

FERNANDO PESSOA

A Little Larger Than
the Entire Universe

SELECTED POEMS

Edited and Translated by

RICHARD ZENITH

PENGUIN BOOKS

II

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 feeling the same wonder
A newborn child would feel
If he noticed that he'd really and truly been born.
I feel at each moment that I've just been born
Into a completely 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

VII

From my village I see as much of the universe as can be seen
from the earth,
And so my village is as large as any town,
For I am the size of what I see
And not the size of my height . . .

In the cities life is smaller
Than here in my house on top of this hill.
The big buildings of cities lock up the view,
They hide the horizon, pulling our gaze far away from the
open sky.
They make us small, for they take away all the vastness our
eyes can see,
And they make us poor, for our only wealth is seeing.

IX

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.

XXVI

Sometimes, on days of perfect and exact light,
When things are as real as they can possibly be,
I slowly ask myself
Why I even bother to attribute
Beauty to things.

Does a flower really have beauty?
Does a fruit really have beauty?
No: they have only color and form
And existence.
Beauty is the name of something that doesn't exist
But that I give to things in exchange for the pleasure they
give me.
It means nothing.
So why do I say about things: they're beautiful?

Yes, even I, who live only off living,
Am unwittingly visited by the lies of men
Concerning things,
Concerning things that simply exist.

How hard to be just what we are and see nothing but the
visible!

11 MARCH 1914

The astonishing reality of things
Is my discovery every day.
Each thing is what it is,
And it's hard to explain to someone how happy this
 makes me,
And how much this suffices me.

All it takes to be complete is to exist.

I've written quite a few poems,
I'll no doubt write many more,
And this is what every poem of mine says,
And all my poems are different,
Because each thing that exists is a different way of saying this.

Sometimes I start looking at a stone.
I don't start thinking about whether it exists.
I don't get sidetracked, calling it my sister.
I like it for being a stone,
I like it because it feels nothing,
I like it because it's not related to me in any way.

At other times I hear the wind blow,
And I feel that it was worth being born just to hear the wind
 blow.

I don't know what people will think when they read this,
But I feel it must be right since I think it without any effort

Or any idea of what people who hear me will think,
Because I think it without thoughts,
Because I say it the way my words say it.

I was once called a materialist poet,
And it surprised me, for I didn't think
I could be called anything.
I'm not even a poet: I see.
If what I write has any value, the value isn't mine,
It belongs to my poems.
All this is absolutely independent of my will.

7 NOVEMBER 1915

Today someone read me St. Francis of Assisi.
I listened and couldn't believe my ears.
How could a man who was so fond of things
Never have looked at them or understood what they were?

Why call water my sister if water isn't my sister?
To feel it better?
I feel it better by drinking it than by calling it something—
Sister, or mother, or daughter.
Water is beautiful because it's water.
If I call it my sister,
I can see, even as I call it that, that it's not my sister
And that it's best to call it water, since that's what it is,
Or, better yet, not to call it anything
But to drink it, to feel it on my wrists, and to look at it,
Without any names.

21 MAY 1917

You say I'm something more
Than a stone or a plant.
You say: "You feel, you think, and you know
That you think and feel.
Do stones write poems?
Do plants have ideas about the world?"

Yes, there's a difference,
But it's not the difference you suppose,
Because being conscious doesn't oblige me to have theories
about things;
It only obliges me to be conscious.

If I'm more than a stone or a plant? I don't know.
I'm different. I don't know what more is or what less is.

Is being conscious more than being colorful?
It might be or might not be.
I know only that it's different.
No one can prove that it's more than just different.

I know the stone is real and the plant exists.
I know this because they exist.
I know this because my senses show it to me.
I know I'm real as well.
I know this because my senses show it to me,
Though less clearly than they show me the stone and the
plant.
That's all I know.

Yes, I write poems, and the stone doesn't write poems.
Yes, I have ideas about the world, and the plant has none.
But stones are not poets, they're stones;
And plants are just plants, not thinkers.
I can say this makes me superior to them
Or I can say it makes me inferior.
But I say nothing. I say of the stone, "It's a stone."
I say of the plant, "It's a plant."
I say of myself, "It's me."
And I say no more. What more is there to say?

