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ABSTRACT

THE PROSE POEMS OF STEPHANE MALLARME:

AN EXEGESIS

By

Ursula Franklin

This study is an explication of the thirteen prose poems, entitled "Anecdotes ou Poèmes," in Stéphane Mallarmé's Divagations, his collected prose work published in 1897.

The interpretation of these prose poems is based on a detailed analysis of each piece, following the order in which the author himself placed them in Divagations. The critical approach of the study is contextual rather than comparative. That is, the study is not primarily concerned with genre, periodization, literary traditions, sources or influences, but rather with the inner logic, the unified aesthetic structure of the prose poems in themselves, in their relations with each other, and in their relations with the verse poems as well. A major aim of the study is to situate these prose poems in Mallarmé's intensely structured poetic universe. To this end the analyses have been internal and ad hoc, involving first the study of vocabulary and imagery within each poem, and then the examination and

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comparison of parallel passages which serve to demonstrate the part that this imagery plays in the unity of Mallarmé's entire aesthetic fabric.

The analysis has revealed certain essential parallels among the poems of the recueil. The pieces have important structural similarities: each consists of an anecdote which serves as a vehicle for the work's themes. And each prose poem is characterized by an antithetical play of opposites, which creates its characteristic tension.

The exegesis has revealed distinct imagistic and thematic patterns in the prose poems, and has thrown light on the interrelationships of these patterns within the group as well as with the poet's other work in verse and prose. The thirteen pieces emerge as a thematically unified whole, a cycle. The theme of this cycle is the story of the poet; that is, on the one hand, the poet's relation to the contingent phenomena of human experience, and on the other the transformation of that experience into an ordered artistic universe through the poet's vision. Since approximately thirty years separate the earliest pieces from the latest, the cycle clearly reflects the development of Mallarmé's prose style. But it does more than reflect this development; it comments on it (especially in "Un Spectacle Interrompu"), expresses the artistic necessity for the development of a new style to convey the poet's expanding vision, and consequently makes the stylistic evolution one



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of the very themes of the cycle. Further, within the recueil itself, the poet formulates his own definition of the prose poem, and demonstrates the new poetic form as well as the new style in the pieces of the second half of the cycle.

So the prose poem cycle reflects vividly the poet's artistic development and the crises associated with it, as well as the major themes found in his other works, verse and prose. At the beginning of the recueil, in those early pieces which express discouragement and hesitation before both life and the poetic vocation, the influence of Baudelaire is pervasive and dominating. It is as if the poet were clinging to Baudelaire as an artistic crutch while he was yet unsure of his own creative powers and direction. But certain of the early poems (especially "Le Démon de l'Analogie") likewise reflect the artist's "crise de Tournon," that early metaphysical crisis from which the young Mallarmé emerged both as atheist and as committed poet. It was this crisis, incidentally, whose resolution was achieved and recorded in Mallarmé's Igitur. The prose poems subsequent to "Le Démon de l'Analogie" begin to show a new, unreserved commitment to poetry. The poet gradually moves from rejection to acceptance of Nature, and defines the role of Nature in his poetic universe; his stature is enhanced from that of harlequin and showman to that of consecrated poet-priest; he comes to recognize his paradoxical love and hate for the crowd, and consciously to acknowledge his need for Mankind, whom it is

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his ideal function to serve. These themes, elaborated in an ever-increasingly terse and obscure manner with the maturing of his style, reflect a world view which sees life as disorderly and meaningless until given order and meaning by the poet's vision. The study demonstrates, in sum, that the central preoccupation of the cycle of prose poems is poesis and its attendant problems.

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THE PROSE POEMS OF STEPHANE MALLARME:  
AN EXEGESIS

By  
Ursula Franklin

A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Romance Languages

1971

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URSULA FRANKLIN  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge contributions of the following people: Richard Berchan, Charles Blend, Joseph Donohoe, Eugene Gray, Herbert Josephs and Maria-Elizabeth Kronegger, my teachers, who guided and encouraged me in my study of French literature. I wish to indicate my deepest gratitude to Laurence Porter, who first introduced me to the poetry of Mallarmé, and who directed this dissertation from its inception. It is his continuing confidence in me which helped me to sustain my own confidence in the worth of what I was doing.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Despite the abundance of excellent scholarship devoted to his work during the past fifty years, Stéphane Mallarmé continues to provide fruitful fields for study. The significance of his position as a culminating figure in 19th-century European poetry, as well as one of the most seminal forces of modern Western literature, makes him an almost inexhaustible object of critical interest, an interest which has been increasing with the past decades. His lyrical poetry attracted critical attention during the poet's lifetime, and more intensively since the twenties with the second edition of Albert Thibaudet's La Poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>1</sup> But it is only in the last few years that Mallarmé's prose, a substantial portion of his work, has begun to receive the attention it deserves and demands.

In a recent essay, Dieter Steland<sup>2</sup> points out that Mallarmé's prose works cannot be indiscriminately designated as kritische Schriften, that is to say as solely analytical critical essays, for even his critical prose is a special type of poetry. An early example of this critical poetry is the "Symphonie Littéraire," a group of three essays devoted

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to Gautier, Baudelaire, and Banville, which Mallarmé himself referred to as "poèmes en prose."<sup>3</sup> The Divagations,<sup>4</sup> Mallarmé's collected prose work, published under his supervision in 1897, introduces a new prose genre, the "poème critique," which term appears in the "Bibliographie" of the Divagations, where the poet explains:

Les cassures du texte, on se tranquilliserà, observent de concorder, avec sens et n'inscrivant d'espace nu que jusqu'à leurs points d'illumination: une forme, peut-être, en sort, actuelle, permettant, à ce qui fut longtemps le poème en prose et notre recherche, d'aboutir, en tant, si l'on joint mieux les mots, que poème critique. Mobiliser, autour d'une idée, les lueurs diverses de l'esprit, à distance voulue, par phrases...<sup>5</sup>

I have chosen to investigate a body of prose which seems to me to stand half-way between Mallarmé's lyric verse poetry and the poème critique, namely his prose poems, which are not interpretative in the manner of the poetic essay. By the term "prose poems," I refer not only to the twelve prose pieces first published separately in various reviews from 1864 to 1887, then gathered together in Pages of 1891, and finally incorporated in the Divagations of 1897. Although it is these twelve that the Pléiade (Mondor and Jean-Aubry) edition<sup>6</sup> of the oeuvre has grouped together under the heading "Poèmes en Prose," my study points out that there are not twelve, but thirteen, "prose poems," namely the thirteen pieces entitled "Anecdotes ou Poèmes" in Divagations, a work which established the author's own structural determination of his prose work a year before his death.

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My concern will not be the position of these prose poems in the development of the genre. Nor does my study examine them from the point of view of periodization in the larger sense of literary movements, that is as a moment in the development of Symbolism or Impressionism. This "literary history" type of approach is represented by Guy Michaud, who in his vast Message Poétique du Symbolisme<sup>7</sup> devotes a chapter to Mallarmé's work in general. Suzanne Bernard's monumental study, Le Poème en Prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours,<sup>8</sup> traces not only the beginnings and subsequent manifestations of the form in some of the greatest poets of the nineteenth century, but also its impact, extending well into the middle of our own century. She devotes a substantial chapter to Mallarmé, including in her discussion "Un Coup de dés." However, she necessarily views his work as but one stage of a historical process. Kurt Wais, who is probably Germany's foremost authority on Mallarmé, has discussed the prose poems along with the verse poetry in his Mallarmé,<sup>9</sup> linking the various pieces to different moments of Mallarmé's private life; and the poet's biography, in turn, is tied to the development of the oeuvre. Wais usually restricts himself to an intelligent paraphrasing and at times to the translation of passages of the pieces, without analyzing any one of them thoroughly. The most interesting recent French critic of Mallarmé's work, Jean-Pierre Richard, in his immense study, L'Univers Imaginaire de Mallarmé,<sup>10</sup>

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touches upon each prose poem in the course of his discussion of Mallarmé's major themes and motifs, but without discussing any single one of them as an organic whole. Finally, the poet's most significant critic, Robert Greer Cohn, who with his L'Oeuvre de Mallarmé: Un Coup de Dés and Toward the Poems of Mallarmé<sup>11</sup> gives a decisive orientation to the reading of all of Mallarmé's poetry, does not discuss our poems specifically. American and English critics have done no analyses of the prose poems.<sup>12</sup>

There is, then, to my knowledge, no study which interprets Mallarmé's prose poems separately, let alone any which treats them as parts of a coherent cycle. That these prose poems do indeed constitute a cycle, rather than a conglomeration of separate elements, is one of my more significant findings.

As the material under investigation covers almost the whole span of the poet's productive life, from the early pieces of 1864 to the closing poem of 1895, this study--aside from dealing with thematic aspects--must account for the marked stylistic break, so much more apparent in Mallarmé's prose than in his verse, which separates his early from his mature work. It will hence show how that mature prose style characteristic of the Divagations is related to the thematic development of these prose poems. As my work has convinced me of the very close interrelationship of style and theme, or form and function, in the thirteen pieces, they are not

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anywhere discussed from a purely stylistic point of view. The identification of Mallarmé's characteristic stylistic devices has been done in Jacques Scherer's painstaking L'Expression Littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Mallarmé,<sup>13</sup> which covers, as its title suggests, all of the poet's production. Norman Paxton's much more recent The Development of Mallarmé's Prose Style<sup>14</sup> constitutes an analysis, often an enumeration, of the variants in some of Mallarmé's prose work. Further, though my interpretation is founded on a thorough vocabulary analysis, I am not concerned with statistical compilations of word frequency in the manner of Monique Parent's Saint-John Perse et quelque devanciers, études sur le poème en prose.<sup>15</sup>

Principally I aim to explore these prose poems' significance in Mallarmé's poetic universe. Any such exegesis must involve the examination and comparison of parallel passages, that is the study of imagery not only within each poem as an independent unit, but also with reference to the other prose poems as well as the verse poetry. For just as Mallarmé believed that all myths can be reduced to the solar drama, so he is attracted to a style of composition which is made up of a few carefully selected patterns of imagery. In fact, I have found this oeuvre to be so close-knit a structure, so very synthetic, that I have quoted only selected echo passages from outside the cycle. I believe, with such critics as Gardner Davies, that this poet uses a fairly limited number

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of images repeatedly to create a symbolic language. This highly synthetic aspect of the oeuvre is, moreover, accentuated by Mallarmé himself:

Jamais pensée ne se présente à moi, détachée, je n'en ai pas de cette sorte et reste ici dans l'embarras; les miennes formant le trait, musicalement placées, d'un ensemble et, à s'isoler, je les sens perdre jusqu'à leur vérité et sonner faux: après tout, cet aveu, peut-être, en figure-t-il une, propre au feuillet blanc d'un album (OC p. 883).

Variant readings and bibliographic information will be discussed only when they aid in the understanding of the text. Most of this information is readily available in the Pléiade edition.

My analysis of the prose poems is based on a careful vocabulary examination, because Mallarmé himself has repeatedly stressed the importance of les mots as the basic ingredients of the poet's working material:

L'oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle trainée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l'ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase (OC p. 366).

— Les mots, d'eux-mêmes, s'exaltent à mainte facette reconnue la plus rare ou valant pour l'esprit, centre de suspens vibratoire; qui les perçoit indépendamment de la suite ordinaire, projetés, en parois de grotte, tant que pure leur mobilité ou principe, étant ce qui ne se dit pas du discours: prompts tous, avant extinction, à une réciprocity de feux distante ou présentée de biais comme contingence (OC p. 386).

And my vocabulary analysis is based on the monumental contemporary dictionary of Emile Littré, whose publication began in 1863 and terminated in 1872. Not only is this dictionary

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Contemporary with Mallarmé's work, but it is moreover certain that the poet utilized it in the creation of his language, where each word is carefully chosen not only for its sound-look aspect and customary significance, but also for its less apparent and often completely unfamiliar meanings. Charles Chassé has devoted a whole book to Littré's influence on Mallarmé's poetry,<sup>16</sup> thus revealing an indispensable key for not only the verse but also the prose. Therefore, all my lexical references, unless otherwise indicated, are to Littré, a dictionary which the poet himself, moreover, mentions in LA DERNIERE MODE:

... grand Dictionnaire de la Langue Française par Littré dans toute bibliothèque sérieuse ... (OC p. 828)

Particular attention has been paid to etymologies, so important to the poet, as we also know from Chassé's work. And it is for the etymological wealth of his vocabulary, too, that Mallarmé consulted Littré.

My reading and interpretation of these prose poems respects their order in Divagations, which is also that of the Pléiade edition, except for the editors' unfortunate omission of the culminating piece.

Where not only imagistic, but also thematic, patterns have emerged, their relationship with both the verse poetry and Mallarmé's prose work is examined. But the principal aim has been to ascertain whether there is a thematic unity and progression within the prose poems themselves, relating them to each other and thus constituting an artistic unity.

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Furthermore, though it is clear that we are dealing primarily with a great poet, and not even secondarily with a philosopher, it is nevertheless true that the oeuvre is enclosed by two works of an overwhelmingly metaphysical significance; the body of Mallarmé's mature work begins with Igitur and ends with "Un Coup de dés." Therefore, this reading also aims to show whether these prose poems reflect Mallarmé's philosophic stance, and if so, how. Igitur has come down to us in fragmentary form, but the poet's last and most significant work, the "Coup de dés," might itself be considered the culminating achievement of the prose poem, while, at the same time, it constitutes a departure from that genre. In his "Préface" to the "Coup de dés," Mallarmé situates the unprecedented form of this poem midway between the poème en prose and the vers libre, the two new phenomena in the literature of his day, the latter of which he had, however, never adopted himself:

Aujourd'hui ou sans présumer de l'avenir qui sortira d'ici, rien ou presque un art, reconnaissons aisément que la tentative participe, avec imprévu, de poursuites particulières et chères à notre temps, le vers libre et le poème en prose... (OC p. 456)

The influence of Igitur, which constitutes the purgation of the metaphysical crisis undergone by the young poet, namely the "crise de Tournon," already makes itself felt in some of the early prose poems, which were written several years before. These poems reflect Mallarmé's stance of ontological questioning, directly revealed in the Igitur fragments, and seen indirectly through the veil of anecdote in

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the prose poems. They also presage, as early as 1864, some of the existential anguish which caused that crisis to erupt a few years later in Mallarmé's life. Our analysis of the prose poems will show that many of the key images and symbols of Igitur, such as the room, the mirror, the clock, and most of all the solitary, anguished hero, hesitating before life and tempted by suicide and madness, are identical with those of some of the early prose poems.

Even after this descent and return, however, the death of the persona's former self and his rebirth as atheist and poet, the human personality which emerges from the mature prose poems, as well as from the verse poetry, is that of a man tortured by a nostalgia for that Eden which he now knows not to exist. And so Mallarmé's final and culminating poetic venture, the "Coup de dés," again, as the early Igitur, expresses both Man's metaphysical yearnings and the ultimate futility and failure of a quest which must end in annihilation. The threat both of the early voyage into the inner depths of the self, as well as of the final one into cosmic spaces, is already vaguely foreshadowed in an early prose poem, whose hero dares not look into the deep mirror of his soul, nor through the windows which shield him from the vast spaces beyond. Nevertheless, the search for meaning and transcendence is carried on through the stormiest seas: the poetic venture is not abandoned until ultimate shipwreck and extinction. The undertaking is hopeless, and the poet knows

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 prose poems reflect Igitur and the poet's inner drama, so  
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 is on the poet's terms: he transforms the world and confers  
 meaning onto contingency and chaos by means of his Art, the  
 supreme fiction of the Orphic, that is the Poetic, explanation  
 of the universe,

**qui** est le seul devoir du poète et le jeu littéraire  
**par** excellence (OC p. 663).

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## INTRODUCTION

## NOTES

- 1 Albert Thibaudet, Le Poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: Gallimard, 1912 and 1926).
- 2 Dieter Steland, Dialektische Gedanken in Stéphane Mallarmés "Divagations" (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1965).
- 3 Henri Mondor, Stéphane Mallarmé Correspondance 1862-1871 I (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 113; in a letter to Albert Collignon, of April 11, 1864, Mallarmé writes:  

Je vous envoie aujourd'hui quelques poèmes en prose dont vous aimez les inspireurs.

The "inspireurs" are Gautier, Banville, and Baudelaire.
- 4 Stéphane Mallarmé, Divagations (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1897).
- 5 Mallarmé, Divagations, p. 373.
- 6 Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry, Oeuvres Complètes de Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). All references to Mallarmé's work, unless otherwise indicated, will be to this edition.
- 7 Guy Michaud, Message Poétique du Symbolisme (Paris: Nizet, 1966), pp. 159-98, "Les poètes maudits: Mallarmé."

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- 8 Suzanne Bernard, Le Poème en Prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours (Paris: Nizet, 1959), pp. 252-330, "Mallarmé et la Métaphysique du Langage."
- 9 Kurt Wais, Mallarmé (München: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1938 and 1952).
- 10 Jean-Pierre Richard, L'Univers Imaginaire de Mallarmé (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1961).
- 11 Robert Greer Cohn, L'Oeuvre de Mallarmé: Un Coup de Dés (Paris: Librairie Les Lettres, 1951) and Toward the Poems of Mallarmé (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965).
- 12 The only specific analysis of one of these prose poems by an English critic is that of A. R. Chisholm, "Le Démon de l'Analogie," ESSAYS IN FRENCH LITERATURE, (1964), 1-5.
- 13 Jacques Scherer, L'Expression Littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Mallarmé (Paris: Droz, 1947).
- 14 Norman Paxton, The Development of Mallarmé's Prose Style (Genève: Droz, 1968).
- 15 Monique Parent, Saint-John Perse et quelques devanciers, étude sur le poème en prose (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1960).
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## CHAPTER II

### LE PHENOMENE FUTUR

This piece occupies the first place in all the editions of the collected prose poems, though it was one of the latest in order or composition of the six poems written in 1864.<sup>1</sup> And the reason why Mallarmé always placed "Le Phénomène Futur" at the head of the recueil is probably due to its prophetic character, for it presages and announces in a blinding vision his own unique poetry. The anecdote of the poem, whose impact is primarily that of an impressionistic Stimmungsgedicht, tells about a showman who displays before a dull audience, which represents a tired and late civilization, the marvel of a woman of yore, a wonder of by-gone times preserved by "la science souveraine." And her brilliant beauty contrasts with the bleakness of the world in which she appears, while in the audience none but the poets have the strength to understand what they are contemplating.

A careful study of the vocabulary of the piece must begin with the title itself, the key to the poem, as it were. To most readers of Mallarmé, "phénomène" would probably suggest the terminology of Hegelian philosophy,<sup>2</sup> to which he was initiated through his friends, above all Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, whom he met in 1864. And no doubt, the poet's

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predilection for such terms as "la notion," "la notion pure," and "l'idée" is due, at least in part, to this influence; further, Hegel does seem to have influenced some of Mallarmé's poetry, and above all the early Igitur, which would be very obscure without a consideration of Hegelian influences.

One ought, therefore, to keep in mind the association of the title with "phenomenology" referring to the science of ideas which derive from sense perception. But at the same time, Littré's fifth definition of "phénomène," namely "chose ou personne extraordinaire qu'on montre à la foire; phénomène vivant," with an added citation making reference to "de montreurs de phénomène," sets the scene of the poem, as it were, from the point of view of matière, while the philosophical association might enlighten its sens. We should further keep in mind the Greek root of the word "phenomenon," i.e. that which appears, for the poem's central image and symbol is, indeed, an apparition of preternatural character.

The fairground setting announced by the title emerges only gradually; for at first we find ourselves in the vaguely dream-like atmosphere of sky, a dying sun, water, and earth approaching their final hour. And while the title indicates that this spectacle is of the future, the verbs of the first paragraph are in the present tense, because it constitutes an impressionistic tableau in which we are already beholding what is to come, and where, moreover, rather than distinguishing sharp outlines, we at first perceive somewhat swaying

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The pale sky is fané, has lost its freshness;<sup>3</sup> but meanings are almost always multivalent for this poet, and in a dying world where miracles are no longer understood, the very concept of "sky" has paled also, with the splendor of ancient astronomy and its diverse crystalline spheres moving the heavenly bodies irretrievably lost to a modern and progressive Weltanschauung.<sup>4</sup>

In its sophistication, the world has turned senile: the pale sky might disappear not only in the clouds, it might vanish along with them, for darkness is impending. But it is a bloody death, "lambeaux de la pourpre usée" not only suggesting that the splendor of former sunsets has faded, but at the same time evoking the image of torn flesh; for though "lambeaux" is a soft-sounding word, its meaning intimates the harsh tearing of "arraché" and "déchiré." And so a violent death is evoked, but the memory of it has now faded, along with the crimson and royal splendor of by-gone sunsets, and along with everything else in this tired world. A worn sun, thus, weakened somehow by too many deaths, sinks into a watery extinction,<sup>5</sup> which creates an impressionistically vague fusion of water and light at the horizon.

Of the four basic elements of ancient natural philosophy, fire, air, water, and earth, the poet has used the first three to paint the sunset, one of the pervasive motifs in his

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total poetic universe, and which will also recur prominently in these prose poems.<sup>6</sup> And as our eyes now turn to the earth, they encounter night and darkness there; for we can barely make out the foliage of the tired trees; it, too, is no longer green, but faded out, as it were, on this earth so old that it is reduced to dust, the very symbol of dissolution. Not the dust of the roads, but that of time and age, "la poussière des siècles," has turned the personified, senile trees white. And "temps," already alluded to in the title with "future," plays throughout this piece in the form of a duration, which is limited, juxtaposed with that which is unlimited, perhaps eternal. Just as the day is ending, the dust of the foliage suggests the end of summer, and this double impact of the solar drama reflects the human one: sickness and sin announce the end of the human race. For with the next generation the earth will die. The obsession with devouring time is reminiscent of Baudelaire, as is the poem's setting, which recalls Baudelaire's prose poem, "Le Vieux Saltimbanque." And Baudelairean also is the whole opposition of Art and Nature, and the jeu de contrastes employed throughout the piece.

As the streetlights gradually illuminate the scene in the falling dusk, we recognize the fairground with canvas tent and showman, which we know from "Le Pitre Châtié," and which we will encounter again in these prose poems. The scene has shifted, and the sky's vault is replaced by that of the

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tent, the sun, source of its own light, by the reflected light of gaslamps, an image of modernity often used by Mallarmé, and which shall also reappear in the prose poems. And now man appears: an anonymous showman and an anonymous crowd. Time again irrupts: the showman specializes in curiosities of the past. The light in our tableau has become vague and uncertain, the very root of "crépuscule," creperus, pointing to the doubtful, the uncertain. Twilight, lamplit dusk, momentarily revives the faces of a vulgar death-bound throng, whose only claim to immortality is its sickness, for they are "vaincu par la maladie immortelle." And the showman now seems to rise out of that crowd like the poets of "Le Guignon"--that early verse poem so reminiscent of Baudelaire's "Bénédiction"--who also towered:

Au-dessus du bétail ahuri des humains.

The "péché des siècles" is an echo both of Baudelaire and Schopenhauer, namely the very sin of perpetuating the human race.<sup>7</sup> Are not the women of this crowd "accomplices" of their mates, thus participants in crime? Women, "chétives," sickly, but by the term's etymology, captivus, also slaves of their men, of whom they bear the miserable offspring, that last generation of men. And the image of these "hommes près de leurs chétives complices enceintes des fruits misérables avec lesquels périra la terre" recalls a verse poem, preceding our prose piece by two years, "Sonnet," where we also find an echo of this Schopenhauerian contempt for the flesh, and

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particularly woman in her reproductive function:

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The imminent catastrophe presaged by a perishing sun, namely the end of the world, is reflected by the anguished silence, whose momentary tension is now relieved by "le simple boniment," that is the salestalk of the Showman. Significantly "Montreur" is capitalized: he alone rises above the dumb crowd, he alone speaks at this last silent hour of humanity. But, at the same time, there is a highly derogatory tone in "boniment," which is a "parade de charlatan," and designated moreover as "mot très vulgaire." Is the poet, then, undercutting "Le Phénomène" by presenting it in a "boniment?" Or is it that humanity, at this hour, no longer understands any language but "salestalk?"

Whereas the setting had been supplied by an omniscient author, we see the "Femme d'autrefois" by means of the Showman's words alone; and, as he proclaims, no painter could give even a sad reflection of the marvel; only his words, then, can describe her.

In this world which appears to be in the very process of dying, he has a "phénomène vivant" to show, a living woman, not of this age indeed, but of a golden age long past, again reminiscent of Baudelaire and his mystique of "La Vie Antérieure." The marvelous woman has been preserved, mysteriously, over the centuries; she alone is not subject to time in this death-bound world, but capable of survival, and

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eternally young. For she is not a natural wonder at all, thus not subject to the laws of nature; she is the product of "la science souveraine," its very creature. On the narrative level of the poem, this supreme as contrasted to natural science is to be accepted as part of the Showman's magic.

The description of the woman opens up a series of basic and recurring images of Mallarmé's poetic universe: the hair, living gold, so reminiscent of Hérodiade's; hair which will be celebrated also in another prose poem in the form of an interpolated sonnet.<sup>8</sup> And frequently in this poetry, the hair's gold fuses with that of the sunset. Our "Phénomène's" hair appears living gold, and was not "l'or vivant" of the alchemists fire imprisoned in matter? "Originelle et naïve," the latter an etymological doublet of "native," this hair is a wonder not of this age; it is hardly recognizable at first as a matter of fact. And the Showman, impressionistically, describes its properties first, culminating in the "extase d'or," which she, the woman, then identifies by calling it her hair. "Extase" again suggests the supernatural, for it is a mystical term designating a state in which communication with the material, the natural world has been severed. And the blood imagery of the poem's opening is now taken up again in the description of the red lips, this red then juxtaposed with the white of the nude body. The very opposite of fané, this woman with her eyes sparkling like precious gems, an image familiar from the verse poetry, her lithe legs still

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moist from the sea, her virginally hard and pointed breasts, which, however, at the same time are pregnant with maternal milk, recalls Botticelli's Aphrodite at the moment of her birth.

After the "boniment" which has cut through the night like a flash of lightning, the omniscient author contrasts this with a willfully narrative, anecdotal ending, which skillfully establishes a contrast with the overwhelming apparition. Further, the real women are now contrasted with the ideal, and while the latter seemed an image of eternal youth with flaming hair, the former are rendered as bald, and "morbides."

The concluding paragraph breaks sharply with the body of the poem, almost in the manner of the "moral" terminating an old fable, which break is partly accomplished by the shift to the future perfect tense, placing the future events described in the poem, and which we had seen in the present, into the past. For now humanity has already contemplated the miracle of the Showman, and most men return to looking at the shadows in the Cave. Yet there are some who are vaguely moved by a mysterious force, and they weep. But even in these last days, there shall be poets, who will feel a glory mysteriously, an intoxication, the breath of Terpsichore. Haunted by the vision, they forget their doomed age and turn to their lamp, the light of art replacing natural light, and also one of Mallarmé's key symbols of the poet's isolation.

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In "Las de l'amer repos," a verse poem of the same year as our piece, there is a lonely poet persona, whose lamp is his only companion:

Et ma lampe qui sait pourtant mon agonie.

A passage from one of Mallarmé's much later and most poetic prose pieces beautifully demonstrates how this vision of "les poètes de ces temps," embodied magnificently for him in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, did not change throughout his life. In his commemorative lecture for his friend, the poet says:

... Une question d'heure, en effet, étrange et de grand intérêt mais qu'ont occasion de se poser peu d'hommes ici-bas, à savoir que peut-être lui ne serait point venu à la sienne, pour que le conflit fut tel. Si! à considérer l'Histoire il avait été ponctuel, devant l'assignation du sort, nullement intempestif, ni re-préhensible: car ce n'est pas contemporanément à une époque, aucunement, que doivent, pour exalter le sens, advenir ceux que leur destin chargea d'en être à nu l'expression; ils sont projetés maint siècle au-delà, stupéfaits, à témoigner de ce qui, normal à l'instant même, vit tard magnifiquement par le regret, et trouvera dans l'exil de leur nostalgique esprit tourné vers le passé, sa vision pure (OC pp. 495-96).

The echoes of imagery of "Le Phénomène Futur" in the early verse poetry are too abundant to be quoted. The bleeding sunsets as well as the poet persona's disgust with the human throng surrounding him, and his isolation from it, appear again and again. But of that early verse poetry, "Le Pitre Châtié," of the same year as the prose poem, shows the most striking kinship with it; for not only does it have the fairground setting and the showtent, but also a poet persona in the role of a showman, "l'histrion," who is most reminiscent of our "montreur."

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The most significant work Mallarmé undertook in 1864 was surely "Hérodiade," an analysis of which would be a study in itself, but which would reveal significant relationships with "Le Phénomène Futur." From the point of view of imagery, the opening of "Hérodiade" echoes our poem: it also celebrates the solar drama, autumn, the purple sky, though of a sunrise rather than a sunset, but evoking nevertheless crime and blood and death:

Crime! buêher! aurore anciennne! supplice!  
Pourpre d'un ciel! Etang de la pourpre complice!

Again the sky's purple is reflected in the water, somehow reminiscent of the drowning of the sun in the water of our prose poem. Contrasting with this violent red is the white chastity of Hérodiade's room, "le neigeux jadis" and the nurse's gown, "ma robe blanchie." And there is again an evocation of the last hour:

A l'heure d'agonie et de lutttes funèbres!

and the end of the world:

Lever du jour dernier qui vient tout achever.

The most striking resemblance, however, is that of the two main symbols of these poems, the golden-haired women; Hérodiade calls her hair:

Le blond torrent de mes cheveux immaculés.

The eyes of both resemble precious stones, the Phénomène's "les yeux semblables aux pierres rares," and the other "Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant." And in both poems, the heroine's youth is juxtaposed with senility, embodied in

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"Hérodiade" by the old nurse:

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Yet, I cannot agree with those critics who tend to identify the two figures,<sup>9</sup> for the sterile splendor of Hérodiade is not the same as that of le Phénomène, so proudly displaying her jubilant nakedness--how different from Hérodiade in her heavy and stiff, jewel-encrusted gown, shielding a body which is seen only at the cost of death. Moreover, the Phénomène has just emerged from the sea, while Hérodiade has not yet entered it.

Having examined the vocabulary and imagery of "Le Phénomène Futur," I want to point to some stylistic features which relate this piece to the other prose poems of 1864. It shows impressionistic techniques, already touched upon in passing: the opening tableau is not drawn in sharp outlines, but rather painted, so that mood is conveyed through colors which seem to flow into one another indistinctly, and impressions are rendered before the image is identified, as with the Phenomenon's hair. Further, in all the early pieces there is a generous use of alliteration, as in our opening sentence, and also of internal rhyme, as for example in "... pleins d'un lait éternel, la pointe vers le ciel..." And these devices also figure prominently in Mallarmé's verse poetry of that time; while in the already mentioned characteristic use of contrasting imagery, we recognize Baudelaire's influence. And though in general the syntax is still

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conventional in these early prose poems, there are already some indications which point to the later style, such as the structuring of unusually long sentences by means of a totally unconventional punctuation--frequent use of colons, exclamation marks, and parentheses within the sentence--while verbs, though still used abundantly, seem sometimes paralyzed in their action by the use of participles. Further, there is already a tendency toward nominalization, with expressions such as "... dans l'oubli d'exister," while adjectives, moreover, are being turned into nouns, as for example in "... le désespoir d'un cri" or "... la nudité sanglante de ses lèvres."

Finally, the thematic implications of "Le Phénomène Futur" remain to be explored. For while in some of the other early, more anecdotal prose poems the theme emerges naturally from the vocabulary analysis, in a truly symbolist poem, such as this one, the key symbol needs to be interpreted. By "symbolist" I mean exemplifying the process by which only one term of a metaphor is developed throughout a poem, without any explicit identification of the thing, person, or idea to which this first term stands in an analogical relationship. Thus, the thing symbolized is to be inferred from the symbol itself, and from other signs in the piece.<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary commentaries on the poem do not reveal its meaning. Even Baudelaire, to whom, as we saw, the piece owes

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much, does not seem to have understood it, as is apparent from his comments.<sup>11</sup> And Mallarmé's own friend, Cazalis, acknowledging receipt of the piece with a warm letter of admiration, limits himself to general comments, without any attempt at interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

The opening of the poem conveys despair with the state of the world, a mood reflected in much of Mallarmé's correspondence of that time, as well as in most of his contemporary verse poetry, which is dominated by this same tone of discouragement. It is of the same world that poets since Baudelaire have despaired of curing the ills through their involvement--poetic or otherwise. They have "turned their back to life," as Mallarmé puts it in "Les Fenêtres." Again, from Baudelaire, who had admired Rousseauists like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and occultists like Eliphas Levi, came the inheritance of what we might call the refusal of history and le regard en arrière, towards a lost Eden. The consequent notion that the very act of perpetuating the race removes humanity ipso facto farther from the source and thus toward evil, and that only art is capable of reflecting some of the lost glory, is a constant theme in Baudelaire, whence his fully developed opposition of Art and Nature.

It might be mentioned here that the almost contemporary Eve Future of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam expresses this notion of the nostalgia for the past by its very title, while the book conveys the idea that only an artificially produced

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woman, and not the real one of our day, may reflect some of that ever-lost beauty of the past. There are no influences of this work on our similarly named prose poem, or vice versa, but both develop a like theme: that nature has fallen into decay, and that only by means of some supreme science--or supreme art--a reflection of what we have lost might be artificially restored. And in the creation of the Beautiful, its creator breaks beyond the limits of his time. Our Montreur is connected to the past Golden Age by the vision which inspires him, and projected into the future by his immortal creation. And the isolation of this creator<sup>13</sup> is reinforced by the fact that most of humanity is totally incapable of comprehending his creation, just as it has lost the memory of Eden.

In our poem, the Showman is the creator of the marvel, and that his "act" is the poetic one becomes perfectly obvious in the closing lines of the piece. Thus, the Phenomenon is probably a poem, or its idea personified. And numerous examples from Mallarmé's contemporary correspondence could be cited wherein he states that the most perfect expression of Beauty is poetry.<sup>14</sup>

Though wary of the excessive predilection of modern criticism for interpreting poetry as "poetry about poetry," we must, on the other hand, heed Mallarmé's own comments about Divagations: "Les Divagations apparentes traitent un sujet, de pensée, unique--"<sup>15</sup> and that subject is his poetic

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theory. And although in the same preface he seems to restrict the just quoted statement to the articles of the book, this study shall show that its prose poems are concerned with the same theme, while further hoping to be able to explain that apparent restriction. In fact, Thibaudet pointed out that the basic theme of poetic creation dominates most of the verse poetry as well.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the Montreur's "boniment," namely that he alone can describe the beauty he has to show, no painter these days capable of giving a sad shadow of it, accentuates the notion of the verbal as the supreme art form. Again, this is a notion Mallarmé will develop throughout his life: poetry surpasses any other form of art, even its greatest rivals, music and dance. Further, the Phenomenon has been preserved "par la science souveraine," namely the magic of language. While this is again a partly Baudelairean inspiration, the "sorcellerie évocatoire," Mallarmé, as his readers know, explored the mysterious resources of language all his life.<sup>17</sup> Both he and his great predecessor might well have been influenced by the Kabala through such figures as the above-mentioned Levi, whose Doqmes et Rituel de haute Magie was published in 1861. Mallarmé, in a late essay of Divagations, appropriately entitled "Magie," still repeatedly uses terms of alchemy to designate the poetic art.

But it is the narrative closing of "Le Phénomène Futur" itself which gives the clearest sign for the interpretation

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of its major symbol: most of mankind will remain indifferent at beholding "Le Phénomène," because they will not have the strength to understand what they are contemplating; but others will be "navrés," broken-hearted, that is emotionally responsive to a poetry which they, however, do not really understand; finally the poets alone will comprehend the apparition, that is in the etymological sense of that word be able to take into themselves that which renders them "ivre un instant d'une gloire confuse."

The poet as Showman, a most important and constant image in this poetic universe, makes his earliest appearance, then, in our prose poem and the contemporary "Le Pitre Châtié." The spectacle which the poet-showman offers to us, the Birth of Venus, is the prose poem's central symbol. It figures in a blinding vision the mature poetry anticipated but yet to be created. Venus' beauty, once lost but now momentarily remembered, embodies the motif of the return to the source, of Paradise regained. This motif, together with the figure of the poet, will be progressively developed throughout these poems, and it will also reappear in other sections of the Divagations, ultimately to reflect Mallarmé's confident, mature affirmation of the importance of the poet's role.

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## LE PHENOMENE FUTUR

## NOTES

- 1 The three publications of the recueil indicated in the Pléiade edition were in Pages (Bruxelles: Deman, 1891); Vers et Prose (Paris: Perrin, 1893); Divagations (Paris: Charpentier, 1897). The reference to the order of composition of the early prose poems is in OC pp. 1548-9.
- 2 A contemporary article by Edmond Scherer, "Hegel et l'hegélianisme," Revue des deux mondes, January, 1861, which might have been read by Mallarmé, gives a summary vulgarisation of Hegel's system. I am quoting from this article a section which could conceivably have influenced our poem:
 

... Hegel a parlé à sa manière, en symboles, en formules; il a été obscur comme les prophètes, mais comme eux il a eu le regard qui va au fond des choses ... Il a reconnu que si l'univers dit quelque chose à l'homme, c'est qu'il a quelque chose de commun avec l'homme; en un mot, que la vraie réalité, la première, ce n'est pas la matière, mais l'esprit. La chose n'est que le corps de l'idée, le phénomène n'est que l'expression de la loi.
- 3 The "fané" is a notion which will reappear not only in these prose poems, but in much of the poet's verse poetry, and to which Jean-Pierre Richard has devoted an excellent chapter in L'Univers, pp. 62-68.
- 4 Much later in the poet's life, his nostalgia for another, by-gone world view is reflected by a charming episode

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related by his one-time disciple, René Ghil in Les Dates et les Oeuvres (Paris: Crès, 1923), p. 114, which has the "maître" say: "non, Ghil, l'on ne peut se passer d'Eden!" upon which the younger replies: "Je crois que si, cher Maître..."

- 5 Richard, L'Univers, pp. 109-116, gives an extensive psycho-critic treatment of fire extinguished in water.
- 6 For an extensive treatment of the theme in Mallarmé's verse poetry, see the beautiful study by Gardner Davies, Mallarmé et le Drame Solaire (Paris: Corti, 1959).
- 7 Without getting deeply into Schopenhauer, it is nevertheless clear that for him the reproductive function, in animal as well as man, is one of the most powerful manifestations of the Will's endless and blind striving, which knows no cessation and can, therefore, never lead to tranquillity. For him, the strong drive to live and perpetuate life is the source of conflict in the world, from which the only possible temporary escape is aesthetic contemplation. This notion, of course, through Hartmann, most strongly influenced Laforgue.

And in Baudelaire the idea of "le péché" of procreation is clearly expressed in a poem which, like ours, contrasts a former, golden age with present misery. Charles Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du mal (Paris: Garnier, 1961), pp. 13-14:

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J'aime le souvenir de ces époques nues,  
 Et vous, femmes, hélas! pâles comme des cierges,  
 Que ronge et que nourrit la débauche, et vous, vierges,  
 Du vice maternel traînant l'hérédité  
 Et toutes les hideurs de la fécondité!

And this theme is reflective of a literary mood of the time, already evident in Musset's "Rolla," and later taken up again in Rimbaud's "Soleil et Chair"; The cult of "ces époques nues" might have originated in Schiller's cult of Greek antiquity, expressed in his "Philosophische Gedichte."

- 8 A study of la chevelure in Mallarmé's verse poetry is that of C. Soula, La Poésie et la Pensée de Stéphane Mallarmé, essai sur le symbole de la chevelure (Paris: Champion, 1929) in which he discusses the symbol in analysing "Dame sans trop d'ardeur"; "Victorieusement fui le suicide"; "Ses purs ongles très haut"; "La chevelure vol d'une flamme"; "Quelle soie aux baumes de temps"; "M'introduire dans ton histoire."

- 9 Frederic Chase St. Aubyn, Stéphane Mallarmé (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 131:

But more interesting is the sideshow tent of the "Showman of things Past," for he has inside a "Woman of other times," ... who can only be Hérodiade.

- 10 This understanding of late 19th-century symbolist technique owes much to Bernard Weinberg's formulations in The Limits of Symbolism (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 34-35.

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- 11 Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 201, quotes Baudelaire's comment:

Un jeune écrivain a eu récemment une conception ingénieuse, mais non absolument juste. Le monde va finir. L'humanité est décrépite. Un Barnum de l'avenir montre aux hommes dégradés de son temps une belle femme des anciens âges artificiellement conservée. "Eh! quoi! disent-ils, l'humanité a-t-elle pu être aussi belle que cela." Je dis que cela n'est pas vrai. L'homme dégradé s'admirerait et appellerait la beauté la laideur. (Pauvre Belgique, Oeuvres posthumes, t. III, p. 35.)

- 12 Bernard, Le Poème en Prose, p. 260, reproduces a section of this letter in a note:

Tu m'envoies ... un poème en prose qui m'a fait jaloux, qui est d'une couleur splendide; le grand couchant avec ses reflets rouges et rayé de bandes noires, sur lequel se dessinent, pâles, étirés, longs et maigres, les squelettes à peine vêtus de nos petits enfants, ce dernier saltimbanque et ce dernier débris des vieux âges, tout cela forme un tableau étrange d'une vraie et rare beauté, un de tes chefs-d'oeuvre...

- 13 From the early "L'Art pour Tous," 1862, to the late, "Le Mystère dans les Lettres," 1896, Mallarmé uncompromisingly accepted and maintained the poet's necessary isolation.

- 14 Henri Mondor in Propos sur la Poésie (Monaco: Ed. du Rocher, 1953), p. 79, quotes from one of Mallarmé's letters to Cazalis:

... Il n'y a que la Beauté,--et elle n'a qu'une expression parfaite: la Poésie.

- 15 Mallarmé, Divagations, p. 1.

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- 16 Thibaudet, at the end of La Poésie, p. 446, comes to this conclusion:

Aussi, chez lui, le sujet de l'écrit est ordinairement, par un jeu d'allusions plus ou moins complexes, l'écrit lui-même.

- 17 An examination of Les Mots Anglais of 1877 bears this out.

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## CHAPTER III

### PLAINTE D'AUTOMNE

This piece, one of Mallarmé's two earliest prose poems, appeared originally under the title "l'Orgue de Barbarie" in 1864, the year of its composition, and it was published under that name several times. Its present title, under which it is also published in the three recueils of the prose poems, appears for the first time in 1875.

The change is, indeed, significant, for it reflects one of Mallarmé's basic principles of poetic composition, formed early, and adhered to all his life. Already in a letter of the same year as our piece, he says:

... car j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en ces deux mots: Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit.<sup>1</sup>

The former title names "la chose," as it were, while the final one suggests "l'effet qu'elle produit."

And as this prose poem, just as the preceding piece, is deeply influenced by Baudelaire, it is possible that its definitive title was suggested by two titles from Les Fleurs du Mal: "Chant d'Automne" and "Sonnet d'Automne." While "plainte" is a mood-setting noun, it is also a formal poetic term; and just as with the title of the first prose poem,

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Mallarmé here again brings multiple associations into play. A "complaint" is the formal designation of a lyric poem, frequent in both French and English medieval and Renaissance literature, which generally bemoans the poet's unhappy lot, or expresses his regret at the unhappy state of the world. A medieval example of the former would be Eustache Deschamps' "Plaintes d'amoureux," while Ronsard's "Plaintes de la France" is one of the latter. So the poet here brings the association of literature into play from the very outset. In this sense, the title classifies the poem formally as belonging to the past, a past almost quaintly remote. The second term of the title reintroduces, in the form of the year's seasons, the motif of the solar drama, which will be developed richly in the piece.

"Plainte d'Automne" is about the solitary narrator's reveries on an autumn evening; he is alone with his cat, in a room visited by memories of his dead sister. And as he meditates on those memories of the past and also his literary taste, which is likewise directed toward the past, he hears a barrel organ playing under his window, whose melancholy tune is in harmony with the lonely listener's somewhat voluptuous sadness.

From the first sentence, the piece is anecdotal and narrative; thus it contrasts rather sharply with "le Phénomène Futur." In the opening sentence, the narrator meditates about the stars--to which one of them did Maria, the departed

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sister go? And this beginning, with the introduction of a proper name, is so highly subjective, that one is fully justified in bringing biographical details into the analysis. Maria, Mallarmé's sister who had died in 1857,<sup>2</sup> haunts much of the poet's early work; and our narrator has ever since Maria's loss loved solitude. To what star might she have gone, "Orion, Altaïr, et toi, verte Vénus?" This enumeration brings to mind a line of Hugo's "A la Fenêtre, pendant la Nuit": "Sirius, Orion, toi, Vénus ... "; and a variant of our line, "Oh! laquelle, Orion, Sirius, et la Grande Ourse?" suggests this association even more strongly.<sup>3</sup> It is also remotely possible that Venus, being the mother of love, might have suggested Maria's return to a Mother; for Stéphane's and Maria's mother had died in 1847. Further, Venus is the name of copper in alchemy, and "cuivre" appears twice in the same paragraph, while the combination "verte Vénus," aside from alliterating, suggests also youth and the rebirth of spring, and youth and age are contrasted throughout the prose poem. And finally the green color may suggest the color of bronze or copper long exposed to the air--as on ancient statues, perhaps a statue of Venus. "Altaïr," the first magnitude star whose Arabic name means "flier," or "bird," brings to mind the bird or wind symbol for the poet or poetic creation, while "Orion," aside from the Hugolian echo indicated above, is also the name of a whole constellation, and the constellation of stars will become a most important

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"... j'ai toujours chéri la solitude" accentuates the highly subjective tone of this poem and at the same time reintroduces the motif of solitude already suggested in "Le Phénomène Futur." This motif, which is part of the theme of the poet's isolation developed in this cycle, is immediately reinforced in the second sentence with "seul," a word which Mallarmé added to the Pages version of the poem, and which he repeated in both the third and fourth sentences, and then finally as the last word of the piece. Originally, however, there was still another sentence added to that ending: "Oh! l'orgue de Barbarie, la veille de l'automne à cinq heures, sous les peupliers jaunis, Maria!" And so the image of the barrel organ was once more evoked here and linked to the memory of Maria; and with the precise indication of the time of day, the poem ended on a more anecdotal note. But the omission of that ending indicates that while Mallarmé at the beginning of the poem's composition might have felt it to be concerned mainly with Maria, he subsequently rendered it more general, toning down, as it were, the personal occasion to accentuate a deeper and at the same time wider significance.

The motif of solitude as well as the image of the cat, the solitary narrator's companion, recall Baudelaire, one of whose prose poems is entitled "La Solitude"; and it is

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possible that Mallarmé's often attested admiration for cats was, at least originally, due to his master's repeatedly expressed delight with them.<sup>4</sup> However, the Baudelairean influence, as well as the cat, which will reappear in the early prose poems, are entirely absent from the late ones.

"Longues journées" and words such as "alanguis," as well as the long mood-setting adverbs, "étrangement, singulièrement, languissamment, mélancoliquement" and "désespérément" tend to slow the passage of time in this piece, and the device of repetition further works toward that effect, which somehow isolates the narrator's world, cutting his own time, that of his reverie, out of the general flow of the time of the world outside. Not only the word "seul," but also whole phrases are repeated, as "de longues journées" and "seul avec mon chat." These poetic devices, the accumulation of long adverbs and the use of repetition, help create the poem's ambiance of time almost standing still. But in this early piece, the poet also still resorts to "telling" rather than merely "imaging" this effect of silent solitude with expressions such as "par seul j'entends" or "je peux donc dire."

The "compagnon mystique," aside from contrasting with "un être matériel," vaguely evokes an occult, rather than a religious, atmosphere, the Greek ethymology of "mystic" pointing to "initiated"; in the author's first article, the opening sentence reads: "Toute chose sacrée et qui veut

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demeurer sacrée s'enveloppe de mystère. Les religions se retranchent à l'abri d'arcanes dévoilés au seul prédestiné: l'art a les siens" (OC p. 257). Here then the religion of art is clearly distinguished from religion, from which, however, it borrows its vocabulary. And so the cat has been transformed by and in the narrator's reveries into a spirit from another world, that of the artistic imagination.

The "derniers auteurs de la décadence latine" reintroduces the subject of literature already suggested by the title. The narrator, if not specifically identified as a poet, is nevertheless a reader of poetry or literature, and his taste reflects, or rather presages, the literary climate of the closing nineteenth century. The vogue of the late Latin writers at the end of the century is most clearly brought out in a work which may have been influenced by this prose poem, Huysmans' A Rebours of 1884. For Huysmans and Mallarmé admired each other's work, and decadence is one of the major themes of both that book and our prose poem. The heroes of both, moreover, isolate themselves from the world to pursue "entre quatre murs" the divagations of their minds turned inward and toward the past. Decadence as a literary movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both in France and England, celebrated the notion of art's superiority over nature, an idea, as we saw, underlying also "Le Phénomène Futur." Further, the decadent writers loved to celebrate the beauty of dying or decaying things. This morbidity, of course,

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immediately brings to mind one of the young Mallarmé's literary heroes, Edgar Allen Poe.<sup>5</sup> And "Plainte d'Automne" celebrates, in fact, the beauty of dying or decaying things: a dead girl--even if in a remote and indirect way--Maria, a decaying literature, the agonizing sun of a dying day in the late, the Fall, season of the year, all of which the poet sums up with the word "chute." And the "blanche créature," who is no more, the dead sister, dominates the poem's mood and gives it its death direction, out and away from the "real" world. White, as already noted, is one of the poet's two dominating colors: it is more exactly the absence of color, the color which is Maria's, whose very absence constitutes her only presence. The virginal white also recalls the paraphernalia of the funeral, the crown of white roses and the winding sheet--Maria's last image. And a whole vocabulary cluster reinforces this moribund ambiance; the last and languid days of summer suggest mortal weakness; the adjective languid usually refers to a "maladie lente," hence suffering and approaching death. This is reinforced by the "s'évanouir" of the sun and the literature "agonisante," all suggesting a slow weakening and a sinking towards death.

The predominant sunset color, a variation of red, copper, but somewhat weakened with "jaune," contrasts with the white, as blood with pallor. And an equally harsh contrast is produced with "derniers moments de Rome" and the "approche *rajeunissante* des Barbares," while in the same sentence

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"esprit" and "volupté" are juxtaposed, suggesting a sublimation of the sensuous or physical to the mental or spiritual; and this pleasure also is death-directed, preferring a moribund, rather than a rejuvenating, tradition and moment of art.

"Les carreaux" introduces the image of the window, and with it the so far rather mental setting becomes physically fixed. As in this way the internal setting is exteriorized, a scene begins to be painted vaguely, of which, however, we see but a window, dividing the phenomenal world into an "inside" and an "outside." On the inside is the musing narrator with his dreams, for whom the window is the threshold to the outside, a sunset, and a city setting, reminiscent of both the "Spleen de Paris" and a considerable part of "Les Fleurs du Mal." The narrator's posture of solitude, remaining alone behind the window, goes hand in hand with his choice of literature. For in preferring Latin over French, he not only opts for a dead, over a living, language, but at the same time necessarily removes himself mentally from his own time and world into that of the past, all of which points to his association with decrepitude rather than with rebirth. Does he not even reject the "proses chrétiennes," those early Latin Church hymns, because they are "enfantin"?

At this point, almost exactly in the middle of the poem, there is a break, for while the first paragraph was mainly concerned with the narrator's thoughts, the second one is

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dominated by external phenomena: the singing of a street organ, the remembered funeral procession in the street below. But as the first part ended, so the second one begins with a discussion of poetry, this subject linking the two parts. Even the poetry now seems to take on concrete form, in the personification of the old filles. Once again, age and youth are contrasted in the worn-out old women, whose patches of rouge the narrator prefers to "l'incarnat de la jeunesse." And so the faded, the artificial, the corrupt are juxtaposed with, and exalted over, youth and life and nature. To reinforce the contrast, the image of the old women follows almost immediately upon the personification of the early Christian hymns, stuttering a child-like Latin.

Now the cat also has taken on concrete form; no longer merely a spirit, it lets the narrator plunge his hand into its fur. And so there is here, in contrast to the first part of the poem, an emphasis on sensation. Though the cat in its purity still recalls the "compagnon mystique" above, "pure" here somehow also evokes the image of a white cat, a truly visual image, while in the first part the whiteness was that of a memory, "blanche créature," a mental image of the dead Maria. Moreover, the stroking of the animal's fur conveys a purely tactile sensation, immediately followed by an auditory one: the singing of the barrel organ below the window.<sup>6</sup> "Barbarie" echoes "Barbare" above, and, further, the hydraulic organ's invention, the barrel organ being but a modification,

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The mood evoked by the barrel organ recalls the tone of sickness and mourning of the poem's first part, with "languissament" and "mélancoliquement" echoing "alanguis" and "agonisante" above; moreover, the barrel organ cannot renew itself, but is eternally condemned to repeat. Likewise, reminiscent of the tired, dusty trees of "Le Phénomène Futur," the poplars' foliage has lost its green freshness; even in springtime the leaves seemed "mornes." Mallarmé as a teacher of English was certainly aware of the English "to mourn" and adds this association to the adjective, for immediately upon "mornes" follows the image of the funeral procession.

"... Depuis que Maria a passé là avec des cierges, une dernière fois," evokes not only the image of the procession, but rhythmically conveys its slow and stately movement. "... Depuis que Maria a passé ... " also echoes the very opening words of the piece: "Depuis que Maria m'a quitté ... " "Cierges," phonetically evocative of "vierges," and resonating in "dernière," emphasizes once again the virginal whiteness, the tall white wax tapers of the procession, the pale young girl in the casket wearing the "couronne des morts" of white roses; and "une dernière fois" marks not only her last passing, but the last mention of Maria in this poem.

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Musical instruments are important in Mallarmé's poetry long before he became interested in music as a possible rival to poetry because of the traditional Orphic association of poetry and music. Two of them are introduced here, and at this early stage in the poet's career, a still rather Baudelairean synesthesia, such as the piano's "scintille" and the violin's giving "aux fibres déchirées la lumière," is not uncommon; one recalls, for example, "De blancs sanglots" of "Apparition" of 1863.

But then the sad tune removes the narrator again from the world of sights and sounds, the senses, back into that timeless inner, spiritual existence, the "crépuscule du souvenir," a twilight zone of memory, where past becomes present and the departed souls are with us again. And "Plainte d'Automne" touches here upon one of the young Mallarmé's obsessive themes, that of the revenant, the return of the dead, which dominates much of his adolescent poetry.

The persona's dreaming is "despairing," perhaps because he cannot really reach the ideal Maria, whose memory, however, isolates him in the world of the living. And that world, the "outside," interrupts the reverie, for the "maintenant" pulls the narrator back from his dreams into the here and now where he has no sense of belonging. The adverbs referring to his state of mind, "singulièrement" and "étrangement," accentuate his alienation; and his state of mind contrasts with the barrel organ's playing which is "joyusement vulgaire" and

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gladdens not his, but the suburb's heart. In its banality, the tune is accessible to all; but the narrator is doubly isolated from the others, physically by the window and spiritually by his emotions which are the opposite of theirs. For the tune which gladdens them makes him weep. And so the joyous suburb seems as indifferent to his sadness as that musical instrument itself, whose cyclic recurrence reflects that of nature: in this life there is only endless repetition, while the narrator's secret aspirations drew him to the stars, where Maria has perhaps gone. Yet he loves the simple melody--as he does his very sadness, one feels--because it is old-fashioned, like a "une ballade romantique," an outmoded literary genre, and moreover a foreign one, which suggests a mental escape both temporally and spatially from the unbearable here and now. Moreover, the romantic ballad was popular with the German poets, and this association suggests Mallarmé's young wife, the German Marie, and thus foreshadows the next prose poem, "Frisson d'Hiver," in which she is celebrated.

The poem's last sentence is again purely narrative: it explains the narrator's refusal to go to the window which might well reflect already the turning away from experience which, rather than being "lived," is transmuted into art. At the same time, we are in the realm of the mysterious, for it appears that if the persona stirred, a sort of spell might be broken; moreover, he wants to preserve this enchantment of

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All of the poem's variants, of which some were mentioned in passing, show that in the revisions Mallarmé tends to suppress sentimental effusions, though the subjective and confiding tone, as well as a certain sentimentality, still permeate the definite version. It is this tone, and the sentimentally-seraphic flavor of variants such as: "le piano m'égaie, le violon m'ouvre les portes vermeilles où gazouille l'Espérance," or "le violon ouvre à l'âme déchirée la lumière des alleluia," which had characterized Mallarmé's adolescent poetry, but which completely disappears from his later verse, as it does from the later prose poems.

The verse poetry contemporary with "Plainte d'Automne," such as "Angoisse," "Las de l'amer repos," "le Sonneur," and "Tristesse d'Eté," is dominated also by funereal images; the poet persona is haunted by his winding sheet, white as the paper on which the poem cannot be born; and the death wish becomes a hallucination nearly driving him into suicide. Even such a specific image, as that of the painted filles, most reminiscent of the "Fleurs du Mal," reappears:

Je goûterai le fard pleuré par tes paupières

And the general weariness of life is most bitterly expressed in this stanza from "L'Azur" of the same year as our prose poem:

Car j'y veux, puisque enfin ma cervelle vidée  
Comme le pot de fard gisant au pied du mur,  
N'a plus l'art d'attifer la sanglotante idée,  
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At the same time, and in seeming contrast to this weary sinking down into death, there is the soul's elevation toward its ideal, the ideal woman and sister who has reentered paradise. Here, then, the death wish becomes an upward inspiration--in paradoxical contradiction with the love for dying and decaying things, for "chute"--to the innocence of a life before the Fall. And this mood of "Plainte d'Automne" is reflected in the similarly named verse poem, "Soupir," which also celebrates autumn, where "l'azur," that is the Ideal, is "attendri," and where the persona's soul strives to rise toward its ideal sister--animus to anima--in nature's gentle Fall:

Mon âme vers ton front où rêve, ô calme soeur,  
 Un automne jonché de taches de rousseur,  
 Et vers le ciel errant de ton oeil angélique  
 Monte, comme dans un jardin mélancolique,  
 Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!  
 --Vers l'Azur attendri d'Octobre pâle et pur  
 Qui mire aux grands bassins sa longueur infinie  
 Et laisse, sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie  
 Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon,  
 Se traîner le soleil jaune d'un long rayon.

