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## Irony, pretence and fictively-elaborating hyperbole

John A. Barnden  
University of Birmingham

This article broadly adopts a well-known approach to verbal irony: taking ironic speakers to be engaging in pretence; and it follows others in viewing the pretences as (micro-)dramas created by the ironists, who act characters in the dramas. But it breaks new ground by strongly emphasizing the *world of the drama* (*the drama's world*). In drama, acted characters operate within some implied world (e.g., a historical setting). Equally, in irony there is such a world. We then see a *triangle of contrast*: not only (a) the opposition usually considered in irony theory – between acted characters' views/attitudes and the nature of the real world – but also potential contrast between (b) those views/attitudes and the rest of the drama's world, and between (c) drama's world and real world. This particularly helps us analyse *fictively-elaborating* hyperbole, arising from drama-world details invented by ironists. The article also invites non-pretence irony theories to try to account for the effects.

**Keywords:** irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, pretence, contrast

### 1. Introduction

This article adopts a pretence-based approach to verbal irony (cf. Clark & Gerrig, 2007/1995; Currie, 2006, 2010; Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg & Brown, 2007/1995; Popa-Wyatt, 2014; Récanati, 2007, pp. 224–226; Walton, 1990, pp. 222–224). I take the ironist (ironic speaker) to be engaging in a pretence of some suitable sort. For instance, ironist Ian may pretend to be a person who thinks that the weather is fine, even though Ian knows the weather is actually horrible, in order to mock someone who thinks the weather fine. I find it helpful to follow the practice adopted by some previous researchers of talking about such pretence in terms of drama. That is, we can regard an ironist as staging a (micro-)drama and simultaneously acting the role of a character within it – in our example, Ian is acting the role of someone

who believes the weather to be fine. Clark & Gerrig (2007/1984) talk of the ironist acting a role, in an early version of a pretence approach, and see Carston & Wearing, (2015) and Popa-Wyatt, (2014) for further references and comment.

In drama in a theatre there are typically several actors, whereas in basic forms of irony there is only one ironist. But ordinary theatrical drama, or improvisation in an acting workshop, can itself be a monologue, with one actor playing one character. Conversely, as irony theorists have often pointed out, several discourse participants can jointly engage in an irony, something we will dwell upon below. To turn to other possible differences between irony and ordinary drama, verbal irony does not generally involve anything like a physical theatre or stage. But radio drama doesn't either. As to the question of whether ironists literally engage in drama or only metaphorically do so, I relegate this matter to discussion elsewhere, despite its interest and general importance, as it makes little difference to the particular claims below. Finally, we could more neutrally call the drama's world in irony the *imagined context* that the pretended agent – the agent that the ironist is pretending to be – is operating within according to the ironist. Indeed, Récanati (2007, pp. 224–226), in a pretence-based proposal, includes contexts that are akin to the imagined contexts or drama worlds of this article, but deploys the idea for different purposes.

Although I adopt a pretence approach, couched as a drama approach, nevertheless for reasons of space and focus I refrain from engaging in the long-proceeding debate about the relative advantages of it and other approaches such as echo-based ones, or about how one might unify different approaches (Currie, 2006, 2010; Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg & Brown, 2007/1995; Wilson, 2006; Wilson & Sperber, 2012; Popa-Wyatt, 2014). The debate seems partly terminological, and it is just as central and natural in pretence theories as in overtly echo-based theories to regard ironists as “echoing” other people's actual or potential wording, noting, as we pass by, the highly metaphorical nature of the term “echoing” and its consequent malleability in theory-making. And of course acted characters in ordinary drama can often be seen as “echoing” what real people have said or might say. Rather, I use the drama view to illuminate certain issues about *irony*, not *primarily* to support pretence views. Perhaps, non-pretence approaches can satisfyingly come to produce their own analogues of that illumination. If so, all well and good; if not, we will have support for a drama-informed pretence approach.

In any drama, there is an implied world that the acted character or characters are operating within. In a murder mystery, the various characters might be in a world where someone has been murdered, a gun is lying on the floor, it is six o'clock, someone has been ill in bed for ten years, the characters are in Scotland in the early twentieth century, Poirot is travelling from London, the police think the death is a suicide, etc. Importantly for this article, even when there is a physical stage for a drama, much of the implied world is conveyed through the drama dialogue

rather than directly shown. I call this world the *world of the play*, or *[the] drama's world* for short. A main theme of the present article is that pretence theorists have not adequately attended to the drama's world. Nor have *non*-pretence theories of irony provided anything parallel to the analytical richness and power provided by bringing in the drama's world.

As a special part of the drama's world, we have the beliefs, desires, emotions, etc. that the acted characters have about the drama's world. This article accordingly highlights all three of the following: *characters' beliefs/attitudes*, as one aspect of the drama's world; *the remainder of the drama's world*; and the *real world* (or the world taken to be real by the discourse participants). Furthermore, there are at least three different types of contrast that should be considered, giving a central *triangle of contrast*:

- a. A character's beliefs (etc.) can be importantly at odds with the nature of the remainder of the drama's world.
- b. The drama's world can contrast importantly with the real world.
- c. A character's beliefs (etc.) can be importantly at odds with the real world.

Yet overwhelmingly in the irony literature, whether pretence-based or otherwise, one only sees contrast of type (c). Ignoring or downplaying the drama's world in a pretence approach to irony is like trying to analyse a theatrical play by relating what the characters say only to the real world.

One main reason for attending to the drama's world and the full triangle of contrast is that we are then able properly to consider a type of hyperbole that often appears in irony – *fictively-elaborating hyperbole*. At an extreme it appears in the form of lengthy satires, such as the commonly-cited satirical essay by Jonathan Swift (1729), "A Modest Proposal," where a fictional scenario of serving up children as food for the rich is extensively elaborated as a political irony. But my concern is with much briefer, mundane ironic uses, as when someone ironically says "Yeah sure, the weather's fine, what with the scorching sun and tropical birds flying about" in reaction to someone who has wrongly claimed the weather is fine but who has not mentioned a scorching sun or tropical birds. The ironist is adding invented detail – fictive elaborations – in mentioning the sun and birds. Fictively-elaborating hyperbole goes beyond the relatively simple type of hyperbole usually discussed in irony research, as for instance when an ironist counters a claim that someone is clever by ironically saying "Sure, he's the cleverest person in the world." Here the ironist merely goes up some scale (cleverness) rather than introducing qualitatively new, invented details.

Such elaborations do, however, feature quite often in the literature on irony, e.g. in some of the examples in Athanasiadou (this volume) and in some of the ironic metaphors discussed by Musolff (this volume). This article aims to be a

step toward a systematic, detailed theoretical account of their role in irony, and in particular of the hyperbole they engender. Also worth noting is that the treatment in this article needs to take a unified view of the types of contrast arising in irony and hyperbole, and this chimes with the emergent view affirmed by Colston & O'Brien (2000) and Herrero Ruiz (2009) that the topic of contrast can serve a unifying role across tropes.

It also turns out to be natural for this article carefully to consider the difference between two forms of verbal irony: [*explicitly-*]attitude-wrapped and non-attitude-wrapped. An attitude-wrapped example of a type sometimes discussed is "I love it that it's such fine weather today" (when it's bad weather).

A variant example is the odder-looking "I love it that it's really nasty weather today." The desired circumstance (fine weather) – or a contrary of it in the odder variant – is wrapped within a statement of attitude ("I loved it that," in the particular example). While such examples do appear in the literature, non-attitude-wrapped forms of irony are the usual ones discussed, as in the bare "Fine weather today." Attitude-wrapped and non-attitude-wrapped irony have been inadequately distinguished in past research, and I will analyse attitude-wrapped irony as involving a measure of fictively-elaborating hyperbole, with the odder variant intensifying the hyperbolic effect. There are degrees of strength of attitude-wrapping, and for instance even starting an irony with the common "Oh great" is a relatively weak form, although I will not explicitly address this particular form in the discussion below.

The plan for the paper is as follows. Section 2 explains some assumptions about irony and hyperbole taken separately and together, and illustrates fictively-elaborating hyperbole, mainly within irony. Section 3 provides some clarifications of the pretence approach taken in this article, and of the drama-based view. Section 4 explains how variations concerning drama's worlds lead to varied flavours of irony. That section does not explicitly analyse hyperbole, but Section 5 analyses examples of fictively-elaborating hyperbole by suitably managing the drama's worlds. Section 6 concludes. Attitude-wrapped irony will crop up in various places.

Caution: My main concern below is not to explain the successful communication of irony from speaker to hearers, but rather to analyse the ironist's pretending. Normally we hope hearers will grasp what the speaker is pretending, but I do not go into the nature of the processing that helps hearers to do this.

## 2. Assumptions about irony and hyperbole

Here I lay out working assumptions used in later sections. The present section in no way relies on taking a pretence or drama view of irony.

## 2.1 Irony

I assume that the ironic quality of an ironist's utterance rests in part on expressing emotional or otherwise affectively loaded attitudes motivated by a contrast between a claim, thought, expectation, etc. (e.g., that the weather is good) that the ironist is alluding to and the reality (e.g., that the weather is bad). Ironists' attitudes are typically negative, at least mildly. They might wish to express, for instance, that they are disappointed or bitter about reality for falling short of some prior expectation of their own, or for falling short of relevant societal norms (see e.g. Kumon-Nakamura, Glucksberg & Brown, 2007/1995). But the attitudes can instead or additionally be non-negative ones such as surprise, the attitude focused on by Colston and Keller (1998).

