

# Baudelaire, Wagner, Mallarmé

## Romantic Aesthetics and the Word-Tone Dichotomy

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There can be no doubting the accuracy of Steven Paul Scher's suggestion (in his 1991 essay, "Melopoetics or Melomania") that the "effort to integrate closer scrutiny of the phenomenon of music into their aesthetic speculations" is more prevalent among German than among French thinkers. Nonetheless, by the mid-nineteenth century music had begun increasingly to influence the development of French literary aesthetics. Together with its emotional power, the unity between form and content that music exemplified had come to represent an artistic ideal to which writers aspired. Of particular relevance in the context of this aspiration are the reactions to music, and to Wagner in particular, of two of the greatest French poets of the period: Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Both were passionately interested in the nature of the relationship between musical and poetic language. For the former, writing in 1861, Wagner's operas were proof of the theoretical and aesthetic validity of unifying words and music in a single work. For the latter, however, writing in 1884, such a procedure amounted to an aesthetic and theoretical error of the greatest magnitude. Condemning Wagner's achievement as a mere juxtaposition of art forms, Mallarmé proposed as an alternative a poetic language that would in itself embody both the expressiveness of music and the intelligibility of words. I shall argue that, in charting the distance between these opposing stances, we gain valuable insight into the nature and development of the "poetological echo" of the word-tone dichotomy found, as Scher so rightly observes, in romantic aesthetics. I shall suggest furthermore that this literary context admirably serves the comparatist wishing to respond creatively to Scher's exhortation to approach both components of the dichotomy between instrumental and vocal music "as a dialectic entity".

In 1991, in an essay entitled "Melopoetics or Melomania: Is There a Theory Behind Music in German Literature?", Steven Paul Scher makes a plea for a fresh approach to the problems confronting scholars interested in the relationship between word and music. "I suggest", he says,

that instead of focusing more or less exclusively on the idea of absolute music as "das ästhetische Paradigma der deutschen Musikkultur des 19. Jahrhunderts"<sup>1</sup> – as Dahlhaus has done with such inimitable aplomb –, we now focus on *both* components of the dichotomy *together* as a dialectic entity: on wordless instrumental music *together* with its counterpart, which is never far away, word-dependent vocal music. (333)

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<sup>1</sup> 'the aesthetic paradigm of nineteenth-century German musical culture' (This and all subsequent translations are mine.)

Convinced of the “potential aesthetic relevance for musical and poetic theory and practice of the dichotomy between instrumental music and vocal music” (333), his purpose is to raise awareness of that potential and, at the same time, to explore ways of realising it more fully. My intention is to examine some of the implications of Scher’s admonition. The context in which I have chosen to do so is noteworthy for a number of reasons. First, it is French and involves two of the greatest French poets of the nineteenth century: Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé. Second, it charts two very different literary reactions to a great German composer, Richard Wagner. Finally, the period it spans – some 24 years between 1860 and 1884 – is one during which traditional boundaries between the arts were being progressively questioned and undermined. A literary aesthetic based on a new vision of the relationship between literature and music was beginning to emerge.

The starting point of my inquiry is neither a piece of music nor a literary reference. It is in fact a painting, one that dates from 1840. The artist, Josef Danhauser – an Austrian who was born in Vienna in 1805 and died there in 1845 – was well known in his own time for his portraits, especially those of artists. The picture is simply called *Liszt at the Grand Piano*, and for me its real interest lies in its ability to capture an aspect of what I would like to call the aesthetic climate of Romanticism (see fig. 1). The hazards facing anyone using such terms are myriad. To quote the philosopher Arthur Lovejoy, in his classic essay “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms”, “the word ‘romantic’ has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign” (6). If, as Lovejoy painstakingly demonstrates, this is the case in a purely literary context, and if, by inference, it is also the case in a purely musical context, what chance is there for a comparatist like me? My hope, however, is that the personal reading of the work I am about to offer will go some way towards redeeming the situation by injecting a modicum of clarity into the phrase I have coined.

