EROS UNDER GLASS

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Psychoanalysis and Mallarmé's "Hérodiade"

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Pour Deborah et Carlos

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
I. The Genesis and Development of “Les Noces d’Hérodiade, Mystère”: Mallarmé and Freud	1
II. Narcissism and the Theater of the Psyche	15
Reading the “Scène”	15
Narcissism Reconsidered	18
III. From the ‘Ouverture Ancienne’ to the ‘Prélude’: Repetition and the Uncanny	43
Tales of the Fantastic	48
No Way to Know	54
IV. Castration and Dissemination	73
The “Cantique de Saint Jean”	73
The “Double Flower”	85
Conclusion	93
Notes	97
Bibliography	109
Index	115

P R E F A C E

The critical reception of a new literary manuscript is often mixed. When it results in the determination of a definitive text and confirms previous analysis, it is usually deemed a valuable contribution. If, on the other hand, the discovery casts doubt on the existing body of knowledge, it may well be perceived as an unsettling presence and its import minimized. Such appears to have been the case with Gardner Davies's 1959 reproduction of the textual fragments for Mallarmé's first and last major work *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère*. Twenty-five years later, the manuscript is still used sparingly, and in many cases, not at all.

As a collection of some two hundred pages of working drafts, new segments, and cryptic notes, the Davies publication implicitly challenges those critical readings based exclusively on the 1945 Pléiade edition of Mallarmé's work. This edition presents *Hérodiade* as a three-part drama (the "Ouverture ancienne," the "Scène," and the "Cantique de Saint Jean") having a well-defined beginning, middle, and end. *Hérodiade* emerges in this criticism as a dialectical struggle for ideal purity, one that inevitably leads toward a "Merveilleuse synthèse hégélienne."¹ Both the Pléiade version and the Hegel influence are, in fact, so pervasive that even the two studies that deal directly with the manuscript (works by Davies and Huot) are infused with the same anecdotal, symbolic, and dialectical structures.

The Pléiade format is problematical, for it is clear that Mallarmé subjected his text to a number of major structural changes: notably, the elimination of the “Ouvverture ancienne” and the addition of both a “Scène intermédiaire” and a new “Finale.” Stylistic changes also mark the later fragments of *Hérodiade*. The poet’s systematic replacement of narrative strains by hypothetical patterns, his subversion of conventional syntax, and his exploitation of alternative modes of signification (phonic and graphic) are but some of the techniques intended to disrupt synthetically oriented readings. Efforts to realign *Hérodiade* in compliance with narrative predictability become suspect, and, as Robert Cohn maintains, the “old Hegelian triadic pattern” simply “won’t do.”²

Confronted with the title *Eros Under Glass: Psychoanalysis and Mallarmé’s “Hérodiade,”* readers may assume or object that I too will construct a masterplot. Yet, in lieu of the singular narrative that has shaped previous conceptions of *Hérodiade*, the present study attempts to demonstrate the coexistence of several conflictual subtexts. My reading of the manuscript, in other words, is geared toward the processive aspects of the work, that is, how it evolves, contradicts itself, represses its implications, and outwits the principles of its production. As Jean-Bellemin Noël argues in *Vers l’inconscient du texte*, the purpose of analyzing a manuscript or “avant-texte” from a psychoanalytic viewpoint is not the discovery of a plot but the elaboration and dismantling of a writing process.³

It is not my intention to psychoanalyze either Mallarmé or his work. This would force *Hérodiade* into the narrow grid of analytic symbolism and create, quite simply, another version of Mauron’s “personal myth.” In reading Mallarmé alongside of Freud, my focus is not fixed psychological themes but a certain mechanics of repetition and displacement occurring in the textual revisions of poem and dream. Thus chapter 1 raises questions about the creative process, questions pondered by Mallarmé as much as by Freud. How is a text produced? What is the relationship between the various stages of its production? What is the role of the Unconscious in its formation? And perhaps most importantly, what implications does the work’s nontranslatable or unreadable aspects have for interpretation?

Freud would undoubtedly agree with Mallarmé's observation that the essence of the poetic lies precisely in "what is not said," for the Unconscious cannot be inscribed in intelligible discourse. To perceive the covert forces of desire at work in dreams or poetry, the interpreter must become attuned to the flow of energy through the text. For Freud, this means focusing on the differences between the successive versions of the same dream.⁴ For Mallarmé, it is a question of the "turning around of the same text—of a second way of rereading" that "allows for having the whole successively. . . ."⁵ In the remaining chapters, I incorporate these strategies to examine the additions, repressions, and hesitations that overdetermine the *Hérodiade* manuscript, leaving it open, as it were, to alternative readings.

I appreciate, beyond all measure, the support of my family and friends during the long process of writing and revising this book. Special thanks go to Rosemary and Dave (my parents), Flow, Richard, Robin, John, Terry, Julie, and Hugo. I am especially grateful to Charles Williams whose tremendous enthusiasm has been instrumental in the revision and publication of *Eros Under Glass*.

I

The Genesis and Development of “Les Noces d’Hérodiade, Mystère”: Mallarmé and Freud

La poésie, sacre; qui essaie, en
de chastes crises isolément,
pendant l’autre gestation en train

MALLARME

I believe I am in a cocoon, and
heaven knows what sort of creature
will emerge from it.

FREUD, LETTER OF 12 JUNE 1897
TO WILHELM FLIESS

With *Hérodiade*, Mallarmé conceived a text and an aesthetic. It is in relation to this first major work that the poet, in his *Correspondance*, discusses theory, evaluates progress or lack of it, reflects openly on his psychic makeup and, more often than not, relates it to his creative process.¹ What emerges from the self-analysis of the 1860s and early 1870s is a nascent psychology of

literary production. In retracing this psychology, I do not propose a rigid application of Freudian principles. Nor will I search out an unconscious obsession in order to correlate it with biographical events. My intention, rather, is to consider Mallarmé and Freud as "valuable allies," exploring with them the nocturnal labor of writing and the slow gestation of an idea and *Oeuvre*.²

In October of 1864, Mallarmé and his young wife, Maria, were awaiting the arrival of their first-born. An examination of the poet's letters of this period reveals genuine uneasiness concerning the advent of his paternity: "Je tremble à cette idée que je pourrais être père."³ And shortly before the birth: "Je ne peux pas me faire à l'idée de ma paternité" (C, 1:133). The arrival of a daughter brings his writing to a standstill and provokes the following comparison in a letter to Roumanille: ". . . j'ai eu une petite fille bien rythmée, dont les yeux ont un bleu que je ne saurais mettre à mes rimes, et les cheveux se déploient déjà avec l'allure de vos grands vers provençaux. Ce poème, malheureusement me prive des autres . . ." (ibid., 147).

One month after Genviève's birth, Mallarmé composes a sonnet in order to resume work on *Hérodiade*. Entitled "Jour," "Poème nocturne," and finally "Don du poème," this poem sets up a sense of rivalry between maternity and artistic production. The biblical allusion of the opening verse ("Je t'apporte l'enfant d'une nuit d'Idumée")⁴ refers to a mythical country that preceded Adam and the creation of women. The kings of Edom were sexless individuals who gave birth to monsters.⁵ Re-counted in the sonnet is the same possibility of parthenogenesis. But here, the birth of the child/poem is a "horrible naissance," a near stillbirth that points up the solitude and sterility of artistic endeavors. Unable to nourish his deformed offspring ("Noire, à l'aile sanglante . . . déplumée" (O.C., 40), the poet/father helplessly hands it over to the nurturing powers of woman. This scenario returns us to Mallarmé's immediate crisis. Driven out by the healthy, relentless cries of Genviève, "le petit vampire" who devours her mother, *Hérodiade* remains, at least for the time being, an aborted text, another descendant of "Idumée."⁶

Henceforth, all of Mallarmé's metaphors for the creative act will be colored by a sense of impotence, separation, and loss.

When he refuses to send his latest work to Cazalis, it is because "les pertes nocturnes d'un poète ne devraient être que des voies lactées," and his verse is but a "vilaine tache" (C, 1:138). Continuous interruptions at home, "le hideux travail de pédagogue," (ibid., 1:160) poor health, disjointed and unfocused thoughts are the elements that produce a state of paralysis; in the poet's estimation, a cruel expiation for "le priapisme" of his youth (ibid., 1:144).

From 1865 to 1867 there is a constant interchange between the development of an aesthetic and the writing of *Hérodiade*. It is while working on this "sujet effrayant" that Mallarmé discovers "une façon intime et singulière de peindre et de noter des impressions très fugitives" (C, 1:161). Yet the experimentation impedes writing, and Mallarmé soon becomes obsessed with the idea that either he will die before this work is finished or that the immensity and difficulty of the project will doom it to incompleteness. It is perhaps futile, he tells Cazalis, to speak so passionately "d'un Rêve qui ne verra peut-être jamais son accomplissement, et d'une oeuvre que je déchirerai peut-être un jour . . ." (ibid.). By June of 1865, Mallarmé decides to put the poem aside for the "cruel winters" and sets to work on a new dramatic monologue, "l'Après-midi d'un faune." But when Théodore de Banville finds the "Faune" unsuitable for theatrical production in August, Mallarmé quickly returns to "*Hérodiade*, non plus tragédie, mais poème" (ibid, 1:174).⁷

Letters of this period indicate that this shift in genre does indeed bear fruit. In April 1866 Mallarmé finishes the first draft of the "Ouverture musicale." And by December 1866, he offers Armand Renaud a time schema for the completion of his "Great Work":

J'ai infiniment travaillé cet été, à moi d'abord, en créant, par la plus belle synthèse, un monde dont je suis le Dieu, — et à un Oeuvre qui en résultera, pur et magnifique, je l'espère. *Hérodiade*, que je n'abandonne pas, mais à l'exécution duquel j'accorde plus de temps, sera une des colonnes . . . de ce Temple. Je m'assigne vingt ans, pour l'achever, et le reste de ma vie sera voué à une Esthétique de la poésie. (C, 11:21-22)

What is of interest here is the relationship between the production of poetry and extensive self-analysis. Mallarmé is clearer about this when he informs Renaud that his work requires prolonged hours of "rêverie" and that he is still in the process of locating "certains poèmes intérieurs" (ibid.). Yet, it is precisely the locating of such inner texts that brings the poet face to face with Nothingness: "Malheureusement, en creusant le vers à ce point, j'ai rencontré . . . le Néant" (ibid., 1:207). With this discovery, the production of poetry becomes strangely aligned with the dismantling of Mallarmé's persona. To Cazalis he writes that he is now "impersonnel," an "aptitude qu'a l'Univers à se voir et à se développer, à travers ce qui fut moi" (ibid., 1:242).

The willed transformation of a coherent self into an "aptitude" or sheer locus of potentiality is primarily a strategic move that, according to Leo Bersani, plays out the "consequence of the poet's subjectivist aesthetic."⁸ When Mallarmé chooses to liberate language through the suppression of reference and the creation of poetic effects, he deconstructs the self, dissects its machinery, and begins to construct a new theory of textual dynamics. Again, it is clear that the experience at hand is neither purely philosophical nor mystical. With some reluctance, Mallarmé admits to Villers de L'Isle Adam that his understanding of the relations between poetry and the universe is based on "la seule sensation" (C, 1:259). For the importance of sensations, we refer to the poet's intention in writing *Hérodiade* (" . . . et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation" (ibid., 1:137) and to the experiments performed during this period. Figuring prominently in the letters is the poet's methodical cultivation of a "horrible sensibilité." The aim is to restore the materiality of language, that is, to magnify its power of expression by evoking the more primitive text of the body. The brain is no longer considered to be the privileged center of inspiration, for strictly cerebral thoughts come and go "sans se créer, sans laisser de traces d'elles" (ibid., 1:249). The true poet, Mallarmé claims, must think with his "entire body."

A new method of sketching poems focuses on direct communication between mental impressions and their physical counterparts. Viewed as a series of gestures, this body language would spontaneously convey "une pensée pleine et à l'unisson":

In order to illustrate the technique, Mallarmé attempts to simulate the vibrating resonances of a musical instrument: "J'essayai de ne plus penser de la tête, et, par un effort désespéré, je roidis tous mes nerfs . . . de façon à produire une vibration en gardant la pensée à laquelle je travaillais alors, qui devient le sujet de cette vibration" (ibid.). To think with all of one's body involves the maximum use of all of its parts. One such exercise calls for complete concentration on "la main qui écrit" and the conscious obliteration of the rest of the body. As instruments of creativity, the various parts of the body function as metonyms. Although the interaction of the parts produces something greater, the body itself remains dislocated and fragmented. At the end of the demonstration, Mallarmé compares his state of dissolution to a museum exhibit entitled "La Valeur d'un homme." The image of a long box with several drawers, each one containing a different element, either natural or synthesized, recaptures both the decomposition and the forced interaction implicit in aesthetic experience.⁹

The correspondence of 1866 traces the gradual conversion and refinement of the "Néant" into a complex series of aesthetic principles. In summer the poet is still working on the "ouverture musicale" when he writes three letters that contain quasi-theoretical descriptions of a writing space. The creative process is first described as a journey into the frigid zones of the "Inconnu," "les plus purs glaciers de l'Esthétique" (C, 1:220). Here, the poet's encounter with the void is superseded by his discovery of Beauty. In a second letter, Mallarmé declares that the mystery of his inner Self, once unlocked, will reveal itself in the form of a sensation. Still enshrouded by mystery, this sensation resituates itself in a text, the production of which is again analogous to maternity and birth: "Quand un poème sera mûr, il se détachera. Tu vois que j'imité la loi naturelle" (ibid., 1:222). The continual use of reflexive verbs ("se transfigure," "se va d'elle-même," and "se détachera") reinforces the passivity of the creator who, during this period of gestation, witnesses the coming-into-being of the text. Language, at this point, is beginning to take on an autonomous character.

A third letter indicates that the poet, having reached his destination ("la clé de moi-même," "clef de voûte, ou centre"),

assumes the position of a spider "sur les principaux fils déjà sortis de mon esprit." The locus of creativity is the center of the Self from which is spun a textual spider web: ". . . je tisserai aux *points de rencontre* de merveilleuses dentelles." The filaments of the mind constitute a pre-text or web ("que je devine et qui existent déjà," *C*, 1:224-25), which is to be transposed into the intricate lacework of poetry. The relationship between these two texts is one of permeability — a continual exchange occurring at the interstices or "points de rencontre." In this way the inner text, presented as a chaotic collection of signs, continues to inhabit and punctuate the literary text. Spun from the etymology of "texte" (the Latin "texere," "to weave"), the metaphor of the web underscores the view of language as an expansive force that spontaneously reaches out in multiple directions. The spider's web, the perforations of the lace, and the fruition and falling of the text, figure a silent writing that foregrounds spacing and mobility. The poet does not attempt to decode the secret of the inner self but observes its transfiguration and insertion into "tel livre ou tel poème" (*ibid*, 1:222). As a reweave of other internal texts (impressions, sensations, memories), the psyche harbors an endless string of dislocated signifiers.

By placing the entire operation under the rubric of "Rêve," Mallarmé encourages a reading of his poetics with Freud's model for the formation and interpretation of dreams.¹⁰ Conceived as a textual effect dislodged from its referent, Freud's dream is also a misplaced text, a multilayered structure the façade of which is "disordered and full of gaps" (*S.E.*, 4:211). The dream's meaning does not reside in the elucidation of a pre-determined or fixed sense but in the differential patterns and subtle interplay between its manifest and latent contents. Freud accentuates the graphic dimension of this double register and eventually decides that it is "more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing than with language." A dream's interpretation, he asserts, "is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphs" (*ibid.*, 13:177).¹¹

The notion of the hieroglyph, with its scrambling of phonic and graphic elements, is consonant with Mallarmé's fabrication of a "mot total, neuf, étranger à la langue et comme

incantatoire" (*O.C.*, 368). In the poetic, as in the dream text, words are treated as things, material objects in a spatial and visual field. Perceived "indépendamment de la suite ordinaire" (*ibid.*, 386) and left to its own "initiative," Mallarmé's signifier approaches the polyvalence of Freud's dream discourse. Attentive to the white, or intervals, between words, Mallarmean syntax subverts traditional mimetic practices to create an unpredictable textual play.¹² His use of contradictions, juxtapositions, cuttings and composites conforms with the subterranean processes of Freud's dream-work: condensation, displacement, representability, and secondary revision.

Investigating the fundamental differences between the operations of language and the dream-work, Jean-François Lyotard proposes a strategy that would undoubtedly interest Mallarmé: "The dream cannot be made to speak? Then we will try to make discourse dream."¹³ Both dream and poem defy the logic of simple translation. Hieroglyphs proliferate to produce an excess of signification. Words, endowed with the material properties of things, reflect and transform one another. To translate vertically between unconscious and conscious systems is, as Derrida has argued, to eliminate the body of the signifier, to ignore the dream's "idiom" or "poetry."¹⁴

To "make discourse dream," Mallarmé cultivates a poetics of suggestion. The poet's effort is not the translation of the dream's content but the replication of its process and trace: "Toutefois, l'écrivain," he writes, "*recopie* ou voit d'abord en le miroir de sa pensée, puis transcrit dans une écriture . . ." (*O.C.*, 878). The gesture is global, for the poet must "tout recréer, avec des réminiscences." No longer subservient to the representation of the thing/referent, writing becomes a procreative act — "une sommation au monde" (*ibid.*, 481).

If the writing of poetry resembles the writing of dreams, it is because both operate according to principles of exclusion and substitution. Mallarmé recaptures both the indestructibility and the infinite transforming powers of Freud's unconscious when he compares the formation of language to a "merveilleux ouvrage de broderie" in which ideas, like "threads," constantly disappear only to resurface tied to other ideas (*O.C.*, 828). In a letter of 17 May 1868 to Eugene Lefébure, he presents the same

dynamic, this time on a universal scale: "Toute naissance est une destruction et toute vie d'un moment l'agonie dans laquelle on ressucite ce qu'on a perdu pour le voir, on l'ignorait avant" (*C.I.*, 249). The combination of the present tense ("ressucite") with the past tense ("a perdu") suggests that what is repeatedly resurrected is an original loss. Moreover, what one seeks to restore at each moment is not the object itself but the perception of its loss. The desire to see, albeit to master, merely reenacts a repetition of the first loss. To create, as Mallarmé will eventually write, is to refigure "la notion d'un objet, échappant, qui fait défaut" (*O.C.*, 647).

This paradoxical linking of perception and loss, blindness and possession, occurs also near the beginning of the letter. Here, Mallarmé speaks of immersing himself in "Total Darkness" in order to contemplate, with "eyes closed," a first draft of his *Oeuvre*. The entire experience is offered as proof that the poet is "un critique avant tout." We can appreciate the full impact of the statement by considering the etymology of "critique": Latin "criticus," meaning "decisive," and the Greek "krinein," "to choose" and "to separate." By means of their common root, "skeri," these etymons can be linked to the Latin "scribere" and the Greek "skariphos," both signifying "scratch, incise, write." These associations become more explicit when Mallarmé continues with: "Je n'ai créé mon oeuvre que par *élimination*, et toute vérité acquise ne naissait que de la perte d'une impression . . ." (*C.*, 1:245-46). The writing of poetry performs the death or elimination of an impression. Consider now the etymology of "élimination": Latin "eliminare" is "to drive outside a threshold." If writing is a form of rupture, a crossing of a threshold, it involves a relation and a separation between an inner and an outer text the boundaries of which remain uncertain. Situated between "le désir et l'accomplissement, la perpétration et son souvenir," Mallarmé's poem as "hymen" or "Rêve" (*O.C.*, 310) is an imbrication of other cryptic texts.

The notion of the poet-critic has both stylistic and theoretical implications. The aim is not the elimination of logical conscious thought but the loosening of its strictures. Exploitation of textual space generates the modern *poème-critique*. To simulate the "naked use of thought" is to transcribe the movement of its

fading—thought “retreating, protracting, fleeing” (*O.C.*, 455). Whether it be the progressive chiseling or hollowing out of the phrase, the careful maneuvering of the syntax or the calculated spacing of the text, the work of censorship constitutes an integral part of Mallarmé’s creative process. His description of his procedure in a letter to Maurice Gillemot provides an excellent example: “Il y a à Versailles ces boiseries à rinceaux, jolis à faire pleurer; des coquilles, des enroulements, des courbes, des reprises de motifs. Telle m’apparaît d’abord la phrase que je jette sur le papier, en un dessin sommaire, que je revois ensuite, que j’épure, que je synthétise.”¹⁵

It can also be argued that to give poetry a “critical” dimension is to make it recognize and evaluate its own dynamic. As Leo Bersani has demonstrated, Mallarmé’s writing “moves” him “to the side of his verse,” producing “an ironic consciousness of poetry.”¹⁶ Anyone who reads the *Correspondance* will note the incongruous welding of enthusiasm and despair, progress and defeat. In the same letter to Lefébure, for example, we find a confident affirmation of the poet’s passage from “conception” to “comprehension” (the conviction that he will finish his Work) immediately followed by a long digression on the inadequacies of language. To prove his point, Mallarmé describes the grasshopper’s song as being intimately tied to the earth—a connection that renders it “sacred” and “less fragmented” than a bird’s song, which already expresses “un peu de mort” (*C*, 1:250). In contrast to the more spontaneous sounds of nature, a woman’s voice appears “transparente de mille mots . . . et pénétrée de néant” (*ibid.*).

