

Textual Self-Branding: The Rhetorical Ethos in Mallarmé's *Divagations*

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Abstract: This article examines, from a rhetorical perspective, the textual presence of the auctorial figure in Mallarmé's collection of prose writings, *Divagations*. It challenges the traditional and structuralist idea of Mallarmé as a poet eager to exclude his own persona from his work, and even as the initiator of the "death of the author." Recent Mallarméan studies have been shifting the field's attention away from the myth of the ivory tower to focus on the poet's social project as it appears in the *Divagations*. Such a project presupposes a rhetorical commitment, and thus an auctorial presence in the text. The question that is raised here is then what role the figure of the poet plays in Mallarmé's rhetorical strategy. A close rhetorical analysis of the *Divagations* reveals that the poet constantly, although discreetly, writes his own persona into the text. Throughout the *Divagations*, Mallarmé deploys much effort to give his persona qualities likely to win the support of his audience. It is argued that this manifest ethos preoccupation has a double function. The rhetorically efficient image of the poet is obviously intended to add authority to his social project. However, the poet's constant cultivation of his textual figure shows that the ethos has gained a certain autonomy. An important preoccupation for the poet is in fact to brand himself as an author: contrary to the traditional idea of the absent poet, the auctorial figure seems to be one of the primary subjects of the *Divagations*. The argument thus invites us, in order to avoid overlooking this central aspect of Mallarmé's project, to take the ethos perspective into account in any approach to Mallarmé's prose work.

Mallarmé writes that "L'oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots" (Mallarmé 256).¹ He seems to wish the death of the ethos (the poet) in favour of the logos (words). The ethos, or "character," corrupts the purity of the work. Hence probably Mallarmé's great success in the literary theory of the following century, a century obsessed with language.

The twentieth century has indeed made language the true reality, or at any rate the only one which is available to us. In American New Criticism as well as in French structuralism and post-structuralism, the figure of the author, too close to extra-linguistic reality, has been the chosen target. The intention of the author is simply not relevant. Denouncing what they call the "intentional fallacy," W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley have said that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 3). Following the model of the death of God, Roland Barthes has proclaimed

¹ "The pure work implies the speaking disappearance of the poet, who yields the initiative to words." References to the *Divagations* will be given with the page number only.

the death of the author. We conceive that “the speaking disappearance of the poet” must have been music to their ears. Barthes explicitly names Mallarmé as the initiator of the death of the author: “En France, Mallarmé, sans doute le premier, a vu et prévu dans toute son ampleur la nécessité de substituer le langage lui-même à celui qui jusque-là était censé en être le propriétaire; pour lui, comme pour nous, c’est le langage qui parle, ce n’est pas l’auteur” (Barthes, “La mort de l’auteur” 492).²

But is it possible or even desirable to purge the text of the ethos? Does not the producer of a text always leave his traces? Does not Mallarmé, like the whole rhetorical tradition, use the weight of his character to rally his readers? The rumours of the death of the author indeed seem exaggerated today. The revival of rhetoric in the wake of Chaïm Perelman’s works has greatly contributed to this renewed interest in the author, through the Aristotelian concept of ethos. Recent Mallarméan studies have also made considerable efforts to put this idea of Mallarmé as the instigator of the death of the author into perspective. Bertrand Marchal has shown in *La religion de Mallarmé* that the poet has a genuine social project, which presupposes a rhetorical commitment and thus an auctorial presence in the text. Jacques Rancière has also followed this track:

Mallarmé n’est pas le penseur silencieux et nocturne du poème trop pur pour être jamais écrit. Il n’est pas l’artiste vivant dans la tour d’ivoire de l’esthète en mal d’essences rares et de mots inouïs. [...] Il a été le contemporain d’une république fêtant son centenaire et cherchant les formes d’un culte civique remplaçant la pompe des religions et des rois.³ (Rancière 11-12)

Daniel Oster, in a frontal attack on the structuralist interpretation of the poet, has even spoken of a Mallarméan tendency towards autobiography: “Il y a chez Mallarmé cette application assez rare à inscrire chaque scène de sa vie privée dans du texte (à la construire donc), autobiographisme non rampant, mais au contraire exhibé, glorieux” (Oster 60).⁴

Whereas the above-mentioned studies of Mallarmé’s social engagement have been focused mainly on logos (that is, on Mallarmé’s social project itself), I will here examine the role of ethos. My object is to show that Mallarmé constantly cultivates his ethos, and that one of the primary subjects of the *Divagations* is in fact the auctorial figure. We can thus, through this approach, get closer to understanding the nature of auctorial engagement. In doing so, we can put “the speaking disappearance of the poet,” too often seen as a programme, into perspective.