Of the seven people in the painting, three are writers and three are musicians. Franz Liszt is playing to a group of friends. To the left and slightly behind him – dressed as a man and reclining in an armchair – is George Sand. Alexandre Dumas *père* is sitting beside her, looking as if he has just been distracted from reading the book that lies open on his knee. Behind them, leaning on the back of Sand’s chair, is Victor Hugo. He also



*Figure 1: Franz Liszt, painting by Josef Danhauser (Austrian National Library, Vienna)*

has a book in his hand, but unlike Dumas he looks as if he has abandoned reading, as if his attention has been captured by what is going on in the room. To his left are two other musicians: Gioachino Rossini, on the far right, rests his hand on the shoulder of Nicoló Paganini. The seventh member of the company, sitting at Liszt's feet, is the Comtesse Marie d'Agoult, the great man's mistress and mother of his daughter, Cosima, Wagner's future wife. (In 1840, Cosima would have been just three years old.)

Like any such work, the painting lends itself to different interpretations and to different levels of interpretation. My reading is influenced by two things: first, by my own musico-literary preoccupations and, second, by an awareness of the aesthetic perfection music represented for many thinkers – theorists, critics, artists and philosophers – in the nineteenth century. Danhauser's presentation embodies this vision of music's superiority. In so doing, it gives visible form to an important aspect of what Scher calls the "extraordinary poetological echo" of the word-tone dichotomy found in romantic aesthetics ("Musicopoetics" 330).

Danhauser's subject is multifarious. The fact that the painting fits well with his reputation as a portraitist hardly needs emphasis. On another level, as a record of the magnetism exercised by great performing artists and as a portrayal of a Parisian *salon* – an enormously important facet of French artistic and intellectual life at the time – it has a certain socio-historical significance. The inclusion of the figure of Paganini emphasises the aptness of this observation, for both he and Liszt (on whom, of course, his influence was legendary) were regarded as models *par excellence* of the Romantic artist. But within this multifariousness there is a unifying point of reference, or, more precisely, an integrative force. It is the art of music itself. In saying this, my intention is not simply to acknowledge the fact that the principal figure is a musician engaged in the act of producing music. On the contrary, rather than dwell on the narrative aspect of the painting, I wish to emphasise its symbolic content. With that in mind, let me draw attention to the strong visual pull towards the right of the picture. All eyes (including of course ours) are directed not just towards the figure of Liszt (placed, incidentally, to the right of centre on the canvas), but beyond it. The tapering lid of the grand piano plays an important role, guiding us unerringly towards the rather extraordinary bust placed on the far right beyond the curtains that enclose and darken the room. This object

dominates the painting for a number of reasons: first, because it is so big, being quite disproportionate to everything else in the picture; second, because it is the largest light-coloured expanse on the canvas; third – and this is surely the most significant reason –, because of the way Danhauser has chosen to paint it. While at first it may appear to be resting on a bundle of books or sheet music on top of the piano, a closer look reveals a merging between the outline of the sheets and the outline of the stormy sky visible through the window behind it. It seems to be suspended against that background, as if the painter wished this mighty figure to be seen at once as something beyond the scene depicted in the painting and as part of it, as if perhaps he intended to suggest a spiritual rather than a physical presence. One also has a sense that Liszt, directing his quasi-religious and completely unimpeded gaze upwards, has – appropriately enough, as the producer of music – privileged access to this presence. It is, of course, a bust of Ludwig van Beethoven, and it is difficult to think of any artist whose presence could be more appropriate in this mid-nineteenth-century Parisian scene. In the 1830s and 1840s, adulation of French audiences for Beethoven's symphonies knew no bounds. Sand and Hugo both published accounts of their reactions to his music, and, in his diary, the painter Eugene Delacroix noted a remark he had made to Sand after a concert they had both attended: “J’ai dit à Madame Sand [...] que Beethoven nous remue davantage, parce qu’il est l’homme de notre temps. Il est romantique au suprême degré.” (201)<sup>2</sup> And there are other reasons too, reasons related directly to Beethoven's thinking and to his influence on musical aesthetics. As early as 1800, the composer had begun to champion the cause of music and musicians, insisting that they were on a par, both artistically and socially, with literature and writers. To quote Carl Dahlhaus:

The earlier notion that music either moved the affections and touched the heart or was nothing but ‘an agreeable noise’ was confronted around 1800 by a modern aesthetic which Beethoven held in common with Friedrich Schlegel: the idea that music, not unlike philosophical meditation, represents a train of thought. (81)

This aesthetic was the first, crucial step towards a heightened regard for music among thinkers in many disciplines. Far from being seen as inferior to the other arts, it

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<sup>2</sup> ‘I said to Madame Sand [...] that Beethoven moves us more because he is the man of our time. He is eminently romantic.’

gradually came to be seen as superior. Music, or rather “the condition of music”, to quote Walter Pater, became something towards which “all art [aspired]” (128). This belief, which first made its appearance in German philosophy in the last quarter of the eighteenth century<sup>3</sup>, is an aspect of nineteenth-century literary aesthetics that makes the period a particularly fertile ground for comparative investigation. Charles Rosen, in the opening sentences of his essay “Secret Codes: Casper David Friedrich, Robert Schumann“, sees it as a clearly-defined turning point in the history of aesthetics: “Does each art have its proper sphere, some aspect of reality that it may reflect or imitate that is closed to the other arts?” he asks. His answer is admirably clear and concise:

The eighteenth century thought so and attempted to define the nature and the limits of each of the arts [...]. In the first decades of the nineteenth century [...] the ability of music to create meaning and significance out of its own elements, independent of any attempt to mirror the world outside, became the model for other arts. (*Romantic Poets, Critics, and Other Madmen* 83)

Another remarkable phenomenon accompanied, or, more accurately, emerged out of this change in perspective: the invention by a group of writers, among them Ludwig Tieck, Novalis, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and Jean Paul, of a literary language specifically designed to talk about music. In the words of M. H. Abrams, author of one of the most influential books on the early nineteenth century, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, the literature in which this language was used was one that “was made to emulate music by substituting a symphonic form – a melody of ideas and images, a thematic organisation, a harmony of moods – for the structural principles of plot, argument, or exposition” (94). For the membership of the WMA<sup>4</sup>, this notion of ‘substitution’ raises important, fascinating and complex questions. Given constraints of time and space, however, I can do no more than acknowledge their existence. My immediate task is to look at the repercussions these developments in Germany had for aesthetic thinking in nineteenth-century France.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Rosen quotes Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) as an example of a philosopher who recognised this tendency. “We demand [...]”, Schiller wrote, “that the art of landscape should work upon us like music.” (*Romanticism and Realism* 52)

<sup>4</sup> International Association for Word and Music Studies

By the 1840s, both the beliefs and the work of one of these writers, Hoffmann, had come to have a significant influence on French literary thinking, especially on the thinking of the greatest poet of the period, Baudelaire. Hoffmann's importance for the development of Baudelaire's aesthetic is well documented<sup>5</sup>. Some argue that his influence on the poet's musical taste was crucial. For example, the Australian scholar Lloyd J. Austin suggests that the ideas the poet expresses in his famous essay on Wagner should be seen against a background of his admiration for Hoffmann's work (cf. 261-263). The French critic, André Ferran, is equally emphatic. Writing in 1968, he describes the poet's reactions to Wagner's work as "l'épanouissement et le terme d'un rêve qui s'est cherché à travers les divagations de Swedenborg, les hallucinations d'Hoffmann ou l'idéalisme de Poe" (352)<sup>6</sup>. But here a certain caution is necessary, for there is an important difference between Hoffmann's outlook and that of Baudelaire. It is one that quite possibly reflects a national difference and almost certainly relates to the comparatively late arrival in France of the ideas we now associate with Romanticism. It is this: whereas, Hoffmann and his fellow-writers were, to quote Scher, "enamoured with the expressive power of pure instrumental music and firmly convinced of the supremacy of music over the other arts, including poetry" (*Verbal Music in German Literature* 159), Baudelaire's belief in the potential of poetry never wavered. His essay "Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris" leaves us in no doubt about his admiration for Wagner. Great as that admiration was, however, enraptured as he was by the music he heard, he never suggests any conflict of interest between himself as a poet and Wagner as a musician. Throughout the essay – incidentally, his only extended piece of writing about music – Baudelaire presents Wagner's art not as one that is essentially different from the other arts, but rather as exemplary Art, the kind that Baudelaire himself wished and strove to produce. Indeed, what the essay reveals is not so much Baudelaire the Wagnerian, as Wagner the Baudelairean.