As commonly assumed, the ironist – let's call him Ian – can also be expressing negative emotional attitudes about actual or potential *holders* of alluded-to claims/thoughts, or holders of analogous thoughts (for the latter case see the siesta/pizza pair of examples in Ruiz de Mendoza, this volume). Ian might react to Winifred's incorrect claim that the weather is fine by saying "Sure, the weather's just great" and thereby ironically mock her. The attitudes can be as strong as bitter mockery, ridicule, or indignation, but can also be ones of mild criticism or disapproval, or just humorous teasing. (See Gibbs, 2007/2000, for emphasis on jocularly, and Kumon-Nakamura *et al.*, *ibid*, for a broad range of attitudes. See also Colston, 1997, for evidence that irony increases levels of condemnation). I will use "criticism" for brevity, to cover all the possibilities. The attitudes usually discussed are at least somewhat emotional or otherwise affective – the criticism is not just of a thoroughly neutral, intellectual sort. Even in positive irony there can be mild criticism of a thought-holder for having an incorrect negative expectation.

Irony can react to the violation of some expectation (etc.) that is a social or cultural norm or a generally held stereotype or hope, such as that it's warm in the summer. For simplicity of writing I subsume this under the case of being critical of thought-holders, the ones in question now being typical people who have the expectations, hopes, beliefs, etc. in question. However, the case could be kept separate without affecting the claims of this article.

Going back to Ian being disappointed that the weather is bad because of an expectation (etc.) of his own, we should not assume that Ian is necessarily also criticizing himself for having the expectation. He might just be disappointed. Equally, Ian might react with mere disappointment or regret, and not criticism, to a good-weather expectation or claim held by someone else, Winifred, or may react ironically to such an expectation or claim as an emphatic way of drawing her attention to the actual facts.

In such cases, while Ian is drawing attention to the incorrectness of Winifred's *claim*, this does not mean *ipso facto* that he is criticizing her. Winifred may have perfectly good reasons for thinking that the weather is fine, and Ian may know this. Of course, in other circumstances Ian may well be criticizing her. Much depends on what sort of person he is, his general relationship with Winifred, what he knows about her, whether there is jocular or criticism in surrounding discourse, and other contextual factors.

Even when Ian is not criticizing *Winifred*, we could still say that he is criticizing the *proposition* that the weather is good. But we should draw a firm distinction between criticism of a proposition (e.g., for being untrue) and criticism of a person for holding a proposition. One can criticize proposition P without criticizing person X for holding P, and indeed in principle one can criticize X for holding P without criticizing P: e.g., because X has hit upon true P through crazy reasoning. I believe this distinction between types of criticism has not been adequately embraced in the irony literature.

Several examples below will involve sarcastic cases of irony, the sarcasm arising through fictively-elaborating hyperbole. Musolff (this volume) also mentions a link between sarcasm and cases of hyperbole that according to the present paper would be categorized as fictively-elaborating. The big and general question of the relationship of irony to sarcasm (see, e.g., Lepore & Stone, 2014, for differences) is not a concern of this paper, which only requires the observation that (i) many cases of irony are also sarcastic, without requiring any sharp delineation of the sarcastic cases, and that (ii) sarcastic irony is of a strong person-criticizing sort. Musolff (this volume) says that sarcasm adds "a further insulting or denouncing effect" to irony. Dictionaries (e.g., Chambers and Pocket Oxford) define sarcasm as language that is scornful, contemptuous, bitterly wounding, etc. and that is often – but not necessarily – ironic. There are indications that ordinary language users see important qualitative differences – for instance, in the experiments of Lee and Katz (1998) participants viewed ridicule as more important in sarcasm than in irony.

In the remainder of the chapter, some examples will use the following conversation fragment or variations/extensions of it:

- (1) [Winifred:] The weather's good today.  
       [Ian:]       Yeah sure, the weather's good. [or just: Yeah sure.]

Winifred is making a straightforward assertion whereas Ian is being ironic because the weather is actually bad.

A note of explanation about examples to follow based on (1): I will add various extra utterance fragments to make it clearer to the reader of this article what I am assuming that Ian is aiming to convey. But this does not imply that those fragments would need to be present in a real discourse – there it could well be that context helps to make it clear to the hearer what Ian is conveying.

## 2.2 Hyperbole: Initial comments

The terms “exaggeration,” “overstatement” and “hyperbole” are variably used, with some commentators implying they mean the same thing. However, I will use “hyperbole” not just to be exaggeration in general, but to be (factually non-deceptive) exaggeration that *emphasizes and/or heightens* the strength of *affect* (*emotional or evaluative attitude*) the speaker intends to convey towards the relevant situation, without explicitly stating this strength.

Although I leave open the possibility that some (non-deceptive) exaggerations are not intended to convey affect, I focus on exaggerations that plausibly do so and therefore count as hyperbole. For example, “This suitcase weighs a ton” plausibly does not just emphasize the extreme weight of the suitcase but also emphasizes how annoying or distressing that heaviness is (cf. similar comments in Ruiz de Mendoza, this volume). Many authors have stressed the emotional or evaluative nature of hyperbole, including Brdar-Szabó & Brdar (2010), Carston & Wearing (2015), Colston & Keller (1998) in their study of surprise in both irony and hyperbole, and McCarthy & Carter (2004) in their extensive corpus-based study of hyperbole. However, that last article notes that terms whose hyperbolic use has become extremely entrenched may have lost their affective quality, in which case they have become merely exaggerative under our criterion.

The suitcase hyperbole *exploits* the hypothetical degree of emotion that would have been appropriate had the suitcase really weighed a ton. However, we should not assume without empirical evidence that this degree of emotion is itself exactly what is *conveyed*. Plausibly, the degree is *attenuated* to become an intensity that would be more appropriate for a suitcase in real life, though still exceptionally high.

Hyperbole can not only be pragmatically bizarre or absurd, as in the suitcase weighing a ton, it can also be logically absurd, as “I agree with you 200%” or similarly in an example reported by McCarthy & Carter (2004): “I had absolutely minus amounts of kip” [kip = sleep]. The former cannot be exploiting the degree of positive emotion that would actually be appropriate to 200% agreement, as 100% is the maximum logically possible. Rather, the speaker is expressing a degree of emotion yet higher than the degree appropriate for 100%. Just because a scale, here agreement, has an upper limit does not mean that an associated emotion does too.

## 2.3 Scalar hyperbole and hyperbole within irony

The exaggerative use of terms like “genius,” “the cleverest person in the world,” “freezing,” “boiling,” “mogul,” “saint”, or of typical quantity-hyperbolic terms such as “millions,” “a ton”, “everyone,” “the whole,” “ages” and “loads” is the typical sort of exaggeration that appears in discussions of hyperbole, whether it is within irony



or not (see, e.g.: Brdar-Szabó & Brdar, 2010; Carston & Wearing, 2015; Kreuz & Roberts, 1995; McCarthy & Carter, 2004; though Herrero Ruiz, 2009, does also emphasize a different type, as will be noted below). With such terms, one clearly sees the speaker going up a scale, such as degree of cleverness, to an extremely high point. Thus, we have what we can call *scalar* hyperbole.

Hyperbole is of course often used without irony, as when one sincerely says that a suitcase weighs a ton (and see many examples in McCarthy and Carter, 2004). However, the focus of this paper is on hyperbole within ironic utterances rather than outside them, and the conjoint use of hyperbole and irony is the concern of many other authors (including Colston & Keller, 1998, Kreuz & Roberts, 1995, and McCarthy & Carter, 2004). Suppose that John ironically says Peter is “a genius” or “the cleverest person in the world,” reacting mockingly to a claim by Mary that Peter is “clever.” Following, for example, Popa-Wyatt (2014), I assume that such exaggeration within irony heightens/emphasizes John’s negative attitude(s), as well as possibly heightening/emphasizing the non-cleverness itself. Hence, the introduction of a term that would be hyperbolic outside an irony still increases affective strength when placed inside. A particular example of this has been experimentally studied by Colston & Keller (1998) [see also Colston & Gibbs, 2002], who show that irony and hyperbole used together express more surprise than either alone. We might note here that since hyperbole is more than just non-deceptive exaggeration, because of the affect-adding/intensifying quality, we cannot simply take it for granted that an exaggeration that would be hyperbole when not combined with another phenomenon such as irony stays as hyperbole (rather than just exaggeration) when so combined.

One might claim that in “genius” there is not just scalar exaggeration but also a tinge of qualitative addition of detail as well: the cleverness is of a particular sort, not just extremely high. A similar comment could be made about, say, “freezing” when used hyperbolically, as literal freezing is not just a matter of being at a particular temperature but also of changing to a solid. Thus, I view such cases as on a fuzzy gradation between scalar hyperbole and non-scalar hyperbole of the sort that is of interest in this article from the next section onwards.

#### 2.4 Fictively-elaborating hyperbole

Fictively-elaborating hyperbole is exaggeration achieved by the addition of invented qualitative detail, where this addition implicitly heightens/emphasizes the speaker’s emotional/evaluative attitude. Such hyperbole can occur without irony, but is certainly commonly used with irony, and such usage has often been noted by others in passing though not using my label. As stated in the Introduction, my concern is

with relatively brief, mundane forms of fictively-elaborating hyperbole in irony, as opposed to extensive satires such as Swift's. I start with three constructed examples for the sake of simplicity but then discuss some real-discourse ones.

First, as an elaboration of (1), Ian could go on to say things like "The sun's so hot, the birds are singing, there's a nice refreshing breeze, ..." (cf. an example of overstatement in Herrero Ruiz, 2009). If Winifred has not herself mentioned very hot sun, singing birds, etc., and these features would not be expected in the local climate, they are elaborative details that Ian has invented and added to exaggerate the weather-goodness that he is overtly stating. The invented, added details plausibly provide attitude-emphasis/heightening and hence hyperbole.

The second constructed example of fictively-elaborating hyperbole arises from a much cited example of irony (e.g., in Kumon-Nakamura *et al.*, *ibid.*). Someone, say Jack, inconsiderately lets a door shut instead of holding it open for someone else, say Sally, who is carrying something awkward. Sally might ironically say "Thanks for holding the door [open]." Since Sally is of course not actually thanking Jack, and could more simply have uttered an ironic "Oh, you left the door open for me," the thanking is an elaboration that heightens the bitterness of her irony, so we have a measure of fictively-elaborating hyperbole. Note that it takes the form of attitude-wrapping, to the extent that "thanks" expresses an attitude.

