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## **Relevance theory and metaphor: An analysis of Tom Waits' 'Emotional Weather Report'**

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### **Abstract**

'Emotional Weather Report' is a song by Tom Waits from his 1975 album, *Nighthawks at the Diner*. 'Nighthawk' is a US colloquial term popularised by its use in the title of Edward Hopper's 1942 painting 'Nighthawks', which depicts a nocturnal scene in a New York diner. The term is used to describe people who habitually seek entertainment or companionship in the night-time hours. Waits refers implicitly to Hopper's work throughout the song, using metaphorical language to present a first-person account of the emotional state of a nighthawk by drawing on the weather report format. Waits' language relies on the listener's specific geographical, meteorological and cultural knowledge to grasp his communicative intention. The song prompts the audience to bring different levels of encyclopaedic knowledge to an interpretation, and affords differing levels of understanding without distorting the extended metaphor that 'weather is Waits' emotions'. This article explores the advantages of a relevance theoretic approach (Sperber and Wilson, 1995) to the stylistic analysis of lyrics. We discuss how the figurative language in Waits' lyrics is foregrounded by the listener's schematic/encyclopaedic knowledge of Waits' history as a performer, of meteorological phenomena, and of American culture. We argue that a comprehensive stylistic analysis of a song necessitates a consideration of numerous factors in addition to linguistic choice, including the presentation of the performer, the genre of music, and the performer's history. Such a consideration is paramount to (i) successful metaphorical mapping for the listener, (ii) a full analysis of the text as a cultural artefact for the critic, and (iii) the achievement of a cohesive and distinct style for the performer.

### **Keywords**

Extended metaphor, metaphor, relevance theory, song lyrics, Tom Waits

## 1. Introduction

In this article, we show the utility of a relevance theoretic (RT) approach to metaphor comprehension. The data analysed are the lyrics of a song; however, the approach that we take is not limited to literary texts or this genre, although we agree with Steen's sentiment that the song lyrics of popular music are a genre of which 'we may assume that there is a relatively high degree of language awareness' (Steen, 2002: 188). This is because song lyrics are a text type that has been brought to the attention of many people, thus making it more likely that the language used has been evaluated in a way that other text types may not.

In order to analyse the metaphorical language in the data, we adopt an RT position.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we use Carston's (2010) model, which posits that metaphors are processed in two ways:

1. As 'ad hoc concepts' in which the concept associated with a lexical item is enriched to fit the intention of the producer. These metaphors are propositional.
2. Interpreted literally, but under an extended metaphor frame. These metaphors are non-propositional but based on images.

We believe that this approach to metaphor is useful for stylisticians as it allows for the analysis of extended metaphors and the role that context plays in a listener's interpretation of metaphorical language. For this reason, we argue that, despite being rarely used within stylistics, an approach to metaphor processing that accounts for intention is well suited to stylistic analyses as both are concerned at some level with choice. It has been noted within stylistics that choice need not necessarily be conscious (McIntyre and Price, 2018). However, we argue that it is highly likely to be the case that in song lyrics, in comparison to other text types, the performer has consciously chosen the words used, given that an aim of song lyrics is to be attention-grabbing and memorable. In song lyrics, linguistic choice is also constrained to a degree by the multimodal aspects of the genre – for example, by rhyme schemes.

Like RT more generally (Sperber and Wilson, 1995; Wilson and Sperber, 2004), Carston's (2010) model for analysing metaphor allows for the analysis of communicative intention in literary texts, e.g. a song or a poem, using the same underlying philosophy as is used when analysing communicative intention in everyday conversation. In our view, this is a convincing argument for explaining metaphor comprehension and is ultimately more in keeping with the standard 'tools' used in stylistics more generally, in which Gricean models

of pragmatics (Grice, 1989) are an accepted part of the analytical toolkit, e.g. Gricean maxims, implicature and presupposition.

In this article, then, we bring together some of the theoretical underpinnings of pragmatics to show that an RT approach to metaphor is the same as that underlying much of the theory already subscribed to in stylistics. We use song lyrics as our data to do this as we believe that the analysis of metaphor in such a text type requires the audience to consider a wealth of other information than can be accounted for in a text-based approach to metaphor – for example, the history of the performer, the genre of the song (in this case, the jazz genre), and the references made within the song. Moreover, analysing a multimodal text, in which context plays an undeniable role in the metaphors used, addresses previous criticisms levelled at an RT approach to metaphor, such as that it uses ‘invented sentences in minimal invented contexts’ (Steen 2007: 291).

Whilst our contribution to this special issue is more concerned with introducing and exemplifying the utility of Carston’s (2010) model for stylistic purposes more generally, we believe that song lyrics are a particularly interesting data type to analyse in terms of metaphor because they are multimodal. For example, the lyrics are obviously sung and therefore the voice quality of the singer contributes to the listener’s experience of the song and of the performer. The lyrics are accompanied by music, which positions the song as belonging to a particular musical genre. They are connected to a performer, and are therefore comprehended within the listener’s wider experience of the performer’s history and personal style. Furthermore, songs provide the performer with a place to reinforce their identity as a performer. Song lyrics also index a specific time, place and ‘scene’. Arguably, jazz is a rich genre to study, as jazz culture is stylised not just through music, but also by such factors as clothing choices, the venues frequented, and even the drinks chosen. Style in this sense, then, is a slippery concept to analyse within a linguistic framework; however, meaning that contributes to how a listener comprehends a song is projected through these non-linguistic, but nonetheless meaningful, dimensions.

