Moments, Rhythms, and Ambivalences in Gaston Bachelard's Theory of Literary Imagination

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Abstract – This contribution aims to analyze Bachelard's theory of moment and rhythm from a literary theory perspective. Firstly, we will examine the fundamental principles of Bachelardian reflection on temporality in *La dialectique de la durée* (1936). Secondly, we will analyze the Bachelardian essay "Instant poétique et instant métaphisique" (1939). Subsequently, we will observe the relevance of certain aspects of the French philosopher's theory of moment and rhythm for his theory of literary imagination in the 1940s. In the conclusion, we will draw a comparison between Bachelard's theory of poetic moment and rhythm and formalist, structuralist and post-structuralist thought.

Keywords – Gaston Bachelard; History of Theory of Literature; Moment; Rhythm; Semantic Ambivalences.

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1. Introduction

The poetological work of Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) is primarily recognized by contemporary narratologists and theoreticians of literature for *La poétique de l'espace* (1957).[1] However, limiting the French philosopher's aesthetics to this text may result in the overlooking of other significant Bachelardian insights.

In light of this, it might be interesting to explore in depth Bachelard's reflection on rhythm presented in *Intuition de l'instant* (1932), in *La dialectique de la durée* (1936) and the essay "La continuité et la multiplicité temporelles" (1937). Although these works have been extensively studied by Bachelardian scholars,[2] the perspective adopted by epistemologists and aestheticians often disregards aspects that are instead crucial for literary theory.[3] In this context, philosophers also tend to neglect Bachelard's essay "Instant poétique et instant métaphisique" (1939).[4] From a literary theory perspective, this article, published in Jean Lescure's literary journal *Messages*, is in fact significant for three reasons:

- It represents the juncture at which Bachelard, an influential philosopher of science, definitively established himself as an influential member of the French literary field (Lescure 46);
- It is the culmination of the Bachelardian philosophical reflection on temporality initiated in *Intuition de l'instant*;
- It discusses issues that Bachelard would go on to explore in depth in his subsequent works dedicated to literary imagination, such as the silent and ambivalent features of literary images.

This paper aims to provide an original critical analysis of Bachelard's theory of the poetic moment and rhythm from the perspective of literary theory. In the first paragraph, we examine the key concepts of Bachelardian reflection on temporality and his theory of rhythm found in *La dialectique de la durée*. In the second paragraph, we analyze the short essay "Instant poétique et instant métaphisique". In the third paragraph, we observe how certain aspects of the French philosopher's theory of moment and rhythm are fundamental to his theory of literary imagination developed in the 1940s. In conclusion we highlight the convergences and the divergences between Bachelard's theory and formalist, structuralist and post-structuralist thought in order to situate the former within the theory of literary canon.

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[1] For example, cf. Alber 46 and 48; Fludernik 231-3.
[2] Cf. Worms and Wunenburger; Zilberberg; Serra, "Riflessioni"; Serra, "Ritmo e durata fra Husserl e Bachelard"; Perrot; Corbier, "Bachelard, Bergson, Emmanuel"; Corbier "Barthes et Bachelard"; Polizzi 49-129; Cicero; Sauvanet; During.
[3] Even literary scholars have not given credence to Bachelard's philosophy of rhythm, with the exceptions of Beccaria 21 and Meschonnic 256-7.
[4] With the exceptions of Sertoli 169-77 and Polizzi 99-102.

2. Bachelard's Philosophy of Rhythm

Bachelard's reflection on temporality constitutes an epistemological rejection of Bergsonism, which dominated aesthetics and philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century (Cariou; Chimisso). The fundamental idea to Bergson's metaphysics is that the continuous flow of time is an immediate *datum* of consciousness.[5] In light of this, our perception of time metaphorically resembles the perception of a melody: the notes of a melody are perceived as being contained within each other; consequently, each melodic element is susceptible to unification by a principle of interdependence. This implies that if we extend the duration of a note, what we perceive is a qualitative shift in time-totality and not that the particular note is incongruous.

Bachelard evaluates the Bergsonian metaphor of melody as an arbitrary abstraction devoted to imposing uniformity on diversity. Thus, the philosopher of Bar-sur-Aube asserts that the true immediate *datum* of consciousness is the moment of articulation which constitutes a rhythm.[6]

Rhythm presupposes discontinuities, pauses, and interruptions of the temporal flow. Consequentially, for Bachelard, the perception of time is not a mere "summation" of elements unified by a principle of interdependence but, primarily, an intuition of a grounded topological syntax that makes the perception of an articulated temporality possible:

> Order thus dominates duration. Order really gives us the algebra of action: the figure follows from it. An *analysis situs* of active instants can disregard the length of the intervals just as the *analysis situs* of geometrical elements disregards their magnitude. The only thing that counts is the way they are grouped. There is thus the causality of order, the causality of the group. (*Dialectic* 86)

In this context, the notes of a melody are different from each other because they do not occupy an identical place in a melodic syntax. The perceived continuum of melody is thus always a rational or emotional reconstruction. Therefore, from the Bachelardian perspective, the freedom to make the flow of time rhythmic is idealistically the primary manifestation of human creative capacities.

