

Acquisto on Bonnet and Frange, eds. (2016)

Bonnet, Antoine, et Pierre-Henry Frangne, éditeurs. *Mallarmé et la musique, la musique et Mallarmé: l'écriture, l'orchestre, la scène, la voix*. PU de Rennes, 2016, pp. 242, ISBN 978-2-7535-4856-5

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Based on a 2015 colloquium, this volume brings together literature scholars and musicologists in sixteen essays that explore, in the first half of the book, Stéphane Mallarmé's conceptual relationship to music and, in the second, twentieth-century composers' engagement with the texts and ideas of Mallarmé. In both parts, the approach is often more expository than argumentative: the literary scholars in the first half offer literary history that synthesizes and summarizes Mallarmé's engagement with music which, as is well known, often operates at an abstract theoretical notion of the musical, despite the poet's frequent attendance at the Lamoureux Concerts in Paris. The first part includes several essays that can serve as useful guides for those seeking accurate explorations of the poet's ambiguous relationship to music generally and to Richard Wagner specifically. Taken together, these essays operate as variations on a theme, with their authors frequently circling around the same key moments in Mallarmé's prose writings, such as his famous definition of music, in a letter to Edmond Gosse, as "l'au-delà magiquement produit par certaines dispositions de la parole" (12), and in the preface to *Un coup de dés*.

Younger contributing scholars break newer ground in the last essays of the first part of the book. Florent Albrecht, for instance, looks at the *objet musical* in Mallarmé's poetry, showing how the choice of musical instruments represented in his verse harkens back to an older concept of lyricism that Mallarmé goes on to reformulate via the play of presence and absence in which these poeticized instruments participate as "pur outil" (96). Margot Favard and Fanny Gribenski examine, from a sociological and anthropological perspective, Mallarmé's musical listening habits and concert attendance as ritualized behavior. They note that Mallarmé seldom mentions the specific works he heard at these concerts and does not evoke the music in theological ways but, rather, comments on the concert-going practices of his fellow listeners in secularized but ritualistic religious terms. Frédéric Pouillade explores the two otherwise forgettable ballets about which Mallarmé wrote in *Divagations*, namely *Viviane* and *Les Deux Pigeons*, providing contextual discussion and illustrations of the no longer extant Éden-Théâtre where Mallarmé saw these works. Pouillade plausibly reads Mallarmé's engagement with such works as "une ligne de fuite qui permet à Mallarmé d'échapper à Wagner sans avoir jamais à l'attaquer de front ou à explicitement le rejeter" (98).

The musicians and musicologists writing in the second half of the book—with the exception of one essay on Claude Debussy and some passing references to Maurice Ravel—engage with twentieth and twenty-first century composers. As in the first half, the approach in the second half is often descriptive rather than interpretive. Pierre Boulez looms large, not just for his musical settings of Mallarmé texts in the work *Pli selon pli* but also for his third piano sonata, written with aleatoric techniques inspired by modernist literature including Mallarmé's approach to chance in *Un coup de dés* and the plans for *Le Livre*.

Some of the essays expand the Mallarmé-Boulez nexus by exploring triangulations with other figures. Such is the case in Sarah Troche's essay, which notes that Boulez offered a copy of Mallarmé's complete works to John Cage. As the essay goes on to argue, however, the two composers' conception of chance was irreconcilably opposed, with Boulez's vision corresponding more closely to Mallarmé's in terms of the artist intervening in an attempt to control chance by formal means. Robert Piencikowski in turn examines Michel Butor's essay on Boulez's settings of Mallarmé. Most of the essays explore affinities rather than detailed connections between the esthetics and compositional practice of Mallarmé and Boulez, the former often inspiring the latter in general terms or what we could call, following Guy Lelong's essay, "des opérations mallarméennes" (189). For Lelong, Mallarmé's "double révolution" (191) of autonomy both from fixed meaning and from the page on which the text is set does not have much resonance in Boulez since, according to Lelong, Boulez's relation to Mallarmé is "au mieux un malentendu" (193) on the part of the composer. Lelong seeks greater resonance in the work of contemporary composer Marc-André Dalbavie and visual artist Daniel Buren.

What emerges collectively in the second half is that it is more the poetics than the poetry of Mallarmé that has inspired modern and contemporary composers. As a result, there is little analysis of the details of Boulez's decisions about setting Mallarmé's texts and more description and structural analysis of the compositional procedures of Boulez and his heirs in their general affinities with the implicit and explicit commentary on artistic production in Mallarmé's prose writings.

Those seeking a general map of the terrain of Mallarmé's involvement with music will find much of value in the first half of the book; specialists may wish for a deeper engagement with the vast amount of scholarship that has appeared on this topic

already, which these essays seldom engage. Likewise, those eager to trace the heritage of Mallarmé's poetics in the contemporary music scene will find several good starting points in the second part that will spur further exploration of the music described there.

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