

**“I’m 100% real. I rather suspect, however, that you are one of these awful parody accounts”**: Using the Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model of parody to understand the Twitter parody of Titania McGrath

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Parody is a prevalent form on the social media platform Twitter. The academic literature has thus far focused on the parody of the so-called 'irreverent internet', which is playful in nature and frequently pays tribute to what it parodies. There is, however, another kind of parody on Twitter which has an altogether more hostile relationship to what it parodies. @TitaniaMcGrath is a prominent parody Twitter account of the latter type. This thesis has a primary and secondary aim: The former is to expand our understanding of the breadth of parody on Twitter by applying the pragmatic model of parody developed by Rossen-Knill and Henry (1996) to the tweets of @TitaniaMcGrath. The latter is to evaluate the Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model as a tool for understanding parody. A random sample of 50 tweets taken from a two-year period between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020 is subjected to a close-reading analysis in relation to the four essential acts of the Rossen-Knill and Henry model.</p> <p>The thesis finds that the tweets of @TitaniaMcGrath parody both particular expressions of opinion produced by a variety of organisations and individuals and a more abstract idea of a kind of person and set of beliefs that are commonly termed 'woke'. In fitting with the medium of Twitter, the parody is mostly topical, and the opinions targeted are usually, though not always, extreme and provocative. Among the sampled tweets, a large majority proved to be concerned with one or more of four topics: race, transgenderism, toxic masculinity and free speech. In contrast to the parody of the irreverent internet, @TitaniaMcGrath's criticism is harsh and accompanied by a humour that mocks and ridicules its object. In addition, this study finds that the Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model provides a useful tool for analysis of Twitter parody. However, flaunting, whereby the desire to parody is intentionally signalled in the re-presentation of the object of parody, is found to be completely absent in at least one @TitaniaMcGrath tweet and non-essential for the purpose of parody recognition. The author tentatively suggests that flaunting is not integral to parody and could be detached from the Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model of parody, leaving the model centered on the relationship between the parody, its object and the parodist's humorous critique.</p>	
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## 1. Introduction

Does what happens on Twitter matter? Its active daily users may only number one sixth of Facebook's two billion, but because of the people who use it - journalists, politicians, business leaders, celebrities, etc. - its influence and agenda-setting power in the offline world is considerable (see Lewis, 2020). Despite its function as an important public square for debate, a notable and arguably unfortunate feature of Twitter is that outrage and extreme viewpoints tend to garner much attention on the platform. This has a self-reinforcing effect: the rewarding of extreme views with attention on Twitter has been shown to lead to increased expression of such views (see Dunleavy, 2021). This in turn has interesting implications for the criticism of such views on Twitter. If a 'moderate' opinion is drowned out by extreme ones, how can it be effectively expressed?

One possibility is by delivering that criticism through parody. @TitaniaMcGrath is a popular Twitter account which, on the surface, advances extreme opinions that do not represent the views of its creator. They are in fact parodies of often extreme opinions that he is opposed to. This does not stop some Twitter respondents appearing to take them at face value. This thesis investigates the dynamics of parody in that context.

The central aim of this thesis is to explore the parody of the Twitter account @TitaniaMcGrath. The exploration takes place within the field of pragmatics with supporting contextual background in theoretical discussions of parody derived from its study in literature. The primary method chosen to investigate the Twitter parody of @TitaniaMcGrath in this research is to apply the Rossen-Knill and Henry (1996) pragmatic model of parody to a sample of tweets by @TitaniaMcGrath. The overarching research question animating the thesis is therefore:

What can the Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model of parody reveal about the Twitter parody of @TitaniaMcGrath?

The pragmatic model of parody developed by Rossen-Knill and Henry functions as an analytical tool for the exploration of the parody of @TitaniaMcGrath and the application of this particular pragmatic model of parody leads to the following secondary research question:

How effective is the pragmatic model of parody developed by Rossen-Knill and Henry for an analysis of @TitaniaMcGrath (and Twitter parody)?

The thesis is structured in the following way: section 2 contains a literature review and the theoretical framework; the literature review includes an account of parody in historical context as a literary genre, attempts to define parody, the relationship between satire and parody, an overview of existing research on Twitter parody and a description of the Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model of parody. Section 3 presents the thesis' materials, @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, and the methods used in collecting those tweets and applying the Rossen-Knill and Henry model to them. In section 4 a detailed analysis of the tweet data is presented and in section 5 the general discussion synthesises and provides an overview of that analysis. Finally, section 6 presents broader conclusions that can be drawn from this research and suggests possible future areas of study.

## **2. Literature review and theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Parody as a literary genre in historical context**

In attempting to address the question of what parody is in the introduction to her *A Theory of Parody* (1985), Linda Hutcheon also asks the related questions of what is parodied, and what can be. She notes that it is invariably the case that whatever is popular will be parodied. Giving a plethora of examples of parodies in different art forms including architecture, sculpture, television, cinema, theatre, the novel, poetry and music, Hutcheon argues inductively that “[a]ny codified form” (Hutcheon, 1985: 18) can theoretically be parodied and, moreover, the evidence suggests that a parody need not even be in the same medium as its target. Nonetheless, in the history of parody scholarship many, such as the Russian formalists, have given primacy to parody as a literary genre with its first recorded roots dating back to Ancient Greece and Aristotle’s reference in his *Poetics* to Hegemon the Thasian as the inventor of *parodia*. The *parodia* were narrative poems with the metre and vocabulary of epic poems. In contrast to the texts they parodied, they dealt with light, satirical or mock-heroic subjects in

mock-epics, as, for example, in *Batrachomyomachia* (*The Battle of the Frogs and Mice*), a parody of Homer's *Iliad* (Dentith, 2000:10).

In English literature parody is a genre well represented in the earliest works of the canon in both verse and prose. The etymology of the word *parody* as used by Ben Jonson meaning a “literary composition modelled on and imitating another work, especially a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are satirised by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects, or are otherwise exaggerated for comic effect” (OED Online, s.v *parody*) dates from the early 1600s. However, there are clearly parodic works in Middle English which pre-date that usage. Chaucer's ‘The Tale of Sir Thopas’ in his *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, is a parody of the chivalric romance, where the eponymous hero flees his only battle pelted by stones. Whatever the age, parody has been quick to take its place in new mediums of expression as they have emerged: A mere two years after the publishing of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, regarded as one of the first novels in that then new literary form, came the publication in 1742 of Fielding's *Shamela*; this was the first great parody novel, and with time it entered the canon and became more well-known than its near-namesake (Dentith, 2000:10-13).

As the mediums for parodic expression have changed over time, so too has the dominant ethos of parody, reflecting the attitude of parodists to their targets in different eras. Hutcheon points out this evolution in her attempt to provide an account of modern parody and she suggests “there are probably no transhistorical definitions of parody possible” despite common denominators, as what is meant by parody has changed over time (1985: 10-11). She notes, for example, the eighteenth-century change in the ethos of parody away from that of earlier eras where parody more frequently showed respect for the parodied form (Hutcheon, 1985: 44):

The mock-epic did not mock the epic; it satirised the pretensions of the contemporary as set against the ideal norms implied by the parodied text or set of conventions.

However, with the valorizing of wit and irony in the eighteenth century an increasingly common function of parody was as a vehicle for satire. The parodied form itself became subject to denigration and ridicule rather than veneration. This is well illustrated in the

1729 classic *A Modest Proposal*, where Swift parodies “the benevolent humanitarian [...] concerned to correct a social evil by means of a theoretically conceived plan” (Greenblatt et al, 2006: 2462) and the pamphlets that such figures issued to that end. Distribution of pamphlets had since the 17th century been a popular means to try to influence political and religious opinion, and many pamphlets had been published on the question of poverty in Ireland. Swift addressed these with his satirical proposal that the children of the poor be sold by their mothers as a “delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food” (Swift, 2006: 2464) for Irish landlords’ dinner tables. *A Modest Proposal* is both a satirical critique directed at Irish landlords for their responsibility for impoverished conditions of their tenants, and a parody of a certain kind of pamphlet published at that time proposing solutions to the problems in Ireland. Hutcheon (1985) proposes that it is these differences in what they target which can be used to distinguish parody from satire. Discussion of this distinction will be returned to below.

## 2.2 Defining parody

The exact definitional boundaries of what constitutes parody are much disputed in the academic literature. Nevertheless, certain qualities of parody have been widely observed and seem to be the subject of broad agreement. Parody entails the imitation of a prior text. It is intertextual and allusive; that is, its meaning is constructed in relation to the imitated text and it indirectly references that imitated text. As Nash (1985: 76) observes “allusions make some demand on our competence as social beings with ready access to certain facts and commonplaces; when we lack such access, the allusion misfires”. For the audience to fully understand a parodic work, they must first recognise the parodist’s allusion, and as our encyclopaedic knowledge of texts, genres and styles varies, so too does our ability to recognise and understand parody. The allusions made to prior texts in parody are often implicit. However, a parodist who doubts that their audience has the required knowledge to recognise an allusion may make the reference more explicit by various means: for example, by quoting the parodied work in conjunction with the parody.

Parody is unlike other forms of imitative intertextuality such as citation and quotation in that its re-presentation of the prior text includes *marked* difference (Henry & Rossen-Knill, 2009). In relation to texts, this difference can be usefully distinguished

into distortions of the form (often through exaggeration) and/or of the content (e.g. in the mock-epic by substituting heroic deeds for mundane ones) — what Highet (1962) calls *formal* (relating to the style of the writer, genre, etc) and *material* parodies. The marked difference in parody further manifests itself in what Bakhtin termed *hybrid discourse*: “the combination of two perspectives or voices within a single utterance” (Black, 2006: 115). A notable feature of parody is that it is *double-voiced* — it speaks both with the voice of the imitated form (the object of parody) and with the authorial voice of the parodist. The voice of the parodied object is located on one level, the “primary, surface, or foreground”, and that of the parodist is on another, the “secondary, implied or background one” (Hutcheon, 1985: 37). Recognition of the juxtaposition of these two voices functions as an indicator for the audience that they are experiencing parody. The double-voicing of parody has been described aptly by Allen as projecting two stances at the same time (Vásquez, 2016). The voice of the parodist is indicative of their stance towards the object of parody and these contrasting stances can give rise to parody’s ironic quality.

Attempts to move beyond such general qualities of parody to a more precise definition have often taken literature and formal relations between texts and their precursor texts as the starting point of categorisation. Genette in *Palimpsestes* (1982), for example, defines parody as being distinct from travesty in that the prior text it draws on is transformed in a playful rather than a satirical manner, and distinct from pastiche in that, while both are playful, parody is a direct transformation of a prior text rather than pastiche’s imitation of a prior text’s style (Dentith, 2000). Accepting this parody-travesty distinction, Fielding’s *Shamela* is not then parody — even if it is commonly classified as such — because of Fielding’s satirical rather than playful intent: namely, to target the “hypocrisy and puerience” of the precursor text, *Pamela* (Dentith, 2000). While usefully highlighting interesting differences in relations between texts, such as between transformation of a prior text and imitation of its style, attempts to draw strict definitional boundaries can clearly produce counter-intuitive results in what they in consequence exclude from the concept of parody.

Dentith (2000) proposes a more inclusive definition of parody which has two requirements: Firstly, that if a cultural practice — text, sculpture, etc — is to be regarded as a parody, then it is a necessary if not sufficient condition that it should involve an allusive imitation of a prior cultural practice — a *hypotext* which the



imitation's *hypertext* draws on and transforms. And secondly, that for something to be regarded as parody, it must be relatively polemical. That is, parody involves some kind of critique of a target, with *relatively polemical* being defined broadly enough to include both playful and satirical attacks on that target.

The second requirement, that the hypertext be relatively polemical in nature, appears to make Dentith's account contradict Hutcheon's. Both recognise that parody is evaluative, but Hutcheon (1985) suggests parody entails imitation with critical distance where the evaluative element in that critical distance may in fact be positive about what is parodied. Dentith acknowledges and accepts Hutcheon's point that parody may make a positive evaluation of the parodied text but argues that when parody is making such a positive evaluation of the hypotext, its polemic will instead be directed towards the world, using the authority of the parodied text to strengthen that attack (2000: 17-18). Thus, Dryden's classic *Mac Flecknoe* (1682), a mock-heroic poem, is not an attack on the epics it parodies, but on his rival Shadwell, who Dryden ridicules by making him the focus of a heroic poem which subverts the expectations of the genre (e.g. the hero's virtue in this case is dullness). There is, however, a name other than parody given to polemic of the kind directed at Shadwell, and that name is satire. This once again raises the question of the distinction between parody and satire and what they target.

### 2.3 Parody vs satire and the function of parody

As with parody, satire has moved freely into new mediums, as a modern dictionary definition makes clear (OED): "A poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise prevailing immorality or foolishness."

In reviewing the academic work on parody and satire, Ermida states that "scholars seldom agree on how to ascertain their conceptual boundaries" (2012: 188), and Hutcheon, noting similar confusion among academics on the distinction, proposes that the reason for it may lie partly in "the fact that the two genres are often used together" (1985: 43). Hutcheon argues that an important distinction lies in their differing targets — parody is *intramural* in that its target is always another discursive text, whereas the target of satire is always social and moral (vice), and therefore

*extramural* (outside the text). As Dane (quoted in Simpson, 2000: 250) puts it: “satire refers to things; parody to words. The target and referent of satire is a system of content [...] that of parody is a system of expression.”

According to the Hutcheon (1985: 43-44) account, both parody and satire involve critical distance from what is targeted, making value judgments about that target, but only satire is inherently negative in its evaluation because its target is always vice. Additionally, Ermida also points to satire’s “pedagogical slant, ridiculing society into improvement” (2012: 190) as a further distinction. That is, beyond the necessarily negative evaluation of its target (something satire shares with the lampoon or personal attack), it also has an instructive or edifying element that need not be present in parody. This view of the function of satire is strongly influenced by the prescriptive account of the Restoration satirist Dryden in his *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* — “perhaps the most influential of all modern pronouncements on satire” (Griffin, 1994: 20). Dryden’s precepts for ‘true satire’, as aiming at inculcating virtue by scourging vice, are defined most closely according to the model provided by the work of classical satirist Persius. However, Dryden also drew on aspects of the work of Roman satirists Horace and Juvenal in describing true satire, allowing for the acknowledgement of a great stylistic breadth even within a highly prescriptive outlook. As Elliot (1998) notes, the terms *Horatian* and *Juvenalian* are still used to mark the stylistic and tonal boundaries of the satiric spectrum with Horatian satire being closer in spirit to comedy with a lighter tone and Juvenalian closer to tragedy employing a more sombre or acerbic wit to make the object of attack abhorrent.

