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in Valéry's Poetry

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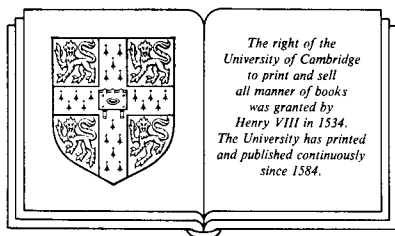
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# PAUL VALÉRY AND MUSIC

A STUDY OF  
THE TECHNIQUES OF COMPOSITION IN  
VALÉRY'S POETRY

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Concevoir en poète c'est concevoir musicalement.

(XI, 1926, p. 618)

Le problème *d'écrire* doit être assimilé à celui de *mettre en musique* (écrire pour la voix).

(IX, 1923, p. 190)

Poème de composition tout harmonique, très influencé par Wagner - sans effet de narration des états d'âme ou d'être. Dans tout ce poème j'ai tout sacrifié impitoyablement à la musique des vers.

(In J. Robinson, 'Un nouveau visage de *La Jeune Parque*: le poème commenté par son auteur', *Bulletin d'Etudes Valéryennes*, 7, No. 25 (Oct. 1980), p. 50.)

. . . nous avons songé à remonter au plus près de la pensée et à saisir sur la table de l'écrivain le document du premier acte de son effort intellectuel, et comme le graphique de ses impulsions, de ses variations, de ses reprises, en même temps que l'enregistrement immédiat de ses rythmes personnels, qui sont la forme de son régime d'énergie vivante: *le manuscrit original*, le lieu de son regard et de sa main, où s'inscrit de ligne en ligne le duel de l'esprit avec le langage, de la syntaxe avec les deux, du délire avec la raison, l'alternance de l'attente et de la hâte, tout le drame de l'élaboration d'une œuvre et de la fixation de l'instable.

('Comment travaillent les écrivains', *Vues*, p. 317.)

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is based upon an examination of material from two major sources: the *Cahiers* and the poetry manuscripts. The number of references to music which are to be found from a careful reading of the *Cahiers* is remarkable, significantly more than the writings published in the two-volume Pléiade edition of the *Oeuvres* would lead one to suppose. Though perhaps reluctant to develop his thoughts in public, he covers in his own notes an astonishing range of issues related to music, from an attendance at a concert or a meeting with a musician to a detailed analysis of 'love' or 'the functioning of the mind' in terms of music, as well as a vast number of notes on 'Poésie-Musique', 'Mélodie', 'les Harmoniques' and so on. It has been necessary to select representative quotations among the many more that offered themselves, summarising others and omitting even more; the choice is not easy, as Valéry would seize upon an idea and rework it, rephrasing, adding further implications, trying to refine his categories, making connections with other topics, and these reformulations are the very substance of the *Cahiers*, the dialogue with the self that prompted him to scrutinise all that he had written and the process of thinking itself. But in order to allow the main drift of Valéry's argument to emerge, some areas of interest, such as the many attempts to explain the effect of music in terms of a chemical reaction on the muscular and nervous systems, may only be mentioned briefly, the reformulations not repeated unless adding an important qualification or development to his thoughts; above all, attention has centred upon those notes which seem to illumine most the questions about music and poetry.

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The second main source has been the poetry manuscripts, the majority of which are to be found in the Department of Manuscripts of the Bibliothèque nationale. In attempting to focus upon the techniques of composition, the rough draft, with words scattered seemingly haphazardly over the page, is as important as the later ordering of stanzas or the variants from one edition to another; and therefore the dossiers of loose-leaf manuscripts have been of singular importance along with the early notebook *Cahier Charmes I*, entitled 'P. V. Petits Poèmes MCMXVII', and the small notebook *Cahier Charmes II* containing notes on poetry and composition as well as drafts of the poems. But Valéry did not work through these chronologically and the evidence of the poems shows that he would move from one to another adding and redrafting, so that it is only by a close examination of the internal development of each poem that it is possible to order the manuscripts with some uncertainty. A further notebook of importance is the *Cahier Voilier* which contains drafts of many poems, including essential stages of *La Pythie*; details from this notebook are to be found in J. R. Lawler, *Lecture de Valéry* (Paris, 1963).<sup>1</sup>

It is not possible to list here all the distinguished writers on Valéry to whom I am indebted, but I should wish to mention the following whose work has been particularly relevant to the subject: L. J. Austin, J. Duchesne-Guillemin, H. Laurenti, J. R. Lawler and O. Nadal.<sup>2</sup> W. N. Ince's work on *The Poetic Theory of Paul Valéry* has proved of enormous value in the preparation of this study: the influence of his authoritative analysis of inspiration and technique and his study of the theory of composition is evident in much of the discussion and is gratefully acknowledged.

The origins of the study lie in the seminar classes at King's College London given by Professor J. M. Cocking, for it was his teaching which excited my interest in Valéry. I am particularly grateful for the assistance and support of Dr Richard Smith who first supervised my research and read the drafts of the chapters: if this work has any clarity and cogency of argument it is in response to his penetrating questions. I owe

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The following signs and abbreviations are used:

- Dormeuse* f. 22 : Dossier of manuscripts for *La Dormeuse*  
feuillet 22
- [Deux] : Deux written and subsequently deleted
- [—] : illegible word
- : dash in Valéry's manuscript

Unless otherwise indicated the stanza numbers are those of the final version and are not in Valéry's manuscript.