Irony, Authority and Interpretation

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Abstract

Philosophical hermeneutics and theories of interpretation have often struggled to account consistently for ironic ambiguity in a text or an event. As a trope which is both dependent upon and undermines the notion of 'authority', it seems that we are forced into a choice of either presenting a 'serious' account of irony, whereby the possibilities of ironic meaning are restricted by the accountable figure of an author, or else resign ourselves to the free play of ambiguity, whereby any statement can be 'ironic'. The former risks over-determining the limit of ironic possibility, and losing the sense of ambiguity which gives rise to irony in the first place; the latter, conversely, risks losing any sense of 'seriousness' to the hermeneutic. In both, the significance of ambiguity can be lost.

The article explores the significance of ironic ambiguity to methods of interpretation, and in particular focuses on the reliance on 'intentionalism' as a means to rendering irony accountable to 'serious' hermeneutics. It argues that the problem which ironic ambiguity poses to hermeneutics is situated on a constructive tension between the challenge to authority in the identifying irony and the investment in a pre-given authority, or authorities, which enables such identification. The paper argues that the problem with applying the traditional author/critic dispute to the concept of irony is that the notions of authorial intention and critical reception are often presumed to be stable entities upon which the ambiguity of irony is shaped. The paper suggests that, on the contrary, attempts to reconstruct hermeneutically the value of irony involves drawing on two distinct notions of 'intention': one as a figurative 'frame' of meaning which is exterior to the text or event itself, the other as an interior 'unity' of the text or event. By extricating these two forms of intention, the paper aims to show that the traditional recourse to intention in the interpretation of irony is neither as straightforward nor stable as is often presumed.[1]

Keywords: Irony, Interpretation, Hermeneutic Circle, Ambiguity

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[1]   This article was first presented as a paper on the occasion of the *Skepsi* conference *Ambiguities: Destabilising Preconceptions* (22nd–23rd May 2009, University of Kent, Canterbury).

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Philosophical hermeneutics has often struggled to account consistently for ironic ambiguity in a text or event. Irony poses particular problems for interpretation regarding both the demarcation of possible meanings, and how we account for our selection of one meaning over another. In other words, the problem of consistency is one of identifying an authority to our claim that a text or event is 'ironic'. In general terms, the prospect of irony suggests that meaning lies beyond the immediate statement, text or event: as such, this dissatisfaction with 'given' meaning both undermines, and yet remains dependent upon, the notion of an intentional 'authority'. This is reflected in the way that 'the problem of irony' identifies an entire history of tension within philosophical, literary and ethical enterprises, concerning the 'seriousness' of discourse related to irony and its potential for critique: from Socrates' ironic questioning of received tradition to Roger Rosenblatt's post-9/11 dismissal of the 'age of irony' as incapable of forming a serious moral position, the value of irony has been held in question over this issue of authority. [2]

The problem for hermeneutic theories of interpretation is thus to account for this tension between meaning and authority within the ironic event. Initially, this problem seems to present us with a limited choice: we are forced into either presenting a 'serious' account of irony, whereby the possibilities of ironic meaning are restricted by or reduced to a supplemental accountable figure (such as an intentional author), or else resign ourselves to the free play of ambiguity, whereby just about any statement can be considered 'ironic', and meaning itself becomes relative to each interpreter's reading. [3] The former risks over-determining the limit of ironic possibility and losing the sense of ambiguity which gives rise to irony in the first place; the latter, conversely, risks losing any sense of 'seriousness' to the hermeneutic. As such, neither approach is satisfactory for a hermeneutic account of ironic meaning, because in both the creative and productive significance of ironic ambiguity can be lost.

In this article, I want to outline a way of thinking through this impasse by examining the specific idea of authority within an ironic text or event. In other words, the paper approaches thematically the question of who has the authority to declare a text or event 'ironic', and on what grounds is this authority based. Situating the criteria for judging the impasse within the

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[2] For a more detailed discussion of Rosenblatt's claim, and its relationship to the history of philosophy, see T. Grimwood, 'The Problems of Irony: Philosophical Reflection on Method, Discourse and Interpretation', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 12:4, pp. 349–64.

