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| Valéry, Paul (October 1871–July 1945) |
| Valéry, (Ambroise) Paul (Toussaint Jules) |
| Paul Valéry is the author of an oeuvre that comprises several genres and attests a polyvalent thinker. Celebrated for his poetry, he is an innovator in imagery and the lyrical subject as in his adaptations of classical form. Introduced into the milieu of symbolist authors at the age of twenty, he left eye-witness accounts of the development of symbolism and insightful analyses of its significance in language arts. His essays and lectures reveal him a critic of historical and philosophical discourses and a forerunner in modern literary theory as he moves its object from a local evaluation to a theory of literary production. An interlocutor of many pre-eminent scientists of his time, he collaborated alongside them in cultural commissions. Although he consistently objected to being labeled a philosopher, esthetic invention, the phenomenology of thought and the functions of language are among his subjects of predilection in his poems, essays, dialogues, drama and notebooks. |
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File: Paul Valery Self-portrait, December 1935.jpg  Paul Valery Self-portrait, December 1935  [[Source: From the Bibliothèque Nationale de France]]  Valéry was born in Sète, on the Mediterranean coast of France, to a Genovese mother and a father of Corsican origin. As early as 1884, he nurtured an interest in architecture and naval arts; he nevertheless turned to letters and drawing as he deemed his aptitude in mathematics insufficient. While studying law, with little interest, in Montpellier, he read several philosophers and expository treatises by mathematicians and scientists; most notably among the earliest referenced in his letters and notes: Helmholtz, Maxwell, Faraday, Thompson, and Henri Poincaré, whom he often re-read throughout his life. In 1890, a chance encounter with Pierre Louÿs proved pivotal: Louÿs soon introduced him to André Gide, leading him to publish several of his poems, and encouraging him to write to Stéphane Mallarmé, whom he subsequently met, as well as Huysmans and Paul Claudel, in 1891, then several other symbolists at Mallarmé’s Tuesday gatherings after his definitive move to Paris in 1894.  Although signs of an intellectual crisis are evident in his letters since 1891, the often mythicized event of October 1892, known as the ‘Genoa night’, remains the temporal marker of what Valéry retrospectively described as a rebirth experience, its emotional and intellectual causes bearing the necessity to annul their effect by opposing to them the very consciousness of the nature of mental phenomena. This first glimpse of the function of the ‘conscious consciousness’ issued Valéry’s lifelong study of the workings of the mind, traceable in his papers written coeval with the Genoa crisis, then in the over 260 *Notebooks*, the first dating from 1894, to which he consecrated his first waking hours throughout his life. His later publications on Edgar Allan Poe and Mallarmé reference the place of this self-awareness in the creative process and define the influence of these admired authors as resulting strictly from the capacity of their works, similarly to those of Wagner or Da Vinci, to evoke a figuration of the living and thinking being that produced them.  File: Paul Valéry’s induction in the Académie Française in 1927.jpg  Paul Valéry’s induction in the Académie  [[Source: From the Bibliothèque Nationale de France]]  Valéry’s first literary figures of the mechanisms of intellect are the *Introduction à la Méthode de Léonard de Vinci* (1895) and *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste* (1896). His renown following the publication of *La Jeune Parque* [*The Young Fate*] (1917) and *Charmes* (1922) ushered a phase of theoretical writing, public addresses – including readings of his poetry, prose and drama; lectures; conferences and interviews – and a series of honours, nationally and internationally. It was also a period of experimentation with prose poetry, within the space of his *Notebooks,* some published in *Autres rhums* (1927) and *Mélange* (1941). In 1933, his views on teaching earned him the directorship of the newly created Centre Universitaire Méditérranéen de Nice, taken from him in 1941 during the Vichy government and reinstated in 1944. In 1937, he was named to the Chair of Poetics at the Collège de France.  