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THE TALES OF THE FOLIO CLUB AND THE VOCATION OF EDGAR ALLAN POE AS HUMORIST

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On 2 September 1836, Edgar Allan Poe submitted to the Philadelphia editor Harrison Hall the plan of a work which never saw the light of day:

> At different times there has appeared in the Messenger a series of Tales, by myself—in all seventeen. They are of a bizarre and generally whimsical character, and were originally written to illustrate a large work "On the Imaginative Faculties." I have prepared them for republication, in book form, in the following manner. I imagine a company of seventeen persons who call themselves the Folio Club. They meet once a month at the house of one of the members, and, at a late dinner, each member reads aloud a short prose tale of his own composition. The votes are taken in regard to the merits of each tale. The author of the worst tale, for the month, forfeits the dinner and wine at the next meeting. The author of the best text is President at the next meeting. The seventeen tales which appeared in the *Messenger* are supposed to be narrated by the seventeen members at one of these monthly meetings. As soon as each tale is read—the other sixteen members criticize it in turn—and these criticisms are intended as a burlesque upon criticism generally.[1]

It was the last time that Poe would try to publish a work that had long been close to his heart. On 4 May 1833, he had proposed to Joseph T. and Edwin Buckingham that they publish in the *New England Magazine* one of the eleven tales ("Epimanes") that "the eleven members of a literary club were supposed to read at table..." (*Letters*, 1: 53). In October 1833, the publication of the volume was announced in the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*.[2] In November 1834 the manuscript was in the hands of the illustrious Philadelphia publishers, Carey and Lea, and, much later, after their refusal, White, the proprietor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, agreed to print this anthology if

Carey and Lea were willing to bestow the prestige of their name (*Letters*, 1: 54, 74).

Thus the project of September 1836 is not a premature "replastering" of independent texts artificially united in a unique work, but a perfected, coherent plan in which the aim is essentially satiric. Several times, in fact, Poe explicitly declares his satiric intentions and the introduction which prefaces the work confirms his plan.[3] The members of this club are "as ill-looking as they are stupid" and their intention seemingly "to abolish Literature."

This little known text was seriously neglected by researchers disinclined to recognize the comic value of the works of Poe and yet more seriously by the "psychological" critics or psychoanalysts who appeared to ignore the parodic intention of many of Poe's tales or to consider that the literary intention changed nothing of the fundamental structure revealed by the scientific point of view. But, one hopes to demonstrate here, these structures—particularly the situations—are dictated by the imperatives of the parody and the intervention of the creative spirit cannot be measured in the narrow domain where the parodic transposition occurs.

As James Southall Wilson—who was the first to emphasize this parodic intention—remarked, many of the commentaries about the comedy of Poe which ignore, deliberately or not, the plans of the Folio Club, become—unwittingly—amusing.[4] The great misunderstanding of Poe's intentions by his contemporaries (perpetuated by the indifference of Americans and the French school of psychoanalytic critics toward Poe's comic works) eventually culminated in Edward H. Davidson's declararation that the sources and the objects of the satire of Poe show us nothing of the spirit of Poe himself. We have, on the contrary, everything to learn about Poe by unmasking the victims of this twenty-four-year-old poet forced to try prose in order to survive.

To do so we should have a complete list of the tales of the Folio Club, but we do not. It will become apparent that on one hand the work entitled *The Tales of the Folio Club* represented a manifest aesthetic of considerable importance in the literary history of the United States, while on the other hand the criticism, though brilliant, was annihilated by attempts to defend the "humor" of Poe. Poe was never a humorist in the sense of Sterne—his admired master—and less still in the sense of Thackeray or Dickens.[5] It is constructive to compare the Folio Club neither to *Tristram Shandy* nor to the *Book of Snobs* but rather to the *Dunciad*. Because the same passion animated Pope and Poe, the stupid persons who gathered round the author of the new

throne of Dullness were, in the nineteenth century, the British novelists and their unimaginative American imitators.

It is important, in order that we read correctly the comic tales of Poe and to illuminate the entire genesis of the preceding work, to seize the key of the jest by identifying the supposed author of each of the tales among the members of the club and the work that was ridiculed in the ironic pastiches which comprise *The Tales of the Folio Club*. To endeavor to comprehend the comic vein of Poe without this preliminary work would be equivalent to reading the *Dunciad* ignorant of the name Colley Cibber or the comment "Bentley sleeps in port" without knowing anything of Bentley.

