

UN COUP DE DÉS

JAMAIS

QUAND BIEN MÊME LANCÉ DANS DES CIRCONSTANCES
ÉTERNELLES

DU FOND D'UN NAUFRAGE

Soit

que

l'Abîme

blanchi

étale

furieux

sous une inclinaison

planche désespérément

d'aile

la sienne

par

avance retombée d'un mal à dresser le vol
et couvrant les jaillissements
coupant au ras les bords

très à l'intérieur résume

l'ombre enfouie dans la profondeur par cette voile alternative

jusqu'adapter

sa béante profondeur entant que la coque

d'un bâtiment

penché de l'un ou l'autre bord

LE MAÎTRE
surgi
inférant
de cette conflagration
que se
comme on menace
l'unique Nombre qui ne peut pas
hésite
cadavre par le bras
plutôt
que de jouer
en maniaque chenu
la partie
au nom des flots
un
naufrage cela
hors d'anciens calculs
où la manœuvre avec l'âge oubliée
jadis il empoignait la barre
à ses pieds
de l'horizon unanime
prépare
s'agite et mêle
au poing qui l'étreindrait
un destin et les vents
être un autre
Esprit
pour le jeter
dans la tempête
en reposer la division et passer fier
écarté du secret qu'il détient
envahit le chef
coule en barbe soumise
direct de l'homme
sans nef
n'importe
où vaine

ancestralement à n'ouvrir pas la main
 crispée
 legs en la disparition par delà l'inutile tête
 à quelqu'un
 ambigu
 ayant l'ultérieur démon immémorial
 de contrées nulles
 induit
 le vieillard vers cette conjonction suprême avec la probabilité
 celui
 son ombre puérite
 caressée et polie et rendue et lavée
 assouplie par la vague et soustraite
 aux durs os perdus entre les ais
 né
 d'un ébat
 la mer par l'aïeul tentant ou l'aïeul contre la mer
 une chance oiseuse
 Fiançailles
 dont
 le voile d'illusion rejailli leur hantise
 ainsi que le fantôme d'un geste
 chancellera
 s'affalera
 folie

N'ABOLIRA

COMME SI

Une insinuation

simple

au silence

enroulée avec ironie

ou

le mystère

précipité

hurlé

dans quelque proche

tourbillon d'hilarité et d'horreur

voltige

autour du gouffre

sans le joncher

ni fuir

et en berce le vierge indice

COMME SI

plume solitaire éperdue

sauf

*que la rencontre ou l'effleure une toque de minuit
et immobilise
au velours chiffonné par un esclaffement sonore*

cette blancheur rigide

dérisoire

*en opposition au ciel
trop
pour ne pas marquer
exigüment
quiconque*

prince amer de l'écueil

*s'en coiffe comme de l'héroïque
irrésistible mais contenu
par sa petite raison virile*

en foudre

soucieux

expiatoire et pubère

muet

rire

que

SI

*La lucide et seigneuriale aigrette
au front invisible*

scintille

puis ombrage

*une stature mignonne ténébreuse
en sa torsion de sirène*

par d'impatientes squames ultimes

de vertige

debout

le temps

de souffleter

bifurquées

un roc

faux manoir

tout de suite

évanoué en brumes

qui imposa

une borne à l'infini

C'ÉTAIT
issu stellaire

LE NOMBRE

EXISTÂT-IL
 autrement qu'hallucination éparse d'agonie

COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL
 sourdant que nié et clos quand apparu
 enfin

par quelque profusion répandue en rareté
 SE CHIFFRÂT-IL

évidence de la somme pour peu qu'une
 ILLUMINÂT-IL

CE SERAIT
pire

non

davantage ni moins

indifféremment mais autant

LE HASARD

Choit

la plume

rythmique suspens du sinistre

s'ensevelir

aux écumes originelles

*naguères d'où sursauta son délire jusqu'à une cime
 flétrie*

RIEN

de la mémorable crise
où se fût
l'événement

accompli en vue de tout résultat nul

humain

N'AURA EU LIEU
une élévation ordinaire verse l'absence

QUE LE LIEU
inférieur clapotis quelconque comme pour disperser l'acte vide
abruptement qui sinon
par son mensonge
eût fondé
la perdition

dans ces parages

du vague

en quoi toute réalité se dissout

EXCEPTÉ
 à l'altitude
 PEUT-ÊTRE
 aussi loin qu'un endroit
 fusionne avec au-delà
 hors l'intérêt
 quant à lui signalé
 en général
 selon telle obliquité par telle déclivité
 de feux
 vers
 ce doit être
 le Septentrion aussi Nord
 UNE CONSTELLATION
 froide d'oubli et de désuétude
 pas tant
 qu'elle n'énumère
 sur quelque surface vacante et supérieure
 le heurt successif
 sidéralement
 d'un compte total en formation
 veillant
 doutant
 roulant
 brillant et méditant
 avant de s'arrêter
 à quelque point dernier qui le sacre
 Toute pensée émet un Coup de Dés