² “In France, Mallarmé was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author.” Translation by Stephen Heath (Barthes, “The Death of the author” 143).

³ “Mallarmé is not the silent and nocturnal thinker of the poem too pure ever to be written. He is not the artist living in the ivory tower of the aesthete in need of rare essences and unheard-of words. [...] He was the contemporary of a republic celebrating its centenary and looking for forms of a civic cult to replace the pomp of religions and kings.”

⁴ “Mallarmé has this quite rare eagerness to put every scene of his private life into text (i.e. to construct it), an autobiographism that is not grovelling, but on the contrary exhibited, glorious.”

I shall here consider ethos as the textual image of the author. In rhetoric, ethos is viewed as a *technical* proof, which relies only on the rhetorical act itself: “This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak” (Aristotle I, 2). A preconceived ethos, independent of the text, obviously exists: it is the character of the speaker as a person (and not as speaker). It would be relevant to study the extra-textual self-branding of Mallarmé, whose public figure has to a great extent influenced the reading of his texts. We would then consult his biography, for example the memories of those who were present during his famous “Tuesdays.” In this article on the textual presence of the author, I will however adopt the Aristotelian perspective of a purely technical ethos.

As empirical basis for my analysis, I shall limit myself to the *Divagations*, Mallarmé’s collection of prose writings. Most of the texts reunited in the *Divagations* are articles from newspapers and journals reacting to current affairs and taking part in debate. The rhetorical dimension will therefore be more perceptible here than in the *Poésies*.

1. Rhetorical ethos

Western society has inherited the concept of ethos from Aristotelian rhetoric, in which the speaker’s persona should be such as to persuade the audience. The speaker must claim to have a good character, explicitly or, even better, implicitly:

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. (Aristotle I, 2)

For Aristotle, ethos is an essential aspect of rhetoric, along with logos (the question) and pathos (the audience). Perelman, who identifies rhetoric with argumentation, generally ignores ethos, and focuses mainly on logos. He nonetheless states that to win support, “c’est déjà une qualité non négligeable que d’être une personne à l’opinion de laquelle on attache quelque valeur” (Perelman 29).⁵ Michel Meyer tries to restore the Aristotelian equilibrium between ethos, logos and pathos, and therefore gives a much bigger role to ethos, which he defines as “ce qui, de l’orateur, fait qu’on le croit, qu’on se fie à son jugement, qu’on accepte ce qu’il dit et qu’on ne remet pas en cause les réponses” (Meyer 303).⁶

Ethos is then a proof. The image that the speaker presents of himself contributes to gain support, and in this way resembles other types of arguments. The ethos proof

⁵ “It is of course an appreciable quality to be a person to whose opinion people attach a certain value.”

⁶ “the quality in the speaker that makes us trust his judgment and accept what he says without challenging his answers”

however works in two distinct manners. Dominique Maingueneau distinguishes *said* ethos from *shown* ethos (Maingueneau 206). The said ethos is put forward as an argument to be admitted by the audience. The speaker could for example say: “You should trust me, because....” The shown ethos is not explicitly mentioned, and must be absorbed, most often without the audience knowing it. Because it passes implicitly, through a confident tone, for example, or a kind smile, the shown ethos is clearly much more efficient than the said ethos.

Concerning the content of rhetorical ethos, Aristotle’s intuition will be of great value. He recognised three principal qualities in a good speaker: “There are three things which inspire confidence in the orator’s own character—the three, namely, that induce us to believe a thing apart from any proof of it: good sense, good moral character, and goodwill” (Aristotle II, 1). Values obviously vary through the ages, but these three components of the ethos are sufficiently general to escape these changes. They correspond to archetypal attitudes. The “good sense” (*phronèsis*) convinces the audience that the speaker has the necessary intellectual capacity to treat the question in a satisfactory manner. The lack of “good moral character” (*aretè*), whatever the content of this concept might be at a given time, could shock the audience and provoke its hostility even though it considers the speaker competent. The “goodwill” (*eunoia*) is an attitude towards the audience itself. It convinces the audience that the speaker does not intend to lead it astray.

