

Erostratus.

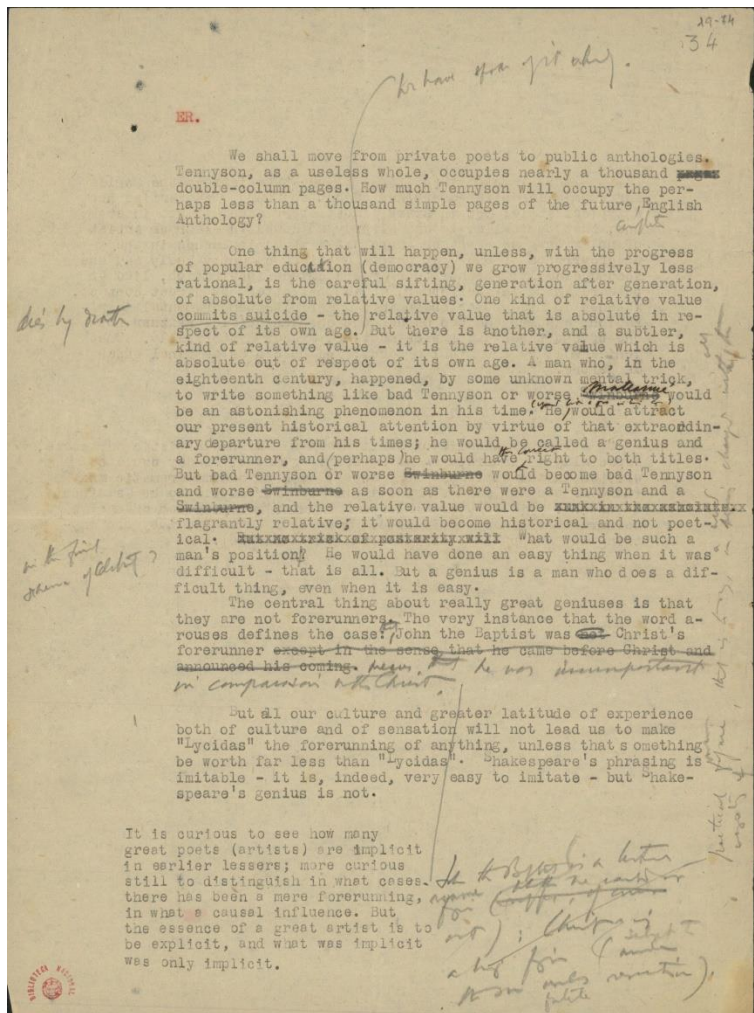
We shall move from private posts to public anthologies. Tennyson, as a useless whole, occupies nearly a thousand ~~pages~~ double-column pages. How much Tennyson will occupy the perhaps less than a thousand simple pages of the future complete English Anthology?

One thing that will happen, unless, with the progress of popular education <sup>/(democracy)\</sup> we grow progressively less rational, is the careful sifting, generation after generation, of absolute from relative values. One kind of relative value commits suicide <sup>/(dies by death)\</sup> - the relative value that is absolute in respect of its own age. We have spoken of it above. But there is another, and a subtler, kind of relative value - it is the relative value which is absolute out of respect of its own age. A man who, in the eighteenth century, happened, by some unknown mental trick, to write something like bad Tennyson or worse ~~Swinnburne~~ would be an astonishing phenomenon in his time. He would attract our present historical attention by virtue of that extraordinary departure from his times; he would be called a genius and a forerunner, and <sup>/(perhaps)\</sup> he would have the concrete right to both titles. But bad Tennyson or worse ~~Swinnburne~~ would become bad Tennyson and worse ~~Swinnburne~~ as soon as there were a Tennyson and a ~~Swinnburne~~, and the relative value would be ~~sunk in the absolute~~ flagrantly relative; it would become historical and not poetical. ~~But no trick of posterity will~~ What would be such a man's position in the final scheme of celebrity? He would have done an easy thing when it was difficult - that is all. But a genius is a man who does a difficult thing, even when it is easy.

The central thing about really great geniuses is that they are not forerunners. The very instance that the word arouses defines the case: that John the Baptist was ~~not~~ Christ's forerunner ~~except in the sense that he came before Christ and announced his coming.~~ means that he was unimportant in comparison with Christ. John the Baptist is a historical name <sup>/figure\</sup> (unless, of course whether he existed or not); Christ is a living figure <sup>/poetical figure /name\</sup>, that is to say, a being <sup>/a word\</sup> charged with all the mystery of [...] (under <sup>/subject to\</sup> the same useless reservation).

