

Two Mallarmé Poems and Their Way through Music to Dance

The Symbolist Poet

The poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé,¹ to which Claude Debussy and Paul Hindemith responded with music and, later and indirectly, Vaslav Nijinsky and Martha Graham¹ with choreographic interpretations, is commonly appreciated as the climax of literary Symbolism. This movement, which had arisen out of a desire to overcome both naturalism and the poetry of the Parnassians around Leconte de Lisle, soon pervaded particularly those forms of artistic expression that deal with words and images. In the visual arts, painters seeking ways to escape from the objective depictions of the academic school (“style pompier”) turned to imagination and fantasy, to the intimate private world of the self, which Baudelaire had made into a cult, as well as to Baudelaire’s theory of ‘correspondences’ and expressive equivalencies. The idea was that color might have a directly expressive rather than a merely descriptive function; similar potentialities were soon claimed for line and form.

In literature, the movement was heralded by the so-called Symbolist Manifesto. This document was formulated in 1886 by Jean Moréas, who rejected the naturalism of Émile Zola and other writers in favor of a totally new school the aim of which was “to clothe the *Idea* in sensual, perceptible form.” Articulating its creed largely in the form of rejection, in contrast to all that was henceforth to be shunned, writers agreed to a catalogue of aesthetic tenets. In contrast to the slackened and amorphous forms of naturalism, the Symbolists committed to reviving a keen sense of form in poetry, epos, and drama. In contrast to a language that, in the portrayal of every-day life, tended towards scattered word fragments, they aspired for disciplined and deliberately stylized expression. In contrast to the world of the disadvantaged and destitute, they promised to focus on representing subjects of external or internal nobility, characterized by

¹Debussy and Hindemith are well known. For details on the poet and the dancers please see in the appendix, pp. 595-596 (Mallarmé), 624-625 (Nijinsky), and 628-629 (Graham).

strength and beauty. In contrast to a description of human cravings, addictions, and class-related limitations, they pledged to preach freedom and the spontaneity of the soul. In contrast to the value-free, relativist mode of observation, Symbolists hoped to reestablish a convincing and binding slate of values. And finally, in contrast to mechanical rationalism, they strove for a return to mythic perception and a recognition of the irrational powers in human beings, in scenery, and in history.²

The relationship of poets and artists to their subjects was reversed: instead of seeking their motifs in the tangible, external world, they now looked inward for feelings and ideas that would become the spawning cells for works of art. Symbols and parables were deemed the two paradigmatic means of this new manifestation of the inner world. For the Symbolists, Alan Chisholm says, “art becomes a subjective creation with an objective value: it is a spiritual magic. [...] The artist or philosopher is not only the creator of his own world, but holds the secrets of this magical creation.”³ The artists as philosopher-priests expressed themselves in symbols the value of which they defined as based on their necessarily hermetic quality. Perhaps the foremost of these symbols is the mirror, which unites at least two of the Symbolist tendencies, hermeticism and narcissism. In the context of narcissism, the mirror is initially perceived as a guarantor of identity and psychic integration, but soon develops into an object with a purpose of its own, capable of destroying what it appears to promise. Apt not only to reflect, much to her horror, the heroine’s nudity, but to break her into a multitude of images, it has the power to contribute to a dismantling of Hérodiade’s “autonomous” identity. The mirror provides the most extreme—and thus for many, the most perfect solution for the wish to contemplate an object excluding uncontrollable external intrusion. At the same time, in a spiritual context, the Symbolists saw it as blending a neo-gnostic understanding of the human being as a likeness of the transcendent with the magical Indian interpretation of the individual as mirror in which universal life is reflected.

²As Mallarmé himself put it in a letter to his friend Cazalis: “J’ai enfin commencé mon *Hérodiade*. Avec terreur, car j’invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d’une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en ces deux mots: *Peindre, non la chose, mais l’effet qu’elle produit*. Le vers ne doit donc pas, là, se composer de mots; mais d’intentions, et toutes les paroles s’effacer devant la sensation.” Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondance*, vols. I-III, Henri Mondor et al., ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959, 1965, 1969), vol. I, p. 137.

³Alan R. Chisholm, *Towards Hérodiade: A Literary Genealogy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1934), p. 128-129.

The “Scène” from *Hérodiade*: Fragment of a Lyrical Drama

When Mallarmé began work on his *Hérodiade*, he conceived it as a classical tragedy. Although the poet worked on this project for thirty-three years, the manuscript was left unfinished at his death. External reasons, like Théodore Banville and his colleagues’ rejection to stage the intended drama at the Théâtre Français, were ultimately probably of less importance for the failure to conclude than internal ones. The poet’s original idea of both this and its sister work, *L’après-midi d’un faune*—also initially projected for the stage—underwent crucial changes. The ideal, striven for through a quarter of a century, was a hybrid: neither dramatic nor lyrical, neither staged as if happening in the present nor poetically expressed as if entirely remembered or contemplated. The focus is on humans as they relate to each other, yet not on their active behavior and the way in which such behavior changes their social environment. The poet’s central concern is not any plot of which *dramatis personae* will become a part and which would develop towards a generalizable moral dilemma, but on the emotions, impressions, and inner states of highly unusual characters. When these *dramatis personae* speak, they reflect largely on themselves. They are at the same time what their words describe and the source of this description; the purpose of their speech is its mode of expression at least as much as its content. As Paul Valéry put it, the subject “is no longer the cause of the form but one of its effects.”⁴ The more this new form developed, the more a real-life actor on stage and a chronological performance in front of an audience proved counter-intuitive.⁵

⁴Paul Valéry, “Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé,” *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 298.

⁵In his chapter on Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* and the hybrid form of the “Scène” as both dialogical and poetic, Peter Szondi urges us to be more acutely aware that “the lyrical drama has its reality not on stage but within that reality of the imagination which is evoked through language. The quality of the dialogue in the lyrical drama should not be determined on the basis of whether or not it lends itself to be spoken in a situation, but whether or not, with the means of language, it brings the situation into being before the inner eye. The lyrical drama is not poetry become dialogue, but imaginary theater.” (“... daß das lyrische Drama seine Wirklichkeit nicht auf der Bühne, sondern in der durch die Sprache evozierten Wirklichkeit der Imagination hat; daß die Qualität des Dialogs im lyrischen Drama nicht daran zu bestimmen ist, ob er sich in einer Situation sprechen läßt, sondern ob er die Situation für die Vorstellung mit den Mitteln der Sprache entstehen läßt. Lyrisches Drama ist nicht dialogisierte Lyrik, sondern imaginäres Theater.” Peter Szondi, *Das lyrische Drama des Fin de siècle*, Henriette Beese, ed., [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975], chapters II-VII: Mallarmé, *Hérodiade*; p. 59.)

The poet began work on *Hérodiade* when he was only twenty-two years old.⁶ Yet despite the fact that he kept mentioning his fascination with the topic and his obsession with his own work on the subject matter in letters throughout the rest of his life, only one of its fragments was published during his life-time. Interestingly, this turned out to be the only dialogical section: “Scène,” a 134-line exchange between the girl Hérodiade and her nurse. “Scène” appeared in 1871 in the influential literary anthology *Parnasse contemporain*, at that time entitled “Fragment d’une étude scénique ancienne d’un poème de Hérodiade” (Fragment of an ancient scenic study of a poem about Herodias), and was reprinted twice, 1886 in the journal *Le Scapin* and 1887 in a facsimile edition of Mallarmé’s poems published by *Revue Indépendant*. Gardner Davies’s careful edition of all fragments and variations known to pertain to the work reveals a structure whereby this “Scène” took the place of the second section.⁷ A ninety-six-line “Ouverture ancienne,” fairly accomplished when compared to the remaining fragments, originally preceded the “Scène”; it was later replaced by a text similar in dramatic function though different in poetic detail, “Prélude,” which remained more fragmented. Both sections contain an introductory monologue spoken by the nurse. Yet despite the fact that both versions of this monologue, to which Hérodiade responds, are now published and accessible, it is the dialogical scene on which all of today’s interest is focused (including that of Paul Hindemith and Martha Graham).

The place this dialogue takes in the intended larger body of the work, and the way it relates—or, perhaps, seemingly fails to relate—to the overall “plot,” are intriguing. To make these accessible, a short account of the intended story and its developmental background as well as a brief report on the projected overall layout of Mallarmé’s text is in order.

⁶I owe this information on Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* particularly to the following sources: Albert Thibaudet, *La Poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), Jean-Pierre Richard, *L’univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1961), Émilie Noulet, *L’œuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: E. Droz, 1940), Gardner Davies, *Mallarmé et le rêve d’Hérodiade* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1978), Gardner Davies’s introduction in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Les Noces d’Hérodiade. Mystère* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), Sylvaine Huot, *Le “Mythe d’Hérodiade” chez Mallarmé: Genèse et Évolution* (Paris: Nizet, 1977), Monic Robillard, *Le désir de la vierge: Hérodiade chez Mallarmé* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1993), and Peter Szondi, *Das lyrische Drama des Fin de siècle*, Henriette Beese, ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975).

⁷See Stéphane Mallarmé, *Les Noces d’Hérodiade*, Gardner Davies, ed., pp. 20-45, according to which we are to assume the following layout: 1: Prélude, 2: Scène, 3: Scène intermédiaire, 4: Le Cantique de Saint Jean, 5: Monologue, 6: Finale.

Hérodiade: The Tale and Its Background

Mallarmé's inspiration has been reconstructed as stemming from various sources. The Biblical story of Salomé who, instigated by her mother Herodias, asks King Herod for the head of John the Baptist, is the best known but does not suffice for an understanding of this particular version. Secundus Reimarus's study of the Salome motif from Cato to Oscar Wilde⁸ traces many variants that prove important to appreciate the angle Mallarmé chose. The earliest version, found in Livius, talks about a Roman consul who, in 192 BC during the war against Gallia, had a prisoner beheaded during a meal to entertain his young male lover. Later authors substituted the boy for a female lover, whom they had plead for the gruesome deed on varying grounds. In his *Controversies* (written 34-41 AD), Seneca reports that the episode, which the rhetoricians considered very effective, had been much copied and embellished, promoting the consul to ever higher offices and imbuing the cruel deed with a variety of political motives.

The Biblical version (told in Mark 6:17-28 and similarly in Matthew) not only adapted the story for the situation in Judea but split the female demanding the prominent captive's head into two, a charming young daughter and a cunning, vengeful mother. In this setting, only the mother had a name: Herodias. The daughter's name, Salome, was not established until the early 5th century. Later folk variations depict the daughter as a twin image of her mother (usually calling her Herodias as well). French renderings see her as a witch or fairy, while German adaptations often stress an erotic infatuation on the part of the young girl with the saintly prophet which, unrequited, prompts her to demand his death. The story survived in medieval mystery plays, performed well into the 17th century (like the popular *Mystère de la Passion de Saint Jean Baptiste*, from which source Mallarmé may have taken his intended title, *Les Noces d'Hérodiade: Mystère*).

Shortly before Mallarmé, Heinrich Heine's 1842 rhymed novella *Atta Troll* was based on the topic; this work may well have served as the missing link between the German folk legend and Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, although it is not entirely clear from the fragments whether our poet intended to show his heroine erotically attracted to John the Baptist. This interpretation of her anticipation of a future encounter with a man and the

⁸See Secundus Reimarus, *Stoffgeschichte der Salome-Dichtungen, nebst einer Analyse des Marcus-Evangeliums* (Leipzig: O. Wigand, 1913).

blood this encounter would involve remains, to my mind, conjecture.⁹ Among the most well-known authors to adapt the topic in the time of Mallarmé are Gustave Flaubert (*Hérodias*, 1877) and Oscar Wilde (*Salomé*, 1894). From this state of its literary development, the topic made its way into opera (see Richard Strauss's *Salome* of 1905, the libretto of which is a German translation of Oscar Wilde's play).

Visual artists frequently portrayed the story. Depictions include art in religious context (St. Mark's Cathedral, Venice; Rouen Cathedral, France; Hildesheim Cathedral, Germany; Ely Cathedral, England; and others), individual paintings (by, among others, Pisano, Donatello, Lippi, Gozzoli, Cranach, Titian, Caravaggio, Delacroix), and illustrations (the most famous being, no doubt, Aubrey Beardsley's erotically charged art nouveau vignettes for the English translation of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*).¹⁰ Mallarmé possessed a reproduction of the Titian, in which Salomé is shown with a companion who could be her mother, her maid, or her nurse, and the head of John the Baptist. St. Aubyn believes that "[t]he immediate influence upon Mallarmé, in addition to Baudelaire's sonnet 'Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés', was in all probability Flaubert's long short story of 1862 about the daughter of Hamilcar, *Salammbô*."¹¹

Mallarmé's choice to call his young girl Hérodiade and not Salomé, made long before Wilde's work appeared, has certainly little to do with rejecting the latter, as has been suspected. However, Mallarmé was not fond of the British writer's French drama, and a preface intended for his own work, first published by Gardner Davies, contains an explicit comment in which he claims a need to distance himself from all that Salomé has become in the 19th century.¹² Another reason, arguably much more persuasive, was the attraction the sound of the name Hérodiade held for Mallarmé, as repeated comments in many of his letters demonstrate. He

⁹Jean-Pierre Richard shows that the motif of the pomegranate as a metaphor for the mouth and the lips, very prominent all through Mallarmé's poetry but especially for his Hérodiade, goes back to Heine, who writes "Sanfte Lippen, wie Grenaten" (Soft lips, like pomegranates). Richard, *L'univers imaginaire* ..., p. 141f.

¹⁰Oscar Wilde had written his play in French. Lord Alfred Douglas translated the work into English. It was for this translation, published in 1894, that Aubrey Beardsley furnished the well-known illustrations.

¹¹F.C. St. Aubyn, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Updated Edition* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1969), p. 40. The characterization of *Salammbô* as a "long short story" would seem unfortunate.

¹²"J'ai laissé le nom d'Hérodiade pour bien la différencier de la Salomé je dirai moderne ou exhumée avec son fait-divers archaïque — la danse etc. (See *Les Noces d'Hérodiade*, p. 51)

found the combination of the heroic first part of the name with the light cadence of its second half, which reminded him of falling roses, irresistible, and promised that the page in his work that was to bear nothing but the title, *Hérodiade*, would be his most beautiful contribution to poetry.¹³

The Introduction of the Protagonist

While *Les Noces d'Hérodiade* has remained a fragment, its projected first section, the nurse's monologue, previously referred to by Mallarmé as the "ouverture ancienne," exists in a form apparently as complete and polished as the "Scène" that follows it. The study of later fragments makes it appear evident that Mallarmé thought about either replacing this "ouverture" or revising it dramatically, replacing it with a much more elliptic version entitled "Prélude."¹⁴ However, since that version is too sketchy to allow a full appreciation of what Mallarmé may have intended, I will here refer to the completed earlier version when summarizing how the poet goes about introducing his heroine.

In her monologue, the nurse stands waiting for her mistress. As she surveys the landscape seen from the open window of the solitary tower in which Hérodiade lives before her marriage, we understand that the older woman represents earthy "realism" in an atmosphere of metaphysical tragedy. Day is beginning to break, and the light of dawn accentuates the lonely horror of the scene. Only a few streaks of red light are reflected in the pool which is described as dead and deserted; the birds who used to come and visit its water have been driven away by the horror of the tower, and have left the place devoid of life. This observation in turn gives rise to the nurse's comment that the most beautiful bird—Hérodiade herself—now also left the tower which, since she as a young girl who should have been full of life had buried herself here, has become like a tomb. The reason, we learn, why the princess has chosen this grave-like abode is that

¹³In a letter to his friend Cazalis, Mallarmé wrote: "Merci du détail que vous me donnez au sujet d'Hérodiade, mais je ne m'en sers pas. La plus belle page de mon œuvre sera celle qui ne contiendra que ce nom divin *Hérodiade*. Le peu d'inspiration que j'ai eu, je le dois à ce nom, et je crois que si mon héroïne s'était appelée Salomé, j'eusse inventé ce mot sombre, et rouge comme une grenade ouverte, *Hérodiade*. Du reste je tiens à en faire un être purement rêvé et absolument indépendant de l'histoire." Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 154.

¹⁴On the reconstruction of Mallarmé's possible intentions regarding the final layout of *Hérodiade*, see Gardner Davies, *Les Noces d'Hérodiade*.

she has understood the void behind all endeavors. The burial of a young life, however, is a crime. Its redness is repeated in the symbolic redness of the dawn, and anything that reflects this color, most particularly the pool in which the light is reflected, partakes of the guilt.

The remainder of the nurse's introductory monologue continues to play on these primary symbols—bird/tomb, red/dawn/crime, water/mirror—but also adds a few that will be taken up in the subsequent “Scène”: age/centuries, gold/faded color, aroma/essence, shadow/void. Through her meditative monologue, the practical nurse is drawn further than her understanding is able to follow into the world of metaphysical tragedy. Her young mistress, we learn, withers between a life not lived and a spiritual retreat not consumed because of her almost morbid fascination with her own hermetic nature.

Here is the text of “Scène”, with my own prose translation to facilitate understanding.

Scène — Hérodiade, Nourrice

[2]¹⁵ (N) Tu vis! Ou vois-je ici l'ombre d'une princesse?
À mes lèvres tes doigts et leurs bagues et cesse
De marcher dans un âge ignoré...

[3] (H) Reculez.

- 4 Le blond torrent de mes cheveux immaculés
Quand ils baigne mon corps solitaire le glace
D'horreur, et mes cheveux que la lumière enlace
Sont immortels, ô femme, un baiser me tûrait¹⁶
8 Si la beauté n'était la mort...

Scene — Hérodiade, Nurse (prose translation)

(N) You live! Or is what I see here the shadow of a princess? To my lips your fingers and their rings, and cease to walk in an unknown time.

(H) Step back! The blond torrent of my immaculate hair freezes my solitary body with horror when bathing it, and my hair, braided by light, is immortal. O woman, a kiss would kill me if beauty were not death...

¹⁵The numbers in square brackets are inserted here for later reference. They correspond with the movements, numbered thus, in Hindemith's composition.

¹⁶As both the text printed in the score and the melodic line show, Hindemith sets “tuerait,” with three syllables, not Mallarmé's original “tûrait.”

- Par quel attrait
Menée et quel matin oublié des prophètes
Verse, sur les lointains mourants, ses tristes fêtes,
Le sais-je? tu m'as vue, ô nourrice d'hiver,
12 Sous la lourde prison de pierres et de fer
Où de mes vieux lions traînent les siècles fauves
Entrer, et je marchais, fatale, les mains sauvées,
Dans le parfum désert de ces anciens rois:
16 Mais encore as-tu vu quels furent mes effrois?
Je m'arrête rêvant aux exils, et j'effeuille
Comme près d'un bassin dont le jet d'eau m'accueille
Les pâles lys qui sont en moi, tandis qu'épris
20 De suivre du regard les languides débris
Descendre, à travers ma rêverie, en silence,
Les lions, de ma robe écartent l'indolence
Et regardent mes pieds qui calmeraient la mer.
24 Calme, toi, les frissons de ta sénile chair,
Viens et ma chevelure imitant les manières
Trop farouches qui font votre peur des crinières,
Aide-moi, puisqu'ainsi tu n'oses plus me voir,
28 À me peigner nonchalamment dans un miroir.
[4] (N) Sinon la myrrhe gaie en ses bouteilles closes,
De l'essence ravie aux vieillesse de roses
Voulez-vous, mon enfant, essayer la vertu
32 Funèbre?
[5] (H) Laisse là ces parfums! ne sais-tu
Que je les hais, nourrice, et veux-tu que je sente
Leur ivresse noyer ma tête languissante?
Je veux que mes cheveux qui ne sont pas des fleurs
36 À répandre l'oubli des humaines douleurs,

By what attraction I am drawn and what morning, forgotten by the prophets, pours its sad festivals on the fading distances—do I know it? You have seen me, o wintry nurse, enter down below the heavy prison of stones and iron where the tawny centuries of my old lions drag. And I walked, fated, my hands safe, amid the desert perfume of these ancient kings. But did you also see what were my fears? I stop, dreaming of exile, and remove the petals of the pale lilies within me as if sitting by a basin whose jetting water welcomes me, while the lions, entranced at following with their eyes the falling of the languid debris, through my dreaming, in silence, push aside the insolence of my robe and look at my feet, which would calm the sea. Calm, you, the trembling of your senile flesh; come and, since in this way you dare no longer look at me, help me comb my braids nonchalantly in a mirror—this hair which imitates the manes of lions in too terrifying ways that cause you to fear it.

(N) If not the gay myrrh in its sealed bottles, would you want to try the dismal virtue of the essence ravished from the old age of roses, my child?

(H) Leave those perfumes there! Do you not know that I hate them, nurse, and would you want me to feel their intoxication drown my languishing head? I want my hair—which is not flowers, intended for spreading forgetfulness of human pains,

- Mais de l'or, à jamais vierge des aromates,
 Dans leurs éclairs cruels et dans leurs pâleurs mates,
 Observent la froideur stérile du métal,
 40 Vous ayant reflétés, bijoux du mur natal,
 Armes, vases depuis ma solitaire enfance.
 [6] (N) Pardon! l'âge effaçait, reine, votre défense
 De mon esprit pâli comme un vieux livre ou noir...
 44 (H) Assez! Tiens devant moi ce miroir.
 [7] O miroir!
 Eau froide par l'ennui dans ton cadre gelée
 Que de fois et pendant des heures, désolée
 Des songes et cherchant mes souvenirs qui sont
 48 Comme des feuilles sous ta glace au trou profond,
 Je m'apparus en toi comme une ombre lointaine,
 Mais, horreur! des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine,
 J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité!
 52 Nourrice, suis-je belle?
 (N) Un astre, en vérité
 Mais cette tresse tombe...
 [8] (H) Arrête dans ton crime
 Qui refroidit mon sang vers sa source, et réprime
 Ce geste, impiété fameuse: ah! conte-moi
 56 Quel sûr démon te jette en le sinistre émoi,
 Ce baiser, ces parfums offerts et, le dirai-je?
 O mon cœur, cette main encore sacrilège,
 Car tu voulais, je crois, me toucher, sont un jour
 60 Qui ne finira pas sans malheur sur la tour...
 O jour qu'Hérodiade avec effroi regarde!

but gold, forever virgin of aromatics, in its cruel gleam and dull pallor—to observe the sterile coldness of metal, having since my lonely childhood reflected you, jewels of my native wall, armor, vases.

(N) Forgive! age effaced what you prohibited, queen, from my mind that has grown pale as an old book, or black.

(H) Enough! Hold before me this mirror. O mirror! Cold water frozen by ennui in your frame, how often and for many hours have I appeared to myself in you like a far-away shadow, desolate of dreams and seeking my remembrances, which are like the leaves beneath your ice with its deep hollow. But, o horror! in the evenings I came to understand in your severe fountain the nakedness of my sparse dreams. Nurse, am I beautiful?

(N) A star, in truth. But this braid is falling...

(H) Halt in your crime, which chills my blood to its source, and repress this gesture, the famous impiety. Ah, tell me what sure demon throws you into this sinister agitation; this kiss, these offered perfumes, and—shall I say it? o my heart—this once again sacrilegious hand (for I think you wanted to touch me) make this a day that will not end without misfortune on the tower... O day upon which Hérodiade looks with dread!

- (N) Temps bizarre, en effet, de quoi le ciel vous garde!
 Vous errez, ombre seule et nouvelle fureur,
 64 Et regardant en vous précoce avec terreur;
 Mais toujours adorable autant qu'une immortelle,
 O mon enfant et belle affreusement et telle
 Que...
 (H) Mais n'allais-tu pas me toucher?
 (N) ...J'aimerais
 68 Être à qui le destin réserve vos secrets.
 (H) Oh! tais-toi!
 (N) Viendra-t-il parfois?
 (H) Étoiles pures,
 N'entendez pas!
 (N) Comment, sinon parmi d'obscures
 Épouvantes, songer plus implacable encor
 72 Et comme suppliant le dieu que le trésor
 De votre grâce attend! et pour qui, dévorée
 D'angoisses, gardez-vous la splendeur ignorée
 Et le mystère vain de votre être?
 (H) Pour moi!
 76 (N) Triste fleur qui croît seule et n'a pas d'autre émoi
 Que son ombre dans l'eau vue avec atonie.
 (H) Va, garde ta pitié comme ton ironie.
 (N) Toutefois expliquez: oh! non, naïve enfant,
 80 Décroîtra, quelque jour, ce dédain triomphant.

(N) Strange times, indeed, from which the heaven may protect you! You wander, lonely shadow and new fury, and search within yourself, precocious with terror: but always adorable like an immortal, o my child, and frightfully beautiful and such that...

(H) But were you not about to touch me?

(N) I should love to be the one for whom destiny guards your secrets.

(H) O! Be quiet!

(N) Will he sometimes come?

(H) Pure stars, hear not!

