The Poetics of Space Study Guide

The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Gaston Bachelard is a French philosopher and the author of "The Poetics of Space." Bachelard lived from 1884 to 1962. He is considered one of the leading philosophers of Europe and the author of many other books. The author is known as a modest, unusual man, who matures from a young man working in public administration to become the chairman in philosophy at the Sorbonne, where he is loved and admired by students. Bachelard spends a majority of his career as a scientist and university instructor following specific scientific methods of observation, experimentation, analysis and reasoning. At the twilight of his career, he decides to take a new approach by reflecting on literature and poetry and using imagination to explore a reality that is not subject to reasoning. During this change, he recognizes his acquired knowledge in science is inadequate to understand the poetic imagination.

Science studies objective phenomena, i.e., observable facts or events. Bachelard decides to study the subjectivity of the soul expressed in poetic imagery. Poetry uses images that touch one's soul without apparent cause or observable fact. Poetic imagery stimulates a response in the reader that seems to come from a forgotten image. The author claims that other scientists (psychoanalysts and psychologists) interpret images from their own analytical, biased points of view. In contrast, Bachelard observes that imagination is a major power of human nature. The fact that poetic imagery is not subject to rules of logic does not lessen its reality. The author uses the house, which is full of sensations and subjective imagination native to anyone who lives in one, to demonstrate the reality of poetic imagery. The term "topophilia" is used to describe his comments on happy spaces. Bachelard comments on felicitous or happy space that is eulogized and enjoyed. Hostile space is not considered. Bachelard begins with images of intimacy in the houses of man, and then follows with things in those houses, hidden things, and houses of other animals, nests and shells. He finishes his study of poetic imagery with comments on size and notions of interior and exterior, open and closed spaces, roundness and book subjects.

"The Poetics of Space" is a 241-page, non-fiction philosophical study of inhabited space. The book includes ten chapters plus an introduction but no glossary or index. Chapters range in size from nine to thirty-six pages. Chapter titles name the subject matter. Each chapter has subsection headings in Roman numerals that discuss aspects of the chapter topic. The work is translated into English from its native French. Quoted verses appear in original language followed by an English translation. Two edition forewords provide biographical and other information about the author. Content is complex and its written expression uses and requires extensive and sophisticated vocabulary skills. Many words specific to an academic discipline, i.e. ontology, phenomenology, are used that do not have frequent common usage. This is a challenging and provocative research study in poetic imagery.

Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

Gaston Bachelard, French philosopher and the prolific author of "The Poetics of Space", lived from 1884 to 1962 and is considered one of the leading philosophers of Europe. He spends a majority of his career as a scientist, then begins reflecting on literature and poetry and using imagination to explore a reality that is not subject to reasoning, recognizing his acquired knowledge in science is inadequate to understand the poetic imagination.

A philosopher who learns to think by following rationalist methods of science and habits of research is ill-equipped to study the poetic imagination. The poetic image may suddenly appear — a novel idea to the individual. The poetic act seems to be of its own making, without a past to which the tools of philosophical reflection can be applied over time. Bachelard studies the beingness, or ontology, of the poetic image that has its own dynamism, drawing upon the analysis of reverberation developed by the philosopher Minkowski. Specifically, a poetic image is not explained or caused by something else, making it independent of causality; however, it can be readily understood or communicable to others, endowing it with ontological significance, or being beyond individual perception. As an individual experience, rational investigation cannot be applied to the poetic act.

Establishing a metaphysics of the imagination requires that one break from the principles of scientific prudence. Only through consideration of the onset of an image in the individual consciousness, i.e., phenomenology, can the subjectivity of the images be understood. Specifically, a poetic image is a naive consciousness and the origin of language. Image precedes thought as a phenomenology of soul. Bachelard claims poetry is a commitment of the soul. He makes a distinction between the calm but active and ever-present watchfulness of the soul in reverie while the mind relaxes between projects.

Phenomenological inquiry requires clarifying differences between sentimental resonance and repercussions or reverberations. Bachelard defines resonances as externalities, or that which we hear, and defines reverberations as internalities, or that which we say. The psychological action of a poem both affects the outpouring of the mind and the depth of the soul. Reverberation rises above the psychology and psychoanalysis of an individual to cause an effect deep in the soul. Logos is an indescribable source of reverberation about which a psychologist tries to describe feelings. A psychoanalyst further intellectualizes an image since his methods profess to understand and interpret images. Bachelard asserts that a psychoanalyst who "understands," confuses poetic image and his interpretation. The conscious imagination of a literate human being is the origin of the poetic image.

Bachelard limits his investigation of the poetic image to its origin as a phenomenon but not to the form and composition in which it appears. Simplifying his inquiry to the study of detached images more clearly exposes reverberation. He compares poetic image to the mathematical tool of differential in its evolution. A verse can influence the soul of a language by awakening forgotten, erased or unforeseen images. Poetry introduces a "phenomenon of freedom."

The isolated poetic image is the least significant element in the composition of a poem. Bachelard includes isolated poetic images in language areas that should be studied with "topo-analysis." A distinction is made between conceptual language and verses. Unlike static, discrete conceptual language, poetic images flow into verses and the full experience of language. The connection of things with language supports study of phenomenology.

Bachelard introduces the concept of pure sublimation to facilitate the analysis of poetic images. Poetry proves the viability of absolute sublimation. The phenomenologist accepts the image and the word spoken in its sublimation. The difficulty Bachelard sees is that not much poetry is subject to psychoanalytic techniques that would make it predictable. Clarity is developed by distinguishing the sublimation evaluated by a psychoanalyst and a phenomenologist. A psychoanalyst may study human character, but cannot see the exalting reality of poetic images. For example, psychoanalysis of artwork has less to do with appreciating the art, i.e., the poetic image, than analyzing the personality of the artist.

Poetry requires non-knowing or lack of skill to be fresh and autonomous for the phenomenologist to be able to study it. Poetry is primal only if unskilled or lacking in precedence. Art should provide surprise, a new, fresh way of seeing. An image is not a substitute for the reality that can be perceived. The poetic image can be mistaken for metaphor in academic psychology. The term "image" can be confused with the things surrounding it that one sees everywhere, rather than as an expression of the imagination. Bachelard proposes the ability to imagine as being a major power of human nature. Imagining lets one face the future and depart from the past and reality. Foreseeing requires imagining. Pure sublimation eliminates the ability for the automatism of language to function.

Bachelard examines happy space he calls topophilia, which is eulogized space that is enjoyed. Hostile space is not considered. He begins with a study of the images of intimacy, starting with the houses of man, following that with the hidden things within the houses, then examines other animals' houses such as nests and shells.

In Bachelard's theories, poetry has dimensions of imagination that touch one's soul without apparent cause or scientific reason. Poetic imagery in itself stimulates a response in the reader that seems to be a forgotten image. The author claims other scientists, i.e., psychoanalysts and psychologists interpret these images from their own analytic, hence biased, points of view. In contrast, Bachelard proposes that imagination is a major power of human nature. The fact that poetic imagery is not subject to the rules of logic does not lessen its reality. The author uses the idea of a house, which is

full of sensations and subjective imagination native to anyone who lives in one, as a vehicle to illustrate the reality of poetic imagery. He uses the term "topophilia" to describe his comments on happy spaces.

The House, from Cellar to Garret, The Significance of the Hut

The House, from Cellar to Garret, The Significance of the Hut Summary and Analysis

The house has dimensions of unity and complexity at the same time. The main problem is to separate personal images of "house" from its concrete essence, without making it an object to be described. A phenomenologist considers all ways in which an individual inhabits his vital space, his house being his world, the a "non-I" that protects the "I". Memories and images of our previous dwelling places converge in the new house. Poems, more so than recollections, enable touching the depth of space we know as the house. The main benefit of a house is to shelter daydreaming. From birth, the house protects and keeps one warm. Dreaming of the house one is born in provides the original warmth, the material paradise that "holds childhood motionless."

