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AFFINITIES BETWEEN THE POETRY OF WALLACE STEVENS AND PAUL VALÉRY

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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I would like to thank Justin Quinn for persevering guidance and advice on the matters of poetry over the two-year period of the work's genesis and to my husband Martin Šmíd for his love and invaluable support, technical, affective and material, during that time. I would also like to thank my mother who never spared energy to let me sit in the library, to my father for moral and material support, and also to my children Samuel, Ada, and Benjamín for patience in waiting for me and Jana Šmídová and Aleš Krejča for faultless logistics. Finally, I must also mention my brothers Matěj and Jenda, their Martina and Kateřina, and my friends Tereza Mašková, Martin Fencl, Andula Tučková, and others who made fun with the children when I was not there.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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1. MAIN POINTS OF INTERSECTION

There is no direct evidence of Stevens reading any particular work by Valéry except at the very end of his life when he was preparing the "Two Introductions" to the American edition of Valéry's *Dialogues*, however, the *Letters*[1] are interspersed with numerous indications of Stevens' interest in thoughts about art which come very close to Valéry's. Stevens did read the *Lettres à quelques'uns* in 1952 (*L* 761) and Elizabeth Sewell's *Paul Valéry: The Mind in the Mirror* (1952), which makes it roughly three years all in all that he was closely reading this French author and more than twenty years, since 1935 at the latest, that he knew accurately enough what the French poet published. I will scan the possible channels of indirect communication between the two poets through Stevens' personal and intellectual ties with people he knew in the course of his life and with whom he exchanged ideas. The most important people engaged in this particular discourse were Ronald L. Latimer, Thomas McGreevy, Henry Church, Jean Paulhan, and Jean Wahl with perhaps T. S. Eliot, Stevens' favorite antipode, acting as the personal intermediary between Valéry and the American public, and Marianne Moore, as Stevens' closest contemporary fully engaged in a search for her own expression. Stevens met Henry Church, an American philanthropist living in France who founded *Mesures*, when he was 60 years old, whereas his active interest for themes related to those contemplated by Valéry manifested itself much earlier, quite possibly as early as in the poem "Academic Discourse at Havana" published by Alfred Kreymborg in 1923, a year before Abbé Henri Brémond made a speech about Paul Valéry and pure poetry before the French Academy. It is my guess (to be defended) that Stevens was attracted to the thought of an academy of ideas and that he knew simultaneously how stale a thing it could be in reality. It is also evident from the *Letters* that Stevens followed the literary discourse in France through various French periodicals, such as *Revue de Paris, Revue de deux mondes* or *Mesures*, once he established himself in the insurance business, and therefore a map of his mental and personal ties leading to Valéry can be sketched reasonably.

1 Stevens, Wallace. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. Holly Stevens, ed. (New York: Knopf, 1970) hereafter abbreviated as *L*

1.1 Stevens' interest in French letters prior to 1914

1.1.1 Henri de Régnier at Harvard in 1900

In the spring semester of 1900 at Harvard, USA, there was a course of eight lectures given by Henri de Régnier (1864-1936) on the French symbolist movement. It took place on the initiative of Pierre la Rose, a friend of the philosopher George Santayana and an enthusiast of French symbolism in the English department at Harvard University. Did Stevens come to the Sanders Theatre to listen to this French poet's account of nineteenth-century novel approaches to poetry? In his second year at Harvard, Stevens became a member of the Signet club where Pierre la Rose played an important role and later served as president of the *Harvard Advocate,* a student magazine where several of his own own poems were published. So much to show that he was a student active in the literary life of the campus. In the same semester Régnier visited, Stevens took a course of French literature entitled "General view of French Literature – Reading, recitations, lectures, composition"[2] and was resolved to go to Paris the following summer (which he never did in the end). All these details would almost certainly speak for him being well informed about the presence of a French poet at the campus.[3] But whether Stevens did or did not come to the lectures does not really matter if we consider the lectures by Régnier in the US a sign of good reception and growing interest that the French symbolist movement aroused overseas at the period. We will, however, focus on what seeds for future relations with the poetics of Valéry could have been sown in such an environment.

1.1.2 Stevens reading 17th century French classicist literature ...

Stevens would have no doubt been deeply concerned with the French cultural influx that could be felt at Harvard. His reading of Joachim du Bellay (1522-60), seventeenth-century French writers like Pascal, Bossuet, La Rochefoucauld, his occasional use of a French idiom in his letters and journal entries make the issue rather obvious. The French seventeenth century could also be read as a period

2 Wallace Stevens. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. Holly Stevens, ed. (New York: Knopf, 1970) p. 34

3 Milton J. Bates situates Stevens within the Harvard society, and explains how Stevens, although rather underprivileged upon his arrival, gradually became one of the 'young men companionable and interesting [with] individual minds and a few enlightened tastes', p. 25)

emblematic of the culture's singular effort to edify itself as a superior national identity. This period was intermittently an object of Stevens' interest, a fact summed up in "The Relations between Poetry and Painting" (1951).[4] In *Variété II* (1929), Valéry, in an article dedicated to Baudelaire, endorsed classicism as coming after, bringing a little order into a great disorder; an antique, subtle and profound understanding of the conditions of "la jouissance intellectuelle sans mélange".[5] And, as serendipitous as this point might be, Stevens' later use of the idea of an academy of ideas in several poems and just possibly his interest in Paul Valéry as a master of language who was elected to such an academy seems to fit gracefully into the puzzle of his mind imagined in the context of the French *Grand siècle*: Stevens read and approved of the independent thought of the authors above perhaps admiring the whole epoch that also gave birth to the French Academy (1636) which was to be devoted to the cultivation of the French language. In itself this would be a noble thing. If the academy, instituted by Cardinal Richelieu, did not become the very instrument by which those powerful minds were, in fact, incorporated into the machine of power of the absolute emperor, Le Roi Soleil.

1.1.3 … and contemporary French poetry with a penchant toward symbolism

The thematic content of the lectures by Régnier, whose main topic was the conflict between the two literary extremes, idealism and realism (or naturalism) in the 1880s,[6] closely matched Stevens' own struggle at that time for a reconciliation between the ideal and the "we must come down, must use tooth and nail"[7] in his earliest thought and poetry. In the summaries of the lectures, printed in the *Harvard Crimson,* we can follow the existential problem of the poet, or the literatus, in the person of Villiers de l'Isle Adam (1838-1889) who was a nearly mythical figure for young French symbolist poets, author of one great masterpiece, a symbolist drama, named Axel. Though himself noble of descent, he lived in great poverty in order to preserve his vision of the "eternal cult of beauty" from being sullied by ordinary living. Arthur Symons calls him the Don Quixote of idealism in his *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*.[8] Other persona mentioned in the lectures were Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, but also Stuart Merrill and Viellé-Griffin as two members of the youngest generation – American poets living in

4 Stevens, Wallace. *The Necessary Angel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960) p. 172
5 Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, Tome I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) p. 598
6 Buttel, Robert. "Wallace Stevens at Harvard", *The Act of the Mind*, Pearce, R. H. and Miller, J. H., eds. (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, MD, 1965) p. 30
7 Ibid.. p. 32
8 Symons, Arthur. *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Constable&Company, Ltd., 1911) p. 37

Paris. Régnier, himself part of the topic, dedicated the last of his lectures to modern prose poets as forerunners of modern poetry.

If later on Stevens became interested in Valéry then a course given by Henri de Régnier would have been of special significance to him – the latter was one of Valéry's closest friends. Since 1894, Régnier, who was seven years Valéry's senior, would meet him every other day in a little room in Paris, rue Gay-Lussac, where Valéry lived when he moved to Paris from Montpellier. There, Valéry, Pierre Louÿs, Henri de Régnier, and André Gide would talk about all things of interest to them. Together they frequented the "mardis" given by Mallarmé at rue de Rome. So when Régnier came to the USA, he was not only a lecturer but a man, soul and body, linked to the poetic family of Mallarmé.

1.1.4 The type of humanism cultivated by the Cercle Français at Harvard

At the same time, the Cercle Français which organized the aforementioned lectures at Harvard was not at all uncritical of the French symbolists. Irving Babbitt, who presided over the Cercle and who led a campaign in the 1880s against the kind of romanticism propounded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (out of two types of symbolism, Babbitt called this one the 'ideal of dream'), himself a conservative humanist, introduced Régnier as the most accomplished of the symbolists and the most conservative of them all. The French symbolists themselves, according to him, trespassed against all rules of poetry and for this reason they were not considered to be good authors by most influential critics. In this rather condescending portrayal of the symbolists his own critical conservatism and dismay at any idealism conceived as vague, romantic, and *onirique* in the vein of Rousseau and Verlaine, can be traced. On the other hand, in his own writings, Babbit fought against the prevalence of 'classical philology' at the expense of 'eternal content', which is a position I rather appreciate. From the perspective of this paper, however, Babbitt's tone concerning the symbolists can be dismissed, if not for its value as criticism, which paves the way for differentiating between the several kinds of idealism Stevens' generation would be dealing with. Such a critical approach would enable any attentive student to refuse extreme positions (i.e. romantic idealism unreceptive toward reality or realistic skepticism refusing extensions into the unreal).

Moreover, the genetic line of symbolism discussed in this paper will not be the 'ideal of dream'

Babbitt criticized[9] but that which led from Mallarmé to Valéry to Bonnefoy to... ?. Their kind of symbolism could be described as an 'ideal of thought' (exemplified by Emerson in the States, according to Babbitt), bearing the characteristics of imaginative brilliance; sculpted by a constructive will. Frank Lentricchia, in his paper on the radical poetics of Yeats and Stevens, classifies Mallarmé and Valéry as poets of the 'constructive imagination' in the context of symbolism and Stevens' poetics as the next step within the Hegelian scheme, a synthesis of the major nineteenth-century approaches to reality – idealism (as conceived by Kant, Schelling) and realism/naturalism.[10] Notwithstanding, Valéry was Stevens' full-sized contemporary and not in the least just a talented protractor of Mallarmé's ideas. Even though Valéry was strongly influenced by the symbolist thought embodied by Mallarmé he was himself refracting its light rather than consuming it. The category of symbolism will be defined in Chapter Two so that it can be surpassed if lead to the possibilities it inherently opened for twentieth-century authors.

1.1.5 Ideal of thought and how to do away with the verbality of poetry and reach toward man/universe

Stevens himself worked with the balance between the ideal and the fact very early on while he was considering what direction he should take in his life. In August 1899, as a student at Harvard, he wrote a long note on this subject in his journal. His thought begins with how dear the feeling of piety and the love of beauty is to him, that there seems to be a conflict between these and reality, but that the conflict of those ideal feelings with the life of 'a man of the world' was possibly a conflict on the surface only. His young man's conclusion was to consider reality a necessary reference point:

> I believe […] in the efficacy and necessity of fact meeting fact – with a background of the ideal. […] I'm completely satisfied that behind every physical fact there is a divine force. Don't therefore look <u>at</u> facts but <u>through</u> them.[11]

The gaze of the inner eye had to be exact in respect to facts. But the ultimate purpose of this position lay in the ability to see beyond facts to their apposite images in the abstract and yet vigorous world

9 *Harvard Crimson*, February 28, 1900. http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1900/2/28/mr-babbitts-lecture-pat-last-nights/ entered Sat Sep 11, 2010

10 Letricchia, Frank. "The Gaiety of Language: an essay on the radical poetics of Wallace Stevens and W. B. Yeats" http://www.google.com/books?id=l0AWiyn_TFkC&lpg=PA1&ots=cWnQL1ZYRq&dq=The%20Gaiety%20of%20Language&lr&hl=cs&pg=PA6#v=onepage&q&f=false entered Fri Oct 8, 2010

11 Stevens, Wallace. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. Holly Stevens, ed. (New York: Knopf, 1970) p. 32

constructed by the imagination, the objectifications of the objects Stevens mentions in the 1948 essay "Effects of Analogy".[12]

1.1.6 Possibilities for future 'cross-pollination' open at this early stage

The question of correspondence between the thought of Wallace Stevens and the thought of Paul Valéry at the early stage of Stevens' poetic development is most of all a question of the determined will to find distinct forms and a "fluent speech" (*L* 231) in the case of Stevens and to find just the right form for poetry in the case of Valéry. It is a penchant for a similar kind of discipline between the two men, a discipline of never being finished with the search. One of Stevens' ways to go about the search for his own expression was to find a kindred spirit in some of the living poets who expressed sincerely their own struggle with 'reality'. According to critics such as A. Walton Litz and Robert Buttel, Stevens found himself in a place and period at once stale with old poetics represented by 'academic romanticism' and buzzing with activity in respect to possibilities of renewal.

The Imagists, for one, were "very much influenced by modern French symbolist poetry" and also by impressionist painters, themselves impressed by Japanese and Chinese art. As such they represented an immediate effort toward change.[13] Their "Imagist Manifesto" was published in *Poetry*, the magazine directed by Harriet Monroe, whose sister had been U.S. Minister to China in Peking and later sent the Stevenses boxes of goods from China. By way of curiosity, Valéry was also capable of such a remote imaginative extension in terms of space having written "Yalou" (1895), an article about the Sino-Japanese conflict. Litz says that, like Eliot, Stevens "'modernized himself on his own', sensing the direction of the 'new poetry' before it had fully declared itself in the little magazines".[14] I have turned to Robert Buttel's essay "Wallace Stevens at Harvard" for a detailed analysis of the method Stevens used to extract himself from the burden of customary poetics at the time he started to publish in the *Harvard Advocate* and *Harvard Monthly.*

Ever since his earliest published poems and prose, his firm desire to implement certain characteristic aspects of themes, moods, forms and symbols in them was manifest. While at Harvard, Stevens made several attempts at working his theme of imagination and reality into text and form.

12 Stevens, Wallace. "Effects of Analogy", *The Necessary Angel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960) p. 114
13 Litz, A. Walton. *Introspective Voyager* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) p. 19 [quotes F. S. Flint, "History of Imagism", Egoist, II, (1 May 1915), 71.]
14 Ibid.. p. 19

According to Buttel, he succeeded partially in several of the poems he wrote: in “Outside the Hospital” he developed the idea by sketching a situation in which a blind girl could see with her mind and a boy without legs could become a gallant knight in his imagination in spite of objective constraints (“the blind and lame at play”). However, the short stories Stevens wrote at the same time reveal that he was able to get more of his ideas into the prosaic experiments he carried out and that the prose was the scene where he let his ideas and means to express them burgeon (e. g. the symbols of crème de menthe vs. beer in his short story “Part of His Education”). Buttel shows that even at this early stage Stevens found original ways of incorporating external influence and that he used it to the effect of modernizing his style. Having traced their possible sources, Buttel suggested that Stevens' interest for all things French in his written work was “an interest that would lead more distinctly to Verlaine and then to the French Symbolists and Ironists – though that is not at all to say that he was to be exclusively devoted to French influences”.[15]

1.2 Impulses toward French influence and first publications of Valéry

1.2.1 The circle of artists around *Others* (Alfred Kreymborg and Walter Conrad Arensberg)

A substantial impulse in the French direction came to Stevens in 1914 when he was asked by his friend Pitts Sanborn, a New York based music critic and editor of *Trend*, to publish some of his poems in the magazine. Stevens waited fourteen years after having left the *Harvard Advocate* to publish once again and when he did he received recognition from a few readers consequent to his future progress in poetry. Besides Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*, whose encouragement to Stevens resulted in a lengthy chain of correspondence, there was Alfred Kreymborg, a poet and editor of *Others*, a NY review where contemporary poetry was published and was actively sought out. Later Stevens stayed in touch with Kreymborg and through him he remained well informed on art matters in France. Kreymborg, too, was one of the numerous American intellectuals who moved to Paris between the two wars, steering finally to Rome. He later founded two poetry reviews where he printed Stevens, the *Broom* and the *New Caravan*, for some of which he intended to collect contributions directly in France from the Dadaist circles. Although this is not a connection directly to the literature dear to Valéry, it

15 Buttel, p. 57

nevertheless is a vein through which that connection also received some blood.

During this period, when Stevens was director of the Equitable Surety Co. in New York, he began to publish again and met people important to his future poetry in the measure of their own creative force and in the direction of their attention. (And he refreshed his senses in the Botanical Garden with flowers and birds form exotic lands.) Very important was the renewed friendship with his Harvard acquaintance Walter. C. Arensberg, an art collector and poet living in New York. The Arensbergs organized parties where Stevens could meet contemporary painters, musicians, writers, and poets, like William Carlos Williams or, in our context more significantly, Marcel Duchamp, a French cubist painter and conceptual artist.[16] These friendships had a tremendous impact upon Stevens simply by enlarging his scope. Incidentally, Arensberg himself translated Mallarmé's *Afternoon of the Faun*, which was a translation Stevens expressly said he knew about though he professed not to have read it, in a letter to Hi Simons in 1939 (*L* 391). But in the same letter Stevens made a taciturn admission that he had read something of each of the poets listed by Simons; Mallarmé, Verlaine, Laforgue, Valéry, and Baudelaire, but did not take from them consciously.

A thing of interest is the identical fashion in which Stevens and Mallarmé seize reality, in the making of it: the *Afternoon of the Faun* was "immédiatement empli d'impressions naturelles nées *de choses comme elles sont*; 'positives'" (italics mine) Mallarmé told his friend Lefébure in a letter. It was a poem parturient of happiness. Stevens doubtless got much more from reading Mallarmé but there is no space for discussing that here. One sweet crumb I will add, though, and that is that one of the most condensed utterances of Stevens' *Adagia*, "La vie est plus belle que les idées", was authored by Mallarmé in a letter to his friend Lefébure.[17] It is strange how these imaginary worlds not easily gained in themselves give forth consolation in the guise of greatest simplicity.

1.2.2 Key publications of Valéry's works in France and in the USA before 1937

When asked directly what influence the French language had upon him in 1929 by René Taupin, Stevens replied in a generic and sufficiently oblique way:

> La légerté, la grâce, le son et la couleur du français ont eu sur moi une influence indéniable et une influence précieuse.[18]

16 *L* 820-23, 850-51 on Walter Arensberg and the French artists he entertained
17 *CPP* 906, I am indebted for this information to Yves Bonnefoy in *Lieux et destins de l'image*
18 Benamou, Michel. *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) p. xvii;

This kind of response seemingly reveals nothing particular, but if we consider what kinds of responses could be made, this one can be interpreted as one of an engaged objectivity focused on the qualities of language as such. A second language for Stevens would have been another fictive world where one's imagination may put to effect nuances of the soul, which would otherwise remain inaccessible and of which that language could become the new form – this is also how Stevens often used French in his poems and prose.

One of Stevens' answers to this same question, however, sheds more light on the type of apprenticeship he could have carried out in relation to Valéry. In quite a stunningly precipitous succession after Stevens started publishing again in 1914 (several poems in the *Trend*, *Others*, and *Poetry* including the most arresting "Peter Quince at the Clavier" and the most praised "Sunday Morning"), Valéry published "La Jeune Parque" (*Nouvelle Revue Française*[19], 1917) and "Charmes" (*NRF*, 1922), the first being an extremely demanding exercise in poetics while the second surprised the author himself with the ease with which the verses took form. The dialogues "L'Âme et la Danse" (1921) and "Eupalinos ou L'Architecte" (1923, 1931) followed suit. In 1925, Valéry was elected to the French Academy after having caused a stir as the subject of the Abbé Henri Brémond's speech on pure poetry. At that time, Stevens' attention was attuned to events in Transatlantic relations, attuned to Europe, and France especially, because of World War I as was witnessed in 1917 by the poems based on the *Lettres d'un soldat*, written by a young painter, Eugène Lemercier, who disappeared on the Western Front.[20] Stevens' *Letters* show that he was widely read in periodicals including French ones, and, apparently, he was informed well enough to be able to get the right book at the right time. To this we might add that in the war-time period, an appetite for art that would transform the old forms was revived in him by his engagement with the artists around the small magazine *Others* which was devoted to experimental art; poetry and theater mostly. If Stevens was to this extent alert to the possibilities of poetry at the time and was able to reply to the debate of the French 1920s on pure poetry, although he was a decade too late for it to be included in the same wave of publicity, would it be conceivable that he miss Valéry?

J. Ronald Lane Latimer's 1935 question to Stevens whether he knew Valéry was answered negatively but shows the nature of the poetic kinship. Latimer might also have asked, how was it that there was so much in common between the two poets' way of thinking. Stevens' answer later became

Stevens' reply to a query by René Taupin, author of a comparative study called "L'influence du Symbolisme français sur la poésie Américaine (1910-1920)"

19 From here on abbreviated as *NRF*

20 Litz, A. Walton. *Introspective Voyager* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 71-77

typical of him on this subject saying “I have read very little of Valéry”, but he went on to specify in just what way there could have been a common understanding between them. It would be a tendency to abstraction expressed in terms not abstract in themselves. Latimer was so trustworthy that Stevens even confided in him that he had “a number of his [Valéry's] books and, for that matter, several books about him.” (*L* 290) In 1955, while preparing for the introduction to Valéry's *Dialogues* he wrote a letter to Thomas McGreevy, translator of Valéry's “Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci” to ask him for a copy of his translation from two decades earlier. Eager to justify the demand, he dropped the information that “Of course, [he had] the French text” and three weeks later he reassessed that he had just found his old copy of the edition of *Charmes* commented by Alain with a letter from Henry Church in it. I assume, therefore, securely that Stevens knew pretty much anything about Valéry that could be publicly known or that at least he would have been able to find out easily if he wanted to. Moreover, it is conspicuous that he read Valéry in French “naturally” and “with pleasure”.

1.2.3 The way of Valéry's texts to the American public

In one of his letters written after World War II Stevens made a general remark regarding the facility of getting French books in New York, the implication of his opinion being that books from abroad were commonplace articles at the market then. He answered to this effect when asked about possibilities of publication of a Pourrat in English: “Most people who have any interest in French books can read French even though they cannot speak it. There are pretty nearly as many good French bookshops in New York as there are good English bookshops.” (*L* 527) Stevens could be *blasé* about these things – since 1931, he had his own Paris book-seller, Anatole Vidal (Librairie Coloniale), who was later succeeded by his daughter Paule. Through them he ordered books or pictures either using catalogues to chose them or sending a specific order issued out of his scholarly need. This way he was able to buy any number of books, sometimes parts of private libraries, sometimes particular pieces he was interested in, François Villon, for example, or the Gide-Claudel correspondence. In 1952, Stevens used a word from Valéry's *Lettres à quelques uns* in a letter to Barbara Church which he told her he was reading at the time (*L* 761). Thus, if Valéry was published by the *NRF* or other smaller French periodicals in the twenties, it is very likely that Stevens would know about his most important texts and could easily buy them when he desired them. More importantly, he would also know Valéry's work well

enough to be able to say that a man like him emerged from his books without close reading (*L* 290). Elsewhere Stevens replied that "where a man's attitude coincides with your own attitude, or accentuates your own attitude, you can get a great deal from him without any effort." (*L* 391)

The first works by Valéry published in the USA were scattered in small magazines related to college campuses.[21] These were mostly commented translations of his "Ebauche du serpent" (from the *Charmes*) and "Cimetière marin". T. S. Eliot contributed to Valéry's reception in the USA by publishing a text called "A Brief Introduction to the Method of Paul Valéry" (Cobden-Sanderson, 1924). Valéry's "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci" together with "Note and Digression" (*Dial)* was published no earlier than 1926, also the year of the appearance of *Variety I* (Hartcourt Brace) containing those two essays. Included in the volume of *Variety I* was the essay called "La Crise de l'Esprit" designed for the English public and published in a British periodical, the *Athenaeum,* in 1919 (Valéry later translated to French an article about Einstein's theory of relativity that was published in this magazine). Moreover, there were two essays focused, very roughly, on the subject of precursors and that every genius must have had them, "Au sujet d'Eureka" and "Au sujet d'Adonis" (about Poe and La Fontaine respectively). Stevens mentions both authors in his essays, one as a mystic with outworn "titinnabulations", the other, conversely, as a man with a good "sense of the world". Then, in 1928, there was one article by Valéry in the *New York Herald Tribune* entitled "Pure Poetry" and another one in the *Kenyon Review* touching upon Mallarmé called "The Existence of Symbolism". Stevens was a frequent reader of both of these reviews and mentioned them often in the *Letters,* we might therefore consider them known by him, especially since he called his own book in 1935, *The Ideas of Order* (Alcestis Press), a book of essentially pure poetry. Finally, in 1929, making that an elegant closure to the decade of the first translations of Valéry into English, John Rodker, Stevens' acquaintance from the 1910s and a fellow poet who published in *Poetry* earlier on, issued forth an "Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci" translated by Thomas McGreevy, an Irish poet, who later became Stevens' friend through the Churches. In spite of the extent to which Valéry had been translated in the USA prior to the 1956 edition of his *Collected Works,*[22] Stevens would much more likely have read him in French than in English.

