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ARTICLE

The 'Illimitable Dominion' of Charles Dickens: Transatlantic Print Culture and the Spring of 1842

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This article explores Edgar Allan Poe's May 1842 edition of *Graham's Monthly Magazine* in the context of debates about international copyright circulating in the press at the time of Charles Dickens's famous tour of the US. I offer a reading of Poe's short story 'The Masque of the Red Death', and his review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* that sees these texts as interventions in transatlantic debates at the forefront of the public imagination in the Spring of 1842. In particular, through an original close reading of 'The Masque of the Red Death' I demonstrate how Poe subtly drew upon penny press exposés to inform the short story's discussion of class, status and rights of access. I also suggest that the argument Poe made in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne about the importance of 'invention, creation, imagination [and] originality' to the 'prose tale' is usefully considered in the same context, as an American response to questions of authorship that were also raised by the popular hysteria surrounding Dickens.

Two contributions by the then-editor of *Graham's Magazine*, Edgar Allan Poe ('The Masque of Red Death' and the second part of his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*), make the May 1842 edition of the journal, arguably, one of the most influential publications in the history of the Anglo-American short story. In 'The Masque of the Red Death' Poe (1982) presented his readers with a fantastical prose narrative in which the 'happy and dauntless and sagacious' prince of an unnamed kingdom controls and manipulates his subjects through an elaborate *coup de théâtre*, 'a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence' that goes on for five months. Prince Prospero has all the 'knights and dames of his court' dance endlessly within 'the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys', while a bloody 'pestilence' rages through the world outside (Poe, 1982: 269). The conclusion is, of course, both inevitable and extremely famous: the walls are breached, '[a]nd Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all' (Poe, 1982: 273). At play in the tale are two competing forms of power. First, is Prospero's vision of an elite order, reliant upon his belief in the sanctity and impenetrability of both his artistic creation and his own physical body. The second is that of the narrator, whose unimpeded movement and unbridled access are paralleled by the reach of the Red Death itself and raise the spectre of a panoptic vision that disrupts public/private distinctions by opening up the walls of the castle and the bodies of its inhabitants. In this article I will show how Poe's tale can be read as a dramatisation of concerns about the rising threat of elite, capitalist control in the publishing industry embodied in contemporary tensions over transatlantic copyright legislation and authorship. In particular, Poe's tale in *Graham's* reflects a moment of international tension around Dickens's 1842 tour when the famous author used his celebrity to push for British-style copyright legislation in the US. I will show how this move was interpreted by critics of copyright in light of the history of intellectual property disputes and 'artisan republicanism' between the US and Britain before demonstrating how this moment impacted upon the writing of Poe's tale. To do this it is worth beginning by outlining some of the more influential critical responses to 'The Masque of the Red Death'.

In recent years, the tale has been out of vogue. Lacking any character development, largely focused on description and containing few instances of dialogue, the story invites readings that see it more as a finger exercise than a fully formed narrative performance. In attempting to account for the story's heavy-handed narration and highly wrought style, New Critical readings have predominated, as scholars have often looked inwardly to Poe's own *oeuvre* for explanation. In particular, Kermit Vanderbilt's 1968 formalist reading of the tale as Poe's attempt to give 'fictional expression to the esthetic [sic] ideas he had been formulating' (Vanderbilt in May, 1991: 145) on the importance of 'the effect' has been deeply influential for generations of readers. Indeed, it has had a surprisingly long pedigree, even in the face of poststructuralist and reader-response challenges to the New Critical focus on close reading and the autonomy of the artist. Vanderbilt's reading reflects New Critical concerns with aesthetic and authorial autonomy through its connection of 'The Masque' with another Poe story 'The Domain of Arnheim or The Landscape Garden' by focusing upon their shared attention to Romantic themes of how 'the artist's superior taste. . . reorders matter and form' (Vanderbilt in May, 1991: 146). More specifically, Vanderbilt's approach to the text sought to demonstrate how Prospero serves as a hyperbolic surrogate for Poe himself: a monstrous, Gothic character that overextends the artist's aesthetic theories beyond the bounds of rationality. However, in this article I will show that the work reaches outside the closed confines of the merely literary to speak directly to the time and place of its composition. By considering the work within the context of its first appearance in the May issue of *Graham's*, it can actually be seen as a subtly-conceived study of the shaping influence exerted upon mid-nineteenth-century transatlantic literary culture by class, spectacle, access and control. I particularly wish to draw attention to the importance of the fact that the May 1842 issue of *Graham's* appeared in the middle of Charles Dickens's famous, and controversial, trip to the United States. Arguably the main event in American literary life during the first half of that year, the visit of the popular British author to the US triggered an explosion of American expressive culture that was the apotheosis of a broader trend in antebellum print described by Isabelle as a 'carnival on the page'

(Isabelle, 2000: 4). Before returning to the story it is worth exploring the context of Dickens's visit.

In order to satisfy the seemingly limitless desire of American readers for descriptions of Dickens and his wife, his clothes, and his travel plans, antebellum newspapers and periodicals at the time of Dickens's trip underwent Gothic transformations of their own that were strangely redolent of the corporeal disfigurements Poe attributed to the Red Death. Publications swelled monstrously with additional copy, and, like the 'profuse bleeding at the pores' (Poe, 1982: 269) that follows the contraction of Poe's fictional plague, faced a possible 'dissolution' of their own as they spent vast sums on commissioning innumerable literary 'extras' and lavish illustrations of the Englishman's opulent lodgings. Journalists from all walks of life were gripped by description frenzy. They scrambled over one another to gain access to him and offer their accounts to their readership, who then penned bulky letters to the editors of periodicals describing their own experiences. In celebrating Dickens during the winter and spring of 1842 antebellum print culture performed 'a collective spectacle, in which producers and consumers, publishers and readers, came to participate' (Lehuu, 2000: 3). Indeed, Dickens became what in ritual terms would be labelled a fetish or effigy; a hypertrophic manifestation of unreconciled social tensions. Poe's tale mirrored this climate of expressive excess through its depiction of a world that outwardly has all the trappings of a renaissance courtly masque and in which politics and art are united through 'a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances' (Poe, 1982*:* 270).

