A la recherche du sens perdu

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William C. Dowling, *The Senses of the Text: Intensional Semantics and Literary Theory*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. xv + 120 pp.

William C. Dowling's *The Senses of the Text: Intensional Semantics and Literary Theory* makes an admirable attempt to introduce recent developments in linguistic semantics—specifically, the work of J. J. Katz—to readers trained in literary criticism and theory. The author argues that Katz's ideas are relevant to problems of literary interpretation, claiming that they provide a new perspective on the problem of "determinate meaning" in literature. Dowling construes *determinate meaning* as "the notion that it is intelligible to say about a line in a poem or a sentence in a novel that it means one thing rather than another thing, X rather than Y" (ix). To make a case for the view that literary texts have determinate meanings in this sense, the author draws on three main elements of Katz's semantic framework.

One element is Katz's linguistic realism, his view that meanings or (to use a technical term in Katz's scheme) *senses* are "objects existing outside the spatio-temporal-causal order in the way that many mathematicians and logicians have been led to posit the existence of things like prime numbers and sets and equilateral triangles" (2; cf. 99–112). A second, related element is the distinction between linguistic types and linguistic tokens—a distinction that figures importantly in Katz's work. An example would be the difference between the ideal type associated with the English definite article *the* and its five separate instantiations, or tokens, in the present sentence. The third element is Katz's theory of decompositional sense structure; ac-

cording to this theory, linguistic meaning depends fundamentally on a network of entailment relations built into the structure of a language such that the meaning of an expression depends on its place within a chain of entailments of the sort Object → Physical → Artifact → Furniture → Desk → Roll-top Desk, and so forth. For Katz this network is describable in turn as a hierarchy of superordination and subordination relations into which word meanings can be decomposed.

Below I discuss in more detail what I view to be (insuperable) problems with how Dowling uses these three components of Katz's framework to fashion a theory of literary semantics.[1] Here at the outset it is worth emphasizing that, in *The Senses of the Text*, Dowling makes an inspiring effort to create new opportunities for dialogue between language theorists and literary scholars. Recent scholarship has been quite responsive to Roman Jakobson's (1960) call, some four decades ago, for a closer rapport between linguistics and poetics focusing on such topics as the representation of speech and thought in literary texts (Fludernik 1993; Herman 2001) and the pragmatic and semantic factors that distinguish fictional from factual discourse (Cohn 1999; Ryan 1991, 1997). Dowling's study participates in this same cross-disciplinary enterprise, adapting ideas from linguistic semantics in an effort to characterize how readers arrive at inferences concerning what literary texts mean.

In what follows, however, I argue that Dowling's study fails to make its case for determinate meaning on the strength of Katz's intensional semantics. For one thing, the author puts Katz's ideas in the service of what he portrays as a non- or anti-ideological approach to literary study. Attempting to ground arguments about the politics of interpretation in a theory of linguistic meaning, Dowling thereby overextends semantic theories into domains for which they were not designed—domains whose scale and complexity seem intractable for theories about linguistic meaning conceived in a narrower, more technical way. Further, the very notion that the system of language involves determinate meanings in Dowling's sense is disputable; the core assumption of the book conflicts with developments in semantic theory to which the author does not allude. An alternative picture, one emerging from research initiatives on several fronts of semantic inquiry (Jackendoff 1983; Frawley 1992; cf. Herman 2002), suggests that linguistic meanings are probabilistic, not deterministic, in nature. In this picture, a language can be characterized in terms of modularized yet interacting preference-

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1. See Harris 1993 for an overview of some of Katz's proposals and of the objections to them that have been formulated within linguistics proper. Significantly, Dowling himself does not discuss those objections.

rule systems in which specific lexical items, for example, will have relatively preferred and relatively dispreferred semantic interpretations. Preference rankings for one interpretation vis-à-vis another will be a function of both language-internal and language-external factors. And as recent work by Manfred Jahn (1997, 1999) confirms, there is no reason to suppose that literary language is exempt from the same probabilistic, preference-based processes of meaning reconstruction at work in other modes of language use. Literary analysis, in the view I outline more fully at the end of my essay, entails assigning probabilistic weightings to candidate interpretations, not separating the wheat of "readings" from the chaff of "misreadings" à la Dowling.

1.

In the "Preface" (ix–xv) Dowling outlines some of the basic themes of and motivations for his study. He writes that, whereas determinate meaning was for New Critics like Cleanth Brooks simply an axiom of literary interpretation, a tacit assumption guiding all their exegetical endeavors, "today . . . determinate meaning has been theorized away in the name of various methods or approaches that have come on the scene in the last thirty years: Derrida and *différence* [*sic*], reader-response criticism, modes of 'ideological' reading that take meaning to be a site of political contestation, etc." (ix). This passage is noteworthy for several reasons, and not only because it points ahead to what will emerge as the overarching thesis of the book, that is, that Katz's semantic framework can be used to help reconstruct and make explicit the theory assumed by New Critical interpretive practice in an implicit or tacit way. Dowling suggests that such reconstruction is needed because, as he puts it in his first chapter, "the revolution in 'close reading' associated with New Criticism in the fifties . . . provided a great deal of semantic action [at a basic level of interpretation] but very little theory" (3).

Beyond this, though, the sentence that I quoted from the "Preface" ends in a listlike parataxis, which tends to flatten out and homogenize theoretical approaches quite different in their origins, methods, and aims, each adopting an identifiably different stance toward what Dowling characterizes as the problem of determinate meaning in literature. The manner in which the author lumps together these diverse approaches is arguably at cross-purposes with a study insisting on the importance of careful discriminations in linguistic as well as literary contexts. Further, Dowling seems strangely unaware that, just by disputing what he views as overly political approaches to literary interpretation, the author himself necessarily participates in political argument, advancing what must be construed as one

mode of ideological reading among others—a mode that draws on recent developments in linguistics to contest, politically, the view that the meaning of literary works is a site of political contestation.

