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INTRODUCTION

Advice To Young Psychoanalysts: Read Mallarmé

As Jean-Michel Rabaté recalls in 'Lacan's Return to Freud',[1] in 1969 the French linguist Georges Mounin published an essay in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* entitled 'Quelques traits du style de Jacques Lacan'.[2] Amidst scathing remarks about Lacan's self-described "Gongorism", his disastrous incomprehension of Saussure, and his idiosyncratic use of constructions like *de ce que* or *pour ce que* in place of the far more familiar *parce que*, Mounin suggested that Lacan's linguistic peculiarities, like those of Mallarmé before him, arose from an infantile bilingualism. While Mounin was wrong about the linguistic ambiance of both the psychoanalyst's and the poet's childhoods, for many French thinkers of the last half-century the proximity between their respective styles has been too striking to ignore. Reflecting on his ambivalence towards the psychoanalyst's literary imagination and scientific pretensions, Lacan's own analyst Rudolph Loewenstein remarked that "when I read his works I can't help thinking, 'Words, words, words'. And yet I love and admire Mallarmé".[3] In a perhaps more positive vein, Jean Bollack described Lacan's translations of Heidegger as having drawn the German thinker's work away from an etymologizing nationalism and towards "science, art, and language", and thus as having "add[ed] a touch of Mallarmé".[4] In his own attempt to account for their stylistic proximity, Vincent Kaufmann offers an impressive — yet far from complete — list of those who have compared Mallarmé and Lacan:

> In her *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France*, Elisabeth Roudinesco recalls that in a dossier published by *L'Humanité* on the day after Lacan's death, Jean-Pierre Léonardini — one of the contributors to this dossier — compared the style of Lacan to that of Mallarmé. He was certainly not the first to do so. In 1974 Shoshana Felman had brought the two *œuvres* together in a very feminine special edition of *L'Arc* devoted to Lacan. René Girard spoke in *La violence du sacré* of a 'Mallarméan version of psychoanalysis', and others had perhaps made similar remarks even earlier. More recently, the same

> comparison has also been made by Alain Badiou, who sees in Mallarmé and Lacan the greatest formal dialecticians in French thought.[5]

Lacan himself referred infrequently to Mallarmé. His two most significant references are no doubt to be found in the *Ecrits*, where Lacan twice uses the poet's image of ordinary discourse as a coin "put into someone else's hand in silence"[6] to convey the difference between empty and full speech.[7] However, as Jean-Claude Milner remarks, Lacan not only composed unpublished sonnets in the style of Mallarmé,[8] he also took inspiration from the poet's designs for a literary ceremony — Mallarmé's infamous "Book" — when conceiving of *La cause freudienne*'s institutional structure.[9] More significantly still, Milner argues that Lacan "associate[d] Freud and Mallarmé under the heading of the signifier". Milner writes:

> The modern reflection on language begins, it seems to me, with the following affirmation that we read in Meillet, who was a direct student of Saussure: the name *bird* does not designate the bird that is there, but the one who has taken flight. The signified consists in the absence of the signified thing. How can we not link these aphorisms to Mallarmé's flower, which is "absent from every bouquet"? Is this the same absence? If yes, then the condition of possibility of language as an object of a Galilean science, and the condition of possibility of language as a poetic material, are one and the same. I claim that the Lacanian notion of the *signifier* sums up this unicity.[10]

In tracking the history of Lacan's — or of Lacanians' — relation to Mallarmé, it is indeed the *signifier* that occupies pride of place. The most noteworthy attempt to bring Mallarmé and Lacan together, and indeed to do so, as Milner suggests, through an alliance between the science of structural linguistics and poetry, is to be found in work of the Telquellians, mostly through Julia Kristeva. Announcing *Tel Quel*'s program in *Les lettres françaises* in 1968, Philippe Sollers wrote that the journal would attempt to "go back before those effects that can be situated in the 1920's (Surrealism, Formalism, the extension of structural linguistics) in order to properly pinpoint a more radical reserve inscribed at the end of last century (Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Marx, Freud)".[11] As Kristeva argued exhaustively in *Sèmeiôtiké* (1969) and *La révolution du langage poétique* (1974), Mallarmé was part of an avant-garde whose radical linguistic negativity presaged the Freudian discovery of the unconscious, understood in terms of Lacan's dictum that the unconscious was structured like a language.[12] This genealogy involved the passage from poetic insight to scientific foundation. Commenting in his 1965 essay 'Littérature et totalité' on Mallarmé's reply to Proust, 'The Mystery in Letters', Sollers put this points as follows:

> Mallarmé writes: 'There must be something occult deep inside everyone, decidedly I believe in something opaque, a signification sealed and hidden, that inhabits the common man: for as soon as the masses throw themselves toward some trace that has its reality, for example, on a piece of paper, it's in the writing — not in oneself — that there is something obscure: they stir

> crazily like a hurricane, jealous to attribute darkness to anything else, profusely, flagrantly'. Mallarmé adds: 'I prefer, faced with aggression, to retort that contemporaries don't know how to read'. For us, these remarks can be illuminated in a new light if we consider the findings of psychoanalysis, particularly the following, recent one: that the unconscious is structured like a language. The existence of this *signifier sealed and hidden*, which Mallarmé suspects in each person, has since, if I may say so, been scientifically *proven*.[13]