## **2. Background**

Tom Waits’ 1975 live studio album *Nighthawks at the Diner* received much critical praise for its close replication of the jazz club character, with one critic writing that the album ‘has the distinctly bohemian feel of a smoky Greenwich village cafe transplanted onto the blooming desert wasteland of the Los Angeles metropolitan region’ (Ballon, 2009). The album, which was recorded in front of a live audience, features 18 tracks that are much more resonant of

beat-poetry<sup>2</sup> than prototypical jazz music. Throughout the album, Waits makes reference to his surroundings as if he were in a jazz club observing the world around him, a feature of the album that allows listeners at home to imagine Waits as not being in a studio but rather performing as a beatnik. The album was recorded in front of an invited live audience and burlesque act. At the start of the album, Waits introduces the venue as 'Rafael's Silver Cloud Lounge'. This compounds Waits' apparent ultimate goal of making this album rather more an experience than just a recording.

Both the song lyrics and the album cover are heavily intertextual, as demonstrated, for example, by Waits' decision to adopt the lexical item 'nighthawks', which is an American slang term for individuals who frequent venues unusually late at night. Reiterating this, the album artwork for *Nighthawks at the Diner* is clearly reminiscent of Edward Hopper's painting 'Nighthawks', which features a man sitting alone<sup>3</sup> in a diner late at night. This is an image that Waits makes reference to throughout the lyrics of several songs on the album. In one of his improvisations between tracks, Waits tells the audience that he is going to take them on 'an improvisational adventure into the bowels of the metropolitan region' (Waits: 1975, 03. Intro). This theme of metropolitanism and urban landscapes specific to the Los Angeles area is one which is carried through the album, with Waits referencing the prominent places on the 1970s 'nighthawk scene'.

In 'Emotional Weather Report', Waits chooses to project the nighthawk culture in Los Angeles at the time of the album (1975). Waits references several prominent nightlife locations and venues, specifically venues that were noted at the time for their subculture. Two references in the song that exemplify this are to the 'Ivar Theatre' and 'the corner of Sunset and Alvarado', a venue and an area in Los Angeles where 'nighthawks' at this time could visit nude shows and witness street prostitution. By introducing these somewhat deviant pursuits and subscribing to the style of the jazz and blues movement, Waits cements an image of deviance, projecting an identity of a person who refuses to subscribe not just to societal conventions but also to traditional musical conventions, choosing a genre in which he can improvise and not conform to the expectations of popular music. Although the different themes explored by Waits (e.g. Jazz culture, strip clubs, and the lonely scene depicted in Hopper's 'Nighthawks') can be thought of as distinct features of Los Angeles culture, the fact that Waits explicitly links these themes within a single concept album forces the audience to consider them as related. References such as these are important to the interpretation and analysis of style as it is through these references that Waits aligns with, and demonstrates, the nighthawk culture that he is projecting in the song lyrics.

In section 2, we outline Carston's model for processing metaphor. In order to do this, we also explain how it fits into RT more generally and what relevance theorists take metaphorical language to be. In section 3, we present the data in full. In section 4, we present our analysis of 'Emotional Weather Report'. In section 5, we discuss our findings and make some concluding remarks.

### **3. Relevance theory**

Relevance theory (RT) (Sperber and Wilson, 1995) was developed as an alternative to a classic Gricean view of communication. It attempted to retain Grice's (1975) insight that communication is intentional-inferential (e.g. a hearer infers what a speaker intends) whilst aiming for psychological plausibility (i.e. based on cognitive processes rather than logical inferential chains like Grice's maxims). RT can be seen as a total renovation of Grice's ideas. Instead of postulating the cooperative principle and maxims, RT posits one governing principle – the principle of relevance, which is a development of Grice's maxim of relation. This is not a language-specific principle but a general principle of cognitive government, which regulates the fact that the human cognitive system is geared toward the acquisition of one commodity: *information*. According to RT, the acquisition of information can be described in terms of *positive cognitive effects* (Wilson and Sperber, 2004), which Wilson and Sperber (2004: 608) describe as 'a worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world'. *Contextual implications* are the most important cognitive effect, and they involve the conjunction of a stimulus (e.g. utterance) and context to yield something that is not derivable from either alone. *Positive cognitive effects* are said to be *relevant*, and RT postulates two principles that are governed by the maximisation of relevance.

#### *Cognitive principle of relevance*

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance. (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 610)

#### *Communicative principle of relevance*

Every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance. (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 612)

These two principles work together in communication and, on hearing a relevant stimulus, a hearer will follow the *relevance theoretic comprehension procedure*, which states:

- a. Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretative hypotheses (disambiguation, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.
- b. Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied (or abandoned). (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 613)

### **3.1 Relevance theory, *ad hoc* concepts and the loose use continuum**

When it comes to metaphor, relevance theorists (see Sperber and Wilson, 2012), like conceptual metaphor theorists (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), argue that metaphor is not a special literary form of communication. This deviates from what might be termed the traditional approach to metaphor, which sees metaphor as a poetic trope, or something that relies on the producer deliberately saying something that they believe to be false (Grice, 1989). Grice's model treats metaphor as implicature, whereas more recent approaches to RT treat metaphor as a fundamental part of the 'proposition expressed' (Carston, 2002) by an utterance, which may in turn lead to implicatures. To do this, relevance theorists argue for what they call the *explicit/implicit* distinction.

#### **3.1.1 The explicit/implicit distinction**

Grice posits a framework that sees the propositional content (after going through reference assignment and disambiguation) feed directly into the pragmatic interpretative system where implicatures are generated as a result of the intentional flouting of certain maxims. For Grice, there is a fundamental distinction between 'what is said' (proposition determined by the lexical content of utterances) and 'what is implicated' (utterance meaning determined by the lexical content in conjunction with context). For Grice, literal meaning is determined separately from figurative meaning, with figurative meaning being part of an utterance's implicature. Importantly, with the exception of reference assignment, 'what is said' is processed without considering context, and an important difference between RT and Gricean pragmatics has to do with the way that RT deals with 'what is said'.

RT (Carston, 2002) adjusts Grice's notions of 'what is said', suggesting that context plays a role in the interpretation of literal language. This renovation follows from the fact that relevance theorists observed that 'even the explicit content of an utterance may go well beyond what is linguistically encoded' (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 615). As a result, they argue that context must be involved in a much greater way from the very beginning of

utterance interpretation, and thus replace ‘what is said’ with the notion of *explicature*. To demonstrate the importance of explicature, consider the following examples:

- (1) Is your glass empty?  
(2) Anne: Have you had a nice day?  
Bob: I need a drink!