Bachelard defines topoanalysis as psychoanalysis that is a systematic psychological study of where memories are localized. Memories may reside in parts of the house, with dates of events less meaningful than the sense of where they occur. Solitude and space where something occurred remain important even after the space is gone. Night dreams may bring hidden memories. Familiar paths may remain, and roads may become symbols of crossroads. These memories may be so deeply buried that a poetic word can strike unaware at the depth of being. Descriptions do not convey the sense of memories alone, and smells, odors and sights reverberate at a poet's word. Reading or hearing may remind one of room experiences. Meditating on dreams and poetry can stir experiences of past memories. The house we are born in means more in memories than in thought.

A house is comprised of images that provide people with a sense of stability and its own soul and psychology. Many houses are physically structured in levels that appeal to a sense of vertical rising, with the extremes being a cellar and an attic. An attic is just under a roof, protected, with strong beams and rafters, and it's darkness disappears in daylight. A cellar, like the unconscious, is always dark and shadowy. Attic fears may be reasoned away, but cellar fears take longer and remain tentative and unknown.

A phenomenologist and a psychoanalyst both may appreciate childhood fear by reading Edgar Allan Poe, where acts of murder and mayhem abound in the shadows of criminal cellars. Another writer, Henri Bosc, describes ultra-cellars with connected underground passages enabling underground maneuvers to occur, yet steps offer a tenuous escape out of the depths into a tower room. Bachelard's images rise from the depths of Poe's underground cellars to the heights of Bosco's tower.

Oneiric, or dreamlike houses in Bachelard's topoanalysis, range only to four stories high from cellar to attic. Despite their neutral value, stairways go down to the cellar and up to

the attic. Large cities have no houses. Residents live in apartments, "superimposed boxes." Elevators replace stairs so there is no height inside, only building height. Home is a horizontal dwelling-place without any verticality. The city house is no longer cosmic.

Another dimension to organize images of a house is its concentrated centrality. A house with many rooms has centers of simplicity and intimacy. A hermit's hut is the essence of inhabitation in centralized solitude, a primal image symbolic of a man keeping vigil. Simple images send waves of reverberation into imagination.

A phenomenon is something observable that can be studied by phenomenology. A house is an external or objective thing but also has an internal subjective being comprised of feelings, dreams and memories that make it a "home". Topoanalysis studies subjective, internal experiences of the "house" phenomenon. A house is the world or cosmos of a person that protects that person. According to Bachelard's opinion, the memory of these dreams and other subjective experiences can be stimulated unknowingly by one or another word in a poem. Poetry, or daydreaming as he calls it, is able to communicate with other souls.

House and Universe

House and Universe Summary and Analysis

Bachelard reiterates the idea that rooms and houses are psychological diagrams that writers and poets use to analyze intimacy. Baudelaire notes that the more severe the outside weather, the warmer and cozier it seems inside, reminding one how valuable a house is. Bachelin writes that winter is the oldest season and reminds us of remote past, old houses and ancestral legends of centuries ago, which recall dramatic times when deep snow and blizzards surround the homestead in snow-drifts.

Rilke writes of city-dwellings, where storms and hurricanes seem more aggressive and hostile than in the countryside. Bachelard imputes Rilke with trust in the storm since lightning shows where to spare the dwellings of men like the negative of a photo-image. City-dwellings on streets are more transient like Rilke than the old country home, where he is born in that survives and overcomes its trials.

Thus far, the house is seen with the negative snow and storms both current and legendary attacking it. Bachelard's rendering of Bosco's house named "La Redousse" or retreat is a humble house with no apparent resistance set alone on an island. A storm is presaged to come for many pages in a poetic report of the weather, with howls and narrowing spaces that Bachelard calls a "menagerie of the hurricane" that is preceded by cosmic anguish. The aggression is of animal origin, and the target is a little island retreat that is man's resistance expressed as human virtue. The humble house on the island becomes a fortified refuge. The house becomes an ally that protects one in rivalry against the storming universe.

Bachelard questions whether this transformation is merely metaphorical to be interpreted by literary critics or positivist psychologists. Bachelard's phenomenologist point of view, however, requires images be lived directly, albeit imaginatively to have a transformative impact on mankind. The cosmos or universe molds and transforms man through the instrumentality of a house. The poet experiences this "anthropo-cosmology" of a house different than rational analysis allows. When the house-like object receives human body and soul, it transforms into space for cheer, intimacy, protection and a dream-world apart from its continuing "objectivity."

The "objectivity" of a house apart from any considerations of daydreaming can be seen by its representation as a drawing. If the drawn representation is well-done artistically or graphically, observers are persuaded to daydream or contemplation. The engraved houses are no longer simple, objective representations but now stimulate feelings, force, strength and the subjective sense of daydreaming.

Some other houses invite into their apparent objective space but, once in, open back out to the universe. Dynamism of these houses is expressed as the universe coming to inhabit them. Bachelard considers them an antidote for claustrophobia. The author

proposes an example of poetic irony that one can love the space in a house that opens weightlessly to anywhere else. To a dreamer of houses, these images are much more real than a positivist would accept as anything but vain poetry. For example, even a peony can be a dwelling-place for a sleeping insect.

The old houses one has lived in provide images that poets use to recapture those dreams and recollections. After leaving, recollection of its distant memories makes one feel homesick. Those experiences once felt as real now seem encircled in an unreal halo of past happiness that remains too vulnerable to be real.

A dream house differs from the house of one's childhood home. It may be the home one dreams of building or owning someday. It may be a house one acquires and then adds to according to his dreams. The antithetical dream of cottage and manor house is fused in Bachelard's metaphor of the chrysalis. From repose of the cottage chrysalis, the winged manor flies. Specifically, while resting in a humble cottage, the poet is free to dream of living in the manor house created in his poetic imagination. A poet simply reconciles alternating daydreams as the needs for retreat and expansion meet in his creative psyche.

Even care of the housework can become a creative activity. Cherished objects achieve an intimacy beyond simple geometric details. A house that is well taken care of on the inside is seemingly rebuilt from the inside out rather than just built from the outside. A dreamer renews the world by magically transforming objects in it through his care.

Simple images reveal the psychic state of the image-maker. The details of a child's drawn house reveal its underlying psychology. Happy children draw happy, well-built and warm houses; however, an unhappy child draws a cold, motionless, and rigid house.

The value of a house as intimate shelter becomes most evident when it is assailed by elements of nature. A snowy winter that buries one's house in a blanket of snow is experienced as a universal child from centuries earlier. Bachelard recalls looking over engraved houses that stimulate dreams of what it may be like living in one. He cites other poets that write of houses able to move, expand, and grow to fit the imagination or need of the inhabitant. Drudgery of housework is a work of renewal from inside to the outside. Stick house drawings reveal happiness by chimney smoke and doorknobs.

Drawers, Chests and Wardrobes

Drawers, Chests and Wardrobes Summary and Analysis

Bachelard comments on the difference between image and metaphor, explaining that a metaphor presents a tangible object as an intangible notion that is otherwise difficult to express. A metaphor stands for the idea but has no phenomenological value itself.

Bachelard is particularly critical of Bergson's polemical use of the "drawer". Bergson also calls drawers concepts or ready-made garments into which knowledge or thinking is classified. Bachelard considers this evidence of the inadequacy of his philosophy of concept. Specifically, he wonders how reason determines into which drawer to put a new object. According to the author, Bergson's illustration of the brain has many "keep-sake boxes" in which pieces of the past are preserved. Bachelard argues that Bergson's use of metaphor is unimaginative and results in what the philosopher himself calls "dry" rationalism.

Bachelard's fundamental point is that the metaphor is used rarely and only because the spoken or written word is inadequate. It is a false or fabricated image that Bergson uses to convert "drawer" into concept. The novelist Bosco transforms Bergson's metaphor by claiming it is not the brain that is a filing cabinet but that the filing cabinet is a brain.

Having dispensed with Bergson's misuse of the drawer metaphor, Bachelard returns to his own use of the metaphorical wardrobe. The inner space of an old wardrobe is a deep, inner intimate space that not everyone sees. A wardrobe is a center of order in a house.

Even locked boxes do not guard the possessions within, as locks can be broken and trick boxes can be figured out. There is a corresponding relationship called "homology" that exists between a small box structure and a person's psychology of secrecy.