In the spirit of avant-garde one-upmanship, in 1974 Kristeva sought to show how Mallarmé offered resources not only for legitimating, but indeed for going beyond Lacan and the primacy he accorded the Law. In a long reading of 'Prose (pour des Esseintes)', for instance, she shows how the poem's phonic patterns disrupt its law-governed signifying unities. A sense of Kristeva's reading strategy can gleaned from her commentary on the first stanza:

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

Kristeva firstly explores the semantic and articulatory overdetermination of the word "Hyperbole", which she claims is central to understanding the poem as a whole. For her, the semantic value of the word is "the negation of an authority",[14] a value she deduces, firstly, from the fact that one of its a-signifying parts, the "signifying differential"[15] [per], is a homophone of *père*, which is also linked phonically to the term "fer", an image of intransigent solidity, as well as to the term "ère" found in the syntagm "l'ère d'autorité" from the fourth stanza. Secondly, she claims that the signifying differential [bol] stands for "the seme for symbolic negation"[16] since it constitutes part of a term Mallarmé frequently uses to refer to negation, namely, *abolir* and its cognates. Finally, that the word "Hyperbole" involves a "glottal stop"[17] means that it expresses an "aggressivity", [18] which constitutes the articulatory accompaniment to the seme of negation. "Hyperbole" thus names the first movement of what Kristeva takes to be the poem's program: that "an irruption of the drives, a negativity, destroys the stases and the finitudes represented by the symbolic code of language".[19] Mallarmé's poetry instantiates and disrupts the Symbolic Law, relativizing Lacan's central concept by recourse to the feminine force of *la sémiotique*.

While *Tel Quel*'s references to Mallarmé and Lacan oscillated between using the psychoanalyst to clarify the poet, then using the poet to surpass the psychoanalyst, Jean-Claude Milner's 1978 book *For the Love of Language* employs Lacan's own concept of *lalangue* to conceive the difference between what structuralist and generativist linguistics can capture of language, on the one hand, and those language-effects that escape both of them, such as poetry, on the other.[20] Given language's proclivity for producing equivocity, all signifying activity is either in excess of what the subject means to say, or misses what the subject was aiming for. For Mil-

ner, this irreducible discrepancy gives rise to the dream of an Absolute language, of which Mallarmé offers a classic image: "Languages imperfect insofar as they are many; the absolute one is lacking".[21] Yet as Milner recognizes, for Mallarmé verse is precisely that which "makes up for language's deficiencies, as a superior supplement"[22] by overcoming the Chance encounter between sound and sense in the transmutational space of a verse.

Milner stages another encounter between Mallarmé and Lacan in his 1983 book *Les Noms indistincts*. Here, he claims *Un coup de dés* comes as close as any text can to simultaneously staging the registers of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary (R, S, and I):

> …in the dry crackle of the two dice, thrown one against the other, one bearing the figure of meaning and the other of sound; in the course of this instant — an instant without duration, but one that, for having taken place once, is such that nothing can make it so that it did not take place: hence the character of an eternal circumstance that, through the alliance of words, we can confer upon it — we will thus hear the encounter: of S, for it is a matter of numbers (figures of the dices' faces, arithmetic of verse, network of syntax and lexicon), of I, for it is a matter of formed matter (cubes of dice, sonorities and significations of words), of R, finally, the idea of which is given by the cluster of stars, without properties, without any form other an illusion, yet nevertheless countable as the *septuor* and nameable as the *Septentrion*.[23]

Milner has since prolonged his engagement with Mallarmé and Lacan in later works such as *L'Œuvre claire*, where the poet's doctrine of contingency is shown to presage post-Popperian science in its insistence on the centrality of falsification.[24] His 2003 piece, 'The Tell-Tale Constellations', reprinted in this collection, extends this argument through an analysis of Mallarmé's image of the constellation.

Published a year before Milner's *Les noms indistincts*, Alain Badiou's *Theory of the Subject* presents Lacan and Mallarmé, as Kaufmann pointed out above, as the "two great modern French dialecticians".[25] We will leave a discussion of this work for our presentation of Badiou's essay published here, 'Is it Exact That All Thought Emits a Throw of Dice?' Suffice to say that while Badiou has never engaged with Mallarmé and Lacan within the framework of a language-centred philosophy or science, the poet and psychoanalyst have long accompanied his thinking: they appear in close proximity, at once textual and conceptual, in pieces such as 'Philosophy and Psychoanalysis' from *Conditions*,[26] as well as in Badiou's 1994-1995 seminar *Lacan: L'antiphilosophie 3*.[27]

