistic guile and a DIY attitude in an attempt to commodify the culture of his community. Jimmy summarises the position of the Irish thus:

—The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.
They nearly gasped: it was so true.

—An’ Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin’ everythin’. An’ the northside Dubliners are the niggers o’ Dublin. ——— Say it loud, I’m black an’ I’m proud. (13)

In this passage Rabbitte, is positioning the Irish as England’s first colony, at the bottom of the sociological pile in Europe. Within Ireland, working-class Dubliners are on the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder. Doyle sees dialect as the primary marker of this status for the characters he portrays. Michael Pierse, an authority on working-class Irish fiction, notes that in The Snapper Jimmy Jr’s “working-class accent impedes his chances of becoming a radio presenter: Becoming acceptable in society is partly about losing the markers of a working-class upbringing” (2010: 249). Pierse also makes astute reference in this context to an incident in The Van, where “accents like newsreaders” (Doyle, 1998: 580) are associated with confidence and wealth, and intimidate Jimmy Sr., making him feel self-conscious and inferior. In The Van Jimmy Jr. has given up his hopes of managing a band, and now hopes to raise himself from his lower socio-economic status by becoming a DJ – but this still demands altering his dialect. Doyle does not, through his methodology in representing dialect, work to elevate Hiberno-English from its lower status in relation to standard English, but it is clear he is aware of its subordinate position.
The crux of the approach for which Doyle is so applauded in representing dialect, is that he simply alters the spelling of certain words to indicate Dublin English pronunciation. This, however, is almost wholly confined to dialogue. Irvine Welsh, on the other hand, often utilises non-standard dialect spelling outside of dialogue and throughout the text. As Aaron Kelly writes, “in Welsh’s work the demotic becomes a mode for thought, agency, and consciousness” (2005: 18). The same cannot be said of Doyle, who confines his non-standard spelling to exclusively dialogue. Welsh not only sees dialect spelling as appropriate for textual narrative, his characters utilise it in their writing too – for example Renton’s diaries in Skagboys, that purport to be reproduced writing. It is noteworthy that despite the fact Welsh confidently employs dialect throughout his corpus, he portrays precisely such written dialect as generally stigmatised, or perhaps considered appropriate only for personal writing or fiction. In Porno (2003) Spud writes a history of Leith, passionately conducting research, producing a manuscript, and submitting it to publishers – only to be rebuked, partly on the basis of having written it in his own dialect:

– I’m sorry if I seemed ambiguous, Mr Murphy. To be more frank, it’s quite an immature work, and you’re not really yet up to publishable standard . . .
– What dae ye mean, man?
– Well, the grammar . . . the spelling . . .
– Aye, but are youse no meant tae sort aw that oot?
– . . . to say nothing of the subject matter being not right for us.

– But youse’ve published history books about Leith before . . . ah kin feel ma voice gaun aw high, cause it’s no fair, it jist isnae, it isnae fair, nowt’s fair . . . – Those were serious works by disciplined writers, the boy sortay snaps. – this is a badly written celebration of yob culture and of people who haven’t achieved anything noteworthy in the local community. (380)

This must be seen in starkly different terms than the spelling mistakes of Christopher’s mother in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, for example. Spud’s deviations from the standard are volitional, systematised, and map onto the phonological reality of his dialect. There no such correspondences in Christopher’s mother’s misspellings, and mistakes such as hers are quite a different textual phenomenon. While Spud’s spelling is stigmatised in a similar way to misspellings, this is because they are seen as such by the publisher, despite the fact they are not. The distinction between dialect spelling and misspelling is depicted as not being observed by those who hold real cultural power; deviations from the standard are lumped into a single category.

Julie Briand-Boyd astutely observes in her PhD thesis that the suppression of dialect writing in the non-fiction genre Spud is attempting to get published in, is contrasted with Welsh’s own success: “Spud’s history is displaced, perhaps even erased [ . . . ] and yet, Welsh persists in his quest to write his own anti-history, his
nomadology, of Leith” (2019: 33). Spud’s dialect writing cannot be commodified in the same way Welsh’s own writing is, the mores of the genre won’t allow it. Welsh is making a subtle comment here, about the distinction between fiction and non-fictional writing as it relates to dialect, and about the power of the gatekeepers who police these boundaries. Briand-Boyd also notes how this thread is taken up again in *Dead Men’s Trousers*, where although the tragedy of Spud’s rejection is emphasised, the legitimacy of writing in this dialect is reasserted:

> It’s a thick manuscript, typed, with some handmade corrections. Astonishingly, it’s written in the same style of my old junk diaries, the ones I always thought I might do something with one day. In that sort of Scottish slang that takes a wee while tae get on the page. But after a few pages of struggle I realise that it’s good. Fuck me, it’s very good. I lie back on my pillow, thinking about Spud. (2018: 345)