As Meredith McGill has shown, at the same time as antebellum readers were experiencing the collective hysteria known popularly as 'The Boz Excitement' Dickens himself was attempting to assert greater control over his publications by garnering 'support [for] the passage of an international copyright law' (McGill, 2003: 76) that would render all his creations the product and sole possession of his singular and inviolate intellect. Such a law, Dickens reasoned, would have shored-up the textual authority of the printed word by identifying him as the author of works that were widely reproduced and disseminated in the US without prior agreement or, more

significantly, payment. While for contemporary critics the right of a writer to be identified as an 'author' is largely assumed, in the mid-nineteenth century the question of what an author was, and their rights under that title, was questioned frequently. As Peter Jaszi and Martha Woodmansee have noted:

> [T]he modern regime of authorship, far from being timeless and universal, is a relatively recent formation – the result of a quite radical reconceptualization of the creative process that culminated less than 200 years ago in the heroic self-presentation of Romantic poets. As they saw it, genuine authorship is originary in the sense that it results not in a variation, an imitation, or an adaptation. . . but in an utterly new, unique. . . work which, accordingly, may be said to be the property of its creator and to merit the law's protection as such. (Jaszi and Woodmansee, 1994: 3)

Dickens's mission to bring conceptions of authorship and legality framed by British Romanticism across the Atlantic was a controversial one. For critics of international copyright his appeals were tantamount to the suppression of the growing American print industry, which relied upon a lack of protection for authors. As Peter Baldwin has noted, 'in nineteenth-century America, copyright was altogether a hard sell. . . [s]trong rights for authors and publishers were regarded as Old World monopolies, thwarting the educational aspirations of a fledgling democracy' (Baldwin, 2014: 83). The aim of Dickens's tour was perceived by certain sectors as therefore both elitist and imperialistic in nature. In fact, to critics of international copyright in the Jacksonian US his plan was a morally dubious attempt to galvanise publishing elites to support a mission that would personally enrich the English author at the expense of the US people. The year of his trip to the US was also the year in which British parliament was debating an extension of the 25 year term of copyright granted to authors in 1814, leading Dickens to believe, albeit with considerable scepticism, that he might be able to win support for his position in the US. As Jessica DeSpain has noted, '[t]he debate over copyright was still ongoing when a new British law

was passed in 1842, partly at the urging of William Wordsworth. . . [t]he Copyright Act of 1842 extended author's right throughout their lifetime, plus seven years' (DeSpain, 2014: 5), whilst also granting protections to authors over 'rights to representation': dramatic performances of their textual works. In attempting to establish an international copyright law, Dickens was seeking to extend the authority of a British legal tradition of copyright beyond the physical borders of the British state, and into the sovereign territory of the United States, and so secure for himself a greater share of capital from the American book trade. Like Prince Prospero in Poe's story, whose 'gates of iron. . . leave means neither of ingress nor egress to the sudden impulses of despair or frenzy' (Poe, 1982: 269), Dickens sought to shore up and constrain the boundaries of his fictional worlds within the unruly nineteenth century literary marketplace by summoning all his 'hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames' (Poe, 1982: 269), the publishing elite of US society, to his side.

However, Dickens's controversial strategy caused an aggressive counterattack from the popular press as his attempts to exert control over the use of his fictional creations ultimately precipitated another, more pressing, need to restrict access to himself and his private life. In *American Notes* Dickens speaks of the popular press's techniques of reportage as a cruel, low, form of entertainment; failing to note the political value of the Jacksonian penny press, and focusing only on its financial benefit to the publishers:

> What are the fifty newspapers, which those precocious urchins are bawling down the street, and which are kept filed within, what are they but amusements?. . . [D]ealing in round abuse and blackguard names; pulling off the roofs of private houses, as the Halting Devil did in Spain; pimping and pandering for all degrees of vicious taste, and gorging with coined lines the most voracious maw; imputing to every man in public life the coarsest and vilest motives; scaring away from the stabbed and prostrate body-politic, every Samaritan of clear conscience and good deeds. (Dickens, 1842: 210–211)

Dickens's equation of the New York press with the Halting Devil (an alternative name for the daemon Asmodeus from Judeo-Christian folklore who was a common figure in eighteenth-century French and Spanish satire) speaks to his fear about the possibilities of unregulated American capitalism to turn the reading public into consumers of 'the coarsest and vilest' content.

By the spring of 1842, Dickens's tour had become a farcical drama of power, which was daily played out in the popular press. Day by day his attempts to control access to private details of his life and plans became increasingly more desperate as journalists upped their efforts to expose the writer to the public gaze. As DeSpain has noted, 'Dickens's critique of the homogenizing effects of mass culture indicate that it was the press's decentralization that most worried him. . . Americans were reading variant versions of the same stories without a central voice controlling' (DeSpain, 2014: 18). In other words, Dickens was deeply concerned that multiple editions of literary works made available by means of unauthorised reprinting did not lead to a plurality of argument called for by a democracy, but, rather, a homogenisation of thought. What was lacking, Dickens felt, was a certain elite, intellectual oversight controlling the operations of the American press. Consequently, Dickens's wish for greater control over the distribution of his printed texts and public persona resonated within emerging structures of class and status in antebellum society that were turning disputes over literary copyright into a battle between the exercise of elite control and Jacksonian, working-class, traditions of abundance and free use with roots in the radical publishing practices of the American Revolution. For many in the new republic it was imperative to the successful operation of the state that texts be readily available and cheap. This was especially true when it came to British literature, which, due to the shared language and history, was perceived as the common possession of both nations. The rapid availability of American editions of British works like those of Dickens that were made possible by the lack of regulation for copyright allowed American citizens who were geographically separate from Europe to cheaply consume prestigious European literary products. Indeed, one of the prevailing forms of nationalism in the US at this time depended upon maintaining ties with Europe that

would allow for the continuation of a transatlantic, republican culture of mutual critique that had given birth to the Revolution. If the US was to be able to present itself as an equal of Britain in the nineteenth century (and not as its infant son or backward dependent) then it had to maintain a speed of access and availability to literary material. Such speed and availability would not have been possible had editions of British texts been issued from only one or two transatlantic publishing houses at a single moment decided upon by the author and publisher. This was especially true in the 1830s and 1840s when a unified national rail-system and large-scale factory production of books, that would have allowed for a distribution of texts rapid enough to meet demand, was only just beginning to emerge in the nation.

