

Caeiro's Stoniness: A pagan reclamation of reality

[A pedreidade de Caeiro:
Uma reivindicação pagã da realidade]

Maria Cintra Guimarães*

Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Stoniness, Paganism, Objectivism, Marginalia, Finitude.

Abstract

In an era shaped by philosophical introspection and symbolic abstraction, Alberto Caeiro advances an unrelenting materialism, where a stone is just a stone, and reality consists of things as they are, not as interpreted. His stance, however, is not an absence of thought but a subversive inversion of modern epistemology. This paper examines how Caeiro's work functions as a countercurrent to dominant intellectual paradigms of his time, restoring a form of pre-Christian objectivism that reclaims the finite and the tangible. Drawing from Pessoa's unpublished marginalia—found in the digital archive of his private library—this study investigates how his readings intertwine with Caeiro's vision, exposing a complex dialogue between classical philosophy, nineteenth-century aesthetic debates, and the poet's literary experiment.

Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Pedreidade, Paganismo, Objetivismo, Marginalia, Finitude.

Resumo

Em uma era moldada por introspecção filosófica e abstração simbólica, Alberto Caeiro afirma um materialismo implacável, no qual uma pedra é apenas uma pedra, e a realidade consiste nas coisas tal como são, não como interpretadas. Sua posição, contudo, não representa ausência de pensamento, mas uma inversão da epistemologia moderna. Este artigo examina como a obra de Caeiro opera em contrafluxo aos paradigmas intelectuais de seu tempo, restituindo um objetivismo pré-cristão que reivindica o finito e o tangível. A partir da marginalia inédita de Pessoa—preservada no arquivo digital de sua biblioteca particular—, este estudo investiga como suas leituras se entrelaçam com a visão de Caeiro, revelando um diálogo entre filosofia clássica, debates estéticos oitocentistas e a experiência literária do poeta.

* Indiana University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese.

In the twilight of Zeus's great flood, when the known world had been effectively eradicated, two survivors remained: Deucalion and Pyrrha. Faced with a landscape reduced to mud and scattered stones, they received a directive from the oracle of Themis at Delphi instructing them to cast "their mother's bones behind their shoulders." Interpreting "mother" as Gaia herself, the primordial earth, they lifted stones —bare, unhewn fragments of reality— and hurled them backward. From these solid, ordinary fragments sprang forth new human beings, as if life's first principle were rooted in the solidity of the earth. Such an ancient story suggests a primal pagan logic: the world renews itself through what is entirely tangible, finite, and external; from stones alone, humanity could begin again. It is in this stark, matter-of-fact salvation that we glimpse a precedent for what, many centuries later in a distant corner of Europe, would appear in the form of a heteronymic poet who also cast his mind behind him to rediscover the bone-structure of reality in stones, hills, rivers, and trees (GARLAND, 2020: 32-33).

Nearly two thousand years after the last rites were sung to the old gods and the Christian world ascended to intellectual and cultural dominance, a subtle yet profound shift began to stir in early twentieth-century Portugal. António Mora, a fictional philosopher integrated into Fernando Pessoa's heteronymic cosmos, declared with liturgical fervor: "Alegrae-vos, todos vós que choraes, sem saber porquê, na maior doença das civilizações! O Grande Pan renasceu!"¹ ["Rejoice, all ye who weep without knowing why, from the greatest disease of civilizations! Great Pan is reborn!"]² (PESSOA, 2016: 328). In this startling proclamation, uttered roughly three decades after Nietzsche's famous pronouncement of the death of the Christian god, paganism returns like a phoenix from the ashes, subverting the metaphysical structures that had become entrenched under Christianity's sway. The old gods, declared dead or silent by the modern age, awaken anew in the poetry of Alberto Caeiro da Silva—not through explicit evocations of Greek deities, but through a worldview that rejects transcendence. For Mora, and indeed for Pessoa and the other heteronyms, Caeiro was the one who restored the connection to a pre-Christian world: a naked cosmic vision that allowed nature to stand forth, unburdened by symbol or metaphysical residue.

The pages that follow accompany this movement, not as an actual resurgence of the gods, but as a reckoning with a world made once more of concrete, finite things. This reading proceeds along three interwoven axes structuring the article's

¹ In the 2024 edition of *O Regresso dos Deuses*, edited by Luís Filipe B. Teixeira (cf. PESSOA, 2024: 378), this phrase notably omits the article before "Grande Pan." A slightly different version, attributed to Ricardo Reis, appears in the Pizarro-Ferrari edition, *The Complete Works of Alberto Caeiro*, translated as: "Rejoice, all you who bemoan the worst disease in History! The great Pan has been reborn!" (PESSOA, 2020: 226; cf. PESSOA, 2016: 340).

² All translations are the author's own, except for translations from (PESSOA, 2020), which follow the bilingual edition translated by Margaret Jull Costa and Patricio Ferrari, and edited by Jerónimo Pizarro.

argument. First, it analyzes how Caeiro's poetry rejects the metaphysical frameworks of modernity by grounding itself in a pagan objectivism—one rooted in direct, pre-reflective sensory apprehension. Second, it explores the new form of reality that arises from this gesture: a world composed solely of attributes—weight, color, scent, taste—divorced from any underlying substance. Third, it situates Caeiro's poetics within the broader debate on modern paganisms, exposing how his radical stance dismantles symbolic, nostalgic, and Dionysian tendencies that sought a form of metaphysical compensation in antiquity. In contrast, Caeiro proposes a paganism without gods, rites, or transcendence—a vision of absolute exteriority that ultimately destabilizes even the category of the object itself.

Having traced these three dimensions, the analysis culminates in a deeper contradiction: Caeiro, who denies substance and perceives only attributes, stands as the very substance of paganism, devoid of all its attributes. His rejection of symbolism and depth results in a figure so devoid of interpretative projection that he appears as the inverted image of the very worldview he enacts—a pagan presence emptied of its signs. In reclaiming a finite world of things, Caeiro paradoxically becomes the most abstract of all—a spectral form at the heart of a poetics that sought to abolish metaphysics. This contradiction lies at the core of his philosophical posture and also shapes the narrative of his creation. To grasp this paradox, one must return to the conditions of his fictional genesis within Pessoa's heteronymic project.

Celebrated as the master among the heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro appears as a near-miracle in Pessoa's oeuvre. In a missive to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, dated January 13, which critics have dubbed "*Carta sobre a génese dos heterónimos*" ("Letter on the Genesis of the Heteronyms")—herein simply referred to as the "*Genesis Letter*"—Caeiro reportedly came into being on March 8, 1914, a "triumphal day" when Pessoa, in a delirious or trance-like state, penned over thirty poems in a single burst of inspiration. These compositions would become the cornerstone of Pessoa's neo-pagan Portuguese project, at one point associated with the tentative editorial title "*O regresso dos deuses*" ("The Return of the Gods"), a literary endeavor dedicated to purging modern misconceptions of paganism and presenting a genuine pagan essence, untainted by contemporary philosophical or metaphysical complexities.

Although Pessoa's internal mythology confers on Caeiro an aura of spontaneous genesis and prophetic authority, recent research by Jerónimo Pizarro and Patricio Ferrari offers a more critical and philologically grounded understanding of the heteronym's formation and editorial afterlife. Their inquiry demonstrates that, even after retrospectively establishing March 8 as the "triumphal day," Pessoa continued to compose and date poems under the heteronym's name—including several written after Caeiro's supposed death in 1915, a date retrospectively associated with the symbolic loss of his close friend Mário de Sá-Carneiro. Caeiro, they note, may have initially emerged as a playful literary creation—his very surname functioning, perhaps, as a pun on Sá-Carneiro's own. Rather than a singular moment of divine

inspiration, Caeiro's appearance reveals itself as a process—marked by gradual construction, continuous revision, and evolving design. Pizarro and Ferrari also underscore the editorial instability of *The Keeper of Sheep*, emphasizing that Pessoa never finalized a definitive version of the book, but instead continuously revised and restructured its contents across notebooks, loose manuscripts, and even personal copies. Even after publishing a selection in *Athena* (1925) and seeing Caeiro taken up in *Presença* (1931), Pessoa continued to adjust the poems, penciling changes into his personal copies and leaving behind variant-rich manuscripts. From this vantage, Caeiro appears less as a miraculous exception and more as a sustained literary artifact—one whose poetic identity was produced through aesthetic strategy, textual recomposition, and dialogical play among heteronyms ("Introduction"; cf. PESSOA, 2020: xi-xx).³

Extending this critical reassessment, Miraglia refutes the centrality of the "Genesis Letter" itself as the privileged lens through which to interpret heteronymic genesis, exposing how much of the critical tradition has remained anchored in Pessoa's own retrospective narrative, rather than engaging with the archival evidence that complicates and destabilizes it. Through exhaustive archival analysis, he demonstrates that Caeiro's formation was gradual and strategically obfuscated: far from emerging fully formed, the heteronym was originally conceived as a singular poetic figure encompassing various styles—some of which would later be reassigned to Campos and even to Pessoa himself. The subsequent construction of a mythic lineage—Caeiro as master, Reis and Campos as disciples—was, Miraglia argues, the result of a retrospective effort to impose coherence on a far more fragmented and provisional creative process. This coherence, Miraglia notes was not achieved in 1914, but constructed over the course of many years, through successive redefinitions and strategic reframings of earlier writings that distanced the published Caeiro from the fluid, experimental figure who first appeared in Pessoa's notebooks (MIRAGLIA, 2020: 367–372, 385).

Despite these scholarly efforts to demystify the illusion of immediacy, Caeiro persists in the literary imagination as a fully formed figure—a poet endowed with a biography, a metaphysics, and a legendary dimension that continues to blur the boundary between fiction, reality, and the internal reality of fiction, sustaining the

³ Ivo Castro was the first to offer a rigorous philological account of *The Keeper of Sheep*, challenging the historical veracity of Pessoa's "Genesis Letter." His facsimile edition and earlier studies remain foundational to Pessoa scholarship, cf. CASTRO (1986: 319-328); (1982: 47-61). More recently, Pedro SEPÚLVEDA (2022: 18–40) examines competing interpretations of the so-called "triumphal day" of March 8, 1914, contrasting philological analyses that emphasize its fictional construction with readings that preserve its symbolic or epiphanic value. He proposes to interpret the multiple accounts of the episode as "modulações literárias de um acontecimento real" ["literary modulations of a real event"] (2022: 18), thereby rejecting both the notion of an imaginative fabrication and the idea of strict factual accuracy.

very mythology that philology seeks to challenge.⁴ This tension between myth and critical demystification was already apparent during the celebrations of Pessoa's centenary in 1988, when Luciana Stegagno-Picchio, in an essay significantly titled "Filologia Vs. Poesia? Eu defendo o dia triunfal" ["Philology Vs. Poetry? I Defend the Triumphal Day"], reaffirmed the importance of Pessoa's self-mythology against philological skepticism. She observed: "Agora a filologia tira-nos o dia triunfal. Certíssimo. Mas Pessoa acreditava no dia triunfal, e sem o dia triunfal não se explica a poesia de Pessoa. O dia triunfal existiu. Entrou no mundo dos mitos, daqueles mitos que são o nada que é tudo" [Now philology takes away the triumphal day. Very well. But Pessoa believed in the triumphal day, and without the triumphal day, Pessoa's poetry cannot be explained. The triumphal day existed. It entered the realm of myths—those myths that are nothing and yet everything] (STEGAGNO-PICCHIO, 1990: 69). Stegagno-Picchio's assessment was justified: Caeiro, transfigured into legend, entered the literary imagination as a "verdade dupla" ["double truth"], as she posits (STEGAGNO-PICCHIO, 1990: 63). In this sense, what matters is not only the historical veracity (*veritas*) of the event—truth conceived as factual opposition to falsehood—but also its poetic unveiling in the archaic Greek sense of *aletheia*: not a confirmation of what happened, but a resistance to oblivion, the un-concealment of what must be remembered.⁵ The myth of the triumphal day thus persists not just as a record of

⁴ For an analysis of how critical scholarship has responded to the persistence of this myth, cf. URIBE LOZADA (2016: 25–27), who notes that Luciana Stegagno-Picchio defended a notion of "dupla verdade" ["double truth"], proposing that Pessoa's "Genesis Letter" should be read as "filologicamente falsa e poeticamente verdadeira" ["philologically false but poetically true"], thus preserving the interpretive validity of the myth even in light of archival contradictions. Uribe also traces how Ivo Castro initially (1986) challenged the historicity of the "triumphal day" through philological analysis but later (2014) reframed the episode semiotically, proposing that the "triumphal day" should not be seen as a historical fact, but as a linguistic construction, where the relationship between narrative and reality is arbitrary, in accordance with Saussure's theory of the sign.

