

John Fawell

The Total Act: A Reading of Paul Valéry's *L'Ame et la Danse*

Valéry once said of Mallarmé, "J'ai adoré cet homme extraordinaire dans le temps même que j'y voyais la seule tête—ors de prix!—à couper, pour décapiter toute Rome" (Lawler, *Anthology* 68). *L'Ame et la Danse* is an example of Valéry's determination to separate himself from, and define himself within the context of, Mallarmé, his greatest mentor. The dialogue first appeared in December 1921 in a special edition of the *Revue musicale* devoted to "Le Balet au dix-neuvième siècle." When Valéry was originally approached for a contribution he refused, citing among other considerations that Mallarmé "avait épuisé le sujet en tant qu'il appartient à la littérature." But having struck upon the dialogue form he was able to include Mallarmé's attitude towards dance while contrasting his own. "J'ai pris le parti de faire figurer, parmi les interprétations diverses que donnent de la danse les trois personnages celle dont l'énoncé et l'incomparable démonstration par le style se trouve dans les Divagations" (Stimpson 96).

Three voices comment on the dance of the great Athikté in *L'Ame et la Danse*: Phaedrus, representative of Mallarmé's airy aesthetic, for whom the dance is important for what it represents; Eryximachus, scientist and lover of bodies, for whom the dance is significant in itself; and Socrates, who dances between the observations of Eryximachus and Phaedrus, representing Valéry's fullest conception of the poetic act.

Eryximachus

Eryximachus is a doctor, that is, a student of the human body. But he is more than that. He is also a lover, a celebrator of the body. His interest in the body borders on the religious. His prose is rife with a sensuality and eroticism that is missing from Phaedrus's mystical prose. His description of his duties vi-à-vis the dancers, for example, is titillating and suggestive. "Je les connais bien mieux que bien," he tells the somewhat jealous and intimidated Phaedrus. He pridefully lists the mysterious, passionately private afflictions from which the dancers suffer and which he treats, "Entorses, boutons, fantasmes, peines de coeur . . . mystérieux malaises . . . jalousie, qu'elle soit artistique ou passionnelle . . ." (Valéry, *L'Ame et la Danse* 117). He is privy to the most private domains of their bodies and carries his duties out in whispers and secrecy. "En moi, par moi, tous les secrets de la médecine s'échangent en secret contre tous les secrets de la danseuse!" (117). He is like their lover, the fortunate recipient of their whispers, fears and dreams.

Eryximachus savors the sensuality of the women who entertain him, even the "musiciennes." Whereas Phaedrus transforms the musicians into light, colorful, poetic images ("L'une de corail rose, et curieusement ployée, souffle dans un énorme coquillage"), Eryximachus emphasizes their sensuality, their physical weight and presence: "La très longue flûtiste aux cuisses fuselées, et l'une à l'autre étroitement tressées, allonge son pied élégant dont l'orteil marque la mesure . . ." (122). He compares the first moments of Athikté's dance to the act of love. "Même dans l'amour, je ne retrouve rien qui l'emporte en volupté sur les tout premiers sentiments" (126). Eryximachus is a connoisseur of sensuality. He likes the first moments of dance drawn out like the first moments of love. In these moments the body is at its most efficient. Its energy multiplies upon itself and mounts within. Valéry describes this state in his *Cahiers* as an "état thermique, d'agitation moléculaire . . . état conservatif. . . état de conservation sensible d'énergie utilisable" (Valéry, *Cahiers* 1299-1300). Athikté's body is in this state, trembling and vibrating from the energy mounting within it. "Il naît de ce glissant regard qui entraîne invinciblement la tête aux douces narines vers l'épaule bien éclairée . . . Et la belle fibre toute entière de son corps net et musculeux, de la nuque jusqu'au talon, se prononce et se tord progressivement; et le tout frémit" (126). Eryximachus savors the slightest movement of her body. He describes her

as being in a state of tense, vigilant anticipation, like that of the poet-lover in "Les Pas." And he emphasizes that this state has been brought about by a physiological propulsion ("corps net et musculeux"), that she is experiencing the kind of physical and sensual awareness known only to the taut, muscular body of the dancer.¹

