

## Adverse Genres in Pessoa: Alberto Caeiro's Other Version of Pastoral

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Mas como causar pode seu favor  
Nos corações humanos amizade  
Se tão contrário a si é o mesmo Amor?

*Camões*

Annihilating all that's made,  
To a green thought in a green shade.

*Andrew Marvell*

### Adverse genres

The rewriting and rethinking of Western literary traditions in the work of Fernando Pessoa involves the question of genre as much as it does that of personality and authorship. The "drama of persons," the theme that has dominated critical readings, extends as well to a "drama of genres." From his earliest works, Pessoa began crossing genres: does the title "Mad Fiddler," early poems written in English, for example, mean that the verses are as mad as the music or the musician, or is the performer merely an exceptional virtuoso? Pessoa wrote that he was a dramatist above all and that he treated genre dramatically, thereby producing a mixed genre wherein one mode is written in the style of another, i.e. an epic or lyric work written dramatically (193-210). Mixed genres, however, are only a first step. Pessoa lives at odds with tradition, and adverse genres—defined by tension between form and thought, writer and text, language and meaning—dominate every major facet of his literary world. Pessoa aims in his literary project to undermine genre and its linguistic formulas until they collapse and can be changed or understood differently. He approaches this task in two ways: first, Pessoa violates traditional aesthetic codes. In a study of his

early, neglected play *O Marinheiro* [*The Mariner*], for example, Robert Anderson notes that Pessoa violates all the Aristotelian principles of drama by writing a play that has no action whatsoever and whose high drama is accomplished solely through speech. In the play's prologue, Pessoa explains his new set of principles that redefines dramatic action in terms of language alone and proclaims the advent of "static theater." Anderson concludes that Pessoa has reformulated the drama by violating Aristotle's rules: "By violating an aesthetic code, Pessoa wrote different drama" (93).

The second way Pessoa attacks genre is to make full use of its rhetorical and referential repertoire. He emphasizes and exploits the inner tensions such that the genre is redefined or a new genre results from the poet's occupying the estranged space in between language and meaning. The dramatization of this space in Pessoa's poetic language makes genre impossible, while its failure and emptiness provide the necessary precondition for its redefinition and rewriting:

All I dream or live  
 Whatever fails or dies  
 Is no more than a covering  
 Over some other thing  
 Where true beauty lies. ("This" 260)

Tudo o que sonho ou passo  
 O que me falha ou finda  
 É como que um terraço  
 Sobre outra coisa ainda  
 Essa coisa é que é linda. ("Isto")

Through rewriting in this different space, Pessoa composes the great "unworks" that replace the classics of Western genres. The *Livro do Desassossego* [*Book of Disquietude*] is a prime example. Assuredly one of Pessoa's lifelong projects, the fragments he wrote were, however, neither assembled nor organized. They never were and are not a book; they are not the diary of a clerk in Lisbon, as they pretend, and they can never have a definitive form. The *Book* is 'nevertheless'—or because of these very characteristics—one of the supreme works of twentieth-century fiction, a challenge to and reformulation of the genre comparable to Kafka or Joyce.

## Rewriting Pastoral

Alberto Caieiro's sequence or book of poems, *O guardador de rebanhos*, [*Keeper of Flocks*], can be considered to be his pastoral symphony, whose forty-nine poems or movements constitute a complete work, comparable to a single long poem in the pastoral style. Sousa Rebelo places the poem in the allegorical tradition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The choice of the pastoral for Caieiro's major work illustrates Pessoa's complex motivation in the treatment of genres. Since Boccaccio and Petrarch, the language and imaginary of the pastoral have been assimilated into the Western love lyric, to compose amorous dialogues between shepherds and shepherdesses, and further assimilated by Christianity to form a principal metaphor of religious language, that of the pastor and the flock. Both lines of development convey an appearance of truth through pastoral metaphors, which became a stock language of Western artistic practice epitomized, for example, in the flocks of Handel's *Messiah*. Pastoral language and imagery is extensively represented in Portuguese literature, from the medieval lyric and chivalric prose to Gil Vicente's pastoral plays, Bernardim Ribeiro's romance *Menina e moça* (1554), and the eclogues and bucolic poetry of Renaissance authors, such as Sá de Miranda. In a study of disguise in *Menina e moça*, Isabel de Sena finds a generic problem in the figure of the false pastor, bound in the symbolism of religious, political, or gendered narration:

[T]he pastoral convention of the pastor who is not really a pastor but someone in disguise in a pastoral setting seems to be one of the most generically problematic texts of this period. Compare, for instance, Núñez de Reinoso's *Clareo y Florisea* (Venice 1552) [...] (note 32).

