

*Fernando*

PESSOA  
& Co.

“His verse is  
as searing as that  
of Rilke or  
Mandelstam.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES  
BOOK REVIEW



*Selected Poems*

*Fernando*

PESSOA

Edited and Translated  
from the Portuguese by

RICHARD ZENITH

WINNER OF THE PEN AWARD FOR POETRY IN TRANSLATION

“Pessoa’s writing, the whole of his extraordinary opus, [is] a major presence in what has come to be known as ‘modernism’ in the European languages. . . . Ghostly, ironic, mercurial . . . Pessoa’s poetry continues to radiate in English.”

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—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

“If [Pessoa] never achieved such renown during his life, the years since he died have elevated him to a numinous status among European poets, and writers as idiomatically disparate as Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, and Antonio Tabucchi . . . have acknowledged his potent sway. . . . [*Fernando Pessoa & Co.*] is the most generous prospect in English so far of the Pessoaan domain, with, at its center, a poet who, in the words of an English writer he surely knew, was ‘ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever’”

—*The Times Literary Supplement*

“When Jose Saramago won the Nobel Prize for Literature . . . [it] reminded poets that another Portuguese writer, who should have received the prize in his lifetime, didn’t. Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) is one of the great originals of modern European poetry and Portugal’s premier modernist. He is also a strange and original writer.”

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“Pessoa [was] Portugal’s greatest poet since Camoëns. . . . Zenith not only edits wisely, he translates magnificently. . . . English readers can at long last appreciate the wide range of talent, craft, intellect, and poetic achievement present in *Fernando Pessoa & Co.*”

—*The Boston Book Review*

“One of the most extraordinary poetic talents the century has produced.”

—*Microsoft Network’s Reading Forum*

“The saddest of our century’s great literary modernists and perhaps its most inventive . . . the finest poet Portugal has ever produced ... we can only hope that this marks the introduction of this great modernist to a wide English-speaking audience.”

—*The Boston Phoenix*

“The greatest Portuguese poet since Camoëns... A worthy compilation of an individualistic yet undervalued modern poet . . . highly recommended.”

—*Library Journal*

“The amazing Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa ... as a fantastic invention surpasses any creation by Borges. . . . Pessoa was neither mad nor a mere ironist; he is Whitman reborn, but a Whitman who gives separate names to ‘my self,’ ‘the real me’ or ‘me myself,’ and ‘my soul,’ and writes wonderful books of poetry for all of them.”

— Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*

“A leading figure of European modernism . . . Borges called him *the* Portuguese poet, but should, perhaps, have made that plural. . . . [Pessoa’s] work is never more profound than when it is most ludicrous, never more heartfelt than when it is most deeply ironic. . . . Like Beckett, Pessoa is extremely funny. . . . His work is loaded with delights.”

—*The Guardian*

“Mysterious and brilliant, Pessoa was a kind of pre-postmodernist.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“There are in Pessoa echoes of Beckett’s exquisite boredom; the dark imaginings of Baudelaire (whom he loved); Melville’s evasive confidence man; the dreamscapes of Borges.”

—*The Village Voice Literary Supplement*

# FERNANDO PESSOA & CO.

*Selected Poems*

*Edited and translated from the Portuguese by*  
RICHARD ZENITH



*Grove Press/New York*

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# CONTENTS

About the Selection and Sources

Acknowledgments

Introduction: The Drama and Dream of Fernando Pessoa

ALBERTO CAEIRO: The Unwitting Master

*from* THE KEEPER OF SHEEP

1 I've never kept sheep

2 My gaze is clear like a sunflower

5 To not think of anything is metaphysics enough

9 I'm a keeper of sheep

10 Hello, keeper of sheep

18 I'd rather be the dust of the road

20 The Tagus is more beautiful than the river that flows through my village

23 My gaze, blue like the sky

24 What we see of things are the things

32 Yesterday afternoon a man from the cities

37 Like a large blot of smudged fire

38 Blessed be the same sun of other lands

39 The mystery of things—where is it?

40 I see a butterfly go by

42 The coach came down the road, and went on

47 On an incredibly clear day

*from* THE SHEPHERD IN LOVE

Before I had you

Perhaps those who are good at seeing are poor at feeling

The shepherd in love lost his staff

*from UNCOLLECTED POEMS*

To see the fields and the river

When Spring returns

If I die young

It is night. It's very dark. In a house far away

On this whitely cloudy day I get so sad it almost scares me

The child who thinks about fairies and believes in them

Slowly the field unrolls and shines golden

Yesterday the preacher of truths (his truths)

They spoke to me of people, and of humanity

I lie down in the grass

Dirty unknown child playing outside my door

You who are a mystic see a meaning in all things

Ah! They want a light that's better than the sun's

This morning I went out very early

I can also make conjectures

This may be the last day of my life

RICARDO REIS: The Sad Epicurean

*from ODES*

Others narrate with lyres or harps

The gods grant nothing more than life

Don't clap your hands before beauty

Ah, you believers in Christs and Marys

On this day when the green fields

Here, with no other Apollo than Apollo

Above the truth reign the gods

Let the gods

Lips red from wine  
I prefer roses, my love, to the homeland  
Follow your destiny  
I was never one who in love or in friendship  
O morning that breaks without looking at me  
Obey the law, whether it's wrong or you are  
I want my verses to be like jewels  
Day after day life's the same life  
Who delights in the mind can delight in no destiny  
As if each kiss  
Your dead gods tell me nothing I need  
Fate frightens me, Lydia. Nothing is certain  
I devote my higher mind to the ardent  
My eyes see the fields, the fields  
Each man is a world, and as each fountain  
Not only wine but its oblivion I pour  
How great a sadness and bitterness  
Solemnly over the fertile land  
As long as I feel the full breeze in my hair  
The one I loved is not here, you say  
What we feel, not what is felt  
I don't know if the love you give is love you have  
Want little: you'll have everything  
I was left in the world, all alone  
I tell with severity. I think what I feel  
I placidly wait for what I don't know  
Countless lives inhabit us

ÁLVARO DE CAMPOS: The Jaded Sensationist



I study myself but can't perceive  
Listen, Daisy. When I die, although  
Ah, the first minutes in cafés of new cities  
Time's Passage  
It was on one of my voyages  
Ah, when we set out to sea  
But it's not just the cadaver  
I leaned back in the deck chair and closed my eyes  
The Tobacco Shop  
Oporto-Style Tripe  
A Note in the Margin  
Deferral  
Sometimes I meditate  
Ah, the freshness in the face of leaving a task undone  
At long last. . . , no doubt about it . . .  
Pop  
I walk in the night of the suburban street  
Yes, I know it's all quite natural  
Streetcar Stop  
Birthday  
No! All I want is freedom  
I'd like to be able to like liking  
Reality  
I'm beginning to know myself. I don't exist  
Pack your bags for Nowhere at All  
I got off the train  
This old anguish  
Impassively  
On the eve of never departing

Symbols? I'm sick of symbols  
The ancients invoked the Muses  
I don't know if the stars rule the world  
I've been thinking about nothing at all  
All love letters are

FERNANDO PESSOA-HIMSELF: The Mask Behind the Man

*from* SONGBOOK

Ocean (Morning)

God

*From* Slanting Rain

The wind is blowing too hard

The Mummy

The gods are happy

In the light-footed march of heavy time

Christmas

By the moonlight, in the distance

Waterfront

Some Music

I feel sorry for the stars

I seem to be growing calm

Sleep

I contemplate the silent pond

Like a uselessly full glass

The sun shining over the field

I don't know how many souls I have

The soul with boundaries

I'm sorry I don't respond

Autopsychography

I don't know how to be truly sad  
The clouds are dark  
Like an astonishing remnant  
If I think for more than a moment  
From the mountain comes a song  
This species of madness  
The wind in the darkness howls  
I have ideas and reasons  
With a smile and without haste  
Outside where the trees  
I hear in the night across the street  
Almost anonymous you smile  
This  
The day is quiet, quiet is the wind  
The sun rests unmoving  
The washwoman beats the laundry  
To travel! To change countries  
This great wavering between  
I have in me like a haze  
Dreams, systems, myths, ideals  
I divide what I know  
The child that laughs in the street  
*from MESSAGE*  
Prince Henry the Navigator  
The Stone Pillar  
The Sea Monster  
Epitaph of Bartolomeu Dias  
Ferdinand Magellan  
Portuguese Sea

Prayer

Notes to the Introduction and the Poems

Bibliography

## ABOUT THE SELECTION AND SOURCES

From the Introduction the reader will gather a sense of how widely Pessoa's written universe stretches. This collection focuses on just one aspect of that universe: the poetry written in Portuguese. The large body of English poetry would need a collection all its own to be adequately represented (admitting, as many do not, that a poetic oeuvre can be represented by selections from it), and I preferred not to reduce the already limited space allotted to four great names in twentieth-century poetry for the sake of Pessoa's lesser work. Curious readers can consult one of the Portuguese or Brazilian editions of Pessoa's English poems, which are interesting above all for their ideas as well as for what they reveal about the poet and his art.

Except for a few signature poems, such as "The Tobacco Shop" and "Autopsychography," this volume consists largely of work never before published in English translation. In fact, many of the poems were still unpublished in Portuguese as recently as 1988, the centenary year of Pessoa's birth. Where other translations exist, discrepancies are occasionally due not to different interpretations but to different source texts. I have had the advantage of working from recent, vastly improved Portuguese editions of Pessoa's works, and future translators will have the advantage of even better ones.

Pessoa's oeuvre is an editor's nightmare, perhaps more than any other produced in this century by a major Western writer. Pessoa published relatively little and left only a small percentage of the rest of his huge output—over 25,000 manuscripts have survived—in anything close to a finished state. The handwritten texts, which constitute the vast majority, tend to teeter on the brink of illegibility, requiring not just transcription but decipherment. Sometimes verses and stanzas are dispersed on a page (or in the margins around an earlier text) like the pieces of a puzzle whose correct order, if there is one, cannot with certainty be determined. To top off the confusion, Pessoa often left two, three, six, or seven textual alternates above or below a given word or phrase without crossing anything out, leaving his final decision for a later revision that all too rarely occurred.

A computer edition could perhaps fairly reflect Pessoa's ever-tentative texts by having the alternate wordings blink on and off at regularly timed intervals (an

idea suggested to me by Professor K. David Jackson), but a book editor must choose which authorial variant to incorporate in the body of the text and which to relegate to the notes. Some editors give preference to Pessoa's original phrasing (provided he didn't strike it out, of course); others go with the last thing he wrote. Editors understandably want an objective methodology, a set rule to follow, but to arrive at one requires an ineluctably subjective determination: first version or last?

A translation, by its nature subjective, need not pretend to be other than what it is, and so I take whatever version—first, last, or one in between—that seems to work best. Usually, though, I prefer the first version, produced in the initial act of creation, when Pessoa was intensely immersed in the text—not always or even usually the case when he went back to tinker with it later. Ricardo Reis is an exception. The Horatian odes written in his name were so tightly woven that Pessoa could not revisit them without getting into the woof of their verse structure. I find the Pessoa-Reis variants generally better than or at least as good as the original versions.

The most important changes in this revised edition of *Fernando Pessoa & Co.* occur in my translations taken from Caeiro's *The Shepherd in Love* and *Uncollected Poems*. The new versions are based on the rather different readings of the originals presented in the complete edition of Caeiro's poetry published by Assírio & Alvim (Lisbon, 2001). The source texts for my translations of the Reis odes and the poetry attributed to Campos are available from the same publisher. The originals of the poems signed by Pessoa himself can be found in Maria Aliete Galhoz's edition of Pessoa's poetry. In a few instances I have preferred a variant reading of a word or phrase found in the critical edition of Pessoa's poetry published by the Imprensa Nacional —Casa da Moeda (Lisbon).

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*Richard Zenith*

# INTRODUCTION: THE DRAMA AND DREAM OF FERNANDO PESSOA

*This is my morality, or metaphysics, or me: passerby of everything, even of my own soul, I belong to nothing, I desire nothing, I am nothing—just an abstract center of impersonal sensations, a fallen sentient mirror reflecting the world’s diversity. I don’t know if I’m happy this way. Nor do I care.*

*The Book of Disquiet*

*Imagine someone pointing to his cheek with an expression of pain and saying “abracadabra!” We ask “What do you mean?” And he answers “I meant toothache.”*

*Wittgenstein Philosophical Investigations*

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa was born in Lisbon on 13 June 1888. When scarcely five years old, he lost his father. His mother remarried two and a half years later and took Fernando to Durban, South Africa, where his stepfather served as the Portuguese consul. Fernando attended English school in Durban, where he lived with his family until the age of seventeen. When he was thirteen he made a year-long visit to Portugal, returning there for good in 1905. He began studying Letters at the University of Lisbon that same year but dropped out in 1907. During the following years he stayed with relatives or in rented rooms, making his living by translating and drafting business letters in English and French. He began publishing criticism in 1912, creative prose in 1913, and poetry in 1914. This was also the year when the alter egos he called heteronyms—Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de Campos—came into existence. In 1916 he dropped the circumflex from his surname. Throughout the rest of his life, Pessoa contributed poems and prose pieces to magazines. He published several chapbooks of his English poems in 1918 and 1921, and a single book of Portuguese poems in 1934. He had one romantic relationship of brief duration. He died in 1935 from cirrhosis of the liver.

So goes the capsule biography of Portugal’s greatest poet, who did not, however, exist. We are informed of this particular by Álvaro de Campos, one of the dramatis personae invented by Pessoa to play out his life and so save him the trouble. Campos was the dynamic, free-spirited heteronym—a bisexual dandy



who studied in Glasgow, traveled to the Orient, and lived it up in London, acting out many things Pessoa dreamed of but never dared to do. Or never cared to? Whatever the case, Pessoa had no reason to regret having delegated his adventurous streak to Campos, who eventually wearied of his boisterous, footloose existence, coming home to Lisbon and to the realization that all his travels and shenanigans had been quite useless, since, as he had already discerned in an early poem, “however much I felt I never felt enough,/ And life always pained me, it was always too little, and I was unhappy.” So that Campos, besides sparing his creator the bother of living, vindicated Pessoa’s decision to let himself be spared.

Insofar as he was socially inept and/or uninterested, Pessoa was like many other authors, preferring to write about life instead of living it, but his renunciation went further, for the very idea of existing horrified him. Or was this horror mere poetic posturing? The question does not fit Pessoa’s case, since he claimed to do nothing but pretend and posture. That claim was itself no doubt a posturing, and therefore self-fulfilling. The logic oscillates between tautology and paradox, the twin poles that governed the world according to Pessoa, who in diversifying himself was ever more the same, who wanted to be everything so as not to be anything, who disowned himself to become the universe.

Literary alter egos were almost the fashion among early twentieth-century writers. Pound had his Mauberley, Rilke his Malte Laurids Brigge, and Valéry his Monsieur Teste. But no one took the game out as far as Pessoa, who gave up his own life to confer quasi-real substance on the trinity of co-poets he designated as heteronyms, giving each a personal biography, psychology, politics, aesthetics, religion, and physique. Alberto Caeiro, considered the Master by the other two, was an ingenuous, unlettered man who lived in the country and had no profession. Ricardo Reis was a doctor and classicist who wrote odes in the style of Horace. Álvaro de Campos, a naval engineer, started out as an exuberant futurist with a Walt Whitmanesque voice, but over time he came to sound more like a mopey existentialist. The pithiest description and distinction of the heteronyms was made by Pessoa in a text he wrote in English: “Caeiro has one discipline: things must be felt as they are. Ricardo Reis has another kind of discipline: things must be felt, not only as they are, but also so as to fall in with a certain ideal of classic measure and rule. In Álvaro de Campos things must simply be felt.”

To remind us or himself what stuff these men were made of, Pessoa gave them all his same basic build (Campos was slightly taller, Reis and Caeiro slightly shorter), his same clean-shaven face, roughly his same age, and his own

status of confirmed bachelor. But the heteronyms, he cautioned, “should be considered as distinct from their author. Each one forms a drama of sorts; and together they form another drama. . . . The works of these three poets constitute a dramatic ensemble, with careful attention having been paid to their intellectual and personal interaction. . . . It is a drama divided into people, instead of into acts.” There was also an “orthonym” who wrote poetry under the name of Fernando Pessoa and was just as much a fiction as the heteronyms, but he had nothing to do with the social entity whose middle names were António and Nogueira. The only way Pessoa could conceive of being a poet was by not being, by pretending, by achieving complete insincerity:

*The poet is a faker  
Who's so good at his act  
He even fakes the pain  
Of pain he feels in fact.  
And those who read his words  
Will feel in what he wrote  
Neither of the pains he has  
But just the one they don't.*

*From “Autopsychography”*

Poetry for Pessoa was something more than life, or at least something different from life, something capable of providing relief from our daily routine. If poets merely dish out to the reader what they really feel in their day-to-day life, then they are giving too little, according to Pessoa. “What a poor hope,” wrote Pessoa in another poem, “that just hopes to exist!” The “real world” is false, in a sense akin to the word “faulty,” which comes from the same Latin root. That is why the true poet must be a faker, giving not what is but what should or could be, or what cannot be except in poetry.

Pessoa was sincere in his insincerity; heteronymy was not a game he acquired or invoked along the way, it was woven into his DNA. Already as a small child he had invented his first literary playmate, the Chevalier de Pas, in whose name he wrote himself letters, perhaps in French, a language he learned from his mother. And by the time he was a teenager he had a wide circle of make-believe friends—with names such as Dr. Pancrácio, Eduardo Lança, and Dr. Gaudencio Nabos — who wrote stories, poems, and humorous pieces for several “newspapers” copied out in neat columns by Fernando, in Portuguese. (Although he spent eight and a half of his formative years in the British colony

of Natal, young Fernando never lost touch with the Portuguese language.) These fictitious authors were soon joined by Charles Robert Anon, Alexander Search, and other imaginary English writers. Several of these proto-heteronyms accompanied their creator on his 1905 voyage back to Lisbon, where other collaborators—including Jean Seul, who wrote poetry and prose in French—soon emerged. Pessoa even had calling cards printed for Alexander Search, author of a large group of English poems under the general title “Documents of Mental Decadence.”

Pessoa, in a fragmentary note only recently published, had this to say about his pathology: “The self-division of the I is a common phenomenon in cases of masturbation.” Although it is just one of many possible glosses on Pessoa’s condition, it has the virtue of revealing the extent of the poet’s ruthless lucidity with respect to himself, and there is something chilling in the diagnosis when we consider that his only romantic liaison, largely epistolary, was prevented from going forward by the constant interference of Álvaro de Campos, who so exasperated the beloved, Ophelia Queiroz, that she finally declared she hated him. Pessoa, in the end, preferred to remain with Álvaro and the other literary characters he had spawned single-handedly. In a twist on Freud, we could speculate that the adult Pessoa might have been able to suppress his strange childhood urge, sublimating his inclination to self-division into a more “normal” kind of life, with marriage and the rest, but he never seems to have considered that route.

In addition to the three full-fledged heteronyms, the mature Pessoa gave birth to Bernardo Soares, a “semiheteronym” who authored the sprawling fictional diary known as *The Book of Disquiet*; Antonio Mora, a prolific philosopher and sociologist; the Baron of Teive, an essayist; Thomas Crosse, whose critical writings in English promoted Portuguese literature in general and Alberto Caeiro’s work in particular; I. I. Crosse, Thomas’s brother and collaborator; Raphael Baldaya, astrologer; Maria José, a nineteen-year-old hunchback consumptive who wrote a desperate, unmailed love letter to a handsome metalworker who passed under her window on his way to work each day; and so on, and so on, and so on. At least seventy-two names besides Fernando Pessoa were “responsible” for the thousands of texts that were actually written and the many more that he only planned, and other names will probably turn up as scholars continue to explore the still not completely charted territory of his writings.

Or should we call those writings an expanding universe? Over the last ten years, as new texts from the archives have been transcribed and published and

with many new players entering the picture, Fernando Pessoa & Co. has proved to be a larger, more complex enterprise than anyone had imagined. When Pessoa called his heteronymic venture a drama, he meant it quite literally, for his personae interacted, with him and with each other. They collaborated on publication projects, critiqued, and even translated one another. To use a trendy term, they networked. And so, in the heyday of Sensationism, his most fruitful literary theory, Pessoa invented Antonio de Seabra to serve as one of its critics and Sher Henay to compile an English-language “Sensationist Anthology,” which —had it been executed—would have featured work by Álvaro de Campos and Alberto Caeiro, the movement’s two most illustrious practitioners. Another movement, Neo-paganism, was ardently defended by Pessoa’s philosophical persona, Antonio Mora, who wrote at length about the importance of Alberto Caeiro and Ricardo Reis for the cause. Interaction was most intense among the main writer-characters, with Campos and Reis frequently commenting on Caeiro’s poetry, usually in glowing terms, while they were rather harsher on each other’s work.

All this behind-the-scenes writing activity has marginal literary value, but it does shed light on the unique genesis of Pessoa’s poetry. While most poets depend on contact with the “real” world (sometimes indirectly, as through reading) for images and emotions to feed their art, Pessoa’s poetry seems, in its germination, to have gained motive and momentum from his inner universe of orbiting thoughts, principles, and preoccupations, whose gravitational pulls produced moments of high tension and occasional clashes. These thoughts, principles, and preoccupations originally came from the outside, of course, and in the more purely literary realm they can be easily traced to his readings (and subsequent acceptance or rejection) of the English Romantics, French Symbolists, Poe, Walt Whitman, and Portuguese authors. Other contributions from the outside, related to the poet’s family circumstances and the surroundings in which he grew up, are harder to pin down, but Pessoa and what he wrote are clearly as much a product of their time as are Shakespeare and his plays and sonnets. The difference, according to Pessoa himself, is that he created a company of Hamlets but no play for them to act in, he himself being the stage on which they extemporaneously performed.

Artists often remark that their finished art objects no longer belong to them, but Pessoa’s creations were out of his hands even before they began. He made them, yes, but at no point were they ever his. Not even his own self belonged to him. He was so resolutely a spectator of his intimate person that he felt it as something completely extraneous. Pessoa, at his most inward, was his most

impersonal.

The heteronymic conceit accentuated and in a certain way justified Pessoa's condition of self-estrangement. Each heteronym was a fresh personification of his abdication from being, a restatement of the fact that he was nothing at all, just an empty place in the universe where many roads happened to meet. He passed the time by describing for us the traffic as it went by. He assigned names to the roads in an attempt to confer, if possible, substance on his non-existence and to give order to his self-dispersion, but they were just names. There is no essential need for the heteronyms and semi-heteronyms and the rest of the naming game, which some critics have dismissed as an author's ploy to mystify and even mythify his literary project. This may be partly true, but the names do have a practical value. They provide useful file drawers for organizing Pessoa's world, which besides poetry included fiction and drama, philosophy, social and literary criticism, political commentary, translations, linguistic theory, horoscopes, and assorted other texts on the strangest topics imaginable—a treatise on wrestling by one Carlos Otto (who also wrote epigrammatical poems), for example, or three chapters of an essay titled *Des cas d'exhibitionnisme*, in which Jean Seul, Pessoa's main French alias, describes the outward behavior and underlying psychology of those who expose their genitalia in public. Otto (and Miguel, his brother and translator) and Seul are minor characters, but a large body of English poetry was attributed to Alexander Search, while the capacious *Book of Disquiet* was credited to Bernardo Soares.

Were we to erase all the signatures from all the thousands of texts this multilingual author typed or wrote—on loose sheets, in notebooks, on stationery from the firms where he worked, on the backs of letters, on envelopes, or on whatever scrap of paper happened to be in reach—we would have an even harder puzzle to piece together or at least sort out. Like any filing system, however, heteronymy imposes an occasionally arbitrary, specious order that risks obscuring less obvious but more important affinities, and it can give rise to insurmountable problems of classification. Pessoa did not always indicate which file drawer a text belonged to, and scholars are sometimes unsure about where a particular poem or piece of prose should go. Pessoa himself was sometimes unsure. He occasionally placed a question mark after Caeiro, Reis, or whatever other fictional signature he had affixed to his latest text. Or he signed more than one name. Or he made a definite attribution and later changed his mind. The six-poem sequence titled “Slanting Rain” was variously assigned to Alberto Caeiro,

Álvaro de Campos, and Bernardo Soares before it was definitively recognized by Pessoa as belonging to Pessoa. The truth is that “Slanting Rain” doesn’t fit in any file, for it’s quite unlike any other poetry written by Pessoa & Co.

Two paragraphs back I stated that there was “no essential need for the heteronyms,” but, like most statements, that isn’t completely true—in fact, not very true at all. The heteronyms were a stimulus for some of Pessoa’s best poetry. Without them he might well have written the shorter Campos poems of his later years, stylistically different but thematically similar to the verses he produced under his own name, but it is doubtful that the long and loud “sensationalist” poems written between 1914 and 1918 —“Triumphal Ode,” “Maritime Ode,” “Salutation to Walt Whitman,” and “Time’s Passage”—would all have been realized without the futurist naval engineer’s name to establish and maintain. And is it conceivable that Pessoa would have written more than two hundred Horatian-style odes without the fiction of a Ricardo Reis to keep up and—gods willing—immortalize?

If we look at other parts of the Pessoaan landscape, and in particular the prose, then yes, the heteronymic attributions do often seem like nonessential I.D. tags, tacked on by an anxious author who was afraid his texts might otherwise get lost. If Pessoa had signed his own name instead of Bernardo Soares’s to *The Book of Disquiet*, no one would have batted an eyelash, for the lucidly melancholy reflections of this “factless autobiography” read like they came straight from Pessoa’s heart. Pessoa would never have admitted that, or he wouldn’t have put it in those words, but he was careful never to call Bernardo Soares a heteronym. “He’s a semiheteronym,” explained his inventor, “because his personality, although not my own, doesn’t differ from my own but is a mere mutilation of it.” In fact Pessoa-himself was *Disquiet*’s first declared author, though he soon passed the pen on to one Vicente Guedes, an assistant bookkeeper like Soares, who was originally assigned the task of writing short stories. It was only in the last and most prolific phase of the forever uncertain, restless book that Bernardo Soares assumed, as it were, authorial control, but even then Pessoa seems to have considered bringing in the Baron of Teive as a contributing author, with his reflections on life that were likewise lucid and melancholy, though tinted by an aristocratic lens.

Control was not Pessoa’s strong point. He probably wrote on just about every day of his adult life, but in fits, as if writing were a body function (or a function of the mind, of consciousness) which he could regulate only to a limited degree. Or perhaps there is an easier explanation. Perhaps it was merely laziness that prevented him from bringing off large works. He did complete and publish

“Maritime Ode,” a 904-line Álvaro de Campos poem published in 1915, but the six hundred or so verses of “Time’s Passage,” also attributed to Campos, are spread across eight different manuscripts which his posthumous editors have tried to piece together in various ways, never convincingly. Campos’s “Salutation to Walt Whitman” was left as no less than twenty pieces of an equally impossible puzzle, his “Martial Ode” as eleven such pieces, “The Departure” as fifteen. Pessoa completed and published one play, *O Marinheiro* [The Mariner], a “static drama” that takes up just ten or twelve pages, but he left over two hundred rhyming and blank-verse passages of an unfinished, hopelessly disordered and unorderable “Faust.” He had big plans for complete editions of his and his heteronyms’ poetry, in Portuguese and English (Pessoa translated a few Campos poems into English), but he got only a small part of his oeuvre into anything like publishable shape. If almost none of Pessoa’s work appeared in book form in his lifetime, it wasn’t because undiscerning publishers were rejecting the manuscripts he submitted; he simply didn’t submit any. Pessoa was a discreet but well-respected literary figure, with over 150 of his poems and more than a hundred prose texts appearing in magazines during his lifetime, but some of his most stunning poems and prose pieces have only lately—half a century after his death—been lifted by specialists from the margins of prior texts and from the backs of handbills where he scribbled them one afternoon in a Lisbon café, or late at night in one of his rented rooms, or in the apartment he occupied on the Rua Coelho da Rocha during the last fifteen years of his life. More often than not he would date these texts and sign them with one of his many names, and he seems to have saved them all, but they were frequently left in an almost undecipherable scrawl, with variants and notations that throw as much doubt as light on his intentions.

Early on, when he was twenty-six years old, Pessoa wrote in a letter to a friend, “My state of mind compels me to work hard, against my will, on *The Book of Disquiet*. But it’s all fragments, fragments, fragments.” And in several of the many “fragments” that make up this book, the fictional author (Guedes?, Soares?, the persona called Pessoa?) complains of his inability to produce finished work. On this point *The Book of Disquiet* is eloquently self-illustrative. The more Pessoa worked on it, the more unfinished it became. It began as a collection of symbolist texts that tried to penetrate the world of dreams and the human psyche through elaborate descriptions of weather and landscape, childhood remembrances, medieval imagery, and idealized visions of sexless women. The narrative voice was impersonal and ethereal, and “disquiet” did not refer so much to human worry or anxiety as to a restlessness present in all of life.

By the end of Pessoa's life, the book had become a highly intimate diary of "haphazard musings" ascribed to the existentially disquieted Bernardo Soares. Along the way, Pessoa used the forever changing, never-ending work in progress as a handy depository for prose texts that had no other home: philosophical notes, sociological commentary, aesthetic theories, aphorisms, literary criticism. Pessoa had a few hazy ideas on how to organize *The Book of Disquiet*, but no unity was possible for such an amorphous, unwieldy work that thrived on diversity and indecision, and so its skittish author just kept turning out text. It was only in 1982, after years of scholarly labor, that the first substantial but by no means complete edition of this astonishing nonbook saw print.

Pessoa's work flourished in the magnetic field between his attempt to impose order and his irresistible attraction to entropy. His tendency to "other himself" (to use Pessoaan terminology) was no doubt partly willful. It was also a temptation he fought against. Or was it all part of the same malady? His determination to organize was as obsessive as his lust (the word is a little strong, but not too) for self-dispersion. He regularly drew up lists enumerating his literary productions, elaborated projects for the structuring of his overall output, and wrote out detailed plans for the publication of his oeuvre. But the lists were full of titles for works he never completed, the projects contradicted one another, and the publication plans came to nothing.

