

**With a smile barely wrinkling the surface: Christopher Brennan's large
Musicopoematographoscope and Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*.**

I

In May 1897 Christopher Brennan (1870-1932), a young Australian poet who was already also a Mallarmé scholar, had his first glimpse of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* when a copy of the journal *Cosmopolis* arrived at the Sydney library where he worked. Within just a few months he had produced in response a large handwritten work he called *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope*. Intended as a private joke between Brennan and his friend Dowell O'Reilly, a NSW Member of Parliament, this pastiche of Mallarmé's work was published only in 1981, in facsimile, nearly fifty years after Brennan's death,¹ allowing us to appreciate the quite remarkable variety of calligraphic styles that Brennan employed to imitate the typographical variety of the *Coup de dés*.² This early Australian response to the *Coup de dés*, although intended above all as a spoof, provides ample evidence of Brennan's sensitive and intelligent reading of Mallarmé's work, as he adapts its form and motifs in a playful reproach to unkind critics of his recently published *XXI Poems*.³ Not entirely hidden behind the bravado of the disparaged Australian poet are some of his own deeply-held poetic aspirations.

Brennan first encountered the works of Mallarmé in 1893 (Clark 69). The record of the various recensions of Mallarmé's works in Brennan's interleaved copies of *Divagations* (1897) and the Deman *Poésies* (1899) demonstrates that he developed for the French poet a scholarly approach as rigorous as the one that had led him at the age of eighteen to make an important discovery about the descent of the texts of Aeschylus (Clark 62-63). His studies of Mallarmé were already well under way in 1897. His first article on Mallarmé, 'Was Mallarmé a Great Poet?', was published in the *Bulletin* in 1898 after the French poet's death; other articles appeared in the *Bulletin* in 1899, the *Modern Language Review of NSW* in 1920 and the *Australian Modern Language Review* in 1921 (Brennan, 1962: 281-84, 312-17, 354-60, 360-64). In 1969, Lloyd Austin said of Brennan's early criticism of Mallarmé, 'Brennan's critical articles on French poetry and particularly Mallarmé, are still of great value and interest, and were remarkable in their time, having no equivalent in English, and indeed none in French' (Austin 536). Arguably Brennan's most significant response to the French poet and to the Symbolist movement as a whole is his *Poems*, a *livre composé* published in 1914. This work is Symbolist in form, and its structure reflects Mallarmé's desire to bring about 'une assimilation humaine à la tétralogie de l'an'.⁴

Ironically, Brennan received an enthusiastic response from Mallarmé to his *XXI Poems* (which the Australian poet had been bold enough to send him) not long after the same work had been attacked by Australian critics. Mallarmé addressed Brennan in the letter as 'Poète et poète merveilleux', and spoke of 'une parentée [*sic*] de songe' between himself and his Australian admirer (Clark 112; Lloyd, 2002: 18-22). It seems unlikely, however, that this would have impressed the critic of the

Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, who had written scornfully: 'Why swell [...] the list of stringers of musical, meaningless words, to an accompaniment of equally futile and meretricious pessimism?'

II

On its title page, the *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope* describes itself as a 'poster'. As we are told in large capitals, this is 'The art of the future', 'The perfection of the past', 'The rage of the present'. The long title appears in larger capitals, of the same size as those Brennan uses for the central statement of the work, 'I DON'T GIVE A TINKER'S DAMN FOR THE PUBLIC' (the equivalent of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*). Smaller lower-case italics tell us that the form has been invented by Mallarmé, but that Brennan has added 'many improvements / freer use of counterpoint'. On the following page Brennan tells us that this is the 'Full Score' (a direct reference to Mallarmé's description of his work as 'une partition' in the 'Observation' accompanying the *Cosmopolis* version of the work) (Mallarmé 1: 391), listing the voices for which it is written and adding ruefully at the end '& no Audience'.

A graphoscope was an instrument for viewing a magnified version of a small picture, postcard or photograph, and versions of it were still being produced in 1900. Intended for home use, such instruments took their place among numerous other optical inventions of the nineteenth century such as the Thaumatrope, Anorthoscope and Phenakistiscope (Mannoni 205-17), many of which attempted to satisfy the longing for animation. Some 'improved' graphoscopes, like Roswell's Stereographoscope, came complete with hundreds of stereo cards. Brennan's *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope* reproduces stereo effects in at least two ways: it offers a new way of viewing the page that necessitates the simultaneous reading of multiple parallel lines of verse, sometimes conventionally horizontal, sometimes vertical or diagonal; and it insists on being read simultaneously as poetry and musical score, an effect that is produced primarily by graphic means, as we will see. In his title, Brennan claims to unite such effects with algebra and even riddle. 'Prose-Verse' relates his attempt to recent experimentation in French verse, the 'poursuites particulières et chères à notre temps, le vers libre et le poème en prose' to which Mallarmé refers in his 'Observation' (Mallarmé 1: 392).⁵