⁵ In classical thought, *veritas* (Latin) came to be associated with truth understood as factual accuracy—the correct correspondence between a statement and an external reality. In contrast, the Greek concept of *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια) originally signified "un-concealment" or "disclosure"—not the verification of facts, but the revealing or remembering of what would otherwise remain hidden. Thus, *aletheia* emphasizes presence against oblivion, whereas *veritas* emphasizes factual correctness. Vrasidas Karalis offers a particularly original insight by suggesting that, playfully, the alpha-privative (ἀ-) in *aletheia* could also be seen as an "alpha-cumulative," meaning the summoning of all oblivions together (KARALIS, 2008: 225). This interpretation highlights the layered, dynamic character of Greek truth as memory and resistance to forgetfulness. Heidegger's conception of *aletheia* as a tragic strife of revealing and concealing, culminating in the idea that art deceives in order to reveal, reframes truth as existential illusion. However, Karalis challenges this Heideggerian tradition by insisting that in Greek thought, *aletheia* remained a public, dialogical, and political practice—rooted in memory and presence, not existential concealment. As Karalis's analysis reveals, Heidegger's engagement with the Greeks was marked by profound historical distortions (cf. KARALIS, 2008: 208–227). Yet, as this reading suggests, it was precisely Heidegger's mystified, metaphysical *aletheia*—and not the careful

fact, but also as a gesture of memory, carrying the enduring force of what demands to remain visible. Caeiro, understood in this light, is a figure who crossed the threshold between fiction and reality and imposed himself upon the latter. As part of this elaborate construction, Caeiro was endowed with a life and history of his own. Said to have been born in Lisbon in April 1889, he is described as having spent much of his life in the countryside, on a “quinta” [farmstead] in Ribatejo, shielded from the intellectualism of the city and devoted to the physical immediacy of the senses. He lived as a shepherd of thoughts that were “all sensations,” and returned to Lisbon mere months before succumbing to tuberculosis in 1915. Beyond these scant details, the master left little to record, prompting Reis to remark: “Caeiro’s life cannot be told because there is nothing to tell. His poems are his life” (PESSOA, 2020: 224).

This shepherd-poet, whom Reis characterizes as “mais pagão que o paganismo” [“more pagan than paganism itself”], accomplished something the ancient Greeks and Romans never did (PESSOA, 2024: 77). Those ancients lived within the pagan cosmos; they did not contemplate its nature from the outside and had no need to rediscover it, for it had never been lost. By Caeiro’s time, centuries of Christianity and the subsequent inward turn toward subjectivity had obscured the external world behind veils of metaphysics, theology, and aesthetics. Caeiro suddenly pulled these veils away, reintroducing nature in all its nakedness.

In an undated fragment from “Notas para a recordação do meu mestre Caeiro” [“Notes for the Memory of My Master Caeiro”] (hereafter referred to as “Notes”), Álvaro de Campos reflects on Caeiro’s poetic evolution, describing how he began as “uma espécie de S. Francisco de Assis sem fé” [“a kind of St. Francis of Assisi without faith”], engaging with the world through an instinctive directness untainted by mystical or sentimental inclinations. His development unfolded as a slow, laborious passage through the “brenha” [“thicket”] of his limited learning—“felizmente muito pouco” [“fortunately very little”]—until he was left utterly bare, devoid of metaphysical beliefs, symbolist embellishments, and romantic mystifications. This process ultimately shaped him into a poet who did not merely observe nature but embraced it in its purest form. Campos sees this final stripping-away as the culmination of *The Keeper of Sheep*, poems that are “tão novos na superfície da função mais antiga no mundo!” [“so new on the surface of the oldest function in the world!”], free from worldly metaphysics and expressing only the reality of nature through the senses (PESSOA, 2024: 224).

Campos, in another undated document from his “Notes,” explains that Caeiro’s work consists of three titles: *The Keeper of Sheep*, *The Shepherd in Love*, and that third one which Ricardo Reis aptly named *Uncollected Poems*. The latter, in Campos’ opinion, also shared by Pessoa, marks the beginning of a “descent,” when the fatigue from

philological reconstructions—that ultimately prevailed in cultural memory. In this paradox, it was the falsified *aletheia* that manifested and endured, and Heidegger’s creative error proved more vital and lasting than centuries of scrupulous philological fidelity.

illness—later identified as tuberculosis—was already manifesting in his writing. Pessoa likewise observes that, “in the final fragmentary poems of the book we have both the continuation of the philosophical deepening through the evolution of the poet’s mind, and a sense of trepidation due to the author’s illness [...]” (PESSOA, 2020: 242). Campos characterizes the second part, *The Shepherd in Love*, as “a futile interlude,” though he concedes that its love poems rank “among the world’s greatest poems.” However, he emphasizes that the definitive expression of the master’s vision is found in *The Keeper of Sheep*. It is in this seminal work that the shepherd poet crystallizes his philosophical stance, navigating between his “concept of the universe” and the blunt recognition of “the lack of universe” (PESSOA, 2020: 229).

In *The Keeper of Sheep*, our poet presents himself as a shepherd whose sheep are his thoughts, which, in turn, “are all sensations” (PESSOA, 2020: 37). Throughout the work, composed of 49 poems, all written in free verse—free from rhyme and rhythm—Caeiro consistently reiterates the idea that thinking is a disease, describing it as “Thinking is a sickness of the eyes” (PESSOA, 2020: 9). Therefore, he declares that he thinks only with the senses: “I think with my eyes and my ears | And with my hands and my feet | And with my nose and my mouth” (PESSOA, 2020: 37). He frequently reiterates the obvious: “What we see of things are the things themselves,” and speaks of it as if it were the greatest novelty in the world (PESSOA, 2020: 59).

Seeing things as they really are constitutes the new poetic attitude that Campos termed Sensationism, although Caeiro himself rejected the label. What everyone in the group agrees on, however, is that this metaphysical—or anti-metaphysical—attitude represents something profoundly original: a complete and absolute negation of thought. Fernando Pessoa, now assuming the role of yet another exegete of the master’s sensationism, defines Caeiro in an undated manuscript—intended as a draft for *A Águia* magazine—as “um philosopho abstractamente materialista *aureolado de alma*, ou um poeta abstractamente mystico” [“a philosopher abstractly materialistic haloed by soul in an abstractly mystical poet”] (PESSOA, 1990: II, 393). All this paroxysmal rhetoric surrounding Caeiro, however, diverges from the way he presents himself: simply as a man who opened the window and discovered that nature exists (PESSOA, 2020: 199).⁶

Eulogistic, occasionally complex, and invariably contradictory are the opinions of Pessoa, Reis, Campos, and Mora regarding Caeiro’s poetry. Yet perhaps none understood him as directly, objectively, and, most importantly, in alignment with the master of the heteronyms’ own vision as did Teixeira de Pascoaes, the leading figure of the *Saudosismo* movement. On the subject, Jacinto do Prado Coelho, in *A Letra e o Leitor*, reports that Pascoaes, near the end of his life, made the following comment: “Quanto ao Caeiro, toda a sua poesia consiste em dizer que as cousas são

⁶ Cf. also the variant: “É um philosopho abstractamente materialista, consumido physicamente de alma, em um poeta abstractamente mystico” (PESSOA, 2016: 241, manuscript 14B-38^r).

o que parecem ser! Que se as pedras tivessem alma, não eram pedras! Que ideia ele faz das pedras e das almas! Nem chega a ser infantil!... Não é assim?" ["As for Caeiro, all his poetry consists in saying that things are what they seem to be! That if stones had souls, they wouldn't be stones! What idea does he have of stones and souls! It's not even childish!... Isn't that so?"] (*apud* COELHO, 1969: 270). The master of *saudosistas* was one of the rare commentators who unabashedly illuminated what he perceived as the overt simplicity in Caeiro's verse. He incisively noted that his poetry predominantly relies on obvious conclusions regarding the nature of the universe. To further illustrate this facet of Caeiro's work, and to substantiate the discussion herein, I present the following excerpt from one of his *Uncollected Poems*.

Se sou mais que uma pedra ou uma planta? Não sei.
 Sou diferente. Não sei o que é mais ou menos.
 [...]
 Sei que a pedra é a real, e que a planta existe.
 Sei isto porque elas existem.
 Sei isto porque os meus sentidos mo mostram.
 [...]
 Sim, escrevo versos, e a pedra não escreve versos.
 Sim, faço ideias sobre o mundo, e a planta nenhuma.
 Mas é que as pedras não são poetas, são pedras;
 E as plantas são plantas só, e não pensadores.
 Tanto posso dizer que sou superior a elas por isto,
 Como que sou inferior.
 Mas não digo isso: digo da pedra, "é uma pedra,"
 Digo da planta, "é uma planta,"
 Digo de mim "sou eu."
 E não digo mais nada. Que mais há a dizer?

(PESSOA, 2020: 178, 180)⁷

[Am I more than a stone or a plant? I don't know.
 I am different. I don't know to what degree.
 (...)
 I know that the stone is real, and that the plant exists.
 I know this because they exist.
 I know this because my senses show me.
 (...)
 Yes, I write poetry, and the stone doesn't.
 Yes, I have ideas about the world, and the plant has none.
 But stones are not poets, they are stones;
 And plants are merely plants, and not thinkers.
 I could equally say that this makes me both superior to them
 And inferior.
 But I do not say that: I say of the stone, "it is a stone,"

⁷ Cf. *The Complete Works of Alberto Caeiro* (PESSOA, 2020) for the original Portuguese orthography of Pessoa's autograph manuscripts.

I say of the plant, "it is a plant,"
 I say of myself, "I am me."
 And I say nothing more. What else is more to say?]

(PESSOA, 2020: 179, 181)

Here we encounter an example of how Teixeira de Pascoaes perceives Alberto Caeiro, a poet who consistently affirms that things are precisely as they appear. Pessoa himself, albeit in more complex terms, arrives at a congruent conclusion. He posits that the master of heteronyms "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 thing a stone tells him is that it has nothing at all to tell him" (PESSOA, 1966: 338; cf. PESSOA, 2016: 284).⁸

The stone, a recurring motif that underscores this worldview, appears ten times in the poem under discussion. It is deeply embedded in Caeiro's writings, as well as in the commentaries surrounding them, suggesting an almost obsessive fascination with this elemental object. Yet what poetic purpose does this fixation serve? Why does Caeiro continually return to and reshape statements such as "the stone is real," and the stone does not "write verses," and "that stones are not poets, they are stones"? Does this emphasis mark an attempt to forge a distinctive literary style or to instill a certain primeval tone, or might it function as a humorous device in its insistent allusion to so basic an image? Alternatively, might the silent stone—echoing the nearly voiceless muses in Romantic poetry—serve as a parody of poetic inspiration—an ironic muse whose force derives from its very muteness? (PESSOA, 2020: 179).