Pessoa's efforts to organize his ideas into something like ordered discourse met with an equal lack of success. Several volumes of his "philosophical texts" were published posthumously, but there are few-interesting ideas to be culled from these one-two-three expositions of logic and metaphysics written in Portuguese and English under various names. Pessoa must have realized this, for he wrote fewer of them as time went on. Not that he didn't have anything provocative to say in this domain. Original philosophical insights—or striking reformulations and applications of ideas advanced by thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche—are found in his poetry and in *The Book of Disquiet*. Pessoa was no philosopher by any stretch of the term, but like Plato and Nietzsche, he had definite ideas and no talent for arranging them into a neat system. The two named philosophers couldn't keep literature out of their writings; Pessoa's prose and poetry were "contaminated" by philosophy. Plato had his Socrates, Nietzsche his Zarathustra, and Pessoa his Caeiro, Campos, Soares, and so on.



Not by coincidence, Pessoa's production of disciplined philosophical texts took a nosedive after the emergence—in 1914—of the major heteronyms, whose launching was Pessoa's great act of philosophical praxis, or so he would have us believe. In *Ultimatum*, a futurist manifesto attributed to Álvaro de Campos and published in 1917, the Nietzschean doctrine of the Superman was promulgated as the solution to liberate Portuguese culture from emasculatory foreign influences and to clear out the literary dead wood, and this Superman was none other than the self-multiplied man, the "Synthesis-of-Humanity Man" who can say, "I am all others." Rejecting the "dogma of artistic individuality," the greatest artist "will be the one who least defines himself, the one who writes in the most genres with the most contradictions and discrepancies. No artist should have just one personality." Instead of, say, thirty or forty poets giving expression to an age, all it should take are "two poets, each with fifteen or twenty personalities." In its loud and exclamatory finale, the manifesto heralds "the scientific creation of Supermen" and, through them, "the arrival of a perfect, mathematical Humanity!"

Thus spake Álvaro de Campos, whose futuristic convictions were poetically expressed in the long Sensationist poems such as "Triumphal Ode" and "Time's Passage." Pessoa in his other incarnations (and in the later Campos poetry) was less concerned with the future of art and humanity than with his immediate intellectual distress. The problems of being and not-being, knowing and not-knowing, moral values, subjective versus objective reality, and determinism versus free will permeate the work of this "poet animated by philosophy," to use Pessoa's self-epithet. But we also find a rigor of expression which, though not resorting to linguistic analysis, is vaguely Wittgensteinian insofar as it demystifies philosophy and would sweep away those notions that cloud rather than clarify. In Caetano, who claimed to have no philosophy, we find these lines:

*The mystery of things? What mystery?  
The only mystery is that some people think about mystery.  
If you're in the sun and close your eyes,  
You begin not to know what the sun is,  
And you think about various warm things.  
But open your eyes and you see the sun.*

This is at least reminiscent of the conclusions drawn by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, where he states, "The right method of philosophy would be this: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e., the

propositions of natural science, i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy.”

Sometimes Pessoa does actually analyze language, as in another Caeiro poem that begins:

*A row of trees across the way, toward the slope. . . .  
But what is a row of trees? There are just trees.  
“Row” and the plural “trees” are names, not things.*

In *The Book of Disquiet* (p. 302), Pessoa (as Bernardo Soares) often invokes clear syntax and precise terminology, as when he calls into question the notion of material possession:

If, referring to what you eat, you were to say, “I possess this,” then I would understand you. Because you obviously incorporate what you eat into yourself, you transform it into your substance, you feel it enter into you and belong to you. But it’s not with regard to what you eat that you speak of possession. What do you call possessing?

Although this kind of direct linguistic examination is relatively rare in his writing, language for Pessoa was a precision instrument, employed like a scalpel to get to the heart of the truth he did not believe in or to get to the heart of himself, which he also did not believe in. Instead of getting anywhere, therefore, the self-analysis merely accrued, filling in the void of Pessoa’s unbelief, taking the place of the self he might have had if he’d been more adept at living in the world. He explains this process through his “mutilation,” Bernardo Soares:

I am, in large measure, the selfsame prose I write. I unroll myself in sentences and paragraphs, I punctuate myself; in my arranging and rearranging of images I’m like a child using newspaper to dress up as a king. . . .

I’ve made myself into the character of a book, a life one reads. Whatever I feel is felt (against my will) so that I can write that I felt it. Whatever I think is promptly put into words, mixed with images that undo it, cast into rhythms that are something else altogether. From so much self-remodelling, I’ve destroyed myself. From so much self-thinking, I’m now my thoughts and not I.

. . . And so, describing myself in image after image —not without truth, but with lies mixed in —I end up more in the images than in me, stating myself until I no longer exist, writing with my soul for ink, useful

for nothing except writing.

*Disquiet*, pp. 169-70

At almost every point of entry into the person of Pessoa we come back to heteronymy or a variation on the theme, back to the question of literature versus life, sincerity versus insincerity. And we are stymied. Can we believe Pessoa's claim of disbelief in himself? Is his professed insincerity sincere? To wonder about these things is a bit like wondering if the statement "This statement is a lie" is true or false. But it is hard not to wonder. What are we to make of a writer who "realized that nobody could love me unless he were completely lacking in aesthetic sensibility, in which case I would then despise him," and who consoles himself by noting that "[i]t takes a certain intellectual courage for a man to frankly recognize that he's nothing more than a human tatter, an abortion that survived"? These citations are from a passage appropriately titled "Lucid Diary" (pp. 426-28) in *The Book of Disquiet*, which is sprinkled throughout with self-deprecation. Pessoa's or Bernardo Soares's?

What are we to make of Pessoa's fear of insanity, expressed not only in his literary writings but in letters to friends when he was still a young man? Were his letters just more literature, or had his paternal grandmother's slow but steady descent into certifiable madness inspired a genuine fear in him? What of the unfinished letter he wrote in 1919 to a French practitioner of hypnosis therapy, Hector Durville, describing himself as an *hystero-neurasthénique* and complaining that his excessive *émotivité* and *cérébralité* resulted in a total lack of will to act? Was that a fair description of his condition? Did the condition *really* bother him? Did the poet who wrote that "[t]he active life has always struck me as the least comfortable of suicides" (*Disquiet*, p. 211) *really* hope to become a man of action through the therapy offered by the Institut du Magnétisme et du Psychisme Expérimental?

What about the fifty love letters he wrote to his "Little Baby," Ophelia Queiroz, over a nine-month period in 1920 and a four-month period in 1929-30? Some scholars believe that the epistolary endearments, occasionally gooey to the point of embarrassment, show the poet faker at his most human and transparent; for others, it was all just another stage for Pessoa to play out life, love by mail having spared him the time commitment and emotional investment of an in-person amorous involvement. (There was, Ophelia revealed years later, an impetuous, impassioned kiss one afternoon in the office where they met, and they often took the streetcar together.)

What of Pessoa's more than passing interest in the occult? A letter in 1915 to

his friend Mário de Sá-Carneiro, shortly before his young friend's death, suggests it was only for money that he translated theosophic works by C. W. Leadbeater and Madame Blavatsky into Portuguese (the volumes were published in 1915 and 1916), but the same letter says he was unexpectedly overwhelmed by the “extraordinarily vast nature of this religious philosophy,” by its “notion of power, of dominion, of higher and superhuman knowledge.” And a letter written the following year to his Aunt Anica, who was no novice in these matters, informed her that he was becoming a “medium,” experiencing phenomena such as automatic writing, astral vision, and—perhaps less surprisingly for one who preached depersonalization—the “sudden feeling of belonging to something else.” He concluded that “the unknown Master” was “imposing on me this higher existence” for some likewise higher purpose, and that this would result in more inner suffering. Four years later, when he broke off with Ophelia for the first time, his letter explained that “my destiny belongs to another Law . . . and is ever more constrained to obey Masters who do not allow or forgive” any deviation. More self-dramatization?

Throughout the rest of his life Pessoa nourished his interest in things arcane and occult, writing about spiritualist beliefs and practices ranging from alchemy, Kabbala and Gnosticism to initiation rites and Rosicrucianism. His “At the Tomb of Christian Rosencreutz” seems to date from the 1930s, along with other poems of the same ilk, and the nationalistic poetry of *Mensagem* [Message], published in 1934, is infused with almost as much esotérica as patriotism. In the next and last year of his life, Pessoa drafted an autobiographical note describing himself as an anti-Catholic “gnostic Christian” faithful to “the Secret Tradition of Christianity, which has close links with the Secret Tradition in Israel (the Holy Kabbala) and with the occult essence of Freemasonry,” and he published a newspaper article attacking a proposed law that would ban secret societies — namely, the Freemasons. To write such an article implied a personal risk, for Salazar was by then a firmly entrenched and intolerant dictator (the proposed law, to no one's surprise, passed unanimously), but it was the risk assumed by a bystander. Pessoa never actually joined the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians, or any other secret order. His interest in them, as in most things, seems to have been intellectual.

Astrology, on the other hand, was an occult art that Pessoa actively engaged in, producing dozens of horoscopes on himself, on his heteronyms, and on relatives and friends. At one point he even toyed with the idea of hanging out a shingle to make his living as an astrologer. So skilled was he at this art that, after reading the autobiography of a well-known English magus named Aleister

Crowley, alias Master Therion, he dared to inform the author that the horoscope he'd drawn up for himself and published in his book was mistaken. Crowley recognized the error, struck up a correspondence with Pessoa, and came to Lisbon in 1930 to meet the poet astrologer, who in the following year published a Portuguese version of "Hymn to Pan," a poem written by his English colleague.

Is it possible that not even Pessoa's keen interest in astrology and other occult sciences was sincere? Can we seriously suspect that he took it all with a certain grain of salt? Is it conceivable that he could expend so much ink, time, and physical and creative energy on something he didn't truly believe in or at least value highly?

Yes: perfectly possible, conceivable, and probable. Yes, if "sincere" interest means it was somehow fundamental to his existence, affording him purpose and meaning in the way politics and religion do for their fervent adherents. Pessoa was obviously interested, even passionately interested, in the occult—the way an avid stamp collector is interested in stamps; a movie buff in David Griffith; or a diehard bowler in his bowling average, in the weight of his bowling ball, and in how it slips out of his fingers. But we cannot, with surety, say much more than that. Pessoa as Álvaro de Campos, riding a streetcar and observing a woman busily and uselessly crocheting, had this to say:

*I also have my crochet.  
It dates from when I began to think.  
Stitch on stitch forming a whole without a whole . . .  
A cloth, and I don't know if it's for a garment or for nothing.  
.....  
.....  
Crochet, souls, philosophy . . .  
All the religions of the world . . .  
All that entertains us in the leisure hours of our existence. . . .*

Unless he chooses to commit suicide, a man who believes in nothing must fill his life with things he doesn't believe in, or he sees it all as crochet, about which it makes no sense to apply the notions of belief, of sincerity, or of true versus false. In a letter dated 13 January 1935, Pessoa wrote that he believed in the existence of worlds superior to our own and in higher beings with whom communication is possible "to the extent we are spiritually attuned," but the narrator of *The Book of Disquiet* specifically mentions Rosicrucianism, the

Kabbala, magic, and alchemy as interests belonging to a bygone phase. “Today,” he concludes, “I’m an aesthetic in my religion of myself. A cup of coffee, a cigarette and my dreams can substitute quite well for the universe and its stars” (p. 217). In another passage (p. 222), Soares speaks of his “physical loathing” toward secret societies and occult sciences. It may be argued that Soares is not Pessoa, but Pessoa is also not Pessoa. Nor, for that matter, were his astrological texts and charts always produced under his own name. Raphael Baldaya, a subheteronym, was responsible for much of Pessoa’s stargazing, which suggests that his interest in astrology, like his interest in naval engineering and shepherding, was largely if not primarily literary. Yes, Pessoa *really* wrote Crowley and *really* received him in Lisbon, but the magus astrologer who’d miscast his own horoscope turned out to be nothing but a magician actor of modest talent. Apparently inspired by the *Boca do Inferno* [Mouth of Hell], a dramatic rock formation found on the seacoast west of Lisbon, the self-styled “666 Beast” staged a mysterious disappearance down the water-eroded chasm. Pessoa, far from being disillusioned, participated in the hoax, deciphering the Kabbalistic writing of a phony suicide note and reporting to the newspapers that he had seen Crowley “or his ghost” a day after he had crossed over into Spain, according to the Portuguese border police. Pessoa enjoyed detective stories, having written a few of his own, and he did not mind being a character in the one Crowley had dreamed up. Nor did Crowley’s charlatanism deter Pessoa from translating his “Hymn to Pan.” If Crowley was a fake, then so much the better, according to Pessoa’s artistic theory. The occult, like love and his mental health and the rest of life, was subordinated to art, whose soul was insincerity.

Interest in the occult and the equation of art to artificiality were fairly common responses to the generalized spiritual and aesthetic crisis experienced by European artists at the beginning of this century and still felt today, in Europe and far beyond. Despite his megalomania, Pessoa harbored no illusions about the unexceptional, even bourgeois etiology of his disquiet, with several long passages from his homonymously titled book describing the generation he belonged to as one that had “lost all respect for the past and all belief or hope in the future” (p. 452). With characteristic dispassion, Pessoa/Soares (p. 260) analyzes the process leading to this lostness, which was far more profound than what Hemingway’s generation felt:

Our fathers still had the believing impulse, which they transferred from Christianity to other forms of illusion. Some were champions of social

equality, others were wholly enamored of beauty, still others had faith in science and its achievements, and there were some who became even more Christian, resorting to various Easts and Wests in search of new religious forms to entertain their otherwise hollow consciousness of merely living.

We lost all of this. We were born with none of these consolations. Each civilization follows the particular path of a religion that represents it; turning to other religions, it loses the one it had, and ultimately loses them all.

We lost the one, and all the others with it.

And so we were left each man to himself, in the desolation of feeling ourselves live.

The upsurge in occult practices in the nineteenth century may be seen as part of the transfer of belief “from Christianity to other forms of illusion,” but many European intellectuals toward the end of that century and into the twentieth began to value the occult more as a drug than as a belief, as a source of immediate sensation rather than as a system to provide long-term meaning to their existence. In Pessoa the sensation becomes merely the idea of sensation, a literary sensation, for which it makes no difference whether Crowley disappeared down the mouth of hell in actual fact or only in the suspenseful paragraphs of the newspaper.

Art, meanwhile, after centuries of service to Christianity and a short stint of duty on behalf of post-God doctrines such as Humanism and Romanticism (the two most often cited by Pessoa), had become a religion unto itself, a kind of floating currency with no more value than what faith in art might give it. Completely meaningless, since it stood in relation to nothing, art was nevertheless invoked by many—including Pessoa—to fill up the vacuum. In these circumstances, art could only be considered genuine when it was completely artificial, when it *replaced* reality instead of trying to express or explain or embody it.

Though this line of reasoning was not unique to Pessoa, in him more than in his contemporaries it led to radical action or, rather, nonaction, making him so relentlessly detached from physical life that even Álvaro de Campos, the most worldly of Pessoa’s personae, “Prefers thinking about smoking opium to smoking it/ And likes looking at absinthe more than drinking it.” In literature as in life, in art as in the occult, all that mattered was the gesture, not the illusory substance behind it.

Pessoa's arm's-length fascination with the occult is intimately related to what he called his "mystical" nationalism, though he might well have labeled it "mythical." The first myth, fostered by a tradition of patriotic prophetic literature, was that Portugal would be the fifth and last of the world's great empires, the fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream as interpreted by Daniel. According to most Biblical exegetes, the four earthly kingdoms described by the lion-resistant prophet correspond to the successive empires of Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece (or Babylon, Media/Persia, Greece, and Rome), with the fifth and final kingdom—divine and indestructible—being variously understood. Transposing the interpretation forward in time and westward in geography, Pessoa associated the first four kingdoms with the empires of Greece, Rome, Christianity in the Middle Ages, and post-Renaissance Europe (or, in a variant scheme, the English colonial empire). Pessoa argued that the Fifth Empire, to be indestructible, would have to be "spiritual" rather than material, and that this could only be achieved by a small nation, since it would never even aspire to territorial domination. Pessoa marshaled other arguments—ranging from Portugal's "civilizational" vocation and its knack for getting along with other races to the supposed superiority of its language, Portuguese being "the richest and most complex of the Latin tongues"—in support of his thesis that Portugal would spearhead the Fifth Empire.

Pessoa was not a typical flag-waver. The poems of his book titled *Mensagem* celebrated the Portuguese discoveries, but he contended that his country's "first discovery was to discover the idea of discovery," and he had no use for the then still extensive Portuguese colonies, writing them off as a millstone around the homeland's neck, an impediment to the "cultural imperialism" he imagined would be based on Portugal's language and literature. Portugal, according to Pessoa, had not yet produced a truly great literature, and *for that very reason* was bound to generate one in the near future. Italy and France had already been cultural heavyweights; now it was Portugal's turn.

Enter Sebastianism, the companion myth and vital key to the Fifth Empire doctrine. It was a myth firmly ingrained in the Portuguese psyche, going back more than three centuries, to the year 1578, when the young and impetuous King Sebastião organized and personally led a suicidal invasion of Morocco. The predictable result was the death or capture of almost every soldier fighting under the Portuguese flag. Severely weakened and with no obvious successor to the throne, Portugal was easily dominated by Spain for the next sixty years, from 1580 to 1640. Since Sebastião's body was never actually found among the



carnage left lying on the battlefield of El Ksar el Kebir, it was rumored that he still lived on some island and would return on a foggy morning to drive out the Spanish. Once Portugal regained its autonomy and was beset by other problems, such as the French invasions in the early 1800s and the country's general inability to keep pace with the rest of Europe, some people began to stake their hopes on a spiritualized, Messianic version of Sebastião to restore Portugal to its previous grandeur.

If Pessoa promoted Sebastianism, it's not because he believed in it but because he didn't. He felt that in politics, as in poetry, nothing could be accomplished without falseness and insincerity. Since "the world is run by lies," only the propagation of "a great national myth" would be able to "raise a nation's morale," he explained to an interviewer in 1926. "Fortunately," he noted, "we have the Sebastianist myth, deeply rooted in the past and in the Portuguese soul. Our work is therefore easier. We don't have to create a myth, but simply renew it."

Before concluding that Pessoa was patriotically using Sebastianism to look out for his country, we should consider how he interpreted a sixteenth-century shoemaker and street poet named Gonçalo Anes Bandarra, whose obscurely prophetic verses were a rich source text for the changing Sebastianist myth. In the visionary quatrains of this Portuguese Nostradamus, Pessoa saw not only the predicted return of Sebastião but also the specific date of that return: 1888, the year Pessoa was born. Thus all of the heteronym forger's mysticism, nationalism, and other ardent divagations came back to none other than himself, the fulfillment of the "super-Camões" whose advent he foretold in his first published prose text, a 1912 essay on "the new Portuguese poetry sociologically considered." Luís de Camões, who wrote a large body of lyric poetry as well as *The Lusíads*, the great epic about Vasco da Gama and seafaring Portugal, was almost universally regarded as his country's all-time greatest poet. Pessoa, albeit grudgingly, went along with the consensus opinion, which fit perfectly into his national-cultural-personal mythology, Camões having died in 1580, just two years after King Sebastião. The Second Coming of Sebastião, in Pessoa's scheme of cultural imperialism, was envisioned as a new and greater Camões. With God, Truth, and Humanity having lost their credibility, all there was left to believe in and hope for was individual human beings of exceptionally, inexplicably higher caliber. The literary Fifth Empire would not require a vast number of good Portuguese writers, just a handful of very gifted multifaceted ones, as described in Campos's *Ultimatum* and incarnated by Pessoa & Co.

"The Fifth Empire, *c'est moi* could have been Pessoa's maxim, were he as

ostentatious as he was megalomaniac, though not even this megalomania should be taken too seriously. It was also a myth, or part of the overall myth of Pessoa, who put so much distance from all he thought or felt that probably not even he could distinguish what—if anything—was there before the mythmaking began.

His childhood? Did he not remember and miss it? Did it not belong intimately and unforgettably to who he was “deep down”? Pessoa’s prose and poetry contain a number of quite specific references to childhood: to the backyard where he played ball, to his toy ships and toy dolls, to the circus where he sometimes went on Sundays, to the crib he slept in as a boy, to the house in the country where he and his aunts drank afternoon tea. He surely did not invent all these details, and nostalgia for childhood is a frequent motif, particularly in the poetry of Campos. And might not the fact that the heteronyms often had brothers—there was a Frederico Reis as well as a Ricardo, a Charles Search as well as an Alexander, two brothers named Guedes, three named Wyatt—be explained by Pessoa’s regret over the loss of his only full brother, who died before reaching age one (Fernando was five and a half at the time)? Or did he merely regret the *idea* of a lost brother, whether his own or someone else’s? Pessoa would have us believe that his self-distancing was total:

Any nostalgia I feel is literary. I remember my childhood with tears, but they’re rhythmic tears, in which prose is already being formed. . . . I feel nostalgia for scenes. Thus someone else’s childhood can move me as much as my own; both are purely visual phenomena from a past I’m unable to fathom, and my perception of them is literary. They move me, yes, but because I see them, not because I remember them.

*Disquiet*, pp. 183-84

These words were penned in September of 1931. Three months later, in a letter to João Gaspar Simões, Pessoa, calling himself a futurist “in the direct sense of the word,” claimed never to have felt nostalgia for his childhood or for anything else from the past. He admitted to missing certain people he once loved, but not the time in which he loved them. Any apparent hankering for the past in his work were “literary attitudes, intensely felt by dramatic instinct, whether they are signed by Álvaro de Campos or by Fernando Pessoa.”

Elsewhere in the same letter, Pessoa found fault with the excessively Freudian interpretations proffered in a book of poetry criticism just out by the still-young Gaspar Simões, who got his revenge—fulfilling what was

presumably only a subconscious wish—almost twenty years later, when he wrote a biography that examined Pessoa’s entire life and work through the twin lenses of frustrated Oedipal yearning and repressed homosexuality. The biographer’s point of view is defensible, but his focus was far too shallow (or “deep,” in the psychoanalytical sense). It’s not as though Pessoa was laboring under the weight of shadowy repressions embedded in the subconscious zone of his psyche. On the contrary, he willfully, systematically frustrated his appetites and repressed his desires, denying himself so as to enrich his art. Pessoa revealed as much in another letter to his future biographer, dating from 1930 and explaining that he wrote his two long, mildly erotic poems—the heterosexual “Epithalamium” (1913) and the homosexual “Antinoüs” (1915)—to get sex out of his system. The second poem is much more convincing, which may or may not tell us something about Pessoa’s sexual orientation, but who cares? The point is that he wanted it all out of his system and into his writing.

Pessoa sought to expel not only his sexual desires but his friendly affections, his religious tendencies, his aggressive feelings, his humanitarian urges, his longing for adventure, his dreams, and his regrets, and in a poem like “Time’s Passage” we can find all this and more. In other Campos poems the process is inverted, the narrator taking in things from the outside and being strongly affected by them. We find him ruefully sorry to leave the man he met on a train, intensely moved by the sight of a complete stranger’s cadaver, and poignantly sympathetic to the seamstress whose boyfriend left her; all were characters that Pessoa at best only grazed in real life. In both processes—expelling what he is at heart and taking to heart what doesn’t belong to him—there is distance. Either way, the emotion is literary. And by investing all this in the fictional person of Álvaro de Campos, Pessoa takes detachment yet one step further.

Psychoanalysis is too poor a science to explain the case of Pessoa, who seems to have been simply, mysteriously, possessed by a demon—that of detachment. His congenital ambition was to turn all that he touched, or that touched him, into the gold of literature, but unlike King Midas he never got tired of performing this alchemical trick. Or he tired of it but could not do otherwise. He thrived on the unreal. Even the “reality” within the unreal world of his writings tends to be insubstantial, a kind of mimesis of vacancy and absence. Drama is the most lifelike genre within literature, but Pessoa’s only completed play is a negation of action, plot, dialogue and even character. Written in 1913, *O Marinheiro* [*The Mariner*] makes no attempt to represent the real world, nor does it offer an alternative one. Discoursing in a register that is neither true dialogue nor true monologue, its three static characters vaguely long for another

age, for other lands and other seas, for whatever is *other*; and then comes the “story”: a hazy recollection of a dream within a dream, and the dreamer suspects that she herself may be a mere figment in a dream of the mariner she dreamed about. Nothing of substance is presented in this wispy text, only words that “seem like people.” Significantly enough, it was one year after those words were written that the three major heteronyms burst onto the scene, dressed and ready to play out their author’s life.

Heteronymy was the most conspicuous distancing technique employed by Pessoa; less important but almost as conspicuous was his persistent use of English. In the aforementioned letter to Gaspar Simões, Pessoa claimed not to know why he wrote “Epithalamium” and “Antinous” in English, which was as good as a confession that he knew exactly why. Converting his sexual drives into writing was, as he himself explained, a way to objectify them, to make them into objects outside himself. As English texts they became that much more foreign. Contrary to what some scholars have supposed, Pessoa was not *perfectly* bilingual. In his less than nine years in Durban, he mastered the English language well enough to win first prize for the essay he wrote as part of his entrance exam to the University of the Cape of Good Hope, an admirable feat (there were 900 examinees) that measured various skills besides linguistic competence. Although the prize essay does not survive, a nearly contemporaneous piece on Thomas Macaulay was published by Pessoa in the December 1904 issue of *The Durban High School Magazine*. It reveals the future poet’s exceptional intellectual and critical capacities, as well as the breadth of his readings in literature, but the English itself is slightly archaic and stilted: “Therefore is it that he gives us no emotional undulations of style,” begins one of the paragraphs.

Therefore was it that Pessoa’s English poems, including the 35 *Sonnets* he published in 1918, might have made a hit several hundred years ago. They do not fall well on modern ears. They never have the sparkle, the music, the colloquial verve, or the quiet elegance achieved at different points in his Portuguese output. Curiously enough, the poetry attributed to Caeiro and Campos has a certain directness of style that Pessoa brought into Portuguese from English, via Walt Whitman in particular. That directness is almost always lacking in his English poetry, among which the sonnets deserve first prize for convolutedness. Take, for example, these verses from the ninth sonnet:

*As in one sinking in a treacherous sand,  
Each gesture to deliver sinks the more;  
The struggle avails not, and to raise no hand,  
Though but more slowly useless, we've no power.*

We could, perhaps cruelly, see these verses as an unintentional self-parody, with the sand representing English and the last two lines referring to Pessoa's infelicitous but irresistible attempts to write poetry in that language. Though Pessoa wrote excellent English for a foreigner, it lacked the organic fiber and carnal weight of what is so aptly known as a mother tongue.

After 1916, Pessoa's creative writing was largely confined to Portuguese, though he still used English for an occasional poem and rather more extensively for his personal notes. As the years wore on, Pessoa's English deteriorated, sometimes sliding into Portuguese syntactical patterns and even exhibiting a few outright errors, but that did not daunt the poet of many masks. Not that we need to suppose that Pessoa was hiding behind his obstinate use of English. There was at least one obvious, banal reason for his jotting down notes and annotations in English—to maintain his linguistic proficiency through regular exercise, particularly since he made money by drafting letters in English and French for Portuguese firms that did business abroad. With his English poems, Pessoa hoped to gain literary recognition in Britain and perhaps elsewhere. His self-published books of English poetry did get reviewed by several British papers, including the *Times Literary Supplement*, and in 1920 a London journal called *The Athenaeum* even published a poem from *The Mad Fiddler*, a collection Pessoa had unsuccessfully attempted to place with an English publisher in 1917.

English had yet another attraction for Pessoa. It comprised an artificiality that became second nature, a kind of spontaneous unspontaneity. For one who eschewed the unmediated expression of emotion (“emotional undulations of style,” he wrote at age sixteen, already subjecting feelings to aesthetics), foreign languages had the virtue of acting as a check, the linguistic strangeness automatically detaching the author from his feelings. The all too likely pitfall, into which Pessoa's English poems largely slipped, was a strained style and a radical loss of emotional power. He himself seems to have sensed this, and toward the end of his life he recognized that “my nation is the Portuguese language” (*Disquiet*, p. 225), but he continued to make forays out of that nation as part of his permanent journey away from himself. With consummate detachment, Pessoa even wrote his final words in English —“I know not what tomorrow will bring”—as if to mark an ironic or existential distance between

himself and death, which is what the next day, 30 November 1935, brought.

Not even in the Portuguese poetry written under Pessoa's own name will we find a unified, integrated, "natural" voice. Removing himself from himself, Pessoa dubbed Pessoa an orthonym, a self-reflexive fiction that comprised—he wrote in a letter from 1935 — "various subpersonalities," which included the pseudo-patriot who wrote *Message*, the pseudo-occultist of "Beyond God" and "The Mummy," the ephemeral Intersectionist of "Slanting Rain," and the ultra-rational Pessoa who used rhymed and metered verses to try to make sense of his scattered identity when he was not, on the contrary, doing his best to scatter it yet more. The orthonym was in a certain way the falsest poet of all, using old-style verse structures to express twentieth-century anxiety from a consistently anti-Romantic point of view. With apparent irony, Pessoa-himself employed traditional forms to highlight the utter vacuity of the traditional values that held those forms dearly. You want neat rhyme and strict meter? he seems to be saying. Here you go! Although Pessoa never explicitly stated that his use of traditional form had an ironic intention, we can infer this from his criticism of Portugal's other great poet, Luís de Camões, for not using innovative verse forms. Or perhaps Pessoa intended nothing at all; perhaps he simply enjoyed making his orthonymic verses rhyme and obey meter. And why not? When we arrive at the conclusion that everything is vacuous, that everything is equally indifferent or indifferently equal, then no one method, approach, or mode of expression is more legitimate or illegitimate than another. Anything goes, including all that has gone before.

By what to some may seem an unexpected channel, we have entered the realm of Intertextuality, in which all styles from all ages are equally valid, if not (opinions here vary) equally valuable. Bizarrely but truly, the deconstructionists' ideal is embodied in this early twentieth-century writer from a lightweight country like Portugal. Cutting across cultures, time periods, languages, and genres, Pessoa's literary production includes democratically rhyming poetry representing various traditions, free-verse styles of a kind never before used in Portuguese, the "ultra-Shakespearean Shakespeareanisms" (citing the *Times Literary Supplement*) of his English sonnets, the Zenlike verses of Alberto Caeiro, the classical odes signed by Ricardo Reis (defined by his cross-cultural creator as "a Greek Horace who writes in Portuguese"), the equally antiquitous *Inscriptions* written in English, a handful of French poems (because why not?), a few hundred witty and unpretentious folk quatrains (such a correctly uncanonical

genre), some detective stories (an old favorite of the structuralists), real diaries and fictional diaries, political commentary, literary criticism, and even jokes, not to mention the poetry and prose translations that endow the oeuvre with a multicultural stamp.