Kumon-Nakamura *et al.* also mention a more elaborate possibility:

- (2) "Don't hold the door open; I'll just say 'open sesame'."

This involves further fictive elaboration because Sally is not claiming she actually will say "open sesame" or would be expected to say it. Indeed, the invented detail is pragmatically absurd, or at least was so before the advent of speech-understanding software that might nowadays be embeddable in the door.

Some real-discourse examples of fictively-elaborating hyperbole appear in McCarthy & Carter (2004), although they were not looking for the phenomenon and instead trawled for examples by means of intensifiers such as "literally" and keywords denoting numbers, amounts, times, and sizes. In one example, someone exaggerated the amount of wrinkling around her eyes and attributed this to "the ozone layer cracking up" – something warned of at the time by scientists, but not something that had actually happened, so it is a fictive elaboration (and would still be so if the ozone had cracked up but the speaker was just inventing its being a reason for the wrinkling). In another example, someone said that in the cheap restaurants they went to on holiday there was no service except that provided by "a million drunks." Here, even without the "million," there was fictive elaboration because of course the drunks (that were truly present) would not have been in the game of providing restaurant service at all; but the absurd fictivity of the elaboration

was further intensified by the hyperbolic “million.” In a further discourse excerpt, someone said that in the case of a catastrophic accident at a nearby nuclear power plant they would sit in a shop for “thirty million years” (because of the long half-life of some radioactivity) and spend the time eating a certain type of cake. The latter is a fictive elaboration because of its absurdity: not only is the time duration mentioned absurd for an act of sitting in a cafe, but the relaxed eating of cakes (even for a realistic period such as minutes) would be absurd under the circumstances. In another case involving an absurd elaboration, although of a milder sort, someone is described as having so much paperwork that they are going to paper their walls with it. McCarthy & Carter (2004) place much weight on impossibility/absurdity in hyperbole, though mainly in their examples the absurd amplification is of some numerical, amount or size feature of a situation, as that is the type of hyperbole they were seeking.

Examples of fictively-elaborating hyperbole can be discerned in Gibbs (2007/2000), and we will use one in later detailed discussion. In this example, a few housemates are discussing some guests who have been annoying. A participant, Anne, ironically says

- (3) “Like I would just love to have them here more often [laughs] so I can cook for them, I can prepare [laughs], ... I just want to welcome them so much, you know, ask them if they want anything to drink or eat [laughs].”

Gibbs does not detail all the circumstances in which this student conversation took place, but anyway for the irony to work there is no need for anyone to have expected Anne to cook (etc.) for the guests or to welcome them strongly, or to have suggested or expected that the guests will come round more often or indeed ever again. And even though cooking etc. for guests is a reasonable general expectation, Anne may not be the main cook in the household, so that no-one would expect *her* in particular to cook. Thus, she is adding qualitative detail that is invented and exaggerative. The extra detail is not just exaggerative but in fact hyperbolic as it emphasizes Anne’s critical attitude toward the guests.

In another real-discourse example, a commentator in the USA, Ann Coulter, is responding to BBC interviewer James Naughtie.<sup>1</sup> She supported business mogul Donald Trump in the race for the Republican nomination for the 2016 American presidential election. In the conversation, Naughtie has just doubted the practicality of building the high wall that Trump has suggested erecting along the two thousand miles of Mexico/USA border. In her response, Coulter ironically conveys that Trump could indeed get the wall built, and mocks Naughtie for thinking Trump couldn’t:

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1. Conversation during programme *BBC Today* on Radio 4, U.K., 18th May 2016

- (4) [Ann Coulter:] If only we had a master developer who had built hundred-storey buildings where you can flush the toilet and eat *crème brûlée* on the hundred and tenth floor. If only we had someone like that running for President.

Coulter is conveying that the USA *does* have someone, Trump by implication, running for President who can indeed build sophisticated tall buildings – and so she is also conveying that Trump knows how to build the wall. Now, a straightforward, non-exaggerating ironic response that Coulter could have made would have been “If only we had someone who knew how to build the wall” or “If only Trump knew how to build the wall.” Naughtie only doubted that Trump could get the *wall* built – he didn’t doubt that Trump can get sophisticated skyscrapers built. Moreover, it’s unlikely Coulter thinks that Naughtie disbelieves *that* fact. Rather, she is talking as if, ridiculously, he did disbelieve it. This postulated disbelief is her own invented elaboration. She is exaggerating Naughtie’s defective way of thinking by *casting him* as having that disbelief as opposed to his merely doubting that the wall could be built. She thereby emphasizes her critical attitude.

Musolf (this volume) discusses irony that rests on metaphorically viewing Britain as being at, or not being at, the “heart of Europe.” Examples he gives from real discourse include one involving the phrase “British ‘debate’, hearts, livers, gall bladders and all,” where no-one has previously made reference to livers and gall bladders, or to aspects of Europe that might be metaphorically described as such. Rather, the livers and gall bladders are new, fictive elaborations added to exaggerate through absurdity the failings of the heart-of-Europe conception, thus achieving emphatic mockery. Musolf casts strong versions of such sarcastic phenomena as a matter of hyperbole.

Fictively-elaborating hyperbole can be used outside irony. However, non-ironic examples are more difficult to come by, perhaps because the invented details could mislead the hearer. On the other hand, since irony already involves dissimulation there is less danger of the addition of further fiction to it being gratuitously misleading. The clearest cases of non-ironic fictively-elaborating hyperbole may be metaphorical ones, because of the fictiveness also inherent in metaphor. An example would be if someone were to report a happy piece of music not just as being “sunny” but as being “sunny, with birds singing, a balmy breeze blowing, ...” Assuming the music does not literally emulate such birds and wind, the added detail is wholly for the purpose of exaggerating how good the metaphorical weather is, as opposed to signalling specific qualities of the music. But there is still a danger: such added details could quickly become ridiculous (“fluffy little birds tweeting, pretty lambs gambolling”), once again lending an ironic tinge to the utterance, conveying perhaps that the music is sentimental or sickly.

For reasons of space I set aside the issue of whether exaggerative simile as in “you are like a toothpick” to emphasize thinness (Athanasiadou, this volume) should count just as scalar hyperbole or as a form of fictively-elaborating hyperbole, but it is an important topic for future deliberation.

### 3. More on pretence and drama in irony

#### 3.1 Location in the theoretical landscape

I will not be advocating any particular, detailed pretence approach to irony, but will rather use an illustrative version to explore some issues. Particular pretence theories in the literature could potentially preserve the thrust of the analyses, notably Récanati’s model (*ibid.*) as it already deploys a notion of imagined context akin to this article’s drama’s worlds, as noted above.

Various authors (Coulson, 2005; Kihara, 2005; Tobin & Israel, 2012) have proposed approaches to irony that are based on “mental spaces” like those of Fauconnier, (1985). These approaches are reminiscent in some ways of pretence approaches, and the pretence approach below could be reformulated in terms of mental spaces.

The drama’s worlds below are broadly similar to the scenarios of Musolff, (2006), and as Musolff (this volume) says, scenarios are a variant of mental spaces, emphasizing narrative and evaluative meaning aspects. Several examples in Musolff (this volume) involve what I would call fictively-elaborating hyperbole, as part of a metaphor/irony mix, but because of this involvement of metaphor a treatment is beyond the scope of this chapter.

As for hyperbole theory, an approach based on mappings between an imaginary, counterfactual situation and the real world has recently been proposed by others (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2014; Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2017; see also Ruiz de Mendoza, this volume). Because of the affinity between the imaginary situations in that hyperbole theory and the drama’s worlds in the current article, the present article can be viewed in part as melding a version of that theory with a pretence approach to irony.

#### 3.2 The pretended/acted speaker

I will call the person that an ironist is pretending to be the Pretended Speaker or Acted Speaker. The ironist is not only acting the part of the Acted Speaker but has also mentally constructed, or is constructing, the drama itself, with its implied drama’s world. Ironic pretending is especially akin to an actor improvising, implicitly constructing the drama *through* acting a particular role within that same drama.

An irony is often jointly developed by two or more conversation participants, a phenomenon stressed, for instance, by McCarthy & Carter (2004) and by Gibbs (2007/2000) in his student-conversation study of irony. In the annoying-guests conversation from that study, excerpted above as (3), another participant, Dana, joins Anne in ironically pretending the guests are wonderful. All the collaborating participants are jointly constructing the drama and are all acting in it, and their characters are therefore both speakers and hearers *within* that drama. *But also*, the participants simultaneously form part of the audience *of* their own drama. Any remaining participants, or people just listening to the conversation, are additional audience.

There is a range of possibilities for who the Acted Speaker is within the drama. They include the following.

- a. The Acted Speaker is the ironist himself. For instance, Ian is acting a drama in which *he* believes the weather to be fine.
- b. The Acted Speaker is some *other real* person, e.g., Winifred who believes (in reality) that the weather is fine. Here the ironist is playing the role of Winifred and casting her as believing, now within the drama, that the weather is fine.
- c. The Acted Speaker is not identified with any particular real person. The character is an invented person who, for example, believes that the weather is fine.

All these options have familiar counterparts in ordinary theatrical drama. I will not systematically address the question of which of the three options or other conceivable candidates is appropriate and when, but will make particular assumptions in specific examples.

For expository reasons, if a drama character is intended by the ironist to correspond to someone called X in reality (self or other), I will name the character with a variant of name X, starting with a “P” for “Pretended.” For example, if an Acted Speaker is intended to depict Ian or Winifred then I will use the name Pian or Pinifred respectively – to suggest “Pretended-Ian” and “Pretended- Winifred” – to avoid having to say things like “Winifred in the drama” versus “Winifred in reality.”