Eryximachus emphasizes throughout the dialogue that Athikté's dance is not a spontaneous creation but a work of art, that is the result of an acquired physical strength and a learned system or order of movements. To Phaedrus's description of Athikté as "l'Âme des Fables," Eryximachus replies, "Crois-tu . . . qu'elle se flatte d'engendrer d'autres prodiges que des coups de pied très élevés, des battements, et des entrechats péniblement appris pendant son apprentissage?" (131). Eryximachus can find a physiological cause for everything that Phaedrus interprets as a dream. This is, in fact, the way in which he goes about his doctoring. "Sais-tu qu'il me suffit qu'elles me chuchotent quelque rêve qui les tourmente, pour que je puisse, par exemple, en conclure à l'altération de quelque dent?" (117). He describes Athikté's movements in the distanced, objective, cause and effect language of a mathematician or physicist. "Elle place avec symétrie sur ce miroir de ses forces, ses appuis alternés; le talon versant le corps vers la pointe, l'autre pied passant et recevant ce corps, et le renversant à l'avance" (123). Her dance is, like a mathematical equation, absolutely self-contained, "dégagé soigneusement de toute cause d'arythmie et d'incertitude." It does not, as Phaedrus claims, represent anything, but exists for itself, "n'a qu'elle-même pour but." It has its own symmetry and beauty. Of dance, he says, "N'est-ce pas ce que nous voyons?—Que veux-tu de plus clair sur la danse, que la danse elle-même?" (129).

Eryximachus trusts the body not the mind. All order comes to him through the body; the mind only confuses that order. "La raison quelquefois me semble être la faculté de notre âme de ne rien comprendre à notre corps." He believes in a natural harmony or balance, as witnessed by the well-ordered body, and is wary of man's rational interference in that harmony. This is why he trusts none of the artificial remedies created by other doctors. He allows the body to cure itself by instituting the proper counter weight to its symptom.

Eryximachus's mistrust of the mind finds its most blatant expression in the speech to Socrates in which he says, "Connaître? Et qu'est-ce que

connaître?—*C'est assurément n'être point ce que l'on est*" (139). Here he is, like Heidegger, protesting against man's flight from "Being" and his pretension "to know," to be able to transcend himself, to give meaning to his life. Life can give meaning to us but we cannot give meaning to it. He criticizes man's pretension "to know" as a psychologist ("Son effroi d'être ce qui est, l'a donc fait se créer et se peindre mille masques . . . Voici donc les humains délirant . . ."), as a physicist ("les jeux de la dioptrique . . . animent la misérable masse du monde . . ."), and as a mathematician ("le principe des erreurs illimitées") (139). He has no faith in man's ability to change or alter his universe. His vocabulary is decidedly deterministic. Sometimes he speaks like a chemist: "Voilà donc les choses telle qu'elles sont qui se rejoignent, qui se limitent et s'enchaînent de la sorte la plus rigoureuse et la plus mortelle" (139). His prose abounds with these reflexive verbs of enclosure and constraint. For him the world moves with the same heavy determinism as does the human body. He describes Socrates's "ennui de vivre" in anatomical terms. "Une goutte suffit, de cette lympe glaciale, pour détendre dans une âme, les ressorts et la palpitation du désir, exterminer toutes espérances, ruiner tous les dieux qui étaient dans notre sang. Les Vertus et les plus nobles couleurs en sont pâlies . . ." (138).²

For Eryximachus all abstract virtues and conditions find their source in the mystical and ordered circulation of the body. He feels, acutely, the weight of his body, the weight of physical determination. "On dirait que l'isthme du gosier est le seuil de nécessités capricieuses et du mystère organisé. Là, cesse la volonté, et l'empire certain de la connaissance" (111).

