

Fernando Pessoa

IMPERMANENCE — It is more difficult to affirm what shall survive...

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It is more difficult to affirm what shall survive by being representative than what shall survive by being perfect, for while perfection has a type and a logic, representativeness exists in direct reference to what is represented, and only in so far as what is represented is important does the representing art survive. But there is the greatest difficulty in knowing what is indeed representative: there is the greatest difficulty in determining what are the important elements to be represented.

Representativeness must be general to hope for survival on that score. An artist must sum up a whole age to live out of that. All secondary and perishing artists represent certain currents; but the artist who survives on this score must represent the current at the bottom of all these currents.

The common characteristic of all the representative artists is that they include all sorts of tendencies and currents.

The highest type of this kind of artists is Shakespeare.

Keats is a poet of a higher type than Shakespeare, yet Keats was not greater than Shakespeare. Keats was a creator; Shakespeare was only an interpreter. But Keats ranks relatively low in the ranks of the creators; whereas

Shakespeare ranks very high — he ranks first, I believe — in the number of interpreters.

A magnificent type of poet who will survive by representativeness is Walt Whitman. Whitman has all modern times in him, from cruelty [?] to engineering, from humanitarian tendencies to the hardness of intellectuality — he has all this in him. He is far more permanent than (Schiller or) Musset, for instance. He is the medium of Modern Times. His power of expression is as consummate as Shakespeare's. (Representative art: The *Rig-Veda*, the *Bible*. That is: either a multi-personal poet (dramatical, like W. Shakespeare, or lyrical, like Walt Whitman), or a "collective" poet: the *Rig-Veda*, or the *Bible*).

s. d.

“Erostratus”. in Páginas de Estética e de Teoria Literárias. Fernando Pessoa. (Textos estabelecidos e prefaciados por Georg Rudolf Lind e Jacinto do Prado Coelho.) Lisboa: Ática, 1966: 289.