

Bergson on Poetics: Philosophy, Literature and Science

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Abstract: In this paper, I analyze Henri Bergson's insightful and contrasted vision of poetry. First, I show in what sense Bergson sympathizes with the idea that the poet must be credited to surpass the novelist in offering to us an unparalleled emotional apprehension of the world. Second, I nonetheless underline how Bergson grants the product of the poet, i.e., the poem itself, a problematic linguistic status, inasmuch as the focus of his analysis shifts from an intersubjective poetical apprehension of feelings to their individual poetic appreciation, or from the spiritual dimension of poetry to its material dimension. Third, I further suggest to reconduct both the poet's inspiration and the poem's intention to their living matrix within the creative dimension of the *poïen*, whose main hallmark might be found in Bergson's concept of addition. As a whole, the article argues that Bergson's approach of poetry helps one in clarifying the delicate distinction that he draws between three possible attitudes that humans take vis-à-vis reality: that is, the standpoint of philosophy, or more accurately of metaphysics; the standpoint of art, or rather of literature in the context of my paper; and the standpoint of science, in its inherent ambiguity. In addition, I unveil some stimulating paradoxes regarding Bergson's conception of language, and discuss his fascinating hypothesis concerning the absolute object of art.

Michel DALISSIER

Bergson on Poetics: Philosophy, Literature and Science

To Robert Smith

The Ambiguity of Bergson's Vision of Science

My starting point is Bergson's contemplation of modern science, which leaves a fairly ambiguous impression. On the one hand, Bergson is well-known to have unleashed a devastating critique on positivism and on the mechanistic view of science (*Creative Mind* 44; *La pensée* 45; Dalissier, "Mécanisme"), which has given birth to a series of debate concerning his "irrationalism" (Merlan; Moulin; Wunsch). But on the other hand, his overt celebration of science, of scientific intuitions and discoveries (Bergson, *Creative Mind* 192; *La pensée* 216) has issued in the characterization of his own philosophical position as scientist (Gouhier 125).

In my view, such an ambiguity is due to the problematic dichotomy of science and philosophy that is no less abundantly discussed in Bergson studies (Delaney; De Boer; Gayon). In order to return to Bergson's thought its inherent depth and full complexity, I propose to investigate a third domain between science and philosophy, namely the art of language, and more accurately poetry. In the present paper, I will dwell on the sophisticated way Bergson conceives of poetical art as a third kind of apprehension of reality that chiefly differs from the scientific one and from the metaphysic one.

My following consideration of literary art does not simply help one in interfering with the aforementioned dichotomy between science and philosophy. It sheds light on Bergson's ambiguous attitude toward science in the first place. To be sure, and despite the stricture he passes on science, Bergson construes it as a kind of art. Science uses language, symbols (*Creative Mind*; *La pensée*), metaphors, images, and technique (Dalissier, "Mécanisme" 28ff), and coincides with art to that regard. Still I will suggest how, in a Bergsonian perspective, something substantially lacks in science, preventing it from becoming a real art.

The Novelist and the Scientist

Let me begin by a seminal evocation of literary language by Bergson. In his *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (hereafter simply referred to as the *Essay*), he fleshes out the example of the reading of a novel in the following terms: "Whatever care the author may have taken in depicting the feelings of his hero, and even in tracing back his story, the end, foreseen or unforeseen, will add something to the idea we have been forming about the character. This means the character was only imperfectly known to us" (Bergson *Time* 185; *Essai* 139).

It is noticeable that in this excerpt Bergson considers the art of writing in the perspective of degrees of perfection in knowledge. Generally speaking, art, philosophy and science represent for him three different kinds of knowledge of what I characterize elsewhere as a hesitant, groping, gradual, complicated, self-making, and enduring reality (Dalissier *In Reality*). Each of these forms of knowledge is endowed with its proper genius, and to rank them in a hierarchical order would be a mere exercise of the analytical intelligence that Bergson sees as the vice of a scientific mind. Let me now sketch those three possible kind of knowledge of a reality that is described in this passage in psychological terms, that is, as the "the feelings of his hero" (I will eventually return to this passage to buttress the idea that reality is at stake here).

1) First, from the perspective of the literary arts, Bergson focuses here on a novelist's "care" (*soin*) to depict the psychological states of his or her characters. But he insists that our knowledge about the character provided by the novelist always remains imperfect.

2) Second, for Bergson, a perfect knowledge would lie within the direct consciousness of the psychological "data" (i.e. feeling) by something as "myself," but where such an "I" would merge with this very feeling. This form of consciousness would be so intense that it would become the feeling itself. As Bergson puts it just after this passage, "the intensity of e.g. a deep-seated feeling is nothing else than the feeling itself" (Bergson *Time* 185; *Essai* 139). The essence of emotional knowledge appears to be of a perceptual and pre-linguistic nature (by "linguistic" I mean what is related to language and never the related science that Bergson never mentions). It might already be called metaphysical, for Bergson conceives of metaphysics as beyond or before language and conceptualization, while supplementing, not replacing, science (De Boer).

