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Sylphs, Serpents and Acrobats:
Dance and the Body in the Poetics of Gautier, Baudelaire and Mallarmé

By

Lauren A Dixon

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Summer 2021

Abstract

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Dance and the Body in the Poetics of Gautier, Baudelaire and Mallarmé

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in French

University of California, Berkeley

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By bringing to light the importance of the body and feminine expressive agency in the writing of Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé, this dissertation makes a case for dance as a key locus of modernity in nineteenth century French literary history. Each of these poets was challenged by the question of how to represent the dancer as an embodied being. My study works through the entanglement of images, figures of speech and fantasies centering on dance in these poets' works, through which each of these writers confronts and responds to changing aspects of the modern world. In particular, I am interested in moments in which the dancer is neither idealized nor denigrated, but rather a powerful symbol of movement, agency and embodiment. How does the autonomy and resistance of the female dancing body inspire the poetics of these writers? In addition, how can a critical emphasis on feminine artistry and agency through the figure of the dancer help us better understand these male authors' relationship to gender and femininity? I will propose that these authors' writings were not purely misogynistic and dismissive of the feminine; rather, each was forced to grapple with the dancer's autonomy and individuality. Finally, this study seeks to reaffirm the importance of each author's interest in the body and bodily experience, challenging a literary history that has often characterized the poetics of these writers as disembodied and disengaged.

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INTRODUCTION

How to define and represent the nature of the body, its interior dynamics and processes, its experience and relation to the outer world, are central questions to both performance studies and literature. In particular, the question of how to represent the dancer as an embodied being challenged the representational frames of nineteenth century French poets Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé. My study works through the entanglement of images, figures of speech and fantasies centering on dance in these poets' works, through which each of these writers confronts and responds to changing aspects of the modern world. By focusing on dance in an analysis of the writing of Gautier, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, my study will make a case for the importance of the body and feminine expressive agency in each of these writers' poetics.

Much work has been done on the emphasis on the corporeality of a variety of predominantly feminine figures by nineteenth century French literary representation, particularly those associated with spectacle and performance art, such as the actress, courtesan and dancer.¹ The dancer serves as a complex and paradoxical figure, both idealized and physical, expressive and objectified. Classical ballet in seventeenth and eighteenth century France was a formal, aristocratic court dance featuring primarily noble and male dancers, highly regulated by etiquette and social hierarchy. The Romantic ballet occasioned a dramatic shift, from ceremony and grandiosity to expression and individuality, from symmetry and balance to extremity and pathos, from the aristocratic male dancer to the professional ballerina. The nineteenth century cultural imaginary, which synonymized dance with the feminine, is filled with images of sinuous snake dancers and bayadères, fantasies of harem dancers and swan-women, starlit sylphs and mechanical dolls. As its audience became one of a wide, middle-class public in postrevolutionary urban modernity, ballet became an ideal site for examining the simultaneous idealization and problematization of the female body in the context of performance and women's participation in the public sphere.

Much recent feminist scholarship has focused on the ambivalent, paradoxical status of the Romantic ballerina's participation in public spaces of performance, as represented by male critics and poets. The pink and white vision of her gauzy tutu and satin pointe shoes remain a quintessential cliché of "feminist nightmares"² for several reasons. The ballerina might be seen to demonstrate how the female body has been dissected and surveilled by the male heteronormative gaze in art. At the Opéra de Paris, for example, Eugène Disdéri's photographs of dancers' legs allowed these body parts to be cut up, fetichized, and reduced into flat and interchangeable images. They could be displayed, assembled into collages, or in carte form, commercialized and manipulated to create the illusion of control and possession. Scholars such as Felicia McCarren and Lucille Toth have written compelling accounts at the intersection of medicine, dance and literature of the way in which the female dancing body has been pathologized. McCarren's work addresses the tension between the dancer's symbolic resonances of "beauty, grace, discipline, geometry, poetry, the body's transcendence of everyday

¹ I use the term "body" to mean the physical form of a being, and "corporeality" in relation to a particular emphasis on the body, with all of its positive and negative resonances such as instinct, "primitivity", rhythm, immediacy and the natural.

² Jennifer Homans characterizes the vision of the Romantic ballerina beginning with Marie Taglioni thusly in her ballet history *Apollo's Angels* (135).

bodilessness” and the “medical, scientific, and negative social connotations of a ‘pathology’”, the way dance is associated with madness, hysteria, disease and death (130-132).

The focus of my study, by contrast, is to restore the expressive agencies of the dancer in an account of her encounter with the nineteenth century French authors Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé. My work seeks to approach the paradoxical status of the female dancing body from the other side: focusing on moments in which the dancer is neither idealized nor denigrated, but a powerful symbol of movement, agency and embodiment. I seek out moments in which her artistic expression and control, capacity to embody the performance, as well as the excessive, irreducible meaning generated by her movement challenged and resisted the controlling, exoticizing and pathological representations by primarily male authors that undeniably existed in nineteenth century France.

My dissertation seeks to address three main questions at the intersection of dance, literature, gender and performance studies. Firstly, it considers the way in which these three authors have been inspired by the expressive, corporeal qualities of the female dancing body in order to reimagine a poetic language that would both seek to imitate and reproduce these qualities – their rhythmic, spatial and temporal effects. I argue that the dancer’s autonomy and resistance to full mastery, control or apprehension is crucial to these authors’ conceptualization of language through dance. How can this emphasis on feminine artistry and agency through the figure of the dancer help us better understand these male authors’ relationship to gender and femininity? I will propose that these authors’ writings were not purely misogynistic and dismissive of the feminine; rather, each was forced to grapple with the dancer’s autonomy and individuality. More broadly, I will seek to restore the importance of feminine expression through the physical and corporeal in the account of these authors’ relationship to gender.

Finally, my third objective is to reconsider each author’s relationship to the body and bodily experience in a literary history that has often been one of disembodiment and disengagement. Théophile Gautier has been tightly tied to the antiutilitarian doctrine of *l’art pour l’art*, exemplified by the statement in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* that “Nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and the needs of man are ignoble and disgusting (22). Gautier was criticized by successors as shallow and uninterested in the quotidian, with a narrow focus on aesthetic concerns to the exclusion of the real. Joris-Karl Huysmans wrote of Gautier in *A Rebours*, “L’impression des objets s’était fixée sur son œil si perceptif, mais elle s’y était localisée, n’avait pas pénétré plus avant dans sa cervelle et dans sa chair” (319-321). Emile Zola condemned his writings as containing “aucune idée nouvelle apportée, aucune vérité humaine de quelque profondeur, aucune prescience de l’évolution des siècles”.³ This evaluation of Gautier as a surface-level, descriptive writer of form and surface, the ornamental and trivial, remote from reality has undermined the importance of his literary and cultural contributions, though more recent work has been done reassessing his importance to French art criticism, journalism and visual culture.⁴ Gautier has primarily been remembered for his contributions to ballet criticism, and is frequently cited in popular ballet histories such as Jennifer Homans’s *Apollo’s Angels* (2010) and Ivor Guest’s *The Romantic Ballet in Paris* (2008). Gautier’s fantastic tales also generated renewed critical attention,

³ This is cited in Michael Clifford Spencer’s *The Art Criticism of Théophile Gautier* (1).

⁴ James Kearns’s *Théophile Gautier, Orator to the Artists: Art Journalism of the Second Republic* (2017) seeks to reestablish Gautier as the most crucial figure in mid nineteenth century French art journalism.

primarily in the seventies.⁵ By taking dance as a perspective to analyze his poetics, I seek to contribute to the renewal of Gautier's place in literary history by demonstrating that his oeuvre is oriented towards engagement rather than disengagement in the literary, scientific and discourses of his time.

Baudelaire, who dedicated *Les Fleurs du mal* to Gautier, has similarly often been identified with the anticorporeal, marmoreal static vision of "La Beauté" as "un rêve de pierre", the dreamy and timeless vision of Andromache in "Le Cygne", and the elusive "fugitive beauté" of "A une passante". In an article on Gautier, Baudelaire wrote that "La poésie ne peut pas, sous peine de mort ou de déchéance, s'assimiler à la science ou à la morale. Elle n'a pas la Vérité pour objet: Elle n'a qu'elle-même"⁶. His work in making poetry more self-referential and autonomous is seen as reaching its apotheosis in Mallarmé, whose poetics seem to be the culmination of abstraction, depersonalization and disembodiment.⁷ However, I will propose that these authors' encounter with the dancer exposes the ways in which their poetics address the changes and challenges to the body posed by modernity; their representations of the dancer served alternately as metaphor for and foil to modern experiences of accelerated time and jarring urban space, as well as the ordering and systematizing of commodity culture⁸.

My first chapter centers on Théophile Gautier and the Romantic ballet, which turned dance into an art form with the female body as its essential form, stage and subject. Gautier has been associated with the view of women espoused by his character d'Albert in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, as "une belle esclave destinée à nos plaisirs . . . quelque chose d'inférieur et de dissemblable que l'on adore et dont on joue" (216). However, an examination of Gautier's dance writings, which feature the artistic mastery and autonomy of the female dancer, contradicts this narrative. Gautier, a ballet enthusiast and professional dance critic, had a central role at the origin of Romantic ballet, defining, shaping and promoting the nascent genre. The gendering of the ballerina and the staging of social and hierarchical relations between bodies in his works also points to his interest in the status of these bodies and subjects, and how they are constructed and presented. Gautier presents both positive and negative models of these relations, ultimately casting his lot in favor of the holism, mobility and antiutilitarianism of dance rather than a view of the body which would seek to straightforwardly dissect, control and objectivize.

Likewise, it is in his reflections on dance, and in his portrayals of dance in fantastic literature that – far from retreating from the real, the physical, from modern perceptions and experiences – Gautier undertakes a reflection on the experiences and sensibilities of his era. Gautier's fantastic tales and his dance writings have generally been considered separately. Cecile Nebel writes that "Although Gautier was a master of the fantastic, as is evident from the short-

⁵ These studies include Elena Margaret Rose's "Théophile Gautier: the Possibilities of the Fantastic" (1973) and Albert Brewster Smith's "Théophile Gautier and the Fantastic" (1977). Tzvetan Todorov also included Gautier in his seminal work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975).

⁶ From "Théophile Gautier", in *Art romantique* (166).

⁷ Amy Billone gives such an account in her analysis of how Hugo Friedrich and others characterized modern poetry's trajectory toward absence and negativity. "Through his use of negative categories such as 'dissonance,' 'depersonalization,' 'deobjectification,' 'empty ideality' and 'deformation,' Baudelaire lays the groundwork, in Friedrich's view, for the opaque ontological poetry of Mallarmé and for the non-representational, silence-centered orientation of modern poetry in general" (287).

⁸ In his essay "Central Park", Walter Benjamin writes that the "19th century began to incorporate women wholesale into the process of commodity production." Specifically, "In the form which prostitution took in the great cities woman appears not merely as a commodity but as a mass-produced article [...] such as is brought about by the application of make-up" (39).

stories he wrote [...]. Clearly, he did not know how to transpose his mastery of the fantastic from the literary medium to that of the dance” (94). However, I will explore the ways in which Gautier’s fantastic relies on the themes, imagery and structures of the Romantic ballet, and conversely, how the hesitation, undecidability and perceptual questioning inherent to the genre of the fantastic subtend his ballet librettos. Gautier’s literary pursuits were not separate from his interest in dance, but in constant dialogue with them, calling into question realistic and objective modes of perception and representation. For Gautier, then, poetry and dance are intermediary sites of hesitation, which enable the imagination of new models of the world. In Gautier’s work, literature becomes a region where writing and the real, changing world come into contact.

Similarly, my second chapter will focus on how a consideration of dance will allow us to see the ways in which agency and expressivity are important elements to Baudelaire’s conception of femininity. Little critical attention has been paid to the place of dance in his oeuvre, despite the dancing snakes, sylphs, acrobats and phantoms repeatedly evoked in his poetry. Baudelaire dedicated many of these and other poems to the dancer Jeanne Duval, with whom he was smitten; Duval also inspired the title character of *La Fanfarlo*, a novella which centers on a dancer. For Baudelaire as for Gautier, encountering the female dancer causes him to hesitate between the polarities of idealization and materialization. Her agency is encoded in his writings as a kind of resistance that prevents complete control or containment. Focusing on dance in his oeuvre prompts a reconsideration of Baudelaire’s relationship to femininity as defined purely by his famed misogyny. Indeed, we will see the dancer’s capacity for activity, movement and knowledge suggests a crucial place for the feminine in his conceptualization of the social and experiential changes associated with mobile, accelerated and technological modernity.

Movement is crucial to Baudelaire’s definition of modernity as “Cet élément transitoire, fugitif, dont les métamorphoses sont si fréquentes” (69). He located modernity “dans le nombre, dans l’ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l’infini” (64). Dance’s status as a newly middle-class and public art form characterized by change, movement, speed and transformation seem to render it particularly suited to responding to modernity.⁹ Indeed, these qualities will inspire Baudelaire’s conception of a modern poetic language. As foregrounding dance in a reading of Gautier’s literary oeuvre helps us to better understand his relationship to modernity, viewing the autonomous, active and corporeal dancer as crucial to Baudelaire’s conception of modern art and language will also help us understand his dense and complex conception of both, holding paradoxical impulses in dynamic tension, and escaping dissection and reduction to a single, static interpretation. Dance’s reconfiguration of gender dichotomies, and the way in which it holds the modern and ideal, stasis and movement, activity and passivity in tension, suggests potentials and possibilities for feminine participation in modernism, commodity culture and public spaces in Baudelaire’s oeuvre.

Such a conception of language prefigures Stéphane Mallarmé’s difficult, extreme notion of poetry. Mallarmé’s writings were heavily influenced by both the Romantic ballet and the early beginnings of Modern dance. The dancing *body* will remain at the forefront of this final analysis; I will spend less time on Mallarmé’s celebrated dance writings, which famously compare the dancer to a “poétique instinct”, a “métaphore”, a “vivante allégorie” of poetic writing. Mallarmé

⁹ Several recent studies have been done on the relation between dance and modernity, mostly beginning with fin-de-siècle or early twentieth-century artists such as Loie Fuller, Vladimir Nijinsky and Serge Diaghilev. Notable examples are Helen Thomas’s *Dance, Modernity and Culture* (2003), Susan Jones’s *Literature, Modernism and Dance* (2013), and Ramsay Burt and Michael Huxley’s *Dance, Modernism and Modernity* (2020).

famously wrote that “la danseuse n’est pas une femme qui danse”. Yet I will do close readings of Mallarmé’s poems in which the body is not abstracted into pure metaphor, but confronted as a physical presence. I will focus on poems depicting bodily experiences in modern, often everyday spaces and stages: flesh performing and receiving violence, scenes of eating and laboring, performers before an audience. The dancers in these poems — less sylphs and swans than acrobats and clowns and bears — are often male as well as female.

Few accounts of the male Mallarmean body exist. My analysis of these moments of dance will attempt to compare the way in which Mallarmé genders these dancers, opening onto a consideration of the Mallarmean body more generally. Mallarmé did not, indeed, always elide the body; rather, that the fact of dance being physical, natural, instinctive and corporeal was highly relevant to his poetics and ultimately a means (as it was for Gautier) of putting into contact literature and the world.

This is particularly clear in examples of Mallarmé’s prose poetry. The nineteenth century prose poem is a form which is seen to address and reflect the development of modern, urban experience, in its rejection of high poetic diction and strict formal constraints and in its hybrid, experimental nature.¹⁰ In the introduction, Mallarmé characterized his collection of prose poems, *Divagations*, as “Un livre comme je ne les aime pas, ceux épars et privés d’architecture [...] comme un cloître quoique brisé, exhalerait au promeneur, sa doctrine” (1). This formulation as well as the title of the collection evoke contingency, organicity and movement, rejecting static, established structures. Indeed, his prose poems feature a large variety of dancing beings, male and female, in modern, quotidian spaces. The final vision of constellations and choreographed male laboring bodies that concludes his collection of prose poetry ends on a surprisingly sympathetic and class-conscious note. This analysis will contest the view of Mallarmé as an abstracted, ahistorical poet removed from the masses and demonstrate the ways in which his oeuvre turns to the physical and the real. Attention to dance will also, as it does for Gautier and Baudelaire, demonstrate ways in which Mallarmé’s work is not purely dominated by his supposed misogyny.¹¹

My analysis of the challenge the dancer has posed to each of these poets both brings to light the crucial importance of feminine expressive agencies in their work, and makes a case for dance as a key locus of modernity in the narrative of nineteenth century French literary history. This account of how these poets and critics have grappled with materiality, femininity and corporeality underlines dance’s vital importance to critical inquiry by scholars of literature, gender and cultural history studies: in its binding together of language, expression and subjectivity, dance has a continued and crucial importance to studying the body as site of meaning, identity and power relations. The way in which the dancer pressures, stretches and breaks conventional conceptions of language also alludes to a future direction for my project and a challenge to my own commitment to literary studies. The question of how to represent

¹⁰ Donna Stonecipher’s book *Prose Poetry and the City* and Catherine Witt’s *Tokens of Discontent: The Emergence of the Modern Prose Poem (1822-1869)* are two recent examples of studies centering on the relationship between prose poetry and the experience of modern urban life.

¹¹ For example, Hélène Stafford, sees a form of virulent misogyny underlying and motivating Mallarmé’s oeuvre. Stafford proposes that the elliptical, indirect syntax essential to Mallarmé’s poetics be viewed as a “shaping and negating gaze” which seeks to appropriate and control the corporeality and femininity of the woman, thereby reducing her to mere decoration, with the result that “the female body under the transforming gaze of the poet is fragmented, dissolved, negated, exorcized”. It is not only the material presence of the woman that is attacked by such a poetics, but the identity and agency of the woman altogether, who is unpersoned, destabilized by this controlling and appropriating gaze (201).

embodied experience has been of much recent interest to performance studies and other extraliterary disciplines.¹² The coda to this dissertation, which leaves these authors behind to center on the dancers themselves, will suggest the necessity of breaking out of a strictly literary focus into interdisciplinary research.

¹² There is a lively debate in Performance Studies over how to write about past embodied experiences. I will discuss Diana Taylor's book *The Archive and the Repertoire* in the coda, which insists upon the importance of the repertoire of embodied practices such as dance, song, chant and other performances, to cultural history. On the other hand, Richard Schechner's foundational *Performance Studies: An Introduction* insists upon the untranslatability of present, live bodies to text.

CHAPTER ONE

Théophile Gautier's Fantastic and the Romantic Ballet

The poet Théophile Gautier became deeply interested in dance at a crucial moment in its history: the birth of the Romantic Ballet. In his review of the ballet *La Fonti* (1855), Gautier identified a crossroads in ballet form and technique. He coined the term “ballet d’action” to characterize *La Fonti*, which he found outmoded and inadequate to the task of expressing the “human passions”.

Quelques gestes très bornés, les uns pris dans la nature, les autres de convention, sont sa seule ressource pour peindre les passions humaines. En sorte qu'un ballet d'action a l'air d'un drame joué par une troupe de sourds-muets, et l'on pourrait d'autant mieux le croire, que les danseurs français ne suivent pas la musique dans leur pantomime. Mais les directeurs, à qui l'habitude du théâtre en a fait perdre le sens, aiment beaucoup le ballet d'action, parce qu'il leur représente une fable, une histoire, un gros thème bien carré et bien massif."¹³

The emphasis on the direct communication of logical, coherent action, use of props and gesture, and insistence on a defined theme struck Gautier as stiff, overly literal, and heavy-handed. In contrast, Gautier wrote, the poetic and ethereal Romantic ballet was “la vraie danse”, with its ambiguity and illusion, sinuousness and plasticity, its emphasis on the “volupté physique” of the female dancer. Ballet’s new character lent itself to Gautier’s questions and experiments as a poet as a particularly rich locus for his thinking, offering him a particular perspective from which to respond to a changing world posing modern challenges and modern experiences.¹⁴

Literary discourses centering on an idea of the world as suffused with mysterious and invisible forces, “correspondances” or “affinities” present in the work of Gautier, Charles Baudelaire, Victor Hugo and other nineteenth century French Romantics deeply resonate with these dynamics of movement and paradox, down to the level of language itself. Hugo’s poetry, and in particular *Les Contemplations*, often features impossible, reversed images which undermine normal human perception and frames of reference by granting form and solidity to the abstract and immaterial and conversely shifting, shivering flux to the concrete and material. Baudelaire’s use of synesthesia in *Correspondances* likewise presents a view of the world as suffused with endlessly rich and perceptually elusive symbolic value. In Gautier’s works, what is perceived to be reality is revealed to be always only a single facet: to see more, one must change perspective, look through different eyes, detect the invisible affinities and connections between seemingly disparate and removed elements.

Gautier’s thinking on dance was centrally related to these ideas in multiple ways. The visuality of dance was one factor. Gautier conceptualized dance as the capacity to take the complex, the inexpressible, the transitory and render it immediate and present as “le rêve visible,

¹³ Théophile Gautier’s article “La Fonti” appeared in *La Presse*, le 16 janvier, 1855.

¹⁴ By “modern experience”, I mean the jarring or disorientation in the very sense of what an experience was or how it could be understood. In this chapter, I will use the word “modern” broadly, to refer to the series of changes in Gautier’s era associated with urbanization, scientific and technological development, and particularly, a changing relationship to time. We will see how Gautier poses dance against the modern, even as dance allows him to develop a poetics of the fantastic and oxymoronic which will better address experience and perception in modern times.

l'idéal rendu palpable".¹⁵ Dance seems to take invisible, ineffable patterns of bodily impulses and rhythms and make them visible. The idea of translating the invisible resonated with the discourses of many of his contemporaries investigating electricity, magnetism, physiology and other natural phenomena to which Gautier makes reference in his fictions on dance. Indeed, this chapter will discuss the ways in which Gautier's reflections on the physical experience of dance comment on, investigate and critique changing conceptualizations of space, time and the body.

The way in which dance generated an excess of inexhaustible, irreducible meaning was also relevant to this analysis. In his review of a performance by Spanish dancers at the Paris Opera, which he deemed one of the "plus poétiques spectacles du monde", Gautier specified the role of the dancer as "développer le sentiment du beau qui s'éteint de jour en jour".¹⁶ After the commencement of the industrial revolution and the development of the first French railways in the first half of the nineteenth century, modern time came to be associated with order, regulation and objective linearity, as the train schedule or factory work day rather than the cyclical time of nature and the body.¹⁷ Gautier critiqued utilitarianism, capitalist modernity and the ethos of progress, famously asserting in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* that "Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid car c'est l'expression de quelque besoin, et ceux de l'homme sont ignobles et dégoûtants, comme sa pauvre et infirme nature" (22). Dance is not linear and teleological but holistic and organic, poetically wasteful in its excesses of potential meanings and resonances rather than direct and pragmatic. Thus, it stands as the antithesis to the utilitarianism that Gautier critiques. It also served as a source of inspiration for his rethinking of a language that would be capable of relating to models of a world increasingly seen as dissociative rather than unified, provisional rather than stable.

In Gautier's era and earlier, dance and poetic paradigms had undergone roughly corresponding evolutions and crises with respect to these questions of linguistic representation and signification. Ballet was in the process of codification roughly at the same time as the French language itself underwent standardization under the influence of Vaugelas and later successors who envisioned a language that would be as pure and rational as possible, and therefore beautiful. The codification of classical ballet in the 18th century and the rise of the "ballet d'action" were closely related to Enlightenment thinking which viewed the French language as a improved, clarified version of natural communication. Similarly, the *Encyclopédie* proposed that dance was developed from an original language of movement shared by all beings; it was therefore not arbitrary but retained a universal intelligibility, only rendered more measured, beautiful and expressive by the refining interventions of technique.¹⁸ For such dance audiences, the telegraphic nature of the "ballet d'action" that Gautier critiqued, as well as its rejection of symbolism and abstraction, were prompted by the desire for maximal correspondence between dance steps and a clearly defined meaning, rooted in the original language of gesture.¹⁹ Dance

¹⁵ From "Opéra: *La Filleule des fées*" in *Écrits sur la danse* (236).

¹⁶ Théophile Gautier, "Les Danseurs espagnols" in *Écrits sur la danse* (31).

¹⁷ Bettina Knapp reads Arria Marcella as an archetypal conflict between Christian eschatological time (associated with the male, linearity, consciousness) and Platonic cyclical time (associated with the female, cyclical, unconscious). According to Knapp, "Theophile Gautier likewise longed for a return to the Greek way and to a society whose goal was aesthetic and not utilitarian; to a religion based on beauty and not repression" (61)

¹⁸ See Louis de Cauhusac's "Ballet", "Danse" and "Geste" in the *Encyclopédie*.

¹⁹ Denis Diderot expressed his wish that dance would be a beautiful form of mimesis: "La danse attend encore un homme de génie; elle est mauvaise par-tout, parce qu'on soupçonne à peine que c'est un genre d'imitation. La danse est à la pantomime comme la poésie est à la prose" (221).

was closely associated with opera in this period, in which it had also largely a mimetic and representational function.

Gautier's critique of classical ballet, his insistence that ballet could "peindre les passions humaines" more effectively with recourse to the indirect, suggestive and symbolic alludes to the changes that Romantic ballet occasioned which have rendered it a particularly productive locus for questions about representation and figuration. Arising in the 1830s and remaining popular throughout the century, the Romantics changed ballet radically by shifting narrative focus onto the specifically *female* dancer. The ballerina was transformed into supernatural creatures such as the ethereally white sylphs of *La Sylphide*, the pale and ghostlike Wilis of *Giselle*, the airy, long-necked swans of *Swan Lake*. Gautier also stresses the physicality and artistic expression of the female dancer — her mobility, rhythm and "volupté" — as key to the expression of the art form.

Romantic ballet also incorporated a series of changes that raised questions about language's relation to the body. The idea of dance steps corresponding to a meaning which was both inherent and readable fell away with the advent of Romantic ballets written by Gautier and others, which privileged symbol and metaphor. Spoken words, drama, opera, were largely banished, and the ballet communicated a scene entirely through gesture, figure and pantomime not intended to be transparent, but rather suggestive. For Gautier, and later Mallarmé, the turn away from plot, causality and narrative represented both freedom and endless possibility: the suggestion and ambiguity of gesture necessitated the active participation of the spectator in the creation of meaning, as a collaboration between scenarist, dancer and audience. The interpretative difficulty of Romantic ballet also ultimately occasioned a closer relationship between dance and writing, since critics such as Gautier had a new role in drawing meaning from balletic ambiguity and in interrogating the aesthetic stakes of these shifts.

For Gautier, dance is paradoxically both an ideal metaphor for and foil to language. In his articles on ballet, Gautier praised dance as exceeding the aesthetic and semiotic qualities of spoken and written language. He frequently compared it to a kind of extreme poetry: more poetic than poetry itself, "un poème charmant écrit avec des ondulations de hanches, des airs penchés; un pied avancé et retiré [...] qui en dit plus à lui tout seul que bien des volumes de poésies érotiques"²⁰. Like poetry, dance operates on multiple levels of signification. On the one hand, Gautier points to its materiality and visibility, emphasizing its grounding in the body.²¹ These qualities render it universally meaningful, concrete and immediate. On the other, dance's expressiveness is held in tension with its semiotic opacity. Gautier's account of viewing a ballet resembles very much the act of reading a poem or interpreting a piece of music: "Dans ce fourmillement du kaléidoscope, chacun voit ce qu'il veut; c'est comme une espèce de symphonie de formes, de couleurs et de mouvement dont le sens général est indiqué, mais dont on peut interpréter les détails à sa guise, suivant sa pensée, son amour ou son caprice"²². Gautier underlines ballet's capacity, like poetry, to effectively exploit both its referential and non-referential levels of signification. Dance conveys an extraordinarily rich and constantly shifting meaning created by the interaction of elements chosen for their musical, spatial and visual effects. Similarly, poetry places emphasis on the sensory qualities of the words themselves, as well as the images and impressions generated by the lexical combinations, interactions and

²⁰ According to Gautier, "la langue des pieds est universelle, et se fait comprendre partout". From "Les Danseurs espagnols" in *Écrits sur la Danse* (31).

²¹ From "Opéra : *La Sylphide*: *La Sylphide, reprise avec Grahn, le 6 novembre 1839*" in *Écrits sur la danse*, (102).

²² From "Opéra : Retour de Fanny Cerrito: *La Fille de marbre, reprise le 4 octobre 1848*" in *Écrits sur la danse* (222).

constellations. For Gautier and other poets, examining and drawing inspiration from dance and fantasy's vexed relationship to figure and embodiment produced innovative approaches to rhetorical figure and to the theorization of language more broadly.

These imaginative, theoretical writings have often been considered evidence for Gautier's disinterest in the real, material existence of his era. Romantic ballet has been associated with escape and imagination, with silvery wings and shadows, unearthly lightness, with removal to a misty past or fantasy space outside of and inaccessible to reality. The poetry and fictional writings of Gautier, who is perhaps most popularly remembered for his doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, have been likewise considered by many critics to be works of form and surface, the ornamental and abstract, to the exclusion of any consequential concern outside the domain of fiction. He was widely critiqued in his own time for his lack of engagement "en matière de politique de droit, de liberté de progrès, de justice", particularly amid the political and societal upheaval surrounding the establishment of the Second Empire.²³ He was accused likewise of turning away from reflections on human thought and experience. Contemporaries such as Philippe Dauriac deemed Gautier's "homme" to be "absent de ce décor splendide", "annihilé, sacrifiée à une extériorité systématique."²⁴ Later writers such as Emile Zola cemented this critique, dismissing Gautier as psychologically superficial: "Il ne faut pas lui demander de pénétrer au fond des cœurs et des intelligences. Il décrit merveilleusement, il n'analyse pas".²⁵ Gautier was undeniably interested in theorizing the aesthetic and semiotic effects of language, in fictional spaces and in imagination. However, my analysis will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which his interest in Romantic ballet and its influence on his poetics do not constitute a turn away from or blindness toward the body, as many literary critics have suggested, but rather a turn *to* the functioning of bodily experience and perception.

Gautier's engagement with the Romantic ballet constitutes a richly experimental, complex and occasionally ambivalent response to the encounter between language and the body, the text and the body, and ultimately between the world and the body in the modern era. In this way the stakes and strategies of Gautier's literary and dance projects also resonate with those of his contemporaries involved in scientific and technological investigation, as agents of disruption, interrogation and wonder. Such a view of Gautier challenges the way in which he has been so often estimated as a surface writer, responsible for "aucune idée nouvelle apportée, aucune vérité humaine de quelque profondeur", to quote Zola²⁶ Attention to dance in his work demonstrates the way in which Gautier is not merely concerned with surfaces, ornament and abstractions — but indeed in understanding bodily experience and perception, in assessing and relating to the exterior world of nineteenth century French modernity.

Sites of Hesitation: Ballet and the Fantastic

Gautier's vision of dance as "le rêve visible, l'idéal rendu palpable"²⁷ takes form in his ballet librettos such as *La Péri*, *Gemma* and *Giselle*. *Giselle* remains one of the most popular and influential Romantic Ballets ever written, centering on a peasant girl who dances to death only to be resurrected as one of the vengeful Wili, ghostly maidens sworn to take revenge on their

²³ This is discussed in Frédéric Morin's "Gautier jugé par la presse antibonapartiste sous le Second Empire" (41).

²⁴ These remarks are found in Gautier's *Correspondance générale* (315).

²⁵ Cited in Rasongles (79).

²⁶ Cited in Michael Clifford Spencer, *The Art Criticism of Théophile Gautier* (1).

²⁷ From "Opéra: *La Filleule des fées*" in *Écrits sur la danse* (236).

faithless lovers. Gautier's personal immersion in the world of dance and dancers as prolific critic, scenarist and suitor, echoes throughout his literary works.

