

# What does Alberto Caeiro see?

[O que vê Alberto Caeiro?]

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## Keywords

Alberto Caeiro, *The Sheepkeeper*, Entity, Concept, Thought, Language.

## Abstract

This essay departs from the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper* to dwell on a controversial understanding of the being of things in Alberto Caeiro's vision: things observed in the master's innocent gaze could be translated into an objectivity constituted by physical perceivable qualities, such as color, scent, and movement, which contrasts with the metaphysical gesture of separation suggested in the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper*. Color, scent, and movement are removed from the entity of a butterfly and flower; the butterfly is evacuated and collapsed, transformed into illusory ruins of structure of the agglutination of concepts intertwined with the petrification of thoughts and time. The metaphorical potential of language unlocked by Caeiro helps to illuminate the interplay of language, understanding, and mentality. This essay sheds light on some quintessential aspects of Alberto Caeiro's vision: the disintegration of the entity and the collapse of the concept, newness born out of no thoughts, and the kaleidoscope of metaphorical language.

## Palavras-chave

Alberto Caeiro, *O Guardador de Rebanhos*, Entidade, Conceito, Pensamento, Linguagem.

## Resumo

Este ensaio parte do quadragésimo poema no *O Guardador de Rebanhos*, para escrutinar um entendimento controverso sobre o ser das coisas na visão de Alberto Caeiro: as coisas percebidas no olhar inocente do mestre podem ser traduzidas em uma objetividade constituída por qualidades físicas perceptíveis como a cor, o perfume e o movimento, o que contrasta com o gesto metafísico de separação sugerida pelo quadragésimo poema do *O Guardador de Rebanhos*. A cor, o perfume e o movimento são removidos da entidade de uma borboleta e flor; a borboleta é evacuada e colapsada, transformada em ruínas ilusórias de estrutura de aglutinação de conceitos entrelaçados com a petrificação dos pensamentos e do tempo. O potencial metafórico da linguagem revelado por Caeiro ajuda a iluminar a interação entre linguagem, compreensão e mentalidade. Este ensaio arroja luz sobre alguns aspectos quintessenciais da visão de Alberto Caeiro: a desintegração da entidade e o colapso do conceito, a novidade nascida do não-pensamento e o caleidoscópio da linguagem metafórica.

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Passa uma borboleta deante de mim  
 E pela primeira vez no universo eu reparo  
 Que as borboletas não teem cor nem movimento,  
 Assim como as flores não teem perfume nem cor.  
 A cor é que tem cor nas azas da borboleta.  
 No movimento da borboleta o movimento é que se move,  
 O perfume é que tem perfume no perfume da flor.  
 A borboleta é apenas borboleta  
 E a flor é apenas flor.

(PESSOA, 2016a: 66-67)

[I see a butterfly go by  
 And for the first time in the universe I notice  
 That butterflies do not have color or movement,  
 Even as flowers do not have scent or color.  
 Color is what has color in the butterflies' wings,  
 Movement is what moves in the butterfly's movement,  
 Scent is what has scent in the flower's scent.  
 The butterfly is just a butterfly  
 And the flower just a flower.

(PESSOA, 1998: 63)]

In the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper*, Alberto Caeiro recounted a particular vision of a butterfly with no color and movement that perplexed and stunned him: in the master's typical metaphysical gesture of separation, color and movement are removed from the entity of the butterfly to be attributed to something else, something unnamed, weirdly perceptible only in its own terms, and which could only be deduced through a relation of subordination. A butterfly without color and movement, a butterfly that doesn't show off its sparkling garments and whose image cannot be conceived through movement, provokes surprise in Caeiro. The being of a butterfly as well as the being of flowers are revealed in an ordinary sparkling moment to be undefined and uncharacterized by their usual qualities. As suggested by the plain tone at the end, butterflies and flowers are restored to their original existence with their primary perceivable qualities extracted; conceptually, butterflies and flowers are separated from constitutive concepts of color and movement; perceptively, they have been deprived of tangible perceptible attributes, to lose graspable visualization and flee sensual domain. Caeiro deliberately and subtly revealed the original and essential being of butterflies and flowers by astonishment and negation: colors cannot be perceived, movements cannot be formed, scent cannot be smelled: what does Alberto Caeiro see?

The answer to this question has to do with the being, the entity, the essence of the things in Caeiro's world, which are focused and revealed through his omnipresent and astonishingly fresh gaze. There is a masterly echo and consistency between his sight full of innocence and directness and the transparency and simplicity of the things he sees. "Ao meu olhar, tudo é nitido como um girassol" (PESSOA, 2016a: 33) ["My gaze is clear like a sunflower" (PESSOA, 1998: 48)], "O meu olhar azul como o céu | É calmo como a agua ao sol" (PESSOA, 2016a: 55) ["My gaze, blue like the sky, | is calm like water in the sunlight" (PESSOA, 1998: 56)], "Passa uma borboleta deante de mim" (PESSOA, 2016a: 66) ["I see a butterfly go by" (PESSOA, 1998: 63)], "Não basta abrir a janella | Para ver os campos e o rio" (PESSOA, 2016a: 117) ["To see the fields and the river it isn't enough to open the window" (PESSOA, 1998: 75)]. The essential being of the things in Alberto Caeiro's world is glimpsed in an idiosyncratic fresh way of observing the world characterized as being clear, tranquil, thoughtless and direct. The sight and the being, the observer and the observed—the entity that has his subjective gaze and the entity that is supposedly studied objectively—define the two teachings that

coherently intertwine in Caeiro's poems. As the respected master among the main heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa, Alberto Caeiro incarnates a vision that guides and encompasses those multitudinous facets and perspectives in other heteronyms (as a result of Pessoa's self-fragmentation). His teaching is so subtle, clear, penetrating, and original that what he does—to see in Alberto Caeiro's way—might be pragmatically unteachable, as suggested by the contradictory terms declared in the twenty-fourth poem: “Mas isso (tristes de nós que trazemos a alma vestida!), | Isso exige um estudo profundo, | Uma aprendizagem de desaprender” (PESSOA, 2016a: 56) [*“But this (if only we didn't have a dressed-up heart!)— | This requires deep study, | Lessons in unlearning”* (PESSOA, 1998: 57)]. A dramatically fresh and primordial lesson is offered by Caeiro in his subtle poems that barely care to concretize, visualize or disclose the world enlightened by his vision. What he reveals seems to be an unfathomable and inaccessible teaching, full of blunt explicitness and negation.

Yet his gaze, as well as what he sees, as his most sobering and fundamental teachings, is not a physical sensorial gaze. It's an encompassing gaze that penetrates and transcends the senses, making them virtually empty: “The stupendous fact about Caeiro is that out of this sentiment, or rather, absence of sentiment, he makes poetry” (Zenith *apud* PESSOA, 1998: 40). Caeiro's world is constructed via eradication of the senses; it's not visual in the normal sense and resists being made commensurate with human intellect. Of course, he is so subtle, he can also seem to be very obscure and unapproachable to elicit understandings in disperse ways.