Other, more technical considerations broached in the "Preface" prefigure problems that become more visible over the course of subsequent chapters. For one thing, Dowling claims that literal meaning is an example of determinate meaning and also that Katz's semantic theory can be used to redescribe literal meaning as a coincidence of type and token meaning in the pragmatic or speech-act situation (x). As I discuss in greater detail below, Dowling here commits himself to a "literal force hypothesis" disputed convincingly by some theorists of speech acts who deny that illocutionary acts have a literal, built-in meaning. Subtending Dowling's account of literal meaning, furthermore, is an assumption that there are *primary* as well as *secondary* meanings of literary texts, the latter a product of "second-order interpretation" that "derives from the analysis of [a text's] primary meaning" (xii). Although Dowling repeatedly reverts to the notion of primary meaning in his discussion (3, 11, 13, 90, 95), he never explicitly defines the term or spells out the exact relation between the primary/secondary and literal/nonliteral dyads. (Significantly, the index contains no entry for *primary meaning*.) For Dowling, the divorce of primary and secondary meaning can be dated back to the publication of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), whose "highly abstract structural analysis" drove a wedge between explication de texte and "higher-order interpretation" (xii). Yet the author himself feels compelled to take a path leading through sophisticated philosophical and linguistic argumentation in order to arrive at a point where he can state what is really "in" the text, that is, differentiate between the senses of the text and the meanings adventitiously imposed on it from without. Dowling's own modus operandi thus seems to be at odds with the mode of interpretive practice he describes as ideal, a practice that fixes primary meaning before stepping out into dangerously secondary territories of exegesis.

Another general methodological problem stems from the way the author sets up his discussion of what is arguably the root concept of the entire study—namely, the idea of determinate meaning. Dowling's first chapter, "Interpretive Communities" (1–17), begins by arguing that Stanley Fish's reader-response approach gets things precisely backward: "'meaning' as it exists for literary theory does not depend on interpretive communities, or social conventions, or language games, or ideological systems, or anything else that is, as one could say in a more innocent age, outside the text. In the last analysis, the argument would be that meanings create interpretive communities rather than the other way around" (1). Dowling here assumes, in

other words, an incompatibility between the view that texts have determinate meanings and the view that interpretive communities fix the meanings of texts. Yet given the definition of *determinate meaning* found in the "Preface"—"the notion that it is intelligible to say about a line in a poem or a sentence in a novel that it means one thing rather than another thing, X rather than Y" (ix)—this assumption may not be warranted. The claim that a thing means X but not Y is consistent with the claim that a particular interpretive community has imputed meaning X, but not meaning Y, to the thing in question. So in using the locution *determinate meaning* Dowling must mean to make a stronger claim than his own definition suggests.

Specifically, two conditions seem to hold for determinacy of meaning in Dowling's sense. For a text to have a determinate meaning, it must be possible (or, as the author puts it, "intelligible") not only (1) to say that the text means X but not Y but also (2) to make this claim on the basis of the internal structure or inherent properties of that text as opposed to the way it may happen to accrue meaning X, but not meaning Y, in a particular context of interpretation. Although condition (2) plays a key operational role in Dowling's analysis (e.g., in the discussion of the two John Donne poems in chapter 1), he does not make it an explicit part of his accounts of the notion of determinate meaning. Perhaps for rhetorical reasons, he only implies a dependency relation between (1) and (2). That is, while trying to push through the relatively weak claim that literary interpretations are falsifiable, Dowling argues in a more indirect, less-attackable way for his stronger claim: that the falsifiability of textual meanings is a function of their being irreducible to contexts of interpretation. He supports this second claim mainly with what he construes as analogies between Katz's linguistic realism and a broadly New Critical philosophy of interpretation, an aesthetics of timeless, "built-in" literary meanings.

Indeed, one finds nontrivial variations across Dowling's statements of what *determinate meaning* itself means. The variations amount to hedges around a problematic aspect of the author's approach. Take two definitional variants that occur early on, the first of which I have already quoted. Determinate meaning is (A) "the notion that it is intelligible to say about a line in a poem or a sentence that it means one thing rather than another thing, X rather than Y" (ix); and it is (B) "simply the notion that it is intelligible to say that a text, or a line in a poem, or sometimes a phrase or word, means one thing and not another thing, X rather than Y" (1). (A third definition, found on p. 88, is a restatement of [A]). My point is that definitions (A) and (B) differ crucially on a dimension of size or scale.

Whereas (A) implies that *parts of texts* (lines or sentences) have determinate meanings, (B) implies that *entire texts*, as well as individual lines,

phrases, and words, have determinate meanings. However, saying that an entire discourse or text has a particular, falsifiable meaning is much more controvertible than saying that a word or phrase has a particular, falsifiable meaning. Further—and this is a crucial point—Katz's semantic theory was designed to account for the meanings of words or, at the upper limit, combinations of words with particular sense structures into semantically and syntactically well-formed phrases and sentences (Katz 1972, 1980, 1981; cf. Katz and Fodor 1964; Harris 1993: 81–89, 111–17, 169–74, 240–60). Katz's theory was *not* designed to account for the semantic properties of suprasentential units such as paragraphs or stanzas or episodes, let alone whole texts. If I use Katz's intensional semantics to describe and analyze the sense structure of the linguistic items *I*, *like*, *cats*, *she*, *likes*, and *dogs* as well as the semantic and syntactic properties of their concatenation in the two strings *I like cats She likes dogs*, I still have not accounted for suprasentential meanings that derive from the successive occurrence of these two strings in a text. I have not, that is, accounted for why most interpreters of these two strings would impute a contrastive meaning to their sequential occurrence in a text. Whether one conceives of them as "determinate" or (as is more likely) probabilistic in nature, textual meanings of this sort cannot be accounted for strictly on the basis of semantic tools of the kind developed by Katz. To put the same point another way, insofar as definitions (A) and (B) hedge on the question of the scale of the linguistic units involved, they reflect what proves to be a fundamental mismatch between Dowling's claims concerning determinate textual meanings and the linguistic framework on which he draws to support those claims. To help substantiate this last remark, I turn now to an outline of the arguments developed in each chapter.

2.

In chapter 1 Dowling uses two interpretive cruxes, one quite venerable and the other more recent, to launch what he views as a Katz-inspired argument in favor of determinate textual meanings. The first crux involves a stanza of John Donne's "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" in which the poet seems to be drawing a four-way analogy between ordinary lovers and earthquakes, on the one hand, and between his own extraordinary love and the movement of the Ptolemaic spheres, on the other hand:

> Moving of th'earth brings harms and fears,
>   Men reckon what it did and mean;
> But trepidation of the spheres,
>   Though greater far, is innocent.