In practicing another form of disguise, that of revealing a true pastor who also is not a pastor generically, Pessoa seeks to overturn this tradition by writing a different pastoral.

Caieiro's pastoral idealizes a return to the style's pagan and classical origins, in which there is a city man's longing for the country, as in Theocritus, or in which a relationship is established between nature in her tranquil moods and human sentiments, as in Virgil's eclogues. The advantages of the pastoral mode are those that help to strengthen a certain portrait or image of Caieiro as if he were a poet of Nature, imbued with directness, simplicity, and truth. They include a view of Nature as humble, permanent, and undeveloped, in

which the complex is reduced to the simplest scenario and the universal is expressed through its concrete imagery: “My sight is as precise as a sunflower” (“O meu olhar é nítido como o girassol”) (II). So far as Caeiro the poet becomes Nature, he takes on its permanence. His reading of Nature identifies with its simple, tranquil existence and imitates Nature’s assumed pure self-knowledge: “I am some natural thing— / For example, that ancient tree” (“Que sou qualquer coisa natural— / Por exemplo, a árvore antiga”) (I). Use of pastoral disguises the enormous complexity of Caeiro’s thought, which charts a way of thinking only with the senses and writing poetry of things in themselves.

Pessoa sets out to restore what had been lost—the generic lost sheep—by a return to neopaganism of sensations:

To define the essence of neopaganism [...] is a task to which Fernando Pessoa takes with enthusiasm [...]. The movement begins with Caeiro’s poetry—a spontaneous act, the voice of origins of being and of feeling, without support from any known pagan philosophy and, for that reason, it can be called paganism in its chemically pure state, absolute paganism.

Definir a essência do neopaganismo [...] é tarefa a que Fernando Pessoa se entrega com entusiasmo [...]. O movimento é iniciado com a poesia de Caeiro—acto espontâneo, voz das origens do ser e do sentir, que não se apoia em qualquer filosofia pagã conhecida e, por isso mesmo, se poderá chamar o paganism em seu estado químico puro, o paganism absoluto.

(Sousa Rebelo 340)

Employing a primitive rhetoric of simplicity and truth, almost without adjectives, Caeiro goes beyond the restoration of pastoral simplicity. His goal is to create a new poetics of mind, rejecting the use of metaphor or poetic language: “The main thing is to know how to see” (“O essencial é saber ver”) (XXIV). Caeiro’s pastoral contradicts the convention using its own language; his is a pastoral without Nature, as it were, just as he is a sheepless shepherd. What better way to put an end to conventional metaphors of pastoral than to create a pastoral poet, who is a dramatic or feigned one: “to think is not to understand...” [“pensar é não compreender...”] (II)? Such adverse pastoral embodies a contradiction that also entraps the poet, who becomes the captive in verse of a genre that he is attempting to free from its chains of metaphor and association. He argues from within the prison-house of a Western iconographic and linguistic misreading:

If at times I say that flowers smile  
 And if I say that rivers sing,  
 It's not because I think that there are smiles on flowers  
 And songs in the rivers's flow..  
 That's just the way I make false men feel more  
 The truly real existence of flowers and rivers.

Se às vezes digo que as flores sorriem  
 E se eu disser que os rios cantam  
 Não é porque eu julgue que há sorrisos nas flores  
 E cantos no correr dos rios..  
 É porque faço mais sentir aos homens falsos  
 A existência verdadeiramente real das flores e dos rios. (XXXI)

An adverse reading of pastoral provides the vehicle for Pessoa to deconstruct genre from the inside, since it would be a meaningless exercise from the outside.

