

Paul Green Cohen

8. TOAST FUNÉBRE



—à Théophile Gautier

This is a solemn, somewhat rhetorical, and even "official" work. The occasion called for it: the death of Gautier, much admired by Mallarmé. He wrote the poem in 1873, at the request of Catulle Mendès, for a memorial volume, *Le Tombeau de Gautier*, which appeared later that year. "Je veux chanter," he said in his answering letter to Mendès, "une des qualités glorieuses de Gautier: le don mystérieux de voir avec les yeux (ôtez mystérieux). Je chanterai le voyant, qui, placé dans ce monde, l'a regardé, ce qu'on ne fait pas." (1465).

The poem represents a middle manner, somewhere between the relative clarity of the early *poésies* and the frequently dense obscurities of the late ones. Yet, it would be fairer to say that the poem is almost entirely clear, with a few ambiguous passages that can still stand some elucidation. The conflict between the properly lyric elements, and, on the other hand, the simplistic rhetorical situation assigned to him make for a certain *malaise*, overcome, I feel, by the weight of intermittent successes in the imagery and sound.

Is the poem the high point of Mallarmé's art, as some, including Thibaudet and Peyre, seem to think? Not for this reader, at any rate. I admire it in a special way, which goes something like this: "Bravo Mallarmé, show them what you can do along more traditional lines, whenever you want to." *Toast funébre* probably would alone have made the reputation of some lesser figure. But Mallarmé makes us demanding about himself. The *Faune* is richer, more warmly beautiful, *Héroïade* too, despite its apparent coldness and its Parnassian lapses (not to mention the *Coup de Dés*, which is quite apart).

O de notre bonheur, toi, le fatal O of our happiness, you the fatal emblem!

A note in the "Bibliographie" Mallarmé penned for his *Poésies* said: "*Toast funébre* vient du recueil collectif le *Tombeau de Gautier*, Maître et Ombre à qui s'adresse l'Invocation."

The dead Gautier is addressed with absolutely modern (or existential) unsentimentality. He, or his tomb, is the symbol of all horrid mortality. As an exemplary, intense representative of humanity, one

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who was especially alive—a poet—his amputation from the world's body is particularly shocking to Mallarmé.

The letter-values (sound, shape) are generally less vivid in this poem—though certain passages are extraordinary in this respect—than is usual in Mallarmé. As we have said, it is relatively rhetorical, depending often on some simple, broad, sweeping, booming, clanging, and other such effects. Note the all-flattering impression of death in the *o's* of *fatal*, as in *l'auree silence et la massive nuit*, below; compare *Quand l'ombre menaça de la fatale loi* (six *a*-sounds) or the key word of different negation, *LE HASARD*, in the *Coup de Dés*.

emblème: overtone of *blème*, compare "squelette, ou . . . emblème quelconque de la brèveré de la vie" (Baudelaire, "Le Tir et le Cimetière"); note the dry *à*.

Salut de la démençe et libation blême, Greeting of madness and pale libation,

Ne crois pas qu'au magique espoir du Do not think that to the magic hope corridor of the corridor

J'offre ma coupe vide où souffre un I offer my empty cup where suffers a golden monster!

Still addressing Gautier: "do not think that I offer a toast—which would be madness and a pale, weak-spirited gesture—to a sentimental hope of immortality (the childish, magic, nonsensical hope to see your ghost); no, my cup is void of all but the dazzling monstrous awareness of the Absurd, fatality."

Salut and *coupe*: remind us of the little sonnet *Salut* in which Mallarmé also refers to the emptiness of his offering, as by *Rien, cette écumé, vierge vers / À ne désigner que la coupe*. In both poems, the poet is being, as usual, modest about his product (particularly in relation to the huge ambitions he harbors). He is, moreover, voicing a familiar artistic despair about ever expressing anything. In this respect, the *coupe* recalls the *pur vase d'aucun breuvage* of *Surgi de la coupe* (Gengoux) or "l'amertume / En la coupe [of life]"; (ML, p. 181). It may echo faintly the "golden cup" of the famous Goethe ballad (translated by Nerval), which was referred to by Gautier in *Caerules Oculi*: "trésor coulé / La coupe du roi de Thulé," and by Villiers in *Isis* (Grès, p. 127). But a likelier source is "Ahl brisée est la coupe d'or! l'esprit à jamais envolé!" (tr. of Poe's *Lenore*; 200). Compare "La coupe d'or ne contient que du fiel," Leconte de Lisle, *À un poète mort* (Gautier).