3) Third, regarding scientific knowledge now, Bergson explicitly conceives of the language of science as nothing but a translation of a state of "myself" by way of symbolization, mathematization,

measure, and comparison, a translation intended to other persons, scientist or not. He continues in this vein: "If I try to give you an account of this psychic state, I shall be unable to make you realize its intensity except by some definite sign of a mathematical kind: I shall have to measure its importance, compare it with what goes before and what follows" (Bergson *Time* 185-186; *Essai* 139-140). In this context, Bergson presents himself as a negative viewer of science. Once again, psychological reality is at stake in the *Essay*, but Bergson will generalize such a negative view of science with regard to the apprehension of reality itself in *Creative Evolution*. He claims that science uses signs to "denote a fixed aspect of the reality under an arrested form" (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 347; *L'évolution* 328). Overall, Bergson envisions science not only as a translation, but worst as a static and formal betrayal of that moving psychological reality that literature carefully (but imperfectly) tries to tell, moreover of that very reality which is, in right, readable only to metaphysics.

The Paradoxes of Language

Such a charge against scientific translation and symbolization conspicuously suggests that the differentiation that Bergson sketches between art, philosophy and science has much to do with his philosophy of language, which is extensively discussed (De Boer; Lahav; Mullarkey; Chiricò *et al.*). In this second part of my paper, I will mostly comment on a famous page of *Creative Evolution* (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 329-330; *L'évolution* 312), where he states his well known position regarding language.

Bergson argues that we cannot confine ourselves to language, because such a confinement cannot but lead us to daunting paradoxes. These paradoxes are to be found both within ordinary and philosophical languages. Concerning the paradox as it appears within our ordinary language, Bergson holds that "our habitual manner of speaking, which is fashioned after our habitual manner of thinking leads us to actual logical deadlocks." He takes as an example the statement "The child becomes a man." This statement first sets forth a subject, "a child," to which the predicate, "a man," does not correspond yet (a child is still a child); second, this statement expresses the predicate "a man" that can apply no more to a subject such as "a child." But a similar logical deadlock is not only a dead end for Bergson, it appears to also be instructive. For he concludes from that: "Reality, which is the transition from childhood to manhood (*âge mûr*), has slipped between our fingers." The paradox thus uncovers the fact that language pretends to tell us what reality is; but in reality, language let an unspeakable reality disappear.

As far as the paradox is reframed within the philosophical way of speaking, Bergson writes: "If language here were molded on reality, we should not say 'The child becomes the man', but 'There is becoming from the child to the man' (...) 'becoming' is a subject. It comes to the front. It is the reality itself." (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 329-330; *L'évolution* 312) But obviously to say that would be awkward, and such a language would be unpracticable. The paradox lurks in the idea that such a language, which would be allegedly fitted to reality, which would not let it go away, would be almost unspeakable, would be a kind of non-language. Molded on reality, i.e. realized or better realizing, such a language would paradoxically lose its essence and function, it will not be any longer able to speak properly. In brief, Bergson finds both languages (the ordinary and the extraordinary) unsuccessful in expressing reality that is "transition" or "becoming"; the former misses it logically, the latter linguistically.

Accordingly, Bergson's thesis might be reframed as such: language is making an enduring reality unreal, it immobilizes it and segments it into pieces of words. In this perspective, language represents what hinders philosophy from reaching reality and even what pretends to take the place of reality itself. Indeed, as some commentators pointed out, Bergson holds the idea that "one will never have a genuine philosophy of language so long as language is reality itself to us" (Galimberti 292). There is an important philosophical stake for not only continental but also analytical philosophy.

However, I do not wish to overlook the fact that Bergson approaches language from another perspective as well: namely, poetical language might provide another possibility that I will explore later. For now, I prefer to make a remark on his intriguing use of the conditional mode in the page I am commenting presently. Bergson argues: "We feel confusingly that we can always get out of them [logical deadlocks] if we like (*il nous serait toujours loisible d'en sortir*); all that we have to do, in fact, is to give up the cinematographic habits of our intellect." (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 329-330; *L'évolution* 312) Needless to say, "to get out" of these logical deadlocks or "to give up" these habits is not fully realizable, and we cannot but speaking by using habitual language. Incidentally, this mention of logical deadlocks should not intimate that Bergson demonizes logic, because he undeniably confers a certain status to logic in general (Dalissier, "Bergson et la logique"). In particular, and in reference to the discussion of

poetry below, I cannot but concur with the idea that he "ascribes to the poem a logic reifying the logic of dreams" (Douglass 38, 78).

We can surmise from all this that what Bergson intends to do is just to point out the possibility of linguistic paradoxes that could erase the essence and function of language. This aspect is further sensible when we reflect on a third paradox that transpires into the language of art, namely into a literary language that is neither "ordinary" nor "philosophical." As we have seen, Bergson suggests that the language of a novel, always imperfect, inevitably reflects the author's own expressive limitations. The paradox I want to stress is as the following: how something such as language, which represents the writer's artistic absolute tool, can also become the real impediment to his art? A comparative treatment in relation to Merleau-Ponty's views (see Dalissier, *Héritages*) will be edifying on that aspect, but I leave this point aside in this paper.