Brennan based his pastiche entirely on the *Cosmopolis* version of the *Coup de dés*.⁶ As in that version, the unit of his poem is the single page rather than the doublet which Mallarmé always preferred and with which we are now familiar, so there is nothing in his poem comparable to the effects Mallarmé obtains with gutters and margins (see *La Charité* 50-51). Working within the frame of the single page, Brennan deploys print and blank space as elements of composition, using a different layout for every page. While most pages are intended to be read in horizontal lines from top to bottom, several pages include diagonal elements working from top left to bottom right, resembling the list of present participles on the final page of Mallarmé's poem (1: 401). The list on Brennan's page 12 ([22]),⁷ for instance, is also a list of verbs, in this case past participles. Page 8 ([18]) has a parenthetical section including two diagonal arrangements, both containing five words, symmetrically displayed so as to represent graphically the critics' reduction of Brennan's poetry to 'powder / dust / ashes'. Page 7 ([17]) has a complex layout, fanning out into three columns which come together again at the bottom of the page. Interpreting it necessitates the

'vision simultanée de la Page' that Mallarmé describes in his preliminary comments (1: 391).

In spite of the fact that the *Musicopoematographoscope* was written partly as a joke, the care taken in the production of the various styles and weights of lettering indicates that the work was not simply dashed off on the spur of the moment. Corresponding to Mallarmé's gradations in type face, weight and point size to create a hierarchy of statements (La Charité 48) are variations in styles, sizes and weights of calligraphy. The largest size of capitals is used for the primary statement, which begins on the first recto after the title page and finishes on page 13 ([23]). Brennan uses a sans serif capital which gives a clear, modern effect, using a thicker pen to imitate bolded type. This makes the statements in capitals stand out from the predominant handwriting style, a rather upright cursive. An italic style, in about the same size as the cursive, also appears, as well as three sizes of capitals, two of them with the bolding effect, and an Irish script on page 7([17]). There is also an upright script with a descender below the baseline on the *h* and a long *s*, as well as a *g* and an ampersand reproducing those of the typewriter.

The initial statement is modified by the phrase 'in spite of my charitable disposition' ([11]) in smaller bold capitals, very much mirroring the function of Mallarmé's own modifying phrase, 'quand bien même lancé dans des circonstances éternelles'. The word 'witness', in bold capitals a size smaller again, introduces a digression about the poet's 'charitable disposition' which occupies pages two to six, where the next part of the main statement, 'A Tinker's', appears. The subsidiary part of the main statement, corresponding to Mallarmé's 'excepté peut-être une constellation' is in bold capitals of the same size as 'witness' and is to be found on the last two pages: 'they [the public] return the compliment'. The word 'for' in the primary statement also introduces a subordinate clause, 'If / this or such / were written / for them & theirs / it would / be / written / by' (10-12, [20]-[22]) which brings us back to 'The Public', the predicate of both main and subordinate clauses. A third-level statement in smaller, unbolded capitals begins on page two: 'O / this / he / opens / a mouth'. This refers to Brennan himself, the poet who offers his words to the public, only to have them thrown back in his face by the critics. As in Mallarmé's poem, there is no punctuation except for parentheses. A parenthetical statement occupies almost all of pages 2 ([12]) and 3 ([13]); others occur on pages 8 ([18]) and 10 ([20]). The arrangement of text and surrounding spaces groups and separates words and phrases, replacing punctuation.⁸

Brennan was quick to realise that the imagery his critics employed to describe the apparent imprecision and empty suggestiveness of his *XXI Poems* could be used to create a metaphorical landscape alluding simultaneously to those critics and to his Mallarméan model. Following the poem itself is a page containing excerpts from the press notices for *XXI Poems*. In the *Bulletin*, A.G. Stephens accuses Brennan of being 'lost in misty ideas & whirling verbiage' and speaks of a 'foam of words'. The review in the *Freeman's Journal* (actually relatively positive) says the poems are written 'as if the singer himself were a Nereid'; the article itself continues 'or a Triton whose own life was one with the life of the streams of the sea'. Brennan does not quote, although he could have, the further comment by this reviewer, 'Experience will show the hardness of life, for after all the duck-pond or the ocean, 'tis all the same if we drown without fame'.

Brennan makes the central event of his poem an anticipated cataclysm that proves to be almost nothing: a complete anticlimax. The word carrying the most emotional weight in his primary statement is 'DAMN'. He gives it a page entirely to it-

self ([19]),⁹ where it fulfils a pivotal role, referring both to his response to his critics, presented in earlier pages ('I don't give a tinker's damn'), and to their damning response to him, to be explored in subsequent pages. In terms of its central function in the poem, this one-word page corresponds to the shipwreck around which the *Coup de dés* is structured. The expletive indicates how powerful the critics' damnation seems to be. On the following page, though, we find that nothing has really happened (corresponding to Mallarmé's suggestion 'Rien / n'aura eu lieu / que le lieu'). The word 'DAMN' is demoted to 'the all-too-common outburst' and nothing remains 'on the spot / where their imagined cataclysm / upbubbled' but 'slight wrinkle / a smile' which 'remains a while'. The origin of the amusement, as large bold italics explain, is the thought that if the poetry '*were written / for them & theirs*' it would also be written *by* 'THE PUBLIC' (here the conditional clause joins up again with the primary statement) and as such, written without the care of the poet, would be 'piled / thrown heaved / jamm'd / dropp'd / bang'd / slamm'd / slung / chuck'd / together / anyhow or nohow / somehow' and therefore without value.

