

CHAPTER 3



‘Le Drame solaire’: *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même*

C’est bien ce que j’observe sur moi — je n’ai créé mon œuvre que par *élimination*, et toute vérité acquise ne naissait que de la perte d’une impression qui, ayant étincelé, s’était consommée et me permettait, grâce à ses ténèbres dégagées, d’avancer profondément dans la sensation des Ténèbres absolues. La destruction fut ma Béatrice.

[This is exactly what I notice with myself — I have only created my work by way of *elimination*, and any truth gained was only born of the loss of an impression which, having gleamed, disappeared and allowed me, thanks to the darkness released, to advance deeply into the sensation of absolute Darkness.

Destruction was my Beatrice]

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ¹

If there is no essence of literature — i.e., self-identity of the literary thing — if what is announced or promised as literature never gave itself as such, that means, amongst other things, that a literature that talked only about literature or a work that was purely self-referential would immediately be annulled. You’ll say that that’s maybe what’s happening. In which case it is the experience of the nothing-ing of nothing that interests our desire under the name of literature. Experience of Being, nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It’s the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world.

JACQUES DERRIDA²

In Chapters 4 and 5, we will find the name ‘Mallarmé’ evoked to mark the opening of the ‘literary’ according to Blanchot’s and Derrida’s understanding of this term. As such, his text is understood to operate a kind of transition. It is the function of this chapter to provide an account of how this transition is effected in Mallarmé’s writings. In order to do this, I am going to turn to what was recognized at various points in twentieth-century Mallarmé scholarship to be a central motif in his work. I will argue that through a consideration of the ‘sunset’ in Mallarmé’s work we can contemplate both the closure of the ‘book’ *and* the opening of the space of ‘littérature’.³ It will be understood, therefore, as a hinge, a closing/opening mechanism.

There are two books which famously deal with ‘Le Drame solaire’ in Mallarmé’s work. The first to be written is *Mallarmé et le drame solaire* by Gardner Davies (1959). The second is *La Religion de Mallarmé*, by Bertrand Marchal (1988). The two authors put forward strikingly different theses concerning the import of the solar drama for Mallarmé’s poetics.

To summarize very quickly, Davies draws on his understanding of transposition as it is outlined in Mallarmé’s more theoretical writings to argue that the sunset enacts the annihilation of the natural order so that it can be resurrected ideally in the poetic work. Mallarmé makes perhaps his most explicit declarations on this mechanism in ‘Théodore de Banville’, where he says that ‘*La divine transposition, pour l’accomplissement de quoi existe l’homme, va du fait à l’idéal*’ [*The divine transposition, for the accomplishment of which man exists, goes from the thing to the ideal*].⁴

In *La Religion de Mallarmé* Marchal’s reading develops as a complex interrogation of Mallarmé’s writings to argue that his oeuvre can be properly understood as an obsessive return to the originary anguish of man confronted by the eternal tragedy of nature, the disappearance of the sun at the end of the day, which has been repressed until its resurgence in Mallarmé’s texts.

That these readings are both possible would perhaps indicate an ambiguity in the texts themselves. Is it then possible that the sunset is essentially ambiguous? It is this position that says both and neither (both the victorious accomplishment of the Absolute and the return of an originary trauma, and therefore neither the one nor the other exclusively) that I will be tracing in this chapter.

This will be undertaken through a reading of the *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même* which, in its later incarnation in the 1887 *Poésies* as *Ses purs ongles très haut...*, has been the subject of so much interpretative work. Commentators often broach the ‘Sonnet en yx’ with a sense of fatigue, as though it has been so thoroughly studied that there can be precious little left to say about it.⁵ In the present context, however, it has emerged as an unavoidable reference, which will allow me to account for an effect of ‘transition’ readable in Mallarmé’s texts.⁶ In fact, it is this ‘precious little’, this ‘next to nothing’, that will destabilize and displace the text in the very movement of its closure.

Before turning to read the poem itself, I will say something about the context of its production, linking it to the reading of *Hérodiade* given above. Why, then, is this sonnet of such importance in terms of the trajectory I traced through the last chapter?

In the first place, it is bound into the context there reconstructed by the brute fact of its date of composition.⁷ It is first mentioned in a letter to Lefébure written on 3 May 1868.⁸ In this letter Mallarmé tells his friend of a sonnet he has been writing and asks him to send him the ‘real’ meaning of the word ‘ptyx’, which he claims to have invented himself ‘par la magie de la rime’ [through the magic of rhyme].⁹ We can date, therefore, almost exactly the composition of this poem: it is happening as Mallarmé writes this letter, and he presses his friend to hurry as he is afflicted by ‘l’impatience “d’un poète en quête d’une rime”’ [the impatience ‘of a poet in search of a rhyme’]. The *Sonnet* is the only poem we know of written in the period following the abandonment of work on *Hérodiade* and during the period when Mallarmé was also working on *Igitur*.¹⁰

But beyond the date, what is there to link it to the aesthetic concerns of the poet as he delineates his *Œuvre*? I will look at the way in which the *Sonnet* is formed by the demands of the *Œuvre* in more detail below, but at this stage, it would be worthwhile anticipating this reading by making an obvious point that can again be

drawn from the correspondence of the poet; this poem seeks to enact the kind of (Narcissistic) self-reflexivity of the 'Œuvre pure'.

So, by its date and by its concerns the work occupies a highly significant position in Mallarmé's development.

The poem was sent to Cazalis on 18 July 1868 for inclusion in a collection of sonnets to be published with etched illustrations.¹¹ In the letter that accompanied the *Sonnet*, Mallarmé provides a description of a possible illustration and a few comments on the poem itself. It is here that it is famously described as a 'se réfléchissant de toutes les façons' [reflecting itself in every way]. In the last chapter where I followed Mallarmé's trajectory through the work on *Hérodiade* to the conception of his *Œuvre*, it was seen that the desire to write a work that was not simply beautiful but was beauty in an absolute sense necessarily meant the displacement of a transcendent measure of value and a movement towards immanence. It was argued that *Hérodiade* enacted the drama of this movement and that the narrative of the 'Scène' told the story of a poetics which was leaving behind a theo-logical writing, separating itself from its past ('vie de jeune fille') and the heavy burden of tradition associated with that past (La Nourrice), and announcing the coming of a new poetics ('plumage héraldique'). This movement implied a reflexive turn of the poem on itself, and it was argued in the reading that one level of the narrative, the referential, became, at certain decisive points, inseparable from the reflexive level of the narrative, in which the mirror plays a key structural role as it turns the poem back on itself. Absolute beauty would require a perfectly reflexive work, and it was the extraordinary demand of this narcissism which provoked the crisis of the late 1860s. The referential level of the perfectly narcissistic text would become inseparable from the reflexive level of the narrative to the degree that it would exclude everything external to the text itself; it would 'abolish chance'. It is in the context of this reflexivity that we can begin to read the *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même*.¹²

1. The 'Sonnet nul'

Sonnet allégorique de lui-même

La nuit approbatrice allume les onyx
 De ses ongles au pur Crime lampadophile,
 Du Soir aboli par le vespéral Phœnix
 De qui la cendre n'a de cinéraire amphore
 Sur des consoles, en le noir Salon: nul ptyx,
 Insolite vaisseau d'inanité sonore,
 Car le Maître est allé puiser l'eau du Styx
 Avec tous ses objets dont le rêve s'honore.
 Et selon la croisée au nord vacante, un or
 Néfaste incite pour son beau cadre une rixe
 Faite d'un dieu que croit emporter une nixe
 En l'obscurcissement de la glace, Décor
 De l'absence, sinon que sur la glace encor
 De scintillations le septuor se fixe.