(N) How, if not among obscure terrors, should one dream the god, and imagine him more implacable still and as if pleading, him whom the treasure of your grace awaits! And for whom do you, devoured by anxieties, preserve the unknown splendor and the vain mystery of your being?

(H) For myself!

(N) Sad flower that grows alone and has no other joy than its shadow in the water, watched listlessly.

(H) Go, keep your pity as well as your irony to yourself.

(N) Nonetheless, explain: O no, naive child, this triumphant disdain will one day diminish.

- (H) Mais qui me toucherait, des lions respectée?
 Du reste, je ne veux rien d'humain et, sculptée,
 Si tu me vois les yeux perdus au paradis,
 84 C'est quand je me souviens de ton lait bu jadis.
 (N) Victime lamentable à son destin offerte!
 [9] (H) Oui, c'est pour moi, pour moi, que je fleuris, déserte!
 Vous le savez, jardins d'améthyste, enfouis
 88 Sans fin dans de savants abîmes éblouis,
 Ors ignorés, gardant votre antique lumière
 Sous le sombre sommeil d'une terre première,
 Vous, pierres où mes yeux comme des purs bijoux
 92 Empruntent leur clarté mélodieuse, et vous
 Métaux qui donnez à ma jeune chevelure
 Une splendeur fatale et sa massive allure!
 Quant à toi! femme née en des siècles malins
 96 Pour la méchanceté des antres sibyllins,
 Qui parles d'un mortel! selon qui, des calices
 De mes robes, arôme aux farouches délices,
 Sortirait le frisson blanc de ma nudité,
 100 Prophétise que si le tiède azur d'été,
 Vers lui nativement la femme se dévoile,
 Me voit dans ma pudeur grelottante d'étoile,
 Je meurs!
- J'aime l'horreur d'être vierge et je veux
- 104 Vivre parmi l'effroi que me font mes cheveux.
 Pour, le soir, retirée en ma couche, reptile
 Inviolé sentir en la chair inutile
 Le froid scintillement de ta pâle clarté
- 108 Toi qui te meurs, toi qui brûles de chasteté,
 Nuit blanche de glaçons et de neige cruelle!

(H) But who would touch me, who am respected by lions? Furthermore, I do not want anything human and, if you see me sculpted, with eyes lost in paradise, it means that I remember your milk, drunk long ago. — (N) Lamentable victim offered to her fate!

(H) Yes, it is for myself, for myself that I flower, I the deserted one! You know it, gardens of amethyst, buried endlessly in learned, dazzled abysses, unknown golds, protecting your antique light under the somber sleep of a primeval earth, you stones from which my eyes like pure jewels borrow their melodious brightness, and you metals, which give my young hair its fatal splendor and its massive sway! As for you, woman born in a cunning age through the evil gossip of sibylline caves, who speak of a mortal! according to whom would come forth the white shudder of my nudity from the chalices of my robes, aroma of fierce delights: prophesy that, if the warm blue of summer, towards which woman natively unveils, sees me in my shivering starlike prudishness, I die!

I love the horror of being virgin, and I want to live among the dread that my hair causes me. So that—in the evening, retired on my couch, inviolate reptil—I may feel in my use-less flesh the cold scintillations of your pale brightness, the sparkles of you who die, you who burn with chastity, white night of icicles and cruel snow.

- Et ta sœur solitaire, ô ma sœur éternelle
 Mon rêve montera vers toi: telle déjà,
 112 Rare limpidité d'un cœur qui le songea,
 Je me crois seule en ma monotone patrie
 Et tout, autour de moi, vit dans l'idolâtrie
 D'un miroir qui reflète en son calme dormant
 116 Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant...
 O charme dernier, oui! je le sens, je suis seule.
 (N) Madame, allez-vous donc mourir?
 [10] (H) Non, pauvre aïeule,
 Sois calme et, t'éloignant, pardonne à ce cœur dur,
 120 Mais avant, si tu veux, clos les volets, l'azur
 Séraphique sourit dans les vitres profondes,
 Et je déteste, moi, le bel azur!
 Des ondes
 Se bercent et, là-bas, sais-tu pas un pays
 124 Où le sinistre ciel ait les regards haïs
 De Vénus qui, le soir, brûle dans le feuillage:
 J'y partirais.
 Allume encore, enfantillage
 Dis-tu, ces flambeaux où la cire au feu léger
 128 Pleure parmi l'or vain quelque pleur étranger
 Et...
 (N) Maintenant?
 (H) Adieu.
 [11] Vous mentez, ô fleur nue
 De mes lèvres.
 J'attends une chose inconnue
 Ou peut-être, ignorant le mystère et vos cris,
 132 Jetez-vous les sanglots suprêmes et meurtris
 D'une enfance sentant parmi les rêveries
 Se séparer enfin ses froides pierreries.

And my dream, your lonely sister, will rise towards you, o my eternal sister. As such, with the rare limpidity of a heart that dreamed it, I already believe myself to be alone in my monotonous homeland. And everything around me lives in the idolatry of a mirror that reflects in its sleeping calm Hérodiade with the clear diamond gaze... O final charm, yes, I feel it, I am alone. — (N) Madam, are you then going to die?

(H) No, my poor grandam, be calm and, withdrawing, forgive this unfeeling heart. But first, if you will, close the shutters. The seraphic blue smiles through the profound window panes, and I for one detest the beautiful azure! — Waves rock gently and, yonder, do you not know a country where the sinister sky has the hated looks of Venus who, in the evening, burns in the foliage? I'd leave for there. Once again—you say it is childishness—light those torches where the wax at a lightly burning fire weeps some strange tear among the vain gold, and... — (N) What now? — (H) Farewell. You deceive, o naked flower of my lips! I await a thing unknown, or perhaps, ignoring the mystery and your cries, you utter the supreme and wounded sobs of a childhood feeling among its reveries its cold precious stones finally separating themselves from one another.

The Dialogue

The “Scène”—that part with which *Hérodiade* begins in most editions—consists of 134 lines, rhymed and metrically fashioned in the pattern of the alexandrine. A total of twenty-eight of these lines are given to the nurse. Yet the long passages reserved for the young girl alone are neither a soliloquy (in which the presence of the nurse would be ignored) nor even a monologue. Instead, the older woman’s earthiness inflects the doubtful, shadowy presence of *Hérodiade*, and each of her suggestions, all of which relate to external features of the young girl’s appearance of hoped-for future experiences, triggers a wealth of symbolic descriptions of the inner states of the heroine.

Structurally, the scene can be viewed as consisting of six sections:

- | | | |
|---|--|---------------|
| 1 | The nurse’s initial words (which one may usefully understand as functioning like the conclusion of the woman’s preceding monologue):
introduction | lines 1-3 |
| 2 | <i>Hérodiade</i> ’s first recitative:
exposition | lines 3-28 |
| 3 | first section of the dialogue, dominated by <i>Hérodiade</i> :
development 1 | lines 29-61 |
| 4 | second section of the dialogue, more equal interchanges:
development 2 | lines 62-85 |
| 5 | <i>Hérodiade</i> ’s second recitative:
recapitulation | lines 86-117 |
| 6 | Final dialogue, coda | lines 117-134 |

If lines 3-117 thus constitute the main body of the scene, the midpoint of this body falls around line 60/61, that is on the dividing line between the two halves of the long central dialogue. As I will show later, comprehending these lines as structurally central provides important insights into Mallarmé’s design with regard to the essential symbols.

In terms of subject matter, the nurse’s initial words can be subsumed under the heading of relief and fondness. *Hérodiade* in her first recitative rejects both feelings as intrusions into the precarious sanctuary of her not-quite-certain physical aliveness, and illustrates her vain attempts to

establish some kind of relationship to herself. The subsequent section, the first segment of the central dialogue, is prompted by the nurse's offer that she bathe Hérodiade's splendid hair in flower essences, and concludes with the woman's approaching hand that intends to keep a strand of hair from falling: suggestions that the girl finds abhorrent. The second section of the dialogue introduces the man whom, the nurse fantasizes, Hérodiade will one day marry, as well as, in juxtaposition to this imagined surrender, the girl's pronounced narcissism as she exclaims that her splendor is intended for nobody other than herself. Hérodiade's second monologue deals with the emotional and spiritual result of all this rejection and self-infatuation, her loneliness and uncertain grasp of reality. In the coda-like final dialogue the girl recognizes the void and deception that looms not only behind the putative pleasures of this world, but equally beneath her own dramatic abnegation.

The Themes

As is evident from the brief sketch of a summary given above, several topics and persons one would have expected in a drama with the title *Hérodiade* are conspicuously absent. Neither the girl's mother nor a step-father (as in the Biblical version), nor indeed any relative other than generic ancestors are mentioned. (In the "ouverture ancienne," the nurse refers to Hérodiade's father, a king, who is absent, fighting a war elsewhere.) There is no indication of time or place that would allow to position this story either in Judea or in the first decades of our era—and yet, Mallarmé left seven completed four-line stanzas of what he called the "Cantique de Saint Jean" as well as a number of other fragments. We thus cannot doubt that he intended to follow the narrative as we know it from the New Testament at least in its main outline.

In many respects, the person the poet presents in the "Scène" appears almost diametrically opposed to a girl who could perform in the familiar tale. While the enticing dance that leads King Herod to promise his wife's daughter the fulfillment of whatever wish suggests a confident corporeality, Mallarmé's Hérodiade experiences her body as not securely embedded in the organic world. Many of her sentences express her doubts about the nature of her physical existence, as well as an obsession with the ideal of being primarily spirit, since all living matter is mortal, if not potentially already dead. Whereas King Herod seems to respond to a dancer's charm

that strives to beguile and seduce, Mallarmé's Hérodiade is riddled with fear of the male gaze, which she imagines as the origin of a future loss of virginity. The precision of the dancer's wish not only to see the captive prophet executed, but to be presented with his head on a platter—even when this request is suggested by her mother—speaks not only of a keen assessment of a social and political situation, but even more of a lust for tangible violence. By contrast, Mallarmé's Hérodiade lives in a world of no present, no attention-demanding “now,” no causality, enthralled by no thought other than her own vulnerability and ephemerality, a world in which no entertainment or concrete wish-fulfillment could rival the arresting riddle that constitutes her own fluctuating experience of reality and unreality. Comparing the two young women—the one in the Biblical story and Mallarmé's heroine—one realizes that the former is defined by her actions and acts as a *chiffre* in a parable, while the latter is entirely determined by her interior self-image and the mental and emotional themes that shape all her perceptions.

The most prominent themes running through the “Scène” are related to the concepts of *time*, *body*, and *reality*. *Time* is experienced in several dimensions. The nurse's three lines with which the scene opens introduce Hérodiade as someone who lives in an “unknown time” (*âge ignoré*). The nurse is uncertain into what kind of inner realm of the not-now her young mistress has retreated. Worried, she attempts to lure or force her back into the here-and-now. When, in lines 12/13, Hérodiade evokes the heavy prison of iron and stone within which she invites her nurse to see her, she describes it not in relation to herself as the inmate but as a place “where the tawny centuries of my old lions drag.” The link of this unusual image to the nurse's earlier word *âge* (“cesse de marcher dans un âge ignoré”—stop walking in an unknown age/time) is striking enough to provide the uncommon use of “siècles” with a reason of existence. The connecting thread here is that which lies as a concern behind the ostensible subject matter of the dialogue: *âge/siècle*¹⁷ as time in which we dwell, century not

¹⁷Charles Chassé, a scholar of Mallarmé's linguistic codes, has pointed to a possible etymological root of *siècles* as “generations,” mentioning Lucretius's use of *saecula ferarum* in the sense of “generations of wild animals” (C. Chassé, *Les clefs de Mallarmé* [Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1954]). I am not, however, entirely convinced that this helps to explain Mallarmé's usage of the term. I find more plausible a remark by Grange Woolley, who writes: “The reference to the lions explains itself when one remembers that according to an ancient legend, lions were supposed not to harm a virgin.” (G. Woolley, *Stéphane Mallarmé, 1842-1898: A commemorative presentation including translations from his prose and verse with commentaries* (Madison, NJ: Drew University Press: 1942), p. 244.

as the span of one hundred years, age not as a point in one's biological chronology, but as a spiritual, abstract, almost disembodied temporal home (as in "the age of reason" etc.). "Old," then, with its connotation of weakness, can be read as another indication for the debilitating power of definite time, that power which Mallarmé's poetry seeks to suspend.

Body, embodiment in physical matter whose boundaries seem all but clear and require definition, is another major theme. Hérodiade's long monologues are triggered, as it were (though one feels they hardly need triggering) by three gestures with which the nurse attempts to transgress the inviolable boundary the young princess has built around her body. The old woman tries to kiss her hand, to perfume her hair, and to touch and rearrange a fallen tress, a triple "impiety" in which Hérodiade, reacting fiercely against each of these contacts, sees a sinister omen.

Like the theme of time, the theme of body, too, is brought up in the nurse's initial lines, where she expresses her concern that the girl she so loves might be attempting to deny her physical existence, withdrawing into a state of near-invisibility. Her very first exclamation, "You live!," attests to this problem of life denied, which is taken up repeatedly in the course of the scene. At the same time, "shadow" is here more than a euphemism for death. The fact that Hérodiade is alive seems no guarantee that she may not live as a shadow of herself. Szondi finds such an interpretation supported in the syntax of the opening line, where the question "Or do I see here the shadow of a princess?" does not follow, as it logically should, another question to which the "or" would present a second option, but appears as if conceived as an alternative interpretation of the ostensibly affirmative "You live!"

Not only is the body as a vessel for the total self perceived as precarious, even apparently not so vulnerable parts like fingers share this utterly exposed state. In the second line, the unusual command in which the nurse wishes the princess's fingers and their rings to meet her lips (rather than her lips to meet these) sounds like the woman's desperate attempt to force Hérodiade into the life of physical contact—an impression substantiated when the girl's harsh rejection makes it abundantly clear that she anxiously desires to remain at a safe distance from any human being around her.

The five lines that follow the initial rejection of contact reflect the girl's strange relationship to her own body. She begins by offering an ostensible explanation why she must defend herself against too much closeness: If her body freezes in horror when touched by the blond torrent

of her own immaculate hair, how could she possibly survive a kiss? And if her hair which, as she claims, is “embraced by light” and immortal, manages to threaten her skin with its touch, how much more menacing would a living being’s kiss be for her fingers. But whereas this reasoning presupposes a clear sense of an—albeit strongly imperiled—physical aliveness, her very next expression suggests that even this basic certainty is questionable for her since she feels impelled to perceive her own beauty as death. As Mary Ellen Wolf puts it, “By refusing her nurse’s attempts at physical contact, Hérodiade projects the image of an autonomous self. This narcissistic pose is then shattered by the heroine’s ambivalent monologue before her mirror and by her emphatic denial of all previous assertions of self-sufficiency at the *Scène*’s conclusion.”¹⁸

The thematic complex comprising the experience of *reality*, and the withdrawal from it into unreality, expresses itself particularly in dispassionate, coldly inviolable and harsh behavior towards persons and objects perceived as outside the inner shell, as well as in a passionate rebuff of anything that threatens to pierce this boundary. Hérodiade’s very first word shows what a momentous effect her nurse’s lines have on her. Her rejection matches the intensity of the attempted approach, her harshness the concern and affection demonstrated. *Reculez*, she demands. The verb “reculer” (to draw back, to step back, to retract) is one of those that sound innocuous enough when used in a narrative or observing context but extremely abrupt in the imperative form. As an introductory exclamation of a quasi-dramatic character, this directive to restore a distance is unique in pre-20th-century literature. Dramatic interactions rely on the frictions created by a certain closeness, a contact between persons. Hérodiade, however, rejects in her very first words not only the caring nurse’s dotting lips, but with them the living now into which the older woman hopes to bring her back.

While Mallarmé leads the reader from image to image and from insight to insight, it becomes painfully clear that the protagonist will not ever encounter anything that is not already part of her being as she brings it to each thought. Having prompted her nurse to confirm her beauty, which she is told is star-like, she feels compelled to engage in a painstaking review of her previous thoughts and feelings (lines 53ff): the rejection of physical contact (this time the nurse had only tried to keep a strand of hair from falling), the insinuation that such contact would bring her death

¹⁸See Mary Ellen Wolf, *Eros Under Glass: Psychoanalysis and Mallarmé’s Hérodiade* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), pp.16/17.

(a kiss would kill her, she had asserted earlier; now the crime of the hand approaching her hair congeals her blood), and the outrage of the flower essences offered. The lines in which she recapitulates her earlier refusal are placed almost precisely at the center of what I defined earlier as the main body of the "Scène." Summary and retrospective of what we already know, they function at the same time as a preview of what we suspect: that, paralyzed by the fear of human touch, Hérodiade has turned into a cold-blooded reptile (lines 105/6). What prompted rigid rejection in the past forebodes disaster in the future, at that point in the scène which corresponds symmetrically to the earlier lines of refusal, linked to them along the axis of the central recapitulation. Believing that she is blocked from both past and future, from memory and dreams, Hérodiade feels forced against her will to face the now. This presence, however, just like her prospects for the future and her memories of the past, is cut off from all that constitutes pulsating life. This is perhaps the final, chilling facet in a woman who, had Mallarmé completed the work as he intended it, would have asked for the head of John the Baptist to be presented on a platter.

At two climactic instances in her recitatives, both of them distinguished by her overriding fear of human closeness, she pretends to be threatened by death. In her very first lines she claims that a kiss from her nurse's lips on her fingers would kill her—and this despite the fact that she perceives herself as already dead owing to her beauty (lines 7/8). In the midst of her second long recitation, in those verses that are placed symmetrically to the earlier threat by their equal distance from the central summary mentioned above (lines 107-112), her threat is even more pronounced. Imagining that she should have to unveil her nakedness in front of a mortal, she exclaims, "I die!" (line 103). Not "I will die" or "I would die," but "I die," this exclamation, provoked by her vivid imagination of the dreaded moment, marks the closest approximation to the Now that Hérodiade seems capable of reaching.

Yet this young woman is, in so many ways, already dead, and thus she will not, in fact, expire. She loves, as she confesses, the horror of her virginity and the terror that her hair inspires in her (lines 103/104). Her heart is cold, and she hates the beauty of a blue sky, wishing herself to a country where the heavens would be sinister. As the concluding dialogue reveals, even the way out of this life, the dying that might at least in retrospect make her more human, is denied her.

On yet another layer, not only Hérodiade herself is struggling with a sense of unreality. The reader, too, is left deliberately in the dark about what degree of even a fictional reality pertains to anything that is being presented in poetic language. In the early stage directions of the “Scène,” which Mallarmé discarded when he gave up the plan to write the work as a drama for staged performance, the author had suggested that parts of the dialogue be treated as a dream.¹⁹ Similarly in the late fragments for the “Finale,” the reader is left wondering whether all of Hérodiade’s drama was perhaps merely imaginary even for herself: “in the distance she wakes up — / (none of this has happened).”²⁰

The Symbols

If Mallarmé’s imagery confuses a first-time reader, it is primarily because of two stylistic traits: the unclear relation of what is expressed to anything in the real world, and the fluctuating reference to time. The utterances of the *dramatis personae* seem to dive in and out of the present without ever surfacing in any distinctly defined past or future. The homogenizing factor that balances these two puzzling uncertainties is the metaphorical structure of the poetry. Both what is presented as rooted in the now and what is narrated as pertaining to some indistinct other time appear as transformed to the sphere of images that have left immediate reality behind. And it is this sphere which holds emotions and impressions together. As the poet seems to suggest, symbolic presentation renders superfluous any placement within recognizable time frames.

Several of the more prominent symbols occurring in Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* can be matched with the prevalent themes briefly explored above. I would like to restrict the discussion to three groups of symbols here: those pertaining to the themes of *time*, *body*, and *reality*.

¹⁹These early stage directions are reproduced in the notes for *Mallarmé’s Œuvres complètes*, p. 1444.

²⁰*Au loin elle se réveille — / (rien de tout cela est-il arrivé)*. See Gardner Davies’s edition of *Les Noces d’Hérodiade*, p. 139. Charles Mauron confirms this impression. He writes, “Never [...], under the pressure of unconscious impulses, would a Parnassian have invented so unlikely a dialogue. For the unreality is here proof of sincerity. Let me say that for my part I find in *Herodias* the effect of a dream. A psychoanalyst would explain the poem better than a literary critic.” Cf. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poems*, translated by Roger Fry with commentaries by Charles Mauron (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 92.

The theme of the body is symbolically expressed in the three-step image of flower, hair, and jewel/stone. Flowers epitomize embodied life, physical beauty that does not ask for its spirit since it is unquestionably sure of it. At the same time, flowers—especially in their often evoked, distilled form as aroma—are the prototypical essence: all spirit, life, and beauty, yet without any physicality. Their colors, by contrast, are of the most material: the white lily is the symbol of purity and, in the characteristic “bodily” transposition of the term, virginity; the red rose signifies not only love but also blood and, by extension, cruelty. Hair, in the language of myths, stands for power. Perceived as an ambiguous hybrid, represents the boundary between the animate and the inanimate. Deceitful in that it is all matter and no spirit, all beauty and no life, it is likened to gold and other metals, whose shine and armor-like qualities it rivals (see the frequent Symbolist image of hair as helmet), or to water which, with its potential to congeal into ice, stifles life. Jewels, metals, and stone are the ultimate emblems of dead matter; one or several of these images often appear in contexts where the body is perceived as a prison for the spirit, or as a tomb within which life proceeds towards inevitable death.

The prison of iron and stone mentioned in *Hérodiade*’s first monologue, a physical vessel that could hardly be imagined any more restricting, houses what the girl refers to as “my old lions”: beasts, ideally wild, fierce, and imperial, here deprived of their most genuine self-expression. The color adjective that describes the lions, too, carries this double meaning. “Tawny” or “dun,” denoting a lack of brightness, the faded remnant of something once radiant, belongs to the realm of growing old and losing one’s brilliance; this is deplored, since only being young and emphasizing a strong body is considered positive. Time is physical here, and the body a prison within which all that develops moves towards relentless decay. In a secondary connotation, the same faded quality relates to a dematerialized state—the same state in which *Hérodiade* perceives her blond torrent of hair as alien to her body and as “immortal.” Within the prison of, as it turns out, body and time, the lions then stand at the same time for wild, untrammelled life sadly incarcerated, and for disembodied, extratemporal self-experience. This symbolic bracket is spelled out even more explicitly later in the “*Scène*” when *Hérodiade* establishes a connection between the pale-yellow mane of the lions and her own mane at which, she asserts, her nurse no longer dares to look. The tawny lions in their dungeon, then, represent an aspect of the girl herself. Her monologue corroborates this notion when she speaks of “my lions.”

The imagery of *j'effeuille* (lines 17ff), literally referring to the process of stripping something of its foliage and thus causing it to become visible in its naked essence, also has a metaphorical meaning. Were the pale lilies left with all their petals removed, their beauty would be destroyed. These lilies, however, are not flowers to be imagined simply "out there" but "inside me." In their iconology, white lilies stand, of course, for virgin purity (in contrast to the red roses soon to be evoked by the nurse). Hérodiade seems to fear that with the loss of her virginity she would lose her physical beauty and be stripped not only literally, but also figuratively of all that makes her herself. The tension is between this self-loss and the need to find, and unveil, her true self.

Once the lilies are established as simultaneously the garment and the essence, the metaphor is extended and bent back to the lions. The garment now takes on an emotional quality when (in line 22) the lions "push aside the indolence of my robe." Indolence, in the strict meaning of the word, denotes the inability to feel, a state in which the senses are dead. This, again, harkens back to one of the primary aspects of Hérodiade's self-perception: her immortal hair, which freezes her body; her beauty, which is nothing but death; her human body, which constricts the expression of her true essence. The lions, then, confront her with her indolence, with her adamant denial of her physical nature that is at the basis of all the fears she expresses in Mallarmé's "Scène." The imagery comes once again full circle when Hérodiade, asking her nurse to calm what the girl perceives as an extreme expression of body and time ("the trembling of her senile flesh") likens her hair (*chevelure*) to the lions' mane (*crinières*). Monic Robillard points out that the lions that, explicitly introduced as "my lions," are part of the girl herself, and the arousal they cause in her when stripping her of her indolence, represent the first sign of the auto-eroticism that is more directly expressed later in the "Scène" when Hérodiade retorts that she guards her physical splendor not for some lover but entirely for herself.²⁰

As if understanding the emotional place where Hérodiade's sensation of being split from organic life and her rejection of her own physical

²⁰Charles Mauron, in the commentary that accompanies Roger Fry's English translation of *Hérodiade*, seems to support this when he observes, "Almost all the familiar ideas of modern psychology find, for that matter, some example in the symbols of this poem. After the repression of the unconscious desires, after the return to childhood, how can we avoid thinking of narcissism in reading the famous invocation to the mirror. How can we avoid remembering the moon cult of Salammô and the ambivalence of the serpent (at once icy and phallic) before the 'inviolable reptile' of *Herodias*." (*Poems*, pp. 92/93).

nature originate, the nurse tries to reconcile the two spheres by suggesting to bathe the hair in a flowery essence—to unite, symbolically, that which is all matter and no spirit with that which is all spirit and no matter. Yet once again, images of what is perceived as threatening encroach on the girl's imagination: symbols of imprisonment (the closed bottles) and of age (the age of the roses). Furthermore, whereas the girl had spoken of lilies, the nurse evokes roses; whereas the girl's notion of her physicality is one of purity and an untouched state of dreaminess, the roses invoked by the nurse twist the image to suggest blood, injury, and defloration.²¹ While the woman, when trying to strengthen Hérodiade's positive floral self-image, may not intend anything other than drawing the girl in her care out of the endangered realm of intermediacy into the world where life takes place, the flowers she mentions prefigure that which will emerge as the central fear behind the dialogue: the girl's resistance to lose her virginity.