What is being explicitly expressed with these examples is not literal meaning of the utterances. For (1), ‘empty’ does not seem to mean ‘empty’ literally, but rather ‘approximately’; and, in (2), ‘drink’ does not literally mean any ‘drink’ but more narrowly refers to ‘alcoholic drink’. In order to give a full analysis, we introduce the concept of *ad hoc concept construction* that we draw on in our analysis of ‘Emotional Weather Report’.

### 3.1.2 *Ad hoc* concept construction

*Ad hoc* concepts are enrichments of an utterance that form part of the explicature. Carston describes *ad hoc* concepts as follows:

a lexical concept appearing in the logical form is pragmatically adjusted, so that the concept understood as expressed by the particular occurrence of the lexical item is different from, and replaces, the concept it encodes; it is narrower, looser or some combination of the two. (Carston, 2004: 641)

This adjustment is referred to as *ad hoc concept construction*. This can be demonstrated using (1) and (2) above. In line with Gricean analytical conventions, we use ‘+>’ to refer to implied meaning:

- (3) Is your glass EMPTY\*?<sup>4</sup>  
+> *would you like it refilled?*  
(4) Anne: Have you had a nice day?  
Bob: I need a DRINK\*!  
+> *no*

In (3), it is unlikely that the glass is literally empty (i.e. it probably has a little bit of liquid in the bottom). The suggestion, then, is that the concept encoded has been *broadened* to include



things that are ‘not quite empty’ – it has a *looser* meaning. We can analyse (4) along similar lines, except this time it seems as though the process goes in the opposite direction. The denotation of the adjusted DRINK\* is *narrower* than the one conventionally encoded by the lexical item (i.e. alcoholic drink). Moreover, in example (4), Anne would not be able to derive the implicature if the adjustment process had not taken place. The explicit/implicit distinction has efficacy because everything is analysed as being governed by the same search for relevance.

Before exploring metaphor, it is worth outlining an RT view on concepts, with particular reference to Carston (2002). Since Sperber and Wilson (1995), much RT has rested on the notion of assumptions (and sets of assumptions). Since assumptions are typically complex (e.g. the assumption that *tomorrow is Thursday*), they are made up of constituents. Such constituents are concepts. A necessary notion of understanding concepts is a *conceptual address*, which Carston defines as:

A mental label or node connecting and providing access to information of various sorts pertaining to a single concept (for example, *cat*, *love*, or *and*): logical or computational rules and procedures, encyclopaedic information about the denotations of the concept and linguistic information about the natural-language counterpart of the concept. Some concepts may have only one or two of these types of information.  
(Carston, 2002: 366)

This three-part division of concept into logical, encyclopaedic, and language-specific aspects is crucial to understanding RT. Carston’s approach is more specific than that of other relevance theorists since she specifies what makes up encyclopaedic information attached to a concept. Carston (2002: 321) argues that encyclopaedic information comprises different kinds of knowledge, including ‘integrated scripts or scenarios’, some of which ‘may be represented in an analogue (as opposed to digital) format, perhaps as mental images of some sort’. In the next section, we follow Carston (2002) as well as Pilkington (2010) in arguing that this analogue information is crucial for understanding extended metaphor.

### **3.1.3 Metaphor**

So far, we have focused on the theoretical underpinnings of RT from its roots in Gricean pragmatics. With this underlying theory in place, we can now turn to an RT account of metaphor.

For relevance theorists, metaphor involves the creation of *ad hoc* concepts and relies on a *literal-loose-metaphor continuum* (Sperber and Wilson, 2008; Wilson and Carston, 2007), including *narrowing* and *broadening*, which captures *approximation* and *hyperbole*. An example of *narrowing* (using the word ‘drink’) and *broadening* (using the word ‘empty’) were provided above, and here we present a well-discussed example (see Wilson and Carston, 2007: 248-249) of how the same utterance can be used literally, approximately, hyperbolically, and metaphorically by highlighting the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the lexical item *boiling*.

(5) The water is boiling.

(6) BOILING WATER:       **encyclopaedic assumptions**

- (a) SEETHES AND BUBBLES, HIDDEN UNDERCURRENTS, EMITS VAPOUR, etc.
- (b) TOO HOT TO WASH ONE’S HANDS IN, TOO HOT TO BATHE IN, etc.
- (c) SUITABLE FOR MAKING TEA, DANGEROUS TO TOUCH, etc.
- (d) SAFE TO USE IN STERILISING INSTRUMENTS, etc.

First, considering the literal meaning of (5), all of the encyclopaedic assumptions listed in (6) are relevant. Now consider an approximate use of (5) where Anne enters the kitchen, walks over to the kettle, and goes to turn it on. Bob sees Anne and, having boiled the kettle a few minutes earlier, he produces (5). Let us say that the water is literally 95 degrees Celsius. Bob’s utterance is not literally true, and it is possible that (d) no longer holds, but (a-c) most certainly do. Moving further along the continuum, imagine that Bob climbs into a bath that Anne has run for him, and utters (5). This time, Bob’s utterance is hyperbolic, deviating even further from its literal meaning, and it is likely that only (a, b) hold. Finally, imagine a poetic use of (5) to describe the movement of the sea in a particularly turbulent storm. Here, boiling is used to describe the visual impact of the scene and only (a) seems to hold.

In each of these examples, relevance theorists argue that comprehension relies on the creation of an *ad hoc* concept (BOILING\*) that is distinct from the concept associated with the literal meaning of the lexical item and is arrived at by following the RT comprehension procedure in deriving the explicature of the utterance. In other words, the loosely used lexical concept forms part of the proposition expressed by the producer.