In more recent years, critics have maintained the suggestive linkage between Mallarmé and Lacan. In *Mallarmé le livre: Etude psychanalytique* (2007),[28] Joseph Attié has offered the most committed and extensive Lacanian analysis of the poet's *œuvre* to date, while in *Contre l'éternité: Ogawa, Mallarmé, Lacan* (2009),[29] Jean Allouch has examined the interlinked questions of hermeticism, language games and, most centrally, of ones second death or disappearance, through a close engagement

with Leo Bersani's classic work *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*. Perhaps the most promising angle of attack is to be found in Patrick Thériault's *Le (Dé)montage de la fiction: La révélation moderne de Mallarmé* (2010).[30] Thériault's point of departure is Mallarmé's admission in 'Music and Letters' that he is reluctant "to take apart impiously, in public, the fiction, and consequently the literary mechanism itself, in order to lay out the principle part or nothing".[31] For this radically modern poet, literature has no transcendental guarantee. However, not only does playing the literary game require an at least feigned investment in the *illusio* of its ontological grounding; it also brings with it a singular *jouissance*, which seems irresistibly to correlate with the existence of an Ideal. How can Mallarmé adapt himself to the pragmatic contradiction between belief and critical lucidity, which characterizes his position of enunciation? For Thériault, Mallarmé precedes Lacan in recognizing that the subject's desiring economy is structured by a *lack*: literature's "principal part or nothing", its "superior attraction" that is in fact a "void".[32] For both poet and psychoanalyst, understanding desire's "motor"[33] not as an *excess* but as a *lack* — one which, moreover, can never be filled — allows a first step towards an equal parts tragic and ludic acceptance of the ineradicable inexistence of the Ideal. But Thériault goes further, showing how their shared conception of desire and the Law can help explain Mallarmé and Lacan's infamously hermetic, indeed initiatory, mode of address. While both promise to lead the reader towards knowledge, whether it be of Literature or the Law, both of these knowledges are progressively revealed to be *nothing* — or *almost-nothings*.

Other contemporary approaches to Mallarmé and Lacan exist, and the points of comparison, real-historical entanglements, and distance-takings have hardly been exhaustively addressed by existing studies.[34] A work on Lacan's Mallarmé remains to be written.

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This edition of *S: Journal for the Circle of Lacanian Ideology Critique*, however, seeks to advance and problematize the relation between Mallarmé and Lacan by translating a series of the best and most exciting scholars working on the poet today. Some of the names in the journal will no doubt be familiar to readers, while others have never before appeared in translation. In what follows, we will briefly outline each of the essays with an eye to situating them within the author's larger work.

One philosophical contemporary of *Tel Quel* who also maintained a close relationship with Mallarmé and Lacan is Alain Badiou, whose 1986 lecture 'Is it Exact That All Thought Emits a Throw of Dice?' is the first article in this edition.[35] To place the essay in its proper context, we first need to refer to Badiou's 1982 book *Theory of the Subject.* Two years after the publication of Kristeva's *La révolution du langage poétique*, and developed over five seminar sessions held between December 15, 1975, and February 8, 1976, Badiou provided his first and to date most extensive engagement with Mallarmé. In these seminars, later published as the second

chapter of *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou reads Mallarmé and Lacan as two equally brilliant exponents of the "structural dialectic".[36] Both poet and psychoanalyst are supposed to have taken a step beyond structuralism by showing how the web of "weak differences" constituting any given structure is caused by an absent event, a vanishing upsurge of "strong difference" that henceforth insists in the structure, splitting each of its individual elements.[37] However, Mallarmé and Lacan still remain incorrigible conservatives who have to be surpassed if a truly revolutionary thought is to be constructed. In poems such as 'A la nue accablante tu' and the 'Sonnet en –yx', Badiou reads Mallarmé as having staged events that are made to disappear as soon as they appear, thus allowing "weak difference" to assert its primacy over "strong difference".[38] By stark contrast, in 'Is it Exact…?' we witness Badiou taking an irreversible step towards treating Mallarmé as his "master",[39] as he puts it in *Logics of Worlds*; a master from whom he has learned to think, rather than repress, the event. In fact, Badiou's 1986 piece includes a long reading of *Un coup de dés* that will make up much of 'Meditation Nineteen' from his magnum opus *Being and Event* (1988), where Mallarmé is treated as the unsurpassable poet-thinker of the event. In anticipation of this reading, Badiou opens 'Is it Exact…?' by asking: how Mallarmé can present himself as a "man habituated to dream", as he does in his 1889 homage to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, yet also write in 'Funeral Toast' that "the pure poet's humble, generous gesture / prohibits dreams, his function's enemy"?[40] For Badiou, everything turns on the poet being habituated — in the sense of attuned to — "dream" in the form of the event, and not in the form of Romantic reverie or mystical communion. Badiou writes: "I will therefore hold that the real of which the Mallarméan text proposes the anticipation is never the unfolded figure of a spectacle. Mallarmé's doctrine devotes poetry to the *event*, which is to say to the pure *there is* of occurrence" (18). Using a Lacanian terminology, he writes that Mallarmé's "prohibition bearing upon imaginary totalization" — the Nature of the Romantics — "authorizes a symbolic subtraction, from which is fixed a point of the real" (19). In his extensive reading of *Un coup de dés*, Badiou thus shows how Mallarmé first circumscribes the "evental site" where an event will — perhaps —have taken place, before producing "an absolute symbol of the event" (25) in the form of the dice-throw, which the Master hesitates to perform before sinking beneath the waves. 'Is it Exact…?' thus constitutes a stunning reversal of *Theory of the Subject*, inaugurating Badiou's mature thinking of the event, whose concept Mallarmé will have heroically provided for all philosophy to come.

