

Fernando Pessoa

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Anyone who is in any way a poet knows very well how much easier it is to write a good poem (if good poems lie in the man's power) about a woman who interests him very much than about a woman he is deeply in love with. The best sort of love poem is generally written about an abstract woman.

A great emotion is too selfish; it takes into itself all the blood of the spirit, and the congestion leaves the hands too cold to write. Three sorts of emotions produce great poetry — strong but quick emotions, seized upon for art as soon as they have passed, but not before they have passed; strong and deep emotions in their remembrance a long time after; and false emotions, that is to say, emotions felt in the intellect. Not insincerity, yet a translated sincerity, is the basis of all art.

The great general who would win a battle for the empire of his country and the history of his people does not wish — he cannot wish — to have many of his soldiers slain (killed). Yet, once he has entered into the contemplation of his strategy, he will choose (without a thought of his men) the better stroke, though it lose him a hundred thousand men, rather than the worse, or even but the slower, action, which may leave him nine-tenths of those men he fights with and for, and whom he generally loves. He becomes an artist for the sake of his fellow-countrymen and he mows down his fellow-countrymen for their strategical sake.

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: 216.