As discourse, poetry is not immune from such criticism. But it is perhaps more accurate to say that, for Mallarmé, poetry includes its own critical apparatus. By exposing its own limitations, literature redefines itself as illusion, game, and fraud. Rather than escape or dominate the instinctual forces that generate it, poetic discourse reactivates them and makes them visible. Figuring its own process of production, Mallarmé’s *poème-critique* demonstrates a dynamic interaction between the conscious or critical aspects of language and the unconscious influences of a “primary process.”¹⁷ Redramatizing the lack of knowledge from which it springs, literature, by its

very obscurity, is nothing more than an "imaginative compréhension" of "ce que eût dû se produire antérieurement ou près de l'origine" (*O. C.*, 856). Herein lies its difference: "on ressuscite . . . *pour le voir*, on l'ignorait avant" (*C*, 1:249; my italics).

But to perceive "le Rêve dans sa nudité idéale" (*C*, 1:270) is, for Mallarmé, a serious transgression against the natural order. To Coppée he admits that he has nearly lost his sanity; to Cazalis he complains of peculiar "symptoms," a sense of "hysteria" precipitated by writing.¹⁸ It is little wonder that by the end of the 1860s Mallarmé abandons *Hérodiade* and begins to rethink language from a different angle.¹⁹ In 1870 he informs Lefébure of a new project that will bring him to Paris: ". . . j'ai choisi des sujets de linguistique, espérant que cet effort spécial ne serait pas sans influence sur l'appareil du langage à qui semble en vouloir principalement ma maladie nerveuse" (*C*, 1:318).

Scholarly pursuits result not in the projected doctoral thesis but in a philological treatise, *Les Mots anglais* (1877). That Mallarmé does not significantly modify his views of the 1860s is evident in his description of language as a living organism. Metaphorically portrayed as a "chair" and an "ossature" inviting dissection, language as body still bears evidence of its instinctual foundations. Product of an interminable play of transformation, the word is an "alliage de vie et de mort" which simultaneously advances "vers quelque point futur" and "se replonge aussi dans le passé" (*O. C.*, 1053). Although language structures and represses, reveals and conceals, it is also subject to decomposition ("une mort cintinuelle," *ibid.*) and in Freud's terms the "return of the repressed." Finally, it is the double character of language that makes it a replica of the irresolvable contradictions of human nature: "factice dans l'essence non moins que naturel; réfléchi, que fatal, volontaire, qu'aveugle" (*O. C.*, 901). This version of the historical development of language may be superimposed on earlier descriptions of textual production as well as Freud's theories of instinctual drives. Indeed, the Freudian problematic of Eros and Thanatos, the intermingling and overlapping of life and death, could well be the most potent response to Mallarmé's question: "Qu'est-ce que le Langage, entre les matériaux scientifiques à étudier?" (*ibid.*).

Yet another project of this period suggests that what began

as a splitting of the poet's psyche, or "crise de verre," is to be gradually reworked into the linguistic "Crise de Vers." In 1868 Mallarmé sends Cazalis a poem taken from "une étude projetée sur la Parole." This "sonnet nul" is an inverted composition whose meaning is totally derived from a "mirage interne des mots même" (C, 1:279). Originally entitled "Sonnet allégorique de lui-même," this text dramatizes its own genesis across a series of repetitions, chiasmic reversals, and specular refractions. Each word, doubled and divided by its own reflective qualities, is inscribed in continuous play with the other words of the sonnet. Words, writes Mallarmé, "*se reflètent les uns sur les autres jusqu'à paraître ne plus avoir leur couleur propre, mais n'être que les transitions d'une gamme*" (ibid, 1:234). Here, the use of "paraître" points to the alterity lodged in language. We are reminded of the poet's specular drama ("il [the mirror] me fond—il me montre la désagrégation profonde de mon être" (ibid, 1:247)) and the "trou profond" of *Hérodiade's* mirror.²⁰ In each instance the mirror, by collapsing the static polarities of subject/object, interior/exterior, suspends reference, threatens consciousness, and ultimately questions the possibility of meaning.²¹

The shift toward a science of language does not, then, abolish the oscillating play of Mallarmé's mirror but rather reconstitutes it in the impersonal structure of verse. Language, in its duplicity, recaptures the dynamic struggle between the conscious and the unconscious—two texts, inextricably allied, one inhabiting the other.²² Significantly, as early as 1864 Mallarmé conceived of *Hérodiade* in terms of a similar technique of textual reflexivity. Implicit in this early vision of the poem is the rapport between the production of multiple poetic effects and the erosion of meaning:

J'ai enfin commencé mon *Hérodiade*. Avec terreur, car j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en deux mots: *Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit*. Le vers ne doit donc pas, là, se composer de mots; mais d'intentions, et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation. (C, 1:137)

At this early stage, the far-reaching implications of this new

poetics were not yet evident. The abolition of the object and the breakup of verse still constituted a point of departure, a question of technique. It is only after a systematic study of language that Mallarmé grasps what he later calls "le pourquoi de la crise" and the presence in *Hérodiade* of a mysterious "motif." In the later fragments for the poem's preface, the only reason given for its interruption is a discrepancy between artistic technique and critical insight. In spite of the risks involved in the late revision of an early work, the poet insists that, from the outset, *Hérodiade* was far in advance of his own critical abilities. As a result, twenty years later he claims ". . . je n'aie pas trop à reculer en arrière."²³

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

In retrospect, Mallarmé will consider his crises and intellectual development of the decade in terms of an evolution from an essentially reductive form of consciousness toward another:

La conscience, excédée d'ombres, se réveille, lentement, formant un homme nouveau, et doit retrouver mon Rêve après la création de ce dernier. Cela durera quelques années pendant lesquelles j'ai à revivre la vie de l'humanité *depuis son enfance et prenant conscience d'elle-même.* (*C*, 1:301; my italics)

This slow awakening of consciousness signals the movement

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

During the 1860s, then, Mallarmé develops a dual system that brings together the processes of writing and reading, text and interpretation. As we have seen, the language of his poetry, like the language of dreams, is built around another discourse which, having its own syntax and rules, cannot be successfully penetrated from the viewpoint of consciousness. By focusing on the processes of transformation and the elliptical communication between these systems, Mallarmé constructs a textual apparatus that functions in much the same manner as Freud's psychical apparatus. If fiction is, as Mallarmé suspected, "le procédé même de l'esprit humain" (*O.C.*, 851), no other thinker did more to demonstrate this idea than Freud. After years of analyzing writing-effects in dreams (condensation, displacement, overdetermination), Freud designated the Unconscious as the "true psychical reality." Concerned by the "much abused privilege" of consciousness, he stresses its reductive aspects and, more specifically, its exaggerated role in the fabrication of art. Calling for precisely the same shift in emphasis as Mallarmé, he concludes: "The more we seek to win our way to a metapsychological view of mental life, the more we must learn to emancipate ourselves from the importance of the symptom of 'being conscious.' " (*S.E.*, 14:193).

Having drawn this parallel between Mallarmé's and Freud's practices of textual interpretation, we might stop here to consider the role of "conscious expectations" in the critical discourse surrounding *Hérodiade*. It is certainly disconcerting that most interpretations concern only those parts of the poem published in the Pléiade edition of Mallarmé's works. By avoiding the series of fragments preserved in manuscript form, this criticism systematically represses the processes of textual production. Negated are those very textual forces that Mallarmé strove to sustain. Although a number of critics do insist on a relationship between *Hérodiade* and the question of creative process, it is the character of the virgin princess as a static symbol of

ideal beauty that commands their attention.²⁴ Moreover, those critics who do deal with the manuscript are preoccupied with the reinstatement of a fixed narrative framework. As the editor of the text, Gardner Davies, remarks: ". . . il est tentant de spéculer, à partir des données qui existent, sur le développement vraisemblable des parties inachevées du poème."²⁵ This temptation to complete the text by imposing a chronological order, or to avoid its complexities by suppressing the variants, explains to a large extent the persisting tendency to read *Hérodiade* across a series of static polarized images. Working toward a definitive reconciliation of opposites, this approach most often results in the formation of a "parfaite beauté ayant la pleine conscience de soi,"—a radical negation of the poet's views on artistic process.²⁶

For what emerges from the preceding discussion of the *Correspondance* is that Mallarmé, like Freud, questions the very authenticity of consciousness. The contradictory versions of a text like *Hérodiade* offer an implicit critique of the fictional process itself. Since each successive version of the poem, whether published or not, opens up the possibility of a new reading, there can be no definitive meanings or ultimate truths. Product of an "enfantement intérieur," the unfinished manuscript for *Hérodiade* is bound up with the invention of a language, the genesis of a text. How does matter become meaning? By what processes does a thought become conscious? What is the relationship between desire, language, and death? And finally, what does it mean to write—"Sait-on ce que c'est qu'écrire"? (*O.C.*, 481).

II

Narcissism and the Theater of the Psyche

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

MALLARME

READING THE "SCÈNE"

Only one part of *Hérodiade* saw print during Mallarmé's lifetime. In 1870 the "Scène," bearing the title "Fragment d'une ancienne étude scénique d'Hérodiade," appeared in *Le Parnasse contemporain*.¹ Thirty years later Mallarmé reassembled the "Scène," along with other fragments of the poem, under the new title *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère*. Thus, in spite of the early decision of 1865 to abandon all theatrical ambitions regarding this poem, *Hérodiade*, it would appear, remained intimately linked to a theatrical motif. According to Mallarmé, the change

in genre from tragedy to poem would not inhibit his continued exploitation of a series of dramatic devices within the work: "les vêtements, le décor, l'ameublement, sans parler du mystère" (*C*, 1:174). Conceived at approximately the same time, "l'Après-midi d'un faune" entertained a similarly ambiguous relationship with the stage: "Je le fais absolument scénique," wrote Mallarmé, "*non possible au théâtre, mais exigeant le théâtre*" (ibid., 1:116).

Not surprisingly, I have found a certain amount of critical disagreement regarding the dramatic value of *Hérodiade* and, more specifically, the "Scène." For some, this classical dialogue between a narcissistic princess and her childhood nurse "cries out for stage presentation." This view is generally shared by those critics who have a marked interest in Mallarmé's dramatic theory and its rapport with the evolution of symbolist drama.² Still others, troubled by the timeless and ambiguous ambiance of the "Scène," regard it as "indéfendable" from a dramatic viewpoint.³ Despite these differences, there is a general tendency to isolate the "Scène" from the rest of *Les Noces* and to read it within a realist framework. The following remarks by two critics exemplify this attitude:

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

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

Now, there is no question that the "Scène" is the most readable segment of *Hérodiade*. By virtue of its classical dramatic form (speakers are identified and given parts) and its relative lack of variants, the "Scène" functions for many readers as a stabilizing point of reference in an otherwise alogical and extremely esoteric text. When considered as a dialogue between two characters, the "Scène" provides, in one critic's words, an "objective confirmation" of Hérodiade's ambivalent personality.⁶ Two basic movements can be readily ascertained: First, a contrasting play between the old nurse's spontaneous, earthy manner and Hérodiade's cold inviolability. By refusing her nurse's attempts at physical contact, Hérodiade projects the image of an

autonomous self. This narcissistic pose is then shattered by the heroine's ambivalent monologue before her mirror and by her emphatic denial of all previous assertions of self-sufficiency at the "Scène's" conclusion:

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

All of the aforementioned critics react to this seemingly sudden reversal by reverting to narrative structures. Two slightly different interpretations are generally offered. First, it is argued that this "unknown thing" can only be an encounter with the head of John the Baptist — the third character in *Les Noces*. If the loss of the heroine's virginity can be projected into the future, then the "Scène," can be read as an intermediary stage of pure antithesis. Thus, for Sylviane Huot, Hérodiade's narcissism, as depicted in the "Scène," creates a structural tension which demands resolution: ". . . le narcissisme, tout en y proclamant encore sa suffisance, prophétise sa rupture, et sa fin dans l'avènement du couple" ⁷ Here, prophecy is a proleptic, linear force that carries the reader toward a satisfactory conclusion. A second proposal, vaguely reminiscent of the biblical reading of Salome, situates an erotic rendezvous between lovers sometime before the "Scène." In this way the heroine's anxiety, as well as the Baptist's decapitation, can be sufficiently motivated by the logic of crime and punishment. These two critical versions merge in their mutual aspiration toward a final synthesis between the severed head and the virgin, usually identified as the respective symbols of genius and beauty. In all cases, the integration of the psyche functions as a metaphor for poetic closure and the creation of a self-sufficient, narcissistic text. ⁸

To ensure the integrity of text and self, this idealist criticism must exclude certain segments of the work while reappropriating others. Eliminated are those heterogeneous elements that disrupt "storytelling," generating instead a barrage of either/or structures. As an example, one could cite the late variant that suggests that Hérodiade's nuptials are not only solitary but incomplete: "Elle s'arrête au seuil solitaires noces"

(*N*, 82). Rather than establish a consecutive order of events, the manuscript dramatizes a confusion, or even a confrontation, of temporal modes. Thus, in the early stage directions for the “Scène,” Mallarmé suggests that parts of the dialogue be treated as a dream.⁹ And, in the late fragments for the “Finale,” it becomes virtually impossible to determine whether Hérodiade’s drama is real or imagined: “au loin elle se réveille — / (rien de tout cela est-il arrivé)” (*N*, 139).

The occultation of this latent dynamic between text and variant goes hand in hand with a reassimilation of alterity on a strictly thematic level. As a “parfaite opération dialectique,” the plotting of Hérodiade’s becoming would necessarily involve the confrontation, absorption, and denial of an Other. Once alienated in the Baptist, Hérodiade, insists Richard, “doit . . . l’effacer [the Baptist] . . . si elle veut se récupérer en lui.”¹⁰ Transposed into psychoanalytic terms, Hérodiade’s identity is contingent on the rupture and reaffirmation of an invincible narcissism.

Although some have described this movement as the “dialectic of Mallarmean narcissism,” I am inclined to view it as the narcissistic ruse of criticism. For it is as if Hérodiade’s fondest wish is performed by the critic. Such narratives work toward the exclusion of the erotic and the promotion of the perfect work of art: “une oeuvre poétique qui reconstituerait, dans une beauté inaltérable, l’univers phénoménal tout entier.”¹¹

NARCISSISM RECONSIDERED

Le plus grand nombre des
plaisirs que j’éprouve, lesquels
viennent de moi-même et y
finissent, ont un caractère
essentiellement fictif.

MALLARME

When Mallarmé chose to keep the “Scène” rather than replace it with a more elliptic version (as he did the “Ouverture

ancienne”), he implicitly tapped an alternative source of drama. For the insertion of these now “vieux vers” into a dense network of pure equivocation creates a rippling effect that upstages even the most convincing narcissistic pose. Identity slips, is indeed pulverized, when the subject, as Valéry puts it, “is no longer the cause of the form but one of its effects.”¹² Or, to paraphrase Lacan, when the character does not speak language but is himself spoken by it.¹³ In the “Scène” the best way to illustrate this decentering of the subject is to reconsider the script of narcissism. I will situate my reading by first discussing Freud’s model and its elaboration by modern French theorists.

The internal dynamics of narcissism become highly visible as soon as it is considered as both a desire and a strategy. Since Freud viewed the strategy as working both for and against the desire, he distinguished two forms of narcissism. What he identifies as “primary narcissism” is a state of absolute unity that precedes the constitution of the subject. During this stage the ego is a “reservoir” that continually stores up “the whole available quota of libido” (*S.E.*, 23:150). According to Freud sleep, by its “reactivation of intrauterine existence,” offers the closest approximation of this objectless state (*ibid.*, 19:222). Yet this buildup of libido in the ego eventually reaches a level where it becomes “unpleasurable.” At this point the libido overflows and the ego, contrary to its initial desire for absolute closure, begins to form object-relations. Thus, Freud concludes: “The development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous attempt to recover that state” (*ibid.*, 14:100).

It is, then, the urge toward this primal, objectless condition that constitutes the motor force or desire behind all narcissistic endeavors. This regressive movement toward the reduction of tension and the absence of stimuli is called the “Nirvana principle”—a tendency that, in Freud’s view, ultimately links narcissism with the death drive.¹⁴ Primary narcissism, writes Laplanche, is a “primal myth of return,” a “primal fantasy” that cannot be proved.¹⁵ Freud deduces it from the regressive tendencies perceptible in “secondary narcissism.” By studying certain psychoses, hypochondria, and infantile megalomania, Freud came to recognize a basic pattern in all secondary narciss-

sistic relations. In each instance the ego appears to abandon its relationships to objects by withdrawing its libido and transforming itself into its own object of desire. I say "appears" because the object is not forgotten but decathected and internalized under the form of an idealized specular image: "This ideal ego is not the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. (. . .) As always, where the libido is concerned, man has here again shown himself incapable of giving up a satisfaction he had once enjoyed" (*S.E.*, 14:94).

In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915), Freud analyzes an extreme form of narcissistic identification. Instead of successfully detaching itself from the lost object or loved one, as in mourning, the melancholic's ego identifies itself with the object, incorporates it, and loses control. Since the ego has also incorporated the ambivalence attached to the object, the melancholic experiences a lowering of self-esteem symptomized by severe self-accusations and criticisms. An internal rivalry begins in which "the ego debases itself and rages against itself" (*S.E.*, 14:257). Later, in "The Ego and the Id," Freud explains the logic behind these symptoms: Every time an object-cathexis is replaced by an identification, the ego must somehow placate the demands of the id. In order to regain control, the ego attempts to negotiate the id's loss by "forcing itself . . . upon the id as a love-object" (*ibid.*, 19:30).

What is essential here is the idea that narcissism is a project that aims at unity through the incorporation of difference. The desire to annihilate desire and thus return to a state of nondifferentiation (a "dégré zéro") only results in the perpetuation of that desire and the internal splitting of the ego into subject and object. Proposed is a view of the ego as divided against and alienated from itself. The far-reaching implications of the theory come to the fore with Jacques Lacan's claim that, from its very inception, the ego constitutes itself through a narcissistic identification with an ideal image. During the "mirror stage," the infant makes a primary identification with a specular image—a figure more perfect than himself. Lacking in motor control, the helpless infant prematurely anticipates the unity and coordination of this idealized Other. Formed is an intrapsychic rivalry.

