

TELL-TALE SIGNS - EDGAR ALLAN POE AND BOB DYLAN:  
TOWARDS A MODEL OF INTERTEXTUALITY

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This article shows how the poetry and prose of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) cast a long shadow over the work of America's greatest living songwriter, Bob Dylan (1941-). The work of both artists straddles the dividing-line between 'high' and 'mass' culture by pertaining to both: read through Poe, Dylan's work may be seen as a significant manifestation of American Gothic. It is further suggested, in the context of nineteenth-century and contemporary debates on alleged 'plagiarism', that the textual strategy of 'embedded' quotation, as employed by both Poe and Dylan, points up the need today for an open and inclusive model of intertextuality.

Keywords: culture; Dylan; Gothic; intertextuality; Poe; quotation

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HACIA UN MODELO DE INTERTEXTUALIDAD

*Este artículo explica cómo la poesía y la prosa de Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) proyectan una larga sombra sobre la obra del mayor cantautor vivo de Estados Unidos, Bob Dylan (1941-). Ambos artistas se ubican en una encrucijada entre la cultura 'de elite' y la 'de masas', puesto que la obra de cada uno se sitúa en ambos dominios a la vez: leída a través de Poe, la obra dylaniana aparece como una importante manifestación del gótico norteamericano. Se plantea igualmente la hipótesis de que, en el marco de los debates, tanto decimonónicos como contemporáneos, sobre el supuesto 'plagio', la estrategia textual, empleada tanto por Poe como por Dylan, de la cita 'encajada' señala la necesidad urgente de plantear un modelo abierto y global de la intertextualidad.*

*Palabras clave: cita; cultura; Dylan; gótico; intertextualidad; Poe*

## 1. Introduction: Poe and Dylan: between high culture and mass culture

In 1961, the budding musician whom the world would know as Bob Dylan, recently arrived in New York, found himself staring up in awe at No 85, West 3rd Street, the location once inhabited by Edgar Allan Poe. In 1975, a by then famous Dylan took time out from his epic Rolling Thunder Review tour to listen to a Poe lookalike recite from ‘The Raven’ in a hotel room in Boston, Edgar’s birthplace (Shepard 1978: 129). In 1997, Dylan would release an album entitled *Time out of Mind*, including songs naming both Boston and Baltimore, where Poe died; in 2008, he paid a discreet visit to the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site in Philadelphia (‘Tell-Tale Visit’ 2008: 2), soon before bringing out a collection of songs under the pregnant Poesque title *Tell-Tale Signs*. Dylan declared in a 1985 interview: “If you can imagine something and you haven’t experienced it, it’s usually true that someone else has actually gone through it and will identify with it. I actually think about Poe’s stories, ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’, ‘The Pit and the Pendulum’” (Dylan 1985). This implies Poe as an alter ego for Dylan, and a close look at the work of both reveals, indeed, much Poe blood on Dylan’s tracks: this paper will endeavour to show that to examine the ‘tell-tale signs’ of Poe in Dylan is to shed light on the creative process not only in Dylan, but also, looping back, in Poe himself.<sup>1</sup>

The subject does not seem to have been studied in detail to date from either the Poe or the Dylan end of scholarship, though a beginning exists thanks to the major Dylan commentator Michael Gray, who adumbrates a number of textual connections in his *Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan* (Gray 2000: 77-78) and *The Bob Dylan Encyclopaedia* (Gray 2006: 540-41). That more has not been said is somewhat surprising, for Edgar Allan Poe and Bob Dylan prove, on closer scrutiny, to have much in common as icons of American culture who have achieved lasting and worldwide popularity. The parallels start even with the two artists’ names: Bob Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman (‘Allen’ with an *e*), officially changing his name in 1962, while the orphan Edgar Poe became Edgar Allan Poe (‘Allan’ with an *a*) after being taken in by the Richmond merchant John Allan. With both, we have a change of name and a common misapprehension: if Poe’s middle name is endlessly misspelt ‘Allen’, it is an equally frequent solecism to refer to ‘Robert Allen Zimmerman’ as Bob Dylan’s ‘real name’, even though he renamed himself in all legality and his children, including the rock singer Jakob Dylan, were born surnamed Dylan. From the outset, the careers of both are marked by mutability and misunderstanding.

Both Poe and Dylan are artists whose work straddles the high culture / mass culture divide, belonging simultaneously and a shade uneasily in both camps. Poe’s work originates on the high-cultural side of the gulf but has been appropriated by mass culture in such genres as comic strip, film and rock; Dylan’s songwriting starts out from a variety of musical traditions on the other, popular side of that same chasm but has subsequently been inducted into the Valhalla of literary respectability. Dylan’s songs –

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of a plenary lecture given at the conference *Poe Alive in the Century of Anxiety* (University of Alcalá, 21-23 May 2009).

