CONCLUSION

The main preoccupation of the foregoing pages has been an examination of Mallarmé's poetics as it first appears in rudimentary form and then evolves in the notes and fragments of the *Hérodiade* manuscript. With this first major work, Mallarmé explored the problematic relationship between productivity, negativity, and Art; cultivated a textual unconscious; and gradually developed a concept of *écriture* as critical process. It is precisely this concern with the becoming of a text and the limits of interpretation that constitutes the productive juncture between Mallarmé's aesthetics and Freud's psychoanalysis.

Subject to thirty-five years of revision and reformulation, *Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère*, not only implements the poetic strategies outlined in the early *Correspondance*, but clearly anticipates the radical proclamations put forth later in "Crise de Vers." Describing this crisis in the 1880s as both "exquise" and "fondamentale," Mallarmé proceeded to announce the birth of a new poetry, an essentially modernist vision of Art that ultimately led him to wonder about the validity and the possibility of creative discourse: "Quelque chose comme les Lettres existent-il" and "A savoir s'il y a lieu d'écrire" (*O.C.*, 645). If the crisis is qualified as acute, it is because the essential changes taking place in the literature of this period entailed a step-by-step deconstruction of traditional forms of literary representation, a process already nascent in *Hérodiade*. 
To free up the sensuous signifying power of words, wrote Mallarmé, is to begin to unveil "mille intentions certaines et mystérieuses du langage" (O.C., 919). To surrender "l'initiative aux mots" (ibid., 366) by calling for the suppression of authorial identity; to create a poetics of effect through the continuous suspension of reference; to approximate the discourse of the Unconscious, this "air ou chant sous le texte" by the systematic subversion of all forms of hierarchy thereby creating a self-reflexive work, a "Text" that would "speak" only "of itself" (ibid., 663): such is the intention informing the composition and recomposition of Les Noces d'Hérodiade, Mystère.

What begins in the 1860s as the adolescent crisis of a solitary shadow princess is gradually transposed into a linguistic drama of becoming, the genesis of character and text being one and the same. Far from representing the immaterial perfection of the "idealist" mind, Hérodiade allegorizes the ambivalent rapport between the writer and his work, the impotent father and his dubious offspring. Like the sickly child/text of "Don du poème," Hérodiade is another "enfant d'une nuit d'idumée" (O.C., 40), the textual fragment that reflects only tangentially the single volume of Literature.

"Hérodiade, ce mot sombre et rouge comme une grenade ouverte" (C, 1:154). "... pareille à la chair de la femme, la rose / Cruelle Hérodiade" (O.C., 34). The Word made Flesh, Hérodiade is not a character in any traditional sense, but a nexus of signification. Lacking in self-definition and completely androgynous, she becomes for her creator an "être purement rêvé, et absolument indépendant de l'Histoire" (C, 1:154). Inquiring into the mystery of her origin, Hérodiade is a "jeune intellectuelle," a reader of texts. As she strives to decipher "le sens de ses marques précoces," (N, 214), written in the faded pages of the old nurse's psyche and figured in the precious gems of her childhood memories she discovers the unalterable fact of her own alterity. The prophecies that return to haunt her are the cryptic remnants of other esoteric texts encoded in a primitive language of drives or pulsions that, once mobilized, continue to resurface at the margins of the work, in the space of the variants, and in the shape and repetition of the letter. What is ultimately figured in the bursting of the heroine's jewels, the
fragmentation of her mirror and the unarrestable flow of rivers of blood, milk, sweat, tears, and ink is the persistent presence of an unconscious discourse of desire: “Ici-bas / Toute coule que la crise / Goutte à goutte thésaurise / vers les cieux / se vaporise” (ibid., 218).

Words, as Mallarmé insisted, “gisent, pareils ou de dates diverses, comme des stratifications” (O.C., 901). There is no way to narratize the drama that occurs in the permutation of words for Hérodiade is a palimpsest, a weave of fantasies in which the simultaneous presence of multiple layers of discourse invites continuous excavation. Perceptible only in the processes of displacement and condensation that operate between variant and text, the return of repressed fantasies of procreation, incest, and death depends on the poet’s conscious and sustained exploitation of syntactic ambiguities, etymological and graphic effects, blank spaces in the text—all marks of the writing process. As in Freud’s dream text, such procedures protect but also elucidate the workings of unconscious drives.

The Hérodiade manuscript does not offer its readers any unified meanings or definitive answers. One might link the heroine’s inability to solve the enigma of her past with the imminent failure of critical interpretation. Radically incomplete, Hérodiade, like Freud’s dream-work, is a rebus, a text in flux. What prompted Freud to describe dream analysis as an “interminable” process was the gradual realization that all dreams contain some part that remains unintelligible. This impenetrable nucleus he identified as the “dream’s navel,” the place “where it straddles the unknown” (S.E., 5:525). It was in much the same manner that Mallarmé recognized and protected the mysteries of language. Thus he concluded that the creative act constituted a lifetime project and that all texts were microcosmic reflections of a single work. Just as the writing of a book has no identifiable beginning or end, the activity of reading is a “desperate practice,” a product of chance and dream. For the very survival of the work depends on its power to engage a reader, who, in the act of reading, “furnishes” the work’s “modernity.”