



# The AALITRA Review

## A JOURNAL OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

### No. 3, May 2011

Website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~aalitra/>

The Opening and the Ending of Paul Valéry's "Fragments of the Narcissus": A Case Study for Translators  
David Elder

To cite this Article:

David Elder, "The Opening and the Ending of Paul Valéry's "Fragments of the Narcissus" : A Case Study for Translators" , *The AALITRA Review: A Journal of Literary Translation*, No.3 (Melbourne: Monash University, 2011), pp.68-79.

*Published by*  
MONASH UNIVERSITY

© Monash University 2011

# The Opening and the Ending of Paul Valéry's "Fragments of the 'Narcissus'": A Case Study for Translators

DAVID ELDER

## Abstract

This paper will concentrate on what I recently called the *formal content* of the text for translators. Translation is an incomparable school of writing, and poetry in particular requires the development of specific linguistic skills in an essentially bicultural framework. A brief introduction to Valéry's poetics will be followed by a study of the complex interactions between form and meaning in the opening and closing lines of his "Fragments of the 'Narcissus'" with special reference to certain pages from his notebooks and other manuscripts. The objective here is to highlight some of his key aesthetic preoccupations before embarking on the final stage: an attempt at translating the many facets of sound and meaning in the lines we have chosen for this exercise. Last, but not least, this study is designed to increase an awareness of *le restant / le résidu* – or what is left *out* or left *over* in translation.

In a recent publication on translation theory<sup>1</sup>, I concentrated on analyzing certain functions of what I called the *formal content* of the text. The starting point for this article will be to highlight the role of form, contrasts, relationships between sound and meaning in Paul Valéry's poetry (all of which are familiar to many of his readers and amply evidenced by his manuscripts, notebooks and of course the *vox in actu*<sup>2</sup>) before applying them to a *genetic* and phonostylistic reading of the opening and ending of his "Fragments of the 'Narcissus'". The second part of this study will centre on my own English versions of the text as well as those by Peter Dale and David Paul.

Form and meaning are united in Valéry's poetry. Indeed, a study of the functions of the form within the poem is necessary to avoid misreading certain aspects of his (poetic) intentions. His aesthetics involve looking at *form* in association with « *les rapprochements des résonances significatives des mots* » (*Cahier XVII*, 21) [the coming together of meaningful resonances in words] and « *l'accroissement des connexions* » (*Cahier IX*, 118). In short, he is concerned with the interactions between sound and meaning: « *Le son du sens et le sens des sons agissent* » (*Cahier XVII*, 21). *Meaning* is embedded in the qualities of the *form with its complex connections*.

For Valéry, « *le fond devient l'acte de la forme* » (*Cahier XV*, 881) ["the *meaning* becomes the *act* of the *form*"]. He is « *un formel* » ["a formalist"] and proceeds « *par les formes, à partir des formes vers la "matière" des œuvres ou des idées* » (*Cahier XIV*, 103) ["through forms, from the substance, the material of works or ideas"]. Moreover, the essence of a beautiful line of poetry lies in its resistance to change. Its elements must be "crystalline" and "undeformable" ["« *cristalline et indéformable* »<sup>3</sup> (*Cahier V*, 24)]. At the same time, Valéry liberates the sensuality of his "Fragments of the 'Narcissus'" from the corset of the quatrains and the tercets of "Narcissus speaks" while retaining a certain classicism from La Fontaine's *Adonis* – a text he was reading at the time he composed the "Fragments".

To translate Valéry's poems one needs to *be aware* of the importance of their lyrical or resonant state and, at the same time, *beware* of anything verging on the oratory. But the translator, like the poet, is not simply there to weigh syllables (*un peseur de syllabes*). (There are already sufficient ridiculous examples of such attempts in operatic works.) Valéry's poems approach music, algebra and architecture – but decomposing or *deboning* the skeletal structure of the consonants in a line will never allow us to recreate exactly its form (rhythm, tone, etc.).

Unlike prose, poetry is a form of writing that cannot be reformulated in spite of its very specific – though modest – musical profile.<sup>4</sup>

Valéry’s poetry aims at a state where sound and meaning are of equal importance.<sup>5</sup> In fact, « Le poème n’a pas de *sens* sans SA VOIX » (*Cahier XXVI*, 807) [“The poem is meaningless without ITS VOICE”]. We are a long way from the discourse-melody (à la Racine), but closer to the melody-discourse (à la Mallarmé). It is « l’union étroite ou la mystérieuse symbiose du son et du sens » [“the close union or the mysterious symbiosis of sound and meaning”] that « est essentielle »<sup>6</sup> [“is essential...”]. For Valéry, « La voix, clef de la poésie » (*Cahier VII*, 164) [“The voice is the key to poetry”]. The poetic text for Valéry is, in a sense, a libretto.<sup>7</sup> The essential part is unwritten and has to be performed. The **voice** of the poem is at the very centre of poetry and yet it remains impossible to reproduce.

