

Of Mallarmé, his Hérodiade and l'Après-midi d'un Faun, and of the Double

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Although his unparalleled work amazed us from the beginning; although it immediately enchanted the ear, imposed itself on the voice, and showed its mastery of all the machinery of speech by creating through art a sort of necessity in the arrangement of syllables, a moment later it embarrassed and puzzled the mind, sometimes defying it to comprehend.¹

The celebrated French poet Paul Valéry (1871-1945) thus praised his mentor and friend Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), the modest and quiet gentleman who taught English in various *lycées* in France, wrote comparatively little, yet managed, almost single-handedly, to create a poetic revolution that would return the mystery to language and renew the power of its expression for decades to come. Following the works of Baudelaire and *les Parnassiens*² in his youth, Mallarmé soon evolved further and, becoming the “displaced centre”³ of the symbolist movement, created his own poetic world of a complex web of images expressed in a new and surprising musical language, which he continued to ply and shape in search of a crystalline (and ultimately impossible) perfection until his death. His poetry demanded intense engagement from the reader and consequently he was, with the exception of the small circle of his symbolist pupils, or *Mardistes*⁴, often regarded as an obscure and sterile partisan of the *l'art pour l'art* movement. Only in the beginning of the 20th century, when avant-garde groups such as the Dadaists, Surrealists and Futurists hailed him as their poetic influence, did Mallarmé start to receive closer critical attention and was slowly recognised as a giant of poetry and language, “at once the most musical and the most philosophical of modern poets.”⁵

In 1866, the twenty-four year old Mallarmé, married and father to a two-year old daughter, experienced an intense crisis of faith resulting from his “terrible struggle with that old and evil plumage, /.../, God.”⁶ Although God was ‘happily vanquished’, the absence of an absolute transcendence opened up an endless Void which threatened to deny the truth of existence – something the young poet refused to believe:

¹ Valéry, Paul. ‘I Sometimes Said to Stéphane Mallarmé’ (trans. Malcolm Cowley), *The Kenyon Review* 27 (1965), 1, (94-112), p. 95

² A group of poets publishing the literary journal *le Parnasse contemporain*, notably Théodore de Banville, Théophile de Gautier and Leconte de Lisle.

³ Lydon, Mary. ‘Skirting the Issue: Mallarmé, Proust, and Symbolism’, *Yale French Studies* 74 (1988), (157-181), p. 160. Displaced because he remained loyal to some traits of the *école Parnassienne*, especially his continuous respect for form and structure.

⁴ Mallarmé held weekly *salons* at his Parisian apartment on Rue de Rome. As the meetings were held on Tuesdays (*mardi*), the attending poets – among them also W. B. Yeats, Rainer Maria Rilke, the already mentioned Valéry, Stefan George and Paul Verlaine – came to be known as *les Mardistes*. The pupils would later rue the fact that none of the Master’s (*le Maître*) talks were recorded or put down in notes.

⁵ Weinfield, Henry. ‘Introduction and Commentary’ in Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Collected Poems*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994, II (1996), p. xi.

⁶ Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Selected Letters* (ed. and trans. Rosemary Lloyd). Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 74. (letter to Henri Cazalis, Friday 14 May 1867) Mallarmé maintained an extensive correspondence with friends and poets which is the main source of understanding his poetry today.

Yes, I know, we are merely empty forms of matter, but we are indeed sublime in having invented God and our soul. So sublime, my friend, that I want to gaze upon matter, fully conscious that it exists, and yet launching itself madly into Dream, despite its knowledge that Dream has no existence, extolling the Soul and all the divine impressions of that kind which have collected within us from the beginning of time and proclaiming, in the face of the Void which is truth, these glorious lies!⁷

He descended into the Shadows looking for an Absolute beyond the Void. The search for a transcendence, for expressing the Ideal, is a trait of symbolism in general⁸, yet Mallarmé went past the ‘empty ideality’ that Hugo Friedrich finds in Baudelaire⁹, to create the ideal *out of* the emptiness, out of the Nothing. One of his most important concepts thus became the *Azure*, metonymically translated as the Sky; the French *Ciel* can mean both sky and heaven, thus “the inability of the French language to say sky without simultaneously saying heaven is precisely what motivates – indeed, necessitates – the use of the term *Azure*.¹⁰ In a poem with the same title Mallarmé bares his struggle. It starts with a realisation that “*De l’éternel Azur la sereine ironie / Accable*”¹¹ and no matter what the poet calls to his help in order to hide from the Azure (fogs, boredom, and the smoke from chimneys), it is to no avail, because “*-Le Ciel est mort*”¹² and the Azure, triumphant, “*traverse / ta native agonie ainsi qu’un glaive sûr;*”¹³ so that the poet is left haunted in its endless face and can utter nothing more except for the cry of “*L’Azur! l’Azur! l’Azur! l’Azur!*” In slowly breathing through the crisis, Mallarmé tried to reach even further, and a year later he returned from his mental voyages on the edge of conceivable thought:

I’ve just spent a terrifying year: my Thought has thought itself and reached a pure concept. All that my being has suffered as a result during that long death cannot be told, but fortunately, I am utterly dead, and the least pure region where my Spirit can venture is Eternity. My Spirit, that recluse accustomed to dwelling in its own Purity, is no longer darkened even by the reflection of Time.¹⁴

He died but was resurrected, because he emerged victorious from the crisis – victorious not in having conquered the Absolute, but having realised *what* it is, and at the same time, that it is unreachable, that one can only bask in its shadowy glimpses, for its real face of pure Concept is something a mortal mind cannot bear. He acknowledges also some more practical ‘solutions’ which show that he had accepted, to

⁷ Mallarmé 1988: 60

⁸ These ideas were articulately expressed in the *Symbolist Manifesto* published by Jean Moréas in *le Figaro*, 18 Sep 1886.

⁹ e.g. in the poem *le Couche du soleil romantique*: “*Mais je poursuis en vain le Dieu qui se retire; / l’irrésistible Nuit établit son empire*”. Friedrich discusses Baudelaire and Mallarmé (among others) in his celebrated work *The Structure of Modern Poetry*, first published in 1956.

