

“We were all lions”: Avatars of the Dandy in Poe’s *Tales of the Folio Club*

Gabriella Vöö

University of Pécs

Abstract

The essay discusses the dandy figures in three early tales by Edgar Allan Poe, “The Duc De L’Omelette,” “Bon-Bon,” and “Lionizing.” Although the tales are parodies of the styles of contemporary British and American authors, themselves dandies, they also address serious issues related to literary personality, the artificial and fictional nature of identity, as well as social and literary authority. As an author writing for literary magazines, Poe felt the pressure to conform to the editors’ demand for writing that was marketable, but was also intent on producing quality works. His dandy characters allowed him to comment on the status of intellectual labor in antebellum America, the fleeting nature of literary fashion, and the difficulty to succeed in a cultural ambiance in which authors were torn between the demands of originality and popularity.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, antebellum American culture, dandyism, the literary dandy, parody and satire, modern notions of the self and identity, social hierarchy, status and authority, literary professionalism, commodification of literature

Making efforts to ingratiate himself with magazine editors and to attract readers by writing tales that were both popular and of good quality, the young Edgar Allan Poe had to acknowledge that literary fame depended on more frivolous factors: publicity could also be achieved by notoriety. The writer and editor Nathaniel Parker Willis, for instance, only a few years Poe’s senior and a much more moderate talent, made his way to literary fame not only as a writer and editor, but also by means of fancy clothes, provocative manners, and by attracting public attention in Boston, New York and London. True, his public image

was not always favorable, his career was littered with scandals, his personal appearance and attitude were often subjected to acerbic criticism. Yet he was present in the social and literary circles of the cities he resided in, and was widely known as a successful author and editor during the 1830s and 1840s. In 1846, Poe provided a short overview of Willis's career in "The Literati of New York City," a series of critical essays published in six installments in the Philadelphia magazine *Godey's Lady's Book*. He evaluated Willis's work positively, but finished the essay contending that "in a republic such as ours, the mere man of letters must ever be a cipher [and must] unite the *éclat* of the *littérateur* with that of the man of fashion or of society" (*Essays and Reviews* 1124, italics in the original). The conspicuous presence of the dandy, this self-made celebrity, on the British and American literary scene prompted Poe to address the issue of fashioning a social identity and putting not only one's work, but one's self on display for the literary market. In his earliest collection of burlesques and literary satires, *Tales of the Folio Club*, the dandy is a recurring character through which Poe explored what it meant, in Jacksonian America, to be "a cipher."

Poe's earliest prose writings document the rise of a new social type that unites the qualities of the fop, the gourmet, and the aspiring writer. Several memorable characters in the tales published between 1832 and 1835 dress daintily, excel in cooking, and are engaged in intellectual endeavors. The eponymous hero of "The Duc De L'Omelette," a French aristocrat whose life depends on the impeccability of his clothing and dinner, dies of disgust when he sees an ortolan, a rare and expensive delicacy, improperly served. Arriving in Hell, he manages to engage the devil in a game of cards, wins, and gets his life back. In "Bon-Bon," a grotesque little chef and philosopher also enters into a pact, albeit a losing one, with the devil. He proposes the deal in expectation of a successful career as a thinker and writer, but the hooped gentleman tricks him out of both his life and his soul. Robert Jones, the narrator of "Lionizing," earns fame in the fashionable society of Fum-Fudge on account of his magnificent nose, as well as by attending dinners and by publishing a pamphlet on the science of Nosology. But alas, he loses his high social standing when he shoots off the nose of his rival, the Elector of Bluddennuff. The latest fashion for "lions" is to have no nose at all. In the political satire "Four Beasts in One" the Syrian tyrant Epimanes, also known as the "Prince of Poets and the Delight of the Universe," leads a procession of people and beasts wearing the costume of a giraffe. A tale in the gothic mode, "The Assigination," features a mysterious hero whose looks, manners, attire, poetic accomplishments and connoisseurship recall the most famous literary dandy of the previous generation, Lord Byron.