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

A THROW OF THE DICE

Stéphane Mallarmé

NEVER

EVEN WHEN TRULY CAST IN THE ETERNAL
CIRCUMSTANCE

OF A SHIPWRECK'S DEPTH

Can be

only

the Abyss
raging
whitened
stalled

beneath the desperately
sloping incline

of its
own wing
through

an advance falling back from ill to take flight
and veiling the gushers
restraining the surges

gathered far within
the shadow buried deep by that alternative sail

almost matching
its yawning depth to the wingspan like a hull

of a vessel
rocked from side to side

THE MASTER
beyond former calculations
where the lost manoeuvre with the age
that formerly he grasped the helm
of the concerted
horizon at his feet
that
readies itself
moves and merges
with the blow that grips it
fate and the winds
as one threatens
the unique Number which cannot
be another
Spirit
to hurt it
into the storm
relinquish the cleaving there and pass proudly
rather
than taking sides
a hoary madman
on behalf
of the waves
one
straight shipwreck
overwhelms the head
flows through the submissive beard
that of the man
without a vessel
empty
no matter where
hesitates
a corpse pushed back
by the arm from the secret

ancestrally never to open the fist
 clenched
 beyond the helpless head
 a legacy in vanishing
 to someone
 ambiguous
 the immemorial ulterior demon
 having
 from non-existent regions
 led
 the old man towards this ultimate meeting with probability
 this
 his childlike shade
 caressed and smoothed and rendered
 supple by the wave and shielded
 from hard bone lost between the planks
 born
 of a frolic
 the sea through the old man or the old man against the sea
 making a vain attempt
 an Engagement
 whose
 dread the veil of illusion rejected
 as the phantom of a gesture
 will tremble
 collapse
 madness

WILL NEVER ABOLISH

AS IF

A simple

insinuation

into silence

entwined with irony

or

the mystery

hurled

howled

in some close

swirl of mirth and terror

whirls

round the abyss

without scattering

or dispersing

and cradles the virgin index there

AS IF

a solitary plume overwhelmed

untouched

*that a cap of midnight grazes or encounters
and fixes
in crumpled velvet with a sombre burst of laughter*

that rigid whiteness

derisory

*in opposition to the heavens
too much so
not to signal*

*closely
any*

bitter prince of the reef

*heroically adorned with it
indomitable but contained
by his petty reason virile*

in lightning

anxious

expiatory and pubescent

dumb

laughter

that

if

*The lucid and lordly crest of vertigo
on the invisible brow
sparkles
then shades
a slim dark tallness upright
in its siren coiling*

*at the moment
of striking
bifurcated
through impatient ultimate scales*

a rock

*a deceptive manor
suddenly
evaporating in fog*

*that imposed
limits on the infinite*

IT WAS
stellar outcome

THE NUMBER

WERE IT TO HAVE EXISTED
 other than as a fragmented agonised hallucination

WERE IT TO HAVE BEGUN AND ENDED
 a surging that denied and closed when visible
 at last

by some profusion spreading in sparseness
WERE IT TO HAVE AMOUNTED

to the fact of the total though as little as one
WERE IT TO HAVE ILLUMINATED

IT WOULD BE
worse

no

more nor less

indifferently but as much

CHANCE

Falls

the plume

rhythmic suspense of the disaster

to bury itself

in the original foam

from which its delirium formerly leapt to the summit

faded

by the same neutrality of abyss

NOTHING

of the memorable crisis
where the event
matured

accomplished in sight of all non-existent

human outcomes

WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE
a commonplace elevation pours out absence

BUT THE PLACE
some lapping below as if to scatter the empty act
abruptly that otherwise
by its falsity
would have plumbed
perdition

in this region

of vagueness
in which all reality dissolves

EXCEPT

at the altitude

PERHAPS

as far as a place fuses with beyond

outside the interest

signalled regarding it

in general

in accord with such obliquity through such declination
of fire

towards

what must be

the Wain also North

A CONSTELLATION

cold with neglect and desuetude

not so much though

that it fails to enumerate

on some vacant and superior surface

the consecutive clash

sidereally

of a final account in formation

attending

doubting

rolling

shining and meditating

before stopping

at some last point that crowns it

All Thought expresses a Throw of the Dice

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
COMPRESSED, AND PUNCTUATED

A **THROW OF THE DICE NEVER**, EVEN WHEN TRULY
CAST IN THE ETERNAL CIRCUMSTANCE OF A
SHIPWRECK'S DEPTH, can be only the Abyss raging, whitened,
stalled beneath the desperately sloping incline of its own wing, through an
advance falling back from ill to take flight, and veiling the gushers,
restraining the surges, gathered far within the shadow buried deep by that
alternative sail, almost matching its yawning depth to the wingspan, like a
hull of a vessel rocked from side to side