More than this, though, control over copyright was often received by Jacksonian Americans as a form of elite privilege that was hazardous to the American democratic public. This was because there remained in the US a concern with the effect copyright might have in leading the country away from the ideals of amateur volunteerism, which Jefferson and others had seen as essential to the national goal of establishing a republic of independent, freethinking artisans, and towards a culture industry organised and orchestrated out of municipal centres by cabals of professional capitalists. Murmuring under the surface of anti-copyright activism was the violent history of what Sean Wilentz called 'artisan republicanism' (1984: 17); the attempts of tradesmen to retain their independence and uphold the values of the apprenticeship system, which, in the book publishing business, meant opposing large monopolies and conglomerates that would control the flow of intellectual property in the US. Indeed, the very logic of apprenticeship is based around the legitimacy of copying from existing models. Importantly, anti-copyright in the US was not, then, wholly an anti-capitalist enterprise (although this was one aspect), but one directed to the protection of smaller, independent publishers rather than the extension of the rights of authors or corporate monopolies. The recent memories of artisan republicans were rich with instances in which British manufacturers had tried to gain substantial footholds in the US. One of the more aggressive had been the British use of closed market '*auctions* [my italics] as conduits for the

American market, to save themselves time and expense and to sell off their surpluses as quickly as possible' (Wilentz, 1984: 150) that had been a site of regular contestation since the end of the War of 1812. These auctions excluded American craftsmen and enflamed class, national and labour tensions in the city. For artisan republican tradespeople and printers, at worst, a transatlantic copyright agreement might mean that British editions of books (potentially printed more cheaply in the UK where industrialisation had already developed to a larger scale than in the US) would flood the American market at great hazard to native printers. What drove much of the print-public sphere in the US (at least until after the Civil War) was not a logic centred upon the rights of the individual author, but the public's right to benefit from the distribution and availability of literary material even if it was obtained through semi-legal, or even piratical, channels. Such piracy (or reprinting) was commonplace and even occurred with texts produced by US authors. The Founding Fathers Madison and Pinckney had attempted to negotiate between public rights and authorial copyright by imposing an embargo period on reprinting in their proposals for the US Constitution, which 'secur[ed] for limited times to authors . . . the exclusive right to their respective writings' (Article 1, Section 8, Clause 8, US Constitution). In reality, though, this protection only extended to the completed, original, printed version of the text (including covers, illustrations and the like) – the materiality of the book – and seldom extended to the contents or ideas, which might be reprinted without consent as long as it did not take on exactly the same form as the original. Enforcing these restrictions was, of course, extremely difficult in a national context that displayed strong resistance to a centralised Federal government, frequently empowered local, regional and state legislatures to rule on copyright infringements, and in which 'leaks' of proofs or even printers' plates were the norm.

This 'culture of reprinting' (McGill, 2003) was driven by extremely high literacy rates in the antebellum US, which far exceeded Britain for most of the century, as well as the lack of a regulated book trade that would only come about with the rise of New York as the main US publishing powerhouse following the

Civil War.[1] What Dickens (and many subsequent critics) failed to grasp about American literary culture was the fact that piracy had never meant quite what it had signified in the motherland. Whereas in imperial centres like London piracy meant loss of trade, in the colonies (including Ireland, Scotland and Wales) it meant access to resources deemed to be the right of subjects of the Crown, yet frequently prohibited by policies of protectionism and tariffs that enriched the municipalities at the expense of the provinces. The greater concern, though, lay in how copyright uncomfortably wedded the growing publishing industry to governmental systems of regulation in such a way that, if misused, might result in a monopoly that was ultimately hazardous to trade. Even British politicians by the time of Dickens's trip to the US were concerned with the potential dangers of authorial copyright in perpetuity. In a parliamentary speech on the publishing industry the noted historian and MP Thomas Babbington Macaulay stated the following:

> copyright is monopoly. . . The effect of monopoly generally is to make articles scarce, to make them dear, and to make them bad. It is good that authors should be remunerated; and the least exceptionable way of remunerating them is by a monopoly. Yet monopoly is an evil. (Macaulay in Ringer, 1974: 13)

Until recently, critical consensus rested upon a presumption that international copyright was a universal good: beneficial for artists, the professionalisation of writing, and for the development of a national literary culture. Yet such critical assumptions have rested upon a certain conception of nations that has emphasised a coherent sense of borders and national autonomy, rather than how national culture is cultivated out of exchange and conflict with others. Additionally, critics have tended

[1] As N. N. Feltes has noted, the growth of the USA as a publishing powerhouse occurred especially after The Chace Act of 1891, which empowered the American publishing industry by granting international copyright to certain nations (Britain included) on the proviso that the work was first or simultaneously published in the United States (1994: 271–280).

to regard the professionalisation of writing in the nineteenth century (a practice Dickens is central to the story of) as important for the development of forms of literary culture focused around the autonomy of texts, close reading, and a 'Romantic' conception of individual authorship. However, this actually presents a more coherent picture of literary culture in the early nineteenth century than is strictly accurate. Abandoning a critical negativity towards piracy allows one to develop a radical counterhistory to modern, professionalised capitalism in the book market. Adrian Johns has argued that it was the Patriots' strategy of piracy towards Britain that had helped motivate much of the rhetoric of the American Revolution. The pirating of texts had created the conditions for the dissemination of revolutionary ideas in the colonies, where geographically disparate populations and the absence of a controlling centre of power would otherwise have rendered such collective action impossible. Johns writes:

> In Britain and Ireland, piracy was controversial. In the American colonies, it was revolutionary. . .. By the time the War of Independence broke out, some were ready to make piracy a tool of insurrection. For them the very act of reprinting London's books was an act of defiance. Incitement to join the revolutionary cause, word of the rising itself, and news of its fortunes all circulated across the colonies by their labors. (Johns, 2009: 179)

Even as late as the 1840s, the public sphere in the US was still governed by the same logic of abundance, diversity of opinion, and reprinting that was a product of the piratical origins of the American Revolution, producing a literary culture that was to observers distinctly carnivalesque. As Johns notes, 'By the 1820s, Jacksonian America had a secure and vibrant public sphere—but to European eyes an utterly piratical one' (2009: 180). When encountering a British representative such as Dickens, the history of piracy and free use of intellectual property became more than just a matter of international copyright but, instead, a clearly anti-imperialist gesture of defiance against an old enemy. Despite the efforts of many writers (Whitman, Poe, Melville, Lippard and Hawthorne included) to lobby for increased regulation of the

book trade for the purpose of cultivating a less precarious national literary culture, there remained a strong and influential public desire to maintain the piratical status quo, though this did not come from writers so much as from printers who generated large incomes from reprinting.[2] This restriction of authors' rights in favour of free trade was further heightened by the apparent latency of the Romantic Movement in America, which had only recently begun to gain significant ground by the time of Dickens's visit.[3] Whereas in Britain the combination of the individual rights of the author and the question of individual copyright had long been established through the conflation of art with personal 'genius' put forward by Romantic luminaries such as Wordsworth, the US's stubborn commitment to Enlightenment principles of circulation and concepts of the 'public good' carried on well into the nineteenth century. This meant that developing a culture around the idea of copyright first demanded the cultivation of support for the idea that literature was the product of an individual consciousness that was inviolate and absolute. However, the issues were far more complex than being merely a matter of English support for international copyright and American distrust of it. Instead, they responded to the complex relationships of class and coterie in American publishing at the time. In the early- to mid-nineteenth century Romanticism was far less established in the USA than much scholarship has suggested and still constituted a largely elite discourse mainly supported by the upper echelons of the American literati – groups like the Boston Transcendentalists whom Dickens admired greatly. The problem was that the Romantic Movement's

[2] Importantly, most of the writers associated with lobbying for increased regulation named above did so as part of American publishing groups (Hawthorne with Ticknor and Fields, Melville with Duyckinck's set, Lippard through links to labour unions and the Peterson and Brothers group in Philadelphia, Whitman through his performed relationship to the Boston transcendentalists). As McGill (2003) has shown, Poe was picked up by the Young America group but was a reluctant joiner.

[3] There are, of course, exceptions to this such as William Cullen Bryant or Washington Irving's 'romantic' work of the 1820s and 1830s, or the paintings of the Hudson River School. Dickens's 1842 visit predated the founding of the 'Young America Movement' in 1845 and Evert Duyckinck taking up editorial duties at the *Democratic Review* in 1844: both major moments for the American wing of Romanticism. Additionally, the Transcendentalist Movement, whose main national organ *The Dial* had only begun publishing in 1840, was yet to achieve a very strong national presence and still remained largely confined to Boston. In *American Notes* Dickens spoke favourably of Transcendentalism, William Channing, and of the culture of Boston more generally.

celebration of individual rights was easily sutured to a Romantic nationalism, as the genius of the author became an index of the genius of a people. This discourse was central to the logic of elite publishing groups like Evert Duyckinck's Young America Movement who, in the years following Dickens's visit, argued in favour of international copyright not only for reasons of ensuring fair pay to American authors, but also to embolden their claims to the local, identifiable provenance of writing – its relation to the individual and land that produced it. For authors like Poe who, as McGill and Leon Jackson have shown, were vocal critics of seeing nationalism as a basis for literary merit, copyright was a complex proposition. Whilst Poe supported the rights of authors on financial grounds, the association of copyright with Romantic nationalism – as seen in Dickens's wish to extend a British law into US territory and Young America's wish to turn copyright into the basis of celebrating 'Americanness' – was beyond the pale. It is an established critical insight that Poe made use of unauthorised reprinting as a basis for his career and his aesthetic, situating most of his tales in scarcely identifiable locations abroad that reflected the mobility of literature in the antebellum period, as well as utilising a variety of authorial frames to disassociate the work from its provenance in one author (McGill, 2003; Jackson, 2008).

'The idiosyncrasy of his intellect': Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens and Authorship

'The Masque of the Red Death' can usefully be seen as a Gothic burlesque about the complexities of transnational authorship that resonates with the antebellum concerns around copyright that Dickens's tour brought to a head in the popular press. The tale engages these questions of authorship and control by means of a carefully considered dramatisation of various forms of ownership. In the tale Poe attempts to locate a middle ground for expression that draws on the energies of the popular print exposés in its critique of excessive authorial control, whilst also demonstrating the appeal of such dominance when faced with the debased, omniscient and omnivorous power of popular press reprinting. Consequently, the form of the tale is worth considering in some detail. As a short story, Poe's work is invested in negotiating the middle ground between literary respectability of the kind Dickens was

afforded (based on his claims to be an individual, inviolate, romantic intellect), and the less reputable mass-market sensationalism of the popular dailies. Robert Tally, Jr. has suggested that Poe's experience of writing for the new magazines helped fuel his wish for international copyright. Referring to Poe's article 'Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House' Tally remarks that 'Poe had become increasingly agitated about the lack of international copyright protections, which not only cut into the potential profits of popular American authors but allowed the literary marketplace in the United States to be flooded with English. . . literature' (2014: 96). Yet, the argument is not so simple as to suggest that Poe was also wholly and completely unequivocal about the necessity of hard copyright restrictions, since his concern for the importance of literature was also partly about circulation. Consequently, Poe's suggestion in 'Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House' that there still remained an '*esprit de patrie*. . . [suggesting] that there is somewhere still existing an ember not altogether quenched among the fires of good feeling for letters and literary men, that once animated the American bosom' (Poe, 1984: 1036; italics in original) served both as a call for greater support for writers in the form of financial remuneration and an evocation of the Enlightenment logic of circulation and the 'public good' of literature. Reading Poe's 1845 essay in this way helps explain some of the artful ambivalences of 'The Masque of the Red Death', which neither throws its weight wholly behind the dominion of the author, nor calls for unlimited, boundless, ungoverned circulation. As I have written elsewhere, this liminal position between respectability and mass-market popularity was a crucial shaping force for the short story genre as it developed in American magazines.[4] In a moment in which the rights of authors were so questioned in US public discourse, fully-fledged Romantic conceptions of genius and originality were hardly suitable for the magazines and, by extension, the short story form as it appeared in them, which relied, at least in part, upon an extensive public circulation to justify their value to the publishers.