In what appears to be a cynical act of self-promotion, some of today's theorists are building high-visibility careers on their "discovery" that the subject is a fiction, that there is only text born of text and leading to more text. Pessoa, acting on better faith, lived out the textual dream, or nightmare, paying the logical price of self-effacement, and he was well aware of the limits and potentialities of his enterprise and of verbal expression in general. Consider the following observation, which many a deconstructionist could subscribe to without qualms:

Everything stated or expressed by man is a note in the margin of a completely erased text. From what's in the note we can extract the gist of what must have been in the text, but there's always a doubt, and the possible meanings are many.

*Disquiet*, pp. 131-32

Some would fuss, of course, over the word "gist," but the purport of this passage is not to claim a hidden meaning or an authoritative Urtext. The point is that there are as many possible meanings as there are readers or readings. The only hidden meaning, Pessoa asserted more than once in the poetry of Alberto Caeiro, is that there *is* no hidden meaning: things are what they are, period.

Caeiro, according to his script, was interested in things themselves, in their direct apperception. Pessoa was not. To his credit, or that of his *métier* as a poet, he did not theorize like Derrida on whether there was any *hors-texte*, on whether writing referred to anything outside itself. With less dogma and pretense, he simply recognized his preference for the written world and his collateral lack of aptitude and taste for the "real" one. Outright aversion to everyday life is stated or implied in passage after fragmentary passage of Pessoa's "Faust," while Álvaro de Campos—in the more compact space of a poem—feels intimate horror

*. . . that there exists a way for beings to exist,  
For existence to exist,  
For the existence of "to exist" to exist.*

These verses from late Campos—the only heteronym to evolve and grow old

with the poet of masks —can be legitimately regarded as closer in spirit than Caeiro to Pessoa himself, but “Pessoa-himself” is always a slippery quantity, the heteronyms, vice-heteronyms and subheteronyms endlessly canceling each other out and leaving their creator to chart the void, or else—turning around the lens—endlessly multiplying and restating each other while Pessoa-himself drowns in the chaos, with only (and this is true either way he or we look at it) “the hope that everything is nothing and nothing, therefore, everything” (*Dis-quiet*, p. 387). Pessoa forever vacillated between subscribing to nothingness (“I’m nothing./ I’ll always be nothing”) or everythingness (“To feel everything in every way”), but it all came down to the same scattered mishmash of nothing (or everything). Even if he did not accept with bucolic equanimity the “Great Mystery” glimpsed by Caeiro on “an incredibly clear day,” Pessoa certainly concurred with the truth of the vision:

*I saw that there is no Nature,  
That Nature doesn't exist,  
That there are hills, valleys and plains,  
That there are trees, flowers and grass,  
That there are rivers and stones,  
But that there is no whole to which all this belongs,  
That a true and real ensemble  
Is a disease of our own ideas.*

*Nature is parts without a whole.*

Yeats, in his lament that the center cannot hold, presaged the twentieth-century collapse of Western Culture as such, with capital W and capital C. Pound, with his *Cantos*, was a precursor of the collage aesthetic, which attempted a kind of makeshift whole, though no longer with any hope or concern for a center of gravity. It was Fernando Pessoa, as much as any other poet of his time or before it, who prefigured—in his own person—the postmodernist experience of utter dissociation. Put more accurately, he experienced what many postmodernists only talk about: the impossibility and undesirability of a whole, and a letting go of all nostalgia for a consensus of human thought and understanding. If Postmodernism is nothing but talk, Pessoa does not fit the bill. He did not rant against the accepted canon, nor was he a champion of equality in the arts. But if Postmodernism implies personal actions and behaviors born out of its discourse, then even before the word existed Pessoa was one of its practitioners, getting there almost on his own.



Like a Picasso of Portuguese letters, Pessoa explored one literary style after another, often as a local cultural pioneer, sometimes as a quirky revivalist. He began conservatively enough, writing English poetry influenced by his Durban high-school readings of Milton, Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Browning. In 1908 or 1909 he also began writing Portuguese poetry and prose, largely according to the precepts of Symbolism, whose “post” or “neo” incarnations were to hold sway in Portugal into the 1910s and beyond, after it had already lost steam in France and elsewhere. Though it was a passing phase in Pessoa, the high-charged poetic prose of his *The Mariner* ranks with the best Symbolist work produced in Portugal and Europe in general. In 1914, a year after that play was written, Pessoa presented an aesthetic derivative of Symbolism known as *Paulismo*, which took its name from a poem whose first word was bogs (*paul* means bog) and which was loaded with the “twilight impressions” announced in the general title given to this and a companion poem, the first ones published by the adult Pessoa. The “bogging” of melancholy metaphors to express inward anguish found a great admirer in Mário de Sá-Carneiro (1890-1915), whose compressed, exquisite poetic oeuvre was much influenced by this style, but Pessoa dropped it in favor of other inventions: an equally ephemeral Intersectionism of Cubist inspiration, the more enduring Sensationism of Campos, the neoclassical style of Reis, and the tautological antipoetry of Caeiro (also categorizable as a Sensationist). It was Pessoa and his friends, including Sá-Carneiro and Almada Negreiros, who founded *Orpheu*, an avant-garde magazine far more important than its summary existence—two issues published in 1915—would suggest, for it was the vehicle that brought Modernism to Portuguese literature. Pessoa was the creative and intellectual motor force behind this and other iconoclastic initiatives in Portugal during the teens. Abreast of the most recent artistic developments in France, England, Spain, and Italy, he was the one who heralded Futurism via the bumptious naval engineer, Álvaro de Campos. He was also probably the first writer to effectively assimilate the genius of America’s Walt Whitman into European literature, relying again on the agency of Campos, whose poetry incorporated (and, for some people’s money, improved on) the Whitmanian style, which also influenced Alberto Caeiro. The work of both heteronyms abandoned rhyme and fixed meters, a revolutionary move for Portuguese poetry.

Unlike with Picasso, all this inventing, innovating, reviving, and reformulating happened more or less synchronically, with the various styles and

doxies overlapping each other in a time span of less than ten years. Endowed with an uncommon capacity for absorption, digestion, and organic adaptation, Pessoa hedonistically tried out all that was going in the aesthetical marketplace, creating his own house blends and reworking old recipes. Some of the isms such as *Paulismo* and Intersectionism he quickly cooked up and quickly discarded, while the rest became more or less important parts of his artistic repertoire, in which the rhetorical and the colloquial, the solemn and the humorous, the patriotic and the seditious, the absurd and the inexorably rational, the highbrow and the lowbrow could all exist together democratically, even if Pessoa was emphatically aristocratic in his sociopolitical views and in how he lived. With regard to how others lived, he was by nature and by scruple indifferent. His ballyhooing of Inter-sectionist and Sensationist doctrines circa 1915 was just another game; he was not concerned to convert anyone to his aesthetic standpoint.

Beyond God and beyond even the heroic stance against God, Pessoa did not even believe in art for art's sake. Art was merely for his sake, without fanfare or higher purposes. It was a means of survival, a pastime, his crochet, his solitaire. In Pessoa, the almighty I of Romantic subjectivism was reduced to "the place/ Where things are thought or felt" (from Reis's last poem), a tiny hub of consciousness whose confused mass of piecemeal percepts constituted—through memory and projection—an inflated pseudo-I, ungraspable and without substance. Pessoa, instead of trying to maintain the illusion, celebrated the fragmentation of his own self and the shattering of the world he could only smatteringly perceive. This attitude and all that was concomitant to it—the relativizing of all truths and all standards; the recognition that no definitive statements are possible; interest in, yet skepticism toward, the "new"; a neo-Baroque taste for the "nonessential" (nothing is essential); and an awareness of the archaeological discontinuity of knowledge—all of this, which certain deconstructionists now present as the latest contributions to human thought, was not merely thought but actually lived out by Fernando Pessoa.

When we read lines from *The Book of Disquiet* such as "I'm the gap between what I am and am not, between what I dream and what life has made me" (p. 180), we are not struck by the novelty of the ideas underlying the statements but by their absolute sincerity, or insincerity, by the complete union of statement and idea, by a sensation that feeling and thinking are one and the same activity in this writer, who elsewhere in the same *Book* aspires "to think with the emotions and feel with the mind" (p. 119).

Nor are we often struck by novelty in the poems, whose accessibility may

actually put off readers fond of linguistic acrobatics or high jinks. Yet there is something compelling in the Reis stanza that reads:

*Reality is always  
More or less  
Than what we want.  
Only we are always  
Equal to ourselves.*

Or in the observation, taken from an orthonymic poem, that “All/The world is a great open book/ That smiles at me in an unknown tongue.” Or in this metaphor, also from a poem signed by the author’s own name: “I’m the orphan of a dream/ Stranded by the outgoing tide.” There is a precise dead-honestness of expression in these lines, and it is backed by the blood guarantee of Pessoa’s self-sacrifice. But the metaphor is misplaced; there was no blood in this transfusion. The opposite of Faust, this troubled Portuguese soul traded in real life for the spiritual world of his writing. Perhaps most writers do this to some extent, but who has annulled himself like Pessoa? Not Joyce. Not Pound. Not even Franz Kafka. We can see Joyce as the brilliant conductor of his daringly dissonant narratives. We can see Pound hyper-actively promoting literary, political, and personal causes. We can see Kafka suffering—as it were in his own flesh—the agony of his negative metamorphoses. With Pessoa all we can visualize is what a handful of surviving photos show: a materialized nondescriptness endowed with a mustache. Pessoa was no language master à la Joyce or Pound. He wrote careful, elegant Portuguese, inventing new locutions and recasting worn-out clichés, but his project was not to deform and reform words and syntax. His project was the universe, with himself as the raw material. He was the object clay, endlessly molded, twisted, divided, and reworked by his writing. And in this autometamorphosis there was no torment or suffering à la Kafka. As if following the recommendation of a Reis poem to “Leave pain on the altar/ As an offering to the gods,” Pessoa stoically endured nonsuffering.

“If at least I could be positively crazy!” cried Álvaro de Campos in a poem from 1934, explaining his frustration in the next stanza:

*An inmate in an insane asylum is at least someone.  
I’m an inmate in an asylum without an asylum.  
I’m consciously crazy,  
I’m a lucid lunatic.*

Not even in his heteronyms could Pessoa have the consolation of brooding, weeping, or going mad. What in other people would be suffering, in Pessoa was subtilized into a colorless, flavorless angst of the intellect, a chronic “bad taste in the mouth of my soul,” according to a Campos poem written in July 1935, five months before the poet and his noisy universe of disquiet voices came to a sudden but unscreaching halt.

In the Pessoaan system of fictionally whirling stars, Alberto Caeiro was the one interlude of serenity, because he lived life, as it were, unconsciously, accepting objective reality at face value. The way of Caeiro was clearly not suitable for his creator, who *loved* the game of consciousness. Redirecting once more our telescope, a move that the dialectic of Nothing = Everything regularly impresses on us, we should remember that Pessoa, whose life in the real world was staid, probably felt bored by objective reality and his immediate quotidian experience. To have inner calm on top of so much outward peace might well have been an abhorrent prospect. Perhaps that is why Pessoa invented heteronyms: to stir up his life, to feel literary if not real anguish, to pretend with all this hubbub of indifferent passions, true lies, and conflicting artificialities that the world—his world or any world—mattered.

The drama of Pessoa was that there was no drama, except for the literary kind. “Real life” hardly existed for this fragmented soul, or it meant little to him. After returning from South Africa to his native Lisbon at age seventeen, he never again left Portugal and almost never even left the capital city. He traveled immensely, but it was all in his writings and his imagination. The realization of a dream will always be something less than the dream, and so the secret of successful living—according to Pessoa—is to act as little as possible, taking refuge from the world in the imagination, where everything is perfect and nothing disappoints.

Pessoa did not exactly follow his own recommendation, for he did more than dream; he wrote, and with furious dedication. He was loath, on the other hand, to realize *completely* his literary projects. He had, as has been mentioned, dozens and dozens of grandiose plans for organizing and publishing his literary output, but he never made any sustained effort to bring them off. Some of his greatest works, such as his anti-Faustian *Faust* or *The Book of Disquiet*, were left in virtual chaos as hundreds of shorter and longer passages randomly scattered across the pages and years of his adult writing life. And some of his most

inspired lines occur in fragmentary poems whose pieces would no doubt yield unprecedented beauties if there were only a way to make them all fit together.

Pessoa's work stands before us today like variously sized building blocks—some rough, others exquisitely fashioned—of an impossible but marvelous monument. A master nonbuilder, Pessoa seems to have understood that by giving only partial form to the imagined work, we with our imaginations would be able to complete it. Thus he succeeded in realizing his dream in all its fullness, preserving it far beyond his own life and private pleasure. Of course, that may not have been his intention. Perhaps intention has no relevance here. Pessoa described the symptoms and development of his writing behavior, but he never explained its origin. One can find psychological motives for every behavior, and books have been written about Pessoa's, and yet the mystery remains: why did he not do something else? Why did he write? Perhaps, as he stated in letters to his aunt and his one sweetheart, he was responsible to higher powers.

I have compared Pessoa's oeuvre to a set of building blocks belonging to an unfinished monument. I could have also compared it to a set of ruins—like the temple complex of one or another acropolis, where only the gods' ghosts still wend through the columns and Apollo's lyre barely twangs in the breeze. Thinking of Pessoa's works in this way, as ruins, what I hear is not a lyre but a seemingly incongruous, wistful progression of piano chords. From one of Chopin's Preludes, Opus 28. A music critic whose name I don't remember contended that these twenty-four brief compositions were misnamed, since they sound after all more like remnants than beginnings, like works that in some mysterious, more-than-real space—as on a heavenly Olympus above the earthly one—had been realized to the point of divine perfection, after which they had fallen to the ground and broken into pieces, most of which were lost irretrievably. From the few exceedingly beautiful pieces that remain—that the higher powers have allowed to remain—we can discern something of that original glory for which we feel, as humans, a natural nostalgia.

Lisbon  
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Richard Zenith

## ALBERTO CAEIRO

### THE UNWITTING MASTER

“The life of Caeiro cannot be told for there is nothing in it to tell.” So said Ricardo Reis in the preface he drafted for his fellow heteronym’s Complete Poems. But Fernando Pessoa informs us that Alberto Caeiro da Silva was born in Lisbon in 1889, lived most of his brief life with an old aunt in the country, and returned to his native city just a few months before his death, from tuberculosis, in 1915. He kept writing poems, however, until at least 1930, apparently by dictating them through Pessoa.

Álvaro de Campos left us a physical description of Caeiro — medium tall, blue eyes, fair hair, and fair skin, with a strikingly white forehead —and reported that he once loved a young lady who did not return his love. Ricardo Reis, defending his view that there was nothing in Caeiro’s life worth telling, declared that this “fruitless and absurd” passion was “not an event but, so to speak, a forgetting.” A forgetting of what? Perhaps his vocation as the “only poet of Nature.”

Although he had no profession, Caeiro fancied himself a shepherd, with thoughts instead of sheep for his flock. His thoughts, he hastened to add in one of his poems, were sensations; his way of thinking was through his eyes and ears, hands and feet, nose and mouth. Caeiro was an unlettered man who eschewed analytical thought.

“Nature is parts without a whole.” This, according to Reis, was the most telling verse written by Caeiro, who appreciated things for what they were, showing no concern to find any unifying principle. Various described as a “pure mystic,” a “reconstructor of paganism,” a “Saint Francis of Assisi without faith,” and an “Antichrist,” Caeiro did not personally have anything against Christianity, it simply happened that his nature was antithetical to it. He felt that if God wanted us to believe in him, he would appear and say, “Look, here I am.” It is possible to speculate that God is behind or in, or in some way *is*, the flowers and trees and sun and moon, but Caeiro had no interest in speculating.

He sees things with the eyes only, not with the mind. He does not let any thoughts arise when he looks at a flower. Far from seeing sermons in

stones, he never even lets himself conceive a stone as beginning a sermon. The only sermon a stone contains for him is that it exists. The only thing a stone tells him is that it has nothing at all to tell him. A state of mind may be conceived resembling this. *But it cannot be conceived in a poet.* This way of looking at a stone may be described as the totally unpoetic way of looking at it. The stupendous fact about Caeiro is that out of this sentiment, or rather, absence of sentiment, he makes poetry.

From a text Pessoa wrote in English

Simple and unassuming as this poet was, the other two heteronyms considered him their Master. Ricardo Reis, in fact, never wrote a single verse until he met Caeiro, at age twenty-five. Reis, the Epicurean classicist who believed in a countless host of gods and divine powers, recognized in Caeiro not a fellow pagan but paganism itself, an innate and absolute awareness of natural forces, such that any affirmation of belief would have been superfluous, a distraction. Álvaro de Campos, on the other hand, tells us that, yes, he had written a handful of more traditional poems before meeting Caeiro in 1914, but it was only after this life-changing encounter that he began to produce his Sensationist odes in the free-verse style that was already being used by the country-bred poet. Although Campos, the worldly naval engineer, at one point chides Caeiro (along with Reis and Pessoa-himself) for *seeing* without actually *touching* reality, he acknowledged him as the Pure Sensationist and therefore as his Master. One day, when attempting to talk metaphysics with Alberto, a frustrated Álvaro finally said, “Just tell me one thing. What are you to yourself?” To which the quasi shepherd answered, “I’m one of my sensations.”

Caeiro was even the Master of his inventor, Fernando Pessoa. They met for the first time on March 8, 1914, and Pessoa, completely shaken up on hearing Caeiro read poems from his *The Keeper of Sheep*, immediately went home to write verses of a kind he never could have produced otherwise. For Fernando, afflicted by an “overly keen sensibility” coupled with an “overly keen mind,” the direct and ingenuous poetry of Caeiro acted like a “vaccine against the stupidity of the intelligent.” It is Álvaro de Campos who recounts the meeting of these two men and the consequences it had for the creator of heteronyms, but he takes care to remind us that “Fernando Pessoa, strictly speaking, doesn’t exist.”

*from*  
**THE KEEPER OF SHEEP**

# 1

I've never kept sheep,  
But it's as if I did.  
My soul is like a shepherd.  
It knows the wind and sun,  
And walks hand in hand with the Seasons  
Looking at what passes.  
All the peace of Nature without people  
Sits down at my side.  
But I get sad like a sunset  
In our imagination  
When the cold drifts over the plain  
And we feel the night come in  
Like a butterfly through the window.

Yet my sadness is a comfort  
For it is natural and right  
And is what should fill the soul  
Whenever it thinks it exists  
And doesn't notice the hands picking flowers.

Like a sound of sheep bells  
Beyond the curve in the road  
My thoughts are content.  
My only regret is that I know they're content,  
Since if I did not know it  
They would be content and happy  
Instead of sadly content.

Thinking is a discomfort, like walking in the rain  
When the wind kicks up and it seems to rain harder.

I have no ambitions and no desires.  
To be a poet is not my ambition,  
It's my way of being alone.  
And if sometimes, in my imagination,



I desire to be a small lamb  
(Or to be the whole flock  
So as to be scattered across the hillside  
As many happy things at the same time),  
It's only because I feel what I write when the sun sets  
Or when a cloud passes its hand over the light  
And a silence sweeps through the grass.

When I sit down to write verses  
Or I walk along roads and pathways  
Jotting verses on a piece of paper in my mind,  
I feel a staff in my hand  
And see my own profile  
On top of a low hill  
Looking after my flock and seeing my ideas,  
Or looking after my ideas and seeing my flock,  
And smiling vaguely, like one who doesn't grasp what was said  
But pretends he did.

I salute all who may read me,  
Tipping my wide-brimmed hat  
As soon as the coach tops the hill  
And they see me at my door.  
I salute them and wish them sunshine,  
Or rain, if rain is needed,  
And a favorite chair where they sit  
At home, reading my poems  
Next to an open window.

And as they read my poems, I hope  
They think I'm something natural —  
That old tree, for instance,  
In whose shade when they were children  
They sat down with a thud, tired of playing,  
And wiped the sweat from their hot foreheads  
With the sleeve of their striped smocks.

8 MARCH 1914

2

My gaze is clear like a sunflower.  
It is my custom to walk the roads  
Looking right and left  
And sometimes looking behind me,  
And what I see at each moment  
Is what I never saw before,  
And I'm very good at noticing things.  
I'm capable of having that sheer wonder  
That a newborn child would have  
If he realized he'd just been born.  
I always feel that I've just been born  
Into an endlessly new world.

I believe in the world as in a daisy,  
Because I see it. But I don't think about it,  
Because to think is to not understand.  
The world wasn't made for us to think about it  
(To think is to have eyes that aren't well)  
But to look at it and to be in agreement.

I have no philosophy, I have senses.  
If I speak of Nature it's not because I know what it is  
But because I love it, and for that very reason,  
Because those who love never know what they love  
Or why they love, or what love is.

To love is eternal innocence,  
And the only innocence is not to think.

8 MARCH 1914

5

To not think of anything is metaphysics enough.

What do I think of the world?  
Who knows what I think of it!  
If I weren't well then I'd think about it.

What's my idea about matter?  
What's my opinion about causes and effects?  
What are my thoughts on God and the soul  
And the creation of the world?  
I don't know. To think about such things would be to shut my eyes  
And not think. It would be to close the curtains  
Of my window (which, however, has no curtains).

The mystery of things? What mystery?  
The only mystery is that some people think about mystery.  
If you're in the sun and close your eyes,  
You begin not to know what the sun is,  
And you think about various warm things.  
But open your eyes and you see the sun,  
And you can no longer think about anything,  
Because the light of the sun is truer than the thoughts  
Of all philosophers and all poets.  
The light of the sun doesn't know what it does,  
And so it cannot err and is common and good.

Metaphysics? What metaphysics do those trees have?  
Only that of being green and lush and of having branches  
Which bear fruit in their season, and we think nothing of it.  
We hardly even notice them.  
But what better metaphysics than theirs,  
Which consists in not knowing why they live  
And in not knowing that they don't know?

"The inner makeup of things . . ."  
"The inner meaning of the Universe . . ."  
All of this is unreal and means absolutely nothing.  
It's incredible that anyone can think about such things.  
It's like thinking about reasons and objectives

When morning is breaking, and on the trunks of the trees  
A faint glimmer of gold is dissolving the darkness.

To think about the inner meaning of things  
Is superfluous, like thinking about health  
Or carrying a glass to a spring.  
The only inner meaning of things  
Is that they have no inner meaning at all.

I don't believe in God because I've never seen him.  
If he wanted me to believe in him,  
Then surely he'd come and speak with me.  
He would enter by my door  
Saying, "Here I am!"

(This may sound ridiculous to those who, Because they aren't used to  
looking at things, Can't understand a man who speaks of them In the  
way that looking at things teaches.)

But if God is the flowers and trees  
And hills and sun and moon,  
Then I believe in him,  
I believe in him at every moment,  
And my life is all a prayer and a mass  
And a communion by way of my eyes and ears.

But if God is the flowers and trees  
And hills and sun and moon,  
Then why should I call him God?  
I'll call him flowers and trees and hills and sun and moon.  
Because if to my eyes he made himself  
Sun and moon and flowers and trees and hills,  
If he appears to me as trees and hills  
And moon and sun and flowers,  
Then he wants me to know him  
As trees and hills and flowers and moon and sun.

And so I obey him.  
(Do I know more about God than God knows about himself?)  
I obey him by living spontaneously As a man who opens his eyes and  
sees,  
And I call him moon and sun and flowers and trees and hills,  
And I love him without thinking of him,  
And I think him by seeing and hearing,  
And I am with him at every moment.

## 9

I'm a keeper of sheep.  
The sheep are my thoughts  
And each thought a sensation.  
I think with my eyes and my ears  
And with my hands and feet  
And with my nose and mouth.

To think a flower is to see and smell it,  
And to eat a fruit is to know its meaning.

That is why on a hot day  
When I enjoy it so much I feel sad,  
And I lie down in the grass  
And close my warm eyes,  
Then I feel my whole body lying down in reality,  
I know the truth, and I'm happy.

## 10

“Hello, keeper of sheep  
There on the side of the road.  
What does the blowing wind say to you?”

*“That it's wind and that it blows,  
And that it has blown before,*

*And that it will blow hereafter.  
And what does it say to you?"*

"Much more than that.  
It speaks to me of many other things:  
Of memories and nostalgias,  
And of things that never were."

*"You've never heard the wind blow.  
The wind only speaks of the wind.  
What you heard was a lie,  
And the lie is in you."*

I'd rather be the dust of the road  
And trampled on by the feet of the poor . . .

## 18

I'd rather be the rivers that flow  
And have washerwomen along my shore . . .

I'd rather be the poplars next to the river  
With only sky above and the water below . . .

I'd rather be the miller's donkey  
And have him beat me and care for me . . .

Rather this than to go through life  
Always looking back and feeling regret . . .

## 20

The Tagus is more beautiful than the river that flows through my  
village,  
But the Tagus is not more beautiful than the river that flows through

my village

Because the Tagus is not the river that flows through my village.

The Tagus has enormous ships,  
And for those who see in everything that which isn't there  
Its waters are still sailed  
By the memory of the carracks.

The Tagus descends from Spain  
And crosses Portugal to pour into the sea.  
Everyone knows this.  
But few know what the river of my village is called  
And where it goes to  
And where it comes from.  
And so, because it belongs to fewer people,  
The river of my village is freer and larger.

The Tagus leads to the world.  
Beyond the Tagus there is America  
And the fortune of those who find it.  
No one ever thought about what's beyond  
The river of my village.

The river of my village doesn't make one think of anything.  
Whoever is next to it is simply next to it.

## 23

My gaze, blue like the sky,  
Is calm like water in the sunlight.  
It is blue and calm  
Because it does not question or marvel too much.

If I questioned and marveled,  
New flowers would not sprout in the meadows,  
Nor would anything change in the sun to make it more beautiful.

(Even if new flowers sprouted in the meadow  
And the sun changed to become more beautiful,  
I would feel less flowers in the meadow  
And find the sun less beautiful.  
Because everything is what it is, which is how it should be,  
And I accept it, and don't even give thanks,  
Since that might suggest I think about it.)

24

What we see of things are the things.  
Why would we see one thing when another thing is there?  
Why would seeing and hearing be to delude ourselves  
When seeing and hearing are seeing and hearing?

What matters is to know how to see,  
To know how to see without thinking,  
To know how to see when seeing  
And not think when seeing  
Nor see when thinking.

But this (if only we didn't have a dressed-up heart!) —  
This requires deep study,  
Lessons in unlearning,  
And a retreat into the freedom of that convent  
Where the stars—say poets—are the eternal nuns  
And the flowers the contrite believers of just one day,  
But where after all the stars are just stars  
And the flowers just flowers,  
Which is why we call them stars and flowers.

13 MARCH 1914

32

Yesterday afternoon a man from the cities  
Spoke at the door of the inn.



He spoke to me as well.

He spoke of justice and the struggle for justice,  
Of the workers who suffer,  
Of their unending drudgery, of those who hunger,  
And of the rich who only turn their backs.

And looking at me, he saw tears in my eyes  
And smiled with satisfaction, convinced that I felt  
The hatred he felt and the compassion  
He said he felt.

(But I was scarcely listening to him.  
What do I care about people  
And what they suffer or suppose they suffer?  
Let them be like me, and they won't suffer.  
All of the world's trouble comes from us fretting over one another,  
Whether it be to do good or to do evil.  
Our soul and the sky and the earth are all we need.  
To want more is to lose this, and to be unhappy.)

What I was thinking about  
While the friend of the people spoke  
(And this moved me to tears)  
Was how the distant tinkling of sheep bells  
As the day began to close  
*Did not seem* like the bells of a tiny chapel  
Calling to mass the flowers and streams  
And simple souls like my own.

(I thank God I'm not good  
But have the natural egoism of flowers  
And rivers that follow their path  
Unwittingly preoccupied  
With only their flowering and their flowing.  
That is the only mission in the world:  
To exist clearly,

And to do so without thinking about it.)

And the man fell silent, looking at the sunset.  
But what good is a sunset to one who hates and loves?

### 37

Like a large blot of smudged fire  
The setting sun lingers in the clouds that remain.  
I hear a faint whistle in the distance of the still evening.  
It must be a distant train.

In this moment I feel a vague nostalgia  
Along with a vague and placid desire  
That comes and goes.

So too, sometimes, on the surface of streams,  
There are bubbles of water  
That appear and then pop.  
And they have no meaning  
But to be bubbles of water  
That appear and then pop.

### 38

Blessed be the same sun of other lands  
For making all men my brothers  
Since all men, at some moment in the day, look at it as I do.  
And in that pure, limpid,  
And sensitive moment  
They partially return  
With a sigh they hardly feel  
To the true and primitive Man  
Who saw the sun come up and did not yet worship it.  
For that is what's natural —more natural  
Than worshipping the sun, then God,

And then everything else that doesn't exist.

**39**

The mystery of things—where is it?  
Why doesn't it come out  
To show us at least that it's mystery?  
What do the river and the tree know about it?  
And what do I, who am no more than they, know about it?

Whenever I look at things and think about what people think of them,  
I laugh like a brook cleanly splashing against a rock.  
For the only hidden meaning of things  
Is that they have no hidden meaning.  
It's the strangest thing of all,  
Stranger than all poets' dreams  
And all philosophers' thoughts,  
That things are really what they seem to be  
And there's nothing to understand.

Yes, this is what my senses learned on their own:  
Things have no meaning; they exist.  
Things are the only hidden meaning of things.

**40**

I see a butterfly go by  
And for the first time in the universe I notice  
That butterflies do not have color or movement,  
Even as flowers do not have scent or color.  
Color is what has color in the butterfly's wings,  
Movement is what moves in the butterfly's movement,  
Scent is what has scent in the flower's scent.  
The butterfly is just a butterfly  
And the flower just a flower.

7 MAY 1914

42

The coach came down the road, and went on,  
And the road was no better for it, nor even any worse.  
So with human action in the world at large.  
We take nothing and add nothing; we pass and forget;  
And the sun is on time every day.

7 MAY 1914

47

On an incredibly clear day,  
The kind when you wish you'd done lots of work  
So that you wouldn't have to work that day,  
I saw—as if spotting a road through the trees —  
What may well be the Great Secret,  
That Great Mystery the false poets speak of.

I saw that there is no Nature,  
That Nature doesn't exist,  
That there are hills, valleys and plains,  
That there are trees, flowers and grass,  
That there are rivers and stones,  
But that there is no whole to which all this belongs,  
That a true and real ensemble  
Is a disease of our own ideas.

Nature is parts without a whole.  
This is perhaps the mystery they speak of.

This is what, without thinking or pausing,  
I realized must be the truth  
That everyone tries to find but doesn't find  
And that I alone found, because I didn't try to find it.