Far from being a mere aesthetic flourish, the motif of the stone operates both as a literal image in Caeiro's verse and as a philosophical articulation of his ontology. Even the name "Caeiro" carries notable etymological resonances with stone, drawing connections to *cantera* (quarry) and *caiado* (whitewashed), as documented in medieval Galician anthroponymy. Portuguese lexicographic sources from the eighteenth century onward consistently define *caeiro* as a worker involved in lime production. Lime (calcium oxide), in turn, is produced through the calcination of limestone (calcium carbonate), a chemical process that breaks down the stone's molecular structure through intense heat, releasing carbon dioxide and leaving behind a fine, white, powdery substance. If stone traditionally symbolizes substance—dense, permanent, inwardly grounded—lime becomes its philosophical dissolution: a white

⁸ Pessoa's remark on Caeiro's refusal to find "sermons in stones" has drawn critical attention as a seminal formulation of his radical empiricism. Cf. JOSIPOVICI (1979: 32), who emphasizes this refusal to transcend perceptual immediacy, observing that, like Wallace Stevens, Caeiro resists the impulse to move beyond immediate reality, viewing the very desire to do so as a form of dehumanization. Cf. also RAMALHO SANTOS (2003: 238–239), who connects Caeiro's poetics to Stevens's notion of the "ignorant eye"—a gaze that rejects allegory, symbolism, and metaphysical projection, insisting instead on "seeing without opinion."

material residue, stripped of interiority, defined by appearance and reactivity. The visual whiteness of lime is not incidental; it marks the obliteration of symbolic depth—the bleaching of meaning itself—leaving only the pure visibility of the matter.⁹

Álvaro de Campos further amplifies this association by emphasizing the white stillness of Caeiro's figure, reminiscent of the hue of limewash, a foundational constituent of classical architecture. He describes his master as having a “cor um pouco pálida” [“slightly pale shade”], a “estranho ar grego” [“strangely Greek air”], and most notably, a white gesture and a strikingly white forehead, conferring upon him the serene majesty of classical statuary. In this vivid portrayal—more visual than conceptual—Caeiro appears less as a living entity than as a figure embodying a quiet, almost sculptural grandeur. Campos observes that the least noticeable feature of Caeiro initially is his mouth and its expression, noting that “como se falar fosse, para este homem, menos que existir” [“speaking, for this man, is less significant than simply existing”]. His facial expression is likened to a smile that neither invites interaction nor seeks to communicate, but exists purely as a manifestation of being—“um sorriso de existir, e não de nos falar” [“a smile of being, not of speaking”]. A smile that Campos then parallels with the poetic imagery of inanimate yet aesthetically pleasing objects, such as flowers, sprawling fields, and sunlit waters. These elements delight simply by their presence, devoid of any symbolic meaning, mirroring Caeiro's unadorned, concrete serenity (PESSOA, 2006: 736).¹⁰

Building upon this physical and psychological concreteness, it becomes evident why Caeiro embodies a philosophy devoid of “sermons in stones.” His sculptural silence and white stillness extend beyond mere aesthetic traits, reflecting an epistemological stance that extols the pagan logic of the earth's bones: he engages with stones—and, by extension, all of nature—with a dispassionate simplicity that rejects metaphysical or symbolic interpretation. Caeiro's perception of nature sharply contrasts with the Western tradition of ascribing spiritual meanings to it. António

⁹ The name Caeiro has been traced in historical documentation and interpreted in onomastic literature as denoting a manufacturer or supplier of lime, with related variants such as Caeira, Caeirão, Caeirinha, and Caeiros. Ana Isabel Boullón Agrelo traces the evolution of cognate forms (Caheneyra, Cahneyra, Cah<n>eyra, and Caeira) in her book, *A Evolución do Sistema Onomástico: Antroponimia medieval galega (ss. VIII–XII)*, highlighting their use as both place names and surnames in medieval Galician contexts (BOULLÓN AGRELO, 1999: 21–80, 165, 503). Early Portuguese lexicographic sources, such as the dictionaries of Moraes Silva, as well as contemporary sources like *Infopédia*, consistently define *caeiro* as a worker in lime production, whether as a manufacturer, spreader, or assistant to bricklayers (MORAES SILVA, 213, 227; *Infopédia*, <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/toponimia/caeiro>). I wish to thank Dr. Thomas Gast for helpful discussions of material in this paper related to Greek statuary and to the chemistry of lime.

¹⁰ This association of Campos's description of Caeiro's whiteness with the classical aesthetic ideal aligns with the perception—widely accepted at the time—that ancient sculptures and architecture were entirely white. This notion, shaped by Renaissance and Neoclassical interpretations, persisted before modern discoveries confirmed the polychromy of ancient statuary.

Feijó addresses this dichotomy in the second essay of *Uma Admiração Pastoral pelo Diabo*, elucidating the origins of the phrase “sermons in stones,” which he traces back to William Shakespeare’s pastoral comedy *As You Like It* (1623). Feijó notes how this imagery subsequently evolved into a Victorian cliché particularly associated with Wordsworth, the emblematic poet of nature, “Who unexpectedly discovers sermons in stones (‘Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks, | Sermons in stones, and good in everything [...]’).” Yet in sharp contrast to mystics like Wordsworth, who imbue the natural world with transcendental meanings, Caeiro’s poetry—marked by its staunch objectivism—“vê uma ausência de significado em tudo” [“sees an absence of meaning in everything”]. Feijó further contends that Caeiro’s method deliberately establishes his work as an antithesis to Wordsworth, coining it a “counter-Wordsworth” stance (FEIJÓ, 2015: 43).

Indeed, Caeiro’s approach constitutes a counterpoint to Wordsworth’s naturalistic pantheism, yet one that starts from the same premise—nature. If, for a Romantic pagan, a stone, a river, or a flower can serve as a mystical portal, expressing the voice of nature and providing direct contact with universal reality, then, similarly, for a sensationist pagan, engagement with these elements elicits an equally profound revelation about the nature of reality. However, in this case, the revelation pertains to the “existência absolutamente real sem sombras nem erros | A coincidência exacta (e inteira) de uma coisa consigo mesma” [“absolutely real existence beyond a shadow of a doubt or error | the exact (and whole) coincidence of a thing with itself”], as he wrote in one of his *Uncollected Poems* (PESSOA, 1990: II, 367; cf. PESSOA, 2005: 137).¹¹ It was precisely for this revelation—that things are what they are—namely, for this subversion of “todas as sensibilidades diversamente conhecidas e de todas as fórmulas intelectuais variamente aceites” [“all sensibilities variously known and all the variously accepted intellectual formulas”] that, in Reis’s assessment, Caeiro was established as “maior poeta do século vinte” [“the greatest poet of the twentieth century”], as stated in one of his undated fragments (PESSOA, 1990: II, 432).

From a critical standpoint, Teixeira de Pascoaes provides a key source for understanding Caeiro’s method. António M. Feijó identifies Pascoaes as the main reference in Caeiro’s development, arguing that it was from a couplet by the *saudosista* that Caeiro derived his ontology of the stone. The referred verses are: “A folha que tombava | Era alma que subia” [“The leaf that fell | Was a soul rising”] from the poem “Elegia” [“Elegy”] in the book *Vida Etérea* (1906) [*Ethereal Life*]. When the heteronym declares, “a stone is a stone,” Feijó says, he is reacting “contra esta implosão de contrários” [“against this implosion of opposites”] that Pascoaes wants to recon-

¹¹ Cf. also (PESSOA, 2016: 105) for a critical transcription of the manuscript (cota 68-12r), including conjectural variants to the phrase: “A existencia absolutamente real sem sombras, sem mim. | A coincidência absoluta e inteira | De uma cousa comsigo mesma.”

cile (FEIJÓ, 2015: 51). Pessoa underscores this connection in his essay “To Whom Can Caeiro Be Compared?,” declaring Caeiro and Pascoaes to be “absolutamente opostos” [“absolutely opposed”] despite sharing a common “sentimento naturalista” [“naturalistic sentiment”] and an intrinsic “directamente metafísico e místico” [“directly metaphysical and mystical”] relation to nature. He further remarks, “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” [“Perhaps Caeiro proceeds from Pascoaes; but he proceeds by opposition, by reaction. Pascoaes turned inside out, without removing him from where he is, gives this—Alberto Caeiro”]. Yet what precisely does Pessoa intend by “turning” Pascoaes “inside out”? (PESSOA, 1966: 337).

Pascoaes’s own writing illuminates the paradox at work. In *Renascença: O espírito da nossa raça* [*Renaissance: The Spirit of Our Race*], he describes *saudade*, a deeply ingrained concept in Portuguese culture, as “amor carnal espiritualizado pela Dor ou amor espiritual materializado pelo Desejo [...]. É a síntese do Céu e da Terra; o ponto onde todas as formas cósmicas se cruzam; o centro do Universo: a alma da Natureza dentro da alma humana e a alma do homem dentro da Natureza” [Carnal love spiritualized by Pain or spiritual love materialized by Desire [...]. It is the synthesis of Heaven and Earth; the point where all cosmic forms intersect; the center of the Universe: the soul of Nature within the human soul and the soul of man within Nature”] (PASCOAES, 1912: 33). Central to the *Saudosismo* movement, *saudade* epitomizes the Portuguese spirit’s unique ability to synthesize material and spiritual, earthly and divine elements into a harmoniously paradoxical unity.

In the draft for *A águia* magazine, it is noticeable how Pessoa borrows this rhetorical mechanism of Pascoaesian paradox in his presentation of Alberto Caeiro. He begins by associating his poetry with an idea of absolute materialism, classifying the heteronym as a materialist who “Veste de concreto uma tendência abstracta, que, naturalmente não de propósito, não deixa atingir o seu máximo de abstracção, mas que fica, bem reparando, nem abstracta nem concreta” [“Dresses the abstract tendency in concrete terms, which, naturally not deliberately, does not let it reach its maximum abstraction, but which, upon closer inspection, is neither abstract nor concrete”]. Subsequently, pushing the paradox toward absurdity, he complicates the exposition by creating the term “abstract materialism,” which is later nuanced as “extremely relative materialism” (PESSOA, 1990: II, 393).

In contrast to this approach, Caeiro’s stand is the antithesis of contradiction, which, according to propositional logic, manifests as tautology—“the negation of a tautology is a contradiction, and the negation of a contradiction is a tautology” (MARKIDIS, 2022: 164). Rather than unifying opposites, Caeiro abolishes the very possibility of contradiction by treating every object as irreducibly itself. His poetry, instead of fostering conciliatory synthesis, promotes juxtaposing analysis, where nothing mixes or meets. Consequently, in the absence of encounter, contradiction cannot

arise. Thus, in Caeiro's universe, a stone remains nothing but a stone, and every element exists in self-contained consistency, sustaining a coherent and harmonious poetic realm. In that sense, if Pascoaes's poetry is, as Feijó writes, an "implosion of opposites," Caeiro's could well be described as an explosion of redundancies, since each element remains firmly contained in its own singularity.

The appropriation of these neoromantic, *Saudosista* poetic formulas is precisely where Caeiro's wit lies, as Pessoa observes in an alternate draft for *A Águia* magazine, where he evaluates the extent of Caeiro's originality and "génio extraordinário" ["extraordinary genius"]: "A meu ver, precisamente o que é grande no sr. A. Caeiro é o modo como utiliza os métodos da poesia espiritualista e idealista para nos tornar completamente bela a sua poesia materialista" ["In my opinion, precisely what is great about Mr. A. Caeiro is the way he uses the methods of spiritualist and idealist poetry to make his materialist poetry completely beautiful"]. The master of heteronyms did not even bother to create a new poetic arsenal to compose his work, described as "assombrosamente original" ["astonishingly original"]; he simply inverted the parameters of what already existed. Or, in Pessoa's words, "É aos armazéns do misticismo e do espiritualismo que a sua Musa vai buscar com que se engalanar" ["It is in the warehouses of mysticism and spiritualism that his muse fetches what adorns it"]. Thus, he acknowledges, almost as a matter of necessity, that "A.C. é um dos maiores poetas da nossa época e da nossa terra" ["A.C. is one of the greatest poets of our time and our land"] (PESSOA, 1990: II, 395). Yet Caeiro's own estimation of his poetic mission surpasses even this insight, as he boldly declares his aspiration to be nothing less than "the greatest poet in the world." In his view, he achieved this unparalleled status simply by daring to open the window and, through this act, arriving at a momentous discovery:

Sou um homem que um dia, ao abrir a janela, descobriu esta coisa importantíssima: que a natureza existe. Verifiquei que as árvores, os rios, as pedras são coisas que verdadeiramente existem. Nunca ninguém tinha pensado nisto. [...] Fiz a maior descoberta que nenhum antes fez e ao pé da qual todas as outras descobertas são entretenimentos de crianças estúpidas. Dei pelo universo. Os gregos, com toda a sua nitidez visual, não fizeram tanto.