Highly conscious of the act of narration and foregrounding the deceitfulness of poetic devices, the poems constitute a series of spontaneous epiphanic moments, as of forty-nine revelations. The work as a whole is an account of the mind's relationship to Nature, as if the poet were both inside and outside, both conscious and unconscious of another way of being: "What metaphysics do those trees have / Other than being green and having canopies and branches" ("Que metafísica têm aquelas árvores / A de serem verdes e copadas e de terem ramos") (V). Harold Toliver finds in Wallace Stevens' poetry a comparable relationship between the "divinations" of the mind and startling reflections found in Nature (304). While Caieiro's oneness with a tranquil Nature is assumed by the genre's definition, their identity is part of the poet's feigning, since Nature possesses no narrative other than non-verbal sounds. Poetic language must be reformulated in order to echo the non-linguistic perception of Nature as pure sensation in form and concept: "Nature does not exist, [...]. Nature is parts without a whole" ("A Natureza não existe, [...]. A Natureza é partes sem um todo") (XLVII).

Caieiro unveils his illuminations as a problem of genre, a seeing through the absurd metaphors of language underlying both faith and reason: "All this is false, all this doesn't mean anything" ("Tudo isto é falso, tudo isto não quer dizer nada") (V). His verses challenge and defy in the language of

vanguard manifestos: “To think about God is to disobey God” (“Pensar em Deus é desobedecer a Deus”) (VI); “I have no philosophy: I have senses” (“Eu não tenho filosofia: tenho sentidos”) (II). One of the paradoxes of Caieiro’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. Moreover, this challenges his status as a poet of Nature: “My mysticism is not wanting to know / It is living without thinking about it” (“O meu misticismo é não querer saber / É viver e não pensar nisso”) (XXX). And it similarly renders his own writing anachronistic, since the poet assumes the language of Nature and abandons the usual language of poetry: “Because there are those who don’t understand its language / For not being any language at all” (“Porque há homens que não percebem a sua linguagem / Por ela não ser linguagem nenhuma”) (XXXI). Throughout his poems, however, Caieiro’s rhetorical posture maintains a naïve and comic pastoral outlook that would equate ultimate simplicity with truth by simple analogy, because such simplicity is the core of the pastoral deception.

#### Versions of Pastoral

William Empson’s notable study, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), provides unusually pertinent parameters for understanding Pessoa’s use of and rebellion against the genre. His chapter on “Marvell’s Garden” could easily be taken as an essay on Caieiro, so profound are the multiple points of similarity. Empson’s work reminds us, first of all, that Caieiro is a metaphysical poet, grounded in the English tradition. Through Marvell, we observe that Caieiro’s Nature is also a conceit, a garden where truth and knowledge are pursued, albeit in an adverse and primitivist version of the gardens of earthly delights. “Thoughts in a Garden” is one of three poems by Marvell included in Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury* (1861, number CXII), an anthology known to have been read by Pessoa.

The main point to be observed in the recognition of Caieiro in the chapter on Marvell is, in Empson’s phrase, “ideal simplicity approached by resolving contradictions.” The calm of Nature is the source of the poets’ self-knowledge, yet the mind outpaces the world it mirrors. They force language to break down its artificial, civilized distinctions and return to natural ideas of the mind. This principle leads both to adopt “primitive epic styles” (140) with a purposefully naïve view of the nature of good:

The naïve view is so often more true than the sophisticated ones that this comes in later ages to take on an air of massive grandeur; it gives a feeling of freedom from humbug which is undoubtedly noble, [...]. Indeed a great part of [the pastoral poets'] dignity comes from the naïve freshness with which they can jump from one level of argument to another, [...].

(Empson 140-41)

The poets locate contradiction in the natural metaphors and most normal uses of language: in the case of pastoral, the claim of identity between Nature and sentiment, or between Nature and thought. While Marvell works with conscious and unconscious states, intuitive and intellectual modes of awareness in order to contrast and reconcile them,—according to Empson's reading, Caieiro idealizes the rejection of discursive consciousness as a threshold to the truth of direct apprehension observed in Nature. His mode of saying what cannot be expressed is to borrow the linguistic and metaphoric practices of pastoral, but to redefine them adversely.