But all our culture and greater latitude of experience both of culture and of sensation will not lead us to make "Lycidas" the forerunning of anything, unless that something be worth far less than "Lycidas". Shakespeare's phrasing is imitable - it is, indeed, very easy to imitate - but Shakespeare's genius is not.

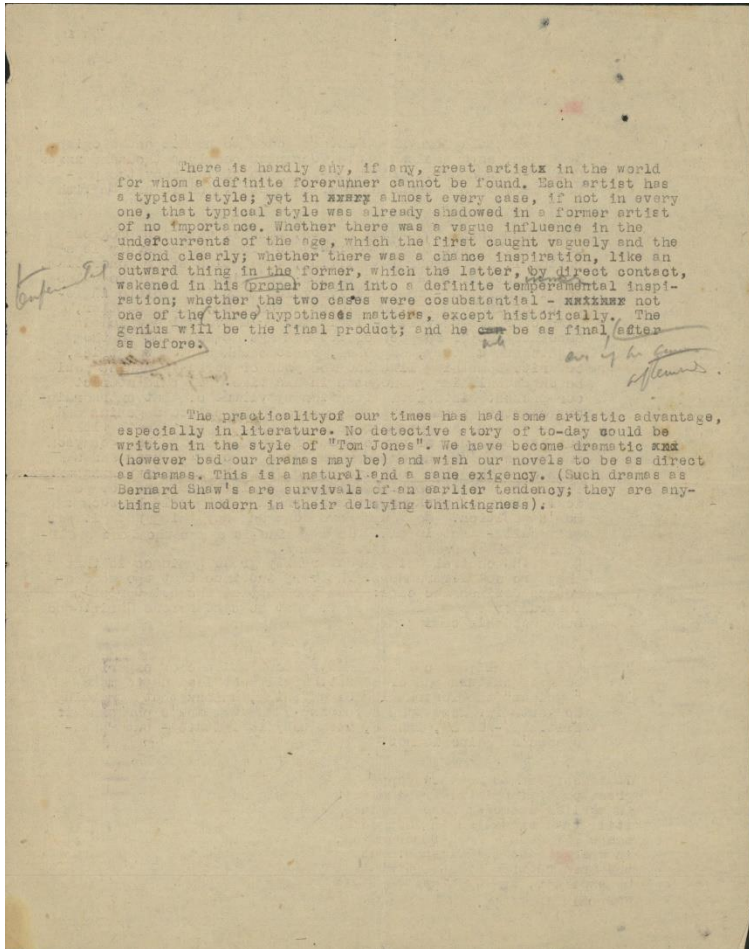
It is curious to see how many great poets <sup>/(artists)\</sup> are implicit in earlier lessers; more curious still to distinguish in what cases there has been a mere forerunning, in what a casual influence. But the essence of a great artist is to be explicit, and what was implicit was only implicit.



# MODERNISMO

Arquivo Virtual da Geração de Orpheu

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Transcrição

There is hardly any, if any, great artists in the world for whom a definite forerunner cannot be found. Each artist has a typical style; yet in ~~every~~ almost every case, if not in every one, that typical style was already shadowed in a former artist of no importance. Whether there was a vague influence in the undercurrents of the age, which the first caught vaguely and the second clearly; whether there was a chance inspiration, like an outward thing in the former, which the latter, by direct contact, wakened in his proper <sup>/temperamental\</sup> brain into a definite temperamental <sup>/inner\</sup> inspiration; whether the two cases were consubstantial - ~~neither~~ not one of the <sup>/(three)\</sup> hypotheses matters, except historically. The genius will be the final product; and he ~~can~~ will be as final after as before. <sup>/even if he comes afterwards.\</sup>

The practicality of our times has had some artistic advantage, especially in literature. No detective story of to-day could be written in the style of "Tom Jones". We have become dramatic ~~and~~ (however bad our dramas may be) and wish our novels to be as direct as dramas. This is a natural and a sane exigency. (Such dramas as Bernard Shaw's are survivals of an earlier tendency; they are anything but modern in their delaying thinkingness).

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## DIREITOS ASSOCIADOS

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