From what precedes, one might conclude that science, philosophy, and literary art—the three positions on reality mentioned above—necessarily lead to unsolvable linguistic complexities. Now, with reference to literary language on which I focus in this paper, we must not neglect the fact that in Bergson's view, if literature's attempt seems vain, it is because only something such as the "care" of the author "in depicting the feelings of his hero" is in question here. It is clear that we can imagine that there are for Bergson not only careful novelists but also bolder writers and artists who are able to manage with their unequalled genius to produce perceptions as if these had been made by nature. We can just wonder who they are.

Poets

In the *Essay*, Bergson calls those exceptional geniuses the *poets*. Generally speaking, he scarcely quotes poets in his works, but very early in his career, he devoted a study to Lucretius (Bergson, *Extraits*). We might count as poets all those artists who make decisive efforts for inventions and discoveries. This is suggested by the fact that in his essay on "Intellectual Effort" (1902), he mentions poets among innovators of all kinds: machine makers, novelists, dramatists, and musicians (Bergson, *Mind-Energy* 212-213; *L'énergie* 174-175). In regard to other artists (such as painters, sculptors), the actual status of the poet is at stake in his works and would require a comparison of his perspective with the one of other philosophers such as, once again Merleau-Ponty, but also Sartre (Dalissier, "La plastique"), Maldiney and Heidegger.

If it is true that the fallacious side of language amounts to deforming, missing, dissimulating or even replacing reality, conversely, the language of those poets is the one that succeeds in expressing the reality of feelings without betrayal. In the *Essay*, Bergson explains that because the poets use a colorful imagery, their language reveals the rhythm of life and duration. More precisely, he claims that their poetic contribution is due to their rhythmic speech that expresses the images of feelings:

[A poet is the one] with whom feelings develop into images, and the images themselves into words (*paroles*) which translate them [the feelings] while obeying the laws of rhythm (*dociles au rythme*). In seeing these images pass before our eyes we in our turn experience (*éprouverons*) the feeling which was, so to speak, their emotional equivalent: but we should never realize these images (*ne se réaliseraient pas pour nous*) so strongly without the regular movements of the rhythm by which our soul is lulled into self-forgetfulness, and, as in a dream, thinks and sees with the poet. (Bergson *Time* 15 ; *Essai* 11 ; on this passage, see Dalissier, "Bergson et la logique" 546).

If Bergson is correct, a poet appears as the artist who succeeds in realizing the emotional "intersubjective" transfer (so to speak) on which some (too) careful novelists precisely stumble and about which all scientists do not even think. I do not linger here on such a transfer that has been scrutinized in Bergson studies, in particular regarding the concrete case of the intellectual link between Bergson and his student, the poet T. S. Eliot (Podoroga), a relation that has been frequently discussed (Abrol; Douglass; Le Brun). As already underlined, Bergson conceives of a novel or of a scientific discourse as a failure in translating to others the mental states that the *I* is experiencing. On the contrary, he manifests here his admiration for poetic language, by which "our soul is lulled into self-forgetfulness" and through which we (at the first person of the plural) are able to "think and see with the poet." Throughout his esthetical treatise (Bergson *Laughter; Le rire*) he will devote rich analyses to approach such a kind of intersubjective character, as it makes its way within the art of the comic poet and the dramatic poet, an aspect that I will not comment here.

Other scholars have provided thorough commentary on poetry for Bergson (Douglass 27ff.) My concern is to emphasize that the poet is able to make us pass from the words to the images, and from the images to the emotional reality. This process is explicitly characterized by Bergson as a process of realization, that is, as a process that orients us towards reality. Let us reread closely the above quote.

Bergson does not claim that the "regular movements of the rhythm" realize the images; he holds that rhythm (ῥυθμός, etymologically, both a measured movement and a sensible form) "strongly" amplifies an already existing movement of realization. Accordingly, such a movement runs back from the words through the images and into the feelings, and such an amplification plunges our soul into self-forgetfulness. Everything goes as if the poetical rhythm were realizing a kind of synchronization of our intimate vital duration with the one of the poet, and beyond, were managing a sort of coincidence into the emotional reality. To put it differently, the poet offers us an enduring perception of the enduring reality of feelings according to their proper temporal rhythms, and not only by following in their processual development into images and words.

Interestingly enough, Bergson emphasizes in this passage that the poet is able to make us forget ourselves and think with him, notwithstanding the fact that this kind of poetical thought is irreducible to bare philosophical understanding. This is why he writes that poetic rhythm makes us "think and see with the poet," but it is "as in a dream." (Bergson *Time* 15; *Essai* 11) Consequently, a poet defined in such a way might be capable of making us grasp the reality of feelings, but not of ideas. Later, in *Creative Evolution*, Bergson will distinguish his position from a cognitive and idealistic conception of poetry within a Platonist "philosophy of Ideas," according to which "[t]he generative idea of a poem is developed into thousands of imaginations which are materialized in phrases that spread themselves out in words" (*Creative Evolution* 338; *L'évolution* 319-320; on this text, see Dalissier "Bergson et la logique" 251). One might believe that this is a resurgence of the theory ushered in the *Essay*. But it is not so, for this is no longer about the art of the poet that issues a development from feelings into images and words. This is about the idealistic generation of a poem that begets a development proceeding from the idea to imaginations, phrases and words.