(PESSOA, 2016: 235)

[I am a man who, one day, upon opening a window, discovered this very important thing: That nature exists. I realized that trees, rivers, stones are things that truly exist. No one had ever thought that before. (...) I made the greatest, most valuable discovery, beside which all other discoveries are merely amusements for rather stupid children. I saw the universe. For all their clear-sightedness, the Greeks didn't do as much.]

(PESSOA, 2020: 199)

It had been quite some time since any poet had felt the need to peer through a literal, open window—one that genuinely opens onto nature. The turn away from this outward perspective can largely be traced to Charles Baudelaire, often hailed as the

master of modernity. Under his influence, Symbolists, *Saudosistas*, and comparable schools discovered that it was the closed window, ironically enough, which offered the grandest panorama, albeit into the mind rather than the external world. As Baudelaire so provocatively remarks: “Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée. Il n’est pas d’objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus éblouissant qu’une fenêtre éclairée d’une chandelle” [“Whoever looks from the outside through an open window never sees as much as the one who looks through a closed window. There is no object deeper, more mysterious, more fertile, darker, or more dazzling than a window lit by a candle”] (BAUDELAIRE, 1892: 109). For poets subscribing to this view, shutting the portal that leads to nature simultaneously opens another into the depths of the soul, where reality ceases to be mere matter and becomes symbol.¹²

Caeiro, by contrast, disrupts the premise altogether: “Há só uma janela fechada, e todo o mundo lá fora; | E um sonho do que se poderia ver se a janela se abrisse, | Que nunca é o que se vê quando se abre a janela” [“There is only a closed window, and the whole world outside; | And a dream of what you might see if the window were to open, | Which is never what you see when the window does open”]. In a subtle yet deliberate counterpoint to Baudelaire, Caeiro reveals that even the open window may function as a site of illusion—not because it obscures the soul, but because it reflects the mind’s projections onto the world. The distortion, he explains, arises not from the senses but from thought itself: “É preciso também não ter filosofia nenhuma. | Com filosofia não há árvores: há ideias apenas” [“It is also necessary to have no philosophy. | With philosophy there are no trees: there are only ideas”] (PESSOA, 2020: 187). For Caeiro, it is not the eye that deceives, but the mind: philosophy stands between us and the world, converting things into meanings, symbols, or ideals. Unlike the Symbolist impulse to transform nature into metaphor, Caeiro, the master of sensationism, is liberated from the mystical symbolism of modern Romanticism. When he looks through a window, he describes only what lies before him: nature without transcendence, stone upon stone, a visible reality composed of “partes sem um todo” [“parts without a whole”] (PESSOA, 2020: 97). He refrains from imposing subjective interpretations on what he perceives. There is nothing beyond sensation. This disposition, as suggested by António Mora, constitutes the ultimate expression of objectivism—one that renders Caeiro “more Greek than the Greeks themselves” (PESSOA, 2020: 222).

¹² For further exploration of the window motif, cf. PESSOA (1914: 23): “Autrefois, dans une autre vie, | J’ai eu peut-être | Une fenêtre | Ouverte sur la nostalgie” [“Once, in another life, | I perhaps had | A window | Open onto *saudade*”]. Like Janus bifrons, with a face at each end, Pessoa borrows from Baudelaire both the window and, here, the tongue itself—now to turn his gaze inward rather than outward: toward absence, memory, and *saudade*. In doing so, he gently recloses the window Caeiro had dared to open.

This reversal of Romantic subjectivism, which emphasizes the discrete perception of each element and acknowledges nature's inherent plurality and diversity, is associated, in Pessoa's work, with a particular pagan worldview. Historian Władysław Tatarkiewicz, in his volume *Historia de la estética antigua* [*History of Ancient Aesthetics*], observes that the Greeks developed a distinctive mode of perception—one that isolates rather than unites. This perspective is reflected in their artistic endeavors, such as the initial sculptures adorning temple pediments, which featured isolated figures (TATARKIEWICZ, 1991: 30). In the poetic persona of Alberto Caeiro, this pagan mode of perceiving nature is realized through pure and direct form of expression, where each element is recognized and depicted in its individuality, concreteness, and finitude. Caeiro's poetic methodology, grounded in realism and devoid of metaphor, subtly resonates with the aniconic and pagan traditions examined by Jane Ellen Harrison, a pioneering scholar who emphasized the primacy of ritual and material symbols in early Greek religious practices. Through his annotations in her works, Pessoa demonstrates an engagement with ideas that evoke the veneration of unwrought natural objects, such as stones—practices deeply rooted in pagan beliefs (see Fig. 1; detail).

Not only Hermes, but, it would seem, many of the other gods, began their ritual life as hermæ. At Pharæ, close to the image of Hermes, Pausanias goes on to tell us, "stood about thirty square stones; these the people of Pharæ revered, giving to each stone the name of a god." "And," says Pausanias, "in the olden time all the Greeks worshipped unwrought stones instead of images." At Orchomenos in Bœotia, where was a very ancient sanctuary of the Charites or Graces, their images were "stones that had fallen from heaven." Pausanias elsewhere tells us that the square-shaped images of Hermes were first used by the Athenians, who were a people "zealous in all religious matters," and from Athens their usage passed to the remainder of Greece. The sanctity of these square-shaped hermæ was seen in the panic that ran through Athens when, just at the time of the fatal Sicilian expedition, the sacred hermæ were sacrilegiously mutilated.

Fig. 1. Jane Harrison, *Myths of Greece and Rome* (1927), p. 50.
Fernando Pessoa's Private Library, Casa Fernando Pessoa (2-23).

In highlighting Harrison's text, Pessoa draws attention to the unadorned authenticity of archaic religious practices, paralleling the austere simplicity found in Alberto Caeiro's poetry. These early rituals, with their emphasis on direct experience and immediate contact with nature, mirror Caeiro's poetic principle, which centers on a fundamental reverence for the observable, shunning symbolic interpretations. His focus on the raw attributes of the natural world embodies a distinctively pagan sensibility. Caeiro's poetic stance, evoking the mythic simplicity with which Deucalion and Pyrrha renew the world through their direct engagement with material objects, stones specifically, aligns with classical pagan conceptions of the divine as immanent within the everyday. Although Caeiro's approach may be perceived as atheistic by contemporary standards, it reaffirms an essential quasi-religious devotion to na-

ture without invoking a deity. In this light, his “pure paganism” may be interpreted as a form of religious expression that dispenses with theistic belief.

Pessoa models Caeiro in this aniconic form of ancient paganism as a counterpoint to the dominant intellectual and artistic trends of his time, or, in his own words, as “uma reacção contra todos os movimentos presentes que têm qualquer coisa de místicos ou de artificiais. O simbolismo, o saudosismo, tanto um como (o) outro são inimigos da obra de A.C.” [“a reaction against all current movements that have something mystical or artificial. Symbolism, *Saudosismo*, both are enemies of A.C.’s work.”] (PESSOA, 1990: II, 395). This perspective is closely aligned with Pessoa’s theoretical foundations of Sensationism. As stated in one of his manuscripts concerning the movement’s principles, the goal of art is “ao mesmo tempo, interpretar e opor-se à realidade social sua coeva” [“at the same time, to interpret and oppose its contemporary social reality”] (PESSOA, 1966: 167). Caeiro actualizes this very interpretation. Rather than merely negating this reality, he inverts it, reshaping its structures and methods while stripping them of their mystical underpinnings. His poetry is not an external rejection but an internal reversal, a mirror image that, while antithetical in content, remains formally indebted to the very traditions it subverts. Furthermore, this oppositional and inverted interpretation is directed not solely at dominant artistic movements but also at the profound philosophical shifts that have shaped European thought since the ascendancy of Christianity.

In one of the texts related to sensationist aesthetics, possibly written around 1915, Pessoa discusses the transformative impact of the Christian worldview on the perception of external reality. He states that, in the transition from paganism to this new religious system, the process led to the internalization of objective reality, of the real fact. This reality began to inhabit the subject, such that the external object became nothing more than “a nossa sensação d’elle, onde elle existe” [“our sensation of it, where it exists”] (PESSOA, 2009: 121). Pessoa observes that this internalization initiated by Christianity was later given intellectual and systematic treatment in the work of Immanuel Kant. The Kantian transcendental subject, he argues, represents “O subjectivismo christão levado a theoria maxima” [“The christian subjectivism taken to its maximum theory”] (PESSOA, 2002: 264). Restoring the pagan worldview first required dismantling the foundations of this system. If Kant revolutionized the understanding of knowledge by placing the subject at the center of the cognitive process—a shift famously termed as the “Copernican Revolution”—then Caeiro, through his radical naturalism, inverts Kantian epistemological anthropocentrism by positioning the object at the core of sensationist metaphysics, a concept that Pessoa would designate as “pedreidade” [“stoniness”] (PESSOA, 2020: 237).

The genesis of this new epistemology is narrated in the first person by Álvaro de Campos in one of the fragments from his “Notes” (PESSOA, 2020: 234). In it, Campos recalls a conversation in which everyone in the group took part, including António Mora and Fernando Pessoa’s homonymous heteronym. The debate cen-

tered on the concept of reality, which Pessoa maintained was not subject to gradations. He argued that while attributes may occupy different positions on a value scale—possessing more or less value relative to one another—they cannot exist to varying degrees. Entities either exist or they do not, leaving no room for an intermediate state.

Caeiro, however, interjected that reality could be understood in degrees, arguing that an object's degree of realness fluctuates according to its mode and intensity of manifestation. For Caeiro, existence is not simply a binary state; rather, one object may possess a greater or lesser degree of reality than another, contingent on the extent of its presence. To illustrate this perspective, Caeiro returned to the motif of the stone, asserting that “pedra não é realidade, tem realidade. A pedra é só pedra” [“A stone is not reality, it has reality. The stone is just stone”]. In his view, the stone's reality is determined by its physical attributes—namely, its weight and dimensions—such that a larger or heavier stone embodies more reality than one that is smaller or lighter. Both, however, invariably possess more reality than a stone depicted in a dream or a photograph (PESSOA, 2020: 236).

Pessoa, deeply intrigued by the metaphysical implications of this “teoria súbita” [“sudden theory”], observes that Alberto Caeiro's perspectives resonate with Kantian motifs, albeit in a contradictory manner. He notes, “V. está a fazer uma espécie de kantismo seu—criando uma pedra-noumenon, uma pedra-em-si” [“You are creating a form of Kantianism of your own—creating a noumenon-stone, a stone-in-itself”]. By invoking Kantian concepts, Pessoa contextualizes Caeiro's assertions about reality. Within Kant's transcendental idealism, attributes such as weight and size “são conceitos impostos à pedra-em-si pelos nossos sentidos, ou, melhor, pelo facto de que observamos” [“are concepts imposed upon the stone-in-itself by our senses, or rather, by the fact that we observe”]. This view sharply contrasts with Caeiro's standpoint, which, Pessoa observes, suggests the notion that “esses conceitos são tão coisas como a própria pedra-em-si” [“these concepts are as much things as the stone-in-itself”]. By not distinguishing between substance and attributes, Caeiro denies any ontological reality beyond that which is empirically perceivable. He posits that reality is constituted solely by the aggregation of an object's observable properties—such as weight, size, and color—with each property possessing its own independent existence. Consequently, the reality of a stone is understood as the sum of these discrete, empirically verifiable attributes. This framework endorses a bottom-up conception of reality, wherein the totality of an object's existence emerges from the cumulative effect of its individual observable attributes (PESSOA, 2020: 236).

In drawing these parallels, Pessoa unveils a fundamental contradiction at the core of Caeiro's thought. Despite his aversion to abstract models, Caeiro paradoxically advances a form of metaphysics that negates the real existence of stone, reducing it to a mere aggregate of real things. This interpretation, Pessoa argues, renders

Caeiro's thesis "difícil de compreender, ao passo que a de Kant, verdadeira ou falsa, é perfeitamente compreensível" ["difficult to understand, whereas Kant's, whether true or false, is perfectly comprehensible"]. Ultimately, despite Pessoa's thorough explanation, Caeiro—having listened intently—dismisses the comparison, severing any ties with established philosophical doctrines: "Eu não tenho teorias. Eu não tenho filosofia. Eu vejo mas não sei nada" ["I have no theories. I have no philosophy. I see but I know nothing"] (PESSOA, 2020: 237).

