In classical rhetoric, irony figured, along with metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, as one of the four principal tropes. However, the historical fate of irony in English literary criticism since then has been a bizarre one. In English (and also German) speaking nations in particular, its primary dictionary meaning (a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used) became transferred to that figurative sense in which one speaks of cosmic irony, the irony of fate - in other words, to an attitude of the modern mind as it interprets man's role in the universe. Irony then became the domain of the philosopher (Kierkegaard), the psychoanalyst (Freud's studies on jokes), or the ideologue for, like parody, irony can be seen as an 'elitist' form of literature. Lately, however, things have been changing. In the last ten years there have been a number of extended attempts to reconcile irony as a formal mode of literary discourse with irony as a world view: witness Wayne Booth's 1974 *The Rhetoric of Irony*, following D. Muecke's *The Compass of Irony* (1969). As recently as December 1980 the Modern Language Association of America devoted a session of its convention to the function of literary irony, signaling perhaps a reappropriation of the trope by modern English criticism.

In semiotics too, the revaluation of irony has begun. There have been special issues on this topic of both *Poétique* (No. 36) and *Linguistique et sémiologie* (No. 2), and a five day colloquium on 'Ironic Discourse' was held at the International Centre for Semiotics and Linguistics at Urbino, Italy in 1979. At this conference many of the papers - in all fields - attempted to posit definitions of irony in terms of the intersection of an ethos (mocking) and a formal structure (antiphrasis). Other recent general semiotic studies of irony have been explicitly oriented towards linguistic (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980) or pragmatic (Hutcheon, 1981) analyses.

In literary semiotics in particular, however, very little new work in this area has appeared. And the studies of irony in literary discourse that do exist reveal a striking and curious consistency in the examples of irony that are cited. Shakespeare's famous line from *Julius Caesar*, 'And Brutus is an honourable man,' has a privileged status, as has the opening sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (see Allemann, 1978;
What one also notices, however, is that in each case the unit of analysis is that of a single sentence. There is an obvious reason for this and that is, quite simply, the traditional definition of irony as an oppositional or antiphrastic semantic phenomenon. One can be relatively convincing in showing that single sentences or words can mean the opposite of what they say. However, it is considerably more difficult to extend such analytic methods to the level of discourse. In fact, the paucity of attempts to do so—especially in English criticism—testifies to this difficulty. It also, of course, acts as a challenge to literary semiotics.

Any attempt to study the extended textual identity of irony is, by its very nature, restricted—in the sense that it must begin from particular texts and only then proceed to general semiotic principles. James Joyce’s *Dubliners* stories provide an appropriate data base, for although they are conventionally described as ironic (for example, by Levin, 1961: 41; Beck, 1969: 25, 27), there has been little attempt and even less success in textually localizing that irony. It would appear that in these stories it is hard to point to any one signifier that has a double signified. Such an antiphrastic semantic view of irony is bound to present problems in the analysis of textual segments larger than the word or, for that matter, the sentence. For instance, Booth’s (1974: 10) first step in reconstructing irony—the rejection by the reader of the literal meaning—presents an obvious dilemma to the critic dealing with a longer text, such as Joyce’s, which would in effect disintegrate, were the literal meaning actually rejected. Joyce is not yet that radical.

In focusing on one of the stories for purposes of analysis—‘The Boarding House’—one notices that, contrary to Booth’s view, there are in fact very few incongruities, few actual stylistic or contextual conflicts to signal to the reader the need to reconstruct a new meaning. This oppositional definition of irony as, in Muecke’s (1969: 15) terms, a ‘double-layered or two-storey phenomenon,’ fails to account for the impression of a more multi-directional and almost polyphonic kind of irony in Joyce’s text. Also, the etymological meaning of irony points towards a discrepancy in awareness that has often functioned as its definitive feature, as it so obviously does in so-called dramatic irony. Indeed, the dupe traditional to much ironic literature, the unaware innocent who lacks the knowledge crucial to preventing his victimization, might at first glance seem the key to the nature of the irony in Joyce’s tale of Bob Doran’s entrapment into marriage. Yet Bob Doran ‘had a notion that he was being had’ and Joyce makes it clear that all of his characters are well aware of what is going on.

Of interest, then, from a semiotic perspective, is the fact that Joyce’s primary mode of irony here is verbal and not situational, despite first impressions. Yet, and here lies the problem, it does not operate either antiphrastically or merely on the level of the single sentence as semantic unit. Both the narrow oppositional meaning of irony and the scope of its textual localization are called into question by a text such as ‘The Boarding House.’ It is clear to the reader that the author’s satiric evaluation is closely
linked to the overall ironic effect of the text. But it is not really a case of what Beda Allemann (1978: 393) has called a basic ironic tonality evoked from the first page and which is easy to recognize. It is, in fact, not easy to recognize, or at least not easy to pinpoint textually, especially within the confines of a purely antiphrastic concept of irony. For, as rhetoric taught, irony is not just a semantic opposition; it also involves a pragmatic ethos which implies a mocking attitude of the encoding author towards his text. Irony is a strategy as well as a structure.