By obtaining recognition in the mirror, the child is thus assured of what he believes to be his own identity. This first identification, a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), is, for Lacan, “root-stock” for all later identifications: “. . . cette forme situe l’instance du moi, dès avant sa détermination sociale, *dans une ligne de fiction*, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu.”¹⁶ Because of this initial formation of the subject, narcissism, writes Lacan, “impose sa structure à tous les désirs fût-ce aux plus élevés.”¹⁷

Moving back and forth between the positions of subject and object, the ego continues its clandestine pursuit of a phantasmic mythical unity. The multiple roles (active, passive, subject, object) that write the script of narcissism are played out at the level of the body. Far from passionless, narcissism (the cathected ego) strives to order a sexuality that is fundamentally autoerotic. According to Freud, the autoerotic phase of sexuality begins when the infant loses a first exterior object that has functioned as a source of pleasure. This is the maternal breast. In order to compensate this loss, pleasure is sought through self-stimulation of the erogenous zones. By eventually concluding that all future object-relations have as a prototype the infant-at-the-breast and that “the finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it” (*S.E.*, 7:222), Freud posits a strong link between sexuality and fantasy. Since the lost object can never be recovered in its original form, the sexual object is always only a substitute. Thus, sexuality (autoerotic and narcissistic) is itself an imaginary construct in which the first object of desire “has been replaced by an object *reflected* within the subject.”¹⁸

This overview of narcissism, with its emphasis on the structuring powers of fiction and fantasy, enables us to take a new look at the “Scène.” Following in the tracks of Narcissus, Hérodiade has severed all relations with the external world by withdrawing her libido. To all appearances, she has achieved autonomy, becoming herself her own object of desire “Oui, c’est pour moi, pour moi, que je fleuris, déserte!” (*N*, 68). Like Mallarmé’s *Igitur*, she seeks Nirvana — “un calme narcotique de moi pur longtemps rêvé” (*O.C.*, 435). Motivated and shaped by this regressive fantasy of purity, Hérodiade’s narcissism invokes the Freudian model. To achieve immortality, she must negate

the fact of her birth. This desire to disappear and to retreat to a place of nondifference is, as we have seen, the mark of primary narcissism:

Même pour n'aller que jusqu'à la fenêtre
Elle n'a pas aimé, cette princesse, naître
(N, 156)

The intense ambivalence that surrounds the heroine's birth is underscored by the rhyme *naître/fenêtre*. What is sacrificed at birth is the prenatal state, the "lost narcissism" of childhood, the phantasmic period in which it was believed that the ego included everything. To deny this loss, Hérodiade assumes what resembles a foetal position: "Pour, le soir, retirée en ma couche, reptile / Inviolé . . ." (ibid., 69). Within the confines of this protective, embryonic space, "Notre reine enfant" (ibid., 169) momentarily convinces herself of her own omnipotence:

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

This passage stands out in the "Scène" as a moment of relative calm and stability. By strategically placing herself at the center of her universe, Hérodiade projects an image of complete solitude and mastery. But the passage also provides a sample or model of the workings of the text with its variants. Beginning with a close examination of those details in the published version (the last draft of the "Scène") that arouse suspicion, we find that the heroine's deficiencies become all too apparent. First, it should be noted that it is the mirror and not Hérodiade that is given the role of subject. The mirror is idolized because it bestows identity on everything else. Since Hérodiade cannot be the subject, she attempts to become the object of every reflection. Through identification with a specular image, Hérodiade sustains an illusion of totality and power. Looking for herself in the eyes of her mirror, Hérodiade, in Lacanian terms, is imme-

diately situated “dans une ligne de fiction.” Projected is an Ideal Self: “Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant. . . .” The heroine’s desired transparency is metaphorically captured by the impenetrable surface of the diamond, an image that is reinforced by a buildup of hard sounds (d’s and t’s) throughout the passage. At the same time, however, the cluster of sibilant s’s of the last line (“Je le sens, je suis seule”) gives off a fragmenting effect. It is useful here to remember that, for Mallarmé, “S” is “la lettre analytique; dissolvante et disséminante par excellence” (*O.C.*, 855). In this context the letter is over-determined as well by its figural dimension. Since “S” retraces the curves of the recoiled serpent, it evokes the near-perfect circularity of the womb. Signaling a regressive movement toward a more primal state, the shedding of skin (“la chair inutile,” *N*, 69) may be read as the desire for non-being and death. Thus, Hérodiade’s desire to see herself everywhere results in the production of multiple self-images that distort, and inevitably dismantle, any illusion of narcissistic plenitude.

The ambiguity of this segment of the “Scène” emerges in the clash between the published version and its textual variants. As was noted in the first variant cited (*N*, 158), Hérodiade wants to avoid the window at all costs. This fear recalls Mallarmé’s poem, “Le Pitre châtié,” (*O.C.*, 31) in which the leap through the window (Fenêtre/naître/n’être) is tantamount to death. Opting for the indecisive posture of what the “pitre” calls “le mauvais Hamlet,” Hérodiade, in another variant, prefers to remain in “cette mandoline au ventre” (*N*, 159). Mallarmé often uses the image of a hollow-bellied instrument to designate a locus of pure potentiality.¹⁹ Like the maternal womb, this melodious v/entre situates Hérodiade at a crossroads between life and death. That her position is indeed precarious is reaffirmed in the opening lines of the “Scène.” It is quite conceivable that, in order to insure immortality, Hérodiade has bound her desires, transforming her body into a static symbol of beauty:

Le blond torrent de mes cheveux immaculés
 Quand il baigne mon corps solitaire le glace
 D’horreur, et mes cheveux que la lumière enlace

Sont immortels, ô femme, un baiser me tûrait
Si la beauté n'était la mort . . .

(ibid., 63)

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

ta
Je me crois seule en ma monotone patrie
(ibid., 164)

Whereas the choice of "patrie" evokes patriarchal power and dominion, the accumulation of m's with soft nasal sounds in the same verse recalls the maternal womb of the variants. From this blending of masculine and feminine elements emerges the figure of a phallic mother, a fantasy already suggested by the virile image of the reclining serpent. Mallarmé's remarks on the letter "m" support this view: "M traduit le *pouvoir de faire*, donc la joie, *mâle* et *maternelle*; puis . . . le nombre, la rencontre, la fusion . . ." (*O. C.*, 960; my italics). Again, a contrasting play of letters and variants combines to undermine Hérodiade's autonomy by producing an alternative reading of the text. Finally, a third variant, also crossed out, reveals that the impenetrable fortress is indeed inhabited by an equivocal figure. Recovered by "Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant" is:

Hérodiade au *clair* sein *double* de diamants*
(*N*, 164)

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

What is uncovered by this initial demonstration of the play between texts is the overwhelming presence of a double dis-

* All italicized words in quotations from *Les Noces* indicate those crossed out by Mallarmé in that particular draft.

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

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

Vous mentez, ô fleur nue
De mes lèvres!
J'attends une chose inconnue
Ou peut-être, ignorant le mystère et vos cris,

Jetez-vous les sanglots suprêmes et meurtris
 D'une enfance sentant parmi les rêveries
 Se séparer enfin ses froids pierreries.

(*ibid.*, 70)

The "Vous mentez, ô fleur nue de mes lèvres" means that all assertions in the work can be simultaneously read in multiple directions. In its capacity for endless duplicity, fiction, this "Glorieux Mensonge," is an unarrestable force that breaks into the character and subverts her mastery. The most graphic example of this sort of linguistic alterity and its power over characters is the language of prophecy that speaks continuously through the old nurse/sibyl. This is the text-within-the-text that Hérodiade is compelled to decipher. Further analysis of these textual tentacles will demonstrate that the drama that is the psyche is played out in the hesitations of language, that is, in the resonances between the "Scène" and the work itself, the heroine's narcissistic pose and the production of the discourse it seeks to dissimulate.

Early on in the dialogue, Hérodiade is both agitated by and magnetically drawn toward certain subterranean influences that appear anonymous and prophetic:

Par quel attrait
 Menée et quel matin oublié des prophètes
 Verse, sur les lointains mourants, ses tristes fêtes,
 Le sais-je?

(*N*, 63-64)

This tableau, the first of many, stresses Hérodiade's curiosity — a trait she associates with childhood: "Allume encore, enfantillage?" (*ibid.*, 70). "Désolée des songes" (*ibid.*, 65), she attempts to penetrate the secret of her origin, the source and logic behind her present existence. This accounts for the frequent use of the verbs "connaître" and "savoir" as well as the hypothetical tone in which the "Scène" is cast. As an "enfant attentive au mystère éclairé de son être" (*ibid.*, 212), Hérodiade actively seeks out her memories which are, as she says to her mirror, entrapped "Comme des feuilles sous ta glace au trou profond" (*ibid.*, 65). Locked into a state of perpetual suspension in the frozen waters of her mirror ("Eau froide dans ton cadre gelée"

ibid., 65), these half-erased texts (the play on “feuilles”) of her psyche retain the capacity for spontaneous eruption.²⁰

The mirror, which initially appeared as the emblem of narcissism (the guarantor of identity and psychic integration), is not as homogeneous and pure as was thought. Like the jewels, it is a versatile object that can at any moment collapse and melt, transforming itself into a gushing fount. Much to Hérodiade's horror, this is what periodically transpires:

Mais, horreur! des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine,
J'ai de mon rêve épars, connu la nudité!
(N, 65)

The melting of the mirror, the overflow of its immutable frame, the multiplication of reflecting surfaces that disfigure and distort, and the subsequent loss of perspective are all movements that betray the hidden dynamics of the “Scène.” All signal the dismantling of Hérodiade's “autonomous” identity and, more specifically, the dissolution of her narcissistic project. The more we read the “Scène” in terms of its volatile imagery and variants, the more we begin to recognize the complex paradigm of narcissism described by Freud.

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

Hérodiade, it seems, cannot establish her identity without

recognition from her nurse. All of her thoughts, phantasies, and desires are to pass through the filter of the nurse's perception:

. . . tu m'as vue, ô nourrice d'hiver,
 Sous la lourde prison de pierres et de fer
 Où de mes vieux lions traînent les siècles fauves
 Entrer, et je marchais, fatale, les mains sauvées,
 Dans le parfum désert de ces anciens rois:
 (N, 64)

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

Quant à toi, femme née en des siècles malins
 Pour la méchanceté des antres sibyllins
 (ibid., 69)

Yet, for the most part, the nurse's oracular vision is distorted and unclear. In the "Ouverture ancienne," she cannot decide whether the voice she speaks and hears is her own or another's: "Une voix, du passé longue évocation, / Est-ce la mienne prêtée à l'incantation?" (N, 147). Similarly, the nurse of the "Scène" is most often the victim of perceptual doubt. In the opening lines, she is unable to determine whether Hérodiade lives or if she is merely looking at a shadowy figure from the past, a princess wandering "dans un âge ignoré" (ibid., 63). Soon after, she compares her forgetful mind to the fading pages of an old book: "Pardon! l'âge effaçait, reine, votre défense / De mon esprit pâle comme un vieux livre ou noir . . ." (ibid., 65). It seems that the role of the nurse's senility is to forget Hérodiade's prohibitions, thereby allowing bits and pieces of the heroine's past to reappear. But if the nurse's vision is so unreliable, why is it the object of so much concern? For, be it faulty or not, it is indeed the problematics of this perception that structure the entire "Scène." All of the action takes place as if projected on a large screen in which characters view themselves perform. As soon as the images on this screen become too vivid and troublesome, there is a quick shift toward the mirror, which functions as a secondary, protective shield:

H.

Aide-moi, puisqu'ainsi tu n'oses plus me voir,
A me peigner nonchalamment dans un miroir.
(*ibid.*, 64)

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

- H: O jour qu'Hérodiade avec effroi regarde! (*N*, 66)
 N: Vous errez, ombre seule et nouvelle fureur,
 Et regardant en vous précoce avec terreur
 (*ibid.*, 66)
 H: . . . si le tiède azur d'été, (. . .) Me voit dans
 ma pudeur grelottante d'étoile,
 Je meurs (*ibid.*, 69)
 H: . . . clos les volets, l'azur
 Séraphique sourit dans les vitres profondes
 (*ibid.*, 70)
 H: Mais aussi, des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine
 Horreur, j'ai contemplé ma grande nudité.
 (*O.C.*, 1444)

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

2. Vain fantôme / de moi-même /
Celle que je ne / serai / pas /
— quiournes / tout autour (ibid., 98)
3. Profil de mon / destin inconnu / que j'ignore /
premier en moi (ibid., 104)
4. Vieux fantôme de la mort qui / me hante (ibid.,
199)

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

But what is the basis for this identification between a queen and an old servant? Throughout *Les Noces* the reader is given only a few details concerning Hérodiade's early years. In the "Ouverture" there is mention of an "enfant exilée en son coeur précieux" (N, 152) and "un roi qui salarie / . . . la gorge ancienne et tarie" (ibid., 152). The illusion to a wet-nurse is then repeated in another note, which replaces the king with a celibate father who is described as "oublieux de la gorge adorable et tarie" (ibid., 232). This lack of a precise familial configuration focuses more attention on the nurse, who appears as the only remaining link to the heroine's past. In the absence of any reference to a real mother, Hérodiade uses the nurse to re-imagine her childhood:

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

This image of the child-at-the-breast, although meant to be pleasurable, is ridden with ambivalence. The past participles "perdus" and "bu," as well as the rhyme "paradis/jadis," emphasize the separation from, rather than the communication with, this now-withered breast. The term "jadis" is frequently used by Mallarmé to evoke a past period of innocence and bliss which

remains part of the character's memory.²² In the "Scène" this moment is a privileged one because it is the only instance in which Hérodiade's pleasure appears directly connected with another person. Assuming the stance of an immobile statue ("sculptée"), Hérodiade reevokes this memory through conscious recall. Although the loss of perspective ("les yeux perdus") can be equated with complete satisfaction, it also denotes a passive position in which Hérodiade becomes vulnerable to the demands and desires of the nurse who controls the flow of milk.

This is not the only place in *Les Noces* where an oral fantasy appears. In the last lines of the "Prélude," the breast and the ambivalence that surrounds it constitute the only visible trace of an otherwise mysterious past:

L'ordinaire abandon sans produire de trace
 Hors des seins abolis vers l'infini vorace
 Sursautant à la fois en maint épars filet
 Jadis, d'un blanc, et maléfique lait.
(N, 60)

As in the passage of the preceding page, the use of "jadis," this time set off at the beginning of the verse, emphasizes that the milk, which has long since dried up, continues to influence the metaphors of the text. The presence of the nurse in this oral fantasy is signalled by the terms "abolis" and "maléfique." "Abolie" constitutes the first word of her incantation in the "Ouverture" and, in a variant for the "Scène intermédiaire," she is described as a "maléfique plumage" (ibid., 195). The anarchic spurting of an evil milk into "maint épars filet" recalls both the "rêve épars" of Hérodiade's mirror and the figure of the "sein double" that stalks the variants. Insisted upon in both of these retrospective fantasies is the relationship between satisfaction ("L'ordinaire abandon"), lack ("des seins abolis"), and desire. What is remembered is not the object itself but its irrevocable destruction and loss. The temporary fulfillment of an instinctual need (hunger) leads only to the creation of an ever-greater desire, the dimensions of which are comparable to the "voracity" of the "infinite." In several of Mallarmé's other poems, the boundlessness of the "Azur" expresses this eternal and absolute character of desire.²³

The associative logic of Hérodiade's reveries is beginning

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

It remains for us to demonstrate that the published version of the "Scène" is itself a transposition or disguised repetition of the oral identifications and womb fantasies of the variants. The oral instinct, although repressed, continues to flow endlessly through the metaphorical and metonymical structures of the

text. This is in keeping with Freud's observation that the repression of the "original object of a wishful impulse" is "frequently represented by an endless series of substitutive objects, none of which, however, brings full satisfaction" (*S.E.*, 11:189). The inward-outward pulsations of Hérodiade's desire, as it passes from one object to the next, is evidence of its continued clandestine circulation. We have observed this rhythmic movement in her ambivalent behavior toward the old nurse. But the latter is only one link in the chain of surrogate objects. At each turn of the dialogue there is a series of breaking-points during which Hérodiade lapses into self-indulgent reveries of varying intensity. The mirror scene, for example, is bracketed by a reference to the princess as "très rêveuse" (*O.C.*, 1444) and a cue for her to wake up and resume the dialogue as soon as the dream turns to nightmare. It is during these moments of regressive introspection that the heroine's vulnerability becomes most visible. With each break in dialogue she is inevitably brought back to the "trou profond" of her mirror identity.

In this permutation of memory and fantasy, the reader witnesses both the elaboration and dismantling of desire. Freud sets forth a similar framework when he describes fantasies as "protective fictions" and "psychical façades" that "bar access" to infantile memories while providing "self-relief."²⁴ Laplanche and Pontalis note that, in Freud's scheme, fantasies constitute a "privileged point" at which to observe "in the raw" the subtle shifts between unconscious, preconscious and conscious systems.²⁵ One has the impression of a layered structure in which the various strata continue to combine and edit the primary texts of childhood. This formation is further complicated by the influx of enigmatic familial myths, elements of a "parental unconscious" subject to constant reinterpretation.²⁶

These commentaries will prove useful in aligning the production of fantasy with the revision of Mallarmé's manuscript. To this end, I will examine in detail one of Hérodiade's most extensive fantasies that, occurring near the opening of the "Scène," is again precipitated by her inexplicable attraction to a dubious past. Beginning with the image of a winter sunrise and its outpouring of subdued colors ("Verse, sur les lointains mourants, ses tristes fêtes"), this first scene portrays Hérodiade as a

prisoner, walking through the perfumed desert of her "vieux lions" — "ces anciens rois." The use of "lointains mourants" suggests that here, as in the "Ouverture ancienne," Mallarmé has intentionally confused dawn with dusk: "De crépuscule, non, mais de rouge lever" (*N*, 152). Is the spectacle observed in the sky an "évanouissement vespéral ou matinal—on ne saura jamais—" (ibid., 139)? The overall effect of this sustained ambiguity is the total suppression of temporality (" . . . l'on ne sait plus l'heure," ibid., 152) and the crossing over of all beginnings with ends. As in several of Mallarmé's poems, the setting and rising of the sun figures as a "mise-en-scène" for the psychological and sexual dramas of the self.²⁷ In this first part of the "Scène," the memory of this celestial "jaillissement," recalling the gushing of the nurse's evil milk "vers l'infini vorace," is perpetuated in the "languides débris" which make up Hérodiade's reveries. A sudden switch from this legendary past to a more personal present generates a second tableau that continues to build on the first. Moving between exterior settings and interior decors, Mallarmé inserts a sequence of incongruous images and actions: the plucking of flower petals, a pond with a spraying fount, lilies, lions, the folding back of a dress, Hérodiade's feet, and, finally, a turbulent sea. The inundation of the sky, repeated in the "jet d'eau" of the fountain, is here accompanied by a plummeting perspective ("le regard . . . / Descendre") that guides the observer's eye, linking the various segments of the tableau.

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

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

(*N*, 64)

While dreaming of exile, Hérodiade stops to engage in the production of more fantasies. A quick shift to the present tense and the use of "comme" signal the inmixing of memory with daydream. Projected onto the surrounding world is the decor of the

psyche — “les pâles lys qui sont en moi” (ibid.). As in previously-examined segments, pleasure is associated with both a flowing liquid and a rhythmic breaking as she drops the lily petals (now bits of herself) one by one into the pond. The erotic overtones of “effeuiller,” suggesting a kind of metaphorical strip-tease, lead into a masochistic fantasy of defloration and rape which is reinforced by the verbs “m’a/cueillir” and épris.” This connotation is further developed in the “Finale,” where the purity of the lily, dishonored by the presence of “l’inexplicable sang,” is “A jamais renversé de l’une ou l’autre jambe” (ibid., 78). In his early poem “Les Fleurs,” Mallarmé also compares Hérodiade’s body to the parts of a flower:

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

The transformation of an active subject into a passive object of desire continues in the third stage of the fantasy. Here, the lions reappear to perform the ludic gesture of spreading back the folds of Hérodiade’s dress. Although it appears that the violation is ocular (“et regardent mes pieds . . .”), we cannot determine who performs it:

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

The interpolation of “de ma robe” indicates that the lions could very well be printed on the fabric of the dress. This idea is supported by a later statement in the “Scène” in which the “frisson blanc” of Hérodiade’s nudity is said to emerge from the eroticized “calices” of her dress. Equally uncertain is the identity of the wearer of the dress. In the “Ouverture” the nurse’s dress is also inscribed with the figural motifs of a tapestry: “. . . avec un passé de ramages / Sur ma [a variant shows “ta”] robe blanchie en l’ivoire fermé” (ibid, 146). The association “indolence-robe” is

further strengthened by a manuscript note in which the dress clearly functions as a metonym for the breast: “robe couler/seins/de moi-même/reculer/jamais elle” (ibid., 106). Is it, then, Hérodiade’s own body movements or those of another mysterious, feminine presence that make the dress move? This continual slippage (“couler”/“reculer”) between self and other, garment and body, make it impossible to determine the active subject from the passive object. Just as Hérodiade is both imprisoned and “toute-puissante,” her lions are simultaneously viewed as protectors (“Mais qui me toucherait, des lions respectée” ibid., 68) and plunderers.

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

et cela fait — sur
un pied l’autre,
eux-mêmes
sur les pieds
seins
une sorte de danse
effrayante esquisse

(N, 114)

Symbolically reenacted by this dance are the oscillating rhythms of the oral cycle, a configuration that resurfaces over and over throughout *Les Noces*. The displacement toward the feet (a highly eroticized image for Mallarmé)²⁸ does not alter the desire, which is one of contact. Rather than sever her relationship with this phantom mother, Hérodiade becomes herself the object of maternal desire. For it is only by appeasing this

primeval Sea-Mother that Hérodiade can fuse back into the peaceful waters of the maternal womb.²⁹ A parallel passage near the "Scène"'s conclusion supports this reading:

. . . clos les volets, l'azur
Séraphique sourit dans les vitres profondes
Et je déteste, moi, le bel azur . . .
Des ondes
Se bercent et, là-bas, sais-tu pas un pays
Ou le sinistre ciel ait les regards haïs
De Vénus qui, le soir, brûle dans le feuillage;
J'y partirais!

(ibid., 70)

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

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

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

By means of metonymy (the lion's mane is now Hérodiade's disheveled hair) and the defensive mechanism of projection (note the double displacement between "tu" and "vous" encompassing "votre peur des crinières"), Hérodiade achieves once

more distance and a semblance of autonomy. Within the confines of the mirror ("dans un miroir"), where even physical contact is permitted, the heroine works to restructure a specular unity, however temporary. For the "jet d'eau" of Hérodiade's fountain (the figuration of self and other), frozen and framed by her looking glass, is to melt and erupt shortly hereafter: "des soirs dans ta sévère fontaine / 'J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité (ibid., 65).