That the cataclysm is conceived in Mallarméan terms is clear from Brennan's allusion at the top of page 10 ([20]) to the 'silence' which 'rolls in again' and the pun 'waste of paper' which follows. It was Mallarmé who taught Brennan to think of silence as an expanse ('waste') of paper, and to make puns of this kind. The ripples which alone remain from the 'all-too-common outburst' are described as a 'slight wrinkle', recalling the 'horizon pas remué d'une ride' of 'L'Après-midi d'un faune'. More significantly, the ripples at the surface are surely an allusion to the 'inférieur clapotis quelconque comme pour disperser l'acte vide' which characterise the spot where 'Rien / n'aura eu lieu / que le lieu' in the *Coup de dés* (the word 'quelconque' itself appears in Brennan's poem two pages later).

The bubbles coming up to the surface from the aborted cataclysm provide one instance of a complex game Brennan plays with round shapes over the course of his poem. The main text begins with the word 'O', part of the introduction of the poet and his gift. That the exclamation 'O' is associated with roundness is made clear not only by its appearance, but by a description on page three of its enunciation as 'the perfect circle of exclamation'. The 'O' is also zero, and the roundness of bubbles is associated with the zero towards the bottom of page 10 ([20]), where O'Reilly, for whom the poem was written, makes an appearance as the abdicating prince of a domain whose worth has been artificially inflated by the 'high-rais'd / puff'd / bubble' of public opinion, the 'emptiness / of mouths / whose rondure / affects / the zeros that would mimic speech'. Bubble imagery has already been introduced higher on this page, as the 'imagined cataclysm' is said to have 'upbubbled'. Whereas Brennan, the genuine poet, avoids naming himself ('Shame ... forbids / nay / self-effacement ... / refuses / to breathe ... the name', pages 2-3 ([12]-[13]), in the hands of public-pleasers the 'O' of Brennan's modest self-effacement is transmuted into empty mimicry: they have nothing to say. What Brennan offers ('authentication / of a spirit & its world') seems to them 'a universe of blanks' (11, [21]). Further puns proliferate on page 13 ([23]): the crowd who 'abjudge' Brennan of definiteness are themselves judged as 'the crowd / anonymous / of blanks / dashes or whatso'er you please / whose only gulf / their hunger / makes them null' (Mallarmé refers to 'contrées nulles', 1:396). On the following page, 'theirs / such product' is summarily dismissed as 'vast / void / quelconque / ephemeral'; in fact, 'eternal nothingness / had more prestige'. Brennan is taking revenge for what he considers to be the complete demolition of his work by the critics.

Before the pivotal one-word page introducing the cataclysm-that-wasn't, two pages deal with those critics. On page seventeen, they appear as hawks, their claws sharpened with 'ingratitude and envy'. On page eighteen, the victim sees his work as having been reduced to 'powder / dust / ashes', although the critics could have seen their job as 'to explain' the poetry, thus providing 'the fitting crust' for 'them & their children ⁽ⁿ⁻¹⁾'. In addition to the puns on zero, this use of mathematical notation constitutes the 'algebraic' aspect of the work, as mentioned in the long title, and seems to represent a jocular response to one possible sense of the 'vierge indice' of the *Coup de dés*. There is another example of a mathematical index on page 13 ([23]), where PUBLIC is designated 'Oⁿ'. Allusions to the word 'vierge' appear twice in Brennan's poem (neither directly associated with anything algebraic or mathematical): on page thirteen the poet's self-effacement attracts the epithet 'virginal', and on page seventeen he describes himself as 'virgin prey' for the critical hawks. In addition to these direct allusions, it seems likely that Brennan's manipulation of zeros, blanks and the letter O reflects the importance of number in the *Coup de dés*, including the probabilities inherent in the dice-throw itself as well as references to 'le nombre unique' (as this line appears in the *Cosmopolis* version), 'calculs', 'division', as well as the verbs 'énumère', 'compte', and 'chiffât'.

III

Brennan develops at some length notions of ancestry and legacy that are to be found in the *Coup de dés*. After the modest disclaimer with which he introduces himself, he lays claim to poetic credibility through his Irish ancestry, as 'descendant / of them that ruled of old my Danaan isle / Thule of mist / & dreams' (4, [14]). The 'misty ideas' of which A.G. Stephens accused him become part of a racial identity and a legacy of dispossession. Rejection does not surprise him: although he sees himself as 'discrown'd', he notes in an aside 'but that were little'. He singles out Ollamh, one of the legendary bard-kings of Ireland, as a representative of the Irish past of his predecessors and describes him in language which makes an implicit connection with Brennan's most immediate and significant poetic precursor, Mallarmé himself. Ollamh is said to have 'set the law' among the wise men of his day, 'holding / in silence' lucid gaze / the viewless code / clear-written or conceal'd / upon the sunset-smoke / within the nightly deeps'. When in 1898 Brennan comes to write 'Red autumn in Valvins', his elegy for Mallarmé, he phrases a question in the second quatrain of his sonnet in similar terms:

What god now claims thee priest, O chosen head
most humble here that wast, for that thou knew'st
thro' what waste nights thy lucid gaze was used
to spell our glory in blazon'd ether spread?