¹⁰ Weinfield 1996: 163

¹¹ ‘The serene irony of the eternal Sky / depresses.’ Except for Hérodiade and the *Faune*, I am using Weinfield’s (1996) translations. In this case he uses ‘sky’ despite the ambiguity. Full citation: Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Collected Poems* (trans. and comment. Henry Weinfield). Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994, II (1996), pp. 19-20.

¹² ‘-The Sky is dead.’

¹³ ‘like a sword / it penetrates your inmost agony’

¹⁴ Mallarmé 1988: 74 (letter to Henri Cazalis, Friday 14 May 1867)

an extent, the strange (non)existence of the Real compared to the Ideal. "I have made a long enough descent into the Void to speak with certainty. There is nothing but Beauty – and Beauty has only one perfect expression, Poetry. All the rest is a lie – except for those beings who derive their existence from the body, love, and that love of the mind which is friendship."¹⁵

The poetics that emerged from this experience was a poetics of *Nothing*, out of which comes pure Beauty. This happens through an exploration of language: about fifty years before the advent of (post)structuralism, Mallarmé realised that because the link between signifier and signified had become an arbitrary one, as soon as he "ventures into the world of things as-they-are their substantial quality (their expected intensity) their very presence, vanishes."¹⁶ Then, "since no necessary link attaches the sound of a word and the notion it evokes, the elucidation is clouded as by a dark drop of ink, in itself nothingness; and the 'jouissance' that was glimpsed turns out to be, in fact, a mirage."¹⁷ Correspondingly, the first verse of the first poem of his *Poésies*¹⁸ is "*Rien, cette écume, vierge vers,*"¹⁹ because "against our senses which perceive appearances and our mind which conceives their possible plenitude, there stands incarnation which jostles these appearances, which over crowds them with others (undesirable), in short, which prevents them from being themselves."²⁰ He therefore searched for a *parole* to reconnect and renew the obsolete *langue*, and explored not only the meanings, but also the musical and sensual imprints of words.

The two main works which were started before the crisis and then evolved and were transformed together with it, were *Hérodiade* and *l'Après-midi d'un faune*. It was already in 1864, when he began writing the former, that a sapling of his new poetics was starting to bud:

I've at last begun my *Hérodiade*. With a sense of terror, for I'm inventing a language which must of necessity bust forth from a very new poetics, which I could define in these few words: *paint, not the object, but the effect it produces*. Therefore the lines in such a poem mustn't be composed of words; but of intentions, and all the words must fade before the sensation.²¹

When processed by the experience of the Void, this seeking of impressions became a play of absence, an instance of *erasure*. The latter, a phenomenon later explored by Derrida from the original term coined by Heidegger, is a form of reflective retrograde absence where signs are denied their existence in retrospect. Of course, in a way, they still exist: "Physically cancelled, yet still legible beneath the cancelation, these signs *sous rature* continue to function in the discourse even while they are excluded from it."²² In terms of basic concepts, erasure is a reminder that certain principles simply cannot be overlooked, however it is also a means of revealing relationships between concepts, and in Mallarmé's case, a sign of the binaries in which he operates: presence and absence, the Real and the Ideal, the Relative and the Absolute, the

¹⁵ Mallarmé 1988: 75 (same letter)

¹⁶ Bonnefoy, Yves. 'The Poetics of Mallarmé' (trans. Elaine Ancekewicz), *Yale French Studies* 54 (1977), (9-21), p. 10.

¹⁷ Bonnefoy 1977: 12

¹⁸ Published posthumously in 1899.

¹⁹ 'Nothing, this foam, virgin verse' (Mallarmé 1996: 3)

²⁰ Bonnefoy 1977: 11

²¹ Mallarmé 1988: 39 (letter to Henri Cazalis, December 1864)

²² McHale, Brian. *Postmodern Fiction*. New York: Methuen, 1987, p. 100.

Body and the Mind. The process of absenting progressively discards all the ‘unnecessary’ elements in order to unearth the basic perfect structure, which can then be re-clothed in a more dynamic, magical and mysterious *parole*. Mallarmé wrote less and less with age, not because the source of his creativity was drying up, but because his passion for perfection was swelling, and he spent years on individual poems, verses and words, slowly removing anything he deemed redundant. “I’ve created my work only by *elimination*, and any truth I acquired resulted uniquely from the loss of an impression which, having sparkled, burned itself out and allowed me, thanks to the shadows thus created, to advance more deeply in the sensation of absolute shadows. Destruction was my Beatrice.”²³ Valéry saw in him one of the last poets who knew that maturing takes time. “For thirty and some years he was a witness or martyr to the idea of the perfect. There are no longer many victims of that intellectual passion.”²⁴

Hérodiade was one of such unfinished projects on which the poet spent decades. It was originally planned as a theatrical work to be entitled *Les Noces d’Hérodiade, mystère*, composed of five parts, of which we have today three completed: the *Ouverture ancienne d’Hérodiade* (an incantation sung by the character of the Nurse), the middle *Scène* (a Racinian dialogue between Hérodiade and the Nurse), and the *Cantique de Saint Jean* (a song uttered by the head of St John the Baptist while being cut off from his body). These now form what is called *Hérodiade* and are treated as an independent work of poetry. Of the others (a *Prélude* intended to replace the *Ouverture*, a *Scène Intermédiaire* and a *Finale*, in which Hérodiade interacts with the head of St John), there remain fragments and sketches which are today not included in the collected works. The Biblical theme of Salomé and John the Baptist is reworked in an ahistoric manner through Mallarmé’s lens of creating impressions rather than narratives. Indeed, the heroine herself, Hérodiade, is a composite of Salomé and her mother Hérodias. The sound or *sensation* of the name was his chief motivation for the whole poetic work:

What inspiration I’ve had I owe to this name, and I believe that if my heroine had been called Salomé, I would have invented this dark word, as red as an open pomegranate, *Hérodiade*. Moreover, I want to make her a creature purely of dream, with absolutely no link to history.²⁵