There are many ways in which the associative strands of this first fantasy feed into other sections of the “Scène,” and *Les Noces*. By confronting it with other textual fragments, we discover that proximity to the mother and to all that she represents (memories of physical contact and nourishment as well as separation and loss) motivates a fair amount of imagery. In one subtext, for example, Hérodiade’s wedding feast is made to serve the supreme narcissistic fantasy—the incestuous consumption of self with other:

Incestueux
Le mets *délicieux* qu'on goûte *l'un à l'autre*
supérieur e l' *à soi-même*
(N, 173)

What this interminable layering of metaphors demonstrates is a work of transformation and textual process, an infinite regression toward other texts. Not only does Hérodiade's desire proceed from without, it is always presented in the form of a hermetic text to be deciphered. This cryptic "discours de l'Autre"³⁰ is the language of prophecy, the "temps prophétique qui pleure sur l'enfant" (*N*, 152), the anonymous straying voice of the nurse's incantation. The desire conveyed by these phantom texts is always experienced as something external, an alien force threatening inundation and total engulfment. It is the magnetic force exerted by a "matin oublié des prophètes" that, like the spilling of celestial milk, streaks the sky with its "tristes fêtes" (*ibid.*, 64). Synonymous with an unarrestable liquidity (milk, water, blood, tears, and melting wax) that builds, overflows, and then rebuilds, desire is preserved and reactivated by the libidinous properties of language.

In the "Scène" itself, desire is encoded by the language of flowers and precious stones. Frozen into crystallized objects or fetishes, these fragments of metal and glass project the image of a superior, narcissistic body—pure, eternal, immense, and impenetrable:

Oui, c'est pour moi, pour moi, que je fleuris,
déserte!
Vous le savez, jardins d'améthyste, enfouis
Sans fin dans de savants abîmes éblouis,
Ors ignorés, gardant votre antique lumière
Sous le sombre sommeil d'une terre première,
Vous, pierres où mes yeux comme de purs bijoux
Empruntent leur clarté mélodieuse, et vous,
Métaux qui donnez à ma jeune chevelure
Une splendeur fatale et sa massive allure!
(*N*, 68-69)

The pose is predictably deceptive. In light of previous discussion, these first lines could be read in reverse: "Non, c'est pour vous, pour vous, que je fleuris, déserte!" The prevalent phantasm of the variants still persists in the distinctively maternal "vous." Note the combining of soft nasal vowels and concave shapes with images of sleep and primeval soil. As evidenced by the metaphorical-metonymical movement of the passage ("Comme," "Empruntent," "donnez"), Hérodiade is neither whole nor autonomous. In Laplanche's words, she has merely redirected this mythical body "back towards" herself, making it "enter into" herself "as fantasy."³¹ To incorporate such volume ("jardins," "Sans fin," "abîmes"), various body parts become distended, the hair taking on a lustrous "massive allure," the eyes now endowed with a "melodious" shine. Hérodiade cannot re-member the lost object without dis-membering herself.

If Hérodiade is a "shadow princess," it is because she never stops fantasizing. As her nurse says: "Vous errez, ombre seule et nouvelle fureur, / Et regardant en vous précoce avec terreur" (*N*, 66). The continual production of fantasy allows the reservoir of childhood memories ("joyaux du mur natal," *ibid.*, 65) to circulate freely within the "Scène." Efforts at censorship prove futile, as each fantasy inevitably ignites or remotivates an entire

string of sinister, reversible, and exceedingly volatile subplots.

With his heroine's closing remarks, Mallarmé not only exposes the ruse of narcissism but extends its problematic toward the general functioning of language.³² Immediately following Hérodiade's admission of deceit ("Vous mentez, ô fleur nue de mes lèvres!") is a double hypothesis:

J'attends une chose inconnue
Ou peut-être, ignorant le mystère et vos cris,
Jetez-vous, less sanglots suprêmes et meurtris
D'une enfance sentant parmi les rêveries
Se séparer enfin ses froides pierreries.

(N, 70)

It is a sweeping interpretation, one that does not further our knowledge but leaves us dangling ("Ou peut-être") between an "unknown thing" and the indeterminate sifting of childhood reveries. To choose either proposition is to miss the point. With this statement the text attempts to reappropriate itself, to contain all possibilities, to systematize its "otherness." Like the narcissist, language is a part parading as a whole.

The drama of narcissism is, then, in every respect, a drama of language, a dialogic struggle between the self and its mirror image, the child and its creator, the fragment and the work. Structured in and around a vast network of other, cryptic, authorless texts, (dreams, prophecies), this "Fragment d'une ancienne étude scénique" mirrors the problematic of narcissism as discussed by Freud. Just as the narcissistic ego is already constituted by a preexistent frame of representation (the alienating ego-ideal), so is the writing of the "Scène" imbedded in a larger, contextual space (drafts, variants) that consistently intrudes upon and dislocates its narrative structure. Like the Self in pursuit of the lost object that will complete it, the text endlessly pursues the missing referent that will insure its narcissistic integrity. The quest is, however, undercut by the very aesthetic that generates *Les Noces*. For restaged in the continual contraction and expansion of text is both the pursuit of meaning and its imminent failure — a "drâme, latent, [qui] ne se manifeste que par une déchirure affirmant l'irréductibilité de nos instincts" (*O. C.*, 321).

III

From the ‘Ouverture Ancienne’ to the ‘Prélude’: Repetition and the Uncanny

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

MALLARME

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

December 1865:

. . . j’ai souffert toute la semaine d’une atroce nevralgie . . . aux minutes de répit, je me jetais en maniaque désespéré sur une insaisissable ouverture de mon poème qui chante en moi, que je ne puis noter (*C*, 1:195).

January 1866:

Il m'est si difficile de m'isoler assez de la vie pour sentir, sans effort, les impressions extra-terrestres, et . . . harmonieuses que je veux donner, que je m'étudie jusqu'à une prudence qui ressemble à de la manie (ibid., 1:195).

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

In his 1896 "Bibliographie" for *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère*, Mallarmé finally admits to a major revision: Un fragment seul de ce poème avait été publié de — à — ; Il était précédé d'une ouverture que je remplace par une autre, en le même sens . . . (N, 87). The poet's definitive discarding of the "Overture" in favor of a new "Prélude" has puzzled, and even displeased, certain of his critics who judge the former superior. Thus, in spite of the poet's explicit intention, the "Overture" has been the object of many more critical studies.²

Yet it is misleading to dismiss the thirty years that separate the "Overture ancienne" from the "Prélude." In the interim Mallarmé's poetics evolved considerably. The experiments with language in the late 1860s, the progressive exploitation of graphic and phonic values in works like "Un Coup de dés," and the modernist implications of the later essays on art and liter-

ature ("Crise de vers," "Le Mystère dans les lettres") must all have influenced the writing of the "Prélude." A first reading of both texts reveals that there are indeed differences. In both content and form, the "Overture" is, of course, the more accessible of the two works. Structured around a series of symmetrical divisions, rhymical constructs (homophony, assonance, alliteration), and verbal repetitions, it is easy to understand why Mallarmé subtitled it "Incantation."³ One finds descriptions of Hérodiade, her morning walks and childhood fears, references to a father/king off fighting in some distant land. These anecdotal elements combine with smatterings of chronology to create a skeletal narrative. The "Prélude," on the other hand, more closely approximates the ideas put forth in the late preface to *Les Noces*: "déplacement de la danse—ici—et pas anecdotique" (N, 94). In the "Prélude" mysterious objects have replaced characters and there is an insistence on things half-hidden. Wavering between an unknown past and an uncertain future, the "Prélude" takes the form of a question. Catalyzed by the very first word "Si," the chain of incomplete conjectures that displace and defer meaning forces the reader to rethink any and all forms of logic. The same sense of disquieting circularity characterizes Mallarmé's mature formulation of dramatic action: ". . . un moyen authentique de théâtre, . . . lequel consiste à feindre son avis prouvé par un fait demeuré hypothétique, . . . pour suggérer cependant à l'esprit des conclusions qui seraient exactes en supposant que le fait sur quoi tout repose fût vrai. Quoi de plus conforme à la loi de Fiction" (O.C., 341).

But if, indeed, the differences between the "Overture" and the "Prélude" are so great, then why did Mallarmé insist that he wrote the works "dans le même esprit" (N, 87)? Fragments for the preface to *Les Noces* suggest that the poet was quite aware of the risks involved in this tardy revision: "—dangereux de compléter mûr un poème de jeunesse . . ." (ibid., 95-96). In juxtaposing the two texts, we do find certain obvious continuities. Images like the ruffling of lace, the twisted candelabra and the crimson dawn, as well as words like "orfèvrerie," crop up in both contexts. Still, this does not account for Mallarmé's comments. It is only by considering

onous. Translating Poe in the early seventies, the poet speaks of an essential incompatibility between obsessive repetition and the poetic effects of his native language:

Le poète (Poe), dans le groupe de morceaux qui compose ce poème célèbre ("The Bells"), a usé librement d'un procédé que récuse la poésie française, c'est la répétition consécutive d'un ou de plusieurs mots dans un ou plusieurs vers. La traduction devait reproduire cette intention, voisine d'une curieuse manie, quand, toutefois, il ne résultait rien de contraire à notre euphonie. . .⁶

The effects of Mallarmé's transition are certainly visible in the "Prélude," where repetition is centered in poetic analogy and the hidden etymological resonances between words. Whereas the "Overture" simulates the harmonious structuring of a symphony, the "Prélude" problematizes the notion of structure itself. Even the title, generating both *ludere* ("jouer") and *eludere* ("tromper"), suggests that the reader is here given over to the elusive play of an unpredictable text. By a proliferation of syntactical ambiguities, contradictory images, and unsettling gaps, the "Prélude," rather than focusing on the content of a prophecy, dramatizes its textual effects. The elliptical style of this work signals Mallarmé's progressive cultivation of repression as a creative mechanism. The poet, who now considers himself a "critique" or interpreter of texts ("Je n'ai créé mon oeuvre que par *élimination*"), seeks to restore a latent potentiality for infinite textualization. In so doing, he abandons a thematics of repetition, moving instead toward a demonstration of its scriptural functioning.

From this perspective, the poetic text brings into focus an oscillating play between that which is repressed and preserved in the corporal structures of language and that which inevitably returns to haunt the surface of the page. In other words, the haunting effect is no longer the product of simple reduplication; it arises rather from the covert displacement of unconscious materials. In what follows I will analyze how, in the "Prélude" and its intertext, this ongoing struggle between black and white, light and shadow, is the practice of writing itself.

TALES OF THE FANTASTIC

A writer's treatment of the supernatural is undoubtedly bound up with his particular view of the Unconscious and the means by which it resurfaces and shapes a literary text. In order to appreciate Mallarmé's complete reversal concerning the "Overture ancienne," as well as the belated revisions of its replacement, the "Prélude," it is imperative to first explore the poet's vision of what Freud labeled as "the return of the repressed."⁷ Both Mallarmé and Freud wrote specifically on the subject of the Uncanny. Whereas Freud's essay "The Uncanny" (1919) involves the laying of a foundation for a theory, Mallarmé's prose poem "Le Démon de l'analogie" (1862) narrates the story of an unsettling encounter with the supernatural.⁸ We know that Freud illustrated many of his psychological insights with examples taken from literature. Similarly, Mallarmé's studies of linguistics led him to consider literature as the "Science du langage" (*O.C.*, 849). Thus, it is not surprising that Freud should devote a good part of his analysis of the Uncanny to a reading of Hoffmann's "The Sand-Man" and that Mallarmé's narrator should turn out to be a poet-linguist desperately seeking a rational explanation for the remnants of a "phrase absurde" that continues to haunt him. The parallelism of these works is extraordinary.⁹ Not only do both writers share the same experience with the Uncanny, but both fail in the end to establish its precise cause.

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

La Pénultième

finit le vers et

Est Morte

se détacha de la

suspension fatidique plus inutilement en le

vide de signification . . .

(*O.C.*, 272)

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

Like Mallarmé's narrator, Freud, in the beginning of "The Uncanny," sets out to track down a demon. Comparing the term *heimliche* ("familiar" and "homely") with its opposite *unheimliche* ("strange" and "hidden"), he discovers that the former can also signify "concealed" or "secret." This identical shade of meaning, which subverts the polarity and establishes rhetorical ambivalence, prompts Freud to define the Uncanny as "that class of the terrifying which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (S.E., 17:22). Paraphrasing Schelling's definition of the Uncanny as "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" (ibid., 241), Freud next identifies the "Un" of "Unheimliche" as "the token of repression" (ibid., 245). When this once very familiar repressed material, proceeding from either "infantile complexes" or "animistic beliefs" that have been "surmounted" (ibid., 248-49), returns in distorted form, it inevitably produces a feeling of overwhelming anxiety.

To illustrate this eerie sense of repetition, Freud narrates a short anecdote. Once, while in Italy, he was lost in the streets of a small town in the provinces. Although he wanted to avoid a particular district inhabited by prostitutes, he found himself returning again and again "by devious paths" to the same place. This sort of involuntary repetition recalls the helpless poet of "Le Démon" wandering "dans la rue des antiquitaires *instinctivement suivie*" (*O.C.*, 273; my italics). If repetition has a demonic character, it is because the repressed always returns in the estranged form of an Other. And what first might appear as chance is transformed through repetition into a confrontation with destiny. Freud's description of an uncontrollable, uncanny sense of repetition certainly fits the disruptive, repetitive movement of the "inexplicable Pénultième." By identifying the demon as analogy (the original title was "Pénultième"), Mallarmé emphasizes the movement of the text rather than its content. Analogy, of course, is a poetic principle that connects its terms by contiguity or metonymic displacement.¹⁰ Each repetition of the "Pénultième" shares only an oblique connection with the preceding instance. In its continual displacement of the signifier, the text creates a threatening mobility that cannot be checked or explained away by any singular reading.

When Freud undertakes a reading of Hoffman's "The Sand-Man," he focuses on the endless repetition of optical imagery: eyes, spectacles, telescopes, and the optician Coppola, whose name comes from "coppo," or "eye-socket." Since there is a "substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ" (*S.E.*, 17:231), this emphasis on sight is, for Freud, evidence of a deep-seated fear of castration and death.

Juxtaposing again Mallarmé's prose poem with Freud's text, one finds the same movement of substitution and indefinite expansion at work. In the former, the images of "aile," "voix," "palme," "plume," and "rameau" (some of which are repeated more than once) constitute a chain evoking the creative process. From one end to the other, this chain is punctuated by a series of ruptures. Analogous to both the breaking of the instrument's string and the splitting of the mysterious verse is the fragmentation of the poet's persona. The possession of the singular voice ("je sentis que j'avais . . . la voix même . . ." (*O.C.*,

273) occurs only momentarily when the narrator willfully erases his own subjectivity, becoming himself the mouthpiece of language.¹¹ But the mystery of the Penultimate is not so easily laid to rest. With its return at the poem's conclusion (now "l'inexplicable Pénultième"), the narrator realizes that he cannot shake what continues to be one of life's "irrefutable" paradoxes. Since the reader never learns what the Penultimate signifies, the demon eludes interpretation and remains at large.

Although Freud does recognize the dynamic principle at work in Hoffmann's text, his interpretation attempts to expel the demon through recourse to an external referent. As Samuel Weber points out, Freud's reading of Hoffmann treats the concept of castration as "possessing a fixed identity, as a substantial, visible theme." In doing so, he undermines the dynamic of castration — the contagious, interminable movement of the substitute. Like castration, the "Unheimliche," writes Weber, "is less involved with a *what* than a *how*, with the mechanism of repetition, recurrence and return."¹² It is significant that, during his discussion of uncontrollable repetition, Freud refers to the notion of a "repetition-compulsion." Written at the same time as "The Uncanny," his "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920) works from the hypothesis that organic life strives compulsively towards "an earlier state of things" and that "the goal of all life is death" (*S.E.*, 18:36-38). Associated with the "death instinct," this form of involuntary repetition may well be, according to Freud, "more primitive" and "more instinctual" than the "pleasure principle which it overrides" (*ibid.*, 23). But in many situations, Freud describes how this destructive instinct toward inertia may also be turned around. In this connection he discusses the repetition of traumatic dreams in terms of symbolization and mastery. The play of children, for example, is regarded as a secondary formation that consists in the active re-creation of absence as symbol and the movement from passivity and helplessness to mastery. Thus, Freud interprets his grandson's game of throwing away a spool of thread and then drawing it back while uttering the alternating sounds "fort" and "da" ("gone/here") as a successful dramatization of his mother's departure and return. This sort of symbolic mastery is also acknowledged in the literary domain. In "The Theme of the

Three Caskets" (1913), he analyzes how characters in myth and literature appear to choose freely what, in reality, they are obliged to confront: "Choice stands in the place of necessity, of destiny. In this way man overcomes death, which he has recognized intellectually" (*S.E.*, 12:299).

Whereas Mallarmé's text emphasizes the demonic, instinctual character of repetition, Freud's interpretation of castration in the "Sand-Man" ultimately privileges repetition as a form of mastery. By identifying castration (the concept) as the final referent and cause, Freud reduces the text to an unequivocal meaning. The "Unheimliche" is cornered and exorcized: "For the conclusion of the story makes it quite clear that Coppola the optician really *is* the lawyer, Coppelius, and also, therefore, the Sand-Man" (*S.E.*, 17:230). Although this reductionism can, in part, be attributed to the scientific purpose that guides the essay, it cannot be reconciled with Freud's continuous references to literature as the "more fertile province of the Uncanny" (*ibid.*, 249). While using literature to illustrate his theory, Freud inevitably finds that the text exceeds the model: ". . . nearly all the instances which contradict our hypothesis are taken from the realm of fiction and literary productions" I (*S.E.*, 17:247).¹³

For Freud, one of the most effective means of producing uncanny effects in fiction is the writer's intentional confusion of the supernatural with the real: "It is true that the writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking us into the real world or into a purely fantastic one of his own creation . . ." (*ibid.*, 230). In the years following the writing of the "Overture," Mallarmé begins to explore precisely this kind of covert manipulation in the production of the Uncanny. His search for new forms and techniques is at the root of the late composition "La Fausse entrée des sorcières dans 'Macbeth'" (1897). Here, he proposes a rereading of Shakespeare's opening scene in light of Thomas De Quincey's essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in 'Macbeth'" (1823). The latter's persuasive explanation of the profound effect that the knocking at the gate after King Duncan's murder left on him as a child is Mallarmé's point of departure. For De Quincey, the drunken porter's knocking represents the reawakening of the everyday world. Functioning

as a link between the chaotic world of murderous fantasies and the more rational, ordered world of consciousness, this very commonplace gesture rescues the spectator from a dreamlike stupor. When the murder scene fades “. . . le pouls de la vie commence à battre encore: et le rétablissement des faits communs au monde dans lequel nous vivions, soudain nous rend sensibles profondément à la terrible parenthèse qui les avait suspendus” (*O.C.*, 348).

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

Perched on the threshold between the exterior and the interior, the past and the future, the conscious and the unconscious, the witches evoke that sense of uncanny undecidability that, according to Freud, arises when “the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced” (*S.E.*, 17:244). The multiple reverberations of this initial apparition continue to infect the rest of “Macbeth.” From this point on, neither the characters nor the spectators can decide if their perceptions are real or imaginary,

the result of fate or mere chance. What Mallarmé's reading accentuates, then, is that the Uncanny is not a theme but a structural ambiguity. On a superficial level, one could compare these witches to the figure of the nurse/sybil in the "Ouverture."¹⁴ The idea of an incantation is common to both. But again, what fascinates Mallarmé is Shakespeare's radical departure from the very concept of character: ". . . pas de sorcières relevant de la figuration ou des accessoires, mais dissipées si entrevues, authentiques donc, qui sait? réelles" (*O.C.*, 350). In bringing to light the *Unheimliche* (that which "ought to have remained hidden"), the witches connect us with a "psychic reality," in Mallarmé's words, a "travail étranger de pouvoirs latents" (*ibid.*) that continues to reverberate throughout Shakespeare's play.

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

NO WAY TO KNOW

It is always a matter of waking up, but
never of some *first* awakening.

JACQUES DERRIDA

Mallarmé begins his "Prélude" with a riddle to be solved, a riddle created by the uncertainty of a contorted hypothesis.

After wading through a speculative muddle ("Si," "Aussi peut-être," "hors," "Ni que," "Même quand"), we begin to sense that the purpose of this hypothetical framework is to explain the uncanny persistence of a golden platter:

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

As the passage indicates, it is not the survival of the plate itself that disturbs, but the memory of a sinister emptiness its vestigial presence reevokes. Note the contrast between the demonstrative "cette vacuité" and the indefinite "un plat." That which remains behind is precisely that which cannot be absorbed into any logically meaningful formulation. Since the platter has been divested of its normal function, it will not, we are told, contain "Le délice attendu du nuptial repas" (ibid.). Deprived of any frame of reference, the golden dish, like the demonic "Pénultième," becomes pregnant with meaning: "Lourd métal usuel où l'équivoque range / Avec anxiété . . ." (ibid., 55). As in Freud's text, the infiltration of the very familiar by the *Unheimliche* results in acute anxiety.

