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Sounding the Noumenal in the Phenomenal:

Gaston Bachelard and José María Arguedas

How can we keep ourselves from postulating beneath the phe-
nomenon
a noumenon where our spirit recognizes itself and comes alive?
*... Comme se defender de poser sous le phénomène
un noumène à notre esprit se reconnaît et s'anime?*
Gaston Bachelard¹

Like a sounding lead, I descend deep into the heart of things.
Je tombe comme un plomb au coeur des choses.
Richard Euringer²

Is it possible to probe and nurture the pulse of a living *logos* at the heart of human experience – a pulse perchance felt as an elusive call from a realm of noumenal possibility latent within the phenomenal realm of everyday life? Such potential for a fertile relation between noumenal and phenomenal intuitions leapt to my attention after encountering some striking points of convergence between the insights of two ostensibly unrelated thinkers from the twentieth century: French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) and Andean novelist José María Arguedas (1911-1969). Notwithstanding their dissimilar scientific backgrounds – Bachelard in mathematical physics, Arguedas in the anthropological sciences – both authors attained international acclaim for their respective masterpieces in the late 1950's: Bachelard for his philosophical work *The Poetics of Space* (*La Poétique de l'espace*,

¹ *Noumenon and Microphysics* in «Philosophical Forum» (NM 80, my trans.); cf. *Noumène et microphysique*, «Études» (NM-F 18). Frequently cited texts have been assigned Siglas for easy reference, followed by corresponding page numbers. See the Bibliography for complete publication details on all texts cited in this essay – including assigned Siglas, where applicable.

² This line from Euringer is cited in Bachelard's *Earth and Reveries of Repose* (ERR 8-9, trans. modified); cf. *La Terre et les rêveries du repos* (TRR 12). Quotations throughout this essay are drawn from their published English versions. If a translated passage has been revised, both the translation and the original will henceforth be referenced as shown here: (ERR 9; TRR 12).

1957), and Arguedas for his poetic novel *Deep Rivers* (*Los ríos profundos*, 1958) set in the Peruvian Andes in the mid-1920's³. Although they apparently never met, nor even cited each other⁴ (their one area of convergence being a shared interest in Wilhelm Dilthey's poetic hermeneutics)⁵, each of these authors devised a distinctive *micro-phenomenological* approach to a world constantly taking shape in response to subtle energies which Bachelard labeled "noumenal" (Gk. *noumenon* = an *a priori* intellectual intuition vs. an *a posteriori* phenomenal one). Bachelard's notion of the "noumenon", however, veered somewhat from that of his predecessors. As the idea of the *thing-in-itself*, for instance, the Kantian "noumenon" was generally understood to be accessible *neither* to experience *nor* to conceptual intuition⁶, which is why Husserl – considering it an oxymoron – decided to set it aside in the articulation of his phenomenology. But Bachelard would insist throughout his career that the philosophical *role* of "noumena" could not be obviated or dismissed: neither in the creative work of science, nor in that of poetry. For him, their role was intrinsically involved in the *generation* of new phenomena which are not mere representations or reproductions of already constituted, conceptualized experiences. Although in *The Poetics of Space* Bachelard would set aside the term "noumenon" *per se*, he was still careful to distinguish sedimented perceptions, images, and metaphors from those events of expression that alight as epiphanic flashes in response to the lure of what he described as "destinal centers" (*centres de destin*)⁷ – i.e. vortical sites of reverie that act as noumenal nurseries for the ripening of embryonic insights.

³ Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace* won the Grand Prix National des Lettres in 1961; Arguedas's *Los ríos profundos* won the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega Prize in 1968.

⁴ Arguedas traveled to France as soon as he submitted *Los ríos profundos* for publication. See *Arguedas en Francia: El Viaje de 1958*, in *Arguedas: La Dinámica de los Encuentros Culturales*, Vol. II, Lima, Fondo Editorial PUCP, 2013, Vol. II, pp. 59-68. Although there is no record of a personal meeting between Bachelard and Arguedas during that trip, Bachelard was by then widely known in Paris, where he remained after his 1955 retirement from the Sorbonne until his death in 1962.