It is notable that in this quotation Renton references his own writing, in which dialect is perceived as more palatable. While both Welsh and Doyle have referred within their novels explicitly to the stigmatisation of the dialects they represent, Welsh goes much further in rejecting this stigmatisation, not only in what he writes, but in how he writes it. Welsh’s aesthetic, employing dialect throughout the full breadth of narrative modes, stands as a rebuttal itself to the disregard in which dialect is generally held. Welsh is
heavily reliant on first-person narrators who generally express themselves in a dialect very close to that used in the dialogue. Like Doyle, his third-person narrators generally do utilise a standardised English, but Welsh’s representation of phonological aspects of dialect through non-standard spelling are more pronounced than Doyle’s.

This conservatism continues through a number of facets of Doyle’s approach. While there is certainly an accurate correspondence between his spellings and the phonology of Dublin English, this is tempered by his method of representation which usually refers back to the standard. There are, however, exceptions to this, where Doyle strikes out and offers spellings with no precedent, which depart unapologetically from the standard orthography (ie. they do not include apostrophes to signal omission etc).

For example, linguist Raymond Hickey notes that, “the frequent reduction of you /ju(:)/ to /ja/ is indicated in Doyle’s writings as <yeh>” (1998: 214). In this instance, Doyle does offer a distinctly non-standard spelling of his own to indicate the phonology of his characters. However, as Åke Perrson points out, in Doyle’s later writings this approach has been almost entirely discarded (2003: 53). Throughout the Henry Smart trilogy the title character, even in dialogue, uses the standard English “you” (2010: 40). An alternative way to represent this pronunciation is “ye”. Doyle may have avoided this to prevent conflation with the sound of the Early Modern-style English dialectal <ye> or confusion with the similar sounding rural Hiberno-English second person plural.

Avoiding phonological ambiguity is a much more acute concern among audiences who are unfamiliar with the dialect being represented. Nevertheless, “ye” remains the written
form preferred by many speakers, demonstrating the subjectivity involved in rendering speech sounds using the standard English alphabet. There are options available to Doyle in most, if not all, such instances.

Welsh is not presented with this difficulty, as Edinburgh “you” is much closer in pronunciation to Middle-English <ye>, so phonological ambiguity is not such an issue. Welsh renders it <ye> for working-class Edinburgh characters: “Cannae help ye, buddy boy!” (A Decent Ride, 2015: 9), and standard <you> for other speakers: “What are you doing?” (280). Both Welsh and Doyle revert to the standard spellings even among their dialect speaking characters when the emphasis is on the pronoun: “Craig Barksdale turns to Jonty. — What you wantin then?” (121). In this sentence it is clear from context the stress is on <you>. Welsh does not need to use italics to indicate this emphasis, the contrast is created simply by reverting from Edinburgh <ye> to standard <you>. But this is not a tactic of the writer, he is simply representing what occurs in the dialect. Åke Persson observes how Doyle accurately records the possessive pronouns of Dublin speech (2003: 52). For example, <me> replaces the possessive <my> – as in “me arse” ( Commitments, 1987:10). Perrson, however, neglects to mention the distinction between a stressed and unstressed pronoun, which like Welsh, Doyle renders faithfully. When the stress is on the issue of possession, the form changes to standard English, as in “I don’t give a fuck wha’ MY ma thinks” (20). Jimmy Rabbite Jr

---

65 See for example, “fair play to ye” attributed to Martin “the General” Cahill in, Frances Cahill’s biography Martin Cahill: My Father (2007: 34).
routinely uses “yeh” as opposed to standard English <you> (12). When emphasising the pronoun, however, the standard form is employed. This sentence displays both forms: “An’ are YOU tryin’ to tell me that yeh played with James Brown?”, demonstrating clearly that there is a semantic contrastive aspect to this usage, an interpretation reinforced in this instance by the capitalisation to indicate increased volume (25). This reversion to the standard cannot be considered in terms of deference, as it accurately reflects the reality of dialectal speech – the full standard spoken form for pronouns etc is typically used in precisely this way when the emphasis is on that word.

