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Poetic Perlocutions: Poetry after Cavell after Austin

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Abstract

Although perlocution has received more interest lately, it remains the great unthought of Austin's theory. The privilege he gives to illocution over perlocution, rather than being a necessity of his linguistic theory, is a contestable philosophical claim that leads him, I argue, to exclude from his consideration poetic and other 'parasitical' uses of language. Cavell's reconceptualisation of perlocutions as 'passionate utterances', however, provides a more fruitful theoretical framework to approach poetic phenomena. Reading Austin through a Cavellian lens offers keys to make space for the parasitic uses Austin rejected and for poetry within a philosophy of language.

I. Introduction

Poetic utterances, and other so-called 'parasitic' uses of language, are one of the major points of difficulty in Austin's theory of language because they remain largely underdetermined and left aside by Austin himself.[1] Despite an apparent appeal to reject such uses of language, because it seems at first glance that, to borrow Searle's words in his reply to Derrida, 'there could not, for example, be promises made by actors in a play if there were not the possibility of promises made in real life',[2] the distinction between fiction and non-fiction on which such a claim relies is

1. We could even broaden this claim and argue, following Henri Meschonnic, that 'poetry is and remains a challenge for thinking about language'. Meschonnic (2001: 18), my translation. Even though the many theories of metaphor and the thorough investigation of fiction somehow fill this gap, poetry is not limited to metaphor (and metaphor not limited to poetry) and, as we will see, its fictional dimension is subject to debate. We are still in need of a theory of language that can account for poetic language
2. Searle (1977: 205).

far from being obvious in the case of poetic utterances.[3] Is lyric poetry, for instance, fictional? The ongoing debate around this question might suggest that the category of fiction is irrelevant to understanding the effects of poetry. Recent forms of poetry ('uncreative writing' and 'documents poétiques', among others) further blur the frontiers between poetry and ordinary speech and show that Searle's reply to Derrida's objection to Austin falls short. Derrida's objection relies on the idea of citationality or iterability: if a statement can be the same in a real-life situation and in a poem, how can we conclude that one is ordinary and the other parasitical?[4] The question Derrida raises has not yet received a satisfactory answer and urges us to further investigate the effects of poetry. In this paper, I argue that the problem of poetic utterances arises because of Austin's distinction between illocution and perlocution, and because of his preference for the former over the latter. Indeed, although

3. Searle holds, for instance, that the function of reference applies similarly in fiction: 'The axiom of existence holds across the board: in real world talk one can refer only to what exists; in fictional talk one can refer to what exists in fiction (plus such real world things and events as the fictional story incorporates)'. Searle (1969: 79). Ordinary language refers to the real world while fiction refers to a fictional world. While it might help when the fictional is clearly distinct from reality, this appeal to fictional reference seems to fail in cases where the distinction between 'real world' and 'fictional world' is more difficult to establish, for instance, in autobiographies or contemporary autofictions. Furthermore, Sandy Petrey argues that one of the important lessons of Austin for literary criticism is precisely the rejection of reference. By calling back reference, rather than solving problems, Searle is making speech-act theory less attractive to literary scholars: 'Speech-act theory came into being when Austin recognized that accurate or inaccurate description of referents was *not pertinent* to how words do things. By taking the referential validity of literary assertions as his paramount concern, Searle brings the descriptive fallacy back into speech-act theory. [...] One of Austin's great lessons for literary scholars is that the constative too repudiates the descriptive fallacy, and confusing the constative and the referential means this lesson hasn't been learned'. Petrey (1990: 67).