By means of a "revolving hypothesis," Mallarmé forces the reader to recognize both the "enigma" and the curtain that veils it.¹⁵ Rather than solving the riddle, which by nature remains groundless and unrepresentable, I will analyze how it functions in the successive versions of the text. Dividing the "Prélude" into two main sections, the first part ("Si . . . / Génuflexion comme à l'éblouissant," N, 55) will be read in terms of its four different segments: a brief sketch of eight lines, two working drafts (with numerous variants and corrections) of thirty and thirty-five lines, and a final draft of twenty-nine lines. The differing lengths and characteristics of each draft indicate that Mallarmé probably began with a single idea or metaphor in mind, expanded it twice to include other connecting motifs, and finally contracted the entire segment into a more elliptical structure.¹⁶

this reading: "Un rêve, m'étreint sous sa griffe" (*O.C.*, 155) and "Affres du passé nécessaires / Agrippant comme avec des serres" (*ibid.*, 73).

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

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

Si . . .

*toute en
selon
toute*

Génuflexion comme la l'éblouissant

là-bas

peut-être aux cieux

Nimbe vide *là-bas* *peut-être* arrondissant
louche

Dans le vide — rigueur de l'heure
Parmi l'heure par une mort éparse refroidie
Malgré l'attente d'une

Son très vide
et vacant incendie
(*N*, 171)

As Robert Cohn points out most perceptibly in a recent article, this "Horizon mort en un dernier éclat" (*ibid.*, 170) mimes what Freud called the "primal scene."¹⁸ Defined as a retrospective phantasy based on a child's accidental perception of parental intercourse, the "primal scene," whether real or imagined, redramatizes the origin of the individual. Comparing it to a "collective myth," which attempts to resolve the "major enigmas" encountered in childhood (procreation, the awakening of sexual desire, sexual differentiation), Laplanche and Pontalis discuss the "primal scene" as a setting for desire rather than its object. The subject is not absent from the scene but appears obliquely in "desubjectivized form."¹⁹ Along the same lines, Mallarmé, in "Les Dieux antiques" (1880), insists that the common origin of all myths is "la double évolution solaire" (*O.C.*, 1169), the peregrinations of the sun as it rises and sets. The following

description of a sunset simultaneously evokes and masks a primal fantasy of sexual desire, orgasm and death: "Comme il (the sun) s'enfonce, les brumes ardentes l'étreignent et les vapeurs de pourpre se jettent par le ciel, ainsi que des ruisseaux de sang qui jaillissent du corps du mythe . . ." (ibid., 1216).

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

Si...

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

(N, 55)

That this “vacant incendie” is, in essence, a form of “combat amoureux,” dissimulating and displacing the phantasized link between procreation, death and birth, is evidenced by several textual details. First of all, the “fusion entre eux” culminates in a “choc malencontreux,” which, according to another variant, is analogous to “une mort éparse” (ibid., 171). Retraced is the exact progression of a violent sexual act. Underscoring the notion of chance, the term “malencontreux” (“unlucky”) generates the contrasting pairs “mâle”/“con” and “crête”/“creux.” The second pair emphasizes the convexity of the male element (reiterated by the multiple *îs* and morbid images of desiring rigidity—“roidie,” “endurci” (ibid., 168), “refroidie” (ibid., 127), and “dressoir,” as opposed to the female element (contained in the somber feminine sounds of “ou,” “on,” and “en,” as well as the numerous circular shapes of the passage: “Nimbe,” “arrondissant,” and “aiguère”).²⁰ This continual crossing over of oppo-

sites is inscribed in the letter "X" which, for Mallarmé, is analogous to a "nodal point" or "zero umbilicus."²¹ Inextricably fused in this double sign of emptiness and productivity are the forces of life and death: "Génuflexion," "glorieux," "eux," "malencontreux," and, a bit further on, "anxiété" The monsters' "abandon," suggesting a sexual abandon or release, is echoed by another, more graphic, image placed near the end of this first section: ". . . l'âpre faim muée en pamoison / Les entrelace bouche à bouche puis les vautre" (N, 56). Not only is the progression the same but the verb "vautrer" signifies both "coïter"²² and "se coucher, s'étendre en se roulant . . . *en prenant une position abandonnée*" (*Petit Robert*, my italics).

Despite the suppression of the image "vains bras hasardeux," which Mallarmé also uses in a most erotic scene of "L'Après-midi d'un faune," we still have the impression of a random intermingling of various body parts. A sense of extensive morcellation is expressed by the manipulation of the indefinite article and the partitive ("un choc," "Des divers monstres") as well as certain words in the variants stressing plurality and fragmentation: "Parmi l'heure," "Mort éparse," "mille monstres," and "pièce à pièce" (N, 167-68, 176). Mallarmé's noted exploitation of the "S" and "ss" as a disseminating letter reinforces this effect: "Si," "éblouissant," "arrondissant," "Aussi," "bossuée," and "dressoir." Finally, the curvature of "Génuflexion" generating "nu" and "flexion" reappears in the convulsive erotic posture traced by the modifier "tors." Mallarmé often uses this word and its forms as a figure evoking twisted torsos engaged in deadly, sexual activity. Compare: ". . . pour séduire un roi / Se tordent dans leur mort des guirlandes célèbres" (O.C., 67) and "Où la Chimère s'exténue / Vaut la torse et native nue" (ibid., 75).

The visualization of these phantom figures ("le manque du saint" "monstres nuls") brings to mind several references to perception dispersed throughout the poem. Remembering that the "primal scene" is a miscomprehension or inaccurate observation that, in its fantasized repetition, produces both pleasure and anxiety, one begins to discern a definite association between sight, horror, and transgression. The following examples are taken from various section of *Les Noces*:

With "rejeton" (signifying "nouveau jet," "tige de plante," and "descendant"), the text foregrounds the power of regeneration while devaluing the offspring. Both the "jeton" ("token") of "rejeton" and "pièce," evoking "pièce de monnaie," suggest the indefinite circulation of empty currency. Continually energized by the emptiness it provokes, this "vide vaisselle" (*ibid.*, 173) is to play a principal role in a vast metonymical circuit.²⁴

As both a golden halo ("nimbe") and an ordinary piece of tableware ("Lourde métal usuel"), the mysterious disc is permeated by an uncanny familiarity. By focusing exclusively on the projected contents of the plate (the head of the Baptist), most critics have entirely overlooked its functioning in the text. To imagine the head on the plate is to create a reference (in this case, biblical) thereby domesticating, or even eliminating, the Uncanny. But again, the text's infrastructure resists this kind of reading, pointing instead to those aspects of fiction that cannot be economized:

Ce Le passé
Cette vacuité louche et muette d'un plat?
Le fantôme
 simulacre
 inoccupé

(N, 170)

Expressing nothing ("muette"), the plate's emptiness ("vacuité") returns uncannily ("fantôme") in the form of a(nother) sign ("simulacre"). Infinitely replaceable and displaceable, it operates like any sign in a system of currency or language. To borrow Derrida's terms, it "re-marks" an originary void by filling it momentarily.²⁵ Figured in the plate's migration is what Mallarmé calls the "double character" of language that, in doubling back, always marches forward.²⁶

As soon as the last glimmers of light fade and the monstrous forms are half submerged by the evening shadows, the plate conjures up the ghostly apparition of an anonymous mask: "On ne sait quel masque âpre et farouche éclairci" (N, 55). Playing, as he often does, on the etymology of "aucun" ("quelque" "quelqu'un"), Mallarmé underscores the notion of an

. . . si
 La chimère au rebut d'une illustre vaisselle
 Maintenant mal éteinte est celle
 Sous ses avares feux qui ne contiendra pas
 Le délice attendu du nuptial repas
 Ni que pour notre reine enfant et le convive . . .
 ne survive
 Comme une chère très délicate à foison
 (ibid., 56)

That the adult psyche is still visited and influenced by the phantoms of childhood is first implied by the description of Hérodiade as "notre reine enfant." On the verge of puberty, this "enfant . . . financée au sens" (*N*, 174) is both virginal and sex-

ual. In the "Ouverture" the nurse chastizes Hérodiade for her self-indulging pleasures: "Froide enfant, de garder en son plaisir subtil, / . . . ses promenades, / Et quand le soir méchant a coupé les grenades" (ibid., 149-50). If, then, the empty platter is not to contain "le délice attendu du nuptial repas," it is because "délice" refers primarily to the appetite of the senses—desires that are both infinite and unappeasable. This association between orality and sexuality is strengthened by several details in the manuscript. For example, Mallarmé's use of "rassasier" rather than "contenir" in an early draft combines the meanings of "satisfaire la faim" and "satisfaire pleinement les désirs de quelqu'un." If the "délice attendu" is, as the text proposes, "Comme une chère [or 'chair'] très délicate à foison," then its lack is also equivalent to a voracious insatiable hunger—"Tâpre faim muée en pâmoison." Precipitating a loss of consciousness ("pâmoison"), this hunger is recovered by fantasy. One is immediately reminded of Hérodiade's ambivalent hallucination of the maternal breast in the "Scène":

Si tu me vois les yeux perdus au paradis
C'est quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis.

Like the term "évanouissement," "pâmoison" can refer either to a lifting of repression or to the act of censorship itself. On the one hand, "muée" ("to shed the skin") and its homonym, "muet" (the "unspoken"), imply repression by means of displacement. Yet in the final draft, it would seem to indicate, as well, the invasion of the Unconscious, for it is immediately followed by the most overtly erotic image of the entire "Prélude":

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

The use of the oral code as a metaphor for a sexual embrace leads the reader to believe that the entire scene concerns only the future bride and groom. This significantly deemphasizes the oral dynamic. But compare Mallarmé's use of "vautrer" in another work: "Vautré dans le bonheur, où ses seuls appétits / Mangent . . ." (*O.C.*, 33). And in certain fragments for "Le

Livre," Mallarmé writes about a starving guest who, after being invited to a feast by a lady and forbidden to eat, ends up by devouring his hostess: "manger la dame."²⁸ My point is that, by consistently confusing the sexual with the oral, the poet successfully camouflages the phantasm that structures the text.

Looking now at the variants to this passage, we find that the "mets supérieur" is equivalent to a "mets incestueux" (*N*, 173) and that all of the references to nourishment and hunger can be traced back to the missing maternal breast. Not only is the oral motif repeatedly tied to the past ("le vieux repas" "l'antique faim," "chère d'autrefois" as opposed to "quelque faim nouvelle"), but this "ancienne faim" is, for the child, the only "chère authentique" (*ibid.*, 169, 173). On this level the wedding banquet is not merely a future event that is not to take place but a ritualized repetition of a phantasmic communion between mother and child that never could take place. Like Hérodiade's solitary nuptials, this archaic feast is the object of a wish. That such transgressive desires must result in guilt and punishment is evidenced by a draft for the "Finale" that reads: "Sa chair de s'offrir en festin / Pour avoir reconnu le seigneur clandestin" (*ibid.*, 80).

But who is the "seigneur clandestin"? In view of the preceding evidence, it is not at all certain that this "principal convive" is, as others all too quickly assume, John the Baptist. Backtracking a bit, let's reconsider the opening lines of the "Prélude" in light of these last variants. Here, horror is strangely equated with "le manque d'un saint" (*N*, 167). It is noteworthy that, in several variants, the oral drive resurfaces in the repetition of the homonymic pairing of "saint"/"sein." Likened to a "sceau de sainteté," the faceless "masque de saint" becomes an ambivalent sign ("sceau") for both the breast ("sainteté" or *sain/tété*) and its lack ("En le manque d'un saint"/*sein*) (*ibid.*, 172, 167). These same associations generate "seigneur clandestin" ("seing" as signature recalls "sceau") in the "Finale" (*ibid.*, 80), and "Seigneurial écriin du nénuphar" (*ibid.*, 144) in the "Ouvverture." The insistence of certain letters throughout the passage under consideration again identifies the maternal body as the stage-setting for the object and its loss: the multiple *v*'s correlating femininity with oscillation and division ("Vide vaisselle," "con-

vive," and "survive") and the systematic use of the "m" ("mâle et maternelle" expressing "la rencontre, la fusion, et le terme moyen" [O.C., 960]: "Troimphalement," "péremptoirement," "chimère," and "Maintenant mal").

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

l'écheveau rompt avec l'
ici à votre âge
Alors, le fil rompu s'achève ici, pourquoi
arrête
Secret refluer voiles ou
Stupeur à prolonger dans les transes et coi
roides
Comme sa révérence
Le spectre que sa clairvoyance comme défaille
témoin
Le confident, parmi la soie et la faille
(ibid., 174)

Outlined in these lines is a description of the process of repression itself. Originally signifying "tourner de l'oeil," the verb "défaillir" echoes both "évanouissement" and "pâmoison." The paradoxical notion that darkness favors vision is suggested by "clairvoyance comme défaille." Reflected only in the observer's rigid stance ("Stupeur," "transes," and "roides"), the content of this horrifying vision is to remain a secret. Although the use of "confident" and "spectre" indicate that it is the nurse's perception, we should recall that Mallarmé intentionally confuses the characters in several places throughout *Les Noces*. The ambiguity of this personage is repeated just a few lines later in the text, in the juxtaposition of "vierge enfant" with "vieux corps." It could be that Hérodiade the adolescent is remembering the child's illicit view of adult sexuality "parmi la soie et la faille."

Since "faïlle" can refer to both a woman's veil and a lack ("manque" or "fissure"), the spectator's vision constitutes an integral part of the phantasm. On a structural level, the floating veil comes to represent the oscillating movements of the text between vision and obscurity, repression and the return of the repressed. In a later fragment, Hérodiade's dance of veils evokes a similar vacillating uncertainty: "se penche-t-elle d'un côté — de l'autre — montrant un sein — l'autre . . ." (ibid., 113). Thus the reader, like the observer in the text, witnesses only its effects "dans les transes / voiles et coi" (ibid., 174).

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

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

The use of the interrogative tells the reader that the hypothesis cannot be verified. For the chain of correspondences initiated by the plate (nimbe/souvenir/masque/chimère/vaisselle/chère/orbe/vacuité) remains impervious to any type of logical arrangement. By inserting the connector "Selon . . . que" to mark a series of indefinite, open-ended rapports, Mallarmé underscores the analogical expansion of the text. Borrowed from different contexts, the images of this passage (mets/orbe/éclat/vacuité/plat) figure as bits and pieces of a collage, the surviving remnants of the "ancestoriele et lourde orfèvrerie." The various strands of the phantasm converge in the term "orbe," which again confuses the solar and oral codes. Generally denoting a "sphere, globe or coil," "orbe" is also a common metaphor for the bosom.²⁹ However, if this word connects the empty platter to

both the rounded halo ("nimbe") and the "gorge ancienne et tarie," it is because the etymological root of its adjectival form is the Latin "orbis," signifying "privé de lumière" or blind. That which is relayed from one image to the next is the division or lack from which it was issued. This sort of repetition is demonic because, as Weber asserts, it ". . . consists not in the re-presentation of the identical but rather in the indefinite incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces. . . ." ³⁰ Thus, when attempting to become reabsorbed into the celestial body that engendered it ("pour se parfaire absorber"), the plate ("rejeton" and "descendant") is once more cast aside and another image is spawned. Doomed to regenerate itself perpetually across a field of signifiers, the plate is both an excess and a lack — a "simulacre," "fantôme," and "vacuité louche" (*N*, 170).

Significantly, the failure of this nostalgic desire for fusion is also the failure of interpretation. The same forces of obscurity that cloud the text and threaten engulfment paradoxically preserve its endless capacity for regeneration. As previously noted, all breaks in the text (lapses in consciousness, reawakenings, relapses, blank spaces, and disquieting gaps) both aid and foil the censor.

As in "Le Démon de l'analogie," there is no unequivocal meaning to be had. In the final section of the "Prélude," the plate, like the "inexplicable Pénultième," continues to circulate in a most uncanny fashion. Here, the same primal phantasms of procreation, separation, and death reemerge across an extensive network of increasingly abstract imagery. Due to the lack of variants for this segment ("A quel psaume . . .", *N*, 59-60), it is impossible to study the processes of repression and repetition in the same depth as in the first part of the "Prélude." In view of my previous discussion of certain parts of this fragment in relationship to the "Scène" (see chapter 2), the analysis will be brief.

Evoked in the opening verse is the sound of an elliptical psalm described as belonging to "nul antique antiphonaire." Since an "antiphona" is a type of liturgical chant usually sung before and after a psalm, this song arises independently, like an answer without question or response. Floating erratically in the background, the destination of this "écho jailli" (*N*, 191) is at first as mysterious as its origin: "Où planer ici comme un viril ton-

nerre / Du cachot fulguré pour s'ensevelir où?" (ibid., 59). After its eruption through a hole already opened by a "vol ébloui de vitrage" (ibid.), the voice suddenly attaches itself to a speaker:

Le Fantôme accoudé du pâle écho latent
 Sous un voile debout ne dissimule tant
 Supérieurement à de noirs plis Prophète
 Toujours que de ne pas perpéteur du faîte
 Divers rapprochements scintillés absolus . . .
 (ibid.)

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

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

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

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

Reinscribed in the billowing folds of the lace, the "Jeu suprême" (ibid.) or white struggle links procreation and doubt with the process of writing. Emphasizing movement, productivity, and uncertainty, the color white is, as Cohn remarks, the "nourishing source" of Mallarmé's poetry.³¹ Reminiscent of several descriptions of the "nourrice d'hiver" (*N*, 64) throughout *Les Noces* ("sachet d'os . . . de cendre," "robe blanchie en l'ivoire," ibid., 198, 146), this pallid "Fantôme's" unsuccessful attempts at repression inadvertently assure the transposition of the "pâle écho latent" into "Divers rapprochements scintillés." Perpetuated now in the fluttering motions of white lace and sheets, these celestial inscriptions figure also on a visual level by the space left blank in the following verse: "Et, . . . plus." Finally, when set in apposition to "noir plis Prophète," such patterns bring to mind one of Mallarmé's favorite metaphors for a non-repressive writing—the shimmering alphabet of white stars set against a night sky.

Now the plate returns, this time under a completely different aspect:

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

(*N*, 60)

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

$(N, 60)$

But what is “cela”? Is it the empty halo, the nurse’s coif, a combination of the two, or something entirely separate? Ambiguity is maintained by the timely insertion of two more blank spaces in the text. These white spaces function simultaneously as bridges and cut between the various images of the passage. As both a blank and the color white, the signifier “blanc” is not just an image or theme but, as Derrida demonstrates in “La Double séance,” a space of writing.³² It is useful to recall that, in the “Prélude,” Mallarmé’s whites constitute a “ponctuel décor” that is first emblemized on the nurse’s white wimple and coif but then immortalized in the sporadic flow of her celestial milk:

 $(N, 60)$

(ibid., 192)

By now, it should be apparent that any reading of the “Prelude” remains unfinished. This is a direct effect of the structur-

ing of the "Prélude" as both a phantasm and its interpretation. By recourse to variants, I have discovered an extensive work of textual transformation that, although suppressed from the final draft, continues to influence and animate its surface. This dynamic is especially visible in the successive versions of the first section "Si . . . / Genuflexion" From this, I have demonstrated that the creation of uncanny effects in the "Prélude" proceeds from a poetics of repetition that differs substantially from the incantatory structures of the "Overture." A retracing the covert displacement of key signifiers in the text, shows that repetition is no longer a principle of identity but one of difference. The intermingling of the imaginary with the real, the familiar with the extraordinary, and the forces of repression with the resurgence of the repressed, are the mechanisms Mallarmé employs in the creation of the fantastic. The same operations are also at issue in Freud's essay, "The Uncanny." One could say that the difficulty of Freud's investigation comes from the nature of the Uncanny (indefinable, imperceptible, and illogical) versus the purpose of his analysis. As already noted, the difference between Freud's reading of "The Sand-Man" and Mallarmé's work lies in the former's inability to relinquish mastery. Yet, in spite of his conclusion, Freud's analysis of the processes of substitution and repression offered a point of entry for the "Prélude." Whereas Freud demonstrates psychological processes by recourse to fiction, Mallarmé uses the psyche to stage the genesis of the text with its interpretation. Continually addressing the question of its own origin, the "Prélude," unlike the "Overture," is a self-reflexive text. Like "Le Démon de l'analogie," and "La Fausse entrée des sourcières," the "Prélude" redramatizes a crisis of interpretation, one that is ultimately bequeathed to the reader, who can follow either Freud, and pretend to have ousted the demon, or Mallarmé: "Enfin la fiction . . . semble être le procédé même de l'esprit humain—c'est elle qui met en jeu toute méthode, et l'homme est réduit à la volonté" (*O.C.*, 851).