In his earlier works Doyle often renders words traditionally ending in <t> with an apostrophe in place of the final <t>. For example, in *The Commitments* “Abou’”, “Wha”, and “righ” appear in this manner (1987: 8). Raymond Hickey describes this practice in terms of Doyle supplying the apostrophe to “indicate the deletion of alveolar plosives”, which is a common feature of Dublin English (1998: 214). This method of indicating vernacular pronunciation acknowledges standard English spelling as inhabiting a superior position – deviations from the standard forms must be signalled by punctuation. Welsh eschews the use of apostrophes to indicate “omissions” that are deviations from the standard: “this poncey cunt wi a wee dog gets oot of a shoap and intae this smart motor” (2002: 104). Because he continues to use apostrophes for contractions “it’s” (161), possessives “Mel’s buttock flesh” (372), etc., this decision must be seen in terms of a choice not to defer to the standard, and not in terms of a rejection of punctuation similar to the final episode in *Ulysses*, for example. The
unchallenged dominance of the standard can blind us to other possibilities. It is
eminently possible to communicate in writing without utilising these elements of the
standard we take for granted. For example, also from Dublin, poet and novelist Karl
Parkinson eschews not only the apologetic apostrophes, but apostrophes full stop
(thankfully he does not discard full stops): “Im writin me way out... Im burnin wit de
word... ” (266). As with Molly’s soliloquy in Ulysses, this does not prohibit
comprehension. Welsh’s decision to retain apostrophes for possessives and some
contractions means the choice not to use apostrophes to indicate dialectal spelling must
be understood not as disregarding punctuation, but as a rejection of the dominance of
the standard dialect, at least in orthographical terms. It must be stressed that the
presence of an apostrophe on the form of <fucking> in “Ah’m fuckin well needin sorted
oot fir some cash right now” (101) would not impinge upon its pronunciation
whatsoever. There is no phonological content being delivered by the apostrophe in
Roddy Doyle’s “Fuckin’ brilliant!” (1987: 22). This cannot be interpreted, as Hickey
charitably does for the apostrophe on words traditionally ending in <t>, as a glottal stop.
The only reason to include that apostrophe is to signal that the deviation from the
standard is intentional, not a misspelling by the author, or a typo by the
editor/typesetter/printer.

As noted earlier, Gavin Miller writes of Irvine Welsh’s reputation for preserving
working-class “linguistic voices in non-standard orthography – a spelling free from the
disparaging apparatus of apostrophes that mark supposed elisions and deviations”
(2010: 89). If we accept Miller’s verdict on Welsh’s work, we must accept Doyle, contrary to the critical consensus, writes in a standard (or at least highly standardised) orthography, replete with disparaging apparatus. Doyle’s methodology in representing Dublin English is replete with precisely the type of orthographical devices Miller praises Welsh for avoiding. These include his consistent use of apologetic apostrophes to signal deviations from the standard, (“Rockin’ Rabbite, I like tha’” [1998: 316]), his inevitable reversion to standard English for narration (“She kept going, around the corner to the stop with the shelter” [1998: 317]), and his aversion to use novel compounds to accurately reflect vernacular usage (eg. “young ones” [1998: 417] as opposed to “youngones”). It is striking that on one of the rare occasions Doyle doesn’t supply an apostrophe to signal contraction/phonological omission, it is a supra-regional form that is left unmarked: “cos” (for <because> [2017: 216, 220, 222]).

Welsh is highly cognisant of the sociolinguistic issues surrounding the representation of dialect, in particular the dominance of the standard, and the historical causes and present-day consequences of that dominance:

This country is so class-based and linguistically imperialist, one of the only ways you can articulate your voice is by adopting or appropriating that BBC accent, the standard English, all the middle-class trappings. (qtd in, Berman, 1996: 57)
Roddy Doyle displays less explicit awareness of the nuts and bolts of linguistics, but the realities of sociolinguistic inequality are certainly implicit in his work, as Jimmy Jr. attempts to go through precisely such a process of appropriating a higher prestige accent. Nevertheless, there is something of this process at play in Doyle’s own rendering of working-class speech. For example, also frequently signalled by an apostrophe in *The Commitments* is the popular Dublin English pronunciation of the lexeme <of>, as in “I bet I know who thought o’ tha’” (9), “Jealous o’ you?” (105), and, “get him ou’ o’ me life” (111). When Imelda sings the song All Kinds of Everything, however, she uses the standard English form:

—all kinds—

OF EVERYTH’N’—

REMINDS ME—

OF—

YOU (119)