4. According to Derrida, the notions of citation and iteration make intention inaccessible and, hence, irrelevant. Once intention is out of the picture, what Austin calls parasitic uses of language can no longer be clearly defined as such: 'Thus, one must less oppose citation or iteration to the noniteration of an event, than construct a differential typology of citation, supposing that this is a tenable project that can give rise to an exhaustive program, a question I am holding off on here. In this typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of utterances. Above all, one then would be concerned with different types of marks or chains of iterable marks, and not with an opposition between citational statements on the one hand, and singular and original statement-events on the other. The first consequence of this would be the following: given this structure of iteration, the intention which animates utterance will never be completely present in itself and its content. The iteration which structures it a priori introduces an essential dehiscence and demarcation. One will no longer be able to exclude, as Austin wishes, the 'non-serious', the *oratio obliqua*, from 'ordinary' language. And if it is alleged that ordinary language, or the ordinary circumstance of language, excludes citationality or general iterability, does this not signify that the 'ordinariness' in question, the thing and the notion, harbors a lure, the teleological lure of consciousness whose motivations, indestructible necessity, and systematic effects remain to be analyzed?' Derrida (1988: 18).

perlocution has recently received renewed attention, it appears to be left aside in Austin's theory. More than that, Austin's preference for illocution does not stem from a linguistic necessity but is much more a philosophical claim and prejudice.[5] My paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, I briefly recast the illocution/perlocution distinction and outline two ways of revaluating it: by abandoning it or by inverting the hierarchy. In the second part, I elaborate on the second option by drawing on Cavell's conception of passionate utterances. In the third part, I show how poetic utterances fare with this theory of perlocution.

II. Recasting Austin's Illocution/Perlocution Distinction

After reaching a dead end in his discussion of the performative–constative dichotomy, Austin operates what he calls 'a sea-change' and moves from a diptych (performative/constative) to a triptych (locution/illocution/perlocution).[6] However, and as Austin himself acknowledges, the distinction between illocution and perlocution is problematic:

> It is the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions which seems likeliest to give trouble, and it is upon this that we shall now embark, taking in the distinction between illocutions and locutions by the way. It is certain that the perlocutionary sense of 'doing an action' must somehow be ruled out as irrelevant to the sense in which an utterance, if the issuing of it is the 'doing of an action', is a performative, at least if that is to be distinct from a constative. For clearly any, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without calculation, of any utterance whatsoever, and in particular by a straightforward constative utterance (if there is such an animal).[7]

5. Stina Bäckström argues that Austin's distinction between illocution and perlocution requires more philosophical work and that it relies on a set of assumptions that need questioning: 'By putting my alternative conception of telling on the table and arguing that it is no more and no less a natural or self-evident conception of telling than the (different and conflicting) ones that build on the illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction, I have shown that the distinction requires more philosophical work for its defence than is often mounted. Next, I will show that beneath the distinction there is a philosophical dialectic familiar from the philosophy of perception. Articulating this parallel gives more substance the idea that the distinction carries problematic philosophical assumptions and needs to be re-examined'. Bäckström (2020: 8).

6. Stephen Mulhall offers an interesting analysis of this notion of 'sea-change' by relating it to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to show the richness of this transformation. Mulhall (2006: 29–31). Austin's appeal to a literary language to characterise the shift in his theory is furthermore intriguing because of his famous rejection of poetic utterances in the realm of the non-serious.

7. Austin (1975: 109).

The difficulty in distinguishing perlocution from illocution is a consequence of Austin's initial characterisation of the constative/performative distinction, as he aims to distinguish perlocutionary acts from the 'doing of an action' *qua* performative which is internal to language, thus, separating perlocution from what he called the performative (which is now the realm of illocution). How can we distinguish perlocution from illocution from there? A first idea is to consider perlocution as extralinguistic (i.e., the use of language has extralinguistic consequences), whereas illocution remains within the boundaries of language. However, this distinction does not eliminate the blur surrounding the effects of the illocutionary force. When I give an order and this order is followed, is the following of the order a mark of illocution or perlocution? Is the 'securing of *uptake*'[8] that Austin deems necessary for the performance of an illocutionary act linguistic or extralinguistic? This linguistic/extralinguistic distinction does not satisfactorily clarify the illocution/perlocution distinction.