21 Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, Tome II, Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1614

22 Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956)

1.2.4 T. S. Eliot and Valéry's reception in the USA

Let us suppose that, throughout the years of his legal apprenticeship and after, Stevens read T. S. Eliot as Marianne Moore suggested in a letter to Eliot himself,[23] then editor of the *Criterion* – he would have known his "Brief Introduction to the Method of Paul Valéry" (Cobden-Sanderson, 1924) a transposition of the title of Valéry's essay on Leonardo da Vinci, he would have known his essay *From Poe to Valéry* (Brace&Co, 1948), not to mention Eliot's interest in things such as 'purity' in the context of poetry, his meetings with Valéry, and his comments on Valéry's "Man and the Sea Shell", the poem "The Serpent", and the modernists' insistence on a certain kind of aristocracy in the gesture of the poet (Moore, Stevens, Eliot – on elite). That Stevens followed what Eliot was doing is also evident from one of his letters to Thomas McGreevy where he said that he used to buy John Rodker's books (The Ovid Press in London, including those written by Eliot at a time when he had to be supported financially by Ezra Pound). Eleanor Cook in *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens* compares the insights of the *Quartets* with those drawn by Stevens in, among others, "This Solitude of Cataracts", yet, for this particular poem she also invites comparison with Valéry's "Le Cimetère marin".[24] Clearly, what Valéry represented was the "aristocratic cipher"[25] not just in his writings but precisely as the man coming out of his books even without close reading.

If the question of Stevens' taste for French poetry and other kinds of French imprints on his personal culture was posed a little bit differently, as a question of his incessant search for human dignity, the answer to the problem of Valéry's spell of attraction for Stevens might result in something slightly more satisfactory than what the prism of symbolism alone promises. Keeping in mind that Stevens was a master of disguise – by which I mean his habit of taking on different masks as speaker of his poems – and that he probably subsumed contemporary or historical influences in the way Riddel describes it in his essay "The Contours of Stevens Criticism"[26], the difference would be that instead of counting words that relate to the French topos of Stevens' language we would look for the ideas and possible significance they hold in the relationship between Stevens' imaginative work and Valéry's "existence at the verge of consciousness".[27]

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23 Goodridge, Celeste. "The Aristocratic Cipher: Moore's Reviews of Stevens", *Hints and Disguises: Marianne Moore and Her Contemporaries.* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989)

24 Cook, Eleanor. *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 244

25 Goodridge, p. 27

26 Riddel, Joseph N. "The Countours of Stevens Criticism", Pearce, R. H. and Miller, J. H., eds. *The Act of the Mind* (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, MD, 1965) p. 262

27 Stevens. *The Necessary Angel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 115, hereafter quoted as *NA*

1.3 Stevens' connection to French letters in person, lectures, and periodicals

1.3.1 Henri Brémond and pure poetry

One of Stevens' strong responses to the French literary scene touched upon the notion of pure poetry. In 1923, Abbé Henri Brémond held a lecture before the French Academy entitled *La Poésie pure* and in it he called the poetry of Paul Valéry a fine specimen of such poetry, a statement which incited a great debate upon the subject (among poets, critics). Paul Souday, editor of the *Temps*, reportedly even said to the Abbé that he took reason for his personal enemy. This controversy was in part also incited by the religious context of Brémond's thesis. He was the author of a lengthy book (eleven volumes) about the history of the French religious feeling[28] and the core of his thesis in respect to poetry was that the it should be the written outcome of a mystical experience.[29] Valéry was his friend and used to come and talk with him in his small studio in Paris. At the occasion of Brémond's death he felt obliged to give his own view of the matter in a speech entitled "Discours sur Henri Brémond".[30] In it, he exerted his rhetorical power to cool the aura of exultation in relation to his poetry and explained that what he meant by "pure poetry" was simply an ideal to reach out for. Over a decade later, Stevens responded to Abbé Brémond's thesis in "The irrational element of poetry" (1936) with no reference to Valéry. This clamorous silence raises the question if he intended to keep Valéry secret as an invaluable source of his own poetic wisdom as has been suggested by Tim Morris,[31] or if he failed to mention him for a different reason, such as being too respectful toward the work of a fellow poet or for the fear that he should not venture into the subject before an audience of greater students of Valéry.
Notwithstanding, Valéry's apology of the concept of pure poetry, was present even in the States. In 1928, he described it in a very spare manner for *The New York Herald Tribune*: "I regard the idea of pure poetry as being essentially analytic. It is, in short, a fiction deduced from observation, which is intended to define our idea of poems in general."[32]Again, Stevens at least occasionally checked this journal as is evident from the *Letters*. Nevertheless, Brémond's work served Stevens well as a link to his own conception of pure poetry. *Ideas of Order* (Alcestis Press, 1935) was intended to be "a book of

28 *Histoire litteraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'a nos jours* (from 1716 to 1936) 11 volumes, as *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France* (1928) translated by K. L. Montgomery
29 Johnson, Benjamin. "Wallace Stevens and the Unfinished Project of a Secular Poetics", *The Varieties of Aesthetic Experience in American Modernist Literature,* a doctoral thesis (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2007)
30 Valéry, Paul. "Discours sur Henri Brémond", *Oeuvres*, Tome I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) p. 763
31 Morris, Timothy. *Wallace Stevens: Poetry and Criticism* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2006) p. xi
32 Valéry, Paul. "Pure Poetry" (*New York Herald Tribune,* 1928)

essentially pure poetry", as Stevens advertised on its dust jacket.[33] And it was an updated and secularized version of it. The essay, "Irrational Element of Poetry" was read at Harvard in 1936 after *Ideas of Order* were published by Latimer.

The idea of 'essence' in connection to poetry comes up again in Stevens' reference to Thierry Maulnier's *Introduction to French Poetry*.[34] Stevens recommended this book to his Korean friend Peter Lee as a perfect introduction to contemporary poetry. I could not get the book but Maulnier is quoted by Henry A. Grubbs for having tried to describe poetry in this evasive manner: "la poésie oppose aux définitions une résistance particulière, parce qu'elle se résigne mal à n'être qu'essence".[35] This is very close to the approximation Valéry gives of poetry in his article on "The Existence of Symbolism".[36]

1.3.2 Stevens' friendship with Henry and Barbara Church, correspondence with McGreevy

Henry Church and Jean Paulhan (chief editor of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, publisher of Valéry), founders of *Mesures* and its American version, represented one of the most important personnal connections Stevens had with the French literary world. Their relationship evolved into a deep-felt kind of friendship which performed its agency through a long period of intensive correspondence and subsequently, when the Churches were forced to flee France where they lived *une vie aisée* in Ville d'Avray, the friendship brought Stevens to bi-annual gatherings at their Princeton residence. Ever since Henry Church wrote Stevens to ask him for a contribution for the *Mesures* in 1939, Stevens became Church's man. Was it because Church had him translated to French for the first time by Raymond Queneau and Valéry Larbaud, among others? *Mesures* was a peculiar magazine because, edited as it was by Paulhan, it constantly ran the risk of not being of interest to the public (whose taste, in general, was for less serious poetry) because Paulhan published there what the board of editors refused to publish at the *NRF* (one of those editors was Gide). However, Henry Church, its sponsor, was resolved it would remain noble, it seems, and when World War II broke out, he published such poetry that *Mesures* fell along into the category of French Résistance and was therefore persecuted. Finally, the Churches were forced to leave France not being naturalized citizens and to

33 Litz, p. 177
34 *L* 490, the book was published in the 1930s
35 Grubbs, Henry A. "The Essence of Poetry: A Concept and A Dilemma". *Yale French Studies*, No. 3, Criticism and Creation (1949), p. 44
36 Valéry, Paul. "The Existence of Symbolism" (*Kenyon Review*, 1928)

create a new home and an American version of the magazine at Princeton.[37]

Stevens subscribed to *Mesures* since the day of its inception in 1934 through Vidal, and in our context, he would have come across Valéry there, as he was published in one of its earliest issues. The poems Stevens sent to France were "Ploughing on Sunday", "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird", "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock", "Emperor of Ice-Cream", and "Fabliau of Florida". It is fascinating to go through his scrupulous care for exact translations – a lot can be found out in the way of how precisely Stevens fashioned his verbal images. Blackmur, in his "Examples of Wallace Stevens", was justified in saying that every word had its exact significance within the structure of the poems.[38]

Church, deeply affected by the war, used his forces to create a new site for his idea of poetry, and arranged with Dean Christian Gauss and Allen Tate to hold four lectures per year at Princeton. These were to concern the most intrinsic issues of poetry such as "The Semantics of Poetry" or "The Foundation of Poetry" (*L* 382n). Stevens was mentioned by Tate for one of those, the invitation was extended to him by Church, and he finally presented "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (1941). According to Jeffrey Mehlman, his essay was structured on Racine's *Phèdre* and it is involved with the possible appearance of the idea of nobility in art. The four aforementioned lectures were devised to serve as preliminary to the intended establishment of a chair of poetry at Princeton, Church's idea that Milton J. Bates writes about in *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self*.[39]

1.3.3 Mount Holyoke University, Jean Wahl and other Frenchmen who wrote about Valéry

In 1939, through the Churches Stevens met the French poet and philosopher, Jean Wahl, who was a Jew and escaped death in the internment camp at Drancy. Finding refuge at Mount Holyoke, where he was generously employed by Helen Patch, Wahl translated some representative pieces of American poetry into French in a volume entitled "Ecrivains et poètes des Etats-Unis d'Amèrique", choosing Stevens to demonstrate the possible richness of inter crossings. They both first met there in

37 Paulhan, Claire. "Henry Church and the Literary Magazine *Mesures*: 'The American Ressource'", *Artists, Intellectuals, and WWII: The Pontigny Encounters at Mt Holyoke 1942-1944*, Bennfey, E. G., Remmler, Karen, eds. (University of Massachusetts Press, 2006)

38 Blackmur, R. P. "Examples of Wallace Stevens", *Form and Value in Modern Poetry*. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957) p. 183

39 Bates, Milton J. "Supreme Fiction and Medium Man", *Wallace Stevens - Mythology of Self.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985) p. 195

1943 at the occasion of the Décades of Pontigny-en-Amérique, a meeting styled upon the illustrious example of the between-the-wars assembly of intellectuals at a Cistercian monastery in Burgundy. Stevens gave his lecture upon the topic of the poet-hero who wants to create a "truth that cannot be arrived at by reason alone […] a truth he recognizes by sensation", it was "The Figure of Youth as Virile Poet" (*NA* 58). It is concluded by the idea of imagination as the violence within. The title of Wahl's speech was "The Essential and Accidental in Poetry" – both poets refused Eliot's concept of time in the *Quartets*, and defended poetry as the means to situate oneself in the present and form resistance to the forces contributing to the degradation of human nature.[40]

It almost seems as if a cluster of ties leading to Valéry formed around Stevens in the forties: Jean Wahl published a book-long essay on Valéry entitled "Poésie, pensée, perception" (1948) where he presents Valéry's work as a radical critique of all systematic thought. In 1948, Jean Wahl invited Stevens to speak at the Pontigny Encounters at Mt. Holyoke once more – his speech then was "Effects of Analogy". Equally, Jean Paulhan was now closer to Stevens through Henry Church, and, incidentally, Paulhan wrote a small satirical monography on Valéry's thinking starting in a mocking tone on the subject of his alter ego, Monsieur Teste, with his famous "la bêtise n'est pas mon fort".[41] Stevens also mentions the critic Alain several times (e.g. in "Imagination as a Value" at the very end) he obtains the epithet of greatest Stevensian praise – man of great sense. Once more, Alain also published some fundamental contributions to the debate on Valéry – his comments on the *Charmes* were even commented back upon by Valéry in one of the volumes of *Variété*.[42]

All this is still not to mention Stevens' engagement with Henri Bergson (his 'fonction fabulatrice' – Kermode[43]), about whom Valéry wrote with all his poetic might praising his capacity to be exact in method and yet fabricate his own appropriate poetic language for things heretofore not yet expressed (Stevens in "The Figure of the Youth as the Virile Poet", *NA* 39), and his study of "The Life of Forms in Art" (1934) by Henri Focillon, art historian whose central metaphor of art was, like Valéry's, architecture. How familiar it sounds in the context of *Eupalinos* and Stevens' essay on the hero-poet when Focillon says, after having devoted himself to an immense study of Romanesque sculpture and nineteenth-century painting, that style and technique should be stressed over subjective interpretation. Stevens's engagement with Focillon also leads to Valéry – the two Frenchmen reunited at

40 Bennfey, E. G., Remmler, Karen, eds. *Artists, Intellectuals, and WWII: The Pontigny Encounters at Mt Holyoke 1942-1944* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2006)
41 Paulhan, Jean. *Paul Valéry ou la Littérature considérée comme un faux* (Paris: Complexe, 1987)
42 Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, Tome I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) p. 1507
43 Kermode, Frank. Wallace Stevens (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960) p. 39

the *Comité permanent des Lettres et des Arts de la Société des Nations* (1933), a council under the auspices of the UN instituted to encourage international exchange of ideas of 'high intellectual activity' and, ultimately, to create a Société des Esprits, among whom were the most influential intellectuals world-wide, Salvador de Madariaga, Einstein, Tsaï Yuan Peï, and others.

1.4 The Two Introductions to Valéry's two dialogues: *Eupalinos or the Architect*, and *Dance and the Soul*

1.4.1 Stevens and Princeton University

Princeton University must have adopted Stevens including his hat. Stevens was a laureate of the Bollingen Poetry Prize in 1951 and served on the committee of that prize, among the members of the committee were also Marianne Moore, by then a good friend of his, Allen Tate, or Randal Jarrell. At that time, Allen Tate resided as professor at Princeton and it was he who suggested Stevens take up one of the lectures for the *Mesures*. The outcome of this suggestion was in 1941 the lecture entitled "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words". It was published in Tate's collection of essays, *The Language of Poetry*[44], the following year. This venture with its theoretic-looking title clearly indicates the type of discussion led between those men and women about poetry – it would concern its very theory. Therefore I presume, Jackson Matthews, editor of the *Collected Works of Paul Valéry* at Princeton University Press, asked Stevens to write an introduction for the intended fourth volume of the collection and let him choose either the two dialogues in the title above or *L'Idée fixe* it was with the knowledge of Stevens' fondness for precisely the sort of theory blooded that we can enjoy in Eupalinos. Stevens was enraptured by the chance to study Valéry – at the age of 75 he accepted to do the job eagerly, perceived it as source of invigoration, saw in it the happiness of change as these words from a letter to Peter Lee witness: "I have just agreed to do something that will require serious effort on my part, and as it is something I am much interested in […] I may change my habits while that job is done." (*L* 856)

After the death of Henry Church, in 1947, Stevens received a letter of acknowledgment from the Irish poet and later director of the Irish National Gallery, Thomas McGreevy, the translator of

44 Tate, Allen, ed. *The Language of Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942)

Valéry's *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*. A new correspondence began, giving Stevens the pleasure of imagining yet another place in the world – Ireland, although McGreevy spent a lot of time in France, as well. In January, 1955, Stevens turned to him for a copy of his translation of Valéry's essay on da Vinci which he, too, admired for its dignity. He also read *Note et Digression* with delight. These texts are perhaps akin to Stevens' idea in "The Whole Man" he was finishing up when he started working on the two introductions to Valéry's *Dialogues*.

To conclude this long trajectory from possible future influence to real engagement with the texts no matter how long ago they have been published, not to mention written, what seemed to be incredible at the beginning seems to have been consummated by the finale: my impression is that when Stevens finally did read Valéry closely at the very ripest of age it would have been the more a pleasure to find his kin in him.

1.4.2 Stevens reading Valéry's texts attentively and limiting himself to particulars

There is yet one more interesting thing to examine in this context and that is Stevens' puzzling explanation for the reason why he had not discussed the value of aesthetics after all. Clearly, there was some kind of constraint that made him lower his gun in saying "I shall not be in conflict with anyone else who may have discussed the question in his introduction. As to what I have said, I don't think that I shall be in competition with anyone." (*L* 878) Would that have been T. S. Eliot? Either way, if Stevens insists, let me finish just with the remark that Stevens' introduction to *Eupalinos* ends upon the idea that Rilke, who admired Valéry and translated his "Cimetière marin" into German, spent his own last moments of life translating those very same *Dialogues*. I think Eupalinos[45] perhaps is a text that could be last; it is a construction in which the existence and essence are consummated (idea of perfect analogy from Stevens' "Effects of Analogy".

45 Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956)

1.5 Criticism on the subject of the affinity between Stevens and Valéry

Criticism devoted exclusively to Stevens' interest in Valéry is still remarkably scarce, despite critics' general awareness of such a relationship. The greatest scholar in this field at the moment is Lisa Goldfarb. She is the author of the first extended study on the subject, *The Figure Concealed*, that will be published in January, 2011.[46] Prior to her close study of the subject many critics have pointed more or less obliquely to the fact that some of Stevens' central ideas resemble Valéry's rather too closely but never went into deeper analysis, rebutted perhaps by the same factor that made Stevens sigh in 1954 that it is for him "impossible to place [Valéry's dialogue] in relation to [his] other work".[47] The complete work of Valéry is simply too extensive to be read by anyone in its sum. Frank Kermode, Harold Bloom, Eleanor Cook, Joseph N. Riddel, Roy H. Pearce, Michel Benamou, and Tim Morris are the major voices in this discourse which started off with Hi Simons' study "The Genre of Wallace Stevens" (*Sewanee Review*, 1945)[48] where Stevens' poetics was first related to French Symbolism and to the symbolist technique of implication.

Michel Benamou's book *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* is a fundamental work on the *symbolist(e)* elements in Stevens' poetry.[49] The references Benamou gives at the end of the book are crucial for a reader interested in what structural similarities there are between the thought of Stevens and Valéry; the book itself is important not so much for an understanding of the Stevens-Valéry relationship (because it focuses on Stevens-Mallarmé) as for what preceded the thought of Valéry historically. Benamou's conclusion that a comparison between Stevens and Valéry would come to the same as that between Stevens and Mallarmé does not take into consideration that Valéry, Mallarmé's finest disciple, was a man of a radically different time from his master and was pressed by it into a different type of consciousness. Precisely what type of consciousness and in what aspects it resembles Stevens is developed by Lisa Goldfarb.[50]

Further criticism touching upon the issue of symbolism in Stevens recommended by Benamou is Chapter V of Joseph N. Riddel's monograph on Stevens *The Clairvoyant Eye* (1965) – in it Riddel shows the tendency of both, Valéry and Stevens, to hypostatize poetry but warns that Stevens could not

46 Goldfarb, Lisa. *The Figure Concealed.* (Sussex Academic Press, 2011), ISBN 978-1-84519-437-6
47 Stevens, Wallace. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*. Holly Stevens, ed. (New York: Knopf, 1970)
48 Simons, Hi. "The Genre of Wallace Stevens", *Wallace Stevens : A Collection of Critical Essays*, Boroff, Marie, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1963) p. 52
49 Benamou, Michel. *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972)
50 Goldfarb, Lisa. "Music and the Vocal Poetics of Stevens and Valéry", *Wallace Stevens across the Atlantic*, Bart Eeckhout and Edward Ragg, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

follow the former into “the realm of absolute abstraction”. He also makes an allusion to the idea of nakedness as bare reality in Valéry's *L'Ame et la Danse,* a resemblance mentioned by Frank Kermode in *Wallace Stevens* (1960).[51] Riddel is also the author of an indispensable general overview of Stevens' criticism in which he shows the critical shift from Stevens' poetry as Symbolist to a poetry of its own organic development propelled by his ever-alert secular meditation (as in Martz's “The World as Meditation”[52]). Riddel perhaps echoes Valéry unknowingly when he praises Martz's idea that Stevens' poetry “becomes not a decadent aestheticism but a reaffirmation of mind (of consciousness, and thus man) which [Stevens] passionately celebrated with the synthetic term of ‘imagination’. Imagination implies a potential unity of self in time rather than a fragmentation. But this unity is achievable only with the greatest expenditure of imagination in its never-ending meditation of the real, of change and otherness, and finally death.”[53]

From Riddel the road leads to Pearce's *Continuity of American Poetry* and Pearce's idea that Stevens, as opposed to Eliot who only had to write poems, had always to justify writing them. Starting with a quote from “The Well Dressed Man with a Beard”, where Stevens says “After the final no, there comes a yes/And on that yes the future world depends”, Pearce proceeds to establish Stevens' poetics as the culmination of the American poetic tradition, showing him as the poet who searched for the “ultimate poem” by which he meant “a reality within reality, a pure abstraction” (Riddel's formulation or Stevens' own).[54] Riddel, like Benamou, differentiates between the direction of that abstraction (beyond nature in Valéry, within nature in Stevens) and draws immense conclusions whereas Goldfarb contemplates on the quality of their process of creation and warns that Valéry's poetics is not identical with Mallarmé's as is sometimes wrongly claimed. To explain why I mention Pearce's idea of Stevens' extreme significance for American literature, it is necessary to recall his vision of him as the ultimate poet, one who unites the poet and the philosopher within himself, which is precisely what Valéry might have dreamed of doing when he wrote *Eupalinos or the Architect* which is a Socratic dialogue based on Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*.

Lisa Goldfarb's essay “Music and the Vocal Poetics of Stevens and Valéry” points to another study which is directly concerned with the subject of the present thesis – Eleanor Cook's discussion of 'enigma' in Stevens in relation to Valéry's aforementioned dialogue in her book *Enigmas and Riddles in*

51 Kermode, Frank. *Wallace Stevens* (London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1960) p. 35
52 Martz, Louis. “The World as Meditation”, Pearce, R. H. and Miller, J. H., eds. *The Act of the Mind* (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, MD, 1965)
53 Riddel, Joseph N. “The Contours of Stevens Criticism”, Pearce, R. H. and Miller, J. H., eds. *The Act of the Mind* (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, MD, 1965) p. 271
54 Ibid. p. 272

Literature (224-5).[55]

The last piece of criticism that needs to be mentioned in connection with the inquiry after Valéry's significance for Stevens is Timothy Morris' book *Wallace Stevens: poetry and criticism*.[56] In the first chapter entitled "Stevens, Santayana and the Aesthetics of Purity" he has a section devoted to Valéry's concept of pure poetry. Morris suggests that Valéry retained a kind of "iconic fascination" for Stevens and was a "prized asset" that he protected from public scrutiny by his repeated denials of having read him and of having consciously incorporated his ideas into his own poetry.[57] Morris takes as point of departure several essays and lectures by Valéry that pertain to either poetry or aesthetics but unlike Lisa Goldfarb, he does not take his *Notebooks* into account nor does he make reference to either *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci* or to the *Dialogues*. He does, however, make an interesting comment on Stevens' conception of pure poetry by putting it in the context of Santayana's aesthetic theory.