Although the absence of the <g> in “EVERYTHIN’” suggests she does not wholly forego vernacular pronunciation in her performance, it is plausible that she would pronounce the words in a song such as this closer to their standard English forms. Doyle thus accurately represents the variations that occur due to linguistic anxieties, and the need to shift register depending on the situation.
Doyle might show an awareness of individual variation (register shifting), however, as Aaron Kelly notes (2005: 50), Welsh proves himself aware of the distinction between dialect (the language of a particular linguistic community) and idiolect (the unique linguistic habits of an individual speaker). Obvious examples of this include Billy “Business” Birrell, the monosyllabic boxer in *Glue* (2001), whose reliance on the phrase “brutal” is a defining characteristic, or Spud’s trademark filler compound “likesay”. However, Welsh recognises idiolect not only in terms of a character’s lexicon and syntax, but also at the phonological level, even within speakers from the same linguistic community. Compare Sickboy’s “I’d love to make a proper porn film [. . . ] with extended hardcore fuck scenes” (*Porno*, 2002: 90) to Begbie’s “Ah’m fuckin well needin sortin oot fir some cash right now” (102). Sickboy retains some elements of Edinburgh phonology (“Is it yir stammer that makes ye shy, or are ye shy cause yuv got a stammer” [317]), however, matching his upwardly mobile pretensions, his idiolect is represented as more standardised than Spud or Begbie, who haven’t left Edinburgh (compare Sickboy’s <I’m> to Begbie’s <Ah’m>).

Dialect, spelling, and the individuality of characters take a metafictional turn at one point in *Porno*, in a scene that must have posed a spelling conundrum for Welsh. Begbie has just been released after a long stint in prison, and is shocked and disoriented by the changes in his hometown of Leith. His first stop is the furniture shop that his business partner Lexo has been running since Begbie’s conviction:
So ah gits a bus tae Leith, bit whin ah gits doon ah sees thit the fuckin shoap isnae even thaire! Ah mean, it’s thaire, bit it’s aw fuckin changed. Intae some fuckin daft café.

Ah sees him but, sittin behind a counter readin the fuckin paper.

Cannae miss yon big cunt, the fuckin size ay um. The place is fuckin empty; an auld wifie n two dippit cunts eatin a breakfast. Lexo, servin food in a café like a big fuckin lassie. Eh looks up n clocks ays, nearly daein a fuckin double take.

— Awright, Frank!

— Aye, ah goes. Ah looks aroond at this dump, aw wee tables n sortay Chinky writin oan the waws n daft fuckin dragons n that. — What’s aw this?

— Made it intae a café. Nae dosh in used furniture. At nights it turns intae a Thai café. Popular wi the new Leith trendies n the student population, eh grins, aw fill ay ehsel.

Fuckin tie café? What the fuck is this cunt oan aboot? — Eh?

— Muh girlfriend, Tina, she runs it really. She’s goat an HNC in caterin. Reckoned the place wid dae better as a café.

— So you’ve done no bad, ah sortay accuses the cunt, lookin around, littin um see thit ah’m no fuckin chuffed. (101-2)
Here the illusion of reality slips and the text reappears. The author intrudes into the first-person narrative of Begbie, as Welsh offers the correct spelling of “Thai” to let the reader in on the joke. Yet Begbie, whose narrative this is, continues to be unaware of the distinction. Although only a single word, it is revealing of how narrative is maintained at the orthographical level. Roddy Doyle reverts to standard English for narration in most of his works, whereas Welsh relies on first-person narrators. Once committed to maintaining this distinction, Doyle must switch back and forth, implying a narrator who is divorced from the reality of the characters and events being related.

Irvine Welsh runs into a problem on this occasion, in maintaining Begbie’s perspective while relating a pun at the orthographical level. He chooses to simply alternate without explanation, which more subtly implies a distance between the character and the text, as it suggests Begbie’s narrative is being further mediated. This narrative intrusion raises questions about literary realism, in that modes which utilise a third-person narrator, while they do not have the problem of the author intruding as Welsh does here, do insert an extra-level of narration that must be essentially ignored by the reader if the illusion of reality is to be maintained. First-person narrative is something we are all familiar with, it is the mode in which people relate their experiences to us all the time. It is only when this is disrupted, as Welsh does in this instance, that we necessarily notice anything unusual about the narrative.

There is another level of “inaccuracy” to Welsh offering the correct spelling in Begbie’s narrative, as of course this confusion is facilitated in the first instance by the
Edinburgh pronunciation of <Thai> rendered as “tie”. Therefore, supplying the correct spelling means the elision of this pronunciation, which is discordant with the approach elsewhere. This is an interruption of the orthographical conventions within the book, an exception to facilitate a pun by offering two different spellings of what would, as Begbie’s bewilderment demonstrates, be homophones in the dialect. This offers a glimpse of the artist’s hand at work in this dialogue heavy, oral style text, a rare reminder that this is a text that was composed in writing – something which, judging by critical responses, is surprisingly easy to overlook.