This last quotation calls for a few comments. First, once again, just as the image, the imagination appears in a "central" position in this text, as I argue elsewhere (Dalissier "Bergson et la logique" 546). Second, such a fallacious *idée génératrice* is not to be mistaken with the genuine "guiding idea" (*directrice*) of a poem, "master idea" (*maîtresse*) or "essential idea," as Bergson also labels it. For him, such a deeply emotional idea is epitomized in the fixity of the laws of nature, and eminently expressed by Lucretius's feeling of "melancholy" in *De rerum natura* (*Extraits* IV, VI-VII, X). In sum, the above analysis suggests prospecting for a binding difference of status between the living poet and the linguistic poem, which I scrutinize later.

The Object of Art

Bergson's argumentation paves the way for a favorable evaluation of the bewitching poet, that might be ranked higher than the careful writer. Still, the poet remains the one who happens to promote the realization of a kind of intersubjective transfer at the level of emotional reality. Might it be possible to go further, that is to consider an archetypal artist that would offer an apprehension of reality itself, and to envision art as an absolute? In the heart of his *Laughter*, Bergson frankly faces such an exciting hypothesis, asking: "What is the object of art? Could reality come into direct contact (*frapper directement*) with sense and consciousness, could we enter into immediate communion (*communication*) with things and with ourselves, probably art would be useless, or rather we should all be artists, for then our soul would continually vibrate in perfect accord with nature" (Bergson *Laughter* 150; *Le rire* 115).

There is a radical way to interpret this delicate passage, by affirming that the object of art amounts to managing a transition towards metaphysics (Mossé-Bastide 293), a gesture that would render art useless per se. A closer reading of this passage hints that Bergson stresses rather a dully problematic kind of universalization of art. Let me retranslate the essential sentence: "I believe well that art would be useless, or rather that we would all be artists (*je crois bien que l'art serait inutile, ou plutôt que nous serions tous artistes*)" (Bergson *Laughter* 150; *Le rire* 115). Bergson means that there are thus grounds to believe that art will become universal, even if it is not certain. What grounds exactly? He makes them explicit immediately after: "For then (*car*) our soul would continually vibrate (*vibrerait*) in perfect accord with nature." Such an ultimate aesthetic vibration of the soul would be no longer the poetical rhythm that plunges our soul into self-forgetfulness, by amplifying the colorful imagery and making us grapple the poet's feelings. The rhythmic synchronization of the soul with the poet would leave the place to a harmonic coincidence of the soul with nature, or perhaps, might I add, natural reality.

However, is a similar coincidence the real "object of art" that Bergson is questioning? Such a hypothetical situation strikes me as highly paradoxical, for four main reasons. First, there would be a *neutralization* of art ("probably art would be useless"): in this situation, art will be absolutized while incapable of doing, making, or realize anything. Second, there would rather be a *universalization* of art ("rather we should all be artists"): art would no longer grant any specificity to the status of art and

artist. Third, there would be a *naturalization* of art ("our soul would continually vibrate in perfect accord with nature"): art would become art per se; but would have to abandon all artifice, all culture, in order to promote the harmonization with nature. Fourth, there would be an *im-mediation* of art ("Could reality come into *direct* contact with sense and consciousness, could we enter into *immediate* communion with things and with ourselves"): art would lose the congenital mediation that it must entertain with reality. This mediation is already sensible in the abovementioned analysis of poetry, where I find both a progressive development from feeling to words and a regressive effort of realization in the opposite direction.

Paradoxically, the object of art must be understood for Bergson in its constitutively mediated situation of meeting (*face-à-face*) with reality (Dalissier, *In Reality* 46ff., 58), which is irreducible to a bare role of preparation for philosophy (Szathmary). The respect of this specific limitation of art also implies that for Bergson the meeting with reality would have to be replaced by a the "facing up" (*faire face*) to reality at a metaphysical level (Dalissier, *In Reality* 48, 58). Summarizing, I hold that the real object of art for Bergson is to provide not a direct but an indirect or negative proof of reality.

It is important to remember that Bergson's hypothetical position is prudently expressed in the conditional. This implies that he recognizes the usefulness of art that responds to the demands of our life. He also believes that not all of us are artists, that very few are real ones, and that such an oversized soul might be the one of a machine, of a mystic, or a god (see Dalissier, "Mécanisme" 16ff.) rather than of a human artist.

Poems

Given this general limitation of art, which is arguably objective (because it stands within mediation), it is expectable that for Bergson the art of poetry must be dethroned in a certain manner. He grants it a lower status because he realizes the specificities of language that hinder poetry from taking the place of metaphysics. The French philosopher certainly acknowledges that poetry consists of exquisite words, and realizes a kind of revolution in the use of language, as Paul Douglass brilliantly highlights:

The poet wishes to melt down the common coin and forge it new. His object—in Bergson's terms—must be to renew the linguistic system's connectedness to inner life, that self-creating evolution flowing through time. The magic of any linguistic system lies in its ability to evoke this fundamental reality for us, and when the poet succeeds in his endeavor, he may be said to have gotten "hold of the *gold coin*, instead of the silver or copper change for it" [Bergson *Mind-Energy* 195; *L'énergie* 161]. In such a moment, language's dry bones live again, for they actually "furnish consciousness with an immaterial body in which to incarnate itself" [Bergson *Creative Evolution* 279; *L'évolution* 265]. Language in such a moment is not the enemy for it has been reinvested with that characteristic impenetrability of the Real. (Douglass 28.)