The *monstre d'or* has been much discussed and never accurately explained. Mallarmé coquettishly applauded when someone suggested

he made out on the poet's vessel a design of Saint George and the dragon. We see it as follows:

In *La Musique et Les Lettres*, Mallarmé writes: "Quelle agonie . . . qu'agie la Chimère versant par ses blessures d'or l'évidence de tout l'être pareil" (648) and further refers to the agonized "torsion" of this dazzling monster expressing Man's fatal limitations. Perhaps a source of the image was Gautier's own *Chimère*, a poem about the poet's eternal hopeless dream: "une jeune chimère, aux lèvres de ma coupe." The agonizing *chimère* of perfect art is found again in "Le Monstre-Qui ne peut Être! Attachant au flanc la blessure d'un regard affirmatif et pur" (541). It is roughly the tragic vision of the "Glorious Lie" Mallarmé early discovered at the heart of reality,² and that feeling, I believe, emerges even without comment, though obscurely or intuitively, from Mallarmé's words; a general helpless suffering and beautiful honesty before the image of death, reminding us, tacitly perhaps, of Pascal's baroque-classic credo, that human life, even crushed, is bigger than that which crushes it.

There are some subtle sound values of horror-shiver in the tremolo of *offre*, *souffle* and *monstre*; yet there is the harmonious glow of the quite different (unaccompanied by a consonant) *r* in *d'or*. The *é* helps *blème* to be notably pallid. The *n* in *coupe* is active, as it is in *cruche*, according to one of France's leading contemporary poets, Francis Ponge, who said, "Pas d'autre mot qui sonne comme cruche. Grâce à cet *n* qui s'ouvre en son milieu" (*Cinq Sapes*).

Ton apparition ne va pas me suffire: Your appearance won't suffice me:
Car je t'ai mis, moi-même, en un lieu For I've put you, myself, in a place
de porphyre. of porphyry.

The poet knows there will be no material resurrection of his master. As a sort of imaginary pallbearer, he has personally seen the remains of Gautier put away for good in the tomb.

Note the empty neuter *en lieu*, all that remains, as in the *Coup de Dés*, after the departure of Man: "rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu."

Le rite est pour les mains d'éteindre The ritual is for the hands to ex-
le flambeau tinguish the torch
Contre le fer épais des portes du Against the thick iron of the portals
tombeau: of the tomb:

Material hands (as opposed to the spiritual voice of the poet, below) have done their work of extinguishing the torches of hope against the uncompromising doors of the tomb; an echo is that the blaze of the dead genius is quelled. Both these feelings are expressed in *Tout orgueil*: "Torche dans un branle étouffée." In *Igitur*, the snuffed candle

symbolizes psychic suicide—the end of hope or belief—the acceptance of the absurd, as in *Hamlet*: "There is within the very flame of love / A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it."

Et l'on ignore mal, élu pour notre And we cannot avoid the truth, [we]
fête elected for our [poetic] feast,
Très-simple de chanter l'absence du A very simple one of singing the ab-
poète, sence of the poet,
Que ce beau monument l'enferme That this beautiful monument en-
tout entier. closes him entire.

This reinforces the preceding lines with a particularly Mallarméan idea of singing the poet's absence. Absence, with him, is a sort of limit-situation, an asymptotic borderline of human endeavor to grasp truth, overcoming (by including) the forces of chance or death or nothingness. Hence, it is a sort of pure essence—like Hegel's "pure Negation which is the essence of Being"—of a phenomenon. The all-too-human limitations of the clumsy ordinary knowing processes are negated away, burned up in the funeral pyre of sentimental desire and hope. And this is the central theme of the poem, that the true, even divine, Gautier is not dead but absent, in this sense: "je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se leve, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets." (857).

ignore mal: mal means "à tort," according to Noullet. The sense is not changed thereby.

élu: "l'élu familial, le poète" (694).

Si ce n'est que la gloire ardente du Unless the ardent glory of the
méter, [poetic] craft,
Jusqu'à l'heure commune et vile de Until the common and vile hour of
la cendre, 'ashes,
Par le carreau qu'allume un soir fier Through the windowpane lit by an
d'y descendre, evening proud to descend there,
Retourne vers les feux du pur soleil Returns towards the fires of the pure
mortel! mortal sun!

This much is saved from the disaster, that the light of his art returns, like a burnt offering, to the source of our light, the sun, as in the *Faune*—"le visible et serain souffle artificiel / De l'inspiration, qui regagne le ciel." At least, it will return—his "eternally" shining glory—until all goes in an apocalypse, "l'heure commune et vile de la cendre" (recalling the *Dies irae*: "on that day the world dissolves in ashes"; C, p. 356). Hence, the sun itself is "mortal," and the "pure" refers largely to the honesty of this truth. A variant read: "l'heure dernière et vile de la cendre," confirming the notion of apocalypse, as

in Poe's *Eureka*, which was a major source of Mallarmé's cosmogonic thinking, most completely expressed in the *Coup de Dés* (C, p. 337); compare also the *Cantique de Saint Jean*.

un soir fier d'y descendre: nature seems to pay a tribute to its pagan son.

After this introductory portion of the poem, there is a visual break and a new section, which is devoted entirely to the ordinary man (or "man")—including perhaps Gautier's ordinary mortal self. This is in contrast to the whole next (third) section, which is devoted to the Poet: "Le Maître" will dramatically introduce that final major section, which is altogether in a rising key; we note the two aspects of Gautier, essential and inessential, in the "Maître et Ombre," previously cited. Compare "l'homme et le génie" (both referring to Hugo) in *Les Gossifs de Mallarmé*, no 5.