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the many references found in more general surveys of Baudelaire's aesthetics, two books-length studies of the relationship exist: Ingeborg Köhler's *Baudelaire et Hoffmann* and Rosemary Lloyd's *Baudelaire et Hoffmann: Affinités et Influences* appeared respectively in Stockholm and Cambridge, England, in 1979.

<sup>6</sup> 'the flowering and culmination of a dream that had felt its way through Swedenborg's ramblings, Hoffmann's hallucinations or Poe's idealism'.

I certainly do not mean to suggest that Baudelaire is unfaithful to Wagner or that he is blinded to the realities of Wagner's art by an artistic vision of his own. Rather, I mean that, as Nietzsche wrote, "there was a lot of Wagner in Baudelaire" (qtd. in Mann 145). Perhaps more than anything else, the essay should be seen as an account of a meeting of like minds. Certainly for Baudelaire nothing could be more natural than the existence of such aesthetic affinity<sup>7</sup>. He states his conviction boldly:

Il ne serait pas ridicule ici de raisonner *a priori*, sans analyses et sans comparaisons; car ce qui serait vraiment surprenant, c'est que le son *ne pût pas* suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs *ne pussent pas* donner l'idée d'une mélodie, et que le son et la couleur fussent impropres à traduire des idées; les choses s'étant toujours exprimées par une analogie réciproque, depuis le jour où Dieu a proféré le monde comme une complexe et indivisible totalité. (363)<sup>8</sup>

Baudelaire's conviction that such synaesthetic correspondences existed ubiquitously between all kinds of different phenomena, artistic as well as natural, allowed him and, more pertinently, predisposed him to penetrate confidently those elements of Wagner's work that transcend the specificities of a particular medium. Consider the view presented in the following passage:

En effet, sans poésie, la musique de Wagner serait encore une œuvre poétique, étant douée de toutes les qualités qui constituent une poésie bien faite; explicative par elle-même, tant toutes choses y sont bien unies, conjointes, réciproquement adaptées, et, s'il est permis de faire un barbarisme pour exprimer le superlatif d'une qualité, prudemment *concaténées*. (383)<sup>9</sup>

These affirmations are, in fact, a reaction to an opinion expressed by Liszt<sup>10</sup> and quoted by Baudelaire. Liszt's statement, which is very plain and easily understood, runs as

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<sup>7</sup> In "Writing about Music: Baudelaire and *Tannhäuser* in Paris", my contribution to volume 3 of *Word and Music Studies*, I discuss Baudelaire's sense of affinity with Wagner in some detail.

<sup>8</sup> 'Here, it would not be ridiculous to reason *a priori*, without analysis and without comparisons; for what would really be surprising is that sound *could not* suggest colour, that colours *could not* inspire a melody, and that colours *should be unable* to translate ideas; given that things have always been expressed by means of a reciprocal analogy, since the day God called forth the world as a complex and indivisible totality.'

<sup>9</sup> 'Indeed, without poetry, Wagner's music would still be a poetic work, endowed as it is with all the qualities of well-made poetry; explanatory on its own terms, because everything in it is so well combined, conjoined, mutually adapted, and, if one may use a barbarism in order to express the superlative degree of a quality, prudently *concatenated*.'

