Poetics and Pragmatics

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1 Introduction

In this paper, I develop a pragmatic view of the poetic function of language by resorting to the ideas of contextualism, inferential pragmatics, and pragmemes (Mey, 2001, Capone, 2005), developing considerations on the poetic function of language on the basis of considerations by Jakobson (1960) and Waugh (1980). I argue that pragmatics plays an important role in elucidating the poetic function of language and that even in everyday language (not only in anthologies) we find cases of texts where the poetic function coexists with (or aids) other functions. Contextualism allows us to interpret a poem: referents must be fixed or need not be fixed due to the requirements of the discourse; citations are brought in through pragmatic ways; polyphony is achieved via sedimentation of citations in a current text; the vicinity of a certain word, or concept, or line is likely to affect the interpretation of a certain expression. Polyphony is what allows the text to live on in a dimension that transcends the limits of the subjective experience of the poet but allows the text to be inserted in a tradition in which each verse reverberates with memories of other verses.

The poetic text can take different forms, from graffiti to discourse at the marketplace, to discourse between lovers. All these forms of poetic text would not exist if the notion of poetry did not include the idea of semantic/pragmatic compression which is matched, in interpretation, by expansions.

In this paper, I also try to tackle the issue of the universal appeal of some poems, even if I am aware that this topic is as mysterious as fascinating. Paradoxically, a contextual approach to poetry seems to be at odds with the claim that the most acclaimed examples of poems have a universal appeal and touch a universal chord in the readers' hearts. What is genuinely puzzling is the contrast between the need

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to fully contextualize a text and the fact that such a text can have a universal appeal across cultures.

2 On the Poetic Function of Language

The battles within the field of linguistics have often centred around the idea that language serves a variety of functions alternative to the idea by formal linguists that the main (and perhaps sole) function of language is to transmit thoughts (or even denying the role of communication and being content with the idea that language allows the articulation of thought). Given the views by formal linguists, language has been studied as a formal system, with little or no connection to social reality. But such a view of linguistics appears to us to be completely aseptic and, also, incomplete, given that language, even if it serves the purpose of articulating thoughts, has to be learned in a social context. Furthermore, pondering on the connection between poetics and linguistics does not seem to be a bad move, given that poetic texts are ubiquitous and are often subordinated to the function of persuading, amusing, rendering a text memorable, etc. Jakobson insisted much on the idea that poetics should be part of the study of language. There may be a lot of truth in what Jakobson says. However, formal linguists are led by Chomsky to deny what Jakobson takes for granted, in other words, that language serves functions different from that of articulating or expressing human thoughts (see Chomsky, 2013 on the view that language essentially serves to articulate thought; but see Jakobson, 1960 on the functions of language). But, clearly, language serves several important functions, such as the phatic function, the conative function, the expressive function, the metalinguistic function, the poetic function, etc. Jakobson believes that the poetic function should be one of the objects of linguistics:

> Insistence on keeping poetics apart from linguistics is warranted only when the field of linguistics appears to be illicitly restricted, for example when the sentence is viewed by some linguists as the highest analyzable construction (...) (Jakobson, 1960, 65).

To restrict the field of linguistics may be useful, from a methodological point of view, as one abstracts away from phenomena that seem to pertain more to *parole* than to language and serves to avoid many distractions. But is the insistence on pragmatic competence only a distraction? When one, at the end of one's work, has to put together the threads of the various strands of research in the sub-fields of linguistics, it may be useful to have a more comprehensive view in which the functions of language and the relevant studies of pragmatic phenomena are put together with formal considerations on language in a unified vision.

A point that is not made by Jakobson or other linguists of a functional persuasion is that the poetic function of language—which I think everyone ought to take for granted—is something that can be put to use (also) when language serves functions different from merely expressing thoughts. Poetry deals with the kind of embellishments that only make sense when we want to communicate thoughts to others with

the ulterior aim of modifying their *forma mentis* and their conduct, when we want to show the importance and the potential impact of our thoughts, when we want them to be remembered, and to function within a general act of persuasion. In other words, poems are often embedded in larger language games and have to be studied in connection with such games. A poem needs to be embedded in social activities to be noted and remembered. This notion is something which has been ignored or undervalued by linguists and literary critics. Critics are satisfied that a poem belongs to a book (an anthology or a collection of poems) and seem to lose track of the fact that a poem is a 'pragmeme', an act of communication (as Mey, 2001 says) requiring a social context and aiming to modify such a context adding something of its own, nourishing the soul of readers and making it capable of being reactive to what is going on around them in terms of social and historical events. (Poetry could also be considered part of the enterprise which Mey 2001 calls *emancipatory pragmatics.*)

Why should poetics be part of linguistics, according to Jakobson? Presumably, Jakobson has the intuition that poetry and language intersect, in so far as their most important functions are social. In fact, it is reasonable to propose that the poetic function of language should be studied in connection with the conative function (language serves the purpose of getting others to do things), because the best way to persuade others to do things for us is to choose words that best express a certain concept, that can have an imaginative impact on the hearer, that help her remember what is going on, that minimize an obligation and may render it more palatable, etc. The conative function, in its turn, may be allied with the argumentative function of language, because we rarely do things because others order them to us (and have the authority to give us orders). We do things for others when they can argue their position, when they can argue the case and give us reasons that motivate our actions. On our view, the conative and the argumentative function are close allies, as very often the former presupposes the latter and vice versa. Jakobson was well aware that the poetic function could not be studied per se, in isolation from other forms of behaviour (see Capone's, 2018 work on pragmemes at the marketplace, for types of discourse where the conative and poetic function coexist). This is due to the fact that most verbal messages are multifunctional: "they usually fulfil a variety of functions, which are integrated one with another in a hierarchical fashion with one function being predominant" (Jakobson, 1960; see also Waugh, 1978, Waugh, 1980, 58). The embedding of one function in another may require some form of indirection. A poem may be an incitement to do something, but the conative function may be mediated by what the poem causes, that is to say critical meditation. A poem is often an illumination, something that can change your life or certainly guide it in one direction, rather than in a different one. A poem often allows you to have access to your internal world (see Kubla Khan by Coleridge), and may have tumultuous effects in bringing out parts of yourself you did not have access to before. In making contacts with one's real self, one can decide to act on such a knowledge.

As I said before, one function may give access to another function. In other words, specific effects may be caused by more general effects. Politicians know this well, and this may be a reason why they relegate Education to a very small portion of the national budget. Educating involves preparing a responsible person, a

responsible political citizen. Developing one's poetic sensitivity may be important to conveying ideas like liberty, creativity and imagining new (alternative) realities. Poetry is an artistic activity that encourages freedom of expression, a critical stance to society, reflection and intellectual autonomy, rather than acquiescence, and all these *perlocutionary effects* are NOT put up with by a political system that aims at conformism and domination.

Usually, the poetic function of language is defined as that function in which a speaker directs attention to the message itself, "toward the message as such" (Jakobson, 1960). According to this view, we would have texts in which their speakers communicate things about the world, without great elaboration of the form used to convey the message and texts that specifically address the issue of form, where form is as important as the main content conveyed and also contributes in a special way to the conveying of the content of the message. An anonymous referee importantly writes:

> He (Jakobson) does not reduce the poetic function to form but defines the poetic function as dealing with the message itself. Maybe the point is rather that poetry does not exclusively have to do with the poetic function. What makes a poem a poem is more than the poetic function.

