

Stéphane Mallarmé

Fragments – Anatole's Tomb

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Introduction

Mallarmé's second child, Anatole, born July 1871, became seriously ill when he was seven years old. He suffered from rheumatism complicated by an enlarged heart, and died in October 1879, aged eight. Mallarmé left a series of fragments for a four-part poetic memorial, a 'tomb'. He was emotionally and artistically unable to forge a finished work from them. This translation or rather adaptation contains many of the two hundred or so fragments, in some cases fragments of the fragments, excluding things I found too partial or obscure to resonate. I have not followed original spacing exactly, except where it genuinely appears to add impact to the verse. Despite being fragments the pieces communicate some part of the loss suffered, and the thoughts engendered, by the child's death, and therefore any child's death, any such tragedy. Mallarmé's spiritual position is taken to be atheistic, and therefore religious assumptions should not be made in interpreting these fragments. The content is however universal enough, I think, for a reader of any spiritual persuasion to respond in their own manner, within their own belief system.

The Fragments

1.

Child emerged from
us both – showing us
our ideal, the way
– for us! A father
mother surviving him
 in sad existence
like two extremes –
ill fused in him
that are parted
–hence his death –
cancelling this small
child's 'self'

2.

Ill in
 spring time
Dead in autumn
 – the sun

3.

Son

 re-absorbed
not gone
 it is he
– or his brother
 I
 myself said it
 to him
 two brothers

4.

– image of I
other than I
 taken in
 death!

5.

 what takes refuge
in me your future
 becomes a
purity for life,
which I shall
not touch –

6.

To pray to the dead
(not for them)

– need
for the child here
– his absence

because of the true dead
only a child!

7.

Hands join
towards him not
to be touched –
but who is –
– whom a space
distances –

8.

To resurrect
– to construct
with his
lucidity – this
work – too
 vast for me

and thus
depriving me
of life, sacrificing
it if it is
not for the work
– to be him grown,
deprived – and
do it without
fear of toying
with his death –
if I sacrificed
life for him –
if I accepted
this death
as my own

9.

Exemplar

we have known
through you this 'more
than ourselves'
which often escapes
us – and will be
in us – in our
actions, now

child, sowing
the ideal

10.

Father mother
vowing never
another child
– grave that he dug
life ends there

11.

Useless
 remedies
 abandoned
if nature
wished it not

 I would
 take myself
 for one dead

balms mere
consolations for us
– doubt
then not, their reality!

12.

Child our
immortality
made in fact
of lost human
hopes – son –
entrusted to woman
by a man
no longer young
despairing of finding
the mystery
taking a wife

13.

Ill

since the day when death
installed itself – marked by
malady –
no longer himself already, but
the one we would wish
to see again later
beyond death –
summing up death and
corruption – appearing
so, with his sickness
and pallor

14.

Ill – to be naked
as the child –

appearing to us
– we profit from those
hours, when death
stricken
he lives
still, and
is still ours

title: poetry of
the malady

15.

With the gift of words
I could have made you
yourself child of the work
king made of you
instead
– no, sad of the son
in us
– made you – of
task
no –
remember the yet he
proves
that he
bad days – was such –
played
mouth closed that role!
native
speech –
forgotten
it is I who have
aided you since

16.

– Have brought back in
you the child –
 youth or sickness
of history learned
 forgotten from which
 nothing

 I would not have
suffered – to be
in my turn
studying only that
– death

17.

Then – you would only
 have been me
 – since I am
here – lonely, sad –
– no, I remember
 a childhood –
 – yours
 twin voices

but without you
I'd not have – known

18.

 So it is I,
hands accursed –
who bequeathed you!
 – silence
 (he forgives)

19.

Oh! Leave...us
at this word
– that merges
us both
– unites us
finally –
 since who has
spoken it
 yours

20.

– All this transformation
once barbarous and
 material
 external –
now
 moral
and within

21.

 No brother sister
ever the absent one

shall not be less than
those present –

22.

to feel it burst
in the night
the immense void
produced by what
would be his life
– because he cannot
know –
he is dead
lightning?

23.

Moment when one must
break with the
living memory,
to inter it
– place it in the coffin,
hide it – with
the brutality of
placing it there,
raw contact

to see it no longer
except as idealised –
later, no longer him
living, there – but
the germ of his being
taken back into itself –
the germ allowing
thought for him
– sight of him

vision (ideality
of state) and
speech for him

for in us, pure
him, a refining
– become our
honour, the source
of our finer
feelings –

true re-entry
into the ideal

24.

Death's treacherous
blow – of
 which he
evil
 knew nothing
– in my turn
to toy with it, the
one thing childhood
knows nothing of

25.

hour of the
 empty room
–
 until it is
 opened
perhaps everything
 follows thus
 (morally)

26.

You can, with your
weak hands, drag me
into your grave – you
have the right –
– I myself
who follow you, I, I
let myself fall –
– yet if you
wish, together,
let us both make...

an alliance
a magnificent bond,
– and the life
remaining in me
I will employ
for.....

27.

You watch me
I cannot tell you
the truth yet
I dare not, too little one,
What has happened to you
–
One day I will tell it
to you
– for as a man
I'd not wish you
not to know
your fate
–
or man
dead child

28.

No – not
one of the great
deaths –
– as long as we
ourselves live, he
lives – in us

it is only after we're
dead he will be so
– and the bell that tolls
for the Dead will toll for
him

29.

