

A new letter from Poe to Lowell on the *Pioneer*

In January 1843, James Russell Lowell and Robert Carter published the first issue of their ambitious, short-lived literary magazine the *Pioneer*. The issue included a contribution from Edgar Allan Poe, arguably the most important piece to appear in any of the *Pioneer*'s three issues: "The Tell-Tale Heart." Thanks to a recently uncovered letter from Poe to Lowell in which he first mentions the tale to the young editor, we now have a more complete picture of how one of Poe's best-known stories made its way to print, as well as of the relationship between the two authors.

The letter, dated November 24, 1842, was offered for sale at a rare book and manuscript auction held at Christie's in New York on June 21, 2013. It is now in the collection of Susan Jaffe Tane, and an image of the letter, but not a transcribed text, appeared in the catalog of the 2014 exhibition of Tane's Poe collection at the Grolier Club.¹ The text of the letter also appeared around the time of the sale on the website of the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore.² Its provenance prior to 2013 is not known, though the Christie's auction catalog identified it as "the property of a California Lady;" additional items so identified in the same sale included manuscript letters by Charles Dickens and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lydia Maria Child, Alexander Hamilton, Robert Gould Shaw, and George Washington.³

The text of the letter reads:

Philadelphia

Nov. 24, 1842.

My Dear Sir,

Through some accident, I have only just now received yours of the 19th.

About ten days ago, I wrote to the “Editor of the ‘Boston Miscellany’, enclosing a brief tale, of the class you especially mention, and requesting him, if the article were not accepted, to hand it to you:— I did this in anticipation of writing you in a few days. As my letter requested an immediate reply, and as I have received none, I am at a loss what to think.

The tale in question is entitled the “Tell-Tale Heart”. Might I beg of you the favor to call upon the Editor of the “Miscellany” and ascertain his determination? If he decline the article, I should be glad to see it in your first number. But should there, now, be no longer time to get it in your first number, it will be unnecessary to say anything upon the subject to the “Miscellany”. In about a week I will forward something to you for your second number.

Most cordially your friend,

J. Russell Lowell, Esqre.

Edgar Allan Poe

The letter is written on one side of a single sheet of plain wove paper measuring 9 7/8” high x 7 11/16” wide. It is docketed on the verso, in an unidentified hand, “E A Poe / 24th Nov^r 1842”. The sheet is mounted with paste at the four corners to a slightly larger sheet, which itself shows signs of having been mounted to a sheet of pasteboard. The paper has no apparent watermark.

<Figure 1. Autograph letter from Edgar Allan Poe to James Russell Lowell, Nov. 24, 1842. Courtesy Susan Jaffe Tane, New York.>

<Figure 2. Recipient's docket on the verso of autograph letter from Edgar Allan Poe to James Russell Lowell, Nov. 24, 1842. Courtesy Susan Jaffe Tane, New York.>

Lowell was a decade Poe's junior, born in 1819 to a well-established Boston family. He attended Harvard, and was elected class poet, but was an inattentive student. A week before the end of his final term in 1838, the faculty of the college suspended him, sending him to Concord for an intensive course of supervised study under the Rev. Barzillai Frost.⁴ Following his graduation he made an effort at working as a lawyer (the subject of his early humorous sketch "The First Client"), but by the beginning of 1842—following a year in which he had published his first book of poems, *A Year's Life*, and seen his work appear in the *Dial*, *Arcturus*, *Graham's Magazine*, and the *Democratic Review*—he yearned to devote himself to literature full-time.⁵

The 1830s and 40s saw no shortage of efforts on the part of authors and editors to establish a purely literary magazine. Poe's own efforts at launching the *Stylus* and *Penn* magazines were part of this larger push to establish an outlet for an authentically American form of literature. But these journals, which rejected out-of-hand fashion plates and romantic stories as "namby-pambyism," struggled to find an audience. An exemplar of these attempts to bridge the gap between popularity and literary aspiration is the magazine to which Poe refers in letter above: the *Boston Miscellany*. This journal was

launched in 1842 by the Boston firm of Bradbury, Soden and Company.⁶ The publishers approached Nathan Hale, prominent Boston journalist and editor of *Daily Advertiser*, to recommend an editor, and he suggested his son, then-21-year-old Nathan Hale, Jr. The character of the new publication was summed up by Edward Everett Hale, the editor's younger brother and a contributor to the *Miscellany*: "If Messrs. Bradbury and Soden had been questioned, they would have said, what was true, that there was no class of readers who could sustain creditably a purely literary magazine... But they would have said that there were a great many factory-girls in the country.... [who] could be relied upon to float the literary magazine, if in each number there was a love-story which they would be glad to read."⁷ The *Miscellany* strove to appeal to both an intellectual, male-coded, "literary" audience and a plebeian, female-coded, "popular" one.