Spirite (1865), one of Gautier's final works, unites many of the threads repeatedly elaborated and reworked throughout his œuvre: the fantastic interrogation and deconstruction of the apparent real; a corresponding hallucinatory affirmation of art and illusion as a truer view of reality; the allegorization of the gaze and desire through interactions with the supernatural; a vision of the world as imbued with a infinite depth and dimensionality waiting to be perceived by the poetic gaze. *Spirite* was inspired by the ballerina Carlotta Grisi, to whom Gautier wrote, "L'idée que vos yeux adorés se fixeront quelque temps sur ces lignes, où palpite sous le voile d'une fiction le vrai, le seul amour de mon cœur, sera la plus douce récompense de mon travail."²⁸ After a lifetime of warmly praising the dancer for her performances in ballets year after year, and an early unsuccessful attempt to woo her, the two reconnected years later and maintained a correspondence. He frequently spoke to her of her influence over his thoughts, "Vous sentez que je vous aime, que je n'ai pas d'autre pensée que la vôtre, que vous êtes ma vie, mon âme, mon éternel désir, mon adoration que rien ne lasse et ne rebute."²⁹ In *L'œuvre fantastique*, Michel Crouzet views *Spirite* as an autobiographical synthesis of Gautier's own experiences with his theories on the spiritual and fantastic aspects of reality: "Moment rétrospectif, le passé revient à [Théophile Gautier]: sans ce retour de Carlotta dans sa vie et la renaissance de sa passion pour elle, il n'aurait pas écrit *Spirite*" (319). Carlotta Grisi as the inspiration for the airy phantom loved by the protagonist Guy de Malivert takes form as an impalpable soul or apparition.

Gautier's fantastic tales and his dance writings have generally been considered separately. *Spirite* is not generally spoken of as a dance work. Yet, in viewing Gautier's theater and ballet reviews that lauded Grisi's qualities as a dancer, one is struck by the many resonances with the female characters he wrote. In one article, he compared Grisi to the ghostly figure of Giselle that she was most famous for portraying: "Comme elle était légère, aérienne, impalpable, vaporeuse ! et quelle perfection de danse ! Elle est restée l'idéal du rôle."³⁰ Gautier describes *Spirite* in near identical terms. Guy, her suitor, first becomes aware of her presence by the soft sound of a sigh "si léger, si aérien" that is almost imperceptible.³¹ In *Spirite*, *Spirite* is compared to a series of figures incarnated by Romantic ballerinas as "cet ange, cette sylphide, cette âme, cette esprit" that "semblait toujours voltiger invisible autour de lui" (72). She evokes the Romantic ballerina with her supple swan neck, pristine flesh, the pure and refined statuesque lines of her body; her associations with the topoi of Romantic ballet such as vapor, starlight evening, silvery gauze, angelic light; and indeed, the way in which she exceeds the capacity of "tous les mots humains" to signify (65). Echoes of Giselle also abound in the novel. Mist and snow swirling down from the sky, Guy visits *Spirite*'s white marble tomb to confess "les douleurs que je lui ai infligées bien innocemment pendant qu'elle habitait encore ce monde", as Albrecht did to Giselle, only to see her "forme svelte et blanche [...] enveloppé des plis flottants d'un suaire de gaze" rise from the tomb like the dancer of the *ballet blanc* (175-176).

Spirite is also one of many of Gautier's fantastic tales which absorb the themes, imagery and structures of Romantic ballet. This is unsurprising, as the Romantic ballerina emblemizes a number of contradictions and dichotomies as the figure of Gautier's poetic ideal. For Gautier, the

²⁸ In Gautier's *Correspondance générale*, vol. 9 (134).

²⁹ In Gautier's *Correspondance générale*, vol. 10 (20).

³⁰ From "Opéra: Reprise de Giselle, avec Adèle Grantzow" in *Écrits sur la danse* (329).

³¹ Théophile Gautier, *Spirite* (Paris: Charpentier, 1866).

inexhaustible charm of the ballet lies not only in the fact that it provided the greatest potential for expression, but in the paradoxical nature of this expression.³² He wrote of the surprising, indirect way in which dance signified, noting that nothing was less natural than to see “une femme affligée exprimer son désespoir en faisant des cabrioles ! Cependant [...] il n'est pas possible [...] de rendre plus exactement la joie ou la douleur.”³³ It is the counterintuitive, unexpected, indirect nature of dance that renders it poetically effective as a means of expression.

In Gautier's relationship to the dancer we observe a number of paradoxes. The Romantic ballerina is a site of hesitation between reality and illusion, surface and depth; the transient and atemporal, modern and eternal; between art and life. The dancer is idealized aesthetic form: idealized into a work of art by costume, narrative and ballet technique. She is highly trained and permanently shaped by new developments in techniques such as pointe and turnout into the idealized slender, bare lines of eternal form — a form which begins to resemble something that is nothing like a body. And yet, the contingent and material presence of her body, her role as an ephemeral object of desire, her femininity and real corporeality, are equally at the forefront. Her body is transformed by gas lights, makeup, tights and veils which simultaneously hide and reveal. The ballerina embodies agency, discipline and training; she is fully in control of the spectacle. Yet, she is repeatedly associated with the animal, the unconscious and the irrational when she is transformed into a vengeful Wili or magical swan. The Romantic ballet stages the way in which the body has been identified with the involuntary and irrational aspects of attraction and desire, the unknown and unfathomable influences of nature, all that which is inarticulable and uncontainable in experience and subjectivity.

This contradictory and problematic nature makes the Romantic ballerina an ideal figure for Gautier, whose poetry is particularly reliant on rhetorical figure, particularly the suspension of meaning produced by oxymoron, as I will discuss below. For Gautier, ballerinas such as Marie Taglioni were abstracted into “une figure idéale” or “personnification poétique.”³⁴ Véronique Magri-Mourgues proposes that the surfeit of metaphorical language found in Gautier's travel writings has the effect of fictionalizing the world, that these figures “montre[nt] comment la description glisse vers la fiction ; elle permet de franchir une nouvelle étape en créant une nouvelle réalité. Les métaphores vives permettent ‘une nouvelle compréhension des choses, et par conséquent, de nouvelles réalités.’”³⁵ The hesitation when confronted with multiple readings suspends the banal meanings of words and interrupts ordinary ways of seeing.

The paradoxical nature of the dancer also makes her an ideal figure for Gautier's fantastic, defined by Tzvetan Todorov as “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (25). I will discuss in this chapter how Gautier uses moments of dance in his fantastic works in order to stage and explicate the strategies of suggestion and figurative language central to his literary interrogation of perception and experience.

³² Gautier repeatedly turned to similar formulations of the contradictory nature of the Romantic ballet in his dance reviews. He wrote in 1864, “On regarde ordinairement le ballet comme une chose légère, de peu d'importance, et l'on imagine que le premier canevas venu y suffit. C'est une erreur, et nul ouvrage dramatique ne présente autant de difficultés que le ballet. La convention y est plus forte que dans l'opéra et la tragédie, car il est plus aisé d'admettre la passion s'exprimant par des chants ou des vers que par des cabrioles et des ronds de jambe. [...] Il faut que chacune de ses situations s'arrange comme un tableau, intelligible sans légende. From “Opéra : *Néméa*” in *Écrits sur la danse* (311).

³³ In *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans* (17).

³⁴ From “Opéra: Retour de Marie Taglioni dans *La Sylphide*” in *Écrits sur la danse* (222).

³⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, cited in Magri-Mourgues (25).

Ora Avni argues that fantastic tales’ “emphasis on narratology, theories of signs and meaning, the rhetorical nature of the literary text and its readiness to produce multiple and incompatible meanings, and especially the reader’s contribution to the formation of these meanings” make the fantastic an enduringly important genre to modern literary criticism (675). Similarly, Gautier located the value of dance precisely in its capacity to exploit and mobilize hermeneutic difficulty. In *Aisthesis*, Jacques Rancière ties pantomime in theater and dance to a notion of poetry starting with Gautier which took the conventionally defined default of pantomime — its inability to represent in a transparent way — as its most appealing feature. For Gautier, and later Mallarmé, in such performances there is a “break [...] with the causal logic of plots and the semiotics of the expression of passions” which contained a great expressive potential; the suggestive, ambiguous nature of dance allowed the treatment of otherwise censored topics and required the spectator to participate in creating meaning (175). For Gautier, viewers with natures that were “très raffinés [...] aiment ces canevas silencieux qu’elles peuvent remplir à leur guise; et guident leur rêverie plutôt qu’ils ne la commandent.”³⁶ Romantic ballet’s active cultivation and stylization of ambiguity and paradox is, I will argue, instrumental in Gautier’s conception of the fantastic.

The affirmation of the importance of movement to inventing new approaches to poetic meaning surfaces in Gautier’s and others’ writings on dance. Gautier was inspired by the excess generated by a single gesture in dance, expressing more than “bien des volumes de poésies érotiques” for those who are able to read it. Stéphane Mallarmé would later write in *Divagations* that dance embodies “avec une écriture corporelle ce qu’il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la rédaction : poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe” (173). Gautier insisted that art, with its excesses of meanings and multiplicity of possible readings, is the only possible way of interrogating reality and attaining, however briefly, a fuller or more truthful understanding. This notion is staged in short stories such as *La Cafetière*, in which the narrator achieves knowledge through a celestial dance in which his “âme, dégagée de sa prison de boue, nageait dans le vague et l’infini”; he comes to the realization that, “Ce que j’avais pris pour de vaines peintures était la réalité” (238). This is to say, that one possible view of art is as a formulation of truth that initially may appear to be illusory, fictional or false but is paradoxically revealed to be more real or true than reality itself.

Gautier’s writing is particularly reliant on oxymoron, both at the level of figure and in the overarching structure of his works. In creating formulations that are contradictory on one level, Gautier’s oxymorons serve as productive *disruptors*. Gautier’s preference for oxymoron is rooted in the fantastic mode, which likewise questions reality and representation, in which everything is always secretly other. The supernatural, which consists of phenomena that do not appear to follow rational, previously understood rules of logic, functions similarly to an oxymoron, which combines two contradictory elements to produce an image which is logically impossible. For Gautier, oxymorons dissolve the unified, rational vision of the world and shift focus to the hermeneutic processes of constant questioning and reinterpretation.

Gautier’s works may be considered fantastically disruptive not only because they introduce movement, tension and constant shift into that which was formerly stable but also because they suspend the normal rules by which we understand the universe to function. Therefore, it is not merely the addition of magical elements which behave logically, but rather a

³⁶ From “Opéra: Griseldis: Griseldis, ou les Cinq Sens” in *Écrits sur la danse* (210).

radical questioning.³⁷ Michel Crouzet writes of the fantastic as “une agression permanente contre l’ordre du monde, ou la stabilité, la solidité, la cohérence des êtres et des choses; contre leur définition; leur séparation, leur division.”³⁸ This principle operates in both the overarching structure of Gautier’s works, as well as on a stylistic level. Works with supernatural, magical or horror elements are not considered fantastic if they ultimately reestablish the convention and order that they have transgressed. Gautier’s stories always end, if not with the attainment of transcendence, with an acknowledgment that self- and world-understanding have irrevocably shifted, as in *Spirite* or *La Péri* when the protagonists are struck with the knowledge that “il n’y avait plus pour moi de bonheur sur la terre!”³⁹

Oxymorons firstly provide ways of working through dichotomies. Olivier Bara proposes that Gautier’s ballets are structured as conflicts between various sets of opposing dualities, “de la matière et du mouvement, du matériau et du rêve, du corps et de l’esprit, du son et du rythme, du signifiant et du signifié” (61). According to Bara, “Une tension traverse ces arguments de ballets soumis à un régime binaire, ou à ce que nous nommerons plutôt *l’exaspération de la dualité*. Notons que ce régime s’inscrit plus souvent dans la structure même, en deux actes, des ballets: tel est le cas de *Giselle*, *La Péri*, *Gemma*, *Yanko*, *Sacountalâ*.” These dichotomies, however, are eventually transcended; this is to say, the structures of the ballets function similarly to oxymorons.

This principle is illustrated in *La Péri*, whose internal architecture constitutes such an oxymoronic, destabilizing regime. The ballet tells the story of King Achmet, who is “un peu poète: les voluptés terrestres ne lui suffisent plus; il rêve des amours célestes, des unions avec les esprits élémentaires; la réalité n’a plus d’attraits pour lui” (281-282). He falls in love with a heavenly winged spirit of marvelous beauty, from an otherworldly realm entirely outside of and foreign to normal, terrestrial human experience. Here, the problem of how to achieve an impossible union between opposing and irreconcilable elements is staged through dance, and through the figure of the primary figure of the piece, La Péri.

The ballet undermines dichotomies on every level. La Péri herself is a liminal, ambiguous figure, not *opposed* to Achmet but rather emblematic of the ability to “franchi[r] la limite qui sépare le monde idéal du monde réel” (284). Her milieu reflects a series of crystallized, paradoxical images which combine the terrestrial and the heavenly, the familiar with the precious and rare, the ephemeral and the eternal in ways not observed in nature: “des lacs de cristal, des palmiers d’émeraude, des arbres aux fleurs de pierreries, des montagnes de lapis-lazuli et de nacre de perle” (283). She doubles herself, transforming into the slave Léïla. These doubles play between similarity and difference: Léïla’s young, ordinarily human form is the antithesis of the gauzy, immortal Péri, and yet, “Plus Achmet regarde Léïla, plus il lui trouve de ressemblance” (290). It is as though Léïla and the Péri are two different perspectives of the same object — as if the eminently bodily Léïla who dances the *Pas de l’abeille* in all of its associations with nature,

³⁷ The fantastic genre is defined by Roger Caillois against the féerique or marvelous, which incorporates magical or otherworldly elements but in a logical and self-consistent manner: “Le féerique est un univers merveilleux qui s’oppose au monde réel sans détruire sa cohérence. Par contre, le fantastique marque un scandale, une rupture, une irruption insolite, presque insupportable dans le monde réel” (8-9). In his reading of *Spirite*, Ross Chambers echoes this distinction between the “féerique” and fantastic: “dans le féerique le surnaturel est dans ‘l’ordre des choses’, dans le fantastique, lié négativement à une mentalité rationnelle, qui adhère à la croyance en un ordre nécessaire, déterminé, maîtrisé, il ne peut être qu’une rupture, une agression, une menace contre la stabilité des lois immuables” (42).

³⁸ From Crouzet’s “Introduction” to *Le fantastique de Théophile Gautier* (119).

³⁹ From “La Cafetière” in *Le Fantastique de Théophile Gautier* (240).

nudity and simplicity could be seen, with a shift of the light or angle, to be la Péri, supernatural creature of crowns and skies and aërial lightness.

Roucem, the head eunuch, warns Achmet that “ces sortes d’aventures finissent toujours mal” (285): and indeed on the level of ordinary understanding they do, as Achmet is thrown out a window to his death. But high and low are in constant tension and reversal: as Achmet dreams, hallucinating heavenly visions, the rising smoke of opium, floating spirits and mist, for La Péri, “le ciel est sur la terre” (286). La Péri tests Achmet presenting him with a binary choice: “Léïla” or “La Péri”, making the stakes explicit for him:

Viens avec moi, lui dit-elle, abandonne l’esclave ; les verrous et les grilles s’ouvriront d’eux-mêmes pour te laisser passer. Si tu me suis, la liberté, la vie, le soleil, les trésors à pleins coffres, tout ce qu’on peut rêver de plaisirs et de bonheur, de voluptés éternelles. Si tu restes, un supplice épouvantable, et pour qui ? pour une femme, pour une simple mortelle, dont la beauté ne doit durer qu’un jour, et qui ne sera bientôt qu’une pincée de poussière. (291-292)

Achmet chooses Léïla, and in doing so rejects the divine in favor of the terrestrial, freedom for imprisonment, light for darkness, eternity for dust — and counterintuitively, attains all that which he has given up. Choosing Léïla proves him worthy of La Péri’s love, and the two are reunited in the sky for eternity. Achmet’s inexplicable choice, which delivers him from destruction and mortal banality, allows him to achieve every one of his desires — Léïla and La Péri, who are one and the same — in a way that upends all normal rules of logic and causality. This oxymoronic ending, in a complex series of reversals, highlight the theme of redefining the way in which the rules operate or in which the question is framed in a manner which is itself the fantastic.

In Gautier’s ballets, then, the fantastic and the oxymoron function as sites of hesitation in the importance they place on disrupting conventional frames of reference, simultaneously manipulating and transcending contradiction. Let us now discuss how this mode of operation becomes instrumental to Gautier’s meditations on time, space and perception.

The Supernaturalized body: Disrupting space and time

The ballerina provides a metaphor for the way in which Gautier explores reality through art. The ballerina performs the ballet, but also is the ballet — the body that dances, and that is permanently shaped by the training of ballet into an aesthetic form. Ballet is the transformation of a woman not merely by means of illusion or narrative, but in a purely literal fashion. Marcel Schneider’s formulation of the fantastic as “une continue, une irrépressible protestation contre ce qui est, contre le monde créé et la vie qu’on y mène” (409) is precisely the task of the ballerina: to evoke the idealized curves of a statue, to be as light as a spirit while still remaining flesh, to be a human body that surpasses the limits of the human body. In posing these questions, Gautier’s writings on the ballerina ultimately meditate on space and time and possibilities for commenting on and reimagining these concepts.

Gautier’s interest in the supernaturalized body that he stages both in his fantastic tales and in the ballet scenarios he writes does not constitute an escape from, but rather an engagement with, the experience of the modern body. Michel Crouzet observes that “En fait, il y a chez Gautier un respect fondamental de la forme humaine: il n’y a pas chez lui de créatures purement fantastique et surnaturelle, pas de démons, de monstres, d’esprits, d’automates.”⁴⁰ Gautier’s

⁴⁰ From “Les violettes de la mort” in *Le fantastique de Théophile Gautier* (43).

fantastic stories are always shot through with realism: hallucinatory, subjective visions acquire force only when they are in tension with and revelatory of this realism. Octavian tells Arria, “Je ne sais si tu es un rêve ou une réalité, un fantôme ou une femme” (449). Such is also true of the Romantic ballerina, as the otherworldly or supernatural elements of her body can be read as exteriorizations of metaphorical traits projected always onto the human body: the form of a swan, or a Willi, or a ghost, stages and exaggerates non-fantasy traits in order to bring them forth and comment upon them. In this section, I will examine how Gautier’s scenes of dance generate reflections on space and on time.

In many of his tales, Gautier uses spatial metaphors of linearity and circularity to disrupt traditional notions of time. *La Cafetière* was Gautier’s first fantastic tale, published in 1831. Though one of his shortest, it contains many of the elements that characterize his whole fantastic œuvre: a narrator with a singular kind of poetic sensitivity to the marvelous, a resurrection or reanimation of the dead and past, the use of dance to allegorize and gloss aesthetic principles, self-reflexive commentary on the workings of fantastic literature, and the momentary suspension of ordinary experience through the artistic interventions of a dancer. In *La Cafetière*, this fleeting moment of transcendence is figured as a dance. In the tale, a young artist called Théodore goes to bed — and dreams, hallucinates or witnesses the portraits and objects in the room come to life around him and perform a frantic minuet. There is one figure who has not taken part in the minuet: a beautiful woman, Angéla. She instead dances an ecstatic waltz with Théodore until his strength is spent and he too passes out. Théodore wakes clutching a shard of her profile, only to find out that Angéla died two years ago after having caught cold from dancing too long at a ball.

Gautier uses dance in *La Cafetière* to interrogate two opposing temporal modes. According to Mark Knowles, the Romantics disdained the “conventional rules, well-ordered symmetry and emotional restraint that characterized the classicism of the previous era [. . .]. A revolt against the symmetrical formality of the minuet led to a passion for softer curvilinear lines” found in the waltz (26). The first mode proposed by Gautier centers on the strict, ordered, mechanical regime of modern temporality. The objects in the room are regulated by the arbitrary tyranny of the clock; their “yeux fixés sur la pendule”, they stare at the “aiguille, qui marchait vers minuit à pas imperceptibles” (236). Automaton, they are compelled to begin their minuet at exactly midnight, as if clockwork themselves. The minuet that takes place is only the parody of a dance: to music so quick that it “jaillissait des étincelles électriques”, the objects struggle to force themselves into the rhythm.⁴¹ Gautier has been criticized for being inattentive, vague or even ignorant with respect to the specific technical and choreographic aspects of dance. For Christiano Merlo, Gautier’s “indéniable manque de savoir technique” renders him overrated as a dance critic per se (247). However, the evocation of a specific technical lexicon here underlines the meaninglessly mechanical nature of the objects’ parodic dance: the steps Gautier invokes are mostly batterie, i.e. involve the beating of legs in the air. Such steps were considered more technical than artistic by critics such as Gautier, displaying virtuosity rather than conveying emotion or poetic meaning.

It is also salient that the objects are male “danseurs”; Gautier considered the true dancer to be the female “danseuse”. The “danseur” was seldom evoked, and when evoked, nearly always mocked and derided. At times openly wondering why male dancers were allowed in the

⁴¹ “C’était pitié de voir tous les efforts de ces danseurs pour rattraper la cadence. Ils sautaient, cabriolaient, faisaient des ronds de jambe, des jetés battus et des entrechats de trois pieds de haut, tant que la sueur, leur coulant du front sur les yeux, leur emportait les mouches et le fard” (255).

Opéra at all, Gautier painted them as “un espèce de monstre,”⁴² with their “rire stéréotypé, inamovible comme un juge; des yeux sans regard, qui rappellent les yeux d’émail des poupées à ressort [. . .] et puis de grands mouvements anguleux, les coudes et les pieds en équerre [. . .] des ronds de jambe, des pirouettes et autres gestes de pantins mécaniques. Rien n’est plus horrible.”⁴³ Their identification with the linear, objective, mechanical modern renders them ugly, anathema to ballet. Their “yeux sans regard” mirrored by unthinking, uncoordinated movements are opposed to feminine agency and the poetic eye, which imagines, reenchants, unifies and aestheticizes.

Against this mode, Gautier juxtaposes another that is circular and subjective, obeying invisible laws of nature rather than those of human direction in modern times. This mode is emblemized by the narrator’s waltz with Angéla. While the minuet is forced and automatic, Angéla freely chooses to waltz with the narrator, knowing that it will lead to her second and final death. Gautier’s female characters, associated with artistic imagination and access to the sublime, constantly make the choice to devote body and spirit to the union that the dance represents. While the minuet forces all into its regimented and unnatural count, the waltz follows the smooth rhythms of the body, suspending chronological linear time: “J’entendais battre mon cœur comme une montre accrochée à mes oreilles. Pourtant cet état n’avait rien de pénible. [. . .] J’étais inondé d’une joie ineffable et j’aurais toujours voulu demeurer ainsi” (240). With the waltz, then, Gautier imagines an alternative to the disenchanting modern chronological regime which offers the possibility of brief transcendence through art.

If the dances in *La Cafetière* can be read as commentary on the clash between regimented time and the body, they also self-reflexively interrogate the workings of fantastic literature. For Gautier, dance is inherently self-reflexive, focusing inward on itself to open a space of reflection: “Le vrai, l’unique, l’éternel sujet d’un ballet, c’est la danse.”⁴⁴ Gautier proposed that ballet’s aim was not to reproduce the appearance of the real (“Une pièce traduite en signes mimiques . . . n’est pas un ballet”)⁴⁵ but to transform, metamorphose and extend the real. Specifically, Gautier uses scenes of dance in his fantastic tales to reimagine realistic, learned and objective modes of considering time. In *La Cafetière*, Théodore formulates the fantastic itself in his statement, “Je n’avais plus aucune idée de l’heure ni du lieu; le monde réel n’existait plus pour moi, et tous les liens qui m’y attachent étaient rompus” (238).

Gautier’s poetry provides other examples that depict fantastic scenes of dance to comment on the modern body’s relationship to time. *Les Néréides* and *Inès de las Sierras*, two poems centered on dancing bodies, can be read as commentaries on the temporally and corporeally destabilizing effects of modernity. Each poem is centered around an enchanting vision of a dancer in movement that increasingly intensifies as the poem progresses.⁴⁶ In *Inès de*

⁴² From “Théâtre de la Renaissance: Zingaro”, in *Écrits sur la danse* (111).

⁴³ From “Les Danseurs espagnols” in *Écrits sur la danse* (31-32).

⁴⁴ From “Opéra: La Vivandière” in *Écrits sur la danse* (225).

⁴⁵ From “Opéra: Betty” in *Écrits sur la danse* (196).

⁴⁶ Interestingly, Gautier draws attention to his own literary enterprise by framing these alluring, intensely diegetic visions with ironic, self-reflexive commentary at the opening and closing of each poem. This bracketing commentary, which distances the reader and undercuts the narrative’s ability to seamlessly transition into the diegesis, deeply contrasts with and would seem to be at cross-purposes with the captivating, gripping nature of the poems’ central visions. From the outset, Gautier ironically evokes the poems’ literary foregrounding, listing authors and painters and the clichés associated with them, “Un vrai château d’Anne Radcliffe”, “Des chauves-souris de Goya”. He refers to artistic technique in a humorously unpoetic way, describing the subject of *Les Néréides* as “une aquarelle / Bizarre, et d’un peintre avec qui / Mètre et rime sont en querelle, / Théophile Kniatowski”. This framing

las Sierras, the thematic acceleration from the stillness of the dancer “arrêt[ée] sur la porte” to a syncopated cachucha,⁴⁷ eventually heightened to an otherworldly “tourbillon”, is underlined rhythmically and aurally by a series of poetic effects. The literal vision depicted is reproduced in the sounds of the words: the halting hesitation of “Entre-choquent les castagnettes, / Comme des dents claquant de froid” develops, as the poem’s velocity intensifies, into the darting sibilance of “Cette apparition fantasque, [...] S’élançant de son lit glacé”. Gautier links Inès, a figure of “l’Espagne du temps passé”, and the mythological sea nymphs to a kind of circular, cyclical temporality. Both poems explicitly draw attention to the motions of dance, which revolve or curve around themselves: the tumbling, rolling motion of the mermaids in the waves, the repeated circling movements of Inès’s cachucha. On a textual level as well, “Inès de las Sierras” reworks the linear narrative of Charles Nodier’s novella *Inès de las Sierras* into the poetic tableau of a dancer circling rhythmically, in both a literal and figurative way.

The opposition between linear and circular temporalities can be found throughout Gautier’s fantastic works more generally. Spirite and her rival, the bland, repressed, undancerly d’Ymbertcourt incarnate these competing conceptions of space and time. Madame d’Ymbertcourt’s association with mass copies of a statue, with a mannequin used to create fashionable dress patterns, and with nonspecific, tasteless furnishings that could have been those “d’un banquier, d’un avocat, ou d’un Américain de passage” place her firmly in the realm of the functional, the modern industrial world of factories and railroads, reflecting a pragmatically linear chronology and teleology (22). Spirite emblemizes the opposing paradigm; it is no accident that it is an intrusion of d’Ymbertcourt’s schema, a “vulgaire contre-temps de chemin de fer” (141), that initially overthrows Spirite’s plans and leads to her physical death. Spirite’s return — as does Arria Marcella’s, Inès de las Sierra’s, Giselle’s — takes place in a kind of palimpsestic layering of past over present, in which movement does not take place linearly but moves back and forth as a pendulum or cycle, or dance that moves around itself.

In *Inès de las Sierras*, Gautier frames the story of the murdered dancer who is resuscitated each year to seek revenge on her killers in terms of an eternal, cyclical clash between the cold steel of the modern and the aestheticized fantastic body of the dancer. “La cicatrice qu’elle porte, / C’est le coup de grâce donné / A la génération morte / Par chaque siècle nouveau-né.” The dénouement of *Les Néréides* ends with a strikingly similar clash, as a steamboat which “Souffletterait leurs belles joues / Et meurtrirait leurs membres nus. / Adieu, fraîche mythologie !” arrives to menace the nymphs. Technology fragments the body — which is synechdochized as a scar or severed limb — without offering the possibility of resuscitation or reassemblage. Part of the stakes of Gautier’s poetic project, then, center on the capacity of art to disrupt, critique and imagine ways of suspending enforced linear time.

These principles of movement, circularity, holism and resistance to attempts to order and simplify are demonstrated by Gautier’s opposition between the corpse and dancing body. In the poem “Bûchers et Tombeaux”, Gautier explores this difference through the metaphor of a danse macabre, deemed a shift from an earlier era which “met en branle le genre humain”. The danse macabre is a *memento mori* consisting of an allegorical representation of Death leading beings from kings to children to laborers in a circular dance. The poem laments the loss of an earlier era in which “Le squelette était invisible. / Au temps heureux de l’Art païen. / L’homme, sous la

of what would otherwise seem to be unironically Romantic poems signal an intention to comment on literary strategies and conventions and more generally on the cultural role of art.

⁴⁷ The Cachucha is a Spanish dance, famously performed by Fanny Elssler, which was warmly praised by Gautier in his dance reviews.

forme sensible, / Content du beau, ne cherchait rien.” Gautier is fundamentally uninterested in the autopsy table corpse: for him, the only body worth considering is the artistic dancing form. “Voile-toi !” Gautier exhorts the modern “comédien que le ver mord”. The tights that smooth and perfect the dancer’s leg, the veil that creates mystery and desire, are infinitely preferable to the harsh light of a brute, stripped-down dissection. The modern cadaver is also for Gautier a form empty of depth, used once rather than part of a unifying, perpetual cycle, unconnected to anything, uninvested with potential, automatic. As opposed to the eternal circle of each form melting and reforming endlessly and inevitably that he posits in *Affinités secrètes*, the cadaver is evidence in *Le Pied de momie* that people in the modern era “ne savez plus vous conserver” (366). A view of science as purely rational or deterministic is fundamentally at odds with the oxymoronic strategies at work in Gautier’s poetics and ideas on art. He exhorts, “Reviens, reviens, bel art antique [...] Couvrir ce squelette gothique.” He ever highlights the movement in the stillness, the life in the stone, the fleeting in the eternal, the warm flesh in the cool marble. The “danse macabre” is the inversion of Gautier’s ideal Dance, which encapsulates these principles opposed to the “anatomical” method: it opposes feminine agency to male control, the inviolate unknowability of the body to its positivistic reducing to a list of components and mechanisms, is the movement of life rather than the stillness of death.

This principle is at work in many of his fantastic tales such as *Le roman de momie*, *Arria Marcella* and *Le pied de momie*, which feature the possibility of corporeal resurrection. These stories also engage with and critique a kind of anatomism which would approach the body in a manner which is positive and single-mindedly, rapaciously direct. Michel Foucault named the “âge de Bichat” around the turn of the 19th century, in which “l’expérience clinique s’arme pour explorer un nouvel espace : l’espace tangible du corps, qui est en même temps cette masse opaque où se cachent des secrets; d’invisibles lésions et le mystère même des origines” (174). For Gautier, the scientific probing of these secrets and mysteries, their cataloguing as known and manipulable individual items, constitutes an attack on the integrity of the body.

In an examination of Gautier’s *Le Roman de la momie*, Claire Lyu examines 19th century France’s fascination with anatomical dissection and proposes two competing modes of inquiry, one dissective, and one holistic. According to Lyu, “Medical dissection is possible only on a dead body. Here lies the paradox and disappointment of anatomical dissection: the most powerful and privileged means of accessing the body cannot give access to its ultimate secret – life” (314). Lyu argues that in contrast to the straight cuts of autopsy, “In Gautier’s literary unwrapping of a mummy, to know is to move along the surface in a horizontal path of circular tour, detour, and contour” (317). Gautier fundamentally opposes this kind of modern scientific objective knowledge which menaces the body to beauty and art. In *Le Roman de la momie*, the men who violate the sanctity of the female mummy’s tomb and ultimately her embalmed body — Lyu points out that “metaphors of sexual possession and rape abound in the text” — ultimately fail in their attempt to gain objective control over and knowledge of this body. They leave the tomb no less ignorant of her story than upon entry, and the body is not restored as in *Arria Marcella* or *Le Pied de momie* but remains simply a corpse.

