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Re-Beginning a sur-rationalist literary criticism. Gaston Bachelard's spectres in Edward Said humanistic philology

Leading exponent of French historical epistemology and author of numerous books on poetic imagination, Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) is one of the key figures of the 20th century. Although Bachelard's thought has received great consideration from philosophers, literary theorists have generally expressed little interest in his works which are regarded as repertoires of literary themes. However, I believe that in the works of some literary comparatists (especially those influenced by "*French theory*") we could find the "specters of Bachelard"(Ch. Alunni) which determine specific analytical practices and ethical attitudes. The basic aim of this paper is to promote the enhancement of Bachelard's contribution to the theory of literature's history. By way of example, I investigate in particular Bachelard's presence in one of the most influential comparatists of the 20th century: Edward Said (1935-2003). In the first part of the paper, I analyze the specific impact that Bachelard's concepts of "*sur-rationalisme*" and "*rêverie*" have in the overall argumentation of Said's *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1974) and *Orientalism* (1978) respectively. In the second part, I reflect on Said's indirect acquisition of some fundamental paradigms of Bachelard's historical epistemology through the mediation of Michel Foucault. It is important to underline how Said, while praising Foucault's archaeology, is unable to renounce an epistemology devoid of the dictates of humanism, and thus he is in substantial agreement with Bachelard's personalist epistemology. Lastly, I discuss the concept of "beginning" in Bachelard's epistemological and aesthetic work and how it finds in Said an interpreter capable of applying it into his militant philology. Both authors, especially in their later works such as *La flamme d'une chandelle* (1961) and *On late style* (2006), seem actually to base their critical and creative activity on an aesthetics of participation that is for them the true *télos* of literary theory.