Hale could not have had greater proximity to Boston's literary circles: early issues of the *Miscellany* contained contributions by his brother, Edward Everett Hale, his mother, Sarah Everett Hale, and his uncle, Edward Everett.⁸ The magazine attracted talented contributors from New England and beyond, including Lowell, who was a regular contributor to the journal throughout 1842, and Rufus Griswold, who had tasked Poe with writing a review of his anthology *Poets and Poetry of America* that appeared in the November 1842 issue of the *Miscellany*. In June 1842 the *Miscellany* absorbed the *Arcturus*, a New York-based journal with similar aims to which Lowell was also a frequent contributor.⁹

By the fall of 1842 Lowell, then only 23 years old, was making preparations to launch his own magazine.¹⁰ He partnered with Robert Carter, a man his own age who had recently moved to Cambridge from Albany. According to Martin B. Duberman, Lowell

believed that Carter's prior experience working in a printing office "would save them from those useless expenditures which had often led amateur editors to their doom."¹¹ The two contracted with Leland & Whiting, who agreed to print 500 copies of a monthly magazine, but the contract required the editors to both guarantee the magazine's expenses and to pay a penalty of \$500 if they were late in delivering the magazine to its publishers. This one-sided contract "provided, in effect, that Lowell and Carter should do all of the work, take all the risk, and still publish their periodical without any likelihood of profit."¹² According to Duberman, Lowell's wife, Maria White Lowell, was nervous that "an immense circulation would be necessary to make the magazine profitable," but that she came to hope for the magazine's success and an income of a thousand dollars a year from it.¹³ On October 15, the Lowell and Carter published a prospectus for their forthcoming magazine, the *Pioneer*, that made no secret of the editors' opinion of the popular magazines of the day:

The object of the subscribers, in establishing the PIONEER, is to furnish the intelligent and reflecting portion of the Reading Public with a rational substitute for the enormous quantity of thrice-diluted trash, in the shape of namby-pamby love tales and sketches, which is monthly poured out by many of our popular Magazines, — and to offer, instead thereof, a healthy and manly Periodical Literature, whose perusal will not necessarily involve a loss of time and a deterioration of every moral and intellectual faculty.¹⁴

Around the same time, the *Miscellany* had come to Poe's attention as a possible market for his own work. Sometime in the late fall, he sent a copy of his new story "The

Tell-Tale Heart” to Bradbury and Soden. However, in between publishing Poe’s review of *Poets and Poetry of America* and receiving “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the *Miscellany* changed editors. Hale had resigned his position, and was replaced by Henry Theodore Tuckerman, an editor who was less willing to overlook Poe’s controversial critical perspective than Hale had been. Tuckerman could be considered an inoffensive author: in a review of his book *The Optimist*, the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* called him “an elegant and graceful essayist, as well as a pleasing and genial poet.”¹⁵ In a memorial essay on Tuckerman, Evert Duyckinck wrote of his approach to literary criticism: “In the usual limited exercise of the faculty as a detective of defects in composition, he cared little. He left carping and fault-finding to others.” To Poe, Tuckerman epitomized dullness; in the sonnet “An Enigma” he coins the word “tuckermanities” to refer to lackluster poetry.¹⁶ Poe’s second “Chapter on Autography,” published in the December 1841 issue of *Graham’s Magazine*, had included a brief analysis of Tuckerman’s signature, which is Poe’s sharpest attack on Tuckerman:

H. T. TUCKERMAN has written one or two books consisting of “Sketches of Travel.” His “Isabel” is, perhaps, better known than any of his other productions, but was never a popular work. He is a correct writer so far as mere English is concerned, but an insufferably tedious and dull one. He has contributed much of late days to the “Southern Literary Messenger,” with which journal, perhaps, the legibility of his MS. has been an important, if not the principal recommendation. His chirography is neat and distinct, and has some grace, but no force — evincing, in a remarkable degree, the idiosyncrasies of the writer.¹⁷

This attack may have resulted in the rejection of “The Tell-Tale Heart” from the *Boston Miscellany*, as Lowell himself theorized in a letter to Poe on December 17: “(perhaps your chapter on Autographs is to blame).”¹⁸ Neither Poe’s letter submitting the tale to Bradbury & Soden, nor Tuckerman’s rejection of it, have survived. However, in a letter to Lowell on December 25, Poe quoted a portion of the letter he received from Bradbury & Soden on behalf of Tuckerman: “if Mr Poe would condescend to furnish more quiet articles he would be a most desirable correspondent.”¹⁹ Poe, undaunted by this rebuke, elaborated to Lowell: “if Mr T. persists in his *quietude*, he will put a quietus to the Magazine of which Mess. Bradbury & Soden have been so stupid as to give him control.”²⁰

The *Miscellany*’s rejection of “The Tell-Tale Heart” could hardly have bothered Poe too much, particularly because the *Pioneer*, which explicitly scorned the sort of popular concessions made by the *Miscellany*, was a magazine closer to his own taste. Poe was already familiar with Lowell, having written about him in “A Chapter on Autography” in the December 1841 issue of *Graham’s*, but the two had never met. Poe wrote to Lowell on November 16, a month after the prospectus of the *Pioneer* was published, enthusiastically offering his talents as a contributor.²¹ Lowell responded with similar enthusiasm on the 19th, flattering Poe by calling him “the only *fearless* American critic,” and telling him that he had intended to approach Poe for submissions.²² Lowell offers Poe “*carte blanche* for prose or verse as may best please you,” but discourages him from too-harsh criticism of other authors like his essay on Rufus Dawes, which appeared in the October 1842 issue of *Graham’s*.²³ He offers ten dollars per article, with a promise

of more when the magazine's finances are established. In a postscript, he hints at some urgency: "I am already (I mean my magazine) in the press—but anything sent '*right away*' will be in season for the first number, in which I should like to have you appear."²⁴

The offer came as at an ideal time, as Poe was in a poor financial position, and filed for bankruptcy on December 19th.²⁵

