

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience by Richard Cándida Smith

Review by: Dorothy M. Betz

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present excellent analyses of Mallarmé's profound influence on German and Hispanic twentieth-century writers. Part V, under the somewhat whimsical heading "On an Affinity and an Indigestion," offers an essay by Roman Doubrovkine, who traces Russian writers' indifference to and ignorance of Mallarmé's work to Tolstoy's negative and often hostile attitude toward all Symbolist writings. Patricia Terry fills in the "Affinity" part with a parallel reading of Mallarmean poetry and the Japanese haiku poem. A fine comparative reading, its only connection to the twentieth century is the essayist's illumination that permits her to rediscover the value of the seventeenth-century classical haiku through Mallarmé's poetry.

Part VI entitled "On the Whole" reveals the strategy of the leitmotif "On . . .," for it contains but a single essay, by Cohn, that can be read as a completion of this heading: "On the whole" . . . it's a good story! For Cohn not only sums up the impact of Mallarmean poetics on the past century, described and analyzed by his collaborators. His pages represent an equally forceful summary of his own career as a pilgrim who seeks Mallarmé. With broad and masterful strokes, he presents a survey of what has become the central theme of his many writings, polypolarity in Mallarmean poetics, and concludes the abstract features of this theme with a reaffirmation of the poet's closeness to real life.

Cohn's essay rounds out and completes the "retrospect questioning" (Kristeva) of the poet's influence on the past century. Cohn titles his contribution "Mallarmé's Wake" and surely means that our cultural activities follow in the wake of Mallarmé's passing and are brought to higher life by the movement of the waves his impact left on the flux of our times. It is this reviewer's delight to imagine that Cohn would also think of a wake for Mallarmé that grants a time for mourning his disappearance; but it would be a kind of Irish wake at which the mourning becomes a celebration of life, befitting "the poet of being." "On the whole" then, this collective effort is a good story; it delivers a representative account of twentieth-century literary and cultural trends formed by Mallarmé's constant "giving" of profound insights on the mystery of being.

Cándida Smith, Richard. *Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999. Pp. xxiv + 304. ISBN 0-520-21828-0

Dorothy M. Betz, *Georgetown University*

This study situates and defines the complexity of Mallarmé's symbolism in such a way as to render its overall intent intelligible to the general reader. There is not much room for detailed readings, as the focus is on Mallarmé's disciples and their contributions to artistic and social theories. The extensive context provided for the work, while representing a far from balanced coverage, stresses links between Symbolism and social thought that are frequently overlooked. The first five chapters, grouped under the heading, "The Symbolist Movement," begin with the historical circumstances in which Mallarmé wrote, where the concept of "art for art's sake"

contrasted with social concerns and the role of the writer as social critic. While Huysmans had des Esseintes praise Mallarmé in his isolation, and Mallarmé himself labored to produce his elusive Book, the new concept of poetry Mallarmé advocated was actually collaborative and clearly conveyed to a number of Mallarmé's poetic disciples.

All students of Mallarmé must regret that we have no comprehensive record of the "mardis" where the poet passed on his ideas. Cándida Smith has, however, gathered testimony from René Ghil, Jean Moréas, Gustave Kahn, Edouard Dujardin, and others to elucidate the way in which poetry was intended to invoke its object without the use of simplistic analogy.

Practical concerns parallel the intellectual context. Analyses of the economic conditions of the 1880's reveal the varied employment poets sought to support their literary work and the strategies necessary to gain public attention amid a great outpouring of new literature. As poetry written in obscure forms gained attention, authors reconciled their ideas of intellectual elitism with a form of social engagement.

Mallarmé's reputation for aloofness does not correspond to reality. Camille Mauclair's novel, *Le Soleil des morts*, depicts a character based on Mallarmé but of aristocratic background and temperament. By contrast, we see Mallarmé himself accepting new ideas and the inevitable evolution of both art and society. Jean Ajalbert proposed a definition of Symbolism that incorporated an important element of popular culture.