⁵ Both authors discussed Dilthey's *Poetry and Experience*. Arguedas, in his article *La Sierra en el Proceso de la Cultura Peruana*, in Pinilla, C.M., *Arguedas: Conocimiento y vida*, Lima, Fondo Editorial, PUCP, 1994, pp. 92-108; Bachelard did so in *Fragments of a Poetics of Fire*, eng. tr. K. Haltman, Dallas TX, Dallas Institute, 1990, p. 100, 100n11.

⁶ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant wrote: «The concept of a noumenon... is of a thing that is not to be thought of as an object of the senses but rather as a *thing-in-itself* ...» but the terms "noumenon" and the "thing-in-itself" are not always interchangeable in his discourse (A254/B310, p. 271). The "thing-in-itself" (A30) is first mentioned long before any reference to the "noumenon" (A250). Kant further distinguished between "negative noumena" (intellectual intuitions totally inaccessible to sensible verification), and "positive noumena" (intellectual intuitions recognized as phenomenal «possibilities»). See the Bibliography for publication details. Over time, the Kantian "noumenon" has led to several controversial interpretations that deserve a separate study.

⁷ M. Jolas's English translation of Bachelard's «*centres de destin*» (PE 28) as «centers of fate» (PS 9) might be misleading insofar as «fate» befalls human beings despite themselves, whereas «destiny» tends to be intuited as a summons or vocation which individuals are free to respond to, or not.

It is in their respective ways of engaging such *reveries*, which gravitate toward «the still-fluid substance of the future»⁸, that I find intriguing affinities between Bachelard and Arguedas. And, much as Bachelard pursued his bold intuitions within a French academic environment not very receptive to the proposals of an adventurous thinker who happened to hail from a tradition in scientific rationalism (then fast decreasing in popularity)⁹, Arguedas had to contend with similar skepticism among his colleagues for his unusual *modus operandi* in his field. He was often criticized by the social scientists of his day who labeled his poetic descriptions as “solipsistic reveries” or “fantasies” allegedly “not faithful to Peruvian reality” (despite their strong testimonial and ethnological component)¹⁰. Nonetheless, Arguedas insisted that his ethno-poetic narratives expressed not only patent truth but latent truth (*verdad-verdad*)¹¹, for they gave voice to subtle forces he detected brewing deep within the Andean world and soul-pulses he had experienced intimately (growing up, as he had, in the lap of Andean natives), but which first needed to be “sounded out” and “sung” before they could come to recognition and fruition in the phenomenal and sociopolitical worlds¹².

We will now start by outlining Bachelard’s evolving probe of the world’s latent *logos* in his philosophy of science and poetry, and then move on to offering examples from Arguedas’s *Deep Rivers* which, I submit, not only illustrate but ultimately help *enrich* Bachelard’s argument.

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⁸ Phrase coined in Bachelard’s *Divination and the Look in the Work of Marcoussis* (*The Right to Dream*, pp. 48-49). Cf. *The Poetics of Reverie*, eng. tr. Daniel Russell, Boston, Beacon, 1969: «In reverie we re-enter into contact with possibilities which destiny has not been able to make use of... [Here, even the] past has a future, the future of its living images, the *reverie future* which opens before any rediscovered image», p. 112.

⁹ The historical rationalism spearheaded by Léon Brunschvig (Bachelard’s doctoral mentor) became eclipsed as «philosophies of existence» gained prominence in mid-twentieth century Europe (see G. Gutting *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 84-89). After earning his doctorate in the Philosophy of Science, Bachelard embarked in the exploration of fields as diverse as microphysics, alchemical literature, depth-psychology, and poetry, always with the goal of stretching the limits of instituted philosophical thinking (PN 32, 79; L 90; PS 120, 132, 147, *et passim*).

¹⁰ See: M. Vargas Llosa, «Dreams and Magic in José María Arguedas» in *Deep Rivers* (pp. 235-242), and *Utopía Arcaica: José María Arguedas y las ficciones del indigenismo* (pp. 157-8, 335-6). Equally revealing are the transcripts of a symposium on Arguedas’s work, held by a group of social scientists and literary critics – Henri Favre, Aníbal Quijano, Sebastián Salazar Bondy, and others – who gathered to discuss the value of Arguedas’s narratives vis-à-vis the world of Andean Peru and its destiny. See: Mesa Redonda sobre *Todas las Sangres*: 23 junio, 1965, ed. Guillermo Rochabrún (*passim*).