The word 'silence' appears as one of the answers to the question posed in these lines, that is, as one of the gods that 'claims thee priest'; Brennan claims that Mallarmé is able to 'spell' something pertaining both to humanity ('our glory') and to the night sky. In the *Musicopoematographoscope*, the 'lucid gaze' belongs to 'silence' itself: Ollamh possesses privileged knowledge of a 'viewless code' written in the sky. In both instances, Brennan uses the English form of the word *lucide*, much favoured by Mallarmé, in the phrase 'lucid gaze'.

As Rosemary Lloyd points out, the word 'spell' is not only a reference to the poet's task, but in alluding to the 'grimoire' which Mallarmé evokes in *Prose (pour des Esseintes)*, it is a pun connecting the creation of poetry with magic (Lloyd, 2002:

27).¹⁰ The *Musicopoematographoscope* refers directly to this 'magical' aspect of the written word of poetry when it speaks of 'the fair white page / whose candour / illumines / the mystic signs / Abracadabra' (7, [17]). With 'white' and 'candour' we have another pun worthy of Mallarmé, a pun which draws attention to the act of populating the blank page with 'mystic signs'. Brennan is drawing attention to the artefact that he is constructing as he disposes his own handwritten signs on the blank space that (as 'candour' also implies) is innocent beforehand, even virginal, but full of potential. That he is overtly alluding to the notion of writing-as-spell as it appears in *Prose (pour des Esseintes)* is absolutely clear because he speaks earlier on the same page of 'a parchment without Anastasius' name'. This is a reference to the second last stanza of *Prose (pour des Esseintes)* with its punning *rimes riches*, 'par chemins' and 'parchemins'. It is also, as Boisivon points out (44), a reference to the word 'Anastase' uttered by the 'enfant' to whom the stanza refers, who has been 'docté par chemins' to recognise the potential for 'resurrection' in the production of 'éternels parchemins'. The 'parchment without Anastasius' name' is further explicated on the following page, where we see the critics tearing Brennan's work to pieces: 'not / as holding the eternal name / no' (8, [18]).

According to Brennan, the critics lack the 'hawklike' eyes that might see a role for themselves as explicators of his text rather than dismissing it; instead, he implies, they are capable of valuing only the kind of 'parchment' that lacks the potential for resurrection. We see that Brennan turns the entire allusion on its head: the parchment in question here (and he could be referring either to what the critics produce or to their condemnation of his own work) lacks any potential for resurrection.

As Brennan sees it, part of the calling of the poet is to understand the implication of the doctrine of correspondences for the development of symbolism. In the lecture on Mallarmé that formed part of a series of public lectures on 'Symbolism in Nineteenth-Century Literature' he gave in Sydney in 1904, he says of *Les Dieux antiques* (1880) and *Les Mots anglais* (1877): 'The myths, however much they may be overlaid with alien matter, all possess a symbolic element, a reading of the drama of nature in terms of man. And language is governed by the law of correspondences, although again imperfectly' (Brennan, 1962: 144). This implies that he sees both works as employing the principles underlying this doctrine (or 'law', as he puts it). In 'Was Mallarmé a Great Poet?', he refers to 'the corroboration of man's ardours by all those "correspondences" in nature's spectacle, which are the roots of all the myths, the secret of their perpetual newness' (Brennan, 1962: 282). The correspondences Brennan finds in Mallarmé 'are those between "different seasons" and "some inner mood"' (Barnes 153), based on the 'symphonique équation propre aux saisons' according to which 'notre passion relève des divers ciels', as Mallarmé put it in 'La Musique et les lettres' (2: 66).

When Brennan speaks in the *Musicopoematographoscope* and the elegy to Mallarmé, then, of a 'viewless code / clear-written or conceal'd / upon the sunset-smoke / within the nightly deeps', or 'our glory / in blazon'd ether spread', this refers to what he saw as the unique responsibility of the poet: to work with these correspondences in the practice of his or her art. By speaking of Ollamh in terms elsewhere reserved for Mallarmé, Brennan implicitly confers upon Ollamh the status of poetic antecedent of Mallarmé. This is one way he responds to the concern of the fourth page of the *Coup de dés* (Mallarmé 1: 396) with ancestry and legacy.

By making Mallarmé the symbolic inheritor of the Irish tradition to which Brennan belongs, the Australian poet inserts himself into the line of descent. Indeed, the very form of the poem he is writing proclaims his right to do so, and he substantiates

his claim in every allusion he makes to his French master. By associating the words 'virgin' or 'virginal' with his own poetic endeavours (as we saw above), Brennan may be suggesting himself as the beneficiary of the Mallarméan legacy, the cradled 'vierge indice' that appears on the fifth page of the *Cosmopolis* text. All this would imply that he takes the 'Master' of the third page of the French text to be the poet himself (unlike Robert Greer Cohn, for instance, who argues for a more universal application, with the Master representing humanity as a whole) (61-62).