George Monteiro, following John Ruskin's criticism of the pathetic fallacy, which is the tendency among poets to anthropomorphize nature and fall deeply into morbidity and sentimentality, characterizes Caeiro's extreme vision as a radicalization of an anti-poetic stance and attitude: “[...] all poetry not essentially anti-poetic, is true only to the extent that it enacts and exemplifies what might be called the poetic fallacy — the belief or conviction, even if only implicit, that there are 'poetic' ways to feel and write [...]” (MONTEIRO, 1999: 68). Monteiro identifies Caeiro with the first rank of poets in the “three ranks” proposed by Ruskin, “the man who perceives rightly, because he does not feel, and to whom the primrose is very accurately the primrose, because he does not love it” (RUSKIN, 1904: 209), in contrast with the poet who has fallen into the second rank, “the man who perceives wrongly, because he feels, and to whom the primrose is anything else than a primrose: a star, or a sun, or a fairy's shield, or a forsaken maiden” (RUSKIN, 1904: 209). Sentimental and fanciful associations with all their visualization and metaphorization blur the original face of things and end up rendering sentimentally elaborated images of things. Thomas Crosse, a heteronymic fictitious writer in the universe created by Fernando Pessoa, also points out the master's style of being devoid of pathetic fallacy and a wired lack of feeling that is supposed to be functional and conventional in human beings, “There is nothing less poetic, less lyrical than Caeiro's philosophical attitude. It is quite devoid of 'imagination', of vagueness, of 'sympathy' with things. Far from

'feeling' them, a hundred times explicitly put, is that he does not feel them, or feel with them" (PESSOA, 2020: 216), and on occasions he also uses certain apparently counteractive terms defining Caeiro's poetics as things must be felt as they are (PESSOA, 2020: 213), which sounds natural but contradictory in the context of our discussion. The several "feel" prompted in his comments collide with each other and produce counteractive interpretative force among themselves: the last "feel" could only be understand non - literally as a way to approach the reality of things, things as what they are.

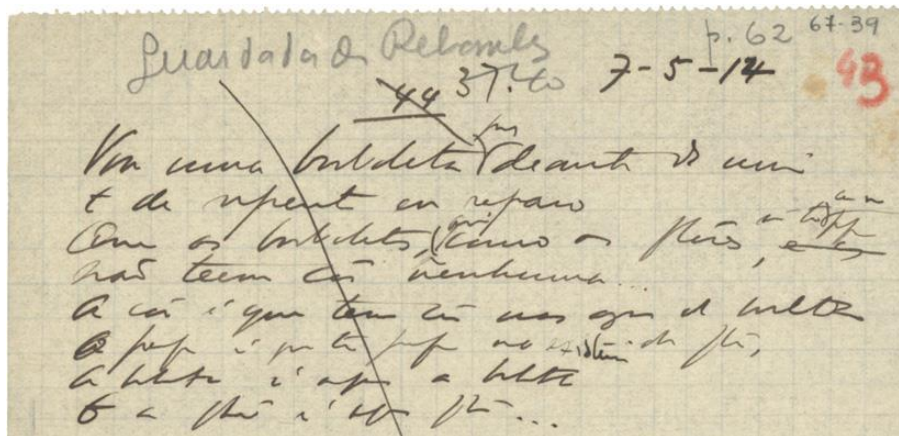


Fig. 1. Copied manuscript draft. "Voa uma borboleta..." (BNP/E3, 67-39; detail).  
Cf. <https://purl.pt/1000/1/alberto-caeiro/index.html>

Monteiro captures the essential non-interference of feelings or love in Alberto Caeiro's perception: "the primrose is very accurately the primrose" coincidentally and sophisticatedly echoes the final verses in the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper*, "A borboleta é apenas uma borboleta | E a flor é apenas uma flor" ["The butterfly is just a butterfly | The flower just a flower"], to exclude romantic associations, from the real being of the primrose, the butterfly, and the flower. For Jerónimo Pizarro, this seemingly objective poetic gesture condensed all of Caeiro and pertains to his reaction against mystic and pantheistic poetry of romantic lineage and local pretensions (PIZARRO, 2021: 55). Interpreting Caeiro's poetics in terms against the pathetic fallacy has pointed to something very fundamental in Caeiro's poetics: his naivety, transparency and unfathomable insight about the world arise without the interference and pollution of human feelings. As most of us are immersed in a pathetic sentient world, his world could be approached deductively and negatively through the didactic removal of human feelings, which appear to be congenitally absent for the master. We might desire some more directness and didactical and explicit nuances in understanding Caeiro's world, as feelings and emotions have been ideally disapproved and disenchanting, but we might still be perplexed and undecided about how to not feel, and we are probably at a loss about what the world really looks like after feelings have disappeared.

Ricardo Reis, the neoclassical pagan poet, one of Alberto Caeiro's major disciples, reduced the elimination of feelings and love through "objectiveness":

He sometimes speaks tenderly of things, but he asks our pardon for doing so, explaining that he only speaks so in consideration of our 'stupidity of senses,' to make us feel 'the absolute real existence' of things. Left to himself, he has no tenderness for things, he has hardly any tenderness even for his sensations. Here we touch his great originality, his almost inconceivable objectiveness (objectivity).

(PESSOA, 1998: 338) (PESSOA, 2016a: 283-284; in English in the original)

In comparison with Monteiro, who identifies Caeiro as the poet of the first order who perceives immaculately without feeling things, Reis, the neoclassical heteronymic poet, seems not to deny the existence of Caeiro's sensations and addresses his diligence in annihilating them. Caeiro's harshness towards his sensations and thoughts frees him from the contamination of the subjectivity that prevents people from seeing "the absolutely real existence" of things. The master's vision that entails uncorrupted abstinence and his pursuit of the absolute real existence of things is parallel with Ricardo Reis's own noble "disciplined attempt to obtain a measure of calm" (*apud* PESSOA, 1998: 96) and his insistence on having a "lucid and solemn consciousness | Of being and of things" (*apud* PESSOA, 1998: 96). Ricardo Reis does not go further to elaborate on "objectiveness; his "objectiveness", similar to the critique of the pathetic fallacy, is defined negatively through the diligent annihilation of subjectivity as the implied opposite of objectivity. His objectiveness could seem to be hermetic and perplexing, as sometimes it is juxtaposed to what it is supposed to be working against, and its reference becomes ambiguous when Ricardo Reis says Caeiro is "the reconstructor of the objective sentiment of the universe" (PESSOA, 1997: 26; PESSOA, 2016b: 279) and "the Argonaut of true sensations" (PESSOA, 1997: 21; PESSOA, 2016b: 284). Objectiveness is being used as metaphor, synonym, and reference to the absolute real existence, but going back to the primal question of "what does Alberto Caeiro see?", an objective butterfly and flower, a butterfly that is butterfly and a flower that is a flower, for the perplexed understanding of many readers, could only answer their existence negatively, hermetically and redundantly. How could we visualize an objectivity that goes against all superfluous sensations? If the tautological and tacit explanation of Caeiro equals an impossibility of intellectual visualization, how could we guarantee ourselves we are approaching Caeiro's world correctly? While this article to a certain extent agrees that there is no intellectual certainty in approaching Alberto Caeiro's world, as there is no truth promised in philosophers and poets' searching, as Caeiro mentioned in his poem (Pessoa, 1998: 62; Pessoa, 2016a: 118), something could be said in relation to opinions that we have puzzledly formed about Caeiro.