Leon Lemmonier alone [in citing analogues] was engaged in the right way in singling out two forgotten tales by Bulwer-Lytton to whose celebrity, in the 1830's, nothing comparable can be found.[6] But he did not trace the precise parallels for each of the tales and his list of pieces included in the series of the Folio Club is rather inconclusive.

Scholars generally agree that the five tales submitted to the competition sponsored by the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* should be part of this list. Poe added, as I have attempted to indicate elsewhere, "On Diddling Considered an Exact Science," despite its belated publication.[7] They also agree that "Siope" ("Silence—A Fable") belongs to the manuscript of the Folio Club, "Epimanes" ["Four Beasts in One; The Homocameleopard" submitted by Poe to the *New England Magazine* in 1833], "MS. Found in a Bottle," which won the prize in a *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* contest, "Lionizing" (in its first form), which Poe mentioned in an 1835 letter to White. "Berenice," "Morella," "King Pest," "Shadow" and "Mystification" are also generally accepted on grounds of their dates of publication and on the basis of internal proofs.[8]

To analyze the "humor" of these tales one must look for the preferences and the methods of the young Poe in order to censure a gross misinterpretation. Each piece, presumably the work of one of the members of the club, is written "in the manner of" and should be read as a pastiche—exaggerated to the point of ridicule—of tastes and mannerisms of certain of Poe's contemporaries.

The most characteristic example is "King Pest," wherein the macabre grotesque that was so repugnant to Robert Louis Stevenson is no more than the powerful weapon of the satire.[9] Poe made, in effect, a comparison to one of the most celebrated episodes of the novel of Disraeli, *Vivian Grey*, which achieved an unheard-of success in the United States. In Ch. 6, Vivian Grey and his faithful servant Essper

George, lost in the Bavarian forest, evoke the traditional legend of the "Wild Hunter." It is midnight. After the terrifying account of Essper George, which revived the ancestral myth, the two cavaliers reach the postern of an enormous castle whence come shouts and songs. There they encounter eight strange individuals, each of whom has the name of a wine of the Rhine, gather round the Grand Duke of Johannisberg, their host. After many prodigious libations, under a grand crystal chandelier, the grand duke and his peers reassemble in this hall to render their cult to the *nare* of the Rhine wines and to entreat Vivian to drink three liters of champagne in a luxurious cup made from elk horn, in hommage to their *Fairy King*, the wine. Upon his refusal and discourse on the virtues of abstinence, they cry "treason," and attempt to drown him in a cask of exquisite Moselle wine. Vivian was saved by his valor and the ingenuity of Essper George.

One is in the right to question what possessed Disraeli to introduce this extravagant fantasy into the body of a narrative where the episode is poorly integrated. First, Disraeli saw a new occasion to indulge his practice of word-painting the luxurious lists and sumptuous scenes in which he took pleasure: the halls, the colors, the chandelier, the glasses and carved cups of the castle are described with a profusion of marvellous detail. He does not, however, omit to weave into these extravagances a moral: To the thread of the monstrous drinker, each of the hosts saw the bestial trait that he defined encroach little by little upon his physical and moral personality. Under the influence of wine, the Bavarians were made elephant, dog, ass or wild boar. No romance of this day dared give itself over to fantasy without interspersing didactism, albeit extravagant didactism here, in regard to the grotesque. An anonymous critic in the *New Monthly Magazine* warmly approved the grotesque in the Palace of Wines episode, under the pretext that this grotesque is "classic" in that it served "a purpose."[10] If we could not prove formally that Poe had consulted this article, one knows nevertheless that the *New Monthly Magazine* was among his regular readings and that the complacent didactism of this journal irritated him. In the first version of "Lionizing"—dating from the same period as "King Pest"—he turned in derision against the alleged seriousness of the critics from the *New Monthly* who frowned upon the physiological talents of Thomas Smith, author of a treatise on nosology. Poe therefore apprehended that the incongruity of the presence of a moral lesson in an episode of unbridled fantasy had no point of escape, and he had little intention of transposing the royalty of the divinity within the fairy domain group to that of the plague to mask Disraeli's didactic pretensions.

