

Fernando Pessoa

[Carta a W. A. Bentley — 31 Out. 1924]

W. A. Bentley — 1 Palmerston Crescent, Palmer's Green, L., N. 13.

Apartado 147,
Lisbon, 31st. October, 1924.

Dear Mr. Bentley:

Many thanks for your card of the 23rd. September. I have been holding over my acknowledgement of it till the date of publication of my review «Athena». This is now out, and I am sending you a copy, registered, under separate cover. I shall send you copies of the succeeding issues immediately on their publication; and I hope you will find this first number, as also the next ones, both interesting and, in an aesthetic sense, generally instructive. I should very much like to have your opinion on «Athena» when you have time to write me.

I have sent two copies to «The Times» — one to «The Times» proper, another to the Literary Supplement. I do not know whether a single copy would not do, and, if it would, to which of these it should be addressed. I have sent no other copies to any British papers because, as far as I know, none but the Supplement publishes, to any purpose, notices of books or reviews of the lesser-known languages. If there be any other papers which do so, could you give me their names when you write me?

My reason for sending out these copies to papers whose notices can have no possible *direct* bearing on the circulation of the review is that we, the editors of «Athena», have found it treated by the local press with even more silence than we had legitimately expected. As you know — or perhaps you do not know —, the spirit of clique and coterie, which is now a typical phenomenon of artistic life all over the world, is especially keen here, for no other reason, of course, than that the smaller the cultural centre, the narrower the cultural spirit, and the more highly developed therefore the particular manifestations of that general provincialism. I give it this name because there is no other name for it:

the spiritual provincialism of modern civilization, in contrast with its material cosmopolitanism, is one of the ironical delights of the critical sociologist.

Now there is no way to counteract this but to seek some impartiality abroad, and then to make known its results at home. This can generally be obtained, for, with few exceptions and not considering political and sociological cliques, these coteries are purely national and no member of them objects very much to being decently impartial to foreigners: these can seldom be competitors. That is, I suppose, one of the reasons why it is said that «posterity begins at the frontier».

I am sure that, if «Athena» could be read by someone with a proper understanding both of its spirit and of the language — a *knowledge* of the language would be indispensable, for instance, to appraise the «Odes» of Ricardo Reis, whose Portuguese would draw upon him the blessing of António Vieira, as his style and diction that of Horace (he has been called, admirably I believe, «a Greek Horace who writes in Portuguese») —, some sort of justice might be expected. But it could not be expected from a contemporary Portuguese. The better he found it, the deeper the silence into which he would sink his opinion.

This is rather lengthy, is it not? But I could not explain it more concisely without leaving out the explanation.

Though I am still too conservative to like typing letters to friends, yet I am forced to do so, in their own interest, by the present occult state of my handwriting.

I do not know how much «Portuguese sunshine» this letter takes over to you; if something of the day has crept into it, it is sure to carry some, for this is one of our faultless Lisbon days — a sky as if there had never been clouds in the world, a stainless light, and no temperature, one way or another, as in a work of art of the Greeks. Is your memory of Portugal responsive to this?

Yours very sincerely,

PS. — Please address me as usual — Fernando Pessoa, Apartado 147, Lisbon.

31-10-1924

Pessoa Inédito. Fernando Pessoa. (Orientação, coordenação e prefácio de Teresa Rita Lopes). Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1993: 183.