The chapter incorporates a class handout in which Dowling recommends careful study of the syntax of Donne's lines coupled with consultation of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) at strategic moments. The author purports to be advancing a common-sense argument, which anyone with competence in the grammar of English and in the use of the *OED* must concede. Specifically, Dowling argues for interpreting the phrase "Moving of th'earth" as a reference to earthquakes but not to planetary motion, whether in the sense of the earth's motion around the sun or its rotation on its own axis (4). Yet circularity creeps into Dowling's handout at precisely those moments when the *OED* is supposed to offer definitive evidence for the earthquake interpretation. The author's phrasing is revealing: "one meaning will stand out right away" for the student looking up the word *trepidation* in an attempt to interpret Donne's line; or again, "one definition"—the Ptolemaic one—"leaps right off the page" (7) in this context. Debatably, however, these definitions "stand out" only to dictionary users who happen already to share Dowling's interpretation of the poem. Circular argumentation shows up again in a parenthetical comment that "one of the *OED* examples used to illustrate [the Ptolemaic meaning] of *trepidation* is the very line from Donne that we're trying to figure out" (8). Dowling concludes: "So we must be in the immediate vicinity of the correct interpretation" (8). But this conclusion does not follow; the citation of Donne's poem suggests not that the interpretation at issue is correct, capturing the true or determinate meaning of Donne's text, but only that the person who wrote this *OED* entry sanctioned a reading of the poem that happens to coincide with Dowling's own.

This strikes me as symptomatic of larger tendencies in Dowling's study. The author engages in a careful analysis of Donne's text but then, fatally as I see it, overextends the scope of his claims by suggesting that his approach is not just defensible but definitive, a reading with which one would be wrong not to concur. Dowling's account is illuminating for reasons other than its assumption that the text has a determinate meaning that the author himself purports to have captured. Inversely, the author's analysis loses cogency whenever the assumption of determinacy of meaning surfaces in the form of an explicit claim for the absolute correctness of an interpretation. The book as a whole seems to me a patchwork of this same kind, interweaving careful arguments with overextended assertions in ways that are sometimes difficult to disentangle.

I mentioned the pages on Donne's "Valediction" for another reason as well. Specifically, they serve to mark off one pole of a continuum that, for Dowling, stretches between close reading of the sort the New Critics used to do and the more abstract linguistic principles that help explain New Critical

method ex post facto. In adopting the persona of Close Reader, the author casts himself as a kind of hermeneutic Everyman, taking on exactly the role recommended by the New Critics, who wrote during the era of the GI Bill and who promoted a democratizing method of criticism for which all you needed was your knowledge of the language and a good dictionary. At a time when "indeterminacy is in the air, and when one's colleague teaching the literature class across the hall may very well be conducting an hour of collective free association" (4), this Close Reader cuts an embattled and heroic if somewhat isolated figure, leading students toward determinate senses of the text and helping them identify and purge themselves of the misreadings that threaten this quest for true meaning.

Shifting from the context of classroom instruction to that of professional literary analysis, Dowling offers an analogous account of a second interpretive crux in chapter 1, this one involving Donne's "Elegy XIX" ("To His Mistress Going to Bed"). Here, again, "the critic who can show that his or her opponent has misread the words on the page holds a trump" (11). In particular, Dowling examines how one literary critic, William Kerrigan, plays "the trump of primary meaning" (13) against others who have constructed precarious, irresponsibly nonliteral elaborations on a poem that simply will not bear their weight.

As Dowling himself is well aware, however, he is writing in 1999, not 1947. Today's Close Reader must be one who has *reasons* for choosing his or her method over other approaches to literary analysis, New Historicist, reader-response, or what have you. Designed to provide reasons of this kind, the next three chapters of the book can be positioned at the other end of the continuum that connects close reading and linguistic theorizing. Meanwhile, chapter 5, "The Senses of the Text" (79–97), shuttles back and forth between narrowly literary and broadly semantic analysis. (A closing "Epilogue" [99–112] argues in favor of the linguistic realism embraced by Katz.) More precisely, these central chapters are meant to legitimate—lend theoretical weight and credibility to—the New Critical intuition that literary texts have determinate meanings.

Chapter 2, "Type and Token" (18–39), takes a first pass at the notion of type meaning and sketches the anti-Wittgensteinian argument that language understanding depends on reducing utterance tokens to their ideal types. Dowling suggests that, because "few of us are so articulate that we just come right out and speak in perfectly formed English sentences . . . what more normally happens is that our linguistic utterance occurs amidst a welter of non-linguistic elements," enabling language users to "hear a meaningful sentence amidst the non-linguistic clutter" (21). In this view, when people work to comprehend an utterance, they abstract away from hesita-

tion phenomena, repetitions, and other conversational disfluencies to grasp the type meaning that is more or less easily reconstructed on the basis of the utterance token actually produced. In this view, too, "in any actual speech act, in which various features of the extra-linguistic situation may be at work to determine meaning, the type-meaning of a word or sentence may be twisted, inverted, negated or otherwise deflected from its sense at the type level so as to take on various other kinds of significance" (22). Thus, according to Dowling, in 1950s American English the word *square* took on a meaning by virtue of its being used nonliterally as a slang term in nongeometric contexts, where it functioned to denote not a rectangle having four sides of equal length but a boringly conventional or old-fashioned sort of person. A crucial point here, according to the author, is that "the token-meaning continues to bear *some* relation to that literal meaning: our talk may be of parents, but a language of geometric figures and relations is always going to be governing what Katz will call the 'pragmatic scatter' in any such situation" (23).

Dowling's discussion of these matters involves the author in several difficulties, however. For one thing, Dowling does not give a principled account of the difference between linguistic and nonlinguistic elements of utterances, yet he uses that contrast as a basis for distinguishing between utterance types and tokens. Indeed, for sociolinguists working in the conversation-analytic tradition (Goodwin and Heritage 1990; Heritage 1989), repetitions, hesitation phenomena, and the like constitute crucial linguistic behaviors in their own right. From this perspective, instead of assuming that actual usage deviates from rules prescribed by the linguistic system, researchers should work to characterize the rule governedness of the linguistic system itself on the basis of language viewed as a resource for communication. Language can then be seen as encompassing disfluencies as well as fluencies, and a model of language structure and use faithful to contexts of face-to-face interaction should not ignore the sociosemiotic meanings of breaks in timing, repetitions of morphemes or whole words, and so on. In effect, Dowling's suggestion that such phenomena amount to "non-linguistic clutter" begs a question to which the author purports to be giving an answer: namely, where do we draw the line between what is systematically part of language use and what is not?

