THE TREE AND THE VINE
A FABLE ABOUT THE RELATION BETWEEN POETRY AND THEORY

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This paper is divided into three sections. In the first the author uses a fable from the Enlightenment period that personifies literature as a tree and theory as a vine growing around the tree. The second section is dedicated to Paul Valéry, who has revived the ancient Greek meaning of poetry and poetics. In the third section the author reveals his "amphibian" experience as a poet and professor.

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1. Against Self-sufficient Literary Theory

As a starting point, I have chosen a fable from the Enlightenment period that personifies poetry as a tree and theory as a vine growing around the tree. In other words, poetry is envisioned as an organic force growing out of the earth (i.e., out of its own foundation) to the sky, whereas theory is a secondary, marginal activity with no foundation of its own; therefore, it sucks the essential life force from the strong, creative stem of poetry. In brief, theory is a parasite on the body of poetry.

This hierarchical view of the relation between poetry and theory was characteristic for traditional literature, and we can still hear it uncritically repeated by some poets that do not exactly excel at self-reflection. The poetic art, in addition to its emotional and unconscious levels, also demands the intense engagement of all other mental levels; as Paul Valéry pointed out, the power of (self-)criticism is the very condition for poetic creation. I do not thoroughly agree with the message of the Enlightenment fable about the tree and the vine – or, more precisely, with its irrationalistic interpretation – but I even agree less with the arrogance of theory in its constant striving to relegate poetry to the edges of the garden. Literary

theory, as practiced in academic circles in recent decades, has been treating poetry even worse than the Enlightenment vine: it attempts to envelop and suffocate the tree of poetry, and yet it imitates the tree and behaves as though it had roots of its own. On the basis of my own experience as a university professor I must, unfortunately, admit that there is an increasing fascination among students for literary theory, which would not be so bad if it were not accompanied by a shocking lack of joy for reading primary literary texts.

The basic disposition of Western philosophy (i.e., Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel) lured literary theory into the constant temptation to dethrone poetry and to commandeer its very position, which finally happened in the 20th century. Today's prevalence of theory over poetry is not only a phenomenon characteristic of the modern and post-modern era, as academic literary critics like to flatter themselves, it is a renewed and radical implementation of the starting point of Western metaphysical philosophy, in which poetry is always subservient to philosophy as the highest and ultimate truth of the world. The honorable exceptions among philosophers and literary critics (i.e., Heidegger, Lotman, Derrida, Steiner, Bloom, and Pirjevec) understand the specific nature of poetic language, which cannot be replaced by the theoretical language.

Poetry is now marginalized; it plays a minor social role but has not lost its dignity, because its very position at the margins enables it to express its own truth and the truth of the world. Is theory now "happier" than before? No, but theory is *a priori* an unhappy consciousness. Perhaps it will find a sort of happiness when it realizes that it must limit its ambitions to control and subjugate the entire world.

The relation between poetry and theory was never abstract, but always took place in a certain historical and social context. The crucial role in this process was played by the respective educational systems with their changing values and aims. The feeling that poetry and theory have exchanged their roles, as suggested by the invitation to our symposium, is perhaps merely a perceptual error: theory always had its place in the mechanism of social power, whereas poetry was always considered as a weakness. The traditional faith in the social meaning of poetry was to a large extent a consequence of humanistic education from the 18th century on, which was based on quotations from the history of poetry. This educational tradition was finally broken a few decades ago. "The crisis of poetry," referred to in the invitation to this symposium, is not a crisis of poetry, but a crisis of the educational system that marginalized poetry and established theory as the ultimate aim of the educational process. This antipoetic, antiartistic, amusical tendency has already experienced a sad and banal catastrophe because it does not enable the intellectual development that is its proclaimed aim: the educational system is drowning in barbarism, the only purpose of which is to serve the society of consummation. Goodbye beauty, goodbye brains!

I am an amphibian: a poet making a living as a professor of literary history and theory. As a poet, I believe that poetry is a tree that needs appropriate care in order to breathe, grow, and bear fruit.

As a professor I would like to believe that theory is not just a vine, but – frankly – I cannot completely trust its greedy nature and parasitical impulse; therefore, I am constantly forced to limit its appetite in order to save the tree. I trust the tree in me much more than I trust the vine. I see the greatest danger in mistaking one for another, in mistaking the different identities and biological laws of tree and vine.