Not only is "Soupir" of the same year as "Plainte d'Automne" and renders a very similar theme, but its total tonality corresponds exactly with that of the prose poem.

This rising and falling, the simultaneously ascending and descending movement and direction, so reminiscent of Baudelaire's "double postulation," confer a distinctive tension on "Plainte d'Automne," one of whose dominant themes is, certainly, the "complaint" bemoaning the Fall from Eden.<sup>7</sup> The occasion of the fall, from childhood's innocence, from

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the oneness of paradise, is the death of the person evoked in the poem. And we saw how throughout the piece the persona's loneliness and separateness is stressed, and linked to that event. But "Plainte d'Automne" is not primarily a commemorative poem, for the theme of art, of literature, is of at least equal importance.<sup>8</sup> Both themes are suggested in the revised title, and the theme of the memory of Eden, as well as that of the resurrective power of art, link this piece to the preceding one.

For "Plainte d'Automne" celebrates the Orphic function of poetry and music in bringing back the dead, and, in this sense, the victory of art over nature. Orpheus was both poet and musician, and our narrator reads poetry and listens to music. In this first prose poem, however, he does not directly assume the Orphic role, though his marked withdrawal from the world is somewhat reminiscent of the traditional Orphic descent into that other realm. And by reading and by listening, the narrator does participate in the magical act; and in another prose poem of the same year, "Le Démon de l'Analogie," we will see him fall under the demon's spell.

Maria is not only the remembered sister, but becomes the personification of an ideal, "la blanche créature," and her death, again, is at once a descent and an ascension, an envol to the stars. The young narrator who dreams of her is in love with death, and at the same time with the elevation to the ideal to which he aspires. Torn between these two polar

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Both his refusal of life and his love for art are reflected in the decadent posture. Decadence, as a moment in the history of art, and as an attitude of this poem's narrator, is an evasion from a world of matter, materialistic and historical progress, and from nature, where every spring is born only to decay in the end. In celebrating decay and death itself, the decadent refuses the enchantment of youth, which he knows to be an illusion.<sup>9</sup>

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## PLAINTE D'AUTOMNE

## NOTES

- 1 Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 137.
- 2 In view of the obviously strong influence which this event had on Mallarmé's early poetry, one must agree with Charles Mauron, Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Mallarmé (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1963), pp. 26-27, in his surprise at Mondor's omission:  

Maria died at thirteen, when Stéphane was fifteen. What is the significance usually ascribed to this event? ... Dr. Mondor, who has furnished us with all the details known on this subject as on so many others, does not use it as the basis of any psychological evaluation of Mallarmé. As a matter of fact, Maria's death does not even appear in the biographical chronology of the Oeuvres complètes.
- 3 The complete original version of "Plainte d'Automne" is reproduced in Adile Ayda, Le Drame Intérieur de Mallarmé (Istanbul: Ed. de la Turquie Moderne, 1955), pp. 29-30, Appendix. This highly biographical study "explains" much of Mallarmé's poetry, and particularly his early work, in the light of the death of the poet's mother, sister, and a young friend. It does not, however, analyze the poetry.
- 4 The cat was throughout Mallarmé's life a member of his little family. Geneviève Mallarmé recalls in "Mallarmé par sa fille," La Nouvelle Revue Française, XXVII (July-December 1926), p. 519:

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La maison était toujours fleurie et jamais elle ne fut vide de quelque bestiole. Ces petites présences vivantes et naïves lui étaient nécessaires. Voici pour vous faire sourire et venant en ordre: l'oiseau bleu et le bengali, la chatte angora blanche Neige et son fils blanc, Frimas;

And Henri Mondor in Autres Précisions sur Mallarmé et inédits (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 218, tells us as follows about Mallarmé's attitude toward cats:

Sur les chats qu'il appela Seigneurs des toits, Mallarmé a été presque aussi souvent interrogé que sur la bicyclette. Voici une des réponses jadis retrouvée et que j'avais pu faire connaître: "Le chat s'étend de la divinité au lapin; poursuivi, hors les portes, par le rustre brutalement, il redevient, à l'intérieur, dans des recoins d'ombre, quelque chose comme nos lares, l'idole de l'appartement. J'ajoute et ai souvent dit, qu'il satisfait, pour cela doux aux solitaires, le besoin de la caresse, en offrant sur lui la place exacte; y compris, philosophiquement, l'au-delà, indispensable, par le déroulement ou la fuite de sa queue.

- 5 In his famous biographical letter to Verlaine, Mallarmé says:

Ayant appris l'anglais simplement pour mieux lire Poe, je suis parti à vingt ans en Angleterre (OC p. 662).

- 6 Again, this predilection for the street organ is a biographical detail, revealed in Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 58, where Mallarmé writes in a letter of 1862:

Je me suis arrêté un instant pour jeter un sou à un pauvre orgue qui se lamente dans le square. ... Le pauvre hère attend peut-être encore son déjeuner ... Non vraiment. Cet homme fait de la musique dans les rues, c'est un métier comme celui de notaire, et qui a sur ce dernier l'avantage d'être inutile. Peut-on rêver une vie plus belle que celle qui consiste à errer par les chemins et à faire l'aumône d'un air triste ou gai à la première fenêtre qu'on voit, ... à jouer pour les pavés, pour les moineaux, pour les arbres maladifs des squares.

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- 7 The most recent book on Mallarmé, Thomas Williams' Mallarmé and the Language of Mysticism (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1970), pp. 31-32, considers "Plainte d'Automne" a "falling away from the divine after the deaths of Maria and Harriet Smythe" and thus considers this poem the first of five stages in Mallarmé's rebirth cycle as a mystic. Unfortunately, all the support for this hypothesis is drawn from the poet's correspondence (la crise de Tournon), while the poem itself is not even superficially discussed.
- 8 Although this death is of great importance for the young Mallarmé, I cannot agree with critics (Ayda, Cellier, Mauron) who use this event to explain not only this, but many other poems.
- 9 Nothing sums up the decadent's attitude better than Huysman's des Esseintes, who particularly loved these early prose poems; J.-K. Huysmans, A Rebours (Paris: Ed. Fasquette, 1968), p. 244:

Mais dans ce recueil, avaient été colligés certains poèmes sauvés de revues mortes: le Démon de l'analogie, la Pipe, le Pauvre Enfant pâle, le Spectacle interrompu, le Phénomène futur, et surtout Plaintes [sic] d'automne et Frisson d'hiver, qui étaient les chefs-d'oeuvre du poème en prose, car ils unissaient une langue si magnifiquement ordonnée qu'elle berçait, par elle-même, ainsi qu'une mélancolique incantation, qu'une énivrante mélodie à des pulsations d'âme de sensitif dont les nerfs en emoi vibrant avec une acuité qui vous pénètre jusqu'au ravissement, jusqu'à la douleur.

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## CHAPTER IV

### FRISSON D'HIVER

This prose poem, of the same year as the two preceding ones, appeared originally and a second time under the title "Causerie d'Hiver," before receiving its definitive name in subsequent publications. Again its anecdote is about the reveries of the narrator, now a poet, in his room; but in this piece the room is carefully developed, for it becomes one of the poem's major symbols. The poet-persona is no longer alone, but addresses his musings to a silent companion, who is a poetic transposition of Mallarmé's young German wife.

Like the title of the preceding piece, "Plainte d'Automne," this one also places the poem under the sign of one of the year's seasons: winter, "L'hiver, saison de l'art serein, l'hiver lucide," as the poet had said two years earlier in "Renouveau." But winter, white and cold, is also the old age of the year, its death, and its cold whiteness is that of absence--recalling the ambiance of the preceding poem--and for the poet the ennui of sterility.<sup>1</sup> The substitution of "frisson" for "causerie" harmonizes with this atmosphere, for it suggests trembling from both cold and fear, and also implies fragility even by its sound-look so similar to the other word of the title. And while "causerie" merely pointed to

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the narrative tone of the piece, "Frisson" points to one of the poem's major, recurring symbols. "Frisson," moreover, conveys a sense of expectancy and potentiality, combining the notions of movement and stasis; and while in this poem, with its cold, white winter ambiance, the latter predominates--for life and movement seem arrested, frozen--there is, at the same time the promise of hidden life, that is of poetry. Similarly, in the contemporary "Hérodiade," the essence of her being appears both hidden and paralyzed in white, virginal coldness, while there is already, however, a promise of her nubility, which manifests itself in a shiver:

De mes robes, arôme aux farouches délices  
Sortirait le frisson blanc de ma nudité.

Later in Mallarmé's verse poetry, "frisson" usually designates the very rhythm of poetic, and sometimes musical, creation; for example in "Toast Funèbre" the ideal poet's, Gautier's, role is described as follows:

Le Maître, par un oeil profond, a sur ses pas,  
Apaisé de l'éden l'inquiète merveille  
Dont le frisson final, dans sa voix seule, éveille  
Pour la Rose et le Lys le mystère d'un nom.<sup>2</sup>

But in "Frisson d'Hiver," this poetic rhythm is still hidden, like a secret well-spring, under a blanket of ice.

The first-person narrator no longer just discusses poetry, as in the preceding piece; he has become a poet-persona, who uses the form of direct address so insistently that, though hearing only one voice throughout, one is intensely aware of "the other" presence.<sup>3</sup> Again, as in

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"Plainte," the setting is a room, but here it is much more carefully elaborated, with each of its cherished objects lovingly painted.

The first of these, the "pendule de Saxe" suggests both Time and Space, for not only does it count hours, but it came from far away; it further suggests fragility, because this is a Dresden china clock,<sup>4</sup> white and fragile, with gods and flowers painted on its delicate house of porcelain.<sup>5</sup> This clock, which is slow, behind time, fits well into this room, whose objects are all of the past. Its striking the thirteenth hour, reminiscent of Nerval's "Artemis," where "La treizième revient ... encore la première,"<sup>6</sup> constitutes a symbolic, rather than a descriptive, aspect; for by striking the thirteenth hour, it strikes an hour which does not exist, a fictitious one. And at the same time, it symbolizes the cyclical nature of the solar drama--reminiscent of the barrel organ of the preceding poem--one of whose moments provides the atmosphere and the setting of the poem: the winter room.

The far-away country from which the clock comes is also that of the silent companion, whom we will see later reading her outdated German almanac; and the clock's mysterious origin, "à qui a-t-elle été?" suggests its great age, so that it, too, must be faded now, as all the other old things. The china clock functions thus both as a richly multivalent symbol, and as a mood-setting device to evoke evasion from the here and now--recalling the mood of "Plainte d'Automne"--

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back into a deep past far away. "Pense qu'elle est venue de Saxe par les longues diligences d'autrefois" reminds the companion of her own past and origin,<sup>7</sup> and turns the narrator's eyes inward toward internal space and time, the world of the imagination.

But now the persona's glance falls on the room's windows, and the curious shadows, or shades, which seem to be hanging there. These worn window panes have lost their transparency and polish. They don't serve here as a threshold to the "outside," nor to reflect the interior of the room; these dull, lusterless windows shield the inside from the outside; but, at the same time, they threaten to expose the former to the latter. The persona keeps looking anxiously at, but never through or into them; and at first, he is merely vaguely aware of those shadows hanging there, without seeing what they are. Maybe they are the spiders' webs, which he will see there later; maybe they are imaginary phantoms. For, while refusing to look through the window panes at an "outside," might he not see through them, for a moment, into that deeper "beyond," whence the ghosts of the past, "ombres," come back, sometimes? Here, just as in the much later sonnet, "Sur les bois oubliés,"<sup>8</sup> everything seems prepared for the revenant's visit: the winter night outside, and the lonely room with its fire and antique furnishings, and the introspective solitary poet in a state of expectancy. So, by the merest suggestion, the two Marias appear to be present: the

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sister of "Plainte d'Automne" and the silent, pale companion, so beautifully addressed as "ma soeur au regard de jadis," with which words the poet seems to speak to them both.

As the narrator looks away from the windows, he sees the Venetian mirror,<sup>9</sup> which introduces one of the key symbols of the Mallarméan universe. "Glace" for mirror carries not only the association mirror-water, but mirror-frozen water, thus fitting well into the white, cold winter atmosphere of "Frisson d'Hiver." The ice suggests both the mirror's impassibility and its fragility, as well as the pure and the virginal, and finally the shiver of recognition, "frisson," which one experiences at the revelation of one's image.

The "de Venise," similarly to the "de Saxe" above, again evokes the far away and, also, as with the painted Dresden china clock, produces a precise image, namely that of a mirror with an ornate gilt frame. Here the exoticism derives from the aristocratic elegance of a by-gone "grand siècle," when Venetian mirrors were, in fact, imported in great numbers into the world of Versailles.

Further, the mirror recalls "vitre," since both function as virtual doors from, or into, the room. But whereas the window panes were dull, the mirror is smooth and clear, like the watery surface suggested by "froide fontaine," an image combining the clearness of water with the coldness of ice. "Fontaine" suggests depth, reinforced by "profonde," which stresses its figurative meaning of the mysterious. Again,

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similarly to "frisson," "fontaine" encompasses both the notions of movement and immobility, but again, in the context of our poem, immobility is accentuated, for its coldness seems to almost freeze that fountain. The "rivage" is at once the fountain's border and the mirror's frame, and this fountain is not a natural, running spring, but an artificial one, with its smooth surface--almost frozen--and an ornately sculpted border, with stone and marble wiverns, the same that are carved into the mirror's tarnished, old gilt frame. "Guivre" is etymologically related to "givre," hoar-frost, thus once more echoing a note of the winter theme.

So the fountain becomes a giant Venetian mirror, decorating a park, which is but the extension of the artificial and artistic environment of the room. Such a fountain, for example, would be the Médicis fountain of the Luxembourg, which, in its rich historicity, evokes both the "grand siècle" and the Italian Renaissance, which so strongly influenced its splendid luxury. In one sentence, thus, we have here a magnificent superposition of two images: the ornate Venetian mirror in a carefully constructed room, and the richly embellished fountain of a park by Le Nôtre: Nature subjugated by Art.

Just as in the preceding paragraph, so here the poet first introduces the symbolic image, and then asks a question about it, and both questions, "à qui a-t-elle été?" and "qui s'y est miré?" intimate the mysterious origin of these antiques

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with their veiled history. But the mirror question also stresses its function, and the ideal function of a luxurious mirror is to reflect an image of Beauty.

"Mirer," etymologically from mirari, to be astonished, invites the association with Narcissus and his fountain, which is further developed with "baigner," where the mirror-fountain analogy is extended, reminiscent of "Le Pitre Châtié," of the same year, where the reflecting also becomes a bathing. This association of looking into and bathing in leads to the nude image, "un fantôme nu," in the Venetian mirror, recalling the Aphrodite-like "Phénomène Futur," stepping out of the sea. "Le péché de sa beauté" is not the sin of nudity, but that of nudity seen, which motif links "Frisson d'Hiver" to "Hérodiade," whose composition began in the same winter. In that poem the mirror-fountain image and the theme of narcissistic introspection is most richly developed, in a similar setting of cold, white and virginal sterility:

... Tiens devant moi ce miroir.

O miroir!

Eau froide par l'ennui dans ton cadre gelée  
 Que de fois et pendant des heures, désolée  
 Des songes et cherchant mes souvenirs qui sont  
 Comme des feuilles sous ta glace au trou profond,  
 Je m'apparus en toi comme une ombre lointaine,  
 Mais, horreur! des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine,  
 J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité!

And Hérodiade's mirror is at the same time, then, also the frozen and motionless fountain of a sterile winter world, corresponding to that of "Frisson d'Hiver."

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"Fantôme" on the literal level designates the dream-evoked illusory image in the mirror, but it almost always carries the associate meaning of "image des morts qui apparaît surnaturellement," and so, again, remotely suggests the revenant, already vaguely alluded to above. Further, the "fantôme nu" of the persona's Venetian mirror, as well as Hérodiade's naked "ombre lointain" in hers, already point to the nymph, "Elle défunte nue en le miroir" of "Ses purs ongles," an image of that death and night, the néant presaged here, and before which the poet-persona hesitates. Whose is the voice arresting the persona's meditations before the mirror? Surely not the companion's: she is silent throughout the piece. Is it the phantom's--transforming itself into a Psyche beckoning--and at the same time warning the poet to look no further into this deep fountain in which the self might drown? For Hérodiade was horrified by the mirror's revelation of nothingness; an impassible "Néant," which threatens the poet from without and from within and so makes him hesitate before both, those windows and that mirror.

The threat from the outside is concretized in the recurring window motif. And now the persona recognizes "des toiles d'araignées au haut des grandes croisées." The "vitres" have changed to "croisées," and so no longer allude to the window's transparency, but emphasize the solidity of the frame, which, originally was but an extension of the walls, "croisée" from "crois de pierre." Again, the persona turns

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his eyes away to the inside, where they fall on "notre bahut encore très vieux"; and this chest must be one of those old-fashioned vaulted traveling trunks, evocative again of the far-away. Its wood is "triste," even as it is struck by the light of a fire which fails to impart any warmth to the pale and faded objects of the winter room. The fire is, moreover, not directly seen, but present by its reflection only, like that pale beam of a distant sun in the contemporary "Soupir":

...  
 Et laisse, sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie  
 Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon,  
 Se traîner le soleil jaune d'un long rayon.

The persona addresses his companion fittingly with "contemple," for she is the personification of the contemplative life, Mary, and not Martha; as the poet later says, one of those "qui ne goûtent pas l'action." And now he gives a whole catalog of all that is cherished in the room: the faded curtains, as old as the chest with its sad wood, the antique chairs whose tapestry and painted wood frames have lost their color, the old engravings on the walls, all summed up in "toutes nos vieilleries." And even the living presences, the colorful waxbill and the bluebird seem to have faded with time. Like the white cat of "Plainte d'Automne," the poet's animals assume and reflect their owner's mood.

The window motif once again interrupts the narrative, and in its insistence has something haunting about it; moreover, the persona seems to want to protect his companion from it: "Ne songe pas aux toiles d'araignées...." But now the

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spiders' webs themselves have begun to tremble, and so the notion of "frisson" is taken up again; for they are still hanging there, always in the same place, but now their slight "shiver" suggests stirrings, perhaps, of a mere idea caught in their lace.

The tone of the poem becomes more discursive, as the narrator addresses the woman, and "... et voilà pourquoi je puis vivre auprès de toi" suggests that she is his wife. But the bond uniting them seems more spiritual than conjugal, the erotic not even being vaguely suggested. When it had but distantly been evoked with the naked mirror phantom, the persona had immediately turned away. Here, in the winter room, both Marias seem to be present, the dead one come to life, and the living one remote as a ghost, in this "soeur au regard de jadis." At the same time, the sister-beloved association is highly reminiscent of Baudelaire, and the whole sentence: "N'as-tu pas désiré, ma soeur au regard de jadis, qu'en un de mes poèmes apparussent ces mots 'la grâce des choses fanées'?" is a kind of homage to the older poet, whose celebration of "la grâce des choses fanées" certainly influenced this and the preceding prose poem. In this sentence, also, the narrator identifies himself as a poet, and we recall, moreover, that the phrase "la grâce des choses fanées" did, in fact, appear in one of Mallarmé's poems, namely a prose poem, also of 1864,<sup>10</sup> "Symphonie Littéraire II," which is the younger poet's formal tribute to his master:

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L'hiver, quand ma torpeur me lasse, je me plonge avec délices dans les chères pages des Fleurs du Mal. Mon Baudelaire à peine ouvert, je suis attiré dans un paysage surprenant qui vit au regard avec l'intensité de ceux que crée le profond opium. ... Arrivé, je vois de mornes bassins disposés comme les plates-bandes d'un éternel jardin: dans le granit noir de leurs bords, enchâssant les pierres précieuses de l'Inde, dort une eau morte et métallique, avec de lourdes fontaines en cuivre où tombe tristement un rayon bizarre et plein de la grâce des choses fanées.... (OC p. 263)

In these opening sentences, we find already some of the symbols and themes of our poem, which were to become characteristic of much symbolist poetry: winter, evasion into the exotic, the park and its fountain with its still water, the sad reflection of the distant winter sun on the mirror-fountain surface, and the obsession with death, for "où tombe tristement" certainly is meant to evoke "triste tombe," all summed up in "la grâce des choses fanées."

And as the persona of our poem addresses his lady, she seems to become herself one of the pale antiques of the room, one of those precious objects, as for example an antique portrait of a lady, somewhat faded, calmly and silently looking down to the poet from its gilt frame. For, paradoxically, though we feel her presence throughout the piece, the narrator at the same time seems alone with his dreams.

The remainder of the paragraph seems singularly disturbing with its discursiveness and lack of imagery. But this is surely intended, for now the ugliness of new objects irrupts into, and breaks the harmony of, this secluded world. "Les objets neufs" sounds and looks hard, and the discord is

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accentuated in the onomatopoetic "laur hardiesse criarde," with its offensively grating alliteration. The last words of the section underline the contemplative nature of Mary, and the image of Maria reading fits beautifully into the portrait, namely the portrait of a lady holding a book, like that silent saint of the stained glass window, "... la Sainte pâle, étalant/Le livre vieux qui se déplie" of the verse poem of 1865.

And her book, the outdated almanac, from Germany as the clock--home of by-gone romanticism--is behind the time also; moreover, the very type of calendar called "almanac" is an old-fashioned one. Like the clock, originally designed to measure time, the almanac now merely recalls the past, for it appeared "il y a plus de cent ans," and the future it foretells is dead, with the kings it announces all gone to their graves. This lost past is again evoked with "Il n'y a plus de champs," for these past fields have now become the city, with its empty evening streets.

Not of the world outside however, but of that inner one which is their home, will the poet speak to his companion, the "calme enfant," in her faded dress, his head resting on her "genoux charitables." This is the same Marie who will be celebrated also in the last of the early prose poems, and who is evoked in "Don du Poème," when the poet brings his new-born "Hérodiane" poem to her so that she may nourish it. And she, her voice, "rappelant viole et clavecin," is also

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the pale saint, "Musicienne du silence," and the companion much later remembered in "Prose," she is the Poet's Anima, spiritual sister and companion of his mind.

The poet will speak to her, his soul, for hours of his treasures, hours which are out of time--fictitious as that thirteenth hour of the old china clock--for this poem is about itself: the introspective poet's fragile and delicate narcissistic reveries, threatened by chaos, and symbolized by the fine spiderwebbing, which now shivers high up on the casement windows.

Of the variants, the only significant one is that of the title, and stylistically the poem resembles the others of that year. However the young Mallarmé's predilection for repetition, which we already saw manifested in "Plainte d'Automne," has in this poem become a major structural device. And while this may again evidence Poe's influence, or certainly Baudelaire's in his prose poems, the recurrence of the obsessive window-spider-web image has here grown into the equivalent of a Wagnerian leit-motif: a melodic figure that accompanies the reappearance of the symbol and plays repeatedly into the main narrative theme. The poet uses the device also in his verse poetry of those years, as for example in the "Ouverture" of "Hérodiade," which Mallarmé himself called "musical":<sup>11</sup>

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Notre tour cinéraire et sacrificatrice,  
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Loin du lit vide qu'un cierge soufflé cachait,  
 Un arôme d'ors froids rôdant sur le sachet,  
 ...  
 Une Aurore traînait ses ailes dans les larmes!  
 ...  
 Comme un cygne cachant en sa plume ses yeux,  
 Comme les mit le vieux cygne en sa plume, allée  
 De la plume détresse, en l'éternelle allée

So there is not only a correspondence of imagery, but also a stylistic one, between Mallarmé's prose and verse poems of those years. And in "Frisson d'Hiver," as in "Hérodiade," the stylistic device under discussion is so closely linked to the theme that form and function become inseparable, so that style becomes the objectification of the idea it expresses.

In "Frisson d'Hiver" some of the major symbols of not only the prose poems, but this whole poetic universe, burst forth. The room itself, which emerges as the symbol of the poet's mind or consciousness, will be the setting also of some of Mallarmé's late sonnets, where we meet again the familiar objects: the mirror, the window, the lace, and the clock. At the same time, this prose poem is still strongly under the influence of Baudelaire, and the winter room itself might well owe part of its inspiration to these lines from "Paysage":

Et quand viendra l'hiver aux neiges monotones  
 Je fermerai partout portières et volets  
 Pour bâtir dans la nuit mes féeriques palais<sup>12</sup>

The need to close the mind off from what threatens it reflects two important aspects of this moment in the poet's development, both revealed by the correspondence of those years: the need felt by Mallarmé for solitude and withdrawal, to be able to hear the melody within, and, at the same time,

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the approaching crisis of 1866,<sup>13</sup> a decisive crisis whose impact will influence the next prose poem of the cycle even more strongly. The emerging poet is already beginning to experience a truly existential anguish, the full force of which will be rendered dramatically in *Igitur*, by means of these same symbols: the room and its furnishings, and, above all, the mirror--into which the hero must now look--and the clock, the objectification of the obsession with Time, and reminder of the ephemeral in human existence:

J'ai toujours vécu mon âme fixée sur l'horloge. Certes j'ai tout fait pour que le temps qu'elle sonna restat présent dans la chambre ... j'ai épaissi les rideaux, et comme j'étais obligé pour ne pas douter de moi de m'sseoir en face de cette glace, j'ai recueilli précieusement les moindres atomes du temps....

Et quand je rouvrais les yeux au fond du miroir, je voyais le personnage d'horreur, le fantôme de l'horreur absorber peu à peu ce qui restait de sentiment et de douleur dans la glace, nourrir son horreur des suprêmes frissons des chimères et de l'instabilité des tentures, et se former en raréfiant la glace jusqu'à une pureté innouïe,--jusqu'à ce qu'il se détachent, permanent, de la glace absolument pure, comme pris dans son froid,--jusqu'à ce qu'enfin les meubles, leurs monstres ayant succombé avec leurs anneaux convulsifs, fussent morts ... et que les rideaux cessant d'être inquiets tombassent, avec une attitude qu'ils devaient conserver à jamais (OC pp. 439-41).

The delicate cobwebs, still shivering by the windows, will later become Mallarmé's image for the Orphic explanation of the earth, which it is the poet's function to reveal: the relation between all parts, the universal analogy, of an artistic universe imposed on chaos:

... je venais de jeter le plan de mon oeuvre entier, après avoir trouvé la clef de moi-même, clef de voûte, ou centre, si tu veux, pour ne pas nous brouiller de métaphores,--centre de moi-même, où je me tiens comme

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une araignée sacrée, sur les principaux fils déjà sortis de mon esprit, et à l'aide desquels je tisserai aux points de rencontre de merveilleuses dentelles, que je devine, et qui existent déjà dans le sein de la Beauté.<sup>14</sup>

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## FRISSON D'HIVER

## NOTES

- 1 In the same winter, January of 1865, Mallarmé writes to Cazalis, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 150:

... et [je] pleure quand je me sens vide et ne puis  
jeter un mot sur mon papier implacablement blanc.

And in "Brise Marine," of 1865: "Sur le vide papier que  
la blancheur défend."

- 2 Cohn in Toward the Poems, p. 105, comments on this passage as follows:

Through this formula Mallarmé evokes the dialectic of creativity and the process of evolutionary refinement, from an original crude rhythm (or polarity) of pain and delight (as in the simple experience of physical love), to the delicate shiver-rhythm of sound waves set in motion by the poetic voice, the air de paroles.

Mallarmé later again uses "frisson" in a similar sense in "Hommage":

Hiéroglyphes dont s'exalte le millier  
A propager de l'aile un frisson familial!

- 3 One can't help but think of the equally insistent "(Nous fûmes deux, je le maintiens)" of the much later "Prose pour des Esseintes," where the woman, moreover, is also addressed as "soeur."
- 4 My notion, that the "pendule de Saxe" must be a Dresden china clock is supported by René Ghil, who in Les Dates, p. 25, describes Mallarmé's room at Valvins:

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Bureau ancien, et la pendule de Sèvres inspiratrice de l'exquis poème en prose que l'on sait: "Frisson d'Hiver."

Whether Dresden or Sèvres, it is a painted porcelain clock.

- 5 As some of the other early prose poems, this one is highly biographical. For the Bengal birds, see note 4 of "Plainte d'Automne"; in a letter of the same year as these poems, Mallarmé again mentions his white cat, the birds, and, above all, Marie Gerhard, and our Saxony clock; Mondor, Correspondance I, pp. 133-34:

... si tu voyais comme nous sommes d'une façon charmante avec nos délicieux oiseaux, les poissons d'or et la chatte blanche, et parmi tout cela, ma douce Allemande, qui va des uns aux autres. Elle a été éblouie des belles choses que j'ai rapportées, de bien loin, et ne cesse de contempler la belle petite pendule de Saxe.

J'ai repris courage et, grâce à ce qui m'entoure, j'espère que je ne retomberai pas de sitôt dans les lourdes ténèbres où j'ai si longtemps vécu.

The same month, to another correspondent, op. cit., p. 136:

... j'ai une adorable maîtresse, toute blanche, et qui s'appelle Neige. C'est une chatte de race, jolie et que j'embrasse tout le jour sur son nez rose. Elle efface mes vers avec sa queue, se promenant sur ma table pendant que j'écris.

Joins à cela que je griffonne ceci au chant des bengalis que j'ai rapportés à ma femme--et tu comprendras combien nous devons être heureux, en famille, ou en ménagerie, comme tu le voudras.

- 6 In his sonnet, "Artémis," Nerval also uses direct address, and develops the theme of time and death, with imagery of flowers, gods, and phantoms.
- 7 The underlying biographical fact is Mallarmé's marriage with Maria-Christine Gerhard, a German girl, on August 10, 1863.

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8 The sonnet, of 1877, reads:

--Sur les bois oubliés quand passe l'hiver sombre  
 Tu te plains, ô captif solitaire du seuil,  
 Que ce sépulcre à deux qui fera notre orgueil  
 Hélas! du manque seul des lourds bouquets s'encombre.

Sans écouter Minuit qui jeta son vain nombre,  
 Une veille t'exalte à ne pas fermer l'oeil  
 Avant que dans les bras de l'ancien fauteuil  
 Le suprême tison n'ait éclairé mon Ombre.

Qui veut souvent avoir la Visite ne doit  
 Par trop de fleurs charger la pierre que mon doigt  
 Soulève avec l'ennui d'une force défunte.

Âme au si clair foyer tremblante de m'asseoir,  
 Pour revivre il suffit qu'à tes lèvres j'emprunte  
 Le souffle de mon nom murmuré tout un soir."

Here it is, of course, the revenant, "Ombre," who addresses the solitary survivor, but the "setting" is very similar to that of our prose poem: the old room waiting in a winter night, i.e., the "state of mind" propitious for "la Visite."

9 In his famous letter to Cazalis of 1867, describing his spiritual crisis, Mallarmé says, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 242:

... enfin je me sois revu un jour devant ma glace de Venise, tel que je m'étais oublié plusieurs mois auparavant.

10 This poem found its way, in a much shorter version, into Divagations under the title "Autrefois, en Marge d'un Baudelaire."

11 In a letter to Cazalis, of 1866, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 207, Mallarmé says:

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J'ai donc à te raconter trois mois, à bien grands traits; ... Je les ai passés, acharné sur Hérodiade, ma lampe le sait! J'ai écrit l'ouverture musicale, ...

12 Baudelaire, Fleurs, p. 91. Also, of course, the prose poem, "La Chambre Double," of the Spleen de Paris comes to mind.

13 In the letter, already quoted from above (Note 9), relating this crisis, Mallarmé tells of his experience in rather Hegelian terms, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 240:

Je viens de passer une année effrayante: ma Pensée s'est pensée, et est arrivée à une Conception pure. Tout ce que, par contrecoup, mon être a souffert, pendant cette longue agonie, est inénarrable, mais, heureusement, je suis parfaitement mort, et la région la plus impure où mon Esprit puisse s'aventurer est l'Eternité, mon Esprit, ce solitaire habituel de sa propre Pureté, que n'obscurcit plus même le reflet du Temps.

14 Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 225.

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## CHAPTER V

### LE DEMON DE L'ANALOGIE

This prose poem also appeared first several times under a different title, "La Penultième," and the present one is used for the first time in Pages, of 1891, and then again in Divagations. Similarly to the change of "Plainte d'Automne" from its variant, in which we recognized a reflection of Mallarmé's principle of painting no longer "la chose," but the effect produced, so here "La Penultième" is part of "la chose," that is of the haunting phrase itself, whereas its demonic power is the effect it has on the poet-persona. Further, the identification of this demon as that of analogy places the piece in the domain of poetics.

The poem's anecdote tells about the narrator's obsession with a phrase which haunts him as he is walking in the streets, and which he vainly tries to exorcise by explaining it to himself. As the poet-persona finally sees his image reflected in a store window, and upon looking through that window discovers that this is a lute-maker's shop, with old stringed instruments hanging on the wall, precisely the kind of instrument that he had been thinking about in connection with the haunting phrase, he is overcome by the strange and

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unexplainable correspondence between the images of his imagination and those of the phenomenal world.

Analogy, originally a term of Greek philosophy, refers, as a rhetorical figure, to the writer's method of exposition by which an unfamiliar object or idea is explained by comparing it in certain of its similarities with other ideas or objects more familiar.<sup>1</sup> That analogy was the underlying logic of Mallarmé's Weltanschauung is not only reflected in his poetry, but also struck those who had the privilege of knowing him.<sup>2</sup>

We saw in the conclusion of the preceding chapter that the perception and creation of analogies is the structural basis for this whole poetic universe, that universal analogy which is the revelation of the relations between all parts of an artistic cosmos, imaged in the spider's web: an order which the poet creates out of his own substance and imposes on chaos.

This discovering and creation of correspondences recalls Baudelaire, and it is in his translation of Poe's prose that Mallarmé might have come upon a title "Le Démon de la Perversité," which could have influenced his own choice.<sup>3</sup> The word demon, originally a spirit, good or bad, points to the role which the supernatural plays in this piece, while figuratively it stands for inspiration, in the sense in which Socrates called the mysterious inner voice which inspired him his demon.<sup>4</sup>

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Aside from insignificant variants of punctuation, there is only one other, namely of the very first sentence, which originally read: "Avez-vous jamais eu des paroles inconnues chantant sur vos lèvres les lambeaux maudits d'une phrase absurde?" The final version is obviously more compressed and leads directly, with the first two words, "paroles" and "inconnues," into the two realms announced by the title: poetics and the mysterious, the extraordinary.

In analyzing the poem's vocabulary, one finds that many of its words fall, in at least one of their definitions, in the domains of rhetoric and music. Thus, "paroles," literally signifying simply "words," that is the poet's raw material, etymologically points to "parable," a sort of extended metaphor which, similarly to an analogy, equates a thing or idea with meanings outside itself. At the same time, in the plural, as used here, it may refer to the words of a song, and "chantèrent-elles" reinforces this association.

Again, "phrase" is a term both grammatical and musical, in both contexts referring to a completed unit, either a group of words constituting a sense unit, or a musical phrase of a certain number of measures closing with a cadence. But here this unity has been destroyed, only shreds of it remaining, and "maudits" endows these shreds of words with a magical quality, as with a charm. The alliterating "lèvres, lambeaux" juxtaposition invites the image association of red lips and "lambeaux de chair," the torn shreds of the phrase bleeding

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red, and this surrealistic image is reinforced with "absurde."

The "torn" phrase introduces a whole vocabulary cluster in this piece, namely that of something broken, ruptured: "interrompre, détacher, descendre, casser, dégager, discontinuer, désespérer," which accompanies the death motif throughout the poem.

The following sentence introduces a first-person narrator and a city setting and, with the factual banality of "je sortis de mon appartement" contrasts for a moment with the mood produced by the images of the opening paragraph. But then, with the narrator's curious sensation, the first manifestation of the demon, we are back in the realm of the strange, where everything seems curiously related and intertwined: "La sensation ... d'une aile glissant sur les cordes d'un instrument, traînante et légère, que remplaça une voix prononçant les mots sur un ton descendant...." Is the sensation first visual, tactile, or auditory, or is it all of these at once? This phrase gives a purely poetic sensation, where the repetition of the "l," that of the "-ent" sound, the "r," and finally that of the "o," produces an incantatory effect of sounds, with words designating wing, gliding, over cords, of stringed instrument, lightly, finally descending with the "o's"--thus a cluster of images named, which is also suggested by the sound, not so much of individual words, but of the whole phrase.

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The very first image, "aile," is so rich in multivalent suggestiveness that it produces a sort of expectant confusion: "d'une aile" sounds like a feminine presence, "une elle," at first, and as the image of the soft wing comes before the mind's eye, it evokes the picture of a white angel, and in these prose poems, the white angel is Maria. But the wing, synecdoche for bird, is also a symbol for poetic inspiration and envol. "Glissant sur les cordes d'un instrument" evokes the lyre, traditional symbol for poetry, and the Orphic association of poetry and music. And then the music suggested by the wing's gliding over the instrument becomes, in fact, "une voix." The voice is born out of the wing's contact with the instrument, suggesting the mandola's belly rendered fruitful by inspiration.

These associations are all reflected in Mallarmé's verse poetry, where the virtual force of poetic envol or Aufschwung is likened to the powerful wing best:

Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre  
of the swan. And the wing-angel-music association is beautifully synthesized in:

Que frôle une harpe par l'ange  
Formé avec son vol du soir  
Pour la délicate phalange

of the Saint Cecilia of the stained glass window. The birth of art, of song, out of the mandola's belly, a womb waiting sadly for its fulfillment, is suggested in the last sonnet of the triptych:

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 Filial on aurait pu naître.

And the "nul" of this sonnet's penult line, composed many years after our prose poem, is also the penultimate syllable of our "Penultième."

So this one rich phrase, with its sudden release of blending sensations and images and sounds is so many-faceted and mobile that we are taken as by a spell of vertigo, where we seem to lose the firm ground under our feet, as everything starts to sway for a moment, until we can make out the words of the falling voice: "La Penultième est morte."

Out of sensations, the sound of words in a falling intonation, emerges, grouped into a meaning, which is, however, detached from any context, like a lonely leaf fallen off a tree, the phrase: "La pénultième est morte." Almost immediately the words arrange themselves in a rhythmic pattern, but then the intonation and rhythmic pattern are not only heard, but visualized, with the noun at the end of a line and the verb and predicate adjective going over into the following verse in a run-on line. And the poet persona not only tells us about this arrangement, but draws it out on the page. Poetry is for Mallarmé as much visual as it is auditory, and the schematic presentation of but one "absurd phrase" in this early poem already foreshadows his growing preoccupation

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The "pénultième," whose lexical definition the poet explains himself further on, suggests something I have already mentioned above, namely something broken, something discontinued, ended before its end. Not the last, with which things naturally come to an end, but the one before the last; and the penult of the very word "pénultième" is precisely the "nul" syllable over which the instrument's strings will break.

So "nul," while denoting the absence of existence, "qui, pour ainsi dire, en parlant des personnes, n'a pas d'existence," also suggests the death of a person. I purposely quote Littré's definition of this term as it refers to "personnes," rather than to "choses," for the word "pénultième," from its very first appearance, is personified in such a way that one almost forgets that it is "quelque chose" rather than "quelqu'un," or, I should say, "quelqu'une." The French grammatical gender distinction here plays beautifully into the poet's hands. This notion of a feminine presence, evoked as so often in Mallarmé by its very absence, is reinforced by the capitalization of the first letter, making a proper noun of it, a woman's name.

And this Penult is dead; thus, from the outset, two antithetical forces are at work: a phrase is born, but in a dying fall, it tells, sings, of a death.

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The "est morte," with its double designation of "has died" and "is dead," is detached from the line, again reinforcing the notion of rupture and cessation. "Suspension" is, again, both a rhetorical and a musical term, meaning "temporary cessation," and it is "fatidique," i.e., one that was fated to be. The notion of the fates suggests ultimate disaster, death. Just as at this initial stage of inspiration the verse pattern seems inexplicable, so does the "fateful suspension," this death. And this basic feeling of absurdity which necessarily accompanies the mind's reflections upon its own approaching and inevitable nonexistence is reinforced by "le vide de signification," with its typically Mallarméan nominalization of the adjective and the use of the prepositional phrase. This stylistic device is significant here, for it raises the notion of the void and of emptiness to predominate over its very opposite, namely meaning.

Again, the anecdotal "je fis des pas dans la rue" seems to put us back into the realm of the ordinary, but only briefly so, for now the penultimate syllable of "La Penultième," the "nul," associates itself with the image of a taut string of the musical instrument evoked above, and forgotten again, but now recalled once more. But there is here so mighty a sweep of Memory, that it must refer to more than merely the recall of the image of the instrument; "le glorieux Souvenir," with its significant capitalization, surges out of a deeper past, and this vast sweeping movement is beautifully rendered with "venait de visiter de son aile ou d'une

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palme," again recalling the wing image above and adding that of the "palme."

Memory and Penult are the only two words capitalized in the poem; Memory is the prime inspiration of the Penult's monody, this song commemorating one departed.

The wing symbol in this connection suggests the poet's Orphic function of resurrecting the past, and bringing back the dead, while "palme," somehow blending with wing in "de son aile ou d'une palme," a symbol of triumph, suggests the triumph of the poetic quest. But the palm branch is also the sign of the martyrs, thus conveying the notion of the poet not only as Orpheus who triumphs over nature and death, but as the Promethean giver of life, fire, who is sacrificed, martyred, a motif taken up again in the following prose poem. At the same time, both images, that of wing and palm, evoke angels and saints, the blessed beyond the tomb, and the white figure of Maria.

"Je fis des pas dans la rue et reconnus en le son nul la corde tendue de l'instrument de musique," with its six-fold repetition of the "u" sound and its short, almost shrill, syllables conveys an obsessive effect. The merciless insistence of these sounds, and their association with the tension of taut strings, creates an indeed mysteriously demonic quality. "Le doigt sur l'artifice du mystère" indicates the persona's cognizance of the mechanism of Memory inspiring song, or poetry. But "artifice" and "je souris" somehow also point,

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by the merest hint, to something else. Does the persona here momentarily step beyond and out of the poem, so as to fuse and identify with the poet? For "artifice" as "habile et industrieuse combinaison de moyens," and etymologically related to "art," could also refer to the just described poetic artifice, which produced so mysterious an effect. Further it could well describe Poe's poetic theory which, in those early years, influenced Mallarmé, and perhaps this poem.

However, this suggestion is present only vaguely, if at all, and so well hidden behind the primary level of meaning, that the illusion of the poem is not destroyed, the spell not broken, as the persona now tries by any means, natural or supernatural--"implorer" and "voeux" having religious, "speculation" and "intellectuelle" rational undertones--to escape the demon who drives him relentlessly from sounds, to images, to rhythmic patterns, to thoughts, and even into the realm of the dead.

The obsessiveness of the furor poeticus is rendered doubly, in the persona's telling us that the phrase keeps coming back to him, and, at the same time, in the very use of the device of repeating the same images and phrases throughout the poem. When the phrase returns "virtuelle," it has something menacing about it, a self-contained, so far unreleased, energy and force. Now it is finally freed, "dégagée d'une chute antérieure de plume ou de rameau." What is this fall, a word so loved by the poet of "Plainte d'Automne?"

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The whole phrase had come in a falling tone, and this obsession with falling and fall must point to a former, higher state. "Chute antérieure" curiously combines both the notions of a former state and the fall from it, just as the very notion of the Fall implies a lost Eden, or, inversely, the very idea of Paradise implies a state now lost.

Again, Baudelaire comes to mind, and his "La Vie Antérieure" complex, so well transposed in the poem of that title. And looking once again at "Symphonie Littéraire II," Mallarmé's early prose poem honoring the older poet, from which we already quoted in connection with "Frisson d'Hiver," we find there the images of our poem: "Nulles fleurs, à terre, alentour,--seulement, de loin en loin, quelques plumes d'aile d'âmes déchues," which renders explicit the association of "aile" and "chute" with the idea of the Fall from Eden, which is also one of the basic themes of "Les Fleurs du Mal."

"De plume ou de rameau," by the conjunction "ou" again makes the images intentionally vague, so that they appear to be almost the same thing. The phrase, now freed from "une chute antérieure de plume ou de rameau," which in the literal sense means now freed from the above described sensation of wing touching instrument, has now definitely become a voice. But now "aile" has changed to "plume ... ou ... rameau." The feather is a synecdoche for the wing it now replaces, but at the same time it evokes the poet's pen which traces the

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poem on the white page. "Rameau" evokes both classical and Christian mythology, "rameau-palme" recalling Palm-Sunday, the "dimanche de Rameaux," and also the golden bough, the "rameau d'or," without which the realm of the dead could not be entered.

From now on, the new-born phrase, no longer merely vaguely felt, but finally freed, and articulated by the voice, become logos, will live its own life, no longer living off the poet's substance but of its own. The formerly vague, subjective perceptions of the persona have grown into an objective entity, no longer dependent on him. This is the very birth process of poetry, the process of creation itself, in which subjective experience becomes objectified.

Now the poet, no longer content just to perceive it, toys experimentally with this phrase. Again, characteristically, he first sees it, "la lisant en fin de vers," then speaks and hears it, "l'adaptant à mon parler." As in the beginning, the Penult will come at the end of the line, the rest run over into the following, with the string so stretched in forgetfulness over the penultimate syllable, "nul," that it breaks, and this breaking, this dying, then rendered in the manner of a prayer: "est morte." "Si tendue en l'oubli" seems strange as applied to the string of a musical instrument; but it must here refer to the poet's "oubli," for above we read: "la corde tendue de l'instrument de musique, qui était oublié," which means that the poet-persona had forgotten his lyre, now

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visited by memory. And "pénible jouissance" reflects at once the poet's joy at the recreation of a remembered past and the regret of its loss; moreover, this antithetical feeling of both joy and pain, which accompanies the natural process of birth, is also characteristic of the artistic one.<sup>5</sup>

The poet now tries again to escape and to calm his obsession by speculating on the origin of the Penult's apparition. He considers that, after all, this is but a lexical term, the definition of which is simple enough, but he fails, of course, to apprehend the word's deeper significance. And, like the young narrator of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, who stops before the blossoming hawthorn bushes calling out to him, but who lacks the will power to carry through the quest for their "real" meaning, a quest not into things but into the self, so here the young poet fails to unveil the Penult's mystery.<sup>6</sup>

Great has been the speculation on the part of critics who, without analyzing the rest of the piece, have tried to define what Mallarmé might have alluded to with "le reste mal abjuré d'un labeur de linguistique par lequel quotidiennement sanglote de s'interrompre ma noble faculté poétique."<sup>7</sup> Whether it alludes to Mallarmé's work as a language teacher or to his researches into the secrets of language in the service of poetry, and I hold to the former, what is interesting above all is the tone of this sentence, which once again clearly and explicitly establishes the narrator as a

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poet, a fact, of course, implicit throughout the poem. But the tone is ironic, and the "noble faculté poétique," which "sanglote de s'interrompre," can be read as an undercutting of the poet's own sense of mission, still threatened by doubts about his ability, which implies his fear of the poetic vocation at the beginning of his career.

The facile "explaining away" of the haunting Penult does not succeed, but only increases the persona's torment.

"Tourment" is immediately reinforced with "harcelé"; conquered, he gives in to the demon of words, letting them play over his lips, surrendering to them. This surrendering "l'initiative aux mots" is many years later described in a passage of "Crise de Vers":

L'oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l'ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase (OC p. 366). [my italics]

So the dirge for the Penult intones itself with the appropriate note of condolence, and in this murmured incantation, with its repetition of "morte ... morte ... morte," the persona hopes to sing himself to peace. But here more than ever does this inexplicable Penult seem to become a woman, a dead woman whose desperate ghost haunts the poet. Wanting to pacify this ghost and rid himself of the spell of the phrase, he tries to bury her once more, that shade, and the haunting phrase with her, in the "amplification" of the "psalmodie," a kind of placandis Mariae manibus.

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But the demon will not let him go, pursuing him out of the mind's recesses right into the world of the city streets, for now the horror-stricken narrator sees himself, reflected in a shop window, caressing something with his hand--in a descending motion, which corresponds to the "ton descendant" of the voice. The window, here functioning as a mirror, is the door to the visible manifestation of the mystery, not to be explained away as "une magie aisément déductible et nerveuse."

A very similar transposition of the creative process, both a birth and a dying, occurs in a verse poem of those years, "Les Fenêtres":

Je me mire et me vois ange! et je meurs, et j'aime  
 --Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité--  
 A renaître, portant mon rêve en diadème,  
 Au ciel antérieur où fleurit la Beauté!

The poet recognizes in the voice now the first voice with which the song began, and it must be this one which he is caressing, that song which originated in him and has now been born into a life of its own, but which is always the same. And so the poem points back to its beginning: "une voix prononçant les mots sur un ton descendant: 'La Penultième est morte.'" In a strange fusion of the visual and the auditory, the reflected image of the poet caressing his own voice becomes a symbol for a vocation which seems to condemn to solitude and narcissism: the poet himself creates the object of his love.<sup>8</sup>

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The poem might have ended here, with the ring of its circular structure closed. But the final paragraph underlines, in taking up once again the key images of the piece, the demonic and inexplicable nature of poetic passion. Yet, the intervention of the supernatural, as well as the narrator's anguish, begin not really here, with the marvelous anecdote, but have prevailed throughout the piece.

From this point, the persona does not continue onward, but remains in front of the same shop window which has just reflected his image. What changes is his "regard," for now he looks no longer merely at, but through, the window.

There is, again, a tone of irony in "l'angoisse sous laquelle agonise mon esprit naguère seigneur," but what is undercut is not the anguish of the obsession, but the rational mind, "naguère seigneur," which has become its victim.<sup>9</sup> "Angoisse" and "agonise," though ironically used, reinforce the Angst atmosphere, which is built up by the device of withholding the object of the anguish until far into the sentence. This is reinforced by a certain Steigerung, or intensification, achieved through an accumulation of preparatory clauses: "c'est quand je vis," "levant les yeux," "dans la rue." These clauses, by delaying the revelation, create a mounting expectancy. Only now do we learn that the narrator is in front of a lute-maker's shop, which establishes the bridge between inner and outer worlds: the memory of the wing brushing "les cordes d'un instrument," and the actual

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display of "vieux instruments pendus au mur." After the initial rencontre of the mental image and the external phenomenon of the key symbol, the poet's lyre, some of the accompanying symbolic images also find their phenomenological complement: palms and wings, mysteriously enveloped by shadows and paled with age.

The motif of old age and a distant past, so reminiscent of the preceding piece, is underlined with the "rue des antiquaires," "vendeur de vieux instruments pendus au mur," "palmes jaunes," and, above all, "les ailes ... d'oiseaux anciens." Just as the "pendule de Saxe" was behind time, and the "vieil almanach allemand" announced kings long since dead, the lute no longer sings, the palm leaves are no longer green, and the birds have long since died. And so the notion of "chute" is suggested again here, where every object is but the souvenir of a former state.

Just as the narrator had been frightened upon discovering in his mirror reflection the image of a poet, so he now flees upon discovering beyond the glass the symbols of his art. He is condemned to a vocation which sets him apart from the rest of mankind, condemned to mourn "l'inexplicable Penultième."

The final note of the poem certainly seems "inexplicable," and this is precisely how it appeared to contemporary critics. Gustave Kahn recalls that:

La presse, toujours la même, avait accueilli d'un déferlement de rires la Penultième. ... il y avait la Penultième, cette fameuse Penultième, dont on parlait

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il y a dix ou douze ans de la rive gauche à partout;  
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et le casse-tête chinois.<sup>10</sup>

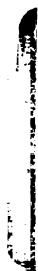
And Mallarmé's close friend, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, predicted that this prose poem would be even more incomprehensible for "le bourgeois" than the poet's verse.<sup>11</sup>

The first and only full analyse of the poem known to me is Thibaudet's; but it is essentially descriptive, rather than analytic.<sup>12</sup> It is with Thibaudet's analyse that A. R. Chisholm takes issue in a short article which, while interpreting the poem, does not, however, account for its multiple levels of meaning.<sup>13</sup>

The poem is an artistic transformation of the creative process,<sup>14</sup> which makes of it a sort of Gidean "composition en abyme," where one finds transposed in a work of art the very subject of that work.<sup>15</sup> On this level, "Le Démon de l'Analogie" is a poem about the creation of "Le Démon de l'Analogie."

The particular tension of the poem, imaged in the taut string of the instrument, consists of the contrapuntal play of two antithetical themes: birth and death. We have discussed the former, the creative process, but the latter, which is paradoxically a part of it, remains to be explored. For, who or what dies in this birth process?

"La Penultième," we saw, suggests a feminine presence, that of the "blanche créature" of "Plainte d'Automne," the white Maria, again evoked in our poem with such images as





"aile," "plume," and "palme," images which are at the same time symbols for poetic inspiration, the writer's instrument, and man's that is the poet's triumph. Further, "antérieure" and "chute," again taking up the theme of "Plainte d'Automne," suggest both micro- and macrocosmically a blessed state now lost, and of which Maria was a part: the poet's childhood, and the lost unity of the universe. Maria not only belongs to, but represents, this childhood before the fall; and the fall for Mallarmé is that point where his own age of faith ceases, where he must choose, at the price of infinite anguish, the atheistic attitude.<sup>16</sup>

Whether the successive deaths of his mother, his sister, and finally his friend, Harriet Smythe,<sup>17</sup> brought about the crisis is less important for this study than is the fact that without it, this paradoxical "fortunate fall," from faith to atheism, the poet could not have been born. To be born a poet, a self had to die, and we know how cruelly Mallarmé suffered the death agonies which set him free.<sup>18</sup>

This dying in order to be reborn, a voluntary death for the sake of gaining a new existence, is well seen by Poulet in his essay on Mallarmé,<sup>19</sup> which enlightens the experience not only of our poet-persona, but at the same time points to his relationship with his dramatic counterpart, Igitur:

... la mort est un acte, une opération volontaire par laquelle on se donne une nouvelle existence et par laquelle on donne l'existence même au néant. La mort est le seul acte possible. Pressés que nous sommes entre un monde matériel vrai dont les combinaisons fortuites se produisent en nous sans nous, et un monde

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idéal faux dont le mensonge nous paralyse et nous ensorcelle, nous n'avons qu'un moyen de ne plus être livrés ni au néant ni au hasard. Ce moyen unique, cet acte unique, c'est la mort. La mort volontaire. Par lui nous nous abolissons, mais par lui aussi nous nous fondons.

The persona's nostalgia for this lost past, which surges back touched by the wing of "le glorieux souvenir," is also manifest in his literally walking toward it, "la rue des antiquaires instinctivement suivie." And so it is his own past which the poet mourns, "condamné à porter probablement le deuil de l'inexplicable Penultième."

The important image of "la plume," here for the first time introduced in the prose poems, and which will later grow to heroic proportions in the "Coup de dés,"<sup>20</sup> suggests by association--"une toque de minuit"--another figure, who will reappear in the prose poems, that of Hamlet, "prince amer de l'écueil." The young Mallarmé more than once<sup>21</sup> compared himself to:

L'adolescent évanoui de nous aux commencements de la vie et qui hantera les esprits hauts ou pensifs par le deuil qu'il se plaît à porter ... (OC p. 299).

And in the same essay, Mallarmé calls Ophelia: "Ophélie, vierge enfance objectivée du lamentable héritier royal," which establishes a close parallel with the hero of our poem, likewise in mourning, and who, in singing the death of the Penult, or Maria, also laments the loss of his "vierge enfance objectivée."

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## LE DEMON DE L'ANALOGIE

## NOTES

1 Gardner Davis in "The Demon of Analogy," French Studies, IX, 3 & 4 (July and October, 1955) 197-211 and 326-347, analyzes the different figures of discourse, commonly called analogies, which the poet employs most often. The "Conclusion" to his Mallarmé et le Drame Solaire essentially reiterates the article.

2 Mauclair, in Princes, p. 116, remembers of Mallarmé:

... une faculté personnelle qu'il possédait à un degré incroyable: celle de l'analogie. Stéphane Mallarmé eut le sens des analogies développé jusqu'à stupéfier quiconque parlait avec lui. Il surprenait entre les objets ou les actes les plus disparates, d'un oeil infailible, le point de contact et de comparaison. Il concevait si nativement et avec une si grande force la plénitude indéfinie de l'univers, qu'à son esprit rien ne se présentait isolément, et que tout était système de signes cohérents et solidaires. C'était le caractère de clarté mystérieuse de sa causerie. Il fut donc amené sans efforts à se servir de l'analogie comme source d'images en littérature. Quant aux exemples analogiques, il en a laissé d'admirables et d'exquis.

3 In Oeuvres Complètes de Charles Baudelaire, Traductions, "Histoires Extraordinaires" par Edgar Poe (Paris: Conard, 1932), pp. 1-9, we find "Le Démon de la Perversité," a story in which certain types of perverse psychic behavior, not accounted for by "la phrénologie," are discussed. As an example, the narrator relates how, after having committed a murder, he was haunted by a demonic voice, repeating certain words, which finally drove him to confess and

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condemn himself. This is not similar to our piece, but rather a typically Poesque psycho-horror story. However, the title, as well as the following paragraph, where words haunt the narrator as he is walking in the city streets, might have struck Mallarmé:

Un jour, tout en flanant dans les rues, je me surpris moi-même à murmurer, presque à haute voix, ces syllabes accoutumées. Dans un accès de pétulance, je les exprimais sous cette forme nouvelle: Je suis sauvé,--je suis sauvé;--oui,--pourvu que je ne sois pas assez sot pour confesser moi-même mon cas!