And yet as the words "capricieuses" and "mystère" indicate, Eryximachus's philosophy is not one of absolute determination and self enclosure. His respect for the body is greater than that. He has a scientific fascination with the body. He knows it is ordered and yet infinitely mysterious, inexhaustibly interesting. The body is his religion. He has a number of terms for the logos of the body: "Nécessités capricieuses," "mystère organisé," "ingénument mystérieux," "légitime et obscure," "fantaisie organisée," "incohérence qui fonctionne," "un désordre qui agit," "nécessaire et incompréhensible," and so on. There is, for Eryximachus, a mysterious order within the body that man can follow and from which he can learn. It is this order that Athikté follows in her dance.

She obeys her body rather than making it obey her. Her movements serve no immediate purpose or end. She relieves them of their banal servitude to the mind's arbitrary will, allowing them, instead, to express themselves. She celebrates their natural symmetry. In doing so she reveals the movements we ordinarily take for granted, such as walking, as "actes étranges" that strike us by their equality, their mathematical perfection. To Eryximachus, the measured pace of the body is the true source of divinity. "Ne crois-tu," he says to Socrates, "que la pensée des Immortels soit précisément ce que nous voyons . . . l'infinité des nobles similitudes, les conversions, les inversions, les diversions qui se répondent et se déduisent sous nos yeux" (119). The meaning of Athikté's dance, for Eryximachus, is not some poetic or transcendent meaning that replaces or nullifies her physical presence but rather the movements of her dance, themselves, "considérés en eux-mêmes," the dancer's athletic, muscular, mathematical rendering of human emotion.

Phaedrus

The opposite of Eryximachus, Phaedrus emphasizes the subjective powers of the mind to the point of ignoring the physical presence of the objective world. "A peine tu parles," he says to Socrates, "tu engendres ce qu'il faut! . . . Voici précisément,—comme si de ta bouche créatrice, naissaient l'abeille, et l'abeille, et l'abeille . . ." (114). We create what we see. Phaedrus asserts the relativity of his world even to the point of losing his own particular identity or self. "Mais moi, Socrate, la contemplation de la danseuse me fait concevoir bien des choses . . . qui, sur-le-champ, se font ma propre pensée, et pensant, en quelque sorte, à la place de Phèdre . . . Je rêve . . . et ma présence s'égaré dans ce dédale de grâces" (132, 118). Phaedrus loses himself in his aesthetic just as he loses the physical world. Lawler writes in his analysis of Valéry's fascination with Mallarmé that "having placed the end of his search in a perfected self, Valéry never forgot the superb irritant of a self (Mallarmé) wholly devoted to the idea of Beauty" (*Poet As Analyst* 130). Lawler also notes that Valéry "emphasized the generality with which Mallarmé approached the problem of poetic composition, and conceived it as being, in its purest state, forever allegorical of itself" (132). Eryximachus makes the same observation of Phaedrus: "Phèdre, à tout prix, prétend qu'elle (Athikté) représente quelque chose" (*L'Ame* 133).

The dancers, to Phaedrus, are souls not bodies. Athikté is "l'échappée de toutes les portes de la vie." He seems a little intimidated by Eryximachus's knowledge of the dancers' bodies. "Tu les connais beaucoup trop bien," he says to Eryximachus. When Eryximachus points out the "très petit sein" of the fallen Athikté, Phaedrus says, "Je ne le vois que trop. Socrates, too, notices Phaedrus's jealousy of Athikté's physical power and flexibility. "Voici donc que tes lèvres sont envieuses de la volubilité de ces pieds prodigieux! Tu aimerais de sentir leurs ailes à tes paroles, et d'orner ce que tu dirais de figures aussi vives que leurs bonds!" (126). Valéry emphasizes the insufficiency of Phaedrus's poetic images in comparison to Athikté's physical prowess. He seems to suggest that a fear of the physical world lies behind the insatiable poetic appetite of this "mystique dévorante." Throughout the dialogue the ideas of gift and grace intermingle in Phaedrus's prose. The dance is, to him, a present, an escape, a temporary respite from the insupportable presence of the physical world.