A second idea is to separate action from consequence: 'We have then to draw the line between an action we do (here an illocution) and its consequence'.[9] This distinction results from Austin's equation of locution and illocution: 'To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an *illocutionary act*, as I propose to call it'.[10] If there is no locution without illocution, the triptych (locution/illocution/perlocution) becomes once again a diptych (locution with illocution/perlocution) in which the first part consists in a linguistic act and the second in its consequence. But to what extent is a surprise, a humiliation, a persuasion more a consequence than a threat? Following the examples Austin gives: *'In* saying I would shoot him I was threatening him' and *'By* saying I would shoot him I alarmed him'[11], to what extent is the second more a consequence than the first?[12]

8. Austin (1975: 116).
9. Austin (1975: 110).
10. Austin (1975: 98).
11. Austin (1975: 121).
12. Martin Gustafsson emphasises that the 'two-step procedure' as effects and consequence is inadequate to describe the way language (and especially the language of ordering in his case) works: 'However, Austin's use of the term 'invite' in this connection is in a sense congenial to his separation between uptake and perlocutionary object. For this separation encourages the idea that ordering is indeed quite similar to an invitation: first the hearer receives it and understands it, and then she is to take a stand on whether to 'accept' it or not. In contrast, I have emphasised that such a two-step procedure cannot be the standard case. Austin's scheme hides from view the kind of structure I have been trying to reveal in this paper: how the institution of ordering depends on the fact that obedience is the default sort of reaction, whereas disobedience and critical reflection require specific positive reasons'. Gustafsson (2020: 12).

Appealing to consequence does not clarify the problem; that is why Austin comes up with a third distinction: illocution is conventional and perlocution not.

> We distinguished in the last lecture some senses of consequences and effects in these connexions, especially three senses in which effects can come in even with illocutionary acts, namely, securing uptake, taking effect, and inviting responses. In the case of the perlocutionary act we made a rough distinction between achieving an object and producing a sequel. Illocutionary acts are conventional acts: perlocutionary acts are not conventional. Acts of both kinds can be performed—or, more accurately, acts called by the same name (for example, acts equivalent to the illocutionary act of warning or the perlocutionary act of convincing)—can be brought off non-verbally; but even then to deserve the name of an illocutionary act, for example a warning, it must be a conventional non-verbal act: but perlocutionary acts are not conventional, though conventional acts may be made use of in order to bring off the perlocutionary act. A judge should be able to decide, by hearing what was said, what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed, but not what perlocutionary acts were achieved.[13]

Summarising Austin's initial conclusions on illocution and perlocution, this paragraph supplements the distinction between an internal effect and an external consequence with the idea that illocution is conventional, whereas perlocution is not. However, Austin's statement that 'acts of *both* kinds can be performed' adds to the confusion. Indeed, perlocution was ruled off as irrelevant to the performative in Austin's initial sense, and the use of the verb perform blurs his claim. We understand that Austin uses the verb 'perform' here to characterise non-verbal acts, but the terminology is confusing. Austin adds this reference to non-verbal acts in order to show that even within non-verbal acts, illocution remains conventional and perlocution not. Although this distinction seems appealing, the notion of convention would require a clearer definition in order to operate as a criterion for distinction.

Indeed, as Layla Raïd argues, Austin does not fully conceptualise the notion of convention:

> We know that Austin's use of the term convention is problematic: illocution in general is not only conventional in the sense of conventions agreed upon at a specific time and space; this case is rather rare. It is also not conventional in the sense of being always guaranteed by an

13. Austin (1975: 120).

> institution, unless we extend the meaning of "institution" to include excuses, blame, warning, etc.[14]

Conventions are, therefore, neither an agreement made in the past (a contract, as it were) nor guaranteed by an institution (because many of Austin's examples are not institutional per se). Following a Wittgensteinian interpretation, we could imagine rooting conventions in forms of life and rules, but these change in relation to the language-game being played, while the notion of convention as Austin uses it seems to transcend the various practices. What we can say is that some conventions are purely institutional (such as marriage or christening), while some are embedded in our linguistic practices, such as excuses and warnings. In this latter sense, however, the notion of convention loses its explicatory power because the grounding of the convention is the conventional nature of language. The distinction between illocution and perlocution is problematic because the notion of convention itself is problematic. Furthermore, if we refer to the conventional nature of language, are perlocutions not conventional as well in the sense that they are the effects of the locution?