In their discussion of the correspondence between Poe and Lowell in late 1842, Ostrom, Pollin and Savoye state: "the history of the tale ['The Tell-Tale Heart'], at this time, suggests several lost letters."²⁶ The recently discovered letter fills in several of the gaps regarding the story's publication. The tone of the letter is somewhat more formal than Poe's later letters to Lowell, beginning with the salutation "My Dear Sir" as opposed to the "My Dear Friend" that appears on most of his letters to Lowell throughout the following two years. From Poe's opening sentence, we have more details about how and when the tale was sent to the *Miscellany*: "about ten days ago," i.e. on or around November 14th. Since Poe initially wrote to Lowell regarding the *Pioneer* on the 16th, it is clear that as of the 24th he had not yet received his rejection from Tuckerman. It also tells us that Poe was already thinking of the *Pioneer*, as he had requested the *Miscellany* pass the tale on to Lowell if they were to reject it. Lowell did not respond to Poe until December 17th, at which time he had already gone to Tuckerman to request the story. His initial statement that he "ought to have written to you before" indicates that the transfer of the tale from Tuckerman to Lowell occurred several days before, perhaps within the first week or so of receiving Poe's letter of the 24th.²⁷ Though several links are still missing from the surviving correspondence—notably Poe's initial submission of the tale

to the *Miscellany* and Tuckerman's rejection of it—this new letter provides additional details to the publication and to the early phase of Poe and Lowell's relationship.

The first issue of the *Pioneer* appeared in January 1843, containing Poe's tale as well as contributions by Lowell, John Neal, William Wetmore Story (both under his own name and the pseudonym "I.B. Wright"), and others. The magazine was well received, as illustrated by a page of notices published "To Periodical Agents" by Leland & Whiting. One of these positive notices, reprinted from the *Philadelphia Saturday Museum*, may have been written by Poe himself.²⁸ The only negative review was from N.P. Willis, whose review in *Brother Jonathan* both praised and condemned Lowell: "A man of genius, who is merely a man of genius, is a very unfit editor for a periodical. A man of taste and common sense... is worth twenty men of genius for any such undertaking."²⁹ (In a letter to Carter, Lowell responded to Willis's compliment: "I had rather have been praised by one whom I respect more.")³⁰

On January 10, 1843, a few days after the publication of the *Pioneer*'s first issue, Lowell travelled to New York to be treated for an eye disease, leaving the bulk of the editorial work on the second and third issues to the less editorially talented Carter. Despite the limited use of his eyes, he corresponded with Carter almost daily during much of his stay in New York, giving him detailed instructions on both the editing and the finances of the magazine.³¹ By the end of the month, however, his health took precedence over all work, as he wrote to Carter in an undated letter: "I am forbidden to write under pain of staying here forever, or *losing my eyes*."³² During his convalescence in New York, Lowell befriended Charles F. Briggs, author of the 1839 novel *The Adventures of Harry Franco*.³³ The *Pioneer* suffered without Lowell's oversight, but still attracted

impressive contributions from Poe (“Lenore” in the second issue, and “Notes Upon English Verse” in the third), Nathaniel Hawthorne (his story “The Birth-Mark” appeared in the third issue), John Greenleaf Whittier, and Elizabeth Barrett. Lowell’s absence proved disastrous for the *Pioneer*. Carter admitted to John Neal that his penchant for “*reverie*” and his lack of “the skill of *thinking* or of expressing thought” meant that he had contributed little of substance to the journal, and this same proclivity may have distracted him from his editorial duties.³⁴ Carter was eight days late in delivering the March number to Leland & Whiting, who invoked the clause in the contract penalizing the editors \$500 for late delivery. After three issues, the *Pioneer* was bankrupt.

Lowell wrote to Poe on March 24th, informing him of the journal’s demise and advising him that he would be unable to pay him for his contributions until he could secure a loan to pay off his debts.³⁵ In Poe’s response on the 27th, he told Lowell not to worry about the debt: “As for the few dollars you owe me — give yourself not one moment’s concern about *them*. I am poor, but must be very much poorer, indeed, when I even think of demanding them.”³⁶ (Poe’s response is magnanimous and somewhat surprising, considering he was just beginning to recover from bankruptcy.) He informed Lowell of his plans to launch his own journal, the *Stylus*, to which Lowell responded with some enthusiasm. But in the middle of 1843 several of Poe’s plans evaporated: his partner in the *Stylus* withdrew his financial support, and he failed to obtain a position at the U.S. Customs house.³⁷ June 1843 saw the publication of one of his most popular tales in his lifetime, “The Gold-Bug,” which won the *Dollar Newspaper*’s \$100 story prize—but despite dozens of reprintings across the country, he saw no more income from it beyond this initial award.³⁸ By September, having moved from Philadelphia to New

York, he was becoming desperate for income, and he wrote to Lowell on September 13 to request his overdue payment of \$10.³⁹ Carter immediately provided half of the sum, and Lowell provided the remaining \$5—but only after a delay of several weeks.⁴⁰

Lowell's financial situation was dire in the immediate aftermath of the *Pioneer's* collapse. He told Poe that his debts exceeded \$1800, but this seems to have been an exaggeration; Carter told John Neal that the total would be “certainly \$1510 and perhaps \$2286 or even more.”⁴¹ Duberman estimates the total debt at \$750, and Leon Howard proposes that it was about \$1000, split between Lowell and Carter.⁴² (Bradley calculates a total cost for the three issues at \$2496.32, but notes that this does not account for fees paid while the magazine was a going concern.)⁴³ This was a potentially devastating debt, especially given Lowell's youth. But Lowell's family intervened to assist him, his brother and father loaning him money and signing promissory notes on his behalf.⁴⁴ Howard notes that Lowell's father “evidently came to the conclusion that it was less expensive to maintain a poet at home than a lawyer and publisher abroad,” and provided housing for Lowell—and possibly Carter as well—in Cambridge.⁴⁵ Within three years, Lowell had paid off his debts from the *Pioneer* and moved on the next phase of his career.⁴⁶

