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MALLARMÉ AND INTERNATIONALISM

Marshall C. OLDS

The centenary of Stéphane Mallarmé's death (September 9, 1898) will be upon us all too soon and with it the attendant flurry of colloquia, scholarly publications and *hommages*. Doubtless among the most frequently cited phrases will be Mallarmé's own, "Tel qu'en lui-même enfin l'éternité le change," that Orphic declaration marking the artist's passage (or celebration of same) from life to that "eternity" of our collective cultural memory and so to the essential self. An interesting question for that commemoration will be how we understand "Mallarmé himself." His own intentions in the commemorative sonnet to Poe are clear. The "lui-même" (as also the "toi, le fatal emblème" of the "Toast funèbre" for Théophile Gautier) is the absent, Platonically-real self, inferred merely from the poet's name on a gravestone or a page of verse. If any "ghost" or material remnant survives, it is in the vibrations of a reader's voice floating in the air. All of this plays well into Mallarmé's post-romantic esthetics of impersonality, what he referred to as "la disparition élocutoire du poète." Beyond the socially marginal figures of the early Romantic ivory tower recluse and the later dandy, the poet lucky enough to predecease her or himself can kill off the social identity altogether and live as an ideal figuration of the mind, black on white. This at least was Mallarmé's "official" self-representation and certainly one of the most enduring aspects of his legacy.¹ For over 100 years, a line of criticism has privileged "textualité"

1. Even 100 years after the poet's death, much in Mallarmé studies conspires to keep at a distant remove all traces of the living man. This is especially true with respect to the manuscripts where there is no body to constitute an *avant-texte* that would be of use in applying genetic criticism, for instance. The manuscripts of the poems that survive in the Mondor collection of the Fonds Doucet are all fair or final transcriptions and, like corrected proof, offer only variants. (The large manuscript fragments, *Le Livre* and the *Tombeau d'Anatole*, are for projects never completed). The manuscript of *Hérodiade* that Mallarmé was working on at his death remains in rigorously private hands; a single scholar, Gardner Davies, has only seen a photographic copy.

over all other aspects of literary production and has come to be the dominant current in the latter half of this century. Following Mallarmé's urbane attacks on Realism and Naturalism, Valéry, Proust, Blanchot, structuralism, the nouveau and nouveau-nouveau romans, de-construction, narratology, feminist readings of "écriture," (with the traveling companion of American New Criticism), all have focused intently — albeit with different emphases — on the finished text while turning away from claims made on behalf of the author, or of the physical, cultural or intellectual milieu that variously "produced" it.

Now, cultural approaches to nineteenth-century French studies are not entirely new, and the rejuvenation of Marxist criticism through feminist studies has challenged the academic supremacy of purely textual analyses. In poetry, nowhere is this clearer than in Baudelaire studies. Mallarmé's work has been largely resistant to this trend, however; there are no urban tableaux to speak of in the verse, and the prose poems are at once anecdotal and abstract. Still, the resistance is not total. At least one major critical text published in the 1980s, Sartre's posthumous *Mallarmé, la lucidité et sa face d'ombre*, places Mallarmé's early obsession with poetic suicide within the intellectual climate of his generation, laying the ground for the purportedly transcendent scripture of symbolism. More recently, work by Evelyn Gould and Mary Shaw has situated Mallarmé's fascination with the theater in the context of the often low-brow theater of the late nineteenth century, and Virginia La Charité has demonstrated the influence of newspapers and poster art on the conception of "Un coup de dés." Bertrand Marchal's welcome new edition of Mallarmé's early correspondence will surely invite a fresh look at the often subtle intersections between text and *hors-texte*. The question is an engaging one not only because of Mallarmé's own pronouncements questioning the mimetic function of literary language but because the oblique referentiality that does occur, sometimes in spite of the poet's overt intentions, points to unexpected structures of thought. I have shown elsewhere how these are at work in the verse, where Mallarmé's cherished notions of friendship among poets and ideal readership play upon his use of the muse figure. A somewhat different though equally fruitful place of enquiry are Mallarmé's essays of the 1880s and '90s, what he called his "poèmes critiques," which have as their subject the necessity of forging a new language. These pieces are written in Mallarmé's late hermetic prose style and so are examples of that new language.