¹¹ J.M. Arguedas *et al.*, *Primer Encuentro de Narradores Peruanos*, (Arequipa, June 1965), 2nd edition, Lima, Latinoamericana, 1986 pp. 109, 140.

¹² In the Quechua language, inchoate forces are referred to as belonging to the realm of *uk-upacha* (underworld); the perceptible human world is referred to as *kaypacha*; and the spiritual overworld is alluded to as *hananpacha*. Arguedas aimed at giving a poetically-entwined “voice” to these three worldly dimensions in his novels, thus intensifying their *truth* value.

We find ourselves at a pivotal point where reciprocal interpretations of dreams through thought, and thought through dreams, keep turning.

Nous sommes ici à un pivot autour duquel tournent interprétations reciproques du rêve par la pensée, et la pensée par le rêve.

Gaston Bachelard¹³

Since the beginning of his philosophical career – spurred by early twentieth-century discoveries in relativity and quantum theory – Bachelard had expressed a keen interest in penetrating the world’s *infinitesimal dimension* to understand how human beings might learn to participate more lucidly and responsibly in its transformative potential. But, as he would write in his 1940 book, *The Philosophy of No*, what is *infinitesimal* or infinitely small (be it in microphysical experiment or in microgeometric intuition) belongs by definition to the realm of the *noumenon*¹⁴. In the chapter where he examines Paul Dirac’s hypothetical idea of “negative mass” (fifteen years before the discovery of anti-protons which would confirm Dirac’s mathematical theory)¹⁵, Bachelard noted that such noumena are first intuited through what he termed “anagogic reverie” (Gk. *anagein* = “leading upwards”), namely, a mode of thinking which – in scientific work – ventures into the area of dialectical surrationalism through meditations that «seek the illumination of thought by thought, leading to sudden revealing intuitions beyond the limits of already instituted thought»¹⁶. While “anagogic reverie” in literary hermeneutics tends to be triggered by the *metaphysical* interpretation of works which venture beyond their literal, historical, or political levels of meaning (such as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*)¹⁷ – in scientific work Bachelard describes such an abstracting mode

¹³ Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Space* (PS 16; PE 33).

¹⁴ «It must be noted at the outset» wrote Bachelard, «that the infinitely small is noumenal. We may not bring phenomenal knowledge (shaped to our scale of being) to the infinitely small» (PN 81). See Bachelard’s extended discussion in «Noumenon and Microphysics» (NM 75-84; NM-F 11-24). Such a noumenal principle would apply also to our intuitions of the «infinitely vast» or to what Kant described as the infinite magnitude of the «mathematically sublime» (*The Critique of Judgment*, eng. tr. by Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1987, pp. xix, 107, 112).

¹⁵ As N. F. Labruno reveals in an asterisked note to the 1978 Spanish edition of *La Filosofía del No*: «In 1955, the existence of antiprotons was proven by Berkeley’s ‘bevatron,’ confirming Paul Dirac’s theory of ‘negative mass’» (PN-S 33, my trans.).

¹⁶ In *The Philosophy of No*, W.C. Waterston translates Bachelard’s «*rêverie anagogique*» (PN-F 39) as «anagogical dreaming» (PN 32). I prefer a literal translation the French phrase, namely, «anagogic reverie».

¹⁷ *The Divine Comedy* is underpinned throughout by *mathematical reveries* which add to its astonishing depth of meaning. Some intriguing articles on *The Divine Comedy*’s mathematical matrix can be found online: see, for instance, <https://www.slideshare.net/williamjohnmeegan/dante-alighieridante-alighieris-la-divina-commedia-mathematical-system>; also «Dante, Mathematics and Cognitive Theory: *la dolce vita* for Italian Prof. Ariel Saiber» (Bowdoin College, ME): <http://www.bowdoin.edu/news/archives/1academicnews/005231.shtml>.

of reverie as essentially *mathematizing* (PN 32)¹⁸. More recently, following the 2017 confirmation of gravitational waves predicted by Einstein's theory of General Relativity in 1915, physicist Marcelo Gleiser wrote: «How sweet it is to push *ideas* to the limit and beyond, to open a new window into reality»¹⁹.

