

Poetry

CRITICISM

VOLUME

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Preface

Poetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *PC* offers more focused attention on poetry than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries on writers in these Gale series. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by *PC* supply them with the vital information needed to write a term paper on poetic technique, to examine a poet's most prominent themes, or to lead a poetry discussion group.

Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, *PC* is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research. Each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *PC* volume.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." In *Interpreting Blake*, edited by Michael Phillips, 32-69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*. Vol. 63, edited by Michelle Lee, 34-51. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005.

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Stéphane Mallarmé

1842-1898

French poet, essayist, dramatist, and translator.

For additional information on Mallarmé's poetic career, see *PC*, Volume 4.

INTRODUCTION

A leading figure in the French Symbolist movement, Mallarmé was recognized as one of the top poets of the last half of the nineteenth century, along with Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. Much of his work is considered obscure and inaccessible, and literary scholars have long disagreed on the correct interpretation of his poetry—a debate that continues today.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Mallarmé was born on March 18, 1842, in Paris to a middle-class family. His mother died when he was five years old and his father remarried fifteen months later. The boy was shunted back and forth between his father and his maternal grandmother, who began sending him to a variety of upper-class boarding schools. Feeling like an outcast because of his family's modest means, the young Mallarmé attempted to reinvent himself under an assumed name and title: "Le Comte de Boulainvilliers." In 1860, he received a baccalaureate degree from the university in Sens. He began writing poetry while working in his grandfather's registry office, and published his first sonnet in *Le Papillon* in 1862. Late in that same year, he went to London to study English so he could achieve certification to teach English in France and also so he could fulfill his ambition to translate the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe. He returned to France a year later, married Maria Gerhard, a teacher, and accepted a teaching position in Tournon on the Rhône; the couple had one daughter, Geneviève. Mallarmé spent the next thirty years teaching in a variety of schools, leaving Tournon first for Besançon, then for Avignon, and eventually Paris. He was less than enthusiastic about his work as an educator, resenting the time it took from his writing. During these years, Mallarmé hosted a group of the leading writers, artists, and philosophers at Tuesday evening salons (*les mardis*) in his Paris apartment. The group, known as les Mardistes, included William Butler Yeats, Rainer Maria

Rilke, and Paul Valéry, among many others. Marcel Proust, Edgar Degas, Paul Verlaine, and Edouard Manet were also part of Mallarmé's wide circle of friends who "acted as a sounding board for his artistic ideas, rather than influencing him directly," according to critic Rosemary Lloyd. In 1893, he took early retirement based on health concerns. After his retirement, he was able to spend more time at his country home at Valvins. He died there, quite suddenly, on September 9, 1898; he was fifty-six.

MAJOR WORKS

Mallarmé's first published poem, a sonnet heavily influenced by the work of his idol, Charles Baudelaire, appeared when he was only twenty years old. Four years later, in 1866, several of his poems—"L'azur" among them—were published in *La parnasse contemporain*, and shortly thereafter he began work on *Hérodiade*, an ambitious prose poem based on the biblical story of Salomé and John the Baptist. Mallarmé agonized over the work for the rest of his life, but never completed it. Meanwhile, he composed *L'après-midi d'un faune*, published in 1876, but subjected to many rewritings over the course of the poet's life. Many critics believe the poem is significant as a turning point in Mallarmé's career, indicating a stylistic maturity missing in his earlier work. *Poésies* first appeared in 1887, and an enlarged edition was published in 1899, shortly after the poet's death. The volume contains approximately fifty of the poems he judged worthy of preservation, leaving a great number of poems unpublished although most have been included in more recent collections of his work. In 1888, Mallarmé published a volume of his translations of the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, and in 1897, he produced a highly original work, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (*A Throw of the dice will never abolish chance*). Although he planned and discussed it throughout his career as a writer, Mallarmé never wrote his *Grand Oeuvre* or *Le Livre* as he called it. He conceived it as "the abstract, essential Book beyond all real books," according to critic Joanna Smith Rakoff, but he was never able to bring the project to fruition.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

As famous for his influence on younger poets as for his own poetry, Mallarmé's body of work was relatively small. Nonetheless, he "was the French poet of his day,"

according to Rakoff, who reports that his 1897 work of prose and poetry, *Divagations*, was “the Symbolist manifesto” and *Un Coup de dés* “became a touchstone for later writers and a model for his successors.” Some scholars claim that he formulated the theories behind the French Symbolist movement; others point to the influence of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud, who were also associated with the movement, which privileged the representation of impressions and emotional responses to concrete objects, rather than the objects themselves. Mallarmé’s influence extended to a variety of other art forms as well—in particular, music, painting, and theatre. Jeanette Leigh Callet contends that “of all the arts, music . . . figures most predominantly in Mallarmé’s conception of poetry’s communicative function.” His poetry inspired Claude Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* (1894) (which, in turn, inspired Nijinsky’s ballet), and Maurice Ravel’s *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1913), as well as compositions by Darius Milhaud and Pierre Boulez. He collaborated with a number of artists—among them Edouard Manet, Jean Renoir, James McNeill Whistler, and Jean-François Raffaëlli—on illustrated editions of his work, and portraits of the poet were produced by Manet, Renoir, Whistler, Paul Gauguin, and Pablo Picasso.