which by now number some six hundred – have been put under the critical microscope, for instance in the UK by as eminent a scholar of English-language poetry as Christopher Ricks (2003), and in Canada by the award-winning poet and critic Stephen Scobie (2004), and he has been nominated every year since 1996 for the Nobel Prize for Literature, by Gordon Ball, professor of literature at the Virginia Military Institute (Ball 2007). There remains, nonetheless, a certain ambivalence, reflected in, for instance, the fact that both Poe and Dylan have volumes devoted to them in the influential *Cambridge Companion* series published in the UK (Hayes 2002; Dettmar 2009), yet while the Poe collection includes a piece on ‘Poe and popular culture’ (Neimeyer 2002), the Dylan volume, conversely, matches it with one on ‘Bob Dylan and the Academy’ (Marshall 2009) – as if no one were quite sure where either belongs. Some critics and writers, notably in Britain, still refuse to accept Dylan’s songs as literature (a debate that has been chronicled as the so-called *Dylan-Keats wars* – Gray 2000: xviii-xix); and much of the specialist discussion of his work takes place in fanzines such as *The Bridge* in the UK or the now defunct *Fanzimmer* in Spain, publications best described as serious but not academic and which do not have the status of a recognised journal like *Poe Studies*. Poe, meanwhile, has an admitted seat at the high table of high culture, and yet T.S. Eliot, writing in 1948, was uneasy about his presence there, labelling his work “a stumbling block for the judicial critic” (Eliot 1976: 205), and today as influential a critic as Harold Bloom clearly does not see Poe as a welcome guest at the table, declaring in *The Western Canon*, in a studiedly fence-sitting comment: “Poe is too universally accepted around the world to be excluded, though his writing is almost invariably atrocious” (Bloom 1995: 228), and grudgingly allowing him into the canon as some kind of tolerated poor relation (Carlson 1986).

Indeed, both Poe and Dylan are American artists who have become ‘accepted around the world’ and have been very widely translated, all the major work of both existing in, notably, French and Spanish – thanks in Poe’s case to Charles Baudelaire and Julio Cortázar, respectively. In the Hispanic universe, we may note, for Poe, the reissue in Spain to coincide with the 2009 bicentennial of the Cortázar translation of the tales (Poe 2008), and, for Dylan, the four different Spanish-language versions (one of them Argentinian) of his novel *Tarantula*, as well as the translations into Spanish and Catalan of the memoir *Chronicles Volume One* and the various volumes of lyrics in Spanish, the most rigorous being that for the period 1975-1997, translated by Antonio Iriarte and Francisco García (Dylan 1999). Both artists also bridge another gap, that between artefact and performance – Poe, in his multiple live readings of his poems, notably ‘The Raven’, and his public renditions as lectures of such prose works as *Eureka* and ‘The Philosophy of Composition’; Dylan, in his concerts right across his career, above all in the seemingly infinite sequence of live performances launched in 1988 that has become known as the Never Ending Tour. Poe was the child of actors; Dylan seems to have a compulsive need to be on stage: both are not simply authors of texts, but also dynamic performance artists.

A further characteristic shared by Dylan and Poe is that both are obsessive re-writers, seeing the text less as a finished object than as one evolving over time: to Poe’s painstaking revisions and frequent retitlings of his tales and poems, as chronicled in Thomas Ollive Mabbott’s Harvard edition, correspond the multiple lyrical variants of

many of Dylan's songs (both in alternate studio takes and in live performance) and his constant, and sometimes disconcerting, musical rearrangements of them in concert. Dylan studies, however, suffer as Poe studies do not from the *absence* to date of a proper variorum edition. The most recent collection of his songs, published in 2004, is *Lyrics 1962-2001* (Dylan 2004b; for subsequent material one has to rely on Dylan's official website at [www.bobdylan.com](http://www.bobdylan.com)).<sup>2</sup> The *Lyrics* volume gives, in all but a tiny handful of cases, only one text of a song, despite the frequent cases where more than one text exists; and, to complicate matters further, a given song text in *Lyrics* may prove on examination not to correspond exactly to what Dylan sings on *any* recorded version. All this might be seen by some as rendering Dylan's acceptance into the canon more difficult, at least until a scholarly edition exists.

The high-visibility profile of both artists has brought both gain and loss, for the range and complexity of both Poe's and Dylan's work is often obscured by a reductive and partial typecasting. In both cases, there is in the mind of the lay consumer a primary fixed image, complemented if one is lucky by a second, additional one, but beyond that only the aficionados are likely to be aware of the real range of the production of either. Thus, Poe is known in the first place for a score of tales of terror, and secondly as the author of a clutch of detective stories and the inventor of that genre; Dylan is known firstly as the composer of a dozen or so protest songs from the early 60s, and after that as an icon of the mid-60s counter-culture. Yet beyond the Poe known under the rubric *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (a title not of his making) and the Dylan labelled as *Civil Rights troubadour* (something he never was) or *voice of a generation* (a role he never wanted), there is also Poe the satirist, Poe the science-fiction pioneer and Poe the journalist and critic, as too there is Dylan the prose writer, author of the experimental novel *Tarantula* from 1966 (Dylan 1994) and the unorthodox memoir *Chronicles Volume One*<sup>3</sup> (Dylan 2004a), not to mention Dylan the composer of an enormous post-1968 arsenal of songs in the most varied genres which have nothing to do with either hippiedom or protest (charging Dylan with 'selling out' for whatever reason is a well-worn newspaper cliché, but on his own avowal he hasn't been a protest singer since 1964).