The *ostensive* theme of the work – and of the whole of Mallarmé’s opus – is absolute Beauty and the desire to reach or *become* it. It starts with its *absence*: the incantation (*Ouverture*) performed by the Nurse who as such gains the status of an oracle, or prophetess, starts with the word *abolie*²⁶, abolished. The dawn reflecting in a frozen lake has thus lost its power. The poet gives us one of his famous empty interiors, an old gilded room with faded tapestries and an abandoned bed, at the top of a solitary tower overlooking the frozen lake. The whole reality seems to consist of no more than remnants of an ancient glory, of the times when Poetry and Beauty still held mystery and a magical transcendence, which now

²³ Mallarmé 1988: 77 (letter to Eugène Lefébure, 27 May 1867)

²⁴ Valéry 1965: 103

²⁵ Mallarmé 1988: 47 (letter to Eugène Lefébure, February 1865) Some interpretations note that the name Hérodiade evokes tonal associations such as *héros*, *Éros*, and *rose*, which is why it works in connection to Beauty, and why Mallarmé associates it with a pomegranate, his symbol of desire.

²⁶ One of Mallarmés preferred words, found in one of his most famous verses, “*aboli bibelot d’une inanité sonore*” (‘Abolished shell whose resonance remains’, Mallarmé 1996: 69) in the mysterious and bizarre *Sonnet en -yx*. Another sonnet, an image of an empty bed, starts with “*Une dentelle s’abolit*” (‘Lace sweeps itself aside’, Mallarmé 1996: 80)

seem to be gone. The question of whether or not they can return is pessimistically answered with the image of an apocalypse, but even the last sunrise fails miserably and the image ends with “*une étoile mourante, et qui ne brille plus.*”²⁷

Although Mallarmé abandoned the project of creating a dramatic work or even a tragedy, *Hérodiade* retains many theatrical qualities, most of all in the *Scène* which follows the *Ouverture*. The first couple of lines reveal the essence of the whole work. As Hérodiade appears, the Nurse’s cry of “*Tu vis! Ou vois-je ici l’ombre d’une princesse?*”²⁸ and her attempt to kiss the princess’s hand is coldly repelled by an imperative “*Reculez.*”²⁹ The emotional power of these two lines is also revealed with the reversal of the formality of address: this is the only moment in the whole text where the Nurse says *tu* to Hérodiade and the princess responds with a *vous*. Everywhere else social hierarchy is strictly observed. “Mallarmé fuses action and gesture, revealing a cleavage that deepens as the scene progresses: the Nurse seeking to draw Hérodiade into common, shared experience; Hérodiade asserting her isolation and inviolability as the very condition of social existence.”³⁰ This movement of back-and-forth happens two more times, as the Nurse tries to touch Hérodiade who recoils more and more aggressively. The princess’s desire is to become a symbol of pure and absolute Beauty (and with it, Poetry). She therefore cannot stand being touched and lives a life of solitude and sterility, for “such dazzling beauty is death because it removes its possessor completely from the life of ordinary mortals, makes her dead-in-life and seals off the possibility of contact between her and others.”³¹ Aware of it herself: “*O femme, un baiser me tuerait / Si la beauté n’était la mort ...*”³², she is obsessed with the purifying actions of washing herself and gazing at herself in the mirror. The mirror in symbolism and in Mallarmé is not just a reflection of the Real, but a window into the Ideal, again a symbol of duality:

The abundance of images in his verse that are at once symbols of reflection and of a passage to another life – windows, mirrors, ice, glass, and water – affirms the extent to which the Mallarméan vision is grounded in a series of irreconcilable polarities – self and other, the prosaic and the poetic, the temporal and the eternal.³³

The very fact of incompatibility is what ‘damns’ Hérodiade. The Absolute she desires to *be* is unreachable and she can see herself as *une ombre lointaine* in the mirror, but sometimes a terrifying glimpse of it passes through, making her exclaim “*Mais horreur! Des soirs, dans ta severe fontaine, / J’ai de mon rêve connu la nudité!*”³⁴ Being bared in front of pure Beauty would destroy her, so her desire is set to fail, she cannot bridge the gap, the void, between the Real and the Ideal.

²⁷ ‘Of a dying star, which shines no more!’ For *Hérodiade* I am using Lenon’s translation: Lenon, David. ‘Herodiade’, *The Massachussets Review* 30 (1989), (573-588), pp. 581-588.

²⁸ ‘You live! Or do I see a shade of a princess here?’

²⁹ ‘Get back.’

³⁰ Block, Haskell M. *Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama*. Westport (CT): Greenwod, 1963, p. 13.

³¹ Block 1963: 14

³² ‘a kiss would kill me / if beauty weren’t death ...’

³³ Weinfield 1996: xiv

³⁴ ‘I have known the nudity of my sparse dream.’