Mallarmé’s poetry has long been considered obscure and inaccessible. Nicholas Powell contends that “few poets have ever been hailed as major or historical whilst being so rarely read and so little understood.” For Anthony Zielenka, the poem “L’Après-Midi d’un Faune” stands “as a monument to poetic ambiguity. It resists all interpretations, analyses, and readings that attempt to identify its sources, allusions, or even themes.” Jon Chatlos, noting “the deep uncertainty of meaning in *Hérodiade*,” suggests that the work “initiates a practice of radical associationism . . . a tendency to pursue connectedness, but to pursue it to such an extreme that . . . it disperses itself.” Roger Pearson finds “the issue of incompleteness . . . central to an understanding of Mallarmé’s work. On the one hand, so many of his texts are actually unfinished; on the other hand, unresolvedness and the deferral of meaning are major features of his poetic theory and practice.”

Claire Lyu notes that Mallarmé’s poetic theory rested on the importance of the language’s formal features, but “this ‘profound’ and ‘scrupulous’ concern with the form of language is, for quite a few people, what makes Mallarmé’s poetry difficult and obscure.” His emphasis on “pure sound” and on the arrangement of words and spaces on the printed page have made his work especially difficult for translators. Rosemary Lloyd has explored Mallarmé’s translations of Poe’s poetry in an effort to shed light on the problems of rendering Mallarmé’s poetry in translation, or as she explains, she has tried to “use Mallarmé’s own images of reading and

translating . . . to focus on what it is in his creative writing, and even his critical writing, that makes it so difficult to seize in other languages.”

So much critical attention has focused on the philosophical aspects of Mallarmé’s later works that his early occasional poems have often been neglected by critics and much of his work—particularly that which fails to conform to the Symbolist trend toward abstractions—has been either ignored or misunderstood. James S. Helgeson has explored the relationship between subject and real-world objects in Mallarmé’s work in an effort to determine “What, exactly, is an ‘object’ for Mallarmé, and how do ‘objects’ shape the poetic project of ‘engagement with the world?’” Pearson also discusses Mallarmé’s concern with real-world objects, noting his interest in furniture and the arrangement of it, and comparing it to his ideas about the arrangement of words and spaces on a page of poetry. Taking issue with Mallarmé’s critics who feel he was disdainful of objects, Pearson contends that the poet actually “revele[d] in them . . . with the aim of finding in even the most inconsequential piece of matter—say, a piece of candied fruit or an empty vase—a symbolic pattern that can palliate our existential anguish in a godless world.”

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Hérodiade 1869

L’après-midi d’un faune 1876

Album de vers et de prose (prose and poetry) 1887

Poésies 1887; enlarged edition, 1899

Les poèmes d’Edgar Poe [translator] 1888

Pages 1891

Vers et prose 1893

Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard 1897

Divagations 1897

Mallarmé: Selected Poetry and Prose 1982

Collected Poems 1994

Collected Poems and Other Verse: Stéphane Mallarmé 2006

Other Major Works

La musique et les lettres (essays) 1894

Igitur; ou, la folie d’Elbehnon (unfinished play) 1925

Oeuvres complètes (collected works) 1945

Selected Letters of Stéphane Mallarmé (letters) 1988

Mallarmé in Prose (prose) 2001

CRITICISM

Peter Dayan (essay date 1986)

SOURCE: Dayan, Peter. "A 'Clôture' of Deconstruction: The Non-ontological Specificity of Mallarmé's Ideal." In *Mallarmé's Divine Transposition: Real and Apparent Sources of Literary Value*, pp. 136-48. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

[In the following excerpt, Dayan discusses Jacques Derrida's theory of idealism as it relates to Mallarmé's version of the ideal.]

I

Unlike Derrida, Mallarmé accepts the anteriority of 'l'Idée', the 'spécificité du beau', and even a sort of 'parousie'—the first situated in the unchanging 'soi', the last in the proper relationship of 'foule' and 'théâtre', and the second in the imagined or projected space between the two. I hope I do not need to repeat my evidence for this; my first three chapters were intended to provide it.

I shall suggest that given the nature of his general theory of idealism—particularly, his assimilation of all idealism to the Platonic paradigm—Derrida's opposition of Mallarmé to Plato could only have led to the pure and folded opening. The 'foule' and the 'soi' as the source of the specific rhythms of art are foreign to his analysis; with the result that the Mallarmean 'idée', indeed Mallarmé's art itself becomes entirely assimilated to the non-teleological mimetic structure which produces the 'ouverture'. 'Foule', theatre, and authenticated space are all, according to my first four chapters, only to be understood through the need to project and prove the universally human figures of the ideal; since Derrida does not posit the existence of such figures, he is obliged to ignore the rôle of the 'foule', and to deny the specific importance of the real, physical theatre as the place of the ideal's objective proof.