Simpson (2003), while agreeing on the premise that satire is necessarily negative in its evaluation of what it targets, suggests that there is one form of satire where the target overlaps with that of parody. He stresses that a particular piece of satire may in fact have multiple targets and that discussion of a text’s *perceived* targets is a question of balance and emphasis. The four possible targets of satire set out by Simpson are (2000: 251f):

1. episodic, a particular event or action;
2. personal, a particular individual;
3. experiential, aspects of the human condition;
4. textual, the linguistic code itself.

The last of these, textual satire, may target a particular text or general ways of saying and therefore “straddles most closely the interface between parody and satire” (Simpson, 2003: 120). Returning to *A Modest Proposal*, on this reading, the text can have both the Irish landlords and the pamphlets it parodies (along with their authors) as targets in its satirical sights. Swift targets such pamphlets’ ways of saying, and this is the point at which the target of parody and satire overlaps. Explicitly, the target parodied is the detached language of rational argument and economic efficiency employed in such pamphlets for dealing with the moral and social problems of abject poverty in Ireland; this language itself can be regarded as vice in the world and therefore also a target of satirical attack.

Simpson (2003), as part of his model of satire, describes what he calls satire’s *dialectical element* — something he argues is essential to satire which need not be present in parody (though it is present in satiric parody, such as *A Modest Proposal*). He draws on Karl Popper’s concept of the dialectic — wherein an idea and an opposing idea come into conflict, and because we are unable to accept the contradiction we search for a new point of view which would resolve the conflict and lead to synthesis. The result of the dialectic element in satire is a text-internal discursive twist which destabilises what has gone before “in order to establish a satirical target” (Simpson, 2003: 82). Though Simpson’s point of emphasis is more the text-internal nature of this process — which he contrasts with parody’s primarily intertextual echoic quality<sup>1</sup> — the establishing of a satirical target is arguably the key distinction with non-satirical parody.

The resolution of incongruities is not only essential to getting the point of satire, but also to understanding the humour of jokes and recognising the two voices present in parody. However, the discursive twist of the dialectic element in satire is not, Simpson points out, the same as the insertion of jokes into parody, though the reliance on incongruities in both cases can cause confusion. He illustrates the point with a Woody Allen imagined account of a meeting with Hemingway (Simpson, 2003: 121):

We had great fun in Spain that year and we travelled and wrote and Hemingway took me tuna fishing and I caught four cans and we laughed... (from Allen 1975:93)

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<sup>1</sup> The set-up phase of satire also has this echoic quality in Simpson’s model of satire, which he argues helps explain satire’s spoof quality.

The text aptly parodies Hemingway's prose style. It also inserts a joke — tuna in the discourse context is expected to be the wild quarry of the big game angler as opposed to the supermarket comestible referenced by the “four cans”. The joke relies on an incongruity brought about by *script opposition*<sup>2</sup> — an item from the register of the supermarket script is inserted into the fishing script. This does not imply a satirical attack on Hemingway — indeed, there is no apparent target of the joke. Likewise, the insertion of Hemingway himself into the text creates an incongruity with the earlier imitation of his prose style in the sentence, where resolution leads to the recognition of the characteristic hybrid discourse of parody. While the target of the *parody* is apparent in the imitation of Hemingway's characteristic writing style, no *satirical* target is found nor, arguably, is there even any plausible polemical critique of Hemingway. It could be argued the parody gently mocks Hemingway's prose style by its slight exaggeration (e.g. by adding an *and* or two too many) and by using it as a vehicle for humour. However, if anything, the text as a whole appears to be a small but affectionate homage to Hemingway's writing, particularly so in the context of Allen's other work.<sup>3</sup> Humour rather than criticism, at least, is definitely to the fore.

Harriot, cited in Rossen-Knill and Henry (2009: 45), suggests that there are two primary modes of parody: a mode of humour and a mode of criticism. The relative weight given to either mode in particular parodies or even eras of parody may vary. Satire and satirical parody are clearly inherently and often primarily critical; they make negative evaluations of their targets. Nonetheless, even where parody is critical, it is evident that the primary aim of the parodist can be an attempt at humour and not criticism of the object parodied. Parodies can also make a positive evaluation of what they parody, which separates this kind of parody from satire. Arguably, parody necessarily involves some critical distance from its object and evaluation of it. The very act of choosing to parody a particular text implies some level of evaluative critique. Why choose to parody one text over another unless the text is of significance?

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 5.3 of Simpson (2006) for an explanation of Raskin's (1985) *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* and script opposition.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Midnight in Paris* (Allen, 2011).

## 2.4 The Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model of parody

Rossen-Knill and Henry (1996) developed their pragmatic model of verbal parody with the intention of moving the study of parody beyond literary criticism to “parody in real communication”. *Verbal parody* as they define it includes “any act in which a speaker uses a verbal expression (written or spoken) to communicate some parodic meaning to the hearer” (1996: 721). They postulate that expressions of verbal parody involve four essential acts (1996: 723): i) the intentional verbal re-presentation of the object of parody, ii) the flaunting of the verbal re-presentation, iii) the critical act and iv) the comic act. To produce a verbal parody, they argue the speaker must apply all four of these acts in their verbal expression with the intent of creating a parody that is recognizable to the hearer (or in the case of Doyle and @TitaniaMcGrath, the reader).

For the speaker’s intentional verbal representation of the object of parody to be successful, Rossen-Knill and Henry note that the imitation need not replicate the object, only be distinctly like it according to the knowledge of the parody’s creator and the audience experiencing the parody (i). It is not enough though that the person experiencing the parody recalls the object of parody for the parody to work. They must also realise that it is the intention of the parodist both to represent the object of parody and for the person experiencing the parody to realise that they are doing so. According to the model, this is achieved by flaunting (ii): the means by which the parodist communicates to the hearer/reader their intention to parody in the re-presentation. Flaunting usually involves some element of distortion, exaggeration or emphasis of particular features of the object of parody. Rossen-Knill and Henry (1996: 733) give the example of a wife parodying, for her husband, an overly dramatic house painter they have asked for an estimate:

Husband: Who called?

Wife: Sal Kobokalski. (pause) Painter. (pause) Paper hanger.

Husband: What did he want?

Wife: No, I was making fun of him. You know how he says it so dramatically.

The wife, in answering her husband, creates a representation of the painter's dramatic style. As Rossen-Knill and Henry note, flaunting is usually achieved by some exploitation of the maxims derived from Grice's cooperative principle<sup>4</sup> — maxims we ordinarily adhere to in conversation to make it flow smoothly. In the case of the painter above, for example, arguably, the maxims of quantity (do not make your contribution more informative than is required) and manner (be perspicuous, which also involves using the appropriate degree of brevity) are flouted. The pauses the wife adds along with the abrupt, short answers flout the maxim of manner and the addition of *Paper hanger* flouts the maxim of quantity — this is more than the relevant information needed to answer the husband's question. The wife flouts the maxims ostentatiously, because it is her intention that her husband should notice the parody. The husband, however, is slow on the uptake and misses his wife's intention to parody Kobokalski. As Rossen-Knill and Henry (1996: 723) note:

While the speaker cannot ensure successful uptake by the hearer, he/she can verbally re-present the object of parody and flaunt that re-presentation in a way that maximizes the likelihood of successful uptake.

What is said in parody, as with humour in general, cannot be properly understood when taken at face value. Raskin (1985:100-101) in his work *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* employs the notions of bona-fide (good faith) and non-bona-fide modes of communication. In bona-fide communication we earnestly try to convey information to our interlocutor and in non-bona-fide communication, which according to Raskin includes joking and lying, other communication goals are intended. In the example above, the husband assumes bona-fide communication and does not notice the clues (flaunting) from his wife which suggest that, as well as conveying the information he requests, she is also engaging in non-bona-fide communication. Parody, like joking, is not straightforward good faith communication that can be fully understood by taking the information conveyed at face value. Nonetheless, unlike lying which intends to fully deceive the interlocutor, parody is cooperative in so far as it is the parodist's *intention* that the target audience recognise the parody as such.

The next element of the model, the critical act (iii), emerges from the imitation of the object of parody and its flaunting. Rossen-Knill and Henry claim the critical act

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<sup>4</sup> See Grice (1991) for a full account of the cooperative principle and Grice's maxims.

is always pejorative, but “may range from mild teasing to contempt” (1996: 735). So, in the example of the house painter, the parody’s critical act could be said to be slightly mocking Sal Kobokalski’s dramatic style. However, the parody’s intended emphasis is arguably more on the comic act than the critical one. According to Rossen-Knill and Henry’s model, the comic act (iv) arises from the manipulation of i), ii) and iii) to the effect of creating some incongruity. In the Kobokalski example, the attempted humour of the parody arises from the juxtaposition of a dramatic style of speaking — short answers with pauses — and the mundane content of the utterance giving information that the house painter had called.

## **2.5 Prior research with pragmatic models of parody and implications**

For her study of news satire, a form which she observes is both parodic *and* satirical, Ermida (2012) constructs a linguistic model for her analysis. In contrast to the Rossen-Knill and Henry model of pragmatic parody, her model is specifically targeted at news satire and is developed with an analysis of it in mind. Nevertheless, the model consists of intertextual, critical and comic components, which broadly correspond to Rossen-Knill and Henry’s intentional re-presentation, critical act and comic act, respectively. In light of the earlier theoretical discussion of parody and its relation to satire, it is notable that Rossen-Knill and Henry state that the critical act in their pragmatic model of parody is essentially pejorative in nature, even if the degree to which it is so may vary, just as Ermida does for her model focusing on satirical parody. In Rossen-Knill and Henry’s own application of their model to an analysis of the film *The Princess Bride*, they observe that in parody “people sometimes pay tribute to the very objects that they appear to be criticising” (2009: 46). As is apparent from the discussion in section 2.2 above on defining parody, it is a disputed issue whether parody is inherently polemical towards its object or not. Rossen-Knill and Henry attempt to maintain it is inherently polemical by appealing to a parallel with Brown and Levinson’s (1988) account of politeness theory; Brown and Levinson note that being too polite may be insulting, as it contains the implication of greater social distance between those communicating. Likewise, Rossen-Knill and Henry argue that the greater the compliment and status of the object of tribute, the greater the need to employ a disavowable means of flattery such as parody. Arguably, this explanation is less

plausible than two considerably simpler alternatives: i) that the critical act<sup>5</sup> involved in parody (as per the model) is not inherently pejorative in nature; or ii) accepting that it is pejorative, the critical act may not be directed at the object of parody itself.

Despite their similarities, the Ermida and Rossen-Knill and Henry models are also notably different in one respect: Rossen-Knill and Henry make the act of flaunting essential to their model of parody, whereas Ermida, despite being aware of the Rossen-Knill and Henry model, makes not even a mention of the concept in her discussion. Rossen-Knill and Henry (1996: 721) emphasise that while their model focuses on the production side of parody and what the parodist does, parody is a communicative act reliant on successful interaction between the parodist and their audience — understanding the production of parody requires knowledge of its comprehension. Their inclusion of flaunting as an essential act in a model aimed at explaining the production side of parody has the advantage of highlighting how parody functions in practice as a communicative act between parodist and audience. However, it does raise the question of whether the role of the audience in detecting parody is necessarily reliant on effort on the production side by the parodist creating signals *specifically intended* for that purpose. A plausible alternative would be that detection occurs reception side entirely as a by-product of the audience noticing the parodist’s humorous and critical acts supported by contextual clues outside the re-presentation.

Rossen-Knill and Henry state that their pragmatic model of verbal parody was developed with the intention of applying it to “single situated speech act[s]”, but that they subsequently hoped it could be applied more broadly to “longer stretches of discourses” (2009:47); they themselves do this in applying the model in an analysis of the film *The Princess Bride*. The individual tweets of @TitaniaMcGrath as authored by Andrew Doyle clearly fall within the model’s scope as single, situated speech acts, while also contributing to a larger discourse. Vásquez observes that Twitter parody accounts constitute “sustained performances of imagined identities over extended periods of time” (2019: 35). In respect of this sustained performance, Twitter parody has something in common with satirical newspapers such as *The Public Enemy*, a Friday comic supplement in the Portuguese daily newspaper studied by Ermida (2012), or the popular online satirical news website *The Onion*, which also has a Twitter account. In addition, the reactions of a section of the parody audience on Twitter is

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<sup>5</sup> If so, it might aptly be renamed “the evaluative act”.



partially accessible because of the ability of Twitter users to comment on the tweets of Twitter parody accounts. The interaction between the sustained parodic performance and its audience thereby contributes to a discourse which is more visible on Twitter than in traditional media. As the Rossen-Knill and Henry model includes flaunting as a necessary act in the production of parody, applying the model entails an analysis of the signalling of parody, something which can be better informed and less speculative by reference to its reception.

Since the inception of parody on Twitter, there have been Twitter users failing to understand that parody accounts are not the genuine article. Vásquez (2019: 33f) gives a notable example of this: in 2010 newspapers reported it as real news when the parody account @ceoSteveJobs tweeted about recalling the iPhone4. While @TitaniaMcGrath is not a parody of a specific person for whom she can be mistaken, many Twitter users in their replies to her tweets do *seem* to fail to understand they are interacting with a parody. It is, nevertheless, more difficult to be certain of a failure to understand parody than of a successful understanding of it: the audience responding to the voice of the parodist shows that voice has been detected, whereas the audience responding to the voice of the object of parody may indicate the parody has not been detected *or* that the audience is merely playing along with the parody. As Attardo (2001) observes with regard to irony, so too of parody: the only non-ambiguous observable behaviour of the audience is their reaction to implied meaning.

## **2.6 @TitaniaMcGrath in context: Twitter parody and existing research**

Twitter is a microblogging and social media site where users can make posts known as tweets as well as interact with each other's tweets by liking, commenting on or retweeting (reposting) them. Each tweet can be up to 280 characters long since the doubling of the original character limit in November 2017 ('Twitter to expand 280-character tweets', 2017). Hashtags that users can mark their tweets with function as topic aggregators — they are searchable, and the most popular hashtags of the moment feature in Twitter's Trends along with other hot topics. It is also possible to follow the tweets of particular users and the posts of those users are displayed front and centre in each user's twitter feed. As of the last quarter of 2020, Twitter recorded 192 million active (logged on and accessing Twitter) daily users with the most popular accounts —

those of prominent politicians or religious leaders, sportspeople and members of the entertainment industry — having many tens of millions of followers. The four largest user bases are in the US with 69.3 million users, Japan with 50.9, India 17.5 and the UK with 16.45 million users (Tankovska, 2021a and 2021b).

