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Helen Abbott, *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé: Voice, Conversation and Music*. Surrey, UK and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Press, 2009. xi + 245 pp. Tables, musical example, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 U.S./£55.00 UK (cl). ISBN 9780754667452.

Review by Joseph Acquisto, University of Vermont.

Helen Abbott's book contributes to and extends a number of recent studies of the relationship of French literature and music in the nineteenth century. *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé* features a familiar pairing of poets and elaborates the notion of "voice" through a number of different avenues of inquiry including rhetoric, conversation, the role of the body, the exchange of voices in conversation, and, finally, music. Although the book analyzes primarily the two poets mentioned in the title, Abbott also gives more than passing attention to Edgar Allen Poe, Richard Wagner, Théodore de Banville, and René Ghil. The book is not a study of intertextuality, nor is it primarily concerned with the linear development of each poet's style and poetics. For Abbott, "'voice' implies a dynamic process of exchange between differing voices which are increasingly difficult to pin down" (p. 187). She underscores that her approach is "aesthetic" as opposed to semiotic or performative. One could add that she also offers, through a consideration of a broad range of approaches to the elusive concept of what "voice" is in poetry, a kind of phenomenology of reading poetry that strives, through ample close readings and analysis of the poets' prose and verse poetry as well as their critical articles, to capture both the intellectual and physical dimensions of reading and interpreting poetry.

Part one seeks a point of entry into the question of voice via the tradition of rhetoric, that is, nineteenth-century treatises on the performance practice of poetry, the use of voice in reading aloud. Such a use of physical voice can "ensure a more active and immediate relationship between the poet and his reader" (p. 20). Abbott focuses primarily on *actio* and *memoria*, in order to claim that, even though Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé did not write "declamatory" poetry, considerations of vocal enactment are still crucial to our understanding of the often troubled relationship of poet and reader in this period. This relationship is couched in rhetorical terms in Baudelaire's "Épigraphe pour un livre condamné," which Abbott reads through its reference to devilish rhetoric, which "means cunning manipulation of the venerable art of poetry" (p. 35). By restricting his poetry to those capable of understanding such cunning manipulation, Baudelaire prepares the kind of negative relation to his public that would haunt him throughout his life.

The consideration of the role of the body in reciting poetry serves as a transition to part two, which, following Poe in Baudelaire's translation, develops the notion of voice as a physical "mouvement dans l'air" (p. 54) and the role of the body in generating voice. Paradoxically, Baudelaire and Mallarmé continue to rely on the notion of voice even as they internalize it. Abbott argues that the moments when "this 'mouvement dans l'air' does not actually physically take place, and instead is sensed or imagined 'internally,'" are the times when "the human attributes of voice become particularly interesting for Baudelaire and Mallarmé" (p. 54). Drawing on current neuroscientific knowledge that suggests that even in silent reading, "the brain primes the necessary muscles" for the action of reading aloud (p. 66), Abbott claims that "virtual" voicing of poems thus participates in the same kinds of activation of voice as actual declamation. In parallel to this increasing abstraction, Abbott traces contemporaries' descriptions

of the two poets reading their own poetry in order to highlight the transition in dynamics from Baudelaire's broader declamatory style to Mallarmé's hushed whispers. From this most literal consideration of the relationship of voice to poetry, Abbott goes on to consider moments in the poets' work that represent actual voices, either speaking, shouting, or laughing, before turning attention to Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés," whose nontraditional layout on the page allows for several options of construing the order in which the poem's words are to be read. Here Abbott includes insightful analysis of two readings of the poem on a CD-ROM dating from 2000. Abbott notes not only varieties in the reconstruction of the syntax but also the differences in vocal quality and volume of the readings by Nicole Ward Jouve and Yves Bonnefoy.