This point seems to adapt well to the general considerations expressed in this paper. I am also persuaded that content should also be considered as important in defining poetry (especially focusing on the universality of the poetic message, something that strikes a chord in the hearts of most readers, from whatever countries). Through a poem, a poet speaks about his/her mind, his/her internal feelings and mental states in a way which is not easily available through daily conversation. This plane of the poetic function can be called and has been called 'defamiliarization' (Kraxenberger, 2014,14), based on the awareness that we should consider poetry as structurally deviant from prosaic language and everyday discourse, due to its function and to its form, including various textual devices ('Defamiliarization' is something important for Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge, who consciously aim at this in their collection of poems). While everyday discourse is about reference and description of reality outside the human mind, poetic discourse integrates emotive and perceptive aspects within the communication process (see Kraxenberger, 2014, 14-15). A certain degree of indirectness serves to define the poetic function, because otherwise there would be no difference between the poetic and the expressive function. The expressive/emotive function can be exercised both in poems and in daily conversation, but the poetic function is more restricted in its contexts of use (or at least it appears to be). We may tentatively say that the poetic function is that function that is exercised through language when one attempts to communicate feelings, states of mind and attitudes through a language that is attentive to form and is characterized by a certain degree of indirection and compression. Jakobson would probably not only focus on poetry proper (what we normally or canonically define as a poem), as he spots several poetic effects in the ways we normally use language for daily purposes, such as the practice of placing an NP that is heavier (longer) last in a sequence (coordination, for example) in order to obtain certain rhythmic

effects. Jakobson also discusses paronomasia, as in "The horrible Harry", where the selection of 'horrible', rather than a different synonym, on the paradigmatic plane, is determined by certain expected sound effects. We may agree that these 'poetic effects' can be seen in language use, but they are not so central as they are in poems. At least, they are not used consciously or with conscious dedication as they are by poets. The poetic function partially overlaps with the expressive/emotive function but has more specific hallmarks. Why not say, then, that the poetic function is part of the expressive/emotive function? The purpose of the expressive function is to look inside, to bring to light the interiority of a person shown in his or her interaction with the world and with nature (As Auden 1938 says, the "primary function of poetry, as of all arts, is to make us more aware of ourselves and the world" (see Kraxenberger, 2014, 10)). The expressive or liberating function of poetry (and of language, in general) is perhaps one of the most fascinating topics in linguistics; even if in a short article we cannot do justice to it. Suffice it to say that when, at the beginning of my career, I lectured on the expressive function of language, an absurd silence fell in the lecture-room and students seemed to be either embarrassed or emotional. The expressive function is not only the contents we share with other people about our deeper selves, but the contents we have access to when we introspect ourselves. Poetry is not only a tool for revealing thoughts about ourselves, but also a tool for gaining introspection, for finally having access to distant (but in fact very close) realities.

But the poetic function can also be aimed at outside objects and historical facts, in order to show the attitudes of the speaker (epic poems, for examples, are not solely about feelings and states of mind; they are mainly about memorable events, which are experienced or re-experienced by insisting on the universal ideals that generate them). The difference from prosaic language is that the speaker colours his texts and attitudes through words that have a high emotive impact on the hearer.[1] The relationship between the text and the fact it refers to can be very indirect and tenuous and, in some cases, ought to be recognized by the hearer (the case of allusions).[2] Reference may be replaced with allusion and predication may be altered in all sorts of ways, through metaphorical language. The general effect is that the hearer has to guess both what is being talked about and what is being said of what is being talked about. The degree of implicitness in poetic texts greatly exceeds the one we find in daily texts. The level of the implicit, in fact, is sometimes used to render a poem and its verses memorable. The effort involved in inference (especially of the conscious kind) must be rewarded with extra effects. However, I am not saying that daily texts do not require implicatures and explicatures (Carston, 2002); even legal texts that

[1] A referee writes: "Maybe from prosaic language, but hardly from artistic prose - prose is not necessarily prosaic. A prose translation of the Odyssey is hardly prosaic". I quite agree that it is always very difficult to distinguish between prose and poetry. Sometimes poetry can be prosaic, sometimes prose can be poetic.

[2] Discussion of fictional names would take us too far afield. But this would be clearly an important chapter both for theories of poetry and theories of philosophy of language. We can use an NP to refer to a fictional entity (e.g. the unicorn) which exists not in the actual world, but in the world created by fiction or poetry.

are devised to be as explicit and precise as possible rely on implicit propositions that are to be patiently recovered by readers, who have to eliminate ambiguities by choosing the most rational interpretative path (Capone, 2013a). Even if such efforts are made, legal texts retain an uneliminable interpretative ambiguity and sometimes a lot of ink has been spilled on how to interpret (or even rejuvenate) a certain law. But in poetry, the dimension of implicitness comes together with *deliberate* compression that renders the poem cryptic and open to subjective interpretations. A poem may reverberate in different ways in the souls of the readers and may evoke and be associated with different personal experiences. It is as if the readers, starting from their experience, provided an egotistical field with which the poem interacts. The function of compression is to lead to greater processing costs, which have to be matched by contextual effects. This creates a greater impact on readers, who are required to be more active and to participate in the creation of the text (a case of polyphony, the text being contributed by more than one voice). The extra effects involved may consist of consolidating the memory of the verses in question or in greater participation of the hearer in the construction work, as if he/she were a partner of the poet in the process of poetic creation. Whereas in daily discourse, the (public) intentions of the speaker are to be recovered and communication is really successful only when this happens, in poetry the speaker's and the reader's intentions are allowed to diverge even considerably. The text, following Umberto Eco, is considered 'open'. The text may be seen as an assembly of disparate voices, interpretations by readers counting as well, and adding something to the texture of the poem.[3]

So far, we have accepted that the focus of the poem is the message (and not only the form of the message), as a dyad of form and content, that is to say the way we relate form to content. This relationship can be improved through reflection, pondering, inventiveness and through deliberative figurative uses of language. The attention to form makes sure that the message is remembered, sometimes for decades ("The Infinite" by Leopardi, for example, which has exercised the memory of thousands of Italian students and which is, usually, remembered by heart with relatively small expenditure cost). Of course, rhythmic patterns also aid in the enterprise of learning long epic poems by heart, as such epic poems, especially at the time of Homer or of the anonymous author of Beowulf, only had an oral tradition, but they do so only through the interplay with figures of speech, images that had a high emotive impact on hearers.[4]

[3] Eco makes a distinction between closed and open texts (testi aperti e testi chiusi). But, as far as I am aware, no texts are really closed, and texts can be considered open in all cases, even if they can be open to a different degree. The poetic text seems to be certainly more open than daily texts, where we do not engage (normally) in deep and sometimes controversial analyses.

[4] An anonmous reviewer adds a comment that is of great importance, and I want to report it verbatim:

"Something has gong wrong. Can one really talk about 'learning by heart' before a written tradition which makes learning by heart possible? Platon got that right in Phaedros: writing makes blind rote learning possible and is thus detrimental to memory.

I do not think the bards learned the epics by heart. They learnt (from listening to other bards, I suppose) how to perform, i.e. re-create them".

I quite agree with the reviewer.

Going back to the idea that in poetry the focus is on the message and not on form only, this allows some symmetry to exist among all the functions of language. Take for example the referential function, which is contrasted with the poetic function. Different though it may be from the poetic function, it is a relationship between form and content. Such a relationship would be entirely missing in the case of poetry if we adopted, for example, the view by Todorov, according to which the poetic function only concerns form. And asymmetry would result. Why should some functions be about content while others not? Presumably the functions of language are categorized through the kind of content they are meant to convey.

Of course, the poetic function can be subordinated to other functions. I can use a rhyme and a certain rhythmic pattern in the course of a TV advertisement ("Con Nelsen piatti, i piatti, li vuole fare lui…" (with Nelsen Piatti, he wants to wash the dishes)), or I can use a poem for filibustering purposes in a parliamentary debate; I can use a poem as an example in a conference (a case of citation, in which brackets must be open so that a text is perceived as being contained in a different one); I can use poems for the purpose of teaching language to small children (learning by heart the days of the months of the year, for example). This does not mean, according to Jakobson, that the poetic text does not have hallmarks of its own, such as rhythm, rhymes, alliterations, assonances, parallels, contrasts, and figurative language.