Indeed, as this dialogue suggests, Caeiro's behavior seems to contradict his professed identity as a poet who rejects metaphysical thought and strongly opposes aesthetic doctrines and theoretical constructs, most notably when he refers to himself as a poet—a shepherd of thoughts: "Sou um guardador de rebanhos. O rebanho é os meus pensamentos" ["I am a keeper of sheep. The sheep are my thoughts"] (PESSOA, 2020: 36–37). However, he does not reject thought per se; rather, he dismisses the intellectual faculty that seeks knowledge and unity. Instead of striving for knowledge, his thinking simply articulates what he sees.

In one of his *Uncollected Poems*, Caeiro states: "Porque o ter consciência não me obriga a ter teorias sobre as coisas: | Só me obriga a ser consciente" ["Because having consciousness of it doesn't oblige me to have theories about things: | It only obliges me to be conscious"] (PESSOA, 2020: 178–179). Notice how Caeiro's approach to thinking lacks the anabolic nature of Kant's speculative judgment, which pursues a synthesis of elements into a complex and coherent unity. In contrast, Caeiro employs a catabolic method of analysis, breaking the whole into its constituent parts. This perspective is exemplified in the final verse of poem XLVII in *The Keeper of Sheep*, a prime instance of the so-called theory of "stoniness."

Num dia excessivamente nítido,
[...]
Entrevi, como uma estrada por entre as árvores,
O que talvez seja o Grande Segredo,
Aquele Grande Mistério de que os poetas falsos falam.

Vi que não há Natureza,
Que Natureza não existe,
Que há montes, vales, planícies,
Que há árvores, flores, ervas,
Que há rios e pedras,
Mas que não há um todo a que isso pertença,
Que um conjunto real e verdadeiro
É uma doença das nossas ideias.

A Natureza é partes sem um todo.

(PESSOA, 2020: 96)

[On an excessively clear day,
(...)]

I glimpsed, like a pathway between trees,
 What might be the Great Secret,
 That Great Mystery of which the false poets speak.

I saw that there is no Nature,
 That Nature does not exist,
 That there are hills, valleys, plains,
 That there are trees, flowers, grasses,
 That there are rivers and stones,
 But that there is no whole to which this belongs,
 That a real and true unity
 Is a disease of our ideas.

Nature is parts without a whole.]

(PESSOA, 2020: 97)

Seeing things in their plurality with clarity and objectivity defines Caeiro's motto, unconcerned with logical deductions or epistemological categorizations. Kant, on the other hand, developed a method that seeks to unify and systematize knowledge through its categories and universal *a priori* principles. In contrast, Caeiro adopts an approach that values the diversity and singularity of sensory experiences without seeking a systematic unification of knowledge. Kant wondered whether there could be knowledge that is synthetic and *a priori*, as analytic judgment, which is *a priori*, is true but redundant; synthetic judgment, which is *a posteriori*, is limited to the contingent and particular. If Kant's answer provided a third way, that of synthetic *a priori* judgment, then Caeiro's attitude, if it were indeed a philosophy, would propose a fourth way, that of analytic *a posteriori* judgment, namely, a thought that arises from experience and deduces from it a predicate that was already contained (*a priori*) in the subject. In other words, it is the empirical confirmation of a tautology, a confirmation that a thing is what it is. And Caeiro makes of this experience, which he termed "A espantosa realidade das coisas" ["the astonishing reality of things"], his "descoberta de todos os dias" ["daily discovery"] (PESSOA, 2020: 128–129).¹³

¹³ The term "analytic a posteriori judgment" is employed here in a deliberately paradoxical and ironic sense. Within the Kantian system, such a category is logically impossible: analytic judgments are, by definition, *a priori*, since the predicate is already contained within the subject and its truth does not depend on experience. Yet in attributing this expression to Caeiro's attitude, the aim is to signal precisely the collapse of that philosophical distinction—the point at which the world coincides with its appearance, and epistemology yields to a lived ontology. The central gesture of Caeiro's poetics is the experienced tautology: a truth that adds nothing, yet is sensorially confirmed with astonishment. An "analytic a posteriori judgment," in this poetic sense, names the immediate apprehension of an evidence that does not require thought—only vision. It is the sensitive and repeated recognition that a thing is what it is: a tautology transfigured into daily discovery. Before such astonishment, philosophical language bends toward the silent affirmation of the real. The statement "All bachelors are unmarried," often associated with Kantian discussions of analytic *a priori* judgments, presupposes

In this context, it is pertinent to characterize Caeiro's thoughts as akin to a flock, a collective of entities he guards like a shepherd tending to his sheep, observing their movements and guiding them in the direction of his vision. His observation focuses solely on discerning distinctions between them, recognizing their differences without engaging in philosophical reflection on their significance. His epistemological attitude claims that the only certainty lies in the distinct reality and diversity among things, a comprehension he asserts is attained "com os olhos, nunca com o pensamento" ["through eyes, never through thought"] since, for him, "Compreender isto com o pensamento seria achá-las todas iguais" ["to understand this with thought would be to find them all the same"] (PESSOA, 2020: 130–131). Therefore, Caeiro never goes beyond the reach of his vision: "Eu nunca passo para além da realidade imediata" ["And I never go beyond immediate reality"] (PESSOA, 2020: 132–133). It is crucial, though, not to conflate this perspective with Berkeley's immaterialist anti-abstractionism, where existence hinges on perceptual acknowledgment—*esse est percipi* ["to be is to be perceived"]—implying that nothing exists beyond the mind. Conversely, for Caeiro, as articulated in his verse, reality exists independently of him.

Quando vier a Primavera,
Se eu já estiver morto,
As flores florirão da mesma maneira
E as árvores não serão menos verdes que na Primavera passada.
A realidade não precisa de mim.

Sinto uma alegria enorme
Ao pensar que a minha morte não tem importância nenhuma.
[...]
Gosto que tudo seja real e que tudo esteja certo;
E gosto porque assim seria, mesmo que eu não gostasse.
Por isso, se morrer agora, morro contente,
Porque tudo é real e tudo está certo.

(PESSOA, 2020: 126)

[If, when spring comes,
I am already dead,
The flowers will flower in the same manner

the stability of conceptual identity across instances. Likewise, the synthetic a priori judgment "7 + 5 = 12" depends on the mind's capacity to construct necessary truths that apply universally, independent of empirical content. Caeiro's worldview dissolves both operations. He refuses to affirm that a man is unmarried simply because he is labeled a bachelor—such a claim, for him, would only be valid if sensorially confirmed. More radically, he rejects the very intelligibility of numerical abstraction: "What is 34 in reality?", he asks, insisting that numbers are not real things but empty fictions detached from lived perception. In his poetics, each entity is irreducibly singular and momentary, and thus incapable of being subsumed under logical identity or quantitative sameness. To see, for Caeiro, is not to categorize or to count, but to affirm difference in its immediacy.

And the trees will be no less green than last spring.
Reality doesn't need me.

I feel a great joy
To think that my death hasn't the slightest importance.
(...)
I like everything to be real and everything to be right:
And I like to be that way even if I don't like it.
That is why, if I were to die now, I would die content,
Because everything is real and everything is right.]

(PESSOA, 2020: 127)

In the poem “Seja o que for que esteja no centro do Mundo” [“Whatever is at the center of the World”], another of the *Uncollected Poems*, Caeiro once again overturns the fundamental tenets of metaphysical thought, rejecting not only Kantian transcendental idealism but also Cartesian rationalism. Here, he refutes the very existence of subjectivity and asserts that external nature as the sole conceivable reality. Contrary to *cogito, ergo sum*, Caeiro would posit: things exist, therefore I do not think. The verses below illustrate his view that everything is *res extensa*:

Seja o que for que esteja no centro do Mundo,
Deu-me o mundo exterior por exemplo de Realidade,
E quando digo “isto é real”, mesmo de um sentimento,
Vejo-o sem querer em um espaço qualquer exterior,
Vejo-o com uma visão qualquer fora e alheio a mim.

Ser real quer dizer não estar dentro de mim.
Da minha pessoa de dentro não tenho noção de realidade.
Sei que o Mundo existe, mas não sei se existo.
[...]

Creio mais no meu corpo do que na minha alma,
Porque o meu Corpo apresenta-se no meio da realidade.
Podendo ser visto por outros,
Podendo tocar em outros,
Podendo sentar-se e estar de pé,
Mas a minha alma só pode ser definida por termos de fora.

Exista para mim — nos momentos em que julgo que efectivamente existe —
Por um empréstimo da realidade exterior do Mundo.

Se a alma é mais real
Que o mundo exterior, como tu, filósofo, dizes,
Para que é que o mundo exterior me foi dado como tipo da realidade?
[...]

Se por acaso esse mundo é o erro e eu é que estou certo?
Se o mundo é um erro, é um erro de toda a gente.
E cada um de nós é o erro de cada um de nós apenas.
Coisa por coisa, o mundo é mais certo.

Mas porque me interrogo, senão porque estou doente?

Nos dias certos, nos dias exteriores da minha vida,
 Nos meus dias de perfeita lucidez natural,
 Sinto sem sentir que sinto,
 Vejo sem saber que vejo,
 E nunca o Universo é tão real como então,
 Nunca o Universo está (não é perto ou longe de mim,
 Mas) tão sublimemente não-meu.

[...]

Vivemos antes de filosofar, existimos antes de o sabermos,
 E o primeiro facto merece ao menos a precedência e o culto.
 Sim, antes de sermos interior somos exterior.
 Por isso somos exterior essencialmente.

Dizes, filósofo doente, filósofo enfim, que isto é materialismo.
 Mas isto como pode ser materialismo, se materialismo é uma filosofia,
 Se uma filosofia seria, pelo menos sendo minha, uma filosofia minha,
 E isto nem sequer é meu, nem sequer sou eu?

(PESSOA, 2020: 144, 146)

[Whatever is that lies at the center of the world,
 Was given to me by the external world as an example of Reality,
 And when I say, "this is real," even of a feeling,
 I can't help but see it in some external space,
 I see it with a vision that is outside and separated from me.

Being real means not to being inside of me.
 I have no real notion of the person I am inside me.
 I know the world exists, but I do not know if I exist.
 (...)

I believe more in my body more than I do in my soul,
 Because my body appears in the midst of reality,
 Able to be seen by other people,
 Able to be touched by other people,
 Able to sit down and stand up,
 But my soul can only be defined in external terms.

It exists for me—in the moments when I think it does really exists—
 Because the World loans me a little external reality.

If the soul is more real
 Than the external world, as you, the philosopher, claim,
 Why then was the external world given to me as an example of reality?
 (...)

If the World is a mistake, it is a mistake for everyone.
 And we are merely each other's mistake.
 Put simply, the world is always more right.

But why do I question, if not because I am ill?

On good days, on the external days of my life,
 On my days of perfect, natural lucidity,

I feel without feeling that I feel,
 I see without knowing that I see,
 And the Universe is never more real than is then,
 The Universe is never (it is neither near nor far from me,
 But) so sublimely not-mine.

(...)

We live before we philosophize, we exist before we know it,
 And the first fact deserves at least precedence and reverence.
 Yes, before we are inner, we are external.
 That is why we are essentially external.

You ailing philosopher, but philosopher nonetheless, will say that this is materialism.
 But how can this be materialism if materialism is a philosophy,
 And a philosophy, at least if it were mine, would be my philosophy,
 And yet it isn't ever mine, nor am I even I?]

(PESSOA, 2020: 145, 147)

Lucidity, for Caeiro, is the clear vision of what is directly perceivable—the finite, the tangible. Conversely, illness is the penchant for philosophizing, which often involves grappling with the infinite, the unknowable, and the abstract. This poem directly opposes metaphysical inquiry, which seeks to define the nature of objective reality, by undermining its fundamental premise: the existence of subjectivity, or the very notion of the "I." To distill his philosophy of objective perception, Caeiro revisits and subverts this foundational element of modern philosophical and scientific methodology: Cartesian doubt. Descartes' method aims at securing absolute certainty through the self-reflection of the thinking subject. In contrast, Caeiro inverts this order. He accepts the existence of the world as an undeniable given, while questioning the existence of the self, as he asserts, "Sei que o Mundo existe, mas não sei se existo" ["I know the world exists, but I do not know if I exist"]. Through this approach, he effectively closes the gateway to metaphysical inquiry that reason opens, opting to acknowledge solely what is external and, within that, only contingent and particular. By casting doubt on the self—the cornerstone of Descartes' philosophy—Caeiro eschews the conundrum of the infinite regress of self-reflective thought that characterizes much of metaphysical speculation. He thus confines his recognition to the external world, focusing specifically on its finite and observable aspects (PESSOA, 2020: 145, 147).