THE MASTER, beyond former calculations, where the lost manoeuvre
with the age rose implying that formerly he grasped the helm of this
conflagration of the concerted horizon at his feet, that readies itself; moves;
and merges with the blow that grips it, as one threatens fate and the winds,
the unique Number, which cannot be another Spirit, to hurl it into the
storm, relinquish the cleaving there, and pass proudly; hesitates, a corpse
pushed back by the arm from the secret, rather than taking sides, a hoary
madman, on behalf of the waves: one overwhelms the head, flows through
the submissive beard, straight shipwreck that, of the man without a vessel,
empty no matter where

ancestrally never to open the fist clenched beyond the helpless head, a
legacy, in vanishing, to someone ambiguous, the immemorial ulterior
demon having, from non-existent regions, led the old man towards this
ultimate meeting with probability, this his childlike shade caressed and
smoothed and rendered supple by the wave, and shielded from hard bone
lost between the planks born of a frolic, the sea through the old man or the

old man against the sea, making a vain attempt, an Engagement whose dread the veil of illusion rejected, as the phantom of a gesture will tremble, collapse, madness, **WILL NEVER ABOLISH**

AS IF A simple insinuation into silence, entwined with irony, or the mystery hurled, howled, in some close swirl of mirth and terror, whirls round the abyss without scattering or dispersing and cradles the virgin index there AS IF

a solitary plume overwhelmed, untouched, that a cap of midnight grazes, or encounters, and fixes, in crumpled velvet with a sombre burst of laughter, that rigid whiteness, derisory, in opposition to the heavens, too much so not to signal closely any bitter prince of the reef, heroically adorned with it, indomitable, but contained by his petty reason, virile in lightning

anxious expiatory and pubescent dumb laughter that IF the lucid and lordly crest of vertigo on the invisible brow sparkles, then shades, a slim dark tallness, upright in its siren coiling, at the moment of striking, through impatient ultimate scales, bifurcated, a rock a deceptive manor suddenly evaporating in fog that imposed limits on the infinite

IT WAS THE NUMBER, stellar outcome, WERE IT TO HAVE EXISTED other than as a fragmented, agonised hallucination; WERE IT TO HAVE BEGUN AND ENDED, a surging that denied, and closed, when visible at last, by some profusion spreading in sparseness; WERE IT TO HAVE AMOUNTED to the fact of the total, though as little as one; WERE IT TO HAVE LIGHTED, IT WOULD BE, worse no more nor less indifferently but as much, **CHANCE** Falls the plume, rhythmic suspense of the disaster, to bury itself in the original foam, from which its delirium formerly leapt to the summit faded by the same neutrality of abyss

NOTHING of the memorable crisis where the event matured, accomplished in sight of all non-existent human outcomes, WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE a commonplace elevation pours out absence BUT THE PLACE some lapping below, as if to scatter the empty act abruptly, that otherwise by its falsity would have plumbed perdition, in this region of vagueness, in which all reality dissolves

EXCEPT at the altitude PERHAPS, as far as a place fuses with, beyond, outside the interest signalled regarding it, in general, in accord with such obliquity, through such declination of fire, towards what must be the Wain also North A CONSTELLATION cold with neglect and desuetude, not so much though that it fails to enumerate, on some vacant and superior surface, the consecutive clash, sidereally, of a final account in formation, attending, doubting, rolling, shining and meditating before stopping at some last point that crowns it All Thought expresses a Throw of the Dice

NOTES:

1. The larger and smaller words in capitals in the poem are to be read as intertwined statements, and dominant and secondary threads of the poem, in accordance with the hints in Mallarmé's Preface.
2. The French *Septentrion* meaning the North, derives from the Latin *Septentrio* also meaning the North, but specifically referring in addition to the constellation Ursa Major known variously as the Great Bear, Wain, Plough or Big Dipper. Note that a constellation is a chance arbitrary visual formation of often widely disparate stars, delineated and designated purely by the human mind.
3. Note the following possible literary echoes, which may equally indicate no more than Mallarmé's absorption of and interest in common 19th century themes:
 - Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner* (1797-1799: especially the casting of dice on the deck of the spectral barge);
 - The legends of the Flying Dutchman, and of the Maelstrom (See for example the final chapter of Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, 1870);
 - Shakespeare's Hamlet who also appears in a Mallarmé sonnet (*The Clown Chastised*);
 - Rostand's *Cyrano* (First performed 1897) with his defiant plume (also of course in French a pen and a quill or swan's feather, a key multiple meaning impossible to capture in English);
 - Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851: for Ahab's defiance, his pursuit of the White Whale that signifies Le Néant, and not merely for its compulsive and obsessive digressions!)