The tales mentioned above were meant to be included into a volume, *Tales of the Folio Club*, a collection of eleven short stories that Poe offered, without success, to publishers in Boston and Philadelphia. Poe's overall intent in writing these tales was parody: in each of the pieces he emulated and gently mocked the styles of fashionable authors of the day, writers he admired or disliked. According to "The Folio Club," the short introductory piece to the volume that survived in manuscript and which had initially served as an introduction, the eleven tales of the collection formed a coherent whole: they were the writings presented by the members of a literary club at their monthly reunion (131).¹ Poe's original intention was to attach to each tale critical commentaries provided by the club members (Hammond 25). Thus, the writings in the volume would have parodied not only the styles

of fellow authors but also some of the critical views of the time. As Poe could not find a publisher for the prospective book, the tales appeared separately in the literary magazines he was working for during the 1830s, the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier*, the *Baltimore Sunday Visitor*, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and *Godey's Lady's Book*. The critical commentaries, if they were written at all, did not survive.

The genial fops of the *Tales of the Folio Club* are all engaged in literary exploits, desperately seeking success in areas in which they have the most expertise: wearing fine clothes, eating or cooking, and writing. These elements of the dandy paradigm become, in the tales, metaphors of identity and authority in the changing social ambiance of Jacksonian America. My essay investigates how Poe captured, in three comic tales, "The Duc De L'Omelette," "Bon-Bon," and "Lionizing,"² the emergence of dandyism as a new means of self-definition and self-assertion. I will argue that the character of the dandy offered Poe an opportunity to experiment with a new notion of the self, acknowledging that identity was not natural or essential, but socially constructed. In addition to this, he also explored strategies of achieving authority in the realm of the social and the aesthetic. As Poe was dependent on literary periodicals for publication and had the intention of leaving a mark on the magazine culture of his time, the portrayal of these comic dandy figures allowed him to reflect on the status of intellectual labor in a cultural ambiance in which the commercialization and commodification of literature was an accomplished fact. Thus, while these tales are clearly meant to parody popular literary modes, styles and authors, as well as to satirize literary personages and actual dandies, Poe also addressed the larger implications of identity, authority, and literary professionalism. By this he stands out as one of the keenest cultural critics of his time.

1. The art of clothing and a new notion of the self

The appealing and titillating character of the dandy was, by the early 1830s, firmly established on the social and literary scenes of Britain and the United States. The emergence of the type dates back, in fact, to the Regency period, when ideas about dandyism as well as flesh-and-blood "lions" travelled to and fro across the English Channel. The prototype of the dandy was probably George Brummel (1778–1840), the legendary fop of the Regency period who was befriended by the Prince of Wales, later King George IV. After his fall-out with the monarch, he spent his later life in Paris. The fame of "Beau" Brummel long outlived the person, and the spirit of dandyism started to spread on the continent (Stanton 57). In a parallel process, French aristocrats in exile, who had found shelter in London during the Revolution, imbibed dandyish ideas and attitudes. Returning to post-Napoleonic France, they unleashed a cultural paradigm shift that radically challenged existing social hierarchies (Feldman 1–2). Unlike aristocrats who were born into positions of privilege, dandies were self-made celebrities. They professed authority not in the realm of hereditary power but in that of the intellectual and the aesthetic. Poe had a keen eye for the cultural developments of his time, but was always careful to remove the characters of his tales to distant – European, Oriental, or purely imaginary – settings. Plots of Gothic mystery regularly take place in Germany and even Hungary, which Poe probably thought of as the easternmost outpost of German culture. Elegant aristocratic characters, portrayed either seriously or satirically, belong either to England or France. "The Duc De L'Omelette"

and “Bon-Bon” are set in Paris, dandyism’s second most important center at the time. The plot of “Lionizing” takes place in the city of “Fum-Fudge,” a thinly disguised version of London. Such metropolitan ambiances offered Poe an insight into the regulated systems that accommodate the dandy: fashion, cuisine, and shared artistic expertise among the privileged.

The relatively new phenomenon of dandyism inspired Poe to explore the artificial, constructed nature of the self and identity, and steered him towards the careful crafting of his own public image as an author. Although never quite a dandy, Poe seems to have consciously designed his looks in order to create a specific impression even when he was living at the edge of poverty. “His figure was remarkably good, and he carried himself erect and well, as one who had been trained to it,” recalled John H. B. Latrobe, one of the editors of the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier*, in 1877. “He was dressed in black, and his frockcoat was buttoned to the throat, where it met the black stock, then almost universally worn. Not a particle of white was visible” (qtd. in Quinn 204). The dandies in the *Tales of the Folio Club* are individuals with an excess of creativity, concerned equally with sartorial and intellectual elegance. Through discipline and professionalism, they appear as figures of authority in the realm of the social or the aesthetic. Their elegance is more than a decorative supplement to their appealing face and body: it is a constitutive factor of their identity.