55 Goldfarb, Lisa. "Music and the Vocal Poetics of Stevens and Valéry", *Wallace Stevens across the Atlantic*, Bart Eeckhout and Edward Ragg, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p. 162
56 Morris, Timothy. *Wallace Stevens: poetry and criticism* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2006)
57 Ibid. p. 12

2. SYMBOLISM IN THE THOUGHT OF WALLACE STEVENS AND PAUL VALÉRY

In this chapter, I will examine the meaning of symbol and of its derivative, symbolism, in literary theory and the several ways in which these terms become significant in relation to the poetry of Stevens and Valéry. On the most theoretical level, Symbolism juxtaposed anachronistically to their poetry refers to the idealistic theory of perception (formulated by Kant) on the basis of which the notion of "constructive imagination" has been created by Coleridge.[58] His influence on Baudelaire and Emerson opens the way for comparison of the active conception of imagination in Stevens and Mallarmé that was carried out by Michel Benamou. Valéry, for his part, realizes to the full the modern shift toward an examination of the mental processes, mental reality, and unifying ideas, which Ellman and Feidelson's anthology, *The Modern Tradition,*[59] describes as the core of the evolution from Romantism to Symbolism. It is in the work of Valéry and Stevens that an integration of such mutually exclusive opposites as the total lack (of what we want) and the total possession (of what does not exist otherwise than as a fictive edifice) happen through the Hegelian process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (being, nothing, becoming),[60] which is what takes place in the complicated symbol (Kermode's image).[61]

2.1 Symbolism as part of the theory that Valéry and Stevens shared

Symbolism, as René Wellek has it in his essay "The Term and Concept of Symbolism", is best to be explained as a historically anchored concept, a specific type of new aesthetic impulse coming

58 René Wellek "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History", New Literary History, vol. 1, No. 2, A, Symposium on Periods (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Winter, 1970), pp. 256 and Bates, Milton J. "Stevens and the Supreme Fiction", *Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens,* Serio, John N., ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 51

59 Ellman, Richard; Feidelson, Charles, eds. *The Modern Tradition – Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965)

60 Croce, Benedetto. "The Dialectic or Synthesis", *What is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel*, translated by Douglas Ainslie, ed. http://www.google.com/books?id=UL99RmTgbR4C&lpg=PA5&ots=-HYorCVFE9&dq=Croce%2C%20%22The%20Dialectic%20or%20Synthesis%22&lr&hl=cs&pg=PR2#v=onepage&q&f=false, entered Tuesday, November 30, 2010

61 Lentricchia, Frank. *After the New Criticism* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 6 and Cohn, R. Greer. "Symbolism", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter, 1974), p. 183

after the period of nineteenth-century realism, spanning between the years 1885 and 1914.[62] The conspicuous nature of this shift of perspective corresponds to a movement, concerning the direction of meaning in language, away from the denotative ("referential" in I. A. Richards' or "centrifugal" in Frye's terminology) to the connotative ("centripetal" in Frye); away from representation toward Being as the poetry of things. This is a paraphrase of Stevens' often contemplated breach between the possibility to perceive "the poetry of a thing" and the possibility to analyze the process of creation simultaneously (rationalize), where he complains that were he to focus too strongly on how a thing was made, he would lose the poetry of it.[63] Kermode says that while prose merely describes, poetry "by virtue of the image *is*."[64] Instead of extra-linguistic reality language itself, or the medium in more general terms, assumes center stage.

The best of poets, however, do not abandon meaning for that, which is also the case of the poets treated in this paper. Their words are symbols with part of the meaning already in them. Valéry, speaking to himself in his notes, says a little provocatively:

> POÈTE. Ton espèce de matérialisme verbal. Tu peux considérer de haut romanciers, philosophes, et tous ceux qui sont assujettis à la parole par la crédulité; – qui doivent croire que leur discours est réel par son contenu et singifie quelque réalité. Mais toi, tu sais que le réel d'un discours, ce sont les mots, seulement, et les formes.[65]

The deeper underlying meaning of this tendency toward the connotative is the will to redefine the "function" of the artist to a sort of composer who orchestrates words into the effective means of reproducing the "poetic state", and achieves thereby a "hidden transformation" in the minds of the audience.[66]

In order to be able to do this, the artist must take full possession of his consciousness, becomes the *homo faber,*[67] the smith of "necessary" fictions, fictions without which we are unable to conceive of the world (*NA* 31); this also presupposes the cleansing ritual of liberating the imagination from various types of belittling mental structures, such as stale religious concepts, romanticism, logical positivism, Freudism, etc (*NA* 154). In this process both Stevens and Valéry use their critical minds to refrain from

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62 René Wellek "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History", New Literary History, vol. 1, No. 2, A, Symposium on Periods (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Winter, 1970), p. 251

63 Stevens. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, Holly Stevens, ed. (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 434, hereafter abbreviated as *L*

64 Lentricchia, Frank. *After New Criticism*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 6

65 Valéry, Paul. "Le Calepin du poète", *Oeuvres*, vol. I, Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1456

66 Valéry, Paul. "Poetry and Abstract Thought", *The Modern Tradition – Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (Richard Ellman, ed., Charles Feidelson, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 84

67 "Homo faber." TheFreeDictionary.com. 2010. Farlex, Inc. 27 Nov. 2010 http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Homo+faber Bergson uses this term in *The Creative Evolution*, 1907, to define intelligence as the "faculty to create artificial objects, in particular tools to make tools, and to indefinitely variate its makings."

being satisfied with ready solutions and instead conceive of their art as of acts intended to produce new acts, each one a little finer than the preceding one. Both aim ultimately at becoming the universal voice of a transparent impersonal speaker, yet a speaker who is the orator of the human self. The imagination thus liberated and referring only to the self of the poet is the "constructive imagination". Frank Lentricchia attributes this kind of imagination to Mallarmé and Valéry in his book *The gaiety of language: an essay on the radical poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens*.[68]

2.1.1 The contours of Stevens from the symbolist perspective

Not only has Stevens particularly enjoyed reading several French Symbolist poets, such as Laforgue or Mallarmé, but he has himself been ranked as a Symbolist by several influential critics. My general impression is that each time he was considered along with the Symbolists, some methodological twist was performed upon his poetry to make it fit the category technically. Benamou, a structuralist critic himself, says that "affinity is a matter of unconscious symbolical values which resonate, at many levels, with the 'great mythic writing in which mankind tries out its meanings, that is to say desires'[69] – in other words, with the symbolic imagination which traverses the individual works of a specific time and makes them contemporaries of another time, however remote it may be."[70] But the part of the symbolism of Mallarmé that reunites Stevens with Valéry is not so much the unconscious as the deliberately conscious aspect of their poetry. Frye is criticized by Wellek for having obliterated spatio-temporal distinctions between movements and individuals in favor of his synthesizing critical method, but Wellek himself restricts the meaning of Symbolism so firmly that he is in danger of losing the tension comprised in the symbol that Robert G. Cohn calls properly "symbolic":

> We ordinarily think of images or notions or words as being mere signs of objects. Poets and visionaries, however at this stage emphasize the underlying connection (…) to try to heal the breach in wholeness opened up by ordinary dissociative practice, scientific analysis, logical thought.[71]

In Stevens the *symbolist(e)*[72] is only a specific aspect of his poetics but as such it offers interesting

68 Lentricchia, Frank. *The gaiety of language: an essay on the radical poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968)
69 Barthes, Roland. *Critique et Vérité* (Paris, 1966), p. 61
70 Benamou, Michel. *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. xix
71 Cohn, R. Greer. "Symbolism", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter, 1974), p. 185
72 This is a term suggested by Michel Benamou in the introduction to *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (cf.

glimpses into his poetry. Benamou finds Stevens' resemblance with the Symbolists in his concept of "central poetry" designed to satisfy the "universal mind". To illustrate this claim he borrows from "Imagination as a Value" (1948) Stevens' idea that to satisfy the universal mind one has to have "the imagination that tries to penetrate to *basic* images, *basic* emotions, and so to compose a *fundamental* poetry even older than the ancient world."[73] Rooted in Stevens' theory, Benamou makes this hypothesis:

> Stevens and the Symbolist imagination are one, if by symbolist we mean central, and by imagination a horizon of basic images the center of which has shifted, since ancient times, from god to man.[74]

With the aid of statistics, Benamou also identifies and explains several key words-symbols, such as nakedness, that Stevens uses and the understanding of which is indispensable for the appreciation of his poetry. The import of Benamou's work resides in that he qualifies the difference in point of view between Stevens' use of those and their use by the French Symbolists, namely Baudelaire and Mallarmé. The idea of nakedness is somewhat representative perhaps. Benamou states that in Stevens nudity/nakedness is a quality situated in the center of the self as in "Nudity at the Capital" where "But nakedness, woolen massa, concerns an innermost atom" (*CP* 145), and where "nakedness" is a central quality, the quality which permits the poet to set up a symbolic world of his own. Mallarmé, however, propounded a "nudité idéale" that symbolises his linguistic *askesis,* his method of cutting off words from their impure meanings.[75]

There are several adages to be made to Benamou's theory. Most recently, Lisa Goldfarb remarked that the poetics of Mallarmé and Valéry have been paired inexactly, which is also the case of Benamou's book where he claims that if a similar comparison was made between Stevens and Valéry the result would be the same.[76] Mallarmé himself, his poetics, has been defended by Yves Bonnefoy as committing himself to a radical experiment without safety belts, as a poet who found "le Beau" and "le Monde" after he made a terrifying descent through language during the course of writing *Hérodiade* at the end of which he lost "le Moi" and found only "le Néant".[77] So if the question were asked if Stevens had affinities with Symbolism the answer would be yes, many; his tendency, however, would not be

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Bibliography) for that strain in Stevens, so that it expresses simultaneously the universal capacity of language to symbolize and the particular meaning given to the word by the synonymous French movement.

73 Benamou, Michel. *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. xii

74 Ibid., p. xiii

75 Benamou, p. 77

76 Goldfarb, Lisa. "Music and the Vocal Poetics of Stevens and Valéry", *Wallace Stevens across the Atlantic*, Bart Eeckhout and Edward Ragg, eds. (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p. 152

77 Bonnefoy, Yves. "Století, které zabilo slovo" *Eseje.* (Opus, 2006) tr. by Jiří Pelán from the original "Le siècle où la parole a été victime", *Yves Bonnefoy et la parole du XXème siècle.* M. Finck, D. Lanson, M. Stayber, eds. (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires du Strasbourg, 2003)

toward a linguistic askesis, the impossible immaculate purity of language represented by *Hérodiade*, but rather toward a perpetual readiness to refresh perception in an incessant motion to and fro between presence and absence. This is how Stevens puts it in "The Man and the Blue Guitar":

> XXII
> Poetry is the subject of the poem,
> From this the poem issues and
>
> To this returns. Between the two,
> Between issue and return, there is
>
> An absence in reality,
> Things as they are. Or so we say.
>
> But are these separate? Is it
> An absence for the poem, which acquires
>
> Its true appearances there, sun's green,
> Cloud's red, earth feeling, sky that thinks?
>
> From these it takes. Perhaps it gives,
> In the universal intercourse.

However, the play between presence and absence in reality is also the exact wording of the genesis of poetry by Valéry in "Poetry and Abstract Thought", that's what he calls the poetic pendulum:

> Think of a pendulum oscillating between two symmetrical points. Suppose that one of these extremes represents *form*: the concrete characteristics of the language, sound, rhythm, accent, tone, movement – in a word, the *Voice* in action. Then associate with the other point, the acnode of the first, all significant values, images and ideas, stimuli of feeling, and memory, virtual impulses and structures of understanding – in short, everything that makes the *content*, the meaning of a discourse. (…) Between Voice and Thought, between Thought and Voice, between Presence and Absence, oscillates the poetic pendulum.[78]

For the two of them the "it gives" of Stevens' poem is the "poet's business to give us the feeling of an ultimate union between the word and the mind" of Valéry's essay, a state that is comparatively rare because the exigencies of life are against it and because language itself tends to empty up its forms.

Nevertheless, Stevens' very life, as increasingly solitary an existence as it was, resembled the aesthetic choices made by the Symbolists in that he held poetry dearer than anything else. I will elude the obvious question of what about family (as for Stevens life was part of the larger entity of poetry and vice versa), and give evidence to my claim in a quote from his speech at the occasion of receiving The National Book Award for Poetry when he said: "We can never have great poetry unless we believe that poetry serves great ends" and that "the significance of poetry is second to none" to the poet in his

78 Richard Ellman, ed., Charles Feidelson, ed. *The Modern Tradition – Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 81-2

particular calling as a poet. [79] And, like Valéry's poetics, his too seems to "adore" and reach to the expressive limits of language as a creative medium in the fashion of Mallarmé ("language is perpetual creation").[80] The soliloquy of Stevens' poem "Not Idea about the Thing but the Thing Itself" gives us a sense of the distance he cultivated between himself and his chosen ideal – reality:

> That scrawny cry–it was
> A chorister whose c preceded the choir.
> It was part of the colossal sun,
>
> Surrounded by its choral rings,
> Still far away. It was like
> A new knowledge of reality.[81]

This poem is possibly itself part of the substance of a new knowledge. Indeed, as the great Symbolists set themselves no little goals, the desire to come to "a new knowledge of reality" discovered exclusively by the means of a newly edified language "on the highest possible level of the cognitive" (*L* 500) was a shared value among them. Having formed a considerable degree of sympathy toward Mallarmé, which he discloses in his essay "Imagination as Value",[82] would he have been surprised at the resemblances between his thought and that of Valéry when he read his *Introduction to the method of Leonardo da Vinci* and *The Dialogues* in the last years of his life?

His surprise would have perhaps been what is new in Valéry in comparison to Mallarmé: his interest in man as he is, body and soul; the soul in the body, limited by the body, and celebrated by it.

2.1.2. A period of literary history

René Wellek wrote about Symbolism in an essay entitled "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History"[83] making it clear that the use of the term, as broad as it can get, must always be delimited in order to make any discourse about it possible. He situates Symbolism as a literary

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79 Stevens, Wallace. *Opus Posthumous*, Bates, Milton J., ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989) p. 289, hereafter cited as *OP*

80 Symons, Arthur. *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1911), p. 126 and Stevens. *The Necessary Angel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 33, hereafter abbreviated to *NA*

81 *Stevens. The Collected Poems (New York: Vintage Books, 1990)*, p. 534, hereafter cited as *CP*

82 *NA 122:* "was there ever any poetry more wholly the poetry of the ivory tower than the poetry of Mallarmé?"

83 René Wellek "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History", New Literary History, vol. 1, No. 2, A, Symposium on Periods (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Winter, 1970), pp. 249-270, http://www.jstor.org/stable/468631, entered Saturday, October 30, 2010

movement after the decline of realism/naturalism and preceding the rise of new avant-garde movements in the twentieth century. Given the fact that symbolism was a *posteriori* label, Wellek asks: first, which of the artists of the designated period called themselves "symbolists" or would want to be included in a movement called "symbolism"; second, who and on what basis could be included in the category by literary science, what characteristics would be decisive? Wellek also says that, once it is situated in time, symbolism must also be considered in terms of space; it could have originated in France (as much as it was inspired by Poe) but perhaps had a much stronger impact elsewhere.[84]

All of these remarks are significant in the context of Valéry (1871-1945) and Stevens (1879-1955). Within the limits of this paper, we have two figures whose work stretches to the utmost the capacity of the accepted definition mentioned above: neither of them belongs to the category of symbolism in terms of time, at least not exactly; yet, both relate to symbolism, not as a period in history, but as to a specific method of approach revelatory of the art of poetry – as seen mostly in the theory of Poe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Laforgue, and Mallarmé. In addition to that, they were the symbolists' "ephebes" in one way or another: Stevens found his predecessor in Emerson and Whitman whom Charles Feidelson ranked as one of the four American Symbolists (Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman – a naming *avant la lettre* according to Wellek, lack of distinction between the Romantic and the modern symbolist use of symbols);[85] Valéry, for his part, was deeply influenced by the *Illuminations* (Rimbaud) and by the poetic gesture of Mallarmé.[86]

Notwithstanding, none of the authors listed above would call himself a Symbolist or acknowledge that he was using a rigorous method of any such kind. When Valéry prepared his speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the Symbolism of 1886, he remarked that he was participating in the generation of a myth: "rien dans les écrits, dans la mémoire des survivants n'éxiste sous ce nom à la date assigné"[87] and yet the very same man wrote an article called "Sur la technique littéraire" (1889) where he spoke about the use of style and form as means to calculate the "*effet final et foudroyant"* of a work of art, and mentioned the power of the symbol to contain a complex image or thought, and, finally, recalling that "aujourd'hui des poètes de la valeur de (…) Mallarmé ont montré tout le parti que la littérature contemporaine pourrait tirer du symbolisme remis en honneur",[88] he referred to the theory

84 René Wellek "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History", New Literary History, vol. 1, No. 2, A, Symposium on Periods (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Winter, 1970), p. 249-50 http://ww.jstor.org/stable/468631, entered Saturday, October 30, 2010

85 Ibid., p. 256 http://www.jstor.org/stable/468631, entered Saturday, October 30, 2010

86 Robinson, Judith. "Préface" à *Ego Scriptor et Petits poèmes abstraites* (Editions Gallimard, 1992), p. xvi

87 Valéry, Paul. "Existence du symbolisme", *Oeuvres*, vol. I, Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 688

88 Ibid., p. 1786

of composition derived from Poe. What exactly was it that Valéry thought could be carried on from symbolism and does it converge with Stevens' method? I think it is the incessant analysis of the creative process, the self-consciousness of the *homo faber*. This approach had been exhausted by Valéry and is ever-present in the poetry of Stevens in his conception of the poem as an act of "piecing together" and as the one without whose fictions we would not be capable of conceiving of reality.[89]

2.2 Principles of the symbolist faith

2.2.1 Valéry, Stevens and Symbolism, the crossroads of modern poetry

Every effort to define what characteristics united the Symbolists is destined to failure because the writers now called Symbolists were like insular forms within their own society, constructing each their separate consciousness and poetics which allowed them to resist external pressure to be 'realistic' and 'exact' in the positivist sense. A basic document about the French Symbolists is doubtless Valéry's essay "Existence du Symbolisme" (A.-A.-M. Stols, 1938; *Ecrits divers sur Stéphane Mallarmé*, 1950)[90] and on the reception of Valéry in the USA it is Eliot's "From Poe to Valéry".[91] In this lecture, Eliot came to the conclusion that "this advance of self-consciousness, the extreme awareness of and concern for language which we find in Valéry, is something which must ultimately break down" and just a page before that he mentions a point we came across earlier in this essay when he says that he does not believe that "this aesthetic can be of any help to later poets". It is perhaps on this point that Stevens disagreed, finding Valéry's poetics as inspiring as the sky at the break of dawn. For Stevens, Valéry lived in the center of the world (which was Paris, a place Stevens re-imagined completely never having been there physically) and "at the verge of consciousness" in order to get at an imagination that is larger than himself. This would have resulted in a poetry of the future ("marginal, subliminal"), whereas Stevens' aim was to write poetry of the present, something he considered to be an "incalculable difficulty" (*NA* 115). Stevens wrote this before he started to read Valéry closely in about 1952.

Valéry says that Symbolism is nothing more than a term of convention, which is entirely

89 Cook, Eleanor. *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 236
90 Ibid.. pp. 686-706
91 Eliot, T. S. "From Poe to Valéry", a lecture delivered at the Library of Congress, Washington, 1948, in: *To Criticize the Critic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965) pp. 27-42

characteristic of him in the lucidity of the terms which leaves no space for vague conjectures and still enough space for imaginative connections between related notions. Valéry defines Symbolism negatively as a common tendency of the artists concerned to stand deliberately apart from publicity and 'the suffrage of number' in order to eliminate the threat of writing conditioned by circumstances. To create their particular vision in extreme solitary concentration and in a way which could be compared to scientific research in the aspect of skepticism (freedom to doubt the doubtful and to maintain what is not) – which is, at least very briefly, Valéry's portrait of Leonardo da Vinci and of his own ideal as he explains it in his *Introduction à la méthode de Leonard de Vinci.*[92] As Mallarmé puts it in "Un coup de dés" there is no order other than "à l'altitude/PEUT-ÊTRE/UNE CONSTELLATION"[93] but, even though a thought can never abolish the contingency of living, of being, every thought is a throw of the dice, a trial, a stirring of appearances. In this heroic feat of throwing the dice, in the activity of constantly issuing forth new assimilations of what appears to the imagination, Mallarmé, Valéry, and Stevens come together. They meet in the tentative quality of their poetics.[94]

As Helen Vendler observes, it is a tentative strategy as if meant to abolish the tentative character of a proposition in the course of a series of variations on the same subject.[95] The tentative style of Stevens and Mallarmé is intrinsically connected with their radical exploration of the capacity of language to register the 'free breath of the spirit'.[96] Indeed, this freedom of spirit is the very element in favor of which 'difficult' writers refuse many ready solutions in a process of self edification which consists in forming their own *résistance au facile*. The sacrifices made in such a procedure are also mentioned by Lentricchia in his account of Northrop Fry's criticism, as something Nietsche called the "process of un-selving" in *The Birth of Tragedy.*[97] In a postmortem article about Mallarmé, Valéry analyses his own understanding of what made the master a master saying that "Le travail sevère, en littérature, se manifeste et s'opère par *des refus*." He goes on to say that the secret discussion between the temperament, the ambitions and the previsions of a writer are the site of the domain of ethics in

92 Ibid. *Oeuvres*, vol. I, p. 1201

93 Mallarmé, Stéphane. "Un coup de dés", *Oeuvres Complètes*, Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry, eds. (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), pp. 445-7

94 Vendler, Helen. "The Qualified Assertions of Wallace Stevens", *The Act of the Mind*, Pearce, R. H. and Miller, J. H., eds. (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, MD, 1965)

95 Vendler, Helen. On Extended Wings (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 16

96 Symons, Arthur. *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1911), p. 126. About Mallarme in *Divagations*: "Words, he has realized, are of value only as a notation of the free breath of the spirit, words, therefore, must be employed with extreme care, in their choice and adjustment, in setting them to reflect and chime upon one another; yet, least of all for their own sake, for what they can never, except by suggestion, express."

97 Lentricchia, Frank. *After the New Criticism* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 11

literature.[98] It is doubtless feasible simply to follow accepted schemes and just repeat them. Exposing one's statements indefatigably to a test of validity against one's consciousness, however, may result in discoveries.

Vendler demonstrates Stevens' oblique manner of presenting a statement in the poem "Landscape with a Boat" (*CP* 241-2) which is entirely about refusals of beliefs that it would be a solace to accept, the poem, however, re-creates the image of Valéry's refusing process quite precisely. It is the pain and beauty of the critical mind never to be satisfied. Stevens' refusing man is an anti-master-man, a man who succumbed too early, before he discovered that the things refused were part of himself. The true master must reach further than "floribund ascetism". Valéry demonstrated that in *Eupalinos* upon the example of the architect. In Socrates' prayer in the dialogue where he expresses the wish that the measure of human art remain the human body.[99] As for Stevens, Quinn shows in "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens" that Stevens dramatizes this ethical conflict by making nominal lists of things done away with (even accepted truth) and re-established subsequently, and concludes that at similar instances Stevens puts up symbolically with larger spiritual issues.[100]

Stevens in "The Three Academic Pieces"[101] calls forth resemblance as the principle of unity in reality as well as in poetry and demonstrates that poetry and reality are one on the basis of structural resemblance. His thinking in this passage echoes Baudelaire's "Correspondences" as well as Valéry's thoughts in "Fragments du Narcisse", although he does not mention them directly, where the first is the romantic prelude to the symbolism of Mallarmé, and in the latter that strain of symbolism is transformed and put to practice in an expression of cadenced feeling, metamorphosing states of mind, a consciousness captured during one day and one night.[102] Stevens' desire to find a relationship between reality and what he calls imagination leads him to linger on the idea of resemblance, which is also that which Narcissus seeks on the surface of the water. Stevens demonstrates his principle using an example of a passage from Ecclesiastes about broken things (precious and ordinary) and identifies the symbolic nature of its language: "these images are not the language of reality, they are symbolic language of metamorphosis, or resemblance, of poetry, but they relate to reality and they intensify our sense of it

98 Valéry, Paul. "Lettre sur Mallarmé", *Variété II* (NRF, 1929), *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 641

99 Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956), p. 90

100 Justin Quinn. "Nature & Ideology in Wallace Stevens". American Studies Colloquium, Spirituality and Religion in American Culture, Olomouc 2000

101 Stevens, Wallace. *The Necessary Angel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 80

102 Robinson, Judith. "Préface" à *Ego Scriptor et Petits poèmes abstraites* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1992), p. xx

and they give us the pleasure of 'lentor and solemnity' in respect to the most commonplace objects".[103] This is part of Stevens' explicit theory. His poems themselves do not give these handles on what they are made of and a reader must come knowing or intuiting that the poem is like a "manifestation des propriétés intrinsèques, impersonnelles, de la fonction composée *Langage* – se dégageant rarement, dans ces conditions aussi rarement réunis que celles qui font le carbone diamant".[104] In a well-faceted diamond, the light comes in and out through the same facet.