Bachelard relies on the work of Rilke to expand the notion of "reading" a box, claiming that a box top, like the cover to a pot, may make the world get along better. Psychoanalysts typically use conflicted locks and keys appearing in dreams to symbolize sexual intimacy. Poets create poetic daydreams that transcend conflicted night dreams. A poet gathers worldly things to express characteristics of an object beyond simple locks and keys. A casket metaphorically provides the security of surrounding our inner self at death and burial. Chests may be opened, but a closed casket returns to a world of objects. A closed box has more to see and experience than an open chest. Psychology is unable to enter the hidden space of the extreme, unlike the poet who regularly does.

Bachelard uses the philosopher Bergson's style of writing to make a philosophical point about the concept "image." Bachelard intends to make a significant distinction between

the image that has phenomenological value and a metaphor that does not. The terms are often confused with each other. Bachelard claims Bergson uses the drawer metaphor as a crude tool with which to teach. In contrast, Bachelard believes metaphor should be used rarely and only when words are inadequate.

Nests

Nests Summary and Analysis

Bachelard moves the imagery of small boxes and secrets to nests and inhabiting. He quotes Victor Hugo's character, the Notre Dame hunchback Quasimodo, that the cathedral is "egg, nest, house, country and universe." These are being and images of the inhabiting function. Vlaminck, a painter writes of the contentment humans feel similar to the animal refuge a rat finds in his hole or a rabbit in his burrow. Bachelard characterizes them as primal images of nests and shells that allow one safe and pleasurable withdrawal into his corner. Bachelard criticizes any images that attribute human qualities to a nest, commenting on the use in literature of a nest as "childish."

Bachelard uses the metaphor of the happy household as a flourishing nest. The woodpecker is the "proprietor" of the tree in which he lives and works. The pecking in a tree by the woodpecker is likened by Bachelard to his neighbors, who disturb him by hammering nails into his wall. A nest is linked with rest and quiet like an image of a simple house. A simple image avoids intimidation by majesty. An old home and simple nest are places to return where memories are dreams and the home of other days is an example of lost intimacy.

Bachelard claims daydreams of nests start us dreaming of security. The nest is hidden by the foliage of the forest or garden and is made of the same vegetable life. A nest reminds us of the confidence in the world where we shall live and be secure. Hostility of the world is diminished by seeing the well-being of a nest. Bachelard recalls a passage by Pasternak that identifies the nest with the world and its center. Pasternak claims only the image can keep up with the changes of nature.

Transitioning from little boxes, Bachelard comments on the huge "box" of Notre Dame Cathedral where the hunchback, Quasimodo, is able to roam, climb and hide in nooks and crannies for his whole life, like a snail in its shell. Bachelard notes that the writer Pare claims no man can build a nest as well as a small animal or bird. However, Bachelard disputes the romantic notion of "lover's nest" compared to a nest from twigs and other forest material. The author comments on Thoreau's woodpecker observations and Van Gogh's thatched cottages like bird's nests set on the ground. Bachelard is particularly taken by the way in which Michelet describes the female bird forming a nest with its own breast hollowing out the walls. Nests make us feel secure since they are hidden from view and away from the hostility of the world.

Shells

Shells Summary and Analysis

The idea of a shell is unlike any other image that appears in poetry. Ammonite shells specifically seem to be designed by geometry above and beyond the world to spiral around a logarithmic axis. Paul Valery's knowledge of geometry lets him understand the form, but not why the mollusk coils to the left or right. His further reflection helps him understand that a mollusk builds from the inside as a living form of protection rather than as a man might build from outside to enter later for protection.

A phenomenologist looks for observable facts or events, but a conchologist classifies a huge variety of shells to discover diversity. Neither appreciates the external beauty, nor is amazed that a mollusk is able to live inside the piece of stone they call a shell. Similar to coming upon an empty nest, finding an empty shell as well makes one daydream.

The imagination easily wonders and exaggerates what may live in a shell, inventing forms of emerging images beyond scientific research. Snails emerge slowly from shells, but when a need for reality is dismissed, even a dog can leap from its shell, according to Bachelard's Baltrusaitis' quote.

Bachelard claims theories develop that are once thought to be scientific but are really just the results of dreaming, including J.B. Robinet's eighteenth-century theory of ontogenesis that states the purpose of life is to make shells. The evidence of fossil shells is considered proof for the universal shell-oriented life still alive in shells. A reasoning mind may think Robinet is a victim of his overactive imagination. A phenomenologist observes an extravagant daydream and a psychoanalyst sees sexually-obsessed behavior. A shell for the Ancients is a symbol of the human body that encloses the soul like an envelope. Bachelard claims the snail and its shell are marvels of the universe. The hard, cold rock-like features of the shell grow and expand uniquely and atypically with the flabby mollusk living inside. Bachelard compares Robinet's idea of the snail rolling over and over to form its shell internally to Michelet's bird that turns round to form its nest with its breast externally.

Nature itself seems complicit in creating phenomena that challenge the imagination. For example, Bachelard describes a mollusk that weighs fourteen pounds, but whose shells, or valves, each weigh five or six hundred pounds. Bachelard considers this huge mollusk the result of an immense dream of nature. Inhabiting a shell requires living alone, where one can repose protected in safety and tranquility.

Bachelard makes the case for the protection and solitude that shells provide, but contrasts that with their aggressive and offensive nature as well. For example, he describes the symbiotic behavior of a blind shellfish and patron pea-crab. The shellfish opens and small fish swim into the shell. The crab nibbles at the shellfish body as a signal to close, trap and crush the fish inside. Crab and shellfish then eat the small fish

they've caught together. Bachelard describes the hermit crab that lives in abandoned shells like a cuckoo bird that seeks nests when the mother-bird is away. The crab takes over empty shells and the cuckoo takes over nests when the mother is temporarily away. The cuckoo lays its egg in the nest for the mother-bird to hatch when she returns.

Bachelard tells the story of Bernard Palissy, a sixteenth century French scholar, enamelist, and one of the creators of ceramic arts. Palissy fears war and dreams about creating a safe fortress town. He decides to design a model like spiral shells that can resist the long beak of aggressive fish. Within walls of the city, the spiral design of the shell allows continuing protected retreat. His gigantic snail-fortress city is not a metaphor but is actually an image of protection. Within the fortress, he designs places of retreat that are rough and rocky like an oyster shell on the outside but on the inside polished like the inside of a shell. Bachelard finds a vast number of opportunities for imagination and observation with nests and shells.

The shell is unique, numerous and mysterious among natural poetic images. The imagination is stimulated by the possibilities of what magical beings may pop out of a shell. The phenomenologist, J.B. Robinet, makes the extravagant claim that the purpose of life is to make shells. However, legends exist that add credibility to the claim, such as the French priest who proposes powdered shell may return to life when sprinkled with salt water, and the anatifere shell-fish such as barnacles that live on shipwood, which look like nests and from whose shells birds fly away. Evidence of nature's imagination include the blind shell fish and pea-crab that work together to catch and eat small fish, and the hermit crab, like the cuckoo bird, that take over the shells and nests of other animals and birds.

Corners

Corners Summary and Analysis

Bachelard turns to the human intimacy associated with corners. Every corner or angle in a house or space where one hides symbolizes solitude for the imagination. A corner is a place of immobility, a sort of half-box that can illustrate the reasoning between inside and outside. One can be at peace in a corner, or can be cornered there.

Bachelard uses the text of the philosopher Sartre's writing on Baudelaire to point out the idea of "invented childhood" so prevalent in novels. The child Emily comes suddenly to a realization "she was she." Psychoanalysts refer to this duality as introvert and extrovert, where Emily finds in herself emerging herself as she leaves her house. The child knows herself as she moves toward the outside. Emily leaves the nook where she has been playing towards the rear of the boat before recognizing she has withdrawn into herself previously. She invents her emerging childhood before withdrawing. The corner of introversion she leaves, as she becomes extroverted and she may never return.

Bachelard comments on the poet de Milosz's cynical character, who is reminiscing in his palace. He forgets nothing and has several different corners into which he retreats while waiting or meditating. The corner contains the object remembered by a dreamer in solitude of his memories abandoned. Some passages in Milosz's work carry one off into a world beyond dreams.

Shorter daydreams can be uplifting and attracted by detail or insignificant features upon which to meditate. The curve of a molding can be attractive to a poet. An intellectual philosopher may be surprised by the daring of a poet who uses words for sensitivity rather than precision. Bachelard concludes by referring to words as little houses with their own sense of space. Each level in a house, as with each word used, has its own meaning. Common sense lives on the ground floor. Poets use words to bring together the earth and the sky, unlike philosophers, who are often condemned by their equals to live on the ground floor only.