From this philosophical perspective, in *La dialectique de la durée* the Bar-sur-Aube philosopher sketches a theory of music and poetic rhythm. Poetic rhythm is for Bachelard not a simple repetition of elements that we perceive as similar. Indeed, rhythm has nothing to do with a sonorous and mechanical reproduction of some phenomenon that belongs to the natural and empirical world. The rhythm is instead the result of a series of structuralizing acts moved by an individual or social intention to specify and valorize a phenomenon through affirmations or negations. It is crucial to observe that, in this sense, Bachelard's reflections on rhythm are based on his adherence to a pragmatic, historical and institutional conception of memory which is totally different from the Bergsonian concept of *mémoire pure*. Indeed, Bachelard's point of view is based on the works of sociologists Eugène Dupréel (*Dialectic* 91-100) and Jean-Marie Guyau (*Intuition* 30, 52-3), historian Maurice Halbwachs (*Intuition* 19-20; *Dialectic* 60), and psychologist Pierre Janet (*Dialectic* 50-65).

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[5] We should bear in mind that Bachelard's aesthetics is deeply influenced by the radical outcomes of his philosophy of science. In this regard, Bachelard's polemic against Bergson is against the vitalistic doctrines that are conceptually unserviceable to the contemporary *esprit scientifique*.

[6] The concept of rhythm has been pivotal in aesthetics and psychology since the mid-18th century. In this regard, see Bayer 281-90; "Histoire des études rythmiques".

However, although he acknowledges the pragmatic feature of the historical-institutional conception of memory, Bachelard also attempts to examine poetic rhythm from a more strictly phenomenological perspective. In chapter VII of *La dialectique de la durée* (121-35), following the observations of musicologists – Maurice Emmanuel and Lionel Landry – and sociolinguists – Raoul de la Grasserie –, the French philosopher states that we perceive the continuous flow of a melody or a meter only after recognizing them as themes and refrains: "we must in fact *learn* the continuity of a melody. It is not heard straightaway, and it is often the recognition of a theme that makes us aware of melodic continuity. Here as elsewhere, recognition takes place before cognition" (*Dialectic* 122-3). Before we hear the repetition, we intuitively create a rhythmic structure that makes possible not only the perception of the single moment but also that of articulations and repetitions of moments through time: "Initially when sounds first developed, temporal structure was not really formed; the causality of music was not yet established. Structure and causality were postulated in the domain of possibility rather than in that of reality" (123).[7] For Bachelard, this virtual syntax mobilizes a dialectics between confirmed expectations and disappointed ones:

> We shall be persuaded that a repeat cannot really be seen as melodically linked to the effect it first had on us. Between one refrain and the next there is less than a latent memory, and less still than a very particular expectation. Expectation is never as plainly negative as it is in music, for it will in fact only become conscious expectation if the phrase we have heard is repeated. We shall not remember having expected it; we shall simply recognise that we ought to have expected it. Thus, what gives melody its light, free continuity is this wholly virtual expectation which is real only in retrospect, and just a risk to be run, a possibility. (123-4)[8]

Bachelard links his virtual conception of rhythm to an energetic conception of the latter. Referring to Pius Servien's theory of poetry, the French philosopher defines rhythm as the process of "restoring form" that always implies an expenditure of psychic energies:

> Let us then decide on the fundamental temporal principle of generalised rhythmics: it is the restoration of form. A characteristic is rhythmic if it is restored. It then has duration through an essential dialectic.
> If a rhythm clearly determines a characteristic, it will often affect related ones. In restoring a form, a rhythm often restores matter and energy. For example, to quote Servien, "as it ends, music brings repose to the energies it has created. Usually too, it carries into this repose most of

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[7] Moreover, through reading Georges Urbain's essay "La mélodie" (1926), Bachelard also observes that we cannot "separate melody from harmony". According to our virtualising power, in listening to a melody there must be "something that accompanies, that upholds. […] [F]or this reason […] Urbain's paradox can be accepted: 'even when melody is unadorned, that is to say when it is monody', he says, there has to be something underlying it and carrying it along; 'harmony is then held to be implied'. It can be said that when we listen to a melody that is as linear as it is possible to be, we give it density, *we accompany it*. We cannot listen to it as a whole without giving it an accompaniment" (*Dialectic* 130).