### 3.3 Export of criticizing attitude

Suppose Ian is ironic in response to Winifred as a way of criticizing her for thinking the weather good, and acts the role of Winifred, i.e. acts a character we will call Pinifred. In constructing his drama about Pinifred, Ian is thereby providing a reason for criticizing *Pinifred*, not Winifred. But does criticizing Pinifred necessarily have any bearing on Winifred? Couldn't the drama be so fictional that it is unclear whether criticizing Pinifred automatically constitutes criticizing Winifred, or criticizing her in the same way or degree?

Thus, to get a criticism of Winifred, we need to assume in our approach that (at least under suitable conditions, to be illuminated by example below) criticisms of Acted Speakers do become exported out of the drama in some form to become criticisms of the similar real-world people (cf. an analogous consideration about attitude transfer in Popa-Wyatt, 2014). Now, an irony theory could simply stipulate that this transfer happens. But an irony-specific stipulation is probably not necessary, because the needed export is arguably standard in ordinary drama and indeed in fiction generally. When watching any play or reading any story, emotions one develops towards a character because of, say, evil or praiseworthy deeds lead, plausibly, to similar emotions towards similar real people, even when one knows the depicted circumstances are partly fictional, over-simplified or exaggerated.

But this does not mean that the attitude applied to Winifred is identical in strength or exact type to that applied to Pinifred. If, for example, Pinifred's view is an exaggeration of Winifred's, then the degree of criticism of Pinifred may be more than Ian intends for Winifred, though the latter degree may still be high. This is entirely analogous to the point made in Section 2.2 about non-ironic hyperbole: the degree of emotion appropriate to a suitcase literally weighing a ton becomes attenuated, though the resulting degree is still exceptionally high.

Below, the Acted Speaker's way of thinking, judging or perceiving is often bizarre, as an aspect of absurd hyperbole in the irony. Then the Acted Speaker comes in for especially strong criticism. This further heightens/emphasizes the degree of criticism exported onto the corresponding real-world person, even though the ironist knows the latter is not guilty of the Acted Speaker's mental bizarreness. This parallels a point made in Section 2.2 about absurd non-ironic hyperbole as in "I agree with you 200%."

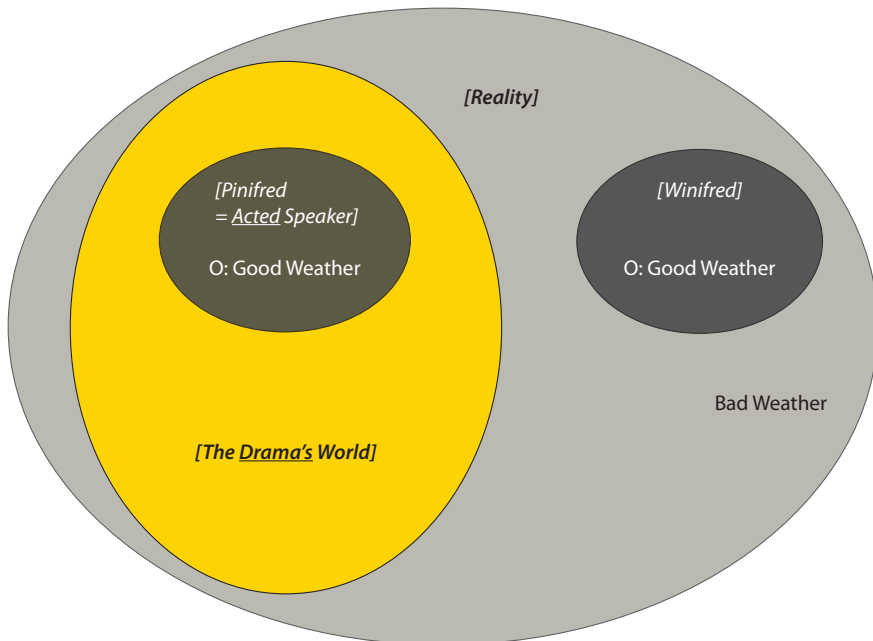
### 3.4 Drama's world versus real world

The drama's world can borrow from the real world. A TV drama that is set in, say, London typically borrows many true facts about London. Below, the Acted Speaker is sometimes within an environment identical to the relevant portion of the real world. In such cases the only fictive elements would be the Acted Speaker's cognitive and attitudinal relationships to the remainder of the drama's world. But equally the drama's world can differ more sweepingly from the real world.

#### 4. The corners of a triangle: Acted speaker, drama's world and real world

This section applies pretence in various different ways to Ian/Winifred conversations about the weather, including variations of (1). Hyperbole and fictive elaboration are often present in our examples, but are not explicated until Section 5. The focus is on the interplay between the cognitive state of the Acted Speaker, the (rest of the) drama's world, and the real world. One main manipulation is of what the weather is like in the drama's world – it can be good or bad there even though bad in the real world in all the examples. Another manipulation is of the Acted Speaker's beliefs and attitudes toward what the weather is like in the drama's world.

Figure 1 is a starting depiction of the drama and the relationship to the real world, suitable for cases based on (1). Pinifred is stipulated to believe O – that the weather is good. The symbol "O" is used because it is Ian's *overt* claim, when he copies Winifred's sincere claim of O. We have yet to populate the surrounding drama's world (i.e., the region of the drama's world lying outside Pinifred) or depict contrasts. Different ways of elaborating the drama's world will provide different opportunities for contrast.



**Figure 1.** The skeleton pretence/drama set-up. The drama's world depicted by the oval on the left includes Pinifred and her cognitive state, which are depicted by the innermost oval. In this and remaining Figures, a person-oval includes wording showing some of the person's mental contents.



Crucially, *Pinifred may have either correct or incorrect beliefs about the drama's world, and either reasonable or bizarre perceptions of it, judgments about it, or feelings about it.* Another point is that Pinifred's cognitive state may have varying degrees of similarity to Winifred's real cognitive state. "Cognitive" includes emotional, below.

In the following, we will first treat some cases of Ian being critical of Winifred, and then some cases where he is not.

#### 4.1 Critical irony: Where Winifred should know about the bad weather

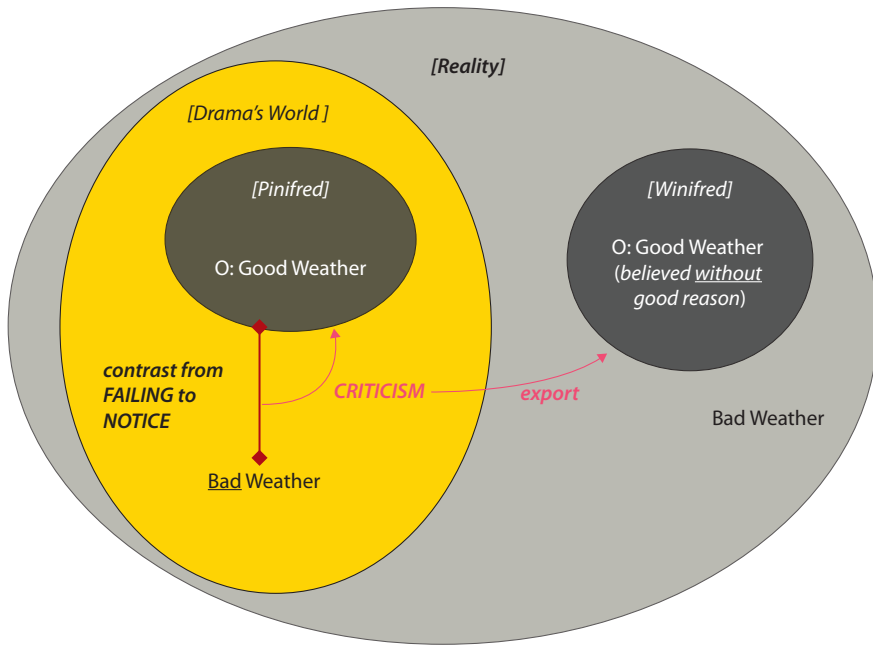
Suppose Ian strongly thinks that Winifred should know the weather is bad. For example, he thinks she should have turned her head, looked out of the window, and noticed the rain or whatever. Consider:

- (5) [Winifred:] The weather's good today.  
[Ian:] Yeah sure, it's good! Can't you see out of the window?

I include the non-ironic continuation "Can't you see out of the window?" to clarify that Ian is being critical, though a critical quality might come over in other ways, even just in (1) as it stands in a suitable discourse situation.

Ian is acting in saying that the weather is good. I assume he is acting the role of Winifred, as Pinifred. My proposed analysis is shown in Figure 2. The drama's world is like the real world in containing bad weather. Ian casts Pinifred as believing the weather to be good and as not noticing the bad weather, and also stipulates that she should have noticed it. So, Pinifred's mental state has a strongly criticizable and even bizarre contrast to her surrounding situation in the drama's world; and this gives, through attitude export, strong criticism of Winifred.

The drama's world (in Ian's imagination) may be exactly the same as the real world both in the nature of the weather and as regards the beliefs of Pinifred/Winifred. Moreover, the non-noticing and should-notice aspects could be included for Winifred as well as Pinifred. So the drama's world is not yet doing useful work for us. But below we will see cases that depart from this sameness. Indeed, we could have a variant of the current illustration, in which Ian is exaggerating the extent to which he thinks Winifred should have noticed the bad weather: or it may even be that he doesn't actually hold that she should have noticed it, but is unfairly using the occasion as an excuse to get at her. In this case the should-notice aspect would be in the drama's world but not the real world.



**Figure 2.** A drama set-up for the critical version of the weather example in Section 4.1. The ironist is Ian. Pinifred's failure to notice the weather in the drama's world when she should have noticed it motivates criticism of her (by Ian). This criticism and its motivation is impressionistically shown by the CRITICISM arrow. The export arrow indicates transformation of the criticism of Pinifred into a criticism of Winifred.