[3] Both approaches have been argued for and against: representatives of the former approach would be the likes of E.D. Hirsch and John Searle; representatives of the latter can be found with Paul de Man and Richard Rorty.

traditional author/critic dispute risks positing both the notions of authorial intention and critical reception as stable entities upon which the ambiguity of irony is shaped. [4] I will suggest that, on the contrary, attempts to reconstruct hermeneutically the *value* of irony involves drawing on two distinct notions of 'intention': one as a figurative 'frame' of meaning which is exterior to the text or event itself, the other as an interior 'unity' of the text or event. By extricating these two forms of intention, the paper will show that the traditional recourse to intention in the interpretation of irony is neither as straightforward nor as stable as is often presumed. However, by unpacking the figurative and thematic structures upon which such explanations of meaning are grounded, the paper suggests ways in which it is possible to theorise a consistent hermeneutic account of irony which does not exclude the formative role that ambiguity plays.

1.   Three Ideas

By way of introduction, I will put forward three general ideas surrounding the relationship between irony and authority in terms of interpretation, which will frame the rest of my study.

First, if we were to examine thematically the various attempts to deal with irony with regards to interpretation, we would find a persistent association of ironic meaning with intention.[5] Even theories of irony that do not employ a directly intentionalist canon are nevertheless prone to involve figures such as 'the ironist' that operate, at the very least, as an order or measure of the study.[6] Indeed, Norman Knox notes that the intentional author of irony is analogous to 'a superhuman power in some field of observation.'[7] 'Until an ironic message is interpreted as *intended*,' Muecke argues, 'it has only the sound of one hand clapping' (my emphasis).[8] Clapping is a significant metaphor for Muecke to use, since the bringing together of hands enacts the sense of *closure* that grounding ironic interpretation on 'intention' produces. One can see the difficulties faced by interpretation without such a closure: an ironic statement might mean *x*, but may also and at the same time mean *y*.

Second, the problem with this — and the intentionalist account in general — is that this doesn't really seem to explain what ironic ambiguity does to communication, which is precisely

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4   Paul Ricoeur explains this in terms of the 'intentionalist fallacy' and the 'fallacy of the absolute text': the former reducing meaning to the intentions of the author, the latter ignoring the contextual genesis of any text or event (P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory.* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976, p. 30). In this article,I aim to show how both these approaches demonstrate a particular aspect of the referential ambiguity of irony, which produces ironic meaning.

5   See L. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 118; C. Colebrook, *Irony in the Work of Philosophy* (London, University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 44.

6   See Grimwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 357–58.

7   N. Knox, 'Irony' in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas Vol. II*, ed. by P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), pp. 627–634), p. 627.

8   D. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* (London, Methuen, 1982), p. 39.

to *introduce* risk and the possibility of misunderstanding. The easiest way is to think of the analogy of explaining a joke to somebody after telling it: one can point to all of the references, puns and reasons that a joke might be considered funny in order to express its meaning — very rarely will the joke then appear to be funny in any way. The same is the case for irony: once we have identified the intention of the irony, the whole gamble of ironic ambiguity seems to lose its risk and, consequently, its irony. If one merely identifies *what* the ironist meant to say, this effectively removes the *how* of the ironic communication. This is why one cannot help but be suspicious of, for example, Haraway or Rorty, when they claim from the off that they are 'being ironic', or talk of 'we ironists':[9] however justifiable their claims are in relation to their individual work, there is something akin to the liar's paradox within such an assertion. If you tell me that you are being ironic, irony ceases to be a part of the conversation. In explaining irony in this way, we have in fact explained something quite different to what first prompted our interest. We would be left wondering, in effect, why the intentional author bothered with irony in the first place, if there was already a straightforward meaning to be had. The association of irony and intention, then, cannot be a simple intentionalist model of understanding.

Third, we cannot, however, simply discard all previous work on ironic ambiguity as wrong. It is far more likely that there is something *within* the alignment of irony and intention which is crucial to the constitutive ambiguity of ironic meaning. The problem which ironic ambiguity poses to hermeneutics is situated on a constructive tension between the challenge to authority in the identifying irony and the investment in a pre-given authority or authorities, which enable such identification. The most interesting aspect of ironic ambiguity, after all, is not that it *simply* negates meaning; rather, it depends upon the very form of communication which it disrupts in order to *produce* meaning. This would suggest that 'intention' signifies something more than the standard sense of an 'author's intended meaning' when it comes to interpreting irony.

The key question that these three ideas raise, then, is how the speculative 'open-ness' of ironic possibility is reconciled with the closure of interpretative understanding. My general hypothesis is that irony disrupts communication, or at least the forms of communication which underlies the hermeneutic criteria of 'understanding', and, as such, to read ironically is to go beyond the usual requirements of interpretation. Because irony suggests, in its most basic definitions, a distrust of the immediate meaning of a text or event, it does not demand simple understanding, but what Jonathan Culler (following Wayne Booth) terms 'overstanding'.