The tree and the vine can coexist by respecting their mutual differences. And here is the problem; the tree can live without the vine, but the vine cannot live without the tree; the vine has to embrace the tree all the time. Too close for comfort. Academics that claim that their theory has replaced poetry should abolish the adjective "literary" in the name of their profession: let them be *theoreticians* and *critics* as such, let them write theory *an sich!* Unfortunately, the place for theory *an sich* has been occupied by philosophy for two thousand five hundred years. That is the unpleasant border of the *hubris* of self-sufficient academic literary criticism: that in the ultimate consequence it is not an independent discipline. That it is merely a vine on the tree of poetry. If literary criticism suffocates the tree of poetry, it becomes the parasite on the tree of philosophy. Embarrassing.

However we turn this relation, there is still a grain of salt in the Enlightenment fable about the tree of poetry and the vine of theory. To the basic message of this old fable we should today add that the vine gives the measure to the tree, showing its breadth and height.

2. Paul Valéry, the Founder of Modern Poetics

Edgar Allan Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (which so deeply fascinated Baudelaire and Mallarmé) introduced the understanding of poetry as a rational construction. Paul Valéry as Mallarmé's most gifted follower continued and radicalized this line so far that he has become a personification of the synthesis between the poetic creation and Cartesian *ratio* in the history of French and European poetry. Precisely this is the reason why Valéry is an appropriate author for the reflection of the relation between poetry and theory. He seems to be the very source and the ultimate authority in this controversy. Even more: because we owe the contemporary understanding of the term *poetics* to Valéry, he seems to be the most suitable poet and critic for the analysis of the relation between literature and literary theory. Tzvetan Todorov, one of the leading structuralists, pointed out in his article "La 'poétique' de Valéry" that "Valéry has the credit of reviving within the French language the term *poetics* in a sense that differs from the set of rules defining rhymes" (125).

Valéry's modern use of this term is – paradoxically – the revival of the original, ancient Greek understanding of *poetics.* Valéry understands the word *poetry* in its primordial, etymological sense: the ancient Greek verb *poiein* means 'to do, to create'. Its Latin equivalent (or, more precisely, a simplified translation) is *pro-ducere* 'to produce', which reduces creation to a mere technique and represents the source of today's dictatorship of

production. Valéry revealed his analysis in 1937 when he became professor of poetics at the *Collège de France.* I mention this biographical detail as a critical remark against academic circles that still treat poets with highbrow arrogance; on the other hand, every poet without a Ph.D. is not Paul Valéry. In his inaugural lecture (when the hall was completely full and people were fighting in order to enter and listen to the Poet and Professor), Valéry simply defined *poetics* with its etymological meaning – "poietics": "It is an utterly simple notion of the work (creation – *faire*) that I want to deal with. To do (to create), *poiein*…" (Valéry, *Oeuvres I* 1342). Valéry' revival of the original ancient Greek understanding of poetry and artistic creation is parallel to Heidegger's return to the Sources. In this context, Heidegger is essential for us because he is one of the rare thinkers that highly appreciated poetry (respect for art is otherwise not very common in the tradition of metaphysical philosophy): he saw thinking and poetry as "two closest, but deeply separated mountain peaks." It is interesting and significant that both Heidegger and Valéry came to the same conclusion about the necessity of the revival of the original, ancient Greek meaning of *poiesis,* although Valéry stemmed from a Cartesian philosophical background and was as a matter of fact "the last Cartesian," whereas Heidegger radically criticized Cartesian principles. Slovene comparatists remember with nostalgia our late professor Dušan Pirjevec, who frequently repeated the etymology of the word *poetry* (*poiesis*) in order to save literature from its slavery to ideas, which was characteristic of the traditional understanding of literature, especially in Slovenia. Due to specific historical circumstances, living under the rule of foreign powers, Slovenes maintained their cultural identity with the help of the poetic word.

In his "Discours sur l'esthétique" (Speech on Aesthetics), presented at the Second International Congress of Aesthetics in 1937 and later published in *Variété IV*, Valéry divided aesthetics into two disciplines: (1) aesthesics (*Esthésique*), which he etymologically understood in the original sense of the ancient Greek word *aisthesis* ('sense') and explained as "a research of sensations," and (2) poietics (*Poiétique*), which deals with "the production of works (*la production des oeuvres*)." According to Valéry, it is "on the one hand the research of the invention and composition, the role of the coincidence, reflection, imitation; the role of the surrounding culture; on the other hand, it is a testing and analysis of techniques, procedures (*procédés*), instruments, materials, means, and supports of the action" (Valéry, *Oeuvres I* 1311).[1]