In consequence, he fails to distinguish real from mental theatrical space.¹ For him, the value of the theatrical metaphor lies in its own internal mimetic structure. In Chapter 3 I suggested that, on the contrary, what counts is the link between the real or imaginary theatrical action, and the unchanging, pre-existent figures of the ideal. Certainly, from the Mallarmean-poetic point of view, the installation of that link requires a certain out-manœuvring of reference, of the discursive mimetic paradigm. But that out-manœuvring constitutes, for Derrida, in itself the theatre's interest; whereas for Mallarmé, it is merely a means to an end.

This point may be clarified by following the fortunes, in 'La double séance', of a phrase from *Mimique*: 'la scène n'illustre que l'idée'. Derrida first quotes it on p.

220, and notes that the word 'idée' is not to be taken here in a Platonic sense, as a form to be illustrated. On p. 236, he goes on to say that the 'scène [. . .] n'illustre rien hors d'elle-même [. . .] n'illustre rien'. At this stage, from the point of view of the first part of this book, one might add that the 'scène' does indeed illustrate nothing—inasmuch as the 'idée' is nothing; but this Mallarmean 'rien' is also 'autre chose', the rhythms of the 'soi', which cannot have a practical or representable existence. And from this point of view the logical conclusion of Derrida's argument, reached on p. 237—'la scène n'illustre donc rien que la scène, l'équivalence du théâtre et de l'idée'—would have to be rejected, in that it excludes the anteriority and specificity of the 'soi' as well as the special function of the theatre. The theatre, place of projection, and the 'soi', latent in every man, play very different rôles in the Mallarmean creative process, although in that process they are mutually dependent; and Derrida's rejection of this difference, his conflation of theatre and ideal, is a necessary corollary of his rejection of the ideal's specific anteriority.

But the anteriority of the ideal is normally the condition of a teleology; and the whole of Derrida's irrefutable examination of Mallarmé's language shows that it is not that of a teleology, of an idealism in the tradition of Plato or Hegel. The writing of such teleologies always invites us (whatever the logical contradictions of the process) to see through it to an essence, a nature or truth beyond, to understand or learn from it. But the Mallarmean text does not. It presents itself; itself as a 'corps' constituted by a 'trace' and its 'différence', not as the bearer of a message to be translated. In this it exemplifies a definition of poetry given in passing by Derrida in his article on Freud:

un corps verbal ne se laisse pas traduire ou transporter dans une autre langue. Il est cela même que la traduction laisse tomber. Laisser tomber le corps, telle est même l'énergie essentielle de la traduction. Quand elle réinstitue un corps, elle est poésie.

(*L'écriture et la différence* p. 312)

How, then, can one reconcile the refusal of Mallarmé's language to express, to signify, to be reduced to an imitation of anything outside itself, and the assertion that the value of a text comes from outside it, from the 'soi'? Why, if the Mallarmean ideal exists independently of the text, does Mallarmé's work not appear an attempt to express it? Is there a possible relationship between text and ideal which would allow both the openness and self-reflection of the text, and the ideal as the source of poetry, the 'Livres' as the vision of a final goal, the 'fête' as a moment of present proof of the ideal?

It seems to me that there is; and it depends on that which one may term transposition.

Derrida, in *La dissémination*, clearly opposes two types of mimetic structure: the Mallarmean and the Platonic. The latter is ontological, that is, it presents writing as an imitation and/or veiling of 'l'être d'un étant'; the former is not. The condition of 'toute l'histoire de la philosophie occidentale' is, writes Derrida, 'justement l'ontologique: la possibilité présumée d'un discours sur ce qui *est*, d'un *logos* décidant et décidable sur l'*on* (étant-présent)' (*La dissémination* p. 217). But it is possible to imagine another sort of ideal, an ideal without possible existence in that realm of being to which writing traditionally pretends to lead or refer, 'through to which' it invites one to see—and nevertheless permanent, unchanging, specific.

At the beginning of 'La double séance', Derrida defines his field of interest as a 'coin entre littérature et vérité' (p. 203). For Plato, 'la valeur du livre [. . .] est en raison [. . .] de sa vérité' (p. 210). And Derrida opposes this view convincingly to Mallarmé's. But in showing the limitation of the Platonic concept of truth and of expression, in refusing the Platonic version of the source of textual value (and of the relation between text and ideal), Derrida lumps together within the Platonic paradigm all possible anterior ideals, specific sources of textual value. It seems to me that his deconstructive method shows conclusively that the Mallarmean text does not try to express a (metaphysical) truth; that the Mallarmean ideal is not an '*on* (étant-présent)'. But that does not mean that it does not exist in any sense of the verb 'exist'; merely that it has no place within a system of reference, of dialectic. It is specific; but it is not to be expressed, arrived at, or 'allowed through' (as Kristeva suggests); the text does not posit a real (if impossible, past, future, unconscious, or veiled) 'présence pleine'. The only 'présence pleine', for Mallarmé, is in the non-practical, non-bourgeois, non-discursive space of the theatre—which says nothing at all.