Dickens's treatment by the US press at the time of the publication of 'Masque of the Red Death' serves as a cautionary tale about the applicability in the American

[4] See Collins (2013).

scene of broadly 'Romantic', British conceptions of authorship and copyright that characterised fiction as the exclusive product and property of a single identifiable author in perpetuity. Indeed, Dickens's wish to control copyright extended beyond mere proprietorship over one edition of the text and into all formats in which his characters appeared was a huge overreach that reeked of a domineering British chauvinism. As Juliet John remarks: 'His elastic concept of the literary text is evident in the use he made of a range of different formats for his writings. . . serialization, the short story, the novel available in various editions and at differing prices, the public readings, the drama, the illustrated text. . .' (2010*:* 49). In other words, Dickens's sense of control over his own productions crossed a dividing line between the first edition that had been protected by US laws and the intellectual property of ideas (a new area for copyright law in the US). Indeed, to place restrictions on all use of Dickens's characters would have suppressed a large sector of the book trade, not to mention the US theatre or performances of *tableaux vivants*, which frequently drew on Dickensian source material. To explore this idea Poe draws attention to how the physical spaces of the story are direct expressions and outpourings of Prospero's intellect and 'eccentric and august taste' (Poe, 1982: 269), which manifest as a certain wild, multiform publishing empire comprising 'buffoons. . . improvisatori. . . ballet dancers [and] musicians' (Poe, 1982: 269). Importantly, as I have already suggested, the legislation for the 1842 Copyright Act in Britain extended protections to 'rights to representation', rolling together the author's performative and textual worlds in a way that had seldom been effectively policed by British law before the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

In naming his fictional Duke after Shakespeare's magician in *The Tempest*, Poe drew parallels between the exercise of authorial autonomy over 'rights to representation' implicit in the desire of Poe's Prospero to express his unique aesthetic sensibilities in all forms of art and culture, and the ambition of Shakespeare's Prospero to control the elements and colonial power relations. Indeed, the word 'dominion' – implying both the legal relation of the colonies to the imperial centre and rights of access and control – is the concluding concept of 'The Masque of the Red Death': 'illimitable dominion over all' (Poe, 1982: 273). As I have suggested, the transatlantic

legal framework for international copyright was perceived by many of its critics as imperialist in nature. This postcolonial history I have outlined above, then, provides an important social framework for understanding the conception of power in Poe's tale. Indeed, the word 'dominion' is ambiguous and evokes the twinned frameworks of the legal language of imperialism and the idea of authorship in the way that other synonyms may not have done: 'control' or 'mastery' are far too specific in their evocation of power, while 'sovereignty' is far too unambiguous.[5]

In the tale, the author then proceeds to claim that for Prospero the 'external world could take care of itself' (Poe, 1982: 269), suggesting that the prince displays a wilful ignorance towards the realities of life beyond the walls of his own creation. Poe shows that whereas variety and 'all the appliances of pleasure' (Poe, 1982: 269) define the world inside the abbey they are actually very carefully policed by a form of panoptic surveillance: 'to the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite' (Poe, 1982: 270). This 'closed corridor' is a significant and subtle detail in Poe's story. Mentioned only once, it implies that the masque itself is not a space for the free discourse of bodies and desires, but a constantly observed space of state-licensed liberty. If we accept that Prospero is a stand-in for the Romantic artist then it is important to note that his regime of jollity is a highly policed entity, controlled not by 'the gates of iron' alone but by a regime of vision. Such a legal regime of surveillance was required for the enforcement of literary copyright, with an official version of a book having to be registered with an institution of Federal power, such as the Library of Congress or The British Museum, in order to qualify for legal protections. Subsequent editions were then subjected to surveillance – carefully observed

[5] Poe's love of wordplay is well known and extends into the interesting choice of the word 'illimitable', rather than 'unlimited', 'limitless', 'boundless' or 'unbounded' – all of which appear in Webster's 1828 dictionary and were in common parlance. Whilst it is impossible to fully trace the provenance without the working drafts of Poe's story it is worth mentioning that Dickens himself was regularly called 'The Inimitable Dickens' in the US (even in an 'Original Letter From Charles Dickens' article that appeared in the same January to June bumper issue of *Graham's* as 'The Masque of the Red Death'). The phonetic similarities between 'inimitable' and 'illimitable' are perhaps worth noting.

by publishers and the government. It is precisely for this reason that figures such as Thomas Macaulay (quoted above) saw the extension of copyright as a pathway to dangerous monopoly: a capitalist collusion with the state that extended the power of both and troubled Enlightenment ideals that trumpeted the value to the individual of access to literature and ideas.

In contrast to the policed regime inside the castle, the world beyond is characterised by the rapid diffusion of a pestilence that leads towards a kind of Gothic universality; a nightmarish version of collective, public ownership not dissimilar from Dickens's own image of the press as a homogenising force. The narrator describes the symptoms of the disease as being identical in all patients: 'sharp pains. . . sudden dizziness. . . profuse bleeding at the pores' that lead eventually to a wholesale loss of identity as 'scarlet stains' finally render the victim unrecognisable and so beyond the 'sympathy of his fellow-men' (Poe, 1982: 269). The rapidity of the 'seizure, progress, and termination of the disease' (Poe, 1982: 269) may be read as Poe's comment upon the operations of the antebellum culture of reprinting, where, as Dickens discovered to his chagrin, an 'original' could spread widely and without the hindrance of borders at a quite considerable speed.