Along the same lines, in discussing how type meanings can be reconstructed on the basis of utterance tokens, Dowling adopts from Katz the term *pragmatic scatter* to suggest the more or less oblique type-token relations that can result when a given string is uttered in a particular discourse context. In other words, particularized speech acts can produce a "scattering" of the type meanings that, according to Katz, reside in the linguistic

system itself. Yet the notion of pragmatic *scatter*, which the index reveals to be much used in Dowling's book, implies an invidious distinction between type and token, a sort of Neoplatonic privileging of abstract senses over material words.[2] As ethnolinguists such as Dell Hymes (1974) pointed out decades ago, however, one of the limitations of Noam Chomsky's approach—an approach on which Katz and ipso facto Dowling heavily rely—is that it privileged study of the abstract properties of the linguistic system over study of the principled, nonrandom uses of that system in contexts of everyday communication. For Hymes, having the grammatical competence needed to produce and interpret the string *How old are you*? is not tantamount to having the communicative competence needed to know when, where, and with whom it is appropriate to use this string. Why is it necessary or desirable, then, to make a decontextualized type meaning the "default" (26) yardstick against which all tokens of the utterance *How old are you*? must be measured in order to be understood? Utterance tokens are not so many scatterings of utterance types; rather, they are themselves typifiable sociocommunicative behaviors whose distributional patterns one must know in order to be a member of the speech community in which they are meaningfully used.

In short, although Dowling's stated purpose is to use "theoretical" linguistic research on semantics to address the problem of meaning in literature, his presentation of that research is remarkably narrow. The book contains no discussion of how research traditions in sociolinguistics and, more broadly, functional linguistics (e.g., Halliday 1994) invert the Chomskyan and Katzian perspectives; these traditions anchor the language system in the sociointeractional world such that linguistic structures themselves can be seen as evolving in response to communicative needs rather than as ideal types instantiated (and sometimes "scattered") in actual tokens of speech. At the very least, given the extent to which the author relies on a Katz-inspired distinction between types and tokens, Dowling's case would have been strengthened by an account of how his approach provides explanatory resources superior to those developed by more functionally minded linguists.

Related problems surface in Dowling's discussion of 1950's slang usage of the word *square*. The author's claim is that "the sort of 'pragmatic scatter' that occurs when extralinguistic constraints enter into the picture—as when, complaining about the extreme conventionality of my parents, I describe them as 'square'—[does] so only in relation to the 'ideal' possibility

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2. In chapter 5, Dowling defines *pragmatic scatter* as a noncoincidence of type and token meaning (81).

of a coincidence of sense at the type and token levels" (26–27). Hence, in Dowling's view, my ability to understand a nonliteral, figurative utterance depends on my being able to comprehend its relation to what that utterance literally means. When I hear something being described as "square" (or "cool" or "gross"), I must therefore mentally realign the type and token meanings that have become pragmatically scattered in slang usages of this sort. Two objections come to mind here, the second more far-reaching than the first.

In the first place, a noncoincidence between type and token meaning may be a necessary condition for nonliteral utterance, but it does not seem to be a sufficient one. Recall that, for Dowling, utterances marked by various sorts of production disfluencies stand at some remove from the types that one supposedly has to reconstruct on the basis of the "deficient" token. But in such cases the disjunction between type and token does not warrant interpreting an utterance as nonliteral. Something additional seems to be required. And that, arguably, is the projection of features associated with a source concept onto a target concept (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989): thereby the rectilinearity of geometric squares, say, blends with the tedious straightforwardness of 1950s parents, adamant in their refusal to depart from well-marked-out lines of conduct. To adapt the Katz/Dowling terminology, what is interesting about figurative slang usages like *square* is the extent to which they, like poetic metaphors, compel interpreters to blend two type meanings jostling for pride of place in one and the same linguistic token, their fusion capable of taking on new and different valences across shifting contexts of use.

The second, more far-reaching objection to Dowling's account stems from the difficulty of mapping the notion "type meaning" into speech acts in order to account for nonliteral utterances.[3] The type-token distinction does seem justifiable in the case of parts of speech, that is, inventories of phonological, lexical, or grammatical features of a language. Thus it is clear that in the English language the sound represented as the /I/ vowel occurs in words as various as *pin*, *tip*, and *stitch*; likewise, any one of those three words could be instantiated in multiple tokens in a particular stretch of talk. But do the same facts hold for utterances, which can be defined as sentences paired with contexts (cf. Gazdar 1979; Levinson 1983)? Does a single utterance type underlie multiple realizations or tokens of a given utterance? In other words, do utterances, as opposed to words, phrases, and sentences specified

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3. Here and in what follows, I build on the account of speech acts originating with J. L. Austin (1962), systematized by John Searle (1969), and then presented in a synoptic (and somewhat critical) fashion by Stephen C. Levinson (1983).

as grammatical by the linguistic system, have a "type" meaning delivered in a more or less straightforward, nonscattered manner by utterance "tokens" in situated contexts? Although Dowling's account of figurative language assumes that the previous questions can be answered affirmatively, recent research on indirect speech acts suggests otherwise.