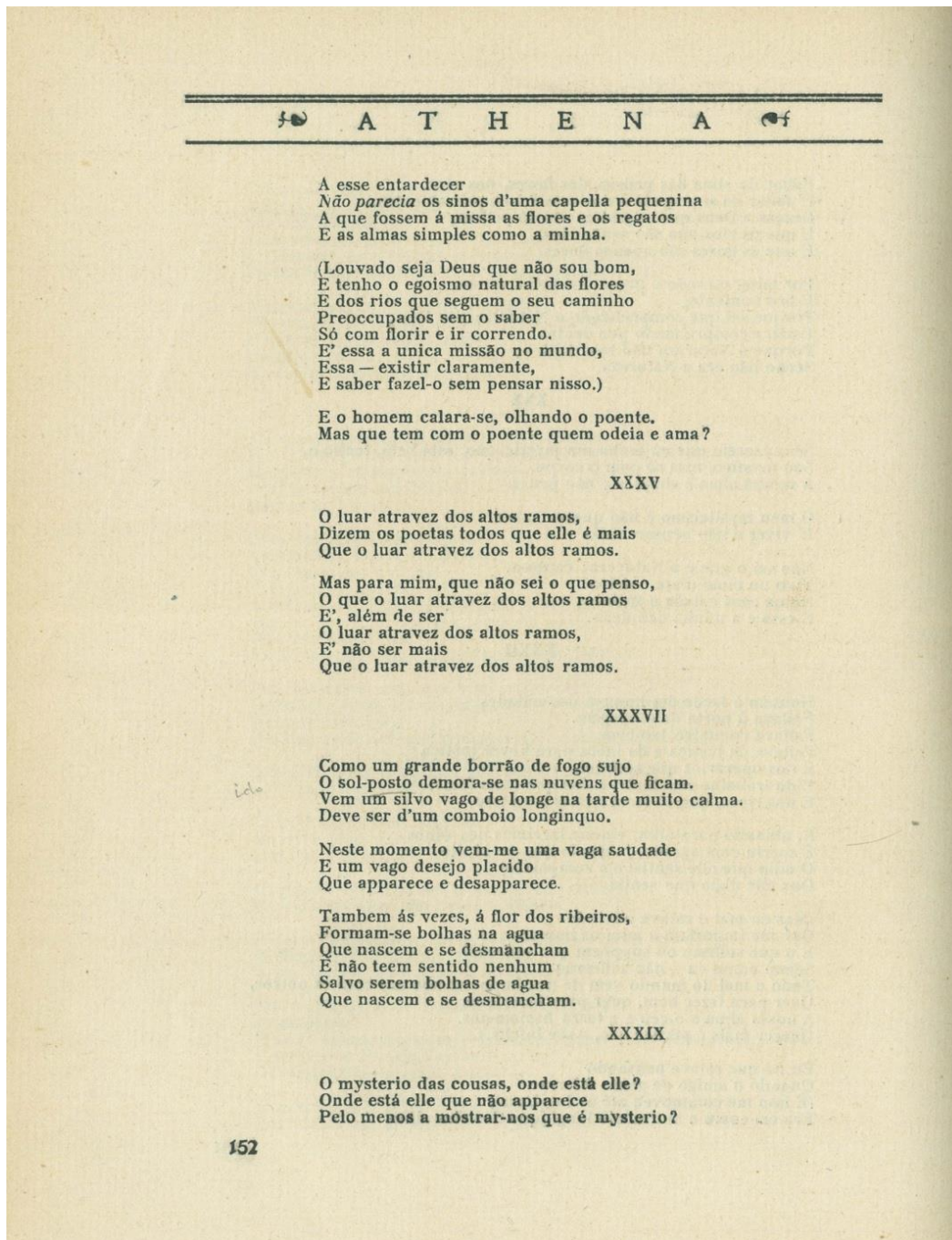


Fig. 2. Poems attributed to Alberto Caeiro (*Athena*, n.º 4, January 1925, p. 152).  
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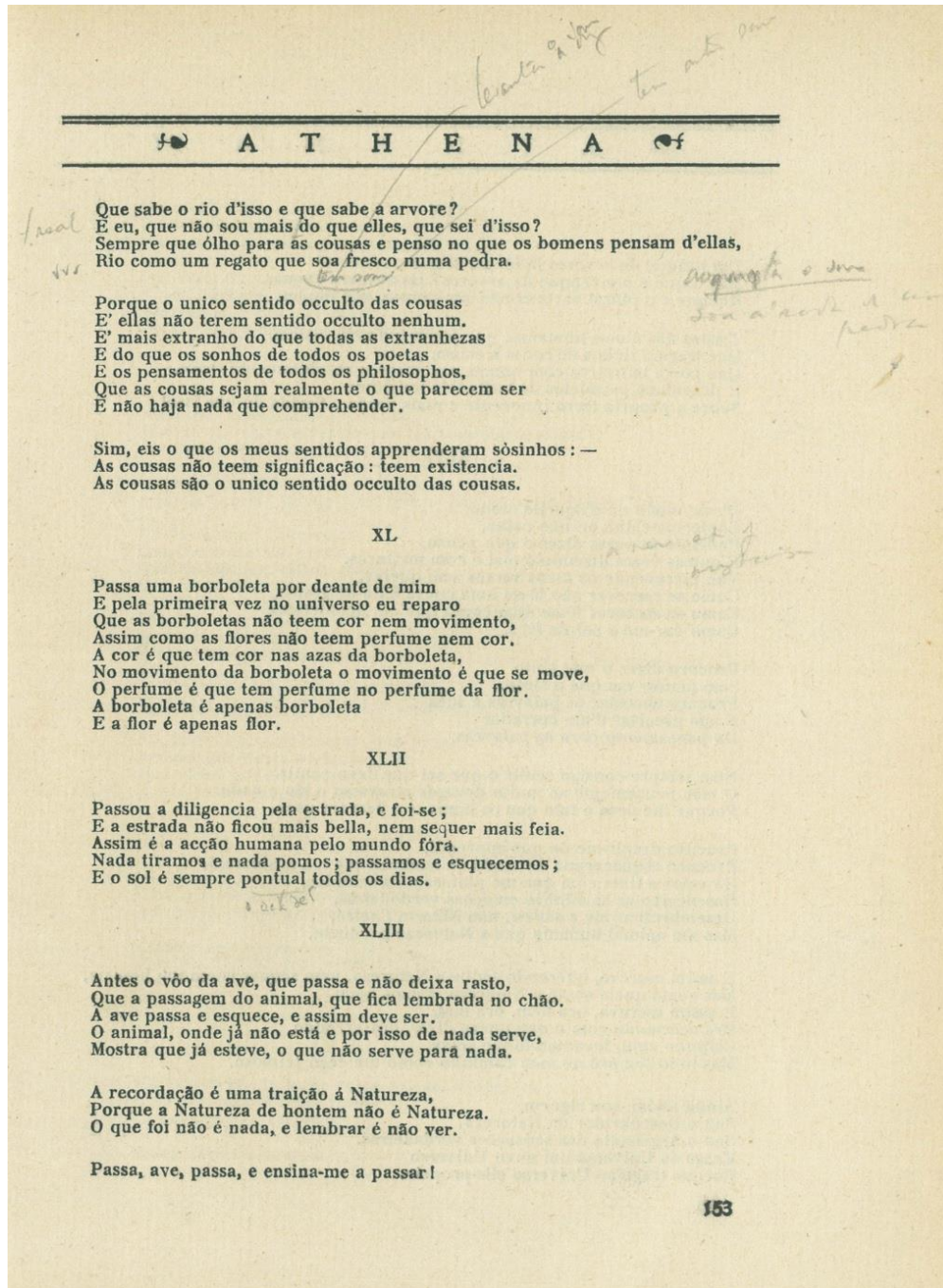


Fig. 3. Poems attributed to Alberto Caeiro (*Athena*, n.º 4, January 1925, p. 153).

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In the essay “As coisas são coisas? Alberto Caeiro e o Zen” (2016), Paulo BORGES reveals a more elaborate reading of the being of the things in Alberto Caeiro’s world. He defines Caeiro’s ontognosiological experience as observing the pure presence and objective exteriority of things, and further concludes that the being of things is existence only and consists of visually sensitive physical qualities: “O centro da experiência ontognosiológica de Caeiro é o olhar para as cousas, que supostamente as oferece na sua pura presença e exterioridade objectivas, irreduzíveis às fantasias do pensamento e da representação” (BORGES, 2016: 113-114) [“*The center of Caeiro’s ontognosiological experience is his looking at things, which are supposedly observed in their pure presence and objective exteriority, irreducible to the fantasies of thought and representation*” (translated by the author)], “Mas o que são as próprias ‘cousas’? São ‘existência apenas’, com as suas imediatas qualidades visualmente sensíveis, ‘cor e forma’, desprovidas de qualquer atributo conferido pelo juízo humano, como a beleza” (BORGES, 2016: 114) [“*But what are the ‘things’ themselves? They are ‘existence only’, with their immediate visually sensitive qualities, ‘color and form’, deprived of any attribute conferred by human judgment, such as beauty*” (translated by the author)].