Several influential papers have been dedicated to the notion of metaphor and *ad hoc* concept construction, but here we want to focus on a fairly recent development in the treatment of metaphor in the RT literature, which specifically deals with extended metaphor.

Carston (2010; see also Carston and Wearing, 2011; Rubio-Fernández, Cummins and Tian, 2016) has argued that metaphor is processed via two routes. The first is outlined above in which *ad hoc* concepts are constructed as part of the enrichment of an utterance. The second is a more reflective imagistic process based on Davidson's (1978) claim that metaphorical sentences do not have propositional content that goes beyond their literal meaning. From a theoretical perspective, these can be called the *proposition* and *image views* respectively. The underlying assumptions of this view are based on three established ideas. First, it has been demonstrated experimentally that, even in metaphorical contexts, the literal meaning of a metaphor vehicle is still activated (see Rubio-Fernández, 2007). Second, during language use, mental images which are related to the denotation of lexical items are activated (Zwaan, Stanfield and Yaxley, 2002), and it has even been demonstrated that visually similar items are primed by lexical items (Dahan and Tanenhaus, 2005; Huettig and Altmann, 2007). Third, co-occurring words prime each other and lower the activation threshold of semantically related lexical items.<sup>5</sup>

Carston argues that it is unlikely that the extended metaphors typically found in literary texts are processed as a series of *ad hoc* concepts; rather, they are interpreted literally, and the mental images activated by the lexical items are interpreted metaphorically as a whole. This is demonstrated in example (7), which we have taken from Stephen King's novel *The Waste Lands* (1991).

(7) May 7th, the day this madness had started, had been pretty, but today was ten times better – that day, perhaps, when spring looks around herself and sees summer standing nearby, strong and handsome and with a cocky grin on his tanned face. (King, 1991: 158)

From an RT perspective, processing (7) would involve the creation of a number of *ad hoc* concepts (e.g. SPRING\*, LOOKS\*, SUMMER\*, NEARBY\*, STRONG\*). Carston's alternative perspective is that, due to the coherent nature of the description (with the words semantically priming each other), the literal meaning of the lexical items contained within the sentence are activated, and that these 'sets of literal representations are framed or metarepresented, mentally held, and submitted for further reflective inferential processing' (Carston, 2010: 9). The literal representations activated by this passage are processed under what may be referred to as a *metaphorical frame*. Therefore, when processing (7), we treat spring and summer as literally being two individuals who can stand next to each other, be handsome, have cocky grins. However, because the whole text is an extended metaphor, the mental image that this

passage evokes is framed figuratively. Example (7) further highlights the plausibility of Carston's view because of the poetic effect achieved by 'his tanned face', which relates to associations of summer, literally. This results from the fact that the word 'tanned' needs to be interpreted both literally as an association with summer, and figuratively as an attribute of the personified summer. To summarise her position, Carston states:

On the first method, word meaning is pragmatically adjusted so as to capture the thought, and, on the second strategy, the thought or world conception is (albeit temporarily) made to correspond to the literal language. (Carston, 2010: 10)

It could be argued that developing a dual route theory of metaphor is unnecessary when the last forty years have been dedicated to creating one-size-fits-all theories of metaphor. However, it does seem that there are some merits to this approach. First, Carston (2010) argues that, psychologically, the *ad hoc* concept construction process is the 'normal mode' of metaphor processing, and that a switch to the second mode will be made once a certain threshold has been reached. Moreover, a recent experimental study (Rubio-Fernández, Cummins and Tian, 2016) has found evidence in favour of the dual route processing of metaphor. In summary, metaphor processing involves a bottom-up lexical adjustment process and a top-down image frame process.

We provide a summary of the major points below:

### **3.2 Summary: An RT approach to metaphor (based on Carston, 2010)**

- Is intention based – allows analyst to account for performer's intentions
- Has a dual route process that allows for extended metaphor
- Allows for analysis of metaphor without changing underlying theory of analysing communication in pragmatics more generally
- Relies on *ad hoc* concepts which can be broken down in to narrowing and broadening
- Is linguistically rather than conceptually motivated
- Accounts for a variety of metaphor forms such as X is Y, parody, meiosis
- Comprehension can be described as following a three-step process:
  - Without evidence to the contrary, process literal meaning
  - If context provides evidence to do so, generate an *ad hoc* meaning based on speaker intention

- If a text contains semantically coherent lexical items, these prime each other, raising the activation of literal meaning and overriding *ad hoc* meaning generation. Then the images evoked by the text are interpreted metaphorically.

#### 4. 'Emotional Weather Report'

Before analysing the data, where it will be necessary to separate chunks of the text to discuss the metaphors at play in detail, we present the data in full here. Whilst the nature of a journal article requires us to present the song lyrics in print, we encourage readers to listen to the song.

What we're talking about is late night and early morning low clouds  
With a chance of fog, chance of showers into the afternoon  
With variable high cloudiness and gusty winds  
Gusty winds at times around the corner of Sunset and Alvarado

Yeah, I know, things are tough all over  
When the thunder storms start increasing over the  
Southeast and south central portions of my apartment, I get upset

And a line of thunderstorms was developing in the early morning hours  
Ahead of a slow moving cold front, cold-blooded  
With tornado watches issued shortly before noon Sunday  
For the areas including the western region of my mental health  
And the northern portion of my ability to deal rationally  
With my disconcerted precarious emotional situation  
It's cold out there  
Colder than the ticket taker's smile at the Ivar Theatre, on Saturday night

Flash flood watches cover the southern portion of my disposition, yeah  
There was no severe weather well into the afternoon  
Except for kind of a lone gust of wind in the bedroom

A high pressure zone covering the eastern portion of a small  
Suburban community with a 1034 millibar high pressure zone

And a weak pressure ridge extending from my eyes down to my cheeks  
'Cause since you left me baby and put the vice grips on my mental health  
Well, the extended outlook for an indefinite period of time  
Until you come back to me, baby, is high tonight, low tomorrow  
And precipitation is expected

That wraps up the weather for this evening.  
Now back to the eleven o'clock blues.  
Doctor George Fishbeck ain't got nothing on me!

