

Mallarmé and the Tension of Timbre

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In the winter of 1894, Stéphane Mallarmé traveled to England “bearing news.” “The most surprising kind.” Judging from the opening lines of the lecture that was the reason for his voyage, he was fairly bursting with it. “I do indeed bring news,” he declared to the crowd assembled at Oxford’s Taylorian Institution on the first of March: “Verse has been tampered with.” A fissure had emerged within the ancient unity long known indifferently as verse or as poetry, and Mallarmé, tracing it, had deduced the magnitude of its implications with astonishing prescience. Standing before the fault line that would bring untold reconfigurations, he marked the moment. He pointed. “That is where we are, right now,” he observed. “The separation.”ⁱ

The separation Mallarmé’s lecture describes is binary in nature: it identifies, on the one side, the “very strict, numerical, direct, two-part meter, from before,” and on the other, “the development of that which just recently obtained the name of prose poem.” The separation divides meter from all the prose poem has inspired. It does not place the two elements in a relation of succession; it merely separates them. For despite the qualifier “from before” (*antérieur*) beside “meter,” and the “just recently” (*naguères*) that characterizes the recognition of the prose poem, that which exists on either side of the divide persists into the present. As the derivatives of the prose poem flourish, “meter, from before, carries on; nearby.”ⁱⁱ

From a twenty-first century perspective, the division Mallarmé describes seems readily recognizable as that which exists today between “verse” and “poetry.” Poetry, a porous and essentially undefined category, is as contested in scope and validity as were the prose poem and its derivatives in Mallarmé’s day; verse, on the other hand, is just language set to meter.ⁱⁱⁱ That meter may be syllabic, accentual, tonal, quantitative, or indeed any combination thereof, but whichever it is, it is the defining feature of the form we call verse, as it has been since antiquity.

In the writings of Stéphane Mallarmé, however, this definition of verse is not self-evident. And if Mallarmé’s “verse” is not, in fact, synonymous with “meter,” the separation he identifies in the Taylorian lecture differs appreciably from the contemporary division between “poetry” and “verse.” In the interest of clarifying the contours of Mallarmé’s separation, the pages that follow explore the form called “verse,” in so far as Mallarmé understood it at the moment it broke with “poetry.” They advance two propositions: first, that for Mallarmé, verse is not defined exclusively by meter; second, that in his account, verse can exist in the absence of meter if it engages another aspect of language, which he calls “timbre.”

I. THE SEPARATION

Let us begin with the first proposition. We recall that the separation Mallarmé describes in his lecture creates a binary division between the “very strict, numerical, direct, two-part meter, from before,” and “the development of that which just recently obtained the name of prose poem.” The substantives established as mutually exclusive are thus “meter” (*le mètre*) and “the development” (*l’épanouissement*). An asymmetry is immediately apparent. These substantives are not alike in kind: “the

development” refers to a subset of literary production; “meter,” to a formal constraint.

In the case of Mallarmé’s announcement, framed as a field report from a neighboring nation, the meter at hand is the meter of French; more precisely, it is the “very strict, numerical, direct, two-part meter, from before.” Very strict, because bound by inviolable rules of syllable placement, rhyme type, and word boundary; numerical, because it demands a procedure of counting; direct, which is another way of saying “linear”; two-part, bifurcated by a mandatory caesura, or perhaps coupled by rhyme; “of before,” having dominated French verse in previous centuries. It is, ostensibly, the alexandrine, although nothing in Mallarmé’s description precludes the inclusion of other versified French lines, such as the octosyllable or decasyllable. Mallarmé’s punctuation and word order are significant: while the adjectives “strict, numerical, direct, two-part” precede “meter,” the temporal modifier “from before” is placed after the substantive and separated from it by a comma. Thus, it is pointedly not “the previous meter” (*le mètre antérieur*), which would be both singular and specific. Mallarmé’s construction suggests “meter” in a more general way, as a more capacious category: “meter, from before” (*le mètre, antérieur*). The specification “two-part” (*à deux conjoints*) indicates that this meter is capable of internal division. The “part” to which Mallarmé refers is most likely the hemistich, indicating a total measure of one line; but it could also refer to the line itself, as within French, according to Mallarmé, “lines of verse go by twos or more, due to their terminal accord, that is, the mysterious law of Rhyme.”^{iv} In either case, the meter from before is tied to a total measure derived from that of the line. On one side, then, we have meter and the line.

And what is “the development of that which recently obtained the name of prose poem”? Mallarmé explains its contours at some length: “[V]erse is everything, as soon as one writes,” he reports, less with the air of the author than with that of the

surprised onlooker. There is “versification as soon as there is a cadence.”^v Verse, evidently, has broken with meter: though meter falls to one side, “verse” turns up on the other. And not just verse, but indeed “versification”: a term that, by its conventional definition, should designate precisely the art of composing in accordance with the metrical dictates across the divide. All that remains in terms of constraint upon “verse” is “writing” (*dès qu’on écrit*) and “cadence.” The two constraints, at first glance, would appear to be mutually exclusive. Cadence, whether understood in the phonological sense of “vocal stress upon accented syllables, dividing a sentence into rhythmic units,” or in the musical one of “the progression of chords, according to certain harmonic rules, that concludes a musical phrase,” would seem to pertain to the production of the voice;^{vi} “writing,” to that of the pen. The two constraints, then, if they cannot be jointly applied, must be understood in parallel: in spoken language, verse exists as soon as a voice expresses a cadence; in written language, verse exists as soon as someone writes. We have a tautology. The constraint “as soon as one writes,” in context, can only be understood if “to write” is read in a narrow sense.^{vii} In other words: “Written language is verse as soon as someone writes literature.” But what is the difference, for Mallarmé, between verse and literature? Is this statement not also a tautology?

If the defining feature of this particular prose is, as yet, obscure, one thing is certain: it is not to be confused with “writing” as a general category. “The prose of any sumptuous writer” falls within this domain specifically because it is “withdrawn from habitual haphazard usage”; such writing is “as good as a broken line, playing with its timbres and even hidden rhymes.”^{viii} Mallarmé dissolves the distinction between the broken line (*le vers rompu*) and the prose poem (*le poème en prose*); prose and verse are no longer opposed. In the absence of meter and the line, verse and

prose are one in the same; between the two forms, there is no longer any distinction.