#### 4.2 Being yet more critical

Consider:

- (6) [Winifred:] The weather's good today.  
 [Ian:] Yeah sure [, the weather's good]. Rain, wind, cold and darkness are examples of that, I suppose!

I propose that Ian is here casting Pinifred as realizing that there is rain, darkness, etc. but nevertheless bizarrely taking the rain, etc. to be *constituting* good weather. See Figure 3. There is now a criticism-motivating contrast between Pinifred's judgment about the rain etc. as constituting good weather and its actually constituting bad weather in the drama's world.

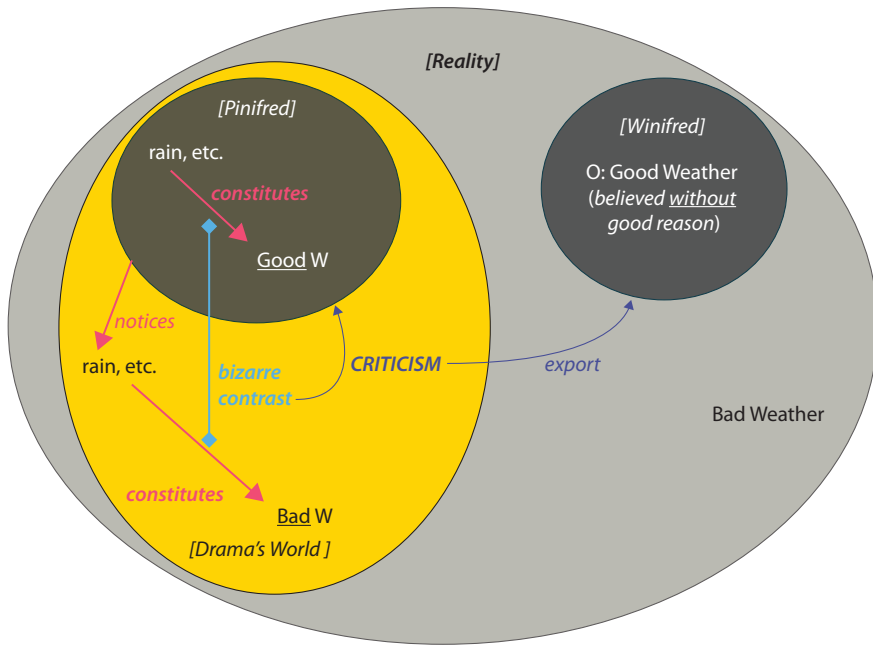


Figure 3. A drama set-up for the critical version of the weather example in Section 4.2.

The bizarreness is clearly greater than in Section 4.1, where Pinifred's failure is merely one of not noticing the bad weather when she should. In fact, the current bizarreness is extreme in supposing a radically defective way of thinking. So the criticism is stronger or more emphatic.

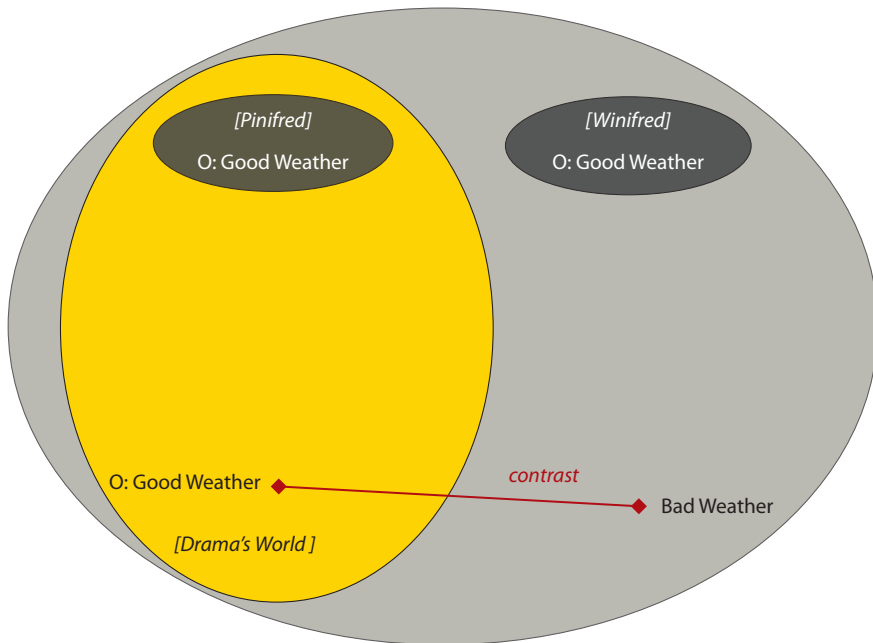
#### 4.3 Non-person-criticizing irony: Ian & Winifred

In (1), it may be that Ian is refraining from criticizing Winifred for being wrong about the weather. This could be because he thinks, or is even generously prepared just to assume, that she has good reasons for her incorrect belief. The point of the irony may be to point out in constructive and friendly way that she is wrong.

Such irony would be more evidently appropriate within the following expanded conversation, conducted in a situation where Winifred has not yet got out of bed in the morning, but Ian is already up and about, and Winifred had last heard a forecast saying the weather was going to be good:

- (7) [Winifred:] The weather's going to be good all day today.  
 [Ian:] Yeah sure, the weather's going to be good. You'll get a shock when you open the curtains. It's wet and dark!

I include Ian's (non-ironic) continuation "You'll get a shock ... It's wet and dark" to suggest that he does not expect Winifred to know what the weather is actually like. Then, the ironic statement that the weather is good can be treated in terms of the drama shown in Figure 4. The crucial difference from subsections 4.1 and 4.2 is that we have banished the person-criticizing element that was there by now having a drama's world containing *good* weather. The contrast is now simply between that good weather and the real world's bad weather. But there is no contrast that motivates criticism of Pinifred for any cognitive deficiency: her belief in and enjoyment of good weather is *reasonable* within the drama's world. So no criticism is exported to apply to Winifred.



**Figure 4.** A drama set-up for the non-person-criticizing version of the weather example in Section 4.3. In the drama, Pinifred rightly believes in the good weather. There is no criticism of Pinifred, nor therefore of Winifred.

I have portrayed just one possibility concerning Ian's intentions in (7), namely that he is not criticizing Winifred. But it's instead possible that he *is* criticizing her. As mooted in Section 2.1 the presence and degree of criticism in the ironist's intentions is a highly context-sensitive matter.

4.4 Non-person-criticizing irony, contd: Ian alone

Unlike the situation in (1) and variants, Ian may not have talked at all to Winifred or anyone else about the weather. Rather, suppose Ian sees that the weather is bad, and this prompts him to think that it would have been nice if it had been good, and therefore says to himself or (now) someone else, “Fine weather!” I assume also that it is possible that Ian is just being regretful, rather than criticizing himself for anything.

I propose the analysis shown in Figure 5. Ian is acting himself, as Pian. The drama’s world is the world as Ian *would like it to have been*, and in that world Pian is enjoying the good weather. This enjoyment contrasts with Ian’s dislike of the bad weather in the real world, motivating Ian’s regret that the weather is bad.

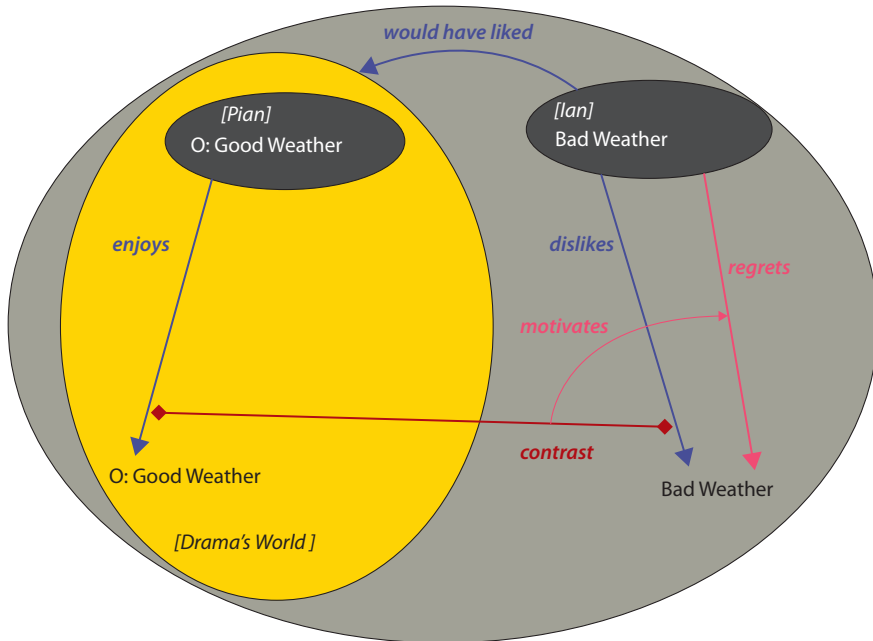
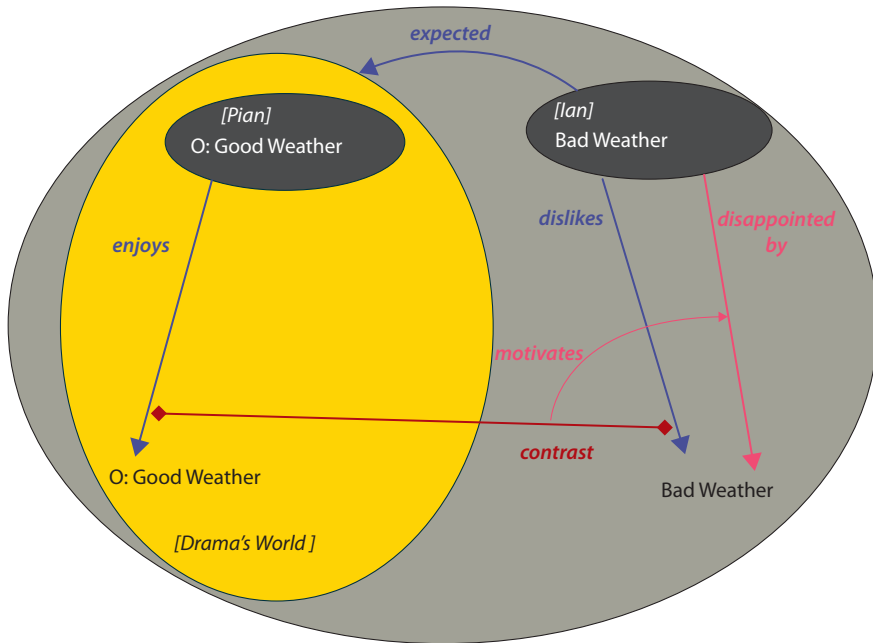


Figure 5. A drama set-up for the non-person-criticizing, regret situation in Section 4.4.