In this text of Mallarmé's, hair as a symbol for the inorganic boundary of human physicality seems closely connected with the mirror as a symbol for uncertain time and frozen reality. Hérodiade's first recitative begins and ends with the mention of her hair. Its concluding image, the hair to be combed in front of a mirror (which, on the surface of the story unfolding in the dialogue, brings her concern with her self-image full circle), actually harkens back to the "blond torrent" of her hair that freezes her body in its inorganic perfection. Both the hair and the mirror are here symbolic of her sense of being both alive and dead. This impression is strengthened by one of those artful stylistic devices for which the Symbolists strove so diligently: the concluding line picks up the images

²¹Jean-Pierre Richard explains in a similar vein Hérodiade's refusal to see her hair as in any way related to flowers, as she retorts in response to her nurse's suggestion regarding the flower oils. "Hérodiade thus denies her true nature which would be to allow herself to go towards man in a free red gift of flowers and hair. In reality, and with a gesture that is a kind of transferal and semi-confession, she limits herself to deflowering 'the pale lilies' that are inside her, to drop their petals on the 'dun' lions, virile yet old. [...] A gift, certainly, yet one that is chaste and without peril; an offer, yet one that is icy: a sign of bad faith, no doubt, in one who was originally dreamt under the symbol of the red and bleeding rose." See J.-P. Richard, *op. cit.*, pp.80/81: "Hérodiade, dans la 'Scène', refuse donc sa vraie nature qui serait de se laisser aller vers l'homme en un libre don rouge de fleurs et de cheveux. En réalité, et avec un geste qui est une sorte de transfer et de demi-aveu, elle se contente d'effeuiller 'les pâles lys' qui sont en elle, et d'en laisser tomber les pétales sur les 'fauve' lions, virils, mais vieux. [...] Don, certes, mais chaste et sans péril, offre, mais glaciale: signe sans doute de mauvaise foi chez celle qui avait d'abord été rêvée sous le signe de la rose rouge et sanglante."

of the opening without repeating any of the key words. (In French: *torrent de mes cheveux—aide-moi à me peigner; glacer—miroir.*) The girl launches her monologue admitting that she perceives her hair as turning her own body into ice (*glace*), and concludes it with a reference to the reflecting surface (officially *miroir* but also commonly referred to as *la glace*).

The nurse's excuse for the mistake she made in insensitively suggesting flower essences for the hair prompts Hérodiade's return to the metaphor of the mirror. Mallarmé speaks of "cold water" and "frozen" (line 45), thus playing again on the double meaning of *glace* as "ice" and "mirror," but positing at the same time the frozen, immobile, hence lifeless nature of that which is reflected. The mirror as a representative of the congealing powers of this world does not seem merely to reflect, but to create Hérodiade's self-image. At one point, again likened to ice, it appears transformed to the frozen surface of a well (line 48). The girl interprets the deep hollow, seen through the translucent glassy pane yet intrinsically inaccessible, as representing the past. The frozen surface separates the speaker forever from the leaves that fell into the well, once again a representative of the realm of flowers and plants and as such speaking of life, its becoming and withering. Thus severed from what she recognizes as both her past and her connection to embodied life, Hérodiade comprehends her reflection as a shadow. In pronouncing this word, she closes another metaphorical bracket, one that was opened by the nurse's first question, "Or am I seeing here the shadow of a princess?," corroborating anew her non-participation—half regretted, half sought—in the physical world. Yet while she originally appeared as a shadow primarily to her counterpart in the dialogue, that is to others, she now becomes unreal even to herself: a lonely shadow, one who aims at flowering for nobody but herself (line 86), well knowing that this makes her *déserte*, both "deserted" and "barren." Yet as the metaphor of the frozen well's mirroring surface fluctuates further to reveal its next facet, something other than only the girl (or her shadow) is being reflected: the nakedness of her scattered dreams. Nothing, then, remains, no possible time within the frame of which one might live. Hérodiade's present is rejected, fought, dreaded; her past, closed off beneath an icy surface of a deep well like the fallen autumn leaves under winter's frost; her dreams, even in their "scattered" nature a promise of a desirable future, revealed as naked.

The frozen reflection provides the frame for another term connected with time and fraught with layers of symbolic meaning: *l'ennui*. This is

that feeling which spans from boredom and listlessness all the way to the rejection of all that is life, all that is sensual, physical, and culturally expected. The sensation of being paralyzed in one way or another, of being intrinsically severed from the heart beat and warmth of life, is a staple of Symbolist expression. Together with its more desolate sister, melancholy, poets like to present it as something that is foreign to one's true self, not arising from within but attacking from without. *Hérodiade*, however, who experiences herself as part alive, part lifeless, cannot truthfully declare anything as alien to her nature since she claims to encompass both. Thus she integrates *l'ennui* into her larger being by defining it as a result of all that is congealing. In this way, the theme and its symbol are wedded even more closely. The mirror, symbol of time, is *glace*, frozen water; *l'ennui* is congealed time.

Hérodiade's entire being is marked by a combination of those two factors that characterize most Symbolist dramas: paralysis and fearful expectancy. This is most evident in the dramas of Maeterlinck, but also a prominent trait in the works of Hofmannsthal. All these works could carry as a subheading the title of a lyrical monodrama by Marie Pappenheim that, were it not for Schoenberg, might be long forgotten: *Erwartung*. Dread-filled anticipation of the unknown, this pervasive topic of the lyrical drama of the *fin de siècle*, entails the passivity of the protagonist, a passivity that Mallarmé has here exacerbated to an absence of aliveness, if not life. Paralysis, symbolically frozen in ice, mirrors, and everything that can be seen as congealed, also charges the images of jewels and metals that are so prevalent. Amethyst and gold are the specific representatives of jewels and metals that appear in *Hérodiade*. Gold is precious matter, unassailable spirit, "forever virginal of aromas" (line 37) and vain (line 128), but also unknown like the temporal world in which the nurse sees the girl lose herself (cf. line 89: *ors ignoré* with line 3: *l'âge ignoré*). Gold in particular, but also metal in general, is forever linked to the lifeless splendor of Hérodiade's hair (line 93). The amethyst chosen to represent all jewels is as symbolic as the lily and the rose are among flowers. Szondi reminds us that the etymological meaning of *amethystos* is "resistant to intoxication"—an eerily apt description for a girl who does not even allow herself to come close to feelings of affection for her nurse.

Jewels, metals, and ice are present throughout the "Scène," where they balance the living realm of flowers. Approximations of the two spheres, while repeatedly attempted, remain as unsuccessful as the nurse's suggestion to bathe the life-denying, metallic hair in flowery essences.

When the jewels appear as flowers in the expression “amethyst garden” (line 87), nature itself seems suddenly congealed. At the moment when *Hérodiade* appears to come closest to love (albeit in its narcissistic variety) and describes herself as “flowering” (line 86), she immediately contorts the image into something utterly desolate by complementing the expression with the attribute *déserte*. The third attempt is equally doomed. The two final sentences recognize the “naked flower of my lips” not only as deceitful and lying (lines 129/130), but also as the source of those sobs of childhood that sense among its dreams the ultimate victory of the “cold stones” (lines 131-134).

***Hérodiade* and *L'après-midi d'un faune*: Sister Poems**

Many Mallarmé scholars regard *Hérodiade* and *L'après-midi d'un faune* as companion pieces and opposites at the same time. If the two works do not seem immediately related, they certainly complement each other in many ways. Both were originally conceived as dramatic works; in both cases, this plan was later abandoned. In his correspondence with Cazalis, Mallarmé himself speaks of undertaking the writing of *L'après-midi d'un faune* as a way of counteracting the severe and depressing frigidity of *Hérodiade*.

The Background of the Faun Story

In ancient Greek literature, satyrs or fauns were the actors in Dionysian mystery plays, where they stood for the primordial, Orphic vision of the highly imaginative and the childlike. Mallarmé, like quite a few other sophisticated artists of the late nineteenth century, yearned for illusions similar to those they saw playfully exploited by the early poets.

While fauns and satyrs are generic beings populating the tales of pantheistic peoples, Pan is their personalized hero. He is the god of shepherds and flocks, half human, half goat, with a crown of leaves wound around the two horns on his forehead. Associated with the reed pipe, he has a reputation of spying on nymphs when he is not sleeping through the mid-day heat. As a satyr, he is also linked with Dionysos, the Greek god of wine. His classical counterpart is Syrinx, the loveliest among the naiads of the streams. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the satyr Pan chases the beautiful nymph Syrinx to the shores of the River Lado in Arcady. In her

desperation to escape the lecherous faun's pursuit, Syrinx turns to the goddess Diana, imploring her to intervene. Diana's solution is to change not only Syrinx herself, but with her all her sisters, into rushes. Pan, caught in the illusion that he is taking the enchanting nymph into his arms, embraces instead these rushes. Sighing, he confides to them his forlorn love. To his surprise his breath, blowing like the wind in the hollow reeds, gives out soft notes of music. Excited by the discovery of this unexpected musical instrument and charmed by its sweet sound, Pan vows to become a superb musician on a flute made of these reeds, called Syrinx in memory of his love.

Following this ancient story, Syrinx became the muse of flute players, while Pan gave his name to the reed flute made of several pipes. Beyond the literal reading of Mallarmé's story about the faun and the nymphs—which, admittedly, is in itself all but simple—there is thus, many Mallarmé scholars have claimed, a figurative layer dealing with the relation of poetry and music, and with the question of artistic inspiration.

The Tale, Told One Hot Afternoon

Although cast largely in what pretends to be the faun's direct speech, Mallarmé's poem shifts extremely gently from telling us *about* the faun, allowing the faun to share his thoughts and feelings, and articulating the faun's memories—which, as he himself admits, may be nothing but dreams after all. In the heat of an early afternoon in Sicily, the faun wakes up from a nap. Still drowsy, he tries to remember what happened to him earlier in the day, before he fell asleep. Afraid that the enticing image of the two nymphs whom, he thinks, he caught and caressed, may again vanish in another period of lazy slumber, he goes over his sweet memories in the hope to perpetuate the charming women. The slight remnant of a fleshy color that he believes to perceive in the air may be their after-image, he muses, or just the remainder of a dream.

The question whether his encounter with the nymphs was dream or reality drives the entire poem. Is the color he remembers seeing, and takes for the rosy pink of their bodies, not just the hue of red roses? Is his presumed recollection of the nymphs, one of whom almost succumbed to his amorous attentions, nothing but the effect on his somnolent senses of the fully blooming flowers around him? Was the virginal, chaste nymph nothing but his dream's metamorphosis of a cold spring near which he lay

sleeping? And was the other, passionate nymph perhaps merely a picture conjured up by a warm breeze playing through his fleece? Yet he notes with glee—full of the wish to perpetuate the sweet idea that all this really happened—that there is no rippling water near him other than the rain of notes from his flute, and no wind other than his breathing into the instrument, what he calls the “artificial inspiration that regains the sky.” On the other hand, as he admits to himself, even if the entire apparition originated not from a dream, it may still be just a hallucination engendered by his lusty mind that indulges in fabricating sensual adventures. But then, this cannot be all that happened, he reassures himself. After all, how could his imagination, fueled by hot desire, create those cold blue eyes that struck him in one of the nymphs? The image of the other, languishing one, could well have been prompted by a warm breeze touching his fleece. Yet again: the air is completely still; thus this theory seems equally unlikely. Turning to the remembered scenery in his attempt to ascertain whether the encounter had been real or merely a product of his fantasy, the faun observes that no murmuring sound is heard that could have evoked the image of the lake into which, startled when they heard him tuning his flute, he believes to have seen many of the nymphs dive.

Heartened by what seems like proof that the encounter with the two nymphs must really have taken place, the faun proceeds to recall in detail what happened. The late morning of this day, the time when he thinks he met the nymphs, thus provides an insert into the reflections and new sensations of the early afternoon hour when we encounter the protagonist narrator. Mallarmé highlights these memories by printing them in italics. For the first of these recollections, the faun asks the “Sicilian shores of a calm swamp” to tell the story, which is as follows. While cutting reeds for his flute, the faun suddenly saw a shimmering of white flesh through the vegetation. When he tuned his instrument by trying out its note A, the sound alerted creatures he at first took for swans. Just when he discovered that they were naiads, some of them hurried away while others plunged into the water to hide their nakedness.

At this point in the tale of what happened to him earlier in the day, the faun’s mind wanders off, overcome by the lethargy of the hot afternoon. Did all this really happen? His body bears no sign of any ardent rendezvous, other than a mysterious bite mark of some deity. Was it, then, nothing but an ordinary sensual day-dream, where passion becomes music and a beautiful but simple melody fades towards the skies? Impossible to tell. Frustrated by what he perceives for a moment as the deceitful power

of music, he discards his flute, telling it to await him next to the lake where it originated, while he returns for a while, now without any assistance of music, to his libidinous memories or fantasies. He compares the pleasures of recollection after a passionate encounter to the joy of seeing the light shine through the translucent skin of empty grapes after one has drunk their juice. Having reached this point in his reflections, he is able to reconnect with the memories themselves.

And this is what we, together with him, are asked to believe (once more presented in italics): as he approached the pond where he had seen the naked nymphs disappear, he found two of them still sleeping soundly, in each others arms. He scooped them up and flew with them toward the nearby sun-drenched thicket. Yet again—is it because the remembered sunshine is so hot as to make him drowsy, or because the anticipated pleasure asks for the sweet delay of interruption?—the faun leaves his direct recollection of the encounter and engages in further observations. What a delight, he asserts, was the outrage of the virginal women as they fought to avoid my burning kisses! And, gloating in the knowledge that one of them was just about ready to yield, he plunges back into the actual memory.

But what does he recall next? His crime! The unforgivable offense of having concentrated his attentions on one of the two women only while fondling the other merely with one finger, and thus separating the two who were meant to be together. This less than perfect behavior, dictated by his growing arousal, had prompted both of them to slip from his arms—ungrateful, as he perceives it, and without pity for his drunken desire for them.

Well, too bad! thinks the faun; other women will quench his craving. Any ripe fruit, he consoles himself, will eventually yield if it is surrounded by murmuring bees. Later today, when the sun has relented a little, the surrounding foliage will be full of drunken rendezvous. This is Mount Etna, after all, where Venus comes to visit! For an instant, he imagines himself possessing the goddess. But frightened by the certain punishment that would ensue were such presumptuous thoughts known to her, he calls his fantasizing mind back. And the hour of the afternoon helps: drowsiness once again overcomes him, and he returns to the shadows of the mid-day sleep whence he had last seen the nymphs disappear.

On the following pages is the text of the poem, again with my own prose translation.

L'après-midi d'un faune. Églogue

Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer.

Si clair

Leur incarnat léger, qu'il voltige dans l'air
Assoupi de sommeils touffus.

Aimai-je un rêve?

- 4 Mon doute, amas de nuit ancienne, s'achève
En maint rameau subtil, qui, demeuré les vrais
Bois mêmes, prouve, hélas! que bien seul je m'offrais
Pour triomphe la faute idéale de roses.
Réfléchissons...
- 8 ou si les femmes dont tu gloses
Figurent un souhait de tes sens fabuleux!
Faune, l'illusion s'échappe des yeux bleus
Et froids, comme une source en pleurs, de la plus chaste:
- 12 Mais, l'autre tout soupirs, dis-tu qu'elle contraste
Comme brise du jour chaude dans ta toison?
Que non! par l'immobile et lasse pâmoison
Suffoquant de chaleurs le matin frais s'il lutte,
- 16 Ne murmure point d'eau que ne verse ma flûte
Au bosquet arrosé d'accords; et le seul vent
Hors des deux tuyaux prompt à s'exhaler avant
Qu'il disperse le son dans la pluie aride,
- 20 C'est, à l'horizon pas remué d'une ride,
Le visible et serein souffle artificiel
De l'inspiration, qui regagne le ciel.
O bords siciliens d'un calme marécage
- 24 Qu'à l'envi de soleils ma vanité saccage,
Tacite sous les fleurs d'étincelles, CONTEZ

The Afternoon of a Faun: Eclogue (prose translation)

These nymphs, I want to pin them down forever.* So clear is their light fleshy pink that it floats in the air, heavy with tufted sleep. Was it a dream I loved? My doubt, a heap of ancient night, is fulfilled in many a subtle branch—which, remaining the true wood itself, proves, alas! that I alone offered myself the ideal fault of roses for triumph. Let's think... Now if the women about whom you gossip represent a wish of your yarn-spinning senses! Faun, the illusion escapes like a well of tears from the cold blue eyes of the more chaste of the two: but the other one, all sighs, are you saying she contrasts, like a hot day's breeze in your fleece! But no! if the fresh morning fights through the still, weary swoon that is choking with heat, it does not murmur of waters other than those poured by my flute in the chord-sprinkled wood. And the sole wind that, outside my two pipes, is ready to exhale before it scatters the sound in an arid rainfall, is the visible and serene artificial breath of the inspiration that, on a horizon unruffled by a single wrinkle, regains the sky. O Sicilian shores of a calm swamp that my vanity pillages, envied by many suns, tacit beneath the flowers of sparks, TELL

[* French *perpétuer* = to perpetuate, to make last, also rings of *tuer* = to kill.]

- 28 *"Que je coupais ici les creux roseaux domptés
 "Par le talent; quand, sur l'or glauque de lointaines
 "Verdures dédiant leur vigne à des fontaines,
 "Ondoie une blancheur animale au repos:
 "Et qu'au prélude lent où naissent les pipeaux
 "Ce vol de cygnes, non! de naïades sauve
 32 "Ou plonge..."*
 Inerte, tout brûle dans l'heure fauve
 Sans marquer par quel art ensemble décala
 Trop d'hymen souhaité de qui cherche le la:
 Alors m'éveillerai-je à la ferveur première,
 36 Droit et seul, sous un flot antique de lumière,
 Lys! et l'un de vous tous pour l'ingénuité.
 Autre que ce doux rien par leur lèvre ébruité,
 Le baiser, qui tout bas des perfides assure,
 40 Mon sein, vierge de preuve, atteste une morsure
 Mystérieuse, due à quelque auguste dent;
 Mais, bast! arcane tel élu pour confident
 Le jonc vaste et jumeau dont sous l'azur on joue:
 44 Qui, détournant à soi le trouble de la joue,
 Rêve, dans un solo long, que nous amusons
 La beauté d'alentour par des confusions
 Fausses entre elle-même et notre chant crédule;
 48 Et de faire aussi haut que l'amour se module
 Évanouir du songe ordinaire de dos
 Ou de flanc pur suivis avec mes regards clos,
 Une sonore, vaine et monotone ligne.
 52 Tâche donc, instrument des fuites, ô maligne
 Syrinx, de refleurir aux lacs où tu m'attends!

'that here I cut the hollow reeds tamed by talent when, on the dull gold of
 far-away pastures that dedicate their vines to fountains, an animal whiteness
 undulates at rest. And that to the slow prelude where my pipes are first
 heard, this flight of swans, no! of naiads runs away, or plunges...'

Inert now, everything burns in this fierce tawny hour of midday, without bearing mark by
 what art together it cleared out the too much hymen that was desired by him who seeks the
 'la' on his flute. Then shall I awake to the primordial fervor, upright and alone, beneath an
 ancient flood of light, Lilies! and wake up one of you all for the ingenuity.

Other than the sweet nothing spread by their lips, the kiss, which very softly bears witness
 of the perfidious ones, my breast, unsullied by proof, attests a mysterious bite, due to some
 august tooth. But enough! Such mystery chose for confidant the vast twin reed on which
 one plays under the blue sky, which—diverting towards itself the cheek's dismay—
 dreams in a long solo that we were amusing the beauty around us with false confusions
 between herself and our credulous song. The flute also dreams of making—as high as the
 sounds of love warble—a sonorous, vain, dull melody, pursued with closed eyes, fade
 away from ordinary visions of back or pure flanks. Try then, o treacherous Syrinx,
 instrument of escapes, to flower again at the lakes where you wait for me!

- Moi, de ma rumeur fier, je vais parler longtemps
Des déesses; et par l'idolâtres peintures,
56 À leur ombre enlever encore des ceintures:
Ainsi, quand des raisins j'ai sucé la clarté,
Pour bannir un regret par ma feinte écarté,
Rieur, j'élève au ciel d'été la grappe vide
60 Et, soufflant dans ses peaux lumineuses, avide
D'ivresse, jusqu'au soir je regarde au travers.
O nymphes, regonflons des SOUVENIRS divers.
"Mon oeil, trouant les joncs, dardait chaque encolure
64 "Immortelle, qui noie en l'onde sa brûlure
"Avec un cri de rage au ciel de la forêt;
"Et le splendide bain de cheveux disparaît
"Dans les clartés et les frissons, ô pierreries!
68 "J'accours; quand, à mes pieds, s'entrejoignent (meurtries
"De la languueur goûtée de ce mal d'être deux)
"Des dormeuses parmi leurs seuls bras hasardeux;
"Je les ravis, sans les désenlacer, et vole
72 "À ce massif, haï par l'ombrage frivole,
"De roses tarissant tout parfum au soleil,
"Où notre ébat au jour consumé soit pareil."
Je t'adore, courroux des vierges, ô délice
76 Farouche du sacré fardeau nu qui se glisse
Pour fuir ma lèvre en feu buvant, comme un éclair
Tressaille! la frayer secrète de la chair:
Des pieds de l'inhumaine au cœur de la timide
80 Que délaisse à la fois une innocence, humide
De larmes folles ou de moins tristes vapeurs.

Meanwhile I, proud of my murmur, will speak at length of the goddesses; and by my idolizing depictions I shall tear more girdles still from their shadows. Thus, when I have sucked the grape's clear liquid to banish a regret that hung over me, I raise, laughing, the empty bunch to the summer sky and, blowing into the luminous grape skins, I look through them till evening, eager to get drunk. O nymphs, let us again inflame various MEMORIES.

'My eye, piercing the reeds, shot at each immortal neck that drowned its burns in a wave with a cry of rage to the forest sky. And the splendid bath of hair disappears in shimmer and shuddering, o jewels! I run closer when, at my feet, I see two sleepers (wounded by the languor and pain of being two) intermingling one with the other among casual arms. I seize them without disentangling them, and fly to this thicket (avoided by frivolous shade) of roses whose floral fragrance is drained by the intemperate sun. May our delight here be equal to the sun-consumed day.'

I adore you, wrath of virgins, o wild delight of the holy naked burden that slips to escape the drinking of my fiery lips, like a flash of lightning thrills! the secret terror of the flesh. From the feet of the cruel one to the heart of the timid one, who simultaneously abandons an innocence, humid with mad tears or less sorrowful vapors.

- “Mon crime, c’est d’avoir, gai de vaincre ces peurs
 “Traîtresses, divisé la touffe échevelée
 84 “De baisers que les dieux gardaient se bien mêlée:
 “Car, à peine j’allais cacher un rire ardent
 “Sous les replis heureux d’une seule (gardant
 “Par un doigt simple, afin que sa candeur de plume
 88 “Se teignît à l’émoi de sa soeur qui l’allume,
 “La petite, naïve et ne rougissant pas:)
 “Que de mes bras, défaits par de vagues trépas,
 “Cette proie, à jamais ingrate se délivre
 92 “Sans pitié du sanglot dont j’étais encore ivre.”
 Tant pis! vers le bonheur d’autres m’entraîneront
 Par leur tresse nouée aux cornes de mon front:
 Tu sais, ma passion, que, pourpre et déjà mûre,
 96 Chaque grenade éclate et d’abeilles murmure;
 Et notre sang, épris de qui le va saisir,
 Coule pour tout l’essaim éternel du désir.
 À l’heure où ce bois d’or et de cendres se teinte
 100 Une fête s’exalte en la feuillée éteinte:
 Etna! c’est parmi toi visitée de Vénus
 Sur ta lave posant ses talons ingénus,
 Quand tonne une somme triste ou s’épuise la flamme.
 104 Je tiens la reine!

O sûr châtement...