Two options arise here: (i) Find a way to conceptualise convention (this is the path Searle follows more or less) and (ii) Reconsider the illocution–perlocution distinction. It is this second option that I intend to explore, because it seems to me that conceptualising convention can only lead to the dead end of grounding convention in the conventional nature of language.

Three kinds of answers have been given to this difficulty in distinguishing perlocution from illocution: (i) Consider perlocution as subset of illocution[15]; (ii) Reject the distinction altogether[16] and (iii) Consider illocution as subset of perlocution.[17] Most commentators follow Austin in opting for the first solution, considering illocution first, and perlocution second. The second option is tempting insofar as the difficulty in distinguishing illocution from perlocution might suggest that such a distinction cannot always be made, that a speech-act is a complex whose parts cannot be clearly delimitated. It, however, goes too far in abandoning the specificity of illocution, and it fails to acknowledge the subtleties

14. Raïd (2011: 156). My translation: 'On sait que le sens dans lequel Austin utilise le terme de convention est problématique : l'illocution en général n'est pas seulement conventionnelle en ce qu'elle invoquerait des conventions passées en un temps et un lieu donné; ce cas est plutôt rare. Elle n'est pas non plus conventionnelle au sens où elle serait toujours garantie par une institution, à moins qu'on étende le sens d'« institution » de telle sorte que l'excuse, le blâme, l'avertissement, etc., soient encore des institutions'.
15. Gaines (1979).
16. Petrey (1990).
17. Campbell (1973).

Austin points out. There are some special cases where the conventions are clear, and those are cases where illocution is institutionalised, either through an actual institution (baptism or christening) or a habit of talking (can you pass me the salt?). Calling such special cases illocutions is indeed helpful. Austin's analysis of illocution is not wrong, and he is pointing out something important, so the category of illocution is still valuable. However, it is the category of perlocution that is underdetermined in Austin, and I, therefore, think the most valuable position is the third, focusing on the efficacy of language in general and considering illocution as a special case of perlocution.

In this sense, all language has an efficacy, language always does something, namely has perlocutionary effects, but some uses of language have been conventionalised in such a way that the effect of language is fully embedded in the language itself. Steven Davis argues that the process of communication relies on such a perlocutionary act:

> When we talk to one another, one thing we normally seek is to be understood. That is, we want our hearer to understand what we mean in saying and by saying what we do and what our thoughts are which we intend to express by the words we utter. If these are achieved, then we can be said to have communicated to our hearer. But often, and in some cases standardly, we want more than this. We ask questions to elicit answers; we tell others something to inform them; and we make requests to get others to do our bidding. It is not enough in these cases to be understood, but what we want to bring about are certain effects, on the thoughts, actions, or feeling of our hearers, for our purpose in bringing these about is the point or purpose of our communicating and the achieving of our purpose is the performance of a perlocutionary act.[18]

We do many things with language. Mostly, at least in the way we use language nowadays, we aim to transmit some information, we aim to communicate something. This communication is already the performance of a perlocutionary act insofar as our words have an effect, namely that of having informed someone else. We can use language to achieve other aims, such as warning, questioning, doubting, ordering, and intimidating. In all these cases, our language aims to have an effect. In this sense, I disagree with David Kaufmann when he argues: 'So, while Austin is certainly right to deny that every speech act has a perlocutionary moment, it is a safe bet that most do. It might be harder to come up with a taxonomy of these moments, but that does not mean that we are free to ignore them'.[19] Although Kaufmann is making a step towards revaluating perlocutions as more important than Austin considers

18. Davis (1979: 242).
19. Kaufmann (2016: 46).

them, he does not go as far as to consider them central to our linguistic practices. However, if we include illocutions as a subset of perlocutions, it is a safer bet in my view to say that all speech-acts have a perlocutionary effect: language is never idle. Kaufmann is right in saying that a taxonomy of perlocution is more difficult to reach (if it is even possible), but we could already say that one group of perlocutions are illocutions (and we could perhaps even distinguish in this subgroup illocutions that rely on institutions and those that do not).