According to Jakobson a poem is a generative structure, such that, given the introduction of a certain word, we are given expectations about what is to follow. This is due to the fact that the verse is based on equivalence relations: we have parallels in metre among verses of the same poem, patterns of assonance, patterns of alliteration, patterns of rhyme. Of course, there may be a certain degree of exaggeration in his claim that, given the introduction of a word, we know what is to follow (unless we take him as a forerunner of concordances made through electronic systems; see also Capone's 1998 considerations on 'Obviously', which is likely to select as a next sentence 'But….', in a concessive structure)). The syntagmatic and the paradigmatic planes intersect at every possible syntactic node and what is inserted may be determined by equivalence relations; yet, the insertion of words on the paradigmatic plane follows free choices (otherwise, everything would be determined from the beginning). But all this, literary critics know very well. What is less well known is Jakobson's view that, while in referential discourse, we are normally focused on the relationship between the word and the referent, in the case of poems we are more focused on the relationship between words and words. I am not alluding to the metalinguistic function, in the sense that a poem is (necessarily) about language, but a metalinguistic ability on the part of the speaker and of the hearer is certainly involved. We choose words, often, in order to avoid implicatures generated by similar words (synonyms). My cleaner who deliberately avoids the word 'scopare' ('sweep', which also has a sexual denotation in the Italian language and replaces it with the least ordinary 'spazzare' (sweep), clearly makes a stylistic choice which is sensitive to her metalinguistic ability to distinguish implicatures. Implicatures are often sensitive to metalinguistic abilities (see the use of scalar quantifiers in language)). The mysterious issue is how can the reader understand that a certain choice has been made, by avoiding an alternative choice. But, often, this metalinguistic ability is based on

past experiences. As Kecskes said in one of his Messina lectures, the word 'police' is often used in narratives to evoke trouble. It is the past uses of this word that create the association with this connotation. Thus, if one wishes to avoid such connotations, one must replace the word with, say, a word like 'The authorities'. This issue will be clearer, when we discuss the case of contextualism. The proximity of words may very well serve to delimit meanings further, to restrict what can be meant (or to broaden it). The very existence of figurative language, furthermore, ensures that a word will stand for other words. Take, for example, the Anglo-Saxon 'sea-swan' (an example of a 'kenning'), which stands for 'ship', according to Daiches (1960 vol. 1). This is clearly a figurative case where a level of metaphor is being used, this time, in a fairly restrictive way (in many other cases, the meanings of metaphors cannot be easily circumscribed). This may have become a dead metaphor but it started as a metaphor. Other examples in context could be discussed. A good example is 'scent of mock orange' (clearly not a metaphor that has sedimented in the *langue*), to be found in the poem "Mock orange" by Louise Glück, discussed later on. Metaphors are useful in establishing a visual plane in poetry, in shifts from the ideational to the visual dimension, a dimension which has a greater impact because it is more easily impressed. With the exception of conventional metaphors, new metaphors also propel forward the identification of the reader with the author, in so far as the reader too becomes the person who constructs meaning, even beyond the intentions of the author, provided that he has a basis to start from, usually his experience as a person who participates in history and daily events.

Emphasis on form (which is certainly characteristic of good poetry, as we have seen, given poets' lavish use of figurative language) may be considered by some an obstacle to the appreciation of the point that poetry is (in the best cases) characterized by universality. Emphasis on form, in fact, seems to involve attention to one's language (the poet's language) and can, therefore, be seen as conducive to particularity, rather than universality (as pointed out by a reviewer, who says that often knowledge of the language of the poem may be an obstacle to universal appreciation, given that in some cases translation is a very thorny, impossible or almost impossible exercise). However, if we reflect well on this issue, it is clear that form is, in general, translatable and that, if a good translation is available, then we should at least be able to appreciate the universality of the poem, the fact that the poem speaks to everyone and touches a chord in the heart of every reader. Consider, for example, Letter to the Mother, by Quasimodo. I merely draw attention to the translation (which I had to make myself, given that no translated text was available):

LETTER TO THE MOTHER
Sweetest of mothers,
now the mists are coming down.
The Naviglio hits the dams confusedly.
The trees are swollen with water,
they are burning with snow,
I am not sad in the North:
I am not at peace with myself,

but I do not expect anyone's forgiveness,
many owe me tears from man to man.
I know you are not well,
that you live like all poets' mothers,
poorly, and fair in your measure of love
for your children who live far away.
Today, it's me who writes to you.
"At last", you will say,
"a couple of words from that boy
who escaped at night with a short coat
and a few verses in his pocket.
Poor, so generous in his heart,
that they will kill him some day in some place".
Certainly, I remember,
it was from that grey station of slow trains
that carried almonds and oranges,
at the mouth of the Imera,
the river full of magpies, of salt and eucalypti.
But now I thank you,
this is what I really want,
for the irony you put on my lips,
gentle as yours,
of the smile which rescued me from tears and sorrows.
And it does not matter if now I have some tears for you,
for all those who like you are waiting
and they do not know for what.
Oh, gentle death, do not touch the clock in the kitchen,
ticking on the wall, all my childhood
has gone by on the enamel of its face,
on those painted flowers:
do not touch the hands,
the heart of the elderly.
But perhaps someone is replying?
Oh, death full of pity, death full of shamefulness.
Goodbye, dear, goodbye, my very sweet mother."
(translation by Alessandro Capone; revision by Martin McLaughlin, published in RASK 54 AUTUMN 2021 81)

It is clear that this is not only a poem about Quasimodo's mother, but about all mothers, or at least those mothers who live far from their children and gradually become old and decrepit, whose skin (on the hands) is ruined by the passing of time. The poet even explicitly addresses the issue of universality ("for all those who like

you are waiting"). The universality of the poem can be perceived even through the translation, provided that it is done sufficiently well. We may ask ourselves how do the universality and the language-specific connect here? Take for instance the verses

> The trees are swollen with water, they are burning with snow.

These immediately precede "I am not sad in the North". So, it is possible to link the pathetic fallacy "The trees….are burning with snow" with this state of isolation deriving from the fact that he has to live far away from his family. This may be a universal theme, the person who lives away from his dear ones, but it is rendered through language-specific images, which, in turn, being translatable, communicate the same rhetorical figure. It may be true to say that rhetorical figures are usually preserved through translation (and if they are not, then that is not a good translation). Consider again "The trees are burning with snow". This may be a mixture of two rhetorical figures, pathetic fallacy and oxymore, given that the verb and the adjective seem to be contradictory. This is certainly an unusual combination of words. You never find in concrete linguistic acts the sentence "The trees are burning with snow", because it does not appear to be a logical one. However, it clearly reveals the state of mind of the poet, who is bothered by the presence of snow in the North and whose soul is burning because he wishes he could be in his home town. Clearly, this stylistic choice is something that can be done because the language allows it (and it can be accomplished only through a specific language that gives the poet particular resources), but it is something that can be translated and, through translation, it can be appreciated as a universal theme. (Of course, it may be true that in some cases it is very, very difficult, impossible or almost impossible to translate poems). The issue of translation and of the culture that determines the translation may be a potential obstacle to the idea that poetry is universal. If I had a language, which, for some mysterious reason, nobody else has, I would be surely able to write a poem and to enjoy it. The issue of universality, however, could never arise, as nobody is able to understand that poem. The issue of universality does not consist of the claim that all poems present universal experiences, but that some poems do and, accordingly, become great (or of great value). If some verses do not have the potential for offering a universal appeal, that is something to be accepted. So the claim of the alleged universality of poetry has to be qualified further.

3 On Prose and Poetry

As Genette (1995, 240-41) says, the prosaic utterance aims at 'mimetic expressiveness', while the poetic utterance, by contrast, is characterized by higher autonomy, less related to its content and, therefore, "less transparent and more perceptible as an object". Needless to say, then, that for authors like Jakobson, "poetic self-referentiality therefore further supports the important difference between poetic

language and prosaic language use: poetry's independence of practical language function" (Kraxenberger, 2014, 12), even if at times the poetic function is subordinated to other language functions.

