

Fernando Pessoa

## To whom can Caeiro be compared?

To whom can Caeiro be compared? To very few poets. Not, be it at once said, to that Cesário Verde to whom he refers as if to a literary ancestor, though a kind of fore-degenerate ancestor. Cesário Verde had on Caeiro the kind of influence which may be called merely provocative of inspiration, without handing on any *kind* of inspiration. An example familiar to the reader is Chateaubriand's very real *influence* on Hugo, a man totally different, personally, literarily and socially. (...)

The very few poets to whom Caeiro may be compared, either because he merely reminds, or might remind, us of them, or because he may be conceived of as having been influenced by them, whether we think it seriously or not, are Whitman, Francis Jammes and Teixeira de Pascoaes.

He resembles Whitman most. He resembles Francis Jammes on some secondary points. He reminds us strongly of Pascoaes because his attitude towards Nature, being essentially a metaphysical, a naturalistic and what may be called an absorbed attitude, as is that of Pascoaes, yet Caeiro is all that inverting what Pascoaes is in the same way.

Caeiro e Pascoaes.

Tanto Caeiro como Pascoaes encaram a Natureza *de um modo directamente metafísico e místico*, ambos encaram a Natureza como o que há de importante, excluindo, ou quase excluindo, o Homem e a Civilização e ambos, finalmente, integram tudo o que cantam nesse seu sentimento naturalista. Esta base abstracta têm de comum: mas no resto são, não diferentes, mas *absolutamente opostos*. Talvez Caeiro proceda de Pascoaes; mas procede por oposição, por reacção. Pascoaes virado do avesso, sem o tirar do lugar onde está, dá isto — Aberto Caeiro.

Caeiro, like Whitman, leaves us perplexed. We are thrown off our critical attitude by so extraordinary a phenomenon. We have never seen anything like it. Even after Whitman, Caeiro is strange and terribly, appallingly new. Even in our age, when we believe nothing can astonish us or shout novelty at us, Caeiro

does astonish and does breathe absolute novelty To be able to do this in an age like ours is the definite and final proof of his genius.

He is so novel that it is sometimes hard to conceive clearly all his novelty. He is too new, and his excessive novelty troubles our vision of him, as all excessive things trouble vision, though it is quite a novelty for novelty itself to be the thing to be excessive and vision-troubling. But that is the remarkable thing. Even novelty and the way of being new are novelties in Caieiro. He is different from all poets in another way than all great poets are different from other great poets. He has his individuality in another way of having it than all poets preceding him. Whitman is quite inferior in this respect. To explain Whitman, even on a basis admitting him all conceivable originality, we need but think of him as an intense liver [lover?] of life and his poems come out of that like flowers from a shrub. But the same method does not hold about Caieiro. Even if we think of him as a man who lives outside civilization (an impossible hypothesis, of course), as a man of an exceptionally clear vision of things, that does not logically produce in our minds a result resembling *The Keeper of Sheep*. The very tenderness for things as mere things which characterises the type of man we have supposed (posited) does not characterise Caieiro. He sometimes speaks tenderly of things, but he asks our pardon for doing so, explaining that he only speaks so in consideration of our «stupidity of senses», to make us feel «the absolutely real existence» of things. Left to himself, he has no tenderness for things, he has hardly any tenderness even for his sensations. Here we touch his great originality, his almost inconceivable objectiveness (objectivity). 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 Caieiro is that out of this sentiment, or rather, absence of sentiment, he makes poetry. He feels positively what hitherto could not be conceived except as a negative sentiment. Put it to yourselves: what do you think of a stone when you look at it without thinking about it? This comes to this: what do you think of a stone when you don't think about it at all? The question is quite absurd, of course. The strange point about it is that all Caieiro's poetry is based upon that sentiment that you find it impossible to represent to yourself as able to exist.

Perhaps I have not been unsuccessful in pointing out the extraordinary nature of Caeiro's inspiration, the phenomenal novelty of his poetry, the astonishing unprecedentedness of his genius, of his whole attitude.

Alberto Caeiro is reported to have regretted the name of «sensationism» which a disciple of his — a rather queer disciple, it is true — Mr. Álvaro de Campos, gave to his attitude, and to the attitude he created. If Caeiro protested against the word as possibly seeming to indicate a «school», like Futurism, for instance, he was right, and for two reasons. For the very suggestion of schools and literary movements sounds badly when applied to so uncivilized and natural a kind of poetry. And besides, though he has at least two «disciples», the fact is that he has had on them an influence equal to that which some poet — Cesário Verde, perhaps — had on him: neither resembles him at all, though, indeed, far more clearly than Cesário Verde's influence in him, his influence may be seen all over their work.

