

Perspecta 37 2005

Famous



gend_f



gend_m



age_20-40



age_41-60



age_61-80



age_81-100



raceethn_



phys_petite



phys_slim



phys_average



phys_stocky



phys_portly



expr_pensive



expr_piqued



expr_severe



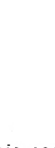
expr_smug



expr_anxious



expr_content



hair_none



hair_vshort



hair_short



hair_medium



hair_long



hair_vlong



hair_black



hair_red



hair_brown



hair_blonde



hair_gray



hair_green



hair_pink



hair_blue



hairsty_01



hairsty_02



hairsty_03



hairsty_04



hairsty_05



hairsty_06



hairsty_07



hairsty_08



hairsty_09



hairsty_10



hairsty_11



hairsty_12



hairsty_13



hairsty_14



hairsty_15



hairsty_16



hairsty_17



hairsty_18



hairsty_19



hairsty_20



hairsty_21



teeth_straight



teeth_braces



teeth_crooked



teeth_missing



facehair_01



facehair_02



facehair_03



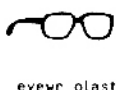
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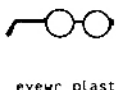
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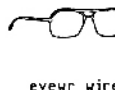
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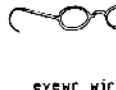
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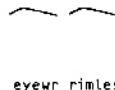
eyewr_plast2



eyewr_wire1



eyewr_wire2



eyewr_rimless



eyewr_patch



eye_green



eye_blue



eye_brown

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THE (TRANS) FORMATIONS OF FAME

Mark Jarzombek

MORALISTS PROTEST THAT FAME IS A FALSE GLORIFICATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL; LEFTISTS ARGUE THAT IT IS THE REIFIED PRODUCT OF A CAPITALIST MACHINERY, THE RESULT OF "AN AUTONOMOUS EGO ORGANIZATION," TO USE A PHRASE FROM JÜRGEN HABERMAS; PSYCHOANALYSTS HOLD THAT PERSONAL HUNGER FOR FAME DERIVES FROM FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY; AND CULTURAL CRITICS SEE IN FAME NOTHING MORE THAN THE REFLECTION OF A DEBASED POPULAR TASTE.

And yet, fame's irrepressible force is not without its own philosophical import. It provokes Being into historical presence and breaks through the silences that are imposed from above or from below, seeking out first the agora, then the printing press, the radio, the television, or whatever aggrandizing means are available to undermine the protocols of authenticity. If Heidegger hoped that language could emerge through the tender and slow cultivation of Being, fame itself breaks down that process and celebrates the remoteness of *Ich bin* from its presumptive ancestral moorings. Fame is clearly not the friend of purity, or *Ordnung*, but of messy reality. Not everyone is cut out for fame, not everyone hungers for it, and not everyone survives its impact; fame creates and destroys, builds up and tears down, and