[The approving night lights the onyx
 Of its claws by the light bearing pure Crime
 Of the Evening abolished by the vesperal Phoenix
 Of which the ash has no funerary amphora

On the consoles, in the black Room: null ptyx,
 Strange vessel of sonorous inanity,
 Because the Master has gone to draw water from the Styx
 With all the objects in which dream takes pride.

And through the window to the vacant north, a harmful
 Trace of gold encourages a struggle for its handsome frame,
 Produced by a god that a nix thought it had beaten

Into the darkening of the mirror, setting
 Of absence, except that on the mirror again
 In scintillations the septet is fixed]¹³

What is an allegory? The *OED* gives the following definition: ‘A figurative sentence, discourse or narrative in which properties or circumstances attributed to the apparent subject really refer to the subject they are meant to suggest; an extended or continued metaphor’. The World English Dictionary supplies this etymology: ‘from old French *allegorie*, from Latin *allēgoria*, from Greek, from *allēgorein* to speak figuratively, from *allos* other + *agoreuein* to make a speech in public, from *agora* a public gathering’. Allegory is defined, therefore, as an extended metaphor, a manner of speaking in which the apparent subject serves as a vehicle towards an other meaning. The title of this sonnet says, though, that it is allegorical of itself. The movement towards the other is folded back, returned on itself. Its apparent movement away from itself is therefore checked and the direction of referral internalized. It is allegorical, so the narrative of the apparent subject really refers to the subject it is meant to suggest, but the subject it is meant to suggest is ‘lui-même’.¹⁴

In the quotation at the opening of this chapter, Derrida says that ‘a work that was purely self-referential would immediately be annulled’ — maybe this is what is happening with this sonnet, this ‘sonnet nul’.¹⁵ The title suggests that Mallarmé has contrived to write a sonnet in which the referential level of the narrative is confused absolutely with the reflexive level. It would then answer the demand of the Absolute as it was implied in *Hérodiade*. This is what the title suggests. It remains to be seen how this sonnet works. I will begin this reading with the event which sets the scene: the pure ‘Crime’ of a global annihilation.

1.1. First Quatrain (*The Crime*)

The first quatrain of the *Sonnet* evokes, then, the solar catastrophe. It is not named as such. Before the opening line of the *Sonnet*, the sunset is a ‘fait accompli’. We read in the third line of the ‘Soir aboli par le vespéral Phœnix’; the evening (‘Soir’) has been destroyed in the movement of the descending sun (‘vésperal Phœnix’). As the sun went down, however, the stars appeared: ‘La nuit approbatrice allume l’onyx | De ses ongles’. It is as though the stars have been ignited by the light of the dying sun. This reading is encouraged because it is said that the ‘ongles’ are lit up ‘au pur Crime lampadophore’. The light of the ‘pur Crime’ is carried over (‘lampadophore

— celui qui portait les lumières dans les cérémonies religieuses' [the light-carrier in religious ceremonies]) to the approving night ('La nuit approbatrice'). What has taken place is a kind of sacred ceremony, the adjective 'vespéral' being overlaid with religious connotations, and the light of the dying sun ('Phœnix') has passed, via the 'lampadophore', to the stars. This may be why the remains of the phoenix are not to be collected in an amphora ('De qui la cendre n'a de cinéraire amphore'). It is a pure crime with no remains — there is nothing left except the stars lit by the passage of the 'Crime'.

But why should the poem open with the evocation of this passage? Why should this passage be called a 'Crime'? And why should this 'Crime' be called 'pur'? These are important questions because the 'pur Crime' is the condition of possibility of this sonnet: although the *Sonnet* does not describe the 'Crime' as such, it is assumed and evoked as the event which opens onto the sonnet 'se réfléchissant de toutes les façons'.

The 'Ouverture ancienne d'Hérodiade', written immediately following the 'Scène', constantly evokes the solar drama. There is confusion throughout the poem as to whether the strange light, 'la rougeur' (rouge heure), is that of a setting or rising sun. This confusion certainly has something to do with the ambiguous nature of Mallarmé's aesthetic project, which seeks on the one hand to leave behind a poetics tied to transcendence (cf. discussion in Chapter 2 of the *Nourrice* as a figure representing the tradition) and, on the other, to consecrate a new, absolute poetics of immanence. Towards the end of the 'Ouverture' we read:

De crépuscule, non, mais de rouge lever,
Lever du jour dernier qui vient tout achever,
Si triste se débat, que l'on ne sait plus l'heure
La rougeur de ce temps prophétique qui pleure (ll. 88–91)

[No sunset, but the red awakening
Of the last day concluding everything
Struggles so sadly that time disappears,
The redness of apocalypse, whose tears]

But the sunset evoked in the first quatrain of *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même* is not a simple metaphor, indicating the end of an affiliation. If it were, it would be of little more than sentimental interest. If the pure work implies, as a poetics of absolute interiority, a perfect auto-reflexivity then it cannot accommodate any reference beyond itself, it cannot accept the contingent and must work towards a purification which will 'abolish' chance.¹⁶ It was in this way that we read Mallarmé's famous statement in the letter of 13 July to Cazalis, where he says: 'après avoir trouvé le Néant, j'ai trouvé le Beau' [after discovering Nothing, I discovered Beauty]. 'Le Néant' is the elimination of everything, and it is this elimination which must be considered as a necessary condition for the production of the 'pure work'. Before the *Sonnet*, then, there is a sunset, and this sunset operates a global annihilation. Everything in the *Sonnet* is calculated to reinforce this evacuation of the world, to construct the 'Décor de l'absence'.

Let us consider for a moment the 'purity' of the crime. The sunset is in a strange position because it is in one (highly ambiguous) sense the only external referent of

the poem (the referent that destroys all referents *except* itself). The *Sonnet* evokes this sunset as the condition of its possibility — it transfers its light to the ‘ongles’ — but it is not in all rigour internal to the poem itself. And so, as the condition of the *Sonnet*’s possibility, the mechanism of the annihilation that sets the scene for the poem, it is both internal and external to the poem. There is an irreducible trace of the world, an irreducible impurity, an ‘outside’ of the text, an ‘ex-ergue’, which constitutes an un-sublatable excess that cannot be annulled in the poem’s reflexive structure.¹⁷ But for the *Sonnet* to achieve absolute reflexivity this impurity must be excluded, so the ‘crime’ is called ‘pure’. The ‘pur Crime’ would be the crime that destroys everything, including the crime itself — an absolute destruction with no remainder — but this is exactly what it cannot achieve.