In his L'Oeuvre, Cohn suggests the influence of Poe's "Israfel" on the imagery of our poem.

- 4 Many years later, in his commemorative lecture for Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Mallarmé will again use this term for inspiration: "Le démon littéraire qui inspira Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, à ce point fut-il conscient?" (OC p. 481)
- 5 The same feeling is expressed in a letter by Mallarmé, of 1891, and quoted by Cohn, L'Oeuvre, p. 480: "Montrer cela et soulever un coin du voile de ce que peut être un pareil poème est dans mon isolement mon plaisir et ma torture."
- 6 Repeatedly, the narrator in the Recherche undergoes this experience of things calling out to him, and of his lack of strength to find their deeper meaning, which is, of course, not in them, but in the artist himself. The example of the "aubépines" is most analogous to the experience of the poet persona of our piece. Marcel Proust,

A la Recherche du Temps Perdu (Paris: Gillimard, 1954),  
p. 138:

Mais j'avais beau rester devant les aubépines à respirer, à porter devant ma pensée qui ne savait ce qu'elle devait en faire, à perdre, à retrouver leur invisible et fixe odeur, à m'unir au rythme que jetait leurs fleurs, ici et là, avec une allégresse juvénile et à des intervalles inattendus comme certains intervalles musicaux, elles m'offraient indéfiniment le même charme avec une profusion inépuisable, mais sans me laisser approfondir davantage, comme ces mélodies qu'on rejoue cent fois de suite sans descendre plus avant dans leur secret [my italics].

In the most recent book devoting a chapter to Mallarmé, Walter A. Strauss, Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971) and which I was able to obtain only after writing this study, the author, who very briefly discusses "Le Démon de l'Analogie," also sees a correspondence between our poet-persona and Proust's narrator:

This resembles, in a curious manner the first stages of Proust's tenacious pursuit of the sensation that the petite madeleine had caused in him, ... (p. 92).

- 7 To mention just a few of these, Guy Delfel, L'Esthétique de Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: Flammarion, 1951), p. 136 ff., sees in this "labeur de linguistique" an allusion to that "science" of finding the essence of phenomena in language, similar to Plato's notions on language expressed in the Cratylus. Scherer, L'Expression, p. 22, sees here, in effect, an allusion to Mallarmé's teaching work, as does Bernard, Le Poème en Prose. Mauclair, in his L'Art en Silence, thinks the phrase refers to Mallarmé's search for



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perfection of form in connection with his poetic work. The interpretation of the allusion will probably always remain doubtful, but it certainly is not of crucial importance for the reading of the poem. One should recall, at any rate, that Les Mots Anglais does not preoccupy Mallarmé until several years later; it is not until 1868 that he begins to think of undertaking linguistic studies, as indicated by his correspondence.

- 8 In a letter to Cazalis of 1867, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 243, Mallarmé says:

Pour moi, la Poésie me tient lieu de l'amour parce qu'elle est éprise d'elle-même et que sa volupté d'elle retombe délicieusement en mon âme.

- 9 Many years later, in his essay "Magie," Mallarmé insists still on the mysterious, the supernatural of poetic creation: "je dis qu'existe entre les vieux procédés et le sortilège, que restera la poésie, une partie secrète"; (OC p. 400).
- 10 Gustave Kahn, Symbolistes et Décadents (Paris: Vannier, 1902), pp. 17 and 138.
- 11 In a letter of 1867, quoted in Mondor, Correspondance I, P. 260, Villiers writes to Mallarmé:

Je viens de lire vos admirables poèmes en prose! Je lirai samedi, c'est-à-dire demain soir, à neuf heures et demie, chez de Lisle, Le Démon de l'analogie que j'étudie profondément. ... Jamais, on n'a vu ni entendu sa pareille et il faut absolument être au diapason du "violon démantibulé" de Louis Bertrand pour saisir la profondeur de votre idée et le talent excellent de la composition.

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The reference to Bertrand is revealing, for the mysterious, somewhat anguished ambiance of our poem resembles, indeed, the general atmosphere of Bertrand's prose poems. We recall that Baudelaire praised these highly in his preface, "A Arsène Houssaye," to the Spleen de Paris. It might be due to the older poet's admiration that Mallarmé became interested in Bertrand. In a letter of December, 1865, to Victor Pavie, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 188, he says:

S'il vous restait encore quelques exemplaires de Gaspard de la nuit je vous demanderais en grâce, Monsieur, de vouloir bien me céder l'un d'eux: croyez qu'il ne serait nulle part plus religieusement conservé.

- 12 Thibaudet, in La Poésie, pp. 184-88, discusses the poem, without examining its vocabulary closely; and he comes to the following conclusion:

Il ne faudrait pas s'autoriser de ce morceau et de cette analyse pour croire, chez le poète, à une manie constante et à un détraquement particulier. Tout homme de lettres un peu nerveux est sujet à des hallucinations analogues (p. 187).

More interesting are his comments introducing his chapter, "Les Mots," in the same book, where he takes our poem as point of departure:

Le mot, pour lui, [Mallarmé] revêtait une existence très présente et presque hallucinatoire. Le Démon de l'Analogie nous met dans les mains une des clefs de sa "noble faculté poétique." Enveloppé de musique et de mystère, un mot souvent s'impose à lui, non par sa signification, mais par son corps, qui est sa forme typographique, par son âme, qui est sa sonorité, ou par un secret plus intérieur encore qui ne prête pas à Mallarmé d'autre concept que celui, vide et

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familier, de "hasard." Il est, et sans autre raison se légitime par cette existence (p. 218).

- 13 A. R. Chisholm, "Le Démon de l'analogie," Essays in French Literature, 1 (Nov, 1964), 106, Univ. of West. Australia Press:

With regard to the actual style of Le Démon de l'analogie, we have to remember that Mallarmé was only about twenty-two years old when he wrote it, and was still too strongly under the influence of Poe and Baudelaire. Hence the "hallucinatory" expressions that misled Thibaudet.... The poet is here expressing, with some Baudelairean exaggerations and a touch of hocus-Poe-cus, what he will later learn to convey in his own incomparable style. There is nothing supernatural in Le Démon.

This reading simply refuses to look closely at Mallarmé's early poetry, because it prefers the late work; but this approach certainly does not do justice to the poem, which the mature poet chose, after all, to place into Divagations.

- 14 Alice Coléno, Les portes d'ivoire (Paris: Plon, 1948), pp. 29-31, describes this process well:

Ce n'est pas toujours la vision qui contraint le poète à l'expression. Chez ceux qui ont été le plus purement artistes, Baudelaire et Mallarmé, c'est plus souvent l'expression qui les conduit à la vision. Quoi de plus logique. Un son, un mot, une cadence ont, dans le monde de la vision, leur correspondance et, comme un parfum suggère une couleur, un rythme poétique appelle l'idée qui lui ressemble. ... Quel poète, et d'une façon plus large, quel écrivain n'a expérimenté cet étrange voyage de découverte où l'entraînent les mots? Mais ce mot trouvé en suggère un autre ou plusieurs, engendrés par le son précis du premier, par sa valeur évocatrice ou par l'obscur ébranlement produit par sa recherche. Ces mots à leur tour éveillent des idées qui éveillent des mots, et cela sans autre fin que l'épuisement nerveux du voyageur.

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And E. Fiser, Le Symbole littéraire (Paris: Corti, 1941), p. 86, shows how the creative act as experienced by a composer, in this case Richard Wagner, is similar to that of a poet:

Wagner raconte dans Ma Vie (T. III, p. 83) comment le motif lui est venu spontanément à l'esprit dans une sorte de somnolence: 'En rentrant l'après-midi, je m'étendis sur un canapé très dur, attendant le sommeil si désiré. Il ne vint pas. Je tombai seulement dans une sorte de somnolence pendant laquelle il me sembla que, soudain, j'enfonçais dans un rapide courant d'eau. Le bruissement de cette eau prit bientôt un caractère musical: c'était l'accord de mi bémol majeur retentissant et flottant en arpèges ininterrompus; puis ces arpèges se changèrent en figures mélodiques d'un mouvement toujours plus rapide, mais jamais le pur accord de mi bémol majeure ne se modifia et sa persistance semblait donner une signification profonde à l'élément liquide dans lequel je plongeais. Soudain, j'eus la sensation que les ondes se refermaient en cascades sur moi et, épouvanté, je me reveillais en sursaut. Je reconnus immédiatement que le motif du Prélude de L'or du Rhin venait de se révéler tel que je le portais en moi sans être parvenu encore à lui donner une forme. En même temps, je compris la singularité de ma nature: c'est en moi-même que je devais chercher la source de vie et non au dehors [my italics].

- 15 Although one tends to identify the "composition en abyme" usually with Gide's later work, and especially Les Faux-Monnayeurs, it should be recalled that the "early Gide" belonged to Mallarmé's group, and that in his Symbolist Traité du Narcisse, of 1891, he was already fascinated with the play of reflections--as is evident, of course, in the very title of that piece.
- 16 In a letter to Cazalis, of 1866, Mondor, Correspondance I, pp. 108-9, Mallarmé says:



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Oui, je le sais, nous ne sommes que de vaines formes de la matière, mais bien sublimes pour avoir inventé Dieu et notre âme. Si sublimes, mon ami! que je veux me donner ce spectacle de la matière, ayant conscience d'être et, cependant, s'élançant forenément dans le Rêve qu'elle sait n'être pas, chantant l'Ame et toutes les divines impressions pareilles qui se sont amassés en nous depuis les premiers âges et proclamant, devant le Rien qui est la vérité, ces glorieux mensonges!

I believe that this is a key passage for the understanding of not only our poem, but all of Mallarmé's poetry.

- 17 The already mentioned work of Adile Ayda, Le Drame, concentrates on the question of the influence of Harriet Smythe's death on all of Mallarmé's early, and even some of his later work. Much more interesting than Ayda is Mauron's "psycho-critique" in Psychoanalysis, p. 48, which is based on the Freudian principle that every action, although apparently meaningless [or "inexplicable"], has an unconscious significance. And Mauron sees in "Penultimate," "the one before the last," the obsessive memory of the poet's mother, for the last one to die was the sister, Maria, and the one before, the mother. The maternal is, of course, constantly present in the poem, namely in the womb-shaped belly of the lute. This image, supporting the birth motif in my reading, is in Mauron linked to the other obsession. He does not discuss the poem except to point out that the obsessive image of the mother here appears under the form of the Penultimate. One could change the schema, of course, and say that the last one to die was Harriet, and the one before her, Maria.

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I feel the presence of Maria evident from the internal evidence of these early pieces, for it is she who is evoked in "Plainte d'Automne," composed in the same year as our poem, and where the theme of "chute" is fully developed. At the same time, the woman suggested is probably, as frequently in artistic transposition, a composite, and thus made up of all three, the mother, the sister, and the friend.

- 18 Again from the important letter to Cazalis, of May 14, 1867, quoted in the preceding chapter (Note 13), Mondor, Correspondance I, pp. 240-41:

Tout ce que, par contrecoup, mon être a souffert, pendant cette longue agonie, est inénarrable, mais, heureusement, je suis parfaitement mort ... ma lutte terrible avec ce vieux et méchant plumage, terrassé, heureusement, Dieu [my italics].

And in a letter of the same year, to Lefébure, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 249, Mallarmé himself links the notions--I should say experiences--of birth and death:

Toute naissance est une destruction....

- 19 Georges Poulet, La Distance Intérieure (Paris: Plon, 1952), p. 325.

- 20 Cohn, L'Oeuvre, p. 82:

La plume est donc un héros de Poème qui s'occupe constamment de soi.

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- 21 In a letter to Cazalis, of 1862, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 25, the twenty-year old Mallarmé describes himself:

Que vous serez désillusionné quand vous verrez cet individu maussade qui reste des journées entières la tête sur le marbre de la cheminée, sans penser: ridicule Hamlet qui ne peut se rendre compte de son affaïssement.

One recalls, further, the identification of the poet-persona with Hamlet in "Le Pitre Châtié," a verse poem of the same year as our prose poem. Here the "Hamlet" was added later, but the association is there.

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## CHAPTER VI

### PAUVRE ENFANT PALE

This poem appeared originally under the title "La Tête," and received its definitive one in its second publication, in 1867; but then it was published under yet another name, "Fusain," in 1886, after which it reappeared only under its final heading. The first title, echoed in the last word of the poem, resembles in this respect the variant title of the preceding piece, where "La Penultième" was likewise repeated in the last word of that poem. Mallarmé then seems to have rejected, in both cases, this rather facile device for establishing circularity.<sup>1</sup> The second variant, "Fusain," in the sense of "dessin exécuté au fusain," that is, a "charcoal sketch," suggests that this piece is a preliminary expression of something yet to be developed, an outline, rather than a fully elaborated poem.<sup>2</sup>

The poem's anecdote is about a street singer in a big city, and the narrator's reflections about him. He sees the future criminal in the child, and while feeling somewhat sympathetic toward the outcast, he feels his own and society's guilt for this human fate.

The visual form of the poem is striking, with its division into eight short paragraphs of similar length, and a final one,



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consisting of a mere half line. Further, each one of these paragraphs is in the form of direct address, somewhat like a ritualistic supplication, or a litany. Yet the vocabulary of the piece is not at all elevated, but even singularly unpoetic. Almost all the words, except "soie incarnadine," are drawn from every-day language, and a term like "à tue-tête" has the familiarity of a colloquialism; a lofty word, such as "seigneur," is used ironically, and the word "chanson," suggesting music and harmony, is immediately undercut by "aiguë." The city-street setting, merely suggested in the three preceding poems, is fully developed here. The speaker, a first-person narrator, refers to himself directly, "moi," only at the end of the piece, so that through most of the poem he is both absent and present; as in a dream, we constantly hear his voice, but we do not know where he is.

The title, as in the twelfth piece of the collection, is immediately echoed in the first words of the poem, and its alliteration is reinforced with "pourquoi" and "perd parmi" in the same sentence. And since this "p" alliteration reappears in the poem, and especially in its last sentence, one might well wonder about the significance of the haunting consonant. Robert Greer Cohn identifies "p" as a "male" consonant,<sup>3</sup> and with this suggestion of male, masculine, man-like, a tension is established from the outset between the notions of Man and Child, while the consonant might, at the same time, be indicative of the gathering force of "la volonté du crime."

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The first word, "pauvre," itself is ambiguous, for, while on the literal level referring to poverty, it connotes two antithetical attitudes: pity and sympathy on the one hand, and contempt on the other. "Pâle," recalling the whole complex of the "fané" developed in the preceding prose poems, contrasts with the notion of "enfance," and thus makes our "enfant" singularly unchild-like, a characteristic which is developed throughout the piece. The image of the "petit homme" evokes the old paintings and sculptures of the "Madonna and the Christchild," where the "Infant Jesus" appears paradoxically as a small full-grown man in the Virgin's arms.<sup>4</sup>

"Crier à tue-tête dans la rue ta chanson aigüe" onomatopoeically renders the shrillness of the child's singing, and, at the same time, with the pun "à tue-tête," in harmony with the setting of "dans la rue," announces the poem's principal theme: decapitation. The setting will be reinforced throughout with vocabulary such as "toits," "volets," "étages," "rues," "pavés," "journaux," and "villes," finally culminating in a fusion of setting and theme with "crime reported in the papers."

The "insolent" character of the song suggests both the contempt of the listener and the haughtiness of the singer; yet his pride is undercut, for his song "se perd parmi les chats," who are the only lords of this world. We are far from "le pur animal" of "Plainte d'Automne," and yet that closed

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world is here suggested by its very inaccessibility, both morally and also literally in space. There is a curious reversal here with both "Plainte d'Automne" and "Frisson d'Hiver," where we were on the inside with the persona, behind the windows, while in this poem we are on the outside, with the singer, looking up at those mysterious windows, so reminiscent of Baudelaire's "Les Fenêtres."<sup>5</sup>

The wretched song will never penetrate those shutters, whose very function is to shut out the city streets. The whole above mentioned vocabulary cluster, of roofs, shutters, streets, sidewalk, brings before the eye the inside of cities, but the outside of the houses which make it up. And so, the child will never know, will never guess, "de lourds rideaux de soie incarnadine," behind which we divine Venetian mirrors, and ancient clocks, and treasures, and dreams. A variant of this sentence reads: "derrière lesquels tu ne vois pas les lourds rideaux de soie rouge." The changes are significant, for "ignore" means that the street singer will not only not "see," but not "know anything about" that other world, thus removing him even farther from it. And in those heavy pink curtains we recognize "les rideaux amortis" of "Frisson d'Hiver," "lourd" etymologically pointing to luridus, yellowish, paled, and also "sombre," which is reinforced with "incarnadine," a word so much more richly luxurious than the original "rouge," yet meaning "faded red."<sup>6</sup>

The beginning of the third paragraph, "Cependant tu chantes fatalement," whose first word underlines the unpoetic

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tone of the piece, onomatopoetically renders the monotony of the child's song with the close repetition of the /ã/ sounds, while the sharp /s/ sounds of "assurance tenace" suggest the harshness of that unchild-like voice. He was "fated" to sing, which now answers the initial question, "pourquoi crier à tue-tête"; and "fatalement," reminiscent of the "fatidique" of the preceding poem, an evocation, by association, of the fates, again portends disaster.

"Petit homme" spells out the already suggested contrasting notions of man and child, and, being neither the one nor the other, the singer is completely isolated from the world around him, its children, "sans baisser tes yeux méchants vers les autres enfants jouant sur le pavé," and its adults, "qui s'en va seul par la vie, et ne comptant sur personne, travaille pour soi." This isolation of a stranger among mankind again recalls another Baudelaire prose poem, "L'Etranger."<sup>7</sup>

The singer is so forsaken that he does not even have the orphan's traditional "vieille" to beat him to make him forget his hunger; and this passage sounds the first note of the hunger motif,<sup>8</sup> implied throughout the poem, and developed from here on. And both orphanage and hunger already point to the Icarian theme of the poem: in part, the orphan is a poet-figure. He sings unheard or for an uncomprehending audience. And no earthly food can allay his spiritual needs, while his spiritual superiority makes him the child of no



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human parents; as an entertainer he prefigures the clown and saltimbanque of Apollinaire, Picasso, the "montreur" of "Le Phénomène Futur."

The third paragraph echoes the above "travaille pour soi" with a slight variation to "travailles pour toi," creating a kind of Leitmotif: "seul," "pour soi," "pour toi." From the narrator's half-ironic point of view and attitude, the "travailler" indicates a certain progression towards social acceptability, from the initial "crier," to "chanter," and the then repeated "travailler." The singer's posture, "debout," with the above "dans la rue" repeated but varied and generalized to "dans les rues," accentuates an ascending movement, with the city streets suggesting horizontal lines. The solitary singer "debout," reinforced by "grand" and "sans abaisser," creates a single vertical line rising perpendicularly from that horizontal plane of the city streets and its humanity.

Again the singer's ambiguous nature, neither child nor man, is brought out in the description of his attire: faded clothes, cut like those of a man, that is, not really man's clothing, but also not a child's. In the same sentence, the "maigreur prématurée" brings back the hunger motif, while the "trop grand à ton âge" literally describes the above suggested tension (man-child) and at the same time indicates the ascending movement, with a hint at its danger. "Tu chantes pour manger" again emphasizes hunger, and "acharnement,"

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etymologically "action d'un animal qui s'attache opiniâtrement à la chair qu'il dévore," underlines this very physical desire, while on the literal level referring to the singing's toughness and also desperation.

The pale child's separation from the children playing in the streets stresses his difference; he does not even have the eyes of a child, but evil ones. These "yeux méchants" on the literal level describe the mean look of the young tough, but they suggest at the same time that he has seen what others have not seen, that his eyes are no longer innocent, but guilty. Evil came into the world through the eating of forbidden fruit, and, by extension, the "yeux méchants" have seen forbidden sights.

Now, almost half-way through the poem, with the anecdotal background established, the theme, only suggested and foreshadowed so far, is exposed: elevation, rupture and decapitation. As the "chanson" changes to "complainte," a lament, which, by association, suggests the literary genre of a song, or poem, about some tragic event or legend, there is a vague intimation of the dimension of a mythical past. "Et ta complainte est si haute, si haute," supports this notion, for "haut" can also mean "éloigné dans le temps." This key word, "haute," emphasized by immediate repetition, recovers the upward movement suggested from the outset; in the first paragraph, the song already rose to lose itself "parmi les chats, seigneurs des toits," unable to penetrate

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the "premiers étages" above the street. And the "debout" of the third paragraph graphically delineated this upward direction, and the "trop grand" its precariousness. On the literal level, "haute" refers to the voice, loud and shrill and high, "élevé," "aigu," and "qui s'entend au loin."

But now the voice and head seem to become one in one upward movement, for as the voice rises, so the head goes up, up, straining to an almost unbearable tension, as the ascent, "si haute, si haute ... se lève ... monte," mounts to a peak, a culmination point, and then breaks, with the rupture suggested by "partir." This is the same tension and final tearing of the lyre's string of "Le Démon de l'Analogie," the rising of a song, and its death, symbolized by the broken instrument. "Monter" can convey not only ascension, but also excess; and so the voice and the head, straining to the breaking point, threaten to fly away. And in one cut the voice is shattered and the head severed--from the body, for which "tes petites épaules" is a synecdoche, perhaps suggestive of wings, and again in a "p" alliteration.

This upward movement of the voice, of song, isolates it totally from not only the world, but the singer even, before it dies; and the singer's fulfillment, is, thus, the very moment of his own death. This simultaneous disintegration of singer and song at the supreme moment is beautifully rendered in a late verse poem, "Petit Air II":

Indomptablement a dû  
Comme mon espoir s'y lance  
Eclater là-haut perdu  
Avec furie et silence,

Voix étrangère au bosquet  
Ou par nul écho suivie,  
L'oiseau qu'on n'ouït jamais  
Une autre fois en la vie.

Le hagard musicien,  
Cela dans le doute expire  
Si de mon sein pas du sien  
A jailli le sanglot pire

Déchiré va-t-il entier  
Rester sur quelque sentier!

The traditional swan symbol, "L'oiseau qu'on n'ouït jamais/  
Une autre fois en la vie," has here been masterfully trans-  
posed into an entirely original image, "le hagard musicien,"  
in our prose poem depicted by the street singer. He is  
"hagard," that is, on the literal level, gaunt and emaciated;  
but, by association with a now obsolete meaning of the term,  
something else is suggested, namely "wanton, unchaste," some-  
how pointing back to the "yeux méchants" above.<sup>9</sup> And this  
again suggests the notion of punishment and chastisement, of  
crime; and the criminal execution is evoked here by "ta tête  
nue," the head bared for the beheading.

The elevation-disintegration complex central to our  
prose poem seems to portend, in a sentence of "La Musique et  
les Lettres," of many years later, as well as in "Petit Air II,"  
the notion of hubris-nemesis associated since times immemorial  
with the poet singer:

Mais, je vénère comment, par une supercherie, on projette,  
à quelque élévation défendue et de foudre! le conscient  
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The singer's rising voice is, thus, a constant symbol with Mallarmé for the transcendental nature of poetry, reflected also in other late essays, as for example in "De Même," where he discusses the religious [transcendental] function of poetry: "... car voici le miracle de chanter, on se projette haut comme va le cri" (OC p. 396).

The "se lever" of the head, aside from its literal and descriptive meaning, carries the association of "lever la tête, s'enorgueillir," to become proud, elated, and in this way points to the hubris notion; and the secondary meaning of "haut," as "qui a d'élévation morale et de la fierté," supports this association. The image of the head leaving the shoulders is a transposition, on the symbolic level, of mind leaving body, or spirit divorcing itself from matter, and the separation of spirit from matter implies for Mallarmé the basic struggle of "pensée" against "hasard."

And so the structural make-up of the prose poem reveals the shape of a parabola: there is a mounting accumulation of imagery and, at the same time, the rising of the ascent, both culminating in the center, the fourth paragraph of the eight, where the symbolic meaning explodes and bursts out of the imagery. In the four remaining sections, there is a falling-off; on the one hand the nature of the poem changes owing to a shift in point of view, from relatively detached description to a guilty socially-conscious intervention by the narrator's voice, and the prosaicness of this voice's

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commentary may well be a deliberate deflation, trivialization, of the lyrical élan, designed to follow the downturn of the parabola; on the other hand, there is a mere elaboration of all the ingredients now posed: the anecdote and the ideas it symbolizes.

The following section, which with its opening words echoes the "petit homme" of the second paragraph, conjectures on the omens posed, by developing the anecdote's literal level, where "chanter" again becomes "crier." We are again firmly placed in the setting "dans les villes," where the street singer's most probable bad ending is predicted: his eventual infraction of the laws of a society of which he is an outcast.

The theme of the pariah, victimized and finally immolated by society, links this piece to a very early verse poem, "Aumône," which had undergone numerous interesting revisions, of which its successive titles are indicative. The first, "Haine du Pauvre," expresses unambiguous contempt for the beggar, "Tu comprends que le pauvre est le frère du chien"; then, in "A un Mendiant," the tone changes a little, as the persona suggests evasion, rather than suicide, to the beggar; and in "A un Pauvre," the most significant change is that of the title; finally, with "Aumône," the most interesting modification lies in the fact that the persona establishes a certain rapprochement between himself and the beggar by the introduction of a "nous," absent from all the preceding

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versions. This growing affinity is above all evident in the poem's last line, of which the variant read: "Et surout, ne va pas, drôle, acheter du pain!" which was then changed to: "Et surtout, ne va pas, frère, acheter du pain" [my italics].

"Un crime n'est pas bien difficile à faire," in our piece also implies a certain empathy on the part of the narrator with the future criminal, and one of the variants of this sentence reflected this orientation even more strongly. The original form of the first part of this sentence read: "il suffit d'avoir une main au bout de son désir," and the paragraph ended there. The idiom juxtaposing hand and desire happily changed to "courage après le désir," much wider in scope, for desire and courage might comprise any human undertaking, physical or spiritual. The second version, "il suffit d'avoir du courage après le désir, et nous qui désirons," also had a "nous," by which the persona established a connivance with the criminal, sharing with him in the desire, but seemingly not the courage. The final alteration to "et tels qui ... " might mean that Mallarmé found the penultimate version too direct and obvious, for the whole paragraph, even if ironic in tone, suggests--perhaps by that very irony--an involvement on the part of the narrator with the singer's fate.<sup>10</sup> The last sentence of this section, whether referring to the singer's head or body, promises that his courage will be equal to his desire.

Another verse poem, "Le Guignon," of the same year as the first version of "Aumône," that is two years before the

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composition of "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," furnishes a connecting link between poet and beggar, for here the poets, pariahs like those in the Baudelairean models of the poem, are themselves depicted as beggars, though of superhuman proportions, rising up literally to tower over the rest of humanity:

Au-dessus du bétail ahuri des humains  
Bondissaient en clartés les sauvages crinières  
Des mendiants d'azur dans nos chemins.

As the street singer, they are starving on their quest,

Ils voyageaient sans pain, sans bâtons et sans urnes  
Mordant au citron d'or de l'idéal amer.

and, like him, doomed to perish:

La plupart râla dans les défilés nocturnes,  
...  
Dérisoires martyrs de hasards tortueux.

There is even a veiled comparison of these outcasts with Christ:

Quand en face tous leur ont craché les dédains,  
rendering their death, again figured in a separation of head from body, a hanging, a sacrificial one:

Ces héros ...

Vont ridiculement se pendre au réverbère.

And the tragic finale is here also undercut by a tone of irony, though very bitter, and the low modern city setting.

This city setting is, in the sixth section of our poem, seen from above, those windows, from which not a penny falls down into the wicker basket held in a hand "sans espoir," which seems already that of a corpse, foreboding the execution. This is further suggested by the wicker basket, evocative of

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those in which guillotined heads were often caught. And "main pendue" is a synecdoche for "corps pendu," with the suggestion of the hand, the instrument of our acts, being punished. This scene recalls the final tableau of "Plainte d'Automne," with the barrel organ man playing under the windows, viewed--or rather heard--from above. But whereas his song "mit la gâité au coeur des faubourgs," our singer and his song go unheard, as we said above, in a city which refuses him its alms.

A variant of this sentence read: "Pas un sou ne descend dans ton petit panier d'osier ... cela te rendra méchant." The substitution of the definite article for the possessive adjective impersonalizes the sentence more, which is also brought out in the basket's not being held by the singer, "tu," but by "ta longue main pendue," which reifies part of the still living body, both basket and hand hanging "sur ton pantalon." Again here the "p" alliteration is conspicuous.

The change from "cela" to "on," however seems to move into the opposite direction: not the lack of alms, and thus the city only indirectly, but now "they" will be responsible. And "mauvais" for "méchant" might possibly put the accent on a more sinister, diabolical side of evil, as in "mauvais augure," "mauvais présage," or "mauvais ange," whereas the other adjective often suggests a less corruptive, less serious kind of wrong. For it is in this final version that Mallarmé again presents, for the third time, the word "crime."

The following section again picks up the ascending movement of the fourth part, head and voice again in unison, the

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former rising still while the voice is becoming more menacing, But now the ominousness of this singing is no longer merely apparent to the narrator, but to the head itself, which, "comme si d'avance elle savait," seems to divine its fate. A variant of this sentence read: "Et ta tête se dresse toujours, et veut déjà te quitter, comme si elle savait d'avance ... " "Déjà" with the "d'avance" probably seemed redundant, and the inversion of "elle savait d'avance" put less stress on anticipation than does the final version. At the same time, the singer seems now to become voice and head, for in this separation of head and body, it is in the former that consciousness and forebodings of misfortune reside.

" ... tu chantes d'un air," referring on the literal level to the way in which the boy sings, by association evokes not only melody, "tu chantes un air," but recalls the movement of head and voice high up into the air, that high point of the parabola, the "se lève en l'air," of the fourth section. In the last paragraph, the head is for the third time referred to by the pronoun, and the "elle te" juxtaposition with which it opens accentuates the notion of severance, the beheading. And it is not the singer, "tu," who will bid farewell to the head, but the inverse, again emphasizing the growing identification of the singer with the head, which reflects the movement toward his spiritualization.

"Tu paieras" reintroduces the hubris-nemesis, or crime-punishment, theme, while "pour moi, pour ceux qui valent moins que moi," points to the sacrificial nature of the

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immolated victim's death. It is at this point that the narrator for the first time refers to himself and, in so doing, enters the world of the poem; but at the same time he sets himself apart from the others. So far, he has been present only as a voice, depicting the city out of which rose the solitary singer, "tu," isolated from humanity, "on." Now the narrator momentarily almost seems to integrate with the others, "pour moi, pour eux," sharing in their guilt, although they are more guilty than he. Later on, in that projected future, narrator and foule again seem to fuse with "nous te verrons dans les journaux." But the ambiguity is not resolved, and one wants to step out of the poem itself in order to find the persona in it: not part of the city, he is perhaps in that closed world still, protected by those "lourds rideaux de soie incarnadine."

"Tu vins probablement au monde vers cela," of which the variant read "Et probablement tu vins au monde pour cela," not only again presages the calamity, but introduces the notion of mission and vocation, already suggested by the "tu chantes fatalement" of the second section. There is even an intimation of the divine calling of Christ, who came into the world to expiate its sins. The change from "pour" to "vers" stresses the forward movement, toward fulfillment, and its urgency, emphasized again with "et tu jeûnes dès maintenant." The original version of that phrase read: "et c'est pour cela que tu chantes dès maintenant," and the change is most

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significant, as it brings back the hunger motif, now developed into "fasting," which on the literal level refers to the street singer's starving existence, but which at the same time means a sacrificial abstinence in preparation for the final ordeal. Thus the singer's sainthood is now clearly suggested, but it is then immediately undercut with "nous te verrons dans les journaux," a shocking anachronism produced by the sudden colliding of the narrative and the symbolic levels of meaning. A variant of that sentence read "nous te verrons alors dans les journaux," and the omission of the "alors" again serves to speed up the forward movement.

The last line is the final invocation of the litany, where the "pauvre enfant pâle" has become a "pauvre petite tête," and the singer's apotheosis accomplished.

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that the variant title, "Fusain," indicates that "Pauvre Enfant Pâle" might constitute a preliminary expression of something yet to be developed, that it might be a kind of sketch for another poem. This other poem is the "Cantique de Saint Jean," which constitutes the third part of Hérodiade, and which was published posthumously, with the date of composition unknown, but of which Mondor says: "On peut penser que ce poème ne date pas de la dernière partie de la vie de Mallarmé" (OC p. 1446).

The "Cantique" is a hymn by the Saint at the very moment of his beheading;<sup>11</sup> and, the Feast of Saint John corresponding

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with the summer solstice, Mallarmé here parallels the sun's trajectory with that traced by the severed head of John. That moment, implied in "solstice," when the sun seems to stand still, on the supreme point of the parabola, corresponds to the supreme moment of the Saint's death and spiritualization, his sanctification:

Le soleil que sa halte  
Surnaturelle exalte  
Aussitôt redescend  
Incandescent

Je sens comme aux vertèbres  
S'employer des ténèbres  
Toutes dans un frisson  
A l'unisson

Et ma tête surgie  
Solitaire vigie  
Dans les vols triomphaux  
De cette faux

Comme rupture franche  
Plutôt refoule ou tranche  
Les anciens désaccords  
Avec le corps

Qu'elle de jêunes ivre  
S'opiniâtre à suivre  
En quelque bond hagard  
Son pur regard

Là-haut ou la froidure  
Eternelle n'endure  
que vous le surpassiez  
Tous ô glaciers

Mais selon un baptême  
Illuminée au même  
Principe qui m'élut  
Penche un salut

**The** parallels of this magnificent poem with our prose  
poem **are** obvious, on both the narrative and the symbolic  
levels **of** meaning. Both poems' heroes realize their

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fulfillment at the moment of their death by decapitation,<sup>12</sup>  
 --"Tu vins probablement au monde vers cela," and "Illuminée  
 au même/Principe qui m'élut,"--symbolizing the divorce of  
 spirit from matter. This is the highest realization of Man,  
 the projection of thought into matter, order against chance.

That both the Saint and the Singer stand for the Poet,  
 who for Mallarmé is Man par excellence, is evident. Saint  
 John is punished for having beheld Hérodiade, Pure Beauty,  
 and in the prose poem we pointed out the associations sug-  
 gested by the Singer's "yeux méchants." And in both poems,  
 the hero prepares himself for the final ordeal by fasting,  
 "et tu jeûnes dès maintenant," and "de jeûnes ivre."<sup>13</sup>

Further, just as the prose poem's structure suggests the  
 shape of a parabola, the very first stanza of the "Cantique"  
 traces the same form of the trajectory of the severed head,  
 symbol of spirituality, on its ascent toward its "halte/  
 Surnaturelle," and yet condemned to fall back to earth.

The solstice is extratemporal like the poet's supreme  
 moment of vision, for when the sun reaches its highest point  
 and "stands still," time stops. And the singer and the song's  
 disintegration--just as when the voice rises to higher and  
 higher notes it reaches a point beyond which it can no longer  
 be heard, thus dies--is analogous with the "extase," where  
 the limits of time and space are overcome and "pensée" is on  
 the brink of the absolute, which is simultaneously the point  
 of the mind's own annihilation. To lose one's head, i.e.,



decapitation, is at the same time to lose one's mind, that is to become "demented," and this danger of poetic vision is suggested in these lines of "Prose pour des Esseintes":

Oh! sache l'Esprit de litige  
A cette heure où nous nous taisons,  
Que de lis multiples la tige  
Grandissait trop pour nos raisons

"Grandissait trop pour nos raisons" echoes the "trop grand à ton âge" of our prose poem, and the very first word of "Prose," "Hyperbole!" points to the hubris of the singer, or poet, and its danger.<sup>14</sup>

The threat of annihilation and disintegration also links our prose poem to Igitur, whose hero does, in fact, cross over into absolute thought, that Hegelian Absolute notion which swallows up individual consciousness:

Je n'aime pas ce bruit: cette perfection de ma certitude me gêne: tout est trop clair, la clarté montre le désir d'une évasion; tout est trop luisant, j'aimerais rentrer en mon Ombre incréée et antérieure, et dépouiller par la pensée le travestissement que m'a imposé la nécessité, d'habiter le coeur de cette race (que j'entends battre ici) seul reste d'ambiguïté.

...  
... un personnage dont la pensée n'a pas conscience de lui-même, de ma dernière figure, séparé de son personnage par une fraise arachnéenne et qui ne se connaît pas ...  
(OC pp. 438 & 439) [my italics].

Gardner Davies<sup>15</sup> comments on this passage as follows:

"L'Ombre s'applique par conséquent à retrouver la progression première; finalement elle réussit à revêtir l'image de la Notion absolue; . . . Ce personnage, libéré de la conscience individuelle, représente l'aboutissement complète de la pensée." Thus, the figure is here also that of decapitation,

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and the "fraise arachnéenne" again evokes Hamlet,<sup>16</sup> as did already the "As-tu jamais eu un père?" of our prose poem.

Just as our street singer is neither man nor child, so Hamlet, "qui se débat sous le mal d'apparaître," (OC p. 299) cannot be, for he is all becoming, and yet hesitating; and it is in this, essentially, that he reflects the growing pains of the young poet. Again, as in the preceding prose poem, becoming is dying, and so the death imagery of both poems reflects the "coming into being" of the poet, threatened everywhere: by a terrible birth into an existence of isolation from his fellowman, which will find its fulfillment at the moment of death:

Tel qu'en lui-même enfin l'éternité le change

The "Pauvre Enfant Pâle" is an outcast of society, like the poet,<sup>17</sup> be it Poe or Baudelaire, these two masters of that young Mallarmé who will many years later say:

Pour moi, le cas d'un poète, en cette société qui ne lui permet pas de vivre, c'est le cas d'un homme qui s'isole pour sculpter son propre tombeau (OC p. 869).

And so this prose poem is again about the young poet; it is one of the last Baudelairean pieces, and as such masterfully demonstrates what Baudelaire expected of "modern" poetry:<sup>18</sup>

Qu'est-ce que l'art pur suivant la conception moderne.  
C'est créer une magie suggestive contenant à la fois  
l'objet et le sujet, le monde extérieur à l'artiste et  
l'artiste lui-même.

And it is also one of the early examples, with "Le Phénomène Futur," of that poetry of suggestion, where the

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symbolic meaning and the profounder theme remain hidden behind the literal story.<sup>19</sup> For the theme of the poet singer, the Prometheus, the Saint, the Christ-like redeemer of mankind, is never stated, but suggested throughout, in a poem whose vocabulary never rises above the "low-life" literal level.

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## PAUVRE ENFANT PALE

## NOTES

- 1 I hope this remark does not sound blasphemous, since circularity is one of the devices in "Un Coup de dés." There, however, it is profoundly inherent to the essence of the poem.
- 2 "Fusain" moreover suggests the sketches of Constantin Guys, Baudelaire's "peintre de la vie moderne," and our poem reads very much like a tableau parisien.
- 3 Cohn, Toward the Poems, p. 271:  

p--male, plosive: père perce pénètre, plume, explosion, pouffer, Les Mots Anglais: "l'intention très nette d'entassement, de richesse acquise ou de stagnation que contient cette lettre (laquelle s'affine et précise parfois sa signification pour exprimer tel acte ou objet vif et net)" (933)

Cohn then discusses the role of the letter particularly in connection with Prose, also referring to its significance in the "Coup de dés."
- 4 An investigation of the symbolic significance of Christian iconography--Christ the Lamb and the Lion, Innocence and Wisdom--lies beyond the limits of this study.
- 5 Charles Baudelaire, Petits Poèmes en Prose (Le Spleen de Paris) (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 173:

Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée. Il n'est pas d'objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus éblouissant qu'une fenêtre éclairée d'une chandelle....

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This prose poem appeared in 1863, thus one year before the composition of "Pauvre Enfant Pâle."

- 6 The unusual word, "incarnadine," which appears in no other prose poem, and whose closest relative in the recueil is the "incarnat" of "Plainte d'Automne," suggests to me the following association. As rare in English as in French, I know it from only one other usage, namely that in Macbeth, where it stresses the blood imagery so vivid throughout the play. Macbeth, right after the murder, says:

Whence is that knocking?  
How is't with me, when every noise appals me?  
What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.  
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hands? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine.  
Making the green red.

Lady:

My hands are of your color; but I shame  
To wear a heart so white.

Here the word is used as a verb, in the sense of rendering something pink, or red. We don't know if Mallarmé had read Macbeth then, a play which he wrote about many years later, "La Fausse Entrée des sorcières dans Macbeth." But it is likely, for he had just spent some time in England, preparing himself for his profession of English professor. In this connection the "un crime n'est pas bien difficile à faire, va, il suffit d'avoir du courage après le désir," of our prose poem, is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth's:

Art thou afeard  
To be the same in thine own act and valour  
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that

Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,  
And live a coward in thine own esteem,  
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"  
Like the poor cat i'th'adage?

7 Baudelaire, Poèmes en Prose, pp. 11-12:

Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? ton père, ta mère, ta soeur ou ton frère? --Je n'ai ni père, ni mère, ni soeur, ni frère. --Tes amis? --Vous vous servez là d'une parole dont le sens m'est resté jusqu'à ce jour inconnu. --Ta patrie? --J'ignore sous quelle latitude elle est située....

This stranger, too, has his head raised high, as he contemplates the clouds.

8 In a letter of the same year as the composition of our poem, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 118, Mallarmé writes to Cazalis:

Après tout, tu sais que la seule occupation d'un homme qui se respecte est à mes yeux de regarder l'azur en mourant de faim.

9 The "hagard" does not appear in our poem, but I am pointing to an underlying association, for the "hagard musicien" of the later verse poem certainly points back to the "pauvre enfant pâle" of the early prose poem, both gaunt, emaciated singers.

10 This identification of poet and singer is suggested in a Baudelaire poem, "La Muse Vénale," Baudelaire, Fleurs, p. 17:

Il te faut, pour gagner ton pain de chaque soir,  
Comme un enfant de chœur, jouer de l'encensoir,  
Chanter des Te Deum auxquels tu ne crois guère,

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Ou, saltimbanque à jeun, étaler tes appas  
Et ton rire trempé de pleurs qu'on ne voit pas,  
Four faire épanouir la rate du vulgaire.

- 11 Cohn in Toward the Poems, pp. 8190, where he analyzes

"Cantique," says:

The hymn is sung by the Saint. It tells us of his decapitation. Whether it is sung before (in anticipation), during, or after (by his spectre) is not quite clear. Mallarmé seems to have envisaged various positions in the verse-drama for the piece.

- 12 Mauron, Psychoanalysis, pp. 41-42, again offers ingenious insights:

The reader will see later that in my opinion the beheading of John the Baptist in the Cantique represents a castration symbol. Mallarmé's St. John thus pays for getting a glimpse of the princess in the nude. ... there is a certain analogy between this beheading and the one in Pauvre Enfant Pâle, a prose poem in Divagations. Now Plainte d'Automne, another prose poem on the dead Maria (and first version of Hérodiade) and Pauvre Enfant Pâle (first version of the Cantique) were published for the first time together....

and on p. 125:

I should like to say one more word for the reader who is shocked by the crudeness of the term "castration." We cannot avoid it in explicating the classic myths.

But Mauron never does seem to come to the point: Saint John's beheading, as a castration symbol, in punishment for having beheld the nude Hérodiade, would be paralleled with the Pauvre Enfant's beheading, as a punishment somehow linked with Maria (according to him as early Hérodiade, celebrated in "Plainte d'Automne"), likewise as a castration symbol. The "leap" here lies in the fact that whereas



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the "Cantique" is the third part of Hérodiade, the two figures, Hérodiade and Saint John thus being thematically linked, no such link exists between the Maria of "Plainte d'Automne," and the hero of "Pauvre Enfant Pâle." All poetry certainly reflects the poet's psyche, but to connect the street singer's punishment, a transposition according to Mauron of the poet's guilt feelings, with the Maria of the second prose poem seems farfetched; moreover, beheading as a castration symbol, can be fully accepted, in both verse and prose poem, simply as an archetypal symbol.

13 Richard, L'Univers, p. 141:

L'importance du thème du festin amoureux, c'est qu'il s'oppose au thème d'un contre-festin, ou plutôt d'une abstention alimentaire d'intention spirituelle. Comme la jouissance charnelle se dit en un repas, l'ascétisme se signifie par un jeûne; ... La faim est donc un thème de dégagement spirituel: elle nie la chair, la supprime, et donc elle accomplit l'essence: "La littérature, d'accord avec la faim, consiste à supprimer le Monsieur qui reste en l'écrivain" (p. 657 "La Musique et les Lettres").

14 Cohn, Toward the Poems, p. 240, referring back to the English edition of his book on the "Coup de dés," says:

Prose later recounts to a sympathetic listener the story of how Mallarmé really attained a perfect vision and how his wiser, more patient self abandoned the attempt to capture that perfection which also threatened madness or the néant.

which reflects my idea that the young poet is still frightened by this threat.



15 Gardner Davies, Vers une Explication Rationnelle du Coup de Dés (Paris: Corti, 1953), pp. 60-61.

16 Richard, L'Univers, p. 277:

Car Jean se possède idéalement lui-même dans la seconde exacte où la nuit annule en lui toute pensée, et grâce à cette annulation. L'acte qui supprime sa conscience est aussi celui qui allume en lui la plus haute et plus consciente lumière dont l'esprit humain soit sans doute capable ... Comme Saint Jean, le héros d'Igitur aura sa tête décollée, "séparée de son personnage par une fraise arachnéenne," mais cette fraise l'apparente aussi à la figure de Hamlet.

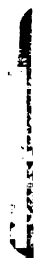
We might add here that "fraise" means both "strawberry mark" and "collerette plissée et empesée à plusieurs doubles que portaient hommes et femmes au XVIe siècle."

17 This strong consciousness of isolation from society on the part of the young poets who were Mallarmé's friends in those years is reflected in a letter of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, written to Mallarmé in 1867, quoted in F. Jean-Aubry, Une Amitié Exempleire: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: Mercure de France, 1942), p. 42.

Chère âme tendre et charmante que vous êtes, mon cher Mallarmé, vous voilà malade! C'est juste, que faire ici, et quel serait notre prétexte de rester si nous n'étions pas percés, traqués, volés, vilipendés, et saignants? ... Allons! mourons le plus tôt possible: c'est que nous avons de mieux à faire. ... Cependant ne mettons mon conseil à l'exécution que lorsqu'il n'y aura plus un seul, un seul capable d'échanger une idée avec nous.

18 Baudelaire, Poèmes en Prose, p. xxxvi.

19 It is, therefore, disappointing to find the following judgment, in one of the most recent books on Mallarmé, Paxton,



The Development, p. 104, of our prose poem, a judgment which clearly misses the mark:

It would be rash to claim that all the Divagations are equally successful. Mallarmé's judgment was no more infallible, and his inspiration no more constant, than those of many other great writers. Sometimes he lyricises a passage of argument too forcefully, and the thought becomes impossibly difficult to extract (as in La cour); sometimes he fails miserably to curb his sentimentality (as in that nauseous piece Pauvre enfant pâle).

## CHAPTER VII

### LA PIPE

This is the last early prose poem of the collection, and as such marks the end of a cycle within the recueil, that of the prose poems dealing with the poet's coming into being. He is now in possession of the traditional forms of his art, and, with his master, he can say: "Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses."<sup>1</sup> And this piece is, in effect, an example of that traditional function of poetry: an evocation of the past, where past experience is transposed, so that the quotidien becomes the marvelous, and fleeting emotions a lasting melody.

The poem's anecdote is about the narrator's memories of a London winter, which suddenly come back to him as he is about to settle down to serious work; and with that London winter return memories of Marie, the beloved, whom the little steamer carried back and forth across the Channel, during that stormy season of their young romance.

"La Pipe," only known title of the poem, serves ostensibly as a mere pretext for the piece; yet, its repetition in both the first and second sentence suggests a deeper significance. On the narrative level, it is merely an insignificant instrument, which, like Proust's famous madeleine, releases the

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a grave pipe  
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mechanism of involuntary memory to disclose a hidden mystery. But whereas the madeleine, once "used" in this capacity, is then abandoned, our pipe is not. Preferred over the frivolous cigarettes, it is taken up again and personified, "ma pipe ... ma grave pipe." in such a way that "it" seems to become a "she," later to be referred to as "cette délaissée" and "la fidèle amie."

This personification is reinforced by the secondary meanings of "délaissée," "l'éloignement qui survient entre mari et femme, entre amant et amante, dont l'un abandonne l'autre," which at the same time foreshadows part of the subject of the poem, and of "fidèle amie" as "dame des pensées." The pipe is thus clearly the narrator's companion, and he, again, reveals himself as a writer, a poet-persona. And so there is here an association with that other meaning of the word "pipe," namely that of a musical instrument, and particularly the reeds of Pan, by means of which the poet, like the Faun, not only evokes, but perpetuates, experience and dreams.

The first word of the poem, "Hier," removes us at once into the past, but an immediate one, serving as the stage for that more distant one, in both time and space, which is invited by the first two verbs of the piece: to find and to dream. In dreaming of "une longue soirée de travail," the mood propitious for poetic creation is established, and since he finds his pipe, we know the poet-persona will find the poem.

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The season particularly congenial to this creative work is winter. In this predilection the persona reflects the poet, for numerous are Mallarmé's references to winter as the season of art. In these prose poems, "Frisson d'Hiver" explains how this is the season of the poet's dreams. And in a verse poem of the same year as these early prose pieces, "Renouveau," again reminiscent of Baudelaire,<sup>2</sup> the persona condemns spring for having chased away winter, the poet's season:

Le printemps maladif a chassé tristement  
L'hiver, saison de l'art serein, l'hiver lucide

Many years later, in "Crayonné au Théâtre," Mallarmé says: "L'hiver est à la prose" (OC p. 340), and much later still, in one of the "réponses à des enquêtes," entitled "Sur le Printemps," we find: "... et l'hiver resterait la saison intellectuelle créatrice" (OC p. 882). Finally, it is not only winter work that the persona dreams about, but the very subject of the poem which he will write is a winter come back to him.

The persona now tosses his cigarettes, of unbecoming levity in comparison with his "grave pipe," into the past of a summer. But this summer itself is not discarded quite so lightly as the cigarettes and "les joies enfantines." As though in spite of himself, while barely mentioning, barely touching, that summer, he ignites it, renders it luminous, with but a few impressionistic strokes of his pen. Last *summer*--for one feels that it is late autumn, and that the

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persona in casting off last summer is moving toward, and preparing for, winter and work--this summer, then, illuminated by leaves "bleues de soleil," and muslin, which one knows must be white, and which evoke the billowy summer dresses of ladies in a garden setting, this summer thus resplendent with light, calls to mind Claude Monet's many summer scenes. And as a favorite one, "Dans un Jardin," rises before the mind's eye, I see there the flowing white muslin of the dresses, the sunlight quivering on the blue-green leaves, and it is just this magic which the poet calls into being--before he can put away last summer.<sup>3</sup>

After this brief but vivid illumination, the tone becomes ironic, as the "grave pipe" is taken up by "un homme sérieux qui veut fumer longtemps sans se déranger, afin de mieux travailler." This "homme sérieux" who has cast off "les joies enfantines" and who wants no distractions, is again the young poet, whom we know from the preceding prose poems, viewing himself, and who, still somewhat doubtful about his poetic accomplishments, thus undercuts his self-portrait. Moreover, as in the closing piece of the cycle, "Conflit," Mallarmé--reflected in his poet-persona--seems to feel somewhat guilty because he does not work with his hands, and produces no tangible results. We recognize the narrator of "Plainte d'Automne," who did not throw a penny to the barrel organ man in the street, because he did not dare stir, "de peur de (se) déranger." This is the young poet listening

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intently to an inner voice and protecting it jealously from the slightest disturbance from without which might break its melody.<sup>4</sup>

But "fumer longtemps ... afin de mieux travailler" also links this prose poem to a sort of poetic tradition in the nineteenth century, which saw in tobacco, and especially the pipe, an inspirational instrument for the poet, and an opiate for life's ills for the unfortunate.<sup>5</sup> This is, of course, due to the fact that many of the poets smoked opium and hashish, some to heighten their perceptual powers, others for the sake of "le dérèglement de tous les sens."<sup>6</sup> But the word "inspiration" itself etymologically points to "drawing air into the lungs," thus describes the very act of smoking, and Mallarmé, so conscious of the etymological weight of words, certainly was aware of this association.

Not only is there a poem in "Les Fleurs du Mal," entitled "La Pipe," where Baudelaire, in a whimsical mood, makes his pipe the poem's narrator: "Je suis la pipe d'un auteur";<sup>7</sup> but there is even a prose poem by Alphonse Rabbe, much more serious in tone, also named "La Pipe," in which this precursor of both Bertrand and Baudelaire celebrates his pipe as a kind of narcotic which helps the poet in transmuting "les chagrins du présent en passagères délices."<sup>8</sup>

For our poet-persona, the pipe suddenly becomes the source of unexpected emotion and wonder, for upon the first inhalation of its smoke, a mechanism of associations is released, which, taking the smoker completely by surprise,

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creates a privileged moment, where past becomes present and the far-away the immediate, and of which this prose poem is the objectification.

As our poet is instantly and inexplicably entranced, his good intentions, again ironically treated, "mes grand livres à faire," sink into oblivion. Yet the tone is not at all bitter, but rather gentle, for it is a kind of dramatic, but at the same time very untragic, irony, of which we, the audience, understand the wit, as we see those "big books to write" turn into this modest one-paragraph prose poem, while the persona himself is still unaware of the humor suggested.

He, like Proust's narrator, at the very instant of that particular physical stimulus, namely the sensation which recalls the same sensation experienced in the past, is both astonished and moved. And he is in that vague emotional and mental state of expectancy propitious for the visit of a revenant. Through his pipe, the faithful friend so long abandoned, a by-gone winter comes back now and "tout Londres," the revenant's apparition, which is the return after its death of the soul of the past.

But this London winter is not recreated, but created now for the first time, called into existence with the poem. Both time, "l'hiver dernier," and space, "tout Londres," surge to the surface, out of the poet's essence--a past which he has lived not only by, but within, himself: "tel que je le vécu en entier à moi seul."

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From this point on, the piece abounds in vocabulary which is, especially for Mallarmé, extremely sense-oriented. It is not merely a taste which sets off involuntary memory here, but the taste of tobacco smoke is at the same time its smell, its feeling as it is inhaled and exhaled, and finally the sight of the smoke rising from the pipe. Further, the description of last winter's London is rich with sensory adjectives: the fogs have an odor all their own; the tobacco itself "sentait," that is tasted like, or smelled of, or felt like, a dark room, which constitutes a Baudelairean synesthesia, where a color, or rather more vaguely a shade, is perceived other than with the eye; the leather furniture is sprinkled with coal dust; the cat is skinny and black; the maid's arms are red; and the coals falling from the iron bucket into the sheet-iron basket make their special noise; and the mailman is perceived by his "double coup" on the door.

And as the shabby furnished room in a strange city is thus depicted, one notes that all the adjectives describe ugliness: a dark room, a woman's red arms, dusty furniture, and a skinny black cat. And this continues outside the room as well, for through the windows, which let in the fog from the outdoors, we see a "square désert" with its sick trees, recalling "les rues vides" outside the windows of "Frisson d'Hiver," and the wan trees of both "Le Phénomène Futur" and "Plainte d'Automne."

But there is a curious tension here between the ugly reality recalled and the golden glow with which the poet

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envelopes it in the poem. For though the room is shabby and dark, as it is evoked here it has a kind of happiness about it, with its "grands feux!" and the expectancy of a new day. And so the black coal dust covering the old furniture, far from conveying the notion of neglect or dissolution, takes away none of the ambiance of comfort of the bright morning fires watched over by the maid, just as the cat, though lean, seems content in all its shabbiness, rolled up on a dusty chair.<sup>9</sup>

The mailman's arrival "me faisait vivre!," because he brought letters from France, the friends left behind; yet there is not the slightest note of sadness here, and one has the feeling that these letters are at least as great a cause of joy as would be the actual visits of those left behind, as though the very distance between himself and his friends added to the charm of those friendships.<sup>10</sup>

The abandoned "square" outside, and the little "steamer," both of which English words help create a foreign feeling, impart no uneasy strangeness; nor does the open sea, a sea familier, for "si souvent traversé cet hiver-là." But most of all, the characteristic London fogs, the very first aspect of that winter which comes back to the narrator's mind: "d'abord les chers brouillards," had nothing threatening about them as they crept in under the casements, but were "chers" to him. On the contrary, they, "qui emmitouflent nos cervelles et ont, là-bas, une odeur à eux," cozily muffled

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and bundled his mind, like a little child. "Emmitoufler" not only sounds snug and comfortable, but literally means: "envelopper quelqu'un de fourrures ou de tissu pour le tenir chaudement." And so the lonely, cold and foggy London winter, as it is here summoned forth, suggests warmth and wellbeing, with the poet sheltered and protected both by the fires inside and the beloved fogs outside, and at the same time by his distance from the world left behind.

This notion of distance is for Mallarmé himself of the greatest importance, and it might even explain some of his repeatedly expressed love for those very London fogs celebrated in our prose poem. In a letter to Cazalis, of that same London winter, he says:

Revoici le brouillard, sans lui j'aurais encore paresse aujourd'hui. Mais il est si beau, si gris, si jaune que je viens de rentrer avec Marie, jurant que jamais plus nous n'affronterions, par une brume pareille, la solitude de Hyde-Park.<sup>11</sup>

Here the "brouillard" is linked to the park's "solitude," and, though the beloved is at the poet's side now, one feels that he would have enjoyed the foggy walk through the solitary park at least as much without her. Do not these fogs, in insinuating themselves between himself and the world around him, isolate him even more by enclosing him in a haze, similar to that cloud of tobacco smoke which would surround him, many years later, when talking to his disciples on those famous mardis.<sup>12</sup> Finally, this fog which, like tobacco smoke, puts a distance between himself and the world, perhaps

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already presages a style, yet to be born, which will isolate not only the poet, but the poetry itself, from most of mankind.