To be sure, Bachelard had been critical of the fact that the phenomenology of his days should have severed itself so categorically from the investigation of *noumena* (considered fathomless since Kant), and from the microphysical sciences (due largely, no doubt, to its role in the creation of the atomic bomb), concentrating on the phenomenal plane of the natural, psychological, and social sciences to the exclusion of other – in his view – also crucial perspectives. Besides the disinterest among his colleagues *vis-à-vis* the microphysical *noumenon*, he regretted their parallel tendency, in studies on the literary imagination, to dismiss as “mere fantasy” those «elemental reveries we never quite overcome with age, despite all the efforts of education». Whereupon he added: «And having forbidden us from thinking the *thing-in-itself*, in any shape or form» philosophers risk «condemning human beings to remain...on the phenomenal plane»²⁰.

Hence, in the introduction to *Earth and Reveries of Repose* (1948) Bachelard ventured to study the mysteries of intimate, inchoate energies by exploring four distinct *attitudinal perspectives* towards what is latent: (1) the “nullifying perspective” that preemptively dismisses the noumenon's inner *value* and its oneiric power; (2) a “dialectical approach” which pursues being's rhythms of concealing vs. unveiling, etc.; (3) the “approach of open wonder” with its deliberate adoption of lucid naïveté; and (4) the perspective of “infinite intensity” manifest, for instance, in endless reveries of purification – elemental and mental²¹. While many of the examples of intimate forces that Bachelard summoned in that book consisted of *visualized* reveries – such as the “secret blackness of milk” (in Audibert), “alchemical reveries” or “archetypal images” (cave, serpent, etc.), there he also began to ponder the value of «verbal and etymological reveries» as a way of *sounding out* the

¹⁸ Although Waterston translates Bachelard's *mathématisante* as “mathematical” I am here using the English neologism “mathematizing” since Bachelard's gerund form of the French *mathématisante* was meant to stress the dialectical *dynamism* of anagogic reverie (PN-F 39). Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), had notably anticipated the *generative* potential of *reverie* in scientific thinking when he recognized that if chemistry were capable of expressing itself in *mathematical language*, it could become a «very useful scientific *fiction*, by means of which an otherwise merely experimental art could become science, and attain (if only hypothetically, within its borders) complete clarity». See Friedrich W.J. Schelling, *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Baumgartner W.H. *et al.*, Stuttgart, Frommann-Holzboog, 1976, Part I, Vol. 5, p. 243; quoted in Chaouli, M., *The Laboratory of Poetry*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 217.

¹⁹ Posted online: <http://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2017/10/03/555320681/nobel-winners-work-in-physics-began-with-albert-einstein>.

²⁰ Bachelard here appears to have been alluding to the phenomenological views of Jean-Paul Sartre *et al.*

²¹ On the basis of this overview of perspectives, Bachelard infers that «any theory of the knowledge of reality that discards oneiric values ultimately divorces itself from the *vital interests* that give impetus to knowledge itself». He then arrives at the thought-provoking conclusion that «any knowledge of the *intimacy* of things is a *poem*» (ERR 8; TRR 11).

hidden pulse in things²². Earlier still, in *Air and Dreams* (1943), he had started isolating “aural reveries” such as the song of the lark in poetry, and reveries involving the “oneiric ear”²³ – an abstract ear that can hear itself hearing, hear itself thinking, and distinguish silent voices²⁴. But not until *The Poetics of Space* would Bachelard explicitly elaborate on this method of “sounding” the subtle energies of a latent logos by registering their *ontological reverberations* in the depths of soul²⁵ – a process which differs, as we shall see, from registering the *psychological resonances* propagated by images as they bounce off the walls of memory²⁶.