Thematic parallels between Poe and Dylan abound. It is not, of course, similarity all the way: the political themes of early Dylan and the religious concerns of his mid-career Christian period would both have been alien to Poe. Nonetheless, Poe's Gothic sensibility has left visible traces in Dylan's writing, strewn as it is with references to death, masquerades and claustrophobia, imagery of ghosts, mirrors and graveyards, and tell-tale signifiers like *gloom* and *shadow*. This Gothic element will be evoked in detail

<sup>2</sup> The website presents the lyrics in alphabetical order. Its selection of songs up to 2001 is not identical in all respects to that of the *Lyrics* volume, nor are the texts always exactly the same; again, only a very few variant lyrics appear. Of Dylan's post-2001 material, the site includes the songs from *Modern Times* (2006) and promises to add those from *Together Through Life* (2009), but makes no mention of the previously unreleased songs and variant lyrics from *Tell-Tale Signs* (2008).

<sup>3</sup> Dylan has promised another two volumes of *Chronicles*. The first volume narrates three discrete swathes of his career – 1961-1962, 1970 and 1989.

below in our examination of specific Dylan songs, but one crucial dimension may here be stressed, namely the *oneiric*. Poe, fascinated by dreams and by the transitional realm between dream and waking, wrote poems with titles like ‘Dream-Land’ and ‘A Dream Within A Dream’ and could have his characters declare, in ‘Eleonora’: “They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night” (Poe 1978j: 638), or in ‘The Assigination’: “To dream has been the business of my life” (Poe 1978a: 165). As distinguished a Hispanic literary figure as Rubén Darío said, in his essay of 1913 ‘Edgar Poe y los sueños’ (‘Edgar Poe and dreams’), that “*el sueño se encuentra en todo Poe, en toda su obra*” (‘dreams are to be found in all of Poe, in all of his work’) (Darío 1976: 93). Comparably, many of Dylan’s songs unfold like dream narratives, and his songbook offers titles such as ‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’, ‘Bob Dylan’s 115<sup>th</sup> Dream’, ‘Motorpsycho Nitemare [sic]’, ‘Visions of Johanna’ and ‘I Dreamed I Saw Saint Augustine’. Indeed, in 1991 he released a song called ‘Series of Dreams’,<sup>4</sup> offering Poesque lines like “everything stays down where it’s wounded” or “when someone wakes up and screams”, (Dylan 2004b: 539, lines 3, 5) which may be read as a meta-commentary on his entire *oeuvre*, as if the whole Dylan songbook were precisely that, a *series of dreams*. All in all, attentive examination of the work of both reveals a similar generic and thematic multiplicity and a shared dynamic of artistic flux.

Both, too, are masters in the art of intertextuality. To consider the intertextual dimension requires, in the first place, elucidating the traces of Poe in Dylan, and those traces are manifold. Nor should they surprise. Poe wrote an essay, included in his *Marginalia*, on ‘Song-Writing’, and this text holds the seeds of a conception of song as popular art. He examines the work of George Pope Morris (author of ‘Woodman, Spare That Tree’), and – in observations which could be transferred to Dylan – declares: “Morris is, very decidedly, our best writer of songs – and, in saying this, I mean to assign him a high rank as *poet*”,<sup>5</sup> having previously stated: “There are few cases in which mere popularity should be considered a proper test of merit; but the case of song-writing is, I think, one of the few” (Poe 1986: 495, 493). Indeed, Roderick in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’, presented as a poet and musician, the “wild improvisations of [whose] speaking guitar” were “not unfrequently accompanied” by simultaneous “rhymed verbal improvisations” (Poe 1978d: 404, 406), may be seen as a prototype of the singer-songwriter whose practice within the text uncannily anticipates early Dylan. Dylan is not the only modern popular-music artist to have drawn inspiration from Poe: in Dylan’s own folk circles, Joan Baez recorded ‘Annabel Lee’ on her 1967 album *Joan*, and Phil Ochs released a slimmed-down rendition of ‘The Bells’ on *All The News That’s Fit To Sing* in 1964. In the rock genre proper, we may note the Poe-inspired albums *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* by the British group the Alan Parsons Project (1976), and *The Raven* by Lou Reed (2003). In Spain, ‘Annabel Lee’ has been recorded (in Spanish) by the rock group Radio Futura, on their album *Memoria del Porvenir* (1998).

<sup>4</sup> This song, composed in 1989, exists in two released versions (1991 and 2008), with lyrical variants. The version printed in *Lyrics* (and available on the website) is not identical to either. For the song’s complicated textual history, see Ford 2009; the extracts quoted here are from the 1991 version.

<sup>5</sup> All italics in quotes from Poe are Poe’s own.

Poe, meanwhile, is very far from being Dylan's only literary influence: the songwriter's work is riddled with allusions to the Bible and to an enormous range of writers all the way from (as we will see) Virgil and Ovid to modern Japanese literature, and among Poe's nineteenth-century American contemporaries alone the Dylan *oeuvre* draws on Melville, Longfellow, Whitman, Twain, Julia Ward Howe and even (on whom more later) the lesser-known poet Henry Timrod. Intertextuality is a multi-directional signpost; meanwhile, what we find in the particular case of Poe-in-Dylan is less a visiting of Poe for individual songs or projects, than a multiplication of 'tell-tale signs' right across the work.