In the lecture "About the Teaching of Poetics at the *Collège de France*" in 1937 (first published in *Variété IV*), Valéry revealed the purpose of his course simply and systematically as a true Cartesian: its aim is "to research the purely literary effects of the language, the examination of the expressive and suggestive inventions created in order to increase the power and the penetration of the word (parole), and to research the limitations that are

[1] When not otherwise indicated, Valéry's quoted thoughts have been translated by the author of this analysis, who also published the first book of Slovene translations of Valéry's poetry in 1992.

sometimes imposed in order to distinguish the language of the fiction from the language of use, etc." (*Oeuvres I* 1441). His insistence that literature is nothing else but a special language activity is worthy of a passionate linguist: "Literature is and cannot be anything else but a kind of extension and application of certain characteristics of the language" (*Oeuvres I* 1440).

One of the signs of the rationalistic nature of Valéry's poetics is his utter contempt for the notion of the inspiration; in *Tel Quel* he defined it as an aphorism: "Inspiration is a hypothesis that reduces the author to the role of the observer" (*Oeuvres II* 484).

Valéry treats the author as a sovereign, omnipotent creator of artistic reality; in this sense, his understanding of the author stems from the basic principle of rationalistic philosophy as founded by Descartes. Following this line of thinking, Valéry came to the following conclusion in the essay "Lettre sur Mallarmé" (Letter about Mallarmé) from 1927: "If ever I should write, I should infinitely prefer to write entirely consciously, and with complete lucidity, something rather feeble, than to give birth, thanks to a trance and while outside myself, to the very finest masterpieces" (*Oeuvres I* 640, *Selected* 216).

Valéry started his lecture at the University of Oxford, entitled "Poetry and Abstract Thought" and first published in 1939, with the following lines that address the very heart of this discussion:

> The idea of Poetry is often contrasted with that of Thought, and particularly "Abstract Thought." People say "Poetry and Abstract Thought" as they say Good and Evil, Vice and Virtue, Hot and Cold. Most people, without thinking any further, believe that the analytical work of the intellect, the efforts of will and precision in which it implicates the mind, are incompatible with the freshness of inspiration, that flow of expression, that grace and fancy that are the signs of poetry and that reveal it at its very first words…. This opinion may possibly contain a grain of truth, though its simplicity makes me suspect it to be of scholarly origin. (Valéry *Oeuvres I* 1414–15, Valéry *An Anthology* 136)

Later in the same text we can read the poetic sentence: "Between Voice and Thought, between Thought and Voice, between Presence and Absence, oscillates the poetic pendulum" (*Oeuvres I* 1333, *An Anthology* 157–58). However, there is no poetry without conscious work:

> All the precious things that are found in the earth – gold, diamonds, uncut stones – are there scattered, strewn, grudgingly hidden in a quantity of rock or sand, where chance may sometimes uncover them. These riches would be nothing without the human labor that draws them from the massive night where they were sleeping, assembles them, alters and organizes them into ornaments. These fragments of metal embedded in formless matter, these oddly shaped crystals, must owe all their luster to intelligent labor. It is a labor of this kind that the true poet accomplishes. Faced with a beautiful poem, one can indeed feel that it is most unlikely that any man, however gifted, could have improvised without a backward glance, with no other effort than that of writing or dictating, such an simultaneous and complete

> system of lucky finds. Since the traces of effort, the second thoughts, the changes, the amount of time, the bad days, and the distaste have now vanished, effaced by the supreme return of a mind over its work, some people, seeing only the perfection of the result, will look on it as due to a sort of magic that they call INSPIRATION. They thus make of the poet a kind of temporary medium. If one were strictly to develop this doctrine of pure inspiration, one would arrive at some very strange results. For example, one would conclude that the poet, since he merely transmits what he receives, merely delivers to unknown people what he has taken from the unknown, has no need to understand what he writes, which is dictated by a mysterious voice. He could write a poem in a language he did not know. (Valéry, *Oeuvres I* 1334–35, *An Anthology* 159–60)

As I have analyzed in the study "Valéry's paradox" (Novak, *Po-etika* 156–91), there are many contradictions between Valéry's poetic practice and his own theory. Among other things, Valéry's own poetry shows that his denial of inspiration is not as absolute and irrevocable as one would expect on the basis of his statements quoted above. On the thematic level we can be surprised by the frequent treatment of mythical poets, such as Orpheus and Amphion, or the prophetess Pythias. Although the Cartesian philosopher Valéry did not believe in the ancient myth about the prophetic nature of the poetic art, as concentrated in the Latin proverb *poeta vates,* in his long poem "Pythias" (published in his volume of classical verses *Charmes* in 1922) the poet Valéry described Apollo's priestess in the temple of Delphi tormented by the terrible power coming from outside, from transcendence, physically tortured by the *inspiration* until her prophetic (poetic) breath articulates the world submitting itself to the discipline of the language. In this poem Valéry wrote the famous verse: "Honneur des Hommes, Saint LANGAGE" (The Pride of Men, Holy LANGUAGE; *Oeuvres* 136).