It is difficult to imagine the dandy in less than perfect attire. Called upon by the Devil to strip for the furnace, the Duc De L’Omelette objects vehemently. “Who are you, pray,” he inquires indignantly, “that I should divest myself at your bidding of the sweetest pantaloons ever made by Bourdon, the daintiest robe-de chambre ever put together by Rombert . . . – not to mention the trouble I should have in drawing off my gloves?” The Duc’s elaborate looks, his pantaloons, “robe-de-chambre,” gloves, hair rolled on paper strips, the “rose-wood coffin inlaid with ivory” (144) in which he is spirited away to the Devil’s underworld compound, are tokens of a status that is achieved by commitment to, and expertise in, designing his looks. Bon-Bon, the *restaurateur* and metaphysician, wears such an assortment of colors (pea-green, bright purple, yellow, sky-blue, and crimson) and materials (flannel, velvet, and satin) that it is difficult to say whether “Pierre Bon-Bon was indeed a bird of Paradise, or the rather a very Paradise of perfection” (167-68). Excellence in clothing, along with proficiency in cooking and writing, is his trademark. Robert Jones, the hero-narrator of “Lionizing,” works hard from a very early age to improve on the size and shape of his remarkable nose, giving his “proboscis a couple of pulls and [swallowing] a half dozen of drams” (212). The dandy’s clothes are ultimately inseparable from his body, or his body has the flexibility of clothing. In either case, the emphasis falls on the external, the visible, the aesthetic, which ultimately reinforces the notion of the self as artifact.

Such a conception of the self as a construct, a fiction, goes against the idea of the body as a natural entity, an organic substance that lies beneath the manipulated surface of garments. Dandies place the core of their identity in their appearance, which is a shiny surface that diverts attention from, if not entirely denies, the existence of a fixed internal essence. As Jessica R. Feldman contends, “Dandies flaunt what a culture usually attempts to ignore or hide, that the human body is never ‘natural,’ or naked of cultural clothing, but is instead a system of signification, a cultural construct. Once dandies discover the power of self-presentation, they can no longer imagine a self independent of cultural mediation”

(270). Poe's dandies have no inner essence, no core of being that lies enveloped in clothes, the indicators of their social existence. Literally, they are what they wear. The Duc De L'Omelette, for instance, is aware of the fact that divesting himself of his clothes, the sartorial component of his self, would annihilate him. In "Lionizing," Robert Jones's identity as a dandy, the darling of fashionable society, depends on his remarkable nose that is widely admired, immortalized in painting, and written about. When the public taste changes and the opposite of a protruding proboscis becomes the latest fashion, the young lion ends up as a social nonentity. The latter case might suggest the vulnerability of the dandy to the whim of his audience, and thus his ineffectiveness as a social and cultural type. However, in Poe's tales, especially in parodies and satires like the ones meant to be included in *The Folio Club*, the argument does not depend on the outcome of the plot. His dandy tales stand out by their viable and essentially modern conception of the self: invented, fictional, and open for experimentation.

Poe's notion of self and identity that found expression in these early tales was at odds with those of Thomas Carlyle whose philosophy of clothes had such a sweeping effect on the American version of German and English romantic thought, Transcendentalism.³ The earliest versions of Poe's dandy tales "The Duc De L'Omelette" and "Bon-Bon" were written before the installments of Carlyle's seminal work on the philosophy of clothes, *Sartor Resartus* was first published, between 1833 and 1834, in *Fraser's Magazine*. But had the ideas of Carlyle's hero, "Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröck," been available, Poe would have disagreed with them. For Carlyle, clothes constitute a powerful metaphor for the visible world of appearances that conceal an invisible spiritual essence. In the preliminary chapter of *Sartor*, the speaking voice defines clothing as "the vestural Tissue . . . which Man's Soul wears as its outmost wrappage and overall; wherein . . . his whole Self lives, moves, and has its being" (4). This was, ultimately, the shorthand version of the romantic epistemology informing Emerson's notion of Nature. Poe had little intellectual affinity with either Emerson or Carlyle. Later in his life he referred to the literary circles of Boston as the "Frogpondians" ("Letter to Frederick W. Thomas"), and although he frequently reflected on contemporary British authors in his essays and reviews, he only mentioned Thomas Carlyle in passing. Elsewhere he called the philosopher's writing "obscure," and himself "an ass" (*Essays and Reviews* 461). Poe's dandies are self-created works of art in whom appearance and essence are one and the same. Through such characters, Poe proposed a proto-modernist notion of the self which, like the figure of dandy, would stay on the European and American literary scene for quite a long time.