Even Mallarmé himself could not stand working on *Hérodiade* for long periods of time: "I've abandoned *Hérodiade* for the cruel winters: that solitary work had sterilized me and in the interval I'm rhyming an heroic interlude, whose hero is a Faun."³⁵ The *'Après-midi d'un faun'* is in many ways a twin brother of *Hérodiade*. It is a result of the same process, and thematically holds a similar basic structure. It was also intended for the theatre: "I'm making it absolutely scenic, not just 'capable of being staged', but 'demanding the stage'."³⁶ Mallarmé showed the first version entitled *Le faune, intermède héroïque*, to Théodore de Banville and Constant Coquelin³⁷ at the *Comédie-Française* in 1865. Although the poem gave his audience 'infinite pleasure', they assured him "that it would be of interest only to poets."³⁸ Consequently, the young poet abandoned both *Hérodiade* and the *Faune* as dramatic projects and reworked them into poems. In the *Faune*, this meant (among general reworking) deleting a stream of stage directions some of them, such as "*rêvant ... rêvant plus ... rêvant plus*"³⁹ already very poetic. The *Intermède* also consisted of three scenes, or plans for them, a *Monologue d'un faune*, a *Dialogue des nymphes* and another monologue, *le Réveil du faune*. The revisions were carried on the first part, the *Monologue*, which eventually became the text we have today. While "treating classical subject matter with humor and erotic frankness was a literary and artistic fashion"⁴⁰ of his time"⁴¹, Mallarmé also added the genre marking *élogue* that puts the *Faune* in relation to a long tradition of pastoral poetry, from Theocritus and Virgil to André Chenier and the neoclassical genres at the end of the 17th century. Like *Hérodiade*, the Faun is characterised by desire, in his case, sexual. Waking up on a hot summer day at the foot of Mt Etna on Sicily, the Faun relates a story of how he caught two nymphs, tried to rape them, but failed as they managed to flee. He then fantasizes about holding the ultimate nymph, the goddess of love Venus herself, but becomes frightened of this *hybris* and rather proceeds to intoxicate himself with wine, and falls back asleep. The whole monologue is, as in the case of *Hérodiade*, intertwined with the play of presence and absence, of doubt as to what is real and what is fantasy or a dream. He is driven by erotic lust which remains unfulfilled. Yet although the language of the *Faune* is much simpler than that of *Hérodiade* and his desire more earthly, set in the idyllic world of the pastoral, this link to the classical texts is treated with irony. The Faun, through the process of analogy, unintentionally achieves that what he is trying to avoid: highly poetic visions and symbolic images (such as the holding of Venus): "throughout his account of his sexual extravaganza with the nymphs, he creates quite unwittingly a network of poetic analogies that mocks his attempts to give up poetry for love."⁴²

In atmosphere the two poems are complete opposites of each other. The winter landscape of *Hérodiade* marks her sterile virginity and her rigid abhorrence of touch, even from her own hair: "*Le blond torrent de mes cheveux immaculés / quand il baigne mon corps solitaire le glace / D'horreur,*"⁴³ while images of water

³⁵ Mallarmé 1988: 51 (letter to Henri Cazalis, June 1865)

³⁶ Mallarmé 1988: 51 (same letter)

³⁷ A famous contemporary actor and, in 1865, also a *sociétaire* of the *Comédie-Française*.

³⁸ Mallarmé 1988: 55 (Letter to Théodore Aubanel, 16 Oct 1865)

³⁹ 'dreaming ... dreaming more ... dreaming more' in Shaw, Mary Lewis. *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual*. University Park (PA): The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993, p. 182.

⁴⁰ One of the main influences on the *Faune* is supposedly Théodore de Banville's *Diane au bois* (1863).

⁴¹ Walker, Steven F. 'The "Faune" as Pastoral', *PMLA* 93 (1978), 1, (106-117), p. 108.

⁴² Walker 1978: 113

⁴³ 'The blond torrent of my immaculate hair / When it bathes my solitary body freezes it / with horror'

and flowers correspond to the blandness of self-imposed isolation: “*Je m’arrête rêvant aux exils, et j’effeuille, / Comme près d’un basin don’t le jet d’eau m’acceuille, / Les pales lys qui sont en moi*”⁴⁴. The mirror is compared to water, ‘frozen by boredom’ and the Nurse’s attempts to touch Hérodiade make her blood ‘freeze at the source’. Every potential source of warmth and light dissolves in blandness and defeat. On the other hand, the *Faune* is full of strong sunlight which cannot be avoided: “*ce massif, haï par l’ombrage frivole, / De roses tarissant tout parfum au soleil*”⁴⁵. Water shimmers like jewels, grapes are full of ‘clearness’, and the Faun desires nothing more than to touch and be touched, as he fantasizes about “*la frayeur secrète de la chair*”, “*les replis heureux*” of one of the nymphs, and realises that “*notre sang, épris de qui le va saisir / Coule pour tout l’essaim éternel du désir.*”⁴⁶

The mythological reveller and the wintry princess are thus bound in an interesting relationship; although very much anti-images of each other, they stem from the same source and are condemned to the same fate of solitude. Indeed, they are different incarnations of a *double* character. This connects them to the long and heterogeneous tradition of doubles starting at the very beginning of existence with the accounts of the creation of the world: the Judaeo-Christian God creates man after his own image, twin brothers are often founders of civilizations⁴⁷, Plato’s hermaphrodites split in order to create the two sexes, and in some accounts the creation-deities are double: “[the deity] constitutes a demiurgic transition between the first divine unity and the unjustified solitude of the creation, separated from the world and its fellows. The original double therefore contains at the same time the idea of splitting, inseparable from creation, and the idea of totality.”⁴⁸ Even in these first accounts we see that “right from the start an essential distinction is to be made between the double-by-duplication and the double-by-division.”⁴⁹ Duplication raises issues of *identity*: can there really exist someone who is identical to me? Or is being unique impossible in the first place? These questions have been explored already in Antiquity (and in all subsequent eras that venerated the classics) through motifs of twins or lookalikes, such as the legend of Amphytrion⁵⁰. On the other hand, division raises questions of *difference*: can my ‘I’ be made up of more than one consciousness (e.g. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde)? Or is someone completely *other* in fact my psychological double (as in Hoffmann’s *Princess Brambilla*)? What happens if I meet my double? The double-as-division was widely used in the 19th century in the Romantic and Post-romantic movement, spurred on by the progress and

⁴⁴ ‘I stop, dreaming of exiles, and I shed / as if near a pool whose fountain welcomes me / The pale lilies that are in me’

⁴⁵ ‘this thicket, hated by the frivolous shade, / Of roses drying up their scent in the sun’ For the *Faune*, I am using Roger Eliot Fry’s translation: Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Poems* (trans. Roger Fry, comm. Charles Mauron). London: Vision, 1951, pp. 103-111. I had originally intended to use Fry’s translation for my script, then realised he had not translated *Hérodiade*. As I had already started rehearsing, I kept the text, although in a new and revised script, I would use the newer and more dynamic Weinfield’s translations for both poems.

⁴⁶ ‘the secret terror of the flesh’, ‘the happy recesses of one’, ‘our blood, aflame for her who will take it, / Flows for all the eternal swarm of desire.’