2. Good sense

Phronèsis is probably the most important of the ethos proofs. Without good sense, no speech can be convincing. It would be natural to think that a book called *Divagations* does not claim to be directed principally by good sense. At best, the title calls to mind an aimless wandering, at worst a complete delirium. But Mallarmé right away puts his title into perspective: “*Les Divagations apparentes traitent un sujet, de pensée, unique*” (79).⁷ The rambling is only apparent, and in reality the speech has a unity. The *Divagations* present themselves as a reverie, but a reverie of a competent mind.

The kind of good sense needed depends on the matter discussed. If it is literary, the speaker, who is a poet, can legitimately claim a specific expertise. This is what Mallarmé conveys in “Tennyson vu d’ici,” where he speaks about the French press’s reaction to the death of the British poet laureate:

L’incompétence [...] compte ; et la grande presse ou quotidienne ici
manifeste un peu la sienne, autrement que par une louable pudeur :
elle voulut sembler au fait, trop vite et, que n’expliqua-t-elle, à
l’instant, surprise ! Je voue ma gratitude à un journal qui, dès
l’événement fatal, adressa, chez moi, comme il eût pu le faire auprès

⁷ “*The apparent Divagations treat a single subject of thought.*”

de tout autre poète informé de plusieurs particularités anglaises, quelqu'un ; afin de ne parler du superbe défunt que sciemment à peu près. Une note du moins conforme à la grandeur en cause, la sienne retentit juste. ⁸ (157)

The praise of the French press proves its incompetence. The only note that sounds right is that of the *Echo*, who has had the good sense of consulting a poet informed about what is going on in Britain, namely Mallarmé. The two components of good sense in this case are the profession of poet and the anglophilia of the speaker. Mallarmé's competence appears in opposition to the incompetence of the press. He then presents a collection of blunders from the journalistic discourse on Tennyson, introduced by a blatant preterition:

À quoi bon rappeler désormais d'immédiates appréciations singulières : où, relativement au coloris instauré par le décorateur en ses *Idylles du Roi* sans doute, on évoquait la chromo-lithographie, alors que c'est de fresque délicate qu'il eût fallu se souvenir, et on cita Cabanel, quant à la galerie peut-être des fascinants portraits féminins dans les premiers poèmes, lorsque l'occasion s'offrit de taire le nom de ce seul peintre. ⁹ (157)

These corrections are quite abusive: Mallarmé is not even certain which parts of Tennyson's work are concerned by the appreciations he discards ("relativement au... sans doute," "quant à... peut-être"). It remains that, when Mallarmé ridicules and corrects the opinions of others, he places himself in a position of authority.

This kind of correction is one of the most commonly used techniques to assume the guise of competence. We have an amusing example of this in "Beckford," where Mallarmé appears as the "corrector" of the British author's French:

Quoi : une phraséologie correcte et par endroits égale au luxe de tableaux ou à quelque grandeur de sentiments [...]. À peine si plusieurs anglicismes accusent de loin en loin un très léger malaise ; et d'autres évoquent-ils quelque charme. Seule erreur avec plus de fréquence consacrée qu'à la lecture de nos maîtres les modèles, une confusion atteignant le *possesseur* ou le *relatif*, dans les *pronoms* comme *son, sa, ses, et il, elle, la, lui*, etc. ¹⁰ (155)

⁸ "Incompetence [...] counts; and that of the weekly press or the daily is here patent, and not because of a praiseworthy modesty: it wanted to appear in the loop, too rapidly, and what didn't it explain, instantly, surprised! I am grateful to a newspaper which, right after the fatal event sent someone to me, as it could have done to any other poet informed of several English particularities; so that it could speak more or less informedly about the superb deceased. Thus, one note at least, conform to the grandeur at stake, sounded in tune."

⁹ "To what end recall to mind now immediate and strange judgments: where, in reference probably to the colour established by the decorator in his *Idylls of the King*, the journalist spoke of chromolithography, whereas he should have thought of delicate frescos, and evoked Cabanel concerning perhaps the gallery of fascinating feminine portraits in the first poems, when the opportunity was there to omit the name of only that painter."