Poe and Lowell continued a collegial correspondence throughout 1844, including a long letter from Poe on July 2 that Casale describes as “the first [letter] in which Poe opens up philosophically to anyone.”⁴⁷ Poe also made a business proposal to Lowell, suggesting in a letter on March 30 that the two start a “coalition” to publish a new magazine.⁴⁸ Lowell never directly responded to this offer, though Poe repeatedly reminded him of it throughout 1844—given his experience with the *Pioneer*, it is unsurprising that Lowell was reluctant to consider starting another magazine. Poe's

letters during this period continued to contain critical comments on other authors and editors, one of which—a remark on having revealed Longfellow’s guilt in “some of the grossest plagiarisms ever perpetrated”—seems a deliberate, and unsuccessful, attempt to bait Lowell into a response.⁴⁹

During this period Lowell was a more enthusiastic correspondent on another matter: a profile of Poe that he was writing for *Graham’s*.⁵⁰ This essay, which took much of its information from the laudatory sketch published in the *Philadelphia Saturday Museum* in February and March of 1843, may have been written at Poe’s request, and he was permitted to review it prior to publication; Lowell certainly intended it to flatter its subject.⁵¹ The essay presents Poe’s side of many disagreements, including his financial disputes with his foster father John Allan; the essay even awards Poe greater youth than he possessed, stating that he was 32 years old rather than 36.⁵² Lowell submitted his biographical essay to *Graham’s* in late September, and it appeared in the February 1845 issue, alongside an engraving of Poe.⁵³ Scott Peeples notes that the essay was part of Poe’s campaign to start his own magazine, presenting Poe “as an ambitious writer-critic in need of a professional home base.”⁵⁴ Meredith McGill notes that the profile of Poe “marked the incorporation of the figure of Poe into the discourse of literary nationalism,” in particular the Young America movement, and that its reach was magnified when it was reprinted in the *New York Evening Mirror*.⁵⁵

The profile opens with a discussion of the general situation of American literature, placing Poe within the context of literary nationalism like that of the Young America movement. It presents his literary criticism as “an American criticism,” though it wrestles with the question of whether his opinions of his fellow authors were too

harsh.⁵⁶ He concludes that Poe is a tough, but intelligent, critic, and fair within his own parameters: “If we do not always agree with him in his premises, we are, at least, satisfied that his deductions are logical, and that we are reading the thoughts of a man who thinks for himself, and says what he thinks, and knows well what he is talking about.”⁵⁷ After a brief biographical sketch, Lowell goes on to discuss Poe’s poetry and fiction in glowing terms: “Mr. Poe has that indescribable something which men have agreed to call *genius*.”⁵⁸ The word “genius” also appears in the opening lines of an unsigned review, attributed to Poe by Killis Campbell, of Lowell’s *Conversations on some of the Old Poets* in the January 11, 1845 issue of the *Evening Mirror*. The reviewer notes that the book shows Lowell’s “fine taste and critical power” to be on par with his poetry, but concludes by taking issue with some of Lowell’s comments on artists, scholars, and critics.⁵⁹

Late in 1844, Lowell introduced Poe via letter to Charles F. Briggs, suggesting that Poe could work for him on his newly launched periodical, the *Broadway Journal*. Thus Poe’s fateful editorship, and later proprietorship, of this periodical owes itself directly to Lowell’s time editing the *Pioneer*. In his letter of introduction Lowell addresses the delicate matter of Poe’s financial situation head-on: Of Briggs, he bluntly states that “He will pay & I thought from something you said in your last letter that pay would be useful to you.”⁶⁰ Lowell also informs Poe that he had mentioned him to George H. Colton, publisher of the *American Review*. Lowell indicates that Colton was likely irritated by Poe’s past criticisms: “I suspect, from some wry faces he made on first hearing your name, you have cut [him] up.” In a postscript, he apologizes if mentioning Poe’s desire for work to Colton meant revealing to one of his enemies that he was in dire

straits: “You must excuse me if I have blundered in recommending you to Colton. I know nothing of your circumstances save what I gleaned from your last letter, &, of course, said nothing to him which I might not say as an entire stranger to you. It is never safe to let an editor (as editors go) know that an author wants his pay.”

Lowell’s suggestions bore fruit for Poe in 1845, as he became editor and later publisher of the *Broadway Journal*, and published his most successful poem, “The Raven,” in the *American Review*. But following this his correspondence with Lowell ceased, and Poe’s public behavior soon began to turn Lowell against him. Poe’s “Longfellow War”—a one-sided campaign against the Boston poet who, in later years, would become one of Lowell’s closest colleagues—was largely carried out in the pages of the *Broadway Journal*. Poe’s broadsides against Longfellow worried Briggs, who did not wish to anger New England literary circles. Silverman reports that Briggs “also fretted that Longfellow might turn against Lowell... who after all had introduced Poe to the *Journal*.”⁶¹ (The relationship between Briggs and Lowell was already strained at this time, owing to Lowell’s disappointment that Briggs had not made the *Journal* a platform for abolitionism.)⁶² Several of Longfellow’s friends defended him against Poe’s charges of plagiarism, and Longfellow himself sent a brief statement on one specific charge to *Graham’s* that appeared in the May 1845 issue.⁶³ Lowell considered the *ad hominem* nature of Poe’s attacks on Longfellow and his young wife to be boorish.⁶⁴