The exteriority and immediateness addressed in his definition could be well translated into an identification with the visually sensitive physical qualities understood in a conventional sense, such as “color and form”, which contrasts with the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper* where color and form have been removed from the real existence of butterflies and flowers: butterfly is reduced to an entity that has no color or movement, and flower is deprived of scent and color. Verbally and metaphysically this poem that initiates our inquiry is dealing with the definition and range of butterflies and flowers against the definition and range of physical sensitive qualities such as color and form that Borges has ascribed to the being of butterflies and flowers by default. The immediate exterior objectivity, as defined by Borges, becomes blurred and contradictory in the context of this poem, thinking of the rejection of inner meanings in Caeiro’s poems and the objectivity addressed and implied by Ricardo Reis and scholars like George Monteiro. How could we reconcile an ideally objective butterfly and flower with the butterfly and flower deprived of color and form? A physical exterior butterfly and flower will collide with a butterfly and flower that have vanished from their brilliant colors and enchanting fragrance, with our understanding perplexed and obstructed. Human judgements and sentimentality have already been taken away from our understanding of the real existence of things in Caeiro’s world as external interference and pollution; now we are approaching the verbal, metaphysical and mental boundaries between butterflies and flowers and their controversial attributes, boundaries of butterflies and flowers that couldn’t decide their own configurations and flee away from intellectual puzzlements.

In fact, this article intends to depart from these perplexing boundaries pushing the central issue beyond the separation of color, form, and scent from



butterflies and flowers to escalating and transcendental changes in our observation of the world inspired by Caeiro. The metaphysical gesture of separation is a momentary initial glimpse into the formation and being of things that will escalate into the entire transformation of entities and their inter-relationship, resulting in an evacuated and emptied overlapping and repetition of shells of entities. This instantaneous deduction of overall impact will draw our attention from the physical perceivable qualities of things to their conceptual and ideal level of constitution to further equalize the formation, structuring, and interconnectedness of concepts to the realization of images and vision, in which the chronological order of time arises parallelly. I will address the issue of how, without thinking, Caeiro could see this wondrous world with its faces ever-changing. By taking on the apparent contradictions found in the master's poems that conflict with what we apprehend from the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper*, I will uncover the metaphorical flexibility and versatility of words used by Caeiro to further highlight the interplay of language, cognition, and mentality as part of Caeiro's unspeakable enlightenment.

### **The disintegration of the entity and the collapse of the concept**

In the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper*, the most intriguing operation made by the poet is the separation of color, movement, and scent from the entity of butterflies and flowers to ascribe to them something that could only be named by a relation of subordination. Once recognized and extracted conceptually from the entity of butterflies and flowers, the color, movement, and scent get rid of their relation of subordination to butterflies and flowers and end up being incorporated instantly into something else. The identification of their existence—the existence of color, movement, and scent—implies beings that are independent, self-sufficient and sealed within themselves and renews the being of butterflies and flowers by removing these recognizable qualities from them. In this clear-minded discernment that happens instantaneously, all perceivable qualities—which are not limited to color, movement, and scent, these most basic and representative elements—by the same token obtain their self-accomplished being and dissolve into the being of butterflies and flowers. The being of butterflies and flowers moves from the perceptible range to the imperceptible range; it is instantaneously evacuated to collapse and finds no foothold in the perceptible world. The recognition of any qualities implies the disintegration of the entity, as another verse by Caeiro suggests, “Mas que não há um todo a que isso pertença, | Que um conjunto real e verdadeiro | É uma doença das nossas idéas” (PESSOA, 2016a: 71) [“But that there is no whole to which all this belongs, | That a true and real ensemble | Is a disease of our own ideas” (PESSOA, 1998: 65)]. The entity of butterflies and flowers is constituted by extraneous entities of color, movement, and scent which are in the same way constituted by

other extraneous entities that could be continuously separated from an illusory temporary ensemble to be recognized and dissolved.

Butterflies and flowers are reduced to an ensemble of ruins of entities that are continuously recognized and evacuated; any entities or concepts that participate in this phantasmal process are fabrics of other concepts. They are so entirely constituted of and dependent on analogical concepts that their real entities could not be found; they are a parallel of the everlasting process of recognition and demolition of phantasmal structures of concepts and the perpetual stillness after the collapse of something never confirmed. “A borboleta é apenas borboleta | E a flor é apenas flor” [*“The butterfly is just a butterfly | And the flower just a flower”*]: this hermetic tautologic syntax permits both the chaotic transmutations occurring within their gigantic illusory structures of concepts and their monotonic emptiness closed on themselves. It says everything and it says nothing, in an apparently vain intention of definition: butterflies and flowers are defined against everything that is not butterflies and flowers; the efficacy of the definition consists in the boundary between butterflies and flowers and everything else, which is punctuated by a recognition that happens and dies out continuously, a recognition that soon expires as its result becomes unreal. So the boundary as well as the definition enter into the range of futility. As the boundary and the definition become illusory, the process of recognition and demolition become illusory as well—the process is not advancing and chronological, it is not really happening and has no starting point or end, it requires no effort, it is eventually against any effort of making efforts. So it becomes, or essentially it stays, but only apparently turns out to be “immediate reality” that needs no penetration to be perceived, because what it is is only what it is when there is no effort of progression to sustain the chain of recognition and disintegration. The needlessness of penetration could be translated into staying at the surface, the rejection and elimination of depth and interiority, the persistence of staying at the boundary between two things—the observer and the observed—staying permanently in the zero-distance imminence of something that is not to be penetrated because it has no depth. As Caetano de Castro claims in other poems, “A luz é a realidade que está defronte de mim. | Eu nunca passo para além da realidade imediata. | Para além da realidade imediata não ha nada” (PESSOA, 2016a: 94) [*“For me it is immediate reality. | I never go beyond immediate reality. | There is nothing beyond immediate reality”* (PESSOA, 1998: 79)]:

Porque o único sentido oculto das cousas  
É ellas não terem sentido oculto nenhum.  
É mais extranho do que todas as extranhezas  
E do que os sonhos de todos os poetas  
E os pensamentos de todos os philosophos,  
Que as cousas sejam realmente o que parecem ser  
E não haja nada que compreender.

(PESSOA, 2016a: 66)

[For the only hidden meaning of things  
Is that they have no hidden meaning.  
It's the strangest thing of all,  
Stranger than all poets' dreams  
And all philosophers' thoughts,  
That things are really what they seem to be  
And there's nothing to understand.

