

Fernando Pessoa

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Taking this distinction of human faculties in conjunction with the distinction of human environments, it is at once seen that the two classes fit each other. It is obvious, from the joint analysis of the two classes, that genius involves an adaptation to the abstract environment which is formed by the general nature of mankind, which is common to all nations and to all times; the proper reward of genius is therefore immortality. It is obvious that talent involves an adaptation to the essential elements which, in a particular application or manifestation, make an age or a nation what it is at a certain time; the proper reward of talent is therefore what we have called fame. It is obvious that wit involves an immediate application to the immediate environment; this is shown in the one form of wit which we particularly call wit, for a joke has no point if no point can be seen. (...)

Many men with no great claim even to mere great wit could have made most of Shakespeare's jokes, as jokes. It is in the creation of the figures who make those jokes that genius underlies wit; not what Falstaff says but what Falstaff is is great. The genius made the figure; the wit made it speak. There are, in the great witty stream of French literature, many writers and speakers who have made better wit than Boileau. Boileau has not gone in wit beyond such minor epigrammatists as the Chevalier de Cailly. But the building by talent of witty wholes is outside the power of those greater minors.

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"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: 189.