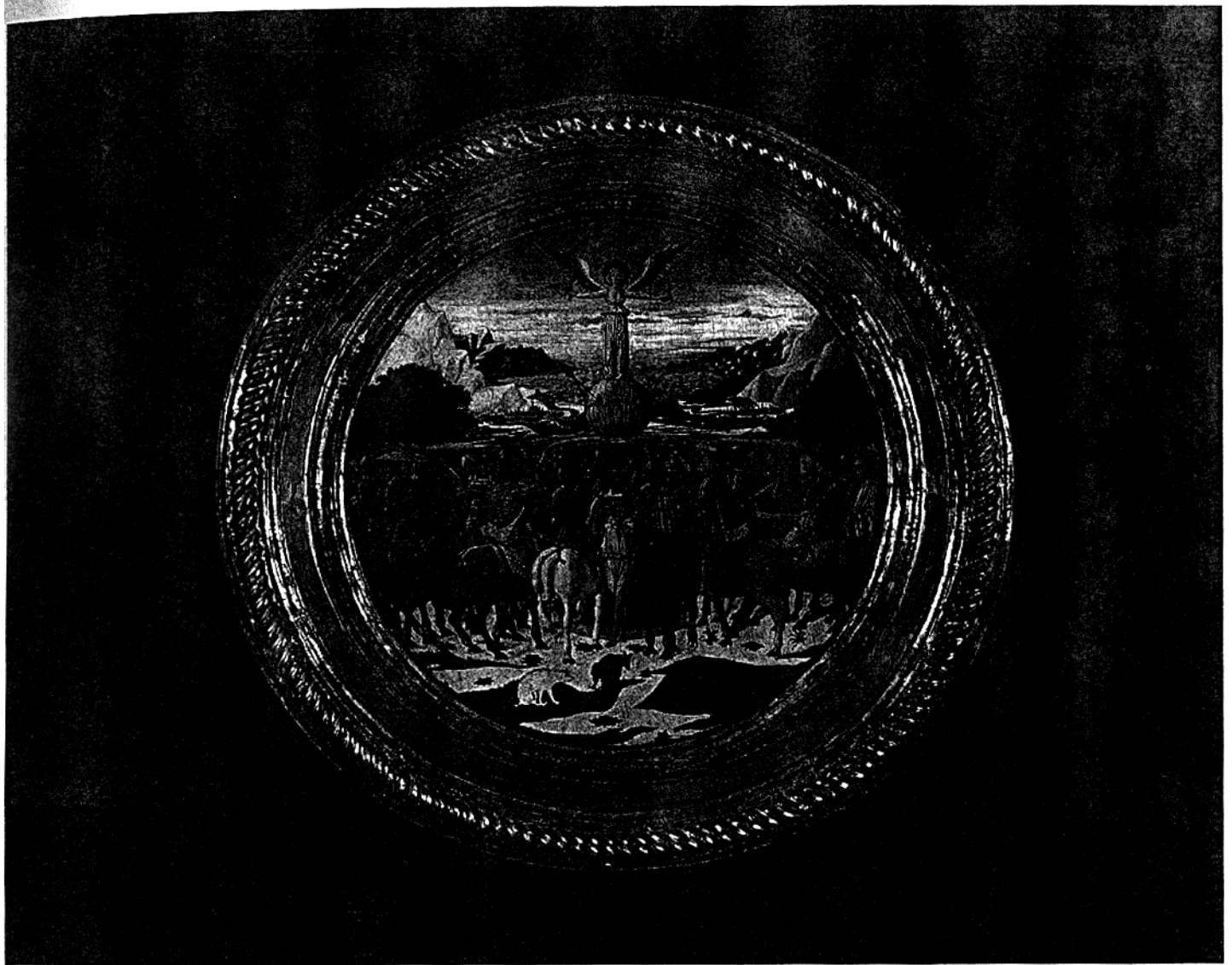


Fig. 1 The Triumph of Fame Giovanni di Ser Giovanni, ca. 1449

derives from this dynamic its superiority over that which claims only to create or, alas, only to destroy. It operates in an asymmetrical relationship to the categories of social functioning, continually forcing society to adjust its expectations as to what is or is not real. The space of fame is a constant flux of opposites yielding a paradoxical standoff between inner and outer realities, between the singular and the multiple, and between the private and the public.

The history of fame's modernity begins not with us, however, but with the Renaissance, when the language of fame was restored to the discourses of political representation. Francesco Petrarca's *De viris illustribus* (On Famous Men), written in 1347, was a watershed in that respect, restoring hundreds of figures of the past to cultural

consciousness. Fame had a double temporal dimension, one in the here and now and one in the past, with the language of fame overlapping with the language of its history. It is in this doubling and simultaneous splitting of time that we see the first glimpse of the structure of modern fame.

