

POEM

*A THROW OF DICE WILL NEVER ABOLISH CHANCE*

by

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

# A THROW OF DICE

# NEVER

EVEN WHEN LAUNCHED IN  
ETERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES

FROM THE DEPTHS OF A SHIPWRECK

SUPPOSING

the Abyss  
whitened  
glassy  
furious  
beneath a declivity  
compacted desperately  
on a wing  
its own  
in

advance fallen back from a failure to take flight  
and stifling the torrents  
cutting short the swell

deep within recapitulates  
the shadow buried in the deep with this alternative sail

to the point of matching  
the span

with its gaping trough like the hull

of a ship

listing this way or that

THE MASTER

risen  
inferring

from this conflagration

that is

as one threatens

the unique Number that cannot

hesitates  
a corpse cut off by the arm

rather  
than playing  
like a hoary maniac  
the game  
in the name of the waves  
one

direct shipwreck

beyond the old reckonings  
where maneuvers forgotten with age

he used to take the helm  
at his feet  
of the unanimous horizon

prepared  
shaken and blended  
in the fist that might grasp it  
some destiny and the winds

be another

Spirit  
to throw it  
into the storm  
closing the division and passing proudly on

from the secret it holds

invades the head  
spills down like a submissive beard

of man this

with no ark  
no matter  
where vain

ancestrally not to open his hand

clenched  
far beyond his useless head

a bequest in disappearance

to someone  
ambiguous

the ulterior immemorial demon

having

from null lands

led

the old man toward this supreme conjunction with probability

he

his puerile shadow

caressed and polished and restored and washed

softened by the waves and subtracted  
from the hard bones lost amid the timbers

born

of a frolic

the sea attempting via the old man or the old man against the sea  
an idle chance

Nuptials

whose

veil of illusion crashing back their obsession  
along with the ghost of a gesture

will falter  
will fall

madness

WILL NEVER ABOLISH

[V]

*AS IF*

*A simple*

*in silence*

*in some imminent*

*hoovers*

*insinuation*

*coiled in irony*

*or*

*the mystery*

*hurled down*

*screamed*

*vortex of hilarity and horror*

*on the brink of the gulf*

*without sprinkling it*

*nor fleeing*

*and draws from it the virgin clue*

*AS IF*

*a plume solitary and lost*

*except*

*for the encounter where a midnight cap brushes against it  
and is fixed  
on the velvet crumpled by a dark burst of laughter*

*this rigid whiteness*

*derisory*

*in opposition to the sky  
too much  
not to mark*

*scantly*

*whosoever*

*bitter prince of the reef*

*caps himself with it heroically  
irresistible but fettered  
by his paltry virile reason*

*in a flash of lightning*



*anxious*

*expiatory and pubescent*

*mute*

*The lucid and lordly crest  
on the invisible brow  
glitters  
then overshadows  
sombre a dainty figure  
in her siren sinuosity*

*with terminal scales impatient and*

*laugh  
that*

*IF*

*of vertigo*

*upstanding*

*long enough  
to slap  
forked*

*a rock*

*false memory  
immediately  
evaporated into mist*

*that will impose  
a limit on the infinite*

*IT WAS*  
*progeny of the stars*

*THE NUMBER*

**WERE IT TO EXIST**

*otherwise than as the sparse hallucination of agony*

**WERE IT TO BEGIN AND END**

*unheard but negated and closed when it appears*

*finally*

*through some profusion of dispersed rarity*

**WERE IT TO BE CIPHERED**

*evidence of the total sum in so far as there is one*

**WERE IT TO BE ILLUMINATED**

*IT WOULD BE*

*worse*

*not*

*more nor less*

*indifferently but just as much*

**CHANCE**

*Down falls*

*the plume*

*rhythmic suspension of disaster*

*buries itself*

*in the original foam*

*whence its delirium formerly leapt to a summit*

*blighted*

*by the identical neutrality of the gulf*

NOTHING

of the memorable crisis  
in which  
the event

may have happened in view of every null result

human

WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE  
an ordinary elevation tips away the absence

BUT THE PLACE

some lowly splashing or other as if to disperse the void act  
abruptly that otherwise  
with its lie  
would have founded  
the loss

in these indefinite regions  
of the wave  
wherein all reality is dissolved

[X]

EXCEPT

at the height

PERHAPS

as far away as a place

merged with beyond

apart from the interest  
assigned to it

in general  
by a certain obliquity in a certain declivity  
of flames

toward

it must be

the Septentrion also the North

#### A CONSTELLATION

cold with neglect and desuetude  
not so much  
that it fails to number  
on some vacant and higher surface  
the successive impact  
starrily  
of a total count in the making

keeping watch

doubting

rolling

shining and meditating

before finally halting  
at some last point by which it is consecrated

Every Thought Emits a Throw of Dice

QUENTIN MEILLASSOUX

# The Number and the Siren

A DECIPHERMENT OF MALLARMÉ'S *COUP DE DÉS*

*Translated by*  
ROBIN MACKAY



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Published in 2012 by

URBANOMIC  
THE OLD LEMONADE FACTORY  
WINDSOR QUARRY  
FALMOUTH TR11 3EX  
UNITED KINGDOM

SEQUENCE PRESS  
36 ORCHARD STREET  
NEW YORK  
NY 10002  
UNITED STATES

Originally published in French as *Le Nombre et la sirène*  
© Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2011

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## BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

A full catalogue record of this book is available  
from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-9832169-2-6

Copy editor: Daniel Berchenko  
Printed and bound in the UK by  
the MPG Books Group, Bodmin and Kings Lynn

[www.urbanomic.com](http://www.urbanomic.com)  
[www.sequencepress.com](http://www.sequencepress.com)

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