As has been commented on in the popular press (see, for example, Buchanan, 2013), academic scholarship (see Highfield, 2015, and Vásquez, 2019) and as ought to be apparent to any frequent user of Twitter, parody accounts have been a ubiquitous feature of the social media site since soon after its inception in 2006. Given that anyone can choose almost any username on Twitter — unlike, for example, Facebook — while also maintaining their own anonymity if they wish, it is well suited to those wanting to create alternative identities. Twitter’s ‘The Twitter Rules’ (2021) state in regard to impersonation of others that:

You may not impersonate individuals, groups, or organizations in a manner that is intended to or does mislead, confuse, or deceive others.

However, this rule is intended to prevent hoaxes, *deliberate* attempts to deceive, rather than parodies. The distinction, which relates to the Twitter account user’s intentions, can be a fine one and will be returned to in the discussion of Highfield’s typology of Twitter accounts below. At any rate, Twitter specifically recognises parody as a legitimate function of Twitter accounts within its rules (‘Parody, newsfeed, commentary, and fan account policy’, n.d.): “Users are allowed to create parody, newsfeed, commentary, and fan accounts on Twitter”.

@TitaniaMcGrath is the Twitter account of Andrew Doyle, a GB News presenter, comedian, media commentator and columnist with an Oxford PhD in Renaissance Poetry. The account was started in March 2018 and Doyle’s public anonymity as the author of the accounts’ tweets was maintained until March 2019 when his identity was revealed in *The Telegraph* (Lyons, 2019). Doyle has been interviewed about his reasons for creating the account in various media outlets and has also written about the topic in his own regular *Spiked!* column. As he makes clear, Titania McGrath is not intended to be a parody of any one individual, but is a satirical attack on a particular kind of person and politics:

I decided to set up a satirical account on Twitter under the guise of radical

intersectionalist poet Titania McGrath. She's a po-faced young activist who, in spite of her immense privilege, is convinced that she is oppressed. She's not a direct parody of an existing individual, but anyone who regularly reads opinion columns in the *Guardian* will be familiar with the type. (Doyle, 2019)

There has been a good deal of scholarly work on Twitter in a range of academic fields, including applied linguistics, and much research on the discourse of Twitter.<sup>6</sup> However, given its prevalence, there seems to have been relatively little academic research on Twitter parody, and what there has been — the work of Vásquez (2019) and Highfield (2015) — has focused on what Highfield has termed *the irreverent Internet*, of which he notes “not everything that happens online is political or aimed at anything other than being fun” (Highfield, 2015: 2029). Vásquez (2019), tellingly, prefers to use the term *novelty accounts* for the parody accounts that she examines, noting that their primary purpose is to entertain. This kind of parody is often a product of fandom where its creators have some reverence for the target of the parody. Such parody is naturally “not intended to be harmful to the original text” (Highfield, 2015: 2029). Rather, the irreverent Internet is *playful*; in so far as it is satirical, it falls within the Horatian tradition of “milder and more amicable” satire, rather than the Juvenalian “uncompromisingly harsh and moralistic” satire (Ermida, 2012: 188). Rossen-Knill and Henry make room for this kind of parody within their model by noting that the critical act can make a positive evaluation of the parodied object; parody can pay tribute to or celebrate what is parodied (Rossen-Knill and Henry, 1997: 738-739).

Highfield's typology of parody accounts provides a useful point of departure for discussion of the classification of the parody of @TitaniaMcGrath according to an existing framework. Highfield (2015: 2029) asks the question “What forms do parody accounts take on Twitter?” and demarcates five parody account types, all of which aim at a comedic effect; the distinctions between the categories in his typology reside in the kind of objects targeted in the parody (adapted from Highfield, 2015: 2029):

1. Public-figure specific: parodies of real persons, such as the Queen of England (see @Queen\_UK).

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<sup>6</sup> See Vásquez (2019: 34) for a short summary with references.

2. Character-specific (fictional): parodies integrating fictional characters into contemporary settings, such as JK Rowling's Lord Voldemort (see @Lord\_Voldemort7)
3. Stereotypes/perceptions of people or groups: parodies which mock and challenge common perceptions of general groups of people, such as stereotypes about mature-age university students (see @MatureAge).
4. Organisations, both real and fictional: mimicking corporate communication styles (see @FakePewResearch and @DeathStarPR)
5. Non-human entities: animals, physical objects and non-human subjects, such as the empty chair addressed by Clint Eastwood at the 2012 Republican National Convention (see @InvisibleObama).

@TitaniaMcGrath is not based on a specific public figure according to Doyle (2019), but a type. The category most suited would then seem to be 3., a parody of stereotypes or perceptions of people or groups. However, the clear-cut examples of this type discussed by Highfield (@MatureAge and Journal of BS @AcademicTitles) differ from @TitaniaMcGrath in that they are not personified in a particular character, but rather are realised as the voice of a diffuse collective experience. Highfield does, however, make room for accounts such as @TitaniaMcGrath when noting that perception-oriented accounts can have a character-specific *approach*. The object of parody within the category is thus the same — the perception of how a kind of person is/group of people are — but the parodist's approach varies in whether they realise this in a collective voice or an individual one.

Though this is not discussed by Highfield, the parodic approach can also vary in its tone — something which reflects the parodist's attitude to the object of parody. The focus of both Highfield and Vásquez is on parody of the irreverent Internet, encompassing both parody for the sake of entertainment and parody in the Horatian tradition with a milder satirical intent. They do not examine and discuss any parody accounts which practise satire in the more scornful and abrasive Juvenalian style.

Highfield (2015: 2035) does, however, note the existence of hoax accounts, which he locates outside his typology of parody accounts by virtue of their more malicious rationales:

Such accounts are deliberately deceitful, with negative and hostile intentions in attempting to damage a public figure's reputation, rather than playfully engaging with their image.

That some hoax accounts seek to do damage to what they imitate does distinguish them from the parody accounts of the irreverent Internet in Highfield's typology. It does not, however, differentiate hoax accounts from parody in the mould of @TitaniaMcGrath, which according to Doyle is intended to "mock the worst excesses of the social justice movement [...] the kind of entitlement and narcissism that you see among social justice activists" (Spencer, 2020). Clearly, not all parody accounts aim at playfully engaging with what they parody. Regardless of whether the parodic authorial intent is hostile or playful, what distinguishes all parody accounts from hoax ones is that parody accounts cannot be regarded as successful if the intended audience believes they really are what they are only imitating. A hoax account intends in the first place to deceive the target audience into believing it is the genuine article. A parody account may fool the unwary or uninitiated in the Twitter audience, but the parodist's intention is that *the target audience* (at least) recognise the attempt at parody for what it is.

As previously discussed, 'The Twitter Rules' (2021) state that Twitter accounts may not impersonate individuals "in a manner that is intended to *or does* mislead, confuse, or deceive others" (emphasis added). According to Smith and Waugh (2019), despite the fact that Titania McGrath has been publicly revealed to be a parody account, Twitter users stumbling on her tweets have often missed their satirical intent and seek "to correct and edify her. Others still frequently ask: "Is this satire?" – a response which can indicate genuine confusion, but which is also itself a rhetorical move ("this is so stupid it must be satire!")". Regardless of authorial intent, @TitaniaMcGrath does manage to mislead and confuse *some* of its Twitter audience into thinking it represents the bona-fide communication of an existing person — in a way that an account purporting to be written by Lord Voldemort or an unoccupied chair could not. Add to this its hostile intent towards the object of parody and it is perhaps not wholly surprising that the parody of @TitaniaMcGrath is a more contested form on Twitter than the parody of the irreverent Internet.

The @TitaniaMcGrath parody account has been suspended by Twitter on multiple occasions (Doyle, 2021), most recently in August of 2020 at a point when it

had amassed over half a million followers. Although @TitaniaMcGrath was reinstated, a number of other parody accounts with a similar approach and target, but follower totals only in the tens of thousands or fewer, were suspended by Twitter and not reinstated (see, for example, @JavisDupont). Even @BabylonBee, a well-known parody account with a large following run by a right-leaning US satirical news site which critiques identity politics, was briefly suspended during the same period and then reinstated (Berstein, 2020). This suggests that even obviously being a parody is not always a sufficient defence to prevent suspension on Twitter and that other factors are at play.

### **3. Methods and materials**

The materials collected and analysed in this study are a sample of tweets posted by the @TitaniaMcGrath Twitter account over a two-year period from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020. A total of 50 tweets were randomly selected for an analysis using the Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model of parody. All of the @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, retweets and replies from 1 January 2019 until 31 December 2020 were downloaded using a web crawler. Replies and retweets were removed, and each tweet was then assigned a random number and a random number generator was used to select 50 tweets from among them.

A proper understanding of pragmatic phenomena such as parody requires fine-grain analysis; the relatively small sample size of 50 tweets in this research — from among the 1037 total tweets posted by @TitaniaMcGrath during the period — allows for an in-depth investigation of their parody by close reading. However, before focusing on application of the Rossen-Knill and Henry model and carrying out a close reading of individual tweets, a general survey of the content of the entirety of the tweets collected is presented to provide a contextual overview.

A classification scheme was developed based on topics raised in the sample tweets, which is presented in depth in section 4.1 below. The author's own perception of the topic-focus of the sample tweets determined this classification. Each tweet was marked as having between 1 and 3 primary topics. The topic categories are not intended as an exhaustive or definitive list of issues raised in the sample tweets. Rather, they aim

at giving a broad picture of tweet content and making it easier to identify recurring topics and topics which overlap.

The Rossen-Knill and Henry model contains four elements: i. the intentional verbal re-presentation of the object of parody, ii. the flaunting of the verbal re-presentation, iii. the critical act and iv. the comic act. The tweets in this study are analysed in respect of these four elements. In the case of the intentional verbal re-presentation in section 4.2, the relationship between the object of parody and its re-presentation in the @TitaniaMcGrath tweets in the sample is explored by constructing a tripartite classification of tweets according to the nature of said relationship.

The flaunting of the verbal re-presentation is the subject of section 4.3. A close-reading analysis of those tweets where a particular object of parody can be identified, as described in section 4.2, is presented. This enables a direct comparison between the object of parody and its re-presentation, so the distortion involved in flaunting the intention to parody should then be more apparent. Section 4.3 also explores a small selection of responses to @TitaniaMcGrath parody tweets. While occurring on the production side of parody, flaunting is particularly concerned with communication of the parodist's intent to the audience on the reception side of parody. Analysis of these audience responses is therefore intended to bring insights on the process of parody recognition about which flaunting is particularly concerned. On Twitter the audience's response to parody is at least partially visible in the comments made on parody tweets. A typical @TitaniaMcGrath tweet receives many hundreds and sometimes thousands of replies, making a systematic analysis of even one tweet response thread a daunting task. Therefore, only a limited number of example comments on the sampled tweets are highlighted on the basis that they are illustrative of the parody recognition process on the reception side. That is, they concern the identification or failure to identify the tweets as parody.

Section 4.4 looks via close reading at the critical and comic acts. From among the 50 sampled tweets, 8 are selected for detailed examination with the selection made to represent the most prevalent topics in the sample and to include tweets that both do and do not point to a particular identifiable object.

## 4. Tweet analysis

### 4.1 Tweet content overview

Table 1 below shows the topic raised according to its frequency in the @TitaniaMcGrath tweets sampled for this study.

**Table 1: Tweet topic by frequency**

Topic	Number of tweets
Race	16
Transgenderism	12
Toxic Masculinity	11
Language Use	10
Sexuality	9
Free Speech	8
Politics	5
Self-Promotion	4
Medicine	3
Science	3
Protest	3
Food	3
Violence	2
Weight	2
Trump	2
Veganism	2
Cancel Culture	1
Antifa	1
Extinction Rebellion	1
Climate Change	1
Covid	1
Comedy	1
Sport	1
Safety	1
Twitter	1
@TitaniaMcGrath Commenters	1
@TitaniaMcGrath Predictions	1



As can be seen in the table above, a number of the topics that occur most frequently can be readily grouped under the rubric of identity politics: race, gender and sexuality. The most popular topic according to the classification above was race with 16 tweets raising it as an issue. An instance of this topic can be found in tweet 1.

### Tweet 1



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



I have always said that Donald Trump only won because we didn't call people racist often enough.

Let's not make that same mistake again.



**Jemele Hill** @jemelehill · Jul 19, 2020

If you vote for Donald Trump, you are a racist. You have no wiggle room.

In the sample of 50 tweets, 39 touch on one of the issues of race, gender (*Toxic Masculinity* and *Transgenderism*) or sexuality. Of the remaining eleven tweets not concerned with race, gender or sexuality, the majority were categorised as raising the topic of free speech. Tweets in the *Free Speech* category concern the expression of opinion. Tweet 2 is in this category.

### Tweet 2



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



This kind of internalised racism is \*precisely\* why black people need our guidance and support.

Without us, they are in danger of expressing the wrong opinions.

It's heartbreaking. 😞

  
Dear white liberals,

Black people don't need you to speak for them<sup>100</sup>

The only tweet topic occurring with comparable frequency (10/50 tweets) to any of the identity topics of gender, race and sexuality was *Language Use*. In the *Language Use* category tweets concern word choice, spelling, etc. Tweet 3 provides an example placed in this category.

### Tweet 3



Tweets marked in the *Language Use* category are all concerned with parodying the use of language, but they do so particularly in relation to language choice on identity topics. *Language Use* occurs most often as a topic together with *Transgenderism*, in 7 out of a total of 9 tweets, as well as once in combination with *Race*, where it concerns the language used in describing different racial groups. However, language use is not parodied exclusively in relation to identity topics, as the *Language Use* category also cooccurs once with *Media* in relation to media bias in its choice of language. In this case, tweet 4, it parodies a BBC description of a protest as “peaceful” despite 27 police officers being injured.

#### Tweet 4



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



And apart from the injuries themselves, those 27 police officers were largely uninjured.