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9   See D. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* London: Free Association Books, 1985); R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge, CUP, 1989).

Interpreting irony is not just a case of 'asking the questions… that the text insists on', but rather asks 'about what the text does and how', and 'what it conceals or represses'.[10] We are not simply reconstructing a given meaning; rather, as Claire Colebrook argues, reading irony is 'a matter of determining the possible positions opened up by an utterance and the subsequent question of who is speaking.'[11]

These points considered, I would argue that it is perhaps the notion of 'intention' as a singular entity which causes some of the interpretative tensions here. If irony demands that we go beyond a simple reconstruction of meaning, then it draws out the figural, schematic and metaphorical uses of authority we invoke within the interpretative process. For the rest of this paper, I will argue that attempts to reconstruct hermeneutically the value of irony involve drawing on (at least) *two* distinct notions of 'intention': one as a figurative 'frame' of meaning which is exterior to the text or event itself, the other as an interior 'unity' of the text or event. By extricating these two forms of intention, I will show that the traditional recourse to intention in the interpretation of irony is neither as straightforward nor stable as is often presumed.

2.   External Authority — the Author Function

Perhaps the most obvious way in which the figure of 'intention' is used in ironic discourse is as a mode of authority which operates as a frame of meaning external to the text itself. This points to a recognisably straightforward 'author figure' that would identify irony's meaning, summarised paradigmatically by Simon Gaunt's proclamation:

> The only way to be sure that a statement was intended ironically is to have a detailed knowledge
> of the personal, linguistic, cultural and social references of the speaker *and* his audience.[12]

Gaunt's quotation is emblematic of a certain strand of ironological literature that privileges this author figure as a site of meaning. As such, the quote suggests two points about the location of authority with the general author figure.

1. The meaning of the text (here, 'statement') operates within a fixed set of parameters (the immediate context) that are, theoretically at least, open to a 'detailed knowledge'; presumably, an historical-empirical knowledge which is discoverable. The author function here becomes a mode of establishing such parameters by situating the cultural references of ironist and audience. In this sense, the figural element of 'the author' enacts a certain boundary for the interpreter's purpose. This 'Author Function', to borrow Foucault's term, is characterised by

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[10]   J. Culler, 'In Defense of Overinterpretation' in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by U. Eco and S. Collini (Cambridge, CUP, 1992, pp. 109-124), pp. 114–15.

[11]   C. Colebrook, *op.cit.,* p. 75.

[12]   S. Gaunt, *Troubadours and Irony* (Cambridge, CUP, 1989), p. 25.

two basic features. First, the figurative representation of the function within interpretation (referencing accompanied by personal pronouns, etc.); second, there is a lack of specific reference within the ironic text or event itself.[13] That is to say, the external authority is given meaning within secondary interpretative literature rather than the interpreted text itself. When this serves as a representation of the author beyond the limits of the text itself, this non-specific reference is to an extent necessary: as Foucault argues, *because* this figure of the author is a 'proper name', 'one *cannot* turn a proper name into a pure and simple reference' (my emphasis).[14] In short, when employing such a figure, we are already turning half an eye away from the object of interpretation, and towards the wider framing interpretative schema.

2. For Gaunt the prospect of irony moves the interpreter to look *beyond* the initial ironic statement of the text, and to the referential frame of meaning that *enables* such a statement to be classed as 'ironic'. While the immediate irony manifests itself in the authorial performance, the possibility of this authorial irony, and the meaning it produces, lies not in the immediate image but the sense of the 'beyond' which frames the text. In other words, the facticity of the text's 'origin', which Gaunt employs here, frames the text by virtue of its being 'beyond' the text.

The constitutive element of ironic meaning is then situated within this linear movement 'beyond' the immediate text. But it is important to see that this sense of the 'beyond' works in two ways. On the one hand, the legitimacy of positing a lived authorial body within a particular time and space is a matter of objective certification. From this, the notion of the historical author — an embodied, intentional actor — as a schematic root for the interpreter is justified. On the other hand, on a purely pragmatic basis, it is rare, if not impossible, that the means of attaining such claims to 'reality' satisfy the ends demanded by the interpretation's use of such a figure. To establish, Gaunt suggests, a 'detailed knowledge of the personal, linguistic, cultural and social references of the speaker *and* his audience' is a far more extensive task than first appears,

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[13] We can think here in particular of the way many interpretations of more ambiguous authorities utilise an author's private and unpublished texts as a reference point, such as journals or letters. Given that such references occur outside of the author's published work and away from the texts in question, the specific grounds for the *authority* of such reference points, in relation to the interpretation of the specific text, is rarely clarified in hermeneutic terms.