Symbolism represents an identical platform for Stevens and Valéry inasmuch as language itself can be made to patch together (Stevens in "The Man Playing the Blue Guitar") or fabricate (Valéry in "Poetry and Abstract Thought" and elsewhere, also quoted by Riddel on the origin of fictions)[105] reality as an abstract construction of inner relationships anchored in "an accuracy with respect to the structure of reality", an idea that Stevens elaborates in the first of the "Three Academic Pieces". In his preface to Valéry's *Eupalinos or the Architect*, Stevens (suspending his "characteristic boorishness" for a moment) admired with Rilke the "composure and finality of Valéry's language" as well as his obsession with clarity in using this excerpt from the closing speech of Valéry's Socrates:

> "What is there more mysterious than clarity? … What more capricious than the way in which light and shade are distributed over hours and over men? … Orpheuslike we build, by means of the word, temples of wisdom and science that may suffice for all reasonable creatures. This great art requires of us an admirably exact language."[106]

Here, Valéry and Stevens meet in their mutual position of artists who inherited the idea of language-as-poetry at the center of their interest in setting out for knowledge. The symbol is precisely what is needed in such an enterprise.

2.2.2. The symbol

Let me use a definition of the term by Robert G. Cohn in his essay on Symbolism: "symbolism, in its most general sense, may be said to arise with a mentality itself – at its root the symbol (any symbol) embodies the complex dialectic of knowing – this is a matter to be investigated, at some point,

103Stevens, Wallace. *The Necessary Angel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 78

104Valéry, Paul. *Ego Scriptor et Petits poèmes abstraites*, Judith Robinson, ed. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1992)

105Joseph N. Riddel. *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens.* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1965), p. 197

106Ibid. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956), p. xx

by epistemology, the science or philosophy of knowing."[107] The symbol, according to Coleridge, whose definition of it is recurrent in all the accounts of symbolism (Wellek&Warren, Grubbs, and *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Lentricchia's *After the New Criticism*), "is characterized by the translucence of the special [i. e. the species] in the individual, or of the general [genus] in the special... above all, the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal"[108]; as opposed to the sign it is not arbitrary. Lentricchia helpfully links what Kermode calls the "image" in *Romantic Image*[109] to the post-Kantian symbol so that we can think of the "image" in Stevens as of a symbol. The trick of the symbolist is to use language or poetry itself as symbol, that is, use it as a substance. Stevens was fascinated by the possibility that language would express "mere being", one of his discoveries regarding this possibility was a judge's remark on Spinoza's logic in search for God: "Indeed, when Spinoza's great logic went searching for God it found him in the predicate of substance." (*L* 415)

This brings me to the effort in literary theory to describe the process of signification of the symbol. In the simplest dictionary terms the symbol is something that stands for something else while it also obliges us to understand itself as a presentation.[110] Valéry's distinction between poetry and prose in his "Poetry and Abstract Thought" expresses the same difference as between the symbol and the sign in semiotics. Stevens himself uses the distinction of I. A. Richards between connotative and denotative language in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" and observes a development toward the connotative in his days. The connotative (or centripetal in Frye's definition) threatens that language will dissipate under the pressure of too many associations (*NA* 13). Let me turn to Lentricchia for an illustration of the ontological aspect of the symbol because it relates closely to the issue devoloped in *Eupalinos*. Lentricchia, still explaining Kermode's book, says that "the symbol permits *us*, as well, to partake of being as it closes the distance between our consciousness and the ultimate origin of things."[111] (italics mine)

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a compositional detail of Stevens' introduction to *Eupalinos* that makes for a comparatively strong evidence of his engagement with the substance of Mallarmé's and Valéry's poetry. He headed the piece with a line – "Gloire du long désir, Idées" – which refers the reader to the symbolist context above. This utterance, a line from Mallarmé's poem called "Prose pour Des Esseintes", reveals much about the essence of Mallarmé's poetics, his very *ars poetica*

107Cohn, R. Greer. "Symbolism", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter, 1974), p. 182
108Ibid., p. 181
109Kermode, Frank. *Romantic Image* (New York: Random House, 1964)
110Cuddon, J. A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1992)
111Lentricchia, Frank. *After New Criticism*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 6

as he expresses it within the limits of that single poem. It also emphasizes the aesthetic content of this lineage because this poem was written on demand for Huysmans who intended to display the delicate aestheticist position of the hero, Des Esseintes, by showing him as a reader of this “harrassing master”, a poet whose poetry resists intelligence almost successfully (“Man Carrying Thing”). It was in *A Rebours* that Valéry read Mallarmé for the first time. It seems almost as if Stevens, not wanting to engage in a conflict with somebody else's “introduction” over the matter of aesthetics (cf. end of first chapter of the present thesis), suggested his true position in the enigmatic title of his own introduction.

2.2.3 A Mechanism of Style

In *Structure of Modern Lyrical Poetry* Hugo Fridrich breaks down the curse of Symbolism as a textbook term which lets the phenomenon die out around the year 1900 in an effort to show that several peculiar characteristics proper to symbolist poetry survived in the poetry of several major twentieth century poets. He makes three important statements in which he supports the idea that there is a unity of modern lyrical poetry in its conversations with the symbolist tradition: first, this unity is issued from the nineteenth-century opposition between Rimbaud's formally free, 'illogical' lyric and Mallarmé's lyric of intellect and formal strictness; second, that the same opposition can be traced in modern painting and has been classified by Kandinsky as “the big real” (analogical to Rimbaud's sensuous irreality) and “the big abstract” (Mallarmé's purified lyric of tension) a finding which explained the frequent allusions of one art toward the other; third, the modern poets' focus on style as the true instrument of self-expression and self-edification and often manifests itself in the form of variations on a subject.[112] The pole of the above opposition discussed in this essay is the pole of intellect and formal precision represented by Paul Valéry who explicitly said that

> “Un poème doit être une fête de l'Intellect. Il ne peut être autre chose. Fête: c'est un jeu; mais solennel, mais réglé, mais significatif; image de ce qu'on n'est pas d'ordinaire, de l'état où les efforts sont rythmes rachetés.”[113]

112Fridrich, Hugo. *Struktura moderní lyriky* (Brno: Host, 2005) pp. 140-167
113Valéry, Paul. “Littérature”, *Oeuvres*, vol. II. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) p. 547

2.3 Surpassing symbolism in the quest for poetic truth

2.3.1 The artist as a virile young poet

Let me focus on the finest point of the two poets' relationship with the heritage of Symbolism. It will perhaps prove useful to return to Valéry and his statement on what has been continued from Baudelaire: "Tandis que Verlaine et Rimbaud ont continué Baudelaire dans l'ordre de sentiment et de la sensation, Mallarmé l'a prolongé dans le domaine de la perfection et de la pureté poétique."[114] This is to give an image of the material way that tradition is passed on. Without the preceding serious effort, there would much less likely be the present serious effort. The effort of Mallarmé had been so great that he only begins to be accepted as a great poet in his own right without Eliot's (or anybody else's) mossy epithet – a great exegesis of his poetic evolution has been done by Yves Bonnefoy in *Lieux et destins de l'image*, a course of poetics at Collège de France,[115] where all that has previously been attributed to Paul Valéry, such as that only when we accept the "*néant*" (absence of preconceived beliefs) only then can we perceive the "*beau*" or that only when we give up the "*moi*" we can perceive the "world", has been tracked to its roots in Mallarmé. But just as Valéry takes further and actualizes the findings of Mallarmé, so does Stevens in taking freely from his predecessors and from his contemporaries what suits his sense of reality.

One such thing is his idea of the imagination as man's power over the possibilities of things in "Imagination as Value". In asserting his power over the possibilities Stevens acts like Valéry in "Poetry and the Abstract Thought" where the latter declares his method: "before making any deep examination of the content, I take a look at the language; I generally proceed like a surgeon who sterilizes his hands and prepares the area to be operated on. This is what I call *cleaning up the verbal situation*."[116] The image of this process in Stevens is that of gradually discarding images that seem for a fleeting moment true but cannot be fixed as such. We have seen that above in "Landscape and the Boat" but it is also used in the prose as when he says "As for the present, what have we, if we do not have science, except the imagination? And who is to say its deliberate fictions arising out of the contemporary mind that they are not the forerunners of some such science?" Stevens' free breath with the imagination finally

114Valéry, Paul. "Situation de Baudelaire", *Oeuvres*, vol. II. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) p. 598
115Bonnefoy, Yves. *Lieux et destins de l'image* (Editions du Seuil, 1999) pp. 237-272
116 Valéry, Paul. "Poetry and Abstract Thought", *The Modern Tradition – Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, Richard Ellman, Charles Feidelson, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 75

zooms to an outlook similar to Valéry's in his *Introduction à la Méthode de Léonard de Vinci:* "And if this mode of being conscious becomes habitual, one will come to consider at once all the possible results of a contemplated act, all the implications of a conceived object, and in this way to achieve their annihilation, to achieve the faculty of divining always a thing more intense or more exact than the thing allowed (…) a thought that has become fixed takes on the characteristics of hypnosis and becomes, in the language of logic, an idol; in the domain of art, a sterile monotony."[117] These are the "greater seemings of the major mind" that Cook points out in her commentary on "Description without Place".[118]

2.4 Conclusion

According to Joseph N. Riddel, Stevens is supposedly most explicit of his symbolism in *Transport to Summer.* Riddel even describes Stevens' position in "Description without place" as his "symbolist self-consciousness *in extremis*". What I like much better, however, and what relates closer to my aim in this paper, is Kermode's remark that "Stevens must have taken immediately to heart some words of Valéry in his dialogue *Dance and the Soul* (1921), for which he wrote an admiring Introduction" and compares the text of Valéry with a couplet in *Notes toward Supreme Fiction*:

> Winter and Spring, cold copulars, embrace
> And forth the particulars of rapture come, (*CP* 392)

The basis of comparison here is the idea of the naked reality of seeing "*things as they are*", a phrase from Valéry's dialogue (italics his), as something completely inimical to nature. Stevens' variations on the opposition between winter and spring represent the great apology of art, fiction making. Fiction/falsity alias the spring stand in contrast to the nothingness of the real/winter/poverty trope and it is this contrast that brings forth "the particulars of rapture". Stevens conceives of poetry as of a remedy to a sense of lack, poverty, and even with the same words in "Large Red Man Reading":

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117 Valéry, Paul. "The Introduction to the Method of Leonard da Vinci", translation of Thomas McGreevy, *The Modern Tradition – Backgrounds of Modern Literature,* Richard Ellman, Charles Feidelson, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 180

118Cook, Eleanor. *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 195

And laughed, as he sat there reading, from out of the purple tabulae,
The outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law:
Poesis, poesis, the literal characters, the vatic lines,

Which in those ears and in those thin spended hearts,
Took on color, took on shape and the size of *things as they are*
And spoke the feeling for them, which was what they had lacked. (*CP* 424, italics mine)

In Valéry's dialogue, fiction figures as a remedy for "the weariness of living" because "the real, in its pure state, stops the heart instantaneously".[119] The fiction propounded here is, unlike the true falsity of passive self-delusion, a fiction ("intoxication") due to acts that sets the motionless in motion. Valéry's dance is a flame which consumes the "cold and perfect clarity"[120] in an act of the mind of the dancer. The dancer and the exquisite possibilities of movement become one – the image is one more celebration of the supreme in the finite, in this case of the "divine" in the mortal Athikte. Dance for her (like the acts of the mind for her spectators) was a refuge from the "*weariness of living*" but it is a creation of the mind which can only be seen in contrast to the nothingness of just having a body.

The Symbolism of Mallarmé opened the way for the self-conscious position of the poet as the technician of language. Whereas this ultimately led to the most merciless self-irony and an overtone of desperation in the "*oeuvre*" as a whole, it also helped include in the art of making, *poiesis*, the knowledge of man that the humanities, science, and history forced into existence under the pressure of the twentieth century. The poet will not only come "thinking-in-poetry" but, in thinking away the thinking,[121] become the universal impersonal mind and imagination playing with the structures of reality ("the inquisitor of structures" in Stevens) inherent in language; using the latest scientific knowledge to work on the psychology of the audience (Stevens in saying that knowing how to make us the poet could also destroy us (*NA* 45), Valéry in his opinions on technique and artifice, "Poetry and Abstract Thought"); and, last but not least, representing an aristocracy of the mind in a democratic society that no longer accepts this kind of differentiation (between the simple and the elaborate) while at the same time it depends on a "*société des esprits*" more than ever before for the simple reason that it will not be able to keep going without the supreme constructions hinted at above, to remain capable of self-governance.

119*Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956), 51-2

120Ibid.

121Valéry, Paul. *Variété IV*, *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1490

Michel Benamou closes his book on Stevens' symbolism with Stevens' poem “Of Mere Being” which represents a stance “Quite different from the Snow Man's (no man's) negated negations, at the end of the mind, the mind is a shining bird, of gold, of fire, inhuman: a symbol still, but unsymbolized. How is one to understand at all if even the explanations become “difficult”? Seriously, Benamou's comparative method following Mallarmé led him to the conclusion that the latter finally wished not only to symbolize a reality separate from the natural one but also that he ultimately desired not to symbolize at all, because “as Cassirer suggestively wrote in *Language and Myth*, 'All symbolism harbors the curse of mediacy'”.[122] If Stevens did or did not “unsymbolize” his poetry will be something for me yet to see.

122Benamou, Michel. *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. xiii

3. STEVENS' READING OF PURE POETRY

With *Ideas of Order* published in October 1936, Stevens laid bare, at a most unpropitious moment in history though probably in an attempt to counter the Depression and the resulting disturbance of "envious cachinnation" ("Mozart, 1935"), his creed that poetry should be written for its own sake and that it should serve no other purpose beside that, let alone a moral one. Pointing out that two slightly different meanings of the term "pure poetry" are at play, A. Walton Litz reproduces Stevens' entire statement on his "poetic theories and aims" from the dust jacket of the Knopf edition of *Ideas of Order* where Stevens raised the question of pure poetry:

> […] While it is inevitable that a poet should be concerned with such questions [external problems of socio-economical character], this book, although it reflects them, is primarily concerned with ideas of order of a different nature, as, for example, the dependence of the individual, confronting the elimination of established ideas, on the general sense of order; the idea of order created by individual concepts, as of the poet, in "The Idea of Order at Key West"; the idea of order arising from the practice of any art, as of poetry in "Sailing after Lunch."
>
> *The book is essentially a book of pure poetry*. I believe that, in any society, the poet should be the exponent of the imagination of that society.[123] (italics mine)

Here, Stevens linked the term of pure poetry unhesitatingly to the imagination, whereas earlier it represented the idea of a poetry imitative of music, meaning just barely tolerated if it could not be obliterated. Litz says that the common meaning of pure poetry when Stevens used it in connection with *Ideas of Order* was, in Stevens' words, "images and images alone, or images and music of verse together" at the time he used the term to qualify his aim in *Ideas of Order*.[124] This is the meaning Stevens responded to in a letter to Latimer referring to *Harmonium* in October 1935. He added also that he still had a liking for that sort of thing.

Pure poetry, but this time in the second, fuller meaning, comes up in "Owl's Clover" (1936) and again in "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (1937), as well as in the lecture "The Irrational Element of Poetry" (1936) that Stevens read at Harvard in 1936. As a concept it is persistent throughout Stevens' work in the sense that the purpose of writing poetry is to attain pure poetry as Stevens wrote to Hi Simons in 1940 about canto XXII of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (*L* 364) and again about canto I of "The Greenest Continent." In the second case, Stevens goes even further and evaluates "the idea of pure poetry, essential imagination, as the highest objective of the poet" (*L* 369) on the same grounds with the idea of God. In "The Irrational Element of Poetry", Stevens attaches his later vision of pure

123Litz, A. Walton. *Introspective Voyager* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 176
124*L* 288, Litz, p. 177

poetry to the idea of the good in the sense of Plato' horse of noble origin as part of the figure of the soul in *Phaedrus* (*NA* 3). This is how he takes the old figures to breathe the present need in them:

> If we descend a little from this height and apply the looser and broader definition of pure poetry, it is possible to see that, while it can lie in the temperament of very few of us to write poetry in order to find God, it is probably the purpose of each of us to write poetry to find the good which, in the Platonic sense, is synonymous with God. (*OP* 228)

The change from Stevens' first idea of pure poetry to the later, fuller one, is an example of how throughout the years his poetry changed its content or, to be accurate, its content gained in contrasts and colors. The "pure poetry" on the dust jacket of *Ideas of Order* no longer represented so pure an evasion of the real problems of the real world into the purity of music and images. Instead, it pointed to its opposite of "pure poverty", which is the depth of shade Stevens reached in "Esthétique du mal" (1945), and it gained its brilliance from the contrast thus created. The search for pure poetry, in the end, became an urgent necessity in face of the absence or loss that Stevens expresses in canto IX of "Esthétique du mal", as in numerous other instances:

> Panic in face of the moon – round effendi
> [….....]
> The moon is no longer these nor anything
> And nothing is left but comic ugliness
> Or a lustred nothingness. Effendi, he
> That has lost the folly of the moon becomes
> The prince of the proverbs of *pure poverty.*
> To *lose sensibility*, to see what one sees,
> As if sight had not its own miraculous thrift,
> To hear only what one hears, one meaning alone,
> *As if the paradise of meaning ceased*
> To be paradise, it is to be destitute. (*CP* 320, italics mine)

And in contrast to that the idea of "high imagination" in canto V of "Extracts from Adresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas" (1941):

> And yet it is a singular romance,
> This warmth in the blood-world for the *pure idea*,
>
> This inability to find a sound,
> That clings to the mind like that right sound, that song
>
> Of the assassin that remains and sings
> In the *high imagination*, triumphantly. (*CP* 256, italics mine)

Presented deliberately in the midst of its various ambiguous tensions, the concept of the "pure idea"

overlaps or anticipates what Stevens later came to call the ultimate poem (*CP* 256), or the supreme fiction.[125] In "Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery" (*Ideas of Order*), he calls it Ananke, Necessity.[126] Whereas Mallarmé devoted a lifetime of meditation to develop his specific aesthetics of purity, Stevens and Valéry, having accepted it as given, examined it in its context within reality.

3.1 Pure Poetry – Brémond's lecture and Valéry's part in it

In October 24, 1925, Henri Brémond, a Catholic priest elected to the French Academy in 1923, presented a speech about pure poetry before its five classes. Neither the person nor the theme are only just what I called them in the previous sentence. First of all, Brémond was an unusual priest: according to his own words in an interview with Frédéric Lefèvre, he believed himself to be a rationalist, but as such he felt the urge to make manifest the limits of rationalism, which led him ultimately to defend the mystics and the romantics. Set against his Jesuit formation, his choice of subject-matter must have and did earn him scorn from his peers. He wrote a number of psychological monographs about people with souls of a religious cast whence he drew the conclusion that true mysticism and intelligence both aspire toward the same object, the former to God, the latter to truth – the two being parts of a basic unity.[127]

3.1.1 It is divine

Brémond was exceptional in his ability to conceive of the human imagination in a very, let's say, spiritually material, affectionate way. This would very likely be confirmed in his study of infancy from 1902 where he conceived of the child's imagination as of its own, not as of a subjected or an inferior one – a common view of the child at his time. Brémond's education also contributes to the particular import of his thought related to the subject of pure poetry. In 1882, aged seventeen, he went to the UK as a Jesuit novice, where, apart from studying scholastic philosophy and seventeenth-century rhetorics, he frequented the lectures of the literary critic A. C. Bradley from whom he received, as Šalda proposes, a great impetus for the subsequent direction of his thought.[128] At the instigation of Bradley, Brémond discovered English meditative Romantic poetry (Wordsworth). And when he did write about "pure poetry" his central question was: what is the nature of the poetic experience?

125Bates, Milton J. *Wallace Stevens - Mythology of Self.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 201
126Cook, Eleanor. *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 105
127Šalda, F. X. "Henri Brémond", *Čistá poesie*. (Praha: Orbis, 1935), p. 12
128Brémond, Henri. "L'enfant et la vie" (1902)

In his speech “Poésie Pure”, Brémond uses his psychological and historical method to show that the source of poetry and prayer, the burning center of all our activity, is one, and suggests which.[129] His speech opens boldly upon the chain of the poetic tradition represented by Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry. Obviously, Valéry was the only one of the poets listed who was alive and publishing, and, moreover, soon to be elected to that same Academy. He therefore became the embodiment of Brémond's radical statement in the eyes of his contemporaries much to his own resentment. Their discord over the thing might well be illustrated by an exchange two years after Brémond gave the above mentioned speech, the outcome of which was a year or more of fights over what poetry was or should be, when Brémond chided Valéry, “Vous êtez de plus en plus intellectualliste. - On va vers la Bêtise ou vers l'intellecte,” Valéry answered, according to his notes.[130]

3.1.2 It comes before reason

Nevertheless, Brémond was sure of his argument and defended it against all kinds of invectives including Valéry's own. One year after his lecture he published a volume entitled “Poésie pure” where the dispute which he raised by defending a religious interpretation of poetry in 1925 was accompanied and documented by the various reactions it provoked and by his responses to those. Among the adverse responses were the refusals of the bourgeoisie, some artists, as well as the dismissive reaction of some scientists and public personae who considered themselves rationalists (eg. Paul Souday, *Le Temps*); but there were also some less predictable affirmative reactions from scientists and philosophers. Brémond himself developed his subject later in “La Prière et la Poésie”, with the intention to compare the mystical experience to the poetic, and returned to it again in *Racine et Valéry*. In retrospect, Brémond seems to have touched upon a taboo that has not been cleared away by pure intellect since. Stevens has a point in “Imagination as Value” where he says:

> The truth seems to be that we live in concepts of the imagination before the reason has established them. If this is true, then reason is simply the establisher of imagination. [...] In the statement that we live in concepts of the imagination [...] the word “concepts” means concepts of normality. [...] But when we speak of perceiving the normal we have in mind the instinctive integrations which are the reason for living. Of what value is anything to the solitary and those that live in misery and terror, except the imagination? (*NA* 154-5)

Stevens' intuition in this passage leads him to portray imagination in terms very similar in which the

129Šalda, F. X. “Henri Bremond”, *Čistá poesie*. (Praha: Orbis, 1935), p. 17
130Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I., Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 51; hereafter quoted as *Oeuvres I*

prophets portray the divine. Here, imagination is really the content and the form: the guiding principle for the reason's organizing power and the substance organized. Similarly, writing about the theory of literary criticism in *After the New Criticism*, Frank Lentricchia points out that postmodern criticism after deconstruction still returns, in the wording of Derrida, to the idea that it has always been thought that a center "which is by definition unique, constituted the very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality."[131] Brémond believed that center to be God, Frye isolated it as the human desire to substitute for it's consciousness of lack, Derrida made it a desire that could never be satisfied, itself trapped in the present between a nostalgia for the past and a future-oriented yearning.[132] Stevens and Valéry kept attacking fixed ideas throughout their life; not in order to destroy but to establish ideas that would hold firm.