Thus, the exact date of the Taylorian lecture is important: March 1, 1894. It represents a decisive moment not just in the history of verse, but also in the history of the poet's thinking about it. For just fourteen months before, Mallarmé had published a book entitled, precisely, *Verse and Prose*.^{ix} Neatly organized into two sections, plainly labeled Verse and Prose, the book features Mallarmé's versified poems in the first half, his prose writings in the second. And although the "Prose (for Des Esseintes)" appears in Part I and "Poe's Poems" in Part II, the apparent contradiction is in fact none at all. For Mallarmé's title "Prose (for Des Esseintes)" belies a strictly versified poem; "prose" in this context refers to the Latin hymns sung in Catholic services.^x And the poems of Edgar Allan Poe, though versified in English, appear exclusively in Mallarmé's prose translations. At the time of *Verse and Prose*, the formal division remains intact.

By March of the following year, however, this is no longer the case. In place of the formal opposition, which relates two elements alike in kind, an asymmetrical division has emerged. Within the vast realm of prose, there exists a sub-category that partakes of poetry and even of verse; it plays with cadence, timbre, and rhyme; it is distinguished from the versified poetry that preceded it by a singular absence: the metrical line. The separation does not divide verse from prose, nor verse from poetry; verse, stretched to the point of breaking, falls on both sides of the divide.

This separation forms the basis of the title "Crisis of Verse" ("Crise de vers"), Mallarmé's watershed essay of 1897.^{xi} The word "crise," in other words, bears the full freight of its Greek root (κρίσις), by which it designates "a separating" — a sense still palpable in certain English words of shared derivation ("discern," "discriminate").^{xii} The topic of the essay is thus the separating, or scission, of *le vers*, itself the bearer of two distinct meanings. *Le vers*

is the versified line: once known in English as “a verse” and most precisely described in this context as “the metrical line” in the process of breaking apart. “Crise de vers,” in this sense, might be translated as “the fragmenting of the line.” Were this the only sense in which the title were intended, however, it might have been better formulated as “Crise du vers”: a construction whose slight change of emphasis preferences a reading of *le vers* as “the line.” As it is formulated, however, “Crise de vers” announces *vers* less as quantity, more as category: and *le vers* also bears the meaning of “verse,” the genre comprised of literary works composed in metrical lines. It is from this reading that we arrive at the standard translation “Crisis of Verse.” This “crisis” designates a decisive stage, “a sudden rupture” in the history of verse, to be sure.^{xiii} But so, too, does it articulate, by means of its etymological root, a separating: of *le vers* (the line), and of *le vers* (verse).

II. OF VERSE WITH VERSES, & VERSE WITHOUT

If *le vers* (verse) need not be comprised of *vers* (lines), the question arises: what, if anything, makes it verse? “Verse is everything, as soon as one writes,” Mallarmé declares — but only to follow that capacious definition with a number of statements that obscure its apparent extent. Verse is not limited to writing, as “versification” exists as soon as a voice expresses a cadence; everything written is not verse, only that which is “withdrawn from habitual haphazard usage.” But how does some prose “withdraw” from “habitual haphazard usage”? Some prose, the passage tells us, such as the prose of the “sumptuous writer,” is as good as (*vaut en tant que*) “a broken line, playing with its timbres and even hidden rhymes.”^{xiv} The precise construction is significant. The verb *valoir* (“to be worth”) confers a judgment of value, placing this prose — let us call it “prose verse” — on a level with the broken line (*le vers rompu*). The conjunction *en tant que* (“as”) assumes an aspect shared

between the elements conjoined. This aspect allows us to understand the first element within the more established terms of the second. “As,” to be sure, is not “is”; Mallarmé does not say that this prose is a broken line. Such a statement would introduce the problem of the line, a precise measure, for which Mallarmé has not, in this text, established any prose equivalent. What Mallarmé says is, rather, that prose verse operates as the broken line does, using an aspect proper to both of the elements conjoined by *en tant que*. This aspect is stated: “playing with its timbres and even hidden rhymes.” That which distinguishes this prose from all prose is, or at least can be (for we do not know if the aspect stated is singular or merely an illustrative example) the play of timbres and rhymes.

These rhymes are “hidden” (*dissimulées*) because the measure of the line no longer announces when they will fall. Mallarmé’s recognition of such rhymes in French is also worth noting: for, prior to the separation, Mallarmé had admitted no such possibility. Rhyme, though endowed with particular and extraordinary powers in French verse, was absolutely tied to the line, metrically defined. A French reader might perceive the alexandrine “to be devoured by its rhyme as if that sparkling cause of delight triumphed from the very first syllable,” but the Mallarmé of 1887 argues that, in fact, a rhyme is “but one with the alexandrine” (*ne fait qu’un avec l’alexandrin*).^{xv} It is not rhyme that makes the line, but the line that makes rhyme. After the separation, however, rhyme is no longer “one with the alexandrine”; rhymes may be “hidden”; rhymes appear in prose.

“Verse,” then, it would seem, admits of at least two definitions. It may be language ordered by meter into the unit of a line, or it may be language that plays with timbre and rhyme. Language can demonstrate one or the other of these behaviors and constitute verse; it may also demonstrate both. The definitions are not mutually exclusive. Prose verse cannot avail itself of the metrical line, but metrical verses can certainly make use of timbre

and rhyme. Indeed, they are better when they do: “This is the superiority of modern verse over ancient verse,” Mallarmé contends, “which forms a whole but doesn’t rhyme.”^{xvi} Rhyme is not necessary to metrical verse, at least not in all languages, but it is preferable.

Timbre, too, appears within the confines of meter. Those who remain “faithful to the alexandrine, our hexameter,” Mallarmé writes in “Crisis of Verse,” “are loosening the childish, rigid mechanism of its length from within; the ear, freed from a gratuitous inner counter, feels the pleasure of discerning, on its own, all the possible combinations and permutations of twelve timbres.”^{xvii} The play of timbre can and does take place within the confines of the metrical line. Yet it seems, at least here, that timbre can suffer from the excessively “rigid and puerile mechanism” of the alexandrine, or more precisely its “measure” — one meaning of the word “meter.” The play of timbres becomes apparent to the ear only when that ear has been “liberated from a gratuitous inner counter.” By Mallarmé’s account, timbre and meter would appear to be engaged in a certain rivalry, just as rhyme and meter are. But while Mallarmé, in 1887, insisted upon the supremacy of meter over rhyme, in 1897, his sympathies seem to align with “timbre.”