Given that one of the most striking aspects of Arguedas’s writing was its attunement to the silent or elusive *sonority* of the steep Andean regions of Peru and its soul, Bachelard’s approach to literature via “aural reverie” will be of particular interest to us in what follows. Yet, before we delve into Bachelard’s insights on “aural reverie” it behooves us to rescue another key aspect of the latent logos that inspired his philosophy. In his 1938 Preface to the French translation of Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* Bachelard happened to draw attention to an *ethical noumenon* which manifests itself in moral intuitions or, at times, in the recognition of a kindred soul:

The noumenon, which may get lost in the vagueness of an open-ended meditation on things, is immediately enriched as it becomes enfolded in another mind/spirit [*esprit*]. The clearest noumenon is thus the meditation of one mind by another, and so the two souls, in a common glance, are closer, more convergent than the pupils of their eyes²⁷.

Here it is essential to point out that a *noumenal intuition* in Bachelard – be it of a thing or a person – never claims to capture its totality, for its mark is *openness* to an infinite dynamic potentiality. No doubt such instances of noumenal “com-

²² In this section of *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, Bachelard quotes a passage from Francis Ponge noting that the infinite depth of things is «rendered by the infinite resources of the semantic depth of words» (ERR 8-9; TRR 11-12). Later, in the *Poetics of Reverie*, Bachelard will develop his method of «verbal and etymological reveries» or word-dreaming. Paradoxically, such etymological inquiry – which he terms «oneiric etymology» – is a way of tapping into *future* possibilities: «Isn’t meditating upon an origin dreaming? And isn’t dreaming upon an origin going beyond it?» (PR 110).

²³ In the *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard will return to an in-depth discussion (and celebration) of the oreille songeuse as the «ear within an ear...that knows how to dream» (PS 166ff; PE 154ff).

²⁴ Such an «abstract ear that can hear itself hearing and thinking» harks back to Bachelard’s analysis of the many-layered *cogitos* in *The Dialectic of Duration*, where he had stated that as soon as we reach the *I think that I think that I think*, we have embarked upon a «noumenological description» (DD 109; DD-F 101).

²⁵ It is from Eugène Minkowski that Bachelard derives the notion of a hidden reverberation (*retentissement*) that cuts through the micro/macrococosmos, as do the recently discovered gravitational waves in astrophysics, from the collision of black holes or neutron stars. See chapter 9, «Retentir (L’Auditif)» in his *Vers une cosmologie* (pp. 101-110). Most interesting is the extended editorial note on Minkowski’s theory included in the *Poetics of Space* (PS xii-xiii, n1).

²⁶ PS xviii-xx.

²⁷ G. Bachelard, *Preface to Martin Buber’s I and Thou*, eng. tr. by E. K. Kaplan, «International Studies in Philosophy», 35-1 (2003), p. 92. Cf. *Préface à Martin Buber*, in M. Buber, *Je et Tu*, tr. fr. par. Geneviève Bianquis, Paris, Éditions Montaigne, 1938, p. 13.

munion” as the one just described, occur but in rare *moments of grace* between souls. In any event, of particular interest to us here is the fact that Bachelard’s contemplation of the eyes of a fellow being prompts us, in turn, to reflect upon the “eye-reveries” that abound in Arguedas’s *Deep Rivers*. Its narrator, a pensive boy named Ernesto, has a way of gazing into the eyes of characters with whom he has memorable encounters – be they cold or steely, calm and clear, dull or radiant, turbulent or smoldering eyes – while he describes the transmutations they undergo as the story unfolds. Again and again, we find him diving into those “gravitational vortices” to sound out the latent worlds he feels emanating from their eyes, as he progressively *gives voice* to the Andean cosmos of clashing forces and whirling confluences he inhabits²⁸.

After publishing his *Preface to Buber* – during the year of the Nazi invasion of Poland – Bachelard decided to delve into the darker layers of the human psyche through a phenomenological analysis of Isidore Ducasse’s *Chants of Maldoror* in a book entitled *Lautréamont* (1939) – intended as a «Psychoanalysis of Life» along the lines of his previously published *Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1938)²⁹. In his study of the aggressive imagination, Bachelard proposed that in order to probe the hidden pulse of impulse-driven lives, as portrayed in Ducasse’s work, we readers must first practice *activating* the author’s expressions in our souls through an inductive reading, punctuated alternately by a philosophical *reduction* that might allow us to observe the unfolding experience in a dispassionate way. In his view, both stages of *psychological activation* and *philosophical reduction* are vital steps toward the conversion of the violent complexes so graphically displayed in the *Chants of Maldoror* – for together they can set in motion a dialectical process that facilitates the understanding of, and liberation from, the unconscious attachments that fuel them³⁰.