IV

Castration and Dissemination

Sait-on ce que c'est qu'écrire?
Une ancienne et très vague mais
jalouse pratique, dont gît le sens
au mystère du cœur.
Qui l'accomplit, intégralement,
se retranche.

MALLARME

THE "CANTIQUE DE SAINT JEAN"

The continued expansion of *Les Noces* in the 1880s and 1890s makes it impossible to decide on either a logical evolution of the work or definitive arrangement of its texts. There is, for example, no mention of the "Cantique de Saint Jean" until the "Bibliographie" of 1898: "*Hérodiade*, ici fragment, où seule la partie dialoguée, comporte outre le 'Cantique de Saint Jean' et sa conclusion en un dernier monologue, des Prélude et Finale qui seront ultérieurement publiés et s'arrange en poème" (*O.C.*, 77).

It is precisely the overall indeterminacy of *Les Noces* that invites and even compels its readers to fill in the gaps. Of the various parts enumerated in the preceding note, we find that, for many critics, the "Cantique de Saint Jean" plays a key role in the structuring and general synthesizing of the work. There are several reasons for this. Frequently considered as the third part of a triptych following the "Ouverture ancienne" and the "Scène," the "Cantique," as Austin remarks, furnishes "la clef de l'énigme" and prepares "le dénouement."¹ In its presentation of a violent scene of decapitation, the poem is also seen as the only "direct reference" to the legend of Salome and John the Baptist.² Not only does a sacrifice proceed to a conclusion, it punishes a transgression and promises a reward. Is it possible that the beheading of the saint is the logical consequence of his "violation" of the "virginal" Hérodiade? At least one of Mallarmé's contemporaries thought so when he described the progression of the drama in the following manner:

Le secret, lequel je le tiens du poète lui-même, n'est autre que la future violation du mystère de son être [Hérodiade's] par un regard de Jean qui va payer de sa mort ce seul sacrilège. Car la farouche vierge ne se sentira de nouveau intacte et restituée tout entière à son intégralité qu'au moment où elle tiendra entre ses mains le tête tranchée en laquelle osait se perpétuer le souvenir de la vierge entrevue.³

In addition to these considerations, I might point out that the "Cantique" is identified by virtually all of its critics as a crucial step in the process of artistic creation: "Le but du 'Cantique' est de forger un symbole, le pur regard . . . représentant l'esprit poétique détaché des contingences de la vie et préparé pour l'acte créateur."⁴ Tantamount to a clean separation between matter and spirit, the saint's decollation would enable the formation of a transcendent literary space, a divine synthesis between "la beauté pure et l'effrayant génie."⁵

A brief summary of the poem will elucidate this reading. Occurring at sunset, the execution releases a flash of light that is almost immediately extinguished by the enveloping darkness of

death and its corollary, night. No longer circumscribed by the body, the head appears to soar upward, suspend itself in midair for a few split seconds, and then fall back and bounce on the ground. Yet at the same time, its glance stubbornly follows a “pur regard” up into the mystical realm of “la froideur / Eternelle” (N, 58). In their view of the scene as a complete polarization of the head from the body, critics usually do one of two things. If they choose to emphasize the movement of ascent, the head is transformed into a “symbol of spirituality” or cosmic consciousness. Representative of the “triumph of genius in its release from life into art,” the severed head not only indicates “un plus haut niveau de conscience” but prefigures “la synthèse finale.”⁶ On the other hand, those who do recognize the head’s earthbound destination proceed to infuse the entire episode with Christian motifs: “Sans doute, y a-t-il là une réminiscence du sacre de Moïse, redescendant du Sinaï, marqué au front pour avoir vu face à face l’Eternelle; . . .”⁷ What both groups of readers have in common is the consistent application of a triadic structure, a “Merveilleuse synthèse ‘hégélienne!’”⁸

But to sublimate the head and abandon the body is to suppress the seminal power of the “coup” which, in “Un Coup de dés,” results in the continued production of celestial “seeds” promising “new life”⁹:

UNE CONSTELLATION
froide d'oubli et de désuétude
pas tant
qu'elle n'énumère
sur quelque surface vacante et supérieure
le heurt successif
sidéralement
d'un compte total *en formation* . . .
(O.C., 477; my emphasis)

It is not the fullness of meaning but its indefinite deferment that ensures the interminable movement of the text: "*l'incohérent manque hautain de signification qui scintille en l'alphabet de la Nuit . . . selon quelques coups d'épingle stellaires*" (ibid., 303; my italics). The decapitation of the Baptist is perhaps better viewed as a "coup de tête" or sign of impending madness reminiscent of

"Igitur": ". . . dernière figure, séparée de son personnage par une fraise arachnéenne et qui ne se connaît pas" (ibid., 439). Not only is the saint's flash of genius an "éclair fou" (*N*, 129), but the aimless bouncing of his head on the soil ("... de jeûnes ivre / ... / En quelque bond hagard," (ibid., 58) is likened, in a variant, to the frenzied circulation of Eros: "sang se rua en moi / ardeur / fou de ce fol élan" (ibid., 133). Far from the creation of an immutable synthesis, the loss of the head signals the toppling of all hierarchical structures. This sort of equalization is stressed by Hérodiade when she addresses the head with the lines: "Je raisonne pour toi tête, pas quant à toi / je ramasse mieux ainsi / est mieux que / ramasser la tête" (ibid., 130). If, then, the scene of decapitation is instrumental in the creative process, it is because, instead of closing the text, it paradoxically continues the cycle of regeneration begun in the "Prélude."

Decapitation as a metaphor for castration is a commonplace in psychoanalytic criticism. Thus, it is not surprising that Mauron, in his reading of the "Cantique," should seize upon this connection while referring to the myth of Kronos:

. . . Kronos gelded his father Ouranos and in turn was castrated by his own son Zeus. Being put to death, being castrated, being dethroned, are synonymous in the infantile unconscious. . . . It is certainly the scythe of Kronos that we find in 'Cantique'.¹⁰

But again, in looking for the "higher" level of meaning, Mauron concludes that the "pur regard" of the "conscious saint" transcends the terrestrial weight of the body and "mounts toward Principle."¹¹ Omitted is that part of the myth that was perhaps of most interest to Mallarmé, that is, when cast into the sea, the genitals of Kronos created a foamy water that gave birth to Aphrodite. Recognizing this goddess as "LA VENUS LATINE," Mallarmé describes this extraordinary event in "Les Dieux antiques": "On dit qu'elle jaillit de la brillante écume de la mer, et fut, en conséquence, appelée Aphrodite (*aphros*, mousse)" (*O.C.*, 1198). Although this productive aspect of castration might at first be difficult to envision, it is operative in the "Cantique" where the Baptist's beheading simultaneously wounds

and fecundates the virgin: "C'est toi cruel / qui m'as blessée / en dessous / par la tête / heurtant / l'au-delà . . ." (*N*, 115) and "mon corps aveu de l'homme / nécessaire / fécondé de la splendeur par ta mort / précoce" (*ibid.*, 136).

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

denced by Mallarmé's notes for "Igitur": "plus je/plume/plume je/plume jet."¹²

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

*Mon crime, c'est d'avoir, gai de vaincre ces peurs
Traîtresses, divisé la touffe échevelée
De baisers que les dieux gardaient si bien mêlée:*

(O.C., 52)

This version of the story does not, however, comply with the earlier statement "*Je les ravis, sans les désenlacer . . .*" (ibid.). Several details in the poem suggest that this rape is of an entirely different order. Since the nymphs could either be real or imaginary "Aimai-je un rêve?," ibid., 50) and the purpose of the poem is their phantasmic perpetuation ("*Dormons: je puis rêver à mon blasphème / Sans crime . . .*," ibid., 1453), the violation lies in the perception/narration of the episode that is itself figured as a series of cuttings and perforations: "CONTEZ / '*Que je coupais ici les creux roseaux*'" (ibid., 50) and "O nymphes, regonflons des SOUVENIRS divers / *Mon oeil trouant les joncs, dardait chaque encolure . . .*" (ibid., 51). The punishment for these erotic musings is exhaustion leading to impotence: "Quand tonne un somme triste où s'épuise la flamme / Je tiens la reine! O sûr châtiment . . ." (ibid., 52). Rather than give up his dream, the faun rekindles his passion by reproducing a censored version: "Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins" (ibid., 53).¹³

A final example of this schema is found in the prose poem "Pauvre Enfant pâle" (1864). Originally entitled "La Tête," this anecdote recounts the miserable fate of a young beggar who sings in the streets for his bread. Since the decapitation motif is central, some critics have recognized an overt parallel between this work and the "Cantique."¹⁴ The character is a miniature adult, a "petit homme," dressed in baggy, tattered clothes. Prematurely thin and too big for his age, he works independently while ignoring his peers playing in the street. To point up the futility of his enterprise, the narrator describes how the child's

song lacks the force to extend beyond the shutters of the first-floor windows. Penniless, the child continues to sing defiantly:

Et ta complainte est si haute, si haute, que ta tête nue
qui se lève en l'air à mesure que ta voix monte, sem-
ble vouloir partir de tes petites épaules (*O.C.*, 274).

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

It is irrelevant whether this projected crime is actually committed or not, for the child's fate is already predetermined by the criminal act of desiring itself. Encoded by this insolent voice, desire strives to penetrate the shutters above while protecting the subject from a direct perception of the room's interior: ". . . traversera . . . les volets . . . derrière lesquels tu ignores de lourds rideaux de soie incarnadine" (*ibid.*). The erotic overtones of "incarnadine" ("couleur de la chair," *Petit Robert*), as well as the use of "tu ignores" for "tu ne vois pas" in an earlier version (*ibid.*, 1558), suggest that the young singer, like the "criminelle enfant" of *Les Noces*, has indiscreetly fantasized and repressed the "mystère éclairé de son être" (*N*, 80). The inevitable result of this perception is the child's textual dismemberment that the narrator predicts in the poem's conclusion: "Nous te verrons dans les journaux, Oh! pauvre petite tête!" (*O.C.*, 275). Reinforced by both the use of small letters and exclamation points (the inversion of the phallic "i")¹⁵ is a close rapport between castration and the production of language.

Each text reenacts the drama of castration in an entirely different way. In settling for a symbolic reproduction of the nymphs, the faun is clearly the most cautious of the three protagonists: ". . . il faut dormir en l'oubli du blasphème" (*O.C.*, 53). Whereas the clown tries to mitigate his offense by feigning ignorance ("Ne sachant pas, hélas!"), the orphan continuously contests all forms of authority by an undaunted display of virility: "Ta tête se dresse toujours . . . pendant que tu chantes d'un

air qui devient menaçant" (ibid., 274). In all three instances, castration involves a negative perception of absence or difference, the locus of which is decidedly feminine—"la touffe échevelée," "l'eau perfide des glaciers," and "lourds rideaux de soie." But perhaps even more important is the idea that in all three poems castration is both real and imaginary, a scenario that may or may not take place. Permeated with dreams and fantasies, this threat is only experienced in its effects: mimed by the clown, sublimated by the faun, and prophesied by the narrator of "Pauvre enfant."

More than a mere theme, castration is a dynamic process that, as Weber succinctly explains, entails a "restructuring of experience, including the relation of perception, desire and consciousness." It is a "*crisis of phenomenality*" that subverts the dichotomies of past and present, interior and exterior, body and mind.¹⁶ Significantly, all three of Mallarmé's characters simultaneously recognize and repudiate knowledge of castration through the erection of screens functioning as filters: the clown's window, the child's curtains, and the faun's grapeskins that he interposes between himself and the scene of his desire: "Rieur, j'élève au ciel d'été la grappe vide / Et . . . / . . . jusqu'au soir je regarde au travers" (*O.C.*, 51).

In the reframing of this perceptual doubt, the Mallarmean subject inevitably glimpses the rupture that constitutes identity. The endless branching of the faun's doubt ("En maint rameau subtil") confirms ("qui prouve, hélas!") not the nymphs' absence but the inseparability of desire, absence, and dream: ". . . les femmes, dont tu gloses / Figurent un souhait de tes sens fabuleux" (ibid., 50).

For Freud, there are two principal means that enable the subject to ward off the threat of castration. To preserve an illusion of narcissistic wholeness, one can create a double or a fetish. Examples of both strategies occur in the "Scène." In her attempts to achieve immortality through the fixation of mirror images, Hérodiade, as we have seen, is ultimately led toward a recognition of her own alterity. Her spectral confrontation with a "rêve épars" (image of a "corps morcelé") recalls Freud's observation that the figure of the double can "reverse its aspect," acting as both "an assurance of immortality" and the "uncanny

harbinger of death" (*S.E.*, 17:234-35). Rather than acknowledging the image of her "nudité" that erupts from the hole of her mirror, Hérodiade rearticulates her desire by crystallizing it in the form of substitute objects, a conglomerate of precious stones, flowers, and metallic icons. This reification of the self depends on that continuous displacement of desire that Freud links to the practice of fetishism. In the symbolic representation of the missing phallus (i.e., by other parts of the body or objects in contact with the body), the fetishist simultaneously recognizes and denies all evidence of castration: "In very subtle instances both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration have found their way into the construction of the fetish itself" (*ibid.*, 21:156). Within such a space, the fetish demonstrates its textuality—"fetish" (derived from the Latin *factisio* signifying "the work of imitation through signs"). Exceeding the simple polarity of presence/absence to affirm instead a space of vertiginous oscillation, the fetish, as Derrida remarks, embodies and sustains an "économie de l'indécidable."¹⁷

In my reading of the "Cantique," I will demonstrate how the text, in maintaining a similar kind of contradictory structure, creates a surplus that renders any type of final synthesis impossible. The placement of the "Cantique" in terms of either motivation or reconciliation is both problematic and irrelevant. Emphasized in virtually all of the references to the poem is the interpenetration of the real with the fictional. In several places in the manuscript, Hérodiade minimizes the significance of the decapitation almost to the point where the reader wonders if it really occurs: "plus que par le glaive / vain du bourreau / je meurs / en mon martyr / solitaire" (*N*, 122) and "Non c'était / vain — couper / tête / tu étais mort . . . / et ton regard / meurt et depuis / longtemps . . ." (*ibid.*, 108). This is further reinforced by those variants that describe the Baptist as a "trivial époux" (*ibid.*, 80), a "passant" (*ibid.*, 109, 129), "celui qui ne devait même pas être intrus" (*ibid.*, 131) and, most importantly, "quelqu'un n'étant pas qui passe le premier" (*ibid.*, 80). At the same time, however, a parallel is drawn between the saint's death and the process of the heroine's development: "j'en porte le remords / un même instinct qui te porta à transgresser le ciel / . . . je recueille mieux pieuse cet éclair . . . par ta mort . . . douée de le

savoir" (ibid., 135). Finally, in another variant, the reader is given to believe that the decapitation and the bridal rite are simply two versions of the same story: "le glaive qui trancha ta tête a déchiré mon voile" (ibid., 136). Functioning as a metaphorical structure for both the breaking of the hymen and the piercing of the veil, the loss of the head recapitulates and continues the series of ruptures that punctuate Hérodiade's history, forcing her toward maturity. Like the maternal breast of the "Prélude" and "Scène," ("tête" provoking its displaced homonym "têter"), the severed head articulates a basic rapport between separation and desire. Consequently, Hérodiade's identification with it ("Tu me possèdes, tu m'es") (ibid.) can only be ambivalent: "Je hais la tête / ai-je dit . . ." (ibid., 101).

In the first stanza of the "Cantique," Mallarmé foregrounds this same type of indecision by setting up a tension between upward and downward motions:

Le soleil que sa *halte*
 Sur naturelle *exalte*
 Aussitôt *redescend*
 Incandescent

(N. 57; my italics)

This diverges substantially from an earlier version that reads: "L'astre épars / bas / Le soleil que prolonge / . . . Cêrtes, *aujourd'hui*, choit" (ibid., 184). Rather than a definitive fall, Mallarmé opts for a certain suspension with vibratory effects. It is continued, for example, in the rhythmical bouncing of the head as it attempts repeatedly to soar "Dans les vols triomphaux." With the fall of the executioner's ax, it appears that the body is granted a measure of peace:

Et ma tête surgie
 Solitaire vigie
 Dans les vols triomphaux
 De cette faux

 Comme rupture franche
 Plutôt refoule ou tranche
 Les anciens désaccords
 Avec le corps

Qu'elle de jeûnes ivres
 S'opiniâtre à suivre
 En quelque bond hagard
 Son pur regard

(ibid., 57-58)

The echo in "triomphaux/faux" sounds a note of deception that is reinforced in the following stanza by the use of "refoule" ("to repress"). As a result of the syntactic ambiguity of these lines, the itinerary of the head remains undetermined. It is not fortuitous that Barbara Johnson chooses these very lines to illustrate Mallarmé's practice of syntactic "pivoting":

Depending . . . on whether the word *que* . . . introduces a subjunctive command or a relative clause, the poem is saying either 'que la tête s'opiniâtre à suivre son pur regard là-haut' or 'la tête refoule ou tranche les anciens désaccords avec le corps qu'elle s'opiniâtre à suivre.' It is equally plausible, therefore, to see the head rising up after its *pur regard*, or falling down in reconciliation with the body.¹⁸

In positing both possibilities, the text deprives the head of either transcendence or reconciliation. What emerges rather is a continuous rotational movement that undercuts the ascendancy of any one proposition. This failed aspiration creates a lateral rhythm, a wave of oppositional pairings that persist through to the poem's conclusion: dispersion/contraction ("S'employer . . . un frisson / A l'unisson), darkness/illumination ("des ténèbres" "noirs coups" / "Solitaire vigie" "Pic lustral") and white heat/iciness ("Incandescent"/"froideur," "glaciers").

As obscurity spreads through the vertebral column, text and body spin in parallel spheres. Mallarmé introduces the analogy with "vertèbres," evoking the Latin *vertere* ("tourner") and the French *vers* ("toward" and "verse"). The conflation of "tête surgie" with "Solitaire vigie" yields another structure with reversible terms. Coterminous with the head's partial emergence from maternal waters ("vigie" signifying both a "poste d'observation sur un navire" and a "petit îlot émergeant à peine de la mer")¹⁹ is its reimmersion into the Source, a baptism of

sorts. Here again, the creation of suspense translates into the suspense of creation—an incomplete birth or, maybe, a semideath:

Là-haut où la froidure
Éternelle n'endure
Que vous le surpassiez
Tous ô glaciers

Mais selon un baptême
Illuminée au même
Principe qui m'élut
Penche un salut.

(*N*, 58)

To read these last lines as an assurance of transcendence is to miss the “principle” at work. There is no sense of resolution, no symbol forged; just a vague ritual (“selon un” and “par quelque,” *ibid.*, 183) loosely connected to an indefinite “salvation” or, more possibly, a form of “salutation.” With “Penche un salut,” Mallarmé invokes that “oblique” movement by which language names and suspends meaning in the same gesture. Thus the variants for “salut” include “Délíce,” “Arcane,” “Sourire,” “Mystère,” and “Miracle” (*ibid.*). The ploy resurfaces in the play of the letter. Now the confrontation of male plosive p’s with maternal m’s, as well as the poet’s hesitation between masculine and feminine articles in an earlier draft (“Que vous la[e] surpassiez,” *ibid.*, 182), extends the text’s vacillation toward the problematic of sexual difference.

There is an undeniable pleasure in this maneuvering. Reflecting a *jouissance* without object or aim, language pivots in polymorphous fashion. It is precisely this capacity for reversal that allows the text to address and yet defer the question of its own productivity. In propagating several alternative texts, the saint’s death, according to one variant, is a “sign” that “flowers in reverse” (*N*, 133). Castration, as Barbara Johnson has argued, “can neither be assumed nor denied, but only enacted in the return of unsuitable difference in every text.”²⁰ In the “Cantique” as well, it is not simply a question of representing castra-

tion but of disfiguring its effects: "Comme rupture franche / Plutôt refoule ou tranche / Les anciens désaccords / Avec le corps." From this perspective the splitting of "désaccords" calls forth its opposite (des/accords) and thereby restores the fragmentation it sought to repress.

THE "DOUBLE FLOWER"

Indecision is what makes Hérodiade the female counterpart of Mallarmé's Hamlet figure, "le seigneur latent qui ne peut pas devenir" (*O.C.*, 300). Besieged from within and without by contradictory impulses and desires, our child-queen, like Hamlet, wanders through a labyrinth of adolescence, prolonging its "circuits avec le suspens d'un acte inachevé" (*ibid.*). In the heroine's case, the act is, as we have seen, either a defloration, a castration, or both. Most readers are inclined to anticipate a resolution or *dénouement* in the "Finale" for, in spite of its unfinished, fragmentary state, Mallarmé did refer to it as "le pourquoi de la crise" (*N*, 83).

