

Thomas Crosse

But Caeiro displaces all our mental habits...

But Caeiro displaces all our mental habits and puts all our notions out of drowsing.

He does it, first of all, by the philosophy which can hardly be said to be simply «at the bottom» of his poetry, because it is both at the bottom and at the top of it. Whatever a mystic may be, he is certainly a kind of mystic. But he is, not only a materialistic mystic, which is already strange enough, but still can be imagined, for there is some sort of a modern precedent in Swift and of an ancient one in some poets, but a non-subjectivistic mystic, which is quite unworldly. [...] but it is so difficult to discover a recent «modern» being precisely like a primitive greek, that we are not at all aided by the very analogy that does at first seem to help us.

Caeiro puts us out, next, by the secondary aspects of his philosophy. Being a poet of what may be called «the absolute Concrete» he never looks on that concrete *otherwise than abstractly*. No man is more sure of the absolute, non-subjective reality of a tree, of a stone, of a flower. Here it might be thought that he would particularize, that he would say «an oak», «a sacred stone», «a marigold». But he does not: he keeps on saying «a tree», «a stone», «a flower».

All these observations will be better understood after reading the poems.

But, if the matter is this perplexing, the manner is more perplexing still.

The intellectual manner, to begin with. There is nothing less poetic, less lyrical than C.'s philosophical attitude. It is quite devoid of «imagination», of vagueness, of «sympathy» with things. Far from «feeling» them, his mental process, a hundred times explicitly put, is that he does not feel them, or feel with them.

Again, his simplicity is full of intellectual complexity. He is poet purely of sense, but he seems to have his intellect put out his senses.

Then, again, his is absolutely self-conscious. He knows every possible unconscious of his. Where there may be a big fault, he hastens to the rescue with a simple and direct argument. Where (...)

This man, so purely or anciently a primitive greek that he is unworldly, is quite «modern» at the same time.

It is this man of contradictions, this lucidly unworldly personality that gives him his complex and intense originality — an originality, in every way, scarcely ever attained by any poet; certainly never before attained by a poet born in a worn and sophisticated age.

Dr. Antonio Mora, explaining his outlines of a similar philosophy — in discipular lines, perhaps — has left this aspect of him out; and that is why I do not feel it [...] to call attention to it. Dr. Mora is also a Pagan, in the same complex and full sense that Caeiro is a Pagan. So, to Dr. Mora, C[aeiro] is a great poet, but hardly a *strange* poet. He is great because he has brought back the Pagan sense of the world; he is not strange because Dr. Mora thinks the Pagan sense of the world a *possible* sense in our time. Now the great point is that the Pagan sense of the world is impossible; and the formidable majesty of Caeiro lies in that he has realized this impossibility.

s. d.

Pessoa por Conhecer — Textos para um Novo Mapa . Teresa Rita Lopes. Lisboa: Estampa, 1990: 389.