In other words: as Derrida observes,

l'opération qui n'appartient plus au système de la vérité ne manifeste, ne dévoile aucune présence; elle ne constitue pas davantage une conformité de ressemblance ou d'adéquation entre une présence et une représentation.

(*La dissémination* p. 236)

This operation therefore does not suppose

l'extériorité ou l'antériorité, l'indépendance de l'imité, du signifié ou de la chose.

(*Ibid.* p. 238)

and refuses to situate its value in

rien qui ait jamais été ou puisse jamais devenir présent.

(*Ibid.* p. 238)

It functions, then, without

l'interprétation platonicienne ou métaphysique, qui implique que quelque part l'être d'un étant soit imité.

(*Ibid.* p. 234)

So the internal structure of Mallarmé's text demonstrates that his ideal is not and cannot become a 'présence' or a 'vérité', an 'imité', a 'signifié', a 'chose', or 'l'être d'un étant'. But that does not mean that it is not an ideal.

If the 'clôture' of the metaphysical 'jeu' is betrayed by its supposition of a purity of truth—which means it cannot allow for a 'pensée de la trace'—the 'clôture' of deconstruction is betrayed by its supposition of an originality of 'la différence', which means it cannot allow for any conditioning of that movement which precedes it. In consequence, in order to maintain the possibility of deconstructionist discourse, Derrida must assume that every idealism can be deconstructed to a system of 'supplémentarité', of substitution, of repetition and separation, of imitation and dialectic. For this deconstruction of an ideal to be possible, the idealist discourse must posit a 'supplément' (for example, a 'contingent' or 'common' reality) and a 'true' reality, separated not by a fundamental dissimilarity (of structure or position), but by the movement of 'la différence'. To the deconstructionist, every historical ideal is such a 'true reality', a 'présence pleine' of ambiguous accessibility. And Derrida says so in all his works.

[. . .] la forme matricielle [de l'histoire de la métaphysique] serait la détermination de l'être comme *présence* à tous les sens de ce mot. On pourrait montrer que tous les noms du fondement, du principe ou du centre ont toujours désigné l'invariant d'une présence [. . .]

(*L'écriture et la différence* p. 411)

[. . .] La *mimesis* doit suivre le procès de la vérité. Sa norme, son ordre, sa loi, c'est la présence du présent. C'est au nom de la vérité, sa seule référence—la *référence*—qu'elle est jugée, proscrite ou prescrite selon une alternance réglée.

Le trait invariant de cette référence dessine la clôture de la métaphysique [. . .]

(*La dissémination* p. 220)

But what happens to this point of view if one posits the existence of an ideal which is not a truth or a presence? which cannot, by its very nature, be imitated or presented, even fictionally or at a distance, as a reality? which is not a pole of reference? in short, an ideal which is not fundamentally a repetition, a supplement, of a 'common reality' (to which it might be opposed), but is formally incompatible with any reality, any description, any explanation that could be imagined—having, one

might perhaps say, too many dimensions—and remains nonetheless a recognizable, specific constant, conditioning poetic discourse?

Obviously, the deconstructionist objection is this: what is the nature of that conditioning? Is it possible to conceive of such a conditioning which is not based either on 'différance', separating origin and supplement, or simply on the displacement of that operation as it saturates the articulations of our discourse? Derrida, as I have suggested, assimilates the Mallarmean ideal to the latter type of conditioning. But it seems to me that there is another possibility.

A particular case of that other possibility—Mallarmean transposition—will be examined throughout the rest of this book. A thorough theoretical analysis of the possibility itself would be far beyond my means. But I should like, tentatively, to suggest a possible point of interaction between such a non-present ideal and the process of 'différance' described by Derrida.

In 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture', Derrida examines the Freudian theory of 'Bahnung', 'le frayage'. He shows that there can be no such 'frayage' without 'différance', that 'la trace' cannot exist without a certain 'refoulement', that there is no consciousness of any sort (even pre-conscious) without writing, and no writing without censorship.

But what is the force that censures? What is the resistance that produces 'différance', hence consciousness? Derrida presents it as nothing more or less than the inseparable play of life and death.

S'il n'y avait que perception, perméabilité pure aux frayages, il n'y aurait pas de frayage. Nous serions écrits mais rien ne serait consigné, aucune écriture ne se produirait, ne se retiendrait, ne se répéterait comme lisibilité. Mais la perception pure n'existe pas: nous ne sommes écrits qu'en écrivant, par l'instance en nous qui toujours déjà surveille la perception [. . .]

(*L'écriture et la différence* p. 335)

However, if the non-presence of a trace, its non-retention by a non-resistance, is death, so too is the absolute presence of a trace (which by its anteriority would refuse the label 'trace').