A structural dimension of physical space is the corner or angle of a room or house. A corner is a sort of half-box between inside and outside. Psychologically, this between lands is the duality between introvert and extrovert. Emily is used as the model of one moving from introvert to extrovert and back as she realizes she is coming out of herself, or just growing up. Corners are not always safe, as the sad, regretful Milosz's bug-filled corners indicate. Anything in a house can be the subject for a poet's meditation, unlike a philosopher who focuses on the precise use of words and entities.

Miniature

Miniature Summary and Analysis

Philosophers and psychologists ignore the miniature worlds and objects in fairy tales. Ironically, these fantasy images have some objectivity from a degree of shared phenomenological similarity. If an observer allows himself to pass a threshold of absurdity, the inversion of perspective occurs in which small things imagined take us back to childhood when familiarity with and reality of toys returns. If one accepts representation as a way of communicating images to one another and that imagination is a basic faculty, then logic alone cannot define large and small.

The man with a magnifying glass and his imagination are different from the laboratory worker who is required to use the tenets of scientific observation in his examination. The first view of any phenomenon under a magnifying glass opens the miniature world to a new world view. It becomes a miniature universe with the elements of any other universe but in smaller dimension. A reasonable philosopher may decide all this commentary is an exaggeration about a small thing that just looks big through a poet's prestidigitation; however, miniatures are not just smaller large things.

A fairy tale is a coherent way to use reasoning to convincingly express primal images. The story of Tom Thumb's tiny stature is believable when described relative to a grain of dust. It becomes incredible when he is killed by the kick of an ant. Gaston Paris, Tom's creator intends for his influence in spite of small size to represent legends in many countries where tiny-ness is the center of decision over the great. The image of Tom Thumb's influence is transposed into the sky through his name on a little star that drives the Grand Chariot (Great Bear in English) constellation. Dreamers large or small can draw upon the inspiration of Tom Thumb on earth and in the heavens as an image of a guiding star. The poet lives in the new that guides the phenomenologist, as compared to the psychoanalyst, who sees only negative sublimation.

In both folklore and poetry, image size transposes back and forth from large to small. Bachelard propounds a correlation between macrocosm and microcosm that appears throughout literature. A poet must be ready to see compatibility of large and small, whether he looks through a microscope or a telescope. Distance to the horizon makes miniatures of all things seen. Philosophers see everything as small from atop their towers of domination that prove their greatness.

Bachelard proposes that the causality of smallness is also of interest, especially in relation to the effect other senses may have. Poets often create impossible sounds that seem fantastic. At the very least, these images exist as "reality of expression" and are not subject to psychological scrutiny. Closing one's eyes enables one to hear differently. Silence enables one to listen to himself and affects his time, speech and very being.

Fairy tales are not a study that either philosophers or psychologists allow themselves to learn. However, poets are able to communicate images and stimulate values through the use of fantasy imagination in miniature. Bachelard claims miniatures are not just smaller, but their very being is different from large things and worlds. A fairy tale matters as long as its scale does not overflow its borders. Size in a tale is not absolute. The perspective of distance from the horizon or the top of a tower can make a dreamer feel larger or more able than he is. Shutting one's eyes to meditate lets wonders of the miniature world open to new perceptions.

Intimate Immensity

Intimate Immensity Summary and Analysis

Bachelard considers immensity to be a philosophical category of daydream because it moves the dreamer into the world of infinity. Quiet daydreaming opens to the immensity within ourselves that is an expansion of being to a motionless man.

The inner immensity of man paradoxically gives meaning to expressions such as the immensity of the forest that, for example, allows one to go deeper and deeper into the grandeur of an apparently limitless world. Old forests in particular seem infinite within their own boundaries. The deep forest offers inner peace. Bachelard cautions against using the adjective "ancestral" in a study of poetic phenomenology because it is too easily used and explains nothing. Forests are not young since they come from a past, unlike fields and meadows that are in the present.

When one becomes absorbed in daydreaming, details lessen and time and space stretches without end. Bachelard cites Milosz's poem on meditation-exaltation of space without borders and looking into the ultimate depths of his own secret being. The images of immensity are an inexhaustible theme for Bachelard to study objectively.

Baudelaire uses the term "vast" to describe the infinity of intimate space. Bachelard claims his use of the term is more appropriately used with intimate meaning. Some of the concepts to which Baudelaire applies the term "vast" include synthesis, perspective, unity and movement. Bachelard summarizes Baudelaire's opinion of man's poetic fate with the comment that for Baudelaire, man is a vast being. Although the word in his poetics is not objective, Bachelard considers vast to have a vocal value that evokes peace and tranquility to the pronunciation of Baudelaire's writing. Bachelard claims the poet Baudelaire confirms that immensity is a category of the poetic imagination.

Bachelard cites Rilke in the use of a tree to evoke a sense of grandeur that also magnifies that sense to its surroundings. Bachelard determines that Diole, a psychologist and ontologist of under-sea life, studies and writes about the desert because each new experience with the cosmos renews one's inner being, and to wander in the desert is to change space and enter a psychically innovative one. Here space is the friend of being, and philosophers would do well to read the poets. Calm becomes an emergence of being through poetry and contemplation to be lived in poetic immensity.

The prior chapter addresses the idea of miniature, and in this chapter, Bachelard poses the other extreme that is foreshadowed with the Great Bear constellation. He begins with quiet daydreaming that opens the depths of man to himself. The metaphor of old forests that just seem to go on deeper and deeper without limit is used to represent man's search deep within. The immensity of time and space absorb Bachelard in endless daydreaming. In addition to Bergson's use of the term "metaphor", Bachelard

also takes issue with the poet, Baudelaire's use of the term "vast," but resolves the issue in favor of its evocative qualities of peace and tranquility. Another poet claims the sea reminds him of Parisian beet-fields that leaves Bachelard mystified. He does not understand why the psychologist Diole moves from a study of under-sea life to the desert except that the new immensity renews his inner being and opens it to psychic space. An example of the hare running through a field that stops to gaze at the horizon is presented as an icon of pastoral peace.

The Dialectics of Outside and Inside

The Dialectics of Outside and Inside Summary and Analysis

The terms outside and inside create a forced-choice form of geometric reasoning that clouds the issue when used metaphorically. An object or concept is either in or out without allowance for any gray area or halfway. The reasoning process of either here or there becomes an absolutism used, unfortunately, with ontological determinism. The first issue to address is that the inside is limited and concrete whereas the outside is vast and unlimited. The terms do not represent symmetrical realities despite how they are used linguistically.

Bachelard uses the example of a prose-poem titled "Shade-Haunted Space," by Henri Michaux to illustrate the significance of unuttered words and unfulfilled intentions. Outside and inside space is like a mixture of being and nothingness. Bachelard is amused by space images, where all complications can be eliminated from consideration. Michaux contrasts claustrophobia and agoraphobia at the same time, experiencing the fear of closed space and open space. The reduction and exaggeration of space occurs at the same time in the same space.

Poetry restores the ability of language to return to its free-form expression without old hardened metaphors. Poetic imagination allows the exploration of man as a surface being separating the same from the other. It is on that surface of being then, Bachelard contends, that "man is half-open being." Doors can represent the open or closed dichotomy that is easily rendered ineffectual by a door that is left ajar, or half-open, yet still half-closed. He proposes the image of a mythical threshold god that gives a door sacred character. Doors can be opened into the world of men or the world of solitude.

In order to appreciate the dream process, one must repose or withdraw into oneself and allow simple humility to flow within. A psychologist will analyze the daringness of an image; however, a phenomenologist accepts the image provided by the poet and takes it into his imagination. Concentration in a restricted space may allow the inside-outside dialectic to draw its strength.

Scientific thought differs from poetic imagery in its absolute "either or" principle without middle ground. The principle is proposed as an example with regard to spiral man, either moving towards or away from center. Specifically, contradictory and contemporaneous fear of open and closed spaces is a conundrum addressed by poets Rilke and Superville. Poetry frees expression from limits of hard metaphors. For example, an open or closed door is also "either or," but a door ajar is a quandary because it is neither open nor closed. Dreaming requires one be able to withdraw into himself to be free for meditating.