⁴⁷ e.g. biological brothers such as Romulus and Remus, Cain and Abel, or brothers in spirit: Gilgamesh and Enkidu. It is very common for one brother to be killed while the other goes on to become the actual ‘father’ of the new nation.

⁴⁸ Jourde, Pierre & Tortonese, Paolo. *Visages du double: un thème littéraire*. Paris: Nathan, 1996, p. 8. All quotes from this work are rendered in my translations.

⁴⁹ Tymms, Ralph. *Doubles in Literary Psychology*. Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1949, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Explored through different genres by a myriad of authors, among them Plautus, Luis de Camões, Jean Rotrou, Molière, John Dryden, Heinrich von Kleist, Georg Kaiser and Jean Giraudoux.

births of new sciences such as psycho-analysis, and more dubious arts like phrenology, mesmerism, magnetism, spiritism and other occult practices. The double thus became much more psychological and was incarnated in the figure of the *Doppelgänger*⁵¹: "To the doubling of narrative subject and object, and to the reduplication of narrative line, nineteenth-century literature characteristically added the doubling of individual characters in order to portray inner conflicts, to depict a *décalage* between a character's conscious and unconscious mind."⁵² The *Doppelgänger* or *alter ego* were often associated with a dark and hidden side of the character that he or she had not been aware of hitherto, and interacted well with the Romantic quest for (national) identity as well as with its appetite for the grotesque, gothic and fantastic⁵³. The *Doppelgänger* often appears as a reflection or shadow, two major figures of doubling.

Mallarmé's doubles emerge from the Romantic tradition but focus on the dichotomy of the body and the mind (or soul), and are thus closer to the *Doppelgängers* of what Otto Ludwig called the German *poetische Realismus*: "One character's actions and personality are directed and developed by carnality and egotism, while his or her opposite is driven by exaggerated spiritual ideals. But a closer observation will reveal that these antagonists are but two sides of one coin, who together form the 'totality' of a single persona."⁵⁴ It is therefore an instance of the double-by-division, with a twist: because Hérodiade and the Faun are not only different characters in their own right, but actually appear in separate works, the process of doubling starts at the 'other' end: instead of dividing, there is joining in order to realise that they belong to the same '*hyper-character*'. To sustain the hypothesis of their connection, we thus need to discover and define the *nature* of this connection. Of all the theories of the double, the ones most applicable to Mallarmé are those by René Girard and Clément Rosset.

Girard posits violence as the origin of all meaning and at the same time an insurmountable epistemological obstacle, while "desire is mimetic: it's the desire for the other that bestows upon a specific object the dignity of an object of desire."⁵⁵ The subject sees the other as a totality which he or she cannot access, however if desire is replaced by fulfilment, the totality disappears as it had only been projected. The violence of the projection of desire, therefore, "becomes the signifier of the desirable absolute, the divine self-sufficiency, the 'belle-totalité'."⁵⁶ This is clearly seen in the *Faune*, when he tries to have both nymphs at the same time. "He wants desire and fulfilment at the same time. But fulfilment is the annulment of desire, and desire is the lack of fulfilment."⁵⁷ This violence is what connects Hérodiade and the Faun as they unknowingly reach toward each other in search of fulfilment and self-confirmation. "Divinity cannot

⁵¹ The term was invented in 1776 by Jean-Paul Richter.

⁵² Porter, Laurence M. 'the Devil as a Double in Nineteenth-Century: Goethe, Dostoevsky, and Flaubert', *Comparative Literature Studies* 15 (1978), 3, (316-335), p. 317.

⁵³ These kinds of doubles can be found in the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Heinrich von Kleist, Goethe, Heinrich Heine Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mary Shelley, Guy de Maupassant, Théophile Gautier, Dostoevsky and many others.

⁵⁴ Pizer, John. *Ego – Alter Ego: Double and/as Other in the Age of German Poetic Realism*. Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998, p. 41.

⁵⁵ Jourde & Tortonese 1996: 77

⁵⁶ Jourde & Tortonese 1996: 77

⁵⁷ Frey, Hans-Jost. 'Tree of Doubt' in *Stéphane Mallarmé* (ed. and introd. Harold Bloom). New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, (pp. 141-149), p. 147.

occur neither in the I nor in the Other. It is perpetually negotiated between the I and the Other.”⁵⁸ Rosset similarly believes that the Romantic frenzy for the double stems from the fact that it is a guarantee of existence. The fact that we seem to be unique is at once rewarding and frightening for humans: rewarding when I perceive that I am the only me that has existed or will ever exist, and frightening for the same reason: because I am only that and no more, and when I’m gone, there will be no more of me. However, the I “is the only unique object that cannot see itself,”⁵⁹ and even a doubling only results in the production of an *other*, be it a shadow, reflection or alter ego of any other sort. The double thus has the same paradoxical structure as an illusion and in can in fact, instead of being proof of existence, endanger the ontological status of the subject, if he or she recognises “too late in the protecting double the same real which one thought one was protected from.”⁶⁰ Hérodiade and the Faun are thus equal in their desire and one is not the other’s imprint, or illustration. The thin line that separates them in their respective poems is the place where desire is stopped from reaching fulfilment: Hérodiade’s mirror through which she longingly gazes into the Ideal, and the Faun’s dream, where he lustfully chases after nymphs again and again. However, this is also the reason why both of them are doomed to fail, and to differ only in the manner they deal with this realisation.

Adaptation

Theory (mind)

In spite of all the dualities we have found in Mallarmé’s work, *Hérodiade* and the *Faune* remain two separate pieces of poetry and in setting them side by side in order to observe the double they create is an act of interpretation that differs somewhat from deciphering doubles in Romantic literature. If they are ‘two sides of one coin’, what is this mysterious character or trait that represents them both? Naturally that position is occupied by the poet himself, but this is too facile a solution. The dualities run much deeper. The basic dichotomy is that of the mind-body, and it can be found on various levels. Hérodiade in her contemplative solitude and high-reaching thoughts is desperately trying to become a spiritual being, a symbol. On the other hand is the Faun, a carnal creature of earthly desires who would seemingly throw away art (“Try then, instrument of flights, oh malign / Syrinx, to reflower by the lakes where you wait for me”⁶¹) in order to achieve sexual release⁶². However, they are not one-sided characters; I have already shown that the Faun almost unwittingly achieves poetic and philosophic heights. In a similar vein, Hérodiade cannot be the part she would like to be constantly; she has several moments of very human weakness which reveal that although she “wills the cold terror of her virginity as the condition of consciousness itself,”⁶³ she is in fact repressing the same desire that is destroying the Faun. After

⁵⁸ Girard, René. *Critique dans un souterrain*. Paris: le Livre de Poche, 1976, p. 94.