In the second section of the book, a philosophical analysis of perception and language links Mallarmé with William James and others who developed a vision of the self unfolding through time, the total experience of which could never be captured by fixed forms of language or analogy. Varied theories on language evolution inform views of poetic expression.

A section entitled "Eros, Labor, Poetry" departs almost completely from Mallarmé and his work to explore links with various later symbolists. A study of Max Eastman, a student of both James and Dewey, establishes the philosophical climate with discussions of the influences of Hegel, Freud, and Marx. The role of women as emerging workers in society on an equal footing with men is examined in paintings that depict a utopian society and in the negative view of women presented in the fiction of the anarchist Jean Grave. Several of Mallarmé's disciples joined the socialists in their acceptance of women as workers. Here a lengthy account of the of the novelist Rachilde reflects on the experience of a woman working in a male context.

A discussion of American attitudes contrasts the idealized image of the working girl with the emphasis on free love that Americans had equated with the French. In America as in France, however, young writers found difficulty in expressing original ideas in a market increasingly dominated by the power of mass media.

The final section of the book sees a major shift in the status of artists as the once proletarian tribe gained respectability. A portrait of Stuart Merrill, who left his upper-class American background to become a disciple of Mallarmé and a proponent of anarchy, exemplifies the poet's search to reconcile artistic and social harmonies. At the turn of the twentieth century, a wave of nationalism and concern to protect French

culture gave new opportunities to artists. Some adapted more readily than others, but art as social criticism gradually yielded to art as a successful business venture.

The conclusion focuses on Marcel Duchamp who tried to keep alive some of Mallarmé's concepts of art. A reading of the last two Pages of "Un Coup de dés" enunciates the central paradox that art may be apart from the public but still function through its reception by the public.

The volume provides an especially inclusive index and a section of footnotes which provide not only extensive and well selected sources but also short essays on topics ranging from Mallarmé's incompetence as an English teacher through the critical reception of works and relationships among the writers of the period to useful summaries of theoretical works. A section reprinting twenty-five works of art has been judiciously coordinated with the text. While somewhat digressive, this study presents many details pertinent to the context of Symbolism.

Finn, Michael R. *Proust, the Body and Literary Form*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 1999. Pp. xiii + 207. ISBN 0-521-64189-6
Gerald Prince, University of Pennsylvania

Arguing that *A la recherche du temps perdu* is, among other things, "a *fin-de-siècle* moral tale in which art and aesthetics conquer medical determinism" (1), Michael Finn investigates the role that Proust's nervous condition played in shaping his view of literature as well as the form and content of his masterpiece.

Specifically, in the first chapter, Finn underlines Proust's similarities with "nervous precursors" like the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert, and Baudelaire, whose production characterized or mirrored nerve-related problems. He also examines the medico-psychological context of *A la recherche*—in particular, Théodule Ribot's *Les Maladies de la volonté* and Dr. Adrien Proust's *L'Hygiène du neurasthénique*—and he discusses Proust's response to it, his struggle to transpose neurasthenia into a literary work. The second chapter focuses on Proust's linguistic anxieties: the obsessive fear of speech that accompanies his search for authentic personal writing, the rejection of a social, other-directed voice such as that of Sainte-Beuve, and, most generally, the severe doubts about the viability of (an infected) language as the basis for literary form. *A la recherche* will point to a solution. Speech and writing are not necessarily antithetical. (Vocal) tone expresses the truth of artistic individuality. The third chapter looks more closely at Proust's attitude toward "transitive writing," other-oriented writing forms which he considered inferior and unauthentic but which he produced throughout his life: correspondence, journalism, literary criticism, pastiche. Once again, the novel suggests that the writer's practice was more supple than his theory and that, in the end, he may have regarded forms and genres as superficial. After all, Proust's correspondence proves an important *avant-texte* to *A la recherche*; his literary criticism informs the substance and structure of the novel; and creative writing is a kind of "self-pastiche." Finally, in the fourth chapter, Finn studies