But the fact is — these considerations once put aside — that no name could describe his attitude better. His poetry is «sensationist». Its basis is the substitution of sensation for thought, not only as a basis of inspiration — which is comprehensible — but as a means of expression, if we may so speak. And, be it added, those two disciples of his, different as they are from him and from each other — are also indeed sensationists. For Dr. Ricardo Reis, with his neo-classicism, his actual and real belief in the existence of the pagan deities, is a pure sensationist, though a different kind of sensationist. His attitude towards nature is as aggressive to thought as Caeiro's; he reads no meanings into things. He sees them only, and if he seems to see them differently from Caeiro it is because, though seeing them as unintellectually and unpoetically as Caeiro, he sees them through a definite religious concept of the universe — paganism, pure paganism, and this necessarily alters his very direct way of feeling. But he is a pagan because paganism is the sensationist religion. Of course, a pure and integral sensationist like Caeiro has, logically enough, no religion at all, religion not being among the immediate data of pure and direct sensation. But Ricardo Reis has put the logic of his attitude as purely sensationist very clearly. According to him, we not only should bow down to the pure objectivity of things (hence his sensationism proper, and his neo-classicism, for the classic poets were those who commented least, at least directly, upon things), but bow down to the equal objectivity, reality, naturalness of the necessities of our nature, of which the religious sentiment is one. Caeiro is the pure and absolute

sensationist who bows down to sensations quâ exterior and admits no more. Ricardo 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. And, seeing that he is a sensationist, he is a pagan in his religion; which is due, not only to the nature of sensation once conceived of as admitting a religion of some kind, but also to the influence of those classical readings to which his sensationism had inclined him.

Álvaro de Campos — curiously enough — is on the opposite point, entirely opposed to Ricardo Reis. Yet he is not less than the latter a disciple of Caeiro and a sensationist proper. He has accepted from Caeiro not the essential and objective, but the deducible and subjective part of his attitude. Sensation is all, Caeiro holds, and thought is a disease. By sensation Caeiro means the sensation of things as they are, without adding to it any elements from personal thought, convention, sentiment or any other soul-place. For Campos, sensation is indeed all but not necessarily sensation of things as they are, but of things as they are felt. So that he takes sensation subjectively and applies all his efforts, once so thinking, not to develop in himself the sensation of things as they are, but all sorts of sensations of things, even of the same thing. To feel is all: it is logical to conclude that the best is to feel all sorts of things in all sorts of ways, or, as Álvaro de Campos says himself, «to feel everything in every way.» So he applies himself to feeling the town as much as he

feel the country, the normal as he feels the abnormal, the bad as he feels the good, the morbid as the healthy. He never questions, the feels. He is the undisciplined child of sensation. 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.

But the common origin of these three widely different aspects of the same theory is patent and manifest.

Caeiro has no ethics except simplicity. Ricardo Reis has a pagan ethics, half epicurean and half stoic, but a very definite ethics, which gives his poetry an elevation that Caeiro himself, though, mastership apart, the greater genius, cannot attain. Álvaro de Campos has no shadow of an ethics; he is non-moral, if not positively immoral, for, of course, according to his theory it is natural that he should love the stronger better than the weak sensations, and the strong sensations are, at least all selfish and occasionally the sensations of cruelty and lust. Thus Álvaro de Campos resembles Whitman most of the three. But he

has nothing of Whitman's camaraderie: he is always apart from the crowd, and when feeling with them it is very clearly and very confessedly to please himself and give himself brutal sensations. The idea that a child of eight is demoralised (*Ode 11, ad finem*) [*Ode Triunfal*] is positively pleasant to him, for the idea of that satisfies two very strong sensations — cruelty and lust. The most Caeiro says that may be called immoral is that he cares nothing for what men suffer, and that the existence of sick people is interesting because it is a fact. Ricardo Reis has nothing of this. He lives in himself, with his pagan faith and his sad epicureanism, but one of his attitudes is precisely not to hurt anyone. He cares absolutely nothing for others, not even enough to be interested in their suffering or in their existence. He is moral because he is self-sufficient.

It may be said, comparing these three poets with the three orders of religious spirits, and comparing sensationism for the moment (perhaps improperly) with a religion, that Ricardo Reis is the normal religious spirit of that faith; Caeiro the pure mystic; Álvaro de Campos the ritualist in excess. For Caeiro loses sight of Nature in nature loses sight of sensation in sensation, loses sight of things in things. And Campos loses sight of sensation in sensations.

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