The grand synthesis of Mallarmé's thinking along these lines is in *La Musique et les Lettres*, delivered in 1894 as an invited lecture at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, later published in England in a volume of the Taylorian

lectures, but appearing in France with some modifications in the *Figaro* and the *Revue Blanche* soon after Mallarmé's return from the tour (O.C. 1607). Mallarmé's idea, here as elsewhere, is to lay the ground for a universal poetic language, that is to say a supra-national poetics for all language(s). Thus the relationship is only indirect with other, more literal internationalist activity such as the Esperanto movement; while universalism is implied in Mallarmé's essay, no specific human language (other than French!) is ever mentioned. As will be discussed below, this suggestive expression of 19th century international political utopianism stems in fact from the poet's own foray into political activism in the early 1870s. Moreover, the surprising mix of politics and poetics informs the inception of the Symbolist movement around 1876, at least as understood by Mallarmé who would become its *chef d'école*.

Readers of Mallarmé's address will recall that the poet came before his English audience to give both an *état présent* of French poetry and, simultaneously, to expose and demonstrate the fundamental precepts of a new poetics. He likened the tumultuous changes on the Parisian literary scene — provoked mainly by the prose poem — to the political disruption caused by the anarchist bombings of the 1890s. Some twenty years earlier, Mallarmé had been involved with another attempt to lay literary common ground on the international stage. The difference is that the vehicle of 1873–74 was political in a much more literal sense. In the aftermath of the Commune, Stéphane Mallarmé found himself, wittingly or no, part of the international workers' movement as an elected Secretary of the Société internationale des Poètes, an organization about which we know very little other than that it strove to foster cooperation among poets by overcoming the clausturation of nationalisms, that parochialism advanced by the policies of the Second Empire.

We do not readily associate Mallarmé's name with political events, much less causes. As a young man in London in the early 1860s, he dismissed cavalierly the Polish émigrés demonstrating for political free-dom (*Corr. Marchal* 147–8) and in 1898, at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, his name would be conspicuously absent from the open letter in support of Zola (*Corr.* 10:14, 108). As Henri Mondor wrote in response to Mallarmé's all but total indifference to the Franco-Prussian war,

Sa correspondance, au cours des années, a été la plus dépouillée qui fût de toute anecdote, la moins nourrie d'actualités, de jugements, de commentaires péremptoires sur la vie, sur les hommes publics ou sur la nation. Les contingences, les opinions, les rivalités lui demeurent étrangères. [...] Attitude hautaine, M. Mallarmé!" (Mondor 304–5).

Yet, neither is it true that Mallarmé remained entirely above the fray. While only rarely evoking current events in his writings, Mallarmé's thought bears nevertheless the imprint of his times, in form if not always in precise content. The theme of internationalism, common to much utopian social theory throughout the nineteenth century, underwent an important evolution in Mallarmé's hands. Mallarmé's views on the subject were at once Republican (in form) and elitist (in content). There was an important sense of universal brotherhood, but among peers, and along with it the poet's need to go beyond poetic tradition. These were important aspects of what Mallarmé referred to as "le goût moderne," a conscious choice on his part and one directly tied to notions of literary genre (especially with respect to the use of prose), as he came to understand the question toward the middle of the 1890s.

One finds a predisposition to go beyond French norms as early as 1860 when the young Mallarmé was copying his translations of Poe into the same notebook as his own French poetry (Gill 2:9). Again, as shown in the *Notes* of 1869 for a projected dissertation on linguistics, his sense of place in the evolution of French literature is clear: the proposed study would trace Descartes, Montesquieu, La Bruyère, Fénelon, Baudelaire and "Enfin du moi-et du langage mathématique." Presumably, this language would share some of the objective properties of mathematics, and for a check-test Mallarmé could look to other languages in countries where mathematics played a more important role than in France. Germany and England could serve as the "contre-épreuve: nous aidant ainsi de ce qu'[elles nous ont pris]" (*O.C.* 851).

But it is a long way from austere reflection to political action, even when that action is *à la Mallarmé*. To understand the flirtation with politics and have a sense of where it would lead, we need to look at developments in the poet's life in the period leading up to the move to Paris in 1871. They primarily involve friendships, although there will be dropped in his lap a bomb (another one) with a delayed fuse: Richard Wagner.