Though the exact date is unknown, the only known meeting between Poe and Lowell likely occurred in Spring 1845, at the height of tensions in the Longfellow War. In a letter to Poe’s biographer John H. Ingram, Lowell recounted the meeting at Poe’s home in New York: “I went by appointment & found him a little tipsy, as if he were

recovering from a fit of drunkenness, & with that... over-solemnity... with which men in such cases try to convince you of their sobriety. I well remember (for it pained me) the anxious expression of his wife.”⁶⁵ After Poe’s death, his mother-in-law Maria Clemm wrote to Lowell: “Oh if you only knew his bitter sorrow when I told him how unlike himself he was while you were there you would have pitied him, he always felt particularly anxious to possess your approbation.”⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Lowell assisted in making arrangements for Poe to deliver a lecture at the Boston Lyceum in October 1845. The performance was, by most accounts, a disaster, thanks in large part to Poe’s bizarre decision to read a lengthy section of “Al Aaraaf,” an obscure piece of juvenilia, rather than (as advertised) a new composition.⁶⁷ Poe’s poor presentation likely caused some embarrassment for Lowell, and Pollin cites the Lyceum talk as the final cause of the rift between the two authors, though considering the prior events of 1844-45 it seems that by this point the damage had been quite thoroughly done.⁶⁸

In Lowell’s profile of Poe for *Graham’s*, he famously wrote of Poe’s criticism that “he seems sometimes to mistake his phial of prussic-acid for his inkstand.”⁶⁹ The Longfellow War can only have galvanized that opinion. In his 1848 poem *A Fable for Critics*, a collection of mostly-satirical profiles of literary figures, his impression of Poe is significantly diminished from that presented in their initial correspondence five years earlier:

There comes Poe with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
Three-fifths of him genius and two-fifths sheer fudge,

Who talks like a book of iambs and pentameters,
In a way to make people of common-sense damn metres,
Who has written some things quite the best of their kind,
But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind,
Who—but hey-day! What’s this? Messieurs [Cornelius] Mathews and Poe,
You mustn’t fling mud-balls at Longfellow so,
Does it make a man worse that his character’s such
As to make his friends love him (as you think) too much?⁷⁰

Lowell’s parodic sketch of Poe continues for 30 more lines, the primary purpose of which is to defend Longfellow and mock Poe’s single-minded approach to the technical aspects of poetry. Clearly Poe’s assaults on Longfellow had made so lasting an impression on Lowell that they overwhelm virtually all other aspects of his character in this sketch. But it is also worth noting that the lampooning of Poe’s attention to the mechanics of poetry could also be traced back to “Notes Upon English Verse” in the second issue of the *Pioneer*—an essay that contains one of Poe’s earliest criticisms of Longfellow, attacking his poor attention to meter.⁷¹ As for Lowell’s suggestion that Poe’s critical writing on poetry is dull, Poe himself had described “Notes Upon English Verse” as potentially “too long, or perhaps too dull” for Lowell’s magazine.⁷²

Lowell’s reference to Longfellow’s friends in the *Fable* is particularly telling in light of Sandra Tomc’s discussion of the economy of friendship that drove American literature in the mid-19th century—an economy that “forced local writers to form alternative literary cultures, ones based not on economic exchange, but on friendship,

civic service, and gift giving.”⁷³ Longfellow, Tomc argues, was a successful participant in this friendship economy; Poe’s literary feuds represent a parallel economy of invective, that sought to engage readers through conflict.

Poe’s opinion of Lowell, too, had diminished in the aftermath of the Longfellow War. In his (unsigned) review of the *Fable* for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe took note of Lowell’s caricature of him, and his reply shows that he no longer considered Lowell worthy of the respect he showed him in 1843: “We may observe here that *profound* ignorance on any particular topic is always sure to manifest itself by some allusion to ‘common sense’ as an all-sufficient instructor... ‘common sense,’ after all, has been the basis on which *he* [Poe] relied, in contradistinction from the *uncommon* nonsense of Mr. L. and the small pedants.”⁷⁴ This dismissal is followed, naturally, by a negative assessment of the poem’s meter. Poe also attacks Lowell’s opposition to slavery, presenting him to the Southern audience of the *Southern Literary Messenger* as a “ranting abolitionist.”⁷⁵ As for the poem as a whole, Poe dismisses it as “ill-conceived and feebly executed, as well in detail as in general.”⁷⁶

Despite the mutual appreciation apparent in their earliest correspondence, the differences that would come to divide Poe and Lowell were present from the beginning. Their differing attitudes were already visible in Lowell’s first letter to Poe, in which he shows signs of discomfort with Poe’s critical attitude. Lowell’s letter accepting “The Tell-Tale Heart” shows that he “respected Tuckerman’s opinion, cautioning that “It may argue presumptuousness in me to dissent from his verdict.”⁷⁷ Poe seemed tone-deaf to these cues, and he attacks Tuckerman and his editorial opinions viciously in a letter on December 25: “Should he, at any time, accept an effusion of mine, I should ask myself

what twattle I had been perpetrating, so flat as to come within the scope of his approbation.”⁷⁸ Lowell’s attempt to soften Poe’s attitude seem only to have incited him to express his opinion all the more forcefully.