⁵⁹ Jourde & Tortonese 1996: 84

⁶⁰ Rosset, Clément. *Le réel et son double*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976, II (1984), p. 125.

⁶¹ ‘Tâche donc, instrument des fuites, ô maligne / Syrinx, de refleurir aux lacs où tu m’attends!’ I am referring to Weinfield’s bilingual edition, where *Hérodiade* can be found on pages 25-37, the *Faune* on pages 38-41.

⁶² He is angrily referring to the mythical nymph Syrinx who, running from the lustful Pan, was in answer to her prayers transformed into a reed from which the god crafted the flute.

⁶³ Block 1963: 15

exploding in anger at the Nurse for having tried to touch her ("Stop your crime! // What sure demon throws you into this sinister passion"⁶⁴), she almost begs her, "But weren't you going to touch me?"⁶⁵ At the end of the *Scène*, she sends the Nurse away only to whisper in her solitude, "You lie, o naked flower / of my lips. / I am waiting for an unknown thing."⁶⁶ What is she waiting for? For John the Baptist to violate her with his regard? In the *Hérodiade* as it is today, there is no mention of any interaction between the princess and the saint, and we have no way of knowing if a confrontation between them has already occurred or not. She is, however, clearly experiencing a transformation.

The Faun is not the only double of *Hérodiade*. Her faithful Nurse is a character taken from the ancient Greek and classic French tradition of the *confidant(e)*, usually in the form of a best friend, a teacher or a nurse⁶⁷. "These characters express antithetical points of view, but at times each sustains the other in a tense psychological drama of light and dark, life and death."⁶⁸ Although the psychological has perhaps shifted more toward the symbolic, the Nurse is, at least in the *Scène*, *Hérodiade*'s commonsensical voice of reason as well as the facilitator and enabler of what is more or less the princess's monologue: "Hérodiade only speaks of herself, while the nurse allows and authorizes the continuation of the heroine's speech with her short – therefore all the more ironical – responses."⁶⁹ Thus she is also a body to *Hérodiade*'s mind. In the *Faune*, it is the main character himself who embodies the duality. He is half goat and half man, and as "half-animal and half-god he participates equally, and to a hyperbolic degree, in the natural and the supernatural, the real and the imaginary, the earthly and the divine. The faun is thus a concrete image of the relationship between these contraries as it is developed through the poem."⁷⁰ He is constantly oscillating between the real world and that of dream, while the play of presence/absence extends to the nymphs and their "light carnation that /.../ floats in the air" – they are an instance of erasure because their ghostly presence has obviously affected the Faun strongly, yet they are, in retrospect, just a fantasy. Even so, they too represent a double, as one is described as 'the chaster one' and 'timid', while the other is 'all sighs' and 'cruel'. Mallarmé further complicates the levels of reality by inverting the habitual meaning of typeface: while most of the poem, representing his thoughts, is in normal typeface, the two narratives are in italics and quotation marks – an intriguing passage from indirect to direct speech.

I have already shown the discursive, narrative and ideologic similarities of *Hérodiade* and the *Faune*. They also share a similar actantial model which makes them very compatible on stage. *Hérodiade* and the Nurse are at the same time the two nymphs that the faun is chasing – as the thin line that divides the two poems never really allows for any actual interaction, their shadowy absence/presence is in fact in a similar reality as the Faun's fantasies. St John, on the other hand, blends in an interesting way with the Faun; firstly for the same reason of not having any actual (textual) interaction with *Hérodiade* and the Nurse. Secondly,

⁶⁴ 'Arrête dans ton crime // Quel sûr démon te jette en le sinistre émoi'

⁶⁵ 'Mais n'allais-tu pas me toucher?'

⁶⁶ 'Vous mentez, ô fleur nue / De mes lèvres. / J'attends une chose inconnue'

⁶⁷ Examples include Orestes and Pylades, Antigone and Ismene, *Hermione* and *Cléone*, *Andromaque* and *Céphise* etc.

⁶⁸ Braga, Thomas J. 'Double Vision in Racine's *Phèdre*', *The French Review* 64 (1990), 2, (289-298), p.289.

⁶⁹ Takeda, Noriko. *The Modernist Human: The Configuration of Humanness in Stéphane Mallarmé's Hérodiade, T. S. Eliot's Cats, and Modern Lyrical Poetry*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008 , p. 35.

⁷⁰ Shaw 1993: 128

the saint is connected to the Faun in another mind-body dichotomy. Because his head has literally separated itself from the body, he is now free to become pure ‘mind’, exactly what Hérodiade desires. In the never finished fragment of the *Finale*, Hérodiade “symbolically joins his head to her body in order to inherit his now pure spirit, which, according to an ancient religious tradition is conveyed through the blood of sacrifice; the saint’s consciousness, or Idea, bleeds into her body.”⁷¹ John therefore becomes a representative of what Hérodiade sees in the mirror, in Rosset’s sense of establishing oneself, but he could also be the object of her carnal desire, as he is often portrayed in other accounts⁷². In that case every human urge that she is repressing is projected onto him in Girard’s sense of the violence of desire and the *image* of her projections (or the opposite of the supposedly cold and distant saint) is – the Faun, with all his lust.