Magnifique, total et solitaire, tel Magnificent, total and solitary, such
Tremble de s'exhaler le faux orgueil Trembles [dars not] to exhale [ex-
des hommes. press itself] the false pride of men.

Ordinary men fail to be "magnificent, total, and solitary" like Gautier, the creator whose pure art has just been evoked as returning to its source. Note the singular of the adjectives versus the dispersing, weakening plural of *hommes* (as in the just-quoted "l'absente de tous bouquets"): "cet s du pluriel. . . S. . . est la lettre analytique; dissolvante et disséminante par excellence" (855).

Cette foule hagard! elle annonce: That haggard crowd! it announces:
Nous sommes We are
La triste opacité de nos spectres The sad opaqueness of our future
futurs. specters.

The crowd, "haggard" from the funeral ordeal, believes in an after-life of eternal souls of which we are, alive, mere opaque versions. In sum, it adheres to the Platonic-Christian myth, which Mallarmé early rejected, as indicated in: "ma lutte avec ce vieux et méchant plumage, rejeté, as indicated in: "ma lutte avec ce vieux et méchant plumage, rejeté, heureusement, Dieu" (Propos, p. 76); "Oubliions [official religion]" ("Catholicisme," 394); "une entre les Chimères" (392); "l'Angleterre ne peut, à cause de Dieu, que Bacon, son législateur, respecter, adopter la science pure" (851). Gautier was also a pagan, atheistic.

Note the flat *a's* of *hagard*, a favorite word with Mallarmé for spiritual disorder and distress. Contrast the bright sounds of *Magnifique*. The *ou* of *foule*, and of *Nous*, is obscure.

Mais le blason des deuil's épars sur But the heraldry of mournings scat-
de vains murs tered on vain walls,
J'ai méprisé l'horreur lucide d'une I have scorned the lucid horror of a
larme, tear,

Mallarmé, unlike the crowd, scorns false sentiment, represented by a tear, such as one of the scattered tears depicted, on the traditional funeral decor of black velvet, by the conventional silver spangles, as in "un haillon noir y pend et pour larmes d'argent / Montre le mur blafard par ses trous" (15). Yet, something of the poet's stoic lucidity is also expressed, ambiguously, by the bright pure tear (rather, in this respect, like the solitary chandelier he could alone admire at the popular theater); compare "au bord de mes yeux calmes s'amasse une larme dont les diamants primitifs n'atteignent pas la noblesse," from his essay on Gautier (262) or, from the same, "cette larme transparente comme mon rêve lucide." Note the bright sounds of *n* and *i* in *lucide*; the sharpness and the hardness (*d*) are offset by the melting *r*, and the transparent *ar*, in *larme*, *épars*, and *horreur*.

épars is another favorite of Mallarmé, as in "hallucination éparse d'agonie" (*Coup de Dés*), a constellation sprinkled in a very dark night, quite close to the impression here.

Quand, sourd même à mon vers sacré When, deaf even to my sacred verse
qui ne l'alarme, which alarms him not,
Quelqu'un de ces passants, fier, Some one of those passing, proud,
aveugle et muet, blind and mute
Hôte de son linceul vague, se trans- Dentzen of his vague shroud, was
muait transmuted
En la verge héros de l'attente post- Into the virgin hero of posthumous
hume. expectancy.

passants: one of the passers-by of life. There is a double sense: just any man—all are equal on this terrain, as in the "*Ubi sum?*" tradition; also a man "passing away" to the beyond, either one of the weak-spirited mass of ordinary humans or the merely bodily Gautier (cf. our comment on "pour les mains," above). The imperfect tense of *se transmuaît* goes with this ambiguity: the funeral ceremony *was going on* while Mallarmé stood still within himself, stoically, and the event *was repeated* in the ordinary course of human history or of Mallarmé's experience, "*whenever* a man died." In any event, the *passant* is reaching death as a newcomer, a virgin or untried adventurer into the beyond, curious about what is there, as Hamlet was. He is "deaf . . . proud, blind, and dumb" (just as the physical death of Gautier is later referred to as "not to open the sacred eyes and to be quiet," or, again, is merely "stingy silence and massive night," in the

last lines of the poem). He is "deaf even to my [Mallarmé's] verse," and this emphasizes the point that we have to do here with the non-verbal or non-spiritual, that is, with bodily demise, "dust."⁸ In Villiers' *Premières Poésies*, "Don Juan," we find the following:

Dans son orgueil sacré lorsqu'un homme succombe
Qu'importe le néant et l'oubli d'une tombe?

.....
Grave, il repose là drapé dans son suaire,
Sourd aux cris vagues des humains.