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**Words & Music by Tom Waits**  
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## **5. Analysis**

So far, this article has been primarily theoretical. This was necessary for two reasons: first, to introduce the basics of RT to an audience that may be unfamiliar with it; and, second, to set up the theoretical position from which we can report our analysis of the data. It is important to state at this point that our aim in this analysis is not to provide an all-encompassing explanation or 'correct' interpretation of the song if such a thing were possible. Rather, our aim is to present the utility of a communicative approach to metaphor analysis (such as RT) for stylisticians. We present our analysis verse by verse as doing so allows us to show how RT can account thoroughly for all the metaphorical language in the song lyrics.

### **5.1 Verse 1**

In this initial verse, there is no linguistic indication that what Waits is singing needs to be processed in any other way than literally (i.e. not metaphorically). One might argue that we are neglecting the title of the song here. However, this is a complex issue. We cannot be sure that a listener is necessarily aware of the title. We want to adopt the perspective of a 'first-time listener' and, since Waits does not verbally introduce the song, it is not unlikely that a first-time listener would not be aware of it. Furthermore, in order to understand the title of the song as being metaphorical, the listener would need to know the premise of the song anyway. Corpus linguistic evidence suggests that 'emotional' followed by a deverbal noun, e.g.

‘response’, ‘reaction’, ‘report’,<sup>6</sup> is more likely to describe the manner (e.g., the person delivering the report is emotional) of the noun rather than the type (e.g., “an emotional report” rather than a “news report” or “sports report”) . This can be contrasted with non-deverbal nouns, e.g. ‘needs’, ‘intelligence’, ‘problems’, where ‘emotional’ describes the type (viz. ‘emotional needs’ can be compared to ‘financial needs’). In line with our analysis here, it makes sense to assume the perspective of a first-time listener because Waits’ immediate audience fall into that category, and we believe that his intentional communicative behaviour reflects this fact.

In either scenario, Waits becomes the weather reporter and, in doing so, gives himself the opportunity to use weather phenomena to present his emotions. In keeping with the listener’s encyclopaedic knowledge of the structure of a weather report, Waits discusses the weather conditions (clouds, fog, showers) of physical, geographical locations; since these themes are semantically coherent, they do not cause the listener to process anything other than the literal meaning.

What we’re talking about is late night and early morning low clouds  
With a chance of fog, chance of showers into the afternoon  
With variable high cloudiness and gusty winds  
Gusty winds at times around the corner of Sunset and Alvarado

In this first verse, the region that Waits refers to (the corner of Sunset and Alvarado) works to position the song (and therefore Waits as a performer) within a specific region – namely, metropolitan Los Angeles. More specifically, the region is the corner of Sunset (otherwise known as the Sunset Strip or Sunset Boulevard) and Alvarado, which are culturally significant landmarks of Los Angeles and Hollywood nightlife. Furthermore, Sunset and Alvarado are situated in an area that was well-known for its street prostitution (Hoskyns, 2010: 133; Meyer, 1990; Rasmussen, 1997). The fact that Waits chooses to reference this particular region suggests that he intends to draw our attention to its relevance in our interpretation of the lyrics, and also in our interpretation of him as a performer. The discussion of a performer’s (akin to a speaker’s) intention in metaphor production is brought to the fore in a pragmatic analysis because what we (and the audience) are trying to interpret is the performer’s intention in producing the language that he or she does.

We believe that the next verse is the trigger for the framing of weather as emotions.

## 5.2 Verse 2, Metaphor framing

Up to this point, the song lyrics have maintained a semantically coherent and plausible weather report format. However, the second verse breaks the conventional structure of a weather report as Waits describes ‘things’ being tough ‘all over’. The use of ‘tough’, which seems at odds with what one might find in a weather report, triggers its narrowing to TOUGH\*, which can be interpreted in relation to psychological rather than physical ‘toughness’.

Yeah, I know, things are tough all over  
When the thunderstorms start increasing over the  
Southeast and south-central portions of my apartment, I get upset

This is reiterated in the next line when Waits begins to describe weather phenomena (‘thunderstorms’) occurring in locations determined by ordinal directions (‘southeast and south central’) in his apartment. This has the effect, due to semantic incoherence, of deviating from the listener’s expectations of weather phenomena and, in doing so, triggers an understanding of these phenomena as being non-literal. Importantly, the syntactic structure suggests that the thunderstorms are *causing* Waits to be upset. In other words, this is not a metaphor where Waits is suggesting that the storms represent his emotions (as we will see below); rather, the storms are causing his emotions. What makes these descriptions of weather events figurative is the fact that they are described as occurring within an apartment. Here, then, if we were to provide an analysis of the weather events using *ad hoc* concepts, it is possible that we would have to suggest a series of adjusted meanings (e.g. THUNDERSTORMS\*, INCREASING\*, SOUTHEAST\*, SOUTH-CENTRAL\*). However, it seems more parsimonious to suggest that the description evokes an image of miniaturised weather events occurring within Waits’ apartment. Furthermore, the imagery created by these lines is evocative of certain depressive states where an individual may feel that he or she is unable to escape from negative emotions. It is possible that Waits’ placing of bad weather within his apartment/home (which typically represents shelter from the elements) could be tied to the fact that people often find it difficult to find emotional shelter from depressive states. This could be achieved as a series of implicatures based on encyclopaedic information associated with ‘thunderstorms’ (e.g. one typically seeks shelter from them) and ‘apartments’ (e.g. a place where one typically seeks shelter).



To summarise, we can say that Waits is explicitly linking weather and his emotions in this verse by stating that thunderstorms make him upset. This link is not figurative. However, the figurative aspect of this verse is in the fact that those thunderstorms seem to be located within in his apartment, evoking an image of weather phenomena existing within the confines of Waits' apartment. As we describe below, it is perhaps this image that Waits relies on when creating his extended metaphor.