Following this literary study of the violent imagination – and already in the midst of World War II – Bachelard would expand the literary exploration of el-

²⁸ Given space restrictions, I here limit myself to listing the multiple passages where Arguedas engages in «eye-reveries» throughout *Deep Rivers*: DR 7, 17, 27, 59, 69, 86, 101, 104, 105, 106-107, 117, 123, 125, 129, 142, 149, 163, 167, 183, 189, 196, 198, 199, 207, 210-211, 215, 261.

²⁹ Bachelard clearly explains the aim of his book *Lautréamont* in its concluding pages: «I undertook this extended meditation on the work of Lautréamont with the *sole purpose* of writing a ‘*Psychoanalysis of Life*.’ In the end, to resist images of fire and to resist images of life is the same thing.... [S]hould one burn with fire, break with life, or continue with life? For me the choice has been made. The new poetry and ideas demand a breaking off and a conversion.... No value is specifically human if it is not the result of a renunciation and a conversion. A specifically human value is always a converted natural value» (L 90-91; my revision and emphasis). I have corrected R.S. Duprée’s English translation of this passage in order to rescue the key point of Bachelard’s thesis statement, which contained a crucial *double negative* in its French structure: «La longue méditation de l’oeuvre de Lautréamont *n’a été entreprise* par nous *qu’en vue d’une* Psychanalyse de la Vie» (L-F 155).

³⁰ The *dialectical* interaction between these two dynamic processes (activation and reduction) could be regarded as a «chiasmic doublet», analogous to the mutually transformative *entrecroisements* between *phenomena* and *noumena* described in Bachelard’s *Le Matérialisme Rationnel*, Paris, PUF, 1953, p. 182.

emental reveries he had begun with his *Psychoanalysis of Fire*³¹. Among these elemental reveries – of water, air, earth, fire – he would discover a range of other culture complexes dragging psychic sediments in their wake, though not all as vicious as the “Lautréamont complex”³². He found that literary images that express such complexes tend to emerge from ingrained habits of feeling, habits of speech, or ways of thinking that we acquire by unconscious contagion, imitation, or cultural inheritance in the course of our unexamined (natural and social) lives.

Little by little, Bachelard realized that such image-complexes, while captivating, lack the potentially healing or renewing virtue of a poetic *logos* that alights through the kinds of meditative, cosmic reveries he would begin to explore in the late 1950s, after retiring from his position as Chair of the Philosophy of Science at the Sorbonne: first in *The Poetics of Space* (1957), followed by *The Poetics of Reverie* (1960) and *The Flame of a Candle* (1961). In the introduction to *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard would refine the dialectical practice of inductive *activation* and critical *reduction*, proposed earlier in *Lautréamont*, by adopting a vigilant “attitude of crisis” in his daily reading with respect to his *own* work-habits and preconceptions – an attitude inspired by Husserl’s “phenomenological reduction”³³ which would expose him in a state of wonder and openness to unexpected flashes of inspiration or poetic advents. Worth citing here are some key passages from his *Poetics of Space* that begin to shed light on the *ontological reach* of his proposal:

The reverberation of a single poetic image involves bringing about a veritable *awakening* of poetic creation, even in the soul of the reader [...].

Through this reverberation, by going *immediately* beyond all psychology or psychoanalysis, we feel a poetic power rising naïvely within us. After the original reverberation, we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past. But the image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface [...]. The image takes

³¹ Besides *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (*La Psychanalyse du feu*, 1938), and the already cited *Air and Dreams* (*L’Air et les songes*, 1942), Bachelard’s works exploring elemental reveries via literature include: *Water and Dreams* (*L’Eau et les rêves*, 1943), *Earth and Reveries of Will* (*La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté*, 1947), *Earth and Reveries of Repose* (*La Terre et les rêveries du repos*, 1948), and his posthumously published *Fragments of a Poetics of Fire* (*Fragments d’une poétique du feu*, 1988).

³² Bachelard finds that culture complexes may have positive dynamic manifestations in some cases – for instance the «Prometheus complex» (a competitive desire to outstrip one’s parents or teachers intellectually). Yet, when not subjected to a critical *reduction*, they tend to become obstacles to human growth as they devolve into ego-driven, pre-reflective attitudes.