Phaedrus uses the word "charme" several times to describe Athikté's dance. Athikté is a magician who creates something out of nothing. Whereas Eryximachus celebrates Athikté's movements themselves, Phaedrus celebrates the space and images engendered around and between her movements. "Je rêve à ces contacts inexprimable qui se produisent dans l'âme, entre les temps, entre les blancheurs et les passes de ces membres en mesure . . ." (128). Athikté creates something from her movements, "Et voici qu'elle se fait une demeure un peu au-dessus des choses, et l'on dirait qu'elle s'arrange un nid dans ses bras blancs" (127). She is not simply a muscular artist following a structured form, but a "fille charmeresse" creating new forms. "La Danse engendre toute une plastique," says Valéry in "Degas, Danse, Dessin" (*Oeuvres* 2: 1171). It creates a kind of "espace-temps," as he likes to call it. Athikté weaves a substance out of time. "Elle se tisse de ses pieds un tapis indéfinissable de sensations . . . qu'ils sont habiles ces purs ouvriers des délices du temps perdu" (127). In dance, says Valéry, "l'Espace n'était que le lieu des actes" (*Oeuvres* 2: 1171).

Phaedrus, then, reveres the dance, not for itself, but for what it creates. He is not interested in the weight and structure of the dance, as is Eryximachus, but in its weightlessness, its ability to transcend itself, to become something else. He is not interested in its mysteriously deter-

mined order but in its freedom, its creative potential. Athikté's dance is not a series of movements "péniblement appris pendant son apprentissage," but a spontaneously creative act. He emphasizes the impossibility of measuring her movements. "Regardez-moi plutôt ces bras et ces jambes innombrables! . . . Quelques femmes font mille choses. Mille flambeaux, mille péristyles éphémères" (117). The possible meanings and structures of the dance are as infinite as the boundaries of the mind. What is one moment a hut is the next a nest, a carpet, a pair of quarreling doves. There are no divisions here, only endless transformations, boundless freedom.

Athikté, then, in Phaedrus's eyes, is trying to disembarrass herself of the weight and determinism of her body. She wants to become invisible form. Through the motions of dance, "par la subtilités des traits, par la divinité des élans, par la délicatesses des points stationnaires," she becomes "cette créature universelle qui n'a point de corps ni de visage" (132). Phaedrus, like Eryximachus, uses a multitude of reflexive verbs but these describe a magic dissipation rather than a constrained determinism. "Les images se fondent, s'évanouissent . . . Il se dissipe en jeunes filles, les tuniques s'envolent" (117). The effect of Athikté's dance is so light it can be breathed in ("odeur muscate et composée"). The music carries her weightless form—"la musique doucement semble la ressaisir d'une autre manière, la soulève" (125). When the cymbals crash and the music ends she falls to the floor, a "petit tas de membres et d'écharpes."

For Eryximachus, dance is following the body, aligning oneself to its natural harmony. For Phaedrus it is escaping the body. Athikté is always chasing phantoms, trying to dissolve into thin air. For Eryximachus, God is in the mysterious order of the dancer's body. For Phaedrus, God is in its absence of any determined form, its ability to constantly re-create itself. "Il se dissipe en jeunes filles et les dieux semble changer d'idée" (119). Phaedrus reveres Athikté's capacity for spontaneous judgement, her playfulness, her capriciousness. "Jouissons de l'instant très délicat où elle change de volonté!" (126). Sometimes she does not do what she had planned to do. Other times she undoes what she had done. Nothing is solid in her dance: "ses orverts intelligents qui attaquent, qui esquivent, qui nouent, et qui dénouent, qui se pourchassent, qui s'envolent" (127). Her dance is a game, an infinitely fascinating exercise, a playful and infinite recreation of the objective world.