La trace est l'effacement de soi, de sa propre présence, elle est constituée par la menace ou l'angoisse de sa disparition irrémédiable, de la disparition de sa disparition. Une trace ineffaçable n'est pas une trace, c'est une présence pleine, une substance immobile et incorruptible, un fils de Dieu, un signe de la parousie, et non une semence, c'est-à-dire un germe mortel.

(*Ibid.* p. 339)

Thus life itself is 'différance', the separation of effaceable traces. 'Le frayage' becomes, at the end of the article, 'l'acte sexuel interdit'.

The whole argument is extraordinarily convincing and forceful. But it seems to me to avoid one question; precisely that which the deconstructionist must avoid.

Obviously, one cannot understand the separation of these effaceable traces as the pure, the necessary play of life and death. The characteristic resistance which separates them is, as Derrida says, 'toujours-déjà'. But does this 'toujours-déjà', this resistance that creates the 'frayage', the separation, the consciousness, have a certain human specificity? Not as a previous trace, nor as a presence, nor as a pattern or a blueprint for traces; but such that a certain type of resistance, a certain sort of 'différance', may be recognized as indicating something of that specificity?

Of course, the immediate tendency of referential language (and, as Derrida shows, reference depends on censorship of its own mechanism) is to turn that specificity into a true reality, the 'home' of man. It cannot, indeed, be *described* (or expressed) in any other way. And it cannot be such a home; it is a manner of resistance, of differentiation, not a presence; it cannot correspond to the way in which all analytical systems work.

The extreme difficulty of either admitting or situating this specificity has led to two types of reaction. Either one ignores it, and denies the existence of any such human specificity; or else one situates it in a realm of myth, whether placed in the past, or in the future, or in the historical process, or in God, or in the unconscious. Such situations invariably contain logical contradictions, and those which have not disintegrated in the course of time are now open to deconstruction. Mallarmé, as I showed in Chapter 4, rejects them inasmuch as they claim to be truths. But far from ignoring that specificity—which is the universally human, the 'soi', to the poet the ideal—Mallarmé bases his aesthetic on its proof. He refuses to deny the ideal's existence simply because all describable situations of it are fallacious.

The question which such an aesthetic presupposes is this: why, if the relationship between ideal and discourse is so inaccessible, should we accept that it exists at all? This question receives two answers, corresponding to two different senses of the word 'should' in the question; and both answers depend not on deduction (in the philosophical tradition), but on creation through the work of art.

The first is entirely empirical. We should accept that the ideal exists, because there is no other possible explanation for what happens in the theatre or the concert-hall. (This argument is traced in Chapter 3.) The second is an essential feature of the literature of transposition. Just as the Mallarmean text refuses to be read as an expression, as the bearer of a truth, a concept, an idea

in the philosophical sense, so it refuses to be read without presupposing the existence of the ideal (that is, in order to pretend that the ideal does not exist one must mis-read the text in a particular way, ignore or conflate certain of its articulations—as, so I have maintained, does Derrida). The proof of the ideal is present in the 'fête'; but private art, denied the theatre's objective proof, can only assert its link with the ideal by its refusal to be read without assuming that link. Hence the concept of poetry as a constant presentation of the poetic process—of art as a metaphor for itself—to which I have often referred, and to which I shall return at the end of my penultimate chapter.

So Mallarmé places the proof of the link between art and a pre-existent, universally human ideal in operations—textual and theatrical—beyond the reach of the phenomenological, philosophical, ontological process of definition—and in consequence also, in the last resort, beyond the reach of deconstruction, for which all specific ideals depend on that ontological process. Whereas 'la déconstruction du logocentrisme' proceeds through the 'analyse d'un refoulement et d'une répression historique de l'écriture depuis Platon' (*L'écriture et la différence* p. 293), and denies through that analysis the anteriority of the ideal, Mallarmé, dealing in a comparable way with that 'refoulement' and 'répression', uses the writing which emerges in order to allow for an ideal located, one might say, at two structural removes from reality, hence from any conceivable realm or time which could be lived by human consciousness as a full immediate presence, and necessarily definable only by figures which include the indication of its inaccessibility to definition. The Mallarmean text points to a dimension for which deconstruction cannot allow (just as deconstruction points to a dimension for which expressive discourse cannot allow): the dimension that allows for the ideal that exists, but is not an 'étant'.

At this point the question becomes relevant: what is the value, for Derrida, of deconstruction? Why devote to it such intense intellectual effort? The answer is certainly that deconstruction tells us something about discourse, about thought, about history and philosophy that all four have repressed since Plato. It is a 'réévaluation radicale' of 'l'écriture' which actually tells us more about 'l'écriture' as it has always functioned than can be admitted without the deconstruction of its tradition. It is impossible to mistake, in Derrida's work, the passion for a certain sort of truth about what happens when one writes (in the broad sense). In dislocating and denouncing the limits of the metaphysical view (via its own contradictions), Derrida seeks, certainly, no truth in the traditional epistemological sense; but he does seek to indicate (as no 'épistémè' could do) the truth

about what writing—or thought in general—is and does; a sort of truth that can only become accepted through a certain death of the historical and metaphysical habit of thought.