There is a surprisingly candid moment of similar, yet less easily explicable, self-reflexive spelling from Doyle in The Dead Republic. With his eyes shut, Henry Smart takes stock of his surroundings: “I smelt the polish before I buried my face in the cloth. It was a shammy, chamois leather, for polishing a car or van” (2007: 179). By juxtaposing two forms of “chamois” (both found in the OED, one more orthodox, one less formal but more standard in terms of spelling), Doyle demonstrates how the author has options, and the same pronunciation can be rendered in emphatically different ways. This was not a result of necessity as in the case of Irvine Welsh’s use of <Thai> and <tie>, Doyle could have plumped for either spelling. It may be, however, given the focus on the distinctions between fact, fiction, falsehood, and impersonation throughout this trilogy, that Doyle is punning on “shammy” to denote also the second definition offered by the OED, “a spurious imitation”. The contrast of the <chamois> form immediately succeeding <shammy> reinforces this interpretation, as it draws attention
to the issue of spelling, and indeed “shammy” could be read in this instance as a modifier of “chamois” – in other words the chamois cloth itself was fake. Again, this distinction is achieved purely through spelling – in Radio, TV or film the distinctions between <Thai/tie> and <shammy/chamois> would not be noticed unless referred to directly. As language is processed visually in the novel form, the distinction between homophones can be noticed directly by the audience, without the character’s expressing any knowledge of the difference, or any reference at all in narration.

One of the instances where deference to the standard can be most definitively actively misleading is in terms of certain compound words. For example, Doyle often makes use of common Dublin phrases such as “your man” (The Dead Republic, 2007: 9) and “oul’ lad” (37). Although these terms derive from separate standard English words, as indicated in Doyle’s spellings, in the Dublin dialect they operate much more like indivisible lexemes than two separate words. They are treated as a single word by speakers – the different syllables may not carry unequal stress. As David Crystal points out, combining two or more words to function as a single item is a common process of word creation. As Crystal puts it:

[ . . . ] scarecrow does not refer to two independent notions of scaring and crows, but to an object whose purpose is to scare crows. Such words are pronounced as single units, with a single stress, and they are used grammatically as a single unit: the plural is scarecrows. (2006: 226)
While “oul’ lad” is presumably derived from <old> and <lad>, pronounced this way the prefix does not have the general applicability of the word “old”. This is made clear by Doyle himself, as Henry Smart uses the word “old” in its standard English form when not part of the phrase “oul’ lad” (eg. “the old prick hid behind them” [2007: 31]).

Again, Doyle’s spelling choices display at minimum a subconscious awareness of the linguistic habits of dialect speakers. Yet Doyle’s decision to leave a space between the two component parts of these compounds, and not to render them as the unified lexical items they in reality are, can only be seen as undue deference to the standard.

There are distinguished predecessors writing in Doyle’s own tradition who were entirely unafraid to compound words. At first glance A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man (1916) appears to be rendered in a much more standardised style than Doyle’s work. However, Joyce displays a tendency in this novel to compound many items which had not reached general acceptance as single units in the standard. Indeed, King describes this practice as a “penchant” (1972: 376), pointing out the difficulty compounds such as redrimmed (228) and poolmottled (215) caused for Joyce’s Italian translator. Compression such as this may be employed in an effort to provide a spoken style of writing by causing the reader to conceptualise the items more rapidly – an attempt to capture what Haas describes as the “temporal sequence of sounds, all merging into one another” that “cannot be matched adequately with any linear sequence of discrete letters” (1970: 85). Ong asserts that it “is impossible for script to be more
than marks on a surface unless it is being used by a conscious human being as a cue to sounded words, real or imagined, directly or indirectly” (1982: 75). The desired effect of Joyce’s novel compounding may be that the sounded words in the mind of the reader are more akin to when they are actually heard spoken, so moo and cow becomes moocow for example (1). Although the use of the compounded form of inasmuch has been well established (eg. Dickens, 1871: 54), Joyce’s use of it in A Portrait occurs only in speech (167). It may, therefore, be intended to convey the compressed expression of the words on the part of the speaker rather than any lexical coherency as a unit. Welsh employs novel compounded dialectal forms such as <hudnae> (<had not> [2003a: 129]) and <gaunnae> (<going to> [101]), although many of these have more conventional non-dialectal counterparts (such as <gonna> for <gaunnae>). Welsh sometimes also makes use of hyphenated compounds, and these stand as a sort of halfway house between a full compound and two separate words. For example, “Sickboy straightens up, his spine coke-rigid” (110), or “leisurewear and sovie-bedecked wee toerags” (119). In these instances Welsh makes a compound form using noun+verb combinations, and as such perhaps needs to retain a degree of separation in order to communicate how the noun modifies the verb. Examples of this novel compounding in Welsh usually occur in narrative not dialogue, and thus the temporal aspect may be of less importance than in Doyle’s use of “annyway”, which will be discussed further on.
The compression inherent in compounding may have semantic implications in and of itself. For example, approximately 32 novel compounds appear in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 8 of these appear in one brief passage alone, in which Stephen watches his friend swim (150-153). This is a dramatic ratio in a novel of over 200 hundred pages. As compounding can convey a faster flow of language towards more ends than mere pronunciation, this may be intended to represent a rush of panicked thought engendered by Stephen’s pronounced fear of the sea (see 219, and *Ulysses*, 1984: 38). However, Doyle’s reluctance to create novel compounds in the manner of Joyce, or for that matter Welsh, is not just a matter of phonological duration, it is semantically misleading, as it diverts the reader’s mind away from the actual pronunciation, but also the distinct reality of a dialect in which these units are combined to form single lexical units with their own indivisible integrity. The temporal aspect communicated by the compression of compounding is inseparable from the semantic aspect. Although reading is faster anyway than speech (Chafe, 1982: 37), the compounding of selected units may express a compressed pronunciation relative to the other words in the sequence. The imposing figure of “Dante” in Joyce’s *Portrait* (2), for example, punning on *the aunty* (Gifford seems uncertain about this, 1982:133) indicates a similar spoken compression. Here the spelling accurately reflects the spoken pronunciation of *the aunty* in Hiberno-English. The pun, while dependent on the sounds involved, is only evident in written form, further emphasising the distinction between written and spoken language in a manner similar to the <Thai/tie> and
<shammy/chamois> incidences discussed previously. The noteworthy difference between the compounds created by Joyce, and the phrases Doyle is reticent about compounding, of course, is that <your man> and <oul’ lad> are established Dublin English, not the sort of novel compounds Joyce created. Again, this is suggestive of a deference to standard English in Doyle’s approach, and an anxiety about representing dialect unapologetically.