– And let us speak
of what
we both know
 we two
 mystery

30.

Oh! Make us
 suffer
 you who
 thought so
little of it – all
that equates to
your life, painful in
 shattered
us

 while you
 glide, free

31.

And you, his sister
you who one day
– (that gulf open
since his death
that follows us
to our own –
when we
your mother and I
have vanished there)
must, one day,

unite us all
three in your thoughts,
your memory...
– as in
 a single tomb
 you who, in
turn, will come
upon this tomb, not
made for you –

32.

Sunset
and wind
now vanished, a
wind of nothing
that breathes
(the emptiness
?modern, there)

33.

Tears, flood
of lucidity, the dead
seen again,
beyond

frissons – I
am not –
 yet in the ideal
 state

and for those
others, tears,
mourning, all that –

and it's my
shade, ignorance
of myself, that
dresses in mourning

35.

Illness to which
one clings
wanting it
to endure, to possess
him longer

36.

Death – ridiculous enemy
– who cannot impose on the child
the notion that you exist!

37.

No more life for

me

and I sense myself
lying there in the grave
beside you.

38.

Death
only consolation
exists, thoughts – balm

but what is done
is done – we cannot
return to the absolute
contained in death –

– and yet
to show that if,
life once abstracted,
the happiness of being
together, all that – such
consolation in its turn
has its root – its base –
absolute – in what
(if we wish
for example a
dead being to live in
us, thought –
is his being, his

thought in effect)
ever he has of the best
that transpires, through our
love and the care
we take
of being –
 (being, being
 simply moral and
 about thought)

there is in that a
magnificent beyond

that rediscovers its
truth – so much
purer and lovelier than
the absolute rupture
of death – become
little by little as illusory
as absolute (so we're
allowed to seem
to forget the pain)

– as this illusion
of survival in
us, becomes absolutely
illusory – (there is
unreality in both
cases) has been terrible
and true

39.

Earth – you lack
 a single plant
– to what purpose –
– I who
 honour you –

flowers,
 vain beauty

40.

 His eyes
watch me, double
and sufficient
– already taken by
absence and the void

all to unite there?

41.

Man and
absence –
the spiritual
twin with which
he blends when he
dreams, reflects

– absence, alone
after death, once

the pious
interment of the
body, creates
mysteriously – that
agreed fiction

42.

Slow to be sacrifice
earth alters him
all this time

pain eternal
and dumb

43.

What! death
in its vastness – terrible
death

to strike down so
small a being

I say to death coward

ah! it is in us
not beyond

44.

He has dug our
grave
in dying

the burial plot

45.

Oh! If the eyes of the dead
had greater power
than those, most beautiful
of the living

if they could draw you in

46.

After-effect

immortality

thanks to

our love

– he prolongs us

beyond

in exchange

we give back

life to him

in deepening

our thought

47.

Earth – gap gaping and

never to be filled

– but by sky

– indifferent earth

grave

not flowers

wreaths, our

joys and our life

48.

No, you are not one of the dead

– you will not be among

the dead, always in us

49.

it becomes a
joy (a bitter
enough thing) for us –
and unjust to him
who rests below, and is
in reality deprived
of all that with which
we associate him.

50.

I –
 perhaps –
the ambiguity
 that might be!

pain and sweet
 joys
 of the ghostly
 sufferer

51.

Vision
endlessly purified
by my tears

52.

Ah! Adored heart
O my image
beyond of too vast
destinies –
 only a child
 like you –
 I dream
 still
 all alone –
in the future

53.

Ah! Truly you know
that if I consent
to live – to seem
to forget you –
it is to
nourish my pain
– and so this apparent
forgetfulness
 can pour out more
fully in tears, at

some moment
in the midst of this
life, when you
appear to me

54.

Time – it takes
for a body to decompose
in earth – (confounded
little by little
with neutral earth
in vast horizons)

it is then he
let's go of the pure
spirit one

was – which was
bound to him,
organised – which
can take refuge
pure in us,
to reign
in us,
the survivors

absolute purity
on which
time pivots and
re-forms

55.

I sense it in myself
wanting – if not
the life lost,
at least the
equivalent –

the death
– where one is stripped
of body
– in those who remain

56.

– Oh! I
sense you
so strongly – and that you
always feel
well with us,
the parents – but
free, child
eternal, and at once
everywhere –

57.

To close the eyes
I – do not want to
close the eyes –
that will watch
me always

58.

Let us speak of him
again, let us extinguish
– in reality, silence

59.

True mourning in
rooms
– not the cemetery –

to find only
absence –
– in presence
of things

60.

And he
the father –
who constructs
a tomb

– won't his spirit
go seeking the traces of

destruction – and transmute
into pure spirit?

so deeply that
purity emerges from
the corruption!

61.

No – I will not
relinquish
nothingness

a father – I
sense the nothingness
invading me

62.

May my thought
make for him a
more beautiful
 purer life.

63.

Wreaths

 One feels obliged
to throw into this earth
that opens before
the child – the loveliest
wreaths of flowers –
the loveliest flowery
products, of that
earth – sacrificed
– in order to veil

or pay his toll
for him

64.

It is only, there,
the explosion of the
shattering caused
by the cry of I –
that little by little
re-forms itself –
all ended