The *Scène* and the *Faune* thus fuse together to create a central scene of the show. Enveloping this central scene in the intercut *Ouverture* and *Cantique* further strengthens the ambivalent play of reality. The Nurse’s incantation is at the same time a funeral chant and a ‘creationist’ ritual of calling something absolute back into being. In relation with the *Cantique*, the beheading of St John becomes a ritual sacrifice, one needed in order to recall Poetry and Beauty. The Nurse in the role of an oracle thus performs a literal separation of the mind and body as a symbolic solution to the dichotomy. However, this cannot work in the world of the Real, because, for man, “poetry is altogether pagan. The muse imperiously demands that there be no soul without a body; no meaning, no idea, that is not the act of some remarkable figure composed of tones, durations, and intensities.”⁷³ That is the paradox portrayed by the bloody union of the Nurse and the Saint. The central scene that follows is therefore cast in doubt: is it in fact the result of the incantation, an incarnation of Beauty that we see come to life and wither in the constant passage from the Ideal to the Real? Or is the whole scene just a flash in the mind of St John, a vision of a dying man who personifies duality and transforms the Sun’s reflection on the falling axe (“The sun whose supernatural / Halt exalts / Soon comes down / Incandescent”⁷⁴) into a warm and pastoral summer heat, while the shadows of death (“I feel like the vertebrae / Spread in the shadows / All in a shudder / In unison”⁷⁵) link themselves to the wintry princess? The Nurse and St John thus become narrators of a legend, one whose outcome cannot *really* be determined because it epitomises an unresolvable paradox.

Practice (body)

The practice of adapting and intercutting *Hérodiade* and the *Faune* revealed several important problems. The starting plan was to locate the many common themes and motifs in both poems (especially in the *Faune* and the *Scène*) and use those as points of connection. There are many of these: both poems contain images of water, hair, doubt, touch, kisses, pomegranates, flesh etc. I chose the *Scène* for the textual basis, as it is the most theatrical part of both poems, written in dialogue and structured with a logical sequence

⁷¹ Shaw 1993: 128

⁷² e.g. Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*.

⁷³ Bonnefoy 1977: 108

⁷⁴ ‘Le soleil que sa halte / Surnaturelle exalte / Aussitôt redescend / Incandescent’

⁷⁵ ‘Je sens comme aux vertèbres / S’employer des ténèbres / Toutes dans un frisson / A l’unisson’

of causality. This however meant that in order to link the similar motifs, I not only had to cut up the *Faun* more than I had intended, but also to switch the order of the acquired fragments. While the former turned out to be a fruitful process in terms of creating a dynamic work for the stage, the latter proved quickly that the poem was much too carefully structured to allow such vulgar editing. Brett, the actor playing the Faun, immediately realised in rehearsal that the continuity of his lines and thought was broken – despite the complexity of the poem, the fact that it had been intercut severely and that he hadn't known it well from before. A lesson in humility before a great poet! We restored the original order of the *Faune* and reinserted a few lines that I had cut and that actually held vital hidden information for the continuation of thought.

The fusion of the *Ouverture* and the *Cantique* presented the issue of vastly different lengths. The problem that occurred was the loss of thought from one stanza of the *Cantique* (the short verses used are very unusual for Mallarmé) to the next, because of the time needed to read or speak the verses of the *Ouverture* in between. I thus cut portions of the *Ouverture*; crucial passages remained, showing the ritual of incantation, the glorified but now dusty past and its attempts at a revival as well as the final decline – while other large sections were sacrificed, including a passage where the Nurse speaks of Hérodiade's absent father, which opens up a whole new vast thematic and interpretational dimension that spurred a host of psycho-analytical studies of the text and of Mallarmé's opus⁷⁶ but which was not in the main focus of my dissertation.

Generally the progression of the adapting process headed towards the creation of shorter fragments from the *Faune* in order to have a more lively and theatrical interaction between the characters. There is, of course, no actual conversation between Hérodiade (or the Nurse) and the Faun (although he does see them – as nymphs) so the structure became one of two parallel stories with a host of features in common *except* direct contact; therefore the importance remained of finding the points where the two narratives *almost* met, where Hérodiade could feel the Faun on the other side of the mirror, and the Faun could sense the two women as something more than the two nymphs. Luckily the revealed structures of the texts allowed for such co-existence.

Both texts start with doubt: "Was it a dream I loved?"⁷⁷ asks the Faun while the Nurse questions, "you live! / Or do I see the shade of a princess here?"⁷⁸ As the emotional Nurse tries to kiss Hérodiade's hand and gets rejected, the Faun is reminiscing of the difference between the two nymphs, then – together with Hérodiade – tries to justify himself (in his case, by music, in hers, by lineage). The next, sharper, Hérodiade's rejection of the Nurse ("Leave those perfumes there! Don't you know / I hate them"⁷⁹) entices the Faun to notice the nymphs for the first time ("There waves an animal whiteness at rest"⁸⁰). After the princess's first weak moment ("Nurse, am I beautiful?"⁸¹) comes the third, strongest, rejection ("Stop your

⁷⁶Including an exhaustive reading of the whole *les Noces d'Hérodiade, mystère*, by Mary Ellen Wolf.

⁷⁷ 'Aimai-je un rêve?'

⁷⁸ 'Tu vis! ou vois-je ici l'ombre d'une princesse?'

⁷⁹ 'Laisse là ces parfums! ne sais-tu / Que je les hais'

⁸⁰ 'Ondoie une blancheur animale au repos'

⁸¹ 'Nourrice, suis-je belle?'