The Phenomenology of Roundness

The Phenomenology of Roundness Summary and Analysis

Metaphysicians who state their view in a few words can express concise truth that may be proven subsequently. Some may want to "understand" or claim they do not understand, but Bachelard asserts the image must be accepted as is. No prior experience supports the claim, but once accepted, we are in the roundness of life like the walnut that becomes round in its shell.

In order to take a fresh approach to the process of imagination, Bachelard tries to undo his years of philosophical belief and reasoning that he refers to as "dephilosophize." Ironically, now when he is old and wise enough to explain how we imagine, he no longer imagines. Another area of learning Bachelard undertakes to undo is psychoanalysis. Previously an image of roundness is fertile ground for psychoanalytical determinations with limited scope of understanding and explanation. Bachelard tries to look with fresh eyes on images of metaphysicians and poets.

Bachelard asserts dropping the word "almost" from Michelet's comment "a bird is almost completely spherical" demonstrates another "round being" to support Jaspers' principle. Bachelard claims Michelet considers the cosmic dimension of a bird as enclosed in a live ball to derive his position as absolute bird, "the being of round life." Bachelard admits no other significance from either psychoanalysis or literary criticism applies to this image. He does claim Rilke's "round bird-call" in a round sky poem echoes Michelet. Bachelard asserts that if he could gather together all the images of being, Rilke's tree would support a chapter in his "concrete metaphysics."

Bachelard draws upon the thinking of four artist-thinkers: Jaspers, Van Gogh, Bousquet and La Fontaine to asses the phenomenological observation that everything is round. This model is unique and dissimilar from Parmenides or Descartes. Bachelard tries to take a fresh approach but comes to the ironic realization that now since he is aware of the need for imagination, he is too old to imagine. Symbolically, the small bird that creates a nest for her eggs with a rounding breast is echoed by Michelet and Rilke's tree.

Characters

Gaston Bachelard

Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) is a French philosopher, who is the author of "The Poetics of Space." He is considered one of the leading philosophers of Europe and is the author of many other books. He is known as a modest, but unusual, man, who grew from a young man working in public administration to win a chair in philosophy. As a university professor at the Sorbonne, he is loved and admired by his students. He begins his study in the philosophy of science but over the course of his career, he eventually turns to the philosophy of art and esthetics. During this change, he recognizes his acquired knowledge in science is inadequate to understand the poetic imagination.

Bachelard leads the reader on the journey through inhabited spaces. Through his eyes and poetic sensibility, the reader is introduced to the poetic imagery of space. He makes an heroic effort late in life to revolutionize his study and thought. Bachelard is a scientist for most of his life and career. He uses specific scientific methods, tools and "facts" to analyze and evaluate thought and appearances - phenomena - and teaches his pupils the same as a university instructor. His work, "The Poetics of Space" presents new, mature and revised thought of an older, perhaps wiser, scientist. He discovers, as a child might, the wonder of things he once dissected for laboratory analysis. This major change in his point of view is compared with poets and professionals who have other points of view.

Gaston leads the reader through a world of dream and imagination about one of the most basic of human needs, their shelter. The space one calls home or the house, hut, cabin, castle, crib or cave that it is called by acquaintances is an apt choice to underpin Gaston's contention that its reality lies within dreams of the perceiver. For example, the writer Campenon wants an estate so he simply describes his dream estate in a series of articles without ever having one for his friends, acquaintances and biographers to visit.

The Poet

The Poet in Bachelard's work is the focus and champion of his thought. All important people in this work have a specific point of view that originates in their professional training and discipline. Whatever phenomena they see are interpreted according to the systems of belief in their particular discipline. The poet relies only on the imagination into which his world opens. The Poet is an archetype for which Bachelard draws on several real world examples including Edgar Allan Poe, Rilke, Baudelaire, Victor Hugo and others.

The Poet experiences the "anthropo-cosmology" of one's house different than rational analysis allows. The house to a poet is not just a composition of tangible, constructed

geometric elements, i.e. wood, stone, steps, walls and a roof. When the house-like object receives human body and soul, it is transformed into space for cheer, intimacy, protection and a dream-world apart from its tangible "objectivity."

A poet gathers together worldly things to express characteristics of an object beyond doors, walls and simple locks and keys. Each level in a house, like each word used, has its own meaning. Common sense lives on the ground floor. For example, a realist is said to have his "feet on the ground." Poets use words to bring together the earth and the sky. Bachelard refers to words as little houses with their own sense of space. Poets, however, make poetic daydreams that transcend conflicted night dreams. A poet must be ready to see compatibility of large and small, whether he looks through microscope or telescope. These experiences grow real by a poet giving them root in consciousness. Poets often create impossible sounds that seem fantastic.

The Metaphysician

The Metaphysician in Bachelard's work is an intellectual philosopher, who may be surprised by the daring of a poet who uses words for sensitivity rather than precision. Bachelard concludes by referring to words as little houses with their own sense of space. Each level in a house, like each word used, has its own meaning. For example, common sense lives on the ground floor and philosophers are often condemned by their equals to live on the ground floor only. A reasonable philosopher may decide all this commentary is an exaggeration and gratuitous hyperbole about small things that just looks big through a poet's prestidigitation. Bachelard claims philosophers ignore the miniature worlds and objects used in fairy tales. Ironically, these fantasy images have some objectivity from a degree of shared phenomenological similarity. However, the arrogance of Philosophers leads them to see everything as small from atop their towers of domination that proves their greatness.

The Phenomenologist

The Phenomenologist in Bachelard's work accepts the image and the word spoken in its sublimation, or form of expression. That is to say, a phenomenologist considers all the ways or shadings, in which an individual inhabits his vital space. The cosmos or universe molds and transforms an individual through the instrumentality of his house. Bachelard's phenomenologist point of view, however, requires images be lived directly, even if just in the imagination to have a transformative impact on mankind.

The Psychologist

The Psychologist in Bachelard's work is a scientist of human behavior. The author asserts "everything specifically human in man is logos" should be the working hypothesis to explain the poetic imagination. Logos is the indescribable source of reverberation about which a psychologist tries to describe his feelings. Bachelard claims philosophers and psychologists ignore miniature worlds and objects that appear in fairy

tales. Ironically, these fantasy images have some psychological objectivity from their degree of shared phenomenological similarity. Consequently, the psychologist ignores by his scientific training and bias the realm of human behavior exhibited in fantasy images.

The Psychoanalyst

The Psychoanalyst in Bachelard's work is a scientist of the mind, who intellectualizes the poetic image. The psychoanalytical approach tries to understand and interpret the image. In order to make sense of an individual, the Psychoanalyst typically uses images such as locks and keys that appear in dreams as symbols of sexual intimacy. A psychoanalyst who "understands" according to Bachelard confuses a poetic image with the context of his interpretation. A psychoanalyst may study the human character but is not able to see the exalting reality of poetic images. As a consequence, the psychoanalyst objects to images by claiming happy speech belies an unhappy reality for which the client/patient is compensating. However, a psychoanalyst may understand the significance of childhood fear by reading the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, where murder and mayhem abound in the shadows of criminal cellars.

The Conchologist

The Conchologist in Bachelard's work is a scientist that specializes in the study of shells. His mission is to identify, classify and compare the huge variety of shells that are created and once inhabited by a living creature. A conchologist classifies a huge variety of shells to categorize their diversity but has little time to appreciate external beauty. In addition to demonstrating another difference between science and art, the conchologist provides the technical background for Bachelard to comment on the amazing fact that a mollusk is able to live inside the piece of stone they call a shell.

C.G. Jung

C.G. Jung is a psychoanalyst. The extremes of soaring heights and subterranean depths are used to illustrate C.G. Jung's psychological nuances. Jung claims that fears inhabit a house. He uses the example of a prudent man who checks the attic for a suspicious noise but finding nothing in the attic decides it must be imagined rather than going down into the cellar to check there also. An attic's probable inhabitants such as mice or rats may scurry away at the sound of someone coming to inspect. However the cellar's dark nooks, crannies and corners throw shadows of unknown dangers like those found in Poe's writings of the underground.