Language always has effects, but some of these effects have been conventionalised in institutions and habits. For Stina Bäckström, Austin's focus on illocution is a focus on the normativity of language:

> What I urge going forward from my conclusion is that the role of affection and response in the hearer should be reconsidered. I am not suggesting that we look for some one way in which hearer-responsiveness might be involved. Austin himself took a special interest in highly formalized, even ritualized, forms of speech, such as christening, marrying, and pronouncing sentence. In such instances, there might be a point in thinking about the acts as primarily setting up a normative space with new entitlements and commitments, and, thus, as relatively independent of the audience's responses. This is connected, it seems to me, to the fact that such forms of speech are not addressed to any one particular person, but are moves within a legal or (quasi-legal) system.[20]

Illocutions are part of a legal or quasi-legal system in which utterances turn out to be felicitous or infelicitous. But before this felicity stage, there is the normative one that decides whether an utterance is legal or not. And in some of our practices, indeed, this legality of moves in the language-game are important, but not in all. Austin focuses on these utterances because the space can be clearly delimitated, but in doing so he rejects to a category he does not analyse all the utterances that are not considered from a normative perspective. The legality of a perlocutionary act is not in question, it just exists, and its effects cannot be analysed in terms of legality (i.e., in respect to the rules of language). In interpersonal speech, illocution plays almost no role because there is no institution to validate or invalidate utterances. This is where Austin's focus on illocution cuts his theory off from many uses of language, perhaps even the most common ones, that is, communication. And this focus is also why he must exclude what he calls *parasitic* utterances from his consideration. This exclusion, against Searle's argument that it is a strategic move, is in fact embedded in his focus on the illocutionary and his quasi- rejection of the perlocutionary.

20. Bäckström (2020: 15).

One of the strengths of the third option is, therefore, to encompass a broader scope on language and to open a space to consider how some uses of language become institutionalised. The group of illocutions is not closed but can accept new uses (as well as reject old ones) according to how conventions in linguistic practices evolve. In this third view, the perlocutionary, the efficacy of language, comes first and the illocution is a subset with the specific characteristics Austin points out. However, we have seen that Austin leaves perlocution largely underdetermined, and the question remains: What would a theory of perlocution look like? Cavell's conception of passionate utterances offers an element of an answer.

III. Cavell's Passionate Utterances

There has been a renewed interest in perlocution after Cavell's paper on passionate utterances,[21] and Cavell points out that Austin's rejection of the perlocutionary is problematic in respect to passionate utterances:

> If I were to continue here, I would try making explicit the kind of challenge which the idea of passionate utterance poses in my mind to the idea of performance as an image of what speech is (remembering Austin's seeking to 'rule out the perlocutionary act as an instance of a performative utterance'), the idea of speech (perhaps I should make explicit that this includes writing, while writing has formal conditions of its own) as designed to work on the feelings, thoughts, and actions of others coevally with its design in revealing our desires to others and to ourselves.[22]

Against Austin's focus on illocution and the normativity of language, Cavell focuses on feelings, thoughts and actions that occur in our linguistic practices. Cavell creates a category for the utterances Austin leaves aside, that he calls passionate utterances. We have seen that Austin's distinction between illocution and perlocution – and all the difficulties it entails – relies on separating conventional effects from unconventional consequences. Cavell's passionate utterances aim to explore these unconventional consequences: 'A performative utterance is an offer of participation in the order of law. And perhaps we can say: A passionate utterance is an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire'.[23]

21. See, for instance, volume 4 of *Conversations: The Journal of Cavellian Studies* on Cavell and literature with two papers on perlocution: Lindstrom (2016) and Kaufmann (2016). See also a forthcoming issue of *Inquiry* on the notion of perlocution: Bäckström (2020), Gustafsson (2020), Laugier (2020) and Lorenzini (2020).
22. Cavell (2008: 185–86).
23. Cavell (2008: 185).