At another level, reading a poem also means being attentive to its *otherness* in relation to a norm (be it linguistic or otherwise). It is this *difference* that must be kept in translation as we look at the nature of the carefully constructed cracks and gaps<sup>8</sup> in Valéry’s texts. Indeed, a feeling of detachment pervades all of Valéry’s creative work. « J’ai toujours fait des vers en m’observant les faire »<sup>9</sup> [“I have always written poetry while watching myself doing so”]. The translator of his poems must remain aware of the distance between the *vouloir-faire* and the *vouloir-dire* as well as his notion of harmony as something “undefinable” situated between what the line of poetry “is” and “is saying” (*Cahier VII*, 151). Hence the necessity to concentrate on the nature of the *contrasts* and *combinations* in translation.<sup>10</sup> His poetry is heavily immersed in the themes of proximity and distance – « Imminence éternelle de toute ma pensée » (*Cahier III*, 680) [“Eternal imminence of all my thought”] – and the paradoxes of philosophical and poetic systems that are open and closed, ajar and adjourned.

« J’ai aimé travailler « une page » – comme un peintre un tableau – *indéfiniment* – Pas de limite. » (*Cahier XX*, 302)

[“I liked working on a page, like an artist on a painting – *indefinitely*. No limit.”]

Note that the *formal* nature of the *Narcissus* cycle in *Charms* relies essentially on an « infinite » set of « contrasts » or oscillations between two « poles »<sup>11</sup> within the following context: « Quel poème admirable que la contemplation se nourrissant d’elle-même » (*Cahier V*, 524) [“Contemplation nourishing itself! What an admirable poem!”] Indeed, the theme of contemplation nourishing itself is essential for Valéry – as it is for translators! But it is the text in a perpetual state of becoming that is our major concern in the poem I will now study.

With the above background statements in mind, let us now “dissect” the first alexandrine of the “Fragments of the ‘Narcissus’” in *Charms* before translating it:

« Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course ! »

k

k

[The two «k» sounds stand out like pillars at each end of the line.]

m m

b -----> p

[voiced and unvoiced forms « b/p »]

t t

R R R R

↘

↘

z -----> s [voiced and unvoiced forms « z/s »]

ã ã

[*enfin*: the veiled (nasalised) finality of the text inside this line]

– tu	ma –
k t	f t p k s
b R z	R R m R

[Notice the balance between voiced and unvoiced consonants.]

It would be a major error to underestimate the importance and the functions of openings in poetry. In the case of the line above, we need to concentrate on the richness of this *event-limit* that is detached from the rest of the poem. Note that the « terme pur » of this “race” serves as an internal and metaphorical closure (terminus), an end, a goal, a desire as well as an opening for the text. This line is rich in *contrasts*, oscillations<sup>12</sup>, oppositions and closeness/proximity (*tu / ma*). Note that the word « enfin » means “finally” and “in the end”, just like « terme » is a “terminus” and a “word”. The « terme pur » is a *corps verbal* at the very limit of language. It is both the frontier for consciousness racing to complete a task and the aim of *work in progress*. But the goal is unreachable given that literature for Valéry is a matter of *form* – images are merely images. There is no congruency between language and reality. The experience of the specific and the particular for Narcissus as well as his quest for his « seule essence » [“his own sole essence”] will end up being liquefied in a bodiless universe. In this way, he provides us with the provisional *end* for a state of imminence in a poem where « L’affaire du poète est de construire une sorte de corps verbal qui ait la solidité mais l’ambiguïté d’un objet » (*Cahier* VI, 118) [“Poetry is about building a sort of *verbal body* that has both the solidity and the ambiguity of an object”]. But « À mesure que l’on s’approche du réel, on perd la parole » (*Cahier* II, 554) [“The voice is lost as we approach the real”]. This is also the ultimate fate for the « belles infidèles » in translation.<sup>13</sup>

The quotes above are essential as we contextualise the “Fragments of the ‘Narcissus’” and navigate between what « brille[s] » [“shines”] at the beginning of the poem *and* what « brise » or « fuit » [“breaks” or “flees”] in the last line with its untranslatable echoes.

**« Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course ! »**

Aesthetic limits are a major theme in Valéry’s poetry.

« Art – L’opération de l’artiste consiste à tenter d’*enfermer un infini*. Un infini potentiel *dans* un fini actuel. » (*Cahier* XVIII, 44)

[“Art – The artist tries to *enclose an infinity*. A potential infinity *in* something present and finite.”]