5 JUNE 1922

Wise the man who's content with the world's spectacle,
And who drinks without recalling
That he has drunk before,
For whom everything is new
And forever imperishable.
Crown him with vine leaves, ivy or twining
Roses. He knows that life
Is passing by him and that
The shears of Atropos cut
The flower and cut him.
He knows how to hide this with the color of the wine
And to erase the taste of time
With its orgiastic flavor,
The way a weeping voice is hushed
When the bacchantes pass by.
And he waits, a calm drinker and almost happy,
Only desiring
With a desire scarcely felt
That the abominable wave
Not wet him too soon.

19 JUNE 1914

Bearing in mind our likeness with the gods
 Let us, for our own good,
See ourselves as exiled deities
 In possession of life
By virtue of an ancient authority
 Coeval with Jove.

Proud masters over our own selves,
 Let's use existence
Like a villa the gods have given us
 To forget the summer.

It's not worth our while to use in another,
 More fretful manner
Our wavering existence, a condemned stream
 Of the somber river.

Like the calm, implacable Destiny
 That reigns above the gods,
Let's construct a voluntary fate
 Above ourselves,
So that when it oppresses us, it is we
 Who'll be our oppressors.
And when we enter the night, we'll enter
 By our own two feet.

30 JULY 1914

The only freedom the gods grant us
Is this: to submit
Of our own free will to their sovereignty.
We should do just that,
Since only in the illusion of freedom
Does freedom exist.

It is what the gods, subject
To eternal fate, do
To maintain their calm and unwavering
Ancient conviction
That their life is divine and free.
Imitating the gods,

Who are no freer on Olympus than we are,
Let's build our lives
Like those who build castles of sand
To delight their eyes,
And the gods will know how to thank us
For being so like them.

30 JULY 1914

THE CHESS PLAYERS

I've heard that once, during I don't know
 What war of Persia,
When invaders rampaged through the City
 And the women screamed,
Two chess players kept on playing
 Their endless game.

In the shade of a leafy tree they stared
 At the old chessboard,
And next to each player was a mug of wine,
 Solemnly ready
To quench his thirst in the moments when,
 Having made his move,
He could sit back and relax, waiting
 On his opponent.

Houses were burning, walls were torn down
 And coffers plundered;
Women were raped and propped against
 The crumbling walls;
Children, pierced by spears, were so much
 Blood in the streets . . .
But the two chess players stayed where they were,
 Close to the city
And far from its clamor, and kept on playing
 Their game of chess.

Even if, in the bleak wind's messages,
 They heard the screams
And, upon reflection, knew in their hearts
 That surely their women
And their tender daughters were being raped
 In the nearby distance,
Even if, in the moment they thought this,
 A fleeting shadow
Passed over their hazy, oblivious brows,
 Soon their calm eyes
Returned with confident attention
 To the old chessboard.

When the ivory king's in danger, who cares
 About the flesh and blood
Of sisters and mothers and little children?
 When the rook can't cover
The retreat of the white queen, what
 Does pillaging matter?
And when with sure hand the opponent's king
 Is placed in check,
It hardly concerns one's soul that children
 Are dying in the distance.

Even if the infuriated face
 Of an invading warrior
Should suddenly peer over the wall and cause
 The solemn chess player
To fall right there in a bloody heap,
 The moment before that
Was still devoted to the favorite game
 Of the supremely indifferent.

Let cities fall and people suffer,
 Let life and freedom
Perish, let secure, ancestral properties
 Be burned and uprooted,
But when war interrupts the game, make sure

The king's not in check
And the most advanced of the ivory pawns
Is ready to redeem the rook.

My brothers in loving Epicurus
And in understanding him
More in accord with our view than with his,
Let's learn from the story
Of the impassive chess players how
To spend our lives.

Let serious things scarcely matter to us
And grave things weigh little,
And let the natural drive of instincts yield
To the futile pleasure
(In the peaceful shade of the trees)
Of playing a good game.

Whatever we take from this useless life,
Be it glory or fame,
Love, science, or life itself,
It's worth no more
Than the memory of a well-played game
And a match won
Against a better player.

Glory weighs like an overlarge burden
And fame like a fever,
Love wearies, for it ardently searches,
Science never finds,
And life grieves, for it knows it is passing . . .
The game of chess
Completely absorbs one's heart but weighs little
When lost, for it's nothing.

Ah, in the shade that unconsciously loves us
And with a mug of wine
At our side, intent only on the useless

Effort of the chess game,
Even if the game is only a dream
And we have no partner,
Let's do as the Persians of this story:
Wherever out there,
Near or faraway, war and our country
And life are calling us,
Let them call in vain, while we dream
In the friendly shade
Of our partners, and the chess game dreams
Of its indifference.