However, Bergson cannot overlook the fact that language cannot be free from those very "words" that are bound to reduce reality. To introduce here a metaphor which is not of Bergson himself, I might say that reality reduces in language such as the volume of a sauce reduces in cooking. Now in the explicit terminology of the text of the *Essay* quoted above, such a reduction means that these very words to which Bergson refers to would be nothing if they did not translate images, and that those images translated into words would be nothing without the feelings behind or within them. In this perspective, the language of a poet, even if it appears divinely inspired, as it is the case in Plato's notorious evocation in the dialogue *Ion*, will always speak "after" the feelings and the images that it cannot fully express. As I already underscored, in a more standard version of Platonism, such a language might be idealistically inspired, and the rhymical voice of the uttering poet might degenerate into the generation of the written poem.

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson expresses more markedly this limitation of poetical language, underlying underlines a degradation that occurs in poetry due to the weight of words. He intentionally takes here the perspective of the audience of the poet:

When a poet reads me his verses, I can interest myself enough in him to enter into his thought, put myself into his feelings, live over again the simple state he has broken (*éparpillé*) into sentences and words. I sympathize then with his inspiration, I follow it with a continuous movement, which is, as the inspiration itself, an undivided act. Now, I need only relax my attention, let go the tension that there is in me (*détende ce qu'il y avait en moi de tendu*), for the sounds, hitherto swallowed up in the sense (*noyés dans le sens*), to appear to me distinctly, one by one in their materiality. For this I have not to do (*ajouter*) anything; it is enough that I withdraw something. (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 220; *L'évolution* 210)

In this passage, Bergson re-apprehends through the reading of a poem the same movement by which "our soul is lulled into self-forgetfulness," as he formulated it in the *Essay*. Comparatively, this time, he does not embrace the perspective of the poet but ours, poetry's audience. More accurately, he refers to the individual "I" (at the first person of the singular) and no more to an enthusiastic and fusional "we." Needless to say, such a new setting does not entail that Bergson overlooks the proper aesthetic contribution of the poet, especially his or her rhythmical speech expressing the images of feelings. Yet, Bergson significantly elaborates on the fact that I, lover of poetry, may lose interest in the sounds and meanings of those words, as soon as I lose a spiritual tension (see Douglass 37, 42) that Bergson examines for itself so painstakingly in *Matter and Memory*.

The corresponding process of the linguistic degradation of poetry is explained in the last part of the quote above, which refers to a sort of betrayal of language against reality. Such a betrayal consists for Bergson in an operation of materialization into "sentences and words" of bare "sounds" that were originally laden with meaning and feelings. In another stunning passage of the 1907 opus, Bergson expresses such a degradation along the lines of an alternative series that proceeds from feelings to stanza, verses and words:

Matter divides actually what was but potentially manifold; and, in this sense, individuation is in part the work of matter, in part the result of life's own inclination. Thus, a poetic feeling, which bursts into (*s'explicitant*) distinct stanza (*strophes*), verses (*vers*) and words, may be said to have already contained this multiplicity of individuated elements, and yet, in fact, it is the materiality of language that creates it.

But through the words, lines and verses runs the simple inspiration which is the whole poem. (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 272; *L'évolution* 259)

In a word, the linguistic degradation follows the path that leads from the poet's "inspiration" to the recitation of a "poem" and flows into the materialization of language. So long as the poet produces poems and as poems depend on language, poetry cannot untangle itself from this linguistic fatality.

Granted, a solution would be then to realize that the poetic spirit must take the opposite direction and free itself from the materialization of language. However, to side with Bergson's analysis, such liberation can hardly be achieved, for three main reasons. First, a grammatical-based reason: the collaborative and sacrificial "we" is individualized in an undivisible and more evasive subject, the "I." Second, it is possible to unearth a linguistic reason from the text: such a I might passively take the position of the receiver of the poem, not of active speaker. Only the poet is resolutely a speaker; and to speak is a pivotal dimension of poetic activities, whereas to listen represents only a preparation for tasting them. Paradoxically, in order to free myself from a materialized poetic language, albeit I stand as an listener, I would have to speak just as the poet.

The third reason why I, as an listener, can hardly achieve the liberation from the materialization of language is due the weight of matter itself, pulling us backwards into materiality. In this passage, Bergson describes a kind of hazard in the reception of poetry. According to the text above, "I" listen to a poet's words, I may take interest in them by means of which I "enter into his thought, put myself into his feelings, live over again the simple state he has broken into sentences and words." Nonetheless, Bergson hints that such a way back will be tremendously arduous. In order to do that, I would need to "add" (and not simply "to do" as in the English translation) something to my immediate and poor linguistic perception. I would have to inject meaning into the arrested sense of words and sentences. In the phrasing of the text of the *Essay*, I would have to play on the dithyrambic register of the images in order to liquefy them, hand them back to their signifying flow, that is, to the meaning permeated with feelings wherein sounds has been drowned till now.