Though a statue of the goddess Peme had been erected in the Athenian agora, the complex set of civic and political meanings associated with fame developed in the days of the Roman republic when the word *ambitus* (the root of "ambition") meant "walking around" to collect votes; when *infamis* was a legal term connoting loss of citizenship due to condemnations in criminal or civil cases; when *celebritas* (from *celebris*, meaning "numerous") referred to the number of times the name of a famous person was spoken;

and when *pomposa* was the ritual procession before state-sponsored theatrical performances in which the chair for Rome's ruler was ceremoniously brought into the theater and placed on the stage. But if the language of fame prospered during the days of the Roman republic, imperial rule brought a more cynical view, with Virgil in his *Aeneid* describing Fame as a terrible female monster covered in feathers, spreading falsities through the land.¹ In the Middle Ages, theologians elaborating on the Virgilian theme emphasized divine glory over earthly ambition and the metaphysical over the temporal. Fame was for the foolish, hearty, or immoral. In Chaucer's *House of Fame* (1383–84), the goddess Fame is depicted as ambivalent and frightening, her house built on the slippery foundations of an icy precipice.²

In the time of Petrarch, the metaphysical presumptions that for centuries had demoted fame were offset by the power of a new historical consciousness requiring the achievements of the hero to measure up not only to the standards of his time but also to the standards of Latin antiquity. Petrarch, seeing this as an opportunity to critique the politics of his day, refused to meet the request of Charles IV to dedicate his *De viris illustribus* to the emperor until Charles had, in Petrarch's eyes, performed some action worthy of comparison with the great Latin heroes celebrated in his book. But if Petrarch was unwilling to bend his pen to the desires of the ruler, thereby transforming fame from a philosophical negative into a weighty ethical force, later humanists were only too eager to accommodate patronal desires. Fame soon became the birthright of the highborn who could buy it along with a veneer of humanism;³ fame became what we might call a floating signifier. Initially stabilized by its association with history, fame was soon exploited by humanists, resulting in a mutually rewarding, sycophantic relationship between humanist and aristocrat that was to last for centuries.

This is nowhere better demonstrated than with the commemorative tray painted by Giovanni di Ser Giovanni, the younger brother of Massaccio who was commissioned to paint the tray in celebration of the birth of Lorenzo de Medici. The tray was treasured by Lorenzo, who kept it in his private quarters long after he had become Lorenzo the Magnificent (Fig. 1). It depicts knights extending their hands in allegiance to the allegorical figure of Fame, who stands poised on a large ball, from the sides of which winged trumpets emerge sounding her triumph. Though the goddess seems precariously positioned, the symmetry of the composition indicates her stability and mastery. The figure of Fame is no medieval monster but an agile and lithe maiden clearly in command of the movements of the ball. This goddess of success, operating under the protection of humanism's epistemological prerogatives, became the prototype from the fifteenth century onward for all actual and

aspiring royalties, princes, and commanders eager for historical legitimacy.

There was, however, another track along which we see the first traces of the language of modern fame emerge. Beginning in the late Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, Giovanni Pisano, Filippo Brunelleschi, and later Michelangelo were truly famous in their own lifetimes. Pisano was given privileges by the citizens of Pisa far above his station in society, and Brunelleschi was accorded the rare honor of being buried in the Cathedral of Florence, the sanctified ground reserved for the tombs of the great military leaders of the city. Their fame was not tied to moral imperatives or Roman precursors but derived just as much from their own skill as from their capacity to exploit it. Brunelleschi, in a particularly ingenious display of command, organized an elaborate stunt—involving dozens of people, including prison wardens and judges—in which a trusted workman was falsely imprisoned, “released,” and then led to believe that he was in actuality someone else,⁴ thus enacting a brilliant psychological farce. Just as Brunelleschi could play with the force of gravity to make bricks and stones seem to float in air, he could play with the laws of social custom to make a man disappear and reappear. If it was the first enterprise by which he earned his fame, it was the second by which he demonstrated it.