1 JUNE 1916

Fruits are given by trees that live,
Not by the wishful mind, which adorns
 Itself with ashen flowers
 From the abyss within.
How many kingdoms in minds and in things
Your imagination has carved! That many
 You've lost, pre-dethroned,
 Without ever having them.
Against great opposition you cannot
Create more than doomed intentions!
 Abdicate and be
 King of yourself.

6 JUNE 1926

The fleeting track made by the vanished foot
In the soft grass, the echo that hollowly rolls,
 The shadow that grows blacker,
 The whiteness a ship leaves in its wake—
So too the soul, no greater or better, quits souls;
What's passed leaves what's passing. Memory forgets.
 Once dead, we keep dying.
 Lydia, we exist for ourselves.

25 JANUARY 1928

All I ask the gods to grant me is that
I ask them for nothing. Good luck is a yoke
 And to be happy oppresses,
 For it's an emotional state.
I want to raise my not easy nor uneasy,
Purely calm being above the plane
 Where men rejoice or grieve.

TRIUMPHAL ODE

By the painful light of the factory's huge electric lamps
I write in a fever.
I write gnashing my teeth, rabid for the beauty of all this,
For this beauty completely unknown to the ancients.

O wheels, O gears, eternal *r-r-r-r-r-r-r!*
Bridled convulsiveness of raging mechanisms!
Raging in me and outside me,
Through all my dissected nerves,
Through all the papillae of everything I feel with!
My lips are parched, O great modern noises,
From hearing you at too close a range,
And my head burns with the desire to proclaim you
In an explosive song telling my every sensation,
An explosiveness contemporaneous with you, O machines!

Gaping deliriously at the engines as at a tropical landscape
—Great human tropics of iron and fire and energy—
I sing, I sing the present, and the past and future too,
Because the present is all the past and all the future:
Plato and Virgil exist in the machines and electric lights
For the simple reason that Virgil and Plato once existed and
were human,
And bits of an Alexander the Great from perhaps the fiftieth
century
As well as atoms that will seethe in the brain of a
hundredth-century Aeschylus

Go round these transmission belts and pistons and flywheels,
Roaring, grinding, thumping, humming, rattling,
Caressing my body all over with one caress of my soul.

If I could express my whole being like an engine!
If I could be complete like a machine!
If I could go triumphantly through life like the latest model
car!

If at least I could inject all this into my physical being,
Rip myself wide open, and become pervious
To all the perfumes from the oils and hot coals
Of this stupendous, artificial and insatiable black flora!

Brotherhood with all dynamics!
Promiscuous fury of being a moving part
In the cosmopolitan iron rumble
Of unflagging trains,
In the freight-carrying toil of ships,
In the slow and smooth turning of cranes,
In the disciplined tumult of factories,
And in the humming, monotonic near-silence of transmission
belts!

Productive European hours, wedged
Between machines and practical matters!
Big cities that stop for a moment in cafés,
In cafés, those oases of useless chatter
Where the sounds and gestures of the Useful
Crystallize and precipitate,
And with them the wheels, cogwheels and ball bearings of
Progress!

New soulless Minerva of wharfs and train stations!
New enthusiasms commensurate with the Moment!
Iron-plated keels smiling on docksides,
Or raised out of the water, on harbor slipways!
International, transatlantic, *Canadian Pacific* activity!
Lights and time frantically wasted in bars, in hotels,
At Longchamps, at Derbies and at Ascots,

And Piccadillies and Avenues de l'Opéra entering straight
Into my soul!

Hey streets, hey squares, hey bustling crowd!
Everything that passes, everything that stops before shop
windows!

Businessmen, bums, con men in dressy clothes,
Proud members of aristocratic clubs,
Squalid, dubious characters, and vaguely happy family men
Who are paternal even in the gold chains crossing their vests
From one to another pocket!

Everything that passes, passing without ever passing!
The overemphatic presence of prostitutes;
The interesting banality (and who knows what's inside?)
Of bourgeois ladies, usually mother and daughter,
Walking down the street on some errand or other;
The falsely feminine grace of sauntering homosexuals;
And all the simply elegant people who parade down the street
And who also, after all, have a soul!

(Ah, how I'd love to be the pander of all this!)