**BBC News (UK)** @BBCNews · Jun 7, 2020

27 police officers injured during largely peaceful anti-racism protests in London  
[bbc.in/37a7qsL](https://bbc.in/37a7qsL)

The overarching topic of gender was divided into two subcategories, *Transgenderism* and *Toxic Masculinity*, both of which feature prominently in the sampled tweets. Tweets placed in the category *Toxic Masculinity* concern relations between the sexes and specifically male oppression of women. An example can be found in tweet 5.

#### Tweet 5



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Scientific studies are tools of the patriarchy designed to reinforce male hegemony, and should therefore be ignored.

Except for this one, which proves that all young boys are evil misogynists.



**The Telegraph** @Telegraph · Apr 23, 2020

Young boys are sexist towards girls, according to psychologists at New York University [telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/2...](https://telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/2...)

Tweets in the topic category *Transgenderism*, on the other hand, concern transgenderism, non-binary people, the gender spectrum and connected issues. Tweet 6, for example, is in the category *Transgenderism* and concerns pronoun choice in addressing transgender people.

## Tweet 6



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Scientists at the Scientific American have used science to prove that we should ALL be using they/them pronouns.

All of us.

No excuses, transphobes.



Four of the 50 tweets sampled were classified as *Self-Promotion*. Three promoted the work of the character Titania McGrath in other forums/mediums (a published book, an opinion piece in *The Critic Magazine* and a comedy show at the Edinburgh Fringe<sup>7</sup>) and one promoted a podcast interview with Andrew Doyle discussing Titania McGrath and other issues relating to free speech. None of the tweets in the sample break character (the sustained performance), so, for example, in one tweet promoting Doyle's activities, @TitaniaMcGrath claims he is a fraud taking credit for her work.

As well as *Self-Promotion* two other tweet topic areas have a certain self-referential quality: @TitaniaMcGrath Commenters and @TitaniaMcGrath Predictions. The former screenshots responses from other Twitter users to @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, where the responders appear to have taken Titania McGrath to be a real person engaged in sincere communication rather than a parody. The latter screenshots a past @TitaniaMcGrath tweet in conjunction with a current news story that Doyle implies his parody has predicted; in this case, an @TitaniaMcGrath tweet suggesting sex should be removed from birth certificates is compared to the same suggestion, which it pre-dated, being made in *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

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<sup>7</sup> With Doyle's character of Titania McGrath played by comedian Alice Marshall (see Desau, 2019).

Only 3 of the 50 tweets could not be classed in one or more of the following 7 topic categories: *Race*, *Transgenderism*, *Toxic Masculinity*, *Sexuality*, *Language Use*, *Free Speech* or *Self-Promotion*. These three tweets were principally concerned with veganism, weight loss and protest about climate change.

#### **4.2 The intentional verbal re-presentation of the object of parody**

The first element of verbal parody according to Rossen-Knill and Henry's model is the intentional verbal re-presentation of the object of parody. Titania McGrath, as has been discussed, is a fictional character created by Andrew Doyle involving a sustained performance of Twitter parody. As has been noted, Titania McGrath is a parody of a general type rather than an individual, so everything that @TitaniaMcGrath tweets can be seen on one level as a parody of the abstract idea of what a certain type of person would say. That is, there need not necessarily be more than this abstract idea as an object of parody, so long as the intended audience would be capable of recognising it. However, the question remains as to what extent the parody re-presentation draws on other particular non-abstract and identifiable objects of parody and if so, what those objects are. The first step taken in this study, examining all tweets from the random sample, was to attempt to discover for each tweet whether there are also particular individual identifiable objects of parody beyond the parody of an imagined kind of person. Tweets were divided into one of three types to reflect what was found:

- i) *No apparent object*: tweets with no links or images pointing directly to any particular external object
- ii) *Identified object not parodied*: tweets with links or images pointing directly to a particular external object, but without any parodic imitation of that object
- iii) *Identified object parodied*: tweets that contain links to or images of an object which is parodied to some degree

Table 2 shows the frequency of the different object types among the 50 tweets sampled.

**Table 2: Number of tweets by type of object of parody**

Type of tweet	Number of tweets
No apparent object	13
Identified object not parodied	19
Identified object parodied	18

#### 4.2.1 No apparent object

The 13 tweets placed in the *No apparent object* group have in common that they do not contain or link to any particular external object, be it another tweet, video, image or news article. There may be such an object of parody, but it is not overtly apparent what it is from the tweet itself. If there is such an object, locating it would rely on the audience's encyclopaedic knowledge. Alternatively, it may be that there is no particular object of parody aside from the abstract idea of the type of person Doyle is parodying or the kind of thing that person might say.

Tweets 17, 8 and 32 below, which do not clearly point to a particular object of parody beyond the abstract idea of what a person like Titania McGrath could say, illustrate the importance of the audience's knowledge within this category.

#### Tweet 7



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath

...

The only way we can promote tolerance is by shunning conservatives for being essentially evil.

Tweet 7, as with tweets 8 and 32, does not contain any link or image pointing to an object of parody. While one may exist, the encyclopaedic knowledge of this study's author is insufficient to locate a plausible particular object of parody occurring around the time of the tweet. Tweet 7 can, nonetheless, still function with an abstract object; that is, it functions as a parody of what might be said by the kind of person Titania McGrath is a parody of.

## Tweet 8



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Until Twitter can guarantee that I will never see another tweet that offends me, insults me, or challenges my opinions in any way, this platform will never be safe.

Tweet 8 above appeared the day after Twitter had blocked the sharing on its site of two NY Post articles relating to suggested corruption involving the son of then presidential candidate Joe Biden<sup>8</sup>. Twitter posted a tweet thread below to explain this decision.



**Twitter Safety** ✓  
@TwitterSafety



Replying to @TwitterSafety

The images contained in the articles include personal and private information — like email addresses and phone numbers — which violate our rules.

While the content of the @TwitterSafety tweet (and the tweet thread) is not re-presented in tweet 8, Twitter's action of removing tweets and its explanation as posted by @TwitterSafety (my emphasis) would appear to be a plausible trigger for the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet, which was posted the following day, on what was necessary to make 'her' feel *safe*. A parodic response to an event, action or verbal expression (the trigger) need not also have that event, action or verbal expression as its object of parody. Rather, while Twitter's actions are clearly *the topic* about which the parody is concerned, *the object* of parody could still primarily be the perceived views about safety held by someone like Titania McGrath. Alternatively, there may have been a particular object of parody which is unknown to this study's author, but given that @TitaniaMcGrath tweets do frequently (18/50 in the sample) use links and images to

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<sup>8</sup> See Fonrouge & Morris (2020).

point to objects of parody, a lack of such signposting could indicate there are no particular concrete objects of parody in tweets without images or links pointing to them.

Tweet 9 below, on the other hand, provides a possible counterexample to the idea that @TitaniaMcGrath uses links and images to point to any specific objects of parody when such objects exist.

### Tweet 9



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



I just glued my baby niece to the front door of a petrol station.

She started crying immediately, which just proves how worried she is about the future of the planet.

[#ExtinctionRebellion](#)

Anyone following major UK news stories in 2019 can likely identify an object of parody for this @TitaniaMcGrath tweet without any links or images pointing directly to it. The hashtag #ExtinctionRebellion in the tweet performs a signposting function towards the object of parody: In 2019 the group Extinction Rebellion conducted a number of protests where they caused disruption by glueing themselves to physical objects such as a train and Home Office and DfT buildings<sup>9</sup>. For this tweet either one particular protest or this generally known tactic of Extinction Rebellion (multiple events) could serve as the object of parody to be re-presented verbally in the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet. That no link to a news story, quote-retweet or similar is used to point to a particular object of parody in this case can plausibly be explained as a consequence of the assumed notoriety of Extinction Rebellion and this protest tactic among @TitaniaMcGrath's target audience. Pointing out the object of parody would thus be unnecessary. As it happens, two days before the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet another such glueing protest had taken place<sup>10</sup> and this, given the general topicality of @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, could plausibly have functioned as a trigger and an object of parody even though this was not made overtly apparent via a link or image. Recognition

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Campbell & Pidd (2019) and Cockburn (2019).

<sup>10</sup> See Marsh (2019).



of the general object of parody (Extinction Rebellion glueing protests) would be enough for the audience to get the parody without knowledge of a particular event two days prior to its tweeting that (possibly) inspired tweet 9.

#### 4.2.2 Identified object not parodied

Among the 50 sampled tweets, 19 were accompanied by an image of or link to an object (tweet, news article, etc.) which they do not parody. These 19 tweets include all those that involve self-promotion as well as those that offer parody comment on or disagreement with the object they link to or provide an image of. An example of self-promotion can be seen in tweet 10.

#### Tweet 10



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



EARTH-SHATTERING ANNOUNCEMENT 🚨🌍💥

I have decided to grace the stage to deliver my ultimate mxnifesto.

I'll be at the [#edfringe](#) throughout August to dispense my wisdom.

Join me and be healed.

[tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/titan...](https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/titan...)

The tweet maintains the character and voice of Titania McGrath, but does not, however, parody the object it points to, the Edinburgh Fringe performance. Rather, the function of the tweet is to promote Doyle's work with actress Alice Marshall playing Titania at the Edinburgh Fringe. Parody, as per the Rossen-Knill and Henry model, involves re-presentation with some degree of distortion of the object of parody. In contrast, the objects pointed to by links and images in the *Identified object not parodied* category do not undergo verbal re-presentation in the tweets of @TitaniaMcGrath. Instead, they

serve as foils/topics for the parody in @TitaniaMcGrath tweets. Tweet 11 below provides an example of an @TitaniaMcGrath quote-tweet where what is quoted serves as a foil for disagreement.

### Tweet 11



The @TitaniaMcGrath tweet is a response to another user's tweet, but it does not represent and parody that tweet; rather, it feigns disagreement with the tweet by parodying an imagined response to it from a person like Titania McGrath. The viewpoint expressed in the linked-to tweet is thus not the object of parody, but it serves as a foil for the views expressed by the character Titania McGrath. The @TitaniaMcGrath tweet does not overtly point via a link or image to any response to the "Dear white liberals" tweet as its object of parody, and neither is there any response in the "Dear white liberals" tweet's response thread which appears to be a good candidate for such an object of parody.

In contrast to the cases of parody disagreement, some of the @TitaniaMcGrath tweets in the *Identified object not parodied* category point (ostensibly) approvingly to objects which Doyle is actually mockingly attacking. Nevertheless, these objects are not re-presented in verbal form as parody. An example of this can be found in tweet 12.

Tweet 12



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



For all you boomers who struggle with new gender categories, here's a list of the ones you should already know.

It really isn't that difficult.



The object is an image containing a long list of gender categories. The comment ‘It really isn't that difficult’ is then a satirical and ironic attack on the list, but it would be stretching the concept of parody to breaking point to say that it constituted a parodic verbal re-presentation of the list. The tweet does, though, remain part of the manifestation of the parody character of Titania McGrath and therefore has as its object the views such a person expresses; in this particular case, the view which is parodied would be that paying attention to and adopting the language of social justice is a simple thing to ask of people.

### 4.2.3 Identified object parodied

The 18 tweets in this group are similar in that they highlight a particular object of parody by pointing to it via links and images. The object of parody is thus presented alongside the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet parody of it. While the 18 tweets are similar in this sense, they still show some variation in the kind of objects they make re-presentations of and in the extent to which they replicate those objects.

Turning in the first place to the kind of objects parodied in the sample, they were all found to be tweets made by other Twitter accounts or online news articles. The tweets made by other Twitter accounts contained either text, images or video. The parodied tweets are either screenshotted within the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet (so no link exists to the original) or they are quote-tweeted. Quote-tweeting links to the parodied tweet and allows the @TitaniaMcGrath account to visibly combine its own text with the quoted tweet's content. Similarly, some part of the content of news articles linked to — usually an image, the headline and an opening paragraph — appears in the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet. All objects of parody in this group are then wholly or to a large degree visible directly in combination with the @TitaniaMcGrath parody re-presentations of them in the same tweet. Another noticeable feature of the tweets is their topicality, as evidenced by noting the number of days elapsed between the posting of the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet and the prior appearance of its parodied object. Table 3 below gives an indication of parody topicality by showing days elapsed from the appearance of the object of parody until the appearance of the parody itself.

**Table 3. Days from appearance of object of parody until appearance of parody**

Days Elapsed	Number of Tweets
0	4
1	7
3	3
4	2
6	1
20	1

As can be seen, of the 18 tweets in the *Identified object parodied* category, 11 of the tweets' parodied objects had been tweeted/published on the same day or one day prior to their corresponding @TitaniaMcGrath parody tweet and only one @TitaniaMcGrath tweet appeared more than a week after its object was tweeted.

All of the @TitaniaMcGrath tweets sampled involve textual parody (sometimes combined with use of emojis). The objects of parody they replicate are also mostly textual. In four exceptions what is parodied and re-presented in text form is taken from video footage. Of those four cases, three re-present verbal statements made in the videos as textual ones in the @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, whereas one arguably re-presents the perceived message of the video as a whole.

### Tweet 13



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath

...

50 years ago protestors at Stonewall fought back against police brutality in the hope that one day children would be able to dance in a sexually provocative manner without fear of parental interference.

Their struggle was not in vain.



[#DragKids](#)

Though it is never verbalised, the inferred message of the video parodied in tweet 13 is something like 'children doing drag should be normalised and celebrated'. The degree of replication of the object of parody varies then both in regard to form and content. There are stricter parodies which more closely replicate the content and form of the object of parody and looser parodies which considerably alter the form and/or content of the original object. Form can vary because of a change of medium, as for example when re-presenting the spoken word in video as text, but also when the type or structure of a text is altered. Tweet 14 provides an example where a news headline is re-presented and parodied as a Twitter comment on that same headline.

## Tweet 14



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



As usual, men are trying to twist the coronavirus death statistics to make this all about THEM.

Our victimhood is our strength. Don't let them take that away from us. 🙏

Tweet 14 points to a CNN headline as its object of parody via a screenshotted image of the headline. The tweet does not, however, attempt to take the form of a news headline, but rather re-presents the inferred message of the headline in the form of a comment interacting with and about that headline. The underlying message of the CNN headline is arguably something like the following: while men are more often killed by the coronavirus, lockdown measures have more impact on women. This message serves as the object of parody, where the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet critiques the perceived motivation for CNN's chosen framing of the story: a desire to promote a victimhood narrative for certain identity groups.