(PESSOA, 1998: 62)]

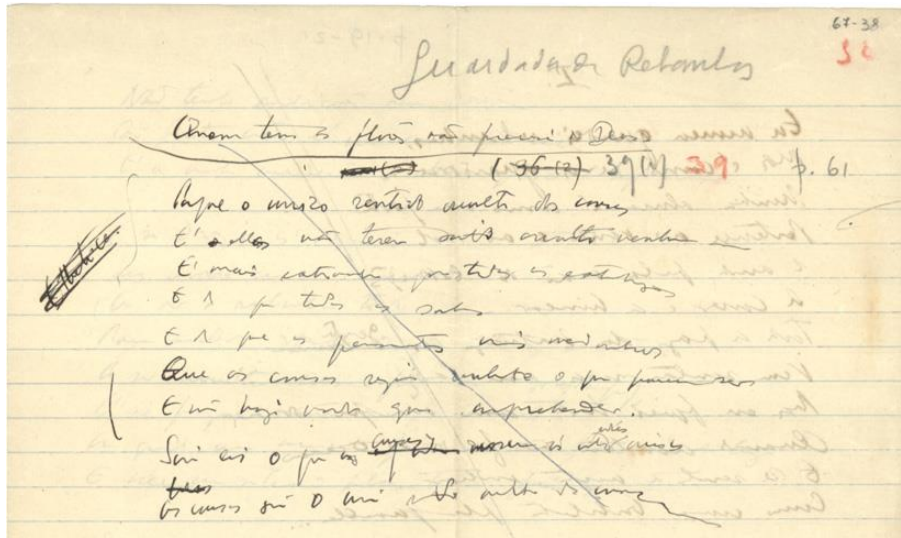


Fig. 4. Copied manuscript draft. "Porque o único sentido..." (BNP/E3, 67-38; detail).  
Cf. <https://purl.pt/1000/1/alberto-caeiro/index.html>

The immediacy of reality rejects penetration and presupposes the lack of depth: that things “have no hidden meaning” overthrows interiority developed in intellectual ways which are pursued by default by philosophers and poets. Thus, reality becomes a surface that is not attached to something hypostatic, an imminence that has no duration, something that is to be glimpsed in Alberto Caieiro’s way as what it seems to be. We might overestimate the accessibility of this vision, as the words “immediate reality” and “no hidden meaning” may suggest no necessity of efforts on our part, which just betrays what Caieiro suggests in another poem: “Mas isso (tristes de nós que trazemos a alma vestida!), | Isso exige um estudo profundo, | Uma aprendizagem de desaprender” (PESSOA, 2016a: 56) [“But this (if only we didn’t have a dressed-up heart!)— | This requires deep study, | Lessons in unlearning” (PESSOA, 1998: 57)]. Lessons in unlearning are required if a dressed-up heart presupposes profundity of reality that calls for penetration and concealed meanings that are destined to be uncovered. Lessons in unlearning are self-counteractive, and they function upon self-motivation; they work against some illusory assumptions that are to be collapsed once they dissolve themselves in carrying forward their progression. The immediacy of reality and the explicitness of meanings will become a vision that only sparks at the moment that the depth of reality disappears, in the moment of adjacency, impact, and

astonishment, when the change is hesitant to commit and recognize itself. After that, the reality and the meanings will assume their completeness, gain their value as truth, and stop presenting attributes of immediacy or profundity, concealment or explicitness.

The difficulty of lessons in unlearning is proportionate to how harshly they are promoted, which is proportionate to how harshly a heart is dressed-up. Thus, the “immediate reality” and “no hidden meaning” are flexibly acquired with respect to the complexity of a heart’s aggressive learning. For a heart that is unlearned from the beginning, the reality, which is neither immediate nor far beneath the surface, is clear like Alberto Caeiro’s gaze.

It is very easy to take the “immediate reality” for the exterior objectivity, as Paulo Borges puts it in his essay; for him, things in Caeiro’s world are only presented in their pure presence and objective exteriority. Pure existence includes those visually sensible immediate qualities such as color and form, in contrast to attributes conferred by human judgements. If we take the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper* as one of the standard versions of the immediate realities that Caeiro glimpses in his moment of enlightenment, we see that this poem that doesn’t touch human feelings works towards the demolition of the convention that physical qualities pertain to objectivity and reality. The unexpected glance separates color, movement, and scent from the undecided being of butterflies and flowers; the glance bestows independent beings with their own being instantaneously and breaks down relations of affiliation, the something unnamed that exists as “what has color in the butterflies’ wings”, which is also color itself, depriving the butterfly of an objectivity that is static and physical. Color is equal to what has color, movement is equal to what moves, scent is equal to what has scent, besides the butterflies and flowers that break down their relation of affiliation with color, movement, scent, within these physical qualities, relations of relativeness and subordination are distorted and overturned. Butterflies and flowers are dispersed and scattered to be reduced to elements that cannot resist the seduction of infinity. Like a Big Bang, they are broken down and produce innumerable entities that equally breed explosions within themselves: the force of their explosions also hastens their self-destruction. We can’t find the concrete debris in the infinitesimal falling stones that used to form the physicality of a butterfly, but only get stunned by the fantasy of a physicality and objectivity that never were.

### **Newness born out of no thoughts**

If butterflies and flowers are scattered and broken down into qualities, pieces, infinitely secondary components that cannot resist the seduction of any further disintegration to lose all attributes that a physical butterfly and flower have, the conception of a butterfly with color and movement and a flower with scent is decomposed, and we cannot find debris that pertains to the entity of butterflies and

flowers. This absence does not mean that visually we could see nothing in front of us. What we might see is an ensemble of ensembles of elements disintegrated from the fake and fragile concepts of butterflies and flowers. What our vision captures is inevitably linked to concepts; just as concepts that compose butterflies and flowers will orderly be evacuated and collapsed and flee into secondary concepts to find no entity, our vision, the images that our brain captures as butterflies—color, movement, limbs, cells—will also wear away according to the ability of recognition and analysis of each one of us. The vivid image of a butterfly fluttering with its sparkling garments is agglutinated by the apparent interconnectedness among concepts that form the stream of thoughts, and the meandering of thoughts promotes the attraction and adhesiveness among concepts, where one is subordinated to another: our thoughts give shape to the image that a physical vivid butterfly requires.

This deduction about our process of vision gives yet another proof of Alberto Caeiro's consistency in his aversion to thoughts; what he glimpses in that sparkling moment of enlightenment is the fruit of the stagnation of the agglutination and subordination of concepts with the end of thoughts. The termination of thoughts deprives butterflies and flowers of the adhesion of unrelated entities and concepts and restores their original being to themselves, which is resistant to further recognition and disintegration and could not be captured physically. In this little poem, without being very explicit or emphatic, the unexpected detachment of thoughts makes the transition of the poet's vision possible. As Maria Irene Ramalho-Santos characterized the master's poetic personae in her monograph, "Caeiro's poet, perfectly coincident with a dazzlingly innocent transparency of vision, portends a superior kind of imagination: deconceptualized, intellectually detached, radically independent, and endowed with the capacity to look and see without thinking" (RAMALHO-SANTOS, 2022: 46). The suspension of thinking, along with the abandonment of conceptualization and intellect is concurrent with a transparent vision. K. David Jackson, in his classical essay on the paradoxical rewriting of pastoral traditions by the heteronymic master, situated the detachment of thoughts within the discussion of the poet's hierarchical view on being, nature, and writing, "One of the paradoxes of Caeiro's poetry is his awareness of the inferiority of writing to Nature, and thus to being; therefore he values immediacy in knowing and detachment in meditation that do not involve conscious thought" (JACKSON, 1999: 154): "Caeiro idealizes the rejection of discursive consciousness as a threshold to the truth of direct apprehension observed in Nature" (1999: 155). Conscious and discursive thinking is disadvantaged by the genuine and instantaneous apprehension of truth in Nature, within the dualistic paradigm of artificiality and nature, which is a permanent motif embedded in Western pastoral literature, and Caeiro rewrote it in a way full of renunciations and multiple contradictions to the traditional patterns as "a pastoral without Nature" and "a sheepless shepherd" (1999: 152).

