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MALLARME'S 'LES NOCES D'HERODIADE, MYSTERE': A
PSYCHOANALYTIC READING

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MALLARME'S 'LES NOCES D'HERODIADE, MYSTERE':

A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING

By

Mary Ellen Wolf, B.A., M.A.

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Patrick Brady, Professor of French, Chairman

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MALLARME'S 'LES NOCES D'HERODIADE, MYSTERE':
A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING

Mary Ellen Wolf

ABSTRACT

Although published in 1959, the "Hérodiade" manuscript has received very little attention. The purpose of this dissertation is to end this critical silence by a reading of the integral work which consists of some 200 pages of notes, variants and published texts. After a preliminary critique of Mauron's psychocritical reading of Mallarmé (in particular his practices of translation, biographical speculation and textual reification), I examine Mallarmé's view of the creative process as it appears in his early correspondence. The poet's discussion of productivity, negativity, depersonalization and the writing experience provides a springboard for drawing a number of striking analogies with Freud's theory of the Unconscious and dream interpretation.

The focus of the ensuing chapters is on the problematic of creative process as mirrored in the production of the work itself. Chapter III is a reconsideration of Hérodiade's narcissistic ego as a fictional construct which duplicates
the relationship of the writer to the work. In Chapter IV, a comparison of Mallarmé's and Freud's notion of the "uncanny" sets up my analysis of processes of repetition and repression in the textual variants for the "Prélude." A confrontation of the various versions of the "Prélude" demonstrates the persistent influence of covert psychic processes which have camouflaged phantasms of procreation, incest and death in the final draft. Chapter V analyzes how the castration motif in the "Cantique de Saint Jean" works as a metaphor for both the force and failure of textual production.

It is by following the perpetual transformation of disruptive and ambivalent elements between variant and text that one finds a psychic economy which opens up "Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère" to alternative readings.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my family and friends for their unfledging support during the completion of this project. Special thanks goes to my director, Patrick Brady, and to Carol Mossman for her attentive ear and invaluable insights.
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INTRODUCTION

Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" constituted the starting-point for the elaboration of a new poetics. Interwoven in the fabric of this highly experimental text are the intellectual dilemmas, philosophical probings and mental anguish of several decades. Conceived in the early 1860's, "Hérodiade" presents a provocative view of the young Mallarmé's obsession with fertility and birth, sterility and death. As evidenced by the poet's correspondence, it is this "oeuvre solitaire" which precipitated the metaphysical crisis at Tournon. The expropriation, fragmentation and perpetual alienation of the writer is inscribed in the writing of the work itself:

"Hérodiade', où je m'étais mis tout entier sans le savoir, d'où mes doutes et mes malaises ...".1 During this period, Mallarmé confronted mortality, renounced religion and, most importantly, began to interrogate the workings of the creative process. Through a sustained analysis of his own writing experience, he came to reconsider the language of poetry as a product of both conscious and unconscious forces. After observing the complex interaction of these forces in the production of the work, he was able to formulate a theory of psychical writing based on the mechanisms of condensation and
displacement. But at the same time, due to the intensity of the experience, he soon found himself on the verge of physical collapse and unable to write. Overwhelmed by "le vieux monstre de l'Impuissance," the poet put the "Hérodiade" manuscript aside around 1870 only to return to it in the 1880's. Although the poem remained unfinished, Mallarmé made his intentions quite clear when on the eve of his death in 1898 he wrote: "'Hérodiade,' terminée s'il plaît au sort." Taking shape over a span of 35 years, "Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère," as it came to be called, provides Mallarmé's readers with an invaluable key to the simultaneous evolution of his poetic theory and practice.

The Manuscript

When Gardner Davies reproduced the textual fragments for "Hérodiade" in 1959, the public was offered an intimate view of Mallarmé's working methodology. Despite the significance of the Davies' publication, it appears to have fallen on deaf ears. With over two decades having elapsed, critics continue to avoid any type of in-depth analysis of the integral work. The psychological intricacies and intellectual framework of "Les Noces" have not yet been intensively explored. This lack of attention can perhaps be attributed to the ambivalence with which a manuscript is sometimes received. When it leads toward the determination of a definitive text and confirms previous readings, it is most often deemed a valuable contribution. If, on the other hand, the discovery
casts doubt on the existing body of knowledge, it is frequently perceived as a threat and its import minimized. Such was the case with Jacques Scherer's 1957 publication of the fragments for Mallarmé's *Le Livre*. In its advocacy of textual interpretation as an open-ended process, the notebook, asserts Scherer, was regarded by some critics as an unsettling presence, something better left alone.

Having dismissed the unedited manuscript of "Les Noces" as "deux ou trois pages peu lisibles," the 1945 edition of Mallarmé's *Oeuvres complètes* proceeded to publish "Hérodiade" in the form of a triptych. Included were the "Ouverture ancienne," the "Scène," and the "Cantique de Saint Jean." This format has had a direct influence on the critical discourse surrounding the work. The triadic structure not only favors an Hegelian approach but promotes the general application of a traditional narrative framework. In all instances, readers appear most concerned with synthesis. This conception of "Hérodiade" is, however, easily refuted. As a collection of some 200 pages of drafts, new fragments, variants and cryptic notes, the manuscript signals a significant reworking of the entire text. The clearest example is Mallarmé's belated rejection of the "Ouverture" for a new "Prélude." During the same period, he added both the "Scène intermédiaire" and the "Finale." Beyond the composition of the work, it should be noted that the later fragments bear the imprint of Mallarmé's most radical concepts of literature. Posing the greatest challenge to the previously
mentioned readings is the poet's systematic replacement of narrative strains by hypothetical patterns, a strategy designed to problematize any type of definitive reading of the text.

Considering the differences between the earliest versions of "Hérodiade" and the text of the 1890's, one might wonder about the feasibility of an integral reading. Mallarmé was undoubtedly acutely aware of this problem as he struggled to complete "Hérodiade" near the end of his life. In a late preface to "Les Noces," he wrote:

\[\ldots \text{j'ayoue que je m'étais arrêté dans ma jeunesse. Je le donne ce motif, tel qu'il m'est apparu depuis, m'efforçant de le traiter dans le même esprit.} \]

(N. 87)

Again, I would argue that what can be witnessed and then appreciated by a rereading of the various fragments of the entire manuscript is the evolution of the writing process, the genesis and the development of the work itself.

Why Psychoanalysis?

It is generally agreed that "Hérodiade" is the story of a psychological crisis and that this crisis is intimately bound up with the question of artistic creativity. For most readers, Hérodiade's struggle for ideal perfection parallels the poet's aspiration towards the absolute. The virgin's icy indifference and repulsion for all things physical are automatically assimilated to what many readers consider to be Mallarmé's "aristocratic" conception of Art—a vision of ideal beauty divorced from the senses. When read from this
perspective, the text is quickly reduced to the pursuit of a mystical transcendence through the creation of a harmonious but immobile "centrale pureté." The problem with this approach is that after freezing the work into a series of static oppositions or themes (corruption/purity, fragmentation/unity, mortality/eternity), it implicitly valorizes the more lofty regions of the intellect at the expense of the body.

But to focus exclusively on the character of Hérodiade as a figure of absolute purity is to ignore the productive side of the text. Completely overlooked is Mallarmé's conception of language as material process: "le Verbe reste, de sujets de moyens, plus massivement lié à la nature" (O.C. 522). What is indeed disconcerting about this omission is that the poet's exploration of the fundamental corporality of the Word began with "Hérodiade": *Peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit.* Le vers ne doit donc pas, là se composer de mots; mais d'intentions, et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation*" (C.I 137). Rather than leading to a completely closed and independent system of pure thought, poetic discourse is a force of perpetual disruption which demonstrates Mallarmé's belief in the "irréductibilité de nos instincts" (O.C. 321).

As Charles Mauron asserts in *Mallarmé l'Obscur,* "Hérodiade" is a poem extremely rich in psychological themes. Considering the materialist base of Freudian psychoanalytical theory, one would expect Mauron to take a dynamic approach in addressing the question of poetic creativity. Yet the
utilization of Freudian concepts does not, as I will demonstrate, prevent the psychocritic from reading Mallarmé in terms of the same abstract idealism. After working out a highly suggestive associative network between texts, Mauron, in an effort to synthesize, succumbs to the rigid polarities of thematic criticism. By defining the artistic impulse as a transition from the "lower" immobility of the Unconscious to the "higher" realm of conscious spirituality, Mauron transforms Mallarmé's work into an immutable form of salvation, a therapeutic sublimation of the instinctual.7

Unlike Mauron's psychocritical reading of the poems which concentrates on similarities between texts (the repetition/variation of the author's "personal myth"), my superimposing of the segments of "Hérodiade" deals with the continuous transformation of disruptive and ambivalent elements between textual variants. Emphasized is the production of the work rather than the writer who produced it. In attempting a new reading of Mallarmé with Freud, my intention is to shift the focus from fixed psychological themes to textual processes. In deviating from a traditional thematic or biographical approach, my essay on "Hérodiade" follows in the spirit of Robert Greer Cohn's seminal word-by-word analysis of "Un Coup de dés," Jacques Derrida's "La Double Séance" (a critique of thematic criticism through a reassessment of Mallarmé's writing strategies) and Julia Kristeva's semiotic/psychoanalytic study of Mallarmé's texts as examples of avant-garde signifying practices.8
At one time or another, each of these critics perceives a certain parallel between Freudian psychoanalysis and Mallarmé's poetics. The present study will elaborate this parallel by first drawing out the psychoanalytic twist of Mallarmé's critical theories and then applying these theories to the manuscript. An exploration of the relationship between Mallarmé and Freud as writers and thinkers forms the basis of Chapter II. In juxtaposing Mallarmé's Correspondance with Freud's writings on repression, the Unconscious, and dream structures, a number of striking analogies centering around the question of textual productivity come to light.

As Jean Bellemín-Noël puts forth in Vers l'inconscient du texte, the purpose of analyzing a manuscript or "avant-texte" from a psychoanalytical viewpoint is to "démontrer des rouages . . . d'étudier un fonctionnement, un travail." Rather than immobilizing the unconscious discourse of desire in the form of a symptom a la Mauron, I will trace its displacements and repetitive movements through the peregrinations of words and images. It is only in the successive versions of the "Hérodiade" manuscript that this dynamic of desire becomes visible. This can, in part, be attributed to Mallarmé's method of composition: "Il me serait difficile," he wrote, "de concevoir quelque chose ou de la suivre sans couvrir le papier de géométrie où se réfléchit le mécanisme évident de ma pensée" (C. IV, 149-50). According to Paul Valéry, Mallarmé often began his poems by scattering words on paper like drops of paint on a canvas. Free association
constituted an integral step in his technique. The second stage of the process involved the censoring of the initial design. By replacing obvious connections with a more oblique poetics of suggestion, the poet deliberately obscured the work:

Il y a à Versailles ces boiseries à rinceaux, jolis à faire pleurer; des coquilles, des enroulements, des courbes, des reprises de motifs. Telle m'apparaît d'abord la phrase que je jette sur le papier, en un dessin sommaire, que je revois ensuite, que j'épure, que je synthétise.11

Like Freud, Mallarmé was interested in the relationship between one layer of discourse and another. As in a dream, there is no means of direct translation between texts for, writing is itself an act of re-interpretation, the transposition of a psychical script: "Toutefois, l'écrivain . . . recopie ou voit d'abord dans le miroir de sa pensée, puis transcrit dans une écriture . . ." (O.C. 878). Thus for Mallarmé, meaning is produced between the lines "... dans l'espace qui isole les strophes et parmi le blanc du papier . . ." (O.C. 872).

Transcribed from the mirror of the psyche, the poetic text, like the dream-text, is a play of surfaces, its manifest and latent contents often appearing "as two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages."12 Perception of the internal dynamic of the work is based on an analysis of the repetitions and discontinuities between the various versions of the text. According to Freud, this space is the interpreter's point of entry:
If the first account given me by a patient of a dream is too hard to follow I ask him to repeat it. In doing so, he rarely uses the same words. But the parts of the dream he describes in different terms are by that fact revealed to me as the weak spot in the dreamer's disguise . . . (S.E. V, 515)

In Chapters III, IV and V, I apply a similar methodology by studying in detail the repressions, additions and hesitations which shape the "Hérodiade" manuscript. Rather than treating the concepts of narcissism, repetition, castration and fetishism as isolated themes, I consider them as dynamic processes for which there is no possible resolution. The role of the manuscript is instrumental in that it opens up the text to alternative readings and thereby removes many of the stereotypes surrounding "Hérodiade."

Edgar Allen Poe once wrote that the value of having access to a writer's manuscript is that it allows the public to "take a peep behind the scenes" and to therefore "retrace" the "modus operandi" by which the work was constructed. If "Les Noces d'Hérodiade" is indeed related to the problematic of creative process, then it is in what Poe playfully calls the "wheels and pinions, the step-ladders and demon traps, the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches" that we can learn the most about this process.
NOTES


5 Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry, Paris: Gallimard (Bibliotheque de la Pleiade), 1945. Future references will be cited in the text as O.C.


9 See the beginning footnote for Chapter II.


CHAPTER I

MAURON'S MALLARMÉ: THE MYTH OF PSYCHOCRITICISM

Sublimation in life may be wisdom; in literature it courts defeat.
Harold Bloom

In the 1950's Charles Mauron, author of Mallarmé l'Obscur, became convinced that the critical apparatus of psychoanalysis would enrich the understanding of literature, if exploited in a systematic way. His new methodology, called psychocriticism, was a bold attempt to renew and modernize the age-old dialogue between science and art. Psychocriticism presupposes the persistence of subconscious or latent structures in literary texts. The repetition of these structures forms an "inner design" whose logic constitutes the author's "personal myth" or obsessive fantasy. Rather than analyzing the details of a particular text, the psychocritic studies the interrelationships between texts. For the psychocritic, reading or superimposing texts, is a structuralist activity: "To read is to perceive between the words a system of relations."1
In the case of Mallarmé, Mauron's textual connections reveal patterns, clusters and secret networks previously unnoticed or written off by numerous critics as enigmatic and incomprehensible. As indicated by his title, *Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Mallarmé*, Mauron's book is a preliminary study which seeks to demonstrate the potential richness of the psychocritical method.² Basing himself on biographical documents, he begins with the assertion that Mallarmé's personal myth is rooted in the traumatic events of his childhood. During these formative years the poet is faced with the loss of his mother at age 5 followed by the death of his sister Maria at age 15. The first death interrupts the progress of normal psychological development. The Oedipal project, usually occurring at about the age of 5, is left unresolved, resulting in the persistence of an Oedipal complex. During this crucial period, "the loss of a parent of the opposite sex leads to a fantastic idealization of his image" (I. 9). Grief is internalized and the image of the dead mother cast aside only to reappear a few years later in a religious context. The strong maternal overtones of the early poem "Ange gardien" can be interpreted as reflecting a deep desire for reunification with the mother. Mallarmé's childhood piety, Mauron claims, is a defense mechanism, "the sign of a profound insecurity" (I. 11).

However the religious solution is quite short-lived and Maria's death provokes a repetition of the initial crisis. Mauron considers this second death as a pivotal point marking
the beginning of poetic sublimation: "The defense mechanisms recur, but in a different context--puberty. The denial of death takes the form of a desire for resurrection, at least in the imagination. The idealization, "... is no longer religious but musical and poetic" (I. 12). Relying on the Kleinian notions of incorporation or expulsion of good and bad objects, Mauron schematizes the ego's system of trade-offs and compromises which forms the basis of a new defense structure. 3 This process of "adolescent molting" is mirrored in the structure and imagery of Mallarmé's "Free Composition" written shortly after Maria's death. "Ce que disaient les trois Cigognes" recounts the visit of a young girl's phantom to her father's hut and forms the emotional nucleus of Mallarmé's personal myth. For Mauron, it presents an undisguised version of the poet's obsessive fantasy. In fact, the remainder of his analysis will focus on the interconnections between this primary text and Mallarmé's other poetry. In the sonnet sequence "Triptique" for example, Mauron detects a metaphorical system (fireplace, rose, musical instrument) which can be linked to the key elements of the "Free Composition." Through the repetition of disguised but similar imagery, both works evoke the latent presence of Maria's phantom. This image, everywhere present, functions as a textual symptom obliquely related to the unconscious and the ambivalence towards the dead mother.

By tracing the evolution of the author's myth, the psychocritic attempts to give his perspective more unity.
Poems are grouped in quasi-chronological order. The poet's anxiety, symptom of his secret obsession, acts as a barometer, subject to three kinds of fluctuation: the events of everyday life, a seasonal rhythm consisting of "winter depressions" and "summer enthusiasms," and the development of new aesthetic strategies which work to neutralize the anxiety.

While anxiety remains a constant factor, its mode of expression evolves with the unfolding of the poet's inner and outer experiences. These correlations between biography, text and psychological make-up become increasingly complex and difficult to follow. In order to obtain clear and coherent results, it seems that psychocriticism must avoid close textual analysis. At a certain point, Mauron seems ready to abandon his chronological approach to Mallarmé's works, as it coincides neither with the poet's "creative development" nor "with any clear psychological order" (I. 112).

Nevertheless, historical sequence continues to loosely structure the ensuing chapters. Poetic production is divided into three general periods:

1. the metaphysical crisis or period of extreme anxiety during the years 1862-68.

2. the summer of 1868, which takes Mallarmé to Paris and his eventual love affair with Méry Laurent, ending in 1889.

3. his remaining years, characterized by the return of anxiety and its familiar thematics in such works as "Un coup de dés."
Although these periods overlap, each one is marked by a particular psychological attitude which attempts to harness emotional energy and use it creatively. During the period of "high anxiety," the poet's meditation on pure thought and death lead him towards madness. As Mauron points out, Mallarmé's preoccupation with the act of suicide is the subject of "Igitur," and figures predominantly in certain fragments of "Hérodiade." The expression of anguish through the act of writing enables the poet to abandon his pessimism, if only temporarily, and seek out new strategies which control it. In "Brise marine," he dreams of escaping to exotic places but opts instead for the stability of conjugal life. For Mauron, the perfect symbol of this "rebellious ennui" is the immobilized swan of "Le Vierge le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui." The themes of defeat and sterility have evolved and become potentially meaningful in the poetic context. Finally, the relative happiness and erotic playfulness presented in "l'Après-midi d'un faune" and the love poems written to Mery Laurent indicate a third attitude—one which suggests even greater control and distancing on the part of Mallarmé. According to Mauron, this expression of eroticism provides the most effective means of diffusing anxiety. Through the use of specific devices (mystery, anonymity, generality and musicality) Mallarmé strives for "mastery of the emotional surges within his original fantasy without destroying the fantasy itself" (I. 234). The
artistic endeavor becomes a "way of curing oneself and re-
storing internal ruins" (Ibid.).

The importance attributed to the therapeutic value of
art signals a close affinity between psychocriticism and the
school of ego psychology. Mauron, like Ernest Kris (Psycho-
analytic Explorations in Art), views artistic creation as
"regression in the service of the ego." The artist's ego is
felt to be in control of the primary process and fully capa-
ble of manipulating the id's contents. This approach insists
on an autonomous ego (detached from the anarchic energy of
the id) and emphasizes its powers of synthesis, psychic
integration and adaptation. Works of art are only success-
ful if conscious and unconscious forces are adequately
balanced. Such are the criteria used by Mauron to disting-
uish "Faune" ("a successful sublimation") from "Hérodiade"
("a poem of anxiety").

Here, Mauron's analysis reaches a turning point as
literary investigation gives way to "scientific logic." The
discovery of the author's personal myth is now reformulated
in terms of a general theory of artistic creation. It is
also at this point that the reductive tendencies of psycho-
criticism emerge most clearly. A scrutiny of Mauron's
lengthy discussion of the relationship between instinct and
poetry will focus on these tendencies and their impact on
his reading of Mallarmé. To read and then catalogue each of
the poems according to its degree of "successful sublimation"
is, of course, to negate the complexities of individual
works. In his search for connecting points, the psychocritic ignores textual differences. But a more serious objection can be raised regarding the indiscriminate use of Freudian terminology. The subtle nature of this critical practice poses a danger for the uninformed reader.

For the psychocritic's purposes, "Freudian mythology" is a reservoir of useful concepts: "Why not adopt them (the concepts) if they exactly reflect the experimental facts?" (I. 205). The problem that seems to be skirted by this attitude is the ambiguity of this terminology, which Freud revised endlessly throughout his writing. Convinced that all of his findings are accurate, Mauron is prepared for the advent of a new metalanguage which, he believes, will simply reconfirm the psychocritic's discoveries. He has chosen the psychoanalytical model because of its structural analogies and "common critical method" which yield a unified perspective. To safeguard this unity, Mauron admits to "using psychoanalysis superficially, sketchily" (I. 52).

We have already noted Mauron's unconditional acceptance of the artistic ego which controls and structures the unconscious contents of the id. Creative energy must be neutralized and bound. Specifically mentioned are the techniques of displacement and multiplication of symbols. The poet's obsession is "made to evaporate," it "loses its force" and finally "changes into a complex play of resonances" (I. 168). This description suggests rather a continuous circulation of unbound energy--an excessive mobility which undermines the
image of an integrated self. The process of displacement itself is dynamic rather than static. Such defense mechanisms are more symptomatic of the fragile and helpless ego portrayed in Freud's essay "The Ego and the Id":

The ego is the actual seat of anxiety. Threatened by dangers from three directions, it develops the flight-reflex by withdrawing its own cathexes from the menacing perception (of the super-ego) and from the similarly regarded process in the id, and emitting it as anxiety." (S.E. XIX, 57)

Mauron's reliance on the process of sublimation proceeds directly from his view of the ego as synthesizer. While Freud used sublimation to relate sexuality and culture, the concept remained ambiguous in his writings. The term involves the desexualization and redirection of instinctual aims towards more abstract and rational forms of expression. Mauron, who considers the concept of sublimation "useful" but "poorly defined" when complex transpositions are involved, does not hesitate to use it frequently as an indicator of artistic success. He attempts to demonstrate how Mallarmé arrived at a "true sublimation of his own obsession" (I. 177). Conspicuously absent is Freud's later ambivalence towards sublimation as a "way out" or alternative to repression. The belated discovery that sublimation did not produce a complete satisfaction, but worked against the instincts in the interests of social conformity compelled Freud to record its effects on the ego:

But since the ego's work of sublimation results in a defusion of the instincts and a liberation of the aggressive instincts in the super-ego, its struggle
against the libido exposes it to the danger of maltreatment and death." (S.E. XIX, 56)

In the context of psychocriticism, ego mastery and sublimation are reductive devices which emphasize manipulation, even renunciation, of the instinctual basis of artistic creation. The transgressive and libidinous elements of the creative process are categorically eliminated in favor of the social and communicative aspects of art. A hierarchy of aesthetic values and judgements is erected and the writer's evolution is consistently interpreted along the lines of normal psychological development and socialization.  

The psychocritic's desire to separate the two "affectivities" of "animal emotivity" and "aesthetic sensitivity" into "inferior" and "superior" stages has a direct bearing on his view of the "unconscious." Mauron's description of Mallarmé's changing attitude towards the unconscious as creative source may be read as a projection of his own critical strategy: In the beginning, the poet was "served by his unconscious" for it gave him a "depth of symbol" admired by his friends. But with the development of anxiety and its resulting inhibitions, he was forced to "live counter to this thought." He evaded his obsession, slipped out of "its magnetic field" and created "successful works" (I. 201). Similarly, the psychocritic discovers a vertical dimension, an "unconscious depth" which enriches his interpretation of the work. This technique of superimposition of texts is then reinforced by the Freudian formula of a double meaning
which provides a framework for his methodology: the manifest content or "obvious sense" of the work is countered by the latent structure defined as the "deeper meaning" or "inner significance of the symbolic rebus." Viewed as a series of layers, the text resembles a dream whose unconscious meaning "should be unraveled" (I. 34).

But the manifest text cannot be considered as a mere screen designed to camouflage the truth of the latent text. This would suppose a relationship of simple translation between two elements which do not belong to the same level of reality. The characteristics of the unconscious (timelessness, absence of negation and contradiction, primacy of the pleasure principle) render it undefinable and unapproachable from the viewpoint of consciousness. To substitute the latent content for the manifest content presupposes the presence of an immobile original text. It is precisely the role of consciousness and the practice of horizontal translation which Mauron attacks in his critique of Ayda's Le Drame intérieur de Mallarmé: "She speaks of the unconscious," he remarks, "but outfits it with conscious content."6 Rather than decipher a fixed code, the psychocritic interprets the text as a symptom or indirect manifestation of the poet's unconscious. Defining the symbol as a "vertical relationship which combines dynamic attraction with meaning," he would trace the progression of unconscious images through the preconscious, towards consciousness. Thus the death of
the mother, or latent meaning of the text, is both revealed and concealed through the manifest image of Maria's phantom.

But this vertical dimension does not preclude translation and the use of a permanent code. Mauron's reading of "Le Démon de l'analogie" appears to us as an example of direct translation. In pondering the famous line, "La Pénultième est morte, elle est morte, bien morte, la désespérée Pénultième," he concludes:

What could be the meaning of the "accursed fragment" singing on Mallarmé's lips? His insistence on death is striking. But let us translate "Penultima . . . by its common equivalent: "next to last." The last is Maria; the next to last, his mother. Thus a famous enigma would be solved." (I. 48)

Like a sleuth seeking to identify the corpse, Mauron solves the enigma, to his satisfaction, and closes the case. Or so he presumes. His reading, however, fails to take into account the challenge to interpretation posed by Mallarmé's text.7 Ironically, the psychocritic, in his quest for unequivocal meaning, performs the same gesture as the anxious narrator of the poem who, in order to calm himself, reaches for the dictionary: "certes, pénultième est le terme du lexique qui signifie l'avant-dernière syllabe des vocables."

Whereas the narrator finds his hasty explanation to be deceptive, inadequate and itself a "cause de tourment" (O.C. 273), the psychocritic does not for an instant doubt the validity of "so much testimony" (I. 49).

Mauron insists that all of Mallarmé's poems involve a "prose sense" which, once reconstructed, assures readability:
"Despite the mysteriousness of certain pieces and the deformations that pressures from below and above, of the unconscious and of style, force upon the line of discourse, the clear sense can be isolated and followed according to its grammatical articulations" (I. 214). (My italics) Since this procedure allows a poem to be read "as it must be read" (ibid.), misinterpretations are avoided. The statement is Mauron's most explicit reference to his own practice of translation. For the "clear sense" can be isolated and logically reconstructed only if the interplay of forces which generate the text is stifled. An inevitable loss is incurred through the vertical translation between unconscious and conscious systems. Derrida, in his essay "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," likens the nature of this loss of the force of the signifier to the elimination of the body: "Laisser tomber le corps, telle est même l'énergie essentielle de la traduction. Quand elle réinstute un corps, elle est poésie."

In his relentless pursuit of the "intelligible" meaning, Mauron relinquishes the materiality of poetic language and represses the sensuous signifying power of words. Mallarmé would certainly reject the idea of a "prose sense" implicit in verse. In fact, he would reverse it with his famous contention that the very concept of prose is erroneous: "en vérité, il n'y a pas de prose; il y a l'alphabet et puis des vers" (O.C. 867). This verse which inhabits prose ("le vers
est partout dans la langue" (Ibid.), is analogous to Freud's unconscious discourse where force and meaning cannot be distinguished. Words, endowed with the material properties of objects, reflect and transform one another. In Mauron's own words, it is a "force" which deforms and pressures the line of discourse (I. 214). It is the non-sense which eludes conscious mastery, engendering instead a process of endless signification. Its fundamental operations (identification and symbolization, condensation and displacement) form the basis of Freud's comparison of dreams and literary texts. It is the inexplicable, Mallarmé's "mystère" or "expansion totale de la lettre," which must continuously draw from itself "une mobilité . . . instituer un jeu . . . qui confirme la fiction" (O.C. 380).

Whereas Mauron finds in art a "certain inflexibility that is reassuring" (I. 215), Mallarmé's and Freud's concepts of textual practice and interpretation focus on energy and infinite movement. Just as Freud came to view analysis as an "interminable" process, Mallarmé acknowledged the impossibility of original and ultimate meanings and forged his aesthetic out of it. For both, a text constitutes an animated structure. Writing about Poe, Mallarmé refers to "cette architecture spontanée et magique . . . antérieure à un concept" (O.C. 872). And Freud's dream facades are architectural conglomerates—multilayered structures which are distorted, "disordered and full of gaps" (S.E. IV, 211). The contrary impression is given by Mauron's structural
metaphor for the work of art: "Beneath a Romanesque church it is no surprise to discover a crypt of architectural value" (I. 197).

Mauron's readings of the poems construct an architecture which does indeed lack the element of surprise. His discussion of "Prose pour des Esseintes" is a case in point. Concentrating once again on the contents of the crypt--"cette soeur sensée et tendre"--he glosses over those elements which would undermine his interpretation. They consist of formal, stylistic devices (optical, etymological and phonemic) which maintain ambiguity and thereby render problematic any singular reading. I list three of them:

1. the capitalization of "HYPERBOLE" at the beginning of the poem, complemented by the final image "le trop grand glaieul";

2. the explicit use of the word "Prose" in the title which undoubtedly refers back to "prosa"--an ecclesiastical term used to designate a rhythmic piece of prose sung at Mass;⁹

3. the conjunction between "désir, Idées" repeated through homophonie play: "Tout en moi s'exaltait de voir/La famille des iridées" (désir(id)dée(s).

The omission of these and other elements allows Mauron to separate desire from art, and to conclude that Mallarmé gave up "hyperbole" during the crisis of 1869-69: "Like the child (in "Prose") . . . after having renounced ecstasy, he
(Mallarmé) became poetically learned; he sublimated the sad absence of a dead woman into an art of absences" (I. 166).

I must emphasize that Mauron does not deny the unconscious but lives counter to its truth. While recognizing the unconscious as another system, he systematically suppresses the "otherness" of the system. Unable to assimilate the irrationality and ambiguity of the unconscious without subverting its own theoretical base, psychocriticism reduces it to an immobile structure and isolates it below the surface of the text. Described as a "manifest rigidity," "lower immobility," and inner fatality," Mauron's unconscious is reflected in the frozen figure of a dead image. As such, it neither "creates" nor "explains" the work, but "determines it, fastens it by the foot" (I. 200).

In order to account for the act of poetic creation, Mauron identifies a third force or superior irrational situated above consciousness. This higher realm is represented by the mythical poet Orpheus. Basing himself on the poet's statement that his "Livre" would constitute the "Orphic explanation of the Earth," Mauron describes the poet as an Orphic ego who descends to the underworld in hopes of retrieving the soul of his beloved Eurydice. Pursuing the analogy further, he views Orpheus as a musician whose power of volatilization enables him to rise again and reanimate the dead through his musical gift of song. During his voyage, however, Orpheus is forbidden to "look back, on pain of returning to death the soul he had wrested from it" (I. 208).
Though the prohibition is mentioned, Mauron leaves out the transgression, failure and consequent dismemberment of Orpheus, whose desire to "look back" surpasses his desire for success.\textsuperscript{10} Emphasis is placed on the reascent towards light and, once again, on the successful production of art. In his attempt to resolve the contradictions of subject/object, ego/non-ego and conscious/unconscious, the psychocritic is akin to the therapist who, according to Mauron, also participates in the Orphic mission. (See page 22 of I.)

