

Some passages in the life of a lion

Edgar Allen Poe

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I am-that is to say I was-a great man; but I am neither the author of Junius¹ nor the man in the mask²; for my name, I believe, is Robert Jones³, and I was born somewhere in the city of Fum-Fudge.

The first action of my life was the taking hold of my nose with both hands. My mother saw this and called me a genius:-my father wept for joy and presented me with a treatise of Nosology⁴. This I mastered before I was breeched⁵. I now began to feel my wan in the science and soon came to understand that, provided a man had a nose sufficiently conspicuous, he might, by merely following it⁶, arrive at a Lionship. But my attention was not combined to theory alone. Every morning I gave my proboscis a couple of pulls and swallowed a half dozen of drams⁷.

When I came of age my father asked me, one day, if I would step with him into his study.

“My son” sad he, when we were seated, “what is the chief end of your existence?”

“My father,” I answer, “it is the study of Nosology.:

“And can you tell me,” he demanded, “what is the meaning of a nose?”

“A nose, my father,” I relied, greatly softened, “has been various defined by about a thousand different authors (here I pulled out my watch.) “It is now noon or thereabouts-We

¹ An allusion to the famous but unknown writer of a series of letters who remains anonymous

² Also mentioned in *The Man Who was Used Up* when the narrator asked “Is he the man in the mask?”.

³ In later versions, this name was changed to Thomas Smith

⁴ Nosology is likely modeled after phrenology, which believed that the shape of one’s head could explain their character as it reflected the brain’s organization. It was also extremely popular due to the efforts of one man, , who published multiple pamphlets and books on the subject.

⁵ In this meaning, “given breeches” indicating an age when boys started wearing pants, somewhere around years of age

⁶ To follow one’s nose was a common expression at this time

⁷ Drinking drams of alcohol in the morning, even for children, was sufficiently common to have the church warn against it

shall have time to enough tot get through with them all before midnight. To commence then--The nose, according to Bartholinus⁸, is that protuberance--that bump--that excrescence--that--" __"Will do, Robert, " interrupted the good old gentleman. "I am thunderstruck at the extent of your information--I am positively--upon my soul." (Here he closed his eyes and placed his hand upon his heart. "Come here!" (Here he took me by the arm). "Your education may now be considered as finished--it is high time you should scuffle for yourself--and you cannot do better thing that merely follow your nose--so--so--" (Here he kicked me down stairs and out of the door.)--"Also get out of my house and God bless you!"

As I felt within me the divine afflatus, I considered this accident rather fortunate rather than otherwise. I resolved to be guided by the paternal advice. I determined to follow my nose. I gave it a pull or two upon the spot and wrote a pamphlet on Nosology forthwith.

All Fum-Fudge was in an uproar.

"Wonderful genius!" said the Quarterly.

"Suburb physiologist!" said the Westminster.

"Clever fellow" sad the Foreign.

"Profound thinker!" said the Dublin.

"Great man!" said the Bentley.

"Divine soul!" said Fraser.

"One of us!" said Blackwood⁹.

"Who can he be?" said Mrs. Bas-Bleu¹⁰.

"Who can he be?" sad big Miss Bas-Bleu.

Where can be?" said little Miss Bas-Bleu.--Bit I paid those people no attention whatever--I just stepped into the shop of an artist.

The duchess of Bless-my-soul¹¹ was sitting for her portrait¹²; the Marquis of So-and-So was holding the Duchess' poodle; the Earl of This-and-That was flirting with her salts; and his Royal Highness of Touch-me-Not was leaning upon the back of her chair.

I approached the artist and turned up my nose.

"Oh, beautiful!" sighed her Grace.

"Oh my!" lisped the Marquis.

"Oh shocking!" groaned the Earl.

"Oh abominable!" growled his Royal Highness.

"What will you take for it?" asked the artist.

"For his nose!" shouted her Grace.

"A thousand pounds" said I, sitting down.

"A thousand pounds?" inquired the artist, musingly.