One of the hallmarks of poetic discourse is that, like all fictional discourse, it bears no guarantee that reference should be interpreted (fixed) according to the rules of ordinary discourse. In ordinary discourse, the name 'John' is used only if both the speaker and the hearer can fix the reference of the name by adopting a rule of use according to which in a certain context C, the name 'X' is used (should be used) in order to refer to X. In other words, the speaker and the hearer or hearers have heard the name used in order to refer to x in the past and, even if they did not witness the event of giving the name 'X' to X, they assume that through a referential chain, language users show deference to such an initial use by assuming that it took place (McDowell, 1998). Every language user who used the name 'X' to refer to X shows deference to uses by other speakers that are causally linked, through a chain of other users, to the original event in which participants having the appropriate status and appropriate conditions established a rule of use according to which the name 'X' is associated with X. These are standard conditions for uses of names within circles of friends and relatives (if you hear 'John' you will have access to the most salient individual whose name is John; I agree with a referee that how this procedure works is not trivial, but I assume that some mechanism must be available, although we may occasionally be mistaken as to the intended referent). But fictional names and uses of names in poems are beyond such rules. First of all, the presuppositions for the use of proper names need not be satisfied, since the hearer in hearing the name 'X' need not know the referent that is associated with 'X'. Speaker's meaning, in other words, becomes sufficiently detached from hearer's or reader's meaning. The name works more or less like a variable, to which the reader attaches a discourse referent (not really a referent from reality) in a discourse representation. The discourse representation can be completely mental, that is, separated from situations in the actual world. The referents in it are referents in possible worlds, worlds that are structured like the real one but diverge from it in some respects. This is why the hearer/reader only needs to know that, when she hears/reads the name 'X', there is an X the speaker is referring to, but does not know which X (Of course, I am aware there are mixed cases, as made clear in Capone (2020a, 2020b, 2020c)).[5] Of course, after reading a poem, literary

[5] A referee writes:

> "If 'X' refers to a fictitious person (like 'Marie A.' in Brecht's «Erinnerung an die Marie A»), the reader only is supposed to believe that there is such a person and not to «know» who this person is. (The help- and hopeless attempts of literary historians to identify the «real» Marie A. show that this is totally irrelevant for the text itself). But here we do not talk about everyday vs. poetic language but about descriptive vs. fictional language use - which is not the same".

What the referee says makes sense. But the situation is a bit more complicated.

We can have uses of empty names in grammatical (or ungrammatical) sentences (or examples a teacher uses to illustrate a rule, a generalization or whatever). We can have uses of empty names in fiction (e.g. novels). We have uses of non-empty names in fiction, where a real character is used, but the author invents parts of the facts of his life. We have non-empty names and empty names in

critics may be busy establishing referents for such uses and the informed hearer (or audience) may become aware that 'X' was used to refer to X, knowing which referent was associated with 'X'. However, in many cases a name may be used in a fictional way, not to refer to anybody in particular, but to refer a particular poetic creation. This is more or less what happens in the long poem by Leopardi entitled "A Silvia". 'Silvia' actually refers to Teresa, but even Teresa need not constitute the referent of the name, since Teresa is both described and transfigured. There is in the idea associated with this name a mixture of qualities that are real and the result of invention. Soon the event of her death is transformed into a general reason for complaining about destiny (and about Nature's cruelty). The name 'Silvia' is little more than a point of departure for the poet's speculations about life, the dreams of the poet and of Silvia, the impossibility of reaching a telos, and about the inimical character of Nature. Silvia is a perfectly natural fictional name, something that corresponds to his poetic creation, rather than to a referent in an actual historical situation.

In poems, even innocent words like 'I' and 'You' need different rules for interpretation. 'You' need not refer to the addressee of the poem, but may refer to a person with whom the poet has an imaginary, implicit dialogue (thus, 'you' may be used to designate a character of the poem). The reader of the poem is sometimes in the position of someone who is witnessing a conversation and learns all there is to learn about the speakers through such a conversation. (More or less what is described by Goffman (1980) in his analysis of radio talk, with the difference that the people addressed by the speaker in radio talk are real, while the ratified addressee of a poem may not be alive at all or real; and sometimes it also happens that the addressee shifts continuously between the people present at the talk and those who listen through the radio.) The speaker in the poem (the lyrical 'I') need not coincide with the person of the poet. Some imaginary qualities may be assigned to her or him as well. As a person who transmits some wisdom to the world, the 'I' is a fictional character that acquires some of the features of universality which in general make a poem great (someone who is capable of transcending the facts of his existence to communicate a message of some importance to the world, not only facts about himself/herself).

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both fiction or poetry. In poetry (in poetic texts) we can have names referring to real persons, who are nevertheless used to epitomize qualities or to exemplify universal dispositions of the human soul. Take 'Silvia' in the poem "A Silvia" by Leopardi. This is an invented name referring to a real person, transformed into an ideal person (that epitomizes certain qualities) by the author. It is not clear that one can speak of uses of names in fiction or in poetry too schematically. But is clear that in certain poems by Leopardi (in particular "A Silvia" and "Le ricordanze"), the use of proper names is problematic in a way that is not in prose or in fiction. The name 'Silvia' is used not so much to describe another person, but to express the feelings, the regrets, the animosity of the author against Nature. So, the use of the third person in poetry is often a vehicle for transmission of personal experiences and feelings by the author. The third person is a kind of projection of the first person. (The two female figures in "A Silvia" and "Le ricordanze", except for their names, are very similar.) The lyrical I is, after all, always present in poems, whereas 'I' is often (but not always) absent in narratives (e.g. the omniscient narrator), and, thus, it is natural that there should be an indirect relationship between the names used (and their referents) and the 'I' of the poem, which is somehow related to the poet. The 'I' of the poem is the point of view from which the facts are seen, including the referents of NPs, which are molecular components of the facts (Asher 2000).

Thus, readers, in many cases, are encouraged to forget that the poem originated from a certain author (Could this be the reason why Keats had the epigraph

'Here Lies One Whose Name was writ in Water'

inscribed on his grave?).

The case of 'you' is more complicated. This deictic element behaves clearly different from the way it behaves in ordinary conversation, where the referent is determined by a rule of use (the character, in Kaplan's terms). The rule normally works in a context in which the speaker, speaking to the addressee, selects him or her as the referent he is talking about in subsequent discourse. However, the addressee in ordinary conversation is *in presentia* (and usually only one, unless plural), whereas in the communication established by a poem the addressee can be displaced in several places (and even times). Thus, it is not impossible for the speaker to address several people through different uses of 'you', provided that each time it is clear somehow that he does not address the person previously discussed. This possibility can add significant mystery to the communication process and can complicate it further.

Although the poet may be male, he may represent the 'I' of the poem as 'female'. In other words, the 'I' refers to some fictional person (morphology in languages like Italian may be an indication of this intended transformation whose purpose is to render the 'I' more fictional than it would otherwise be). On the one hand, we may say that the deictic use of pronominals in the context of a poem cannot completely parallel the use of pronominals in ordinary discourse, for one thing, because the poem is normally removed from a situation of discourse which is presupposed by both the speaker and the hearer (Waugh, 1980). They do not share a space or a time, and thus there is no point in demonstrating a certain object by the use of a demonstrative like 'That man' (here actually a complex demonstrative use). On the other hand, the poet can make an effort to construct a shared context, in which case uses of demonstratives can be legitimized. The referents, however, are only evoked through such demonstrative uses, they are not really referred to. In some cases, however, the poet can refer to real objects, which are well-known, (e.g. The Tate Gallery), and, thus, the deictic use of a pronominal is feasible.

There is one type of ordinary discourse that resembles the poetic one. When a teacher writes a sentence on the blackboard with the purpose of illustrating a grammatical rule, the hearers involved (the participants) know well that they should not look for referents in seeing names used under these circumstances (with the obvious exception of proper names of historical significance). 'Mary' in such contexts becomes inert, in that it does not necessarily trigger a search for the referent, because the students know well that the teacher did not have a referent in mind (Capone, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). These are cases of sentences that do not raise to the status of assertions, in that it is not reasonable to predicate of them truth or falsity. The illocutionary act is to explain a grammatical rule by demonstrating the way the rule produces sentences/examples. This is a case in which the illocutionary point is not associated with the use of a sentence, but with the use of a number of sentences. It is a language game, if we want to use terminology by Wittgenstein. In such a language game, the rules for names may be different from those of ordinary discourse. Sometimes the names are merely invented, but such uses have to coexist with uses of

names that follow the normal use. Faced with a sentence like "Mary likes Aristotle", 'Mary' need not trigger a search for the referent, while 'Aristotle' does and still refers to the well-known Greek philosopher (if sufficient clues are available to distinguish the philosopher from, e.g. Onassis). A mixed language game may be seen in poems as well. Some referents are imaginary, while others are real enough.