The opening exclamation of this soliloquy is ambiguous. It conveys presence, imminence, approximation, approach, appearance, seduction, closure, a way of carrying the « terme » to its limit, « une manière d’en finir par les *mots* »<sup>14</sup> [“a way of ending with words”], the paradox of a future inaccessible « terme pur » or horizon for the work...

The essential ambiguity<sup>15</sup> of the first line of the “Fragments of the ‘Narcissus’”:

**« Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course ! »**

is eliminated in the English translations and its relevance to the poem (and to Valéry’s poetry in general) is lost.

“How you shine, [...]” [presence and amazement]

or

“May you shine, [...]” [absence and becoming]

On the other hand, if we were to combine these two expressions:

“How you shine and may you shine, [...]”

the conciseness, the ambiguity and the doubling up of meanings would be diluted. Worse still, the awkward amplification of the word “you” could only be offset by placing the word « ma » [“my”] (at the end of the line) in italics.

“How you shine and may you shine, pure end of *my* race!”

But Valéry would oppose all attempts at diluting poetic effects.

It goes without saying that the « tu » (symbolising *proximity*, as opposed to distance and even discontinuity) in this text has its equivalent only in an archaic and inappropriate form in English.

Besides,

“Shine on finally, pure end of *my* race!”

is an aberration as the « tu » (subject) is absent. The fundamental and necessary opposition between « tu » / « ma » (perfectly placed at both ends of this line in French) is completely lost. In Valéry’s *Cahiers*, consciousness is all about the distance between a *subject* and an *object*. On the other hand, he notes that dreaming is when the frontiers between the two are blurred.

So the last thing to do with this poem would be to reduce the variations on *opposites* that are so present in his poetry. In the context of the theme of Narcissus, proximity and distance, oppositions or *contrasts* and imminence are omnipresent, and amply developed. At the risk of diminishing the multiple oppositions and divisions inherent in this line, some translators have chosen:

“How you shine...”

By doing so, they eliminate the essential ambiguity of the first words of the text. The ideal situation for the translator here would be to create oppositions between *presence* and *becoming*, while at the same time maintaining a *state* of discovery and *absence*. Note that « L’extrême du désir s’alimente d’absence » (*Cahier* XIX, 470) [“The extreme point of desire feeds on absence”]. States of approaching and waiting are powerful « excitants » and « stupéfiants » (*Cahier* XVII, 678) [“stimulants”] favoured by Valéry. « La « création poétique » – c’est la création de l’attente » (*Cahier* XII, 660) [“Poetic creation is the creation of a state of expectancy”] or « Le plus grand plaisir est l’approche du plaisir » (*Cahier* VII, 528) [“The greatest pleasure is the approach of pleasure”]. Or, as his “Young Fate” would say: « Tout peut naître ici-bas d’une attente infinie » [“To infinite waiting, here below, all may come” (Paul)].

Right from the beginning of the “Fragments of the ‘Narcissus’” the « je » (the “I”) is absent. However, in David Paul’s translation of the first line:

“How you finally gleam<sup>16</sup>, pure goal of the race I run!”<sup>17</sup>

we find two *subjects* (“you” / “I”), and not a *subject* and an *object*, in opposition – which, by the way, is what Valéry is writing about.<sup>18</sup> It is particularly the absence of the « je » (the *I*) that opens the poem. The « je » only comes on stage *progressively* in this text. It is *decentred* and *suspended* both here and at the end of the text. Indeed, its presence is *delayed* or *deferred* for both aesthetic and thematic reasons until the sixth line (where it is accompanied by a verb in the *negative future form*). In the 19<sup>th</sup> line the « je » is associated with a quest in the *conditional* followed by a play on possession. It is in the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza that the « je » reveals itself – but essentially to announce its solitude. In the second “Fragment”, it only appears in the last part of the text to become the subject of the (un)divided self.

« Mais moi, Narcisse aimé, je ne suis curieux  
Que de ma seule essence »

It is important to note that, in the third “Fragment”, the « je », with its poetic crescendo (« J’aime... J’aime !... »), does not appear before the 10<sup>th</sup> line.

Even if five poems in the *Album de vers anciens* contain a « je » right from the first line<sup>19</sup>, this is not the case in « La Jeune Parque » [“The Young Fate”] (with its multiple layers of the *Moi* [self] gradually unfolding through different levels of (*pre*)consciousness), the three “Fragments of the ‘Narcissus’”, and their unfinished “Finale”. The only exception in *Charms* is « Le vin perdu » [“The lost wine”] – and even then, the presence of the “I” is softened and restrained. The « je » affirms itself in other ways – remains in waiting, in its multiplicity – and does not overtly declare itself as in some earlier poems.<sup>20</sup> In the fragmented “Finale” of the Narcissus cycle, the « je » belongs to a past that is relegated to the fourth and then the fifth line of this unfinished text.