In other @TitaniaMcGrath tweets in this category, the parody more closely maintains the form of the object of parody, while still also acknowledging the object of parody and engaging in dialogue with it. For example, tweet 15 re-presents a tweeted United Nations list of gendered words and gender-neutral replacements as its own list of gendered words and parodic replacements.

## Tweet 15



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



This doesn't go far enough. ALL words should be gender-neutral.

Please take note and modify your language accordingly:

✗ he  
✓ they

✗ she  
✓ they

✗ father  
✓ oppressive parent

✗ mother  
✓ nonoppressive parent

✗ woman  
✓ victim

✗ man  
✓ rapist

✗ boy  
✓ rapist-in-waiting

Tweet 15 both re-presents the @UnitedNations' list of gender-neutral replacement terms for gendered words with its own parody list (above) *and* comments on the original list in character. The tweet acknowledges its object of parody (the UN list) in order to motivate the need for the Titania McGrath list: “[The UN list] doesn't go far enough.” In contrast to the @TitaniaMcGrath tweets in the *Identified object not parodied* category, which engage in disagreement with their objects, tweets in the *Identified*

*object parodied* category frequently express agreement with or praise for their objects of parody at the same time as making a parody verbal re-presentation of them.

### Tweet 16



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



This protester speaks for all of us. 🙌

I often find myself having to rebuke black people for not being as black as myself.

The above tweet first offers praise for its object — a white, BLM protester in a video who admonishes a black woman: “You’re not black on the inside. I’m more black than you on the inside.” It then re-presents the quoted statement for parody through a claim about (white) Titania McGrath’s own experiences with black people: “I often find myself having to rebuke black people for not being as black as myself.” The re-presentation of the form — moving from verbal statements in video to text — involves a larger change than that of the text-to-text and list-to-list re-presentation in tweet 15 above. However, the re-presentation of the content is, on the contrary, more strictly faithful to the object of parody in tweet 16. That is, the propositional content of what is said undergoes less distortion in its parody re-presentation for this tweet than the UN gender-neutral word list undergoes in its parody re-presentation in tweet 15.

### 4.3 The flaunting of the verbal re-presentation

According to Rossen-Knill and Henry (1996), flaunting is the means by which the parodist draws attention to their intention to parody in the re-presentation of the object of parody; this can be performed by distorting, emphasising or exaggerating the object of parody’s features. The flaunting in @TitaniaMcGrath tweets may then most easily be identified by a comparison of the parody tweets with what they are parodying. As there is no one person whom the character Titania McGrath is modelled on whose utterances can be compared to @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, comparison is most easily facilitated by focusing on the 18 tweets in the *Identified object parodied* category. In



this category each @TitaniaMcGrath tweet can be compared to the object of parody it points to through images, quote-tweeting or links. Tweet 17, for example, belongs in this category and contains an image of its object of parody.

### Tweet 17



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



A brave and powerful reminder from Wiley that it is literally IMPOSSIBLE for black people to be racist.

(He's said some other stuff too, but I haven't got time to read everything.)



Wiley  
@WileyCEO



Black People can't be racist they can only be upset about how they have been mistreated.

The inclusion of an image of the object of parody, the @WILEYCEO tweet, within tweet 17 makes the flaunting more apparent, not just for the purpose of comparison here, but also for @TitaniaMcGrath's Twitter audience. Indeed, all @TitaniaMcGrath tweets in the *Identified object parodied* category facilitate recognition of authorial intent to parody in this way. The juxtaposition of the parody and its object reduces the amount of encyclopaedic knowledge needed to recognise the parody, as the audience does not need to search for its object. In tweet 17 the statement "Black People can't be racist" in the @WILEYCEO tweet is reiterated while also praising Wiley, the author of the sentiment. The main method of flaunting employed in the parody tweet is amplification of the object of parody's message. The certainty of the statement made in Wiley tweet is emphasised in its re-presentation, even though the propositional content remains the same: "it is *literally IMPOSSIBLE* [my italics] for black people to be

racist”. The use of *can’t* in the original tweet already implies not possible, so the amplification of the message by adding *literally* and capitalizing *impossible* functions to flaunt parodic intent.

Another means of flaunting employed in @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, one which does not rely on distorting the propositional content of what is parodied, uses a kind of emphasis that comes from condensation of content, as in tweet 18.

### Tweet 18



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



The most effective way to combat racial discrimination is to continually remind white people that they are inhuman demons who are beyond redemption.



The above tweet links to its object of parody, a video where a woman holding a presentation on racism makes the following statements:

“We’re not going to discuss “some of us may work it out”. No, you [*white people*] are always going to be racist actually.”

“I believe that white people are born into not being human.”

“Y’all are taught to be demons.”

Tweet 18’s description of white people as “inhuman demons who are beyond redemption” combines and condenses the, for many, already provocative claims made across several statements into one noun phrase, and thereby emphasises them. The effect is to flaunt the intention to parody without any significant distortion of the propositional content of the object of parody.

Another method of flaunting the intention to parody uses repetition and is employed in other @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, such as tweet 19 on the next page.

## Tweet 19



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Please do NOT deadpronoun Sam Smith.

They has always been they/them, no matter what the haters say.

And if they call them him they will have them arrested.



Here, rather than the contentious aspects of the propositional content being condensed for emphasis, repetition of the contentious *form* of what is parodied is employed to achieve a similar effect. The object of parody in the above tweet is a Sky News story concerning singer-songwriter Sam Smith's desire to be referred to using the pronouns *they* and *them*. In the final sentence of tweet 19, the same pronouns are used repeatedly to refer to two different referents (Sam Smith and people) in a manner which could be confusing, and which also exaggerates the novelty (for many) of referring to a named individual with the pronouns *they* or *them*.

In contrast, other @TitaniaMcGrath tweets flaunt themselves as parody by distorting the object of parody to a much greater degree in its re-presentation. For example:

## Tweet 20



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



In order to promote racial harmony, the Associated Press has issued new guidelines to journalists to use uppercase “B” for “Black” and lowercase “w” for “white”.

Other acceptable alternatives for “white” include:

- wh ⚠ te
- wh 🙅 te
- wh 🤬 🤬 🤬 te
- dumb cracka muthaf\*ckas

The Associated Press’ guidelines concerning different capitalisation rules for the words *Black* and *white* are the object of parody in the above tweet. Not capitalising the *w* in *white* is explained by the Associated Press as a consequence of the negative associations with white supremacy that would result from capitalising *white*. On the other hand, it is stated that black people have a shared history, culture and experience of discrimination that white people do not, thereby justifying the capital letter in *Black*. The parody in tweet 20 involves offering alternatives for the word *white* which replace its letter *i* with increasingly stigmatising emojis and then as a final alternative with a string of pejoratives including the derogatory racial term *cracka*. Here flaunting is not achieved by emphasis of some feature of the object of parody but by the repetition of re-presentations with each iteration increasing the distortion.

An interesting point of focus for tweet 21 (below) in the *Identified object not parodied* category is that it screenshots and thereby highlights multiple responses to a prior @TitaniaMcGrath tweet. The tweet responders have in common that they appear not to have noticed the flaunting in the tweet they have replied to and instead engage with @TitaniaMcGrath assuming good faith communication. Tweet 21 makes it more visible for those in the Twitter audience not reading the response threads that not everyone realises Titania McGrath is a parody character.

## Tweet 21



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



How dare these bigots question my infinite wisdom?



The above tweet remains in character and can be said to mock (rather than parody) the twitter responders who appear not to understand they are interacting with a parody account. Tweet 22 is not an @TitaniaMcGrath tweet in this study's sample, but it is screenshotted in a sampled tweet (tweet 21 above). Unlike tweet 21, tweet 22 does have a particular object of parody that it points to via a screenshot.

**Tweet 22**



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Adele is a traitor to the body positivity movement.

By losing weight, she is fat-shaming her younger self.

## **The Telegraph**

### **Why the photo of a new, slimmer Adele makes women like me feel uncomfortable**

This tweet’s object of parody is the Telegraph headline “Why the photo of a new, slimmer Adele makes women like me feel uncomfortable” and accompanying comment piece about the author’s reaction to Adele’s weight loss — “personally affronted, as if Adele had done something deliberately to hurt me” (Reid, 2020). Flaunting the intent to parody is achieved by taking the idea in the article that losing weight hurts overweight people one step further (exaggeration): In the parody re-presentation it is suggested that Adele is fat-shaming and harming her younger, overweight self by losing weight. The tweet also uses inflammatory language (“traitor”) which could be a means of flaunting the intent to parody. The seven responses to tweet 22 screenshotted in tweet 21 are not the only ones that appear to miss the flaunting in the Adele tweet thread, but they have in common that the @TitaniaMcGrath account has replied to them in character in the response thread. A noticeable feature of @TitaniaMcGrath’s activity is engagement with commenters who disagree with her tweets and who appear not to realise they are dealing with a parody. In addition to the 1034 tweets made by @TitaniaMcGrath during the period 01.01.19-31.12.20, the account also made 722 tweet replies in the same time span and a great many of them are interactions between Titania McGrath and such commenters on her tweets. One such exchange screenshotted in tweet 21 is enlarged in the image on the next page.



Noticeable here is that the user commenting on tweet 21 expresses disagreement as though assuming the @TitaniaMcGrath account is engaging in good faith communication. The first @TitaniaMcGrath response to this takes the flaunting of the parodied opinion a step further and contests the idea that Adele should even be allowed to decide for herself about losing weight without “asking a feminist”; this appears to make the commenter doubt whether the @TitaniaMcGrath account is engaging in bona-fide communication: “Are you for real?”. The final @TitaniaMcGrath response in the above exchange accuses the commenter of being a parody account. A useful distinction can be made here between *signalling* that @TitaniaMcGrath is a parody — performed here by ironically accusing someone else of being a parody account — and flaunting the intention to parody as described in the Rossen-Knill and Henry model. The latter occurs specifically in the re-presentation and distortion of the object of parody, whereas the former occurs outside the re-presentation proper of the object of parody or as part of the context surrounding it. This is complicated by the fact that everything @TitaniaMcGrath says is part of a larger parody performance even if not everything is part of the “demonstration proper”<sup>11</sup>. That is, not everything @TitaniaMcGrath says need have a particular object of parody. In this instance, the accusation that the commenter is “one of these awful parody accounts” echoes the commenter’s question,

<sup>11</sup> See Rossen-Knill and Henry (1997: 729) for an account of Clark and Gerring’s depictive, supportive, annotative and incidental aspects of the re-presentation of the object of parody.

and it *could* even be argued that this particular utterance loosely parodies the commenter questioning her despite not breaking character.

The difficulty in detecting parody when looking at one @TitaniaMcGrath tweet in isolation detached from any object of parody is well illustrated by tweet 23 below.

### Tweet 23



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



I'm sorry I was born white and privileged. It disgusts me. And I feel so much shame.

This particular tweet has a clear object even though it does not link to it. Tweet 23 is in fact a word-for-word copy of a tweet posted the same day by actress Rosanne Arquette. Tweet 23 is the only tweet in the sample (with an identifiable object of parody) that is re-presented unaltered. There is no flaunting at all in the verbal re-presentation of the object of parody — it is recreated as is. Is the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet still a parody of the @RoArquette tweet? Strictly applying the Rossen-Knill and Henry model, it would appear not, as there is no flaunting in the re-presentation; there is only a change of context. That is, when Rosanne Arquette's tweeted statement regarding her feelings about being white is appropriated and tweeted verbatim by @TitaniaMcGrath, it comes from a parody account.

The only thing that distinguishes tweet 23 from its object is the context of the utterance — in the re-presentation the utterance comes from the Twitter account of the parody character Titania McGrath. This distinction means the tweet can still be regarded as parody rather than mere iteration despite the absence of flaunting as it is part of the larger parody performance. This begs the question as to whether anything (e.g. randomly selected verbatim quotes by celebrities) tweeted by @TitaniaMcGrath would be considered parody; the answer is clearly no. Titania McGrath is a parody character and Doyle does not obviously break character in any of the sampled tweets sent from @TitaniaMcGrath, including tweet 23. Rosanna Arquette's tweeted utterance is sufficiently parody-like in the mould of something the character Titania McGrath could say that Doyle has clearly concluded it can be re-presented unaltered, whereas anything that did not fit the character would break the parody effect. For tweet 23 to



function as parody in the absence of flaunting in the re-presentation, it needs to work as part of the larger performance of a known parody character. The fact that Titania McGrath is a parody character is presumably something which the vast majority of those who choose to follow @TitaniaMcGrath and read her tweet response threads (see below) are aware of. That a tweet comes from a parody account signals that the tweet is parody even if in this instance the re-presentation of Arquette's utterance is verbatim, and no flaunting occurs.

In addition to the issue of whether a particular utterance such as tweet 23 can be considered parody when there is no flaunting, another question arises: If flaunting is in fact *the* means by which a parody's audience are able to detect they are experiencing parody, how is parody detected on first encountering it when there is a total absence of flaunting as in tweet 23? Some users' comments among the thousands of responses in tweet 23's response thread provide a clue: "I read the TL. Still not sure wheter this is irony or for real." When unsure of whether a tweet is sincere, one possibility, beyond checking the account's bio text, is to look through its timeline (TL) where past tweets are visible. This provides greater context showing all @TitaniaMcGrath tweets and, as previously observed, the degree of flaunting varies by tweet and is therefore more likely to be detected by viewing a number of tweets. Context can also be obtained by reading tweet response threads. Multiple tweet responders to tweet 23 praise the parody and baldly state that @TitaniaMcGrath is a parody account while edifying others who they believe have assumed good faith communication. The two responses below provide illustrative examples.

"It's a (v funny) parody account."

"Just an FYI, this is a parody account. But you're spot on about the supposed privilege white folks enjoy. Very sorry for what you've had to endure."

These kinds of comments also occur in response to tweets where there is significant flaunting. Such messages informing another Twitter account that @TitaniaMcGrath is a parody are frequently directed to a response to @TitaniaMcGrath which has since been deleted, making it more difficult to analyse possible failures to recognise parody. For example, of the seven tweet responses screenshotted in tweet 12 which appear not to have recognised the parody, five had been deleted by the time the tweets sampled here were analysed. A plausible explanation for this phenomenon is that many Twitter users who have responded to @TitaniaMcGrath in good faith and missed the parody

are inclined to delete their responses upon being informed they have been fooled.