This conjecture is reinforced by the subtitle in the September 1835 *Southern Literary Messenger* version: "A Tale Containing an Allegory—By ——." James S. Wilson suggested that Poe intended to replace the dash by the name Ben Disraeli (p. 218). But he omitted commenting upon the precise sense that Poe always gave to the word "allegory": that of moral or moralistic fable. Thus, when one recalls that this tale is a work by a member of the Folio Club—a stupid admirer of the moralistic art of Disraeli—it appears that "King Pest" is not the work of a novice prose writer who imitated a fashionable novel but a parodic essay about the exaggerations and the artifices in this novel. As soon as the new tale appeared, it justified a most attentive examination of the parallelisms with the Disraelian episode, for each deformation revealed not only the precocious manner of Poe but the artistic criteria by means of which he turned derisively against the most celebrated among British novelists.

Two sailors on watch—Legs and Tarpaulin—are driven back toward the borders of the plague-stricken sector of a great city, and to a hovel where they are queued in the English style. They overcome the barriers and find before them a "great edifice" whence arise clamors and cries. They knock at the door—in a style less fitting than that of Essper George—and are admitted to the presence of a strange company resembling that in *Vivian Grey*. This group is also organized in a hierarchical council and thus seats the newcomers at a table laden with wines, under a baroque chandelier. Each member of the odd group, like the personages of Disraeli, possesses an inordinately large physical characteristic (face, ears, nose) which defines his or her bestial personality. For an insult similar to the one committed by Vivian Grey—refusing to pay homage to a gallon of *grande ordinaire* the local divinity—Legs and Tarpaulin are condemned to be drowned in a barrel of October beer. Their escape shares common points with the set-to between Vivian Grey and the German barons. The basic situation is thus manifestly borrowed from *Vivian Grey*, but one should look to the transposition for the particular intention of Poe. We note above all the irony of the subtitle—sly irony, too sly to be grasped by everyone—as James K. Paulding was to remark. There is not, in effect, the least trace of moral lesson or allegory in "King Pest" except in the sarcastic mode, the absolute gratuity of the farce. But we attach chiefly to the minute transposition of intonation: the master-valet pair, an association banalized by two centuries of picaresque literature, is vulgarised by the traits of Poe's two slightly drunk sailors. The conventional Germanic legend of the *Wild Huntsman* devouring youngsters was actualized in the presence of the plague which had left

to Poe's Baltimore recent memories of its ravages; the horror thus lost its character of exotic distraction. The Bavarian castle of legend, where the accumulation of splendid riches was paramount, became the sordid shop of a mortician. The bottles of fine wine were transformed into barrels of vile liquor, the finely chiselled cups into half skulls, the elk horn into a vulgar gourd, the casks of Moselle into crude barrels of October beer, and the sparkling chandelier into a disjointed skeleton. Poe effected the systematic vulgarisation of the situation and the decor of Disraeli, as well as the refined language of the novel: the bouquet (*nare*) of the fine wines—exotic word of the snobism in British romances—becomes the prosaic and popular "nose," which is in turn singularly fantasized into comic takeoffs related to Roman, or aristocratic, noses. In short, the enchanting perfumes are no longer anything other than vulgar odors and the homage that Disraeli rendered to the enchantments of luscious wines is addressed now to the disproportionate *proboscis* of the triumphant plague.

Thus, in vulgarizing the Disraelian episode, although he carefully conserved the structure,[11] Poe attained a double goal: first, the grotesque lost its exotic character and quit the forests of legend in order to insinuate itself in the quotidian (and, he made note, in the quotidian life of London snobs, because the river which flowed through the city of "King Pest" was called la Tamise); second, a certain snobism of the terror disappeared, dispelled in the grotesque parody that finally explained the mysterious citation placed in the epigraph of the first version of the tale:

> *The Gods do bear and allow in kings*
> *The things that they abhor in rascal routes.*
> (Mabbott, *Works*, 2: 240)