From here Abbott's argument returns to more abstract considerations, namely the ways in which Baudelaire and Mallarmé's poetry seeks to establish resonance between poet and reader. She sees in the transition between Baudelaire's style and Mallarmé's increasingly abstract poems a decrease in emphasis on meaning in favor of something more vague which she calls "profound resonances of poetic language" (p. 91), and which she links to "the vibrating suspension created by words themselves," a "sensation that is best appreciated through the quiet murmuring of poetic language to oneself" (p. 93). Here one begins to get a fuller sense of what Abbott characterizes as her "aesthetic" approach to poetry, since there are limits to ways in which such an approach to poetry can be explicitly theorized. The poetry and poetics of Mallarmé dominate this portion of the book, serving as illustrations of the way poetic meaning can never be fixed; rather, "patterning of meaning...take the form of irregular interstitial pulls that may be re-awakened or re-discovered on each re-reading of the texts" (p. 95). Words conceived as movement on the air generate not fixed meanings but rather "an emotive response, an effect, or a 'sensation'" (p. 109).

Part three is devoted to the notion of "exchange" of various kinds: "between poet, reader and language itself, in the form of differing 'voices'" within the poetry (p. 113). Abbott demonstrates that the works of Baudelaire and Mallarmé thrive on, rather than being broken down by, the potential for misunderstanding engendered by ever-increasing levels of ambiguity and ever more indirect relationships between subjects and voices. She focuses on Baudelaire's use of direct address, quotation, and rhetorical questions, as well as on Mallarmé's increasingly oblique syntax and style which go hand in hand with entry into "the abstract, symbolic realm where 'voice' and 'subject' become more and more dissociated from each other" (p. 139). Of particular note is the analysis of a series of seldom-mentioned fragmentary notes on conversation made by Mallarmé in 1869-1870, in which he values a conversational approach to language because of its implication of imagination and its transience which leads to "differing resonant possibilities" in interpretation (p. 118). Abbott notes that "on each new encounter with a poem, new voices, new pleasures and new memories are brought to life through a process of exchange, each time reviving a past voice, yet each time in a new guise" (p. 151). This enlivened encounter with a poem takes place in spite of, or perhaps even because of, the poetry's modulation of "disembodied, dead and silent voices" (p. 173) whose *étrangeté*, or strangeness, becomes a catalyst for the ever more abstract exchange of voices that constitutes the reading and writing of poetry.

The final part of the book addresses music, a sister art to poetry which also depends on a certain degree both of abstraction and of "impulses on the air." In this section, Abbott draws on her experience as a soprano in order to offer insightful analysis of the ways music can contribute to the aesthetics of voice and exchange that she has been tracing. Music participates in the same paradox that Abbott identifies with voice more generally; she suggests that the aesthetics of Baudelaire and Mallarmé move "toward a notion of 'voice' which is inherently musical because it should be able to sing out silently, and to resonate with the soul" (p. 186). In keeping with her emphasis on resonance over meaning, she notes that Baudelaire and Mallarmé favor instrumental over vocal music in their theorizing about music "because of its (apparent) ability to cast semantics aside" (p. 193). This is not to say that instrumental music is devoid of meaning, but rather that, like Mallarmé's poetry, it provides a space for "meanings which necessarily remain irregular, unusual and unstable" (p. 202). The remainder of this section explores how repetition in poetry—and its treatment in Henri Duparc's song setting of Baudelaire's

“L’Invitation au voyage”—highlight this sense of instability through engaging the mind as it associates the repeated material with both past and present contexts, leading to an aesthetic strategy in both poetry and music which emphasizes “patterning and unexpected disruptions on either a larger or smaller scale” (p. 220).

Abbott succeeds in demonstrating the mystery and complexity of the poetry she analyzes, and is careful to explore the notion of voice without reducing its ambiguity or elusiveness as a category. Her analysis situates voice in a state of betweenness, a “process of interaction” (p. 229) that is both human and textual, physical and abstract. Likewise, the study situates poetry effectively between music and oratory, enlarging the scope of the book as announced by the title in order to bring Poe, Wagner, Hermann Helmholtz, and others into the conversation. The strength of the book lies in its close readings of many verse and prose poems by Baudelaire and Mallarmé; her larger theorizing of voice is always at the service of the readings of the poems. In this way, Abbott invites the reader to enter into greater appreciation of poetry as a phenomenon that will always disrupt and complicate our attempts to gain a full analytical grasp on its complexity.

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