

Fernando Pessoa

Our age is not that of long poems,

Our age is not that of long poems, for the sense of proportion and construction are the qualities that we have not got. Our age is the age of small poems, of short lyrics, of sonnets and of songs. Our survival to succeeding ages will most probably be in the form of Song-Books, as those where the troubadours of Provence and the courtly poets of King Denis' reign are kept for survival. All that will remain of several ages of our poetry will be (the great names like Dante or Milton excepted) for each nation, a collection of poems like the Greek Anthology, possibly [?] more an embodiment of a general spirit than the addition of many poems of many individuals — to all intents (. . .), an anonymous publication.

Even poems like *Adonais* will perhaps not survive: dreams do not. *Prometheus Unbound* shall fade, and in the English Anthology of the future only one or two lyrics from it will speak of Shelley to eternity.

Time deals hastily with them who deal hastily with it. Saturn eats his own children, not only in the sense that he himself consumes what he produces, but also in that he consumes them who are so far his children as to keep their eyes on their age and who ask not for an abstract timelessness (the Jovian age of the soul), or the changeless place of that immortal Beauty whom Plato loved.

There is a note of immortality; a music of permanence subtly woven into the substance of some rhythms and the melodies of some poems. There is a rhythm of another speech in which the careful ear can detect the note of a god's confidence in his godship.

This note is in the sonnets of Milton, in *Lycidas*; it is not in Shakespeare's Sonnets, even when they speak of something like it. There is a poise, a calm, a freedom which do not inhabit the fever of inspiration. It is sibyls and prophetesses who are inspired; not the Gods themselves.

The *Moïse* of Vigny, the *Booz Endormi* of Hugo have this note. Of all French poets Vigny is more close to it, though he attains it not very frequently.

Succeeding times shall have too many poets of (. . .) from which to choose. Too much cannot remain. "Posterity", Faguet said, "likes only concise writers"; true, and a concise number of writers also. Too much is too little.

It is a child's proverb that you cannot eat your cake and have it too; and a telling [?] one that you cannot serve both God and Mammon. You cannot serve your age and all ages in the same time, nor write for gods and men the same poem.

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: 282 t. 41.