*from*

## **THE SHEPHERD IN LOVE**

### **BEFORE I HAD YOU**

Before I had you  
I loved Nature as a calm monk loves Christ.  
Now I love Nature  
As a calm monk loves the Virgin Mary,  
Religiously (in my manner), like before,  
But in a more heartfelt and intimate way.  
I see the rivers better when I walk with you  
Through the fields to the rivers' banks.  
When I sit next to you and watch the clouds  
I see them much more clearly.  
You haven't taken Nature from me,  
You haven't changed Nature.  
You've brought Nature closer.  
Because you exist I see it better, though the same as before.  
Because you love me I love it in the same way, but more.  
Because you chose me to have you and love you  
My eyes gaze at it  
More than at anything.

I don't regret what I was before,  
For I am still what I was.  
I only regret not having loved you before.

6 JULY 1914

### **PERHAPS THOSE WHO ARE GOOD AT SEEING ARE POOR AT FEELING**

Perhaps those who are good at seeing are poor at feeling  
And do not enchant because they don't know how to act.  
There are ways for doing all things,  
And love also has its way.  
Those whose way of seeing a field is by seeing the grass

Cannot have the blindness that makes a man stir feelings.  
I loved, and was not loved, which I only saw in the end,  
For one is not loved as one is born but as may happen.  
She still has beautiful lips and hair, like before.  
And I am still alone in the field, like before.  
I think this and my head lifts up  
As if it had been bent down,  
And the divine sun dries the small tears I can't help but have.  
How vast the field is and how tiny love!  
I look, and I forget, as the world buries and trees lose their leaves.

Because I am feeling, I cannot speak.  
I listen to my voice as if it belonged to another.  
And my voice speaks of her as if this other were speaking.  
Her hair is yellow-blond like wheat in bright sunlight,  
And when she speaks, her mouth utters things not told by words.  
She smiles, and her teeth gleam like the river's stones.

18 NOVEMBER 1929

## **THE SHEPHERD IN LOVE LOST HIS STAFF**

The shepherd in love lost his staff,  
And the sheep scattered over the slope.  
And so lost was he in thought that he didn't even play his flute.  
No one came or went. He never found his staff.  
Other men, cursing him, rounded up the sheep.  
He had not, after all, been loved.  
When he stood up from the slope and the false truth, he saw  
everything:  
The wide valleys full of the same shades of green as always,  
The tall mountains in the distance, more real than any feeling,  
All of reality, with the sky and air and fields that exist,  
And he felt the air reopen, with pain, a freedom in his chest.

10 JULY 1930

*from*

## UNCOLLECTED POEMS

### TO SEE THE FIELDS AND THE RIVER

To see the fields and the river  
It isn't enough to open the window.  
To see the trees and the flowers  
It isn't enough not to be blind.  
It is also necessary to have no philosophy.  
With philosophy there are no trees, just ideas.  
There is only each one of us, like a cave.  
There is only a shut window, and the whole world outside,  
And a dream of what could be seen if the window were opened,  
Which is never what is seen when the window is opened.

### WHEN SPRING RETURNS

When Spring returns  
Perhaps I will no longer be in the world.  
Today I wish I could think of Spring as a person  
So that I could imagine her crying for me  
When she sees that she's lost her only friend.  
But Spring isn't even a thing:  
It's a manner of speaking.  
Not even the flowers or green leaves return.  
There are new flowers, new green leaves.  
There are new balmy days.  
Nothing returns, nothing repeats, because everything is real.

7 NOVEMBER 1915

### IF I DIE YOUNG

If I die young,  
Without having been able to publish a book,  
Without having seen how my verses look in print,  
I ask those who would protest on my account

That they not protest.  
If so it will have happened, then so it should be.

Even if my verses are never published,  
They will have their beauty, if they're beautiful.  
But they cannot be beautiful and remain unpublished,  
Because roots may be hidden in the ground  
But their flowers flower in the open air for all to see.  
It must be so. Nothing can prevent it.

If I die very young, take note:  
I was never more than a child who played.  
I was pagan like the sun and the water,  
With a universal religion that only humans lack.  
I was happy because I didn't ask for anything,  
I didn't try to find anything,  
And I didn't think there was any explanation beyond  
The word explanation meaning nothing at all.

I wanted only to be in the sun or in the rain —  
In the sun when there was sun  
And in the rain when it was raining  
(And never in what was not),  
To feel warmth and cold and wind,  
And to go no further.

Once I loved and thought I'd be loved back,  
But I wasn't loved.  
I wasn't loved for one overwhelming reason:  
It wasn't meant to be.

I took consolation in the sun and the rain,  
Sitting once more at the door of my house.  
The fields, after all, are not as green for those who are loved  
As for those who are not.  
To feel is to be distracted.

7 NOVEMBER 1915



## IT IS NIGHT. IT'S VERY DARK. IN A HOUSE FAR AWAY

It is night. It's very dark. In a house far away  
A light is shining in the window.  
I see it and feel human from head to toe.  
Funny how the entire life of the man who lives there, whoever he is,  
Attracts me with only that light seen from afar.  
No doubt his life is real and he has a face, gestures, a family and  
profession,  
But right now all that matters to me is the light in his window.  
Although the light is only there because he turned it on,  
For me it is immediate reality.  
I never go beyond immediate reality.  
There is nothing beyond immediate reality.  
If I, from where I am, see only that light,  
Then in relation to where I am there is only that light.  
The man and his family are real on the other side of the window,  
But I am on this side, far away.  
The light went out.  
What's it to me that the man continues to exist?  
He's just the man who continues to exist.

8 NOVEMBER 1915

## ON THIS WHITELY CLÓUDY DAY I GET SO SAD IT ALMOST SCARES ME

On this whitely cloudy day I get so sad it almost scares me,  
And I start meditating on make-believe problems . . .

If man were, as he should be,  
Not a sick animal but the most perfect of animals,  
Directly and not indirectly animal,  
Then he would have a different, true way of finding meaning in things.  
He would have developed a *sense* of the "whole" —  
A sense, like seeing and hearing, of the "sum" of things  
And not, as we have, a *concept* of the "whole,"

And not, as we have, an *idea* of the “sum” of things.  
Then we would have no notion of “whole” or of “sum,”  
Since the *meaning* of “sum” or of “whole” wouldn’t be of a “sum” or  
of a “whole”  
But of Nature as it really is, perhaps neither a whole nor parts.

The only mystery of the Universe is what’s added, not what’s missing.  
We understand things to excess—that’s the source of our error and  
doubt.  
What exists transcends below what we suppose exists.  
Reality is just real, not something thought.

The Universe is not an idea of mine;  
My idea of the Universe is an idea of mine.  
Night doesn’t fall before my eyes;  
My idea of night falls before my eyes.  
Independent of my thinking and of there being any thoughts  
The night concretely falls,  
And the stars’ shimmering exists like a weighable thing.  
Just as words fail us when we try to express a thought,  
So thoughts fail us when we try to express reality,  
For just as the essence of thought is not in speaking but in thinking,  
So the essence of reality is not in thinking but in existing.  
Thus everything that exists simply exists.  
The rest is a kind of slumber we have,  
A feebleness that’s with us from the childhood of our sickness.

The mirror reflects correctly; it doesn’t err because it doesn’t think.  
To think is essentially to err.  
To err is essentially to be blind and deaf.

These truths are imperfect because they were spoken,  
And before they were spoken, thought,  
But the main and true point is that they negate themselves  
In the negation opposed to affirming anything.  
Being is the only valid affirmation,  
And only what’s affirmative doesn’t need me.

1 OCTOBER 1917

## **THE CHILD WHO THINKS ABOUT FAIRIES AND BELIEVES IN THEM**

The child who thinks about fairies and believes in them  
Acts like a sick god, but like a god nonetheless.  
For although affirming the existence of what doesn't exist,  
He knows how it is that things exist, which is by existing,  
He knows that existence exists and cannot be explained,  
He knows there's no reason for anything to exist,  
And he knows that to exist is to occupy a point.  
What he doesn't know is that thought is not a point.

1 OCTOBER 1917

## **SLOWLY THE FIELD UNROLLS AND SHINES GOLDEN**

Slowly the field unrolls and shines golden.  
The morning strays over the dips in the plain.  
I'm extraneous to the scene I observe: I observe it,  
It's outside me. No feeling links me to it.  
This is the feeling that links me to the new morning.

29 MAY 1918

## **YESTERDAY THE PREACHER OF TRUTHS (HIS TRUTHS)**

Yesterday the preacher of truths (his truths)  
Spoke to me again.  
He spoke of the suffering of the working classes  
(And not of the suffering of people, who are after all the ones who suffer).  
He spoke of the injustice of some men being rich  
While others are hungry—he didn't say whether hungry for food  
Or merely for someone else's dessert.

He spoke of everything that could possibly rankle him.

How happy the man must be who can contemplate the unhappiness of others!

How stupid if he doesn't realize that the unhappiness of others is theirs  
And cannot be cured from the outside,  
Because suffering isn't the fact of a man having no ink  
Or a crate lacking metal hoops!

The existence of injustice is like the existence of death.  
I would never make a move to fight  
Against what is called the injustice of the world.  
If I made a thousand such moves,  
They would be only a thousand moves.  
I accept injustice as I accept a stone not being round  
And a cork tree not having sprung up as an oak or pine.

I cut the orange in two, and the two parts couldn't be equal.  
To which part was I unjust—I, who am going to eat both?

## **THEY SPOKE TO ME OF PEOPLE, AND OF HUMANITY**

They spoke to me of people, and of humanity.  
But I've never seen people, or humanity.  
I've seen various people, astonishingly dissimilar,  
Each separated from the next by an unpeopled space.

## **I LIE DOWN IN THE GRASS**

I lie down in the grass  
And forget all I was taught.  
What I was taught never made me any warmer or cooler.  
What I was told exists never changed the shape of a thing.  
What I was made to see never touched my eyes.  
What was pointed out to me was never there: only what was there was there.

## **DIRTY UNKNOWN CHILD PLAYING OUTSIDE MY DOOR**

Dirty unknown child playing outside my door,  
I don't ask you if you bring me a message from symbols.  
You amuse me because I've never seen you before,  
And if you could be clean you'd of course be another child,  
One who wouldn't even come here.  
Play in the dirt, play!  
I appreciate your presence with just my eyes.  
To see a thing always for the first time is better than to know it,  
Because to know is like never having seen for the first time,  
And to never have seen for the first time is to have only heard.

This child is dirty in a way that's different from other dirty children.  
Go on, play! Picking up a stone that fits in your hand,  
You know it fits in your hand.  
What philosophy can arrive at a greater certainty?  
None. And none can come play outside my door.

12 APRIL 1919

## **YOU WHO ARE A MYSTIC SEE A MEANING IN ALL THINGS**

You who are a mystic see a meaning in all things.  
For you everything has a veiled significance.  
There is something hidden in each thing you see.  
What you see you always see to see something else.

I, who have eyes that are only for seeing,  
See an absence of meaning in all things.  
And seeing this, I love myself, since to be a thing is to mean nothing.  
To be a thing is to be subject to no interpretation.

12 APRIL 1919

## **AH! THEY WANT A LIGHT THAT'S BETTER THAN THE SUN'S**

Ah! They want a light that's better than the sun's!  
They want meadows that are greener than these!  
They want flowers more beautiful than these which I see!  
For me this sun, these meadows and these flowers are enough.  
But if they weren't enough,  
What I would want is a sun more sun than the sun,  
Meadows more meadows than these meadows,  
Flowers more flowers than these flowers—  
Everything more ideal than what it is, in the same way and same  
manner!  
That thing over there more there than it is!  
Yes, sometimes I weep for the perfect body that doesn't exist.  
But the perfect body is the body that's the most body of all,  
And the rest is the dreams of men,  
The myopia of those who see little,  
And the desire to sit felt by those who don't know how to stand.  
All of Christianity is a dream of chairs.

And since the soul is what doesn't appear,  
The perfect soul is the one that never appears:  
The soul that's made out of body,  
The absolute body of things,  
Existing—absolutely real—without shadows or errors,  
The exact and entire coincidence of a thing with itself.

12 APRIL 1919

## **THIS MORNING I WENT OUT VERY EARLY**

This morning I went out very early,  
Because I woke up even earlier  
And had nothing I wanted to do.

I didn't know which way to go,

But the wind blew hard toward one side,  
And I followed in the way it pushed me.

So has my life always been, and so I would like it always to be—  
I go where the wind takes me and don't need to think.

13 JUNE 1930

## **I CAN ALSO MAKE CONJECTURES**

*To Ricardo Reis*

I can also make conjectures.  
There is in each thing an animating essence.  
In plants it's a tiny nymph that exists on the outside.  
In animals it's a remote inner being.  
In man it's the soul that lives with him and is him.  
In the gods it has the same size  
And fills the same space as the body  
And is the same thing as the body.  
For this reason it is said that the gods never die.  
For this reason the gods do not have body and soul  
But just body, and they are perfect.  
The body is their soul,  
And they have consciousness in their divine flesh.

## **THIS MAY BE THE LAST DAY OF MY LIFE**

This may be the last day of my life.  
I lifted my right hand to wave at the sun,  
But I did not wave at it in farewell.  
I was glad I could still see it—that's all.

## RICARDO REIS THE SAD EPICUREAN

This most elusive of Pessoa's heteronyms was born in 1887, in Oporto, and went to the Americas when already in his thirties, but his exact whereabouts and livelihood were never very clearly established. It does not seem that Ricardo Reis, a trained physician, ever practiced his profession. He was reported to be a "Latin teacher in an important American high school," though in a letter written in 1935, Pessoa merely states that "he's been living in Brazil since 1919." Yet elsewhere among Pessoa's papers there is an address for a Dr. Ricardo Sequeira Reis in Peru.

It is fitting that Reis should be so hard to pin down, for he was not of this world. Álvaro de Campos celebrated the modern age—with its machines, bustle, and surfeit of sensations. Alberto Caeiro celebrated the natural world as it is, on the surface. But Ricardo Reis, the third in the trio of Pessoa's major heteronyms, celebrated the *spirit* of things. The atmosphere of his poetry is bucolic, but in the Greek manner, nature being appreciated as an ideal—for the spirit it embodies—rather than for its sensorial qualities.

Reis was educated by Jesuits, who no doubt taught him his Latin and perhaps fostered his religious attitude, but he was a pagan and fundamentally hostile toward Christianity. He recognized Christ as just one among many gods, all of whom were subject—like humans—to the indiscernible workings of an impersonal Fate. Far from being a means to an afterlife, the gods were a way for him to elevate this present life, spiritually and aesthetically, in answer to a primordial human need. Pessoa wrote in an English text that, whereas Caeiro only admits the external world, "Reis is less absolute; he bows down also to the primitive elements of our own nature, our primitive feelings being as real and natural to him as flowers and trees. He is therefore religious."

Ricardo's "brother" (or cousin?), Frederico Reis, summed up the neoclassical poet's philosophy in this way: "Avoiding pain wherever possible, man should seek tranquillity and calm above all else, abstaining from effort and useful activity." The best we can do, since we cannot change Fate, is to accept things as they are. The constant awareness of unrelenting Fate precluded Reis from ever being exuberant, as Campos sometimes was, or glad, as Caeiro almost always



was, but it served him as a refuge, and he frequently invoked the solace of “clear seeing” in his poetry. In verses dating from 1915 he wrote that the gods could take everything from him as long as they left him his “lucid and solemn consciousness/ Of beings and of things,” his “clear and useless vision of the Universe,” which “fears and suffers nothing.”

It was only after meeting Caeiro and hearing him read verses from *The Keeper of Sheep* that Reis came into his own and realized he was “organically” a poet. This discovery prompted Álvaro de Campos to make the following rather curious observation:

Some physiologists claim it is possible to change sex. I don't know if it's true, because I don't know if anything is “true.” But I do know that Ricardo Reis stopped being a woman and became a man, or stopped being a man and became a woman — as you like—on the day he met Caeiro.

Did Campos, with this bizarre affirmation, also mean to suggest that there was some kind of sexual discovery? Elsewhere he informs us that Reis, in an ode comparing his beloved to a flower, actually had a young man in mind, though this was only Campos's interpretation. Even if true, it may simply have been Reis's way of paying poetic homage to the Greeks, whom he so admired.

Frederico never delved into such particulars when speaking of Ricardo's “profoundly sad” poetry, which he described as “a lucid and disciplined attempt to obtain a measure of calm.” Criticizing the free-verse forms of his heteronymic peers, saying that they had “no other artistic purpose than to display their sensations,” Reis composed terse Horatian odes on themes reminiscent especially of the Augustan poet's second book of odes: the brevity of life, the vanity of wealth and struggle, the joy of simple pleasures, patience in time of trouble, and avoidance of extremes. Horace prided himself on introducing Greek genres, Greek meters, and Greek ambience into Latin poetry, and Ricardo Reis largely followed suit, maintaining strict blank-verse patterns and evoking the tone of Hellenistic epigrams in a conspicuously “classic” Portuguese. He did not often cite Greek people and places, but Lydia, Chloe, and Neaera, three of the Greek lovers whom Horace addresses, likewise appear in Reis's odes, though for him they were little more than ethereal companions (see Campos's theory, above). Reis was less concrete than Horace, never referring to the events of his time and the more prosaic details of daily life.

Of course, Reis himself was ethereal, almost without any time or life of his own to refer to. “I don't know, when I think or feel,/Who it is that thinks or

feels,” says the poet doctor in the last poem attributed to him, just two weeks before Pessoa’s death in November of 1935. And the verses continue:

*I am merely the place  
Where things are thought or felt.*

*I have more than just one soul.  
There are more I’s than I myself*

Here at last the fiction breaks down, the neoclassical veil becoming blatantly transparent, for never had Fernando Pessoa so clearly expressed the drama, the genius, and the trouble of his own uniquely multiple life.

### *from ODES*

## **OTHERS NARRATE WITH LYRES OR HARPS**

Others narrate with lyres or harps;  
I tell with my thought.  
For he finds nothing, who through music  
Finds only what he feels.  
Words weigh more which, carefully measured,  
Say that the world exists.

## **THE GODS GRANT NOTHING MORE THAN LIFE**

The gods grant nothing more than life,  
So let us reject whatever lifts us  
To unbreathable heights,  
Eternal but flowerless.  
Let our only science be to accept,  
And as long as the blood in our veins still pulses  
And love does not shrivel,  
Let us go on  
Like panes of glass: transparent to light,  
Pattered by the sad rain trickling down,  
Warmed by the sun,

And reflecting a little.

17 JULY 1914

## **DON'T CLAP YOUR HANDS BEFORE BEAUTY**

Don't clap your hands before beauty,  
Which isn't meant to be felt too much.  
Beauty doesn't pass.  
It's the shadow of the gods.

Statues represent the gods  
Because statues are calm and eternal:  
The Fates do not spin them  
A short black thread.

Jupiter thunders in accord with cold laws,  
And on certain nights Diana appears,  
Divinely calm  
By the laws of her appearing.

What we call laws of how the gods act  
Are merely the calm that the gods have.  
The laws are not over them:  
They're the life they desire.

## **AH, YOU BELIEVERS IN CHRISTS AND MARYS**

Ah, you believers in Christs and Marys  
Who muddle my fountain's clear waters  
Merely to tell me  
There are happier waters

Flowing in meadows with better hours—  
Why speak to me of those other places  
If the waters and meadows

In this place please me?

This reality was given by the gods,  
Who made it external to make it more real.  
Can my dreams be greater  
Than the work of the gods?

Leave me with only the Reality of the moment  
And my tranquil and manifest gods who live  
Not in the Uncertain  
But in fields and rivers.

Leave me this life that paganly passes  
On the banks of rivers amid the soft piping  
By which the rushes  
Confess they're of Pan.

Live in your dreams and leave to me  
The natural altar where I have my worship  
And the visible presence  
Of my immediate gods.

Ah, useless suitors of the better-than-life,  
Leave life to the believers who are more ancient  
Than Christ and his cross  
And weeping Mary.

The queen of the fields, Ceres, consoles me,  
And Apollo and Venus, and ancient Uranus,  
And thunder, because it comes  
From Jupiter's hand.

9 AUGUST 1914

## **ON THIS DAY WHEN THE GREEN FIELDS**

On this day when the green fields

Are a colony goldenly ruled by Apollo,  
May the sensation we have of life  
Be a dance within us.

Not randomly but with regular rhythm  
May our feeling, like a nymph,  
Accompany in its cadences  
The discipline of the dance.

At twilight when the fields become  
An empire overwhelmed by shadows  
As by a legion marching onward,  
Let us renounce the day.

And let us place on high in our memory,  
Like a new god from a new land,  
Whatever calm remains in us  
From the transitory day.

11 AUGUST 1914

## **HERE, WITH NO OTHER APOLLO THAN APOLLO**

Here, with no other Apollo than Apollo,  
Unsighing let us abandon Christ  
And the fever of seeking  
A dualistic god.

And far from Christian sensuality  
May the chaste calm of ancient beauty  
Restore to us the ancient  
Feeling of life.

## **ABOVE THE TRUTH REIGN THE GODS**

Above the truth reign the gods.

Our science is a flawed copy  
Of the certainty with which  
They know the Universe exists.

Everything is everything,  
And higher are the gods, whom science  
Cannot know, but we should  
Praise them like the flowers.

Visible to our higher sight,  
They're as real as flowers are real,  
And on their calm Olympus  
They are another Nature.

16 OCTOBER 1914

## **LET THE GODS**

Let the gods  
Take from me  
By their high and secretly wrought will  
All glory, love and wealth.

All I ask  
Is that they leave  
My lucid and solemn consciousness  
Of beings and of things.

Love and glory  
Don't matter to me.  
Wealth is a metal, glory an echo,  
And love a shadow.

But accurate  
Attention given  
To the forms and properties of objects  
Is a sure refuge.

Its foundations  
Are all the world,  
Its love is the placid Universe,  
Its wealth is life.

Its glory is  
The supreme certainty  
Of solemnly and clearly possessing  
The forms of objects.

Other things pass  
And fear death,  
But the clear and useless vision of the Universe  
Fears and suffers nothing.

Self-sufficing,  
It desires nothing  
But the pride of always seeing clearly  
Until it no longer sees.

6 JUNE 1915

## **LIPS RED FROM WINE**

Lips red from wine,  
White foreheads under roses,  
Naked white forearms  
Lying on the table:

May this be the picture  
Wherein speechless, Lydia,  
We'll forever be inscribed  
In the minds of the gods.

Rather this than life  
As earthly men live it,  
Full of the black dust

They raise from the roads.

The gods, by their example,  
Help only those  
Who seek to go nowhere  
But in the river of things.

29 AUGUST 1915

## **I PREFER ROSES, MY LOVE, TO THE HOMELAND**

I prefer roses, my love, to the homeland,  
And I love magnolias  
More than fame and virtue.

As long as this passing life doesn't weary me  
And I stay the same,  
I'll let it keep passing.

What does it matter who wins or loses  
If nothing to me matters  
And the dawn still breaks,

And each year with spring the leaves appear,  
And each year with autumn  
They fall from the trees?

What do the other things which humans  
Add on to life  
Increase in my soul?

Nothing, except its desire for indifference  
And its languid trust  
In the fleeting moment.

1 JUNE 1916



## **FOLLOW YOUR DESTINY**

Follow your destiny,  
Water your plants,  
Love your roses.  
The rest is shadow  
Of unknown trees.

Reality is always  
More or less  
Than what we want.  
Only we are always  
Equal to ourselves.

It's good to live alone,  
And noble and great  
Always to live simply.  
Leave pain on the altar  
As an offering to the gods.

See life from a distance.  
Never question it.  
There's nothing it can  
Tell you. The answer  
Lies beyond the Gods.

But quietly imitate  
Olympus in your heart.  
The gods are gods  
Because they don't think  
About what they are.

1 JULY 1916

## **I WAS NEVER ONE WHO IN LOVE OR IN FRIENDSHIP**

I was never one who in love or in friendship

Preferred one sex over the other. Beauty  
Attracts me in equal measure, wherever  
I find it, in season.

The bird alights, looking only to its alighting,  
Its desire to alight mattering more than the branch.  
The river runs where it finds its repose,  
And not where it is needed.

Thus I separate myself from distinctions  
Of where and how I love or don't love,  
And I don't offend the inherent innocence  
Of when people love.

Love is not in the object but in the act.  
I only love something when I start loving it.  
My love does not reside in it  
But in my love.

The gods who gave us this path of love  
To which we have given the name beauty  
Did not place it only in women  
Or only in fruit.

They also gave us the flower to pluck.  
And perhaps we pluck with better love  
What we seek for the using.

## **O MORNING THAT BREAKS WITHOUT LOOKING AT ME**

O morning that breaks without looking at me,  
O sun that shines without caring that I see you,  
It's for me that you  
Are true and real,  
For it's in the foil to my desire

That I feel nature and life to be real.  
In what denies me I feel  
They exist and I am small.  
And in this knowledge I become great  
Even as the wave which, tossed by storms  
High into the air, returns  
With more weight to a deeper sea.

## **OBEY THE LAW, WHETHER IT'S WRONG OR YOU ARE**

Obey the law, whether it's wrong or you are.  
Man can do little against the outer life.  
Let injustice be.  
Nothing you change changes.

Your only kingdom is the mind you've been given,  
And in it you're a servant to Fate and the Gods.  
The mind rules to the borders  
Of where your will pretends.

Though conquered there, at least you can boast  
In your conquerors: Destiny and the great gods.  
You're not twice defeated  
By defeat and mediocrity.

So I see it. And that hasty justice  
By which we try to moderate things  
I expel, like a meddling  
Servant, from the mind.

How can I, who am not even my own ruler,  
Expect to rule or determine what happens  
Where my mind and body  
Are but a small part?

Let sufficiency suffice me and the rest spin

In its predestined orbit, as even the gods spin:  
Suns, centers,  
Servants of a vast flux.

29 JANUARY 1921

## **I WANT MY VERSES TO BE LIKE JEWELS**

I want my verses to be like jewels,  
Able to endure into the far future  
Untarnished by the death  
That lurks in each thing,  
Verses which forget the hard and sad  
Brevity of our days, taking us back  
To that ancient freedom  
We've perhaps never known.  
Here in these friendly, far-removed shadows  
Where history ignores us, I remember those  
Who carefully weave  
Their carefree verses.  
And remembering you above all others,  
I write beneath the veiled sun  
And drink, immortal Horace,  
Superfluous, to your glory.

5 AUGUST 1923

## **DAY AFTER DAY LIFE'S THE SAME LIFE**

Day after day life's the same life.  
All that happens, Lydia,  
In what we are as in what we are not,  
Happens all the same.  
Picked, the fruit withers; unpicked,  
It falls. Destiny is  
The same, whether we seek or wait  
For it. Our lot today,  
Our fate from always, and in either form

Beyond us and invincible.

2 SEPTEMBER 1923

## **WHO DELIGHTS IN THE MIND CAN DELIGHT IN NO DESTINY**

Who delights in the mind can delight in no destiny  
Better than to know himself. To know he is nothing  
Is better than not knowing:  
Nothing inside of nothing.  
If I don't have within me the power to master  
The three Fates and the shapes of the future,  
May the gods at least give me  
The power of knowing it.  
And since in myself I cannot create beauty,  
May I enjoy it as it's given on the outside,  
Repeated in my passive eyes,  
Ponds which death will dry.

22 OCTOBER 1923

## **AS IF EACH KISS**

As if each kiss  
Were a kiss of farewell,  
Let us lovingly kiss, my Chloe.  
Perhaps already  
We're touched by the hand  
Which calls to that inevitably empty boat  
And binds in one sheaf  
What together we were  
With the alien universal sum of life.

17 NOVEMBER 1923

## **YOUR DEAD GODS TELL ME NOTHING I NEED**

Your dead gods tell me nothing I need  
To know. Without any love or hatred  
I dismiss the crucifix  
From my way of being.

What good to me, a Latin, are the creeds  
This hanging torso of Christ would die for?  
With the sun I have fellowship  
And not with these truths.

They may be valid. But I was only given  
One vision of the things that exist on earth,  
And an uncertain mind,  
And the knowledge that we die.

### **FATE FRIGHTENS ME, LYDIA. NOTHING IS CERTAIN**

Fate frightens me, Lydia. Nothing is certain.  
At any moment something could happen  
To change all that we are.  
When we leave what is known, the very step  
We take is strange. Grave numens guard  
The customary boundaries.  
We are not gods: blind, we fear,  
And prefer the meager life we know  
To novelty, the abyss.

### **I DEVOTE MY HIGHER MIND TO THE ARDENT**

I devote my higher mind to the ardent  
Pursuit of the summit,  
leaving Verse to chance and its laws,  
For when the thought is lofty and noble,  
The sentence will naturally seek it,  
And rhythm slavishly serve it.

## **MY EYES SEE THE FIELDS, THE FIELDS**

My eyes see the fields, the fields,  
The fields, Neaera, and already  
I suffer the cold of the darkness  
In which I will not have eyes.

I can feel, even now, the skull  
I'll be when all feeling has ceased,  
Unless the unknown shall assign me  
Some other, unforeseeable end.

I weep less for the moment  
Than for my future self,  
A null and void subject  
Of the universal destiny.

25 DECEMBER 1923

## **EACH MAN IS A WORLD, AND AS EACH FOUNTAIN**

Each man is a world, and as each fountain  
Has its own deity, might not each man  
Have a god all his own?

In the inscrutable succession of things,  
Only the wise man feels he was nothing  
More than the life he left.

## **NOT ONLY WINE BUT ITS OBLIVION I POUR**

Not only wine but its oblivion I pour  
In my cup, and I will be happy, because happiness  
Is ignorant. Who, remembering  
Or foreseeing, ever smiled?

Let us, with our thinking, obtain not the life  
But the soul of animals, taking refuge  
    In the impalpable destiny  
    Which neither hopes nor remembers.

With mortal hand I raise the fragile cup  
Of fleeting wine to my mortal mouth,  
    Eyes clouded,  
    Ready to stop seeing.

13 JUNE 1926

## **HOW GREAT A SADNESS AND BITTERNESS**

How great a sadness and bitterness  
Drowns our tiny lives in chaos!  
    How often adversity  
    Cruelly overwhelms us!  
Happy the animal, anonymous to itself,  
Which grazes in green fields and enters  
    Death as if it were home;  
    Or the learned man who, lost  
In science, raises his futile, ascetic  
Life above our own, like smoke  
    Which lifts its disintegrating arms  
    To the nonexistent heavens.