With the intervention of Orpheus, an abrupt shift from an empirical to an imaginary mode of representation occurs in Mauron's study. Orpheus is the figure who not only escapes the magnetic hold of the unconscious but transcends the structures of rational logic. This in effect means that synthesis can only take place by recourse to an imaginary hero. This "miraculous fusion" (I. 214) reveals the subjective moment of psychocriticism. It is the core of its "personal myth." The psychocritic's strategy is nevertheless foiled by the primary chaos of the unconscious which succeeds in penetrating the harmony of the Orphic sphere. An attentive comparison of the two levels shows that the characteristics previously assigned to the unconscious have been sublimated or displaced upwards. Thus the higher form of the work possesses a "fixity" not unlike that of its "lower obsessions," and we find traces of those "fields of force" which combine to produce, in Mauron's estimation, a kind of "motionless movement" (I. 212).
The psychocritic's claims to perfect objectivity are consistently undermined by his use of metaphor. In reference to his methodology, Mauron compares himself to a chemist who isolates and breaks down the elements of a complex compound. While this particular metaphor expresses the desire to grasp meaning and master the text, other metaphors surreptitiously indicate the critic's subjective relationship to the text and the impossibility of mastery. The critic who wants to understand myth must therefore become a "creator of myths." And Mauron can conceive of no psychoanalyst "but who must be psychoanalyzed himself" (I. 195). The simultaneous use of both types of metaphor creates a tension in the discourse indicative of this disjuncture between theory and practice. This is best illustrated by a systematic but subjective manipulation of Freudian concepts.

Psychocriticism has been repeatedly extolled for the development of a new methodology and oftentimes criticized for the reductive nature of its ideology. In the present era of deconstruction, it has become subject to the same criticisms as those leveled at structuralism. In any analytic approach, the discovery of a structural order is initially productive. Patterns of repetition emerge to establish an unprecedented system of communication between texts. Such "experimental findings" given the "force of a general law" (I. 217) can, however, immobilize a text, stripping away disruptive and heterogeneous elements. Mallarmé's repeated insistence on the non-conforming and unpredictable aspects
of poetic language certainly preempts simplistic and singular readings of his work. Those critics like Mauron who pursue scientific accuracy through the rigid application of a system would do well to remember the poet's warning against excessive formalism in "Les Mots anglais": "Trop de rigueur aboutissant à transgresser plutôt que des lois, mille intentions certaines et mystérieuses du langage" (O.C. 919). The psychocritic's belief in a total harmonious structure which can be objectively verified and then supported by biographical detail is especially problematical in Mallarmé's case.

For the "Livre" is itself a mythical construct--an impossible totality to be revealed in a series of esoteric fragments. The "Orphic explanation of the Earth" is, for the poet, "le jeu littéraire, par excellence." As such, it does not emphasize textual elucidation but signals rather a particular kinship between text and dream--an undeniable parallelism based on an economy of indirect representation and the ongoing process of textuality: "car le rythme même du livre, alors impersonnel et vivant, jusque dans sa pagination, se juxtapose aux équations de ce rêve ou Ode" (O.C. 663).

The contradictions of psychocriticism become especially visible in its futile attempts to untangle and "psycho-analyze" Mallarmé's masterpiece "Hérodiade." Viewed as a poem of unresolved anxieties and nonsublimated desires, "Hérodiade" is said to represent the infantile ego. The following reactions taken from both of Mauron's studies
indicate that "Hérodiade" defies interpretation and remains an enigma for the psychocritic:

Bref, tout marque dans "Hérodiade" une indécision, une absence d'unité . . .

. . . 'Hérodiade,' malgré ses splendeurs verbales, me semble un des poèmes les plus bizarres, les plus gauches, et, si j'ose dire, les plus 'sous-marins' de la langue française." (Ibid.)

As to "Hérodiade," she is ambivalence itself." (I. 119)

Although the second comment suggests that the poem's obscurity renders it less valuable than other poems, it is interesting that Mauron bequeathes the work to the future of psychoanalytic interpretation. Reading "Hérodiade" as a figure of pure ambivalence implies a complex interaction between the conscious and the unconscious--an interplay of forces which the grid of psychocriticism cannot account for. Ironically, it is the failure of sublimation which is to become the new focus of criticism. The legacy of "Hérodiade" is, in this sense, its own resistance to interpretation.

The transition from "applied psychoanalysis" (clinical diagnosis) to the problematics of the text begins with psychocriticism. By drawing the bulk of his evidence from the superimposition of texts, Mauron succeeds in de-emphasizing biographical speculation. Describing himself as a "partial critic," he later predicts that psychocriticism, in its mature form, will eventually constitute only a segment of literary criticism and that "the study of creative language" will "occupy the center." This kind of insight exemplifies Mauron's critical spirit and points the way towards a new psychoanalytical reading of Mallarmé.
NOTES


2 All page numbers are from Introduction to the Psycho-
analysis of Mallarmé, trans. by Archibald Henderson and Will
This later edition contains a new preface or introduction
to the "psychocritical" method and an additional chapter on
poems written during Mallarme's youth. In this chapter, all
references to this work will be cited as I.

3 Introduction, p. 225: "The free composition of 1857
shows us an ego expelling from its hut everything that causes
grief (night, cold, death, parental and religious authority)
so as to retain on the inside only the good familiar objects,
memories and dreams. It is this equilibrium that is first
so threatened that one may think it is destroyed."

4 Ernst Kris, Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art, New
York: International Universities Press, 1952. See in par-
ticular Chapter 1. For a penetrating description of the
differences between the French reading of Freud and American
Ego Psychology see Jeffrey Mehlman's "How to Read Freud on
Jokes: The Critic as Schadelen," *New Literary History*, XVI

5 In *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in
Bersani discusses the alliance between psychocriticism and
social psychology. According to Bersani, Mauron "shows the
freedom of unconscious relations from the constraints of
individual identities, but he subverts that freedom by defin-
ing all unconscious relations in terms of a fixed evolution
of familial sexuality." "... as a result, desires lose
their dynamic unpredictability and have, ... the responsi-
bility of serving the coherence of the structure." Although
these comments refer to Mauron's work on Racine, I find a
similar "dogma of normal psychic development" and "genital
sexuality" in his readings of Mallarmé.


9 The ambivalence of the term reiterates Mallarmé's belief that Verse, as the "dispensateur, ordonnateur du jeu des pages, maitre du livre," is dissimulated in prose: "... qu'il se dissimule, nommez-le Prose, néanmoins c'est lui si demeure quelque secrète poursuite de musique dans la réserve du Discours." O.C., p. 375.

10 In *L'Espace littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955, Maurice Blanchot reads Mallarmé also in conjunction with the Orpheus myth. Keeping in mind Mallarmé's account of his encounter with nothingness and his statement "La destruction fut my Béatrice," Blanchot focuses on the moment of transgression, the second loss of Eurydice and the subsequent dismemberment of Orpheus. For Blanchot, the moment of inspiration (the desire to see Eurydice) guarantees the authenticity of the work of art. Even after the creative act, the work continues to bear the imprint of this encounter. Mauron's repression of these parts of the myth signals yet another instance of his own desire for homogeneous structures.

11 This metaphor leads into the discussion of the "prose sense" in Mallarmé's poetry and the necessity of finding the "intelligible meaning." See page 213 of *Introduction*.


14 Ibid., p. 76: ". . . je ne puis m'empêcher de croire qu'Hérodiade fournira un de ses exemples les plus claires à la nouvelle critique."
CHAPTER II

THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF "LES NOCES D'HÉRODIADE, MYSTÈRE": MALLARMÉ AND FREUD

La poésie est la langue d'un état de crise.

Mallarmé

Critics, generally impressed with the sophistication of Mallarmé's aesthetic theories, have often referred to him as a great metaphysician with an acute awareness of human psychology. ¹ Many of his ideas can be read productively in conjunction with Freudian theory--his view of the psyche as apparatus, his meditations on depersonalization and death, and finally, his perception of language and its relationship to the Unconscious. In letters to friends and colleagues, Mallarmé reflected openly on his personal experiences, his own psychic make-up, and more often than not, related it to his creative process. ² We shall begin our reading of "Hérodiade" where psychocriticism leaves off. That is, rather than searching out the "unconscious obsession" in order to correlate it with biographical events, we shall consider Mallarmé as a "valuable ally" and explore with him
the interaction between the conscious and the unconscious systems in the production of art.³

For a period of 35 years, Mallarmé was preoccupied intermittently with one poem. This first major work, "Hérodiade," found open among his notes on his deathbed, was destined to remain unfinished. The poet's Correspondance contains numerous references to the work, intimately linking it to a series of psychological crises.⁴ The material of these crises forms the basis of many intellectual revelations. By tracing the evolution of the poem, the reader is able to witness at the same time the development of a nascent psychology which deals primarily with the act of literary production.

In October of 1864, Mallarmé began his second year as an English instructor at a lycée in Tournon. At the age of 22, he and his young wife Maria were awaiting the arrival of their first-born. An examination of the poet's letters of 1864 reveals a genuine uneasiness concerning the advent of his paternity: "Je tremble à cette idée que je pourrais être père" (C.I., 115). And shortly before the birth: "Je ne peux pas me faire a l'idée de ma paternité" (C. I, 133). The birth of a daughter interrupts his work and provokes the following comparison in a letter to Roumanille:

... j'ai eu une petite fille bien rythmée, dont les yeux ont un bleu que je ne saurais mettre à mes rimes, et les cheveux se déploient déjà avec l'allure de vos grands vers provencaux. Ce poème, malheureusement me prive des autres ... (C.I., 147)⁵
The parallel between this experience and the genesis of "Hérodiade" is striking. One month after Genevieve's birth, Mallarmé composes a short poem in order to resume work on "Hérodiade." Entitled "Jour," "Poème nocturne," and finally "Don du poème," this text also posits an equivalence between the birth of a child and that of a poem. The metaphor, which will resurface in several poems, including "Hérodiade," sets up a sense of rivalry between maternity and artistic production. The Biblical allusion of the opening verse ("Je t'apporte l'enfant d'une nuit d'Idumée")6 refers to a mythical country which preceded Adam and the creation of women. As sexless individuals who reproduced without women the kings of Edom gave birth to monsters.7 The imagery and structure of the poem explores the possibility of a poetic parthenogenesis. However, the birth of this child/poem is a "horrible naissance" and points up the solitude and sterility of artistic endeavors. Unable to nourish the fruit of his labor, the poet/father offers up his deformed offspring ("Noire, a l'aile sanglante . . . déplumée") (O. 40), to the nurturing powers of woman.

In several letters, Mallarmé utilizes the metaphor of paternity to describe the creative act in terms not of production but of impotence, separation and loss. While working on "Hérodiade," another descendant of "Idumée, "8 he refuses to send Cazalis his "vers obscènes" because "les pertes nocturnes d'un poète ne devraient être que des voies lactées," and his verse is but a "vilaine tache" (C. I, 138).
In 1867, he writes that unlike the all-rewarding experience of maternity, the artist's paternity is limited to works of his imagination. And in his *Tombeau pour Anatole*, written after the death of his young son, these associations are again explicit: "enfant, sémence idéalisation." 

The fear of failure, which permeates the *Correspondance* during the 1860's, is exacerbated by the poet's working conditions. Continuous interruptions at home and "le hideux travail de pédagogue" (C. I, 160) force him to work at night. His health degenerates and his thoughts become disjointed and unfocused. Again, Mallarmé considers this state of improductivity as a cruel expiation for "le priapisme" of his youth (C. I, 144). He soon becomes obsessed with the idea that either he will die before his work is finished or the immensity of the project will doom it to incompleteness. Weary, he chastizes himself for having chosen "un sujet effrayant" (C. I, 160). However, at the same time, aware that "Hérodiade" is a pivotal work which will determine his status as a true poet or as a miserable failure, Mallarmé enters a period of crisis. A series of comments from his letters reveal the intensity of this struggle:

**October, 1864:**

Car je veux--pour la première fois de ma vie--réussir. Je ne toucherais plus jamais à ma plume si j'étais terrassé. (C. I, 137)

**March, 1865:**

Mais pourquoi te parler d'un Rêve qui ne verra peut-être jamais son accomplissement, et d'une oeuvre que je déchirerai peut-être un jour, parce qu'elle aura été bien au-delà de mes pauvres moyens. (C. I, 161)
December, 1865:
Ah! ce poème, je veux qu'il sorte, joyau magnifique,
du sanctuaire de ma pensée; ou je mourrai sur ses
débris! (C. I, 180)

April, 1866:
Je reviens à "Hérodiade," je la rêve si parfaite que je
ne sais seulement si elle existera jamais. (C. I, 213)

By 1865, "Hérodiade," directly associated with failure
and sterility, is put aside for the cold cruel winters.
Mallarmé immediately sets to work on his "l'Après-midi d'un
faune," which like "Hérodiade," was originally conceived for
the theater. (A chapter on the theatricality of "Les Noces"
and narcissism follows.) The following summer Mallarmé goes
to Paris to show the "Faune" manuscript to Théodore de
Banville, who finds the work unsuitable for theatrical pro-
duction. Discouraged, the poet abandons the project and
resumes work shortly thereafter on "Hérodiade," which he now
characterizes as "non plus tragédie mais poème" (C. I, 174).
With this shift in genre comes a new creative energy and in
December of the same year the beginnings of an aesthetic
project are revealed:

J'ai choisi le plan de mon oeuvre et sa théorie poétique
qui sera celle-ci: donner les impressions les plus
étranges, certes, mais sans que le lecteur n'oublie pour
une minute la jouissance que lui procurera la beauté du
poème: En un mot, le sujet apparent n'est qu'un prétexte
pour aller vers Elle. (C. I, 193)

It is the creative process which provokes a descent
into the self resulting in the discovery of a new interior
space. Through language, the poet encounters the "Néant"
and proceeds to formulate a metaphysics of absence:
"... en creusant le vers à ce point, j'ai rencontré ... le
Néant" (C. I, 207). Posited in the remainder of the same letter is Mallarmé's basic materialism. He acknowledges the plight of human beings as useless forms of matter whose ingenuity lies in the invention of God and the Soul. For Mallarmé, the powers of God are to be assumed by the poet who proclaims: "le Rien qui est la Vérité" (C. I, 208). The basis of comparison between religion and art has been misread by several critics who prefer to consider Mallarmé's crises as religious rather than metaphysical. If, for Mallarmé, religion resembles poetry, it is because both are concerned with the act of textual interpretation. Whereas religion re-enacts the mystery of man's origins and entertains a plausible explanation of it (the presence of God), literature identifies the absence of origin as its motivating force. Both are acts of fiction:

"... je veux me donner ce spectacle de la matière, ayant conscience d'être et, cependant, s'élancant forcenément dans le Rêve qu'elle sait n'être pas, chantant l'Ame et toutes les divines impressions pareilles qui se sont amassées en nous depuis les premiers âges et proclament... ces glorieux mensonges! (C. I, 207)

For a number of years, Mallarmé continues to struggle with the relationship between the "Néant" and productivity. It is the summer of 1866 and he is actively at work on the "Ouverture ancienne" when he learns that his position at Tournon is to be terminated. During this period of incubation and transition, he writes three letters which contain extensive meditations on the nature of the production of art. By means of metaphorical structures which interconnect, the
letters illustrate the gradual conversion of negativity into a positive creative force.

The creative process is first described as a journey into the frigid zones of the "Inconnu," "les plus purs glaciers de l'Esthétique" (C.I, 22). Here, the poet's encounter with the void is superseded by his discovery of Beauty. In a second letter, Mallarmé declares that the mystery of his inner Self once unlocked, will reveal itself in the form of a sensation. Still enshrouded by mystery, this sensation resituates itself in a text, the production of which is again analogous to maternity and birth: "Quand un poème sera mûr, il se détachera. Tu vois que j'imite la loi naturelle" (C.I, 222). The continual use of reflexive verbs ("se transfigure," "se va d'elle-même" and "se détachera") reinforces the passivity of the creator who, during this period of gestation, witnesses the coming-into-being of the text. Language, at this point, is beginning to take on an autonomous character.

A third letter indicates that the poet, having reached his destination ("la clé de moi-même," "clé de voute, ou centre") assumes the position of a spider "sur les principaux fils déjà sortis de mon esprit." The locus of creativity is the empty center of the Self from which is spun a textual spider web: ". . . je tisserai aux points de rencontre de merveilleuses dentelles." The filaments of the mind constitute a pre-text or web ("que je devine et qui existent déjà") (C.I, 224-25), which is to be transposed into the intricate
lacework of poetry. The relationship between these two texts is one of permeability—a continual exchange occurring at the interstices or "points de rencontre." In this way, the inner text, presented as a chaotic collection of signs, continues to inhabit and punctuate the literary text. Spun from the etymology of "texte" (the Latin "texere" "to weave"), the metaphor of the web underscores Mallarmé's view of language as an expansive force which spontaneously reaches out in multiple directions.

The descent into the "Néant," the holes and fragmentation suggested by the image of "dentelles," and the natural separation which follows birth signal the increasing power of negativity in the evolution of Mallarmé's aesthetic system. This "Rien qui est la Vérité" will gradually become the central force behind the metaphorical framework of his poems—hence, the frequency of the figures of silence, virginity, purity, and of course, the whiteness of the blank page. However, the full potential of this "Rien" is realized only after a long and painful process entailing the death of the autonomous Self.

Again, we will focus on three letters written in 1867, the year in which the poet reveals the plan of his projected "Oeuvre." After announcing that "Hérodiade" will be its "Ouverture," Mallarmé informs Cazalis that he is perfectly dead, impersonal and completely different from his former self. Although this metaphysical death resembles certain mystical experiences, the poet insists that he has discovered
the void without any knowledge of Buddhism. Moreover, in the Correspondance, there is a constant emphasis on the senses, rendering any kind of spiritual transcendence questionable. It is rather the lack of a philosophical basis which prompts Mallarmé to admit that his understanding of the intimate correlation between poetry and the universe is based on "la seule sensation" (C. I, 259).

Figuring prominently in the letters, is the poet's view of the body and the slow formation of a "horrible sensibilité." His perception of the "Néant" gives rise to a nightmarish vision of fragmentation—"le vide disséminé en sa porosité" (C. I, 259). It is clear that the death of the self is not the negation of the body but rather its disintegration. Inscribed on the surface of the body are the aftershocks of metaphysical anguish: "les frissons et les rides de la souffrance" (C. I, 245). According to Mallarmé, sensations have the potential to revive man's archaic and mysterious past and thus diminish the gap between matter and spirit. As reinscriptions of past impressions, sensations form a discourse which is closer to the origin. For Mallarmé, language is "poetic" wherever it evokes the more primitive text of the body. Thus, in "Les Mots anglais" (1871), Mallarmé explores the phonetic properties of words and their fundamental rapport with the body:

A toute la nature apparente et se rapprochant ainsi de l'organisme dépositaire de la vie, le Mot présente, dans ses voyelles et ses diphtongues, comme une chair; et, dans ses consonnes, comme une ossature délicate à disséquer. (O.C. 901) (My italics)
One can only attempt then to approximate an origin by the conscious manipulation and perfection of the senses. The brain is no longer considered to be the privileged center of inspiration—for strictly cerebral thoughts come and go "sans se créer, sans laisser de traces d'elles" (C. I, 249). The true poet, in Mallarmé's words, must think with his entire body. A new method of sketching poems focuses on direct communication between mental impressions and their physical expressions. Viewed as a series of gestures, this body language would spontaneously convey "une pensée pleine et à l'unisson." In order to illustrate the technique, Mallarmé describes his attempts to simulate the vibrating resonances of a musical instrument:

J'essayai de ne plus penser de la tête et, par un effort désespéré, je roidis tous mes nerfs . . . de façon à produire une vibration en gardant la pensée à laquelle je travaillais alors, qui devient le sujet de cette vibration. (C. I, 249)

To think with all of one's body involves the equal use of all of its parts. One such exercise calls for complete concentration on "la main qui écrit" and the conscious obliteration of the rest of the body. As instruments of creativity, the various parts of the body function as metonymy. While the interaction of the parts produces something greater, the body itself remains dislocated and fragmented. At the end of the demonstration, Mallarmé compares his state of dissolution to a museum exhibit entitled "La Valeur d'un homme." The image of a long box with several drawers, each one containing a different element, either natural or
synthesized, recaptures both the fragmentation and the idea of forced interaction implicit in aesthetic experience.16

This quest for a more complete sensuality signals a concern for permanence (the notion of trace) and a desire for purity (the abolition of chance). The same process will find its parallel in the poet's experimentation with the Word which is, as we have seen, metaphorically portrayed as "une chair" whose "ossature" invites dissection (O.C. 901). Considered as a series of layers or stratifications of meaning, the Word still bears evidence of its sensual foundations.

However, like the repressed body of its creator, the body of language has lost much of its power of expression. The gradual conversion and displacement of language into abstract and differentiated forms has led to greater division between words and their original sensual significations. Quite dismayed at the common discrepancies between sounds and meanings in French, Mallarmé voices his deception "devant la perversité confréant à 'jour' comme à 'nuit' contradictoirement, des timbres obscur ici, la clair" (O.C.364). The elimination of such impurities requires the disappearance of the author "qui cède l'initiative aux mots" (O.C. 366). The suppression of authorial voice has a liberating effect on words, which are then mobilized by their differences: "ils [words] s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle trainée de feux" (O.C. 366). This re-creation of the world as text constitutes a radical break with traditional mimesis.17 Rather than simply representing the Book of Nature, the poet's obligation
is to "tout recréer" by unleashing the creative forces and primordial instincts embedded in language. Writing becomes a form of procreation--"une sommation au monde" (O.C. 481).

As Mallarmé begins to shift from a study of the Self to the study of language, some of the most interesting parallels with Freud come to the fore. The most revealing document of the period is the famous letter of May 17th 1867, addressed to Eugene Lefébure. Here, Mallarmé speculates openly on the characteristics of modern art and the origin of beauty. Considered as process, the artist's experience is a movement towards anonymity, non-being and death. It is the essentially regressive character of language (its force of repetition) which takes the writer back towards the mysterious origin of the self—a silent and closed space comparable to an inter-uterine state. However, at the same time, the dynamic and temporal aspects of language involve a forward motion away from this original point. Since the origin is always, already mediated by sensations, impressions, and other symbols, it can never be directly apprehended. Any sense of it comes after the fact and is already contaminated by some form of representation. Viewed in this manner, literature can only be hypothesis—a belated interpretation or "imaginative compréhension" of "ce qui eut dû se produire antérieurement ou près de l'origine" (O.C. 856).

Throughout the letter, the poet's attitude towards language is then decidedly ambivalent. The pressing need to work out a writing strategy which would effectively deal with
these contradictory forces is signalled by a continual vacila-
lation between nostalgia for the impossible origin and belief
in the inherent productivity of words. When juxtaposed with
the deficiencies of human speech, the sounds of nature appear
to be superior. Mallarmé describes the grasshopper's song,
for instance, as being intimately tied to the earth—a
connection which renders it sacred and "moins décomposé"
than a bird's song which already symbolically expresses
"quelque chose des étoiles et de la lune, et un peu de mort"
(C. I, 250). Whereas natural sounds are spontaneous and
unified, a woman's voice described as "transparente de mille
mots ... et pénétrée de néant" (Ibid.), is marked by
alienation and separation.

Synonymous with rupture and lack, language continues to
bear within its own structure both the memory of an original
plenitude and its subsequent mutilation. That writing
simultaneously negates and constructs, destroys and re-
creates, is implicit in the following statement which Mallarmé
purposely sets off in paragraph-form:

Toute naissance est une destruction et toute vie d'un
moment l'agonie dans la-quelle on réssucite ce qu'on a
perdue pour le voir, on l'ignorait avant. (C. I, 249)

Again, what begins the process of symbolization is not the
origin itself but the recognition of its absence, the memory
of its loss. This equivalence birth/death as well as the
observation that human nature is forever seeking to restore
the fiction of a primal unity recalls Freud's concepts of
primary narcissism and the death drive. According to Freud,
primary narcissism is an undifferentiated mythical state which precedes the presence of objects and therefore the experience of loss. Fantasies of regression towards this womblike existence are commonly expressed in terms of an all-inclusive "oceanic feeling." From his hypothesis that organic life is consistently striving towards this "earlier state of things," Freud posits the notion of a death drive.

In contrast to Eros or the life instinct which creates "ever greater unities" by "binding things together," the aim of the death instinct is "to undo connections and so to destroy things" thus leading the organism back towards "Nirvana"--a state of total inertia (S.E. XXIII, 148).

There is no clear-cut opposition between these instinctual drives, which can, as Freud discovers, "replace each other," "combine with one another," and "operate against each other" (S.E. XXIII, 149). It is in much the same manner that the overlapping and intermingling of contradictory forces in poetry generates a rhythmic alternation between tension and release. We are thinking of two letters of approximately the same period (April 22 and June 19), in which Lefébure refers to Mallarmé's poetic practice in terms of "magnifiques jets de vie" followed by periods of "repos sans pensée." As Lefébure notes, "la poésie est une tension . . . par conséquent elle suppose une détente." Thus recapitulated in the Freudian theory of instinctual drives is the pendulum movement of poetic language.
Since the attainment of a perfect Nirvana is tantamount to death, the backward path to complete satisfaction is ultimately blocked. The primary desire to return to the origin has been, in Freud's estimation, necessarily reversed and converted into a drive towards perfection. Man's creative impulse, he argues, is the result of instinctual repression:

No substitutive or reactive formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct's persisting tension; and it is the difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is demanded and that which is actually achieved that provides the driving factor which will permit or no halting at any position attained, but, in the poet's words, "Presses forward ever unsubdued." (S.E. XVIII, 42)

It is then, the difference between desire and its fulfillment which constitutes the drive towards meaning. Moving backwards and forwards between the time of original rupture and a continuous, proleptic time of "nonsavoir," the time of literary production also operates "sous une apparence fausse de présent" (O.C. 310). This suspension between past and future structures a multidimensional textual space of pure signification in which every element can be simultaneously connected with every other element. It is in terms of these textual dynamics that the writing of poetry becomes, for Mallarmé, completely analogous to the writing of dreams:

La scène n'illustre que l'idée, pas une action effective, dans un hymen (d'ou procède le Rêve), vicieux mais sacré, entre le désir et l'accomplissement, la perpétuation et son souvenir. (O.C. 310)

The remainder of the poet's letter to Lefébure continues to focus on productivity and art. According to Mallarmé, the
modern poet is "un critique avant tout." We can appreciate the full impact of the statement by considering the etymology of "critique": (Latin, "criticus," meaning "decisive" and the Greek "krinein," "to choose, to separate"). By means of their common root "skeri," these etonyms can be linked to the Latin "scribere" and the Greek "skariphos," both signifying "scratch, incise, write." The associations become more explicit when Mallarmé continues with:

Je n'ai créé mon oeuvre que par élimination, et toute vérité acquise ne naissait que de la perte d'une impression. (C. I, 245-46)

The creation of poetry performs the death or elimination of an impression. Consider the etymology of "elimination": (Latin "eliminare," "to drive outside a threshold"). If writing is a form of rupture, a crossing of a threshold, it involves a relation between an inner space and an outer space, the boundaries of which remain uncertain. The poetic text, in this sense, is a form of distortion, a displacement of the inner text of the psyche. We should recall that for Mallarmé, thinking constitutes a form of psychical writing: "penser étant écrire sans accessoires" (O.C. 363). Thoughts are textual transcriptions of the more primitive texts of instincts, sensations, and perceptions. What differentiates the writing of poetry from these psychical texts is precisely the idea of a threshold between the non-visible and the visible. As a form of criticism, writing re-reads another text but repeats it with difference.
Mallarmé sums up this difference in his essay "1'Action restreinte":

Ton acte toujours s'applique à du papier; car méditer sans traces, devient évanescent, ni que s'exalte l'instinct en quelque geste véhément et perdu que tu cherchas. (O. 369)

The persistence of the instinctual is evident only through the visible trace of writing. Rather than escape or dominate these forces which engender it, poetic language reactivates them and makes them visible. Conscious of its own process of production, Mallarmé's "poème-critique" demonstrates a dynamic interaction between the inner and the outer, the unconscious and the conscious. Literature becomes a redramatization, a "mise-en-scène," of the lack of knowledge from which it springs. Herein lies its difference: "on réssuscite... pour le voir, on l'ignorait avant"²⁰ (my italics).

But if consciousness is a form of perception, it is always by nature incomplete. The belief in an indivisible totality is the result of the perception of fragments. Mallarmé was undoubtedly thinking of this when he referred to poems as "lambeaux" which tangentially reflect the single volume of Literature. From the outset, it is understood that total execution is impossible. This gap between conception and execution gives the poet no choice but to prove "par les portions faites, que ce livre existe" (O.C. 663). Beauty, "complète et inconsciente," manifests itself in the form of flashes--"scintillations." All of the descriptions of beauty in this passage point towards the existence of a
subterranean realm which remains hidden, out of reach. By its structure and position, this interior, psychical space bears a striking resemblance to Freud's Unconscious. Indefinable in terms of its essence or nature, the Unconscious can only be inferred "from its effects" (S.E. XXII, 70). Like Mallarmé's notion of beauty, it can only be assigned a locus, given a topography.

For Mallarmé, beauty functions then as an obscure point of reference. In its pure form, it remains inaccessible and barred from consciousness. The idea of a split recalls the image of the threshold and forms the basis of a structural analogy between Freud's mental apparatus and Mallarmé's literary apparatus. Both focus on the question of passage and communication between two levels of discourse. Like the Unconscious, Beauty is the result of a repression. In this part of the letter, Mallarmé mentions three instances of repression. First, the mysterious origin of Beauty is related to a secret repulsion. This "horreur secrète" or "mystère forcé" is identified as "la condition de son être" (C. I, 246). It is the incursion of this irrational force into art which commands the spectator's fascination. But repression is also triggered by, and susceptible to, external influences which shape the conception and affect the reception of a work of art at any given historical moment. As an example of a particularly harsh and enduring censorship, Mallarmé cites the Renaissance:
La Beauté ayant été mordue au coeur depuis le christianisme par la Chimère, et dououreusement renaissant avec un sourire rempli de mystère. (C. I, 246)

Finally, a third form of repression occurs in the creative process. Although Mallarmé does not describe this form in detail, he notes that it varies from work to work and is measurable only in terms of a work's particular approach to the mystery of its origin. Whereas Da Vinci's "Gioconda" is limited to a passive expression of its origin ("elle ne savait que la sensation fatale"), modern art actively cultivates the idea of mystery and recognizes repression as an integral force in the production of art.  

While Freud considered his topography (Unconscious/Preconscious/Conscious) as expedient and necessary, he also recognized that, by itself, it could not account for a dynamic interaction among systems. Therefore this spatial configuration is always considered in relation to an economic point of view which deals with the processes of excitation and discharge—an endless binding and unbinding of instinctual energy. It is important to recall that, for Freud, ideas and thoughts are situated "between" systems rather than "in" systems. And the process of repression is not confined to the Unconscious, but works "at the border between the systems." As evidenced by our discussion of instinctual drives, the notion of an energetics operative between inner and outer texts is also central to Mallarméan poetics. Rather than represent a static impression of Beauty, poetry is to reveal "la visée du langage à devenir beau" (O.C. 853).
(my italics). The drive towards language takes precedence over meaning itself.

That creativity occurs in an intermediate and indeterminate zone between desire and language, sense and nonsense, is apparent in the numerous figures of division and contradiction in Mallarmé's poems. The writer ("captif solitaire du seuil" O.C. 69) is locked into a precarious position of suspension "sur le seuil furtif où je [the poet] règne" (O.C. 285). Contradiction is maintained, and the relationship between activity and passivity, conscious and unconscious, authority and submission remains undecidable. What is certain is the conscious effort to preserve this indecision. It becomes a matter of quantity, a question of more or less. For, as an act of penetration, this momentary, surreptitious crossing of a boundary called writing is always already a form of transgression.