While less well-known to Anglophone readers than Badiou, Jean-Claude Milner's engagement with Mallarmé nevertheless extends from his first book to his most recent writings. 'The Tell-Tale Constellations', a 2003 piece first published in the journal *Elucidation*, finds its place within the second stage of his dialogue with the poet. In one of his early works, *For the Love of Language* (1978), Milner asks how it is possible that language can be the object of a science — linguistics — as well as of love, in the form of poetry. Here, he differentiates between the motivations of the linguist, who seeks to identify the universal rules governing the grammatical and

the ungrammatical, and the purists, who are fascinated by the power of language to break down these very rules. Milner's first examination of Mallarmé treats the poet as an exemplary purist. As he notes in a recent 2016 essay 'Mallarmé Perchance', which continues the thread of *For the Love of Language*, rather than strictly adhering to the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified legislated by Saussure, Mallarmé thinks that verse can alone create a total word whose signifier would in fact correspond to its signified — whose sound would be uniquely joined with its sense. This is Mallarmé's "promise":[41] that verse can create a word whose phonic qualities match with its signified content, thus making up for the internal deficiencies of language. Yet this is a promise unable to be kept, and defines Mallarmé as an exemplary purist.

Taking up the relations between linguistic science and poetry in the second stage of his engagement with the poet, 'The Tell-Tale Constellations' pits Mallarmé the purist against a thematic that has occupied Milner since *For the Love of Language*: the conditions that define post-Galilean science. Following the work of Alexandre Koyré — and, above all, Koyré's influence on Lacan — Milner locates a radical historical cut that took place with Galileo's unveiling of the infinite Universe, as opposed to the finite cosmos of the ancients. One of the defining features of this Universe is the role Galileo accorded mathematics. In the post-Galilean universe, mathematics underwrites the sensible regime thanks to what Milner calls the "mathematization of the empirical".[42] For the post-Galilean scientific subject, empirical reality is not defined by a sensible relation to the world or even by a situated agent operating in a spatio-temporal field. Instead, empirical reality is mapped and formalised by mathematical language. This, for Milner, results in the non-existence of the constellations in the post-Galilean Universe. As he opens 'The Tell-Tale Constellations': "Constellations do not exist; there only exist the stars that compose them. This is a lemma of modern science. It is also one of the differential traits that separates the *phusis* of the Ancients from post-Galilean Nature" (31). In other words, the Universe mapped by Galilean science takes stars that cannot be immediately perceived by the gaze as *more real* than the ideological, cosmological and contingent groupings of stars named the constellations: "Visible or not, the stars are real; precisely because they are visible, constellations are imaginary" (31).

In this article, Milner asks how Mallarmé responded to this "sacrifice demanded by science" (33). Rather than constructing an alternative, intrinsically poetic, Universe to the one presented by post-Galilean science, Mallarmé believes that "[v]erse and, more generally, Letters must constitute a limit to science" (34). In other words, Mallarmé uses the calculations of verse and his doctrine of Chance to render visible that which post-Galilean science deems invisible. His poetry, though, not only "bear[s] witness to this disappearance", it also draws upon the brilliance of the constellations to posit a "subtraction and exception" (34) to modern science — that is, an internal limit. This limit, crystallized by the image of the Constellation that *perhaps* appears at the close of *Un coup de dés*, signals Mallarmé's verdict on post-Galilean science: he "says no" to it, calling upon the numbers that comprise the cal-

culations of verse to critique the "hyper-scientific" modernity instituted by Galileo. Mallarmé's singular use of language not only stands in distinction to the linguistic sciences, but, in 'The Tell-Tale Constellations', also to scientific modernity as such.

In his article on 'Play, jouissance and *illusio* in Mallarmé and Bourdieu', Patrick Thériault continues the work begun in his 2010 book *Le (Dé)montage de la Fiction*. There he had demonstrated a homology between Lacan's apparently oracular discourse and the notoriously hermetic structure of Mallarmé's own address. In his 2011 article, Thériault extends his engagement to Bourdieu's reading of a key passage from Mallarmé's 'Music and Letters'. Arguing that Bourdieu mistakes Mallarmé's relation to the "literary game" for an elitist cynic, Thériault shows how the poet was not only exemplarily conscious of the sociological determinants of his practice, as Bourdieu recognized, but also that he understood the libidinal dynamics of literature — something the sociologist failed to elaborate. In a striking anticipation of Lacan, Mallarmé describes how the practice of reading and enjoying literature is performed "[i]n light of a superior attraction like a void"; in light, that is, of an Ideal or transcendent object of belief, which is ultimately revealed to be a "nothingness". As Mallarmé clarifies, the vacuity of this Ideal does not prevent the reader from being "lured on" (*Divagations*, 187) by it. Like Lacan after him, Mallarmé recognizes "the perennial or invincible nature of the Ideal, beyond all of the twists and turns of the history of thought" (47). More importantly still, both Frenchmen understand how the desiring economy of the subject can be structured by an *absent* object, whose inexistence in no way prevents it from acting as a libidinal "motor" (Mallarmé's own term, *Divagations*, 187). For Thériault, against Bourdieu, this mode of *jouissance* cannot be identified purely and simply with cynicism. This is not only because it operates pre-reflexively. Rather, as Thériault shows through a reading of an early letter written to Mallarmé by his friend Eugène Lefébure, Mallarmé's subjective position is best described as that of a "pervert". At once duplicitous and mystifying, read through the structural position of the pervert, Mallarmé can be seen to orient himself towards the restricted domain of literary production in late-19th century France in a way that allowed him to be aware of, detached from, yet capable of manipulating its singularly complex codes.