14 JUNE 1926

## **SOLEMNLY OVER THE FERTILE LAND**

Solemnly over the fertile land  
The brief and futile white cloud passes,  
And for a black instant the fields are touched  
    By a cold breeze.

So too in my soul the slow thought soars



And darkens my mind, but I, like the field  
That returns to itself, return to the day,  
The surface of life.

31 MAY 1927

### **AS LONG AS I FEEL THE FULL BREEZE IN MY HAIR**

As long as I feel the full breeze in my hair  
And see the sun shining bright on the leaves,  
I will not ask for more.  
What better thing could destiny give me  
Than the sensual passing of life in moments  
Of ignorance like this?  
Where there are roses we plant doubt.  
Most of the meaning we glean is our own,  
And forever not knowing, we ponder.  
Foreign to us, capacious nature  
Unrolls fields, opens flowers, ripens  
Fruits, and death arrives.  
I'll only be right, if anyone is right,  
When death at last confounds my mind  
And I no longer see,  
For we cannot find and should not find  
The remote and profound explanation  
For why it is we live.  
Wise is the one who does not seek.  
The seeker will find in all things  
The abyss, and doubt in himself.

16 JUNE 1927

### **THE ONE I LOVED IS NOT HERE, YOU SAY**

The one I loved is not here, you say,  
In this grave by which I stand. This mound  
Hides neither gaze nor smile.  
Ah, but it does hide eyes and a mouth!

I squeezed hands, not soul, and here they lie.  
Friend, I weep for a body.

6 JULY 1915

## **WHAT WE FEEL, NOT WHAT IS FELT**

What we feel, not what is felt,  
Is what we have. Winter naturally straitens.  
Like fate we accept it.  
May winter wrap earth and not our minds,  
As love to love, or book to book, we relish  
Our brief warm fire.

8 JULY 1930

## **I DON'T KNOW IF THE LOVE YOU GIVE IS LOVE YOU HAVE**

I don't know if the love you give is love you have  
Or love you feign. You give it to me. Let that suffice.  
I can't be young by years,  
So why not by illusion?  
The Gods give us little, and the little they give is false.  
But if they give it, however false it be, the giving  
Is true. I accept it, and resign  
Myself to believing you.

12 SEPTEMBER 1930

## **WANT LITTLE : YOU'LL HAVE EVERYTHING**

Want little: you'll have everything.  
Want nothing: you'll be free.  
The same love by which we're loved  
Oppresses us with its wanting.

1 NOVEMBER 1930

## **I WAS LEFT IN THE WORLD, ALL ALONE**

I was left in the world, all alone,  
By the Gods who ordain.  
It's futile to fight them: what they've given  
I accept without question,  
Like wheat that bows in the wind, raising  
Its head when the wind stops blowing.

19 NOVEMBER 1930

## **I TELL WITH SEVERITY. I THINK WHAT I FEEL**

I tell with severity. I think what I feel.  
Words are ideas.  
The purling river passes, and not its sound,  
Which is ours, not the river's.  
So I wanted my verse: mine and not-mine,  
To be read by me.

16 JUNE 1932

## **I PLACIDLY WAIT FOR WHAT I DON'T KNOW**

I placidly wait for what I don't know—  
My future and the future of everything.  
In the end there will only be silence except  
Where the waves of the sea bathe nothing.

13 DECEMBER 1933

## **COUNTLESS LIVES INHABIT US**

Countless lives inhabit us.  
I don't know, when I think or feel,  
Who it is that thinks or feels.  
I am merely the place

Where things are thought or felt.

I have more than just one soul.  
There are more I's than I myself.  
I exist, nevertheless,  
Indifferent to them all.  
I silence them: I speak.

The crossing urges of what  
I feel or do not feel  
Struggle in who I am, but I  
Ignore them. They dictate nothing  
To the 11 know: I write.

13 NOVEMBER 1935

## ÁLVARO DE CAMPOS THE JADED SENSATIONIST

Born in Tavira, a small town in the Algarve, in 1890, Álvaro de Campos was the most substantial of Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms and the one closest to his true heart and person. The "naval engineer and Sensationist poet," as Campos often signed himself, was in many ways a larger-than-life version of his creator. Pessoa was relatively tall for a Portuguese man of his day, but Campos was slightly taller, about 5 feet 9 inches. Pessoa had some Jewish blood on his father's side, but Campos had rather more, and may actually have been Jewish. Pessoa was a heavy drinker, but it was Campos who indulged in absinthe and smoked opium. Pessoa was always well-dressed but was not a dandy like Campos, and he preferred conservative eyeglasses to his heteronym's more stylish monocle.

Álvaro de Campos was Pessoa—same basic attitudes, desires, and anxieties—but with more pizzazz and chutzpah, living out much of what his progenitor only dreamed of. When normally reserved Pessoa wanted to use strong language or announce radical ideas, Campos was usually his mouthpiece, and not only in poetry. Various manifestos, including the Futurist *Ultimatum* of 1917, were signed by the naval engineer, who also got involved in Pessoa's private life, sometimes even writing letters to Pessoa's friends. Campos was the ostensible thorn in Pessoa's one romantic relationship, saying a number of hard and disagreeable things to the beloved lady, Ophelia Queiroz, who informed Pessoa that she hated his alter ego. "I don't know why," replied Fernando. "He's rather fond of you."

Campos, whose motto was "to feel all things in all ways," was the most sexually liberated heteronym, as readily smitten by men as by women, but he was by no means a Don Juan, being too steeped in his feelings to actually do very much, whether socially or professionally. He studied engineering in Scotland, living there or in London when not on one of his long voyages to the Orient and other parts of the world, but he never seemed to work too hard, and when he eventually returned to Lisbon, where he'd lived as a young man, he did almost no work at all and lost interest in traveling. "The best way to travel," he wrote, "is to feel."

Campos's biography corresponds to the evolution in his poetry. Beginning as a decadent romantic, he produced several sonnets as well as a poem in rhymed quatrains justifying his use of opium. This last was written aboard a steamer in the Suez Canal. Then came his Sensationist period, in which he wrote long, exuberant poems celebrating the new machine age and life's fullness and diversity, his verses sometimes smacking of Futurism—"My body is the center of a stupendous and infinite flywheel/ Forever in frenetic motion around itself"—while at other times recalling Walt Whitman—"I feel kinship with all things, I live all in all." But despair was already lurking in between the heady affirmations. In "Time's Passage," which contains the verse just quoted, we also find: "I feel that all of what I wanted eluded what I imagined,/ That although I wanted everything, everything lacked." Or again: ". . . it would have been better not to be born,/ For no matter how interesting it is at every moment,/ Life sometimes hurts, jades, cuts, bruises, grates."

This nascent sense of futility will gradually get the upper hand, so that Campos, by the time he returns to Lisbon, is haunted by a "vague nausea, the ill-defined affliction, of feeling myself." He deplures life's ordinariness and realizes that he too is ordinary. He hates life's redundancy and comes to feel that travel itself is a dull routine. Whereas in an early poem he expressed his desire to "eat the universe" so as to incorporate and possess it, late Campos says, "If I could eat the universe to throw it up into the sink, I'd eat it." Disillusioned with real travel, real love, and real life in general, Campos travels and loves and lives in his writing, just like his creator, of whom he is finally the perfect reflection. Pessoa, however, would wonder if he himself might not be the reflection of Álvaro de Campos, the ideal poet engineer who came to him one day by seeming magic, in a dream.

## **I STUDY MYSELF BUT CAN'T PERCEIVE**

*Lisbon, August 1913*

I study myself but can't perceive.  
I'm so addicted to feeling that  
I lose myself if I'm distracted  
From the sensations I receive.

This liquor I drink, the air I breathe,  
Belong to the very way I exist:

I've never discovered how to resist  
These hapless sensations I conceive.

Nor have I ever ascertained  
If I *really* feel what I feel.  
Am I what I seem to myself—the same?

Is the I I feel the I that's real?  
Even with feelings I'm a bit of an atheist.  
I don't even know if it's I who feels.

## **LISTEN, DAISY. WHEN I DIE, ALTHOUGH**

*On an Orient-bound ship  
December 1913*

Listen, Daisy. When I die, although  
You may not feel a thing, you must  
Tell all my friends in London how much  
My loss makes you suffer. Then go

To York, where you claim you were born  
(But I don't believe a thing you claim),  
To tell that poor boy who gave me  
So many hours of joy (but of course

You don't know about that) that I'm dead.  
Even he, whom I thought I sincerely  
Loved, won't care . . . Then go and break

The news to that strange girl Cecily,  
Who believed that one day I'd be great. . .  
To hell with life and everyone in it!

## **AH, THE FIRST MINUTES IN CAFÉS OF NEW CITIES**

Ah, the first minutes in cafés of new cities!  
The early morning arrivals at docks or at stations  
Full of a tranquil and luminous silence!  
The first pedestrians on the streets of a just-reached city,  
And the special sound of time's passing when we travel . . .

The buses or streetcars or automobiles. . .  
The novel look of streets in novel countries. . .  
The peace they seem to offer for our sorrow,  
The happy bustle they have for our sadness,  
Their absence of monotony for our wearied heart!  
The large, dependably right-angled squares,  
The streets with rows of buildings that converge in the distance,  
The cross streets with unexpected things of interest,  
And in all of this, like something that floods without ever overflowing,  
Motion, motion,  
Swift-colored human thing that passes and remains . . .

The ports with their unmoving ships,  
Intensely unmoving ships,  
And small boats close by, waiting . . .

## **TIME'S PASSAGE**

TO FEEL everything in every way,  
To live everything from all sides,  
To be the same thing in all ways possible at the same time,  
To realize in oneself all humanity at all moments  
In one scattered, extravagant, complete, and aloof moment.

I always want to be the thing I feel kinship with.  
I always become, sooner or later,  
The thing I feel kinship with, be it a stone or a yearning,  
A flower or an abstract idea,  
A multitude or a way of understanding God.  
And I feel kinship with all things, I live all in all.  
I feel kinship with superior men because they are superior,



And I feel kinship with inferior men because they are superior too,  
Since to be inferior is different from being superior,  
And so it is a superiority at certain moments in our seeing.  
With some I feel kinship because of their character qualities,  
And with others I feel kinship because they lack those qualities,  
And with still others I feel kinship because I feel kinship with them,  
And there are absolutely organic moments when “them” is all men.  
Yes, since I’m an absolute king in my feeling of kinship,  
It need only exist to have a raison d’être.  
Tight against my heaving breast, in a heartfelt embrace I hold  
(In the same heartfelt embrace)  
The man who gives his shirt to an indigent he doesn’t know,  
The soldier who dies for his country without knowing what a country  
is,  
And . . .  
And the matricide, the fratricide, the incestuous, the child molester,  
The highwayman, the freebooter, the pickpocket,  
The one who lies in wait in dark alleys —  
All are my preferred lover for at least a moment in life.

I kiss every whore on the lips,  
I kiss every pimp on the eyes,  
My passivity lies at the feet of every killer,  
And my Spanish cape shields every fleeing thief.  
Everything is the raison d’être of my life.

I’ve committed every crime,  
Lived within every crime  
(In vice I was not this person or that person  
But the vice-in-person carried out between them,  
And these are my life’s most arch-triumphant times.)

I multiplied myself to feel myself,  
To feel myself I had to feel everything,  
I overflowed, I did nothing but spill out,  
I undressed, I yielded,  
And in each corner of my soul there’s an altar to a different god.

The arms of every athlete have squeezed my suddenly female self,  
And the mere thought made me faint in imagined muscles.

All kisses of all trysts have been placed on my lips,  
All handkerchiefs of all farewells have waved in my heart,  
All obscenely suggestive gestures and gazes  
Pound in my sex organs and throughout all my body.  
I was every ascetic, every outcast, every forgotten man,  
And every pederast—absolutely every last one of them.  
Black and red rendezvous in the hell of my soul's depths!

(Freddie, whom I called Baby, because you were blond, fair, and I  
loved you,  
How many future empresses and dethroned princesses you were to me!  
Mary, with whom I read Burns on days as sad as the feeling of living,  
Mary, you've no idea how many honest couples and happy families  
My eyes and my clasping arm and my doubting conscience have lived  
in you,  
Their peaceful lives, their suburban houses with yards, their  
unexpected half-holidays . . .  
Mary, I'm unhappy . . .  
Freddie, I'm unhappy . . .  
Oh, all of you, all, who passed by or lingered,  
How many times you must have thought to think of me without doing  
it;  
Ah, how little I've counted in what you are, how little, how little —  
Yes, and what have I been, O my subjective universe,  
O my sun, my moon, my stars, my moment,  
O outer part of me lost in God's labyrinths!)

Everything passes, all in a marching file inside me,  
And in me every city of the world buzzes . . .

My courthouse heart, my marketplace heart, my stock exchange heart,  
my bank counter heart,  
My heart the rendezvous of all humanity,  
My park bench, hostelry, boardinghouse, jail cell heart

*(“Aqui estuvo Manuel antes de ser ejecutado”)*,  
My heart that’s a club, hall, auditorium, doormat, ticket booth,  
gangway,  
Bridge, turnstile, outing, march, journey, auction, fair, festival,  
My service window heart,  
My parcel post heart,  
My letter, luggage, remittance, delivery heart,  
My margin, border, summary, index heart:  
Hey-ya, hey-ya, hey-ya, my bazaar of a heart.

All dawns are the dawn and are life.  
All auroras shine in the same place:  
Infinity . . .  
Every joy of every bird comes from the same throat,  
Every shiver of every leaf is from the same tree,  
And everyone who gets up early to go to work  
Goes from the same house to the same factory by the same road.

Roll, huge ball, anthill of consciousnesses, earth,  
Roll dawned and dusked, sun-scorched and nocturnal,  
Roll in abstract space, in the dimly lit night really  
Roll and. . . .

I feel in my head the speed of the earth’s spinning,  
And all nations and all persons spin inside me,  
Centrifugal yearning, the lust to travel through space to the stars  
Beats its fists against the inside of my brain,  
Pokes blindfolded needles throughout my body’s consciousness,  
Makes me get up a thousand times to go to the Abstract,  
The Undiscoverable, the There without limits,  
The invisible Goal, all the points I’m not at, all at the same time.

Ah! to be neither still nor in motion,  
Neither lying down nor standing up,  
Neither asleep nor awake,  
Neither here nor anywhere else,  
To solve the equation of this prolix restlessness,

To know where to be that I could be in all parts,  
To know where to lie down that I could stroll on all streets,  
To know where. . . .

Whooooooooosssssshhhhhh  
WHOOOOOOOSSSSSSHHHHHHH  
WHOOOOOOOSSSSSSHHHHHHH  
WHOOOOOOOSSSSSSHHHHHHH

Winged cavalcade of me riding over all things,  
Exploded cavalcade of me riding under all things,  
Winged and exploded cavalcade of me for the sake of all things . . .  
Alley-oop over the trees, alley-oop under ponds,  
Alley-oop into the walls, alley-oop against tree trunks,  
Alley-oop in the air, alley-oop in the wind, alley-oop on beaches,  
With increasing, insistent, frenetic speed,  
Alley-oop alley-oop alley-oop alley-oop . . .

Pantheistic cavalcade of me inside all things,  
Energetic cavalcade of me inside all energies,  
Cavalcade of me inside the coal that burns, inside the lamp that glows,  
Inside every kind of energy,  
Cavalcade of a thousand amperes,  
Explosive cavalcade, exploded like a bursting bomb,  
Cavalcade bursting in all directions at the same time,  
Cavalcade over space, a leap over time,  
Hurdling ion-electron horse, compressed solar system  
Inside the driving pistons, outside the turning flywheels.

Inside the pistons I take the form of raging abstract speed,  
Acting by iron and motion, come-and-go, madness, pent-up rage,  
And on the rim of every flywheel I turn staggering hours,  
And the entire universe creaks, sizzles, and booms in me.

Whooooosssshhh . . .  
Ever faster, the mind ever farther ahead of the body,  
Ahead even of the rushing idea of the propelled body,  
The mind behind ahead of the body, shadow, spark,  
Hey-ya-whooooo . . . Heyawhooooo . . .

All energy is the same and all nature is the same . . .  
The sap of tree sap is the same energy that turns  
Train wheels, streetcar wheels, the diesel engine's flywheels,  
And a vehicle moved by mules or gasoline is moved by the same  
thing.

Pantheistic rage of awesomely feeling  
With all my senses fizzing and all my pores fuming  
That everything is but one speed, one energy, one divine line  
From and to itself, arrested and murmuring furies of mad speed . . .

Whooooooooosssssshhhhhh WHOOOOOOOSSSSSSHHHHHH  
WHOOOOOOOSSSSSSHHHHHH  
WHOOOOOOOSSSSSSHHHHHH

Hail, hurrah, long live the hurtling unity of all things!  
Hail, hurrah, long live the equality of all things soaring!  
Hail, hurrah, long live that great machine the universe!  
Hail, because you—trees, machines, laws—are the same,  
Hail, because you—worms, pistons, abstract ideas—are the same,  
The same sap fills you, the same sap transforms you,  
You are the same thing, and the rest is outer and false,  
The rest, the static rest that remains in eyes that stop moving,  
But not in my combustion-engine nerves that run on heavy or light oil,  
Not in my all-machine, all-gear-system nerves,

Not in my train, tram, car, steam-thresher nerves,  
Ship-engine, diesel-engine, semidiesel, Campbell nerves,  
100 percent steam-run, gas-run, oil-run, and electric-run nerves,  
Universal machine moved by belts of all momentums!  
Smash, train, against the buffer of the sidetrack!  
Ram, steamer, into the pier and split open!  
Dash, automobile driven by the madness of all the universe,  
Over the edge of every cliff  
And crash—bam!— into smithereens in the bottom of my heart!

Straight at me, all projectile objects!

Straight at me, all object directions!  
Straight at me, all objects too swift to be seen!  
Strike me, pierce me, pass right through me!  
It's I who strike, who pierce, who pass through myself!  
The rage of all impetuses closes in a me-circle!

Heya-whoooooo my train, auto, airplane desires.  
Speed, force your way into all ideas,  
Collide into all dreams and shatter them,  
Scorch all humanitarian and useful ideals,  
Crush all normal and decent and harmonious feelings,  
Catch in the whirl of your heavy and dizzy flywheel  
The bodies of all philosophies, the tatters of all poems,  
Shredding them till only you remain, an abstract flywheel in space,  
Metallic supreme lord and libido of Europe's hour.

Let's go, may the cavalcade never end, not even in God!  
Let's go even if I should fall behind the cavalcade, even if I must  
clutch  
The horse's tail and be dragged, mangled, lacerated, lost  
In free fall, my body and soul behind my abstract yearning,  
My giddy yearning to transcend the universe,  
To leave God behind like a negligible milestone,  
To leave. . . .

My imagination hurts, I don't know how, but that's what hurts.  
The sun on high inside me is sinking.  
Dusk is starting to fall over the blue and in my nerves.  
Let's go, cavalcade, who else will you turn me into?  
I, this swift, voracious glutton of abstract energy,  
Who wanted to eat, drink, claw and flay the world,  
I, who could only be satisfied by trampling the universe underfoot,  
Trampling, trampling, trampling until feeling nothing . . .  
I feel that all of what I wanted eluded what I imagined,  
That although I wanted everything, everything lacked.

Cavalcade dismantled above all summits,

Cavalcade dissolved underneath all wells,  
Cavalcade flight, cavalcade arrow, cavalcade flashing thought,  
Cavalcade I, cavalcade I, cavalcade universe-I.  
Heyawhoooooooooooo . . .

My elastic being, a spring, a needle, a trembling . . .



I CARRY inside my heart,  
As in a chest too full to shut,  
All the places where I've been,  
All the ports at which I've called,  
All the sights I've seen through windows and portholes  
And from quarterdecks, dreaming,  
And all of this, which is so much, is nothing next to what I want.

The entrance to Singapore, new day rising, all green,  
The coral of the Maldives in a sweltering passage,  
Macao at one in the morning . . . I wake up with a start. . .  
Yhat-loh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh . . . Gea — . . .  
And the sound reaches me from the heart of another reality . . .  
The almost North African stature of Zanzibar in the sun,  
Dar es Salaam (hard to clear the port),  
Mahajanga, Nosy-Bé, Madagascar's lush greens,  
Storms around Guardafui,  
The Cape of Good Hope glowing in the morning sun,  
And Cape Town with Table Mountain in the background . . .

I've visited more lands than I've set foot on,  
I've seen more landscapes than I've laid eyes on,  
I've experienced more sensations than all the ones I've felt,  
Because however much I felt I never felt enough,  
And life always pained me, it was always too little, and I was unhappy.

At certain times of the day I remember all this and am terrified,  
I think of what will remain of these snatches of life, of this exaltation,

Of this winding road, of this car on the road's shoulder, of this sign,  
Of this calm confusion of conflicting sensations,  
Of this transfusion, of this evanescence, of this iridescent convergence,  
Of this disquietude at the bottom of every glass,  
Of this anxiety at the heart of every pleasure,  
Of this satiety anticipated in every teacup's handle,  
Of this tiresome card game between the Cape of Good Hope and the  
Canaries.

I don't know if life is too little or too much for me.  
I don't know if I feel too much or too little, I don't know  
If I lack moral scruples, a fulcrum in my mind,  
Consanguinity with the mystery of things, impact  
On contact, blood beneath blows, sensibility to noises,  
Or if there's a simpler and happier explanation for all this.

Whatever the case, it would be better not to have been born,  
For no matter how interesting it is at every moment,  
Life sometimes hurts, jades, cuts, bruises, grates,  
Makes us want to scream, to jump, to wallow, to walk  
Out of every house and every logic and off every balcony,  
And to become savage and die among trees and things forgotten,  
Among collapses and hazards and the absence of tomorrows,  
And all this, O life, should be something closer to what I think,  
To what I think or what I feel, whatever that is.

I cross my arms on the table, I lay my head on my arms,  
And I need to want to cry, but I don't know where to find the tears.  
No matter how hard I try to pity myself, I don't cry,  
My soul is broken under the curved finger that touches it. . .  
What will become of me? What will become of me?

They ran the jester out of the palace with a whip for no reason,  
They made the beggar get up from the step where he'd fallen.  
They spanked the abandoned child and took away his bread,  
Oh immense grief of the world, what's needed is action . . .  
So decadent, so decadent, so decadent. . .



I'm only at peace when I listen to music, and not even then.  
Gardens of the eighteenth century before '89,  
Where are you? For I'd like to cry one way or another.  
Like a balsam that only comforts because of the idea that it's a balsam,  
The evening of today and all days, little by little, monotonously falls.

The lights have come on, the night is falling, life changes its face.  
One way or another I have to keep on living.  
My soul burns like a hand, physically.  
I'm on the road of all men and they bump against me.  
O house in the country, if only there were less  
Than a train, a coach and the decision to leave separating me from  
you.  
As it is I stay, I stay . . . I'm the one who always wants to leave  
And always stays, always stays, always stays.  
Until death I'll stay, even if I leave I'll stay, stay, stay . . .

Make me human, O night, make me helpful and brotherly.  
Only humanitarily can one live.  
Only by loving mankind, actions, the banality of jobs,  
Only in this way—alas! —only in this way can one live.  
Only this way, O night, and I can never be this way!

I've seen all things, and marveled at them all,  
But it was too much or too little—I'm not sure which—and I suffered.  
I've lived every emotion, every thought, every gesture,  
And remained as sad as if I'd wanted to live them and failed to.  
I've loved and hated like everyone else,  
But for everyone else this was normal and instinctive,  
Whereas for me it was always an exception, a shock, a release valve, a  
convulsion.

Come, night, and snuff me out, come and drown me in yourself.  
O beloved from Beyond, lady of infinite mourning,  
Exterior grief of Earth, silent weeping of the World,  
Gentle ancient mother of unexpressed emotions,  
Chaste and sad older sister of incoherent ideas,

Fiancée forever waiting on our unrealized plans,  
The constantly abandoned road of our destiny,  
Our joyless pagan uncertainty,  
Our faithless Christian weakness,  
Our inert Buddhism that loves neither things nor ecstasies,  
Our fever, our pallor, our weak-kneed impatience,  
Our life, O mother, our lost life . . .

I'm unable to feel, to be human, to reach out  
From inside my sad soul to my fellow earthly brothers.  
And even were I to feel, I'm unable to be useful, practical, quotidian,  
definite,  
To have a place in life, a destiny among men,  
To have a vocation, a force, a will, a garden,  
A reason for resting, a need for recreation,  
Something that comes to me directly from nature.

So be motherly to me, O tranquil night. . .  
You who remove the world from the world, you who are peace,  
You who don't exist, who are only the absence of light,  
You who aren't a thing, a place, an essence or a life,  
Penelope who weaves darkness that tomorrow will be unraveled,  
Unreal Circe of the fevered, of the anguished without cause,  
Come to me, O night, reach out your hands,  
And be coolness and relief, O night, on my forehead . . .

You, whose coming is so gentle you seem to be drawing away,  
Whose ebb and flow of darkness, as the moon softly breathes,  
Has waves of dead tenderness, the cold of vast oceans of dream,  
Breezes of imagined landscapes for our inordinate anguish . . .  
You, pallidly, you, faintly, you, liquidly,  
Scent of death among flowers, breath of fever along riverbanks,  
You, queen, you, chatelaine, you, pale lady, come . . .



I TURN every corner of every street every day,  
And whenever I'm thinking of one thing, I'm thinking of another.

I don't conform except by atavism,  
And unless one is bedridden there's always a reason to emigrate.

From every sidewalk café of every city  
Accessible to the imagination  
I look at life passing by, watching without getting involved,  
Belonging to it without pulling a gesture out of my pocket  
And without noting down what I see to pretend later on that I saw it.

The definite wife of someone rides by in the yellow car,  
And I'm sitting next to her although she doesn't know it.  
On the sidewalk they run into each other by a planned coincidence,  
But before they were there I was already there with them.  
There's no way they can avoid finding me, no way I won't be  
everywhere.  
My privilege is everything  
(My soul patented, *Sans Garantie de Dieu*).

I witness everything and exhaustively.  
There's no woman's jewel that's not bought by me and for me,  
No thought of waiting that's not in some way mine,  
No conversation that doesn't in the end have a bearing on me,  
No pealing bell in Lisbon in thirty years or night at the opera in fifty  
That hasn't been gallantly laid at my feet.

I was brought up by Imagination,  
I always traveled by her hand,  
And thus I always loved, hated, spoke, thought,  
Having every day this window before me,  
Every hour being mine in this way.



BRIGHT bugle of morning on the outer edge  
Of the horizon's cold half circle,  
Tenuous distant bugle like hazy flags  
Unfurled beyond where colors are visible . . .

Tremulous bugle, dust that hovers where the night ends,  
Golden dust hovering on the edge of visibility . . .

Car that cleanly screeches, steamer that whistles,  
Crane that begins to swivel in my ear,  
Hacking cough announcing that the man's going out,  
Light morning shiver of the joy of living,  
Burst of laughter veiled in some strange way by the mist,  
Seamstress destined for worse than the morning she feels,  
Consumptive laborer dying of happiness in this  
Inevitably vital hour  
In which the contours of things are soft, friendly, and sure,  
In which the walls are cool to the hand's touch, and the houses  
Here and there open their white-curtained eyes . . .  
Every morning is a gently waving curtain  
Reviving illusions and memories in my passerby soul,  
In my exiled, epidermically spirited heart,  
In my tired and veiled. . . .

. . . .and everything proceeds  
Toward the light-filled hour when shops lower their eyelids  
And noise traffic pushcart train I-feel sun resounds

Vertigo of midday framed in vértigos—  
Sun in the heights. . . . of my striated vision,  
Of the frozen whirl of my parched memory,  
Of the faint steady glimmer of my consciousness of living.

Noise traffic train pushcart cars I-feel sun street,  
Hoops crates streetcar shop street shopwindows skirt eyes  
Quickly tracks pushcarts crates street crossing street  
Sidewalks shopkeepers "excuse me" street  
Street strolling over me strolling down the street over me  
All is mirrors shops on this side in the shops on that side  
The speed of the cars upside down in the tilted shopwindow mirrors,  
The ground in the air the sun underfoot street watering flowers in the  
basket street

My past street shaking truck street I don't remember street  
Me headfirst in the center of my consciousness of myself  
Street unable to pinpoint just one sensation street  
Street behind and ahead under my feet Street in x in y in z in my arms  
Street through my monocle in circles of a small movie projector,  
Kaleidoscope in distinct iridescent curves street.

Drunk from the street and from feeling seeing hearing everything at  
once,  
My temples throbbing from coming here and going there at the same  
time. . . . .



I FALL full length into all of life,  
And my lust for living roars within me.  
No pleasures in the world can equal  
The stupendous joy of one who can't tell it  
Except by rolling on the ground in the grass and the daisies,  
Mingling with the dirt until his suit and hair are dirty . . .  
There are no verses that can grant this.  
Pluck a blade of grass, bite into it, and you will understand,  
You'll completely understand what I incompletely express.  
I crave to be a root  
Pursuing my inner sensations like a sap . . .  
I'd like to have all of the senses—including  
My intellect, imagination and inhibition—  
On my skin's surface so that I could roll over the rough ground  
More deeply within, feeling more roughness and bumps.  
I'd only be satisfied if my body were my soul,  
For only then would all winds, all suns and all rains  
Be felt by me in the way I'd like.  
This being impossible, I despair, I rage,  
I wish I could gnash at my suit  
And have a lion's tough claws to rip at my flesh  
Until the blood would flow, flow, flow, flow . . .  
I suffer because all of this is absurd,  
As if I could scare somebody

With my hostile feeling toward destiny, toward God,  
Which arises when we confront the Ineffable  
And suddenly perceive our weakness and smallness.



I'M HELD by nothing, I hold on to nothing, I belong to nothing.  
All sensations seize me, and none endure.  
I'm more motley than a random crowd,  
I'm more varied than the spontaneous universe,  
All eras have belonged to me for a moment,  
All souls for a moment have had their place in me.  
Current of intuitions, river of imagining me as them,  
Always wave after wave,  
Always the sea—now growing strange,  
Always drawing away from me, indefinitely.

O wharf where I would definitively embark for Truth,  
O boat with a captain and sailors, symbolically visible,  
O calm waters, as of an actual river, in the twilight  
In which I dream I'm possible—  
Where are you in real space? When are you in real time?  
I want to depart and find myself,  
I want to return knowing where from,  
Like one who returns home and becomes sociable again,  
Like one who is still loved in his old village,  
Like one who brushes against his dead childhood in each stone of each  
wall,  
And spread out before him he sees the eternal fields of yesterday,  
And nostalgia like a mother's lullaby wafts  
In the tragedy of belonging to the past.  
O native, local, and neighboring lands to the south!  
O line of the horizon, hazy to my eyes,  
What a tumult of approaching winds I can sense in your distance!  
And how you quiver in all that I see from here!