We have already noted that depersonalization is an integral part of Mallarmé's poetic strategy. With the absence of the author, there is a definite easing of repression and a subsequent mobilization of instinctual energy. However, this constitutes the mature form of Mallarmé's aesthetic. In 1867, this willed destruction of the Self is considered primarily as a serious act of transgression against the natural order. In spite of his bold assertion "la Destruction fut ma Béatrice" (C. I, 246), Mallarmé is left with feelings of tremendous guilt and inadequacy. At the very
end of the letter to Lefébure, he laments the artificial and forced nature of his experimentations with negativity:

Je n'ai personnellement aucun mérite, et c'est même pour éviter le remords (d'avoir désobéi à la lenteur des lois naturelles) que j'aime me réfugier dans l'impersonnalité—qui me semble une consécration. (C. I, 246)

Depersonalization, then, is essentially part of a psychological defense-structure which allows the poet to avoid the implications of his discoveries. In this instance, repression becomes a form of protection.

A second reference to transgression and its consequences appears in a letter of the following year 1868:

Pour moi voici deux ans que j'ai commis le péché de voir le Rêve dans sa nudité idéale, tandis que je devais amonceler entre lui et moi, un mystère de musique et d'oubli. (C. I, 270).

The perception of the dream's nakedness offers Mallarmé the image of his own death. It is this presence of death in life which precipitates "la vision brutale" of pure nothingness and threatens the poet with madness: "... j'ai presque perdu la raison et le sens des paroles les plus familières" (C. I, 270). Rather than risk a total psychological breakdown, Mallarmé will eventually opt for a rhythmic alternation between obscurity and insight.

Is depersonalization an act of transgression or a form of defense? Does repression temper an instinct or does it inadvertently increase its force by keeping the instinct in a perpetual state of potential disruption? According to Freud, repressed instincts "proliferate in the dark" and are
sometimes capable of "extreme forms of expression." These kinds of ambiguity are mirrored in Mallarmé's view of language as "L'organisme dépositaire de la vie" (O.C. 901). Product of an interminable play of transformation, the word is an "alliage de vie et de mort" which simultaneously advances "vers quelque point futur" and "se replonge aussi dans le passé" (O.C. 1053). While language structures and represses, reveals and conceals, it is also subject to deconstruction ("une mort continuelle") and the "return of the repressed." For Mallarmé, this double character of language makes it a replica of man's irresolvable contradictions: "Factice dans l'essence non moins que naturel; réfléchi, que fatal, volontaire, qu'aveugle" (O.C. 901).

This portrait of language, presented in the philological treatise Les Mots anglais (1877), comes as a result of a definite change of direction beginning around 1868. At this point, Mallarmé abandons "Hérodiade" and takes some time to rethink language from a different angle. In 1870 he informs Lefébure of a new project which will bring him to Paris:

... j'ai choisi des sujets de linguistique, espérant que cet effort spécial ne serait pas sans influence sur l'appareil du langage à qui semble en vouloir principalement ma maladie nerveuse. (C. I, 318)

This link between neurosis and language continues to crop up in a number of letters some of which the poet is forced to dictate. "l'Hystérie" he complains "commence à troubler ma parole" (C. I, 299), and the act of writing has become unbearable. 27
It seems that what began as a splitting of the psyche or "crise de verre" is gradually being reworked into the linguistic "Crise de Vers." Spectral confrontations in letters and texts are common throughout the period. In order to be sure of his existence, the poet is compelled to contemplate himself periodically in a mirror. But the mirror either reflects absence (as in the perception of nudity) or a horrifying image of fragmentation: "Il [the mirror] me fond--il me montre la désagrégation profonde de mon être . . ." (C. I, 247). The quest for self-knowledge and identity inevitably leads the poet to a discovery of a fundamental lack at the center of being. 28

The shift towards language does not then abolish the oscillating play of the mirror but rather reconstitutes it in the impersonal structures of verse. In 1868, Mallarmé sends Cazalis a poem taken from "une étude projetée sur la Parole." This "sonnet nul" is an inverted composition whose meaning is totally derived from a "mirage interne des mots même" (C. I, 279). Originally entitled "Sonnets allégorique de lui-même," this text dramatizes its own genesis across a series of repetitions, chiasmic reversals and specular images. Each word, doubled and divided by its own reflective qualities, is inscribed in a continuous play with the other words of the sonnet. "... les mots" writes Mallarmé, "se reflètent les uns sur les autres jusqu'à paraître ne plus avoir leur couleur propre, mais n'être que les transitions
d'une gamme" (C. I, 234). Here, the use of "paraître" suggests that words are and are not themselves. This loss of identity recalls the poet's mirror-drama in the Correspondance and the "trou profond" of Hérodiade's mirror in which she glimpses bits and pieces of a dream. In each instance, the mirror, by collapsing the static polarities of subject/ object, interior/exterior, produces an excess of signification. Such emphasis on the mirroring faculties of language suspends reference, threatens consciousness and ultimately questions the possibility of meaning.

Transparent and opaque, the double mirror of language recaptures the dynamic struggle between the conscious and the unconscious--two texts, inextricably allied, one inhabiting the other. Significantly, as early as 1864, Mallarmé conceived of "Hérodiade" in terms of a similar technique of textual reflexivity. Implicit in this early vision of the poem is the rapport between the production of multiple poetic effects and the erosion of meaning:

J'ai enfin commencé mon "Hérodiade." Avec terreur, car j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en deux mots: Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit. Le vers ne doit donc pas, là, se composer de mots; mais d'intentions, et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation. (C. I, 137)

At this early stage, the far-reaching implications of this new poetics were not yet evident. The abolition of the object and the break-up of verse still constituted a point of departure, a question of technique. It is only after a systematic study of language that Mallarmé grasps what he
later calls "le pourquoi de la crise" and the presence in "Hérodiade" of a mysterious "motif." In the later fragments for the poem's preface, the only reason given for its interruption is a discrepancy between artistic technique and critical insight. In spite of the risks involved in the late revision of an early work, Mallarmé insists that, from the outset, "Hérodiade" was far in advance of his own critical abilities. As a result 20 years later he claims: "... je n'aie pas trop à reculer en arrière." 32

What is discovered in the five-year period between the conception of "Hérodiade" and its interruption, and again between 1868 and the poem's revival in the 1880's, is the paradoxical nature of knowledge. During these intervals, the psychological and the aesthetic merge in a series of crises provoked by language (... en creusant le vers ... j'ai rencontré le néant") and transposed into poetry. By exploring through writing the textual mechanisms of repetition, depersonalization and repression, Mallarmé becomes "conscious" of the limitations of "consciousness." "Le sens trop précis," he insists, "nature ta vague littérature" (O.C. 73). The "conscious" character of writing institutes logical relations which restrict, obscure and therefore violate the ideal purity of the white page, the poet's figure for the potentiality of thought unexpressed. In order to retain the latent powers of language, this form of consciousness must be deconstructed and its processes reversed. In retrospect, Mallarmé considers his crises and intellectual
development of the decade in terms of an evolution from an essentially reductive form of consciousness towards another:

La conscience, excédée d'ombres, se réveille, lentement, formant un homme nouveau, et doit retrouver mon Rêve après la création de ce dernier. Cela durera quelques années pendant lesquelles j'ai à revivre la vie de l'humanité depuis son enfance et prenant conscience d'elle-même. (C. I, 301) (My Italics.)

In this context, consciousness is the movement towards a critical awareness of its own problematic. As a critical operation, poetic writing is a double instrument of revelation and repression. As both defense and transgression, the writing of poetry alternately obscures and reveals, blocks and liberates the unconscious and virtual forces at work in language.

During the 1860's, then, Mallarmé develops a dual system which brings together the processes of writing and reading, text and interpretation. As we have seen, the language of his poetry, like the language of dreams, is built around another discourse which, having its own syntax and rules, cannot be successfully penetrated from the viewpoint of consciousness. By focusing on the processes of transformation and the elliptical communication between these systems, Mallarmé constructs a textual apparatus that functions in much the same manner as Freud's psychical apparatus. If fiction is, as Mallarmé suspected, "le procédé même de l'esprit humain" (O.C. 851), no other thinker did more to demonstrate this idea than Freud. After years of analyzing writing-effects in dreams (condensation, displacement,
over-determination), Freud designated the Unconscious as the "true psychical reality." Concerned by the "much-abused privilege" of consciousness, he stressed its reductive aspects and, more specifically, its exaggerated role in the fabrication of art. Calling for precisely the same shift in emphasis as Mallarmé, he concluded:

The more we seek to win our way to a metapsychological view of mental life, the more we must learn to emancipate ourselves from the importance of the symptom of "being conscious." (S.E. XIV, 193)

Having drawn this parallel between Mallarmé's and Freud's practices of textual interpretation, we might stop here to consider the role of "conscious expectations" in the critical discourse surrounding "Hérodiade." It is certainly disconcerting that most interpretations concern only those parts of the poem published in the Pléïade edition of Mallarmé's works. By avoiding the series of fragments preserved in manuscript form, this criticism systematically represses the processes of textual production. Negated are those very textual forces which Mallarmé worked so hard to sustain.

While a number of critics do insist on a relationship between "Hérodiade" and the question of creative process, it is the character of the virgin princess as a static symbol of ideal beauty, which commands their attention.33 Moreover, those critics who do deal with the manuscript are preoccupied with the reinstatement of a fixed narrative framework. As the editor of the text, Gardner Davies remarks: "... il est tentant de speculer, à partir des données qui existent, sur
le développement vraisemblable des parties inachevées du poème." This temptation to complete the text by imposing a chronological order, or to avoid its complexities by suppressing the variants, explains to a large extent, the persisting tendency to read "Hérodiade" across a series of static polarized images. Intrinsic to this point of view, is, of course, the critical quest for synthesis. This definitive reconciliation of opposites, which traditionally follows a Hegelian pattern, most often results in the formation of a "parfaite beauté ayant la pleine conscience de soi,"--a radical negation of the poet's views on artistic process.35

For, what emerges from the preceding discussion of the Correspondance, is that Mallarmé, like Freud, questions the very authenticity of consciousness. The contradictory versions of a text like "Hérodiade," offer an implicit critique of the fictional process itself. In this text, writing questions its own possibility: "l'acte d'écrire se scruta jusqu'en l'origine" (O.C. 645). Since each successive version of the poem, whether published or not, opens up the possibility of a new reading, there can be no definitive meanings or ultimate truths. Product of an "enfantement interieur," the unfinished manuscript for "Hérodiade" is inextricably bound up with the invention of a language, the genesis of a text. How does matter become meaning? By what processes does a thought become conscious? What is the relationship between desire, language and death? And finally,
what does it mean to write ("Sait-on ce que c'est qu'écrire?" O.C. 481)? Resurfacing again and again in Mallarmé's Correspondance, these very fascinating but troublesome questions return in condensed form to haunt the fragments and notes for "Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère."
NOTES

1 In his introduction to l'OEuvre: Un Coup de Dés, Paris: Librairie Les Lettres, 1951, p. 18, Robert Greer Cohn describes Mallarmé as "un penseur qui pénètre aussi profond dans les opérations de son esprit qu'aucun autre. . . ." And the following comment by Jean-Luc Steinmetz taken from "Mallarme on corps," Littérature, No. 17, février, 1975, p. 117, is representative of certain of Mallarmé's critics involved in textual analysis. This category would include Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, Albert Sonnenfeld and Jacques Derrida. "Mallarmé parlera avant Freud de l'individu clivé, des problèmes de la persona; il faudra attendre la révolution psychanalytique . . . pour que son œuvre prenne une gravité qui avait échappé auparavant à ses lecteurs. . . ."

2 One of the many examples concerning his sister Maria is found in a letter to Henri Cazalis, dated July, 1862: "Vois-tu c'est mon chef-d'oeuvre que je veux faire là comme je le referai un jour pour ma pauvre soeur dont je n'ai point osé encore rhythmér la vision" C. I, 35.

3 In the beginning of his analysis of Jensen's Gradia, Freud considers "creative writers" as "valuable allies" whose "evidence is to be prized highly . . . (. . .) In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science" S.E., IX, 8.

4 One example is found in a letter to Cazalis dated March, 1865: "Si encore j'avais choisi une oeuvre facile; mais, justement, moi, stérile et crépusculaire, j'ai pris un sujet effrayant, dont les sensations, quand elles sont vives, sont amenées jusqu'à l'atrocité, et si elles flottent, ont l'attitude étrange du mystère. Et mon Vers, il fait mal par instants et blesse comme du fer" C. I, 160-61.

5 This association between biological birth and the production of poetry is repeated in another letter to Cazalis: "Malheureusement, je ne jouis pas du tout ce charme qui voltige autour d'un berceau. Comprends-moi . . . je suis trop poète et trop épris de la seule Poésie pour goûter,
quand je ne puis travailler, une félicité intérieure qui me semble prendre la place de l'autre, la grande, celle que donne la Muse" _Ibid._, 160.

6 Mallarmé, O.C., p. 40.


8 In a variant for the "Ouverture ancienne," Mallarmé mentions a "tapisserie iduméenne." _Les Noces d'Hérodiade: Mystère_, p. 145.

9 Letter to Cazalis, May 9, 1871 (C. I, 354): "... nous ne sommes les pères que de nos productions imaginatives. Nous sentons notre nullité... devant les devoirs terribles, apparaı̂e telle et dure par cela que notre organisation gardant tout ce qu'il y a de meilleur par son instinct jaloux de production glorieuse... . . ."


11 O.C., see notes pp. 1449-50.


13 See _Correspondance_ I, pp. 211-213, letter to Catulle Mendès, April, 1866.

14 _Ibid._, letter to Cazalis, April, 1866, p. 207.

15 _Ibid._, letter to Eugène Lefèbure, May 17, 1867, p. 249.

16 See the letter to Cazalis dated January 7, 1869, C. I, 295: "... la nature, elle est trop faussée en moi, et monstrueuse, pour que je me laisse aller à ses voies."


20. In his *Discours, figure*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1971, Jean-François Lyotard, takes Mallarmé's "Coup de dés" as an example of a "poème-critique" which articulates at several levels the relationship between desire and language. This "travail de figuration" is the mark of the Unconscious within the structures of poetic language.

21. Freud defines repression as "... turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious." S. E. XIV, 148.

22. It is this cultivation of "mystère" which separates Mallarmé and other Symbolists from the Parnassian poets. In his essay "Le Beau est négatif," *Mélanges, Oeuvres complètes*, I, Editions de la Pléiade, 1962, Paul Valéry reinforces the notion of beauty as a product of repression: "Le Beau implique des effets d'indécidabilité, d'indecidabilité, d'ineffabilité. Et ce terme lui-même ne dit RIEN. Il n'a pas de définition, car il n'y a de vraie définition que par construction."


24. In Derrida's "La Double séance," (op. cited), the disseminating play of language in Mallarmean poetics is demonstrated at length by means of a terminology of "indecidabilité." Certain terms such as "hymen," which have a "valeur double, contradictoire, ..." produce an excess of meaning which, according to Derrida, can be read as a mark of the Unconscious: "Ils [the words] appartiennent en quelque sorte à la fois à la conscience et à l'inconscient dont Freud nous dit qu'il est tolérant ou insensible à la contradiction. En tant qu'il dépend d'eux, qu'il s'y plie, le texte joue donc une double scène." p. 250.

25. In a passage from "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, S. E. XIV, 157, Freud uses a political analogy to describe the inherent increase in a repressed impulse: "While the ego protects itself by its work of repression it 'has at the same time given it' (the repressed instinct) some independence
and has renounced some of its own sovereignty. This is inevitable from the nature of repression, which is, fundamentally, an attempt at flight. The repressed is now, . . . an outlaw; it is excluded from the great organization of the ego and is subject only to the laws which govern the realm of the unconscious."

26. The next mention of "Hérodiade" comes in a letter to Léo d'Orfe, September 29, 1868: "Pour 'Hérodiade,' ce serait de mauvais goût que je republie ce fragment [the 'Scène'] plusieurs fois, d'autant mieux que je compte le compléter et en faire avant peu, une plaquette." C. III, 62


28. Two passages in the Correspondance accentuate the ambiguity of the mirror: a) 1868 C. I, 242: "J'avoue du reste, que j'ai encore besoin . . . de me regarder dans cette glace pour penser." Without the mirror Mallarmé says "je redeviendrais le Néant." b) Letter to Villiers, 1867, C. I, 259: "Le miroir qui m'a réfléchi l'Etre a été le plus souvent l'Horreur." Both the need for recognition and the perception of absence recur in "Igitur" a short tale written in 1869. See O.C. p. 441.

29. Hérodiade's "rêve épars" (Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère," "Scène" p. 65) is again an image of fragmentation, horror and nudity. This association between mirrors and dreams is frequent in Mallarmé and has to do with the chiasma--a figure of crossing-over. Like the textual web of "écriture," a dream-text reflects several levels of signification which intersect creating a multitude of possible meanings. Mallarmé's mirror-sonnet reminds the poet of "une eau-forte pleine de rêve et de vide" (C. I, 279). All of these metaphors recall Freud's comment on the ambiguous structures of a dream which never reveals "whether its elements are to be interpreted literally or in a figurative sense." S. E. V, 341.

30. I fully agree with Barbara Johnson's assessment of referentiality in Mallarmé's poetics: "Reference is not denied but suspended . . . by the ceaseless production of seemingly mutually exclusive readings of the same piece of language." "Poetry and Performative Language," Yale French
In her article "Crise de Prose," (op. cited) Johnson concludes that it is the suspension of reference which constitutes Mallarmé's "Crise de Vers," which she interprets as "crise de métalangage"--a negation of the "hiérarchie de la maîtrise d'une pensée par une autre." p. 106.

31 That the Unconscious is not separate or prior to consciousness is evident throughout Mallarmé's essay "Le Mystère dans les lettres": "... je ne sais quel miroitement, en dessous, peu séparable de la surface concédée à la rétine, ..." and "Je crois décidément à quelque chose d'abscons, signifiant fermé et caché, qui habite le commun. ..." O. C. pp. 382-83.

32 Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère, pp. 95-96. Mallarmé admits this lack of knowledge early on in several of the passages already quoted.

33 Those critics who do insist on this rapport are Gardner Davies, Sylviane Huot and H.G. Zagona. (See Bibliography.)


CHAPTER III

NARCISSISM IN THE "SCÈNE": EROS UNDER GLASS

". . . maintenant le livre essaiera de suffire, pour entr'ouvrir la scène intérieure et en chuchoter les échos."

Mallarmé

The Theater of the Psyche

Only one part of "Hérodiade" saw print during Mallarmé's lifetime. In 1870, the "Scène" bearing the title "Fragment d'une ancienne étude scénique d'Hérodiade" appeared in Le Parnasse contemporain.¹ Thirty years later, Mallarmé re-assembled the "Scène" along with other fragments of the poem under the new title "Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère." Thus in spite of the early decision of 1865 to abandon all theatrical ambitions regarding this poem, "Hérodiade," it would appear, remained intimately linked to a theatrical motif. According to Mallarmé, the change in genre from tragedy to poem would not inhibit his continued exploitation of a series of dramatic devices within the work: "les vêtements, le décor, l'ameublement, sans parler du mystère" (C. I, 174). Conceived at approximately the same time, "l'Après-midi d'un faune" entertained a similarly ambiguous relationship with
the stage: "Je le fais absolument scénique," wrote Mallarmé, "non possible au théâtre, mais exigeant le théâtre" (C. I, 116). In both instances then, a certain dramatic machinery is to be incorporated into the poems. But at the same time, the theatricality of these texts is situated at the very limits of representation.

Within this optic, I have found a certain amount of critical disagreement regarding the dramatic value of "Hérodiade" and, more specifically, the "Scène." For some, this classical dialogue between a narcissistic princess and her childhood nurse "cries out for stage presentation."

This view is generally shared by those critics who have a marked interest in Mallarmé's dramatic theory and its rapport with the evolution of symbolist drama.² Still others, troubled by the timeless and ambiguous ambiance of the "Scène," regard it as "indéfendable" from a dramatic viewpoint.³ Despite these differences, there is a general tendency to isolate the "Scène" from the rest of "Les Noces" and to read it within a realist framework. The following remarks by two critics exemplify this attitude:

It [the "Scène"] dominates the entire triptych by its dramatic intensity and its realism.⁴

Le dialogue échangé dans la "Scène" . . . est censé se dérouler dans la réalité: . . au point de vue de la forme, il ne s'agit ni d'une remémoration du passé ni d'une priscence de l'avenir.⁵

Now there is no question that the "Scène" is the most readable segment of "Hérodiade." By virtue of its classical dramatic form (speakers are identified and given parts) and
its relative lack of variants, the "Scène" functions for many readers as a stabilizing point of reference in an otherwise alogical and extremely esoteric text. When considered as a dialogue between two characters, the "Scène" provides, in one critic's words, an "objective confirmation" of Hérodiade's ambivalent personality. Two basic movements can be readily ascertained: First, a contrasting play between the old nurse's spontaneous, earthy manner and Hérodiade's cold inviolability. By refusing her nurse's attempts at physical contact, Hérodiade projects the image of an autonomous self. This narcissistic pose is then shattered by the heroine's ambivalent monologue before her mirror and by her emphatic denial of all previous assertions of self-sufficiency at the "Scène's" conclusion:

H.

De mes lèvres! Vous mentez, o fleur nue
J'attends une chose inconnue (N. 70)

All of the aforementioned critics react to this seemingly sudden reversal by reverting to narrative structures. Two slightly different interpretations are generally offered. First, it is argued that this "unknown thing" can only be an encounter with the head of John the Baptist--the third character in "Les Noces." If the loss of the heroine's virginity can be projected into the future, then the "Scène" can be read as an intermediary stage of pure antithesis. Thus for Huot, Hérodiade's narcissism, as depicted in the
"Scène," creates a structural tension which demands resolution: ". . . le narcissisme, tout en y proclamant encore sa suffisance, phropéhtisé sa rupture, et sa fin dans l'avènement du couple. . . ." Here, prophecy is a proleptic, linear force which carries the reader towards a satisfactory conclusion. A second proposal, vaguely reminiscent of the Biblical reading of Salome, situates an erotic rendez-vous between lovers sometime before the "Scène." In this way, the heroine's anxiety as well as the Baptist's decapitation can be sufficiently motivated by the logic of crime and punishment. Despite these few variations, the two versions converge in their mutual aspiration towards a final synthesis between the severed head and the virgin, usually identified as the respective symbols of genius and beauty. In all cases, the integration of the psyche functions as a metaphor for poetic closure and the creation of a self-sufficient, narcissistic text. 

The abrupt leap from realistic concerns to ethereal, idealistic visions is, of course, cause for objection. But there are several reasons why this kind of approach to Mallarmé's text is extremely problematic. Looking at the work itself, we see that all dramatic action is presented, as in "Un Coup de dés," under the form of hypothesis: "Tout se passe, par raccourci, en hypothèse; on évite le récit" (O.C. 455). Mallarmé's systematic elimination of narrative strains from "Les Noces" generates a barrage of either/or structures. The reader witnesses a convergence and
permutation of several hypothetical texts which appear to contradict one another. In a late variant, for example, we learn that Hérodiade's nuptials are not only solitary but incomplete: "Elle s'arrête au seuil solitaires noces" (N. 82). Rather than establish a sequential order of events, Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" dramatizes a confusion or even a confrontation of various temporal modes. Is it possible to apply the logical categories of before and after to a text which lacks any sort of definitive ending or beginning? Had these critics read the "Scène," either in conjunction with the other sections of "Les Noces," or even in terms of its early variants, they might have discovered the inadequacy of traditional narrative codes. In the early stage directions for the "Scène," Mallarmé goes so far as to suggest that parts of the dialogue be treated as a dream. This proposal is upheld in the late fragments for the "Finale" where dramatic action and dream are again found to be interrelated thereby making it virtually impossible to decide whether events are real or imagined:

. . . --elle jette la tête par la fenêtre--en le bassin--coucher--au loin (rien de tout cela est-il arrivé) elle se reveille--. . . (N. 139)

Although I intend to return to this rapport between text and dream at a later point, it is already quite clear that the drama of the "Scène" exceeds the limits of conventional dramatic form.

The definitive title "Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère," given in 1898, suggests that it is more productive to read
the drama alongside Mallarmé's later critical writings on theater. Dissatisfied with the "théâtre borné" (O.C. 344) of his contemporaries, Mallarmé was convinced that the true potential of the stage was yet to be discovered. In several places, he argued that the theater ("notre seule magnificence," O.C. 313) would be of seminal import for the future of art. At the same time, however, Mallarmé, a theater-critic himself, preferred reading to attending plays:

Quelle représentation! le monde y tient; un livre, dans notre main, s'il énonce quelque idée auguste, supplée à tous les théâtres, non par l'oubli qu'il en cause mais les rappelant impérieusement, au contraire. (O.C. 334)

Rather than choose one genre over another, the poet envisions a reciprocal rapport--"une ambiguïté délicieuse entre l'écrit et le joué" (O.C. 342-43). The decisive and innovative influence of the theater is not forgotten but enhanced:

"... maintenant le livre essaiera de suffire, pour entr'ouvrir la scène intérieure" (O.C. 328). The choice of the verb "entr'ouvrir" suggests that what literature affords us is a brief glimpse of another stage--a set which does not comply with the logic of traditional representation. Momentarily illuminated by the dramatic effects of language, this "Spectacle de Soi" (O.C. 370) constitutes an inner theater of the mind: "il en est de la situation mentale comme des méandres d'un drame" (O.C. 294).

Posited then is the construction and the manipulation of a metaphorical space which interconnects theater and
poetry with the psyche. Such a proposal ultimately plays havoc with conventional concepts of time and space. Laws of chronology are abolished, plot sacrificed, all reference suspended:

... une oeuvre dramatique montre la succession des extériorités de l'acte sans qu'aucun moment garde de réalité et qu'il se passe, en fin de compte, rien. (O.C. 296)

What matters here is not the representation of an inner reality but the production of a new literary space which continuously unveils itself as a fluid interplay between signs. To conceive of the psyche as both a stage and a book is to break down the dichotomous realms of traditional dramatic form: interior/exterior, past/present, dream/reality. Poetry becomes theatrical insofar as it involves the restaging and recasting of an interior psychical drama whose "real" or "phantasmic" character cannot be determined. Perceptible only in terms of its effects, this "théâtre, inhérent à l'esprit" (O.C. 328) was already an integral part of Mallarmé's early doctrine of poetic effects. "Hérodiade," it should be recalled, was conceived in terms of a language which would "Peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit" (C. I, 137).

It is my belief that with this discrediting of narrative and traditional representation should come a new consideration of character. In Mallarmé's view, psychological drama involves un unstable self, a character such as Hamlet---"le seigneur latent qui ne peut devenir" (O.C. 300). It is the
process of characterization that is, the problematical nature of self-identity, which fascinates Mallarmé and subsequently structures his entire essay on the play. According to Mallarmé, Hamlet's is a solitary drama in which all other characters function "selon une réciprocité symbolique ... relativement à une figure seule" (Ibid.). These mute, secondary figures become the external and fragmentary reflections of a single psyche: "Qui erre autour ... n'est que lui Hamlet" (Ibid.). Conversely, it is Hamlet's precarious and volatile position vis-a-vis the other characters which generates the drama. Besieged on all fronts by contradictory impulses, duties, and desires, Hamlet is also internally split and fixated "sur une image de soi qu'il y garde intacte autant qu'une Ophélie jamais noyée ... ." (O.C. 302). The metaphor is significant. For this "otherness" which persists inside of Hamlet precludes any possibility of a homogeneous, integrated self. Identified with both childhood and femininity ("Ophélie, vierge enfance objectivée du lamentable héritier royal ... ." O.C. 301), this internalized, crystallized image constitutes that part of Hamlet which has been split off and repressed. Hamlet's lack of self-definition, as reflected in his inability to choose, is what leaves him open to these subterranean influences and what makes him, in Mallarmé's view, an emblematic or mythical figure--"une personnalité multiple et une" (O.C. 395).

Such allegorical figures are common throughout Mallarmé's essays and poems. An analysis of their attributes will help
to determine the forces which generate and motivate the characters of "Hérodiade." Psychic division is a prominent feature of all Mallarmé's characters. Reenacted in "Igitur" for example, is the entire process of depersonalization which we discussed in relation to the poet's Correspondance. In this dramatic tale, the dissolution of the Self is superseded by its phantasmatic rebirth in the mirror. In some instances, this disappearing Self is directly associated with the creative process. In the prose poem "Le Nénuphar blanc," the inspirational powers of Woman are contingent upon the narrator's suppression of her individuality. Spying from behind some bushes, the narrator deliberately refuses visual contact with his anonymous muse in order to maintain "le délice empreinte de généralité" (O.C. 285). A sharp definition of her traits would limit his imagination and therefore jeopardize both his pleasure and the creative potential of the work. Finally, the most complete illustration of Mallarmé's "l'in-individuel" (O.C. 304) is presented in his portrait of the dancer. By virtue of her spontaneous execution of multiple figures or "pirouettes," the dancer is no longer a woman but a metaphor or pure sign--"un instrument direct d'idée" (O.C. 312).12 Her movement towards totality is always accompanied by a sensation of dispersion and loss. Dance is perhaps best described as an energetic "fuite en avant," a "synthèse mobile" (O.C. 304), which builds to illustrate "le sens de nos extases" (O.C. 296). For Mallarmé, dance ultimately allegorizes the process of symbolization.
But since indefinite expansion and excessive mobility lead to fragmentation and death, the dancer, as a linguistic sign, can neither contain nor control the disseminating power of language: "elle . . . morte de l'effort à condenser . . . des sursautements . . ." (O.C. 309).

We have already encountered this abstraction and breakdown of the subject in the writer's willed disappearance from his work—a dissolution which, like the dancers', increases the evocatory powers of verse. In each case considered, language becomes more important than its speaker. Or, put in another way, the subject is only a passive instrument of language, an interpreter of signs. To paraphrase Lacan, Mallarmé's characters do not speak language but are themselves spoken by it. This could explain why his characters are often presented as readers. Just as the much-admired Hamlet wanders about "lisant au livre de lui-même" (O.C. 1564), so too does the Mallarméan hero/ine desperately attempt to decipher his own internal, mysterious text.

Keeping these notions in mind, we can return to Hérodiade's outburst at the end of the "Scène" and read it as a testimony to the disruptive and subversive forces at work in language. The "Vous mentez ô fleur nue de mes lèvres" means that all assertions in this text can be simultaneously read in multiple directions. In its capacity for endless duplicity, fiction, this "Glorieux Mensonge" (C. I, 208) is presented as an unarrestable force which breaks into the character from the outside and subverts her mastery. In
"Les Noces," the most graphic example of this sort of linguistic alterity and its power over characters is the language of prophecy which speaks continuously through the old nurse/Sibyl. This is the text-within-the-text which Hérodiade is compelled to decipher. One of Valéry's comments on Mallarmé reinforces this notion of language as a system of signification which both precedes and exceeds the character: "The subject is no longer the cause of the form: it is one of its effects."\(^{14}\)

The chief defect of the "idealist" readings of "Hérodiade" then, is the refusal to deal with or even acknowledge a problematic of the subject. Considered as continuous with its speaker, language sheds its dynamic ambiguity and comes to reinforce a string of static, transcendent structures. The drama, as Mallarmé conceived it, is effectively squelched. The notion that Hérodiade can somehow complete herself through a symbolic coupling with the severed head implies that the heroine's narcissism is only temporary. At some future point, the "anciens désaccords/Avec le corps" (N. 58) which, in my view, characterize the "Scène" are to be transcended by a higher order of things—the perfect work of art: "une oeuvre poétique qui reconstituerait, dans une beauté inaltérable, l'univers phénoménal tout entier."\(^{15}\) Upon comparison, however, we are hard put to find any significant difference between the narcissism of the "Scène" and this new space of poetic synthesis. Within this critical optic, both stages appear immobile and timeless. It is as if the character's
desire for self-enclosure is actually performed by the critic. As one reader, perhaps unwittingly, puts it, the "idealistic" approach to "Hérodiade" ultimately reinforces what can be called the "ice theory" of Mallarméan poetics. Perpetuated is the myth of an autonomous Self. 16

Narcissism Reconsidered

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

Mallarmé, "Les Fenêtres"

In the remainder of this chapter it is my intention to dispel the critical mythology which has so completely enveloped "Hérodiade." Considered from a psychoanalytical viewpoint, the "Scène," we shall see, becomes a highly complex and dynamic poetic piece which performs several of Mallarmé's most radical theories on literature and theater. If Mallarmé chose to keep the "Scène," rather than replace it with a more elliptic version in the later years (as he did the "Ouverture ancienne"), it is because he continued to see it as compatible with the evolution of his manuscript "Les Noces"--certainly a "mystère autre que représentatif" (O.C. 393).