Few poems written by Valéry use the « je » in the first line.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, in *Alphabet*, an unfinished collection of 30 or so prose poems, 8 of these texts contain a « je » in the first sentence – but then it is because five of the different variations belong to the letters M and J (« Moi » and « Je »).

David Paul’s and Peter Dale’s translations of the first line of these “Fragments of the ‘Narcissus’” contain certain internal harmonies and echoes – but inevitably creates two very different approaches to the nature of music in Valéry’s poetry.

“How you finally gleam, pure goal of the race I run!” (Paul<sup>22</sup>)

gl r g l r r  
n n  
ju ai ə juəf ə ə rei ai r

“At last you shine, pure end of all my course!” (Dale<sup>23</sup>)

l s ju am juəf n ə ɔ:l ai ɔ:s

The “pure end of all my course!” has a sense of finality that is too evident, emphatic and far removed from the French text. Valéry does not feel the need to insist further on the function or the force of this “pure end” – which is already a “superlative” – by using « tout » [“all”].

The first line

« Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course ! »

indicates an action and a movement towards a « terme **pur** » that is unmixed and unadulterated as well as

- the finale,
- the final aim,
- the terminus,
- the word.

But the final state<sup>24</sup> (unlike the earliest manuscripts) accentuates the *intellectually absent/open* and the *aesthetically present/closed* in the text. Furthermore, *brillare* in Latin is « briller comme le beryl » (or to shine like a variety of emerald whose colour can also be that of water). Key etymological suggestions can be lost in translation, and it is well known that Valéry consulted the 1913 edition of the *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française* by Léon Clédat. Once again, it is this *crystalline* « terme pur » associated with a state of *becoming* that pervades Valéry’s poetry. The richness of such poetic games remains to a large extent absent from the above translations of these “Fragments”.

The universe of Narcissus is *within* and *without* the line as well as being an integral part of the *workings* in Valéry's aesthetics. The *end* of the « course » *calls for* the « source » in the form of a rhyme in the second line. (Peter Dale achieves this, but David Paul reduces it to an *internal* “pool” and misses the point.) The *circle* or *circuit* here is closed and open – but to respect this in translation, an obsolete meaning of the word « course » is required in English. Let us not forget that Valéry's « conception sportive » (*Cahier* XIX, 223) of the poetic language is linked to intellectual gymnastics (rather than the spiritual acrobatics of a Mallarmé). This is the case of the poem « le Rameur » [“The Rower”].

« Je remonte à la source où cesse même un nom. »

There are other essential links between « terme », « course » and « source ». According to Valéry: « Tout commencement achève quelque chose » [“All beginnings end something”]. In order to insist on the theme of *attente-désir* the following translations could be proposed.

“At last you shine, pure end of my course!”

or

“At last you shine, pure term of my course!”

The word “term” in English today is more likely to evoke “terms of reference”. (But Valéry would perhaps not have refused this meaning.)

The last line of these “Fragments” creates another set of problems.

« **Passe, et dans un frisson, brise Narcisse, et fuit... »**

	s		[z]s		[z]		s s
p		f		f			
		R		R		R	
a	[a]					a	
		i		i		i	
							e

[« et » – this “addition” is so clear and light in French]

First and foremost, it is the word « Narcisse » that is decomposed in both sound and meaning in this line.

**Passe, et dans un frisson, brise Narcisse, et fuit... »**

[ɑs    [an]z    rɪs [n]    rɪz    (**narsis**)    i]

Valéry contrasts voiced and unvoiced consonants as well as vocal oppositions (open, veiled, sharp and acute vowels):

« s » / « z » / « s »            / « z » / « s » « s »  
 « p »                            /    « b ».

« **Passe, et dans un frisson, brise Narcisse, et fuit... »**

	e		i		i		i		e	i
a	ã	œ	ö		a					

[Vocal oppositions: opening and closure]

The phonetic qualities of the last line intensify our understanding of its meaning. It requires notes that are vibrant, whispering, acute and open. There are essential oppositions between the verbs: « passe » (open / whispering), « brise » (vibrant / sharp) and « fuit... » (The lightness of this last verb is amplified by the fourth and final fleeting note in the line.)