## 2. Poe in Dylan: a textual presence

Dylan states in *Chronicles* that Poe was among the authors he read while living in New York in 1961 (the text lists a whole, somewhat Poesque, library of them), and it was there too that he discovered 'The Bells' and set the poem to music: "I read the poetry books, mostly. Byron and Shelley and Longfellow and Poe. I memorized Poe's poem The Bells and strummed it to a melody on my guitar" (Dylan 2004a: 37). He recalls the sound of chimes in the Big Apple in language that also strongly suggests that poem: "Across the street from where I stood looking out the window was a church with a bell tower. The ringing of bells made me feel at home, too. I'd always heard and listened to the bells. Iron, brass, silver bells – the bells sang" (2004a: 31). It is in *Chronicles*, too, that Dylan narrates the episode evoked at the beginning of this paper, when he "stood outside of Poe's house on [West] 3rd Street, ... staring mournfully up at the windows" (2004a: 103).

Poe is also a presence in Dylan's other major prose work, the novel *Tarantula*: indeed, that book's first page contains what may be a Poe reference (to "el dorado" [*sic*] [Dylan 1994: 1]), and one of its sections is named "Al Aaraaf and the Forcing Committee" (1994: 129), evoking one of Poe's less accessible poems. *Tarantula* speaks, in parallel with *Chronicles*, of "New York neath spells of Poe" (1994: 136), and, indeed, the poet himself makes a cameo appearance: "edgar allan poe steps out from behind a burning bush" (1994: 39). The reference to *Al Aaraaf*, notably, suggests a detailed knowledge of the nineteenth-century master's work; it may even be that the title *Tarantula* itself comes from Poe's 'The Gold-Bug', with its epigraph, certainly fitting to the crazed atmosphere of Dylan's novel:

What ho! what ho! this fellow is dancing mad!  
He hath been bitten by the Tarantula. (Poe 1978n: 806)

We shall now proceed to examine the numerous Poe traces present in the corpus of Dylan's song production, taking as our basis the texts published in *Lyrics* except where otherwise indicated.

The first incontestable presence of Poe in the Dylan song canon dates from the songwriter's fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, released in 1964 and, significantly, the album on which Dylan bade farewell to protest. The song that bears Poe's imprint here is 'Chimes of Freedom', a six-stanza epic which may be seen as

Dylan's answer to 'The Bells' – or his first answer, since, as we shall see, years later he will return to the motif. Dylan deploys synaesthetic imagery to imagine a small cluster of friends, caught "far between sundown's finish and midnight's broken toll", listening to the chime of bells in a thunderstorm ("as the echo of the wedding bells / before the blowin' rain / dissolved into the bells of the lightning") and hearing in their toll a gesture of solidarity with whole groups of humanity – "the disrobed faceless forms of no position", the outlaws and outcasts of the earth (Dylan 2004b: 116-17, lines 1, 11-12, 26). Three of Poe's four sets of bells – wedding bells, alarm bells and steeple bells – are echoed by Dylan's bells; Dylan's lyric has a social and metaphysical edge not present in Poe's poem, but it would have been impossible without it.

Dylan's next album, *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965) offers, in 'Love Minus Zero / No Limit', an equally unmistakable reference to 'The Raven', storm and all: "The wind howls like a hammer / The night blows cold and rainy / My love she's like some raven / At my window with a broken wing" (2004b: 145, lines 29-32); and, in the comic narrative song 'Bob Dylan's 115<sup>th</sup> Dream', the line "They asked me my name, and I said Captain Kidd" (2004b: 148-51, lines 113-14), a reference which not only suggests the celebrated pirate's horde from 'The Gold-Bug' (in *Chronicles*, too, Dylan mentions "Captain Kidd's buried treasure" – Dylan 2004a: 132) but, since Dylan's dreamer goes on to give an absurd answer, makes a similar pun on *kid* (in the sense of 'deceive') to Poe in his tale. From the ratiocinative 'The Gold-Bug' it is but a step to Poe's detective stories featuring C. Auguste Dupin, and the album *Highway 61 Revisited*, also from 1965, offers Dylan's first plundering of the first of those stories, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', in 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues'. This song, a nightmare evocation of Ciudad Juárez in Mexico, just across the border from El Paso, includes the lines: "Don't put on any airs / When you're down on Rue Morgue Avenue / They got some hungry women there / And they really make a mess out of you". Dylan's words have the effect of reversing the violence-against-women theme of both Poe's story and – in an eerily prophetic touch – the sad reality of that city's notorious twenty-first-century feminicides: but, since the song also features housing-project corruption and intimidating male 'authorities' who reduce a character called Angel to "looking just like a ghost", what is created is an enveloping atmosphere of universal violence (Dylan 2004b: 179-80, lines 5-8, 40; the Dylan-Poe connection in this song has recently been examined by Adam Lifshey, in the context of an examination of Mexican/Hispanic themes in another iconic US popular music figure, Bruce Springsteen – Lifshey 2009: 227). The *Highway 61 Revisited* album also features the darkly oneiric 'Desolation Row', whose sinister masqueraders ("going to the carnival tonight / On Desolation Row" – Dylan 2004b: 181-83, line 35) recall the "supreme madness of the carnival season" of Poe's 'The Cask of Amontillado' (Poe 1978q: 1257).