A “timbre,” though not explicitly defined, is established here as occurring twelve times within an alexandrine; its length therefore is, or can be, equal to that of a syllable. We might provisionally say that a “timbre,” in Mallarmé’s vocabulary, consists of a vowel or diphthong optionally flanked by accompanying sounds — or, consonants. A relation emerges: a timbre is the minimal element required to form a rhyme. For poor rhyme requires, at minimum, the matching of two vowel timbres; there can be no play of rhyme without a play of timbre. Our second definition of verse may therefore be simplified further still. Thus:

verse may be language ordered by meter into the unit of a line, or verse may be language that plays with timbre.

But what, more precisely, does it mean to “play with timbre”? Mallarmé offers an extended reflection on the topic in “Crisis of Verse.” The dating of the passage is, again, significant. Absent from the 1892 essay “Concerning Verse” (“Relativement au vers”), a prototype for “Crisis of Verse” that appeared in *Verse and Prose*, the paragraph on timbre appears for the first time on September 1, 1895.^{xviii} Which is to say, after the separation. It then reappears, in its definitive form, in “Crisis of Verse,” an essay whose title, like its paragraph on timbre, announces a significant development in its author’s understanding of verse. The passage is well known:

... but, at times, in turning to aesthetics, I regret that discourse fails to express objects by means of strokes corresponding to them in coloring or bearing, which exist in the instrument of the voice, amongst languages and sometimes in one. Beside the opaque *ombre* [shade], *ténèbres* [shadows] is not very dark; what a disappointment, before the perversity that makes the timbres of *jour* [day] and *nuit* [night], contradictorily, dark in the first case, bright in the second. The wish for a term of brilliant splendor, or for a dark one, the opposite; as for the simple examples of brightness — Only, be aware that verse would not exist: it philosophically remunerates the deficiency of languages, superior complement.^{xix}

The clash described here takes place between elements alike in kind: the “coloring or bearing” (*coloris ou allure*) of “objects” and the coloring or bearing that “exists in the instrument of the voice, amongst languages, and sometimes within one.” The specific vehicle through which this coloring or bearing appears in the voice,

and in language, is “timbre,” as evidenced by the poet’s dismayed lament, “what a disappointment, before the perversity that makes the timbres of *jour* and *nuit*, contradictorily, dark in the first case, bright in the second.”

The vehicle through which coloring or bearing manifests itself in objects is more obscure. This is at least partially due to the fact that the “objects” of Mallarmé’s formulation are not precisely objects in the conventional sense of “things in the world.” The “objects” that Mallarmé cites are more accurately “facts of nature” or even “natural occurrences” (*faits de nature*) understood from an anthropocentric perspective and structured by the semantic divisions of the terms that designate them (*jour*, *nuit*). Thus, they are not precisely objects in the world, nor explicitly linguistic constructs; they are indifferent to the distinction. A pre-Saussurean thinker, Mallarmé does not make the three-fold distinction between the word (the signifier), the linguistic construct (the signified), and the thing in the world. For Mallarmé, there is only “the term” (the signifier) and “the object” that refers indifferently to the linguistic construct and the thing in the world.^{xx} The opening lines of the paragraph, which directly precede the excerpt cited above, articulate the source of the “objects” to which Mallarmé refers:

Languages, imperfect in that they are many, the supreme one is lacking: thinking being writing without accessories, nor whispers, but still tacit immortal speech, the diversity, on earth, of idioms prevents anyone from uttering words which, otherwise would be found, through one, unique strike, materially truth itself. This prohibition rules precisely, in nature (one brushes up against it with a smile) so that no one has any reason to consider himself God.^{xxi}

The barrier encountered here arises from the will to express thought in linguistic form. Thought, described as “writing without accessories, nor whispers,” precedes any putting into language. It is in the effort to articulate “immortal speech” (*l’immortelle parole*) that the thinking being runs up against a “prohibition.” That prohibition stands not against uttering words that would correspond perfectly to an objective reality, but upon uttering words that would materialize one’s own thought.^{xxii} Only one person gets to do that, Mallarmé notes with a smile: God. “This prohibition rules precisely, in nature (one brushes up against it with a smile) so that no one has any reason to consider himself God.” God does not exist for Mallarmé at this point, hence the passage’s initial assertion that “the supreme [language] is lacking.” The supreme language, for Mallarmé, is not lost, broken, or forgotten, it is simply “lacking.” It does not exist and never has — except, of course, as a “Chimera, attested in our having thought of it.”^{xxiii}

In the supreme language, objects, understood in Mallarmé’s sense, correspond perfectly with expression. This correspondence is not attested as a whole, but one catches glimmers of its possibility now and again, by which to infer what it would be. These glimmers appear not just in language, but in many forms of human expression, and when he spots them, Mallarmé tends to call them “poems.” Hence his confession that, “I never sit on a concert bench without perceiving amid the obscure sublimity the sketch of one of the poems immanent to humanity or those poems’ original state, all the more comprehensible for being silent,”^{xxiv} or his account of a ballet dancer as a “poem detached from any scribal apparatus.”^{xxv} For Mallarmé, these “poems immanent to humanity” are nothing less than that by which “humanity” can be said to exist at all. Like the constellations that exist only by means of the viewer who, in one and the same act, both reads and writes them,^{xxvi} “poems”

constitute the sign by which the human being evidences and asserts the very category of “humanity.”

Many arts afford glimmers of this sign, but for Mallarmé, it is ultimately language that holds the greatest potential to realize it. “It is not the elementary sonorities of brasses, strings, or woodwinds,” he writes emphatically, “but undeniably intellectual speech at its apogee that must evidently, opulently, result, as the totality of the relations existing in everything, Music.”^{xxvii} The greatest hope of realizing the “totality of the relations existing in everything” — and “everything,” for Mallarmé, includes humanity — lies in “intellectual speech at its apogee.” And “intellectual speech at its apogee,” is, or at least can be, “verse”:

Thus launched out of itself, the principle that is none other than — Verse! drawing inward no less than releasing for its full flowering (the instant they shimmer and die in a rapid bloom, on something transparent like ether) a thousand beautiful elements, hurried, rush together and order themselves in accordance with their essential values. Sign! in the central gulf of a spiritual impossibility that nothing belong exclusively to everything, the divine numerator of our apotheosis, some supreme mold that does not exist as any object: but it borrows, to burnish a seal, all the scattered ore, unclaimed and floating like riches, and to forge them together.^{xxviii}