Both poets contemplate the whole material world and are aware of controlling it by thought. Marvell reduces the material world to the mind, which grasps the totality of all that exists through a reconciliation of rational and intuitive states. The reduction of the world to idea is common to the metaphysics of both: whether the material world is reduced to nothing, as to a thought, or whether it has no value when compared to a thought. Caieiro's extreme pessimism likewise begins in the mind and its artificial artistry, but privileges the superior truths of an instinctual, unconscious Nature. He values harmony with totality more than intellectual understanding of it. Being nothing and thinking nothing, categories attributed to Nature observed, form the basis both of a new poetics and metaphysics of radical immanence. Empson's essay demonstrates the dynamic of Caieiro's thought as a metaphysical poet through the comparative reading undertaken here. As a radicalization of Marvell, Caieiro's metaphysical and primitivist verse could well have been included in Empson for its other version of pastoral.

### **The Deflocked Pastor**

Caieiro's rewriting of pastoral goes beyond the limits of Empson's essay on Marvell in his attempt to exterminate an entire philosophic, religious, and linguistic tradition. Caieiro is first of all a master, with a highly individualistic and original consciousness. He mixes metaphysical poetry with avant-garde

esthetics, based on conflict and contradiction between one state, one reading and another; his verse is constantly contradiction, resisting, rejecting, like a manifesto. In the manner of a sermon by the seventeenth-century Jesuit Father António Vieira, Caeiro privileges the primacy of intellect in divining the will of Nature, as revealed by the rational progression of an inspired rhetorical exposition. Caeiro's radical correction of the Western tradition is conveyed negatively through the false metaphor of the "shepherd of thoughts," by which means the poet reassigns pastoral conventions in verse to opposing metaphorical associations. Through his other reading of pastoral, the mind of the poet became the mind of the creator; the poet watched over existence as the shepherd did the flock. Yet there was no flock, only a mystification of language, and the heteronyms, which are Pessoa's flock of poets and ideas. In this context, the first line of *Keeper of Flocks* is both confessional and explosive: "I never kept flocks / but it is as if I did" ("Eu nunca guardei rebanhos / Mas é como se os guardasse") (I). What kind of shepherd is it, after all, who does not keep sheep? Caeiro's manipulation of the genre is patent in the "as if." He substitutes the charged metaphor of the shepherd in Western amorous and religious pastoral with a metaphysical one: "The sheep are my thoughts" ("O rebanho é os meus pensamentos") (IX).

Caeiro casts his own anti-hierarchical language against the hierarchical language of pastoral. His call for a correction, a revision, or return to origins constitutes a philosophical quest, an epic monologue on the theme of truth through observation and the senses, substituting a materialist for a transcendental philosophy. In this, Caeiro assumes the role of a master or teacher, but one whose textbook is an inverted pedagogy of unlearning: "That requires a profound study / An apprenticeship of unlearning" ("Isso exige um estudo profundo / Uma aprendizagem de desaprender") (XXIV). His teaching exposes an entire symbolic system that misuses language and misreads metaphysics.

Emerson had sensed "something Far-Eastern" (119) in Marvell's implied but unstated metaphors. Caeiro's Orientalism is founded in primitive elements of the pagan pastoral: calm; the identity of simplicity, intuition, and pure knowledge; the control over Nature by thought; and the attainment of a state in between conscious description and unconscious harmony with Nature. Caeiro could never be confused with a Buddhist, however, since in Emerson's terms he follows Western Christianity and the



sciences on the question of predetermination or free will, rather than the Buddhist problem of the "One and the Many" (Empson 142). His rhetorical and discursive patterns are all dualistic, founded on contradictions.

Caeiro's pastoral is the adverse of a romance or dialogue; the love quest is transmuted into a monologue on language, reality, and knowledge between the lover/poet and his silent gods, manifested in things. Caeiro is not a poet of Nature at all, but of mind. Perhaps for this reason the other heteronyms considered him their Master. His truths are not to be found in language, but rather in the only senses with which nature speaks to us, in love, in song, and laughter. The long, multi-faceted poem changes its own nature, to reveal an adverse pastoral dialogue that makes use of the genre's metaphorical and linguistic conventions in order to reinterpret it metaphysically. *Keeper of Flocks* is the spiritual exercise of an unbeliever, a garden of delights constructed in his imagination, which was in reality only a Lisbon square.