We begin to catch sight then of the sunset as a closing and opening mechanism: its essential ambiguity. The sunset begins to emerge as the condition of possibility and impossibility of the identity of the self-reflexive (narcissistic) text.¹⁸

1.2. *Second Quatrain (ptyx and the ‘Maître’)*

In the second quatrain the darkness of the scene is again evoked (‘le noir Salon’). The cosmic drama has created the void necessary for the work. On the side-table (‘console’) there is nothing to be found except, perhaps, a ‘nul ptyx’; which is, again, strictly speaking, nothing. This word has given rise to a lot of speculation, but there is no need to look for any kind of ‘object’ here, even an absent one. On the console is a ‘nul ptyx’ and the *Sonnet* describes this ‘non-object’ as an ‘insolite vaisseau d’inanité sonore’. It is a piece of nothing, a sonorous inanity that is left when all possible referents have disappeared.¹⁹ The ‘Maître’ has removed all objects from the room, descending to the Styx ‘avec tous ses objets dont le rêve s’honore’. It therefore functions as a metonym for the poem itself, the ‘sonnet nul’. If there is anything left in the room, on the console, it is just the poem, but as the poem is nothing, ‘nul’, there is nothing there except this strange, absent, vessel (‘nul ptyx’), the strangeness of which is precisely that it refers to nothing but itself.

Ellen Burt says: ‘In a sense one can say that the *ptyx* reflects nothing more than itself. It is fully adequate to itself in that its only referent is itself, in that signifier and signified are one and the same, in that what it names is exactly itself.’²⁰ The ‘nul ptyx’ operates here a kind of ‘mise en abyme’ of nothingness: the ‘sonnet nul’ contains within itself, as a part of it, a little piece of nothing, the only referent of which is the nothingness of the *Sonnet* itself. The Greek meaning of the word ‘ptyx’ [fold] is therefore extremely felicitous, whether Mallarmé was aware of this or not. The word says nothing but itself, folding back on itself, ‘se réfléchissant’, in an incessant movement. We will see how this structure of self-referral, exhibited in exemplary fashion by this word, will be seen to be the very thing which, while promising the self-identity of the text, in fact displaces it, preventing it from ever coinciding with itself, from ever being ‘fully adequate to itself’.

The ‘Maître’ is also absent from the scene.²¹ He has gone to draw water from the Styx. We saw in the last chapter that the ‘synthesis’, taking place in the non-temporal time of Midnight, is accomplished through the agency of an ‘aptitude’, a logical function (Igitur), and not the poet who dies as an individual in this movement

('C'est t'apprendre que je suis maintenant impersonnel, et non plus Stéphane que tu as connu, — mais une aptitude qu'a l'Univers Spirituel à se voir et à se développer, à travers ce qui fut moi'). In 'Crise de vers' we read the following:

L'œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle trainée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l'ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase.²²

[The pure work implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet, who yields the initiative to words, through the clash of their ordered inequalities; they light each other up through reciprocal reflections like a virtual swooping of fire across precious stones, replacing the primacy of the perceptible rhythm of respiration or the classic lyric breath, or the personal feeling driving the sentences]

If the 'Maître' is absent, this is because the pure work implies his disappearance, his quasi-death (his death and resurrection as an 'aptitude') as he descends to the river that separates the earth from the underworld. He has relinquished the initiative to the words themselves. It is in this way that Mallarmé can suggest that a word ('ptyx') is created through 'la magie de la rime'. The meaning of the poem is no longer the personal affair of the poet but is generated in his absence through the internal relationship of the words. In the letter accompanying the *Sonnet* Mallarmé says: 'il est inverse, je veux dire que le sens, s'il en a un (mais je me consolerais du contraire grâce à la dose de poésie qu'il renferme, ce me semble) est évoqué par un mirage interne des mots mêmes' [it is the other way around, I mean the meaning, if there is one (but I would be happy to say the contrary thanks to the dose of poetry it contains, it seems) is evoked by an internal reflection of the words themselves]. The 'dose de poésie' is a measure of the autonomy yielded to the words themselves.²³

1.3. *The Tercets*

The tercets begin with the vision, through the north window ('selon la croisée au nord'), of the frame of a mirror, evoked only as the fleeting disappearance of its sumptuous decoration, showing the struggle between a god and a water nymph ('nixé'), into the darkness ('l'obscurcissement') of the mirror. With this disappearance, the setting of absence ('Décor | De l'absence') is complete.

In the last chapter we saw the importance of the mirror for *Hérodiade*. In *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même* it is again a highly significant structural element of the text. Without the mirror all of the various referential elements of the *Sonnet* encountered during the reading could not be turned back onto the *Sonnet* itself. The positioning of the mirror in the final tercet is therefore essential to setting up this structure.

It seems as though the god and the 'nixé' have disappeared into the oblivion of the mirror. But it only seems this way (the verb 'croire' already suggests that this disappearance may not be exactly what it seems). In any case, it is this last disappearance that creates the space of absence, and as the frame of the mirror disappears into the mirror itself, all that is left is a 'pure' reflecting surface. Precisely nothing: 'Décor | De l'absence'.

It is worth considering here the end of *Un coup de dés*. The phrase that runs through in smaller capitals evokes a similarly vacated space: ‘RIEN N’AURA EU LIEU QUE LE LIEU’, an absolute destruction, down to the pulsing absence of everything: the ‘Néant’ (what Levinas and Blanchot will name the ‘il y a’, see Chapter 4). In both poems, it is exactly here, where everything has disappeared, that an exception is announced. ‘EXCEPTÉ PEUT-ÊTRE’ says *Un coup de dés*, ‘sinon que...’ says *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même*. And it is right here that the passage from the ‘Néant’ to the ‘Beau’ ‘takes place’.²⁴ In the *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même* this happens through the agency of the mirror. On this pure reflecting surface (‘sur la glace encore’), which is nothing other than the poem itself, the ‘sonnet nul’ when it has been reduced to a setting of absence, ‘De scintillations le septuor se fixe’.²⁵ Here, then, is the ‘coup de théâtre’ which consecrates the *Sonnet* as an allegory of itself. ‘Le septuor’ is the constellation, doubled in the mirror to indicate the fourteen lines of the sonnet we have just read, or visually the seven Xs of the rhymes ‘en-x’. Pearson comments on the *septuor*:

A seven letter word suggesting (because of ‘scintillations’, not Mallarmé’s letter to Cazalis) a constellation of seven stars: a constellation reflected so that we have not only the fourteen lines of the sonnet, but the structure of the Petrarchan sonnet itself (a repeated four, a repeated three) and the rhyme scheme (two sevens: /iks/ and /ir/; or two fours: ‘yx/ix’ and ‘ore’; and two threes: ‘or’ and ‘ixe’).²⁶

2. The ‘Nothing-ing of Nothing’

What has just happened? In *Lecture de Mallarmé*, Marchal writes the following:

De l’‘inanéité sonore’ au ‘septuor’, du poème-réceptacle au poème-foyer, c’est donc le même poème, péjorativement puis emphatiquement mis en abyme, le même poème qui doit effacer toute trace de transitivité entre le monde et lui pour accéder à une auto-réflexivité totale. Le dernier vers renferme ainsi, triomphalement, l’allégorie du poème: le sonnet est allégorique de lui-même jusqu’en cette apothéose stellaire, puisque en une réflexion ultime et totalisante le poème idéalement apparu sur le miroir sous la forme du septuor est en fait le poème déjà écrit; le poème signifié apparaît comme le poème signifiant.²⁷

[From the sonorous ‘inanity’ to the ‘septuor’, from the poem-receptacle to the gathered-poem, it is therefore the same poem, pejoratively then emphatically *mis en abyme*, the same poem that must efface any trace of transitivity between itself and the world to accede to a total auto-reflexivity. The last line thus encloses, in triumph, the allegory of the poem: the sonnet is allegoric of itself up to and including this stellar apotheosis, since, in a final and totalising reflection, the poem which has ideally appeared on the mirror in the form of a septuor is in fact the poem that has already been written; the signified poem appears as the signifier poem]

When Marchal refers to ‘une auto-réflexivité totale’, he is referring to what we have been calling the perfect narcissism of the *Sonnet*. At a couple of points in the reading above it was indicated, however, that this narcissism might not be as successful as it would appear.

In his reading, Marchal says that with this final apotheosis which is the appearance of the poem itself, in the form of a 'septuor' in the mirror, the signified (signifié) poem appears as the signifier ('signifiant') poem. What does he mean by this, and how can this formulation be related to the reading strategy that I have been employing up until this point?

The *Sonnet* begins, we saw, with the illumination of the stars ('La nuit [...] allume les onyx | De ses ongles'). Having undertaken an initial reading of the poem, we can now say a little more about 'La nuit'. The later version of the *Sonnet* was, according to the *Œuvres complètes*, originally envisaged under the title *La Nuit*, it is therefore legitimate to say that 'La nuit' in the first line refers to the *Sonnet* itself, or, to be more precise, to the pure reflecting surface of the 'sonnet nul': the 'Décor | De l'absence'.²⁸ The stars, which glimmer in the first lines, emerge on this pure reflecting surface as the very lines of the poem which is here being read; they are accepted by the approving night ('La nuit approbatrice'). In the last lines of the final tercet these stars are 'fixed' in the reflecting surface of the mirror, again, the 'Décor | De l'absence'. It is an 'apothéose stellaire' because it is only with this last consecration that the poem's 'meaning' becomes clear. The stars we see at the beginning have no other referent than themselves — something we can only see through the agency of the mirror, or the poem (as pure reflecting surface) itself. When the last line says 'De scintillations le septuor se fixe', we are sent back to the very beginning of the poem which is recuperated in such a way that any possible movement of reference outside the poem is checked and the stars of the 'septuor' (the seven Xs of the rhyme scheme, etc.), shine with the strange light of self-referral: 'une sensation assez cabalistique'.²⁹ It is this movement of return on itself that Marchal refers to when he says that 'le poème signifié apparaît comme le poème signifiant'. The poem is simply the referent ('signifié') of its own reference ('signifiant'). Marchal says here the same thing as was noted above — that the title *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même* implies that the referential level of the narrative is confused absolutely with the reflexive level. The total obliteration of anything external to the poem means that all reference can only be self-reference, the two levels coincide and what the poem signifies is only itself as a signifier: 'insolite vaisseau d'inanité sonore'.

We have already noted a suspicion, however, that the poem has not been able to 'effacer toute trace de transitivité entre le monde et lui', that, in fact, something of an irreducible 'outside' has been carried through to disrupt the self-identity of the *Sonnet*. We might call this the 'double bind' of the 'pur Crime'. In the first place, the *Sonnet* requires the absolute annihilation of the world, the pure holocaust of the pure crime: only by excluding all trace of the outside, by 'abolishing chance', can the *Sonnet* close up on itself, can it 'renferme triomphalement, l'allégorie du poème'. The crime, however, can never be pure, or rather it can only ever be both pure and impure; the *Sonnet* must carry a trace of the annihilation that made it possible, and since that annihilation is of the world, that is, it belongs to the world even as it destroys it, the *Sonnet* is constrained to carry this 'outside' 'within'. The 'pur Crime' can never be simply what it claims to be, its purity is the index of a desire which cannot be realized, that is disrupted in the very movement of its realization.

This desire is the desire for an absolute identity, the pure presence to itself of meaning (the *now* of midnight uncontaminated by past or future). In the *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même*, what is laid bare is that the poetic Absolute can never achieve the necessary purity which would allow it to attain this absolute presence to itself or identity. The ‘pur Crime’ if it were ‘pur’ would imply the annihilation of the work itself, its annulment, as it closes on itself in perfect reflexivity. It is this impossible completion that is staged in the *Sonnet*, driven as it is by the promise of its own destruction. In the next chapter, we will see how this desire is contemplated by Blanchot as the desire of the first night (‘la première nuit’).³⁰

Let us look again at the last line of the *Sonnet*, the one of which Marchal says that it: ‘renferme [...] triomphalement, l’allégorie du poème’. We have seen in the foregoing analysis that when we read ‘le septuor se fixe’, the poem is consecrated as an allegory of itself. Marchal’s reading is hardly contestable on this score. But this attempt to write a ‘sonnet nul’, a sonnet which annuls itself through its own perfect reflexivity, cannot have worked. Mallarmé’s last poem tells us as much: ‘UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS QUAND BIEN MÊME LANCÉ DANS DES CIRCONSTANCES ÉTERNELLES [...] N’ABOLIRA LE HASARD’ [A THROW OF THE DICE WILL NEVER EVEN WHEN LAUNCHED IN ETERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES ABOLISH CHANCE]. Even if the requisite purity seems to have been achieved (‘quand bien même lancé dans des circonstances éternelles’), chance cannot be excluded.³¹ The aleatory is irreducibly at work in the game of writing.

In ‘Psyché: Inventions de l’autre’, an essay which is the text of two conferences papers given in 1984 and 1986, in the course of a reading of *Fable* by Francis Ponge, Derrida gives an indication of how we might re-read the ‘apothéose stellaire’ of *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même*.³²

An initial question: what is the status of the pronouncement at the end of the *Sonnet*? A first answer might be, if we refer to the categories of speech act theory elaborated by J.L. Austin, that it is a ‘constative’ statement.³³ In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin gives the minimal definition of such a speech act as a true or false statement.³⁴ In ‘Signature événement contexte’, Derrida cites the definition given by the French translator of Austin’s work: ‘l’énonciation *constative* (c’est-à-dire l’“affirmation” classique, conçue la plupart du temps comme une “description” vraie ou fausse des faits)’ [the *constative* utterance (that is the classical ‘assertion’ most often conceived as a true or false ‘description’ of the facts)].³⁵ ‘Le septuor se fixe’ seems, then, to be readily comprehensible as this kind of statement. The poem, in its final line, describes a state of affairs which is either true or false. But can this category of utterance account fully for the ‘function’ of the last line of the *Sonnet*? At certain points in the analysis above, I said that the last line ‘consecrates’ the *Sonnet* as a self-reflexive work. This verb suggested itself firstly on account of the ‘religious’ connotations at the opening of the poem, but also because the statement, ‘le septuor se fixe’, on a particular level of reading, has an unavoidable ‘performative’ dimension. A ‘performative’ utterance, as used by Austin is defined by his French translator, again cited in ‘Signature événement contexte’, in the following way: ‘*performative* c’est-à-dire celle qui nous permet de faire quelque chose par la parole elle-même’ [*performative*, that is the utterance which allows us to do

something by means of speech itself].³⁶ This sentence, then, carries out an action. Something is achieved through it: the establishment of the poem as a self-reflexive unity. As the *Sonnet* conflates the two levels of narrative, referential and reflexive, it becomes impossible to decide what kind of utterance 'le septuor se fixe' is. It is both constative and performative, and therefore strictly neither one nor the other. Reference to Derrida's reading of Ponge will allow us to see what is at stake in this confusion or undecidability.