Mallarmé often uses the word *passant* in the main sense of it here: that is, a chance passer-by, haphazard as the wind and all outdoors, as in: "Personne! ce mot n'obsède pas d'un remords le passant" (546); or, "le texte . . . résumé de toute l'âme, la communiquant au passant" (530); compare "tombeau . . . ceux du dehors, ces *promeneurs*, au bénéficien" (502). An excellent example is "Apprenons, messieurs, au *passant*, à quiconque . . . par incompetence et *vaine vision* se trompa [about Verlaine's true nature]" (510). The *quiconque*, rather like the *quelqu'un de ces passants*, affords an idea of randomness, and note the related effect of a plural for something unessential: *passants*. In the same Verlaine essay we find the parallel idea of the contrast between the merely physical being and his essential voice: "celui qui s'y [in the tomb] dissimule pour ne pas offusquer, d'une présence, sa gloire." (510).⁹

attente posthume: the unknown fate we, like Hamlet, curiously await; and the closely corollary sense of the waiting period before a Last Judgment by fate. Davies produces good evidence for the latter sense (*Les Tombeaux de Mallarmé*, p. 46). But he is wrong in seeing this as applied only to Gautier.

The main sense is attested by: "l'attente [d'une vérité ultime] . . . fain . . . dans l'humanité" (294).

Vaste gouffre apporté dans l'amas de
la brume
Par l'irascible vent des mots qu'il n'a
pas dits,
Le néant à cet Homme aboli de jadis:

Vast gulf added to the mass of fog
By the irascible wind of the words
he has not spoken,
The Nothing to this Man abolished
of yore [says]:

"Souvenirs d'horizons, qu'est-ce, ô
toi, que la Terre?"
Hurle ce songe; et, voix dont la
clarté s'altère,
L'espace à pour jouet le cri: "Je ne
sais pas!"

"Memory of horizons, what, o thou,
is Earth?" [so it says or]
Howls out this dream; and, voice
whose clarity breaks,
Space gets for plaything the cry: "I
don't know!"

"Vast gulf added to the mass of fog / By the irascible wind of the

words he has not spoken" means that all the unsaid, all the inarticulateness, which characterizes the ordinary citizen as compared to the poet, now rises up to confront him in a sort of Last Judgment; the unsaid adds to—or rather digs a fresh vivid pocket in—the general fog of meaninglessness which goes with the awful abyss of chance or death now facing him. This ugly wind foreshadows the "solennelle agitation par l'air de paroles," the beautiful breath of poetry, below.

The unsaid haunts him, judges him—this man who was already dead in a sense, formerly ("of yore"), that is, in his lifetime because of his inarticulateness—and howls out to him this nightmare question: "Memories of horizons, what, O thou, is Earth?" It seems to be a revenge for the question "Rêveur, à quoi sers-tu?" (*Le Poète et la foule*, Gautier). In his early poem, *Pain*, Mallarmé asked "Qu'est la terre . . . Et l'homme qu'est-il donc?" and went on to give the "vain and stupid" religious answers offered by a believing man (noted by Austin). In contrast to the *Maitre*, of the next section, this typical creature has saved nothing from these memories of his whole life's horizons, has no "explication orphique de la Terre" (663), has nothing to say but "I don't know." The whole of his experience added up to a horizon—an excellent image of man's life as a quest toward an ever-receding beyond; a sundown is surely implied, almost always associated with the total Question for Mallarmé (as in the *Coup de Dés*, Page 4); and *horizon* is an ideal image for a final vision of the Earth as a ball in space as we conceive leaving it behind in death, ultimately as blankly empty as the "Rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu" of the *Coup de Dés* (Page 10). This precise use of *horizon* as the site of the ordinary man's eternally unanswered enigma is found in "Bucolique": "la nature, Idée tangible pour intimer quelque réalité aux sens frustrés . . . communiquait à ma jeunesse une ferveur [mais savait] en défendre l'interprétation au lecteur d'horizons" (402).⁶ A probable source is: "[Racontez] Vos *souvenirs* avec leurs cadres d'horizons. / Dites, qu'avez-vous vu?" (Baudelaire, *Le Voyage*).

voix dont la clarté s'altère: a spooky, echo-chamber effect of a transfigured voice. This ghostly atmosphere is prolonged in the cosmic loneliness of *L'espace à pour jouet le cri "je ne sais pas"*; compare "le cri de Pérendue" (371).

In *Le Guignon* we have a fairly close equivalent to the *irascible vent*: the wind occasionally represents to Mallarmé the threatening or meaningless outside world.⁷ Thus "un noir vent . . . dans la chair des poètes . . . creusait aussi d'irritables ornières." In a dramatic project he related to George Moore (*Arrowalds*), the wind stood for destiny outside the castle, as opposed to an intimate life indoors. A good illustration

of the associated images of wind-empty-pir-inarticulateness-inauthenticity of the crowd is: "Ja, en public, éventée par le manque du rêve qu'elle [the flame of beauty] consume" (402); compare "le gouffre de vaine fain . . . vulgaire" (298).