There is little disagreement among semioticians that irony does involve, for the reader, a going beyond the text, to a decoding of the ironic evaluative intent of the encoder. However, it is also obvious that there must be signals within the text for the reader to begin this process. Yet theorists as diverse as Allemann (1978: 393) and Orecchioni (1977: 139) agree that the degree of ironic effect in a literary text is inversely proportionate to the number of overt signals needed to achieve that effect. This seemingly desirable lack of ironic signals in the text obviously suggests certain problems for semiotic analyses of literary irony.

However, one important attempt to liberate irony from the straight-jacket of an oppositional semantic definition is that made by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in their article, 'Les ironies comme mentions' (1978). The 'mention' of the title is opposed, as in philosophical logic, to 'emploi': when one uses an expression, one designates what that expression designates. On the other hand, when one mentions an expression, one designates that expression itself. This idea of 'mention' seems particularly relevant to irony of Joyce's type, since his irony too adds little to the overt message, in informational terms, but does point to an attitude — a negative evaluative attitude — of the encoding author. As a self-reflexive modality, the irony of Joyce's textual repetitions echo back on themselves intratextually with judgemental impact. This would seem to be in agreement with Sperber and Wilson's idea that most ironies can be described as 'mentions (généralement implicites) de proposition; ces mentions sont interprétées comme l'écho d'un énoncé ou d'une pensée dont le locuteur entend souligner le manque de justesse ou de pertinence' (1978: 409).

In terms of speech act theory, the lack of truth and pertinence value in most ironic utterances flouts Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle — of Quality and Relation. In conversation one usually copes easily with the shifts introduced by this ironic flouting. In Grician terms, this comes about through what is called 'implicature,' those assumptions needed to keep the Cooperative Principle in force. These implicata are not a necessary part of understanding the conventional meaning of the utterance. They are optional and additional factors but they do rely on culturally-shared knowledge of conventions and expectations. If literature is considered a speech context, albeit of a special kind,' one can see how an ironic text provides a paradigm of this situation for, in such a work, what is 'implicated' is indeed distinguishable from what is stated. In other words, the text's meaning consists of both what is written and what is 'implicated.'

Two consequences follow: first, what is 'implicated' need not be reduced to a simple antiphrastic identity in relation to what is stated. In fact, polysemantic possibilities present themselves. Second, however much one might wish to point to textual indices
Verbal Irony

of ironic meaning in a text, one cannot restrict 'what is written' to lexical items in the text. The meaning of what passes between encoder and decoder might be determined just as easily by semantic implication (explicit or implicit), lexical connection and syntactic devices such as deixis, substitution, ellipsis and structural parallelism.

If irony as 'mention' is an internalized evaluative strategy, then existing linguistic studies of evaluative mechanisms in discourse might prove helpful in textually localizing irony in a 'deadpan' text such as 'The Boarding House.' For an evaluative utterance to be ironic, the implied attitude of the encoder toward his text must, in addition, be one of critical distance and mockery. The 'marking' (in the linguistic sense) of the pragmatic ethos would be a pejorative one. Given the bizarre (in terms of the later Joyce) simplicity of Joyce's narrative style and form in this text, the idea of a comparison with what is referred to as 'natural' narrative, for example, does not seem as far-fetched as one might at first think. The findings of sociolinguists such as William Labov (1972), regarding the common formal and syntactic structures used by people recounting narratives about their own lives provide one possible model of investigation of a story whose banal simplicity of structure and narration is so startling.

Figure I is a graphic illustration of Labov's (1972: 369) simple — and, to literary critics, very familiar — structural findings. Their very familiarity reinforces the suggestion by Barbara Hardy (1968) that narrative is a natural act transferred from the human mind to man's constructs in art, and not vice-versa, since the Harlem adolescents who provide Labov's data can probably not be considered literarily sophisticated. A discussion here of this diegetic structure can supply the basic plot of 'The Boarding House'; a reminder of the exact narrative details is necessary if it is to be argued that this particular text's irony can indeed be localized.