In the account developed by Searle (1969), indirect speech acts can be defined as utterances whose illocutionary force disagrees with their surface form. Take, for example, the utterance *Can you pass me the salt?* spoken by someone who wants an interlocutor to pass the salt, not to provide an account of the interlocutor's own reaching, grasping, and passing abilities. This utterance is nonliteral, or indirect, insofar as there is a mismatch between its surface form (interrogative) and its illocutionary force (imperative). As Levinson (1983: 264) notes, *most* usages are indirect in this sense, especially when it comes to imperatives, which when issued in a direct, bald-faced manner tend to be perceived as threats to a recipient's desire not to be imposed upon by others (Brown and Levinson 1987; Scollon and Scollon 1995). What is more, there are an indefinite number of ways of mitigating a request through indirection, as in requesting the salt by saying *My, but this food is underseasoned*! or *I wonder how this food might be made less bland*? or *How I wish I were sitting closer to the salt shaker*! or *You seem to be really skilled at passing people salt* or *May the gods rain down salt upon my food*. As Levinson points out, the human proclivity for indirectness provides a compelling reason for *not* trying to separate out a level of illocutionary force built into—or at least prototypically associated with—particular sentence forms (283). Hence, whereas claiming that utterances have type meanings is tantamount to assigning them built-in or literal forces, the existence of such forces is belied by attested linguistic behavior. In this way, indirect speech acts furnish grounds for construing "the senses of the text" not as immanent or context-independent but rather as radically context-dependent—in precisely the manner of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1958), whose conception of meaning as use is critiqued by Dowling in the second part of chapter 2 (23–39). Arguably, and in a manner directly anticipated by Wittgenstein's later philosophical work, matching illocutionary forces with locutionary forms can only be accomplished by figuring out how an act of saying is "geared into" a particular context of use, the meaning of an utterance being a function of the type of activity in which it is used (Levinson 1992 [1979]), the identity of the participants involved, the "key" in which it is said (sarcastic, earnest, etc.), and so on.

Yet Dowling, taking his cue from Katz, seeks to argue against Wittgenstein's context-based theory of meaning. From the Katz/Dowling perspective, meaning is something that can be recovered *in spite of context*; type

meanings survive in the face of pragmatic scatter. In this connection, Dowling reexamines Wittgenstein's famous *Slab!* example from perspectives afforded by Chomsky's syntactic theories and Katz's intensional semantics. The author does skillfully draw on an early version of Chomsky's theory of generative grammar to dispute Wittgenstein's claim that *Slab!* is not an elliptical form of *Bring me a slab!*—the philosopher's assertion being part of more general argument against theories postulating invisible entities beneath the surface of language. In particular, Chomsky's early account of the difference between deep structure and surface structure allows Dowling to argue that Wittgenstein's example is misleading because it involves a noun instead of a verb. The really interesting case, as Dowling sees it, would be a verb (e.g., *Dress!*) whose subject (*you*) remains unexpressed but is nonetheless recoverable from the deep structure of the utterance, namely, the logico-grammatical representation of its type as opposed to token meaning (32).

Other aspects of the author's critique of Wittgenstein are, however, less persuasive. One problem is Dowling's failure to argue in any sustained way for the intertranslatability of the deep structure/surface structure and type/token pairs. The ambiguity of a string such as *Flying planes can be dangerous* derives from what appear to be two alternative deep-structural representations. Yet Dowling does not provide any instances of a "2 types/1 token" analogue—of two different utterance types associated with one and the same utterance token.[4] Another, more serious problem with Dowling's critique of Wittgenstein, and for that matter his discussion of "Chomsky's Revolution" in chapter 4 (60–78), is that it does not take into account later developments in syntactic theory, including Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (Gazdar 1985), Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (Pollard and Sag 1994), or Chomsky's own more recent Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995). In the first two frameworks just listed, lexical units constrain the properties of syntactic units, and syntactic "rules" are either reduced to a minimum or eliminated as such—including the rules for transformation (passivization, ellipsis, and so on) to which Dowling appeals at various points. Likewise, the Minimalist Program assumes a minimum of

4. Interestingly, in chapter 4, the author points out that early work in generative grammar was able to capture how two superficially similar strings like *John is easy to please* and *John is eager to please* mean different things because of a difference in their deep structures (66). But he does not mention the type-token distinction in his discussion of this example. Nor does Dowling mention it in connection with the inverse case, where one string has two competing deep-structural descriptions, this being the more problematic instance vis-à-vis Dowling's Katz-inspired theory of type meanings. In his example, *The President could not ratify the treaty* (69), the second reading becomes evident when one pronounces the word *not* as a stressed syllable (gloss: What the president could do is not ratify the treaty).

levels of representation in grammatical theory, making it an empirical question how many levels are needed beyond those of Logical Form, Phonetic Form, and various output conditions or filters on representations at each level. My broader point here is that Dowling, in arguing that Wittgenstein's account suffers from having been fashioned prior to Chomsky's linguistic theories, himself relies on a Chomskyan paradigm now more than thirty years old—and superseded in many respects by Chomsky's and others' more recent work. This more recent work reveals a general trend toward economy of abstract representations in grammatical theory, in a spirit not drastically dissimilar to that found in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*—a text Dowling criticizes precisely for its theoretically parsimonious stance, its resistance to hypotheses about language based on abstract entities, such as type meanings and sense structures. Finally, the author's critique of Wittgenstein does not address in enough detail the problem of indirect speech acts, of which *Slab*! is an example. The philosopher's discussion of this example in fact gives prescient indications of how difficult it is to account for indirect speech acts in terms of utterance types and tokens.

Chapter 3, "Linguistics Naturalized" (40–59), which contains some of the most illuminating pages of the book, continues to develop Dowling's overall argument: namely, that meaning derives not from the way (formally describable) linguistic structures pair with contexts of use but rather from a system of abstract semantic representations bound up with the internal structure of language. As discussed below, however, even if arguments in favor of Katz's intensionalist approach win the day over arguments for other, contextually oriented approaches, that still does not settle the question of whether Katz's theory of linguistic meaning can be mapped into a theory of the meaning of *literary texts*.

Be that as it may, chapter 3 takes its title from an essay by W. V. Quine called "Epistemology Naturalized" (1969), in which the philosopher repudiates classical (e.g., Fregean) concepts of "meaning" as vestiges of a style of metaphysical thinking no longer tenable. More precisely, Quine's essay rejects intensional theories of meanings or senses in favor of a purely extensional theory of meaning or reference (meaning and referring then coming down to the same thing); in such a theory, the term "*bachelor* means . . . by denoting a certain class of real human beings we call bachelors" (42). In synopsizing Katz's response to Quine's argument, and thereby continuing the effort begun in chapter 2 to get beyond the anti-intensionalist program articulated by philosophers such as Wittgenstein and then Quine, Dowling goes back to the future by way of Gottlob Frege, the logician whose work proved foundational for twentieth-century theories of language and logic. The author notes that Frege was an intensionalist for whom "an account

of meaning as internal to language was essential if one were to make co-
herent sense of certain important facts about denoting" (43). The facts in
question were those surrounding what became known as the problem of
propositional attitudes (Kamp 1990; Quine 1980). Propositional attitudes,
or contexts involving a matrix verb of believing, thinking, doubting, liking,
and so on, suggest the limitations of a strictly extensionalist theory of mean-
ing. In such contexts it is sometimes the case that, even when an expression
A is extensionally equivalent to an expression B, I cannot substitute A for B
without changing the truth value of the resulting proposition. For example,
the truth value of the proposition *Mary likes the writing style of John Fowles* may
be false even when the truth value of the proposition *Mary likes the writing
style of the author of "The French Lieutenant's Woman"* is true, simply because
Mary may not be aware that *John Fowles* and *the author of "The French Lieu-
tenant's Woman"* indeed share the same extension, that is, pick out the same
referent.