Socrates

Socrates's conception of the dance dances, itself, between Phaedrus's mystical freedom and Eryximachus's medical determinism. Of the banqueters, for example, Socrates says, "Chacun . . . donne équitablement ce qui leur revient, à chacune des chances de vie, à chacun des germes de mort" (110). Man knows possibilities as well as death. He is both a creative and a determined creature. He has both freedom and a destiny. When Athikté appears Socrates exclaims, "Elle n'est rien . . . Chose sans corps!" but also "elle cède à quelque noble destinée!" (121). Athikté is both Phaedrus's free soul and Eryximachus's structured artist. One moment Socrates describes her dance in Phaedrus's prose, "on dirait maintenant que tout n'est que spectres autour d'elle . . . elle les enfante en les fuyante," the next in Eryximachus's cold, clinical language, "Un oeil froid la regarderait aisément comme une démente . . . sa tête se renverse, traînant sur le sol une chevelure déliée; . . . l'une de ses jambes est à la place de cette tête" (131). When asked whether Athikté's dance represents anything Socrates responds, "nulle chose, cher Phèdre. Mais toute chose, Eryximaque." Athikté's dance exists both in itself and as something else. It is both human and divine. She is neither a body nor a soul but a metamorphosis from one to the other, a flame, a dissipation of matter into ether. "Ne sentez-vous pas qu'elle est l'acte pur des métamorphoses?" (134).

Athikté achieves the lightness, the invisibility, that Phaedrus celebrates, but through the physical strength and determination that Eryximachus praises. "Oh la voici . . . qui entre dans l'exception et qui pénètre dans ce qui n'est pas possible! . . . Comme nos âmes sont pareilles . . . devant ce prestige qui est égal et entier" (126). She reaches the impossible, the exceptional but through a mathematically ordered system of movements. Dance, Socrates tells Phaedrus, is a dream, but "Un rêve de vigilance et de tension qui ferait la Raison elle-même. . . . Rêve, rêve, mais rêve tout pénétré de symétries, tout ordre, tout actes et séquences" (118). Socrates, like Eryximachus, is too self-conscious, too objective, to lose his and Athikté's physical presence in a mystical poetic image. He is curious about the physiological causes behind her magical effect. "Je m'inquiète comment la nature a su enfermer dans cette fille si frêle et si fine, un tel monstre de force et de promptitude? Hercule changé en hirondelle, ce mythe existe-t-il?" (128). Athikté is as light as a

swallow and as strong as Hercules. She has achieved the lightness of Phaedrus's images but through the intense molecular agitation and condensation which Eryximachus studies. The magical effect of her dance is due to an intense mobilization of her physical energy.

Dance

Valéry has a number of fascinating ways of thinking about the combined physical power and magical grace of dance. In "Philosophie de la Danse," for example, he compares the dance to a top. "On songe à la toupie qui se tient sur sa pointe et qui réagit si vivement au moindre choc."³ Her movement is totally self-contained, powerful, so intense that the slightest external interference results in a violent rupture of her enchanting effect. Building on Valéry's metaphor, one might also compare Athikté to a runner or swimmer who, in time, falls into such perfect measure in his strides that he loses awareness of his movements and of his fatigue. Or she is like the hummingbird which, through the perfect measure and rapidity of its beating wings, seems to be suspended immobile in the air. "Elle reposerait immobile au centre même de son mouvement. Isolée, isolée, pareille à l'axe du monde," says Socrates. Saint-Amand writes that "derrière cette acceptation d'une conception fluctuante, dynamique et même stochastique de la danse se cache une passion pour la statique. . . . L'imagination de Valéry ne cesse pas d'être celle des solides" (324-25).