The “Verse” of this passage, to be sure, is verse in meter: the words whose recitation prompts it are explicitly “arranged according to an absolute meter.”^{xxix} The “drawing inward” and “releasing” of the “thousand beautiful elements” described as “hurried” suggest linguistic elements engaged in a sort of tension with time, “rushing” into an “order” dictated by “their essential values.” The instant that order is attained is also the instant it perishes: “the instant they shimmer and die in a rapid bloom.” But the instant, brief as it may

be, is nonetheless a “Sign,” furnished by “an absolute meter,” attesting to “some supreme mold that does not exist as any object.” The supreme mold, like the supreme language, attests to a human vision of language ordered in a non-arbitrary, “absolute” way. Borrowing from the world of objects “scattered ore, unclaimed and floating like riches,” the absolute meter restores the order that is absent in words spoken without it. It will “burnish a seal”; in the terms of the passage with which we began, we might say that it “philosophically remunerates the deficiency of languages, superior complement.” What is the deficiency (*défaut*)? Implicitly, the order in which the elements find themselves before they “rush,” at the impetus of the absolute meter, into their “essential” order. There are, in other words, two orders: “brute and immediate here; there, essential.”^{xxx}

This passage, first published in February 1887, dates from before the separation; it appears in *Verse and Prose*; it gives no indication that anything besides “absolute meter” could generate the vibrant tension it describes. But the “verse” that appears in “Crisis of Verse” — the verse that explicitly can “remunerate the deficiency of languages” — is not described in terms of meter, absolute or otherwise. That without which “verse would not exist” is articulated in entirely different terms. By 1897, verse, stripped of none of its remunerative powers, has been reconfigured into something that we have yet to grasp.

III. “EN COLORIS OU EN ALLURE”

That without which verse would not exist is articulated in terms of a tension between the wish for a term endowed with certain properties and an encounter with a term lacking those properties, wholly or partially. While the sonic properties of *nuit* and *jour* seem to be fully opposed to the degrees of brightness inherent in the meaning of those terms, *ombre* constitutes an instance of partial

correspondence, implying an object nearly as dark as the “opaque” timbre Mallarmé perceives it to bear. The properties inherent in objects and in the voice thus admit of degrees; “opaque” and “not very dark,” are not binary and oppositional, but rather degrees of realization of the same quality, measured along the same axis. If the degrees of realization were always to correspond, verse would not exist; so would it cease to exist in the absence of the potential for correspondence. The potential for correspondence resides on the existence of the common axis: a property common to both objects and language.

That property seems to be of capital importance. Let us take a closer look at what it might be. To begin with, Mallarmé articulates it not as one property, but as two. The voice has the capacity to correspond to objects either *en coloris* ou *en allure* — in “color or movement,”^{xxxii} or perhaps, “shading or bearing.”^{xxxiii} He offers four examples of insufficient correspondences, all four of which are discussed in relation to the axis of “brightness.” And “brightness” is not precisely “color,” “coloring,” “movement,” “bearing,” or “shading” — though this last term certainly seems to come the closest.

Originally a painting term, *coloris* appears in French in 1675 to designate the “manner of using and manipulating colors, and, by metonymy, the effect obtained.”^{xxxiii} Of the definitions offered in the *Littré*, the one that lends itself most readily to Mallarmé’s text is the metonymic use of the term as extended into the realm of music: “the effect resulting from the use of instruments, sounds, and timbres.”^{xxxiv} The precise construction of Mallarmé’s sentence reinforces this reading: *coloris* does not exist “in the voice,” but indeed, “in the instrument of the voice.” Thus, we might say that *coloris* refers to the qualities of the voice that it shares with musical instruments: its sounds and timbres.

Allure, a derivative of the verb *aller* (“to go”), began by designating “speed and manner of movement.” Used particularly to

describe the gaits of horses — walking, trotting, galloping — the term can also be used in reference to the gaits of other creatures, including humans, as well as the progress of the sun. English translations in this sense might include “speed,” “rate,” or better still, “pace.” Used figuratively, *allure* can also refer to the general aura of people or things, as well as the overall pace or rhythm of a work of art.^{xxxv} In twentieth century phonetics, the term serves as the technical designator for the speed or rhythm of speech: “the rhythm [*allure*] of the utterance (sometimes referred to as movement) may be “slow” “rapid” or “staccato.”^{xxxvi} It is time, perhaps, to reconsider our translation of *allure*. While the English “pace” or “pacing” bears the advantage of the walking movement at the origin of the French term, it lacks any capacity to suggest the “staccato” rhythm of the technical designator. The best term available, then, would seem to be “rhythm.”

The two properties Mallarmé identifies as common to objects and language are thus quite distinct. Although we cannot say with certainty what they are in “objects,” we can say with considerable precision what they are in the voice. The first, coloring, refers to the sounds and timbres of the voice; the second, rhythm, references the rhythm of utterances. As to the category to which Mallarmé’s examples pertain, we have little choice but to say “coloring.” For while “brightness” is not precisely “coloring,” it is “rhythm” even less.

Thus, the answer to the question, ‘What is that without which verse would not exist?’ is dual in nature. There are two answers. Mallarmé explains one of them in considerable detail: it is the tension that arises between one’s desire for a term with a particular coloring and one’s encounter with a term lacking that coloring. The desired coloring is the one inherent in the object named and inheres in meaning; the encountered coloring is that of the timbre in the term pronounced and inheres in linguistic sound.

This is the answer afforded by *coloris*. Let us call it *the tension of timbre*.

The second answer lies in the term *allure*. Considered beside the numerous examples provided to illustrate “coloring,” the lack of explanation with regard to “rhythm” suggests that the author assumes the matter to be self-evident. He does not explain it. We know of its presence only because of the inclusion of “allure” in the expression “en *coloris* ou en *allure*.” And because, in the line directly following the passage under consideration, Mallarmé names it. Concluding his reflection on the desire, necessary to verse, to make the coloring of meaning correspond to the coloring of sound, he writes, “Strange mystery; and, from no lesser intentions, meter appeared in incubatory times.”^{xxxvii} The second answer is meter.

For meter also generates a tension in language; meter also awakens a human desire to see fragments of language “order themselves in accordance with their essential values.”^{xxxviii} Those values, in the case of meter, are not colored, but rhythmic — they have to do with the forward march of speech sounds in time. If the tension of timbre may be defined as the tension that arises from a discrepancy between one’s desire for a term of a particular hue and one’s encounter with a term of a different color, metrical tension might be described as the tension that arises between one’s desire for an expression with a particular rhythm and an encounter with an expression lacking that temporal structure.