Another London letter,<sup>13</sup> of the summer following the winter evoked in our poem:

Je haïs Londres quand il n'y a pas de brouillards:  
dans ses brumes, c'est une ville incomparable.

points to yet another reason why those fogs may have been so beautiful to the poet. For, while they enclose the poet himself, they at the same time envelop the objects surrounding him, as for example that whole big city, hiding its ugliness under a mysterious veil of vapor, whose infinitely fine transparent particles blur the sharp outlines. These tiny watery granules at the same time refract the sun's sharp light into a luminous haze, reminiscent of the resplendent atmosphere of Impressionistic paintings, whose magic the poet has just allusively evoked himself in the opening lines of this poem.<sup>14</sup>

Now the narrator has left the room, and the square, and he is out on the open sea--as yet another image moves before his mind's eye, "j'ai revu ... j'ai vu,"--once again shivering on the steamer's bridge, which is "mouillé de bruine et noirci de fumée." Yet, though trembling from cold on the ugly, dirty deck, he seems to behold the misery surrounding him without partaking in it, for he appears enveloped still by the warmth, that glowing ambiance, created in the poem.

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And it is only now that the beloved is introduced, the companion of the London winter. Her presence had not even been suggested until now. She appears here suddenly, almost as an attendant figure, "--avec ma pauvre bien-aimée errante." Though the remainder of the poem is devoted to her, the unity of the piece, one single paragraph, is in no way broken, for the detailed description of phenomena, now that of the beloved's clothes, continues. Everything about her is faded and poor, and the poet seems to love the girl because of those tired garments, which are all that we see of her, but which must be the outer manifestation of her essence. For in her "longue robe terne couleur de la poussière des routes," she seems the very incarnation of "la grâce des choses fanées"; and this "bien-aimée errante" in her shabby traveling costume at the same time brings with her the mystery of the far-away, reminiscent of the Dresden china clock "venue de Saxe par les longues diligences d'autrefois," and the out-dated German almanac, both loved for their fragile, time-worn, and old-fashioned beauty. And as we recognize the "soeur au regard de jadis" of that other winter prose poem, the "calme enfant" who is as silent here as she was there, with her poverty as lovingly described as the shabby London room, her distress seems not shared by the narrator who fondly beholds, but never holds, her.<sup>15</sup>

The beloved is not only pale and exhausted, but cold, and whereas the "fané" described only her attire, "froide"

applies to part of her very body, those shoulders shivering under the damp coat. And this cold body is again vaguely reminiscent of Maria, silent and pale in her coffin, which is probably the secret of the poet's love for that woman who never quite seems to come alive, in love or even in motherhood. For is she not the same who will become the innocent, maidenly mother of "Don du Poème," a verse poem written one year after our prose piece:

O la berceuse, avec ta fille et l'innocence  
De vos pieds froids accueille une horrible naissance:  
Et ta voix rappelant viole et clavecin,  
Avec le doigt fané presseras-tu le sein  
Par qui coule en blancheur sibylline la femme  
Pour les lèvres que l'air du vierge azur affame?

And as this is the last prose poem celebrating the young poet's love for the virginal woman who with every silent appearance seems to resuscitate the companion of his childhood--thus bridging at once the distances to the past and the beyond--it is also the last piece to sing "la grâce des choses fanées," and the poem's final words, "adieu pour toujours," aside from their literal meaning on the narrative level, certainly suggest this. It is another ideal of beauty which will be celebrated in the mature prose poems, where the woman sung will be of the vibrating splendor of "Le Phénomène Futur," that is as splendid as the poetry dreamed of, and her attire of the greatest elegance.<sup>16</sup>

After having depicted the beloved's dress, the persona now gives so minute a description of her hat that, again, it must be the visible sign of her hidden nature. "Sans plume

et presque sans rubans," it is wilted from the very sea air which the poet loves and will celebrate a year later in "Brise Marine," where it summons him on his solitary venture, "le large," and for which he must forsake everyone. In that poem, the young poet-persona, for whom the poetic venture is symbolized by the sea voyage--already foreshadowing the "Coup de dés"--must leave woman and child, and even his masters. Similarly this prose poem is a farewell, the last in the recueil where the Baudelairean influence is felt.

The "terrible mouchoir qu'on agite en se disant adieu pour toujours" of the last sentence of our poem is also echoed in "Brise Marine's" "... adieu suprême des mouchoirs," a phrase which could end the poem on a hopelessly sentimental note. But this is avoided by the use of the impersonal pronoun and the present tense and the present participle of the verbs in the relative clause, which makes out of a personal and unique experience a general one, known to all lovers, and contributes, at the same time, to establishing that esthetic distance which we have felt to permeate the piece. And so, though the letters Mallarmé wrote about the same time about the underlying experience are most emotional,<sup>17</sup> the poem is not, for while Erlebnisdichtung, it is not the expression of emotions, but their transposition into poetry.

And in concluding our reading of this first half of the recueil, which encompasses Mallarmé's "early" prose poems, I cannot agree with Suzanne Bernard,<sup>18</sup> who, like some of



Mallarmé's readers, because of her very admiration for his late style, seems not to appreciate justly this early poetry, which the poet himself, however, included in Divagations shortly before his death. She condemns all the early prose poems, with the exception of "Le Phénomène Futur," for being too directly biographical. However, the fact that one might easily "recognize" the experience underlying a poem makes it no less a poem, the whole question being what the artist makes out of this experience. It is precisely in examining the correspondence dealing with this experience that one appreciates its transposition in even these early pieces.

Mallarmé always insisted on the importance of the role of "souvenir" in poetic creation, and the very first line of his "art poétique," the late "Prose pour des Esseintes," points to this:

Hyperbole! de ma mémoire  
Triomphalement ne sais-tu  
Te lever, aujourd'hui grimoire  
Dans un livre de fer vêtu;

and the Faune says:

O nymphes, regonflons des SOUVENIRS divers.

Finally there are numerous prose references to the basic role of "souvenir" in the creative act of the poet:

... le parfait écrit récuse jusqu'à la moindre aventure  
pour se complaire dans son évocation chaste, sur le tain  
de souvenirs ... (OC p. 318).

... ou que sur une feuille de papier proche du testament,  
un passé ait à ce point surgi devant une mémoire ...  
(OC p. 555).

## LA PIPE

## NOTES

- 1 Mallarmé himself quotes these lines of Baudelaire's "Le Balcon" in a letter of 1862, to Des Essartes, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 47:

Quel temps! Voici l'automne et l'hiver dans une même journée. L'automne. Ce matin des brouillards londoniens. ... "Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses."

- 2 I am thinking, for example, of the opening lines of "Brumes et Pluies," Baudelaire, Fleurs, p. 113:

O fins d'automne, hivers, printemps trempés de boue,  
Endormeuses saisons! je vous aime et vous loue  
[my italics]

- 3 Though winter is for him the season of art, Mallarmé is not a poet of one season: just as the cold "Hérodiade" is his immortal winter creation, so summer lives forever, incomparably, in the "Faune."

- 4 A letter of 1865, to Aubanel, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 181, reflects the poet's fears, in those years, of distractions which might disturb his listening to himself:

Je ne t'écris pas aujourd'hui, parce que toute distraction, même la plus charmante, m'est odieuse, et j'ai besoin de la plus silencieuse solitude de l'âme, et d'un oubli inconnu, pour entendre chanter en moi certaines notes mystérieuses.

- 5 A stanza of "Aumône," a poem from which I quoted in connection with "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," points to this aspect of



tobacco, reminiscent of "Le Vin des Chiffonniers" of "Les Fleurs du Mal":

Eglise avec l'encens que toutes ces maisons  
Sur les murs quand berceur d'une bleue éclaircie  
Le tabac sans parler roule les oraisons,

Et l'opium puissant brise la pharmacie!

And the much later, 1895, miniature ars poetica, "Toute l'âme résumée/Quand lente nous l'expirons" again plays with the etymology of "âme-breath-inspiration."

6 Rimbaud, Oeuvres (Paris: Garnier, 1960), p. 344.

7 Baudelaire, Fleurs, pp. 73-74; The tercets of this humorous sonnet point to the anodyne effects of the pipe upon the poet:

J'enlace et je berce son âme  
Dans le réseau mobile et bleu  
Qui monte de ma bouche en feu,

Et je roule un puissant dictame  
Qui charme son cœur et guérit  
De ses fatigues son esprit.

8 Pierre Moreau in La Tradition Française du Poème en Prose avant Baudelaire (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1959), pp. 26 and 28, says:

A quelques égards la destinée de Rabbe préfigure celle de Baudelaire ... Le romantisme de ses poèmes ne regarde pas seulement vers la vie: la mort l'obsède; il annonce le suicide, il le prépare. ... la délectation morose de cette volonté de mourir qui est l'un des démons de ce que Baudelaire appellera "La Destruction."

He then gives the prose poem, "La Pipe," on p. 29:

Que cherchè-je moi-même au fond de ton petit fourneau,  
Ô ma pipe? Je cherche comme un alchimiste à transmuier

les chagrins du présent en passagères délices. Je pompe ta vapeur à coups pressés, pour porter dans mon cerveau une heureuse confusion, un rapide délire préférable à la froide réflexion. Je cherche le doux oubli de ce qui est, le rêve de ce qui n'est pas et même de ce qui ne peut pas être.

Tu me fais payer cher tes consolations faciles; le cerveau s'use et s'alanguit peut-être par le retour journalier de ces mouvements désordonnés. La pensée devient paresseuse et l'imagination se fait vagabonde, par l'habitude d'ébaucher en vacillant d'agréables fictions.

Je périrai bientôt: tout ce qui compose mon être et le nom même dont on me nomme disparaîtra comme cette légère fumée ... Dans quelques jours, peut-être, à la place même où j'écris, on ne saura pas même si j'ai vécu ... Mais de ce corps si périssable s'exhalera-t-il quelque chose qui ne périsse pas et s'élève en haut? Réside-t-il en effet dans chaque homme une étincelle digne d'allumer le calumet des anges sur le parvis des cieux?

O ma pipe! chasse, bannis ce désir ambitieux et funeste de l'inconnu, de l'impénétrable.

Clearly, this poem is much more in the tone of Baudelaire than of Mallarmé, and I do not know if Mallarmé even knew it. But in the genre of the prose poem, Rabbe is a precursor of Bertrand, in whom Mallarmé was interested in those years.

- 9 This poem, as most of these early prose pieces, is highly biographical. That the reality, out of which this poem grew, was far from happy, is evident from Mallarmé's correspondence of this London winter; for example, the black cat was certainly not loved like the "mystic companion" of "Plainte d'Automne." In a letter to Cazalis from London, of 1863, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 77, Mallarmé writes:

Je suis seul, tout seul avec un chat noir. Et cela est affreux. Je vis replié sur moi-même et, quand je veux oublier, j'ai des remords.

The last sentence refers to Marie Gerhard's frequent unhappy visits there. She will become "ma pauvre bien-aimée errante" of our prose poem.

- 10 Years later still, Mallarmé expresses this notion of real togetherness with his friends in their very absence, writing to his best friend of those years, Cazalis, in 1869, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 294:

... c'est vraiment quand mes amis sont partis que je commence à être avec eux, avec leur souvenir voisin de mon Rêve, et que dérange un peu parfois leur apparition véritable--les tiennes surtout, inattendues et breves. [my italics]

And to a less close friend, François Coppée, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 314, he writes in the same year:

Vous êtes obsédant. Votre visite, d'abord, a été interminable; car ce n'est qu'après leur départ, et quand ils sont redevenues des absents, que je suis avec mes chers hôtes hâtifs.

- 11 Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 59, November 30, 1862.
- 12 The many references to these fascinating evenings at the rue de Rome are too numerous to mention all; most of them mention the china bowl of tobacco for host and guests, and the cigarette or pipe in the master's hand, and smoke filling the modest room as incense a chapel. Arthur Symons, in The Symbolist Movement in Literature (New York: Dutton, 1958), p. 64, recalls:

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No one who has ever climbed those four flights of stairs will have forgotten the narrow, homely interior ... the table on which the china bowl, odorous with tobacco, was pushed from hand to hand; above all, the rocking chair, Mallarmé's, from which he would rise quietly, to stand leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, while one hand, the hand which did not hold the cigarette, would sketch out one of those familiar gestures.

And a description of Mallarmé by Mauclair, cited in Henri Mondor, Vie de Mallarmé (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), pp. 794-95, emphasizes the feeling of distance emanating from Mallarmé:

Cette homme paraissait immensément éloigné, isolé de tout contact par le magnétisme d'un génie secret, par l'insaisissable réticence qui penchait sa tête en arrière. [my italics]

- 13 Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 92, July 24, 1863, to Cazalis.
- 14 Richard, L'Univers, p. 496, also notes this predilection on the part of the poet for English fogs, but explains it somewhat differently--an explanation, by the way, which seems somewhat forced:

C'est la magie dissolvante du brouillard, que Mallarmé apprit à aimer en Angleterre. L'effet en est paradoxal: car le brouillard, qui semblerait théoriquement devoir obturer le ciel et noyer toute clarté terrestre, réussit en réalité, de par sa granulation infinitésimale, de par sa prodigieuse puissance de motilité et de décomposition, à fondre en lui les résistances du lointain et à nous redonner le libre accès des choses.

And Poulet, Distance, pp. 311-12, sees in the fog's particular quality the following attraction for the poet, linking it also to the Impressionists:

Car si toute relation directe est impossible, l'image même du brouillard ne nous suggère-t-elle pas la possibilité d'une relation indirecte? Le brouillard, conçu cette fois non plus comme un mur opaque, mais comme une vitre voilée, à demi transparente, milieu à la fois conducteur et protecteur, à travers lequel les choses matérielles s'imprègnent de lumière et où la luminosité devient comme matériellement sensible. Ainsi l'espace ne serait plus ni tout à fait un vide, ni tout à fait un plein, mais, comme dans les tableaux impressionnistes, une ambiance.

- 15 That some of Marie Gerhard's charm for the young poet was her very poverty and the sadness inherent in her humble condition is evident from some of the letters about her. In 1862, Mallarmé writes to Cazalis, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 45:

Comme toutes les gouvernantes et institutrices, qui sont toujours déclassées, elle a un charme mélancolique qui produisit son effet sur moi.

- 16 Mallarmé's interest in feminine elegance is evident from his own short-lived but incomparable ladies journal, LA DERNIERE MODE. In the September, 1874, issue of LA DERNIERE MODE (OC pp. 727-28), one finds a veritable celebration of womens' hats, "Je dis que le chapeau a pour toute règle celle-ci: d'aller à ravir," where Mallarmé literally "sings" the two latest styles, "le chapeau Berger," of incredible luxury,

Le dessus est garni d'une torsade de velours et de quelque plumes, tandis qu'une guirlande de fleurs fait le dessous ...

and the "chapeau Valois," no less elegant,

... ayant la visière derrière au lieu de l'avoir devant, on le couvre de velours ou d'une broderie de jais, un bouquet de fleurs avec traîne et apprêt

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de dentelle se place derrière sur la calotte alors que devant un très-beau feuillage forme bourrelet et tombe sur les cheveux.

In the "toilette de bal" of the November issue of the same year (OC pp. 778-79) the woman described seems almost to suffocate in an abundance of silk, flowers, and lace. These are exactly the fashions worn by "les riches dames" with which our "pauvre bien-aimée" is contrasted. And one can't help but be reminded of this same contrast between the poet's humble wife and the dazzling beauty and elegance of Méry Laurent.

17 In July, 1862, Mallarmé writes to Cazalis, Mondor,

Correspondance I, p. 41:

De toutes les amertumes humaines, celle qui naît du départ, cette mort momentanée, est la plus affreuse.

And in January, 1863, p. 70, again to Cazalis:

Mon frère, je voulais t'écrire sur le bateau, mais je pleurais. Hier, non plus, je ne le pouvais pas. Oh figure-toi, c'est affreux, quand on s'aime, de se quitter pour la vie. A une heure du matin, par une bruine sombre, je l'ai menée à la gare, et, quand la porte s'est ouverte, elle a glissé de mes bras à moitié morte.

And in March, of the same year, again to Cazalis, p. 82:

Nous étions convenus que nous aurions beaucoup de courage; et en effet, nous nous sommes longtemps embrassés et regardés sur le bateau sans pouvoir pleurer tellement nous étions fous de douleur. Longtemps, nous avons agité nos mouchoirs et, quand je n'ai plus vu le sien, j'ai sangloté à travers les rues.

18 Bernard, Le Poème en prose, p. 258:

... alors que plus tard le moindre incident de la vie courante lui sera un prétexte pour remonter, par le



miracle d'un style savant, condensé et métaphorique, jusqu'à l'essence des choses, on trouve ici l'élément biographique utilisé de façon directe, presque naïve: on reconnaît sans peine la maison de Tournon et sa "pendule de Saxe, qui retarde et sonne treize heures parmi ses fleurs et ses dieux" dans Causerie d'hiver; Penton Square dans L'orque de Barbarie; et, dans La Pipe, la maison de Londres, les "arbres malades du square désert," et Marie Gerhard secouant, du steamer, "le terrible mouchoir qu'on agite en se disant adieu pour toujours." Il n'y a dans La Pipe aucun effort de "composition" artistique; le style est uni jusqu'au prosaïsme, la seule recherche étant celle d'un certain "réalisme" moderniste.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### UN SPECTACLE INTERROMPU

The seventh piece of the "Anecdotes ou Poèmes" of Divagations marks a significant moment in the cycle, for it belongs no longer to the "early" prose poems and not yet to the "late" ones. While the six preceding poems were all of 1864, and the six following ones will be of 1885 or after, "Un Spectacle Interrompu" occupies an intermediate position with its publication date of 1875. We do not know when the piece was written, but it is safe to assume that it was around that time, for stylistically it is as different from the early poems as it is from the late ones.

Almost all commentators on Mallarmé's poetry are in agreement that a decisive stylistic change took place shortly after 1870,<sup>1</sup> and this change is as striking in his prose as it is in his verse. Mallarmé is beginning to form a new language of art, where he distinguishes not, in the traditional way, between a language of verse and one of poetry, but between "écriture" and "parole":

L'écrit, envol tacite d'abstraction, reprend ses droits en face de la chute des sons nus: tous deux, Musique et lui, intimant une préalable disjonction, celle de la parole, certainement par effroi de fournir au bavardage (OC p. 385).

"Ecriture" constitutes for Mallarmé a closed system of artistic expression, which would have to be mastered, as the fundamentals of any other art, as those, for example, of music--for an intelligent appreciation. This desire for a new form of literary expression is already clearly stated in the very youthful "Hérésies Artistiques: L'Art pour Tous" of 1862, in which the then twenty-year old poet says:

Toute chose sacrée et qui veut demeurer sacrée s'enveloppe de mystère. Les religions se retranchent à l'abri d'arcanes dévoilés au seul prédestiné: l'art a les siens.

La musique nous offre un exemple. Ouvrons à la légère Mozart, Beethoven ou Wagner, jetons sur la première page de leur oeuvre un oeil indifférent, nous sommes pris d'un religieux étonnement à la vue de ces processions macabres de signes sérieux, chastes, inconnus. Et nous refermons le missel vierge d'aucune pensée profanatrice.

J'ai souvent demandé pourquoi ce caractère nécessaire a été refusé à un seul art, au plus grand. Celui-là est sans mystère contre les curiosités hypocrites, sans terreur contre les impiétés, ou sous le sourire et la grimace de l'ignorant et de l'ennemi.

Je parle de la poésie (OC p. 257).

After 1870, both verse and prose will reflect the increasingly complex system of analogies, the structural principle of this poetic universe, which in ordering simplifies the world:

Tout l'acte disponible, à jamais et seulement, reste de saisir les rapports, entre temps, rares ou multipliés; d'après quelque état intérieur et que l'on veuille à son gré étendre, simplifier le monde (OC p. 647).

And this change will result in the prose work in a most unusual syntax. For that connected system, or order, of the various elements of the sentence, though rigorously "correct," will at the same time be as intricate as the ideas it serves

to express. And so the question arises whether the poet changed his style in order better to express his ideas. The early "L'Art pour Tous" indicates that there was already a desire for a certain hermetic form before Mallarmé had encountered some of the important ideas which this form was to serve; yet it is only after decisive ideological developments that the new style appears, which suggests that form and function are inextricably linked.

In the preceding chapters I pointed out that the crisis of Tournon, that spiritual descent and return, transposed in Igitur, already overshadowed some of the early prose poems. Igitur was written in 1869 at Avignon, where the poet read it to his friends, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Catulle Mendès, who had eagerly looked forward to this reading. They, especially Mendès, Mallarmé's own friends, and poets themselves, did not understand the work.<sup>2</sup> And the significance of the event is reflected in the fact that Igitur, this key document for a comprehension of Mallarmé's poetry, was never finished, but has come down to us in the fragmentary form of 1869. Is this "failure" somehow connected with the drastic change of Mallarmé's style so shortly after?<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after, namely around 1870, decisive changes took place in Mallarmé's life, not the least significant of which was his long desired move to Paris. And as Mallarmé begins to realize himself, and as in his work the new style asserts itself, some of the fears and anguish reflected in some of

the early prose poems make room for a tone of confidence, a new tone which permeates "Un Spectacle Interrompu."

I said that Mallarmé distinguishes not between a verse and a prose style so much as between a style of art and a style of communication.<sup>4</sup> "Un Spectacle Interrompu" is not only in the style of "écriture," but the poem is, in fact, about this distinction of "écriture" and "parole," of writing and journalism, the poem's anecdote being the vehicle for its demonstration. For in this piece the artistic vision, a privileged one, is set apart from the common one, and "mon regard de poète" is contrasted with that of the "reporters," a contrast which Mallarmé elsewhere expresses by a striking analogy:

Narrer, enseigner, même décrire, cela va et encore qu'à chacun suffirait peut-être pour échanger la pensée humaine, de prendre ou de mettre dans la main d'autrui en silence une pièce de monnaie, l'emploi élémentaire du discours dessert l'universel reportage dont, la littérature exceptée, participe tout entre les genres d'écrits contemporains (OC p. 368).

The "new" style of "Un Spectacle Interrompu" is the objectification of a mature artistic vision, "mon regard de poète."

The poem is further the first longer piece of the recueil, and it no longer deals with the private world of the narrator. Its very title recalls the world of "Le Phénomène Futur" and its side-show atmosphere, but while in that poem the showman's tent was but vaguely evoked in a highly impressionistic tableau, here the theatrical event is, as the narrator himself terms it, "anecdotal," that is it has all the trappings of a

particular factual occurrence. And whereas in "Le Phénomène Futur" the essence of the poetic vision seemed dressed up and placed into the fairground setting, in this poem an actual theatrical event appears to have given birth to the vision, and to the reflections aroused by it.

The anecdote tells about the persona's attendance at a theatrical presentation; and while describing the act shown, the poet gives us his own interpretation of the event on the stage, which to the rest of the audience appears merely like an animal act, ending in a rather dangerous climax, as a bear comes too close to a human acrobat.

The vocabulary of the piece is, of course, of the domain of the theatre, but at the same time it is one of contrasts--poet, reporter; ideal, factual; reality, dream; little theatre, "Prodigality"; genius, beast; sad heaviness, silvery nudity; darkness, brilliance--for contrast is inherent in the very essence of theatre: the show of appearance which both reflects and transforms reality.

The first word of the title, "spectacle," leaves the exact nature of the performance vague, and Mallarmé nowhere on the narrative level renders absolutely clear whether we have to do with a puppet show, a marionette-play, a ballet, a circus act, or a straight pantomime, while at the same time he evokes the atmosphere so vividly that one never doubts the factuality of the event. Etymologically "spectacle" points to its Roman origin, and the "jeux et combats" which

included those barbarian confrontations of man and animal in the arena; and an "animal act" is precisely that part of the show which is the subject of our poem's anecdote.

The first sentence, an impersonal exclamation, somehow reminiscent of the classical exhortations over a dying civilization in the manner of the Ciceronian O tempora! O mores!, or its bombastic Rousseauistic echoes, is, in fact, a derogatory commentary on modern civilization. How far it is from being civilized! In every truly civilized city one should expect to find a society of dreamers supporting a journal recording events in the light of dream.<sup>5</sup> Though somewhat ironic by its hortatory tone, this opening, which gives us the "tableau parisien" setting with "grande ville" and "journal," which we know from "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," at the same time suggests the absence of poetry in an age of decline, reminiscent of the desolate atmosphere of "Le Phénomène Futur." One of the most powerful products of modern civilization, "le journal," in which "reporters par la foule dressés," that is servile instruments of the masses, report the commonplace, is contrasted with an imaginary journal of "reveurs."<sup>6</sup> "Rêve" is juxtaposed with "artifice que la réalité," resulting in a paradoxical inversion where reality, or "les mirages d'un fait," are designated illusory, which implies, by contrast, that "dream" is true. At the same time, "l'intellect moyen," "la foule," is opposed to the poet-persona. And whereas the reporters "divulge," that is "portent à la connaissance du public ce qui était ignoré," the poet writes



"en vue de moi seul." Both, poet and reporter, will treat the same "Anecdote," but while the reporters only see and write about the factual, the poet will transpose it into the ideal. In an article about a fellow poet, Banville, Mallarmé says:

La divine transposition, pour l'accomplissement de quoi existe l'homme, va du fait à l'idéal (OC p. 522).

But does not reality, by the very fact of "fixing" the average mind in a common way of viewing it, rest on some universal understanding, so that "dans l'idéal" there might also be "un aspect nécessaire, évident, simple, qui serve de type?" The poet, for whom analogies serve to order and simplify the world of chance phenomena, proposes to discover whether a chance event, "les mirages d'un fait," might not likewise be simplified and reduced to meaning and order. And so, aside from establishing the contrast between actualities expressed by every-day language and their ideal transposition expressed in artistic language,<sup>7</sup> the first paragraph poses a problem: in this piece the persona will report the factual, an anecdote, but "sous le jour propre au rêve," a sample, then, of what the imaginary "journal" would contain.<sup>8</sup> And so the early still somewhat "Baudelairean" prose poem has evolved into a new form, namely this paradoxical reportage of the ideal, in which the Mallarméan prose poem will fully come into its own, where chance events of every day life will be transposed into meaning and order by poetic vision objectified in a new prose style.

With the second paragraph the anecdote proper--the exemplum--is presented, while the last paragraph of the poem, set off from the rest by double spacing, will give the moral of the story. "Le petit théâtre des PRODIGALITES," the scene of the event, has an air of factuality about it, but this may be due to the poet's "creating" an anecdote for us;<sup>9</sup> for the ironic contrast of the "little theatre" and its grandiose name suggests to me a Mallarméan invention. The show itself, the "féerie classique la Bête et le Génie," taken in their stride by those commentators, who have briefly paraphrased the poem, as though it were indeed a classic fairy tale known to us all, likewise has a factual tone about it, especially as it's title echoes the well known folk tale "La Belle et la Bête."<sup>10</sup> And in our act, "added to" the main performance, the theme of "la Bête et le Génie" will, of course, be mimed by bear and acrobat. "Atta Troll"<sup>11</sup> is of German origin, and "Martin" can be "le nom qu'on donne à l'ours retenu et dressé dans les ménageries," which definition somehow echoes the above "reporters par le foule dressés." "Féerie" leaves the type of performance as vague as did the "spectacle" of the title; but "féerie" with "génie" in the sense of the Arabic "jinniy" suggests vaguely the "conte oriental," the ambiance of the Arabian Nights, also evoked with the stage settings. Most of the imagery describing the act itself seems, as in a dream, to shift somewhat, at times suggesting a marionette theatre, which, however, could not accommodate "le vivant

cousin d'Atta Troll ou de Martin," who nevertheless later will be "ému au léger vent," which appears somewhat strange for a heavy bear. But, then, this is not the "copying" of reality at all, but an impressionistic painting of the scene, whose vagueness, however, in no way reduces its vividness.

The persona's isolation from the other spectators is indicated by the empty seat beside him, "la stalle vacante à mes côtés," and the friend who is not present, "une absence d'ami," which is not only an example of nominalization for "absent friend," and the typically Mallarméan suggestion of presence through absence, but it again raises the notion of "absence" to predominate over the other term, similar to "le vide de signification" encountered in "Le Démon de l'Analogie."<sup>12</sup> Since "stalle" is not the most common word for a theatre seat, and since it can also refer to a church bench, there is here a very vague hint already of the theatre-church association which will be developed later in the poem. The persona's isolation is again stressed by the "goût général à esquiver ce naïf spectacle," which, by his very presence, he seems not to share. That the performance is only "naïve" to the naive who fail to realize its deeper significance--for "ce spectacle naïf" hides "un des drames de l'histoire astrale"--is ironically implied.

In the next sentence we follow the narrator's thought and vision step by step, aided by most original punctuation, as he gives a highly impressionistic rendition of the moment.

The opening question, "que se passait-il devant moi?." part of the very sentence which answers it, reflects his trying to orient himself in the action on the stage--or is it a circus arena? for the pedestals "en architecture de Bagdad" suggest a stage decor reminiscent of the Arabian Nights, and which used to be that of the big circuses--at the moment when the lights come on brightly upon the scene, or as he turns his eyes from the inside, his own reflections, toward the outside, where the show begins. And throughout the piece there seems to be a perpetual kind of movement from the "outside" to the "inside" and vice versa, in the sense that the outer events described then lead to inner reflections upon it, climaxing with the outer show being internalized altogether into the poet's vision, which completely transforms it.

"... pâleurs évasives de mousseline se réfugiant ..." brings before the mind's eye Degas' dancers whose bright ruffles and limbs appear as one brilliant flash of movement caught suspended in space. And that there are dancers before us is never stated, but suggested<sup>13</sup> by their attributes: brilliant airy lightness and graceful smiles and open arms reaching down from their pedestals toward, and contrasting with, "la lourdeur triste de l'ours," which, with its dark and heavy sounds, onomatopoetically paints what is designates. These "sylphides," supernatural beings, "nom que les cabalistes donnaient aux prétendus génies élémentaires de l'air," are the only dancers in these prose poems, but their brief

evocation is unforgettable and reminds us that the ballet was one of Mallarmé's favorite art forms.<sup>14</sup>

Only now is the "hero" of the show introduced, "de ces sylphides évocateur et leur gardien, un clown," and "un clown" somewhat undercuts the "héros," His "haute nudité d'argent," the tightly fitting leotards and the white rice powder make-up under the bright lights, contrast with the squat and furry heaviness of the bear--the former an image of man as artist, the latter one reminiscent of the primordial raw material of animal existence--whom he banters with a show of man's superiority. For in all his white splendor, the clown is by definition a grotesque figure who, having the dancer's agility but none of his grace, can at best put on a ludicrous show, a caricature of genius.

As the narrator's reflections now turn back on himself, there is an ambiguity in "jouir comme la foule du mythe inclus dans toute banalité, quel repos," for the last two words could mean "how restful it is," or "how restful it would be." The ironic implication is that the poet cannot enjoy the show "comme la foule," for while they see and enjoy merely "toute banalité," he alone is conscious of the "mythe inclus," which stresses again his isolation, as does also the welcome absence of friends, which leaves him free to concentrate on the performance, both "ordinaire" and "splendide," and for the poet but part of his perpetual quest of "imageries" or "symboles." And this prose poem is a

demonstration of this poetic quest, in which the little theatre is transformed into the bright and fleeting images of an impressionistically vibrating scene, and its simple action raised to symbolic stature.

"Etranger à mainte réminiscence de pareilles soirées," introduces a sentence which moves us from the inside to the outside, again, following every turn of the narrator's thought and vision, and which rhythmically reflects this experience. That opening clause, verbless and luxuriously précieux, is suddenly and brusquely interrupted from the outside, with the sharp, short syllables: "L'accident le plus neuf! suscita mon attention." A wave of applause had suddenly stopped short, a burst of noise turned to instant silence, and the "cesser net" imitates the abruptness of the break, "brisée par quoi?" This applause is independent of the human somehow, "décernés selon l'enthousiasme,"--"selon" is one of Mallarmé's favorite prepositions on account of its very vagueness--for "l'illustration sur la scène du privilège authentique de l'Homme." People do not applaud performers here, but "enthousiasme" applauds an "illustration du privilège authentique de l'Homme," and the degree of abstraction here strongly separates the poet's experience; for, clearly, none of the audience saw "sur la scène [le] privilège authentique de l'Homme," for the simple reason that this abstraction is not visual. But what is incredibly visual in this sentence, where the scene has disappeared, is the image of

the applause suddenly standing still: "un fixe fracas de gloire à l'apogée, inhabile à se répandre," where it is rendered concrete like a tangible element standing still in dense turbulence at its highest point, needing, but being unable, to come down, to flow off, to spread out again. This is a very real wave of concentrated force--of enthusiasm concretized--standing breathtakingly still "à l'apogée." There is thus a brilliant inversion, where the visual scene before us is abstracted so that we can no longer see it at all, while the abstract, but to the theatre so essential, aspect, the audience's enthusiasm, is concretized to the point of becoming both visual and almost tactile, a powerful element menacing with latent force.

But now we see the stage action, for "il fallait être tout yeux," where the clown, now called "pantin," performs one of the traditional lazzi. "Pantin" in its first definition means a puppet or marionette, but figuratively it designates one who "gesticule sans motif et ridiculement," thus fitting the circus clown, whose very gesture, "une paume crispée dans l'air," strikingly resembles that of the "maître" of the "Coup de dés," that clenched fist up in the air before final shipwreck.<sup>15</sup> With his lazzi, the clenched fist now opening wide as though catching something in flight, the "ingenieux," here probably in its slightly pejorative sense of engignos, had won the crowd's approbation; but the trick, a figure--and the parenthesis reduces it to its first

definition of "forme extérieure d'un corps"--of the ease with which everyone grasps an idea, is richly ironic, for "chacun," on the contrary, sees only appearance while failing to grasp the idea which it hides.

The bear--"ému au léger vent" again vaguely suggesting a marionette show--now rises "rythmiquement et doucement," that is with a live animal's supple movement, as he examines the trick, ironically termed "exploit," recalling the clown's designation of "héros" above. The heavy bear claw coming to rest on the ribbons of the clown's costume, rather than shoulder, makes for an even stronger contrast in this strange rapprochement. But the audience's excitement is not shared by the narrator, whose ironic distance from the spectacle is apparent in "conséquences graves pour l'honneur de la race," where "honneur" is but another ironic use of a heroic term, in harmony with the preceding "héros" and "exploit." This ironic tone is completely absent from the idealized description of the animal, gentle and good, aspiring after genius. But this aspiration is hidden from the audience, thus a "secret rapprochement," who see only the bear's dangerous proximity to the clown. And so "un homme inférieur" is concealed under the superbly impressionistic image of the heavy animal gradually rising "debout sur l'écartement de deux jambes de poil," which defies translation. One paw on the clown's shoulder, the other on his arm, the animal seems to be reaching up toward the slender human body to embrace, not



to harm, it, in longing admiration for his "frère brillant et surnaturel." And so, gradually, the narrator, though describing the outer event, the show, internalizes it, fusing outer phenomena and inner vision.

As the "hero" performs his trick, he raises his head, "chef affreux," probably both horrible and horrified, his "bouche folle de vague," that is his mouth open and perhaps grotesquely painted by the clown's make-up, in order to stare after a paper and gold fly. "Remuant par un fil visible dans l'horreur les dénégations véritables d'une mouche de papier et d'or," is confusing, perhaps as the stage trick itself. Does "les dénégations véritables" mean that the stage prop, the paper and gold fly after which the clown stares open-mouthed with his head raised up, is but imaginary, not really there but only suggested by his play? The "fil visible," again vaguely reminiscent of a marionette show, might stress the actor's mechanical performance of the lazzi. "Spectacle clair" of the following sentence refers on the narrative level both to the brightness of the stage and also the clear meaning of the act, namely that the bear fails to grasp what is going on, the play of genius. Only for the narrator does the spectacle transcend its little stage, "tréteau" signifying "théâtre de charlatan, saltimbanque, théâtre où l'on présente des pièces bouffonnes." And while for the audience the moment seems to last forever because of its danger, for the poet it takes on the dimension of art, ars longa ..., as his vision

now entirely separates itself from theirs, "sans que m'offusquât l'attitude probablement fatale prise par le mime dépositaire de notre orgueil," which, again, ironically undercuts both the clown's play and role, and what it represents: a caricature of humanity's complacent superiority to animals. The clown is now called a "mime," indicating that this is a pantomime, where the actors, by definition, may only use gesture to express themselves. Thus there is a strange reversal, when discourse, "interdit au rejeton des sites arctiques" under natural, but not artistic, laws, is accorded to the animal, while "human genius" must remain silent. And the bear is here identified as a polar bear, "rejeton des sites arctiques," which introduces the association with "the most conspicuous of the northern constellations, Ursa Major," that is the Great Bear, which will be the final constellation of the "Coup de dés," and in our poem foreshadows the "un des drames de l'histoire astrale," into which the pantomime show will be transformed in the poetic vision.

The bear's imaginary monologue--with the parenthesis implying that if these were not his precise words, this was at least their message--is an appeal to human charity, to explain to him the quality of this splendid theatrical atmosphere in which man has taught him, the beast, to move. But it is not an atmosphere of splendor alone, but also one of dust, and these seemingly contradictory terms, splendor and dust, on the descriptive level befit the stage with its glaring

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lights and dusty sets; but on a figurative level they designate modern civilization, as it might appear to an outsider--the outsider here both the beast, and, paradoxically, the poet, who had deplored its sorry state at the outset of the piece. Splendor and dust and noise,<sup>16</sup> do they not characterize "toute grande ville"; and we recall that "la poussière du temps" had also marked that late, death-bound civilization of "Le Phénomène Futur."

The bear, addressing the mime his "aîné subtil," claims that his request, both pressing and just, should and could be answered by him whose fear he imagines but feigned--is a clown's every gesture not theatrical make-believe? For this brother is "élançé aux régions de la sagesse" because the bear, still wearing the attire of the caves of a dark age--in contrast to the other's "haute nudité d'argent" and civilization's apparent splendor--has reimmersed his latent strength in prehistoric darkness to set his human brother free. And so a secret bond unites them; this secret bond is, moreover, also suggestive of the bear as "terrible parent" archetype in Jungian psychology, a figure for a demonic anima which is destructive because it is repressed, "ma force latente," and not understood--none but the poet understands the symbolic significance of the animal act. In this sense, it is perhaps also this dark brother who is now seeking reconciliation. Far from begrudging the brilliant clown his superiority, the bear wants, on the contrary, to seal the pact of their secret

brotherhood, and their reconciliation, "devant la multitude siégeant à cette fin." "Siéger" transforms the theatre audience into an assembly, or a tribunal, of witnesses, and so the audience has, along with the action on the stage, been absorbed into and fused with the ideal vision. And this vision, with a kind of vague comprehension on the part of the idealized bear of the process of evolution, with the implied notion of the original common origin of all creatures--or by extension the Hugolian idea of the gradual upward movement of all forms of life toward spiritualization on the great chain of being--also recalls that in the early "Plainte d'Automne" the narrator's cat had already been his "compagnon mystique, un esprit."<sup>17</sup>

Not only the stage action and the spectators, but the entire theatre is transformed, for its modest dimensions are magically opened up, as it were, when the breathless attention of the excited audience is referred to as "l'absence d'aucun souffle unie à l'espace" [my italics]; and "dans quel lieu absolu" takes away all limits and evokes cosmic spaces, absolute time and place, which creates a setting of eternity and the infinite, where the evolution of a race is but a moment and constellations not remote, reminiscent of "des circonstances éternelles" of that final drama of the "Coup de dés." For our show has become a cosmic drama, "un des drames de l'histoire astrale," with the theatre audience fading away now, "la foule s'effaçait toute," and becoming

part of a ritual, a "situation spirituelle," of which the stage has become the emblem.

An emblem is, similar to the symbol, a visible sign of an idea, but it is not traditional, but the poet's own, a symbol, thus, particular to the Mallarméan poetic universe. And in this universe, the theatre in its ideal form is ritualistic and takes on the spiritual function of the dying Church, thus becoming a kind of modern Church itself:<sup>18</sup>

Notre seule magnificence, la scène, à qui le concours d'arts divers scellés par la poésie attribue selon moi quelque caractère religieux ou officiel, si l'un de ces mots a un sens, je constate que le siècle finissant n'en a cure, ainsi comprise (OC p. 313);

says Mallarmé in "Crayonné au Théâtre," and, late in his life still, in one of his responses to Jules Huret's inquiries, the poet maintains:

Je crois que la Littérature, reprise à sa source qui est l'Art et la Science, nous fournira un Théâtre, dont les représentations seront le vrai culte moderne (OC p. 875).

And so, the entire theatre being transformed as the stage action is elevated to ritual proportions, the gas light, a sort of giant constellation, "le gaz, dans les hauteurs de la salle," which has replaced the church tapers of yore, plays its part in the rite, that of "dispensateur moderne de l'extase." "Extase" here carries its meaning as a mystical term, "élévation extraordinaire de l'esprit, dans la contemplation de choses divines, qui détache une personne des objets sensibles jusqu'à rompre la communication de ses sens avec

tout ce qui l'environne," which aptly describes the narrator's situation among the theatre audience. This gas light, "avec l'impartialité d'une chose élémentaire," one of the newest products of modern civilization, held a special fascination for Mallarmé,<sup>19</sup> and with its "bruit lumineux d'attente," this synesthesia, recalls its role in "Le Tombeau de Charles Baudelaire." What is being described on the literal level here is the theatre's chandelier, a gas light fixture, which, as I said, in the "drame astrale" setting figures as a giant constellation; and the traditional chandelier itself, "le lustre," also played an important role in Mallarmé's conception of the theatre outside of our prose poem. For, with its multiple facets, this suspended and blazing giant gem seems to reflect not only the action on the stage, but the multiple consciousness of the spectators, that is the communicants in the ceremony:

... le lustre, dans la salle, représentât, par ses multiples facettes, une lucidité chez le public, relativement à ce qu'on vient faire (OC p. 388).

In the contemporary DERNIERE MODE, when discussing "théâtres, livres, beaux-arts," in his "Chronique de Paris" section, the poet-editor says:

La vraie représentation est, dans cette nuit de gala, non ce qu'éclaire la rampe, mais le lustre (OC pp. 717-18).

But at this climactic moment, the culminating moment of elevation and expectancy of "lumineux d'attente," there occurs an absolute break, "le charme se rompit," a break indicated in

the poem by double spacing; for the vision disappears, and we no longer see the event "sous le jour propre au rêve."

Nothing could more vividly image the crassness of the natural order--where factual reality replaces magic and dream--than the piece of flesh, "un morceau de chair, nu, brutal," "loque saignant[e]," thrown on the scene, a scene no longer a "lieu absolu," but a humble stage with its dusty spaced sets and the customary, but usually hidden, gory feedings of the beasts after an animal act.<sup>20</sup> The magic of the theatre, "le rayonnement théâtral," which--in the poetic vision--had endowed the bear with a higher curiosity, an aspiration, and, above all, with speech, has vanished, as the beast with muffled tread seems to carry "Silence" away with him. The contrast of the ideal vision with reality is further stressed by the suggestion that the animal, no longer aspiring after human, that is supernatural, wisdom and splendor, would now have to degrade man, "notre image," to the level of crudest matter, namely shreds of torn flesh, to enjoy him, "goûter" here playing with the word's multiple meanings. Once more the theatre's bright lights are evoked, when the uncomprehending audience, spellbound, watches the bloody feast, as rows of shiny opera glasses both reflect and glaringly stare at, the action.

And now the circular form of the poem comes to a close with "la toile et son journal de tarifs et de lieux communs," echoing the "journal" and "reporters," and "caractère commun"



of the opening paragraph. For this curtain with its advertisements and price schedules moves us bluntly back into that modern civilization and "la réalité, bon à fixer l'intellect moyen entre les mirages d'un fait," a world in which the poet is a stranger. And as he steps outside, "comme tout le monde," in the crowd, but not of it, he realizes the answer to his original question: if there is in the ideal "un aspect nécessaire," it is not "evident" to man, for the vision of the ideal is not shared, but the poet's alone. However, the now mature poet is, in his solitude and isolation from his fellow man, serene, for his poetic vision is not only superior, but alone true. And Mallarmé chose the end of this poem to announce, with a rather uncharacteristic directness, the superiority of his vision, which confirms my assertion that this poem--rather than "Le Démon de l'Analogie"--inaugurates a new style and form.

In this prose poem, the only one where the poet-persona is a spectator in a theatre, and not (as frequently) a performer himself, several important themes converge, of which the most obvious is that of the theatre itself, developed here poetically, that is by suggestion. And this ritual of spiritual regeneration implies the crucial relationship between performance, or more widely a work of art, and the beholder who becomes in a sense a participant, and the interaction between the two.<sup>21</sup> In this dialectical relationship, there is an interplay of three planes, where an object, in our



case "le spectacle," is perceived by a subject, here the poet-persona, so that through this encounter a new object comes into being. In "Un Spectacle Interrompu," the "spectacle" in being transformed by the poet at the same time modifies him; and the "événement sous le jour propre au rêve"--the beast's potential liberation or spiritualization by the poet--becomes a new synthesis. But in our case, the "new object" is also a definition of the Mallarméan prose poem, of which the piece is the demonstration: reportage of the ideal.

Central to these ideas is the notion of the power and isolation of poetic vision, developed in this prose poem, which is, again, about poetry and the poet. This notion carries with it the attendant theme of the poet's isolation--reflected here also in a new poetic language--from society, from la foule. Poetic vision seeks, or creates, meaning in the world of phenomena and chance events--that is, in confronting "reality," the poet asks--or creates--its meaning.

## UN SPECTACLE INTERROMPU

## NOTES

- 1 E. Moulet, L'Oeuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: Droz, 1940), p. 299:

Comme ses premières poésies, les poèmes en prose de la première heure sont parfaitement limpides. La première page qui parut difficile coïncide avec le premier poème obscur. C'est, au sortir de la crise de Tournon, Le Démon de l'Analogie, qui étonna les lecteurs de LA REVUE DU MONDE NOUVEAU, pendant que le Toast funèbre étonnait ceux du Tombeau de Théophile Gautier.

I agree with Mme Noulet that the "Toast Funèbre" is Mallarmé's first "difficult" verse poem. It dates from 1873; the first "difficult" prose poem is not "Le Démon de l'Analogie," which, by the way, was written before the "crise de Tournon," but our "Un Spectacle Interrompu" of 1875. Further, I cannot agree with her when she condemns Mallarmé's new prose style, as follows: (p. 299)

L'oeuvre en prose de Mallarmé, plus abondante que son oeuvre poétique, devient dès lors indicatrice de ses tendances et de ses procédés. La tentative de transporter dans la prose les moyens de l'hermétisme semble cependant vaine. La réforme verbale, valable en poésie où il s'agissait de rompre avec un passé oratoire et codifié, ne se justifiait pas en prose. Celle-ci doit rester avant tout l'instrument du raisonnement.

This remark seems to fail to understand the prose poems, and moreover Mallarmé's most fundamental notions regarding the language of literature.

Scherer, L'Expression, pp. 225-26, notes the stylistic break as follows:

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L'année 1874 est décisive dans l'évolution de la technique de Mallarmé. Brusquement, cette année-là, il s'élance vers les régions inexplorées de la syntaxe française, et trouve presque d'emblée un bon nombre de ses hardiesses. Pourquoi? C'est en 1874, en même temps qu'il prépare sa traduction du Corbeau de Poe, que Mallarmé édite, de septembre à décembre, le journal de modes et de frivolités qu'il intitule LA DERNIERE MODE. On sait que, sous divers pseudonymes, il est l'unique rédacteur de cette publication. Sans doute, LA DERNIERE MODE n'est-elle qu'un divertissement, une oeuvre de circonstance, une aimable fantaisie, un délassement. Mais sous ce charmant travesti, Mallarmé peut tout oser. Cette oeuvre légère revêt une importance capitale pour la fixation des tendances de Mallarmé devant le langage.

Le système défini par la DERNIERE MODE s'affirme aussitôt en prose avec le Spectacle Interrompu (1875), en poésie avec L'Après-midi d'un Faune (1876).

- 2 This disastrous reading of Igitur is related in Mondor, Vie, pp. 229-302.

- 3 This notion is also Paxton's, The Development, p. 50;

That Mallarmé recognized Igitur as a failure to be discarded is surely indicated by the fact that he never attempted to publish it, nor did he ever revise it or work on it again. It is my belief that the realisation that the message which he wished to communicate could not be rendered by a conventional use of language came to Mallarmé as a result of Igitur and began the search for a new language which continued all his life.

- 4 Maclair, Princes, p. 112, recalls Mallarmé confiding to him:

Que de fois, j'ai résolu de me mettre à écrire les livres que je portais dans mon cerveau, en me contentant d'une forme française habituelle, d'un à peu près éloquent et expressif, avec des rythmes et une syntaxe d'usage courant, en me jurant à moi-même de secouer le joug; et puis, au moment de commencer, je sentais que je ne pouvais pas, que l'on n'a pas le droit de mésuser ainsi de la langue écrite--et je recommençais à étudier ce qu'elle exige.

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- 5 Leon Cellier in Mallarmé et la Morte qui Parle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), p. 156, reports "Mais l'année du Toast [two years before our poem] il [Mallarmé] écrit à Mistral pour lui proposer de créer une Association internationale des Poètes."
- 6 "Rêve" is one of the most frequent terms in Mallarmé's poetic dictionary, and it is so multivalent, that its meaning tends to vary according to its use. While it often is the first principle of poetry, and sometimes the process of poetic creation itself, it can at other times also be the enemy of poetry. Walter Naumann in Der Sprachgebrauch Mallarmés (Marburg: Hermann Bauer, 1936), pp. 196-98, furnishes an index for the usage of "rêve" in Mallarmé's poetry and prose, outlining the most frequent meanings the word carries. Nowhere, however, does Mallarmé refer to "rêve" in the sense of the Surrealists, and the exploitation of night dream for "écriture automatique."
- 7 To the charge of obscurity in this artistic prose, Mallarmé answers, again contrasting his language with that of the newspapers, as follows:

Je préfère, devant l'agression, retorquer que des contemporains ne savent pas lire--

Sinon dans le journal; il dépense, certes, l'avantage de n'interrompre le chœur de préoccupations (OC, p. 386).



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8 A sample of the imaginary journal itself is, of course, LA DERNIERE MODE, in which not only fashions, but theatrical and other "events" of interest to the readers, are "reported," but certainly "sous le jour propre au rêve," and at the same time in the new prose style. The fact that LA DERNIERE MODE was so short lived testifies to modern civilization's inability "de procurer les jouissances attribuables à cet état!"

9 Bernard, le Poème en Prose, p. 293, says:

Lors d'un spectacle, un ours s'était soudain redressé contre le clown qui le faisait manoeuvrer, et l'avait étreint dangereusement, jusqu'au moment où l'appât d'un quartier de viande lui avait fait lâcher prise: telle est, en style de "reporter" cette "anecdote" que je n'ai trouvée rapportée nulle part dans les journaux de l'époque, pas plus que je n'ai trouvé la mention d'un théâtre des "Prodigalités."

She then quotes some passages of the poem with the comment:

"Il faut, on le voit, une véritable 'explication du texte' pour saisir la valeur significative et suggestive de chaque mot, pour reconstruire la phrase selon nos habitudes syntaxiques," and characterizes the newly evolving style (p. 297) under three headings: "Tendance à l'abstraction; tendance à la concentration; tendance à reconstruire la phrase."

10 In my search through the following reference material:

Gertrude Jobes, Dictionary of Mythology and Folklore Symbols (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962); Stith-Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-literature (Bloomington: Univ. of

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Indiana Press, 1958); Funk & Wagnalls, Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1949); Bolte & Polivka, Anmerkungen zu Grimms Kinder und Hausmärchen (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1963), I have not been able to find a reference to "la Bête et le Génie."

- 11 Chase St. Aubyn, Mallarmé, pp. 50-51, where he discusses the role of Hérodiade in 19th-century literature and then specifically in Mallarmé, notes in passing: "... and in 1841 the German lyric poet Heinrich Heine wrote a series of satirical poems, subsequently translated by the author into French, under the title Atta Troll in which Hérodiade got her due."
- 12 This indicates that, though there occurred a marked stylistic change rather suddenly, some of the characteristics of the new style were already present in the earlier period.
- 13 This tendency to "suggest" rather than "name" will become stronger as Mallarmé's style matures; he proposes it as one of the most important characteristics of modern poetry in his "Crise de Vers":

Décadente, Mystique, les Ecoles se déclarant ou étiquetées en hâte par notre presse d'information, adoptent, comme rencontre, le point d'un Idéalisme qui, (pareillement aux fugues, aux sonates) refuse les matériaux naturels et, comme brutale, une pensée exacte les ordonnant; pour ne garder de rien que la suggestion. Instituer une relation entre les images exactes, et que s'en détache un tiers aspect fusible et clair présente à la divination ... Abolition, la

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prétention, esthétiquement une erreur, quoiqu'elle régit les chef-d'oeuvre, d'inclure au papier subtil du volume autre chose que par exemple l'horreur de la forêt, ou la tonnerre muet épars au feuillage; non le bois intrinsèque et dense des arbres (OC pp. 365-66).

- 14 In his enthusiastic article about the Cornalba he says:

La Cornalba me ravit, qui danse comme dévêtue; c'est-à-dire que sans le samblant d'aide offert à un enlèvement ou à la chute par une présence volante et assoupie de gazes, elle paraît, appelée dans l'air, s'y soutenir....

The significance of the dancer for the poet lies in the fact that she also writes, and creates a kind of visual metaphor:

... la danseuse n'est pas une femme qui danse, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu'elle n'est pas une femme, mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme, glaive, coupe, fleur, etc., et qu'elle ne danse pas, suggérant, par le prodige de raccourcis ou d'élans, avec une écriture corporelle ce qu'il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la rédaction: poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe (OC p. 304).

- 15 This "geste du pantin, une paume crispée dans l'air" reveals an underlying association, at that time still unconscious, connecting the grotesque show of "le Génie" with "l'Homme," par excellence, the Master Poet, who in the final work is seen "la main/crispée/par-delà l'inutile tête" (OC p. 464).
- 16 This "atmosphère de splendeur, de poussière et de voix" is strikingly similar to the atmosphere of Baudelaire's "Le Vieux Saltimbanque," Poèmes en Prose, p. 72:

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Les hercules, fiers de l'énormité de leurs membres, sans front et sans crâne, comme les orangs-outangs, se prélassaient majestueusement sous les maillots lavés la veille pour la circonstance. Les danseuses, belles comme les fées ou des princesses, sautaient et cabriolaient sous le feu des lanternes qui remplissaient leurs jupes d'étincelles.

Tout n'était que lumière, poussière, cris, [my italics].

Here the dancers are also magically beautiful, but the clowns a sad caricature of Man, and the stage, bathed in bright light, is similar to that of our poem; but while the ambiance of the two prose poems is alike, the two pieces have otherwise no similarity.

- 17 Though Mallarmé certainly did not share Hugo's faith or philosophy, there is here a vague reminiscence of some of the ideas expressed in, for example, "Ce que dit la Bouche d'Ombre," with its universal animism and plenitude. Victor Hugo, Les Contemplations (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p.

476:

... la création qui, lente et par degrés,  
S'élève à la lumière, et, dans sa marche entière,  
Fait de plus de clarté luire moins de matière

...  
Qui va du roc à l'arbre et de l'arbre à la bête,  
et de la pierre à toi monte insensiblement

- 18 Haskell M. Block in his Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 85-86, comes to the following conclusion regarding Mallarmé's vision of a new theatre:

In his highly personal reformulation of the drama, Mallarmé is not concerned with the details of the "explication de l'homme," but rather with the



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spiritual attitudes and values that the new theater will express: the primacy of mystery, dream, and imaginative vision, projected beyond any particular time or circumstances. The magic and mystery of the theater reside within its very substance, as an evocation of the absolute, embracing the destiny of all humanity. In this sense, Mallarmé's ritual drama is the means of the propagation of a new religion, a secularization of the liturgy and rites of ancient dramatic performances.

This vision of a ceremonial theater is in fact a configuration of elements derived from a variety of sources: Greek drama, the medieval liturgical drama, Shakespeare, Wagner, Banville and the tradition of poetic drama, and the Catholic Mass. Mallarmé saw the theater of both the past and the future as a temple, wherein actor and spectator participate in a sacred rite.

- 19 Richard, L'Univers, p. 502, notes:

Deux lumières "modernes" fascinent tout spécialement Mallarmé: l'électricité ... mais surtout le gaz, qui réunit, comme un Génie d'ancienne féerie, l'éclat à l'impalpabilité, le brio au don d'ubiquité. Brutal, d'une façon et nu--malgré sa nature "impalpable," il réserve surtout "son effet de magie" afin de créer "l'éclat obligatoire au théâtre," (OC p. 736). Son flot inonde violemment, assaille le spectacle: il opère avec une telle franchise que sous cette "lumière réelle" (La Dernière Mode) celui-ci en paraît simplifié, dénudé, transfiguré.

- 20 The image of the raw, bloody shred of flesh--in contrast to the ideal astral vision--is evocative of Rimbaud's prose poem, "Barbare," Oeuvres, p. 292, where there is also a juxtaposition of arctic purity and the food of animal instincts, bloody meat:

Oh! Le pavillon en viande saignante sur la soie  
des mers et des fleurs arctiques; (elles n'existent  
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- 21 This dynamic relationship, the "dialectics" between

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Kunstwerk und Betrachter, a work of art and its beholder, is the subject of Steland's Dialektische Gedanken, where he concentrates on Mallarmé's essays on the ballet.