« Passe, et dans un frisson, brise Narcisse, et fuit... »

p s	f s	<u>s s</u> f	[unvoiced consonants]
d z	r	<u>b r z n r</u>	[voiced consonants]

All the words here have been repeated elsewhere in the text to reinforce a certain feeling of closure. (This is another challenge for translators as they approach Valéry's aesthetics.) On the other hand, the first alexandrine is *detached* on purpose, and key words such as « brilles », « terme » and « course » are used only once in the poem. This in itself amply justifies separating it from the rest of the text.

But even if the word « Narcisse » is absent from the first line, it is present elsewhere, and especially when our mythological protagonist speaks about himself in the third person singular.

\*\* \*\* \*

Let us move on to the unfinished “Finale” of the “Fragments of the ‘Narcissus’” that was published for the first time in France in 1973.<sup>25</sup>

The opening line

« La fontaine n'est plus qu'une splendide nuit »

Ms. 162 99/317

ε	ε	y	y	i	i	[“clear” vowels]	
[n]	n	n	n	[n]	n	[audible or visible consonants]	
a	[n]	n	n	[n]	i	n i	[ <i>Narcisse</i> – without “s”, or “{”]; survival of the consonant “n” and the most open (“a”) and closed vowels “i” at the opposite ends of this line.]
l					l		

can be translated in the following ways:

“The fountain is nothing but a splendid night”	ə ntɪn ɪ nʌ ʌ ə s ndɪd naɪt
“The fountain is merely a splendid night”	ə ntɪn ɪ ɪəli ə s l ndɪd naɪt
“The fountain has become a splendid night”	ə ntɪn ɪ ə s ndɪd naɪt

But in order to maintain the incomplete echoes in English of the word Narcissus, another melodic structure can be proposed:

“The pond is but a splendid night”	
ə n ɪ[z] ə s n ɪ naɪ	[the word <i>Narcissus</i> : with its residue of echoes]
p b p	[mirroring of unvoiced and voiced consonants]



d                    d d                    [echoes]  
                           t                    t                    [echoes]

The possible rhymes for the last line of the third “Fragment” are problematic:

« **Passe, et dans un frisson, brise Narcisse, et fuit...** »

**flight... fuit...** [*fuit* is both an (*en*)*vol* and “flight”]

**night... nuit...** [The word *nuit* appears five times in the text.]

**bright...** ...

... **suit...** [and *suivent*: twice]

... **fruit...** [The word *fruit* has already been used four times in this poem]

**light... luit...** [A possible rhyme *luit* would recall the beginning of the poem – but this is not the subject of the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> “Fragment”.]

Keeping the echo of the missing rhyme (“flight” / “night”) would detract from the *movement* created by the *verbal* form chosen by Valéry and our two translators.

“The unseizable love you came promising me,  
 “Passes, and in a shudder breaks Narcissus, and flees...” (Paul<sup>26</sup>)  
 [Note the unorthodox use of four dots here by David Paul.]

“That love, ungraspable, you’d promised whole,  
 “Passes and, shuddering, breaks Narcissus, flees...” (Dale<sup>27</sup>)

The use of a comma before « , et » is respected by David Paul in his translation of the last line. But Peter Dale intensifies the feeling of *fragmentation* by keeping (like Valéry) the three commas.

In Peter Dale’s translation, there remains the possibility of another rhyme, even though all suggestion of a *nocturnal suite* (« nuit ») is lost. But “flees” leads to *bee’s knees, trees* and *fleas* and not “night”! Moreover, the English language is devoid of the corrosive power of the verb « fuit » at the end of the “Fragments of the ‘Narcissus’” which is echoed by the stability of a noun, « nuit », in the unfinished finale of this poem. It is obviously impossible to translate the same effects. However, the manuscripts of the “Finale” amply justify maintaining “flight” as an echo of “night”.

« Passes, trembles, breaks Narcissus, parts in flight... »

While maintaining the echoes of « Narcisse » [“Narcissus” – nār sis´s], I have kept, as far as possible, the following consonants *p s t k s s p t s f t* in order to evoke the flight of Narcissus along with a slight vibrant current (*r*).

Yet, it is a different scene that unfolds in Valéry’s “Finale” of the “Narcissus” as it moves from “flight” to “night” – from an action to a state.

« **La fontaine n’est plus qu’une splendide nuit**  
**Qui représente aux cieus leur merveille fermée**  
**Par les mêmes clartés dont toute elle est formée. [...] »**

Narcissus is absent from this nocturnal universe:

« il ne trouve plus que l'univers étincelant  
reproduit par les eaux et comme achevé  
fermé, **formant** un tout complet [...] »

It is the drama of an impossible *form* or its limits in relation to an all-embracing *corps-complet* or *corps-regard*. Herein lies the formal game for the translator as well. In fact, the text is situated between *corporalité* (the unexplainable physical side) and *form* (what is “fixed”). The drama oscillates between the aspirations of formal unity (the text) and the feeling of multiplicity (le corps). In short, we need to study closely the *symmetry* and *asymmetry* in Valéry’s texts before translating them.