For Katz, as Dowling points out, even though Frege's pathbreaking dis-
tinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (meaning/sense and reference) pre-
pared the way for his own version of intensionalism, Frege left a "mixed"
philosophico-linguistic legacy insofar as he conceived of sense as deter-
mining reference. Dowling shows how Katz extends and refines Frege's
approach by developing a radically intensionalist theory of proper names
(48–53). The author also summarizes Katz's explanation of why Frege's
theories fell out of favor, for example, with Quine. According to Katz,
when Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1986 [1922]) exposed fun-
damental problems with Frege's approach, it was all but inevitable that the
extensionalist theory of meaning would replace intensionalism as the domi-
nant analytic framework. By contrast, Katz himself has worked to com-
bine a broadly Fregean emphasis on intensions with Chomskyan linguistic
theory, attempting to use modern-day linguistics to reclaim sense as a legiti-
mate (i.e., nonmetaphysical) object of inquiry. However, to restate a point
introduced above, even if Katz's arguments concerning the value of inten-
sionalist programs for semantic analysis were to carry the day, additional
argumentation would be required to demonstrate that Katz's model is able
to capture the senses of *texts* as distinct from words, phrases, and sentences.[5]

5. In their use of possible worlds semantics as a framework for literary analysis, researchers
such as Lubomír Doležel (1998), Thomas Pavel (1986), and Marie-Laure Ryan (1991) have
made compelling arguments along just these lines. Ryan, for instance, has characterized "the
senses of the text" in terms of possible worlds that can have various sorts of "accessibility rela-
tions" vis-à-vis the worlds that producers and interpreters of literary texts construe as actual.
However, despite its relevance for any attempt to sketch an intensional theory of meaning in
literary texts, Dowling makes no mention of this research tradition, which extends back to
groundbreaking essays by Doležel and Pavel in the mid–1970s.

And still further argumentation would be needed to show that Katz's analysis of the sense structure of words, phrases, and sentences supports Dowling's claim for determinate meaning in literature. In my view, the author assumes instead of arguing for the applicability of the intensionalist framework in these two extra-Katzian problem domains. The result is that, even in the capstone chapter 5, Dowling's explication of Katz's theories (and of developments in philosophy and linguistics informing his theories) never yields the hermeneutic payoff that readers likely will expect.

Above I remarked that chapter 4, "Chomsky's Revolution," suffers from the author's failure to incorporate more recent research inspired by but sometimes departing quite significantly from Chomsky's early theories. Nonetheless, the chapter provides a helpful overview of early work in generative grammar, showing how it emerged against the antimentalist backdrop of Leonard Bloomfield's and Zellig Harris's methods of distributional analysis. Dowling also notes that Katz's intensionalist theory began as an attempt to develop, in work published with Jerry Fodor, a generative semantics geared toward Chomsky's syntactic models.[6] The second half of the chapter (70–78) offers a useful sketch of the current state as opposed to the history (and prehistory) of Katz's framework. Dowling's outline begins with the idea of the compositionality of meaning, that is, the view that, just as words are built up out of morphemes and sentences out of words, complex meanings are composed of simpler meanings and ultimately of "semantic primitives." Hence, Katz focuses on superordination and subordination relations between meanings within a decompositional sense structure; in other words, the meaning of an expression can be decomposed into a hierarchical structure of senses. The meaning of the expression *Roll-top Desk* derives from its place in a chain of relations: Object → Physical → Artifact → Furniture → Desk → Roll-top Desk and so forth. This relational structure licenses entailments built into the structure of language whereby something could not be a desk without being furniture and could not be furniture without being a physical object. To comprehend the meaning of the expression *Roll-top Desk* is to comprehend this hierarchy of senses and the chain or network of entailment relations that it licenses.

Dowling then turns to the verb *chase* (73ff.) as an example of Katz's symbolic representation of sense structure. In Katz's symbolism, syntactic function is prior to semantic value "because phrasal constituents can play various roles which therefore must be specified" (74). Dowling goes on to write:

6. See Harris 1993 for a fuller account of the "linguistics wars" precipitated by the rise and fall of generative semantics as a program for research.

> It would be entirely in the spirit of Katz's program to say that what the [symbolic] representation has . . . done is to dissolve the verb *chase* into the decompositional sense structure that is its underlying semantic form. Or one might say, on analogy with those "exploded" diagrams that aim to make motors or machines comprehensible to the weekend mechanic, that it is an exploded view of the same structure. The analogy does not matter so long as one has seen that the whole point of the semantic representation is to make *chase* disappear as a syntactic simple so that the complex reality of its sense structure may suddenly leap into view.   (74–75)

Thus, "to see a semantic representation in Katzian terms is to see a constellation of senses held together as though in a gravitational field" (76). After commenting on how Katz's scheme handles the notion of entailment more elegantly and more cogently than Rudolf Carnap's idea of "meaning postulates" (77–78), Dowling remarks that the networks of semantic relations discoverable in apparently simple words like *desk* and *chase* afford an account of the type meaning "that imposes constraints on token meaning in any situation in which utterance takes place" (78). This, then, is the promissory note that is to be paid in full in chapter 5, "The Senses of the Text," readers will assume. The theory of decompositional sense structure will provide a workable notion of type meaning in contexts of literary interpretation, and that notion will in turn afford the basis for claiming that a particular text means X but not Y. My next section argues that Dowling's promissory note remains unpaid.

3.