3.1.3 It *is* not. It is a desire. It *is*

In the process of writing, one of the necessary conditions is concentration. In "Poetry and Abstract Thought" Valéry describes the process by which a poetical state of being may eventually result in the "machine" of a poem capable of reproducing the poetical state in others and likens the desired effect to the effect produced by music. The comparison of the mysterious effect of poetry to that of music, a preferred Symbolist metaphor for poetry, was something Brémond opposed. He, too, observed a similar sort of unexplainable immediacy of effect in music as in poetry but remarked that poetry could not be compared to music as sound because as such it would come out infinitely more vulgar and monotonous. The poetical state, according to him, is comparable to what is in mysticism called the "magic of concentration". It brings us to a peaceful state of mind in which we become less ourselves and simultaneously partake in something more powerful and better than ourselves (cf. "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon"). In quite a distinct critical voice, Brémond, who was himself accused of being completely bereft of reason because of this, pierced the analogy between poetry and music, taking apart the hyperbole edified by Mallarmé and used by Walter Pater in his romantic literary theory ("all arts aim toward the goal of becoming music")[133] as well as by Stevens ("vital music" in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"), and, waving the red cloth in front of the bull's eyes, he concluded without mercy that the purity toward which all the arts aimed was prayer.

131Lentricchia, Frank. *After New Criticism*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 14
132Ibid., p. 15
133Brémond, Henri. *Čistá poesie*. (Praha: Orbis, 1935), p. 38

This, of course, was the reason why he was attacked by the majority of contemporary respondents, but such was his personal belief just as the belief of Stevens or Valéry was invested in their own fictions. The fact that he had courage to say an unpopular idea in public helped other good ideas develop and form. Nor was his presentation of the notion of pure poetry as tedious as it comes out in my summary of it, on the contrary, his arguments were delicate, witty, and supported by examples of poems that he considered close to his theme. But this cannot be shown here. There is, however, a common element in the conception of pure poetry of these three thinkers – its elemental secrecy, its spiritual character, and the concession to rationality in admitting that no one could read pure poetry for too long (Brémond associated this idea with Dante at his most intense; Valéry compared it to a flame through which one may pass the hand but cannot linger without being consumed). Brémond linked the poetic in poetry to nonsense, saying that what is beautiful in some poetry is independent of the meaning of its verbal vectors. He said that all rhetorics is impure that represents, not so much the art of speaking much without saying much, as speaking and wanting to say (mean, express) something. He says that the desire to transpose poetry to the laws of rational knowledge, judgment, is an effort against nature, an attempt to square the circle ("quadrature du cercle").[134] The intransitive quality of poetry is the kernel that thwarts all attempts at its definition – and to prove that poetry, let alone "pure poetry", cannot be defined was one of the aims of Brémond's lecture. Brémond also refuted the idea that Mallarmé and Valéry should be considered the "dangerous revolutionaries" they were supposed to be at their time in literature if, as he insisted, the major ideas they held and defended (absolute language, pure poetry, critical intellect) allied them to the ancient tradition of late Italian humanism.[135]

In the argument with Paul Souday, admirer of Valéry's *Une soirée avec Monsieur Teste* and editor of *Le Temps*, who accused Brémond of having forsaken reason, Brémond defended himself by saying that he did not curse the ear in saying that we do not hear with our eyes. There can be meaning in poetry but it's not the meaning that constitutes the beauty of it. He claimed that neither Poe nor Valéry could seriously be considered intellectual poets. To prove this to the lover of reason who seeks truth and thinks that truth is the highest aim of poetry, he quoted Poe's *The Poetic Principle:* "It is foolish to want to reconcile the oils and waters of Poetry and Truth. He must be blind indeed who does not perceive the radical chasmal differences between the truthful and the poetic modes of inculcation."[136] Valéry's side of this dispute was silence imposed by modesty. Then of course his point

134Ibid. 34

135Ibid., p. 27. Brémond recommends these studies: J. G. Robertson, *Studies in the genesis of Romantic theory in the eighteenth century* Cambridge, 1923) – G. Toffanin, *La fine del umanesimo* (Turin, 1920)

136Ibid., p. 45

of view was the point of view of one who makes and is not just passively "inspired". Only on the occasion of the death of Henri Brémond, Valéry held a *discours* in his honor (1934) in which he briefly returned to the question of pure poetry and offered his succinct opinion in what resembles the clearest mathematical language:

> "il ne s'agissait dans ma pensée que de désigner une tendance vers la limite d'un art, limite impossible à rejoindre par les moyens du langage mais dont l'idée et le désir sont essentiels à toute entreprise de poésie."[137]

Brémond called such a thing a dead thing, because it was a thing that according to him never had been living; and declared that he could not believe Valéry would be able to resurrect the dead. Brémond stripped bare the myth of a poetry of the intellect, although such a thing had perhaps never been in fact Valéry's intention. He called Valéry "poet without a will", a tragic hero who defied his own poetic talent because he understood once and for all that language could never seize the delicate structure of the soul. The Valéry of Brémond is the Léonard of Valéry, whose published poetry and prose at the time could be likened to the debris of his larger designs as in the following quote from *L'Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci*: "c'est à l'univers qu'il songe toujours, et à la rigeur. (…) Il abandonne les débris d'on ne sait quels grands jeux."[138]

3.2 The arcane exercise of a poem[139]

The idea of a poetry of the intellect, even if the technician was a supreme artist, promises to offer a dry vista of poetry-making – after all, poetry is usually associated with feelings. This is very likely the picture of Valéry one gets when he is presented as a poet of the intellect. But Brémond was probably justified, in spite of Valéry's refusal, in saying that the latter was an anti-intellectual poet, in the end. Jean Wahl shared this opinion when he wrote in *Poésie, Pensée, Perception* (1948) that

137*Oeuvres I*, p. 766

138Ibid., 1155

139In "Au Sujet d'Adonis", *Oeuvres I*, p. 482: Valéry presents an apology for strict classical form presenting the example of La Fontaine's "exercise" *Adonis*, a poem of a hundred lines with alternated rhymes (feminine/masculine). In course of the argument, inadvertently or deliberately, he puts in contrast the words "arcane" and "exercise", both of the same IE base, *areq-*, "to protect", where arcane is an adjective for "hidden, secret" while exercise means "to drive out the secret".* In this light, classical form is a way to say what is ineffable: "Le bonheur de nos amants est incomparable. On n'essaie pas de nous le dépeindre: il faut éviter la fadeur, il faut se garder de la crudité. Que va donc faire le poète, si ce n'est se fier à la poésie toute seule, et user d'une musique délicieusement combinée, pour effleurer tout ce que nous savons, et qui n'a jamais besoin que de nous être rappelé?" (485) *(Agnes, Michael, ed. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, Fourth Edition [Foster City: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2001])

Valéry's *oeuvre* represented a radical critique of all systematic thought but that even his own generalized skepticism endangered the value he accorded to artistic creation, which, in Valéry, was superior to the arbitrary character of thought.[140] In order to justify this, it is of utmost importance to differentiate between the places where the intellect is allowed to be an agent in the process of writing. This becomes perfectly clear once the term of "pure poetry" dissociates from its past Symbolist context to its specific significance in the present (of Valéry). Valéry first used the phrase in a preface, "Avant-propos" (1920), to a collection of poems by Lucien Fabre, *Connaissance de la Déesse*. There he described as an incomparable adventure the insensible search he and his contemporaries led for a poetry free of the didactic or historic or any other function poetry fulfilled until then, for the first time in history; despite the fact that this was already an ideal in ruins because it was not continued by the new generation. The research itself, however, had an important result in that the Symbolists and their posterity made critical thought a legitimate part of the creative process. From this followed their renowned difficulty, which consist in that they desired to have only the effects presented in the finished work of art:

> Il semble que la pensée abstraite, jadis admise dans le Vers même, étant devenue presque impossible à combiner avec les émotions immédiates que l'on souhaitait de provoquer à chaque instant ; exilée d'une poésie qui se voulait réduire à son essence propre ; effarouchée par les effets multipliés de surprise et de musique que le goût moderne exigeait, se soit transportée *dans la phase de préparation et dans la théorie du poème*.[141] (italics mine)

The abstract thinking was moved to the preparatory phase of writing; the poem itself became a site of the play of effects – the equivalent of such an ideal discrimination can be found in Stevens' "Relations between Poetry and Painting" where he speaks about Shakespeare:

> He was not dependent on the fortuities of inspiration. It is not the least part of his glory that one can say of him, the greater the thinker the greater the poet. It would come nearer the mark to say the greater the mind the greater the poet, because the evil of thinking as poetry is not the same thing as the good of thinking in poetry. (*NA* 165)

Here, thinking as poetry means thought about external reference presented in the form of poetry while thinking in poetry is the necessary work of the mind spinning a tight web of connections within the universe of the poems themselves. The research Valéry spoke about was in fact an obsession, however. What betrayed him was that in the act of searching for the right name for "pure poetry" he created a litany of superlatives:

> N'était-ce pas la fleur suprême, et merveilleusement retardée, de toute la profondeur de la culture? [...] On peut penser d'abord que nous étions les simples victimes d'une illusion spirituelle. [...] Il faut supposer, au contraire, que notre voie

140Wahl, Jean. *Poésie, Pensée, Perception,* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1948)
141*Oeuvres I*, p. 1273

était bien l'unique; que nous touchions par notre désir à l'essence même de notre art, et que nous avions véritablement déchiffré la signification de l'ensemble des labeurs de nos ancêtres, relevé ce qui paraît dans leurs oeuvres de plus délicieux, composé notre chemin de ces vestiges, suivi à l'infini cette piste précieuse, favorisée de palmes et de puits d'eau douce; à l'horizon, toujours, la *poésie pure*... Là le péril; là, précisément, notre perte; et là même, le but.[142] (italics mine)

An obsession of which the substance was to sustain the human intellect, the bite of the serpent "délicieux", in face of a Goddess Valéry was well acquainted with. He knew the dangers thereof. And therefore he exerted all his might to oppose her with the obstacles of form even up to the point of silence.

3.2.1 Irrational vs. rational element of poetry

Stevens might have had in mind Valéry's idea of the Goddess when he spoke about the irrational in "The Irrational Element in Poetry". His version of the irrational is somewhat more rationalized than Valéry's (Stevens was much older when he wrote his essay), but he also searches for a "freedom" that is irrational, calls it a desire and says that the particular freedom craved for by the poet is the possibility of a new poetry, a freedom not yet experienced. He calls this the poet's ultimate obsession and part of the dynamics of poetry (*OP* 231). It springs out of the irrational desire to have what is not, replaces that void by itself, the fictive thing as in "Credences of Summer":

II
Postpone the anatomy of summer, as
The physical pine, the metaphysical pine.
Let's see the very thing and nothing else.
Let's see it with the hottest fire of sight.
Burn everything not part of it to ash. (*CP* 373)

Here the poem itself is the postponement it calls for, it is what makes the summer, the fullness of experience, being, last and project itself into the metaphysical state. As if it recalled Mallarmé's "Gloire du long désir" quoted in *Eupalinos* and in its American preface. But the desire is self-consuming, burns itself together with "everything not part of it" because *it* is nothing but the energy or will to fiction, the will to suspend a feeling in time when the thing of full existence in space and time is already gone.

In "Credences of Summer" (1947) Stevens creates a sense of fullness. I even intended to say that he creates fullness itself. In a letter to Bernard Herringman in 1949 he makes the "Credences of

142*Oeuvres I*, p. 1275

Summer" stand in contrast to the question of influence by Mallarmé, and his aesthetics of purity, saying, as he did before of Valéry, that he would have absorbed from him unconsciously in the role of the "youthful general reader", and added that Mallarmé never meant so much to him as Hi Simons made it appear. I will now return to Stevens' slight difference with Brémond over "pure poetry" with Stevens' idea of fullness in mind and its contrast to his idea of Mallarmé in order to sketch a more accurate image of his concept of "pure poetry".

I deduce from the above and other hints that the opposition at stake here is the opposition between pure poetry and reality; between *purity* as a sort of intangible ideal in which the "paradise of meaning" (cf. "Esthétique du mal") is unnecessary (cf. "nakedness" in *The Soul and the Dance*, above ch. 2) and *fullness* as the ripeness of reality including its component of meaning. Stevens' idea of "pure poetry" with its dimension of meaning is simply something more complex than Brémond's "pure poetry" even though they might not be so remote a pair as Stevens makes it seem. And so in "The Irrational Element of Poetry," he rejects the "irrational passion" of Brémond for a supreme poetry, although he himself gets very close to that same idea in his *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,* at least in part; and he creates the need for the "delicatest ear of the mind" (*CP* 240), an exact sound in opposition to a vague mysticism. In this aspect too, he is preceded by Valéry who dreamed of being able to do without "tous les mensonges intellectuels, ne se jamais satisfaire de mettre un mot à la place d'un pouvoir réel" and exclaimed "ma nature a horreur du vague."[143] Stevens thinks that Brémond's experience is impossible for most men and ironically claims that "we" must be content with less. "When we find in poetry that which gives us a momentary existence on an exquisite plane, is it necessary to ask the meaning of the poem? If the poem had a meaning and if its explanation destroyed the illusion, should we have gained or lost?" (*OP* 228) It seems, however, that Stevens deliberately dodges understanding the Abbé in order to set the stage for a development of his own, as Milton J. Bates suggests in *Mythology of the Self*.[144]

3.2.2 Wider definition of pure poetry

Eleanor Cook also says about the Stevens of *Ideas of Order* that "by 'pure poetry' he meant

143Oeuvres I, p. 43

144Bates, Milton J. *Wallace Stevens - Mythology of Self.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 201

something wider than the strict definition of Henri Brémond. It is perhaps of interest that Brémond never said that a poem should be without meaning or that the meaning should not be looked for. Equally, he never said that pure poetry was the result of pure inspiration exclusively. He said, on the contrary, that inspiration and production went hand in hand. He also proposed, what Valéry and Stevens would think too (eg. Stevens about "La Vie antérieure" in "Two or Three Ideas", Valéry about *Hérodiade* in "Lettre sur Mallarmé"), that there was an exquisite poetry or music to some lines and that it was wholly independent of the meaning of those lines. Meaning may or may not be present in a beautiful line according to Brémond. Stevens was apparently a poet of violent purpose, however, because he intended that meaning there should be, along with reciprocity between the poet and the world. His concept of "pure poetry" is much more complex than Brémond's because secular. Apparently, things which can go unexplained on the mystical plane, must be staged and shown on the secular plane: "Theoretically, the poetry of thought should be the supreme poetry. Hegel called poetry the art of arts, specifically because in poetry the material of which the poem is made, that is to say, the language of the poem, is *wholly subordinated to the idea*. A poem in which the poet has chosen for his subject a philosophic theme should result in the poem of poems. That the wing of poetry should also be the rushing wing of meaning seems to be an extreme aesthetic good; and so in time [...] it may come to be." (*OP* 270, italics mine) Stevens' recurrent idea of meaning as pleasure, the high order of poetry applied to it, seems to be at once a return to the didactic and historic functions of poetry and at once not so. In Stevens, there is no didactics ("begin, ephebe" is not a case of it), instead there is an imaginative play with meaning in as much as meaning can be expressed by language.

3.2.3 Ideas in poetry

In conclusion, I would like to focus once more on the poetic theory of Paul Valéry and in particular on the subject of the poetic aspect of ideas in poetry, which is after all the realm of Valéry, and which allows the poet to subordinate ideas, and therefore philosophy, to poetry. In a sort of final statement on the subject of pure poetry Valéry explains that pure poetry is something that cannot exist and gives a list of its impossible components to make the thing clear:

> Si ce problème paradoxal pouvait se résoudre entièrement, c'est à dire si le poète pourrait arriver à construire des oeuvres où rien de ce qui est de la prose n'apparaîtrait plus, des poèmes où la continuité musicale ne serait jamais interrompue, où les relations des singifications seraient elles-mêmes perpétuellement pareilles à des rapports harmoniques, où la transmutation des pensées les unes dans les autres paraîtrait plus importante que toute pensée, où le

jeu des figures contiendrait la réalité du sujet, - alors l'on pourrait parler de poésie pure comme d'une chose existante.[145]

Stevens states his intention toward meaning in a straightforward way as shown above, even if it is expressed as a thing of the future; Valéry also speaks of ideas, although they are often directed at the inner experience as *in extremis* the last time he met Mallarmé before the Autumn of his death:

> "Je perdais le sentiment de la différence de l'être et du non-être. La musique parfois nous impose cette impression, qui est au delà de toutes les autres. La poésie, pensais-je, n'est-elle point aussi le jeu sûpreme de la transmutation des idées?"

The choice of subject-matter is irrational, as Stevens says in the "Irrational Element of Poetry", it is perhaps because of this that both, Valéry and Stevens, consciously subordinate ideas in poetry to the highest idea of composition, one that Valéry calls "the most poetic of all ideas"[146] and Stevens "the poetic quality" that is more precious to him than philosophy. In doing so, their poetry becomes the subject of the poem as in "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (XXII, *CP* 176). Poetry is the spirit, poem is the body (*L* 363). And, finally, poetry is the content ("*fond"*) while the poem is the form ("*forme*"), which is still not a final statement because poetry (as the essential imagination) is also the form as Stevens expresses this paradox bent over his blue guitar:

And the color, the overcast blue
Of the air, in which the blue guitar

Is a form, described but difficult,
And I am merely hunched

Above the arrowy, still strings,
The maker of a thing yet to be made; (*CP* 169)

If the content is irrational, and the more it is so, the form must countervail the balance by being deliberate, it must be the site of purity. I think that this idea translates into the meanings of Stevens, since, after all, even in Valéry it has a meaningful content:

> Mais l'art le plus haut ne peut certainement pas consister à émouvoir par d'émouvants objets. [...] Cela est à peine créer. [...] Mais émouvoir par des formes et des objets dont l'art seul fait des forces émouvantes, repousser la simulation, ne se fonder ni sur la crédulité ni sur la niaiserie, ne pas spéculer sur les réactions les plus probables, c'est le dessein le plus ferme et le plus profond que l'artiste puisse concevoir. Il ne sollicite que les larmes et la joie les plus difficiles, celles qui se cherchent une cause et qui ne la trouvent point dans l'expérience de la vie... [...] une composition de Sébastien Bach, par exemple, qui n'emprunte rien au sentiment, mais qui construit un sentiment sans modèle, et dont toute la beauté consiste dans ses combinaisons, dans la'édification d'un ordre intuitif séparé, est une acquisition inestimable, une immense valeur tirée du néant...[147]

145Oeuvres I, "Poésie pure", p. 1456
146Oeuvres I, "Au sujet du *Cimetière Marin*", p. 1504
147Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 676

It is very likely that Stevens admired Valéry for his prose writing, at least he hinted as much when he mentioned him as belonging to a class of those who are modern in respect to what they say as opposed to those who are modern in respect to the form in which they express themselves. He illustrated his statement with an allusion to a catholic priest of the French seventeenth century: "Without the unequaled beauty of his prose who would continue to interest himself in Bossuet?" (*NA* 169)

4. COMPOSITION: AGENCE DE L'ESPRIT SUR LE MONDE

> *Tout clacissisme suppose un romantisme antérieur.* Tous les avantages que l'on attribue, toutes les objections que l'on fait à un art "classique" sont relatifs à cet axiome. *L'essence du classicisme est de venir après. L'ordre* suppose un certain désordre qu'il vient réduire. La *composition*, qui est artifice, succède à quelque chaos primitif d'intuitions et de développements naturels. La *pureté* est le résultat d'opérations infinies sur le langage, et le soin de la *forme* n'est autre chose que la réorganisation méditée des moyens d'expression. Le classique implique donc des actes volontaires et réfléchis qui modifient une production "naturelle", conformément à une conception *claire* et *rationnelle* de l'homme et de l'art.[148]

In this chapter, I would like to return to Valéry's Socratic dialogue *Eupalinos* to discuss the idea of composition, often called construction by Valéry who had been fascinated by the architecture of Viollet-le-Duc in his teenage years, and its counterparts in Stevens' work, mainly in the poems from *Auroras of Autumn, The Rock*, and in "The Sail of Ulysses", but also of the essays, letters, and other poems where necessary. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Valéry considered the idea of composition to be the most poetical of ideas. This very proposition is an instance of how, within the smallest sample of language, Valéry is capable of constituting the tension of his ultimate paradox. This tension stretches in the void between the notion of what is poetical, which is something non existent (belonging to Nothingness and thereby pointing to Something in Hegelian phenomenology of experience; "in naming it, or conceiving it at all we are establishing it as something, a part of Being"[149]) and can only be experienced, "Le plaisir, enfin, n'existe que dans l'instant, et rien, de plus individuel; de plus incertain, de plus incommunicable,"[150] in the words of Valéry, and the reference of the word idea which is usually considered as belonging to the field of reason, logic, and is the means of reaching absolute truth in the sense of Plato. Explaining the aim of his research in writing "La Jeune Parque", he says "Je ne pouvais [...] souffrir (dès 1892) que l'on opposât l'état de poésie à l'action complète et soutenue de l'intellect." He compares his ideal of poetic composition with the composition of the "musicien savant" who is capable of true composition which consists of the ability to distribute on the page, in itself "un champs reglé," "son calcul des temps et des formes, et pouvant véritablement *composer*, concevoir et mener l'ensemble avec détail de son entreprise, voler de l'un à l'autre, et observer leur dépendence réciproque."[151] Because this sort of perfection, where the artist takes into account all the combinations possible, is not possible in linguistic composition, Valéry mends it with an

148Valery, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 604
149Cohn, R. Greer. "Symbolism", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter, 1974), p. 183
150Valery, Paul. "Propos sur l'Esthétique," *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1301
151Valery, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1153

idea inherited from Poe's "The Poetic Principle": the aim of composition in poetry must be to build an effect of enchantment as the sort of perfection which can be achieved. Charms and enigmas are to be the constitutive elements of perfection in language.

4.1 Artificial: the poem imitates the human body

Valéry developed this idea previously in his search for a universal method which would permit access to all the possibilities of an "esprit" in the *Introduction to the Method of Leonard da Vinci*, a work that enabled him later to write immodestly that the only way to proceed in respect to *esprit* is to accept "le grand dessein de mener notre *moi* à l'extrème de son désir de se posséder."[152] In order to find perfection of expression, he says, one must renounce at the outset the desire to be published, that is become member of the society which defines what is literature. Only then, in perfect solitude, can the artist develop a rigorous method of his/her own, not in order to reach originality but, on the contrary, to retain "cet esprit symbolique, la plus vaste collection de formes."[153] What Valéry calls "esprit" in *The Introduction* is "imagination" in Stevens; both are qualified as active and connected with consciousness and the fabrication of concepts.[154] Both comprise an active self-organizing principle, and depend on a body for expression. The body is the means of the spirit's presence as in Bergson's "L'Esprit et le Corps."[155] To this unlimited reach of the spirit Valéry opposes art:

> L'art s'oppose à l'esprit. Notre esprit ne s'inquiète de quelque matière: il admet tout; il émet tout […] Ce n'est que par des reprises qu'il peut accumuler hors de soi, dans une substance constante, des éléments d'action, choisis pour […] tendre vers l'unité de quelque composition.[156]

In itself the spirit has no definite identity, feels no anxiety; only outside of itself, in matter, here in the matter of language or in the matter of earth in the case of the architect, through an interaction with a "constant substance", can it find expression. In the dialogue mentioned above, Socrates and Phaedrus meet at the bank of Ilissus only as "shades" of the former fictive philosophers who debated matters of beauty in boys and in speeches as in the original *Phaedrus* by Plato. But as shades they are constrained to make constant recourse to memories of other speeches, like Phaedrus' memory of the speech of Eupalinos, and to memories of their former lives, like the young Socrates walking along the seashore

152Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1466
153Ibid., 1174
154Ibid., 1203, NA 154: "It may be that the imagination is a miracle of logic and that its exquisite divinations are calculations beyond analysis, as the conclusion of the reason are calculations wholly within analysis."
155Bergson, Henri. "Duše a tělo" (Agentura Fischer, 1994)
156Ibid., 1490

and finding a shell, in an effort to say anything *substantial*.