¹⁰ "What: a phraseology that is correct and sometimes comparable to the luxury of paintings or to a certain emotional greatness [...] Of course, a few Anglicisms here and there show a very mild uneasiness; others

Mallarmé here assumes the role of teacher, a role that is particularly connected to authority. When a little later he calls Beckford's errors "impéritie," he implicitly claims to have himself the opposite quality—competence. In "Planches et feuillets," he talks about Maeterlinck's frequent repetitions: "sortilège fréquent [...] qu'on nommerait à tort procédé" (238).¹¹ Even though his opponent is virtual, this claim is clearly dialogic. Mallarmé replaces the term of *device*, which is often used to class repetitions, with that of *charm*. Through this kind of correction, manifest all along in the *Divagations*, Mallarmé presents himself as more lucid than the majority of people, through a technique that clearly comes under shown ethos. He does not say that he is the most lucid, he shows it.

An important device for a speaker to enhance his authority is to speak in a peremptory tone. This is probably not among the typical Mallarméan devices, but he uses it occasionally, at strategic points, like here in "Hamlet": "Il n'est point d'autre sujet, sachez bien : l'antagonisme de rêve chez l'homme avec les fatalités à son existence départies par le malheur" (196).¹² The peremptory tone here comes from the exclusivity ("point d'autre sujet") and especially from the insistent appeal to the reader ("sachez bien").

But the will to correct public opinion and the assurance of tone are obviously not sufficient to establish the speaker's authority. This attitude even becomes ridiculous if it is not supported by other arguments. It is always useful, for example, to mention the provenance of one's good sense. The poet's profession justifies his authority in the literary domain. Mallarmé does not claim to have an exceptional intelligence, but rather an expertise which is the fruit of a long experience:

Arguer d'expérience par éclats doctoraux ; vanité ou si quelqu'un poussé à la circonstance, il montre le mépris d'une règle fondamentale—qu'on ne doit s'attarder même à l'éternel plus que l'occasion d'y puiser ; mais, je précise, atteindre tel style propre, autant qu'il faut pour illustrer un des aspects et ce filon de la langue : sitôt recommencer, autrement, en écolier quand le risque gagnait d'un pédant.¹³ (320)

Mallarmé denounces the vanity of putting forward one's experience, but that is exactly what he does himself! However, the experience that he claims is of a different kind than

are just charming. The only mistake seen more frequently than when reading our own masters, the models, is a confusion concerning the *possessor* and the *relative* in *pronouns* like *son, sa, ses* and *il, elle, la, lui, etc.*"

¹¹ "a frequent charm [...] which it would be a mistake to call device"

¹² "There is no other subject, note it well: the antagonism in Man between dreams and the fate distributed to his existence by misfortune."

¹³ "Putting forward one's experience with doctoral lustre is vanity or if someone is driven to do it, he defies a fundamental rule—that one should not linger, even at eternity, longer than the time it takes to draw from it what one needs; but, to specify, reach such-and-such a particular style, as much as it takes to illustrate one of the aspects and a certain vein of language: then start from scratch, differently, as a schoolboy when the risk was there of becoming a pedant."

that of the doctors. It comes from the fact that he is the eternal schoolboy. True experience comes from never being happy with what one already knows (the danger of pedantry), from beginning anew after each victory. It appears here that when it comes to justifying one's good sense, it is easy to fall into the said ethos. This is much less efficient rhetorically, and could be perceived as boasting and thereby undermine the second component of the ethos—the good moral character. Hence the rarity of such justifications in the *Divagations*. The above-mentioned justification presents the advantage of also working from a moral point of view, because it insists on learning, and supposes a certain modesty.

Another way of *saying* one's authority is to quote favourable opinions of third parties: "You should believe in my good sense, because others have done so." Once again, a conflict with the moral imperative is possible, and Mallarmé does this quite rarely. He says with a certain pride that he has been invited to lecture at Oxford and Cambridge (306), and, in "Solitude," he mentions that his disciples have attributed him with the title of 'Maître' (319). He seems embarrassed by this honour, but he could also not have mentioned it. Another way, then, to put forward one's competence and at the same time look modest.

It appears clearly here that Mallarmé in different ways claims to be in possession of good sense. This authority is often conveyed implicitly—as shown ethos. Mallarmé seldom explicitly *says* his competence. This image of good sense is however worth nothing unless accompanied by an image of good moral character.