To summarize: prior to the Taylorian lecture, the only aspect of language Mallarmé recognizes as capable of stamping the forger’s seal upon an utterance to make it verse is meter. From March 1, 1894 onward, however, “verse” admits of two definitions. It may be language ordered by meter into a line, or it may be language that engages the tension of timbre.^{xxxix}

IV. A THEORY OF VERSE

Let us return, once more, to the passage. Can we really say that there are two, and only two, answers to the question “What is that without which verse would not exist?” The difficulty, to begin with, is one of syntax. The verb of the italicized warning appears in the conditional: “verse would not exist.” It seems to partake of a hypothetical if-then structure, such as one typically finds in the form “If X __, then Y___.” But the first clause is missing. X, therefore, remains an enigma. We infer from the context that the missing clause concerns the wish articulated at the beginning of the sentence: “The wish for a term of brilliant splendor, or for a dark one, the opposite.” The missing clause, we hypothesize, would be: “If that wish were realized.” Thus: “If we had a term of brilliant splendor, or for a dark one, the opposite, verse would not exist.”

This seems reasonable enough. But taken literally, it would imply that meter is not capable, on its own, of creating verse. In this reading, verse resides on one aspect of language and one aspect alone: the tension of timbre. Which is manifestly false.

Might we, then, read the missing clause in a different sense? Perhaps by taking into account the component of the sentence that we have thus far ignored: “as for the simple examples of brightness”? This phrase, which refers to the desired “term of brilliant splendor” and its dark opposite, reduces those entities to illustrations of a general idea. We have assumed this idea to be the tension of timbre. But the categories to which the examples pertain are multiple: they are “simple examples of brightness,” of which other examples might be, and indeed have been, offered; but the principle of “brightness,” according to our current understanding, is itself but an example of the larger category of “coloring.” This categorization, however, was made only reluctantly; “brightness” was said to partake of “coloring” only because it could not be assimilated into “rhythm.”

But might not “coloring” and “rhythm,” too, partake of a larger category, a category into which “brightness” might more comfortably fall? For just as we read the “term of brilliant splendor” and its opposite as indications of a general principle, so might we also read “coloring or rhythm” as examples pertaining to a shared category. By this reading, that without which verse would not exist might be understood in terms of a single principle, of which rhythm, coloring, and brightness are three examples. They are not even, necessarily, the only possible examples. Nothing in Mallarmé’s syntax, when thus understood, precludes the possibility of yet other linguistic phenomena capable of instantiating the principle they enact in verse.

So what is the principle? It would have to partake of that which is structurally common to the tension installed in language by meter and by timbre. Let us return to the two passages that describe these experiences: “Solemnity” and “Crisis of Verse.”

The force that drives the passage on meter is the listener’s perception, and expectation, of an order to be realized: the “thousand beautiful elements,” we read, “rush together and order themselves in accordance with their essential values.” We understand this “order” to be that of the “absolute meter”; it operates in accordance with the elements’ “essential values.” Referred to as the “divine numerator of our apotheosis,” this order partakes of a system based on number. Placed in parallel with — even, arguably, granted the appositive of — “some supreme mold that does not exist as any object,” it also partakes, unmistakably, of the supreme language. This supreme order exists in a state of tension with another force: it “draws in” and “releases”; the elements are “hurried”; they “rush.” In moving to the meter, the earthly language reveals the presence of other constraints against which it must work. We infer these constraints to be those that govern language in non-meter: the rhythm and word order governed less by sound and more by syntax. The particularity of the

experience of meter seems to lie not only in an awareness of the metrical order, but also in a heightened awareness of this order: the one dictated by sense. This order, although ever present in non-metrical speech, is usually unconscious because unchallenged; meter, whether it actually disrupts this order or not, introduces the possibility of disruption. And it is the possibility, not the violation, which creates the tension constitutive of verse. Metrical verse awakens the speaking being's awareness of the arbitrary rhythms of everyday speech: the pauses and groupings that have been uttered so often as to seem necessary, inviolable, and absolute. Meter, in furnishing another order, exposes the contingency of the one that was already there.

The same might be said of the passage on timbre. It, too, asserts the existence of an order intrinsic to language: an order that stands at odds with the order inherent in everyday usage. It, too, resides on a human expectation of the linguistic element. Only someone who expects a particular timbre can be "disappointed" "before the perversity that makes the timbres of *jour* and *nuit*, contradictorily, dark in the first case, bright in the second." This perversity reigns in non-verse, but no one particularly notices because no one thinks to expect otherwise. That which distinguishes the experience of timbre as recounted by Mallarmé is merely the heightened perception of an order intrinsic to linguistic sound — this time articulated not in terms of rhythm, but in terms of brightness — that is different from the order governing non-verse. Timbre, in offering a glint of this order, reveals the arbitrary nature of the one governing everyday speech.

That which distinguishes verse from non-verse would appear to be nothing more than an idea of order: an awareness of the arbitrary principles governing everyday speech, coupled with a desire to replace these principles with non-arbitrary ones. Both the awareness and the desire are generated by the emergence of the non-arbitrary order, internal to language, which holds the potential

to disrupt the mechanisms governing non-verse. For Mallarmé, this other order is singular and absolute: it is the supreme language. Its singularity is implied by the singularity of the “supreme mold” in the passage on meter,^{xli} and by that of “the supreme one” in the passage on timbre.^{xlii} Mallarmé simply assumes that the “essential values” of the elements will be universally perceived and uncontested, just as he assumes his readers will hear *jour* as dark and *nuit* as light. The idea that some fortunate soul might perceive the timbre of *jour* as something other than dark does not appear to cross his mind, any more than the possibility that someone might think of days as dark. Because there is only one supreme language, the values accorded its timbres are universal and not specific to the phonology of any single language. Thus, the supreme language, for Mallarmé, is in no way particular to French. It inheres “amongst languages”; it is “absolute.”^{xliii} For Mallarmé, the principle of verse based in a relation to the supreme language therefore defines not only French verse, but all verse.^{xliiii}

Verse exists as soon as a speaking being is sensitive to the existence of the supreme language: as soon as that being, expecting it, can be “disappointed” by the language that comes in its stead. This seems to be the fundamental difference distinguishing verse and non-verse: the tension installed in language by its non-correspondence with the supreme one. This tension is premised merely on an idea of the supreme language in language. It resides, therefore, on a “Chimera, attested in our having thought of it.”