Non, mais l’âme

De paroles vacante et ce corps alourdi

Tard succombent au fier silence du midi:

‘My crime is to have—glad to conquer those treacherous fears—divided the disheveled tangle of kisses that the gods kept so well commingled. For I was just about to hide an ardent laugh among the blissful locks of the one (keeping the younger, naïve and unblushing one with only a finger, so that her feathery candor might be dyed by her sister’s kindling desire) when from my arms, which are yielding in vague failing, this prey, forever ungrateful, releases itself without pity for the sob with which I was still drunk.’

O well, too bad! Others will lead me towards happiness, their braids knotted to the horns of my forehead. You know, my passion, that each pomegranate, purple and already ripe, bursts and murmurs with bees; and our blood, in love with whoever will take it, flows through the whole eternal swarm of desire. At the hour when this wood changes its color to gold and ashes, a celebration gets carried away in the extinguished foliage: Etna! among your hills, visited by Venus who places her candid heels on your lava, when a sadness thunders or the flame dies. I hold the queen!

O sure punishment.

No, but the soul that is void of words and this body that is weighed down, succumb at last to the proud silence of midday:

108 Sans plus il faut dormir en l'oubli du blasphème,
 Sur le sable altéré gisant et comme j'aime
 Ouvrir ma bouche à l'astre efficace des vins!

Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins.

without further ado, it's time to sleep in the oblivion of the blasphemy lying on the parched sand, and how I love to open my mouth to the wines' potent starlight!
 Couple, farewell; I'll go see the shadow that you became.

Form and Language

Mallarmé has subtitled his poem "Eclogue." Encyclopedias define this form as "a short pastoral poem," often with the additional remark that it may contain direct speech in either a dialogical setting or a soliloquy but typically "without appreciable characterization or action."²² Roger Pearson believes that the French version goes back to a misspelling originating with Dante. As he points out, Dante assumed (incorrectly but interestingly) an etymology in which the component for goat, *aix*, was paired with *logos*.²³ If Pearson is right, Mallarmé no doubt adopted the term not only because of its associations with Virgil's bucolic eclogues, but also because of his delight in finding the word—like the protagonist he had in mind—divided between a lower-body animality (goat) and an upper-body humanity (flautist), between sensuality and the aesthetic pursuits of his music making.

Like *Hérodiane*, this poem is written in alexandrines which, however, the poet has drastically freed from their traditional rigidity. *L'après-midi d'un faune* consists of 110 verses, grouped unevenly into blocks the shortest of which spans less than a line, the longest thirty-one lines. Mallarmé uses three types of print: normal Roman for the faun's present-time deliberations, passages in italics recalling what he thinks must have happened, and two capitalized words, "CONTEZ" and "SOUVENIRS." In these words (which appear one in each of the poem's two main sections), he first prompts the landscape to tell him what happened, then declares his visions about the erotic encounter with the nymphs as "memories," trying

²²Cf. in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Littré's Greek dictionary, which Mallarmé used, only gives the etymology as *eklegein* = to choose, select.

²³Roger Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé: The Development of Poetic Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 116.

to make them more real than mere dreams or fantasies. There is thus, even in this ostensible soliloquy, a dialogical element. Just as the virginal princess Hérodiade, threatened by the glacial unreality of frozen water, stones, metals, and jewels, attempts to find herself partially in the image reflected back to her by her mirror (and all it stands for), partially in the nurse from which she distinguishes and separates herself so violently, so also does the faun, imperiled at any moment by his own drowsiness and the unreal but attractive realm of sleep and dream, try to grasp reality about himself partially by querying nature's impressions, partially by reflecting about the images his mind presents before his inner eye.

I perceive the poem as laid out in two almost equal halves followed by what in music would be called a coda:

section I	=	lines 1-51
section II	=	lines 52-93
epilogue	=	lines 94-110.

One basis for this assessment of the structure is the fact that all the expressions referring to the faun's music making appear in the first section—see “my flute” (line 16), “the chord-sprinkled wood” (17), “my two pipes” (18), “the artificial breath of inspiration” (21/22), “the hollow reeds tamed by talent” (26/27), “the slow talent where my pipes are first heard” (30), “what art together” (33), “who seeks the ‘A’ on his flute (34)”, “the large twin reed on which one plays” (43), “a long solo” (45), “our song” (47), “warbles” (48), and “a sonorous line” (51). The second section, by contrast, is conspicuously free of any word alluding to music. It begins by blaming the flute for the misfortune the faun encountered when the two enticing nymphs fled prematurely from his arms. Consequently, he challenges his flute, *instrument des fuites, ô maligne Syrinx*, to flower again at the lake where he first found it, to return to reed since it has proved counterproductive to his present aim, that of conquering the women. In this section, the faun speaks, sees, and paints; the art of sounds is replaced by the various arts of words and images—see his announcement to “speak at length of the goddesses” (lines 54/55), to remove their girdle through “flattering depictions” (55), and to “look through luminous grapeskins” (61), as well as his remembrance how “my eye shot at each immortal neck” (63). In the coda or epilogue, finally, he lets go of the futile question whether or not these nymphs were real or merely a product of his dream. In three brief yet very different segments we see him engaged first in general deliberations, then in wishful thinking about

seducing Venus, and finally “void of words” (line 105), succumbing to “proud silence” (106). Both music and the spoken word, it seems, have fallen silent by now. As he indulges himself with another nap, what remains as a means of sensual contact is the visual: “I’ll go see the shadow that you became” (line 110).

Another difference in speech attitude between the sections of the poem attests to the faun’s changing degree of self-reflection (and, perhaps related, of artistic sublimation). In section I, the first object introduced with the possessive pronoun is “doubt” (line 4); later he adds “illusion” (10), anticipates that he may wake up “upright and alone” (36), and looks for signs that “bear witness” (39) and give “proof” (40)—all expressions of doubt, in general or with regard to the reality of the nymphs.. In section II, by contrast, he is “proud” (line 54), “laughing” (59), and “eager to get drunk” (60/61); he revels in the “wrath of virgins” (75), and is defiant in the face of the failure of his amorous adventure (“*Tant pis!*,” line 95). In keeping with these very different poses, the capitalized word that, in the first section of the eclogue, triggers a quasi-dialogical second layer, is “tell” (or, as many have translated, “relate”), while the corresponding term in section II is “memories.” The first, a verb, engages an other (here: the Sicilian shores of a calm swamp) to active participation and reassurance; the second, a noun, indicates that the faun trusts his own recollection, without the aid of the witnessing landscape. Ultimately, however, neither doubt and the need for reassurance nor pride and frivolity survive into the epilogue; they give way to a sense of blasphemy: the exuberant faun ends up fantasizing about possessing Venus herself, no less! This final feeling is quickly erased, subjected to the oblivion of sleep.

In his study, *Unfolding Mallarmé*, Roger Pearson makes a striking point (supported with manifold examples), claiming that, were the poem *heard* rather than merely *read*, it would reveal yet another significant layer, created by the homophonic ambiguity of words and word strings. This subcutaneous layer, Pearson argues, deals with the relationship between music and poetry—a topic other interpreters have similarly sensed as a presence behind or beneath the bucolic story. Some key terms in Pearson’s dual layer of meaning are hidden in the identical pronunciation of *faune* = *phone*, *vol des cignes* = *vol des signes* (flight of swans = flight of signs), *maligne Syrinx* = *ma ligne Syrinx* (evil Syrinx = my line [or melody] Syrinx), *jumeaux* = *jus-mots* (twins = juice words), and *midi* = *mi-dit* (midday / half said). When the *Afternoon of a Faun* is thus recast as *Après mi-dit d’un phone* (something like “After [what is] half said by a

phoneme”), this opens a distinctly different window for the interpretation of the poem, inviting an entirely new and unexpected access to what may have been the poet’s secondary expressive aim, if not his primary aesthetic message.²⁴

***Hérodiade* and *L’après-midi d’un faune*: Parallels and Contrasts**

Different as they are, the two sister poems have perhaps more in common than meets the eye. Both are not, as they at first may seem, accounts of events, but rather of states of mind. In *Hérodiade*, the description of the protagonist’s troubled sense of what is real and what is not, where living spirit ends and dead matter begins, is dialogically distributed among two speakers. In *L’après-midi d’un faune*, the similar questions about what happened and what did not, where sensuous imagination ends and dull reality begins, is presented in the complementary voices of the faun’s present-time deliberations (in Roman print) and his recollection of what he believes to remember or asks the landscape to tell (in italics). We witness *Hérodiade* looking with fear towards what the immediate future may bring, especially in terms of forcing her to become more physical; the faun is looking back wistfully to what may or may not have happened to him in the immediate past. *Hérodiade* perceives herself as materializing primarily in her reflection in the mirror, and refers to herself as a shadow; the faun dives in and out of the realm of drowsiness, where the nymphs are part shadow, part real. Both protagonists live in, and are defined by, ambiguity. As St. Aubyn puts it, “the faun demonstrates that his basic attitude towards the realities of life and love and physical desire is not so different from that of *Hérodiade*. What is desired is frightening, frightening because desired. What is genuinely frightening is the realization of desire, the revelation of his illusion as reality.”²⁵

²⁴See Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé*, pp. 124-136. Fascinating as Pearson’s point appears, I have problems with a certain ahistoricity. As Romance literature scholar Albert Gier confirmed to me (private communication, September 1997), the word *phone*, to give just one example, was entirely unknown in Mallarmé’s time; even later, its use in linguistic circles would hardly have influenced an audience’s response to a poetic reading. Similarly, constructions like *jus-mots* strike me as an instance of the postmodern love for nonsense. Most importantly for my purpose in this study, there is no indication that either Debussy’s or Nijinsky’s intersemiotic transmedializations of the work were based on an understanding of Mallarmé along these lines.

²⁵F.C. St. Aubyn, *Stéphane Mallarmé*, p. 66.

How warm and approachable the amorous satyr is—despite his poet's often almost inaccessible language—becomes especially clear when he is compared with the protagonist of the sister poem written during the same (long) period of Mallarmé's life. The faun is as sensual as Hérodiade is emotionally repressed, his craving for physical touch is as pronounced as her fear of it. Where the inhibited eroticism of the young princess is cast in the cold, pale scintillations of jewels, mirror surfaces, and inhuman hair, the sexuality of the faun is diffused with the warm, golden glow of a summer afternoon, with languor and indulgence. Where Hérodiade perceives her object world as chilling (see the fountain's "cold water frozen by ennui," and her nurse's gesture, which "chills her blood to its source,") the faun is pictured in the heat of a summer's day, pleasantly exhausted by the sun and the stillness of the "fierce hour." For Hérodiade as well as for the faun, water represents the element that blocks something desired, while at the same time allowing indirect access to unexpected treasures. In the faun's case the water, whose gentle sound may have triggered the whole dream of nymphs, leaves him doubting what is real and what is not. In the context of his adventure, water both separates him from the desired naked bodies, when the naiads plunge into the lake in an attempt to avoid his lust, and brings him to the spot where the two remaining nymphs lie hidden in profound sleep. In Hérodiade's world, water appears almost exclusively in the form of ice that separates her from the "profound hollow" in which her memories are encapsulated. The only exception is the fountain by which she bares the white lilies within her of their petals.

The colors both protagonists encounter are white, red, and blue. For both, white represents virginity. Yet while virginity is exciting and challenging for the womanizing faun, the erotically repressed Hérodiade associates it with utter panic. Similarly, red, and red roses in particular, are perceived by both as symbols of passion. For Hérodiade, the color and even the flowers alone denote blood and violence; for the faun, by contrast, they speak of promise, excitement, and lust. His imagery of red begins with "the fleshy pink" of the supposedly aroused nymphs' bodies and the "faute idéal de roses" when he fears to have clumsily chased away the promising rosy hues of the naiads. It intensifies further in the blushed cheeks of the embarrassed flautist until it reaches his "purple passion." Hérodiade's experience of the color blue remains ambivalent: while she acknowledges "the warm blue of summer," she claims to "detest the beautiful azure." For the faun, there is no doubt that the younger nymph's blue eyes are cold.

Hérodias's hair is described as foreign to her living human body, which it chills with horror; the faun's mention of hair, by contrast, regards his fleece in which the wind plays (suggesting a passionately responding nymph), the pubic hair that he caresses, and the nymphs' braids that he imagines wound around his horns in erotic play. (Even sleep, evoked at the very beginning of the poem, is *touffu*, literally "tufted," endowing the growth of hair with a quality of uninhibited sensual indulgence.) While Hérodias hates flowers and their essences, fearing the intoxication they might cause, the faun loves the flora around him. He is especially fond of what can be regarded as his equivalent to flower essence: wine. He seeks and enjoys inebriation, and celebrates the joy of the world as he gazes through empty grapeskins. The faun, describing the passion he believes hidden in any ripe woman, speaks of pomegranates "bursting and murmuring with bees." In stark contrast to this positive image of eroticism, Hérodias refers to herself as an "inviolable reptile." Both are portrayed as perceiving creatures from the animal world as standing in for humans: the faun believes he sees swans—which he later identifies as naiads; Hérodias describes lions, with whom she identifies. It seems striking that in all these images, the young princess relates exclusively to herself, while the faun, despite his reputation as a narcissist defined by self-sufficient sexuality, associates every passionate image with the objects of his desire.

In terms of inanimate objects, the world in which Hérodias lives is characterized by cold, dead matter: stone, metal, gold, and jewels. The dialogue with her nurse takes place in a tower. The faun's habitat, by contrast, is warm and alive: it consists of a swamp, woods with their foliage, pastures, and the reeds at the lake shore. The girl speaks of descending to the "heavy prison of stones and iron"; the faun's secondary location is the sun-drenched rose thicket to which he abducts the two sleeping nymphs.

When Hérodias turns toward the past or the future, she remembers a lonely infancy and declares, apprehensive about what may be in store for her, that she "wants nothing human"; her counterpart the faun, impervious to such anxieties, recalls carnal pleasures and envisages new conquests. Hérodias seems to have no footing in the present; she is tense, afraid of her own and others' corporeality, and forever anxious to avoid touch. He, by contrast, lives primarily in and for the present; he is idle, open to the surprises of the moment, and desires above all to touch and be touched. She speaks of virginity, he of sexuality; she experiences "shudders of terror," he causes "shudders of pleasure." When she announces "I die," it is out of her overwhelming fear of being exposed to a man's gaze; when he

acknowledges that it is time to interrupt his lusty thoughts and go back to sleep, he acts out of sheer self-indulgence. Hérodiade is perceived by her nurse as a “lamentable victim,” a “sad flower,” and describes herself as “barren”; the faun is proud, laughing, and defiant even in the face of the factual failure of his amorous pursuit.

Finally, even where the two characters are surrounded by or confronted with the same attributes, their reactions are diametrically opposite. Both are, no doubt, narcissistic creatures; while Hérodiade pictures herself as spiritual yet appears self-enamored, the faun, reputedly self-enamored and infamous for his onanistic pleasures, clearly seeks the involvement of the other here—as well as the aesthetic pleasure of artistic expression. Shadows play a role in both poems; yet while Hérodiade is the one who appears as a shadow, both to her nurse and to herself, in the faun’s case it is the nymphs who seem to belong to the realm of the not-quite real. Both poems mention a kiss perhaps never given; yet while Hérodiade is certain that such all-too-human contact would kill her, the faun wishes fervently to have kissed and been kissed. In both poems, the favorite color adjective of the Symbolists, “fauve” (which translates alternatively as “tawny, dun” or as “wild, fierce”) is mentioned; yet while Hérodiade associates the color with “her old lions” and thus with reduced animal power and brilliance, the faun uses the word to describe the hottest hour of the day, which he perceives as full of brilliance. Shortly before the end of each poem, both characters speak of Venus; yet again, their respective perceptions could hardly differ more. The life-evading princess, having explained how much she “detests the azure,” looks towards the land of Vulcan with a perverse longing when she asks her nurse (cf. lines 123-125): “Do you not know a country where the sinister sky has the hated looks of Venus who, in the evening, burns in the foliage?” By contrast, the two-horned satyr identifies with Etna, the volcano that is located between two high peaks and is therefore also known by the Latin nickname *bicornis*. As he expresses it, “At the hour when this wood changes its color to gold and ashes, a celebration gets carried away in the extinguished foliage: Etna! among your hills, visited by Venus who places her candid heels on your lava” (99-102).

As Mallarmé himself remarked with regard to his sister poems, Hérodiade and her surroundings are as frigid, severe, and erotically inhibited as the faun’s are glowingly warm, indulgent, and unabashedly sensual.

Poetic Transformations, Further Transmedialized

From their very beginning, the existence of the two sister poems was closely linked to the aesthetic question of translation from one reality to another. Mallarmé is said to have talked about a ‘transposition from the fact to the idea,’ to what Mauron describes, with regard to the *Faune*, as an “evaporation of reality into a sort of musically fluid dream.”²⁶

Whether one or both of the Mallarmé poems were actually inspired by specific works of visual art, as has sometimes been suggested, will probably remain a matter of speculation or intuitive conviction. The case has been made particularly for *L’après-midi d’un faune*. A painting of French Rococo style, François Boucher’s *Pan and Syrinx*, today owned by the National Gallery in London, appears indeed as a very likely pictorial source for the poet both in subject matter and in expressive content. Albert Thibaudet, in his extensive study on Mallarmé mentioned earlier, presents this view as a fact, claiming that the poet saw the Boucher painting in 1863, during the year he spent studying in London shortly after his graduation from high school, and that—“hence”—the idea for the poem was conceived as a response to the painting. However, soon after this claim was published, Henri Mondor refuted Thibaudet’s argument, proving that it was based on a faulty assumption. Under the chapter heading “Une source fictive,” he called the hypothesis attractive but unfortunately wrong: the National Gallery did not purchase the Boucher painting until 1880, thus many years after Mallarmé’s sojourn in England.²⁷ Nonetheless, many of today’s Mallarmé scholars seem to feel that even in the absence of the straightforward biographical link that was earlier assumed, there is reason to believe that the poet must have been familiar with many paintings from reproductions, and thus may well have been inspired by Boucher’s depiction after all.

Boucher’s *Pan et Syrinx* shows two naked nymphs—one rosy in color, the other rather white; one with brown hair, the other blond—who lie very close by one another, almost in each others’ arms. They are far from asleep, having apparently just been surprised by the faun who is seen emerging from among the reeds. Their childlike faces would seem to contradict their well-endowed bodies as well as the obvious flirtation with which the blond, possibly younger one looks up. While the nymphs are

²⁶See Charles Mauron in *Stéphane Mallarmé: Poems*, trans. Roger Fry, p. 25.

²⁷Henri Mondor, *Histoire d’un faune; avec un état inédit de L’après-midi d’un faune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 19-22.

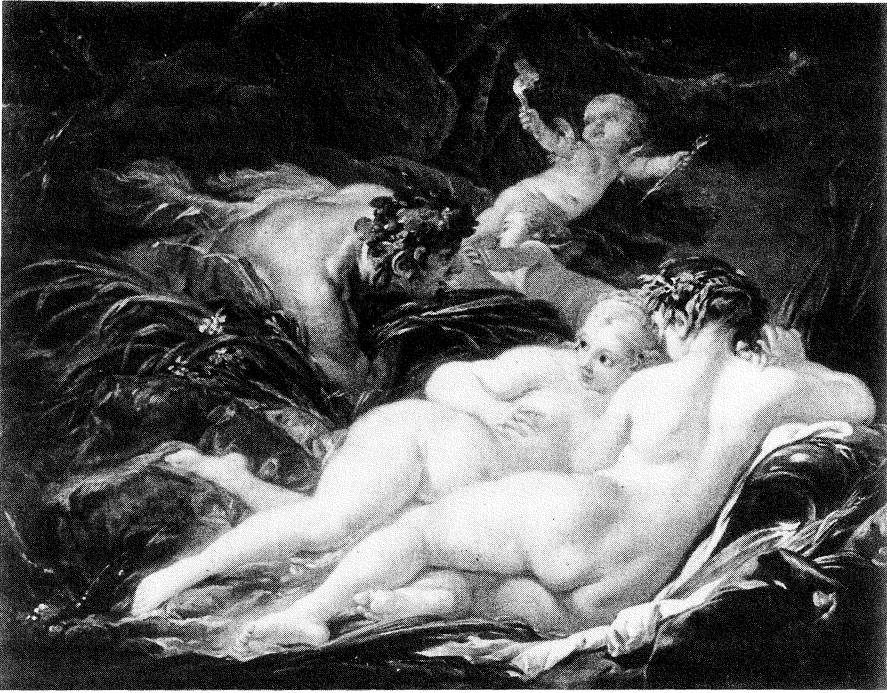


PLATE 44: François Boucher (1703-1770), *Pan et Syrinx*
National Gallery, London.

bathed in bright sunlight, the faun is slightly in the shadow. Both his face and his hurried movement towards the two nudes speak a clear language: there is no attempt to dissimulate his lustful anticipation. He is aided—or intercepted?—by two winged cupids, one of whom is equipped with a torch and a single arrow, pointed not at either of the beauties but, if anywhere, at the spot where the forward-thrusting faun's own heart will be the next moment. While the two nymphs do not give the impression that they need a third person for their happiness, neither do they exhibit any fear or panic.

If Mallarmé was indeed inspired by Boucher's painting at any point in the process of conceiving, writing, and recasting his poem, one understands how he could have described the nymphs as both accommodating and ultimately escaping, both ready for passion and unwilling to yield to this particular male's lust. Yet the cast of three, their position, coloring,

and the environment of the reedy swamp, is all that links the painting to the poem. Mallarmé's text is immeasurably richer and deeper than the scene portrayed on the canvas of Louis XV's light-hearted court artist.

Besides this possible source of pictorial inspiration for *L'après-midi d'un faune*, a number of visual depictions of Salomé have been suggested as potentially influential for Mallarmé's sister poem. More intriguing, however, and certainly more fruitful in the context of the present study, is the question which artists working in media other than poetry felt inspired to recreate one or the other work, and what readings of the poems their recreative interpretations convey.

For the Symbolist poets, the link to music is not something that may or may not be added to the verbal composition; rather, music is embedded in the lyrical form itself. Mallarmé's two poems have been described as cast "in the form of a symphonic poetic reverie."²⁸ In this respect as in so many others, they exemplify what is perhaps the most characteristic tendency of the Symbolist movement: to take the inspiration for form and diction, and the model for poetic expression, from symphonic (i.e. non-vocal, not primarily representational) music. Not surprisingly, then, these works have themselves inspired re-interpretations in symphonic music.

Still in Mallarmé's lifetime, working with the poet's consent and, once finished, his unreserved admiration, Claude Debussy created his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1892-94, full score 1895). Half a century later, Paul Hindemith composed a "recitation orchestrale" with the title *Hérodiade* (1944). Yet this was still not the final stage of transformation for either poem. While the musical translations were conceived in close contact with the poet in one case (Debussy) but without feedback from the original author in the other (Hindemith), the transformation from music to dance followed the opposite pattern. When, in 1912, Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes staged their rendering of *L'après-midi d'un faune* in Paris, Debussy, who for almost twenty years had experienced his composition as entirely self-sufficient, felt alienated and misrepresented. By contrast, Martha Graham's choreography of *Hérodiade* was devised in 1944 in direct synchronization with Hindemith, who was commissioned to write a music that she would choreograph and dance and chose the poem (and perhaps even his way of writing the music for it) with this further translation in mind.

In the following chapters, I will investigate these translations into other art forms, asking once again how the music represents the poetic

²⁸See Grange Woolley, *Stéphane Mallarmé, 1842-1898*, p. 257.

text it claims to recreate, and in what ways the dance relates to either or both of its respective source texts: the poetic and the musical ones.

Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and Hindemith's orchestral recitation *Hérodiade* are similar—and equally unusual when compared to other pieces of non-vocal music based on specific works of poetry²⁹—in that both follow certain aspects of the verbal text chronologically. Debussy, as many scholars keep reminding us, is said to have claimed that he followed the poem verse by verse; Hindemith, as I intend to show, reproduced the verbal text even word by word. What expressive means the two composers employed, and what reading of Mallarmé's poems the results convey, is truly fascinating and worth being examined in some detail.

Debussy and Mallarmé

How close a friendship linked Claude Debussy to the poet who was twenty years his senior is not clear. Yet it is known that the young composer occasionally attended the salon Mallarmé held each Tuesday in his house in the rue de Rome. In 1887, Debussy gave a copy of the poet's *Après-midi d'un faune* to his composer friend, Paul Dukas, inviting him to share his own enthusiasm and admiration for these verses.³⁰ Yet it was not until seven years later that he had a score performed and printed that, in its first version, was further divided, under the title *Prélude, interludes et paraphrase finale pour L'après-midi d'un faune*.³¹

²⁹I am thinking, for example, of Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* and of Debussy's preludes on Baudelaire's "Harmonie du soir," Leconte de Lisle's "La fille aux cheveux de lin," etc.