\*\* \*\* \*

In conclusion, the conditions for metre, rhythm and other sound effects in French are only partly reproduced in English. If, for David Paul, French is a violin with its “vibrato”<sup>28</sup>, English is a complex keyboard instrument. The major obstacle for translators is the specific musicality of each language. When translating the tightly knit web of connections in Valéry’s poetry it is important never to underplay the effects created by the voice and the specific functions of his personal vocabulary. Valéry is also acutely aware of the limits of translation. We are condemned to translate – and the limitations of our writerly skills make the task in(de)finite – hence the important role of the translator’s notes in order to account for the *remainder*, the *residue* – or, in other words, what is left *out* or left *over*.

Last but not least, this paper contains a fragment of the groundwork for a further study of one of Valéry’s overarching and earliest principles concerning translation: “The life of the mind (or mental activity)” [la « vie mentale »] is an “infinite series of translations” [« série infinie de traductions »]<sup>29</sup>, and thought « est une série de traductions » [“is a set of translations”]<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> ELDER, David. Réflexions à « claire-voix » sur la forme du texte à traduire. In D’AMELIO, Nadia. *La forme comme paradigme du traduire*. Mons: Éditions du CIPA. 2009: 301-318.

<sup>2</sup> Le poème est corps mais corps animé, « vox in actu » (*Cahier XXI*, 180). « Le Moi c’est la Voix » (*Cahier XIV*, 390).

<sup>3</sup> My highlighting and underlining.

<sup>4</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. *Lettre à Madame C*. Paris: Les Amis des Cahiers verts, Grasset, 1928.

« On peut dire qu’elle va chanter plus qu’elle ne chante ; et qu’elle va s’expliquer, plus qu’elle ne s’explique. Elle n’ose sonner trop haut, ni parler trop net. Elle ne hante ni les sommets, ni les abîmes de la voix. Elle se contente de ses collines et d’un profil très modéré. »

<sup>5</sup> The poet is « un homme pour qui les sons du langage ont une importance égale (égale, vous m’entendez bien !) à celle du sens » VALÉRY, Paul. *Œuvres, Vol. I*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957: 1079.

<sup>6</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. « Images de la France », *Œuvres, Vol. II*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1960: 1003.

<sup>7</sup> « L’écriture dans le poème joue le rôle de partition. L’essentiel n’est pas écrit. » (*Cahier IX*, 98) For LYOTARD, « Lire est entendre et non pas voir. L’œil ne fait que balayer les signes écrits. » [Reading is hearing and not seeing. The eye merely skims over the written signs.]

LYOTARD, Jean-François. *Discours, figure*. Paris: Klincksieck, 2002: 217.

<sup>8</sup> « Toute vie de l’esprit – est écart. Penser est s’écarter. (...) » (*Cahier XXV*, 587)

<sup>9</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. *Calepin du Poète, Œuvres, Vol. I*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957: 1455.

<sup>10</sup> « Tantôt c’est la combinaison de choses, et il faudra la traduire ; tantôt c’est celle des mots qui jouira de la propriété énoncée, et il faudra la justifier. » Id.: 1454.

<sup>11</sup> « ... c’est un monologue infini que celui qui peut s’entendre (si on y prête l’oreille) entre deux... pôles celui que l’on est par les circonstances, par la mémoire,

par l'observation de chaque figure particulière de l'instant,  
l'examen de son corps, l'état de son humeur, – en somme,  
tout ce qui peut être nommé, décrit, fixé ; et d'autre  
part en contraste absolu avec celui-là, l'autre qui ne  
peut, ni ne veut être défini, qui se refuse à toute spécification,  
qui ne consent à aucune détermination, qui se dégage automatiquement  
de tout acte de conscience.

Pour moi, mon « Narcisse » n'est pas tant occupé de  
sa beauté. » (Ms. 162 105/317)

<sup>12</sup> « Narcisse.

Le problème – et la poésie – de l'*objet* – l'oscillation entre l'objet et le  
sujet – qui est le problème du moi et de son *fonctionnement* –  
n'est-ce pas le mythe du Narcisse ? » (*Cahier XII*, 795)

<sup>13</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. « Tel Quel », « Littérature », *Œuvres, Vol. II*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,  
1960: 564.