Not only do grammatical examples offer opportunities for escaping the rules of reference assignment; logicians and philosophers are used to inventing stories about hypothetical people. They use names, but they do not actually expect their readers to identify the people associated with those names, because there are none. These are completely invented, objects/individuals in fictional possible worlds and, if some names of historical significance appear in such contexts, it is not guaranteed that they should connect with their historical referents. They may, in fact, be partly invented fictional creatures.

I raised the issue whether verses are a form of assertion. In the case of the linguistic examples on the blackboard, the sentences never surge to the status of assertion, presumably because the names do not trigger a search for the referent and even if they did, they would not correspond to the illocutionary force of assertion, being intended for something else. Certainly the speakers do not expect such sentences/examples to be evaluated as being true or false, as being parts of situations in the actual world. They are only linguistic examples, used to illustrate a certain point of grammar. But what about sentences in poems, that is, verses? Are they assertions or not? A poem may be based on a number of utterances, each of them corresponding to a possibly different illocutionary force. However, as a whole the poem does not present factual information, but may be expressive of some interior feelings or reactions to the world. It expresses possible worlds, rather than actual ones, and if it refers to actual ones, this may happen indirectly. Names as used in poems need not link to real referents. That may very well depend on how much information we have. Certain names may work like proper names, others do not. Certain verses are factual, others are not. In a poem like "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", by Thomas Gray, some verses refer to real historical facts and battles, transfigured though they are, given that the point of the poem is to draw a moral lesson from those facts.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.
Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,
Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

A poem is not a piece of discourse where we can use fixed rules for its interpretation, but, stanza by stanza, we know where we are and how to make sense of the verses. A poem, more than any other text, requires a dynamic approach to interpretation, where revisions of the context and of the possible interpretations depending on it are continuously called for. Contextual clues come to our aid in understanding whether a verse is factual and can amount to an assertion. What is interesting about the verses above is that clues tell us when we are dealing with the assertoric function, but other clues also tell us how to modulate the assertion in an ironic way ('Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood'). The ironic meaning, in this case, is certainly an accusation, requiring vast slices of historical knowledge, as well as a moral orientation. By this ironic intended meaning, the author reveals himself as belonging to a portion of humanity that hates despots and disapproves of their conduct.

4 Contextualized Language Uses

We all recognize that human languages require several levels of contextualism for the interpretation of their uses (as we have seen in the case above of the Elegy by Gray). Pronominals normally require to be contextualized, for their interpretation, either through anaphora (grammatical and textual anaphora) or through some demonstrative gestures that point to the referent. Conversational implicatures, furthermore, can be heavily contextualized, as they require a certain degree of knowledge of the context so that we can have access to speakers' intentions. However, there is the theoretical possibility that we can use language explicitly in order to project unequivocal intentions (if I were asked for an example, I would not hesitate to give a case of arithmetic: 2 and 2 are four). Admittedly these cases, in ordinary language, are rare, but they exist. Normally, contextualization allows us to save time (e.g. Horn has spoken of the speaker's economy (see Horn, 2019)), to be indirect in our requests and statements (thus, escaping responsibility), allows us to rescue infelicitous or extravagant uses (explicatures), allows us to get rid of messages that seem to be blatantly false or logically absurd (explicatures), allows us to settle on the intentions of the law-makers in interpreting the law (explicatures), given that the law has to reach certain standards of rationality, etc. (see Capone, 2006, 2009). The case of poetry is quite paradoxical. On the one hand, we need heavy doses of contextualism (recourse to biographical facts, recourse to intertextual considerations, recourse to cultural acts, including the very language of the poem) to make sense of verses that otherwise would be cryptic, too compressed, expressed through sloppy syntax; on the other hand, poetry aims at universality. Universality must be seen as the poem's ability to communicate an intersubjective experience that matters to most and is, usually, incommunicable or not easily communicated; furthermore, this ability must rest on unusually contrived artistic competence that makes use of the best possible expressive means. Universality is based on a dyad of content and form. The beauty of a poetic verse is that it can strike a chord in the hearts of people belonging to all cultures. Poetry, to some extent, escapes the boundaries of cultures (as a reviewer notes, the very language

of the poem is a boundary that is difficult to cross). Why are Montale or Coleridge great? They are great because they can address universal themes and express them through verses that are memorable and that strike the hearts of the readers. It appears that the most beautiful and memorable verses are those that transcend cultures.

Which are the elements that require heavy contextualization in a poem? Certainly metaphors, especially the non-standardized ones (those metaphoric uses that have not accrued to the langue). As an example of non-standardized metaphor, I usually provide students with the following example:

(1) Mary is the oceanic wave that expands and expands and caresses all of us with her velvet voice.

Of course, here we have several levels of metaphoric meanings as some of these levels are embedded in a level further up on the plane of interpretation. When we have complex metaphors like these, we have to start interpretation work within the lower levels and then reach the superior level or levels (a kind of compositionality of explicature reconstruction). The general point I would like to make is that metaphors like these have no guarantee that they will be interpreted in standard ways; each of the readers has to bring his personal story in the interpretation of these multiple metaphors. The resulting interpretations are always different—but of course, they can be compared and, at the end, we may opt for a synthesis of all these interpretations available. Metaphors always require what Kecskes (2013a, 2013b) calls the *egocentric* dimension of interpretation. How can the egocentric dimension of interpretation be reconciled with the idea that a poem communicates an intersubjective experience? Should we consider a poem a message that is then divided into a variety of messages, each for each reader who is expected to process it? Can there be any unity in such a variety of final messages? We should probably rest content that the meaning of a poem is what guides or constrains interpretations, rather than fully determining them. The idea is that meaning constrains what can be done with the poem and that pragmatics is there to modulate meaning and to further assist the interpretation process by requiring that it be rational, coherent, that it takes into account all contextual elements and that it be a process aimed at the best inference. This is why it makes sense to compare interpretations of a poem by different literary scholars.

A poem can be contextualized by certain (cultural) presuppositions. It is my firm persuasion that the poem Mock Orange by Nobel Prize Louise Glück cannot be understood unless one makes reference to cultural presuppositions. However, given that a culture is always a coalescence of various subcultures, it may be difficult to understand which one is selected. We probably have to choose the cultural expectations that promote the most reasonable understanding of the poem.

Mock Orange

BY LOUISE GLÜCK

It is not the moon, I tell you.

It is these flowers

lighting the yard.

I hate them.

I hate them as I hate sex,
the man's mouth
sealing my mouth, the man's
paralyzing body—
and the cry that always escapes,
the low, humiliating
premise of union—
In my mind tonight
I hear the question and pursuing answer
fused in one sound
that mounts and mounts and then
is split into the old selves,
the tired antagonisms. Do you see?
We were made fools of.
And the scent of mock orange
drifts through the window.
How can I rest?
How can I be content
when there is still
that odour in the world?

The poet is reacting to a culture in which women are seen as objects, and sex is seen as the primary purpose of a relationship between a man and a woman. This looks to her like a lie; presumably love is meaningless if devoid of a spiritual dimension (and if based only on a material dimension). The metaphor she uses for this lie is mock orange (flowers). The predominant cultural values are seen as an illusion. Now, the main question is: how do these cultural presuppositions get selected. It is an inferential mechanism that is responsible for selection. We are clearly not dealing with semantic phenomena, but with pragmatic phenomena. I agree to some extent with Louise Cummings that pragmatic inference is a holistic phenomenon. Here we clearly see certain parts as a critique, and we have to choose a reasonable object to which the critique is directed. These considerations support Capone's view that there is a class of pragmatic conversational presuppositions (Capone, 2017 a,b).

5 Literary Citations

Literary citations create a level of intertextuality. More than one voice merges in making text and in spreading a message. The use of multiple voices, according to me, may help creating a dimension of *universality*, as one is given the impression that it is not the voice of the author but that of humanity that speaks (the presence of different important authors may be symbolically representative of humanity as a

whole); and the readers are asked to decipher the text intended as a stratification (or sedimentation) of voices, as an accumulation of messages relating to the same matter each expressing a point of view, an orientation, some values, etc. This accumulated layer of texts may have a certain structure in the final poem: A poet that replies to another poet, ironically or not ironically, one author that takes up an idea and expands it, a poet that rejects a certain idea, or a poet that comments on a certain idea by another poet. A citation, furthermore, has potentially the ability to evoke the poem cited as a context in which the final poem can be interpreted, the original poem providing contextual clues or missing elements in the interpretation of the final poem.