The dazzling beauty of graft and corruption,
Delicious financial and diplomatic scandals,
Politically motivated assaults on the streets,
And every now and then the comet of a regicide
Lighting up with Awe and Fanfare the usual
Clear skies of everyday Civilization!

Fraudulent reports in the newspapers,
Insincerely sincere political articles,
Sensationalist news, crime stories—
Two columns and continued on the next page!
The fresh smell of printer's ink!
The posters that were just put up, still wet!
Yellow books in white wrappers—*vient de paraître*!
How I love all of you, every last one of you!
How I love all of you, in every way possible,

With my eyes, ears, and sense of smell,
With touch (how much it means for me to touch you!)
And with my mind, like an antenna that quivers because of you!
Ah, how all my senses lust for you!

Fertilizers, steam threshers, breakthroughs in farming!
Agricultural chemistry, and commerce a quasi-science!
O sample cases of traveling salesmen,
Those traveling salesmen who are Industry's knights-errant,
Human extensions of the factories and quiet offices!

O fabrics in shop windows! O mannequins! O latest fashions!
O useless items that everyone wants to buy!
Hello enormous department stores!
Hello electric signs that flash on, glare, and disappear!
Hello everything used to build today, to make it different
from yesterday!
Hey cement, reinforced concrete, new technologies!
The improvements in gloriously lethal weapons!
Armor, cannons, machine-guns, submarines, airplanes!

I love all of you and all things like a beast.
I love you carnivorously,
Pervertedly, wrapping my eyes
All around you, O great and banal, useful and useless things,
O absolutely modern things my contemporaries,
O present and proximate form
Of the immediate system of the Universe!
New metallic and dynamic Revelation of God!

O factories, O laboratories, O music halls, O amusement
parks,
O battleships, O bridges, O floating docks—
In my restless, ardent mind
I possess you like a beautiful woman,
I completely possess you like a beautiful woman who isn't
loved
But who fascinates the man who happens to meet her.

Hey-ya façades of big stores!
Hey-ya elevators of tall buildings!
Hey-ya major cabinet reshufflings!
Policy decisions, parliaments, budget officers,
Trumped-up budgets!
(A budget is as natural as a tree
And a parliament as beautiful as a butterfly.)

Hi-ya the fascination of everything in life,
Because everything is life, from the diamonds in shop windows
To the mysterious bridge of night between the stars
And the ancient, solemn sea that laps the shores
And is mercifully the same
As when Plato was Plato
In his real presence, in his flesh that had a soul,
And he spoke with Aristotle, who was not to be his disciple.

I could be shredded to death by an engine
And feel a woman's sweet surrender when possessed.
Toss me into the furnaces!
Throw me under passing trains!
Thrash me aboard ships!
Masochism through machines!
Some modern sort of sadism, and I, and the hubbub!

Alley-oop jockey who won the Derby,
Oh to sink my teeth into your two-colored cap!

(To be so tall that I couldn't pass through any door!
Ah, gazing is for me a sexual perversion!)

Hi-ya, hi-ya, hi-ya, cathedrals!
Let me bash my head against the edges of your stones,
And be picked up from the ground, a bloody mess,
Without anyone knowing who I am!

O streetcars, cable cars, subways,
Graze and scrape me until I rave in ecstasy!

Hey-ya, hey-ya, hey-ya-ho!
Laugh in my face,
O cars full of carousers and whores,
O daily swarm of pedestrians neither sad nor happy,
Motley anonymous river where I'd love to swim but can't!
Ah, what complex lives, what things inside their homes!
Ah, to know all about them, their financial troubles,
Their domestic quarrels, their unsuspected depravities,
Their thoughts when all alone in their bedrooms,
And their gestures when no one can see them!
Not to know these things is to be ignorant of everything,
O rage,
O rage that like a fever or a hunger or a mad lust
Makes my face haggard and my hands prone to shaking
With absurd contractions in the middle of the crowds
Pushing and shoving on the streets!

Ah, and the ordinary, sordid people who always look the same,
Who use swearwords like regular words,
Whose sons steal from grocers
And whose eight-year-old daughters (and I think this is
sublime!)
Masturbate respectable-looking men in stairwells.
The rabble who spend all day on scaffolds and walk home
On narrow lanes of almost unreal squalor.
Wondrous human creatures who live like dogs,
Who are beneath all moral systems,
For whom no religion was invented,
No art created,
No politics formulated!
How I love all of you for being what you are,
Neither good nor evil, too humble to be immoral,
Impervious to all progress,
Wondrous fauna from the depths of the sea of life!