[8] Bachelard's dialectics between confirmed or disappointed expectations may echo the system of retentions and protentions conceptualized by Husserl in his philosophical investigation of the perception of time. However, as Serra notes: "in Husserl there is a temporal vector, the present, which runs through the opposition between past and future [...], in Bachelard […] instants create hooks, which condense a plurality of interconnected lines. In Husserl the instant becomes interval, in Bachelard rhythm gives form to separate nuclei, connecting them" ("Ritmo e durata fra Husserl e Bachelard" 332; my translation). On this difference between Husserl and Bachelard, cf. also Cavazzini 9-27. In this context, it might be interesting to compare the Bachelardian perspective with that of literary theorist Wolfgang Iser, who was influenced by Husserlian philosophy of perception and temporality. For an interesting attempt to hybridize Bachelardian and Iserian theory, cf. Touponce. On Iser, see the monographic issue of *Enthymema* edited by Laura Lucia Rossi, cf. Rossi.

the energies originating elsewhere that it has captured and brought with it" […]. Rhythm really is the only way of disciplining and preserving the most diverse of energies. (133-4)[9]

A poem represents therefore a virtual reserve of physical and psychic energies. Consequentially, reading a verse is a complex operation that relies on a dialectics between action and a "vibrate" repose – a repose always in tension to decompose and recompose syntactically a literary work.

In light of this virtualistic and energetic conception, rhythm is intended by Bachelard as a product of an imaginative activity of signification, symbolization and hierarchization of values that operates on aesthetic objects that are constitutively indeterminate from a semantic point of view. It is crucial to observe that, for the Bar-sur-Aube philosopher, this indeterminate essence of an aesthetic object – that stimulates our intellectual activity and does not inhibit it – can then be grasped only in a soundless dimension, that is, only in silent reading and reflection:

[P]oetry […] will not reveal all its charms when we confine ourselves to speaking or feeling it. […] If we speak soundlessly and allow image to follow image in quick succession, so that we are living at the meeting point, the point of superimposition, of all the different interpretations, we understand the nature of a truly mental, truly intellectual, lyric state. Reality is enfolded and adorned by the rich garment of conditionals. In place of the association of ideas there comes the ever possible dissociation of interpretations. The mind takes pleasure in its refusal of all that it once found unfailingly attractive: it discovers all the delights of poetry in its destruction of poetry […]. (*Dialectic* 154)[10]

3. Complex and Ambivalent Moments

Let us now proceed with the examination of "Instant poétique and instant métaphisique". The beginning of the essay seems cryptic:

Poetry is a metaphysics of the moment. It has to convey within the space of a short poem a vision of the universe and the secrets of a heart, a person, things – and do so all at once. If it merely obeys the time scale of life, it is something less than life; it can only be greater than life by immobilizing life and experiencing on the spot, as it were, the dialectic of joy and pain. It is the principle of essential simultaneity in which the most scattered and disunited being achieves unity. ("The Poetic Moment and The Metaphysical Moment" 173)

In this suggestive paragraph,[11] Bachelard states a simple concept: the moment is not a phenomenon of perceived temporality but a construction that imaginatively immobilizes life by

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[9] On the relationship between Bachelard and Servien, cf. Bordei-Boca.

[10] It is also worth noting the Bachelardian debt to Raoul de la Grasserie's *De l'elément psychique dans le rythme* (1892): "Raoul de la Grasserie has shown that the rhythm of sound alone has come late in poetry. He sees the starting point of prosody as the line 'which was entirely psychic and formed by the divisions of time between which words, that is to say ideas, were distributed. […]'. The important point for our argument is the primary character of the psychic line in poetry and its inherent supremacy over objective temporal value. We shall rediscover this psychic poetry, this soundless poetry, if we are prepared to think the lines instead of scanning them, above even our inner language, in the time of thought, a time that is full of lacunae" (*Dialectic* 131).

[11] The paragraph is clearly evocative due to Bachelard's use of the term metaphysics. What is metaphysics for him? It should be noted that Bachelard, in his epistemological reflection, like the neo-positivists, openly argued against traditional metaphysics. Moreover, in *La poétique de l'espace*, the Bar-sur-Aube

unifying, hierarchizing and superimposing in the present a series of heterogeneous and simultaneous elements.