³⁰See Henri Mondor, *Histoire d'un faune*, pp. 270-272.

³¹Debussy had originally intended this cyclically designed symphonic work to alternate with Mallarmé's text (see the appendix in H. Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry's *Stéphane Mallarmé: Œuvres complètes*, as well as the comment in Pierre Citron, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Poésies*). In 1890, Mallarmé planned a staged production in Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art of the (definitive) *Faune* text with Debussy's *Prélude, interludes et paraphrase finale pour L'après-midi d'un faune* as incidental music. The performance was announced for February 27; however, in late January Mallarmé (possibly still not satisfied that his work was completed) withdrew his text. Citron believes that Debussy may later have integrated his sketches for the interludes and the finale into what became the *Prélude*. Mallarmé's appreciation for the composer is expressed in one of his quatrains (Pleiade edition no. 14) in which he asks us to "hear all the light that Debussy has breathed" into his poetry:

Sylvain d'haleine première / Si ta flûte a réussi /
Oùs toute la lumière / Qu'y soufflera Debussy.

Thanks to a letter written by Debussy to Georges Jean-Aubry and published by the latter, we know what the poet's first impression after listening to the music was. "I lived, at that time," the composer writes, "in a small furnished apartment in the rue de Londres. [...] Mallarmé came to me, dressed in a Scottish plaid. Having listened, he remained silent for a long while, and then said to me: 'I did not expect anything like that! This music prolongs the emotion of my poem and renders its scenery more passionately than color...'.³² From an exchange of letters between Mallarmé and Debussy, it seems further that the poet must have been present at the first public audition of what was by then simply called the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, held at the salle d'Harcourt on Sunday, 23 December 1894. Two days before this first performance, Debussy had sent Mallarmé an extraordinarily gracious invitation, written in a language that, Mondor believes, attempts to emulate or at least allude to that of Mallarmé's poetry.

Cher Maître,
 Ai-je besoin de vous dire la joie que j'aurai si vous voulez bien
 encourager de votre présence les arabesques qu'un peut-être coupable
 orgueil m'a fait croire être dictées par la flûte de votre Faune.
 Votre respectueusement dévoué

Claude DEBUSSY³³

After this concert, Mallarmé added further enthusiastic compliments to those prompted by his first impression of the music in Debussy's apartment. He stated that he thought the composer's illustration of *L'après-midi d'un faune*, far from presenting any dissonance with the poetic text, actually "goes farther, truly, in terms of nostalgia and light." The poet seemed to suggest that he felt the music surpassed the lyrical text in subtlety and richness. What, then, did Debussy set, and in which way does his composition "expand the impression" of the poem?

³²Quoted after Henri Mondor, *Histoire d'un faune*, p. 271.

³³"Dear Master,

Do I need to tell you what joy I will have if you will consent to encourage with your presence the arabesques that a perhaps guilty pride has made me believe to have been dictated by the flute of your Faun.

Your respectfully devoted

Claude Debussy."

(Quoted after Henri Mondor, *Histoire d'un faune*, p. 273.)

Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

In his introduction to the piece in the Norton Critical Score, William Austin seems to believe that he provides a key to this question with his structural and motivic analysis. With all due respect for the thorough work, I do not find the lengthy deliberations that attempt to impose a ternary form (A B A' or one of its variants) on Debussy's piece all that helpful. Not only do they not seem to do justice to the music when appreciated as a separate work³⁴ (theorists seem locked in a never-settled disagreement, diligently documented by Austin, on where the B and A' sections begin), but what is more, not one of them seems to relate in any discernible way—be it structural, thematic, metaphoric, or otherwise—to Mallarmé's poetic text.

More important than the labeling of the layout seems to me the fact that the composition spans 110 measures, exactly as many as Mallarmé's poem has lines—an almost too obvious detail that, surprisingly, I did not find mentioned in any of the analyses I consulted. Furthermore, the piece appears based on—and oscillates between—two tonal centers, C# and E; one is reminded of the way in which the faun's afternoon musings fluctuate between various paired poles. Most scholars confirm the listener's impression, that the melodic material appears as if in ever-evolving flux, but seem to shy away from following through with a discussion of just how this phenomenon may be informed by, and reflect back upon, Mallarmé's text. Austin points in an important direction when his analysis traces the changing tonal environment against which the flute's initial C# is heard; but the question how this play of Debussy's bears out the meanderings of the faun's multi-faceted monologue remains unaddressed.

How, then, does Debussy's composition "transpose" Mallarmé's poem into music? I would like to approach this question from several angles, including aspects of structure and texture, tonal design, and motivic presence.

³⁴Austin establishes five points of articulation, at mm. 30/31, 37, 55, 79, and 94. Nevertheless he suggests an ABA design where B begins at mm. 55, A' at mm. 79, and B+A' balance the initial A. (See W.W. Austin, *Claude Debussy: Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun." An Authoritative Score. Mallarmé's Poem. Backgrounds and Sources. Criticism and Analysis* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1970], pp. 71-96.) However, as Austin reports, Jean Barraqué assumes a sonata form overlaid with a song form, with a main division at mm. 31 and the recapitulation at mm. 94, while Ernst Decsey begins a two-fold middle section at mm. 31, as does the anonymous analysis contained in the *Larousse de la musique*. Finally, Denijs Dille (*Inleiding tot het vormbegrip bij Debussy* [Antwerp 1945]) argues for four sections, to begin at mm. 1 (A), 37 (B I), 55 (B II), and 79 (A') respectively.

As I have attempted to show in my remarks on Mallarmé's text, the layout of the poem allows readers to distinguish two large sections followed by a tripartite coda. Provided that we can free our music-analytical approach from the tempting search for ever-hidden A B A forms (where the third section has to be a recapitulation in kind), we soon discover that Debussy's *Prélude* follows Mallarmé's design very closely:

Mallarmé	Debussy
I lines 1-51	I mm. 1-54
II lines 52-92	II mm. 55-93
coda lines 93-110	coda mm. 94-110

In Mallarmé, the first large section was shown to be defined by recurring expressions referring to the faun's music making and to his basic doubt, the second by the prevalence of expressions describing verbal and visual contact and his pride and laughter. The coda, as we saw, contains a brief fantasy of another erotic conquest quickly followed by the retreat (before remorse over the blasphemy has a chance to take root) into lazy slumber. All through the poem, the faun is present as a protagonist; and yet, his self-image and self-projection as well as his relationship to his surroundings and his sense of reality are balanced ever differently.

In Debussy's music as in Mallarmé's poem, the sections share themes and colors: the flute melody as a representative of the faun's drowsy lust recurs in many guises throughout the piece, and the two central tones as reminders of the fact that the story is open to different viewpoints also shape all sections, albeit in significantly dissimilar ways.

While a tonal analysis along the lines dictated by traditional harmonic developments offers results that may reveal some intriguing details for the appreciation of the music *per se*, a different emphasis may be better suited if we aim at an understanding of how the composition bears out its poetic source. I would like to base the ensuing investigation on a fairly thorough look at the first segment of Debussy's work, which comprises mm. 1-10.



EXAMPLE 81: The arabesque in Debussy's *Après-midi d'un faune*

As is well known, the *Prélude* begins with a languorous arabesque in the unaccompanied flute. After a protracted initial C#—entirely timeless, since neither pulse nor pace have yet been established—the line sweeps down to the tritone G, on which it lingers for a shorter while before allowing a returning ascent to C#. The curve is then repeated literally before the flute, in slightly increasing emphasis, blossoms into a figure with larger ambit, larger intervals, longer note values, and a clearly spelled-out C#-minor triad. The pitch C#, privileged by its triple position on consecutive downbeats, is thus supported in two mutually exclusive but complementary ways. A sliding motion of mainly chromatic steps (countered in the reverse by an ascending whole-tone progression) strings the note to the pitch that marks the half-way point of the octave. The combination of—immediate as well as framing—intervals repeals any suggestion of tonal definition, just as the rhythm keeps metric order out of sight for the time being; both combine to reject the thought of any mooring in a known and safely contained realm. This dreamlike gesture, which seems to speak of unrestrained freedom of the imagination owing to an absence of a background against which it would be measured, subsequently expands, like a radiant face opening into a glorious smile. The closure that follows in the middle of bar 4 is perfectly in tune with the expressive intention, although perhaps unexpected and momentarily inexplicable in tonal respects.³⁵

“Somewhere in the middle of a measure”—this is the impression for the listener without the score, and thus the pertinent message here—the flute sinks back into silence. Its concluding note, however, is doubled and subsequently extended by the first oboe, who redefines the A# in relation to the second oboe’s pitch as the tritone counterpart of E. E is also the note with which the rhythmically more prominent, syncopated entry of the first horn claims attention, while the simultaneous *glissando* in the first harp is launched from and returns to A#. Another tritone, then; it subsequently settles, as did the flute’s tritonic arabesque, into a tonal frame: with the downbeat of bar 5, the second harp, assisted by the lower strings and embellished by figures in the horns, redefines the pitch enharmonically as the base of a dominant-seventh chord on Bb. Even the two clarinets, who with a perfect fifth C#-G# had seemed to want to perpetuate the flute’s C#-centered tonal reference, give in half-heartedly, in that C#

³⁵I do not subscribe to the belief, which has been suggested to me, that this phrase-ending presents a hardly veiled plagal cadence of C# major / G# minor / F# major. Debussy certainly knew how to use plagal gestures, but I believe that what he is doing here is quite something else, as the following deliberations will show.

ascends to D and thus blends into the overall harmony of B \flat -D-F-A \flat . This sound fades, and a whole-bar general pause separates the ensemble's initial response to the flute from its hardly varied repetition, where violins now replace oboes and clarinets. After that, the horns create a retransition (over the slightly extended seventh-chord) that prepares the return of the flute arabesque in bar 11. The first horn, in particular, renews here its emphasis of the pitch E, which ascends chromatically through F to the F \sharp that will accompany the flute's incipient C \sharp .

There are, then, two tonal realms here, of which the second is far more ambiguous than the first. C \sharp is uncontested, whereas E and its tritone A \sharp (/B \flat) compete with one another for the listener's attention. There are, also, two clearly delineated segments: that of the solo flute and that of the ensemble's response. These segments are ostensibly very different; yet the correspondences of layout and length, with regard to both their similarities and their significant deviations, are striking. As long as we rely on Debussy's marking of measures, the flute arabesque covers slightly more than 3½ measures, while the response in the ensemble takes up almost five bars, followed by two more measures for the retransition. However, if we abandon this assessment based on the visual impression from the score and trust our ears, the musical reality presents itself as different. The unaccompanied flute is heard for a total of thirty eighth-notes—exactly as long as the ensemble's response.³⁶ Both the flute's arabesque and the ensemble's response encompass an extensive repetition; in the flute, the repetition follows immediately and subsequently expands into a larger gesture, while in the ensemble, it is not the repetition but the original statement that is extended—and not in the form of an extroverted gesture but in the form of complete silence.

How does all this relate to Mallarmé? Debussy seems to have spoken literally rather than metaphorically when he said that his composition “followed Mallarmé's poem.” In fact it is almost inevitable, once we allow ourselves this seemingly pedestrian pairing of music and text, to relate the first segment of Debussy's *Prélude* (10 measures) to the first segment of Mallarmé's poem (7½ lines). Taking into consideration the overall correspondence of 110 lines of text with 110 measures of music, the poetic passage is shorter than the musical one. Correspondingly, the change of perspective that may have prompted Debussy's change of instrumentation, texture, and tonal orientation in the middle of bar 4 hap-

³⁶Compare in the flute, 9/8 + 9/8 + 9/8 + 3/8 (since the final A \sharp blends both tonally and texturally into the ensemble), with in the ensemble, five measures of 6/8 extension.

pens earlier in Mallarmé, slightly more than halfway through line 3. I do not base this argument on the fact that the printed version of the poem has one of the well-known line breaks here; a similar visual break occurred already before the end of the very first line. Rather, imagining—as in the case of the composition—a listener along with a reader, I am struck by the change of attitude that accompanies this line break. After the faun has indulged himself, for the first 3½ lines of the poem, in sensual memories and illusions, which mix his carnal desire with what many have called his “aesthetic pursuit,” the line break marks the seam to a very different stance, one dominated by the questioning of reality, experienced as a struggle of doubt and reasoning for proof. The extension of this segment, Mallarmé’s *Réfléchissons...*, acts as a transition in much the same way as the one Debussy composed does.

In terms of the two tonal centers realized in the music, C#, introduced in the context of the arabesque that appears as the symbol of the faun’s drowsy sensuality, may be understood to represent the other aspect for which the protagonist stands particularly at the beginning of the poem: his love for music, even perhaps the sublimation of sensuality into art that the story of his flute *syrix* tells. E, the contrasting pole (and occasionally its tritone counterpart, A#), may then be taken to represent doubt and the reasoning search for proof.

In the poem, the segments that follow this first representation of the dual attitude are demarcated from one another in many ways. In order to prepare the ground for my subsequent comparison of the musical with the poetic layout, I would like to run quickly through the segment comprised within the poem’s first large section, drawing attention to a single aspect: the faun’s speech attitude (as distinguished from his shifting inner attitude with regard to the question of illusion and reality).

The poem begins in the first person singular: *Je veux ... Aimerai-je ...? Je m’offrais* After a brief recourse (with *Réfléchissons ...*) to the first person plural, segment 2 (lines 8 middle through 13) finds the faun addressing himself in the second person: *tu gloses ..., tes sens ..., Faune ..., dis-tu ...?* A third segment (lines 14-22) returns to the first-person perspective, albeit only with the single, indirect *ma flûte....* While segment 4 (lines 23-25) picks this up with an equally indirect *ma vanité*, its main addressee is a second person and, for the first time, an entity other than the faun himself: he addresses the *bords siciliens d’un calme marécage*, the Sicilian shores of a calm swamp, as *vous*, challenging them to tell what they have witnessed. The tale that his subsequent lines spell out (segment 5, lines

26-32) reintroduces the first person with *je coupais*; but since it is to be imagined as told by the Sicilian shores, this form of address actually constitutes a new variant. When the tale is interrupted, this happens by yet another, surprisingly different mode of address: in the sixth segment, with less than three lines even shorter than the fourth, the faun sees himself from the outside, as a third person, and speaks accordingly of “him”: *de qui cherche le la*. The seventh segment (lines 35-41) returns to the first-person address with *m'éveillerai-je ...* and *mon sein* This is followed, in segment 8 (lines 42-51), by reflections in another variant of the third-person address, which combine the grammatical subject—the vast twin reed—with a human agent referred to in the indirect third person, *on joue ...* (“one plays ...”).

Regarded from the angle of the faun's speech attitude, the poem's first half falls, then, into eight segments. These are matched in stunning correspondence with eight segments in the music. Before I proceed to explore some of the myriad exciting details, here is an overview:

Mallarmé	Debussy
I,1 lines 1-8	I,1 mm. 1-10
I,2 lines 8-13	I,2 mm. 11-20
I,3 lines 14-22	I,3 mm. 21-22
I,4 lines 23-25	I,4 mm. 23-25
I,5 lines 26-32	I,5 mm. 26-30
I,6 lines 32-34	I,6 mm. 31-33
I,7 lines 35-41	I,7 mm. 34-36
I,8 lines 42-51	I,8 mm. 37-54

In the music, the beginning of the second segment is unmistakable: the flute returns with its arabesque (mm. 11-14). Yet while it recurs unchanged in itself, much happens in the surroundings to defamiliarize it. The tonal center of the melodic contour, as before, is C \sharp ; but this time, the arabesque does not have the opportunity to unfold in the midst of silence. It is accompanied by the voices of the ensemble—and the accompaniment favors a tonality on D which, oscillating between the major and the minor triads, establishes a reality that is sorely unrelated to the flute's C \sharp . It seems as if the faun's inner perspective (of seductive nymphs and music making) were jarring with the external view with which Mallarmé has him accuse himself of chattering away. The second tonal reality, here with a chord on A \sharp (see mm. 17-18) enters with a short reminder. The segment closes with a diminished-seventh chord that, in terms of traditional harmony, can be read as the dominant-ninth over C \sharp without its root. C \sharp ,

of course, is by now securely established as the drowsily lecherous faun's musical and aesthetic pursuits—ambitions that, Debussy seems to concur with Mallarmé, may well prove “without deep roots” as soon as women come into play.

Where Mallarmé's third poetic segment returns at some length to the first-person mode, Debussy deals with the same return very briefly. In the third segment of the music (mm. 21-22), the flute arabesque skips its repetition, accelerates the largely gestured extension, and places the ensemble's contrast with its secondary tonal center E against rather than after the flute.³⁷ Just as the lower division of the violoncelli enters to confirm the reality of E, the higher division and the violas launch a little curve emphasizing C#. Whose reality is it, after all, one wonders?

The question appears as if suspended while Mallarmé's faun invites the Sicilian shores to tell the story of what happened. This ingenious shifting of the angle, initiated by the faun in the hope for reassurance, appears in the music with a shift that involves tonality—the “perspective”—as well as many details. The shortened arabesque, now launched from A, is contracted in its ambit and embellished in its extension; the framing interval, no longer a tritone but now a mere perfect fourth, touches briefly on the “second reality,” E, which the varied extension also favors. The transitional bar 25 leads back to the faun's original perspective from C#, just as Mallarmé reintroduces the first person. In the following fifth section, however, the superimposition of the flute's wishfully dreaming C# reality and the ensemble's E-based reservations (see mm. 26-30) takes on a new urgency. The alternative perspective represented by E—that of doubting and the attempt to secure the wished-for illusion by reasoning or, here, through confirmation by the shore's remembering—is taking over. The ensemble unites in a ninth chord on E (E-G#-B-D-F#), establishing a reality to which the flute's languorous tritone C#-G must remain alien. As soon as (in bar 28) the double bass comes to the support of the faun's C# dreams, the bassoon picks up the syncopated repeated E that the horn had first established in bar 4, and soon all instruments appear torn between the two tonal poles.

In Mallarmé's poem, the italicized passage that, or so the faun wishes to believe, represents the ostensibly objective narrative of the landscape confirming what he hopes happened, having revealed itself to the reader

³⁷See the E as a root in double bass and horns, later picked up in the second violins, and the harps that remain ambiguous with a four-note chord combining the pitches of C# minor and E major.

and listener as yet another projection of the lusty protagonist's half-somnolent mind, breaks off to give way to a description in which not only this landscape, but even the faun himself is seen from the outside. In the music, segment 6 (mm. 31-33) seems similarly to portray the faun as part of his surroundings. The flute's arabesque is, for the first time in the piece, taken over by another instrument (the first clarinet) and launched from G, the tritone counterpart of C# to which it usually descended only briefly. Meanwhile, C# itself sounds prominently in the ensemble, where double bass and horns establish it as a foundation. Just as Mallarmé evokes art and allows his faun to search, for the first time, not lustful memories but the pure tuning of his instrument, the violoncello's soft but prominent motif is all about the repeated C#, the tonal symbol of the faun's "aesthetic pursuit"; just as doubt and reasoning are far in these lines of the poem, so is the competing tonal reality of E in these measures of the music: for the first time, there is not a trace of the secondary tonal reality.

Not for long, though. In the seventh segment, when Mallarmé's faun, in a moment of clarity and honesty, sees himself waking up "upright and alone," Debussy's music is entirely defined by the secondary reality, while C# is absent. E and B \flat (enharmonic for A#, as the tritone of E was originally introduced) compete for the foundation of this phrase, with E marking the downbeat in bassoon, fourth horn, and harp, and B \flat sounding simultaneously in the second horn and the double basses. Concurrently, the clarinet, holding on to the faun's arabesque, privileges B \flat , while the prominent violoncello motif pits multiple repetitions of E against it. Subsequently, E is emphasized in the woodwinds, while a ninth chord on B \flat unites all the strings.

But how long can the faun remain objective and pursue the search for proof? Enough, he exclaims, and returns to his twin reeds, his music, and his dreams about perfect beauty and ideal art (which, for once, he claims to value higher than the bodies of compliant nymphs). Correspondingly, Debussy's music for the eighth segment (mm. 37-54) plays with the alternation of C# and E without, for the first time, any memories of the languorous arabesque. New motifs appear, a new pace, a new timbre: it is as if the faun was awakening to another facet of himself—that of the artist and aesthete—a facet that for most of this sun-drenched afternoon was dulled by lazy somnolence. Debussy's music explores the quickening of the faun's energy and the increase in his alertness and brightness, with an ever more animated tempo, energized rhythms, swelling dynamics, thus creating a glorious arch whose final brief descent—the calming of tempo,

rhythms, dynamics, and thematic intensity—convincingly concludes the first large section of the *Prélude*.

In Mallarmé's text, as has been pointed out earlier, this brings to a close, for the time being, all allusions to the flute, to music making, and to art; the faun, disappointed by the nymphs' escape, challenges his instrument to transform itself back into the reeds out of which it was made. Concurrently in Debussy's music, the arabesque along with most of the prominent motifs from the first section are now for a while suspended. This, however, is not the only way in which the composer marks the beginning of an entirely new section. What is perhaps more intriguing than the inner-musical changes is the fact that the composer's translation of the poem's second large section proceeds along entirely different lines than that of the first. Just as Mallarmé allows his faun to indulge his sensuality in two passages of visualizations (lines 52-61 and 75-81) and two passages devoted to the "memories" he pretends to share with his nymphs (lines 62-75 and 82-92), so Debussy creates a section compounded of two distinct forms (mm. 55-78 and 79-93), both of them segmented in a way that can be read as a musical mirror of Mallarmé's stylistic devices.

The first of Debussy's forms, corresponding with the faun's reflections regarding activities he imagines himself engaging in the future, is designed as a small rondo. Its refrain (mm. 55-58, 63-66, 74-78) is securely rooted in the D \flat (enharmonic for C \sharp) of the faun's aesthetic ambition. While the form is rudimentary—a b a' c a"—one can easily imagine how the faun's verbal and visual approaches to the nymphs as well as his corresponding musical images could continue going round and round. The second of Debussy's structural entities consists, like the italicized memories in Mallarmé's text, of two halves: mm. 86-93 are a varied sequence of mm. 79-85. As the aesthetic transformation of lust gives way, in the would-be seduction Mallarmé's faun pretends to remember, to direct eroticism, the symbolic pitch C \sharp /D \flat is conspicuously absent in Debussy's music. And while the languorous arabesque wanders from the flute through the oboe to the horn, exploring yet new shades of expression in metric shifts, rhythmic lingerings or sudden syncopations, ornaments, and staccatos, even the secondary tonal reality E, whose presence still stabilizes the first half of this section, is being "lowered" by a semitone. This heightens the anticipation for E, which will be duly emphasized in the coda with the sudden introduction of "antic cymbals."

But the nymphs escape, the sexual encounter is not completed, and the faun has to abandon this particular erotic dream, at least for now. Just

like the “coda” in Mallarmé’s poem, Debussy’s coda also consists of three short segments:

Mallarmé	Debussy
lines 93- 98	mm. 94- 99
lines 99-104	mm. 100-105
lines 104-110	mm. 106-110

In the poem, an initial, general reflection is followed by the brief but utterly bold new fantasy concerning the possession of Venus. This leads quickly to the final renunciation, with the faun returning to his nap and—perhaps—his dream of the nymphs. In the music, the cymbals, newly added for this section, distinguish the timbre from the work’s main body. The two framing sections within the coda enact (for the first time in the composition and thus truly as an epilogue) a happy coexistence of C# and E, with the melodic material in C# superimposed over a harmony on E. Only in the central passage are the complementary aspects of reality once again briefly separated. Here, the faun’s lascivious arabesque seduces not only the cello into a unison, but also successfully chases away all rival images of reality from the remainder of the ensemble—only to be drastically put into place (its extension lowered a semitone and the reality of E reinstated) when the faun realizes that this fantasy of seducing a goddess has gone too far. The recurrence of the pure E-major harmony (m. 106) comes as a relief, and the fact that, for the first time with this explicitness, first flute and first harp set an unembellished C#-minor chord against the E-major harmony, confirms in symbolic language the closure achieved in the artistic portrayal of the faun’s afternoon episode.

Hindemith’s Approach to Mallarmé

Whereas Debussy was a contemporary and younger friend of Mallarmé’s, Hindemith’s life time hardly overlaps with that of the creator of the emotionally paralyzed princess whom he undertook to portray in musical language. When the poet died near Fontainebleau on 9 September 1898, the composer from Hanau near Frankfurt was not yet three years old. Even the spiritual relationship between the two men of different times is not immediately obvious to the cursory glance. The Symbolist Mallarmé was (and is still) considered a poet of the intellectual élite whose language resists attempts at “grasping” it; Hindemith considered it essential that music should be accessible, both for the listener and for the skilled musical amateur. Mallarmé’s poetic output is compiled in a single slim

volume; almost as many pages are filled by a mere listing of Hindemith's works, represented by their titles and general descriptive details alone.