The emphasis on the external and tangible in Caeiro's poetry has led critics such as Aníbal Frias to interpret his poetics through a phenomenology of immanence—an effort to dissolve traditional oppositions like subject / object and thought / sensation through the direct engagement of the body with the world. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Frias characterizes Caeiro's writing as an "ouverture au monde par le bas, par le truchement du corps sensible" ["an opening to the world from below, through the mediation of the sensitive body"] (FRIAS, 2012: 61). In this framework,

the self does not disappear but becomes dispersed across sensory experience—entangled with things, shaped before reflection takes place. Frias situates this within what he calls a psychic and ontological fracture: “cet écartèlement psychique [...] dans la polarité qui dresse face à face le sujet et l’objet” [“this psychic tearing [...] in the polarity that sets subject and object face to face”]. Caeiro’s response is not to heal or resolve this divide, but to engage it through what Frias terms a “série de synthèses disjonctives” [“a series of disjunctive syntheses”] (FRIAS, 2012: 61-62)—moments of contact that sustain the distance between body and world without collapsing their separation into unity. From this perspective, Caeiro offers an alternative to the Cartesian model of knowledge, grounded in “perceptio sive operatio intellectus”—the reflective act of a thinking subject. Rather than locating perception in the mind, Caeiro reorients it in the body, turning toward the world as a boundless field of sensation. Here, the infinite is not a metaphysical beyond, but the continual openness of perception itself—an ever-receding horizon. As Frias puts it, “Caeiro introduit dans la conscience une espèce d’intentionnalité irréductible: celle propre du souhait, ou du désir asymptotique d’être, sur une ligne d’horizon qui se retire à l’infini, chose parmi les choses” [“Caeiro introduces into consciousness a kind of irreducible intentionality: that of wishing, or of an asymptotic desire to be, on a horizon line that recedes infinitely, a thing among things”] (FRIAS, 2012: 60-61). This reading thus frames Caeiro’s poetics not as a static affirmation of what is, but as a movement animated by desire—a desire to dissolve into the multiplicity of things while still preserving the embodied tension of subjectivity at the threshold of perception.

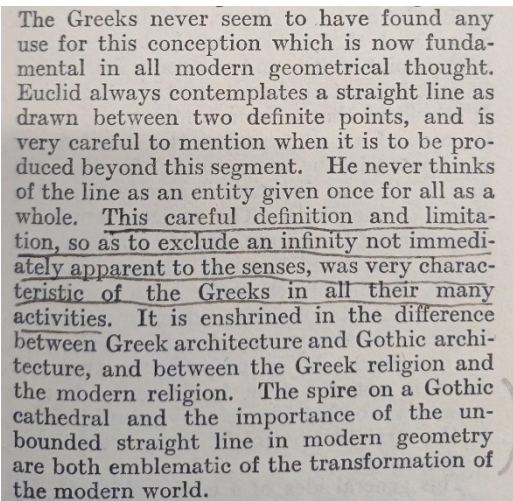
A related approach appears in José Gil, who also emphasizes Caeiro’s commitment to exteriority, though from a distinct philosophical perspective. Drawing on Deleuze, Gil argues that Caeiro inhabits a plane of immanence where things are not interpreted but encountered as singularities stripped of cultural or metaphysical meaning. For Gil, Caeiro’s vision—“aspirando à pura exterioridade” [“aspiring to pure exteriority”]—rejects any metaphysics of interiority and instead aligns with a form of objectivity that is “ao mesmo tempo não-objetiva (no sentido de não-científica) e não-subjetiva (no sentido de um eu empírico)” [“that is at once non-objective (in the sense of non-scientific) and non-subjective (in the sense of an empirical self)”] (GIL, 2000: 15, 18). Gil further notes that measurable attributes like size and weight are not universal properties but are “afetados por uma potência de diferenciação” [“affected by a power of differentiation”]; each thing must be seen from “a própria coisa em toda a sua potência” [“the thing itself in its full potency”], which resists comparison “para mais ou para menos” [“as greater or lesser”]. Individuation, from this perspective, is not the result of external comparison but the expression of a singular reality unfolded in maximal clarity (GIL, 2000: 35–36). Yet while Gil adopts a Deleuzian framework of immanence, he resists dissolving Caeiro’s literalism into a metaphysics of becoming. For Deleuze, immanence is not stasis but a continual modulation of intensities—a dynamic field where degrees of

reality express varying capacities to act, affect, and transform. Entities are always in motion, traversed by flows of becoming. Gil does not impose this model wholesale onto Caeiro. Instead, he locates in Caeiro's poetics a mode of exteriority that is not the outcome of relational dynamics or temporal unfolding, but rather presents itself as immediately given—prior to any interpretative or developmental mediation.

While Aníbal Frias and José Gil have both explored Alberto Caeiro's poetics in relation to modern philosophical paradigms, their interpretations diverge significantly in emphasis and orientation. Frias approaches Caeiro through a phenomenological lens, emphasizing the dissolution of classical dualisms—such as subject and object, or thought and sensation—through the mediating presence of the sensing body. Gil, by contrast, articulates a more radical position. Drawing on Deleuze, he identifies in Caeiro's poetics an aspiration to “pura exterioridade”—a commitment to pure exteriority that rejects all metaphysics of interiority and affirms multiplicity as an ontological given. This reading proposes an alignment with Gil's perspective, reinforced by Steffen Dix's interpretation, according to which Caeiro offers “a poetic rebuttal of the ontological fixation of the subjective-objective relation” (DIX, 2010: 78). Rather than grounding reality in embodied sensation or in its phenomenological unfolding, Caeiro posits reality as anterior to perception—self-evident, tautological, and empirically irreducible. What results is a disenchanted encounter with finitude. Dix's contribution is decisive: he defines Caeiro's stance not as a celebration of “the immediate presence of nature,” nor as an offshoot of Romantic or phenomenological paradigms, but as “the modern reincarnation of ancient objectivity”—a mode of vision that precedes both symbolic mediation and metaphysical abstraction (DIX, 2010: 76).

This commitment to a literal, empirical worldview—rooted in what Dix terms “ancient objectivity”—finds vivid expression in various commentaries and fragments. A notable instance appears in another passage from “Notes,” where Campos underscores what he considers a striking contrast between modern sensibilities and those of the ancient Greeks, particularly their aversion to the notion of the infinite. During a conversation, Caeiro challenges the classical materialist belief that space is infinite, maintaining that every entity must possess discernible limits and declaring, “O que não tem limites não existe” [“Anything without limits can't exist”]. Campos attempts to refute this claim by invoking the concept of infinite numerical sequences—“Tomemos qualquer número—34, por exemplo. Para além dele temos 35, 36, 37, 38, e assim sem poder parar. Não há número grande que não haja um número maior...” [“Let's take any number—34, for instance. Beyond it, we have 35, 36, 37, 38, and so on, without end. There's no larger number that doesn't have a still larger number following it...”]. Caeiro, however, dismisses this line of reasoning with characteristic brevity, asserting that those are mere numbers. With disarming simplicity, he poses the decisive question that encapsulates his worldview: “O que é o 34 na realidade?” [“What is number 34 in reality?”] (PESSOA, 2020: 231).

This passage highlights Caeiro's commitment to a worldview grounded in direct sensory experience. He dismisses the notion of infinity not merely as inconceivable but as devoid of meaning. By asserting the primacy of form and limit, Caeiro rekindles the ancient Greek aversion to the infinite and rejects both the Christian and modern valorization of boundlessness as a sign of transcendence. His finite ontology represents both a poetic and philosophical insurrection—an affirmation of the reality of things as they are: seen and touched, rather than imagined or conceived. Pessoa's engagement with this theme resonates even in the margins of his private library. In his heavily annotated copy of Alfred North Whitehead's *An Introduction to Mathematics*—a 1911 work that treats mathematics not merely as a technique but as a symbolic language shaping the modern worldview—Pessoa underlined, commented on, and marked with vertical lines numerous passages, revealing a methodical and enduring confrontation with the epistemic foundations of abstraction. While this work is not a common point of reference in Pessoa scholarship, it provides a revealing glimpse into Pessoa's lifelong preoccupation with the symbolic structures of modernity, especially in contrast to classical ideals—a tension evident both in the geometric abstraction rejected by Caeiro in favor of concrete sensation and in the classical balance sought by Ricardo Reis in response to the metaphysical excesses of modernity. In this volume, Pessoa underlined a passage contrasting the finite and measured sensibilities of Greek architecture and religion with the modern fascination for the infinite, symbolized by the “unbounded straight line in geometry” and the Gothic cathedral spire (WHITEHEAD, 1911: 119) (see Fig. 2; detail).



The Greeks never seem to have found any use for this conception which is now fundamental in all modern geometrical thought. Euclid always contemplates a straight line as drawn between two definite points, and is very careful to mention when it is to be produced beyond this segment. He never thinks of the line as an entity given once for all as a whole. This careful definition and limitation, so as to exclude an infinity not immediately apparent to the senses, was very characteristic of the Greeks in all their many activities. It is enshrined in the difference between Greek architecture and Gothic architecture, and between the Greek religion and the modern religion. The spire on a Gothic cathedral and the importance of the unbounded straight line in modern geometry are both emblematic of the transformation of the modern world.

Fig. 2. Alfred North Whitehead. *An Introduction to Mathematics* (1911), p. 119.
Fernando Pessoa's Private Library, Casa Fernando Pessoa (5-33).

The Greeks favored boundaries and proportions that the senses could grasp. Caeiro's poetry picks up this forgotten line of thought, the idea that reality must be finite, divisible into discrete parts, if it is to have any meaning at all. By treating nature as a scattering of stones and trees rather than a grand symbolic unity, Caeiro

reclaims a clarity of pagan, aniconic origin, perhaps suggesting that what Western culture has long needed is not limitless freedom but a renewed sense of finitude, structure, and proportion. This impulse appears strikingly paradoxical within the modernist and avant-garde movements, which championed unconstrained artistic expression—poetry liberated from rhyme, meter, and form—while simultaneously cultivating a fascination with paganism. These modern neopagan initiatives, often associated with Victorian reappraisals of classical myth, commonly misinterpret the essence of the pagan world, romanticizing Dionysus and neglecting Apollo's emphasis on order and restraint. Walt Whitman's pantheistic exuberance, for instance, might have inspired numerous poetic experiments that claimed a "pagan" pedigree but largely neglected the crucial role of discipline and finitude central to actual Greco-Roman civic and religious practices.

The introduction of Alberto Caeiro into the cultural landscape serves as a pointed critique of modern conceptions of paganism. Moving beyond Nietzsche's psychological interpretation, centered around the Apollo / Dionysus dichotomy, Pessoa presents a vision fundamentally rooted in finitude and clarity—qualities he associates with the objectivism of ancient Greek and Roman traditions. As Ricardo Reis asserts in his "Prefácio a Caeiro," "Reconstruir o paganismo envolve, pois, como primeira acção intelectual, fazer renascer o objectivismo puro dos gregos e dos romanos" ["Preface to Caeiro," "Reconstructing paganism involves, therefore, as its first intellectual act, reviving the pure objectivism of the Greeks and Romans"] (PESSOA, 1966: 34; cf. PESSOA, 2024: 66). For him, a genuine revival of paganism demands more than mere aesthetic and superficial replication of ancient practices. He contends that most contemporary attempts to resurrect paganism merely replicate sterile and surface-level elements without embodying the objectivist mindset that defines true paganism.