In this context, a vertical and spatialized time emerges during the silent reception of a poem. This vertical and artificial time is different from the horizontal time of prosody and duration.[12] Indeed, we need to note that prosody is understood by Bachelard as the sound, metric-rhythmic and even psychological-emotional dimensions of poetry:

> Prosody is simply a way of organizing sounds in sequence; it governs cadences and administers passions and alarums […]. In accepting the consequences of the poetic moment, prosody offers a path back to prose, to thought made explicit, to love as experienced, to everyday social life, to glancing, linear, continuous life. (173)

In order to discover the vertical time of poetry it would be necessary to:

1. Getting used to not referring one's own time to other people's time – breaking the social framework of time [*les cadres sociaux de la durée*]:
2. Getting used to not referring one's own time to the time of things – breaking the phenomenal framework of time [*les cadres phénoménaux de la durée*];
3. Getting used […] to not referring one's own time to the time of life – e to no longer knowing whether one's heart is beating or whether one's happiness is burgeoning – i.e., breaking the vital framework of time [*les cadres vitaux de la durée*]. (175)[13]

Through this list, Bachelard is affirming that vertical time is not perhaps subordinate to sound declamation – *les cadres sociaux* –, to imitation of the rhythms and sounds of things and of living beings – *les cadres phénoménaux* – and to our intimate, psychophysical and emotional experiences – *les cadres vitaux de la durée*.

The suppression of prosody and *cadres* causes a change in our reading habits. We no longer read following the linearity and the temporal continuity of the text because the vertical time imposes a discontinuous, articulated and topological temporality. Only through this, we can perhaps grasp the poetic moments.

Bachelard specifies that these moments are complex because they are the site of unstable semantic ambivalences:

> the poetic moment is the awareness of an ambivalence. But it is more than that because this ambivalence has been provoked, is something active, dynamic. The poetic moment compels a person to raise or lower his values. In the poetic moment a person goes up or down without accepting the world's time, which would turn ambivalence back into antithesis and resolve simultaneity into succession. (174)

philosopher declares that his poetology is an oxymoronic "concrete metaphysics" (29). In light of this, Giovanni Piana has noted that we need to intend the concept of metaphysics in Bachelard as a philosophical provocation: in the Bachelardian perspective, the word metaphysics is actually a synonym for "philosophy of imagination." The Bar-sur-Aube philosopher, as Piana argues, opposed a rational and intellectualistic conception of metaphysics, which implies "a totalizing notion of being, in which subjectivity is only indirectly involved"; for Bachelard, in the aftermath of the cultural revolution of the sciences, metaphysics should rather be understood as exclusively as a specific and rigorous study of the activity of an imagining subject (Piana 62; my translation).

[12] The concepts of vertical time and horizontal refers to a well-known philosophical terminology in use during the nineteenth century, cf. Sertoli 173-4.

[13] The term *cadre* Bachelard probably derives from his reading of Maurice Halbwachs' *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925).

The ambivalence of complex instants is grasped if, naively, we try to re-experience in ourselves the poet's creative act. The latter, while writing, experiences in fact "both terms of his antitheses in the same moment. The second term is not consequent upon the first. The two terms are born together" (174). Complex moments are therefore conceptualized by Bachelard as androgynous: "The mystery of poetry is androgynous" (174).

The vertical and androgynous time of ambivalence thus makes us grasp the poetic text as an articulated space in which various ambivalent and simultaneous semantic units are positioned, differentiated and coordinated with each other:

> the accumulated simultaneities are arranged in order. They give that moment dimension because they give it internal order. Time is order and nothing but order. And all order is time. Consequently, the order of ambivalences in the moment is time. (174)

According to the Bar-sur-Aube philosopher, semantic ambivalence in a poem can emerge as an element subordinate to the syntactic construction or as an autonomous element. In the former case, Bachelard mentions - without quoting, unfortunately, a specific textual sample - the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. Mallarmé's poems

> mutilate horizontal time by means of syntactical inversion, blocking or deflecting the consequences of the poetic moment. Complex prosodies place pebbles in the stream so that the ripples shall shatter futile images and the eddies break up the reflections. Reading Mallarme, one frequently has an impression of a kind of recurrent time completing moments gone by. One is living belatedly the moments one ought to have lived — and the feeling is all the stranger for containing no hint of regret or remorse or nostalgia. It consists simply of *wrought time*, which is able sometimes to put the echo before the voice, and contain refusal within avowal. (175)

In the case of an autonomous ambivalence, Bachelard refers to Charles Baudelaire's poetry. The poet of *Les fleurs du mal* is able to bring out ambivalence from a simple succession of different words without disturbing the syntactic order of the poetic verse. An example on which Bachelard focuses is found in the first triplet of the sonnet "Recueillement":

> […] Loin d'eux. Vois se pencher les défuntes Années,
> Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées;
> Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant; […] (141)