Fable is a short text of seven lines in italics and a kind of post-face of two lines in roman text. It begins with the words: '*Par le mot par commence donc ce texte*' [*With the word with begins then this text*]. It is, Derrida says, a 'un mythe d'origine impossible' [a myth of impossible origin]. The interest of this text for Derrida is the way in which it deconstructs the opposition of the 'constative' and 'performative'. In his reading given in *Roger Laporte: The Orphic Text*, Maclachlan summarizes as follows:

Derrida notes that the self-reference of the opening line describes its own inaugural performance, it is at once constative and performative, and in referring to itself and nothing else, is at once language and metalanguage, and neither [...]. These simultaneities inscribe a division within the self-reference of the line: referring to itself, saying what it does, it refers to itself otherwise in the constation of its own performance, articulated and divided, we might say, by the minimal *différance* which is the time of reading.³⁷

With the word 'par', the text begins the enactment of its own beginning, but its first statement, its first 'descriptive' (constative) statement states this inaugural performance. This constative statement is also, however, the performance of its own beginning:

Le constat est le performatif même puisqu'il ne constate rien qui lui soit antérieur ou étranger. Il performe en constatant, en effectuant le constat — et rien d'autre. Rapport à soi très singulier, réflexion qui produit le soi de l'auto-réflexion en produisant l'événement par le geste même qui le raconte.³⁸

[The constative statement is the performative itself, since it points out nothing that is prior or foreign to itself. Its performance consists in the 'constation' of the constative — and nothing else. A quite unique relation to itself, a reflection that produces the self of self-reflection by producing the event in the very act of recounting it]³⁹

We move from one to the other in an 'oscillation infiniment rapide'. This oscillation has a strange effect when we come to consider the word 'par'. Its second occurrence in the text seems to be a citation of its first occurrence; Derrida notes that the typology of the word indicates that it is a quotation. That is to say, the 'par' of the constative statement seems to quote the '*par*' of the performative statement. But as, on the level of the statement as a whole, the 'constat est le performatif même', the 'par' of the constative statement does not simply cite the performative '*par*'. The first 'par' belongs to the phrase in which it will be cited and in which, therefore, it will cite itself. As there is no event being referred to, except the linguistic event, here recounted as it produces itself, this event takes place through its own citation: 'Rapport à soi très singulier, réflexion qui produit le soi de l'auto-réflexion en produisant l'événement par le geste même qui le raconte'. It never takes place for a first time, and this is why it is a 'mythe d'origine impossible'.

Looking again at the *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même*, we are presented with a similarly complicated structure of self-reference. The last line says: ‘le septuor se fixe’. On the one hand, as we saw above, this is a simple ‘constative’ statement, but on the other, and immediately, it ‘performs’ the consecration of the poem as a self-referential work. We could here re-cite the quotation above from *Psyché*, it is appropriate in its totality. The constative *is* the performative. The line does these two things at once: ‘Une circulation infiniment rapide [...] Celui-ci est ce qu’il est, un texte, ce texte-ci, en tant qu’il fait passer *dans l’instant* la valeur performative du côté de la valeur constative et inversement’ [An infinitely rapid circulation [...] This text is what it is, a text, this text here, inasmuch as — *instantaneously* — it transfers the performative into the constative, and vice versa] (p. 12).

We saw above how the ‘septuor’ (when it is doubled in the mirror) can refer to the fourteen lines of the *Sonnet*, or visually to the seven Xs of the rhymes ‘en -x’. The constellation with seven stars is the Plough (the ‘tail’ section of Ursa Major); this is further verified in the poem because the window is to the north.⁴⁰ The constellation has four stars in the plough end and three in the handle. A distribution echoed in the *Sonnet* where four of each of the line endings (masculine -x and feminine -re) are found in the quatrains and three in the tercets (feminine ‘-xe’ and masculine ‘-or’). The distribution of the Xs through the poem is the same, four in the quatrains and three in the tercets. When the last X is laid down in the last word of the poem, it visually completes the constellation, providing the last of the stars and fixing the ‘septuor’. At the same time as it ‘describes’ a state of affairs, the ‘se fixe’ provides the final element, the missing star (X) of the *Sonnet* it ‘describes’. The ‘se fixe’ oscillates at infinite speed between these two textual functions.

Strangely, in this stellar apotheosis, it is also the word ‘septuor’ which is fixed in the *Sonnet*. It is a seven-letter word and therefore a group of seven (a ‘septuor’) itself. In the mirror of the poem the ‘septuor’ discovers itself as self-reference; it re-marks itself in the moment of its inscription in a sentence which is irreducibly both constative and performative. The ‘septuor’ begins to flicker in the strange light of its own self-reference. On the one hand, on the referential level, it refers to the *Sonnet*, and on the other, the reflexive level, it refers to itself, but the absolute confusion of these two levels, divides the word in the moment of its inscription. Because we can never stop the oscillation of reference and self-reference, we can never be sure about the ‘first time’ of the word. It ‘begins’ in the play of re-citation, and the word’s meaning is absolutely undecidable.

And what about the ‘nothing’ word which, it was noted, is an exemplary word serving as a metonym for the ‘sonnet nul’ itself: the ‘ptyx’?

The ‘ptyx’ is included in the poem as signifier which is at once absolutely empty and absolutely full. Because it is cut loose from any referent (an ‘Insolite vaisseau d’inanité sonore’) the word should not refer beyond itself. Reducing completely the difference between signifier and signified it should operate as an instance of pure, self-identical meaning, and because it does not mean any thing, it does not mean anything; it is a ‘nul ptyx’ in the same way and for the same reasons that the *Sonnet* is a ‘sonnet nul’. But even in the highly controlled context of the *Sonnet*, it cannot extract itself from the process of meaning generation.