Yet in the beginning of the monologue, Mallarmé frustrates that intention by a striking interplay of conflicting temporal modes:

O, désespérément sous l'aile échevelée
 Obscure de la nuit *future* violée
 Quand ton morne penser ne *monta* pas plus haut
 Dur front pétrifié dont le captif sursaut
Tout à l'heure n'aura de peur de se dissoudre
Suivi la magnifique intérieure foudre
Heurtée à quelque choc de ses rêves décus
 Sans l'établir vivante et regner par-dessus . . .
 (*N*, 77; my italics)

Setting up a "perpétuelle allusion" between past and future, event and fiction, these lines suggest that what is about to take place may have already taken place. Or, in Derrida's terms: "What takes place is only the *entre*, the place, the spacing, which is nothing. . . ."21

dénie / une virginité" (ibid., 83), and "Avant que sur le sol / La double fleur n'ait chu . . ." (ibid., 162). In the "Finale" the undecidability of this "double fleur" is figured in the flow of an "inexplicable sang déshonorant le lys" that is "A jamais renversé de l'une et l'autre jambe" (ibid., 78). Finally, as the text of the "Finale" states most explicitly, "Ce n'est point / Hymen froid d'une enfance avec l'affreux génie" but a perpetual enmeshing of red and white, a "hésitation entre la chair et l'astre" (ibid.).

Since it is impossible to decide whether Hérodiade's wedding vows have been or ever will be consummated, the drama remains virtual. In fact, the paradoxical conception of virginity as something intact and yet forever divided from itself is, at times, put forth as a general principle: "Toute *virginité* / nubilité / enfance disjointe en la tunique / *Le fut de tous les temps* selon l'approche unique / De quelqu'un n'étant pas qui passe le premier" (N, 211). The same principle is woven into Mallarmé's essays on aesthetics, where the notion of a divisive unity, or two-in-one paradox, constitutes the very locus of artistic creativity: "Virginité qui solitairement, devant une transparence du regard adéquat, elle-même s'est comme divisée en ses fragments de candeur, l'un et l'autre, preuves nuptiales de l'Idée" (O.C., 387). In the unedited fragments for the "Finale," the potentiality of this virginal space is again exploited in the heroine's execution of a most extraordinary dance. Set in a "lieu nul" (N, 114) and performed in utter solitude, the dance recapitulates the "l'une ou l'autre" rhythm of the entire text:

se penche-t-elle d'un
côte — de l'autre —
montrant un
sein — l'autre —

et surprise
sans gaze
selon ce sein, celui-là
identité

(ibid., 113)

In leaning to one side or the other, Hérodiade performs not the act but the "Idea" in its "hymen," figuring, as it were, an excess

and a lack: "Une virginité que c'est trop / pour l'homme de rêver" (ibid., 132).²² Like the fetishist, she denegrates castration through the erection of a contradictory symbolic substitute, executing "sur les pieds seins / une sorte de danse / effrayante esquisse" (ibid., 114). Reframed in one striking moment is the horror and denial of castration: "La fiancée adorable et funeste / Dans sa gaine debout nulle de firmament / A peine la minute inoubliablement" (ibid., 83).

It would be easy to reify both the moment and the dance with a gesture toward the absolute. In this connection Jean-Pierre Richard speaks of a "perfect equilibrium," a "conscious and neutral existence," in which Eros is again made to serve a "metaphysics" of sorts.²³ This would require, however, that we eliminate the alternative ("l'ambiguïté d'Hérodiade et de sa danse," *N*, 111) and reinstate the vertical, all to the contrary of the poet's reminder:

avant que le
froid ne gagne —
—
aujourd'hui
je retrouverais
la danse

— déplacement de
la danse — ici — et
pas anecdotique.

(ibid., 94)

For this displacement is, in effect, the primary trait of all of Mallarmé's ballerinas, who function not as individuals but as living metaphors, bodying forth "mille imaginations latentes" (*O.C.*, 307). Without identity or sex, they, like Hérodiade, mime the androgynous fluidity of language, exchanging roles in what Mallarmé calls "le double jeu" or "toute l'aventure de la différence sexuelle" (ibid., 305). By virtue of her spontaneous execution of multiple figures or "pirouettes," the dancer's movements coincide with the practice of a hieroglyphic writing.²⁴ Although the dancer produces the text, she is also consumed by it. As a linguistic sign, she is inevitably shattered and dispersed

by the disseminating power of language: “. . . elle . . . morte de l'effort à condenser hors d'une libération presque d'elle des sur-sautements attardés décoratifs de cieux, de mer, de soirs, de parfum et d'écume” (*O.C.*, 309).

The same process of creative dissolution emerges in the proliferation and perpetual transformations of the name “Hérodiade.” In a letter to Lefébure, Mallarmé reveals his fascination with the poetic resonance of this name:

. . . la plus belle page de mon oeuvre sera celle qui ne contiendra que ce nom divin *Hérodiade*. Le peu d'inspiration que j'ai eu, je le dois à ce nom . . . ce mot sombre et rouge, comme une grenade ouverte, *Hérodiade*.

(*C*, 1:157; Mallarmé's italics)

Redramatized by the various senses of this name is “l'ambiguïté d'Hérodiade et de sa danse” (*N*, 111). Aside from the comment in the *Correspondance*, this hypothesis finds support in the poet's discussion of the power of proper names in “Les Mots anglais”: “Mêlés encore à la Langue, leur sens tient l'imagination en éveil; autrement, incompréhensibles ou anciens, c'est par leur aspect presque bizarre” (*O.C.*, 1041). On page after page of “Les Dieux antiques,” Mallarmé points out how the etymologies of the names of mythological figures encapsulate the basic drama of the myth. Proper names are also frequently designated as the inspirational starting point for the elaboration of a poetic text. One sonnet begins with “Mes bouquins refermés sur le nom de Paphos / Il m'amuse d'élire avec le seul génie” (*ibid.*, 76). Equally suggestive is the visual trace of the name's letters: “Hamlet . . . , son nom même affiché exerce sur moi, . . . une fascination, parente de l'angoisse” (*ibid.*, 299).

In his comparison of the signifier “Hérodiade” to a “grenade ouverte,” Mallarmé emphasizes the name's generative capacity. A cross-section of a pomegranate offers an image of hundreds of seeds waiting regeneration. Again, what permits the proliferation of the fruit is its ripening, fall, and *découpage*.²⁵ It is precisely in this way that language develops and renews itself in “Les Mots anglais”: “Soit cette isolation pure et simple du Mot inaltérable, soit cette copulation de plusieurs Mots . . .

tout, jusqu'à disparition même du sens . . . n'est qu'alliage de vie et de mort et double moyen factice et naturel . . ." (*O.C.*, 1052-53). This cooperation/intermingling of creative and destructive forces in nature is best illustrated by the language of flowers running through several of Mallarmé's essays and poems. In the early poem "Les Fleurs," it is by means of a floral motif that the name "Hérodiade" is associated with both fertility and death:

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

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

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

 l'ombre étonné
 Comme un casque léger d'impératrice enfant

 toujours
 D'où pour toute personne il tomberait deux roses
 la figurer roses jumelles
 (N, 161)

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

It is not difficult to demonstrate the haunting repetition of the name "Hérodiade" in the text of *Les Noces*. In his analysis of the "Ouverture," Robert Cohn focuses on the contrasting pat-

terns of “roi/roide/froide” (evoking “the hard virile aspect of the virgin:”) and the “liquid harmonious r and or” as in “or/rose-arôme.”²⁶ But the signifying force of this name can be taken even further. What is indeed fascinating about the word “Hérodiade,” for our purposes, is that it reproduces the alternating structure of the text as previously discussed. The feminization of the essentially masculine appellation “Hérode” returns us not only to the question of sexual ambiguity but to the ambivalent relation between child and parent, the self and its mirror image: “Hérode/Hérodias/Hérodiade.”

From the circulation of this “nom épars” and the suspension of the heroine’s dance, we derive a better understanding of what Mallarmé meant by “le pourquoi de la crise.” Both gestures posit a liminality that maximizes the “double game” and deprives the text of any fixed point or center from which to order its meaning. Thus, the problem of self-figuration becomes coextensive with the problem of reference. Accordingly, Hérodiade performs her dance “sans bouger” somewhere between the margins of consciousness and dream:

au loin elle se réveille
 (rien de tout cela est-il arrivé)

 et danse un moment
 pour elle seule— afin d’être
 à la fois ici là— et que
 rien de cela ne soit arrivé

 pour la première fois
 yeux ouverts—

(N, 139)

CONCLUSION

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

Subject to thirty-five years of revision and reformulation, *Les Noces d'Hérodiade*, *Mystère*, not only implements the poetic strategies outlined in the early *Correspondance*, but clearly anticipates the radical proclamations put forth later in "Crise de Vers." Describing this crisis in the 1880s as both "exquise" and "fondamentale," Mallarmé proceeded to announce the birth of a new poetry, an essentially modernist vision of Art that ultimately led him to wonder about the validity and the possibility of creative discourse: "Quelque chose comme les Lettres existent-il" and "A savoir s'il y a lieu d'écrire" (*O. C.*, 645). If the crisis is qualified as acute, it is because the essential changes taking place in the literature of this period entailed a step-by-step deconstruction of traditional forms of literary representation, a process already nascent in *Hérodiade*.

To free up the sensuous signifying power of words, wrote Mallarmé, is to begin to unveil "mille intentions certaines et mystérieuses du langage" (*O.C.*, 919). To surrender "l'initiative aux mots" (*ibid.*, 366) by calling for the suppression of authorial identity; to create a poetics of effect through the continuous suspension of reference; to approximate the discourse of the Unconscious, this "air ou chant sous le texte" by the systematic subversion of all forms of hierarchy thereby creating a self-reflexive work, a "Text" that would "speak" only "of itself" (*ibid.*, 663): such is the intention informing the composition and recomposition of *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère*.

What begins in the 1860s as the adolescent crisis of a solitary shadow princess is gradually transposed into a linguistic drama of becoming, the genesis of character and text being one and the same. Far from representing the immaterial perfection of the "idealist" mind, Hérodiade allegorizes the ambivalent rapport between the writer and his work, the impotent father and his dubious offspring. Like the sickly child/text of "Don du poème," *Hérodiade* is another "enfant d'une nuit d'idumée" (*O.C.*, 40), the textual fragment that reflects only tangentially the single volume of Literature.

"Hérodiade, ce mot sombre et rouge comme une grenade ouverte" (*C*, 1:154). ". . . pareille à la chair de la femme, la rose / Cruelle Hérodiade" (*O.C.*, 34). The Word made Flesh, Hérodiade is not a character in any traditional sense, but a nexus of signification. Lacking in self-definition and completely androgynous, she becomes for her creator an "être purement rêvé, et absolument indépendant de l'Histoire" (*C*, 1:154). Inquiring into the mystery of her origin, Hérodiade is a "jeune intellectuelle," a reader of texts. As she strives to decipher "le sens de ses marques précoces," (*N*, 214), written in the faded pages of the old nurse's psyche and figured in the precious gems of her childhood memories she discovers the unalterable fact of her own alterity. The prophecies that return to haunt her are the cryptic remnants of other esoteric texts encoded in a primitive language of drives or *pulsions* that, once mobilized, continue to resurface at the margins of the work, in the space of the variants, and in the shape and repetition of the letter. What is ultimately figured in the bursting of the heroine's jewels, the

fragmentation of her mirror and the unarrestable flow of rivers of blood, milk, sweat, tears, and ink is the persistent presence of an unconscious discourse of desire: "Ici-bas / Toute coule que la crise / Goutte à goutte thésaurise / vers les cieux / se vaporise" (ibid., 218).

Words, as Mallarmé insisted, "gisent, pareils ou de dates diverses, comme des stratifications" (*O. C.*, 901). There is no way to narratize the drama that occurs in the permutation of words for *Hérodiade* is a palimpsest, a weave of fantasies in which the simultaneous presence of multiple layers of discourse invites continuous excavation. Perceptible only in the processes of displacement and condensation that operate between variant and text, the return of repressed fantasies of procreation, incest, and death depends on the poet's conscious and sustained exploitation of syntactic ambiguities, etymological and graphic effects, blank spaces in the text—all marks of the writing process. As in Freud's dream text, such procedures protect but also elucidate the workings of unconscious drives.

The *Hérodiade* manuscript does not offer its readers any unified meanings or definitive answers. One might link the heroine's inability to solve the enigma of her past with the imminent failure of critical interpretation. Radically incomplete, *Hérodiade*, like Freud's dream-work, is a rebus, a text in flux. What prompted Freud to describe dream analysis as an "interminable" process was the gradual realization that all dreams contain some part that remains unintelligible. This impenetrable nucleus he identified as the "dream's navel," the place "where it straddles the unknown" (*S.E.*, 5:525). It was in much the same manner that Mallarmé recognized and protected the mysteries of language. Thus he concluded that the creative act constituted a lifetime project and that all texts were microcosmic reflections of a single work. Just as the writing of a book has no identifiable beginning or end, the activity of reading is a "desperate practice," a product of chance and dream. For the very survival of the work depends on its power to engage a reader, who, in the act of reading, "furnishes" the work's "modernity."

NOTES

Preface

1. Lloyd J. Austin, "Le 'Cantique de Saint Jean' de Stéphane Mallarmé," *AUMLA*, May 1959, 56.
2. Robert Greer Cohn, "New Approaches to *Hérodiade*," *Romanic Review* 72 (1981): 472.
3. Jean-Bellemin Noël, *Vers l'inconscient du texte* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France [Collection "Ecriture"], 1979), 200.
4. For an account of Freud's methodology for locating the "weak spot in the dreamer's disguise," see vol. 5 of the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 515. This 24-volume edition of Freud's works will be cited in my text as *S.E.*.
5. The quotation from Mallarmé's *Le Livre* (ed. by Jacques Scherer, [Paris: Gallimard, 1957]), is cited by Derrida in *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 329.

Chapter One

1. Critics have often referred to Mallarmé's acute awareness of human psychology. In his introduction to *l'Oeuvre: Un Coup de Dés* (Paris: Librairie Les Lettres, 1951), 18, Robert Greer Cohn describes Mallarmé as "un penseur qui pénètre aussi profond dans les opérations de son esprit qu'aucun autre. . . ." And the following comment by Jean-Luc Steinmetz taken from "Mallarmé en corps," *Littérature*, February 1975, 117, is representative of certain Mallarméan critics involved in textual analysis: Kristeva, Sollers, Derrida, Bersani, B. Johnson, and Sonnenfeld. "Mallarmé parlera avant Freud de l'individu clivé, des problèmes de la persona;

il faudra attendre la révolution psychanalytique . . . pour que son oeuvre prenne une gravité qui avait échappé auparavant à ses lecteurs. . . ."

2. In the beginning of his analysis of Jensen's *Gradiva*, Freud considers "creative writers" as "valuable allies" whose "evidence is to be prized highly . . . (. . .) In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science" (*S.E.*, 9:8).

3. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondance 1862-1871*, ed. Henri Mondor (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 115. Future references will be cited in the text as *C*, 1. For additional examples of this association between biological birth and the production of poetry, see *C*, 1:160, 354, as well as Julia Kristeva's insightful analysis in *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974), 441-55.

4. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1945), 40. The work will be cited in the text as *O.C.*

5. Denis Saurat, *Perspectives* (Stock, 1935), 113-16; cited in Mallarmé's *Oeuvres complètes*, 1439.

6. In a variant for the "Ouverture ancienne," Mallarmé mentions a "tapisserie iduméenne." See *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère*, 145.

7. For an account of this episode, see the notes for "L'Après-midi d'un faune," in the *Oeuvres complètes*, 1449-50.

8. Leo Bersani, *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 16.

9. See also the letter to Cazalis dated 7 January 1869, *C*, 1:295: ". . . la nature, elle est trop faussée en moi, et monstrueuse, pour que je me laisse aller à ses voies."

10. For Mallarmé's use of the term "rêve" in a psychoanalytic framework, see Albert Sonnenfeld's excellent article "Elaboration secondaire du grimoire: Mallarmé et le poète-critique," in *Romanic Review* 69 (1978):72-89.

11. Freud's recourse to ancient systems of writing is discussed at length by Jacques Derrida in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

12. The source-text for Mallarmé's implicit critique of Platonic mimesis and consequently thematic criticism, is Jacques Derrida's "La Double Séance," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 173-285.

13. Jean-François Lyotard, "The Dream-Work does not Think," *Oxford Literary Review* 6(1983):16.

14. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 210.

15. Cited by Jacques Scherer, *l'Expression littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Mallarmé* (Paris: Droz, 1947), 79.

16. Bersani, *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*, 1-2.

17. In *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), 72, Jean François Lyotard takes Mallarmé's "Coup de dés" as an example of a "poème-critique," which articulates at several levels the relationship between desire and language. This "travail de figuration," as Lyotard calls it, is the mark of the Unconscious within the structure of poetic language.

18. The letter to Coppée, 20 April 1868, C, 1:270 reads: ". . . j'ai presque perdu la raison et le sens des paroles les plus familières." See also two letters to Cazalis dated 4 and 18 February 1869, *ibid.*, 299-301.

19. The next mention of "Hérodiade" comes in a letter to Léo d'Orfer, 29 September 1886. "Pour 'Hérodiade,' ce serait de mauvais goût que je republie ce fragment [the 'Scène'] plusieurs fois, d'autant mieux que je compte le compléter et en faire avant peu, une plaquette, *Correspondance 1886-1889*, ed. Lloyd James Austin and Henri Mondor (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 62.

20. Hérodiade's "rêve épars" (*Noces*, 65) is again an image of fragmentation, horror, and nudity. This association between mirrors and dreams has to do with the chiasma—a figure of crossing-over. Reminding Mallarmé of "une eau-forte pleine de rêve et de vide" (C, 1:279), the mirror-sonnet reflects the same structural ambiguity as Freud's dream that never reveals "whether its elements are to be interpreted literally or in a figurative sense," *S.E.*, 5:341.

21. I fully agree with Barbara Johnson's insightful assessment of referentiality in Mallarmé's poetics: "Reference here is not denied but suspended." — This by "the ceaseless production of seemingly mutually exclusive readings of the same piece of language" (*The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980], 65).

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

23. The quotation is taken from the preface of *Les Noces*, 95-96.

24. The critics who insist on this rapport are Davies, Huot, and H. G. Zagana. See Bibliography.

25. Gardner Davies, *Mallarmé et le rêve d'Hérodiade* (Paris: Corti, 1978), 300.

26. *ibid.*, 284.

Chapter Two

1. Gardner Davies, "Introduction," in *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 12. All quotations from the Davies's edition will be cited in my text as *N*.

2. The quotation comes from Haskell M. Block's *Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 20.

3. Emilie Noulet's *L'Oeuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Droz 1940), 106. In *Mallarmé et le rêve d'Hérodiade* Davies says of the "Scène": "Le seul élément véritablement dynamique de la 'Scène' est celui que l'héroïne introduit aux derniers vers . . ." (291).

4. Wallace Fowlie, *Mallarmé* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 139.

5. Davies, *Le Rêve*, 291.

6. Block, *Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama*, 14.

7. Sylviane Huot, *Le Mythe d'Hérodiade chez Mallarmé: Genèse et évolution* (Paris: Nizet, 1977), 60.

8. This dialectical progression toward wholeness structures the two principal readings of the "Hérodiade" manuscript: Huot, p. 67: ". . . la tension qui caractérise la 'Scène,' entre la tentation du dévoilement et la tentation du narcissisme, était destinée dès 1866 à se résoudre en une synthèse," and Davies, *Le Rêve*, 295: ". . . il nous est relativement facile de reconnaître . . . dans l'union des deux [Hérodiade and the severed head] un symbole de la réalisation de cette perfection dans le poème ou *Oeuvre*."

9. These early stage directions are reproduced in the notes for Mallarmé's *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 1444.

10. Jean-Pierre Richard, *l'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1961), 205.

11. Davis, *Le Rêve*, 284. Since the initial writing of this study, Leo Bersani (*The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*) has written some very perceptive pages on Hérodiade's narcissism. Although the reading is brief and based on the Pléiade edition, Bersani underlines the narcissistic tendencies of thematic criticism that he describes as a "critical version of those immobilizing strategies by which Hérodiade seeks to possess her own image" (p. 18).

12. Paul Valéry, "Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé," 8, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 298.

13. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), 283.

14. *S.E.*, 18:55-56: "The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant

or to remove internal tension due to stimuli [the 'Nirvana principle,' to borrow a term from Barbara Low] — a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle; and our recognition of that fact is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of the death instincts." See also *S.E.*, 23:198.

15. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 72.

16. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 94. See in particular the chapter "Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," 93-100.

17. *ibid.*, 188.

