

“Erostratus”

1.

[BNP/E3, 19–38^r]

ER¹

[. . .]

I purpose to examine the problem of celebrity, both occasional and permanent, to investigate in what conditions either sort has happened to men, and to foresee, as far as can be, in what conditions either sort is likely to happen in the future. Celebrity is the acceptance of any man or of any group of men as in some way valuable to mankind. To investigate the problem we shall have to define value.² We shall also have to define mankind.

(1) Celebrity may be of things or of men. There are celebrated crimes, battles, novels, empires; there are celebrated authors of these. We shall not concern ourselves with the things, but with the men. It is the conditions that produce celebrity that interest us.

(2) Celebrity may be incidental or fundamental. A man who is killed in a particularly mysterious manner becomes celebrated by his death. If the case is important, he may live³ through history as a corpse.⁴ We are not interested in incidental but in fundamental celebrity, however unjust it may happen to be.

(3) Celebrity may be artificial and natural. A king is naturally famous. He is born into that with the kingdom. We shall not concern ourselves with this sort of celebrity. It varies with manners and customs, with institutions. We shall examine only the problem of natural⁵ celebrity.

(4) Celebrity may be good or bad, the second sort being generally called notoriety. The shifting ideas of good and evil sometimes complicate the problem; they are even superimposed in some cases. Where one sees a murderer, another will see a bold man. Where one sees a martyr, another will see a fool. The difficulty of the point has been given, with no intention of giving it, in Proudhon's famous phrase: “After the tyrants, I know nothing more hateful than the martyrs.”

ER.

They do not fall in some silly corner of duty, but in the sillier open spaces of vanity. They have no status above the dandy and the swaggerer except the bad taste of the dandy and the ~~swaggerer~~ ~~swaggerer~~ ~~swaggerer~~ height of the swaggerer (vanity) (impudence). They lose their lives not like heroes but like animals; ~~swaggerer~~ ~~swaggerer~~ ~~swaggerer~~ as these blunder into danger, those blunder into chance. Gewordigkeit seems a virtue when courage is hidden under these. (thus defiled)

Except the Germans and the Russians, no one has as yet been able to put anything like art into the cinema. The circle cannot be squared there.

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3) Celebrity may be natural and artificial. A king is naturally famous. He is born into that with the kingdom. We shall not concern ourselves with this sort of celebrity. It varies with manners and customs, with institutions. We shall examine only the problem of natural celebrity.

2) Celebrity may be incidental or fundamental. A man who is killed in a particularly mysterious manner becomes celebrated by his death. If the case is important, he may live THROUGH HISTORY as a corpse. (an interesting corpse). We are not interested in incidental but in fundamental celebrity, however unjust it may happen to be.

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"I purpose to examine the problem of celebrity,"
manuscript page from "Erostratus," BNP/E3, 19-38f.

2.

[BNP/E3, 19-39^r]

ER.

There are only two types of constant mood with which life is worth living—with the noble joy of a religion, or with the noble sorrow of having lost one. The rest is vegetation, and only a psychological botany can take interest in such diluted mankind.

Yet it is admissible to think that there is one sort of greatness in Erostratus—a greatness which he does not share with lesser crashers into fame. He, a Greek, may be conceived as having that delicate perception and calm delirium of beauty which distinguishes still the memory of his giant clan. He may therefore be conceived as burning Diana's temple in an ecstasy of sorrow, part of him being burnt in the fury of his wrong endeavour. We may fitly conceive him as having overcome the toils of a remorse of the future, and facing a horror within himself for the stalwartness of fame. His act may be compared, in a way, to that terrible element of the initiation of the Templars, who, being first proven absolute believers in Christ—both as Christians, and in the general tradition of the Church, and as occult Gnostics and therefore in the great particular tradition of Christianity, had to spit upon the Crucifix in their initiation. The act may seem no more than humanly revolting from a modern standpoint, for we are not believers, and, when, since the romantics, we defy God and hell, defy things which for us are dead and thus send challenges to corpses. But no human courage, in any field or sea where men are brave with mere daring, can compare with the horror of that initiation. The God they spat upon was the holy substance of Redemption. They looked into hell when their mouths watered with the necessary blasphemy. Thus may be conceived Erostratus, save that the stress of the love of beauty is a lesser thing than the conviction of a sentimental truth. Thus let us conceive him, that we may justify the remembrance.