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récit policier en gestation" fulfills the promise of its title. The comparison of *Zadig* with *Maître Cornélius*, as Vanoncini adroitly demonstrates, rests on several bases: Balzac's admiration for Voltaire, the colorful background of both novels, the deductive prowess of Zadig and Louis XI, and the pivotal theme that love conquers all obstacles. With overwhelming exemplification, Danielle Dupuis's substantial "Dérision du pathétique et pathétique de la dérision" traces the fusion—and ambiguity—between tragic and comic throughout the *Comédie humaine*. Addressing an esoteric topic and marginal text in "'Madame Firmiani' ou 'Peindre par le dialogue,'" Mireille Labouret offers a well-documented, original, and perceptive interrogation into the constitution of character through dialogue.

Two of the best analyses in this *Année Balzacienne*—by Eric Bordas and Anne-Marie Baron, respectively—focus on tantalizing if curious topics: digression and anagrams. In "Pratiques balzaciennes de la digression," Bordas maintains that Balzac's use of digression constitutes an integral form of expression. A typical Balzacian turn of phrase encompasses elements irrelevant to plot, with intercalated descriptions and humorous asides that are almost audible, like tonal reprises of melody. In "Balzac et l'anagramme," Baron underscores young Honoré's pleasure in creating pseudonyms and character names based anagrammatically on his own. "Toute l'œuvre de Balzac m'apparaît comme une infinie réécriture de son roman familial, qui repose sur la démultiplication du moi et la mise en scène de doubles dont il a composé les noms à partir du sien" (320). In line with her biographical bias, Baron signals Honoré's Oedipal conflict with his father. By lending his name, or parts thereof, to his characters, Balzac could disseminate his identity and experience their destinies as dandy, businessman, politician, and seeker of the absolute. Baron's article is a model for scholars: written with insight and clarity, her study begins with a seemingly tangential topic which she then ties to the totality of Balzac's *œuvre*.

Although distributed somewhat indiscriminately throughout the text, analogies between Balzac and other writers abound (as usual in the *Année Balzacienne*). Under the rubric "Balzac et le XVIII^e siècle," Michel Delon explores the effect of Louvet de Couvray's three-episode novel *Les Amours de Faublas* (1787–90) on some half-dozen pages of the *Comédie humaine*. Slight but scholarly, Delon's essay segues into Erik Leborgne's informative if lopsided examination of "Balzac lecteur de 'Gil Blas'" which, perhaps because of the writer's expertise or predilection, assigns undue preponderance to Lesage. The tendency to shortchange Balzac in partiality to a favorite—or more familiar—writer is also evident in André Lorant's essay "Proust and Balzac" and in Jean-Claude Yon's "Balzac et Scribe," which closes the book with a weak and inconclusive thud.

Prescribed reading for all Balzicians, the 1999 *Année Balzacienne* is by turns invigorating and anemic, fortifying and pallid—a bracing tonic too often diluted into a watered-down nostrum.

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Gretchen Rous Besser

CÁNDIDA SMITH, RICHARD. *Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999. ISBN: 0-520-21828-0. Pp. 318. \$45.00.

Cándida Smith rigorously investigates the development of Symbolism and those who created poetry within this context. He illustrates the trend for Symbolist poetry to examine discourse itself as the poets attempted to under-

stand how language shaped consciousness. This thorough examination is composed of four sections: "The Symbolist Moment," "Poetics and the Politics of 'Experience,'" "Eros, Labor, Poetry," and "From Symbol to Design, From Harmony to Elegance." The first section begins with an engaging link between Huysmans's *A Rebours* and Mallarmé's "L'Après-midi d'un faune." Mallarmé endeavored to evoke the sensation of an object with his poetry and Des Esseintes used this poetry as simply another means of escape.

Cándida Smith concludes the first section with an examination of how elite culture develops within the context of commercially organized society. In chapter 3, "Apprentices and Washouts," the author peruses Camille Mauclair's novel, *Le Soleil des morts*. He reveals how Mauclair, once a champion of transcendent literature, ironically ended his career as a highly prolific anti-Semitic xenophobe.