In a piece of literature, the natural narrator's abstract ('Have I told you the story about ... ?') is replaced by a title — here, simply 'The Boarding House.' However, already the decoding reader knows that he is in the realm of bought and sold domesticity, in a house, not a home, a house where one pays to eat and sleep. A reader of the later punning Joyce might further explore the semantic range of something as crucial as a title and be tempted to see in the 'boarding' idea the naval action of coming alongside a ship in order to attack. Such a decoding is, in fact, reinforced by the mention in the second paragraph of the fact that the house has a 'floating population made up of tourists from Liverpool and the Isle of Man.' In addition, part of an extended semantic association of nautical 'boarding' is the notion of 'accosting,' or making sexual advances. Therefore the title, 'The Boarding House,' functions as an extremely economical abstract for a story about a seduction and entrapment into marriage.

The first five paragraphs of the text provide the decoding reader with what Labov calls the orientation. The boarding house in question is firmly and cunningly run by one Mrs. Mooney. It was bought with the proceeds of the sale of her butcher shop after its ruin by her alcoholic husband. She is a determined woman, we are told in the second sentence, and one who is 'quite able to keep things to herself.' This is a curious and arresting detail, until a subtle, implied echoing 'mention' of the nautical
association of the title recalls the semantic cliché that something secret, something kept to oneself, is said to be 'below board.' In this house live a few tourists, some music hall artistes, and a number of young clerks who speak of Mrs. Mooney as 'The Madam.' With her live her tough son, Jack, and her 19-year-old daughter, Polly. To her Mrs. Mooney gives the run of the young men — until she notices a romance developing. Without any verbalizing, perfect understanding reigns between mother and daughter, until the 'affair' reaches what Mrs. Mooney feels to be the 'right moment.'

At this point, Labov's complicating action begins. One Sunday morning after breakfast, Mrs. Mooney, armed with Polly's confession, prepares to call down young Bob Doran and demand that he act like a man of honour and marry Polly. To use Joyce's game imagery, she counts her cards and knows she will win: he is a serious young man, with a bit of money saved, and besides ... he would not want to face any scandal that might jeopardize his job at the office of that 'great Catholic wine-
merchant.' Decisively she sends the servant upstairs to call Doran, satisfied that she, unlike some mothers, is quite capable of getting her daughter off her hands.

The diegetic focus changes here to the anxious, helpless Bob Duran. The action is arrested for twelve full paragraphs as Doran evaluates the situation, fresh from his confession of the affair to a priest. He too now feels willing to make reparation – at least in spiritual terms – for his sin. A feeble man, he lives in fear of losing his job, of being laughed at by his friends, of being snubbed by his family, not to mention of being damned. In his studies, Labov found that there is one very important element in natural narrative that literary critics and folklorists both have ignored. There is a moment, he observed, when the storyteller suspends his narration of the action and evaluates – and validates – the narrative. In Joyce’s story, the unobtrusive narrator does no such thing. However, Doran’s own functional assessment acts in such a way as to suspend the action and thereby become a kind of allegory, in fact, of Labov’s moment of evaluation. Such an interpretation is confirmed by the concentrated presence in these paragraphs of many of what Labov calls evaluative stylistic devices. These devices are used throughout the story but they are present here in an especially condensed fashion. Since it was suggested earlier that irony functioned as an evaluative strategy, one that is frequently used by satirists and parodists (see Hutcheon, 1978), a study of these evaluative devices should aid in locating irony textually. In fact, here, they can be seen to operate as a secondary structure which, while concentrated stylistically in this central evaluative passage, spreads out like waves, inundating the entire narrative.

Before examining these evaluative devices in detail, however, we should complete Labov’s diegetic structure (of Figure I) as Joyce adumbrates it. The resolution is swift. Called by the servant, Doran unwillingly descends the stair, compelled by twin spectres of authority (the Madam and his employer) and their very physical henchman Jack, who (Doran suddenly and ironically recalls) once became violent when someone made ‘a rather free allusion to Polly.’

At this point Joyce literally interrupts his text with a line of dots. Doran is left to the mercies of Mrs. Mooney and the reader is returned to Polly, who dries her eyes, regards Doran’s pillows with ‘secret, amiable memories’ and slips into a pleasing reverie, forgetful of everything. Her mother’s command ‘Come down, dear. Mr. Doran wants to speak to you.’ is followed by a simple final coda: ‘Then she remembered what she had been waiting for.’ Few decoders fail to feel the weight of Joyce’s evaluation here.