Alberto Caeiro has emphasized the obstruction and futility of thoughts in his own poems several times, in their more didactic moments. He opposes thinking with seeing and conceives thinking as an erroneous way to approach the world, in contrast to his limpid and innocent vision that grasps the essence of reality directly as it implies full agreement and acceptance.

Creio no mundo como n'um malmequer,  
 Porque o vejo. Mas não penso n'elle  
 Porque pensar é não comprehender...  
 O mundo não se fez para pensarmos n'elle  
 (Pensar é estar doente dos olhos)  
 Mas para olharmos para elle e estarmos de accôrdo...

(PESSOA, 2016a: 34)

*[I believe in the world as in a daisy,  
 Because I see it. But I don't think about it,  
 Because to think is not to understand.  
 The world wasn't made for us to think about it  
 (To think is to have eyes that aren't well)  
 But to look at it and to be in agreement.*

(PESSOA, 1998: 48)]

Contrary to the usual understanding, for Alberto Caeiro full understanding doesn't mean painstaking penetration of thoughts, rather innocently seeing in a way which implies instant apprehension and full agreement. Thoughts imply the movement of penetration, the movement of ignoring and overcoming the surface to reach the interiority. It is dissatisfaction and dismissal of the explicit reality motivated by the obstinate belief in a truer reality that resides on the track where thoughts wind. Thoughts would stop if they reconciled with the reality that they already surpass; they are driven by a fever of blindness. Thoughts are so committed to the progression of themselves that they create self-enclosure and fantasy; they substitute the desire of really knowing with the fantasy that their progression creates:

Com philosophia não ha arvores: ha idéas apenas.  
 Ha só cada um de nós, como uma cave.  
 Ha só uma janella fechada, e todo o mundo lá fora;  
 E um sonho do que se poderia ver se a janella se abrisse,  
 Que nunca é o que se vê quando se abre a janella.

(PESSOA, 2016a: 118)

*["With philosophy there are no trees, just ideas.  
 There is only each one of us, like a cave.  
 There is only a shut window, and the whole world outside,  
 And a dream of what could be seen if the window were opened,  
 Which is never what is seen when the window is opened.*

(PESSOA, 1998: 75)]

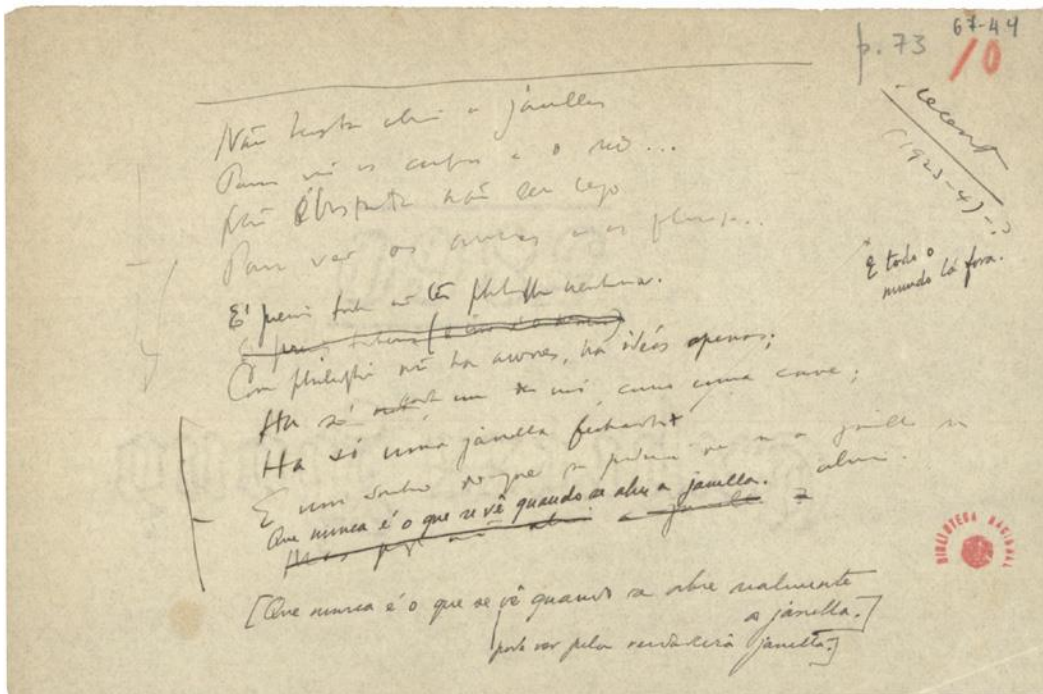


Fig. 5. Manuscript version. "Não basta abrir..." (BNP/E3, 67-44).  
Cf. <https://purl.pt/1000/1/alberto-caeiro/index.html>

Ideas substitute the real vision of trees and dream contrasts with reality; instead of revealing and capturing reality, thoughts create a medium that is segregated from and incompatible with truth, trapping us into the fantasy of possessing the truth. The act of thinking is considered to be a detrimental disturbance of seeing, Caieiro's wisdom consists in subtly differentiating thinking and seeing and knowing how to use them separately in their full strength and independence:

O essencial é saber ver,  
Saber ver sem estar a pensar,  
Saber ver quando se vê,  
E nem pensar quando se vê,  
Nem ver quando se pensa.

(PESSOA, 2016a: 56)

[What matters is to know how to see,  
To know how to see without thinking,  
To know how to see when seeing  
And not think when seeing  
Nor see when thinking.

(PESSOA, 1998: 57)]

Seeing and thinking could constitute mutual interference and pollution if they are used misleadingly in a mixed way, when seeing, in its full integrity and independence, could resolve the problem that thinking mistakenly guarantees to undertake: seeing fully gives play to its strength of clarity when thoughts disappear.

If the vivid image of a physical butterfly is amalgamated by thoughts and concepts, the agglutination is maintained by the reinforcement of the assumptive yet false logic of subordination. The accumulation of superficial and invalid concepts, which identify and invalidate themselves simultaneously, disapprove the progression of the chain of recognition and disintegration and resume their emptiness in an unchronological emergence and collision of identities. Then, the deceitful formation of concepts becomes homologous and synchronous with the rise of the perception of time: concepts coexist with time. Their independence is an illusory misconception that rejects the disintegration that will naturally follow the identification in awareness of the whole texture of interrelationships of concepts, whose integrity as concepts is destined to be divisible, part of larger or smaller ensembles equally divisible and emptiable. The rejection of disintegration constitutes an inertia to accumulate nullified concepts in every scale and make the structure of the visible world possible. It is a counteractive persistence against the chain of recognition and disintegration, which pretends to be progressive spatially and chronologically but results to nullify every constituent element of the progression. The failure to disintegrate and the retention of the integrity of concepts breed the apparent sequential order of time. The countless sequential layers of chronological time are inherent to the repetitive accumulation of shells of nullified concepts.

Elsewhere Caeiro, in a gesture of renunciation, expresses his will to expell time from his awareness to access things as what they are, without the prescript and interference of time: “Não quero incluir o tempo no meu haver. | Não quero pensar nas coisas como presentes; quero pensar nellas como cousas. | Não quero separal-as de ellas-proprias, tratando-as por presentes” (PESSOA, 2016a: 112) [*“I don’t want to include time in my awareness of what exists. | I don’t want to think of things as being in the present; I want to think of them as things. | I don’t want to separate them from themselves, calling them present”* (PESSOA, 2006: 77)]. When time disappears, things are restored to their original existence, which is better depicted as “things as things.” Time involves a measurement that is external to the original being of things as they are (DUARTE, 2021: 123). Concepts summon the accumulation and petrification of time; the substantial existence of a butterfly is summoned by the gravitation and inertia of the past, of a crystalized past that rejects so as to be renewed. It is something static, petrified, and expired; it’s a tangible image made out of insubstantial concepts that unite the force of resistance of time to be demolished. The disappearance of thoughts breaks up the rigid fantasy of a butterfly which is the agglutination of ruins of insubstantial concepts; it brings the butterfly to reality and frees the butterfly from time. Thoughts stick to the past and are products of resistance to changing and progressing, to letting go of an image or a concept that only once fulfilled itself in an infinitesimal interval of an illusory time. Thoughts remain and belong to the past. Thus, a butterfly restored to its original existence is a new butterfly: one that could not be captured visually and exhausted verbally is born out of no thoughts.