And yet, this ostensible contrast does not give the complete picture. When Hindemith—who had begun his professional career (as concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera) with even less of a formal education than the highschool teacher of English who was Mallarmé—began to educate himself in his thirties, the literatures of Europe constituted one of his focal points of concentration. The young professor of composition in Berlin, who after many financially tight years finally disposed of some time to broaden his horizon, taught himself Latin, Italian, and French. And while his official prose remains simple and matter-of-fact, his letters to his wife³⁸ testify to a sudden very noticeable increase in references to literature, art works, and critical writings. His language, unobtrusive yet undoubtedly that of an intellectually alert man, affirms the formation of the practicing musician into a widely-read, cultured man. For his works in the 1930s, he had done extensive research on, among others, the inventor of the printing press, Gutenberg (in the context of a plan for an opera on the enlightenment and the ideal of literacy), on the late Gothic painter, Grünewald (for his opera *Mathis der Maler*), on the astronomer, Kepler, and his philosophy (for the opera *Die Harmonie der Welt*, to be completed much later), and on the late-medieval Italian painter, Giotto (for his ballet *Nobilissima Visione*, as described in the previous chapter).³⁹

All through this time, Hindemith was also collaborating with contemporary German poets and taking some of his artistic lead from them. More important than a team production in his youth with Bertolt Brecht is, especially in this context, his oratorio *Das Unaufhörliche* (*The Perpetual*), first performed in 1931, which resulted from a collaboration with one of Germany's least conformist poets, Gottfried Benn. Its topic is the

³⁸See Paul Hindemith, "Das private Logbuch": *Briefe an seine Frau Gertrud*, ed. Friederike Becker and Giselher Schubert (Mainz: Schott, 1995).

³⁹Eberhard Preussner comments on Hindemith's self-education during these years as something that he did entirely for himself. "He was interested in all subjects—'interest' understood in the sense of 'being truly in the center of something.' In this way he studied the classical languages; he can read Augustine and Boethius in the Latin original. What he needs, he masters: Italian in Italy, French in France, and during the years in America the English language, the latter so well that his [theoretical] works from that time were written directly in English, so that Hindemith later had to translate himself into German. His genuine knowledge of art history is self-evident. However, when one considers the degree to which he entered into the art works, it becomes evident that his way of seeing works of the other arts was extraordinary." Eberhard Preussner, *Paul Hindemith: Ein Lebensbild* (Innsbruck: Edition Helbing, 1984), p. 27.

evanescence of human endeavor in contrast to the permanent values of the universal order. Hindemith had been looking for a text that would portray human nature in a larger perspective, something he sorely missed in the texts of the “socially committed” writers of the time. He welcomed Benn’s emphasis on the timeless confirmation not of the technological, but of the inner achievements as a testimony to values that he saw dwindling. And last but not least, throughout the decade of the 1930s Hindemith had worked on a complete revision of his song cycle, *Das Marienleben*, based on poetry by Rainer Maria Rilke. The ground was thus well prepared for this ambitious undertaking: an instrumental composition transmedializing Mallarmé’s famously complex poem.

Both Benn and Rilke use language in ways that, while not Symbolist in the stricter sense of the French movement, create new combinations of imagery. These, leaving conventions behind and engaging into a kind of alchemical process with eternal metamorphoses rather than fixed results, recognize no confinements by the requirements of reason or of easy comprehensibility. Rilke, whose early work was strongly marked by the influence of the French Symbolists, was foremost among German poets in the early years of the 20th century in pointing to the exposed condition of human beings in this world, their inherent loneliness, their lack of definition by friendly objects and reliable spiritual values. In a different way, the imagery in Benn’s poetry, which often combines medical jargon with dream sequences and excruciatingly sober descriptions of gruesome horrors with quixotic amalgams of words, touches a very similar nerve as the French poet’s “Scène”: what is alive in human experience and what dead, what cold and paralyzing and what warm and inspiring has become obfuscated and distorted for those whose contact to their own carnal existence and to that of others is utterly confused.

The attraction that Mallarmé’s poem exercised on Hindemith thus seems very much in line with the composer’s own spiritual and literary preoccupations in the early 1940s. There is no hint that the literary-historical background of the heroine, the Salomé of Oscar Wilde’s play on the basis of which Hindemith’s senior compatriot Richard Strauss had written his highly successful opera, played any role in the choice of the topic. Neither do we get the impression that interpretations of the often-depicted female character other than the very idiosyncratic one suggested in the “Scène” intruded into Hindemith’s perception.

Notwithstanding the fact that the orchestral programs that Hindemith began to conduct during the years he was based in Yale seem not to have

featured Debussy's *Après-midi d'un faune*, we must assume that he was familiar with this symphonic interpretation of Mallarmé's sister poem. Yet while it may seem striking that both composers should have chosen to translate Symbolist poetry into non-vocal music and to do so in surprisingly linear, chronological ways, the number of correspondences beyond these basic facts is actually small.

The differences begin with the choice of instrumentation. Beyond Hindemith's substitution of the piano for Debussy's harp, his setting is of a chamber ensemble in contrast to Debussy's (chamber) orchestra—a choice the Hessischer Rundfunk orchestra has chosen not to accept in its recent recording of the work:⁴⁰

Claude Debussy, *Faun*

3 flutes
2 oboes
1 English horn
2 clarinets
2 bassoons
4 horns
2 harps
1st violins
2nd violins
violas
violoncellos
double basses

Paul Hindemith, *Hérodiade*

1 flute
1 oboe
—
1 clarinet
1 bassoon
1 horn
1 piano
violin I
violin II
viola
violoncello
double bass

⁴⁰It is, I would argue, highly debatable that Hindemith was thinking of an orchestra here. Since both composer's scoring indications are in French, it is worth noting that Debussy's "violons, altos, violoncelles, contrebasses" compares with Hindemith's "violon, alto, violoncelle, basse." Hindemith mentions the "instruments of the orchestra" to whom he has given the poetic text, yet he never refers to the sounding body he uses as "orchestra" but as alternations of solos and ensemble. More significantly, he describes the first of his strings-only pieces, no. 2 (in which the double bass, too, remains silent), as a "quartet." The English term "quartet," appearing in the preface of the piano reduction, is not common for orchestrally scored strings; even less is this true for the German expression the composer used (found in the preface of the full score), "in Form eines kurzen Streichquartettsatzes." Both wordings seem to indicate that he indeed thought of soloistically used instruments. Notwithstanding this ample evidence, however, the only easily available compact disc recording of the work (VG Bild-Kunst 1994, on the cpo label) uses the full string section of the Hessischer Rundfunk orchestra, without any explanatory note in its documentary booklet. But then this same recording also contains, in addition to the purely instrumental version intended by Hindemith, a second rendition in which the entire Mallarmé text is recited!—over the music, or rather: very often with the effect of drowning out the important musical lines. The musicians seem not to have trusted Hindemith's own words in anything here.

Where Are the Words?

While Debussy seems not to have seen any necessity to stress verbally that this was indeed meant as a purely instrumental work, Hindemith, usually so sparing with his prefacing remarks, explicitly comments on his scoring here. “With *Hérodiade* an attempt was made to mould into one single concentrated form words, poetic idea, lyric expression, and music, without using the most commonly used and most natural means for such a fusion: Song.” And a little later he specifies that “... the desired congruence of poetry and music could only be achieved by giving the melodic lines that a singer would have sung to the instruments of the orchestra.” Most important in terms of a hint regarding Hindemith’s compositional procedure in this work is the following sentence: “Such an ‘orchestral recitation’ could follow the text literally, even to the point of using the typical cadences of french [*sic*] poetry as a stimulant for the musical structure; furthermore, it would free the composer from the limitations of the human voice without renouncing its power of declamation and articulation.”⁴¹

The misunderstanding of the Hessischer Rundfunk orchestra recording, in which the words are recited⁴² while the music is relegated to the role of an agent responsible for the non-verbal parts of a message, is, of course, strongly reminiscent of melodrams such as Viktor Ullmann’s realization of Rilke’s *Corset*. But what works there, where the music was devised with this intention, does not work here. As if in complementarity to Ullmann’s (and other’s) technique of “recitation *with* orchestra,” where the words are kept intact but do not come to form part of the music as such, Hindemith’s “recitation *by* the orchestra” in *Hérodiade* retains, in varying instrumental voices, the rhythm and approximate intonation of the poetic text, yet not the phonemes.

One practical aspect of this technique, which Hindemith used only in this one work, is that he wrote cues from Mallarmé’s text into the score: between three and six words, marking what he seems to have considered a new thought, change of attitude, or just the beginning of a new complete sentence. What, one wonders upon opening the piano reduction, did the

⁴¹All quotations from the preface in Paul Hindemith, *Hérodiade de Stéphane Mallarmé: Recitation orchestrale* (1944), Réduction de piano (Mainz: Schott’s Söhne, 1955).

⁴²It seems surprising that this should happen today, when Hindemith’s almost desperate exclamation, in a letter to ... of ..., “The *Hérodiade* is not to be spoken!” is published and easily accessible. (For the English see *Selected Letters of Paul Hindemith*, ed. and transl. by Geoffrey Skelton [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995], p. 204.)

composer mean by these cues? On first impulse, performers and readers of the score tend to take Hindemith's explanation merely metaphorically. Yet how literally Hindemith meant that he had "given the text to the instruments" can be demonstrated when one matches the text to the various instrumental lines: pitch contour and rhythm are found to "speak" quite eloquently—and by no means in some symbolic, non-verbal language, but in Mallarmé's French!

A single excerpt may have to suffice here to demonstrate the extent to which intonation and rhythm as well as hesitations—suggested, perhaps, by the nature of what is being expressed—are represented in the music. The following is the first half of the bassoon solo heard in no. 10 (over a complex ostinato pattern in low strings, piano, and horn, repeated three times before it is suspended until the beginning of the second phrase).



EXAMPLE 82: The bassoon declamation in Hindemith's *Hérodiade*, no. 10

Hindemith's verbal clue, printed against the first notes of the bassoon entry, reads "Hérodiade: Non pauvre aïeule." Note how the lines from Mallarmé's poem that begin thus are, indeed, musically represented here:

(Non, pau-vr' aï-eu-le, sois cal-me et, t' éloignant, pardonn' à ce cœur dur, mais avant, si
tu veux, clos les vo-lets, l' a-zur séraphique sou-rit dans les vitres pro-fon-des, et je dé-tes-te, moi, le bel azur!)

EXAMPLE 83: The words behind the bassoon's declamation in Hindemith's *Hérodiade*, no. 10

Hindemith's "orchestral recitation," *Hérodiade*

Where, as documented above, Debussy's single-movement composition left questions regarding the structural plan and its meaning open to ample discussion, Hindemith's work is laid out in clearly distinguished numbers. Harmonically, some of them seem to pair into larger movements; in terms of extension, some are brief, while others are complex forms in themselves. The closest descriptive term that does not violate the impression of the sequence is that of the suite, but several details are idiosyncratic enough to withstand traditional labeling.

Here is a first overview. For a correspondence between the arabic numerals in the left column and the poetic text, please refer back to the square brackets on pp. 476-481. In the right column, letters indicate the main tonal centers, solistically employed instruments are singled out, whereas "ens." stands for the participation of the entire ensemble.⁴³

[1] Prélude: Lent (♩ = 96-100) / Modéré (♩. = 56-60) transition (without retard) to	12/8	25 mm.	B, ens.
[2] Modérément animé (♩. = 80-88)	6/8, 9/8	17 mm.	B, string quartet
[3] Modéré (♩ = 72-76)	2/2 (3/2)	84 mm.	C♯, fl/ob/hr (+ ens.)
[4] Modérément animé (♩. = 80-88)	6/8, 9/8	16 mm.	B, string quartet
[5] Vif (♩ = 92-100)	2/2	33 mm.	D?, solo winds + ens.
[6] Modérément animé (♩. = 80-88) transition to	6/8, 9/8	14 mm.	E, string quintet
[7] Soutenu (♩ = 50) transition to	5/4	18 mm.	E♭, solo clar + ens.
[8] Agité (♩ = 76)	2/2	95 mm.	– B, winds vs. strings
[9] Vif et passionné (♩. = 66)	3/4	203 mm.	E-C, solo winds, ens.
[10] Grave (♩ = 50); Plus calme	4/8	30 mm.	B, solo bn + ens.
[11] Lent (♩. = 56-60) / Très passionné (♩. = 76-80)	4/4	13 mm.	F-B, ens. ⁴⁴

⁴³Since efforts at gaining an appropriate understanding of the work are discouraged and, for most interested readers, thwarted by the publishers' incomprehensible decision not to allow the full score to be purchased by individuals or libraries, I will try to provide more details than would otherwise be necessary.

⁴⁴On the use of structures comprising eleven sections in Hindemith's work in the 1930s, see pp. 453-454 above. The striking recurrence of this number may one day warrant a separate study.

The initial section, entitled “Prélude,” functions on two levels. With regard to its prominent material, it serves a purpose similar to that of the overture to the ballet, *Nobilissima Visione*, in which Hindemith presents the musical signifiers of the protagonists. In *Hérodiade*, the compound triple meter and the tonal centeredness in B prefigures what will remain, throughout the cyclical composition, the signature of the princess’s nurse. The presentation of the main protagonist, however, occurs only indirectly, by way of genre: she is the implied addressee of the caring attitude expressed in the lullaby that forms the center of the prelude. This indirect introduction of *Hérodiade* is an ingenious parallel to the nurse’s monologue preceding the “Scène” in Mallarmé’s text, in which the girl is also present through her concerned nurse’s words alone.⁴⁵ Even more striking, the only section in Hindemith’s composition that is, by its genre, a song, is scored “without words”: unlike the subsequent sections, this is not an instrumental representation of language.

The timbral choices, too, seem symbolic. The lullaby is begun by the strings alone, a color that, for the remainder of the work, will signify the nurse. The melody of the prelude’s middle section sounds in a unison of woodwinds (the color most characteristic of *Hérodiade*) and strings, involving all but the lowest register. The tune is supported, as it were, by a contrapuntal line in bassoon and double bass, while the piano adds a complementary rhythm. The world, it seems, is rich and harmonious here. By the time we reach the closing of the frame, however, not only the piano has retreated, but even the strings have fallen silent. The princess enters the stage, one is tempted to read the musical message, without the human contact that her nurse so lovingly offers.

The timbral characterization of the nurse by strings and of *Hérodiade* by woodwinds, while explicitly announced in the composer’s preface, warrants further comments, not least because the characterization goes further than the composer lets on. Among the nurse’s six contributions to the dialogue, three are cast as separate movements, while the three remaining ones appear integrated into larger structural forms. All six are related melodically, in addition to their shared instrumentation by strings.

The three pieces dealing entirely with the nurse’s words are reserved for the three significant moments in which the older woman attempts to

⁴⁵The lullaby is in a a' b a" form, framed by contrasting material in much slower tempo (mm. 1-7 and, abridged from the same material, mm. 23-26). The song proper, beginning at RN A, consists of two 3-measure phrases (a, a'), a 5-bar contrast (b), and a 3-measure recapitulation (a", at RN B).

establish physical closeness to the emotionally inhibited princess. No. 2 covers Mallarmé's opening lines with the suggestion to kiss Hérodiade's fingers; no. 4 sets the words in which the nurse offers flower incense, ("Sinon la myrrhe gaie..."), and no. 6 corresponds with her third remark, in which she apologizes for her age-related forgetfulness of Hérodiade's dislikes. The three shorter inserts representing the nurse that are closely related to the musical expression in nos. 2, 4, and 6 occur in nos. 7 and 8. In no. 7 the nurse, having affirmed Hérodiade's stellar beauty, moves to catch a falling braid and thus once again threatens to touch; in no. 8, one segment represents the nurse's reaction to Hérodiade's dread of the day when she may be touched: "Temps bizarre, en effet, de qui le ciel vous garde!" (Strange times, indeed, from which the heaven may protect you!), while the other constitutes that part of the nurse's suggestions concerning the man in Hérodiade's future that acknowledges the princess's anguish: "Comment, sinon parmi d'obscures épouvantes" (see ex. 83).

Hindemith has rendered these six musical utterances, semantically connected in that they all refer explicitly to Hérodiade's fear of physical contact and her fluctuations between reality and shadow, as variants of a single underlying pitch contour. The outline consists of five pitches — B-D-C#-F#-G#—with, in all but the first case, an auxiliary-note enhancement B—A-B for the central tone. This is not a leitmotif in the sense known from Wagner's music dramas or even Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*; nor are the different versions of the contour manifestations of psychologically new constellations, as is the case with Saint Francis's troubadour song in *Nobilissima Visione*. The ever-changing embellishments of the same contour represent superficially different events triggering the same basic fear.

Four of the passages are both melodically and harmonically centered in B. In no. 6, the third of the separate movements, the melodic line stresses the pitch B while the tonal basis is E major/minor; the third of the inserted comments is altogether transposed to E. Furthermore, the three separate movements are in exactly the same tempo and meter, the slow compound-triple time symbolic of lullabies and, by extension, motherly caring women. The first samples in each group (from nos. 2 and 7) are melodically less obviously related, in the one case because of the change of voice from first to second violin, in the other because of the unaccented position of the F# and the octave displacement of the final note G#. Nevertheless, the striking similarities that remain constitute an intriguing example of musical transliteration of what could be summed up as "a person, her character, and her attitude to another person."

No. 2,
mm.
1-9

B ----- D ----- C# F# G#

(Tu vis! Tu vis! Où vois-j'ici l'om-bre d'u-ne prin-ces - - - se?)

No. 4,
mm.
1-4
|
mm.
13-16

B ----- A ----- B ----- D ----- C# F# G#

(Sinon la myrrhe gai-e en ces bou-teil - - les clo - ses)

B ----- D ----- C# F# G#

(es-say-er la ver-tu (-----) fu -- nè ----- bre?)

No. 6,
mm.
1-6

B ----- A ----- B ----- D ----- C# F# G#

(Par-don! l'âge ef - fa - çait, rei ----- ne, vot-re dé - fen ----- se)

No. 7,
RN B
[+2]

B ----- A B - D ----- C# F# G#

(Un as - tre, en vé-ri-té. Mais cette tresse tom - be...)

No. 8,
RN B
[+2]

B ----- A B ----- A B - D ----- C# F# G#

(Temps bi-zar - re, en effet, de quoi le ciel vous gar - de!)

No. 8
RN E

E ----- D E G ----- F# B C#

(Com-ment, si-non par-mi d'ob-scures é-pou-van-tes)

EXAMPLE 84: The nurse's pitch contour and its variants in *Hérodiade*

This explicit link between the overall message behind various sentences of the poem and the music with which Hindemith represents them continues into two segments of *Hérodiade*'s utterances. In her long initial monologue, she occasionally keeps her nurse somewhat in mind—more at least than later, when her reflections deal with more general concerns and anxieties. In two cases, the moment when she turns to the older woman (with “Tu m’as vue, ô nourrice d’hiver” and the even linguistically echoing “Mais encore as-tu vu”) is set as a line ascending in embellished form

from B to D, against a secondary voice that realizes this ascent more directly;⁴⁶ in both cases, the remainder of the text deals, once again, with the girl's fears ("la lourde prison" and "mes effrois" respectively). And in both cases, *Hérodiade's* lines are given to the strings—not usually her medium of musical expression but that reserved for the nurse. Here are the two corresponding musical phrases:

[fl/clar/hr;
+8va alta e
bassa] (B) ----- (D) -----
 No. 3
 RN C
 [vl I/vc/db;
+8va alta e
bassa]
 (Tu m'as vue, ô nour-ri-ce d'hi-ver, sous la lour - de pri-son de pierres et de fer)
 No. 3
 RN E
 [-4]
 [fl/clar/hr;
+8va alta e
bassa]
 [vl I/vc/db;
+8va alta e
bassa]
 (Mais en-co - re as-tu vu quels furent mes ef-frois?)

EXAMPLE 85: Two additional manifestations of the relationship between the caring woman and the fearful princess in *Hérodiade*

Finally in this context, there are three further instances where B itself, by virtue of a particularly prominent position in the structural development of a movement, takes over the referential meaning of the disturbed young woman's rejection of caring love. At the end of no. 8, the nurse sums up her pity for the "Lamentable victim offered to her fate!" in a passage firmly centered in B. No. 10 ends with *Hérodiade's* reply to her nurse, "Adieu," in B. Finally, at the very end of the cycle, the girl's (horn)-meditations on the unknown thing she is awaiting, the sobs over childhood feelings, and the cold precious stones that ultimately separate themselves from one another, while centered (as much this term applies at all) in A_b over an F-minor tremolo, are complemented during suspensions by rather eerie double-octave attacks in the piano on low-registered Bs.

No. 2 also presents another melodic gesture that recurs prominently, relates to the nurse in each instance, and involves string quartet texture as well as the central pitch B. The woman's opening words, quoted in the example above as the first incarnation of the contour of *Hérodiade's* fear, are followed by a short gesture consisting of a three-note component, a

⁴⁶Both lines sound in three-octave parallels: *Hérodiade's* words in violin I, violoncello, and double bass, the line quoting the nurse's pitches in flute, clarinet, and horn.

harmonically altered repetition, and the return to the original. Presented in double octaves by violin I and violoncello against a soft counterpoint in the viola, the gesture, which sets the words that are so offensive to Hérodiade, “A mes lèvres tes doigts et leur bagues” (To my lips your fingers and their rings), is based on the sequence G♯-G♮-E. In no. 8, a variant of this sequence recurs twice. The first time, it follows one of the previously mentioned variants of the pitch contour. At “Temps bizarre...”, it sets the nurse’s description of Hérodiade, “Vous errez, ombre seule et nouvelle fureur” (You wander, lonely shadow and new fury). The second occurrence is transposed, to begin with the symbolically significant B, and represents the nurse’s wish, “J’aimerais être à qui le destin réserve vos secrets” (I’d like to be the one for whom destiny guards your secrets).

Having discussed what I consider the melodically and tonally most significant details of the composition—the three related movements, the three inserts derived from the same contour, the three ominous endings with B, and the three instances of the little melodic sequence just described—I would now like to turn to portrayal by means of texture.

A first case regards instances where a verbal statement is represented in an unaccompanied solo or unison. Such moments, in which the weight of the message is expressed in the absence of any competing or even inflecting lines, are given to both women; they occur at the beginning of no. 5 and at the conclusion of nos. 5, 7, 8, and 9 respectively. Hérodiade’s violent refusal of flower essences for her hair, “Laisse là ces parfums! ne sais-tu que je les hais” (Leave those perfumes there! Do you not know that I hate them) opens no. 5 with a ten-part *ff* unison of woodwinds and strings. The exclamation thus gains even more rage and forcefulness than it had in Mallarmé’s words. Its interval pattern, a threefold, accelerating sequence of a falling major seventh followed by an ascending perfect fourth—determines much of this piece and the manifestations of the heroine’s furor. Its three falling sevenths recur alone at the end of no. 6 where Hérodiade cuts the nurse’s excuses short with the order “Assez! Tiens devant moi ce miroir” (Enough! Hold before me this mirror.)—this time much softened, in the three-part *p pizzicato* of the low strings.⁴⁷

⁴⁷A further unison passage of seven parts, involving oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and string quartet, matches her words “...des prophètes verse sur les lointains mourants ses tristes fêtes, le sais-je?” (which forms part of the sentence “Do I know by what attraction I am drawn and what morning, forgotten by the prophets, pours its sad festivals on the dying distances?”) The dynamic increase leads to a powerful *f* in the final drawn-out triplet. However, the fact that the reduction of complexity to unison happens in the middle of a linguistically complex sentence makes this unison less effective than the others.

A different facet of the young girl's character is evoked in her two solo-voiced passages. At the end of no. 5, the words "depuis ma solitaire enfance" (since my solitary childhood) are set as an unaccompanied bassoon line, and in the middle of no. 7, the clarinet sounds alone when it articulates "Mais, horreur! des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine," a segment of the longer sentence "But, o horror! in the evenings I came to understand in your severe fountain the nakedness of my sparse dreams." In both instances, the impression given by the unaccompanied woodwind instrument enhances the loneliness and despondency expressed in the words.

The nurse also has three statements enhanced by their unison texture. At the close of no. 7, an expressive first violin solo in *mf crescendo* sets the remark about the falling braid. While it ostensibly indicates that the woman may touch the girl after all, the fact that the gesture is fiercely refused places the line among those pointing to the princess's lonesomeness. The sentence concluding no. 8, "Victime lamentable à son destin offerte" (Lamentable victim offered to her fate), a five-part string-quintet unison in *ff*, and the question with which no. 9 closes, "Madame, allez-vous donc mourir?" (Madam, are you going to die, then?), uncannily enhanced in its very slow, very soft unison of violin I and viola, both confirm the link between unison and precarious solitude.

