

Fernando Pessoa

IMPERMANENCE — The problem of the survival of literary works,

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The problem of the survival of literary works, and of the permanent elements of literature is, after all, a very simple one. All life is adaptation to environment, and all death inadaptation to it.

A work of art is therefore living or great by its approval as great by a critical environment. There are 3 environments of this kind. One is the immediate one — the nation to which the artist belongs or the strict epoch in which the work appears. The other is the larger environment of the whole course of the civilisation to which the nation belongs, in whose language the literary artist wrote, or in which the artist was born (supposing him not a literary artist). The widest environment is that which is not that of a certain nation, nor even of a certain civilisation, but of all nations in all times, and of all civilisations in all their eras — that [...] human element which is present wherever an organised and cultured society exists, whatever its type of organisation may be, of what kind soever its culture.

Certain ideas and forms of sensibility underlie each historical period *qua* such; certain (...) underlie each nature *qua* such and distinguish it from other natures throughout the space of its allotted life. An art adapted to the first of these environments dies out with its epoch and the small (?) surviving influence of its typical ideas. If these ideas are imported (?) or civilizacional (?) rather than transitional, the work will make a greater bid for popularity; it will [...] the case we are discussing. An art adapted to a purely national environment, *qua* national will only by the shadowy fame of hearsay pass the frontiers of space, and will only pass those of time in proportion as the national instinct it received is near to that born (?) human instinct which underlies all types of nations and of cultures. That is why Greek art is so rooted in the earth of Time; for ancient Greece was of all nations the one which the most closely compound conformed to the eternal laws of civilisation and of culture. Even if national:

its art was universal and eternal; since [?] the national and the eternal met in Greece.

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: 278.