The disappearance of thoughts nurtures newness to come and flourish in the world. Newness seems to presuppose the existence of an older version that lives in the past and the comparison between the two; but for Alberto Caeiro, newness could only smoothly blossom without the interference of thoughts, which also means without time that resides in the internal structure of thoughts, because thoughts assemble the force of time to refuse to update themselves, to petrify and crystalize themselves, which is to preserve a petrified image that has already dissipated: the persistence of a vivid, progressive and living time consists in its inertia of death and petrification. As Caeiro describes in other poems:

O meu olhar azul como o céu  
 É calmo como a água ao sol.  
 É assim, azul e calmo,  
 Porque não interroga nem se espanta...

Se eu interrogasse e me espantasse  
 Não nasciam flores novas nos prados  
 Nem mudaria qualquer coisa no sol de modo a elle ficar mais bello

(PESSOA, 2016a: 55)

[*"My gaze, blue like the sky,  
 Is calm like water in the sunlight.  
 It is blue and calm  
 Because it does not question or marvel too much.*

*If I questioned and marveled,  
 New flowers would not sprout in the meadows.  
 Nor would anything change in the sun to make it more beautiful.*

(PESSOA, 1998: 56)]

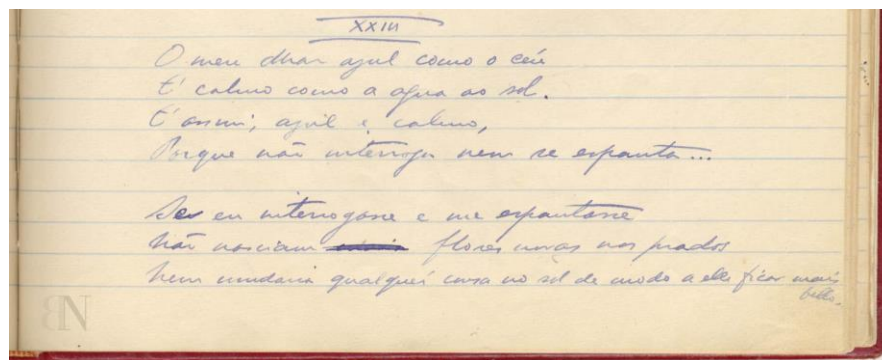


Fig. 6. Caeiro's notebook. "O meu olhar azul..." (BNP/E3, 145-22; detail).  
 Cf. <https://purl.pt/1000/1/alberto-caeiro/index.html>

The disappearance of thoughts allows newness which does not live in time to update and roll over itself in an unchronological sequence that appears to be a constant replacement of the old with the new. Everything perceived in every moment is new in itself; its newness comes from a baseless comparison that disappears with the rise of the newness, as Caeiro states in this poem:

E o que vejo a cada momento  
 É aquilo que nunca antes eu tinha visto,  
 E eu sei dar por isso muito bem...  
 Sei ter o pasmo commigo  
 O que teria uma creança se, ao nascer,  
 Reparasse que nascera devéras...

(PESSOA, 2016a: 33)

*[And what I see at each moment  
 Is what I never saw before,  
 And I'm very good at noticing things.  
 I'm capable of having that sheer wonder  
 That a new born child would have  
 If he realized he'd just been born.*

(PESSOA, 1998: 48)]

Where thoughts drown themselves in the clear and calm gaze, newness would populate in the unchronological time and space where every perception is independent and unique in that perpetual and ephemeral instant. Literally, newness implies the sequence of time; however, it can only be named as newness because it reveals and fulfills itself in the collapse of the structure of time. It fulfills itself in the demolition of the chronological structure of time where comparative relations between the former and the latter could be established. The real newness has no reference and order, it exists in an unchronological realm.

### The kaleidoscope of metaphorical language

In *The Sheepkeeper*, Alberto Caeiro tries to be precise and didactic in introducing his unique “philosophy” of seeing while not intending to compile, organize and name it as any form of philosophy at all: what he glimpses and reveals is meant to be stranger than all poets’ dreams and all philosophers’ thoughts. Going parallel and essentially against the mechanism of most philosophy and poetry, dissuaded from their habitual intellectual and sensual intricacies that struggle for truth, Caeiro returns to a negative and immediate simplicity that stuns for its directness and inapproachability engendering something radically new that promises a totally unconventional and treacherous access to reality. Caeiro is very aware that language as his medium and instrument of expression is burdened with inertial and inflexible conventions that prevent new visions from freely blossoming; and despite of and just because of this petrification of form and reference embedded in language, newness is desired and could be elicited through paradoxical tricks and self-contradictions played on language.

Alberto Caeiro uses very limited and impuissant language to transmit a peculiar vision that could not see color or movement in a butterfly. The language that corresponds with this vision is free from the structure, connotation, and reference

that a verbal fluttering colorful butterfly is dressed in. The rigid conceptual linkage between butterfly and color or movement is already embedded in these plain words, as most readers would interpret, and thus the vague astonishment implied in the fortieth poem replicates empathically the astonishment of the readers who cannot conceive a colorless and motionless butterfly in front of them. The language of Caetano is welcoming readers to a peculiar realm, walking them through the separation and vanishing of color and movement from the butterfly into a mental transition that reconciles them with this unusual scene. Readers are intrigued and puzzled by the language, wondering how to penetrate through the unusual phenomena, an apparent and drastic contradiction frequently employed by Caetano as apparently innocent and childish as he is. These linguistic tricks and intricacies, for Caetano, should be the beginning of a transition and alteration in awareness and mentality for the readers to perceive a colorless and motionless butterfly as they run amazedly into Caetano's eccentric poems. Simultaneous to the butterfly and flower that lose their physical attributes, language is deprived of stable and conventional reference, loosened and flexible, fluttering and exploding, to bifurcate and be activated with a metaphoricality that transfers us to the other vision, the other realm, the other world.

The ninth poem of *The Sheepkeeper* is a metaphorical chain that has deliberately covered its metaphorical dynamics in two ways: by equalizing things otherwise conceived as incompatible in Alberto Caetano's poems and by eccentrically approving what he has always claimed as preposterous. Some emphatic affirmative equations that establish connections between things considered as heterogeneous from Caetano's perspective feature in the first stanza of the poem. The illustrative and epiphanic power of the poem consists in its eccentric rebellion of advocating what he declaredly disapproves in other poems, along with the hesitant amazement produced in readers for this blunt reversal. We will soon realize that there might be a trick in these metaphorically affirmative sequences, and on further scrutiny, the "metaphoricality" of the words involved here—implied from the first verse, the typical metaphor of the sheepkeeper looking after his thoughts—is problematic and perplexing in terms of how we would understand "thought" and "sensation". "Metaphoricality" originally involves openness, ambiguity and vacillation in referential meanings, which draw contrast with the deliberate emphatical style of this poem. The literal plainness and assertion of this poem is in a modest way requesting us to read it in association with its "orthodox" context, with those poems where Caetano earnestly tells us "pensar é não compreender" (PESSOA, 2016a: 34) ["to think is to not understand" (PESSOA, 1998: 48)] and "O unico sentido intimo das cousas | É ellas não terem sentido intimo nenhum" (PESSOA, 2016a: 38) ["*The only inner meaning of things | Is that they have no inner meaning at all*" (PESSOA, 1998: 50)].