In the initial reading of the poem given above, the 'ptyx' was seen to function as a metonym for the 'sonnet nul'. It is an exemplary moment of the text because it is a word with no reference except itself. But, because of this, the 'ptyx' is not quite nothing. At the absolute minimum it still functions as an example of nothing, and this is why it can be considered a metonym for the *Sonnet*. Even if we allow that the 'ptyx' has no referent, if it does not mean anything outside of the context of the *Sonnet* (as Mallarmé would have liked), then this minimum function cannot be excluded, it is still, through its status as a mark (grapheme), involved in the process of meaning generation. To return to the quotation with which I opened this chapter, we can say that the 'purely self-referential' work cannot annul itself; there is still the 'experience of the nothing-ing of nothing'. Pure self-identity would be the accomplishment of truth in the poetic Absolute. It would be this accomplishment on condition of the destruction of the *Sonnet* itself, as the poetic work enacts the self-transcendence of art in its own sphere, and arrives at a beauty which is equivalent to nothing ('le Néant'). What Mallarmé discovers here, however, is the irreducibility of externality or chance.

This is the reason why the *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même* has emerged as an unavoidable reference. This poem stages, in exemplary fashion, the annulment of the work in its self-reference, but it also demonstrates the impossibility of achieving the desired closure. The word 'ptyx' cannot simply say nothing because it is constrained, in the same movement, to 'say-itself-saying-nothing': the mark (grapheme) 'ptyx' re-marks itself as a word saying nothing, as it says nothing. There is no poetic Absolute because there can be no meaning which is self-identical and independent from the moment of its inscription. The movement of signification cannot be reduced. There is no poetics of pure interiority because it cannot be expressed except via the detour of exteriority, which will always introduce a measure of contingency.

Nothing nothings. Chance cannot be mastered, but this is not through some failure of the poet. Chance has not been mastered where it should have been. So the Master is all at sea, sinking with the wreckage of his craft.

3. The End of Art

At the end of this chapter I will look at the *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même* in terms of the broader trajectory being traced here. In the first two chapters I was interested in the way in which Mallarmé came to his conception of the Absolute through his work on *Hérodiade*. At the highest stage of art-historical development, the work effects a transition from a poetics in which value (beauty) is referred to a measure external to the poem, or transcendent, to a poetics in which beauty is 'for itself' ('pour moi, pour moi' says *Hérodiade*). This new poetics implied a self-reflexivity which was evident in *Hérodiade* and which, as we have seen in the course of this chapter, is staged in *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même*. Why, then, does the demand of the Absolute lead to this reflexivity? We can answer this question by looking again at the decisive passage of Marchal's reading of *Ses purs ongles très haut...*:

le sonnet est allégorique de lui-même jusqu'en cette apothéose stellaire, puisque en une réflexion ultime et totalisante le poème idéalement apparu sur le miroir

sous la forme du septuor est en fait le poème déjà écrit; le poème signifié apparaît comme le poème signifiant.⁴¹

[the sonnet is allegoric of itself up to and including this stellar apotheosis, since, in a final and totalizing reflection, the poem which has ideally appeared on the mirror in the form of a septuor is in fact the poem that has already been written; the signified poem appears as the signifier poem]

So what happens at the moment of the stellar apotheosis? We have already noted that the constellation thus achieved results from the synthesis restaged in the tale of *Igitur* (cf. note 24 above). This passage through which the 'septuor se fixe' is nothing other than the passage to the Absolute as it has been conceived in Mallarmé's work. Marchal says that this apparition of the 'septuor' in the mirror leads to the logical conclusion that the signified poem coincides with the signifier poem. The Absolute would be the coincidence of signifier and signified: the presence to itself of meaning through the absolute reduction of signification. We encountered the same conclusion in the citation from Burt's discussion of the 'ptyx', which, it was said, stands as a metonym for the poem as a whole: 'It is fully adequate to itself in that its only referent is itself, in that signifier and signified are one and the same, in that what it names is exactly itself'.⁴²

This identity is, for the Mallarmé of *Igitur*, the ultimate horizon of the work of art, the achievement of which is the task he is charged with accomplishing. We read there, for example: '*Un coup de dés qui accomplit une prédiction, d'où a dépendu la vie d'une race*' [*A throw of the dice which fulfils a prediction, on which has depended the life of a people*].⁴³ In a paragraph just before, Mallarmé writes:

Tout ce qu'il en est, c'est que sa race a été pure: qu'elle a enlevé à l'Absolu sa pureté, pour l'être, et n'en laisser qu'une Idée elle-même aboutissant à la Nécessité: et que quant à l'Acte, il est parfaitement absurde sauf que mouvement (personnel) rendu à l'Infini: mais que l'Infini est enfin fixé.⁴⁴

[All there is, is that his people has been pure: that it has raised its purity to the Absolute, in order that it be, leaving nothing of this but an Idea itself arriving at Necessity: and that regarding the Act, it is perfectly absurd except as (personal) movement returned to the Infinite: but that the Infinite is finally fixed]

The 'Act' which is the achievement of the synthesis in a poetic work (referred to in the previous quotation as *Un coup de dés*) is the act of purification which 'fixes' the infinite. The seeming paradox that the infinite can be 'fixed' is cleared up if we remember that Hegel had made a distinction between the 'true' infinite and the 'false' infinite.⁴⁵ The infinite can be fixed in as much as the poetic work is perfectly adequate to its idea — it is united with its concept. Mallarmé was very well aware of what is at stake when we talk, with Hegel, of something's concept. In 'Notes sur le langage' he says: 'Le moment de la Notion d'un objet est donc le moment de la réflexion de son présent pur en lui-même ou sa pureté présente' [The moment of the Concept of an object is therefore the moment of the reflection of its pure present into itself or its present purity].⁴⁶ The poetic Absolute, 'fixed' through the act of synthesis (or the reflexive turn of the 'sonnet nul' — 'le septuor se fixe'), reflects the work into its pure (self) presence. The reflexivity of the work is simply the mechanism through which this return to self in presence is

effected. This pure presence of the work is the ultimate horizon of the artwork, and because the artwork, as such, is metaphysical through and through, because it belongs to the history of the West, we have to say that the passion we read in all of Mallarmé's texts which return again and again to this notion of purity is, in itself, a metaphysical passion.⁴⁷