2. The art of cooking and an ironic view of the soul

There is a character in two of Poe's tales under scrutiny here that both represents a spiritual entity and has some of the attributes of a dandy. The plots of "The Duc De L'Omelette" and "Bon-Bon" turn upon a pact with the devil. "His Grace" or "Baal-Zebub, Prince of the Fly" (144) receives the Duc in his resplendent underworld apartment, and the two of them engage in a game of cards. "His Majesty", the mysterious diabolic gentleman, who turns up in the little café in Rouen, enters into a lengthy conversation with Pierre Bon-Bon before snatching his soul. The devil is a comic figure⁴ in both tales, yet one that allows Poe to take another look at issues related to art and connoisseurship, intellectual endeavors,

essence and appearance. That the soul becomes, in “The Duc De L’Omelette,” the stake in a game of *rouge-et-noir* or, in “Bon-Bon,” the object of bargain, is an ironic commentary on the soul’s spiritual nature. The comic plot of the latter tale even suggests that the soul is edible. These, and the circumstance that both incidents involving the devil take place after a foiled dinner, lead us to another art form that is prominent in Poe’s dandy tales: the culinary.

The opening statement of “The Duc De L’Omelette” evokes the shock of frustration in existentially important activities: “Keats died of criticism . . . The Duc De L’Omelette perished of an ortolan” (143). Baptiste, his valet, made the mistake of serving the small bird, a rare delicacy, without a paper cover. Bon-Bon, the philosopher and *restaurateur*, botches a couple of dishes: he spoils *des oeufs à la Princesse* and overturns a stew (169). His blunder makes him excessively anxious, and thus vulnerable to the devil’s advances. The plight of Poe’s dandies foregrounds the extreme fragility of the artist, no matter if he invests in the art of poetry or in the art of life. Being a dandy, like writing poetry, requires full commitment and orderliness of execution. If elegance in clothing is a binding obligation for him, so are eating and cooking. As we have already seen, wearing elegant garments does not serve the purpose of covering and protecting the natural, naked body, but is constitutive of the self and identity. By the same logic, neither cooking, nor eating serve the purpose of nourishment. Rather, like clothing, they are stylized activities, means of creating the self through hard work, extreme discipline, and even self-denial.

Achieving and maintaining competence in dressing flawlessly, cooking masterfully, and eating like a gourmet requires orderliness and training. Becoming a dandy means adopting an identity that is dependent on, as James Eli Adams claims, “an aesthetic regimen, an elaborately articulated program of self-discipline” (2). For the Duc De L’Omelette, to have roasted ortolan for dinner is both a particularly high point in his daily routine and a painstakingly regulated ritual. The etiquette of preparing and serving the small songbird lifts out the act of eating from the realm of the natural and the instinctual. The ortolan is, like the dandy, an exotic creature, an artist and a work of art in the same time. “[T]he little winged wanderer, enamored, melting, indolent” is born in a golden cage “from its home in far Peru” to the Duc’s apartment in Paris (143). For a dandy and a gourmet like the Duc, killing, preparing, serving, and eating the bird requires a strict method that precludes disorder and contingency. While the exact source of Poe’s knowledge of how to roast an ortolan cannot be located, a book of zoological curiosities published in 1869 adequately summarizes the phases and rules of transforming this delicate songbird into a delicacy. The bird is fattened for days in a dark room. When it is “a handful” in size, it is drowned by plunging her head into a glass of brandy. The tiny carcass is carefully picked, then roasted in a paper bag soaked in olive oil. The ortolan thus prepared is served under a paper cover so that its scent and flavor should not evaporate (Timbs 175–77). By his adherence to the discipline of creating and consuming such a veritable work of art as roasted ortolan, the fastidious dandy places ascesis in the service of aesthetics.

That asceticism should be posited as the condition of creating aesthetic enjoyment looks like a paradox. The two, however, are hardly opposites. Ascesis, the “elaboration and stylization of an activity” is, according to Michel Foucault, a constitutive part of the “arts of existence” or “techniques of the self,” those rules of conduct by which men “seek to transform themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that

carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria” (10-11). A gourmet’s dinner represents a peak of pleasure, yet the established practices that bring forth this pleasure are rigorous and binding. The Duc De L’Omelette does not eat his victuals in order to feed his body, but transforms food into an essential means of crafting his self. The dandy is not a physical being but a masterfully wrought work of art that collapses if the integrity of the process of creation is compromised. When the dinner of roasted ortolan is spoiled, the Duc perishes.