Another factor in the dissolution of the relationship between Poe and Lowell may have been the wealth gap between the two. In his manuscript notes for “The Living Writers of America,” Poe’s outline of his introductory essay rails against cliquishness and regionalism, as well as “The aristocracy of dollars [that] here tends... to depress genius which, as a general rule, is poor, for the reason that it seeks especially the unpurchasable pleasures—Just as wealth is worshipped, so is poverty despised, and in every way depressed.”⁷⁹ The economics of the American literary world in the mid-19th century—with no international copyright protections, rampant piracy, and minimal pecuniary reward for wordsmiths—made it virtually impossible to earn a living at writing alone. Sidney Moss notes that “the professional author, the author who lived exclusively on the income from his writings... was a rarity in the United States... In almost every case, an American author had to have another source of income in order to survive as a writer.”⁸⁰ Poe hoped for a world where a writer could simply write, and Lowell—who abandoned his fledgling career as a lawyer to launch the *Pioneer*—had similar aspirations. But the backgrounds and relative financial security of the two authors differed greatly. Burton Pollin suggests that it was a sense of economic injustice that led to Poe’s feud with Longfellow, who embodied the very things Poe believed had kept him from achieving success.⁸¹ Tomc similarly argues that Longfellow’s self-presentation in *The Waif* stoked this sense of injustice: “Here was Longfellow, a Harvard professor with a loving family and friends, grandiosely claiming orphan status and taking on the mantle of anonymity in

order to stand with history's great poets."⁸² Lowell—the son of a prominent and wealthy Boston family, a core member of a regional literary clique—occupied a similar position. While the *Pioneer* was being published, Lowell appealed to his family for financial support, and they assisted him after its collapse as well.⁸³ He had the luxury of participating in the “gift economy” of the New England periodical press, providing his friends' publications with free contributions: a system that depended “on voluntary labor, on unpaid intellectual work as its primary source of capital.”⁸⁴ Though he was in debt after the magazine's collapse, his social position gave him a financial buffer that Poe lacked.

Lowell's actual financial position was complex, and Wagenknecht cautions against considering him as simply a child of privilege:

One of the many myths about Lowell devoutly cherished by those who describe—and dismiss—him as a ‘Brahmin,’ without knowing quite what they mean by the word, is that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and lived a comfortable life, sheltered from want and ‘reality.’ The truth of the matter is that during much of his life he was desperately poor, and that though he lived in a beautiful house, the residence was a white elephant and an unmanageable tax burden, horribly uncomfortable in winter because it was impossible to heat.”⁸⁵

But, in a sense, Lowell's actual level of wealth is irrelevant to how he was perceived. And there can be no question that he was well positioned in the New England literary world, at a time when friendship functioned as a sort of currency. Lowell may have

mocked his own “aristocratic” background—in, for example, the unpublished essay “A Brahmin’s Self-Laughter”⁸⁶—but he nevertheless benefited from it, as illustrated by his family’s taking up the obligations of his immediate debts after the collapse of the *Pioneer*. Poe had no such support network. As such, tensions between the two were perhaps inevitable, Lowell representing almost as much as his nemesis Longfellow the “aristocracy of dollars” at the heart of American literature. Even without Poe’s attacks on Longfellow, the economics of literature, and of friendship, would have proven a barrier to a sustained friendship between the two authors.

¹ Gabriel Mckee and Susan Jaffe Tane, *Evermore: The Persistence of Poe : The Edgar Allan Poe Collection of Susan Jaffe Tane*. (New York: Grolier Club, 2014), 80. The text and description of the letter given here are from direct examination of the original document. Grateful acknowledgment is given to Mrs. Tane for permission to access and publish images of the letter, as well as for access to other materials in her collection, including additional manuscript materials by both Poe and Lowell and a collection of all three issues of *The Pioneer* in wrappers.

² Edgar Allan Poe, “Text: Edgar Allan Poe to James Russell Lowell — November 24, 1842 (LTR-148a),” Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, June 4, 2013, <https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4211240.htm> The text of the letter originally published on the website had some transcription errors, including the presence of a concluding line that appears, not in this letter, but in Poe’s letter to Lowell of December 25, 1842.

³ Christie's, "Sale 2717: Fine Printed Books and Manuscripts Including Americana," Christie's, 2013, <https://www.christies.com/Fine-Printed-Books-and-23994.aspx>. The full provenance of this letter cannot be traced, but some information regarding Poe's other letters to Lowell may provide some illumination. Most of Poe's other letters to Lowell are held by the Houghton Library at Harvard University, which received them from Sarah Norton, daughter of Lowell's literary executor Charles Eliot Norton, in 1914—a provenance indicating that the letters had not left Lowell's possession (John Ward Ostrom and Jeffrey A. Savoye, "Check List of the Correspondence of Edgar Allan Poe," The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, 2017, <https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/chklst04.htm>). However, two additional letters from Poe to Lowell, dated December 27, 1842 and June 20, 1843, are now held at the Ransom Center at the University of Texas. Both letters were formerly in the collection of William H. Koester. The Dec. 27 letter was also previously owned by Gabriel Wells, who likely acquired it from Stan. V. Henkels' auction of the collections of Caesar, Thomas, and Caesar A. Rodney on October 22, 1919 (Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, II:1212, 1216; Stan. V. Henkels, *The Final Sale of the Rodney Papers, Embracing the Papers of Caesar Rodney... Col. Thomas Rodney... Caesar A. Rodney...*, Catalogue No. 1243 (Philadelphia: Stan. V. Henkels, 1919)). However, the presence of this letter in the Rodney Papers is unusual. The Rodney collection primarily contained material related to American history, and was assembled naturally by the Rodney family in Delaware during the late Colonial period, the Revolutionary War, and the early 19th century; the youngest of the three Rodneys died in 1824. The archive sold by Henkels did include several literary manuscripts by Longfellow, Washington Irving, and Horace Greeley, but the bulk

of the archive preceded the 1830s, and the presence of this mid-century material is unusual, and so the connection of the Poe letter to the Rodneys, if any, is unclear.