As the correspondence makes abundantly clear, the first friendships of Mallarmé's late youth and early maturity, especially with Cazalis and Lefebure, set the tone for those to follow. Themselves poets, these friends were indivisibly associated with the very idea of poetry; they represented in fact the poet-interlocutor completing the circuit of communication initiated by the poet-scriptor via the muse, whose erasure guarantees the interlocutor's status. The circle of poet friends grew during the 1860s: Des Essarts, Vil-

liers, Glatigny, Banville, Mendès, Aubanel, Mistral. The group began to include foreigners: Italian Gualdo and Englishmen Payne and Bonaparte-Wyse; Swinburne and O'Shaughnessy would soon follow. Mallarmé's stay in Avignon, his last provincial teaching post before moving to Paris in 1871, was the solidifying period for this circle. Not only was it a more hospitable place for house guests than Tournon or Besançon had been, but it was itself home to an important group of poets with whom Mallarmé had already become allied, the Provençal *félibrige*. Headed by Mistral, Roumanille and Aubanel, these French poets writing in Provençal strove to revive the region's literary tradition. More than a loose association or even a school, the *félibres* were a formal organization with a quasi-political mandate. Their program was not in any way isolationist or separatist, however, and they were in regular contact with writers from within and without France (Mondor 271). Some of Mallarmé's ties with English poets came through them. We can infer how attractive such a program was to Mallarmé, given the way in which he cultivated friendships, and it stands to reason that as his Society's representative, Mallarmé should contact Mistral, the then *félibre* president, to solicit a formal agreement between the Provençal organization and the new internationalist group in Paris.

The Société internationale des Poètes did in fact exist, however briefly. The *Correspondance* points us to the April 16, 1874 issue of *La Semaine parisienne*: "La Société internationale des Poètes (section française) a tenu, samedi soir, sa deuxième séance générale dans les ateliers de M. Carjat. Après avoir voté l'admission de quelques membres nouveaux [...], la Société a procédé à la réélection de son comité." On this list is the name of Stéphane Mallarmé (*Corr.* 2:41). The first meeting was probably held shortly before Mallarmé's November 1, 1873 letter to Mistral, in which he is aflutter with the new project:

Mon cher ami, Tu aimes les choses qui ont une grande allure: voici une de celles-là. Ouvre et lis le pli qui accompagne cette lettre : deux feuilles, l'une pour toi, c'est-à-dire pour la Provence, car les chefs-lieux de sections françaises sont Paris et Avignon : l'autre pour Zorilla, que tu connais, c'est-à-dire pour l'Espagne [...] L'Angleterre abonde dans notre visée. L'Italie de même (*Corr. Marchal*, 543-5).

The brochure that accompanied this letter has been lost. This is doubly unfortunate because the society's statutes seem to have been written in part by Mallarmé. We do, however, get a sense of the thing:

[...] c'est tout simplement une franc-maçonnerie ou un compagnonnage. Nous sommes un certain nombre qui aimons une chose honnie : il est bon qu'on se compte, voilà tout, et qu'on se connaisse, que les associés se lisent et que les voyageurs se voient.

If Mallarmé was interested in such a society, it was because it re-sponded to his notion of friendship among poets: they would read each other and at least in part write for each other. Mallarmé is explicit in his terms: *compagnonnage* refers to the medieval associations to shelter itinerant journeymen, and in the nineteenth century to trades associations. Freemasonry was of course an international society that in France had strong republican and pan-European tendencies. Writing from post-Commune Paris, Mallarmé's choice of words could not have been clearer.

Though Mistral refused official affiliation (Mondor 351), he had already participated, and unbeknownst to him, in the nascent inception of the Society: the volume in memory of Théophile Gautier. Mallarmé wrote, "Il y a un *Tombeau de Gautier* pour [Bonaparte-Wyse] chez Lemerre. As-tu le tien? *Ce livre qu'on aurait dû faire plus international contient en germe notre projet*" (*Corr. Marchal* 544; emphasis added).

With the exception of Mallarmé's poem and a polite bow to Hugo's contribution, this volume is generally regarded as an inferior, if touching collection of tributes bringing together the poets of the first *Parnasse contemporain* and a few invited guests. It is in fact more interesting than that, at least as far as Mallarmé's involvement is concerned. Poet-friend Albert Glatigny put forth the idea, and the project was picked up by the editor, Alphonse Lemerre, who had published the *Parnasse contemporain*, and who would write the brief "Au lecteur": "En des jours lointains, on sera touché sans doute, en feuilletant ce Livre, de voir que tant de Poètes, Français ou Étrangers, séparés d'habitudes, d'esprit et de langage, se sont réunis pour louer une existence paisible et une Œuvre exemplaire."

In fact, there are 91 texts in seven languages, from contributors ranging well beyond the original *Parnasse* group. Poems are in French, English, German, Italian, Provençal, Latin and ancient Greek. Mallarmé's hand in the planning is evident in the presence of the *Félibrige* poets and some of the English contributors.²

2. I wish to thank François Chapon and the staff at the Fonds Jacques Doucet for kindly allowing me to examine the copy in their collection.