(The donkey goes round and round
The water wheel in my yard,
And this is the measure of the world's mystery.

Wipe off your sweat with your arm, disgruntled worker.
The sunlight smothers the silence of the spheres
And we must all die,
O gloomy pine groves at twilight,
Pine groves where my childhood was different
From what I am today . . .)

Ah, but once more the incessant mechanical rage!
Once more the obsessive motion of buses.
And once more the fury of traveling in every train in the
world
At the same time,
Of saying farewell from the deck of every ship
Which at this moment is weighing anchor or drawing away
from a dock.
O iron, O steel, O aluminum, O corrugated sheet metal!
O wharfs, O ports, O trains, O cranes, O tugboats!

Hi-ya great train disasters!
Hi-ya caved-in mineshafts!
Hi-ya exquisite shipwrecks of great ocean liners!
Hi-ya-ho revolutions here, there and everywhere,
Constitutional changes, wars, treaties, invasions,
Outcries, injustice, violence, and perhaps very soon the end,
The great invasion of yellow barbarians across Europe,
And another Sun on the new Horizon!

But what does it matter? What does all this matter
To the glowing, red-hot racket of today,
To the delicious, cruel racket of modern civilization?
All this erases everything except the Moment,
The Moment with its bare chest as hot as a stoker's,
The shrill and mechanical Moment,
The dynamic Moment of all the bacchantes
Of iron and bronze and the drunk ecstasy of metals.

Hey trains, hey bridges, hey hotels at dinnertime,
Hey iron tools, heavy tools, minuscule and other tools,

Precision instruments, grinding tools, digging tools,
Mills, drills, and rotary devices!
Hey! hey! hey!
Hey electricity, Matter's aching nerves!
Hey wireless telegraphy, metallic sympathy of the
Unconscious!
Hey tunnels, hey Panama, Kiel and Suez canals!
Hey all the past inside the present!
Hey all the future already inside us! Hey!
Hey! hey! hey!
Useful iron fruits of the cosmopolitan factory-tree!
Hey! hey! hey! Hey-ya-hi-ya!
I'm oblivious to my inward existence. I turn, I spin,
I forge myself.
I'm coupled to every train.
I'm hoisted up on every dock.
I spin in the propellers of every ship.
Hey! hey-ya! hey!
Hey! I'm mechanical heat and electricity!
Hey! and the railways and engine rooms and Europe!
Hey and hooray for all in all and all in me, machines at
work, hey!

To leap with everything over everything! Alley-oop!

Alley-oop, alley-oop, alley-oop-la, alley-oop!
Hey-ya, hi-ya! Ho-o-o-o-o!
Whir-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

Ah if only I could be all people and all places!

LONDON, JUNE 1914.

Distant lighthouses
With their light suddenly so bright,
With night and absence so swiftly restored,
On this night, on this deck—the anguish they stir up!
The last of our grieving for those we left behind,
Fiction of thinking . . .

Distant lighthouses . . .
Life's uncertainty . . .
The fast-swelling light has returned, flashing
In the aimlessness of my lost gaze.

Distant lighthouses . . .
Life serves no purpose.
Thinking about life serves no purpose.
Thinking about thinking about life serves no purpose.

We're going far away and the bright light begins to flash less
brightly.
Distant lighthouses . . .

30 APRIL 1926

ALMOST

To put my life in order, with shelves for my will and my
action . . .

That's what I want to do, as I've always wanted, with the
same result.

But how good it is to have the clear intention—firm only in
its clearness—of doing something!

I'm going to pack my suitcases for the Definitive,
I'm going to organize Álvaro de Campos,
And be at the same point tomorrow as the day before
yesterday—a day before yesterday that's always . . .

I smile in anticipation of the nothing I'll be.
At least I smile: to smile is something.

We're all products of Romanticism,
And if we weren't products of Romanticism, we probably
wouldn't be anything.

That's how literature happens . . .
And it's also (sorry, Gods!) how life happens.

Everyone else is also a Romantic,
Everyone else also achieves nothing and is either rich or
poor,
Everyone else also spends life looking at suitcases that still
need to be packed,

Everyone else also falls asleep next to a clutter of papers,
Everyone else is also me.

Peddler crying out her wares like an unconscious hymn,
Tiny cogwheel in the clockwork of political economy,
Present or future mother of those who die when Empires
 crumble,
Your voice reaches me like a summons to nowhere, like the
 silence of life . . .