### 5.3 Verse 3, 'weather is emotion'

Once the image of weather phenomena occurring in Waits' apartment is established, the first line of the third verse is likely to be interpreted not as a standard description of weather events, but as a more circumscribed, figurative description of weather events taking place in Waits' apartment.

And a line of thunderstorms was developing in the early morning hours  
Ahead of a slow moving cold front, cold-blooded  
With tornado watches issued shortly before noon Sunday  
For the areas including the western region of my mental health  
And the northern portion of my ability to deal rationally  
With my disconcerted precarious emotional situation  
It's cold out there  
Colder than the ticket taker's smile at the Ivar Theatre, on Saturday night

In the first three lines of this verse, Waits continues to describe typically negative weather events ('thunderstorms', 'cold front', 'tornado') but he now links them to specific times ('early morning hours', 'before noon Sunday'). These times provide information for the image that Waits is creating and describing. Meteorologically speaking, Waits' description is entirely coherent. Lines of thunderstorms typically precede cold fronts, which may result in further serious weather events like tornadoes. This could be taken as suggesting that all of these weather events take place in a single morning, starting with the thunderstorms in the early hours and the tornado watches happening before noon. A further important element in these first three lines is the metaphorical use of 'cold-blooded', which serves to give the weather events animal characteristics whilst at the same time suggesting that they lack empathy.<sup>6</sup>We believe that the most parsimonious account of this metaphor is an *ad hoc* one. In other words, 'cold-blooded' is pragmatically adjusted to COLD-BLOODED\*, perhaps giving

rise to the assumption that the weather phenomena that Waits is describing lack empathy. This might make relevant a series of implicated premises and conclusions:

Implicated premises:

- Being cold-blooded is a property of animals.
- When they are slow moving, animals are often stalking their prey.

Implicature:

- The weather that Waits describes is not a chance occurrence, but is specifically targeting him.

In these lines, Waits also invites the audience to interpret a double meaning of ‘cold’, where the first relates to temperature and the second to temperament (see Pilkington, 2010: 159). Interestingly, Waits, once again, leaves the figurative trigger ‘cold-blooded’, which is more likely to be interpreted as referring to temperament than temperature, until the end of the line. This has the potential effect that the metaphorical reading of ‘slow-moving cold front’ as animalistic can only be accessed once it has already been comprehended literally, further highlighting the (literal) imagistic qualities of the weather events.

In the second half of this verse, Waits presents a shift in location from the physical location of his apartment to the figurative locations of his ‘mental health’ and ‘disconcerted precarious emotional situation’. These locations are no longer spatially meaningful in a real-world sense (mental health does not have a western region), but serve the preservation and semantic coherence of the weather report. In the first three verses of the song, Waits has shifted location, as outlined below:

1. Unspecified, presumably geographical, location relating to weather events.
  - a. Weather phenomena such as ‘low clouds’, ‘fog’, ‘showers’ must occur somewhere. The utterance ‘it’s raining’ has been extensively analysed in the linguistic literature as requiring a specification of location (Recanati, 2004: 9).
2. ‘Sunset and Alvarado’.
3. ‘My apartment’.
4. ‘My mental health’.

These different locations become less like the script of a weather report and eventually more abstract. The potential effect on the audience is that the imagery associated with (1) is applied to (2) and then to (3) and then to (4). This imagery leads to the possible conclusion that the weather that Waits is describing is not real but rather represents his emotional state. In other words, weather does not cause emotion; *weather is emotion*.

The final two lines of this verse are interesting because they both involve the word 'cold'. First, the line 'it's cold out there' could refer to temperature or it could refer to a general lack of emotion. If the latter, Waits is perhaps repeating the sentiment underlying 'things are tough all over' that is mentioned earlier in the song. Interestingly, according to COCA, of the 87 instances of 'cold out there', 82 clearly refer to temperature. In the final line, the phrase 'colder than the ticket taker's smile' clearly relates to emotional coldness, since it seems highly unusual to describe a smile as literally cold. This interpretation is strengthened when it is enriched by the reference to the Ivar Theatre, which was a venue in Los Angeles known for strip shows and burlesque acts. This line is of further interest when we consider the foregrounding effect caused by Waits' choice to describe a smile, which is conventionally associated with conveying warmth or invitation, as emotionally cold. Moreover, Waits' choice to draw attention to the cold smile suggests that he is aware of the superficiality of the relationship between himself and the ticket taker. Specifically mentioning the cold smile could be seen as a pragmatic device that affords Waits the chance to show his identity as a performer, i.e. he is a lonely nighthawk, and also adds to the overall message that Waits is conveying, i.e. the LA night scene is a lonely place. Furthermore, Waits' choice to reference the Ivar Theatre specifically reiterates the interpretation that Waits is only engaging in superficial relationships, i.e. he has to frequent venues that offer strip shows in order to recreate, albeit superficially, a warm relationship.

In the song, Waits has set up two potential readings for 'cold':

COLD\*: referring to the temperature of weather

COLD\*\*: referring to a lack of emotion

It is possible that, during each instance of the word 'cold', these interpretations will be activated to different degrees, depending on the semantic (including established imagery) and syntactic context. This would be difficult to explain without some notion of online<sup>8</sup> meaning adjustment as envisioned by RT. Further, these two readings of 'coldness' are consistent with Carston's dual route processing. COLD\* is highly relevant because it fits the imagery already

established and forms a coherent set of conceptual relations with other descriptions of weather phenomena. COLD\*\* is relevant because it relates back to the reference of ‘cold-blooded’ and because it is syntactically salient since ‘colder’ is predicating something for which temperature is an unlikely feature (‘the ticket taker’s smile’).