I would insist, however, that Gautier’s argument for the body’s wholeness and integrity indeed demonstrates his interest in the *depths* of the body, in the invisible processes and dynamics that can only be observed indirectly, by reading the signs on the surface. Gautier’s critique of the utilitarian resonates with the Romantic turn away from the view of scientific, physical and mathematical knowledge as stable and calculable. John Tresch delineates the way in which Romanticism defined itself against the “classical machine”:

Exemplified by the clock, the lever, or the balance, the classical machine was identified with primary qualities of mass, position, and velocity. [...] It was against this classical machine — and its implication of a lifeless, unchanging agglomeration of points and forces — that romanticism exalted the spontaneity and holism of the organism. (12)

Dance seems to exemplify this “spontaneity and holism”, this indefinable and morphable body organicity which resists attempts to quantify or simplify it. Gautier’s thinking of dance is posed as a bodily countermodel to such an “anatomical” mode of inquiry. The aspects of dance particularly appreciated by Gautier – its lack of usefulness, its abnormality, its idealizing nature, its subjective resistance to hermeneutic penetration, its viscosity and state of being in constant flux and movement – are central to Gautier’s thinking of a literature which would produce an alternative model of knowledge.

Gautier also uses these aspects of dance to comment upon space. Dance exceeds all attempts by referential description to circumscribe and delineate its meaning, as it is constantly shifting and dependent on angle of view. In the same way that a line in three dimensions can resemble a dot in two dimensions, or a whole plane can appear to be a line, Gautier’s oxymorons may occasion a change in perspective which show us that the prosaic logic of the quotidian fails to capture the complexity and hidden potentiality or layered dimensionality of the world. In *Spirite*, Guy de Malivert employs a series of oxymorons to describe an opening up of reality: “Je m’élance vers ces mondes aux splendeurs éblouissantes, au-dessus de toute imagination et de toutes paroles [...]. Nous serons l’unité dans la dualité, le moi dans le non-moi, le mouvement dans le repos, le désir dans l’accomplissement, la fraîcheur dans la flamme” (216). Oxymoron as a conscious breaking of the rules of language is self-reflexive in the way that it draws attention to the limitations of referentiality and its ability to signify, creating a world in which no concept is static but rather fluid and open to change. Impossible images reach to surpass the limitations of the apparent real.

In contrast, the opposing notion of the “flatness” of superficial perceived reality is expressed spatially as “le cercle” that ordinary people “tracent autour d’eux et que les esprits ne peuvent franchir”, ignorant of the existence of a “monde invisible qui nous entoure” (57). As Madame d’Ymbercourt serves as a foil to Spirit with respect to temporality, she also incarnates this myopia with respect to space in the first part of the novel. Madame d’Ymbercourt is presented as “une fausse belle femme” who resembles her sitting room — a façade, form empty of agency and content (91).

Sa richesse banale était parfaitement convenable, mais elle manquait de cachet. [...]

L’âme et la personnalité lui faisaient défaut. Aussi Guy, artiste de nature, trouvait-il ce luxe affreusement bourgeois et déplaisait au possible. C’était pourtant bien le fond duquel devait se détacher Mme d’Ymbercourt, elle dont la beauté ne se composait que de perfections vulgaires. (2)

Like “la copie d’une statue classique faite par un sculpteur médiocre” (148), Madame d’Ymbercourt lacks the suggestion and contained movement held in the lines of classical statue, the excess of significations and suggestions present in the ghost of a smile, or the almost-twist of a sculpted arm on the verge of a gesture. To the contrary, she is exactly what she appears to be, flat and vacant. Contradiction and complexity are entirely missing; she follows a “banal” and “vulgaire” pattern without deviation. Baron de Féroë, who observes the protagonist with his mistress, metaphorizes the notion of form in terms of dance, comparing a love affair with the blank Madame d’Ymbercourt to “serrer au bal un mannequin entre ses bras, et c’est une valse macabre que celle-là pour un homme de coeur” (148).

If the Romantic ballet is in a sense an extreme coincidence of form and content — in which the mysterious and irrational forces of imagination and desire are exteriorized and literalized in the supernatural transformations of the ballerina's body — at other times Gautier writes “bad ballets”, “danse macabres” and “false dances” that seems to pose negative counterpoints, in which form and depth are entirely separated and the body is alienated and unmoored. The Romantic ballet can be wings, transcendence, suspension — parodic, ineffective forms of dance are associated rather with automaticity, pathological repetition, loss of self. In *Spirite*, Guy's relationship with Madame d'Ymbercourt is a “danse macabre” for the precise reason that she is “fausse belle femme” whose beautiful form has no expressiveness or agency behind it.

Gemma likewise stages such a “false dance” in which the bewitched countess “tourne autour de Santa-Croce avec tous les signes de la passion ; elle se penche amoureusement vers lui, l'enlace de ses bras” (337), and yet these signs, which do not match the truth of the situation, are misread by the characters in the ballet. *Gemma*, which was staged in Paris in 1854 and has been largely ignored by both literary and dance critics, tells the story of a young countess who is seduced against her own will by the “magnetic” or “mesmeric” eyes of the marquis de Santa-Croce. She falls in and out of the malevolent sorcerer's thrall, to the confusion and dismay of her painter suitor who does not realize that Gemma is dancing under the compulsion of the marquis. Gemma's fascination is deeply tied to this separation between form and depth: it is pure visuality, surface. She goes through the motions “d'une manière automatique” (341) as her body is alienated from her mind by means of deception, illusion, seduction. Everyone is convinced, including Massimo.

Gemma regains her agency and self-expression at the end, as the danse macabre ends. Santa-Croce's defeat at the end of the play is tellingly accompanied by a reconciliation of Gemma and Massimo, and a rather literal staging of the rematch of sign and signifier: the countess climbs into the frame of her own portrait and “après une suite de poses coquettement amoureuses, Gemma fait comprendre à Massimo qu'elle n'est pas un vain fantôme” (344), in other words, she convinces Massimo that the image of her that he has painted, both literally and figuratively, does in fact correspond to the reality, and the two share a Romantic pas de deux which vividly contrasts with the emptiness of her earlier, erratic movement.

Gemma also explores this theme of surface/depth with respect to writing. Santa-Croce's words come out of Gemma's mouth when she is under his thrall. And the most objective, documentarian proof, the evidence that convinces Massimo that Gemma does not love him, is the marriage contract she signs while under the control of Santa-Croce, who gloats to Massimo, “Si vous doutez encore, lisez ce contrat, voyez cette signature” (341). Faith in the power of the word as reason and sense, as pledge and identity (“to give your word”), as reflection of reality and truth, is entirely undermined. *Gemma* reflects upon itself philosophically, commenting not only on dance, but on its own writing; turned to itself, it destabilizes its own underpinnings as Gautier's fantastic tales are wont to do. It also suggests that the straight lines of prose, as in the document, catalogue, encyclopedia must be reconsidered. Things are never that which they appeared to be, once turned to a different angle.

The end of the vision and return to modern times in *Arria Marcella* is encapsulated in a bad ballet which Octavian attends shortly after the collapse of his Pompeiian vision. Here, ballet as the dreamy evocation of timeless ideal is inverted, as a mise-en-abyme of the restoration of modern banality in *Arria Marcella*'s final pages. The ugly ballet, “sur les traces d'Amalia Ferraris, la danseuse alors en vogue, un essaim de nymphes culottées, sous leurs jupes de gaze,

d'un affreux caleçon vert monstre qui les faisait ressembler à des grenouilles piquées de la tarentule" (452). As the vision of Pompeii dissolves, the revival of Arria Marcella's ideal corporal form is replaced by uncoordinated and misshapen figures; the eternal by the tastelessly trendy; hallucinatory imagination by brute bodily reality. If to admire a work of art is to "s'incarner" within it, the inability of Octavian's "yeux troublés" to comprehend the grotesque spectacle figures his essential alienation in modern times.

As Gautier illustrates "la vraie Danse" by showing countermodels which lack agency, movement and expression, his tales also illustrate a countermodel to positive poetic gaze. Tales such as *Gemma* and *Jettatura* can be read as centering on concerns and anxieties relating to the idea of invisible forces and dynamics, and their relationship to consciousness and subjectivity in the modern era — which they increasingly viewed as uncontrollable, unreadable and unknowable. David Sandner argues in *Critical Discourses of the Fantastic* that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "the central problem fantastic literature embodies is the "problem" of modern consciousness itself: self-reflection and its attendant yearning, loneliness, and suffering as underlying its possibilities for wonder, sympathy, and joy" (160). In the fantastic tale *Jettatura*'s discussion of the significance of the poetic eye is contained the image of a bird transfixed by a snake's fatal gaze: "l'oiseau qui, palpitant d'horreur et poussant des cris lamentables, descend du haut d'un arbre, d'où il pourrait s'envoler, pour se jeter dans la gueule du serpent qui le fascine" (269), a thematically significant image which is also cited in *Gemma*. This image contains within it each of the primary aspects of fascination. As in the Medusa story, in which a Gorgon with hair of snakes and a face once beautiful and yet so terrifying that to gaze upon it would turn to stone, the bird is immobilized, petrified by the fixing of its gaze. The bird is in equal parts obsessively attracted and viscerally repulsed, throwing itself toward the snake in spite of itself, against its own will, as allegory for the Romantic anxieties developing on the limits of human control and knowledge of one's own mind as well as the relativity of perception.

Dance is associated in Gautier's works not always with transcendence, but elsewhere with a kind of fatal alienation — notably, when the dance is not under the agency and control of the dancer. This is particularly clear in *Gemma*'s examination of the negative side of the poetic or artistic gaze, whose capacity for enchantment and imagination can be menacing as well. *Gemma* elaborates on the theme of fascination in order to problematize dance and indeed writing, to show its treachery and instability. The motif of mirrors in the ballet which abound throughout the choreography, décor and narrative is particularly apt, as the ballet self-reflexively turns inward to interrogate itself. Mirrors are also linked to Narcissus, whose myth is the other fundamental fascination story, likewise grounded in an obsessive visual desire; immobilized by an inability to avert his eyes from his own reflection, Narcissus is seduced by an illusory image. When *Gemma* is "magnetized" by the burning eyes of the count, she is compelled to dance with him, "animée et morte, amoureuse et endormie, [il y] a quelque chose de surnaturel et de magique qui frappe l'assemblée de stupeur et l'engourdit comme par un charme" (341). The scene contains layer upon layer of spectatorship, as the ballet's audience's eyes are fixed on the paralyzed spectators watching *Gemma* mesmerized by Santa-Croce. The effect is that of a series of distorting mirrors, drawing attention onto the act of the gaze itself.

Jettatura, another fantastic tale which stages the negative side of the fantastic eye through dance, centers on Paul d'Aspremont, an unwitting "jettatore" whose "mauvais oeil" wreaks havoc: mysterious accidents, unfortunate mishaps, unpredictable and tragic coincidences fall wherever his gaze rests. Unbeknownst to the jettatore himself, Paul is killing his fiancée Alicia by the intensity of the gaze that he casts upon her. In certain respects, Paul doubles and inverts

Octavian. Poetic and refined, he is intoxicated by beauty and consumed by visual aesthetic appreciation. Like Octavian, he *sees* that “le rêve existe autant que la réalité!” (278). But whereas Octavian’s creative gaze revives and resurrects a Pompeii awash in moonlight, for Paul, who likewise traverses the ancient ruins, “Pompéi, la ville morte, ne s’éveille pas le matin comme les cités vivantes [. . .] elle reste endormie sur sa couche funèbre”. The power of Paul’s mysteriously fatal eyes does not confer life but pulls Alicia’s soul from her body into the realm of death. Each moment under Paul’s gaze progressively weakens her; and, as she loses her vitality, she grows pale and ethereal. The moment of completion — the final glance that kills Alicia — is depicted as an aesthetic enterprise: the moment that Paul fully assimilates her as a work of art, knows her very visual detail, possesses her, is the moment in which Alicia is finally dematerialized by Paul’s “murderous” eyes (311).

In the apotheosis of *Jettatura*, then, is a staging of Gautier’s formulation of an artist’s gaze that would be capable of dissecting, controlling and mastering. Such powerful knowledge, which is positively used by characters such as Octavian to resurrect and artistically create, is fatal for Paul, who puts out his own eyes and flings himself into the sea. Gautier repeats this moment of artistic annihilation in another episode in the novella, in which Paul’s stare leads to a ballet dancer’s accidental death by flame. Gautier’s dance critiques are haunted by the death of Emma Livry, who “ressemblait trop au papillon; ainsi que lui, elle a brûlé ses ailes à la flamme”⁴⁸ when her skirt caught fire from a gas lamp, and that of Clara Webster, who died in London under similar circumstances.

In *Jettatura*, Paul provokes such an accident by watching a ballet too intently. “Un soir, la danseuse, emportée par le vol circulaire d’une valse, rasa de plus près cette étincelante ligne de feu qui sépare au théâtre le monde idéal du monde réel [. . .]. En un moment la flamme environna la jeune fille, qui dansa quelques secondes comme un feu follet au milieu d’une lueur rouge, et se jeta vers la coulisse, éperdue, folle de terreur, dévorée vive par ses vêtements incendiés” (279). In Gautier’s stories, the artistic expressiveness and control of the dancer, her resistance to full and complete mastery by the poetic eye, her ability to transcend any complete description, ultimately leads to redemptive endings. In describing the horrific scene in which agency is missing and the dancer is literally de-materialized under the control of a dominating gaze, however, Gautier critiques this form of vision.

These anti-dances, threatening, alienated, uncontrolled or empty, are productive as foils to the Romantic ballet in Gautier’s writing; they occasion meditations on possibilities for rethinking language, for reaffirming the importance of art in making sense of the world, for revealing the unseen connections and rhythms which give experience endless potential and depth.

The World as Text: Form, Desire and the Problem of Reading

As the Romantic ballet serves as a site for examining and metaphorizing time, space and the depths of the body, Gautier’s reflections on the act of viewing and making sense of a ballet parallel his interrogation of the functioning of perception and sight. The theorization of “form” comes up in many of Gautier’s writings, conferring richness and depth to his view of a world which must be encountered and perceived as a literary enterprise. “Form” appears in many of Gautier’s texts as a permanent aspect, essence or trace by which different impermanent physical manifestations are linked. “Affinités secrètes”, the first poem in the collection *Emaux et Camées*,

⁴⁸ From “Hommage à Emma Livry” in *Écrits sur la danse* (311).

presents a vision of the world which is fundamentally underlaid by this principle. The poem gives a circular vision of time in which all material is contingent and ephemeral, but in which eternal “forms” are endlessly recycled and given new bodies, bestowing a form of immortality. “Par de lentes métamorphoses, / Les marbres blancs en blanches chairs, / Les fleurs roses en lèvres roses / Se refont dans des corps divers” (26-27). In conceptualizing beings as the temporary embodiments of eternal forms, melting back into the ether only to be reborn into another body, Gautier envisions rejecting the dichotomies of materiality and immateriality, flesh and stone, animate and inanimate, mutable and immutable, transitory and enduring, past and present.

Gautier’s obsession with ballet is no doubt linked to its grounding in form, the striving for an idealized shape, essence or line of a position which is imperfectly manifested in each individual dancer, as well as its grounding in the body. In “De la mode”, Gautier complained that “Le vêtement, à l’époque moderne, est devenu pour l’homme une sorte de peau dont il ne se sépare sous aucun prétexte [...] à ce point que la forme réelle du corps est de nos jours tout à fait tombée en oubli” (1). Ballet followed the opposite trajectory, as Marie Taglioni’s ankle-length tutu retreated upward into near-nothingness from the thirties to the eighties, the better to show more clearly and completely the body that dances. For Gautier, the nude form is “le principe même de l’art, puisque l’homme ne peut concevoir de forme plus parfaite que la sienne, pétrie à l’image de Dieu” (2). As an art, ballet to a greater extent than any other form of dance is based on embodying and displaying the purity of line and form: its classical positions and *épaulement*, or “shouldering”, the subtle twisting and shading of codified positions, are rooted in principles of Greek statue such as *contrapposto*; the spiraling line of the position *croisé*, the elongation of the neck in *effacé*, attempt to recover in the contingent, organic and irregular body idealized forms as in *Affinités Secrètes*.⁴⁹

In his capacity as dance critic, Gautier pronounced repeatedly that the ballerina should never truly smile: “le sourire doit voltiger sur la bouche d’une danseuse comme un oiseau autour d’une rose, mais il ne doit pas y percher, sous peine de la déformer. Le sourire, qui ne se trouve jamais sur la bouche de marbre des déesses antiques, produisait une crispation qui détruit l’harmonie des lignes.”⁵⁰ The clean lines that produce the form are paradoxically bare — clarified and distilled to the essence of pure and eternal form — and saturated, pregnant with a kind of potential energy, a possibility of movement, a meaning that is contained but on the verge of visible manifestation. Similarly, each form in ballet is never static — a position requires constant energy to turn out the legs, extending lines past their own position in space; a balance is not stillness or repose but a kind of dynamic equilibrium created by opposing forces.

Like the Romantic ballerina, the women that Gautier writes are ever transforming, changing their bodies, materializing and dematerializing while remaining formally the same: *Jettatura*’s Alicia into translucent angel, *La morte amoureuse*’s Clarimonde into vampire, *Spirite*’s Lavinia into a semi-perceptible spirit. In Gautier’s ballets, Giselle shifts into the form of a vengeful ghost and *La Péri* repeatedly trades between immortal creature of the air and human slave. His stories are obsessed with disguise, metamorphosis, concealment. Elena Anastasaki observes the importance of the literary form of *Emaux et Camées*, a collection which includes many tributes and dedications to Gautier’s muses. Anastasaki writes that “les objets évoqués

⁴⁹ *Croisé* is a ballet position in which the body is turned diagonally, with the front leg crossing over, and the upper body spiraling in the opposite direction. *Effacé* is also diagonal, with the back leg extended and the upper body twisted away.

⁵⁰ From “Opéra: Débuts de Lucile Grahn: Le Carnaval de Venise” in *Écrits sur la danse* (63).

dans les poèmes écrits pour des femmes qui ont joué un rôle important dans la vie de Gautier sont des objets qui fonctionnent à la fois comme concrétisation de l'essence immatérielle de la personne et comme forme concentré de mémoire de celle-ci", as if each poem distilled an aspect of each, the pure form from which the whole of the person could project outward (331).

One thinks of the metonymic imprint of Arria Marcella's breast into rock that revives into the long-dead woman herself, or similarly the preserved foot in *Le Pied de momie* that generates the complete body of an Egyptian princess, Hermonthis. Omphale and *La Cafetière's* Angela as well are revived after years or centuries of stillness from mere images or fragment of their bodies. In a single aspect — such as the Platonic ideal of a female curve — infinite histories are contained, which may manifest again in endless "corps divers". Even as the impermanent flesh coalesces and dissolves, the eternal forms persist. Michel Crouzet underlines the paradoxical nature of transformation in his analysis of *Spirite*, "La métamorphose affirme au contraire que chaque être qui a une unité est uni au reste, ouvert à ses influences, capable de retrouver le courant originel qui pose les formes et en dispose: il est déjà, d'emblée, plus que lui-même, il est un mouvement vers, en participation avec" (118). The effect is to turn aspects of flesh — the imprint of a breast, a likeness, a part of a foot — into poetic signifiers, constellations of a thousand suggestions and associations for those who have the eye to see them. These forms are pregnant with possibility: that which is still has the potential to move again, death can be reversed, the past can come forward into the present.

Guy is warned, "Vous êtes sur le seuil d'un monde illimité, profond, mystérieux, plein d'illusions et de ténèbres où se combattent des influences bonnes et mauvaises qu'il faut savoir discerner" (57). Gautier stresses the primacy of a particular kind of penetrating sight as the means of access to truth, which is analogous to the functioning of reading. Images of interpretative denseness abound: depth, visual ambiguity, shadows, contradiction, in a formulation which evokes dimensionality, multidirectionality, infinite expansion. Gautier underlines the insufficiency of words to capture this complexity in a straightforward way; *Spirite* asserts that "les mots ne sont que l'ombre de l'idée" (99), insisting upon the depth behind a sign.

Gautier uses spectatorship, or the gaze, as an extended metaphor for poetry. We have mentioned that Gautier's analysis of *viewing* a ballet resembles very much the act of reading a poem or work of literature.

"Le public travaille sur le thème fourni par l'auteur ou le chorégraphe, et le brode des mille variations de sa fantaisie, ce qui fait d'un ballet le spectacle le plus matériel et le plus idéal à la fois. Selon la disposition d'esprit, ce peut être une suite de pirouettes et de gambades plus ou moins gracieuses, ou le plus ravissant poème — celui qu'on n'écrit pas."⁵¹

Here, it is the hermeneutic act that transforms balletic material into the ideal poem: the ability to perceive the connections, images and figurative meanings generated by the dance that remain invisible to ruder eyes. Gautier's poetic eye is not bound by the normal spatial, material and temporal limits of sight. In its capacity to perceive and thereby render tangible shadows, dreams, enchantment where others see only the utilitarian and literal quotidian, this poetic vision is central to artistic imagination. Thus the act of viewing, or reading, a ballet can be for Gautier nearly as creative as the act of composing, and an essential element in the functioning of art. For Gautier, this act also collapses the distance between the spectator and the artist, or the spectator and the artwork (and with respect to dance, artist and artwork are much the same). In a review of *La Sylphide*, Gautier describes his feelings watching Marie Taglioni dance:

⁵¹ From "Opéra: Griseldis" in *Écrits sur la danse* (210).

“Admirer est une si douce chose ! Voir quelqu’un réaliser un de vos rêves, une de vos pensées avec un éclat, un art auxquels vous ne pouvez espérer d’atteindre ! Admirer un grand artiste, c’est s’incarner avec lui, entrer dans le secret de son âme; c’est le comprendre, et comprendre c’est presque créer.⁵²

Gautier’s fantastic works are deeply concerned with the role of the poetic eye in art, suggesting ways in which these ideas on form, dance and reading are relevant to interrogating perception and reality. This is allegorized in *Arria Marcella*, a fantastic novella centering on a young artist, Octavien, who traverses the ruins of Pompeii and witnesses the town’s resurrection through his own artistic vision. The ruins are a space that fuses the ancient and the new: under the veneer of modern economic activity and circulation in the form of tourism, travel and the documentarian museum lie palimpsestic traces of ancient architecture, art and imprints which themselves allude to anterior times: Plautus’s *Casina*, the Temple of Isis, a mosaic worked by Sosimus. Likewise, *Casina* is art within art within art: the novel’s play centers on the movements of an actress, a “fausse Casina” (444).

Under the artist’s contemplative eye, “La ville se peuplait graduellement comme un de ces tableaux de diorama, d’abord déserts, et qu’un changement d’éclairage anime de personnages invisibles jusque-là” (440). By only a shift in light, a certain change of perspective, the past may be brought forth into the present. The tale proposes that “rien ne meurt, tout existe toujours; nulle force ne peut anéantir ce qui fut une fois” (445). The role of the artist is to reinvest with visibility and substance what already exists in the realm of dream and shadow, but cannot be perceived by ordinary eyes. In Gautier’s fantastic tales, this allows the passage back and forth between the real and the more-than-real.

Arria Marcella is described in terms of an artwork: “son col présentait ces belles lignes pures qu’on ne retrouve à présent que dans les statues [. . .] on aurait pu croire [ses seins] fouillés dans le marbre par Phidias ou Cléomène [. . .] cette gorge d’un contour si correct, d’une coupe si pure” (449). Her purity of form is preserved in a Pompeiian museum as an imprint of her breast in volcanic rock, imbuing her with a form of immortality. Gautier’s stories frequently offer self-reflexive commentary on the nature of art in the form of *mise-en-abîmes*: spectacles, portraits, dances. The transformations of female characters such as Arria Marcella, who is resurrected in a theater, or Giselle, whose love of dance causes both her death and rebirth in metamorphosed form, can be read as allegories for what art and imagination can do: bringing the past into the future, reviving the dead, seducing and fascinating the gaze, rechanting and refashioning the world through creative vision.

The insistence upon hesitation and the unreliability of perception confers great significance upon the eye in Gautier’s work. In the fantastic story *Jettatura*, the count d’Altavilla gives what might be considered to be a defence of this significance.

“Vous ne niez pas, miss Alicia, reprit le comte, la puissance de l’œil humain; la lumière du ciel s’y combine avec le reflet de l’âme; la prunelle est une lentille qui concentre les rayons de la vie, et l’électricité intellectuelle jaillit par cette étroite ouverture [. . .] Beaucoup d’effets n’ont-ils pas eu lieu par des causes inappréciables pour nos organes ? Les miasmes de la fièvre paludéenne, de la peste, du choléra, sont-ils visibles ? Nul œil n’aperçoit le fluide électrique sur la broche du paratonnerre, et pourtant la foudre est soutirée ! Qu’y a-t-il d’absurde à supposer qu’il se dégage de ce disque noir, bleu ou gris, un rayon propice ou fatal ? Pourquoi cet effluve ne serait-il pas heureux ou malheureux d’après le mode d’émission et l’angle sous lequel l’objet la reçoit ? (269)

⁵² From “Opéra: Représentation au bénéfice de Marie Taglioni” in *Écrits sur la danse* (161).

Here Gautier alludes to recent forays into what would become electrochemistry, biology and engineering not to foreclose but rather to strengthen the case for the veracity of the unknown, invisible or paranormal. Indeed, nearly all of his fantastic works more or less explicitly evoke scientific or naturalistic justifications for the supernatural effects they depict. In *Avatar*, “des effets qui semblent merveilleux, quoique naturels” are produced by “les conducteurs de métal chargés à outrance de fluide magnétique” (167). The deeds of Santa-Croce in the ballet *Gemma* are likewise explained by mesmerism or animal magnetism; the villain “a, dans ses travaux hermétiques, retrouvé le secret du magnétisme connu autrefois des adeptes, et dont Mesmer sera plus tard le grand prêtre” (337), Octavian is pulled to Arria Marcella by a “secret magnétisme”, or “une commotion électrique[:] il jaillissait des étincelles de sa poitrine lorsque le regard de cette femme se tournait vers lui” (445-446). Humans are bathed in surging flows and eddies of unseen forces and dynamics they can observe only indirectly, by their effects. *Jettatura*’s misfortunes are blamed on “les électricités dangereuses, les influences fatales de l’atmosphère” (278). Furthermore, the human subject becomes not a whole, unified, solid but rather a penetrable container for the forces that act through it. *Avatar* stages this through the melancholy Octave, plagued by a condition in which “la vie se retirait de lui et fuyait par une de ces fentes invisibles dont l’homme est plein” (151).

Guy de Malivert in *Spirite* is depicted as a man of science,⁵³ deeply interested in “astronomie, cosmogonie, électricité, vapeur, photographie, chimie, micrographie, génération spontanée”, able to interact with his ghostly lover by means of “le fluide nerveux” or “un influx nerveux” (269). The climax of the novel is a vision of outer space as a “merveilleux spectacle”, a ballet of geological, cosmological and electric elements which swirl together in mysterious harmonies (168).

In the Romantic view of the body as a porous container open to the dynamic and transformative forces of nature, the idea of electricity, atmosphere and rhythms connecting bodies and their milieu seems to make dance a compelling metaphor for, if not means of, accessing these larger movements and energies and making them visible. The Romantic topoi of *Spirite* and *Giselle* are frequently employed by Gautier to investigate space, which has been conceptualized as dense and layered. Albrecht’s searching through the dark woods for the spirit of Giselle is one of the most iconic scenes of both *Giselle* and of Romantic ballet more generally. This topos of the disappearing dancer has been featured enough to be satirized in the twenty-first century. In *Giselle*, shadowy space becomes expressionist, concentrated inwards, the conflation of the mental and physical. It can also be read as an allegory of scientific investigation, as Albrecht turns this way and that in the dark, looking up and down, attempting to search out and comprehend the invisible dynamics he can sense. The choreography is led by the intense focus of

⁵³ In this chapter, I will use the word “science” broadly, as a field and process in continual self-revision and change — not to refer to objective fact, categorization or description of the world (sets of physical and chemical formulae, taxonomic charts, scientific laws and theories as we understand them today) — but rather to refer to systematic investigation of any kind of natural phenomena, visible or invisible, real or perceived, ultimately verified or disproven. Such a broad definition therefore includes many twists, imaginative propositions and dead ends that we now consider to be wrong, or even ridiculous from a modern vantage point. The science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke famously put forth, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic”. Gautier’s era was one in which the mechanisms behind newly discovered phenomena such as electricity, nerve impulses and biological processes were not yet well-worked out, and seemed quasi-magical. In examining Gautier’s work, I will therefore pay attention to hypotheses such as mesmerism, miasma theory, vitalism and other models that ultimately turned out to be factually incorrect. I do not equate these with the rigors of the modern scientific establishment; indeed, the idea of “science” or “scientific investigation” as provisional and tentative is key to the reading of his oeuvre that I will propose in this chapter.

Albrecht's probing gaze, as progressively, Giselle and the Wilis are revealed to him. Over the physical space of the forest is superimposed a fantastic space of air and dynamic forces, evoked by the diaphanous tulle of the corps de ballet of Wilis, their weaving and swirling together. Dance seems to make these dynamics or phenomena visible, projecting them onto the body as if it were a cosmological instrument. For Gautier, dance has the greatest potential to "rendre la pensée visible."⁵⁴ Dance's ability to seemingly embody the invisible and ineffable demonstrates the way in which Gautier's art is concerned with and engages with the structure of reality itself, and the body's relationship to time and space.

Indeed, Romantic discourses that sought to investigate the natural world often centered around that which was not directly perceptible or observable by the direct human gaze. Franz Anton Mesmer theorized that there existed a "universally distributed and continuous fluid" that "fills and connects all bodies, celestial, earthly and animate" which could be manipulated to positively or negatively affect living beings.⁵⁵ In *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France*, Gautier declared his own literal belief in mesmerism, or "animal magnetism", which he deemed "un fait désormais acquis à la science et dont il n'est pas plus permis de douter que du galvanisme et de l'électricité" (201). Joel Faflak characterizes mesmerism as a "simultaneously legitimate and occult influence on eighteenth-century thought and culture and beyond, [...] part of a larger culture text that attempts to explain gravity, galvanism, or electricity as universal forces compelling the motion of bodies in the universe" (51). Observable phenomena such as movement and light were understood to be produced by invisible, even supernatural, forces that were not fully understood, and that the surface which had to be read could be read not in a straightforward way but always obliquely. William Fox Talbot mused about the exploitation of photography's capacity to see transparent forces and invisible rays "whose existence is only revealed to us by this action which they exert" since they flowed beyond the limits of human perception (115). "Alas!" continues Fox Talbot, "that this speculation is somewhat too refined to be introduced with effect into a modern novel or romance; for what a dénouement we should have, if we could suppose the secrets of the darkened chamber to be revealed by the testimony of the imprinted paper".

These discourses surrounding the discovery of invisible forces and phenomena stressed the importance of looking beyond the surface of any apparent model or representation. Stories such as *Spirite*, *Gemma* and *Jettatura* can be situated in these Romantic discourses fascinated by the invisible forces, processes and dynamics composing the world and their detection. Because surface no longer necessarily corresponded to depth, form to content, science entered the domain of a new kind of literature. The fantastic — a genre which alternated between fear and wonder, belief and disbelief, unknowability and understanding, responded to cultural hopes and anxieties surrounding new scientific discoveries and advances.

Scholars such as John Tresch and Richard Sha have written recent histories of the ways in which the strategies, interests and stakes of art and science align and interpenetrate in the Romantic Era. In *The Romantic Machines*, John Tresch argues that view of nature as "alive with dynamic, transformative powers" were "confirmed by [...] the writings of prominent physicists, astronomers, biologists, and engineers" of the era (16). Tresch cites examples of new scientific discoveries, inventions and technologies such as the daguerreotype, employed not just in the photographic domain but also as an investigative tool. Such devices were used to probe "invisible phenomena unfolding over time" in the atmosphere "as another member of the family

⁵⁴ From "Opéra : *Néméa*" in *Écrits sur la danse*, 311.