⁸ Casper Bartholinus was a famous dutch physician and theologian who wrote one of the most widely read manuals of anatomy

⁹ References to the current literary journals at the time of the time, ie Fraser's Magazine

¹⁰ A riff on the term "bluestocking" which was used for female members of high society and the literary elite

¹¹ A reference to Lady Blessington, who was a prominent figure in the popular gossip letters by Nathaniel Parker Willis published in the New York Evening Mirror and known for her London salon

¹² A famous portrait of Lady Blessington exists that was painted by Thomas Lawrence

“A thousand pounds,” said I.
“Do you warrant it?” he asked, turning the nose to the light.
“I do,” I said, blowing it well.
“It is quite original?” inquired he, touching it with reverence.
“Humph!” said I, twisting it to one side.
“Has no copy been taken?” he demanded, surveying it through a microscope.
“None,” said I, turning it up.
“Admirable!” he ejaculated, thrown quite off his guard by the beauty of the manoeuvre.

“A thousand pounds,” said I.
“A thousand pounds?” said he.”
“Just so,” said I.

“You shall have them,” said he, “what a piece of virtu!”--So he drew me a check upon the spot, and took a sketch of my nose. I engaged rooms in Jermyn street and sent her Majesty the ninety-ninth edition of “Nosology” with a portrait of the proboscis. That sad little rake, the Prince of Wales, invited me to dinner.

We were all lions and *recherchés*¹³.

There was a modern Platonist. He quoted Porphyry, Iamblichus, Plotinus, Proclus, Hierocles, Maximus Tyrius, and Syrianus.

There was a human-perfectibility man. He quoted Turgot, Price, Priestly, Condorcet, De Stäel, and the “Ambitious Student in Ill Health.”

There was Sir Positive Paradox. He observed that all fools were philosophers, and that all philosophers were fools.

There was Æstheticus Ethix. He spoke of fire, unity, and atoms; bi-part and pre-existent soul; affinity and discord; primitive intelligence and homöomeria.

There was Theologos Theology. He talked of Eusebius and Arianus; heresy and the Council of Nice; Puseyism and consubstantialism; Homousios and Homouioisios.

There was Fricassée from the Rocher de Cancale. He mentioned Muriton of red tongue; cauliflowers with *velouté* sauce; veal *à la* St. Menehault; marinade *à la* St. Florentin; and orange jellies *en mosaïques*.

There was Bibulus O’Bumper. He touched upon Latour and Markbrünnen; upon Mousseux and Chambertin; upon Richbourg and St. George; upon Haubrion, Leonville, and Medoc; upon Barac and Preignac; upon Grâve, and upon St. Peray. He shook his head at Clos de Vougeot, and told, with his eyes shut, the difference between Sherry and Amontillado.

There was Signor Tintontintino from Florence. He discoursed of Cimababué [[Cimabue]], Arpino, Carpaccio, and Argostino — of the gloom of Caravaggio, of the amenity of Albano, of the colors of Titian, of the frows of Rubens, and of the waggeries of Jan Steen.

There was the President of the Fum-Fudge University. He was of opinion that the moon was called Bendis in Thrace, Bubastis in Egypt, Dian in Rome, and Artemis in Greece.

¹³ Recherché was used to mean “exotic or refined person” but also can literally be translated to mean researcher

There was a Grand Turk from Stamboul. He could not help thinking that the angels were horses, cocks, and bulls; that somebody in the sixth heaven had seventy thousand heads; and that the earth was supported by a sky-blue cow with an incalculable number of green horns.

There was Delphinus Polyglott. He told us what had become of the eighty-three lost tragedies of Æschylus; of the fifty-four orations of Isæus; of the three hundred and ninety-one speeches of Lysias; of the hundred and eighty treatises of Theophrastus; of the eighth book of the conic sections of Apollonius; of Pindar's hymns and dithyrambics; and of the five and forty tragedies of Homer Junior.

There was Ferdinand Fitz-Fossillus Feltspar. He informed us all about internal fires and tertiary formations; about æriforms, fluidiforms, and solidiforms; about quartz and marl; about schist and schorl; about gypsum and trap; about talc and calc; about blende and hornblende; about mica-slate and pudding-stone; about cyanite and lepidolite; about hæmatite and tremolite; about antimony and calcedony; about manganese and whatever you please.