<sup>10</sup> In *Lohengrin et Tannhäuser de Richard Wagner*.



follows: “même si la musique de cet opéra devait être privée de son beau texte, elle serait encore une production de premier ordre” (383)<sup>11</sup>. Baudelaire’s response is considerably less straightforward. Indeed the ideas expressed in his beautifully constructed sentence, as well as the vocabulary used to express them, are highly ambiguous and daring. For instance, consider the way he uses the word “poésie”. It occurs twice in the passage. The first time, its meaning is unproblematic: “Sans poésie”, he says, “la musique de Wagner serait encore une œuvre poétique.” Given that he presents his statement as an endorsement of Liszt’s very clear assertion, it seems reasonable to assume that this is a simple reference to the text of Wagner’s opera. But what of the second use? He says that the reason this music is poetic is because it is “douée de toutes les qualités qui constituent une poésie bien faite”. He does not say that it possesses some of the qualities that constitute well-made poetry; he says it has all of them. Is this not tantamount to claiming that, in some definable sense, this music is poetry? The plot thickens, for if such an interpretation is legitimate, does it not follow that Baudelaire is, by implication, inviting us to consider poetry as a free-floating phenomenon? To put it more precisely, he is implying that poetry has an independent existence and that, as a category *à part*, unconstrained by the artistic medium chosen by an artist, it transcends boundaries and ultimately constitutes itself in an abstract realm of concatenation.

Related to his use of “poésie” is Baudelaire’s use of “poétique”. Indeed, the way he uses it highlights one of the most difficult and fascinating questions raised by the passage. It obliges us to confront directly a problem of interpretation that has frequently exercised the minds of scholars of the period, be they musical or literary. For Dahlhaus, for example, the idea of poetic music is “the centerpiece of the aesthetic thought of the age” (142). At the same time, it is an idea that “thrives on its own internal contradictions”. Generally speaking, he argues,

the poetic is determined by its opposition to the prosaic – to the trivial and mechanical, in Jean Paul’s curt formulation. Yet the changing hues in the apparent meaning of [the poetic] depend in part on the polemical or apologetical functions it is meant to serve. (143)

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<sup>11</sup> ‘even if the music of this opera were to be robbed of its fine text, it would still be a first-rate production’.

Is it mere coincidence, then, or does the fact that Baudelaire is quite explicit about the function he intends the word to perform not tell us something about the nature of the critical enterprise he undertook when he chose to write about music? I suspect it does. The criteria he sets out make it quite clear that, as far as he is concerned, “une œuvre poétique” is one that conforms to certain, predetermined standards. The decisive factor is the way the component parts of a work relate to one another, the way they are balanced and lend themselves to perception as a progression – or, to follow the logic of his ‘barbaric’ past participle, as a chain – with a perceptible logic of its own. A work that meets these criteria is, as he puts it, “explicative par elle-même”, explanatory on its own terms, enlightening by virtue of its being, and therefore ‘poetic’.

From a critical point of view, these principles have a special interest, and it pertains to the fact that the principles themselves are non-specific. That is, their presence or absence may be looked for and discerned in all works of art, regardless of medium. For Baudelaire this was an essential critical prerequisite. However sensitive he was to music – and it cannot be doubted that he was acutely so – he was not a musician. This is a fact of which he was very aware and also one to which he chooses to draw attention several times, both in the essay and in the letter he wrote to Wagner. Though he appears to present it as a defect, one cannot fail to notice the polemical advantage he derives from it. Far from allowing the lack of specific musical knowledge to inhibit or in any way deter him, he uses it subtly to undermine traditional artistic boundaries. Indeed, it is in the context of this apparent deficiency that the non-specific nature of his criteria comes into its own, revealing itself as a powerful, innovative critical tool. Not only does it allow him, as a non-musician, to approach Wagner’s art and assess it with assurance, authority and impunity; it becomes a means whereby his aesthetic thinking is liberated and his vision broadened. In the final analysis, the highly original critical enterprise embodied in this essay is inseparable from Baudelaire’s avowed position as “quelqu’un qui [...] *ne sait pas la musique*” (356)<sup>12</sup> and from the flexibility with which, in light of it, he endows certain aesthetic categories.