File: Paul Valéry reading ‘Mon Faust’ at Adrienne Monnier, March 1941.jpg  Paul Valery reading 'Mon Faust' 1941  [[Source: Gallimard. <http://lediteursingulier.blogspot.com.au/2010/05/reading-people-paul-valery.html>]]  Valéry’s innovation in creating *dramatis personae* that represent the mechanics of the mind inaugurated his modernity in theorizing the universal. In the *Introduction*, his fictitious Léonardo da Vinci represents the power of a mind and its acts in the creative process, using analogies from the physical sciences and mathematics to depict the abstraction that is the Leonardo method, while the non-object-specific basis of the method devised affirms its claim to universality. His celebrated poem, *The Young Fate*, was originally meant as a farewell to poetry, to be added to those written between 1889 and 1900 for a collected edition. The Fate is a figuration of the sequence of changes in the state of consciousness through a night, with the poet’s express intention of investing within it his study of the functioning of a being, rendering the various phases of consciousness into sections akin to musical modulations. A comparison between draft papers from his old verses and the new poem may prove informative as to subject and method.  File: PV vers anciens 146r.jpg  PV vers anciens 146r  [[Source: A manuscript page of unused verse from the 1897-1900 period from the Album des vers anciens draft papers. Sourced from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Vers Anciens II. This image, and the entire book that it was pulled from, can be found at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000195h>]]  File: PV La JP brouillon 1r.jpg  PV La JP brouillon 1r  [[Source: A Manuscript page 1r° in La Jeune Parque draft papers. Sourced from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, La Jeune Parque. This image, and the entire book that it was pulled from, can be found at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000165c>]]  File: PV La JP brouillon 31r.jpg  PV La JP brouillon 31r  [[Source: A manuscript page 31r° in La Jeune Parque draft papers. Sourced from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, La Jeune Parque. This image, and the entire book that it was pulled from, can be found at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000165c>]]  Before the first printing of this masterpiece, Valéry had already begun writing several odes, later included in *Charmes*, with the collective title referencing the incantatory effect of poetry. Detailed descriptions of his creative process with reference to specific poems illustrate his poetic theory, whereby conditions of form, increasingly specified, come to define the subject of a poem, which is itself a representation of a given moment in an act of invention. His essays, dialogues and lectures formalize the study of invention in comparative poetics, mainly in architecture and music, with its acts founded on the relation between the spontaneous and the reflective, the sensory event and the fabrication of the intellect – a moment in the gap between being and knowing – and the functions of language in this process. In his lectures at the Collège de France, Valéry recaptured the universal reach of the word poetics in its original sense, treating ‘of the fabrication of the ‘works of the mind’ in general’, following his conviction, perhaps most succinctly stated, ‘that, in the liveliest phase of intellectual research, there is no difference, other than nominal, between the inner workings of an artist or poet, and those of a scientist.’ Collected Works *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*. Jackson Mathews, ed. (Princeton, 1958)  *Paul Valéry, Oeuvres*. Jean Hytier, ed. (Gallimard, 1957) Selected WorksPoetry *The Young Fate* (1917)  *Album of Early Verse* (1920)  *Charmes* (1922)  *L’Ange* (1946)  *Agathe* (1956) Essays, Dialogues *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci* (1895); Note and digression (1919); *Leonardo and the Philosophers* (1928)  *An Evening with Monsieur Teste* (1896)  *Philosophy of the Dance* (1921)  *Eupalinos or the Architect* (1921) Drama *My Faust* (1941) Conferences, Prefaces, Lectures *On Poe’s ‘Eureka’* (1921)  *Letter about Mallarmé* (1927)  *Remarks on Poetry* (1928)  *I Would Sometimes Say to Stéphane Mallarmé* (1932)  *Concerning Le Cimetère marin* (1933)  *Memoires of a poem* (1937)  *Man and the Sea Shell* (1937)  *The existence of Symbolism* (1938)  *Aesthetic Invention* (1938)  *Poetry and Abstract Thought* (1939) Notebooks *Cahiers*. 29 volumes. (facsimile, 1957)  *Cahiers*. Judith Robinson, ed., 2 volumes (Anthology, 1974)  *Cahiers 1894-1914*. Celeyrette-Pietri, Pickering, eds. 12 volumes. (1987-2013)  *Cahiers / Notebooks*. Brian Stimson, ed., 5 volumes. (Anthology, 2000) Correspondence André Gide et Paul Valéry, Correspondance: 1990-1942. Peter Fawcett, ed. (2009)  Correspondances à trois voix. Peter Fawcett, Pascal Mercier, eds. (2006)  Paul Valéry – Gustave Fourment. Correpondance: 1887-1933. Octave Nadal, ed. (1957)  Lettres à quelques-uns. (1952) |
| Further reading: |