I look up from the papers I'm thinking of not putting in order
 after all
To the window through which I didn't see—I just heard—the
 peddler,
And my smile, which still hadn't ended, ends in metaphysics
 inside my brain.

I disbelieved in all the gods while sitting at a cluttered desk,
I looked all destinies in the face because I was distracted by
 a shouting peddler,
My weariness is an old boat rotting on a deserted beach,
And with this image from some other poet I close my desk
 and the poem.

Like a god, I've put neither truth nor life in order.

15 MAY 1929

ORIGINAL SIN

Who will write the story of what he could have been?
That, if someone writes it,
Will be the true history of humanity.

What exists is the real world—not us, just the world.
We are, in reality, what doesn't exist.

I am who I failed to be.
We are all who we supposed ourselves.
Our reality is what we never attained.

What happened to that truth we had—the dream at the
window of childhood?
What happened to our certainty—the plans at the desk that
followed?

Sitting sideways in a chair after dinner, with my head
Resting against my folded hands, which are resting
Against the high sill of the balcony window, I ponder.

What happened to my reality, that all I have is life?
What happened to me, that I'm just who exists?

How many Caesars I've been!

In my soul, and with some truth;
In my imagination, and with some justice;

In my intellect, and with some warrant—
My God! My God! My God!—
How many Caesars I've been!
How many Caesars I've been!
How many Caesars I've been!

THE WORLD, 7 DECEMBER 1933

ABDICATION

O night eternal, call me your son
And take me into your arms. I'm a king
Who relinquished, willingly,
My throne of dreams and tedium.

My sword, which dragged my weak arms down,
I surrendered to strong and steady hands,
And in the anteroom I abandoned
My shattered scepter and crown.

My spurs that jingled to no avail
And my useless coat of mail
I left on the cold stone steps.

I took off royalty, body and soul,
And returned to the night so calm, so old,
Like the landscape when the sun sets.

JANUARY 1913

from
SLANTING RAIN

I

My dream of an infinite port crosses this landscape
And in the flowers' colors I see the sails of large ships
Casting off from the wharf, dragging the silhouettes of these
old
Sunlit trees as their shadows over the waters . . .

The port I dream of is somber and pallid,
And the landscape is sunny viewed from this side . . .
But in my mind today's sun is a somber port
And the ships leaving the port are these sunlit trees . . .

Freed into two, I slid straight down the landscape . . .
The substance of the wharf is the clear and calm road
That rises, going up like a wall,
And the ships pass through the trunks of the trees
In a vertically horizontal fashion,
Dropping their lines in the water through the leaves one by
one . . .

I don't know who I dream I am . . .
Suddenly all the seawater in the port is transparent
And I see on the bottom, like a huge print unrolled across it,
This entire landscape, a row of trees, a road glowing in that
port,
And the shadow of a sailing ship older than the port and
passing

Between my dream of the port and my looking at this
landscape,
And it approaches me, enters me,
And passes to the other side of my soul . . .

III

The Great Sphinx of Egypt dreams inside this sheet of
paper . . .
I write—and she appears to me through my transparent hand
And the pyramids rise up in a corner of the paper . . .

I write—and I'm startled to see that the nib of my pen
Is the profile of King Cheops . . .
I freeze . . .
Everything goes dark . . . I fall into an abyss made of time . . .
I'm buried under the pyramids writing verses by the bright
light of this lamp
And the whole of Egypt presses down on me through the
strokes I make with my pen . . .

I hear the Sphinx laughing to herself
The sound of my pen running over the paper . . .
An enormous hand, passing through my not being able to
see her,
Sweeps everything into the corner of the ceiling that's
behind me,
And on the paper where I write, between it and the pen
that's writing,
Lies the corpse of King Cheops, looking at me with
wide-open eyes,
And between our gazing at each other flows the Nile,
And a gaiety of flag-bedecked ships meanders
In a hazy diagonal line
Between me and what I'm thinking . . .

Funeral of King Cheops in old gold and Me! . . .

V

Outside a whirlwind of sun the horses of the merry-go-round . . .

Within me a static dance of trees, stones and hills . . .

Absolute night in the brightly lit fair, moonlight on the sunny day outside,

And the fair's many lights make noises out of the garden walls . . .