The fact that great poets converge on a certain view or on the importance of a certain issue is taken as an expression of a universal interest in the issue of the poem. Readers (at least the most active ones) are more or less in the role of archaeologists, who intend to dig into the text and see how the text lives in different ages, comparing the context of events occurring now and the context of past events (or the contexts of the past). This interplay of contexts, texts and sedimentations of interpretations creates an effect of multiple comments. The fact that multiple authors are involved in the expression of a certain statement or generalization or awareness shows, at least, that a certain issue has been an issue for a multitude of authors, and not only for the author of the poem. The message of the poem, this way, becomes an intersubjective experience. At least the poet transcends the boundaries of his individuality by following a collective, rather than an individual path. The author shows that he/she is not the only one who has that view or perspective. Authority to that view or perspective is given by the authoritativeness of the sources of information. Each text and context comments on the other texts and takes us one stage further in the understanding of the poem. Quotation marks are normally missing in poems, as they do in oral conversations. They have to be reconstructed and the best way to do so is to start from background knowledge (pragmatics plays a pervasive role in this, as proposed by Capone, 2013b). If we know that a text belongs to a prior poem, then we are entitled to add inverted commas and obtain the effect of quotation. This procedure, as can be easily seen, is thoroughly pragmatic. Speaker's intentions prevail and readers have to reconstruct them with the best tools they have available—fragments of memories of past poems. Of course, it remains to be said that such techniques presuppose different effects on readers, as readers range from those who can easily have mnemonic access to the texts cited (and compare them with the citing texts), to those who are not experts on poetry and fail to see the citations and to make comparisons. The comparison usually recognizes the meaning of the cited text in the context of the poem (as well as the cultural and historical context). Consider the following quotation from Alda Merini:

> Ho conosciuto Gerico,/ho avuto anch'io la mia Palestina,/ le mura del manicomio/
> erano le mura di Gerico/ e una pozza di acqua infettata/ci ha battezzati tutti.
> I have known Jericho,/I have had my Palestine,/The walls of the madhouse,/
> they were Jericho's walls/and a pool of infected water/baptized us all.

This has clearly been cited by Capone's poem "La fine del peccato".

E con l'acqua di pozzanghere infette
ci lavammo di fretta le mani,
che assai erano sporche
tra la polvere e le insopportabili mosche,
ti diedi un battesimo d'acquasanta
And with the water of infected pools
we washed our hands in a hurry,
which were very dirty,
between the dust and the unbearable flies,
I gave you a baptism of holy water.
(Capone, A. from "Quando le stelle si staccano dal cielo", 2020, La fine del Peccato).

The poem by Capone clearly quotes the poem by Alda Merini. But the quotation is not literal. In fact, it is split into two verses. The verse quoted is the following, but it was split into two halves by Capone:

e una pozza di acqua infettata
ci ha battezzati tutti.[6]

The issue of quotation takes us to the issue of polyphony. While linguists usually work with a notion of intention (or intentions) which is linked to the individual, since Vološinov (1986, originally published 1929), certain linguists have been busy showing that the text has a polyphonic structure and that speakers are not solely responsible for it. Hearers take responsibility as well, as they can correct, modify, query and object. Quotations and indirect reports (see Capone, 2016, 2020b) may have appeared to some to be the best way to prove that this polyphony issue exists. Of course, the text (especially the poetic one) has to be seen as a kind of sedimentary rock, to which different voices have contributed in a harmonious or at least structured way. Each voice lives independently of one another. Yet, allusions to previous texts may provide a context of interpretation (A road takes you to another road). The voice of the author is one among many and encapsulates other voices explicitly and implicitly. Some poets take pleasure in quoting without using quotation marks, confident that readers will not come to the conclusion that they appropriated other poets' verses, but that they will play the same game of polyphony. Sometimes they quote with quotation marks, without however citing the quoted poet, being sure that the readers will identify them. It rarely happens that poets quote explicitly by attributing verses to others.

The poetic text, however, certainly includes the voices of the hearers/readers who fill the lacunae or spaces voluntarily left by the authors when using cryptic language and an exaggerated degree of compression. In this sense, a poem is an *open text*, following Umberto Eco.

[6] The poem by Alda Merini can clearly be interpreted by reference to her personal experiences, including her stay in a psychiatric hospital. The poem by Capone is about the explicit search for a corner in Paradise.

6 Poetry and Communication

It is one of the misconceptions about poetry that it has no place in ordinary communication (although Jakobson was aware that the poetic function could be subordinated to other functions). In fact, sometimes it happens that we see an author recite his poems in public (and in such cases, the context of the potential hearers can play a role in shaping interpretation). However, very often we are under the wrong impression that poetic texts are to be studied or read silently, or at most they are made to be recited aloud among circles of people who are devoted to poetry or to be the objects of conferences, where they are cited and then dissected, so to say. At school, poetic texts are studied with the guidance of teachers, who are themselves guided by what literary critics have said about them. "Momigliano says....", "Pagliaro says", "Giacalone says", the teacher used to say, after learning by heart what these scholars said. This method of studying poems, although it shows deference to tradition and to what knowledgeable people have said about poetic texts, leaves little space for critical discussion and personal analysis. Furthermore, it makes the texts appear as sacred entities, which ordinary readers cannot unravel via personal reactions. But this attitude to literary texts has been put in question. After all, following Umberto Eco, poetic texts should be considered *open* and disparate readers ought to be able to find different things in them, as they bring their egocentric experience to bear on the texts (see Kecskes, 2013a, 2013b on egocentrism and interpretation). In reading a poem, there is always a tension between the authorial intentions and what readers are able to see in it, given their personal experience. Personal experience surely is the first guidance to reading a poem. This is not to say that, when one proceeds towards a more complete interpretation, one goes beyond individual experience.

Communication plays an important role in poetry. I want to set aside the view that poems are there to be read aloud among groups of readers, whether class-mates or readers who meet on a more voluntary basis. As I have said repeatedly, the poetic function may be subordinated to selling goods at the marketplace (see Capone, 2018) or to other purposes. In Sicily, especially in the past, vendors used to shout and invented (on the spot or by plundering common resources) stories to persuade their customers to buy their products. The poetic function (in particular, the use of rhythm, rhymes, alliteration, metaphors, hyperbolic language, inversion, etc.) in these cases is not autonomous, but has to be seen in its auxiliary function: vendors who try to gather huge crowds of customers who listen to what they have to say and can be persuaded to buy goods. (This is not to say that clients could not participate in these activities just to be gratified by the artistic and histrionic qualities of the vendors.) We have many of the formal markers of poetry: rhythm, rhymes, inversion, parallelism, contrast, metaphors, etc. We may also have certain original departures from ordinary poetry, as when one vendor replies to what another vendor says, by inventing a rhyme. These rudimentary poets have learned to make poetry through exposure to experience, certainly not through books or school training. They are, in a sense, 'natural poets'. This kind of language promotes inventiveness, as contrasted with the acquiescence by ordinary speakers to rules of use (leaving aside great authors like Dante, who

made the most of the pragmatic tools that could make their language more flexible and richer).[7] In poetic texts, we are certainly not the slaves of conventions and rules of use. Poets and their analogues in more practical areas of discourse want to deliver products that are new, not only in so far as they re-combine ordinary language uses, but also in so far as they create objects that did not exist previously. Creativity is most easily seen in the language of the marketplace, given that these forms of art did not start from codified rules (printed in manuals) and also, given that these natural poets had to adapt poetry to the practical exigencies of daily life and their work. The poet/vendor who says to the clients to look for their husbands who are betraying them with a lover under the blankets, clothes, dresses that rest on the stalls is clearly engaged in an act of creativity, as he is inventing something humorous that attracts attention and he is also predisposing an action that conforms to the conative function without intending to impose anything on the clients. This creativity represents the best compromise between intending to make people do things and wanting to avoid the awareness of an obligation to do things, as intended by the speaker. The artistic quality of this action rests on inventiveness, on parallel, on the metaphoric/symbolic exploitation of language (a woman who saves money and is attentive to the family financial resources proves to be able to keep her husband to herself).