The specific stylistic evaluative devices mentioned above are summarized by Labov (1972: 371 – 393) as follows:

A EVALUATIVE COMMENTARY: (1) External, (2) Internal
B SENTENCE-INTERNAL DEVICES:
   (1) Intensifiers: a. gestures; b. expressive phonology; c. repetition; d. ritual interjections; e. quantifiers.
   (2) Comparators: a. negatives; b. futures; c. modals and quasimodals; d. questions; e. commands; f. superlatives and comparatives (therefore metaphors and similes).
Here external commentary takes only two forms, for the narrator himself is unobtrusive. It is overt in diction choice, for to call Mrs. Mooney ‘determined,’ ‘imposing’ and ‘shrewd’ and to call Doran helpless and feeble, obviously does act as evaluative, though not ironic, commentary. The second technique Joyce deploys is the use of a series of proverbial-sounding expressions which do function as intratextual ironic ‘mentions,’ because they echo not only each other (tonally) but society’s potential negative evaluation: ‘Young men like to feel that there is a young woman not very far away’ is Mrs. Mooney’s reasoning for keeping Polly around the boarding house. And Doran fears the consequences of Polly’s availability: ‘Dublin is such a small city: everyone knows everyone else’s business.’ Internal evaluative commentary is evident in that early insinuation, the appropriateness of which is made clear by subsequent echoing repetitions: Mrs. Mooney’s resident young men speak of her as ‘The Madam.’ And, of course, all of Doran’s evaluating allegory functions as internalized evaluative commentary, often ironically because of its position as an echo of Mrs. Mooney’s version of the same situation.

It is really, however, on the stylistic, rather than diegetic, level that the textual nature of Joyce’s irony can be identified more clearly by using the tool of Labov’s sentence-internal evaluative devices. Joyce, for example, employs almost all of the intensifiers that Labov found used orally in natural narration. Gestures, expressive phonology, and ritual interjections are all present, but since this is a work of literature and not spoken narrative, they are present only as reported phenomena, for example, in the scene in which Polly, in a mock panic, enters Doran’s room to inform him that Mrs. Mooney knows ‘everything’. Suggestively, she throws herself onto his bed, moaning ‘O my God!’ The italics are Joyce’s.

The chief means by which the ironic tone of this kind of evaluative device is established is by echoing repetition. As with the cumulative irony of the repeating of Mark Antony’s ‘And Brutus is an honourable man,’ Joyce’s play on the repeated words ‘instinct,’ ‘affair,’ and ‘reparation’ take on ironic and pejorative value as a web of lexical connection is woven. Doran’s ‘instinct’ tells him to escape before it is too late. But the adverb ‘instinctively’ had earlier been used to describe Mrs. Mooney, whose instinct is to get him before he can escape. The word most frequently repeated is ‘affair’ and its signaling of the sexual code increases in intensity with each echoing mention. Mrs. Mooney wants ‘reparation’ for Doran’s taking advantage of Polly (though, in fact, Polly has seduced him). ‘Reparation’ appears three times within a few sentences, always with financial and social connotations. Three paragraphs later Doran gives it its religious meaning because the priest’s confessional offers him a ‘loophole of reparation.’ Yet even at this point he suspects that it will not only be a spiritual one. The reader, privy to the earlier intratextual echoes of the word, knows
that this will indeed be so. The idea of irony as echoing 'mention' seems particularly relevant to the interpretation of this evaluative device of repetition.

Besides using what Laboy calls intensifiers of this kind, Joyce also uses evaluative comparators. In the allegory of the moment of evaluation there is, once again, a concentration of these devices. Many of the verbs are negative, future or modal, as Doran tries to deny, then imagine and finally escape a life with Polly. But the ironic possibilities of evaluative comparators are best suggested in Joyce's text through the device of juxtaposition. For example, the asking of rhetorical questions - a favourite method of self-reassurance - is a habit of Mrs. Mooney and also of Bob Doran. The other and most obvious forms of comparators mentioned by Labov, similes and metaphors, are curiously rare in 'The Boarding House.' In fact there is only one noteworthy simile - but it is an ironic one. Mrs. Mooney deals with moral problems 'as a cleaver deals with meat' and this image acts as an echoing 'mention' of the opening paragraph of the text in which the drunken Mr. Mooney goes after his wife with a cleaver and in doing so gets himself turfed from their home and her life, and brings about the purchase of the boarding house itself.

Although a stylistic account of Labov's categories of correlatives and explicatives would locate some textual irony within the evaluative structure, the ellipses are even more suggestive. There are, in fact, explicit textual markers of absence: ' ... ' The most ironic — although not in an antiphrastic sense of the word at all — is in a song Polly sings: 'I'm a ... naughty girl. / You needn't sham: / You know I am.' The irony here derives from the echoing of Polly's behaviour in her words. The 'points of suspension,' as they are so appropriately called, are used frequently also in Doran's evaluation scene. He had led a mildly wild youth but 'that was all passed and done with ... nearly.' He then thinks that maybe he and Polly 'could be happy together .... ' He recalls 'the touch of her hand and his delirium .... ' The next sentence brings an abrupt halt: 'But delirium passes.' Most noticeable, on another level, are Joyce's ironically evaluative sexual ellipses. No overt textual mention is ever made of things sexual for, it is implied, society does not speak of that with which it baits its traps. In his long evaluating interior monologue too Doran never once uses Polly's name; he substitutes the feminine singular pronoun.