⁵⁵ Cited in Faflak (50).

of Humboldtian geophysical instruments — another temperamental, site-specific and networked tool for registering and mapping a specific range of phenomena, manifesting the invisible, dynamic connections among them” (115). Richard Sha proposes that the work of scientists such as “Roger Boscovich, Humphry Davy, Joseph Priestley, Mary Somerville, and Michael Faraday” led to a reconceptualization of matter not as static material but rather as the interactions of forces and energies: “If matter is force instead of corpuscles, one has a greater sense that the world is one in which change and motion are not only possible but inevitable, since as the hypothesized essence of matter, change and motion are the being of the world” (31). For Gautier, these invisible dynamics and rhythms that animate and embody forms give them enormous richness as poetic signifiers to be read. The thinking of dance, space, reality and representation provide possibilities for the reenvisioning of language as it appears paradoxically that ambiguity and suggestion provide a richer means of signifying than the prosaic directness of “la précision grossière de la réalité”.

This insistence upon hermeneutic difficulty has a direct relevance to the perceptual upheaval of the era. The aim of scientific investigation and technical innovation in the Romantic era were not necessarily clarity, functionality and the eradication of mystery or ambiguity, but rather the opposite. John Tresch argues in *The Romantic Machines* that counterintuitively, seemingly spiritual or hallucinatory domains such as physiospiritualism, the optical illusions of pre-photography, visual technologies such as the diorama, as well as perception-altering drugs⁵⁶ widely and openly relied on “the use of reason and mechanical devices to produce aesthetic effects” (125). Tresch writes that in this mode of thinking, “drugs were a technology that structured thought and perception. Hallucinations followed regular patterns: despite the variable content of users’ fantasies, all users underwent comparable distortions of time and space, as well as a common sequence in the unfolding of the experience” (129). Marion Kant points out that art and science were likewise aligned at the Opéra; ironically, the Romantic ballet’s “‘other-worldly charms’ and fairy-tale escape from reality depended on the real world’s industrial progress and economic development” that made possible the eerie light of gas lamps and gossamer tulle (186). Tresch concludes that these new Romantic technologies highlighted the ways in which perception, rooted in the body, was suspect, contingent, ambiguous and indeed hallucinatory. New scientific discoveries or investigations were not necessarily concerned with clarifying and making explicit but rather produced hesitation in the recognition of hitherto unseen depth and complexity.

Similarly, Gautier’s literary project challenges a unified, smooth model of the world. His fantastic tales demonstrate reality’s resemblance to literature, in that we are always presented with multiple contradictory, irreconcilable ways of reading and relating to this reality. These works stage the impossibility of resolvability, the ability of reality to always exceed our logical formulation of it and render all positivistic models only provisional in the way that science was coming to realize that they were. Precisely the concern of Gautier’s fantastic tales and ballets, these questions, anxieties and discourses surrounding the depths of perception and experience were at the heart of his enterprise.

Gautier’s encounter with the Romantic ballerina brings him to a poetics which is unexpectedly complex, undecidable and tinged with modernism in its capacity for excessive and irresolvable poetic meaning. These qualities render it ideal for his investigation of perception and representation, which assumes not smooth surfaces, but rather the constant presence of change

⁵⁶ Gautier wrote about experimentation with such drugs in stories such as “Le Club des Hashischins”, “Le Haschich” and “La Pipe d’Opium”.

and depth. In doing so, Gautier's oeuvre does not turn away from the body or away from the exterior world, but rather fulfils what Paul Celan would come to see as the nature of poetry: "stricken by and seeking reality."⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Cited in Signer (399).

CHAPTER TWO: Gender, Movement and the Body: Baudelaire's Modern Language

I have put forth a view of how three canonical poets of Early French modernism relate to modernity. Gautier's language is self-reflexive in its use of oxymoron, mirroring the hesitation produced when two incompatibilities suspend the normal interpretative process. Surprising early moments of modernity emerge from these pauses: moments which demonstrate Gautier's reflection on the experience and perception of the modern body in works generally considered purely Idealistic or Romantic. The paradoxes of the female dancing body — the way she seems to stage the conflict between the ideal and the real, the corporeal and the artistic, the way she seems to write the invisible with her body into the visible — prompts Gautier to pose questions about the interior processes, tensions, energies and experiences of the body and its relation to the exterior world.

There has been little critical attention on dance and its relationship to modernity in Baudelaire's oeuvre. However, dance imagery is omnipresent in Baudelaire's works: darting sylphs and undulating serpent dancers, balletic pirouettes and masqued waltzes, sparkling tulle skirts and tumbling saltimbanques flicker through poem after poem in *Les Fleurs du mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris*. Dance serves not only as a locus for conceptualizing poetic structure, but also for considering the body's modern experience with space and time. Like Gautier, Baudelaire ultimately presents a vision of a dancer who is not purely a foil to modernity as much as a complex figure for rethinking the way language and art could address and respond to these extra-literary concerns.

As attention to dance causes us to rethink the standard narrative of Gautier as a pure poet of surfaces, a reading of Baudelaire's oeuvre that foregrounds dance will help us to understand the role of gender, movement and the body in his multivalent conception of language and of art in modernity. Taking dance and the dancer as a vantage point will de-emphasize Baudelaire's famed misogyny in favor of the active, uncontainable, corporeal presence of the dancer. We will see how the expressive agencies of this figure help Baudelaire to conceptualize a language rendered dense, perturbing, perplexing in the opposing impulses it holds in energized tension, irreducible to any simple, decisive interpretation. Generally de-emphasized aspects of Baudelaire's theorization of language become prominent — primary among them, the corporeality and capacity for intervention of the dancing woman, functioning not as organic vices to be suppressed but rather factors crucial to Baudelaire's theorization of art and specifically, language. These qualities will also suggest a way out of the material/ideal, eroticization/abstraction dichotomies of many of the critical approaches to his relationship to gender.

Baudelaire's writings on the dancer undo a vision of him as a static, marmorean poet. The poem "La Beauté", which allegorizes Beauty as a pure white statue that "hai[t] le mouvement qui déplace les lignes", exemplifies this view. Baudelaire ventriloquizes her, "Je suis belle, ô mortels ! comme un rêve de pierre, / Et mon sein [...] Est fait pour inspirer au poète un amour / Éternel et muet ainsi que la matière." Though this poem has been read by some critics as a statement of Baudelaire's artistic beliefs, much recent criticism has convincingly argued that the poem is an ironic critique of previous, static, formalist positions such as Parnassianism⁵⁸ or

⁵⁸ Francis S. Heck's "La Beauté: Enigma of irony" takes this position.

Neo-classicism⁵⁹. The dancer is a figure for Baudelaire's aesthetic valorization of the irregular, transient, contingent and morphable.

The corporeality of dance, as well as its perceived femininity, have no doubt contributed to the dearth of critical studies of dance in Baudelaire. It is also my contention that Baudelaire's relationship to dance has been underexamined because it complicates a set of standard narratives about femininity and modernity. The feminine is often posed as a counterpoint to modernity. Indeed, the canonical account of Baudelaire's modernity has frequently been associated exclusively with the masculine in the form of both positive and negative male figures such as the urban dandy in the modern city, the industrial or consumerist bourgeois, the masses of laborers that ran mechanized factories and tamed the city of Paris under Haussmann's direction into the order of straight lines. In this narrative, the feminine is associated with authenticity, domesticity, nostalgia; she is posed therefore *against* artificial, mechanized, alienating and masculine modernity. Female figures in Baudelaire often taken as exemplars of this model are the mistily timeless Andromache in *Le Cygne* or the "fugitive beauty" of *A Une Passante*, read as representatives of the loss of transcendence in the modern era. However, the dancer does not fit this passive model.

The dancer illustrates the ways in which modern art, and indeed modernity, are not just male for Baudelaire. Movement is crucial to Baudelaire's definition of the latter in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* as "Cet élément transitoire, fugitif, dont les métamorphoses sont si fréquentes" (69). Baudelaire located modernity "dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini" (69). Dance's reconfiguration of gender dichotomies, and the way in which it holds polarities in tension: the modern and ideal, stasis and movement, activity and passivity, challenges standard narratives about potentials and possibilities for feminine participation in modernism, commodity culture and public spaces in Baudelaire's oeuvre.

This examination of corporeality and materiality in Baudelaire's oeuvre helps us to reconsider his view on the female body. In *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender and Performance in the Fin de siècle*, Rhonda Garelick examines the fraught and ambiguous relationship of the dandy to women. According to Garelick, "A female character permitted into the decadent hero's world serves normally only as a tabula rasa upon which the dandy spectator projects his own creative musings, for to grant a woman consciousness or creativity would be to threaten the dandy's most important attribute : his self-containment" (5). While in many respects the dandy might resemble a modern woman in her self-performance — the continual production and shaping of her own image through the artifice of makeup, the curation of attire as well as the theatricality and self-consciousness of her social interactions — ultimately, argues Garelick, women in Baudelaire "depend for the ontological status upon an exterior creator — painter, poet, or whoever else might translate the monstrous beauty they unwittingly embody" (36). While this is no doubt a reasonable model for certain female figures in Baudelaire's oeuvre, the dancer provides a countermodel in untranslatability, expressing the depth of interior processes, motivations and artistic choices, forcing a type of hesitation when the flatness of the conventional strategy of capture fails. For Baudelaire, as for Gautier, the hesitation produced by the female dancer and her physicality produces a kind of interpretative *resistance* that prevents complete control or containment.

My aim is to shift focus to these moments of dance which have been often elided, in order to reframe our understanding of Baudelaire's theorization of writing and its relationship to

⁵⁹ This is the position of Jennifer Yee in 'La Beauté': Art and Dialogism in the Poetry of Baudelaire.

the female body.⁶⁰ Centering dance in the analysis of this relationship allows us to avoid falling into the standard narrative polarities of Baudelaire's women as either the degraded natural body, or conversely, an abstracted screen for reflecting male desire. My aim is not to challenge the value of these readings, which bring out aspects of Baudelaire's writings which are no doubt present. Rather, I would like to consider how Baudelaire's dancer indeed provides a third way out of this polarization, one that restores the expressive agencies of this literary figure. In so doing, I will make the case for dance as a site for examining the relationship between gender, aesthetics and materiality in Baudelaire's writing at the beginning of the age of modernism.

Femininity in Baudelaire: Beyond a Dichotomy?

I will begin by discussing the first canonical narrative surrounding femininity in Baudelaire which identifies femininity with transcendence and idealism. In *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*, Toril Moi calls for a revival of the term idealism, contending that literary critics have forgotten the extent to which idealism was crucial to the way in which critics of the nineteenth century understood literature and art, and that it was key to the way in which they conceptualized and understood various approaches to art. According to Moi, modernism is best understood not in relation to realism — which in its multiple and conflicting manifestations is neither antecedent nor foil to modernism — but rather in opposition to *idealism*. Canonical representations of femininity as whole, outside of alienation and the contingent as a “recurring symbol of the atemporal and asocial at the very heart of the modern itself” (71), seem to concatenate in the dream of inscribing the ephemeral and unsayable that characterized the Romantics.

Romantic ballet's focus on flawless form, the beautiful and the sublime; its embodiment of imagination and mental states; its aim of creating a maximal emotional and aesthetic engagement with art were all idealistic goals which seemed to offer possibilities for reimagining language. In *L'Art romantique*, Baudelaire quotes Gautier, in an idealistic moment, declaring that “L'inexprimable n'existe pas” (175). This new language would be transcendent, poetic, transparent and embodied.

For this reason, Romantics often envisioned this ideal language as a dance. The idealistic mode is emblemized by Gautier's ballerina: pure, distant on the stage, smoothed by pink tights and fairy lights into image or figure. A similar vision is put forth in Madame de Stael's Early Romantic novel *Corinne* (1807).

Corinne connaissait si bien toutes les attitudes que représentent les peintres et les sculpteurs antiques [...], elle rappelait les danseuses d'Herculanum, et faisait naître successivement une foule d'idées nouvelles pour le dessein et la peinture. [...] Corinne, en dansant, faisait passer dans l'âme des spectateurs ce qu'elle éprouvait, comme si elle avait improvisé, comme si elle avait joué de la lyre ou dessiné quelques figures ; tout était langage pour elle : les musiciens, en la regardant, s'animaient à mieux faire sentir le génie de leur art ; et je ne sais quelle joie passionnée, quelle sensibilité d'imagination électrisait à la fois tous les témoins de cette danse magique, et les transportait dans une existence idéale où l'on rêve un bonheur qui n'est pas de ce monde (196).

⁶⁰ Debarati Sanyal's *The Violence of Modernity* discusses the dancer in a nuanced analysis of Baudelaire's ambivalent and contradictory relationship to the female body as both matter and figure. However, most major studies of Baudelaire by Walter Benjamin, Ross Chambers and other scholars have generally not discussed Baudelaire's dancer at length.

The dancer's body is suppressed, abstracted or dematerialized into the nostalgic or transcendent figure or ideal. The vision is derealized: out of body, out of this world, out of this time. Corinne is not contingent, not individual, not an acting agent, but rather a pure vehicle for the ideal — She exists in a timeless, unchanging atemporal space. As she is entirely dematerialized, decorporealized, sublimated, all becomes pure metaphor or “langage” for her.

The other canonical narrative about the female body in Baudelaire's writings, opposite to the first, is that of degraded, material corporeality. In Baudelaire's novella *La Fanfarlo*, this is the frame that Madame de Cosmelly uses to comprehend her rival, La Fanfarlo, whom she deems to be “aussi belle que bête”:

Pourquoi ... les hommes préfèrent-ils souvent la fleur que tout le monde a respirée, à celle qui s'est toujours gardée des passants dans les allées les plus obscures du jardin conjugal ? Pourquoi donc les femmes prodigues de leur corps, trésor dont un seul sultan doit avoir la clef, possèdent-elles plus d'adorateurs que nous autres... ? De quel charme si magique le vice auréole-t-il certaines créatures ?

Cosmelly evokes degradation, contamination, destabilization in a similar manner to academic work on Baudelaire which has emphasized the role of debasement, violence, misogyny and domination related to the feminine in his writings.⁶¹ He has been viewed as equating femininity with degraded corporeality, with unhealthy and contaminated sexuality, with a regressive or base animality.

In particular, Baudelaire's literary prostitute has often been implicated as the incarnation of his misogyny. According to Charles Bernheimer, for many male authors in the age of Emile Zola's *Nana*, such as Flaubert and Huysmans, “female sexuality = prostitution = castration = syphilis = the organic world” (784). Among Baudelaire's critics a similar line has been drawn, the most incriminating line constituting his scribbled journal musing that “La femme est naturelle, c'est-à-dire abominable.”⁶² Raisa Rexer has summarized this reading as the belief that “women are fundamentally sexual, corporeal beings who only come to symbolize ‘art's power to redeem matter’ through the complete suppression of their bodies, whether through de-sexualiation into the unnatural dandy (the lesbian) or sublimation into a metaphoric signifier for some superior abstract concept (such as art itself)” (126). When these female bodies are not suppressed, this narrative has tied Baudelaire's female prostitute to contamination, decay and the breakdown of order into the natural, leading to “la création littéraire comme perturbation de tous les systèmes d'échange et de circulation: ceux du désir, des corps, et des signes”, in the words of Nathalie Buchet Rogers (238). This is accomplished by reconfiguring the cultural vision of how bodies are supposed to be ordered in social space (by allowing “natural” desires rather than social standards determine who comes into contact) and the distribution of financial compensation (leading to the vision of rich prostitutes and impoverished aristocrats), posing the female and natural negatively against the male and modern order.

There is also a visual dimension to this disordering. In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski writes that female performers such as the prostitute or actress could be seen as “‘figure[s] of public pleasure’ whose deployment of cosmetics and costume bore witness to the artificial and

⁶¹ Nathalie Buchet Rogers reads *La Fanfarlo* through the lens of prostitution, as a “centre d'une déstabilisation générale où, aux limites du désir de narration, se nouent et se dénouent les métaphores fondatrices pour Baudelaire de la création poétique et des dangers qui la guettent sous le double emblème de la prostitution et du faux monnayage” (238).

⁶² In *Oeuvres Posthumes* (101).

commodified forms of contemporary female sexuality” (19). According to Felski, “graphically embodying structuring logic of commodity aesthetics, the prostitute and the actress fascinated nineteenth century critics preoccupied with the decadent and artificial nature of modern life” (20).

However, the dancer does not neatly fit this model: she was and must be perceived differently from the prostitute or actress in her corporeality, and on account of the connection maintained between this corporeality and her visual self-presentation. One might not be surprised that female dancers in Baudelaire’s life and oeuvre, such as his partner Jeanne Duval and the main character of *La Fanfarlo*, have generally been referred to in scholarly works as “courtesans” rather than as dancers. While there was often a good deal of overlap between the two terms backstage at the nineteenth century Paris Opera Ballet and in the public understanding of the figure of the professional dancer more generally, the two terms are and were hardly synonymous.

I will affirm that thinking of dancers as specifically dancers, as Baudelaire did in his writing, is crucial in understanding his oeuvre. Female agency and influence indeed has a role in Baudelaire’s conception of the dancer, a role that complicates a straightforward condemnation of Baudelaire’s assumed misogyny and which accords far more of a positive place to female artistic and corporeal agency.

I begin my analysis with *La Fanfarlo*, Baudelaire’s only extended work of prose fiction. Little work has been done on the novella, particularly in view of the immensity of the critical attention devoted to the canonical *Les Fleurs du mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris*. This lack of attention is surprising given *La Fanfarlo*’s status as Baudelaire’s only work that remotely resembles a novel, and also in view of its relevance to the themes of Baudelaire’s most celebrated poems. The protagonist, Samuel Cramer, has been read as a more or less ironic self-portrait of Baudelaire himself. Raymond N. MacKenzie points out that “Nearly every detail in the life of the fictional Cramer is analogous to a detail in the life of Charles Baudelaire” (ix). A dandy and writer of modern sonnets, Cramer dwells on the malignant and macabre, shocking his readers with unexpected and explicit descriptions of anatomy. With his artistic meanderings into the melancholy and vitiated, Cramer likewise shares Baudelaire’s aesthetic tastes and mirrors his literary innovation. *La Fanfarlo* stages Cramer’s various bizarre and imaginative attempts to find beauty through conventionally morbid and artificial means, “par désespoir de ne pouvoir être nobles et beaux suivant les moyens naturels” (369).

Samuel Cramer is initially interested in the proper and sincere Madame de Cosmelly, an avatar for early Romanticism idealism who exhorts a sallow Cramer to “célébrer la santé et les joies de l’honnête homme” (397). His attempt to win her favor consists in his promise to separate the philandering Monsieur de Cosmelly from the fashionable and earthy dancer with whom he is smitten — the “légère, magnifique, vigoureuse” Fanfarlo currently reigning the stage through the daring and artistic genius of her metamorphic dance, as well as the attraction of her bodily form. Through the course of composing and publishing three months of scathing critiques of the eponymous dancer, Samuel falls madly in love with her in an affair that has been associated with Baudelaire’s relationship with the dancer Jeanne Duval. *La Fanfarlo* is struck by the similarity of her tastes and aesthetic views to Samuel’s, preferences which are explored at length in the narrative, and the two carry out an extended, passionately “terrible, désolant et honteux” love affair.

I would like to begin with the question of why this novella has received so little critical attention, despite its seeming pertinence to discussions of Baudelaire's aesthetics, his reflections upon his own writing, as well as questions of prose versus poetic form. One piece of the answer to this question is that the few scholarly writings that do dwell on *La Fanfarlo* focus on the discussions between Cramer and Cosmelly on literature, reading, and poetry and almost entirely ignore *La Fanfarlo* herself.⁶³ It is natural that this meta-commentary would attract the attention of critics. However, this shift of focus from the title character to the virtuous, wholesome and utterly conventional Madame de Cosmelly, arguably a minor character in the novella, produces readings that feel curiously off-center — even un-Baudelairian — in the way they tend to privilege Cosmelly's moral commentary and put into question Cramer's artistic experimentation.

Michele Hannoosh, for example, characterizes the story's conclusion (in which Cosmelly's household is restored and Cramer is relegated to the publishing of cheap socialist newspapers) as a warning to follow Madame de Cosmelly's example rather than Cramer's, thereby avoiding "confusing ourselves with the narrator, considering ourselves the author of the story, lest we find ourselves similarly caught out, our "honest" views shown to be those of a hypocrite" (54). Madame de Cosmelly seems to me, however, an implausible avatar for the ambiguities, tensions and radicalities of Baudelaire's narrative voice. I will examine, rather, the tension between the irony of Samuel Cramer and the dynamic movement of *La Fanfarlo*, the way that poetry and dance as embodied by the two characters serve as unstable and shifting mirrors or reciprocal sites of examination for each other, producing a vision of language which incorporates both.

The novella's contrasting of its two female characters illustrates the way in which our reading drastically shifts when we take *La Fanfarlo* to be the focal point rather than Madame de Cosmelly. The two display, firstly, competing visions of the female body. Madame de Cosmelly's physical aspects render her an anti-Fanfarlo, a counter-model to the dancer. Cosmelly recounts the way in which from childhood her body has been tightly controlled, shaped and regulated by others: "on m'a forcée à me tenir droite ; on m'a fait faire de la gymnastique, et l'on m'a défendu de gêner mes mains à planter des fleurs ou à élever des oiseaux" (404-405). Her own will seems to be entirely absent from her physical movements, directly producing "la chasteté de sa démarche" (413). She herself seems absent from her movements, which follow a prescribed form to reveal nothing. *La Fanfarlo*, on the other hand, never ceases to express herself when she moves, daring to "marcher en dansant" (415). The fact that Madame de Cosmelly is sheltered by a parasol also contains multiple symbolic resonances that oppose those of dance. She is sheltered and protected, physically and emotionally impenetrable; she turns inward towards herself, seemingly a unified subject — in contrast to the dancer, whose performance projects her interiority onto her body to be visible and read, opening her outwards to spectators. It is eminently appropriate that the impenetrable, virtuous and incredibly banal Madame Cosmelly, the anti-poem, carries "dans la main un livre qu'elle ne lisait pas" (392).

In *La Fanfarlo*, people are constantly being compared to works of literature. Madame de Cosmelly is "tout ce jeune roman", appropriate to her taste for the wholesome, sentimental virtue of Early Romantic literature. Samuel's character on the other hand, is associated with a type of living, embodied poem: "La poésie brille bien plus dans sa personne que dans ses œuvres." While Madame de Cosmelly has a distaste for the sordid and explicit nature of Samuel Cramer's poetry, *La Fanfarlo* shares all of his tastes. Samuel the poet and *La Fanfarlo* the dancer are

⁶³ Two examples are J.A. Hiddleston's book *Baudelaire and Le Spleen de Paris*, and Michele Hannoosh's article "The Function of Literature in Baudelaire's 'La Fanfarlo'".

presented as mirrors, with “une parfaite confraternité de goûts et de sentiments”, yet expressing these preferences through differing artistic forms. And indeed the synchronicities and tension between the two is suggested in La Fanfarlo’s name itself, with the “la” and “lo” on each end, one evoking the feminine and one the masculine. In between are the syllables “fan” and “far”, also mirrored in a slightly skewed symmetry.

The mirroring between Samuel and La Fanfarlo parallels a mirroring and slippage between text and body. Literature pervades all of Samuel’s experiences. “Si quelque fille, dans un accès de jalousie brutale et puérile, lui faisait une égratignure avec une aiguille ou un canif, Samuel se glorifiait en lui-même d’un coup de couteau.” Conversely, he automatically narrativizes and aestheticizes all that is real. When his words succeed in making Madame de Cosmelly cry, he considers her tears “comme son œuvre et sa propriété littéraire”. There is a kind of extreme permeability between writing and life: “il était à la fois tous les artistes qu’il avait étudiés et tous les livres qu’il avait lus”. Passions are literarily absorbed, all that is real is turned into a story which in its turn produces physiological reactions, reactions which affect the physical body.

Samuel will propose rather a kind of interchange between the body and the word. Madame de Cosmelly reproaches Samuel for the “descriptions d’anatomie” that pervade his poetry. Such descriptions also suffuse the text of *La Fanfarlo*, and not just in the descriptions of the dancer herself. The reasons for this striking interest in the body are hinted at in Samuel’s analysis of the relationship between the body and his use of language. He claims that his lack of conventional beauty prompts him to “si bizarrement fard[er] le visage. Nous nous sommes tellement appliqués à sophistiquer notre cœur, nous avons tant abusé du microscope pour étudier les hideuses excroissances et les honteuses verrues dont il est couvert, et que nous grossissons à plaisir, qu’il est impossible que nous parlions le langage des autres hommes.” There is a kind of corporeal self-creation here — as the poem can be manipulated and shaped for artistic expression, the dandy manipulates not just his exterior by dress and makeup but engages in a kind of self-shaping of his body. This vision accords with that proposed in *Peintre de la vie moderne*, in which “L’homme finit par ressembler à ce qu’il voudrait être” (53). There is a constant movement between poetry and the body: each is a pervasive, symbiotic mirror for the other.

As a dandy, Samuel is continually engaged in physical and visual self-creation through his words, self-presentation, costume and activities. Rhonda Garelick’s description of the construction of the dandy’s identity as “antiutilitarian philosophy of pure, ephemeral performance” is eminently applicable to the dancer (29). It also parallels the way in which as a dancer, La Fanfarlo manipulates and modifies her own body to create meaning, as well as the violence of this act — the way it permanently shapes and modifies the dancer’s own body or self. This kind of reconfiguration and corporeal transformation is also suggested by the title of Samuel Cramer’s volume of poetry, “Orfraies”: the bird of prey literally named “bone-breaker” from the Latin. The idea of a poetic collection named “bone-breaker” hints at Samuel’s structural experimentation, breaking down and remaking the form of conventional poetry. The disruption of a smooth, idealistic and stable vision of poetry gives way to experimentations presented as monstrous and grotesque by the poet himself.

Samuel Cramer, has a name which alludes to fire, with its play between the material and the immaterial evoking the conflict between the real and ideal. Paul Diel emphasizes the movement inherent to the poetic symbolism of fire, “La flamme montant vers le ciel figure l’élan vers la spiritualisation. L’intellect sous sa forme évolutive est serviteur de l’esprit. Mais la

flamme est aussi vacillante, ce qui fait que le feu se prête également à figurer l'intellect en tant qu'oubliés de l'esprit" (38-39). The constant movement of the flame, its metamorphic transformation from one state to another, the illumination it casts, resonate with the type of hermeneutics associated with the dancer. Ultimately, poetic speech begins to resemble the body of La Fanfarlo: "Cette parole tantôt brutale comme un chiffre, tantôt délicate et parfumée comme une fleur ou un sachet". The word is brutal because of its solidity, its incontestable reality, its insistence (as a number or figure) that it is itself. Simultaneously, it is also infinitely suggestive and ephemeral as a perfume in the way it is apprehended.

The characters of Samuel Cramer and La Fanfarlo are two kinds of shifting and paradoxical poetic objects which must be read, pondered, engaged with in time. The contradictions of Samuel's "esprit chez qui le paradoxe prenait souvent les proportions de la naïveté, et dont l'imagination était aussi vaste que la solitude et la paresse absolues" demand that he has to be read continuously, as a poem, rather than as a stable container of meaning to be deciphered. Likewise, from the point of view of one reader, La Fanfarlo is "brutale, commune, dénuée de goût, de vouloir importer sur le théâtre des habitudes d'outre-Rhin et d'outre Pyrénées"; another sees her as "décente, féerique, folle, enjouée". She has the power to change herself into the form "de Colombine, de Marguerite, Elvire et de Zéphirine" through her dance. Baudelaire will indeed use La Fanfarlo's cycling of identities, of states through dance as a figure for the functioning of poetry.

One key moment is this passage from the novella, which presents a complicated and multifaceted accounting of the relationship between dance and poetry. The dancer's body is not here elided or suppressed, but rather key to this conception in its corporeality and materiality.

Chez nous, l'on méprise trop l'art de la danse, cela soit dit en passant. Tous les grands peuples, d'abord ceux du monde antique, ceux de l'Inde et de l'Arabie, l'ont cultivée à l'égal de la poésie. [...] La danse peut révéler tout ce que la musique recèle de mystérieux, et elle a de plus le mérite d'être humaine et palpable. La danse, c'est la poésie avec des bras et des jambes, c'est la matière, gracieuse et terrible, animée, embellie par le mouvement.

Baudelaire's description of La Fanfarlo literalizes this poetic process, embodying it through her dance: "Une impatience mutine et charmante, comme d'un enfant gâté qui trouve que cela ne va pas assez vite, remuait toute la créature et ses vêtements, et découvrait à chaque instant de nouveaux points de vue, de nouveaux effets de lignes et de couleur." The curve is a figure for the transformation of a word — twisting, deforming, shifting, as if in movement. These transformations likewise happen in time — as each aspect is revealed successively, one after the next, in a process. Simultaneously, this process also unfolds in space. The word acquires space in the way Baudelaire stresses the in-between the words as the place where the hermeneutic process occurs. Like La Fanfarlo's body, the word stages its own material, dimensional, visual effects as a result of the way it is "choreographed" into a poem.

As a result, the materiality and movement of the words, like that of the female dancer's body, actually become a source of productive resistance. The formulation of poetry as "la matière, gracieuse et terrible, animée, embellie par le mouvement" or "l'hypothèse d'un être vaste, immense, compliqué, mais eurythmique" encourages the reader look behind the literal sign to observe the dynamic forces and processes that underlie it, that operate between the words. The corporeality does not fall away, so much as resist complete comprehension or containment. And indeed it is this very impenetrability, resistance, hesitation that is necessary to this new view of poem as process, as the constant shift of dance, rather than as the static image exemplified in the

“rêve de pierre” of “La Beauté”. The materiality of the female body mirrors the way in which the word’s materiality resists easy comprehension. The hermeneutics envisioned by La Fanfarlo contains this same ambivalence — holding the promise of movement and meaning and embodiment, and yet also holding in tension a kind of resistance which one might consider a precursor to Mallarmé’s famed difficulty. This difficulty functioned not as obstacle to understanding, but as the very focus of the poems themselves, in which there is no clear and stable subject to uncover or decode but continual engagement as a dynamic process.

This vision of language is startling in its anticipation of Mallarmé. Realist and Romantic literary projects often conceived of prose like a clear window pane, which would be invisible in its representation of a concrete thing. However, Mallarmé would reverse the metaphor: poetic language became a stained glass window, in which oblique and suggestive words bring attention onto their own aesthetic and semiotic effects rather than onto the thing described. The rejection of this idea of language as a transparent and readable vehicle for expressing a unified and stable meaning could be summed up in Stéphane Mallarmé’s exhortation to “peindre non la chose, mais l’effet qu’elle produit”, which depicts a language which is oblique, non-transparent, suggestive, and forever denying a closing of the interpretative process.⁶⁴

The two opposing visions of the female body proposed by Madame de Cosmelly and La Fanfarlo correspond to two opposing visions of language. Samuel’s communication with Madame de Cosmelly is a succession of misunderstandings, in which the two talk past each other in a “jet singulier de malentendus”. Communication is thwarted by the existence of an essential alterity which blocks, problematizes and complicates almost any attempt at making oneself understood through words. One might think of Proust’s metaphor of language as words which pass through a curtain of water and arrive late, deformed beyond recognition, and indecipherable.⁶⁵ This denial of the possibility of language offering clear and instant communication views speech rather as a distorting filter between the two interlocutor’s minds which seems to render hopeless the notion that two people could *ever* make themselves understood to each other. This entanglement of misapprehension is explicitly contrasted to a moment of communication between Samuel and La Fanfarlo.

L’impudence sublime de cette parole alla droit au cœur du pauvre Samuel; il avait bavardé comme une pie romantique pendant huit jours auprès de Madame de Cosmelly ; ici, il répondit tranquillement : Oui, Madame. Et les larmes lui vinrent aux yeux.

The ineffective words and words of Madame de Cosmelly’s idealism stand in contrast to the reimagined single word, which is deep in the multiplicity of its suggestions and significations, which retains a connection to the body, and which offers meaning through its very resistance to apprehension.