³³ According to Husserl, only such an *attitude of crisis* can open us to original knowledge, for it entails *not having decided beforehand* the nature of a phenomenon or the truth of an experience – an uncertainty that leaves us exposed to the unexpected. In other words, it assumes a rupture with our previous knowledge of the world and things. Such a crisis urges us to incorporate ourselves fully before a world that *begins* to reveal itself to us *in the present moment*. For a more complete account of Husserl’s “phenomenological reduction” see Cogan, *The Phenomenological Reduction*, in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/phen-red/#H7>> (June 30, 2015). Here we should note that Bachelard’s “anagogical reverie” – proposed and described in his *Philosophy of No* with regard to the emergence of the notion of “negative mass” in science – derives from a similar *attitude of crisis* (critical questioning) of previously held ideas about a scientific concept and phenomenon.

root in us [...]. It becomes a new being in our language, expressing *us* by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being. (PS xix, initial sentence foreshortened)

Thus the poetic image, which stems from the logos, is personally innovating. We cease to consider it an “object” but feel that the “objective” [...] attitude stifles the “reverberation” and rejects on principle the depth at which the original poetic phenomenon starts. (PS xix-xx).

I cannot but ask myself – at this point – if the “depth” from which a “poetic phenomenon” originates does not remit us back to the *noumenon* as infinitesimal and infinite essence that Bachelard had intuited not only in the eyes of a beloved person in his “Preface” to Buber, but also in the celebrated “song of the skylark” in the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and others, in *Air and Dreams* (1943). Associating it with the wave-particle paradox in microphysics, Bachelard here described the song of the lark as an *invisible corpuscle accompanied by a wave of joy*. Even earlier, in 1931, he had explicitly defined the microphysical *noumenon* as a «center of radiation capable of *generating* phenomena». But, with respect to the song of the lark, he would come to recognize that neither the categorical intellect nor sensation, but only the vibratory aspect of our being (*la partie vibrante de notre être*) is capable of intuiting its ethereal call.

* * *

Such a *call* is precisely what the narrator in *Deep Rivers* heeds one day when he hears the piercing song of an Andean lark – “*tuya, tuya*” – as it disappears into the infinite skies, not without first evoking in him the sudden realization that «[this is] *surely the substance of which I am made – the diffuse region from which I was torn, to be cast in among men*». Through this reverie, Ernesto tunes into the voice of the Andean lark – not as a chimerical fantasy but as a profound summons that induces a transpersonal *awakening* in his soul, such as that described by Bachelard in the advent of a poetic logos. For the aural reverie of the *tuya* triggers in the boy a decisive noumenal intuition, both into his origins and his destiny: his *vocational call* to transmit to the broader world, like the Andean lark, the secrets of the deep valleys.

A close reader will indeed witness a series of *incremental awakenings* in Ernesto’s being from the earliest passages of *Deep Rivers*, starting with the buried beat he detects in the stones of the Inca Roca palace in the first chapter – a pulse that reverberates and then resonates in his soul, evoking memories of war dances in Quechua (*yawar mayu*, meaning “rivers of blood”), and ultimately eliciting in him an aural reverie that generates a new verse: *puk’tik yawar rumi* (boiling blood stones). This sudden insight into the pulsating microcosmic energy trapped in hard matter provokes a radical change in the boy’s being which now moves him to make a pledge: «Wherever I go, the Inca Roca stones [will] go with me. Another example in the novel is Ernesto’s encounter with the huge gold bell of the Cuzco cathedral, whose mournful tolling stirs up ancient traumas and repressed agonies in the region as it transforms everything it traverses into *throbbing gold*. When the boy must soon face his despotic uncle, a Cuzco mogul who had publicly

scorned his father (a defense lawyer for indigenous rights), Ernesto – strengthened by the voice of the bell that keeps reverberating in his soul like the war-dance of the rocks – will not be intimidated»³⁴. Further examples abound, especially in the chapters devoted to the adventures of the *zumbayllu* – a wondrous spinning top whose delicate, penetrating hum is capable of altering moods and transforming his boarding-school environment – not to mention its symbiotic association with numerous Andean creatures and instruments that share its high-frequency *yllu*-sound, as announced by their names: the *tankayllu* insect-dancer, the *pinkuyllu* wind-horn, etc.³⁵.

