

## from *Desolation : Souvenir*

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*The poems from Desolation : Souvenir were produced in response to A Tomb for Anatole (North Point Press, 1987), Paul Auster's translation of 202 Mallarmé fragments written on the death in of his nine-year-old son in 1879. They were not intended for publication. I was intrigued by the choppy and closed character of the writing, so unlike the rest of Mallarmé's poetry, even "A Throw of the Dice." My first intention was to write something in response to all the fragments then to gather them into a long poem of my own. There was no other expectation except perhaps to "complete" the Mallarmé. As the work developed, I abandoned the idea of doing all 202 as too exhaustive. The result is a serial poem of 50 pages, three stanzas to the page. Wanting to have a title for each page, I borrowed a line from page fifty to serve as the title of page one, and vice-versa, with the crossing to occur at page 25. "Desolation : Souvenir" is quoted on page 28: "destination : mirror / desolation : souvenir." I thought I was exploring the poetic fragment, but the main force of the long poem is its elegiac mode.*

**silence is far from reverence**

a melody for the sheriff  
    then a bright marquee  
scissors break into knives  
    speech breaks into words  
appearances on TV  
    are daily more pale

being is an infant  
    life's the first encore  
for the last thing  
    we remember

the word is on parole  
    maybe that's why  
it remains forever old  
    even youth has wrinkles  
let it rain its histories  
    be what it impales

**thoughts acquire time**

alone like a fuse

I becomes you

finally, it's just me

a crowd of one gaping

death is always taking

a busman's holiday

end of the affair

another snow falls

silence is a pardon

what has it bequeathed

our time is out of time

love squandered on the world

we are south of words

what was hidden

could always be seen

mouth sweet, skin cold

would the infinite have a size

if it wore shoes?

**life was never greener**

ancient Egyptian  
suddenly seems so clear  
words spent by their allure  
rust on all the gold

seeing alters being  
undying words are few  
only two of us  
spoke the language  
and we couldn't  
stand each other

the child is absent  
followed in time  
by father and mother  
finally no one's there  
to know or remember  
why spiders are admired

**the first gust of rain**

the moment's always wise  
    but it dissolves in beer  
the crash test dummies  
    were wearing high heels  
antecedents of the invisible  
    to be is what we feel

the germ of some idea  
    repeats itself in dust  
a living thinking leaf  
    scrapes the pavement like a car  
from a yellow house  
    in a yellow wood  
we watch with all our nerves

on my honor, the oil of state  
    runs the car of ideation  
down the avenue of dreams  
    who are we to quail?  
can't think of infinite space  
    without a footnote present

**clouds over miami**

night is spoken here  
    its time is earned and paid  
a breathless signal  
    white heat  
my father as I recall  
    always ran east

when death plays  
    with a child  
it goes out nimble  
    comes back cold  
life that traitor  
    aboard a razor boat

not time but empty rooms  
    the sovereign sense regrets  
missing the occasion  
    it's not that we love nothing  
it just hangs around  
    seeking a companion

**how to describe sky blue**

ideas at the brink

nouns about to sink

a sinister car

in the land of pleasure

where rain's

the only measure

small hands in the tomb

somber shadow, umber meadow

the father says goodbye

to the child who gave him birth

what will be enough

when the earth

contains no one

will the harvest still be full

grass in need of trimming

the mind of nature canters

all the wind is gone

no ice, no weather