The associations between Poe and Dickens are more than anecdotal. By 1842 Poe had already written several major reviews of Dickens's work and they had met in the March of that year when Dickens was in Philadelphia. The reviews were generally measured and actually revealed Poe's deepening suspicion of the English author's stylistic direction. In a February 1842 review of *Barnaby Rudge* in *Graham's* Poe had upbraided Dickens for the very thing he attributes to Prince Prospero; an excess of style. He speaks about the 'mad design' and 'untimely desire for a novel path' (Poe, 1984: 244) that ruin the text. The description in full reads:

> We think that the whole book has been an effort for him – solely through the nature of its design. He has been smitten with an untimely desire for a novel path. The idiosyncrasy of his intellect would lead him, naturally, into the most fluent and simple style of narration. . . He has a talent for all things,

> but no positive genius for adaptation, and still less for that metaphysical art in which the souls of all mysteries lie. (Poe, 1984: 244)

Poe's umbrage in the review is directed towards the architecture of Dickens's novel, its lack of naturalness, and its want of compositional simplicity. When read in the context of Dickens's visit to the US, and alongside the *Barnaby Rudge* review a few months earlier, Poe's references to the architecture of the castle in 'The Masque of the Red Death' take on a more specific meaning related to his concern that literary art be formally restrained. The strange layout of the abbey is a product of 'the duke's love of the *bizarre'* that leads to the structure being 'irregularly disposed. . . a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect' (Poe, 1982: 269; italics in original). Additionally, Poe chose to place the story in the same issue as his review of Hawthorne in which he claims that the American author is 'original at all points' (Poe, 1984: 574), not least because Hawthorne remains free from eccentricity. The battle staged in Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death' is therefore transatlantic in nature – pitting American simplicity against a distinctly European-inflected form of excess. Yet it is also about the battle of different forms of intellect and their relationship to control. If Prince Prospero stands in for a generic European author, then, for Poe the unfettered expression of their intellect is a moral problem; characterised as it is by a bizarrely egocentric cruelty that leads to an imperialistic ambition to force the products of his own mind upon his people. By contrast, Hawthorne's intellect is rendered as measured and appropriately American – influencing his readers less by strangeness of design, than by potency of '*tone*' and, famously, his capacity to 'conceive a certain *single effect*' (Poe, 1984: 586; italics in original). For Poe, it is not even the specifics of the location and content that impress him about Hawthorne, as such valorisation of geographical locality would resemble support for the literary nationalism he broadly rejected (the kind of nationalistic lionisation Herman Melville would parody in his 1850 essay 'Hawthorne and his Mosses'), so much as an personalised form of feeling produced by structural effects.

Poe's tale refers outside itself to mimic the style of particular forms of writing in the popular press that had reached their apotheosis during Dickens's tour. To illustrate my claim that Poe draws as much on popular literary form as on more elite forms of discourse, I will turn to a passage in the story in which the narrator describes the interior of the castle. He writes:

> It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. There were seven – an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. . . There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and the left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor. . . (Poe, 1982: 269)

The narrator then describes each of the seven apartments with considerable, technical precision, commenting upon their colour, shape and furnishings. What strikes the reader here is the excess of specificity. The phrases 'but first let me tell you of the rooms' and 'in many palaces, however' (Poe, 1982: 269) are clumsy and out of keeping with the careful attention to aesthetic formalism that shape the rest of the tale. The effect is to draw the reader from within the world of the narrative into a new order of representation, one that includes a sense of context, history and precedent ('in many palaces, however, such suites do. . .'), whilst also implying a certain panoptic vision on behalf of the narrator. This context, the story establishes, is the very thing that Prince Prospero forcibly excludes from the masque. In his effort to 'bid defiance to contagion' (Poe, 1982: 269), the prince also bids defiance to history. The author's peculiar tone here interrupts the flow and 'hermetic' logic that New Critics such as Vanderbilt have drawn out in their readings of the tale by striking a strangely condescending note of commanding oversight and expertise, rather like a tour guide or historian.

The significance of Poe's excessive description in 'The Masque of the Red Death' only becomes clear when it is compared to a common genre within the working-class penny press of the 1840s that Carl Ostrowski has called the 'popular exposé'; a Jacksonian version of muckraking or investigative journalism. The exposé, Ostrowski argues, was 'a generic classification that straddle[d] traditional lines between fiction and non-fiction', and 'constituted itself in the author's claim to bringing shocking [or] hidden truths to light' (2009: 1, 2). Exposé writers would often speculate and bend various truths in order to reveal other, more pressing, realities (such as increasing divides between rich and poor or sensational abuses of power). By 1842, such exposés had become an important tool in the popular, lower-class press's arsenal against elite control and influence. In addition to revealing a Jacksonian distrust of privatised elite power, such exposés often deployed an exceedingly lofty and exalted tone to affect an imitative mockery and critique of the very elites whom they pilloried. Exposés of Dickens were numerous, but I wish here to quote from two that resemble the tone of Poe's short story: *The New York Aurora's* 'Extra' of 15th February 1842 (whose harshly satirical take on Dickens's visit to New York was most likely penned by a young Walt Whitman, who had recently been appointed as editor and features writer) and an anonymous review of Dickens's New York trip that appeared as a supplement in the 15th February issue of the *New York Herald*. A comparison of the text of the *Aurora's* extra with 'The Masque of the Red Death' reveals some surprising similarities.