There was myself. I spoke of myself; — of myself, of myself, of myself; — of Nosology, of my pamphlet, and of myself. I turned up my nose, and spoke of myself.

"Marvellous clever man!" said the Prince.

"Superb!" said his guests: — and next morning her Grace of Bless-my-Soul paid me a visit.

"Will you go to Almacks¹⁴, pretty creature?" she said, tapping me under the chin.

"Upon honor," said I.

"Nose and all?" she asked.

"As I live," I replied.

"Here then is a card, my life. Shall I say you *will* be there?"

"Dear Duchess, with all my heart."

"Pshaw, no! — but with all your nose?"

"Every bit of it, my love," said I: — so I gave it a twist or two, and found myself at Almacks.

The rooms were crowded to suffocation.

"He is coming!" said somebody on the staircase.

"He is coming!" said somebody farther up.

"He is coming!" said somebody farther still.

"He is come!" exclaimed the Duchess. "He is come, the little love!" — and, seizing me firmly by both hands, she kissed me thrice upon the nose¹⁵.

A marked sensation immediately ensued.

"*Diavolo!*" cried Count Capricornutti.

"*Mille tonnerres!*" ejaculated the Prince de Grenouille.

"*Tousand teufel!*"¹⁶ growled the Elector of Bluddennuff.

This was not to be borne. I grew angry. I turned short upon Bluddennuff.

"Sir!" said I, "you are a baboon."

¹⁴ Almacks Assembly Rooms held exclusive Wednesday night balls. These rooms were invitation only and the Patroness had full power to deny or accept entry. Acceptance here decided social acceptability.

¹⁵ Scandals often arose from relationships between lions and bluestockings

¹⁶ Variations on "devil"

“Sir,” he replied, after a pause, “*Donner und Blitzen!*”¹⁷ “

This was all that could be desired. We exchanged cards. At Chalk-Farm, the next morning, I shot off his nose — and then called upon my friends¹⁸.

“*Bête!*” said the first.

“Fool!” said the second.

“Dolt!” said the third.

“Ass!” said the fourth.

“Ninny!” said the fifth.

“Noodle!” said the sixth.

“Be off!” said the seventh.

At all this I felt mortified, and so called upon my father.

“Father,” I said, “what is the chief end of my existence?”

“My son,” he replied, “it is still the study of Nosology; but in shooting off the Elector’s 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. I grant you that in Fum-Fudge the greatness of a lion is in proportion to the size of his proboscis — but, good heavens! there is no competing with a lion who has no proboscis at all.”

¹⁷ Thunder and lightning in German

¹⁸ Altercations and duels with other lions was a way of ensuring notoriety, though it often backfired

EDITOR'S NOTE

The high society of Lions and Bluestocking was created not only by wealth and name, but also by notoriety. Because of this, acceptance into the elite could be capricious. It was celebrity culture, literary culture, and high society all in the same space. Modeled from the literary salons of Paris, the salons of New York sought out celebrity and exclusivity. Edgar Allen Poe, following the success of "The Raven", was a part of the literary salons of New York. His view of the salons was often changing. He told his friend Kennedy in a letter that Lionizing was satirical. It is probable that this piece was designed to satirize the works of Nathaniel Parker Willis, who gained fame through portraits of the society members he was amongst and his interactions with them. The model of flirting with Bluestockings and fighting with other Lions that worked for Willis was less successful for Poe. Ultimately, Poe's trajectory was closer to that of the Lion he satirized. He was briefly a star guest in the salons, but an indiscrete relationship with Frances Osgood and subsequent odd behavior--including a fight with Thomas English--ruined his standing and became part of a series of literary and physical attacks between members of the salon (Hayes 134). The battle for lasting rather than ephemeral fame is indicative of the type of celebrity culture the salons produced. However, they also provided an opportunity for fame and societal acceptance based on talent and personality rather than family (though that still helped). Like Poe's character Robert Jones, it was possible for ordinary people to rise to prominence through scientific or literary advancements. The idea of a celebrity scientist or author spoke to a culture that valued education and advancements, constantly seeking the new.

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