

Fernando Pessoa

The formation of definitive fame is analogous to this.

The formation of definite fame is analogous to this. An author of real genius has become famous in his time; he has become famous because he has been in some sort of adaptation to his time. That adaptation can be of three sorts: complete (that is to say, in virtue of the substance and entire content of his work), partial (that is to say, by virtue of one part of his work, the other being worthless), and imperfect (that is to say, by virtue of one part of his work, the other beings though great, incomprehensible to his times).

In the reaction which the following age makes against the age before it, each of these types of author is subject to a definite treatment. The one who was completely adapted to his age, yet is nevertheless a genius (in other words, the author in whom genius and intelligence have been intermixed) will be retained as famous, but set down lower than he was. This is the case of Victor Hugo, who is a great poet, and was so considered in his time; he is still considered a great poet, but a lesser one than he was thought.

The one who was partially adapted to his time will be put down much lower; he will survive as a note. Scholars will read him; extracts may revive the accidents of his name. This is the case of men like the lesser lyrists of all times, the better class of passing essayists, the novelists who have good pages and a lost story. The one-poem man, like Blanco White or Felix d'Arvers, are typical of this half-class.

The one whose adaptation was imperfect will obviously survive the other way about, but he will rise in fame. What was of his time will be understood and put second, though retained; what was above his time will take first place. The great example of this is Shakespeare, who was famous in his time as a witty writer and has since become famous as a great tragic writer in whom comedy was a secondary, though a great, aspect of his genius.

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: 197.