4.1.1 The finite being - "The body is the great poem" (*OP* 194)

The spirit or imagination is something allied with the individual will of the artist in the two poets discussed. There is a sort of resemblance between Valéry's "résistance au facil" and Stevens' resistance to reality, as when Stevens says in the "Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" that "resistance to this pressure or its evasion in the case of individuals of extraordinary imagination cancels the pressure so far as those individuals are concerned."(*NA* 22-3) Valéry seems to resist a similar kind of exterior reality when he calls for the resistance against one's own "créations immédiates" with some sort of "contraintes" pertaining to method. The profound purpose of such constraints is to constitute a whole and organized man who is ready to act and whose action itself is thereby perfected, "*l'être fait pour agir, et que parfait, en retour, son action même.*"[157] In this state of affairs, Valéry shows the spirit to be a guarantee of the possibilities of the individual being, saying "Quand l'esprit est bien éveillé, il n'a besoin que du présent et de soi-même. Ce qui est le plus vrai d'un individu, et le plus Lui-Même, *c'est son possible* [...]"[158] while the artistic expression of such a momentarily perfect human being (*inhuman* in its perfection, in fact) should be the perfection of one chosen particular possibility, one single manifestation out of all the possibilities of a spirit:

> Comme une combinaison définie se précipite d'un mélange, ainsi quelque figure intéressante se divise du désordre, ou du flottant, ou du commun de notre barbotage intérieur. C'est un son pur qui sonne au milieu des bruits. C'est un fragment parfaitement exécuté d'un édifice inexistant.[159]

Stevens expresses the same opposition between the infinitude of the spirit or consciousness and the finite character of composition. Through the act of construction, Eupalinos, the perfect artist, and "men like him" make "manifest in common things their understanding of uncommon things."[160] Let me give an example of this tension in Stevens' "The Hand as a Being", with its allusion to the finality of the language of the Canticles:[161]

157Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1470
158Ibid., 1203
159Ibid., 1490
160Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956), p. xviii
161Cook, Eleanor. *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 166

In the first canto of the final canticle,
Too conscious of too many things at once,
Our man beheld the naked, nameless dame,

Seized her and wondered: why beneath the tree
She held her hand before him in the air,
For him to see, wove round her glittering hair.

Too conscious of too many things at once,
In the first canto of the final canticle,
Her hand composed him and composed the tree. (*CP* 271)

"The Hand as a Being" gives a particular example of being, the poem itself being a body like the woman looked at. The effect of repetition of the line containing "conscious of too many things at once" encloses its infinite thematic content in the finite form of the poem and suggests the unity of the two. This aspect of language is what Bonnie Costello writes about when she describes Stevens' technique in "Stevens and Painting":

> More in lexical texture and variegated syllables than in statement or semantics, the words build this double sense of man as both poor and regal, of language both referential and internally patterned. Reiterative and permutational in sound and sense, the passage composes a "fluent mundo" (*CP* 351) rather than a copy of the world or a statement about it.[162]

The theme of the poem above which reconstitutes the instant of unity between the consciousness and the man to whom it belongs is somehow skewed, a curious oddity that adds to its effect. If the setting is Eden with the tree of knowledge, why is it "she" who composes and not God? Obviously, "she" is the source of "his" knowledge of himself. But "she" can be many things and so can his knowledge be a knowledge of many things. If seen through the lens of Valéry's aesthetic theory, as Lisa Goldfarb suggests,[163] we should not read a poem for what it *says* as much as for what it *does*. We should ask: does it create a sense of unity between the soul and the body as we read, between man thinking and man living?

4.1.2 The greatest poverty is not to live in a physical world

At this point it is necessary to explain the link between Valéry's early work on the renaissance master of universal knowledge, *L'Introduction à la Méthode de Léonard de Vinci* (1895), and his much more composed *Eupalinos où l'Architecte* (1923). In the first, Valéry searched for the maximum

162Costello, Bonnie. "Stevens and Painting," *Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, Serio, John N., ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

163Goldfarb, Lisa. "Music and the Vocal Poetics of Stevens and Valéry", *Wallace Stevens across the Atlantic*, Bart Eeckhout and Edward Ragg, eds. (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p. 162

breadth, the universal in man, and found it in his spirit which in turn was to be looked for only in the self. It was precisely to preserve his self that Valéry created his own system for thinking against the contingency of being possessed by an "idol"; in order to defend himself from "une douleur insupportable de la chair et de l'esprit." Laurenti comments upon his "Système" saying:

> Il avait un approche absolument sans barrières interdisciplinaires, curiosité universelle – quel est le fonctionnement de la pensée, quels lois, conditions, ce fonctionnement obéit. Le sigle "CEM" (Corps, Esprit, Monde) ce sont les trois dimensions qui ne peuvent jamais être considérées séparément: elles sont toujours en équilibre mobile.[164]

The relationship between the three is as follows: "L'Esprit = l'action du Corps sur le Monde."[165] Valéry shifted his focus from the universal to the means of action and to how the spirit (or imagination in Stevens) gains from its action upon the world. The idea shared is that, if we do not live in a physical world but in the mind as Stevens claims in the *Adagia*, (*OP* 190) we are bereft of our only possibility to make our spirit manifest, the despair of which Stevens shows in *Esthétique du Mal*:

> The greatest poverty is not to live
> In a physical world, to feel that one's desire
> Is too difficult to tell from despair. Perhaps,
> After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,
> Itself non-physical, may by chance, observe
> The green corn gleaming and experience
> The minor of what we feel. (*CP* 327)

Not to live in a physical world means not to have access to the particular sensations responsible for images. These are necessary for the imagination to edify itself upon:

> The poet finds that as between these two sources: the imagination and reality, the imagination is false, whatever else may be said of it, and reality is true; and being concerned that poetry should be a thing of vital a virile importance, he commits himself to reality, which then becomes his inescapable difficulty and inamorata. In any event, he has lost nothing; for the imagination, while it might have led him to purities beyond definition, never yet progressed except by particulars. (*OP* 256)

In *Eupalinos*, Valéry tested the artistic object, the work of the architect in this case, as the means of expressing the ideal unity of thought and act "par le détour du corps," back upon the world. In "Note et Digression" he explains this unity achieved by the architect:

> "Il doit suffire à l'être suprêmement coordonné de se prescrire certaines modifications cachées et très simples au regard de la volonté, et immédiatement il passe de l'ordre des transformations purement formelles et des actes symboliques au régime de la connaissance imparfaite et des réalités spontanées […] c'est seulement jouir de l'intégrité de l'homme."[166]

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164 Laurenti, Huguette. *La Revue des Lettres Modernes*, Paul Valéry 3: approche du « Système », ed. Huguette Laurenti. (Paris: Lettres Modernes, Minard, 1979)

165 Valéry, Paul. *Ego Scriptor et Petits poèmes abstraites*, Judith Robinson, ed. (Editions Gallimard, 1992), p. ?IFP

166 Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1211

The supremely organized being can liberate itself to experience the joy of integrity; Stevens, too, speaks of integrity at the end of "Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" when he extemporizes that it might be something within the power of the imagination by means of the sound of words; that it has to do with self-preservation. Later on, in "The Relations between Poetry and Painting" he speaks about it as of a "synthesis of exceptional concentration" which has a degree of lucidity in which we know exactly what we want to do and do it instantly and perfectly. It seems to be a "constructive faculty that derives its energy more from the imagination than from the sensibility." (*NA* 164)

In Eupalinos, Valéry invents such an integrated human being, the architect, whose edifice is a body twice removed – first as a building, and then as a building bearing the particular bodily proportions of a beloved woman. Politically speaking, Eupalinos is a tyrant who would be exiled from the Greek polis – that his orders were obeyed as by one body would be seen as a potential danger for the Greek democracy. Stevens, in the close of his introduction, turns to the text of *Eupalinos* and shows that it, too, acts as a sort of body. Language is portrayed as "a mobile edifice, incessantly renewed and reconstructed within itself, and entirely dedicated to the transformations of a soul."[167] In the course of the dialogue, the construction of spatial monuments is transformed almost imperceptibly into the construction of the temporal structure of language and back again. The language of the dialogue becomes a form emptying itself out and filling itself, as though in an imitation of the architect's creation which alternates between being a building and being a body, depending on the point of view. The language of the dialogue is, like the constructions of Eupalinos, the form (body) *and* the content (spirit). Moreover, it is an energy which moves forward into the future.

4.2 The art of making

The master idea behind the idea of composition is that there are separate or opposite parts not easily reconciled to a possible whole. What are those parts and what is the motive to bring them in harmony? On the level of language they are the components of the artificial distinction between form and content. Artificial, because according to Valéry, the artist as opposed to the philosopher, moves freely between the two:

167Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956), p. xxi

> Le philosophe ne conçoit pas aisément que l'artiste passe presque indifféremment de la forme au contenu et du contenu à la forme; qu'une forme lui vienne *avant* le sens qu'il lui donnera, ni que l'idée d'une forme soit égale pour lui de l'idée qui demande une forme.[168]

Let me add what Valéry thinks about the nature of the philosopher's approach to aesthetics, the object of which, according to him, might be the very principle and secret guide of intelligence,[169] in order to make his point clear:

> En vérité l'existence des *autres* est toujours inquiétante pour le splendide egotisme d'un penseur. […] Mais enfin l'*autre* existe, et l'énigme nous presse. […] Il veut *comprendre* ; il veut les comprendre dans toute la force du mot. Il va donc méditer de se construire une science des valeurs d'action et une science des valeurs de l'expression ou de la création des émotions, - une ÉTHIQUE et une ESTHÉTIQUE. - comme si le Palais de sa pensée lui dût paraître imparfait sans ces deux ailes symmétriques dans lesquelles son Moi tout-puissant et abstraît pût tenir la passion, l'action, l'émotion et l'invention captives.[170]

Here we have Valéry showing how philosophy became inadequate in his day. Insofar as art represents execution, the bringing forth of what belongs to the order of "egotisme" to interact with the world in "an act of the mind",[171] it must resist comprehension. Stevens says about as much in "Man Carrying Thing": "Poetry must resist the intelligence/ Almost successfully." (*CP* 350)

In his preface to *Eupalinos* Stevens quotes Valéry on his intended goal in this dialogue which was "to show that pure thought and the search for truth in itself can only ever aspire to the discovery or the construction of some form."[172] This is a critical statement on the address of philosophy: form is not enough for the artist, form in itself belongs among the non-living. To construct a form is to subordinate everything arbitrary to a kind of order, Valéry says; it excludes "la grande énigme que lui propose l'arbitraire d'autrui."[173] This is a subtle reminder that there is no "truth" which would not be limited by the form in which it is conveyed. Stevens and Valéry both perceive the tension between the task of the philosopher and the task of the artist, they make use of philosophy and converse with it, but their final preference is for the way of the artist and the pleasure/responsibility of an incessant renewal of our sense of life. Stevens has many remarks to that effect, one of which is that "The poet represents the mind in the act of defending us against itself," (*OP* 199) as against the totality of a tight logical system of thought, for example.

168Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1244
169Ibid., p. 1235
170Ibid., p. 1238
171A term common enough in Stevens' poetry and in Valéry's theory, e. g. "Of Modern Poetry"
172Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956)
173Ibid., "Léonard et les philosophes" (1929), p. 1236

4.2.1 The will to make out of nothingness

Valéry and Stevens seem to be peers in their conception of the ideal artist who *is*, not by "virtue of the image," but by virtue of the *will* to say what has not yet been said and what is nearly impossible to say. In *Mélange*, Valéry sums up his ideal which developed in his work about Leonardo da Vinci, as "Édification de l'homme. Ne peut se concevoir que par deux voies: primo – par le choix des *Idéaux*; secundo – par *l'exercice*, dévelopement, *travail*."[174] In "Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" Stevens defends the will of the artist in much the same way that Valéry does in the *Introduction to the Method*; he liberates individual creative power by seeing in it a trait of the universal and defends its activity by means of its potential: "what makes the poet the potent figure that he is, or was, or ought to be, is that he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it." (*NA* 31) These fictions are vital, Valéry acquiesces:

> "Vous savez que ce nom: *Poésie*, a deux sens. […] Poésie porte un sens plus général, plus répandu, plus difficile à définir, parce qu'il est plus vague; il désigne un certain état, état qui est à la fois réceptif et productif […] Il est productif de la fiction et remarquez que la fiction c'est notre vie. Nous vivons continuellement en productions de fictions... Vous pensez à present au moment désirable où j'aurai fini de parler... C'est une fiction!"[175]

But *poésie, poiésis (ποίησις),* also has a third sense and that is the one whose meaning is discussed by Socrates and Diotima in the *Symposium*: in the broadest sense of the word it means creation or production, the origin of all change from the state of non-being to the state of being.[176]

4.2.2 Construction is knowledge of oneself

In the closing part of his preface, Stevens quotes the critic Alain, famous for his commentary in the margins of Valéry's *La Jeune Parque* and *Charmes*:

> And if it is true, as I believe, that Thought, daughter of Poetry, resembles her mother, we shall see everywhere a clarity of details, a clarity won by conquest, in the place of our vague aspirations; and the young will make us see another manner of believing – which will be a refusal to believe.[177]

This "refusal to believe" is developed by Valéry in the dialogue where he blasphemously reverses the

174Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 331
175Valéry, Paul. "Propos sur la poésie," *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1387
176Platón. "Symposion," *Platónovy spisy*, sv. II (Praha: OYKOYMENH, 2003), p. 197, 205c
177Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956), p. xx

Platonic order of things so that he can carry out the experiment of what it would be like if Socrates had originally chosen to be a poet (here artist/architect) instead of a philosopher. It is perhaps needless to say that the argument in the original dialogue by Plato is in fact based on the belief in one truth, the necessity of which Socrates confirmed by his own death. This truth is sought under the auspices of the god, or rather the daemon, of lack/desire, Eros, to whom Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus* constantly appeals. In this new order, man by his acts, such as constructing a perfect temple or a ship whose body is the sum of the forces of the sea, puts himself in the place of God. Stevens quotes Anti-Socrates' anti-prayer in *Eupalinos*:

> The Demiurge was pursuing his own designs, which do not concern his creatures. The converse of this must come to pass. […] But I come after him. I am he who conceives what you desire a trifle more exactly than you do yourselves.... I shall make mistakes sometimes, and we shall have some ruins; but one can always very profitably look upon a work that has failed as upon a step which brings us nearer to the most beautiful.[178]

The self-confident tone in this speech is double-edged. Ten years after World War II when it was published in the United States it sounds even more ironic than after World War I when it was written.

Resembling a palimpsest where the upper layer, *Eupalinos*, is translucent to the one beneath it, *Phaedrus*, by its many details of factual and structural connotations with the latter, *Eupalinos* reiterates Valéry's earlier ideas on composition. In having Eupalinos say "By constructing … I truly believe I have constructed myself... To construct oneself, to know oneself – are these two distinct acts?" and a little further on "Here I am, says the Constructor, I am the act," Valéry returns to his earlier work we have seen above. He makes a downright parody of his earlier self in having Socrates say, "And exercising an ever stricter control over my mind, at the highest point I should have realized the operation of transforming a quarry and a forest into an edifice, into a splendid equilibrium."[179]

Fortunately for Valéry, the dialogue ends in the phantoms' oblivion made equivocal with silence. The afterworld is, after all, a place where nothing makes any difference. Death is the end of difference in *Eupalinos* and therefore "Nothing beautiful is separable from life and life is that which dies."[180]

4.2.3 Ambiguous relation of the soul and the body

What remains however, are the points in which Valéry and Stevens resemble each other: the common things used to make manifest the understanding of things uncommon, the creed that knowing

178Ibid., 148
179Ibid., 149
180Ibid., xii

and constructing is one act, and the adherence to "durée réelle" – "the fundamental self which is a qualitative multiplicity of conscious states flowing, interpenetrating, melting into one another, and forming an organic whole, a living unity or personality."[181] Stevens seems to be directly engaged in a dialogue with Valéry when he says in "The Sail of Ulysses", canto V, while retaining his proper system of symbols:

> A longer, deeper breath sustains
> The eloquence of right, since knowing
> And being are one: the right to know
> And the right to be are one. We come
> To knowledge when we come to life.
> [….....]
> Each man
> Is an approach to the vigilance
> In which the litter of truths becomes
> A whole, the day on which the last star
> Has been counted, the genealogy
> Of gods and men destroyed, the right
> To know established as the right to be.
> The ancient symbols will be nothing then.
> [….....]
> To the chatter that is then the true legend,
> Like a glitter ascended to fire. (*OP* 128)

As if "the longer breath" at the beginning of the canto recalled Stevens' own comment on the text of Eupalinos in terms reminiscent of Mallarmé: "a sense of large and long considered form."[182] There is also a similar symbolical reversal as in *Eupalinos* in the last two lines where the "glitter ascended to the fire." Valéry's idea about the genesis of a poem, the idea that it can be reworked in view of an arbitrary formal exigency seems to be reflected in the contracted version of "The Sail of Ulysses" entitled differently as "Presence of an External Master of Knowledge":

> [….....]
>
> "A longer, deeper breath sustains
> This eloquence of right, since knowing
> And being are one - the right to know
> Is equal to the right to be.
> The great Omnium descends on me,

181Gunn, J. Alexander. *Bergson and his Philosophy* http://books.google.com/books?id=6P0b5iO74BYC&lpg=PA54&ots=XBjIJ72FUI&dq=duree%20reele&pg=PA5#v=onepage&q=duree%20reele&f=false, p. 54, entered Tuesday, December 28 2010

182Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956), p. xxi

Like an absolute out of this eloquence."

The sharp sail of Ulysses seemed,
In the breathings of that soliloquy,
Alive with an enigma's flittering,
And bodying and being there,
As he moved, straightly, on and on,
Through clumped stars dangling all the way. (*OP* 132)

In this poem the "sail" moves with the syllables, "sharp" being responsible for the movement because it has to do with meaning as in "Prologues to what is Possible," another poem that seems even closer to a discourse with Valéry about its "idée-maîtresse", the possible, flow of successive states of mind that it an effort has to be made not to think they are related:

[….....]

As he traveled alone, like a man lured on a syllable without any meaning,
A syllable of which he felt, with appointed sureness,
That it contained the meaning into which he wanted to enter
A meaning which as he entered it, would shatter the boat and leave the oarsmen quiet
As a point central arrival, an instant moment, much or little,
Removed from any shore, from any man or woman, and needing none.

II
The metaphor stirred his fear. The object with which he was compared
Was beyond his recognizing. By this he knew that likeness of him extended
Only a little way […] (*CP* 516)

The boat and the oarsmen is once more a reference to Plato and the question of relation between the soul and the body, and about the different approach to answering this question by the poet and by the philosopher in "The Collect of Philosophy." Out of two images, the composer's and the performer's, Stevens chooses, without telling, the performing image (the other one explains the relation of the soul and the body as of sight to the eye) (*OP* 269). The spirit, here the oarsmen, "the one-ness of their motion," animates the boat-body, but if this meaning, possibly death or eternity, was entered, all would become inanimate. But fear, a wonderfully human characteristic, gives the measure of what is human, makes the man compose himself. The need of beauty has a similar effect of composition on the perfect artist, Eupalinos:

> "I feel my need of beauty, proportionate to my unknown resources, engendering of itself alone forms that give it satisfaction. I desire with my whole being … The powers assemble. The powers of the soul, as you know, come strangely up out of night ... By force of illusion they advance to the very border of the real. I summon them, I adjure them by my silence... O Phaedrus, when I design a dwelling (whether it be for the gods, or for a man), and when I

lovingly seek its form, … I confess, how strange soever it may appear to you, *that it seems to me my body is playing its part in the game*."[183]

4.3 Conclusion

Stevens' poetic practice was different from Valéry's in the sense that many of his poems are a testing ground for ideas, as in the philosophy of William James[184] – what are my ideas and do they withstand being put to the test against the world, its history, its politics, its society? Underlying this fundamental doubt is the sharp knowledge of the moderns that the truths, be they religious beliefs or scientific experiments, are "free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world."[185] Valéry and Stevens both use this knowledge to their advantage. When Valéry met Einstein, he was happy to hear him affirm his own conviction that aesthetics as a study of our sensations corresponds in its premises to physics and, moreover, that the objects of its study, man-made pieces of art, are vital in making the most abstract notions possible.[186] This led him to perceive language and its creations, its structure, as the site of all theory, and its process of composition a most worthy challenge of the spirit:

> "Mais la véritable force s'impose par la structure et ne demande rien. Elle contraint les hommes sans les voir. En somme, je regarde bien plus amoureusement aux méthodes qu'au résultats, et la fin ne me justifie pas les moyens – *car, il n'y a pas de fin*."[187]

Stevens, however, is not unaware of the interrelated character of ideas and the medium in which they are put to the test. In this way in Stevens and in Valéry, poetry, as the supreme art of language, itself becomes a question and object of examination. The two poets meet in their predilection for abstract thinking and thinking devoted to the idea of poetry, as Joseph N. Riddel observes.[188] The first knowledge of poetry for Stevens is its fictionality and simultaneously the possibility that as fiction it is

183Valéry, Paul. *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV - 4] 1956), p. 87

184Bates, Milton J. *Wallace Stevens - Mythology of Self.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 206-7

185Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld. *The Evolution of Physics: Growth of Ideas from Early Concepts to Relativity and Quanta* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938), p. 33

186Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1312, PV reports that, in order to complete his ideal construction of symbols, Einstein was forced to use "quelques points de vue de l'architecture."

187Ibid., 1472

188Riddel, Joseph. *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens.* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1965), p. 197

real. That through the process of mimesis, it may partake in being[189] or that through the "instrumentality of language" it may perform. Like Valéry, Stevens has a check in his thinking on becoming too systematic:

> Of systematic thinking … Ercole,
> O skin and spine and hair of you, Ercole,
> Of what do you lie thinking in your cavern?
> To think it is to think the way to death … (*CP* 256)

which constantly brings him back to give poetical solutions which are but for a moment true, true for their effect of satisfying the imagination. In a hidden discourse with Valéry on the purity of the poem, Stevens measures its purity against "the detachment that it produces in the reader." (*L* 390) The example of *Eupalinos ou l'architecte* is an instance of ideal fusion of the fluidity of thought with the materiality of language where the intelligence of the maker is elegantly detached from the thing made. And this is what seems ultimately to be Stevens' affinity with Valéry – to "patch and patch", which, according to Eleanor Cook, is a revisionary term for "compose"[190] with the intention to enchant by as close an analogy as possible, to charm by the "acutest speech": "To speak humanly from the height or from the depth/ Of human things" (*CP* 300).

189Hobson, Marian. "Derrida and Representation: mimesis, presentation, and representation", p. 138; *Republic* 398a, *Sophist* 241b

190Cook, Eleanor. *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 236, "Man with the Blue Guitar", II; "Notes toward Supreme Fiction", Epilogue

5. CONCLUSION: AFFINITIES

5.1 From the End to the Beginning

5.1.1 Objective

At the beginning I set myself the goal to find out what affinities there were between Stevens and Mallarmé. My intention was to focus on the poetry itself and study its ways of signifying or, conversely, of defying signification. At the time I only had a first reading's understanding of Stevens' poetry, I knew that Mallarmé was an altogether puzzling poet whose poetry remained closed to me when I first read it, and I only had a superficial knowledge of Valéry's writing. On the other hand, I had a strong intuitive apprehension that the secret I had learned to appreciate in literature thanks to some writing by Derrida[191] was there, hidden in the seemingly unyielding texts.