The basic idea of the *gouffre* and of the whole passage is found in similar terms in Mallarmé's "Villiers" lecture: "la foule, quand elle aura, en tous les sens de la fureur, exaspéré sa médiocrité, sans jamais revenir à autre chose qu'à du néant central, hurlera vers le poète, un appel" (499); perhaps it is even clearer in: "L'âme, tacite et qui ne suspend pas aux paroles de l'élu familial, le poète, est . . . vouée irrémédiablement au Néant" (694). The unsaid as a concrete negative entity, "peres," is expressed in: "Au fond du rêve, peut-être, se débat, en tant que pertes, l'imagination de gens lui refusant un essor quodidien." (Propos, p. 162).⁷

amas de la brume: the same image of fog expressing the inarticulate masses is found in "la brume et le public" (510).

Homme: Capitalized because the *Homme* is the hero of this common drama—"L'Homme . . . le Mystère" (545)—as the *Maitre* is of the poetic drama; partly because it lacks bright sounds and vertical letters, the word seems apt for this usage, as in the *Coup de Dés*, Page 4. *de jadis*: associated with the simple sort of man, a hardy ancestor, in the *Coup de Dés*: "jadis il empoignait la barre" (Page 4). But this ancestor was Man and hence included the poet ambiguously, as here.

Le Maitre, par un oeil profond, a, The Master, through a profound eye,
sur ses pas, has, on his footsteps,
Apaïsé de l'eden l'ingénuité merveilleuse Appeasèd the eden's unquiet marvel
Dont le frisson final, dans sa voix Whose final shiver, in his voice alone,
seule, éveille awakens
Pour la Rose et le Lys le mystère d'un For the Rose and the Lily the mystery
nom. of a name.

There is a dramatic contrast between the final "Je ne sais pas" (and the whole tone) of the preceding section versus the triumphant entry of *Le Maitre* and the rest of the section following. We may recall the "Maitre et Ombre" of the "Bibliographie" already cited: the Master of the third section is contrasted with the "Ombre," the mere shade, or spectre, of the preceding section.

Mallarmé occasionally uses the word *Maitre* for the artist (e.g., pp. 498, 542).⁸ This part of the poem has caused relatively little difficulty to the commentators and readers. The "eden" is the garden the poet—"ce civilisé édenique" (646)—cultivates, his field of potential poetic reality, as in "Le devoir idéal que nous font les jardins de cet astre," below, and "On ne peut pas se passer d'Éden," a remark he

made to René Ghil in refutation of materialism which, as he said elsewhere, "ne prête pas un sens." (Obviously, though no sectarian, the poet must maintain some sense of mystery in order to make beauty.)

The poet's field—which is ultimately life itself—is "uneasy" or "unquiet" until it is tamed by the Master. Through this formula Mallarmé evokes the dialectic of creativity and the process of evolutionary refinement, from an original crude rhythm (or polarity) of pain and delight (as in the simple experience of physical love), to the delicate shiver-rhythm of sound waves set in motion by the poetic voice, the *air de paroles*. This recalls the famous phrase applied to Baudelaire by Hugo: "frisson nouveau." The whole of the *Coup de Dés* is a prolonged version of this dialectical evolution.

Poe seems to have been an influence here: "Is not every word an impulse on the air?" (*The Power of Words*). My discovery here was duplicated by Cellier, who saw a further connection in "I spoke . . . into birth [these] brilliant flowers."

The *oeil profond* refers no doubt to the visual, somewhat Parnassian, quality of Gautier's art (he began as a painter); he was the "poet for whom the external world exists," as Gautier liked to say of himself; compare "le déplaisir éclaterait . . . qu'un chanteur ne sût à l'écart et au gré de pas dans l'infinité des fleurètes, partout où sa voix reconte une notation, cueillir" (364).

Rose: is always a feminine entity for Mallarmé, for example, in *Les Fleurs*, the *Faune*, and the various poems addressed to Méry Laurent (*Dame, sans trop d'ardeur, Rondel II*); the lily symbolizes the male faun: "Lys! et l'un de vous tous pour l'ingénuité"; together therefore they form a couple of universal significance.⁹

Compare "La rose aime le lys" (ML, p. 142).

Est-il de ce destin rien qui demeure, Is there of this destiny nothing which
non? remains. No?
O vous tous, oubliez une croyance O all of you, forget a somber belief.
sombre.
Le splendide génie éternel n'a pas Splendid eternal genius has no
d'ombre. shadow.

In the "O vous tous" and the "moi de votre désir soucieux," below, there is at least a partial—heart-warming and moving—reconciliation with the initially scorned crowd, as in Mallarmé's later work generally; compare "la Foule (où inclus le Génie)" (383), and particularly "Confrontation," "Conflit" and the *Coup de Dés* (C, pp. 159-166).

A juvenile poem (8) expressed the same quite conventional idea of spiritual survival on earth (an idea especially favored by poets since the Renaissance):

Et tout est dit. Oh! non, doit-on donc l'oublier?
Qui sut se faire aimer ne meurt pas tout entier!
On laisse sa mémoire ainsi qu'aux nuits l'étoile
Laisse une blanche fleur qu'aucune ombre ne voile.