The rise of the culture of fame piqued the interest of the leading Renaissance theorist, Leon Battista Alberti, who because of his central role in the classical revival might have sympathized with Petrarch's conservatism. Instead, he not only accepted artisanal fame but was the first to describe it. In a much-overlooked passage in Chapter Ten of Book Nine of *De re aedificatoria*, he allows the architect to savor up front just “how much applause, profit, favor, and fame” he will gain from the successful execution of his work.⁵ But artisanal fame, not being stabilized by historical models, was far from secure. This was, after all, before the days of legal contracts. Alberti warned the aspiring architect that if he “goes about anything ignorantly, unadvisedly or



Fig. 2 Fame Bernardo Strozzi 1635

inconsiderately," he exposes himself to "disgrace" and "vituperation."⁶

If in the fifteenth century artisanal fame was for the brave of heart, by the seventeenth century, supported by the increasing power and prestige of the bourgeoisie and by competition among the royal courts, it had reached into all the arts, fueled in England by the pre-Restoration emotionalism of the Protestant Revolution and on the Continent by the Baroque excesses of the Catholic courts. This was the age which saw the rise of great musical virtuosi like Arcangelo Corelli, of great playwrights like Jean Baptiste Molière, and of women writers like Margaret Lucas Cavendish. Fame was everywhere. Her image was regularly evoked before theater performances and was a common trope in publications, celebrations, and burials. "What shall

I do to be forever known / And make the age to come my own?" asked the poet Abraham Cowley.⁷ Or, as Samuel Johnson famously noted in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), "Restless burns the fever of Renown." The culture of fame made it possible for private life to become the subject of public discourse; autobiographies became the vogue, and even novels like Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) began to take on autobiographical features. In architecture, one can track fame's escalation from the career of Brunelleschi, who was the model for that artisan-citizen Alberti had in mind, to Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), who had no need to doubt his fame. When he went to Paris in 1665, crowds lined the streets of each city along the route to watch him pass. That Bernini also produced several self-portraits was only to be expected.

The image of the goddess Fame in Bernardo Strozzi's painting (1635) (Fig. 2) is the visual key. It shows an elegantly dressed young lady with smooth, swanlike wings reclining on a sofa, delicately holding the long trumpet by which she heralds a person's renown. She no longer appears as a remote and abstract allegory but instead looks softly and sweetly at the viewer. She is accessible, perhaps all too accessible.

That would certainly have been the opinion of the Enlightenment philosophers who tried to restrain the advances that the culture of fame had made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The forces of Reason, Nature, and Law, though liberating the psyche from superstition, also restrained excess. Emmanuel Kant argued for a link between the individual and the totality of mankind even in



Fig. 3 George Washington Jean-Antoine Houdon, 1788

the use of the simple word *humanity*. He wanted artists to be known not for singular works or for their technical virtuosity but for an entire lifetime of work, an *opus*, properly judged and validated along the principles of “common sense.” Similarly, William Davenant conceived of the poet not as a man of strong passions but as a lawgiver.⁸ Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, called imagination a “decaying sense,”⁹ and even in the liberal and sophisticated criticism of Dryden, Pope, and Johnson, the basic conservatism of the age is evident. Terms such as imitation, decorum, and propriety were the theoretical tropes of the day, as opposed to ingenuity, virtuosity, and imagination, which were the principal theoretical themes of the earlier age.

In truth, the Enlightenment did little to dampen the advances of fame. By the late eighteenth century a new set of philosophers was overriding Kant’s plea for a studied and adjudicated differentiation of genius. George Friedrich Hegel, even though he may not be considered the first theorist of modern fame, wanted History to be freed from the mediating and meddling role of court-appointed historians. History, for him, is an autonomous force that sweeps over an entire spectrum of time using a few personages who, thinking

they serve their own interest, execute the agenda of the *Weltgeist*. Napoleon, for Hegel, was such a person; he was “world history on horseback.” History no longer needed an allegorical double, and above all it no longer needed its historical parallel in classical antiquity. The goddess Fame disappeared, and fame (with a small “f”) was now free to seek out its embodiment in real people. The 1788 statue of George Washington by Jean-Antoine Houdon, for example, portrays Washington in the modern garb of the day, with his riding boots, his tight-fitting pants and vest, and his walking stick (Fig. 3). He could as easily be a gentleman farmer as the president of the United States. The only referent to classical fame, somewhat incongruously, is the bundle of fasces on which his hand rests.