As a word of caution, Cavell is talking of performative and passionate utterances, not illocution and perlocution here. As we have seen, Austin's move from performative to illocution is problematic because it does not establish a ground for perlocution. However, Cavell further argues that his 'idea of passionate utterance turns out to be a concern with performance after all'.[24] So the passionate–performative distinction breaks down in a way similar to the illocution–perlocution distinction. But let us not get ahead of ourselves here. A performative, following Austin, would be primarily concerned with illocution, and hence concerned with convention or, as Cavell puts it here, with the order of the law. Against this order are the 'disorders of desire' that are expressed in passionate utterances. Such passionate utterances are not concerned with illocution and convention, but rather with perlocution.

One of the reasons perlocution is so important for passionate speech is that:

> Perlocutionary acts make room for, and reward, imagination and virtuosity, unequally distributed capacities among the species. Illocutionary acts do not in general make such room—I do not, except in special circumstances, wonder how I might make a promise or a gift, or apologize, or render a verdict. But to persuade you may well take considerable thought, to insinuate as much as to console may require tact, to seduce or to confuse you may take talent. Further, that perlocutionary-like effects—for example, stopping you in your tracks, embarrassing or humiliating you—are readily, sometimes more effectively, achievable without saying anything, indicates that the urgency of passion is expressed before and after words. Passionate expression makes demands upon the singular body in a way illocutionary force (if all goes well) forgoes.[25]

Illocution, primarily because of its conventional character, is something that does not require interpretation, that can be made without special thought or talent, that we have learned to use and follow in our practice of language. Following a Wittgensteinian-like interpretation of 'convention' in Austin as rules, we could say that with illocution 'we follow the rule blindly'.[26] In contrast to this blind rule-following, perlocutionary acts create a space in which 'imagination and virtuosity', among other capacities, can express themselves. In a sense, baptising a child or christening a ship or enacting a marriage cannot be done well or badly; it is either done or not, in Austin's terms, happy or unhappy. To the contrary, conviction, persuasion or humiliation are not absolutely achieved. Whereas the christening of a ship entails a permanent change of status

24. Cavell (2008: 187).
25. Cavell (2008: 173).
26. Wittgenstein, PI 109.

for the ship, persuasion can be more or less effective, be it in duration or intensity. To that effect, Daniele Lorenzini recasts the natural-conventional distinction in terms of predictability and stability: 'Instead of employing the natural-conventional distinction, I therefore propose focusing on the degree of predictability and stability that differentiates illocutionary from perlocutionary effects'.[27] This idea is interesting because it does not distinguish illocution and perlocution in terms of their nature but considers illocution a form of perlocution with higher predictability and stability. In this sense, Lorenzini's view can be seen as considering illocution a subgroup of perlocution. Connecting it to Cavell's view shows that there is a space for interpretation in perlocution that is contrary to the working of illocution, because the latter has stability and predictability.

With perlocution, Cavell argues, the space is therefore opened to interpretation:

> With illocutions, interpretations or decisions are sometimes to be made as to whether an instance is happy (Austin cites the case of a ship sliding into the water before the ceremony of christening is concluded); with perlocutions, interpretation is characteristically in order, part of the passionate exchange.[28]

Usually, that is, if everything goes according to plan, an illocutionary act needs no interpretation: it is happy or unhappy. In borderline cases, such as the one mentioned by Austin, the interpretation will reach an answer. Hence, a 'judge should be able to decide, by hearing what was said, what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed, but not what perlocutionary acts were achieved'.[29] Indeed, if, as Cavell argues, interpretation is part of the passionate exchange and perlocution, it cannot make a steady case for a judge. A large part of Cavell's paper is concerned with establishing, in contrast and reference to Austin's characterisation of performative utterances, the conditions for analysing passionate utterances and a taxonomy of passionate utterances. I will not develop this aspect of Cavell's thought here, as I want to follow another path that he opens in the conclusion to his paper. In bringing up a reference to Jane Austen's *Emma* in his conclusion, Cavell relates his theory of passionate utterances to the literary and poetic realm.