A similar case is where Ian actually had a prior expectation that the weather would be good, sees the weather is bad, is therefore disappointed, and says “Fine weather!” This can be treated as in Figure 6, which is the same as Figure 5 but with disappointment instead of regret and with the drama’s world now being what Ian actually expected rather than what he merely would have liked. Note that in both analyses (Figures 5 and 6) Ian’s regret/disappointment is motivated by the contrast between his envisaged *enjoyment of* good weather and his non-enjoyment (dislike) of the actual bad weather. This motivation is more plausible than the sheer contrast about

weather itself – namely the contrast between the envisaged/expected bad weather and the actual good weather. *This* contrast would not matter to Ian if enjoyment or otherwise of the weather were not an issue (because, say, he were just going to stay snug at home anyway).



**Figure 6.** A drama set-up for the non-person-criticizing, disappointment situation in Section 4.4.

## 5. The drama's world and fictively-elaborating hyperbole

Here we explicate fictively-elaborating hyperbole through manipulation of the drama's world, etc. Some of the cases have already arisen in Section 4.

### 5.1 Ian the hyperbolic ironist

In the highly critical irony in (6) [Figure 3], fictively-elaborating hyperbole is present because Ian casts Pinifred's belief about the weather not simply as being wrong but as being *absurdly* wrong, as she does realize that there's rain, etc. This amplification of Winifred's mistaken belief into Pinifred's more comprehensive, absurd cognitive failure motivates strong criticism of Pinifred. By attitude export, this

becomes strong or highly emphatic criticism of Winifred, though with possible attenuation during export.

In Example (5) [Figure 2], where Pinifred is in a drama's world containing bad weather but doesn't notice it, we noted that Ian might not sincerely think that Winifred should have noticed the bad weather. In this case, Ian is unfairly exaggerating Winifred's actual deficiency – merely *not* noticing the bad weather – into a stronger deficiency of Pinifred's as the latter *should* have noticed the bad weather. This exaggeration motivates considerable criticism, and so we have hyperbole, though not as strongly as in (6).

In both cases the exaggerations consist of invented detail in the drama's world. This detail is either that Pinifred should easily have noticed the bad weather features or that she has noticed them but has an absurd judgment of them. Thus, we have fictive elaboration, concerning her cognitive relationship to the drama's world.

There are other types of exaggeration to discuss. Ian might make the weather in the drama's world worse than it is in reality. In a variant of (6), he might say, for example:

- (6') "Yeah sure, it's good weather, what with this freezing cold, onslaught of hail, ..."

even though in reality the temperature is not freezing, there is no hail, etc. Such exaggeration (intensification of the cold, and fictive elaboration in the addition of hail) increases the contrast between Pinifred's misguided thoughts and the surrounding dramatic situation, further heightening/emphasizing the criticism of her.

In cases where Pinifred has not noticed the bad weather in her surroundings, the Pinifred/drama's-world contrast could also be increased by giving Pinifred an exaggeratedly positive version of Winifred's belief. Ian might say

- (8) "Yeah sure, good weather. No rain, cold, wind or darkness, luckily. Just nice warm sun, singing birds, balmy breeze in the coconut grove."

Casting Pinifred as thinking there are singing birds, a coconut grove, etc. constitutes additional fictive elaborations. Figure 7 shows the inclusion both of these and the exaggeration of the real badness of the weather as in (6').

In Section 4.4 [Figures 5 and 6] Ian was not criticizing Pian, nor therefore himself, since the drama was rigged with good weather to render Pian justified in his belief. But there too the weather could be exaggerated, by adding fictive elaborations such as singing birds both to the drama's world and Pian's beliefs. Ian would thereby be heightening/emphasizing his regret or disappointment (etc.) about the weather. See Figure 8 for the regret case. Similarly, the analysis of Section 4.3 [Figure 4] could be enriched with such elaborations, heightening the contrast and hence heightening further elements such as Ian's desire to put Winifred straight.

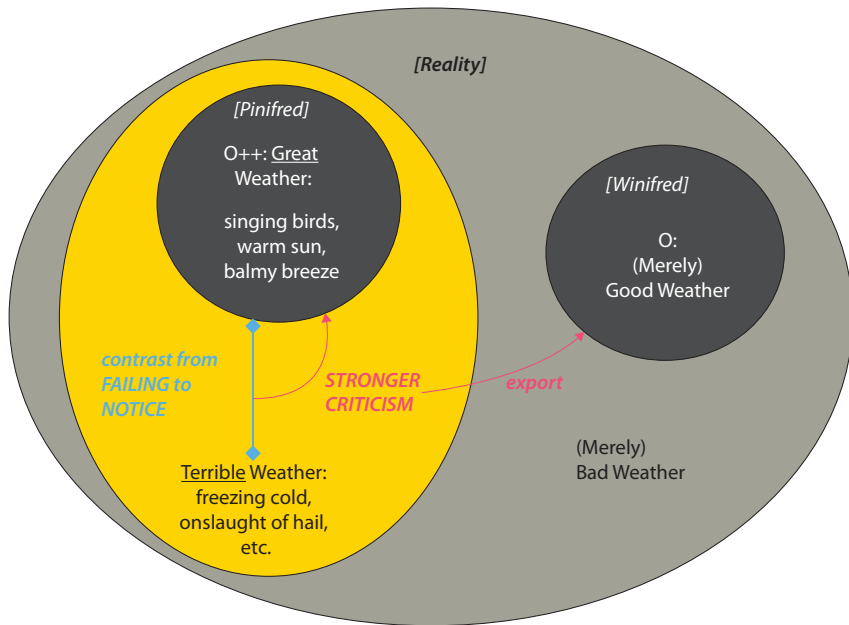


Figure 7. Variant of Figure 2, for an example in Section 5.1. A drama set-up showing additional hyperbole through equipping Pinifred with additional positive beliefs, which are fictive elaborations, and equipping the surrounding dramatic situation with intensified and additional negative weather features, the latter also being fictive elaborations.

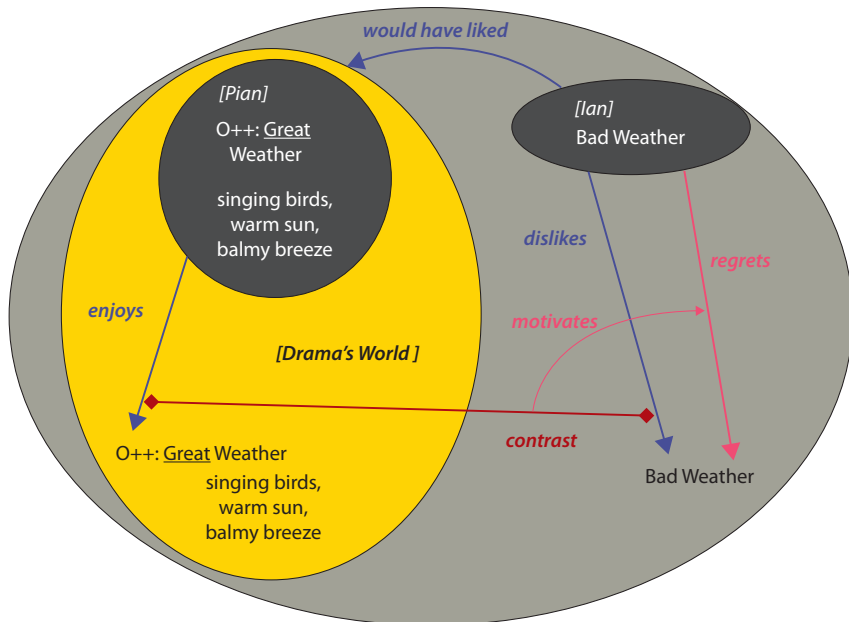


Figure 8. Variant of Figure 5, showing a drama set-up for a non-person-criticizing, regret case including fictive elaborations that exaggerate the goodness of the weather.  
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5.2 The picnic

Picnics feature forlornly in weather examples in the irony literature, including in relation to hyperbolic irony (e.g., Noh, 2000, p. 95; Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 239). An interesting possibility is:

- (9) [Winifred:] It'll be good weather for a picnic today.
- [Ian:] Yeah sure. Lovely to sit in the rain eating soggy sandwiches!

See Figure 9. Ian is stipulating that the drama's world involves Pinifred bizarrely sitting in the rain having a picnic and knowing she is eating soggy sandwiches, and enjoying doing so. However, assuming Ian doesn't really think that Winifred would like this or has proposed sitting in the rain, we have fictive elaboration that exaggerates Winifred's cognitive failings. The ridiculousness of the dramatic situation again heightens/emphasizes the criticism of Winifred.