The sculptural ornamentation for the Pantheon in Paris is another case where we see, rather dramatically, the decoupling of fame from its historiographic requirements. The building, originally designed as a church and commissioned by Louis XV in 1774, was transformed following the French Revolution into a national shrine dedicated to the great heroes of France. The first design for the sculptural elements in the tympanum by Baltard the Elder was made in a neo-classical

style, with an Athena-like *la Patrie* presiding over various toga-clad allegorical figures. In the alternate version by David d’Angers, executed between 1831 and 1837, *la Patrie* and the seated representations of Liberty and History remain as a concession to tradition, but they are flanked by the figures of Rousseau, Voltaire, Napoleon, and others clothed in contemporary dress, squeezing their way, literally and symbolically, into the cramped space of the tympanum (Fig. 4).¹⁰

It would be wrong to argue that modern fame, no longer needing the crutches of allegory, is more authentic than its humanistic antecedent. Instead, the situation became more complex, for the epistemological double of old—knowing the present through the past—was replaced by an ontological double that was just as slippery. But authenticity, at the very moment it seemed within grasp, split against itself and became all the harder to objectify. And from here on, the vocabulary of fame starts to become more familiar to us. The increasing fascination with both the private lives of “great” men and their visible profile in public (the first wax museum was built in 1802), the rise of nationalist historicism in midcentury, the development of psychology in the late nineteenth century, the prolifera-