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe is an American poet of murder and mayhem. For example, Poe details frightful images and experiences in underground haunts that send chills down a reader's

spine. None of these images exist anywhere but in his imagination and the reader's soul. However, phenomenologist and psychoanalyst both may learn the significance of childhood fear by reading the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, where frightful acts abound in the shadows of criminal cellars. Bachelard dismisses the notion that these are just hallucinations since they cannot be confirmed phenomenologically. Bachelard's concern is with poetic images, not human behavior. Edgar Allan Poe writes about his experiences with auditory hallucinations that have accepted literary value. For example, he writes of "glowing" terrestrial objects and words that "murmur." Bachelard refers to them as "the miniature of an entire cosmos that speaks softly." These experiences grow real by a poet giving them root in consciousness.

Henri Bosco

Henri Bosco is a novelist. Bosco writes about ultra-cellars, where connected underground passages enable underground maneuvers to occur. These depths provide a network of passages, cells and padlocked doors for secrets to be thought and dark plots to form. In another of his novels, diabolical schemes give ground to the sudden appearance of an immense body of black, stagnant water. The phosphorescent shimmering on its surface suggest existence of yet more dark, unknown powers lurking in the depths of the bottomless subterranean pool. Only the narrow, steep steps carved out of the rock side offer a tenuous escape out of the depths, into a tower room, where the gentle, young girl heroine lives. Bachelard's thesis is supported in the images rising from horror in the depths of Poe's underground cellars to the heights of Bosco's tower. This is the verticality dimension in extremis that exemplifies the subterranean depths and heights.

Thus far, the house is seen from the negative snow and storms both current and legendary attacking it. Bachelard's rendering of Bosco's house named "La Redousse" or retreat is a humble house with no apparent resistance set alone on an island. A storm is presaged to come for many pages in a poetic report of the weather. Again a hurricane is coming, but this time the arrival is forthcoming with howls and narrowing spaces that Bachelard calls a "menagerie of the hurricane" preceded by a cosmic anguish. Aggression is of animal origin and the target of attack is the little island retreat that is man's resistance expressed as human virtue. Bosco writes that the "house was fighting gallantly" as if it could. The storming metaphorical beast is held at bay by the house that clings to Bosco's character, Malicroix, like a "she-wolf," who, that night, feels in his heart she "was really my mother." The humble house on the island becomes a fortified refuge for him. He is alone on the stormy island protected by the thatched cottage that Bosco transforms into a human body with the physical and moral energy necessary to protect him. The house becomes an ally that protects him in rivalry against the storming universe. Bachelard poses the question whether this transformation is merely metaphorical.

Bachelard selects another passage of Bosco's for help in attacking Bergson. He uses a false or fabricated image to convert the "drawer" in a filing cabinet into concept. The novelist Bosco transforms Bergson's metaphor by claiming it is not the brain that is a

filing cabinet but the filing cabinet is a brain. Bosco's Monsieur Carre-Benoit comments on the seemingly magical power of his forty-eight drawer filing cabinet, whose contents are "the foundations of the human mind" until he discovers his maid using a drawer to store mustard, salt, rice and coffee.

Rainer Marie Rilke

Rainer Marie Rilke is a poet. Rilke writes of city-dwellings, where storms and hurricanes seem more aggressive and hostile than in the countryside. He is more frightened by hurricanes in the city at night than in the countryside. Ironically, Rilke writes of his preference to be outside watching the raging storm lash at the trees, as long as he is sheltered inside the house. Bachelard imputes Rilke with trust in the storm since lightning flashes show where to spare the dwellings of men like the negative of a photo-image. City-dwellings on streets are more transient to Rilke, than the old country home he is born in that survives and overcomes its trials. Regardless, his imagination of the country house is stimulated by the negative-storming universe around it, whether Rilke is within or without and just dreaming of its opposite.

Bachelard asserts that Michelet considers the cosmic dimension of the bird as enclosed in a live ball to derive his position as absolute bird, "the being of round life." Bachelard admits no other significance whether psychoanalysis or literary criticism is applied to this image he finds so extraordinary. He does find Rilke's "round bird-call" in a round sky poem to echo Michelet. In addition for someone who likes words, "round" is a peaceful and poetic choice. Bachelard finds additional support for roundness in Rilke's walnut tree that is "proudly rounded" and rests under the great dome of the Heavens. He affirms his belief that Rilke's tree would support a chapter in his "concrete metaphysics."

J.B. Robinet

J.B. Robinet is an eighteenth-century scientist. Robinet develops a theory on ontogenesis that Bachelard believes is more a result of dreaming than science. His theory claims the purpose of life is to make shells, which are proven by evidence of fossil shells. Other opinions may surmise Robinet is a victim of overactive imagination, an extravagant daydream or sexually-obsessed behavior. Bachelard resolves the question of shell formation by comparing Robinet's idea of the snail rolling over and over to form its shell internally to Michelet's bird turning round to form a nest with its breast.

Michelet

Michelet is quoted in Bachelard's work for calling the bird a worker without tools. Bachelard compares Robinet's idea of the snail rolling over and over to form its shell internally to Michelet's bird that turns round and round to form a nest externally with its round breast. Bachelard argues that dropping a word "almost" from Michelet's comment "a bird is almost completely spherical" makes another claim of a "round being" that can support Jaspers' principle. Bachelard claims Michelet considers the cosmic dimension

of a bird as enclosed in a live ball to derive his position as absolute bird, "the being of round life." Bachelard admits there is no other significant reference through psychoanalysis or literary criticism applied to this extraordinary image. However, he does find Rilke's "round bird-call" in a round sky poem to echo Michelet's notion, and for someone who likes words, "round" is a peaceful and poetic choice.

Baudelaire

Baudelaire is a French poet. Baudelaire uses the term "vast" to describe for him most naturally, and ironically, the infinity of intimate space. Bachelard claims his use of the term is more appropriate with intimate meaning. Baudelaire does use the term in a number of cases that Bachelard calls "astonishing variety," for which he provides examples. Some of the concepts to which Baudelaire applies the term "vast" include synthesis, perspective, unity and movement. Bachelard summarizes his opinion of man's poetic fate with the comment that for Baudelaire, man is a vast being. Although the word in his poetics is not objective, Bachelard considers vast has a vocal value that evokes peace and tranquility to pronunciation of Baudelaire's writing. Bachelard claims Baudelaire confirms his opinion that immensity is a category of the poetic imagination.

Objects/Places

The House

The House is a term used by Bachelard to describe the special object for a phenomenologist to study. It is a difficult object to study because this vital space is possessed of personal images and concrete reality. A phenomenologist's goal is to consider all the ways in which an individual inhabits his dwelling. Bachelard claims the main benefit of a house is to shelter and/or experience daydreaming. The house is an individual's world, where the "I" is protected by the "non-I" surrounding him. An oneiric, i.e., dream-like house discussed by Bachelard is typically comprised of four levels from the cellar to the attic with steps connecting them.

The Cellar

The Cellar is the term Bachelard uses to describe the lowest level of a house, generally subterranean, i.e. below the ground level. A cellar is considered always dark, shadowy and in harmony with irrational underground forces. Typically a cellar connected by steps going down is a place of murder and mayhem in mystery tales. The cellar is a fearsome place with nooks and crannies for ever-present underground creatures such as spiders to hide.

The Garret

The Garret, or attic, is the term used by Bachelard to describe the highest level of a house. It is the space just under the roof and functions as the main source of protection from the elements such as rain and snow. Open, exposed rafters showing in an attic may provide a sense of strength and geometry. Steps leading to the attic are said to go up to the attic. Thoughts and dreams in an attic are considered clearer because its darkness is said to disappear in the light of day

The Hut

The Hut is a term Bachelard uses to describe the primitive refuge of living in a hut in a forest. It is the legendary archetypical hermit's hut that is the essence of solitude. The hut is a primal image of man alone facing God without any worldly riches. It is symbolic of man keeping vigil.

Drawers

Drawers are the term used by Bachelard to challenge the philosopher Bergson's use of the word as a metaphor in debate and discussion. Bergson calls drawers concepts or ready-made garments into which he classifies knowledge or thinking.

Chests

The term Chests is used by Bachelard to denote the boxes, small chests and large caskets that craftsmen regularly create. Some chests have locks that make their contents more attractive to thieves. Bachelard uses the term to indicate a relationship between the small box structure and the psychology of secrecy.