« Grâce aux règles bizarres, dans la poésie française classique, la distance entre la « *pensée* » initiale  
et « *l'expression* » finale est la plus grande possible. Ceci est de conséquence. Un travail se place entre  
l'*émotion* reçue ou l'*intention* conçue, et l'achèvement de la *machine* qui la restituera ou restituera une  
*affection* analogue. Tout est redessiné ; la pensée reprise, etc.

Ajoutez à ceci que les hommes qui ont porté cette poésie au plus haut point étaient tous *traducteurs*.  
Rompus à transporter les anciens dans notre langue.

Leur poésie est marquée de ces habitudes. Elle est une traduction, une *belle infidèle*, – infidèle à ce  
qui n'est pas en accord avec les exigences d'un langage pur. »

<sup>14</sup> Note: « La prose jamais n'est *finie*. Mais le vers se trouve fini. Quand la prose est finie, elle est *un vers* »  
(*Cahier VII* 84). [“Prose is never *finished*. But a line of poetry is. When prose is complete, it is *a line of*  
poetry.”] But this must be read in conjunction with the following fundamental intellectual principle (that also  
applies to poetry): Nothing in the mind is complete.] « Un poème n'est jamais achevé – c'est toujours un  
accident qui le termine [...] » “A poem is never complete – it is always an accident that completes it.”  
VALÉRY, Paul. « Tel Quel. Littérature. » *Œuvres, Vol. II*. Paris: Édition de la Pléiade, 1960: 553.

<sup>15</sup> See: LAWLER, James. *Lecture de Valéry: Une Étude de « Charmes »*. Paris: PUF, 1963: 103.

<sup>16</sup> The word *gleam* in English has little to do with the vivid light of the verb *briller*. David PAUL uses the  
same verb to translate: « les rares lueurs des clairs anneaux perdus. » [“And the fitful gleamings of bright lost  
rings.”]

<sup>17</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. *Poems* [translated by David PAUL]. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1971: 140.

PAUL falls into a similar trap in his translation of the 1<sup>st</sup> line of « La Jeune Parque »:

« Cette main, sur mes traits qu'elle rêve effleurer, »

“*This hand of mine*, dreaming it strokes my features,” [my underlining]

“This hand of mine” is excessive as the Young Fate is not yet aware that it is *her* hand. (It is perhaps  
*numbed*.) Besides, the poem is about the awakening of consciousness and such a declaration in English is  
therefore unwarranted here. Valéry also replaces « Ma main » with « Cette main » in many early draft  
versions of the poem.

<sup>18</sup> There is an intense poetic play on multiple oppositions and *contrasts* in this text: *je / me / mon / ma / mes /*  
*moi / moi-même / Narcisse / il / l(e) / la / s(e) / son / sa / ses / soi / soi-même / (ce)lui / nous / nos / vous / votre*  
*/ vos / tu / ton / ta / te / tes / toi / leurs...* as well as in the following text in the *Cahiers*.

« Monologue en soi – qui est dialogue

À qui parle-t-on ?

Ici la logique voudrait intervenir – –

« Parler » implique *quelqu'un* qui parle et  
*quelqu'un* à qui il parle.

Ce propos naissant se crée des pôles.

Il est très difficile d'observer ce monologue sans  
le falsifier.

- Comment peut-on être *deux*, dans *Un ?* » (*Cahier XX*, 261)

<sup>19</sup> « Hélène » (1891) « AZUR ! c'est moi... Je viens des grottes de la mort. »

« Orphée » (1926) ... « JE compose en esprit sous les myrtes, Orphée »

« Narcisse parle » (elegies) (1891) « Ô frères ! tristes lys, je languis de beauté »<sup>19</sup>

« L'amateur de poèmes » (1906) « Si je regarde tout à coup ma véritable pensée, je ne me console pas de  
subir cette pensée intérieure. »

« Un feu distinct... » (1920)

« Un feu distinct m'habite et je vois distinctement »

<sup>20</sup> Except in a few of Valéry's early poems, the « Je » [the "I"] does not manifest itself ostentatiously in an opening line. This is not the case for Rimbaud in « Le Bateau ivre », « Oraison du soir », « Ma Bohême (Fantaisie) », « Au Cabaret-vert », « Sensation », « Aube » and many other prose poems.

<sup>21</sup> « Rêve » (1889) « Je rêve un fort splendide et calme, où la nature / S'endort »  
« Ensemble » (1892) « Je vous salue, ô frère exquis !... ô Mien ! »  
« Solitude » (1897) « Loin de ce monde, je vis seul comme un ermite / Enfermé »

« Testament de Vénitienne » (1897) « Le jour où je mourrai, courez à ma gondole »

<sup>22</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. Fragments of the Narcissus. *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Poems* [translated by David PAUL]. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1971: 141.