For if Erostratus did this, he comes at once into the company of all men who have become great by the power of their individuality. He makes that sacrifice of feeling, of passion, of □ which distinguishes the path to immortality. He suffers, that his name may enjoy.⁶

ER.

constant mood

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like Christ who dies as a man that he may prove himself the Word.

"There are only two types of constant mood with which life is worth living," manuscript page from "Erostratus," BNP/E3, 19-39f.

3.

[BNP/E3, 96-32^r]**Erostratus**

We meet then that peculiar thing called inspiration—a meaningless name and a reality. It is that strange accident that breaks like a day out of the night of Wordsworth's dullness. It is the strange gleam on those strange sonnets which Gerard de Nerval got from outside the world. Blake stretched out his hand and received it through the curtain. Shakespeare had it perpetually⁷—and⁸ was his own daemon.

A great rise and swell in the verse of Homer, Virgil or Milton can be understood with reason; it is a quickening of what is. But how is this⁹ quickening of what is not to be gathered into understanding? Not a light that rises into a flame, but a log that is kindled with an outer light that becomes its own—this inspiration is . . .

Erostratus.

~~the same~~
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"We meet then that peculiar thing called inspiration," manuscript page from "Erostratus," BNP/E3, 96-32f.

4.[BNP/E3, 96-23^r]**ER**

Not sincerity in the absolute, but some sort of sincerity, is required in art so that it may be art. A man can write a good love sonnet in two conditions—because he is greatly in love, or because he is greatly in art. He must be sincere in the love or in the art; he cannot be great in either, or in anything, otherwise. He may burn inwardly not thinking of the sonnet he is writing; he may burn outwardly not thinking of the love he is figuring. But he must be on fire somewhere. Otherwise he will not cook the goose of his human inferiority.¹⁰

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place. ~~He~~ ^{He} ~~can~~ ^{can} ~~cook~~ ^{cook} ~~his~~ ^{the} ~~own~~ ^{form} ~~stew~~ ^{of}
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~~the~~ ^{inferior} ~~human~~ ^{human} ~~inferior~~ ^{inferior}.

Common
 sense
 is
 the
 key
 to
 the
 art



"Not sincerity in the absolute," manuscript page from "Erostratus," BNP/E3, 96-23^r.

5.

[BNP/E3, 19-46^r]

ER.

In the arts which are not literature, we have a universal speech and there is no misunderstanding, except each man's insensibility. But in literature, in this matter of fame and extension of fame, we are met at the corner of speculation by the problem of language and come into a different landscape of conjecture.

There is a dead and a living fame, and each is fame; there is a fame that works and delves, and a fame that is like a statue, or an inscription on a tomb, a survival without life. Shakespeare lives and works; Spenser is a name without force. No one (perhaps not even Spenser) ever read the *Faerie Queene* with a through¹¹ thoroughness. Even the great complete epics have sinned against interesting always. The ideal is an epic that shall wear like Milton and interest like Conan Doyle. That is not an impossibility, for there are no impossibilities; even contradictions in terms have been freed by Hegel from being such.

How shall a man survive if he survive but as the name he had. How much of the fame of Homer comes from men who have read him in the original? Frenchmen have been known to be moved by Shakespeare, yet no French mind can ever grasp the mental rhythm of phrase and the sudden complexity of meaning that only a knowledge of English from the soul side can allow or concede.

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"In the arts which are not literature," manuscript page
from "Erostratus," BNP/E3, 19-46f.

6.

[BNP/E3, 19-70^r]

Er.

He may not be intelligent, but he must be intellectual.

Art is the intellectualization of sensation¹² through expression. The intellectualization is given in, by and through the expression itself. That is why great artists—even great artists in literature, which is the most intellectual of the arts—are so often unintelligent persons.

Er.

He ~~may~~ may not be intelligent,
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"He may not be intelligent, but he must be intellectual,"
manuscript page from "Erostratus," BNP/E3, 19-70'.

NOTES TO TEXT 1

1. The text preceding the dashed line is excluded.
2. value [↑ celebrity]
3. live [↑ be immortal]
4. The author's variant is in parentheses: "a corpse" / "(an interesting corpse)."
5. By mistake, the author wrote "natural" instead of "artificial."
6. that his name may enjoy [↓ like Christ who dies as the man that he may prove himself the Word]
7. perpetually [↑ inhabitantly]
8. and [↑ he]
9. this [↑ a]
10. human inferiority [↓ natural humanity]
11. By mistake, the author wrote "through" instead of "thorough."
12. The author's variant is in parentheses: "sensation (feeling)."