There is a certain ambiguity in the word *ombre*, however, which may refer, like the earlier *spectre*, to sentimental belief, as opposed to the stoic credo of impersonal survival through art.

Note the bright *i-é-i-é* of the genius's light versus the dark nasals of *ombre* and *sombre*, the obscure *ou* of *vous tous*.

Moi, de votre désir soucieux, je veux	I, concerned about your desire, I
voir,	want to see
A qui s'évanouit, hier, dans le devoir	[Survive!] The one who vanished,
	yesterday, in the ideal
Idéal que nous font les jardins de cet	Duty set for us by the gardens of this
astre,	planet,
Survivre pour l'honneur du tranquille	Survive in honor [memory] of the
désastre	tranquil disaster
Une agitation solennelle par l'air	A solemn agitation through the air
De paroles . . .	Of words . . .

I, concerned about your desire to have *something* conquer death, want to see it this way: the one who vanished recently—from amidst the ideal duty set for us (poets) by the gardens of this planet—is survived by a solemn agitation of words through the air (or "by the air" of expressed words, the *frisson nouveau* of Gautier's voice, sound waves) which honor, or celebrate, the quiet disaster of physical death, that is, appraise the horror into something human, as art generally does—for example, those early incantatory forms of it that arise from funeral ritual.

Is this a statement of ultimate optimism, offsetting the ultimate pessimism of the first section ("soleil mortel" and so on)? This is not clear, nor could it be. Certainly it is a ringing affirmation of faith in the value of art, which outlives the body—"Je buste survit à la cité," Gautier's own famous little poem, *L'Art*, had declared—even if we cannot know the final destiny of man. For obviously the artistic "message" goes down to posterity, and though we know that we die, we do not know that this will ever die.

The ancient (since Aristotle) idea of art as appeasement of fear through rhythmic incantation—which, so to speak, spreads it out, homeopathically controls it—is treated with brilliant insight in "De même": "l'orgue . . . un balbutiement de ténèbres énorme, ou leur exclusion du refuge, avant de s'y déverser exaltées et pacifiées . . . causant aux hôtes une plénitude de fierté et de sécurité" (396).

devoir: recalls "Tout en moi s'exhalait de voir / La famille des tridées / Surgir à ce nouveau *devoir*" (*Prose*).

. . . pourpre ivre et grand calice clair,	. . . drunken purple and great clear
Que, pluie et diamant, le regard diaphane	That, rain and diamond, the diaphanous look
Resté là sur ces fleurs dont nulle ne se fane,	Remaining there on those flowers of which none fades,
Isolé parmi l'heure et le rayon du jour!	Isolates amid the hour and the radiancy of the day!

All this is in apposition to *paroles*: it is the epiphany of perfect poetic flowers: "La voix divine . . . chaque parole remonta, en pluie de fleurs" (631). They stand out to the pure look of Gautier, as any epiphany (meaning: "apparition," cf. Mallarmé's *Apparition*) does, or really as any authentic art does, which is "bigger than life," like the *hyperbole* of *Prose* with its *trop grands glaieus*.¹⁰ An implication of *pluie et diamant* is that the poet's gaze is the "rain and sunlight" of each "absente de tous bouquets." But the main effect is the combination of liquid transparency and hard brightness (kinesis and stasis) in these mysterious—androgynous, angelic—creatures, as in "pleurer le diamant" (60).

Compare this whole glowing passage to "je laisse cette larme, transparente comme mon rêve lucide," from an early essay on Gautier (262); also "une pluie éblouissante de diamants" (673); "une clairvoyance de diamant" (Lettre à Gosse); "Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant" (*Scène*).

We note the blooming hyperbolic *p*'s of *pourpre*, *paroles*, *pluie*, as in *Prose* (*hyperbole*, *trompettes*, *trop pour*, *trop grands glaieus*); the darkly or drunken amorous red-purple of *ou* (or *our*) in *pourpre* as in the bursting pomegranates of the *Famine*: "Tu sais ma passion que pourpre et déjà mûr" (note in passing the similar *p*'s) and the erotic sonnet *M'Introduire*: "comme mourir pourpre la roue." A keen, acute tone is added by the *i* of *ivre*; note the bright *w* and *i* of *pluie*, the *d* and the *i* of *diaphane* and *diamant* (cf. the two parallel effects of hard *d* and bright *i* in the just-quoted "Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant"); a circular halo effect is supported by the *o* of *isolé* and *rayon*.