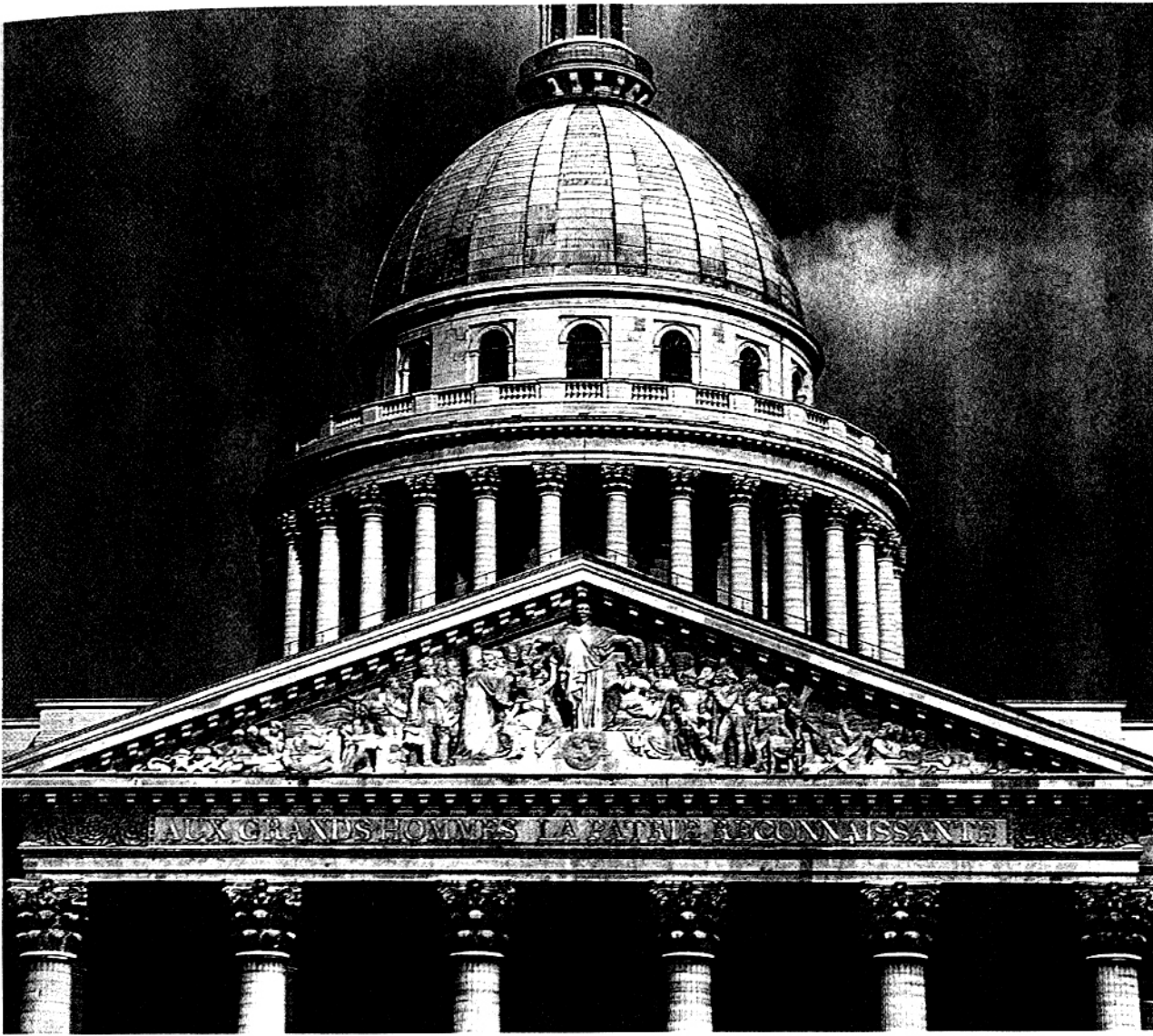


Fig. 4 Tympanum of the Pantheon, Paris David d'Angers, 1831–7

tion of photography at the turn of the century, the emergence of the modern theater personality in the late nineteenth century, the establishment of the first corporate public-relations firms around 1910, the fusion of heroism and technology in the 1930s, the rise of Hollywood and the mass marketing of personalities in the 1950s, and the recent proliferation of halls of fame (of which there are now about three thousand in the United States)—all have played a part in reshaping the notion of fame with an ever more intrusive and forceful scrutiny of both the internal and the external realities of Being.

The modernizing of fame has had and continues to have opponents who are disturbed by fame's split from its humanistic-historiographic or Enlightenment-legalistic agenda. It is not fame itself that was at issue

but rather the right to wear its mantle. Compare Antonio Canova's depiction of George Washington from about 1820 to the earlier one by Houdon to witness the neo-conservative return to a conflated Roman-Renaissance modality (Fig. 5). Washington, dressed in a Roman-inspired legionnaire's toga, prepares to write down the laws of the land in good Enlightenment manner.

For a more theoretical point of view, one should compare William Hazlitt's early-nineteenth-century writings with Max Stirner's spirited *The Ego and Its Own* (1848). Hazlitt, though operating within a pro-individualist tradition inaugurated in large part by Wordsworth, returns nonetheless to the old distinction between fame and glory as the difference between those who are aware of their talents but don't proclaim them, and those

who think they are talented and beat their own drum. Hazlitt perceived art as a Kantian proposition: It had to stand in the service of humanity and be measured from that point of view alone. Not all human actions are of the same value, not all artists are equally worthy.¹¹ Though his own age ultimately disappointed him, his true hero was Napoleon, not because, as with Hegel, Napoleon was serving the teleological intent of History, but because he was "the only man who rose in deeds and fame to the level of antiquity."¹² Stirner, on the other hand, found fault precisely with those who try to determine who fits and who does not fit into the matrix of the humanist abstraction. As a result, he blames not those who seek fame, but a society envious of individuality and talent, using the terminology of lawfulness to repress and stifle. If there is one thing

that one should struggle to regain, he argued, it is our right to be egoists.

And so the debate on the nature of fame continues to this day, with most critics returning to either the humanistic or the philosophical ideologies that had tried to graft political control or metaphysical method onto fame's unruly essence. A critic with a Heideggerian-Baudrillardian point of view, for example, deplores that we live in a world in which "the distinctions between object and representation, thing and idea, are no longer valid." He speaks, however, from a perspective that disguises its nostalgia for the old humanistic-aristocratic ideal.¹³ In a different tenor, Richard Sennett, who argues that modernity is moving away from outer- to inner-directed realities, sees fame as a negative force eroding the capacity of society to recognize "the essential dignity" of life.¹⁴ He upholds the perspective of the Enlightenment philosophy of restraint, wanting a liberal exchange of ideas but without the disruptions fame imposes on bourgeois history. That these critiques of fame return directly to the history of fame proves the cunning of fame's modernity.