Sou um guardador de rebanhos.

O rebanho é os meus pensamentos  
 E os meus pensamentos são todos sensações.  
 Penso com os olhos e com os ouvidos  
 E com as mãos e os pés  
 E com o nariz e a bocca.

Pensar uma flor é vel-a e cheiral-a  
 E comer um fructo é saber-lhe o sentido.

Por isso quando num dia de calor  
 Me sinto triste de gosar-o tanto,  
 E me deito ao comprido na herva,  
 E fecho os olhos quentes,  
 Sinto todo o meu corpo deitado na realidade,  
 Sei a verdade e sou feliz.

(PESSOA, 2016a: 47)

*[I'm a keeper of sheep.  
 The sheep are my thoughts  
 And each thought a sensation.  
 I think with my eyes and my ears  
 And with my hands and feet  
 And with my nose and mouth.*

*To think a flower is to see and smell it,  
 And to eat a fruit is to know its meaning.*

*That is why on a hot day  
 When I enjoy it so much I feel sad,  
 And I lie down in the grass  
 And close my warm eyes,  
 Then I feel my whole body lying down in reality,  
 I know the truth, and I'm happy.*

(PESSOA, 1998: 52)

With the first equational lines where subsequently “sheep” is replaced with “thoughts” and “thoughts” is replaced with “sensations”, the metaphorical potential suggested to the readers from the beginning will abandon the image of “sheep” and “thoughts” to accumulate concrete force and existence in “sensations”: “sensations” is displayed in its most literal and substantial manifestation in comparison with “sheep” and “thoughts”.

The first line “I’m a keeper of sheep”, echoing the first poem in the collection, is borrowing the image of a shepherd watching over his flock to analogize figuratively how his consciousness watches over all his internal occurrences in terms of thoughts or sensations. Sheep is a bucolic externalized metaphor for the object of his overarching introspective vigilance. The sequential order of “thoughts” and “sensations” suggests a “metaphorality” of “thoughts” over the substantiality of “sensations”. Although the figurative sheepkeeper mentions both the actions of thinking and sensing, in terms of the equation of “think” and the sense organs and

their function, “to know” and the action of “to eat a fruit”, “think” is fundamentally disapproved, so to give way to those corporeal sensations which he further identifies with “the truth”. Thoughts are equalized with and substituted by sensations; thoughts—criticized by Caeiro elsewhere as obstructive, deceptive and poisonous to clear seeing—are rendered as something different from the “thoughts” denounced as an erroneous path to truth in other poems. “Thoughts” are just metaphorically invoked to analogously refer to Caeiro’s approach to truth, whose counterpart for other people is the thoughts that are censured by Caeiro. Caeiro’s tautological and self-contradictory use of “think” also appears in another poem where he expresses his aversion to philosophical thoughts, “Não sei. Para mim pensar nisso é fechar os olhos | E não pensar... É correr as cortinas | Da minha janella (mas ella não tem cortinas)” (PESSOA, 2016a: 37) [*To think about such things would be to shut my eyes | And not think. It would be to close the curtains | Of my window (which, however, has no curtains)*] (PESSOA, 1998: 49)]. The second “think” deviates directly and dramatically from the first “think”; an accentuated metaphoricality of the word “think” is suggested by the homography between the two “thinks” and a decided posterior negation. A bifurcation of meaning is produced while the second “think” is valued over the first one: the second “think” has its referential emphasis fall into the value and significance of think, as understood and expected by Caeiro, and the first “think” refers more to the banal and factual action of that type of think that is disapproved by Caeiro, but exercised by most people. This divergence is articulated by Caeiro taking into consideration the plural connotation that readers would apply to “think” during reading, while stimulating the readers to be aware of the flexible mutations in the word’s reference.

Here and elsewhere, Caeiro displays his verbal wisdom in taking advantage of a banal understanding of “think” to suggest intuitively his particular approach to truth, to elicit an analogous epiphanic moment in readers, which consists of the negation of think. The different meaningful layers of “think” invoked and emphasized in different contexts constitute a volatile “metaphoricality” that distracts us from a numb indifference to the basic human phenomena, such as thoughts and sensations, and a negligently taken for granted monotone in their referential meaning. Inspired by this unconventional versatility, we are driven suspiciously to dwell on our own perception of “think” and “sense”, which we undiscerningly rely on. It mediates a world that seems so different from Caeiro’s world. The building brick of our understanding of the reference of thoughts and sensations is being oscillated to admit fresh air propelled by Caeiro’s wisdom.

In this poem where the “metaphoricality” and blunt assertion are dramatically juxtaposed, reading “To think a flower is to see and smell it,” both within the context of this poem and associating it with the fortieth poem in *The Sheepkeeper* where flowers are perceived as separated from color and scent, we will realize that “to see and smell” in this poem full of plain emphasis on senses does not have the object of

color and scent: it is a seeing and smelling that deviate from the seeing and smelling that necessarily and consequentially result in sensations that our cognitive system would assume convincingly as physical qualities that pertain to the substantial entity of things. It is seeing and smelling that do not have objects to function upon, and thus its very functioning and existence are distorted: it's seeing and smelling that have no objects. However, this perception could only be read in association with the fortieth poem of *The Sheepkeeper*, and this poem that emphasizes senses could only stop being eccentric when the fertile texture of "metaphoricality" of the words being used is apprehended, which is the transmutation and flexibility of certain connotative layers of the words, even their most functional and fundamental referential meanings. The revealed and accentuated metaphoricality results in both an attention and a betrayal to the literal plainness of the words; it activates our introspective observation on the interplay and intertwining of language, cognition, and mentality.

The question that came to us in the beginning "What does Alberto Caeiro see?" would be shaken and aberrated and lose its directional questioning force when the "metaphoricality" of "see" is prompted and revealed, when the objectivity of the result of "see" is evacuated in its every level of composition and deconstructed, as the thought-concept-time symbiosis dies out in the perpetual identification and evacuation that push forward illusorily, non-spatially, and non-chronologically. Color, scent, and movement stop presenting themselves as color attached to a butterfly, scent emitted from a flower, and movement prompted voluntarily: their corporal, conceptual and mental presence irrevocably, momentarily, and simultaneously explode to find no relic in the infinitesimal division that is both executed and rejected by infinity. They flutter and wander to a realm that is not subject to the rules that form and condition our vision in this physical world. Their otherworldly existence flees the perceptual and intellectual anxiety that intend to grasp their elusive residual shape in the hollowness of physical hands.

What does Alberto Caeiro see? The question mark is doubtfully and irrevocably leading to the concrete existence and objectivity of the questioned reference, preconditioned by our unchecked habitual conception of the physical world. This whole question, with its acute and inopportune force and its misleading form, is opening to unfathomable contemplations on subjectivity and objectivity, the observer and the observed, images and beings, thoughts and no thoughts, and also the intertwining of concepts, thoughts, and time, all displayed in a personal style in this essay. When the reference to "see" is utterly altered and driven to another level, when the "see" could no longer be structured by a thoughtful observer and a physically concrete and authentic being, we begin to notice that this eccentric question is our first trembling touch with Caeiro's bucolic singular world imbued with transcendental epiphany and unorthodox wisdom. He sees through not seeing anything concrete, stagnated, physical as prescribed by rules of this world; he thinks through the suspension of thoughts and the outsider's rumination on the phenomena

of human intellectual and sensitive activities. He evacuates himself from these basic human phenomena that structure a worldly understanding that he detaches himself from innocently and joyfully.

What does Alberto Caeiro see?<sup>1</sup>

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