[14] M. Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by P. Rabinow (London, Penguin, 1991, pp.101–120), p. 105. In more detail:

> [A]n author's name is not simply an element in a discourse […] it performs a certain role with regards to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others […] The author's name serves to characterise a certain mode of being of discourse […] (p. 107)

even before we consider that the presupposition within the claim that there is a coherent and relatively stable speaker-audience relationship at work in every case of irony.[15] In this sense, the historical author is 'beyond', not only the text, but also the limits of the interpreter's justification.

If treating these two senses as the same notion of the 'beyond' is an equivocation, it is a formative equivocation. In the case of interpreting irony, the first sense entails the second. The very authority of the external author-figure is constituted within the postponement of 'immediate' meaning within the ambiguous text; meaning, therefore, lies not in the reductive act of reference, but in the gesture *towards* a reference. But this reference is not simply unfulfilled: rather, the intentionalist gesture allows the text to be framed within a particular purpose and direction based on that reference (i.e. the meaning of irony is rooted in the empirical references of the speaker's intention). In this way, the value of such a gesture is not the 'completing' the reference itself, but the framing of the text or event within a particular relation between meaning and intention. It is such a framing which allows certain possibilities of meaning to be authorised, and others precluded.

3.   'Literal Meaning' and Stability

It is relatively clear, of course, why the 'problem of irony' in relation to interpretation should be dealt with through the figure of an intentional author. Structuring meaning around an authorial intention 'behind' the text itself enables irony to be considered as a figurative trope, reducible to the 'literal meaning' of the communication.[16] Consequently, the non-literal meaning of figurative language — its playful ambiguity — is assessed by virtue of the literal ordering of the text. But such an ordering presupposes certain hermeneutic commitments. Ambiguity does not invite a 'neutral' interpretation, when interpretation is concerned with *understanding*: the two are already at odds. It is true that the appeal to authorial intention allows the interpreter to resist the relativism of 'total irony', whereby everything and anything can be claimed to be ironic. But it follows that, if this is the case, the role of the 'literal meaning' of a text must be seen as bearing a strategic relation to the ironic excess of meaning. As Gibbs argues, the process of interpreting irony does not rest on a 'single point' of literal meaning, as the notion of what constitutes 'literal meaning' is itself an ambiguous area: unproblematic

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[15]   Of course, this is far from a justified presupposition. One can easily find quotations which are ironic only in hindsight or when juxtaposed with related yet contextually distinct events. Awarding Henry Kissinger the Nobel Peace Prize, for example, may well only be considered an ironic event when juxtaposed with evidence of U.S-sanctioned political subversion in South America under Kissinger's jurisdiction.

[16]   As Hutcheon notes, 'the understandable urge to anchor the slipperiness of meaning in the intention of the encoder is evident in most studies of figurative language or indirect expression' (*op. cit.*, p. 116).

references to any such literal point are 'no more stable than the eventual interpretation it supposedly authorises.'[17] This strategic relation is of the utmost importance to a productive ironic interpretation, because it raises the question of *how* the value of 'literal meaning' is constructed from the ironic event.

If we reverse the linear approach represented by Gaunt,[18] and ask not how irony arises from the a given author, but instead how a given author arises from an ambiguously ironic event, then we can see that the apparent stability of 'literal meaning' as a counter-balance to ironic ambiguity is supported only by a particular repression of certain ambiguities at crucial moments. That is to say, the ambiguity is illuminated at a certain stage of interpretation, a stage which is *already* subordinated by the figure of the 'ironist'. In other words, for irony to be reduced to the 'literal', a certain hierarchy of value is being presupposed in the hermeneutic approach. Such a hierarchy may be grounded on 'knowledge' (for example, Hirsch's claim that authorial meaning is the only basis on which proper *knowledge* of a text can be built[19]), or on 'necessity' (for example, Searle's argument that a sentence cannot have both a literal and a distinct figurative meaning, because 'sentences and words have only the meanings that they have.'[20]); but in any case, such reductive organisations are brought into focus by the challenge of ironic ambiguity.