Wardrobes

The term Wardrobes is used by Bachelard as a metaphor to indicate the center of order in a house. He claims the inner space of a wardrobe reflects the deep, intimate inner space that is not exposed to everyone. A wardrobe is not opened everyday and the fragrance of lavender is used to suffuse the linens kept within. Wardrobes may have keys that ensure items can be kept in reserve.

Nests

The term Nests is used by Bachelard in combination with other images to illustrate the function of inhabiting. He considers a bird's nest to be a good, warm, life-giving home for the newly-hatched, naked baby bird just out of the egg. However, Bachelard disputes using the bird's nest, perched in a tree, to describe the warm, cozy little nest lovers use to describe their relationship in literature. The female bird forms a nest by hollowing out its walls with her breast. The male bird brings twigs and other materials to be formed by the female bird into a nest by the female turning.

Shells

The term Shells is used by Bachelard to describe the snail and its shell as marvels of the universe. The hard, cold rock-like features of a shell grow and expand to fit the flabby mollusk inhabiting it. Pictures of some shells indicate their existence as early as the Mesozoic Age. Shells form by seeming to spiral around a logarithmic axis. Bachelard refers to an essay of Paul Valery who believes the mollusk's process of coiling to the left or right is mysterious. A mollusk builds from the inside as a living form of protection rather than from the outside to enter later for protection.

Corners

The term Corners is used by Bachelard to represent the human intimacy and protection that is associated with them. A corner is a place of immobility, a sort of half-box to show the reasoning between inside and outside. One can hide, take refuge and be at peace in the protection afforded by a corner or on the other hand find oneself being cornered there.

Themes

Inhabited Spaces

Bachelard's underlying theme in "The Poetics of Space" is focused on spaces in which things and people live. However, his point of view is not as an architect, engineer or other builder detailing dimensions but rather as a poet imagining. The poetic images of several poets are used as tool to wake and express the soul of imagining consciousness in daydreaming. For example, Edgar Allan Poe details frightful images and experiences in underground haunts that send chills down a reader's spine. None of these images exist anywhere but in his imagination and the reader's soul. In contrast, a poem describing the grounds of a country estate can set the reader to dreaming of a walk through its gardens.

Bachelard begins with the images of intimacy in the houses of man. The size or quality of one's house does not matter to the extent it is the world to its inhabitants that protects them from their surroundings outside. The house is a cradle experienced at birth, where daydreams of original warmth are sheltered before being tossed to the world. Memories deeply buried can become vivid again with the reading of a poetic word. Levels within Bachelard's typical dream house from attic to cellar each have their own set of feelings and memories that poetic images can stir up. City-dwellers living in apartments do not have these levels with steps going up or down to connect them with images. A hermit's hut on the horizon symbolizes man keeping vigil as he faces God without earthly riches. The writer Campenon lives in the imaginary country estate of his mind that is so real to the overseer reading about it that he offers to care for it. The hunchback of Notre Dame Cathedral lives in the old church's hiding places that form his life like an animal refuge.

Subsequently, his day-dreaming leads to where other animals take refuge, like a rat in its hole or a rabbit in its burrow. Bachelard cites the writing of Pare that no man can build a house with the skill and efficiency that small animals and birds use to make a nest. The woodpecker lives and works in the same tree and wrens' nests are covered and round like a thatched cottage. Nests are hidden by the foliage used to make them. The male bird brings materials to the female bird that uses her breast to round out and shape their form to that of a nest.

Unlike the hidden bird's nest, shells are present in the open everywhere. Similar to the female bird, the mollusk turns round to right or left inside the shell as it forms its living quarters. The irony in shells is the growing and expanding hard, stone-like material made by a slimy flabby mollusk that lives inside it. For example, a mollusk weighing fourteen pounds makes a shell that weighs five or six hundred pounds, which is named the "Grand Benitier." It takes four horses to force the shell apart. Similarly, the turtle travels with its shell on its back for protection wherever it goes and withdraws into its shell when attacked.

Corners and ears are also places for inhabitants that show up in poetic images. Even uninhabitable corners may be haunted by spiders, ladybugs and other creatures that occupy one's mind. An ear may be a useful place to inhabit as demonstrated byTom Thumb's soft, tiny voice in the horse's ear that guides the farmer to plow straight furrows.

Contrasts of Science and Imagination

Bachelard is undergoing a self-imposed change of thought pattern that pervades "The Poetics of Space." The study of science requires using habits of rigorous observation and research methods that build up over years of deductive reasoning to prove very specific, if greatly limited, points. Science is by definition eminently reasonable. Bachelard is a wise and reasonable man of science, who is well-respected in his profession. The work which he has set before himself in his later career is to become, in effect, unreasonable. Poetic imagination is an open door to the world of freedom and exploration.

The practice of poetic imagination uses neither habits of observation nor any research methods. The buildup of any deductive reasoning over years must be absent or actively countered because it can destroy the spontaneous outpouring of daydreams. Bachelard is trained to be reasonable and now is trying to be spontaneous. Admittedly, he recognizes the challenge in the observation he makes that now that he knows the value of imagining, he can't imagine. Consequently the author reads and quotes from Poe, Baudelaire, Hugo, Bosco and Cyrano. He is in awe of and wonders vicariously at storms, houses, walnuts, cuckoos and snails. Bachelard's literary mentors expose worlds he never thought real.

Ironically, Bachelard produces an exhaustive study in the literature of poetic imagination. His study seems to have the characteristics of scientific research. His work includes many observations and integrated thoughts. He cites many sources in original and translated texts followed by his own analysis and interpretation. The question remains in all of his work whether he accomplished the task of becoming imaginative, poetic or otherwise. The scholarly rational and well-ordered expertise he exhibits in "The Poetics of Space" makes one wonder whether Bachelard ever just daydreams.

Different Viewpoints

Throughout Bachelard's work, a comparison between points of view is noted. Perhaps because Bachelard undergoes significant psychological adjustment in his own thought, he frequently comments on how one or another professional sees things and how they differ. A comparative phrase allows either or both professional viewpoints to be seen in relation to one another. For example, in describing Robinet's idea of shell formation, Bachelard offers several alternatives that include the possibilities that (1) a reasoning mind may think Robinet is a victim of his overactive imagination, (2) a phenomenologist observes an extravagant daydream and (3) a psychoanalyst sees sexually obsessed

behavior. Another example of difference between the two is that a psychologist will analyze daringness of an image, but a phenomenologist accepts image as provided by the poet and takes it into his life, imagination and thought. At some primitive levels, the distinctions take on much less meaning. A phenomenologist and a psychoanalyst both may understand the significance of childhood fear by reading Edgar Allan Poe, whose acts of murder and mayhem abound in shadowy criminal cellars.

The major area of distinction that is a theme throughout is how differently the poet sees things. For example, an intellectual philosopher may be surprised by a daring poet, who uses words for sensitivity rather than precision. Psychology is unable to enter the hidden space of the superlative unlike the poet who regularly does. Poets use words to bring together the earth and the sky unlike philosophers who are often condemned by their equals to live on the ground floor only. Because a psychoanalyst "understands," according to Bachelard, he confuses poetic image with the context of his interpretation. Bachelard claims philosophers and psychologists ignore miniature worlds and objects in fairy tales.

Bachelard compares the perception of an empty shell by a phenomenologist who seeks inhabiting images and a conchologist. Bachelard's phenomenologist looks for observable facts or events, but a conchologist classifies a huge variety of shells to discover diversity. Neither takes time to appreciate the external beauty that could disturb their deliberation nor recaptures the wonder that a mollusk can live inside a piece of stone they call a shell.

Style

Perspective

Gaston Bachelard is the French philosopher who wrote "The Poetics of Space." He was a leading philosopher of Europe and a Sorbonne university professor. Bachelard begins his study in philosophy of science but eventually turns to the philosophy of art and esthetics. As an older man at the height of his renowned scientific career, Bachelard decides to take on the challenge of an entirely new body of knowledge. He admits at the outset that his acquired knowledge in science does not help him understand the poetic imagination. Bachelard leads the reader, as he explores himself, on a journey through inhabited spaces as a poet might see them. Bachelard is accustomed to use specific scientific methods, tools and "facts" to analyze and evaluate thought and appearances that is useless on this journey.