While the death of the Duc De L’Omelette is caused by excessive perfectionism manifesting in fastidiousness, the fall of Pierre Bon-Bon is brought about by a similar perfectionism manifesting in vanity and gluttony. The tiny philosopher – only three feet tall – is the author of several delicious dishes as well as learned works in metaphysics: “His *patés à la fois* were beyond doubt immaculate; but what pen can do justice to his essays *sur la Nature* – his *thoughts sur l’Ame* – his observations *sur l’Esprit*?” (164). The eponymous hero of the tale “Bon-Bon” is equally interested in the pleasures of the palate and those of the soul.⁵ He is a gourmet and a cook, sports a rotund belly, and reads voluminous philosophical manuscripts (167, 170). When on a terrific night the devil pays him a visit, the *restaurateur* learns that the cultivated souls of the philosophers he admires have all been turned into artfully prepared dishes on the dinner table of hell. He also finds out that in order to enjoy a hearty and delicious meal, the devil does not wait for the souls to go stale after they are removed from their shell, the dead body. If “the souls are consigned [to hell] in the usual way,” he has them pickled, or else he purchases spirits “*vivente corpore*” (178, italics in the original). Those whose souls he procured in this latter way live on joyfully, never missing their spiritual component. Bon-Bon, the philosopher-gourmet, rushes to join the company of those who achieved the immortality of fame, and offers his soul to the devil in order to be prepared as “*soufflée*”, “*fricassée*”, “*ragoût*” or “*fricandeau*” (179). The comic revelation that the soul is not only palpable but also edible ironically subverts the Romantic notion of the soul as a spiritual entity. During “His Majesty’s” visit, Bon-Bon finds out that the soul is not even the prerequisite of an individual’s physical and intellectual performance. The devil has, in his wallet, the contract for the soul of that “clever fellow” Voltaire (179). “Is *he* not in possession of all his faculties, mental and corporeal?” (178, italics in the original), he queries the flabbergasted philosopher with mock indignation.

By representing the soul as food for the devil, Poe offers a slanted view of Christian theology as well. With his usual playfulness, he pays a tongue-in-cheek tribute to the Eucharist, turning upside down the idea of Christ’s body as spiritual nourishment for the faithful. But more importantly, by exploring cuisine – another area, besides clothing, that pertains to social refinement –, he directs attention to a new conception of the self as commodity. The cultivation of the self and soul is, like French cuisine, subordinated to strict rules, but ultimately subjected to the judgment of individual taste. In “Bon-Bon,” the souls that end up as tasty morsels on the devil’s dinner table are criticized as “pretty good,” “passable,” “exquisite,” stomach-turning, flavorless, or “a little rancid on account of the gall” (176-77). The phenomenon of dandyism rests on the idea of the self as a “thing” crafted into an artificial object of art, the worth of which is ultimately determined by the viewer or the consumer. The tale’s comic discourse conflating the idea of the soul as man’s spiritual essence with that of the soul as a dish is Poe’s ironic commentary on a cultural

ambiance in which intellectual accomplishment is subjected to the rules of consumption. Bon-Bon, the *restaurateur*, chef and philosopher, eagerly enters into a deal with the devil in order to gain fame and public recognition. His plight dramatizes the early nineteenth-century author's desperate wish to succeed, through professional accomplishment, in a literary market increasingly controlled by the rules of capitalist exchange instead of aesthetic principles.

3. The craft of writing and the market value of literary talent

The heroes of Poe's dandy tales are committed not only to sartorial elegance and high quality cuisine, but also excel in complex professional activities. Working hard with his pen and chef's ladle, Bon-Bon attains a respectable social position both as an author and as the owner of a restaurant in Rouen. With nerve and expertise in playing cards, the Duc De L'Omelette defeats the devil in a game of *rouge-et-noir*, and escapes the torments of hell. By assiduously pulling his own nose, then following it with determination, Robert Jones becomes a celebrated member of the high society of Fum-Fudge. The three dandies succeed in achieving social standing and status without relying on inherited privilege, and manage to recast the quotidian activities of clothing, cooking, eating, or playing cards as forms of art.