The problem is that making such an addition will not be simple. In the text, Bergson rehearses his argument that it is easier to withdraw something from the richness of the real rather than to add something to it, that is, rather than to participate in the creating process of reality itself. I will highlight that such an additive operation refers to an increasing dimension that characterizes reality itself. In poetry, Bergson's argument takes this form: it is easier to listen simply to the rattling of words and the monotonous bass of sentences than to return to the underground music on which they are sampled. In consequence, most of the time, the sympathy of poetry lovers that retrieves (*retrouve*) the in-spiration of the poet in the quasi-pneumatic unity of the act, degenerates into the one-by-one unit of sounds disarticulated in my materialized language, a process that renders language hegemonic. Contrariwise, where sympathy emerges, there language would no longer appear, and we would not hear it any longer.

Poïen

The above description might suggest that a poem by itself, as a piece of language, as a literary product, might sound poetically deceiving. In stark contrast, one once said that: "It is possible for a poem to incorporate a metaphysics without ceasing to be a poem, but only if its readers are able to subordinate the metaphysics to its total poetic intention" (Tenney 117). I surmise that Bergson tries to probe such an intention. It is true that for him the spoken or written poem appears as the crux of the living poet.

Let us however cease focusing on the negative side of poetry. To put it differently, let us cease to reduce poetry to spoken or textual poems or even to the human activity of poets. As already emphasized, Bergson is far for considering poetry barely from its receivers' point of view. What is more, he intuits the poet as a medium for poetry, but the poet is not tantamount to poetry itself. In a Bergsonian vein, the gist of poetry squares with the very "inspiration" that is mentioned in the two passages of *Creative Evolution* quoted above. At the end of the second text in particular, Bergson conceives of this inspiration as the living spiritual force that drives through the materialization orchestrated by language and proclaims: "Through the words, lines and verses runs the simple inspiration which is the whole poem." (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 272; *L'évolution* 259). Hence the poem is not nothing, yet nothing apart from the inspiration conveyed by the poet.

In this last part of my paper, I will experiment my reading of Bergson (*In Reality*) by initially commenting on this moment of inspiration, in which language is still not a problem (nor will be). Such an inspiration that comes upon a poet and makes its way in his poem, as its vitalizing blood, happily connects my analysis to a conceptual bedrock of Bergson's philosophy, namely creation. At this stage of my demonstration, after having discussed the role of the poet and the poem, it is fruitful to remind that poetry etymologically harks back to the verb *poïen* (ποίη) that significantly means creation. In a nutshell, my interpretation will run as follows: for Bergson, inspiration refers to the pivotal moment when a poet in-spires reality, realizes it in himself or herself, such as reality realizes itself in itself, i.e., creates something.

Bergson's argument may be adumbrated as follows: analogically, each poetical creation imitates the very creation wherein reality itself consists. For this reason, in a vibrant passage of *Creative Evolution*, he refers exclusively to poets, nothing but poets, in view of illustrating his guiding thesis couched in these terms: "Reality is a perpetual growth, a creation pursued without end" (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 252; *L'évolution* 240). Let me quote at length this celebrated passage, where he considers a famous atomistic and alphabetic metaphor that I will leave aside. As announced, my purpose is to stress that poetic activity exemplarily epitomizes the creative activity of reality itself. Bergson writes:

Consider the letters of the alphabet that enter into the composition of everything that has ever been written: we do not conceive that new letters spring up and come to join themselves to the others in order to make a new poem. But that the poet creates the poem and that human thought is thereby made richer, we understand very well: this creation is a simple act of the mind, and action has only to make a pause, instead of continuing into a new creation, in order that, of itself, it may break up (*s'éparpille*) into words which dissociate themselves into letters which are added to all the letters there are already in the world. Thus, that the number of atoms composing the material universe at a given moment should increase, runs counter to our habits of mind, contradicts the whole of our experience; but that a reality of quite another order, which contrasts with the atom as the thought of the poet with the letters of the alphabet, should increase by sudden additions, is not inadmissible. (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 253; *L'évolution* 240-241)

In what follows I comment on this passage. I begin by using it as a springboard to answer, with Bergson, this question: what is the ultimate poetic and creative process? First, and undoubtedly, it not born perchance; according to his metaphor, the letters of alphabet in a poem composed by a genius do not create anything at random, they do not realize any "mere assemblage of materials" (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 252; *L'évolution* 240). Second, and trivially enough, an ultimate creative process differs obviously from the one at work in the writings of an ordinary man or woman that "create" nothing. Third, and against all odds, an ultimate creative poetic process is although not the product of a solitary mind, such as a genius, the *ego* or a god. Bergson holds that if an author innovates through his or her writings, the creation becomes only valuable if it is recognized as an innovation by other minds. I know well that he contends in his 1911's work "Life and Consciousness" that there is an ultimate standpoint where human creation reaches creation of reality itself. These are words that have been often cited:

He who is sure, absolutely sure, of having produced a work which will endure and live, cares no more for praise and feels above glory, because he is a creator, because he knows it, because the joy he feels is the joy of a god (...) Human life has its goal in a creation which, unlike that of the artist and scientist (*savant*), can

be pursued always by all man—creation of self by self. (Bergson *Mind-Energy* 30-31; *L'énergie* 24; see Dalissier, *In Reality* 112)