C'est de nos vrais bosquets déjà tout le séjour,	It [art] is the entire abode already of our true groves,
Où le poète pur a pour geste humble et large	Where the pure poet has as his humble and broad deed
De l'interdire au rêve, ennemi de sa charge:	To ward off from it [i.e. from the haunt] [mere] dreaming, enemy of his task:

The last section is a solemn declaration of the poet's task: of death's victory over his earthly being; and of his final triumph, transfiguration into immortal glory; both—the death and the transfiguration—are symbolized by the "beautiful monument." The *rêve* is of the sentimental variety that bred the false hopes of immortality and the inarticulateness dealt with earlier in the poem. Mallarmé usually employs the word *rêve* in a positive sense—*rêverie* (as used in the Preface to the *Coup de Dés*) is closer to his meaning—but from the context there is little doubt of his usage here, as in "sortir [la Poésie] du Rêve et du hasard" (letter to Villiers, 1866; Davies). Chisholm is helpful on this point: in his *L'Art*, Gautier had counseled against vague dreaming, "Quand flotte ailleurs l'esprit" and added "Que ton rêve flottant / Se scelle / Dans le bloc résistant!"

The last few lines are fairly rhetorical and, to me, less successful as poetry. They may remind us of Baudelaire's statement in *Le Vin et le haschisch*: "Par l'exercice assidu de la volonté et la noblesse permanente de l'intention nous avons créé à notre usage un jardin de vraie beauté."

Afin que le matin de son repos altier, Quand la mort ancienne est comme pour Gautier	So that the morning of its [death's] [or "his, the poet's"] high repose, When ancient death is as for Gautier
De n'ouvrir pas les yeux sacrés et de se taire,	To not open the sacred eyes and utter no words,
Surjette, de l'allée ornement tribu- taire,	There should spring, as tributary or- nament of the lane,
Le sépulchre solide où git tout ce qui nuit,	The solid sepulchre where lies all that harms,
Et l'avare silence et la massive nuit.	Stingy silence and massive night.

The sense is that, the poet having performed his duty—"so that . . . there should spring"—depends on the verb *interdire*, the performance of the pure deed—there will be no harm other than to the physical body, which is summed up in the *n'ouvrir pas les yeux* and the *se taire*. Then proudly, as a monument to Gautier—*containing*, in a rich dialectical or paradoxical sense, the evil—a solid tomb, a *beau monument* [qui] *l'enferme tout entier*, where lies all that can harm (corporeal "silence" and "night," in sum the vicissitudes of human dust as opposed to immortal art), may spring up. Death and beauty are eventually inextricably linked for Mallarmé as they are for the Greek playwrights, for Shakespeare, Poe, Rimbaud, Valéry, Milosz; and the dazzling tombstone is one of his key images, particularly for poetic glory. "Every poem is an epiphany" (T. S. Eliot).
The implication of the elliptic "Afin que surgisse" is thus a tacit

conversion, a miraculous change from the uncompromisingly honest, stoic acceptance of bodily death to its fitting reward—like the ultimate constellation of *Un Coup de Dés* emerging from the dark night of an apocalypse—the immortal monument of glory, art.

yeux sacrés: the implication is that the sacredness of the eyes—Gautier's particular gift—survives their physical closing, as in the *Cantique de Saint Jean* and the *Tombeau d'Anatole*: "ferme ces doux yeux . . . et tu vivras" (f. 106).

tribunaire: mainly creates the image of a monument beside a cemetery lane; perhaps there is a suggestion that this *outer* shape pays tribute to the ways of ordinary mortals: "tombeau . . . ceux du dehors en bénéficient" (lecture on Villiers; 502); the uncertain meaning harmonizes with the prevailing ambiguity in this whole last section. Even the last line has a vibrant effect. Its dominant tone of massive calm expresses the flat line of death, that final horizon: "la ligne finale et calme du lourd tombeau" (*Tombeau d'Anatole*, f. 132).

NOTES

¹ The *hoir* of *Tout orgueil* is probably an echo of Villiers, who wrote: "La Mort est un pays inconnu d'où nul pleurin n'a pu revenir encore" (écrite Hamlet, dans son soliloque métaphysique. Ce qui nie absolument l'Apparition." (*Chez les Parents*, note the word *parents*)).

² The *chimère* of *Igitur*, which emerges like a vestigial constellation from the black experience of nothingness, is similar: "la clarté de la chimère en laquelle a agonisé son rêve" (436), cf. the *gairlande* of *Quand l'ombre*, the *heornes* of *Ses purs ongles*. Wallace Fowlie sees an influence of the poison-cup of *Faust*.

³ In "Bucolique" there is an image, only partly humorous, invoking the contrast between body and spirit: "Le Monsieur, plutôt commode, que certains observent la coutume d'accueillir par mon nom" versus "moi l'esprit, là-haut aux espaces miroitants" (401).

⁴ The term *parent* is several times used for Saint Jean in various fragments (N, pp. 109, ecc.) in the ambiguous sense of a man who happened by (and perhaps saw Hérodiasse naked) and a dying man. It is used in the sense of "the dead" in *La Dernière mode* (784), capitalized.