To read the "Scène" as a drama of the psyche requires an examination of Hérodiade's narcissism from a different perspective. Up to this point, critics have used the term
narcissism as a catch-all label to designate all that is sterile, static, and, of course, impenetrable in the text. Rather than identify this psychological trait with Mallarmé's aristocratic tendencies in art (i.e., the doctrine of "Art for Art"), or relate it to nineteenth-century stereotypes of female neurotics, both of which have been done, I prefer to consider narcissism as a dynamic psychological process. Before turning to the ruse of narcissism in the "Scène," we will first explore Freud's essay and work on the subject and its elaboration by Lacan and Laplanche.

The internal dynamics of narcissism become highly visible as soon as it is considered as both a desire and a strategy. Since Freud viewed the strategy as working both for and against the desire, he distinguished two forms of narcissism. What he identifies as "primary narcissism" is a state of absolute unity which precedes the constitution of the subject. During this stage, the ego is a reservoir which continually stores up "the whole available quota of libido" (S.E. XXIII, 150). Sleep is the condition which offers the closest approximation of this objectless state: "Somatically sleep is a reactivation of intrauterine existence, fulfilling as it does the conditions of repose, warmth, and exclusion of stimulus" (S.E. XIX, 222). According to Freud, this build-up of libido in the ego eventually reaches a level where it becomes "unpleasurable." At this point, the libido overflows and the ego, contrary to its initial desire for absolute closure, begins to form object-relations. In the 1914 essay
"On Narcissism: An Introduction," Freud summarizes this movement: "The development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous attempt to recover that state" (S.E. XIV, 100).

It is then the urge towards this primal, objectless condition which constitutes the motor force or desire behind all narcissistic endeavors. This regressive movement towards the reduction of tension and the absence of stimuli is called the "Nirvana principle"—a tendency which, in Freud's view, ultimately links narcissism with the death drive. Primary narcissism, writes Laplanche, is a "primal myth of return," a "primal fantasy" which cannot be proved. Freud deduces it from the regressive tendencies perceptible in "secondary narcissism." By studying certain psychoses, hypochondria and infantile megalomania, Freud came to recognize a basic pattern in all secondary narcissistic relations. In each instance, the ego appears to abandon its relationships to objects by withdrawing its libido and transforming itself into its own object of desire. We say "appears" because the object is not forgotten but decathcted and internalized under the form of an idealized specular image:

This ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. (. . .) As always, where the libido is concerned, man has here again shown himself incapable of giving up a satisfaction he had once enjoyed. (S.E. XIV, 94)

In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915), Freud describes an extreme form of narcissistic identification. Instead of successfully detaching itself from the lost object
or loved-one, as in mourning, the melancholic's ego identifies itself with the object, incorporates it, and loses control. Since the ego has also incorporated the ambivalence attached to the object, the melancholic experiences a lowering of self-esteem symptomized by severe self-accusations and criticisms. An internal rivalry begins in which "the ego debases itself and rages against itself" (S.E. XIV, 257). Later in "The Ego and the Id," Freud explains the logic behind these symptoms: Every time an object-cathexis is replaced by an identification, the ego must somehow placate the demands of the id. In order to regain control, the ego attempts to negotiate the id's loss by "forcing itself . . . upon the id as a love-object" (S.E. XIX, 30).

What is essential here is the idea that narcissism is a project which aims at unity through the incorporation of difference. The desire to annihilate desire and thus return to a state of non-differentiation (a "dégre zéro") only results in the perpetuation of that desire and the internal splitting of the ego into subject and object. It seems that the narcissistic project is doomed from the start. Proposed is a view of the ego as divided against and alienated from itself. The melancholic's symptoms simply demonstrate how extreme this alienation can be. The far-reaching implications of the theory come to the fore with Jacques Lacan's claim that from its very inception, the ego constitutes itself through a narcissistic identification with an ideal image. This is the "stade-du-miroir" or "mirror-stage."
Here, the infant makes a primary identification with a specular image—a figure more perfect than himself. Lacking in motor control, the helpless infant prematurely anticipates the unity and coordination of this idealized Other. Formed is an intrapsychic rivalry. By obtaining recognition in the mirror, the child is thus assured of what he believes to be his own identity. This first identification, a misrecognition (méconnaissance), is, for Lacan, "root-stock" for all later identifications: ". . . cette forme situe l'instance du moi, dès avant sa détermination sociale, dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu" (my italics). Secondary identifications (parental figures, social norms, religion) perpetuate this ideal ego and continue the process of alienation. In general, Freud describes character-formation as the continuous incorporation of such external influences:

The process (of identification) . . . makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexis and that it contains the history of those object-choices. (S.E. XIX, 29)

The history of the ego then is not forgotten but permanently recorded within. The "effects" of the first identifications are described as "general" and "lasting" (S.E. XIX 30). Because of this initial formation of the subject, narcissism, writes Lacan, "impose sa structure à tous les désirs fût-ce aux plus élevés." Although Freud posited two types of object-choice (narcissistic and anaclitic), he found the narcissistic element to be active in virtually every
type of love relationship. In studying the behavior of people "in love" he discerned four variations of narcissistic object-choice according to which a person loves:

- a) what he himself is (i.e., himself)
- b) what he himself was
- c) what he himself would like to be
- d) someone who was once part of himself

(S.E. XIV, 90)

In several cases, these factors are found in combination, one dissimulating the other. Certain men who have renounced their own narcissistic desires can become attracted to women who project an inaccessible and self-sufficient persona. And what Freud discerns in the over-enthusiastic attitude of proud parents towards their child ("His Majesty the Baby") is essentially a reactivation of their own narcissism disguised as object-love (S.E. XIV, 91).

Moving back and forth between the positions of subject and object, the ego continues its clandestine pursuit of a fantasimical mythical unity. The multiple roles (active, passive, subject, object) which write the script of narcissism are played out at the level of the body. Narcissism (the cathexed ego) is far from passionless. It promotes rather a sexuality which is fundamentally auto-erotic. According to Freud, the autoerotic phase of sexuality begins when the infant loses a first, exterior object which has functioned as a source of pleasure. This is the maternal breast. In order to compensate this loss, pleasure is sought through self-stimulation of the erogenous zones. By eventually concluding that all future object-relations have as a prototype
the infant-at-the-breast and that "the finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it" (S.E. VII, 222), Freud posits a strong link between sexuality and fantasy. Since the lost object can never be recovered in its original form, the sexual object is always only a substitute. Thus the sexuality of narcissism is itself an imaginary construct in which the first object of desire "has been replaced by an object reflected within the subject." Mallarmé makes the same connection between auto-eroticism and fantasies of self-containment when he writes: "Le plus grand nombre des plaisirs que j'éprouve, lesquels viennent de moi-même et y finissent, ont un caractère essentiellement fictif" (C. II, 331).

This overview of narcissism with its emphasis on the structuring powers of fiction and fantasy enables us to take a new look at the "Scène." Following in the tracks of Narcissus, Hérodiade has severed all relations with the external world by withdrawing her libido. To all appearances, she has achieved autonomy, becoming herself her own object of desire: "Oui, c'est pour moi, pour moi, que je fleuris, déserte!" (N. 68). Like Mallarmé's Igitur, she seeks Nirvana--"un calme narcotique de moi pur longtemps rêvé" (O.C. 435). Motivated and shaped by this regressive phantasy of purity, Hérodiade's narcissism parallels the Freudian model. To achieve immortality, she must negate the fact of her birth. This desire to disappear and to retreat to a
place of non-difference is, as we have seen, the mark of primary narcissism:

Même pour n'aller que jusqu'à la fenêtre
Elle n'a pas aimé, cette princesse, naître
(N. 138)

The intense ambivalence which surrounds the heroine's birth is underscored by the rime naître/fenêtre. What is lost at birth is the prenatal state. Or, to put it in Freud's terminology, the "lost narcissism" of childhood, the fantasmic period in which it was believed that the ego included everything. It is in order to deny this loss that Hérodiade assumes what resembles a foetal position: "Pour, le soir, retirée en ma couche, reptile/Inviolé . . ." (N. 69).

Within the confines of this protective, embryonic space, "Notre reine enfant" (N. 169), momentarily convinces herself of her own omnipotence:

Je me crois seule en ma monotone patrie
Et tout, autour de moi, vit dans l'idolatrie
D'un miroir qui reflète en son calme dormant
Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant . . .
Ô charme dernier, oui! Je le sens, je suis seule.
(N. 69)

This passage stands out in the "Scène" as a moment of relative calm and stability. By strategically placing herself at the center of her universe, Hérodiade projects an image of complete solitude and mastery. The passage also provides a sample or model of the workings of the text with its variants. Beginning with a close examination of those details in the published version (the last draft of the "Scène") which arouse suspicion, we find that the heroine's
deficiencies become all too apparent. First, it should be noted that it is the mirror and not Hérodiade which is given the role of subject. The mirror is idolized because it be-stows identity on everything else. Since Hérodiade cannot be the subject, she attempts to become the object of every reflection. Through identification with a specular image, Hérodiade sustains an illusion of totality and power. Looking for herself in the eyes of her mirror, Hérodiade, in Lacanian terms, is immediately situated "dans une ligne de fiction." Projected is an Ideal Self: "Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant..." The heroine's desired transparency is metaphorically captured by the impenetrable surface of the diamond, an image which is reinforced by a build-up of hard sounds (d's and t's) throughout the passage. At the same time however, the cluster of sibilant s's of the last line ("Je le sens, je suis seule") gives off a fragmenting effect. It is useful here to remember that for Mallarmé "S" is "la lettre analytique; dissolvante et dis séminante par excellence" (O.C. 855). In this context, the letter is overdetermined as well by its figural dimension. Since "S" retraces the curves of the recoiled serpent, it evokes the near-perfect circularity of the womb. Signaling a regressive movement towards a more primal state, the shedding of skin ("la chair inutile" N. 69) may be read as the desire for non-being and death. Thus Hérodiade's desire to see herself everywhere results in the production of multiple
self-images which distort and inevitably dismantle any illusion of narcissistic plenitude.

We can demonstrate the ambiguity of this segment of the "Scène" on yet another level. This is an example in which textual variants clearly contradict the published version. As was noted in the first variant cited (N. 158), Hérodiade wants to avoid the window at all costs. This fear recalls Mallarmé's poem "Le Pitre châtifié," (O.C. 31) in which the leap through the window (Fenêtre/naître/n'être) is tantamount to death. Opting for the indecisive posture of what the "pitre" calls "le mauvais Hamlet," Hérodiade, in another variant, prefers to remain in "cette mandoline au ventre" (N. 159). Mallarmé often uses the image of a hollow-bellied instrument to designate a locus of pure potentiality.24 Like the maternal womb, this melodious v/entre situates Hérodiade at a crossroads between life and death. That her position is indeed precarious is reaffirmed in the opening lines of the "Scène." It is quite conceivable that in order to insure immortality, Hérodiade has bound her desires and transformed her body into a static symbol of beauty:

\[ \text{. . . mes cheveux que la lumière enlace.} \\
\text{Sont immortels, ô femme, un baiser me tutait} \\
\text{Si la beauté n'était la mort . . . (N. 63)} \]

Yet another variant, later suppressed, suggests that from the outset, Hérodiade's glacial refuge is not really her own:

\begin{align*}
\text{ta} \\
\text{Je me crois seule en ma monotone patrie} \\
\text{(N. 164)}
\end{align*}
While the choice of "patrie" evokes patriarchal power and
dominion, the accumulation of m's with soft nasal sounds in
the same verse recalls the maternal womb of the variants.
From this blending of masculine and feminine elements
emerges the figure of a phallic mother, a fantasy already
suggested by the virile image of the reclining serpent.
Mallarmé's remarks on the letter "m" support this view: "M
traduit le pouvoir de faire, donc la joie, mâle et maternelle; puis ... le nombre, la rencontre, la fusion . . ."
(O.C. 960). (My italics.) Again, a contrasting play of
letters and variants combines to undermine Hérodiade's
autonomy by producing an alternative reading of the text.
Finally, in a third variant, also crossed-out, we discover
that Hérodiade's impenetrable fortress is indeed inhabited
by the equivocal figure of a "sein double." In place of the
heroine's diamond-like stare, we read:

\[ \text{Hérodiade au clair* sein double de diamants} \]
\[ (N. 164) \]

Proceeding from variant to poem then, we note a systematic
repression of otherness, doubleness, the maternal body and
the ambivalence directed towards this body. Threatening
Hérodiade with total destruction, the regressive desires
articulated in the variants (the tendencies of primary nar-
cissism) have been rapidly overturned in the "Scène" in
favor of the mesmerizing contemplation of the mirror.

*All underlined words in quotations from "Les Noces" indicate
those crossed-out by Mallarmé in that particular draft.
What is uncovered by this initial demonstration of the play between texts is the overwhelming presence of a double discourse which continuously sends out contradictory messages. Whereas the published version tends to uphold the narcissistic project, the textual variants consistently work against it. As we have seen, the blocking-out of words by editorial selection does not cancel out their influence in the "Scène." Through the processes of displacement, condensation, and the obsessive repetition of letters, the repressed elements inevitably return. In the movement from variant to poem, we find that what Mallarmé envisions as the "milieu, pur de fiction" (O.C. 310), is a superimposing of written surfaces—a space of limitless productivity. With the progressive erasure/repression of the bottom-most layers, there is a corresponding increase of polyvalent, poetic effects. The surface of the "Scène" becomes charged with an excess of meaning. It is in this sense that one can appreciate Mallarmé's belated description of "Les Noces" as a haunted text. According to the 1898 preface, his primary intention was to isolate his heroine "... dans le fait même terrible, mystérieux--et faire miroiter ce qui probablement hanta..." (N. 51). (My italics.)

Cut off from any particular source or speaker, language breeds uncertainty and haunts. The narcissistic illusion of solitude and self-containment is indeed shattered by the shimmering effects of what can be called an unconscious discourse—the persistent flickering of a "miroitements, en
dessous" (O.C. 382). That Hérodiade's icy contemplation of her mirror (the symptom of her narcissism) still bears the imprint of this more archaic text (the "air ou chant sous le texte") is borne out by the displacement of "sein double" to "regard de diamant." By the end of the "Scène," the heroine's thoughts can no longer conceal the "immuables textes inscrits en sa chair" (O.C. 288). The crystallized memories of her childhood, these "ors ignorés" buried "Sous le sombre sommeil d'une terre première" (N. 68) begin to burst and split apart. Significantly, Hérodiade now links the melting and separating of her precious childhood gems to the transgressive energies of language. Addressing her own lips, she cries:

    Vous mentez, o fleur nue
De mes lèvres!  J'attends une chose inconnue
Ou peut-être, ignorant le mystère et vos cris,
Jettez-vous les sanglots suprêmes et meurtris
D'une enfance sentant parmi les rêveries
Se séparer enfin ses froides pierreries.
    (N. 70)

Further analysis of these textual tentacles will demonstrate that the drama that is the psyche is played out in the hesitations of language, that is, the resonances between the "Scène" and the work itself, the heroine's narcissistic pose and the production of the discourse it seeks to dissimulate.

Early on in the dialogue, Hérodiade is both agitated by and magnetically drawn towards certain subterranean influences which appear anonymous and prophetic:
Par quel attrait
Menée et quel matin oublié des prophètes
Verse, sur les lointains mourants, ses tristes fêtes,
Le sais-je?
(N. 63-64)

This tableau, the first of many, stresses Hérodiade's curiosity—a trait which she associates with childhood: "Allume encore, enfantillage?" (n. 70). "Désolée des songes" (N. 65), she attempts to penetrate the secret of her origin, the source and logic behind her present existence. This accounts for the frequent use of the verbs "connaître" and "savoir" as well as the hypothetical tone in which the "Scène" is cast. As an "enfant attentive au mystère éclairé de son être" (N. 212), Hérodiade actively seeks out her memories which are, as she says to her mirror, entrapped "Comme des feuilles sous ta glace au trou profond" (N. 65). Locked into a state of perpetual suspension in the frozen waters of her mirror ("Eau froide dans ton cadre gelée" N. 65), these half-erased texts (the play on "feuilles") of her psyche retain the capacity for spontaneous eruption.25 The mirror, which initially appeared as the emblem of narcissism (the guarantor of identity and psychic integration), is not as homogeneous and pure as was thought. Like the jewels, it is a versatile object which can at any moment collapse and melt, transforming itself into a gushing fount. Much to Hérodiade's horror, this is what periodically transpires:

Mais, horreur! des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine,
J'ai de mon rêve épars, connu la nudité!
(N. 65)
The melting of the mirror, the overflow of its imutable frame, the multiplication of reflecting surfaces which disfigure and distort, and the subsequent loss of perspective are all movements which betray the hidden dynamics of the "Scène." All signal the dismantling of Hérodiade's "autonomous" identity and, more specifically, the dissolution of her narcissistic project. The more we read the "Scène" in terms of its volatile imagery and variants, the more we begin to recognize the complex paradigm of narcissism described by Freud. Identity, already an elusive construct, is further problematized by the continually shifting point of view. In exploring the interactions between the two characters, it is useful to keep in mind the following remark by Mallarmé:

Le point de vue où l'on se place, tout en dépend; or, il est multiple et c'est même une succession de points de vue, se reliant entre eux, qui peut, seule, vous faire une conviction à cet égard. (O.C. 1047)

Throughout the "Scène," Hérodiade is both attracted to and repulsed by the blatant sensuality of her nurse. To the latter's impious offerings of incense and perfumes, she curtly replies: "... ne sais-tu/Que je les hais, nourrice, et veux-tu que je sente/Leur ivresse noyer ma tête languissante?" (N. 65). For the most part, however, Hérodiade's emphatic orders of "Reculez!" and "Arrête dans ton crime" (N. 63 and 66), are immediately followed by demands for attention, recognition, approval ("Nourrice, suis-je belle?" (N. 65) and even physical contact ("Mais n'allais-tu pas me toucher?" N. 66). Calling her nurse "Pauvre aïeule" and
"femme," Hérodiade displays a certain intimacy towards the old woman who, confused by these inconsistencies, addresses her mistress with both the tenderness of a mother ("mon enfant") and the deference of a servant ("Reine," "Madame"). A continual vacillation between the use of "Vous" and "Tu" on the part of both characters, reinforces these basic contradictions.

Hérodiade, it seems, cannot establish her identity without recognition from her nurse. All of her thoughts, phantasies, and desires are to pass through the filter of the nurse's perception:

. . . tu m'as vue, ô nourrice d'hiver,
Sous la lourde prison de pierres et de fer
Entrer, et je marchais, fatale, les mains sauvès,
Dans le parfum désert de ces anciens rois:

(N. 64)

As in the "Ouverture ancienne," the nurse is recognized as having divinatory powers:

Quant à toi, femme née en des siècles malins
Pour la méchanceté des antres sibyllins
Prophétise que si . . .

(N. 69)

Debilitated by her senility, the nurse's oracular vision is always distorted and unclear. In the "Ouverture ancienne," she cannot decide whether the voice she speaks and hears is her own or another's: "Une voix, du passé longue évocation,/ Est-ce la mienne prêtée à l'incantation?" (N. 147). Similarly, the nurse of the "Scène" is most often the victim of perceptual doubt. In the opening lines, she is unable to determine whether Herodiade lives or if she is merely looking
at a shadowy figure from the past; a princess who, as she says, walks "dans un âge ignoré . . ." (N. 63). Soon after, she compares her forgetful mind to the fading pages of an old book: "Pardon! l'âge effaçait, reine, votre défense/De mon esprit pâli comme un vieux livre ou noir . . ." (N. 65). It seems that the role of the nurse's senility is to forget Hérodiade's prohibitions, thereby allowing bits and pieces of the heroine's past to reappear.

But if the nurse's vision is so unreliable, why is it the object of so much concern? For be it faulty or not, it is indeed the problematics of this perception which structures the entire "Scène." All of the action takes place as if projected on a large screen in which characters view themselves perform. As soon as the images on this screen become too vivid and troublesome, there is a quick shift towards the mirror, which functions as a secondary, protective shield:

H:

Aide-moi, puisque'tu n'oses plus me voir,
A me peigner nonchalamment dans un miroir.
(N. 64)

Underlying Hérodiade's need to be seen is then an overwhelming fear of being seen and of the act of perceiving in general. The following examples are taken directly from the "Scène":

H: O jour qu'Hérodiade avec effroi regarde! (N. 66)

N: Vous errez, ombre seule et nouvelle fureur,
Et regardant en vous précoce avec terreur (N. 66)
H: ... si le tiède azur d'été, ( . . . ) Me voit dans ma pudeur grelottante d'étoile, Je meurs  (N. 69)

H: ... clos les volets, l'azur Séraphique sourit dans les vitres profondes (N. 70)

H: Mais aussi, des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine Horreur, j'ai contemplé ma grande nudité. (O.C. 1444)

Although these fears are allayed by a displacement towards the mirror, it is nevertheless the nurse, and not the mirror, who assures Hérodiade of her identity. The psychical import of the old woman's dim-sightedness and oracular gifts cannot be overstated. It is only when Hérodiade corrects or broadens the nurse's perspective that she is able to perceive herself as she imagines being seen: H: "Mais as-tu vu quels furent mes effrois?" (N. 64). In matters of perception, she appears to reason for the nurse: "Si tu me vois les yeux perdu au paradis/C'est quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis" (N. 68). By manipulating the nurse's vision, Hérodiade attempts to censor and control its content. This strategy however, proves unsuccessful, for despite these manoeuvres the nurse's prophetic powers can neither be silenced nor effaced. Dismissed by her mistress immediately following the "Scène's" conclusion, the contorted and ghostly figure of the old Sibyl remains firmly rooted to the spot:

Vain secret ténébreux encore là sur pied Evanoui comme un séculaire plumage s'endommage Silencieusement mais demeuré figé Dans l'hésitation vaine à prendre congé. (N. 73)
Considered apart from the rest of "Les Noces," this bizarre and contradictory portrait of the nurse appears unmotivated. Perhaps this accounts for the critical tendency to downplay these inconsistencies, drawing instead a clear-cut opposition between Hérodiade's frigidity and youth and the nurse's sensuality and age. This view of the characters as "Deux extrêmes incompatibles"\(^2\) is maintained only by disregarding the interactions between text and variants. What the "Scène" attempts to mask, and apparently quite effectively, is the liminality of its characters—the blurring of their contours as they merge with one another across an excessive permutation of attributes and desires. Just as Hérodiade's virginity is tinged with eroticism, the variants offer a paradoxical description of the old sibyl as a "mère" who "n'a jamais conçu" (N. 154). Equally unstable is the opposition youth/age. In a variant for the "Finale," Hérodiade is said to evoke "la beauté humaine de la vie—qu'on ne dépasse pas en même temps qu'elle représente la vieille chair" (N. 112). (My italics.) Thus while the nurse, by her feebleminded and clumsy manner, her transgressive behavior and daemonic presence, might appear to be Hérodiade's antithesis, she is really a projected image of what Hérodiade was, is, and could become.

A series of notes found interspersed throughout the manuscript draws attention to the crucial role played by the nurse in the formation and development of Hérodiade's
identity. All of the following quotations appear to be spoken by Hérodiade:

1. disparais toi/ma hantise de ce que je ne serai pas et bannis la femme
   Nourrice je crois t'appela-t-on (N. 97)

2. Vain fantôme de moi-même
   Celle que je ne serai pas--qui tournes tout autour (N. 98)

3. Profil de mon destin inconnu
   que j'ignore premier en moi (N. 104)

4. Vieux fantôme de la mort qui me hante (N. 199)

What emerges from these passages is the subject's avowed incorporation and continued interaction with an idealized Other. Internalized is the Self and its mirror-image in the form of an intrapsychic rivalry ("Celle que je ne serai pas"), a primary relation of pure difference ("premier en moi"). Efforts at repression ("disparais toi") have proven futile and the all-pervasive presence of this phantom figure ("qui tournes tout autour") continues to haunt Hérodiade's psyche.

But what is the basis for this identification between a queen and an old servant? Throughout "Les Noces" the reader is given only a few details concerning Hérodiade's early years. In the "Ouverture," there is mention of an "enfant exilée en son coeur précieux" (N. 152) and "un roi qui salarie/. . . la gorge ancienne et tarie" (N. 152). This allusion to a wet-nurse is then repeated in another note which replaces the king with a celibate father who is described as "oubli eux de la gorge adorable et tarie" (N. 232). This lack of a precise familial configuration focuses more
attention on the nurse who appears as the only remaining link to Hérodiade's past. In the absence of any reference to a mother, the nurse's functions at one point, were clearly those of a surrogate mother: Hérodiade acknowledges this fact in the middle of the "Scène":

Du reste, je ne veux rien d'humain, et sculptée,
Si tu me vois les yeux perdus au paradis
C'est quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis.
(N. 68)

This image of the child-at-the-breast, while meant to be pleasurable, is ridden with ambivalence. The past participles "perdus" and "bu," as well as the rime "paradis/jadis," emphasize the separation from rather than the communion with this now-withered breast. The term "jadis" is frequently used by Mallarmé to evoke a past period of innocence and bliss which remains part of the character's memory.27 In the "Scène," this moment is a privileged one because it is the only instance in which Hérodiade's pleasure appears directly connected with another person. Assuming the stance of an immobile statue ("sculptée"), Hérodiade re-evokes this memory through conscious recall. Although the loss of perspective ("les yeux perdus") can be equated with complete satisfaction, it also denotes a passive position in which Hérodiade becomes vulnerable to the demands and desires of the nurse who controls the flow of milk.

This is not the only place in "Les Noces" where an oral fantasy appears. In the last lines of the "Prélude," the breast and the ambivalence which surrounds it constitute the only visible trace of an otherwise mysterious past:
L'ordinaire abandon sans produire de trace  
Hors des seins abolis vers l'infini vorace  
Sursautant à la fois en maint épars filet  
Jadis, d'un blanc, et maléfique lait.  
(N. 60)

As in the passage of the preceding page, the use of "jadis," this time set off at the beginning of the verse, emphasizes that the milk, which has long since dried-up, continues to influence the metaphors of the text. The presence of the nurse in this oral fantasy is signalled by the terms "abolis" and "maléfique." "Abolie" constitutes the first word of her incantation in the "Ouverture" and, in a variant for the "Scene intermédiaire," she is described as a "maléfique plumage" (N. 195). The anarchic spurtling of an evil milk into "maint épars filet" recalls both the "rêve épars" of Hérodiade's mirror and the figure of the "sein double" which stalks the variants. Insisted upon in both of these retrospective fantasies is the relationship between satisfaction ("L'ordinaire abandon"), lack ("des seins abolis") and desire. What is remembered is not the object itself but its irrevocable destruction and loss. The temporary fulfillment of an instinctual need (hunger) leads only to the creation of an ever-greater desire, the dimensions of which are comparable to the voracity of the infinite. In several of Mallarmé's other poems, the boundlessness of the "Azur" expresses this eternal and absolute character of desire.28

The internal logic of Hérodiade's reveries is beginning to emerge. For the loss of the breast is at every level a repetition of the traumatic separation experienced at birth.
Appearing as the back-drop for all of Hérodiade's fantasies, each successive split only re-opens what psychoanalysts call the "narcissistic wound," that is, the painful reminder of the subject's origin and continued dependency on another. Thus Hérodiade's identification is not with the nurse herself but with that moment of rupture which her presence revives. Through the rhythmic giving and withdrawal of the breast, the nurse has come to represent the very juncture or break between pleasure and unpleasure, satisfaction and hunger. According to one variant, the nurse embodies a rhythmical spacing: "La vieille qu'elle bannit est toute l'intervalle de vie vieillesse etc." (N. 124). The sense of "écart" or distance between points evoked by "intervalle" is reinforced by the proliferation of "V's" in the verse as well as the concave shape suggested by "valle." The first instance of disjunction is, in this sense, intimately linked to the maternal body. It becomes increasingly apparent that the nurse's function is entirely allegorical. Within the contours of her haunting, decrepit figure, the rhythms of life and death ("la vieillesse"), presence and absence, past and future intersect and overlap. As the voice of prophecy in the text, the nurse is a linguistic marker which signifies death-in-life by deferring it: "Du moins ce ponctuel décor assigne-t-il/Comme emblème sur une authentique nourrice/Affres que jusqu'à leur lividité hérissée" (N. 60). Her breasts figure only as a "trace" of an even more archaic body which appears anonymous and fragmented: "la gorge
ancienne," "des seins abolis," and "d'un lait . . . maléfique." Functioning as part of Hérodiade's oneric landscape, the old sibyl is a product of condensation. Like one of Freud's composite dream-figures, she is a haphazard collection of contradictory traits and gestures, a "vieille ombre" (N. 199), an "entremetteuse" (N. 128) who simultaneously reveals and masks the uncanny presence of an unidentified Other. 29

It remains for us to demonstrate that the published version of the "Scène" is itself a transposition or disguised repetition of the oral identifications and womb fantasies of the variants. The oral instinct, although repressed, continues to haunt the metaphorical and metonymical structures of the text. This is in keeping with Freud's observation that the repression of the "original object of a wishful impulse" is "frequently represented by an endless series of substitutive objects none of which however, brings full satisfaction" (S.E. XI, 189). The inward-outward pulsations of Hérodiade's desire, as it passes from one object to the next, is evidence of its continued clandestine circulation. We have observed this rhythmic movement in her ambivalent behavior towards the old nurse. But the latter is only one link in the chain of surrogate objects. At each turn of the dialogue, there is a series of breaking-points during which Hérodiade lapses into self-indulgent reveries of varying intensity. The mirror scene, for example, is bracketed by a reference to the princess as "très rêveuse" and a cue
for her to wake-up and resume the dialogue as soon as her
dream becomes a nightmare (O.C. 1444). Each of these day-
dreams can be viewed as an imaginary representation of the
character's desire in search of a lost object. It is during
these periods of regressive introspection that Hérodiade's
vulnerability becomes most visible. Each time she is brought
back to the primitive stages of her psyche, that is, to the
"trou profond" of her mirror-identity.