In spite of his rationalism and his contempt for traditional "inspiration," Valéry believed that the beginning of poetic creation is an irrational and even "supernatural gift;" in the essay "Au sujet d'Adonis" (With Reference to Adonis, 1920), Valéry launched his famous idea about the first verse: "Graciously the gods give us the first line for nothing, but it is up to us to furnish a second that will harmonize with it and not be unworthy of its supernatural elder brother" (*Oeuvres I* 482, *Selected* 140). It also means that only the first verse is "free" whereas all the others must imitate its rhythmic and euphonic structure.

Paul Valéry has great merits for the dethronement of the author as the only and exclusive proprietor of the sense of his work, as the supreme interpreter with an absolute monopoly over the meaning of his text. At the end of the essay "Au sujet du Cimetière marin" (1933), in which Valéry explained the genesis of his most famous poem, "The Graveyard by the Sea," he comes to a far-reaching conclusion: "*There is no real sense of the text.* There is no authority of the author. Whatever he *wanted to say,* he has written what he has written. Once published, the text is similar to a tool that anybody can use according to his or her wishes and abilities; and it is not quite certain whether its constructor uses it better than anybody else" (*Oeuvres I* 1507).

In the preface to the edition of the book of poetry *Charmes* commented on by the philosopher Alain (1929), Valéry wrote: "My verses have the meaning that is given to them. The meaning that I give to them is suitable for me only, and is not in discordance with any other. It is the error that is contrary to the nature of poetry and can even be fatal for poetry if we demand that each poem have a real and unique sense that would correspond or be identical with the author's thoughts"(*Oeuvres I* 1509).

Valéry is one of the rare poets that has a good opinion about criticism and critics. Even more: for him, self-reflection is not just a control instance for poetic creation – it is the highest creative ability, as he pointed out in his shocking aphorism from the book *Tel Quel:* "Each poet will in the end be evaluated according to his value as a critic (of himself)" (Valéry, *Oeuvres II* 483)**.**

Valéry's poetics is based on reason, but poetry always prevails over reason; the following definition from *Tel Quel* brilliantly reveals this paradox: "Reason demands that the poet should love rhyme more than reason" (*Oeuvres II* 676). In *Cahier B. 1910* (Notebook B 1910), the only one he published during his lifetime in the framework of *Tel Quel* (otherwise Valéry wrote notes every morning of his life, leaving behind 261 notebooks), he reversed the generally accepted idea about the relation between the rhyme and the idea: "There is a greater possibility that a (literary) idea would be born out of a rhyme than to find a rhyme starting with an idea" (*Oeuvres II* 582).

These lucid and paradoxical remarks by Valéry refer to his poems written in classical forms and published in three books of poetry: *Album des vers anciens* (Album of Ancient Verses, 1920), in which he gathered youth symbolist poetry created in the framework of the Mallarmé circle (*mardistes* 'Tuesday followers'); the long and hermetic poem *La Jeune Parque* (The Young Fate, 1917), the most "mallarméan" of Valéry's poetic texts; and *Charmes* (Charms, 1922), one of the best-composed volumes of poetry ever written. This segment of Valéry's *oeuvre* was named *poésie pure* ('pure poetry') – a label that caused many controversies. However, we should point out that *poésie pure* represents only a tiny part (150 pages) among thousands and thousands of pages of Valéry's entire literary production, gathered in his collected works (*Oeuvres*) and notebooks (*Cahiers*) in the famous French collection *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.* The great majority of his literary work is written in a hybrid form of diary entries, essays, prose poems, free verse, and so on, and we could name it *poésie brute* ('brute poetry'), which is the title of one such cycle.