Whatever the path of the two letters from Poe to Lowell now held in the Ransom Center may have been, it can be assumed that the newly discovered letter took a similar route.

⁴ For Lowell's time at Harvard, see Leon Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant; a Study of the Early Literary Career of James Russell Lowell* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 11–24; Horace Elisha Scudder, *James Russell Lowell: A Biography* (Boston, New York and Cambridge: Houghton, Mifflin and Company/The Riverside Press, 1901), 26–61; Martin B. Duberman, *James Russell Lowell* (Boston and Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company/Riverside Press, 1966), 17–29.

⁵ Duberman, *James Russell Lowell*, 38–41.

⁶ Information on the Boston Miscellany is drawn from Debra Brown, “The Boston Miscellany of Literature and Fashion,” in *American Literary Magazines: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Edward E. Chielens, Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 70–73; Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), 718–20.

⁷ Edward Everett Hale, *James Russell Lowell and His Friends* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899), 83, <http://archive.org/details/lowellandfriends00halerich>.

⁸ Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*, 718.

⁹ Debra Brown, “Arcturus, a Journal of Books and Opinion,” in *American Literary Magazines: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Edward E. Chielens, Historical

Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 43–44.

¹⁰ For histories of the Pioneer, see Sculley Bradley, “Introduction,” in *The Pioneer. A Literary Magazine*, ed. James Russell Lowell (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1947), v–xxix; Edward E. Chielens, ed., *American Literary Magazines: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Historical Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 315–19; Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*, 735–38.

¹¹ Duberman, *James Russell Lowell*, 45.

¹² Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant*, 123.

¹³ Duberman, *James Russell Lowell*, 44.

¹⁴ James Russell Lowell and Robert Carter, “Prospectus of the Pioneer, a Literary and Critical Magazine,” in *The Pioneer : A Literary Magazine*, ed. James Russell Lowell (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1947), [xxxvi].

¹⁵ “Notices of New Books,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 26, no. 142 (April 1850): 383.

¹⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, “An Enigma [Sarah Anna Lewis],” in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), I:425, <https://www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom1p100.htm>. Mabbott comments that “Poe and Tuckerman seem to have liked each other personally.”

¹⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, "A Chapter on Autography," in *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. John H. Ingram (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1875), IV:30, <https://www.eapoe.org/works/ingram/jhi74402.htm>.

¹⁸ George E. Woodberry, "Lowell's Letters to Poe," *Scribner's Magazine* 16, no. 2 (August 1894): 170–71. Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4212170.htm>.

¹⁹ Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:373 (letter 149). Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4212250.htm>.

²⁰ Poe, I:373 (letter 149).

²¹ Poe, I:368 (letter 147). Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4211160.htm>.

²² Woodberry, "Lowell's Letters to Poe," 170. Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4211190.htm>.

²³ Woodberry, 170.

²⁴ Woodberry, 170. Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4211190.htm>.

²⁵ Barbara Cantalupo, "Interview with Jefferson Moak (October 2007)," *Edgar Allan Poe Review* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 92–98.

²⁶ Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:373.

²⁷ Woodberry, "Lowell's Letters to Poe," 170–71. Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4212170.htm>.

²⁸ See Thomas O. Mabbott, "A Review of Lowell's Magazine," *Notes & Queries* 178, no. June 29, 1940 (June 29, 1940): 457–58.

²⁹ Quoted in James Russell Lowell, ed., *The Pioneer. A Literary Magazine* (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1947), [unnumbered page between 96 and 97]. Willis praises Poe's tale as "the only thing in the number that most people would read and remember."

³⁰ Edward L. Tucker, "James Russell Lowell and Robert Carter: The 'Pioneer' and Fifty Letters from Lowell to Carter," *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 1987, 201.

³¹ Lowell's letters to Carter during his convalescence are collected in Tucker, 201–16.

³² Tucker, 210, emphasis in original.

³³ Duberman, *James Russell Lowell*, 51–52.

³⁴ Benjamin Lease, "Robert Carter, James Russell Lowell and John Neal: A Document," *Jahrbuch Für Amerikastudien* 13 (1968): 247.

³⁵ Woodberry, "Lowell's Letters to Poe," 171. Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4303240.htm>.

³⁶ Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:393 (letter 158). Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4303270.htm>.

³⁷ Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 195.

³⁸ John Ward Ostrom, "Poe's Literary Labors and Rewards," in *Myths and Reality* (Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society, 1987), 40, <https://www.eapoe.org/papers/psbbooks/pb19871e.htm>.

³⁹ Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:407 (letter 163). Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website:

<https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4309130.htm>. Ostrom suggests that this payment was for “Notes on English Verse,” but Howard indicates that it was for “Lenore,” and that Poe may never have been paid for the essay (Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant*, 133).

⁴⁰ Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant*, 133; Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:412 (letter 164). Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4310190.htm>.

⁴¹ Woodberry, “Lowell’s Letters to Poe,” 171. Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4303240.htm>; Benjamin Lease, “Robert Carter, James Russell Lowell and John Neal,” 247.

⁴² Duberman, *James Russell Lowell*, 53; Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant*, 133.

⁴³ Sculley Bradley, “Lowell, Emerson, and the Pioneer,” *American Literature* 19, no. 3 (1947): 244, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2921778>.

⁴⁴ Duberman, *James Russell Lowell*, 53.