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## CHAPTER IX

### REMINISCENCE

This poem is the first "late" piece of the recueil, dating from 1888, and though it originated from an early piece, "L'Orphelin" of 1867, it is not really so much a modification of that version as it is an entirely new prose poem, which is why Mallarmé placed "Réminiscence" in the second group of the cycle. A reading of the two pieces as different poems,<sup>1</sup> which are, however, thematically linked, is more profitable than examining "variants." It reveals not a progression from the early to the late style, but their difference, and all which this stylistic difference implies.<sup>2</sup>

Mallarmé indicates the poem's transformation by the change of the title itself.<sup>3</sup> "L'Orphelin" was one of the young poet's obsessive themes, which not only pervades his adolescent lyric poetry but was suggested in the early prose poems in "Plainte d'Automne" and "Le Démon de l'Analogie," and finally fully developed in "Pauvre Enfant Pâle." But "Réminiscence" indicates by its definition that the mature Mallarmé is no longer obsessed by the experience which had become a recurring theme of his early poetry. For "réminiscence," not exactly synonymous with "souvenir,"

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means: "rappel d'un souvenir à peu près effacé; acte par lequel nous cherchons à ressaisir un souvenir incomplet."

In terms of poetry this means that the poet, rather than being visited by a childhood memory, recalls it at will, to paint it in the light, the colors, and, above all, the style of a mature artistic imagination. Far from being obsessed or haunted by a theme, he now, on the contrary, owns and controls it artistically, that is with masterful aesthetic distance. Moreover, "réminiscence" also suggests by association the apprehension of perfect forms, in the sense of the Platonic Idea, for the poem is about "l'orphelin" in its widest sense, the archetypal idea of the orphan in this poetic universe, or what Mallarmé would call its "notion pure," "the idea itself," rather than its particular manifestation:

Je dis une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue  
aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les  
calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave,  
l'absente de tous bouquets (OC p. 368).

The poem's anecdote recounts the meeting of an orphan with the children of the circus, which had come to town. The lonely child feels instinctively drawn toward the vagabonds, and the mature narrator in reminiscing about this childhood experience wonders whether this early felt affinity might not have presaged already his future isolation from mankind and his own artistic vocation.

"Orphelin j'errais en noir et l'oeil vacant de famille" introduces at once the narrative subject, a first-person narrator, the Hamlet-Igitur theme, and an example of the



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extraordinary stylistic virtuosity which characterizes the poem. The very first word is reminiscent of the opening of "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," with which the original version of this piece is almost contemporary. But while the other poem's narrator identified himself with the "pauvre enfant" only indirectly, here he "was" the orphan himself. Yet, the temporal distance, as well as the one created stylistically, are such that from the outset the orphan and the first-person narrator describing him (-self) constitute two clearly distinguished voices, with the poetic one almost completely absorbing that of the child. Further, this opening line by its high compression--and, in inverse relationship to it, its infinitely extended suggestiveness--creates not only the key image of the poem, but at the same time is pregnant with the meditations aroused by it. And so one already presages here, vaguely, the poet's very latest manner, that of the "Coup de dés," and explained in its Preface: "Tout se passe, par raccourci, en hypothèse; on évite le récit" (OC p. 455), for, in a sense, this opening line is, or contains, the whole poem; but in "Réminiscence" we now pass to the elaboration of the theme, "le récit."

And in "le récit," the narrative, we now see a child dressed in black, recalling "une personne condamnée à porter probablement le deuil de l'inexplicable Penultième," wandering somewhat aimlessly--for he is not yet a singer like the "pale child" but still without a mission--"l'oeil vacant de

famille." These eyes are the mirrors of his soul, reflecting an outer, and at the same time expressing an inner, state: the loneliness, isolation, and separateness of an orphan searching for those to whom he belongs.<sup>4</sup> The second part of the sentence provides the setting of the piece, the festive tents of a fairground among the trees<sup>5</sup> outside the city, reminiscent both of "Le Phénomène Futur" and the verse poem, "Le Pitre Châtié" of the same year. And in the verse poem, the poet persona, who was a showman in the early prose piece, is a circus clown, who calls himself "le mauvais Hamlet," which indicates an underlying association of Poet, Showman or Clown, Hamlet, and Orphan, all of which converge in "Réminiscence." But while this association is still spelled out in "L'Orphelin": "... déjà, enfant avec tristesse présentant le Poète, j'errais vêtu de noir, les yeux baissés du ciel et cherchant ma famille sur la terre," it is suggested only in our prose poem. For our next clause not only makes no mention of the poet, but renders the premonition of the future even more vague by phrasing it like a question within the sentence. Only the orphan's fascination with the gypsies is affirmed, and expressed not in a child's terms, but in poetic ones: "J'aimais le parfum des vagabonds"; and it is the narrator who then suggests that the orphan--and how could Hamlet be more strikingly evoked than "en noir et l'oeil vacant de famille?"--perhaps already felt a kinship, a spiritual relationship, with the itinerant entertainers.

And the "vagabonds," in echoing the "j'errais" above, somehow stresses this affinity.

"Vers eux à oublier mes camarades"--where the preposition, similar to its use in "tu vins ... au monde vers cela" of "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," conveys a strong sense of anticipation--is immensely condensed by the suppression of the finite verb, which extends the suggestiveness of not only this clause but the whole sentence. Like the somber Hamlet, leaving behind his courtiers to seek out the wandering players come to festive Elsinore, our black-dressed child, contrasting with the colorful fairgrounds surrounding him, forgets his own comrades, his own kind among whom he is a stranger, for the strangers come to town. Thus, the Hamlet association, though not stated, is most powerfully suggested in this opening sentence.

Further, the word "fête," which is the entire atmosphere that the show people bring with them, by association, "jour consacré à des actes de religion; cérémonies par lesquelles on célèbre ce jour," introduces a vocabulary cluster of religious imagery and language, which in this poem is set side by side with the "low" and colloquial language, the slang even, of the gypsy children. This religious language is that of the poet-persona's reflections on the nature of theatre, whose sacred and ritual character was already developed in the preceding prose poem, and which in the long second sentence is expressed by "choeurs, drame, sainte heure,"

the mention of the poet of the Divine Comedy, and "prier, chaste, repas supérieur," and the celebration of "blancheur" in "neiges des cimes, lys, ailes." At the same time, the second sentence introduces the action proper, but only after what seems like an interminable albativ absolute, an elaborate adverbial stage and, at the same time, mood setting.<sup>6</sup>

"Aucun cri de chœurs par la déchirure, ni tirade loin, le drame requérant l'heure sainte des quinquets," evokes that quiet hour before the show begins, the momentary calm before the multifarious agitation of the colorful scene. For Mallarmé this moment of suspens, in its rich virtuality, held a particular fascination; and in our poem it has a manifold significance, for while it refers to the literal level of the moment of expectancy before the performance, it at the same time suggests an analogous point in not only the poet-persona's, but the Poet's--that is Man's--becoming. It is Hamlet's stage of indecision which is, however, already pregnant with the Act, the present of possibility preceding the future actualization of the self. In his "Hamlet" essay, which is almost contemporary with "Reminiscence," Mallarmé says:

Son solitaire drame! et qui, parfois, tant ce promeneur d'un labyrinthe de trouble et de griefs en prolonge les circuits avec le suspens d'un acte inachevé, semble le spectacle même pourquoi existent la rampe ainsi que l'espace doré quasi moral qu'elle défend, ... (OC p. 300) [my italics].

"Chœurs" not only suggests the chorus of Greek drama, but also the enfants de chœur who participate in the Christian ritual of the Mass, and the "brise ancienne des chœurs" of "L'Orphelin" was still more explicit in bringing

out these associations. The "déchirure," rent or tear, of either show tent or theatre curtain, has about it a mysteriousness, heightened by the very vagueness of the phrase, of things hidden from the uninitiated, on the literal level the secret preparations for the show. "Choeur" is now reinforced with "tirade," suggesting the long, declamatory monologues of classical theatre, and leads up to "le drame"; and "loin," referring on the literal level to spacial distance, also suggests a temporal distance which implies, at the same time, an artistic one. In this way, by suggestion, the humble fairground stage is linked to both classical Greek drama, theatre's origin, and also French classical drama, the artistic culmination of the tradition. For the actual side-show magically reaches back through the ages to classical drama, from which it is as far removed temporally as it is artistically. "Le drame," which requires its "l'heure sainte des quinquets," constitutes here not only an ironic juxtaposition of the "low comedy" characteristic of the théâtre de foire with elevated and even ritual drama, but points to their secret kinship. "Quinquets," phonetically echoing "quinconce" above, and which recalls "la suie ignoble des quinquets" of "Le Pitre Châtié," marks this theatre with a touch of modernity,<sup>7</sup> but "l'heure sainte," with its suggestion of the canonical hours, is, again, richly evocative of the past.

"The "action" of the orphan-hero is more correctly a mere wish to act: "je souhaitais de parler," and the child

he feels instinctively drawn to is a little outsider himself, "un môme trop vacillant pour figurer parmi sa race." "Môme," a "terme populaire," and thus fitting for the little gypsy, at the same time suggests "mômerie," that is a masquerade, which underlines the show atmosphere of the poem. And this urchin, "trop vacillant" to even "figure," to take a humble part, in the performance, so that he is not even a real circus child yet, appears like a spiritual brother to the orphan by the similarity of his condition. "Vacillant," aside from literally describing the little one as too shaky on his legs to work with his acrobat family, suggests figuratively the undecidedness inherent in the moment before finding one's vocation. And just as the orphan is marked by his somber costume, so this lonely child is wearing a rather peculiar attire, that strange Dantesque night-cap, a long, pointed cowl that seems to come from another age. This allusion to the Middle Ages was in "L'Orphelin" reinforced with "des toiles ... peintes par le maître qui, peut-être, à cet instant, croyait seul au moyen âge." But the mere allusion to the medieval poet, which, by association, evokes the original théâtres de foire and also medieval religious drama, is infinitely richer, for the name Dante summons forth the eternal celebration of human drama in Poetry and an age of faith.

The juxtaposition of the trivial and the sublime, of the recalled childhood experience and its poetic expression, reaches its culmination in "qui rentrait en soi, sous l'aspect

d'une tartine de fromage mou, déjà la neige des cimes, le lys ou autre blancheur constitutive d'ailes au-dedans." For the rather unaesthetic slice of bread covered with soft cheese on which the little gypsy was munching, paradoxically releases in the poet an explosion of imagery celebrating whiteness. The cheese has become "l'aspect," that is the mere external appearance, under the form of which the little Dante already took possession of what in "L'Orphelin" was called "toutes les blancheurs sacrées des poètes," absolute whiteness--reminiscent of Mallarmé's absolute Néant--whose sacredness to poets is merely suggested here with "blancheur constitutive d'ailes au-dedans," where "aile" is again symbolic for poetic creative power, as it was in "Le Démon de l'Analogie." There is thus a curious conversion of "nourritures terrestres" in the crassest sense to spiritual food. And this whiteness of "la neige des cimes" and "le lys," this absolute purity, is reminiscent of that other orphan, the virginal Hérodiade, motherless, and abandoned by her father, "Reviendra-t-il un jour des pays cisalpins!"--suspended, as it were, in that solitary, young moment of expectancy before fulfillment:

J'attends une chose inconnue  
 Ou peut-être, ignorant le mystère et vos cris,  
 Jetez-vous les sanglots suprêmes et meurtris  
 D'une enfance sentant parmi les rêveries  
 Se séparer enfin ses froides pierreries.

But the rapprochement of the orphan and the little Dante, who innocently carries a still secret artistic mission within him, never quite comes about, for the orphan does not speak,





and "je l'eusse prié de m'admettre à son repas supérieur," a designation doubly ironic, by its stilted phrasing with the pluperfect subjunctive rather than the past conditional of the formal verb "prier," expresses merely the unfulfilled wish. At the same time, this ironic description of the slice of bread and cheese is suggestive of a ritual meal, like the Communion, where the communicant, similarly, under the aspects of bread and wine--nourritures terrestres--partakes of divine substance, and to which the orphan would have "prayed to be admitted," had not a dazzling, older boy, seemingly surging out of nowhere, interposed himself.

The past participle, "partagé," followed by "vite," stresses the swiftness of that "aîné fameux," who has already obtained what the orphan never even succeeded in asking for. "Contre une proche toile en train des tours de force et banalités alliées au jour," vaguely suggests a backdrop of canvas tents, fitting setting for his nimble tricks. And somehow it seems not quite clear whether the "tours de force" belong to the tents or the young acrobat, while in "L'Orphelin" the whole image was so clearly delineated that it left much less to our imagination: "la baraque voisine dans laquelle on allait donner les tours de force." Not only his easy lazzi, but his nakedness in "sa prestesse de maillot," where the performer's agility seems to become part of his costume and that a part of him, recalls the clown-acrobat of "Un Spectacle Interrompu" in "sa haute nudité d'argent."

And this nude form of the dancer-acrobat-clown, barely disguised under the tightly fitting leotards, always fascinated Mallarmé, perhaps as an attribute of the dancer's freedom, as is his very mobility.<sup>8</sup>

For this other one, contrasting with and admired by the orphan, appears sovereignly free, both of body and of speech, and his superior liberty was immediately apparent in his easy and uninhibited eating of the little one's piece of bread, partly effected so fast that we didn't even see it, and later continued as freely as his tricks and talk. In this quiet and silent scene, the calm hour before the show, it is he who introduces action and movement, all the words concerning him, "jaillir, vite, tours, prestesse, pirouetter," designating motion. But a peculiar tension is created by a certain weakening of verbal expression through the use of the narrative infinitive, present and past participles, or even nominalization, from the acrobat's very arrival on the scene, "partagé, jailli, de pirouetter," and then later again with "de triompher en élevant" and "de mordre." This stylistic device not only creates tension, but, by keeping in check the very motion whose quickness and ease the verbs describe, somehow catches and fixes this motion in the very act.

The acrobat contrasts with the two other children not only because of his physical superiority, which is the outer sign of his having found his vocation and that he already is, rather than still becoming, freely himself; but his speech,

a happy torrent of slang, which swallows up the orphan's only line, a melancholy one "je n'en ai pas," underlines the theme of orphanage by contrast in stressing his own strong sense of belonging. For he is securely attached not only to the whole tribe of homeless performers--those gypsies forever wandering on the fringe of society--but particularly to his own father and mother, and thus doubly to "sa race."

And his language, "c'est farce, un père"--which was much less rich with "c'est amusant un père" in "L'Orphelin"--is not only fittingly "[de] la langue populaire," but at the same time evokes the type of show characteristic of the fair: "farce, pièce dramatique et souvent simple dialogue où l'on emploie les plaisanteries hasardées et les lazzis burlesques," and of which the circus child seems to be giving us a small sample, as he tells about his life, which is show life. Among his kind, art and life are inseparable so that, while not in the show, but waiting for it to begin, he puts on a show, already resembling his father, who is so thoroughly an artist that even when he is ill, he performs his "grimaces aussi belles." The father is a clown, for his feat is to make faces; and, therefore, the expression "que bouda la soupe," to tell us that he could not eat, is particularly funny here, for it literally means that "the soup made faces" at him, "bouder" almost being synonymous with "faire des grimaces." Whether the older clown got the ringmaster's "claques et coups de pied" because he was sick or whether it

was the other way around, is not quite clear. And the sentimental note of "L'Orphelin," which did not have our marvelously suggestive idiom and read "même l'autre soir où l'on a mis en terre mon petit frère, il faisait des grimaces plus belles quand le maître lui lançait des claques et des coups de pied," has happily disappeared. It is really not even clear whether the "claques et des coups de pied" reveal some of circus life behind the scenes, or whether they were part of the "act," which suggests again how inextricably art and life are interwoven among the show people. And it is possibly their unreserved commitment to their art which makes the gypsies so attractive to the Poet, an outsider to society like they.

The young acrobat's triumphant "élevant ... la jambe avec aisance glorieuse" contrasts with the "coups de pied" received by the older clown, which suggests at once the strength and beauty of youth and its fugitiveness, and vaguely intimates the theme of Baudelaire's prose poem, "Le Vieux Saltimbanque."<sup>9</sup> "Il nous épate, papa" expresses not so much the child's admiration for his father, but for his father's showmanship, and, after a quick bite into the smaller one's piece of bread--the "régal chaste" both reminiscent of "repas supérieur" above and doubly ironic as juxtaposed with "mordre"--he begins to display his mother's talents, whose greatness is attested by public acclamation.

The orphan's motherlessness, "peut-être que tu es seul?" is passed over quickly by the other child, who now disappears

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as suddenly as he had appeared, for "la parade s'exaltait."  
 "Parade" here means "scènes burlesques données par les bateleurs à la porte de leur théâtre pour piquer la curiosité des passants et s'attirer des spectateurs," and "s'exaltait" is much more suggestive than "sa parade venait de commencer" of "L'Orphelin," because it not only indicates the long-awaited beginning of the show but evokes all the excitement and heightened intensity of the moment. This mood, along with the acrobat's last words, "drôle" and "rire," contrasts with the orphan's "moi, je soupirais," and his sudden sadness at not having parents, pointing back to the beginning of the poem, where it was expressed only in his eyes. The last sentence of "L'Orphelin," in its more explicit manner, helps clarify what is implied here: "Moi, je m'en allais tout seul, songeant que c'était bien triste que je n'eusse pas comme lui des parents." Again, in our sentence the sentimental note has been removed, but what comes out more clearly in the original is that the orphan does not merely regret having no parents, but rather that he does not have parents "comme lui," like the little showman. For our orphan, wandering "l'oeil vacant de famille" toward the gypsies, is already vaguely looking for the family of Poets, symbolized by these wandering entertainers.

And just as the little orphan is doubly burdened, by his past and also already by his future, so the poem itself in recalling the past prepares the future, so that it occupies

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within the recueil as decisive a moment as the one artistically fixed within the piece. The poem on the narrative level recalls a moment in the persona's youth, and at the same time it is an image of that moment when Man confronts his destiny alone, those threatening worlds both within and without, a moment which for Mallarmé was embodied in the modern myth of Hamlet.<sup>10</sup> And this figure, the incarnation of that moment suspended between the alternatives of action or refusal, acceptance or suicide, and which in Mallarmé's universe is symbolized by the twin figures of the white Hérodiade and the somber Igitur, encountered in almost all the early prose poems, is here recalled for the last time. At the same time "Réminiscence," in suggesting the association of poet and saltimbanque, that is poet and performer, and thus reaching back to the first poem of the recueil, foreshadows the following poem, "La Déclaration Foraine," where the poet performs, that is, mounts the fairground stage himself to entertain la foule, with poetry.<sup>11</sup>

## REMINISCENCE

## NOTES

- 1 I shall restrict my interpretation to "Réminiscence," as it appears in Divagations and only refer to "L'Orphelin" as it helps my reading of the former.
- 2 The Pléiade edition gives "L'Orphelin" in full in the notes (OC pp. 1559-60). Paxton, The Development, pp. 18-19, gives a minute listing of the "variants," but his subsequent discussion of them, pp. 19-20, more enumerative than synthetic, tells us nothing important about either poem.
- 3 The poem's title had undergone successive changes from "L'Orphelin" to "Le Petit Saltimbanque" to "Le Môme Sagace" before its final form. The intermediate titles, however, were not published but only mentioned in Mallarmé's correspondence:
 

Le titre définitif, Réminiscence, ne fut adopté par Mallarmé que pour la publication du poème dans Pages; l'auteur lui avait donné, d'abord, dans sa pensée, ceux de le Petit saltimbanque (lettre à Deman, 19 juillet 1888) et de le Môme Sagace, (30 juillet 1888). Une lettre du 15 septembre 1888 au même éditeur indique pour la première fois le titre Réminiscence et date vraisemblablement la mise au point de la seconde version (OC p. 1560).
- 4 It goes without saying that this image and theme reflect Mallarmé's early loss of his mother (which, as we saw, influenced several of the early prose poems) and the neglect experienced through his father's remarriage shortly

thereafter. And that these facts contributed to form the poetic vocation itself cannot be questioned. Kurt Wais, Mallarmé, p. 48, goes so far as to see a direct causal relationship here: "Mit dem jähen Bewusstsein des Kleinen, elternlos zu sein, began jene Störung im inneren Wachstum, ohne die es den dichterischen Funken nicht gäbe."

- 5 In "L'Orphelin" these trees, in their sickliness, "les arbres dont le vent cassait le bois mort," were most reminiscent of the trees whitened by the dust of time of "Le Phénomène Futur."
  
- 6 This device is similar to what Leo Spitzer in Stilstudien (München: Huber, 1961), p. 125, calls "Inszenierende" Adverbialbestimmungen, which he feels are characteristic of "newer French literature"; he does not mention Mallarmé, however, in the chapter he devotes to the subject. We are reminded, of course, of Mallarmé's predilection for the elaborate adverb to open a sentence or line, more notable in his verse poetry than in his prose.
  
- 7 The "quinquet" is, according to Littré, "une sorte de lampe inventée vers 1800 à laquelle le fabricant Quinquet a donné son nom"; and he then goes on to describe this oil lamp.
  
- 8 Richard, L'Univers, pp. 96-97, discusses the psycho-erotic implications of nudity in Mallarmé's poetry.

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- 9 Baudelaire, Poèmes en Prose, 71-75. Here the poet-persona contrasts the carefree activity of the younger showpeople with the misery of the old "saltimbanque," with whom he then openly identifies:

Je viens de voir l'image du vieil homme de lettres  
qui a survécu à la génération dont il fut le brillant  
amuseur; du vieux poète sans amis, ... dégradé par sa  
misère et par l'ingratitude publique, et dans la  
baraque de qui le monde oublieux ne veut plus entrer!"  
(p. 74)

Although this theme is suggested here, it is not nearly as fully developed as it will be in "La Déclaration Foraine," where the persona will put on a "charity performance" for the old clown.

- 10 René Taupin in "The Myth of Hamlet in France in Mallarmé's Generation," Modern Language Quarterly, XIV (1953), 432-47, discusses Hamlet's significance in the 19th century, and the transformation of the myth from Romanticism to Laforgue. And Charles Chassé in "Le Thème de Hamlet chez Mallarmé," Revue des Sciences Humaines, 77-78 (1955), 157-69, outlines how Mallarmé, influenced by theatre and painting, appropriated and subsequently transformed the figure of Hamlet, which pervades his poetry from such early verse pieces as "Le Guignon" [original version] and "Le Pitre Châtié" through "Igitur" and "Un Coup de dés."
- 11 Wallace Fowlie in Mallarmé (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 243-44, discusses "Réminiscence" pointing to its relationship with Hamlet, whose significance for the poet

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he explains as follows:

Hamlet has to play many parts in his tragedy; the jilted lover, the friend of the two courtiers, the king's nephew, the avenging son, the son of his mother. Only briefly in his soliloquies does he manifest the part he didn't invent: the grief-stricken son unable to execute the revenge and whose mind wavers under the tragic burden. To continue living he needs a theatre, a play in which to test himself and the world he knows. To live one's own part is not sufficient for Hamlet and for the poet. A scene has to be constructed by them in which their destiny may be re-enacted theatrically. In his ordinary life a man, in his lack of knowledge and imperfect vision, is unable to comprehend his own fatality. Only by projecting his life into an art form, a Shakespeare tragedy or a Mallarmé poem, is he able to discover some reasonableness in the mystery that is his (p. 244).

The last sentence in particular points to what I have developed in my discussion of the preceding poem, namely that the poet, through his art creates meaning in his world.

## CHAPTER X

### LA DECLARATION FORAINE

This prose poem, stylistically the most difficult of the recueil, is, with the exception of "Conflit," possibly one of the latest not only of composition but also of conception. For there are no earlier versions known, and the piece, published for the first time in 1887, appears practically unchanged in Divagations.<sup>1</sup> The stylistic virtuosity of the poem renders its translation extremely complicated, and the complications show themselves already in the title, of which both words carry more than one meaning. "Déclaration" here means both "déclaration publique" and "aveu d'amour"; and while "foraine" immediately suggests the foire setting of "Le Phénomène Futur" and "Réminiscence," it also means "foreign, strange,"<sup>2</sup> with each signification, though seemingly excluding the others, being of equal importance in the context of our poem.

The anecdote is about the sunset carriage ride of the persona and a lady friend out into the suburbs where they pass by a fair; the lady wants to visit it. As they come to an empty stand, the lady suddenly decides to mount the stage, and as a crowd of onlookers begins to gather, the poet-persona



entertains them by reciting a poem celebrating the beautiful woman on the stage.

The first word of the poem itself, a noun set off from the rest of the sentence by an exclamation mark, like the beginning of "La Gloire," sets the mood of the first-person narrator as well as the opening scene, and at the same time establishes a tension by contrast with the title and the whole world of the poem indicated by it. "Le Silence," resonant in "songes, bercement," and "assoupissant," is a condition of predilection for Mallarmé,<sup>3</sup> a state of being denoting absence--not only of noise, but of agitation, and passion even, a state almost of the absence of existence and being--out of which alone, paradoxically, the essence of things, which is poetry, is born.

And now the scene unfolds, with the narrator riding in a coach in the company of a lady, who will recognize her portrait in the poem, in which she is a figure, however, for "toute femme." She is dreamily stretched out by his side--or, though really there, does she perhaps seem more like part of his mental world, a dream, "ainsi que songes"?--lulled by the gentle motion of the carriage, whose wheels appease the interjection of the flowers bending under them. So silent seems this dream-like ride that the flowers' weak resistance even is calmed; but "interjection" by association suggesting passion, "partie du discours qui exprime les passions," do these flowers, as a beautiful manifestation of a hidden

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sexuality and so resembling the "femme," with which they alliterate, suggest erotic passion and thus a hidden tension under the surface calm? This calm, at any rate, would be broken were the narrator to compliment his lady aloud on her costume, all the mystery of which constitutes a gift to him who lives or dreams this privileged moment. "Ne pouvant ... que suggérer" has as its antecedent probably still "quelque interrogatrice toilette," which, despite all this chance nearness, is only able to suggest not only the distance suggested by her face, but a perfect equilibrium. For just as this elegance is at once provocative and protective, so on her face the witty smile and its dimple, establish a perfect balance of nearness and familiarity on the one hand, and distance and reserve on the other--for the dimple evokes the physical charms of the woman's face, while the "sourire spirituel" suggests the disembodiment of the physical expression of her laughter.

But the harmony is now abruptly broken as reality erupts and interrupts the ideal moment, the direct brevity of the short phrase emphasizing the break. And in the remainder of the long sentence, the dying moment's bliss is contrasted with reality's crass vulgarity in which it is mercilessly swallowed up. The sunbeam felt luxuriously on the landau's varnish is an emanation of brightness, warmth and sumptuous magnificence, but dying there like the dream itself and the sun which it reflects.<sup>4</sup> For there was "trop de tacite

félicité," and so the poet-persona's favorite hour is now submerged in a violent outcry, somewhat reminiscent of "le désespoir d'un cri" of the sunset of "Le Phénomène Futur." "Avec orage" menaces with all its figurative connotations of revolt, war, danger, and passion--the threat of multitudes, already foreshadowing some of the poem's later moments, and contrasting with "Le Silence!" And "dans tous les sens à la fois et sans motif" underlines the atmosphere of disorder and confusion, the wild profusion of matter with its "rire strident ordinaire des choses" which now replaces the "spirituel sourire" of a beautifully mysterious and silent face. This grating "rire strident" of things with their "cuivrerie triomphale" is reminiscent of "les objets neufs avec leur hardiesse crierde" of "Frisson d'Hiver"; but while the silent companion of that early piece shared the poet's feelings and soul, this poem's lady does not.

"La cacophonie à l'ouïe de quiconque" onomatopoetically renders the discord it signifies. This discord remains shrilly present to whoever "un instant écarté, plutôt qu'il ne s'y fonde, auprès de son idée," one who, like the narrator, fails fully to abandon himself to the ideal, and thus remains haunted by existence. This passage is highly reminiscent of Igitur where, as the hero does, in fact, almost fully "melt into" the realm of pure essence, one after another "les choses" disappear about him, including his own existential manifestation, namely his mirror image. "Un instant

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écarté ... auprès de son idée," however, was that perfect moment of silence with its intimation of absence, now drowned in the tumultuous uproar of existence round about.

And it is toward this noisy commotion that the narrator's companion feels drawn and draws him: the fairground and "fête," under whose spell he, too, will fall. And so it is she--"l'enfant voiturée dans mes distractions" suggesting both the real woman riding beside him and the ideal one of his reveries, thus juxtaposing inner and outer, or essential and existential, realms--who draws him "out of himself" and into the apparently banal festivity, which she announces happily. "J'obéis" introduces the tone of chivalry and courtly love, which will be predominant throughout the poem, and which was already vaguely suggested at the opening with the gallant note of secrecy which at once acknowledged and masked the identity of the Lady celebrated. And this motif of fin amour will be supported by a vocabulary cluster of terms such as: "gonfalon, tambour, exploit, héros, altesse, honneur, péril, Madame," not the least of which is "obedience" to one's lady.

But the narrator needs to orient himself in the very disorder, and his "besoin d'explication" is one plausible for a poet's mind, a "figurative" one, which he then immediately symbolizes in a beautiful image: the lighting up of lamps--those of the fairground--in the evening dusk, in which his mind discovers--or creates--an order of garlands and

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attributes, purposefully arranged wreaths and emblems, that is a design. And so we recognize the poet and his "recherche assoupie d'imaginations ou de symboles" of the little theatre of "Un Spectacle Interrompu." For this need to create meaning, only compensation to the shock experienced by the harsh clash of dream and reality, touches in passing Mallarmé's basic theme of the defeat of chance, of hasard by the poetic mind; and the lamps coming to life in the falling evening recall the multitude of stars on the night sky, which become meaningful as constellations, the final image of the "Coup de dés." At the same time, our poem is a demonstration, again, of the creation of meaning, the ideal, that is poetry, out of chance circumstances.

As the narrator now definitely gives up "solitude," mentioned here for a last time, and throws himself with a mockingly chivalric show of daring, "même avec bravoure," into the violent confusion "naguères fui dans une gracieuse compagnie," which conveys both a précieux and highly courtly flavor, she, in keeping with the rules of fin amour, accepts his service without surprise, a belle dame sans merci ready for adventure and relying on her knight with her "bras ingénu." "Ingénu," originally a feudal term meaning "noble and free," by extension points back to the youthful beauty of the "enfant voiturée" above. They enter the fairground, their eyes on the rows of barracks, and walk down its center walk, to both sides of which the occasion's confusion,



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echoing noisily everywhere, is spread out. And so this setting, already evoked several times in these prose poems, is most fully developed here, as almost a miniature medieval world, where the crowd for a brief time limits, or encloses, its universe, and of which our aristocratic couple will briefly, but magically, become a part.

The following sentence not only "is about" an aristocratic attitude amidst the masses whose amusements appear to it like "assauts d'un médiocre dévergondage," but it "reflects" this attitude in a style so highly précieux, beginning with the rather cumbersome, but somewhat typical, long adverb, which is at the same time a term of jurisprudence, juxtaposed with a military term, that one cannot miss the ironic flavor. And ironically, too, this vulgarity does divert the couple's "stagnation," again a highly precious latinism to indicate merely that they stopped walking, to look at the sunset. "Crépuscule" here not only designates the sunset, but, by its etymological association, creperus, suggests an uncertain state of transition, not only of the sky, but within the poem, that of passing from the introduction to the action proper, whose occasion is the "humain spectacle, poignant," while the sunset's "nue incendiaire" again foreshadows the "déclaration foraine" itself. The "touching human spectacle" is touching because of the absence of the human: an apparently empty, miserable shanty, "renié," or abandoned, by a multicolored facade or big-lettered inscription, which adorn other buildings,

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And now, similarly to the little theatre of "Un Spectacle Interrompu," which was transformed into the absolute stage of a cosmic drama, this poor shack is endowed by the poet with an aura of sanctity, contrasting sharply with its actual shabbiness. In fact, this whole paragraph has that peculiar tension created by the repeated juxtaposition of trivial and sublime imagery, couched in a tone of transparent irony, which barely veils the tragic, and which strongly recalls "Réminiscence." Thus, the "matelas décousu," hiding the lowly stage, or marking it, parodies not only heavy velvet theatre curtains, but "les voiles dans tous les temps et les temples," which, in its very compression and at the same time vagueness, is infinitely suggestive. For "dans tous les temps" evokes the mythological past of the race, with "temples" intimating not only churches, but the temples of antiquity, perhaps even the Temple of Jerusalem and its Veil of costly material hung on the two columns separating the sanctuary and hiding the Holy of Holies, perhaps vaguely suggested here by "l'arcane," the mystery. For the absent showman had hung his dismantled mattress cover here "pour improviser l'arcane," which, while conferring on the sideshow the spirituality of a ritual performance, at the same time once more foreshadows "la déclaration foraine," to be, in fact, "improvised" by the poet performer. The show tents, then, are the holy places

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of that universe enclosed, for a time, by the limits of the fairground.

But now, in sharp contrast to the sublimity inherent in the stage, some of the human misery indicated by that poor mattress shred is suggested, and also, ironically, by an evocation of the past: the hungry nights--visited not by marvelous dreams but only the nothingness of hunger-inspired nightmares--spent on it, before its transformation, by its starving owner. Yet, reminiscent of "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," the miserable performer's hunger is sublimated to a kind of devotional abstinence by "jeûne," in harmony with the ambiance created above. The mystery of the "fête" had, however, transformed the uninspired one, so that he had made of his bitter nights' companion his "gonfalon d'espoirs en lièsse," the sign, by association, of his readiness for daring feats. For the daily misery seems excluded from the fraternal and festive magic of the fairground universe,<sup>5</sup> which bans both loneliness, "des souliers nombreux y piétinant," and hunger, its mysterious atmosphere being such that it arouses "aux profondeurs des vêtements ... [le] dur sou" to emerge, thus causing the inanimate, even, to come to life, so that no one can resist the spirit. And, therefore, "lui, aussi" had rendered himself, saved himself, by sheer faith alone, "de tout denué sauf de la notion qu'il y avait lieu pour être un des élus" ironically playing with the Doctrine of Salvation by Faith--rather than Works. Thus, guided not by talent,

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but the sheer faith inspired by the fair, he had yielded to its calling, in order to, if not sell, at least show--and the "mais quoi" now reminds us that "he" is not there at all, but absent, and had only been put on the scene, as it were, due to this very absence, which left the poet-persona free to create him. "Très prosaïquement" undercuts the preceding speculations with the simple conjecture that, perhaps, the absence of a trained rat prevents the show from going on; and this brief evocation of the most humble kind of "animal act" mocks "l'arcane!" above. Or did this imaginary "beggar" count on a display of his own physique to flatter popular taste? "L'athlétique vigueur de ses muscles" by association ironically juxtaposes the sorry figure of the starveling evoked above with the youthful beauty and strength of athletes. But at the same time, the irony hides, barely, the tragic, which surges particularly out of the final part of the sentence, which superficially merely gives a possible explanation for the absence of the trained rat, perhaps caused "comme cela résulte souvent de la mise en demeure de l'homme par les circonstances générales." And "mise en demeure" here plays both with its meaning as a legal term, "interpellation faite au débiteur, pourqu'il ait à remplir ses obligations," and its figurative one; but the humorous intimation that this particular show business may have fallen prey to bankruptcy almost disappears behind the most basically tragic of themes, which Mallarmé expresses with stark directness in his essay on "Hamlet":



... car il n'est point d'autre sujet, sachez bien: l'antagonisme de rêve chez l'homme avec les fatalités à son existence départies par le malheur (OC p. 300).

But these meditations and the long reverie about the chimerical owner of the shanty are now interrupted with an imperative "Battez la caisse," proposed by the very real companion. "Madame ..." not only again veils her identity, but underlines the chivalric note, as it was formerly the title reserved "aux seules femmes des chevaliers," and this note is reinforced with "seule tu said Qui," echoing "une qui voit clair ici" of the beginning, and the gallant secrecy of fin amour. Further, "en altesse" not only indicates her fitting haughtiness of tone, but, at the same time, paints, with a fine hint of irony, the portrait of a courtly lady. As she points thus to the old drum, there rises from it its equally old owner, perhaps the guardian of the forsaken stage, who now uncrosses his idle arms to indicate to them that there will be no show, with "théâtre" here for the first time actually named in the piece; but "sans prestige," which on the narrative level designates the lowliness of the little stage, suggests etymologically, praestigium, that this theatre is no longer capable of creating the illusion of sorcery and magic, and, thus, has lost its vital powers, like the speechless old showman and the silent drum, his companion. Yet, the life-long fellowship, perhaps, with this "instrument de rumeur et d'appel," which half ironically again evokes the world of knightly adventure and at the same time vaguely the

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masses' threatening discontent, makes the old one beat his drum," [le] séduisit à son vacant dessein."<sup>6</sup>

The following section of this long sentence is an example of a Mallarméan analogy, as brilliant as the precious jewel which is one of its terms. The method of "raccourci" leaves the narrator's questions to his companion unstated, to be merely suggested by "le manque de réponse," which creates "l'égnime." The poet likens her mystery to a jeweled pin closing her blouse, because her mystery, like her jewelry, is an adornment, and because her mysteriousness "closes her mouth" as it were, the way a jeweled pin clothes her blouse and veils her body.

But she is already engulfed by the crowd whom the drum has attracted, "engouffrée" vaguely hinting at the danger of the moment whose mock military ambiance is suggested with "halte" and the beating of the drum. "Ma surprise de pitre coi," in character with the narrator's attitude and his role as his lady's servant and fool, directly recalls the verse poem "Le Pitre Châtié," and indirectly the prose poem, "Le Phénomène Futur," in preparing for his part as performer at the fair. And his speechlessness, "coi," is already broken as he automatically assumes his role of montreur, with the boniment, "invariable et obscur d'abord pour moi-même," and deafened by the drum's noise, beginning to pour out of him mysteriously; for he, too, now has fallen under the fair's magic spell and from spectator turned performer.<sup>7</sup>

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And, in keeping with the tenets of chivalry, our aristocratic couple gives a charity performance for the old man,<sup>8</sup> who, by a brilliant synecdoche, "nimbe en paillasson," is likened to a saint, saying a prayer of thanks for the alms collected for him, "joignant deux paumes séniles." But this clause is as difficult as it is brilliant, for the synecdoche, "straw halo," is at the same time a totally original image for "hat," and subject of "joignant deux paumes séniles," with the past participle "vidé" floating somewhat lost at the end of the sentence. For it does not agree with the senile palms; if it goes with "remerciement," it might mean "thanks poured forth," which sounds unlikely. Most likely, "vidé" modifies the hat itself, suggesting that the narrator had collected the pennies in it and now emptied it before the grateful old man. But this interpretation limits our vision of the setting to that of a straw halo emptied into two senile palms joined by the gesture of giving thanks. I have the feeling that both readings: the old man wearing his straw hat which makes him look like a medieval saint, and the narrator's having collected the receipts in the hat now emptied before the old man, are somehow compressed into one richly evocative phrase.

The collection completed, the narrator now waves, in knightly fashion, "les couleurs," either of the hat itself, or by extension of the old man's little theatre, namely that poor mattress shred, above referred to as "gonfalon d'espoirs,"

as a signal from afar for the crowd that the show is to begin. And the "je me coiffai" here parodies the donning of the helmet before action: "prêt à fendre la masse debout en le secret de ce qu'avait su faire avec ce lieu sans rêve l'initiative d'une contemporaine de nos soirs."

But now her entrée en scene, set off from the rest of the poem, naive and incomprehensible at once, and with "emergeait" vaguely suggesting a rising out of water, is reminiscent of the Birth of Venus image of "Le Phénomène Futur," with the foule, "cent têtes," figuring as the sea from which the apparition rises and into which it will later again disappear.

The following comparison, of the sudden bright beam of light striking the figure on the stage, with the lucidity of an idea striking the narrator, both illuminations flashing forth simultaneously and "électriquement," links inner and outer or mental and factual events. And the resulting "calculation," that the woman, not without anything but her mere presence, but rather without anything by her elegant presence, amply repays the crowd for the alms exacted from it, recalls the opening of the poem, where, even in the narrator's private world, symbolized by the landau, the companion's beauty was celebrated in her dress as much as in her features. This balance between the artificial and the natural is charmingly rendered here with "elle, selon que la mode, une fantaisie ou l'humeur du ciel circonstanciaient sa beauté." Not only does

this celebration of elegance recall the Baudelairean inheritance with its cult of the artificial, but it perfectly fits the courtly ambiance of our poem, which, in turn, reflects that Mallarméan préciosité and delicate refinement which produced LA DERNIERE MODE and, above all, the very style of "La Déclaration Foraine."

Again, the essential ingredients of theatre, "danse ou chant," are evoked by their absence, but the audience's dangerous presence, "cohue," dictates the narrator's course of action, the sentence ironically alluding to the two knightly duties of charity to the poor and the defense of ladies in peril. For the lady's "exhibition" seems indeed too "subtile" for the general comprehension of the vulgar audience, for they appear to be losing interest, and the only power in the world the narrator feels he can resort to is the absolute one of Metaphor, significantly capitalized, and surely a synecdoche for poetry, identifying the narrator of this poem, too, as a poet. "Dégoiser" not only undercuts somewhat ironically this tone, but, above all, the magnificent poem, which will be "spouted forth" until a certain enlightenment on their faces indicates that they, the crowd, believe that they are getting their money's worth. "Leur sécurité" is a synecdoche for them, who will, thus, by the "évidence impliquée en la parole," that is by the sonnet, be induced to "exchange their cheap coin for superior presumptions," an allusion to the alchemical operation of changing base metal into gold, the

gold being that revealed by the poet who will celebrate the lady's hair as a golden flame.

But before he begins, he gives a last glance at the apparition, all of whose beauty appears to be concentrated in her hair and which, therefore, becomes not only a synecdoche for, but the symbol of, that woman who represents, both dramatically in this little theatre, and as a figure--"la vivante allégorie"--in the poem, feminine beauty. And this burning hair is highly reminiscent of that of "Le Phénomène Futur," which was "une extase d'or." But, curiously, the hair is here so inextricably linked to the carefully described hat--of pale color and of crepe and decorated with flowers--which complements it, that they seem to melt into one another; for is it the hat which "fume puis éclaire" the hair with flowery magnificence--"de fastes de jardins" not only describing the flowers on the hat, but with "jardins" underlining the artificial--or is it the inverse? Further, the poet takes care to indicate that this lovely hat matches both dress and shoes, a dress animated by the woman wearing it, "statuaire," and the foot, a traditionally erotic image, "comme le reste hortensia," that is, immediately associated not with the woman's body, but with her costume and its pale color of the hydrangea blossom. The whole paragraph would, without any modification almost, perfectly fit the "Fashions" section of any of the issues of LA DERNIERE MODE.

And now the poet-persona makes "La Déclaration Foraine," that is he improvises a poem, which has become one of



Mallarmé's most famous sonnets, "La Chevelure vol d'une flamme."<sup>9</sup> The poem, in which the poet has "fixed" both the intensity and the fleetingness of beauty, and the passion it inspires, in the image of the flame which, like the sun itself, rises, mounts to a climax, and then dies, and which was foreshadowed in the prose poem's opening with the expiring sunset, falls into the dead silence of an uncomprehending crowd, similar to that of "Le Phénomène Futur." And nothing could better indicate this total lack of reaction but the poet's own absolute silence, before he pursues the "anecdote"--as though the magnificent poem had never even taken place, "RIEN de la mémorable crise ... N'AURA EU LIEU ... QUE LE LIEU" (OC p. 474-5). For the indifferent foule, from which the Poet rises--like his Muse from the "cent têtes"--and into which he returns, is, indeed, suggestive of the elemental sea whence the solitary Maître almost casts his "Coup de dés."

The lady celebrated has not understood her poem either, for she is already getting off the table, but, then, she had at this point lost her individual identity; for, similarly to the dancer who "n'est pas une femme qui danse, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu'elle n'est pas une femme, mais une métaphore" (OC p. 304), she had, in fact become "la vivante allégorie," and this designation, while indicating the woman's transformation, at the same time suggests, in its seeming contradiction, the tension between life and art. The woman served so gallantly--"mon aide à la taille afin d'en assoupir l'élan

gentiment à terre"--throughout the poem by the courtly poet, herself, in turn, serves him, as an occasion of poetry, as his Muse. For "courtly love" was never a way of life, but a way of art, and the Minnesänger is not a lover, but a singer.

His lady's "resigning her faction," again in mock-chivalric tone, "faute ... de faconde ultérieure" of the narrator, after the recitation of the "déclaration," is bitterly ironic, and reflects the isolation of the poet who now resorts to prose to put himself on the audience's level of understanding. And as he tries to convince them by flattery that they have had a complete show, expressing his previous "calculation," that the lady's elegance amply replaces the theatre's customary accessories, what keeps the crowd in the temporary "suspens de marque appréciative," long enough for our couple to disappear among them, is not, ironically, what he is saying, but their very incomprehension of his words. For, "ce naturel s'accommode de l'allusion parfaite que fournit la toilette toujours à l'un des motifs primordiaux de la femme, et suffit, ainsi que votre sympathique approbation m'en convainc," though prose, is that of a prose poet. When the narrator cuts short their dangerous surprise with "une affectation de retour à l'authenticité du spectacle," "affectation," which on the narrative level refers to method, "faux-semblant," at the same time suggests the manner, a "manière qui s'éloigne du naturel," which is one way to characterize this style.<sup>10</sup>

As our couple, submerged now in the crowd, in and with it is led to the exit "sur une vacance d'arbres et de nuit,"--an "emptiness" probably in contrast to the crowded little theatre inside--there is a momentary ambiguity--as if until the eyes get accustomed to the dark--for, is it "une vacance d'arbres," an absence of trees? But then "et de nuit" makes clear that they are stepping out into the night; and the trees, now, are perceptible. What might the festively white-gloved "enfantin tourlourou," so reminiscent of the "gant blanc des tourlourous" of "Petit Air Guerrier," be hanging back for, if not to dream, as the poet suggests humorously, of unstiffening those new gloves "à l'estimation d'une jarretière hautaine." But what does the striking image suggest but another reaction to the Beauty displayed inside, and celebrated with the "déclaration foraine," an uncomprehending one, though somewhat different from that of the crowd.<sup>11</sup>

The remainder of the piece is its conclusion, a dialogue which, similarly to a fable's moral which teaches its lesson, is about what the poem demonstrated: the creation of a poem, from its conception to its delivery and reception into the world. Yet this conclusion is an integral part of the whole structure, presented as a conversation of the hero and heroine, the Poet and his Muse, now alone again, as they were in the beginning, which closes the circle. And so the lady, both celebrated and rescued by her poet, characteristically

"consents" to thanking him for this double service, while drinking in the night air, "une bouffée droit à elle d'une constellation ou des feuilles," to regain the habitual coolness of her voice, fitting the distant smile we know. She had, of course, never lost her serenity, for Pure Beauty is self-confident. Her "j'ai dans l'esprit le souvenir de choses qui ne s'oublient" is enigmatic, as are her ways, for does it refer to her own display or its celebration by the poet? He, at any rate, accepts it as a compliment, which he must politely diminish, and reduces his magnificent creation to a mere convention, "lieu commun" here suggesting the formal rhetorical "lieux oratoires." She accepts it so, but indicates that, perhaps, without the occasion the poem would not have been born; and was she herself not doubly that, in being the one celebrated by it, and in having produced the need to utter it, that is "une impatience de gens" and the resulting "coup de poing brutal à l'estomac?" And what could better express this brutal, but practical and efficient midwifery of the public? The poet admits it, and "la rêverie," the new poem, "qui s'ignore et se lance nue de peur, en travers du public," at the moment of its birth, this fearful naked creation--reminiscent of "l'enfant d'une nuit d'Idumée" of "Don du Poème," almost too fragile to live through the night of its birth--also exposes its creator, "Une nudité de héros tendre," the poet hero. And he now not only explains the strange and literally foreign features of his creation, which

he takes care to point out to us in a footnote, but also that, just as he had needed the public, la foule, so did she, his companion. For would she have so clearly appreciated the refinement of his "boniment" without its repercussion from the many?

And again here under the jesting irony of the narrative level is hidden the serious business of poetry. For neither had the poem been received by a "multiple comprehension," nor is it certain that it had "charmed" the lady's mind. But the notion suggested by these words is the need of a work of art to create its audience; after the poem is born, it has to live in the world, and this life may well begin only after the poet's death.

What would better indicate the lack of understanding of the persona's companion, "une contemporaine," than this "perhaps," which either "received the poet's thought unchanged," or with which "she, the same, received it," either of which reading expresses the lady's indifference.

And so this prose poem, again about the poet's unique preoccupation, his art, also ends on a note of solitude, as did some of the early pieces, but especially "Un Spectacle Interrompu" and "Réminiscence." But at the same time, "La Déclaration Foraine" manifests, demonstrating in its anecdote and restating in its conclusion, the solitary artist's paradoxical need of "the others," la foule, without which, like the "montreur" of "Le Phénomène Futur," he would cease

to exist. It is perhaps for this reason that Mallarmé chose to place that piece, which, as I mentioned, was not the earliest composed, at the head of the recueil, where it appears like a still vague premonition--neither was the "montreur" directly identified as a poet, nor was he a first-person narrator--of the destiny unfolded here, both of and by the mature poet.

This paradoxical tension of the artist's need of both solitude and the multitude is reflected in his exigency of both silence and utterance; silence which is, as I indicated, almost like an absence of existence, which the poet needs to create its essence. Yet is it not the very meaninglessness of the world as it exists which sets the artist on his search for meaning and ideal order? Not only did our poet-persona need the fairground's haphazard array of lamps lighting up in the night in order to discover "guirlandes et attributs" there, but the Poet needs the night to see the stars, and these, in turn, to discover--or create--Constellations.

So as the poet needs both the absence of the world and its presence to conceive his Declaration, this declaration, even if it is a soliloquy, is a declaration to someone; the soliloquizing Hamlet needs the stage of the world, theatrum mundi, both to speak and to be heard, in order to find himself. And, aside from their traditional kinship, that of the Orpheus-singer with the entertainer, the troubadour with the harlequin, some of the secret relationship of poet and

showman lies in this: they both need la foule as proof of their existence, as the solitary Igitur needed his mirror image.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, then, "the others" perform a most vital function in the poetic act for the poet, who, in turn, performs for them. And as the ideal poet priest's performance is a mystery--"improviser ici l'arcane"--both to and for those who participate in the ritual, so the crowd in our poem, though not understanding that it beheld Pure Beauty, beheld it, however, only because the poet celebrated it before and for--and as we now know with--them.<sup>13</sup> But in order to celebrate the Ideal, the poet sacrifices his own existence by transmuting it into art, which will be the theme of "Le Nénuphar Blanc," and which was rendered in our poem by a courtly poet-persona, for whom a beautiful woman, "la flamme," was not an occasion of love, but of poetry.

## LA DECLARATION FORAINE

## NOTES

- 1 The only variant, from the poem's appearance in Pages, five years before Divagations, is an insignificant one of punctuation (OC p. 1553).
- 2 While the adjective "forain" carries today principally the meaning "traveling, itinerant, or strolling," Littré lists as its first definition "qui est dehors, étranger," and as its second one "qui n'est pas du lieu"; then he makes the following point: "bien que forain signifie qui est étranger, et non qui est de la foire, par confusion de sens, comme si, dans marchand forain, forain voulait dire qui est de la foire, théâtre forain, petit théâtre dressé à la foire." As so often, Mallarmé here certainly plays with multiple meanings, the "foreign," that is English sonnet, which he takes care to indicate in a footnote, and the "fairground" performance, so important in this poetic universe.
- 3 We recall the silence pervading "Plainte d'Automne" and "Frisson d'Hiver"; and we will find the notion of silence richly developed in the late prose poems "Le Nénuphar Blanc," "La Gloire," and, above all, "Conflit."
- 4 The celebration of reflected sunlight, which prepares already for the sonnet within our prose poem, is reminiscent



of Mallarmé's verse poetry, especially the almost contemporary love sonnet "M'introduire dans ton histoire," and "Tout Orgueil fume-t-il du soir," of exactly the same year, but particularly "Victorieusement fui le suicide beau," which celebrates the sunlight's death and subsequent resurrection in the beloved's hair and is, thus, thematically similar to the sonnet in our poem. The image of reflected evening sun is, of course, part of the major theme of the solar drama, brilliantly exposed in Davies, Le Drame Solaire.

- 5 I have not been able to find "frérial" in Littré, nor in such dictionaries as Larousse and Robert, or the bilingual Heath; and though its meaning is obviously "brotherly" from frère, it strongly suggests "férial," not only phonetically, but particularly in our context.
- 6 The quoted clause is not entirely clear on account of the equivocal possessive adjective, which could imply that the old man yielded to the lady's seemingly meaningless, or empty, plan, or that he was seduced from his own vacant scheme, namely to do nothing. This and similar willfully created ambiguities contribute to that "technique of strangeness," to which James L. Kugel has devoted a book, The Techniques of Strangeness in Symbolist Poetry (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1971). He characterizes Mallarmé's particular technique as "Grammatical Chaos," and then discusses only "Soupir" as an example of it.

- 7 The period after "d'abord," line 14, p. 281, of the Pléiade edition, is a printing mistake; for no punctuation mark at all appears in the 1897 edition of Divagations (p. 30) at this passage between "d'abord" and "Entrez," except the opening quotation mark.
  
- 8 The poet's giving alms to the old saltimbanque recalls "Le vieux Saltimbanque" of Baudelaire, as we mentioned in the preceding chapter, but the two prose poems differ so widely artistically, that one does not dare compare them. Baudelaire "explains" where Mallarmé "transposes" his ideas into poetry.
  
- 9 This sonnet was for the first time published in the body of our prose poem, but subsequently placed by the poet into his volume of verse poetry, the Deman edition of the Poésies (1899), prepared by him; and it appears in the Pléiade edition (OC p. 53) also at the place which Mallarmé had assigned it in Poésies. One of the most famous of Mallarméan sonnets, it has been thoroughly explicated many times, sometimes with more or less brief references to its original context. Some of these analyses of "La Chevelure vol d'une flamme" are as follows: Charles Chadwick, Mallarmé sa Pensée dans sa Poésie (Paris: Corti, 1962), pp. 101-102; Chassé, Les Clefs, who has a whole chapter on "Les Poèmes sur la Chevelure," pp. 190-200; Cohn, Toward the Poems, pp. 147-152; Davies, Le Drame,

pp. 165-191; Fowlie, Mallarmé, pp. 39-42; Noulet, L'Oeuvre, pp. 194-200; Richard, L'Univers, pp. 347-349; Thibaudet, La Poésie, p. 196; Wais, Mallarmé, pp. 589-599. In view of this profusion of easily available analyses, I will refrain from offering mine.

- 10 This smiling and gentle self-irony, whether intended or not in this particular case, is frequent, especially in the poet's late work.
- 11 I would not go quite so far as Thibaudet, La Poésie, p. 70, who identifies the soldier boy, who wants to touch the vision, i.e., the poetry, with "la critique," though his suggestion is far more precise than mine:

Et le malentendu entre Mallarmé et la critique n'est-il pas ici symbolisé? Le public en général, la critique en particulier, tiennent à pouvoir toucher le mollet de la Muse. C'est même cela souvent que l'on entend par ce mot: comprendre. Sentir les strophes du Lac effleurer comme des rames une eau musicale n'est rien, si l'on n'a résolu de palpitants problèmes sur Madame Charles, et dégourdi, comme les gants blancs du bleu, des doigts tachés d'encre à l'estimation de sa jarretière.

It is true, however, that every single critic who has had anything to say about "La Déclaration Foraine" in particular, has at the same time felt called upon to discuss Mallarmé and Mery Laurent; this is also true for most of the analyses of "La Chevelure vol d'une flamme." So, Perhaps, one could see the little soldier as a symbol for "biographical criticism."



- 12 Richard, L'Univers, p. 346, also arrives at the idea that the foule finally reflects the poet, as had formerly the mirror, but his associations are rather psycho-erotic than philosophical, as are mine. He, for example, makes no association with Igitur in this connection, but rather with the Faune, but he concludes similarly:

Le même besoin qui l'amenait à se faire le poète du miroir, le pousse donc maintenant à rechercher l'épreuve d'un "éclat multiple." ... Privée d'attestation divine, la pensée tendra, et surtout à partir des années 1880-1885, à trouver une consécration dans l'appui de cette nouvelle "divinité éparse," la foule.

- 13 Block, Symbolist Drama, pp. 78-79:

Though intimate, Mallarmé's poetic recitation was envisaged as a public ceremony and a means of revealing spiritual truths to the masses. This aspiration seems to go back at least as far as Mallarmé's participation in the Théâtre de Valvins: "Un de ses vœux," reports Paul Margueritte, "était que le poète, en des salles immenses, devant des foules attentives, prononçât les phrases lapidaires de l'enseignement esthétique, d'où tout découlait. Seul, le poète sachant, affirmait-il, révéler la beauté, source de vertu parfaite, aux masses."

## CHAPTER XI

### LE NENUPHAR BLANC

This is by far the best known of Mallarmé's prose poems; both composed and published for the first time in 1885, it remained practically unchanged in its successive publications.<sup>1</sup> One of the poem's great attractions lies, undoubtedly, in the beauty of its perfect marriage of thought and expression, so that, though of the "late style," its difficulties and obscurity seem to dissolve smoothly as we enter the gentle flow of its opening passages.

