



## Divagations

*Stephane Mallarme*

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"This is a book just the way I don't like them," the father of French Symbolism, Stéphane Mallarmé, informs the reader in his preface to *Divagations*: "scattered and with no architecture." On the heels of this caveat, Mallarmé's diverting, discursive, and gorgeously disordered 1897 masterpiece tumbles forth--and proves itself to be just the sort of book his readers like most.

The salmagundi of prose poems, prose-poetic musings, criticism, and reflections that is *Divagations* has long been considered a treasure trove by students of aesthetics and modern poetry. If Mallarmé captured the tone and very feel of fin-de-siècle Paris, he went on to captivate the minds of the greatest writers of the twentieth century--from Valéry and Eliot to Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida. This was the only book of prose he published in his lifetime and, in a new translation by Barbara Johnson, is now available for the first time in English as Mallarmé arranged it. The result is an entrancing work through which a notoriously difficult-to-translate voice shines in all of its languor and musicality.

Whether contemplating the poetry of Tennyson, the possibilities of language, a masturbating priest, or the transporting power of dance, Mallarmé remains a fascinating companion--charming, opinionated, and pedantic by turns. As an expression of the Symbolist movement and as a contribution to literary studies, *Divagations* is vitally important. But it is also, in Johnson's masterful translation, endlessly mesmerizing.

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