For Bachelard, neither term of ambivalence – "*le Regret souriant*" - is antecedent to the other: "the reversibility of being is here emotionalized: the smile regrets and the regret smiles and consoles. Neither of the occasions here expressed successively is the cause of the other, proving that they are imperfectly expressed in terms of horizontal time" ("The Poetic Moment and The Metaphysical Moment" 176). This example of semantic ambivalence in Baudelaire's poem induces Bachelard to assert the existence of a formal causality in vertical time quite different from the efficient causality that dominates the horizontal time of prosody:

> The sensitive metaphysician […], in smiling regret [*le Regret souriant*], […] will understand in terms of formal causality the property of dematerialization that distinguishes the poetic moment. Here is further proof that formal causality unfolds within the moment, in the sense of vertical time, whereas efficient causality unfolds in life and in things, horizontally, by grouping together moments of varying intensity. (177)

3. Rhythm in the Literary Imagination

From our examination of "Instant poétique et instant métaphysique", two crucial principles seem to emerge:

- The vertical time is a silent time;
- The poetic moment is complex because it is a semantic ambivalence.

In the next subparagraphs, we will observe how Bachelard reflects on these two topics in his works from the 1940s. We will also note how the French philosopher resumes the virtual and energetic conception of rhythm conceptualized in *La dialectique de la durée*.

3.1 Silent Speech and Writing

In *l'Air et et les songes* (1943), Bachelard elaborates an interesting reflection on the relationship between orality and writing. The French philosopher does not conceive the origin of oral poetry as derived simply from the perception and imitation of the sounds and rhythms of nature. Rather, he thinks that the beginning of oral literature coincides with the moment in which man, in the silence of his own consciousness, begins to valorize and sublimate the dynamic and rhythmic activity of his own breathing, which is also understood by Bachelard as an imaginative and energetic struggle against airy matter:

> Before it is ever expressed metaphorically, *poetic breath* is a reality that can be found in the life of a poem if we are willing to follow the lessons of the *aerial material imagination.* And if we were to pay more attention to *poetic exuberance* and to all the forms that the joy of speaking takes – speaking quietly, rapidly, shouting, whispering, intoning – we would discover an incredible multiplicity of poetic breathing. In its strength as in its gentleness, in its poetic wrath as in its poetic tenderness, we would see an economy of breathing at work. (*Air and Dreams* 239)

However, the word declaimed aloud "requires too much effort on our part; it requires too much presence; it does not allow us total mastery over our slow pace" (250-1). Thus, the speaker completely dominates airy matter through the activities of writing and silent reading. These activities do not entail any vocal or listening fatigue because the airy matter with which we previously entered into friction during declamation and breathing has been completely dematerialized and sublimated.

During writing and silent reading, moreover, a "*poetic will*" emerges, which is understood by Bachelard as the will to confer a structure that gives a formal and artificial coherence to the lines of a poem:

> Reality is so distant for anyone who knows written reverie, for anyone who can live and live to the full with the flow of the pen! What he had intended to say is so quickly replaced by what he discovers himself writing that he feels clearly that the written language is creating-its-own-universe. A universe of sentences arranges itself on the blank page with a coherence among its images that often has very diverse laws, but which always keeps the great laws of the imaginary. (250)

The units on which the structural will operates are the words we used to pronounce or hear, but which in the silence of writing and reading become rhythmic units that preserve a sort of energetic memory of the breathing movement:

the form of the words contains exactly the right amount of aerial matter. They will be sur-rhythmed, and they will benefit from a surrealism of rhythm in the sense that they will derive their rhythm directly from aerial substance, from the material of breath. (244)

The phenomenon of breathing, even if virtualized, is thus at the heart of a structuring dialectics between thought and expression. This relationship, observes the Bar-sur-Aube philosopher, certainly runs the risk of making writing automatic and reading mechanical (245). This can be avoided if the writer and the reader desire to (re)innovate their imaginative activity, thus respectively re-actualizing and reliving the dialectics between "reflective silence" and "attentive silence", both expressions of a "the will to speak in its nascent state while it is yet a primary, potential, unuttered vocalization" (245).

The silenced will of speaking can be grasped even more clearly if we compare the writer and the reader to the composer of symphonies:

There are musicians who compose on blank paper, in silence and immobility. Their eyes wide open, they create, by a gaze that stretches into emptiness, a kind of visual silence, a silent gaze that effaces the world in order to silence its noises; they *write* music. They do not move their lips; even the rhythm of their blood has stopped its drumming; life waits; harmony is about to come. Then they hear what they are creating in the creative act itself. They no longer belong to a world of echoes or resonances. […] For them, the staff is an abstract lyre that is already sonorous. There, on the blank page, they take pleasure in conscious counterpoint [. In a live performance, some voices may get lost, be too low, or be drowned out; the blend may not work well. But creators of written music have ten ears and one hand. The hand wrapped around a pen draws together the world of harmony: ten ears, ten powers of concentration, ten chronometers to listen, reach out, and regulate the onrush of symphonic sounds.
There are also silent poets, silencers who start by quieting an overly noisy universe and all the hubbub caused by its thunderous sound. They also hear what they write at the same time as they are writing it, in the slow cadence of written language. They do not transcribe poetry; they write it. Let others "execute" what they have created there on the blank page. […] As for them, they savor the harmony of the written page on which thought speaks and the word thinks. They know before they scan and before they hear it that the rhythm that they have written is certain. They know that their pen would stop of its own accord if it encountered a hiatus, that it would refuse to write unnecessary alliterations since it would no more want to repeat sounds than thoughts. (247-8)