Chapter 4, "Crises of Opportunity," and chapter 5, "Moving Toward an 'Industrial Art'" trace the advances in the nineteenth-century printing industry and reveal an inherent problem within the Symbolist movement. Mallarmé and his followers responded to societal unrest by linking the unstable society with unstable art. Yet, Mallarmé's disciples were not as prolific as their mentor. The "fascinatingly incomprehensible" was fused with a good devoid of practical purpose.

The second section begins with chapter 6, "Symbolism, Pragmatism and the Synthetic Self." The author discusses the concept of "self" based on contrasting notions of "experience." Mallarmé contemplated poetry as the hinge between language, a system of meaning, and lived, embodied experience. Chapter 7, "Truth as Self-Representation," chapter 8, "Poetry and the Translation of History into Truth" merge to complete the second section. The first of these two chapters addresses the illness that plagued William James's life and influenced his refusal to classify experience into logical categories. Chapter 8 analyzes the notion of that which is absent (*l'absente*), the lingering echo of the original sensation. Within this context, poetry can be defined not as the message but the way in which words are used in order to give voice to alternative perspectives.

Section three begins with an overview of Max Eastman's *The Masses* and several visual artists. Labor, not family or sexual relations, determines community. Harmony is comprised of humanity and nature. Imagination represents all that is private. Therefore, the arts resonate as the one domain where work and nature must exist in unity.

Chapter 12, "The Order of Things Hidden", chapter 13, "Vision and Language into the Gap" and chapter 14, "Working Within the Dream" complete this fine investigation. Cándida-Smith writes of poetry's ability to serve as a revelation for the poet who experiences harmony as he/she transcends purposeful expression. Symbolist paintings and poetry embody the notion of individual transcending grace that surpasses the commercial venues of everyday society. Within this context "purposelessness" can indeed be translated into "dreams for the future."

Cándida-Smith successfully couples writers and theorists in this fascinating examination of "experience" and the Symbolist movement. His remarkably broad range of knowledge and his attention to the intricacies of this particular period of intellectual history make this work invaluable.

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Susan F. Crampton

Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience. By *Richard**Cándida Smith.*

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999. Pp. xxiv + 304.

\$45.00.

In this broad-ranging and innovative book, Richard Cándida Smith uses the public success of the famously hermetic symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé to raise a much larger question about how we might conceive aesthetic intellectuals “as a distinct social formation.” In late nineteenth-century France and the United States, (mostly) petty bourgeois male artists paradoxically legitimated their claims to speak for humanity by asserting their elite status: they were specialized professionals who affirmed their technical expertise by the “difficulty” of their work. Young poets and artists sought professional recognition in the rapidly modernizing and thus increasingly fragmented and automated world whose alienating, dehumanizing character they also sought to critique. In this argument, the much heralded or much scorned “difficulty” often associated with the work of symbolist poets and their heirs on both sides of the Atlantic proves really to be a particularly revolutionary lyric form expressing radical democratic aspirations.

Literary critics and theorists have long insisted on the symbolists' break with a Parnassian elitism—they were republicans, socialists, and anarchists; they borrowed colloquialisms and refrains from popular culture. Smith instead places their challenge to the sonnet and fixed meaning (i.e., to constrained poetic form) in a much larger social and intellectual context: not only in the increasingly complex and necessary relationship between cultural producers and the marketplace but also within the trans-Atlantic, multidisciplinary challenge to positivism in the arts (literature and painting) and sciences (linguistics and psychology) that he dubs a “renewal of experience.” Works by William James, Stuart Merrill, Floyd Dell, and Max Eastman in the United States, and by painters Paul Signac and Henri-Edmond Cross in France, mirrored Mallarmé's celebration of a poetic practice linking our rational, reflective faculties to the immediacy of bodily sensation. They all engaged in analogous efforts to rescue human “experience” of the world from the ossified thought categories and conventions in which positivist science had embedded it.