Another case, where the poetic text can be seen as part of a communicative event is within the context of courting. Lovers may well write poems and give them to each other as a sign of their love. Of course, they take the opportunity to talk about what is of great importance to them; they express their feelings and emotions. The emotive function is uppermost in such exchanges of poems. Unlike the poetic texts of the marketplace, where the focus was on attracting people, advertising and persuading people to buy goods (conative function), here the focus is on the self and on the other. The participants are mostly busy talking about their own emotions and the other as well is transfigured through emotions, rather than being merely described. Consider for example the following fragment from a poem taken from "Quando le stelle si staccano dal cielo", written by Alessandro Capone.

E tu che ora mi guardi
rannicchiata sul mio divano,
in questo angolo di mondo che ormai è tuo,
con aria interrogativa,
per capire cosa ci riserva il futuro,
sappi che anche io sono stato intrappolato
nei tuoi occhi troppo chiari, troppo azzurri,
ove saltavano i pesci
e giocavano i delfini
e la vita sembrava scivolare
verso una meta sconosciuta.
And you who are now watching me,

[7] This may deserve a deeper discussion, as literate society is under greater pressure to accept the normativity of grammar, given the role that school and education plays in it.

lying crouched on my sofa,
in this corner of the world which is now yours
with an interrogative expression,
to understand what the future has in store for us,
you should know that I too was entrapped
in your eyes, which are too clear, too azure
where the fish used to jump
and the dolphins played
and life seemed to slide
towards an unknown destiny.

The poet here has two intentions: Talking with his lover and talking with his readers. The readers are in the position of over-hearers. The other-than-self is obviously transfigured. She is not described in realistic ways, but in ways that, though personal and emotive, give us a hint as to her real way of behaving. We may very well use the term *hyper-realistic* to allude to the fact that though the person is described in a subjective way and through a level of figurative meaning, the ultimate effect is that of offering readers a more faithful description of reality than the one we would otherwise obtain through ordinary prose.

Similar effects can be seen in the graffiti on the palaces' walls in Italy, where a lover can express his love for a girl by writing verses. Graffiti would presumably require an essay, but we cannot get into this issue. Songs (seen as texts) can also be seen as popular forms of poetry, but in one case a singer/author (Bob Dylan) reached the glory of the Nobel prize. Songs (seen as literary texts) would also deserve another essay, as they can be recycled to express what a lover feels for a girl or boy, without explicitly saying that. This form of indirect communication should not be ignored. In this way, a lover can tell me that she loves me without directly saying that. It is enough to dedicate a song to me. And the text of the poem may say what the lover is not able to say, without her actually saying it. Suppose you have been dedicated a poem/song like the following "Nel mondo dei sogni" by Marco Masini. You would certainly start asking what purpose this dedication served, if any, and then at one point you may find resemblances between the lyrical 'I' and the person who dedicated you the song/poem. And at a later point you will find messages that are intended for you: apologies, expressives, declarations of love, etc.

7 Compression and Pragmatics

Most of our readers would agree that the poetic text is one where the poet tries to say things with maximal economy. A poetic text, especially during the hermetic period in Italy, reached an unprecedented level of compression. Consider the following poem, entitled "Soldati" by Ungaretti:

Soldati (Soldiers)

Si sta come d'autunno/ sugli alberi/ le foglie.
(One stays like leaves/on the trees/in Autumn).

The experience of World War I is rendered through the metaphor of the Autumn leaves, which are about to drop by thousands and, at the same time, form a carpet on which we tread when we walk producing disturbing noises. The poem is extremely compressed, but we can reach its ultimate meaning through *decompression*, by using pragmatic means. Metaphors are the keys to interpretation, but this metaphoric level can only be triggered once certain clues are activated. In fact, if we were to omit the title "Soldiers", we would get stuck in choosing an interpretation based on the right metaphoric meaning. The poem might well acquire, this way, a more generic meaning, being a metaphor for the passing of time. Instead, in this poem, the impersonal use of the verb 'si sta' (one stays) seems to point to a physical state, as well as to a psychological one: one has the feeling of being in a very provisional state. The poem is also enriched by an implicit contrast. Whereas the leaves fall due to a natural course of events, the soldiers fall from the branches of the trees because of an unnatural cause. Another implicit contrast is that, while the leaves are one with the branch on which they sit, the soldiers can at most stay on the branch, they are not part of it, and, thus, are likely to fall off. Expanding a poem is a question of patience and time, as readers need to contextualize it, need to choose those words that could work as intended clues to determine and select interpretation (e.g. the title "Soldiers"), and they are like archaeologists who need to dig deeper and deeper: the more context they bring to the interpretation of the poem, the richer its interpretation becomes. They need not only confine themselves to the boundaries of this single poem, but they must compare it with all other poems that show a connection with it, either because we know that the author read them or because of the presence of literary citations.

That a poem is to be considered an open text, in the sense of Eco, is shown by the fact that a reviewer arrived at a different possible interpretation of the poem, capitalizing on the fact that Ungaretti was considered to be sympathetic to Fascism and inserted the poem in a collection entitled "Allegria di Naufragi". The reviewer considers the possibility of soldiers having a sort of mutual sympathy, deriving from being involved in a common condition. The reviewer even points to the possible interpretation that old leaves will be replaced by new ones (in a perpetuation of the war). I agree, in general, that a poem is an open text, as has been pointed out various times, but I should say that the interpretation of the reviewer is rather extreme. He even doubts that "Soldati" is an anti-war poem, given Ungaretti's association with futurism and irredentism. Well, let me say that the discussion is open and that the context in which the poem was written may play an important role in interpretation.

8 Poems as Pragmemes

In this section, I capitalize on some notions expressed in Capone (2021), where I link the discussion of the poetic function of language to the discussion of pragmemes, a pragmatic notion introduced by Mey (2001) and then revisited by Capone (2005) and various authors who contributed to Allan, Capone and Kecskes, ed. 2017. The idea by Capone is that a poem is a pragmeme, something that resembles Wittgenstein's notion of language games, in that it is circumscribed, a language activity that is integrated in the other language activities but has formal boundaries. Understanding this language game requires some understanding of the context where it is situated (thus, it is a situated language use in the sense of Mey 2001). Since we were children, when asked by a teacher to learn and then recite a poem by heart, we had a precise feeling of engaging in a separate activity, which could be integrated to some extent in overall activities, such as the lesson. However, while the teacher was, overall, responsible for the lesson, the child was perceived to be responsible for learning the poem by heart and reciting it to the audience of the class. A proper act of performing (a performance) was what was being done. However related to the class activities, the performance "reciting a poem" was a different activity. Goffman's category of footing (Goffman 1980) comes to our aid. The child was clearly not the author of the message and was not the principal (the person responsible for the words and the thoughts expressed). The audience did not expect the child to communicate directly to them, although it could be accepted that the child was indirectly communicating something valuable to them. The boundaries between the different activities were also evident enough, and some prefatory brackets could also be used to introduce the poem and the actor. The literary critic who discusses poetry (or a poem) may do so in a different context. He is not reciting, but quoting, and he is not only quoting, but he or she is also commenting on the poem, its cultural context, the poet's biography as a natural context for interpretation, literary genres, etc. The teacher who reads a poem to his class is not necessarily reciting (or engaging in a performance); he is not necessarily quoting, but he is dissecting a poem, after reading it. He shows the poem as a prerequisite to literary dissection. The lover who writes a poem on the wall of a building (graffiti) may be the author and principal of his poem, although only those who witness the event know who the author and the principal are, while the remainder of the readers do not even know which girl is being addressed, why and by whom. We know that there is an author and a principal, who lives nearby, but we need not know who. This looks like the situation of universal poetry—poetry that escapes the boundaries of time, place and purpose. Perhaps after some years, the author may forget that he authored this poem on the wall and starts interpreting it like any other reader, without being able to bring in sufficient context to see what is contingent (especially the situation that gave rise to it). While a pragmeme (Mey 2001; Capone, 2005; Allan, Capone, Kecskes 2017) is a situated language use, a poem often (though not always) looks like a message in a bottle. We open the bottle and start interpreting it, as we can. There may even seem to be a discrepancy between the presumed universality of good poetry and the fact that the pragmeme 'poem' is

situated in a certain culture (and language, as a referee notably said). The situation which initially situated it has been lost, but now the message is situated in the context of the readers. Universal poetry is the kind of poetry which still makes sense when detached from the situation in which it was originated and still is a pragmeme in so far as the readers try to reconstruct the speaker's intentions, albeit not on the basis of the original context, but on the basis of what they know about their world in general. It is as if the author made an effort to insulate the poem from its own context, knowing that in years to come, this could never be reconstructed, and imagining what direction the interpretation could take without access to that context. This is not imagining what the future context can be like, given that the future is unpredictable and history could take many directions; this is like imagining what the poem would be like without having any context in mind.