"King Pest" therefore now appears as a triple protestation conducted against the art of the English novel as represented by Disraeli: at the first level is the parodic objective, the affirmation of the legitimacy of the pure grotesque and the denunciation of the incongruity of Disraeli's justification of an "allegory" artificially introduced into the web of the narrative. Such a lesson echoes in the antididactic declarations of Poe's "Letter to B__." At the second level, the parodic aim derides conventional use of traditional themes in German fantasy. Poe's protestation that terror came not "from Germany, but from the soul," has apparently more relevance. Finally, at a third level, the parodic vulgarisation brings proof that, far from aping the elegances and the conventions of the post-romantic tradition, Poe waxed indignant against

the romantic stereotype (such as it appeared in the novels then in vogue—those of Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, Lady Morgan and Ainsworth[12]) and above all against the artificial and unjustified use of fantastic convention: diabolical medieval legends, gothic and fog-enshrouded German castles, somber country squires and cunning revellers in the secret halls of phantasmic residences.

Thus we may read anew Poe's explanatory remark, according to which the Folio Club "was written originally in order to illustrate a work of importance on the imaginative faculties." The first tale illustrates the defect of creative imagination and systemization of conventional archetypes in the contemporary British novelists and their emulators who, assembled as clubs in the mode of the eighteenth century (Poe probably evoked the spirit of the *Tuesday Club* of Baltimore, which he had known through William Gwynn), perpetuated the conventions of a dead literature. The comic Poesque already appeared therefore like the favorite arm of a literary critic who did not have the leisure to publish the manifestos in which he would contradict more clearly Willis, Fay, Mattson or Stone, who foolishly aped the pseudo-distinction and the mannerisms of British fiction-writers.

Among the most established conventions of the British novel, the narrative of a fictive voyage enjoyed an incomparable vogue under the illustrious impulsion of Swift and of Defoe. But the imitators of Gulliver and of Robinson did not devote themselves to the exterior appearance of the narrative, did not attempt scarcely anything other than the plausible presentation of an extraordinary series of adventures with the sole concern, often ineffacacious, to convince audiences of the veracity in their narratives. They had, naturally, among the members of the Folio Club, an American imitator: Solomon Seadrift, presumed author of "MS. Found in a Bottle."[13] Seadrift appeared to owe his name to two equally celebrated personages in the United States: Sir Edward Seaward, author of *Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative* and Captain Adam Seaborn, author of *Symzonia.*[14] These two immensely popular works were both imaginary narratives. The narrative of Seaward, a gigantic affair of mystification in three volumes, edited by Miss Jane Porter, the English novelist, and the utopia of Seaborn (probable pseudonym of John Cleve Symmes) described the fictive voyage of the *Explorer* into the depths of the earth. But, despite their improbabilities, the two works were believed not only by a credulous public but by numerous serious and knowledgeable critics as well. The findings of a critic published in the *London Quarterly Review* expose the mystification.[15] Likewise we must attend the communications of

Reynolds, Poe's friend and old disciple of Symmes, in order to counter Symmes's theories about the structure of the earth. Poe knew the two works well, and he realized their fictive character and had not failed to criticize the multiple improbabilities in the narrative and the gratuity in the mystification. Therefore "MS. Found"—which is simultaneously founded upon the narrative of Seaward and upon the theories exposed in Symzonia (as in the case of the *Explorer*, the bottle in Poe's tale, thrown into the sea on a voyage to the center of the earth transmitted the message of shipwreck to the world)—appears now like an ironic commentary upon the imperfections of narratives of imaginary voyages. If, at first reading, "MS. Found" perhaps appears as a realistic narrative of extraodinary events, certain contemporaries had to be used up by means of a scientific theory (Symmes's), seriously valued by Congress,[16] which upon more sustained attention soon disclosed the whimsical character habitual in Poe's narratives of voyages of certain events.

One forgets too often that the narrator in the tale is gifted with an acute sense of observation and an "arid scientific spirit." Adept of "physical philosophy" he had "the habit of referring occurrences, even the least susceptible of such reference, to the principles of that science." After this presentation, one expects a scientific exposition of the voyage with appropriate technical commentaries and logical explanations.

If the precision with which the narrator described the cargo-hold of the ship seems to be plausible, then the shipwreck seems above all to confirm his character, and if this rigor of detail (all of the provisions stocked on board really come from the Lacquedive Islands—the list is found, moreover, in the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*—) appears to parallel the narratives of fictive voyages like that edited by Miss Porter, some astonishing incidents come ere long to change radically the tone in this tale.