Poems, like the scores of symphonies, are written and they can be read vertically. In the poetic moment "words, symbols, and thoughts are in accord", just as in the symphonic moment there is the union between melody, harmony and rhythm (248). Bachelard then argues that, in order to examine carefully a poem, we should copy it several times on a sheet of paper. Only through, we can grasp its structural complexity: "Pen in hand, we have some possibility of doing away with the unfair advantage of sounds. We can teach ourselves *to* relive one of the most all-inclusive of associations, that of dream and meaning, by allowing dream the time to find its sign and to form its meaning slowly" (283).

3.2 Towards a 'Rhythmanalysis' of Ambivalences

A key concept in Bachelard's literary aesthetics is that of dialectics. However, by using this term, the French philosopher does not intend to make any reference to the scientific dialectics studied in works such as *La philosophie du non* (1940) or to Hegelian dialectics. For him, the scientific-philosophical dialectics "juxtaposes contradictions in order to cover the whole field of the possible" while the dialectics of imagination "wants to take hold of all the real and finds more reality in what is hidden than in what is shown" (*Earth and Reveries of Repose* 19). By

comprehending the dialectics of imagination in this sense, Bachelard is inclined to consider literary images as possible "hotbeds of ambivalence" on the axiological level (*Earth and Reveries of Will* 7). In other words, literary images are essentially dynamic and semantically indeterminate because they are susceptible to being valued ambivalently.

This characteristic of literary images has both a pragmatic and an aesthetic consequence.

From a pragmatic point of view, the ambivalent values of images do not refer to real objects but to the writer's subjective judgments: "the imagination is first and foremost the *tonalized subject*" (*Earth and Reveries of Repose* 63). Consequentially, an image can be subject to both praise and insult by the author using it.[14] In this context, images both potentially laudable and insulting are thus always the basis of persuasive discourse that aims to create and limit a shared value horizon between the writer and the reader: "the imagination is animated by an unbounded proselytism. The literary imagination in particular exists to persuade" (99). However, referring to Eugène Dupréel's sociology of values, Bachelard claims that "*precariousness* constitutes one of the fundamental attributes of *value*" (96). The attribution of praise value or insult value to an image that is by its essence semantically indeterminate is precarious because there can be no agreement between the author's subjective evaluation and that of the reader:

> literary images are in many respects polemical images. Writing means pleasing some people and displeasing many more. Literary images come in for criticism of contrary kinds. An image will be called banal by some and precious by others, and be tossed into arguments over good and bad taste. (*Earth and Reveries of Repose* 67)

The images, both potentially laudable and insulting, are thus the founding elements that give a social and historical rhythm to the conflicts that animate the concrete "domain of literature" ("A Psychology of Literary Language" 136).[15]

From an aesthetic point of view, the ambivalent values of literary images could invite a double participation in the reader's aesthetical response. During the reading, "[w]e have the opportunity to live a rhythmanalysis that can restore two contrary temptations in a situation in which ambiguous being expresses itself as ambiguous being, as the being that has dual expression" (*Earth and Reveries of Repose* 61). The terms "rhythmanalysis" – derived by Lúcio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos' philosophy deeply investigates by Bachelard in the chapter VIII of *La dialectique de la durée* (136-55) – is intended as a pointillistic and atomistic analysis of the possible and hidden ambivalences that could be activated when we read literary images.

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[14] The ambivalence of praise/insult is regarded by Bachelard as the fundamental ambivalence of the imagination. The French philosopher arrives at this conclusion influenced by the many years of epistemological and historical research on alchemical texts: "[a]ll alchemy is motivated by this dialectics of praise and insult, the richness of which would hardly be suspected if one read only historians of chemistry. In fact, objective judgments are crushed beneath the weight of value judgments" (*Earth and Reveries of Will* 248). We should note that Bachelard was not the only literary scholar who developed a theory of values based on the dialectics between praise and insult in the 1940s. We could refer, in this regard, to Mikhail Bakhtin's reflections dated 1944, cf. Sini, "Lineamenti di una teoria del tragico" 100-2 and *passim*.