This interpretative difficulty is also associated with the corporeality of the dancing body. This is exemplified by the narrator’s description of La Fanfarlo’s leg, which may strike us as very strange in the context of late Romanticism.

Cette jambe était [...] l’objet d’un éternel désir. Longue, fine, forte, grasse et nerveuse à la fois, elle avait toute la correction du beau et tout l’attrait libertin du joli. Tranchée

⁶⁴ From “Lettre à Henri Cazalis” (292) in *Correspondance, 1854-1898*.

⁶⁵ “Mes paroles ne seraient parvenues à Gilberte que déviées, comme si elles avaient eu à traverser le rideau mouvant d’une cataracte avant d’arriver à mon amie, méconnaissables, rendant un son ridicule, n’ayant plus aucune espèce de sens. La vérité qu’on met dans les mots ne se fraye pas son chemin directement, n’est pas douée d’une évidence irrésistible. Il faut qu’assez de temps passe pour qu’une vérité de même ordre ait pu se former en eux” (485). From *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

perpendiculairement à l'endroit le plus large, cette jambe eût donné une espèce de triangle dont le sommet eût été situé sur le tibia, et dont la ligne arrondie du mollet eût fourni la base convexe. Une vraie jambe d'homme est trop dure, les jambes de femmes crayonnées par Devéria sont trop molles pour en donner une idée.

This description seems bizarre precisely because it does not fit any of the conventional narratives about female flesh. Indeed, it exemplifies the way in which the dancer challenges and provides a way out of the idealization/degradation dichotomy. This dancer is not the idealized, dematerialized dancer — such as the transcendent Romantic ballerina of Théophile Gautier, or Mallarmé's abstracted dancer who is not a woman (in Mallarmé's words "la danseuse [qui] n'est pas une femme qui danse") but rather pure metaphor. This explicit anatomical description is far from repressing or dematerializing the female body. The flesh of Baudelaire's dancer is not abstracted into the flawless, decorporealized ideal but is fully present and eminently, specifically visible in its crackling, dynamic energy.

Yet simultaneously, La Fanfarlo is not identified with the degraded, contaminated, natural body of the prostitute or corrupted modern woman, but is unconventionally, almost excessively robust. Baudelaire stresses not just the geometric lines of her form but her flesh and the hardness of the muscles that she uses to effect the poetry of her dance. This description is intriguingly different from so many other Romantic descriptions of a female body precisely because it avoids both a kind of idealizing, beautifying panegyric language and a condemnatory, sexualized, debasing language, both of which locate mastery and control in the poetic eye.

Dance provides the possibility of a third way into the materialization and dematerialization opposition: the possibility for bodily agency to intervene. This third way is intriguingly figured by La Fanfarlo. Baudelaire identifies her not as a man, and simultaneously as a male idea of a woman — he denies that someone like Devéria could translate, mediate or ideate her — but as someone who in being herself resists or defies this flat and empty sketch. Indeed Baudelaire nods to his own inability to "en donner une idée" of her. There are multiple moments of interpretative difficulty, or resistance to apprehension, figured by la Fanfarlo in these passages. "Jamais elle ne portait de ces insipides robes de gaze qui laissent tout voir et ne font rien deviner". Simultaneously, her movements are not restful but continually disruptive.

Irony is key to the way La Fanfarlo thwarts a reductive gaze. In my first chapter, I proposed a poetics of the oxymoron as a way of understanding how Gautier relates to modernity. Irony is a better figure for describing Baudelaire's relationship to the modern: the layers of meanings (literal, counterfactual, insincere, all present simultaneously) that must be confronted on their own terms and which lead to an interminable questioning rather than a collapsing to a single interpretation. Baudelaire's ironic mode ultimately sets the stage for Mallarmé's self-reflexive, extreme poetics. Both poets find the dancing body as a site of inspiration and a site of reflection for the evolution of poetic language. Samuel and La Fanfarlo are, like the poetic word, characterized always as hermaphrodite, doubled, contradictory, paradoxical, hypocritical. Dance has often been considered double in the way it seems to produce an image or indication of the unconscious or that which is not fully realized into conscious thought. Baudelaire defined art as "une magie suggestive contenant à la fois le sujet et l'objet, le monde extérieur à l'artiste et l'artiste lui-même". Dance deconstructs these same categories: the spectator and participant, in the way that the spectator is often physiologically affected by viewing a dance (heart rate, breath, rhythm) and must always participate in interpreting the meaning of the visual movement. Dance also suggests a problematic relationship between art and artwork, body and ideal, the natural and artificial in ways that will prove productive for Baudelaire's interrogation of poetic language.

The recentering that we have performed onto the mirrored tensions between La Fanfarlo and Samuel engages with the questions and contradictions at the heart of *La Fanfarlo*. To shift focus onto La Fanfarlo herself and the semiotics of movement she presents is indeed to challenge a plethora of standard narratives around the relationship between gender, corporeality and modernity in Baudelaire's works.

In order to observe the implications of *La Fanfarlo*'s reimagining of the poetic word, it will now be productive to turn to *Le Thyrsus*. This poem gives an explicit account of how dance and the dancing body function as sites for Baudelaire to examine questions of modern time, experience and perception. Thereby, he conceptualizes a new poetics which accounts for the uncontainable, explosive force of motion. This new poetics does not seek to transcend language, to go "au delà de la parole", but considers how language itself could acquire aspects of the dancing body: time, transformation and movement.

La Fanfarlo's dance resembles a poetic process in the way that it "découvrait à chaque instant de nouveaux points de vue, de nouveaux effets de lignes et de couleur". In *Fusées*, Baudelaire borrowed from both a poetic and corporeal lexicon in his analysis of the curve as a figure for the transformation of a word — twisting, deforming, shifting, as if in movement. For the poet, the charm of watching a ship in movement rested:

à la multiplication successive et à la génération de toutes les courbes et figures imaginaires opérées dans l'espace par les éléments réels de l'objet. L'idée poétique, qui se dégage de cette opération du mouvement dans les lignes, est l'hypothèse d'un être vaste, immense, compliqué, mais eurythmique, d'un animal plein de génie⁶⁶

Here, the poem acquires multiple aspects of the dancing body. Baudelaire stresses the temporal aspect of the poem, as a *successive* multiplication, as the *operation* of movements — the poem unfolds in time as of a choreographed succession of meanings. Simultaneously, it also unfolds in space — an idea which suggests mobility and a radiation outward into infinite expansion, an endless possibility of directions.

Le Thyrsus articulates this new poetics based on a hermeneutics of movement. In the poem, the central image is that of a straight rod, the masculine element, around which "dances" the feminine element, "exécut[ant] un mystique fandango."⁶⁷ This is an expansion upon a formulation found in *La Fanfarlo*: the poet Samuel Cramer "aimait un corps humain comme une harmonie matérielle, comme une belle architecture, plus le mouvement ; [...] il y avait selon lui deux éléments : la ligne et l'attrait."

This image of the thyrsus, the ivy-wrapped staff of the intoxicated, ecstatic Dionysian dance morphs into a multiplicity of images: the invisible harmonies, "chants de délectation ou d'ineffable douleur" spiraling from Liszt's conducting baton; the gauzy ballerina with her partner, "exécutant autour du mâle ses prestigieuses pirouettes" ; the Rod of Asclepius evoked in the Hippocratic Oath, whose twisting serpent embracing a staff alludes to the contradictory, double-nature of medicine as cure and poison. The image of the dancing snake echoes throughout Baudelaire's poetry.⁶⁸ The symbolism of the serpent is closely tied to that of the line as "une abstraction incarnée" capable of "toutes les représentations, de toutes les métamorphoses. On ne voit de la ligne que sa partie proche, présente, manifeste. Mais on sait

⁶⁶ From *Oeuvres Posthumes* (96).

⁶⁷ Charles Baudelaire. "Le Thyrsus", in *Le Spleen de Paris: Petites Poèmes en Prose* (64).

⁶⁸ A few examples are the poems "Le serpent qui danse" and "Avec ses vêtements..." in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

qu'elle se poursuit, en deçà et au-delà, dans l'invisible infini".⁶⁹ Serpents are linked to transformation, paradox, duality. In these multiple, highly disparate images of the straight line and curved line entwining, the straight line is identified with the masculine, the teleological, the functional and material; one thinks of wizard's wands, the staff of Moses, the shepherd's rod: symbols of intent and transformation and authority. The female element, the curved line, is tied to the aesthetic, the sensual, the ineffable.

Baudelaire roots the doubleness of his definition of beauty in the human body: "La dualité de l'art est une conséquence fatale de la dualité de l'homme. Considérez, si cela vous plaît, la partie éternellement subsistante comme l'âme de l'art, et l'élément variable comme son corps."⁷⁰ Dance is eminently a double art, a combination of the eternal will: line, technique, choreography, and the relative: impulse, instinct, performance, the individual and contingent embodiment of the former. *Le Thyrses* is fascinated by the dynamic combination of these two opposing elements, which are joined specifically in the poem into a dance: "la ligne courbe et la spirale font cour à la ligne droite et dansent autour dans une muette adoration".

Despite the multitude of references to dance and the poem's absorption of a balletic lexicon linked to the Opéra de Paris: nymphs and fandangos, bare lines and arabesques, the lithe "sinuosité" and dynamic "énergie" of "penchées" and "renversées", critics have said little about this aspect of the poem. *Le Thyrses* is generally read as an abstract figure for Baudelaire's poetry. Kevin Newmark sees it as a representation of "artistic genius" and a means of thinking about the processes of Baudelaire's poetics, stressing that the thyrses is unimportant in and of itself: "On its own, the thyrses has no power; or better, on its own, the thyrses is not really a thyrses [...] It's just a stick, a plain old hop pole for making beer, a workaday vine stake for making wine" (12). Richard Klein likewise sees the Thyrses as an absence itself, functioning to interrogate the word "is": the "possibilities and ambiguities of that *is*, the articulation by which one term can seem to represent another [...] 'in the manner of a Sign, which she *is*.'" (84). While each provides a compelling reading of the symbol of the thyrses, dance at the center of the poem is curiously absent from nearly all of these analyses and not specifically accounted for.

Indeed, only Suzanne Braswell views dance as central to an understanding of the poem. In her analysis, Braswell proposes that "Baudelaire seeks to enact a union between mind and body in the poem and through poetic use of danced rhythms and movement" (23). This image of Baudelaire's dancer is an essentially positive figure for artistic inspiration which calls back to archetypal definitions of dance as a "langage au delà de la parole: car là où ne suffisent plus les mots surgit la danse... retrouver d'un bond l'unité première où corps et âmes, créateur et création, visible et invisible se retrouvent et se soudent, hors du temps, en une unique extase."⁷¹ It also recalls the Idealistic visions of dance, such as that of Corinne in *De Staël*, as a perfectly transparent and infinitely expressive embodied language.

I would like to read *Le Thyrses* not as a transcending, resolving or unifying figure, but one that creates its meaning through the intense potential energy of holding two opposing forces in tension. This is figured by the tension between the bone and flesh. Samuel's description of La Fanfarlo's leg emphasizes implicitly the body's bones – the strong form, shape, line under the control of the dancer. Between these bones is the flesh – which since the Old Testament has been associated with the ephemeral, transitory, that which is *opposed* to will or the spirit – in other words, resistance. Between the words of Baudelaire's poems are meanings which shift, dance,

⁶⁹ From Jean Chevalier & Alain Gheerbrandt's "Serpent" in the *Dictionnaire des symboles*.

⁷⁰ Cited in "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" (65).

⁷¹ Jean Chevalier & Alain Gheerbrandt propose this definition in "Danse", from *Dictionnaire des symboles*.

morph around the structure of the poem. We see this in *Le Thyrses*'s image of the thyrses itself, which embodies in turn a dozen distinct valences in the poem and which has been read by critics in a hundred more. Meanings become "sinueuses et fuyardes", in a state of constant transformation and shift, sparking off an endless succession of images.

Le Thyrses sets out such a vision of how a word functions. The poem begins by contrasting its two dimensions: the physical sense, and the poetic or moral sense. The physical form is "un bâton; un pur bâton, perche à houblon, tuteur de vigne, sec, dur et droit". It is the *lack* surrounding the word that defines it — it is dried-out and hollow, without any kind of marrow or essence inherent to it, the sketched lines of form only, "un pûr baton", the narrator qualifies, as if to preempt us from imagining that it might have any of its own qualities. Indeed, the bâton is compared to a "perche à houblon" or "tuteur de vigne" — serving as the bare architecture or support for the flowering hops or grape-heavy vines that wind about it, as the body does for the dance. Baudelaire evokes this figure again in *La Fanfarlo*, "La danse, c'est la poésie avec des bras et des jambes, c'est la matière, gracieuse et terrible, animée, embellie par le mouvement".

In the poetic dimension, the word achieves the status of "un emblème sacerdotal dans la main des prêtres ou des prêtresses célébrant la divinité dont ils sont les interprètes et serviteurs". The bâton becomes a wand, whose effect — charm, enchantment, transfiguration — sparks off a type of dynamic movement or transformation. The hermeneutic process is evoked here: the emblem is a constellation of meanings that must be thought or interpreted to exist. The narrator describes these as a dance: "Ne dirait-on pas que la ligne courbe et la spirale font leur cour à la ligne droite et dansent autour dans une muette adoration ? Ne dirait-on pas que toutes ces corolles délicates, tous ces calices, explosions de senteurs et de couleurs, exécutent un mystique fandango autour du bâton hiératique?". It is the effects of movement, the tension between the material form or body and the immaterial dance, between the choreography and the mysterious element of corporeal instinct that performs and exceeds it, that explodes language into a multitude of significations.

Le Thyrses is suffused with images of impenetrability and interpretative difficulty. The arabesque, which for Gautier was a symbol of depth and the need to *read*, generates a dense forest of "des tiges et des fleurs, celles-ci sinueuses et fuyardes, celles-là penchées comme des cloches ou des coupes renversées". The images of emptied-out bells, cups and chalices echo the essential modern loss of faith in the ability of words to signify. In *Le Thyrses*, the "sinuosité du verbe" expresses the way in which all intention must be expressed through indirectly signifying, slippery, changeable words. The poem calls attention to the *effects* of the words: the "gloire étonnante [qui] jaillit de cette complexité de lignes et de couleurs" or the "explosions de senteurs et de couleurs" that are set off by the bare words themselves, figured by the baton. Key to this semiotics is the way in which dance expresses and holds in tension all of these dualities: male and female, organic and ideal, movement and stasis. In parallel to *La Fanfarlo*, *le Thyrses* meditates on dance as a site for articulating the corporeality and the materiality of the body, as well as its ineffable performativity and agency. For Baudelaire as well as Gautier, these are qualities which underlie the depth, tension and irreducibility of the poets' modern conception of language.

In his fantastic tales, Gautier contrasted the un-poetic "danse macabre", in which these qualities of feminine agency and expressivity were absent, to "la vraie danse". Similarly, Baudelaire's poem *Danse Macabre*⁷² addresses *La Fanfarlo*'s and *Le Thyrses*'s questions of body

⁷² In *Les Fleurs du mal* (108).

and gender in the negotiation between idealism and modernism from the reverse side: that of absence, stillness and linguistic emptiness, in a kind of anti-Dance. *Danse Macabre* provides an extreme case of idealization as stasis, an illustration of the counterpoint to Baudelaire's dancing body in *Le Thyrses* or *La Fanfarlo* as dynamic and complex fusion of artistic intention and material expression. *Danse Macabre* indeed dares to divide and separate what *Le Thyrses* fuses — “Ligne droite et ligne arabesque, intention et expression, roideur de la volonté, sinuosité du verbe, unité du but, variété des moyens” — in order to critique this separation.

There are moments in Baudelaire's poetry in which the poet, like Gautier, seems to imagine Romantic ballet as a nostalgic evocation of the ideal which for him has been lost in modernity. Walter Benjamin cites lines of “l'Horloge” in his reflections on Baudelaire's modernity: “Le Plaisir vaporeux fuira vers l'horizon / Ainsi qu'une sylphide au fond de la coulisse.”⁷³ Art, transcendence, and imagination are figured by the ethereal ballerina stealing away as the curtain tumbles down. Baudelaire likewise makes a melancholy comparison between the ballerina's gauzy skirt and flashes of lost transcendence in “Crépuscule du soir”: “On dirait encore une de ces robes étranges de danseuses, où une gaze transparente et sombre laisse entrevoir les splendeurs amorties d'une jupe éclatante, comme sous le noir présent transperce le délicieux passé.”⁷⁴ The idealized past becomes remote, accessible only as half-seen incomplete fragments, as if overlaid and obscured by the oppressive dark smoke of the banal quotidian — tantalizing glimpses of a dancer's dazzling skirt hidden by a vaporous veil of diaphanous gauze.

However, if at times Baudelaire figures a Gautier-like longing for the lost and inaccessible ideal in the Romantic ballerina, this vision always ultimately proves to be unsatisfying. Baudelaire's dancer evokes enchanting visions of idealism only to ironically undermine them. “Le Vieux Saltimbanque” is a case in point: the poem conjures a quasi-fantastical vision of sparkling lights and shimmering veils, booming brass and crackling fireworks. On the occasion of a carnivalesque holiday, dancers perform before a street crowd in a scene in which “tout n'était que lumière, poussière, cris, joie, tumulte.”⁷⁵ By means of visual illusions and the transport of performance art, the world-weary, banal real is suspended.

En ces jours-là il me semble que le peuple oublie tout, la douleur et le travail ; il devient pareil aux enfants. Pour les petits c'est un jour de congé, c'est l'horreur de l'école renvoyée à vingt-quatre heures. Pour les grands c'est un armistice conclu avec les puissances malfaisantes de la vie, un répit dans la contention et la lutte universelles.⁷⁶

The visual illusions and aesthetic escape of the carnival is concentrated in the image of the dancers, adorned in the language of Romantic ballet and seemingly straight from the stage of the Opéra de Paris. “Les danseuses, belles comme des fées ou des princesses, sautaient et cabriolaient sous le feu des lanternes qui remplissaient leurs jupes d'étincelles.” Beautified by flickering lights and the visual manipulation of their costumes (Baudelaire famously wrote that dancers' tights “rapproche immédiatement l'être humain de la statue, c'est-à-dire d'un être divin et supérieur”)⁷⁷, the dancers incarnate an alluring vision allowing for forgetting or suspension of

⁷³ From “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (192).

⁷⁴ In *Les Fleurs du mal* (105).

⁷⁵ Hiddleston reads this as a vision of the real world: “In this ‘real’ world, the mind is bombarded with many new and unusual happenings and sensations of all kinds, so that it takes on the terrifying unreality of a nightmare in which reason has lost its grip and is numbed and bewildered by the assault upon the senses” (89).

⁷⁶ In *Le Spleen de Paris: Petites Poèmes en Prose* (24).

⁷⁷ Cited in “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” (113).

“douleur”, pure ocular aesthetic rather than utilitarian “travail”, theatricality rather than the quotidian banal.

At the same time that this idealistic⁷⁸ vision is posed as intoxicatingly lovely, it is simultaneously a view of idealism with streaks of debasement and disenchantment, an idealism which can no longer be taken ingenuously on its own terms. In the narrator’s recounting that “en ces jours-là il me semble que le peuple [...] devient pareil aux enfants”. He mimics this childlike, naive language with a kind of ironic ventriloquization, explaining what this experience is “pour les petits” and “pour les grands”. Rather than a soaring, optimistic vision of art perfecting humanity, there is a lexicon of coarse degradation and grotesque regression: “elles piaillaient, beglaient, hurlaient”, performers are compared to “ourang-outangs”, an excess of “la joie, le gain” is inseparable from “la débauche”.

Partout la joie, le gain, la débauche ; partout la certitude du pain pour les lendemains ; partout l’explosion frénétique de la vitalité. Ici la misère absolue, la misère affublée ; pour comble d’horreur, de haillons comiques, où la nécessité, bien plus que l’art, avait introduit le contraste. Il ne riait pas, le misérable ! Il ne pleurait pas, il ne dansait pas, il ne gesticulait pas, il ne criait pas [...]. Il était muet et immobile. [...] Mais quel regard profond, inoubliable, il promenait sur la foule et les lumières, dont le flot mouvant s’arrêtait à quelques pas de sa répulsive misère !

The dissolution of the ballet’s gauzy and glittering fairy-tale vision in favor of a stripped-down, cynical gaze on the silence of a decrepit old man figures not only the modern era’s loss of transcendence but a denial of the possibility of idealism. The confident insouciance of the carnival, the endless possibility and optimism, fades to a frozen vision of grey silence and the debris of another era. Amidst this scene, the narrator enumerates the ways in which the Romantic poet’s insight and understanding can no longer be expressed or represented by normal means of movement, gesture or word.

The stasis of this vision will be examined as well in *Danse Macabre*, which likewise features a series of images which evoke various ironic articulations of the ideal. The poem opens on the image of the skeleton of a beautiful dancer, an image which appears to be praised by the narrator. Like the dancer on the stage, the skeleton is unattainably remote, a “coquette”, who seduces and excites while remaining cold and unaffected herself. The skeleton of a dancer gives the image of the idealized lines stripped of their flesh, their corporeality in a vision which is simultaneously alluring and grotesque because of its exaggerated extremity. The poem evokes aspects the Romantic dancer pushed to their limits. “Vit-on jamais au bal une taille plus mince ?” asks the narrator ironically. The skeleton’s “robe exagérée, en sa royale ampleur” and pointed “pied sec qui pince [...] joli comme une fleur” are lauded by the narrator as extremizations of balletic aspects. The flowers that “oscille mollement sur ses frêles vertèbres” evoke the pale fragility of Giselle, the white blossoms in her hair, dancing “au chant des violons, aux flammes des bougies” as she would on the flickering stage of the Opéra de Paris.

The skeleton is most exaggerated, however, because it figures idealization to the exclusion of all material, motion or flesh; expression, agency and intention are entirely absent. Baudelaire wrote in his “Salon de 1859”: “Le sculpteur comprit bien vite tout ce qu’il y a de la

⁷⁸ This passage articulates various tenets of idealism, incarnated in the carnival: art or literature as escape from or solace for the griefs and travails of life, “pour compenser les mauvais temps de l’année”; the willingness to surrender to imagination and suspend one’s disbelief or skepticism to this end; the optimistic, even utopian belief in art’s capacity to recover or achieve truth, beauty and freedom in an imperfect world suffused with malevolent, corrupting forces, to counter the alienation inherent to this vision.

beauté mystérieuse et abstraite dans cette maigre carcasse, à qui la chair sert d'habit, et qui est comme *le plan du poème humain*. Et cette grâce caressante, mordante, presque scientifique, se dressa à son tour, *claire et purifiée* des souillures de l'humus, parmi les grâces innombrables que l'Art avait déjà *extraites* de l'ignorante nature." [emphasis added] (359). *Danse macabre* contains multiple symbols of refining, purifying, concentrating into the bare form or essence through the "éternel alambic", an alchemical still which refines through distillation, as well as the "parfum", "myrrhe" and "musc" that cling to the skeleton.

With the skeleton, Baudelaire gives a vision of ideal without material or stasis without movement, as the immobile rigidity he critiques in "La Beauté". While *La Fanfarlo* represents the poetic process in the way her dance is *in-between*: the meaning found in the movement, the shifting, sparked off by the steps, or the lines of her body in the same way that words in a poem spark off dynamic effects and the process of interpretation — the skeleton is entirely still: bones without movement, a structure without flesh — or in "Le Thyrses"'s terms, the straight line with no curved line to "dance around it", will without imagination, intention without expression.

The poem is, indeed, filled with images of hermeneutic void, particularly linked to the form of the dancer — who has traditionally been linked with the idealistic, transcendent understanding and expression seen in the extract from *Corinne* — the dancer is traditionally the one most in touch with her body and senses, most able to bring together the ideal and material and express it transparently. However, in "Danse macabre", the skeleton is "faits de vide et de ténèbres", impenetrable and dark. Her body is expressed as impossible images: from the "gouffre de [ses] yeux" which are paradoxically "plein" to the "vivante carcasse" of her body. Her sense organs in particular are interfered with: besides possessing an eye that "exhale le vertige" she is described as a "bayadère sans nez" — without the organ of sense, discernment, instinct or intuition.

The bones are the essential element of the body, with all that is contingent and impermanent stripped away, that which constitutes its barest structure, the support for all that can be seen or perceived. Here is an analogue of what modernism does to language: a demonstration of the extent to which words are containers for meanings which are unstable and shifting, perishable and evanescent. It is tied to the death of idealism in the ability of language to attain and express truth and beauty — in the *danse macabre* these last two concepts become confused and doubled in a slippery manner that renders them indistinguishable from illusion and the grotesque. These rhetorical moves are undeniably modern: skepticism, particularly directed towards the capacity of language to communicate and represent; they are self-reflexive and turn in on themselves to their own form. Explicitly, the narrator is constantly evoking wrongness and misapprehension, envisioning the way in which the skeleton will be, besides called a misunderstood caricature, subjected to "lazzi ridicules" and chased by a "cauchemar moqueur". His lamentation that no one will understand the skeleton's "coquetterie" or "raillerie" could be read as self-reflexive commentary on the ironic strategies at play in *Les Fleurs du mal* and in *Danse macabre* in particular. "Les charmes de l'horreur" (the portrayal of evil as attractive and beautiful) are put forth are deeply anti-idealistic positions, reflecting on themselves and their own interpretative blockages.

If the first half of the poem provides a vision of what the ideal is like stripped of the material, the second half reverses this vision. The singular ideal figured by the still skeleton changes to a more traditional vision of the "danse macabre" in which writhing masses of human flesh are prompted endlessly, aimlessly into pure movement without purpose. This second half is filled with significative overexcess, evoking constantly shifting, doubled language both explicitly

and implicitly in a nightmarish way — as the cauchemar is the bad double of life that nonetheless is revelatory of this life. The choreographed lines of the ballet, the harmonic waltz of the ball break down into pure movement and metamorphosis, ending in the “contorsions” of the “troupeau mortel [qui] saute et se pâme, sans voir”. The entirety of the human race engages in a dance mixing “irony” and “insanity” which signifies nothing itself, except the limits of expression and understanding. In the background of this dance, the image of an angel’s trumpet singing to the celestial skies is inverted into the barrel of a black gun — this shift is so jarring and unexpected that it calls attention to the way in which its own semiotic process is being interfered with, subverted. The sky is pulled to the ground, the possibility of vision or understanding is denied, producing a void of meaning, standing in for the limits of reason, the failure of language, the hesitation when faced by an indecipherable image.

The account Baudelaire gives in *Danse macabre* of pure idealism is also one of gender: without movement, the material and indeed the feminine, the frozen stasis of the male bones is ultimately a void. *Danse Macabre* presents one possible vision of language in the modern era, the absence and negativity that are introduced into it as it becomes paradoxically labyrinthine and empty. To return to the question of what the skeleton hides — we can take the narrator at his word when he tells us that the answer is literally nothing. That she is “un néant follement attifé”, that her eyes are empty, the abyss. The skeleton as signifier is the realization that there is in fact nothing underneath that can be grasped, defined or rendered tangible. The skeleton is death because it doesn’t move — death is what happens when there is “nothing between” the bones. The elegance of the skeleton is quite literally “sans nom”.

Danse Macabre and *La Fanfarlo* critique modern space, and give illustrations of the way in which Baudelaire’s thinking on dance shifted from the fairy-lit stage of the Paris Opera to modern urban spaces. Samuel contrasts La Fanfarlo to the serene and dignified ballerina: “On lui opposait, avec cette tactique particulière aux journalistes, qui consiste à comparer des choses dissemblables, une danseuse éthérée, toujours habillée de blanc, et dont les chastes mouvements laissaient toutes les consciences en repos”. Rather, she is identified with the saltimbanque figure that appears in other of Baudelaire’s poems, with carnivalesque, illusory, intoxicating, aestheticized fantasy spaces which are nonetheless disruptive urban spaces: precisely because they are places where the ideal and material, stasis and movement, male and female come into contact in a new way. Baudelaire’s *A une passante* gives this account.

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair... puis la nuit! — Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici! trop tard! jamais peut-être!
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!⁷⁹

This figure encountered by Baudelaire’s narrator is quite dancerly, with her statue-like legs and delicate hands, the light airiness of her skirt, the grace of her physical moments. Likewise, she is also a figure of agency — exceeding the narrator’s attempts to grasp her in a

⁷⁹ In *Les Fleurs du mal* (103).

physical and semiotic sense, the one who possesses knowledge. It is this resistance, the knowledge that she acts outside of the narrator's capacity to see, influence or seize that fascinates him.

Another illustration of these dualities between straight line and curved line, stasis and movement can be found in *La Femme Sauvage et la petite maîtresse*. These lines are entirely unbalanced, once again in a performance space which is urban and degraded, cynical, as a perverse fairground populated by the spectating masses. The male voice of the piece is repeatedly associated with a kind of extreme straight line — figured by the punishing stick, the cold iron bars imprisoning the woman, the rigid edges of the cage — rigorous, rational, teleological will and authority pushed to their negative extremes. The woman, on the other hand, embodies aspects of the overdetermined curve.

Considérons bien, je vous prie, cette solide cage de fer derrière laquelle s'agite, hurlant comme un damné, secouant les barreaux comme un orang-outang exaspéré par l'exil, imitant, dans la perfection, tantôt les bonds circulaires du tigre, tantôt les dandinements stupides de l'ours blanc, ce monstre poilu dont la forme imite assez vaguement la vôtre.⁸⁰ She is associated with irrational, purposeless movement, the uncontrolled "savage", the circular, the excessive. There are multiple images of the conflict between these opposing fields — the wild woman's attempt to shake the bar of the cage, the man hitting her with his stick in an attempt to "calm" her, to cease her movement. The two appear to be painted in equally negative colors — the man in his cruel and unfeeling rigidity, the woman in her excessive, animalistic fury.

The poem presents a third figure — that of a pampered mistress, whom the narrator addresses as radically different from the wild woman: "Vous qui ne reposez que sur des étoffes aussi douces que votre peau, qui ne mangez que de la viande cuite, et pour qui un domestique habile prend soin de découper les morceaux ?" However, this comparison which seems to render them so different stresses the way in which both women, one an avatar of the material, the other for ideal — lack control over their bodies — from the food that they consume, to the spaces in which they are displayed, to the violence threatened against them. In the mistress's case, the narrator threatens to throw her out of the window "comme une bouteille vide", a figure for an empty signifier.

In this aspect she is the opposite of the dancer, whose supreme control of her own body allow her to express "everything" — it seems to be the fact that the mistress's body and voice (absent here from the poem) are highly regulated and controlled from the outside which results in her incapacity to signify. The irony of the poem that undermines the cruelty of the male narrative voice thus hints at a surprising sympathy for the female characters of the poem in its rejection of the ideal/material dichotomy.

Similarly, Baudelaire invents forms of male bodies as foils to dance in *Les Sept Vieillards*. The poem likewise uses urban space to stage a conflict between the material and ideal, the straight line and curved line, articulated through the site of dance. The gray tedium and uniformity of the crowd and the industrialized city acquire horrifying and hallucinatory dimensions as identical old men in the "fourmillante cité" follow the narrator, demonic gleams in their eye.⁸¹ While the poem initially seems to imbue the masses of male bodies with the mechanical and linear aspects of the modern city, their eyes gleaming with "méchanceté" (no doubt a play on *mécanicité*) and their spines bending at an alarming "parfait angle droit", it

⁸⁰ In *Le Spleen de Paris: Petites Poèmes en Prose* (18).

⁸¹ In *Les Fleurs du mal* (97).

ultimately stages the failure of this vision. The linear mechanized cold steel of reason associated with a view of modernity as primarily masculine (embodied by the stiff old men) gives way to a vision of modernity which has prominent and unmistakably *feminine* qualities (embodied by an uncontrollable dance).

The narrator questions the reality of this event as reason fails to account for the inexplicable occurrences, turning toward art. The final stanza announcers:

Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre;
La tempête en jouant déroutait ses efforts,
Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre
Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords!