Peut-être la méditation patiente et l'enquête rigoureuse autour de ce qui s'appelle encore provisoirement écriture [. . .] sont-elles l'errance d'une pensée fidèle au monde irréductiblement à venir qui s'annonce au présent, par-delà la clôture du savoir.

(*De la grammatologie* p. 14)

La constitution d'une science ou d'une philosophie de l'écriture est une tâche nécessaire et difficile. Mais parvenue à ces limites [de la science et de la philosophie] et les répétant sans relâche, une *pensée* de la trace, de la différance ou de la réserve, doit aussi pointer au-delà du champ de l'*épistémè*.

(*Ibid.* p. 142)

Not infrequently, Derrida precedes particularly non-metaphysical movements of his argument with indications of the necessity of those movements based on the verb 'devoir': 'une *pensée* [. . .] doit [. . .] pointer', in the quotation above; 'Nous devons commencer par tenir un compte rigoureux² de cette *prise* [. . .] la lecture doit toujours viser un certain rapport [. . .] la lecture ne doit pas se contenter de redoubler le texte' (*De la grammatologie* pp. 226-7); 'la lecture ne doit plus procéder ici comme un simple relevé de concepts ou de mots' (*La dissémination* p. 221).³ Why shouldn't it, one might ask? Whence this apparent teleology, in a discourse which claims to have deconstructed teleology? But the answer is plain: if it does not, we will lapse into the metaphysical error. And there is no doubt that the metaphysical viewpoint, on which all historical discourse is based, is, for Derrida, a sort of error; its basic assumptions are self-contradictory, and the classical writer must refuse to see this. Derrida's deconstructionist analyses of such writers' texts invariably pass through a 'reductio ad absurdum', a confrontation of the text's overt 'intention' with the logical conclusions to be drawn from what it does. Some examples are listed in note 4, Chapter 5; innumerable others are to be found throughout his works (except, of course, when he is considering texts—such as those of Mallarmé or Solers—which are not merely metaphysical), on all scales. Derrida's deconstruction points out the logical gaps without which classical discourse cannot exist.⁴

Of course, Derrida does not point out such inadequacies in order to oppose to them an argument that 'makes more sense', a 'truer' concept. He is concerned, rather, with the way in which such texts create a certain notion of truth, in which they 'make sense' of the world.

But Mallarmé's motive, the direction of his effort, is entirely different.

He never denies that the real world 'makes sense'—its own kind of sense—or that the language of politics, of journalism, of economics or psychology, is reasonable,

logically consequent, and adequate to its task. His dislocation of that language is not motivated, as is Derrida's, by an interest in discourse as such, and a realization that its operation can only be shown in its dislocation. If it were, could he have written *Les Mots anglais* and *Les Dieux antiques*, with their blatant dependence on the 'centrism' that characterizes metaphysical discourse? Just as *Les Dieux antiques* attempts to explain all myths by their origin, so *Les Mots anglais* classifies words by their etymology—and by a certain cratylism which, as I shall show, is by no means to be uncritically transferred to his poetic practice. Both works are saturated by a concept of origin, of history, of time and the movement of sense which is displaced as surely in Mallarmé's poetry as by Derrida's deconstruction. In mythology and philology—as in that 'économie politique' to which he refuses to address himself—Mallarmé is unable to call into question the nature of logocentric discourse. Indeed, it seems to me that he never questions it at all on internal grounds (as does Derrida). Rather he questions its adequacy for a certain particular and rare process—the creation of private art.

Linear discourse appears to Mallarmé the satisfactory language of human perception of reality. Its dislocation in his poetry (prose and verse) is due to an ambition to do something other than describe reality or its discourse; it is due to the attraction of something entirely outside reality, entirely (structurally) foreign to it: the ideal, which in its latent form pre-dates language, and refuses to be reduced to discursive logic.

Derrida's deconstructionist method, one might say, is put in place by Mallarmé's view of music, and of the 'foule'. Does a symphony by Brahms play with and enfold the metaphysical process of expression? Is its effect on an audience determined by its internal mimetic structure? Surely not. The musical language which developed out of Beethoven's later symphonies and chamber music, unlike 'notre discours', is not saturated with the mechanism of reference, of representation, of 'making sense' in the Platonic tradition;⁵ so it does not need to out-manoeuvre that mechanism. This, of course, means that Derrida's deconstructive motive (as I have just defined it) can find no nourishment in such music;⁶ and indeed, its mode of operation does not seem to have attracted his attention. The same certainly cannot be said of Mallarmé, who (as I showed in Chapter 4) saw in the concert-hall the nearest modern equivalent to one of his artistic absolutes, and could not imagine that absolute—the 'rite'—without music. The response of the audience (cf. *Plaisir sacré*) is sufficient proof to Mallarmé that the concert has a certain ideal value.