To hell with life!  
To have a profession weighs like paid freight on the shoulders,

To have duties stupefies,  
To have morals stifles,  
And to react against duties and rebel against morals  
Lives on the street—a fool.



I WALK on, nothing touches me: I'm foreign.  
The women who scurry to their front doors  
See only that I've walked by.  
I'm always around the corner from whoever tries to see me,  
Invulnerable to metals and encrustations.

O afternoon, what memories!  
Just yesterday I was a child leaning over the well,  
Delighted to see my face in the water down below.  
Today, a man, I see my face in the deep water of the world.  
And if I laugh it's only because I was once a different I:  
A child delighted to see his face in the bottom of the well.

I feel them all as flesh of my own flesh.  
I touch my arm and there they are:  
The dead, who never leave me!  
And the dead are all the people, places, and days from my past.  
Sometimes amid the noise of the factory machines  
A nostalgia lightly grazes my arm,  
I turn around, and there in the sunlit yard of my old house  
Stands the child I was, happily ignorant of what I would become.

Ah, be motherly!  
Ah, be mellifluous and speechless,  
O night in which I forget myself  
Remembering . . .



TO FEEL everything in every way,

To hold all opinions,  
To be sincere contradicting oneself every minute,  
To annoy oneself with absolute open-mindedness,  
And to love things just like God.

I, who am more brother to a tree than to a worker,  
I, who feel the poetic pain of waves beating the shore  
More than the real pain of beaten children  
(Ah, but this must be a lie, poor beaten children—  
And why is it that my sensations take such sudden turns?),  
I, finally, who am an unending dialogue,  
An unintelligible voice, dead of night in the tower,  
When the bells barely sway without a hand having touched them  
And it's saddening to know there's life to be lived tomorrow.  
I, finally, literally I,  
And I metaphorically too,  
I, the poet of sensations, sent from Chance  
To the irreproachable laws of Life,  
I, the cigarette smoker by meet profession,  
The man who smokes opium and drinks absinthe but who, in the end,  
Prefers thinking about smoking opium to smoking it  
And likes looking at absinthe more than drinking it. . .  
I, this superior degenerate with no archives in the soul  
And without a value-declared personality,  
I, the solemn researcher of futile things,  
Who could go and live in Siberia just to get bored of it  
And who thinks it's fine not to feel too attached to his homeland,  
For I don't have roots, I'm not a tree, and so I have no roots. . .  
I, who often feel as real as a metaphor,  
As a sentence written by a sick man in the book of the girl he met on  
the terrace

Or as a game of chess on the deck of an ocean liner,  
I, the nursemaid who pushes baby carriages in all public gardens,  
I, the policeman standing behind her on the walkway, watching,  
I, the baby in the carriage who waves at his lucid unconsciousness  
with a necklace of little bells,  
I, the scenery behind all this, the civic peace



Filtered through the garden's trees,  
I, who wait for them all at home,  
I, whomever they meet in the street,  
I, whatever they don't know about themselves,  
I, what you're thinking about and that makes you smile,  
I, the contradictory, the fictitious, the blather, the foam,  
The poster just hung up, the French girl's hips, the priest's gaze,  
The place where two roads meet and the chauffeurs are sleeping  
against their cars,  
The scar of the mean-looking sergeant,  
The sweaty ring on the shirt collar of the sick tutor going home,  
The teacup from which the little boy who died always drank,  
And the handle is chipped (and all this fits in a mother's heart and fills  
it) . . .  
I, the French dictation of the girl fiddling with her garter,  
I, the feet that touch beneath the bridge game under the ceiling lamp,  
I, the hidden card, the scarf's warmth, the balcony window half open,  
The service entrance where the maid talks with her desires for her  
cousin,  
That rascal José who promised to come but didn't  
And we had a trick to play on him . . .  
I, all this, and besides this the rest of the world . . .  
So many things, the doors that open, and the reason why they open,  
And the things that the hands that open the doors have already done . .  
.

I, the inborn unhappiness of all expressions,  
The impossibility of expressing all feelings,  
With no tombstone in the cemetery for the brother of all this,  
And what seems to mean nothing always means something . . .  
Yes I, the naval engineer who's as superstitious as an old farmer's  
wife,  
Who uses a monocle so as not to look like the real idea I have of  
myself,  
And who sometimes spends three hours getting dressed and still  
doesn't find it at all natural,  
But I do find it metaphysical, and it vexes me if someone knocks at the  
door,

Not so much for interrupting my necktie but for reminding me there's  
life.

Yes, finally, I the addressee of sealed letters,  
The chest with the worn initials,  
The intonation of voices we'll never hear again —  
God keeps all this in Mystery, and occasionally we feel it  
And life suddenly weighs more and produces a chill more intimate  
than skin.

Brigida my aunt's cousin,  
The general they used to talk about—a general when they were little  
And life was civil war on every street corner. . .  
*Vive le mélodrame où Margot a pleuré!*  
Dry leaves fall to the ground intermittently,  
But the fact is that it's always autumn in autumn,  
And winter inexorably follows it,  
And life has only one path, which is life.

That old man, a nobody, but he knew the last of the Romantics,  
That political pamphlet from the time of the constitutional revolutions,  
And the grief that all this leaves, for some unknown reason,  
And the only reason to cry about it is to feel.  
All lovers have kissed one another in my soul,  
All vagrants have slept on me for a moment,  
All the scorned have leaned for an instant on my shoulder,  
All the old and infirm have crossed the street on my arm,  
And there was a secret told me by every murderer.

(That woman whose smile suggests the peace I don't have,  
In whose lowering of the eyes there's a Dutch landscape  
With the female heads wrapped in white linen  
And the daily effort of a tidy and tranquil people . . .  
That woman who is the ring left on top of the dresser,  
And the ribbon that's caught when the drawer is shut,  
A pink ribbon, I don't like the color but I like the ribbon being caught,  
As I don't like life but like to feel it . . .

To sleep like a spurned dog on the open road,  
Definitively for the rest of the universe,

Run over by every passing vehicle . . .)

I've gone to bed with every feeling,  
I've been the pimp of every emotion,  
All felt sensations have bought me drinks,  
I've traded glances with every motive for every act,  
I've held hands with every urge to depart,  
Tremendous fever of time!  
Anguished furnace of emotions!  
Rage, foam, the vastness that doesn't fit in my handkerchief,  
The dog in heat howling in the night,  
The pond from the farm going in circles around my insomnia,  
The woods as they were, on our late-afternoon walks, the rose,  
The indifferent tuft of hair, the moss, the pines,  
The rage of not containing all this, not retaining all this,  
O abstract hunger for things, impotent libido for moments,  
Intellectual orgy of feeling life!

To obtain everything by divine sufficiency—  
Holiday eves, permissions, useful tips,  
Life's beautiful things—  
Talent, virtue, impunity,  
The inclination to see others home,  
The status of traveler,  
The convenience of boarding early so as to get a seat,  
And something's always missing, a glass, a breeze, a phrase,  
And the more one invents and enjoys, the more life hurts.

To be able to laugh, laugh, laugh uproariously,  
To laugh like an overturned glass,  
Completely crazy just from feeling,  
Completely disfigured from scraping against things,  
My mouth cut up from biting on things,  
My fingernails bloody from clawing at things,  
And then give me whatever cell you like that I may look back on life.

## **IT WAS ON ONE OF MY VOYAGES**

It was on one of my voyages. . .  
High sea, and the moon was out. . .  
The evening hubbub aboard ship had quieted.  
One by one, group by group, the passengers retired.  
The band was just furniture that for some reason had remained in a  
corner.  
Only in the smoking lounge did a chess game silently continue.  
Life droned through the open door of the engine room.  
Alone ... A naked soul face-to-face with the universe!  
(O town of my birth in faraway Portugal!  
Why didn't I die as a child, when all I knew was you?)

## **AH, WHEN WE SET OUT TO SEA**

Ah, when we set out to sea,  
When we shove off from land and begin to lose sight of it,  
When everything starts to fill with purely ocean air,  
When the coast becomes a shadowy line,  
An ever hazier line as the night falls (lights hover) —  
Then what joyful freedom for those who feel!  
Suddenly there's no reason for existing socially,  
There are no more reasons for loving, hating, doing one's duty,  
There are no more laws, no human-tasting griefs . . .  
There are only the Abstract Departure and the waters' movement,  
The movement of pulling away, the sound  
Of the waves lulling the prow,  
And a large skittish peace that softly enters the soul.

Ah, to have my whole life  
Unsteadily fixed in one of these moments,  
To have the whole meaning of my duration on earth  
Summed up in a departure from the coast where I left everything—  
Loves, vexations, sorrows, alliances, duties,  
The restless anguish of regrets,  
The weariness caused by so much futility,  
The surfeit even of imagined things,  
The nausea, the lights,  
The eyelids that weigh heavy over my lost life . . .

I'll go far, far away! Far away, O boat without cause,  
To the prehistoric irresponsibility of the eternal waters.  
Far away, forever far away, O death.  
When I know faraway where and faraway why, O life . . .

## **BUT IT'S NOT JUST THE CADAVER**

But it's not just the cadaver,  
It's not just that frightful person who's no one,  
That abysmal variation on the usual body,  
That stranger who appears in the absence of the man we knew,  
That gaping chasm between our seeing and our understanding—  
It's not just the cadaver that fills the soul with dread  
And plants a silence in the bottom of the heart.  
The everyday external things of the one who died  
Also trouble the soul, and with a more poignant dread.  
Even if they belonged to an enemy,  
Who can look without nostalgia at the table where this enemy sat,  
At the pen with which he wrote?  
Who can see without sincere anguish  
The coat in whose pockets the dead beggar kept his (now forever  
absent) hands,  
The now horridly tidied-up toys of the dead child,  
The rifle the hunter took with him when he vanished beyond every  
hill?  
All of this suddenly weighs on my foreign comprehension,  
And a death-sized nostalgia terrifies my soul.

## **I LEANED BACK IN THE DECK CHAIR AND CLOSED MY EYES**

I leaned back in the deck chair and closed my eyes,  
And my destiny loomed like a cliff in my soul.  
My past life mingled with that of the future,  
And at some point a noise reached my ears  
From the smoking lounge: the chess game must have ended.

Ah, tossed  
In the feeling of the waves,  
Rocked  
In the comforting idea that today is still not tomorrow,  
That at least right now I have no responsibilities,  
That I don't have a personality as such but just feel myself here,  
On this chair, like a book left by the Swedish lady . . .

Ah, sunken  
In a torpor of the imagination, no doubt a bit sleepy,  
Peacefully restless,  
Suddenly analogous to the child I once was,  
When I played at the house in the country and didn't know basic  
algebra,  
Let alone the algebras with  $x$ 's and  $y$ 's of the emotions . . .

Ah, all of me years  
For that moment of no importance  
In my life.  
All of me years for that as for other analogous moments—  
Those in which I had no importance at all,  
Those in which I grasped, without the mind, the complete emptiness of  
existence,  
And there was moonlight and sea and solitude, O Álvaro.

## **THE TOBACCO SHOP**

I'm nothing.  
I'll always be nothing.  
I can't want to be something.  
But I have in me all the dreams of the world.

Windows of my room,  
The room of one of the world's millions nobody knows  
(And if they knew me, what would they know?),  
You open onto the mystery of a street continually crossed by people,  
A street inaccessible to any and every thought,

Real, impossibly real, certain, unknowingly certain,  
With the mystery of things beneath the stones and beings,  
With death making the walls damp and the hair of men white,  
With Destiny driving the wagon of everything down the road of  
nothing.

Today I'm defeated, as if I'd learned the truth.  
Today I'm lucid, as if I were about to die  
And had no greater kinship with things  
Than to say farewell, this building and this side of the street becoming  
A row of train cars, with the whistle for departure  
Blowing in my head  
And my nerves jolting and bones creaking as we pull out.

Today I'm bewildered, like a man who wondered and discovered and  
forgot.  
Today I'm torn between the loyalty I owe  
To the outward reality of the Tobacco Shop across the street  
And to the inward reality of my feeling that everything's a dream.

I failed in everything.  
Since I had no ambition, perhaps I failed in nothing.  
I left the education I was given,  
Climbing down from the window at the back of the house.  
I went to the country with big plans.  
But all I found was grass and trees,  
And when there were people they were just like others.  
I step back from the window and sit in a chair. What should I think  
about?

How should I know what I'll be, I who don't know what I am?  
Be what I think? But I think of being so many things!  
And there are so many who think of being the same thing that we can't  
all be it!  
Genius? At this moment  
A hundred thousand brains are dreaming they're geniuses like me,  
And it may be that history won't remember even one,

All of their imagined conquests amounting to so much dung.  
No, I don't believe in me.  
Insane asylums are full of lunatics with certainties!  
Am I, who have no certainties, more right or less right?  
No, not even in me . . .  
In how many garrets and non-garrets of the world  
Are self-convinced geniuses at this moment dreaming?  
How many lofty and noble and lucid aspirations  
—Yes, truly lofty and noble and lucid  
And perhaps even attainable —  
Will never see the true light of day or find a sympathetic ear?  
The world is for those born to conquer it,  
Not for those who dream they can conquer it, even if they're right.  
I've done more in dreams than Napoleon.

I've held more humanities against my hypothetical breast than Christ.  
I've secretly invented philosophies such as Kant never wrote.  
But I am, and perhaps will always be, the man in the garret,  
Even though I don't live in one.  
I'll always be *the one who wasn't horn for that*;  
I'll always be merely *the one who had qualities*;  
I'll always be the one who waited for a door to open in a wall without  
doors  
And sang the song of the Infinite in a chicken coop  
And heard the voice of God in a covered well.  
Believe in me? No, not in anything.  
Let Nature pour over my seething head  
Its sun, its rain, and the wind that finds my hair,  
And let the rest come if it will or must, or let it not come.  
Cardiac slaves of the stars,  
We conquered the whole world before getting out of bed,  
But we woke up and it's hazy,  
We got up and it's alien,  
We went outside and it's the entire earth  
Plus the solar system and the Milky Way and the Indefinite.

(Eat your chocolates, little girl,  
Eat your chocolates!



Believe me, there's no metaphysics on earth like chocolates,  
And all religions put together teach no more than the candy shop.  
Eat, dirty little girl, eat!  
If only I could eat chocolates with the same truth as you!  
But I think and, removing the silver paper that's tinfoil,  
I throw it all on the ground, as I've thrown out life.)

But at least, from my bitterness over what I'll never be,  
There remains the hasty writing of these verses,  
A broken gateway to the Impossible.  
But at least I confer on myself a contempt without tears,  
Noble at least in the sweeping gesture by which I fling  
The dirty laundry that's me —with no list—into the stream of things,  
And I stay at home, shirtless.

(O my consoler, who doesn't exist and therefore consoles,  
Be you a Greek goddess, conceived as a living statue,  
Or a patrician woman of Rome, impossibly noble and dire,  
Or a princess of the troubadours, all charm and grace,  
Or an eighteenth-century marchioness, décolleté and aloof,  
Or a famous courtesan from our parents' generation,  
Or something modern, I can't quite imagine what—  
Whatever all of this is, whatever you are, if you can inspire, then  
inspire me!

My heart is a poured-out bucket.  
In the same way invokers of spirits invoke spirits, I invoke  
My own self and find nothing.  
I go to the window and see the street with absolute clarity.  
I see the shops, I see the sidewalks, I see the passing cars,  
I see the clothed living beings who pass each other.  
I see the dogs that also exist,  
And all of this weighs on me like a sentence of exile,  
And all of this is foreign, like everything else.)

I've lived, studied, loved, and even believed,  
And today there's not a beggar I don't envy just because he isn't me.  
I look at the tatters and sores and falsehood of each one,  
And I think: perhaps you never lived or studied or loved or believed

(For it's possible to do all of this without having done any of it);  
Perhaps you've merely existed, as when a lizard has its tail cut off  
And the tail keeps on twitching, without the lizard.  
I made of myself what I was no good at making,  
And what I could have made of myself I didn't.  
I put on the wrong costume  
And was immediately taken for someone I wasn't, and I said nothing  
and was lost.  
When I went to take off the mask,  
It was stuck to my face.  
When I got it off and saw myself in the mirror,  
I had already grown old.  
I was drunk and no longer knew how to wear the costume that I hadn't  
taken off.  
I threw out the mask and slept in the closet  
Like a dog tolerated by the management  
Because it's harmless,  
And I'll write down this story to prove I'm sublime.

Musical essence of my useless verses,  
If only I could look at you as something I had made  
Instead of always looking at the Tobacco Shop across the street,  
Trampling on my consciousness of existing,  
Like a rug a drunkard stumbles on  
Or a doormat stolen by gypsies and it's not worth a thing.

But the Tobacco Shop Owner has come to the door and is standing  
there.  
I look at him with the discomfort of a half-twisted neck  
Compounded by the discomfort of a half-grasping soul.  
He will die and I will die.  
He'll leave his signboard, I'll leave my poems.  
His sign will also eventually die, and so will my poems.  
Eventually the street where the sign was will die,  
And so will the language in which my poems were written.  
Then the whirling planet where all of this happened will die.

On other planets of other solar systems something like people

Will continue to make things like poems and to live under things like  
signs,  
Always one thing facing the other,  
Always one thing as useless as the other,  
Always the impossible as stupid as reality,  
Always the inner mystery as true as the mystery sleeping on the  
surface.  
Always this thing or always that, or neither one thing nor the other.

But a man has entered the Tobacco Shop (to buy tobacco?),  
And plausible reality suddenly hits me.  
I half rise from my chair—energetic, convinced, human—  
And will try to write these verses in which I say the opposite.

I light up a cigarette as I think about writing them,  
And in that cigarette I savor a freedom from all thought.  
My eyes follow the smoke as if it were my own trail  
And I enjoy, for a sensitive and fitting moment,  
A liberation from all speculation  
And an awareness that metaphysics is a consequence of not feeling  
very well.  
Then I lean back in the chair  
And keep smoking.  
As long as Destiny permits, I'll keep smoking.

(If I married my washwoman's daughter  
Perhaps I would be happy.)  
I get up from the chair. I go to the window.

The man has come out of the Tobacco Shop (putting change into his  
pocket?).  
Ah, I know him: it's unmetaphysical Esteves.  
(The Tobacco Shop Owner has come to the door.)  
As if by divine instinct, Esteves turns around and sees me.  
He waves hello, I shout back "Hello, Esteves!" and the universe  
Falls back into place without ideals or hopes, and the Owner of the  
Tobacco Shop smiles.

15 JANUARY 1928

## **OPORTO-STYLE TRIPE**

One day, in a restaurant, outside of space and time,  
I was served up love as a dish of cold tripe.  
I politely told the missionary of the kitchen  
That I preferred it hot,  
Because tripe (and it was Oporto-style) is never eaten cold.

They got impatient with me.  
You can never be right, not even in a restaurant.  
I didn't eat it, I ordered nothing else, I paid the bill,  
And I decided to take a walk down the street.

Who knows what this might mean?  
I don't know, and it happened to me . . .

(I know very well that in everyone's childhood there was a garden,  
Private or public, or belonging to the neighbor.  
I know very well that our playing was the owner of it  
And that sadness belongs to today.)

I know this many times over,  
But if I asked for love, why did they bring me  
Oporto-style tripe that was cold?  
It's not a dish that can be eaten cold,  
But they served it to me cold.  
I didn't make a fuss, but it was cold.  
It can never be eaten cold, but it came cold.

## **A NOTE IN THE MARGIN**

Put time to good use!  
But what's time that I should put it to use?  
Put time to good use!

Not a day without a few lines . . .  
Honest and first-rate work  
Like that of a Virgil or Milton . . .  
But to be honest or first-rate is so hard!  
To be Milton or Virgil is so unlikely!

Put time to good use!  
Taking from my soul the right little bits —no more and no less —  
That will fit together like a jigsaw puzzle  
To make a definite picture in history . . .  
(And it's just as definite on the underside no one sees.)  
Making my sensations into a house of cards —a miniature, after-dinner  
China . . .  
Arranging my thoughts like dominoes, like against like . . .  
Treating my will like a tricky billiard shot. . .  
Images of games or of solitaires or of pastimes —  
Images of life, images of lives, Image of Life . . .

Verbosity.  
Yes, verbosity.  
Put time to good use!  
Not letting a minute go by without examining my conscience . . .  
Not allowing a single indefinite or factitious act. . .  
Not permitting any move out of line with my goals. . .  
Good manners of the soul . . .  
The elegance of persevering . . .

Put time to good use!  
My heart is weary like a veritable beggar.  
My brain's ready to go, like a bundle in a corner.  
My song (verbosity!) is what it is and is sad.  
Put time to good use!  
Five minutes have gone by since I started writing.  
Have I put them to good use or not?  
If I don't know, then how will I know about other minutes?

(Lady who so often rode in the same compartment with me

On the suburban train,  
Did you ever become interested in me?  
Did I put time to good use by looking at you?  
What was the rhythm of our silence in the moving train?  
What was the understanding that we never came to?  
What life was there in this? What was this to life?)

Put time to good use!  
Ah, let me put nothing to use!  
Neither time nor being, nor memories of time or being!  
Let me be a tree leaf tickled by breezes,  
The dust of a road, involuntary and alone,  
The incidental runlet of the rains that are letting up,  
The tracks left by wheels until new wheels come along,  
The little boy's top, which is coming to a halt,  
And it sways, with the same movement as the earth's,  
And it quivers, with the same movement as the soul's,  
And it falls, as the gods fall, onto Destiny's floor.

11 APRIL 1928

## **DEFERRAL**

The day after tomorrow, not until the day after tomorrow . . .  
I'll spend tomorrow thinking about the day after tomorrow,  
And then maybe, we'll see; but not today . . .  
Today is out of the question. Today I can't.  
The confused persistence of my objective subjectivity,  
The fatigue of my real, intermittently appearing life,  
The anticipated and infinite weariness,  
A multi-world weariness just to catch a streetcar,  
This species of soul . . .

Not until the day after tomorrow . . .

Today I want to get ready,  
I want to get ready to think tomorrow about the day after . . .  
That will be the decisive one.  
I've already planned it out; but no, today I'm not planning anything.  
Tomorrow is the day for plans.

Tomorrow I'll sit at my desk to conquer the world,  
But I'll only conquer the world the day after tomorrow . . .  
I feel like crying,  
I suddenly feel, deep within, like crying.  
No, don't try to find out any more, it's a secret, I'm not telling.  
Not until the day after tomorrow . . .

When I was a child I was amused by the Sunday circus every week.  
Today I'm only amused by the Sunday circus of every week of my  
childhood.

The day after tomorrow I'll be different,  
My life will triumph,  
All of my real qualities of intelligence, erudition and practicality  
Will be convened by an official announcement,  
But by an announcement to be made tomorrow . . .  
Today I want to sleep; I'll draft announcements tomorrow . . .  
For today, what show is playing that would reenact my childhood?  
I'll be sure to buy tickets tomorrow,  
Since the day after tomorrow is when I want to go,

Not before. . .

The day after tomorrow I'll have the public image which tomorrow I'll  
rehearse.

The day after tomorrow I'll finally be what today I could never be.

The day after tomorrow, not before . . .

I feel tired the way a stray dog feels cold.

I feel very tired.

Tomorrow I'll explain it to you, or the day after tomorrow . . .

Yes, perhaps not until the day after tomorrow . . .

The future . . .

Yes, the future . . .

14 APRIL 1928

**SOMETIMES I MEDITATE**

Sometimes I meditate.  
Sometimes I meditate deeply, more deeply, still more deeply,  
And the whole mystery of things seems like an oil on the surface,  
And the whole universe is a sea of faces with eyes bugging out at me.  
Each thing—a corner lamppost, a stone, a tree —  
Is an eye that stares at me from an inscrutable abyss,  
And all the gods and ideas of the gods march through my heart.  
Ah, that things exist!  
Ah, that beings exist!  
Ah, that there exists a way for beings to exist,  
For existence to exist,  
For the existence of “to exist” to exist,  
For anything to exist. . .  
Ah, that there can be the abstract phenomenon of being,  
The existence of consciousness and reality,  
Whatever these may be —  
How express the horror that all of this causes me?  
How tell what it’s like to feel this?

29 APRIL 1928

## **AH, THE FRESHNESS IN THE FACE OF LEAVING A TASK UNDONE**

Ah, the freshness in the face of leaving a task undone!  
To be remiss is to be positively out in the country!  
What a refuge it is to be completely unreliable!  
I can breathe easier now that the appointments are behind me.  
I missed them all, through deliberate negligence,  
Having waited for the urge to go, which I knew wouldn’t come.  
I’m free and against organized, clothed society.  
I’m naked and plunge into the water of my imagination.  
It’s too late to be at either of the two meetings where I should have  
been at the same time,  
Deliberately at the same time . . .  
No matter, I’ll stay here dreaming verses and smiling in italics.  
This spectator aspect of life is so amusing!  
I can’t even light the next cigarette . . . If it’s an action,



It can wait for me, along with the others, in the nonmeeting called life.

17 JUNE 1929

## **AT LONG LAST . . . NO DOUBT ABOUT IT**

At long last . . . no doubt about it. . .  
Here it is!  
Madness has definitively entered my head.

My heart exploded like a two-bit bomb,  
And the shock went up my spine to my head . . .

Thank God that I'm crazy!  
That everything I did has come back to me as garbage  
And like spit in the wind has splattered all over my face!  
That everything I was has gotten tangled around my feet,  
Like packing cloth to pack nothing at all!  
That everything I thought tickles my throat  
And makes me want to vomit, although I ate nothing!  
Thank God, since this, as for drunkenness,  
Is a solution.

How about that, I found a solution, via my stomach!  
I discovered a truth, I perceived it with my intestines!

Transcendental poetry? I've done that too!  
Great lyrical raptures have already paid me a visit!  
The organization of poems by general topics divided into subtopics?  
That's no novelty either.  
I feel like vomiting, and like vomiting my own self. . .  
I feel a nausea such that, if I could eat the universe to throw it up into  
the sink, I'd eat it.  
With a struggle, but it would be for a good purpose.  
At least it would be for a purpose.  
Such as I am I have no purpose and no life . . .

## POP

Today, feeling bored and uninspired,  
Today, apathetic, short on desire,  
I'll write my epitaph: "Here lies Álvaro . . ."  
(The Greek Anthology has more apropos.)  
What's the reason for these several rhymes?  
No reason. A friend I see from time to time  
Wanted to know what I'm doing these days,  
And I write these verses to have something to say.  
I rarely rhyme, and rhymes rarely succeed,  
But sometimes to rhyme is an imperative need.  
My heart goes pop like a paper sack  
Filled with air and given a good smack,  
And the startled stranger turns in confusion,  
And I end this poem without a conclusion.

2 DECEMBER 1929

## I WALK IN THE NIGHT OF THE SUBURBAN STREET

I walk in the night of the suburban street,  
Returning from the conference of experts like myself.  
I return alone, now a poet, without expertise or engineering,  
Human unto the sound of my solitary shoes in the beginning of night.  
In the distance the last shutters are pulled down on the last shop.  
Ah, the sound of supertime in happy homes!  
I walk, and my ears peer into the homes.  
My inherent exile comes alive in the darkness  
Of the street which is my home, my being, and my blood.  
To be a child from a well-off family,  
With a nursemaid, a soft bed, and a child's slumber!  
O my unprivileged heart!  
My feeling of exclusion!  
My bitter grief for being I!

Who made firewood out of my childhood crib?  
Who made rags from the sheets I slept in as a boy?

Who tossed the lace from the shirt I wore when baptized  
Into the house dust and fruit skins  
Of the world's garbage cans?  
Who sold me to Fate?  
Who exchanged me for what I am?

I've just spoken with precision in definite circumstances.  
I made concrete points, like an adding machine.  
I was accurate like a scale.  
I told what I knew.

Now, heading to where the streetcar turns around to go back to the city,  
I walk as a metaphysical outcast by the light of streetlamps spaced far  
apart,  
And in the shadow between two lamps I feel like not going on,  
But I'll take the streetcar.  
The bell at the invisible end of the cord will ring two times  
When pulled by the stubby fingers of the unshaven conductor.  
I'll take the streetcar.  
In spite of everything—alas!—I've always taken the streetcar.  
Always, always, always . . .  
I've always gone back to the city.  
I've always gone back, after speculations and detours.  
I've always gone back, hungry for supper.  
But I've never had the supper I hear behind the venetian blinds  
Of happy homes on the outskirts, where people like me head back to  
the streetcar.  
The conjugal homes of normal life!  
I pay for the ticket through the slits,  
And the conductor walks by me as if I were the Critique of Pure  
Reason . . .  
I've paid my ticket. I've done my duty. I'm like everyone else.  
And these are all things not even suicide can cure.

6 JANUARY 1930

**YES, I KNOW IT'S ALL QUITE NATURAL**

Yes, I know it's all quite natural,  
But I still have a heart.  
Shit and good night!  
(Burst into smithereens, O heart!)  
(Shit to all of humanity!)

In the house of the woman whose child was run over  
All is laughter and play.  
And there's a great racket of horns to commemorate.

They received compensation:  
Baby equal to  $x$ .  
Now they're enjoying the  $x$ ,  
Eating and drinking the dead baby.  
Bravo! They're people!  
Bravo! They're humanity!  
Bravo: they're all the fathers and mothers  
Who have children that can be run over!  
Money can make us forget everything.  
Baby equal to  $x$ .

Thus an entire house was wallpapered.  
Thus the last installment on the furniture was paid.  
Poor baby.  
But if it hadn't been run over, how pay the bills?  
Yes, it was loved.  
Yes, it was cherished.  
But it died.  
Too bad, it died!  
What a pity, it died!  
But it did bring in some cash  
With which to pay the bills.  
Indeed it was tragic,  
But the bills have been paid.

Indeed, that poor tiny body  
Was crushed to a pulp,

But now, at least, no money is owed the grocer.  
It's too bad, yes, but there's always a silver lining.