The gigantic swell that carries the narrator and the old Swede to the domain of the albatross, where the air was rarefied, quickly makes us skeptical. Yet, the "scientific" narrator hardly appears astonished. But when he tells us without winking the amazing number of trapezian graces which performed his tranship, we finally refuse to play the game: the episode is too comic. With this burlesque episode, Poe revealed his parodic intentions: What appeared an exercise of style in the manner of Defoe, of Swift, or of Miss Porter becomes then, by the exaggeration of details, by the constant repitition of the words "horror" or "horrible," a bantering parody of pseudo-realistic improbabilities of contemporary British storytellers. Calling upon the "scientific" theories of Symmes

permitted him to explicate "logically" the final return of the manuscript after a voyage to the center of the earth.

Thus this tale that had appeared as a tour de force in the manner of Miss Porter and of Symmes furthermore betrayed in reality a critical intention that Poe revealed in his sly manner: the "MS. Found" was to be the first of the "Tales of the Folio Club" at the time of their publication in volume form. It therefore immediately followed the introduction, which ended with these words: "Here Mr. Snap, having pushed the bottle, produced a M.S. [and read as follows]." This wordplay was not able to escape the narrator in the "Prologue," come to give the key to Poe's intentions: He proceeded, in effect, to suggest that the manuscript of Solomon Seadrift had been found after all in a bottle of wine upon the table; that is to say the tale was not a work of pure imagination (Mabbott, *Works* 2: 205-206).

"MS. Found" should therefore be considered as an ironic pastiche: weary of the improbabilities of British storytellers, Poe there affirmed the doctrine that he made his own: that of verisimilitude acquired through patient work of documentation by the artist. But he also affirmed (there) in the ironic mode the poverty of imagination of his predecessors and announced the renewal of the narrative of the voyage which became with *Pym* the support of a symbolic message.

We are far from the unconscious fascinations of the chasm described by the psychologists who ignored all of Symmes and—let it be said—Mercator. But, once again this circumstance does not nullify the humor. Poe's intention is manifestly critical. His veritable subject is the exercise of the creative imagination, first stage of a reflection upon the writing which nourished his entire oeuvre and culminated in the vast metaphor of *Eureka*.

It is this reflection that appeared to underly "Loss of Breath," the most decried of Poe's grotesque tales and the playground of the psychoanalytic critics. Without making light of what these critics have supplied us about this tale, it seems imperative to place in relief the other aspect of the piece, the level at which Poe fashioned one of the most convincing protestations against the gratuity of the tales of horror which littered the pages of the British periodicals, notably *Blackwood's*. It does not suffice to talk of jest at the expense of popular genre without further analysis of what was parodied and to pass the test of relative strictures, as did Marie Bonaparte (373-410). For these strictures do not appertain to Poe but to the same tale which he made the object of the satire. I do not know if psychoanalysis will confirm that the linking of certain situations (impotence in "Loss of Breath") with others is also relevatory of the direct creation of the situations

(this was naturally the function of diurnal rest), but I fear that in "Loss of Breath" it was grave negligence to neglect "The Buried Alive" and "Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician," where all of the situations which were made the object of the artist's derision in "Loss of Breath" appeared.[17]

It is not a question here of vague conjecture: Poe himself subsequently, in "How to Write a Blackwood Article," cited these tales of *Blackwood's* as examples of typical marketable fiction in the imaginary conversation between Psyche Zenobia and the editor-in-chief of a sensational journal (quite evidently *Blackwood's*). One knows also that Poe described "Loss of Breath" in the following terms: "'Lionizing' and 'Loss of Breath' were satires properly speaking—at least so meant—the one of the rage for Lions...—the other of the extravagancies of Blackwood" (*Letters*, 1: 84). It is therefore legitimate to search the pages of *Blackwood's* —with which he was familiar—for basic elements and structures of Poe's tales. One will find there, without difficulty, the same type of passage that he cited.