Not, however, the most absolute proof, the most absolute ideal value; they require words, too (for reasons suggested in Chapter 4 and developed in Chapter 8). And whereas Romantic music, not being

based on a referential language, need not out-manoeuvre reference, poetry, based on words, must; for the 'clôture' of reference—which, to Mallarmé (though not in the same sense to Derrida), is also that of the real, the bourgeois world—cannot allow for the ideal's extra dimension. It is not in order to show something about the nature of discourse, but in order to allow for the ideal—I hope my musical example has shown that this is not an idle distinction—that Mallarmé dislocates 'notre discours'. His motive is different from Derrida's—though the operation which he performs on that 'discours' is, it seems to me, better described by Derrida than by anyone else.

Nor is this motive merely an attribute of a fictitious 'Mallarmé the man'. It is present throughout the *Poésies* and the prose articles and lectures, conditioning the movement of the text in a way for which, it seems to me, deconstruction cannot account. The specific ideal figures, limited in number, proven by the crowd's real or imagined response, and transferred to imaginary space by the solitary poet (according to the operation described in Chapter 3), demand not merely the creation of a fold and opening beyond ontological polarity, but a specific manner of creating that opening. It is that specific manner which I now intend to examine.

II

At this point, I shall provide a definition of terms which is long overdue—but which I could not have provided earlier, because it depends on the arguments developed in the last few pages. It concerns my use of the words 'real' and 'realistic'.

As I have just suggested, there is, for Mallarmé—though not for Derrida—an objectively imitable external reality, which corresponds formally to normal, bourgeois thought, to the referential movement, and to that discourse which I have called linear or journalistic. The peculiar formal type of this reality and discourse I shall simply call realistic.

From this point of view, however, it must be emphasized that not only the physical world is realistic. Traditional (metaphysical, Platonic) ideals are, too. Such ideals operate in the same way as the 'reality' to which they are 'opposed'—so deconstruction conclusively demonstrates; and to Mallarmé, when he speaks as a conscious poet, they are obstructive to the true ideal 'élan' in almost the same way as bourgeois banality. Hence his rejection of Wagner's representational ideal, the occultist's alchemical ideal, the Christian's mystical ideal, the naturalist's scientific ideal—all of them governed by the deconstructible fallacy of truth, of presence, all referential, all, in this sense, realistic; and I shall normally call them so.

But from another point of view—that internal to such metaphysical idealisms—there is a vital difference between the banal and the metaphysically essential;

between (in my terms) the realistic ideal and the realistic reality. And although I have not yet mentioned it, this difference (deconstructible though it is) has a central role in the process of transposition; a role which I shall be examining particularly in my next chapter. Therefore, although I shall use the term 'realistic' (or, for added clarity, 'realistic-essential') to refer to both metaphysical ideal and metaphysical banality, I shall have occasion to use the metaphysician's distinction between the two.

When I am using this distinction, I shall (in order to avoid ambiguity) refer to the non-realistic, non-metaphysical, extra-dimensional ideal as 'figured' or 'Mallarmean'.

Notes

1. Cf. for example, *La dissémination* pp. 244 and 264.
2. Rigour—properly placed, or rather displaced—is perhaps the prime textual virtue, for Derrida. Cf. for example, *L'écriture et la différence* p. 414: 'La qualité et la fécondité d'un discours se mesurent peut-être à la rigueur critique avec laquelle est pensé ce rapport à l'histoire de la métaphysique [. . .].'
3. Some comparable expressions: 'Parce que nous commençons à écrire, à écrire autrement, nous devons relire autrement' (*De la grammatologie* p. 130). '[. . .] cette dissymétrie stratégique [. . .] doit sans cesse contrôler les mouvements neutralisants de toute déconstruction. Cette dissymétrie doit être minutieusement calculée [. . .]' (*La dissémination* p. 235). 'Pour lire convenablement cette page [. . .]' (*De la grammatologie* p. 190).
4. A further typical example: 'C'est là une conséquence qui ne se déduit pas rigoureusement de ces prémisses. Si on l'en déduit néanmoins [as does Lévi-Strauss], il faut aussitôt conclure que la non-exploitation, la liberté, etc., "vont de pair" [. . .] avec l'analphabétisme et le caractère non obligatoire du service militaire, de l'instruction publique ou de la loi en général. Est-il utile d'insister?' (*De la grammatologie* p. 192).
5. It would be invalid to object that Mallarmé also admired Wagner's operas, which do have a certain mimetic ambition. For precisely because they have that ambition, they are not what Mallarmé normally calls music: 'sa partition, du reste, comparée à du Beethoven ou du Bach, n'est, strictement, la musique' (RI56).
6. Though it would certainly find much meat in the books and articles which have been written about Romantic instrumental music, with their often flagrant structural teleology and expressive reductionism.

Bibliography

The abbreviations used in this book are: OC, for (i) below; *Corr*, for (ii) below; *Poésies*, for (v) below; RI, for (vii) below.