That Mallarmé should have prized the volume beyond its overtly commemorative nature sheds light on his thinking during the 70s and also recasts our understanding of the intended audience of "Toast funèbre." The apostrophe, "O vous tous" (1. 37) and the collective expressed in the opening line, "O de notre bonheur, toi, le fatal emblème," do not merely designate humanity or even other poets. Specifically, the intended audience are the poets published in this volume. If this was indeed the seed of the later project in Mallarmé's eyes, then an important aim was *compagnonnage*. If it failed in any way, it was only because the net had not been cast widely enough.

The line of internationalism runs through much of the disparate activity undertaken by Mallarmé during the 1870s. An important example is found in the circumstances surrounding the publication of "L'Après-midi d'un faune," the so-called *Parnasse* affair and the germ of the Symbolist movement. Lemerre's refusal of Mallarmé's poem for the third *Parnasse contemporain*, and the poet's decision to take it elsewhere, led to the founding of a new journal, *La République des Lettres*. It was not to be a specifically French publication, but rather one that was international in scope and associated with *modern* literature. The editors of the correspondence are correct to see in the shift of publishers the inconspicuous birth of the Symbolist movement. What should be emphasized is that from its inception, this new aesthetic was anchored in internationalism. It is well known that younger poets from different countries would gravitate toward it as many had done to the rue de Rome for the Tuesday evenings; in later years, Mallarmé enjoyed pointing out that among the poets writing in French who represented what was new, there was often a mix of national backgrounds: French, Belgian, Spanish, Greek, American.³ The social context of such lists should not be forgotten; it is a sobering irony that the publication of *La Musique et les Lettres* and the arrest of Captain Dreyfus should have occurred the same year. The challenge to national authority would grow and the reactions would be strong. According to Marcel Muller, the virulent attacks on Symbolism that were to come in the first decades of the twentieth century were grounded in the same uncrested wave of xenophobia swelling in France at least since 1870.⁴

3. See especially the Toasts and the "Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire" (*O. C.*, 662–72).

4. In an unpublished conference paper on Proust and turn-of-the-century antisemitism and xenophobia, delivered at the Colloquium in Nineteenth-Century French Studies, SUNY Binghamton, October, 1992.

Other projects from this period in Mallarmé's life that pertain to internationalism and modernism are the translations (especially Poe and Tennyson), the *Vathek* preface, *La Dernière Mode* (Mallarmé's fashion magazine), the *Gossips*, *Les Mots anglais*, and the *Nursery Rhymes*. Amid the disparity of these activities, one notices the cultivation of forms other than pure verse and canonical literary genres. With his arrival in Paris, he began writing much more prose for publication than before. Whether some of this writing came from economic necessity or not hardly matters. As Baudelaire had already intimated, for careerism or for art, prose was the language of the modern city.

Before we move ahead to 1894, there is still the question of Wagner. In a sense, Mallarmé spent the last twenty or so years of his life responding to a letter he received from Catulle Mendès in the summer of 1870. In July, Catulle would stay with Wagner in Lucerne.

Vous connaissant comme je crois vous connaître, je me fais une fête de vous inviter à l'art nouveau qui n'est ni la poésie ni la musique. [...] Aucune des sensations, aucun des sentiments imposés par les manifestations de n'importe quel art ne sont comparables [...], et je vous répète, ce n'est pas de la musique ! (Mondor 296).

As we know, Mallarmé's views on Wagner, music and poetry are complex and tangled. Essential questions concerning the true nature of language and of music become enmeshed with other, more disturbing issues, such as the idea of an artistic super-genre, the onslaught of music, theater and public art on the intimate and private forms, and the challenge against poetry as the supreme art form. Other problems stemming from the controversy around Wagner and that pertain to our theme of internationalism include its opposite, nationalism, and the associated discussion of the "materialism" of music, especially as it relates to theater.

Mallarmé's first published essay on music and literature, the "Chronique de Paris" of the 6 December, 1874 issue of *La Dernière Mode*, will be more fully developed in the 1885 essay on Wagner and in the 1886 essay, "Crise de Vers." Wagner's art is admirable, writes Mallarmé, in that it moves toward the fusion of genres, but it falls short on several counts. It does not appeal finally to the sensibility of this *poète contemporain* because it is public art, art of a particular race that relies on "de déploiements de beauté officiels," rather than on the private intimacy of "de solitaires fêtes." Music is largely responsible for this state of affairs. (Unlike Catulle, Mallarmé did not see Wagner bringing about the sublimation of music, just the opposite in fact: in Wagner, music gets in the way of everything). "La magie musicale" has changed