The narrator's attempt to turn to the straight lines ("barre") of reason is ultimately futile, unable to account for the experience of modernity. Many scholars have commented on the way in which the loose sonnet-like structure falls away at the end. In "Daylight Specter: Baudelaire's 'The Seven Old Men'" Ross Chambers writes that the poem closes "on a note of total disarray, adjectives and adjectival phrases pile up as the narrative depicts the new and totally disturbed state to which the protagonist has arrived", a state which is identified with modern art (45). However, scholars have not focused on the central image of *dance* as the explicitly named part of modern art that here represents an explosion of the attempt to order or idealize.

In *Les Sept Vieillards*, the dance of the narrator's soul emblemizes and embodies this explosion, as a figure for the modern multiplicative rush of signification. At the same time, it opposes the multiplicative logic of the *vieillards* as a unique, temporal event or performance in the same way that dandies strove to be singular beings. Art and imagination serve as a counterpoint to the sterility and metallic menace of modernity: in reimagining the city as "pleine de rêves / Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant / Les mystères partout coulent...", the poem attempts to re-enchant the space, reinvesting it with beauty and mystique. This critique of the linear rationality and turn towards the curves and spirals of dance echoes the way in which Baudelaire frames *Le Spleen de Paris* as an attempt to reach the dream of "une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience". Dance the explosion of meaning into multiplicity, overabundance, doubleness, uncontainability. The rethinking of language in terms of dance in *Le Thyrses* and *La Fanfarlo* provides a means of critiquing the perverse and misaligning effects of the body's relation to modern space and movement and reimagining this relation.

I would like to close this chapter by saying a brief word on how all of these ideas might affect our readings of Baudelaire more broadly, in even poems that do not explicitly evoke dance. Indeed, the principle of seeing a woman as resistance is demonstrated by Baudelaire's "Avec ses vêtements", which uses a variation of the image of the Thyrses.

Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés,
Même quand elle marche on croirait qu'elle danse,
Comme ces longs serpents que les jongleurs sacrés
Au bout de leurs bâtons agitent en cadence.

Comme le sable morne et l'azur des déserts,
Insensibles tous deux à l'humaine souffrance

Comme les longs réseaux de la houle des mers
Elle se développe avec indifférence.
Ses yeux polis sont faits de minéraux charmants,
Et dans cette nature étrange et symbolique
Où l'ange inviolé se mêle au sphinx antique,

Où tout n'est qu'or, acier, lumière et diamants,
Resplendit à jamais, comme un astre inutile,
La froide majesté de la femme stérile.⁸²

Here there are two main images of interpretative difficulty: the desert and the body of the woman. In the latter, the exhaustively large number of grains of sand, with their plasticity, their shifting flow, their capacity to form any shape, create the space of the desert, which serves as an indifferent, sterile screen — the desert has long served as a hermeneutic space in the Western tradition with the search for an abstract realm beyond the visible, material and concrete; with purifying fire and divine revelation. The interesting part of the poem, however, is the way in which it imputes these qualities to the body of the dancing woman.

In a piece in the collection “Les Paradis artificiels” likely dedicated to Jeanne Duval, his muse and a dancer, Baudelaire wrote that “la femme est fatalement suggestive, elle vit dans une autre vie que la sienne propre, elle vit spirituellement dans les imaginations qu’elle hante et qu’elle féconde” (164). The formulation here of “Même quand elle marche on croirait qu’elle danse”, encourages to look behind the literal sign to observe the dynamic forces and processes that underlie it. In this poem, Baudelaire compares the dancer to an “ange inviolé”, the intermediary or interpreter of invisible forces, and “sphinx antique”, emblem of an enigmatic and ineluctable meaning with a “nature étrange et symbolique”.

If this body is that of a “femme stérile”, it is not so much that her corporeality falls away, allowing her to become pure poetic abstraction, so much as she resists to complete comprehension or containment. The Sphinx is a guardian of secrets, keeper of an ultimate meaning out of reach of or beyond the understanding of humans. Indeed, it is this very impenetrability, resistance, hesitation that is necessary to this new view of poem as process, as the constant shift of dance, rather than as the static image. It also gives an example of the way in which these examinations of Baudelaire’s writings on dance expose critical aspects of the importance of femininity, materiality and performance in Baudelaire’s theorization of language.

In this account of the fusion of matter and form through the figure of the dancer, Baudelaire brings out the dancer’s corporeality, self-performance. The ways in which she resists control and containment are not suppressed but underlie this dense, complex, and perturbing theorization of language set forth by *La Fanfarlo* and “Le Thyrsé”. This theorization will prefigure the extreme density of Mallarmé’s poetics, also highly influenced by dance in his critical essays on language. In emphasizing the agency and self-performance of the female dancer, these qualities also ultimately provide possibilities for rethinking the standard critical dichotomies of the ideal and material, of aestheticization and degradation in Baudelaire’s conceptualization of femininity and its relationship to modernity. We will now see how dance and dancing bodies allow us to reconfigure narrative polarities surrounding Mallarmé’s relationship to femininity and corporeality as well.

⁸² In *Les Fleurs du mal* (88).

CHAPTER THREE: The Emergence of the Body in Mallarmé's Poetics

As attention to dance in Baudelaire's works allows us to perceive a way out of the idealization/materialization dichotomy and restore expressive agencies to the female figure, centering dance in an analysis of Mallarmé's relationship to the body allows us to reconsider similar critical divides with respect to the place of feminine corporeality in his oeuvre. Much has been written about Mallarmé's relationship to the body, in analyses of his writings on dance, but also with respect to photography, cinema, fashion and medicine. The two loose narratives which appear to structure most of these analyses are opposing, though both are characterized by a near-exclusive preoccupation with the female figure. The first narrative, which characterizes much of the canonical critique of Mallarmé's oeuvre, claims that Mallarmé's female body is primarily a poetic body, and that Mallarmé is primarily interested in dance as a pure metaphor for poetry. According to what I will term the "Hérodiade" narrative, after Mallarmé's haughty and remote "ombre d'une princesse", Mallarmé's poetics deny the materiality of the women featured in his poetry. This denial is not precisely the pure idealization or aestheticization of Gautier or Baudelaire, veiling and smoothing spotty flesh into the pure white marble of a statue, but rather an abstraction, a negation, a denial of its presence. The body is not present at all, according to this dematerializing narrative, but as pretext only, as purely metaphorical figure for art.⁸³

In the critical essays of *Divagations*, Mallarmé wrote of the dancer as a metaphor: "À savoir que la danseuse n'est pas une femme qui danse, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu'elle n'est pas une femme, mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme, glaive, coupe, fleur, etc" (173). This narrative discusses Mallarmé's poetry in terms of "discretion", "refinement", "veiling" of the body. More recent critique has also pointed out the problematic nature of this narrative; from this point of view, the poet is interested in his own depersonalizing and dehumanizing gaze upon the dancer to the exclusion of her own subjectivity or presence⁸⁴.

⁸³ Daniel Sipe gives an overview of a number of Mallarmé scholars associated with the first narrative. "Bien des critiques, pourtant, dont Eile Noulet, Jean-Pierre Richard et Charles Chassé, se sont contentés de classer de telles images sous le rubrique de l'érotisme raffiné. On aime noter, par exemple, la grande 'discretion' du poète" (369). He gives the example of Mallarmé scholar and editor Bertrand Marchal, who proposes a Mallarméen "érotisme discrète", writing that "il est normal de voir Mallarmé utiliser en dernier ressort l'instrument qui nous donne les choses mais en nous les élevant, nous les communique, mais sous la forme creuse d'abstractions et de signes, le langage" (380). Refinement, abstraction, ornamentation and veiling have been linked to Mallarmé's fashion writings and various discourses on "nothingness", in which body is present as if an outline only, or a space around which signifying fabrics flutter and shimmer, a space which is approached or described, if it is at all, only indirectly.

⁸⁴ This notion of the disappearing body appears as well in critical studies of Mallarmé's dance writings. In her discussion of Mallarmé as a theorist of dance, Mary Lewis Shaw writes that Mallarmé "considers dance very broadly and primarily in terms of its relationship to poetry", rather than the characters, settings, physical movements themselves, that he "dismisses the plots of both *Viviane* and *Les Deux Pigeons* as pretexts albeit charming for the signifying process of dance itself". There is a Mallarmean disinterest in the literal, the material, the phenomenological in favor of analogy, figure, the ineffable and self-reflexive hermeneutic. Evelyn Gould hints that Mallarmé's lack of specific technical knowledge — a critique that was levelled at Gautier in his capacity as dance critic more than once as well — prompt him to "denigrate the cardboard settings and logical frameworks within which the more difficult to describe physical enervations of ballet spectatorship occur". Canonical Mallarmé criticism has often praised Mallarmé for the imagination of his poetic theorizing loosely inspired by dance, while rejecting the idea that he was interested in the mental activity or subjective experience of the dancer herself to any real degree — analogizing her to pure poetic instrument, her dance to literary metaphor.

More recently, a node of studies has coalesced around a second narrative, opposed to the first. Many recent critiques have seen Mallarmé's writings on the body as highly gendered and deeply problematic, but stake out an almost diametrically opposed position on the reason why: seeing an occasionally subtle, but persistent, erotic objectification of the female body in Mallarmé's verse.⁸⁵ I will call this framing the "Phénomène Futur" narrative, after the golden beauty who stands like Venus with the "sel de la mer première" still clinging to her naked legs. According to this narrative, which characterizes much of the recent literature,⁸⁶ Mallarmé is intensely interested in the female body in a way that threatens to slip into the unhealthy, the misogynistic, prurient (or even pornographic), rooted in the way dance is intensely gendered for him. It sees in Mallarmé much of the anti-femininity and ambivalence that has often characterized scholarly estimations of Baudelaire's writings, as well as a salacious over-interest in the very materiality of woman. While this misogyny is not as overt or explicit as that of Baudelaire's, according to this narrative, nevertheless it is inherent to and undeniably underlies Mallarmé's poetics.

I would like to propose a reconsideration of this dichotomy between genders in Mallarmé's oeuvre, and a third way of considering this opposition: through an examination of the dancer as a site of potentiality for speech, as well as poetic and artistic expression and experimentation. In order to rethink narratives of Mallarmé's relationship to the body, I turn not to his verse, nor to his celebrated dance essays which bring into contact elements of dance with poetic verse, but primarily to the prose poems.

Thomas C. Connolly points out that the prose poems have been understudied and undervalued in Mallarmé scholarship, arguing that each non-verse entry in his collection has been "eclipsed like all of his prose poems by his verse" (234). I propose that one reason for this lack is that the prose poems feature a far greater array of literal beings, male and female interacting in modern, quotidian physical spaces. Accounts about Mallarmé's relationship to the male body are largely absent — I wish to not take for granted that Mallarmé's dancer is female, as many critics do, but to look at how the dancing body is gendered in the prose poems in both male and female ways, and to pose the question of how we might rethink the dichotomy. Mallarmé did not always elide or eroticize the body; rather, dance's physical, natural, instinctive and corporeal qualities were highly relevant to his poetics and ultimately a means (as it was for Gautier and Baudelaire) of putting into contact literature and the world.

In the first part of this chapter, I will examine "Hérodiade" and "Le Phénomène Futur" together. I will propose that the failure of the poem "Hérodiade" is linked to its repression of the physical, which the poem stages and problematizes, and that "Le Phénomène Futur", as the first of Mallarmé's prose poems, illustrates the way in which the prose poems are interested in working through this lack. The second part of this chapter will examine various dance figures which appear in the prose poems: the acrobats, clowns and bears of "Un Spectacle Interrompu"

⁸⁵ For example, Daniel Sipe sees "un érotisme coercive" in Mallarmé. Charles Minahen critiques Mallarmé's poetic gaze as directed on "female objects", implying a view of "woman not just as an other but as an object, as a dehumanized thing" (48).

⁸⁶ Several of these critiques point to a perhaps apocryphal anecdote recounted by Jerome Tharaud, in which Mallarmé purportedly told an acquaintance reading his poetry, "Cherchez [...], à la fin vous trouverez une pornographie." One extreme account of this narrative is given by Daniel Sipe, who identifies a current of "contenu obscène" giving rise to a violent "attentat contre la figure problématique de la femme" (369). According to Sipe, "Mallarmé comprend le corps féminin comme un point nodal — un 'hymen féminin' où se rencontrent poésie et société, subjectivité et altérité, action et esthétique" (368-369). From this perspective, then, Mallarmé's poetics are deeply rooted in and follow from an aggressively fearful heteronormativity.

and “Réminiscence”. By including these figures, I propose to complicate and rethink the way in which critical oppositions have been drawn between male and female, language and body, instinct and expression. I read these poems as considerations of the dancing body’s expressive potential, rather than as attempts to poeticize or erase it, on the one hand, or dissect and master it on the other. Finally, I will conclude with a reading of “Conflit”, the conclusion to Mallarmé’s prose poems, to consider the social and poetic implication of this reframing to Mallarmé’s oeuvre as a whole.

Part I: The Rejection of the Corporeal in “Hérodiade” to its Embrace in “Le Phénomène Futur”

In a note to his always incomplete, forever rewritten chef-d’oeuvre “Hérodiade”, a poetic retelling of the Salomé story, Mallarmé announced his intention to write a “légende dépouillée de danse et même de la grossièreté — de la tête sur le plat”. “Hérodiade” constituted an extreme refining, a paring away of the corporeal and material, attempting to create a new form of poetry which would “peindre, non la chose, mais l’effet qu’elle produit.”⁸⁷

In “Hérodiade”, Mallarmé would ultimately turn to a more rigorous and intellectual type of music — one that was not created through the sounds and rhythms of the words themselves but through the effects they produced: their significations would resonate with each other like notes of a chord in a non-material, extremely difficult, and purely mental form of music. Mallarmé wrote in a letter to Edmund Gosse, “Je fais de la Musique, et appelle ainsi non celle qu’on peut tirer du rapprochement euphonique des mots [...]. Vraiment *entre les lignes et au-dessus du regard* cela se passe, en toute pureté, sans l’entremise de cordes à boyaux et de pistons comme à l’orchestre, qui est déjà industriel ; mais c’est la même chose que l’orchestre, sauf que littérairement ou *silencieusement*” (2606). “Meaning” or “signification” with respect to Mallarmé’s poetry may be taken to be not a referent or single stable interpretation of a word or phrase, but rather the always multiple, interconnecting, multivalent resonances, suggestions and evocations sparked off by the words.

In “Hérodiade”, as in all of Mallarmé’s poetry, the blank spots on the page between words can be seen as the present space in which meaning in all its multiplicity is created.⁸⁸ Hérodiade in front of a mirror addresses the “pierres où mes yeux comme des purs bijoux / empruntent leur clarté mélodieuse” and her own “clair regard de diamant”. In *Divagations*’s “Crise de vers”, Mallarmé gives an analogy of poetic meaning as light bouncing between jewels: “L’œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s’allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l’ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase” (246). Mallarmé accords a privileged place not to the words themselves, but to what happens in the space between them: the light that reflects back and forth as a metaphor for the interpretative process in poetry. This process, which happens “entre les feuillets et le regard” — is purely mental, not consisting of the visible inscription on the page or of the audible sounds of music notes but of the dynamic, ephemeral

⁸⁷ From “A Henri Cazalis” in *Correspondance 1854-1989* (292).

⁸⁸ Whiteness and silence are particularly important to Mallarmé’s poetics. Literally the absence of sound, or the absence of words on a white page, the blanks can conversely also be present. The word *blanc* has an abundance of signification in “Hérodiade”, associated with an array of significations including winter, impersonality, flawlessness and virginity. The white space on the page can also be present and signify in a poem, seen most famously in *Un Coup de Dés* but also in *Hérodiade*, in which the spaces affect the interpretation of the poem and must be taken into account.

process of reading or interpreting, the “condition et délice de la lecture” (186). The notion of illumination can refer both to physical light and to mental discovery, rendering the metaphor of reflecting light particularly apt. Meaning is produced through the words’ collision and harmonization; the words are not static in a one-to-one correspondence to signification but rather set in motion to bounce off of each other in endless movement. There is no match to a static referent but the sparking off of a dynamic process in which the effort to interpret the text produces images in constant motion and flux. Thus, it is not the referential words themselves, but in the white space between them, that meaning is created.

The sparseness of winter that features in “Hérodiade” is an appropriate analogy, and an illustration of how the poem pushes Mallarmé’s notion of effects further. As winter sweeps over the landscape and leaves nothing but bare snow and the black form of trees, Mallarmé refined his choice of words to the utmost; a minimum of words are painstakingly chosen to resonate with a maximum of aural, spatial, temporal and graphic effect and resonance.

One might think of Mallarmé’s poetry as more reliant on metonymy (in particular, synecdoche) than on metaphor.⁸⁹ When metaphors are used to describe an object or scene, subsequent phrases generally give an ever more precise idea of the material referent, which is unchanging and represented in increasingly specific detail (such as a woman, or a garden, or a season). To use a well-known example, Ronsard’s “Mignonne, allons voir si la rose” uses a series of springtime metaphors to describe the woman he desires. In Mallarmé’s poetry, however, metonymy is used to move from a basic *aspect* of one thing to another (sharpness, a flutter, a line, foam...) with the result that the image produced is not static, but always in motion and in state of change. Foam might allow the movement from bubbly champagne to frothy ocean, for example (as in “Salut”); or, what at first seems to be the flutter of a swelling sail is changed to that of waving handkerchiefs (as in “Brise Marine”). The initial definition of a word is shed, so that only the effects and impressions dynamically produced by an obscure and constantly shifting poetic image — remains. The image created by the poem is never fixed or static but in constant motion, the complex and dense intersection of dynamic tensions.

An illustration is a phrase, spoken by Hérodiade: “frisson blanc de ma nudité”. The first word gives the impression of a shiver, appropriate to the winter theme. It also evokes desire and sensuality. “Blanc” likewise reinforces the winter motif, and Hérodiade here applies the word literally to her own pristine flesh, white as snow. For Mallarmé, white and silence are not empty but vibrate with potentiality and possibility. Here, it appears that the word “nudité” refers only to the *potential* of her nudity, which is not ultimately realized in the poem. Thus, the shiver is also one of desire. In *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Théophile Gautier writes, “Il y a quelque chose de grand et de beau à aimer une statue, c’est que l’amour est parfaitement désintéressé, qu’on n’a à craindre ni la satiété ni le dégoût de la victoire, et qu’on ne peut espérer raisonnablement un second prodige pareil à l’histoire de Pygmalion. [...] L’impossible m’a toujours plu” (153). Gautier conceives desire as a tension state that can never be fulfilled, and thus destroyed, serving as metaphor for his oxymoronic approach to language which is indirect, contradictory and in tension with itself. Similarly, Hérodiade’s presentation as an object of desire — always out of

⁸⁹ Barbara Johnson defines the two terms as “the substitution of a figurative expression for a literal or proper one. In metaphor, the substitution is based on resemblance or analogy; in metonymy, it is based on a relation or association other than that of similarity (cause and effect, container and contained, proper name and qualities or works associated with it, place and event or institution, instrument and user. “Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” (109). In her study *Défigurations de la langue poétique*, Johnson analyzes how the two fuse and slip together in Baudelaire’s “La Chevelure”.

grasp, beyond reach, unable to be possessed, “sculptée” — parallels Mallarmé’s approach to language. The dialogue between Hérodiade, a figure for art, and her nurse as poet or reader figure involves the latter constantly physically reaching out for the former and being rebuffed. To actually touch haughty Hérodiade would be to end the pleasure of desire, in the same way that one does not read Mallarmé to uncover a subject but to engage in a hermeneutic process whose end is itself. These three words of “frisson”, “blanc” and “nudité” thus work together as a kind of mental music, each word resonating with the others as a complex chord. Each word does not correspond to a single transparent referential meaning, but rather interacts with the others as a musical note dependent on its placement and the notes that surround it.

Key to this form of music was the impossible task of knowing all possible associations, suggestions and impressions produced by each word in the poem, and all the ways in which they would interact to produce meaning in the mind of the reader. “Je suis souvent des journées entières à me demander si celle-ci peut accompagner celle-là, quelle est leur parenté et leur effet.”⁹⁰ This necessarily led to failure, paralysis in the face of the infinite permutations of words’ implications, short of Mallarmé’s standard of “une pureté que l’homme n’a pas atteinte — et n’atteindra peut-être jamais.”⁹¹

Mallarmé’s ultimate failure to master “Hérodiade” is intriguingly staged by the poem itself, in which the physical repeatedly threatens to reemerge, collapsing the vision. Hérodiade herself is compared to images which evoke essences, absences, traces: a distant shadow, “de vols partis costumée et fantôme”, “un arôme d’ors froids”, absent from a “lit vide qu’un cierge soufflé cachait”. As it is not the words that create Mallarmé’s music, but the resonances between the words, in the blanks, Hérodiade herself is never physically present but only an effect, a ghost. Much of the critical work on this poem has pointed to the incomplete erasure of the physical that underlies the drama of the poem. David Lenson writes that “Herodiade, obsessed with nothingness and emptiness, is determined to suppress the body, which Schopenhauer calls ‘nothing but the objectified will.’ All of her ‘actions’ are turings away from the world; but [...] she subverts her own intentions by too sensual a delight in the suppression of the senses” (576-577). Scholars have also analyzed the erasure of the famous Salomé dance from the original tale, which Mallarmé nevertheless considered reintroducing in some form.⁹² Maria Assad opposes carnal knowledge to virginity in her dialectical reading “Hérodiade: A Hermeneutical Gesture”. Assad concludes that Hérodiade’s “own horror becomes the object of her dilemma: To know herself, she must lose herself, that is, lose virginal purity” (188).

This dilemma is never resolved by the poem. Indeed, the drama of the poem is the dialogue that occurs between Hérodiade and her nurse, who emblemizes the threat of the return of the material, the corporeal. The nurse seeks to kiss her hand, to bathe her with perfume, to touch her hair; she questions her disdain, solitude and inward focus. Hérodiade’s insistence that “un baiser me tûrait”, her interdiction of the nurse’s touch, are ultimately futile as her last words admit she is still waiting for “une chose inconnue”.

The poem’s ending, the beheading of John the Baptist, echoes this failure: initially presented as a moment of transcendence, when the head surges into the sky in triumph, shedding the corporeal body. “Les anciens désaccords / Avec le corps” becomes a definitive break. This motion is repeated as an incandescent sun ascending or as a leap suspended in the air. The last

⁹⁰ From “A Henri Cazalis”. *Correspondance 1854-1989* (263).

⁹¹ From “A François Coppée”, *Ibid.* 384.

⁹² Atsuko Ogane examines the question of “Hérodiade, danse-t-elle ou non ?” in the various versions of the poem in her article “Noces, Notion, Sacrifices dans les Noces d’Hérodiade”.

stanza of the *Cantique* alludes to the sacrifice of Jesus to come: “Mais selon un baptême / Illuminée au même / Principe qui m’élut / Penche un salut.” John the Baptist, who famously baptized Jesus, was presented in the Bible as an anticipation of Jesus, whose life repeated John the Baptist’s but on a more extreme scale — as the complete and full accomplishment of every promise in the scripture. “After me one will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”⁹³ As John the Baptist himself failed to manifest the prophesized perfection and glory of Jesus, the *Cantique* could likewise be read as ultimately a story of failure. The sun inevitably descends, the head falls back to the Earth, John the Baptist receives a nod but does not attain the absolute, Mallarmé is forced to abandon “Hérodiade”. And indeed, unsatisfied by this replacement of the dance with the beheading scene — in its “bond”, “penche”, “vol” and “suspension”, its unity of body and mind — Mallarmé would experiment with adding the dance back in more literally in future rewritings, “Hérodiade” never quite accomplishing the elimination of the corporeal, this same corporeal always seeking to reemerge.

The counterpoint to this repression of the physical is given by the Prose Poem “Le Phénomène Futur”, which was first published together with “Un Spectacle Interrompu” in 1875. “Le Phénomène Futur” strikingly contrasts with the long, unfinished, ultra-verse poetry of “Hérodiade”. The poem also reverses Hérodiade’s iciness, seclusion and anti-physicality, giving the vision of an extraordinarily lovely “Femme d’autrefois” preserved from a time long past, in a washed-out and corrupted world almost entirely free of beauty and imagination. The humans of this time are stunted and deformed men with the “visages d’une malheureuse foule, vaincue par la maladie immortelle”; the women are pitifully “chétives”, “chauves” and “morbides”. Gazing upon the radiant face and body of the shimmering, golden woman, most react with uncomprehending indifference, yet a few, capable of recognizing true beauty, weep with wonder and the knowledge of the loss of transcendence in a modern “époque qui survit à la Beauté”. Roger Pearson writes that Baudelaire was unimpressed by the poem, which he deemed to overestimate the imaginative and aesthetic capacity of humanity: “Eh! quoi! disent-ils, l’humanité a pu être aussi belle que cela? Je dis que cela n’est pas vrai. L’homme dégradé s’admirerait et appellerait la beauté laideur” (42).

Yet despite the word “futur” in the title, it appears that Mallarmé’s poem, written mostly in present tense, is less about an imagined fate for humanity as much as his own poetics and their context in his contemporary artistic world. “Futur” is used here, rather, to indicate a working out that will be accomplished, a looking forward. This opening to the prose poems introduces a new understanding in particular of the central importance of the word “rhythm” to his poetics, thereby placing the body at the heart of the prose poems.

In 1865, Mallarmé told his friend Eugène Lefébure that “Hérodiade” sprung forth from the name alone: “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’eus inventé ce mot sombre, et rouge comme une grenade ouverte, Hérodiade.” Hérodiade has a name because the hope is that she, and it can be refined, mastered, completed; Mallarmé indeed writes of the poem in terms of possession, and in terms of progeny in “Le Don du poème.”⁹⁴ However, the woman of “Le Phénomène futur” has no name. And

⁹³ Mark 1:7-8.

⁹⁴ Mallarmé writes in the first line of the poem, “Je t’apporte l’enfant d’une nuit d’Idumée !” in a reference to Edom and Herod in the Bible.

indeed, the poets acknowledge their failure to fully apprehend her, awed but simultaneously remaining “confus” and “hanté”. Here, I differ from scholars such as Rhonda Garelick who view the central figure of the poem as entirely under the mastery of the male poet, as “pure, liminal, female theatricality, preserved by men of science to inspire men of poetry” while characterized herself as “blank, naked and mute” (50, 56). I would like to propose an alternative view of the poem which does not degrade the female body, displaying as Ursula Franklin reads the poem, “contempt for the flesh, and particularly woman in her reproductive function” and a turn to “aesthetic contemplation.”⁹⁵ I will argue, rather, that the poem posits dance and the body as “incontournable”, not subsumable to poetry as the “Hérodiade narrative” suggests, but as productive tension, as both metaphor and foil.

In the preface to his book of critical prose poems, *Divagations*, Mallarmé wrote of the collection as not “Le Livre” but “Un livre comme je ne les aime pas, ceux épars et privés d’architecture. [...] L’excuse, à travers tout ce hasard, que l’assemblage s’aide, seul, par une vertu commune. [...] les Divagations apparentes traitent un sujet, de pensée, unique — si je les revois en étranger, comme un cloître quoique brisé, exhalerait au promeneur, sa doctrine” (1). In this way, *Divagations* is posited as an entirely different project from that of “Hérodiade” or “Le Livre”: as a project that escapes the strict control of the poet, open to contingency and wandering and organic flow, as a cracked-open cloister that *breathes* the insight to a living and moving interlocutor.

The central female figure of the spectacle is not projected inward, like Hérodiade, rebuffer of even the poet/nurse, but outward, open and in communion with the crowd. The icy, virginal perfection of Hérodiade is contrasted with the pregnant, corporeal ecstatic vision of *Le Phénomène Futur*. As Baudelaire featured street performers and saltimbanques in his analysis of modern, quotidian space, the use of urban spectacles and carnival settings hint at a broadening or opening up from the individual to the communal featured in many of Mallarmé’s prose poems.

While the poem is not explicitly about dance, it shares many of the same characteristics — a spectacle centered around the (female) body, and one that resembles a dancer. Rather like Loie Fuller, whose serpentine dance involved manipulating great waves of fabric about her body, her hair swirls around her with “la grâce des étoffes”. The woman is carried by “jambes lisses”, and her posture, with her chest lifted towards the sky, resembles that of a ballet dancer. The narrator insists on her physical, corporeal presence; she is not shade, image or representation but rather “vivante...préservée par la science Souveraine”. There is undeniably an element of exoticization in the poem, particularly in the way the woman is introduced by a figure resembling a master of ceremonies (as the dancer is by an impresario or artistic director), and the poem emphasizes her body, and identifies it as key to her appeal — “à la place du vêtement vaine, elle a un corps”. Yet, the direction of the gaze is key. The narrator concludes that it is “ce regard qui *sort* de sa chair heureuse” (emphasis added) that exceeds all else. It is not only the audience’s — or the narrator’s — gaze upon her but rather a kind of *exchange* or *encounter* that is taking place, one that is initiated by the woman looking outward.

As it is often in Mallarmé’s works, dance and poetry serve as figures for each other. The premise is characterized as a “spectacle intérieur”, emphasizing the central place of the interpretative process, the mental engagement that is taking place between the spectacle and the eye, that is made in the exchange between the gaze of the audience and the “regard” that returns from the intention of the dancer. The poem specifies this process, describing those in the audience who can understand the significance of the moment: “d’autres navrés et la paupière

⁹⁵ From Franklin’s “Le Phénomène Futur” in *An Anatomy of Poesis: The Prose Poems of Stéphane Mallarmé*.

humide de larmes résignées se regarderont ; tandis que les poètes de ce temps, sentant se rallumer leurs yeux éteints, s'achemineront vers leur lampe, le cerveau ivre un instant d'une gloire confuse, hantés du Rythme et dans l'oubli d'exister à une époque qui survit à la beauté". The evocation of "Rythme" in the brain characterizes the effect as a physiological process, like electricity or some other dynamic, connecting the bodies of the "Phénomène futur" and the audience; this connection is also described as a "lumière", "réverbération", "rallumation."⁹⁶

Human societies have historically sensed the capacity for rhythm in music and dance to create connections and social cohesion through observation and communal participation, persisting through time as traditional rhymes, songs, dancers or other performances.⁹⁷ Mallarmé speaks of "rhythm" in his essays and in his correspondence as a kind of ineffable structuring pattern that brings together and elicits strong responses; this pattern is invisible, based on secret correspondences that are not created by the poet but "natural". In *Divagations*, he equates rhythm alternately to the "mouvement de pensée" (218), the instinct that both "élit" the poet and that the poet must "suiv[re]" (285). While these formulations are somewhat elliptical, the term recurs repeatedly to connect poetry and dance, linked to the "poétique instinct" of the dancer. In Mallarmé's correspondence, he writes "La Poésie est l'expression, par le langage humain ramené à son rythme essentiel, du sens mystérieux des aspects de l'existence : elle doue ainsi d'authenticité notre séjour et constitue la seule tâche spirituelle" (1283). Elsewhere, he muses, "La Danse figure le caprice à l'essor rythmique — voici avec leur nombre, les quelques équations sommaires de toute fantaisie" (1094). Such formulations implicitly evoke the unique insights of the dancer on the body to poetic inspiration.

In his analysis of the ways in which Mallarmé's writing resonated with "la poésie négroafricaine", Leopold Sédar Senghor proposed a reconsideration of Mallarmé not as "stérile, [...] solitaire, indifférent, glacial" but rather "un être de chair" whose poetry depended fundamentally on rhythm. Senghor proposed that Mallarmé's "tissu d'images analogiques, mélodieuses et rythmées" created a poetry which would be in tune with the biological or living forces of the universe, one that would make use of a kind of instinct to reveal that which was invisible and underlying or producing the visible.

"Il y a seulement qu'il tend à l'expression de forces qui, comme une toile d'araignée, maintiennent la tension vivante de l'univers. Or donc, pour Mallarmé, il s'agira de 'peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit'. Je complèterai, 'ou la cause qui la produit'. Il n'en va pas autrement chez les poètes négroafricains.