Mallarmé's achievement is, however, ambiguous. It is this ambiguity which makes him uniquely interesting to both Blanchot and Derrida. In the reading given above, I argued that the 'pur Crime' of the *Sonnet* was compromised in its purity. It is not that Mallarmé failed where he could have succeeded — the impurity of the 'pur Crime' appeared rather as an essential impurity. The crime could not be pure without an annihilation that destroys everything, including all trace of the crime itself. But something must remain of this crime — the 'inside', the presence to itself of meaning in the poem, is unsettled by the trace of the 'outside', the pure/impure condition of its possibility. The narcissistic reflexivity of the pure work ('l'œuvre pure') fails in its very accomplishment. The work of art, opened in this way by its outside as it encounters the impossibility of pure presence, is no longer strictly speaking a work of art. If the artwork has been produced within a horizon of truth as self-presence, then a work which encountered the impossibility of achieving this purity would no longer belong to the history of art.⁴⁸ With this encounter we enter what Blanchot calls the 'l'espace littéraire'.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. *CLP*, pp. 348–49 (letter to Lefébure, 27 May 1867).
2. Jacques Derrida, "That Strange Institution Called Literature": An interview with Jacques Derrida, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 47.
3. The 'book' is an extremely important notion, for both Blanchot and Derrida, which we have already encountered, and which I will examine in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5. The 'book' is produced under the constraints of a metaphysical paradigm that has dominated/constituted the history of the West. We saw in the introduction how, in Blanchot's short 'Note' at the beginning of *L'Entretien infini*, he explicitly uses the name Mallarmé to designate a movement beyond the concept of the 'book' and towards the experience of something he calls 'littérature'.
4. *OC*, p. 522. See also on this subject 'Crise de vers', in *OC*, p. 366 and passim. For Davies's interpretation see the introduction to *Mallarmé et le drame solaire*, and 'Mallarmé's commitment to "Transposition"' in *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 26 (January–April, 1989), 52–70.
5. See, for example, the first words of Marchal's reading of the later published version *Ses purs ongles très haut...* in *Lecture de Mallarmé: 'Du nouveau sur le sonnet en -ix? Sûrement pas...'* [Again on the sonnet en-yx? Surely not...], p. 165. Marchal provides here an extensive list of commentaries up until the publication of his book in 1985. At the beginning of Roger Pearson's reading of the sonnet in *Unfolding Mallarmé* (1996), he supplements this list with more recent publications (p. 139).
6. We have already Blanchot's commentary on this movement that takes the name of 'Mallarmé'. For a similar evocation in Derrida's work, see 'La Double Séance', in *La Dissémination*, p. 255, where he speaks of a 'déplacement que nous nommons ici par convention "mallarméen"' [displacement we name here by convention 'Mallarmean'].
7. It is in part because of its date of composition that I am focusing my attention on this early version of the sonnet which was not published during the lifetime of the poet, rather than *Ses purs ongles très haut...*, the later revised version, which appeared in *Poésies* in 1887. In *Unfolding Mallarmé* Pearson notes: 'Almost always [...] attention has focussed on the 1887 version ('Ses purs ongles...'), while "Sonnet allégorique de lui-même" (1868) has tended to be passed over

- as the less accomplished version of a hermetic masterpiece [...] only one commentary has been dedicated to “Sonnet allégorique de lui-même” (p. 139).
8. It is, an editorial note assures us: ‘[Le] premier poème écrit par Mallarmé après la crise d’*Hérodiade*’ [the first poem written by Mallarmé after the crisis of *Hérodiade*] (*CLP*, p. 393).
 9. *CLP*, p. 386 (letter dated 3 May 1868). This is the same letter, mentioned in the last chapter, in which Mallarmé speaks of a two-year frequentation of the Absolute since his stay in Cannes.
 10. In Bonniot’s preface he dates the composition of *Igitur* between 1867 and 1870 (*OC*, p. 426).
 11. The collection was published by Lemerre in 1869 without a contribution from Mallarmé; the correspondence concerning this omission can be read in *OC*, p. 1489.
 12. The editorial note attached to the letter of 18 July says that it is: ‘l’illustration parfaite d’une poésie désormais consciente d’elle-même qui consacre l’immanence du sens’ [the perfect illustration of a poetry now conscious of itself which consecrates the immanence of meaning].
 13. In my translation I have made no attempt to respect the rhyme scheme or the metre. The reading given in this chapter is of the French work and the translation is provided for the convenience of the reader only.
 14. ‘Oui, c’est pour moi, pour moi, que je fleuris, déserte!’ (l. 86) [Yes, it is for me, for me, that deserted I bloom] says *Hérodiade*.
 15. ‘J’ai pris ce sujet d’un sonnet nul et se réfléchissant de toutes les façons’ [I took this subject of a null sonnet reflecting itself in every way] (*CLP*, p. 392).
 16. There is an interesting parallel here with Hegel’s *Aesthetics*, which was, as noted above, already available in a French edition. In volume 1, chapter 3, ‘The Beauty of Art or the Ideal’, Hegel writes: ‘Now since art brings back into this harmony with its true Concept what is contaminated in other existents by chance and externality, it casts aside everything in appearance which does not correspond with the Concept and only by this purification does it produce the Ideal’ (p. 155).
 17. In this sense it resembles, structurally, the *pre*-face as it is analyzed by Derrida in ‘Hors livre’, in *Dissémination*: ‘On a toujours écrit les préfaces, semble-t-il... en vue de leur propre effacement. Parvenu à la limite du *pré* (qui présente et précède, ou plutôt devance la production présentative et, pour mettre devant les yeux ce qui n’est pas encore visible, doit parler, prédire et prédiquer), le trajet doit en son terme s’annuler. Mais cette soustraction laisse une marque d’effacement, un *reste* qui s’ajoute au texte subséquent et ne s’y laisse plus tout à fait résumer’ [We have always written prefaces, it seems, with a view to their erasure. Having arrived at the limit of the *pre* (which presents and precedes, or rather pre-empts the presentative production and, to show what is not yet visible, must speak, predict and predicate), the passage must ultimately annul itself. But this subtraction leaves a mark of erasure, a *remains* which is added to the subsequent text and does not quite allow itself to be incorporated] (p. 15).
 18. This ambiguity will be significant in the next chapter, where I will be looking at Mallarmé’s importance for Blanchot as he distinguishes ‘the night’ and the ‘other night’ in *L’Espace littéraire*.
 19. Bertrand Marchal writes: ‘En tout cas, ce mot vide, qui témoigne d’une structure formelle nécessaire construite sur le ruine de toute représentation extérieure, est la limite du désir mallarméen, tel qu’il se manifeste dans le sonnet en –ix, d’une création verbale pure, désencombrée d’objets, qui renvoie à l’absence de toute réalité’ [In any case, this empty word — which bears witness to a necessary formal structure built on the ruin of any exterior presentation — is the limit of Mallarméan desire, such as it is manifested in the sonnet en–yx, for a purely verbal creation, clear of objects, which refers to the absence of all reality] (*Lecture de Mallarmé*, p. 180).
 20. See Ellen Burt ‘Mallarmé’s “Sonnet en yx”: The Ambiguities of Speculation’, *Yale French Studies*, 54 (1977), 69–73. As I go on in this reading, I will try to show why this structure of self-referral does not mean that the ‘ptyx’ is ‘fully adequate to itself’, that in fact what it reveals is the non-coincidence with itself of the graphic mark.
 21. I would take this opportunity to indicate two errors of transcription in the notes of the first edition of the *Œuvres complètes* which could give rise to certain confusions. Both of them are in the reproduction of the letter accompanying the sonnet which Mallarmé sent to Cazalis. The first is in the description of a possible etching to accompany the poem in the Lemerre edition.

The notes have 'une chambre avec une personne dedans'; in both editions of the correspondence I have consulted this line reads 'une chambre avec personne dedans', a significant difference given the reading of the poem here underway. In Ellen Burt's reading of the 'Sonnet en γx ', this error does, in fact, give rise to interpretative difficulties (cf. p. 59). The second error gives the sentence: 'J'ai pris ce sujet d'un sonnet nu' instead of 'J'ai pris ce sujet d'un sonnet nul'. The use of the adjective 'nu' is suggestive in terms of Mallarmé's concerns (cf. the discussion of 'nudité' in the last chapter), which makes the error all the more serious. Both of these errors are corrected when the same letter is cited by the editor in the notes of the 1998 edition of the *OC*.