What Ernesto most *yearns for* in Deep Rivers, after having been delivered by his father at a boarding school in Abancay, is to overcome the oppressive elemental resistance he feels blocking communication with him. But true “communicability” in Andean thought is necessarily linked with the *purity* and *temper* of the materials employed in its transmission: only those substances that have gone through the crucible of fire (such as the Cuzco gold bell, or a well-forged *zumbayllu*) are deemed to be “ensouled”. Ernesto’s friend Romero insists that certain natural elements, such as river water, should be as capable to transmit messages across distances as is the song of the *zumbayllu*. But Ernesto is not convinced. He senses the resistance of brute nature: «The cordillera (mountain chain)» he replies to Romero, «is harder than steel. If you call out loud, it bounces your own voice right back in an echo – all the more so now that the region of Abancay «has the weight of the sky hanging over it» due to rampant moral and political corruption³⁶. Any deceitful alloy would risk contaminating the instrument and interfering with the transmission of a subtle energy-frequency. That is why, before playing the harmonica, he urges Romero first to tear out its tin, so that its well-carved wood might sing with fidelity. For Ernesto, it’s not just a matter of transmitting notes, but of opening up a clear path for the conduction of affective and moral energy capable of penetrating and stirring the soul.

Yet even beyond the temper of the instrument employed – be it musical, linguistic, or technological – fidelity in the transmission of a latent *logos* depends, above all, on the mental state or *temper* of the persons sending and receiving messages. It is crucial to dispel inner turbulences and resistances in order for a person to sound the noumenal depths of the *anima mundi*. A difficult task, to be sure (as is the phenomenological reduction proposed by Husserl to tap into the living sources of knowledge), which is why poetic reveries in Deep Rivers tend to be expressed in the subjunctive and conditional moods – always as open-ended possibilities, or challenges.

³⁴ DR 7, 9, 17

³⁵ In the chapter on the «Zumbayllu» (Sp. *zumber* = buzz, + Q. *-yllu*) Arguedas offers a lengthy exposé on the connotations of the onomatopoeic *-yllu* and *-illa* suffixes in Quechua (DR 64-7), where «*Yllu* ... means the music of tiny wings in flight, music created by the movement of light objects» while «*Illa* is the name used for a certain kind of light... [a] radiance, the lightning flash, the rays of the sun, all light that vibrates», DR 64, 67.

³⁶ DR 137-138.

In closing, let me take a final metaphysical leap, highlighting the virtual relation between Ernesto's intense yearning to *communicate with his father*, and his capacity to *tune into the hidden pulse of his world*. Might his longing for contact with that living logos which he seeks throughout the novel not have been – after all – an incipient sign of his heeding the noumenal call of the father: the transpersonal father he so fervently invokes as he prays the *Yayayku, hanak' pachapi kak'* (Our Father in Quechua) after realizing he's been exposed to the typhus epidemic in Abancay?³⁷ For it is just as he is *himself* submitted to the fiery crucible of the rector's gaze, and to the harsh disinfectants against the plague³⁸ – while quarantined in a cell at the boarding school – that Ernesto begins to feel the earth move under his feet: the soft yet firm steps of the *colonial serfs* rising far in the horizon after celebrating midnight Mass, crossing the city bridge without fear of military fire, while their women sing high-pitched *jarahuis* – hymns aimed at bursting “the mother of the fever”: their term for the ill matrix that has seized the soul of the zone³⁹.

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³⁷ DR 231.

³⁸ DR 221-230.

³⁹ Arguedas writes this passage on the *mobilizing power of song and prayer* toward the end of his novel, using a combination of Spanish verbs in the subjunctive and conditional moods ending in the “*ía*” phoneme – *seguirían, llegarían, cantarían, lanzarían, alcanzaría, penetraría* (DR 231-232; cf. RP 259-260) – suffixes which wondrously rhyme with the penetrating Quechua “*illa*” and “*yllu*” vibrations that traverse Arguedas's bilingual novel (see note 33 above).

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