The baby died, but a thousand dollars exist.  
Yes, a thousand dollars.  
A lot can be done (poor baby) with a thousand dollars.  
A lot of debts paid (precious little baby)  
With a thousand dollars.  
A lot put in order  
(Beautiful baby that died) with a thousand dollars.  
Of course it's sad  
(A thousand dollars)  
To have our own child run over  
(A thousand dollars)  
But the thought of a remodeled house  
(A thousand dollars)  
And of a home all fixed up  
(A thousand dollars)  
Can make one forget quite a lot (how we've wept!).  
A thousand dollars!  
As if it came straight from God  
(This thousand dollars).  
Poor mutilated baby!  
A thousand dollars.

## **STREETCAR STOP**

Dish me up some forgetfulness!  
I want to eat the renunciation of life!  
I want to kick the habit of shouting on the inside.  
Enough already! I don't know what of, but enough!  
Live tomorrow, you say? And what do we do with today?  
Live tomorrow because today was postponed?  
Did I buy a ticket for this show?  
I'd roar with laughter if I could laugh.  
And here's the streetcar, the one I've been waiting for.  
I wish it were another one. To have to climb aboard already!  
No one's forcing me, but why let it go by?

Unless I were to let all of them go by, and my own self, and life . . .  
How nauseating a conscious soul is to the physical stomach!  
How peacefully I'd sleep if I could be anyone else!  
Now I understand why children want to be streetcar operators.  
No, I don't understand anything.  
Blue and gold day, human happiness, clear eyes of life . . .

28 MAY 1930

## **BIRTHDAY**

Back when they used to celebrate my birthday  
I was happy and no one was dead.  
In the old house even my birthday was a centuries-old tradition,  
And everyone's joy, mine included, was as sure as any religion.

Back when they used to celebrate my birthday  
I enjoyed the good health of understanding nothing,  
Of being intelligent in my family's eyes,  
And of not having the hopes that others had for me.  
When I began to have hopes, I no longer knew how to hope.  
When I began to look at life, it had lost all meaning for me.

Yes, that person I knew as me,  
That person with a heart and family,  
That person of quasi-rural evenings spent all together,  
That person who was a boy they loved,  
That person —my God!—whom only today I realize I was . . .  
How faraway! . . .  
(Not even an echo . . .)  
When they used to celebrate my birthday!

The person I am today is like the damp in the hall at the back of the  
house  
That makes the walls mildew . . .  
What I am today (and the house of those who loved me trembles  
through my tears) —

What I am today is their having sold the house,  
It's all of them having died,  
It's I having survived myself like a spent match.

Back when they used to celebrate my birthday . . .  
Ah, how I love, like a person, those days!  
How my soul physically longs to return there,  
Via a metaphysical and carnal journey,  
In a duality of me to me . . .  
To eat the past like the bread of hunger, with no time for butter  
between the teeth!

I see it all again, so vivid it blinds me to what's here . . .  
The table with extra place settings, fancier china, more glasses,  
The sideboard full of sweets and fruits, and other things in the shadow  
of the lower shelf.  
Elderly aunts, different cousins, and all for my sake,  
Back when they used to celebrate my birthday.

Stop it, heart!  
Don't think! Leave thinking to the head!  
O my God, my God, my God!  
I no longer have birthdays.  
I endure.  
My days add up.  
I'll be old when I'm old.  
That's all.  
If only I'd filched the goddamn past and brought it away in my pocket!

When they used to celebrate my birthday!

13 JUNE 1930

## **NO! ALL I WANT IS FREEDOM**

No! All I want is freedom!  
Love, glory, and wealth are prisons.

Lovely rooms? Nice furniture? Plush rugs?  
Just let me out so I can be with myself.  
I want to breathe the air in private.  
My heart doesn't throb collectively,  
And I'm unable to feel in jointly held society.  
I'm only I, born only as I am, full of nothing but me.  
Where do I want to sleep? In the backyard.  
Without any walls, just the great conversation,  
I and the universe.  
And what peace, what relief to fall asleep seeing not the ghost of my  
wardrobe  
But the black and cool splendor of all the stars in concert,  
The great and infinite abyss above  
Placing its breezes and solaces on the flesh-covered skull that's my  
face,  
Where only the eyes—another sky—reveal the world of subjective  
being.

I told you I don't want it! Just give me freedom!  
I want to be equal to myself.  
Don't castrate me with ideals!  
Don't put me into your straitjackets of manners!  
Don't make me respectable or intelligible!  
Don't make me into a living corpse!

I want to be able to throw this ball up to the moon  
And hear it fall into the yard next door!  
I want to lie down in the grass, thinking, Tomorrow I'll go get it. . .  
Tomorrow I'll go get it from the yard next door. . .  
Tomorrow I'll go get it from the yard next door . . .  
Tomorrow I'll go get it from the yard  
Get it from the yard  
From the yard  
Next door . . .

11 AUGUST 1930

**I'D LIKE TO BE ABLE TO LIKE LIKING**



I'd like to be able to like liking.  
Just a second . . . Grab me a cigarette  
From that pack lying on top of the nightstand.  
Go on . . . You were saying  
That in the development of metaphysics  
From Kant to Hegel  
Something was lost.  
I agree entirely.  
I really was listening.  
*Nondum amabam et amare amabam* — St. Augustine.  
What odd associations of ideas we sometimes have!  
I'm tired of thinking about feeling anything else.  
Thanks. Excuse me while I light up. Go on. Hegel . . .

## REALITY

Yes, I often came by here twenty years ago.  
Nothing has changed, as far as I can tell,  
In this part of town.

Twenty years ago!  
The person I was back then! Yes, I was different. . .  
Twenty years ago, and the houses have no idea . . .

Twenty useless years (or maybe they weren't:  
How do I know what's useful or useless?) . . .  
Twenty lost years (but what would it mean to win them?) . . .

I try to reconstruct in my mind  
Who and what I was when I used to come by here  
Twenty years ago . . .  
I don't remember. I can't remember.  
The person who came by here back then  
Might remember, if he still existed.  
There are lots of characters from novels I know better  
Than this I who came by here twenty years ago!

Yes, the mystery of time.  
Yes, our knowing nothing about anything,  
Yes, all of us born on a ship already at sea,  
Yes, yes, all of this, or another way of saying it.

From that third-story window, still identical to what it was,  
A girl who was older than I used to lean out, dressed—as I usually  
remember her—in blue.  
What might she be now?  
We can imagine anything about things we know nothing of.  
I'm at a physical and moral standstill: I'd rather not imagine . . .

One day I walked up this road thinking happily of the future,  
For God allows what doesn't exist to shine brightly.  
Today, walking down this road, I don't even think happily of the past.  
At best, I don't think at all.  
I have the impression that the two figures crossed paths on this road,  
not then and not now,  
But right here, their crossing undisturbed by time.  
They looked indifferently at each other.  
And the old I walked up the road imagining a future sunflower.  
And the I of today walked down the road imagining nothing.

Perhaps this really happened . . .  
Truly happened . . .  
Yes, physically happened . . .

Yes, perhaps . . .

15 DECEMBER 1932

## **I'M BEGINNING TO KNOW MYSELF. I DON'T EXIST**

I'm beginning to know myself. I don't exist.  
I'm the gap between what I'd like to be and what others have made  
me,  
Or half of this gap, since there's also life . . .

That's me. Period.  
Turn off the light, shut the door, and get rid of the slipper noise in the hallway.  
Leave me alone in my room with the vast peace of myself.  
It's a shoddy universe.

## **PACK YOUR BAGS FOR NOWHERE AT ALL**

Pack your bags for Nowhere at All!  
Set sail for the ubiquitous negation of everything  
With a panoply of flags on make-believe ships —  
Those miniature, multicolored ships from childhood!  
Pack your bags for the Grand Departure!  
And don't forget, along with your brushes and clippers,  
The polychrome distance of what can't be had.  
Pack your bags once and for all!  
Who are you here, where you socially and uselessly exist—  
And the more usefully the more uselessly,  
The more truly the more falsely?  
Who are you here, who are you here, who are you here?  
Set sail, even without bags, for your own diverse self!  
What does the inhabited world have to do with you?

2 MAY 1933

## **I GOT OFF THE TRAIN**

I got off the train  
And said goodbye to the man I'd met.  
We'd been together for eighteen hours  
And had a pleasant conversation,  
Fellowship in the journey,  
And I was sorry to get off, sorry to leave  
This chance friend whose name I never learned.  
I felt my eyes water with tears . . .  
Every farewell is a death.  
Yes, every farewell is a death.  
In the train that we call life

We are all chance events in one another's lives,  
And we all feel sorry when it's time to get off.

All that is human moves me, because I'm a man.  
All that is human moves me, not because I have an affinity  
With human ideas or human doctrines  
But because of my infinite fellowship with humanity itself.

The maid who hated to go,  
Crying with nostalgia  
For the house where she'd been mistreated . . .

All of this, inside my heart, is death and the world's sadness.  
All of this lives, because it dies, inside my heart.

And my heart is a little larger than the entire universe.

4 JULY 1934

## **THIS OLD ANGUISH**

This old anguish,  
Which I've carried around for centuries,  
Overflowed from its vessel  
In tears, in wild imaginings,  
In nightmarish dreams without terror,  
In sudden huge emotions that make no sense.

It overflowed.  
I'm at a loss to know how to live life  
With this malaise that's crumpling my soul.  
If at least I could be positively crazy!  
But no: always this in-betweenness,  
This almost,  
This it might be that. . .  
This.

An inmate in an insane asylum is at least someone.  
I'm an inmate in an asylum without an asylum.  
I'm consciously crazy,  
I'm a lucid lunatic,  
I'm alien to everything and equal to all:  
I'm sleeping while awake with dreams that are madness  
Because they're not dreams.  
I'm . . .

Poor old house of my lost childhood!  
Could you ever have imagined I'd so desert myself?  
What happened to your boy? He went nuts.  
What happened to the one who slept soundly under your provincial  
rooftop?  
He went nuts.  
What happened to who I was? He went nuts. Today he's who I am.

If at least I had some kind of religion.  
The religion, for example, of that idol from Africa  
We had at home (the one I've mentioned).  
It was unsightly, it was grotesque,  
But it contained the divinity of everything that's believed in.  
If I could believe in some idol or other-  
Jupiter, Jehovah, Humanity . . .  
Any one would do,  
For isn't everything merely what we think it is?

Shatter, heart of painted glass!

16 JUNE 1934

## **IMPASSIVELY**

Impassively,  
Indifferently,  
Distractedly,  
I look at the crochet you make

With two hands.

I look at it from the top of a nonexistent hill,  
Stitch after stitch forming a cloth . . .

Why are your hands and soul entertained  
By this riddled thing  
Through which a burnt match can be pushed?  
But then again,  
Why do I criticize you?

No reason.  
I also have my crochet.  
It dates from when I began to think.  
Stitch on stitch forming a whole without a whole . . .  
A cloth, and I don't know if it's for a garment or for nothing.  
A soul, and I don't know if it's for feeling or living.  
I watch you so intently  
I stop seeing you.

Crochet, souls, philosophy . . .  
All the religions of the world . . .  
All that entertains us in the leisure hours of our existence . . .  
A hooked needle, a loop, silence . . .

9 AUGUST 1934

## **ON THE EVE OF NEVER DEPARTING**

On the eve of never departing  
At least there are no suitcases to pack  
Or lists to draw up with things to do  
(Some of which are always forgotten)  
The following day, before leaving.

Nothing needs to be done  
On the eve of never departing.

How relaxing not to have anything at all  
To be relaxed about!  
What peace of mind when there's no more reason to shrug,  
Tedium (poor tedium!) having been left behind  
To arrive deliberately at nothing!  
What happiness it is not to need to be happy,  
Like an opportunity turned inside out.

For some months now I've been living  
The vegetative life of thought,  
Day after day *sine linea* . . .

Yes, how relaxing . . .  
Peace of mind . . .  
What a relief after so many journeys—physical and mental —  
To be able to look at closed suitcases as at nothing!  
Doze off, soul, doze off!  
Doze while you can!  
Doze!

You don't have much time! Doze,  
For it's the eve of never departing!

27 SEPTEMBER 1934

## **SYMBOLS? I'M SICK OF SYMBOLS**

Symbols? I'm sick of symbols . . .  
Some people tell me that everything is symbols.  
They're telling me nothing.

What symbols? Dreams . . .  
Let the sun be a symbol, fine . . .  
Let the moon be a symbol, fine . . .  
Let the earth be a symbol, fine . . .  
But who notices the sun except when the rain stops  
And it breaks through the clouds and points behind its back

To the blue of the sky?  
And who notices the moon except to admire  
Not it but the beautiful light it radiates?  
And who notices the very earth we tread?  
We say earth and think of fields, trees and hills,  
Unwittingly diminishing it,  
For the sea is also earth.

Okay, let all of this be symbols.  
But what's the symbol —not the sun, not the moon, not the earth —  
In this premature sunset amid the fading blue  
With the sun caught in expiring tatters of clouds  
And the moon already mystically present at the other end of the sky  
As the last remnant of daylight  
Gilds the head of the seamstress who hesitates at the corner  
Where she used to linger (she lives nearby) with the boyfriend who left  
her?  
Symbols? I don't want symbols.  
All I want—poor frail and forlorn creature! —  
Is for the boyfriend to go back to the seamstress.

18 DECEMBER 1934

## **THE ANCIENTS INVOKED THE MUSES**

The ancients invoked the Muses.  
We invoke ourselves.  
I don't know if the Muses appeared  
—No doubt it depended on what was invoked and how—  
But I know that we don't appear.

How often I've leaned over  
The well that's me  
And bleated "Hey!" to hear an echo,  
And I've heard no more than I've seen—  
The faint dark glimmer of the water  
There in the useless depths.  
No echo for me . . .



Just the hint of a face, which must be mine since it can't be anyone else's.

Just an almost invisible

Luminously smudged image

There in the depths . . .

In the silence and deceptive light of the depths . . .

What a Muse!

3 JANUARY 1935

## **I DON'T KNOW IF THE STARS RULE THE WORLD**

I don't know if the stars rule the world

Or if tarot or playing cards

Can reveal anything.

I don't know if the rolling of dice

Can lead to any conclusion.

But I also don't know

If anything is attained

By living the way most people do.

Yes, I don't know

If I should believe in this daily rising sun

Whose authenticity no one can guarantee me,

Or if it would be better (because better or more convenient)

To believe in some other sun,

One that shines even at night,

Some profound incandescence of things,

Surpassing my understanding.

For now . . .

(Let's take it slow)

For now

I have an absolutely secure grip on the stair rail,

I secure it with my hand —

This rail that doesn't belong to me

And that I lean on as I ascend . . .  
Yes... I ascend . . .  
I ascend to this:  
I don't know if the stars rule the world.

5 JANUARY 1935

## **I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT NOTHING AT ALL**

I've been thinking about nothing at all,  
And this central thing, which isn't anything,  
Is pleasant to me like the evening air,  
Fresh in contrast to the hot summer days.

I've been thinking about nothing at all, and how lucky!

To think about nothing  
Is to fully possess the soul.  
To think about nothing  
Is to intimately live  
Life's ebb and flow . . .

I've been thinking about nothing at all.  
Only . . . it's as if I'd wrenched a muscle,  
I feel a pain in my back, or on one side of it,  
There's a bad taste in the mouth of my soul,  
Because, after all,  
I've been thinking about nothing,  
But really, nothing,  
Nothing . . .

6 JULY 1935

## **ALL LOVE LETTERS ARE**

All love letters are  
Ridiculous.

They wouldn't be love letters if they weren't  
Ridiculous.

In my time I also wrote love letters  
Equally, inevitably  
Ridiculous.

Love letters, if there's love,  
Must be  
Ridiculous.

But in fact  
Only those who've never written  
Love letters  
Are  
Ridiculous.

If only I could go back  
To when I wrote love letters  
Without thinking how  
Ridiculous.

The truth is that today  
My memories  
Of those love letters  
Are what is  
Ridiculous.

(All more-than-three-syllable words,  
Along with uncountable feelings,  
Are naturally  
Ridiculous.)

21 OCTOBER 1935

## FERNANDO PESSOA- HIMSELF THE MASK BEHIND THE MAN

Fernando Pessoa the orthonym was probably born in Lisbon, in 1888, like his creator and namesake, Fernando Pessoa, who provided virtually no biographical information about his most intellectual and analytical poetic persona. From his verses we can glean that Pessoa the poet was a cigarette smoker, often sat by a window, enjoyed dreaming and daydreaming, and suffered from an acute identity problem that could cause him to lose track of whether he was the subject or the object, as when he wrote:

*I contemplate the silent pond  
Whose water is stirred by a breeze.  
Am I thinking about everything,  
Or has everything forgotten me?*

Although we're told nothing very specific about his childhood, he sometimes felt nostalgia for it. At other times he felt "nostalgia for nothing at all,/ A desire for something vague." The problem for this indecisive, doubt-plagued poet was not so much that he lacked an identity but, rather, that he had too many of them. "I don't know how many souls I have," he wrote in August of 1930, because "I've changed at every moment." In another poem written on the same day, he admits that his problem is largely brought on by himself, saying, "I break my soul into pieces/ And into various persons."

This penchant for splitting his personality may have something to do —either as cause or result—with his poetic bilingualism, Pessoa having written verses in English as well as Portuguese throughout his adult life, though the *Times Literary Supplement*, in its review of his 35 *Sonnets* (1918), commented that "Mr. Pessoa's command of English is less remarkable than his knowledge of Elizabethan English." However antiquated his written English may have been, it was adequate to express the poet's very immediate existential difficulty. In the eighth sonnet he asks:

*How many masks wear we, and undermasks,*

*Upon our countenance of soul, and when,  
If for self-sport the soul itself unmask,  
Knows it the last mask off and the face plain?*

Remaining on the Portuguese side of the linguistic divide, we find that Pessoa is subdivided thematically. For besides the vaguely nostalgic Pessoa whose verses wonder who and why he is, there is a Pessoa who writes esoteric poems with titles such as “Beyond God,” “The Mummy,” and “Initiation.” And there’s the Pessoa who wrote the national/historical poems *of Message*, the only book of Portuguese poetry he published. And there’s even a Pessoa, rarely mentioned, who wrote several hundred traditional folk quatrains, like this one (translated into English):

*In the dance where everyone dances  
There are some who don’t dance, just stare.  
Better not to go to the dance  
Than to be there without being there.*

4 August 1934

Could it be that, just as there were various heteronyms, so too there were various orthonyms—Fernando Pessoa the existentialist, Fernando Pessoa the patriot, Fernando Pessoa the occultist, Fernando Pessoa the rhymester—all different from one another but all having the same name as their creator, since by definition an orthonym cannot have a different name? (The definition belongs to Pessoa, who invented the word.)

Busy as he was, producing diverse selves and diverse poetries, Pessoa hardly had time for “real” experience, but there was one crucial event in his life early on, in March of 1914, when he met Alberto Caeiro and heard him read poems from *The Keeper of Sheep*. Álvaro de Campos tells us that Pessoa, overwhelmed, went home and immediately wrote the six “intersectionist” poems that make up *Slanting Rain*. Although these poems show no evidence of Caeiro’s influence, it is true that Pessoa had never written anything quite like them, nor would he ever again. Instead, he went back to his inner reflections, too immersed in “self-sport” to appreciate Nature and the world as it is on the surface, à la Caeiro. On occasion he remembered the simple yet not so simple way of the pastoral poet, as when in a poem many years later he wrote that “The sun shining over the field/ Perhaps could be the remedy,” but this remained, for Pessoa-himself, a hypothetical remedy.

There's something else we find in the poetry attributed to Pessoa's orthonym: music. His creator's father, perhaps not by coincidence, was an avid devotee of this art form, working as the music critic for a Lisbon newspaper. The poems signed with the name of Fernando Pessoa— mostly short, with rhyming and metered stanzas—have a singularly musical quality, and he wanted them to be published under the general title "Songbook," but that does not mean he loved music for music's sake. In fact, he seems to have had an ulterior motive, music acting as a more effective remedy for his condition than the sun. Any kind of music would do, he wrote in the poem called "Some Music," as long as it enabled him to forget his uncertainty and "not to feel the heart."

With these scattered biographical details we can form only a fuzzy picture of this restless poet who thought too much. We can imagine him in his room next to a window, looking anxiously at the street down below without knowing what he's looking for, and when the girl from the upstairs apartment begins practicing the piano, as she does every day at that particular hour, he leans back in his chair and puffs on his cigarette, momentarily relieved. Or we can envision him in a Lisbon café or bar, where sometimes there's fado music or a blind man who plays the accordion while a little boy holds out a can, and when the fado music ends or the blind man and his boy go away, Pessoa starts to fidget, orders another drink, smokes another cigarette, pulls some paper out of his pocket, jots down verses for one of the poems that will go into his *Songbook*, recites in an undertone the rhymes he's just written, tentatively smiles, and knows another brief respite.

*from*  
**SONGBOOK**

**OCEAN (MORNING)**

Gleaming with sunlight, soft  
And enormous, the wave advances.  
It rocks this way and that,  
And falls as if relaxing,

So long and slow it seems  
Like the sleeping blue-green breast  
Of a child of the Titans

Breathing in the morning breeze.

The movement of an ocean wave  
Resembles a living thing:  
A snake that slithers forward  
With placid turns and twists.

United, vast, and unending  
In the healthy sun's tranquillity,  
The ocean steadily breathes,  
Drunk with the blue luminosity.

But my own sensation is devoid  
Of pleasure as well as of pain:  
Drunk with being estranged from me,  
It tosses on the ocean's lucid wave.

16 NOVEMBER 1909

## **GOD**

At times I'm the god I carry in myself,  
And then I'm the god, the believer and the prayer  
And the ivory image  
In which this god is forgotten.

At times I'm no more than an atheist  
Of this god I am when exalted.  
I see in myself an entire sky,  
And it's only a vast and hollow sky.

3 JUNE 1913

## **SLANTING RAIN**

VI

The maestro waves his baton,  
And the sad, languid music begins . . .

It reminds me of my childhood, of a day  
I spent playing in my backyard, throwing a ball  
Against the wall . . . On one side of the ball  
Sailed a green dog, on the other side  
A yellow jockey was riding a blue horse . . .

The music continues, and on the white wall of my childhood  
That's suddenly between me and the maestro  
The ball bounces back and forth, now a green dog,  
Now a blue horse with a yellow jockey . . .

My backyard takes up the whole theater, my childhood  
Is everywhere, and the ball starts to play music,  
A sad hazy music that runs around my backyard  
Dressed as a green dog that turns into a yellow jockey . . .  
(So quickly spins the ball between me and the musicians . . .)

I throw it at my childhood, and it  
Passes through the whole theater that's at my feet  
Playing with a yellow jockey and a green dog  
And a blue horse that pops out over the wall  
Of my backyard . . . And the music throws balls  
At my childhood . . . And the wall is made of baton  
Movements and wildly whirling green dogs,  
Blue horses and yellow jockeys . . .

The whole theater is a white wall of music  
Where a green dog runs after my nostalgia  
For my childhood, a blue horse with a yellow jockey ...

And from one side to the other, from right to left,  
From the trees where orchestras play music in the upper branches  
To the rows of balls in the shop where I bought my ball  
And the shopkeeper smiles among the memories of my childhood . . .



And the music stops like a wall that collapses,  
The ball rolls over the cliff of my interrupted dreams,  
And on top of a blue horse the maestro, a yellow jockey turning black,  
Gives thanks while laying down his baton on a fleeing wall,  
And he takes a bow, smiling, with a white ball on top of his head,  
A white ball that rolls down his back out of sight . . .

8 MARCH 1914

## **THE WIND IS BLOWING TOO HARD**

The wind is blowing too hard  
For me to be able to rest.  
I sense there's something in me  
That's coming to an end.

Perhaps this thing in my soul  
That thinks life is real. . .  
Perhaps this thing that's calm  
And makes my soul feel . . .

A hard wind is blowing.  
I'm afraid of thinking.  
If I let my mind go,  
I'll heighten my mystery.

Wind that passes and forgets,  
Dust that rises and falls . . .  
Thank God I cannot know  
What inside me is going on!

5 NOVEMBER 1914

## **THE MUMMY**

I

I walked through miles of shadow  
Within me, via the mind.  
My dependably fickle idleness  
Flourished in reverse,  
And the lamps went out  
In the teetering alcove.

In a flash the scene transforms  
Into a soft, smooth desert  
Seen not by my eyes  
But by my fingers traveling  
Over the alcove's velvets.  
There's an oasis in the Indefinite  
And, like a hint of light  
Through an absence of cracks,  
A caravan passes.

I suddenly forget  
What space is like, and time  
Instead of horizontal  
Is vertical.

The alcove  
Descends I don't know where  
Until I lose myself.  
From my sensations  
A thin smoke rises.  
I no longer include me  
In myself. There's no  
In here and no out there.

And now the desert  
Is upside down.  
The notion of me moving  
Has forgotten my name.

My body weighs on my soul.

I feel like a heavy drape  
Hanging in the room  
Where a dead person lies.

Something fell  
And jingled in the infinite.

## II

Cleopatra lies dead in the shade.  
It rains.

The ship was dressed with the wrong flags.  
It continues to rain.

Why do you gaze at the distant city?  
Your soul is the distant city.  
It rains a chill rain.

And as for the mother who rocks a dead child in her arms —  
We all rock a dead child in our arms.  
It rains, it rains.

I see the sad smile left on your weary lips  
In the way your fingers won't let go of your rings.  
Why does it rain?

## III

Whose is the gaze  
Which peers through my eyes?  
When I think I'm seeing,  
Who keeps seeing  
While I'm thinking?  
What roads are followed  
Not by my sad steps

But by the reality  
Of my having steps?

Sometimes in the shadows  
Of my room, when  
Even in my own soul  
I scarcely exist,  
The Universe takes on  
Another meaning in me:  
It's a dull stain  
Of consciousness smudging  
My idea of things.

If the candles are lit,  
Adding to the dim light  
Coming from some lamp  
From somewhere outside,  
I'll vaguely wish  
That there never be more  
In the Universe and in Life  
Than the obscure moment  
I'm living right now:

A fast-flowing moment  
Of a river always heading  
Toward forgetting to be,  
A mysterious space  
Among desert spaces  
Whose meaning is to have none  
And to be nothing to nothing.  
And thus time passes  
Metaphysically.

IV

My anxieties tumble  
Down a flight of stairs.

My desires swing  
In the middle of a vertical garden.

The Mummy's position is absolutely exact.

Music in the distance,  
Far off in the distance,  
So that Life will pass  
And gathering forget its gathering.

V

Why do things open up passageways for me?  
They're so consciously still I'm afraid to pass through them.  
I'm afraid that, once behind me, they'll take off their Masks.  
But there are always things behind me.  
I feel their non-eyes staring at me, and I shudder.  
Without moving, the walls vibrate their message to me.  
Without talking, the chairs speak to me.  
The designs in the tablecloth have life: each one's an abyss.  
Brightly smiling with visible invisible lips,  
The door consciously opens:  
My hand's merely the means by which it opens.

I'm being watched, but where from?  
Which things that can't see are looking at me?  
Who's in everything, peering?

The edges are staring at me.  
The smooth walls really smile at me.

The sensation of being nothing but my spine.

The swords.

**THE GODS ARE HAPPY**

The gods are happy.  
They live the calm life of roots.  
Fate doesn't oppress their desires,  
Or it oppresses but redeems  
With immortal life.  
The gods are not grieved  
By shadows or other beings.  
And, what's more, they don't exist.

10 JULY 1920

## **IN THE LIGHT-FOOTED MARCH OF HEAVY TIME**

In the light-footed march of heavy time  
Always the same way of living!  
The same old habit of deceiving ourselves  
By believing or disbelieving!

In the nimble flight of the dying hour,  
Always the same disillusion  
Of the same gaze cast from the top of the tower  
Across the futile plain!

Nostalgia, hope—the name changes, only  
The useless soul remains  
In the poverty of thinking, today, of its wealth  
Yesterday or tomorrow.

Always, always, in the fickle and constant  
Lapse of endless time,  
The same moment returns, unavailing and far  
From what in myself I want!

Day or night, always the same (even when  
Different) disillusioned gaze,  
Cast from the tower of the ruined church  
Across the futile plain!

1 JANUARY 1921

## **CHRISTMAS**

A God is born. Others die. The Truth  
Didn't come or go. The Error changed.  
Now we have a new Eternity,  
Less good than what passed away.

Blind science tills the useless earth.  
Irrational faith revels in its ritual.  
A new god is just a word.  
Don't seek or believe. Everything's hidden.

## **BY THE MOONLIGHT, IN THE DISTANCE**

By the moonlight, in the distance,  
A sailboat on the river  
Sails peacefully by.  
What does it reveal?

I don't know, but my being  
Feels suddenly strange,  
And I dream without seeing  
The dreams that I have.

What anguish engulfs me?  
What love can't I explain?  
It's the sailboat that passes  
In the night that remains.

## **WATER FRONT**

Blessed are those to whom is waved  
A handkerchief of farewell!

They're happy: they feel sorrow . . .  
I suffer life without sorrow.

I grieve to the core of my thinking,  
And the grief comes from thinking.  
I'm the orphan of a dream  
Stranded by the outgoing tide . . .

Tired of fruitless agonies,  
I take a full breath and feel  
(On the dock I'll never leave)  
The low-tide stench of the days.

## **SOME MUSIC**

Some music, any music at all,  
As long as it cures my soul  
Of this uncertainty that longs  
For some kind, any kind of calm.

Some music—a guitar, fiddle,  
Accordion, or hurdy-gurdy . . .  
A quick, improvised melody . . .  
A dream without any riddle . . .

Something that life has no part in!  
Fado, bolero, the frenzy  
Of the dance that just ended . . .  
Anything not to feel the heart!

## **I FEEL SORRY FOR THE STARS**

I feel sorry for the stars  
Which have shined for so long,  
So long, so long . . .  
I feel sorry for the stars.



Is there not a weariness  
Felt by things,  
By all things,  
Such as we feel in our limbs?

A weariness of existing,  
Of being,  
Just of being,  
Whether sad or happy . . .

Is there not, finally,  
For all things that are,  
Not just death  
But some other finality?  
Or a higher purpose,  
Some kind of pardon?

## **I SEEM TO BE GROWING CALM**

I seem to be growing calm.  
Perhaps I'm about to die.  
There's a new and gentle fatigue  
Around all I wanted to want.

I'm surprised to find my soul  
So resigned to feeling.  
Suddenly I see a river  
Shining in a grove.

And they are a real presence:  
The river, light, and trees.

17 MARCH 1929

**SLEEP**

I'm so sleepy it hurts to think.  
So sleepy. Sleeping is for man  
What waking is for the animals.

It's to live life unconsciously,  
The way animals live on life's surface.  
It's to be, unawares, my profound being.