Brennan contrasts the genuine ancestor-inheritor relationship of Ollamh, Mallarmé and himself with the spurious authority of O'Reilly and his advice to please the public and make money out of writing poetry, transferring to O'Reilly some of the imagery associated with the Hamlet-figure in the *Coup de dés*. In a parenthetical section on page 10 ([20]), after the 'imagined cataclysm' has failed to materialise, O'Reilly appears at one with the critics: 'Not they alone / but he'. There are a number of parallels between this page of the *Musicopoematographoscope* and the sixth page of the *Cosmopolis Coup de dés* (Mallarmé 1: 398). In the centre of Mallarmé's page is the word 'Si', capitalised and in large bold italics. In a corresponding place on Brennan's page (not alone, though, as the word 'FOR', part of the primary statement of the text, precedes it) is the word 'If', also capitalised and in large bold italics. Above 'Si' the *Cosmopolis* text introduces the 'prince amer de l'écueil'; below it is a section in parentheses. Brennan too has a section in parentheses below the word 'If', and in that section he identifies O'Reilly as the 'prince'. In the *Cosmopolis* text a rock, presumably belonging to the reef mentioned above, turns out to be 'faux' and evaporates into mist (Mallarmé later altered the text to read 'un roc / faux manoir'); the 'desert isle' of which Brennan makes O'Reilly the prince is both 'immemorial' (echoing the 'ultérieur démon immémorial' of the fourth page of the *Cosmopolis* text) and 'inexistent'. The mist of the Mallarmé text is transferred, as we have already seen, to the 'island' of Ireland with its 'mist / & dreams'.

Whereas the Hamlet-figure in the *Coup de dés* 's'en coiffe comme de l'héroïque' (Mallarmé 1: 398)), in the *Musicopoematographoscope* the genuine poet, 'doffing the royal part of admiration / enrolls / his forefather's shame' (6, [16]). Having determined to offer the world the 'immaterial gift' (5, [15]) of his verse, produced out of the riches of his inheritance, he has opened his mouth for the bardic utterance, only to find that, like Ichabod, the glory of his nation has departed ('not / among us', 6, [16]): hence his abdication of the 'royal part'. Instead, 'his part' is 'A TINKER'S'. This must surely be a pun on the final line of the Mallarmé poem, 'Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés', an expression which, as Minahen points out (108-9), makes the entire poem circular. In keeping with the Irish cast of his version of the *Coup de dés*, Brennan's spoof converts the thinker to a tinker.

In the last few pages of the *Musicopoematographoscope*, the rejected poet appears more like the ghost in Hamlet than Hamlet himself. On page 13 ([23]) 'the singer' (the poet) 'slips / phantom haunting no more Elsinores / from his imperial song'. There are no obvious references to Hamlet's father in the *Coup de dés*, but it is possible that Brennan thinks of Mallarmé's 'fantôme' (1: 396) as Hamlet himself, appearing as a spectre from the point of view of posterity, as well as the literal ghost, Hamlet's father. If Brennan thinks of Mallarmé as a father figure, like the Irish bards he identifies as his ancestors, then Brennan stands to Mallarmé as genuine inheritor, rather than the spurious inheritor O'Reilly, who is unworthy of that heritage. As poet, Brennan has had 'his world detach'd from him as bubble from pipe-stem', a further elaboration of the bubble imagery that associated O'Reilly's advice with empty air, as well as a reference to his own habit of smoking a pipe (which further associates him

with Mallarmé, producer of smoke rings and poems, as described in 'Toute l'âme résumée'). If O'Reilly is prince Hamlet, 'abdicating' (10, [20]) his responsibility to fulfil the injunction laid upon him, then Brennan, the genuine inheritor of the legacy of Elsinore, must 'slip' from his own responsibilities. On page 14 ([24]), the abdicating prince becomes Pandarus, going between Brennan and the public, but also Polonius, implied by the play on 'palpable' in the second part of that page: 'THEY / by our Pandarus / his face with palpable verse / all radiant / RETURN / also / the phantom treasure / or want return'd / the unimpalpable [...]'. The reiteration of the word 'phantom' signals the return of imagery associated with *Hamlet*, so that O'Reilly's satisfaction over his own 'palpable' verse acquires overtones of the pragmatism of Polonius, while the treasure of Brennan's verse, positively valued in its association with the ghost of Hamlet's father, is rejected as having no genuine substance, 'phantom' in another sense.

Casting himself as Hamlet's father, and establishing for himself a place in a poetic tradition going back centuries in Ireland, imply an intention more serious than the constant verbal fireworks of the *Musicopoematographoscope* might suggest, and Brennan draws imagery from Mallarmé to convey his own poetic aspirations. On page 5 ([15]) he alludes to Mallarmé's 'gouffre' (1: 397) in the context of the 'immaterial gift' he wants to make: 'from which [the Ollamh-Mallarmé legacy] / HE / enrich'd / [...] / the gulf of night that moves with each & all / jewell'd in every hole / ay & the dead stars roll / black diamonds / disastrous / athwart the nebula of his remorse'. A year or two after writing the *Musicopoematographoscope* Brennan used similar imagery (somewhat toned down) for the creative enterprise in a piece he included in 'The Forest of Night', the central section of *Poems*:

What do I know? Myself alone,
a gulf of uncreated night,
wherein no star may e'er be shown
save I create it in my might.