3. Good moral character

The good moral character or virtue (*aretè*) is indeed an essential component of ethos. An audience who finds the speaker vicious would not trust him whatever good sense he would seem to have. For Aristotle, good moral character is a golden mean between lack and excess of a quality. I shall here explore how Mallarmé tries to present himself as what we could call "a good man."

As mentioned before, the imperative of good sense can enter into conflict with that of good moral character. Trying to appear competent can most notably interfere with the duty of modesty. Mallarmé therefore exhibits his modesty with much care, to counterbalance his ambitions which could be perceived as aggressive. His modesty appears constantly throughout the text, most often implicitly as shown ethos. This begins from the very first page, in the preface: "un livre comme je ne les aime pas, ceux épars et privés d'architecture" (79).¹⁴ Beginning a book with this kind of self-devaluation is obviously quite conventional and not very convincing, and we have seen that the regretted lack of architecture was tempered by the affirmation that the book presents "a single subject of thought." But from one end of the *Divagations* to the other,

¹⁴ "a book as I don't like them, those scattered and without architecture"

the role of its author is minimized. In “Villiers de L’Isle-Adam,” the circle of friends to which Mallarmé belongs is opposed to the solitary genius of Villiers:

Nous, par une velléité différente, étions groupés : simplement resserrer une bonne fois, avant de le léguer au temps, en condition excellente, avec l’accord voulu et définitif, un vieil instrument parfois faussé, le vers français, et plusieurs se montrèrent, dans ce travail, d’experts luthiers. ¹⁵ (125)

The work of Mallarmé is that of an instrument maker, and he does but tune the instrument of verse so that future musicians can play it. He does not create new lutes, and his role in the contemporary poetic revolution, represented most notably by the invention of free verse, is very modest. He states the same thing in “Crise de vers,” where he corrects the common impression that he is part of the poetic revolution: He is just a “témoin de cette aventure, où l’on me voulut un rôle plus efficace” (249). ¹⁶ The opportunity is a good one: the poet can in this way both look modest and take his distance from an adventure that clearly is not his. Mallarmé’s project is not in insignificant formal inventions like free verse.

Placing oneself in the same situation of mental poverty as the audience is a form of modesty particularly likely to inspire their sympathy. Mallarmé admits being “un parmi les dénués” ¹⁷ who lack the qualities needed to finish the great project of the Book (274). When Mallarmé insists on his failure, it is of course to highlight the enormous difficulty of his poetic project, but the rhetorical effect is also to downplay a certain image of the arrogant and presumptuous poet. Modesty is thus omnipresent in the *Divagations*. It could of course be interpreted as a conventional or even false modesty. It seems, however, that the very quantity of expressions of modesty, and especially the discretion with which they are presented (the small quantity of said ethos) gives the audience the impression that this is an essential and sincere attitude of the speaker.

Along with this modesty, the principal virtue of the speaker in the *Divagations* is his conscientiousness. He is “un homme ponctuel et scrupuleux” ¹⁸ who answers even troublesome requests, “obligé par convenances intérieures” (319). ¹⁹ He teaches his disciples and receives journalists even though he finds both tasks (particularly the latter) unpleasant. Even working as a theatrical critic is only conforming to “une obligation traditionnelle” (213) ²⁰ of poets. In “Beckford” he hints to the great work that is behind the articles in the *Divagations*. The author of *Vathek* seems to have met, among the great figures of French literature, only Voltaire and Mme de Staël: “Cent mémoires

¹⁵ “Our desire was on the contrary to act as a group: simply tighten up once and for all, before we hand it down to time, in an excellent condition, with the desired and definitive tuning, an old instrument which at times have sounded out of tune, French verse, and several of us proved to be, at this work, expert instrument makers.”

¹⁶ “a witness to this adventure, where some thought I played an active part”

¹⁷ “one amongst the poor”

¹⁸ “a punctilious and scrupulous man”

¹⁹ “bound by inner proprieties”

²⁰ “a traditional obligation”

fouillés, voilà nos deux seuls littérateurs que Beckford ait abordés” (152).²¹ Mallarmé claims having read a hundred memoirs in his research for this article, only to establish how many French authors Beckford has met. This is of course a very unlikely claim, but the audience still gets the impression of a hard-working scholar. Mallarmé seems to do everything that is expected of him, and even more. His ethos is in this way defined in opposition to that of the “oisif” (281)²² of “Le Mystère dans les Lettres.” Discreetly (the only example of said ethos is when he claims to be a punctilious and scrupulous man), he appears conscientious, meticulous and always at the service of others.