crime / That freezes my blood at the source”⁸²), which corresponds with the nymphs fleeing from the Faun’s tuning of the flute (“And that to the prelude where the pipes first stir / This flight of swans, no! Naiads, flies / or plunges ...”⁸³). As Hérodiade stops the nurse (“Hold / That gesture, famous impiety”⁸⁴), the landscape around the Faun falls into silence (“Inert, all burns in the fierce hour”⁸⁵) and they both contemplate being touched and kissed; Hérodiade (seemingly) with disgust (“another sacrilege”⁸⁶), the Faun with longing (“My breast, though proofless, still attests a bite / Mysterious, due to some august tooth”⁸⁷). This is one of the closest moments where the two are truly separated only by the coin of which they are the *heads and tails*. The Nurse’s more pragmatic intervention (“A strange time indeed, heaven protect you from it”⁸⁸), however, breaks this moment and they break off one by one: “But enough!”⁸⁹ cries the Faun, whilst Hérodiade suffers another moment of weakness (“But weren’t you going to touch me?”⁹⁰) before recomposing herself (“Oh, shut up!”⁹¹). The Nurse goes on to reminisce about a potential suitor for the princess, mentioning a god, which corresponds to the Faun’s second narrative of seeing the nymphs and finding an ‘enlaced’ pair of them at his feet. The princess is keeping her beauty for herself and the Nurse’s caring worry (“Sad flower that grows alone with no other passion”⁹²) lets them become an image of the two nymphs. However, Hérodiade has one last outburst of anger (“Go, keep your pity and your irony”⁹³) that triggers an immediate and delighted reaction by the Faun (“I adore it, the anger of virgins”⁹⁴), before she professes her love for the Nurse (“If you see my eyes in paradise / It is when I remember your milk chunk long ago”⁹⁵), corresponding to a much more sexual and passionate display of eros by the Faun. This does not last for long, as Hérodiade launches into a long ode to hidden beauty (“You know it, amethyst gardens, hidden / forever in dazzled learned abysses”⁹⁶) and the nymphs escape the Faun. Hérodiade’s speech and the Faun’s carelessness bring them both to their ultimate and forbidden fantasy: for the princess to have the “warm azure of summer” see her in her “star’s shaking modesty”⁹⁷ and die, for the Faun to hold the queen (Venus) herself and be punished. This marks the second infinitely intimate moment for both – the fantasy is that of meeting your own double, an event that can end in annihilation of one or even both ‘halves’ or selves, and in any case procures anguish and a feeling of dizzying vertigo. The princess stays in the fantasy (“I love the horror of virginity”⁹⁸), evoking the moon and

⁸² 'Arrête dans ton crime / Qui refroidit mon sang vers sa source'

⁸³ 'Et qu'au prélude lent où naissent les pipeaux / Ce vol de cygnes, non! de naïades se sauve / Ou plonge ...'

⁸⁴ 'réprime / Ce geste, impiété fameuse'

⁸⁵ 'Inerte, tout brûle dans l'heure fauve'

⁸⁶ 'encore sacrilège'

⁸⁷ 'Mon sein, vierge de preuve, atteste une morsure / Mystérieuse, due à quelque auguste dent'

⁸⁸ 'Temps bizarre, en effet, de quoi le ciel vous garde!'

⁸⁹ 'Mais, bast!'

⁹⁰ 'Mais n'allais-tu pas me toucher?'

⁹¹ 'Oh! tais-toi!'

⁹² 'Triste fleur qui croît seule et n'a pas d'autre émoi'

⁹³ 'Va, garde ta pitié comme ton ironie'

⁹⁴ 'Je t'adore, courroux des vierges'

⁹⁵ 'Si tu me vois le yeux perdus au paradis / C'est quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis'

⁹⁶ 'Vous le savey, jardins d'améthyste, enfouis / Sans fin dans de savants abîmes éblouis'

⁹⁷ 'le tiède azur d'été, 'ma pudeur grelottante d'étoile'

⁹⁸ 'J'aime l'horreur d'être vierge'

herself as an idol, as if to convince herself that it is possible ("O final charm, yes! I feel it, I am alone."⁹⁹), but then, in an unexpectedly tender moment ("No, poor Nana"¹⁰⁰) reveals that, at the same time, she is aware of its impossibility (And I hate, I hate the beautiful azure!"¹⁰¹). In a final vision she sees a strange land ("Waves / Rock and, yonder, don't you know a country"¹⁰²), perhaps the Faun's, where he is wearily falling back to sleep in order to dream of the nymphs he cannot catch ("I shall see the shade you became"¹⁰³). And, finally, the sleepless princess reveals her inner torments ("you weep out the supreme hurt sobbing / Of a childhood groping among the dreams"¹⁰⁴); she is waiting for something. That something is the link to what I called the Epilogue (the second part of the *Ouverture* and the *Cantique*) that suggestively restarts with the leaping into the air of the head of St John.

The fusion of the two texts thus revealed a constant back-and-forth motion of both characters. They are spurred on by desire, then resign and search for a compensation before flaming up again. Once we understood this basic dynamics, it was much easier also for the actors to find their way through the complex parallel structure of the show. The Prologue and Epilogue are much more lyrical, therefore the points of connection in the intercutting are based more on general themes and sensations: the light of dawn (in the *Ouverture*) corresponds with the flash of the sun (in the *Cantique*), which creates no splash in the 'resigned' water, followed by shadows spreading through the vertebrae. The climactic cry of the Nurse ("Crime! pyre! ancient dawn! torture!"¹⁰⁵) marks the actual leap of the head ("And my head leapt up"¹⁰⁶) and from the smouldering remains of the body rise a smell and a voice of mysterious ancient glory. However, even this ancient past becomes "Fatidic, conquered, monotonous, tired"¹⁰⁷ and the head, although it "wants to follow / in some haggard leap / its pure gaze"¹⁰⁸, has to fall down (or offer salvation?) as "the last sunrise /.../ comes to finish everything."¹⁰⁹

⁹⁹ 'Ô charme dernier, oui! je le sens, je suis seule.'

¹⁰⁰ 'Non, pauvre aïeule' which refers to her Nurse as her ancestor.

¹⁰¹ 'Et je déteste, moi, le bel azur!'

¹⁰² 'Des ondes / Se bercent et, là-bas, sais-tu pas un pays'

¹⁰³ 'je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins'

¹⁰⁴ 'Jetey-vous les sanglots suprêmes et meurtris / D'une enfance sentant parmi les rêveries'

¹⁰⁵ 'Crime! bûcher! aurore ancienne! supplice!'

¹⁰⁶ 'Et ma tête surgie'

¹⁰⁷ 'Fatidique, vaincu, monotone, lassé'

¹⁰⁸ 'S'opiniâtre à suivre / En quelque bond hagard / Son pur regard'

¹⁰⁹ 'Lever du jour dernier qui vient tout achever'