Might we establish a parallel between such a human self-creation and the problem of the divine creation of creators (*Two Sources* 255; *Les deux sources* 270), that I tackle elsewhere (Dalissier, *In Reality* 41, 110 ff.; "Mécanisme" 26)? Be as it may, my immediate concern is to point out the fact that if such a genius no longer cares for the praise and glory lavished by admirers or flatterers, he or she still has to be recognized by others as a genius. As Bergson puts it, he has to be himself or herself, in brief has to be granted such a "self" that so ingeniously creates itself. Correspondingly, the creative activity of such a genius is not to be construed of as barely fusing with human life in general and with a self-making reality. Otherwise, such a genius would appear no more under the guise of "an" individual, of "a" scientist, of "an" artist, and more importantly for me, of "a" poet. In this study, I highlighted several times the underestimated fact that poetry represents for Bergson a kind of intersubjective transfer between the poet and "us," "we," rather than the "I." This aspect also comes to the front when Bergson declares in the text of *Creative Evolution* quoted above "that the poet creates the poem and that human thought is thereby made richer, we understand very well." A genuine poem is something that makes people's thought richer. It is not enough for him to compose a poem; he has to make real poems in order to *move* others. In that sense, e-motion is in the moving (*mouvant*), is intersubjective.

Such an enrichment of human thought directly leads me to the nodal point of Bergson's main argument alluded to above, namely that he presents an analogy between the creative activities of poetry and reality. The analogy runs as follows: when real poetic creation occurs, the poet creates a poem by which human thought "is made richer," just as "a reality of quite another order" than the material and atomistic universe "should increase by sudden additions." This amazing theory of the jerky growth of reality has provoked discussions. From the vantage point of the general interpretation of Bergson's philosophy, there is a lot to discuss about this theory of a reality that is growing, in particular through the enrichment of human thought (Dalissier *In Reality*). In this paper, I put stress instead on the following point: for Bergson, poetry (*poïen*) stands as an activity that embodies the perpetual creation of reality in a privileged manner.

One might demur that his perspective on creation surely concerns all kinds of "invention" (Bergson *Creative Evolution* 252; *L'évolution* 240), and not specifically poetical creation. To that regard, Bergson's perspective redirects us to the "general effort" that he mentions in "The Intellectual Effort," which concerns indifferently the poet among other artists, as already noticed. However, invention and creation are not identical, and I would like to gather arguments to sustain the primacy of poetical creation for Bergson.

First, he seems to focus primarily on the idea of poetic creation. It is true that in "The Intellectual Effort," he once addresses the idea of "poetic invention" referring to Ribot and Paulhan (Bergson, *Mind-Energy* 212-213; *L'énergie* 174-175). Accordingly, the "effort of invention" converts and embodies an abstract and "incorporeal" scheme into concrete images and words. For the both the "musician and poet" this scheme consists specifically in "a new impression, which they must unfold in sounds or in imagery." Such a scheme is not static but dynamic and finds itself retroactively modified by the images through the whole process. As Bergson puts it: "The characters which the poet or the novelist creates are always reacting on the idea or the feeling which they are intended to express. In this especially is the part of the unforeseen; it is, we might say, in the movement by which the image turns round towards the scheme in order to modify or transform it."

In that penetrating passage, I discern both a rehearsal of the analysis of the novelist and the poet in the *Essay* as well as a prefiguration of the critique of the generative idea in *Creative Evolution*, but I will not dwell on that point. Suffice it to mention that once again the effort of invention appears not specific to poetry at all, for the poet not only surfaces at the end of a series of inventors (machine maker, novelist, dramatist, musician, and poet), but moreover, as the above quotes attest, the poet *sides* with the novelist and musician when Bergson delves into his or her effort of invention. In addition, if poetic invention concerns primarily a human intellectual effort, creation hark us back to the *poïen* itself at the level of reality. Lastly, in *Laughter*, Bergson refers twice to the inventions produced by the comic poet (*Laughter* 55, 122; *Le rire* 42, 93), but such fancies do not concern the deepest form of poetry that I fathom in this paper.

A second argument against the objection raised above is that Bergson actually distinguishes the notion of invention from the one of creation. In particular, invention plays a specific role in mechanics (but not only), and creation in metaphysics and religion, which I analyze elsewhere (Dalissier, *In Reality* 92ff; "Mécanisme" 14ff). This distinction makes that he does not equalize the two notions but mentions

them side by side, in *Creative evolution* (*Creative Evolution* 11, 24, 365; *L'évolution* 11, 23, 345) as well as other works.

A third argument is that once again, at the end of the passage of *Creative Evolution* quoted above, Bergson refers specifically to poetic creation (and not to poetic invention) in an overt analogy to the universal creation in which reality itself consists. A last argument and more formal would be that the apparent parallelism between the two notions is significantly broken after this very passage where, Bergson speaks solely of "creation" without referring any longer to any "invention." In any case, it is clear that the notion of poetical creation (*poïen*) definitely occupies an extraordinary position in Bergson's vision of the universe.

In closing, let me recapitulate the above analysis in the light of three moment, by taking as a clue Bergson's evocation of a break or scattering within the poetical process.

1. According to the text of the *Creative evolution* quoted above where I stand as receiver of a poem, the weak point of the poet inheres in his unavoidable resort to language. This flaw makes that the poet inevitably "broke," writes Bergson, or rather "scatter" (*éparpiller*) "into sentences and words" the "simple state" of thought and feeling that he or she originates. In this perspective, the poet is no less subjected to the fate of the materialization of language than the auditor.