Labov also noted that in natural narrative, when the order of events was broken in any way, reorderings had evaluative impact. There are two main breaks of this kind in the narrative order of the text here and it is once again through the juxtaposition of them as evaluative mechanisms that the actual irony is made manifest. The first break is a passage of indirect monologue: Mrs. Mooney recalls Polly's recent confession and plots to entrap the guilty Doran. This is juxtaposed with Doran's flashbacks, in his parallel interior monologue, to the scenes in which he is seduced by Polly. This is juxtaposed with Doran's flashbacks, in his parallel interior monologue, to the scenes in which he is seduced by Polly.

The combination of the intratextual phenomena — of ironic juxtaposition and echoing 'mention' — with Labov's findings regarding basic evaluative stylistic devices does allow for textual localization of Joyce's evaluating irony in a way that oppositional methodologies have failed to do. By working from the narrative form (Figure I), it is perhaps possible to account in part for the overall cumulative irony felt in the text. Northrop Frye (1957: 40), in describing the modern ironic mode of
literature, claims to find there, in accord with much English criticism, 'complete objectivity' and 'suspension of moral judgement.' Although there is a semblance of narrational objectivity in 'The Boarding House,' the irony is definitely judgemental, and there are real textual indices for the reader to decode. While these signals will not be those one might seek when working from an antiphrastic definition of single ironic utterances, they do nevertheless appear to allow some means of approach to Joyce's elusive irony, an irony which acts as a major satiric, evaluative strategy in the text. This pragmatic pejorative ethos combines with a repetition or juxtaposition structure ('mention' or 'echo') in order to make evaluative passages into ironic ones.

Another of Labov's suggestive findings (1972: 376) is that people seem to use a very simple narrative syntax when telling stories about their lives. Unlike regular conversation, these oral narratives proceed, he found, in simple units. An introductory conjunction is followed by a simple subject. Next invariably come the past tense marker (an auxiliary or quasi-modal) and the preterit verb and its simple complement, the direct or indirect objects. Then, and in this order, come adverbials of manner, place and time.

The reader of Finnegans Wake (which opens with 'riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay') is not immediately likely to think Labov's findings very relevant. But 'The Boarding House,' like all the stories in this collection, is written in a surprisingly and deliberately bare style. In a letter to the publisher of Dubliners, Joyce wrote: 'I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard' (Ellmann, 1966: 134). It is indeed the almost banal simplicity of the style of this story that suggests a comparison with Labov's data, as was mentioned earlier. Since irony is an evaluative modality, it is particularly interesting that Labov noted that any departures from this norm of basic syntax stood out as deviations and functioned to suspend the narrative momentarily. They also, therefore, possessed evaluative force.

The opening sentences of 'The Boarding House' (Joyce, 1967: 61) form a good place to begin an analysis because it is here that Joyce establishes his syntactic norm (see Figure II). This passage fits very closely Labov's structures of natural narrative and the (marked) deviations are indeed evaluative, some even ironic. There are relatively few of them, and so their departure from the norm does carry a certain force.

The possessives in the complements of units 1, 6, and 7 all regard the departed father figure and his role, a detail of importance to a reading of the ironic myth of the story, as we shall see later. The words 'determined' and 'quite' are evaluative without being ironic. Time and causality are stressed in the long 'But as soon as' and the final 'to the devil' is an amusingly metaphoric locative.

With this simple structure of syntax as a norm, another passage (Joyce, 1967: 64) can be studied, this time one from the start of the complicating action as Mrs. Mooney prepares her plot to snare Doran. (See Figure III.) Some of the elements here are merely out of Labov's order but they do often seem to gain ironic emphasis, especially the 'always' of unit 12; the reality of the sexual situation never seems to
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<tr>
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<th>Conjunctions, Temporals</th>
<th>Simple Subjects</th>
<th>Past Tense Markers (auxiliary)</th>
<th>Predicate</th>
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make Polly awkward, even if this is 'always' so for 'allusions of that kind' (one of the rare qualifiers here and also a sexual euphemism with some cumulative, retrospective ironic value). This is also the case for the semantic paradox of unit 14, 'in her wise innocence.' The reader also notices both the parallelism of syntactic structures and the repetition in units 5 and 6, 8 and 11; these suggest on a formal verbal level the connivance of the two women. Both mother and daughter are made to break the simple past tense markers too with negatives and modals (units 9 and 13). And the almost contorted complexity of the verb forms of units 9 through 13 mirrors the moral casuistry and psychological avoidance of the sexual topic of Mrs. Mooney's interview with Polly.

