

Fernando Pessoa

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One of the most disconcerting phenomena in celebrity is that of what may be called fictitious genius. Genius manifests as an inadaptation to environment. Sometimes, however, there is difference from environment without real inadaptation (...).

The case of Robert Burns, writing in Scots and in songs in a world of English and couplets, is the example of fictitious genius. But the very acceptance by the age warns us off the grass of calling him genius. Such differences cannot be accepted as genius unless they are not genius at all. Blake was different from the same age, and the age did not heed him.

Fictitious genius lives by outward opposition to the age; real genius consists in an inward opposition (...).

When an age aches for something new (if ages ever ache), it wants something old. Burns brought into the eighteenth century a tradition different from the central literary tradition of the eighteenth century, and, as a matter of fact, a tradition altogether alien to European literature. But he brought a tradition; he brought nothing new. In this manner do we receive a curious impression from the negro songs and negro music that have invaded modern Europe; but those songs are nothing new in themselves. If they were, they would not please us. We know they are not new and love their novelty for that.

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: 195.