.....

What do I seek? I seek the word
that shall become the deed of might
whereby the sullen gulfs are stirr'd
and stars begotten on their night.

Here, '[o]nly the self has the power to create stars in the darkness of this inner chaos' (Barnes 114). The 'word' required is the magic, powerful word of the poet. Likewise in the *Musicopoematographoscope* the poet has sought to 'enrich' the chaotic inner gulf (no, not 'his purse', he adds in a mocking aside) with star-jewels. Although the jewels become 'dead stars', 'black diamonds' in 'the nebula of his remorse' (presumably for having made the mistake of offering his riches to an unappreciative public), we should not take this as an entirely negative outcome, since the contrast Brennan draws with the putative output of the public, 'immovable / without wings / a brick / [...] no black diamond / blazing thro' death / with clearer confidence of deity' (11-12, [21]-[22]) gives a positive connotation to the dead stars. The 'only gulf' known to 'the crowd' (13, [23]) is 'their hunger'.¹¹ Mallarmé's poem leaves us with a constellation, its meaning created only by the perceiving mind, which may or may not (given the circularity of the work) provide the single exception to the rule of chance. Brennan's diamonds are black.

IV

As pastiche, the *Musicopoematographoscope* provides an indirect commentary on the *Coup de dés*, particularly its musical aspects. Brennan's elegy to Mallarmé was a response to the French poet's emphasis on the 'musicalité de tout' in 'Crise de vers', and demonstrates that he was fully sensitive to this aspect of Mallarmé's thought. The last line of the elegy evokes the music of the Faun, confirming our sense that the poem enacts a Mallarméan 'transposition' of the dead poet into the music of verse (Barnes 190-92). As it is not clear how we are to understand the *Coup de dés* as 'partition', it is instructive to consider what light Brennan's version of the form, written only a few months after the publication of the original, might throw on his understanding of its musical aspects.

Mallarmé's own indications for the oral performance of his work seem bizarre, as Mary Shaw has noted (445).¹² Brennan's work is more horizontal in appearance than Mallarmé's, possibly indicating that he too felt a certain scepticism about Mallarmé's directions about intonation. Although it is tempting to try to align the variations in handwriting style, size and weight with the eight voices Brennan lists (one bass, tenor, soprano and alto, and four baritones), this proves impossible as there are more than eight variations. There are also more than eight positions on each page, so we cannot assign a voice to each line, as in a vocal score. However, David J. Code draws attention to Mallarmé's interest in orchestral timbre (510), and it certainly seems possible that Brennan's variety of calligraphic styles is intended to convey the impression of various timbres of voice, without striving for an exact identification of each voice with a single calligraphic style. Another possibility is that Brennan intends that his different sizes of capitals will correspond to indications of volume in a musical score, so that the largest size of capitals, for instance, is intended to represent the loudest statement, and so on down the hierarchy of written styles.

It seems that musical terms like 'counterpoint' have been interpreted syntactically and expressed graphically in the page layout. By pushing language beyond the limits of normal syntax, Brennan disrupts the linear progression of the poem over time. We have already seen that on page seventeen there are three parallel vertical streams of text. Each represents an alternative application of 'hawklike', functioning as an adverb in relation to the preceding verb 'rush', but as an adjective with relation to the noun phrases that head each column, 'their claws', 'their nose' and 'their optic'. Page two is headed by 'THIS', one of the words from the second-level statement 'O THIS HE OPENS A MOUTH'; as well as modifying 'HE', 'THIS' introduces a page-long digression or aside relating to that 'HE', which is likewise the subject of the top half of page 5 ([15]), before 'OPENS' introduces another modifying section. An effect of polyvocality is created: words operating in two or more syntactic systems impel the verse forward, giving to the digressions and asides an effect like the depth of music scored for multiple voices. Instead of succeeding one another, voices seem to sound together because we have to read them simultaneously in two semantic clusters, one of which is taking us forward rapidly, at the rate of only a word or two per page. Brennan has grasped the implications of Mallarmé's suggestion in the 'Observation' that the physical separation of groups of words 'semble d'accélérer tantôt et de ralentir le mouvement' (1: 391). In creating this effect of polyvocality, Brennan follows and extends the techniques of the *Coup de dés*, which also works with asides ('SOIT / que / l'abîme ...') and parenthetical statements ('La lucide seigneuriale aigrette de vertige / au front invisible / scintille ...') and which uses first-level and subsidiary-level

statements ('RIEN N'AURA EU LIEU QUE LE LIEU') to advance the poem's progress more rapidly, conferring on the asides and qualifications a contrapuntal effect.