The author of the *Aurora* piece writes:

> We have seen the rooms at the Carlton, prepared for Dickens. There is a reception room upon the second parlor, on the corner of Broadway and Leonard street, where he can sit in the morning, and overlook the fashionables in their daily promenade, and many, many a bright eye will look up at that window. . . The curtains are white and crimson – the carpets Wilton – the furniture plain and elegant, and the pictures superb. There is a beautiful one over the mantel – a fine painting, which Dickens will take a sever [sic] look at, and will surely admire. . . The private parlor, his sanctum sanctorum,

> where only his most intimate friends will be admitted, is room No. 37, on the third floor. On one side of him is the celebrated Genesse heiress, Miss W—, on the other, a son of the immortal Clinton. (Anon., 1908: 24)[6]

Like in 'The Masque of the Red Death' the author then speaks of each of the various chambers; one that is 'perfect bijou', a parlor in which hangs 'an original Vandyke', the 'most exquisite' (Anon., 1908: 24) bedroom. In his journalistic exposé, Whitman performs a complex balancing act. At once revelling in a certain vicarious prestige afforded him by means of his access to the inner 'sanctum sanctorum' of the illustrious British writer and his small friendship group, the piece also serves as a peculiar kind of threat; offering details that might easily be abused by fans, other journalists and even criminals (the number of his room, the location of a 'celebrated Genesse heiress' [Anon., 1908: 24] and controversial American political figures). There is also at play here a tone of rich irony. Immediately preceding this passage is another in which the author apostrophises Dickens: 'The editor of *The Aurora* welcomes thee in his own behalf; for in weariness, in solitude, in sickness, in prison, thy genius has enlivened the gloomy hours, and cheered the desponding. So to thee and thine, Welcome!' (Anon., 1908, 24). Here, Dickens is evoked as the father of a form of ethical fiction that 'enlivened the gloomy hours' of the neglected and oppressed in Victorian society. In this context, the subsequent description of the 'superb' Carlton House on Broadway, written in a high tone appears sarcastic, even, to use a term from modern journalism, snarky. Underneath the overt praise of Dickens's ethics the reader can detect an anger that stems perhaps from the well-known fact of Dickens's hatred for the penny press and his attempts to restrict the well-established practice of reprinting through international copyright control. Aimed at the lower-middle-class mechanics who were the readers of *The Aurora*, the writer's knowledge of the interior of Dickens's temporary domicile serves to illustrate a mastery that he does not actually possess, yet he performs as his right, playing an artful game with the

[6] The original text has also been digitised and is available courtesy of the Walt Whitman Archive at (http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/aurora.html). Attribution to Whitman is assumed based on this archival work.

concept of private and public ownership that speaks to the US copyright battle in which Dickens was involved. Whitman is engaged in a form of class mimicry, or, more precisely *emulation*. As Andrew Lawson has remarked: 'emulation evolves from the desire to imitate another person with the aim of equaling or excelling him or her. . . imitation with a competitive edge' (2004: 598). The piece displays a certain self-confident virtuosity perfectly in keeping with the politics of the paper and of an author who, in the 1855 version of 'Song of Myself', would perform similarly aggressive acts of intrusion and violation.[7] Returning to Poe, we can see how the heavily descriptive qualities of 'The Masque of the Red Death' might operate less as a litmus test of the real-world application of his own aesthetic theories, as Vanderbilt suggests, than as a form of satire that neatly punctures the private life and activities of a generic European aristocrat, sharing similarities with one of the primary literary techniques of the penny press.

Americans often used Dickens's characters in unlicensed, non-traditional settings that were often oddly at variance with the author's own particular textual usages; challenging the idea that Dickens's books were the sole source through which US audiences might experience the words of the English writer. As I have already mentioned, The Copyright Act of 1842 that was being debated in the British Parliament at the time extended protections over literary materials to their theatrical expressions – a clause that would have stifled a significant and lucrative resource for the American theatre, had it been introduced in the US. Dickens's arrival in New York on 14th February had been the occasion of an elaborate ball for 3,000 elite paying guests at The Park Theatre. Significantly, the body that made up the planning committee for the event included some of the most vocal supporters of international copyright and of literary nationalism, Philip Hone, Henry

[7] Whitman's poetic voice in 'Song of Myself' shuttles between intimacy and violation. Some examples include the persona's claim that it wishes to '[u]nscrew the locks from the doors! / Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!' (Whitman, 1855: 32), whilst also suggesting a few pages later that 'I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself / And tighten her all night to my thighs and lips' (1855: 41). Overall, this produces the effect of the poet as a slightly overly familiar friend or acquaintance. This mixture of threat and companionship is repeated throughout the poem and is distinctly reminiscent of the tone of the *Aurora* persona.

Brevoort, Evert Duyckinck and Washington Irving, testifying to the relationship between elite coteries and authors' rights in the antebellum US. The committee charged with honouring the writer in the city reported the following in their minutes:

> To heighten the effect, and in compliance with the desire universally expressed, it is recommended that the Ball Room represent various compartments of [the] 'Curiosity Shop' in which the productions of Boz may be illustrated. In order to add a strikingly novel and agreeable feature to the intended fete, it is suggested that a number of Tableaux Vivants be formed by competent artists, in the intervals of the dance, drawn from the novels, sketches, poems and dramas of Mr. Dickens, and shadowing forth, in living pictures, the graphic and glowing delineations of this singularly gifted and original author. (Anon., 1842a: 4)

'The Boz Ball' resembles Poe's fictional 'Masque' in the manner by which the products of Dickens's imagination, egotistical outgrowths of 'the prince's own eccentric and august taste' (Poe, 1982: 269), became physically and performatively manifested in reality. Like Prospero's masquerade, it was solely for the most powerful political and publishing elites of the city. For the Boz Ball Committee, their event was a key moment in which the widely circulating productions of Dickens could be returned to their source – in the sense that these tableaux vivants could be performed in the presence of their creator – effectively dramatising the anchoring logic of copyright. Again, it is useful to return to the *Aurora* extra which included a long description for readers of The Boz Ball. The *Aurora* writes:

> The tableaux vivants were very fine indeed, and to those that could see them, afforded great gratification. The scene was a curious one. There was a raised stage at the back of the ballroom, and at the sound of a gong, the curtain drew up, and for the space of a minute, the characters were visible to those that were near enough, and tall enough, to see them. (Anon., 1908: 46)

The forms of power present in the authorial function of copyright law are also dramatised in a memorable, expressive moment of Poe's story:

> [T]here strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away – they have endured but an instant – and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. (Poe, 1982: 271)

In both pieces the sound of a 'chime' or 'gong' interrupts the dancing, and forces the audience to stand stock-still. In the case of the Boz Ball, the revellers watch tableaux vivants, whereas in Poe's story the audience, in effect, become those tableaux. In both cases, though, the products of the author's mind (whether Prospero or Dickens) render the audience static. As the New York committee for honouring Dickens desired, these tableaux produced the effect of reverence, the removal of his fiction from a ludic, public realm in which it could be reinterpreted and reconsidered, and the forging of that work into the shape of an 'official' monumentalisation. As such, the tableaux were synecdochal of the deployment of elite power that characterised the committee's treatment of Dickens more generally and was, so republican dissenters argued, eroding the free play of ideas that had helped cultivate the revolution. As a dramatic device in Poe's story, tableaux serve a similar purpose: one of reverence and stasis, a ritual action of deference. Yet it is not enough to point out that the ritual seems to replay monarchical or Old World cultures of prestige and honour; the mechanical nature of the tolling bell also recalls the rationalisation of time that allowed for the industrialisation of labour. Consequently, Prospero appears to readers as both an elite artist and an industrial overseer – a dual-threat to the security and ideology of the Jacksonian artisan republic.

Another exposé of the Boz Ball in the *New York Herald* also resembles Poe's interior description in 'Masque of the Red Death'. In the 15th February edition of the *Herald*, the author describes the decoration of the Park Theatre in minute detail, breaking the theatre down into seven distinct areas of unique design: 'First Tier. . .

Second Tier Front. . . Third Tier Front. . . Fourth Tier. . . Boxes Second Tier. . . The Proscenium. . . and The Dome' (Anon., 1842b: 3). The author then describes the stage decorations and arrangements, which 'were the most chaste and beautiful that can be imagined'. The author goes on to say:

> the whole stage represented a splendid chamber, of carved and gilded oak, with magnificent ceiling to match, of the Elizabethan age, with deep bow windows on each side. . .. On each panel of this room was placed a medallion tableau, highly finished, representing a scene from Boz's works. There were twenty-two in number. . . (Anon., 1842b: 3)

Even among exposés for the popular press the description of the interior of the Park Theatre by the *Herald* reporter is excessive here. The paper was known for putting out extras concerning the events of the New York uppercrust's party season, yet this precision of architectural description, especially when paired with illustrations, is remarkable for the sheer quantity of copy given over to it. According to the *Herald* reporter, each of the seven areas was individually colour-coded and themed: the First Tier was 'covered with white muslin', the Second Tier Front curiously decorated with twenty-three classical statues and medallions, the Third Tier Front 'festoons of flowers', the Fourth Tier portraits of American Presidents with 'English and American ensigns crossed', the boxes of the Second Tier contained 'red-striped drapery curtains to represent tents, each having a blue ground in the corner' and the proscenium and dome were covered with 'red, white and blue bunting' (Anon., 1842b: 3). Overall, the effect communicated by the reporter is of a sensory overload of conflicting, decontextualised symbols. Comparison with Poe's own description is fruitful:

> [The] windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example, in blue – and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout,

> and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange – the fifth with white – the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. (Poe, 1982: 269)

Whilst it is impossible to know precisely whether Poe read the New York exposés, the descriptions directly point to the tone of popular newspaper journalism. Poe's story also describes seven individually decorated chambers in an enclosed space that permits entry only to the elites of the social world. Poe continues to describe each of the chambers as containing:

> [no] lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire that protected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. (Poe, 1984: 270)

Like Poe, the author of the *Herald* article dedicates a whole sub-section to lighting, noting in particular 'six golden astral lamps hanging from golden brackets'. Indeed, there is a notable excess of lighting and gold for the venue, with 'splendid golden chandeliers', pillars supporting 'golden candelabras' and more, in addition to the usual gaslights for the theatre (Anon., 1842b: 3). The references to gold in both Poe and the *Herald* may, of course, point in both cases to a sense of clear and contrived ostentation. The style of simultaneous wonder and satirical excess in the *Herald* article represents the American popular press's approach to the elite's dream of dominion over law and space. When captured by Poe's story, this complex affect reflects his own comments on the excessiveness of Dickens's style I remarked upon above. Additionally, it shows how the author was exploited and lionised by elites who sought to utilise his talent to advance their own careers and perform their own sense of

entitlement – a capitalist cabal. In the context of ongoing debates about how copyright legislation could negatively affect producers of literary material (especially the artisans and mechanics who were the traditional readers of the *Herald*) and enrich elites off the back of an author's work, Poe's use of popular print techniques in 'The Masque of the Red Death' demonstrates his precarious position. As a supporter of international copyright to advance author's rights *and* a person concerned about the implications of such a move in assisting the rise of a nationalistic modern culture industry, Poe had to find a way to balance these competing needs. Consequently, 'Masque of the Red Death' is both lower-class satire and elite romanticism simultaneously – a generically unstable performance of excess that deliberately undercuts itself.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, Poe's tale utilised the language of popular print culture to weave its rich tapestry of Gothic excess and 'gaudy appearances'. The work was part of a wider debate in antebellum society about how in a transatlantic world the changing role of the author was seemingly gravitating towards the emergence of a nationalistic literary-industrial complex. For many Americans in 1842, Dickens was more than a talented and popular writer or celebrity; he was a tool by which to expose important local and national regimes of class stratification and inequality. Dickens may have ultimately regretted his trip to the US, but for an important sector of the American workforce it was a rare opportunity to voice their dissent from emerging practices of monopolisation and capitalist control that were wresting power away from the American people and into the hands of cosmopolitan publishing elites. Poe's tale may be read as a dramatisation of these similar concerns, which were shaping the position of the author and the role of literature in the transatlantic literary marketplace at the time of its first publication in *Graham's*.

Conflict of Interest Statement

'Since the acceptance for publication of this article, the researcher has become a Trustee of the Open Library of Humanities'.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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