I will examine in detail the first of these fantasies
which, occurring near the opening of the "Scène," is again
precipitated by the heroine's inexplicable attraction to-
wards her dubious past. Beginning with the image of a win-
ter sunrise and its outpouring of subdued colors ("Verse,
sur les lointains mourants, ses tristes fêtes"), this first
scene portrays Hérodiade as a prisoner, walking through the
perfumed desert of her "vieux lions"--"ces anciens rois."
The use of "lointains mourants" suggests that here, as in
the "Ouverture ancienne," Mallarmé has intentionally confused
dawn with dusk: "De crépuscule, non, mais de rouge lever"
(N. 152). Is the spectacle observed in the sky an "évanouis-
sement vespéral ou matinal--on ne saura jamais--" (N. 139)?
The overall effect of this sustained ambiguity is the total
suppression of temporality ("... l'on ne sait plus l'heure"
N. 152) and the crossing-over of all beginnings with ends.
As in several of Mallarmé's poems, the setting and rising of
the sun figures as a "mise-en-scène" for the psychological
and sexual dramas of the Self.30 In this first part of the
"Scène," the memory of this celestial "jaillissement," recalling the gushing of the nurse's evil milk "vers l'infini vorace," is perpetuated in the "languides debris" which make-up Hérodiade's reveries. A sudden switch from this legendary past to a more personal present generates a second tableau which continues to build on the first. Moving from an exterior setting to an interior decor, we find a sequence of incongruous images and actions: the plucking of flower petals, a pond with a spraying fount, lilies, lions, the folding back of a dress, Hérodiade's feet, and finally, a turbulent sea. The inundation of the sky, repeated in the "jet d'eau" of the fountain, is accompanied by a plummeting perspective ("le regard . . ./Descendre") which guides the observer's eye, linking the various segments of the dream.

The main difference between the exterior scene and the psychological landscape is one of emotional impact. The initial feeling of remorse at daybreak has, in the second tableau, become pleasure:

Je m'arrête rêvant aux exils, et j'effeuille
Comme près d'un bassin dont le jet d'eau m'accueille
(N. 64)

Although Hérodiade claims to have stopped dreaming about her walks in the desert, she is still busily engaged in the production of fantasies. This is indicated by the use of "Comme." Projected onto the surrounding world is the decor of her psyche---"les pâles lys qui sont en moi" (Ibid.). As in those segments of "Les Noces" already examined, Hérodiade's pleasure is associated with both a flowing liquid and a
rhythmic breaking as she drops the lily petals (now bits of herself) one by one into the pond. The erotic overtones of "effeuiller," suggesting a kind of metaphorical strip-tease, lead into a masochistic fantasy of defloration and rape which is reinforced by the verbs "m'a/cueillir" and "épris." This connotation is further developed in the "Finale," where the purity of the lily, dishonoured by the presence of "l'inexplicable sang," is "A jamais renversé de l'une ou l'autre jambe" (N. 78). In his early poem "Les Fleurs," Mallarmé also compares Hérodiade's body to the parts of a flower:

Et, pareille à la chair de la femme, la rose
Cruelle, Hérodiade en fleur du jardin clair,
Celle qu'un sang farouche et radieux arrose!
(O.C. 34)

The transformation of an active subject into a passive object of desire continues in the third stage of the fantasy. Here, the lions reappear to perform the ludic gesture of spreading back the folds of Hérodiade's dress. The lions' violation is ocular: "Et regardent mes pieds. . . ." Yet upon closer examination, it is not at all certain that it is the lions who part the dress:

Les lions, de ma robe, écartent l'indolence
Et regardent mes pieds qui calmeraient la mer.
Calme, toi, les frissons de ta sénile chair.
(N. 64)

The interpolation of "de ma robe" indicates that the lions could very well be printed on the fabric of the dress. This idea is supported by a later statement in the "Scène" in which the "frisson blanc" of Hérodiade's nudity is said to emerge from the eroticized "calices" of her dress. Equally
uncertain is the identity of the wearer of the dress. In the "Ouverture," the nurse's dress is also inscribed with the figural motifs of a tapestry: ", . . . avec un passé de ramage/Sur ma (a variant shows "ta") robe blanchie en l'ivoire fermé" (N. 146). The association "indolence-robe" is further strengthened by a manuscript note in which the dress clearly functions as a metonym for the breast: "robe couler/seins/de moi-même/reculer/jamais elle" (N. 106). Is it then Hérodiade's own body movements or those of another mysterious, feminine presence which make the dress move?

This continual vacillation between self and other, garment and body, make it impossible to determine the active subject from the passive object. And just as Hérodiade is both imprisoned and "toute-puissante," her lions are simultaneously viewed as protectors ("Mais qui me toucherait, des lions respectée" N. 68) and plunderers.

What the surface structure of the fantasy attempts to mask is another more serious transgression. It is not the forbidden perception of Hérodiade's feet which offends, but the very brief allusion to a wished-for (the conditional tense) encounter between these feet and the maternal figure of the restless sea. Note the rimes and homonyms of "calmerait/mer/mère/chair/chère." Like the dress, Hérodiade's "roses talons" are obliquely related to the maternal body, and more specifically, to the rhythmic alternation of the maternal breast. The association is repeated in a variant
for the "Finale," in which a phantasmic dance of feet and breasts is performed in a "lieu nul":

\[
\begin{align*}
et & \text{ cela fait -- sur} \\
\text{un pied l'autre,} \\
\text{eux-mêmes} \\
\text{sur les pieds} \\
\text{seins} \\
\text{une sorte de danse} \\
\text{effrayante esquisse} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(N. 114)

Symbolically re-enacted by this dance are the oscillating rhythms of the oral cycle, a configuration which resurfaces over and over throughout "Les Noces." This displacement towards the feet (a highly eroticized image for Mallarmé\(^{31}\)) does not obscure the desire, which is one of contact. Rather than sever her relationship with this phantom mother, Hérodiade becomes herself the object of maternal desire. For it is only by appeasing this primeval Sea-Mother that Hérodiade can fuse back into the peaceful waters of the maternal womb.\(^{32}\) A parallel passage near the "Scène's" conclusion supports this reading:

\[
\begin{align*}
clos & \text{ les volets, l'azur} \\
\text{Séraphique sourit dans les vitres profondes} \\
\text{Et je déteste, moi, le bel azur . . .} \\
\text{Des ondes} \\
\text{Se bercent et, là-bas, sais-tu pas un pays} \\
\text{Ou le sinistre ciel ait les regards hais} \\
\text{De Vénus qui le soir, brûle dans le feuillage;} \\
\text{J'y partirais!} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(N. 70)

Here, the maternal image is broken into two sets of images which intertwine. By means of a \textit{rejet}, the ironic and dispassionate gaze of the blue sky is perpetuated in the rocking motions of the waves: "le bel azur/Des ondes." Again, cradling movements suggest the already-distant world of
prenatal bliss. Like the "miroir en son calme dormant" (N. 69), the locus of Hérodiaade's omnipotence, this country where Vénus, by implication, "ne brûle pas" is a fictional paradise motivated and shaped by the regressive desires of primary narcissism. Since this desire for complete reintegration with a non-desiring maternal body is tantamount to death (a variant reads "Allons Au doux tombeau des songes mes talons" N. 163), it can never be completely fulfilled.

Returning now to the text of the initial fantasy, we find that with this passing reference to the sea everything comes to a grinding halt. Turning abruptly to her nurse, Hérodiaade commands:

Viens et ma chevelure imitant les manières
Trop farouches qui font votre peur des crinières,
Aide-moi, puisqu'ainsi tu n'oses plus me voir,
A me peigner nonchalamment dans un miroir.
(N. 64)

By means of metonymy (the lion's mane is now Hérodiaade's disheveled hair) and the defensive mechanism of projection (note the double displacement between "tu" and "vous" encompassing "votre peur des crinières"), Hérodiaade achieves once more distance and a semblance of autonomy. Restructured within the confines of the mirror ("dans un miroir"), where even physical contact is permitted, the heroine's identity is a false construct, an image of specular unity offering only a temporary stability. For the "jet d'eau" of Hérodiaade's fountain (the figuration of maternal desire), frozen and framed by her looking-glass, is to melt and erupt
shortly hereafter: "des soirs dans ta sévère fontaine/J'ai
de mon rêve épars connu la nudité" (N. 65).

There are numerous ways in which the associative strands of this first fantasy connect with other sections of the "Scène" and with "Les Noces" in general. By confronting it with other textual fragments, it can be noted that proximity to the mother and to all that she represents (memories of physical contact and nourishment as well as separation and loss) motivates the selection of imagery. Hérodiate's metaphors continue to build on and elaborate a primal fantasy of unmediated communion with a maternal deity. What this interminable layering of metaphors demonstrates is a work of transformation and textual process, an infinite regression towards other texts. Identity is constructed through the activity of interpretation. Not only does Hérodiate's desire proceed from the Other, it is always presented in the form of a hermetic text to be deciphered. This cryptic "discours de l'Autre"\textsuperscript{33} is the language of prophecy which captivates and beckons her. The desire conveyed by these phantom texts is always experienced as something external, an alien force threatening inundation and total engulfment. This "temps prophétique qui pleure sur l'enfant" (N. 152) is the anonymous, straying voice of the nurse's incantation. It is the magnetic force exerted by a "matin oublié des prophètes" which, like the spilling of celestial milk, streaks the sky with its "tristes fêtes." Synonymous with an unarrestable liquidity (milk, water, blood, tears, and melting wax) which
builds, overflows, and then rebuilds, desire is a rudimentary form of psychical writing, a series of "jailissements" and "retours." Modeled after the rhythmical losing and regaining of the maternal breast, this primitive textualization of desire is preserved and reactivated by the libidinous properties of language which traverse the "Scène." As Mallarmé suggests in his _Tombeau pour Anatole_, the writing of poetry itself is an imperfect repetition of a maternal rhythm:

mère identité
de vie mort
père reprend
rhythme pris ici
du bercement de
mère
suspens -- vie
mort --
poesie -- pensée

In the "Scène," desire is encoded by the language of flowers and precious stones which Hérodiade attempts to freeze into crystallized objects or fetishes—"joyaux de mur natal/Armes, vases depuis ma solitaire enfance" (N. 65). And it is in relation to this prefabricated world of fragmented objects and metallic forms that she synthesizes her identity:

Oui, c'est pour moi, pour moi, que je fleuris, déserte!
Vous le savez, jardins d'améthyste, enfouis
Sans fin dans de savants abîmes éblouis,
Ors ignorés, gardant votre antique lumière
Sous le sombre sommeil d'une terre première,
Vous, pierres ou mes yeux comme de purs bijoux
Empruntent leur clarté melodieuse, et vous,
Métaux qui donnez à ma jeune chevelure
Une splendeur fatale et sa massive allure!
(N. 68-69)
Like the lily petals, these jewels constitute the shimmering decor of Hérodiade's psyche. But this interior space is decidedly derivative. Note the metaphorical-metonymical movement of the passage ("comme," "Empruntent," "donnez") as well as the maternal presence suggested by "savants abîmes," "sombre sommeil," and "terre premièrem." Like the "froides perreries" which thaw and then separate from the block of Hérodiade's memories, each of these precious objects refers in miniature to any other fragment of the work. Although imprisoned under glass, the forces of Eros ("Joyau intacte sous le désastre") remain virtual and "pret à se ressaisir" (O.C. 302) at any moment.

Thus Hérodiade, we discover, is hardly as "virginale, pure et indépendante"\textsuperscript{35} as most critics would have it. Her narcissism is not a static image of ideal beauty but an ongoing process of dissimulation. Her autoerotic behavior masks a more primary desire to fuse with an idealized Other. This is the fantasy of non-being which simultaneously structures and threatens her entire world. In the variants for the "Prélude," this imaginary merging is again articulated at the level of oral incorporation:

\begin{center}
\textit{incestueux}\\
Le mets \textit{delicieux} qu'on goute \textit{l'un à l'autre} \textit{s\textsuperscript{upérieur} el'} \textit{à soi-même}\\
\textsuperscript{(N. 173)}
\end{center}

Even the name "Hérodiade," as I will demonstrate in a later chapter, is a microcosm which reiterates the drama of the entire work. It too is motivated by the oral instinct:
"... si mon héroïne s'était appelée Salome, j'eusse inventé ce mot sombre et rouge comme une grenade ouverte" [C. I, 157]. (Mallarmé's italics.)

The drama of narcissism is then in every respect a drama of language, a dialogue between the Self and its mirror-image, the child and its creator, the fragment and the work. Structured in and around a vast network of other mysterious texts (dreams, prophecies etc.), this "Fragment d'une ancienne étude scénique" mirrors the central problematic of narcissism as discussed by Freud—the relationship between identity and difference. Just as the narcissistic ego is already constituted by a pre-existing frame of representation (the alienating ego-ideal), so is the writing of the "Scène" imbedded in a larger, contextual space (drafts, variants, other segments of the work) which consistently intrudes upon and disrupts its dialogic, linear structure. Like the Self in search of the lost object which will complete it, this text endlessly pursues the missing referent which will insure its narcissistic integrity. This perhaps is the narcissistic thrust of Mallarmé's "Livre." In attempting to approach a point of absolute purity, Mallarmé's writing scorns reference and turns inward. This quest is however, automatically undercut by the very aesthetic which generates "Les Noces": "Peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit." The rupture of the narcissistic ego becomes concomitant with the rupture of the Word: "le vers ne doit donc pas, là se composer de mots mais d'intentions, et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant
la sensation" (Ibid.). For Mallarmé, this laying bare of the instinctual gives to literature an inherent theatricality:

Voilà une théorie tragique actuelle ou, pour mieux dire, la dernière: le drame, latent, ne se manifeste que par une déchirure affirmant l'irréductibilité de nos instincts. (O.C. 321)
NOTES


8. Huot, p. 67: "... la tension qui caractérise la "Scène," entre la tentation du devoilement et la tentation du narcissisme, était destinée dès 1866 à se résoudre en une synthèse." And Davies, Le Rêve, p. 295: "... il nous est relativement facile de reconnaître ... dans l'union des deux [Hérodiade and the severed head] un symbole de la réalisation de cette perfection dans le poème ou Œuvre."

9. These early stage directions were suppressed after the first draft of the "Scène." They are reproduced in the Pléaïade notes for Mallarmé's Œuvres complètes, p. 1444.
10. The notion of "mystère" which appears frequently in the late years is used to refer to those central enigmas in life which are virtually unrepresentable--procreation, death and, in Hérodiade's case, the bridal rites. See the manuscript notes for Le "Livre" de Mallarmé, edited by Jacques Scherer, Paris: Gallimard, 1977.

11. For Jacques Derrida, La Dissémination, Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1972, this insertion of the Book-Stage into the mind constitutes Mallarmé's most radical gesture in literature: "L'opération mimée [writing] ne résume pas de dehors dans le dedans, elle n'installe pas la scène dans la clôture d'un réduit mental, elle ne réduit pas l'espace à l'imaginaire. Insérant au contraire l'espacement dans l'intériorité, elle ne laisse plus celle-ci se refermer sur elle-même, s'identifier à elle-même. (. . .) Cette impossibilité de se fermer sur soi, cette déhiscence du livre mallarméen, comme théâtre intérieur, c'est la pratique et non la réduction de l'espacement." p. 264.

12. In its entirety, the passage on the impersonality of the dancer reads as follows: "À savoir que la danseuse n'est pas une femme qui danse, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu'elle n'est pas une femme, mais une métaphore resumant 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." (O.C. 304).


17. According to H.G. Zagona, The Legend of Salome and the Principle of 'Art for Art's Sake,' (Gêneve: Droz, 1960), Hérodiade incarnates Mallarmé's "aristocratic tendencies" in art. p. 48. Edna Epstein ("Hérodiade: La Dialectique de
l'identité et de la création poétique," Revue des sciences humaines, XXXV, no. 140, 1970), who also views Hérodiade as "ce double du poète," goes even further: "Dans la scène dialoguée, Hérodiade, ... apparaît comme le type même d'une jeune fille hystérique et névrosée, telle que la fin du XIX siècle la connaissait, ou disons plutôt, telle qu'on la concevait à cette époque et, par la même, telle qu'on croit en réalité." p. 587.

18 S.E. XVIII, 55-56: "The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the 'Nirvana principle,' to borrow a term from Barbara Low)--a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle; and our recognition of that fact is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of the death instincts." See also S.E. XXIII, p. 198.


21 Ibid., p. 188.

22 In this connection, Freud writes in his essay "On Narcissism," S.E. XIV, 90 that "a person may love . . . according to the anaclitic (attachment) type: a) the woman who feeds him, b) the man who protects him, and the succession of substitutes who take their place."

23 Laplanche, p. 86.


25 In Mallarmé's poem "Le Vierge, le vivace, et le bel aujourd'hui," (O.C. p. 67-68), the potentiality of the creative impulse is depicted in a similar manner: "Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre/Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui!"

27 This insight is offered by Cohn in l'Oeuvre de Mallarmé, p. 169. When placed at either the beginning or end of a verse, or used as a noun, "jadis" suggests a "paradis perdu." For this usage, see the poems "Les Fenêtres" and "Les Fleurs" (O.C. 32-3). In the notes for the "Ouverture ancienne," Mallarmé again associates the term "jadis" with innocence: "A le pâle (variant reads "neigeux") jadis pour ancienne teinte," N. 145.

28 See the poems "Don du poème" and "Les Fenêtres," in O.C., 40, 32.

29 In dreams, Freud discovered that one of the techniques of condensation was the formation of composite figures or images which combined the attributes of two or more persons. A dream figure might represent "an element common to two persons," "a displaced common element," or "a merely wishful common element." S.E. IV, pp. 293-95.


32 In "Les Formations de l'inconscient," (Seminars, 1956-7), Bulletin de Psychologie, 1956-7, Jacques Lacan describes the period of primary narcissism as one of imaginary possession of the mother. By identifying himself with the mother's object of desire, the child becomes the missing maternal phallus.
The phrase refers to Lacan's definition of the Unconscious as the discourse of the Other. See Ecrits, pp. 27-28 and 814.


Davies, Le Rêve, p. 295.
CHAPTER IV

FROM THE 'OUVERTURE ANCIENNE' TO THE 'PRELUDE':

REPETITION AND THE UNCANNY

"Je crois décidément à quelque chose d'abscons,
signifiant fermé et caché qui
habite le commun."

Mallarmé

Approximately one year after composing the "Scène," and barely three months after switching genres, Mallarmé set to work on the celebrated "Ouverture ancienne." The difficulties posed by this new undertaking are described at length in letters to Cazalis and Aubanel:

December 1865:
. . . j'ai souffert toute la semaine d'une atroce
nevralgie . . . aux minutes de répit, je me jetais en
maniaque désespéré sur une insaisissable ouverture de
mon poème qui chante en moi, que je ne puis noter.
(C. I, 195)

January 1866:
Il m'est si difficile de m'isoler assez de la vie pour
sentir, sans effort, les impressions extra-terrestres,
et . . . harmonieuses que je veux donner, que je m'étudie
jusqu'à une prudence qui ressemble à de la manie.
(C. I, 195)

Despite the steady deterioration of his psychological state, leading him toward his encounter with the "Néant," Mallarmé completes a first draft of his poem in the spring of 1866.
A new sense of pride and confidence towards his work becomes evident by March. Writing to Cazalis, he draws the following comparison between the "Scène" and the new "Ouverture musicale": "... la scène dramatique ... n'est auprès de ces vers que ce qu'est une vulgaire image d'Épinal comparée à une toile de Léonard Da Vinci (C. I, 207). This initial enthusiasm does eventually go sour. Ironically, it is the "Scene," rather than the "Ouverture," which will survive the many years of revision and editorial pruning. Never once considered for publication, the "Ouverture" would remain in manuscript form. That the poet intended its eventual reworking is evident from the cutting-up of the manuscript into displaceable sections. On the last page, a blank space followed by the word "Et ... " indicates that the piece was simply left unfinished.1

In his 1896 "Bibliographie" for "Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère," Mallarmé finally admits to a major revision:

Un fragment seul de ce poème avait été publié de--à--
Il était précédé d'une ouverture que je replace par une autre, en le même sens . . . (N. 87)

The poet's definitive discarding of the "Ouverture" in favor of a new introduction called the "Prélude" has puzzled and even displeased certain of his critics who judge the former superior.2 The two works are often read separately. In both content and form, the "Ouverture ancienne" is, of course, a much more accessible work than the cryptic "Prélude." Structured around a series of symmetrical divisions, rhythmic constructs (homophony, assonance, alliteration), and
verbal repetitions, it is easy to understand why Mallarmé subtitled it "Incantation." Narrated by the old nurse/sibyl, the poem resembles the exposition of a classical tragedy. Descriptions of Hérodiade (her morning walks and childhood fears) as well as references to a father/king off fighting in some distant land create a narrative frame which is then reinforced by smatterings of chronology. Relying on such traditional symbols as the swan and the rose, the nurse's oracles are frequently couched in a relatively straightforward language: "... car tout est présage et mauvais rêve!" (N. 151).

The difference in style between the "Ouverture" and the "Prélude" is radical. Excessively fragmented, Mallarmé has purged the latter of all anecdotal elements. In this sense, it more closely approximates the ideas put forth in the late preface to "Les Noces": "-déplacement de la dance--ici--et pas anecdotique" (N. 94). In the "Prélude," mysterious objects have replaced characters and there is an insistence on things half-hidden. Wavering between an unknown past and an uncertain future, this text takes place "sous une apparence fausse de présent," creating a "milieu pur de fiction" (O.C. 310). Completely contrary to the laws of intelligibility, the "Prélude" takes the form of a question. Any notion of cause and effect is immediately subverted by the chain of incomplete conjectures which shape the work. Its very first word "Si . . . .," reminiscent of the paradoxical
"COMME SI" of "Un Coup de Dés," promotes a disquieting circularity which parallels Mallarmé's mature formulation of dramatic action:

... un moyen authentique de théâtre, ... lequel consiste à feindre son avis prouvé par un fait demeuré hypothétique, ... pour suggérer cependant à l'esprit des conclusions qui seraient exactes en supposant que le fait sur quoi tout repose fût vrai. Quoi de plus conforme à la loi de Fiction. (O.C. 341)

The thirty years which separate the "Ouverture ancienne" from the "Prélude" cannot then be dismissed. In the interim, Mallarmé's poetics had evolved considerably. The experimentation with character in "Igitur," the exploitation of the nonverbal resources of language in "Un Coup de Dés," and the modernist implications of the essays on literature and the arts ("Crise de vers," "Le Mystère dans les lettres") must all have influenced the writing of the "Prélude."

But if indeed the differences between the "Ouverture" and the "Prélude" are so great, then why did Mallarmé insist that he wrote the works "dans le même sens," striving to treat a mysterious motif discovered early on "dans le même esprit" (N. 87)? Fragments for the preface to "Les Noces" suggest that the poet was quite aware of the risks involved in this tardy revision: "... dangereux de compléter mûr un poème de jeunesse ..." (N. 95-6). In juxtaposing the two texts, we do find certain obvious continuities. Images like the ruffling of lace, the twisted candelabra and the crimson dawn, as well as words like "orfèvrerie," crop up in both contexts. Still, this does not account for Mallarmé's
comments. It is only by considering these texts in the broadest of terms that we are able to perceive a common function. Both are designed to evoke a first encounter with the supernatural through the manipulation of linguistic effects. The previously-quoted passages of the Correspondance specify that the writing of the "Ouverture" involved the interpretation of "impressions extra-terrestres," the painstaking decrypting of an "insaisissable ouverture . . . qui chante . . ." (C. I, 179-80). Similarly, in composing his "Prélude," Mallarmé voices his intention to "... faire miroiter ce qui probablement hanta . . ." (N. 51).

Although each work is haunted by sinister shadows, strange omens and echoing prophecies, the approach to "le fantastique" is not at all the same. Due to its rigorous architecture, the "Ouverture ancienne" appears heavily censored. The conscious repetition of entire word-clusters as well as the exploitation of rigid internal rhyme schemes create a sense of predictability. Perhaps the poet realized that the incantatory effects of his "Ouverture" bordered on the monotonous, for after its completion, his emphasis on the musical resonance of language begins to fade. Translating Poe in the early seventies, Mallarmé recognizes an incompatibility between this kind of obsessive repetition and the French language:

Le poète [Poe], dans le groupe de morceaux qui compose ce poème célèbre ("The Bells"), a usé librement d'un procédé que récuse la poésie française, c'est la répétition consécutive d'un ou de plusieurs mots dans un ou
plusieurs vers. La traduction devait reproduire cette intention, voisine d'une curieuse manie, quand, toutefois, il ne resultait rien de contraire à notre euphonie . . .

By 1885, he chides René Ghil for being a "compositeur" rather than an "écrivain," while joking about his own experience: "... je sais bien votre désir exquis, ayant passé par là, pour en revenir comme vous le ferez peut-être de vous-même!" (C. II, 286). As Jacques Scherer astutely points out, Mallarmé would abandon his incantatory style of the 1860's in favor of a syntactical complexity in the 1870's. The effects of this transition are certainly visible in the "Prélude," where repetition is centered in poetic analogy and the hidden stymological resonances between words.

Whereas the "Ouverture" simulates the harmonious structuring of a symphony, the "Prélude" problematizes the notion of structure itself. Even the title "Prélude," generating both ludere ("jouer") and eludere ("tromper"), suggests that the reader is here given over to the elusive play of an unpredictable text. By a proliferation of syntactical ambiguities, contradictory images and unsettling gaps, the "Prélude," rather than focusing on the content of a prophecy, dramatizes its effects. By reading the "Prélude" alongside of its variants, we shall discover that it resembles a palimpsest or layered-dream text which bears the imprint of the primary-process--condensation, displacement and overdetermination. The elliptical style of this work signals Mallarmé's progressive cultivation of "Le Mystère" in the 1870's. At this
time, the valorization of repression as a creation mechanism becomes a dominant theme in the Correspondance. (See our second chapter):

Je n'ai créé mon oeuvre que par élimination, et toute vérité acquise ne naissait que de la perte d'une impression qui, ayant étincelée, s'était consumée et me permettait, grâce à ses ténèbres dégagées d'avancer profondément dans la sensation des Ténèbres absolues. (C. I, 245-46).

By eliminating the narrative coherence of the work, the poet, who now considers himself a "critique" or interpreter of texts, seeks to restore a latent potentiality for infinite textualization. This conscious reactivation of a textual unconscious is a result of Mallarmé's evolving belief in the inherent magical properties of language. In "Le Mystère dans les lettres," he stresses this conviction:

... je crois décidément à quelque chose d'abscons, signifiant fermé et caché, qui habite, le commun; car, sitôt cette masse jetée vers quelque trace ... ouragan jaloux d'attribuer les ténèbres à quoique ce soit, profusement, flagrément. (O.C. 38)

The poetic text is then a heterogeneous product of the oscillating play between that which is repressed and preserved in the corporal structures of language and that which inevitably returns to haunt the surface of the page—"signifiant fermé et caché, qui habite le commun." In what follows, I will demonstrate that in the late fragments for the "Prélude," this ongoing struggle between black and white, light and shadow, is the practice of writing itself, which obscures as it illuminates: "Tu remarquas, on n'écris pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur, l'alphabet des astres, ... l'homme poursuit noir sur blanc" (O.C. 370).
A writer's treatment of the supernatural is undoubtedly bound up with his particular view of the Unconscious and the means by which it resurfaces and shapes a literary text. In order to appreciate Mallarmé's complete reversal concerning the "Ouverture ancienne" as well as the belated revisions of its replacement, the "Prélude," it is imperative to first explore the poet's vision of what Freud labeled as "the return of the repressed." Both Mallarmé and Freud wrote specifically on the subject of the Uncanny. Whereas Freud's essay "The Uncanny" (1919) involves the laying of a foundation for a theory, Mallarmé's prose poem "Le Démon de l'analogie" (1862) narrates the story of an unsettling encounter with the supernatural. We know that Freud illustrated many of his psychological insights with examples taken from literature. Similarly, Mallarmé's studies of linguistics led him to consider literature as the "Science du langage" (O.C. 849). Thus, it is not surprising that Freud should devote a good part of his analysis of the Uncanny to a reading of Hoffmann's "The Sand-Man" and that Mallarmé's narrator should turn out to be a poet-linguist desperately seeking a rational explanation for the remnants of a "phrase absurde" which continues to haunt him. The parallelism of these works is extraordinary. Not only do both writers share the same experience with the Uncanny, but both fail in the end to establish its precise cause.

When the narrator of "Le Démon" leaves his apartment one day, he experiences the sensation of a wing brushing
lightly over the strings of a musical instrument. This feeling is quickly transmuted into the sound of a voice pronouncing the words "La Pénultième est morte" in a falling intonation so that:

finit le vers et

La Pénultième

Est Morte

se détacha de la suspension fatidique plus inutilement en le vide de signification . . . (O.C. 272)

Starting down the street, the poet suddenly identifies the sound "nul" of "Pénultième" with the stretched string of the instrument. Now the eerie phrase comes back again, this time "virtuelle" and completely autonomous: "elle s'articula seule, vivant de sa personnalité." From this point on, the narrator will use all of the resources of his "noble faculté poétique" to explicate and hopefully exorcise the enigmatic verse. First he reads it aloud. Then, by reproducing the same break after "Pénultième," he tries to adapt it to his own voice. Experiencing a "pénible jouissance," he finally attempts to compose himself by recalling the dictionary sense of "Pénultième." Despite these manoeuvres the phrase continues to obsess and distress. Taking a passive stance, he decides to let the words wander by themselves over his lips. Suddenly, on seeing the reflection of his hand caressing something in a vertical motion, he senses that his voice has coincided with "la première, qui indubitablement avait été l'unique." This victorious moment is however, rapidly overturned when he discovers himself standing in
front of a lutemaker's boutique gazing at a collection of old instruments, yellowed palms, and wings half-buried in shadows. Unable to overcome his anguish, he runs away "condamné à porter probablement le deuil de l'inexplicable Pénultième" (Ibid., 273).

Like Mallarmé's narrator, Freud, in the beginning of "The Uncanny," sets out to track down a demon. Comparing the term heimlich ("familiar" and "homely") with its opposite unheimlich ("strange" and "hidden"), he discovers that the former can also signify "Concealed" or "secret." This identical shade of meaning, which subverts the polarity and establishes rhetorical ambivalence, prompts Freud to define the Uncanny as "that classe of the terrifying which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (S.E. XVII, 22). Paraphrasing Schelling's definition of the Uncanny as "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" (Ibid, 241), Freud next identifies the "Un" of "Unheimlich" as "the token of repression (Ibid. 245). When this once very familiar repressed material (proceeding from either "infantile complexes" or "animistic beliefs" which have been "surmounted" (Ibid. 248-49) returns in distorted form, it inevitably produces a feeling of overwhelming anxiety.

To illustrate this eerie sense of repetition, Freud narrates a short anecdote. Once, while in Italy, he was lost in the streets of a small town in the provinces. Although he wanted to avoid a particular district inhabited by
prostitutes, he found himself returning again and again "by devious paths" to the same place. This sort of involuntary repetition recalls the helpless poet of "Le Démon" wandering "dans la rue des antiquités instinctivement suivie" (O.C. 273). (My emphasis.) If repetition has a demonic character, it is because the repressed always returns in the estranged form of an Other. And what first might appear as chance is transformed through repetition into a confrontation with destiny. Freud's description of an uncontrollable, uncanny sense of repetition certainly fits the disruptive, repetitive movement of the "inexplicable Pénultième." By identifying the demon as analogy, Mallarmé emphasizes the movement of the text rather than its content. The original title was "Pénultième." Analogy, of course, is a poetic principle which connects its terms by contiguity or metonymic displacement. Each repetition of the "Pénultième" shares only an oblique connection with the preceding instance. This continual displacement of the signifier creates a threatening mobility which cannot be checked or explained away by any singular reading of the poem.

