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This study on Paul Valéry's 1920 *Album de vers anciens* shows that this collection of poems labelled as his early verse is far from the truth. Instead, we argue that the poems' evident artifices, reworking and retouches make these 'early verses' a chain of 'successive and indefinite transformations' written over the entire course of the poet's life.

Two events in Valéry's life mark major shifts in his poetic career: his 1892 'Night of Genoa', mythical origin of his abandonment of literature, and the 1917 publication of *La Jeune Parque*, which marks his return to poetry. *Album* connects these events over the long silence and occupies a very special place in Valéry's body of writing: in addition to containing some modified early verses, it also includes some poems *disguised* as early works. These latter poems were, in fact, written after the completion of *La Jeune Parque* in 1917, and they are therefore contemporary with *Charmes*, a later volume of Valéry's poetry.

In this work, we attempt to answer the following questions: Why and how did Valéry return to the art of poetry that he had abandoned? Why did he feel the need to rework his earlier poems? What modifications did he make to his early verses in *Album*?

In the first chapter, we examine the circumstances that gave birth to *Album* and the factors that led Valéry back to poetry. We also observe the collection's evolution: the first edition, published in 1920, contains 16 poems, then others were added in 1926 and 1931, and the final edition of *Album* consists of 21 pieces. We study *Album*'s composition by considering the order of the pieces in each edition. (Indeed, the collection does have one, despite bearing that 'condemnatory word of *Album*', which according to Mallarmé is used to describe a collection without composition, the very antipode of a 'book'.)

The following three chapters are devoted to analysing nine different poems. Chapter 2 examines three pillars of the collection: 'La Fileuse', 'Narcisse parle' and 'Amateur de poèmes'. (These pieces, respectively located in the beginning, middle and end of the collection, were gathered together in the 1906–1907 *Anthologie des poètes français contemporains*.) Chapter 3 analyses four sonnets: 'Naissance de Vénus', 'Baignée', 'Féerie' and 'Même féerie'. Finally, Chapter 4 examines two poems disguised as early verses: 'César' and 'Air de Sémiramis'.

To consider Valéry's modifications of his early works in *Album*, we compare the primitive versions published in various journals (*La Conque*, *L'Ermitage*, *La Syrinx*, etc.) between 1890 and 1892 to their *Album* modified versions, taking into account intermediate states and later retouching. It is in 'Narcisse parle' – the poem Valéry considered as 'the first characteristic state of his ideal and means at that time' – that these modifications are the most representative. We also examine the formal specificity of 'La Fileuse', *terza rima* only composed of feminine rhymes, in relation to its Parnassian and Symbolist sources (Leconte de Lisle, Verlaine, Henri de Régnier and Francis Vielé-Griffin). As for 'Amateur de poèmes', the only prose (or prose poem) of the collection, we reflect on the complexity of this poetics of Valéry, written from the reader's point of view. Among the sonnets, 'Féerie' and 'Même féerie' are twin examples of variation on the same theme, while 'Naissance de Vénus' and 'Baignée' both illustrate young Valéry's obsession with Madame de Rovira. Finally, 'Air de Sémiramis', one of the poems disguised as early work, is notable for its ostensible subtitle, 'fragments of a very old poem', and for its relationship with *La Jeune Parque* and possible link to Catherine Pozzi.

Valéry completes the poems' modifications in stages: they had already begun in 1900, with seven poems collected in the *Poètes d'Aujourd'hui* anthology, and had continued until 1942, when Valéry reviewed and corrected the last edition of *Poésies*. Asking ourselves what the reasons may be for these successive retouches, we argue that for a poet, who considers a poem 'an inexhaustible inner object of reprise and regret', the act of modifying an early verse is not necessarily to transfigure or disguise his past, but rather to free himself from the defined and return to the 'possible-at-every-moment', the living state of production.

One of the most important tendencies of Valéry's modifications is his weakening the link with symbolism: the religious or precious vocabulary, uncertain rhythm and the breaking of the caesura against the classical metric are all typical of symbolist poets and can be found quite frequently in Valéry's early verses, whereas these features tend to fade through retouching. The poems disguised as early works also stand out on the metrical level from *Album*'s other pieces: in many ways, these works have more in common with Valéry's poems written after *La Jeune Parque*. This shows that Valéry had moved away from the symbolist aesthetics to return to classical aesthetics. However, he always kept to the ethics of symbolism (it was not the *aesthetics* but the *ethics* which according to him united the symbolists) and preserved some traces of the end of the 19th century in vocabulary as well as in metrics.

In the fifth and final chapter, we consider the relationships of *Album de vers anciens* to the poems of his maturity such as *La Jeune Parque* and *Charmes*.

Valéry's reworking of early verses and his new 'exercise' of the future *Jeune Parque* took place around the same period. This fact invites us to examine the interactions in their final texts and their drafts. We particularly focus on a passage from *La Jeune Parque* where the poet developed the theme of 'memory' (l. 185-208) inserting one verse derived from an early poem 'Episode' (published in *La Syrinx* in 1892 and collected in *Album*): 'Ressusciter un soir favori des colombes (To resurrect an evening favoured by doves)' (l. 186). Originally written more than twenty years before the birth of the new poem in which it appears, this line fulfils a performative and symbolic role: it not only resurrects the childhood of the *Parque*, but also the early verse itself and, through that verse, all of Valéry's early works and his youth. This self-referential aspect brings to mind the often-debated question of 'an autobiography in the form' as the poet of *La Jeune Parque* says himself.

The comparison of *Album* with *Charmes*, which also consists of 21 pieces, reveals the differences between the two collections. The poems of *Charmes* were composed during one decade (1917–1926), which gives them some homogeneity, while the writing of *Album*'s poems was spread over from 1890 to 1920, and possibly even until 1942, making the volume rather heterogeneous and composite. There are three distinguishable time periods to the poems: before Valéry's 1892 crisis, after he published *La Jeune Parque*, and the period between these two events. If *Charmes*' particularity consists in the variety of forms and subjects, that of *Album* resides in the multiple layers found in each poem as well as in the collection as a whole.

It is precisely through this multi-layered aspect that *Album de vers anciens* builds a bridge connecting the poet's youth to his maturity, and might therefore, as Valéry himself qualified his works on the theme of Narcissus, be called a 'poetic autobiography'.