Words which Doyle rendered with concessions to vernacular pronunciation in earlier works appear, both in narrative and dialogue, in their standard English forms (for example “That’s right”, *The Dead Republic*, [2007: 28], to be compared to <righ’> in *The Commitments* [1987: 8]). Nevertheless, in *The Dead Republic* Henry Smart continues to use such Hiberno-English forms as “arse” (2007: 38), expressions such as “Grand” (41), and Hiberno-English words such as “jacks” (117). Vernacularisation through apostrophisation is much more extensive in Doyle’s early work. It is perhaps due to such issues of commercial potential, and therefore ease of comprehension, that Doyle decided to temper his use of dialect in later works. Critics such as Turlough Johnston, hostile to Doyle’s project in *The Last Roundup* trilogy, nevertheless ignore this trend (2000: 145). While dialectal forms appear in Doyle’s latest novel *Smile* (2017), they are generally confined to dialogue, which again is orthographically standardised in comparison to his early works. The dialect in *Smile* continues the trend towards standardisation, however, as with *The Dead Republic*, it is often pronouns and expletives that represent the phonology of Dublin English orthographically. For
example, “Yeh fuckin’ queer” (28), displays both the dialectal forms of <you> and <fucking> (mediated through apostrophisation). This can be compared with “Scoping the opposition?” (35), in which <scoping> would in all likelihood be pronounced to rhyme with <fucking> by the speaker, yet “fuckin’” by the same character appears on the subsequent page, apostrophised to signal vernacular pronunciation. Given the use of some dialectal forms, it seems that Doyle’s tactic is to present certain words in a way which indicates vernacular pronunciation, as a way to inflect the speech of his characters without departing from the standard to the extent he does in earlier works. It is important to remember that from the outset Doyle displayed standardising tendencies in his method of representing Dublin English (such as restraining dialectal forms to dialogue). When seen in this context, his ongoing abandonment of the dialect is perhaps a natural progression.

In contrast, Welsh’s unapologetic commitment to representing the dialect of working-class Edinburgh characters is striking:

Some say that the Irish are the trash ay Europe.

That’s shite. It’s the Scots. The Irish hud the bottle tae win thir country back, or at least maist ay it. Ah remember gettin wound up when Nicksy’s brar, down in London, described the Scots as “porridge wogs”. Now ah realise that the only thing offensive about that statement was its racism against black people. Otherwise it’s spot-on. (Trainspotting, 1993: 190)
Welsh’s piece reads suspiciously like a direct metafictional reply to Doyle’s aforementioned portrayal, through Jimmy Jr, of the Irish as the most dispossessed and marginalised European nationality: “the niggers of Europe” (1987: 13). Welsh objects to this evaluation, asserting this is a position occupied by the Scots, who he similarly describes with a pejorative racial epithet: “porridge wogs”. But *Trainspotting* is better read as a stylistic response to Doyle. Welsh makes extensive use of first-person narrative in the vernacular, allows his characters a much wider vocabulary than Doyle, and, crucially, renders the vernacular of his native city in an unapologetic manner. With respect to dialect, it is clear Welsh does not harbour any class-based inferiority complex.