Modern fame remains riveted not only to its history but also to the history of its own critique, and in that fame is not just one attribute among others—the proverbial opposite to "value" or "tradition"—but something that is "always-being-one-and-yet-always-other," to borrow a phrase from Derrida.¹⁵ And yet, astonishingly, out of this cycling between fame's modernity and its history, fame remains highly pragmatic, thus reinforcing the tendency to mistake it as an antihistorical agent. Fame asks for—and delivers—immediate results, reaching for those mechanisms

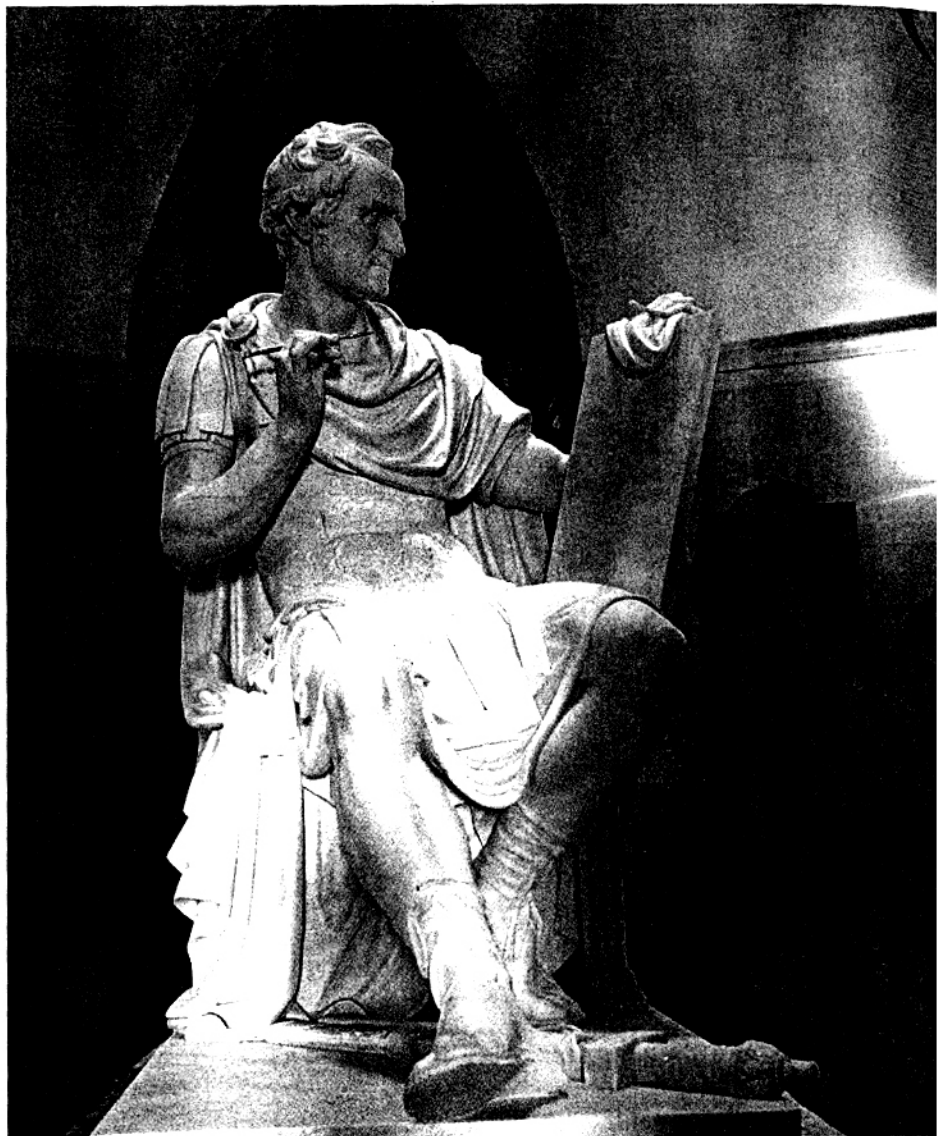


Fig. 5 George Washington Antonio Canova, ca. 1820

that escalate or enhance ego production. This was true, however, already in the Renaissance, when the insignia of fame could be bought by the rich and powerful. Fame at its historical inception had already precluded authenticity as its defining criteria, just as in reaching for history it had precluded critiques against insubstantiality. In the same way, modern fame should not be reduced to being "an industry" merely because the mechanisms of ego production are now more democratic; nor should fame be seen as radically foreign to ethics or simply a subordination of ethics to other social or cultural forces. Rather, fame reconstructs ethics within the structure of the bourgeois cultural dynamic.

Fame continuously conditions our understanding of Being and, if you will, creates a respect for Being by making it into an object

of history even if paradoxically illuminating and hiding it at the same time. It engages Being with its X-ray-like probes, penetrating the otherwise opaque private life while at the same time flattening it into an image that provokes a desire for both less *and* more. The advantage becomes clear only when one gives thought to what the critique of fame revolts against, namely the collapse of the historical and transhistorical moment in which one sees a glimmer of the utopian in its utopic and dystopic contexts simultaneously. In that sense, fame represents *both* the possibility of transcendence *and* the impossibility of Reason's finality; it represents the ambition for an authentic equation between talent and creativity while creating the space in which one can undermine or at least rethink the logic of that equation.

1 Ovid, however, saw Fame as a goddess "obligated to no one's orders." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), 853. For a detailed account of Ovid's effort to subvert Virgilian ideas of *bona fama*, see Rosemary Zumwalt, "Fama Subversa: Theme and Structure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 12," in *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 10, eds. Ronald S. Stroud and Philip Levine, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). See also, Deborah Cibelli, "Images of Fame and Changing Fortune in the First and Second Editions of Vasari's *Vite*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 25 (1999), 113-37. 