The basic situation (the apparent death of a being who survives) itself was furnished to him by "The Buried Alive," published 21 October 1821 in *Blackwood's*, and he found in "Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician," published nine years later, just before "Loss of Breath," many examples of loss of respiration by a malady, who risked thus to be buried "before the breath was out of his body."[18] Poe observed the simple use of this pathological trait in dramatic conclusions. The transposition of an excessive situation onto the comic plan is a traditional element of satire. But the great aim of Poe is a jocular denunciation of the pusillanimity and awkwardness of the tales of horror of *Blackwood's* .

In "The Buried Alive" the anonynmous author accumulated, in disorder, the horrible details (like the hissing sound rising toward the assault of a *faux cadavre*) in a tone which has as its objective the creation of an altogether gratuitous sentiment of horror (p. 263). The hero is presumed dead, buried alive, disinterred and taken to the hospital in order to be dissected. Under the scalpel of the professor and the effects of a galvanic battery, he abruptly stands straight up and an hour later he is walking again. All's well that ends well: The timorous storyteller did not dare to go to the extremity of the horror that he created. Poe caught the exact counterbalance of each of these incidents. The tone of farcical witticism that he adopted in order to describe the multiple avatars of his hero was already in itself an ironic commentary on the ponderous pseudo-realistic descriptions of the Scottish storytellers. But in putting his hero to death—killed by the same

galvanic battery that saved the personage of the Scottish tale—he exactly inverted the original tale and thus mocked the pusillanimity in addition to the maladroitness of the storyteller who, having pointlessly accumulated the most horrible details, brusquely dispelled the effects of horror by a happy and perfectly artificial conclusion. Thus "Loss of Breath," seen from this angle, is not only an argument in favor of the legitimacy of the sentiment of terror but an ironic commentary (by dint of the slant in the pastiche) upon the pseudo-realistic and pseudo-scientific narrative methods of the Scottish school to which one connects the tale a little too easily.

Therefore it appears that ultimately the central subject of the "Tales of the Folio Club" is the creative imagination itself and that the comic Poesque is not the arm of the critic, the arm that he had used at leisure in the sarcastic reviews of contemporary novels: Fay's *Norman Leslie*, Stone's *Ups and Downs*, Mattson's *Paul Ulric*. In the "Tales of the Folio Club," Poe focused the critical method which made him a celebrity and affirmed by diverse means his essential classicism. In effect, when one returns to the source of each of these tales, one discovers the same uniform technique of the ironic pastiche.

When one compares it to "The Metempsychosis," a tale published in *Blackwood's*, one discovers that "Metzengerstein" becomes a clear-cut exercise of style in ironic imitation of the multiple tales of German inspiration which rest upon the themes of this philosophy that Poe judged "absurd." The "Duc de l'Omelette" is an obvious satire on the linguistic, vestimentary and gastronomic affectations of Nathaniel P. Willis, the American dandy who aped the extravagances of the fashionable novelists. "A Tale of Jerusalem" is—one knows it—an adroit parody of Horace Smith's *Zilla, A Tale of the Holy City* (Wilson, p. 218). "The Bargain Lost"—probably based on the unfruitful conduct of Maturin's Melmoth, who can not inveigle anyone into taking his place as the devil's victim[19]—is a virulent satire on ancient philosophers and German metaphysicians. "On Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences" adroitly parodies the intentions of Yankee writers—John Neal and Thomas Ward—whose heroes—the hawker Yankee and the crook Sam Patch—tended to conform to a popular type in the creation of which the imagination did not have much of a role (Richard, 93-109). James S. Wilson (p. 215) has shown that "Siope," often considered as the only transcendentalist work by Poe, was a very clever pastiche of the style of Bulwer-Lytton's "Monos and Daimonos" and probably of Coleridge in "The Wanderings of Cain." "Lionizing" is another emphatic satiric parody of a lame *jeu d'esprit* by Bulwer entitled "Too Handsome for Anything," and

"Epimanes" contained coded satires of the Jacksonian political milieu—as did, later, "The Man That Was Used Up." Finally, Clark Griffith has convincingly analyzed the sly satiric current that animates "Ligeia."[20]