The same cannot be said of Doyle. In *The Commitments*, Derek’s question “What’s an explanation mark?” (8), and Jimmy Sr’s explanation to Sharon in *The Snapper* that “perception” means ‘sweat’” (158) perhaps reveal something of Doyle’s own perception of working-class Dubliners’ vocabulary. While violent hardman Mickah Wallace’s penchant for literature seems to defy a stereotype, his critical analysis of the book he has lent to James is confined to an assertion: “It’s better than Catch 22 . . . Fuckin’ sure it is” (82). As Gerry Smyth notes, Doyle avoids recondite words, perhaps in the interest of accessibility, perhaps to avoid literary pretension (1998: 69). Yet this choice, combined with an over-emphasis on expletives, continues a literary tradition of

---

66 Welsh’s characters have a wider vocabulary not only in terms of standard English words, but also dialectal words and forms, prompting Jennifer Berman to suggest his books should come with “a glossary on the side” (1996: 56).
portraying dialect speakers as vulgar and uneducated, and conveys a sense that those who
inhabit the linguistic landscape Doyle portrays are doubly impoverished. Nevertheless,
as with Welsh, Doyle does celebrate the with, irreverence, and creativity of the non-
standard speakers he represents. Doyle’s orthographical choices, however, inflect the
entirety of the text. It is this inescapable supra-segmental aspect which truly undermines
the critical consensus around his depiction of dialect.

The use of linguistic analysis to investigate the relationship between a dialect
represented by authors, and that dialect as it exists in a speech-community, is important
in evaluating an author’s success in the task of translation such speech to writing.
However, interrogating the methodology employed by the author as they set about
translating that speech into text on the page is also essential. Once the decision has been
made to depart from the standard, there is still much discretion and many decisions
involved in the process of representing speech sounds. These choices must be taken as at
least possessing the potential to communicate meaning (this remains true whether or not
they have implications for how the items in question would be pronounced). As such they
must be engaged with critically, in particular by those commenting on the representation
of dialect. The often unseen dominance of the standard must be recognised and
understood before attempts at its subversion or rejection can be effectively evaluated.
Conclusion

There is a scene in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* when, at a moment of crisis in a London train station, Christopher finds himself surrounded by an enormous variety of text of different forms: rail information, health and safety notices, special offers in cafés, newspaper headlines, signage for toilets, and more. All this text is depicted using a wide variety of fonts, font-sizing, and spacing (see Figure 11). Christopher becomes overwhelmed by this visual cacophony, and the text merges into an incoherent jumble of characters. When he manages to get his thoughts under control, narrative text resumes in its usual form, interrupted only by Christopher’s focus on the single beacon of an information sign (distinguished by a one small graphic and a different font). Too much visual exuberance is disorienting and unmanageable – but, in context, text that is properly presented provides clarity, and is helpful.

Figure 11. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Haddon, 2004: 208-10).
In *Dead Men’s Trousers* the primary recurring cast of characters in Welsh’s fiction take the hallucinogenic drug Dimethyltryptamine. This experience of this substance, which has of late become a popular culture phenomenon (and is widely known as DMT), is portrayed as a radical departure from reality, even for the seasoned drug-users in Welsh’s fiction (Renton stresses “this isn’t a drug”, and Sickboy announces it to be “a new frontier to explore” [277]). Welsh represents what happens subsequently using a comic-strip style sequence, with images and text (see Figure 12). Their inexplicable experiences on the drug are marked by a shift away from typography, punctuation, and spelling, and into abstract and figurative art (augmented by text captions). When the drug wears off, the usual text-style of the novel resumes.

![Figure 12. Dead Men’s Trousers (Welsh, 2018: 277, 280, 279).](image-url)
In these instances, both Welsh and Haddon are implying that graphic images or textual forms which are too extreme cannot be sustained by the characters, and therefore, ultimately cannot be sustained in this genre. Crucially, when these experiences end, the text of the narrative resumes. In both cases, this text is still replete with visual elements, albeit graphic forms which are integrated within language in a coherent synthesis. These scenes can be read as an assertion that the remit of the novel is essentially confined within the parameters of linguistic meaning: phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. These are to be conveyed visually, by those dimensions of print that form the basis of this study. However, the work of these authors more broadly very firmly asserts that within these limits there is much room to manoeuvre. Inside the boundaries of typography, punctuation, and spelling, there is expansive space for variation in novels – so long as the fundamental integrity of the genre, as a textual printed narrative form, is adhered to.