The title, which introduces the major symbolic image of the piece, at the same time discloses both its setting of a water world, and one of its principal themes, that of absence, symbolized, as so often in Mallarmé, by the color of his predilection, the white of pure negation or nonexistence. And though of a flower, this whiteness is of one not rooted in the earth, but a floating, shimmering blossom, which appears like matter refined and sublimated into pure form, the ideal, by nature herself. This pure white absence is reminiscent, as always with this poet, of the virgin page prior to the birth of poetry.<sup>2</sup>



The poem's narrative tells of a summer day, which the poet-persona spends traveling in his little boat on the Seine. Having lost himself in his rowing, he realizes, as the boat comes to a sudden stop in a clump of reeds, that he has run aground near the property of a friend's friend, a lady to whom he was supposed to introduce himself. But instead of meeting her, he avoids the real encounter in order to create the poetic image of the idealized woman, the heroine of "Le Nénuphar Blanc."

And while the first word of the poem introduces a first-person narrator, this opening sentence, at the same time, suggests a former gradual sinking away of his consciousness, with the verb reaching back to an anterior past, between which and the present moment, in his consciousness, there was only absence. For, from the absence of his mind, with his eyes unseeing and, like an embryo's, turned inward "sur l'entier oubli" of his journey, the narrator is coming back into the existence of his consciousness. He had lost himself in a rhythm, the rowing motion of his body and the gliding of his boat, "un grand geste net assoupi," on the water, from which, as from a Lethean oblivion, his awareness now emerges--and into which it had seemingly disappeared--to be born gently into time, that of a mid-summer day. "Comme le rire de l'heure coulait alentour" not merely describes this harmony of the One, consciousness of time, with the All, time flowing into space, but with its gentle vowels and softly



1

alliterating r's and l's renders the blissful, liquid, fluid, flowing of this water environment, which smoothly carries the drowsy dreamer. This instrumentation continues throughout the paragraph, with "frôlé, fila" and "yole" suggesting the continuity of the boat's gliding and the flowing of the water, while "l'étincellement stable d'initiales" onomatopoetically evokes its breaking up into sparkling, glittering globules, the transparent fragments of space and time in suspense.

The rower had been so unaware of his rowing, sharing the summer morning's apparent immobility and idleness, "tant d'immobilité paressait,"<sup>3</sup> its absence both of movement and activity, that he had not noticed the boat's slipping gently to a stop in a "bruit inerte"--"inerte" etymologically suggesting absence, again, of activity--which it made coming to a halt in a clump of reeds. And he did not fully realize that he had actually ceased to move along with the river until his eyes fell on the sparkling oars, which he had pulled in, again, without being aware of it. But this bright and insistent scintillation awakens the dreamer to his identity in the world. And this birth into existence is vaguely reminiscent of the opening of the preceding poem and its narrator's awakening from "le Silence!" into the outer world; but while it was harsh and shocking there, forcing the poet out of his solitude, it is gentle here, for he remains alone.

The occasion of his return, the "initiales sur les avirons," is richly symbolic, for "avirons," from virer, a

verb very important later on in the poem, reminds us that this drifting boat--in its drifting perhaps a symbol of the mind's subconscious wanderings--is not wind-driven, like a yawl, for example, but to be directed by the rower alone who, once awakened, will not leave its course to chance. For, though the little boat had floated almost into a chance encounter, symbolized by its getting caught in the reeds--which at the same time paradoxically mark the rower's intended destination--its pilot wakes up in time still to direct it. And the wet "initials," glittering in the sun, by their etymology, in ire, indicate the hero's entering the mysterious territory of his adventure, not without, at the same time, constituting a veiled erotic allusion.

"Qu'arrivait-il, où étais-je?" he tries to orient himself on the threshold between inner and outer worlds, with "arrivait" etymologically again alluding to the nautical venture.

In order to "see clearly" now, which by contrast recalls his "yeux au-dedans fixés" before, the narrator has to cross that gap of absence, and reach back, to his "départ tôt," "tôt" from tostus, "... brûlé, par assimilation de la rapidité de la flamme," leading directly into "ce juillet de flamme," an impression of the moment's atmosphere, which, not only by its image, but both phonetically and also by the visual arrangement of the letters, suggests light quivering in heat vibrations. "L'intervalle vif," the water flowing



among its vegetation, reinforces that moment, for "vif" refers not only to the water's flow, but also to the sunlight's play on its surface, and the triple alliteration of the v's, "l'intervalle vif ... végétations," conveys an agitation of flickering light, with the plants' secret energy, vegetatio, hidden under their sun-drenched sleep.

The traditional early departure for "l'aventure," with its rich associations, suggests the chivalric quest voyage, underlined with "en quête de floraisons d'eau." The water flowers indicate, again, that this quest is nautical, and so the traditional forest of the quest voyage transforms itself, accordingly, "en fluvial bosquet," both literally and magically a "water forest." At the same time, the water flowers point to that other aim, "reconnaître l'emplacement occupé par la propriété de l'amie d'une amie, à qui je devais improviser un bonjour," and also back to the title. The chivalric note comes out in the originally military "reconnaître," reinforced with "l'emplacement occupé," and this vocabulary of conquest has the erotic undertones of not only the subconscious voyage, but appropriate to the courtly love theme, developed in this poem as it was in the preceding one. Not only is "amie" also a term of fin amour, but the distance implied with "l'amie d'une amie" fits the world of Minne as beautifully as the identification of a courted lady by her property, which constituted, in fact, a medieval lady's worldly identity.

As in his absence of mind the narrator had seemingly become part of the "distrain ruisseau" on and by which he was driven along, his oarstrokes, too, had merged with surrounding nature's fundamental rhythms, "chasing" the boat along the lawns--or, impressionistically, the landscapes along the boat--inevitably and without stopping before any, the oars breaking their meaningless, because unseen, mirror reflections with the regularity and impassibility of day following day, season upon season, and year upon year. And this, "le même impartial coup de rame," recalls the gaslight of "Un Spectacle Interrompu," humming relentlessly "avec l'impartialité d'une chose élémentaire."

But then the boat had run aground, and "je venais échouer" vaguely suggests the "naufage" ever haunting the poetic sea voyage from "Brise Marine" to the "Coup de dés," while the obstacle hidden in the water, "quelque touffe de roseaux," is doubly the journey's "terme mystérieux." For as the narrator on the literal level reaches the limits of the sought-after "propriété de l'amie d'une amie," on a more obscure and hidden level of consciousness "touffe de roseaux" is associated with a Faun's erotic dreams--of having "divisé la touffe échevelée" of forest and water-dwelling nymphs espied in their "sommeils touffus," with his dreams' desires perpetuated, "ici les creux roseaux domptés/Par le talent," in a melody. Mysterious obstacles, moreover, characterize the traditional chivalric quest through the magic forest.

The river, both symbol and vehicle of the journey, becomes, at the destination, a proudly displayed pond, its "nonchaloir" underlining the stagnant water etymologically implied by "étang," which, while pointing to the end of the voyage, connotes, however, no dullness, for its ripples suggest the virtuality "des hésitations à partir qu'a une source." And the pond's virtuality, its promise of potentiality and unrealized possibilities, throws its charm over the whole adventure. "Source," echoing "ma course" above, evokes the notion of first origins associated with water,<sup>4</sup> and modulated in the birth motif--of the hero's consciousness--in the opening passages of the poem.

And now the narrator discovers that the obstacle of greenery on the water "masquait l'arche unique d'un pont"; bridges suddenly discovered in the forest being a traditional quest obstacle, whose mystery--where do they lead, are they to be crossed--the hero must solve.<sup>5</sup> Ours reveals itself as part of the unknown lady's estate, toward which the hero had drifted unconsciously. Significantly, however, he does not arrive at either entrance of the bridge, but at right angles to it, seeing the curve of its single arch spanning the water, its extension on the ground hidden, "prolongé, à terre, d'ici et de là, par une haie clôturant des pelouses." The little bridge's balanced symmetry is rendered with "d'ici et de là," with its two short syllables to either side of *their* conjunction.

This passage at the same time displays a significant image cluster, dominating the whole poem, namely the imagery of enclosure, introduced already with the boat, and then the pond, now reinforced with "une haie clôturant," whose insistence is almost redundant, since a hedge is by definition a clôture protecting or limiting a territory. This imagery will become more and more prominent, culminating finally in the swan's egg--whose shell will remain unbroken--and the closed "nénuphar" itself. The unknown one's park surrounding her is, again, by definition, an enclosure, and, at the same time stresses the imposition of the artificial upon the natural, already vaguely suggested above with "le ruban d'aucune herbe" and "pelouses."

Now moving from the description of the scene, the outer world, to the reflections aroused by it, the inner world, and which permit the narrator to cross those enclosures, the very sentence reflects a tension of "inside" and "outside," of the apparent and of the hidden. For, while having a certain tone of banality and triteness about it, "un joli voisinage, pendant la saison," and approaching the woman in the most distant and indirect manner, "la nature d'une personne qui ... ne pouvant être que conforme à mon goût," it, at the same time, suggests the closest intimacy. For the narrator is, in fact, entering her chosen "retraite aussi humidement impénétrable" revealing her innermost privacy to an unseen beholder.<sup>6</sup> The erotic suggestiveness of the





sentence strongly surges through the surface of its apparent nonchalance, reminiscent of those ripples on the pond. And it is this intense eroticism, not only veiled by politesse of language and attitude, but sublimated into the spirituality of aesthetics, which constitutes the tension of this poem, culminating finally in the "rapt de mon idéale fleur."

The woman alone with her mirror, "elle avait fait de ce cristal son miroir intérieur," evokes Hérodiade before hers, solitary also and separated from the world by "l'eau morne"--and of whom a glance had cost the beholder's life--while "l'indiscrétion éclatante des après-midi" recalls the Faun, already evoked above. And not only has the natural river become part here of an artificial park, but the pond and "la buée d'argent glaçant des saules" have become part of their owner, the willows' silvery mist the approaching lady's "limpid glance," and the water surface her "miroir intérieur." This is both a private pond, enclosed by bushes and trees, and at the same time the reflection of its solitary beholder's psyche, thus doubly enclosed, doubly "intérieur." "Glaçant," as well as "cristal," which etymologically suggest cold and ice, intimate an absence or refusal of passion, Hérodiade's virginity. The narrator, thus, did, indeed, evoke her "lustrale," which, in suggesting the purification of baptismal waters, vaguely recalls the birth motif, while also pointing to woman's sublimation in the poem.

The following paragraph leads back to the narrator's external attitude, that posture of one leaning forward to see without wanting to be seen, in which curiosity held him, and which foreshadows the narrator's stance in the opening of "L'Ecclésiastique." But then the poet extends that image beautifully, for he is "courbé ... comme sous le silence spacieux de ce que s'annonçait l'étrangère," bent as if under "spacious silence," that is pure absence, which is, however, pregnant with expectancy. And then he smilingly associates this submissive-looking pose with the potential enslavement imposed by "une possibilité féminine," which under an apparently distant tone hides, again, suggestions of intimacy, while both the notions of "esclavage" and distance befit the courtly motif. Now, haunted by his "démon," the poet creates another of those sparkling and surprising analogies, in comparing the potential bondage to the lady who inspires him, and who thus becomes part of the courtly poet, to the straps attaching the rower's feet to his boat, instrument of his mysterious journey--the boat which had drifted, into the enchanted garden. But since in this universe the poetic quest is repeatedly rendered as a sea voyage, the poet's magic instrument, which at the same time casts its spells on him, is his poetry.

But then a barely audible noise--and in this magic world noise is softened and diminished into an almost silence as with the initial "bruit inerte"--makes the musing hero wonder

whether the lady, again distantly and manneristically designated "l'habitante du bord," is approaching. Is she merely haunting his mind, "mon loisir," or really coming to the water's edge, "inespérément?" The sentence indicates not only a fusion, almost a confusion, of inner and outer worlds, but implies a preference for that of the imagination, for "inespérément," while literally meaning "unexpectedly," at the same time suggests the narrator's hope that the lady may not come.

And before the narrator continues his mental divagations, he seems to pause, pose a question, then pause again, and we notice, how almost every sentence now, some long, some short, becomes a separate paragraph. This typographical arrangement, so significant in the poem, is much more obvious in the original Divagations, where the spaces between paragraphs are wider. The poet here literally utilizes empty space--absence--poetically, the spacing between the sentences suggesting the pauses between the narrator's thoughts, so that the white of the paper itself makes the "Nénuphar" poem even whiter.<sup>7</sup>

But why did the walking stop?

It stopped in time--as had the hero's boat--for the foot, gracefully displayed in "La Déclaration Foraine" in its silken shoe, has a more subtle and elusive power if unrevealed. It is the rhythm of the imaginary feet, "qui vont, viennent, conduisent," which charms and leads the dreamer's

mind where the lady, who has become the absence of a mere shadow, wishes. And as she is enclosed in the misty elegance of batiste and lace, reminiscent of LA DERNIERE MODE, so are these unseen feet--"circonvenir" stressing at once the notions of enclosure and approach--by the skirt flowing on the ground, "affluent" in harmony with the water ambiance as is "dans une flottaison,"<sup>8</sup> echoing "floraisons d'eau" above. The elegant woman's walk appears like a rhythmically moving ship,<sup>9</sup> or like the floating white waterlily itself, which, though the steps' "initiative" vaguely intimates commencements of adventure reinforced with "s'ouvre," we know will remain closed. The concluding analogy merely suggested here is that of a gliding ship's prow throwing a misty train of foam behind its path with the flowing white lace folds thrown back "en traîne" by the walking feet, "double flèche savante," the veiled allusion to Cupid stressing their erotic attraction.

And, again, a pause, and then a question, "Connaît-elle un motif à sa station la promeneuse?" But the intricate style, again here, expresses so much more, as for example that tension suggested by the juxtaposition of "motif" and "station," where the notions of movement and its absence are played against each other, as later in the sentence "mentale somnolence" and "lucidité"; or the tone of "la promeneuse," which continues a modulation begun with "l'amie d'une amie," "l'inconnue," "l'étrangère," "l'habitante du bord," and

"la chère ombre," and which leads up to and prepares for  
 "la Méditative ou la Hautaine, la Farouche, la Gaie."<sup>10</sup>

To find out why she stopped walking would be to destroy the mystery by questioning, which, in the tradition of romance, breaks the magic spell. The narrator's raising his head beyond the reeds which hide him would expose him and, at the same time, bring him out of the magical drowsiness which permeates the poem and--as the reeds hide his dead--hides his lucidity. But the "trop haut la tête" further suggests the punishment of decapitation for having beheld the forbidden, again linking the Nénuphar lady to Hérodiade.

While not approaching, nor even looking at, the real one, the poet-persona--for the narrator more and more, if but indirectly, reveals himself a poet--addresses the lady in and of his imagination, with the courtly, general and distant "Madame," warning her that the revelation of her face would break the charm. "Précision" contrasts with the great vagueness of "chose installée ici par le bruissement d'une venue," designating his own arrival. And on one level, "ce charme instinctif d'en dessous" points, etymologically, to carmen, "d'en dessous" intimating a hidden melody and, at the same time, the poet's hiding in the reeds, potential instruments of his modulation, while "instinctif" refers back to that absence of lucidity designated above "mentale somnolence," all of which imagery is highly reminiscent of "L'Après-midi d'un Faune," as is, most of all, "la plus authentiquement

nouée, avec une boucle en diamant, des ceintures." And the allusion to the chastity belt--an enclosure somewhat ironically "authentiquement nouée"--with that other level of meaning of the sentence, namely the notion of charms vainly defended against an explorer, which reintroduces the martial love language, directly recalls the Faun's dream of the nymphs:

Moi, de ma rumeur fier, je vais parler longtemps  
Des déesses; et par d'idolâtres peintures,  
A leur ombre enlever encore des ceintures

But while he had, before that point, rejected art, "Tâche donc, instrument des fuites, o maligne/Syrinx, de refleurir aux lacs où tu m'attends!," our whole poem constitutes desire's sublimation and its modulation on those reed pipes. The buckle "en diamant," symbol of a hard purity become useless--for what can defend woman against the poet's dreams?--suggests its melting,<sup>11</sup> and recalls remotely the "separating of cold jewels" upon Hérodiade's nubility.

Again the poet warns the real woman not to approach and lean her face "sur le furtif seuil où je règne," his secret and literally "stolen" domain, where she (her particular features) would trouble his emotion, which is an aesthetic one. For that artistic transposition into "le délice empreint de généralité," which not only permits but demands the exclusion of the particular, and which transformed the companion of "La Déclaration Foraine" into "toute femme," in a somewhat Hegelian dialectic, elevates the mere suggestion of a lady in her park, negating her by her absence, into the synthesis of the ideal, the Pure Notion:

A quoi bon la merveille de transposer un fait de nature en sa presque disparition vibratoire selon le jeu de la parole, cependant, si ce n'est pour qu'en émane, sans le gêne d'un proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure (OC p. 857)?

And so the poet will not introduce himself to the lady, with the excuse of chance justifying his "tenue de maradeur aquatique"; for in refusing the encounter he has conquered chance, avoiding the contingent doubly, the unforeseen and what it implies etymologically, tangere. At the same time the ironic designation of his costume alludes again to the everywhere suggested goal of this nautical quest: the abduction of the nymphs.

In "séparés, on est ensemble," no longer addressing the woman but beginning the internal monologue which makes up the remainder of the poem, we recognize the young narrator of "La Pipe," who, happier with his friends' letters than with their presence, tasted those friendships' charm in distance more than in nearness, a trait we found reflected in the poet's correspondence of those years already. The short phrase, again, has that tension created by the juxtaposition of opposites, "séparés ... ensemble," and the impersonal pronoun stresses the notion of distance, which is then, however, immediately juxtaposed with the suggestion of the greatest intimacy, "je m'immisce à de sa confuse intimité," not so much with the noun "intimité" itself as with the verb, which brings out also the notion of resistance, "se mêler de quelque chose sans en avoir l'autorisation," a phrase which recalls the opening line of a love sonnet almost



contemporary with our prose poem, "M'Introduire dans ton histoire."<sup>12</sup>

"Ce suspens sur l'eau où mon songe attarde l'indécise," recalls the above "le silence spacieux de ce que s'annonçait l'étrangère," for both denote empty moments of absence, pure space "sur l'eau," which is, at the same time, pregnant with virtuality, indicated here with "suspens." The moment's uncertainty hovers over the water like the lady's hesitation, a state of suspense in which the poet's musing keeps and delays the undecided one who is, thus, under his spell. And just as the "ceinture avec une boucle en disant" cannot defend the woman against the poet's dreams, so here those dreams authorize more intimacy than any real visits, "visite" here also playing with its etymological origin, videre. And the happy absence of "discours oiseux," which reflects Mallarmé's distrust of "la parole,"<sup>13</sup> befits the silence of this privileged world, where the "intuitif accord" of the conversation held "pour n'être pas entendu" recalls the unheard harmonies of Saint Cecilia, "Musicienne du silence." The poet is still "courbé ... sous le silence spacieux," and his ear now "vers le sable entier qui s'est tu," might suggest the stopping of the sand in an hourglass, that is, not only complete silence, but time even "standing still" for the privileged moment.

"La pause se mesure au temps de ma détermination" of which a variant read "sa détermination," the change suggesting



the poet-persona's control of the moment, might, at the same time, with "temps" mark the end of the privileged moment, as we are also gradually approaching the end of the poem; for "que faire?" reintroduces preoccupation, concern with the here and now, while the moment was marked not by "doing," but pure "being," that être which always borders on the néant.

"Résumer" marks the beginning of the poem's conclusion, where its tensions, though not resolved, are brought into the consonance of one symbolic image, while on the narrative level the persona has resolved his question: a last glance at "la vierge absence éparse en cette solitude," a virgin absence which is ideal presence, he decides to leave as secretly as he had arrived by chance, taking along as a souvenir of this unrealized experience "l'un de ces magiques nénuphars clos," both a symbol of its idealization, and a figure for our poem itself, "Le Nénuphar Blanc." The poem, like the blossom, is closed, enfolding "a nothing, made of dreams," recalling Mallarmé's life-long preoccupation with the transmutation of nothingness into poetry, and which, for him, at the same time constitutes the essence of fiction.<sup>14</sup> The water-lily's "creuse blancheur" is reminiscent of the mandola's "creux néant musicien," virgin wombs both, empty and yet paradoxically pregnant with the possibility of birth, of poetry and, therefore, the poet.

He will row away quietly, careful not to "briser l'illusion," like the calm water surface by the strokes of



his oars, lest the foamy trail of his departure, reminiscent of "les plis rejetés en traîne" by the lady's walk, might after all reveal his secret presence to her, "aux pieds survenus" again distantly précieux while at the same time once more evocative of the charm of those hidden feet celebrated above. In the comparison of "la bulle visible de l'écume enroulée" with the "rapt de mon idéale fleur," where the juxtaposition of "rapt" and "idéale fleur" culminates, as I said, the poem's tension of the erotic and its sublimation, "bulle" and "nénuphar" are likened as fragile enclosures of nothingness, while "écume" vaguely suggests the agitation of passion.

Should "she," however, have come to the shore, it is now too late for him to ever know her features, which are, therefore, "indicible," and which may be those of a Meditative, a Haughty, a Wild or Cruel, or a Gay lady, sheer possibilities of which not any one--because merely virtual and thus not real--excludes any of the other, and which wealth of unrealized possibilities constitutes precisely "le délice empreint de généralité qui permet et ordonne d'exclure tous visages." "Car j'accomplis selon les règles la manoeuvre" emphasizes control, on the narrative level that of the boat by the rower, which at the same time suggests the artistic control of the poem, whose form is that of a spiral. It is circular in that the persona now departs exactly from where he had arrived for "l'aventure," but just as in the opening the

chance nature of that arrival was elaborately modulated, so in the poem's closing the notion of purpose is stressed, that is "a higher level." For to maneuver literally means "to guide with adroitness and design," which is then reinforced with "selon les règles," the whole phrase recalling "la manoeuvre avec l'âge oubliée" of the "Coup de dés," where the loss of control is shipwreck, that "naufrage" which was so vaguely suggested, as we saw, in our poem's beginning with "je venais échouer."

The "me dégageai, virai," with "virai" already foreshadowed when the sight of his "avirons" woke the narrator from his drowsiness and its chance wanderings, shows him on the narrative level finally freeing his boat from the reeds and turning it around. But "me dégageai" at the same time again suggests the artistic refusal of "engagement" in a life which is sacrificed in order to become the matter of art, thus once more pointing to the theme of our poem: the transposition of reality into ideality. This is also the theme of the sonnet chosen by Mallarmé to close his collection of verse poetry, a poem written two years after ours, "Mes bouquins refermés sur le nom de Paphos," where the poet renounces the "real" for the "ideal" fruits, not without evoking, however, as he has in the "Nénuphar," all their savor:

Ma faim qui d'aucuns fruits ici ne se régale  
 Trouve en leur docte manque une saveur égale:  
 Qu'un éclate de chair humain et parfumant!  
 Le pied sur quelque guivre où notre amour tisonne  
 Je pense plus longtemps peut-être éperdument  
 A l'autre, au sein brûlé d'une antique amazone.

But even "Le Nénuphar Blanc," Mallarmé's "whitest" poem, as it were--any poem for that matter--involves, or engages, the poet in the contingent, namely that of language itself, where he continues, in creating the intricate structures of his style, to combat chance. For its total abolishment, true absence and purity, would--as in our poem suggested with the image of the bubble--not be any poem, but the empty page of the poet's silence:

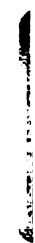
... le hasard vaincu mot par mot, indéfectiblement le blanc revient, tout à l'heure gratuit, certain maintenant, pour conclure que rien au-delà et authentifier le silence--(OC p. 387).

And the "noble swan's egg from which flight will never spring" is the symbol of that absolute silence, for from this white virtuality the singer-poet would never be born, as his song--"le vol," Mallarmé's constant symbol for poetic envol--would never break the fragile shell, "qui ne se gonfle d'autre chose sinon de la vacance de soi." Exquisite absence and emptiness of self, from which the dreamer had awakened into a summer morning, and which the imaginary and ideal woman--"toute dame" recalling "toute femme" of the preceding poem--likes to pursue in those privileged intervals, those absences, of life, "dans les allées de son parc, arrêtée parfois et longtemps, comme au bord d'une source à franchir ou de quelque pièce d'eau." This is a gentle fading away into distance of this world which we leave silently with the poet, in a sentence where some of its loveliness, like the park, the moment of rest, the spring, and finally the water itself, are





echoed once more softly like the waves on the disappearing pond.



## LE NENUPHAR BLANC

## NOTES

- 1 The principal variant is the orthographic one of the title which was originally "Nénufar," which applies, of course, also to that word's appearance in the body of the poem. Both spellings are lexical, but the final one is more common, while the first points to the word's arabic origin, "nînûfar." Proust, by the way, in the famous Nymphéa passage of Combray, also uses the "nénufar" spelling. The other variants from the poem's publication in Pages, such as the omission of commas and conjunctions, are minor.
- 2 This obsession with the white page manifests itself both in the verse poetry, as in the early "Brise Marine," where we find: "... le vide papier que la blancheur défend," and in the prose; for example, in an issue of LA DERNIERE MODE, where, mentioning the color in the description of an interior, the poet editor says: "Blanc comme une feuille de papier sans poème ..." (OC p. 770).
- 3 "Le Nénuphar Blanc" reflects Mallarmé's summers at his vacation retreat, Valvins, which will also serve as the setting of "Conflit." His love for the Seine, which he enjoyed at Valvins with his little boat, "idling away" time, without losing it, is expressed in his famous "biographical letter" to Verlaine, Correspondance II, p. 304:



J'honore la rivière, qui laisse s'engouffrer dans son eau des journées entières sans qu'on ait l'impression de les avoir perdues, ni une ombre de remords. Simple promeneur en yoles d'acajou, mais voilier avec furie, très-fier de sa flotille.

- 4 Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), p. 130, in his chapter on "Structure of Aquatic Symbolism" says:

The waters symbolize the universal sum of virtualities; they are fons et origo, "spring and origin," the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence; they precede every form and support every creation. ... immersion in water signifies regression to the preformal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence.

And these associations are clearly suggested by the water ambiance of "Le Nénuphar Blanc."

- 5 One of the best-known examples that comes to mind is Lancelot's arrival on the "Pont de l'Epée" in Le Chevalier à la Charette.
- 6 Richard, L'Univers, in his chapter, "Les Rêveries Amoureuses," devotes many pages to "le regard," but, as frequently, unduly isolates the motif from its context. He generalizes, as follows, on p. 95:

... l'amant pourra user d'un instrument fort efficace: son regard. Qu'est-ce en effet que celui-ci, sinon une transparence intime, capable de traverser, sans la toucher ni la briser, la transparence d'un dehors? Il se jette au delà, mais il n'entame rien: merveilleuse arme d'hyperbole, outil dangereux d'indiscrétion ... Rien de plus monotone, en un sens, que la dramaturgie mallarméenne du désir: parfaitement illustratrice de l'attitude érotique baptisée par d'aucuns "complexe d'Actéon," elle reproduit ça et là, avec assez de variantes, le même geste essentiel, celui du vol oculaire.

- 7 Mallarmé expresses his utilization of the silence of the white paper in one of his "Réponses à des Enquêtes," talking about Poe:

L'armature intellectuelle du poème se dissimule et tient--a lieu--dans l'espace qui isole les strophes et parmi le blanc du papier: significantif silence qu'il n'est pas moins beau de composer, que les vers (OC p. 872).

- 8 "Dans une flottaison" literally refers to a ship's water-line, "terme de marine, plan qui divise la partie du vaisseau qui est dans l'eau, de celle qui est hors de l'eau, ligne de flottaison."

- 9 "Le Beau Navire," Baudelaire, Fleurs, pp. 57-58, comes, of course, to mind, and especially its second (which is also the seventh) stanza:

Quand tu vas balayant l'air de ta jupe large,  
Tu fais l'effet d'un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,  
Chargé de toile, et va roulant  
Suivant un rythme doux, et paresseux, et lent.

- 10 Thibaudet, La Poésie, p. 328, charmed with this particular sentence, finds in it even this further suggestion:

On suit avec un plaisir curieux, chez Mallarmé, la virtuosité des coupes syntaxiques. Dans le Nénuphar Blanc, arrêtant sa barque sur la rive d'un parc, un bruit le fait douter si l'habitante du bord ne s'approche pas de l'eau: "Connaît-elle un motif à sa station, elle-même la promeneuse." Les trois membres de la phrase, dont les deux virgules marquent les articulations, se présentent dans l'ordre inverse de l'usage français qui exigerait "La promeneuse elle-même connaît-elle un motif à sa station?" 3-2-1 remplace 1-2-3. Ne dirait-on pas que cet ordre inverse des trois membres, comme la tête, le buste et les jambes se mireraient reverbérés sous l'eau, suspend la vision du rameur?

- 11 Elsewhere in Mallarmé's poetry, the melting of the diamond is a symbol for orgasm, as in "Sonnet," almost contemporary with the "Nénuphar":

Dame

sans trop d'ardeur à la fois enflammant  
La rose qui cruelle ou déchirée et lasse  
Même du blanc habit de pourpre le délace  
Pour ouir dans sa chair pleurer le diamant

- 12 Cohn, who in Toward the Poems, pp. 223-28, analyzes the sonnet, points to its kinship with not only other verse poems, but also with our prose poem:

One of his finest prose poems, Le Nénuphar Blanc, tells of the possible contact with a flower-lady, an absente de tous bouquets, whose pure unglimped barely-guessed-at presence exhales an almost maddening beauty. Rowing meditatively in his little boat, on the Seine near Valvins, he pulls into some inlet or little stream tributary to the river and arrives inadvertently, at the edge of the property of a neighbor he has never met. He hears soft footsteps behind foliage, but he cannot decide to make a move to meet the lady in the flesh. At last he prefers to shove off and row away with his dream of her intact. The whole prose poem is alive with this presence-absence of a woman, unsure between an airy lightness of sublimation and fierce eroticism: ... Note, in passing, that the "pelouses-parc" of the prose poem is close kin to the gazon of the sonnet, as we shall see; the histoire of the sonnet is exactly equivalent to the meditative isolation, the intimité of the lady he imagines in the Nénuphar.

- 13 The futility of "la parole" is most clearly confirmed and demonstrated in our last prose poem, "Conflit," and in the related essay, "Confrontation," expressed thus: "... le meilleur qui se passe entre deux gens, toujours, leur échappe, en tant qu'interlocuteurs" (OC p. 411).





- 14 We recall that the metaphysical crisis of the poet's youth, which, in a sense, created the oeuvre, resulted in this basic and unvarying tenet: "le Rien qui est la vérité."



## CHAPTER XII

### L'ECCLESIASTIQUE

This prose poem, published for the first time in 1886, has only one variant, namely that of the title, which in one of its subsequent publications was "Actualité. Printemps au Bois de Boulogne." And though this heading was used only once in its five different publications, it helps us in the reading of this curious piece. For in suggesting "actualités, nouvelles du moment dans la presse," it identifies "L'Ecclésiastique" as reportage of an anecdote "comme elle frappa mon regard de poète," while, at the same time, with "actualité, caractère de ce qui est actuel, relatif aux choses qui intéressent l'époque actuelle," pointing to that "modernité" underlined in its conclusion. However, it is not only this variant title which, in recalling the definition of the prose poem developed in "Un Spectacle Interrompu," points to that other piece, but the opening of "L'Ecclésiastique" itself reveals a striking similarity with that of the other poem, for in both the poet deplores the absence of the kind of writing exemplified, in each case, by his own composition.<sup>1</sup>

The anecdote of our prose poem relates how he had seen, while strolling in the Bois de Boulogne on a spring day, an

ecclesiastic "responding" to the season. And then our narrator stole away unseen to elaborate the strange scene which he had just witnessed in his imagination.

The definitive title appears to float, somewhat vaguely over the opening sentence with which, on first glance, it seems to have no connection, were it not for its suggested contrast with the very first word of the poem. For the term "ecclésiastique" not only evokes, in designating a priest, a black figure, but by its Greek character at the same time suggests the great age of many centuries, while "printemps," evocative of fresh and bright greens, brings with it the notions of newness and youth. And the opening sentence itself would sound like a general, factual statement, except for the touch of préciosité of its first word, the plural "les printemps," and the coda-like "chez les animaux," which, ironically, somehow makes one wonder, before reading on, what that could have to do with priests. The sentence ending, then, prepares for the basic contrast underlying the whole poem, while its opening introduces a style which characterizes the whole piece. In a way, only this style makes it even possible, by establishing from the outset the very ironic detachment of the mature poet, which permits him to approach any subject whatsoever, even this bizarre one of our prose poem, of the secretly observed priest behaving in rather unpriestly fashion. "Les printemps" at the same time situates the piece, the only one of these prose poems of which almost



every one is placed in one of the year's seasons, in the poet's "bad season";<sup>2</sup> and more than that, this season plays so significant a role in "L'Ecclésiastique" that it almost becomes, as the variant title had suggested, the subject of the poem.

As this first sentence makes perfectly clear, "les printemps" is not the season of art, but, on the contrary, of nature, which is strongly brought out with "poussant l'organisme à des actes," where "l'organisme" means any substance organized by nature, with "pousser" implying its passive subjection to those natural forces. In this general evocation of Physis, that primordial force pulsating through and animating matter, "actes" suggests a curious contrast with its inherent contradiction to passivity; but it is precisely this paradox which renders the "acte" about to be witnessed so bizarre. At the same time, in view of the title, "actes" also recalls its function as an ecclesiastical term, such as the "acts of the martyrs," or Apostles, so that this opening passage already reveals the poem's alternate use of vocabulary drawn from the domains of "termes de physique" on the one hand and that of theology on the other, growing out of and at the same time underlining the theme of the somewhat mock-heroic defeat of spirit by matter. Further, certain expressions belonging to one of these two spheres will sometimes suggest the other by the merest hint, as for example "histoire naturelle," which, while perfectly unequivocal within

the context of its sentence, recalls "histoire sainte" in the wider and mildly burlesque one of the whole poem, which is, after all, about the acts of a priest!

On the narrative level, the poet-persona--he will later identify himself as a poet--who, in the first sentence, noted the existence of treatises on strange animal behavior induced by spring, deplores, in the second one, their absence as concerns this influence on individuals made for spirituality. Now that opening sentence which would have, without that tagged-on ending which we found so curiously jarring with the title, referred to both flora and fauna in a general sense, under its mock-scientific lucidity, by means of that brief ending, makes a veiled but unmistakable reference to the animals' mating season. And the "d'individus faits pour la spiritualité!" of the second sentence by its position exactly parallels the ending of the preceding one, thus contrasting animals and "individuals made for spirituality" with that added touch of irony which distinguishes between them and "spiritual individuals." At the same time the phrase juxtaposes a "terme de classification zoologique et botanique" with one of metaphysics. The smoothly alliterating "plus plausible" adds to that ironic tone by its etymological association of "worthy of applause"--not without however also pointing to the virtuosity of the very poem which accomplishes it--that collecting of "certains des altérations qu'apporte l'instant climatérique dans les allures . . .," where

"altérations," again etymologically a "terme de physique," in "l'usage ordinaire" implies a "changement de bien en mal," and further "se dit aussi des dérangements de la santé," which befits the use of medical terminology further on in the poem. "Climatérique" itself, which in our narrative context refers to "les printemps," by association suggests "l'an climatérique, l'époque de la décadence," thus together with "altération" pointing to a deterioration. Littré takes pains to note that "il ne faut pas, comme font quelques-uns, faire dériver ce mot de climat, ni dire influence climatérique pour influence de climat," which recalls Mallarmé's deliberate playing with both correct and incorrect uses of "foraine" in that other prose poem. For another "correct" meaning of the adjective is "période de la vie humaine qui présente un caractère dangereux," which will later be picked up with such terms as "diabolique," and "énergumène," all pointing, with gentle mockery, to the dangerous abdication of reason.

The following sentence links the very general opening of the poem to its specific anecdote, by briefly touching upon spring's effect on the narrator himself, not without first, however, mentioning the season of his predilection. "Mal quitté par l'ironie de l'hiver" expresses the effect which only now has begun to wane, of its ambiguous influence on the poet-persona. For, similarly to "l'azur," it can be both beneficent, as "saison de l'art serein, l'hiver lucide," and as the season of the poet's dreams, as in "Frisson d'Hiver,"



and also a torture, a cruel season for the poet plagued by sterility: "Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui," where it is a "blanche agonie." And it is spring, then, which frees the poet-persona from this "état équivoque" by "un naturalisme absolu ou naïf, capable de poursuivre une jouissance dans la différenciation de plusieurs brins d'herbes," which hints at a kind of reconciliation with the unloved time of the year which, though not inspiring, is, at times at least, one of "repos." Yet, at the same time, "L'Ecclésiastique," Mallarmé's only "spring-time poem" in the recueil, constitutes a victory over the enemy season, which even in "Bucolique," of the 1890's, is still called "le vénéneux printemps" (OC p. 401).

But our sentence really points more to the poet persona's contact with nature than with spring, and with the "enjoyment in the differentiation of several blades of grass" suggests the poet's role vis-a-vis nature as that of a beholder, which is in sharp contrast, of course, with the ecclesiastic's attitude. This relationship with nature, which becomes progressively more important in the poet's mature work, a progression, moreover, reflected in these prose poems, prepares for Mallarmé's notion of Nature as a Spectacle, developed in the last two prose poems and elsewhere in the late prose, where he, the Poet, becomes both a beholder of, and a participant in, a rite. And it may be such reflections--not "de profit à la foule" as long as they are not yet objectified in

art--which draw the poet "sous quelques ombrages environnant d'hier la ville," that is both into spring and into nature. The beautiful phrase, which in its préciosité again indicates the poet's inner distance from the outer sylvan setting, at the same time reflects the general movement of the prose poems out of the confines of rooms, houses, and finally the city itself, into the open natural setting, the suburbs, Valvins, the Bois de Boulogne, and the forest of Fontainebleau.

And so, in the Bois de Boulogne, in his customary isolation so propitious to poetic creation, the poet-persona finds its unexpected occasion, "un exemple saisissable et frappant," the exemplum of "springtime inspirations" on an individual made for spirituality. The sylvan mystery, vaguely suggestive of the celebration of secret pagan rites, is duly undercut with "presque banal," while "j'exhiberai" recalls the poet's role of montreur.

After this brief but richly suggestive introduction, the anecdote proper begins with the second paragraph, whose first sentence introduces its hero. But since this is no longer an abstract consideration, its style is not that of logic, but a highly impressionistic rendition of the narrator's encounter with a phenomenon, where the visual impressions, rendered in the order of their surprising appearance to the narrator, precede the explanation of their cause.<sup>3</sup> The first impression is simply a "sombre agitation basse," obscure not only because of the priest's black gown, but because the image is at first

indistinct through the "mille interstices d'arbustes bons à ne rien cacher," and further because the beholder does not understand, at this point, what he is looking at. "Basse" because whatever it is, it is on the ground, but with the added suggestion of "vil, méprisable, honteux," which latter reinforces that same undertone produced by "cacher." And "interstices," amusingly is, aside from its literal meaning on the narrative level, again both a "terme de physique" and also a "terme de l'Eglise," as the latter referring to "the period of time between the reception of holy orders," which somehow points ahead to the "gambade du séminaire." The vague commotion comes gradually into focus, and a three-cornered hat, now its wearer, down to his silver-buckled shoes, a priest! appears; and the "battements supérieurs" ironically refers both literally and figuratively to man's highest part, his head, that seat of reason, on the ground now, like the rest. The silver buckles, recalling those other symbolic ornaments, the diamond necklace of the lady of "La Déclaration Foraine," or the diamond-buckled belt of the Nénuphar lady, might suggest that though the shoes are thus fastened, their wearer's feet have literally lost their ground. And only now is the poem's title at once echoed and explained: an ecclesiastic, "à l'écart de témoins" like the poet, "répondait aux sollicitations du gazon," where he finds, however, a different kind of enjoyment than that derived from "la différenciation de plusieurs brins d'herbes."<sup>4</sup>



The narrator steals away unobserved, reminiscent of that motif in the preceding poem, and again not without having thus secretly come upon the material for a poem. For here, also, the vision modulated in the larger part of the poem is not the observed one, but the one created by the poet-persona. Thus, far from acting scandalized--and the parenthesis here is a purely ironic interjection--or embarrassing the other by seizing a pebble from the road or merely acknowledging his presence to him by a smile, he avoids the "real" encounter. But there is at the same time a suggested one, on the non-narrative level, in the juxtaposition of his own "sourire même d'intelligence" and the other's "rougeur sur le visage à deux mains voilé," for, by suggestion, his smile does unmask the "pauvre homme" and penetrates those protecting hands to reveal a blush, whose cause, "son solitaire exercice" has frankly erotic undertones, later reinforced with that curious reflection on the priest's gown. Further "la tentation d'un regard porté en arrière," to which the narrator does not succumb, has somewhat diabolical connotations, "tentation" by definition being a "sollicitation au mal par la suggestion du diable," preparing for "l'apparition quasi-diabolique." At the same time, this temptation is not only reminiscent of "Hérodiane," but of that other biblical story, of the wife of Lot and her forbidden backward glance upon the depravation of the Sodomites who had no wives.

The important turning point, however, is the literal one of the persona, away from the factual scene toward that of his imagination, "me figurer en esprit l'apparition quasi diabolique qui continuait à froisser le renouveau de ses côtes, à droite, à gauche et du ventre en obtenant une chaste frénésie," where "figurer" means not a passive beholding, but an active selecting, forming, and creating which transforms an apparition into vision. "Froisser le renouveau" ingeniously juxtaposes the concrete and the abstract, the first term, etymologically from frustrum, "mettre en morceaux," suggestive of a frenzy both destructive and productive of organic life, resumed in "renouveau," time of physical renewal. The frantic nature of the grotesque vision is rendered by the accumulation of "de ses côtes, à droite, à gauche," finally culminating with the most unpoetic "ventre." And in "chaste frénésie" the juxtaposition of antithetical elements seems to reach its climax, with the former a moral and the latter again a physiological-medical term, the one implying not only a moral quality but the control of reason, while the latter designates its opposite, namely the lack of control and a state of delirium due to mental derangement. The process of accumulation is repeated with "se frictionner, jeter, se rouler, glisser," whose boisterous hilarity is only heightened with the sudden bewildered cessation of the agitation, due to the tickling of a flower. As spring invades the ecclesiastic's very body, his outer trappings seem to be



defeated by the mere force of flowers. And "cette robe," referring to the cassock, but suggesting a woman's dress, thus seemingly uniting the two, strangely befits the celibate, that "solitaire," whose androgynous aspect was already suggested above.

In the following sentence a curious inversion takes place; for, while the ecclesiastic appears to have become a natural phenomenon, nature is personified, and thus humanized, and it is the latter which the persona now addresses directly with "Solitude, froid silence épars dans la verdure, ... vous connûtes les claquements furibonds d'une étoffe," where nature's impassible cold silence contrasts sharply with the cloth's furious clappings, that frenzy, paradoxically, of something usually inanimate, a synecdoche which further dehumanizes the priest. At the same time "silence épars dans la verdure" echoes the "vierge absence éparse en cette solitude" of the "Nénuphar," pointing to the movement of these prose poems into an open, natural setting. The ecclesiastic's "sens moins subtils qu'inquiets" reinforces the contrast of a calm flora witnessing the subjection to his senses of an "individu fait pour la spiritualité." Throughout the poem, the cassock, "sombre agitation basse," "cette robe spéciale portée avec l'apparence qu'on est pour soi tout même sa femma," "claquements furibonds d'une étoffe," has something sinister about it, an effect created by the shocking surprise of seeing this traditional symbol of dignity literally "par le



démon secoué."<sup>5</sup> And "la nuit absconse en ses plis" finally shaken out of it culminates that accumulation of the dark, the mysterious, and the hidden suggested by that "robe spéciale" which, like a shroud, hid a skeleton, whose bizarre "heurts sourds contre la terre" evoke an almost Bertrand-like tableau macabre with the dead coming out of their graves. The perversity, thus, of both the scene depicted and the one suggested, lies in their violation of the natural order.

"Mais l'énergumène n'avait point à vous contempler" again stresses the difference between the poet-persona, mentally beholding and communicating with nature, that is her solitude and silence, and that other individual who, on the contrary, far from contemplating her, lets himself be possessed by her diabolic forces, with "énergumène," a "terme de théologie," literally designating him as "qui est possédé du démon." But then the following sentence by its tone, emphasized with the ablative absolute-like "hilare," saves the passage from sliding into the Gothically-horrible, while at the same time indicating that the hilarious ecclesiastic carries his demon within him, so that the "plaisir" which it subjects him to is also his "devoir," neither of which to be accounted for by the life he had furtively escaped. And this life is now evoked, by contrast to the "influence du souffle vernal," with "les immuables textes" inscribed in his flesh, making the poor priest appear somewhat like the branded chattel of the Church, later to be reinforced with his mirthful



It is somewhat surprising that the remaining portion of the piece is not set off by paragraphing as had been the introduction, for there occurs a marked break with the

following sentence, where the poet-persona returns to himself and his role as creator of the poem, thus not only stepping out of the anecdote, but almost out of the poem itself. "Le héros de ma vision" points back to that moment in the anecdote, when the persona had abandoned the description of the observed in order to paint the image of his mind, "me figurer en esprit l'apparition." At the same time, "héros" is a final ironic designation of this anti-hero, whose real-life model must no doubt by now have returned "inaperçu, dans la foule, et les habitudes de son ministère." But in resolutely rejecting the trite and "real" conclusion from the adventure, the poet-persona underlines once again the artificiality, and at the same time artistically, burlesque character of this "ecclésiastique," whose futive embrace with spring is once more evoked with the suggestive "pistils" and "sucs" attached to his person.

The final sentence again introduces the poet's fundamental bargain with life, if I may say so, and which has not only been implied merely, but sometimes stated, in these prose poems: the deliberate renunciation of life for the rewards of art. "Ma discretion ... n'a-t-elle pas pour récompense," is reminiscent of "sans compensation à cette secousse qu'un besoin d'explication figurative" of the "Déclaration," or finally "mon imaginaire trophée" of the "Nénuphar." In each case, the poet turns away from the encounter with reality's fleeting phenomena, to give them permanence by "fixing" them



in a harmonious image. Nothing is more fugitive, in fact, than the eruption of nature's spring, or the temporary divagations of man under its influence, but lasting is this "image marquée d'un sceau mystérieux de modernité, à la fois baroque et belle," the poet's definition of our prose poem. The "rêverie d'un passant" designates poet and poetry, he the perishable and mortal creator of the permanent.<sup>6</sup>

It is not the adventure, but its image, the poem, which is mysteriously signed and sealed, for its beauty is hidden, by a modernity--which may well be that of the form of the prose poem itself, reportage of "une anecdote comme elle frappa mon regard de poète"--which renders it both baroque and beautiful. "Baroque et belle," these melodious last words, which constitute the confident master poet's judgment of his own work, once more underline the antithetical tension which permeates this poem, in which the fantastic and the bizarre are molded into artistic harmony.

## L'ECCLESIASTIQUE

## NOTES

- 1 One should place both opening passages side by side to appreciate their resemblance of tone:

Que la civilisation est loin de procurer les jouissances attribuables à cet état! on doit par exemple s'étonner qu'une association entre les rêveurs, y séjournant, n'existe pas, dans toute grande ville, pour subvenir à un journal qui remarque les événements sous le jour propre au rêve ("Spectacle").

Les printemps poussent l'organisme à des actes qui, dans une autre saison, lui sont inconnus et maint traité d'histoire naturelle abonde en descriptions de ce phénomène, chez les animaux. Qu'il serait d'un intérêt plus plausible de recueillir certaines des altérations qu'apporte l'instant climatérique dans les allures d'individus faits pour la spiritualité ("Ecclésiastique").

- 2 In these prose poems, this dislike for spring was brought out clearly, as we saw, in "Plainte d'Automne," where it was part of the young poet's infatuation with decadence. It is further reflected in such verse poetry as "Renouveau," and in the correspondence, where Mallarmé at times literally seems to hide from the season behind his windows, as for example in a letter, cited by Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 208, to Cazalis of 1866:

Quant à maintenant, je me repose (bien que je ne participe pas au printemps, qui me semble à des millions de lieues derrière mes carreaux) ...

Mallarmé must have liked this phrase, as he repeats it almost word for word in another letter of that year, to Mérat (p. 213):

Ma rêverie avait été consumée par la lampe des nuits d'hiver quand je reçus vos vers; et une promenade n'aurait pu restaurer aux objets entrevus leur réel ni poétique aspect. Le printemps derrière les carreaux, me semblait à des millions de lieues.

And Charles Mauron, Introduction, p. 76, also identifies spring as the "low point" in Mallarmé's year:

Each winter brought on a depression, which apparently reached its lowest point--no doubt because of the cumulative effect--between February and May.

- 3 This sentence is very similar in its "impressionistic" technique to the very beautiful and justly famous Proustian one, painting the beginning of a summer rain in Cambray. Proust, A la Recherche, pp. 101-2:

Un petit coup au carreau, comme si quelque chose l'avait heurté, suivi d'une ample chute légère comme de grains de sable qu'on eut laissés tomber d'une fenêtre au-dessus, puis la chute s'étendant, se réglant, adoptant un rythme, devenant fluide, sonore, musicale, innombrable, universelle: c'était la pluie.

- 4 The difference must be stressed, for a German critic, Franz Rauhut, Das Französische Prosagedicht (Hamburg: Friederichsen, de Gruyter & Co. m.b.H., 1929), p. 84, in this sole commentary on our poem says:

... das in übermütigster Laune verfasste Stück L'Ecclésiastique symbolisiert in der Gestalt eines Geistlichen, den Frühlingsgefühle zu wenig würdevollen Kapriolen verleiten, wiederum den geistigen Menschen, den Dichter.

And Chase St. Aubyn, Mallarmé, p. 138, likewise, identifies ecclesiastic and poet:

Under the influence of spring the ecclesiastic "had come to recognize by an immediate, clear, violent, positive contact with Nature, stripped of all



intellectual curiosity, the general well-being."  
Such a contact with the world would seem to resemble  
that of the poet.

How Mallarmé of all people would ever appear "stripped of  
all intellectual curiosity" when making "a contact with  
the world" is incomprehensible to me.

- 5 And our prose poem does, of course, echo the grotesque  
note of the early "Une Négrresse par le démon sécouée,"  
originally entitled "Image Grotesque," which could well  
be that of the prose poem.
- 6 "A jamais" expresses an optimism most unusual for Mallarmé.  
The hero of the "Toast Funèbre" was similarly designated  
"Quelqu'un de ces passants, fier, aveugle et muet," in a  
poem which celebrates at once the mortal and the immortal  
aspect of the poet; and the poet-hero of "Conflit" says  
of himself: "quelque singulier instinct de ne rien pos-  
séder et de seulement passer."

## CHAPTER XIII

### LA GLOIRE

This poem, which appeared for the first time in 1866, was composed that year for Verlaine's Les Homme d'aujourd'hui, where it carried the subtitle "Notes de mon Carnet," which it retained in one of its subsequent publications; and the Pléiade edition closes the recueil of "Poèmes en Prose" with this piece, which is the penultimate one of the "Anecdotes ou Poèmes" in Divagations.

The anecdote concerns the poet-persona's autumn visit to the forest of Fontainebleau, from his departure by train to his arrival before the festive forest, which he does not approach until he is alone, a solitary "royal intruder" in Nature's splendor.

The title, immediately echoed in the first word, has by its superposition of multiple references, and at the same time its sound-look beauty, something of the many-faceted sparkle and fire of the whole poem. For all the meanings of glory are simultaneously suggested here: renown, fame, honor, but above all éclat and superhuman splendeur, thus not only royal but divine magnificence, which is that of the Poet.<sup>1</sup> And so the opening, set off from the rest of the

piece, suddenly ignites, a beam of light caught in a diamond's flare, not dissimilar to the brilliant apparition of "Le Phénomène Futur," which left poets "le cerveau ivre un instant d'une gloire confuse."

On the anecdotal level, this beginning sentence paragraph introduces a first-person narrator who emphasizes his deliberate isolation from "the others." But at the same time it reveals another contrast, a stylistic one created by the juxtaposition of a highly lyrical and lofty tone: "La Gloire! je ne la sus qu'hier, irréfragable," with a narrative manner tending toward the ironic, "et rien ne m'intéressera d'appelé par quelqu'un ainsi." And this double tension, that of the solitary poet and his vision against the blind masses of humanity, as well as that of an elevated language and an ironic vein, already intimated here, is characteristic of the whole poem, much of whose anecdote is dominated by irony, while the theme for which it is the vehicle constitutes a sublime elevation. These tensions are, of course, indicative of the fundamental antithesis of ideality and reality inherent in the very notion of apotheosis--deification in death--which is celebrated in "La Gloire."

The second paragraph, which begins the anecdote proper, the narrator's departure from the city by train, carrying him toward the forest, describes both the phenomena surrounding him and, at the same time, evokes the moment's special ambiance, in a language as beautiful as it is economically

functional, for it establishes by its tonality the poem's éclairage, while at the same time not only announcing its major theme, but also illuminating several subordinate ideas suggested by it. "Cent affiches s'assimilent l'or incompris des jours" juxtaposes the banal advertising posters with not merely daylight or sunlight, but with that peculiar golden glow of autumn days,<sup>2</sup> whose symbolic significance the foule is unaware of, thus emphasizing again the poet-persona's isolation, while also preparing already the final scene. And this magic light is appropriated by the signs which reflect it, those publicity posters which betray the higher function of letters, thus reintroducing the theme developed in "Un Spectacle Interrompu," of the profanation of écriture in a journalistically-oriented civilization, which is, however, again unaware of this defilement. At the same time we get the impression of the signs rushing past the train, rather than the inverse, while the narrator's eyes, a fitting synecdoche for him, the beholder, try somehow to pass beyond the immediate, to the distant horizon. This glance again foreshadows the culminating scene, and recalls Mallarmé's designation of himself in "Bucolique" as "lecteur d'horizons" (OC p. 402). And there is a special urgency suggested by the poet's being drawn toward the horizon and forest, both literally by the train, and at the same time by his desire "de se recueillir dans l'abstruse fierté que donne une approche de forêt en son temps d'apothéose." This movement and



striving to come to a rest is again indicative of that tension permeating the poem; and we will soon encounter its inversion, namely the rest heavy with impending motion of the forest's "extatique torpeur." While "fierté" announces the "orgueils surhumains," it is "abstruse" again merely to la foule, the adjective at the same time etymologically foreshadowing the poet's role of "intrus royal." The characteristically vague nominal phrase "une approche de forêt," suggestive of the more common "l'approche d'une forêt," intimates both the narrator's approach of the forest and also the forest's approach of its final hour, with "approche" again emphasizing the urgency and that sense of expectancy tending, both spatially and temporally, toward the climactic "apothéose," the glorification announced by the title.

The following paragraph is strongly reminiscent of the opening passages of "La Déclaration Foraine," where "une vocifération, parmi trop de félicité" of an evening hour, was as discordant as here the "discord parmi l'exaltation de l'heure," which shrilly breaks the balance of inner and outer harmony of the moment.<sup>3</sup> The peace is shattered here by a stationmaster's cry, as the train comes to a stop at the narrator's destination. And there is a double dissonance, both that of the voice interrupting the moment's exaltation, and, at the same time, the one produced by the "crying out" of that magic name, Fontainebleau, itself, "faussé," thus, by an inarticulate bark, which merely conveys their location

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to the passengers, simultaneously serving la foule and disturbing the poet. This again suggests the theme touched upon above, that of the antithetical double function of language: its every-day use as parole and that of the poet; for while in the former a name is but a designation, so that, once the information has been imparted, the word is left to die, the same name in that other realm lives independently by its own magic. And the very syntax of our sentence, first introducing the evocations carried by that name, and only then the magic word itself, set off by commas, accentuates this notion, reminiscent of the similar function of "Saxe" in the early "Frisson d'Hiver," with its suggestiveness of both temporal and spatial distances. Fontainebleau "connu pour déployer la continuité de cimes tard évanouies," is a name both famous, pointing to "gloire," and known to evoke the woods' silhouette on the horizon. And it suggests here both the evening hour hovering over those trees threatened by impending darkness, and at the same time the late moment of the year, the fall, "évanouies," of that splendor.<sup>4</sup> There is in "cimes tard évanouies" a further vague intimation of Fontainebleau's historical past, represented by its palace, which will later again be suggested by the trees, which appear like "torches ... dans une haute garde," with both their and the sky's "pourpre," of course, always evoking royal splendor.

And just as the "interrupteur" had violated peace, so the narrator now mentally resorts to violence, which is not



devoid of a certain irony. The ablative absolute, "la glace du compartiment violentée," a superb concrete image of the inner experience of suddenly interrupted calm, refers to an imaginary breaking of the window in order to reach out and grab that adversary by the throat. This gesture introduces a likewise imaginary, and moreover rather one-sided, dialogue. "Tais-toi,!" not only calls for quiet, but suggests the verb's secondary meaning, "ne pas divulguer un secret," which the narrator develops in entreating the other not to give away, to la foule, "l'ombre ici insinuée dans mon esprit," namely that mysterious magic evoked by the name. And the stationmaster's dehumanizing "aboi indifférent" juxtaposed with "l'ombre ici insinuée" sharply accentuates the clash of outer and inner worlds, with the former again gaining the upper hand by the means of noise, that of the compartment doors' banging. The ablative absolute, "les touristes omniprésents vomis,"<sup>5</sup> not only marks, again, the narrator's isolation from, but now adds his scorn for, the others, which is emphasized furthermore by their reification implied in the substitution of the train's doors for its passengers, "ne divulgue pas ... aux portières."