Joyce does appear to employ something close to what Laboy has labeled basic narrative syntax. And when he deviates from it, be it by the order of the items or by the addition of qualifying or complicating elements, these departures from the norm have evaluative, and sometimes ironic, force. This suggests that syntax might function as a textual index of irony, as did diegetic structure and sentence-internal evaluative devices. And this would be evaluation at an almost subliminal level, one of which we are seldom aware.

Leaving Laboy behind, however, one ought to return to what has deliberately, if temporarily, been ignored here: the fact, as argued earlier, that irony should be discussed as a semantico-pragmatic phenomenon, whatever the actual textual signals to the reader might be. It was suggested that, for discourse rather than isolated sentences, the definition of literary irony as just a binary opposition between what is written and what is intended is a constricting one. Often Joyce's irony only makes itself manifest by multiple repetition or by positional juxtaposition of diegetic or linguistic elements. Therefore irony is not 'subtractive' in structure, to use Wayne Booth's term (though it is so in terms of its ethos). Rarely is the surface or literal meaning of the words in Joyce's text actually meant to be rejected, for the meaning of the text lies in both what is written and what is intended (see Groupe Mu, 1978: 427). And what is intended need not necessarily be restricted to a single and antonymic meaning. In fact, in Joyce's text, often three separate interpretative levels or codes are suggested by a single word. This is because, in context, that overdetermined word becomes the focus of irony directed simultaneously at three distinct objects - here, the religious, financial and sexual restrictions of Irish society as Joyce seeks to represent them in his story.

The specific semantic codes deployed are soon made clear to the reader. The orientation of Joyce's tale quickly takes on a mythic or even religious cast, partly because of its studiedly simple narrative syntax and partly because it recounts, in a parody of Genesis, the 'origins' of the boarding house. This microcosm is, like the fallen world, created out of violence and separation. Mr. and Mrs. Mooney make a degenerate Adam and Eve; she too married 'her father's foreman' and together they ran a butcher-shop, like her father's, near Spring Gardens. It is significant that Mr. and Mrs. Mooney are the only characters in the story who are not provided with Christian names. At any rate, like Eve, Mrs. Mooney is quite - and yet not quite -
'able to keep things to herself.' When she is chased out of her house with a meat cleaver, it is a degraded casting out of Eden, in a degraded world of broken relationships. Mrs. Mooney in turn evicts her husband, goes to the priest for a separation, sells the shop and buys the boarding house. The Heraclitan flux that generates the social cosmos of this little story is compounded out of three elements: sex, money and religion. Throughout the entire text, dictional choices are recurrently made which blend these three codes.

Early on in the text, the financial and sexual codes are both established and linked together. Mrs. Mooney buys a boarding house, a place where one pays for food and lodging and where the residents call her 'The Madam.' The house, by phonetic as well as semantic association, almost becomes a 'bawdy house.' Indeed in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce would pun intertextually on the title of this story, as the 'boardelhouse.' The codes of money and sex seem to have a natural historical affinity! In the third paragraph of Joyce's text a series of double entendres reinforces this associational affinity. The paying male residents of the house are good friends and discuss together 'the chances of favourites and outsiders.' They may be referring here to the Madam's favourites or to racehorses. And in fact the same play is explicitly made a few lines later as her son is said to be always 'on to a good thing — that is to say, a likely horse or a likely artiste' from the music hall. These latter are girls who are said to 'oblige' (a sexually encoded word) by ... singing for the company on Sunday evenings, as would Polly, singing that song about being a 'naughty girl.'

The degraded religious code is echoed and reinforced in the next paragraph where Polly is said to look like a 'little perverse madonna.' A normally solid Joycean critic, Robert Adams (1969: 75), refers to this comment and asserts that, despite it, no reader 'would ever suspect this metaphor of concealing a full-scale parodic parallel with the Holy Family,' though he uneasily confesses a 'hidden anti-religious dimension' to this story. One might argue, however, that while subtle the religious parody is not hidden and certainly is not a private code of the sort Adams deprecates. Instead, it plays its part in the weaving together of the triple-encoded diction in the story. It is Mary and Christ, not Joseph, who form the theological paradigm for human marriage, however decayed it may become. And so, here Doran is no Joseph. He does acquire, however, the attributes of a mock-Christ about to claim his degraded bride — Polly is a familiar form of the name Mary. After a three-day ordeal marked by a three-day growth of beard, Doran longs to ascend by miracle; instead he descends the stairs to the butcher's daughter, like a Lamb to the moral cleaver, to make his reparation.

