

Fernando Pessoa

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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 celebrity. We shall also have to define mankind.

1) Celebrity may be of things or of men. There are celebrated crimes, battles, novels; 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 be immortal through history as an interesting corpse. 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 artificial 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".

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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: 179.