

## A Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis of Typography and Layout in “Alexander Master’s Novel Stuart: A Life Backwards”

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### Abstract

*The output of multimodal texts has increased over the past 20 years due to advances in technology and culture, which has accelerated the demand for tackling multimodal additional semiotic modes for meaning making, such as typography, layout, visual images, colour, etc. The theory of multimodality, as supposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001–2006), Baldry and Thibaut (2006), is applied to a potential framework for the analysis of multimodal novels that use not only wording structure but also many semiotic modes in the formation of meaning. The social approach to multimodality, in brief, is based on Halliday's linguistic description and adhered to the multimodal assumption that "mutual propositions are employed and worked together in various modes" (Kress and Leeuwen, 2002:3). Thus, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:39), in their book "Reading Images" investigate the level for which the underlying theories of Halliday's framework to language are feasible and applicative to visual communicative management, and they create a visual system that mostly makes use of Halliday's principles and concepts. The study is concerned with the investigation of a multimodal analysis of the multiple elements of various modes of typographic devices, and layout design used in the selected novel. This selected text "Stuart: A Life Backwards" is a multimodal novel since the writer Masters does not rely on linguistic verbal tools, he extends them to incorporate a variety of visual semiotic modes and graphic communicative elements that will intensify his understanding of storytelling and narrative development. The study has shown that an extension to the mode of wording formation is performed in the multimodal analysis by incorporating more multimodal tackling features of typographic principles and layout framing devices in creating an appropriate comprehensive meaning construction in Masters' selected narration.*

**Keywords:** *Multimodality, Modes, Multimodal Analysis, Linking, Meaning-Making*

### Introduction

A multimodal social semiotic access supposes that all modes are of equal importance in presentation and communication, all modes form an integrated resource, and each mode can be given with the specific and important features of its affordances. Also, they can potentially play an effective role in meaning making. These potentials of meaning turn out to be part of the cultural resources of any society. Therefore, modes express social and cultural shared meaning. The multifaceted perspective confirms that multimodal semiotics involves more than merely the accumulation of many different modes; instead, the mutual integration of them leads to distinct meanings that expand the total of their separate contributions (Norgaard, 2019:18).

In the present study multimodal inspection of social approach of modes of typography, and layout will be tackled and how they are interacted multimodally alongside with the wording structure in handling meaning formation. It is hypothesized that many distinctive features and semiotic principles (index, icon, and discursive import) of typography are used impressively in this text. Furthermore, tools of composition meaning of layout in connection of "information value, salience and linking and framing" play an effective part in constructing meaning making in the novel. The procedures followed are explicating a multimodal analysis of representative examples from the novel showing the potential modes and their interactive communicative functions relying on a developed model of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), Van Leeuwen (2005, 2006) and Nogaard (2003, 2019).

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*A Social Semiotic Theory and Multimodality*

The theory can characterize and analyze all signs in all modes besides their interconnection in a specific text. The categories of social semiotics accomplish the social interest, and the requirements of communities whose members shaped, designed, developed and firmly reshaped semiotic resources. They implicate together material resources, the modes, and the classes that shape the social and cultural world. These classes contribute to understanding actions, entities, and relations, frames, and classes for dealing with time, space, and so on. The whole modes in the social approach to multimodality, simultaneously, make up one integrated domain of cultural semiotic resources of the community (Kress,2010:132).

In communication, many modes are always employed in ensembles of modes, where the affordances of each mode are utilized for the goals that, at the moment, seem to be most important to the mode's designer of signs. Combining modes provides a richer way to communicate meaning than the relatively limited capabilities of individual linguistic modes in speech and writing. A multimodal ensemble, which is a structured combination of many modalities, can be interpreted as either text or a sign. While the latter relates to the emphasis on the object's function, usually as a message in an interaction, the former refers to the emphasis on its modal composition. Considering that the overall meaning is dependent upon every component of the ensemble or text taken into consideration, it is clear that the separate contributions of each element only intensify the whole meaning (Kress,2010:61).

