

Thomas Crosse

In placing before the English-reading public my translation of these poems,

A. Caeiro

In placing before the English-reading public my translation of these poems, I do so with the full confidence that I am making a revelation. I claim, in all confidence, that I am putting before Englishmen the most original poetry that our young century has as yet produced — a poetry so fresh, so *new*, untainted to such a degree by any kind of conventional attitude, that the words a Portuguese friend said to me, when speaking of these very poems, are more than justified. «Every time I read them», he said, «I cannot bring myself to believe that they have been written. It is so *impossible* an achievement. . . !» And so much more *impossible*, that it is of the simplest, most natural and most spontaneous kind.

II

Alberto Caeiro — that is not his whole name, for 2 names are suppressed — was born in Lisbon in August 1887. He died in Lisbon in June of the past year.

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The Keeper of Sheep remains one of the highest works of all time, hard-bound upon a sense of nature or spirit, so spontaneous, so fresh and so natural that it is astonishing that any one should have had it.

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The Keeper of Sheep is both a series of solitary [?] poems and a philosophical [. . .]; hence its strenght, its unity and its power. The later poems, even allowing for the fact that they are mere fragments, are weak even in form, in comparison with that great achievement. Exception must be made for the two love poems. But thereafter his *tone* suffers. It does not become garrulous or, properly speaking, weak. But it loses its intellectual keenness, it becomes uncertain, even tentative. Each fragment must to have cost him an effort to write, and he seems to have been tired of things to write it.

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Caeiro has created (1) a new sentiment of nature (2) a new mysticism (3) a new simplicity, which is neither a simplicity of faith, nor a simplicity of sadness (as in [...]’s case), nor a simplicity of abdication from things and (...). Much as he likes to prove his irrationalism, he is a thinker and a very great thinker. Nothing is so ennobling as this faith that declares the senses superior to the intellect, that speaks of intellect as of a disease.

He has contradictions very slight, but he is conscious of all of these and has forewarned his critics. His contradictions are of 3 kinds: (1) in his thought, (2) in his feeling, (3) in his poetical manner.

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But the most astonishing circumstance is that C[aeiro] possesses in an extraordinary degree that metaphysical subtlety which is generally, if not universally, considered as associated with spiritualistic and transcendentalist doctrines.

This pure and absolute materialist, who admits no reality outside things as he feels them, writes, quite in accordance with his theory of things, [...]

There is something not less than scholastic and (...) in the exterior subtlety of his metaphysics. Yet no one can ignore that it is natural from beginning to end.

And the astonishing final verse of the (...) poems

Things are the only occult meaning of things
The only occult meaning of things is the things themselves.

A verse of which it is not to much to say that it opens new roads for philosophical meditation.

Caeiro is the only poet of nature. In a sense, he *is* Nature: he is Nature speaking and being vocal.

.....

He has neither interest in mankind, nor in any human activity, not even in art. All these things are to him unnatural.

Only Nature *is* divine and it is not divine.

1916

Pessoa por Conhecer — Textos para um Novo Mapa . Teresa Rita Lopes. Lisboa: Estampa, 1990: 388.