With Thierry Roger and Jean-François Hamel's articles, we turn from libidinal to political economy. In 'Art and Anarchy in the Time of Symbolism', Roger provides perhaps the most extensive and informed treatment to date of Mallarmé's relation to anarchism.[43] As Roger recalls, this question preoccupied prominent modern critics like Julia Kristeva, whose book *La révolution du langage poétique* includes a long section on the objective solidarity between the poet's artistic negativity and anarchist political praxis.[44] Yet by drawing on newspaper and journal articles, books of literary criticism as well as novels from fin-de-siècle France, Roger proves that the question of anarchism already exercised the minds of Mallarmé's literary contemporaries — perhaps even more so than it did his 20th century avant-garde readers. But Roger does more than rectify the scholarly record.[45] His article also clarifies the complex process of metaphorical transfer, as well as mutual misun-

derstanding, that linked literature to anarchism in late-19th century France. Firstly, Roger maps the most obvious sites of conflict between anarchism and Symbolism. Despite what he describes as the "sincere, profound and durable engagement" (62) of writers like Mirbeau, Quillard, Lazare or Fénéon with the anarchist movement, from the start there existed an irreducible tension between Symbolism's tendency towards the autonomization or absolutization of literature, not to mention its historical pessimism, and anarchism's progressivism and obvious concern for *le fait social*. Even their shared distaste for commodity society could not durably synthesize the egalitarianism of one with the aristocratism of the other. A more promising terrain of agreement, however, could be found in the "cardinal notion of the individual" (66). Yet as Roger explains, while one form of individualism "attack[ed] institutions and authority, the other attack[ed] the people, universal suffrage and equality understood as egalitarianism" (67). But where is Mallarmé to be situated on this constantly shifting terrain? Roger proceeds first by assessing the poet's own pronouncements on anarchism, before turning to the formal properties of his work. While Mallarmé showed a deep distrust of what were for him the factitious forms of justice found in the institutions of the Third Republic, he showed a consistent scepticism towards modes of anarchist praxis such as bombings. Instead, he praised both the intellectual virtues and enduring political efficacy of writing. Most significant, however, was his desire to go beyond — or rather before — all existing political ideologies to again institute, through poetry, an "articulation between the human and the cosmic" (73). Following Bertrand Marchal's *La religion de Mallarmé*, Roger thus concludes that however radical his poetic innovations, Mallarmé's was ultimately a quite traditional "Grand politics" that sought a social form and cosmological harmony; a politics, in other words, that "would no doubt horrify an anarchist nominalist like Stirner" (74), not to mention many of Mallarmé's own anarchist admirers.

Jean-François Hamel's article picks up where Roger's historical inquiry leaves off, turning this time to the political reception of Mallarmé in the 20th century. Drawing on his account of the initial stages of this reception, which he presents in exhaustive detail in his 2014 book *Camarade Mallarmé: Une politique de la lecture*,[46] Hamel offers a genealogy of the figure of 'le camarade Mallarmé', a paradoxical incarnation of the poet as a privileged point of reference for progressive and revolutionary thinkers, from Sartre to the Telquellians, Badiou to Rancière. Hamel's research sheds light on contemporary readings of Mallarmé, in particular those of Badiou and Rancière, and allows us to see, as he puts it, the "two chains of memory" (99) that have structured Mallarmé's recent reception. On the one hand, Hamel discerns a tendency to treat Mallarmé's work "as a philosophical hieroglyph that demands to be deciphered" in order to discover within it "the ethical and political foundations of a community to come" (99). On the other hand, Hamel reveals how Mallarmé's nationalization — or sacralization — in the context of the Occupation and the Liberation determined that his exigent poetics and posture of aristocratic isolation became associated with a principled opposition to "the collaborationist

gregariousness of universal reportage" (99), as Hamel memorably puts it. In the most extensive section of his article, Hamel demonstrates that it was the decisive influence of Valéry's reading of Mallarmé — indeed of his reading of late-19th Symbolism more generally — that laid the foundations for this figure of 'le camarade Mallarmé'. For Valéry, Mallarmé was at once an aesthetic and an ethical guide. For later writers such as Henri Mondor and Maurice Blanchot, Valéry's reading thus permitted the poet's very position within the "Ivory Tower" to become the condition of possibility for his political and ethical potency. Moreover, it made him a metonymy of all that was best in French culture. As Hamel remarks, there was nothing obvious about this, since "[i]n his lifetime, his poetry was described as Latin, Hebrew, Chinese" (96): that is, as anything but French. Hamel's work thus suggests that Mallarmé's uncompromising linguistic radicality — his formal inventiveness — has ultimately become indissociable from the ethical and political guidance that, in the guise of 'le camarade Mallarmé', he has provided to many French thinkers since.

