

Thomas Crosse

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE [a]

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE [

A preface is always bad, and a translator's preface positively immoral. But sometimes, like immorality, a preface is a necessary thing. This is one of the cases in which there is the excuse of necessity. The great poet whom I present to the English reading public — rather more attentive to poetry than it recently had fallen off from being — belongs to a literature of which we know less than the classic next-to-nothing. And this miserly bit of knowledge of that literature is merely that Camões is its greatest poet, — a statement which, though it is controvertible and has been controverted, has at least the appearance of supposing knowledge of other poets, when, after all, it only means that we are more or less sure there must be others.

The ordinary presentation of Alberto Caeiro to the English public should, in this literary connection, mean an establishing of his relation to immediately preceding literature in his country, and an establishing of such of his influences as are outside the normal, or even abnormal, knowledge of that public. But being so, this is in the present case entirely the contrary. The curious fact about Alberto Caeiro is that he comes apparently out of nothing, more completely out of nothing than any other poet. The one Portuguese poet whose influence he supposes himself to be under is so remote from him both in quality and strength of inspiration, that it is idle to do more than say so.

But we will not limit our brief study of Caeiro to seeking of his influences; we will push our study further and summon the reader's attention gently to the absolute aspects of the present book as poetry of national and other relational connections.

s. d.

Páginas Íntimas e de Auto-Interpretação. Fernando Pessoa. (Textos estabelecidos e prefaciados por Georg Rudolf Lind e Jacinto do Prado Coelho.) Lisboa: Ática, 1996: 376.