Ronsard, to whom Mallarmé owes much more than is realized, wrote in his *Épithaphe*: "Passant, j'ai dit, sur ta fortune / Ne trouble pas mon repos, je dors." Coppée's *Le Parent*, admired by Mallarmé, has "Je suis vraiment celui qui vient on ne sait d'où / Et qui n'a pas de but, le poète, le fou, / Avide seulement d'horizon et d'espace, / Celui qui suit au ciel les oiseaux et qui part." This has the ambiguous vibrancy we sense in Mallarmé's use. Even closer is "Je voile obscur qui te couvre, ô passant . . . Qu'ont-ils vu? qu'est-ce qu'ils font? qu'ont-ils dit, ces fils d'Ève? Rien" (Hugo, *Conséquences*, in Collier, p. 60).

⁵ The association of wind, fear, horizon, and the unreflecting crowd is found in "un vent ou peur de manquer à quelque chose exigeant le retour, chasse de l'horizon à la ville, les gens" (388).

⁶ The wintry wind of *Mes bouquins* is contrasted with the warm indoors memory of a summery classic scene. But elsewhere, of course, the wind can be something highly positive, as in "Crise de vers" where it stands for the fresh cleansing breath of the new spirit, "l'enseigne un peu rouillée... le vent l'a décrochée, d'où soufflé" (491), cf. "bouffée unique de joie" (510). Mallarmé is a poet of the outdoors as much as the indoors; *pace* Claudel, that claudicating elod of a genius.

⁷ A similar notion of unsaid words, but this time the poet's, is found in "Verlaine": "la parole haute cesse, et le sanglot des vers abandonnés ne suivra jusqu'à ce lieu de discrétion [the tomb] celui qui s'y dissimule." (510).

⁸ In the *Coup de Dés* he becomes rather Man, the oft-humbled Master of the world, including, as a later development, his special representative, the poet or artist. The ambiguity is hence similar in the two works.

⁹ Eternal poles in many a mystic doctrine, certainly Mallarmé's "primitives foudres de la logique" (386) which we have treated at length in our *Oeuvre de Mallarmé*. The pairing is reflected in Saint Jean, the pure upright ascetic, versus Hérodote, "la rose cruelle" (*Les Fleurs*); also more vaguely, in *Anastase* versus *Patibérie* of *Prose*, (q.v.). Of course, good symbolism is always a delicate matter, and to prove how elusive it can be there is: "Les demoiselles Caralis / L'autre une rose et l'une un lys" (165). We might remind those eager to throw out symbolism and its study because of such difficulties that certain qualities associated with the male are not only found in males. The whiteness of the lily, usually associated with the male, occasionally symbolizes the purity of the dead woman, as in "Ce que disaient les trois cigognes."

¹⁰ Mallarmé's vision is often eidetic; when an object is loved sufficiently it comes toward us, so to speak, like the swelling stomach of the window or mandolin in *Une dentelle*; cf. Eliot's "window belled like the fig's fruit" (*Ashe Wednesday*). Such elite apprehensions we now are apt to call "epiphanies," after Joyce. They are apart, isolated; the hyperbolic "trop grands glaçons" are surrounded by a "lacune / Qui des jardins les sépare"; in our more discursive terms, "an Erotic glow of 'knowing' surrounds the named object, replacing (arising as joy from sorrow) the black analytic boundary which kills its connections with the rest of reality. It is a kind of halo or aura... a pure phenomenon of knowing... Faith (*credo ut intellegam*) yields to a superior will, through a little death of the human will and reemerges as this transfiguration, the beauty of knowing." (W, p. 427).

9. ÉVENTAIL



—de Madame Mallarmé

This poem is a slight, quietly affectionate tribute to the modest, dutiful, somewhat faded and dull lady he married, investing her, as a gift, with a little poetic glamor and playful humor. It was written and published in 1891.

Avec comme pour langage	With as if for a language [the fan's rhythm seems to give off the poetic rhythm]
Rien qu'un battement aux cleux	Nothing but a [fan's] beating in the skies
Le futur vers se dégage	The future verse arises
Du logis très précieux	From the very precious dwelling [Madame Mallarmé]

The lady's fan seems to "beat out," or scan, in the air the poetry it inspires in the observing and admiring husband; the *logis* is, no doubt, her hand which is the source of the movement; the word is chosen for its domestic qualities. Thus, in the *Tombeau d'Anatole*, the mother's cradle-rocking was the source of the poet's rhythm (pp. 56-57); an exact equivalent is the "woman"-boat of the *Coup de Dés* (C, p. 154); see also the *bercement* of the *nef* in "Le Livre," pp. 17-18.

The *avec* is chosen partly for its *v*, the fan-shape, and wing-shape, as in the later words *éventail* and *vol*; compare *Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui*.

Allé tout bas la courtière	With wing low the courier
Cet éventail si c'est lui	This fan if it is
Le même par qui derrière	The same by which behind
Tel quelque miroir a lui	You some mirror has glistened

The fan is, as in *Autre éventail* (q.v.), a wing, the wing of a courier (bird), that is to say, seeming to have darted across the salon into the mirror behind her. The *aile-éventail* echo is important (it is featured in many of the *Vers de circonstance*, 107-110). We observe the bright effect of *si, lui, lui*, and the round *o* of *miroir*, with its liquid, soft, light-brimming *r*'s.