Vincent Kaufmann is one such critic intimately familiar with the various incarnations of 'le camarade Mallarmé'.[47] In his 2011 book *La faute à Mallarmé: L'aventure de la théorie littéraire*,[48] Kaufmann uses the poet — or, rather, those readings of the poet published in journals such as *Tel Quel* and *Change* — as a point of condensation for the aesthetic and political concerns of post-Sartrean French literary theory. Kaufmann defends the utopian energy and theoretical inventiveness of this period's signature texts, all the while admitting that today it is "no doubt closed as a chapter in the history of literary criticism".[49] In 'Believe That it Was to be Very Beautiful', by contrast, Kaufmann turns away from theory to a more traditional form of literary history, even if he qualifies his article as an "anti-philological tale". He takes up the crucial question of Mallarmé's relation to his two most important predecessors, Victor Hugo and Charles Baudelaire. Focusing on Baudelaire as the poet who first — and perhaps forever — "defigured" French poetry, to adapt a term from Barbara Johnson to whom Kaufmann's essay is dedicated, he describes the paradoxical intergenerational dialectic linking Mallarmé to his forebears. Is it possible, he asks, to be the heir of a poet notorious for his own inability to fully assume his history, who squandered his inheritance and neglected the property he was bequeathed; a poet, moreover, who denied the very existence of a transcendent Other from whom symbolic authority could flow? As Kaufman shows, Mallarmé's first treatment of Baudelaire in *Literary Symphony* is a model of self-deception. Instead of registering that his predecessor had broken — indeed "denounced" (Kaufmann's term, 112) — the poetic contract between religion, community and lyrical subjectivity, in his 1865 text Mallarmé treats him as nothing less than the preeminent exponent of a "religion of letters" (107). Comparing *Literary Symphony* with its heavily-modified reprise in *Divagations*, titled *Long Ago, in the Margins of a Copy of Baudelaire* (1888), Kaufmann notes how in the intervening period Mallarmé erased from his text all of the marks of subjectivity. For Kaufmann, Mallarmé's infamous *death as an author* is above all a mark of his relation to Baudelaire. In regards to the poet's well-known

letter to Henri Cazalis, Kaufmann argues that it is no coincidence it was written at almost the exact same time as Baudelaire's death. "Whatever the real state of Mallarmé's health", he writes, "whatever role hypochondria played (but all of this is even more significant if it is a case of hypochondria), it is necessary to point out that at the moment of Baudelaire's death Mallarmé begins to be sick, to die — as if he were contaminated by Baudelaire's death" (110). This "contamination" consists in the fact that far from promulgating "a religion of letters", Mallarmé came to recognize that Baudelaire had in fact "denounce[d] a specific poetic contract signed by God, the (charitable) poet and meaning (the good), a contract which had had its glory days and its romantic predecessors, Hugo in particular" (111). But if symbolic transmission was now impossible, for the simple reason that after Baudelaire the Symbolic itself had been revealed to be radically inconsistent, how did Mallarmé take up the intergenerational thread of French poetry? How, Kaufmann asks, can one "come after a poetry infected by a pathology?" (112), a pathology of transmission? For Kaufmann, Mallarmé's *œuvre* cannot be understood unless his apparent reprise of the Hugolian gesture of creating a poetic ceremony to unite a sundered community is seen as a knowingly *post*-Baudelairean project. After *Les Fleurs du mal*, there are no more subjects or communities; no more God or "people". However, there is language, and thus poetry, even if its existence is as precarious as the communities it can fleetingly form. After swallowing Baudelaire's "tutelary poison", Mallarmé thus undertook the impossible task of creating a community for whom the big Other is knowingly barred.

Claude Pérez's piece 'Mallarmé, Polecat-Ferret', is similarly concerned with questions of transmission and poetic history. This time, however, it is not Mallarmé who occupies the unenviable position of the troubled heir, but rather the contemporary French poet Dominique Fourcade, who is introduced to English readers for perhaps the first time in his otherwise long and celebrated career. As Pérez points out, Fourcade's relationship to Mallarmé is unique in the contemporary intellectual context. For not only is he a working poet and theoretician of poetry in his own right, he is also a critic — at times furious, forgiving, but always energetic — of the "obscure Sphinx of Tournon".[50] Central to Fourcade's approach is the gap he perceives between Mallarmé's "programmes" and the actual "poems" that result from them. While an extensive and star-studded list of philosophers have mined Mallarmé's prose works for insights, Fourcade's judgement of them is devastating: "There is an abyss between the great programmatic moments — unverifiable experiences, capital experiences, as stimulating as possible — and the very constrained mechanics of a number of poems" (127). However, as Pérez also makes clear, Fourcade's severity with respect to Mallarmé is interwoven with a deep ambivalence about the influence the poet has had on French letters. Recounting an at turns hilarious and horrifying dream, Fourcade imagines himself "being handcuffed to Mallarmé" (123). But is Mallarmé the policeman who has captured Fourcade as punishment for his heresy, or is Fourcade the one detaining Mallarmé, thus protecting contemporary French poets and artists from his deleterious influence? For Pérez, the answer is

both. Moreover, he demonstrates that Mallarmé and Fourcade share more than the latter is perhaps willing to admit. Not only does the postmodern bric-à-brac cluttering Fourcade's poems recall Mallarmé's staging of the salon décor of his time, but in its formal dispersal Fourcade's poetry shows the author of *Est-ce que j'peux placer un mot?* owes an unpayable — and thus disavowed — debt to Mallarmé.