Levenston introduces *The Stuff of Literature* by framing his project negatively, characterising his general thesis as a rejection of “wordbound” theories of meaning (1992: 2). By this he means not only that locating meaning solely at the level of the lexicon is inadequate, but also that syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and indeed literary theories, insofar as they conceive as words as the primary building blocks which an utterance or a text is composed of, cannot hope to fully describe and analyse meaning in any given piece of text. They “fail to take into consideration the contributions to meaning made by
punctuation, by typographical layout, by choice of spelling where choice exists” (3). For Levenston, this is “the stuff” of literature – this is what texts are made from. This is all true. But the issue can just as easily be framed positively, in terms of an injunction to expand the conception of the text to include the hitherto neglected elements, along with the words, syntax, semantics, not to mention the characters, setting, plot, and historical and political context. The emphasis might also be placed not on composition, as per Levenston, but on reception – on how the audience engages with the text, not how the author makes it. Levenston writes of choosing the title for his work in “desperation” due to there being “no accepted way of referring to the topic” (1). But perhaps the issue of drawing attention to these aspects need not be so difficult. These building blocks are of course all visual – as such a simple instruction to “look at the novel”, drawing a distinction between looking and reading, may serve to encourage the type of holistic analysis for which Levenston shrewdly recognises the need.

As Vivian Cook (2004: 69) notes, language “consists of many interacting systems rather than a single overriding system”. It is essential not just to recognise the many different systems at play, but to understand that they interact. Typography, punctuation, and spelling all interact with one another, they cannot be understood in isolation. Visual elements need not be extreme to convey meaning, all text must be presented in some manner. It is even more important to emphasise, however, that these interact too with the more prevalent subjects of literary analysis – historical context, style, setting, characters, plot, and politics. They are integral parts of the text, and as such are indispensable to
interpretation. The separation of these visual elements from the general conception of the literary text, and their consequent critical neglect, is unfortunate, as it gives rise to fundamental misconceptions about novels, and a range of critical oversights. It is, however, understandable.

Copyright law protects the unique pattern of words out of necessity – to prevent pirates printing an author’s material presented differently. There is an extent to which our reception of certain visual elements – just like our interpretation of phonological dimensions such as intonation – is subconscious. Language processing is automatic. There is an extent to which this is true of writing as well as speech. We often do not consciously notice font style or size, especially when we are focussing intently on the semantics of the text, perhaps out of a concern for the characters that keeps us reading. But this by no means suggests these elements do not inflect our interpretation. There is a growing body of criticism, within linguistics and literary studies, that treats hitherto neglected visual dimensions of the text. This increased awareness of the fundamental unity of the novel as an object, may finally dispel the artificial division between words and their appearance, and facilitate a deeper and more complete understanding of individual novels, and the novel as a genre. That this occurs at a time when the medium is in obvious flux – with new electronic forms of text offering an alternative way to experience novels – may not be coincidental. The manuscript tradition is better understood for the comparison to print. Handwriting is better understood for the comparison with type. The hegemony of one media form can obscure rather than
encourage its full understanding. New modes of understanding prior forms can also enhance our understanding of present forms. Some conventions persist across media, some evolve, some die, and this process itself offers to reveal much about the genre and medium.

The conceptual reintegration of visual elements of the text with those aspects that are more commonly granted critical attention promises to create a fuller understanding of individual literary works, print culture, and the novel as a genre. Yet dividing the task of the critic in two, offering a dual rubric to look at, as well as read, remains a good heuristic. As Buck Mulligan admonishes Stephen in *Ulysses* (1984: 4-5) “You must read them in the original [. . . ] Come and look.”
Bibliography

Primary Sources


———"Interviews," qtd in, Stuttering Help (non-profit organisation website),


Secondary Sources


Battersby, E., 2015. “Bloomsday: If you haven’t read ‘Ulysses’ yet, then start here.”


British Academy, 2006. “Guidelines on Copyright and Academic Research.”

https://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Copyright-guidelines.pdf,


accessed 7th June 2019.


Vol. 112, No. 1.


https://journals.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/DLLS/article/viewFile/31796/30043,
accessed 1st January 2015.


Maginn, C., 2010. “Gaelic Ireland's English frontiers in the late Middle Ages.”


Page, D., 1990. “Writing Got a Lot Easier When the Old ‘Manual’ was New.”

*Smithsonian*. Vol. 21, No. 9, 54-64.


Shapiro, J., 2016. “‘What ish my Nation?’: Shakespeare’s Irish Connections.”


———2005. *Reading the Graphic Surface: The Presence of the Book in Prose*
*Fiction.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.