<sup>23</sup> *Course* and *source* are kept here in English in spite of an inevitable digression from the meaning of the text in Peter DALE's translation of VALÉRY's « Fragments du Narcisse » as both the second and the last line in French move from the *static* noun "flight" / « fuite » to movement through the verb "flees" / « fuit »: [VALÉRY, Paul. *Charms* [translated by Peter DALE]. London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2007: 61.]

<sup>24</sup> The first lines of this text in the typed manuscript (*N ms 1,44*) are well known to all Valéry specialists. Nicole CELEYRETTE-PIETRI and Huguette LAURENTI also published them in LEVAILLANT, Jean. *Écriture et génétique textuelle. Valéry à l'œuvre*. Lille: Presses universitaires de Lille, 1982.

« Voici.. Tu m'as conduit au terme de ma course,  
Ce soir comme du cerf la soif que fuit sa course  
Ne cesse qu'il ne tombe au milieu des roseaux,  
Amour tu m'as [...] »

These first lines undergo immense changes – but the « je » is never present. Valéry plays with the "hugolian" effects of the word « Voici » which will disappear in the published version of this 1<sup>st</sup> « Fragment »,

« Amour voici briller ta substance, source »

The word « Voici » is an opening for one of his early poems: « ... Voici la porte refermée », as well as in a draft version of his « *Naissance de Vénus* »: « La voici ! fleur antique et d'écume fumante / La nymphe magnifique [...] ». In his later poems, Valéry focuses more on *imminence* than *presence*.

<sup>25</sup> ELDER, David. « Le finale fragmenté des « Narcisse » de Valéry », *Poétique et poésie* [Édition inaugurale des *Cahiers Paul Valéry*, Éd. ROUART, Agathe et LEVAILLANT, Jean]. Paris: Gallimard, 1973: 187-206.

<sup>26</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. Fragments of the Narcissus. *Poems* [translated by David PAUL]. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1971: 161.

<sup>27</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. Fragments of the 'Narcissus', *Charms* [translated by Peter DALE]. London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2007: 81.

<sup>28</sup> See VALÉRY, Paul. *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Poems* [translated by David PAUL]. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1971: 391.

<sup>29</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. *Cahiers 1894-1914. Vol. II*. Paris: Gallimard. Collection Blanche, 1988:156 and VALÉRY 1957-61, I, 275.

<sup>30</sup> VALÉRY, Paul. *Cahiers 1894-1914. Vol. II*. Paris: Gallimard. Collection Blanche, 1988: 160.

\*\* \*\* \* \*\* \*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

VALÉRY, Paul. *Œuvres, Vol. I*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957.

VALÉRY, Paul. *Œuvres, Vol. II*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1960.

VALÉRY, Paul. *Cahiers*. Paris: CNRS, 1957-61 [29 volumes].

VALÉRY, Paul. *Cahiers 1894-1914. Vols. I-XI*. Paris: Gallimard. Collection Blanche. 1987-2009.

VALÉRY, Paul. *Poems* [translated by David PAUL]. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1971.

VALÉRY, Paul. *Charms* [translated by Peter DALE]. London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2007.

BOURJÉA, Serge (ed.) *Génétique et traduction. Cahier de critique génétique*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995.

CLAUDEL, Paul. *Œuvres en proses*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965.

---

ELDER, David. « Le finale fragmenté des « Narcisse » de Valéry, *Poétique et poésie* » [Édition inaugurale des *Cahiers Paul Valéry*, Éd. ROUART, Agathe et LEVAILLANT, Jean]. Paris: Gallimard, 1973.

ELDER, David. « Réflexions à « claire-voix » sur la forme du texte à traduire. » In D'AMELIO, Nadia. *La forme comme paradigme du traduire*. Mons: Éditions du CIPA. 2009: 301-318. Published with the support of the *Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique*. (FNRS). (Belgium).

GAUTHIER, Michel. *Les Équations phonétiques*. Lille: Université de Lille III, 1973. [This text is an excellent introduction to a whole range of phonostylistic games in Valéry's poetry.]

LAWLER, James. *Une étude de « Charmes »*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963.

LEVAILLANT, Jean. *Écriture et génétique textuelle. Valéry à l'œuvre*. Lille: Presses universitaires de Lille, 1982.

LYOTARD, Jean-François. *Discours, figure*. Paris: Klincksieck, 2002.

MALLARMÉ, Stéphane. « Les mots anglais ». *Œuvres complètes, Vol. II*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2003.

MESCHONNIC, Henri. *La rime et la vie*. Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 2006. [Just one of many of the major contributions to poetics by this eminent critic.]