Another virtue, particularly important to the speaker who wishes to convince an audience concerned about its own interest, is to seem disinterested. Indeed, the public must not suspect that the speaker is actually pleading his own cause. Mallarmé constantly puts forth his lack of personal interest. His product has little commercial value:

À quoi bon trafiquer de ce qui, peut-être, ne se doit vendre, surtout quand cela ne se vend pas.

Comme le Poète a sa divulgation, de même il vit ; hors et à l’insu de l’affichage, du comptoir affaissé sous les exemplaires ou de placiers exaspérés : antérieurement selon un pacte avec la Beauté.²³ (274)

He first explains his absence from business with a principle – books are not meant to be sold – but then adds, laconically, a more pragmatic reason: nobody buys them anyway... In terms of financial gain, “la métallurgie l’emporte,”²⁴ he earlier says, in a pleasant tone. The poet lives far from the hustle and bustle of business, symbolised by advertisements, counters and vendors, according to a “pact with Beauty.” This eagerness to show that he is disinterested is a good example of Mallarmé’s constant preoccupation with ethos. What the audience is meant to infer is that Mallarmé’s words are more trustworthy than those of others. The disinterested Mallarmé should not be suspected of feathering his own nest.

Beside these three major virtues (modesty, conscientiousness and lack of personal interest), many others occasionally appear. Of greatest import to the audience is probably sincerity, which appears clearly in the essay on Wagner:

²¹ “I have rummaged through a hundred memoirs, and those are the only two of our writers that Beckford has approached.”

²² “the idler”

²³ “To what end traffic that which perhaps is not meant to be sold, especially when it does not sell. The Poet lives the same way his work circulates; far from advertisements, counters sagging under heavy books, and exasperated vendors: he lives according to an immemorial pact with Beauty.”

²⁴ “Metallurgy is better.”

Le sentiment se complique envers cet étranger, transports, vénération, aussi d'un malaise que tout soit fait, autrement qu'en irradiant, par un jeu direct, du principe littéraire même.²⁵ (178)

Whatever admiration Mallarmé has for Wagner, the German composer also makes him fear a devaluation of poetry in favour of music, and thus a devaluation of the poet himself. This is a rather petty concern, and Mallarmé is not obliged to confide it to the audience. One could object that this whole article is constructed around the competition between music and literature through the emblematic figures of the composer and the poet. But this does not alter the impression of sincerity: the audience feels that it can trust a man who admits such weaknesses.

Mallarmé shows another virtue, discretion, when in the Bois de Boulogne he surprises a churchman who is answering the "sollicitations du gazon":²⁶

À moi ne plût [...] que, coupable à l'égal d'un faux scandalisé se saisissant d'un caillou du chemin, j'amenasse par mon sourire même d'intelligence, une rougeur sur le visage à deux mains voilé de ce pauvre homme.²⁷ (107)

He appears concerned not to embarrass the cleric by smiling at his weakness. At the end of the article he speaks explicitly of this particular virtue when mentioning his "discretion vis-à-vis d'ébats" (108).²⁸ It is certainly an ambiguous virtue, annulled by the very fact that he tells the story to the reader.

It is clear that Mallarmé carefully constructs his image of integrity and probity. His most important virtues are modesty, conscientiousness and disinterestedness, to which we can add sincerity and discretion. These are "soft" virtues, with little connection to the virile origin of the word *virtue*. The total impression is that of a nice person, pleasant to spend time with, and more concerned about others' interest than his own. This good moral character more than compensates for the poet's emphasizing of his competence. Depending on the audience, this is perhaps even an overcompensation that undermines his authority. We have said that the content of the three archetypal ethos categories (*phronèsis*, *aretè* and *eunoia*) is historically unstable. This image of the soft man is probably more appreciated today, in the age of gender equality, than at the time the *Divagations* were published, and may have contributed to the provocative effect Mallarmé's writings had upon some of his contemporaries.

4. Goodwill

²⁵ "My feelings towards this foreigner, transports, veneration, but also a slight fear that everything could be done without irradiation, through a direct play, from the literary principle itself."

²⁶ "the invitation from the grass"

²⁷ "Far be it from me [...] to, guilty as much as someone pretending to be scandalized and taking a stone from the road, bring through my smile, even of complicity, a blush to the face that this poor man hid in his hands."