*Analysis of the Mode of Typography*

Nogaard (2019) confirms that typography is the visual component of wording mode within itself when analyzing text from a multimodal perspective. Typography is used here to refer to all visual appearances of writing words including handwriting and printed types. Thus far, this approach to typography is concentrated on two specific aspects, how various distinctive features related to various typefaces such as (expansion, weight, slope, regularity, connectivity, size and color ), and how several kinds of semiotic principles of (index, icon, and discursive import) are correlated in the interpretation of typographic meaning of the text (Van Leeuwen 2005; Nogaard, 2009).

Masters frequently uses bold type, a variety of fonts, and an unconventional utilization of the space on the page to transition between text and image and back again, reminding readers of the visual nature of written words. He also uses an integration of verbal and nonverbal cues to effectively enhance his narrative. In "Stuart: A Life Backwards", semiotic devices such as chapter labeling, the inclusion of pictorial tools, footnotes, newspaper essays and biblical resources are employed visually to enhance the story and character development in distinct and significant ways. He intentionally deviates the typographic and visual conventions by utilizing a variety of semiotic devices that fall within the umbrella of verbal and as well nonverbal modes (Gibbons,2012:419).

It is a biography narrative written in conversation between the author (Masters) and his friend the hero (Stuart) who has a criminal history and imprisoned. It describes how a young child who was born with some disabilities and grew up to be violent, criminal, and mentally disturbed homeless boy who lives on the rough streets of Cambridge. The narrative is told from Stuart's adult life and his death at the age of 33 as the title indicates, and then follows backwards throughout his challenging childhood investigating the influences of his family, and inability on his final stage of affairs and also answering the question raised by Stuart in the first chapter "What murder the boy I was"(Masters,2005:12). In an integrated narrative that focuses on social issues, friendship, and mental health, Masters skillfully incorporates the story of Stuart's life with his own reflective expedition.

*Indexical Meaning*

Typographic signifiers that demonstrate signs of their own material creation are considered to be marker of the person, instrument, etc. that creates the text, and this is known as typographic indexical meaning. Several items from Stuart's private diary are reproduced in facsimile format throughout the novel. It is an instance of indexical meaning representation, in which the writing's structure and shape refer to the material

source of its own production. The configuration of mimesis, or high modality in multimodal concept is certainly an essential result of the inclusion of the copies and duplicates of his handwriting (Van Leeuwen, 2005a:1961).

Stuart's diary records eventually begin to turn into unclear graphic marks in his handwriting (see Figure 1). In connection with distinctive features, these records show irregular, slope to the left, irregular connectivity and uneven weight which construct this type of writing to be prominent and conspicuous from the other parts of the text. It should be pointed out that the iconic meaning of handwriting as an indicator of mental disorder is much more dependent on the multimodal connection between the modes of wording and typography compared to the indexical meaning of handwriting as an indicator of Stuart. The reader cannot deduce from the visual written text only that Stuart is disturbed mentally; rather, Masters' explication of how Stuart's handwriting integrates with an instance of mental instability produces a multimodal meaning for the reader. Genuine indexical indicators of Stuart's existence are the samples of handwriting from Stuart's records in his diary. The handwriting and the actual individual who wrote the diary records, Stuart, are entirely and authentically connected.



Figure (1). Examples of Indexical and iconic meaning from Stuart's Diary Records and Handwriting (Masters, 2006:160)

### *Iconic Meaning*

Typographic iconic meaning can be seen when letterforms resemble the signified or have conceptual characteristics in common with it. Sometimes uppercase letters and particularly tall capitals are employed iconically to communicate a distinct text and a particular form of sonic prominence--that is, emphasis on word meaning. In connection with handwritings of Stuart, the following (Figure 2) is an instance of typography from his diary events which is considered as iconic instead of indexical:

*'Monday: ADDanBRocK's.' 'Tuesday: QuiSt going to Vist VoLanteR services. ASK for NAME & ADReSS For AwarD organation.'*

*March: SAT'S LOTTO 5 10 17 20 44 48 7.30 Cam. 2 meeting Bath House if not Brambram.*

*April: Phone to DR P——. CAnCell if in court. 2OCLOCK go TO ALEXDER'S BooK must go ScriPt PicK 200 100.*

*May: MuSic FesTervile. STUART LOOK SET ALRAM. MAKE SURE ALRAM*

*Button is up not Down. When WeaK up is needed."*

**Figure (2). An Iconic Indication from Stuart's Diary (Masters,2005:16)**

In these lines, Stuart's eccentric and misspelling way of writing his schedule appointments of visiting places and doing actions have given more description of his character construction. Masters attempts to recreate Stuart's writings employing printing typography. By imitating the disorganized nature of Stuart's writing and his somewhat random selection of big letters, the peculiar typographic mix of both lower and uppercase additionally creates an impression of authenticity, making it visually more identical to the text that Stuart originally created compared with the conventional typographic selections. The printed representation of the letters is not entirely devoted to what his handwriting will be, especially when it comes to the approach of distinctive features (curvature 'angular', slope 'upright', regularity 'regular', and connectivity 'disconnected'). If high modality is at playing when it relates to size, subsequently low modality plays a role when it relates to the shape and design of the letters. Therefore, The modality "what we would have perceived if we had been there" is higher at the level of discourse compared to the conventional typographic selections.

#### *Discursive Import Meaning*

It is the third tool of the typographic semiotic principles when typographic connections are brought and inserted to situation to which they didn't be there. Thus, the meaning that is produced results from the import of correlations from the field that a particular typeface originally is counted with the field of that it transferred and inserted into (Van Leeuwen,2005b:138). The typographic meaning of Stuart's diary records explained formerly in (Figure 2)is an illustration of many typographies are discursively incorporated imported into the narrative, placing them in a setting where they were previously detached from the place. Even though none of the typefaces utilized are exact reproduction of the original sign, the typographic import adds a high visual modality feature. In this novel, Stuart's handwriting indicates a potential iconic likeness and connection between its breakdown and irregularity and the disintegration of his mental health condition.

The clipping of newspaper image report is another semiotic device used and inserted in the novel by Masters to indicate different typographic text and develop multimodally possible meaning making realization. The two persons in this clipped peace of newspaper, see Figure (3), are given separate penalty. Ruth is given a sentence of five years, and after that John received a prison sentence of five years. After their campaign for release, Stuart and Masters--two differently unsuitable couples--collaborate together to release them from the imprisonment. Consequently, they establish an intimate relationship and confidence that motivates Masters to write and produce a biography of Stuart. This example illustrates the discursive import of many typographies of visual and verbal representation into the novel and therefore, into a context in which they previously seemed out of place.

# FREE

## The Cambridge Two



**Ruth Wyner**  
imprisoned for 5 years



**John Brock**  
imprisoned for 4 years

On December 17th 1999 Ruth Wyner, the Director of Wintercomfort for the homeless, and John Brock, the Day Centre Manager, were sent to prison because some of the people they were helping were secretly exchanging drugs on the charity premises.

Figure (3). A discursive Import Example from *Stuart: A life Backwards* (Masters,2005:30)

### *Analysis of the Mode of Layout*

Layout is the third tool of the developed model to be tackled in analyzing the multimodal aspects of this novel. According to (McIntyre and Busse,2010), layout refers to “the inclusive spacial page form which includes features of constancy, space of line, margins, position of visual and verbal parts and also the visual meaning established by their relatedness”. Following the previous principles of the social semiotic multimodal system (information value, salience and framing) to compositional meaning, the researcher will apply and investigate them to Master’s selected data.