The final three words in this verse, ‘on Saturday night’, are interesting because they suggest a temporal relationship between the beginning and the end of this verse (the beginning of the verse refers to Sunday morning). It is possible that the weather events/Waits’ emotional state described at the beginning of the verse directly follow from the events of the previous night, which may include visiting the Ivar Theatre. This goes in line with Waits’ identity as a lonely nighthawk who is unsatisfied with the relationships that he is trying to create.

#### 5.4 Verse 4

Verse four continues the description of ‘portions’ of Waits’ mental health as if they were physical locations subject to weather phenomena (‘flash floods’, ‘severe weather’), which, once submitted for inferential processing, invoke sudden wetness, e.g. in the form of tears.

Flash flood watches cover the southern portion of my disposition, yeah  
There was no severe weather well into the afternoon  
Except for kind of a lone gust of wind in the bedroom

The final line returns to descriptions of locations in Waits’ apartment and presents a ‘lone gust of wind’. The image of a ‘gust of wind’ seems to present something that is fleeting and volatile,<sup>9</sup> i.e. a gust of wind has the potential to cause damage quickly. Waits’ decision to bring the listener’s attention to the fact that it is a ‘lone’ gust of wind could be said to reiterate the extended metaphor, and that what Waits is describing through weather is himself, i.e. *he* is lonely and volatile. Furthermore, in contrast to Waits’ very specific meteorological descriptions prior to this line, ‘kind of a’ is notably vague. It could be argued that this is due to the fact that Waits himself is unsure what destruction he may cause. Moreover, in terms of imagery, to picture a gust of wind in a bedroom is to picture the effect that the wind would have, an effect of a force that is no longer present. Waits’ choice to place himself in the bedroom, a place that is associated conventionally with being intimate with another person, reinforces the suggestion that Waits’ loneliness is of the romantic kind. Further to this, Waits’ choice to report that there ‘was no severe weather well into the

afternoon' suggests that, true to the image of a nighthawk, he is sleeping in the day in order to sustain his nocturnal pursuits. He has nothing to report, because he is not conscious.

### 5.5 Verse 5

The fifth and penultimate verse is notable for the increase in technical language associated with weather reports (e.g. '1034 millibar high pressure zone', 'weak pressure ridge'). However, as with most of the song, these descriptions are consistent with the previous verses in that it is possible to treat the images evoked by them as relating directly to Waits and his emotional state.

A high pressure zone covering the eastern portion of a small  
Suburban community with a 1034 millibar high pressure zone  
And a weak pressure ridge extending from my eyes down to my cheeks  
'Cause since you left me baby and put the vice grips on my mental health  
Well, the extended outlook for an indefinite period of time  
Until you come back to me, baby, is high tonight, low tomorrow  
And precipitation is expected

These technical weather descriptions are coherent with the phenomena discussed so far. For example, high pressure zones are typically associated with coldness, while weak (or low) pressure is associated with rain. When Waits describes 'a weak pressure ridge extending from my eyes down to my cheeks', he is describing the path of his tears down his face. It is important to note here that the listener is not expected to have such a detailed knowledge of weather phenomena, but rather just a knowledge of a weather report format. Moreover, Waits' choice to refer to the region where the weak pressure ridge occurs (i.e. from my eyes down to my cheeks) allows the listener to interpret Waits' intended meaning without necessarily knowing what a weak pressure ridge entails. The fourth line of this verse introduces the reason for Waits' emotional state when he reports 'since you left me baby and put the vice grips on my mental health'. In this line, he introduces a new metaphor which can be analysed using the *ad hoc* concept VICE GRIPS\*, which relates to the encyclopaedic assumptions of inescapable pressure inflicted by an external force typically associated with a literal vice grip. The final three lines return to the weather report structure using the phrase 'extended outlook', and reports that the weather will be 'high tonight, low tomorrow/And precipitation is expected'. Considering the themes that Waits introduces in the song, we can

interpret this as referring to Waits' nighthawk pursuits on the LA nocturnal scene (his sadness in the day time and his subsequent tears). Alternatively, using the established mapping that high pressure is cold weather and low pressure is wet weather, we can interpret these lines as relating to lonely nights and sad days. The penultimate and final lines of the song have the effect of a narrative coda, which is 'a functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment' (Labov and Waletzky, 1967: 39). We now know the reason for Waits' loneliness: he is stuck in a negative emotional place because he has been left by someone.

### **5.6 Summary and a comment on relistening to and reinterpreting metaphor in 'Emotional Weather Report'**

So far in this article we have used Carston's (2010) version of RT to explain the lyrics of 'Emotional Weather Report' enriched by our own knowledge of the context that surrounds it, i.e. that Waits as a performer is a nighthawk, and that the areas of LA that he references are famous for subculture. Analysing Waits' lyrics has involved exploring the history of LA, the concept of nighthawks, and meteorological phenomena (amongst other things). We do not expect every listener to go to the lengths that an analyst might go to in order to understand a song. However, we do believe that it is likely that Waits as a lyricist (at least) did go to the lengths that we went to. It is not a coincidence that his descriptions of weather events are scientifically accurate. This creates a situation of what perspective an analyst should adopt. For example, an analyst could adopt Waits' perspective, using information about Waits, including biography and interviews, to build a picture of what the song means. Alternatively, we could try to adopt a naïve perspective, assuming as little awareness of Waits and the themes discussed in the song as possible. We could also adopt an expert perspective, assuming that everything in the song is deliberate and needs to be analysed exhaustively. The fact that an interpretation of the song can be understood from different perspectives is no problem for a pragmatic theory such as RT, since it was designed to analyse naturally occurring communicative practice (misunderstandings included). For relevance theorists (Sperber and Wilson, 1995), it is assumed that context is chosen for interpretation. Context is a set of assumptions relevant to inferring the speaker's intention in producing a communicative behaviour. Therefore, different interpretations of the song can be thought of as being arrived at due to different sets of assumptions.

This raises an interesting question – not about different listeners, but about the same listener on separate occasions, especially in relation to the processing of extended metaphor.

