

An Interdisciplinary View of Paul Valéry's Production

ANDREA ALLERKAMP UND PABLO VALDIVIA OROZCO (HG.),
PAUL VALÉRY. FÜR EINE EPISTEMOLOGIE DER POTENTIALITÄT,
HEIDELBERG, WINTER VERLAG, 2017, PP. 374.

The reception of Paul Valéry's work has been until recently a perfect example of an ongoing scholarly *malentendu*. Regarded traditionally as a high-profile poet and *belle-lettrist*, Valéry's writings received much attention in the domain of literary and poetic studies, but have remained largely obscure in other fields. Valéry's more theoretical ideas and insights, which are mostly concentrated in his dense and somewhat inaccessible private notebooks, have been treated almost exclusively in specialized literature, itself limited to a select number of journals and publications. In recent years there have been more systematic attempts to synthesize the various aspects of Valéry's work, to consider his poetic output in light of his theories, and to frame those theories in the broader context of scientific and philosophical discourse.

The aim of this publication is to illuminate the different and highly diverse aspects of Valéry's writings. As such, the volume brings together scholars from Francophone and Germanophone academia, specializing in different fields from philosophy and comparative literature to mathematics and history of science, with each offering an independent exploration using the methodology and vocabulary of their respective fields. The bi-lingual volume is separated into four distinct segments, each dedicated to analyzing Valéry's corpus under a different perspective. As indicated in the volume introduction, those sections deal respectively with the themes of intellect, method, knowledge, and attention ("éveil", which can also be rendered as "wakefulness" or "alertness"), and with the notion of potentiality, which is one of the terms that are most associated with Valéry's vocabulary, acting as an overall unifying concept to the volume. Accordingly, each of the titles of the four sections of the volume follows this term under some variation.

The first section of the volume, entitled "Potentialité" is concerned with the question of creativity and potentiality as it arises in Valéry's theoretical writings. It includes a close reading of Valéry's engagement with philosophy, aesthetics and the relations between them. The contribution by Pablo Valdivia Orozco focuses on the ways in which the idea of potential-

ity is performed in a number of Valéry's more philosophical essays. Thomas Vercruyse analyzes Valéry's conception of space and spatial movement and compares it to two influential 20th-century conceptions, namely the neovitalism of Gilbert Simondon and the idiosyncratic Marxism of Guy Debord. The contribution by Nataniel Christgau assesses the themes of power and potentiality in Valéry's narrative of *Monsieur Teste*, an experimental quasi-novel dedicated to the question "What is the potential of a person? [Que peut un homme?]". Benedikt Krüger in his contribution takes Valéry's idea of poetry as the interplay between resonance and resistance, and uses it to assess the notion of art and literature as vehicles for the cultivation of human potentiality.

Besides his literary and public engagement, Valéry was also intensely interested in science, especially in the domains of mathematics and physics which informed much of his lyric and essayistic writing. This is explored in the second section of the volume, entitled "Pouvoir". The contributions incorporate novel concepts from those fields in order to illuminate Valéry's own engagement with the sciences. Karin Krauthausen discusses Valéry's interest in physics, primarily 19th-century thermodynamics, while Norbert Schappacher explores Valéry's elusive and somewhat hermetical interest in mathematics, namely in geometry and algebra. Those two contributions are presented in a way that is found accessible and enlightening even to a reader who is by and large illiterate in those fields (such as the author of these lines). Hjördis Becker-Lindenthal's contribution examines Valéry's grand dialogue *Eupalinos* in light of the notion of the anthropocene, a notion which operates at the intersection of natural science and humanities, and denotes the impact of human civilization on natural environment.

Valéry's poetic works come to the fore in the third section of the volume, entitled "Possible". As indicated by the editors, this section is concerned with the means of aesthetic production, in particular as they relate to basic concepts in art and literature. Susanna Hübschmann, in her highly general contribution, examines the notion of the real in some of Valéry's poems, while Sebastian Schönbeck's contribution offers a much more specific discussion as it analyzes the curious yet rich image of the honeybee in Valéry's poetic language. The other two contributions adopt a more historical angle: Erik Martin examines the corollary between Valéry's aesthetic theory and the artistic avant-garde of early 20th-century Eastern Europe, and Sergio Ugalde Quintana examines Valéry's collaboration and correspondence with the Mexican writer and intellectual Alfonso Reyes.

The fourth segment, under the title “Puissance”, caps the volume with three synthetic studies which consider Valéry’s ideas and writings in light of modern day critical thought. Andrea Allerkamp comments on Derrida’s engagement with Valéry’s work, and by doing so ties it into a discussion on potentiality in modern critical theory, following Agamben and other contemporary thinkers. Chiara Caradonna explores the relations between desire and potentiality in Valéry’s work, involving insights from phenomenology and includes a close examination of Husserlian traces in Valéry’s corpus. The contribution of Jean-Christoph Cavallin shifts the discussion back to aesthetics, discusses Valéry’s notion of “pure poetry”, reads it in light of key ideas from German idealism and demonstrates its application in Valéry’s own lyric. This segment is the most constructive of the four, with each of the contributions representing a standalone essay rather than commentary on Valéry.

The volume is immensely rich and covers an exceptionally broad scope of subjects and materials. The heterogeneity of the publication guarantees it would capture the interest not only of scholars of French literature, but also of students of modern literary and intellectual history, and of readers attentive to trends in aesthetic and critical thought. Although the asserted unifying theme of the publication, namely potentiality, is not dealt consistently in all of the chapters of the study, this is understandable considering the large diversity of perspectives and disciplines. The inclusion of high quality contributions by established scholars as well as by early stage academics (including graduate-level students) is also noteworthy, and should be commended.

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Intrighi tra storie e la Storia

GIADA TREBESCHI, *L'AUTISTA DI DIO*, GÜNZBURG,
OAKMOND PUBLISHING, 2017, PP. 278.

Ho finito di leggere (anzi, di ‘tracannare’) *L'autista di Dio* di Giada Trebeschi in due giorni. E mi è venuta la curiosità di verificare i pareri di altri lettori. Così – è normale oggi, no? – ho cercato sul sito di Amazon e lì ho trovato che molti altri hanno usato metafore simili alla mia per indicare la loro velocità e avidità nella lettura di questo romanzo. È un giallo, o un *noir*, o un romanzo