When Freud undertakes a reading of Hoffman's "The Sand-Man," he focuses on the endless repetition of optical imagery: eyes, spectacles, telescopes, and the optician Coppola whose name comes from "coppo" or "eye-socket." Since there is a "substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ" (S.E. XVII, 231), this emphasis on sight is, for Freud, evidence of a deep-seated fear of castration and death.
Juxtaposing again Mallarmé's prose poem with Freud's interpretation of "The Sand-Man," one finds the same movement of substitution and indefinite expansion at work. In the former, the images of "aile," "voix," "palme," "plume" and "rameau," (some of which are repeated more than once) constitute a chain which evokes the creative process. From one end to the other, this chain is consistently punctuated by a series of ruptures. Analogous to both the breaking of the instrument's string and the splitting of the mysterious verse into two parts is the fragmentation of the poet's persona. The triumphal seizure of the voice ("j'avais . . . la voix même") is achieved only through the narrator's depersonalization and absorption into the Other.11 Significantly, Mallarmé's text does not end here. In the last paragraph, the narrator's mastery is again completely undermined: "Mais où s'installe l'irréusable intervention du surnaturel, et le commencement de l'angoisse sous laquelle agonise mon esprit naguère seigneur?" (O.C. 273). Since we never learn what the enigmatic "Pénultième" signifies, the demon remains at large.

Although Freud does recognize the dynamic principle at work in Hoffmann's text, his interpretation attempts to expel the demon through recourse to an external referent. As Samuel Weber points out, Freud's reading of Hoffmann treats the concept of castration as "possessing a fixed identity, as a substantial, visible theme." In doing so, he undermines the dynamic of castration--the contagious interminable
movement of the substitute. Like castration, the "Unheimliche," writes Weber, "is less involved with a what then a how, with the mechanism of repetition, recurrence and return." It is interesting that during his discussion of uncontrollable repetition, Freud refers to the notion of a "repetition-compulsion." Written at the same time as "The Uncanny," his "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), works from the hypothesis that organic life strives compulsively towards "an earlier state of things" and that "the goal of all life is death" (S.E. XVIII, 36-38). Associated with the "death instinct," this form of involuntary repetition may well be, according to Freud, "more primitive," and "more instinctual" than the "pleasure principle which it overrides" (Ibid. 23). But in many situations, Freud describes how this destructive instinct towards inertia may also be turned around. In this connection, he discusses the repetition of traumatic dreams in terms of symbolization and mastery. The play of children, for example, is regarded as a secondary formation which consists in the active re-creation of absence as symbol and the movement from passivity and helplessness to mastery. Freud interprets his grandson's game of throwing away a spool of thread and then drawing it back, while uttering the alternating sounds "fort" and "da" ("gone/here") as a successful dramatization of his mother's departure and return. This sort of symbolic mastery is also acknowledged in the literary domain. In "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913), he analyzes how characters in myth and literature
appear to choose freely what, in reality, they are obliged to confront: "Choice stands in the place of necessity, of destiny. In this way man overcomes death, which he has recognized intellectually" (S.E. XII, 299).

Whereas Mallarmé's text emphasizes the daemonic, instinctual character of repetition, Freud's interpretation of castration in the "Sand-Man' ultimately privileges repetition as a form of mastery. By identifying castration the concept as the final referent and cause, Freud reduces the text to an unequivocal meaning. The "Unheimlich" is cornered and exorcized: "For the conclusion of the story makes it quite clear that Coppola the optician really is the lawyer, Coppélius, and also, therefore, the Sand-Man" (S.E. XVIII, 230). Although this reductionism can, in part, be attributed to the scientific purpose which guides the essay, it cannot be reconciled with Freud's continuous references to literature as the "more fertile province of the Uncanny" (Ibid. 249): "Fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny feelings than are possible in real life" (Ibid. 251). For Freud, one of the most effective means of producing uncanny effects in fiction is the writer's intentional confusion of the supernatural with the real:

It is true that the writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking us into the real world or into a purely fantastic one of his own creation . . . (Ibid. 230)
In the years following the writing of the "Ouverture," Mallarmé begins to explore precisely this kind of covert manipulation in the production of the Uncanny. His search for new forms and techniques is at the root of the late composition "La Fausse entrée des sorcières dans 'Macbeth'" (1897). Here, he proposes a rereading of Shakespeare's opening scene in light of Thomas De Quincey's essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in 'Macbeth'" (1823). The latter's persuasive explanation of the profound effect which the knocking at the gate after King Duncan's murder left on him as a child is Mallarmé's point of departure. For De Quincey, the drunken porter's knocking represents the re-awakening of the everyday world. Functioning as a link between the chaotic world of murderous fantasies and the more rational, ordered world of consciousness, this very commonplace gesture rescues the spectator from a dreamlike stupor. When the murder scene fades "... le pouls de la vie commence à battre encore: et le rétablissement des faits communs au monde dans lequel nous vivions, soudain nous rend sensibles profondément à la terrible parenthèse qui les avait suspendus" (O.C. 348).

But as Mallarmé insists, this is not the only place in "Macbeth" where Shakespeare has skillfully and deliberately obscured the distinction between real and imaginary states. The first appearance of the sorceresses, who seem to emerge out of a dreamlike haze, partakes of the same type of ambiguity. That Mallarmé is primarily interested in the
playwright's technique is evident from his interrogations "Introduire le funeste Choeur, par quel moyen?" and "Les présenter, insiste-je, comment?" (O.C. 349). Rather than simply representing "l'irruption du fantastique" as part of the play, he notes that Shakespeare breaks with tradition and tricks his audience into believing that they have indiscretely stumbled upon the witches' secret ritual already in progress. It is as if "le rideau simplement s'est levé, une minute, trop tôt, trahissant des menées fatidiques" (O.C. 351). The sorceresses, who neither enter nor exit (they fade into the air), are merely there "en tant que le destin qui préexiste" (O.C. 349). Mallarmé perceives this "Artifice extraordinaire" as Shakespeare's device for putting the notion of chance and its counterpart fatality into play. When not directly involved in the action, these "Weird Sisters," as Shakespeare called them, hover in the background ready to re-emerge at any point: "Au seuil et qu'elles y règnent; même pas en prologue participant de la pièce: extra-scéniquement" (O.C. Ibid.).

Situated on the threshold between the exterior and the interior, the past and the future, the conscious and the unconscious, the witches evoke that sense of uncanny undecidability which, according to Freud, arises when "the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced" (S.E. XVII, 244). The multiple reverberations of this initial apparition continue to infect the rest of "Macbeth." From this point on, neither the characters nor the spectators can decide if their
perceptions are real or imaginary, the result of fate or mere chance. What Mallarmé's reading accentuates, then, is that the Uncanny is not a theme but a structural ambiguity. On a superficial level, one could compare these witches to the figure of the nurse/sibyl in the "Ouverture." The idea of an incantation is common to both. But again, what fascinates Mallarmé is Shakespeare's radical departure from the very concept of character: "... pas de sorcières relevant de la figuration ou des accessoires, mais dissipées si entrevues, authentiques donc, qui sait? réelles; ainsi qu'au travail étranger de latents pouvoirs ... ." (O.C. 350). (My emphasis.)

These last quotations suggest that the basis of comparison between "La Fausse entrée" and "Les Noces" is a profound reconsideration of technique. When Mallarmé returns to his masterpiece in his later years, he is faced with the problem of a new beginning: How to begin something which has already begun and the origin of which must remain mysterious? Secondly, how to portray the effects of something which is invisible, cut-off from consciousness, and yet has come to light? Or, as Mallarmé puts it, how to "faire miroiter ce qui probablement hanta ... ." (N. 51)? Since "La Fausse entrée" was written at approximately the same time as the "Prélude," it is highly conceivable that Mallarmé followed Shakespeare's example and completely revamped his beginning episode after the fact: "... on a conté ... qu'il décida, [Shakespeare]
après coup, la présence, initiale, des sorcières, . . .
c'est--très beau ainsi" (O.C. 350).

As noted earlier, this kind of perpetual equivocation through the intermittent lifting of repression is characteristic of the "Prélude." The purpose of its hypothetical framework is to explain the uncanny persistence of a golden platter which is supposedly to bear the severed head of the Baptist:

Alors, dis ô futur taciturne, pourquoi
Ici demeure-t-il et s'éternise coi
Selon peu de raison que le richissisme orbe
Opiniâtrement pour se parfaire absorbe
Jusqu'à l'horizon mort en un dernier éclat
Cette vacuité louche et muette d'un plat?
(N. 56)

As the passage indicates, it is not the survival of the plate itself which disturbs, but the memory of a sinister emptiness which its vestigial presence re-evokes. Note the contrast between the demonstrative "cette vacuité" and the indefinite "un plat." That which remains behind is precisely that which cannot be absorbed into any logical, meaningful formulation. Since the platter has been divested of its normal function, it will not, we are told, contain "Le délice attendu du nuptial repas" (Ibid.). Deprived of any specific frame of reference, the golden dish, like the daemonic "Pénultième," becomes pregnant with meaning: "Lourd métal usuel oû l'équivoque range/Avec anxiété . . ." (N. 55). As in Freud's text, the infiltration of the very familiar by the "Unheimlich" results in acute anxiety.
Early on, Mallarmé had attempted to create an atmosphere of obscurity and doubt in his "Ouverture." But here, it is the theme of repression rather than its functioning which is emphasized. Still languishing "dans les plis jaunes de la pensée" (N. 147), the voice of prophecy falters and fades away into the stagnant waters of what resembles an unconscious reservoir:

Et, force du silence et des noires ténèbres,
Tout rentre également en l'ancien passé,
Fatidique, vaincu, monotone, lassé*
Comme l'eau des bassins anciens se résigne.
(N. 148-49)

This failure of the voice ("nulle, sans acolyte") is linked to the suppression of textuality. At one point, the nurse pauses to mourn the absence of her mistress and cries:

Lamentable!

le lit aux pages de velin
Tel, inutile et si claustral, n'est pas le lin!
Qui des rêves par plis n'a plus le cher grimoire,
Ni le dais sepulcral à la déserte moire.
(N. 149)

Playing on the textual metaphors of writing and weaving ("velin," "lin" and "moire"), the sibyl intimates that without the restless stirrings of a dreamer, creating "rêves par plis," the bed ("le lit" evokes "lire") is useless. Like the motionless, glassy pond "Que ne visite plus la plume ni le cygne" (or pen and sign) (N. 144), the bed is stripped of "le cher grimoire" or "Magic Book."

It is instructive to analyze how, in the "Prélude," Mallarmé strives to attain that "travail étranger de

*A variant for "lassé" is "éffacé."
pouvoirs latents" (0.C. 350) that he so admired in "Macbeth."
Dividing the poem into two main sections, the first part
("Si . . ./Génuflexion comme à l'éblouissant" N. 55) can be
read in terms of its four different versions: a brief sketch
of 8 lines, two working drafts (with numerous variants and
corrections) of 30 and 35 lines, and a final draft of 29
lines. The differing lengths and characteristics of each
draft indicate that Mallarmé probably began with a single
idea or metaphor in mind, expanded it twice to include other
connecting motifs, and finally contracted the entire segment
into a more elliptic structure.¹⁵

Re-enacted in the shortest and no doubt earliest version
(N. 175-76) is a dynamic struggle between light and darkness,
vision and obscurity. Although the golden plate is missing,
the notion of inheritance is already central. Will the rem-
nants of "Notre ancestroriale et lourde orfèvrerie/Héritière
. . ." survive or fall back into irrevocable oblivion:
". . . choie dans l'évanouissement nocturne du dressoir?"
The repetition of "peut-être" as well as the abrupt and in-
definite ending "Comme . . ." renders the outcome of the
conflict most uncertain. Containing a perfect anagram of
"rêverie," the word "orfèvrerie" (an "assemblage of ornaments
or jewels") implies that the legacy in question is somehow
related to the mysterious realm of dreams and phantasms.¹⁶
Reminiscent of the "ors ignorés" and "froides piergeries"
which make up Hérodiade's memories in the "Scène," this
"orfèvrerie" is both indestructible ("Étalée à jamais") and in potentia—a "Joyau intact sous le désastre" (O.C. 302).

Significantly, the Unconscious is envisioned not in terms of a magnetic verticality and fateful circularity, as in the "Ouverture," but as a distant flickering or lingering half-light which perpetually animates the contorted ghostly decor of Hérodiade's bedchamber. Like Shakespeare's witches, who vanish if noticed, the Unconscious in the "Prélude" is only perceptible in terms of the uncanny effects it produces. Thus, it is equated not with the candelabra or object itself, but with its "magnificence à tarder" or after-glow. In order to illustrate the powerful and continuous grip of these unconscious phantasms on consciousness, Mallarmé interpolates a very graphic image:

En l'immobilité de vains bras hasardeux  
vastes crocs
Au loin sans empêcher peut-être par un d'eux  
brusquement
étrignant
En soupesant la gloire inutile meurtrière  
--en des griffes
Notre ancestoriale et lourde orfèvrerie . . .
(N. 175-76)

A comparable use of this imagery in two other works supports this reading: "Un rêve, m'étreint sous sa griffe" (O.C. 155) and "Affres du passé nécessaires/Agrippant comme avec des serres" (O.C. 73).

This constant interplay between light and darkness, presence and absence, signals the ongoing battle between the resurfacing of the repressed and the opposing forces of censorship. What we are in effect witnessing is the staging of
an unconscious phantasm and its simultaneous repression through the act of interpretation. At this early stage in the manuscript, in which images are juxtaposed rather than syntactically aligned, several suggestive analogies are spawned. It becomes impossible to determine whether the clutching arm, for example, is a figure for the persistent forces of the Unconscious erupting in the text or for the analytical powers of a conscious mind trying to decipher and thereby dominate the enigmas it is forced to confront. There is substantial evidence to support either viewpoint, for, aside from its physical connotation, the verb "étreindre" could also refer to the grasp of comprehension. This alternative meaning is repeated in its replacement "soupesant," signifying "peser" or "évaluer." Again, the figure of a hand judging something by its weight is implied. The same possibilities surround the term "évanouissement." Is it a fading of consciousness in favor of the Unconscious (i.e., the lifting of censorship as in dreams) or a blacking-out of the phantasm, a defensive tactic? The latter meaning anticipates a description of the nurse's reaction in another fragment when she finally realizes the import of her role: ". . . et la vieille reconnaissant prophète s'évanouit" (N. 80). Again, this ambiguity is perfectly articulated by the notation: "Nul ne saura jamais pas même elle évanouie/ mais e-t-elle entendu . . ." (N. 128)? Finally, one should bear in mind that Hérodiade is described as an "enfant attentive au mystère éclairé de son être" (N. 80), an "enfant
les yeux fixés en soi" (N. 127). Written in the form of a hypothesis, this entire first segment traces the thought processes of an inquiring mind.

In the second version for this segment of the "Prélude," (N. 171-74), Mallarmé brackets the imagery of his first draft with the hypothetical marks "Si . . . si" and expands his central dialectic to cosmic proportions. The "évanouissement nocturne" is now depicted in the form of a dying sunset:

Si . . .

\[
\begin{align*}
toute \\
Génuflexion comme à l'éblouissant \\
peut-être aux cieux \\
Nimbe vide là-bas peut-être arrondissant \\
louche \\
Dans le vide-- rigueur de l'heure \\
Parmi l'heure par une mort épars refroidie \\
Malgré l'attente d'une très vide \\
Son et vacant incendie
\end{align*}
\]

(N. 171)

As Robert Cohn points out most perceptibly in a recent article, this "horizon mort en un dernier éclat" (N. 170) mimes what Freud called the "primal scene." Defined as a retrospective phantasy based on a child's accidental perception of parental intercourse, the "primal scene," whether real or imagined, redramatizes the origin of the individual.

Comparing it to a "collective myth" which attempts to resolve the "major enigmas" encountered in childhood (procreation, the awakening of sexual desire, sexual differentiation), Laplanche and Pontalis discuss the "primal scene" as a setting for desire rather than its object. The subject is not absent from the scene but appears obliquely in "desubjectivized form." Along the same lines, Mallarmé, in "Les
Dieux antiques" (1880), insists that the common origin of all myths is "la double évolution solaire" (O.C. 1169), the peregrinations of the sun as it rises and sets. The following description of a sunset simultaneously evokes and masks a primal phantasy of sexual desire, orgasm and death:

Comme il (the sun) s'enfonce, les brumes ardentes l'étreignent et les vapeurs de pourpres se jettent par le ciel, ainsi que des ruisseaux de sang qui jaillissent du corps du mythe . . ." (O.C. 1216)

The reader is immediately reminded of the celestial combat which takes place in the opening lines of the "Prélude." Although I am citing the final draft, the principal images are used in both the second and third versions:

Si . . .

Génuflexion comme à l'éblouissant
Nimbe là-bas très glorieux arrondissant
En le manque du saint à la langue roidie
Son et vacant incendie
Aussi peut-être hors la fusion entre eux
Immobilisées par un choc malencontreux
Des divers monstres nuls dont l'abandon délabre
L'aiguière bossuée et le tors candélabre
A jamais sans léguer de souvenir au soir
Que cette pièce héréditaire de dressoir . . .

(N. 55)

That this "vacant incendie" is, in essence, a form of "combat amoureux," dissimulating and displacing the phantasized link between procreation, death and birth, is evidenced by several textual details. First of all, the "fusion entre eux" culminates in a "choc malencontreux," which, according to another variant, is analogous to "une mort éparsa" (N. 171). Retraced is the exact progression of a violent sexual act. Underscorign the notion of chance, the term "malencontreux" ("unlucky") generates the contrasting pairs
"mâle"/"con" and "crête"/"creux." The second pair emphasizes the convexity of the male element (reiterated by the multiple "i's" and morbid images of desiring rigidity--"roideur," "dressoir" and "refroidie") as opposed to the female element (contained in the somber feminine sounds of "ou," "on" and "en" as well as the numerous circular shapes of the passage: "Nimbe," "arrondissant" and "aiguière"). This continual crossing-over of opposites is inscribed in the letter "X" which, for Mallarmé, is analogous to a "nodal point" or "zero umbilicus." Inextricably fused in this double sign of emptiness and productivity are the forces of life and death: "Génuflexion," "glorieux," "eux," "malencontreux," and a bit further on "anxiété." The monsters' "abandon," suggesting a sexual abandon or release, is echoed by another more graphic image placed near the end of this first section: "Les entrelace bouche à bouche puis les vautre" (N. 56). Not only is the progression the same but the verb "vautrer" signifies both "coïter" and "se coucher, s'étendre en se roulant . . . en prenant une position abandonnée" (Petit Robert). (My emphasis.)

Despite the suppression of the image "vains bras hasardeux," which Mallarmé uses in a most erotic scene of "L'Après-midi d'un faune," we still have the impression of a haphazard intermingling of various body parts. A sense of extensive morcellation is expressed by both the manipulation of the indefinite article and the partitive ("un choc," "Des divers monstres") and certain words in the variants
stressing plurality and fragmentation: "Parmi l'heure,
"mort épars" "mille monstres," and "pièce à pièce" (N. 167-68, 176). Mallarmé's noted exploitation of the "S" and "ss" as a disseminating letter reinforces this effect: "Si," "éblouissant," "arrondissant, "Aussi," "bossuée" and "dressoir." Finally, the curvatures of "Génuflexion" reappears in the convulsive erotic posture traced by the modifier "tors." Mallarmé often uses this word and its forms as a figure evoking twisted torsos engaged in deadly, sexual activity. Compare: "... pour séduire un roi/Se tordent dans leur mort des guirlandes célèbres" (O.C. 67) and "Où la Chimère s'estue/Vaut la torse et native nue" (O.C. 75). The violent overtones of this scene bring to mind several references to vision dispersed throughout the poem. Remembering that the "primal scene" is a miscomprehension or inaccurate observation which, in its phantasized repetition, generates both pleasure and anxiety, we begin to discern a definite association between sight, horror and transgression. The following examples are taken from various sections of "Les Noces":

L'arrière volupté jusque dans l'agonie
Du regard révulsé par quelqu'un au néant ... (N. 78)

... effroi de la pauvre vision/qui s'en fut ... (N. 128)

Et l'interdit
Que veut voir là celle-là (N. 213)
Mais horreur! dehors, dans ta sévère fontaine,
J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité!
(N. 65)

In addition, these associations help to illuminate the "orfèvrerie éteinte" of the "Ouverture ancienne." According to Laplanche and Pontalis, the violent nature of the "primal scene" fantasy results from "the child's introjection of adult eroticism"--the alienating language of passion and its prohibition. That which is hereditarily transmitted is then the subject's confused perception of parental desire. If Hérodiade's bedroom is "nuptiale déjà" (N. 163), it is because even before her entrance in the "Scène," the marital bed is already, as the text states, "fait d'une horreur maternelle/Dans quelque noir baiser" (N. 155-56).

It is the young girl's forbidden reminiscence of this scene, which makes her a "très attentive et criminelle enfant" (N. 212). This same sort of sexually violent imagery is inscribed in both the interior and exterior settings of the "Ouverture": "Ciel brûle . . . /Et bientôt sa rougeur de triste crépuscule/Pénétrera du corps la cire qui recule!" (N. 151). And "De l'or nu fustigeant un espace cramoisi" (N. 143).

The only visible residue of this amorous encounter in the "Prélude" is the platter--"cette piece héréditaire de dressoir." In variants of the third draft, Mallarmé juxtaposes the plate with the words "race" and "rejeton." Again, the dictionary definition of "rejeton" as both a "nouveau jet," "tige de plante" and an "enfant" or "descendant"
elucidates the text. Emphasized is the plate's own power of regeneration and dissemination. Arising from the plate's uncertain status in the text, this power has a destabilizing effect. As both a golden halo ("nimbe") and an ordinary piece of tableware ("Lourd métal usuel"), this mysterious disc is permeated by an uncanny familiarity. By focusing exclusively on the future contents of the plate (the decapitated head of the saint), most critics have entirely overlooked its functioning in the text. In a variant, we discover that the importance of the plate lies not in what it might not contain, but in its association with absence:

Ce Le passé
Cette vacuité louche et muette d'un plat?
Le fantôme
simulacre
inoccupé (N. 170)

The poet's hesitation confirms that the plate is as much a vestige of the past as a symbol of the future. As a "simulacre" or substitute, its primary function is to indicate an absence which, by nature, is irrepresentable, since the repressed unconscious cannot be known in its original form. Continually energized by the very emptiness it evokes, this "vide vaisselle" (N. 173) is to play a principal role in a vast metonymical circuit.

As soon as the last glimmers of light have faded and the monstrous forms have finally disappeared into the evening shadows, the plate conjures up the ghostly apparition of an anonymous mask: "On ne sait quel masque âpre et farouche éclairci" (N. 55). Playing, as he often does, on the
etymology of "aucun" ("quelque" "quelqu'un"), Mallarmé underscores the notion of an absent presence in a variant:
"Aucun masque de saint" (N. 168). With the appearance of this "face defunte" (Ibid.), the text comes to a brusque halt: "Quelque silence abrupt" is jotted in italics (Ibid.). In the final draft, Mallarmé blocks out this notation and simply closes the parenthesis of the initial hypothesis. In this way, all of the preceding becomes plausible:

La chimère au rebut d'une illustre vaisselle
Maintenant mal éteinte est celle
Sous ses avares feux qui ne contiendra pas
Le délice attendu du nuptial repas
Ni que pour notre reine enfant et le convive . . .

(N. 56)

With these lines, Mallarmé introduces what appears to be an entirely new set of images. To be noted is an extensive use of the oral code: "repas," "une chère," "l'âpre faim," "bouche," "le mets supérieur," and "goûte." Precipitated by the metonymical displacement of "chimère" to "vaisselle," this sudden intervention of the oral motif can be viewed as an attempt at censorship. But as a monstrous fusion of incompatible creatures (lion, goat and serpent) and a figure for the processes of poetic imagination and rêverie, this phantom chimera inevitably recalls both the bizarre mating of "divers monstres nuls" and the image of the "orfèvrerie." Moreover, in the apposition of "mal éteinte" with "avares feux," there is a continuation of the dynamic struggle between vision and obscurity. By analyzing further the deletions and disguises of the manuscript, we
shall see that the primal fantasy surrounding the solar combat has thwarted the censor by returning, so to speak, in the form of a "festin amoureux."

That the adult psyche is still visited and influenced by the phantoms of childhood is first implied by the description of Hérodiade as "notre reine enfant." On the verge of puberty, this "enfant . . . finacée au sens," (N. 174) is both virginal and sexual. In the "Ouverture," the nurse chastizes Hérodiade for her self-indulging pleasures: "Froide enfant, de garder en son plaisir subtil,/ . . . ses promenades,/ Et quand le soir méchant a coupé les grenades" (N. 149-50). If then the empty platter is not to contain "le délice attendu du nuptial repas," it is because "délice" refers primarily to the appetite of the senses--desires which are both infinite and unappeasable. This association between orality and sexuality is strengthened by several details in the manuscript. For example, Mallarmé's use of "rassasier" rather than "contenir" in an early draft combines the meanings of "satisfaire la faim" and "satisfaire pleinement les désirs de quelqu'un" (Petit Robert). If the "délice attendu" is, as the text proposes, "Comme une chère (or "chair") très delicate à foison," then its lack is also equivalent to a voracious insatiable hunger--"l'âpre faim muée en pâmoison." The intensity of this hunger soon precipitates a loss of consciousness which is signalled by "pâmoison." One immediately thinks of Hérodiade's ambivalent hallucination of the maternal breast in the "Scène":

Si tu me vois les yeux perdu au paradis
C'est quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis.
(N. 68)

Like the term "évanouissement," "pâmoison" can refer either to a lifting of repression or to the act of censoring itself. In the final draft, it would seem to indicate the invasion of the Unconscious, for it is immediately followed by the most overtly erotic image of the entire "Prélude":

Les entrelace bouche à bouche puis les vautre
Le mets supérieur qu'on goute l'un à l'autre . . .
(N. 56)

The use of the oral code as a metaphor for a sexual embrace leads the reader to believe that the entire scene concerns only the future bride and groom. This significantly de-emphasizes the oral motif. But we should compare Mallarmé's use of "vautrer" in another work: "Vautré dans le bonheur, où ses seuls appétits/Mangent . . ." (O.C. 33). And in certain fragments for "Le Livre," Mallarmé writes about a starving guest who, after being invited to a feast by a lady and forbidden to eat, ends up by devouring his hostess: "manger la dame." 24 Our point is that by consistently confusing the sexual with the oral, the poet successfully camouflages the phantasm which structures the text.

Looking now at the variants to this passage, we find that the "mets supérieur" is equivalent to a "mets incestueux" (N. 173) and that all of the references to nourishment and hunger can be traced back to the missing maternal breast. Not only is the oral motif repeatedly tied to the past ("le vieux repas" "l'antique faim," "chère d'autrefois" as
opposed to "quelque faim nouvelle"), but this "ancienne faim" is, for the child, the only "chère authentique" (N. 169, 173). On this level, the wedding banquet is not merely a future event which is not to take place but a ritualized repetition of a phantasmic communion between mother and child which never could take place. Like Hérodiade's solitary nuptials, this archaic feast is the object of a wish. That such transgressive desires must result in guilt and punishment is evidenced by a draft for the "Finale" which reads: "Sa chair de s'offrir en festin/Pour avoir reconnu le seigneur clandestin" (N. 80). But who is the "seigneur clandestin"? In view of the preceding evidence, it is not at all certain that this "principal convive" is, as others all-too-quickly assume, John the Baptist. Backtracking a bit, let's reconsider the opening lines of the "Prélude" in light of these last variants. Here, horror is strangely equated with "le manque d'un saint" (N. 167). It is noteworthy that, in several variants, the oral drive resurfaces in the repetition of the homonymic pairing of "saint"/"sein." Likened to a "sceau de sainteté," the faceless "masque de saint" becomes an ambivalent sign ("sceau") for both the breast ("sainteté" or sein/tête) and its lack ("En le manque d'un saint"/sein) (N. 167, 172). These same associations generate "seigneur clandestin" ("seeing" as signature recalls "sceau") in the "Finale" (N. 80), and "Seigneurial écrin du nénuphar" (N. 144) in the "Ouverture." The insistence of certain letters throughout the passage under
consideration again identifies the maternal body as the stage-setting for the object and its loss: the multiple "V's" correlating femininity with oscillation and division ("Vide vaisselle," "convive" and "survive") and the systematic use of the "M" ("mâle et maternelle" expressing "la rencontre, la fusion, et le terme moyen" [O.C. 960]: "Triomphalement," "péremptoirement," "chimère" and "Maintenant mal").

The second draft for the wedding feast is the most revealing. Not only does it posit a close connection with the solar drama ("Aujourd'hui comme le précédent jour/soir fameux on fusion"), but it contains the deleted phrase "le mets incestueux" (N. 171-74). At this exact point, the entire scene suddenly fades. Analogous to the breaking of a thread, this hold in the text is articulated in the following manner:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{l'écheveau rompt avec l'
}\underline{\text{ici}} \quad \text{à votre âge} \\
&\text{Alors, le fil rompu s'achève ici, pourquoi}
\underline{\text{refluer}} \quad \text{voiles ou roides} \\
&\text{Stupeur à prolonger dans les transes et coi}
\underline{\text{Le spectre que sa clairvoyance comme défaillance}} \\
&\text{Le confidant, parmi la soie et la faille . . .}
\end{align*}
\]

(N. 174)

Outlined in these lines is a description of the process of repression itself. Originally signifying "tourner de l'œil," the verb "défaillir" echoes both "évanouissement" and "pâmoison." The paradoxical notion that darkness favors vision is suggested by "clairvoyance comme défaille." Reflected only in the observer's rigid stance ("Stupeur,"
"transes" and "roides"), the content of this horrifying vision is to remain a secret. While the use of "confident" and "spectre" indicate that it is the nurse's perception, we should recall that Mallarmé intentionally confuses the characters in several places throughout "Les Noces." The ambiguity of this personage is repeated just a few lines later in the text, in the juxtaposition of "vierge enfant" with "vieux corps." It could be that Hérodiade the adolescent is remembering the child's illicit view of adults "parmi la soie et la faille." Since "faille" can refer to both a woman's veil and a lack ("manque" or "fissure"), the spectator's vision constitutes an integral part of the phantasm. On a structural level, the floating veil comes to represent the oscillating movements of the text between vision and obscurity, repression and the return of the repressed. In a later fragment, Hérodiade's dance of veils evokes a similar vacillating uncertainty: "se penche-t-elle d'un côté--de l'autre--montrant un sein--l'autre ..." (N. 113). What this variant does demonstrate is the impossibility of direct perception. After a brief glimpse, the reader, like the observer in the text, can only witness the effects of the phantasm: "Stupeur/secret à prolonger/ refleur dans les transes/voiles et coi ..." (N. 174).