For Valéry, the central question is the relation between the Mind (Intellect) and Poetry. In *Tel Quel* (in the chapter "Literature," which was first published as a separate booklet), we can read the following praise to the poetic capacity of the Intellect:

> A poem must be a holiday of Mind (Intellect). It can be nothing else.
>
> Holiday: it is a game, but solemn, ordered and significant; image of what one ordinarily is not, partaking of a state where efforts are rhythms – and redeemed.

> One celebrates something in accomplishing it, or representing it in its purest and fairest state.
>
> Here we have the power of language and its inverse phenomenon, understanding, identity of the things it separates. One discards its poverty, its weaknesses, its everydayness. One organizes all the possibilities of language.
>
> Holiday over, nothing must remain. Ashes, trampled garlands. (*Oeuvres* II 546–47, *Selected* 147)

For Valéry the poem is, therefore, "a holiday of Mind," the highest expression of Intellect, where the usual laws of Logic are no longer valid. The prose poem that immediately follows the quoted fragment shows that the basic law of poetic language is paradox:

> In the poet:
> The ear speaks,
> The mouth listens;
> It is intelligence, vigilance, that gives birth to dream;
> It is sleep that sees clearly;
> It is the image and the phantom that look;
> It is the lack and the blank that creates.
> (*Oeuvres II* 547, *Selected* 147)

The central book of Valéry's poems written in classical forms is entitled *Charmes* (1922). This typically French expression bears the Latin epigraph: *Deducere carmen* (To deduce a poem; Valéry *Oeuvres I* 111). *Carmen,* 'poem', is, namely, the etymological source of the French word *charme,* or English *charm.* Such a definition of the title offers us the best possible key for understanding the poetic nature of Valéry's poems: his poetic language is so musical and metaphorically fresh precisely because of the fact that this sworn Cartesian rationalist was capable of surpassing his own poetics and brilliant theoretical concepts in order to listen and trust the poet in himself.

3. From Poetry to Poetics and Back

As an "amphibian" I would like to explain how I experience literary theory "out" of my poet's skin.

When as a timid freshman – was it really already 35 years ago? – I was listening to the explanations of the late professor Anton Ocvirk about versification systems, I had mixed feelings: on the one hand, all that scientific pedantry about *ictus* and number of syllables seemed completely absurd to me (especially because of the fact that at the time I belonged to the neo-avant-guard movement), but on the other hand I vaguely felt that the music of words I dreamt as a young poet was mysteriously connected with this extremely boring academic rubble.

My poetic development was paradoxical: contrary to the great majority of other poets, who usually start with the traditional forms and only later

decompose them into free verse and personal poetic expression, I did it the other way around. The experimental research of "sound poetry" has led me to the discovery of the classical poetic forms that allow the deepest music of words. I have found that strict poetic form – paradoxically – deepens the poetic message, irradiating a magnetic emotional impact. Due to these limitations, poets must explore the language and their own mental structure (which in poetry is the same thing), where they find unexpected solutions that reveal the "dormant" truth of the heart and of the world. The poetic form, therefore, does not limit the freedom of artistic expression; quite the contrary – it establishes true artistic freedom.

I was first charmed by alliterations and assonances, then I discovered rhyme as a musical embrace of words, and finally I became obsessed with the search and re-search of the poetic rhythm: the entire world lies hidden and reveals itself each time again through the *memory of the language,* the time vertical given by the repetition of rhythmic and euphonic patterns! Traveling through different countries, I have been cleaning the dust from the ancient notebooks of poetic forms at the shelves of old bookshops: I, a former avant-gardist, have cast away the barbaric arrogance of the modern age and have learned to be humble before ancient masters. (As always: arrogance is ignorance.) I have discovered that classical poetic forms were not a petrified chain of unnecessary rules, but an accumulated formal wisdom of generations of poets. I have discovered that different rhythms corresponded to different layers of my emotionality, that different voices living in me expressed their worlds through different poetic forms. Things that can be expressed through the form of the Troubadour *sestina* cannot be expressed with free verse, and vice versa. Poetic forms are basic rhythmic and euphonic codes for different registers of the heart and of the world.

I cannot quite recall the moment when I moved from practical research on poetic forms into the field of theory. Between both I have never felt a gap, but a bridge. (As a matter of fact, I have been feeling this gap only lately, because of the self-sufficiency and arrogance of literary theory described above.) Frankly, literary history and theory have helped me to discover many poetic forms that otherwise I would have never known. On the other hand, the loving struggle with the poetic language that I have been fighting throughout my life enables me to understand the theoretical questions "from inside;" from the organic, so to say "bodily," experience of the language.