Songs are notable for their replayability. And, if we assume that the images evoked by this song are used in the processing of the extended metaphor, then it is possible that such images are available to a listener who has previously listened to the song at the beginning of the song. For example, if one relistened to the song, would the figurative meaning of ‘gusty winds’, ‘low clouds’ and ‘showers’ as relating to Waits’ emotional state be available from the beginning? This is not something that we address here, but it is an empirical question worthy of future research.

## **6. Discussion and concluding remarks**

In our analysis, we have presented a case for an RT account of extended metaphors. This account assumes that metaphorical language is processed via two routes. The first route involves the local adjustment of one or more lexically encoded concepts to fit context as guided by the relevance theoretic comprehension procedure (detailed in Section 2). The second route involves a slower, reflective and more interpretative process of reframing the text in accordance with evoked imagery while interpreting the language literally. This second route facilitates the processing of extended metaphors like those found in ‘Emotional Weather Report’. What is more, because RT is a theory of general communication, it is able to capture the production and reception of the song from the perspective of Waits as a performer or communicator and the audience as interpreter, compared with models that deal with the text as a self-contained linguistic event. In doing so, RT is able to capture how aspects of Waits’ identity play a role in interpretation as well as the culture that he indexes more broadly.

Our analysis has demonstrated the flexibility of an RT approach to analysing metaphorical language. We have shown its utility for explaining top-down, extended metaphor processing, based on the listener holding constant the image of weather events created by Waits and using them to analyse the language. This was contrasted with a bottom-up, *ad hoc* construction of adjusted concepts. An example of this that we discuss in Section 4.3 is the mismatch between the pervading imagery, which makes COLD\* (temperature) in ‘cold out there’ relevant, contrasted with the local syntactic relevance of COLD\*\* (temperament) in ‘colder than the ticket taker’s smile’.

The significance of our contribution to this special issue has been less about uncovering some hidden meanings in the song lyrics or providing a new method for data analysis. We see the significance of our work as being concerned with exemplifying a theory that we believe is underused in contemporary stylistics to analyse song lyrics that are

undeniably context rich. In doing so, we have added to the body of research that responds to the kind of criticism levelled by Steen (2007: 291) that we mentioned in the introduction.

Given that the aim of this special issue is to discuss song lyrics in contemporary stylistics, we will now ask ourselves specifically, how does what we have presented here fit into contemporary stylistics? And why should stylisticians be interested in what we have done in this article? The first reason is that RT is primarily an intentionalistic model. For the purposes of our analysis here, we believe that there is no qualitative difference between the notions of speaker intention within pragmatics and the key notion of choice (why a particular form has been chosen over another) within stylistics. We argue that the notion of choice presupposes intention, i.e. if we are to analyse choice, we must be analysing intention. Therefore, an intentionalistic model like RT belongs to the stylistics toolkit. The second reason is that the theory underpinning RT is the same as Gricean models that are already well used in stylistics (such as Grice's maxims). They can be defined as being concerned with the intended meaning of communicative behaviours. For this reason, it seems less of a theoretical leap for stylisticians to analyse metaphor using RT. It is curious that, within stylistics, the most popular means of analysing metaphor in texts, CMT, is at odds with the underlying theory of Gricean pragmatics, and yet both are used as tools in the same stylistics toolkit. Moreover, whilst both CMT and RT are cognitive theories, RT allows for discussion of how a listener/reader/receiver processes metaphor rather than simply identifying metaphors within texts. This point also raises a question about the challenges associated with theoretical eclecticism in stylistics in the light of the 'cognitive turn' (Stockwell, 2002: 6).

In conclusion, our contribution to this special issue has added to the growing body of literature in stylistics that adopts a relevance theoretic position. Specifically, we have shown the utility of Carston's (2010) model for the analysis of extended and embedded metaphor in language use. Moreover, we have made the case that the model affords analysts the opportunity to discuss the different dimensions of song lyrics, such as cultural references (nighthawk culture, Ivar Theatre, Sunset and Alvarado) that have clearly been chosen for specific communicative purposes by the performer, i.e. to index nighthawk culture, which enrich a listener's experience of the song.

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## Notes

1. A relevance theoretic approach has previously shown to be fruitful for stylistic analyses more generally; see Boase-Beier, 2004; Caink and Clark, 2012; Chapman and Clark, 2014; Clark, 2014; Furlong, 2011. Beat poetry or beat generation is the name given to a literary movement started in America in the 1950s, specifically the Greenwich Village area of New York.
2. Beat generation poetry was a comment on American culture, and prominent beat poets such as Alan Ginsberg used their poetry to oppose capitalism, militarization and sexual oppression. As such, beat poetry became associated with being countercultural, bohemian and non-conformist.
3. It is worth noting that, when we say ‘alone’, we are referring to the fact that he appears to be disengaged from the other people depicted in the painting. There are three other people in the diner.
4. Here we use the convention of using SMALL CAPS to refer to concepts and asterisks to refer to any deviation from the lexical concept.
5. ‘Semantic priming’ is a widely acknowledged effect where a lexical item (e.g. *nurse*) reduces the time required to process a semantically related lexical item (e.g. *doctor*) in comparison to an unrelated item (e.g. *door*). For an overview of the topic, see McNamara (2005).
6. Based on data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).
7. It is interesting that (according to COCA and iWeb) ‘cold-blooded’ is more regularly used as a pre-modifier for nouns referring to humans or human acts (‘killer’ and ‘murder’) than ‘animals’. This form of zoomorphism usually suggests that an individual is lacking the ability to empathise with living beings. What makes Waits’ use interesting is that he is attributing it to something that is non-living, but it seems to have the same effect.
8. By ‘online’, we mean occurring during the real-time processing of an utterance, not retrospectively.
9. Corpus evidence supports this interpretation. The top adjectival collocates of *gust of wind* in the British National Corpus (BNC) include *sudden*, *vicious*, *strong*, *stray*, *powerful* and *freak*

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