In another play with texture, Hindemith has separated certain words from the linear context, to use them as recurring insertions or underlying reminders. In no. 3, he reacts to the rather unusual nature of Mallarmé's "reculez!," an exclamation strange enough as an entry for a quasi-dramatis persona, which sums up her general attitude much more than it forms a constituent part of a sentence. For the duration of the first twenty measures, while the flute traces Hérodiade's arguments up to "si ma beauté n'était la mort," the French horn keeps reiterating a three-note motif that, for any listener familiar with Mallarmé's text, is a musical rendering of the command that refuses any human contact. Ex. 85 gives a few bars from the beginning where this flute-horn interaction is only accompanied by a contrapuntal line in the oboe and a few notes in the clarinet. (The same musical comment recurs the end of the piece, when Hindemith sets Hérodiade's return to the mention of her hair ("ma chevelure imitant les manières trop farouches qui font votre peur..." [my hair, which imitates the too terrifying ways that cause your fear of manes...]) as a recapitulation of the music that had first set her concern with her hair (at "Le blond torrent de mes cheveux immaculés" [The blond torrent of my immaculate hair]). Here again, the French horn suggests: "Reculez!")

(flute) Le blond tor-rent de mes cheveux imma-cu-lés quand il
Re-cu-lez! Re-cu-lez!

(horn)

bai - - gne mon corps so-li - tai - - re le gla-ce d'horreur
Re-cu-lez! Re-cu-lez!

EXAMPLE 86: The separated, reiterated “Reculez!” in *Hérodiade*, no. 3

In no. 8, Hindemith seems to have similarly separated the indirect question “le dirai-je?” (shall I say it?) from its linear context. As the melodically leading line in clarinet and bassoon reaches the expression “sinistre émoi” (sinister agitation) and proceeds to speak with abhorrence of “this kiss, these offered perfumes,” the piano, abandoning its previously repeated patterns, enters with a staccato parallel that, in continuous eighth-notes, seems to ponder “Le dirai-je? Le dirai-je? Le dirai-je? Le dirai-je?” (This text matching is subsequently confirmed when the horn, which has picked up from “ces parfums,” integrates a further string of eighth-notes into Mallarmé’s originally simpler sentence.) With this musical device, Hindemith draws our attention with more force than words alone can achieve to that of which the princess is hesitant to speak: “this once again sacrilegious hand (for I think you wanted to touch me).” Both the opening “Reculez!” and the interjected, self-questioning “le dirai-je?” are exhibitions of denial that underlie much larger planes in *Hérodiade*’s life than their relatively brief representations as verbal statements in the text allow. Hindemith’s music expounds on just these qualities.

A similar point can be made—albeit with less inevitability since these words do form part of the linear translation into melodic lines—for the exclamation “nourrice” that follows *Hérodiade*’s angry refusal of aromas. (In Hindemith’s music, this appears in the ten-part unison mentioned earlier as forming the beginning of movement 5). While the declamatory

line, in a unison of oboe, clarinet, violins, and viola, begins as in Mallarmé's original with "nourrice, et veux-tu que je sente leur ivresse noyer ma tête languissante?" (nurse, and would you want me to feel their intoxication drown my languishing head?), the accented three-note motif in bassoon, violoncello, and double bass that accompanies the entire argument up to the mention of "humaines douleurs" (human pains) strongly suggests an underlying anger that expresses itself in reiterated exclamations of an aghast "nour-ri-ce!!!" The interval pattern of this motif, too, is the one that in the outcry that opened this piece expressed rage: a falling major seventh followed by an ascending perfect fourth.⁴⁸

An third textural device employed by Hindemith in the "setting" of the French poetry is the use of polyphonic techniques, particularly stretto and word-carrying counterpoint; by the latter I mean not the contrapuntal voices sounding from within the ensemble while the leading voice is declaiming Mallarmé's lines, but a juxtaposition of phrases carrying different verbal texts, as it were. A first instance of imitation occurs in the middle of no. 3 (four measures before RN D). The oboe leads here with a line articulating the passage "... où de mes vieux lions traînent les siècles fauves, entrer, et je marchais, fatale, les mains sauvées, dans le parfum désert de ces anciens rois" (...enter, where the tawny centuries of my old lions drag. And I walked, fated, my hands safe, amid the desert perfume of these ancient kings). At the distance of one half-note, the bassoon imitates the entire passage an octave lower (except for the very last words, which are cut off). I find it intriguing that this device, unexpected in even such an indirect realization of words—we do not expect the lines of a poem to sound in stretto with themselves!—should appear at just that moment when Hérodiade alludes to something equally unexpected: the fact that she *identifies* with old lions. (I have discussed this in more detail above.) Later in the same monologue and still in the same movement of the music, she returns to the image of the lions. Hindemith expresses this peculiar identification, heightened by the girl's likening of her tresses with the lions' manes, by way of an interesting contrapuntal overlay. Remember Mallarmé's rather difficult sentence here? The second half of a very long clause reads "tandis qu'épris de suivre du regard les languides

⁴⁸There is another interesting detail to be observed here: this little ostinato motif is extended with a rest to span three half-notes. In the given 2/2 time, it thus places the accent of the French word, on the second syllable of "nourrice," alternatively on strong beats and second beats, thus throwing the ongoing argument even more off-balance with its single-minded anger.

débris descendre, à travers ma rêverie, en silence, les lions, de ma robe écartent l'indolence et regardent mes pieds qui calmeraient la mer," which, exploiting the liberties that a prose translation offers, I rendered as "while the lions, entranced at following with their eyes the falling of the languid debris, through my dreaming, in silence, avert my robe's indolence and look at my feet, which would calm the sea." Here is how the sentence sounds in its translation into flute, strings, and clarinet:

flute:	tandis qu'épris de suivre du regard les languides débris descendre,														
strings	les	li	-	-	-	ons,	de	ma	ro	-	-	be	é	-	-
<hr/>															
flute:	à travers ma rêverie, en silence, à travers ma rêverie, et regardent mes														
strings	car	-	tent	l'in - - do - len - - - - - ce											
<hr/>															
flute:	pieds	qui	cal - - me - - - raient										la mer.		
clarinet:	tandis qu'épris de suivre du regard														

Yet another variant of this play with polyphonic textures appears in no. 5. When Hérodiade, in four-part unison of flute, oboe, clarinet, and second violin, expounds about her hair which is not like flowers but like gold which, "forever virgin of aromatics, in its cruel gleam and dull pallor, observes the sterile coldness of metal," a contrapuntal voice (consisting of the five-part unison of bassoon, horn, viola, cello, and bass) repeats her earlier words, as it were, by sounding an imitation of that line with which, after her initial outraged shout, she had opened this movement: "Nurse, and would you want me to feel their intoxication drown my languishing head?" I am fascinated by this musical juxtaposition, which enhances my appreciation of the weird contrast between the vice of flowers with their intoxicating fragrances and the virtue of cold, cruelly gleaming but completely unscented gold.

Finally with regard to texture, there is a single instance of homorhythmic setting. Despite the fact that it involves only two chords, it stands out because these are very slow (*Très retenu*), in five parts, and engage only the woodwinds. This change of color, remarkable for its eerie calm amidst much commotion, occurs towards the middle of no. 8 (at RN F). Significantly, Hindemith sets with this gesture what many interpreters believe are the key words in Mallarmé's poem: Hérodiade's solipsistic exclamation "Pour moi!"

Much more could be pointed out about this unique composition. I will have to limit myself, and close with some observations regarding characterization. This is achieved primarily in three ways: with the help of metric allusions, of instrumental colors, and of unusual register, range, or

rhythmic gesture. At least three of the symbols in Mallarmé's poem are presented in the latter way: (1) the mirror and the strangely broken reality for which it often stands through extremes in the range through which the line dives up and down,⁴⁹ (2) stones and jewels through extremely low notes,⁵⁰ and (3) the lifeless gold or metal through sudden interruptions of the vivacious play for multiple repetitions of long values.⁵¹

With regard to instrumental color, it was already mentioned that Hindemith casts the nurse's sentences exclusively in string timbre, while the princess has access to these potentially more soothing colors only in the few instances when she allows herself to be in some degree of contact with her nurse. Hérodiade's typical colors are the high woodwinds: flute and oboe above all, and the clarinet, but then usually with lines similar to those of the two treble instruments. All the more significant are the two movements that Hindemith's preface labels, respectively, "aria for the clarinet" (no. 7) and "aria for the bassoon" (no. 10), in which the particular timbres of these two instruments are used as interpretive devices. No. 7 is also one of the three pieces Hindemith has composed as dances; the others are nos. 8 and 9. It is then about nos. 7 to 10 that I wish to speak with regard to characterization.

The seventh movement is a weird kind of polonaise; weird because of its prevalent meter of 5/4—not exactly the typical organization for a music used for stately processions. The accompanying figure, however, especially the typical rhythm in the piano, leave no room for doubt. Against this backdrop of an oddly spaced polonaise accompaniment, the clarinet builds its eccentric lines—an apt setting for Hérodiade's bizarre mirror monologue. The intervals are beyond anything a woman in her sane mind would want to sing: covering a total range of three octaves, they include several leaps of two octaves, notably at words like "congealed," "ice," and "far-away shadow." Anyone choosing to express a relatively ordinary question like "Nurse, am I beautiful?" with an outlandishly stretched tessitura might indeed be capable of addressing a mirror with words like "O mirror! Cold water frozen by ennui in your frame, how often and for many hours, desolate of dreams and seeking my remembrances, which are like the leaves beneath your ice of the deep hollow, have I appeared to myself in you like a far-away shadow. But, o horror! in the evenings I

⁴⁹See particularly the clarinet in no. 7, on which I comment below.

⁵⁰See the words about the heavy prison of stone and iron in no. 3, which requires several of the instruments to reach to the lowest notes they are capable of producing.

⁵¹See the unexpected three-measure-long C in no. 5 at "froideur stérile du métal."

came to understand in your severe fountain the nakedness of my sparse dreams.”⁵²

The eighth movement is a march; the composer explicitly confirms an impression that is also clearly conveyed in the music. Like the model on which it is built, the piece features several easily recognizable recurring sections. The first three of them are melodically noticeable: a sturdily accented march rhythm with an almost literally recurring melodic contour sets Hérodiade’s lines “Arrête dans ton crime,” “Quel sûr démon te jette,” and “O jour qu’Hérodiade.”⁵³ Three times does the nurse interject variants of her two gestures of concern and fondness (from no. 2), only to be rudely put in her place by the young girl in her care. After the conspicuous “Pour moi!” this altercation becomes even more heated: the nurse’s string-quartet suggestions are now presented in a motif with prominent syncopations and a hectic bass line, while Hérodiade’s replies, still in the dotted rhythm of the march, sound ever shriller. Only just before the end of this violent interchange does the girl calm down a little—and return to a more normal octave—as she describes herself as with eyes in paradise, remembering how she was lovingly nursed as a child. The nurse, in profound sympathy with the distraught princess, brings the music back to the reassuring tonal center B in her unison about the “lamentable victim.”

At first thought, a march seems one of the most unlikely musical forms in which to approach Mallarmé’s poetic language. Yet Hindemith has chosen wisely the phrases he thus set: it is Hérodiade’s inflexible nature, her desire to see her requests, strange and unhealthy as they may be, obeyed, that motivates this character. In turn, the music adds to the understanding of the poem a nuance that, given the difficulty of the text, one might otherwise have overlooked.

⁵²In fact, the falling two-octave interval at “cadre gelée” (frozen frame), for instance, reminds one of the same plummeting, albeit a fifth higher, in Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*, where Marie, having just been stabbed into her throat, dies screaming “Hilfe!” with a two-octave plunge on the famous “B of death.” This is, without doubt, no moment of sanity, and it is in this context that Hindemith’s extravagant clarinet lines will be heard (by listeners who engage in making the connection to the words Mallarmé gives his emotionally distressed princess Hérodiade).

⁵³From the passage that I translate as “*Halt in your crime*, which chills my blood to its source, and repress this gesture, the famous impiety. Ah, tell me *what sure demon throws you* into this sinister agitation; this kiss, these offered perfumes, and—shall I say it? o my heart—this once again sacrilegious hand (for I think you wanted to touch me) are a day that will not end without misfortune on the tower... *O day upon which Hérodiade* looks with dread!” (The italicised fragments are those that Hindemith sets with similar means.)

Hindemith describes the ninth movement as a “triumphant, wild waltz.” It articulates Hérodiade’s long monologue, beginning with “Yes, it is for myself, for myself that I flower, I the deserted one!” and ending with her ecstatic “O last charm, yes, I feel it, I am alone,” which prompts her nurse to ask, “Madam, are you then going to die?” Again, the choice of the dance form does not appear self-evident at first glance. “Gardens of amethyst, buried endlessly in learned, dazzled abysses, unknown golds, protecting your antique light under the somber sleep of a primeval earth,” etc., do not intuitively invite a waltzing tempo, or the zest evoked in the “passionné” indicated in Hindemith’s title. The composer is portraying here not a languid princess-of-the-tower reflecting guardedly, but a young woman whose passion, while overlaid with an often paralyzing fear, is burning hot. The music highlights the brightness of her eyes, the “fatal splendor of her hair” and its “massive sway.” It depicts “the white shudders of her nudity” and her “shivering starlike prudishness,” on account of which she may wish to die, as violent convulsions, and stresses—perhaps more than Mallarmé had in mind, but perhaps not—that Hérodiade herself mentions the very sexually allusive “aroma of fierce delights.”

This movement is also particularly vivid in its change of timbre; clearly, the protagonist is thrown about in this passionate monologue. Here is how I read Hindemith’s scoring for the first half of the passage:

flute:	Oui, c’est pour moi, pour moi, que je fleuris, déserte!
clarinet:	Vous le savez, jardins d’améthyste, enfouis
flute:	Sans fin dans de savants abîmes éblouis,
bassoon:	Ors ignorés, gardant votre antique lumière
clarinet:	Sous le sombre sommeil d’une terre première,
	Vous, pierres où mes yeux comme des purs bijoux
	Empruntent leur clarté mélodieuse,
oboe:	et vous
	Métaux qui donnez à ma jeune chevelure
	Une splendeur fatale et sa
clarinet:	massive allure!
violin I:	Quant à toi! femme née en des siècles malins
	Pour la méchanceté des antres sibyllins,
flute:	Qui parles d’un mortel!
horn:	selon qui, des calices
	De mes robes, arôme aux farouches délices,
	Sortirait le frisson blanc de ma nudité,
	Prophétise que si le tiède azur
clarinet:	d’été,
	Vers lui nativement la femme se dévoile,
flute:	Me voit dans ma pudeur grelot-
oboe:	tante d’étoile,
woods + piano:	Je meurs!

I find it particularly telling that “under the somber sleep of a primeval earth” should have been given to the darker color of the bassoon, and that the French horn—the instrument that is otherwise in this composition most prominent for its articulation of persistent distance and rejection (see the multiple reiteration of *Reculez!* in no. 2) is chosen to represent the lines that come as close as the princess ever gets to a description of the man that may one day enter her life (“according to whom would come forth the white shudder of my nudity from the chalices of my robes, aroma of fierce delights: prophesy that, if the warm blue...”).

The tenth movement, finally, is scored as an aria for the bassoon. In its tessitura, this instrument deviates from the image we have so far gained of *Hérodiade*: we have met her as a dramatic soprano, not as a warm alto and much less as a voice that reaches into the male register. But it is clear which wording prompted this: “pauvre,” the self-centered princess calls her nurse, “pauvre aïeule” (poor grandam). This address launches the first and only segment of the “Scène” in which the princess seems to grant her nurse a right to feelings and sensitivities of her own. In this spirit, she even asks her to “forgive this hard heart.” This conciliatory mood, which governs also the uncommon kindness with which she asks the shutters to be closed, her longing for waves that rock gently, and—in the woodwind-quintet coda that follows the bassoon aria, calmer still—her allegedly childish desire to have torches lit, all this seems to inspire the music of Hindemith’s *Grave*. The composer gently relegates to secondary importance all those segments of the passage that are, in accordance with *Hérodiade*’s psychology, less relaxed and tender, in particular her hatred of the blue sky, later reinforced as a desire for “a country where the sinister sky has the hated looks of Venus.” Hindemith’s beautiful cantilena, laid out over an accompaniment pattern of several repeated fragments whose softly detached chords paint a delicate impressionistic picture, allows the troubled princess more inner warmth, more respite from her relentlessly alert suspicion, than Mallarmé did. The bassoon cantilena ends, at “j’y partirais,” with the lowest B of the instrument—a note we know *Hérodiade* could not have reached, neither in her singing nor in her personality. But the composer trusts her, if only for a fleeting moment. In the course of the very soft woodwind passage that completes this movement, *Hérodiade*’s words rise again from the clarinet (“Allume encore, enfantillage dis-tu, ces flambeaux”) through the oboe (“où la cire au feu léger pleure parmi l’or vain”) to the flute (“quelque pleur étranger et... Maintenant? Adieu.”)

In time for the final movement, she is back in character: *ff* in unison accents of the high woodwinds. But, exploring Mallarmé's poetry more deeply than before with the assistance of the musical suggestions, we have been allowed to glimpse a different facet of her complex nature.

From Music to Dance: Martha Graham and Vaslav Nijinsky

On 29 May 1912, Paris witnessed a new incarnation of *L'après-midi d'un faune*: a ballet devised to the music by Debussy, premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet. The lead dancer, Vaslav Nijinsky (1890-1950), then the brightest star of the ballet company and still considered by many the greatest dancer of his age, impersonated the faun and also signed as the work's choreographer. *L'après-midi d'un faune*, his first work as a creative artist, remains the sole ballet of his to survive both in reconstructions from memory handed down through generations of dancers and in his own, minutely detailed notation, which was only recently decoded. The sets and costumes were designed by Léon Bakst and not, as was originally intended, by Odilon Redon, the famous illustrator of Flaubert and many poets after him. This choice proved momentous: as much as Nijinsky's archaizing choreography itself, the famous spotted faun costume and the frieze-like setting invented by Bakst influenced the overall message of the production.⁵⁴

On 30 October 1944, the audience at the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress in Washington witnessed the premiere of two choreographies of and with Martha Graham. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge had subsidized a commission that went to the dancer as well as two composers

⁵⁴These "friezes," created not only by the decor and by the repeatedly suspended, "frozen" movements but even more so by the nature of the movements itself, are so important a trait of this ballet that they warrant further explanation. "Nijinsky's ballet *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* has long been noted for its two-dimensional use of the stage space as well as of body direction and body shape. The lines of progression, the pathways, are always parallel to the footlights. The dancers' front (direction of feet) and the facing direction for the head are, with only two exceptions, toward either stage left or stage right. Half-turns used to face the opposite direction occur swiftly so that the illusion of flatness is maintained. The chest faces toward the audience [...]" (Guest and Peschke, p. 17.) See also the fascinating account of the detective story that constituted the decipherment of the notated score, which had lain in the British Library in manuscript form for more than forty years without anybody being able to read it, in Ann Hutchinson Guest and Claudia Peschke, *Nijinsky's Faune Restored: A Study of Vaslav Nijinsky's 1915 Dance Score L'Après-midi d'un Faune and His Dance Notation System* (Philadelphia etc.: Gordon and Breach, 1991).

who were to create music for her: Aaron Copland and Paul Hindemith. Copland wrote his now famous *Appalachian Spring*, while Hindemith chose Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*. Interestingly, Edwin Denby, writing about Graham's first performance of *Hérodiade* in New York in the spring of 1945, comments on the presentation with words that are very much reminiscent of those used in impressions of Nijinsky's *Faune*. Describing the story as presented by the two dancers as an "immolation scene [that] might take place in the antechamber to the Cretan labyrinth. It has the tone of a mythological rite....," he draws attention to the "superbly restrained performance" that he saw characterized by "a few large static gestures of tragic splendor," with "passages in 'archaic' profile."⁵⁵ My colleague at the University of Michigan School of Music, professor of dance and choreographer Peter Sparling, who danced in Graham's company during the years 1973-87, remembers her *Hérodiade* as "very serious, very intense, stark, angular"⁵⁶—a wording strikingly similar to that used elsewhere to describe the style Nijinsky developed for his *Faune*. Also, both dances end with the protagonist in relation to a veil: in Nijinsky's *Faune*, the last of the three veils that the chief nymph, about to take a bath, has unfastened from her dress becomes the object next to which the faun lies down in the final scene, while Graham's *Hérodiade* "ends the dance hanging her head in a large black sheath of fabric as if being swallowed up."⁵⁷

Yet here the similarities end. As Denby and many others have commented with regard to Graham's interpretation of *Hérodiade*, "the ballet has very little relation to his [Mallarmé's] poem." In fact, the American dancer had originally intended to call her choreography *Mirror Before Me* and changed the title only to please Hindemith. As she writes in an article in the *Dance Observer*: "When I did *Hérodiade*, this was a great crisis in my life. It was the first time that I had done a dance in which I did not do the scenario first. Mr. Hindemith decided that he wanted to do that particular piece and I wanted very much to do a piece with him. I had not read the poem of Mallarmé. I went to work. I tried to arrive at something from which I could depart. What did Mallarmé mean to say? I believe he

⁵⁵Edwin Denby, "Graham's *Hérodiade*," in *Dance writings* (New York: Knopf, 1986), p. 315.

⁵⁶Peter Sparling (Ann Arbor: private communication, 20 February 1997).

⁵⁷*Ibid.* While Martha Graham could retain her closing gesture, Nijinsky appears to have reacted to the storm of controversy caused by the sexually overt final movements of the faun's symbolic union with a nymph's veil, and subsequently modified the controversial ending.

means that fear which we all have, the fear of the artist, of the blank white page when writing a composition, the fear of the empty studio when starting to dance.” And she continues her interpretation: “The story is that this woman looks at herself in the mirror. When you look in a mirror, what do you see? Do you see just only what you want to see? A mirror is an instrument in an endeavor to arrive at the truth. And that is how it is used in *Hérodiane*.”⁵⁸

Mallarmé scholars might argue that she misunderstood or at least short-changed the poem. Graham autobiographer Ernestine Stodelle remarks that the dancer found Mallarmé’s poem “elaborate, abstruse.” What she gleaned, according to Stodelle, is that it dealt with the thoughts of a woman who prepares herself for her destiny by scrutinizing her innermost feelings. “A mirror and the presence of a Woman Attendant assist her in the painful act of self-confrontation.”⁵⁹ Stodelle further implies that Graham interpreted the second role, whom her program contrasts as “an Attendant” with “a Woman,” as a projection of the Woman’s alter ego—that her *Hérodiane* is actually a soliloquy.⁶⁰

Denby, commenting on Nijinsky’s interpretation of the *Faune*, had observed that the gestures, which “have prototypes in Greek reliefs and vase paintings,” presented for him an “intellectual association with adolescence.”⁶¹ Stodelle reports that Graham’s rendition of the quest for self-discovery in *Hérodiane* was “that of every older woman who dares to face the closing circle of her life.”⁶² Both interpretations can be read to reflect the age of the interpreters at the time they conceived these works (Nijinsky was in his early twenties, Graham in her mid-forties) more than, especially in the case of *Hérodiane*, the age of the fictional protagonists. Beyond that, however, Mallarmé’s faun, while not defined in terms of biological age, appears indeed young and vigorous, while the poet’s princess is not an old maid (a conclusion one would have to draw from the combination of the virginity so important in Mallarmé’s portrayal and

⁵⁸Martha Graham, “Martha Graham Speaks,” *Dance Observer* (April 1963): 53-54, p. 54.

⁵⁹Ernestine Stodelle, *Deep Song: The Dance Story of Martha Graham* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), p. 130.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 131. In the same context, Stodelle also quotes a Japanese poem: “I do not see myself / Reflected in the mirror. Myself, reflected in the mirror, / Sees me,” Unfortunately, it remains unclear whether this association is Stodelle’s or Graham’s.

⁶¹Edwin Denby, “Nijinsky’s *Faune*; Massine’s *Symphonie fantastique*: American Ballet Caravan,” in *Dance Writings*, p. 39.

⁶²Stodelle, *Deep Song*, p. 151.

the age Graham gives her), and even less an experienced woman in her mid-life.⁶³ Nor is she, as Graham rendered her according to Denby's report, "the victim of the action."⁶⁴

Hindemith, who had chosen the poem and in his music interpreted it so carefully, was "baffled" first of all by the dancer's choice to ignore the main elements of the plot. Graham replied: "...but I'm dealing with the magic of the mind, not the actuality." Beyond that, as Agnes de Mille reports, the composer was apparently no less baffled by the way his music was being treated. For, strangely enough, Graham's choreography seems to appear equally unrelated to the music as it is to the poem. While Hindemith himself, for whom Graham apparently had only admiration, did not voice his thoughts, his wife felt less restraint. As Graham tells it in a 1985 interview, "They didn't like what I did to his music, Mrs. Hindemith particularly. [...] She said, 'You didn't consult the composer at all about this.' I said, 'Why, it never occurred to me to consult the composer about the choreography.' Well, this upset her no end."⁶⁵

While its success with the audience and the many favorable reviews leave no doubt that Martha Graham's ballet *Hérodiade* is a fascinating and meaningful work of art in its own right, it is not, then, an example of what this study has set out to explore: it is not an interpretation of Mallarmé's poem *or* Hindemith's music, and not even an attempt at an inter-semiotic transposition of either.