²⁸ "discretion about frolics"

In a general sense, *eunoia* is of course part of the good moral character. What we are talking about here is a specific goodwill towards the audience. Every aspect of ethos has of course a transitivity towards pathos, since the speaker always aspires to gain the support of *someone*. But this connection is stronger here, because the objective is to give the impression of a good attitude towards the audience itself, which must believe that the speaker wants what is good for it and will not deceive it. Perelman defines this audience not as every person ever likely to be exposed to a speech, but as “*l’ensemble de ceux sur lesquels l’orateur veut influencer par son argumentation*” (Perelman 32).²⁹ In the case of the *Divagations*, this definition would exclude the “idler” whom Mallarmé is happy to have diverted, and include only those who are willing to make an effort to understand his writing. Is a true communion between the poet and these true readers possible through the act of writing and reading. The “salut exact” (281)³⁰ between the idle reader and the author is, at any rate, a parody of this communion. In trying to get rid of this kind of reader, the author shows no goodwill for him.

The reader always has his place on the textual scene along with the author, but this place is generally implicit. It can, however, be made explicit if the author uses the second person whose referent is the person addressed—the reader. Mallarmé frequently uses the *tu/vous*, highlighting the presence of the reader on the scene. But it is quite rare that this reader is really incarnate and more widely described. This happens for example when the speaker is disappointed at the triviality of a kiss in *Two Pigeons*: “*Ce sera.. comme si la chose se passait, madame ou monsieur, chez l’un de vous avec quelque baiser très indifférent en art*” (203).³¹ The readers, of both sexes, serve as comparison to show the triteness of the kiss. The audience feels included and the speech becomes less masterful. The “goodwill” of this inclusion of the reader appears better in an example from “Beckford”:

À vous, lecteur, mais sans les mille fables et l’absurde, se montre, rattachée presque toute ici à l’écrit imaginaire en jeu comme par l’instinct contemporain elle le fut, l’existence de celui qu’on appela jusqu’au dernier jour l’*Auteur de Vathek*.³² (151)

The noun *reader*, in apposition to the pronoun of the second person, confirms the identity between audience and reader. The speaker makes his goodwill explicit when saying that thanks to his work, Beckford’s life is revealed to the reader. This biographic account is then like a gift offered by the benevolent author to the reader.

²⁹ “those whom the speaker wishes to influence with his argumentation”

³⁰ “exact greeting”

³¹ “It will be.. As if the thing were happening, Madam or Sir, at your house, with some kiss which is very indifferent to art.”

³² “To you, reader, is here disclosed, but without the thousand fables and absurdities, the existence of the man who was called until his last day the *Author of Vathek*, almost entirely related to his imaginative writing, as it was by the contemporary instinct.”

Making the reader's place on the scene explicit highlights the communication between author and reader, but this is obviously not enough to create confidence. A much-used technique for conveying one's goodwill is to present oneself as similar to the audience. The modesty that we have already analyzed at length answers this imperative. Modesty is part of what makes "the good man," but it is also a way of expressing one's goodwill towards the audience by showing that one is not trying to outshine it. This is very clear when Mallarmé "exhumes" an old piece written on Banville, which he introduces in this way:

Afin de prouver que je vois comme tout le monde, moins bien certes,
j'exhume, sans pitié à mon égard, une des premières pages qu'écolier je traçai
dans la solitude, à la louange du dieu. ³³ (161)

The modesty is here explicitly constructed in relation to the audience. The speaker places himself on the same level as the audience ("comme tout le monde"), if not at an even humbler level ("moins bien certes"). The word *prouver* indicates that we are in the world of rhetoric, but here it is less a question of "ethos proof" than of "proof of ethos." What the speaker seeks to prove is not the logos (what he says about Banville), but the ethos (that he is himself like everyone else). The ethos seems to have assumed a certain autonomy: it is a goal in itself and not merely an argument for the logos.

Since goodwill is the component of the ethos that is the most closely linked to the pathos, specifically pathetic arguments can also contribute to establishing a close relation between speaker and audience. Mallarmé uses one such argument when he praises a melodrama:

Je consens d'attendre ou de suivre, au long du labyrinthe que mène l'art—
vraiment non pour m'accabler comme si ce n'était assez de mon sort. ³⁴ (191)

Mallarmé does not watch melodramas to weep at their maudlin intrigues, for his own life is already quite pathetic enough. This is the same as saying that he himself knows the sorrows of his audience. He is not more fortunate than them.