Perhaps I'm sleepy for having touched  
The spot where I feel the animal I shunned,  
And sleep is a memory I found.

## **I CONTEMPLATE THE SILENT POND**

I contemplate the silent pond  
Whose water is stirred by a breeze.  
Am I thinking about everything,  
Or has everything forgotten me?

The pond tells me nothing.  
I cannot feel the breeze.  
I don't know if I'm happy,  
Or even if I want to be.

O hesitant smiling ripples  
In the water which is sleeping,  
Why did I make my only life  
A life made only of dreams?

4 AUGUST 1930

## **LIKE A USELESSLY FULL GLASS**

Like a uselessly full glass  
Which no one lifts from the table,  
My unsad heart overflows

With a sorrow not its own.

It acts out sorrowful dreams  
Just to have to feel them  
And thus be spared the grief  
It pretended to be dreading.

Fiction on a stage not of boards,  
Dressed up in tissue paper,  
It mimics a dance of sorrows  
So that nothing will occur.

19 AUGUST 1930

## **THE SUN SHINING OVER THE FIELD**

The sun shining over the field  
Perhaps could be the remedy . . .  
I dislike those who like me;  
To be loved is for me a tedium.

I want only the simple kiss  
Given by light when it gleams,  
And the impersonal, abstract love  
Of fields when their flowers bloom.

The rest is people and soul  
To complicate, talk, and see.  
It robs me of dreams and my calm,  
And is never what it seems.

21 AUGUST 1930

## **I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY SOULS I HAVE**

I don't know how many souls I have.  
I've changed at every moment.

I always feel like a stranger.  
I've never seen or found myself.  
From being so much, I have only soul.  
A man who has soul has no calm.  
A man who sees is just what he sees.  
A man who feels is not who he is.

Attentive to what I am and see,  
I become them and stop being I.  
Each of my dreams and each desire  
Belongs to whoever had it, not me.  
I am my own landscape,  
I watch myself journey—  
Various, mobile, and alone.  
Here where I am I can't feel myself.

That's why I read, as a stranger,  
My being as if it were pages.  
Not knowing what will come  
And forgetting what has passed,  
I note in the margin of my reading  
What I thought I felt.  
Rereading, I wonder: "Was that me?"  
God knows, because he wrote it.

24 AUGUST 1930

## **THE SOUL WITH BOUNDARIES**

The soul with boundaries  
Is for the deaf and blind;  
I want to feel everything  
In every possible way.

From the summit of being conscious,  
I gaze at the earth and sky,  
Looking at them with innocence:

Nothing I see is mine.

But I see them so intently  
And am so dispersed in them  
That every thought I think  
Makes me into someone else.

Since every dispersed facet  
Is another sliver of being,  
I break my soul into pieces  
And into various persons.

And if my very own soul  
I see with a varying gaze,  
How can I have anything  
Definite to say?

If I think I belong to me,  
I'm merely self-deceived.  
I'm diverse and not my own,  
Like sky and land and sea.

If all things are but slivers  
Of the universal intelligence,  
Then let me be my parts,  
Scattered and divergent.

If from myself I'm absent  
And whatever I feel is distant,  
How did my soul come to have  
An individual existence?

I've learned to adapt my self  
To the world God has made.  
His mode of being is different;  
My being has different modes.

Thus I imitate God,  
Who, when he made what is,  
Took from it the infinite  
And even its unity.

24 AUGUST 1930

## **I'M SORRY I DON'T RESPOND**

I'm sorry I don't respond  
But it isn't, after all, my fault  
That I don't correspond  
To the other you loved in me.

Each of us is many persons.  
To me I'm who I think I am,  
But others see me differently  
And are equally mistaken.

Don't dream me into someone else  
But leave me alone, in peace!  
If I don't want to find myself,  
Should I want others to find me?

26 AUGUST 1930

## **AUTOPSYCHOGRAPHY**

The poet is a faker  
Who's so good at his act  
He even fakes the pain  
Of pain he feels in fact.

And those who read his words  
Will feel in what he wrote  
Neither of the pains he has  
But just the one they don't.

And so around its track  
This thing called the heart winds,  
A little clockwork train  
To entertain our minds.

1 APRIL 1931

## **I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BE TRULY SAD**

I don't know how to be truly sad  
Or how to be really happy.  
No, I don't know how to be.  
Might sincere souls be  
Like me, without knowing it?

Before the lie of emotion  
And the fiction of the soul,  
I cherish the calm it gives me  
To see flowers without reason  
Flower without a heart.

But finally there is no difference.  
As flowers flower without wanting to,  
Without wanting to, people think.  
What in flowers is florescence  
In us is consciousness.

Later, for us as for them,  
When Destiny decides it is time,  
The feet of the gods will come  
And trample all of us under.

Fine, but until they come  
Let us still flower or think.

3 APRIL 1931

## **THE CLOUDS ARE DARK**

The clouds are dark  
But toward the south  
A scrap of sky  
Is sadly blue.

So too in the mind,  
Which has no answer,  
A scrap remembers  
That the heart exists.

This scrap is what  
We know as the truth  
Of eternal beauty  
Beyond what is.

5 APRIL 1931

## **LIKE AN ASTONISHING REMNANT**

Like an astonishing remnant  
From childhood, I still retain  
Half my enthusiasm —mine  
Because I had it back then.

At times I'm almost ashamed  
Of believing so much in what I don't  
Believe. It's a kind of dream  
With reality in the middle.

False beauty round a speechless  
Center, the sunflower speaks,  
Yellow and astonished by the black  
Center which is everything.

18 APRIL 1931



## **IF I THINK FOR MORE THAN A MOMENT**

If I think for more than a moment  
Of my life that's passing by,  
I am —to my thinking mind —  
A cadaver waiting to die.

In a little while (the longest life  
Amounts to a few short years),  
I, with all I've had or missed,  
With my delusions and my fears,

Will cease to have visible form  
Here where the sun shines down,  
And—dispersed and insensible,  
Or else drunk with another dawn —

I suppose I will have lost  
That warm and human contact  
With the passing months and years,  
With earth and the dreams it contains.

The sun may gild the face  
Of the days, but soundless space  
Reminds us it's just a façade:  
In the night all things are erased.

1 MAY 1931

## **FROM THE MOUNTAIN COMES A SONG**

From the mountain comes a song  
Saying that however much  
The soul may come to have,  
It will always be unhappy.

The world is not its home,  
And all that the world gives it  
Is given as if to someone  
Who'd rather not receive.

Is that what it says? I don't know.  
There's music, no voice, at the window  
Where I ponder my self, alone,  
Like a shining star its glow.

14 NOVEMBER 1931

### **THIS SPECIES OF MADNESS**

This species of madness  
Which isn't just cleverness  
And which shines in the darkness  
Of my muddled intelligence

Doesn't bring me happiness.  
There is always, in the city,  
Either clear or cloudy skies,  
But in me I don't know what there is.

### **THE WIND IN THE DARKNESS HOWLS**

The wind in the darkness howls,  
Its sound reaching ever farther.  
The substance of my thought  
Is that it cannot cease.

It seems the soul has a darkness  
In which blows ever harder  
A madness that derives  
From wanting to understand.

The wind in the darkness rages,  
Unable to free itself.  
I'm a prisoner to my thought  
As the wind is a prisoner to air.

23 MAY 1932

## **I HAVE IDEAS AND REASONS**

I have ideas and reasons,  
Know theories in all their parts,  
And never reach the heart.

## **WITH A SMILE AND WITHOUT HASTE**

With a smile and without haste  
She gracefully breezed down the road,  
And I, who feel with my head,  
Immediately wrote the right poem.

The poem doesn't speak of her  
Or of how, grown-up but girlish,  
She vanished around the corner  
Of a street whose corner is eternal.

The poem speaks of the sea;  
It describes the surf, and sorrow.  
Rereading it makes me remember  
The implacable corner, or the water.

14 AUGUST 1932

## **OUTSIDE WHERE THE TREES**

Outside where the trees  
Are rustling to a standstill  
The only thing I see

Beyond them is the ocean.

It is intensely blue,  
Flashing here and there,  
And in its lazy wave  
There is a sleepy sighing.

But neither I nor the ocean  
Sleeps on this gentle day,  
And it calms while it advances,  
And I don't think and I'm thinking.

14 AUGUST 1932

## **I HEAR IN THE NIGHT ACROSS THE STREET**

I hear in the night across the street  
From a faraway neighboring tavern  
An old and uncertain tune that makes  
Me suddenly miss what I'd never missed.

Is the tune old? The guitar is old.  
I can't say about the tune, can't say . . .  
I feel the blood-pain but can't see the claw.  
I feel, without crying, that I've cried already.

Whose past has this music brought to me?  
Not mine or anyone's, it's just the past:  
All the things that have already died  
To me and to everyone, in the world gone by.

It's time, time that takes the life  
Which cries, and I cry in the sad night.  
It's grief, the ill-defined complaint  
Of all that exists, because it exists.

14 AUGUST 1932

## **ALMOST ANONYMOUS YOU SMILE**

Almost anonymous you smile,  
And the sun gilds your hair.  
Why is it that, to be happy,  
We cannot know we are?

23 SEPTEMBER 1932

## **THIS**

They say I lie or feign  
In all I write. Not true.  
It's simply that I feel  
Via the imagination.  
The heart I never use.

All I dream or live,  
Whatever fails or dies,  
Is no more than a covering  
Over some other thing  
Where true beauty lies.

That's why I base my writings  
On things that are remote,  
Freed from my reality,  
Serious about what isn't.  
Feel? That's up to the reader!

## **THE DAY IS QUIET, QUIET IS THE WIND**

The day is quiet, quiet is the wind,  
Quiet the sun, and quiet the sky.  
If only this described my thoughts!  
If only this described my I!

But between myself and the quiet glories  
Of this clear sky and this air without me  
Dreams and memories intervene . . .  
This, I know, is how I'll always be!

The world is whatever is in us.  
Everything exists because I exist.  
Things are because we see them.  
And this is everything, everything is this!

15 AUGUST 1933

### **THE SUN RESTS UNMOVING**

The sun rests unmoving  
Over the waving wheat.  
I don't know myself.  
I'm forever deceived.

If I had succeeded  
In not asking who I was,  
I would have forgotten  
How forgotten I am.

The wheat waves in the sun,  
Always aloof and equal.  
How the soul here is  
brief With its good and evil!

12 SEPTEMBER 1933

### **THE WASHWOMAN BEATS THE LAUNDRY**

The washwoman beats the laundry  
Against the stone in the tank.  
She sings because she sings and is sad  
For she sings because she exists:

Thus she is also happy.

If I could do in verses  
What she does with laundry,  
Perhaps I would lose  
My surfeit of fates.

Ah, the tremendous unity  
Of beating laundry in reality,  
Singing songs in whole or in part  
Without any thought or reason!  
But who will wash my heart?

15 SEPTEMBER 1933

## **TO TRAVEL! TO CHANGE COUNTRIES**

To travel! To change countries!  
To be forever someone else,  
With a soul that has no roots,  
Living only off what it sees!

To belong not even to me!  
To go forward, to follow after  
The absence of any goal  
And any desire to achieve it!

This is what I call travel.  
But there's nothing in it of me  
Besides my dream of the journey.  
The rest is just land and sky.

20 SEPTEMBER 1933

## **THIS GREAT WAVERING BETWEEN**

This great wavering between

Believing and not quite dis-  
Believing troubles the heart  
Weary of knowing nothing.

Estranged from what it knows  
For not knowing what it is,  
The heart only has one vital  
Moment, the finding of faith —

The faith that all the stars  
Know, for it is the spider  
Whose web they weave, and it is  
The life before everything.

5 MAY 1934

## **I HAVE IN ME LIKE A HAZE**

I have in me like a haze,  
Which holds and which is nothing,  
A nostalgia for nothing at all,  
The desire for something vague.

I'm wrapped by it  
As by a fog, and I see  
The final star shining  
Above the stub in my ashtray.

I smoked my life. How uncertain  
All I saw or read! All  
The world is a great open book  
That smiles at me in an unknown tongue.

16 JULY 1934

## **DREAMS, SYSTEMS, MYTHS, IDEALS**



Dreams, systems, myths, ideals —  
Like pieces of a torn sheet of paper. . .  
I stare at the water lapping the wharf,  
Yielding to it as to a just fate,  
Watching the shreds with eyes that reveal  
Only a vain, resigned disquietude.

What consolation can they give me?  
Me, who no longer cries when troubled,  
And who with solitary mind and heart  
Remembers shadows, just shadows, shadow?  
Me, in everything, always, in vain,  
Tired even of the gods that don't exist . . .

## **I DIVIDE WHAT I KNOW**

I divide what I know.  
There's what I am  
And what I've forgotten.  
Between the two I go.

I'm not who I have in memory  
Nor who is in me now.  
If I think, I self-dismember.  
If I believe, there is no end.

Better than all of this  
Is to listen, in the foliage,  
To the soft and certain breeze  
Blowing through the leaves.

10 SEPTEMBER 1934

## **THE CHILD THAT LAUGHS IN THE STREET**

The child that laughs in the street,  
The song one hears by chance,

The absurd picture, the naked statue,  
Kindness without any limit—

All this exceeds the logic  
Imposed on things by reason,  
And it all has something of love,  
Even if this love can't speak.

4 OCTOBER 1934

*from*  
**MESSAGE**

**PRINCE HENRY THE NAVIGATOR**

God wills, man dreams, the work is born.  
God willed that the earth be one,  
That the sea not divide but unite it.  
Anointed by Him, you unveiled the foam,

And the white crest went from island to continent,  
Like dawn to the world's end,  
And suddenly the entire earth  
Appeared, round, from out of the blue.

The One who anointed you made you Portuguese,  
A sign to us of our pact with the sea.  
The Sea was won, the Empire undone.  
Lord, we still must win Portugal!

**THE STONE PILLAR**

The labor is great and man is small.  
I, Diogo Cão, a navigator,  
Left this pillar by the swarthy strand  
And sailed onward.

The soul is divine and the work imperfect.  
This pillar is a sign to the wind and skies  
That I've done my part in this venture:  
The rest only God can do.

And the five shields of this coat of arms  
Teach the immense and possible ocean  
That the sea with limits is for Greece or Rome:  
The limitless sea is Portuguese.

And the Cross on high says that what's in my soul  
And gives me this fever to navigate  
Will only find in God's eternal calm  
The forever sought-after port.

## **THE SEA MONSTER**

The monster that lurks at the end of the sea  
On a pitch-black night rose up in flight.  
It flew around the ship three times,  
Round and round, hissing strange sounds,  
And said, "Who has dared enter  
My secret caverns with these vast  
Black ceilings at the world's end?"  
And the man at the helm said as he trembled:  
"The King Dom João the Second!"

"Whose are these sails I brush against,  
And whose these keels I see and feel?"  
Asked the monster that flew round the ship.  
Three times it flew, horrid and huge:  
"Who comes to do what only I can do,  
Living where no one ever saw me,  
Dripping with the dread of the depthless sea?"  
And the man at the helm, trembling, said:  
"The King Dom João the Second!"

Three times he raised his hands from the helm,  
Three times the helm his hands again held,  
And finally, trembling three times, he said,  
“This helm is manned by more than my hand:  
I am a Nation that covets your sea;  
And despite the monster that frightens my soul,  
Flying in this darkness at the world’s end,  
I hold this helm, for a higher force beckons:  
The King Dom João the Second!”

### **EPITAPH OF BARTOLOMEU DIAS**

Here on this small far beach lies buried  
The Captain of the End, who rounded Terror.  
The sea is the same, no more to shudder!  
Atlas, he lifts the world high on his shoulder.

### **FERDINAND MAGELLAN**

A bonfire lights up the valley.  
A dance shakes the entire earth.  
And huge, contorted shadows  
In the valley’s black clearings dart  
Suddenly up the slopes Until they are lost in the dark.

What is this dance that frightens night?  
The Titans, the sons of Earth,  
Are dancing the death of the seaman  
Who hoped to be the first to reach  
His arm all the way around her body  
But now is buried on a far-off beach.

They dance without knowing that the daring  
Dead soul still rules the fleet,  
A bodiless wrist that steers the ships  
Through the rest of the end of space.  
Though absent, he can still circle

The entire earth with his embrace.

He raped the earth. But they don't  
Know it, and dance in the waste;  
And huge contorted shadows  
Leap up the slopes until  
They are lost in the far horizons  
Beyond the silent hills.

## **PORTUGUESE SEA**

O salty sea, so much of whose salt  
Is Portugal's tears!  
The mothers who wept for us to cross you!  
All the sons who prayed in vain!  
All the brides who never married  
For you to be ours, O sea!

Was it worth doing? Everything's worth doing  
When the soul is not small.  
Whoever would go beyond the Cape  
Must go beyond sorrow.  
God placed danger and the abyss in the sea,  
But he also made it heaven's mirror.

## **PRAYER**

Lord, night has come and the soul is wretched.  
So great was the storm and the will!  
All we have left, in this hostile silence,  
Is nostalgia and the universal sea.

But the flame that life created in us  
Still smolders if there is still life.  
Cold death has hidden it in ashes;  
The hand of the wind can still raise it.

Give the breath, the breeze—a yearning or curse —  
To revive the flame of effort.  
Make us reconquer the Distance —of the sea  
Or of another frontier we can possess!

## NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION AND THE POEMS

### INTRODUCTION

The opening epigraph is found on p. 184 of the Penguin edition of *The Book of Disquiet*, the same translation cited throughout. The line “What a poor hope that just hopes to exist!” is from a poem signed by Pessoa and dated 2 August 1933; the Caeiro poem beginning “A row of trees across the way” is from *The Keeper of Sheep*. All other quoted verses, except those originally written in English, are taken from poems in this anthology. It is commonly accepted, but perhaps not true, that Pessoa died from cirrhosis of the liver; the Portuguese physician Francisco Manuel da Fonseca Ferreira makes a convincing case (see the Bibliography for the reference to his book) for death from acute pancreatitis, a malady likewise attributable to Pessoa’s excessive intake of alcohol.

It was in a bibliographical note for the December 1928 issue of *Presença*, a literary magazine published in Coimbra, that Pessoa dubbed his heteronymic enterprise a “drama divided into people instead of into acts.” The best survey of this enterprise, beginning with the literary companions of Pessoa’s childhood, has been made by Teresa Rita Lopes in her *Pessoa por Conhecer*, which identifies seventy-two fictional authors invented by Pessoa and examines more closely the “behind-the-scenes writing activity” lightly touched on here. The book’s second volume transcribes Pessoa’s note equating the “self-division of the I” to maturation (p. 477) as well as the French essay on exhibitionism signed by Jean Seul (pp. 202-6).

“Pessoa & Co.” is a term borrowed from the writings of Jorge de Sena. In a 19 November 1914 letter addressed to Armando Cortes-Rodrigues, Pessoa wrote that he felt compelled to work, against his own will, on *The Book of Disquiet*, while in a 13 January 1935 letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro he characterized Bernardo Soares as a mutilation of his own personality. It was in an early undated text written in English that Pessoa called himself “a poet animated by philosophy.”

The quotations from Pessoa’s writings on Portugal, the Fifth Empire and Sebastianism are all taken from *Sobre Portugal*. His criticism of Camões for relying on established forms such as the Petrarchan sonnet was recorded in a “Random Note” signed by Álvaro de Campos and published in November 1935. Pessoa’s description of Reis as “a Greek Horace who writes in Portuguese” appears in a 1924 letter written to an Englishman and published in *Pessoa*

*Inédito* (p. 318).

## **CAEIRO**

*The Keeper of Sheep.* According to Caeiro's fictional bio-bibliography, this sequence of forty-nine poems was written in 1911-12. In fact none was written before 1914. Pessoa determined the order of the sequence but did not establish definitive versions for all the poems, the "final" manuscript containing a number of alternate words and phrases in the margins and between the lines. Virtually every posthumous edition, therefore, presents a slightly different text, except for the twenty-four poems that Pessoa himself published in periodicals.

*The Shepherd in Love.* Of the eight poems that belong to this group, Pessoa wrote the first two early on, the other six much later. The fictional date for all of them would presumably be 1913 or 1914, since Caeiro dies in 1915. According to the copious notes written by Reis and Campos about their Master, the experience of being in love obscured Caeiro's "initial clarity," his pure vision of Nature, but Campos affirms that the poems produced by the pastoralist in this period were "among the great love poems of the world, because they're love poems by virtue of being about love and not by virtue of being poems. The poet loved because he loved, and not because love exists."

*Uncollected Poems.* Many of these poems were supposedly written after Caeiro contracted the illness that led to his death when he was just twenty-six years old. Campos writes that "in the uncollected poems there is weariness. . . . Caeiro is Caeiro, but a Caeiro who's sick. Not always sick, but sometimes sick. He's the same but a bit alienated. This is particularly true in the middle poems of this third part of his work."

"I can also make conjectures" Titled "The Next to the Last Poem" when published by Pessoa in 1931, but actually written on 7 July 1922.

"This may be the last day of my life" The autograph bears the title "Last Poem," in English, and the parenthetical remark, in Portuguese: "Dictated by the poet on the day of his death."

## **REIS**

"Others narrate with lyres or harps." Undated, but probably written around the same time as the two odes on the front side of the autograph, dated IO December 1931. It was chosen to open the section in spite of being far out of



place chronologically.

“Don’t clap your hands before beauty.” The autograph contains two verses in the margin that could be an unfinished stanza, though they seem extraneous: “Though our sterile life may stir,/ Aeolus unleashes his winds on us.”

“Follow your destiny.” Pessoa may have inadvertently written “Gods” in the fourth stanza instead of the lower-case “gods” found in the third and fifth stanzas, though he often resorted to the capitalized form. A passage from *The Book of Disquiet* (pp. 83-84), dated 6 May 1930, sheds indirect light on his usage:

Sometimes the mere rhythm of a sentence will require God instead of the Gods; other times the two syllables of “the Gods” will be necessary, and I’ll verbally change universe; on still other occasions what will matter is an internal rhyme, a metrical displacement, or a burst of emotion, and polytheism or monotheism will prevail accordingly. The Gods are contingent on style.

“I was never one who. . . .” Reis’s editors understand the final, line-shy stanza to be not a stanza at all but a revised version of the last three lines of the stanza before it. The manuscript evidence weighs in favor of this view, but the result—as I see it—does not result. Pessoa, since he did not cross out any of the verses in question, evidently still planned to work on the ending. I have preferred to translate all the verses he wrote. Those who prefer formal perfection can read the poem as translated here but without the final three lines (the version found in Manuela Parreira da Silva’s edition) or with the final three lines substituting for the last three lines of the fifth stanza (according to Luiz Fagundes Duarte’s edition), like so:

*The gods who gave us this path  
Also gave us the flower to pluck.  
And perhaps we pluck with better love  
What we seek for the using.*

“Your dead gods tell me nothing. . . .” The words “way of being” in the fourth line correspond to a blank space Pessoa meant to fill in later but did not.

## **CAMPOS**

“I study myself. . . .” This is the first of three sonnets probably written in

1915 but given fictional dates in accord with Campos's "biography" and poetic evolution, as described in the introduction to this section.

"Listen, Daisy. . . ." This is the third of the three sonnets just mentioned. Pessoa published it in 1922 under the title "An Already Old Sonnet."

"Time's Passage." Pessoa left eight fragments (plus some isolated verses not presented here) of this incomplete poem. There are virtually no clues as to how—or whether—he would have assembled them. The translation follows the transcription found in Teresa Rita Lopes's edition of Campos's poetry. The fragments have been reordered, however, according to a dramatic logic (as far as this is possible) and without regard to chronology. Five dots (. . . .) indicates passages left incomplete by the author. Blank spaces left between stanzas, where the author may have thought to add something at a later date, are not necessarily indicated. Dates, for those fragments that have them, are given in the notes that continue.

"To feel everything in every way. . . ." Dated 22 May 1916. Numerous lacunae. The various occurrences of "Whooooosshhhh" were written as "Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho" in the original. This was used to represent a "wind sound," according to a note by Pessoa.

The original contains an illegible word after the comma in the fifth line of the stanza beginning "Pantheistic cavalcade."

The name Campbell in the twelfth line of the stanza beginning "Hail, hurrah" probably refers to Sir Malcolm Campbell (1885-1948), a celebrated car and boat racer. Although he achieved his greatest fame in the 1920s and 1930s for the various land speed records he set at Daytona Beach and the Bonneville Salt Flats, Campbell was already well known in the teens. After winning gold medals in the London-Edinburgh motorcycle trials in 1906, 1907, and 1908, he took briefly to flying airplanes and then began racing automobiles at Brooklands, England.

The final verse in the penultimate stanza ends with a comma in the original. The author left blank space between this stanza and the next.

"I carry inside my heart. . . ." Dated 22 May 1916.

"I fall full length into all of life. . . ." In the eighth verse the word "blade" has been inserted where in the original the author left a blank space.

"I'm held by nothing. . . ." Dated 10 April 1923.

"I walk on, nothing touches me. . . ." Written on stationery from the firm F.

Pessoa, founded in 1917.

“To feel everything in every way. . . .” Undated, but typed on the same letterhead paper used for the first fragment.

The italicized verse in French (*Vive le mélodrame . . .*) is from a poem by Alfred de Musset (1810-1857).

“It was on one of my voyages.” Lopes’s edition of Campos’s poetry regards this text as the first stanza of the poem that follows.

“Sometimes I meditate.” Lopes, in her edition, may well be right in considering four lines found on the reverse side of the autograph to be the poem’s continuation and closure. Translating and adding these, the poem would end:

*How tell what it’s like to feel this?  
What’s the soul of the existence of being?*

*the awful mystery that the tiniest thing exists,  
For it’s the awful mystery of there being anything at all,  
The awful mystery of there being . . .*

“Birthday.” When he published this poem in a magazine, Pessoa dated it 15 October 1929, Álvaro de Campos’s “birthday.” According to the autograph, Pessoa actually wrote it eight months later, on his own birthday.

## **PESSOA-HIMSELF**

“Slanting Rain.” The six poems published under this title in 1915 exemplify Pessoa’s Intersectionist aesthetic, which may be broadly defined as the simultaneous experience and/or expression of disparate realities or disparate facets of the same reality—a species of Cubism taken beyond the visual plane. In a text written in English, Pessoa hailed Intersectionism as a practical method for achieving the artistic aim of Sensationism: “decomposition of reality into its psychic geometrical elements.” Another text, in Portuguese, explains that “the Romantics tried to *join*. The intersectionists seek to *fuse*. Wagner wanted music + painting + poetry. We want music x painting x poetry.” The poem translated here records the narrator’s experience of a present-day orchestral concert intersected with a childhood memory of playing ball. Pessoa’s biographer, João Gaspar Simões, speculates that the “whole theater... at my feet” of the fifth

stanza refers to the fact that Fernando the toddler lived in an apartment that looked directly down on the Teatro de São Carlos, then Lisbon's most important opera and concert hall.

"The Mummy." Published in 1917 as the first poem of "Episodes," a projected sequence that did not materialize.

"The gods are happy." Attributed by several scholars to Ricardo Reis on the basis of an early manuscript version, in which the poem has a Reis-like strophic pattern and is designated as an epigram. But whatever may have been Pessoa's original intention, his final revised version of the poem has little in common with Reis. In Portuguese the poem rhymes (extremely rare in Reis), does not keep a strict meter or strophic scheme (equally rare), and was typewritten by Pessoa without the indentations typical for Reis. The poem was not attributed by Pessoa to Reis, and there is only a partial thematic resemblance to the classicist heteronym, who believed that the gods existed. Pessoa-himself usually did not.

"I don't know how many souls I have." A virtual paraphrase of this poem is found in *The Book of Disquiet* (p. 254):

I've created various personalities within. I constantly create personalities. Each of my dreams, as soon as I start dreaming it, is immediately incarnated in another person, who is then the one dreaming it, and not I.

To create, I've destroyed myself. I've so externalized myself on the inside that I don't exist there except externally. I'm the empty stage where various actors act out various plays.

*Message.* During the more than twenty years that it was a work in progress, Pessoa called this book *Portugal*, changing the title to *Mensagem* almost as it was going to press in 1934. In a letter written in January 1935, he agreed with a literary friend that this was not an ideal publishing debut (as things turned out, it was the sole book of Pessoa's Portuguese verse to be issued in his lifetime), since it showed only the "mystical nationalist" side of him and his work. The forty-four poems employ symbols and evoke mystery to endow factual and legendary events of Portuguese history with quasi-esoteric meaning, and nostalgia for the past is used to kindle a messianic hope for Portugal's future. Of course Portugal can and sometimes patently does stand for the universe, and also for Pessoa's own personal—or impersonal—condition, as in the book's final verses: "All is scattered, nothing is whole./ O Portugal, today you are fog . . . / It's time!" The poems translated here all come from the second part, "Portuguese Sea," and were originally published, with slight differences in the titles and texts,

by a Lisbon-based magazine in 1922.

“The Stone Pillar.” The practice of leaving stone pillars (called *padrões*) at prominent points discovered by the Portuguese began with Diogo Cão, the first navigator to reach present-day Gabon, the Congo, and Angola. The pillars were dated, engraved with the royal Portuguese coat of arms (which has five shields), and topped by a cross. A few pillars left by other navigators are still standing on their original sites. Cão, on his first voyage (1482-83), set up one pillar at the mouth of the Zaire River and another at the Cape of Santa Maria, in Angola. He erected two more pillars on his second voyage (1485-86), when he pushed farther south without ever reaching his goal: the southernmost tip of Africa.

“The Sea Monster.” A retelling of Vasco da Gama’s encounter at sea with Adamastor, the giant that personified the Cape of Good Hope (originally called Cape of Storms) in the fifth canto of Luís de Camões’s *The Lusians*.

“Epitaph of Bartolomeu Dias.” The first to round the Cape of Good Hope, in 1488, Dias met his death not far from there in 1500. He was part of the fleet led by Pedro Alvares Cabral that accidentally discovered Brazil, after which the India-bound voyage cut back toward the tip of Africa, where the vessel carrying Dias was shipwrecked.

“Ferdinand Magellan.” After discovering and traversing the strait that bears his name, Magellan was killed in the Philippines, but one of the ships in his fleet continued westward to arrive back at Spain, where the voyage had begun. shields), and topped by a cross. A few pillars left by other navigators are still standing on their original sites. Cão, on his first voyage (1482-83), set up one pillar at the mouth of the Zaire River and another at the Cape of Santa Maria, in Angola. He erected two more pillars on his second voyage (1485-86), when he pushed farther south without ever reaching his goal: the southernmost tip of Africa.

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