The poet can attain the supreme language, in a way, in the metrical line. The metrical verse in “Solemnity” does achieve its “full flowering” and the “thousand beautiful elements” do, at that instant, align to form a “Sign!” Whether the poet can attain the supreme language through the tension of timbre is less clear. Mallarmé does not offer us any such gratifying moments of alignment when it comes to timbre; the closest he comes to providing an example of fulfilled correspondence is the rather

lackluster example of “*ombre*, opaque.” It is not even clear, in the case of timbre, over what unit the poet would make the timbres of sense correspond with those of sound. In the case of meter, the unit was the line; but after the separation, the line has been withdrawn. A timbre inheres in a single syllable, we know, from Mallarmé’s mention of the “twelve timbres” of the alexandrine; and a single timbre can color an entire word, even one of multiple syllables (*ténèbres*). But the unit over which the poet’s timbres could attain a perfect correspondence of sound and sense, conquering the “perversity” that mis-assigned them, remains almost entirely obscure.

In what sense then, we might well ask, can the play of timbre be said to constitute verse? For verse, in Mallarmé, negates chance. That is its role. As Gérard Genette, amongst many others, observed half a century ago, Mallarmé “assigns to poetic language the precise task of suppressing, or more precisely of giving the illusion of suppressing, the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign.”^{xliv} In the poet’s own words, it is “verse which from many expressions makes a total, new word [...] negating, in a sovereign sweep, the chance that remains in terms.”^{xlv} If the tension of timbre does not do this, what does it do?

Mallarmé tells us: it “remunerates the deficiency in languages.”^{xlvi} The formulation merits a moment’s reflection. For despite the resemblance by which *rémunérer* has, for centuries, been misspelled in both French and English as *rénumérer* (“renumerate”), the verb bears no reference to number and thus, no reference to meter. And despite the superficial similarity by which it might be taken as synonymous with “giving the impression of suppressing the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign,” to “remunerate the deficiency in languages” is not to “eliminate chance,” nor even to “negate” it.

In order to read the expression *rémunère le défaut des langues* as synonymous with “nier le hasard” we would have to

understand *le défaut des langues* as “chance” and *rémunère* as “negate.” The word *défaut*, however, suggests an absence, not a presence; the word is defined as “the absence of a thing or person whose presence is necessary or desirable (generally, for the formation of a coherent whole).”^{xlvi} Chance is not absent in languages, but present; its presence is not necessary or desirable — on the contrary, it inspires “regret.” The equation *le défaut des langues* = *hasard* is therefore imprecise. That which is “absent,” but whose presence would be “desirable,” is not *le hasard*, but *la suprême*. It is not chance that is lacking in languages; it is the supreme language.

The question, then, is what distinguishes *rémunérer l’absence de la langue suprême* from *nier le hasard*. The verb *rémunérer* is primarily an economic one; it means “to pay someone a sum in exchange for work or services rendered.”^{xlvi} In the medieval period, it carried a strong religious connotation, as *le rémunérateur* was another name for God: he who “rewards Christian virtue.”^{xlvi} In both economic and religious usage, the structure of the verb involves two steps, two parties, and two elements: an initial transaction, in which party one renders a gift, service, or work (element one) to party two, and a second transaction, in which party two compensates party one, typically but not exclusively by means of a financial or spiritual reward (element two). Whether the transactions be religious or economic, an element of faith is required from party one: that party two will carry out the second transaction.

Mallarmé’s sentence conforms to a derivative use of the verb, by which element two serves as grammatical subject and “remunerates” the direct object, element one, in the sense of “constitutes the remuneration of.”¹ In this usage, the parties disappear, causing the transaction take place between elements alone. The giver, be it the economic power that pays or the God that rewards, has been eliminated; so, too, has the laborer or

believer. Mallarmé's verb enacts a very simple equation that takes place entirely within language: verse compensates for the absence of the supreme language.

While this formulation does entail a principle of equivalence and a gesture of compensation, its structure does not emphasize, nor even necessarily entail, a "negation." The action entailed in *rémunérer* is clearly distinguishable from that of say, *annuler* or *supprimer*: paying someone for services rendered is not the same thing as canceling the whole transaction. Accounts are settled in both cases, but in the second, nothing will have taken place; in the first, something will. In Mallarméan terms, it is the difference between "NOTHING / WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE" and "NOTHING / WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE / BUT THE PLACE." "BUT THE PLACE" acknowledges that something has taken place, even when by another measure, nothing has. We need not even reach possible alignment found within a constellation — which is not necessary, but optional: "EXCEPT / PERHAPS / A CONSTELLATION."^{li} Even without the appearance of a legible constellation, something will have taken place.

And that which will have taken place is the *rémunération* of language unto itself: the site (*le lieu*) it furnishes in compensation for the supreme language that it lacks. The verb Mallarmé selects to articulate that which verse offers "in return" reveals the impossibility of the initial offering: the prefix *re-* belies the absence of any such noun as *munération* or verb as *munérer*. The supreme language was never offered, because the supreme language never was; the remuneration is the second transaction to an absent first. The element of faith, therefore, has been eliminated. Unlike the economic equation and unlike the religious one, the remunerative equation that produces verse relies not on faith in a "supreme one," but on the supreme one's absence.

To summarize: there has been a separation of *le vers*. The line, ordered by meter, negates chance. This is the "antique verse"

whose worship Mallarmé maintains in his preface to the “Roll of the Dice”; it is the *vers* of the quotation previously cited, which might be better translated not as “verse,” but indeed, as “the line which from many expressions makes a total, new word [...] negating, in a sovereign sweep, the chance that remains in terms...”^{lii} But the line, for Mallarmé, is no longer synonymous with “verse.” The line is but one instance of the greater principle whose defining feature is its capacity to expose the supreme language in language: not necessarily to give the impression of having attained it. Thus, there can be such a thing as a “free verse” (*vers libre*); verse can exist in the absence of the line, “playing with its timbres, and even hidden rhymes.” This verse cannot suppress, eliminate, or negate chance. Severed from the line, it can only “philosophically remunerate the deficiency in languages” by calling attention to what it is not, but which we, in noticing, attest to be.

ⁱ “Sûr, nous en sommes là, présentement. La séparation.” In Stéphane Mallarmé, “La Musique et les Lettres,” *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Bertrand Marchal, Vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 2003) 64. Henceforth *OC II*. Translations of Mallarmé refer to Barbara Johnson’s *Divagations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) when applicable. I have silently modified these translations throughout. Other translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱ “l’épanouissement de ce qui naguères obtint le titre de poème en prose” ; “Très strict, numérique, direct, à deux conjoints, le mètre, antérieur, subsiste ; auprès” (*OC II*, 64).