Chapter 5 begins by reiterating a claim with which I have already taken issue: "no matter how bizarre the results one can obtain by imagining variations in the pragmatic situation [of an utterance], utterance within the speech-act context must still consist of linguistic tokens which sustain a determinate relation to a *type* existing outside or beyond that context" (82). The question that remains unanswered, however, is whether the type-token relation pertains (or pertains in the same way) to all linguistic units, no matter what their size or scale—extending from syllables to texts. Tellingly, when Dowling takes an extract from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (82) to support the claim I just quoted, he chooses a passage that centers around a meaning that Humpty Dumpty imposes by fiat on a single word, *glory*. The passage does not thematize speech acts with the richness and complexity of those constituting literary texts. Neither does a somewhat more complicated example borrowed from Katz, the string *George is a fine friend*, exhibit the requisite richness and complexity. And when Dowling

does turn back to Donne's "Valediction" as a full-fledged literary example, he makes no suggestion that the tools developed to analyze relatively small-scale semantic units might have to be rescaled to address textual (in the sense of whole-text) meanings: "a poem like the 'Valediction' is *already* a pragmatic or speech act situation in which interpretation must operate by simultaneously determining sense structure at the type level and mapping pragmatic scatter within the dramatic situation" (83).

One gets a sense of the sorts of hermeneutic readjustments that are required for literary analysis—readjustments that arguably *cannot be made from within Katz's semantic framework*—in some further comments offered by Dowling concerning this Donne poem. Attempting to characterize the speech-act situation embedded in two other stanzas of the "Valediction," Dowling puts forth as the determinate meaning of Donne's poem a reading that strikes me as being quite far afield from the type meanings, sense structures, and entailment relations associated with Katzian semantics:

> No student who has understood the syntactic relations involved in the three occurrences of *it*, and that *sublunary* involves not simply the sense "earthly, imperfect" but a whole way of imagining the cosmos, will then fail to have understood that the speaker is a man of a certain age and social class speaking to a woman upset by his going away, or that this man and woman are either young married people or lovers newly on terms of physical intimacy.   (84)

My point is not that Dowling's interpretation of the stanzas is "wrong," though I note in passing that by hedging on the question of whether the interlocutors are married people or merely lovers, the author evokes not a single determinate meaning for the poem but at least two candidate interpretations. Instead, what I wish to stress is that Dowling's gloss on the speaker's class, age, and relationship to his loved one does not consist of senses "entailed," in Katz's usage, by the meanings of the words in the poem. There is simply nothing in the poem that entails Dowling's interpretations in the way that the words *desk* and *chair* entail furniture. To argue otherwise would be to stretch the notion of "entailment" so thin that it encompasses semantic relations—meanings bound up with attitudes toward romantic love, theories about the cosmos, and notions of class and age—which are vastly different from the relations described by Katz in his account of the sense structure of words, phrases, and sentences. And since Katz interdefines type meaning with entailment relations taken in his narrow, technical sense, it is hard to parse (let alone concur with) Dowling's claim that "given Katz's interpretation of the type-token relation and the notion of pragmatic scatter, one is also given a means of understanding the ways in which errors at the level of primary meaning inevitably produce errors in second-order interpretation" (88).

The same goes for Dowling's later remarks concerning the values or norms that can be imputed to the speaker of Donne's "Elegy XIX." Dowling suggests that "it is an implication of Katz's intensionalism that they [the speaker's values], as much as the sense of individual words and sentences, are 'in' the poem" (93). But even if the values are indeed in the text, they are not, on pain of overextending and trivializing Katz's very notion of "sense," in the text in the same way that the sense structures of words are in the text. To put the same point another way, Dowling's claim for the text-internal status of the speaker's values rests on a framework for semantic analysis that simply will not support the author's claim about how and what the poem means.

Indeed, evidence in the book suggests that there may be extralinguistic as well as linguistic motivations for Dowling's claims about the text-internal status of literary meaning. These extralinguistic motivations have little to do with the provenance, methods, and aims of Katz's framework for semantic analysis. Interspersed with Dowling's discussion of determinate meaning and intensional semantics are hints of a politics of interpretation that surface in relatively explicit form at the end of chapter 5.[7] Dowling writes of Kerrigan's interpretation of Donne's "Elegy XIX": "Today, a similar insistence on primary meaning, in the rare instances when it is insisted on, will usually be an attempt to reclaim literary meaning from ideological or political interpretation" (95). Furthermore,

> The support such reading [as Kerrigan's] now unexpectedly gains from the New Intensionalism in semantic theory thus poses a new and significant obstacle to various contemporary modes of ideological interpretation. For the theory of literary autonomy associated by New Criticism with close reading and "the liter-

7. Other signs of Dowling's politics of interpretation manifest themselves in this part of chapter 5. Again working to distance itself from (all) "ideology," the author's approach ipso facto reveals its own deep affiliations with a particular politico-ideological framework—namely one in which literary art is a repository of timeless meanings that exist outside or beyond sociopolitical conflicts. Writing of another critic with whose interpretation of Donne's "Elegy XIX" he disagrees, Dowling remarks: John "Carey's notion that the poem is about a submissive girl-victim being made to perform a strip tease, or his related ruminations about males who inhabit a shadowland of pornographic fantasy . . . may be seen to draw its authority from a newer mode of ideological reading meant to demonstrate the complicity of literary works in one or another system of social domination" (95). Even if Dowling's critique of Carey were warranted, however, it is important to distinguish two sorts of claims in this connection: (1) narrow claims associated with particular, more or less carefully argued political readings of literary texts and (2) the broad claim that strategies for reading literature (and intuitions about what literature is) are at some level shaped by the social and political contexts in which those strategies and intuitions emerge. Pace Dowling, rebutting claims of the narrower sort is not tantamount to rebutting (or even addressing) the second, broader claim. Suppose, further, that semantic tools of the kind developed by Katz can enable narrow claims about specific works to be rebutted. It still remains to be proved that Katz's semantic scheme has any bearing on the broader claim.

ary study of literature" was also the theory that literary works, as self-contained
worlds embodying their own laws and their own logic, were subject to violence
and distortion when made to answer to doctrines or epistemologies or ideologies
external to themselves.   (95)

It may strike the reader as paradoxical that Dowling's account, so much of
which is devoted to the explication of complex linguistic and philosophical
theories and of their bearings on literary analysis, would eventuate in a call
for "the literary study of literature." But his remarks do suggest why he chose
to use Katz's ideas as a resource for literary theory. Seeking to "reclaim lit-
erary meaning from ideological or political interpretation," *The Senses of the
Text* focuses on the New Intensionalism because of Katz's insistence on the
language-internal, language-determined status of word, phrase, and sen-
tence meanings. For an analyst who views literary works as self-contained
domains with their own special laws and logic, intensionalist accounts of the
senses built into language would have obvious appeal over extensionalist
accounts of meaning as reference to entities or situations in the world. How-
ever, by foregrounding an approach that best supports the ideal of literary
works as autonomous worlds existing unto themselves, the author back-
grounds other developments in semantic theory that are arguably better
suited for studying the richness and complexity of the meanings of literary
discourse.