She could also be compared to a tornado ("O Tourbillon!—J'étais en toi, o mouvement"), light as air but bearing inhuman strength, a totally self-contained swirl of energy. "Les actes se dessinent de plus en plus en économie; ils semblent exactement proportionnés à l'énergie et cette énergie, sans frais ni pertes" (Valéry, *Cahiers* 1279). Her body is churning with such efficiency that it is able to shed the burden of its own weight. She has caught up with her energy. She is as light as her soul. She has reached Phaedrus's universal realm, not through a poetic metaphor but through the molecular agitation of her own body. "Et le corps qui est ce qui est, le voici qu'il ne peut plus se contenir dans l'étendue! Où se mettre? Où devenir? Cet Un veut jouer à Tout. Il veut jouer à l'universalité de l'âme."

Valéry also compares dance to the concentration of energy in sexual intercourse.

Le spasme d'Eros est la sensation dans laquelle le Monde (M) se réduit à la masse étreinte convulsivement du corps adverse, et le corps (C) s'élève à la souveraineté instantanée de toute sa présence et force résumées depuis les extrémités de son étendue sensible, comme un seul muscle frappant un seul coup. (*Cahiers* 532)

Reminiscent of these remarks is Socrates's cry of "Battez, battez," during the climax of Athikté's dance:

la matière frappée et battue, et heurtée, en cadence; la terre bien frappée; les peaux et les cordes bien tendues, bien frappées; les paumes des mains, les talons, bien frappant et battant le temps, forgeant joie et folie; et toutes choses en délire bien rythmé, règnent. (146)

Athikté is like a lover: tense, taut, inebriated by the vibrations of her body, unburdened of the weight of her mind and body, consumed in a violent rhythm like matter in a flame.⁴

The flame is the symbol with which Socrates prefers to describe Athikté's dance. "O mes amis tout ce qui passe de l'état lourd à l'état subtil passes par le moment de feu et de la lumière" (143). His speeches on the flame are permeated with "v" and "e" sounds. The "v" words tend to represent the objective act of the dance, its churning matter and violent vibrations ("se divise," "s'élève," "s'ouvre," "vibration de la vie," "délivrance," "s'enivre," "ravisement," "éclats de vigueur," "violence," "vitesse et variété"). The "e" or "é" words tend to represent the state of freedom and pure essence that Athikté attains through her violent motions, the ether into which she dissipates ("essence très subtile," "énergie inépuisable," "éclate en événements," "extrême félicité," "état d'étincelante salamandre," "éther," "l'étendue"). Athikté's dance is, like a flame, a combination of violent agitation, furious destruction and magical dissipation and escape.

Et flamme n'est-ce point aussi la forme insaisissable et fière de la plus noble destruction? . . . la flamme . . . de la matière à l'éther, furieusement gronde et se précipite. . . . Comme il détruit furieusement, joyeusement, le lieu même ou il se trouve, et comme il s'enivre de l'excès de ses changements! (144)

She is intoxicated, consumed by the fervor, the heat, the vigor, the violent energy of her movements. Her body is eaten up in her dance. "Cette femme est dévorée de figures innombrables."

Her movements have no end, no purpose other than their own scattering, their own dissipation. She is, as Valéry says in "Degas, Danse, Dessin," like the animal who, tired of its immobility, "s'évade, s'ébroue, fuyant une sensation et non une chose; il se répand en galop et en déportements" or like the man

en qui la joie, ou la colère, ou l'inquiétude de l'âme, ou la brusque effervescence des idées, dégage une énergie qu'aucun acte précis ne peut absorber et puisse tarir dans sa cause, et qui se lève, part, marche à grands pas pressés, obéit à l'aiguillon de cette puissance surabondante. (*Oeuvres 2*: 1171)

Dance is the scattering of this "énergie surabondante," this energy that serves no apparent or immediate purpose, "l'énergie de la plus haute valeur," energy that cannot be explained in the realm of finite or ordinary purposes. She flees "une sensation et non une chose." This mysterious, purposeless, inexplicable physiological agitation attests to untold resources and powers within us, a hidden divinity.