[15] The pragmatic side of Bachelard's literary theory is often overlooked by his exegetes, who do not recognize the crucial influence that Jean Paulhan's *Les fleurs de Tarbes* (1936) had on the French philosopher. Cf. Bachelard, "A Psychology of Literary Language". In this regard, it is interesting to note that "domain of literature" is actually an incorrect translation of the term *cité littéraire* that appears in Bachelard's original text (*Droit de rêver* 178). The concept of *cité* evokes a well-known category that is central to the interests of political philosophy (from Plato to Leo Strauss). Bachelard probably takes this concept from reading Georges Sorel's *De l'utilité du pragmatisme* (1921), which is cited in *Essai sur la connaissance approchée* (1928; 163-4). We intend to study the relationship between Bachelard and Sorel's sociology in the future.

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Although he did not articulate a rigorous methodology, Bachelard deeply experimented the rhythmanalysis method in 1944 in the article "La dialectique dynamique de la rêverie mallarméenne" published in the literary journal *Le Point*. In this essay, the Bar-sur-Aube philosopher analyses the first tercet and the first verse of the second tercet in Stéphane Mallarmé's sonnet "Renouveau":

> Puis je tombe énervé de parfums d'arbres, las,
> Et creusant de ma face une fosse à mon rêve,
> Mordant la terre chaude où poussent les lilas,
>
> J'attends, en m'abîmant que mon ennui s'élève […]. (34)

Following the analysis of the sonnet provided by Deborah Aish in *La métaphore dans l'œuvre de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1938), Bachelard observes two semantic constructions, one based on the dynamical images that refer to the values of sinking – *tomber, creuser, fosse, terre, abîmer* and *ennui* – and one based on dynamical images that refer to the values of rising – *rêve, pousser, élever* ("The Dialectic of Mallarmé's Imagination" 120). For the philosopher, the dialectics between values of sinking and values of rising suggests us an imaginative experience of falling and rising:

> Three and a half lines heavy with downward movement to find at the bottom the upward of a boredom without even contingent. […] We must […] accept the movement of our heaviness and go on to work at our destiny of earthly weight by excavating with open mouth at the subterranean chasm of our dreams. It is after this long, slow fall, this prolix, meticulously detailed and wittingly complete fall, that we feel the induction of the inverse movement. Then the boredom lifts, the boredom lifts us. (120)

However, we can 'rhythmize' some images to read Mallarmé's verses differently. To do this, we need to read images not as ideas or concepts with standard meanings. Firstly, we could counterintuitively confer the values of sinking to images of *rêve* and *pousser*:

> Mrs. Aish […] takes dream [*rêve*] to signify some kind of elevation. As if there were no such things as dreams of subterranean life, dreams of digging pits! […]
> Not everything that grows necessarily grows upward, even the April lilac. And bearing the in the mind that Mallarmé's spring is first and foremost a feeling of nostalgia for the clarity of winter, we are rather inclined to think of this growth [*pousser*] as being still subterranean, as possessing the life of a root. (120-1)

Secondly, we could, again counterintuitively, confer a dynamic and positive value to the word *ennui*:

> The time has not yet come for growing upward. It is necessary to wait, to wait in the abyss, or rather: to wait while sinking into the abyss. The poem's initial movement lasts until the final hemistich of the fourth line.
> During this wait, deepened being discovers its true substance, its tranquil substance. With Mallarmé the substance of being, raised to poetic awareness, is boredom [*ennui*], tranquil boredom, pure boredom detached from all care and worry, "dear boredom". And this boredom […] is revealed as a dynamic reality, as an agreeable floating feeling, a feeling of rising above the temptations of a heavy world. (121)

In light of this, Bachelard argues that Mallarmé's verses can express not only the dialectical ambivalence between sinking/rising but also between heaviness/boredom:

What the poet has done, then, is to make us experience the dynamic dialectic of heaviness and boredom; he presents heaviness and boredom as dynamic opposites — opposites that the simple psychology of everyday feelings would call synonyms. […] Boredom in this case is no longer a dark seed; this boredom is sprouting. Like all beautiful, simple forces, it possesses impetus. (121)

4. Conclusion

In the previous paragraphs, we have closely examined the Bachelardian reflections on poetic moment and rhythm from the perspective of literary theory. In our conclusion, it may be interesting to contextualize historically Bachelard's theory by elucidating the affinities and divergences between the latter and other theoretical proposals on literature.