2 M.F. Braswell, "Architectural Portrait in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 11:1 (1981), 101-12. 3 See for example, Michaela J. Marek, "'Virtus' und 'fama' zur Stilproblematik der Portraitbüsten," in *Piero de' Medici "il Gottoso" (1416-1469): Kunst im Dienste der Mediceer*, eds. Andreas Beyer and Bruce Boucher (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 341-68. 4 For a discussion of the stunt, see Eugenio Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi: The Complete Work*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), 326-7. 5 Leon Battista Alberti, *L'Architettura*, ed. and trans. Giovanni Orlandi (Milan: il Polifilo, 1966) vol. 2, 853-5 [Book 9, Chapter 10]; also, Leone Battista Alberti, *Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. James Leoni, ed. Joseph Rykwert (London: Alec Tiranti, 1955), 205. For more on Alberti's image of himself, see Mark Jarzombek, "Das Enigma von Leon Battista Alberti's *dissimulatio*," *Theorie der Praxis: Leon Battista Alberti als Humanist und Theoretiker der bildenden Künste*, eds. Kurt W. Forster and Hubert Locher (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), 203-16. 6 *Ibid.* 7 Cowley (1618-67) was a noted poet with Royalist leanings. He published his first volume of verse when he was fifteen. During the Civil War, he left Cambridge to join the King at Oxford and followed Queen Henrietta Maria to France in 1644 as her secretary. Returning to England in 1654, he enjoyed high esteem during his lifetime and was buried in Westminster Abbey alongside Chaucer and Spenser. 8 John L. Mahoney, *The Logic of Passion: the Literary Criticism of William Hazlitt* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1978), 15. 9 *Ibid.*, 17. 10 See Jean-Claude Bonnet, *Naissance du Panthéon: Essai sur Le Culte des Grands Hommes* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), which studies the modernity of the French revolutionary cult of the individual. I would like to thank Erica Naginski for pointing out this example to me. 11 William Hazlitt, "Essay on the Principles of Human Action [1805]," in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1930-34), vol. 4, 88-92. On egotism, see vol. 9, 224. 12 Hazlitt, "On Egotism," in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. 12, 166. 13 Mark Poster, "Introduction," in Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988), 5-6. 14 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 11. 15 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 131.