The key point here is that these two apparently conflicting motifs — reference, on the one hand, and 'the beyond', or the ambiguous spaces between references, on the other — do not simply overrule one or the other in the case of ironic interpretation. As I have argued in the previous sections, merely positing a reference to an intentional author does not solve the problems of ambiguity, as it relies on the same notion of the 'beyond' for authority. In cases such as Gaunt's (or Hirsch's, or Searle's), we are seeing under the guise of a referential claim an hermeneutic organisation of possible meanings, which may or may not be entirely relevant to the specific ambiguity at work in the text or event. Conversely, however, to locate the meaning of an ironic text *is* a problem of reference — one cannot simply find irony wherever one pleases. Philosophical hermeneutics remains concerned with justifying and accounting for our understanding, in which cases the problems raised so far by the 'superhuman figure' of

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[17] R. Gibbs, 'Process and Products in Making Sense of Tropes' in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed by A. Ortony (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 252–276), p. 263.

[18] We can include here similar intentionalist approaches, which suggest a philosophy of mind is more useful than a philosophy of interpretation in cases of irony: for example, S. Knapp and W. Michaels, 'Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction' in *Critical Inquiry* (Vol. 14, No. 1, 1987) pp. 49–68.

[19] See E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (London: Yale University Press, 1967).

[20] J. Searle 'Metaphor' in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. by A. Ortony (Cambridge: CUP, 1993, pp. 83–111), p. 84.

intentionality must be both traceable and accountable. In order to understand this, we must probe deeper into the internal authority of the text itself.

4.   Internal Authority — the Hermeneutic Circle

Umberto Eco suggests that such notions of 'intentional author', 'implied author', etc. are only projections from the *internal* coherence of the text (or, in this case, the text's irony), or what he terms 'the intention of the text':

> Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a model reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the model reader consists in figuring out a model author that is not the empirical one and that, in the end, coincides with the intention of the text. Thus, more than a parameter to use in order to validate the interpretation, the text is an object that the interpretation builds up in the course of the circular effort of validating itself on the basis of what it makes up as its result […]. I am so defining the old and still valid "hermeneutic circle".[21]

The meaning of a text is restricted by a certain sense of internal coherence. As Ricoeur notes, even though there is 'always more than one way of construing a text,' the text nevertheless presents only a 'limited field of possible constructions'.[22] As an object of interpretation, each unit of that object must itself be unitary, representing the single order of that object. This single order is not discoverable in a linear manner, though, as with the case of referencing an author outside of the text.[23] The internal meaning of a work is, rather, a circular process. A word has multiple meanings, but the possibility of its meaning must cohere with the text at large: 'In this sense the internal textual coherence controls the otherwise uncontrollable drives of the reader'.[24] The interpreter constructs a meaning by circulating between the part and the whole, a circulation which operates at every level of interpretation (from word to sentence, sentence to text, text to corpus, corpus to genre, etc.) and thus 'expand[s] the unity of the understood meaning centrifugally'.[25] This is, in essence, the structure of the hermeneutic circle. However, even in its most traditional representations, the hermeneutic circle is not only a schematic means of interpretative understanding, but also a mode of signifying the lack of absolute meaning in a text, the separation of the text from its origin inherent to the act of inscription; a separation that imposes the need for interpretation in the first place.[26] The circle

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[21] U. Eco, 'Overinterpreting Texts' in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by U. Eco and S. Collini, (Cambridge: CUP, 1992, pp. 45–66), p. 64.

[22] P. Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[23] W. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 234.

[24] Eco, *op. cit*., p. 65.

[25] H-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* trans.by J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 291.

[26] See, amongst others, W. Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 53.

thus not only signifies the contradictory progression of interpretation that involves movement from part to whole and back, but further, both the presence and absence of understanding.

Such is the case of interpretation in general, but what of ironic interpretation? The ironic question is different from the traditional formulations of the hermeneutic circle because of the constructive tension we have already seen between the challenge to authority given in the terms of identifying the ironic, and the investment in a pre-given authority, or authorities, which enable the focus on irony in a text. The most important point to note is that the use of the circle as a trope in ironic interpretation is not necessarily a descriptive figure, but rather represents the presupposition of unity within the act of interpretation.[27] The circle is not only a schema, but a vital metaphor for the construction of an interpretation. In order to close the circle, there exists a certain inevitable imbalance towards particular points of reference, which become central for locating the resistance to the ironic possibilities of the text. As a unity, the circle *contains* the 'space' of ambiguity. By containing it, it can define ambiguity. But the metaphorical completion of the circle has reconstructed the ambiguity by providing a context, an ordering, and an orientation. The ways in which schema and metaphor conflate within the hermeneutic circle are thus vital for organising the possibilities of meaning.