António Mora, for instance, critiques the tendency to conflate Epicureanism or Stoicism with the entire scope of pagan thought. He contends that neither doctrine adequately encapsulates the fundamental metaphysical disposition underpinning pagan ethical systems. In other words, each represents a particular manifestation of a broader principle: discipline, understood as the systematic organization of both individual and communal existence without recourse to transcendental ideals. In this paradigm, discipline is not only a structural necessity but also a recognition of the intrinsic limitations of human existence, the acceptance of finitude as the defining condition of human life (PESSOA, 2024: 72). Within Christian civilization, however, paganism has not been revived but distorted—what Reis calls "lixo cristão com pretensões pagãs" ["Christian trash with pagan pretensions"] (PESSOA, 1966: 234; cf. PESSOA, 2024: 66). For this reason, Reis critiques figures such as Matthew Arnold, Oscar Wilde, and Walter Pater, who believed themselves to be aligned with the

ancients yet remained bound to Christian thought, clinging only to fragments of pagan philosophy.¹⁴

Critiques of this kind became increasingly common among the generation that succeeded the Victorian aesthetes. One prominent voice in this discourse was the English writer Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936), whose significance within Pessoa's intellectual landscape is underscored by the presence of seven volumes of his works in the poet's personal library. As a critic both shaped by and reacting against the aestheticism of the previous generation, Chesterton sought to challenge contemporary misconceptions regarding the myths and religions of classical antiquity. The romanticized and distorted image of the pagan world propagated in the nineteenth century—particularly through the works of Walter Pater and Algernon Swinburne—becomes a central target in chapter 12 of *Heretics*. Chesterton approaches paganism not as a moralist alarmed by apostasy among aesthetes and decadents, but as a cultural critic engaging directly with the philosophical substance of their claims. His contention is not that they embraced paganism, but that they profoundly misunderstood its essence:

The New Paganism is no longer new, and it never at any time bore the smallest resemblance to Paganism. The ideas about the ancient civilization which it has left loose in the public mind are certainly extraordinary enough. The term “pagan” is continually used in fiction and light literature as meaning a man without any religion, whereas a pagan was generally a man with about half a dozen. The pagans, according to this notion, were continually crowning themselves with flowers and dancing about in an irresponsible state, whereas, if there were two things that the best pagan civilization did honestly believe in, they were a rather too rigid dignity and a much too rigid responsibility. Pagans are depicted as above all things inebriate and lawless, whereas they were above all things reasonable and respectable. They are praised as disobedient when they had only one great virtue—civic obedience. They are envied and admired as shamelessly happy when they had only one great sin—despair.

(CHESTERTON, 1905: 62)

¹⁴Although Pessoa, speaking through Reis, hurled epithets such as “Epicuristas cristãos, hedonistas católicos, estoicos de um pórtico judeu” [“Christian Epicureans, Catholic hedonists, and Stoics of a Jewish portico”] at Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde, his engagement with the literary and aesthetic legacy of these critics reveals a dialectic of influence, positioning him as both an inheritor and a challenger of nineteenth-century English thought (PESSOA, 2024: 66). For a detailed examination of Pessoa's engagement with these figures, particularly his understanding of the relationship between art and criticism, see Jorge Alberto URIBE LOZADA's PhD dissertation, “Um drama da crítica: Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater e Matthew Arnold, lidos por Fernando Pessoa” (2014). Uribe Lozada explores how Pessoa's readings of these authors shaped his own conception of literary production and the role of the artist-critic, tracing their influence on his formulation of what Pessoa termed “um drama em gente” and demonstrating how their reflections on art after Romanticism provided a conceptual framework for his heteronymic project.

Pessoa's critique of contemporary fallacies about paganism resonates profoundly with this analysis. Chesterton disputes the prevalent misconstrual that pagan societies were irreligious, asserting instead that they were, in fact, profoundly devout—often venerating a pantheon of deities while upholding strict civic discipline and a rigorous sense of duty. This perspective will echo in Pessoa's argument—"Every atheist who loves beauty calls himself a pagan, whereas a pagan is of course not an atheist, but a polytheist" (quoted by URIBE LOZADA, 2014: 246). Ricardo Reis further refines this idea by arguing that what distinctively characterizes Greco-Roman paganism is not merely its polytheism—given the diversity of polytheistic systems, from Nordic to other ancient traditions—but rather its fundamentally objective worldview, which derives ethical and philosophical principles from nature and human experience rather than from imposed transcendental ideals (PESSOA, 2024: 64).

Extending this critique, Chesterton also challenges the caricature of paganism as a tradition of unrestrained joy, suggesting instead that ancient pagans engaged deeply with existential despair—a recognition of human limitations starkly contrasting contemporary portrayals of their supposed shameless happiness. This refined perspective is likewise reflected in Reis' "Preface," in which he directly addresses Chesterton's commentary on the emotional spectrum of Christianity: "Não era mister que nos viesse dizer toda a gente que o cristismo é mais triste que o paganismo, nem que nos viesse dizer o sr. Chesterton, para dizer o contrário, que ele é mais alegre que o paganismo" ["It was hardly necessary for everyone to come and tell us that Christianity is sadder than paganism, nor for Mr. Chesterton to assert, conversely, that it is more joyful than paganism"] (PESSOA, 1966: 235-236; cf. PESSOA, 2024: 66). Without outright disagreement, Reis engages with Chesterton's argument by highlighting the dual aspects—joy and sadness—as intrinsic to Christianity, not as balanced emotions but rather as extreme oscillations akin to hysteria. He argues that this emotional instability defines Christianity as a condition prone to excess, lacking the equilibrium and sobriety characteristic of classical paganism.

At its core, both Chesterton and Pessoa distinguish Greco-Roman paganism not merely as a religious creed or philosophical doctrine but as an attitude toward nature. For Reis, this attitude is a firmly objective stance, rooted in a mentality that seeks to ground truth in the external world, identifying nature—or an abstract principle derived from it—as the ultimate criterion of reality (PESSOA, 2024: 66). For Chesterton, this attitude reflects a profound engagement with nature as a sacrament—a tangible reality that conveys meaning through direct experience—suggesting that the true essence of paganism lies in celebrating life's immediate, sensory experiences as inherently imbued with significance.

In *The Victorian Age in Literature*, Chesterton defines a pagan as "a person who can do what hardly any person for the last two thousand years could do: a person who can take Nature naturally." In the realm of poetry, amidst the self-styled pagans of the modern era, Chesterton recognized only one poet who might have earned the

distinction of a true “pagan,” George Meredith. He describes Meredith as “perhaps the only man in the modern world who nearly attained the great honor of ascending to the high state of paganism,” adding, “It is due to Meredith to say that no one outside a few of the great Greeks has ever taken Nature so naturally as he did” (139) (CHESTERTON, 1914: 139) (see Fig. 3). Notably, Fernando Pessoa owned this book and underlined this passage, indicating a clear alignment with his own literary sensibilities. Chesterton’s conceptualization of paganism resonates with Caeiro’s insistence that the essence of things lies in their materiality rather than in symbolic or interpretative constructs. In his discussion of Meredith in this book, the critic terms this view “mystical materialism” (CHESTERTON, 1969: 228). Likewise, as previously described, Pessoa employs similarly paradoxical expressions to characterize Caeiro’s philosophical stance as “a philosopher abstractly materialistic” (PESSOA, 1990: II, 393). Meanwhile, I.I. Crosse, one of Pessoa’s fictional commentators and translators, defines Caeiro’s philosophy as “mysticism of objectivity” (PESSOA, 1990: II, 235)

This parallel between Meredith and Caeiro is particularly poignant in their views of nature as a finite and transient space. In “The Moral Philosophy of Meredith,” included in *A Handful of Authors* (1953), CHESTERTON argues that pursuing infinity ultimately distances one from reality: “It is the idea that to enter upon abstractions and infinities is to get further and further from the mystery, whereas drawing nearer to concrete limits—some particular stone or flame or boundary—brings one closer to mystery” (69).

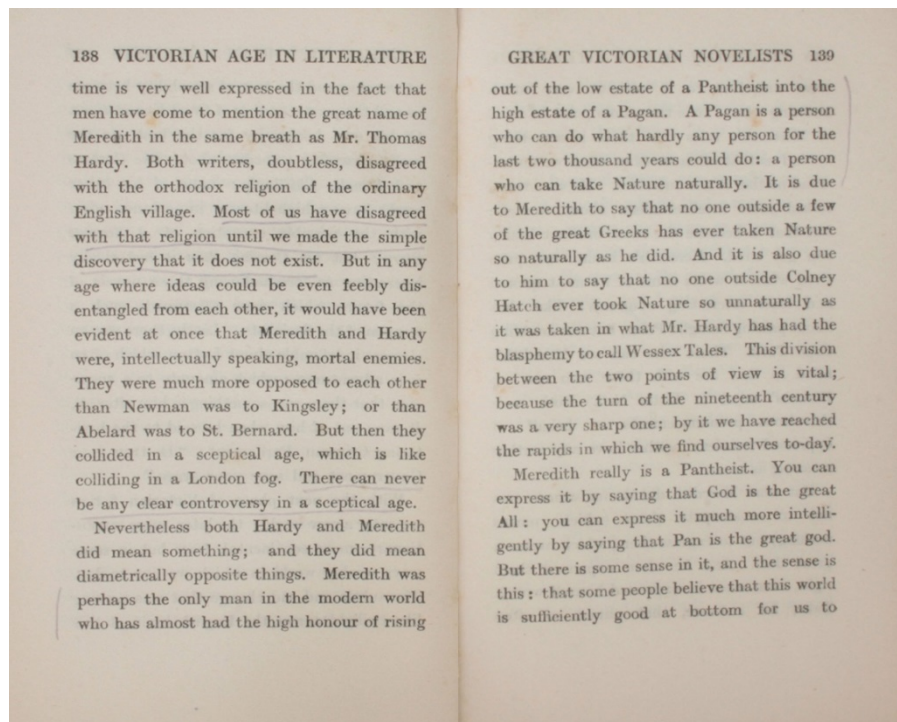


Fig. 3. Gilbert Keith Chesterton. *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1914), pp. 138-139. Fernando Pessoa’s Private Library, Casa Fernando Pessoa (8-110).

Meredith finds a presence of sacred mystery in the tangible world—a subtle, almost numinous quality in physical experience. However, Caeiro adopts an even more radical stance. For him, to know things—to think of them—is simply to see, to smell, and to taste: “Pensar uma flor é vê-la e cheirá-la. E comer um fruto é saber-lhe o sentido” [“To think a flower is to see it and smell it. And to eat a fruit is to know its meaning”] (PESSOA, 2020: 36-37). Once again, this emphasis on the primacy of physical experience resonates with Chesterton’s notion of “mystical materialism.” In *Alarms and Discursions*, Chesterton expresses a similar impulse in his geophagic yearning to assimilate the physical world through sensory experience in “The Appetite of Earth”:

I think any poetic mind that has loved solidity, the thickness of trees, the squareness of stones, the firmness of clay, must have sometimes wished that they were things to eat. If only brown peat tasted as good as it looks; if only white fir-wood were digestible! We talk rightly of giving stones for bread: but there are in the Geological Museum certain rich crimson marbles, certain split stones of blue and green, that make me wish my teeth were stronger.

(CHESTERTON, 1910: 44)

Unlike the prevailing poetic evocations of paganism, which often emphasize mythological symbolism or metaphysical speculation, Pessoa and Chesterton articulate a vision rooted in direct engagement with the material world, rejecting abstraction in favor of immediate sensory experience. While Caeiro expresses this through a radical materialism that denies all transcendence, Chesterton, in discussing Meredith, suggests that nature possesses a numinous quality, where physical experience resonates with deeper significance. Despite this difference, both perspectives share the conviction that nature is not a lifeless, inert entity but something that must be fully experienced through the senses. This emphasis on immediacy aligns with a broader critique shared by Chesterton and Pessoa: the failure of modern interpretations to grasp the essence of true Greco-Roman thought. For them, contemporary attempts to revive antiquity often neglect its defining principles—clarity, concreteness, and the recognition of finitude as the foundation of objective understanding. If Chesterton discerned traces of this pagan objectivity in Meredith, Pessoa sought to fully embody it in Caeiro. By identifying this objective stance as the hallmark of an authentic modern pagan, Pessoa crafts a poetic experiment in Alberto Caeiro da Silva, a pure pagan, composing his verses in the quietude of the Ribatejo countryside, where he observes the hills, plains, rivers, and stones—recalling Deucalion and Pyrrha, who once cast stones brimming with the promise of life. Whereas the mythic couple foresaw a material genesis in each stone, Caeiro discerns a metaphysical genesis untouched by interior illusions, affirming existence in its most unadorned form. Just as Deucalion and Pyrrha revitalized humanity by focusing on what lay before them, Caeiro restores poetic and philosophical inquiry to the realm of the visible and tangible. While modern metaphysics often retreats into subjective introspection, he

leads it outward into the open expanse, where things simply are and need no further justification.