18. Laplanche, *Life and Death*, 88.

19. See in particular the poems "Sainte," "Don du poème," and "Une dentelle s'abolit," *Oeuvres complètes*, 53, 40 and 74. In his article, "Mallarmé's Windows," *Yale French Studies*, 54 (1977):23-31, Robert Greer Cohn discusses the connections between windows, wombs, and musical instruments.

20. In "Le Vierge, le vivace, et le bel aujourd'hui," *Oeuvres complètes*, 67-68, the potentiality of the creative impulse is depicted in a similar manner: "Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre / Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui!"

21. Davis, *Le Rêve*, 180.

22. This insight is offered by Cohn in *l'Oeuvre de Mallarmé*, 169. When placed at either the beginning or end of a verse, or used as a noun, "jadis" suggests a "paradis perdu." For this usage, see the poems "Les Fenêtres" and "Les Fleurs," *Oeuvres complètes*, 32-33. In the notes for the "Ouverture ancienne," Mallarmé again associates the term "jadis" with a white innocence: "A le pâle (variant reads "neigeux") jadis pour ancienne teinte," *Les Noces*, 145.

23. See in particular "Don du poème" and "Les Fenêtres," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 40 and 32.

24. Freud makes these observations in his letter of 2 May 1897 to Wilhelm Fliess. See *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess: 1887-1904*, trans. Jeffrey Masson (London: Belknap Press, 1985), 239-40.

25. Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 49 (1968):12.

26. *ibid.*, 4-5, 10.

27. In "Les Dieux antiques" Mallarmé asserts that "les actes variés du soleil" constitute the basis of all myths. This "tragédie de la Nature" is frequently depicted in terms of a highly erotic and bloody battle between the tandem forces of light and darkness. See p. 1216 *O.C.* For an insightful discussion of the sunset image and its relationship to love, orgasm, and

death, see Albert Sonnenfeld's "Eros and Poetry: Mallarmé's Disappearing Visions," in *Order and Adventure in post-Romantic French Poetry: Essays presented to C. A. Hackett*, E. M. Beaumont (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), 89-98.

28. In *l'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, 126-28, Richard discusses Mallarmé's extensive use of the image of the "pied nu" and the "pied transgresseur."

29. In "Les Formations de l'inconscient," (Seminars, 1956-57), *Bulletin de Psychologie*, 1956-57, Jacques Lacan describes the period of primary narcissism as one of imaginary possession of the mother. By identifying himself with the mother's object of desire, the child becomes the missing maternal phallus.

30. The phrase refers to Lacan's definition of the Unconscious as the discourse of the Other. See *Ecrits*, 27-28, 814.

31. Laplanche, *Life and Death*, 102.

32. Mallarmé's recognition of the narcissistic component in all acts of interpretation is evident in the following statement: "Avec véracité, Qu'est-ce que, les Lettres, que cette mentale poursuite, menée, en tant que le discours, afin de définir ou de faire, à l'égard de soi-même, preuve que le spectacle répond à une imaginative compréhension, il est vrai, dans l'espoir de s'y mirer" (*O.C.*, 648).

Chapter Three

1. See Gardner Davies's description of the manuscript in *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère*, 231-32.

2. See in particular Luigi de Nardis' "Les Noces d'Hérodiade: dubbi e proposte," in *Rivista di Letteratura Moderna e Comparata*, 29 (1976):258-80 and Jean-Pierre Chausserie-LaPrée's article "l'Architecture secrète de l'Ouverture ancienne," in *Europe* (April-May 1976): 74-103.

3. E Noulet analyzes the techniques of repetition in the "Ouverture" in *l'Oeuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé*, 108-09. See also Leo Bersani's discussion of 'specularizing procedures' in the "Ouverture ancienne," pp. 7-17, *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*.

4. According to Jacques Derrida (*Dissemination*, 257, n. 56), Mallarmé's ambitious aesthetic formula ("peindre non la chose mais l'effet qu'elle produit" *C*, 1:137) was composed in a "naively sensualist and subjectivist" language. Nevertheless, "the exclusion is clear: poetic language will not be a description or imitation . . . of some substantial referent . . . , and it should not be *composed* of words taken as substantial or atomic units that are precisely undecomposable or uncompoundable."

5. Jacques Scherer offers an excellent analysis of Mallarmé's "Premières recherches syntactiques (1870-74)," in *l'Expression littéraire de Mallarmé*, 223-28.

6. Cited by Henri Mondor, *Vie de Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 210, n. 1.

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

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

9. In "Poe Pourri," *Semiotexte(e)*, 1 (1975):68, Jeffrey Mehlman calls the "Démon de l'analogie" Mallarmé's version of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*. Jean-Luc Steinmetz draws the same parallel in passing, in his article "Le Paradoxe mallarméen: Les 'poèmes en prose,'" *Europe* (April-May 1976):146.

10. In discussing Mallarmé's use of analogy as a "principle of reduction and expansion," Jean Dornbush underscores its paradoxical movement in "Le Démon de l'analogie": "... while analogy unifies through resemblance, it also posits as a principle of its operation the potential disorder of the differentiation." In this sense, he continues, "it supplies the precarious 'almost' that is the comparative distinction essential to poetic relief." See his article "The Death of the 'Penultimate': Paradox in Mallarmé's 'Le Démon de l'analogie,'" *French Forum* 5 (September 1980):241.

11. Barbara Johnson in "Crise de Prose," *Poésie* No. 4, (1978):102-3, aptly describes the narrator's relationship to alterity: "Céder l'initiative aux mots, c'est avoir la voix de l'Autre, s'éclipser comme sujet, devenir soi-même autre." The death of the subject is equivalent to "une transformation du sujet en discours. Mais le discours du sujet, c'est le discours de l'Autre."

12. See Weber's excellent article, "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on an Uncanny moment," in *Modern Language Notes* 88 (1973):1119 and 1129.

13. For a subtle reading of the fictional movement of Freud's text, see Hélène Cixous' article "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's

'Das Unheimliche' ('The Uncanny')," in *New Literary History* 7 (Spring 1976):525-48.

14. Davies makes this connection in passing in *Mallarmé et le rêve d'Hérodiade*, 287.

15. The full quotation is found in *Crayonné au théâtre, O.C.*, 297: "... que l'énigme derrière ce rideau n'existe sinon grâce à une hypothèse tournante peu à peu résolue ici et là par notre lucidité: plus, que le sursaut du gaz ou de l'électricité, la gradue l'accompagnement instrumental, dispensateur du Mystère."

16. According to Davies, all drafts for this segment were written at approximately the same time, probably after 1887. See *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère*, 96.

17. Mallarmé uses the same image in "Igitur": "Je me rappelle que son or allait feindre en l'absence un joyau nul de rêverie, riche et inutile survivance, sinon que sur la complexité marine et stellaire d'une orfèvrerie se lisait le hasard infini des conjonctions" (*O.C.*, 435). The connection between this image and the process of writing is reinforced in a letter to Mallarmé from Lefébure, in which the latter refers to the poet as a "Diable de condensateur" and an "orfèvre, . . . dans tous les sens" (*C*, 1:178).

18. Cohn compares this segment of the "Prélude" to the "love-hate battles" and struggles of "begetting" in "Ses purs ongles," "Surgi de la croupe," scenes from "Les Dieux antiques," and fragments from *Le Livre* in "New Approaches to Hérodiade," 472-81.

19. Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," 17.

20. Anyone who doubts the validity of this sort of pattern should read Robert Cohn's remarkable analysis of the role of letters in Mallarmé's poetry in *Towards the Poems of Mallarmé*, Appendix C., 265-80. For his remarks on the "crest-trough" pattern in "Un Coup de Dés," see *l'Oeuvre de Mallarmé*, 198.

21. These expressions are taken from Robert Cohn's article, "Mallarmé's Windows," 30-31.

22. The definition comes from Pierre Guiraud's *Le Langage de la sexualité: Dictionnaire érotique* (Paris: Payot, 1978), 623.

23. Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," 5.

24. In his rereading of Mallarmé's essay "Or," Derrida demonstrates quite convincingly the effects of the title's syntactical ambiguity. As both noun and conjunction, the signifier "or" illustrates the infinite doubling or deferring of sense: "The limits of thematicism . . . have never been so striking as in the case of 'or,' . . . first and foremost because that signifier

'loses even a meaning,' becomes extenuated, devalued, mimed out. Names no longer." See *Dissemination*, 263, n. 62.

25. The Uncanny resurfaces in the acceleration of what Derrida calls the movement of the "supplement." In adding itself as a "surplus," each representation or substitute refigures a "lack." Whence the haunting effect. See chapter 2 ('. . . That Dangerous Supplement . . .,' 141-64) in *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

26. All of Mallarmé's references to language as a conflictual space of life and death forces are relevant here. See in particular pages 901 and 1053 of *Les Mots anglais*, *O.C.*

27. For several examples of this usage see Scherer, *l'Expression littéraire*, 104-5.

28. Mallarmé, *Le Livre*, critical edition by Jacques Scherer (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 169 (A).

29. The "orbe" metaphor was used by both sixteenth-century poets as well as contemporary writers. In his *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, 5:4, Paul Robert cites the example: "Son sein rond et hardi comme l'orbe d'un bouclier d'amazone" from Colette's *Belles saisons*. In *Les Noces*, p. 106, "orbe" is also an anagram of "robe" which in the "Scène," is a metonym for the maternal breast: "robe/couler/seins."

30. Weber, "The Sideshow," 1132.

31. Cohn, "New Approaches to 'Hérodiade'," 476.

32. According to Derrida, Richard's thematization of such key concepts as "pli" and "blanc" work toward the overestimation of the "word" and the restriction of the "lateral." "The dissemination of the whites," insists Derrida, "produces a tropological structure that circulates infinitely around itself through the incessant supplement of an extra turn: there is *more* metaphor, *more* metonymy" (*Dissemination*, 254-59).

Chapter Four

1. Lloyd J. Austin, "Le Cantique de Saint Jean' de Stéphane Mallarmé," *AUMLA* 10 (May 1959):48.

2. Patricia Rossworm Kellogg, "The Myth of Salome in Symbolist Literature and Art" (Ph.D. Diss.: New York University, 1975), 142.

3. Robert de Montesquieu, *Diptyque de France* (Paris: Chilberre, 1923), 235.

4. Davies, *Mallarmé et le rêve d'Hérodiade*, 144.

5. Davies, 263. In his *Towards 'Hérodiade': A Literary Genealogy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1958), 57, A. Chisholm concludes that "an alliance is affected between absolute beauty and a spirit freed from 'Les anciens désaccords / Avec le corps'."

6. The quotations are from Ursula Franklin's *An Anatomy of Poesis: The Prose Poems of Stéphane Mallarmé* (North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 78, Austin, "Le 'Cantique' . . .," 56, and Helen Osterman Borowitz, "Visions of Salome," *Criticism*, 5:14 (1972), 15.

7. This example is from Huot's *Le Mythe d'Hérodiade chez Mallarmé*, 146. See also Jean-Pierre Richard's *l'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, 162-63.

8. The full quotation taken from Austin's "Le 'Cantique,'" 56, reads as follows: "En conséquence, la synthèse finale réside dans l'union mystique d'Hérodiade et du principe spirituel du Saint, principe symbolisé par sa tête tranchée et livrée de toutes ses entraves terrestres. Telles devraient être 'Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère.' Merveilleuse synthèse 'hégélienne!'" Robert Cohn attacks this approach when he reassesses Hegel's influence on Mallarmé in *Mallarmé: Igitur* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 171-72: ". . . although one must grant an awareness of Hegel in Mallarmé's essential movement of mind, one is hardly justified in asserting more than that; second, I would claim . . . that Mallarmé did not really need Hegel, . . . that he worked out the essential ideas in his own mind and that indeed . . . Mallarmé has gone beyond, or bypassed, Hegel in his push beyond the triadic to the tetrapolar and polypolar universe of thought that is the great leap of the modern mind." One critic who bypasses the Hegel pattern in his reading of Mallarmé is Leo Bersani (*The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*). For his commentary on the "Cantique" as a "monologic fable of sublimation," see 79-83.

9. The terms are taken from Cohn's comments on "Un Coup de dés" in *Mallarmé's Masterwork: New Findings* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1966), 72 and "New Approaches to 'Hérodiade,'" 475.

10. Mauron, *Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Mallarmé*, 125-26.

11. *ibid.*, 127.

12. Published in 1925 by Dr. Bonniot, these notes for the "Igitur" manuscript are cited by Robert Cohn in *l'Oeuvre de Mallarmé: Un Coup de Dés*, 253.

13. The two best articles on narration and the production of phantasm in "l'Après-midi d'un faune," are Jean-Pierre Richard's "Feu rué, feu scintillé: note sur Mallarmé, le fantasme et l'écriture," in *Littérature* (1975):84-104 and Albert Sonnenfeld's "Elaboration secondaire du grimoire: Mallarmé et le poète-critique."

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

15. Cohn, *Towards the Poems of Mallarmé*, 268: "i—principe mâle, héros, lumière, centripète, rigide . . . 'Droit comme un I: The examples are innumerable: All of 'Le vierge, le vivace . . . '."

16. Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment," 1113 and 1119.

17. Jacques Derrida, *GLAS* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1974), 235.

18. Johnson, *The Critical Difference*, 151.

19. In his reading of the "Cantique," Chisolm (*Towards 'Hérodiade'*, p. 150) stresses the second sense of "vigie."

20. Johnson, *The Critical Difference*, 12.

21. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 214.

22. Mallarméan virginity inscribes a "hymeneal" logic that, as Derrida demonstrates, systematically "outwits" all ontological, dialectical, and philosophical hierarchies. For the discussion, see *Dissemination*, 212-26.

23. The full quotation taken from Richard's *l'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* reads as follows: "Par le seul rêve de l'alternative, la danseuse immobile atteint donc à l'identité, à l'existence consciente et neutre que la danse réele lui eût dynamiquement et dialectiquement permis de réaliser en elle," p. 429.

24. For a productive discussion of Mallarmé's analogy between *écriture* and *danse*, see Carol Barko's "The Dancer and the Becoming of Language," *Yale French Studies* 54 (1977):173-87.

25. Elaborating castration as part of the process of creative dissemination, Derrida (*GLAS* and *Dissemination*) shows how writing performs the continual loss/cutting/spacing and dispersal of the Word. The metaphorical system that best illustrates the process is, of course, the language of fruits and flowers.

26. Cohn, *Towards the Poems of Mallarmé*, 62.

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INDEX

- Analogy, 50, 103 n.10
 Aubanel, Théodore, 43
 Austin, Lloyd, 74, 106 n.8

 Banville Théodore de, 3
 Barko, Carol, 107 n.24
 Bersani, Leo, 4, 9, 100 n.11,
 106 n.8

 Castration, 50, 51-52, 84-85;
 defense against, 80-81, 88; and
 productivity, 76-77, 79; and
 writing, 77-79, 107 n.25
 Cazalis, Henri, 3-4, 10-11, 43-44
 Chisholm, A. R., 106 n.5
 Cixous, Hélène, 104 n.13
 Cohn, Robert Greer, x, 58, 70,
 90-91, 97 n.1, 101 nn.19, 22,
 104 nn.18, 20, 106 n.8
 Coppée, François, 10

 Danse: as scriptural act, 87-89, 91
 Davies, Gardner, ix, 14, 100 n.8
 DeQuincey, Thomas, 52-53
 Derrida, Jacques: *Of Grammatology*,
 105 n.25; *Dissemination*, 62, 71,
 85, 98 nn.11, 12, 102 n.4;
Writing and Difference, 98 n.11;
Glas, 81, 107 n.25
 Dornbush, Jean, 103 n.10

 Freud, Sigmund, x-xi, 2, 10, 13-14,
 72, 93, 95; autoeroticism, 21;
 castration, 50, 52, 77, 80-81;
 death instinct, 10, 19, 51,
 100 n.14; the 'double,' 80-81; on
 dreams, 6, 7, 33, 95, 97 n.4,
 99 n.2; ego, 19-21; fantasy, 21,
 33-34, 77; fetishism, 40, 80-81,
 88; identification, 20-21;
 narcissism, 19-22, 30, 38, 41;
 the pleasure principle, 10, 19,
 51; primal scene, 58; repetition-
 compulsion, 50, 51-52; repres-
 sion, 34, 49; the 'return of the
 repressed,' 10, 48, 50; the
 unconscious, x-xi, 7, 13
 — works: *The Ego and the Id*, 20;
Mourning and Melancholia, 20;
The Theme of the Three Caskets,
 51-52; *The Uncanny*, 48-54, 55,
 72

 Gillemot, Maurice, 9

 Hegel, G. W. F., ix, x, 106 n.8
 Hoffman, Ernst: *The Sand-Man*,
 48-52, 72
 Huot, Sylviane, ix, 17, 100 n.8

 Identity: and fragmentation, 11,
 39, 50-51; specular, 20-23,
 26-27, 29, 80. *See also* Perception

 John the Baptist, 17, 65, 74
 Johnson, Barbara, 83, 84, 99 n.21,
 103 n.11

 Kristeva, Julia, 98 n.3

 Lacan, Jacques, 19, 20-23,
 102 n.29

- Language: and dream discourse, 6-11, 13; of flowers, 40, 90, 107 n.25; materiality of, 4-7, 10, 39
- Laplanche, Jean, 19, 34, 40, 58, 61, 103 n.7
- Lefébure, Eugène, 7, 9-10, 89
- Lyotard, Jean François, 7, 99 n.17
- Mallarmé, Stéphane, works:
L'Après-midi d'un faune, 3, 16, 60, 78, 79-80; *Un Coup de dés*, 44, 75, 99 n.17; *Crise de vers*, 11, 45, 93; *Le Démon de l'analogie*, 48-52, 55, 68, 72, 103 nn 8-11; *Une dentelle s'abolit* . . . , 69-70; *Les Dieux antiques*, 58-59, 76, 89, 101 n.27; *Don du poème*, 2, 94; *La Fausse entrée des sorcières dans 'Macbeth'*, 52-54, 69, 72; *Les Fleurs*, 36, 90; *Hamlet*, 85, 89; *Igitur*, 21, 70, 76, 78, 104 n.17; *Mes bouquins refermés* . . . , 89; *Les Mots anglais*, 10, 88-89; *Le Mystère dans les lettres*, 45; *Or*, 104 n.24; *Pauvre Enfant pâle*, 78-80; *Le Pitre châtié*, 23, 77, 79-80; *Ses purs ongles* . . . , 11
- *Les Noces d'Hérodiade*, *Mystère*, ix, 15, 44-45, 73-74, 93-94; *Cantique de Saint Jean*, 73-77, 78, 81-85; *Finale*, 18, 30, 36, 37, 65, 85-87; *Ouverture ancienne*, 3, 28, 31-32, 35, 36, 43-47, 54, 56, 61, 64, 65, 69, 72, 74, 86, 90, 101 n.22; *Prélude*, 32, 44-47, 54-72 passim, 76, 82; *Scène*, 15-19, 21-29, 33-41, 43, 44, 56, 61, 64, 68, 74, 80, 82; *Scène intermédiaire*, 32
- Mauron, Charles, x, 76
- Mehlman, Jeffrey, 103 n.9
- Narcissism: and criticism, 17-18, 100 n.11; and language, 41, 102 n.32; in the "Scène," 21-27, 30, 38, 40-41. *See also* Freud, narcissism
- Noël, Jean-Bellemin, x
- Perception, 7-8, 28-29, 66-68, 69; and the 'primal scene,' 58, 60-61; and transgression, 10, 37, 77-80
- Poe, Edgar Allan, 47
- "Poème-critique," 8-9, 99 n.17
- Pontalis, Jean Baptiste, 34, 58, 61, 103 n.7
- Proper names: poetics of, 89-91
- Renaud, Armand, 3-4
- Repetition: involuntary, 50-52; poetics of, 46-47, 72; and writing, 7-8. *See also* Freud, repetition-compulsion
- Repression, 57, 63-68; and creative process, 9, 47, 70, 72. *See also* Freud, repression
- "Return of the repressed," 10, 48, 56-57, 63-64, 67, 70-72; defined, 103 n.7. *See also* Freud, the 'return of the repressed'
- Richard, Jean-Pierre, 18, 88, 105 n.32, 106 n.13
- Roumanille, Joseph, 2
- Salome, 17, 74
- Scherer, Jacques, 46
- Sonnenfeld, Albert, 98 n.10, 102 n.27, 106 n.13
- Steinmetz, Jean-Luc, 97 n.1, 103 n.9
- Uncanny, 48-54, 55, 105 n.25; defined by Freud, 49. *See also* Freud, works: *The Uncanny*
- Unconscious, 7-9, 13, 25, 46, 48, 56-57, 64, 99 n.22. *See also* Freud, the unconscious
- Valéry, Paul, 19
- Villiers de l'Isle Adam, P. H., 4
- Weber, Samuel, 51, 68, 80