On the next album, *Blonde and Blonde* from 1966, 'Rue Morgue' resurfaces in 'Temporary Like Achilles', in which song a woman employs a bodyguard called Achilles and described as "hungry like a man in drag" (Dylan 2004b: 205, line 29) – pointing back to the lines from the seventeenth-century writer Sir Thomas Browne prefixed as epigraph to 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', with their question concerning "what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women" (Poe 1978g: 527) – referring to Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses* of Achilles disguised as a girl in a vain

bid to keep him from the Trojan war. Browne's and Poe's poser ultimately derives from the life of the emperor Tiberius by Suetonius. Both the *Metamorphoses* – called by Dylan a “scary horror tale” – and Suetonius' *The Twelve Caesars* are among the books cited in *Chronicles* (Dylan 2004a: 36-37). Yet another reference to ‘Rue Morgue’ appears in ‘This Wheel's On Fire’,<sup>6</sup> recorded in 1967 and released in 1975 on *The Basement Tapes*, where the lines “I was goin' to confiscate your lace / And wrap it up in a sailor's knot” (Dylan 2004b: 299, lines 14-15) recall Poe's sailor, tracked down by Dupin by that same tell-tale sign: “this knot is one which few besides sailors could tie” (Poe 1978g: 561).

The album *Blood on the Tracks*, released in 1975, contains a fresh harkback to ‘The Raven’ in ‘Simple Twist of Fate’, where the narrator, caught in nostalgia for a disappeared woman, “walks along with a parrot that talks” (Dylan 2004b: 334, line 22): that parrot may, like Poe's raven, symbolise what Poe himself calls in ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ “*Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*”, for in that essay Poe says that before he thought of the raven “a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself” (Poe 1972: 177, 170). The link with Poe's poems continues with the *Desire* album from 1976, for which Michael Gray suggests, in a rare Poe connection from a Dylan critic, that ‘Sara’, dedicated to Dylan's then wife Sara Lowndes, recalls, in lines like “glamorous nymph with an arrow and bow” (Dylan 2004b: 369-70, line 38), the idealising neoclassical imagery of ‘To Helen’ (Gray 2000: 77-78; 2006: 541).

The album *Street-Legal*, from 1978, locates its song ‘Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)’ in the Poe/Dylan New York neighbourhood of Greenwich Village (“laughter down on Elizabeth Street”), with imagery recalling a tale like ‘Ligeia’ (“There's a white diamond gloom on the dark side of this room”), and three lines which seem almost to summarise ‘William Wilson’, Poe's classic tale of the *Doppelgänger*: “I fought with my twin, that enemy within / ‘Til both of us fell by the way” (Dylan 2004b: 394-95, lines 6, 47, 35-36). Two songs written in 1981 and first released on the 1991 collection *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3*, offer Poe nuggets: ‘Angelina’ has a character with eyes like “two slits” and a “face that any painter would paint as he walked through the crowd” (456-57: lines 10-11), recalling Poe's sinister protagonist in ‘The Man of the Crowd’, who is likened to “pictorial incarnations of the fiend” (Poe 1978f: 511); and in ‘Need A Woman’ (Dylan 2004b: 455), we find a crystal-clear reference in the line: “The tell-tale heart will show itself to anybody near”.<sup>7</sup> The ghost of ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ hovers too over ‘I and I’, from 1983's *Infidels* – a song which replicates the macabre pun on ‘I’ and ‘eye’ of Poe's story (“I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever” – Poe 1978m: 792; “I and I / In creation where one's nature neither honours nor forgives”; “Took a stranger to teach me to look into justice's beautiful face / And to see an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” – Dylan 2004b: 474-75, lines 5-6, 19-20).

In 1989 came *Oh Mercy*, an album little-known to the general public but arguably one of Dylan's best. This album and some of the other songs recorded at the time form

<sup>6</sup> Co-written with Rick Danko.

<sup>7</sup> This line is sung by Dylan on the record but is not included in the text available in *Lyrics* or on the website.

the body of Dylan's work showing the densest traces of Poe's influence. In 'Ring Them Bells', we have the second Dylan composition to bear the imprint of 'The Bells', taking over where 'Chimes of Freedom' left off a quarter-century before. The song opens with a Poe-like landscape recalling poems like 'Dream-Land' or 'The City in the Sea': "Ring them bells, ye heathen / From the city that dreams / Ring them bells from the sanctuaries / 'Cross the valleys and streams" (Dylan 2004b: 529, lines 1-4). The register is no longer socio-political as in 'Chimes of Freedom', but theological. The bells chime "for the chosen few / Who will judge the many", but also for "the time that flies" (lines 19-20, 21) – the latter phrase being lifted straight from Poe's 'The Masque of The Red Death' – "after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock" (Poe 1978k: 673). With 'Disease of Conceit', Dylan returns to 'The Tell-Tale Heart': conceit, he warns, will "give ya delusions of grandeur / And an evil eye / Give you the idea that / You're too good to die", until that megalomania, like that of Poe's demented narrator, winds down and "they bury you from your head to your feet" (Dylan 2004b: 534-35, lines 39-42, 43). Above all, 'Man in the Long Black Coat'<sup>8</sup> is a triumph of American Gothic, a tale of terror in verse combining a death-like visitation with Calvinist rumblings of predestination. Dylan writes of this song in *Chronicles*: "It's cut out from the abyss of blackness – visions of a maddened brain ... Something menacing and terrible" (Dylan 2004a: 215-216). Lurking behind that 'blackness' is the Puritanism-obsessed Nathaniel Hawthorne of a story like 'The Minister's Black Veil', but also the Poe of, again, 'The Masque of the Red Death' and, even more so, 'The Fall of the House of Usher'. The setting is part sinister dance-hall ("He looked into her eyes when she stopped to ask / If he wanted to dance, he had a face like a mask") – with shades of the intruder at the ball in 'Red Death'; and part dark mansion and decaying domain out of 'Usher' ("African trees / Bent over backwards from a hurricane breeze"). An unnamed woman runs off with the Man in the Long Black Coat, and the song ends with "smoke on the water" and "tree trunks uprooted, 'neath the high crescent moon" (or, in a variant introduced by Dylan in performance and printed in the *Lyrics* text, "blood on the moon") (Dylan 2004b: 530, lines 10-11, 3-4, 27, 28). Here indeed we are in a Poesque nightmare world, Dylan's ending recalling the culmination of 'Usher' as the "full, setting, and blood-red moon" macabrely lights up the collapse of the House (Poe 1978d: 417).