The station's "vent inspiré et égalitaire," with the ironic juxtaposition of the exceptional and its opposite, contrasts with "une quiétude" of the following sentence, which now introduces the real presence of the forest, so far merely announced by the narrator's anticipatory reflections



accompanying his approach. "Une quiétude menteuse de riches bois suspend alentour quelque extraordinaire état d'illusion" accentuates two of the poem's essential ingredients, that of illusion, inherent in the very idea of spectacle and theatre, and that of suspense, which is its atmosphere. The former is reinforced with a whole vocabulary cluster dispersed throughout the piece, "paraître, trahison, fausser, menteuse, illusion, doute, ombre," which, with "pompeux, splendeur, éclat, exaltation, ivresse, orgueil," points to the illusory magnificence of the solar drama. For it is to witness its final act that the poet persona has left the city; and it is because he alone is capable of appreciating its significance that he delights in being its solitary spectator. In his "Hamlet" essay, of the same year as "La Gloire," Mallarmé stresses the poet's role of ideal beholder, who alone penetrates the meaning of this spectacle which reflects, however, not only the poet's, but mankind's destiny:

Loin de tout, la Nature, en automne, prépare son Théâtre, sublime et pur, attendant pour éclairer, dans la solitude, de significatifs prestiges, que l'unique oeil lucide qui en puisse pénétrer le sens (notoire, le destin de l'homme), un Poète, soit rappelé à des plaisirs et à des soucis médiocres (OC p. 299).

And while the poet there returns to "des soucis médiocres," the ideal poet of our poem leaves a mediocre existence to attend the sublime performance.<sup>6</sup>

But restrained still by that mediocrity he is trying to escape, his spirit cannot liberate itself yet--reminiscent of his eyes trying to reach beyond the phenomena of the city

toward the horizon--to meditate on that "quiétude menteuse," that deceptive calm pregnant with its own annihilation and the storm which will disperse this wealth of flaming trees, a splendor held suspended in an extraordinary state of illusion of immortality. And so his mind falls back again not only to an imaginary question, but even to an imagined response, from that proudly dutiful master of his railroad station, for whom the poet-persona has but ironic condescension: "ta gare," do you really believe all these people have left the city for it? "bon employé vociférateur par devoir." "Vociférateur," recalling "une vocifération, parmi trop de tacite félicité" of "La Déclaration Foraine," moreover by its etymology, vox combined with ferus, recalls the "aboi indifférent" above and, with "bon" in the sense of "qui réunit les qualités de son espèce," further dehumanizes this man who is later, similarly to the crowd above, chosifié as a mere "uniforme inattentif." And the persona again pleads with him for silence, merely long enough "de m'isoler de la délégation urbaine," which once more emphasizes his obstinate, but at the same time necessary, alienation.<sup>7</sup> Yet, he claims to have no intention of hoarding "une ivresse à tous départis par les libéralités conjointes de la nature et de l'Etat," reminiscent in its tone of the "vent inspiré et égalitaire" above. But in the very sentence which concedes, even if ironically, the equal right of admission to the others, "les touristes omniprésents," "ces voyageurs," the persona

intensifies his separation from them by an accumulation of terms referring to the organized masses of society which swallow up their individualities, "tous, Etat, délégation urbaine," entitled all, certainly, to their kind of "ivresse," that is a holiday outing in the public forest, earned by their labor in the city. And in this poem--contrary to the next and last piece of the cycle--the poet-persona cannot linger over their concerns, mere obstacles to his "isolating himself toward" his aim, where the deliberately vague verbal construction implies both the movement of separation from the multitude and, at the same time, toward the solitary vision, thus a physical and mental escape.

And then, within the same sentence, the ironic tone makes room for the lyricism of "l'extatique torpeur de ces feuillages là-bas trop immobilisés pour qu'une crise ne les éparpille bientôt dans l'air," before oscillating back to an ironically condescending gesture. The tension of "l'extatique torpeur" is like that of a dramatic crisis, where opposing forces are momentarily interlocked, before that turning point which tips the balance, turning--in this supreme drama--not only the leaves' but the sun's glory into death. The "crise" is thus both a culmination and an annihilation--the "mémorable crise" of the "Coup de dés" refers both to Man's tragic effort and his nauffrage--while the "trop immobilisés," with its notion of the excessive, later accentuated with "ce pompeux octobre exceptionnel," "trop inappréciable trophée" and

culminating with "d'orgueils surhumains," contains the moment's threat, not without recalling that elevation-disintegration complex celebrated in "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," which symbolized the poet's drama.<sup>8</sup>

But from its height the sentence falls--amusingly the last words of the foregoing lofty phrase are "dans l'air"--back to the immediate scene, where the pleading narrator now wants to resort to bribery, "suborneur métal." However, in one short paragraph the plan, as well as the whole imaginary dialogue, collapses in an anti-climactic "real" confrontation with reality. For the narrator "sans dire mot," which somewhat ironically contrasts with all those imagined ones, simply hands over his ticket to the stationmaster, whose inattention and at the same time professional politeness, "m'invitant," remind us that all along he was, of course, completely unaware of the agitation he had caused, while "quelque barrière," on the literal level the station gate, suggests perhaps once more the obstacles of this quest voyage.<sup>9</sup>

Yet it appears as though the stationmaster had done the narrator's bidding, for no one else got off the train, and he sees "l'asphalte s'étaler net de pas," the synecdoche for the road suggesting civilization's subjection of nature, its enemy, while "net de pas," that is its cleanliness or purity, vaguely intimates the stain of the feared "touristes omniprésents vomis." Mallarmé expresses his "hantise" of asphalt as a symbol of progress similarly in "Bucolique":

Longs faubourgs prolongés par la monotonie de voies  
jusqu'au central rien qui soit extraordinaire, divin  
ou totalement jailli du sol factice en échange des  
lieues d'asphalte, de nouveau, à piétiner, pour fuir  
(OC p. 402).

The very syntax of this sentence reflects that monotony which the poet flees, and which characterizes big-city life also in our poem, "une monotonie énorme."<sup>10</sup> This notion of civilization corrupting nature, which is in a sense an inversion of the repeated superimposition of the artificial upon the natural, evident throughout these prose poems, indicates the mature poet's final acceptance of that nature, toward which, as I pointed out in the preceding chapter, these poems gradually move.<sup>11</sup> But it is an acceptance of nature on the poet's terms, where--in contrast, for example, to that demonstrated in "L'Ecclésiastique"--nature is spiritualized by being endowed with a symbolic significance and meaning, accessible to the poet alone, and so of access to the rest of mankind only through his poetry. And therefore this "orphyic explanation" of nature is both the poet's highest task and his obligation toward his fellow man:

L'explication orphique de la Terre, qui est le seul  
devoir du poète et le jeu littéraire par excellence  
(OC p. 663).

Our narrator can hardly believe that "en ce pompeux  
octobre exceptionnel"<sup>12</sup> none but he has felt its magic, but then the very difference between that exceptional moment in nature and the city's monotony explains the latter's incomprehension of the former; and this sentence paragraph contrasts

precisely the city and its population with nature reflected in the solitary poetic vision. For the exceptional moment is directly juxtaposed with the empty durations of "millions d'existences étageant leur vacuité," where the accentuated emptiness of existence suggests the absence of the essential, real life, while in "en tant qu'une monotonie énorme de capitale," the vague conjunction suggests that these wasted lives make up that very monotony of the city itself,<sup>13</sup> "une monotonie énorme de capitale" syntactically echoing "une approche de forêt" above. Further, "énorme," that is the exceptional, and "monotonie," its opposite, somehow cancel each other, leaving nothing but that emptiness whose obsession--which is that same noisy obsession with existence of "Une Déclaration Foraine," there termed "la cacophonie à l'ouïe ... reste à vif devant la hantise de l'existence"--will, however, dissipate itself with the whistle blast, like one last shrill, discordant note of civilization, vanishing with and in the disappearing locomotive's steam.<sup>14</sup> For none but the poet has stolen away to feel "qu'il est, cet an, d'amers et lumineux sanglots, mainte indécise flottaison d'idée désertant les hasards comme des branches, tel frisson et ce qui fait penser à un automne sous les cieux."

"D'amers et lumineux sanglots," a synesthesia reminiscent of the early "blancs sanglots" of "Apparition," paints both the forest's autumnal luminosity and conveys the bitter funereal grief of approaching death, which Mallarmé in his



"Hamlet" essay calls "l'amertume feuillemorte" (OC p. 299). But the year's approaching death agony is then transformed into a magnificent analogy suggesting birth; for the falling of autumnal leaves from the branches, its understood first term, is likened to slowly ripened ideas disengaging themselves from the ramifications of chance, both constituting a release and a liberation.<sup>15</sup> And so, on the threshold of both death and life, leaf and idea seem to hesitate, "indécise," in this "suspens" which permeates "La Gloire," before floating--Mallarmé again uses "flottaison," which we encountered in the "Nénuphar," a word he loves--the one out of, the other into, existence. The "idée" is, of course, a poetic one, the hesitating leaves being an image for poetry awaiting its birth, "désertant les hasards."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, "tel frisson" is both the shudder of approaching death, and also a creative one, and only now "un automne sous les cieux" is mentioned for the first time, an autumn already painted and evoked throughout the poem.

Just as the preceding paragraph consisted of one long, sinuous sentence, so the poem's last one is the delicate tissue of a single intricate thread. The ablative absolute of the opening merely suggests a concrete image, superimposed by the second term of the rich analogy which it occasions, and which, in turn, leads to a beautiful simile. As the still astonished narrator ascertains that he is indeed alone, we must imagine his arms raised up in a gesture of surprise, his

doubt now leaving him and animated by being likened to a winged creature flown away, "les bras de doute envolés," and this gesture of the persona's raised arms--wing-like--is now compared to his carrying something up high, "comme qui porte aussi un lot d'une splendeur secrète, trop inappréciable trophée pour paraître!" And this image is reminiscent of the ending of the "Nénuphar," where the poet's prize was likewise invisible, "mon imaginaire trophée," like this "trop inappréciable trophée pour paraître"--because ideal. At the same time, trophy always suggests something won by conquest, that is the poetic quest which is a conquest in that it conquers reality, or experience, to yield the ideal, which stresses again the poet's difference from the others--as for example the ecclésiastique--who, instead of conquering experience, undergoes it. This proud trophy--and we saw above how it supports the tone of the excessive, of hubris, emphasized throughout the poem--is designated "un lot d'une splendeur secrète"; for it cannot be divulged, in the etymological sense of that word, rendered vulgar, because it is that necessarily solitary vision, whose wealth can be imparted to the many only in poetry, as, for example, this prose poem, "La Gloire."

But now, finally assured of solitude, with all obstacles overcome, the poet persona does not need to dash into the forest, or cross its threshold immediately, for his serene possession of himself, and of the moment, is in perfect

harmony with its "suspens," that momentary arrest of both time and motion, reminiscent of the "Nénuphar's" lovely pond, calm in its "nonchaloir," but "plissé des hésitations à partir qu'a une source."

And the forest's splendor now reaches its climax, which unites it with that of the sky; in "cette diurne veillée d'immortel troncs," the trunks appear to hold a devotional vigil, in preparation for the rite, "l'universel sacre," in the day's, that is the sun's, glow which illuminates them. They appear immortal as though their stasis, as well as that of the vision beholding them, were forever out of time, in a theatrical illusion, "une quiétude menteuse." But this stasis is rich with tension, for the trees seem immobilized in a gesture, that of bending down toward "un," the visionary poet, and pouring over him--"déversement" contains both the notions of bending and of pouring out--"d'orgueils surhumains." And in the forest's apotheosis, its "fierté" has become sublimated to the divine, thus also metaphysically linking its trees with the heavens to which they are reaching out, and with which splendor they will annoint the Poet. For all this pride and glory, it exists only through that vision which authenticates it, "(or ne faut-il pas qu'on en constate l'authenticité?)."<sup>17</sup> Nature simply is, Mallarmé reminds us in "La Musique et les Lettres":

La Nature a lieu, on n'y ajoutera pas; que des cités,  
les voies ferrées et plusieurs inventions formant notre  
matériel (OC p. 647).

But on the metaphysical level, the Poet creates its significance, which makes him a God himself--however, in his own apotheosis, he, "the royal intruder," celebrates both his divinity and his mortality.

The trees, like flaming torches, consuming their own substance in a fire reverberating in the sky's imperial purple clouds--reminiscent of the splendid image of a sonnet of those years, "Tout Orgueil fume-t-il du soir,/Torche dans un branle étouffée"--in "consuming dreams" point back to the analogy created above, where the leaves were likened to ideas of poems at the moment of birth. So, the fire consuming those leaves and dreams before their bursting forth suggests the idea of poetry never to be uttered, arrested in a vision--perhaps reflecting a vision of the oeuvre which Mallarmé frequently alluded to, but which he never wrote.

As the universal stage is set for the sublime solemnitas, with earth and heaven aflame and waiting for the Hero, the poet-persona knows that it is ready, waiting for him to celebrate his imperial triumph. And this scene was already the dream of the very young poet of "Symphonie Littéraire III," of which an early version reads as follows:

J'ai institué dans mon Rêve la cérémonie d'un Triomphe  
que j'aime évoquer aux heures de gloire et de féerie,  
et je l'appelle la Fête du Poète. ... Dans une apothéose,  
il siège sur un trône d'ivoire, couvert de la pourpre  
que lui seul à le droit de porter,--vous l'entendez, ô  
rois,--et ce front couronné de feuilles géantes du  
laurier de la Turbie.<sup>18</sup>

But our poet persona waits, celebrating not the realization but the virtuality of his consecration, until the last vestiges of reality, symbolized by the train "emportant du monde quelque part," be reduced to the proportions "d'une chimère puérile," before approaching his "Fête" alone.

And so this poem closes on this note of solitude of the poet and his vision,<sup>19</sup> and which endows it with its mysterious splendor; and at the same time it is reminiscent of the advice Mallarmé gives to the true artist in "Crayonné au Théâtre":

peindre une solitude de cloître à la torche de votre immortalité ... (OC p. 298).

But the revelation of the vision, a vision which had carried the Poet to the solitary and sublime heights of ideality, was the destiny of Man; and so the cycle of prose poems does not come to a close with the last word of this poem, "seul," but with a prose poem in which the poet celebrates "l'homme."

## LA GLOIRE

## NOTES

- 1 The term "gloire" is frequent throughout the verse poetry, where it always refers to the poet's renown as well as his magnificence, both aim and reward of his quest:

Las de l'amer repos où ma paresse offense  
Une gloire pour qui jadis j'ai fui l'enfance (1864)

Que ce beau monument l'enferme tout entier,  
Si ce n'est que la gloire ardente du métier,  
.  
.  
.  
Retourne vers les feux du pur soleil mortel! (1873)

Non! Le bouche ne sera sure  
De rien goûter à sa morsure  
S'il ne fait, ton princier amant,

Dans la considérable touffe  
Expirer, comme un diamant,  
Le cri des Gloires qu'il étouffe. (1885)

And in the early correspondence, the poet distinguishes already, as he does in the first paragraph of our prose poem, between true and false "gloire." Cited in Mondor, Propos, p. 71 (letter to Aubanel of 1866):

Que je prévois qu'il me faudra vingt ans pour ces  
cinq livres dont se composera l'Oeuvre, et que  
j'attendrai, no lisant qu'à mes amis comme toi, des  
fragments, --et me moquant de la gloire comme d'une  
niaiserie usée.

And, in contrast to that false one, true glory is referred to in a letter to Cazalis, of 1871, cited in the same work, p. 94:

Ceci peut ne pas rapporter un sou, et n'être que  
l'équivalent de ma gloire intérieure invétérée.  
Je suis payé.

In the "Réponse à des Enquêtes," of 1891, we find, about Verlaine:

Les individus mélodieux, rien n'exige qu'un décédé  
en soit un autre, avec hâte; d'autant que tel, en  
mourant, inaugure sa gloire (OC p. 873).

And this statement, similarly to our poem, links the notions of glory and death implied in "apothéose." The poet's isolation from his contemporaries, who do not understand "gloire," is brought out in a statement made by Mallarmé, and quoted in Naumann, Sprachgebrauch, p. 70:

Je crois que la poésie est faite pour les fastes et la pompe suprêmes d'une société constitués où aurait place la gloire dont les gens semblent avoir perdu la notion.

Finally, the notions of royalty and splendor are beautifully expressed in Mallarmé's commemorative discourse on Villiers, for him the ideal poet, whom he quotes in the passage:

Ce qu'il voulait, ce survenu, en effet, je pense sérieusement que c'était: régner. Aussi ce candidat à toute majesté survivante, d'abord élu domicile, chez les poètes; cette fois, décidé, il le disait, assagi, clairvoyant "avec l'ambition d'ajouter à l'illustration de ma race la seule gloire vraiment noble de nos temps, celle d'un grand écrivain." La devise est restée (OC p. 489).

This highly aristocratic attitude is, indeed, reminiscent of Vigny.

- 2 "L'or incompris des jours" is a beautiful example of that new sense and beauty with which "ordinary" words are endowed by the poet, which Mallarmé explains in "Crise de Vers," and which is as true for his prose as verse poetry:

Le vers qui de plusieurs vocables refait un mot total, neuf, étranger à la langue et comme incantatoire, achève cet isolement de la parole: niant, d'un trait souverain, le hasard demeuré aux termes malgré l'artifice de leur retrempe alternée en le sens et la sonorité, et vous cause cette surprise de n'avoir ouï jamais tel fragment ordinaire d'élocution, en même temps que la reminiscence de l'objet nommé baigne dans une neuve atmosphère (OC p. 368).

- 3 The curious use of the preposition "parmi" before a singular noun, "parmi l'exaltation de l'heure," is reminiscent not only of "parmi trop de félicité" of "La Déclaration," but also of the same construction in "L'Ecclésiastique," with "parmi cette robe spéciale." By an uncommon use of prepositions in general, Mallarmé usually creates a greater vagueness and therewith increases the suggestiveness of the phrase. Those he uses most strikingly are "selon" and "parmi," expressions of envelopment which create a special ambiance around the beings and events of the poems.
- 4 I feel that "cimes" on the narrative level refers to tree-tops, with the suggestions indicated, rather than to "mountain peaks," which is Bradford Cook's translation in Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays & Letters (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), p. 7. Cook's translations of four of our prose poems in that book are indeed very poetic and beautiful, but, I believe, too free in certain places.
- 5 This unkind reference to his fellow man is very reminiscent of two early verse poems, "Les Fenêtres," of 1863, also



stressing the poet's (the narrator's) alienation, where we find the stanza:

Mais hélas! Ici-bas est maître: sa hantise  
Vient m'écoeurer parfois jusqu'en cet abri sûr,  
Et le vomissement impur de la Bêtise  
Me force à me boucher le nez devant l'azur.

In the other, "L'Azur," of 1864, we find:

--Le Ciel est mort.--Vers toi, j'accours! donne,  
    ô matière,  
L'oubli de l'Idéal cruel et du Péch<sup>é</sup>  
A ce martyr qui vient partager la litière  
Ou le bétail heureux des hommes est couché

- 6 The notion of autumn as a theatrical spectacle, with its atmosphere of heightened "suspens," is also expressed in "Plaisir Sacré":

Un vent ou peur de manquer à quelque chose exigeant  
le retour, chasse, de l'horizon à la ville, les gens,  
quand le rideau va se lever sur la magnificence  
déserte de l'automne. Le proche éparpillement du  
doigté lumineux, que suspend le feuillage, se mire,  
alors, au bassin de l'orchestre (OC p. 388).

Here, as in "Bucolique," the autumnal magnificence is linked to that of Music.

- 7 Again, "Bucolique" marks the poet's similar need for isolation from the city and its crowds:

Que l'artiste et lettré, qui se range sous l'unique  
vocable de poète, n'a lui, à faire dans un lieu  
adonné à la foule ou hasard; serviteur, par avance,  
de rythmes-- (OC p. 401).

- 8 Cohn, L'Oeuvre, pp. 268-69, in discussing a passage of that poem ("le Coup de dés"), makes the following observation:

Le mouvement vers le haut est annulé par le mouvement vers le bas dans le passage que nous étudions. ... ce procédé se trouve à plusieurs reprises chez Mallarmé toujours avec l'idée d'un orgueil enflé aboutissant à une chute: "feuillages là-bas trop immobilisés (cf. notre texte) pour qu'une crise ne les épargille bientôt" (289); "la tige/Grandissait trop pour nos raisons" (Prose, 56); plus subtilement: "trop inappréciable trophée pour paraître" (289); "un éclat triomphal (note l'élément phal) trop brusque pour durer" (384), ... La défaite sera complètement indiquée par la foudre qui habituellement frappe les projections les plus élevées, les projets les plus ambitieux; "l'honneur d'Erechtheus par la foudre frappé (701) en représente un excellent exemple qui évoque un hubris grec.

And though Cohn does not mention "Pauvre Enfant Pâle" or "Petit Air II" and the "Cantique" itself, I feel that they are all part of that same idea of excess which contains and demands its own destruction here implied in "apotheose."

- 9 This oscillation, even within a single sentence, between elevated and ironic voices, with neither destroying the mood evoked by the other, evidences, again, Mallarmé's complete mastery of the genre, a genre all his own, moreover, which, as he explained, draws from and exploits both the factual and the ideal. Even a masterful translator, like Bradford Cook, can manage this shifting tonality only by breaking up the sentence.

- 10 Another passage of "Bucolique" again contrasts nature and city, with the latter seen as man's "fortress built against his own magnificence":

Combien, véritablement, une capitale, où s'exaspère le présent, restraint, dehors, la portée de ce miasme ... il ne traverse pas l'atmosphère de quinze lieues, au-dessus d'herbes et de feuilles ... nul intérêt ne rappellerait sur le coup--combien de la

forteresse construite, par les gens, expres, contre leur magnificence comme la répand la nature, sauf un recours à la musique dont le haut fourneau transmutatoire chôme, ces mois--je dis combien, sur les remparts, tonne, peu loin, le canon de l'actualité: que le brut puisse cesser à une si faible distance pour qui coupe, en imagination, une flûte où nouer sa joie selon divers motifs celui, surtout, de se percevoir, simple, infiniment sur la terre (OC pp. 404-5).

Here, as in our poem, the poet escapes the city's agitation, and particularly its noise, to be alone in nature.

- 11 It is, therefore surprising, after having followed Mallarmé's work from the beginning toward its end--as it is reflected in our cycle--to find some critics calling the poet "un homme d'intérieur," as for example Guy Michaud in Message, p. 189, where he draws on Claudel for support of this view:

Selon le mot de Claudel, Mallarmé est irrémédiablement un "homme d'intérieur." Il ne voit plus au dehors que "la nuit sans espérance." De même que Vigny était prisonnier du monde, Mallarmé est prisonnier de sa chambre, c'est-à-dire, au fond, d'un rationalisme trop étroit.

For while the early autumn poem of our cycle, "Plainte d'Automne," was indeed a poem of the "intérieur," where the persona would not even look out of his window, "La Gloire," the late autumn piece, on the contrary, shows the persona's flight from the confines of not only a room, or house, but the city itself, into open nature.

- 12 October seems always to have been Mallarmé's favorite month; he already celebrated it in the early "Soupir":

--Vers l'Azur attendri d'Octobre pâle et pur

And in a much later (1883) letter to Verlaine, Mondor,

Correspondance II, p. 248, he says:

Tous les soirs de ce mois d'octobre où j'ai toute une année de gagne-pain, en même temps d'oeuvre personnelle à préparer (sans compter des échappées vers les fugitives beautés de l'automne, notre grande passion à tous les deux) j'ai voulu vous écrire.

- 13 Scherer, L'Expression, devotes a whole chapter to conjunctions, pointing out Mallarmé's predilection for their uncommon use; and he analyzes our phrase as follows, p. 128:

Parmi les conjonctions de subordination, en tant que est employé, un peu comme selon, avec des sens très variés, marquant l'unité du motif, ou de la direction, ou de la substance, sous une diversité apparente. Cette conjonction est aimée de Mallarmé parce qu'elle lui permet d'exprimer un grand nombre de rapports subtils, et aussi parce qu'elle peut s'employer sans verbe. En voici quelques exemples: "million d'existences étageant leur vacuité en tant qu'une monotonie énorme de capitale" (parce qu'au fond elles sont), ...

And on pp. 247-49, he analyzes the passage "Si discord parmi l'exaltation ... to "tiens, une monnaie." But the analysis, which is rather narrowly grammatical, does not particularly aid in the interpretation of the passage.

- 14 Again "Bucolique" expresses, in almost the same terms, this obsession with the city turmoil, of which the train is but an extension, while at the same time being the means of escape:

Comme il suffit de s'en aller, à une heure et demie seulement que l'obsession qui continue, par le vacarme du train, finisse, prés: et accourt, avec une épaisseur, ou la parité de végétations ultérieures, tel bois (OC p. 404).

- 15 In an early (1866) letter to Aubanel, Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 222, Mallarmé already compared with a natural process this way that the idea, ripened into a poem, detached itself:

Je travaille à tout à la fois, ou plutôt je veux dire que tout est si bien ordonné en moi, qu'à mesure, maintenant, qu'une sensation m'arrive, elle se transfigure et va d'elle-même se caser dans tel livre et tel poème. Quand un poème sera mur, il se détachera. Tu vois que j'imité la loi naturelle.

- 16 For Cohn, L'Oeuvre, p. 295, this sentence reveals what "gloire" meant for Mallarmé:

... dans La Gloire, où Mallarmé suggère qu'il trouve la vraie gloire dans son oeuvre en gestation: "Il est, cet an, d'amers et lumineux sanglots, mainte indécise flottaison d'idée désertant les hasards comme des branches, tel frisson et ce qui fait penser à un automne sous les cieux" (289).

- 17 Cohn, Toward the Poems, p. 119, sees in this the revealing of the significance of "the Dream," the orphic explanation, and continues: "Which he proceeded to try to do in the Coup de dés."

- 18 This early version of the Theodore de Banville section of "Symphonie Littéraire" is quoted in Mondor, Précisions, p. 32.

- 19 Cohn, Toward the Poems, p. 122, in analyzing "Quand l'ombre menaça de la fatale loi," says about its line "Aux yeux du solitaire ébloui de sa foi":

solitaire ébloui de sa foi: this is the central theme of the prose poem La Gloire.

And Pierre Beausire, Mallarmé Poésie et Poétique (Lausanne: Mermod, 1949), p. 9, points to a certain solitude which seems to characterize Mallarmé's poetry itself:

Je ne pense pas que l'on trouve dans toute notre littérature poésie plus grave et plus étrange que celle de Mallarmé. ... Elle est sans analogue, rigoureusement pure et distincte, pleinement autonome et si parfaitement solitaire, qu'elle retentit en nous comme la voix même de la solitude.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CONFLIT

This piece, which the Pléiade edition of Mallarmé's oeuvre has published together with other prose pieces under the section "Variations sur un Sujet," was chosen by Mallarmé himself to be the closing poem of "Anecdotes ou Poèmes" of Divagations.<sup>1</sup> The Mondor edition merely acknowledges this fact in a note; yet they chose to group "Conflit" under "Variations sur un Sujet" because it had also appeared under that general title in the series of prose pieces which the poet had published in 1895 in LA REVUE BLANCHE. But the other prose poems had likewise first come out separately in various publications. Since the 1897 edition of Divagations, one year before Mallarmé's death, indicates the author's own grouping and thus structural determination of his prose work, it would seem to me more prudent to follow that order.

However, this is not a mere a priori proposition; for the study of the poem will show that it does, in fact, a posteriori, constitute not only an important part, but the culmination of the "Poèmes en Prose." Thus, rather than twelve, there are thirteen pieces in this recueil, and the uneven number is not insignificant; for just as the seven stars which make up the constellation of the "Coup de dés,"

so here the odd thirteen somehow indicates a tension, rather than rest; and we have seen that every single one of these prose poem is characterized by tension. At the same time, the thirteen also indicates a cyclical structure of this group of poems, a structure already suggested by that old Saxony clock of "Frisson d'Hiver," which struck the thirteenth hour. For the twelve hours of the clock's dial, just as for the twelve signs of the zodiac, the thirteen suggests a return to the beginning.

Since the original version of "Conflit" is of the poet's very latest period, it did not undergo significant revisions for its publication in Divagations.<sup>2</sup> The poem's setting is the narrator's country retreat, that beautiful forest and river region we know already from "Le Nénuphar Blanc," where he has come for a quiet summer. But on his arrival, he finds the ground floor of his vacation house invaded by a team of railroad workers; and the anecdote, which is about his encounter with these working men, becomes the vehicle for the theme of the Poet's relationship with the People, a theme already touched upon in some of these prose poems, but developed fully in this closing piece.

The tension of this piece is, of course, already inherent in its very title, whose etymology, cum fligere, reveals its kinetic quality. And as it thus evokes not a resolution, but a clash, hostile encounter even, it is in harmony with a vocabulary cluster of the combative and the belligerent,



which is prominent in the poem: "envahie, injure, ennemi, force pure, défense, assaillant, stratégie, pugilat, lutte, tomber champ de bataille." The antithetical tension of the concept of conflict is further rendered by the sound-look of the word designating it, the round-lettered "con," in sound suggestive of "conque," the female, and "flit," with its dominant "i," high and light sound and pointed letters, suggestive of the male principle, its antithesis--thus already prefiguring the image of "pioche" and "pelle" of the poem.<sup>3</sup> And as the male and the female principles stand in antithetical relationship to each other, so does the master-poet and the crowd. And this relationship of the poet to mankind, his position in society, is the principal theme of this poem, and already contained in its title.

The first word, "longtemps," reminiscent of the opening chord of Proust's A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, evokes both human freedom and imprisonment, in that Space and Time are not only the categories of our mind which permit us to order and rule the indeterminate manifold about us, but also the protective modes of understanding beyond which Man--and even artistic vision--may venture only at the risk of annihilation. And this deeper significance suggested by the word is important here, where it opens not only a paragraph, but a poem dealing with the poet-persona's secure order of existence, one created by him, threatened from the outside, that is by the unforeseen.

This threat of annihilation, a dominant theme in this poetic universe, was celebrated in the dramatic Igitur, whose hero, at the point of breaking beyond those mental categories and thus ceasing to exist as an individual mind, overshadowed several of the early prose poems; it was reflected further, in some of the early pieces in the persona's hesitations and fears, imaged, for example, in the trembling spider webs of "Frisson d'Hiver," or the need for the protective shell of rooms, but finally openly confronted in "Pauvre Enfant Pâle" with its celebration of elevation into death.<sup>4</sup>

For a long time, to proceed on the literal level, the first-person narrator believed, that is felt secure, in a certain order of experience created by himself; and the anecdote relates the threatened destruction of this order through the fortuitous, which recalls, of course, the narrative schema of most of the late prose poems. And this most difficult first sentence paragraph reflects this experience, so that to force its seeming dislocation into a smooth rendition would be to destroy its intention. In "que s'exempta mon idée d'aucun accident même vrai," "mon idée," that is the mental representation and ordering of phenomena in and by the mind, and that mind itself, is contrasted with "accident," namely the given, the uncontrolled confronting it. In this encounter, the intellect's impulse is to "s'exempter," that is free itself from the contingent by refusing it, even if true. And, again, as in these last prose poems, in refusing

to submit to it, the mind can dominate chance by transforming it into meaning. This Kantian transformation, als ob--comme si, comme si--is that of art, like philosophy a fiction, as if--that is pretending--mind were able to conquer matter, or thought chance. The mind, then, prefers to plunge into and draw from "puiser" later to be echoed by "puisatiers," its own principle; and just as "idée" and "accident" were contrasted in the preceding clause, so here "principe" and "hasard"; the object of this drawing forth from its own principle is "jaillissement," a bursting or gushing forth of idea or thought, reinforcing "puiser," both suggestive of creation out of the first origin, water, fons et origo both individually and collectively, which vaguely intimates the poet's kinship with the race.<sup>5</sup>

With the second paragraph begins the narrative proper, the persona's return for his annual summer visit to his country house, his partaking of the great rhythm of nature.<sup>6</sup> His love for the deserted house is based on his disposition to create in its calm the elements of his universe, so in harmony with this quiet, hidden world. But even here, paradoxically, once again the unexpected and hated encounter with intruders to his peace, the cherished silence, will occasion a poem. With the regularity of the annual cycle, which infallibly turns the vines on the outside stairway green, the poet expects the same happiness at each return, upon pushing the shutters back against the old walls. And "année"



underlines the security and predictable certainty of the temporal and spatial laws, that rhythmical cycle in which the earth always takes the same time to travel the same space, and back again to the origin to repeat the same revolution, while the becoming green again of the old stone stairway is a beautiful image for both stability, that of the stone, and rebirth, the new green leaves.<sup>7</sup> The shutters, "wintry" because belonging to the little house's winter dress, are thus opened for the customary summer view; and the poet links--but the French "raccorder" is much richer as it immediately points to "accord," "harmony," and thence "re-establishing harmony"--this view to past ones: "l'oeillade d'à présent au spectacle immobilisé autrefois." When "today's glance" is in this way linked to last year's and those of the years before, namely to the recreated, the "fixed" mental image of memory, it seems that in this act today's "live" view is also already "immobilised." And the present is thus rendered stable by being linked to the past, that is by being internalized at once. This is reminiscent of what the poet, at the conclusion of "L'Ecclésiastique," where he had likewise "fixed" the fugitive in a permanent artistic image, described like this:

Ma discrétion vis-à-vis d'ébats d'abord apparus n'a-t-elle pas pour récompense d'en fixer à jamais comme une rêverie de passant se plut à la compléter, l'image marquée d'un sceau ... (OC p. 288) [my italics]

And nature as "spectacle" for the poet beholder prepares already for the poem's conclusion, where he will, again, become

a participant in its drama. By the expedient, this mechanism of instantly connecting the outer view to the inner, thoroughly mental, one, the poet creates an illusion: "comme si pas d'interruption." [my italics] The real world of phenomena is characterized by ruptures, breaks, interruptions, and it is only with the mind that we create its form or order, that we "fix" it.

But this year, the operation and its result, "contentement pareil," the persona's reward--and "gage" here is reminiscent of "récompense" in the just quoted passage of the other poem--for his faithful returns does not succeed. For as the shutters, "worm-eaten" which stresses their great age, bang against the walls--"battement" a fitting synecdoche for the shutters whose noise is being emphasized, the word, which is also an artillery term, moreover fitting into the vocabulary cluster mentioned above--this banging "scande un vacarme," the latter alliterating with "vermoulu," unfamiliar to the customary scene. "Scander," a poetic term, is used ironically here, for what is scanned is not verse, but clamor and shouts, "refrains" not of song, but of angry fighting from below. The remainder of the sentence explains the phenomenon, for the narrator now remembers having been notified that the ground floor of the house was to be rented to a group of railroad construction workers for the summer. And "légende de la malheureuse demeure" is multivalent, in that "legend" besides meaning simply "explanation," at the same time suggests

"livre contenant les actes des saints pour toute l'année," which seems to personify the house as a martyr, reinforced with "malheureuse," preparing for the narrator's resolution at the end of the sentence, while etymologically, legere, implying simply that the persona had read the letter informing him of the circumstance.

Again the great age of the house is brought out--in contrast to the new, progress, which echoes the mood of not only the early "Plainte d'Automne" and "Frisson d'Hiver," but especially the preceding poem, where one of the symbols of progress was also the railroad, "chimère puérile"--with "dont je hante le coin intact." And the verb here means not merely "to frequent," but, from one of its English secondary meanings, "to pervade with spectral activities." "Coin," in the sense of "endroit retiré, peu fréquenté," prepares for "solitude" farther on in the sentence, while "intact," tangere, suggests undefiled, pure. "Envahie par une bande de travailleurs" accentuates the military tone in suggesting occupation by force, reinforced with "bande," an antagonistic group. "Travailleurs" already vaguely foreshadowing the contrast with bourgeois to be developed further on, as a military term refers to "soldats qu'on emploie à des travaux de retranchements," exactly the type of work these men do: moving the earth for the building of embankments. The key term, however, is "offenser," and the victim, the country, is particularly vulnerable "parce que tout de solitude," thus in harmony with

its solitary poet inhabitant, and martyriized as the old house. When the unwelcome news about the workers had arrived, it had so anguished the narrator that he had hesitated whether he should come this year, "irais-je ou non" marking this conflict of alternatives. But, assuming a knightly--coming to the rescue of the defenseless--somewhat military stance, in his turn, he decided "à défendre, comme mien," and even "arbitrairement s'il le faut, le local," which tells us also that he does not own this property, "comme mien," a point he will develop later. And so, overcome by "une tendresse, exclusive dorénavant," excluding any other feelings or considerations, "that it was it," after all, "le local," which had received the greatest wrong and insult, and which, we remember, is totally defenseless, he assumes his task of "hôte de sa déchéance." And "hôte" of what later is called "séjour" points again to the narrator's non-ownership of this property, where he is, thus, somewhat like these itinerant workers, merely a passing occupant himself, which vaguely suggests a certain kinship between them. The old house's "déchéance," decadere, is reminiscent of the decadence theme of "Plainte d'Automne," while at the same time distantly recalling the Igitur-Hamlet-Villiers complex, that is the idealized figure of "the last prince of his line." Further, "dans la suppression concernant des sites précieux" is not only a characteristic nominalization but also extremely précieux, and the "précieux" of the clause itself, which on



the narrative level refers to the priceless beauty of the country, may very well at the same time constitute a veiled description of the style of the very sentence in which it appears.

The "invraisemblablement," which opens the concluding section of this long sentence, is a typically Mallarméan beginning, with the elaborate adverb setting the tone;<sup>8</sup> but here its use is even more striking than usual, as it is an ellipsis swallowing up subject pronoun, verb, and relative pronoun. The narrator can hardly believe that his summer place, so loved for its "désuétude" echoing "abandonnée" above, and "l'exception," phonetically echoing "s'exempta" of the first sentence, a place so exceptional, should have been turned into--and what a contrast!--a "cantine" for the workers, namely a "lieu," by suggestion through its secondary meaning, "où l'on vend à boire dans des casernes, les prisons," which, though not the literal meaning of the term here in its narrative use, already foreshadows the workers' drinking which will figure prominently later on, while, once again, intimating a military ambiance. At the same time, "ouvriers" is already different in tone than the above "bande de travailleurs," in that it suggests the word's collective use for the whole class of working people, which these men will come more and more to represent for the poet-persona. And really, the aggressor threatening here is progress, rather than the workers who are merely its instrument. And the use of progress in the plural,

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a word which is usually in the singular when it refers to "le progrès: l'évolution de l'humanité, de la civilisation (vers un terme idéal)," might constitute an ironic fragmentation of the apparent general "mouvement en avant."

But now, in fact accepting the feared confrontation, the narrator from his window looks these men over: "terrassiers, puisatiers," men who work "à remuer des terres" and "à creuser les puits"; and are not earth and water the elements from which the poet also draws--Valvins, loved for its land and river. At the moment, the men are "au repos, dans une tranchée," and "tranchée," on the narrative level the ditch in which they are stretched out, by association suggests a "terme de guerre," namely the trench, which had for hundreds of years been a fundamental part of European wars, and which foreshadows the poem's culminating image of the "champ de bataille." Characteristically, the poet-persona meditates on the clothing people wear: "velours hâve aux jambes" indicates that, because their working clothes are worn, the project must be going ahead, "le remblai bouge"; but "velours," on the literal level the corduroy pants, by a secondary meaning suggests plush velvet cloth, so sharply contrasting with "hâve." The transverse blue and white stripes of their jerseys occasion a comparison rendering the humble work clothing deeply symbolic; for they resemble a watery surface, water reminiscent again--as already suggested with "jaillissement" and "puiser" above--of first origins, which is reinforced

with the men's lying in the earth, an image fully developed at the closing of the poem, also suggestive of a return to the origin. And so the clothing symbolizes the human life cycle, "(vêtement oh! que l'homme est la source qu'il cherche)," which is in harmony with the evocation of the solar-annual one above. Blue and white might further suggest milk as original substance and sustenance, reminiscent of Hérodiade's memories of the "lait bu jadis," and that "blancheur sibylline" of "Don du Poème." And as man's "being the source which he searches" points back to the opening where the poetic act was termed as the mind's drawing from its own principle, the suggestion here is that not only poet, but the laborers also, that is both physical and spiritual workers, pursue a quest, whose circularity is further intimated by "chercher," etymologically circare, "faire le tour de."<sup>9</sup>

And so gradually a secret kinship of the poet-persona with his unwelcome intruders suggests itself, perhaps even symbolized by "co-locataires." "La rumeur les dit chemineaux," on the narrative level "reportedly they are itinerant workers," connotes society's negative judgment of them--"rumeur" can be "soupçon du public contre quelqu'un" and "chemineau" tramp--preparing for the notion of their being victimized by that society, developed later on. The poet sees in the workers the contradiction of weariness and strength, though it is not quite clear whether their independance, "en absence

d'usine," is a chosen or imposed one. "Grouillement partout" is somewhat evocative of the crawling workers of an anthill, perhaps reinforced with the ironic "partout où la terre a souci d'être modifié," for at the moment the men appear vanquished by and in that impassible earth.

The short opening sentence of the following very long paragraph is characteristic of Mallarmé's latest manner: entirely lacking in verbs, it is tersely difficult. "Les maîtres quelque part" are the workers, which is again indicative of a certain progression from "bande de travailleurs," to "les ouvriers quelconque par excellence" to this appellation, which, while designating foremen, in the sense of "maître ouvrier," also suggests that they are now the masters of the region, "envahie" as we read above, by them. And both meanings support their behavior, free of constraint and noisy, where "verbe haut" likewise shows a progression from their "vacarme" and "altercations" above. In the narrator, "le malade des bruits," we recognize the hero of "Plainte d'Automne," who always cherished solitude, that of "Frisson d'Hiver," who in his companion loved a "calme enfant," and the persona of "Le Démon de l'Analogie," who listened only to an inner voice, to mention the early prose poems. In the late ones, the clash of silence and harmony with noise and discord opened the anecdotes of "La Déclaration Foraine" and "La Gloire," while "Le Nénuphar Blanc" celebrated silence.<sup>10</sup>

But slowly the narrator becomes accustomed to the rhythm of these workers' lives, whose steady monotony is beautifully rendered in "cette cohue entre, part, avec le manche, à l'épaule, de la pioche et de la pelle," which not only conveys the eversame, simple rhythm with these one and two-syllable words, but reinforces it with internal alliteration; "cohue" again stresses their noisiness so painful to the poet, while "pioche" and "pelle" are introduced here to be picked up again and fully developed later on in inverse order. And this way of life causes the persona to reflect, "inviting in its favor" rather vague emotions, "de derrière la tête," not quite thoughts yet, but impressions forcing him "to go directly beyond" notions of which one says "c'est de la littérature," where the author's italics underline a derogatory intention, "idées" here meaning purely intellectual notions--which are not felt but thought--while "littérature" is to be read in the sense of Verlaine's "Et tout le reste est littérature."<sup>11</sup>

The following sentence defines this vague feeling, for, seeing in a storage cellar the workers' shovels and picks neatly lined up, the poet is overcome by a "religious" emotion, forcing him to his knees, as he reflects on the basic life-creating force, the sexual one, doubly symbolized here by the workers who impregnate the earth by their labor, and their tools, shovel and pick, womb- and phallus-shaped.<sup>12</sup> And this religious emotion is not merely stated, but accentuated with the vocabulary cluster "dévot, crypte, religion,

m'agenouiller." "Dévot ennemi" suggests the narrator's ambiguous attitude, with its tension of both love and hate for those men, a tension which underlies the whole poem, and which is that indicated by its title, "Conflit."

"Pénétrant" is richly suggestive, for, while on the literal level referring to the persona's stealing into the tool shed, it has the sexual connotations--to pierce, diffuse itself through--in harmony with other elements of the sentence; and as the poet penetrates the cellar, he is in turn penetrated in the sense of "being deeply affected in senses or feelings."

And the partly visually alliterating "crypte ou cellier en commun" suggests the workers' forming a kind of spiritual community, the instruments of their labor functioning as a synecdoche for the men, for "crypte" aside from being the cellar with its sepulchres of European churches, is also a "terme d'antiquité chrétienne," referring to a certain kind of church itself, while "en commun" reinforces the communal idea. It is thus as though the poet had stolen into "their" church secretly, where the images before which he bows are the instruments of their toil: "la rangée de l'outil double, cette pelle et cette pioche, sexuels"; and in "l'outil double" there is a suggestion of an androgynous quality, vaguely evocative of a first mythical stage of life, before the sexes were divided. The instruments' metal, which itself had to be wrought from deep within the earth, sums up "la force pure du travailleur," the latter now seemingly

totally redeemed with "pure," for the worker, too, though unlike the farmer who tills and sows, renders the earth fruitful by his labor. And the narrator's inner conflict of attitudes is characterized by the simultaneous emotions of "religion" and "mécontentement," respect for these men and at the same time annoyance, reinforcing the "dévot ennemi" above.

The following sentence has a rich ambiguity suggested by the singular definite article of "intrus"; for from the narrator's viewpoint, the intruders are the workers, whom no man of law, that is country constable or sheriff, prides himself in ousting. And the self-importance of this imagined constable is nicely rendered with "se targuer," a verb implying something of the ostentatious pretentiousness of the small official, reminiscent of the stationmaster of "La Gloire." But "l'intrus," in view of the foregoing sentence, might also refer to the narrator himself, who had stolen into the workers' toolshed, and we recall that in the preceding poem, the poet persona had designated himself "l'intrus royal," this being the only other use of the noun in these prose poems. Further, some of the rest of the clause could also equally well apply to the workers and to the narrator: both have paid the owner, and both might be there on the basis of a verbal agreement, rather than a formally written contract, the less formal way being customary in the country, "beaux tacites, usages locaux." And "établi par surprise" could



refer to the workers being there, which surprised the narrator, who had forgotten the letter telling him about it, while for the workers, the narrator's sudden presence was probably just as surprising as theirs to him. And it is in this "établi" in the masculine singular which grammatically modifies "l'intrus" where the ambiguity lies, an ambiguity which somehow again vaguely intimates a kinship between the narrator and the workers, setting them both off against the "propriétaire." The last clause shows the narrator's reaction to the situation as a balancing of alternatives: play along with them, or defend himself against them, reflecting the tension of his conflicting feelings. The "rôle" he might play is, therefore, ambiguous--is it that of "homme de loi" or of "intrus"--and its uncertainty becomes evident in the following section, where he plays it out mentally, in an inner dialogue, reminiscent of that engaged in with the stationmaster in the preceding poem. In this role, he will both "restrict" the intruders "à mes droits"--represented by the little garden he closes off to them, for their presence there would be an "empiétement," a transgression, into something too private to be shared--but also assume the part of fellow-intruder, "camarades" accentuating his kinship with the men. The narrator's "rôle," thus reflects his attitude of irresolvable conflict.

Now he mentally "acts out," then, his approach, not without misgivings as to a certain disdainful tone of language,

should he speak to the men, a tone which would be due not to condescension on his part, but simply to the fact that he has no taste for "promiscuité." And this word, "mélange confus et désordonné, en parlant des personnes," intends no value judgment here, but accentuates the persona's fear of the disorder of hasard. However, might he not, after all, fall into the "note juste"? Now these are terms of music, the former designating intonation and length of sound, the latter conformity to the rules as to scale and tonality. And the significance of the musical terminology here lies in its connotation of the formal, the artistic; for as the poet persona discloses his imaginary address in the following sentence, we recognize in it the language of art, of poetry, écriture, rather than parole. The only term the men would have understood, really is the first word: "Camarades," which continues the progression we have been following from the beginning of the encounter, with the gradually increasing rapprochement of poet and people. Again, this is a military term also, but the solidarity suggested here is predominantly social.

The very first clause of the lengthy sentence addressed to the workers is extremely précieux; the use of "vous ne supposez pas" for "you can't imagine" sounds formal and distant, so that the preceding "camarades" seems somehow nullified by it; and the rest of the clause, where the narrator refers to himself with the very impersonal "quelqu'un" further increases the distance, which direction is continued by the use of the

definite article: "l'état de quelqu'un." Again, not this region, but "un paysage celui-ci" stresses the remoteness not only of the speaker, but also of the setting, from those spoken to. There is, thus, again a tension between a desired rapprochement and a factual distance, the attempt of a personal tone, which is then undercut by the most highly impersonal style possible.

"Epars" here as in the "Nénuphar" and the "Ecclésiastique" refers to something characterizing the natural setting; in the former it was a "vierge absence éparsée en cette solitude," and in the latter a "solitude, froid silence épars dans la verdure." In our poem it is "l'état de quelqu'un épars dans un paysage," which suggests that not "quelqu'un," but "l'état de quelqu'un," namely one characterized by "absence, solitude" and "silence" is dispersed in the landscape, again accentuating the correspondence between the poet and his chosen paysage.<sup>13</sup> And this landscape, "ou toute foule s'arrête" underlining absence, solitude and silence, is an ambiance protected by the forest's density, where the protected "isolement," etymologically suggesting "island," is the water's guardian. So, the forest protects the land, and the land the still water, which recalls the secret magic landscape of the "Nénuphar," which similarly to ours was also evocative of the protective shelter of the womb, and symbolized perhaps by that closed water blossom itself.<sup>14</sup> In our poem this landscape gently modulates the motif of the return to the source introduced at the beginning.

"Or mon cas, tel," characteristic by the absence of the verb, suggests by its brevity a shyness almost on the part of the poet, the small one-syllable words expressing his reluctance to tell the workers that their noisy behavior hurts him, while their activities are at the same time rendered somewhat less offensive by the use of the impersonal pronoun. The enumeration of vulgarities is summed up in "discordance," a discord causing an "intolerable, if invisible rent" in the poet's soul which wants to remain in harmony with the atmosphere, "ce suspens lumineux de l'air." And this impressionistically rendered ambiance of vibrating airy brightness, a calm only broken by the trembling of light, is reminiscent of that golden equilibrium of "La Gloire."

Though it is clear that the workers would not have understood this language, they might have understood the solitary man's need for solitude instinctively, and certainly better than others, more sophisticated than they, which accentuates the bond, so far merely intimated, between poet and workers, setting them off from the broad middle-class bourgeoisie, here represented by "onze messieurs," such as the property owners of the region.<sup>15</sup> And it is thus not because he fears the "inanité," the emptiness, of his confession as it would strike the workers' ears that the narrator refrains from speaking out. The lack of understanding and care for the poet on the part of society, a theme familiar from the early "Guignon" as well as the mature "Tombeaux," is here

symbolized by the "rire immédiat," a response as cruel as it is ugly, and which has nothing in common with the working man's innocent and incomprehending, but not unfeeling, simplicity.

And these reflections are confirmed by a characteristic of these men's lives, their drinking, both bane and blessing for them. For they have, it seems "le sens du merveilleux," that sense which the poet also has, and which the materialistic bourgeoisie does not know, precisely because they are "pochards," drunkards. Is it not by means of their kind of "ivresse" that they turn their back on an unacceptable here and now to enter another world; and is it not because of their brutish hard toil, "soumis" and "corvée" reminiscent of the soldier's unquestioning performance of his duty, that they have a sense, however vague, "de délicatesses quelque part supérieures?" For this reason, then, might they not perhaps see in the narrator's "douloureux privilège," namely a life and work condemning him to solitude--where we feel the tension between the privileged calling and the price paid for it--might they not see in it a personal rather than a social distinction and thus not be suspicious and defiant? Again, here, the tension of rapprochement and distance between poet and workers is spelled out. Might these men, therefore, not, if but for a short time, try to disturb the poet less? But no, much more "plausibly," habit would get the upper hand soon, and by its etymology the adverb suggests that the

workers would rightfully go back to their own noisy ways. And the following sentence develops the poet's understanding of the necessities of these men, as vital to them as his own--such different ones--to himself. But we must remember that this dialogue is merely imaginary, an idealized one, which will soon clash with a real one. "A moins qu'un ne réponde, tout de suite, avec égalité" stresses that they are now on equal terms with him, while "avec égalité" at the same time even suggests on their part a certain dignified manner of presentation, "modération que ne trouble aucune impatience." And so, at this point, poet and workers seem to have reached a temporary balance of equality. The imaginary justification of the workers explains that for those short periods when work ceases, they need each other's shouting to continue to exist; to keep them alive, from sinking into unconsciousness, they need to be encouraged by it, their own and that of the others, like a chain of hands, where each individual is at the same time supported by, and supporting, himself and the whole group. The shouting of a comrade is exhilarating almost like drinking--and costs nothing; and so the poet understands that "leur coeur, incohérent, est en effet nécessaire."

How quickly the narrator becomes less firm in his "défense," now as sensitive to their needs as he had been--and still is--to his own! Is he not almost ready to lead the "assaillant" in by the hand? But "défense" and "assaillant,"

again military terms, suggest that, even now that the poet's attitude has shifted from his former martial stance, the tension remains insurmountable. For the countryside itself, this small domain exactly right for "l'usage du rêveur," closed off from the outside world by the forest shade--echoing "où toute foule s'arrête, en tant qu'épaisseur de forêt à l'isolement" above--this land carefully enclosed like that of the "Nénuphar," its isolation stressed with "se clôture, au noir d'arbres," how can it accommodate those intruders? And this land is, of course, the symbol for the poet's mind--as had been the room in the early prose poems, "spacieux" symbolizing that mind's expansion, jealously closed off from the outside world, "retirement," but vast in its "distances intérieures."

But the term "Propriété" is not the narrator's designation of this spot, but "comme le veut le vulgaire," implying here "la chose qui appartient en propre à quelqu'un" in the sense of legal possession, an ownership which is held, ironically, by absent owners; and their kind of possession has nothing in common with true "belonging" in the sense of that spiritual affinity which is meaningless to the "vulgaire," a term again designating the bourgeoisie, those property owners precisely in the legal sense, who were above represented by the "onze messieurs" with their brutal and vulgar laughter. And now the already intimated non-ownership on the part of the narrator of this property is being fully developed.

Yet there is a curious juxtaposition in "il faut que je l'aie manquée, avec obstination," namely the acquisition of this summer place in the legal sense. For "manquer" implies passivity, and "avec obstination" its opposite, action with tenacity. At the same time the poet muses on his factual lack of funds, "omettant le moyen d'acquisition," but then again suggests choice with: "pour satisfaire quelque singulier instinct de ne rien posséder et de seulement passer," where "singulier instinct" again evokes the notion of the exceptional being's isolation and at the same time the involuntary nature of his calling. "De ne rien posséder et de seulement passer," which reads like an alexandrine with internal rhyme, and which on the narrative level refers to the poet's poverty, at the same time plays with the notion: "not to possess anything" = "to possess nothing."<sup>16</sup> And the poets' designation of himself as "passant" is reminiscent of "une rêverie de passant" at the conclusion of "L'Ecclésiastique."

Or had the narrator not refrained from acquiring property also so as not to risk a disturbance such as the present one? In other words, in not binding himself to material possessions, had he not hoped to remain free of chance--"hasard" always of the domain of "matière"--"l'aventure"? But then, immediately, the meaning of this word, "ce qui advient par cas fortuit," is negated, "l'aventure qui n'est pas, tout à fait, le hasard," which shows a most significant shift from the position at the poem's opening, where, as we saw, "idée" and



"accident," as well as "principe" and "hasard," were still in diametrical opposition. But what has really shifted, of course, is the workers' presence as representing "hasard." Not a purely chance encounter this, which draws the poet nearer, le rend voisin, not to propriétaires, but to "prolétaires," with whom, again by some "singulier instinct," he vaguely feels a growing spiritual kinship.

The following line, one of the most beautiful of the poem, is a restatement of the title, "Conflit." "Alternatives," so much softer than the former word, poses, again, no resolution, but simply balances rapprochement or éloignement, conflicting attitudes which result in the tension of conflicting feelings: "sympathie" and "malaise." And "je prévois" suggests the poet's function of voyant in the widest sense, for this "saison, de sympathie et de malaise" exceeds the sphere of the poem and might well reflect Mallarmé's historical moment, that is his socially revolutionary nineteenth century,<sup>17</sup> for whose conflicts the poet sees no resolution.

On the literal level, the narrator, who had above leaned toward rapprochement, "et j'introduis, par la main, l'assaillant," now suggests--we note the importance of "ou"--in fact the alternative, that is breaking off the connection by means of a quarrel. And in "ou souhaiterais, pour couper court, qu'un me cherchât querelle," "couper court," aside from its literal function, again describes the sentence

itself, similarly to the use of "précieux" above. "Pour couper court," the idiom "in short," literally also means "to cut short," namely relations with the workers; and the military connotation of "querelle" is reinforced by "stratégie," which, ironically, on the narrative level amounts to closing a garden gate. And this little garden, created "par mon art," is not part of the surrounding land, but an artificial creation, set off against the natural setting. While the poet is almost willing to share the latter with the workers, he protects this garden, which might be a symbol for artistic creation, a poem perhaps.<sup>18</sup> In fact, "qu'étranger ne passe le seuil" is an exhortation which seems to apply to the very poem in which it appears.<sup>19</sup> The poet's "jardinet" is juxtaposed and contrasted with the worker's "cabaret"; as to a tavern, might the men find another way to the workyard; let them cut through the fields.

At this point a shift occurs, for now the internal, imaginary, dialogue ceases; for as the narrator is closing the little garden gate, one of the drunken workers angrily reacts with a very real curse, as violent as his gesture is furious. And in "fumier! se profère violemment," the contrast between the curse and the préciosité of the phrase introducing it is not devoid of humor. "Je comprends qui l'aménité nomme" means both "I understand who the compliment refers to" and "I understand who calls the compliment," while "aménité," referring to the curse is again humorously ironic.

And as the drunkard leans over the garden gate shouting his insult, the poet is annoyed despite himself, that is although he understands that the other through his drunkenness is no more responsible than an angry child, "grand gars." But after the long imaginary encounter with the rather idealized workingmen, he can't but consider the other his equal: simply another human being. "Est-ce caste, du tout" poses and at the same time answers the question of class distinction as it affects this encounter, which is, then, purely that of one individual with another. The poet is "en ce moment" still under the spell of the inner and imaginary confrontation, despite the intrusion of outer phenomena: the anger of a vulgar drunkard, and cannot quite distinguish yet between the "forcené, titubant et vociférant," who in fact threatens him, and the "homme" of the vision. And "considérer" by its etymology, cum sidus, "looking at the stars," suggests something of the conflict of dream and reality. With "forcené" and "homme" the irrational and the rational are contrasted, while "vociférant" recalls the "vociférateur" of "La Gloire." The persistence of the factual is reflected in the short blunt sentence, with its harsh sounds: "Très raide, il me scrute avec animosité," while "impossible de l'annuler mentalement" admits the mind's defeat by matter.