Channelling Fourcade, Pérez remarks that philosophers do little of what Fourcade exemplarily does, namely to ask whether Mallarmé's poems are successful *as* poems. For Larissa Drigo, by contrast, there is no bathetic gap between the poet's soaring pretensions and his actual achievements. Correlatively, there is no reason to give up on the project of treating Mallarmé's work "as a reservoir or generator of concepts" (128). In 'Folding and Unfolding the Infinite', Drigo sets herself the difficult task of explaining how with *Un coup de dés* Mallarmé produced a work whose singular "configuration of space-time [was] capable of presenting its own infinitude" (137). For Drigo the infinity operative in *Un coup de dés* is without doubt a potential infinity. Drawing on two of Borges' short stories, 'The Garden of Forking Paths' and 'The Aleph', stories which present in a contracted, finite form both temporal and spatial infinities — infinities capable of being unfolded in the successive manner proper to reading — Drigo explains how Mallarmé seeks to do something similar in the space-time of his final poem. "From Borges", Drigo writes, "we can conclude that to demonstrate the inexhaustible infinity of literature, the poem must provide the following: the presentation of a potentially infinite series of convergent, divergent, or parallel times that intersect or are unaware of one another; and the presentation, in a restricted space, of a multiplicity of infinite spaces" (137). In demonstrating how Mallarmé achieves this, Drigo's analysis focuses on the formal features of *Un coup de dés*. The different motifs of the poem, for instance, constitute so many convergent and divergent narrative trajectories for the reader to follow, while the singular use of the double page and its central fold is supposed to stage the fan-like structure of the poem: its contraction and potentially infinite dilation of space and time. If in his 'Observation relative to the poem', Mallarmé claimed to have replaced "regular sound patterns or verses" with "prismatic subdivisions of the Idea", then according to Drigo Mallarmé's "Idea" is infinitely divisible. For her, the figure of the siren, whose impatient scales make disintegrate the "rock / false manor / which imposed / a limit on infinity", is the ideal incarnation of *Un coup de dés* itself. Drigo thus implicitly provides a novel interpretation of Valéry's intuition upon seeing the proofs of *Un coup de dés* for the first time, when he asked: "Was I not present at an event of a universal order?"[51]

Closing our collection is Guillaume Artous-Bouvet's piece 'Of a Latent Prose'. Combining close attention to the syntactical intricacies of the texts with a philosophical sensibility, Artous-Bouvet leads us back to a typically Lacanian problem also addressed by Thériault: the relation between desire and knowledge. Beginning with a comparison of Badiou and Rancière's readings of the sonnet 'A la nue accablante tu', Artous-Bouvet demonstrates that by translating the sonnet into a prose discourse, both philosophers fail to distinguish between three very different forms of

prose that Mallarmé mobilizes. First, there is "the literal and linear prose" (151) that relates the successive hypothetical events of the sonnet. Next, there is the sonnet's immanent meta-discursive voice, through which it speaks of what it (ideally) does or is doing. As Artous-Bouvet suggestively puts it, this is "the reflexive *consciousness* of the poem", as opposed to its mere "*meaning*" (151). Finally, there are Mallarmé's "external" (146) prose pieces, which include his infamous "critical poems". On the basis of this triple distinction, Artous-Bouvet proceeds to a close reading of 'Prose (pour des Esseintes)', a poem whose perplexing title foregrounds the very problematic of the piece. For Artous-Bouvet, 'Prose' is indeed a work of prose insofar as it takes the form of a linear narrative, at least at some of its key junctures. Yet it is also a work of prose insofar as it "expresses its own operation": that is, it both performs and proclaims it is performing poetry's "new duty" (153) to "transpos[e] a fact of nature into its vibratory near-disappearance" (*Divagations*, 210), as Mallarmé famously put it in 'Crisis of Verse'. However, in order to double its effective operation with a discourse on its very operation, Artous-Bouvet shows that the poem must stage within itself some irreducible moment of enunciation. Identifying three such moments in 'Prose', Artous-Bouvet notes that the second person pronoun "tu" present in the opening verses — "Hyperbole ! de ma mémoire / Triomphalement ne sais-tu / Te lever…" — mysteriously disappears and is replaced by the first person plural pronoun "nous", most notably in the ninth and tenth verses: "Nous promenions notre visage / (Nous fûmes deux, je le maintiens)". For Artous-Bouvet, the parenthesis that surrounds this tenth verse, along with the verse's strikingly assertoric tone — not to mention the strangely singular form given to the noun "visage" in the verse that precedes it — all suggest that the unity-in-duality of the poet and his companion — of the poem and its contemplative meta-discourse — is actually of the order of desire, not of actuality. Through this reading, Artous-Bouvet thus seems to conclude that if Mallarmé wrote extensive "external" prose pieces, then it was precisely to suture the irreducible gap between desire and knowledge, which the poem exemplarily articulates.