Also recorded at the *Oh Mercy* sessions but released somewhat later were 'Series of Dreams', a song we have examined above, and the very striking 'Dignity'. This song exists in three official recordings – one released in 1994 and two in 2008 – and three sets of lyrics. It narrates the search for a never-defined, ever-deferred person or quality

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<sup>8</sup> There is only one official recording of this song, that released on *Oh Mercy* (A). The text printed in *Lyrics* (B), however, is not identical to that sung on the record and incorporates changes introduced by Dylan in live performance. The website nonetheless follows the words of the record (A). Of our quotations, the first three up to and including "smoke on the water" (lines 10-11, 3-4 and 27) are common to the (A) and (B) texts; for line 28, the phrase "tree trunks uprooted" appears in both (A) and (B), while the "high crescent moon" variant is from (A) and the "blood on the moon" alternative is from (B).

called Dignity, in terms that, in the 1994 version, strongly parallel Poe's poem 'Eldorado'. "Searchin' high, searchin' low", Dylan's quester "went into the city, went into the town / Went Into the land of the midnight sun" (Dylan 2004b: 540-41, lines 13, 11-12), as Poe's "gallant knight" seeks Eldorado "over the Mountains / Of the Moon / Down the Valley of the Shadow" – Poe 1969: 463, lines 19-21). Dylan here uses antitheses for poetic effect ("I met the sons of darkness and the sons of light" – Dylan, line 43), as too does Poe ("in sunshine and in shadow" – Poe, line 2). The lines "Chilly wind sharp as a razor blade / House on fire, debts unpaid" (Dylan, lines 29-30) recall, in turn, the "chilling and killing" wind of 'Annabel Lee' (Poe 1969: 477-78, line 26), the ape's razor from 'Rue Morgue', and an episode from 'The Angel of the Odd' (Poe 1978p). One of the 2008 variants even offers a line that could have been penned by Poe, fusing visions of Madeline "without the door" in 'Usher' (Poe 1978d: 416) and Death "look[ing] gigantically down" in 'The City in the Sea' (Poe 1969: 201-02, line 29), as Dylan declaims: "Death is standing in the doorway of life".<sup>9</sup>

Nor has Poe's shade been absent from the more recent Dylan. The 1997 album *Time Out Of Mind* echoes 'Usher' in its title ("His very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament" – Poe 1978d: 398), and, as we have seen, mentions both Boston (where the song 'Highlands' is set) and, in 'Tryin' To Get To Heaven', in lines reminiscent of a Poe beloved, Baltimore: "I was riding in a buggy with Miss Mary-Jane / Miss Mary-Jane got a house in Baltimore". The latter song also offers the image of "hearts a-beatin' / Like pendulums swinging on chains", as if fusing 'The Tell-Tale Heart' with 'The Pit and the Pendulum' (Dylan 2004b: 564, lines 29-30, 19-20). 'Not Dark Yet' starkly confronts mortality, its mournful opening recalling both Poe's 'Usher' and his 'The Island of the Fay' (Poe 1978h): "Shadows are falling, and I've been here all day / It's too hot to sleep, time is running away", to conclude – as if the lake were slowly swallowing up Poe's Fay's shadow – "It's not dark yet, but it's getting there" (Dylan 2004b: 566, lines 1-2, 6). The same song contains the line: "Behind every beautiful thing there's been some kind of pain" (8), lugubriously echoing Poe's dictum in 'The Philosophy of Composition' that "the death... of a beautiful woman" is "the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe 1972: 170). "Love and Theft", in 2001, featured in the song 'Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum' (itself about doubling) the line "he'll stab you where you stand" (Dylan 2004b: 579-580, line 30), which is lifted straight from the climax of 'William Wilson', when Wilson challenges his double: "Follow me, or I stab you where you stand" (Poe 1978e: 446).