Rhythm in a poetical sense is inherently rooted into the body — the steps or breaths connect with biorhythm, the body always has to perform it based on its own instinct and time. Indeed, in the

⁹⁶ Various overlapping scientific models have been proposed for understanding how rhythm works on the body. One such model has been termed "entrainment", defined by Clayton, Sagar and Will as:

"the interaction and consequent synchronization of two or more rhythmic processes or oscillators [...] first identified by the Dutch physicist Christiaan Huygens in 1665... "Examples of endogenous or naturally occurring rhythms within the human body include the heart beat, blood circulation, respiration, locomotion, eyes blinking, secretion of hormones, female menstrual cycles, and many others.

Biorhythms of humans and animals are not merely internal, but may synchronize among populations, examples being "crickets chirping in unison and fireflies flashing synchronously". Such ubiquitous patterns may hint at bodily reasons behind the compelling quality of repeating patterns in music and dance. While such scientific discoveries were not made explicit in Mallarmé's time, the capacity to synchronize to a rhythm has long been intuitive to humans.

⁹⁷ Molnar-Szakacs and Overy explain that "mirror neurons" which fire in the observer's body at the sight of another's action have also been proposed as a mechanism for the capacity of rhythm to act physiologically on the body.

prose poems Mallarmé envisions a more instinctual kind of rhythm. He wrote to Paul Fort in references to his “ballades”, early prose poems, that they were beautiful “par la force seule du souffle vital [...] votre invention rythmique, à vous, y ajoute un moyen proche dénouant et composant à peu de distance de terre, et de l’eau, et des branches, un souvenir de chansons et de danses primitives. Je suis sous le charme” (3968-3969). The “primitive” dance alludes to the way rhythm connects bodies, connecting peoples of different cultures and modern peoples to their ancestors in the same way that the poet is guided by an instinct portrayed as ineffable and natural.

Part II: The Male Dancer in Mallarmé’s Prose Poems

Mallarmé’s dance writings have generally been considered in the context of the dematerialized or abstracted dancer, in which corporeality — the body of Loie Fuller, or the seductive, carnal dance of Hérodiade — disappear to become suggestions or aspects of flowers and foam, or otherwise edges of fluttering fabric. Much has been written of Mallarmé’s abstracted dancer as pure metaphor, his figure for Poetry lying at the nexus of hermeneutic enigma, elusion and ellipse, ephemeral shift, that his writing strived to attain.

Perhaps because this process has been framed as a gendered process, this narrative accounts less well for the treatment of corporeality of Mallarmé’s prose poems. In the prose poems, dance appears not only in the form of frothy and ethereally feminine sylphs and butterflies but dancing bears and male acrobats; here, a pas de deux can be between a trained animal and a clown or a pair of brothers rather than neatly opposed *danseuse* and *danseur*. This part of the chapter will broaden the discussion of Mallarmé’s dancing bodies from female ballerinas to acrobats and dancers that are male, and even animal.

In these poems, male and female bodies often feature in a surprisingly Baudelarian way: encountering modern spaces, flesh performing or receiving violence, or being displayed or offered to an audience. Though much of the critique around Mallarmé’s writing with respect to women, female bodies, and dancing bodies in particular has centered around a kind of synecdochization of the body, in which the women are said to be reduced, fetishized, fragmented into body parts — a delicate foot, a red mouth, the glimpse of a leg — Mallarmé frequently refers to the male bodies in his prose poems with a kind of metonymic, symbolic shorthand as well. Yet while a brutality or abruptness of phrasing might underline the immediacy of the encounter in Baudelaire’s prose poems, the elliptical syntax and rarefied lexicon retained by Mallarmé’s prose poems might make this encounter less readily apparent — well-observed, yet not less penetrating. I will argue that dance demonstrates the ways in which Mallarmé does not veil or abstract the body but places it at the center of his literary enterprise, opening up of the conversation to different types of bodies and ways of conceptualizing, thereby disrupting the narrative of the male heteronormative poetic gaze.

In the dedication of his collection of prose poems, *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire imagined “le miracle d’une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s’adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l’âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience”. Mallarmé increasingly conceived of his own poetry in similar terms, as the interaction of a kind of rhythm, conceptualizing it in 1893 in a letter to Edmund Gosse as “Musique dans le sens grec, au fond signifiant Idée ou rythme entre des rapports” (2606). Baudelaire continues: “l’idée m’est venue de tenter quelque chose d’analogue, et d’appliquer à la description de la vie moderne, ou plutôt d’une vie moderne et plus abstraite, le

procédé [que Bertrand] avait appliqué à la peinture de la vie moderne, si étrangement pittoresque”. This reading of “Un Spectacle interrompu” will consider how Mallarmé writes meaning visually through the body of the dancer, how bodies and flesh signify in his prose poem, and how meaning is created through performance and accident in modern spaces — the dancer and spectator encountering through visuality.

“Un Spectacle Interrompu” (1875) opens with the narrator’s description of his own project: to write an “Anecdote” which would retain the dreamlike qualities of reality. Published shortly after one of Mallarmé’s own imaginative journalistic projects, the whimsically ethereal fashion magazine *La Dernière Mode*, the poem contrasts two modes of journalistic meaning-making. The first, employed by the narrator, would be a kind of poetic vision: “une association entre les rêveurs” that would “subvenir à un journal qui remarque les événements sous le jour propre au rêve”.⁹⁸ The direct narrativization and linearity of journalistic writing would be rethought as dream, contingency, prophecy, wandering, reverie. The reimagination of journalism in *La Dernière mode*, the critical poems and essays of *Divagations* and *Un Spectacle Interrompu* would rethink the task of the ordinary reporter who, the narrator argues, caters to the crowd or “intellect moyen” and in so doing must “assigner à chaque chose son caractère commun.” Such a journalism’s “reality”, i.e. the creation of a seemingly unified and neutral narrative, is presented as having only superficial connection to the truth, dwelling “entre les mirages d’un fait.”

The title of the poem as “Un Spectacle interrompu” conforms to this thinking. A spectacle is an arrangement of elements intended to produce “une vue remarquable,”⁹⁹ that is to say, that the elements are manipulated and arranged in space not necessarily with a single or unified meaning, but in order to produce a vision of something extraordinary or surprising. One might consider Blanchot’s distinction between the novel and the récit. The novel would be associated with a kind of teleological movement, narratives of self- and world-discovery, education and psychological growth (as in the epic, national myth, autobiography or roman de formation). The récit is the “exceptional event” or *fait-divers* which escapes this logic of continuous, goal-oriented straight forward movement. Corporeal means of expression such as dance, dreams, which are associated with the unconscious, the unpremeditated, subjectivity, the instinctual — that precisely which is elided in realist linear modes of narrative — do not promise advancement, coherence or eventual legibility so much as offer an experience or the potential of an enlightenment.

The vision of a spectacle unites contingency — the dependence on audience perspective, their relation to the spectacle and interpretation of the elements— and a certain number of stable elements required to spark off these effects. This conforms quite closely to Mallarmé’s vision of poetry as a process that occurs *between* the stable elements of the words, with meaning located in the blanks rather than in the words themselves; these blanks are dense, shivering with potential and dynamic tension.

The idea of instinct or dream also alludes to a somatic way of making meaning; a way of sensing the invisible connections between things, of sensing the invisible processes behind, between and among the visual signs rather than in a literal, surface interpretation. The poem’s continual concern with reading the outward signs of the body — “une paume crispée”, “un griffe posée”, a “bouche folle”, creates a kind of parallel between the meaning-mapping done by poetic

⁹⁸ All quotes from “Un Spectacle Interrompu” are found in *Divagations* (20-24).

⁹⁹ See “Spectacle”, Le Grand Robert de la Langue Française (Version Numérique), <https://grandrobert.lerobert.com/robert.asp>.

dream-sight, the physiological diagnostic and the spectatorship of a dance. Instinct is used to perceive less obvious but more profound and dynamic invisible truths behind the literal signs of the banal and apparent.

The word “interrompre” gains particular pertinence in this context: “inter” and “rompre — implies a breaking up of these constituent elements, an intervention or reconfiguration of the spectacle. Such a mode of engagement would be poetic in its multiplicity and multivalency. It also implies a kind of dynamism absent from the static banality of the common reporter, who aims to “fix” the intellect (by precluding the interpretative process) or “repose” on an agreement (eliding complexity to settle on a unified narrative), formulations in which movement is absent or ceased.

Indeed, the poet uses a number of words to describe the incident in *his* terms as a kind of metonymic movement from the “aspect” that might “serve de type”. The tale is likewise described as an “Anecdote”, a “petit fait curieux (épisode, événement, mot, repartie, trait...) dont le récit peut éclairer le dessous des choses.”¹⁰⁰ Julien Weber points out that “type” has a double meaning — it can be the reduction of uniqueness to banality, but it can also be the opposite, a technique or device used to make a multitude of other connections, “la pièce matérielle qui rend la répétition de telle empreinte possible, c'est l'instrument qui, porteur d'une empreinte, effectue son impression en série.”¹⁰¹ The spectacle, indeed, takes place in “Le petit théâtre des Prodigalités”, foreshadowing the excess or abundance that will be generated from the minimalist space.

There is an intense focus on visuality in the poem. The poet wishes to “voir l'ordinaire et splendide veille trouvée à la rampe par ma recherche assoupie d'imaginations ou de symboles”. The idea of the spectacle is visual. The performance is made through accident or interruption, in which the enlightened audience or poet must read the movements to create meaning. The common crowd's applause is *noise* in the double sense, as sound and as muddy interference — bodily movements with no sense to them. “Tout oreilles, il fallut être tout yeux”, says the poet. Speech is not merely stated, but performed by the body of the bear, and meaning is created through the collaboration of this performance and the gaze of an audience. And what this meaning is, precisely, is a rethinking of the relations, divisions and hierarchies between corporeality, animality or instinct, and language; indeed, an illustration of a form of journalism which would rely on the interdependence of these.

At this theater, the narrator recounts his attendance at an exhibition called “La Bête et le Génie”. The drama on stage, ringed by a corps of gauzy sylphs, is performed by a clown with a bear, acting out the titular myth of the superiority of the human being over the mute beast. The narrator gazes upon the spectacle with his poetic sight. The unexpected happens when the bear and clown tangle together for a brief moment in the embrace of an accidental pas de deux, the former moving to delicately pose one claw on the shoulder of his partner, and one on his arm. The poet translates the frozen, razor-edge duet as the bear's starry-eyed appeal for reconciliation; he wishes that the clown will explain the theater space, “cette atmosphère de splendeur, de poussière et de voix” for him and thereby allow him to attain the transcendent knowledge of his human “aîné subtil”. But the enchantment breaks when a bloody rag, or scrap of flesh, is flung to

¹⁰⁰ See “Anecdote”. Le Grand Robert de la Langue Française (Version Numérique), <https://grandrobert.lerobert.com/robert.asp>.

¹⁰¹ Weber, Julien. “Poétique du type dans ‘Spectacle interrompu’ de Mallarmé : la griffe de l'ours.” *The French Review*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (Mar. 2011).

the bear and he drops to all fours, regressing to his unconscious and ursine state, and the curtain falls, returning to its vapidness of “tarifs” and “lieux communs”. The narrator claims that though he saw the spectacle differently from his peers, he is content to have seen better, and truthfully.

I would like to begin with a discussion of the nature of this theatrical space. The presence of the animal act, the pedestals, the clown, suggest a circus. In *Circus As Multimodal Discourse : Performance, Meaning, and Ritual*, Paul Bouissac depicts the circus as a “locus of mythical, transcendent experience” in part because it is a space of precarity and danger, in which “the potential tragedy which is always lurking behind a wild animal act like a threatening hidden agenda — the ancestral confrontation and its bloody consummation” (160). That is to say, it is a space in which the physical and corporeal are potentially on the verge of appearance, and invisible biological instincts, rhythms and impulses may be made visible.

A number of critics have also pointed out the sacred or religious dimensions of the Théâtre des Prodigalités. In her article “La Production du Sens: ‘Un Spectacle Interrompu’”, Maria Assad reads the encounter between the clown and bear in terms of rite and sacrifice. For her part, Ursula Franklin has noted that the space in which the spectacle takes place resembles a church, with its “stalles” and “rangs”, writing that for Mallarmé, “the theatre in its ideal form is ritualistic and the inheritor of the spiritual function of the dying Church, thus becoming a kind of new Church itself.”¹⁰² Mallarmé’s vision of a Temple of Art is evoked throughout *Divagations*, defined in his essay *Parantheses* as a simultaneously theatrical and religious space prepared and presided over by a Dancer. The very first line of the essay reads:

Cependant non loin, le lavage à grande eau musical du Temple, qu’effectue devant ma stupeur, l’orchestre avec ses déluges de gloire ou de tristesse versés, ne l’entendez-vous pas ? dont la Danseuse restaurée mais encore invisible à de préparatoires cérémonies, semble la mouvante écume suprême (206)

Indeed, dance is *never* named in “Un Spectacle interrompu”, though it suffuses it invisibly on an atmospheric and narrative level. The sylphs, quintessentially balletic figures, are draped gauzily in “de pâleurs évanescentes de mousseline” and arranged as in a *corps de ballet*, reaching out their arms in a port de bras signature to the *ballet blanc* and featured in choreography from *Giselle* to *Swan Lake* to *La Bayadère*.

In the center of the corps, the bear and clown are united in an impromptu pas de deux, which is also described in the lexicon of dance, suspended in a moment of “vol” and “vent”. It is significant that the bear is described as a cousin of Heine’s *Atta Troll* (1843), which centers on a dancing bear who likewise wishes to transcend the degradation and humiliation of his role and escape the debased banal, desiring to ascend to a more noble and human form. The bear of “Un Spectacle Interrompu” sways “rythmiquement et doucement”, gesturing with his delicate and “souple” paw. The bear, the poet says, describes his surroundings as a hazy, gas-lit spectacle space: “cette atmosphère de splendeur, de poussière et de voix où tu m’apprends à me mouvoir”.

The fact that the dance is performed by a bear may seem incongruous with Mallarmé’s sublime conception of Dance, even parodic. Indeed, Heine’s *Atta Troll* has likewise been read in this way, as a “comic spoof of radical pomposity and the clumsiness of contemporary political verse.”¹⁰³ *Atta Troll*’s desire to escape his trainers and transcend his existence as a dancing bear was often deemed by nineteenth century critics as a ridiculous and futile mockery of Romantic sentimentality. Yet the poem can also be read as a critique of the cynicism and physical

¹⁰² From “Un Spectacle Interrompu” in *An Anatomy of Poesis: The Prose Poems of Stéphane Mallarmé*.

¹⁰³ See “Heinrich Heine” in Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Heinrich-Heine-German-author>

alienation of modern civilization. “Yea, they smile forever. Even / In their dances!—desecrate / Thus this high and noble art /Which a sacred cult should be.”¹⁰⁴

“Un Spectacle Interrompu” ultimately redeems the bear as well — through a series of doublings which ultimately undermines dichotomies and allows a metonymic movement which brings into a circular relation the bear and the clown, the clown and the poet, the poet and the dancer, and the dancer and bear. “Un Spectacle Interrompu” is *saturated* with doubles. The exhibition is titled “La Bête et le Génie”, referring to the bear and clown. The poet attends the show through “l’invitation du billet double”, yet, the present poet is paired with his absent friend, a kind of camera-negative doppelganger. The poet is defined in the poem against the common reporter of the crowd, and yet he (like Mallarmé and his avatars in the pages of *La Dernière mode*) seeks to engage in a form of dream journalism. The title of “Un Spectacle Interrompu” is ambiguous. Such a reporter would fix it as the moment when the bear is loosed; the poet would choose the moment when the “charm” of the strange embrace is broken by the scrap of flesh.

The bear is an ambiguous figure with a number of symbolic resonances appropriate to Mallarmé’s vision of poetry. Bears are representative of hidden depth, peering into dark spaces and deep shadows, moving through dense forests, all self-reflexive metaphors for hermeneutic difficulty that appear in other of Mallarmé’s poems such as *L’Après-midi d’un Faune* and *Hérodiade*.¹⁰⁵ These symbolic resonances hint at the bear’s potential connection to poetic expression, transformation, and the reach for knowledge.

And indeed, the clown is no less ridiculous in Mallarmé’s poem, his ironic title of the “Héros” or “Génie” undercut by the image of his “bouche folle”, the depiction of him as a “splendide imbécile évaporé dans sa peur”. What the doubled pair of the bear and human share is that they both strive for the perfection of art. And as there are two bears — “Martin” the banal animal and “Atta Troll” the seeker of the sublime — there are two clowns: the “brilliant and surnaturel” silver guardian and the terrified lump, speechless with fear, cowering mindlessly before the bear. In her analysis of journalism in *Un Spectacle interrompu*, Stacy Pies thinks of the line from *Madame Bovary*, “la parole humaine est comme un chaudron fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours quand on voudrait attendrir les étoiles” (12). This comparison evokes a connection between primitivity, dance, rhythm, animality and emptiness — the simultaneous hollowness of the “cracked cauldron”, and the heaviness of the flesh and metal that weigh down the spirit and allow it to reach the sublime. The bear’s dance parallels the poetic gesture of reaching for, yet falling short, of this artistic transcendence.

The bear also invites a reconsideration of the relationship between instinct, corporality and poetry. Julien Weber proposes that in the text, “les reporters eux-mêmes sont comparés à des animaux domestiques puisqu’ils sont “dressés” par la foule à faire du reportage [...] Si la poésie est donc invoquée comme alternative au reportage, ce n’est pas ici comme agent civilisateur, mais plutôt comme moyen critique.”¹⁰⁶ The most meaningful speech is thus posed as reappropriating, tapping into the invisible and uncontrollable rhythms of the body.

¹⁰⁴ Like Mallarmé, Atta Troll speaks of dance in religious dimensions: “Ah, the dance in olden days / Was a pious act of faith, / When the priests in solemn round / Turned about their holy shrine. [...] / Dancing then was worship too,— / It was praying with the legs!”

¹⁰⁵ Chevalier and Gheerbrandt write of bear’s symbolism in mythology: “En Europe, le souffle mystérieux de l’ours émane des cavernes. Il est donc une expression de l’obscurité, des ténèbres [...]. L’obscurité, l’invisible étant liés à l’interdit, cela renforce sa fonction d’initiateur. [...] Jung le considère comme symbole de l’aspect dangereux de l’inconscient”. From “Ours” in the *Dictionnaire des Symboles*.

¹⁰⁶ “Ballets”, in *Divagations* (173).

The ending of the poem is a meditation on how flesh signifies. I have suggested that rhythm is a way of considering this: the invisible patterns, dynamics and processes that underlie the visible body, much in the same way that the gaps between the written signs are where the dynamic hermeneutic process occurs. Dance might be considered an extreme case; the foot is an important nexus of dance and poetry for Mallarmé, who wrote famously that the dancer's writing is an "écriture corporelle [de] ce qu'il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la rédaction : poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe". With a single gesture of the foot, the dancer generates a constant stream of suggestions and metaphors in motion. While Mallarmé used the fewest words ("décors permanents ou stables") to produce the greatest effect, the dancer has the ability to use no words at all to generate these effects. The foot is the site where this happens and the creator of this process: the thing that sparks off, looses (dégagé) this process of dynamic meaning into motion, that ignites the banal into the extraordinary for those who can see it. In this poem, it is the narrator's poetic vision that causes the silent words of the bear to "jaillir". The name of the "petit Théâtre des Prodigalités" echoes this as well: an excess generated by the minimum.

The vision of the pas de deux, which resonates with meaning under the eyes of the poet, collapses when "un morceau de chair, nu, brutal" or a "loque substituée saignant" interrupts the spectacle and distracts the bear, reducing him to his animal form. This flesh differs from the dancer's flesh in several ways. It is itself static, unattached to anything — a sign that is empty because it has no process behind it, no movement to create meaning. The scrap, whether of fabric or flesh, is not "mere flesh" for Mallarmé but rather a visual symbol of detritus which is not poetic because it is not *seen*. As in the case of the hand gesture that the poet finds so meaningful, upon which he confers meaning through his gaze, the object itself is entirely trivial and commonplace: a flimsy and false "mouche de papier" attached by a "fil visible", a silly and obvious trick.

Flesh that is *seen* acquires meaning, like the stable object or "decor" required for the shifting, ephemeral poetic process to take place. Consider the following visual enactment of meaning-making through the body. "Au geste du pantin, une paume crispée dans l'air ouvrant les cinq doigts, je compris qu'il avait, l'ingénieux ! capté les sympathies par la mine d'attrapper au vol quelque chose, figure (et c'est tout) de la facilité dont est par chacun prise une idée". In the representation of capturing, opening, seizing in mid flight there is a repeated slippage between the poetic and the real, the literal and the figurative in the enactment of a perceived meaning.

The poet writes that the bear comes to "flairer, pour y appliquer les dents, cette proie". The scrap is "un repas abject préféré peut-être par l'animal à la même chose qu'il lui eût fallu d'abord faire de notre image, pour y goûter". Here there is a slippage between the poetic and the non-poetic registers. There are two bears: the banal bear and the poetic bear. What the bear would have to do to "our" image would be to literally smell and taste it. Such a bear would no doubt prefer to sink his teeth into the clown. The bear who would *not* prefer to eat human flesh, the one that would be able to recognize and privilege "our image" is the poetic or figurative one, not the animal worrying a bloody rag. This sentence cannot be made sense of from either the literal or figurative perspective alone, but slips between the two.

This change of register is underlined by the abrupt slamming down of the curtain between the spectator and the sight, "abatt[ant] subitement son journal de tarifs et de lieux communs." The narrator finishes by underlining the superiority of his own vision to that of his common peers: "ma façon de voir, après tout, avait été supérieure, et même la vraie". This can be read doubly as a restatement of the poem's vision, and alternatively, it can be read ironically —

perhaps the bear, the clown and the poet have more in common than one would initially see! There is a cascading series of doubled doubling, between the bear and clown, and clown and poet, and poet and dancer. The speaking, dancing bear eventually ‘retomba à quatre pattes’. As the bear, presented as distorted and dull homunculus of the clown, resembling “un homme inférieur, trapu” doubles the clown, Mallarmé (and Baudelaire before him) often identified the poet with the clown or saltimbanque street entertainer figure, participating in the economy of cheap entertainment. The clown moves from “brilliant and surnaturel” to a “splendide imbécile évaporé dans sa peur”, evoking the shrinking back of his body. When it comes to movement, the poet resembles the other members of the crowd: “je me levai comme tout le monde, pour aller respirer au dehors”; his body moves like theirs, smells and hears like theirs. It is only his “façon de voir” that is “supérieure”. The movement asks: is the bear like the poet? Is the poet like the clown? The slippage back and forth creates a circular, active mode of meaning, rendering the poem itself an experience, an event. It also invites us to reconsider the oppositions between physicality and speech, the body and civilization, inward rhythms and instincts and outward visual signs.

The narrator’s final pronouncement on the superiority of his own vision echoes that of Baudelaire in “Les Fenêtres”, which like “Un Spectacle Interrompu” complicates the binaries between dream and reality, poet and reporter, inside and outside through the visual observation of a kind of accidental performance space:

[...] j’aperçois une femme mûre, ridée déjà, pauvre, toujours penchée sur quelque chose, et qui ne sort jamais. Avec son visage, avec son vêtement, avec son geste, avec presque rien, j’ai refait l’histoire de cette femme. [...]

Et je me couche, fier d’avoir vécu et souffert dans d’autres que moi-même.

Peut-être me direz-vous : “Es-tu sûr que cette légende soit la vraie ?” Qu’importe ce que peut être la réalité placée hors de moi, si elle m’a aidé à vivre, à sentir que je suis ce que je suis ?¹⁰⁷

As windows are simultaneously a figure for the lacune between the spectator and spectacle, the impossibility of communication, on the one hand, simultaneously also for a kind of visual encounter, “Un Spectacle Interrompu” might be seen as Mallarmé’s expansion of Baudelaire’s quintessential compact statement of his own poetic strategy, as engaging with and staging specifically its implications about spectatorship, performance and visual encounter with body and movement in an intriguingly literalized way. In so doing, that which is considered mute — the animal, the corporeal, the rhythmic — may be seen to speak.

A number of these same themes are taken up by *Réminiscence* (1889), which expresses a longing for the physical in a form that is neither sexualized, nor exclusively female. Both poems feature a kind of displaced or re-defined spectacle. Both take place in the poetic or theatrical space of circuses: not refined, but experimental; not elite, but popular; featuring not scripts, but rather bodily feats both human and animal. Both of these performances are intensely concerned with the visuality and functioning of the body, and how flesh signifies: indeed, both poems act out this meditation through staging an apparently unscheduled or unanticipated dance which takes place in a modern and urban space given meaning, and rendered sanctified or sacred, by the

¹⁰⁷ In *Le Spleen de Paris: Petites Poèmes en Prose* (67).

poetic gaze. Ultimately, the poem will pose the body, and the dancing body in particular, as a site of enormous potentiality for speech, redemption and participation in social relations that are longed for by the narrator.

In the poem, an orphan wanders from his friends to view a fairground in the process of being set up. Curious, he thinks to initiate conversation with a young boy holding a delectable-looking tartine spread with white cheese, only for his older brother to dance up to him, pirouetting and lifting up his flexible legs to an impressive height. Between bites of the tartine and the continued performance of these acrobatic tricks, the brother asks the narrator whether he has parents, assuring him that it's quite amusing to have a father who makes funny faces while being kicked by the circus "maître", and a mother who elicits applause for swallowing rope. The festivities heighten, and the narrator is left suddenly disappointed to be without parents.

Réminiscence rewrites a former poem, "L'Orphelin" (1867), which is itself framed as a memory of the poet. A "reminiscence" is not merely a memory, but refers to the act of calling up the memory from a later time, etymologically to "re-mind" something, to mentalize it again. Defined as a "ressouvenir confus, vagues, flottants, incertains, involontaires,"¹⁰⁸ this circling back is thus both named and performed by the title, signaling its own rewriting in the same mode of signification as dance.

The opening line of the poem "Orphelin, j'errais en noir et l'oeil vacant de famille". To err, or wander, is a mode of movement with both mental and physical dimensions. The aimless circular motions of the narrator will be contrasted with another motif of circular motion — the ecstatic, free motions continuously performed by the dancing brother "en train des *tours de force*", never ceasing to "pirouetter", to extend his leg "avec aisance glorieuse" in a smooth arc to improbable heights.

Like "Un Spectacle Interrompu", the theatrical space of "Réminiscence" is suffused by an intense sense of potential energy; as a pendulum at the top of its arc or a spring compressed. The poem presents multiple images of being on the verge of a spectacle — peering through a crack in the tent, reaching "l'heure sainte, a parade about to "s'exalter": The two poems also share repeated subtle evocations of church. Both features frequently appear together in Mallarmé's dance writings, emblemized by "la Danseuse restaurée mais encore invisible à de préparatoires cérémonies" who presides over Mallarmé's Temple of Art. As the narrator peers through a gap in the tent to view the fairground preparations, he remarks that the "cri de choeurs" has not yet been realized on account of the "drame requérant l'heure sainte des quinquets". The narrator is about to "pray" that the waif will share his meal when the brother appears; his performance of the dance, too, is described in reverent terms as "régal", "glorieuse", a "triomphe". The naming of the dancer's grace as *prestesse* also unites these themes — referring to the dancer's mastery while resembling *prêtresse* (as the circumflex signals an etymologically lost s, the archaic word was naturally *prestresse*).

Indeed, the "repas supérieur" of "une tartine de fromage mou" offered by the younger brother has a good deal of symbolic resonance. The morsel of bread evokes communion. *Eating* echoes again a kind of circular, transformative process, distilled as well in the idea of communion as the transmutation of bread to flesh. Eating is also naturally symbolic of social bonds, constituting one definition of family — indeed, the "family" depicted in *Réminiscence* is hardly presented as a traditional one. The doe-legged waif, the robustly vital dancer, the grimacing clown and the rope-swallower have next to nothing in common physically. Nor does there appear to be any hint of affection or respect in the dancer's description of his "parents" as a

¹⁰⁸ "Réminiscence". Le Grand Robert électronique, 2017. <https://grandrobert.lerobert.com/robert.asp>.

“farce” or “des gens drôles, qui font rire”, much less in his amusement and delight at the “les claques et les coups de pied” inflicted on his father. The poem poses the question, therefore, in what sense this assemblage of characters constitutes a family.

Throughout *Réminiscence*, the narrator is described always in terms of senses rather than flesh — sight, smell, breath, essence, as opposed to the other characters who eat, touch, kick, clap. He loves the “parfum” des vagabonds, listens for the echo of a “tirade loin” or a glimpse through the “déchirure” of the fabric, expressing his disappointment as only a gentle “soupir”, all images that evoke traces or essences. He is as a ghost half-present in the story, seeing and yet not physically participating — hence his incapacity to eat the bread, though he might wish to. Rather than engage with the tartine on a corporeal level, he sees it as “déjà la neige des cimes, le lys ou autre blancheur constitutive d’ailes au dedans”. White, as we have seen, is a color highly charged with meaning for Mallarmé, a symbol of potentiality and the space from which inexhaustible meaning springs forth.

What is strange, and striking, about the conversation between the narrator-orphan and dancer is that they both seem to be *writing* it. The first words exchanged between the two are: “Tes parents ? — Je n’en ai pas. — Allons, si tu savais comme c’est farce, un père...” What is odd about this is that the first question, spoken by the dancer, seems to reflect not his *own* thoughts or concerns, but anticipates those of the narrator, who presents himself from the first line as an orphan with “l’œil vacant de famille”. For Mallarmé, seeing and writing are intimately connected: indeed, he values dance as a generator of meaning for this reason, as “écriture corporelle [de] ce qu’il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la rédaction”. As in “Un Spectacle Interrompu”, the process of generating meaning is collaborative, the eye of the poet casting out and the dancer’s performance sending back an intensely saturated meaning.

The dancer, indeed, projects back the question the narrator has in his eyes from the first line, his questions and desires and visions. This can be read on its face as biting commentary on a repressive situation in which as Laurence M. Porter suggests, “the entire circus family suffers from exploitation and dire abuse. With grating irony, the carnival setting and the children’s ingenuousness expose the wretchedness of the poor” (276). Yet, the poem treats the events as a “farce”, the style named by the dancer as he reframes what appears on the literal level to be violence. The dancer recounts: “Même l’autre semaine que bouda la soupe, il faisait des grimaces aussi belles, quand le maître lançait les claques et les coups de pied. Mon cher ! ... il nous épate, papa”. If we take this recounting literally, being beaten for losing one’s appetite (are we to understand, for being ill, or refusing to perform?), as well as being coerced into swallowing lengths of rope (the act performed by the mother to thunderous applause), certainly constitute forms of attack on bodily integrity.

The violence here, as it is in *Un Spectacle Interrompu*, is displaced, evoked indirectly. While violence appears unfiltered in Baudelaire’s prose poems, present-tense, starkly painted, in Mallarmé, it is called up but not fully manifested. The blows and kicks are set off but are not shown as connecting — the way in which they are described make them glance off, not fully contact the body of the clown. The phrasing of “bat des mains” for the applause given to the mother’s rope-eating act likewise implies violence, but is couched as praise.

What the dancer accomplishes with this description is to doubly turn the story about bodies into a performance. The father’s contortions of pain are rendered “farce” or clownery. The swallowing of inedible material is transformed into a circus act. In tandem with this

transformation, the dancer performs the words. The kicks of the master are turned into a developpé of the leg, the mother's rope-eating underscored by a bite of the tartine.

Parents are figures of attachment, hierarchy, authority, discipline, transcendence rather than self-generation. It is for this reason that on one level the final line of the poem, the narrator's state of being "déçu tout à coup de n'avoir pas de parents" has been read as the poet's lament of being in the world without ties, "an image of that moment when Man confronts his destiny alone", Ursula Franklin suggests, thereby justifying "the association of poet and saltimbanque, that is poet and performer."¹⁰⁹ And yet along with this solitude comes an allegory of bodily participation. The narrator is jealous of the dancer from the start, all in *bodily* ways: wishing for his meal, admiring his "tours de force" and "prestesse", envious of his family. Beyond the notion of a paradoxical but productive relationship posited between poet and dancer, as simultaneous metaphor and foil, there is a critique of the poet-narrator's separation from the body as a site of social connections and site of speech. And as it does in the other prose poems, the body keeps returning as a locus of questions, anxieties and potentialities relating to the relationship between corporeality and poetry.