Just after this description of Polly as a 'little perverse madonna,' the reader learns of Mrs. Mooney's disappointment that none of the young men in the house 'meant business.' The double sexual and financial connotations of the single phrase are directly superimposed here upon the religious semantic context. And by the sixth paragraph of the text all three of the codes are firmly established. The sexual one is further reinforced, with considerable irony, by innuendo and ellipsis, as we have already seen: Polly's 'wise innocence' and awkwardness at 'allusions of that kind.' The innocence and pudicity are perhaps parodied Christian values. The financial code
is stressed by the actions of Mrs. Mooney whose frugality dictates that the servant save scraps of bread from breakfast to use in bread pudding later in the week. She also puts her butter and sugar under lock and key, like the Host of middle-class salvation. While she is doing this, she is thinking (in a revealing, significant and ironic juxtaposition) of Polly’s confession of her sexual affair with Doran. The linking of the sexual and financial codes here is again done within the religious context, however, for in a parody of communion it is after the communal Sunday breakfast that the bits of ‘broken bread’ are collected – a Biblical intertextual echo which Joyce repeats in two consecutive sentences, lest one miss the point. While the bells of George’s Church ring in the background, the codes of religion, sex and money become indistinguishable, one from the other.

In the next paragraph a new development occurs in the diction; it is marked by euphemistic sexual clichés. Mrs. Mooney becomes ‘the outraged mother’ whose ‘hospitality’ has been abused by one she took to be a ‘man of honour.’ Instead he took ‘advantage’ of Polly’s ‘youth and inexperience.’ The paragraph ends by asking: ‘What reparation would he make?’ The next paragraph expands this same sexual punishment association with the word ‘reparation’ to include the cost of social stigma. Here the elliptical clichés – ‘the man,’ ‘the girl,’ ‘the mother’ – are not merely coyly sexual, for by depersonalizing the figures they point to social roles as well. In this they prepare us for the third repetition of ‘reparation,’ set as it is in direct grammatical apposition to ‘marriage.’

The full impact of Joyce’s economical triple entendre on this word is felt as the focus shifts to Doran, thinking that his confession to the priest has left him ‘a loophole of reparation’ for his sin. This tri-directional ironic force continues throughout Doran’s evaluative passage discussed earlier, as the character’s mind oscillates between memories of sexual pleasure and fear of spiritual and social punishment. His instinct tells him to flee; his socialized sense of honour tells him reparation must be made for his sexual sin. True spiritual reparation is hardly at issue; the price to be paid is marriage. Despite his awareness of the trap he is in, Doran descends to Mrs. Mooney and the other great middle-class sacrament parodied here, marriage.

Joyce concludes his little tale with Polly, and rightly so since she embodies all three of the codes of reference his diction has merged. This ‘little perverse madonna’ finally brings her price on the marriage market, but she rests in the decoder’s mind as a being almost wholly sensual. Her reverie is wordless and one never learns her dreams of past or future. Joyce created in her a creature so instinctual that he has no need to use that word to describe her. Young and pretty though she is, Polly represents, even more than Mrs. Mooney perhaps, the inexorable nature of the fates Joyce traced in Irish Catholic Dublin. She sinks into a complacent passivity, a willing abandonment of awareness, that establishes her final archetypal status, since it suggests the social inevitability of her drama. The coda then becomes a chilling reminder of the human ability to suppress awareness: ‘And then she remembered what she had been waiting for.’

In Dubliners as a whole it is clear that Joyce took satiric aim at the social and religious follies of the city and country he both loved and hated. In ‘The Boarding
House,' the satire's judgemental force operates through three codes - the religious, financial and sexual. Irony, as the strategy used to enforce the satire, also becomes a triple-encoded phenomenon, in that each repeated intratextual 'mention' of a word such as 'reparation' echoes earlier ones and also the three general semantic codes in such a way that three simultaneous and complementary significances are evoked. This irony would not appear to be binary nor is it strictly-speaking even oppositional. This polysemantic identity is brought about by means of the same devices as were found in the investigation of Labov's stylistic sentence-internal evaluative devices and his basic diegetic pattern and narrative syntax - that is, by repetition and juxtaposition in the context of a pejoratively marked or mocking ethos. If irony can be determined in this way textually, then the concept of irony as echoing 'mention,' operating intratextually, appears to be a necessary theoretical underpinning to a consideration of the structure of literary irony. It also offers a way out of the impasse created by antiphrastic definitions of irony in literary criticism.

