

Fernando Pessoa

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It might be supposed that the presence, in the same man, of more than one intellectual element would facilitate his immediate celebrity. To a certain extent this is so, but it is so to a lesser extent than might be conjectured in the idleness of hypothesis. A man who has jointly great genius and great intelligence (like Shakespeare), or great genius and great talent (like Milton), does not accumulate in his time or in the next time the results of genius and the results of the other quality. For these different intellectual elements are interfused because they coexist in the man, and there is poured into the substance of intelligence or talent the sacred poison of genius; the drink is bitter, though it retain something of its common taste. The ancients mixed honey with wine and found it pleasant; but nectar cannot make any wine pleasant to the taste of the commonalty.

A man who might have in himself, in some degree, genius, talent and intelligence, would be prepared to strike his time with his intelligence, his age with his talent and the generality of future times and ages with his genius. But as his genius would affect his talent and his talent and genius his intelligence — for things which coexist in the mind coexist by interfusion and not by simpleness — the less would his talent be pure talent and so attract the wider generations, and the less would his intelligence be pure intelligence and so caress the simplicity of all presents. Any example will make this clear to all who understand by examples. A man of wit who makes, among his common fellows, a joke such as a wit of talent might cleverly devise, raises a general and appreciative laugh. This impure thing is pure intelligence. The man who will make, in the same company, a joke with a classical allusion, or with a stretch of intellectual wit, may show to the analyst that he has added something to intelligence, but, in his subdued effect on the hearers, he will have subtracted something from it. If the same man be furthermore a genius and happen to make such a joke as will clearly contain his genius and suffuse his intelligence with its colour, he will get upon the daltonism of every man before whom he makes a fool of his wisdom. It will be something like making a joke in a foreign language. The present has no second-sight, and the point remains in the scabbard.

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: 185.