27. Lorenzini (2020: 5).
28. Cavell (2008: 185).
29. Austin (1975: 120).

IV. Poetic Perlocutions

Cavell's notion of passionate utterances reintegrates perlocution within the performative, against Austin's initial exclusion. Another exclusion, more (in)famous perhaps, is that of poetic utterances and other so-called 'parasitical' uses of language. Such uses of language are one of the reasons Austin rejects the term 'use of language' and prefers his concepts of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

> To take this farther, let us be quite clear that the expression 'use of language' can cover other matters even more diverse than the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. For example, we may speak of the 'use of language' for something, e.g. for joking; and we may use 'in' in a way different from the illocutionary 'in', as when we say 'in saying "p" I was joking' or 'acting a part' or 'writing poetry'; or again we may speak of 'a poetical use of language' as distinct from 'the use of language in poetry'. These references to 'use of language' have nothing to do with the illocutionary act. For example, if I say 'Go and catch a falling star', it may be quite clear what both the meaning and the force of my utterance is, but still wholly unresolved which of these other kinds of things I may be doing. There are parasitic uses of language, which are 'not serious', not the 'full normal use'. The normal conditions of reference may be suspended, or no attempt made at a standard perlocutionary act, no attempt to make you do anything, as Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar.[30]

Much has been said about this exclusion, but one element strikes me in the last sentence: Austin considers that poetry and parasitic uses of language make no attempt 'at a standard perlocutionary act, no attempt to make you do anything'. Austin's reference to a 'standard' reinforces the normative dimension of his theory of language and is rather questionable, especially since the perlocutionary is so much underdetermined. What is a standard perlocutionary act? If perlocutions are not conventional, how can they be standard? Austin seems to be ascribing some characteristics to perlocution that he does not make explicit. If there is a standard to perlocutions, it means that there are criteria to assess the felicity or infelicity of the utterance. But Austin never makes these criteria explicit.

Paul Campbell comments on this passage:

> In referring to 'parasitic uses of language' in which there is 'no attempt made at a standard perlocutionary act, no attempt to make you do anything,' he cites Walt Whitman who, he says, 'does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar.' I find this example unfortunate because it suggests that figurative language is not intended to produce effects, and I find the phrase 'parasitic uses of language' unfortunate as applied here

30. Austin (1975: 104).

> because it distorts and degrades the nature and function of metaphor by implying that whatever meaning Whitman's exhortation may have derived from 'conditions of reference' having to do with an actual eagle and with actual flight.[31]

Austin's casting away of parasitic uses of language from perlocution is unfortunate because it means that poetic utterances have no effect, that figurative language is a vain play with language with no consequence. A metaphor, in this sense, would be useless from a pragmatic perspective. Austin's problem here is that he is reintroducing the notion of reference through the normativity of his theory. While his substitution of truth-condition by felicity and force seemed to go towards encompassing uses of language that do not rely on reference, Austin comes back to reference. The problem with Austin is not that he thinks that there is a suspension of illocutionary force[32] (or at least this is not a problem once we regard illocution as a subset of perlocution), but that he thinks there is a suspension of perlocutionary force as well.

Kaufmann precisely rejects this suspension of perlocutionary force in literary works and takes them to be performative as well:

> If I am correct that literary conventions supervene (or suspend) conventional illocutionary force, then the literary, by Austin's lights, becomes precisely the realm of the perlocutionary. Let me stake my claim as clearly as possible: against the deconstructive reading of Austin, I am suggesting that the literary is not "performative" in any scandalous way. I am suggesting that the performative in literature serves largely perlocutionary aims. I am thus dragging the literary back to pragmatics, aesthetics and everyday ethics.[33]