Mallarmé's “children” (René Ghil, Jean Ajalbert, Jean Moréas, Gustave Kahn, and others), inspired by the master, effected a shift away from the content and meaning of poetry to another focus on literary form. Mallarmé had insisted on the double origin of language: its everyday utility and thus conventional meaning and an underlying realm of connections that made meaning possible. It was this realm that he sought to liberate from the habits of association wrought by conventional usage: he sought to “induct his readers into the processes that led to interpretation” (p. 21) and thus to recreate the whole experience of making meaning. The playful but rigorously constructed language games associated with symbolist poetry underscored the arbitrary nature of meaning, and its frisson-inducing eloquence evoked the beauty that exceeded language itself and thus marked the incommensurability between the sayable and the said. The poet's “science” both revealed the hidden but universal laws by which meaning is created and expressed their “truth” in an involuntary bodily shudder.

Smith terms this project a “praxis of the subject, not a theory” (p. 112), and he links poets' quest to discover the universal, underlying “being” of the world to increasingly specialized, modernizing societies in which alienation was now a central experience. In the United States, William James's efforts to grasp the “flow” of mind—to understand how the mind processes experience—outside the conventional categories that organize thought paralleled Mallarmé's own emphasis on that which exceeded lin-

guistic expression. Moreover, an entire group of American thinkers who defined their project in slightly different terms also engaged in salvaging experience from its linguistic and social prison houses. Mallarmé and his disciples celebrated the capacity of poetry to expose the arbitrariness of linguistic convention and thus to renew human “being” in the world, paradoxically, through the virtuosity of technically proficient and difficult poets. The poet’s social alienation from the masses was a condition of democratic renewal that took the form of a poetic practice linking mind and body in quest of truth. Smith argues that the circle around the radical American journal *Masses* aestheticized images of “working girls” to renew the alienated world of work. Writers thereby represented the purity and vitality of nature—of eroticism, nurturing, and privacy that women symbolized—as an intrinsic quality of labor. Aesthetic labor was both a product of the mind and an “attitude of the body” (p. 171) that renewed social life by restoring and renewing the full experience of self in the world: “Poetry appeared useless, but it disrupted the knowledges that societies had come to value” (p. 172). The Americans used rhetoric about the liberating and authenticating power of free love, eroticism, and sexuality to set themselves apart from the putatively puritanical society they criticized, and, in so doing, established an authoritative, professional voice in the mass media on which their livelihoods depended. Like their French counterparts, they too were “professionalized dreamers” (p. 251).

Smith’s approach, as he acknowledges, is “archaeological.” It unearths diverse developments in poetry, psychology, and painting and then painstakingly rebuilds lost linkages and relations not only between ideas and persons but also between ideas and the contexts within which they emerged. He does so to argue that avant-garde aesthetic practice is not an “escape from modernity but a key constituent element in the modern organization of intellectual and symbolic work” (p. 251). Though he contextualizes this argument by cross-cultural comparison and biography (rather than by a detailed analysis of the relation between texts and more thickly defined cultural contexts), his argument is persuasive. By demonstrating to what extent the avant-garde and symbolism in particular emerged as a social and political critique that changed the terms of cultural producers’ relation to the social world, he challenges the still-dominant perspective on modernism: that modernist art is a form of escape into the psyche, that it recreates totality no longer possible in the world, that the modernist artist cynically exploits the marketplace even as he critiques it. This is an important, original, and optimistic assessment of the modernist legacy. Smith might have emphasized better the importance of his contribution by framing the argument more effectively. Rather than placing it in the context of debates about modernism or current debates about “experience,” Smith uses Julia Kristeva’s magisterial study of poetic language as a point of departure. But that work is far too narrow (and too much itself a part of these larger debates) to serve as an adequate framework for this wonderful book.

CAROLYN DEAN

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A Culture of Fact: England, 1550–1720. By *Barbara J. Shapiro*.
Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999. Pp. x + 284. \$42.50.

The notion of the fact pervades many modern disciplines. It is difficult today to know how one could do physics or chemistry—or, for that matter, history—without seeking, sorting, and respecting facts. What reasonable people think about their surroundings is