ⁱⁱⁱ I am aware of two challenges to this definition. In his 1974 essay “Reflections on the Mechanics of French Verse,” Jean-Claude Milner argues that “a poetic sequence is not only a meter, ... but also a line (*vers*), which is to say a set space within which specific procedures can be defined and whose exterior limits possess characteristic properties” (“Réflexions sur le fonctionnement du vers français,” *Ordres et raisons de langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1978) 285). Hence Milner’s argument that the line, or rather the phonological break that the end of the line creates in language, be considered the defining feature of verse. That which defines verse from non-verse, for Milner, is thus not meter, but the possibility of enjambment (300). The other challenge is brought up, but not resolved, by Giorgio Agamben in his reflection on Milner’s hypothesis. “For if poetry is defined precisely by the possibility of enjambment,” he writes, “it follows that the last verse of a poem is not a verse. Does this mean that the last verse trespasses into prose?” In *The End of the Poem*, tr. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 112.

^{iv} “les vers ne vont que par deux ou à plusieurs, en raison de leur accord final, soit la loi mystérieuse de la Rime” (“Solennité,” *OC II*, 201).

^v “...le vers est tout, dès qu’on écrit. Style, versification s’il y a cadence” (“La Musique et les Lettres,” *OC II*, 64).

^{vi} “CADENCE. 1. Appui de la voix sur les syllabes accentuées, marquant la répartition rythmique des éléments d’une phrase [...] 2. Succession d’accords selon certaines règles harmoniques, terminant une phrase musicale” (*Trésor de la langue française*).

^{vii} See Jean-Claude Milner, “Mallarmé Perchance,” 87–110 of the present volume.

^{viii} “toute prose d’écrivain fastueux, soustraite à ce laisser-passer en usage, ornementale, vaut en tant qu’un vers rompu, jouant avec ses timbres et encore les rimes dissimulées” (“La Musique et les Lettres,” *OC II*, 64).

^{ix} *Vers et prose* (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1893).

^x See Bertrand Marchal’s commentary in *OC I*, 1177.

^{xi} The text, an amalgamation of several previous essays, was published in its definitive form in *Divagations* (Paris: Charpentier, 1897).

^{xii} “crise” (*Trésor de la langue française*); “κρίσις” (Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*); “crisis” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

^{xiii} “crise” (*Trésor de la langue française*).

^{xiv} “toute prose d’écrivain fastueux, soustraite à ce laisser-passer en usage, ornementale, vaut en tant qu’un vers rompu, jouant avec ses timbres et encore les rimes dissimulées” (“La Musique et les Lettres,” *OC II*, 64).

^{xv} “On a pu, antérieurement à l’invitation de la rime ici extraordinaire parce qu’elle ne fait qu’un avec l’alexandrin qui, dans ses poses et la multiplicité de son jeu, semble par elle dévoré tout entier comme si cette fulgurante cause de délice y triomphait jusqu’à l’initiale syllabe” (“Solennité,” *OC II*, 199–200). The text was first published in February 1887 and also appeared in *Vers et prose*.

^{xvi} “Là est la suprématie de modernes vers sur ceux antiques formant un tout et ne rimant pas” (“Solennité,” *OC II*, 201).

^{xvii} “Les fidèles à l’alexandrin, notre hexamètre, desserrent intérieurement ce mécanisme rigide et puéril de sa mesure; l’oreille, affranchie d’un compteur factice, connaît une jouissance à discerner, seule, toutes les combinaisons possibles, entre eux, de douze timbres” (“Crise de vers,” *OC II*, 206).

^{xviii} The paragraph first appears in “Averses ou critique” in *La Revue blanche* (*OC II*, 1643).

^{xix} “... mais, sur l’heure, tourné à de l’esthétique, mon sens regrette que le discours défaille à exprimer les objets par des touches y répondant en coloris ou en allure, lesquelles existent dans l’instrument de la voix, parmi les langages et quelquefois chez un. À côté d’ombre, opaque, ténèbres se fonce peu; quelle déception, devant la perversité conférant à jour comme à nuit, contradictoirement, des timbres obscur ici, là clair. Le souhait d’un terme de splendeur brillant, ou qu’il s’éteigne, inverse; quant à des alternatives lumineuses simples — Seulement, sachons n’existerait pas le vers: lui, philosophiquement rémunère le défaut des langues, complément supérieur” (“Crise de vers,” *OC II*, 208).

^{xx} See Gérard Genette, “Le jour, la nuit,” *Cahiers de l’Association internationale des études françaises* N° 20 (1968) 158; as well as Jean-Claude Milner’s “Mallarmé Perchance,” 87–110 of the present volume.

^{xxi} « Les langues imparfaites en cela que plusieurs, manque la suprême : penser étant écrire sans accessoires, ni chuchotement mais tacite encore l’immortelle parole, la diversité, sur terre, des idiomes empêche personne de proférer les mots qui, sinon se trouveraient, par une frappe unique, elle-même matériellement la vérité. Cette prohibition sévit expresse, dans la nature (on s’y bute avec un sourire) que ne vaille de raison pour se considérer Dieu » (“Crise de vers,” *OC II*, 208).

^{xxii} Maurice Blanchot disagrees on this point. In his reading, the supreme language Mallarmé describes would be one in which language coincides with “the reality of things” (*la réalité des choses*): a reality inaccessible to language because language can only ever partake of “this fictive reality that is the human world” (*cette réalité fictive qu’est le monde humain*). In *L’Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955) 32 fn; tr. by Ann Smock, *The Space of Literature* (Nebraska University Press, 1982) 40 fn. The textual basis for Blanchot’s separation and implied hierarchy between “the reality of things” and “this fictive reality which is the human world” is not stated, and, indeed, dubious. Mallarmé would seem to be interested in “the reality of things” only in so far as it is mediated by humans: he writes in “Crisis of Verse,” for example, that “Speaking has to do with the reality of things only commercially: in literature, one contents oneself with alluding to it or disturbing it slightly, so that it yields up the idea it incorporates” (Parler n’a trait à la réalité des choses que commercialement : en littérature, cela se contente d’y faire une allusion ou de distraire leur qualité qu’incorporera quelque idée) (*OC II*, 210).

^{xxiii} “Chimère, y avoir pensé atteste” (“Crise de vers,” *OC II*, 211).