Part III: "Conflict" and Social Connection

I have argued that the body which is conspicuously absent in much of Mallarmé's poetry — emblemized by the missing dance of Salomé in "Hérodiade", the convalescent "las du triste hôpital" with bent back and withered frame turning to the stained-glass refuge of art in "Les Fenêtres", the narrator of "Brise Marine" whose "chair est triste" but whose spirit flies towards the transcendent "écume inconnue et les cieux", among many other examples — is staged explicitly in the prose poems. Having proposed that the dancing body in particular, with its capacity to express, to make the invisible visible, to embody art, serves as a locus for working through set of questions, hopes and anxieties about the relationship of the body to poetic speech and language, I would now like to turn to "Conflict", Mallarmé's final statement on the topic and the culmination of the work. In 1897, the year before his death, Mallarmé collected the prose poems he had written over the past thirty years and published them together under the name of *Divagations*, adding a thirteenth poem, "Conflict", as the conclusion to the collection.

Ursula Franklin notes that "Conflict" has not always been remembered by critical scholarship, denied its rightful place as the capstone of the prose poems.¹¹⁰ Indeed "Conflict" has received relatively little critical attention in light of the importance we may assume Mallarmé attached to it. It has been read by Franklin as "the poet's paradoxical dislike of, and yet dependence on, the crowd" and by Laurence M. Porter as a sign of Mallarmé's "heightened social awareness" and development as a "humanist", formulations which engage with the notion of Mallarmé as an elitist and hermetic snob (273). What is undeniable is that "Conflict" is interested in so many of the themes not commonly associated with Mallarmé's poetry: the violence, consumption, labor and noise associated with a particular kind of modern, laboring male body.

The first line given by Mallarmé's narrator echoes and reconfigures the introductory statement of "Un Spectacle Interrompu", which posed a notion of poetry as a contingent event. "Longtemps, voici du temps — je croyais — que s'exempta mon idée d'aucun accident même vrai ; préférant aux hasards, puiser, dans son principe, jaillissement." "Interruption" or

¹⁰⁹ In "Réminiscence", in "An Anatomy of Poesis: The Prose Poems of Stéphanie Mallarmé".

¹¹⁰ From "Conflict", in "An Anatomy of Poesis: The Prose Poems of Stéphanie Mallarmé".

“accident” is crucial to disrupting the static idea which is “fixed between the mirages of a fact”; the introduction of a new and unexpected element into the arrangement of a spectacle or a homogeneous system of thought. The prose poem is the appropriate genre for such encounters — eschewing the claim of verse to balance, proportion and the perfection of structure, the prose poem is looser, more heterogeneous, structured syntactically by rhythm and more organic constellations of sounds rather than the classical proportions of form. Against the vision of the poet striving for the perfection of “Le Livre” or mastery over the silent music of “Hérodiade”, in the prose poems, so often it is the contact with this outside element — the face-to-face with the bear in “Un Spectacle Interrompu”, or in this case, the band of railway workers who resemble the narrator so little in their vigorous, noisy physicality — that draws the poetic insight. The title of the poem, “Conflit”, implies a bodily encounter — a coming together or etymologically from the Latin, a “striking together”.

The narrator sets the scene of the drama as a neglected but beautiful house, slowly aging, crumbling, progressively melting back into its countryside setting, “chaque année verdissant l’escalier de pierres extérieur”. He frames this description of the setting as a gazing upon a spectacle, “l’œillade d’à présent au spectacle immobilisé autrefois”. Yet to the displeased surprise of the narrator, soon to burst onto the serene scene is a rowdy band of railway workers, who have rented the lower floor of the house and converted it into their canteen. The idea of spectacle will recur throughout the poem, as the narrator observes the workers in their blue and white-striped costumes through a window, alternately evoking a “cabaret”, a “legend”, a “ritual” to be observed.

What precisely is on stage is the poet’s encounter with these workers. The narrator himself speaks always obliquely, eliding verbs, indirectly approaching concepts by employing gentle and slow long-syllabled words, and nesting clause into clause like one smoke ring melting into the next. But present too are words of combat and violence, which cannot fail to cut through the mist, forcing themselves into view as the encounter evoked by the title.

Gage de retour fidèles, mais voilà que ce battement, vermoulu, scande un vacarme, refrains, altercations, en dessous : je me rappelle comment la légende de la malheureuse demeure dont je hante le coin intact, envahie par une bande de travailleurs en train d’offenser le pays parce que tout de solitude, avec une voie ferrée, survint, m’angoissa au départ, irais-je ou pas, me fit presque hésiter — à revoir, tant pis ! ce sera à défendre, comme mien, arbitrairement s’il faut, le local et j’y suis.

Repeatedly, the subtlety and poeticity of the circling clauses is interrupted by the incontournable “vacarme”, “refrains”, “altercations” of the workers. The words “défend”, “offense” and “invasion” also stand out in the otherwise soft, circular speech. The number and saturation of these words interrupting the poetic flow is a pattern that will persist through the entirety of the poem. The narrator’s “ennemi” rests in “une tranchée”. One observes the noise they make in the characterization of their activities: each one “jure, hoquète, se bat et s’etropie”. The narrator’s speech to them is a “défense” against men who snarl “violemment”, described as an “assailant”, a “pugilat”, a “colonnade”. Finally, lying down for the day, they “chancel[ent] tous comme sous un projectile, d’arriver et tomber à cet étroit champ de bataille”. The narrator is unable to stay on the level of eloquence and speech as he would wish to do — the physicality of the workers continually intervenes and asserts itself.

The narrator’s ambivalent attitude, strange, unhappy, tinged with admiration, is clear from his description of the workers.

Terrassiers, puisatiers, par qui un velours hâve aux jambes, semble que le remblai bouge, ils dressent, au repos, dans une tranchée, la rayure bleue et blanc transversale des maillots comme la nappe d'eau peu à peu (vêtements oh! que l'homme est la source qu'il cherche) [...] Las et forts, grouillement partout où la terre a souci d'être modifiée

The men are physically robust but wary, swarming like insects over the earth, rendered interchangeable by the collectivity of their work as well as their identical costumes. The narrator jokes about the blue and white stripes of their suits which resemble rippling water: "l'homme est la source qu'il cherche", simultaneously interpreting this clothing as a symbol on multiple levels. The religious implication evokes the idea that man, shaping their Earth in their own image, is now his own God — the source of himself and the ultimate master, through modernity and progress, of himself.

For Mallarmé, it would also be accurate to say that "Le poète est la source qu'il cherche": the image of the source is that too of inspiration as a rhythm or instinct internal to the poet, which spontaneously produces a flow of images. He wrote in a letter to Charles Bonnier:

Le livre lui-même, ensuite, contient de l'enchantement, la spontanéité successive de vos émotions qui retombe dans sa limite d'art congénère, s'y étale comme dans un immédiat bassin fixant et conservant les images qui ne jaillirent que d'un instinct pur et selon un besoin seul de rythme, tout cela atteste avec une belle évidence l'opération sacrée, vive, et guidée, chez vous, dès la source (2652)

"Opération sacrée", "interprétation sacrée", are phrasings that appear in *Divagations* to connect dance and poetry, as the invisible dynamic or rhythm of inspiration which manifests as visible art (175). The image of the dancer's identity to the space of her art, the poet's formation by natural innate instincts is put into analogy with the laborer's self-production.

The narrator continues, "Les maîtres si quelque part, dénués de gêne, verbe haut." The dreamily wandering phraseology continues here while speaking of the bourgeois bosses of the workers. Read as referring to the actions of the workers, this phrase describes the noisy clamor permitted by the absent masters. Yet the phrase can also be read as referring to the masters themselves, encapsulated by the phrase "verbe haut", suggesting the opposition between body (immediate, direct, confrontational) and word (indirect, unspecific, eliding).

Je suis le malade des bruits et m'étonne que presque tout le monde répugne aux odeurs mauvaises, moins au cri. Cette cohue entre, part, avec le manche, à l'épaule, de la pioche et de la pelle : or, elle invite, en sa faveur, les émotions de derrière la tête et force à procéder, directement, d'idées dont on se dit c'est de la littérature ! Tout à l'heure, dévot ennemi, pénétrant dans une crypte ou cellier en commun, devant la rangée de l'outil double, cette pelle et cette pioche, sexuels — dont le métal, résumant la force pure du travailleur, féconde les terrains sans culture, je fus pris de religion, outre que de mécontentement, émue à m'agenouiller.

Here the narrator contrasts the weakness of his body, the "malade des bruits" in a way that echoes the way Mallarmé speaks of his own body in his *Correspondance*. In these letters, he writes of "mon misérable corps", lamenting, "c'est mon corps qui est totalement épuisé" (482). Here too, the body of the narrator is delicate, ailing, pained, penetrated by noise and filled with intangible "émotion". The robust railway workers, by contrast, are associated with force, solidity, and explicitly, sexuality.

The metaphor of picks and shovels as male sexual instruments penetrating the Earth serves firstly as synecdoche for the men themselves. While the poem refers to the narrator's "head", the purpose of the railway workers is encapsulated, "résumé" by this act alone. The use

of synecdoche to describe female bodies has often been associated with a fragmenting, objectifying gaze; here, the literary device is not gendered female. This metaphor has religious connotations as well, echoed by the use of “dévot”, referring to the springing up of metal frameworks and modern structures rather than living plants from the Earth, echoing the theme of modernity and progress.

The religiosity of the description expresses a reverence or admiration for the workers, even as they intrude on the narrator’s solitude. In imagining a speech he could give to them to persuade them to be quiet, the narrator’s feelings continue to be ambivalent — imagining that they will be kinder than the “onze messieurs”, presumably his bourgeois neighbors, who immediately ridiculed him for the same request, he denies looking down on them because of their class and imagines that they might possess “délicatesses quelque part supérieurs”. Yet he admits that any language he uses will “comporte du dédain, bien sûr, puisque la promiscuité, couramment, me déplaît”. The double meaning of the word as overcrowding or cacophony, and as sexual indiscrimination, then adds a hint of menace or excess to the masculinity of the workers. The narrator precises the actions of the men, each one “jure, hoquète, se bat et s’etropie” (swear, gasp, fight, cripple each other), each indicating the intensely physical actions that are repeatedly performed to the bafflement of the narrator, whose incomprehension comes when faced specifically with the *corporeal*.

The result is that “la discordance produit, comme dans ce suspens lumineux de l’air, la plus intolérable si sachez, invisible des déchirures”. That is to say, the Mallarméan silence is torn, like a piece of fabric or scrap of flesh, when it comes into contact with this incomprehensible physicality.

Despite the differences in the type of physicality that shows up in this poem, one observes many of the same strategies used in other prose poems. These are in a sense bodies put on stage. Even the working, quotidian men, debased and drunk, are ‘pochards du merveilleux’. The poem is suffused by a theatrical lexicon. In envisioning an attempt of his speech on the men, the narrator states, “Alternatives, je prévois la saison, de sympathie et de malaise”, as if the reactions of the audience are choreographed themes described in a theater program.

When the narrator has given up on attempting to verbally connect with the workers, he finally takes action — yet again in character, a kind of displaced, diagonal action rather than one which will be read by the workers — closing his gardens to the workers so that they will be mildly inconvenienced by having to make a new path. “‘Fumier !’ accompagné de pieds dans la grille, se profère violemment”. The worker is only a pair of kicking feet, a visually cut-up and fragmented “visage au barreaux”. Elsewhere, the workers are represented only as “une voix”, disembodied, floating up to the narrator’s ear, or “les bouches ordinaires” chattering below, as they were earlier summarized by the shovel and pick that represent their sexual organs. Yet even as the narrator focuses on and isolates for analysis particular parts of their bodies, in the same breath, he writes, “en ce moment, et ne parviens à ne pas considérer le forcené, titubant et vociférant, comme un homme” — a denial of such dehumanization; indeed, recognition as an equal.

The narrator makes another attempt at connecting with the worker, doomed to fail again because they are speaking on different levels. “Impossible de l’annuler, mentalement : de parfaire l’œuvre de la boisson, le coucher, d’avance, en la poussière et qu’il soit pas ce colosse tout à coup grossier et méchant.” This attempt is doomed to fail because it moves between the literal and the figurative, the physical and the mental, each level failing to connect with the next.

The day concludes when the group of laborers lie down on the grass. The narrator, for his part, is confused by their actions and asks, “Véritablement, aujourd’hui, qu’y a-t-il?” He describes the scene: “l’escouade de laboureurs gît au rendez-vous mais vaincue. Ils ont trouvé, l’un après l’autre qui la forment, ici affalée en l’herbe, l’élan à peine, chancelant tous comme sous un projectile, d’arriver et tomber à cet étroit champ de bataille : quel sommeil de corps contre la motte sourde.” As always, it is the physicality of the workers that perplexes him — the actions of their bodies, their placements. The scene — presumably, the banality of man lying in their trenches after a day of hard work and hard drinking to rest before the next day — is rendered nearly incomprehensible by the narrativization of the description, filtered through the same vocabulary of battle projected by the narrator.

The conclusion centers on the narrator’s longing for the knowledge of why they are the way they are, why he is how he is, and how these questions intersect — the conclusion of *Conflit* and of the prose poems is the realization of what has been missing from his consideration.

Non, ma vue ne peut, de l’ouverture où je m’accoude, s’échapper dans la direction de l’horizon, sans que quelque chose de moi n’enjambe, indûment, avec manque d’égard et de convenance à mon tour, cette jonchée d’un fléau et, maintenant, la voici, demain, ils ne savent pas, rampent par le vague et piochent sans mouvement — qui fait en son sort, un trou égal à celui creusé, jusqu’ici, tous les jours, dans la réalité des terrains (fondation, certes, de temple).

What his view must stride over, straddle, is precisely the scattered bodies of the men — not denying this corporeality, but rather affirming the centrality of their labor to art, suggesting that it is precisely this labor that digs the foundation of the temple. The narrator regrets the futility of his attempt to share his art, the “tristesse que ma production reste, à ceux-ci, par essence, comme les nuages au crépuscule ou des étoiles, vaine”, the way in which neither can reach the other. Implicit behind this formulation is also the idea that it is the missing connection that disturbs him — not merely that the men are necessary to the function of his own life but that it is the situation of “un contact peut, je le crains, n’intervenir entre des hommes” — a neat summary of the problem posed by the poem.

The poet’s “view” reaches for the sky, a metaphor for art which is repeated in the final paragraph of the prose poem.

Les constellations s’initient à briller : comme je voudrais que parmi l’obscurité qui court sur l’aveugle troupeau, aussi des points de clarté, telle pensée tout à l’heure, se fixassent, malgré ces yeux scellés ne les distinguant pas pour le fait, pour l’exactitude, pour qu’il soit dit. Je penserai, donc, uniquement, à eux, les importuns, qui me ferment, par leur abandon, le lointain vespéral ; plus que, naguères, par leur tumulte.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Benjamin, later, would propose a notion of the idea as constellation. One might consider Mallarmé’s writings on the ballet “Viviane” in *Divagations* to be a prefiguration: “Les astres, eux-mêmes [...] sont de la partie ; et l’incohérent manque hautain de signification qui scintille en l’alphabet de la Nuit va consentir à tracer le mot VIVIANE, enjôleurs nom de la fée et titre du poème, selon quelques coups d’épingle stellaires en une toile de fond bleue : car le corps de ballet, total ne figurera autour de l’étoile (la peut-on mieux nommer !) la danse idéale des constellations” (171-172). A word — “Viviane” — is compared to a constellation in an extended metaphor, formed visually by the sparkling configuration of dancers. The constellation-word is multiple, dimensional, escapes comprehension due to this multiplicity. Yet it signifies something, in the inky blackness of incomprehension. There is a pun on the word “étoile” — the star dancer. Like the Mallarmean word, “Viviane” is present and absent — the dancers do not literally spell out the word with their bodies. Yet, the meaning is found in the way she is configured with respect to the dancers that surround her, thus shifting, shining, in constant motion because she is living flesh. It is precisely that which prevents complete comprehension as well in “Conflit”.

Abandon is a particularly semantically rich word, meaning defeat or elimination, as in the battle scene envisioned by the narrator. Alternatively, it could signify to relax or let oneself go, in its positive connotations — the carefree nonchalance of their interactions with each other, the unencumbered physical strength of their bodies — or in its negative, which is to say *promiscuité*, the inattentive disorder of their ceaseless cacophony. Most aptly, I believe, it can refer to separation or distance, with the connotation of emotional loss — to be abandoned is to be stranded alone, without contact.

The narrator's statement, then, that the "abandon" of the workers block him, more than their noise ever did, from the evening distance, from the constellations beginning to shine in the sky, casts a retrospective eye over the hole left by the absent bodies in earlier stages of his artistic program. The ultimate conclusion of Mallarmé's working out of the signification of these issues of class, labor and embodiment through the prose poems ends on a note of uncertainty and questioning, yet "Conflit" serves as a gesture of reconciliation, a reaching out which is both redemptive and hopeful.¹¹² Ultimately, it is the undeniable materiality and presence of the physical form that the narrator must encounter and confront — whether the inexhaustible expressive potential of the ballerina, the unexpectedly moving "speech" of a dancing bear, or the connection between labor and art that must be recovered — that allows him to arrive at a fuller articulation of his own artistic program and the significance of his life's work.

¹¹² Jacques Rancière reads the ending of "Conflit" in his essay "L'intrus: politique de Mallarmé" as the poet's realization that he, ironically, is the true intruder. This realization has profound political implications. "La question poétique est ici identique à la question fondamentale de la politique : 'avérer qu'on est bien là où on doit être', avérer le partage des manières de faire, des manières d'être et des manières de dire, le partage qui structure une communauté" (102).

CODA

This project has centered on restoring the central place of the body in a literary trajectory that has been described as one of disembodiment. This history posits Théophile Gautier as a poet of pure surfaces and ornament, turning away from physical experience and perception in modern times; Baudelaire as suspended between an aggressive condemnation of feminine corporeality and a marmoreal dream of stone; Mallarmé as a hermetic and removed writer of metaphor and abstraction. I have primarily focused on the role of female dancers and the materialization of their dancing bodies. Though these dancers have often been regarded as subaltern and under the control and direction of the male director, choreographer, scenario writer and critic, we have seen that they retain forms of expressive agency and resistance to complete control or apprehension in their mobility, momentaneity and excessive, inexhaustible artistry. I have been particularly interested in moments in which these authors have been faced with hesitation or difficulty in encountering the dancing body, and the influence of these encounters on both their innovative, non-traditional uses of language and the ways in which we understand their relationship to femininity.

In doing so, I have focused primarily on these poets' own words. I would now like to leave them behind and devote the last few pages to the dancers, in hopes that this project will avoid reinscribing the same blind spot that it critiques: erasing the presence of each individual dancer. From one point of view, this is a challenging task. Few of the dancers' words have been preserved. No video footage or even photos in some cases exists, and anyone who knew them is long gone. However, in her performance studies book "The Archive and the Repertoire", Diana Taylor sets forth a possible path to investigation. Taylor delineates two approaches to cultural memory: "'Archival' memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistance to change" (19). From the archival view, many of these dancers have been very nearly erased. However, Taylor suggests that other ways of knowing, preserving, and transmitting knowledge exist. She names these the "repertoire", the set of practices that "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dancing, singing — in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible meaning" that are passed down from generation to generation, teacher to student (20). Taylor argues that by taking these embodied practices seriously, we can widen the sources of information and knowledge to which we have access. Though the repertoire changes over time, an indelible link remains in the live, embodied performance transmitted from one person to another. It is in this spirit that I would like to turn to these dancers and see — indirectly, and over time — if they speak back.

André Levinson, the writer of one of Marie Taglioni's many biographies, points out that these must necessarily be based on conflicting, secondhand information. "One cannot but be astonished at the writers who, in investigating birth certificates, documents and correspondence, have the singular presumption to pride themselves on reconstructing the personality of an artist" (90). But one can perceive echoes of Marie Taglioni, lauded by Gautier as "la danse elle-même", in the quiet thumps of satin pointe shoes launching stretched legs into the air in thousands of ballet studios every day. The gauzy Romantic tutu that she daringly shortened grazes the legs of dancers from waiflike students rehearsing their first variations to international stars bathed in the floodlights of the Mariinsky stage. Marie Taglioni's ghost can also be seen in the gaps. Levinson writes, barely exaggerating, "In causing the eternal feminine to triumph, she evicted male

dancing. Not a single male dancer arose between Perrot [Taglioni's dance partner] and Nijinsky" (110). Perhaps, however, she lives on most permanently, and most extensively, not in the pink satin and sparkling tulle but in the powerful muscularity she contributed to ballet technique.

In *Apollo's Angels*, Jennifer Homans describes Marie Taglioni's efforts to overcome her physical limitations by developing exceptional strength and endurance through a "series of arduous exercises, repeated many times on both legs. [...] When she trained, she held each pose to the count of one hundred [...]. She began with exercises in which she bent her knees, back straight, in *grand pli  *, so that she could touch the floor with her hands without leaning over, then pushed herself up to full pointe on the tips of her toes — a move requiring enormous power in the back and legs." (139-140) Arduous dozens of slow pli  s and relev  s are today not only performed behind the scenes regularly by each dancer, but also by 320 pound NFL defense tackles hoping to strengthen their feet and legs.¹¹³ Most do not think of her while they train, but if each were to trace backwards, person-to-person, the lines of this transmission, they would inevitably end in Taglioni.

Perhaps Marie Taglioni's presence in the "archive" will also be increased with the recent rediscovery of her memoirs at the Mus  e des arts d  coratifs, finally published and available as *Souvenirs: Le manuscrit in  dit de la grand danseuse romantique*.¹¹⁴ These memoirs will no doubt serve as a valuable source of information to put in dialogue with the words written about her by ballet critics such as Th  ophile Gautier, August Ehrhard and others.

Unfortunately, no such written record exists for Jeanne Duval, the actress and dancer who was Baudelaire's muse and who almost certainly inspired the character of La Fanfarlo. Her words and correspondence appear not to have survived, except in the most oblique of forms. She has also historically been treated with suspicion, hostility and contempt by Baudelaire's biographers and contemporaries, such as Nadar and Fran  ois Porch  , when not entirely erased in their writings.

However, much work has been done since which attempts to recover Duval's voice. Beatrice Stith Clarke has attempted to give the echoes of Duval in Baudelaire's poetry body and form in her analysis "Elements of Black Exoticism in the 'Jeanne Duval' Poems of 'Les Fleurs du mal'". In a chapter of her book "V  nus noire", Robin Mitchell has also reconstructed the narrative of Duval's life as far as possible in an account which de-emphasizes Baudelaire as the central defining figure. The irreducibility and incontournability of Jeanne Duval is suggested by the extraordinarily contradictory descriptions of her as "both angry and strong-willed and fragile; fat and thin; dark and light; frizzy- and smooth- haired; stupid and shrewish; angelic and devilish; a muse, a wife, a whore, and a lesbian; a second-rate actress and a sexual vampire of [...] biblical proportions" (103). by Baudelaire's contemporaries perhaps uncomfortable about the central place she had in his life and oeuvre. Ultimately, Mitchell convincingly argues that Duval "chipped away at the racial and gender boundaries designed to constrain" her, and though "the effects of [her] life may be hard to see directly", they can be traced and made visible through figures such as Josephine Baker who would follow in her footsteps in confronting and challenging French self-identity (140).

Many other imaginative, artistic works have attempted to recover Duval's voice. A few of the many recent examples include Erika DeFreitas's exhibition "arriver avant moi, devant moi", which attempts to trace the links between labor, agency and corporeality in a series of

¹¹³ See <https://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/steve-mclendon-ballet-is-harder-than-anything-else-i-do/>

¹¹⁴ This is discussed in Hubert Goldschmidt's article "Marie Taglioni".

collages featuring the “hands of other known and unknown Black women artists and muses.”¹¹⁵ Another example is Yslaïre’s stunning graphic novel centering on Jeanne Duval. The first page, which features the death of Baudelaire, seeks to look through her eyes and imagine a story told in her words. The extent to which these artistic endeavors succeed in recreating Duval accurately is impossible to know, but Duval’s place both in the literary and artistic history of France, and in current artistic projects under way, is no less enduring for the gaps in the archive.

When it comes to the ballerinas who inspired Mallarmé — he referred specifically to “La Cornalba”, “La Zucchi” (Virginia Zucchi) and “La Laus” (Emilia Laus) — few of their own words survive. It was clear, however, that each dancer was highly individual in her approach. Elena Cornalba was not necessarily appreciated at her time, particularly by her Italian contemporaries, but is now esteemed for the influence of her technical accomplishments in the history of Italian ballet, a tradition which remains extraordinarily strong today.¹¹⁶ She was deemed by dance critic Natalia Roslavleva to be “technically brilliant but very cold”, and according to another reviewer, “was said to have such mathematically exact steps that a reviewer likened them to the movements of a robot and the action of a chronometer: the mechanical regularity of her iron legs.”¹¹⁷ Whether or not these judgments on Cornalba’s supposed lack of passion are accurate, she was credited at least for her brilliant virtuosity.

Virginia Zucchi, for her part, was famous for her mime.¹¹⁸ In his biography of Zucchi, *The Divine Virginia*, Ivor Guest recounts many anecdotes in which Zucchi insisted upon her own supremacy in matters of artistic control, as well as her lack of concern for rules and regulations.

In the scene where Aspìccia is chased by the lion, Virginia added to the effect by tearing off her head-dress, pulling down her hair and disarranging her clothes, [...]. Petipa was appalled. “How could you, a princess, think of appearing before the audience in such an untidy state?” he remonstrated. [...] “I can tell you this, M. Petipa — had you been pursued by a lion, you would have lost not only your crown, but your trousers, too!” (83)

Another time, when told repeatedly that her shorter Italian skirts were forbidden by imperial Russian regulation, Zucchi ignored the directive and cut the skirts herself above the knee (83-84). It is clear that Zucchi viewed herself as the arbiter of her own performance, self-presentation and artistic work, holding her own with artistic directors even as well-known and formidable as Petipa.

¹¹⁵ See “Scarborough artist examines 'obscured histories' in new exhibit at MacLaren”.

<https://www.barrietoday.com/local-news/scarborough-artist-examines-obscured-histories-in-new-exhibit-at-maclaren-3277820>

¹¹⁶ The article “Elena Cornalba” in the Italian encyclopedia Treccani quotes this newspaper review in Venetian dialect: “Il nome della C., al di là delle vicissitudini da lei avute soprattutto in patria [...] si colloca nella storia della evoluzione tecnica del linguaggio accademico, accanto ad altre famose colleghe italiane come A. Ferraris, G. Salvioni, C. Brianza e la P. Legnani, La C. contribuì ad arricchire di continui apporti tecnici quella già vasta gamma di possibilità espressive, che solo la mancanza di saldi valori artistici "fin de siècle" poté far degenerare nel gusto del virtuosismo come acrobazia e competizione fini a se stesse. Dopo il 1895 non si hanno altre notizie su l'attività artistica della C. e non sono noti né il luogo né la data della sua morte.”

¹¹⁷ This review is cited by Cristina Della Coletta’s *World's Fairs Italian-Style: The Great Expositions in Turin and Their Narratives, 1860-1915* (73)

¹¹⁸ In *The Divine Virginia*, Ivor Guest recounts the words of a critic who wrote that she “revealed that ballet is not merely dancing but drama too, a drama that is dumb and all the more expressive” (5). According to Guest, other “critics found small faults in her technique (not enough jumps or speed) her physique (bowed legs) her training (not pure and academic) and her appearance [...] but she also had the most mobile features the finest arms and back [...] exquisite acting” (31).

When it comes to La Laus, Frédéric Pouillaude writes that unfortunately, “It seems we no longer know anything [...except] that she played the role of Queen Genvieve in Viviane” (74), and that her name was listed in the rolls of the Opéra de Paris, where she no doubt left an impression on the many spectators who watched her dance, even if we have few or no hints to the exact nature of it. For her part, Mademoiselle Mauri (Les Deux Pigeons) was described by the composer François Coppée: “To the trials of rehearsal...[she] brought a kind of physical enthusiasm, a kind of joyous delirium. You felt that she loved to dance for nothing, from instinct, for the love of dancing, even in a dark and empty theater. She whinnied and darted like a young foal; she soared and glided in space like a white bird, and in her sombre and somewhat wild beauty, there is something of both the Arab steed and the swallow.”¹¹⁹ To what extent these words succeed in conveying the particulars of Mauri’s dance is difficult to know, but the uniqueness, specificity and expressive agency of each figure makes it clear how irreducible they are to mere pretexts or artistic screens for poets.

I will conclude with a few words on Loie Fuller, who so impressed Mallarmé with her intriguing artistic approach of modernizing impersonality. “I cannot explain...how I do it...It is intuition, instinct”, Fuller described at times, seemingly de-emphasizing the role of her own personal creative control.¹²⁰ These dance shows often featured her “children”, young female dancers trained by Fuller who performed her dance under her direction in an identical manner. Susan Jones recounts that “In a 1909 interview Fuller virtually confessed to her own curiously dehumanized view of the children. Asked about her future plans for the young dancers she replied, ‘oh yes there are children this year but no one knows what will happen, perhaps we will reach a point where the children will be optical delusions as well.’” (19)

One sees the Fuller’s approach of impersonality at the forefront of modern dance groups to come, such as the Ballet Russes, who also de-emphasized individual performers, subsumed to choreography, staging and the artistic direction of their director, Serge Diaghilev, and famously made use of unconventionally angled motions and large, obscuring costumes. One might also think of Merce Cunningham, who featured chance, indeterminacy and a harmony in his own works, striving for a minimally representational, narrativized or structured form of choreography.

Yet, the impersonal or even dehumanized vision of the dancer does not preclude Fuller referring to her own agency, rather than passivity: “I make that lily by sheer will force” (40). Rhonda Garelick quotes Fuller’s description of her own hypnotic power:

Fuller describes her mother as “unable to stir,” “gasping” “dazed,” “pale,” and “trembling,” [...]; it bespeaks Fuller’s long-standing notion of herself as not just a performer, but a hypnotizer, a supernatural force. Here, for example, in another passage [...]: ‘The unearthly appearance of my dances . . . enraptured . . . children, caught under the spell of my art. [One little girl was] fascinated and dazed. She did not say a word, did not make the slightest noise, hardly dared to stir. I seemed to have hypnotized her.’” (40)

Fuller was able to accomplish this through her artistic mastery of improvisation and dance, and simultaneously, her groundbreaking technical skill and craftsmanship, making use of machinery, chemical innovation, and lighting effects. Much exciting recent work follows in her footsteps by dance troupes such as Pilobolus, whose fusing together of shadow play, multimedia visual art and live choreography in “Shadowland” remixes many of the elements of Fuller’s “Serpentine Dance”. Another example is Wayne MacGregor’s “Tree of Codes”, featuring dancers dancing with mirrored reflections, appearing and disappearing, morphing and

¹¹⁹ Coppée is quoted in Lynn Garafola’s *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance* (91).

¹²⁰ This, and the other Fuller quotes, are cited in Rhonda Garelick’s biography of Loie Fuller, *Electric Salome* (19).

transforming by tricks of lighting and mobile scenery.¹²¹ The trippy, technical, disorienting manipulations of colored light and fragmented, disjunctive choreography were inspired by Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*, a book created by physically cutting words out of Bruno Schultz's *Crocodile Street*. As ever, writing and dance continue to perform their intangible pas de deux, inspiring, reflecting and partnering each other.

¹²¹ See Judith Mackrell's "Tree of Codes review – visual wizardry and pizzazz in sexy modern ballet". <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/05/tree-of-codes-review-wayne-mcgregor-olafur-eliasson>

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