Notes

1. Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Lacan's Return to Freud', in Jean-Michel Rabaté (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-24.

2. Georges Mounin, 'Quelques traits du style de Jacques Lacan', *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, January 1 (1969), pp. 84-92.

3. Cited in Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan: An Outline of a Life and a History of a System of Thought*, trans. Barbara Bray (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1997), p. 87.

4. Cited in Ibid., p. 228.

5. Vincent Kaufmann, 'Les styles du livre: Mallarmé et Lacan', *Dalhousie French Studies*, Vol. 25, 'Mallarmé, Theorist of our Times' (Fall-Winter, 1993), p. 57.

6. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations*. Translated by Barbara Johnson, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 210.

7. See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 251, p. 801. Page numbers refer to the original French pagination, reproduced in the English translation.

8. Jean-Claude Milner, 'I Believed I Owed Mallarmé the Truth', in Robert Boncardo, Christian R. Gelder, *Mallarmé: Rancière, Milner, Badiou* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017) [forthcoming].

9. Jean-Claude Milner, *L'Œuvre claire: Lacan, la science, la philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), p. 160.

10. 'I Believed I Owed Mallarmé the Truth', *op. cit.*

11. Philippe Sollers, *Lettres françaises*, 30 October-5 November, 1968.

12. Kristeva, J., *Sèméiôtiké : Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Editions du Seuil, 1969), Kristeva, J., *La révolution du langage poétique : L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXème siècle : Mallarmé et Lautréamont* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974).

13. Philippe Sollers, 'Littérature et totalité', *Logiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p. 109.

14. *La révolution du langage poétique*, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

15. Ibid., p. 211

16. Ibid., p. 243.

17. Ibid., p. 246.

18. Ibid., p. 247.

19. Ibid., p. 245.

20. Jean-Claude Milner, *For the Love of Language*, trans. Ann Banfield (London: The MacMillan Press, 1990).

21. *Divagations*, p. 205.

22. Ibid., p. 206.

23. Jean-Claude Milner, *Les Noms indistincts* (Paris: Verdier, 2007), p. 41.

24. *L'Œuvre claire*, p. 62.

25. Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. xl.

26. Alain Badiou, 'Philosophy and Psychoanalysis', in *Conditions* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 201-202.

27. Alain Badiou, *Lacan: L'antiphilosophie 3, 1994-1995* (Paris: Fayard, 2013), pp. 21-22, p. 38.

28. Joseph Attié, *Mallarmé le livre: Etude psychanalytique* (Toulon: Editions du Losange, 2007).

29. Jean Allouch, *Contre l'éternité: Ogawa, Mallarmé, Lacan* (Paris: Epel, 2009).

30. Patrick Thériault, *Le (Dé)montage de la fiction: La révélation moderne de Mallarmé* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010).

31. *Divagations*, p. 187.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. See for example Aleksić Branko, 'L'acte poétique absolu de Mallarmé et de Lacan', *Topique* 4, No. 109, (2009), pp. 87-128.

35. This piece has previously appeared. along with the original, in *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics*, 'On Mallarmé', Vol. IX, No. 3 (Winter 2015), pp. 44-63, pp. 64-786.

36. *Theory of the Subject*, pp. 54-55.

37. Ibid., p. 72.

38. Ibid., p. 88.

39. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event 2* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 4 (translation modified).

40. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Funeral Toast', in *The Poems in Verse*, trans. Peter Manson (Oxford, OH: Miami University Press, 2011), p. 107.

41. Jean-Claude Milner, 'Mallarmé Perchance', trans. Liesl Yamagutchi, in *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics*, Vol. IX, No. 3 (Winter, 2015), p. 87.

42. Jean-Claude Milner, *Introduction à une science du langage* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989), p. 21.

43. Readers interested in this topic will no doubt also find Patrick McGuinness' even more recent work stimulating. See Patrick McGuinness, *Poetry and Radical Politics in fin de siècle France: From Anarchism to L'Action française* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

44. See in particular *La révolution du langage poétique*, p. 427.

45. Roger's extraordinary and unsurpassable work on the *Coup de dés*, numbering over 900 pages in length, is similarly at once a work of historical reconstruction and critical limit-marking. See Thierry Roger, *L'Archive du* Coup de dés: *Etude critique de la récéption d'*Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard *de Stéphane Mallarmé (1897-2007)* (Paris: Garnier, 2010).

46. Jean-François Hamel, *Camarade Mallarmé: Une politique de la lecture* (Paris: Minuit, 2014).

47. See Kaufmann's *Poétique des groupes littéraires, avant-gardes 1920-1970* (Paris: PUF, 1997).

48. Vincent Kaufmann, *La faute à Mallarmé: L'aventure de la théorie littéraire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2011).

49. Ibid., p. 15.

50. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Mallarmé: La lucidité et sa face d'ombre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 92.

51. Paul Valéry, 'Le *Coup de dés*. Lettre au directeur des *Marges*', *Œuvres, I, éd. J. Hytier* (Paris, Gallimard, coll. 'Pléiade', 1957), p. 624.