Having scarcely begun by a first reading of Stevens' poetry and a trial translation of a few of his poems I knew there was a long way to go if I wanted to compare those poetries. Although I intended at first only to compare their poetical and theoretical texts with a vague notion that I had to follow some kind of theory of poetry which would represent a common ground for the comparison, I eventually found it necessary to reconstitute historical facts relevant to the chosen poets in order to steer safely by traps of cardinal misinterpretation in matters of philosophy, literary theory and aesthetics. With the intention to narrow down the theme I limited the subject to the things Stevens could be found to have in common with Valéry only, which, however, still meant the covert presence of Mallarmé since a significant part of Valéry's theory was formulated in his solitary conversations with the former long after he had died, as in e. g. “Je disais quelquefois à Stéphane Mallarmé”.[192]

5.1.2 Facts concerning the possible areas of intersection

Whereas it is certain that Stevens (1879-1955) never met Mallarmé (1846-1898), he could well have met Valéry (1879-1945) like Eliot did, for example. But having chosen the career of a lawyer in

191Derrida, “Plato's Pharmacy”, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981)
192Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 644

the insurance business, he practically gave up the possibility of travel to Europe to pursue his considerable literary or cultural interests there. He did not give them up altogether though, he only transposed them to the level of having Europe come to him. That Stevens actively sought information about Valéry's life, poetry and theory has revealed itself from all the major primary texts available as suggested by the critics Michel Benamou, Joseph N. Riddel, Timothy Morris, Lisa Goldfarb, and others: *The Letters of Wallace Stevens*, *The Necessary Angel*, *The Collected Poems*, and *Opus Posthumous*. In *The Letters*, Stevens denies having consciously borrowed from either of the previously mentioned French poets but he says simultaneously that he had many books by and about Valéry, and most importantly, that "where a man's attitude coincides with your own attitude […] you can get a great deal from him without effort." (*L* 391) Moreover, in the course of the forties, Stevens began to encounter European intellectuals, war-refugees, who were close to Valéry's grain of thought like the philosopher Jean Wahl who wrote about Valéry's thought in his *Poésie, Pensée, Perception* as of a major twentieth century critique of systematic thought or Jean Paulhan, chief editor of la *Nouvelle Revue Française*, who wrote a mildly satirical monograph about Valéry called *Littérature comme un faux*. Eliot, whom Stevens, a relentless reader of periodicals, read according to Marianne Moore, published an essay called "From Poe to Valéry" and an "Introduction to the method of Paul Valéry" where he criticized Valéry's extreme of aesthetic theory, his extreme consciousness and care for the language. "The introspective critical activity", he declared, is carried to its limit leaving the posterity to find a middle intensity between an "aesthetic which merely contradicted" and a hypothetical barbarous insistence on pure spontaneity, subject-matter, and inspiration without technique.[193] This is a simplified account of what I view to be Eliot's simplified account of Valéry. Nevertheless, from this tension between the "happens to like" of Eliot and Stevens a tendency toward Valéry's aesthetics on the part of Stevens emerges – when Stevens mentions Valéry in his essays it is with a wary admiration. Eliot's position was reserved while Stevens probably absorbed his ideas without any particular difference.

5.1.3 Symbolism and beyond

Symbolism is a term I found necessary to situate in literary history and in the history of thought in order to meet the philosophical and aesthetic ideas Stevens and Valéry might have shared. As a period of literary history it spanned between the years 1885 and 1914, according to Wellek in his essay

193Eliot, T. S. *To Criticize the Crittic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 41-2

"The Term and Concept of Symbolism".[194] The fundamental ideas against which the ideas of Valéry's and Stevens' generation formed were, on the one hand, those of Symbolism, and on the other, those of Realism. The former, as represented by Mallarmé, evolved from Kant's definition of the work of art as an isolated aesthetic object determined by the medium in which it is executed, and from Hegel's phenomenology of experience where it was possible to establish *being* only against *nothingness* – a world where there is no "thinker of the the first idea" as Stevens has it in his "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" (*CP* 386), a deeply skeptical vision of the world, which can however be overcome by a unity found beyond the oppositions in the universal. Hugo Fridrich makes another step in showing the conversation twentieth-century lyric engaged upon with Symbolism. He makes a point of the opposition that sprung from, on the one hand, the illogical sensuous lyric of Rimbaud, and on the other, the formally polished aspect of the lyric of Mallarmé, his chosen language and his heavy irony. These two correspond to Impressionism (the big Real) and abstract painting like that of Kleé (the big Abstract), respectively, in the domain of painting according to Kandinsky.[195]

These were concepts already in existence before the major works of Valéry and Stevens began to be published. Valéry escaped repetition by a radical turn to the self, "le Moi", subjecting it to a relentless examination while he conducted a private research about the mental processes, ways of perceiving, ways of discovery in poetry and science, which he called the perception of the analogy of forms. Stevens perhaps turned to Valéry as we can trace in the nature of the questions he asked himself. His essay "Effects of Analogy", for example, could be read not just as a rumination on analogy as an exclusively poetic device but also as an abstraction on the level of symbolic forms as conceived by Ernst Cassirer in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1929), and in "Essay on Man" (1944) which Stevens read. Such thinking leads to imagining the possibilities of invention in general, enabling a discourse between art and science. Valéry conceived of science as art. This is how far Valéry ventured in his lecture "Discours sur l'Esthétique" before the French Academy in 1937, where he says that the then contemporaneous science was in imaginative crisis because its "pouvoirs d'action", its means of action, had by far outreached its means of representation, and he suggested that a new field of study, Esthésique, be founded whose aim would be to search in both directions but also to find a balance between our possibilities of perception and our means of production. This is the type of abstraction to which Stevens purportedly could not follow Valéry and which criticism, i. e. Joseph N. Riddel in *The*

194René Wellek "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History", New Literary History, vol. 1, No. 2, A, Symposium on Periods (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Winter, 1970), p. 256 http://www.jstor.org/stable/468631, entered Saturday, October 30, 2010

195Fridrich, Hugo. *Struktura moderní lyriky* (Brno: Host, 2005)

Clairvoyant Eye,[196] called abstraction beyond reality as opposed to Stevens' abstraction within reality. It does not seem to me to be the case. I think that Valéry's type of abstraction, inasmuch as he portrayed it in his cogitations about Leonard da Vinci is still an abstraction within reality (what a fitting term in relation to da Vinci) aiming, however, at a profounder knowledge of reality with a heightened awareness of the role of the various mental factors which are engaged in the gaining of such a knowledge – the type of analogies of which the mind is capable, for example.

5.1.4 The process of making, language as the medium

Michel Benamou mapped Stevens' possible affinities with the Symbolist *topos* on the basis of a complex anthropological system of symbols expressive of certain fundamental psychological motions from a structuralist point of view. Based on Gilbert Durand's systematization of Bachelard's studies of the material imagination in *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (Paris, 1961), his study is methodologically very scrupulous, accurate and revealing of particular examples in the poets compared. Using the concept of anthropological man and a small set of symbolic values, all of which coincide with Stevens' idea of man as central, Benamou places these values in a limited number of schemes, or "anthropological itineraries", which enable man to cope with vital fears. On the basis of this anthropological theory of man a comparison of two poetries of different national origins can be envisioned.[197] It has only been remarked by Riddel that some major developments in the meaning of Stevens' images cannot be accounted for by their simple frequency of use at different stages. But it is important to say that, by making his study, Benamou offered an answer to Roy Harvey Pearce's question in his *Continuity of American Poetry* where he asks if that continuity which he called Adamic, the separate yet democratic identity of the American poet, was not identical with the continuity in Europe, the *symboliste* and the avant-garde.[198]

My approach to the subject has been from the point of view of the creative process, the part of writing that relates to will and intention. The making of a work of art is, after all, the first and foremost concern of Valéry; it is his characteristic subject-matter of watching himself watch himself. In his essays he explores the sources of poetry in the human soul, describes the conditions under which a

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196Riddel, Joseph N. *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), Chapter V

197 Benamou, Michel. *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. xxiii

198Pearce, Roy Harvey. *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 6-8

personal method can be developed, and calls forth all the ways of perception of which man is capable. At the same time he shows that there never was a genius in the history of mankind who did not have a predecessor, showing such a relationship on a well chosen detail of La Fontaine's *Adonis* that was skillfully appropriated and developed by Racine. He shows the measure in which language resists being appropriated, its origin being in the vernacular and the practical, and suggests that poetry be an environment where language is delivered of its primary function of utility in favor of the secondary that he likens to dance, the image of which he gives in his dialogue *L'Ame et la Danse*. In dance, the body metamorphoses in an ideal unity with the spirit and, most of all, it is an act. So is poetry in both Stevens and Valéry. In the measure in which poetry is a result of the intentional will, it is a conscious creation and must be illumined by the presence of an intelligent maker. There is, however, a border beyond which consciousness cannot go, "the end of the imagination" (*CP* 502), which is evoked in many different ways in these two poetries. In this context the act of writing poetry is a way to call upon thoughts that would otherwise never have come and yet are an integral part of us. The prose of Paul Valéry offers an embezzling view of the source from where a specific type of poetry might spring. He is not dogmatic only insistent; he is not the one who "shunned the beautiful from the realm of thought" nor the one who would say that poetry is only what the words composing it are (see Lentricchia in "Four Types of Nineteenth Century Lyric", pp. 37-39). I think that he is misinterpreted in this because, first, he is not a philosopher, does not therefore propose a closed system of theses necessarily consistent between themselves and, second, he is an artist who even as he says what he thinks art is, says it artistically, that is with a sense for symmetry and resemblance.

On the other hand, he is scrupulously consistent in establishing the relationship between the body, the spirit and the world, his own fictive mobile edifice, "Corps-Esprit-Monde". In Valéry's thought, the written text represents the body, but a body without its animating spirit is motionless and without defense. In Valéry's thought, the work of art at the moment of its conception is an act of the mind. Such a definition obviously leaves the work of art itself as "half a shoulder and half a head" in marble, "the fragments found in the grass,/ From his project, as finally magnified" in Stevens' "Two Illustrations that the World is What You Make of It" (*CP* 514-15). The only continuity between individual works of art is the "living and thinking being" responsible for its origin or for bringing it to life again in reading and interpreting. It is in this aspect of attachment rather than detachment that Valéry and Stevens meet in the American publication of the *Dialogues.*[199] The ultimate aim is to

199*Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens, pp. vii – xxviii, *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, Jackson Matthews, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV -

promote what man is not in his/her usual state of mind; what they can be elevated to by the "lure" of a charming but tricky figure, never to be entirely revealed.

In "Effects of Analogy" Stevens reflects upon this immediacy called for by the poem when he says: "There is always an analogy between nature and the imagination, and possibly poetry is only the strange rhetoric of that parallel: a rhetoric in which the feeling of one man is communicated to another in words of the exquisite appositeness that takes away all their verbality." (*NA* 118)

5.1.5 Valéry's aesthetics in the thought and poetry of Stevens

The consciousness of the evidence of the body to the spirit, "son mortel", is also at the heart of Valéry's aesthetic theory, and his aesthetic theory is at the heart of the man. Its fundamental attitude is not detachment as is often claimed, the impersonal character of the finished text[200] but attachment to the work of art in its process of generation, which is "l'exercice combiné de toutes les puissances humaines".[201] In its intensity it is so fiercely private ("La définition du Beau est facile: il est ce qui désespère"[202]), that outwardly it must adopt the appearance of an imperturbable enigma like Valéry's *Jeune Parque* or Stevens' sail in "The Sail of Ulysses". On this point Stevens was of one mind with Valéry saying in a letter in 1940 that "there is a kind of secrecy between the poet and his poem which, once violated, affects the integrity of the poet." (*L* 361)

Of course, by detachment a detachment between the author and the text is meant, between the the process of making and its point of identical issue/return ("Man with the Blue Guitar", XII), between the original poetic state and the resulting finite object of art. On this point Stevens also agreed with Valéry saying that "the final authority is the poem itself" and that the basis of criticism is the poem and not the hidden intention of the writer (*L* 390). This claim for impersonality is a common trait of all the Modernists, however, as it is also famously expressed by Eliot at the end of "Tradition and Individual Talent". It raises the question of where the change occurs from an initial first-person singular of the person who experienced a "poetical state" which is to be captured and the first-person singular performed when the work is achieved. Valéry discusses this at length in his 1939 lecture "Poetry and Abstract Thought". For Valéry thoughts, like the previous paradox of impersonality, are not ends but

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4] 1956)

200Lentricchia, Frank. *The gaiety of language: an essay on the radical poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 39

201Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1299

202Ibid., p. 633

means of transformation. In "Note et Digression" (1919), he explains this paradox as a means of imagining "un personnage cappable de bien des oeuvres"[203] as opposed to the impasse of a state of being contracted by fear and torn by desire facing nothingness; or a clean white page. In so doing, he invented a theory of poetry – the art of making – in the widest sense of the word which permitted him among other things to imagine a "moi inqualifiable qui n'a pas de nom, pas d'histoire, mais qui résulte de tout."[204] This concept of poetry-making is comparable to the *poiesis* which can be found in Plato's *Symposium* and is also often alluded to or directly mentioned by Stevens in his poetry about poetry, "the thing itself" (cf. "The Large Red Man Reading").

For Stevens the central aspect of Valéry is very likely the enormous effort of the former to reunite the inhuman character of the perfection of which man is capable in his "abstract fabrication" – be it in language or in science – with man himself. Man fabricates by abstraction, by abstracting particular elements of a "constant" matter outside the self (language in the case of the poet) and by creating among those a new artificial order more perfect than what it was abstracted from. At the same time, however, man himself is perfected by the perfection of his act because it allows him to know himself better. To know oneself, to comprehend, leads to new inventions, and these to new knowledge, each change more perfect than the preceding one, and so *ad infinitum*. The work of art itself is therefore valuable not as a result but as a process, an "act of the mind", whose real power is to change a real existing thing, the maker him/herself. Thus we can read among the ideas Stevens selected as noteworthy from *Eupalinos* the architect's "trouvaille" that "By dint of constructing … I truly believe that I have constructed myself" and in the poem by Stevens from the fifties when he started to read Valéry closely: "The master of the spruce, himself,/ Became transformed. But his mastery/ Left only the fragments found in the grass" (*CP* 515).

Based on this evidence of the value that the poetic act represented for Stevens and Valéry, I suggest that Stevens consciously worked with the ideas about art that Valéry published in his sequence of *Variété I – V*. They were hard-earned for Valéry, he abs-tracted them from his very own life, the life of his mind, and Stevens, according to his own words could not conduct such abstract research to make similar radical conclusions on his own: "living at the center of the world, he is far beyond me is so many things." (*L* 855) As an act of the mind, or the finite artistic act carried out against the grain of the indefinite character of the spirit, poetry and art in general represent the particular realizations of the unlimited posibilities of the spirit, which is reciprocally perfected by them. In this sense, art for Valéry

203Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 1228
204Ibid.

and for Stevens represents the conflict that I would reformulate as a conflict between the infinity of possibilities of the mind and the heroic act of a poem such that it presents us with a complex image of the "mind in the act of finding what will suffice" (*CP* 239) or also of thought becoming an act of speech through the process of composition; the perfected speech as a particular example of language retroactively changing the initial thought by producing sensations. This theory enables the artist to conceive of his act of making as separate from the subject matter and gives him/her the necessary freedom to remain the "eternal seeker" ("Sail of Ulysses") as well as a "maker" whose metaphors, being embodied by an element other than the initial mind, edify him/herself.

5.2 Ideas for further research on the topic

Reading Stevens against Valéry brings up several issues. A large part of their thought is occupied by things which are seemingly beyond and outside of poetry: their substantial interest in the case of Stevens and research in philosophy, aesthetics, exact science in the case of Valéry. On the whole their approach to the art of making poetry is seemingly as far from the romantic as possible in the measure in which they make use of critical intellect to control emotion; their desire for maximum clarity of thought in poetry itself is puzzling in face of the real poetical texts written by them. For the most part they effectively thwart trials to comprehend. But there precisely lies the value both of them proffered – that poetry should invite and resist intelligence. Elizabeth Sewell, who wrote a monograph about Valéry from the point of view of possible conversations between art and science, remarked that an unguessed enigma may become a charm.[205] Fry defines charm as a rhetorical device which "seeks to break down and confuse the conscious will," enigma is associated with the question asked by the Sphinx. Despite the two poets' invocation of clarity, the secret of their text remains intact, which is to say in other words that their capacity to signify has not been exhausted even though many delicate interpretations have been carried out. What light, for example, would a close reading throw on their mutual attention to Plato's *Phaedrus,* as interpreted by Derrida in "Plato's Pharmacy"?

Another direction of thought inspired by reading Stevens with Valéry's aesthetics in mind is lodged in one of Lentricchia's comments on the quality of Stevens poetics as well as the two poets' engaged discourse with philosophy. In a chapter where Lentricchia portrays Stevens as an existentialist rather than a neo-Kantian, he describes his fictive world in this way:

205 Sewell, Elizabeth. *Paul Valéry: The Mind in the Mirror* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952)

> Stevens' dominant theme is the stubborn independence, the final freedom of being from mind and the priority of natural existence over consciousness. As he puts it in "The Connoisseur of Chaos": "The squirming facts exceed the squamous mind …" Stevens' poetics is a two-term system where fiction and reality engage in endless and complex play in which one term, while open to qualification by the other, always successfully resists subsumption by its opponent. So that if Frye's mythic structures are perfectly closed to existential reality, then Stevens' fictions would appear to be open – which is a way to say that Frye's myths are spatially isolated, while Stevens' fictions participate in and are subject to the flowing of time.[206]

This paragraph is not immune to the critical remark made by Helen Vendler on the address of interpretations of poetry as enclosed structures of thought.[207] But in the spirit of Vendler's critical comment, in the spirit of Valéry's conception of poetry as revelation of a little fragment of the infinity resulting out of a certain degree of radical exposure to the other, "l'autre", as opposed to philosophy which tends to create total systems of thought that assimilate the other, it would be fascinating to do a reading of their poetries based in the philosophy of ethics of Emmanuel Lévinas whose aim is, as I have been able to understand it, to posit a relation of responsibility between "le Même" et "l'Autre" such as would respect the irreducible nature of the other. This is a suggestion Valéry inspired in me with his repeated allusions to his aesthetics as having an origin in ethics.

5.3 Conclusion

Paul Valéry considered form to be the central figure of poetic expression. Form alone is that which moves men even without naming them. Composition means composition into some kind of form, a unity. In Valéry, Stevens encountered an infinitely cultivated yet provincial man whose poetic insight retained the man living and thinking, which eventually led him to study man and his/her mental processes in general. Nevertheless, poetry remained his life-long topic of contemplation and he never stopped thinking about what it was and how it should be made. Nor did Stevens. They sought poetry in order to achieve transformation in the man, and increasingly so as they grew older and as reality grew more oppressive. Poetry held the value of an instrument of completion for the spirit that cannot be otherwise contained. The aim of this completion, the transformation conducted by the poet, was to achieve a state of detachment from which the whole of humanity could be surveyed. The mission to find such poetry as would suffice can perhaps really be accomplished if by "suffice" we mean the moment of execution as Stevens shows in "The Bouquet":

206Lentricchia, Frank. *After New Criticism*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 34
207Vendler, Helen. *On Extended Wings* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1969) , chapter I

> The infinite of the actual perceived,
> A freedom revealed, a realization touched,
> The real made more acute by an unreal. (*CP* 451)

There is an indisputable closeness between the two poetries in precise analysis of the states of mind of man (by poetic image), search for a central concept (based in humanity as opposed to a deity), with the premise that there can be no end to the search for the supreme fiction. Divide: Is Valéry's insistence on the material relation of the spirit, the finite character of human thought, its delimitation by the secular trinity Corp-Esprit-Monde, his "System" only material after all, basing all of man's resources upon the perfection of the human organism?

I think not, he was only looking for parallels of the functioning of the mind in scientific models, he wanted to point out the role of the physical body and outer world (reality) in thought. Valéry did want to get a firm hold of his mind via his system, but he did not succeed ('douleur' persisted) - and beautiful texts were written (or else they were written thanks to him being successful in subordinating all to the supreme faculty of his mind). Conclusion: System is open to change - because one cannot stop and say one won't think anymore. Every change of system retroactively changes the whole - which is the same for Supreme Fiction. It seems they both refused totalizing (because partial) concepts in favor of an ineffable unity of the diversity perceived.

Valéry marked down in his notebook that the true work of art is the 'Moi' (PPA 204), the self, that what is finally written is but an accidental fragment of a larger whole that can never be written. To this whole, however, all parts converge. According to him a book or poem published is a concession to a public. This stance very closely resembles Stevens' relationship to his audience ("As you leave the room") and also his project of the poem as an act of mind. As a process the poem participates on building the structure of the mind, it is this exercise that is sought out for its intrinsic and original value.[208]

208Valéry, Paul. *Ego Scriptor et Petits poèmes abstraites*, Judith Robinson, ed. (Editions Gallimard, 1992) pp. 162, "Confession"

« Que l'idée de l'infini, dans sa passivité, puisse être entendue comme le domaine de l'incertitude d'une humanité préoccupée d'elle-même et incapable d'embrasser l'infini et où le fait d'être frappé par Dieu ne serait qu'un pis-aller de la finitude, c'est probablement la méconnaissance de l'originalité irréductible de l'altérité et de la transcendance et une interprétation purement négative de la proximité éthique et de l'amour, l'obstination de les dire en termes d'immanence, comme si la possession ou la fusion –idéal d'une conscience intentionnelle –épuisait l'énergie spirituelle. Que la proximité de l'Infini et la socialité qu'elle instaure et commande, puissent être meilleures que la *coïncidence de l'unité,* que la socialité soit de par sa pluralité même, une excellence irréductible, même si on ne peut pas la dire en termes de richesse sans retomber dans l'énoncé de la misère ; que la relation ou la non-indifférence à l'autre ne consiste pas, pour l'Autre, à se convertir au Même, que la religion ne soit pas le moment de l' « économie » de l'être, que l'amour ne soit pas qu'un demi-dieu –c'est certainement cela aussi que signifie l'idée de l'infini en nous ou l'humanité de l'homme comprise comme théologie ou l'intelligibilité du transcendant ».
Emmanuel Lévinas, *Transcendance et intelligibilité*, 1996

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CP – *Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc. 1990)
L – *Letters of Wallace Stevens,* Holly Stevens, ed. (New York: Knopf, 1970)
LOA – *Collected Poetry and Prose*, eds. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997)
NA – *The Necessary Angel*. (New York: Knopf, 1951)
PPA – *Ego Scriptor et Petits poèmes abstraits,* Judith Robinson, ed. (Editions Gallimard, 1992)

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ABSTRAKT

Název: DUCHOVNÍ BLÍZKOST POEZIE WALLACE STEVENSE A PAULA VALÉRYHO,
Autorka: Karolína Vančurová

1 Úvod

Když ke konci roku 1954 Stevens přijal žádost Jacksona Matthewse, editora sebraných spisů Paula Valéryho, aby napsal předmluvu k některým z Valéryho dialogů, vybral si dialogy *Eupalinos čili architekt* a *Duše a tanec* (*L* 855). V té době mu bylo sedmdesátpět let, do konce života mu zbývalo jen několik měsíců, ale jako by nikdy před tím nebyl živější. Dokonce byl ochoten kvůli tomu změnit své dosavadní zvyklosti, a stále ještě zaměstnán na plný úvazek pro pojišťovací agenturu Hartford Indemnity Company, začal po večerech znovu číst Valéryho básně a prózu, konkrétně *Charmes*, *Introduction à la Méthode de Léonard de Vinci* a *Note et Digression*. V té době byl Valéry pokládán za poetický zázrak, „the prodigy of poetry“, nebo ho za něj považoval alespoň Stevens.