5. Intention and Beyond

I started this article with the general hypothesis that irony disrupts the forms of communication which underlies the hermeneutic criteria for understanding. The persistent thematic emphasis on 'intention' as a criterion for assessing ironic meaning, however, often produced an impasse between author and critic over who has the authority to claim a text or event is ironic. Rather than dismiss this theme, I argued that closer analysis of the relationship between intention, interpretation and authority could point to ways in which quite an accountable hermeneutic of irony might be produced. In this final section, I will briefly outline how the previous discussion would point towards this.

As a hermeneutic concern, the essential problem lies with attempting to explain irony in terms of the very models of successful communication which it disrupts. This inevitably reduces ironic ambiguity. Such a problem gives rise to the need for not just understanding, but Culler's concept of 'overstanding'. The way through this was to expand on Colebrook's idea that irony calls into question 'who is speaking', by suggesting that irony exposes the hermeneutic framework for understanding as a *frame*. Irony models communication not in terms of a closed

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[27] Gadamer calls this the hermeneutic circle's implication of a 'fore-conception of completeness.' *Op. cit.*, p. 294.

linear references or circulations of meaning, but in terms of the spaces opened up between these points of reference: shifts in context, gaps in reference, and so on. There is thus a constructive tension between a) the challenge to authority given in the terms of identifying the ironic, and b) the investment in a pre-given authority, or authorities, which enable the focus on irony in a text. So, when Rorty claims that the 'opposite of irony is common sense', this is in fact only half the story, because the common-sense structures of authority nevertheless remain *affective*.[28] I read Linda Hutcheon's argument over the situating of 'intention' as supporting this:

> To call something ironic is to frame or contextualize it in such a way that, in fact, an intentionalist statement has already been made — either by the ironist *or* by the interpreter (or by both).
> In other words, intentional/non-intentional may be a false distinction: all irony happens intentionally, whether the attribution be made by the encoder or the decoder. Interpretation is, in a sense, an intentional act on the part of the interpreter.[29]

While Hutcheon enlarges the limiting correlation of intention with empirical author to include the interpreter, we can see that, in fact, 'intention' is not an empirical factor but a schematic *and* metaphorical structure; or, at the very least, it is as a trope of coherence that 'intention' is employed in the interpretation of irony. Identifying the importance of intention to the understanding of irony is, then, not merely to posit a context by which irony might 'make sense' in terms of its historical or social significance. The hermeneutic expression of the author function — how the interpreter re-presents such an intention — crucially reveals the ways in which the various possibilities of what irony might mean is constructed, organised and prioritised. In this sense, 'intention' can operate in at least two ways: as exterior to the text itself (as the 'author function'), or as the interior 'unity' of the text. While irony disrupts models of communication — whether through appeal to a separate, distinct author figure, or to a circular interpretative process — these models nevertheless remain in play. But their signification is more pronounced once we attempt to account for the specific ambiguity of the ironic event, rather than for the 'proper' meaning behind it. In such cases, the metaphorical aspects of such models become as relevant as their schematic aspects. Intention is not simply an empirical question, but one of hermeneutic structure: it is invoked as an organising principle to justify an interpretative claim that a text or event is ironic or not.

We can see now how the impasse between the absolute authority of the author's intention and the apparent relativism of the critics reading is not an endpoint in the discussion. Rather, it is a mistake to see the author's figure operating as a single reference point in the interpretative presentation of irony. The 'intention' of the author is instead facilitated within the coherence of

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[28]   Rorty, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
[29]   Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

the text-interpreter relation. 'Intention' is not an empirical factor but a schematic *and* metaphorical structure; or, at the very least, it is as a trope of coherence that 'intention' is employed in the interpretation of irony. Thus, the interpretation of irony is not investing in the 'given' authority as a governing schema which would bring closure to the ambiguous meaning of irony, but is rather investing in the tropological shape of interpretation. The importance of intention is not*,* as was first presumed, as some kind of 'original' position 'beyond' the ironic moment, which would guarantee its limitation. It follows that the sense of non-immediacy in the ironic text is, similarly, not in some way 'beyond' the inscription, but contained within the structures of interpretation that give it meaning. If this is the case, then the sense of an immanent 'beyond' contained within the ironic mode is clearly an essential element to an interpretative strategy. Irony works to reveal — and, perhaps, account for — such a strategy.

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