

Fernando Pessoa

Conciseness and a hold on the reader, which are required in detective stories,

Conciseness and a hold on the reader, which are required in detective stories, are no less required in all forms of literature. Nothing is gained by wearying the reader. Edgar Wallace is more interesting than Walter Scott, but Edgar Wallace is not more interesting than Shakespeare. There is an Edgar Wallace in Shakespeare.

The stress and pressure of modern conditions may have many disagreeable aspects, but it has had a very favourable one — the need for conciseness and for deliberate interestingness in a literary work. It was one of Poe's critical triumphs that he foresaw the necessity of the shorter poems. This was one of his visions of a future, as the detective story was one of his anticipations of it.

We need not exclude the epic poem, but we can reduce it to five books — the size of a drama, which should be the limit of literary bulk, that interest may be thorough and maintained.

No greatness of everything in verse can triumph over the twenty-four books of the "Iliad" or carry Virgil into the middle of Olympus.

Compare the luminous beauty of Tennyson's original and short "Morte d'Arthur" with the dull good-writing of his later and very long "Idylls of the King".

The constancy of scattered beauty cannot wipe out the unbeautiffulness of its being scattered over too long a stretch of verse.

The epic poem was really the old correspondence to the human [?] need for the novel. The novel having come, we can omit the epic in the poem.

Matthew Arnold's "Sohrab and Rostum".

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: 207.