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<sup>12</sup> ‘someone who [...] *has no knowledge of music*’

This work has been said by many critics to be the source of all later French literary reactions to Wagner. In particular it has been said to be the source of Mallarmé's reflections on the composer. Lloyd Austin, for example, does not hesitate to state this unequivocally:

A celui qui a lu de près l'article de Baudelaire, il est évident que ces pages sont la principale source de tout ce que Mallarmé a écrit sur Wagner: tous les éléments du problème des rapports entre la musique et la poésie, tel qu'il le pose dans les *Divagations* et dans *La Musique et les Lettres*, se trouvent ici en germe. (280)<sup>13</sup>

But in one, crucially important respect, Mallarmé's stance in relation to Wagner is substantially different from Baudelaire's. Rather than seeing the composer as a fellow traveller, Mallarmé sees him as a rival, even going so far as to suggest that he is an unconscionable usurper who dares to challenge poets on their own ground (cf. 541). Writing in 1935, Paul Valéry makes the background to this rivalry clear: "Le problème de toute la vie de Mallarmé, l'objet de sa méditation perpétuelle, de ses recherches les plus subtiles était [...] de rendre à la Poésie le même empire que la grande musique moderne lui avait enlevé." (700)<sup>14</sup> Though Valéry mentions no names, there can be little doubt about the identity of the composer of this "great modern music". In 1885, at the invitation of Edouard Dujardin, editor of the newly founded *Revue wagnérienne*, Mallarmé published an essay about Wagner. The title he chose to give his essay – "Richard Wagner: rêverie d'un poète français" – intimates in a subtle but resolute way the poet's intention to view his subject from a clearly defined remove. Not only does he straightaway imply an important artistic and professional contrast between himself and his subject; he also underlines a national – and therefore cultural – distance that separates them. And, given the context, the implications of the word "reverie" too are complex and significant. This piece of writing may be a kind of daydream, but it is neither idle nor vague, as daydreams so often are. On the contrary, Mallarmé's agenda

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<sup>13</sup> 'For anyone who has read Baudelaire's article closely, it is clear that these pages are the main source of all Mallarmé has written about Wagner. All aspects of the problem of the relationship between music and poetry, as he sets it out in *Divagations* and in *La Musique et les Lettres*, are found here in embryo.'

<sup>14</sup> 'The problem that dominated Mallarmé's life, the object of his constant reflections and of his most painstaking research was [...] to restore to Poetry the very supremacy of which it had been robbed by great modern music.'

is quite clear: to chart the distance between two diametrically opposed and equally ambitious visions of the nature and purpose of art and creativity, that is, between his own vision and that of Wagner. Treading carefully, but never faltering, Mallarmé shows how and why his view of Wagner's work is coloured and ultimately obstructed by what, in a famous passage from *Crise de vers*, he later called “un indéracinable préjugé d'écrivain”<sup>15</sup>.

Most artists will feel a certain bias towards their chosen medium. Indeed, who would argue that Wagner was free of such partiality? Mallarmé's case is, however, a little out of the ordinary. The prejudice he felt – as perhaps the formulation I just quoted suggests – was so central to his thinking and so fundamental to his creativity that it was nothing less than the bedrock of his entire aesthetic. Here is the passage in which the phrase occurs:

Je me figure par un indéracinable sans doute préjugé d'écrivain, que rien ne demeurera sans être proféré; que nous en sommes là, précisément, à rechercher [...] un art d'achever la transposition, au Livre, de la symphonie ou uniment de reprendre notre bien: car, ce n'est pas de sonorités élémentaires par les cuivres, les cordes, les bois, 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. (367-368)<sup>16</sup>

Not for Mallarmé then the sounding music of “brass, strings and woodwind”. As the quotation shows, Mallarméan Music has nothing to do with sound. Rather, it has to do with verbal structure. If poets find what they are, or should be, searching for – a way of structuring verbal language perfectly, a way of enabling “l'intellectuelle parole” to reach its apogee – the result, as he said in 1895, will be “Musique, par excellence” (381), a Music whose soundless perfection is such that conventional music will cease to have a *raison d'être*.