In the handbooks of poetic forms *Oblike sveta* (Forms of the World, 1991) and *Oblike srca* (Forms of the Heart, 1997) I combined poetic practice and theory, with pedagogic and didactic intentions as well: I have written poems in 140 different forms and poetic procedures, in the wide range from the East to the West, from ancient Greek prosody to modern poetics. In the process I have introduced forty new forms into Slovene poetry and the Slovene language, which turned out to be exceptionally elastic, as though made for poetry. The Slovenes are a small nation: in order to console us, God has given us the language of poetry.

The monograph *Oblika, ljubezen jezika* (The Form, the Love of Language, 1995; in the Slovene original the title rhymes), which represents the book

adaptation of my doctoral dissertation *Recepcija romanskih pesniških oblik v slovenski poeziji* (The Reception of Romanic Poetic Forms in Slovene Poetry, 1995), is completely different: it is written in objective language, free of metaphorical polysemantic meanings, as a decent scholarly work is supposed to be. At the same time, I must confess that this work was not merely a fruit of scholarly zeal, but a fruit of pain as well: I had been writing it in the first half of the 1990s, in the long years and even longer nights when, because of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, I could neither sleep nor write my own poems. I was afraid that by writing poetry I would open the wound that was a consequence of the organization of humanitarian help for refugees and writers from the besieged city of Sarajevo. (I coordinated one of the biggest humanitarian actions by International PEN.) Surrounded by tragedies, I felt a need to flee from terrible reality into the world of pure beauty, into the world of pure sound, void of any meaning. I found it in literary theory: versology enabled me to stare into pure sound, into the cosmic space beyond any meaning and, therefore, beyond any pain, into that abstract dimension where music corresponds with mathematics. At that extreme point of running away from meaning, I discovered that in the end rhythm always depends on meaning. Together with meaning, pain returned and, together with the pain – joy, that beautiful and terrible joy of life… and together with the pain and the joy my poetic voice burst out from my closed throat again. The result was one of the most painful, but – I believe – also one of the best poetry volumes I have ever written: *Mojster nespečnosti* (The Master of Insomnia, 1995).

What is, therefore, the source of the literary "science" as I practice it, according to my best, but – I am afraid – humble forces? Following Plato, I would say: *Eros,* which pushed me to research poetic forms. Out of poetry into poetics, and out of poetics into literary theory. After my painful experience with the book *Oblika, ljubezen jezika,* I would also add: pain. This book, full of metric schemes and graphic representations of the frequency of rhythmic procedures, was stained by the blood that I have systematically cleaned with cold scholarly language.

Ever since then, I respect, love, and obey – yes, also obey – both of my demons: the demon of Poetry and the demon of theory. The first one deserves the capital letter, the second one does not.

Let me conclude this examination of the relation between poetry and theory with my own poetic experience. The genesis of my poem "Narcis in Eho" (Narcissus and Echo) – first published in the volume *Stihija* (Cataclysm*,* 1991), and then in *Oblike sveta* (Forms of the World, 1991) and *Oblike srca* (Forms of the Heart, 1997) – offers a significant example that theory can help in the process of the poetic creation. I had been writing it ten long years, returning to it all the time and putting it away with a mixture of content and discontent: I knew that I had very precious material under my pen, but this material simply grew and grew, dissipating at the same time. After ten years of intense work I found a solution in an old and dusty English handbook of poetic forms: the *echo sonnet* (a rare form invented a thousand years ago and flourishing in French, English, Italian, and German

poetry of the 16th and 17th centuries) offered a form that crystallized my verse material into the definitive shape of the poem. Unfortunately, the poem is untranslatable because of the close relation between sound and meaning in Slovene.

I was extremely happy that I was able to finally conclude the poem. I believed then that "Narcis in Eho" was the best poem I had ever written. My creator's happiness was soon overshadowed by the fear that all the poems in my future work would necessarily be less powerful, and I longed for those ten long years of language search and research, ten long years of creative efforts. I realized that the happiness felt in the process of the creation is far greater than the happiness after the successfully concluded work.

It is probably not a coincidence that it is the most "mallarméan" and "valéryan" poem in my entire poetic *oeuvre.* Its beauty is based on the perfection of the form, the perfection of the relation between sound and meaning.

I still think that "Narcis in Eho" is my most beautiful poem. However, today I believe that beauty is not everything. The essence of poetry is not in beautiful, but in *true* verses. And here theory cannot offer any help to poets.

Translated by the author

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