⁴⁵ Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant*, 134.

⁴⁶ Chielens, *American Literary Magazines*, 317.

⁴⁷ Ottavio M. Casale, “The Battle of Boston: A Revaluation of Poe’s Lyceum Appearance,” *American Literature* 45, no. 3 (1973): 426, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2924615>.

⁴⁸ Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:430-434 (letter 173). Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4403300.htm>.

⁴⁹ Poe, I:451 (letter 179). It is particularly ironic, in the broader context of Poe and Lowell's professional relationship, that "The Tell-Tale Heart" begins with an epigraph from Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life."

⁵⁰ Woodberry, "Lowell's Letters to Poe," 173–76; Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:430-433, 441-442, 448-452, 455-457, 462-465.

⁵¹ Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 233–34; Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1941), 431–32, <https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/quinn00c.htm>.

⁵² For more on the misinformation included in Lowell's essay, see Scott Peeples, "A Life in Print: 1831–1849," in *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Scott Peeples (Oxford University Press, 2019), 34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190641870.013.2>.

⁵³ George E. Woodberry, *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe, Personal and Literary, with His Chief Correspondence with Men of Letters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), 2:100.

⁵⁴ Peeples, "A Life in Print," 42.

⁵⁵ Meredith L. McGill, "Poe, Literary Nationalism, and Authorial Identity," in *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 272.

⁵⁶ James Russell Lowell, "Our Contributors.--No. XVII. Edgar Allan Poe," *Graham's Magazine* 27, no. 2 (February 1845): 49. Electronic text available on the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1827/18450200.htm>.

⁵⁷ Lowell, "Our Contributors.--No. XVII. Edgar Allan Poe," 50.

⁵⁸ Lowell, "Our Contributors.--No. XVII. Edgar Allan Poe," 51.

⁵⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of Lowell's Conversations (A), from *The Evening Mirror* (New York), January 11, 1845, p. 2, Col. 3," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, March 29, 2001, <https://www.eapoe.org/works/criticism/em450108.htm>.

⁶⁰ Woodberry, "Lowell's Letters to Poe," 175–76. Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4412120.htm>.

⁶¹ Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 252.

⁶² Duberman, *James Russell Lowell*, 70–71.

⁶³ For detailed explorations of the Poe-Longfellow feud, see Sidney P. Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles: The Critic in the Context of His Literary Milieu* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1963), 132–89; Kent P. Ljungquist, "The 'Little War' and Longfellow's Dilemma: New Documents in the Plagiarism Controversy of 1845," *Resources for American Literary Study* 23, no. 1 (1997): 28–59. Ljungquist provides several important corrections to the versions of the affair presented by Moss and others, demonstrating that Longfellow did not remain entirely aloof from the dispute.

⁶⁴ Tucker, "James Russell Lowell and Robert Carter," 223; Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 252.

⁶⁵ I. B. Cauthen, "Lowell on Poe: An Unpublished Comment, 1879," *American Literature* 24, no. 2 (May 1952): 231–32.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Duberman, *James Russell Lowell*, 83.

⁶⁷ Notably, Thomas W. Higginson was impressed by the performance. See Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 267–68. Ottavio Casale proposes that Poe sought to impress the Transcendentalist Boston audience with one of his most philosophical compositions; see Casale, "The Battle of Boston."

⁶⁸ Burton R. Pollin, “‘The Living Writers of America’: A Manuscript by Edgar Allan Poe,” in *Studies in the American Renaissance 1991* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1991), 160n7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30227607>.

⁶⁹ Lowell, “Our Contributors.--No. XVII. Edgar Allan Poe,” 50.

⁷⁰ James Russell Lowell, “A Fable for Critics,” n.d., 59, Wikisource, https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=A_Fable_for_Critics&oldid=6365644.

⁷¹ Burton R. Pollin, “Longfellow and Poe: An Unnoted Hexameter Exchange,” *The Mississippi Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1984): 477.

⁷² Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:377 (letter 151). Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website:

<https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4302040.htm>. Prior to its publication, Lowell’s recovering eyesight prevented him from reading Poe’s article in its entirety; after a brief review he had concluded that it was “accurate & scholarly to all appearance” (Tucker, “Lowell, Carter, and the Pioneer,” 209).

⁷³ Sandra Tomc, “Edgar Allan Poe and His Enemies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Scott Peeples (Oxford University Press, 2019), 560, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190641870.013.32>.

⁷⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, “James Russell Lowell,” in *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. John H. Ingram, (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1875), IV:308–9.

⁷⁵ Poe, “James Russell Lowell,” 308.

⁷⁶ Poe, “James Russell Lowell,” 305.

⁷⁷ Woodberry, “Lowell’s Letters to Poe,” 171. Electronic text available at the Poe Society of Baltimore website: <https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4212170.htm>.

⁷⁸ Poe, *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, I:372-373 (letter 149).

⁷⁹ Pollin, "The Living Writers of America," 168.

⁸⁰ Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 15.

⁸¹ Pollin, "Longfellow and Poe," 481–82.

⁸² Tomc, "Edgar Allan Poe and His Enemies," 566.

⁸³ For Lowell's appeals to his father for assistance with the magazine, see Tucker, "James Russell Lowell and Robert Carter," 206, 208, 210, 212, 214.

⁸⁴ Tomc, "Edgar Allan Poe and His Enemies," 561.

⁸⁵ Edward Wagenknecht, *James Russell Lowell: Portrait of a Many-Sided Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 34.

⁸⁶ Martin B. Duberman, "A Brahmin's Self-Laughter," *Manuscripts* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1963): 23–26.