V

There is one very significant difference between the *Musicopoematographoscope* and its primary model: Brennan's text is handwritten. In producing what can be thought of as a handmade book,¹³ he aligns himself with three authors singled out by Jerome McGann for their interest in 'the (ultimately medieval) arts and crafts processes of the handmade book' (5): William Blake, William Morris and W.B. Yeats. These were all authors in whom Brennan took a special interest, judging by the (substantial) remains of his own library, and his critical writings. His lecture on Blake for the series on Symbolism indicate that he was familiar with the illustrations to the prophetic books, as well as to Job and Thornton's *Virgil*, and thought that Blake's poetry and art were of equal importance (Brennan, 1962: 90, 102). Naturally he could not have been familiar with the single copy of Morris's handwritten *Book of Verse*, offered as a gift to Georgiana Burne-Jones, but his library included the Reeves and Turner (second) edition of Morris's *Poems by the Way* (Chiswick Press),¹⁴ which makes use of italics, bolding, and various sizes of capitals, including large bolded initial capitals, and provides at least a taste of the 'typographically rendered poetry' (McGann 69) of the Kelmscott Press edition of *Poems by the Way*.

The year after he wrote the *Musicopoematographoscope*, Brennan produced a handmade book of the poems of Mallarmé, 'colligés pour la joie de Chris: Brennan', now in the library of St John's College, Cambridge. John Foulkes describes it as 'a solid, smartly-bound album, ten inches by eight, into which have been copied with almost excessive care a number of poems or isolated lines by Mallarmé' (42).¹⁵ As well as the poems, this book included 'Aphorismes sur la poésie, le vers, l'art', 'Renseignements sur l'Œuvre inachèvement [sic]', a 'Chronologie' and a detailed record of places where the various poems had appeared. Although Brennan gives the date as 1898 at the beginning of his book, he clearly added to it until at least 1913. In this book, he makes use of three styles of handwriting, each in several sizes, but this is what he says about the *Coup de dés*:

Omis, à cause de la typographie spéciale dépassant les limites de cette page, le poème symphonique en vers libres, UN COUP DE DES [sic] JAMAIS N'ABOLIRA LE HASARD, qu'au mois de mai 1897 publia, accompagné d'une OBSERVATION relative à sa forme déjà aux DIVAGATIONS [...] annoncée, la revue COSMOPOLIS [150].

Obviously he felt reproduction was beyond what he cared to attempt.

Brennan could not have known that the *Coup de dés* would have such an immense influence on the development of twentieth-century poetry and poetics, or anticipated that his own pastiche, unpublishable at the time, would prove so fascinating to later readers. He paid tribute to the 'typographie spéciale' of the *Coup de dés*, not by reproducing it, as he could have done in his handwritten collection of 1898, but by exploring and extending its form. Mallarmé specifies at the end of his 'Observation' that the form should be used for 'tels sujets d'imagination pure et complexe ou intellect' (1: 392). Brennan deploys it with relish for less serious ends, but his exploitation and development of the form show how readily he perceived its potential and turned its complexities to his own ends. The result is as much of interest in its own right as it is as a commentary on the *Coup de dés*, showing as it does how many potential as-

Katherine Barnes

pects of interest in Mallarmé's work Brennan reflects (and reflects on) in a work brought to completion within just a few short months of the publication of the original.

Katherine E. Barnes
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of New South Wales@ADFA
Northcott Drive
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

k.barnes@adfa.edu.au

WORKS CITED

I am grateful to HarperCollins Publishers Australia for permission to reproduce the text of the facsimile edition of Brennan's long *Musicopoematographoscope*, and to Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview, NSW, for permission to reproduce the photograph of Brennan accompanying this article.

Many thanks to Peter Brown and Paul Eggert for their helpful comments on the draft version of this article, and to Monica Anderson for pointing out that the graphoscope might be an actual apparatus, rather than simply an invention by Brennan for the purposes of this poem.

Austin, L.J. 1969. 'Alan Rowland Chisholm: An 81st Birthday Tribute'. *Meanjin Quarterly* 28: 531-37.

Barnes, Katherine. 2006. *The Higher Self in Christopher Brennan's Poems: Esotericism, Romanticism, Symbolism*. Leiden: Brill.

Boisivon, François, transl. and intro. Christopher Brennan, 'Proème-Affiche Algébri-cosymbolique Crible Musicorimé Graphoscopique'. In *Le Nouveau Recueil* 56 (Sept.-Nov. 2000): 41-61.

Brennan, Christopher. 1962. *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, ed. A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

— 1981. *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope*, intro. Axel Clark, facsimile edn, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger.

Clark, Axel. 1980. *Christopher Brennan: A Critical Biography*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Code, David J. 'Hearing Debussy Reading Mallarmé: "après Wagner" in the "Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune"'. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54: 3 (Autumn, 2001): 493-554.

Cohn, Robert Greer. 1966. *Mallarmé's Masterwork: New Findings*. The Hague: Mouton.

Daily Telegraph. 31st July 1897. Sydney.