^{xxiv} “je ne m’assieds jamais aux gradins des concerts, sans percevoir parmi l’obscur sublimité telle ébauche de quelqu’un des poèmes immanents à l’humanité ou leur originel état, d’autant plus compréhensible que tu” (“Crise de vers,” *OC II*, 213).

^{xxv} “poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe” (“Ballets,” *OC II*, 171).

^{xxvi} See Jean-Claude Milner, “Les constellations révélatrices,” *Elucidations* 8–9 (winter 2003–4) 3.

^{xxvii} “ce n’est pas de sonorités élémentaires par des cuivres, les cordes, les bois, indéniablement mais de l’intellectuelle parole à son apogée que doit avec plénitude et évidence, résulter, en tant que l’ensemble des rapports existant dans tout, la Musique” (*OC II*, 212). For Mallarmé, “Music” with a capital M is clearly distinguished from “music” the art form; ‘Music’ is synonymous with Chimera, Idea, “poem immanent to humanity,” or what we have referred to as a “sign” of humanity. See, for example, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta : Figures de Wagner* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1991) 91–160.

^{xxviii} “Ainsi lancé de soi le principe qui n’est — que le Vers ! attire non moins que dégage pour son épanouissement (l’instant qu’ils brillent et meurent dans une

fleur rapide, sur quelque transparence comme d'éther) les mille éléments de beauté pressés d'accourir et de s'ordonner dans leur valeur essentielle. Signe ! au gouffre central d'une spirituelle impossibilité que rien ne soit exclusivement à tout, le numérateur divin de notre apothéose, quelque suprême moule n'ayant pas lieu en tant que d'aucun objet qui existe : mais il emprunte, pour y aviver un sceau tous gisements épars, ignorés et flottants selon quelque richesse, et les forger" ("Solennité," *OC II*, 200).

^{xxix} "appareillés d'après une métrique absolue" ("Solennité," *OC II*, 200).

^{xxx} "brut ou immédiat ici, là essentiel" ("Crise de vers," *OC II*, 212).

^{xxxi} Rosemary Lloyd translation, in *Mallarmé: The Poet and His Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 230.

^{xxxii} Barbara Johnson translation, in *Divagations*, 205.

^{xxxiii} "coloris," *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, ed. par Alain Rey (Paris: Le Robert, 1993) 450 ; "coloris," *Trésor de la langue française*, ed. par Paul Imbs, Vol. 2 (Paris: CNRS, 1973) 1068.

^{xxxiv} "coloris," *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, ed. É. Littré, Vol. 6 (Versailles: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1994) 1009.

^{xxxv} "allure," *Trésor*, Vol. 2, 593-5; "allure," *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, 172.

^{xxxvi} "allure," *Trésor*, Vol. 2, 593-5.

^{xxxvii} "Arcane étrange; et, d'intentions pas moindres, a jailli la métrique aux temps incubatoires" ("Crise de vers," *OC II*, 208).

^{xxxviii} "les mille éléments de beauté pressés d'accourir et de s'ordonner dans leur valeur essentielle" ("Solennité," *OC II*, 200).

^{xxxix} Despite the prominence of the passage on jour and nuit, the inclusion of this second term within Mallarmé's conception of verse has been overwhelmingly overlooked. See, for example, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's argument that Mallarmé's "verse" may be reduced to "a principle of rhythm" in *Musica Ficta*, 91-160, and particularly 155-9.

^{xl} "quelque suprême moule n'ayant pas lieu en tant que d'aucun objet qui existe" ("Solennité," *OC II*, 200).

^{xli} "Les langues imparfaites en cela que plusieurs, manque la suprême ..." ("Crise de vers," *OC II*, 208).

^{xlii} It is interesting to note that from the perspective of modern linguistics, Mallarmé's formulation is asymmetrical. For timbre inheres in vowel sounds, rather than vowels as such; which is to say, measurements of timbre consider language in acoustic, rather than linguistic terms. Timbre is therefore universal, not language-specific. Meter, on the other hand, is language-specific: organizing a language by means of phonological units, meter necessarily differs in accordance with the phonology of the language at hand; hence the syllabic-accentual meters of English, the quantitative classical meters, the syllabic meters of French, the tonal meters of Chinese, and so on. In Mallarmé's formulation, however, there is such a thing as an "absolute meter." This meter seems to refer to that by which "meter" can be said to constitute a category across languages.

Yet a definition of meter that makes no reference to phonology seems difficult to formulate; one would begin, presumably, with the principle of number.

^{xliii} This orientation, manifest throughout Mallarmé's theoretical texts, is also discernible in his correspondence. In setting a title for his Taylorian Lecture of 1894, for example, Mallarmé first proposes the title "Les Lettres et la Musique." The English organizers, gently reminding him that the event will form part of a lecture series on French Literature, respond by requesting that the word "français" figure in the lecture title. Though Mallarmé's letter of response to this request is now lost, it is attested by the response of Oxford tutor Charles Bonnier; Bonnier confirms that Mallarmé's lecture has been announced, in accordance with the author's wishes, as "Les Lettres et la Musique." The absence of any national or linguistic marker in the title thus appears to have been not only considered, but indeed, insisted upon. In *Correspondance de Stéphane Mallarmé*, ed. by Henri Mondor & Lloyd James Austin, Vol. VI (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 176; *OC II*, 1599).

^{xliv} "assigne au langage poétique la tâche précise de supprimer, ou plus exactement de donner l'illusion qu'il supprime l'arbitraire du signe linguistique" (Genette, "Le jour, la nuit," 160). See also Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," *Selected Writings III*, ed. by Stephen Rudy (The Hague: Mouton, 1981) 44-5.

^{xlv} "Le vers qui de plusieurs vocables refait un mot total, neuf, étranger à la langue et comme incantatoire [...] niant, d'un trait souverain, le hasard demeuré aux termes ..." ("Crise de vers," *OC II*, 213).

^{xlvi} "rémunère le défaut des langues" ("Crise de vers," *OC II*, 208).

^{xlvii} "défaut," *Trésor de la langue française*.

^{xlviii} "rémunérer," *Trésor*, Vol. 14, 780.

^{xlix} *Ibid.*

^l *Ibid.*

^{li} "RIEN / N'AURA EU LIEU / QUE LE LIEU / EXCEPTÉ / PEUT-ÊTRE / UNE CONSTELLATION" ("Un coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard," *OC I*, 384-7).

^{lii} "Observation relative au poème," *OC I*, 392; "Crise de vers," *OC II*, 213.