And yet this energy swells up in us every day, in the man who takes a walk, in "le distrait qui balance son pied ou qui tambourine sur les vitres; l'homme en profonde réflexion qui se caresse le menton, etc." (*Oeuvres 1*: 1401). Everyday, Valéry suggests, our bodies escape the resistance of our minds and dance without our knowing it. Athikté is an artist who, through tense vigilance, and the ordered movements of her muscular body, cultivates this excess energy, summons it, cedes to it, allows it to move her without any interference and to express or expend itself more freely.

The whole room, Socrates notes, is caught up in Athikté's churning energy. Socrates is more self-conscious than Phaedrus. He cannot enjoy the dance without analyzing its effect on himself and the others. He describes Athikté as gathering and tightening the entire room within her furious rhythm. "Je jouis comme personne de cette magnifique liberté. Les autres, maintenant, sont fixes et comme enchantées. Les musiciennes s'écoutent, et ne la perdent pas de vue. . . . Elles adhèrent à la chose" (121). The freedom of Athikté's movement, here, contrasts with the fixed,

vigilant attention of the rest of the room. She is like a swirl of air sucking in the entire room. The audience, too, is shedding the burden of its weight, being consumed in the fervor of her movements. "Tout le monde frappe et chante et quelque chose grandit et s'élève" (146). Their hands, clapping to her beat, are weightless, and shine with a divine light. "J'entends le fracas de toutes les armes étincelantes de la vie" (146).

In his *Cahiers*, Valéry asks:

Mais, au fait, qui parle dans un poème? Mallarmé voulait que ce fût le Langage lui-même. Pour moi—ce serait—l'Être vivant ET pensant (contraste, ceci)—et poussant la conscience de soi à la capture de sa sensibilité—développant les propriétés d'icelle dans leurs implexes—résonances, symétries etc.—sur la corde la voix. En somme, le Langage issu de la Voix, plutôt que la Voix du langage. (435-6)

A poem involves the poet's entire being, corporal as well as spiritual. There is a physiological and molecular agitation and determination involved in poetic inspiration and a precise calculation and travail involved in poetic expression. The poet's mind must be as well toned and flexible in the science of language as the dancer's body is in the science of movement. "Un homme est penseur comme il est danseur . . . usant de son esprit comme celui-ci de ses muscles et nerfs" (334). The continuity between sensory, affective and intellectual experience, the complete cycle of energy, that characterizes the poetic state, is best summarized, for Valéry, in the act of love, "l'acte le plus complet qui soit, le modèle qui comprend, assemble, exige la co-ordination la plus générale et réalise un cycle de O à O bien net—avec psychie, sens, muscles, glandes, seuils, disruption—rôle et localisation de la conscience" (Crow 53). Consciousness is more than passive reception. As Christine Crow says, "Consciousness is not only autonomous perception but also the center of a dynamic state" (55). The poet does not simply interpret the world, re-create it in his own mind, as Phaedrus does, he acts upon it physically, re-creates and purifies it in its own form.

NOTES

1. For an excellent discussion of Valéry's ideas on thermodynamics, see Serres's article, "Moteurs."
2. For a discussion of Valéry's scientific (more than aesthetic) appreciation of dance, see Saint-Amand's article, "Valéry: Pirouettes."
3. Pierre Saint-Amand reflects also on the metaphor of the top: "La toupie n'y est plus en effet un simple objet ludique, mais un modèle résumant toute une physique appelée des circonstances; la toupie fluctue entre stabilité et instabilité, entre ordre et désordre" (323).
4. For further discussion of Valéry's ideas on rhythm, see Celeyrette-Pietri's article, "Rythme et symétrie," and Austin's, "Some of Valéry's Reflections on Rhythm."

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