In 2006, *Modern Times* threw up, in 'Nettie Moore', a line taken near-verbatim from Poe's tale 'Eleonora': where Poe writes: "the world grew dark before mine eyes" (Poe 1978j: 644), Dylan declares in his song's refrain: "The world has gone black before my eyes" (line 18).<sup>10</sup> A song recorded in 1997 and released in 2008 on *Tell-Tale Signs*,

<sup>9</sup> The text printed in *Lyrics* (and available on the website) is that of the 1994 version (included on the album *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Volume 3*). The two variant lyrics have not been officially published in any medium, and therefore no citation is given in the case of our final quotation from this song.

<sup>10</sup> The four last-named songs postdate *Lyrics*. The words of 'Nettie Moore' can be found on the official website: the other three have not appeared there yet.

the mysterious love-meditation 'Red River Shore', offers dramatic imagery that could have flown off the pages of 'Ligeia': "Some of us scare ourselves to death in the dark / To be where the angels fly" (lines 3-4). Finally (so far), the most recent tell-tale signs of Poe-in-Dylan appear on *Together Through Life*, released in 2009, whose stalking shadow imagery – 'Forgetful Heart'<sup>11</sup> evokes "a walking shadow in my brain" (line 20); in 'This Dream of You', "Shadows dance upon the wall / Shadows that seem to know it all" (lines 13-14) – conjures up 'The Raven' or 'The Masque of the Red Death' and suggests that Poe's own shadow remains a presence still floating on Bob Dylan's floor.

### 3. Conclusion: Plagiarism, artistic creation and intertextuality

Intertextuality with Poe is, then, written right across Bob Dylan's *oeuvre*. At this point it will be useful to take account of *how* Dylan uses the material he takes from Poe. It should be clear from the examples above that in his song references, Dylan does not in general cite Poe *directly* (the 'Rue Morgue Avenue' and 'tell-tale heart' lines being rare exceptions); the Poe material enters the songs in the form of what might be called *embedded* quotation or allusion, requiring extraction by listener or reader on the basis of knowledge external to the texts. This is in fact typical of Dylan's writing method in general, much the same applying, for instance, to his extensive use of biblical quotation. Dylan's use of quotation may, besides, be pregnantly juxtaposed with Poe's own, notably if we now proceed to examine intertextuality in relation to the vexed issue of (real or alleged) *plagiarism*.

As is well-known, for Poe plagiarism was both an obsessive theme and a knife that cut both ways: as a critic he regularly charged others with literary theft, only to be accused by his compeers of committing the same sin in his own writings. The issue peaked with the 'Longfellow war' of 1845, with barbed accusations of plagiarism flying back and forth between Poe and Longfellow and their respective allies. Poe's biographer Kenneth Silverman, chronicling the saga, notes his habit of "pilfering ... long stretches ... from other books, at the same time that he was shaming Longfellow for copying Tennyson" (1992: 147). In this respect there are strong parallels between the reception of Poe's and Dylan's work: Dylan too has, at least figuratively, stood in the dock under charge of plagiarism. The complex issues involved have been examined in studies (for Dylan) by Richard Thomas (2007), professor of classics at Harvard, and (for Dylan and Poe) the distinguished Poe scholar Scott Peeples (2007).

On 8 July 2003, the *Wall Street Journal* carried a front-page article identifying some dozen phrases from Dylan's much-praised album of 2001, "*Love and Theft*", as being lifted from the English translation, published in 1991, of *Confessions of a Yakuza*, a chronicle of Japanese gangsterdom from 1989 by the writer Junichi Saga (Eig and Moffett 2003). Examination of this book – which, as Thomas stresses, "blurs the genres of novel and biography, fiction and non-fiction" (2007: 3), and would certainly have attracted Dylan – bears out the claim: five of the album's twelve songs include quotations, verbatim or almost, taken from right across Saga's narrative. Dylan's album

<sup>11</sup> Co-written with Robert Hunter.

was already known to abound with quotations from other people's songs and from authors ranging from Virgil to Twain and Fitzgerald, which have been identified and discussed in detail (Rollason 2002). Its very title is enclosed in quotation marks and is identical with that of an academic study of nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy by Eric Lott, professor of American Studies at the University of Virginia (1995). Lott himself, far from objecting to Dylan's appropriation of his title, later wrote an appreciative essay on the album (Lott 2009). Nonetheless, in the *Yakuza* case some – even some long-term Dylan acolytes – felt that the intertextuality had gone too far.

One of the “*Love and Theft*” songs, the earlier-mentioned ‘Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum’, turned out to include lines deriving from the nineteenth-century poet Henry Timrod, creating by anticipation an intertextual bridge with the next album, *Modern Times*, released in 2006. Dylan scholars soon established that several of that work's songs contained embedded quotations from Timrod (1829-1867), who, a Civil War bard and (controversially, given Dylan's radical past) laureate of the Confederacy, is generally considered a minor poet – though that does not stop Harold Bloom from ranking his poems above Poe's (Carlson 1986: 51). At the same time, on four of its tracks, notably the long narrative song ‘Ain't Talkin’’, the same album incorporates – as shown in detail by Thomas (2007: 6-9) – some nineteen quotations taken from the 1994 translation by Peter Green of Ovid's two volumes of poems from exile, the *Tristia* and the *Black Sea Letters*.<sup>12</sup> By this point, Poe, surely, would have either eulogised or castigated Dylan for appropriating lesser-known classical texts and writers as obscure as Timrod and Saga, paralleling his own recourse to such recondite sources as Ebn Zaiat (in ‘Berenice’ – Poe 1978b: 209) or Pomponius Mela (in ‘Usher’ – Poe 1978d: 409).