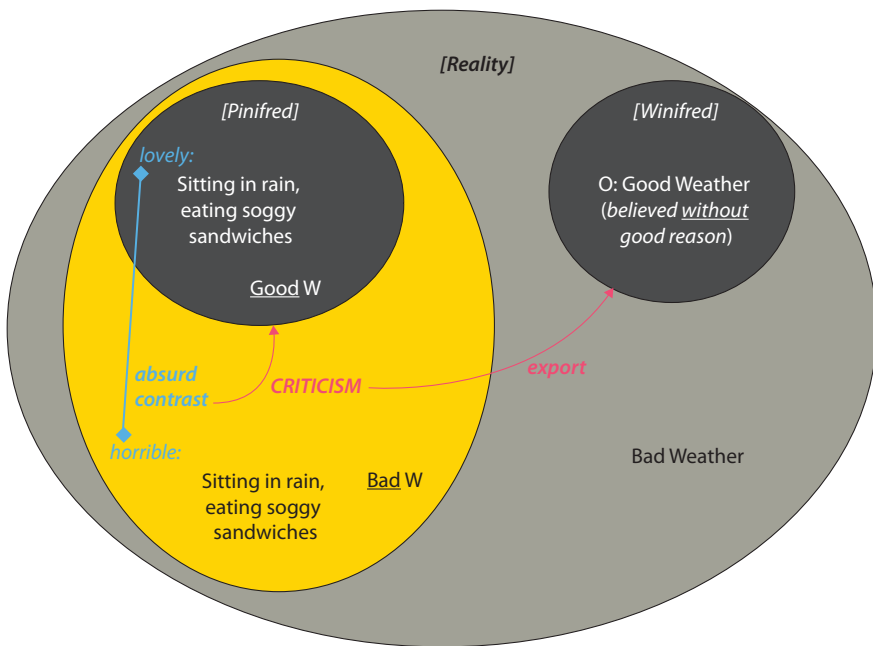


Figure 9. A drama set-up for the critical version of the weather/picnic example, (9), in Section 5.2. There is fictively-elaborating hyperbole in the drama's-world fact that Pinifred is knowingly sitting in the rain eating soggy sandwiches and enjoying it.

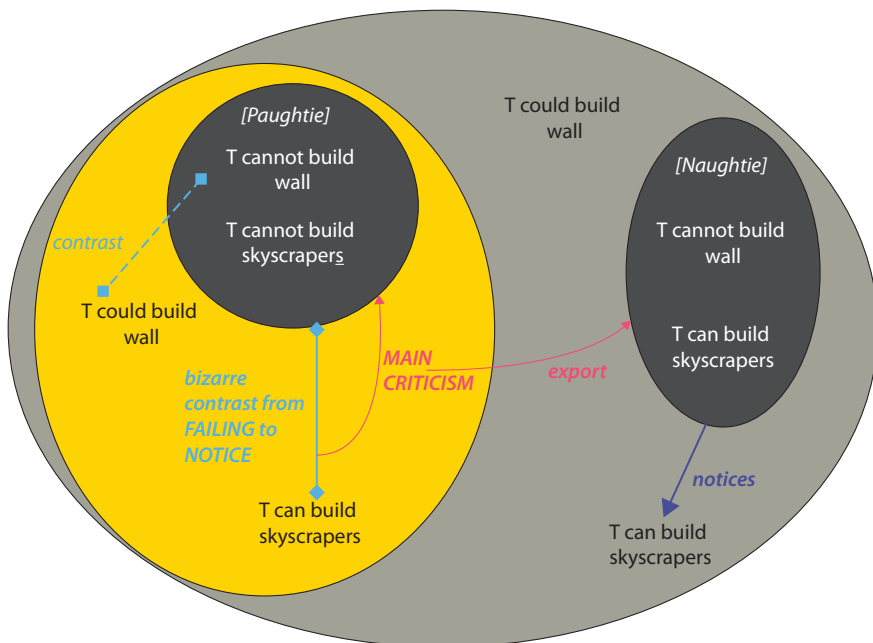
### 5.3 Other examples

First, a note on how scalar hyperbole fits in. Consider:

Yeah, sure, the weather's just wonderful.

Much as when Ian says (8) in Section 5.1, the weather can be wonderful both in Pinifred's mind and in her surrounding drama's world. That would be for a non-critical irony. In a critical irony, the weather could be wonderful only in Pinifred's mind, and bad in the surrounding drama's world. We get scalar hyperbole in that non-critical case because the wonderfulness heightens the contrast between the drama's good weather and the real bad weather. In the critical case mentioned, we get fictively-elaborating hyperbole because of the contrast between Pinifred's cognitive state and her surrounding situation.

For the wall-building example, (4), see Figure 10. The ironist (Coulter) is posing as criticizing Naughtie for not noticing that Trump can build the mentioned skyscrapers. This building prowess is in the drama's world as well as in the real world.



**Figure 10.** A drama set-up for the Trump wall example in Section 5.3. The ironist is Coulter. Her criticism of Paughtie is motivated by his bizarre failure to notice that Trump can build prandially and lavatorially advanced skyscrapers. This provides fictively-elaborating hyperbole. (The failure to believe that he could build the wall is itself a basis for criticism – not depicted – but that failure is not of itself bizarre, so the criticism is lesser.).

But in the drama's world Naughtie doesn't notice the prowess. Presumably Coulter doesn't really think Naughtie hadn't noticed Trump's skyscraper prowess: such non-noticing is an invented, extra failure committed by Paughtie in the drama, and hence an exaggerative, fictive elaboration. Furthermore, such non-noticing is a more notable failure than Paughtie's simply disbelieving Trump could get a wall built.

As for the annoying-guests example, (3), I give two analyses (without Figures), one of the example as it stands and one of a possible variant. The first analysis is as follows.

Note the attitude-wrapping involved in "I would just love." The Acted Speaker, Panne, is in a drama situation where the guests are *nicely*-behaving ones and Panne would love them to come more often, etc. Panne's cognitive state is perfectly reasonable with respect to the drama's world. Anne is engaging in non-[self]critical irony, alluding to the general expectation that guests should behave nicely. She sets up a contrast between Panne's enjoyment of the nice guests in the drama and her own (Anne's) annoyance with the real guests. There is fictively-elaborating hyperbole because Anne includes invented details in the drama's world (see discussion of (3) in Section 2.4), and this inclusion heightens/emphasizes the contrast and hence emphasizes Anne's annoyance.

This non-self-criticizing construal of the irony would seem to be a natural, basic default, rather than to suppose that Anne is criticizing herself for, e.g., previously expecting that she would enjoy the guests.

So far, the irony is non-self-critical because Panne is not criticized – her cognitive state fits the drama's world. But there is a possible variant of the conversation that warrants a different analysis, where Anne is criticizing Panne but nevertheless *still* not criticizing herself. Suppose Anne also says:

- (10) "I especially want them to come round and drop their dirty socks on the floor and insult my cooking."

Panne again enjoys the guests, but now, in the drama's world, the guests are not nicely-behaved but are known for behaving annoyingly. Thus, Panne's view is bizarre with respect to the drama's world, and Panne can be strongly criticized for that. So, we might think, just as in examples (6) [rain etc. constituting good weather] and (9) [soggy sandwiches at picnic], where Pinifred's bizarre cognition was the reason for strong criticism of her and therefore of Winifred by export, we should in the current example get strong criticism of Anne by export. But there is a fundamental difference between the Pinifred/Winifred cases on the one hand and the current Panne/Anne case on the other. The bizarreness in Panne's case is in her liking of the guests' behavior in the surrounding drama's world, where that enjoyment is the *opposite* of the corresponding attitude in the real world, namely Anne's dislike of the guests' behaviour. But the bizarreness in Pinifred's cases is in her belief about the weather in the surrounding drama's world, namely that it is good, where that belief

is the *same* as the corresponding belief of Winifred's that the weather is good. So it is reasonable to export the criticism of Pinifred to apply to Winifred, but there is no warrant to export the criticism of Panne to apply to Anne. Indeed, the absurdity of Panne's liking of the drama's guests' behavior serves precisely to highlight the *appropriateness* of Anne's dislike.

The exaggerative, fictive elaboration consists of (i) Panne having a bizarre cognitive state with respect to the surrounding drama's world, and also possibly (ii) exaggeration by the drama's world of the real-world sins of the guests. Component (ii) exists if the real guests have not in fact behaved badly with socks and insults. The exaggeration is analogous to Ian's invention of soggy sandwiches, etc. in (9).

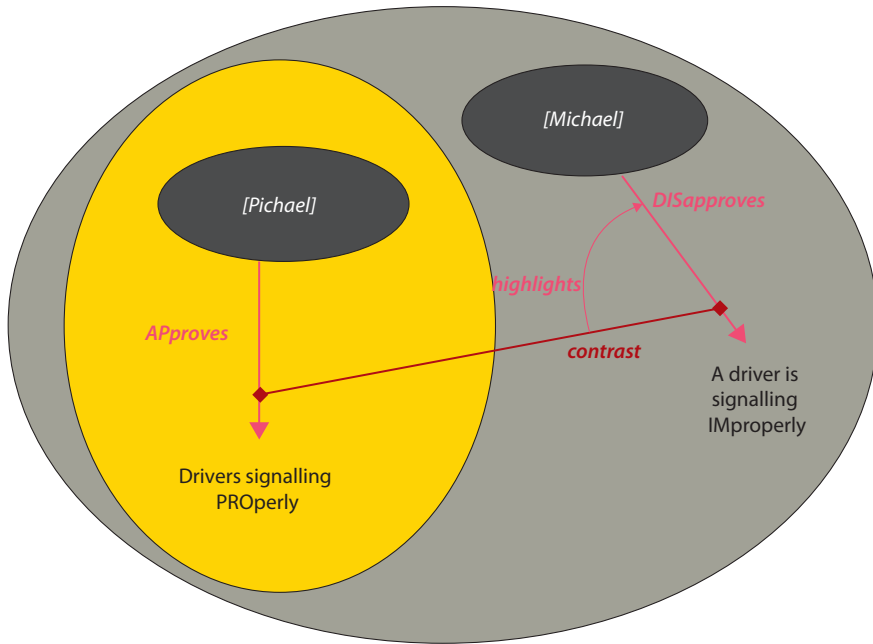
We can similarly address certain pairs of attitude-wrapped ironies in the literature (Kihara, 2005; Colston, 2007/2000). For instance, Colston (2007/2000, Experiment 2) explored the sarcasm ratings for the following pair of alternative ironic statements that a driver Michael might make when another driver turns suddenly in front of him without signalling:

- (11) a. "I just love when people use their turn signals."  
 b. "I just love when people don't use their turn signals."