These various approaches tried out on this particular Joycean text appear to have yielded some textually located signals of the ironically evaluative intent of the encoding author. More than that, the text itself points to a theme that, while Joyce never states it, is ironically 'implicated' in the triple encoding. In other words, this is not just a story about the entrapment into marriage of a helpless sensitive man, seduced by a conniving girl, with her mother's silent sanction. If it were, the story should not have proceeded beyond the seventh paragraph. Instead, the secondary ironic structure of the story reveals an attitude of Joyce towards his text, an attitude in which is implied a negative judgment on his message. This judgment cannot be stated; that is, it cannot (or will not) be faced by society. As the semantic field widens, Joyce's ideological purpose becomes clear: the revelation of the social institution of marriage as a sordid sexual and financial arrangement enforced by the authority of the church, of business interests, and of the family structure. While all of the evaluative force of Joyce's irony operates both rhetorically and satirically, there is also a sense in which it functions heuristically, leading the decoder to this central, but only implicated, theme of the text. And, although it was initially stated that situational irony was not a major factor in this text, that stand can now be modified. Although Mrs. Mooney, Polly, and Bob are aware of the drama they act out, they remain unaware of the ideological forces that direct their actions. Through an accumulation of ironic devices that convey the attitude of the encoding author to his own discourse, Joyce leads his reader towards that wider understanding.

Obviously, this kind of detailed analysis offers a particular reading of a particular ironic text. However, semiotic studies of the textual localization of literary irony are, by definition, particularized. Nevertheless, certain general conclusions can perhaps be drawn. Though the localizing of irony in textual segments longer than the sentence is no doubt difficult, it is not perhaps impossible. But the purely semantic definition of irony must be altered. There do seem to be norms (syntactic, semantic, diegetic) that
Verbal Irony

are established by and in the text, and therefore available to semiotic analysis. Through the transgression of these norms a set of evaluative signals can be discerned which, when repeated or juxtaposed in the context of a mocking ethos, become ironically evaluative. Furthermore, a move away from limiting binary antiphrastic models toward a more multivalent semantic and pragmatic definition of ironic encoding and decoding might well prove to be a liberating first step in the reworking of the general concept of literary irony from a semiotic perspective. This would, of course, in many ways be a salutary return to the insights of classical rhetoric where the pragmatic evaluative ethos is always implicitly as important as the formal antiphrastic structure, since it is the reader who must recognize and decode the intent as well as the meaning of ironic discourse.

NOTES

1 We do not mean to suggest that Grice's framework in itself constitutes a general pragmatics of literature. We are merely pointing out that ironic implicature appears to work in the same way in conversation and in literary texts.

2 Labov's limited theories of natural narrative have been used here rather than a more comprehensive text theory because our focus is not on the text as a whole but on the textual localization of irony as an evaluative strategy — a perspective very few theories have taken into account. Labov's framework is not intended to be taken as a general text theory here.

3 Irony is one of the rhetorical tropes or strategic modes that the genre of satire has at its disposal. It is not, therefore, the equivalent of satire, but rather a tool of it. The same is true of the use made of irony by the genre of parody.

REFERENCES

ABSTRACT

The analysis of extended ironic discourse in literature has been hampered by the defining of irony in binary, oppositional, semantic terms: only single word or single sentence units are usually cited as examples of verbal irony as antiphrasis. In the analysis of a longer text, one which is generally accepted as being ironic – James Joyce’s ‘The Boarding House’ from the collection, *Dubliners* – pragmatic and sociolinguistic theories have proved useful in isolating polysemantic ironic *implicata* from the point of view of irony as an extended evaluative literary strategy, as well as a more limited semantic phenomenon.

RÉSUMÉ

L’analyse du discours ironique dans des segments linguistiques plus longs que le mot ou la phrase se trouve limitée par la définition de l’ironie en tant que trope antiphrastique, à savoir, une définition en termes sémantiques binaires et oppositionnels. Prenant comme exemple un texte qui est communément accepté comme ironique – ‘The Boarding House’ de James Joyce – on a examiné ce que pouvaient apporter certaines théories pragmatiques (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Grice, Sperber et Wilson) et sociolinguistiques (Labov) à l’identification des *implicata* ironiques polysémiques du point de vue du trope comme stratégie évaluative. La présence d’une évaluation moqueuse dans la structuration diégetique et syntaxique et aussi dans l’emploi des mécanismes rhétoriques (‘sentence-internal devices’) révèle l’importance capitale de la répétition intratextuelle cumulative dans la signalisation de l’ironie. L’ironie dans les unités verbales plus étendues se manifeste comme phénomène sémantico-pragmatique, identifiable et localisable par des indices textuels: il existe des normes (syntaxiques, sémantiques, diéétiques) établies par et dans le texte qui se montrent comme sources de l’ironie verbale – mais seulement quand elles sont transgressées par la juxtaposition ou par la répétition dans le contexte d’un éthos moqueur.

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