Only 18/50 of the sampled tweets identify their object of parody directly via a link, image or quote-tweet. In these cases, the re-presentation is immediately comparable with the object of parody, making any flaunting of the intent to parody more visible to the audience. However, most @TitaniaMcGrath tweets are not juxtaposed with their object of parody facilitating such a comparison. How then do the Twitter audience recognise flaunting in these tweets on first encounter?

A close reading of tweet 24 can be used to demonstrate how the process of parody recognition *could* take place in the absence of any clear particular object of parody.

### Tweet 24



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Gay people who voted for Donald Trump are heterosexuals in all but sexuality.

Tweet 24 does not indicate an object of parody via any image or link. But even without any apparent object of parody to compare with or the context of being tweeted by a for-the-reader known parody account, tweet 24's propositional content invites the reader to question its status as good faith communication. As noted previously, flouting the maxims derived from Grice's cooperative principle is a means of alerting your audience to the fact that what you are communicating should not be taken at face value and that they should therefore try to recover another meaning than the literal one conveyed by the communication (parody being one possibility). The statement in tweet 24 appears to flout the maxim of quality: make your contribution one that is true (see Grice, 1991). Tweet 24 advances self-contradictory propositions: i) to be gay (homosexual) is by definition to not be heterosexual, and ii) whether one is homosexual or heterosexual is (again) by definition inherently a matter of sexuality and all other matters (including how one votes) are irrelevant. The general assumption in communication is that people do not sincerely hold and advance such apparently self-contradictory beliefs and therefore there must be another explanation for such claims. However, to go one step further and draw the conclusion that parody is intended by tweet 24 when there is no apparent object of parody, the audience must either know of or be able to conceive of

someone who would advance a sufficiently similar belief that tweet 24 be recognisable as a re-presentation of it. Another possible explanation for insincere communication on Twitter is trolling (intentionally trying to cause upset or instigate an angry reaction). If the opinion re-presented in tweet 24 is not recognised by a member of the Twitter audience, trolling might well seem the most likely explanation for the tweet.

What knowledge would be required to locate a plausible object of parody for tweet 24? The proposition that if you belong to certain identity groups you *ought* to vote in a certain way is commonly advocated by politicians and activists in both US and British politics. A prominent example from the 2020 US presidential election campaign was Joe Biden's claim "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't black" (Bradna, Mucha & Saenez, 2020). Biden's intended meaning here is no doubt figurative, meaning that black people clearly ought to vote for him rather than Trump, but the literal meaning recalls tweet 24 (which predates Biden's claim). The kind of real-life people Titania McGrath parodies go still further in this direction, making use of concepts such as *enacting whiteness* and being *politically heterosexual*. According to these concepts acting in certain ways is deemed a betrayal of one's identity group and in some sense voids one's belonging to the group in spite of one's black skin/homosexuality/etc. A good example is journalist Laurie Charles' tweet below.

### Tweet 25



Laurie Charles  
@TheStuffOfMemes



There are no queers at ICE.

Far as I'm concerned once you start working for them you're politically heterosexual and will never belong in my community again.



ICE @ICEgov · Jun 16

During #PrideMonth, we recognize our #LGBTQ+ employees, reflect on the trials that their community has endured and rejoice with them in the triumphs of those who have bravely fought — and continue to fight — for full equality.

Tweet 24 is clearly a parody of this kind of viewpoint and flaunts the intention to parody it by removing the qualifier *politically* and replacing it with *in all but sexuality*. The idea of being politically heterosexual involves acting (e.g. by voting) in a way that is in

the interests of heterosexual people. The qualifying phrase ‘in all but sexuality’ parodies the concept by expanding it with a kind of flaunting by exaggeration to include all possible ways of being heterosexual excluding the defintional one (and it thereby pointedly reasserts that definition). Tweet 24 does not indicate a clear object of parody via, for instance, a link or image, so if the audience is to recognise such flaunting for what it is, their encyclopaedic knowledge of the world must include mental constructs of the kind of person who holds these views (the object of parody) to compare the parody with. If a particular member of the audience does not have such a mental construct, flaunting cannot serve to distinguish the parody from its object for them.

As noted, the act of juxtaposing the parody with its object in the same tweet could be viewed as a non-subtle method of signalling the intention to parody. The twitter parody of @TitaniaMcGrath differs from many traditional forms of parody in other mediums in that other forms of parody do not usually replicate the parodied text together with their parody. The objects of parody Titania McGrath tweets point to are highly topical and come from a wide range of sources making it less likely the audience would be aware of the particular objects than is the case for longer-standing and culturally well-known objects of parody. Traditional parody therefore relies more heavily on the audience’s encyclopaedic knowledge to recognise references to specific texts and spot the parody. As Hutcheon states, placing the object of parody alongside its parody in such cases “might suggest a lack of confidence in the reader” (1985: 122). However, in the case of @TitaniaMcGrath the commenters who appear to fail to understand they are interacting with parody despite the juxtaposition lend some credence to the idea that the juxtaposition serves other purposes than just facilitating recognition of the intention to parody. Likewise, that the majority of tweets (32/50 in the sample) do not point directly to any object of parody, suggests the audience is expected to recognise the kind of person whose opinions are being parodied without assistance. A clue as to another possible function of pointing at external objects can be found in tweet 26 shown below.

Tweet 26



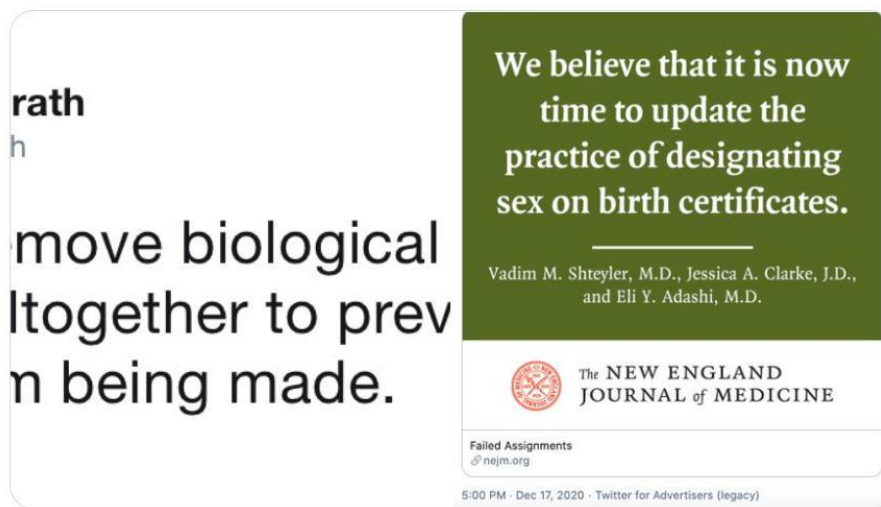
Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



I am \*constantly\* ridiculed for my forward-thinking suggestions.

But there is literally nothing I can tweet that won't eventually come true... 🍷

#Prophet



The above tweet juxtaposes screenshots of a prior @TitaniaMcGrath tweet and a tweet from the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM), where the former predates the latter by two years. The screenshotted @TitaniaMcGrath tweet suggests that the sex of babies should be removed from all birth certificates “so no mistakes are made” and the NEJM tweet makes the same suggestion, because sex designations on birth certificates “can be harmful for intersex and transgender people”. Tweet 26 does not point to an object it is parodying, but rather points to a tweet which shows that a parody viewpoint (though not the justification for that viewpoint) expressed by @TitaniaMcGrath has with time become the real and sincere position of a serious medical journal. A plausible function of pointing to particular objects in this way could then be alerting @TitaniaMcGrath’s followers to the existence or pervasiveness of such opinions and showing how close the extreme parody opinions of @TitaniaMcGrath are to the actual opinions held by some people. That a @TitaniaMcGrath parody viewpoint can be

advanced sincerely by some people also helps to explain why it could be difficult for an audience on first encountering @TitaniaMcGrath to recognise it as parody.

#### 4.4 The critical act and the comic act

The tweets from the sample presented in this section were chosen by making use of the topic classification in the tweet overview (see section 4.1). Together the eight tweets selected include the six most common topic categories in the sample. In total, 45 of the 50 sampled tweets are accounted for within one (or more) of those six most common topic categories of *Race*, *Transgenderism*, *Toxic Masculinity*, *Sexuality*, *Language Use and Free Speech*. The eight tweets have been chosen with the intention of giving a good impression of topic coverage in the sample as a whole. The eight selected tweets were also chosen to include both tweets that have a particular, identified object of parody and those whose only identifiable object of parody is a Titania McGrath kind of person and their opinions.

The most common tweet topic (16 tweets) is *Race*, of which tweet 27 provides an example.

##### Tweet 27



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Martin Luther King dreamed of a future in which the population would be strictly segregated according to skin colour.

In order to overcome racism, we need to make that dream a reality.



The object of parody linked to in tweet 27 contains a video of a student at the University of Virginia asking white people to leave the university multicultural centre: “Frankly there is just too many white people in here, and this is a space for people of color.” Tweet 16 echoes and exaggerates this message in its re-presentation by calling for strict

segregation according to skin colour. The implied criticism and attempted humour are both achieved by invoking Martin Luther King who famously dreamed of a future where skin colour would no longer be used to judge people. The incongruity needed for humour comes about by misstating Martin Luther King's position as the exact opposite of his actual one. The implied criticism then (assuming Doyle's views to be in line with MLK's and in opposition to his character Titania McGrath's) is that segregating spaces according to skin colour will not decrease racism but increase it.

Common to the critical act in the @TitaniaMcGrath tweets concerning race is a general critique that treating people differently according to their race is a bad thing. However, the criticism of the critical act and the means by which the humour of the comic act is achieved for tweets concerning race can vary even though the topic classification is the same. Tweet 23 (repeated again below) also relates to race, but the primary critique in the critical act and the means of achieving the comic act are quite different from tweet 27 above.

### Tweet 23



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



I'm sorry I was born white and privileged. It disgusts me. And I feel so much shame.

Doyle's views can be seen as in opposition to both his character Titania McGrath's and Rosanna Arquette's, author of the object of parody which is re-presented verbatim in tweet 23 (see previous discussion in section 4.3). If the audience on encountering tweet 23 is aware of the parody character Titania McGrath and unaware of the Arquette tweet, the critical act appears to critique the kind of opinions expressed by someone like Titania McGrath. In this context the critical act asserts the opposite of what tweet 23 says: that one's skin colour does not determine one's moral status in direct opposition to the view that an immutable characteristic, being born white, is something to be ashamed of. However, on becoming aware of Arquette's tweet, the *main* thrust of the critical act in tweet 23 changes. Central to the critical act's critique of Arquette's tweet is that the re-presentation of it is made verbatim, indicating that her view is beyond parody. No distortion of the original tweet is required to parody and ridicule it, as the

original is viewed as sufficiently extreme and ridiculous enough in itself to pass as parody. Likewise, the incongruity required for the comic act occurs on discovery that the Arquette tweet has been re-presented word-for-word by a parody account. This tweet is particularly illustrative of the importance of contextual knowledge for the audience in understanding parody even when they are aware they are experiencing parody. As tweet 23 does not contain an image or link to the Arquette tweet (only published a few hours prior to it), fully understanding its critical act likely requires the @TitaniaMcGrath audience to have followed what is trending on Twitter or to have subsequently read the tweet thread's comments. This is illustrated by the comment below (which links to the Arquette tweet) from tweet 23's comment thread.

“Once again, postmodern insanity has struck. I saw this and thought, "typical Titania." Then, i bumped into this... May God have mercy on all our souls...”

Tweet 23 has also been classified in this research as concerning the topic of race, but the main thrust of the critical act does not critique treating people differently because of their race.

### Tweet 28



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



100% THIS 👍👍👍

Boris Johnson's ethnically diverse cabinet only proves just how racist he actually is.

It's like all those fascists you see who pretend not to be fascists by never saying or doing anything remotely fascist.

Nobody's fooled.



**Kehinde Andrews** @kehinde\_andrews · Jul 25, 2019

'A cabinet packed with ministers with brown skin wearing Tory masks represents the opposite of racial progress' my piece for @guardian on @BorisJohnson latest cynical ploy #NotMyPM theguardian.com/commentisfree/...

[Show this thread](#)



In tweet 28 the object of parody is a Guardian opinion piece arguing that “A cabinet packed with ministers with brown skin wearing Tory masks represents the opposite of racial progress”. The comic act in the re-presentation here relies on the incongruity in asserting that racial diversity is proof of racism. Emphasis is used to heighten the comic act in the re-presentation by use of hyperbolic language ”100% THIS 🖐🖐🖐” and by adding an illustrative analogous case where not doing anything fascistic is similarly proof of being a fascist. The critical act, meanwhile, is directed at the notion of a political racial identity which overrides actual racial identity: that black, Asian or other ethnic minority members of a Conservative government are somehow less black, Asian and so on as a result of their political allegiance. This recalls the discussion of political identity in relation to sexuality in tweet 24 in section 4.3 above, where the critique was similarly aimed at the idea a person would somehow be less homosexual as a consequence of voting for Donald Trump. As with race, the broad thrust of the critical act in tweets concerning sexuality is often against the idea that people should be treated differently because of their sexuality, such as in tweet 29.

### Tweet 29



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Now that Marvel has confirmed that Guardian of the Galaxy’s Star-Lord is bisexual, Chris Pratt must \*not\* be allowed to play the role in future sequels until he has felled at least twelve men.

Tweet 29 is in the *Identified object not parodied* category. The embedded link points to a news story about a Marvel comic revealing a particular character is bisexual, something which functions as a topic for the tweet rather than as its object of parody. No object of parody is identified directly, so to understand the re-presentation’s critical act one must instead recognise the kind of view which is being parodied. That view is that cis heterosexual actors ought not to play LGBTQ+ characters. It has been expressed, for example, by the actor Richard E. Grant (McDonald, 2019). The critical act is aimed at the view that identity and experience as a non-heterosexual is defined to

such a degree by one's sexuality that non-heterosexuals ought not to be played by heterosexual actors. The comic act in tweet 29 involves assuming that this would even be true of the comic book character Star-Lord and makes the implications of the viewpoint criticised crudely explicit by suggesting that Chris Pratt would become more suitable to play the role if he had felled 12 men.