Colston found, with strong statistical significance ( $p < 0.01$ ), that the latter was rated as considerably more sarcastic than the former (mean 6.76 versus 5.89 on a 1–7 scale). We can now give a possible explanation of this difference, based on the assumption in Section 2.1 that sarcasm involves strong disapproval, as follows.

A natural analysis of (11a) is analogous to the first analysis above of the guests example. See Figure 11. In the drama's world, drivers are signalling properly. The Acted Speaker, Pichael, strongly approves of this ("just loves" it), and therefore thinks reasonably in the drama. The point of the irony is merely the good/bad contrast between what should happen overall – drivers signalling properly and Pichael approving of this – and what actually happened – a driver signalling improperly and Michael disapproving. (By improper signalling I mean lack of proper signalling.)

By contrast, a natural analysis of (11b) is analogous to the analysis of the variant of the Anne/guests example (in the discussion surrounding (10)). See Figure 12. In the drama's world, drivers now are *improperly* signalling, but Pichael strongly approves of this. Thus, as an exaggerative, fictive elaboration, Pichael now has a bizarre cognitive state with respect to the drama's world. But, Pichael is contrary to Michael precisely in approving of improper signalling whereas Michael disapproves of it. So, analogously to the Anne/guests example, the criticism of Pichael is not exported, and the drama is counterfactual in the special way of highlighting how ridiculous it *would* be to approve of improper signalling. This heightens/emphasizes the *appropriateness* of Michael's disapproval.



**Figure 11.** A drama set-up for the driver-signalling Example (11a) in Section 5.3. The ironist is Michael. There is no criticism of Pichael, nor therefore of Michael.

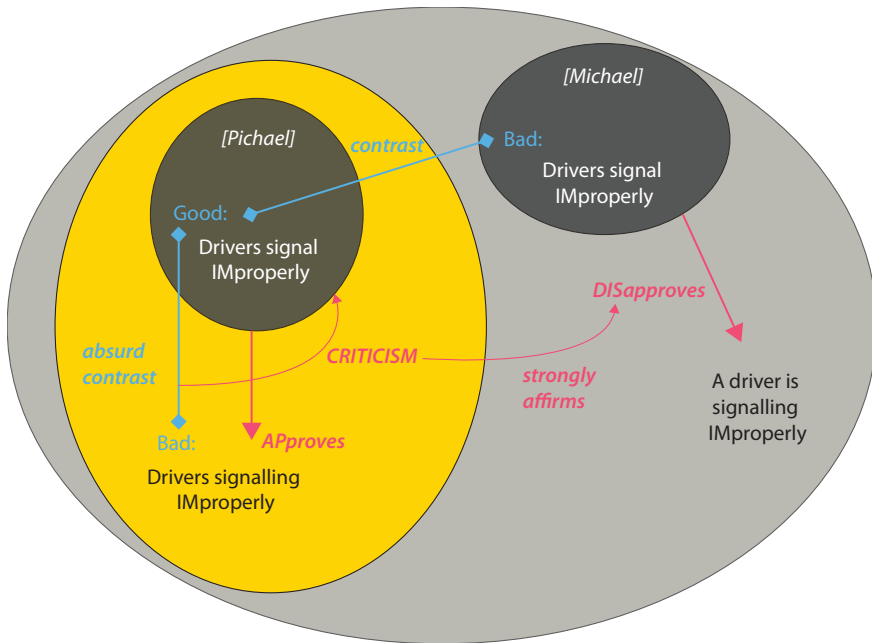
That hyperbolic effect does not arise in (11a) because, even though it might superficially look as though Pichael and Michael are directly contrary there too, with Pichael feeling approval and Michael feeling disapproval. But, crucially, in (11a) the target of Pichael’s approval is the opposite of the target of Michael’s disapproval. Pichael’s approval is of proper signalling, Michael’s disapproval is of improper signalling. These states of mind do of course contrast with each other in one sense but are nevertheless eminently compatible rather than *contrary*; indeed, they are loosely inferable from each other.

Colston *ibid.* found also that (11c) did not, statistically, significantly differ in sarcasm rating from (11a), and had statistically significantly lower mean rating (6.16) than the 6.76 for (11b):

- (11) c. “I just hate when people use their turn signals.”

How do we account for this lower-sarcasm result, given that Pichael is bizarre here as well as in (11b)?

First, (11c) may sound less sarcastic because it directly conveys the type of emotion (hatred) Michael has rather than reversing it. So it is more openly critical as opposed to being purely snide.



**Figure 12.** A drama set-up for the driver-signalling Example (11b) in Section 5.3. The ironist is Michael. The approval of improper signalling within the pretence is an absurd contrast, which provides fictively-elaborating hyperbole. Two links are shown for parity with previous figures, but the approval link merely duplicates the “good” qualifier within the Pichael oval. Also shown is the crucial contrast discussed in the text between Pichael and Michael, blocking export of the criticism of Pichael. Instead, the strong criticism motivates strong affirmation of Michael’s disapproval of improper signalling.

But secondly, (11b) involves evidential relationships that are both more obvious and more forceful than those involved in (11c), rendering (11b) more sarcastic. Let’s use PS to stand for proper signalling. Then (11b) appeals to the support (if any) that

- i. bizarreness of approving of lack-PS [in the drama]

provides for

- ii. appropriateness of disapproving of lack-PS [in real life].

But (11c) instead appeals to the support (if any) that

- i’. the bizarreness of disapproving of PS [in the drama]

provides for (ii). Now, (i) strongly implies (ii) in a rather obvious way. If it’s bizarre (highly inappropriate) to approve of something X, then, as a plausible default conclusion, X is something undesirable. But if X is undesirable it is virtually immediate

that it is appropriate to disapprove of it. So, putting  $X = \text{lack-PS}$ , going from (i) to (ii) is simple and strongly justified. But the relationship between (i') and (ii) is very different. Certainly, if it's bizarre to disapprove of something  $Y$  then plausibly  $Y$  is good (approvable). ( $Y = \text{PS}$  in (i').) But the question of whether it is appropriate to disapprove of the *lack* of  $Y$  depends strongly on  $Y$ . If  $Y$  is just an "optional extra" then it could well be *inappropriate* to disapprove of the lack of  $Y$ . (ii) simply does not follow from (i').

It is useful to give a further example here to make that point. Suppose, in a restaurant scenario, Jack disapproves of the presence on the table of an elegant small sculpture that is generally recognized to be beautiful. Let's suppose it is bizarre of Jack to disapprove of the sculpture's presence (the sculpture does not take up too much room on the table, it is not racially offensive, it is not annoyingly cloying or smug, etc.). This is a parallel of (i'), with PS replaced by the sculpture's presence. But it would not therefore follow that it would be appropriate for Jack or anyone else to disapprove of the *absence* of the sculpture (or any sculpture); and it could well be judged *inappropriate* for that person to do so (e.g., judged as excessively demanding on his/her part). The sculpture is an optional extra, so its absence is not a failing. Hence, the analogue of (ii) not only does not follow, but could actually be markedly wrong.

In sum, (ii) is *potentially consistent with* (i') but only if one adds the additional premise that PS is not an optional extra, which is tantamount to affirming (ii) anyway, so (i') hardly provides any additional support for (ii). By contrast, (i) provides strong, obvious support for (ii).

An example that can be treated similarly to the turn-signals one is the shutting-door situation mentioned in Section 2.4, where someone might ironically say either "Thanks for holding the door [open]" or "Thanks for shutting the door" to someone who has inconsiderately let the door shut. The "Thanks" amounts to "I am grateful to you" and so provides attitude-wrapping.

## 6. Concluding remarks

This article has highlighted hyperbole through fictive elaboration in irony, going beyond the simple, scalar type of hyperbole that is usually analysed in irony studies. It has also explored the benefits of carefully considering the role of the drama's world in a drama-adumbrated pretence-based approach to irony. In particular, this role helps us analyse fictively-elaborating hyperbole. While the developments are first of all a potential contribution to pretence-based analyses of irony, expanding the range of phenomena they can systematically explain, they also invite non-pretence-based theories of irony to consider how they could deal with the phenomena.

A central theme has been that the drama's world surrounding an Acted Speaker – or in more neutral language the context imagined by the ironist to surround the Pretended Speaker – needs to be considered separately from the real world, even when very similar to it. It is evident from the drama view of irony that there is a triangle of potential contrast: not just (a) the standardly-considered contrast between the cognitive state of the Acted Speaker and the real world, but also, potentially, (b) contrast between that cognitive state and the surrounding *drama's world* and (c) contrast between the latter and the real world. These contrasts can support different forms of hyperbole. In particular, strong forms of (b), which can involve bizarreness or even absurdity, underlie some types of fictively-elaborating hyperbole.

We have thrown new light on effects that attitude-wrapping can have in irony, and in particular shown in detail why it makes a difference to say, for instance, “I love it when drivers don't signal” versus “I love it when drivers signal,” when a driver has annoyingly not signalled. Both involve fictively-elaborating hyperbole, but the former does so in markedly stronger form through introducing bizarreness of the Acted Speaker's cognitive state into the drama's world.

Of course, we have left many matters unresolved, such as what the hearer does in interpreting a potentially ironic utterance, what the precise role of irony signals such as “Yeah sure” is, the detail of how contextual factors enter into irony production and interpretation (and especially how they affect the hearer's impression of how person-criticizing the utterance is, if at all), how the types of hyperbole illustrated might fit into a more encompassing account of hyperbole, and so forth.

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