- Davies, Gardner. 1953. *Vers une explication rationnelle du Coup de Dés*. Paris: Corti.
- Freeman's Journal. 14th August, 1897. Sydney.
- Foulkes, John. 'Mallarmé and Brennan: Unpublished Letters and Documents from the Moran Collection in St John's College, Cambridge'. *French Studies* 32 (1978): 34-45.
- Gans, Eric. 'Mallarmé Contra Wagner'. *Philosophy and Literature* 25 (2000):14-30.
- La Charité, Virginia A. 1987. *The Dynamics of Space: Mallarmé's Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*. French Forum Monographs 67, Lexington: French Forum.
- LeMire, Eugene D. 2006. *A Bibliography of William Morris*. Delaware: Oak Knoll Press.
- Lloyd, Rosemary. 1999. 'Écrire Mallarmé: la parodie et la pastiche en tant que miroir linguistique'. In *Mallarmé ou l'obscurité lumineuse*, ed. Bertrand Marchal and Jean-Luc Steinmetz. Paris: Hermann.
- 2002. 'Mallarmé Reading Brennan, Brennan Reading Mallarmé'. In *Australian Divagations: Mallarmé and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jill Anderson. New York: Lang: 18-22.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Correspondance*. Vol. 9. Ed. Henri Mondor and Lloyd James Austin. Paris: Gallimard.
- 1998. *Œuvres complètes*. Ed. Bertrand Marchal. 2 vols. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 65, 497. Paris: Gallimard.
- Mannoni, Laurent. 2000. *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- McGann, Jerome. 1993. *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Minahen, Charles. 1987. 'Whirling Towards the Void at Dead Center: Symbolic Turbulence in Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*'. *Romanic Review* 78.1: 102-13.
- Shaw, Mary. 2002. 'Parody and Metaphysics: Le Coup du 'Livre''. *Romanic Review* 93. 4: 445-56.
- Wall-Romana, Christophe. 2006. 'The Poem Uncoiled by the Cinematograph, 1893-98'. *PMLA* 120.1: 128-47.

NOTES

¹ Brennan also wrote a smaller work, the '*Pocket Musicopoematographoscope*', published in the same edition. This article refers only to the large *Musicopoematographoscope*.

² A French translation of the *Musicopoematographoscope* by François Boisvion, entitled 'Proème-Affiche Algébrosymbolique Crible Musicorimé Graphoscopique' appeared in 2000.

³ Rosemary Lloyd describes the work as parody, commenting 'Si je l'appelle *parodie*, c'est parce que le poème s'avère bien moqueur, moins sans doute de Mallarmé, que de Brennan lui-même' (1999: 365). Given that the work is clearly *not* mocking the form Mallarmé invented, as Lloyd agrees, I prefer the terms 'pastiche' (which it clearly is) and 'spoof'.

⁴ See Barnes, especially chapters 4, 5 and 7.

⁵ In the light of Christopher Wall-Romana's article on cinematic effects in the *Coup de dés* (*passim*), we could say that Brennan's reference to the 'graphoscope' indicates at least a rudimentary awareness of visual effects going beyond the normal confines of text.

⁶ All references in this article are to that version, as reproduced in Mallarmé, 1998, vol. 1.

⁷ As shown in the reproduction of the text accompanying this article, both Brennan and the editor have paginated the work. Both paginations are given in the article, the editor's pagination being in square brackets.

⁸ This is very much as Mallarmé suggests in his 'Observation': 'L'avantage, si j'ai droit à le dire, littéraire, de cette distance copiée qui mentalement sépare des groupes de mots ou les mots entre eux, semble d'accélérer tantôt et de ralentir le mouvement, le scandant' (I: 391).

⁹ Brennan thus carries out Mallarmé's prescription, expressed in the letter to Gide of 14 May 1897: 'Tel mot, en gros caractères, à lui seul, domine toute une page de blanc' (Mallarmé, 1983, 172). Naturally Brennan could not have known of this letter.

¹⁰ For more on Brennan's elegy to Mallarmé, see Barnes 165-96.

¹¹ There is no suggestion here of 'la faim, misère profane' which Mallarmé associated with the crowd in 'Catholicisme', and which Brennan seems to have taken up, with compassion for the crowd, in '1908', the second epilogue to *Poems* (Barnes 265).

¹² According to Mallarmé, placement on the page signifies variations in intonation: 'La différence des caractères d'imprimerie entre le motif prépondérant, un secondaire et d'adjacents, dicte son importance à l'émission orale et la portée, moyenne, en haut, en bas de page, notera que monte ou descend l'intonation' (I: 391-2).

¹³ Although Brennan did not have the *Musicopoematographoscope*, which he referred to as 'a big MS', bound (Clark, intro. to Brennan, 1981, [5].), the quality of the calligraphy and the absence of mistakes indicate a status comparable to that of a published work. Naturally he could have cherished no expectation that an Australian publishing house would take on the production of such a work.

¹⁴ This is the edition classified by Eugene D. LeMire as A-59.02, ordinary copies (168).

¹⁵ As Foulkes comments, 'Brennan's album is a remarkable document, but it is not unique. Calligraphic albums of Mallarmé's poems were owned by Pierre Louÿs, M. Metman and Valère Gille [...] and it is highly probable that other admirers had made similar albums. The extraordinary pains which they took reveal the extent of their admiration. Frustrated, no doubt, by the failure of Mallarmé to publish an edition of his poetry that was either reasonably complete or readily obtainable, they produced for their own use "volumes" of his work, executed with a care which was at once a homage to Mallarmé and an indication of the almost religious awe they felt for his work' (43).