In an age inclined to savor complexity and indulge in ironic deconstruction, Caeiro's unassuming stance constitutes the most profound irony: by asserting facts, he negates lofty metaphysics; by naming what is plainly seen, he refutes transcendence; and by celebrating surfaces, he dispels the notion of hidden depths. His pastoral setting in Ribatejo thus becomes the stage for a philosophical upheaval that overturns centuries of intellectual tradition. Within his verses, we witness a subdued "stoniness" revolution—an emancipation of nature from the subject, of reality from conceptual scaffolding, and of poetry from the constraints of symbolism. By reducing centuries of philosophical musings to the plainest of truths, "a stone is a stone," Pessoa, through the poetry of Caeiro, offers us his final, infinite jest.

Can one, then, conclude that he has succeeded? Is it conceivable to revive paganism within the modern context of Fernando Pessoa's time, so far removed from ancient Greece or Rome? And can one truly discern in Caeiro what Mora designates as the "*substância absoluta do paganismo*" ["absolute substance of paganism"] in a world shaped by two millennia of Christian tradition (PESSOA, 2016: 325; cf. PESSOA, 2024: 347)? Notably, Reis subtly contradicts Mora's assertion by conceding that Caeiro is merely "*substância sem os atributos*" ["a substance without attributes"] (PESSOA, 2016: 325; cf. PESSOA, 2024: 88). The master of the heteronyms embodies an almost pagan core that appears exempt from fluctuating historical and cultural modes. Caeiro is celebrated for eluding both the Christian sensibility of his era and the systematic doctrines—whether Stoic or Epicurean—that would otherwise reduce paganism to codified beliefs. In this respect, it is sensible to consider him as the substance of paganism, as Reis proposes. Nevertheless, a fundamental contradiction cannot be overlooked. On the one hand, Caeiro ostensibly champions a materialistic view of reality, perceiving objects solely in their immediate physicality without metaphysical overlays. Yet his treatment of these objects frequently veers into the abstract, stripping them of their individual essence and transforming them into general concepts, as articulated by Pessoa in his discourse on the theory of stoniness (PESSOA, 2020: 234-239). Moreover, one must recall Pessoa's observation that merely adopting pagan elements or cultivating attitudes aligned with paganism does not suffice to reconstitute a genuinely pagan sensibility. Similarly, rejecting both transcendent metaphysics and Christian interiority, on its own, does not necessarily render one pagan. This tension, woven into the very notion of a modern pagan "substance" devoid of historical attributes, remains unresolved, pointing to the enduring complexity of Pessoa's literary architecture. The question of whether Caeiro authentically embodies a pure pagan outlook continues to provoke debate, hinting at a deeper complexity that resists definitive resolution and sets the stage for continued inquiry into the intricate system of voices that shape his poetic cosmos.

Bibliography

- BAUDELAIRE, Charles (1892). *Petits poèmes en prose: les paradis artificiels*. Paris: Lévy.
- BOULLÓN AGRELO, Ana Isabel (1999). *A evolução do sistema onomástico: Antroponímia medieval galega* (ss. VIII–XII). Tübingen: Niemeyer, pp. 21–80, 165, 503.
- CASTRO, Ivo (1986). “Para o texto de ‘O Guardador de Rebanhos.’” *Actas do Colóquio Critique Textuelle Portugaise* (Paris, 20-24 Out. 1981). Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, pp. 319-328.
- (1982). “O corpus de ‘O guardador de rebanhos’ depositado na Biblioteca Nacional.” *Revista da Biblioteca Nacional*, vol. 2, n.º 1, pp. 47-61.
- CHESTERTON, G.K. (1969). “The Moral Philosophy of Meredith.” *A Handful of Authors: Essays on Books and Writers*. New York: Kraus Reprint, pp. 69-74.
- (1914). *The Victorian Age in Literature*. London: Williams and Norgate. Casa Fernando Pessoa (CFP 8-100).
- (1910). “The Appetite of Earth.” *Alarms And Discursions*. London: Methuen & Co.
- COELHO, Jacinto do Prado (1969). *A Letra e o Leitor*. Lisbon: Portugália Editora.
- DIX, Steffen (2010). “The Plurality of Gods and Man, or ‘The Aesthetic Attitude in All Its Pagan Splendor’ in Fernando Pessoa.” *The Pluralist*, vol. 5, n.º 1, Spring, pp. 73–93. On-line: <https://doi.org/10.5406/pluralist.5.1.0073>
- FEIJÓ, António (2015). *Uma admiração pastoril pelo diabo (Pessoa e Pascoaes)*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda.
- FRIAS, Aníbal (2012). “Meu corpo deitado na realidade: Caeiro et la phénoménologie.” *Pessoa Plural — A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, n.º 2, Spring, pp. 58–87. Brown Digital Repository, Brown University Library. <https://doi.org/10.7301/Z0028Q1X>
- GARLAND, R. (2020). *Greek Mythology: Gods and Heroes Brought to Life*. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword History.
- GIL, José (2000). *Diferença e negação na poesia de Fernando Pessoa*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará.
- HARRISON, Jane Ellen (1927). *Myths of Greece and Rome*. London: E. Benn. Casa Fernando Pessoa (CFP 2-23).
- JOSIPOVICI, GABRIEL (1979). *The Lessons of Modernism*. London: Macmillan.
- KARALIS, Vrasidas (2008). “Martin Heidegger and the *Aletheia* of his Greeks.” *Heidegger and the Aesthetics of Living*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 208–227.
- MAKRIDIS, Odysseus (2022). “Sentential Logic Languages.” *Symbolic Logic*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 115-289
- MIRAGLIA, Gianluca (2020). “Do ‘Dia Triunfal’ ao Orpheu: Ascensão e queda de Alberto Caeiro.” *Pessoa Plural — A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, n.º 18, Fall, pp. 365–386. Brown Digital Repository, Brown University Library. <https://doi.org/10.26300/xkkk-8w33>
- MORAES SILVA, Antonio de (1789). *Diccionario da lingua portugueza: composto pelo padre D. Rafael Bluteau, reformado, e acrescentado por Antonio de Moraes Silva natural do Rio de Janeiro* (Volume 1: A—K). Lisboa: Na Officina de Simão Thaddeo Ferreira, pp. 213, 227.
- PASCOAES, Teixeira de (1912). “Renascença: O espírito da nossa raça.” *A águia*, 2nd series, n.º 1, Jan, pp. 33-34. <https://purl.pt/12152>
- PESSOA, Fernando (2024). *O Regresso dos deuses. Fernando Pessoa e o ideal neo-pagão: edição e estudo*. Edited by Luís Filipe B. Teixeira. [E-book Kindle]. N.p: Escritas Mutantes.
- (2020). *The Complete Works of Alberto Caeiro: Bilingual Edition*. Edited by Jerónimo Pizarro and Patricio Ferrari. New York: New Directions.
- (2016). *Obra Completa de Alberto Caeiro*. Edited by Jerónimo Pizarro and Patricio Ferrari. Lisboa: Tinta-da-china.
- (2014). *Poèmes français*. Edition established and annotated by Patricio Ferrari with the collaboration of Patrick Quillier. Preface by Patrick Quillier. Paris: Éditions de la Différence, Clepsydre Collection.

- _____. (2009). *Sensacionismo e outros ismos*. Edited by Jerónimo Pizarro. Critical edition. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda.
- _____. (2006). *Obra poética e em prosa*. Edited by António Quadros and Dalila Pereira da Costa. Vol. 1. Porto: Lello & Irmão.
- _____. (2005). *Poesia completa de Alberto Caeiro*. Edited by Fernando Cabral and Richard Zenith. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- _____. (2002). *Obras de António Mora*. Edited by Luís Filipe B. Teixeira. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda.
- _____. (1990). *Pessoa por conhecer. Textos para um novo mapa*. Edited by Teresa Rita Lopes. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa. 2 vols.
- _____. (1966). *Páginas Íntimas e de Auto-Interpretação*. Edited by Jacinto do Prado Coelho and Georg Rudolf Lind. Lisboa: Edições Ática.
- PORTO EDITORA. "Caeiro." *Dicionário Infopédia de Toponímia*. Porto: Porto Editora. 10 May 2025. <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/toponimia/caeiro>
- RAMALHO SANTOS, Irene (2003). *Atlantic Poets: Fernando Pessoa's Turn in Anglo-American Modernism*. Hanover: Dartmouth College.
- SEPÚLVEDA, Pedro (2022). "Narrativas e variações do dia triunfal de Fernando Pessoa." *Revista Estranhar Pessoa*, n.º 9, Fall, pp. 18–40.
- STEGAGNO-PICCHIO, Luciana (1990). "Filologia vs. Poesia? Eu defendo o dia triunfal." *Um século de Pessoa*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, pp 63-70.
- TATARKIEWICZ, Wladyslaw (1991). *Historia de la estética I: La estética antigua*. Madrid: Akal.
- URIBE LOZADA, Jorge Alberto (2016). "Autoria, evolução e sentido: apontamentos para uma releitura da 'Carta sobre a Génese dos Heterónimos.'" *Estranhar Pessoa*, Lisboa, n.º 3, pp. 23–44.
- _____. (2014). "Um drama da crítica: Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater e Matthew Arnold, lidos por Fernando Pessoa." Tese de Doutoramento apresentada à Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa.
- WHITEHEAD, Alfred North (1911). *An Introduction to Mathematics*. London: Williams & Norgate. Casa Fernando Pessoa (CFP 5-33).

MARIA CINTRA GUIMARÃES earned her Ph.D. in Portuguese from Indiana University in 2024, with a minor in History and Philosophy of Science. Her dissertation, “Unity & Diversity in Fernando Pessoa,” was completed under the supervision of Dr. Estela Vieira. She holds an M.A. in Portuguese from Indiana University (2013), where she authored “Poetry and Music: A Transdisciplinary Study of Fernando Pessoa’s *Mensagem*,” and a B.A. from *Universidade de Brasília* (2003). She taught as an Associate Instructor at Indiana University and later served as a Visiting Professor in the Department of Literary Theory and Literature at the University of Brasília (UnB), where she developed and led courses in 19th- and 20th- century Portuguese literature and Luso-African literature. In 2022, she conducted research in Portugal with support from Indiana University’s Institute for European Studies, FLAD, and BNP. Her research focuses on Lusophone literature, modernism, philosophy, and the intersections of poetry, science, and music. As a violinist, she has performed with the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra and the Orquestra Sinfônica da Ceilândia, integrating her musical training into her literary analysis.

MARIA CINTRA GUIMARÃES obteve seu doutorado em Português pela *Indiana University* em 2024, com um *minor* em História e Filosofia da Ciência. Sua dissertação, “Unidade & Diversidade em Fernando Pessoa,” foi concluída sob a orientação da Prof.^a Estela Vieira. Ela também possui um Mestrado em português pela *Indiana University* (2013), onde escreveu “Poesia e música: Um estudo transdisciplinar da obra *Mensagem* de Fernando Pessoa” e um Bacharelado (B.A.) pela *Universidade de Brasília* (2003). Ela lecionou como *Associate Instructor* na *Indiana University* e foi Professora Visitante no Departamento de Teoria Literária e Literatura da *Universidade de Brasília* (UnB) (2014–2015), onde projetou e ministrou cursos sobre literatura portuguesa dos séculos XIX e XX e literatura luso-africana. Em 2022, realizou pesquisa em Portugal com o apoio do Instituto de Estudos Europeus da *Indiana University*, da FLAD e da BNP. Sua pesquisa concentra-se na literatura de língua portuguesa, no modernismo, na filosofia e nas interseções entre poesia, ciência e música. Violinista, atuou com a Bloomington Symphony Orchestra e a Orquestra Sinfônica da Ceilândia, incorporando sua formação musical à análise literária.