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<sup>15</sup> For translation, please see note 16 below.

<sup>16</sup> ‘As a consequence of a writer's prejudice that probably cannot be eradicated, I fancy that nothing will remain unless it is uttered; that we have in fact reached a point where we must look for [...] a way to complete the transposition of the symphony to the Book or, quite simply, to take back what belongs to us: for it is not from elementary sonorities of brass, strings and woodwind, but, clearly, from verbal language raised to its highest point that Music, considered as the entirety of the connections existing in everything, must flow with abundance and certainty.’

This then is what lies behind Mallarmé's reservations about Wagner and, more significantly, about the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The essential nature of that concept – a combination of many art forms in one work – was the very antipole of Mallarmé's vision. In 1885, in a famous autobiographical letter to Verlaine, he attempted to put his vision into words. It was, he said, “un livre, tout bonnement, en maints volumes, un livre [...] architectural et prémédité” (662)<sup>17</sup>. Then, warming to his topic, he went on: “J'irai plus loin, je dirai: le Livre, persuadé qu'au fond il n'y a qu'un, tenté à son insu par quiconque a écrit, même les Génies. L'explication orphique de la Terre, qui est le seul devoir du poète et le jeu littéraire par excellence.” (663)<sup>18</sup> Mallarmé's use of the adjective “orphique” indicates clearly that the work he envisaged was a musical one. Equally clear, however, is the unconventional nature of its musicality. This was a book, a work of literature. Indeed, as he says, it was the Book. In saying so, he takes us back to the crucial admonition contained in the quotation from *Crise de vers* in which the goal of poetic research is set down in unequivocal terms: “Nous en sommes là”, Mallarmé says, addressing his fellow poets directly, “à rechercher [...] un art d'achever la transposition, au Livre, de la symphonie ou uniment de reprendre notre bien”<sup>19</sup>. The Book that must be written, one in which “l'ensemble des rapports existant dans tout” will be embodied and elucidated, is one in which silent Mallarméan Music will be realised.

But where does all this leave us? On the one hand, with music that qualifies as poetry because, to paraphrase Baudelaire, it is endowed with the requisite qualities; on the other, with Mallarméan Music, that is, literature which, as the product of an act of reappropriation and transposition performed by a poet, has become “Musique, par excellence”. Thus we are left with a dichotomy, and with one that may at first seem no more tractable than that between vocal and instrumental music. I shall not leave it there,

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<sup>17</sup> ‘simply a book in many volumes [...] a monumental book with a set purpose’.

<sup>18</sup> ‘I shall go further, I shall say: the Book, convinced that there is essentially only one, attempted unawares by all those who have written, even Geniuses. The orphic explanation of the World, which is the poet's sole responsibility and the literary game *par excellence*.’

<sup>19</sup> For translation of this passage, please refer to note 16 above.

however. Like Mallarmé, I shall go further. This dichotomy is plainly, on one level, a counterpart of the first. It is also, by virtue of its origins in two poets' contemplations of music, vocal and instrumental alike, a musico-literary paradigm. It is an entity in its own right and a corroboration of a belief in the existence of an aesthetic common ground between music and literature. At the same time it exemplifies a rich and multi-faceted process of aesthetic cross-fertilisation between the arts. Does it not then constitute a model on which to base a response to the call made by Scher in the article from which I quoted at the outset? The possibility of focusing, as he would have us do, on absolute or wordless music and verbal or word-dependent music as a "dialectic entity" depends, in the first instance, on the possibility of establishing a unified aesthetic premise from which to proceed. Separately and together, each in his own way, Baudelaire and Mallarmé allow us to see clearly that such a premise exists.

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