Bachelard aligns with the positions of the mature Russian formalists who, in opposing *Ohrenphilologie* from the mid-1920s, refused to examine poems only with reference to their pure acoustic dimension; moreover, they rejected any psychological criteria to analyze poetries (Sini, "I formalisti russi"). In this regard, parallels can be drawn between the French philosopher's thesis and that of Yuri Tynianov in *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924). Firstly, both posit an energetic conception of poetic rhythm and both postulate a dialectics between confirmed expectations and disappointed ones.[16] Secondly, Tynianov and Bachelard conceive the poetic word as an intrinsically complex element. Analogously to the Bachelard moment, the words comprising poetic verse are, for the Russian formalist, complex because they are the resultant of heterogeneous and simultaneous series: "[t]he word proves to be a compromise […]. Consequently, the word proves to be impeded, while the vocal process is successive" (58).

The proposed comparison between Bachelard and Tynianov may also lead to the observation of similarities between the French philosopher's theory and the theoretical tenets of structuralism and post-structuralism. Firstly, we need to note that, from the Bachelardian perspective, rhythm identifies qualitative and positional units that emerge through differentiation in acts of repetition. Thus, poetic moments are graspable through a topological intuition that is also fundamental for structural rationality (Deleuze 173-5).[17] Secondly the French philosopher attributes importance to the structural agency of the literary critic's consciousness (Barthes).[18] Finally, Bachelard's theoretical thought and post-structuralism - particularly Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism - privilege the written and silent dimension of literature over the sound dimension. Indeed, the soundless dimension is capable of restoring autonomous aesthetic objects that can be infinitely decomposable.

[16] On these aspects of Tynianov's theory, cf. Sini, "Energy spent in Orientantion". Sini also mentions the energetic conception of poetry by Jan Mukařovský, exponent of the Prague School and close reader of French aesthetics (Henri Bremond).

[17] However, it should be noted that the topological-spatial intuition does not only belong to French structural literary theory. In this sense, we could mention Costanzo Di Girolamo's research on poetic metre influenced by generativist approaches, cf. Di Girolamo.

[18] It is interesting that on this issue Bachelard admits his theoretical affinity to Paul Valéry's aesthetics: "[w]e should […] establish, as Paul Valéry so well put it, *an algebra of acts*. An action thus appears as a necessarily complex formula, with many articulations, and with well-defined dynamic relations between impulses' (Bachelard, *Dialectic* 82). However, Valéry could be considered as one of the hidden sources of French structuralism (Genette). The concordance of Valéry's and Bachelard's positions with those of structuralism could moreover be justified by the implicit Romantic origin of their thought. On the romantic origin of the concept of form and structure, cf. Petitot 73-9. Bachelard himself notes that the first to decompose experience were the Romantics: "At the time of people like Novalis, Jean-Paul Richter and [Johann Kaspar] Lavater, it was fashionable to disorganise psyches that were stuck in contingent forms of sentimentality and thus incapable of leading an aesthetic and moral life" (*Dialectic* 21).

However, fundamental differences exist between Bachelard and formalist, structural, and post-structural thought.

Firstly, Bachelard's theoretical aim seems to us to be primarily focused on examining the semantic aspect of the literary image and the aesthetic reception of the reader. Thus, Bachelard does not intend to rationally deconstruct and recreate the system-totality of the literary work by elucidating heterogeneous series organized among themselves (phonetic, morphological, syntactic, metrical, and semantic series, etc.). Secondly, Bachelard's theory of poetic rhythm does not distinguish literary genres and forms synchronically or diachronically. In contrast to Tynianov, for example, the French philosopher does not consider rhythm as a defining characteristic of the literary genre of poetry. Indeed, Bachelard posits that literature in general is subject to rhythmic laws, which he interprets as laws of decomposability. Finally, unlike the most radical structuralists and post-structuralists, Bachelard does not assume a 'scientific' theory of language that postulate the complete arbitrariness and autonomy of the system of signs. For him, poetic language is always subject to an external and pragmatic motivation that transcends it and transforms it into psychic and dynamic matter, a matter which forms the basis of literary communication ("A Psychology of Literary Language" 141).[19] This is why, for instance, Bachelard was not content with identifying the standardized meanings of words or the most commonplace ambivalences in his rhythmanalysis of Mallarmé's verses. In fact, in order to suggest some new ways of experiencing aesthetically and dynamically the poem to readers, Bachelard endeavored to elucidate the polysemous potential of literary images and, consequently, the possible ambivalences hidden in verses.

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[19] This theoretical position is probably derived from Bachelard's proximity to Surrealist aesthetics, which possesses a motivated conception of poetic language (Stockwell 40, 44). Moreover, it is worth noting that a motivated conception of language is also theorized in Bachelard's historical epistemology: "we would remark that language can be just as misleading in the physical sciences [...] for who that are not attentive to the very evolution of the language of science. [...] The language of science is in a state of permanent semantic revolution" (*Le matérialisme rationnel* 215; my translation).

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