Single quotations marks are used to indicate guillemets in passages quoted in French. Spelling, punctuation, capitals, accents, and the form of titles are as in the edition quoted.

Where I give the name of an author, but not of a work, the reference is to the only work by that author in this bibliography.

Where a book's place of publication is not given, it is Paris.

MALLARMÉ

This is not by any means a complete bibliography of Mallarmé's published work. Rather, it is a list of the works I have quoted in the editions used.

Whenever possible, and whenever no reference to another edition is given (except in the case of the 'poèmes critiques', for which see below), I have used the Pléiade *Œuvres complètes*. For the verse poems, the editors generally give Mallarmé's latest revised version. For the texts which Mallarmé revised for inclusion in *Divagations* in 1897, it is that revised text which is given, except for the *Symphonie littéraire*, *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*, *La Musique et les lettres*, and the preface to *Vathek* (of these, *Divagations* contains only fragments).

For verse not included in the Pléiade edition, I have invariably used the 1983 Flammarion *Poésies*.

The documents published by Scherer as *Le 'Livre' de Mallarmé* and those published by Richard under the title *Pour un tombeau d'Anatole* are quoted in those editions.

For Mallarmé's correspondence I use throughout the Gallimard edition; the first volume was edited by Mondor and Richard, and all subsequent ones by Austin, drawing on Mondor's papers.

This leaves only one problematic area: the articles or 'poèmes critiques' which Mallarmé published in the *Revue Wagnérienne*, *Revue Indépendante*, *National Observer*, and *Revue Blanche*.

Wherever I give the name of one of these articles (listed below) but no OC page number, the quotation is from the original text of the 'revue' (apparent misprints are noted).

However, the articles of the *Revue Indépendante* have no individual names, being published under the 'rubrique' *Notes sur le théâtre*. For the sake of brevity and precision in reference (given that the pagination in

the *Revue Indépendante* is not continuous), I have given my own page numbers to Mallarmé's articles, indicated simply as a number after the letters RI.

Reference to the list below will show clearly to which article I refer; a brief calculation will reveal, furthermore, which page of that article is quoted.

(i) *Œuvres complètes*, eds H. Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Gallimard, 1945)

(ii) *Correspondance*, eds H. Mondor and J.-P. Richard for volume 1, H. Mondor and L. J. Austin for volumes 2-11; volumes 1-11 (Gallimard, 1959-85)

(iii) *Pour un tombeau d'Anatole*, ed. J.-P. Richard (Seuil, 1961)

(iv) *Le 'Livre' de Mallarmé*, ed. J. Scherer, nouvelle édition (Gallimard, 1977)

(v) *Poésies* (vol. 1 of projected *Œuvres complètes*), eds C. P. Barbier and C. G. Millan (Flammarion, 1983)

(vi) *Richard Wagner, rêverie d'un Poète français*, in *Revue Wagnérienne*, tome 1, février-décembre 1885, pp. 195-200

(vii) *Notes sur le théâtre*, in *Revue Indépendante*, nouvelle série:

RI1-RI7: tome 1, novembre 1886, pp. 37-43

RI8-RI15: tome 1, décembre 1886, pp. 246-53

RI16-RI20: tome 2, janvier 1887, pp. 55-9

RI24-RI31: tome 2, février 1887, pp. 192-9

RI32-RI39: tome 2, mars 1887, pp. 384-91

RI40-RI45: tome 3, avril 1887, pp. 58-63

RI46-RI50: tome 3, mai 1887, pp. 244-8

RI51-RI57: tome 3, juin 1887, pp. 365-71

RI58-RI63: tome 4, juillet 1887, pp. 55-60

(viii) Articles in *National Observer*:

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(ix) Articles under the general title *Variations sur un sujet*, in *Revue Blanche*:

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La Cour, mars 1895, pp. 223-7

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D. A. Reynolds (essay date December 1989)

SOURCE: Reynolds, D. A. "Illustration, Present or Absent: Reflecting Reflexivity in Mallarmé's 'Sonnet en yx.'" *Journal of European Studies* 19, no. 4 (December 1989): 311-29.

[In the following essay, Reynolds examines Mallarmé's ambiguous attitude toward the practice of illustrating literary works—doubting the usefulness of illustrations at times, yet wanting his own poetry illustrated at other times.]

Je suis pour—aucune illustration, tout ce qu'évoque un livre devant se passer dans l'esprit du lecteur.

(MOC [Mallarmé *Oeuvres Complètes*] 378)¹

[Le "Sonnet en yx"] est peu "plastique", comme tu me le demandes, mais au moins est-il aussi "noir et blanc" que possible, et il me semble se prêter à une eau-forte pleine de Rêve et de Vide.²

Although it is clear from the first citation above that Mallarmé had strong reservations about the usefulness of illustrations, he was frequently keen to have his own poems illustrated. Unfortunately, he never formulated a view of the role of illustration which would clarify this ambiguity in his attitude. L. J. Austin has suggested that Mallarmé's misgivings may have been connected with