Nijinsky's frieze-like tableaux, too, were perceived by many in the original audience as contrasting with Debussy's fluid music. However, as Nijinsky scholars Ann Hutchinson Guest and Claudia Peschke point out, the "choreographic concept departed from traditional theatrical precepts of scenic representation and audience response" rather than from the music—though the latter was perhaps more difficult to express. What motivated the young choreographer (according to his sister and fellow dancer) was as much an interpretation of Mallarmé's poem and Debussy's music as it was a desire to find his own style. "I want to move away from

⁶³Or, as Peter Sparling explains what he saw Graham express, a woman "torn between the desire for the relatively easy life of simple human pleasures (represented by her hand-maiden, dancing in more rounded, swooping embracing shapes, who tries to convince her to resist the ascetic artist's life) and the life of the artist, the seeker, the 'doom-eager' woman (danced by Martha in a succession of tormented, angular bone-dry shapes) pursuing a path of commitment into the well of aloneness." (Private communication, 2/1997)

⁶⁴Denby, "Graham's *Hérodiade*," p. 315.

⁶⁵Quoted in Agnes de Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 260-61.

the classical Greece that Fokine likes to use. Instead, I want to use the archaic Greece that is less known and, so far, little used in the theatre.”⁶⁶ Correspondingly Nijinsky, whose set directions asked for a “parched, Greek summer landscape” to be depicted on the backdrop, with “a stream, and, to the left, a hillock,” specified that “[t]he aim is for everything to be almost flat, more like a low-relief.”⁶⁷ As Massine commented later, full of admiration, by “suppressing the sense of depth and dispensing with the usual graceful positions, and by twisting sharply in opposite directions the upper part of the body against the lower, Nijinsky evolved a sculptural line which gave an effect of organic beauty such as I had never seen in any ballet.”⁶⁸

How closely Nijinsky kept to the plotline of Mallarmé’s poem can be gleaned already from his brief synopsis, which states very simply that the faun plays his flute and enjoys the grapes; nymphs appear and prepare to go bathing; before the nymphs catch sight of the faun, one of them has begun undressing; most of them manage to leave, but the faun intercepts the half-undressed nymph, who escapes later. In the end the faun remains alone with a veil of her dress, which he carries carefully to his bed on the hillock, where he “has fun with it” and then lies down beside it.⁶⁹ Among the seven nymphs that Nijinsky casts there are two with special roles in relation to the faun: the fifth nymph (also called the “chief nymph,” intended to look more mature than the others), whom he catches and caresses and almost embraces—he’ll ultimately have to make do with her veil when she, too, escapes—and the fourth nymph (referred to as the “joyful” or “younger” nymph), who runs off first but returns, curious. The characters, then, are those familiar from Mallarmé’s poem.

With regard to the unfolding of the inner story, it is almost uncanny to what detail Nijinsky’s choreography goes to match both the music and at least some of the symbols contained in the poetic text. His notated score correlates all movements very precisely with the measures, if not even the individual beats, of Debussy’s score. Also, in the layout of his dance he meticulously respects the musical design—and, given the close relation of the music with the words, also that of the poetry.

⁶⁶Nijinsky according to Bronislava Nijinska, *Early Memoirs* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 315.

⁶⁷Quoted in Ann Hutchinson Guest and Claudia Peschke, *Nijinsky's Faune Restored*, p. 13.

⁶⁸Leonid Massine, *My Life in Ballet* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 84.

⁶⁹Abridged and emended from the somewhat repetitive longer Nijinsky quotation in Guest and Peschke, *Nijinsky's Faune Restored*, p. 14.

Here is a summary of the interpretive conclusions Guest and Peschke derive from Nijinsky's notated score (which they have transcribed into the more common labanotation) in relation to the segments in Debussy's music and, by extension, the passages in Mallarmé's poem. Numbers in square brackets refer to the measures of the music.⁷⁰

L'après-midi d'un faune: Mallarmé, Debussy, Nijinsky

Section I:

In lines 1-8 of his poem, Mallarmé shows the faun drowsily visualizing the nymphs he just saw—whether in reality or in a dream, he is not quite sure. In the corresponding measures 1-10 of his symphonic composition, Debussy introduces two components, the flute arabesque and the ensemble's response to it, along with two tonal centers. The arabesque appears as the symbol of the faun's drowsy sensuality, while the first tonal center, C#, was taken to represent the protagonist's love for music, even perhaps the sublimation of sensuality into art that the story of his flute syrinx tells. E, the contrasting pole, here linked to the ensemble, was interpreted as representing doubt and the reasoning search for proof. In both the poem and the music, the initial segment introduces the dual attitude so characteristic of the faun's afternoon tale.

According to Guest and Peschke, Nijinsky's faun starts out motionless, lounging on his rock, holding a flute close to his lips (see plate 45). He begins to stir in m. 3, i.e. at the juncture of Debussy's two components, lowers his flute [5], sits up as if seeing someone, and turns his head [7]. Concluding that no one is there, he turns back [9] and resumes his original lying position [10 = Debussy's retransition].

Segment 2 of Mallarmé's poem (lines 8 middle through 13) finds the faun addressing himself in the second person. In the music, the onset of the second segment (mm. 11-20) is marked by the return of the flute arabesque which, as was shown, is now much defamiliarized, as if to suggest that the faun's inner perspective of seductive nymphs and music making was jarring with the external view with which Mallarmé has him accuse himself of chatting away. Correspondingly, Nijinsky's dance begins with a repetition of the three initial bars of stillness. Then the faun raises his flute [13] and again sits up [14] before assuming a crouched position [15].

⁷⁰For more details, refer to the extensive description in Guest and Peschke, *Nijinsky's Faune Restored*, pp. 33-46 (text) and 72-139 (music juxtaposed with labanotation).

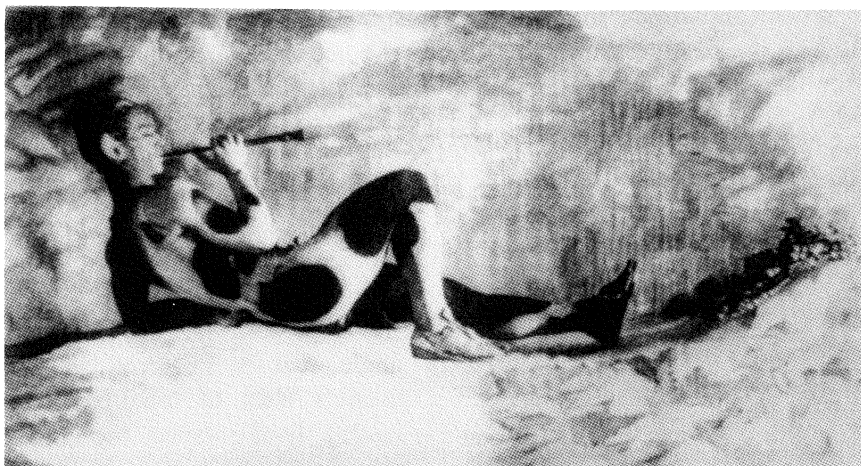


PLATE 45: Vaslav Nijinsky as the faun, in the opening pose.
(This and all subsequent photos were taken during the 1912 production.)

As before he turns his head, and turns it back. At this moment he sees the grapes (which Mallarmé mentions only towards the end of the poem but Nijinsky assumes to be part of the faun's surroundings all along). Taking two crouching steps toward them, he puts down his flute [16], takes up a bunch of grapes to the crescendo in the music [17], lifts them, regards them at eye level, then puts them down, only to lift another bunch to the repeat of the crescendo [18]. Having put these down as well, he leans forward and places one hand after the other on the floor [19], as if to indicate that, as in the poem, he will leave sensual gratification for later. After a cat-like stretch in which he arches his head and upper body backward, he twists to the right, back into the position of the opening. He remains in this position, with the flute at his lips, for nine measures, as the music concludes this segment.



PLATE 46: The faun gazing at the grapes
in Nijinsky's *Faune*

Where Mallarmé's third poetic segment (lines 14-22) returns at some length to the first-person mode, concentrating particularly on the effects of the faun's flute, Debussy deals with the same return very briefly (mm. 21-22). Nijinsky uses the short segment to have three of the nymphs enter, as if thus to suggest the effects of the faun's flute. Walking closely together they take a few steps, then look back to where they came from.



PLATE 47: The “joyful” nymph after her spring in Nijinsky’s *Faune*

Next, Mallarmé's faun invites the Sicilian shores to take over the telling of what happened (lines 23-25), a shifting of the angle that is mirrored in the music's shift of tonality (mm. 23-25). In the dance, the corresponding shift is brought about as the young, “joyful” nymph enters [24] with fast steps, slows down and pauses, springs on the spot, then turns to walk towards the other three nymphs [25]. Together the four nymphs stop and then resume walking.

In the fifth segment, Mallarmé has his faun hear the tale supposedly told by the Sicilian shores (lines 26-32). In the music [26-30], the alternative perspective—of doubting and attempting to secure the wished-for illusion through confirma-

tion by the shore's remembering—is taking over. Nijinsky begins this segment with a whole measure of anticipatory stillness [26]. Now the four nymphs already on stage are joined by the remaining three. The “chief” nymph enters first and prominently. She is followed by the sixth [28] and, half a bar later, by the seventh nymph; both enter with five steps off the beat (“on the ‘and’ counts”). Linking hands, nymphs 6 and 7 then walk slowly, with a pause between each step [29]; on their last step [30], they adjust into place. All seven nymphs, now in a straight line, look alert; stillness follows [end of 30].

In the sixth segment, both the poem and the music portray the faun as part of his surroundings. Mallarmé's lines 32-34 suggest that the faun sees himself from the outside, as a third person; accordingly, he speaks of himself as of "him who seeks to tune his flute." Debussy's mm. 31-33 proceed similarly: the flute's arabesque is heard in another instrument, centered in a different tone. In the ballet, the chief nymph, looking down at her shoulder, loosens the end of her first veil, preparing herself for a bath (see plate 48). The faun lowers his flute and sits up, aware that something interesting is about to happen, and turns his head to look at the nymph [32]. On each beat of the music, which is now in three-four time, the attendant nymphs raise their arms one after the other in canon; each turns her head towards the next as her arms move. Then, with a unison movements [33], each set of three nymphs glides to the other side, crossing behind the chief nymph (again with steps off the beat). By this crossing they shield the chief nymph momentarily from the faun's gaze.



PLATE 48: The "chief" nymph
unfastens the veils in
Nijinsky's *Faune*

In the seventh segment (lines 35-41), when Mallarmé's faun, returned to the first-person address, describes himself as waking up "upright and alone," Debussy's music is entirely defined by the secondary tonal reality [34-36]. Nijinsky's chief nymph unfastens a second veil, thus beginning a repeat of the previous sequence to the other side. As the nymphs start to raise their arms in canon, the faun rises into a crouch, his head alert, looking at the chief nymph. He then takes one crouching step forward [36].

In the final segment of the poems first section (lines 42-51), the faun seems wary of pursuing the search for proof. "Enough," he exclaims, and returns to his twin reeds, his music, and his dreams about perfect beauty

and ideal art. Correspondingly, Debussy's music for the eighth segment (mm. 37-54) is, for the first time, devoid of any traces of the languorous arabesque. With new motifs, a quickened pace, and a changed timbre the faun seems to be awakening to another facet of himself: that of the artist and aesthete. Here Nijinsky decides to follow the momentum of his own story. The faun puts down his flute and rises slowly [37, 38], alerting us to the chief nymph who performs a sequence of steps intended to represent a bathing ritual [38]. Immediately thereafter, the joyful nymph takes two light steps, pauses, and repeats the motion, thus traveling away from the chief nymph [39], looking back at the other nymphs who copy her light, springy steps [40]. In the meantime [39, 40], the faun has taken three steps toward the edge of his rock; now he slowly climbs down the stairs [42, 43]. The six attending nymphs have retraced their paths [41] and sunk into a pose, which the chief nymph acknowledges. As the music swells [44-47] and the meter changes to 4/4, all participants get involved in increased activity. Two of the attendant nymphs pick up the chief nymph's two veils and carry them, as in a ritual, before they exit [47]. Meanwhile, the chief nymph has swiveled through several still poses, holding each for one half-bar. The faun, having reached the bottom of his rock, moves evenly to stage left [44, 45]. Seeing the joyful nymph, he follows her [46, 47] until he has passed her. Just before [48] he swivels around to face her. Startled, she turns quickly away from him and runs away with light springy steps, exiting [48-49]. The faun, having watched her depart, follows after her [49, 50]. A quiet moment ensues as the music leads into a return of what Nijinsky referred to as the "unveiling theme" and "the chief nymph begins to loosen the last veil of her dress" [51]. As she is about to drop it [52], the first nymph reaches out to catch it; but at this moment the faun takes a step towards the nymphs. Startled, the first nymph misses the dress and, together with the second nymph, leaves the stage [53]. The chief nymph, turning to face the joyful nymph and feeling undressed, places her arms across her chest and hips, then lowers into a kneel, bends forward, and begins to pick up the dress [54]. Meanwhile, the faun has traveled toward the joyful nymph. Passing the chief nymph, who does not see him, he turns quickly to face her, taking a step directly toward her. Thus what Mallarmé presented as a moment in which the faun almost preferred art to female bodies, appears in the ballet as a rather direct intrusion into the nymphs' sphere.

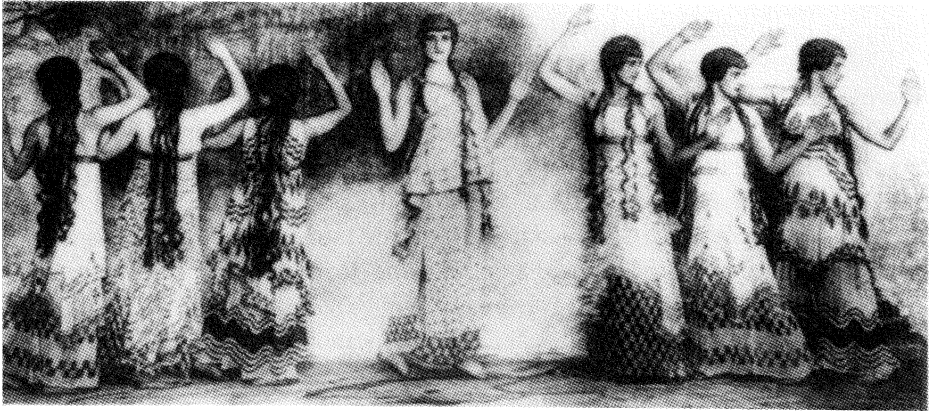


PLATE 49: “Frieze”-like postures in Nijinsky’s *Faune*

Section II:

During the first half of the music’s second long section, Debussy’s little rondo (mm. 55-78), which corresponds with the faun’s reflections regarding activities he imagines himself engaging in in the future (lines 52-61 and 75-81 in Mallarmé’s poem), Nijinsky’s story of the encounter between the faun and the two most enticing nymphs unfolds further. The chief nymph attempts to move toward the joyful nymph but is intercepted by the faun [55]. She freezes in her tracks. Both stand perfectly still, face to face, before a duet begins. For two measures, total stillness creates dramatic tension [55, 56]. Slowly she sinks to the floor [57], her head gradually inclining (with dignity, not submissiveness, as Guest and Peschke assert). Again there is stillness [58, 59]. Lifting her head and slowly inclining it backward, she rises to normal standing [60] and then leans backward away from the faun [61]. During this time she continues to cover her body with the dress. Spurred now into action, he makes three ‘pawing’ movements in place. In reaction to this display of impatience, she turns away from him while thrusting her right arm back toward him [62]. He lifts both arms and takes two high forward steps in preparation for a swift run into a big *croisé* leap to stage left, passing behind her just before taking off so that his goat-like leap can be seen. Pausing after landing the leap (according to Nijinsky, “a deepening of the landing gives an animal-like quality”), he takes three more steps and whips around to face

her again [63]. She turns her head toward him, inclines it forward and closes her right arm across her hip to hold the lower part of her dress.

The following *très expressif* passage brings the two leading dancers even more closely together, with increasing willingness on the part of the chief nymph. The segment begins with two measures of stillness [63, 64]; then the chief nymph rises slowly. The backward inclination of her head at the end of this rise leads into a repeat of the previous torso tilt away from the faun [65, 66]. As the music becomes more animated, he rises swiftly while she whips around, stepping and leaning away from him, again extending her arm backward toward him [67]. Once more she must quickly take hold of the dress. After a brief moment of motionlessness, both walk toward the joyful nymph [68]. Again he faces her abruptly, she turns and leans away from him, repelling him with her right arm [69]. As before, they remain motionless until they repeat the same number of steps traveling toward stage left [70]. The unison style of walking that now follows suggests harmony between them. While she looks guarded and he aggressive, they travel towards the joyful nymph with swift low steps [71], then back in the other direction [72]. The remaining five nymphs enter one after the other [72, 73]. As the chief nymph pauses and then sinks to her left knee, she allows the faun to link his right elbow from above around her left. This is the only moment in the ballet where there is physical contact between the faun and a nymph. The attending nymphs pause in suspense [73], then walk toward the couple [74]. Seeing the other nymphs; the chief nymph slips her arm out of the faun's, picks up her dress, as if to indicate clearly that she has lost interest in the encounter. The faun places his right hand near his face (Nijinsky describes this as "pointing with his thumb like a horn"). The other nymphs continue walking toward him [74, 75], while the chief nymph rises [75], draping her dress around her body. Then, however, she drops it again and exits, head erect [76]. The other nymphs now turn away from the faun and leave [77, 78]. The faun remains still [76-78] as he watches the nymphs depart.

Like the two italicized passages that in Mallarmé's text signify the faun's pretended memories of the almost-seduction of two nymphs (lines 62-75 and 82-92), the second of Debussy's structural entities consists of two corresponding halves (mm. 79-85 and 86-93). Nijinsky's interpretation of these "memories" is interesting: more than in the poet's words, they are truly nothing but memories in the dancer's rendering: the nymph herself is no longer anywhere near his arms.

As a version of the music's opening theme returns, Nijinsky holds his faun still, thus "remembering" earlier episodes of the story. Then, drawn to the abandoned dress, he takes two steps toward it [80]. Fascinated, he pauses, then with another step arrives next to it [81]. Two gentle pawing steps in place suggest his 'remembering' the excited feeling before his one big leap [82]. Seeing four of the nymphs return, he takes a step in their direction, past the dress, then pauses while the nymphs tease/haunt him. Almost aggressively, two of the nymphs take a step toward the faun; he reacts by stepping back. With rapid arm gestures they tease him before they retreat stage right. The two other nymphs advance toward the faun with the same chastising movement. As they travel away from him [85], they move into a line with the other two. All exit [86]. Meanwhile the faun has lowered himself on his left knee near the dress. Disregarding the nymphs, he concentrates fully on the veil. Slowly lifting his head [87] he



PLATE 50: Nijinsky's faun with the captured veil, "laughing like an animal" [90]

turns to look back to where the chief nymph has exited, then returns his gaze at the dress [88]. Picking it up by the hem, he rises [89], contracts his torso, and slips the dress to hang over his elbow as he takes a step forward in preparation for the animated passage that follows. After six swift steps to stage right, his head inclined [90], he stops abruptly and swivels. Throwing his head backwards he opens his mouth wide and, as Nijinsky stated, "laughs like an animal." The running and the laugh are then repeated to the other side as the faun travels slightly upstage [91]. Another turn and beginning run is intercepted by an entering nymph [92], so he turns back and continues upstage. The nymph, having thus chased the faun, departs, head upright.

Coda:

In the poem, the coda begins with the faun distancing himself from his former ardent pursuits with an “O well, there will be others” (lines 93-98), upon which he engages in a brief fantasy of seducing Venus (lines 99-104), only to renounce his amorous desires for this afternoon and return to his nap (lines 104-110). Dancing with the corresponding music (mm. 94-99, 100-105, 106-110), the faun stops abruptly and turns to look at another of the nymphs who has just entered. Yet she, feeling his eyes on her, quickly turns away, pauses briefly, and exits. Alone again, the faun holds still as though uncertain as to whether more nymphs might appear [94]. That not being the case, he concentrates on the dress as he starts to walk slowly toward his rock [95]. Four more steps and he stands still, slowly raising his arms with the dress. As though in another world, deeply absorbed in the veil, he continues his slow walk back to the rock [97-99].

Arriving near the bottom of the steps, he adjusts the dress before slowly climbing [100, 101]. He begins to lower himself first to his right knee, then to the left [102]. Holding the veil now only with his left hand, he slips his right hand alongside it, in a gesture that is like a wisp of remembrance of the departed nymphs. He then raises the veil close to his face and “smells” it (writes Nijinsky) [103].

After a pause, he lowers the dress as he inclines his head forward [104]. Gathering the lower part of it toward him, he lays the end down near his right side [105]. As he lowers himself to kneels on his right knee, he leans forward, then comes partially upright before he inclines his torso again. Extending his left leg to join the right [107], he sustains his body position for a moment before his arms bend as he sinks slowly down to the floor until he is lying prone, feet no longer tucked under. Lifting his head while pushing with both hands away from the floor, he arches his upper spine backward before again sinking slowly [109]. (The gestures created a scandal in the first performance; even some of the dance critics found them too directly suggestive of “making love to a veil.”) Slowly he extends his right arm backward alongside his body until the hand is on the thigh. In a relaxing movement, he rests his forehead on the floor, dropping his right arm as well.

Summary: Mallarmé's Poems and Their Transmedializations

Several aspects are quite unique about the way in which Mallarmé's sister poems were received by artists working in other media. Although Claude Debussy and Paul Hindemith differ distinctly in their styles and aesthetics, they chose to respond to the two Symbolist texts in largely corresponding ways. Both devise structures that unfold as close analogs to those of the poems; both employ tonal centers to epitomize contrasting aspects. Debussy seems, at first glance at least, the more abstract; in his composition, tonal centers relate to concepts, e.g., erotic passion versus aesthetic pursuits. Hindemith associates keys in a more straightforward manner with persons; see prominently his use of B for the nurse, particularly in connection with the very tangible characterization given in the lullaby rhythm. Hindemith's ingenious way of setting the text by giving the poetic lines to the instruments of the orchestra, almost as a dialogical "song without words," represents a very different kind of abstraction, which allows its composer details of shading even for individual words that no other musical decision would support. Where Debussy explores additional poetic nuances through varying degrees of harmonic friction, Hindemith layers the depth of the scene with the help of ever-varying devices of a polyphonic interplay. Debussy's through-composed music captures the atmosphere of the pastoral scene, while Hindemith's more noticeably structured composition aims at heightening and fine-tuning the listener's insight into the solitary princess's psychological complexity. Both composers achieve what readers of Mallarmé's difficult poetry may have thought next to impossible: with the help of musical means to draw the beholders' attention to the poetic protagonists' complex and contradictory motives.

The subsequent transmedialization of these musical responses to Mallarmé's poems into dance are no less extraordinary. Unique circumstances prompted a young dancer and choreographer to devote his time and creative energy to preserve with pen on paper his idiosyncratic interpretation of Mallarmé's poem and Debussy's music. Caught during World War I as a foreigner in Austria and subsequently detained and barred from dancing, Vaslav Nijinsky devised his own dance notation and wrote down a complex score of his ballet. Thanks to the untiring efforts of dance researchers we are, as of recently, in the fortunate position to convince ourselves that this *Faune* is, in fact, a "transposition" of both the poet's and the composer's ideas into movement, posture, kinetic

rhythm, and plastic imagery. Even subtleties like the “remembrance” in part II of the *Faune* poem and the irreverent sexual self-assurance in the middle segment of its coda have found their way into Nijinsky’s performance gestures, not to speak of the musical layout, which he interprets in a unique mixture of respect (for the phrases and their relationship) and creative freedom (repeatedly placing his accents into the still points of the music).

While close analysis reveals that *Hérodias* represents an ingenious transformation from poetic into musical language and poetic into musical imagery, followed by a rather independent dance creation that does not attempt to interpret either source work but merely takes them as a vague point of departure, *L’après-midi d’un faune*, by contrast, consists of a three-, if not a four-step process of transmedialization. Assuming a basic inspiration of the poem by the Rococo painting, we find elements of Boucher in Mallarmé, the images and conceptual contrasts as well as Mallarmé’s layout in Debussy’s composition, and a lot of Boucher, Mallarmé, and Debussy in Nijinsky’s choreography. Contrary to what Martha Graham may have feared, neither of the works is at all the smaller for its close reading of and respectful engagement with a predating text.