The careers of Poe's dandies are comic examples of a paradigm shift that occurred, both in Britain and in the United States, during the first decades of the nineteenth century. In this period, economic transformations "incited increasingly complicated and anxious efforts to claim new form of status and to construct new hierarchies of authority," that of the "professional man" (Adams 5, 6). Dandies represented, in the new phase of social competition, the self-made person who achieved, by his own creative efforts, public fame and recognition. Poe's dandy tales provide veritable blueprints of success. In addition to proficiency in clothing and cooking, their accomplishments include writing. The Duc De L'Omelette is "author of the 'Mazurkiad,' and Member of the Academy" (144), Pierre Bon-Bon is a renowned writer of metaphysical treatises (164), and Robert Jones, the hero of "Lionizing," has written a pamphlet on the science of "Nosology" (213). Through these endearingly funny characters Poe evoked a new type of authorial persona that dominated the literary world of the 1830s, that of the literary dandy.

Critics have identified among the authors parodied in *The Tales of the Folio Club* the British writers Thomas Moore, Edward Bulwer, and Benjamin Disraeli, the Americans John Neal, Nathaniel Parker Willis, and Edgar Allan Poe himself (see Hammond 26, 27, Benton). All of them displayed dandyish airs and attitudes in the early phase of their careers. The British authors who made their *début* during the 1820s capitalized on the joint appeal of their personal appeal and literary talent. The young Benjamin Disraeli and Edward Bulwer, for example, were not only accomplished writers but also generally regarded as dandies. The reason for the latter was not so much their dedication to sartorial elegance but the fact that the public imagination conflated their biographical person with their fictional personae (Allen 68). Their novels of *début*, Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826, 1827) and Bulwer's *Pelham* (1828), featured young heroes moving with ease in fashionable London society. Their American apprentice, the aspiring author and editor Nathaniel Parker Willis imbibed, in the 1820s, the basic skills of dandyism in the fashionable circles

of London (Baker 61-62), and returning home, spread them assiduously on the other side of the Atlantic.

"Beau" Brummel, the father of all dandies, was a commoner, yet he was able to rise to the status of the British Regent's favorite by his skill in defining fashion and embodying an ideal of elegance and wit set by himself. The literary dandies in Poe's *Tales of the Folio Club* are heroes who, by their personal appeal and professional expertise, challenge traditional social arrangements and aspire to status on the basis of their accomplishments. The Duc De L'Omelette, although just an upstart, challenges the monarch of Hell in grand style as if they were equals. First, he wishes to escape eternal damnation by means of a duel. But, as "his majesty does not fence" (146), they agree on a game of cards. The game of *rouge-et-noir* epitomizes the contest between the aristocracy of birth and privilege against the emerging arbiter of fashion and intellect: the tale captures the moment when status shifts from the former to the latter. Throughout the game, the Devil is "all confidence," the Duc is "all attention." The Duc thrives by means of intellectual agility, while the Devil resorts to the habitual mechanisms of power: "His Grace thought of his game. His Majesty did not think, he shuffled" (146). The saucy dandy, the representative of an emerging aristocracy of taste and competence, revokes old divisions of authority and status. He deals cards with a sure hand and plays with skill. He wins, and saves himself through intellectual discipline enhanced by professional competence. In "Lionizing," the transition of power from the old generation to the new is a little less smooth. When Robert Jones's father learns that his son's "chief end of existence" (217) is the cultivation of his nose and the study of "Nosology," he kicks his son out of the door to "follow his nose" (213).

While successfully rising in society, dandies subvert existing hierarchies and redefine the rules of fashion and connoisseurship. These new social upstarts succeed by their ability to impose their own style as a new standard of excellence. Robert Jones makes his *début* in the high circles of society not only by writing a scientific work on the nose, but also by displaying his own nose in front of the Duchess of Bless-my-Soul, the Marquis of So-and-So, and the Earl of This-and-That (213).⁶ Although an association of Robert Jones's "proboscis" with Tristram Shandy's minuscule nose in Laurence Sterne's novel readily offers itself, and scholars like Marie Bonaparte and John Arnold read sexual references into the tale (see Arnold 52), it is more likely that Poe applied the nose in regard to literary style (see Thomson 94-95). "Is it quite original?"... Has *no* copy been taken?" (214, italics in the original), an artist inquires when Robert Jones offers his nose, in exchange of a thousand pounds, as a model for a painting. The portrait of the nose is then sent, with compliments, to the wife of the Regent (214). It is relevant that Jones is defined by his nose the way dandies are identifiable by their styles, and originality is a requirement for both. However, fashions and dominant styles are subject to change, and the whim of the public may shift in a matter of seconds. Provoked to a duel by the jealous Elector of Bluddennuff, Robert Jones takes aim and shoots off the nose of his opponent. But alas, his triumph is short-lived, as the arbiters of taste in the city of Fum-Fudge rapidly shift their favor from the dandy sporting a protruding nose to the one who has no nose at all. Old Mr. Jones accurately explains the new situation to his son: "in hitting the Elector upon the nose you have overshot your mark. You have a fine nose, it is true; but then Bluddennuff has none. You are damned, and he has become the hero of the day" (217).

