

PREFACE

I'd choose for this Note not to be read, or then for it to be forgotten once glanced at; it has little to teach that goes beyond any skillful Reader's own penetration, and may bother the naïve reader who has to look at the first words of the Poem so that the following ones—spread out as they are—lead on to the last ones with nothing new except a certain distribution of space made within the reading. The "blanks" in fact assume an importance, striking first: versification required them like a surrounding silence, to such an extent that a lyric piece or one with a few feet usually takes up about a third of the leaf on which it is centered: I don't transgress against this system, but simply disperse it. The paper intervenes every time an image on its own, ceases or retires within the page, accepting the succession of the others, and it is not a question, unlike the usual state of affairs, of regular sound effects or verses—rather of prismatic subdivisions of the idea, the instant when they appear and during which their cooperation lasts, in some exact mental setting. The text imposes itself in various places, near or far from the latent guiding thread, according to what seems to be the probable sense.

The literary advantage, if I may put it like that, of this copied distance which mentally separates groups of words or words between themselves, seems to be now to speed along and now again to slow down the motion, scanning it, even intimating it according to some simultaneous vision of the Page, the latter taken as a unit as in the verse or the perfect line elsewhere. The fiction will come to the surface and rapidly dissipate as the writing shifts about, around the fragmentary halts of the sentence, predominant from the time the title is introduced through its continuation. Everything happens by a shortcut, hypothetically; storytelling is avoided. Add to that: that from this naked use of thought, retreating, prolonging, fleeing, or from its very design, there results for the person reading it aloud, a musical score. The difference in the printed characters between the preponderant, secondary, and adjacent motifs, dictates their importance for oral expression; the disposition of the characters: in the middle, on the top, or the bottom of the page, indicates the rise and fall in intonation. In my work, which has no precedent, there remain only a few daring rubrics, turns, and so on

forming the counterpoint of prosody in the elementary state; not that I deem the opportunity of essays timid; but it does not behoove me outside of my own special pages or volume, even in a courageous Review, however generous and open to freedom it shows itself to be, to act in a fashion too contrary to custom. All the same, I will have indicated about this Poem, more than the sketch, a "state" which does not at all break with tradition, adjusting its presentation so as not to offend anyone, just enough to open some eyes. Today, or at least without presuming anything about the future which will follow from this, nothing or almost an art, let us openly acknowledge that the attempt shares, unexpectedly, in the particular pursuits dear to our time, free verse and the prose poem. Their meeting takes place under an influence I know to be odd, that of Music as it is heard at a concert. Quite a few techniques found therein seem to me to belong to Letters, and so I pick them up. Let the genre become one like the symphony, little by little, beside the personal declamation, leaving ancient verse intact—I venerate it and attribute to it the empire of passion and of dream—while it would be the time to treat, preferably, as it follows naturally, subjects of pure and complex imagination or intellect, not to exclude them from Poetry—the unique source.

—STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ
(translated by Mary Ann Caws)

DICE THROWN

NEVER



WHEN EVEN INDEED CAST IN CIRCUMSTANCES
OF ETERNITY

FROM THE DEPTH OF A SHIPWRECK

BE

that

the Abyss

blanched

slackwater

raging

slanted

glides despairingly even

some wing

its own

be-

forehand fallen back from incapacity to trim the flight
and covering what foams
cutting back what soars

most inwardly resumes

the shadow buried within the deep by this alternative sail

to the point of fitting
to wing-span

its yawning deep in so far forth as shell

of a ship

listed to one or th' other board

THE MASTER

beyond old-time cypherings
where the manoeuvre with age forgotten

risen

inferring

once he was wont to grasp the helm

from this conflagration

at his feet

from the unanimous horizon

that there

readies itself

works itself up and mingles

with the fist which would grip it

as one threatens

a destiny and the winds

the unique Number which can not

be another

Spirit

to hurl it

to the tempest

to undo division and to pass on proud

hesitates

corpse by the arm

separated from the secret it pens

rather

than to play

as hoar fanatic

the hand

in the name of the waves

one

invades the head

flows as beard subdued below



shipwreck that

strict of the man

barkless

little it matters

where vain

ancestrally to not open the hand
clenched
beyond the useless head

legacy amid vanishment

for some one
ambiguous

the ulterior immemorial demon
having
from null lands
induced
the ancient towards this supreme conjunction with probability

he
his puerile shade
caressed and polished and rendered and washed
suppled by the wave and withdrawn
from the hard bones lost among the timbers

born
of play
the sea via the old one trying or the old one against the sea
a useless chance

Betrothals

of which
the illusory veil spun again their hauntingness
like the ghost of a geste

will totter
will collapse

madness



WILL ANNUL

An insinuation *merely*
in the silence *rolled up in irony*
 or
 the mystery
 flung down
 howled out
in some neighboring *whirlpool of hilarity and horror*

hovers *about the gulf*
 without strewing it
 nor fleeing

 and of it cradles the virginal trace



quill solitary desperate

*except that encounters or grazes it a midnight toque
and immobilises
in velvet crumpled by a burst of dark laughter*

this stiff white

laughable

*opposed to the sky
too much
not to brand*

exiguously

whosoever

bitter prince of the reef

dons it like the heroic

*irresistible but contained
within his small virile reason*

in a flash

under the weather

scapegoat pubescent

mute

laugh

that

IF

The lucid and lordly aigrette *of vastness*
invisible on the brow

glitters

then shadows

a stature minion darkling *standing*

in its siren twist

the time

to slap

with impatient terminal scales *forked*

a rock

false manor

instantly

dispersed in mist

which laid

a limit on infinity

IT WAS
born of stars

THE NUMBER
MIGHT IT EXIST

otherwise than hallucination of scattered spray
MIGHT IT BEGIN AND MIGHT IT END
welling up as denied and bounded on show
at last
in some outpouring rarely spread
MIGHT IT BE COUNTED

evidence of a tot of the sum however little one
MIGHT IT ILLUMINE

IT WOULD BE

worse

nor

more nor less

indifferently but as much

C H A N C E

Drops

the quill

rhythmical suspending of defeat

to bury itself

in the original spray

whence but lately whose frenzy sprang as far as a peak

blasted

by the identical neutrality of the gulf

NOTHING

of the memorable crisis
or might have
the event

come about of itself in view of every result nul
human

WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE
an everyday uplifting pours out absence

BUT PLACE
commonplace plashing below of waves as for dispersing the empty act
abruptly which otherwise
by its lie
had founded
perdition

in these reaches

of the vague

in which all the real dissolves

EXCEPTED

at the summit

PERHAPS

as far as one place

fuses with beyond

outside the interest

for its part signalled

in general

by such obliquity on such declivity

of fires

towards

that should be

Septentrion also North

A CONSTELLATION

cold of forgetfulness and disuse

not so much

as to not enumerate

on some vacant and superior surface

the shock successive

starwise

of a total count in the making

waking

doubting

rolling

shining and musing

before halting

at some latest point which crowns it

All Thought utters Dice Thrown