The most striking manifestations of this communion between speaker and audience are the personal pronouns of the first person plural—*nous*—when they are *inclusive* (when they include the addressed person, the reader). They are numerous in the *Divagations*. In "Catholicisme," we have a *nous* that refers to the entire human race:

Une race, la nôtre, à qui cet honneur de prêter des entrailles à la peur qu'a
d'elle-même, autrement que comme conscience humaine, la métaphysique et

³³ "To prove that I see things like everyone else, and even less well, I exhume, without mercy for myself, one of the first pages that I wrote down in solitude as a schoolboy, in praise of the god."

³⁴ "I agree to wait or to follow, along the labyrinth of art—not at all to be overwhelmed with grief, as if my own fate was not enough."

claustrale éternité, échet, puis d'expirer le gouffre en quelque ferme aboi dans les âges.³⁵ (293)

Mallarmé here strongly emphasizes the common destiny of all humans. Later in the same article, the poet tries an "intrusion dans les fêtes futures."³⁶ These celebrations consist of a "Representation avec concert":³⁷

L'orchestre flotte, remplit et l'action, en cours, ne s'isole étrangère et nous ne demeurons des témoins : mais, de chaque place, à travers les affres et l'éclat, tour à tour, sommes circulairement le héros.³⁸ (296)

This *nous* is particularly revealing, because it appears in the context of the communion that the poet wishes to establish in future celebrations, a communion which is then sealed by this *nous* synthesizing the *je* and the *vous*. This communion is utopian during the interregnum, but it is what the speaker wishes for the audience and for himself in the future.

It appears here that goodwill is also considered in the construction of the rhetorical ethos of the *Divagations*, although to a lesser extent than good sense and good moral character. The obscurity of the style can even be construed as ill will, because it complicates the hermeneutic work of the audience. But we have seen that those who were scared off by this obscurity were not truly part of Mallarmé's audience. The poet carefully constructs a climate of confidence between himself and his readers, in order to establish a literary communion, foreshadowing the true communion he imagines one day in the future.

In a general manner, we see that ethos plays a very important role in Mallarmé's rhetoric. The poet constantly writes his own person into the text, and this inscription of the auctorial figure is manifestly carried out to gain rhetorical competitiveness. The speaker gives himself qualities likely to win the support of his audience. If I were to rank the components of the ethos as they appear in the *Divagations*, I would say that the image of good moral character is given priority, followed by that of good sense, and lastly that of goodwill. Moreover, the ethos is usually constructed implicitly, as shown ethos, and this further enhances its rhetorical efficiency.

We have also seen that the ethos here gains a certain autonomy, and it goes without saying that this rhetorical efficiency is not solely intended to work within the limited textual context of the *Divagations*. It also greatly contributes to establishing the public image of the person Stéphane Mallarmé. This means that ethos is here partly independent of logos. Mallarmé does not only use ethos to add authority to his social

³⁵ "A race, our own, to whose lot fell the honour of lending guts to the metaphysical and claustral eternity's fear of itself in other forms than as human conscience, and then the honour of exhaling the abyss in some firm scream through the ages."

³⁶ "intrusion into future celebrations"

³⁷ "representation with concert"

³⁸ "The orchestra floats, fills, and the action, in progress, is not unfamiliar and we do not stay witnesses: rather, from each seat, through torments and splendours, we are, in turn, circularly, the hero."

project, but also to brand himself as an author. The term “self-branding” or “personal branding,” coined in the 1990s, refers to an obsession with this autonomous ethos which characterizes the highly specialized and hypercompetitive labour market of postmodern society: every person is a brand that needs to be cunningly managed and promoted in order to obtain success. It can be argued that the names of writers functioned as brands long before we all became CEOs of “Me Inc” (Peters 83). The name of Mallarmé, more than others, marked a set of values triggering the admiration or the repulsion of the poet’s contemporaries. The constant ethos work that is carried out in the *Divagations* indicates that Mallarmé is aware of this, and wishes to influence the perception of his persona. Contrary to the common idea that the *Divagations* illustrate the disappearance of the author, it seems to me that they are an excellent example of textual self-branding.

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