Groups of girls with jugs on their heads

Passing by outside and drenched by the sun

Cut across thick crowds of people at the fair,

People mixed up with the lights of the stands, with the night and the moonlight,

And the two groups meet and blend

Until they form just one which is both . . .

The fair, the fair lights, the people at the fair

And the night that seizes the fair and lifts it into the air

Are above the tops of the trees drenched by the sun,

They're visible beneath the rocks that gleam in the sun,

They pop out from behind the jugs carried on the girls' heads,

And the whole of this spring landscape is the moon above the fair,

And the whole fair, with its sounds and lights, is the ground of this sunny day . . .

Suddenly someone shakes this twofold hour as if in a sieve,

And the powder of the two realities, mixed together, falls

On my hands full of drawings of ports

Where huge sailing ships are casting off with no intention of returning . . .

Powder of white and black gold on my fingers . . .

My hands are the steps of that girl leaving the fair,

Alone and contented like this day . . .

CHESS

Pawns, they go out into the peaceful night,
Tired and full of fictitious feelings.
They're going home, talking about nothing,
Dressed in furs, coats and pelisses.

As pawns, destiny only allows them
One forward square per move, unless
They're given another one diagonally,
On a new path, through someone else's death.

Eternal subjects of the noble pieces,
Like the bishop or rook, that move far and fast,
They're suddenly overtaken by fate
In their lonely march, and breathe their last.

One or another, making it all the way,
Redeems not his own but someone else's life.
And the game goes on, indifferent to each piece,
The relentless hand moving them all alike.

Then, poor creatures dressed in furs or silks,
Checkmate! the game's over and the weary hand
Stows away the contest's meaningless pieces,
Since, just a game, it's nothing in the end.

I NOVEMBER 1927

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 his writing
Neither of the pains he has
But just the one they're missing.

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

I APRIL 1931

I'm a fugitive.
I was shut up in myself
As soon as I was born,
But I managed to flee.

If people get tired
Of being in the same place,
Why shouldn't they tire
Of having the same self?

My soul seeks me out,
But I keep on the run
And sincerely hope
I'll never be found.

Oneness is a prison.
To be myself is to not be.
I'll live as a fugitive
But live really and truly.

5 APRIL 1931

INITIATION

You aren't asleep under the cypress trees,
For in this world there is no sleep.

.....

Your body is the shadow of the clothes
That conceal your deeper self.

When night, which is death, arrives,
The shadow ends without having been.
And you go, unawares, into that night
As the mere outline of yourself.

But at the Inn of Wonderment,
The Angels take away your cape;
You continue with no cape on your shoulders
And little else to cover you.

Then the Highway Archangels
Strip you and leave you naked,
Without any clothes, with nothing:
You have just your body, which is you.

Finally, deep within the cave,
The Gods strip you even more.
Your body, or outer soul, ceases,
But you see that they are your equals.

.....

The shadow of your clothes remains
Among us in the realm of Destiny.
You are not dead amid cypress trees.

.....
Neophyte, there is no death.

23 MAY 1932

THE CIRCLE

I traced a circle on the ground,
It was a mystic figure strange
Wherein I thought there would abound
Mute symbols adequate of change,
And complex formulas of Law,
Which is the jaws of Change's maw.

My simpler thoughts in vain had stemmed
The current of this madness free,
But that my thinking is condemned
To symbol and analogy:
I deemed a circle might condense
With calm all mystery's violence.

And so in cabalistic mood
A circle traced I curious there;
Imperfect the made circle stood
Though formed with minutest care.
From Magic's failure deeply I
A lesson took to make me sigh.

30 JULY 1907

A TEMPLE

I have built my temple—wall and face—
Outside the idea of space,
Complex-built as a full-rigged ship;
I made its walls of my fears,
Its turrets many of weird thoughts and tears—
And that strange temple, thus unfurled
Like a death's-head flag, that like a whip
Stinging around my soul is curled,
Is far more real than the world.

AUGUST 1907

I

Whether we write or speak or are but seen
We are ever unapparent. What we are
Cannot be transfused into word or mien.
Our soul from us is infinitely far.
However much we give our thoughts the will
To make our soul with arts of self-show stored,
Our hearts are incommunicable still.
In what we show ourselves we are ignored.
The abyss from soul to soul cannot be bridged
By any skill or thought or trick for seeing.
Unto our very selves we are abridged
When we would utter to our thought our being.
 We are our dreams of ourselves, souls by gleams,
 And each to each other dreams of others' dreams.

[AUGUST 1910]