Connection with the theory of pragmemes, anyway, has revealed that a number of language activities, for example selling goods at the marketplace, exploit the poetic function of language. Vendors may never reach the kind of universality obtained by Leopardi or Thomas Gray's poems, but their activities are sensitive to poetic techniques, like repetition, rhythm, rhymes, figurative language and frequent use of metaphors, to sum up considerations to be found in Capone (2018, 89–104).

9 On the Universality of Poetry

It can be reasonably said that the best poems have a universal appeal (this is well known since Aristotle's Poetics (see also Heath, 1991)). Surely, everyone agrees that when we read Dante, Leopardi, Carducci, Keats, Coleridge, Montale, etc. we go through experiences that are very touching and memorable. Such poems and verses exercise a lot of influence on us readers, they get stuck in our memories, and those words have greater chances to survive than their competitors. Poets are perhaps the only people who can have a powerful influence on language and its (democratic) propagation (regardless of what Saussure has to say about this). We agree that the best poems have a universal appeal,[8] but can we really say what it consists of, how that appeal is constructed? It seems that at the heart of the best poems is the attempt

[8] A reviewer importantly writes:

> "I do not. Some of the best poetry is virtually untranslatable and as such not universal. Consider the famous controversy about whether Ungaretti's "M'illumino / d'immenso" is translatable into German - the content may be universal, or can be read as such, but not the form. In this case the poem is universal, but only in the Italian original. Nice paradox".

I agree there are exceptions to Searle's famous dictum that anything that can be thought can be expressed. Sometimes it is impossible to make translations without adding footnotes that explain cultural differences and it would be very odd to translate a poem by recourse to lengthy footnotes. But then it would be true that, if someone were in a position to acquire perfect mastery of the language of the poem, s/he would appreciate its universality (the fact that it touches a chord in his or her heart, if it does).

by their authors to use the best possible means of expression for what they want to say. Thus, given that a certain notion is expressible through expressions a, b, c, d, the author will select the expression that will have a greater impact on the reader, that has greater chances to be remembered by heart, the one which has more expressive potential (if a is chosen, then a should express more than b, c or d), the one that resonates more. Figurative language plays an important role, because notions that are expressed through suitable felicitous images are more likely to attract attention and to be remembered. In the same way as poems can use a figurative plane, advertisements can make leverage on it to convey notions in a felicitous way, that is by attracting attention, making sure they are remembered, and establishing connections between one notion and another. Consider the advertisements on Daikin air conditioners, where there is a focus on leisure time and butterflies. The air produced by these conditioners is so pure that butterflies can thrive in it; thus, TV viewers are invited to try Daikin conditioners. The success of the commercial is proportional to the success of the images used. Such images attract attention, can no longer be wiped out of one's memory and establish connections with other notions (e.g. pure air). They are also poetic in so far as we remember them independently of their purpose. They create a world no one has seen (except for Italians when traffic was forbidden on Sundays and people could gather in public squares without the danger of being hit by cars and were more relaxed and happy).

Consider the end of the poem "Vicolo" by Quasimodo:

Vicolo: una croce di case
che si chiamano piano,
e non sanno ch' è paura
di restare sole nel buio.
(This alley: a cross of houses
That call one another softly
And they do not know that it is fear
To stay alone in the darkness).

When the author utters "a cross of houses", we may, on the one hand, evoke the urban landscapes of certain parts of old cities, with intersecting and small alleys; on the other hand, we may have access to the concept 'cross' and its associated connections with sorrow, weeping, despair, but also salvation; the fear of remaining alone in the darkness is compensated by the solace which this Christian concept brings with it. Figurative language adds deeper interpretation levels.

Going back to the presumed universality of poetry's appeal, this has to do with form, but also with content. To say that form is everything in a poem is like wanting to propose that we can construct beautiful lines made out of rhythmic structures dispensing with meaning structures altogether. The problem for the poet is not only how to invent beautiful rhythms and rhymes, but to give content an expressive shape. Poems remain impressed, because the contents are universal and the words used to express them are the best that anyone at all could use to express those contents, making their impact deep and making sure that they are remembered for generations.

The right image of the poet is that of a person who struggles with form and content and must find the most suitable form to express a certain content. He is someone who searches for the best possible words, given the content s/he wants to express. The real problem for the poet, of course, is ineffability. Sometimes it can be really hard to put one's thoughts on paper. Of course, the context could not exist without the form, but surely the poet has the freedom to construct a poem in which combinations of words create a unique effect, in which words have influence on what follows and meanings can be enriched further in a contextual way. The poet has conventional and unconventional resources. Very often his structures are elliptical, cryptic, and they have to be completed through integration with other words that co-occur in the poem (see Capone, 2021). While the resources a poet inherits from convention are limited, the resources s/he can use by adopting pragmatic principles are infinite. Modulations à la Recanati (2004) find in poetry the best domain for their applications. When Quasimodo in his poem "Vento a Tindari" says "Amaro pane a rompere" (bitter bread to break), he is certainly not saying that bread is hard to break, that the task of eating is difficult and hard, but he is presumably referring to the existential condition of (us) human beings, who have to suffer to bring home some food. Now the metonymic broadening of 'bread' does not have the effect of providing a certain and fixed referent for bread; for bread, for the poet and his readers, can mean anything that is essential to human life, from food to spiritual needs (spiritual food). There may be a latitude in the broadening of the meaning of this word, which may be induced by the word 'amaro (bitter)' and by the word 'rompere (break)'. Now, the fact that a word may have some *latitude*, in interpretation, and one that is intended by the author, is important in making a poem universal, because it will appeal to a greater number of people. (Paradoxically, it may be possible to say that a poem becomes famous for always different reasons, because different readers see many different things in them). Universality also consists in the resonance between the verse and the readers. A universal verse is one that is touching, but why is it touching? Presumably because the condition it addresses is one that is experienced by most, perhaps all people. Perhaps it is touching because it addresses an issue which no one so far has been able to put (to translate) into words, but which was clearly crucial to her or him. The poem "Vento a Tindari" after a central part dealing with the poet's exile and existential anguish, ends with the poet's friends waking him up from his meditations, scared that he might fall down the slope into the sea. The final verses are

> E io fingo timore a chi non sa
> che vento profondo mi ha cercato
> (And I dissimulate fear to those who do not know
> what a deep wind has searched me).

Here the poet establishes a contrast between the fear he was supposed to have (being so close to the slope, he could be afraid of falling down the slope, so the other friends might have thought) and the state of anxiety brought about by the previous meditations. Such meditations are summed up by the thought/presupposition that a deep wind has searched him. While Shelley used the image of the wind for the

prophetic message of the poet and its transmission and propagation, here for Quasimodo, the deep wind (as clarified with the collocation with 'deep') is the wind of *introspection.* The wind also has the ability to push Quasimodo down the slope, either physically or through the intervention of some psychic state. I prefer the latter interpretation. As he wakes up from his meditations, the poet understands that he was about to fall down the slope due to utmost depression. This verse in which the poet says "E io fingo timore a chi non sa/che vento profondo mi ha cercato" has a claim to universality, because it deals with an existential condition that many people experience (isolation, for example) but also because of the formal means used which have a deep resonance in our minds.

10 Conclusion

If this paper is of importance, it is NOT because of what it has said, but because of what it has not said. The ineffability of poetry also propagates to the linguist and the literary theorist. I believe we have to wait for a while before we can formalize our considerations on the poetic function of language and the presumed universality of (some) poems. I am confident, however, that this is a small step in this direction and that this direction ought to be pursued by those who are more capable than I am. So we have to wait for another day.

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