22. *OC*, p. 366. Translation taken from *Divagations*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), p. 208 (slightly modified).
23. The absence of the poet from his work is discussed in the letter of 27 May 1867 to Levébure (*CLP*, p. 350): 'Car tout cela n'a pas été trouvé par le développement normal de mes facultés, mais par la voie pécheresse et hâtive, satanique et facile, de la Destruction de moi, produisant non la force, mais une sensibilité qui, fatalement, m'a conduit là. Je n'ai, personnellement, aucun mérite, et c'est même pour éviter le remords (d'avoir désobéi à la lenteur des lois naturelles) que j'aime à me réfugier dans l'impersonnalité — qui me semble une consécration' [Because all this has not been discovered through the normal development of my faculties, but by the hasty and sinful, satanic and simple, path of Destruction of self, producing not a power but a sensibility which, fatefully, led me there. Personally I take no credit, and it is even so as to avoid the regret (of having disobeyed the slower rhythm of natural laws) that I like to shelter in impersonality — which seems to me a consecration]. In this quotation, we again find the association of the passage to a new poetics with the notion of sin. The 'Destruction' necessary for the pure work is a crime. The passage to impersonality is a consecration, which accords with the religious atmosphere at the beginning of the *Sonnet*.
24. In both cases, the constellation in which the words 's'allument de reflets réciproques' [light up through reciprocal reflection] is set up through the agency of a logical function, an exception announced in the space of the 'Néant'. Inasmuch as this logical function 'achieves' the synthesis of the work, it coordinates with the function of the *Igitur* as it was analysed in the previous chapter. I will investigate these analogical instances in the reading of *Un coup de dés* in Chapter 5.
25. See discussion above of the 'purity' of the mirror encountered in *Igitur* ('Le Minuit' in the last chapter).
26. *Unfolding Mallarmé*, p. 154.
27. *Lecture de Mallarmé*, p. 186.
28. When the *Sonnet allégorique de lui-même* was reproduced in the 1998 edition of the *OC*, a number of errors of transcription were rectified. Significantly, the 'n' of La Nuit was capitalized, an amendment which serves to emphasize the coincidence of the reflexive and referential levels of the text (see below), as the reference for 'La Nuit' is nothing other than the sonnet which begins, therefore, by citing its own 'title'. Other amendments are: the insertion of a comma in the second line before 'lampadophore'; the addition of 'de' in l. 3 of the second quatrain which now reads 'puiser de l'eau du Styx', and can be read as a full alexandrine; the capitalization of the 'r' of Rêve in the last line of the second quatrain; the capitalization of the 'n' of Nord in the first line of the first tercet; the decapitalization of the 'D' in décor in the first line of the second tercet.
29. Mallarmé's letter to Cazalis: 'En se laissant aller à le murmurer plusieurs fois on éprouve une sensation assez cabalistique' [If you permit yourself to murmur is several times you experience a pretty cabalic sensation] (*OC*, p. 1489).
30. See especially 'La piège de la nuit', in *L'Espace littéraire*.
31. See discussion above (Chapter 2, part 2, '1866 — Conception of the *Œuvre*') on the association of the pure work with the eternal.
32. Jacques Derrida, *Psyché: inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987–1998)..
33. See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962).
34. See 'Lecture 1'.
35. 'Signature événement contexte', in *Marges de la philosophie*.
36. Austin offers this basic definition: 'I propose to call it a *performative sentence* or a performative

- utterance, or, for short, ‘a performative’... The name is derived, of course, from ‘perform’, the usual verb with the noun ‘action’: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action — it is not normally thought of as just saying something’ (*How to Do things with Words*, p. 7).
37. Ian Maclachlan, *Roger Laporte: The Orphic Text* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), p. 126.
 38. Derrida, *Psyché*, p. 24.
 39. Derrida, ‘Psyche: Inventions of the Other’, translated by Catherine Porter in Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 12 (translations occasionally modified).
 40. The North Star (Polaris) can be located by imagining a line between two stars of the Plough and extending it.
 41. *Lecture de Mallarmé*, p. 186.
 42. ‘Mallarmé’s “Sonnet en yx”: The Ambiguities of Speculation’, p. 72.
 43. *Igitur*, in *OC*, p. 442.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 442.
 45. ‘Dualism, in putting an insuperable opposition between finite and infinite, fails to note the simple circumstance that the infinite is thereby only one of two, and is reduced to a particular. Such an infinite, which is only a particular, is co-terminous with the finite which makes for it a limit and a barrier: it is not what it ought to be, that is, the infinite, but is only finite’, Hegel, *Logic*, part 1 of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. by William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 139. See also Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. by A.V. Miller (New York: Humanity Books, 1969), especially the section on ‘Infinity’ in Book 1, Chapter 2: ‘This contradiction occurs as a direct result of the circumstance that the finite remains as a determinate being opposed to the infinite, so that there are *two* determinatenesses; *there are* two worlds, one infinite and one finite, and in their relationship the infinite is only the *limit* of the finite and is thus only a determinate infinite, an *infinite which is itself finite*’ (pp. 139–40).
 46. Mallarmé, ‘Notes sur le langage’, in *Igitur/Divagations/Un coup de dés*, p. 73 (this work was written, but never published in his lifetime, during the period when Mallarmé was working on *Igitur*).
 47. On this subject, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *Les Muses* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), especially section 4 of the chapter entitled ‘Le vestige de l’art’, which begins: ‘Si l’on veut bien être attentive, et peser avec précision les mots et leur histoire, on conviendra qu’il y a une définition de l’art qui englobe toutes les autres (pour l’Occident du moins, mais “art” est un concept de l’Occident)’ [If we are really willing to be attentive, and weigh our words carefully along with their history, we will admit that there is one definition of art that encompasses all the others (for the West at least, but ‘art’ is a Western concept)].
 48. See Derrida’s remarks at the beginning of ‘La Double Séance’: ‘Entre Platon et Mallarmé [...] une histoire a eu lieu. Cette histoire fut aussi une histoire de la littérature, si l’on admet que la littérature y est née et en est morte, son acte de naissance comme telle, la déclaration de son nom, ayant coïncidé avec sa disparition selon une logique que l’hymen nous aidera à définir. Et cette histoire, si elle a un sens, est tout entière réglée par la valeur de vérité et par un certain rapport, inscrit dans l’hymen en question, *entre* littérature et vérité’ [Between Plato and Mallarmé [...] a history has taken place. This history was also the history of literature, if we admit that literature was born and died of it, the act of its birth as such, the declaration of its name, having coincided with its disappearance according to a logic that the hymen will help us to define. And this history, if it has a meaning, is regulated in its entirety by the value of truth and by a certain relation, inscribed in the hymen in question, *between* literature and truth] (p. 225).