Above the narrator had mused upon the blessing of drunkenness, and here its bane confronts him in fact, represented by this dehumanized human being, "ce colosse tout à coup

grossier et méchant," whom he can't overcome mentally. "Le coucher en la poussière," reminiscent of traditional epic combat, where "mordre la poussière" and "laisser sur la poussière" mean being killed and killing on the battlefield, again already foreshadows the final scene. But the narrator won't yield to the other's further "provocations," or the fistfight, which would illustrate the class struggle. Thus, whereas above there was a total rejection of the notion of "caste," here it is reintroduced; for although the fight is refused by the persona, he feels that had it taken place, it would have been an image of the conflict of the classes. At the same time, of course, "la lutte des classes" is ironically undercut with the mundane phrase "sur le gazon." Moreover, are these men not already condemned by their vice? Now the poet feels guilty at silently beholding this man's and his brothers' fate--for does his indifference not make him an accomplice of it? And this is a rare, but clear, indication of Mallarmé's social conscience, for under his and the persona's merely apparent indifference lies not only sympathy, but compassion, for the people, whom the poet will serve in his way, that is by celebrating them.

Just as above the short "Alternatives ... " was set off in a separate paragraph, so here "Un énervement d'états ... " interposes itself into the flow of the narrative. And its absence of verbs accentuates the moment where all action, external and internal, stops; for the persona is himself now

victimized by the continual tension of conflicting feelings and states of mind, to the point where he seems contaminated by "le mal" surrounding him, that is as though intoxicated himself by debilitating and enfeebling confusion.

Yet, at times there is also "le calme," tranquillity of soul and quiet "jusqu'au silence," in windstill evening hours, in this "région d'échos," later called "cette contrée de luxe et sonore." "Comme on y trempe," where the pronoun refers both to the calm and the country, that is the état d'âme and its corresponding symbol in nature, intimates that the moi participates in the privileged moment by immersing itself in it as in water, pointing back to the water motif modulated in the opening. "Soirs de dimanche" designates not only the poet's favorite hour of declining day, but with "dimanche" suggests the notion of fête, somewhat like the German Feierabend. But the poet has fearful forebodings that "this hour" might be disturbed by the men. As in "La Gloire," the holy moment is that instant of "suspens lumineux de l'air," the epiphany before the end, a timelessness, where everything becomes transparent in evening's glow, before flowing "lucide vers quelque profondeur," "lucide" describing both the brightness of the sunset hour and at the same time the poet's state of heightened consciousness, as "profondeur" means the shades of the oncoming night, death, and those of the mind. And, again as in "La Gloire," this moment of equilibrium between the forces of light and night is "la

crise," symbolic of the human drama: "may it claim kinship with someone."

But "les compagnons," suggestive at once of "journeymen," and also "compagnons d'armes, gens qui font la guerre ensemble," but above all, "friends," appreciate the instant in their own way, by ceasing to fight, "se concerter" implying at least some degree of harmony, which weakens the aggressive tone of "disputent." The subject of "les salaires," etymologically, salarium, again fitting into the dominant vocabulary cluster, preoccupies them "entre souper et coucher," their respite from toil, Feierabend, thus a festive hour also for them. Yet, "en le décor vautrés" suggests a contrast of the animal-like in the men and the art-like in nature--nature spiritualized by the poet--as they "wallow" in its "décor." And though the narrator does not leave his window to go outside and talk with the workers--and this very passage of the poem is about the impossibility of communication--he at the same time neither physically, "quitter ... la fenêtre," nor mentally isolates himself from them, "s'abstraire, s'isoler mentalement," though he is, in fact, isolated from and by them, "exclus." "Conflit," though about Poet and People, continues to stress, as did the other prose poems, the former's isolation and solitude. And as the window looks out from the old house, "l'ancienne bâtisse," which had already been personified in the opening, "sur l'endroit qu'elle sait," where the window becomes a beholding eye, so the poet becomes a

"regard moi." At this point the theme of conflict reaches a climax, for the desire and attempt of rapprochement are definitely frustrated now, "sans effet," which accentuates the "sympathie et malaise" permeating the poem, which now points to one of the harshest truths of human existence in general: Man is condemned to solitude: "un contact peut ... n'intervenir entre des hommes."<sup>20</sup>

As the poet-persona overhears their talk, mere voices, for he is cut off from the men, the source, he mentally, maybe even in a whisper, corrects their misconceptions: not only do they labor for the profit of others--a motif already prepared for above--but they even sell themselves. "Afin qu'on vous paie et d'être légalement" implies that they not only sell themselves for the profit of others, but that they, in this way "legally" buy their very existence, their right to be, from their oppressors. And here, again, a kinship, but also a difference, is suggested between poet and working man: both work "au profit d'autres," but the poet cannot sell his soul, cannot buy his right to exist.

But all is silenced now by the magic of the starry sky: "quelle pierrerie, ce ciel fluide!," and the unusual singular use of this noun, "pierrerie ne se dit jamais au singulier," refers to a multitude of stars on this sky which, designated "fluide," not only suggests the flow of water, but also the harmony of sound, evocative of the revolving spheres of the ancient heavens, with their music and the many stars fixed,

in a set order, in each sphere as in one immense precious piece of jewelry.

"Bouches ordinaires" is a synecdoche for the workers and their banal talk, in other words parole, now silenced by the night, stretched out on the ground like dead men, sleeping open-mouthed after having vomited forth empty bombast. But the poet beholding them thus, finally come to rest, after hard work and hard talking, again feels drawn to them, "peut-être, moi, aussi, je travaille ... " With the men now distanced from him by their sleep, and which distance paradoxically makes this rapprochement possible, the poet again mentally creates the working man's idealized response: yes, they appreciate, without objection, that some work with their mind rather than with their muscles; do not all workers--as all soldiers--know to esteem the bookkeeper's occupation. And though this implies some irony, the dominant note is that of simplicity on the part of these men who unquestionably accept this age-old division of human labor. But for the poet the dialogue culminates in a question of conscience: "à quoi?" For, if this division of labor is just, of what use, "parmi l'échange général," is the poet's work to the others? For these men at least, he sadly feels, and "tristesse" here really means souffrance morale, that his production remains "par essence," that is in its ultimate and intrinsic nature, "vaine," echoing the above "vanité de parole" of the workers. But then the comparison, "comme les nuages au crépuscule ou



des étoiles," somehow weakens "vaine," for did the narrator not say above that "les compagnons apprécient l'instant," namely the twilight's clouds and the rise of the stars, "à leur façon?"

The now complete silence of the workers, to which the poet is not accustomed, wakes him from his musings, and as he looks down upon them, he sees the familiar lawn turned into a battlefield strewn with the bodies of its victims. And the poem's war imagery reaches its greatest concentration here; "l'escouade du labeur," the work gang, is also a "terme militaire," and "gésir" recalls the formula of epitaphs. "Rendez-vous," on the literal level referring to the customary place and hour for the men's brief leisure time, in the light of the other vocabulary of the sentence suggests "une assignation de duel," which association is reinforced by "vaincue," suggestive of "qui a succombé en guerre, en combat." And now the poet narrates the end of the battle, namely how they have, one after another, "fallen." How, as though hit by a "projectile," they stagger before sinking onto the grass, "cet étroit champ de bataille." "Etroit" here not only designates the smallness of the lawn on which the men are resting, but suggests that their "battle field" has none of the grandeur by which history extends its limits beyond time. "Quel sommeil de corps" likens this sleep to death, and "la motte sourde" suggests the impassibility of the earth to which Man must inevitably return, once more recalling the return to the

origin motif of the beginning, while at the same time evoking the dull sound of bodies falling to the ground.

And with the intruders thus finally vanquished, by their own fate, is the one intruded upon at last free? As the poet, "lecteur d'horizons," raises his eyes toward the horizon--the glance we remember from "La Gloire"--to admire, and abandon himself to, the sunset, the open window, "l'ouverture où je m'accoude," does not set him free, for he could liberate himself only by, and an American idiom puts it most aptly, "walking over dead bodies," in the sense of "at the expense of the others." He would thus be repaying the men their lack of understanding for him "avec manque d'égard et de convenance à mon tour," were he to abandon them now, they reduced to "cette jonchée d'un fléau," recalling both the image of the battle field and the just mentioned idiom. As poet, "en ma qualité," it is his duty to "comprendre le mystère et juger le devoir," "comprendre" here implying more than merely intellectual understanding, but its literal sense of "prendre en soi, contenir," so that the fallen workers must, in this way, become part of the poet. And so, just as they have become his task, as it were, his responsibility, he must now judge theirs.

In the following sentence the poet exposes "le devoir," which he had already judged above, their labor sold to, and their right to exist bought from, society, legally. "Ils ont peiné une partie notable de la semaine pour l'obtenir," that

is their daily bread and hence their life. But "semaine" is not only the measure of worktime, but also "payement de travail de la semaine," with which they have, of course, bought their escape. And this is precisely their "mystery," which the poet understands, this escape which the majority of society, the "fortunate" bourgeoisie, does not need, but which the poet, in his own way, knows--"ma vue ne peut ... s'échapper." Once again, then, the narrator tightens the bond between himself and the working people by setting himself and them apart from society; and as widely as their needs may differ, nothing sums up better wherein they agree than: "le pain ne lui a pas suffi." It is in this that they both differ from the materialistically-oriented majority whose designation as "fortuné" is ironic in that their material wealth implies their spiritual poverty.

Above the narrator, growing accustomed to the steady rhythm of these workers' lives, was led to reflections and emotions of a religious nature. Here, again, the monotony of the men's lives is emphasized: how they have toiled upon the earth on which their bodies are now resting, knowing nothing of tomorrow, but that they shall toil again, "rampent par le vague et piochent sans mouvement." "Rampent," as the above "grouillement," again likens theirs to an animal existence, close to and even in the earth. And "le vague" refers both to the apparent emptiness of their lives, the lack of consciousness and orientation in their daily activity of blindly and

aimlessly working in the earth, where they "piochent sans mouvement," dig without going anywhere. And with this wearisome work, day after day, of turning up the soil, they are digging a hole not only in the earth, but their very existence, their life. Yet, as they thus undermine and spend their "sort," digging in "la réalité des terrains," are they not setting the foundations of temples? And so the poet is again overcome by a religious emotion in considering these lives, "fondation ... de temple" having both physical and metaphysical implications. Not only is it their labor which allows human civilization to erect its monuments on the face of the earth, but it is their labor alone which even makes possible the very civilization of which these monuments are the symbol. In this sense, then, these men are a symbol of what Robert Greer Cohn calls the "hardy ancestor," founders ~~or~~ fathers of culture, which produced the poet. The kinship of the persona and the working men in our poem thus grows in complexity; for while the poet-persona assumes, on the one hand, the paternalistic role vis-a-vis the men of shepherd and pastor of the sleeping flock, and further that of celebrant of a rite for them, the incomprehending crowd, he at the same time, paradoxically, stands in a filial relationship to them.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, as the narrator likens their blind activity almost to that of animals, by a curious inversion, he at the same time raises these workers, then, to the founders of culture through their work. Similarly, they, though unconscious of it,

honor the sacred of human existence by their brief repose from toil, unknowing participants in the human tragedy, whose symbolic reflection in nature--as we saw in "La Gloire"--is accessible to the poet alone. And so they celebrate through the poet's consciousness, the "fête," which their sleeping eyes cannot see, and whose symbolic significance they could not comprehend.<sup>22</sup> Further, their deep sleep, that "momentané suicide" reflected in the sunset, and which they have chosen by their drinking, is reminiscent of Mallarmé's meditations on suicide elsewhere; for example, the voluntary death dramatized in Igitur, and which we discussed in connection with "Le Démon de l'Analogie." There is here, then, a suggestion that the men have in their own way, by their choice of a "momentary suicide," this only "free" act possible, negated chance.<sup>23</sup>

"Une colonnade de futaie," those proud columns of huge, old trees, which recall the "immortels troncs" and "orgueils surhumains" of "La Gloire," might symbolize and "magnify round about" the resplendent feeling of pride in their work for these men--if fate permitted. For this ideal "connaissance" contrasts, in fact, with their dull sleep, and "resplendirait" with the actual darkness in their minds.<sup>24</sup> And instead of standing upright and proudly, they have followed "quelque instinct" which has victimized them: again, the drinking is paradoxically both their escape from--and their victimization by--chance.<sup>25</sup>

"Déjeter" describes the twisted postures of their bodies, contrasting with the ideal upright position of "une colonnade de futaie" above, the term lexically referring both to the human body and to trees: "s'écarter de sa direction naturelle en parlant d'une partie du corps," and "se déjeter, en parlant des arbres qui viennent mal." At the same time, the poem's circularity is accentuated by this image of the men lying on the ground, which recalls the opening one, where they were "au repos, dans une tranchée."<sup>26</sup> And so their physical condition reflects these working men's metaphysical one: they are victims both in the theological, Promethean, and Christ-like sense of "la victime offerte pour le salut des hommes," and also in the social sense developed above, "celui qui est sacrifié aux intérêts d'autrui." They are victims, further, in and of the fête, rather than "officiants"; of the drama, celebrated here by the poet-priest, whose consecration was the theme of "La Gloire." "Avec l'absolu d'un accomplissement rituel" echoes "la part du sacré" above: the solar drama reflects the human one, and the poet-officiant's regular observance and celebration of it endows it with the ritualism of a religious ceremony, where, as in its Greek origin, life and death are symbolized. This is the ideal theatre--already announced in "Un Spectacle Interrompu"--where the workers now figure and represent the sacrifice paid by human labor; and "si l'observance relève de la fatalité plus que d'un vouloir," means that their role in the drama is assigned not by their will, but by fate.

Now the sun has died, and "les constellations s'initient à briller"; significantly not "étoiles," as above, but "constellations" now, not the fortuitous and random multiple points of luminosity appearing arbitrarily on the night sky, but those configurations of fixed stars, upon which imaginary connecting lines confer their special significance, and which symbolize in our poem the poet's new insight, which endows his world with greater meaning. "Le hasard" has, thus, been encountered and transformed into order by the poetic mind. At the same time, the verb "s'initier," which seems rather précieux, with "briller" and the repetition of high and bright i'sounds, somehow renders the sparkling in the sky. And just as the workers partook of the sunset ritual, though unknowingly, so the poet now wishes that they might share in this light.<sup>27</sup> "Parmi l'obscurité qui court sur l'aveugle troupeau" likens the men once more to animals, sheep, with the poet their shepherd, while the darkness is both that of the surrounding night and that of their minds, which, however, might also veil a secret. Their eyes, "aveugle," later reinforced with "ces yeux scellés," contrast with the poet, become, as we saw, a "regard." When he wants his wish, namely that some of the stars' light might stay over the sleeping flock, and some lucidity in their minds, to be uttered, not only for the sake of justice for them, but also for the sake of his own peace of mind, we are reminded that the name of an article by Mallarmé, likewise dealing with the Poet and the People, "Confrontation," was originally "Cas de Conscience."

And so, of them alone he will think, "les importuns," who have cut him off from "le lointain vespéral," which is evocative of the penultimate of the canonical hours and thus the poet's priestly function, announced with the "religious" emotion above. The poet performs, in fact, a prayer vigil for these men, whose designation of "artisans" again points to their secret kinship with the artist. And the poet-priest's "il m'est loisible" has something of the tone of the dignum et justum est of the Mass, and the workers' individualities--as that of the faithful in the ritual--are at once annihilated and magnified as they are taken up in the flow of humanity, a flow "unbroken" as that of the river by their side, inevitable death and rebirth into which they have poured their toil and their lives.

In conclusion, the themes developed in the poem are summed up again: these working men, too, with their toil, render the earth fruitful, though "sans l'intermédiaire du blé." And with their "intelligence robuste" they also have an understanding--though not the poet's high consciousness--of the human condition, a condition, above all, which they alone make even possible by their labor "le miracle de vie qui assure la présence."

The "défrichements passés," as well as the work of generations to come, are part of them, and they, in turn, part of past and future, "les mêmes." Aqueducts and provinces establish the historical dimension, linking present to



antiquity and "tous les siècles," saecula saeculorum. Whatever their individual names, their lives, may be, they flow into the stream of humanity anonymously, as does the Ideal Poet:

... mon travail personnel qui, je crois, sera anonyme,  
le Texte y parlant de lui-même et sans voix d'auteur  
(OC p. 663).

Their sleep on the earth symbolizes the return to the common origin, "sombrier" implying a sinking as into water, "l'immense sommeil," the source. And the earth, "la génératrice," on which they are resting--and which they have also rendered fruitful--is the giant womb from which all life springs, and the giant tomb to which all must return. "Subir," literally "to go under," is that sinking back in which the men are both magnified, "un élargissement," and liberated, freed to sink into the stream of time, and, "autant cela possible," of eternity.

We mentioned above that their "étroit champ de bataille" denied these men the grandeur by which history extends limits beyond time; yet the Poet, who serves the People in celebrating them, with this poem, confers upon them an immortality only art can give: "Conflit" in their tombeau.

## CONFLIT

## NOTES

- 1 Bernard, Le Poème en Prose, p. 310, notes:

Fait significatif, Conflit, qui faisait partie de ces Variations, devait être joint par la suite aux poèmes en prose des Divagations, ce qui prouve bien qu'il n'y a pas, de l'un aux autres, une différence fondamentale.

And she thus points to the stylistic similarity between Mallarmé's "articles" and his "prose poems." I have already noted that, rather than distinguishing between "poetic" language and "prose" language, Mallarmé distinguished between écriture and parole. The fact that only "Conflit" of all the REVUE BLANCHE pieces was chosen to appear not only among, but as the closing piece of, the prose poems is due not only to its style, but also to its structure and theme.

- 2 Paxton, who in The Development examines the variants of all the REVUE BLANCHE pieces, discusses those of "Conflit" on p. 88:

The next article Conflit, was placed among the prose poems in Divagations, from which we may perhaps assume that it might incur a different treatment in revision from that accorded to the others. One difference does indeed stand out: the number of alterations made in the text of Conflit although it is the longest of the 1895 Revue Blanche articles, is significantly smaller than with any of the others, and only about half of the average for the series. Moreover the majority of the emendations consist of minor adjustments of punctuation, or of relatively insignificant alterations such as the removal of capital letters from "Messieurs," "Dimanche," and "Sacré,"

or the removal of an article from "le verbe haut" and of the second pronoun from "je dois jouer le rôle moi-même."

Two pleasing ellipses are induced when "Terrassiers, puisatiers, par qui a tel lieu, du fait d'un velours hâve aux jambes, semble que le remblai bouge" becomes "Terrasiers, puisatiers, par qui un velours hâve aux jambes, semble que le remblai bouge" and when "la promiscuité, pour parler couramment, me déplaît" becomes "La promiscuite, couramment, me déplaît"; and a finite verb is removed when "grouillement qui abonde partout" becomes "grouillement partout." Adverbs such as "ici" and "enfin" are removed when non-essential, and the word-order is changed to make "qu'on vous paie afin d'être légalement" into "afin qu'on vous paie et d'être légalement," which does some violence to normal syntax.

- 3 Cohn, Toward the Poems, p. 270, says:

o--stasis, circularity ... A corollary of the circularity is evidently the feminine principle ...

And on p. 268:

i--male principle, hero, light, centripetal ...

- 4 In an early verse poem, "Les Fenêtres," this threat is imaged in a persona who, pushing through the window out into the infinite, risks falling through eternity:

Est-il moyen, ô Moi qui connais l'amertume,  
D'enfoncer le cristal par le monstre insulté  
Et de m'enfuir, avec mes deux ailes sans plume  
--Au risque de tomber pendant l'éternité?

And in the late "Prose," there is an image most reminiscent of Nerval, that Symbolist precursor who did, in fact, "assume the risk" of poetic vision threatening to destroy the mind:

Que de lis multiples la tige  
Grandissait trop pour nos raisons

and which we quoted already in connection with "Pauvre Enfant Pâle."

- 5 This "jaillissement," poetic inspiration, was forever latent in the "noble oeuf de cygne, tel que n'en jaillira le vol" of the "Nénuphar"; and in an undated letter to Charles Morice, quoted in Mondor, Propos, p. 164, Mallarmé writes:

Le chant jaillit de source innée, antérieur à un concept, si purement que refléter au dehors mille rythmes d'images.

- 6 Mallarmé's summer retreat, Valvins, the setting also of "Le Nénuphar Blanc," was celebrated by Valéry, Oeuvres I (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 85, in a poem by that name where even the "Nénuphar's" yole gets its due:

Si tu veux dénouer la forêt qui t'aère  
Heureuse, tu te fonds aux feuilles, si tu es  
Dans la fluide yole à jamais littéraire,  
Traînant quelques soleils ardemment situés

Aux blancheurs de son flanc que la Seine caresse  
Emue, ou pressentant l'après-midi chanté,  
Selon que le grand bois trempe une longue tresse,  
Et mélange ta voile au meilleur de l'été.

Mais toujours près de toi que le silence livre  
Aux cris multipliés de tout le brut azur,  
L'ombre de quelque page éparse d'aucun livre

Tremble, reflet de voile vagabonde sur  
La poudreuse peau de la rivière verte  
Parmi le long regard de la Seine entr'ouverte.

- 7 Mallarmé's country house at Valvins did, indeed, have this outside stairway of stone, which Ghil, Les Dates, p. 25, mentions in describing one of his visits at Valvins:

Une porte campagnarde, et la cour, d'où parmi des  
rosiers monte l'escalier de pierre haut et rustique.

- 8 This device, which we already mentioned in connection with "Réminiscence," (note 6), is even more common in Mallarmé's verse than in his prose: "Victorieusement fui ..."; "Indifferément sommeillez ..."; "Mais langoureusement longe ..."; "Indomptablement a dû ..."; "Abominablement quelque idole ..."

- 9 The circular form was evident in the structure of some of these prose poems, and is the form, moreover, of the recueil, as will become more evident later on. Circularity is also the form underlying Mallarmé's most important poem, the "Coup de dés."

In a letter of 1889 to Vielé Griffin, quoted in Mondor, Propos, p. 142, Mallarmé writes:

C'est une oeuvre comme il en pourrait surgir au début d'une littérature, si tout ne finissait, au contraire, par les commencements.

And Richard, L'Univers, p. 264, in discussing in this connection a line from "Une dentelle s'abolit" sums up:

Naître en soi, et à partir de soi. Mieux que tout autre objet sensible, la mandore nous aura fait comprendre "que l'homme est la source qu'il cherche." Rythme des saisons, alternance des jours et des nuits figureront le même drame ontologique, que refléteront aussi pour Mallarmé, fidèle en cela aux modes de son époque, les mythologies et les religions.

- 10 Richard, L'Univers, p. 440, notes:

Autre grief de Mallarmé contre la matière: sa crudité, son agression immédiate, par celle surtout exercé, dans le domaine des sons.

- 11 The implied contrast is that between literature and poetry, or littérateur and poète, the former designating the superficiality of dilettantism as opposed to the complete devotion of the poet and the high seriousness of his art. This is reminiscent of Vigny--just as the offensive railroad as a symbol of progress recalled "La Maison du Berger"--who in "Dernière Nuit de Travail," the preface to Chatterton, his play about the poet in society, made a similar distinction between "l'homme de lettres" and "le poète," adding, however, the intermediate category of "le grand écrivain."

In Mallarmé's verse, littérature in this derogatory sense of the sterile and livresque might be implied in the famous opening, and somewhat Faustian, line of "Brise Marine":

La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres.

- 12 Though any instrument with which the laborer impregnates the earth is in that sense phallic, I feel that the sexual aspect of the shovel and the pick here refers not only to this figurative sense, but also to the very shape of those instruments themselves, suggestive of "female" and "male."
- 13 This correspondence between paysage and poet is not so much Baudelairean, but most suggestive of the early Gide's Symbolist "Le Voyage d'Urien," which he comments himself in a bibliographical note, André Gide, Romans, Récits et

Soties Oeuvres Lyriques (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp.

1464-65:

Il y a là une sorte d'algèbre esthétique: émotion et manifeste forment équation; l'un est l'équivalent de l'autre. Qui dit émotion dira donc paysage; et qui dit paysage devra donc connaître émotion.

Il n'y a pas d'émotion, si particulière et neuve qu'elle puisse paraître, qui n'ait en la nature tous ses équivalents--

- 14 Richard, L'Univers, p. 134, who generally tends toward a rather Freudian interpretation, comments on the ideal landscape as follows:

Cette double valeur, végétale et aquatique, du paysage de Fontainebleau lui permet aussi de satisfaire au vœu d'intimité. Cf. par exemple, l'évocation dans Conflit d'"un paysage celui ci, où toute foule s'arrête en tant qu'un épaisseur de forêt à l'isolement que j'ai voulu tulélaire de l'eau. ... où l'intimité herbeuse et fluviale retrouve une charge érotique: "un joli voisinage. La nature d'une personne qui s'est choisi retraite aussi humidement impénétrable ne pouvant être que conforme à mon goût.

- 15 This stance not only recalls the persona's attitude toward the city population in the preceding poem, but was already that of the very young poet, who wrote in 1867 to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, who certainly shared it, as quoted in Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 261:

... je veux, dans un mois ou deux, vous envoyer une Nouvelle. J'en avais un vague plan, mais la conservais pour l'avenir, dans plusieurs années, alors que mon livre de "Beauté" serait achevé. Cela s'appelle en effet Esthétique du bourgeois, ou la Théorie universelle de la laideur.

The project was probably never realized.

16 And this pun--we remember that the major phrase of the "Coup de dés" is a pun--might be a vague evocation of the poet's having come to terms with "le néant," that decisive outcome of the "Crise de Tournon," discussed in connection with some of the early prose poems.

17 Robert Greer Cohn in Mallarmé's Masterwork: New Findings (Paris: Mouton, 1966), p. 48, alludes to Mallarmé's socio-historical sense, in which connection he also mentions "Conflit" and "Confrontation," as follows:

We may recall the moving invocation to the crowd in "Toast Funèbre": "O vous tous oubliez une croyance sombre." And we may reflect that the ouvrier represents partly an at least passing interest on Mallarmé's part in the key social phenomenon of his times, the rise of the working class and its ideology, Marxism: the poet is always something of a revolutionary politically, and Mallarmé tended to defend the underdog, whether anarchists, like his friends Fenéon and Tailhade, or occultists (who were being persecuted) or Lesseps or Dreyfus.

18 The analogy of garden and poetry is also suggested by Paul Valéry, Oeuvres, p. 657, who in one of his "Variété's" about Mallarmé says:

Un poète use à la fois de la langue vulgaire,--qui ne satisfait qu'à la condition de compréhension et qui est donc purement transitive,--et du langage qui s'oppose à celui-ci,--comme s'oppose un jardin soigneusement peuplé d'espèces bien choisies à la campagne toute inculte où toute plante vient, et d'où l'homme préleve ce qu'il y trouve de plus beau pour le remettre et le choyer dans une terre exquise.

19 Eliade, The Sacred, p. 25, points out the importance of the notion of the "threshold" (seuil) as marking off



"sacred" and "profane" space, which, by analogy, might be likened to the demarcation of the poet's realm from that of "the others":

For a believer, the church shares in a different space from the street in which it stands. ... The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds--and at the same time the paradoxical place where those two worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.

- 20 And this conclusion is also that of one of Mallarmé's essays, significantly entitled "Solitude":

J'attribue à la conscience de ce cas, dans un temps que deux hommes ne se sont, peut-être, malgré la grimace à le faire, entretenus, plusieurs mots durant, du même objet exactement, la restriction qui garde des interlocuteurs de rien livrer à fond et de prêter souci; mais les persuade, par ruse mutuelle avec de la bravade, reliquat des surannés combats d'esprit généreux et baroques ou conformément au monde dont les lettres sont le direct affinement--de soustraire autant que révéler sa pensée, le premier; le second, de saisir, obstinément, autre chose--pour réserver leur intégrité, quand un besoin cordial les leurre à se rencontrer (OC pp. 408-9).

- 21 Cohn not only discovers and develops this notion as it is reflected in the "Coup de dés," with the "Maître" and his son, "l'ombre puérile," but points to the reappearance of the motif in both our poem and Mallarmé's essay dealing with the theme of the poet's confrontation with the working man, "Confrontation." See Cohn, L'Oeuvre, p. 161 and pp. 193-94.

- 22 Richard, L'Univers, p. 231, points to the function and "service" of the poet here implied:

L'office du poète est d'abord de donner une fête. Fête qui sera donc organisée, comme une cérémonie réglée par un pour tous. Les soirées de la rue de Rome, les conférences de Mallarmé, la lecture rêvée du Livre sont bien des sortes de fêtes. Or ce sens de la festivité, publique ou intime, manque cruellement à notre époque: sa platitude, sa crainte de l'éclat, sa division en classes, l'empêchent de se découvrir elle-même en cette sorte d'explosion communautaire d'être, en cette "fête" cet "embrasement idéal," (OC p. 1563), où se manifesterait brusquement "la part du sacré dans l'existence." Conflit.

- 23 Richard, L'Univers, p. 240:

On sait que l'idée de son propre suicide occupa longtemps Mallarmé. ... C'est que, comme le dit Mallarmé dans la Fausse Entrée (OC p. 348), tuer est "le seul acte en soi surnaturel commis à la disposition de l'homme." Se tuer est peut-être alors le seul moyen d'accéder à la fois à soi, à l'esprit et au sacré. C'est bien le sens que Mallarmé donne, dans Conflit (OC p. 359), à ce "momentané suicide," cette fulguration mineure, d'ivresse.

- 24 This last reference to trees in these prose poems reveals a significant progression--as though trees symbolized somehow the poet's own growth--from the early pieces. In "Le Phénomène Futur," we encountered "les arbres ... leur feuillage blanchi (de la poussière du temps)"; in "Plainte d'Automne," "des peupliers dont les feuilles me paraissent mornes même au printemps"; in "La Pipe," "ces arbres malades du square." But the nocturnal trees of "La Déclaration Foraine" had an almost nourishing quality, drunk in by the woman with the night air, while in the "Nénuphar," the "buée d'argent glaçant des saules" became the ideal woman's

"limpid glance" itself. The "ombrage environnant d'hier la ville" becomes the setting of "L'Ecclésiastique," while the magnificently proud trees of both "La Gloire" and "Conflit" are celebrated as symbols of human pride and strength.

- 25 "Se montrer debout" is a gesture symbolizing control and even defiance; this was clearly brought out in, for example, the "debout dans les rues" of "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," with its opposite in the ecclesiastic's position "contre la terre."
- 26 When I use the term "circular," I assume it understood that this is always the circularity of a spiral; in other words, the poem comes back to its starting point--as does the whole cycle--while at the same time evidencing progression, namely the poem's, or cycle's, significance.
- 27 Not only is this reminiscent of the final constellation of the "Coup de dés," but, as Richard sums up in L'Univers, p. 514:

Car le champ d'étoiles symbolise d'abord le fourmillement de la contingence, "le hasard infini des conjonctions" (Igitur p. 435) mais chaque étoile inscrit aussi sur le fond noir de la nuit les signes lumineux d'une pensée, peut-être d'une écriture. Dans Conflit, par exemple, Mallarmé constate que "les constellations s'initient à briller," et il émet le vœu que "parmi l'obscurité qui court sur l'aveugle troupeau, aussi des points de clarté, telle pensée tout à l'heure, se fixassent."

## CHAPTER XV

### CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of our reading of these thirteen prose poems, it is evident that, taken together, they tell a single story, that, on the one hand, of the poet in his relationship to the raw data of human experience, and, on the other, to the transformation of that experience into an ordered artistic universe through the poet's vision. At the beginning of this study, I indicated my awareness of the exaggerated emphasis which modern critical interpretation tends to place on poetry as "poetry about poetry"; but, at the same time, I draw attention to Mallarmé's own comment about Divagations: "Les Divagations apparentes traitent un sujet, de pensée unique,"<sup>1</sup> namely the subject of his poetic theory, or of art in general, always related to it. Yet Mallarmé seemed to except the "Anecdotes ou Poèmes" from his statement, and to belittle them: "à part des poèmes ou anecdotes, au début que le sort, exagéré, fait à ces riens, m'obligeait (envers le public) de n'omettre." But now that we know these pieces also to be concerned with poet and poetry, "de pensée unique," we may well ask why Mallarmé suggested their exception. One answer might be that these pieces are not "poèmes critiques," that is, of

an interpretative or theoretical nature. They are poems showing thought dependent upon the contingencies which the surrounding material world thrusts upon the perceiving consciousness, rather than illustrating the movement of a more purely self-reflexive thought. Moreover, it is entirely possible that the poet himself was not fully conscious of the underlying thematic unity of these poems, written over a period of more than thirty years, even though he suggested this unity by placing them together in Divagations. Further, Mallarmé's comment about these pieces seems somehow to undercut their value by its tone of exaggerated modesty. But, again, is his judgment of these prose poems not, in fact, suggested by their very inclusion in this "late" book? We must remember that the poet could, at times, be as modest about his work, as he could sound confident at others, though both extremes were never totally devoid of that irony which we have encountered again and again in our reading of these poems themselves. Did he not at one time view his whole poetic output as mere "exercises,"<sup>2</sup> while at another esteeming himself as one of his own "favorite" poets?<sup>3</sup>

And so, in concluding this investigation, I would like to retrace briefly once more the theme revealed in these poems, namely the story of the poet, from his artistic birth to his maturity--with this progression reflected in the development of the style of the recueil itself--following, and at the same time confirming, the structural form of the cycle imposed by Mallarmé himself.



The prose poem cycle opened with a vision of Beauty: Venus at the moment of her birth out of the primeval sea, preserved "par la science souveraine," that is, the magic of language. The "boniment" of the "montreur" alone can describe what humanity is no longer capable of comprehending: a memory of Eden, the vision of which will, for a privileged moment, intoxicate the poets alone with an overwhelming glory. And we found this role of the "montreur" poet echoed also in the verse poetry; it was a recurring one in the recueil, as was the motif of the poet's isolation from and in the society of man, without which, however, he, poet and "montreur," would cease to exist. Mallarmé, in a group of essays entitled "Quant au Livre," says:

L'écrivain, de ses maux, dragons qu'il a choyés, ou d'une allégresse, doit s'instituer, au texte, le spirituel histrion (OC p. 370).

"Plainte d'Automne" celebrated one of the Orphic functions of poetry, and the quest for Eurydice led necessarily "out of this world," but the persona--from here on and throughout the remainder of the cycle a first-person narrator--hesitated at this point before the double calling; the descent into the crepuscular realm of the mind, and the ascension toward the ideal, his vocation. He was a reader of decadent literature and a listener to old-fashioned airs, that is, romantic poetry; and he appreciated a moment of art characterized by the refusal of the now, death-directed as the very hour he preferred: "chute." And in this piece we saw only

the sunset, not the constellations, while only its last words vaguely suggested the first stirrings of song.

The third piece moved us into the "saison de l'art serein," haunted by the ennui of sterility--pure white as the page on which the poem cannot be born. The key images of "Frisson d'Hiver" are the room, the mirror, the window, the spider's lace, and the fragile china clock. And this room, so jealously and anxiously protected, emerged as a symbol of the poet's mind, with its familiar objects, cherished and old. But the persona still hesitated to look deep into the Venetian mirror, profound and deep fountain of the soul--what unfamiliar phantoms might it not reveal? The other threat was from without: from those windows, at once shielding and exposing the meditations of this calm, pale solitude, whose narcissistic fragility was imaged in the trembling spider-webbing. In one of his letters of those years, Mallarmé wrote:

Ma chambre est si grande, et haute, que j'y suis encore un étranger et ne l'ai pas peuplée de ma pensée et de mes paroles.<sup>4</sup>

And just a few years later, as we saw, with the plan of his oeuvre beginning to take shape in his mind:

--centre de moi-même, où je me tiens comme une araignée sacrée, sur les principaux fils déjà sorties de mon esprit, et à l'aide desquels je tisserai aux points de 5 rencontre de merveilleuses dentelles, que je devine ...

And as Mallarmé wrote to the same correspondent of his need of the greatest "silencieuse solitude de l'âme," in order to hear the inner melody, so "Frisson d'Hiver" in the cycle



marks this moment of withdrawal from the outside, so that the poet may listen to the melody within.

This "chant intérieur" and the poet's enslavement to it was the theme of "Le Démon de l'Analogie," with its dominant vocabulary cluster of rhetoric and music, and whose key symbols are those of poetry: the traditional lyre, and lute, the wing and bird, and "palme" and "plume." But this engagement, we saw, is at the cost of a death--of a former ~~self~~, and this prose poem is at once a poetic rendition of the creative process and a monody, celebrating thus both a becoming and a dying. And the general feeling of the poem was that of the persona controlled by, rather than controlling his inspiration, the furor poeticus. But he was now driven to look into the mirror reflecting his own image: a poet caressing the voice; and, as the mirror turned into a window, it revealed to him the symbols of his art.

The poet's sacrificial death, Promethean and Orphic, was the theme of "Pauvre Enfant Pâle," which we did not read as a commentary on Mallarmé's compassion for the unfortunate of society. No, the poet projected himself into the pale singer who sang "fatalement," that is, who was fated to sing, and "qui s'en va seul par la vie." And we demonstrated how this prose poem announced the "Cantique de Saint Jean" and its decapitation theme. Now the poet-singer is "outside" the windows: his vision--the nudity of Hérodiade?--sets him apart, and as his head rises higher and higher, his voice strains to

the breaking point, just as that string of the lyre of "Le Démon de l'Analogie." And, as in the "Cantique," in this poem death was the punishment of a crime--both hubris and a sacrificial death as in the myths--committed "pour moi, pour ceux qui valent moins que moi."

The last of the early prose poems, whose title played with both the instrument of the privileged moment, its madeleine, and by association with the instrument which sang it, was the objectification of an epiphany aroused by the mechanism of involuntary memory. Our poet now knows "l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses," that is, he has mastered the art of traditional poetry. And it is precisely here, as we saw, that a break occurs--with tradition--in these prose poems, "La Pipe" constituting the last of the "early," the traditional, pieces of the cycle.

The seventh poem marked a decisive change: Mallarmé has now forged a new language of art: for he, as we saw, distinguishes not, in the traditional way, between a language of verse and one of prose, but between one of art and one of communication, the former being a closed system of artistic expression, which, like music, requires its own mastery. And Mallarmé once expressed this development to a friend:

... j'ai résolu de me mettre à écrire les livres que je portais dans mon cerveau, en me contentant d'une forme française habituelle; ... et puis, au moment de commencer, je sentais que je ne pouvais pas, que l'on n'a pas le droit de mésuser ainsi de la langue écrite--et je recommençais à étudier ce qu'elle exige.<sup>6</sup>

Much later in his life, in 1891, the poet still says:

Dans le genre appelé prose, il y a des vers, quelquefois admirables, de tous rythmes. Mais, en vérité, il n'y a pas de prose: il y a l'alphabet et puis des vers plus ou moins serrés; plus ou moins diffus. Toutes les fois qu'il y a effort au style, il y a versification (OC p. 867).

And we saw how "Un Spectacle Interrompu" not only discussed, but demonstrated, the distinction between écriture and parole, between writing and journalism, the poem's anecdote being the vehicle for its demonstration. Therefore, at the end of that piece, Mallarmé very emphatically set artistic vision apart from the common one, contrasting "mon regard de poète" with that of the "reporters." At the same time, the poem's style was, of course, the objectification of this artistic vision. Moreover, we saw in this first "late" piece a reflection of the mature poet's calm serenity: "... car ma façon de voir, après tout, avait été supérieure, et même la vraie."

The distance which separates its original version, "L'Orphelin," from "Réminiscence," we suggested, provides a demonstration of the difference between the "early" and the "mature" style of these prose poems. And "Réminiscence" is, where it stands in the cycle, indeed a remembrance of things past, an evocation of the poet's youth, this "... orphelin ... en noir et l'oeil vacant de famille," the archetypal, solitary Hamlet:

... l'adolescent évanoui de nous aux commencements de la vie et qui hantera les esprits hauts ou pensifs par le deuil qu'il se plaît à porter (OC p. 299).

At the same time, the fairground, reminiscent of the first poem of the recueil, to which the child felt already drawn,



presaged, then, with its ambiance of "fête, choeurs, drame, sainte heure," and the allusion to the poet of the Divine Comedy, already something of the sacredness of the ideal ritual theatre, where the poet will finally, at the close of the cycle, celebrate his mysterious hymn with and for his fellow man.

We found the same setting in the following piece, "La Déclaration Foraine," where an anonymous poet rose out of the crowd to celebrate Beauty for and before it: "improviser ici, comme les voiles dans tous les temps et les temples, l'arcane!" And so this poem also reaches back to "Le Phénomène Futur," but now the poet showman's "boniment" has become a formal love poem. But, we suggested, Minne--and we recognized in this piece a courtly love poem, where the "old" sonnet form, inserted in the prose, was in harmony with an "old" tradition--never was a way of life or love, but one of art, where for the Minnesänger, our courtly prose poet, his Lady is but the occasion for his song. The poem, then, was neither about a woman, nor about love, but again about poetry, and the only absolute power appealed to in it was that of "metaphor." Further, this piece introduced a theme already touched upon before, the poet's paradoxical love and hate for the crowd,<sup>7</sup> his fear of it even; and the significant conclusion admitted that not only would the poet never have proclaimed his poem without la foule, but the Lady could not have understood it, "... si chaque terme ne s'en était réprecuté ... par de variés tympons." And so, reaching back to the

opening of the recueil, that is to a "montreur" who needs the crowd to exist, "La Déclaration Foraine" at the same time points ahead to the end of the cycle, where this theme of Poet and People receives its full development.

The magical opening of "Le Nénuphar Blanc" was an awakening from lethean oblivion into the light of a midsummer day; the emergence and separation of an individual consciousness from the timeless Urelement. But it was a poetic consciousness which set out for the quest through the magic forest, which, therefore, became an artistic quest, with nature transformed and sublimated, so that the fountain became a mirror, the forest a park, and woman the lustral ideal evoked by the poet. He sacrifices life to art, in order to reduce it to order and form, a fiction: "... le délice empreint de généralité qui permet et ordonne d'exclure tous visages ..." Thus the poet-hero remained the master of his ideal world, rather than becoming the slave of that other, the "real" one, which mastery we saw symbolized by the rower's control over his boat. And the tension throughout that piece was that of the erotic and its sublimation--life and art--culminating in the "rapt de mon idéale fleur."

The "Ecclésiastique" is, in a sense, the "Nénuphar's" antithesis: the only spring-time poem in the recueil, it displayed "les allures d'individus faits pour la spiritualité," their abandoning themselves to nature. At the same time, the piece constitutes again what Mallarmé, in the opening of

"Un Spectacle Interrompu" had designated reportage of a fact, an anecdote "comme elle frappa mon regard de poète." And though the image of the priest necessarily suggested the poet's sacerdotal function, both the irony of tone and the "préciosité of style maintained the persona's distance from his vision. The ecclesiastic, encountered by chance, was, again, merely the pretext of the poem, his description being abandoned half-way through the piece for that of the poet's mental image, "me figurer en esprit l'apparition quasi diabolique," so that the persona could designate him at once ironically and correctly "le héros de ma vision." Again, then, in this piece the fleeting phenomena of reality were reduced to a fixed image, for, as we said, what is more fugitive, in fact, than those temporary divagations under the influence of the season? But the poet-persona had transformed the fugitive into the permanent: "Ma discrétion vis-à-vis d'ébats d'abord apparus n'a-t-elle pas pour récompense d'en fixer à jamais ... l'image marquée d'un sceau mystérieux de modernité, à la fois baroque et belle?" And in those last words we saw, again, the confident judgment of his work by the master poet, as well as a restatement of the definition of the prose poem, "l'image marquée d'un sceau mystérieux de modernité."

Not only confidence, but certitude, and triumph burst forth--exultant "jaillissement"--in "La Gloire," whose very title sounded like a trumpet call of victory: the poet now





has seen true glory, and the faith in his vision sets him apart from those who could not share it: "La Gloire! je ne la sus qu'hier, irréfragable, et rien ne m'interessera d'appelé par quelqu'un ainsi." The anecdote was about the persona's anxious effort to withdraw from "the others," the city first, and then his fellow travelers, "million d'existences étageant leur vacuité." But they could not even hear the magic calling of that name, "Fontainebleau," and so the solitary pilgrim found himself doubly isolated: Abandoned by those whom he had to reject. Thus we saw him waiting to approach the autumnal forest alone, the stage of the sublime drama, in its turn, waiting for him alone--in a suspended moment of pure expectancy of the anointment and the coronation of the "royal intruder." This poem, then, marks the Poet's consecration in a supreme solemnitas, but though the poet's vision was solitary, its revelation was the destiny of Man.

And it is to his fellow man that the last and culminating piece of the cycle is devoted, a cycle whose final note is not that of the poet's isolation in the stasis of Vision, but that of his return from the solitary mountain top into the community of his fellow man. Having received his sacerdotal ordination in "La Gloire," the poet-priest descends as celebrant for the people. And here the structural circularity of the cycle becomes evident. For did not the "montreur" of "Le Phénomène Futur" need his audience, even if it were uncomprehending? But at the same time, the circle closing is,

as I suggested, that of a spiral. For along with the poetry, the poet-persona has progressed through the recueil from "saltimbanque" to the consecrated officiant of a rite, a rite both for and before the People. This is the final image of "Conflit" and the "Anecdotes ou Poèmes," an indeed solitary celebrant of a ritual, the meaning of whose language, similarly to the Latin of the Christian Mass of Mallarmé's day, is mysteriously veiled from those for whom it is intoned:

La nef avec un peuple je ne parle d'assistants, bien d'élus: quiconque y peut de la source la plus humble d'un gosier jeter aux voûtes le répons en latin incompris, mais exultant, participe entre tous et lui-même de la sublimité se reployant vers le chœur (OC p. 396).

And so, again chance encounter was transformed into meaning, the intruders becoming the heroes celebrated in the tombeau, erected for them by the poet, who, at the same time, discovers here his own highest function and fulfillment.

The poet's growth is reflected, moreover, in the cycle, by a progression, already touched upon, that from "inside," as it were, to the "outside," or more literally from indoors to outdoors, a development which seems to parallel the poet's growing independence. As we saw the early prose poems overshadowed by the influence of Baudelaire--with the very first piece of the recueil at the same time a Stimmungsgedicht perhaps somewhat reminiscent of the manner of Bertrand--so the persona in those early pieces is still protected by the shell of the room shielding him from the world. This artificially created shell--which at the same time symbolizes the persona's

mind--was celebrated especially in "Frisson d'Hiver," which is the very prose poem in which the young Mallarmé cites a phrase from his prose tribute to Baudelaire. And it is with the crisis of "Le Démon de l'Analogie" that the poet attains and accomplishes both his deepest descent and his liberation. For both his independence of literary influences, as well as his movement out and into nature, symbolizing acceptance of the world--an acceptance, as we saw, however, always on the poet's terms--progress from that early moment in the cycle to a culmination in its end: in "Conflit" Nature is the Poet's stage.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of the early projection of his oeuvre, in 1871, shortly after his metaphysical crisis and its purgation in Igitur, Mallarmé wrote to his friend, Cazalis:

Je redeviens un littérateur pur et simple. Mon oeuvre n'est plus un mythe. (Un volume de Contes, rêvé. Un volume de Poésie, entrevu et fredonné. Un volume de Critique, soit ce qu'on appelait hier l'Univers, considéré du point de vue strictement littéraire.)<sup>9</sup>

And Robert Greer Cohn says about this passage:

Ce passage est remarquablement prophétique. Les Contes sont devenues les Poèmes en prose, les poèmes ont été écrits ainsi que les Divagations.<sup>10</sup>

I agree with this position, for in each prose poem we find a "conte" or anecdote, which is the vehicle of the major theme, and its lesser satellites. And in this structural characteristic, "Conflit" likewise reveals its kinship with the other twelve pieces, for its anecdote relates the poet-persona's encounter with the unforeseen, those invading railroad workers,

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

and his coming to terms with it, which serves as the vehicle for the theme of the Poet and the People.

"Conflit," moreover, has in common with the other pieces of the collection its tension, which is forcefully evident in its very title and permeates the poem. Tension and the predominance of a specific vocabulary cluster characterizes almost every prose poem. In the opening piece, the tension was that of the contrast between the blindingly bright vision of "Le Phénomène" with the decrepit and dull civilization in which it appeared; in "Plainte d'Automne" it was that of a simultaneously ascending and descending movement still so reminiscent of Baudelaire's "double postulation." But most notable, in this respect, among the "early" prose poems was "Le Démon de l'Analogie" with its celebration of the birth-and-death theme. In the second half of the cycle, "Un Spectacle Interrompu" achieved this tension by its juxtaposition of the poetic vision with that of la foule, represented both by the theatre audience and the reporters; while the paradoxically ambiguous relationship of the poet and audience, his contempt for them as well as his need of them, was one of the most important themes of "La Déclaration Foraine." In "Le Nénuphar Blanc," the tone was set throughout by eroticism and its sublimation, while in the late "La Gloire," a most remarkable tension was achieved by the feat of closely juxtaposing the ironic and the elevated manner in a totally unprecedented way.



The tension which characterizes each of the prose poems, this somewhat Hegelian play of opposites, invites the question of their philosophic nature. Do they convey any particular philosophic thought in a formal sense, or do they suggest, at least, a philosophic stance on the part of the author? Though the Hegelian hero of Igitur suggested his presence, by association, in some of the early pieces, I see no evidence of Hegelianism in these prose poems, other than a certain Hegelian turn of mind, at best, in that the play of opposites in most of them creates the living tension which makes the poem. Similarly, Steland found not a Hegelian dialectics, but "Dialektische Gedanken," in some of the critical pieces of Divagations, as I mentioned in discussing "Un Spectacle Interrompu." And though we found in the "Nénuphar" a vaguely Hegelian movement which synthesized the specific woman by "negating" her, as it were, into her ideal Pure Notion, yet this reflects no Hegelian thinking but could equally well and equally loosely be said to reflect Platonism.<sup>11</sup>

Mallarmé invites an association with Hegel by his frequent use of Hegelian terms in his prose; and he was, of course, at least indirectly acquainted with that philosophy through his close friendship with Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, about whom he said, in his commemorative lecture:

... Saint-Bernard, Kant, le Thomas de la Somme, principalement un désigné par lui le Titan de l'Esprit Humain, Hegel, dont le singulier lecteur semblait aussi se revendiquer ... (OC p. 491).

In the poetry, it is principally Igitur which reflects Hegel, as its hero moves through the Triad, by first divorcing his consciousness from phenomena, in order to reach a pure consciousness of the self, and finally rising up to the dissolution of that individual consciousness in the Absolute Spirit. And as for Hegel this pure self-thinking thought would actualize itself in the final stage of the historical process, so Igitur, "the last of his line," symbolized the final aboutissement of the human spirit, where it merges into the Weltgeist. And surely, the young Mallarmé was haunted by this temptation of "losing his mind," which was at the same time a threat, in a spiritual self-annihilation, which we discussed.<sup>12</sup> And it is evident, of course, in Igitur's play on "fiolle-folie." Since Igitur was a most important stage in Mallarmé's development, its hero did, in fact, find his image reflected in some of the early prose poems.

But at the foundation of Hegel's philosophy lies the belief that the rational is the real, and the real the rational, and I do not feel that Mallarmé shared that optimistic faith. Nor do I believe that Mallarmé ever considered the phenomenological world--the domain of "la matière"--to be the manifestation of infinite reason. Rather, the Absolute for Mallarmé, we saw, was "le Rien," which, by the way, reappears in the "Coup de dés." A thinker who seems to me much more profoundly akin to the poet is Kant. For just as



he constructed his whole Idealistic system, that intricate Critique of Pure Reason in the face of Hume's radical empiricism, so, by analogy, Mallarmé built the equally intricate fabric of his symbolist and poetic universe in the face of the reigning naturalism and positivism of his day; and we have already quoted his statement to one of his disciples: "Non, Ghil, l'on ne peut se passer d'Eden!" Further, just as Kant's "Copernican Revolution" made the human mind the center of the world, so the poet's mind is the center, that "sacred spider" of the web.

Again and again, Mallarmé's answer to chaos and hasard has been to construct comme si--as if a poetic cosmos and order could be imposed on reality. And it is this tendency, which becomes more and more evident in the later prose poems, which points to the "Coup de dés." And here, again, an analogous but deep kinship with Kant comes to light. For at least is not all of the Critique of Practical Reason based on als ob? The categorical imperative itself, after all, contains this important clause, "... as if the maxim of your action were to ..." And as Kant, then, demolishes systematically the traditional proofs for the existence of God, he founds, similarly, his whole religious philosophy on those two small Mallarméan words: comme si-als ob. In other words, I feel that both the greatest Idealist philosopher and the greatest Idealist poet are heroically constructing each his own system, his world-order, the one a philosophical, the

other a poetic, fictional Cosmos--against the Chaos which they know to be the truth.

One of Mallarmé's late letters to Odilon Redon,<sup>13</sup> describing the latter's lithograph "Dans mon rêve, je vis au ciel un visage de mystère," expresses his sympathy with an image in which he recognized himself:

... mais mon admiration tout entière va droit au grand Mage inconsolable et obstiné chercheur d'un mystère qu'il sait ne pas exister, et qu'il poursuivra, à jamais pour cela, du deuil de son lucide désespoir, car c'eût été la vérité! Je ne connais pas un dessin qui communique tant de peur intellectuelle et de sympathie affreuse, que ce grandiose visage.

## CONCLUSION

## NOTES

1 Mallarmé, Divagations, p. 1.

2 Cohn, An Exegesis, p. 3:

For, everyone knows that Mallarmé, whom Gide has called the most stubbornly literary figure "in our literature," regards everything he had accomplished, ... as mere "exercises."

In his famous "biographical" letter to Verlaine, Mallarmé says:

Rien de si simple alors que je n'aie eu hâte de recueillir les mille bribes connues, qui m'ont, de temps à autre, attiré la bienveillance de charmants et excellents esprits, vous le premier! Tout cela n'avait d'autre valeur momentanée pour moi que de m'entretenir la main: et quelque réussi que puisse être quelquefois un des [un mot manque] à eux tous, c'est bien juste s'ils composent un album, mais pas un livre (OC p. 633).

3 In the "Introduction" to the Pléiade edition, the editors relate:

Aucun n'avait placé le Poète au sommet suprême avec moins d'hésitation, mais lorsqu'une jeune femme lui tendait l'album où se trouvait préparée cette question: "Quels sont vos poètes favoris?" il répondait avec la simplicité de son orgueil: "Quelques-uns dont je suis" (OC p. x).

4 Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 176, letter to Eugene Lefébure from Tournon, dated "octobre-novembre 1865. by the editor.

5 "Frisson d'Hiver," note 15.

6 Cited in Mauclair, Princes, p. 112.

- 7 Mallarmé's attitude toward la foule, an attitude some of whose complexity we saw reflected in the prose poems, is beautifully discussed in an article by Paul Bénichou, "Mallarmé et le public," Cahiers du Sud, 30 (1969), 272-90.
  
- 8 Significantly, Mallarmé's adolescent poetry collection, which was, of course, strongly influenced by the poets the child was reading, particularly Victor Hugo, was entitled by him "Entre Quatre Murs." (Mondor, Lycéen, p. 121.) In the same volume, Mondor prints the long prose piece, "Ce que Disaient les Trois Cigognes," (pp. 338-56) which has as its theme the visit of a revenant, a piece which Mondor entitles "Premier Poème en Prose."
  
- 9 Mondor, Correspondance I, p. 342.
  
- 10 Cohn, L'Oeuvre, pp. 475-76.
  
- 11 This, as a matter of fact, has been done. Thibaudet, in La Poésie, p. 108, says:
 

Comment donner au non-être une certaine existence? Et cette vision de l'absence chez Mallarmé, cette existence du non-être chez Platon, naissent pareillement, à la fois, de la conscience et de la hantise des Idées, d'une croyance obstinée de visuels à l'être nécessaire et suffisant du Mot. Le Nénuphar Blanc m'apparaît comme le Parménide esquissé, désarticulé et flottant d'un poète et d'un rêveur.
  
- 12 This fear and temptation is reflected in the correspondence, where indeed it is often dressed in Hegelian terms. Already in 1864, Mallarmé wrote to Cazalis, Mondor,

Correspondance I, 152:

... et je passe des heures à observer dans les glaces  
l'envahissement de la bêtise qui éteint déjà mes  
yeux aux cils pendants et laisse tomber mes lèvres.

The crisis then becomes acute in 1867, when he writes  
again to Cazalis, and this time in Hegelian terms, Mondor,

Correspondance I, p. 242:

C'est t'apprendre que je suis maintenant impersonnel  
et non plus Stéphane que tu as connu, --mais une apti-  
tude qu'a l'Univers spirituel à se voir et à se  
développer, à travers ce qui fut moi.

Fragile comme est mon apparition terrestre, je  
ne puis subir que les développements absolument  
nécessaires pour que l'Univers retrouve, en ce moi,  
son identité. Ainsi je viens à l'heure de la Syn-  
thèse, de délimiter l'oeuvre qui sera l'image de ce  
développement.

And though this seems to announce "Hegelian poetry," if  
such a phenomenon is possible, only Igitur, the fragment  
of purgation of this same crisis, really is.

- 13 Mondor, Correspondance II, p. 280, letter to Odilon Redon,  
2 février, 1885.

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