Mallarmé's suppression of this fragment is quite understandable. For it illustrates the genesis of the text in a much too vivid fashion. By the more subtle insertion of a colon and a rapid shift to a different symbolic register,
the poet recreates this pause in his final draft. A return to the solar imagery of the beginning indicates that the text has come full circle:

Le mets supérieur qu'on goûte l'un à l'autre:
Alors, dis ô futur taciturne, pourquoi
Ici demeure-t-il et s'éternise coi
Selon peu de raison que le richissime orbe
Opiniâtremment pour se parfaire absorbe
Jusqu'à l'horizon mort en un dernier éclat
Cette vacuité louche et muette d'un plat?
(N. 56)

The use of the interrogative tells the reader that the hypothesis cannot be verified. For the chain of correspondences initiated by the plate (nimbe/souvenir/masque/chimère/vaisselle/chère/orbe/vacuité) remains impervious to any type of logical arrangement. By inserting the logical connector "Selon . . . que" to mark a series of indefinite, open-ended rapports, Mallarmé underscores the analogical expansion of the text. Borrowed from different contexts, the images of this passage (mets/orbe/éclat/vacuité/plat) figure as bits and pieces of a collage, the surviving remnants of the "ancestoriele et lourde orfèvrerie." The various strands of the phantasm converge in the term "orbe," which again confuses the solar and oral codes. Generally denoting "tout corps sphérique et globulaire," "orbe" is also a common metaphor for the bosom.25 However if this word connects the empty platter to both the rounded halo ("nimbe") and the "gorge ancienne et tarie," it is because the etymological root of its adjectival form is the latin "orbus" signifying "privé de lumière" or blind. That which is relayed from
one image to the next is the division or lack from which it was issued. This sort of repetition is daemonic because, as Weber asserts, it "... consists not in the re-presentation of the identical but rather in the indefinite incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces..."26 Thus, when attempting to become reabsorbed into the celestial body which engendered it ("pour se parfaire absorbe"), the plate ("rejeton" and "descendant") is once more cast aside and another image is spawned. Doomed to regenerate itself perpetually across a galaxy of signifiers, the plate is both an excess and a lack—a "simulacre," "fantôme" and "vacuité louche" (N. 170).

Significantly, the failure of this nostalgic desire for fusion is also the failure of interpretation. The same forces of obscurity which cloud the text and threaten engulfment, paradoxically preserve its endless capacity for regeneration. As previously noted, all breaks in the text (lapses in consciousness, re-awakenings, relapses, blank spaces and disquieting gaps) simultaneously point up the force of censorship and the lifting of repression.

As in "Le Démon de l'analogie," there is no unequivocal meaning to be had. In the final section of the "Prélude," the plate, like the "inexplicable Pénultième," continues to circulate in a most uncanny fashion. Here, the same primal phantasms of procreation, separation and death re-emerge across an extensive network of increasingly abstract imagery. Due to the lack of variants for this segment ("A quel
psaume . . " N. 59-60), it is impossible to study the processes of repression and repetition in the same depth as in the first part of the "Prélude." In view of my previous discussion of certain parts of this fragment in relationship to the "Scène" (See Chapter III), the analysis will be brief.

Evoked in the opening verse is the sound of an elliptical psalm described as belonging to "nul antique antiphonaire." Since an "antiphona" is a type of liturgical chant usually sung before and after a psalm, this song arises out of nowhere like an answer without question or response. Floating erratically in the background, the destination of this "écho jailli" (N. 191) is at first as mysterious as its origin: "Oui planer ici comme un viril tonnerre/Du cachot fulguré pour s'ensevelir où?" (N. 59). After its eruption through a hole already opened by a "vol ébloui de vitrage" (Ibid.), the voice suddenly attaches itself to a speaker:

Le Fantôme accoudé du pâle écho latent
Sous un voile debout ne dissimule tant
Supérieurement à de noirs plus Prophète
Toujours que de ne pas perpétuer du faite
Divers rapprochements scintillés absolus . . .

(Ibid.)

A translation of these very complex lines would read that the ghost of the pale latent echo does not dissimulate well enough so as not to perpetuate diverse and absolute relationships which scintillate. It is instructive to recall that in "Macbeth," this sort of imperfect dissimulation precipitated a seemingly accidental perception of the witches'
secret ritual: "Shakespeare . . . feint, plutôt, de dissimuler insuffisamment et laisser voir, dans un coup de vent" (O.C. 350). The same fleeting and indiscreet perception is afforded in the "Prélude" by the "vol ébloui de vitrage"--the double sense of "vol" implying a stolen look. Continuing the parallel, a premature raising of a theatre curtain is next suggested by the swirling motions of a "fatidique panache/De dentelles à flot torses sur le linon" (N. 60). Such convulsive movements ("torses") indicate that this bedchamber, unlike the motionless "lit aux pages de vélin" of the "Ouverture," is continually animated by the restless activity of a dreamer creating "rêve par plis":

Divers rapprochements scintillés absolus:
Et, plus
Insoumis au joyau géant qui les attache . . .
(N. 59)

There is a striking resemblance between the imagery of this section and Mallarmé's sonnet "Une dentelle s'abolit":

Cet unanime blanc conflit
D'une guirlande avec la même
Enfui contre la vitre blême
Flotte plus qu'il n'ensevelit . . .
(O.C. 74)

Reinscribed in the billowing folds of the lace, the "Jeu suprême" (Ibid.) or white struggle links procreation and doubt with the process of writing. Emphasizing movement, productivity and uncertainty, the color white is, as Cohn remarks, the "nourishing source" of Mallarmé's poetry. In the "Prélude," the pale "Fantôme" is, as in "Mimique," "blanc comme une page pas encore écrite" (O.C. 310).
Reminiscent of several descriptions of the "nourrice d'hiver" (N. 64) throughout "Les Noces" ("sachet d'os . . . de cendre," "robe blanchie en l'ivoire" N. 198, 146), this pallid "Fantôme's" unsuccessful attempts at repression inadvertently assure the transposition of the "pâle écho latent" into "Divers rapprochements scintillés." Perpetuated next in the fluttering motions of white lace and sheets, these celestial inscriptions figure also on a visual level by the space left blank in the following verse: "Et, . . . . . . plus."

Finally, when set in apposition to "noirs plis Prophète," such patterns bring to mind one of Mallarmé's favorite metaphors for a non-repressive writing--the shimmering alphabet of white stars set against a night sky.

This vacillating uncertainty is momentarily suspended by the return of the plate, this time under a completely different aspect:

Vains les noeuds éplorés, la nudité fausse
Ensemble que l'agrafe avec ses feux rehausse,
Plus abominé mais placide ambassadeur
Le circonstanciel plat nu dans sa splendeur,
Toute ambiguïté par ce bord muet fuie,
Se fournit, on dirait, s'époussette ou s'essuie
Aux dénégations très furieusement . . .

(N. 60)

As in "Igitur," the action of dusting or polishing is analogous to the elimination of doubt: ". . . la clarté la lueur se mirait dans la surface polie, inférieure, dépourvue de poussière" (O.C. 446-47). But in the above-quoted passage, the use of "noeuds éplorés," "nuitidité fausse," "placide ambassadeur" and "circonstanciel" points up the
artificiality of this newly-found certitude. Tantamount to a scouring of the mind or "dénégation," the wiping of the dish is an attempt at repression. Ironically, it is in the repetition of this very commonplace heimlich gesture that the repressed suddenly resurfaces:

Loin dans frôlement
De l'Ombre avec ce soin encore ménagère:
Il il exagère
Le sépulcral effroi de son contour livide;
(N. 60)

In another fragment, the circular shape of the platter creates further associations: "elle époussette un nimbe/et de sa coiffe/même tremblant que ce soit cela qui l'a glacée d'effroi" (N. 123).

But what is "cela"? Is it the empty halo, the nurse's coif, a combination of the two, or something entirely separate? Ambiguity is maintained by the timely insertion of two more blank spaces in the text. These white spaces function simultaneously as bridges and cuts between the various images of the passage. As both a blank and the color white, the signifier "blanc" is not just an image or theme but, as Derrida demonstrates in "La Double séance," a space of writing. It is useful to recall that in the "Prélude," Mallarmé's whites constitute a "ponctuel décor" which is first emblematized on the nurse's white wimple and coif and then immortalized in the sporadic flow of her celestial milk:

L'ordinaire abandon sans produire de trace
Hors des seins abolis vers l'infini vorace
Sursautant à la fois en maint épars filet
Jadis, d'un blanc, et maléfique lait.
(N. 60)
Again, by leaving a space after the word "blanc" in his final draft, Mallarmé indirectly resuscitates the ambivalence of the maternal breast as a double structure of plenitude and lack. Since the same manoeuvre is reproduced in one of the few variants for this passage the intention is quite clear:

Lieu de plus noir secret
Pour voile se frange
Sinistrement Blanchit et s'illumine

(N. 192)

In view of this inconclusive conclusion, any reading of the text might continue indefinitely. This is a direct effect of the structuring of the "Prélude" as both a phantasm and its interpretation.

My analysis has attempted to demonstrate two very important points: the genesis of the text and its critical mechanisms of self-interpretation. By recourse to variants, I have discovered an extensive work of textual transformation which, while suppressed from the final draft, continues to influence and animate its surface. This dynamic is especially visible in the successive versions of the first section "Si . . ./Génuflexion. . . ." From this, it can be concluded that the creation of uncanny effects in the "Prélude" proceeds from a poetics of repetition which differs substantially from the incantatory structures of the "Ouverture." By retracing the displacement of key signifiers in the text, we find that repetition is no longer a principle of identity but one of difference. The intermingling of the imaginary with the real, the familiar with the extraordinary,
and the forces of repression with the resurgence of the repressed, are the mechanisms which Mallarmé employs in the creation of the fantastic. The same operations are also at issue in Freud's essay "The Uncanny." One could say that the difficulty of Freud's investigation comes from the nature of the Uncanny (indefinable, imperceptible and illogical) versus the purpose of the analysis. As already noted, the difference between Freud's reading of "The Sand-Man" and Mallarmé's work lies in the former's inability to relinquish mastery. Yet in spite of his conclusion, Freud's analysis of the processes of substitution and repression offered a point of entry for the "Prélude." Whereas Freud demonstrates psychological processes by recourse to fiction, Mallarmé uses the psyche to stage the genesis of the text. Continually addressing the question of its own origin, the "Prélude," unlike the "Ouverture," is a self-reflexive text. Recalling both "Le Démon de l'analogie," and "La Fausse entrée des sorcières," the "Prélude" redramatizes a crisis of interpretation. The imminent failure of Hérodiade's interpretive gesture is, ultimately bequeathed to the reader who, in the end can follow either Freud and pretend to have ousted the demon or Mallarmé:

Enfin la fiction . . . semble être le procédé même de l'esprit humain--c'est elle qui met en jeu toute méthode, et l'homme est réduit à la volonté. (O.C. 851)
NOTES

1 See Gardner Davies' description of the manuscript in Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère, Paris: Gallimard, 1959, pp. 231-32.


3 Davies makes this comparison in his Mallarmé et le rêve d'Hérodiade, Paris: Corti, 1978, p. 286.

4 E. Noulet analyzes the techniques of repetition in the "Ouverture" on pages 108-09 in L'Oeuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé, Paris: Droz, 1940.


7 Laplanche and Pontalis offer the following definition for the "return of the repressed": "Process whereby what has been repressed--though never abolished by repression--tends to reappear, and succeeds in so doing in a distorted fashion in the form of a compromise. The Language of Psychoanalysis, New York: Norton, 1973, p. 398.

8 The continued relevance of this early work for the later fragments of "Les Noces" is evidenced by the fact that Mallarmé delayed its publication until 1874 and that he continued to include it in such late anthologies as Pages (1891) and Divagations (1896). Between the early text and the definitive version we find one very significant revision.
The original title "Penultième" which simply reiterates a key word in the text was changed in 1891 to "Le Démon de l'analogie" thereby emphasizing textual process rather than content. For these détails see Pléiade edition of Mallarmé's Oeuvres complètes, 1557.


10 While discussing Mallarmé's use of analogy as a "principle of reduction and expansion," Jean Dornbush underscores the paradoxical movement of analogy in "Le Démon de l'analogie": "... while analogy unifies through resemblance, it also posits as a principle of its operation the potential disorder of the differentiation." In this sense, he continues, "it supplies the precarious 'almost' that is the comparative distinction essential to poetic relief." The remark comes from "The Death of the 'Penultimate': Paradox in Mallarmé's 'Le Démon de l'analogie'," French Forum, V, No. 3, Sept., 1980, p. 241.

11 Barbara Johnson in "Crise de Prose," Poésie, No. 4, 1978, aptly describes the narrator's relationship to alterity: "Céder l'initiative aux mots, c'est avoir la voix de l'Autre, s'éclipser comme sujet, devenir soi-même autre." The death of the subject is equivalent to "une transformation du sujet en discours. Mais le discours du sujet, c'est le discours de l'Autre." pp. 102-03.

12 See his most perceptive article "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on an Uncanny Moment," in Modern Language Notes 88, No. 4-6, 1973, pp. 1119 and 1129 respectively.


14 Davies makes this connection but downplays any further parallels: "Sans vouloir pousser l'analogie trop loin, il nous paraît vraisemblable que le personnage de la vieille nourrice d'Hérodiade doit quelque chose à ces réflexions de jeunesse sur les sorcières dans 'Macbeth'." Le Rêve D'Hérodiade, Paris: Corti, 1978, 287.
According to Davies, (Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère), p. 96, all drafts for this segment were written at approximately the same time, probably after 1887.

Mallarmé uses the same image in "Igitur": "Je me rappelle que son or allait feindre en l'absence un joyau nul de réverie, riche et inutile survivance, sinon que sur la complexité marine et stellaire d'une orfèvrerie se lisait le hasard infini des conjonctions" (O.C. 435). The connection between this image and the process of writing is suggested in a letter to Mallarmé from Lefèbure. The latter refers to Mallarmé as a "Diable de condensateur" and an "orfèvre, ... dans tous les sens" (C. I, 178).


These expressions are taken from Robert Cohn's article "Mallarmé's Windows," in Yale French Studies, LIV, 1977, pp. 30-31.


LaPlanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," p. 5.

For several examples of this usage see Scherer, L'Expression littéraire, 104-05.

25 The metaphor "orbe" was used by both sixteenth-century poets as well as contemporary writers. The following example cited by Paul Robert, in his Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française, V, p. 4 is from Collette's Belles saisons: "Son sein rond et hardi comme l'orbe d'un bouclier d'amazone." In our text, "orbe" is also an anagram of "robe" which, as was noted in the "Scène," is a metonym for the maternal breast: "robe/couler/seins" (N. 106).


27 Cohn, "New Approaches to 'Hérodiade'," p. 476.

28 La Dissémination, see pp. 284-85. Derrida's critique of Richard's L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé is based on the latter's thematization of such key concepts as "pli" and "blanc." Severely limiting the displacement and textuality of the work, Richard, Derrida writes, "surévalue le mot et confine le latéral."
CHAPTER V

THE 'CANTIQUE DE SAINT JEAN':

CASTRATION AND DISSEMINATION

Sait-on ce que c'est qu'écrire?
Une ancienne et très vague mais
jalouse pratique, dont git le sens
au mystère du coeur.

Qui l'accomplit, intégralement,
se retranche.

Mallarmé

In the 1890's Mallarmé continues to expand "Les Noces."
The insertion of both the "Cantique de Saint Jean" and the
"Finale" is announced in the "Bibliographie" of 1898:

'Hérodiade,' ici fragment, où seule la partie dialoguée,
comporte outre le 'Cantique de saint Jean' et sa conclu-
sion en un dernier monologue, des Prélude et Finale qui
seront ultérieurement publiés et s'arrange en poème.

(O.C. 77)

Rather than supplying his readers with a definitive arrange-
ment of texts, Mallarmé publishes the poem in bits and pieces
while continuing to shift its various segments. This sort
of random structuring recalls the format for "Le Livre."
Here, each reading was to involve the reshuffling of the
work's displaceable pages. In this sense, the radical frag-
mentation of the text becomes its source of energy and
renewal: "le volume, malgré l'impression fixe, devient par
ce jeu, mobile--de mort il devient vie."\textsuperscript{1} If for Mallarmé,
the act of reading constituted a "pratique désespérée,"
(O.C. 647) it is because he automatically incorporated it
into the theater of fiction. The reader's active participa-
tion in the drama of the text began with "Igitur," a tale
dedicated "à l'Intelligence du lecteur qui met les choses en
scène, elle-même" (O.C. 433).

It is precisely the overall indeterminancy of "Les Noces"
which invites and even compels its readers to fill in the
gaps. Of the various parts enumerated in the preceding note,
we find that for many critics, the "Cantique de Saint Jean"
plays a key role in the structuring and general synthesizing
of the work. There are several reasons for this. Frequently
considered as the third part of a triptych following the
"Ouverture ancienne" and the "Scène," the "Cantique," as
Austin remarks, furnishes "la clef de l'énigme," and prepares
"le dénouement."\textsuperscript{2} In its presentation of a violent scene
of decapitation, the poem is also seen as the only "direct
reference" to the legend of Salome and John the Baptist.\textsuperscript{3}
Not only does a sacrifice proceed to a conclusion, it pun-
ishes a transgression and promises a reward. Is it possible
that the beheading of the saint is the logical consequence of
his "violation" of the "virginal" Hérodiade? At least one of
Mallarmé's contemporaries thought so when he described the
progression of the drama in the following manner:
Le secret, lequel je le tiens du poète lui-même, n'est autre que la future violation du mystère de son être (Hérodiade's) par un regard de Jean qui va payer de sa mort ce seul sacrilège. Car la farouche vierge ne se sentira de nouveau intacte et restituée tout entière à son intégralité qu'au moment où elle tiendra entre ses mains la tête tranchée en laquelle osait se perpétuer le souvenir de la vierge entrevue.  

In addition to these considerations, I might point out that the "Cantique" is identified by virtually all of its critics as a crucial step in the process of artistic creation: "Le but du 'Cantique' est de forger un symbole, le pur regard ... représentant l'esprit poétique détaché des contingences de la vie et préparé pour l'acte créateur." Tantamount to a clean separation between matter and spirit, the saint's decollation would enable the formation of a transcendent literary space, a divine synthesis between "la beauté pure et l'effrayant génie."  

A brief summary of the poem will elucidate this reading. Occurring at sunset, the execution releases a flash of light which is almost immediately extinguished by the enveloping darkness of death and its corollary night. No longer circumscribed by the body, the head appears to soar upwards, suspend itself in mid-air for a few split seconds, and then fall back and bounce on the ground. Yet at the same time, its glance stubbornly follows a "pur regard" up into the mystical realm of "la froideur/Eternelle" (N. 58). In their view of the scene as a complete polarization of the head from the body, critics usually do one of two things. If they choose to emphasize the movement of ascent, the head is
transformed into a "symbol of spirituality" or cosmic consciousness. Representative of the "triumph of genius in its release from life into art," the severed head not only indicates "un plus haut niveau de conscience" but prefigures "la synthèse finale." On the other hand, those who do recognize the head's earthbound destination proceed to infuse the entire episode with Christian motifs: "Sans doute y a-t-il une réminiscence du sacré de Moïse, redescendant du Sinai, marqué au front pour avoir vu face à face l'Éternelle; ...". What both groups of readers have in common is the consistent application of a triadic structure, a "Merveilleuse synthèse 'hégélienne'!" 

But to sublimate the head and abandon the body is to suppress the seminal power of the "coup" which, in "Un Coup de dés," results in the continued production of celestial "seeds" promising "new life".  

**UNE CONSTELLATION**

froide d'oubli et de désétude pas tant qu'elle n'énumère
sur quelque surface vacante et supérieure le heurt successif sidéralement
d'un compte total en formation ... (O.C. 477) (My emphasis)

It is not the fullness of meaning but its indefinite deferment which ensures the interminable movement of the text: "l'incohérent manque hautain de signification qui scintille en l'alphabet de la Nuit selon quelques coups d'épingle stellaires" (O.C. 303). (My emphasis.) The decapitation
of the Baptist is perhaps better viewed as a "coup de tête" or sign of impending madness reminiscent of "Igitur": 
"... dernière figure séparée de son personnage par une fraise arachnéenne et qui ne se connaît pas" (O.C. 439). Not only is the saint's flash of genius an "éclair fou" (N. 129), but the aimless bouncing of his head on the soil ("... de jeunes ivres... ./En quelque bond hagard" N. 59) is likened, in a variant, to the frenzied circulation of Eros: "sang se rua en moi/ardeur/fou de ce fol élan" (N. 133). Far from the creation of an immutable synthesis, the loss of the head signals the toppling of all hierarchical structures. This sort of equalization is stressed by Hérodiade when she addresses the head with the lines: "Je raisonne pour toi tête, pas quant à toi/je ramasse mieux ainsi/est mieux que ramasser la tête" (N. 130). If then the scene of decapitation is instrumental in the creative process, it is because instead of closing the text, it paradoxically continues the cycle of regeneration begun in the "Prélude."

As Freud points out in his essay "Medusa's Head" (1922), decapitation is a metaphor for castration. It is not surprising that Mauron, in his reading of the "Cantique," should seize upon this connection while referring to the myth of Kronos:

... Kronos gelded his father Ouranos and in turn was castrated by his own son Zeus. Being put to death, being castrated, being dethroned, are synonymous in the infantile unconscious. ... It is certainly the scythe of Kronos that we find in 'Cantique.'
But again, in looking for the "higher level of meaning,"
Mauron concludes that the "pur regard" of the "conscious
saint" transcends the terrestrial weight of the body and
"mounts toward Principle." 12 Omitted is that part of the
myth which was perhaps of most interest to Mallarmé, that is,
when cast into the sea, the genitals of Kronos created a
foamy water which gave birth to Aphrodite. Recognizing this
goddess as "LA VENUS LATINE," Mallarmé describes this extra-
ordinary event in "Les Dieux antiques": "On dit qu'elle
jaillit de la brillante écume de la mer, et fut, en consé-
quence appelée Aphrodite (aphros mousse)" (O.C. 1198).
Although this productive aspect of castration might at first
be difficult to envision, it is operative in the "Cantique"
where the Baptist's beheading simultaneously wounds and
fecundates the virgin. Since meaning is produced through
the process of fragmentation, the moment of castration be-
comes concomitant with the birth of the text: "C'est toi
cruel/qui m'as blessé/en dessous/par la tête/heurtant l'au-
delà . . ." (N. 115) and "mon corps aveu de l'homme/néces-
saire/fécondé de la splendeur par ta mort/précoce" (N. 136).

Before turning to an analysis of the "Cantique" and the
"Finale," it is instructive to discuss Freud's theory of a
"castration-complex" in conjunction with other poems by
Mallarmé. As an integral part of the psychological develop-
ment of the child, the "castration-complex" hinges on the
discovery of sexual differentiation. According to Freud,
the little boy's perception of his mother as "castrated,"
causes him to abandon his incestuous desires and identify with the paternal role. Resulting in the introjection of the "super-ego," this identification is instrumental in the resolution of the Oedipal complex. For the girl, on the other hand, the same perception precipitates "the taking of the mother's role and the adopting of a feminine attitude towards her father" (S.E. XIX, 179). Rather than settling the Oedipal drama, the girl's identification puts it in motion. From a Lacanian viewpoint, this transition marks the entrance of both sexes into the "Symbolic Order of the Law":

By internalizing the Law, the child identifies with the father and takes him as model. The Law now becomes a liberating force: for, once separated from the mother, the child can dispose of himself. He becomes conscious that he is still in the making and, turning towards the future, integrates himself into the social, into Culture, and re-enters into language.13

Analogous to an initiation rite, the "castration-complex" assures the child's development of a "normal" or culturally acceptable adult sexuality.

Placed by Freud in the category of "primal phantasies," castration involves the ambiguous relationship between truth and fiction, event and phantasm.14 What should be emphasized here, is that castration is a threat which not only extends back to the "pre-Oedipal" phase but survives indefinitely in the form of retroactive fantasies of morcellation and death. Since any form of rupture is experienced as a menace to the child's idealized image of narcissistic unity, it can be considered under the rubric of castration.15 Like the "primal scene," castration anxiety is directly linked to
an illicit and traumatic perception of absence, a misconception which is subsequently repressed and fictionalized. Such ocular transgressions appear frequently in Mallarmé's poetry. Generally committed by male figures, these crimes are never left unpunished. Written in 1864 and substantially reworked for the anthology "Poésies" of 1887, "Le Pitre châtié" is one of the first texts to articulate a rapport between perception, castration and productivity. In the early version, an exuberant clown dives "comme un traître" into the eyes of his muse--"ces lacs défendus" (O.C. 1416). Giving birth to a "corps nouveau," this baptismal plunge acts out a desire for reunion with the maternal waters of the womb. But in washing away his make-up, that is, his power to create illusion, the swim also leaves the clown impotent: "Ne sachant pas, hélas! quand s'en allait sur l'eau/Le suif de mes cheveux et le fard de ma peau,/Muse, que cette crasse était tout le génie! (Ibid.). In the second version, the crime is transformed into an act of voyeurism: "J'ai trouvé dans le mur de toile une fenêtre" (O.C. 31). Here, the clown's hollowing out of the window not only seals his fate "dans l'eau perfide des glaciers," but makes possible his rebirth as text: "... c'est comme si j'innovais/Mille sépulcres pour y vierge disparaître" (Ibid.). (My emphasis.) Playing on the double meaning of "châtié" ("castrated" but also "pure"), the poem links the creative dynamic to the death of the subject and his subsequent displacement into
writing. Mallarmé's consciousness of this process is evidenced by his notes for "Igitur": "plus je/plume/plume je/plume jet."

A similar dynamic is operative in "L'Après-midi d'un faune." In retelling his encounter with the nymphs, the faun views his crime retrospectively as a form of carnal possession:

Mon crime, c'est d'avoir, gai de vaincre ces peurs Traîtres, divisé la touffe échevelée De baisers que les dieux gardaient si bien mêlée: (O.C. 52)

This version of the story does not however, comply with the earlier statement "Je les ravis, sans les désenlacer . . ." (Ibid.). Several details in the poem suggest that this rape is of an entirely different order. Since the nymphs could either be real or imaginary ("Aimai-je un rêve?" O.C. 50) and the purpose of the poem is their phantasmic perpetuation ("Dormons: je puis rêver à mon blasphème/Sans crime . . . O.C. 1453), the violation lies in the perception/narration of the episode which is itself figured as a series of cuttings and perforations: "CONTEZ/'Que je coupais ici les creux roseaux" (O.C. 50) and "O nymphes, regonflons des SOUVENIRS divers/'Mon oeil trouvant les joncs, dardait chaque encolure . . .'" (O.C. 51). (My emphasis.) The punishment for these erotic musings is exhaustion leading to impotence: "Quand tonne un somme triste où s'épuise la flamme/Je tiens la reine!/O sûr châtiment! . . ." (O.C. 52). Rather than give up his dream, the faun rekindles his passion by
carefully censoring the text: "Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins" (O.C. 53).\(^{17}\)

A final example of this schema is found in the prose poem "Pauvre Enfant pâle" (1864). Originally entitled "La Tête," this anecdote recounts the miserable fate of a young beggar who sings in the streets for his bread. Since the decapitation motif is central, some critics have recognized an overt parallel between this work and "Cantique."\(^{18}\) The character is a miniature adult, a "petit homme" dressed in baggy tattered clothes. Prematurely thin and too big for his age, he works independently while ignoring his peers playing in the street. To point up the futility of his enterprise, the narrator describes how the child's song lacks the force to extend beyond the shutters of the first-floor windows. Penniless, the child continues to sing defiantly:

\[\text{Et ta complainte est si haute, si haute, que ta tête nue qui se lève en l'air à mesure que ta voix monte semble vouloir partir de ses petites épaules (O.C. 274)}\]

It is the child's rebellious nature which prompts the narrator to wonder ". . . si elle [the head] ne s'en ira pas un jour, quand, après avoir crié longtemps dans les villes, tu auras fait un crime" (Ibid.). In order to commit this crime, he continues, "il suffit d'avoir du courage après le désir, et . . . Ta petite figure est énergique" (Ibid.).

It is irrelevant whether the crime is actually committed or not, for the child's fate is already predetermined by the act of desiring itself. Encoded by his insolent voice, this
desire is to penetrate the shutters above while protecting himself from a direct perception of the room's interior:
"... traversera ... les volets ... derrière lesquels tu ignores de lourds rideaux de soie incarnadine" (Ibid.).
The erotic overtones of "incarnadine" ("couleur de la chair" Petit Robert) as well as the use of "tu vois" for "tu ignores" in an earlier version (O.C. 1558), suggest that the young singer, like the "criminelle enfant" of "Les Noces," has indiscreetly observed and repressed the "mystère éclairé de son âtre" (N. 80). The inevitable result of this perception is the child's dismemberment which the narrator predicts in the poem's conclusion: "Nous te verrons dans les journaux, Oh! pauvre petite tête!" (O.C. 275). Reinforced by both the use of small letters and exclamation points (the inversion of the phallic "i"),¹⁹ is a close rapport between castration and the production of language.

Each text re-enacts the drama of castration in an entirely different way. In settling for a symbolic reproduction of the nymphs, the faun is clearly the most cautious of the three protagonists: "Il faut dormir en l'oubli du blasphème" (O.C. 53). Whereas the clown tries to mitigate his offense by feigning ignorance ("Ne sachant pas, hélas!"), the orphan continuously contests all forms of authority by an undaunted display of virility: "Ta tête se dresse toujours ... pendant que tu chantes d'un air qui devient menaçant" (O.C. 274). In all three instances, castration involves a negative perception of absence or difference, the
locus of which is decidedly feminine—"la touffe échevelée," "l'eau perfide des glaciers" and "lourds rideaux de soie."
But perhaps even more interesting is the idea that in all three poems, castration is both real and imaginary, a scenario which may or may not take place. Permeated with dreams and phantasies, this threat is only experienced in its effects: performed by the clown, sublimated by the faun and prophesized by the narrator of "Pauvre enfant."

More than a mere theme, castration is a dynamic process which, as Weber succinctly explains, entails a "restructuring of experience, including the relation of perception, desire and consciousness." It is a "crisis of phenomenality" which subverts the dichotomies of past and present, interior and exterior, body and mind. Significantly, all three characters simultaneously recognize and repudiate knowledge of castration through the erection of screens functioning as filters: the clown's window, the child's curtains and the faun's grapeskins which he interposes between himself and the object of his desire: "Rieur, j'éloge au ciel d'été la grappe vide/ Et . . . / . . . jusqu'au soir je regarde au travers" (O.C. 51). (My emphasis.) As a prefiguration of the character's own death, castration is perceived but never fully acknowledged.

For Freud, there are two principal means which enable the subject to ward off and defend himself against the threat of castration. Rather than recognizing the symbolic father, he can preserve an illusion of narcissistic wholeness by the
creation of either a double or a fetish. Examples of both strategies occur in the "Scène." In her attempts to achieve immortality through the fixation of mirror-images, Hérodiade, as we have seen, is ultimately led toward a recognition of her own alterity. Her spectral confrontation with a "rêve épars" (image of a "corps morcelé") recalls Freud's observation that the figure of the double can "reverse its aspect" acting as both "an assurance of immortality" and the "uncanny harbinger of death" (S.E. XVII 234-35). Rather than acknowledging the image of her "nudité" which erupts from the hole of her mirror, Hérodiade rearticulates her desire by crystallizing it in the form of substitute objects, a conglomerate of precious stones, flowers and metallic icons. This reification of the Self involves a continuous displacement of desire which echoes Freud's description of the practice of fetishism. In his symbolic representation of the missing phallus (i.e., to other parts of the body or objects in contact with the body), the fetishist simultaneously recognizes and denies all evidence of castration: "In very subtle instances both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration have found their way into the construction of the fetish itself" (S.E. XXI, 156). It is the persistence of these "two contradictory and independent attitudes" (S.E. XVII, 134) ('the woman has still got a penis' and 'my father has castrated the woman') (S.E. XXI, 157) that protects the fetishist while permitting him to satisfy the instinctual drive through the production of a very specific fantasy.
Like doubling, fetishism is a defensive manoeuvre which results in a "splitting of the ego" (S.E. XXIII, 203). According to Derrida, it is precisely this contradictory structure of the fetish which immerses it in an "économie de l'indécidable." Rather than a simple polarity between presence and absence, the fetish inscribes a space of vertiginous oscillation.