Especially relevant in this connection are semantic models that make
linguistic (and other sorts of) meanings a function of preference-rule sys-
tems of various kinds. For instance, William Frawley (1992: 56–58), like Ray
Jackendoff (1983: 128–58; cf. Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983), associates pref-
erence rules with gradient and prototypical as opposed to absolute, "either-
or" situations, properties, and relations. Thus, taking the (gradient) seman-
tic property of punctuality (= occurring in an instantaneous rather than a
continuous fashion) as an example, Frawley defines a preference rule as "a
statement in probabilistic form of the relative strength of two or more items
for interpretation relative to some property or properties. To be interpreted
punctually, *wink* is preferred over *punch*, which in turn is preferred over *slide
off*, notationally, *wink* > *punch* > *slide off*" (57).

Along the same lines, in his pathbreaking account of the ubiquity of
preference-rule systems that can be seen to operate in areas as apparently
diverse as musical compositions, taxonomical classifications, and the gram-
mar of verbs, Jackendoff (1983: 152) identifies five symptoms of systems of
preference rules: "(1) judgments of graded acceptability and of family re-
semblance; (2) two or more rules, neither of which is necessary, but each of
which is under certain conditions sufficient for a judgment; (3) balancing
effects among rules that apply in conflict; (4) a measure of stability based

on rule applications; (5) rules that are not logically necessary used as default values in the face of inadequate information." Preference-rule systems thus require a shift from the idea of *necessary and sufficient conditions* associated with binarized, either-or judgments about a thing's membership in a class or its possession of particular attributes to *typicality conditions* that work in a gradient, more-or-less way. For example, it is typical but neither necessary nor sufficient for members of the class "bird" to have the attribute "capable of flight." Preference-based typicality conditions of this sort should be contrasted with the entailment relations specified as part of sense structure by Katz. As the previous example suggests, the word *bird* in some cases but not all denotes "capable of flight," and the same goes for the inverse relation: being capable of flight is sometimes tantamount to being a bird, sometimes not. By this measure, a theory of reasoning based on preferences as opposed to entailments will be more flexible and better adapted to the fuzziness of so many of the semantic phenomena associated with natural languages. Conceivably, a preference-based theory could also accommodate reasoning via entailment relations, reconstruing it as a special case of reasoning via typicality conditions. In other words, entailment might be described as a semantic relation in which it is absolutely (= invariably) typical for one category or phenomenon to co-occur with (imply, be implied by, or both) another category or phenomenon. If preference-rule systems proved capable of explaining sense structures of the kind discussed by Katz, then "preferred meaning" could be construed as a more basic notion than "intension."

Indeed, as characterized by semantic theorists such as Frawley and Jackendoff, preference-rule systems can be viewed as a major resource for probabilistic reasoning, which is arguably the kind of reasoning that most people use in most situations most of the time. Such reasoning can be defined as "the formation of probability judgments and of subjective beliefs about the likelihoods of outcomes and the frequencies of events"; these judgments are often "about things that are only indirectly observable and only partly predictable" (Shafir 1999: 671). Debatably—although this claim amounts to a statement of topic for another book—in the ongoing effort to use linguistic models to develop a semantics of literary texts, a more promising framework than Katz's would be a theory involving probabilistic reasoning based on preference rule systems. Preference rules are not bound to a particular scale of linguistic units in the manner of Katz's type meanings and entailment relations: it is possible to specify discourse- and genre-level preferences as well as preference rules for phrasal collocations, verb types, and other small semantic structures (cf. Herman 2002; Jahn 1997, 1999; Schauber and Spolsky 1986).

Further, the need to shift from a semantics of intensions to a semantics of preferences finds independent support in work by Russian Formalists such as Viktor Šklovsky and Jury Tynanov (see Steiner 1984: 137), by Hans Robert Jauss (1982), by Stanley Fish (1967, 1980), and by other theorists concerned with the evolution of the literary system and the dynamic nature of the reading process. This work makes it plausible to assume that, both for individual readers and for reading collectivities, literary interpretation involves probabilistic reasoning—judgments to the effect that interpretation X can be given a higher probability weighting than interpretation Y—as opposed to once-and-for-all decisions about "determinate meaning." One of the best-learned lessons of reception theory is that, as norms for interpretation change, reshaped in part by the new reading habits required to make sense of innovative texts, different strategies for meaning reconstruction produce an altered understanding of older works as well. Thus, even if the case could be made for treating literature as an autonomous domain, that domain itself has a history, with the result that its laws and its logic are variable rather than fixed. When read in light of works that did not exist during the poet's own era, a line of Donne's poetry, let alone an entire poetic text, can take on any number of unanticipated meanings—by virtue of a network of intertextual relations that grows ever more dense as the world's poetic corpus continues to expand. Even something as basic as choosing to write in a particular poetic genre, or a particular language, can carry different sociosemiotic meanings across different places and times. What is more, on any given interpretive occasion, as individual readers progress through a Donne poem and form moment-by-moment judgments of its meaning, they are likely to accentuate certain details and predict certain outcomes until such time as new details and outcomes (or inferences about them) cause them to reassign probability weightings to their candidate interpretations, perhaps downplaying what they earlier thought important and foregrounding what before had escaped their notice. Temporary and provisional judgment formation of this sort is the essence of people's everyday mental lives. There is no reason to suppose that literary analysis involves radically different cognitive processes from those we use to make our way in the wider world.

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