



Stéphane Mallarmé (Critical Lives)

Roger Pearson

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This concise biography of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98) blends an account of the poet's life with a detailed analysis of his evolving poetic theory and practice. "A poet on this earth must be uniquely a poet," he declared at the age of twenty-two—but what is a poet's life and what is a poet's function? In his poems and prose statements and by the example of his life, Mallarmé provided answers to these questions.

In *Stéphane Mallarmé*, Roger Pearson explores the relationship among Mallarmé's life, his philosophy, and his writing. To Mallarmé, being a poet consists of a continuous, lifelong investigation of language and its expressive potential. It represents, argues Pearson, a fundamental response to the metaphysical mystery of the human condition and the desire to make sense of it for others. A poet turns everyday banality into prospects of mystery; and a poet, in Mallarmé's conception, is able to bring all human beings together in heightened awareness and understanding of the "magnificent act of living."

This concise and engaging biography tells the story of a fascinating and utterly unique voice in French poetry, one that was often overshadowed by other Symbolist writers. It is an essential read for students of literature and nineteenth-century France.

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