#### **A Flock of Ideas: Caeiro's Metaphysics of Mind**

Renunciation and rapture are the two extremes of Caeiro's metaphysics. Weighted by its very rational and logical paradoxes, Caeiro's logic collapses into a renunciation of the world. As the visionary of a new religion, the poet becomes a sacrificial victim of his own acute perceptions of a reality absolutely without transcendence: "Because I write for them to read me at times I sacrifice myself / To their stupidity of senses" ("Porque escrevo para eles me lerem sacrificio-me às vezes / A sua estupidez de sentidos") (XXXI). Condemned by consciousness, he will be forever denied union with the desired bodies of Nature. His village with its river will remain incommunicable symbols of the only possible ideal: a divine Nature that is not divine: "Only Nature is divine, and she is not divine" ("Só a natureza é divina, e ela não é divina") (XXVII).

Through exercise of a free and unlimited imagination, the poet approaches a god-like condition. Caeiro does not distinguish between thought, myth, or dream. His fable of the Eternal Child, which is also Jesus Christ's return to Earth, may read like a Zen parable, but it illustrates a vanguard esthetics in which an imagined fable may be more true than philosophies or religions: "Why [...] shouldn't it be truer / Than all that philosophers think / And all that religions teach?" ("Por que [...] não há de ser mais verdadeira / Que tudo quanto os filósofos pensam / E tudo quanto as religiões ensinam?") (VIII). The child who jumps and sings and laughs

shares the poet's secret knowledge of things. He sees a universe in each stone and renews the human spirit through play:

Enjoying our common secret  
 [.....]  
 That there is no mystery in the world  
 And that everything is worthwhile.

E gozando o nosso segredo comum  
 [.....]  
 Que não há mistério no mundo  
 E que tudo vale a pena. (VIII)

Oneness with the self-knowledge of Nature annoints the poet as the hero of a different epic pastoral. His "philosophy without thought" is enshrined in the grandeur of a rhetorical achievement, comparable to the voyage of Vasco da Gama which Pessoa would celebrate in similar language in *Message* [*Mensagem*]:

I am the Discoverer of Nature  
 I am the Argonaut of true senses  
 I bring to the Universe a new Universe  
 Because I bring the Universe to itself.

Sou o Descobridor da Natureza  
 Sou o Argonauta das sensações verdadeiras  
 Trago ao universo um novo Universo  
 Porque trago ao Universo ele-próprio. (XLVI)

The poet's power grows from the opposing forces that he cultivates in his garden of the mind: a union of the "unusually intellectual" with the "unusually primitive" (Empson 119). As Empson had noted in Marvell, the poet's adoration of his idea leads to ecstasy and rapture. In the case of Caeiro, his ecstasy is produced by the ultimate complete merging of his being with the Universe: "I pass and remain, like the Universe" ("Passo e fico, como o Universo") (XLVIII). Through metaphysical unity with a world of the senses, Caeiro reinvents the meaning of pastoral and becomes the only modern poet

of Nature: "I don't know what Nature is: I sing it" ("Não sei o que é a Natureza: canto-a") (XXX); "Blessed be me for all that I do not know" ("Bendito seja eu por tudo quanto não sei") (XXVII).

In the final poem of the series, aware of the temporal limits to his existence, Caiero prepares to confront life as pure existence. He says his calm good-byes and wishes that all his friends may continue to live in concert with Nature, whatever her mood. His final awareness is of life coursing through him like the river of his village, and of the great silence of the pagan gods of pastoral:

I go inside and shut the window

[.....]

Not reading anything, not thinking about anything, not sleeping.

I feel life running through me like a river in its bed,

And outside a great silence like a sleeping god

Meto-me para dentro, e fecho a janela

[.....]

Sem ler nada, sem pensar em nada, nem dormir,

Sentir a vida correr por mim como um rio por seu leito,

E lá fora um grande silêncio como um deus que dorme (XLIX).

The sleeping god is Caiero's Master.

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