"The Poetics of Space" is an apparent self-exploration of the new, mature and revised thought of an older, perhaps wiser, scientist. He discovers as a child might, the wonder of things he once took for granted as a reasoning scientist. His book is full of comparative comments how one or another professional might see the same phenomenon. Bachelard seems to examine his own thoughts with the reader so he can better understand his own feelings. Gaston perhaps is his own audience as he ruminates on a world of dream and imagination that lies within poetic images. Among many audiences, he comments on are psychologists, phenomenologists and psychoanalysts. He knows how scientists see these things, and having been one himself, Bachelard pushes his limits forward by commenting on how these other quasi-scientists see things to reach out for his own poetic imagination.

Tone

"The Poetics of Space" is a subjective study of Gaston Bachelard's journey from a basic scientific reasoning process to an understanding, exposition and appreciation of poetic imagination or daydreaming as he refers to it. The author shares with the reader his awe and growing appreciation of the poetic world. He is a scientist whose tools no longer are adequate to explore the world of imagination. Bachelard's pathos is expressed in the observation that he now appreciates imagination when he is too old and disciplined in scientific methods to be able to imagine. Ironically, Bachelard's subjective observations are expressed through the mechanism of literary criticism too sophisticated and objective for many readers to grasp and appreciate.

The subjective tone of Bachelard's writing is matched by the equally subjective tone of his subject's poetry. For example, Poe's cellar images and Bosco's island cabin fighting against the hurricane are chilling excerpts from their work. Bachelard creates a sense of objective awe and wonder at nature's imagination when he describes a six-hundred pound shell opened and shut by the fourteen-pound mollusk. Bachelard's work itself

creates an objective sense of awe and wonder at the extent to which he integrates and brings in play a vast amount of literature and knowledge to advance an understanding of the unscientific reality of poetic imagination. It is ironic that he calls poetic imaging daydreaming, which in common speech doesn't take any amount of literature or knowledge to do.

Structure

"The Poetics of Space" written by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard is a 241-page, non-fiction philosophical study of inhabited space. The book includes ten chapters plus an introduction but no glossary or index. Chapters range in size from nine to thirty-six pages. Chapter titles use straight-forward names that concisely reflect the subject matter addressed in the chapter. Each chapter has from five to thirteen subsection headings in Roman numerals. The work is translated into English from its native French, except for quoted verses from poems presented in their original language followed by the English translation. There are two four-page, 1964 and 1994 edition Forewords with biographical information about the author. Content is complex and its written expression employs and requires extensive and sophisticated vocabulary skills. Many words used by Bachelard are specific to an academic discipline, i.e. ontology and phenomenology, and do not have any widespread common understanding.

There is an irony in the choice of chapter size and title. A one-word chapter title called "Shells" has thirty-one pages but a nine page chapter is called "The Phenomenology of Roundness." Many chapters have titles that seem simple, such as "Corners," but are really just a starting point for complex, philosophical thought. Chapter subsection headings address a specific thought or thought grouping that may run for several pages. Division into subheadings may help a reader classify Bachelard's thought processes but is limited by the language complexity and section length.

Bachelard makes extensive use of literary quotations in their original and translated versions. A well-read reader may gain great benefit and appreciation from the body of literary knowledge Bachelard shares. However, a less well-read reader may be frustrated and confused by the continuing references to other works, disciplines and authors. The text may benefit from a glossary and index to give readers a ready guide to Bachelard's work. Overall the book, subject and language are complex, erudite and challenging.

Quotes

"A philosopher who has evolved his entire thinking from the fundamental themes of the philosophy of science, and followed the main line of the active, growing rationalism of contemporary science as closely as he could, must forget his learning and break with all his habits of philosophical research, if he wants to study the problems posed by the poetic imagination. For here the cultural past doesn't count. The long day-in, day-out effort of putting together and constructing his thoughts is ineffectual. One must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears: if there be a philosophy of poetry, it must appear and re-appear through a significant verse, in total adherence to an isolated image; to be exact, in the very ecstasy of the newness of the image." (Introduction, Pg. xv)

"I propose, on the contrary, to consider the imagination as a major power of human nature. To be sure, there is nothing to be gained by saying that the imagination is the faculty of producing images. But this tautology has at least the virtue of putting an end to comparisons of images with memories." (Introduction, Pg. xxxiv)

"For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty. Authors of books on 'the humble home' often mention this features of the poetics of space. But this mention is much too succinct. Finding little to describe in the humble home, they spend little time there; so they describe it as it actually is, without really experiencing it primitiveness, a primitiveness which belongs to all, rich and poor alike, if they are willing to dream." (Chapter 1, Pg. 4)

"Sometimes the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past, so that the image of the dream house is opposed to that of the childhood home. Late in life, with indomitable courage, we continue to say that we are going to do what we have not yet done: we are going to build a house." (Chapter 2, Pg. 61)

"In reality, however, the poet has given concrete form to a very general psychological theme, namely, that there will always be more things in a closed, than in an open, box. To verify images kills them, and it is always more enriching to imagine than to experience." (Chapter 3, Pg. 88)

"With nests and, above all, shells, we shall find a whole series of images that I am going to try to characterize as primal images; images that bring out the primitiveness in us. I shall then show that a human being likes to 'withdraw into his corner,' and that it gives him physical pleasure to do so." (Chapter 4, Pg. 91)

"Robinet believed that it was by rolling over and over that the snail built its 'staircase.' Thus, the snail's entire house would be a stair-well. With each contortion, this limp animal adds a step to its spiral staircase. It contorts itself in order to advance and grow. The bird building its nest was content to turn round and round. Robinet's dynamic shell

image may be compared with Michelet's dynamic image of the nest." (Chapter 5, Pg. 122)

"The point of departure of my reflections is the following: every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house." (Chapter 6, Pg. 136)

"The man with the magnifying glass - quite simply - bars the every-day world. He is a fresh eye before a new object. The botanist's magnifying glass is youth recaptured. It gives him back the enlarging gaze of a child. With this glass in his hand, he returns to the garden." (Chapter 7, Pg. 155)

"And, once more, the dialectics of immensity and depth is revived. It is hard to say where the two hyperboles begin; the one of the too sharp eye, and the other of the landscape that sees itself confusedly under the heavy lids of its stagnant water. But any doctrine of the imaginary is necessarily a philosophy of excess, and all images are destined to be enlarged." (Chapter 8, Pg. 210)

"As soon as the word 'in' appears in an expression, people are inclined not to take literally the reality of the expression and they translate what they believe to be figurative language into reasonable language. It is not easy for me, indeed it seems futile, to follow, for instance, the poet - I shall furnish documentation on the subject - who says that the house of the past is alive in his own head. I immediately interpret: the poet simply wants to say that an old memory has been preserved in his mind. The exaggerated nature of the image that seeks to upset the relationship of contained to container makes us shrink in the presence of what can appear to be mental derangement of images." (Chapter 9, Pg. 225)

"When metaphysicians speak briefly, they can reach immediate truth, a truth that, in due course, would yield to proof. Metaphysicians, then, may be compared and associated with poets who, in a single verse, can lay bare a truth concerning inner man." (Chapter 10, Pg. 232)

Topics for Discussion

Describe and discuss why Bachelard claims the methods of science and research are inadequate to explain and understand the poetic image.

List, describe and characterize at least five features of a poetic image.

Define and discuss the term "topophilia" and "topoanalysis" used by Bachelard.

Identify, describe and characterize at least five distinctions Bachelard makes between a country house and a city apartment.

Identify and explain the distinctions Bachelard makes between the use of a metaphor and an image in literature.

Compare and critique the similarities and differences between the respective theories of shell and nest formation proposed by Robinet and Michelet.

List and describe several significant features of the "Grand Benitier."

Describe and discuss the significance of the apple according to Cyrano de Bergerac.

Describe and discuss the significance of Tom Thumb's soft voice in the plow horse's ear.

Describe and explain how distance creates miniature worlds.

Identify and discuss several uses of the term "vast" by the poet Baudelaire on which Bachelard comments.

Identify, describe and discuss the significance of roundness proposed by Bachelard.