2. As Bergson already emphasized in the passage quoted from the *Essay*, if we revisit the same process in the perspective of the poet, such a dramatic dimension of breaking disappears. Along the lines of the argument developed in this paper, this process recovers its continuity as a real process if it becomes the very movement whereby a poet translates into rhythmic words the transient images that develop his ineffable feelings.

3. Actually, the main virtue of the poet dwells in the positive value of creation, that is of the very *poïen* of reality epitomized in his or her art. For Bergson, a striking hallmark of such a creation stands in the phenomenon of a genuine and real addition that he foregrounds in two passages of *Creative Evolution* already quoted. The reference to reality is implicit in the first text where I stand as an listener, but explicit in the second where the analogy between poetry and reality is introduced.

Interestingly enough, such an addition was already at work in the passage of the *Essay* from whence I stated in this paper. Bergson affirmed that the reading of the "end" of the novel "will add something to the idea we have been forming about the character," will perfect a knowledge of the psychological reality, of the character or the hero that was "imperfectly known to us". In reality, the revelation of the real end of the novel will actualizes the "story" of the hero, which was still open to hypothesis throughout the reading of the novel. I find here an insightful prefiguring of the illustrious thesis of "The Possible and the Real" (*Creative Mind* 107-125; *La pensée* 99-116). Bergson writes that during the reading, the end of the novel was "foreseen or unforeseen," that is *possibly* known. In contrast, the knowledge of the *real* end of the novel will retroactively actualizes the hypothesis articulated about it and thus provides a real addition to the idea of the character that is thus updated, fully endured, in brief, realized. As I suggested in the first part, psychological reality is effectively at work here.

Admittedly, such a real addition is not to be confused with the intellectual reflex of addition that happens to be necessary to build the concept of non-existence, an addition that Bergson notoriously criticizes in the last chapter of *Creative Evolution* (301ff., *L'évolution* 285). Now the crux of the matter is that such a real addition enables Bergson to implement a propitious reconsideration of the phenomenon of scattering. He writes that creative action "may break up (*s'éparpille*) into words which dissociate themselves into letters which are added to all the letters there are already in the world." Therefore, the process of scattering is no longer stigmatized as an undue linguistic materialization; in a striking contrast, it sympathetically realizes, i.e., adds letters to the real, to the actual state of the world, and participates thereby in the self-making of reality.

My recapitulation above sustains the idea that for Bergson an effective addition of reality appears as a sign of the "growth" of reality as well as a signal of a growing proximity to reality itself. Everything thus goes as if a heavy language, loaded with words that congregate in sentences, were hindering the very effort to realize a genuine poetical creation. Bergson rather esteems that a lighter language, richer in proliferation of letters because it is issued from dissociated words, will celebrate a real moment of poetic creation in the republic of letters.

Conclusion

It is now the place to return to the starting point of my study, where I postulated three alternative approaches to the reality of deep feelings, namely philosophy, art and science. In this paper, I tried to argue that Bergson holds that philosophy, or better to say metaphysics, resolutely aims at a direct consciousness of reality, whereas art searches for an imperfect knowledge of reality that exemplary appears within poetic expression. But I also claim that when it comes to science, Bergson finds in it an

indeed rigorous symbolic "representation" of reality that nevertheless utterly lacks a true consciousness of the reality of deep feelings.

In the perspective of creation exposed above, this argument might be translated in the following manner: if philosophy embodies the aspiration for a direct seizure of reality that consists in infinitely pursued creation, then an inspiration-based art, or better to say, poetic creation, tries to stand up, despite the limitations of language, within this movement of reality. A disturbing consequence would be that science, even if it evidently excels in discoveries inventions of all kinds, seems condemned to be non-creative in the narrow sense, because it does nothing but symbolizing and does not add anything to reality itself.

It goes without saying that the threefold structure of my argument is by no means limitative. Bergson might suggest the existence of intermediate states between extremes states such as poetic creation and scientific non-creation. I suspect that it is the case in 1911, when he originally revisits dreamlike productions (*Mind-Energy* 113; *L'énergie* 93), a hypothesis that I leave unexamined here. It is more urgent to correct an impression that the above argument might leave about Bergson's ultimate position vis-à-vis science. Considering the potential that the French philosopher detects in science, it seems uneasy to affirm that he refuses to grant it any creative aspect. But in what sense?

As a matter of fact, he distinguishes scientific discoveries from scientific routines to the extent that scientific discoveries imply creation to a certain extent. In his last work, the *Two Sources*, Bergson is adamant about that point: "Creation signifies, above all, emotion, and that not in literature or art alone. We all know the concentration and effort implied in scientific discovery" (*Two Sources* 45; *Les deux sources* 42-43), Bergson unambiguously defends here the creative character of science. If it is true that creation means "emotion" (see Podoroga), then such an emotion also drives scientific intelligence forward. The new paradox to unravel in his attitude regarding science would runs as follows: if scientific symbolization appears at a loss to translate the emotional reality, if scientific inventions stem from an intellectual effort, scientific discoveries creatively derive from an emotional potential.

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