Giving perlocutionary aims to literature, therefore, brings the literary back into the ordinary, like Wittgenstein's bringing philosophy back from metaphysics to the ordinary. Although I agree with Kaufmann's attempt to bring perlocution back into the poetic realm, and hence to bring the poetic back into the ordinary, I believe that poetic utterances

31. Campbell (1973: 290).
32. Searle defends such a view that conventions (and hence illocutionary force) are suspended in fiction: 'Now what makes fiction possible, I suggest, is a set of extralinguistic, non-semantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world established by the rules mentioned earlier. Think of the conventions of fictional discourse as a set of horizontal conventions that break the connections established by the vertical rules. They suspend the normal requirements established by these rules.' Searle (1979: 66). Joe Friggieri follows Searle's idea that fictions are pretended speech-acts that therefore suspend illocutionary force: 'The suspension of illocutionary force in stage utterances, coupled with the actors' pretence that they do have that force, together with the audience's attitude or predisposition (its willingness to play along with the pretence), combine to give rise to the game of pretending which is necessary for the success of the play.' Friggieri (2014: 58).
33. Kaufmann (2016: 60).

do not suspend illocutionary force. Quite to the contrary, as the perlocutionary effect of poetic utterances is precisely to undermine illocutionary force (not just to suspend it).[34] Whereas the idea of a suspension of illocutionary force remains within the Austinian framework in which illocution comes first and perlocution second, considering the undermining of conventions as the perlocutionary force of poetry closes the conventional path to illocution and forces the subject to think the world anew.

If, following Cavell's analysis of passionate utterances, perlocution is part of performance after all, and if poetic utterances are primarily perlocutionary, we can, therefore, say that poetic utterances are performative after all (against Austin's initial view).[35] Whereas Austin's initial view excludes poetic utterances from the realm of performance and from the realm of standard illocutionary or perlocutionary force, recasting the perlocutionary creates space for the poetic. Creating this space, however, requires reconsidering the role of illocution and giving more importance to perlocution. Doing so, the move back to the performative (that Austin makes after his locution/illocution/perlocution 'sea-change') brings us to a performative somewhat different from Austin's initial characterisation: it is no longer primarily conventional (*qua* institutional) but focused on what language does in a broader way. Austin's failure to acknowledge poetic utterances has brought him to a limited view of perlocution and of performance. His incapacities to deal with perlocution and poetic utterances are therefore intimately related to one another. Giving its force back to perlocution creates space for the poetic, while considering the poetic seriously creates space for exploring perlocution. Unless we

34. This undermining of convention goes against Peter Lamarque's conception of poetry (which he builds from Wittgenstein among others) which relies heavily on the idea of convention (on the idea of practice as conventional): 'If we combine this point with the first, then we can derive the following: that participants in the rule-governed practice of literature are defined not by social or political criteria – class, gender, age, reader preferences, etc. – but by conformity to the roles in the practice'. Lamarque (2010: 377). However, the roles in the practice seem to be more and more subject to debate. Is the author still an author in the sense of conforming to the role in the practice in 'uncreative writing'? Against such reified roles, it seems that poetry rather constructs itself in opposition to actual practices and conventions.

35. Sandra Laugier argues that the opposition between performative and perlocution can be viewed as following the double sense of the Latin prefix 'per-': 'Austin, for all his sensitivity to language, never comments on the fact that there could be confusion between the per- of perlocution with the per- of perform. The per- of performative, like that of performance, or of perfection (another Cavellian theme, perfectionism) denotes achievement, fulfilment; while the per- of perlocution denotes the means, the medium, the 'by' of 'by saying'. In the perlocutionary, the statement is a means of doing, of creating an effect – to go through you, to reach, touch you. But is not Cavell's perlocutionary also a kind of performance'? Laugier (2020: 19). Considering that Cavell equates perlocution and performative, we could argue that perlocution after Cavell is both a means and an end.

want a theory of language that is limited to what Cavell calls 'the order of law' – that is, a theory of something that is certainly not ordinary language as we experience it every day – we need to acknowledge the force of the poetic and the importance of perlocution.

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