

Fernando Pessoa

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It may be admitted that genius is unappreciated in its age because it is opposed to that age; but it may be asked why it is appreciated by the times that come after. The universal is opposed to any age, because the characteristics of that age are necessarily particular; why therefore should genius, which deals in universal and permanent values, be more kindly received by one age than by another?

The reason is simple. Each age results from a criticism of the age that preceded it and of the principles which underlie the civilizational life of that age. Whereas one principle underlies each age, or seems to underlie it, criticism of that one principle is varied, and has in common only the fact that it is a criticism of the same thing. In opposing his age, the man of genius implicitly criticises it, and so implicitly belongs to one or another of the critical currents of the next age. He may himself produce one or another of those currents, like Wordsworth; he may produce none, like Blake, yet live by a parallel attitude to his, risen in that age by no discipleship properly such.

The more universal the genius, the more easily he will be taken up by the very next age, because the deeper will be his implicit criticism of his own. The less universal, within his substantial universality, the more difficult will his way be, unless he happens to hit the sense of one of the main critical currents of the age come after.

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: 199.