After *Race*, the second most commonly occurring topic category with 12 tweets is *Transgenderism*. Seven of those 12 tweets are also classified in the *Language Use* topic category, as is tweet 30 below.

### Tweet 30



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



10 years ago, the world would have laughed at such a headline.

Today, we cheer and applaud.



Tweet 30 contains an image of a news headline “My 15-year-old transgender son is going through menopause - and I’m so proud of him”, but there is no intentional representation of the headline within the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet as per the Rossen-Knill and Henry model. The headline serves as a topic for tweet 30 but is presented without modification. The parody character Titania McGrath is, nonetheless, used to make a satirical attack on that headline. A reader aware of Doyle’s general outlook can infer that his meaning, in opposition to the one expressed in tweet 30, is both critical and

mocking of the headline. The headline itself is not, however, technically the object of parody, as what is re-presented and parodied in tweet 30 is the view that such headlines represent “progress”. The critical act is directed at a state of affairs, arguably not present 10 years ago, where the headline is not readily interpreted as a spoof — something that might appear in a satirical newspaper — rather than news to be lauded. The comic act in tweet 30 is reliant on the incongruity of the worthy tone of the tweet in combination with the, likely for many people, strangeness of the language in the headline. While the headline is not itself technically the object of parody (the viewpoint re-presented is), it is still clearly integral to the functioning of the parody’s critical and comic acts.

After *Race* and *Transgenderism*, the third most commonly occurring topic category with 11 tweets is *Toxic Masculinity*, a category that co-occurs with *Transgenderism* 3 times. Tweet 31 below is classified in both the *Transgenderism* and *Toxic Masculinity* categories.

### Tweet 31



**Titania McGrath**  
@TitaniaMcGrath



The time of the “gingerbread man” is over.

@coopuk’s new “gingerbread person” not only debunks the myth of the gender binary, but is far less likely to rape the other biscuits.



Gingerbread Biscuit To Become Gender Neutral  
The Co-op have announced that they're rebranding the ginger biscuit treat as a gingerbread person.  
[lbc.co.uk](https://lbc.co.uk)

The direct object of parody is the Coop rebranding of its gingerbread man biscuit as a “gingerbread person”, a story which is linked to in tweet 31. However, the views of people like Titania McGrath who celebrate such stories are also an object of parody. The critical act is seemingly directed at the motivations behind the change and the reception accorded to it. According to the news article reporting the story, the stated motivation of the Coop in making the change is upholding values of “inclusion and diversity” and a desire to make a character that “will appeal to all our customers”. The implication of tweet 31 is that the change is motivated, and therefore welcomed by Titaniaesque people, by a desire to erase binary notions of gender and by their negative views of masculinity (the rape association). The critical act is directed at the idea that there is something negative about gingerbread men, that they are in some way exclusionary and that their replacement with gingerbread persons is newsworthy and laudable. The comic act in the re-presentation arises from a combination of the use of aggrandizing language “The time of the “gingerbread man” is over.”, the weighting of the story with implausible significance “debunks the myth of the gender binary” and sheer ridiculousness “far less likely to rape the other biscuits”.

The *Free Speech* category with 8 tweets is the sixth most common topic category, an example of which can be found in tweet 32.

### Tweet 32



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



Cancel culture is a myth invented by fascists.

If you see anyone disagreeing with this statement, please send me their name, twitter handle, address and employment details.

I'll do the rest.

Tweet 32 does not indicate a direct object of parody via a link or image. The view parodied is nonetheless identifiable and concerns the simultaneous support for and denial of cancel culture. According to the OED, cancel culture is “the action or practice of publicly boycotting, ostracising, or withdrawing support from a person, institution,

etc., thought to be promoting culturally unacceptable ideas.” An example of the kind of opinion parodied can be found in Hagi’s article on cancel culture in *Time Magazine*: “[C]ancel culture isn’t real [...] it’s turned into a catch-all for when people in power face consequences for their actions or receive any type of criticism” (Hagi, 2019). The re-presentation of this kind of opinion in the tweet employs a heavy irony. The denial of the existence of cancel culture is followed by a directive to provide Titania McGrath with information including employment details on any person disagreeing. The implication of “I’ll do the rest” being that the information will be used to pressure the person’s employer to fire them from their job. The critical act is directed at those who deny the existence of cancel culture, implying that in fact they are often active proponents of it. The comic act likewise arises from the incongruity of someone denying the existence of cancel culture in the first line of their tweet only to show themselves to be an active participant in it in their next line.

Another example of a tweet that does not indicate a direct object of parody via a link or image (it links to an event it is promoting) is found in tweet 9 (repeated again below). However, unlike tweet 32, there is no obvious opinion expressed which serves as an object of parody.

### Tweet 9



Titania McGrath  
@TitaniaMcGrath



EARTH-SHATTERING ANNOUNCEMENT 🚨🌍💥

I have decided to grace the stage to deliver my ultimate mxnifesto.

I’ll be at the [#edfringe](#) throughout August to dispense my wisdom.

Join me and be healed.

[tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/titan...](https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/titan...)

The tweet has been categorised within the topics of *Self-Promotion* and *Language Use*. As no viewpoint is expressed, the character and language of a Titania McGrath kind of

person instead come into focus, including, for example: i. use of hyperbolic language and emojis: “EARTH-SHATTERING ANNOUNCEMENT 🚩🌍💣”, ii. egotism and grandiosity: “to dispense my wisdom” and “join me and be healed” and iii: use of politically correct spelling: “mxnifesto”<sup>12</sup>. These elements of character and language use instead of a viewpoint are the subject of the critical act. Doyle’s non-parody and, arguably, primary goal in the tweet is to convey information and promote the show he has written for the Edinburgh Fringe. However, he stays in character as Titania McGrath while engaging in this bona-fide communication, so the very act of maintaining the parody character’s self-aggrandizing style of communication without expressing a viewpoint emphasises the object of parody’s character and form of expression as targets. The comic act, meanwhile, arises out of the exaggeration of the elements of this communication style. The replacing of vowels with an -x spelling, for example, is usually limited to gendered words, but in this re-presentation spreads to a non-gendered word; additionally, what might be seen as a touch of grandiosity in the type of person who is parodied is turned up several notches with the hyperbole present in the re-presentation.

## 5. General Discussion

By its structure the Rossen-Knill and Henry model brings four aspects of the parody of @TitaniaMcGrath into focus. Firstly, there is the relationship between the parody of Titania McGrath and its object: What is being re-presented and how? In more than one third of the sample tweets (18/50), there is a clear object of parody that @TitaniaMcGrath overtly points to for its audience. These objects of parody vary considerably in who they represent: hither-to anonymous tweeters or individuals in the offline world (tweet 3 and tweet 16), celebrity tweeters (tweets 17 and 23), self-styled educators (tweet 30), journalists in opinion pieces (tweets 27), media organisations such as the BBC and Sky News (tweets 4 and tweet 19), academic journals (tweet 26), activist organisations such as Stonewall (tweet 13), businesses such as the UK’s Co-op food retailer (tweet 31) and governmental organisations such as the UN (tweet 15). It

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Regan (2018) for a discussion of the issue of replacing ‘women’ with the spelling ‘womxn’.

is evident then that the parody draws on multiple objects for inspiration to create the viewpoints of the character Titania McGrath. What unites these targets of Doyle's parody is that they all express opinions which can be grouped together under the popular moniker *woke* or the less popular but perhaps less loaded *intersectionality*. As Doyle (2021) himself notes, *woke* is a contested term "whose definition varies depending on who is using it at any given time". The term has been variously embraced as a popular form of self-identification by some of those who hold the applicable set of viewpoints relating to identity and dismissed as a right-wing slur by others in response to the term being applied critically to them by their opponents (such as Doyle).<sup>13</sup> The usually extreme intersectional/woke viewpoints expressed by objects of parody in the sample concern a set of topic areas *mostly* relating to identity; in particular, these viewpoints concern race, sex and gender identity and an oppressor-oppressed dynamic between different identity groups. Restrictive attitudes to free speech are also a frequent object of parody re-presented in Doyle's @TitaniaMcGrath tweets, as is the language which is often used to express woke viewpoints. That is, Doyle targets both the content (viewpoints) and form (means of expression) of what he is parodying. There are also a small number of objects of parody in the sample not directly covered under the headings of identity politics, free speech or language use. These subjects are, however, still associated with 'wokeness'. Environmental activism as practised by Extinction Rebellion is, for example, re-presented for parody in one tweet in the sample, and while this kind of politics would not usually be considered as falling within the boundaries of identity politics there is some indication that those practising such activism also espouse woke viewpoints regarding identity (as Doyle's character Titania McGrath does). It is evident, for example, that some proponents of intersectionality are attempting to coopt environmental activist movements (see Naberhaus, 2020). In addition, another prominent target of Doyle's parody is undoubtedly the character of people holding an extreme intersectional worldview.

The sample tweets also reveal that the degree to which the object of parody is altered in its re-presentation varies considerably. The spectrum spans a case of the object of parody being completely unaltered in its re-presentation (tweet 23) to dramatic changes taking place in the re-presentation of the object of parody, such as in tweet 20, where not capitalising the *w* in *white* eventually morphs into replacing the word with

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<sup>13</sup> See Carl (2021) for an informative discussion of the contested nature of the term.

*dumb cracka muthaf\*ckas*. The amount of alteration taking place in the re-presentation seems to some degree to be inversely proportional to the moderation of the language/viewpoint in the original. Where a viewpoint might generally be perceived as more extreme (e.g. “Black People can’t be racist” and tweet 17), it is re-presented more or less without distortion. Likewise, where hyperbolic language is used in the object of parody, it is re-presented more or less as is in the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet, as for example in the statement “white people are born into not being human” parodied in tweet 18. On the other hand, in the few cases where an object of parody expresses what might be considered a more moderate viewpoint, the distortion is usually considerable. A good example of this is a UN tweet calling for the use of more gender-neutral language (e.g. saying *police officer* instead of *policeman*), which is re-presented in an @TitaniaMcGrath list that suggests replacing *boy* with *rapist-in-waiting* (tweet 15).

As previously noted, only 18 of the sampled tweets point directly to a particular object of parody and these show a fair degree of topicality as evidenced by the number of days elapsed between the appearance of the object of parody and the parody itself. The remaining 32 tweets rely on @TitaniaMcGrath’s Twitter audience recognising any particular object of parody relatively unaided (assuming there is one) *or* on recognition of a generalisable, abstract idea of a kind of person and viewpoint. Many of the sample tweets point to objects they do not parody but which the character Titania McGrath engages in disagreement with. What is pointed to in such cases appears to be the stimulus prompting the @TitaniaMcGrath tweet without being its object of parody. This is, for example, true of tweet 27, which points to a video of Martin Luther King. The @TitaniaMcGrath tweet was posted on the 60-year anniversary of a famous speech King gave (5th November 1960), which effectively denounces the politics of the kind of person Titania McGrath is a parody of in favour of a universalism that Doyle himself subscribes to (King, 2018):

Black supremacy is as dangerous as white supremacy, and God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown men and yellow men... God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race and the creation of a society where all men will live together as brothers.



Without a particular person to point to who is directly disagreeing with King's sentiments to parody, the Twitter audience must believe that there are people expressing such viewpoints antithetical to King's in order to understand the parody.

The majority of tweets in the sample point directly to some kind of object. While the tweets differ in whether they parody these objects, they have in common that what they point to appears to serve as the stimulus for the parody tweet. That is, the bulk of the parody character Titania McGrath's tweet opinions appear in a sense to be 'crowdsourced' from current events and opinions expressed on them. Whether they overtly point to an object that serves as such a stimulus or not, all @TitaniaMcGrath tweets in the sample project a consistent parody character's voice. The object of parody re-presented in @TitaniaMcGrath tweets is thus *always* a particular kind of woke person and the topical objects that her tweets point to can either be incorporated into the presentation of the parody character Titania McGrath or set up in opposition to that parody character.

The second pillar of the Rossen-Knill and Henry model concerns flaunting and, more specifically in this study, the way in which the parodist Andrew Doyle's re-presentation intentionally communicates to the audience his desire to parody. According to Rossen-Knill and Henry, flaunting is key to the hearer's ability to recognize that the speaker intends to parody, and it occurs in the re-presentation of what is parodied. The sampled @TitaniaMcGrath tweets employ several different patterns/methods of altering their objects of parody in their re-presentation of them. These methods invariably hold in common that they emphasise certain features of the object of parody, with the degree to which they stress those features varying along with the exact means of doing so. Repetition, amplification, condensation and exaggeration are four methods of emphasising the features of an object of parody identified in the tweets sampled for this study. Repetition 'overuses' textual features in the object of parody in the re-presentation, such as the pronoun *they* in tweet 19. Amplification involves a kind of textual shouting, such as in tweet 17 with the use of capitalisation and the addition of the intensifier *literally*. Condensation emphasises certain features of the object of parody by reiterating them within a more restricted space. Thus, several controversial claims regarding white people made in separate statements by the object of parody are condensed into one noun phrase in tweet 18. The aforementioned three methods of emphasis do not alter the propositional content of the verbal expressions

they re-present: they primarily concern form rather than content. Exaggeration, on the other hand, distorts the propositional content of a viewpoint expressed in the object of parody. One way this can be done is by removing qualifiers, as is discussed in the case of tweet 24 and the concept of *political* heterosexuality. Another way is by taking what is said one step further, as in tweet 12, where the idea that someone losing weight can be hurtful to other overweight people is extended to the idea of harming one's past overweight self.

The relevant question to be put to the Rossen-Knill and Henry model regarding the above observations is whether such alteration of the object of parody in its re-presentation is necessarily intended by the parodist to alert the target audience to the parody. How do we move from an observable change in the re-presentation to what the function of that observable change is? The same alteration made in a re-presentation could be interpreted as serving the function of flaunting or, equally, and in some cases more plausibly, the function of amusing the audience (the comic act) or critiquing the object of parody (the critical act) or even all three functions at once. As previously discussed, the degree of alteration of the object of parody in Doyle's re-presentation seems to vary to some degree depending on the perceived extremity of the viewpoint being parodied. Where the viewpoint is particularly extreme, there tends to be *less* alteration of it in its re-presentation and therefore less differentiation of the parody from the object of parody. This suggests either that Doyle is less concerned to flaunt his intention to parody in the case of extreme views, perhaps wanting to be mistaken for the genuine article, or that alteration of the object of parody in its re-presentation *for the purpose of flaunting* is unnecessary for the audience to perceive that they are experiencing a parody. If the latter possibility is the case, then alternative explanations to flaunting need to be offered to explain how the audience comes to the conclusion they are observing a parody.