The slightly bitter outcome of “Lionizing” adequately summarizes the plight of the writer in antebellum America. The era of the self-made man was definitely not a favorable time for the self-made author. Those writers who had no personal means to lead a comfortable middle-class lifestyle depended on the emerging publishing industry for their subsistence. The absence of an international copyright law made the publication of original books by American authors difficult (Whalen 36), and the literary magazines, these vibrant products of the early nineteenth-century literary market, were still struggling with economic difficulties in the United States. “We are behind the age in a *very* important branch of literature . . .,” Poe complained in 1836. “Magazine writing,” he predicted, “in the end (not far distant), will be the *most* influential of all departments of Letters” (“Magazine Writing” 397-98, italics in the original). However, the periodical and commercial nature of the literary magazines rendered them extremely vulnerable to the changing demands of the reading public, and the success of the authors working for them was, to say the least, temporary and fleeting. The fate of Poe’s early dandy figures reflects the uncertainty of the literary market. Only one of them, the Duc De L’Omelette, is lucky enough to succeed in his contest with the devil; Bon-Bon and Robert Jones fail pitifully after their brief moment of success. It is very likely that the battered careers of the dandies in the *Tales of the Folio Club* point to Poe’s own resentment at his vain struggle, during the early 1830s, to make a living as an author and editor. When he decided upon a literary career, Poe set out for a lifelong struggle to make himself known in the literary circles of Baltimore, Richmond, Philadelphia and New York, and establish his prestige as an author and critic. By inspiration and hard work, he was able to churn out poetry, prose fiction and criticism at a remarkable pace, giving evidence of his expertise. However, his efforts were close to futile at a time when the literary market was not yet prepared to accommodate and support such professionalism. In his dandy tales, Poe holds a mirror to the increasingly commercialized literary scene of his time. If clothing and cooking are elevated to the status of art, then writing becomes, through an act of ironic inversion, merely a craft.

Concluding remarks

Poe’s fascination with the dandy in the early phase of his career was almost inevitable. The relatively new phenomenon of dandyism inspired him to explore, in the *Tales of the Folio Club*, the artificial, constructed nature of the self, and guided him towards the invention of his own authorial persona. The dandies of his early tales are individuals with an excess of creativity, concerned equally with sartorial, culinary, and intellectual elegance. They painstakingly bring into being and display crafted images of themselves in front of a real or imagined audiences and, by commanding some singular skills, they manage to carve out a niche for themselves in the hierarchical society of their time. The emergence of the dandy was coeval with the democratization and commodification of literature and with Poe’s own *début* as a writer for the literary magazines of Philadelphia, Baltimore and Richmond. There is an eerie correspondence between the growing public appeal of the dandy and the spreading of the popular literary magazines that writers, Poe among them, depended on for publication and income. Both the dandy and the magazines relied on fashion for their existence, even if they were at the same time engaged in the creation of fashion. Their visibility rested on their ability to display uniqueness and distinctiveness,

qualities which ensured the continuity of their presence on the public scene. Poe's dandies are artists who struggle, yet hardly ever thrive in an ambiance that demands talent and originality. Those who admire them – highly positioned patrons, acquaintances, or readers – seldom reward their efforts adequately. The trajectory of their rise – and, more often, of their fall – dramatizes the difficult situation of the professional author in the United States during the antebellum decades.

Notes

¹ All references to the texts of the tales discussed in this essay are to the definitive versions published in the volume Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales* (New York: The Library of America, 1984).