theatrical art, which in the past one could read if one wished. Now, it *must* be performed, and its enchantment will "violenter votre raison avec un simulacre, et d'emblée on proclame: Supposez que cela a eu lieu véritablement et que vous y êtes !" It is too immediate and, in that sense, too material. Mallarmé will not be taken in. "Le Moderne dédaigne imaginer." Music, moreover, gives rise to "une phase de théâtre, laquelle répond, comme par surprise, à la disposition de sa race" (543). The Germans are now able to contemplate their legendary origins as the Greeks had done. Wagner's musical art speaks to the German race because it lacks the universality that comes through abstraction or de-materialization. Truly modern art will be beyond Wagner: "en des temps de jubilé qui ne le sont pour aucun peuple, une hospitalité contre l'insuffisance de soi et la médiocrité des patries" (OC 546).

In the essays over the following decade, it is the idea of Wagner that will be sublimated by that of music, rather than the other way around, and music in turn will evaporate into language. Wagner and all that his art represents is dismissed in a stroke of the pen: "ce n'est pas de sonorités élémentaires par les cuivres, les cordes, les bois, indéniablement mais de l'intellectuelle parole à son apogée que doit [...] résulter, en tant que l'ensemble des rapports existant dans tout, la Musique" (*O. C.*, 367–8). In the 1894 essay he is magisterial: "oublions la vieille distinction entre Musique et Lettres" (649). We are firmly in a post-Wagnerian world.

All of this is to establish the "true" meaning of music, the rhythm inherent in language, or *tangage* he calls it in the poem "Salut." He pursues the theme with a vengeance in his essays from 1886 to 1894, where music and letters lead to *Mystère* and *l'Idée*. The racial imagination associated with music and theater has been quelled. Yet the specter of nationalism is not fully exorcised: there is still French poetic tradition. Here, Mallarmé does an uncharacteristic thing: he evokes current events. In "Crise de Vers" it is the death of Victor Hugo a year earlier and in "La Musique et les Lettres" the terrorist bombings of the '90s. The two events are emblematic with respect to literature: the death of the French poetic order and the welcome figurative intrusion of "outside" or "non-French" disturbances that keep the old order from reestablishing itself as a new classicism. French prosody, especially the *instrument national* of the alexandrine, has been surpassed by individual expression: "toute âme est un nœud rythmique" (644). Free speech. "On a touché au vers" (643).

The "bomb" in question was of course the prose poem that Baudelaire had hurled at the *body poétique* nearly thirty years before. Mallarmé offers a his-

tory of that *attentat*, beginning with the Romantics who dissolved the caesura and liberalized use of the carry-over line; then free verse (of the English type) allowing even greater personal expression especially with respect to rhythm, followed by the rhythmic prose of the *poème en prose*, and finally *the poème critique*, of which Mallarmé's own variant *La Musique et les Lettres* is an example (O. C. 644). Prose is not only the form that gives the greatest personal freedom; it is the natural development beyond the collective forms of the national lyric tradition. In the one demiurgic move of sublimating Music within Letters, Mallarmé places us in a world that is resolutely post-nationalist, post-Wagnerian and post-Hugolian. The "médiocrité des patries" has given way to the right to structure language according to individual sensibility.

It is perhaps only coincidental that Mallarmé's sense of change in poetic production and practice should run parallel to political change, as it had thirty years earlier (communism then anarchism), and we may marvel at the degree to which his understanding has taken him beyond the overtly political realm. Yet, it is startling to read "La Musique et les Lettres" unadorned by the notes and short, prefatory essay, as it was published in England in a volume of the Taylorian Lectures. One is aware of just how carefully Mallarmé was to frame the essay for a specifically French reading public, and one's attention is drawn to the elaboration of the relationship between esthetics, politics and religion. It has been a mistake, writes Mallarmé, to foster the view that governments mirror universal order. If anything, universal order should be reflected not in nations but in global unity, our original "association terrestre" (O. C. 653). Should there be a future religion in France, it would amplify the ideal aspirations of the individual. In the meantime, some sort of political organization will have to suffice. What to choose? "Un gouvernement mirera, pour valoir, celui de l'univers; lequel, est-il monarchique, anarchique [...] Aux conjectures" (O. C. 656). Mallarmé's mind is set: he is for the new world order arising from the individual. We should recall that "La Musique et les Lettres" was, in England, a lecture, a public form that nevertheless retained the privileged communicative circuit of the printed page, from one *maître* to an "assemblée de maîtres illustres et d'une jeune élite" (O. C. 650). And, because all political action must be individual, he notes to his French reader, "La Conférence, cette fois *lecture*, mieux Discours, me paraît un genre à déployer hors frontières" (O. C. 656–7).

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