In the opening of this study it appeared impossible to speak of Poesque humor. The comic of Poe is engaging. A voluble American, in pursuit of English modes, the twenty-six-year-old poet looked to affirm the originality of his artistic vocation. His manifesto—already satiric—"Letter to B__" passed relatively unnoticed, and it did not have the means to express his discord with the prevalent conventions that he unburdened in the columns of the *Southern Literary Messenger.* Therefore he used the arm of parody—often with a certain maladroitness—in order to protest the decadent Romanticism and the didactism of British fiction, the deficiency of creative imagination of the Yankee imitators and the verbal obscurities of a nascent Transcendentalism. Doing this, he imposed the discipline of the ironic pastiche and learned to measure the most delicate effects, the words and phrases which managed to tip the serious into the comic. If the present century can hardly appreciate this artful handling of words and themes, and if the times hardly permit the perceiving of the line separating [Poe] from those whom he mocked, it is not a grievance to be levelled at Poe but instead toward an epoch that had placed at its literary pinnacle Lady Morgan, Disraeli, Bulwer Lytton or John Neal—whose artifices Poe was the first to denounce. He was not the mechanical and ponderous humorist that some modern critics reject, but already the exacting critic, the master artist of his effects, and the epitome of the obscure patience of the genius who denounced by his work the decline of the creative imagination.

NOTES

*Thanks to Minard of Paris, who published the original version of this essay, in French, in *Configuration Critique de Edgar Allan Poe,* 1969, for permission to use Richard's study. Bracketed notes supplement the work of the late Professor Richard. The translation is not literal, but it in no way alters Richard's intents. References to Poe's works are also revised to cite editions that supersede Harrison's 1902 texts.

[1]*The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe,* ed. John Ward Ostrom (New York, 1969), 1: 103-104.

[2]John C. French, "Poe and the Baltimore Saturday Visiter," *MLN,* 33 (1918), 262.

[3]*Letters*, 1: 84. See also *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1978), 2: 200-207.

[4]James S. Wilson, "The Devil was in It," *American Mercury*, 24 (1931), 217; Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), pp. 138-139.

[5]Stephen Mooney, "The Comic in Poe's Fiction," *AL*, 33 (1962), 433-441; cf. Poe's review of Longfellow's *Hyperion*, in *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, ed. G. R. Thompson (New York, 1984)--Library of America--p. 670. Is it not characteristic that, in his accounts of the works of Boz, Poe never discussed—or perceived—the humor and that he cited as "ideal" passages (in the sense of "representing an idea") those scenes where humor is absent. [Richard's observation, we should remember, includes nothing in regard to Poe's undoubted familiarity with Dickens's grotesque endeavors, such as "The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton" or "The Baron of Grogzwig."]

[6]"La Vocation Fantastique d'Edgar Allan Poe" in Edgar Poe, *Histoires Grotesques et Serieuses...suivies de Derniers Contes*, Paris: 1950, pp. 135-154.

[7]"Metzengerstein," "The Duc de l'Omelette," "A Tale of Jerusalem," "A Decided Loss," "The Lost Bargain." I will cite these tales in their first versions, wherein the parodic intention is clearest. "Poe and the Yankee Hero: an Interpretation of '[On] Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences,'" *MissQ* (1968), 93-109. [See also Benjamin F. Fisher, "Poe's 'Metzengerstein': Not a Hoax," *AL*, 42 (1971), 487-494; and *The Very Spirit of Cordiality: The Literary Uses of Alcohol and Alcoholism in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 1-12; G. R. Thompson, *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (Madison, Wis., 1973), Ch. 3; Alexander Hammond, "A Reconstruction of Poe's 1833 'Tales of the Folio Club': Preliminary Notes," *PoeS*, 5 (1972), 25-32; and "Edgar Allan Poe's 'Tales of the Folio Club': The Evolution of a Lost Book," *Poe at Work: Seven Textual Studies*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 13-43.]

[8]Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe, A Critical Biography* (New York, 1941), p. 746. William Bittner, *Poe, A Biograpy*, 1962, p. 289. James S. Wilson, "The Devil was in It," *op. cit.* Thomas O. Mabbott, "On Poe's Tales of the Folio Club," *SR*, 36 (1928), 171-176. [See also Fisher's "The Power of Words in Poe's 'Silence'," *Poe at Work*, pp. 56-72; and "To 'The Assignation' from 'The Visionary' and Poe's Decade of Revising," *LC*, 39 (1973), 89-105; 40 (1976), 121-151; Hammond, "Poe's 'Lionizing' and the Design of 'Tales of the Folio Club'," *ESQ*, n.s.