### *Framing and Salience in Chapter, Page and Paragraph Distinction*

Chapters are frequently framed with greater clarity than paragraphs. In term of visual, chapters are formed by completely separating white space frames that separate text blocks; in the case of chapters, these breaks occur on separate pages. Furthermore, paragraphs are usually only demarcated by a line break; this may be done in combination with paragraph indentation to create frame blank-space districts of different lengths.

Masters changes and deviates the conventional way of sequencing of events of biography structure of Stuart’s story, and making it backwards that is from the present to the past to reveal the events that construct Stuart’s individuality. The device of narrating this biography is distinctive and has an extensive emotional influence on reading process. Furthermore, it is not common to deal with such topics of homeless and addicted person for writing biography, because most biographies handle known impressive figures. Here, Masters wants to indicate in his book the disorder and confused condition of Stuart which is an indexical revelation to some of social problems and affairs and their effects on individual such as Stuart. Another divergence, it is uncommon for a biography to tackle the process of writing along with the author (Masters) who is mentioned in the book as a character.

Masters deviates the traditional forms of salience by substituting position and numbering of chapters and their titles. By changing between text, drawings, images and making unusual use of the available space on the page, Masters uses both verbal and visual modes to develop and fulfill his narrative purpose. In Masters’ novel, the number of chapters are put in the left side of the above part of the page instead of the center (the next chapter starts immediately when the preceding chapter ends). Some of the chapters (14) are introduced with only bold numbers without headings, others (11) are introduced in numbers and headings with the typographic qualities of boldness and capital typeface, and separated by white space frames with visual salience in relation to the remainder of the text. An italicized comment by the author is

given to these titled chapters (between the number and title) in order to handle Stuart's character and enhance reader's attention to the thematic process of narrative.

Furthermore, many phrases and expressions stand out and in different special composition because of their repetition grammatically with interaction with typographic features (big size and boldness) such as, 'MURDERER', 'Lady Birds Books', 'Bendy Boy', etc. (P. 88,117,186,212). Drawing pictures are framed in the central position on the top side of the page (P.18,30,64,95,etc.). They are salient with equal importance to the written text and attract the attention of the reader's view because of their visual effect and appearance in the special representation of the layout mode. In addition to pictures and drawings, many chunks of Stuart's and Masters' speeches and discourses of various topics (newspaper clipped essays, recipes, political, social and educational topics) are inserted to the narrative and seems to be salient and occupy specific white space frames with different lengths in the page's layout design.

#### *Framing in Another Kinds of Text block*

In this section, another detached layout block unities in the spacial arrangement will be explicated. An example of text block that stands out as a separate layout unit with variation of typographic construction of the meaning is the text of "recipe" as shown in Figure (4). The framing shows broader margins with a central position in the page, and the title (bold, capital, and large) typeface with some variation in line spacing. The visual layout features of this text deals with series of lists such as of ingredients lists instead of a constant written prose only. Although spatial design of the frames of this example is essential in the establishment of its different meaning, it is significant to indicate that the variation is basically related to the mode of wording. The lexica grammar selections engaged in this example shows two different categories of lexical groups and speech functions. The experiential meaning of the textual structure of the "recipe" is realized by specific groups of words such as : 'mushroom', 'mixed spice', 'onion', etc. Furthermore, it is differentiated by various selections of speech functions, because the information and details of the recipe is realized by the use of imperative constructions ( 'Rise out the carry jar and add the water...' , "Sprinkle in the mixed spice..."). Even though the mode of wording interact with the visual semiotic features of layout and typography in the construction of the meaning of this example, the mode of wording carries the larger part of semiotic work in interaction with other modes.

It is significant to say that the structured layout of the novel's pages can make the various blocks stand out as a separate entities. The meaning of these layout elements tends to be the consequence of closely connected selections concerning wording, typography and layout.