In my reading of the "Cantique," I will attempt to demonstrate how the text, in maintaining a similar kind of contradictory structure, creates an excess which renders any type of final synthesis impossible. As in "L'Après-midi d'un faune," it is quite uncertain whether the decapitation scene is a real event or the product of a dream. The hybrid nature of the scene is emphasized in a preliminary sketch for the "Finale":

moment d'évanouissement vespéral ou
matinal -- on ne saura jamais --
roideur -- elle jette la tête par la fenêtre - en
le bassin -- coucher
au loin elle se réveille
(rien de tout cela est-il arrivé)

(....)

pour la première fois
yeux ouverts --
(N. 139)

If, as this passage suggests, the entire drama unfolds within the heroine's psyche ("Seul monologue/éclat intérieur" N. 118), then the localization of the "Cantique" in terms of either motivation or reconciliation becomes both impossible and irrelevant. Emphasized in virtually all of the references to the "Cantique" is the interpenetration of the real
with the fictional. In several places in the manuscript, Hérodiade minimizes the significance of the decapitation almost to the point where the reader wonders if it really occurs: "plus que par le glaive vain du bourreau/je meurs/en mon martyr solitaire" (N. 122) and "Non c'était vain--couper/tête/tu étais mort . . ./et ton regard meurt et depuis longtemps . . . (N. 108). This is further reinforced by those variants which describe the Baptist as a "trivial époux" (N. 80), a "passant" (N. 109, 129), "celui qui ne devait même pas être intrus" (N. 131) and, most importantly, "quelqu'un n'étant pas qui passe le premier" (N. 80). At the same time, however, a parallel is drawn between the saint's death and the process of the heroine's development: "j'en porte le remords/un même instinct qui te porta à transgresser le ciel/ . . ./je recueille mieux pieuse cet éclair/ . . . par ta mort . . . douée de le savoir" (N. 135). Finally, in other variants, the reader is given to believe that the decapitation and the bridal rite are simply two versions of the same story: "le glaive qui trancha ta tête a déchiré mon voile" (N. 136). Functioning as a metaphorical structure for both the breaking of the hymen and the piercing of the veil, the loss of the head recapitulates and continues the series of ruptures which punctuate Hérodiade's history forcing her toward maturity. Like the maternal breast of the "Prélude" and "Scène," the severed head articulates a basic rapport between separation and desire. Consequently, Hérodiade's identification with it
("Tu me possèdes, tu m'es") (N. Ibid.) can only be ambivalent: "Je hais la tête/ai-je dit/ta mort suffit pour que j'en sorte--et moi seule/doute" (N. 101).

This same type of undecidability permeates the "Cantique de Saint Jean." In the first stanza, Mallarmé immediately sets up a tension between the vertical and the horizontal:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Le soleil que sa halte} \\
&\text{Surnaturelle exalte} \\
&\text{Aussitôt redescend} \\
&\text{Incandescent}
\end{align*}
\]

(N. 57) (My emphasis)

An earlier version of the same stanza reads: "L'astre épars, bas/Le soleil que prolonge/. . . Côtes, aujourd'hui, chois. . . ." (N. 184). This oscillatory movement between the lower realm of the senses and the upper regions of the intellect is continued in the rhythmical bouncing of the head as it attempts repeatedly to soar "Dans les vols triomphaux" (N. 57). With the fall of the executioner's ax, the head appears momentarily split-off from the body:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Comme rupture franche} \\
&\text{Plutôt refoule ou tranche} \\
&\text{Les anciens désaccords} \\
&\text{Avec le corps}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Qu'elle de jeunes ivre} \\
&\text{S'opiniâtre à suivre} \\
&\text{En quelque bond hagard} \\
&\text{Son pur regard}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Là-haut où la froideur} \\
&\text{Eternelle n'endure} \\
&\text{Que vous le surpassez} \\
&\text{Tous ò glaciers}
\end{align*}
\]

(N. 57-8)

Yet as a result of the syntactic ambiguity of these lines, the itinerary of the head remains undetermined. It is
interesting that Barbara Johnson chooses these very lines to illustrate Mallarmé's practice of syntactic "pivoting":

Depending . . . on whether the word que . . . introduces a subjunctive command or a relative clause, the poem is saying either 'que la tête s'opiniâtre à suivre son pur regard là-haut' or 'la tête refoule ou tranche les ancien désaccords avec le corps qu'elle s'opiniâtre à suivre'. It is equally plausible, therefore, to see the head rising up after its pur regard, or falling down in reconciliation with the body.  

The fluctuation of this rise-fall pattern is continued in a series of oppositional pairings which persist through the poem's conclusion: dispersion/contraction ("S'éployer . . . un frisson"/"A l'unisson," darkness/illumination ("des ténèbres" "noirs coups"/"Solitaire vigie," and white heat/iciness ("Incandescent"/"froideur" "glaciers."

Recalling the primal sun-drama of the "Prélude," these "heurts, vols triomphaux/De cette faux" (N. 180), point up an association between pleasure and death. For Julia Kristeva, the saint's decollation figures as "la métaphore de la jouissance," a "petite mort" which may or may not produce an offspring.  

Supported by the erotic undercurrent wandering through the poem ("Comme rupture"/"Que dans l'extase"), ("Elle de jeûnes ivres") and "Délice, Sourire") (N. 182-83), this reading also finds confirmation in a variant which summarizes the entire process in the following manner: "le temps/de--de s'enorgueillir/--de jouir--/de--/brève et féconde scintillation/et de se connaître/s'éblouir/ . . . se refroidir/--et de se dresser à elle mêlé" (N. 131). This movement toward knowledge ("Principe," "Arcane,"
"Délice," "Mystère," and "Miracle" N. 183) can be viewed simultaneously as an incomplete birth and a semi-death:

Et ma tête surgie
Solitaire vigie
(N. 57)

The partial emergence of the head from the maternal ocean ("vigie" signifying both a "poste d'observation sur un navire" and "un petit îlot ou un écueil émergeant à peine de la mer")\textsuperscript{24} is reversed in the last stanza by a movement towards re-immersion into the Source, a baptism evoking a new beginning:

Mais selon un baptême
Illuminée au même
Principe qui m'élu
Penche un salut.
(N. 58)

As evidenced by the final verse, the tension between the upper and the lower ("Penche un salut") is maintained to the end. In the last few stanzas, moreover, the confrontation of "male plosive p's" with "maternal" "m's" as well as the poet's hesitation between masculine and feminine articles in an earlier draft ("Que vous la(e) surpassiez" N. 182) displaces the vacillating uncertainty of the text to the question of sexual differentiation.

Most readers are inclined to anticipate a resolution of these contradictory impulses in the "Finale." Beginning with a panoramic view of the heroine's life, this last monologue is riddled with the same structural uncertainty as the "Cantique." Although Mallarmé refers to the text as "le pourquoi de la crise" (N. 87) in a bibliographical note, he
immediately subverts any type of linear progression by a striking interplay of conflicting temporal modes:

0, désespérément sous l'aile échevelée
Obscure de la nuit future violée
Quand ton morne penser ne monta pas plus haut
Dur front pétrifié dont le captif sursaut
Tout à l'heure n'aura de peur de se dissoudre
Suivi la magnifique intérieure foudre
Heurtée à quelque choc de ses rêves déçus
Sans l'établir vivante et regner par-dessus . . .

(N. 77) (My emphasis)

Setting up a "perpétuelle allusion" between the past and the future, event and fiction, this text erects a "hymen . . . entre le désir et l'accomplissement, la perpétration et son souvenir . . ." (O.C. 310). Not only is it impossible to determine whether or not the decapitation/violation has taken place but the same contrasting rhythms of the "Cantique" have returned in full force: "sous," "morne," "Dur," "Pétrifié," "captif," and "déçus" opposing "échevelée," "dissoudre," "vivante," "regner" and "par-dessus."

In contrast to this initial ambiguity is a sense of causality reinforced in the poem's concluding lines. It is here that Hérodiaide justifies, in retrospect, the role of an anonymous force in her development.

Comme soufflant le lustre absent pour le ballet
Abstraite intrusion en ma vie, il fallait
La hantise soudain quelcoque d'une face
Pour que je m'entr'ouvrisses et reine triomphasse.

(N. 79)

The selection of these lines as proof of Hérodiaide's encounter/violation/marriage with the Baptist is rendered problematic by the use of the term "entr'ouvrisses" ("entr'-ouvrir" signifying "ouvrir à demi, très peu" also evoking
"entrouvert" "qui est déchiré par endroits"). Both here and in other fragments, the verb indicates the incomplete and solitary nature of Hérodiade's flowering. Compare the note "entr'ouvrant un baiser solitaire" (N. 119) and Mallarmé's description of Hérodiade's auto-erotic behavior in a variant for the "Ouverture": "Froide enfant, de garder en son plaisir subtil/ Et quand le soir méchant entr'ouvre (changed to "a coupé" in the definitive version) les grenades!
(N. 149-50). This metaphor of bursting pomegranates clearly anticipates the vision of Hérodiade's impenetrable garden in the "Finale":

Il est peristyle
Maints fruits jardins
Neigeux ambres, incarnadins:
Mais aucun partagé pour savoir si je l'aime
Sinon l'espalier opulent de moi-même
Un selon de chers pressentiments inouï
Se sera tout à coup Sans aide épanoui
(N. 77-78)

Rather than a carnal possession by a lover, this spontaneous but partial opening of fruits evokes the blossoming of adolescent sexuality: "Comprend le sens de ses marques pré-
coces/De toute se libère/ Et magnifiquement pubère/Célèbre ses noces" (N. 214). (My emphasis.) That Hérodiade's virginity is indeed dubious but nevertheless real, is evidenced by several notes and variants: "Une virginité mûre" (N. 220), "Une virginité que c'est trop" (N. 132), "chaque dénie . . . une virginité" (N. 83), and "Avant que sur le sol/ La double fleur n'ait chu . . ." (N. 162). In the "Finale," the undecidability of this "double fleur," is figured in the flow
of an "inexplicable sang déshonorant le lys" (usually white) which is "A jamais renversée de l'une et l'autre jambe" (N. 78). The paradoxical conception of virginity as something intact and yet forever divided from itself is also suggested by a fragment which reads: "Toute virginité/nubilité/enfance disjointe en la tunique/Le fut de tous les temps . . ." (N. 211). For Mallarmé, the notion of a divisive unity or two-in-one paradox constitutes the very locus of artistic creativity:

Virginité, qui solitairement, devant une transparence du regard adéquat, elle-même s’est comme divisée en ses fragments de candeur, l’un et l’autre, preuves nuptiales de l’Idée. (O.C. 387) (My emphasis.)

Thus it is impossible to be certain whether Hérodiade's wedding vows have been or ever will be consummated. As the text of the "Finale" states most explicitly "Ce n'est point/Hymen froid d'une enfance avec l'affreux génie" but a perpetual enmeshing of red and white, a "hésitation entre la chair et l'astre" (N. 78). The drama of "Hérodiade" is to remain virtual: "Le métal commandé . . ./. . ./. . ./Peut selon le suspens encore par mon geste/Changeant en nonchaloir/ Verser son fardeau avant de choir . . ." (Ibid.).
Héroïade's Dance of Flowers

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

"Toast Funèbre"

Wavering indefinitely between the masculine and the feminine, the active and the passive, the living and the dead, Héroïade becomes the female counterpart of Mallarmé's Hamlet-figure: "le seigneur latent qui ne peut devenir" (O.C. 300). As she wanders through this labyrinth of adolescence, "Notre reine-enfant" prolongs "les circuits avec le suspens d'un acte inachevé" (Ibid.). In the unedited fragments for the "Finale," this inability to become is illustrated by the heroine's execution of a most extraordinary dance. Set in a "lieu nul" (N. 114) and performed in utter solitude, the dance recapitulates the "l'une ou l'autre" rhythm of the entire text:

se penche-t-elle d'un côté -- de l'autre --
   montrant un sein -- l'autre --
   et surprise sans gaze
   selon ce sein, celui-là identité
   (N. 113)

Rather than assuming a definite identity through the recognition of sexual difference, Héroïade, like the fetishist, denies castration through the erection of a contradictory symbolic substitute: "... sur les pieds seins/une sorte de
danse/effrayante esquisse" (N. 144). In simultaneously occupying all positions and reversing roles, the virgin dancer incarnates the androgynous fluidity of the text. In this sense, she becomes the fetish herself, a dual symbol of plenitude and lack. "Dans sa gaine debout nulle de firmament" (N. 83), evoking both "la beauté humaine de la vie" and "la vieille chair" (N. 112) she represents the contradictory forces of life and death.

According to Kristeva, it is this "double sexualité" of Mallarmé's dancer which best personifies the poet. In order to appreciate this insight and its significance for Hérodiade's ballet, we should recall Mallarmé's basic concept of dance. Involving an alternation between movement and immobility, expansion and contraction, the "contradictoires vols" (O.C. 309) of the dancer create a "mouvante écume" (O.C. 337) or "synthèse mobile" (O.C. 304). Mallarmé views the ballet as "la forme théâtrale de poésie par excellence" (O.C. 308) because the dancer functions, not as an individual, but as a living metaphor bodying forth "mille imaginations latentes" (O.C. 307):

A savoir que 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'élan, avec une écriture corporelle ce qu'il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la rédaction . . . (O.C. 304)

Endowed with an "excessive mobilité" (O.C. 306), the dancer's gestures create a "virginité de site pas songé" (O.C. 308).
Without identity or sex, this "ballerine illettrée" is a bisexual figure who fluctuates between the various positions of the symbolic order. Mallarmé stresses this interchangeability of roles in his review of the ballet "Les Deux Pigeons":

Enfants, les voici oiseaux, ou le contraire, d'oiseaux enfants, selon qu'on veut comprendre l'échange dont toujours et des lors, lui et elle devraient exprimer le double jeu: peut-être toute l'aventure de la différence sexuelle! (O.C. 305) (My emphasis.)

As an exercise in interpretation, the movements of dance coincide with the practice of writing.27 "... elle (the dancer) te livra ... la nudité de tes concepts et silencieusement écrira ta vision à la façon d'un Signe, qu'elle est" (O.C. 307). Although the dancer produces the text, she is also consumed by it. Just as the poet undergoes depersonalization in the creation of a work, the dancer is shattered and dispersed by the excessive forces of language she attempts to represent: "... elle ... morte de l'effort à condenser hors d'une libération presque d'elle des sur-sautements attardés décoratifs de cieux, de mer, de soirs, de parfum et d'écume" (O.C. 309).

In "Les Noces d'Hérodiate," the same process of creative dissolution emerges in the proliferation and perpetual transformations of the name "Hérodiate." In a letter to Lefébure, Mallarmé reveals his fascination with the poetic resonance of this name:

... la plus belle page de mon oeuvre sera celle qui ne contiendra que ce nom divin Hérodiate. Le peu d'inspiration que j'ai eu, je le dois à ce nom ... ce mot sombre
et rouge, comme une grenade ouverte, Hérodiade. (C. I, 157). (Mallarmé's italics.)

It is my belief that the name "Hérodiade" constitutes a condensed version of the text of "Les Noces." Redramatized by the various sesmes of this name is "l'ambiguïté d'Hérodiade et de sa danse" (N. III). Aside from the comment in the Correspondance, this hypothesis finds support in the poet's discussion of the power of proper names in "Les Mots anglais":

Mêlés encore à la Langue, leur sens tient l'imagination en éveil; autrement, incompréhensible ou anciens, c'est par leur aspect presque bizarre. (O.C. 1041)

On page after page of "Les Dieux antiques," Mallarmé points out how the etymologies of the names of mythological figures encapsulate the basic drama of the myth. Proper names are also frequently designated as the inspirational starting-point for the elaboration of a poetic text. One sonnet begins with "Mes bouquins renfermés sur le nom de Paphos/Il m'amuse d'élire avec le seul génie" (O.C. 76). Equally suggestive is the visual trace of the name's letters: "Hamlet . . ., son nom même affiché exerce sur moi, . . . une fascination, parente de l'angoisse" (O.C. 299).

In his comparison of the signifier "Hérodiade" to a "grenade ouverte," Mallarmé emphasizes the name's generative capacity. A cross-section of a pomegranate offers an image of hundreds of seeds waiting regeneration. Again, what permits the proliferation of the fruit is its ripening, fall and découpage. This metaphor recalls Mallarmé's view of the way in which language develops and renews itself in "Les Mots anglais":
Soit cette isolation pure et simple du Mot inaltérable, soit cette copulation de plusieurs Mots . . . tout, jusqu'à la disparition même du sens . . . n'est qu'alliage de vie et de mort et double moyen factice et naturel . . . (O.C. 1052-53)

This cooperation/intermingling of creative and destructive forces in nature is best illustrated by the language of flowers running through several of Mallarmé's essays and poems. In the early poem "Les Fleurs," it is by means of a floral motif that the name "Hérodiade" is associated to both fertility and death:

L'hyacinthe, le myrte à l'adorable éclair
Et, pareille à la chair de la femme, la rose
Cruelle, Hérodiade en fleur de jardin clair,
Celle qu'un sang farouche et radieux arrose!
(O.C. 34)

In a fragment for "Les Noces," a similar language of flowers links the fertility of the heroine's name with artistic productivity:

vierge lourd rehaussant un
La dame au nom fier ombrageant son visage

l'ombre étonné
Comme un casque léger d'impératrice enfant toujours
D'où pour toute personne il tomberait deux roses
la figure roses jumelles
(N. 161)

Overburdened with signification, the name signals the impending loss of Hérodiade's virginity. This idea is reinforced by a variant for the passage which reads: "D'où pour feindre sa joue il tomberait des roses" (N. 158). The use of "feindre" ("forger," "imaginer" "simuler" Petit Robert), points up a parallel between the "chute" of the "double fleur" and the production of Art. At the same time,
however, the conditional "il tomberait" intimates that the
work, like the "vierge violée," is forever suspended between
desire and its accomplishment.

It is not difficult to demonstrate the haunting circu-
lation of the name "Hérodiade" in the text of "Les Noces."
In his analysis of the "Ouverture," Robert Cohn focuses on
the contrasting patterns of "roi/roide/froide" (evoking "the
hard virile aspect of the virgin") and the "liquid harmonious
r and or" as in or/rose/arôme.29 But the signifying force
of this name can be taken even further. What is indeed
fascinating about the word "Hérodiade," for our purposes, is
that it reproduces the alternating structure of the text as
previously discussed. The feminization of the essentially
masculine appellation "Hérode," returns us not only to the
question of sexual ambiguity but to the ambivalent relation
between child and parent, the self and its mirror-image:
"Hérode/Hérodiac/Hérodiade." Reinforcing this sense of
division is the element "diade" which generates "di" (gr.
"deux fois") and "dia" (gr. "séparation, distinction, et à
travers" Petit Robert). This sort of dual unity mirrors the
ambiguous interconnections between life and death. The over-
lapping of these forces is also encoded within the name:
"H/éros versus "éроде/roide/raide" (suggesting rigidity and
death) and possibly, considering Mallarmé's knowledge and
love of English, "die/died/dead." Recalling both the "Dur
front pétrifié" of the Baptist and Hérodiade's iron-clad ar-
mour in the "Scène," this last cluster embodies both the
threat of castration and a defensive response against it. As Lacan insists, castration is inherent to the process of naming by which the child receives his pre-ordained place in the symbolic structure.\(^{30}\)

But again, castration is only a threat, for we are never sure if Hérodiade will penetrate the Symbolic order. This incertitude is perfectly illustrated in a variant concerning the princess' giving of the order for the Baptist's decapitation:

Même d'entendre ces mots négligemment dits ou sourdement avec un (. . .)
ou méchanta-ment ce peut-être -- ou --

Nul ne saura jamais . . .
pas même elle évanouie mais a-t-elle entendu?--évanouie en
car furent-ils dits

va me chercher le chef du saint sur un plat d'or
ces mots--rigides comme une épee
ils le furent . . .

(N. 127-28)

In this quotation, the obsessive repetition of the syllable "ment" underscores the capacity of language for endless duplicity, the "double fleur" of equivocation, taking us back to Hérodiade's spectacular about-face at the end of the "Scène": "Vous mentez Ô fleur nue de mes lèvres!" For Mallarmé, this "Glorieux mensonge" is the essence of fiction. By the continuous proclamation of simultaneous alternatives, language, like dance, expresses "le double jeu." Although
the name circulates freely within the text, ("Le nom/Le message de traits," "sachet exhalé sur qui rode le nom" N. 196-97) it can never, by reason of its excessive signification, be articulated as a single entity: "Ce vieux baiser épars des lèvres ... agite sous les plis comme un besoin de prononcer un nom épars" (N. 199). It is the incessant wandering of the semes of this "nom épars" through the text which not only points up the futility of Hérodiade's quest for identity but ultimately foils the reader's attempt to achieve synthesis by bringing the text to a conclusion, whether logical or not.

In a bibliographical note for "Les Noces," Mallarmé admits that, in choosing his heroine's name, his intention is to "bien la différencier de la Salome je dirai moderne ou exhumée avec son fait-divers archaïque -- la danse etc." (N. 51). Yet, in the notes for his preface he also writes: "... avant que le/froid ne gagne--/aujourd'hui/je retrouverais/la danse/---déplacement de/la danse--ici--et/pas anecdotique" (N. 94). Thus while rejecting the theme of dance, Mallarmé keeps the dynamic as a means of illustrating, in summary form, the creation and destruction of the text through the perpetual oscillation of desire:

elle se réveille--et danse un moment
pour elle seul--pour la première fois
yeux ouverts--afin d'être à la fois
ici là--et que rien de cela ne soit
arrivé. (N. 139)
NOTES


6. Davies, p. 263. In his Towards 'Hérodiade': A Literary Genealogy, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1958, p. 57, A. Chisholm concludes that "an alliance is affected between absolute beauty and a spirit freed from 'Les anciens desaccords/Avec le corps'." Recently, in The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, Leo Bersani deviates from this critical current and describes the "Cantique" as a "monologic fable of sublimation" which, rather than obliterating desire by elevation to a higher plane, signals the "differential moves of eroticized thought in art." In elaborating this viewpoint, Bersani continues: "Mallarmé encourages us to view sublimation not as a mechanism by which desire is denied but rather as a self-reflexive activity by which desire multiples and diversifies its representations." See pages 79-83.


The full quotation taken from Austin's "Le 'Cantique,'" p. 56 reads as follows: "En conséquence, la synthèse finale réside dans l'union mystique d'Hérodiade et du principe spirituel du Saint, principe symbolisé par sa tête tranchée et livrée de toutes ses entraves terrestres. Telles devraient être 'Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère.' Merveilleuse synthèse 'hégélienne'!" I fully agree with Robert Cohn's assessment of Hegel's influence on Mallarmé in Mallarmé: Igitur, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, pp. 171-72: "... although one must grant an awareness of Hegel in Mallarmé's essential movement of mind, one is hardly justified in asserting more than that; second, I would claim ... that Mallarmé did not really need Hegel, ... that he worked out the essential ideas in his own mind and that indeed ... Mallarmé has gone beyond, or bypassed, Hegel in his push beyond the triadic to the tetrapolar and polypolar universe of thought that is the great leap of the modern mind." In his article "New Approaches to 'Hérodiade,'" Romanic Review, LXXII, no. 4, p. 472, Cohn writes: "... immediately we can see that the old Hegelian triadic pattern won't do for this poet, or not for long. Mallarmé, like other great creators went on stubbornly to surpass Hegel in ideational depth, in his intuitive way."


For a remarkable discussion of the dynamic of the fictional in Freud, see Peter Brooks "Fictions of the Wolfman: Freud and Narrative Understanding." *Diacritics*, March, 1979, pp. 72-81.

Published in 1925 by Dr. Bonniet, these notes for the "Igitur" manuscript are cited by Robert Cohn in *l'Oeuvre de Mallarmé: Un Coup de Dés*, Librairie Les Lettres, 1951, p. 253.


Those critics who mention this relationship are Richard, Huot, Franklin, Davies, and Cohn.

Cohn, *l'Oeuvre de Mallarmé*, pp. 102-03: "i--principe mâle, héros, lumière, centripète, rigide . . . 'Droit comme un I': Les exemples sont innombrables: tout le 'Vierge, le vivace. . . .'


In his reading of the "Cantique," A. Chisholm stresses the second sense of "vigie." *Towards Hérodiade*, p. 150.

See Robert Cohn's Letter Table (Appendix C) in *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965, pp. 269 and 271.
26 My reading of this segment echoes Jacques Derrida's discussion of Mallarmé's concept of virginity as an undecidable structure in "La Double séance," La Dissémination, pp. 290-91.

27 Kristeva, La Révolution, p. 601.

28 The most interesting article on the analogy between Mallarmé's system of écriture and danse is Carol Barko's "The Dancer and the Becoming of Language, Yale French Studies, 54, 1977, 173-87.

29 In his elaboration of castration as part of the process of creative dissemination, Derrida (GLAS and La Dissémination) shows how writing involves, the continual loss/cutting/spacing of the Word. The metaphorical system which best illustrates the process is, of course, the language of fruits and flowers.

30 Cohn, Toward the Poems of Mallarmé, p. 62.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The main preoccupation of the foregoing pages has been an examination of Mallarmé's poetics as it first appears in rudimentary form and then evolves in the notes and fragments of the "Hérodiade" manuscript. With this first major work Mallarmé explored the problematic relationship between productivity, negativity and Art, cultivated a textual unconscious, and gradually developed a concept of écriture as critical process. It is precisely this concern with the becoming of a text and the limits of interpretation which forms the basis of a comparative analysis of Mallarmé and Freud.

Subject to thirty-five years of revision and reformulation, "Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère" not only implements the poetic strategies outlined in the early correspondence but clearly anticipates the radical proclamations put forth later in "Crise de Vers." Describing this literary crisis in the 1880's as both "exquise" and "fondamentale," Mallarmé proceeded to announce the birth of a new aesthetic, an essentially modernist vision of Art which ultimately led him to question the validity, indeed even the feasibility of

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literary praxis: "Quelque chose comme les Lettres existe-
t-il?" and "A savoir s'il y a lieu d'écrire" (O.C. 645). If
the crisis is qualified as acute, it is because the essen-
tial changes taking place in the literature of this period
entailed a step by step deconstruction of traditional forms
of literary representation, a process already nascent in
"Hérodiade."

To free up the sensuous signifying power of words,
wrote Mallarmé, is to begin to unveil "les mille intentions
certaines et mystérieuses du langage" (O.C. 919). To sur-
render "l'initiative aux mots" (O.C. 366) by calling for the
suppression of authorial identity; to create a poetics of
effect through the continuous suspension of reference; to
approximate the discourse of the Unconscious, this "air ou
chant sous le texte," by the systematic subversion of all
forms of hierarchy thereby creating a self-reflexive work, a
"Texte y parlant de lui-même" (O.C. 663): such is the inten-
tion informing the composition and development of "Les
Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère."

What begins in the 1860's as the adolescent crisis of
a solitary princess is gradually transposed into a macro-
cosmic drama of becoming, the genesis of character and text
being one and the same. Far from representing the immaterial
perfection of the "idealist" mind, Hérodiade allegorizes the
ambivalent rapport between the writer and his work, the
father and his offspring. Like the sickly child/text of
"Don du poème," "Hérodiade" is another "enfant d'une nuit d'Idumée" (O.C. 40), a work doomed to incomplection.

Hérodiade, ce mot sombre et rouge comme une grenade ouverte" (C. I, 154). "... pareille à la chair de la femme, la rose/Cruelle Hérodiade" (O.C. 34). As the sum of the polymorphous qualities of her name, Hérodiade is not a character in any traditional sense, but a nexus of signification. Embodying the subversive of the signifier, that is, its perpetual power of regeneration, this virgin dancer incarnates what Mallarmé calls "le double jeu" of language--"peut-être toute l'aventure de la différence sexuelle" (O.C. 305). Lacking in self-definition and completely androgynous, she becomes for her creator an "être purement rêvé, et absolument indépendente de l'Histoire" (C. I, 154). As a "jeune intellectuelle" inquiring into the mystery of her origin, Hérodiade is a reader of texts. Striving to decipher "le sens de ses marques précoces," (N. 214) written in the faded pages of the old nurse's psyche and figured in the precious gems of her childhood memories, she discovers the unalterable fact of her own alterity. Originally inscribed in a complex weave of specular relations and phantom images which have been camouflaged by the published version of the "Scène," Hérodiade's narcissism functions as both a defense mechanism and a fantasy-machine. The prophecies which return to haunt her are the cryptic remnants of other esoteric texts encoded in a primitive language of drives or pulsions which once mobilized, continue to resurface at the
margins of the work, in the space of the variants, and in the shape and repetition of the letter. What is ultimately figured in the bursting of the heroine's jewels, the fragmentation of her mirror and the unarrestable flow of rivers of blood, milk, sweat, tears and ink is the persistent presence of an unconscious discourse of desire: "Ici-bas/Toute coule que la crise/Goutte à goutte thésaurise/Vers les cieux/se vaporise" (N. 218).

"Les mots," as Mallarmé insisted, "gisent, pareils ou de dates diverses, comme des stratifications" (O.C. 901). A reading of the multiple versions of the "Hérodiade" manuscript has shown us that the drama occurs in the permutation of words for, "Hérodiade" is a palimpsest, a pattern of fantasies in which the simultaneous presence of multiple layers of discourse invites continuous excavation. Thus in the "Prélude," the drama of the psyche is played out in the contradictions and repetitions of the manuscript. Perceptible only in the processes of displacement and condensation which operate between variant and text, the return of repressed fantasies of procreation, incest and death depends on the poet's conscious and sustained exploitation of syntactic ambiguities, etymological and graphic effects, blank spaces in the text and other forms of ellipses. Such procedures protect but also elucidate the workings of unconscious drives in the poem.

When read as an integral text, the various segments of the work constitute a block of desiring forces which yield
a multilayered structure open to several alternative readings. By considering the "Cantique" in relation to the "Finale," for example, I uncovered a definite parallelism between decapitation and the loss of virginity. Whether real or imagined, these moments of rupture are not presented as an abstract purification rite involving a complete repudiation of the body as some would have it, but as a swift and exuberant reconciliation between the intellect and the senses. Rather than a denial of the physical, the heroine's quest for self-knowledge replicated by the breaking of the hymen and the fall of the executioner's ax is both rooted in and ultimately defeated by "Les anciens désaccords/Avec le corps" (N. 181).

The "Hérodiade" manuscript does not offer its readers any unified meanings or definitive answers. In this sense, the heroine's struggle with fertility and sterility is bequeathed to the reader. Hérodiade's inability to solve the enigma of her past makes us conscious of the imminent failure of our own interpretive practice. Radically incomplete, "Hérodiade," like Freud's dreamwork, is a rebus, a text in flux. What prompted Freud to describe dream analysis as an interminable process was the gradual realization that all dreams contain some part which remains unintelligible. He identified this impenetrable nucleus as the "dream's navel," the place "where it straddles the unknown" (S.E. V, 525). It is in much the same manner that Mallarmé recognized and protected the mysteries of language. Thus he concluded
that the creative act constituted a lifetime project and that all texts were microcosmic reflections of a single work. Just as the writing of a book has no identifiable beginning or end, the activity of reading is a "pratique désespérée" (O.C. 647), a product of chance or dream. Yet the very survival of the work depends on its power to engage a reader, not merely to consume a text but to produce another: "Un solitaire tacite concert se donne, par la lecture, à l'esprit qui regagne, sur une sonorité moindre, la signification . . . ." (O.C. 380). Since every strand and fragment of the "Hérodiade" manuscript is capable of countless associations which are each time determined by the approach/position of the reader, the work can never be considered a finished product. Recalling that for Mallarmé "toute la modernité est fournie par le lecteur," it is hoped that this study will encourage further inquiry.
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