Rather than accusing Dylan in his recent works of plagiarism, it may be more useful and productive to consider his use of others' words as a case of what I have already termed *embedded quotation*. Dylan deploys his borrowings from Saga, Timrod and Ovid right across the respective albums, and takes the extracts from the full span of Saga's book, from the range of Timrod's poems, and from across Ovid's two works, thus placing his own two works *as a whole* in dialogue with his various sources *in their entirety*. The context, too, of 21<sup>st</sup>-century America is obviously *not* that of any of the three sources. We are surely dealing not so much with plagiarism as with an ongoing interchange between writers and works. This, in its turn, leads us back to Poe, who is quite capable of using the embedded quotation method himself. Dylan lifts the last two lines of the 2003 version of his song ‘Gonna Change My Way of Thinking’<sup>13</sup> from the ending of Oscar Wilde's ‘The Ballad of Reading Gaol’; Poe, in a passage on industrialism in ‘The Colloquy of Monos and Una’, similarly embeds material taken straight from chapter 45 of Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Poe 1978i: 610; Dickens

<sup>12</sup> This song is particularly instructive for Dylan's writing methods: the 2008 collection *Tell-Tale Signs* includes a variant, recorded *before* the *Modern Times* version, which contains *no* quotations from Ovid. This *Ur*-lyric does not appear on the official website; the song as such postdates *Lyrics*.

<sup>13</sup> This song was originally released in 1979 on the album *Slow Train Coming*. The rewritten version appeared in 2003 as Dylan's own contribution to the collective album *Gotta Serve Somebody: The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan*. Both versions are printed in *Lyrics*.

1972: 423). In particular, Poe's 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains' (Poe 1978o), in the episode where the American Augustus Bedloe dreams of himself as a British soldier in India under Warren Hastings, has been shown (Isani 1972; Rollason 2007) to import and combine phrases and images wholesale from two different passages of a classic text of the literature of empire, Thomas Macaulay's essay on Hastings. This borrowing by Poe has long attracted charges of plagiarism, but, as with Dylan, Poe's American context is totally different from Macaulay's.

Borges, in his famous story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' – a text with close connections to Poe (Rollason 2009) – imagined a planet where the concept of plagiarism did not exist, and to sophisticated postmodernists that notion, at least where applied to creative writing and not academic papers, may seem inherently specious. Yet today's press and public seem conversely wedded to naively absolute ideas of literary originality, as has been seen in recent opportunistic plagiarism suits against J.K. Rowling and Dan Brown, or in the furore in Britain when it emerged that Graham Swift's Booker-winning novel *Last Orders* took its *structure* from William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. The rival concepts of plagiarism and intertextuality are not easily compatible. Charges of plagiarism, too, can run in both directions: the Chilean poet Raúl Zurita has been charged in his country's press with lifting lines from Dylan's 1965 song 'Highway 61 Revisited' (Páez 1993). It should also be stressed that in the Saga and Ovid cases Dylan has taken phrases not from the originals but from translations, and the borrowing is thus already textually mediated.

The whole plagiarism issue raises questions related to the very nature of textuality and "originality". The evidence set out above suggests that it may reasonably be affirmed that Dylan's entire *oeuvre* is in constant dialogue with the entirety of Poe's *oeuvre* – yet the two artists' work is almost entirely in different genres, and no-one would, or even could, claim Dylan's work to be a copy of Poe's. At the same time, both are artists whose entire canon is in constant dialogue with their textual predecessors, from Poe's Gothic precursors and Dylan's folk and blues antecedents to Shakespeare, the Bible and the Greco-Roman classics. Poe's characters include (in 'The Masque of the Red Death') a Prospero; Dylan's (in 'Desolation Row'), an Ophelia and a Romeo. Dylan's textual debt to the Bible (and not only in his overtly religious work) has been tracked in detail by Gray (2000: 206-248); Poe's appropriation of the classics, similarly, has recently been demonstrated in depth (González-Rivas Fernández and García Jurado 2008). To characterise Poe's and Dylan's work as multi-dialogic *oeuvres* would be convergent with some of the more significant developments in twentieth-century criticism. Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, a book consisting entirely of commented quotations, subverts received notions of originality in a ground-breaking act of cultural synthesis (Benjamin 1999); Bloom's concept of influence anxiety (1995: 7-12) places "strong" writers in a constant agonistic struggle for originality with their predecessors. In the light of such work, and such criticism, simplistic notions of plagiarism appear to manifest a naive conception of literary innocence, as if a work sprang parthenogenetically and Athena-like from its author's head, devoid of all connection with anything ever written before. The Poe-Dylan nexus, and its ramifications with other texts literary and musical, points up relationality and interconnectedness as essential criteria for our time. It affirms literary resemblance in terms of intertextuality,

embedded quotation and creative appropriation. Indeed, Dylan's use of Poe, as explicated above, may be taken as paradigmatic of a model of imaginatively productive textuality, of dialogue between texts through 'tell-tale signs', that is eminently appropriate for the age of interrelations that is our emerging twenty-first century.

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Received 23 February 2009

Accepted 25 April 2009

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