² The tales were first published under the titles "The Duke De L'Omelette" (*Philadelphia Saturday Courier*, March 3, 1832), "The Bargain Lost" (*Philadelphia Saturday Courier*, December 1, 1832), and "Lion-izing. A Tale" (*Southern Literary Messenger*, May 1835). Poe changed the titles, and also rewrote and re-edited the texts in subsequent editions. My essay refers to the titles as they appear in *Poetry and Tales*.

³ Carlyle owed the first publication in book form of *Satror Resartus* to Ralph Waldo Emerson, who arranged the first publication in book form in Boston by publisher James Munroe in 1836 (Tarr 415).

⁴ Poe's deployment of the character of the devil conformed to a tradition sufficiently well established in the British magazines. The character's immediate model must have been the devil featured in Edward Bulwer's series of articles published between 1831 and 1832 in the *New Monthly Magazine*, "Asmodeus at Large," a series of witty dialogues on themes that interested Bulwer (Allen 27). Asmodeus, the editorial persona's conversation partner, is a devil trapped in a jar.

⁵ Poe is indebted for the idea of the "culinary philosopher" to Isaac Disraeli, father of Benjamin Disraeli, who in Volume 2 of his monumental collection of essays *Curiosities of Literature* (1793) playfully conflated the art of cooking with that of thinking. The chapter entitled "Ancient Cookery and Cooks" provides an introduction to the metaphysics of cookery. "[T]he ancients, indeed," explains Disraeli, "appear to have raised the culinary art into a science, and dignified cooks into professors" (434).

⁶ The satire of the tale is directed to Nathaniel Parker Willis who, in 1831, frequented the dinner parties of Lady Blessington, providing detailed commentaries on London high society in the *New York Mirror*. On his return to the United States and embarking on a career as a writer, editor and public celebrity, his critics dubbed him "an empty suit of clothes" (Tomc 110-11, 104).

Bibliography

- Adams, James Eli. *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1995. Print.
- Allen, Michael. *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition*. New York: Oxford UP, 1969. Print.
- Arnold, John. "Poe's 'Lionizing': The Wound and the Bawdy." *Literature and Psychology* 17 (1967): 52–54. Print.
- Baker, Thomas N. *Sentiment and Celebrity: Nathaniel Parker Willis and the Trials of Literary Fame*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

- Benton, Thomas Hart. "The Works of N. P. Willis as a Catalyst of Poe's Criticism." *American Literature* 39.3 (Nov. 1967): 315–24. Print.
- Carlyle, Thomas. *Sartor Resartus*. 1836. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987. Print.
- Disraeli, Isaac. *Curiosities of Literature*. Vol. 2. 1793. Cambridge, Riverside, 1864. Print.
- Feldman, Jessica R. *Gender on the Divide: The Dandy in Modernist Literature*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1993. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Uses of Pleasure*. Vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Vintage, 1990. Print.
- Hammond, Alexander. "A Reconstruction of Poe's 1833 *Tales of the Folio Club*, Preliminary Notes." *Poe Studies* 5.2 (Dec. 1972): 25–32. Print.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *Essays and Reviews*. New York: The Library of America, 1984. Print.
- . "Letter to Frederick W. Thomas, February 14, 1849." The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore. Web. 12 June 2011.
- . "Magazine Writing. – Peter Snook." *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*. Vol. 4. Ed. Rufus Wilmot Griswold. New York: Redfield, 1856. 397–408. Print.
- . *Poetry and Tales*. New York: The Library of America, 1984. Print.
- Quinn, Arthur Hobson. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. New York: Appleton, 1941. Print.
- Stanton, Domna C. *The Aristocrat as Art: A Study of the Honnête Homme and the Dandy in Seventeenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1980. Print.
- Tarr, Rodger R. "Sartor Resartus: Composition and Publication." *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*. Ed. Mark Cumming. Madison, NJ: Farleigh, 2004. 413–15. Print.
- Thompson, G. R. "On the Nose – Further Speculations on the Sources and Meaning of Poe's 'Lionizing.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 6 (1968): 94–97. Print.
- Timbs, John. *Eccentricities of Animal Creation*. London: Seeley, 1869. Print.
- Tomc, Sandra. "Restyling an Old World: Nathaniel Parker Willis and Metropolitan Fashion in Antebellum United States." *Representations* 85.1 (Winter 2004): 98–124. Print.
- Whalen, Terence. *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999. Print.

Address:

University of Pécs

Faculty of Humanities

Institute of English Studies

H-7624 Pécs

Ifjáság útja 6

Hungary

voo.gabriella@pte.hu