#### *Convict Curry – Recipe*

##### *Too feed four*

7 \* *economy chicken quarters. (There's always someone*

*Want Won't two.)*

4\* *onions.*

1 \* *jar of curry paste, 'whatever sort they have got'.*

2 \* *'cheap and cheering' tins of tomatoes – Aldi,*

*Sainsbury's or Tesco.*

*Mushrooms, sweetcorn, 'anything like that'.*

*Mixed spice.*

*Ground cumin.*

*“Fry the onions and the jar of curry paste together ‘until you feel satisfied’. Throw in your two tins of tomatoes, mushrooms, sweetcorn, and chicken. Rinse out the curry jar and add the water, sprinkle in the mixed spice and cumin, stir, bring to a splattering boil, and simmer for two and a half hours.”*

**Figure (4). A Text Block of Recipe from Stuart: A Life Backwards (Masters,2005:35).**

### *Linking*

Linking is the last device of layout to be tackled in this section. visual and verbal linking as a semiotic resource will be explained in addition to the condition of the meaning performed by the linking of various modes. The image’s visual depiction is either elaborates and reaffirms the verbal narrative by saying the same information or extends and attaches new knowledge linked to the existent one. . In Masters’ novel, many semiotic resources are used and unconventional accessible space of the page as shifting from verbal to visual modes employing the combination of them to grasp the narrative progress.

There are many instances of this linking tackled in this selected text. Masters uses many humorous drawing of images to show how Stuart and others look like in relation to different recited situations in the novel. Masters on P.(17) presents the verbal mode of describing Stuart’s eccentric features of his personality showing the tattoo down his right hand arm with a large ‘Fuck’ drawing on the bicep. Alongside, the legs of newcomers and Christmas consumers are rustled with a sound like a horse running past, and a set of high heels clipped and clopped. Adult sounds sank with the meaning of speech missing and with excessive sibilants. The visual mode as shown in Figure (5) is supported by more verbal explanation and clarification. This type of linking according to Van Leeuwen (2002:231) is extension as the verbal representation add more information to the existing narrative of the visual picture. Most drawing pictures in the novel are separated by specific empty spaces between each of the frames and there is no boundary of segregated line between them and the verbal narrative. Therefore, the decoding and grasping of the meaning of image is easy and clear because of the closeness and relatedness of the image and verbal wording.

*A bigger can gain about 100 dollar on Christmas Eve in Cambridge*



*I have to come down on my knees to listen and understand his speech*

Figure (5). A drawing picture from *Stuart: A Life Backwards* (Mastrs,2005:18)

## Conclusions

visual tools of typography are very important and are always combined with mode of wording in handling multimodal features of the novel. Masters uses many choices of the detailed system of distinctive features of typefaces such as boldness, capitalization, sloppiness, regularity and connectivity to identify different meanings in many examples, and employ unconventional utilization of spacial design on the page to make transition between text and image making integration between verbal and visual modes. Multimodal elements of a particular typeface (e.g. Stuart's diary, handwriting, and his scribbling) are inserted and used iconically as a distinct text in this novel in order to create a communicative functions of meaning and participate in the explication of narrative perspective. Furthermore, typographic semiotic principles of indexical, iconic, and discursive import meanings are tackled and explicated in many examples such as (Stuart's recipes and newspaper clipping) in connection with the mode of wording in order to get a comprehensive and significant understanding of their typographic meaning.

The composition meaning of layout's tools show that in contrast to the limited application of information value in the context, they demonstrate that framing, salience, and linking can be utilized effectively and be more productive in the study and analysis of layout choices of meaning in this selected novel. In addition, linking also proved to be a beneficial tool for layout analysis, leading researcher to consider which parts in the novel's layout are linked and how, as well as to decide whether a particular element in the layout is elaborating on or including and adding new information to the element with which it is linked and related. It is important to consider the salience of the elements under study into account when examining the novel's layout. The researcher illustrates how framing of particular parts such as blocks of recipe, diagrams and drawing pictures be salient and attract the reader's attention.



Finally, it is significant to say that in addition to wording structure, all other modes of typography, layout design, photographs, etc. are necessary in integration with each other for the ultimate comprehensive meaning construction of the text exposition.

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