For the re-presentation involved in parody to be more than mere iteration, some degree of alteration of the object of parody would be expected. One possible function of such alteration may be flaunting (to indicate parodic intention). However, as has been shown in tweets sampled for this study, parodic intention may also be indicated without flaunting: it may be revealed contextually, rather than intentionally in the actual re-presentation. To illustrate this point with one example, the Twitter audience can find unambiguous evidence of many parody accounts' intent to parody

by turning to their Twitter bio text. In the case of accounts imitating a particular person/company, Twitter's 'Parody, newsfeed, commentary, and fan account policy' (n.d.) requires that this be indicated clearly in their Twitter bio (e.g. @Queen\_UK's bio opens with '(FICTION/SATIRE)'). This is signalling the intent to parody rather than flaunting it in the technical sense described by Rossen-Knill and Henry. In the case of parody accounts not parodying a particular individual, there is no requirement in Twitter's parody policy to declare the intent to parody. As Titania McGrath is not a parody of a particular individual, the account's bio does not give any *explicit* indication that it is a parody account, but rather presents a parody bio with implicit indicators consistent with flaunting the intent to parody (Doyle, n.d.): "Activist. Healer. Radical intersectionalist poet. Selfless and brave. Buy my book." Without an overt statement of parodic intent in the bio, recognising @TitaniaMcGrath as a parody account is reliant here too on detecting flaunting in the re-presentation. The parody in the bio is achieved by clustering and thereby emphasising tropes about the way the kind of person Titania McGrath parodies would describe themselves. To recognise this one must already have a mental construct of such a person and their use of language.

Though parody is not rare on Twitter, the default assumption of Twitter users is likely that most Twitter accounts do represent real people expressing, to some degree, their actual views. The vast majority of Twitter accounts do not at any rate appear to be parody accounts. A potential issue for identifying parody on Twitter is that the format seems to encourage a certain stridency and there are many tweeters who use provocative language and advance controversial/extreme opinions. When encountering a tweeter with such an opinion, a plausible question to be asked is whether a real person would sincerely believe what is being tweeted. To distort and exaggerate a particular opinion and make it more extreme can function to flaunt the intention to parody that opinion, but Twitter is an environment where extreme views are not uncommon. Such parody viewpoints could be regarded by some as ones that might be held by some individuals, particularly ones seeking attention, and this creates a difficulty for parody recognition. This issue is captured in the well-known internet adage of Poe's Law<sup>14</sup>, which states that *without a blatant display of humour* it is impossible to create a parody belief so extreme that some people will not mistake it for a sincerely held expression of an actual

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Chivers (2009).

belief. Even if the audience does doubt the sincerity of an opinion, other explanations than parody, such as trolling (deliberately seeking an argument/emotional reaction), may occur to the audience in the absence of their recognition of the object of parody in the re-presentation.

For those without any prior knowledge of the character Titania McGrath encountering one of her tweets for the first time, the flaunting which occurs in a single tweet alone may not provide sufficient evidence to suggest they are dealing with a parody account. That is, more context is often needed than is typically provided in one 280-character tweet to be sure @TitaniaMcGrath is a parody account. The flaunting in a parody text placed in different contexts may become harder or easier to discern according to that context. Consider the case of a satirical magazine which contains a poem parodying the style of a famous poet. In the context of a satirical magazine, the reader is already primed to notice any flaunting and seeks a plausible contextual interpretation, of which parody is a reasonable one. On the other hand, should the same reader encounter the same poem in a stack of other poetic compositions submitted in a creative writing course for beginners, that reader would not be as primed to expect parody and might plausibly interpret the poem instead as an attempt to emulate the famous poet.<sup>15</sup> Context then is key to our ability to notice and interpret parody. A Twitter environment where controversial views and provocative language are also employed by non-parody accounts provides a context that could make the flaunting of the intention to parody much harder to spot. However, for those in the audience who have once realised that Titania McGrath is a parody character, likely a large majority of the account's followers, there is no need to reestablish this via flaunting with each new tweet. Flaunting as conceptualised in the Rossen-Knill and Henry model would seem to be of more significance for a person's parodic verbal utterance in everyday life rather than for a sustained parody performance such as Titania McGrath where the majority of the audience at any time are already well aware the character is a parody. Doyle's alteration of the object of parody may still partly be intended to alert the audience to the parody, but flaunting does not seem to be an integral function of parodic re-presentation for particular tweets in a sustained Twitter parody performance. Clearly, the alteration that occurs in the re-presentation does serve other important functions. Its primary purpose in the parodist's mind could be to convey some critique of the object

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<sup>15</sup> Example adapted from one given by Rossen-Knill and Henry to make a similar point (1996: 734).

of parody (the critical act) or to be humorous (the comic act) and, as per the theoretical discussion in section 2.3, these functions are arguably integral to any parody. Certainly, even when using a relatively broad definition, without some element of polemic we are no longer dealing with parody. In addition, the act of noticing the alteration that occurs in the re-presentation and the humour or implied criticism contained in it can alert the audience ‘reception side’ to the parodist’s parody without there being any conscious intention to flaunt the parody located ‘production side’ in the parodist. I would therefore tentatively suggest that flaunting is not an essential part of a production side model of parody in the way that the other acts of Rossen-Knill and Henry’s model are. Nonetheless, the question of how parody is detected is an important one, and this part of the model has helped illuminate that process with regard to @TitaniaMcGrath. One possible method of answering this question more directly would be asking the parodist directly what role flaunting plays in the parody and, likewise, asking the audience what revealed to them that they were experiencing parody.

The third and fourth pillars of the Rossen-Knill and Henry model are the critical and comic acts, wherein the comic element of the parody and critique of the object of parody are achieved. As has been stated above, the general object of parody that @TitaniaMcGrath’s critique is directed at is a set of beliefs and opinions that can be gathered under the term *wokeness*. What implied criticisms of that object do @TitaniaMcGrath tweets offer and what is the tone of the critique? As shown in section 4.4 above the critical act for each tweet is very particular to that tweet even where the topic area is the same. This can be seen, for example, in a comparison of tweets 27 and 23, which both concern the topic of racial identity politics. While the main thrust of tweet 27’s critical act is directed against treating people differently because of their race, the criticism of tweet 23 is directed mainly at a performative display of guilt based on racial identity, which Doyle implies — by re-presenting the object of parody unaltered — is beyond parody. Nonetheless, there are broad themes of criticism that can be extrapolated from the particulars. For the identity topics of race, gender and sexuality, a consistent criticism of the objects of parody is that they overturn universalism (the ideals of colour, gender and sexuality-blindness) in favour of judging and treating people differently in respect of the identity groups they belong to. Likewise, another consistent critique of objects of parody across the same topic areas is of the idea that identity markers are or should be tied to particular political beliefs.

This is the case, for example, in relation to race in tweet 16, where a white BLM protestor claims he is more black on the inside than the black woman he is debating, and again in relation to sexuality in tweet 24, which claims gay people who voted for Donald Trump are heterosexuals “in all but sexuality”. The two other most consistent topic-area critiques are in relation to free speech and language use. In relation to free speech, criticism is targeted at the suppression of it, as in one of the tweets in the sample where @TitaniaMcGrath accuses a journalist of inciting violence with his words. In fact, the violence referred to was directed at the journalist himself, who was beaten and hospitalised for his coverage of Antifa, a group who attempt to silence their opponents’ speech by means up to and including violence. In relation to language use, the central criticism can perhaps best be surmised as the claim that language is being twisted to achieve certain goals: (i) to show some disfavoured groups in a bad light (e.g. tweet 20 concerning the justification of different capitalization rules for different racial groups), (ii) to protect other groups deemed victims of oppression (e.g. tweet 19 concerning trans people and use of the pronoun *they*) and (iii) to hide realities that could be damaging to various woke political causes (e.g. tweet 4 concerning “peaceful” violent protests).

As well as being directed at a set of ideas, the target of criticism is also, as has been indicated, the kind of person who holds them. Those traits (according to the picture painted by Doyle) include among others: narcissism, grandiosity, vindictiveness, blindness to blatant contradictions in the viewpoints they express, hypocrisy and faux victimhood. However, while it is relatively easy to locate people on Twitter who are hypocritical or grandiose and who hold particular beliefs (or close approximations of them) that the character Titania McGrath espouses, I would argue that it is more useful to view the character as the personification of a set of beliefs being parodied, rather than as a parody of a particular person that could ever be pointed to. No doubt there are people with many Titania McGrath-like qualities, but the weight of the critique is not primarily directed at the character of such people, but at a belief system.

Turning to the tone of the critical act and comic acts, it is very far from the often playful and affectionate mocking typical of the irreverent internet investigated by Highfield (2015) and Vásquez (2019). In so far as they meet the definition of parody implied by the Rossen-Knill and Henry model, the parody accounts of irreverent internet emphasise the comic act rather than the critical one and often pay tribute to what they parody (e.g. the Queen, or the work of JK Rowling). While it can be argued

that some of the parody accounts belonging to the irreverent internet are satirical, such as @academicssay (see Vásquez, 2019), the satire seems to come from a place of affection and takes an insider's position; that is, the in-group are being asked to laugh at themselves. @TitaniaMcGrath's critique, on the other hand, is acerbic, strongly ridicules what it targets and has an out-group perspective on what is being parodied. In this sense, the parody of Titania McGrath fits within the Juvenalian rather than the Horatian tradition of satire.

According to Rossen-Knill and Henry's model, the comic act is a result of some incongruity caused by the manipulation of the other acts in the model. This incongruity is frequently achieved through the absurdity of the opinions expressed with apparent sincerity in @TitaniaMcGrath tweets. While many of the objects of parody border on the absurd themselves, this is turned up a notch for comic effect in their parody representations. Making straight-faced assertions that are apparently self-contradictory is a common method of achieving the required incongruity through absurdity, such as in tweet 28 where the ethnic diversity of Boris Johnson's cabinet is held up as clear proof of his racism. This frequent use of absurdity is also sometimes coupled with crudity to further the comic act, such as in tweet 12 where it is asserted that the actor Chris Pratt should first fellate at least 12 men if he is to be allowed to play a bisexual comic-book character. In addition to absurdity and crudity, another means of creating humour in @TitaniaMcGrath tweets is the use of hyperbolic or provocative language, often in combination with relatively trivial topics. One instance combining these methods is in tweet 30, where the creation of a gingerbread person biscuit is hyperbolically heralded as "debunking the myth of the gender binary" and the provocative and ridiculous claim is also made that a non-gendered biscuit is less likely to "rape the other biscuits".

What is funny is, of course, subjective. Nonetheless, I would argue that the comic act, while clearly present, is generally less prominent and of less importance than the critical act in the tweets sampled for this study. In other words, criticism rather than humour is the dominant mode of the parody of Titania McGrath. Certainly, this difference in the emphasis of the two modes is apparent when comparing the parody of Titania McGrath with that of the irreverent internet.

## 6. Conclusions

This thesis has been concerned with the nuts and bolts of how parody works in the narrow context of a particular Twitter account, while also furnishing insights into the application of an existing pragmatic model of parody in a new context. The Rossen-Knill and Henry model itself has provided a useful framework for a pragmatic analysis of the tweets of Titania McGrath. The research has brought into focus the relationship of the parody character Titania McGrath to the many particular objects of parody that its creator comedian Andrew Doyle draws on to sustain it, along with the parody's relationship to its more abstract object and satirical target: extreme wokeness. The model has also enabled an exploration of the parody's implied criticisms of that wokeness.

In summary, this study has found that the character Titania McGrath has multiple particular objects of parody while also having two abstract objects of parody: a collection of intersectional/woke beliefs and the character of the kind of person who holds them. The particular beliefs targeted are usually extreme, but not always. The tone of the parody's criticism is harsh and the humour mocking. With regard to the pragmatic model itself, this study finds that flaunting - described as an intentional act of the parodist in the Rossen-Knill and Henry model - is not integral to parody. A full understanding of parody *comprehension*, including the role of flaunting when it occurs, also needs to look to the parody's audience and contextual clues located outside the parodist's intentional re-presentation of the object of parody. Perhaps flaunting could be detached from the Rossen-Knill and Henry pragmatic model of parody, leaving the model centered on the relationship between the parody, its object and the parodist's critique. A separate pragmatic model of parody comprehension could then incorporate flaunting among other key elements involved in the understanding of parody (e.g. audience knowledge and context).

A limitation of this research is that it has relied on the author's surmises about the beliefs, motivations and intentions of the parodist, Andrew Doyle. These are based largely on inference from @TitaniaMcGrath tweets and supplemented to some degree by comments in a few media articles and videos, rather than being taken from directly elicited responses about said beliefs, motivations and intentions in regard to the tweets analysed. Likewise, the interpretation of the Twitter audience's responses to the tweets in this study relies entirely on the author's ability to correctly infer the audience's



understanding of those @TitaniaMcGrath tweets. As previously noted, the only non-ambiguous observable behaviour of an audience to implied meaning in parody is their direct reaction to that implied meaning. The failure to react ‘appropriately’ to parody may indicate playing along with it *or* a lack of understanding. Further research on Twitter parody could fruitfully elicit direct responses from the parodist about both their intent and the mechanics of the construction of the parody. Likewise, if possible, direct audience feedback on their processing of the parody text would be enlightening as to their understanding of it.

In addition to exploring the parody of the Twitter account @TitaniaMcGrath and the applicability of the Rossen-Knill and Henry model parody, the present study also expands the scope of existing research from the playful parody typical of the irreverent internet to another generally more political genre of Twitter parody. Such parody is typically more abrasive and its dominant mode is criticism rather than humour. This kind of parody seeks to harm its target and can thus be aptly located in the Juvenalian tradition. It might well then be termed *the parody of the irascible internet*. New research could profitably further explore the parody of the irascible internet by examining other significant Twitter accounts for comparison with @TitaniaMcGrath to broaden our understanding of the genre. Two possible candidates for investigation would be @TheOnion (11.7 million followers) and @TheBabylonBee (1.1 million followers), parody accounts on Twitter that both take the form of satirical newspapers posting tweets in the form of news stories, but from opposing political viewpoints. The parody of the irascible internet is extensive and as yet largely unexplored in the field of pragmatics outside this thesis.

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