18 (1972), 154-165—which is supplemented by Fisher's opinion that "King Pest" might just as well served as the concluding piece of the Folio-Club scheme: *The Very Spirit of Cordiality*, pp. 9-10; and his comments (pp. 5-7, 19-32) on "MS. Found" as part of that same work. Most recent scholars do not include "Berenice," "Morella," or "Mystification" as Folio-Club tales, although "Shadow" is numbered among them by Hammond and Fisher, as well as by Thompson in *Poe's Fiction*, pp. 168-169.]

[9]"He who could write 'King Pest' is no longer human," in "The Works of Edgar Allan Poe," *The Academy*, 2 January 1875, p. 1.

[10]Ruth L. Hudson, "Poe and Disraeli," *AL*, 8 (1937), 406.

[11]The commentary of Marie Bonaparte upon "King Pest," one of the tales in which "the sins of the father are punished" (p. 514), becomes amusing if one thinks here of the personality of the father of Ben Disraeli, to whom belonged the structures she analyzed—*The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, transl. John Rodker (London, 1949).

[12]Poe mocked these stereotypes in "Lionizing" (Bulwer), "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" (Lady Morgan), "The Duc de l'Omelette" (Willis) and "[On] Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences" (John Neal).

[13]It is the one identification upon which all commentators agree.

[14]Jane Porter, ed., *Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative of His Shipwreck and Consequent Discovery of Certain Islands in the Carribean Sea....* (London, 1831), 3 vols., re-edited for Scholars' Facsimiles with an introduction by J. O. Bailey (Gainesville, Fl., 1965).

[15]Cited by Allibone, *A Dictionary of English Literature...* (London, 1877), 1: 1646.

[16]In 1823, when Symmes demanded from congress a subvention destined to finance a voyage which might prove the accuracy of his theories, he received 25 favorable votes to his request (Bailey, *Symzonia*, "Introduction," n. p.)

[17]"The Buried Alive," *Blackwood's*, 10 (1821), 262-264; and "Pages from the Diary of a Late Physician," 28 (1830), *passim*.

[18]Kenneth L. Daughrity, "Poe's Quiz on Willis," *AL.*, 5 (1933), 55-62.

[19]In a "Letter to B—," Poe is astonished that the devil in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1824) takes such pains to secure just one soul (the protagonist's) when, with little effort, he could have gained thousands.

[20]William Whipple, "Poe's Political Satire," *UTSE*, 25 (1956), 81-95; Clark Griffith, "Poe's 'Ligeia' and the English Romantics," *UTQ*, 24 (1954), 8-25. [For further commentary on Poe's comic propensities, one should consult the critiques of Poe's ironies by James W. Gargano, notably "The Question of Poe's Narrators," *CE*, 25 (1963), 177-181; "The Distorted Perception of Poe's Comic Narrators," *Topic*, 16 (1976), 23-43; and *The Masquerade Vision in Poe's Short Stories* (Baltimore, 1977); Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, "Blackwood Articles á la Poe: How to Make a False Start Pay," *RLV*, 39 (1973), 418-432; "Poe's 'Tarr and Fether': Hoaxing in the Blackwood Mode," *Topic*, 31 (1977), 29-40; the pioneering, though still important studies of Poe's hoaxes by Richard P. Benton, who first shed light on "The Assignation" as more than a bit of magazine froth; and, more recently, Harry M. Bayne, "Poe's 'Never Bet the Devil Your Head' and Southwest Humor," *ARLR*, 3 (1989), 278-279; and, in the same periodical, Robert Hoggard, "Red Moon Rising: A Marxist View of the House of Usher," 280-281. Finally, one should not omit the signal collection of many essential works on Poe's humor, *The Naiad Voice: Essays on Poe's Satiric Hoaxing*, ed. Dennis W. Eddings (Port Washington, N. Y., 1983). Here, in addition to many of the names mentioned above, are reprinted critiques by Kent Ljungquist, J. Gerald Kennedy, Bruce I. Weiner, James M. Cox, and Eugene R. Kanjo, among others. A thorough bibliography of works on Poe's comic side is given.]