V práci jsem se zabývala duchovní blízkostí poezie Wallace Stevense a Paula Valéryho, protože k takovému srovnání vede mnoho indicií včetně výše zmíněných dvou předmluv k americkému vydání Valéryho *Dialogů*. Původně jsem měla v úmyslu hledat společné rysy poezie Stevense a Stéphana Mallarmého, k němuž Stevens daleko otevřeněji odkazuje ve svých esejích a také proto, že o vztahu těchto dvou básníků již bylo leccos napsáno. Nejvýznamější mezi kritickými texty, které se dotýkají vztahu Stevense a Mallarmého je sbírka esejů Michela Benamou pod titulem *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination*. Ale právě proto, že o vztahu poezie Stevense a Mallarmého už existuje obecné povědomí, bylo daleko zajímavější zabývat se méně probádaným územím vztahu mezi poezií Stevense a Valéryho, neboť tito dva básníci byli téměř vrstevníky a dalo se předpokládat, že méně známý a o osm let mladší Stevens, který miloval Paříž, francouzská vína a měl dobrý přehled o francouzské literární scéně, o umanutém francouzském nebásníkovi aristokratického ražení věděl, a že jeho psaní sledoval se zájmem tak jako jiný významný představitel amerického Modernismu, o dalších devět let mladší, T. S. Eliot.

2 Struktura

Jak již bylo řečeno výše, sekundární literatury o vztahu Stevens-Valéry mnoho nebylo, Timothy Morris, Benjamin Johnson, a další se ve svých pracech věnovali především Stevensovu zájmu o koncept čisté poezie v souvislosti s jeho estetickým vnímáním. Dnes už je na světě kniha Lisy Goldfarbové na toto téma, *The Figure Concealed: Wallace Stevens, Music, and Valéryan Echoes*[209], ale ve chvíli, kdy jsem s prací začínala mi nezbylo než si vytvořit vlastní faktografickou mapu možných vazeb mezi oběma básníky. Velmi mi v tom pomáhala díla autorů, kteří se zabývali Stevensovým raným básnickým obdobím jako Robert Buttel v článku „Wallace Stevens at Harvard: Some Origins of His Theme and Style"[210] (pomohla by nejspíš také jeho kniha *The Making of Harmonium*, kterou jsem ale nesehnala), Milton J. Bates v knize *The Mythology of Self*[211], nebo A. Walton Litz v knize *The Introspective Voyager*[212] a samozřejmě také Stevensovy dopisy[213] a eseje.[214] Kromě této strukturální opory jsem se na základě četby poezie Wallace Stevense a Valéryho sbírky *Charmes,* jeho *Dialogů* a dalších jeho textů, které se týkají podstaty (nebo spíše bytnosti? – esence) poezie, pokusila zachytit určité myšlenkové rysy, ve kterých se oba básníci potkávali. Nejvýraznější mezi nimi je estetické vnímání obou básníků a pozornost obou dvou upřená především ke způsobu vzniku poezie, proto jsem se ve třetí kapitole věnovala tématu čisté poezie a ve čtvrté teorii kompozice. Práce byla dobrodružná, protože jsem k ní přistoupila s minimálními důkazy, že vztah, který jsem chtěla nalézt, vůbec existuje, a s velmi nepřesnou představou o tom, jaký vliv mohlo mít dílo Paula Valéryho na Stevensův básnický růst. Mým cílem bylo obě dvě díla blíže poznat, a dosáhnout hlubšího porozumění Stevense, jehož poezie mi při prvním setkání připadala obtížně uchopitelná ne-li dočista cizí. Přesto v sobě od prvního setkání skrývala příslib poznání něčeho nového, co má mnoho různých poloh a silný svérázný hlas.

3 Symbolismus

209 Goldfarb. *The Figure Concealed*. (Sussex Academic Press, 2011), ISBN 978-1-84519-437-6
210 Buttel, Robert. "Wallace Stevens at Harvard: Some Origins of His Theme and Style", *The Act of the Mind*, Pearce, R. H. and Miller, J. H., eds. (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, MD, 1965)
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212 Litz, A. Walton. *Introspective Voyager* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972)
213 Stevens. *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, Holly Stevens, ed. (New York: Knopf, 1970)
214 Stevens. *The Necessary Angel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960)

Z první nutnosti, nutnosti rekonstruovat možné cesty, po kterých se mohlo ubírat seznamování Stevense s Valérym, pro mne vyplynula náplň práce v následujících kapitolách: tak jako to činí Paul Valéry ve své eseji *Introduction à la Méthode de Léonard de Vinci,* pokusila jsem se vytvořit si na základě faktů o díle Wallace Stevense představu o mysli, která dílo vytvořila. Teprve, když jsem si dovolila přemýšlet tak, jak asi Stevens nebo Valéry mohli přemýšlet, ukázalo se mi, že mohla nastat určitá asymetrie mezi tím kolik slov o předpokládaném vztahu Stevens napsal a tím, jak velký mohl být a jaký charakter mohl mít skutečný vliv, o němž jsem se rozhodla na základě podnětů v kritických studiích a náznaků vedoucího diplomové práce psát. Několik zmínek v tomto duchu lze v primárních zdrojích, které jsem měla k dispozici, nalézt, ale není jich mnoho a nejsou přímým a jednoznačným vyjádřením zvláštního vztahu mezi oběma básníky. Stevens ve svých dopisech a esejích o Valérym neříká mnoho, když už ho ale zmiňuje, nebo když zmiňuje témata jednoznačně s Valérym spjatá, bývá to v otázkách, o nichž víme, že ve Stevensově myšlení mají významné místo.

Začátky Stevensova psaní spadají do období, kdy studoval na Harvardu, proto jsem sledovala s jakými vlivy se zde mohl setkat. Stevens byl velmi aktivní student, stal se členem jednoho z univerzitních klubů, Signet Club, v němž shodou okolností působil jeden z velkých propagátorů francouzského Symbolismu na Harvardské katedře anglistiky, Pierre la Rose, přítel filosofa George Santayany, a kromě toho byl v posledním ročníku také prezidentem studentského časopisu the *Harvard Advocate*, kde publikoval své první básnické pokusy. Jeho tříleté studium bylo zaměřeno na literaturu, včetně literatury francouzské, a v posledním ročníku mohl Stevens navštěvovat přednášky francouzského básníka Henri de Régniera, který byl v té době na Harvardu hostujícím lektorem. Přednášku organizoval „Cercle français“ vedený předním americkým konzervativním humanistou Irvingem Babbittem, který téma Symbolismu uvedl velmi kriticky, i když konkrétně Régniera kritiky ušetřil. Jako jeden z úzkého kruhu umělců, jež se setkávali o pravidelných *mardis* u Stéphana Mallarméa, mohl Régnier pro Stevense znamenat významný podnět pro jeho pozdější zájem právě o Valéryho, neboť byl jedním z jeho nejbližších přátel.

Régnierovy přednášky byly zaměřeny na Symbolismus a na jeho protiklad k Realismu, na problém konfliktu mezi skutečností a ideálem, o kterém Stevens v té době intenzivně přemýšlel, jak ukazují jeho deníkové záznamy. Stevens časem tento konflikt proměnil ve vzájemnou hru mezi skutečností („reality“) a představivostí („imagination“). Závěr tedy je, že jeho zájem o francouzskou literaturu a zvláště o autory vztahující se tak či onak k období Symbolismu, ziskal během jeho studia významnou podporu a směřoval podle Buttela k francouzským „Ironists“ – Ironikům, tedy k

Mallarmému.

Ve druhém desetiletí dvacátého století se Stevens zajímal o nové básnické směry v okruhu umělců kolem časopisu *Others*, jehož sponsorem byl Walter Arensberg, který do angličtiny přeložil Mallarmého „L'Après midi du Faune“; tito umělci a časopis *Poetry*, kde Stevens poprvé významně publikoval v roce 1914, měli blízko k Poundovu Imagismu, který se sám významně inspiroval francouzským Symbolismem. Stevensovo zaujetí francouzským sedmnáctým stoletím jej jednak sbližuje s Valéryho obhajobou klasicismu v době, kdy byl za nejpokročilejší umělecký směr považován surrealismus, ale také podtrhuje další jejich společný rys, kterým je jejich sklon k abstraktnímu uvažování o poezii samotné: jejich poezie nabývá na mnohoznačnosti díky tomu, že osvětluje nejen rovinu věcí, o kterých vypovídá („the particular“), ale také obrovský duševní prostor za ní („the abstract“), prostor, jehož existenci básník jazykem z oblasti hmotné představivosti potvrzuje a jehož vnitřní zákonitosti pomocí konkrétních obrazů a konkrétních technických postupů odhaluje.

Z toho je patrné, že ani jeden z obou básníků se nepovažoval výhradně za Symbolistu, ani nepatřil přímo k Symbolismu, přitom ale jako by oba dva hledali cestu, jak vsadit Mallarmého estetiku čistoty a dokonalosti poezie („fleur absente de tout bouquet“) zpátky do skutečnosti s lidskými dimenzemi. Symbolismus pro oba představoval cenný zdroj myšlení o funkci poezie a funkci básníka ve společnosti. Básník ve Valéryho pojetí a posléze i Stevensově, je někdo, kdo svým jazykovým nástrojem dokáže transformovat skutečnost, nebo konkrétněji, mysl a pocity druhého člověka ideálně takovým způsobem, že si ten druhý ani neuvědomí, že slova, která přesně zapadla, musela být vymyšlena. Cílem transformace má být povznesení nad běžný stav mysli, jakkoli by jím teoreticky mohlo být i ničení (Stevens v eseji „Noble Rider and the Sounds of Words“). Frank Lentricchia v knize *After the New Criticism* tuto teorii poezie nazývá konzervativním fikcionalismem, což je postoj, který shrnuje Frank Kermode v knize *The Sense of an Ending*. Poezie je v tomto pojetí původkyní fikcí pomocí kterých jsme schopni svět uchopovat, za předpokladu, že jim dobrovolně uvěříme. Fikce u Stevense i u Valéryho ale zároveň musí být uvěřitelné, musejí dávat smysl v součinnosti se skutečností, musejí ze skutečnosti vycházet. Oba dva za svůj cíl považují vyjadřovat bezprostřední přítomnost pomocí konkrétních věcí ale dosazených do abstrakního světa představivosti.

4 Čistá poezie

Další důležitý obrat v mé práci nastal, když jsem u Stevense našla naprosto přímočaré přijetí konceptu čisté poezie, konkrétně na obálce jeho sbírky *Ideas of Order* (1936) ještě s jistou zdrženlivostí ale později již naprosto přesvědčeně v komentářích k básni „The Man with the Blue Guitar“ (*OP* 165, *L* 363 „without the slightest pejorative innuendo“, 1940). Čistá poezie je termín, který pro dvacáté století oprášil právě Paul Valéry poté, co jej přijal jako jednu z básnických hodnot Stéphana Mallarméa, a který byl definitivně zanesen do oblasti literární kritiky Abbé Henri Brémondem v přednášce před Francouzskou akademií z roku 1925 nazvané *La Poésie pure*. Podstatou Brémondovy přednášky byla myšlenka, že poezii nelze definovat a to, co označujeme za poetické, nelze uchopit rozumovými prostředky. Brémond, sám erudovaný jezuita, proti svému vlastnímu jakož i tehdy převládajícímu racionalismu/positivismu na základě psychologických principů obhajoval romatické básníky a náboženské mystiky coby představitele nevyslovitelného a slovem nerozborného v člověku. Tento rozpor vyjdřuje slovy, „Na básníkovi žádáme, aby celou jeho odpovědí byla pouze slova. A tím se kupodivu liší právě od ostatních inspirovaných bytostí. Avšak jeho slova, stejně jako mlčenlivé projevy jiných lidí inspirovaných, pokračují v původní zkušenosti a snaží se ji vyjádřiti.“[215] V pozadí básnického díla je podle Brémonda zkušenost, kterou on přirovnává ke zkušenosti mystické a poezie tak, alespoň v jeho výkladu, ve své nejzazší poloze splývá s potřebou podobnou potřebě modlitby. Zajímavé je, že Valéry tuto Brémondovu myšlenku odmítl, ačkoli hlavním rysem jeho psaní je naprostá věrnost prožitku a důraz na sjednocení funkce vnímání a vyjadřování (perception/expression).

Za jednoho z představitelů této výsostné poezie vybral Brémond Paula Valéryho a to proti vůli jeho samotného. Valéry byl jediný v té době píšící a taktéž jediný, který měl ale ke svému neštěstí natolik silnou lidskou sebeúctu nebo pýchu („orgueil“), že nemohl podlehnout splynutí v mlčenlivosti mystika a byl nucen hledat nesnadná řešení rozporů, jež přináší lidská existence, v celoživotním studiu lidských způsobů poznávání. V reakci na Brémondovo tvrzení, že poezie je ve své nejhlubší formě obdobou modlitby, se strhla vášnivá diskuze mezi představiteli literatury, vědy, víry i publicistiky/společnosti. Když ovšem Stevens o deset let později zahrnul svou kritickou úvahu o Brémondově pojetí poezie do své přednášky na Harvardu (1936), v eseji, již nazval „The Irrational Element of Poetry“, o Paulu Valérym se vůbec nezmínil, ačkoli právě v té době o něm psal ve svých dopisech jako o někom, s kým má tolik společného, že jeho myšlenky vstřebává bez větší námahy.

215 Brémond, Henri. *Čistá poesie* (Praha: Orbis, 1935), p. 78

Stevens je básník pokládaný za „post-Christian“, což je postoj, jehož symbolem by mohly být například verše z jeho básně „Sunday Morning“:

> Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
> Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams
> And our desires. (*CP* 68-9)
>
> […....]
>
> A voice that cries, “The tomb in Palestine
> Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
> It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay.” (*CP* 70)

Ovšem zápas, který ve své poezii svádí s touhou po možnosti víry poukazuje spíše na to, že otázka víry byla velmi naléhavá a jeho verše směřující k nejvyšší fikci jsou jakoby úlomky brnění rytíře, který marně bojuje o osvobození od starých mýtů, příkladem budiž báseň „The Latest Freedman“:

> It was how the sun came shining into his room:
> To be without a description of to be,
> For a moment on rising, at the edge of the bed, to be,
> To have the ant of the self changed to an ox
> […....]
> It was how he was free. It was how his freedom came.
> It was being without description, being an ox. (*CP* 205)

Jádrem vzdoru obou básníků k tezi Henriho Brémonda byla jejich hluboká touha po možnosti věřit, touha, které se oba ve svém díle bránili důkladným zkoumáním skutečnosti, oslavou intelektu (Valéryho „fête de l'intellect“ z eseje o Baudelarovi), a přijetím víry v nezbytnou nejzazší fikci o níž víme, že je fikcí.

Zatímco Brémond patrně vyjádřil skutečný význam poetické zkušenosti pro oba básníky, nebo přinejmenším přispěl k myšlení o tom, jaké jsou meze lidského poznání rozumem, oni sami jeho tezi odmítli a definovali čistou poezii po svém pro účely své tvorby. Kdyby totiž básník jako ten, který skládá, přistoupil na to, že poezie existuje nezávisle na rozumu, těžko by ji mohl psát. A tak se všichni tři setkávají ve třech bodech: čistá poezie je ze své podstaty nedosažitelná, má duchovní rozměr a převést poezii na rozumovou úroveň je nemožné; číst výlučně čistou poezii je nemožné.

Valéry nakonec definuje čistou poezii matematicky jako limitu umění, ke které je třeba směřovat a k níž se lze přiblížit důkladnou racionální analýzou všech uměleckých prostředků, ale které nikdy nelze dosáhnout. V tom se podobá jeho definice Stevensově definici, která také obsahuje prvek neukončenosti. A tento prvek neukončenosti a nevyčerpatelnosti poezie tvoří základ jejich společného

estetického vnímání. Zatímco sám poetický akt je konečná činnost, jeho efektem je vyvolat potřebu nekonečného opakování. K tomu je ještě potřeba doplnit, že Stevensovo pojetí čisté poezie odpovídá v jeho symbolice pojmu bytostné představivosti („essential imagination“) a zároveň je vystavěná na podkladu myšlenkové konstrukce. To odpovídá Valéryho matematickému pohledu na věc neboť v momentě, kdy dosáhneme stavu dokonalosti, nezbývá pro představivost prostor. Tento stav ovšem není stav odpovídající lidským potřebám a cíl obou básníků je nakonec nalézt důstojnou lidskou míru věcí. .Při kompozici podle Valéryho v eseji na téma „Poésie et Pensée abstraite“ nikdy nedosáhneme na nejzazší mez, zato jsme ale nuceni využít veškerou vnímavost k rozlišení nuancí řeči na jedné straně a ke shrnutí „toutes les puissances humaines“, všech našich lidských schopností k odhalení stvu duše.

5 Kompozice

Výše zmíněná oslava intelektu jíž má být poezie je obdobou nároku na poezii, která má vznikat „at the highest possible level of the cognitive“ („na nejvyšší možné úrovni poznávání“, *L* 500) u Stevense. V tvorbě těchto dvou básníku jako by zvláštní složku poezie tvořila otázka možnosti poezie jako takové. Pro Valéryho se poezie v určitém momentu stala nemožnou, protože nebyl ochoten smířit se s požadavkem na srozumitelnost, nebyl ochoten ustupovat ze svých absolutních nároků na čistotu poezie, čistotu v tom smyslu, že by se metamorfovala jen podle svého tvůrce, ani v nejmenším s ohledem na publikum. Neznamená to ovšem, že by přestal psát, jen nepsal pro veřejnost. Stejně tak Stevens, ačkoli svou tvorbu pomyslně situuje do středu lidského vnímání a neúnavně hledá její význam pro společnost, jedním ze dvou pólů jeho díla je „purity“, nedosažitelný ideál jehož nedosažitelnost sama musí být vymyšlena, oproti kterému staví „the paradise of meaning“, lidskou dimenzi poezie v níž se hra významů také stává čistou poezií tehdy, když se tato podřídí jediné řídící ideji důsledné kompozice. Zatímco duch tvořící obsah je nevyčerpatelný stejně jako poezie, kompozice aneb forma, je ukončená a představuje vysvobození některého malého zlomku dokonalé stavby z nicoty. Oba básníci nakonec docházejí k závěru, že čistá poezie neexistuje, ale zároveň pro ně představa dokonalosti, ke které lze směřovat při vytváření „nezbytných fikcí“, představuje něco, co lze vyjádřit „nejpoetičtější myšlenkou“ ze všech myšlenek, a sice kompozicí. V eseji „The Irrational Element of Poetry“ Stevens dochází k závěru, že obsah („content“, „mind“) je iracionální zatímco forma je způsob jak pomocí vůle nastolit mezi prvky vědomí určitý řád.

Stevens stejně jako Valéry ve svém díle nechává zaznívat dialog mezi poezií a filozofií. Poezie ovšem pochopitelně za všech okolností zůstává vyvolenou u obou dvou. Ovšem proces v němž vzniká báseň je jakoby výměnou mezi tím, čemu se věnuje filozofie, oblastí ducha, a tím co *je* samo o sobě. Akt kompozice je v jejich pojetí akt, kdy obě opačné strany za normálních okolností, kdy vládne nahodilost, působením vůle splynou v jedinou uspořádanou výpověď. Zatímco ve svých esejích Stevens často staví na protikladu představivosti (imagination) a skutečnosti (reality), v jeho poezii lze z pohledu kompozice vysledovat ještě jinou opozici – konečnost/konkrétnost a nekonečno/abstraction. Podívat se na tento notoricky známý předmět jeho zájmu očima Valéryho estetiky přináší Stevensovu dílu nový rozměr, který je v mnoha ohledech překvapivě přesným nástrojem interpretace pro Stevensovy básně.

V první řadě, Stevensova představivost (imagination) se velmi podobá Valéryho duchu (esprit). Oba dva nástroje lidského poznání ve své nejzraleší formě obsahují schopnost vlastního uspořádávání a jsou závislé na těle jako na svém nástroji vyjádření, což je myšlenka, kterou Valéry ztělesňuje v dialogu *Tanec a duše*. Jak Stevensova „představivost“ tak Valéryho „duch“ jsou aktivní, představují vědomí a jsou původci fikcí. Valéryho přínos pro myšlení ve dvacátém století spočívá v tom, že přikládá hodnotu jen těm nejobtížnějším fikcím – vždyť podle něho je tvorba fikcí naše přirozená a soustavná činnost; fikce tak samy o sobě nemají hodnotu, všechno, co je, co je v jazyce, je do určité míry fikce. Avšak pokud tyto fikce vzniknou jako přesně uspořádaný záměr ducha který se uskuteční opakovanými pokusy se usebrat vně sebe sama pomocí nějaké konstantní hmoty, v tomto případě jazyku, může vzniknout nová samostatná ucelená hodnota.[216] Valéry tuto teorii uvádí v život dialogem Eupalinos čili Architekt, kde myšlenka kompozice nebo konstrukce vévodí všem ostatním myšlenkám a motivací tohoto aktu mysli, kterým je básnický akt stejně jako ve Valéryho dialogu akt umělecký, je touha tvořit pro lidskou potřebu uskutečnění. Jakkoli se takové myšlení může zpočátku zdát zdrcujícím způsobem suše abstraktní, při jeho realizaci v dialogu tomu tak není. Když se z Valéryho poetiky vrátíme zpět ke Stevensovi, zjistíme, že i ten, jakkoli v daleko menší míře, ve své teorii i v básních samotných používá tělo a smrtelnost jako symbol konečnosti a přesto jedinou možnost lidského prožitku na zemi. Této tezi odpovídají verše z jedné z jeho dlouhých básní „L'Esthétique du mal“:

> The greatest poverty is not to live
> In a physical world. To feel that one's desire
> Is too difficult to tell from despair. (CP 327)

216 Valéry, Paul. *Oeuvres*, vol. I. Jean Hytier, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) , p. 1490

Nakonec jsme v díle těchto dvou abstraktních básníků svědky výpovědi o tom, že jedině působením skrze tělo se může projevit lidský duch. Ten je neomezený a neuchycený v přítomnosti tak jako je tělo, nebo báseň čtená. Nemá tedy jinou možnost než se projevit spojením se svým tělem při manifestaci sebe sama činem jako je umělecké dílo. Ve Stevensově poetice báseň představuje tělo (formu) zatímco poezie je jejim duchem (obsahem). Ale zatím co ve filozofii jsou tyto dvě složky díla nezaměnitelné, básnická mysl jimi prochází bez zábran. Tak se stalo, že Valéry při psaní básně „Hřbitov u moře“ nejdřív ze všechno poznal rytmus, do něhož teprve jehož významy se teprve postupem času uspořádaly do náročné formy. Stevens také dokázal vydavatelce básně „Notes Toward Supreme Fiction“ říct už několik týdnů před jejím dokončením, že skladba bude mít přesně 30 básní, každá báseň sedm slok, 'verses', a to vše bude rozděleno do tří částí.

6 Závěr

Jazyk je pro tyto básníky jak forma tak obsah stejně jako pojem představivosti, nebo jako architektova stavba malého altánku, která představovala jak nádhernou stavbu tak svými proporcemi konkrétní milovanou osobu a tedy tělo ale s ním opět i obsah, ducha. Podobně dokáže jazyk obou básníků fluktuovat mezi vyjádřením času a prostoru, mezi přítomností a absencí, mezi hlasem a myšlením, mezi formou a obsahem, a také mezi konečným a nekonečným. Odhodlání Stevense a Valéryho nenechat za žádnou cenu spolknout jednu stranu (konkrétní a ukončenou) stranou druhou (nekonečnou) nebo naopak a vytvářet pomocí konceptu básně jako činu nové a nové pokusy o spojení těch dvou vzájemně se odpuzujících součástí lidského života vede v nejzazší interpretaci k přijetí druhého (l'Autre) aniž je tento tím přijetím omezen nebo redukován na úroveň stejného (le Même).

A tak se v závěru dostáváme k otázce položené Sókratem v Faidrovi ve stejnojmenném dialogu: je tedy řeč krásná, když je výsledkem machinací se znalostí řečnických pravidel, nebo tehdy, když je pravdivá? Přístup Stevense i Valéryho jako by na tuto otázku odpovídal mnoha činy, kdy se řeč spojila se skutečností ducha.